

Six Faults that Destroy Bhakti

4. Niyamāgraha – Too much attachment to, or too much neglect of, rules and regulations

Srila Prabhupada Says in “The
Nectar of Instruction”

Niyamāgraha – Nectar of Instruction

- Accepting some of the scriptural rules and regulations for immediate benefit, as utilitarians advocate, is called niyama-āgraha, and neglecting the śāstric rules and regulations that are meant for spiritual development, is called niyama-agraha.
- The word āgraha means "eagerness to accept," and agraha means "failure to accept."
- By the addition of either of these two words to the word niyama ("rules and regulations"), the word niyamāgraha is formed.

Niyamāgraha – Nectar of Instruction

- Thus niyamāgraha has a twofold meaning that is understood according to the particular combination of words.
- Those interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness should not be eager to accept rules and regulations for economic advancement, yet they should very faithfully accept scriptural rules and regulations for the advancement of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- They should strictly follow the regulative principles by avoiding illicit sex, meat-eating, gambling and intoxication.

Niyamāgraha as explained by
Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura in
“Sri Bhaktyaloka”

Niyamāgraha – Too much attachment to, or too much neglect of, rules and regulations

- Niyamas, or rules, are of two kinds-vidhis, or prescriptions, and niṣedhas, or prohibitions.
- Whatever is enjoined as one's duty is a prescribed rule. Whatever is enjoined as restricted is a prohibited rule.
- Both kinds of rules are auspicious for the living entities.
- Conditioned souls are eligible to attain a very exalted position from a very low position.
- Between these two positions there are many other positions.

Niyamāgraha – Too much attachment to, or too much neglect of, rules and regulations

- Each position is a gradual step. Each gradual step is a distinct level of advancement.
- Each and every gradual step has different prescriptions and prohibitions.
- Whenever a living entity steps to one level and stays there, he is obliged to follow the prescriptions and prohibitions of that step.
- By following those enjoined prescriptions and prohibitions, one becomes eligible to attain the next step.

Niyamāgraha – Too much attachment to, or too much neglect of, rules and regulations

- If one is unable to attain the next step, he falls down to a lower step. This is called degradation.
- Attaining the higher step is called advancement.
- To properly follow the precepts of one's own level is called "one's prescribed duties" or steadiness in one's own position.
- Steadiness in one's own position is piety, and deviation from one's position is impiety.
- There is no other piety and impiety than this.

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- Therefore in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (11.21.2-7) Lord Kṛṣṇa spoke these instructions to Uddhava:

**sve sve 'dhikāre yā niṣṭhā sa guṇaḥ parikīrtitaḥ
viparyayas tu doṣaḥ syād ubhayaor eṣa niścayaḥ**

**deśa-kālādi-bhāvānām vastūnām mama sattama
guṇa-doṣau vidhīyete niyamārthaṁ hi karmaṇām**

"Steadiness in one's own position (**sve sve adhikāre yā niṣṭhā**) is declared to be actual piety (**sa guṇaḥ parikīrtitaḥ**), whereas deviation from one's position is considered impiety (**viparyayas tu doṣaḥ syād**). In this way the two are definitely ascertained (**ubhayaor eṣa niścayaḥ**).

O saintly Uddhava (**sattama**), in order to restrict materialistic activities (**karmaṇām niyamārthaṁ hi**), I have established (**mama vidhīyete**) that which is proper and improper among all material things (**vastūnām guṇa-doṣau**), including time, space and all physical objects (**deśa-kālādi-bhāvānām**).”

Niyamāgraha – Too much attachment to, or too much neglect of, rules and regulations

- Prescribed and prohibited rules are further divided into two categories—conditional and constitutional.
- The living entity is pure spirit.
- The prescriptions and prohibitions in the living entity's constitutional position are constitutional rules.
- But when the living entity is separated from his transcendental position, he accepts the designations given by the illusory energy and is entangled in this world—these are false designations.
- These designations are of many varieties, but the constitutional situation is one without second.

Niyamāgraha – Too much attachment to, or too much neglect of, rules and regulations

- In the eternal state of the living entity, prema is the only prescription and envy is the only prohibition.
- This prescription and prohibition is subordinate to the living entity's eternal nature.
- The living entity imbued with prema and devoid of envy is the shelter of eternal rasa.
- Although rasa is of five varieties, still they are one undivided spiritual truth.
- The rules of that position are not to be discussed here.
- We must know only that this state is the eternal condition of the living entity.

Niyamāgraha – Too much attachment to, or too much neglect of, rules and regulations

- Although in the conditional state the rules are of different types, still all the steps are divided into three principle categories.
- According to the Vedas, Bhagavad-gītā, and all the smṛtis, three principle divisions are found-karma, jñāna, and bhakti.
- In each division certain prescriptions and certain prohibitions are enjoined.
- In the karma division, the rules of varṇāśrama and the ten supplementary saṁskāras as well as regulative prayers are prescribed.

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- Sins and bad habits are prohibited.
- In the jñāna division, sannyāsa, renunciation, detachment, and discussing matter and spirit are prescribed. Fruitive activities, forbidden activities, and attachment to sense enjoyment are prohibited.
- In the bhakti division, indifference, performance of activities favorable to devotion, following the prescriptions and prohibitions of the jñāna division, and cultivating devotional service with the help of those prescriptions and prohibitions are prescribed.
- All activities opposed to the Lord, jñāna, renunciation, attachment to sense enjoyment, conclusions opposed to devotional service, and giving up action are prohibited.

Niyamāgraha – Too much attachment to, or too much neglect of, rules and regulations

- When the conditioned soul advances by giving up his illicit activities, or low-class character, then he attains the level of karma-kaṇḍa.
- Such a person should remain in varṇāśrama-dharma and aspire to attain the level of jñāna. This is his duty.
- He should remain in varṇāśrama until he attains detachment from material activities by discussing the difference between matter and spirit and analyzing the nature of false ego, otherwise he becomes sinful.

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- When that detachment is attained, then his higher qualification destroys his attachment to fruitive activities.
- But if that person still remains inclined to the rules of karma-kaṇḍa, then he cannot make advancement.
- The duty of one who has attained the level of jñāna-kaṇḍa is to remain fixed in knowledge.
- Until he attains a taste for devotional service, he should remain under the rules of jñāna-kaṇḍa.

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- As soon as the qualification for devotional service manifests, he should give up his attachment for jñāna-kaṇḍa, otherwise he is guilty of niyamāgraha and will not make advancement. As stated in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (11.20.9):

**tāvat karmāṇi kurvīta na nirvidyeta yāvatā
mat-kathā-śravaṇādau vā śraddhā yāvan na jāyate**

"As long as one is not satiated by fruitive activity (**na nirvidyeta yāvatā**) and has not awakened his taste for devotional service by śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ (**mat-kathā-śravaṇādau vā śraddhā yāvan na jāyate**) one has to act according to the regulative principles of the Vedic injunctions (**tāvat karmāṇi kurvīta**)."

Niyamāgraha – Too much attachment to, or too much neglect of, rules and regulations

- Śraddhā, or faith, is the only qualification for bhakti. As stated in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (11.20.31):

**tasmān mad-bhakti-yuktasya
yogino vai mad-ātmanah
na jñānam na ca vairāgyam
prāyaḥ śreyo bhaved iha**

"Therefore (**tasmād**), for a devotee engaged in My loving service (**mad-bhakti-yuktasya yoginah**), with mind fixed on Me (**mad-ātmanah**), the cultivation of knowledge and renunciation (**jñānam ca vairāgyam**) is generally not the means of achieving the highest perfection within this world (**na prāyaḥ śreyo bhaved iha**)."

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- The temple of kṛṣṇa-prema is situated on the highest peak of Goloka Vṛndāvana.
- In order to reach that peak one has to cross the fourteen planetary systems of karma-kaṇḍa, the Virajā-Brahmaloka of the jñāna-kaṇḍa, and then rise above Vaikuṅṭha.
- By gradually giving up attachment to the stages of karma and jñāna, one becomes eligible for bhakti.
- After crossing the various stages of bhakti, one reaches the temple door of prema.

Niyamāgraha – Too much attachment to, or too much neglect of, rules and regulations

- Śraddhā is the only rule for people established on the level of bhakti.
- As anarthas, or unwanted habits, are destroyed by the power of devotional service performed under the shelter of sadhu and guru, that śraddhā transforms into devotional service with niṣṭha, or firm faith.
- As the anarthas are further destroyed, one progresses from the level of niṣṭha to ruci, or taste; from ruci to āsakti, or attachment; and from āsakti to bhāva, or emotion.

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- When bhāva, in the form of rati, or affection, is mixed with the appropriate ingredients, it becomes rasa. In the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (11.14.26) it is said:

**yathā yathātmā parimṛjyate 'sau
mat-puṇya-gāthā-śravaṇābhidhānaiḥ
tathā tathā paśyati vastu sūkṣmam
cakṣur yathaivāñjana-samprayuktam**

"When a diseased eye is treated with medicinal ointment it gradually recovers its power to see (**cakṣur yathā eva añjana-samprayuktam**). Similarly (**tathā**), as a conscious living entity cleanses himself of material contamination (**yathā ātmā parimṛjyate asau**) by hearing and chanting the pious narrations of My glories (**mat-puṇya-gāthā-śravaṇa abhidhānaiḥ**), he regains his ability to see (**tathā tathā paśyati**) Me, the Absolute Truth (**vastu**), in My subtle spiritual form (**sūkṣmam**)."

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- Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī clarifies the sequence in his Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu as follows:

**ādau śraddhā tataḥ sādhu- saṅgo 'tha bhajana-kriyā
tato 'nārtha-nivṛttiḥ syāt tato niṣṭhā rucis tataḥ
athāsaktis tato bhāvas tataḥ premābhyudañcati
sādhakānām ayam premṇaḥ prādurbhāve bhavet kramaḥ**

"In the beginning one must have a preliminary desire for self-realization. This will bring one to the stage of trying to associate with persons who are spiritually elevated. In the next stage one becomes initiated by an elevated spiritual master, and under his instruction the neophyte devotee begins the process of devotional service. By execution of devotional service under the guidance of the spiritual master, one becomes free from all material attachment, attains steadiness in self-realization, and acquires a taste for hearing about the Absolute Personality of Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This taste leads one further forward to attachment for Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which is matured in bhāva, or the preliminary stage of transcendental love of God. Real love for God is called prema, the highest perfectional stage of life."

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- In the process of sādhana-bhakti there are four stages—śraddhā, niṣṭhā, ruci, and āsakti.
- After passing these four stages one comes to the level of bhāva, which is the doorstep of prema.
- According to the degree of faith, each level has different rules.
- As one leaves behind one level and progresses to the next, he should honor the rules of the latter and leave aside those of the former.
- Those who do not give up the rules of the previous level are bound by those rules like chains that do not allow him to proceed to the next level.

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- In the process of devotional service, whatever rules are prescribed for each level are all subordinate to one principle rule. That general rule is given in the Padma Purāṇa as follows:

**smartavyaḥ satataṁ viṣṇur
vismartavyo na jātucit
sarve vidhi-niṣedhāḥ syur
etayor eva kiṅkarāḥ**

- Remembering Kṛṣṇa is the eternal duty. All other prescriptions mentioned in the śāstras have arisen from this main prescription.
- Forgetting Kṛṣṇa is never allowed. All other prohibitions mentioned in the śāstras have arisen from this main prohibition.

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- Keeping this main prescription in mind while advancing, the practitioner should give up his attachment for the prescriptions of the previous level and accept the prescriptions of the next level.
- Otherwise he will be guilty of niyamāgraha and weak in reaching the next level.
- The practitioner of devotional service must always remember this point.
- In the conclusion of Hari-bhakti-vilāsa a special instruction is given in this regard:

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kr̥tyāny etāni tu prāyo
gṛhinām dhaninām satām
likhitāni na tu tyakta-
parigraha-mahātmanām

"Whatever activities are written in Hari-bhakti-vilāsa (**etāni kr̥tyāny tu**) are mostly all meant for householders and rich devotees (**prāyah gṛhinām dhaninām satām**). There are no rules written (**na tu likhitāni**) for the renunciates (**tyakta-parigraha-mahātmanām**)."

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- Also in the conclusion of the Hari-bhakti-vilāsa it is stated:

avaśyaṁ tāni sarvāṇi
teṣāṁ tād ṛktva siddhaye
prāg apekṣyāṇi bhaktir hi
sadācāraika sadhana

- "Although the rules for renunciates are avoided in this book, still renunciates should follow those rules in order to perfect their position."
- The behavior exhibited by the renunciate sadhus is proper behavior in this connection.
- That alone is to be followed.

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- The first symptom of one who has attained śraddhā is surrender to the feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
- That surrender is of two types—for the householders and for the renunciates.
- Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa mentions only those rules that are meant for householders.
- That is why observances such as Śiva-caturdaśī are given therein.

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- The surrendered renunciate should follow whichever observances are appropriate for renunciates.
- Both the householder and the renunciate become unalloyed surrender souls while advancing on the path of sādhana.
- Then their rules are only slightly different.
- At that stage they attain ultimate surrender due to advancement in sādhana.

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- It is said in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (11.18.28), the Hari-bhakti-vilāsa (20th vilāsa), and the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (11.20.36):

jñāna-niṣṭho virakto vā
mad-bhakto vānapekṣakaḥ
sa-liṅgān āśramāms tyaktvā
cared avidhi-gocaraḥ

"A learned transcendentalist dedicated to the cultivation of knowledge (**jñāna-niṣṭhah**) and thus detached from external objects (**virakto vā**), or My devotee (**mad-bhakto vā**) who is detached even from desire for liberation (**ānapekṣakaḥ**) - both neglect those duties based on external rituals or paraphernalia (**sa-liṅgān āśramāms tyaktvā**). Thus their conduct is beyond the range of rules and regulations (**avidhi-gocaraḥ**)."

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ekāntitām gatānāntu
śrī-kṛṣṇa-caraṇābjayoḥ
bhaktiḥ svataḥ pravartteta
tad vighnaiḥ kiṁ vratādibhiḥ

"When one becomes a pure devotee of the Lord (**ekāntitām gatānām tu**), then devotion (**śrī-kṛṣṇa-caraṇābjayoḥ bhaktiḥ**) is spontaneously established in his heart (**svataḥ pravartteta**). What then is the need to observe rituals (**kiṁ vratādibhiḥ**) that simply obstruct one's devotional service (**tad vighnaiḥ**)?"

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**na mayy ekānta-bhaktānām
guṇa-doṣodbhavā guṇāḥ
sādhūnām sama-cittānām
buddheḥ param upeyusām**

"Material piety and sin, which arise from the good and evil of this world (**guṇa-doṣa udbhavā guṇāḥ**), cannot exist with My unalloyed devotees (**na mayy ekānta-bhaktānām**), who, being free from material hankering (**sādhūnām**), maintain steady spiritual consciousness in all circumstances (**sama-cittānām**). Indeed, such devotees have achieved Me, the Supreme Lord (**upeyusām**), who am beyond anything that can be conceived by material intelligence (**buddheḥ param**)."

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- In the Hari-bhakti-vilāsa it is stated:

evam ekāntinām prāyaḥ
kīrtanaṁ smaraṇaṁ prabhoḥ
kurvatām parama-prītyā
kṛtyam anyan na rocate

vihiteṣv eva nityeṣu
pravartante svayaṁ hi te
ityādy ekāntinām bhāti
māhātmyaṁ likhitaṁ hi tat

The devotees whose minds are fixed on chanting and remembering Kṛṣṇa's glories in pure love have no taste for activities prescribed for lower stages. Although they are not attached or bound to follow the prescribed rules of the scriptures, they sometimes follow out of their own accord.

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- This is nicely explained in the eighth verse of the Upadeśāmṛta:

**tan-nāma-rūpa-caritādi-sukīrtanānu-
smṛtyoḥ krameṇa rasanā-manasī niyojya
tiṣṭhan vraje tad-anurāgi janānugāmī
kālam nayed akhilaṁ ity upadeśa-sāram**

The essence of all advice (**upadeśa-sāram**) is that one should utilize one's full time-twenty-four hours a day (**akhilaṁ kālam nayed**)-in nicely chanting and remembering the Lord's divine name, transcendental form, qualities and eternal pastimes (**tan-nāma-rūpa-caritādi-sukīrtana-anu-smṛtyoḥ**), thereby gradually engaging one's tongue and mind (**krameṇa rasanā-manasī niyojya**). In this way one should reside in Vraja [Goloka Vṛndāvana dhāma] (**tiṣṭhan vraje**) and serve Kṛṣṇa under the guidance of devotees. One should follow in the footsteps of the Lord's beloved devotees, who are deeply attached to His devotional service (**tad-anurāgi janānugāmī**).

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- These are the glories of the pure devotees; that is, their glories are not diminished by neglecting other's prescribed rules.
- The purport is that exalted devotees follow whatever rules of the lower stages they like.
- The jñānīs follow the varṇāśrama-dharma of the karmīs by their own will, not by rule or obligation.
- Similarly the devotees, out of their sweet will, also follow the rules of the karmīs and jñānīs for some purpose.
- This means that although they are not obliged to follow the prescriptions and prohibitions, they do so on their own accord.

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- The topmost pure devotees are also not considered overly attached to regulations when they follow the rules of karma, jñāna, and ordinary sādhana-bhakti.
- Independently they are engaged in the unalloyed devotional service of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
- The practicing devotee who gives up niyamāgraha but spontaneously follows the rules achieves auspicious results.
- The conclusion is that the practitioner attains a higher level as a result of following the rules prescribed according to his qualification.

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- He should not maintain attachment for the rules of his previous level.
- Keeping this instruction always in mind, he should always engage in chanting and remembering Lord Kṛṣṇa and thus continue advancing to higher levels.