

Maharaj Memories by H H Radhanath Swami

Verse:

Location: Chowpatty

H H Radhanath Swami Maharaj: Hare Krishna! Thank you Kalacakra Krishna prabhu for your brilliant class and we very much felt the presence of HH Mahavishnu Goswami Maharaj through your devotion to him. As you were speaking, I was remembering, years ago, by Srila Prabhupada's and Krishna's grace, I was in Kurukshetra with a group of devotees and we all gathered at Jyothisar. Jyothisar is the place where Bhagavad Gita was originally spoken by Krishna to Arjuna. There is an ancient banyan tree and we read in histories of acharyas. Sripad Madhava Acharya went to that place, Ramanuja Acharya went to that place, Shankaracharya went to that place, our beloved Gurudev Srila Prabhupada he went to Kurukshetra and very much wanted land to build a Vaishnav university at that place. Historically the great acharyas have very much recognized and worshiped the ancient banyan tree of Jyothisar and it was there that HH Mahavishnu Goswami Maharaj came to meet us. On this occasion, there was a nice group of devotees and the two of us sat right under the tree and when Maharaj spoke, he spoke from the 10th chapter (BG 10.8).

*aham sarvasya prabhavo mattah sarvam pravartate
iti matva bhajante mam budha bhava-samanvitah*

I am the source of all spiritual and material worlds. Everything emanates from Me. The wise who perfectly know this engage in My devotional service and worship Me with all their hearts.

And how he explained that verse, in his own transcendental style! He had us repeat the verse again and again and again in Sanskrit and then word by word he was explaining the significance and he was emphasizing, "If, if we just understand this one verse, everything is in it. Everything is in this verse." He gave a very very deep profound, and heart felt explanation, connecting to it with Prabhupada and as he was speaking with such conviction, with such philosophy, with such scholarship and mostly with such love, I was sitting right next to him. I actually kind of felt like Arjuna hearing from Krishna, (laughter) although I wasn't qualified to be Arjuna, but he was definitely Krishna's representative. It was such a beautiful experience.

And not long before he passed from this world, I was with HH Giriraj swami at his home in California and we got a phone call that HH Mahavishnu Goswami Maharaj was not so far away, some where in San Diego or something and he really would like us to come to see him and we went to the house of one of his disciples and he was just such an emblem of Vaishnav etiquette, qualities, how he welcomed the devotees, the guests of his house. We sat, we spoke, we laughed. He was reciting some slokas and we were talking about everything. Then I remember he gave me this mixture of honey and ginger powder. Yes, because he heard that I had some little sore throat or something or cold and he personally with his own hands, he made this honey and ginger powder. And he was so enthusiastic that I eat it and so I ate so much (everybody laughing). Stirred by his own hands, was really special. He told me that he takes it every day and I, today I am going to definitely in his honour, take some honey and ginger powder. (laughter)

HH Mahavishnu Goswami Maharaj was very unique and special Vaishnav. In many ways when I remember him, I remember HH Gaur Govinda Swami Maharaj also. They both had a very very special place in our society. HH Mahavishnu Goswami Maharaj, I believe he was born in 1920, which is 3 years before my father. He is senior to my father and as we all know, he was born outside of Bombay, his parents were Vaishnavas, and generations and generations, I read eight generations of his family were all devotees of Krishna. Naturally he had such an enthusiasm for Bhagavad Gita, Srimad Bhagavatam and he had so many questions and nobody could answer his questions. Even as a little child, his questions were very deep and real and philosophical and even pandits could not answer them properly. He was a devotee all of his life and by his parents' arrangements, he was married young.

In 1955 he went to London and there he was highly respected as a very pious, very religious man. He had earned his master's degree in Sanskrit and English. He spoke practically any language he wanted to speak, tremendous intellect, tremendous absorption and he told us that one day he was just walking down Oxford street and he saw some western

Hare Krishnas singing and dancing on the street. In those days, today I think they have revived it. And every day, I remember, I was in London in 1972 on my way back from India and one of our God brothers Revathi nandan swami, every day he would lead Harinam kirtan down Oxford street, the most famous street in all of London, perhaps the most famous street in the world, for hours and hours. So you know when people see devotees chanting and dancing, everybody has their own perception of what is happening. Now, here is HH Mahavishnu Goswami who is older than the fathers of all these devotees who were dancing around on the street. They have all been devotees for at the most for 3 or 4-5 years, he has been a devotee at this time, this was 1972-73, he has been a devotee for 52 years. He is scholar of Sanskrit and scholar of Bhagavat. But he saw the devotion in them, and he was very, very attracted. *Sāgrāhi*, and he really saw the essence. He really felt Srila Prabhupada's grace coming through these devotees, became very attracted. He went to the temple in Bury place near the British museum and there he heard a young devotee from Amsterdam, Holland, very white complexion and red hair and he was giving Srimad Bhagavatam class. His name is Hari Krishna das Prabhu. And that is special connection to me because when I first came from India to Amsterdam, I lived in the temple there for about a month or two and my best friend, his name was Henk and later he became Hari Krishna Das. He used to preach to me, he was a very good philosophical devotee. So, he is younger than me and so here is Mahavishnu Goswami coming from a very, very traditional Vaishnav family of India, scholar and here there is a young boy, younger than his sons (laughing) speaking Srimad Bhagavatam and in his eagerness to hear Bhagavatam and his natural humility, he was so deeply impressed that this devotee was speaking with so much devotion and so much conviction and he was from Holland. It was, it was a very moving experience for Maharaj and he asked you know, "how did you learn this?" And he said, Hari Krishna prabhu told him that, "I am simply repeating the words that I have read in the books of my spiritual master, A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada." So Mahavishnu Goswami went to the temple in Bhaktivedanta manor and there was a library of Prabhupada's books there and daily, from what I have been told, he would sit for 3 or 4 hours, studying Srila Prabhupada's books. And because he was already a scholar and Sanskrit expert, you know, he saw what Prabhupada was presenting to the world. He surrendered his heart to Srila Prabhupada by reading Prabhupada's books.

He met Srila Prabhupada the first time, I believe in 1973. Srila Prabhupada was so impressed that here is a person. In those days, there were very few Indians, who were coming to our society seriously beyond just giving a donation or bringing some prasadam. Besides his age and he was so deeply absorbed, Srila Prabhupada loved him and in fact Srila Prabhupada told him that he should take initiation, he should take Sannyas and he should spread Krishna consciousness all over the world. It was Prabhupada's order to him.

But he was a very serious responsible man. He had a family, children, wife and a job. When he first met Prabhupada, he was the president of the Gujarati association for London and for those of you who go to London, you would understand that there are so many Gujaratis, may be more than in Gujarat (laughter), I don't know. But, there is definitely lot of Gujaratis in London. He was the president of the whole organization and for the annual event, he invited Srila Prabhupada to be the chief speaker. That is how much he really relished Prabhupada's books and after his meeting with Srila Prabhupada, he surrendered his life, he surrendered his heart. Prabhupada told him, "Take sannyas. I will give you. Travel all over the world." He decided to do it and there was no question in his mind with, if he will do it. But he wanted to do it in an exemplary way after completing his duties as a Grhastha. That conception was quite revolutionary in Iskcon those days (laughter). It was what Prabhupada wanted to really establish Varnashrama dharma in a very sober and responsible way. And so, he would read the Srimad Bhagavatam hours and hours a day, he did his work, he raised his family, he completed his duties, but during that time Srila Prabhupada left the world in 1977. Then I believe, it was around 1980 that he took initiation and he moved in the temple. I believe it was, I am not sure if it was Bury's place or Soho street.

Devotees: Soho street.

HH Radhanath Swami Maharaj: Soho street, and then he lived in that little temple in downtown London. And everybody else in the temple was younger than his children and he was junior than all of them. (Laughter) Can you imagine taking orders from little British kids? But he did! This was how he valued Srila Prabhupada that these were Prabhupada's representative. They may be western, they may be very young, they may be not, you know very scholarly. But they were sincerely serving Srila Prabhupada. ***He would sit in the temple and study Srimad Bhagavatam 3-4-5 hours a day.***

He wouldn't fall asleep, he wouldn't have to walk around. He was absorbed. Krishna consciousness means absorption. Srila Prabhupada taught us that there is a book Bhagavatam and there is person Bhagavatam. A person Bhagavatam is one who is so totally absorbed in book Bhagavatam that he speaks and lives as an example of the scripture. And everyone could see that he personified this principle. And for many years, many years, he lived in the temple as a Vanaprastha and eventually Srila Prabhupada's order was fulfilled and he accepted sannyas and began to travel and preach all over the world.

Very interesting similarity of him and Srila Prabhupada. When Srila Prabhupada was a very young man, 1922, Bhakti Siddantha Saraswathi Thakur told him that he should travel all over the world and spread Lord Caitanya's message in the English language. But Prabhupada also was responsible, he had a wife, he had a child, he had a job. Srila Prabhupada told us that on the very day, he accepted Srila Bhakti Siddantha Saraswathi Thakur as spiritual master and accepted his orders as life and soul, but he wanted to do it in a responsible way. He would visit Bhakti Siddantha Saraswathi Thakur whenever he could and serve the devotees and in the same way Mahavishnu Goswami, whenever Prabhupada was in London, he would go to visit him. Prabhupada was so affectionate towards him. He loved to be with the devotees and assist the devotees in every way he could.

Many years later, over 30 years later, Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswathi Thakur was appearing in Prabhupada's dreams and was telling him, "You must take sannyas and spread this message all over the world." And he took sannyas from one of his God brothers and he did so. Although Mahavishnu Goswami was not officially initiated by Srila Prabhupada, because he felt that he needed to live by the highest standards for surrender before his initiation, that was his mood. But, in his heart, he was fully initiated. In fact, he had more personal association with Srila Prabhupada than most of Prabhupada's initiated disciples. And he had more direct specific instructions than most of Prabhupada's direct disciples. So, he was Prabhupada's disciple in spirit and in every way, he gave his life. And similar to Srila Prabhupada, he took sannyas for this purpose, to spread his guru's message and his guru's order all over the world. Like Srila Prabhupada, he had 12 world tours and wherever he went, people felt such shelter, not just because of his age, because of his scholarship, but his kindness. He was so respectful to honour everyone, whether it was a non-devotee or a new devotee or a senior sannyasi. He just had such love and kindness towards everyone, and people really felt deeply that he cared about them, because he did. Because he really saw everyone as part of Krishna, he really saw his service to Prabhupada, in serving every person he came in contact with. Naturally, he was so popular. Wherever he went, people found shelter in him. They were not only convinced by what he spoke, but they found shelter in his compassion. More and more people wanted to take initiation from him because they had ultimate faith in his representing of Srila Prabhupada but because he wasn't officially initiated by Srila Prabhupada, there was this technical controversy. And some people said, "No. you cannot do." So many people were coming and I remember, I was in the GBC meetings in those days when this was being discussed and it took a few years (laughter). It ran in some committee to make a paper of research to find out if whether it was really like this or that and he waited. And always so respectful, always so kind, but at the same time being respectful and kind to everyone and honouring people who were technically his superiors, still he was giving full shelter to all these people. And it was a great time when, a very historically time in our society when he was completely blessed by the leadership of our movement, to take disciples. That was what Jaysheel was speaking about.

Mahavishnu Goswami went to Dwaraka practically along with couple of students and sat on a little field and was giving Bhagavat saptahs and from that a beautiful temple arose. He went to Rajkot and started doing Bhagavat saptahs and from that guest house, ashram and temple came up. He was really a man who personified the essence of Srila Prabhupada and Lord Caitanya's mission in every way and every aspect of him.

He was ill for many years. I believe he had a stroke or something, at one time, yeah in London and yeah I remember I went to visit him in England after he had the stroke. And he even though he was somewhat incapacitated physically, his purity, his kindness, his appreciation of devotees was just absolutely heart melting, beautiful. He was transcendental. Transcendentalists in a compromised physical body, cannot in any way block the compassion, the love and the conviction of the devotee. He was speaking about his stroke in purely philosophical terms to me. (laughter) It wasn't even a physical problem. It was a philosophical revelation. *tat te 'nukampāṁ su-samīkṣamāṇo*. He was just grateful and surrendering to Krishna in whatever happened.

And from what he told me, and what his disciples told me, is that he did not like hospitals. He hated hospitals. That was what they told me. His disciples actually used that word. He hated hospitals. Devotees do not hate anything, but that means he really didn't like hospitals. (laughter) And he would tell them that, "No matter what happens, don't bring me to hospitals." Somehow or the other they convinced him to come to Bhaktivedanta hospital as his health was really deteriorating and when he came he said that, "This is not a hospital, this is a spiritual world, this is a dham, this is a holy dham." As much as not more than anybody in history, he encouraged our devotees at Bhaktivedanta hospital by giving so much affection, so much appreciation. Because some people criticize you know that its philanthropy and like that. But Mahavishnu Goswami Maharaj said that this is non different from Vrindavan and he not only said it, but he did something which is perhaps the greatest honour that our hospital will ever gain.

In his last days, I believe he went to Nasik for some time because he loved Nasik. He loved to preach in Nasik. It was also very good place for his health. Nasik is one of the four places of Kumbha Mela. It is also a place where Lord Sriram lived for a very long time, lived with Sita and Lakshman, many lilas in Nasik. But his health was getting worse, so he knew he was going to leave. And should he stay in a holy place like Nasik, should he go to Vrindavan, should he go to Puri or Mayapur? He said, "Bring me to Bhaktivedanta hospital." He said, "it is not different than Vrindavan. It is a holy dham." That's where he decided to leave this world, surrounded by loving devotees, chanting the holy name. For many of us, this was a revelation of his total faith and love for Srila Prabhupada. Bhaktivedanta hospital, Prabhupada's devotees, they were all serving together for the pleasure of Srila Prabhupada and he recognized that in such a way that it is non different than Vrindavan.

I remember I was in Mayapur, it was just after the GBC meeting or something like that or something. I was in Mayapur, I don't remember if it was GBC meeting or something else, but I was with HH Bhakti Charu swami Maharaj, we did a program in Calcutta together and that's where we got the news that he was in his last stages. So, I had the great and immortal fortune of being able to speak to him on the phone, He couldn't talk much, but expressed to him, my love, my gratitude and then Bhakti Charu swami and myself decided immediately to leave everything. It was 3 days huge festival in Calcutta. That's what it was, and it was only one day passed and we are going to leave it. We decided that we will go to Bhaktivedanta hospital and decided to be with Mahavishnu Goswami Maharaj. So, we booked airplanes and then by Krishna and Srila Prabhupada's will, they took him. Srila Prabhupada brought him back to his eternal loving embrace to the spiritual world. Bhakti charu swami and myself came in with Maharaj's beloved associates, disciples, followers, well-wishers, we went to Nasik to have a beautiful, beautiful ceremony. Bhaktivinoda Thakura, he wrote,

*He reasons ill who tells that Vaishnavas die,
When thou art living still in sound.
The Vaishnavas die to live, and living try
To spread the holy name around.*

Mahavishnu swami Maharaj taught us by his life's example, how to be absorbed in holy name, how to be absorbed in Srimad Bhagavatam, how to be absorbed in service to the guru Srila Prabhupada, how to be absorbed in service to the Vaishnavas, how to be absorbed in compassion to all beings and he did it with such absorption, total absorption. Today we are all praying to HH Mahavishnu Goswami Maharaj for even a drop of his absorption, into our own lives. Thank you very much. Srila Mahavishnu Goswami Maharaj ki jai.

Devotees: (Cheering) Jai.

It is truly an honour and we are so grateful that you have decided to have this ceremony here at Radha Gopinath's temple today, of all the places in Brahma's creation, (laughter) you have chosen to have the ceremony here, we feel very much Gurudev Goswami Maharaj's blessings upon us. Thank you.

Devotees: H H Radhanath swami Maharaj ki jai! Gurudev Srila Prabhupada ki jai!