

# Śuddha-bhakti Cintāmaṇi

by H.H Śivarāma Swami

# Foreword

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- To be honest, we are all unfortunate.
- Whether we can admit it or not, and even though we can't possibly remember what we did to make it happen, we have been sent away from where we used to live very happily in the company of our best friend. "All we like sheep have gone astray."
- (Isaiah 53:6) Or as Lord Caitanya tells it, praying for mercy:

ayi nanda-tanūja kiṅkaram  
atitam mām viṣame bhavāmbudhau  
kṛpayā tava pāda-paṅkaja-  
thita-dhūlī-sadṛśam vicintaya

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- “O son of Nanda, I am Your eternal servant, but somehow or other I have fallen into this horrible ocean of nescience. Kindly pick me up and fix me as a speck of dust at Your lotus feet.” (Śikṣāṣṭaka 5)
- We were Kṛṣṇa’s servants, perhaps His close friends, elders, or beloveds, and for some foolish reason or other we gave up that intimacy to enter the miserable struggle of material life.
- But even though we chose to forget Him, He is still our well-wisher, ever ready to save and restore us as soon as we honestly recognize our helplessness and with all humility beg for His mercy.
- Lord Caitanya begs Kṛṣṇa to think of Him as a particle of dust attached to His lotus feet.
- Taken too literally, of course, this image is not properly understood.

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- Lord Caitanya is not advising us to become impersonalists or demons like Śiśupāla so we can attain sāyujya-mukti by merging into the Supreme Lord's body.
- No, becoming dust on Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet should be understood as the poetic expression it is.
- Just as Kṛṣṇa's feet are not literally lotus flowers, but rather lotuslike in their beauty and softness, so attaining Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet means not the literal act of merging, but approaching Him with full submission and regaining a loving connection with Him.
- This image is repeated often in the prayers of Kṛṣṇa's devotees.

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- In His Śikṣāṣṭaka prayer, Lord Caitanya sets the example of a devotee who expects his attitude to be changed by Kṛṣṇa to one of a wayward servant, simply by the servant's making a sincere enough request of the Lord.
- One such perfect prayer should be enough to evoke Kṛṣṇa's complete mercy.
- But what about those of us who are not fit to pray perfectly, who don't have the required pure, helpless humility? Kṛṣṇa in His infinite kindness also provides for us:

atha cittaṁ samādhātuṁ  
na śaknoṣi mayi sthiram  
abhyāsa-yogena tato  
mām icchāptuṁ dhanañjaya

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- In “My dear Arjuna, O winner of wealth, if you cannot fix your mind upon Me without deviation, then follow the regulative principles of bhakti-yoga. In this way develop a desire to attain Me.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 12.9)
- Regulative devotional practice, sādhana-bhakti, begins with two basic activities, hearing and speaking about Kṛṣṇa, highly recommended as leading to all kinds of success. According to Queen Kuntī:  

śṛṅvanti gāyanti gṛṅanty abhīkṣṇaśaḥ  
maranti nandanti tavehitam janāḥ  
ta eva paśyanty acireṇa tāvakam  
hava-pravāhoparamam padāmbujam
- “O Kṛṣṇa, those who continuously hear, chant, and repeat Your transcendental activities, or take pleasure in others’ doing so, certainly see Your lotus feet, which alone can stop the repetition of birth and death.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.8.36)

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- As Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī explains in his commentary on this verse, it is because Kṛṣṇa is so attractive that hearing and chanting about Him brings a person to the point of insatiable obsession with Him and ultimately to constant remembrance of one's forgotten loving relationship with the Lord.
- Śrī Śukadeva speaks similarly:

pibanti ye bhagavata ātmanaḥ satām  
athāmṛtaṁśravaṇa-puṭeṣu sambhṛtam  
punanti te viṣaya-vidūṣitāśayam  
rajanti tac-caraṇa-saroruhāntikam

- “Those who drink through aural reception, fully filled with the nectarean message of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the beloved of the devotees, purify the polluted aim of life known as material enjoyment and thus go back to Godhead, to the lotus feet of Him [the Personality of Godhead].”  
(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 2.2.37)

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- Śrīla Viśvanātha explains that devotees with developed attachment to the Supreme Lord see Him as ātmanaḥ, their own favourite object of worship.
- Some of them worship Him as Nārāyaṇa, some as Rāmacandra, and some as Kṛṣṇa.
- And among those who worship Kṛṣṇa in particular, some worship Him as an infant, some as an older child, and some as a maturing youth.
- Because their taste for hearing about Him is strong, such devotees eagerly drink what they hear as if it were the nectar of the immortal gods.
- Less advanced devotees may have little taste for drinking this nectar, but their practice of hearing and chanting, if done faithfully, will purify their hearts and gradually give them the taste.

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- These two basic practices, hearing and chanting, are the foundation of all further activities of devotion:
- remembering the Lord, doing loving service for Him, and reviving one's eternal bond with Him in a unique personal mood.
- In the current degraded age, proper meditation and loving service are almost impossibly heroic accomplishments for most people to even hope to achieve, so intense hearing and chanting about Kṛṣṇa are all the more important.
- And they are also all the most effective by the grace of Lord Caitanya, the prime teacher of the means of spiritual success in the Kali age.

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kalim̐ sabhājayant yāryā  
uṇa-jñāḥ sāra-bhāginah  
yatra saṅkīrtanenaiva  
arva-svārtho 'bhilabhyate

- “Those who are actually advanced in knowledge are able to appreciate the essential value of this Age of Kali. Such enlightened persons worship Kali-yuga because in this fallen age all perfection of life can easily be achieved by the performance of saṅkīrtana.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.5.36)
- There are many sources of authorized kṛṣṇa-kathā, to hear and discuss.
- First, there are Kṛṣṇa’s names in the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra, which contain everything of the spiritual nature.

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- Given all this, shouldn't those who want to be Kṛṣṇa's devotees delve deeply into the nectar of His pastimes, giving up all inhibitions and other interests?
- Why, some ISKCON devotees may wonder, did Śrīla Prabhupāda and his guru before him apparently de-emphasize hearing and chanting kṛṣṇa-līlā and focus instead on promoting the busy activities of preaching and organizing?
- This doubt has led too many devotees to leave the company of Śrīla Prabhupāda's preaching mission for supposedly greener pastures.
- Probably fewer would have made this most unfortunate choice had they better understood the intentions of Śrīla Prabhupāda and his predecessors.

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- The vision of our ācāryas is that everyone should hear and chant about Kṛṣṇa, but always according to the level of their individual qualification.
- Beginners should hear the basics and practise chanting Kṛṣṇa's names.
- Only to the degree that devotees become purified of lust, envy, and greed should they gradually enter into more intimate hearing.
- Inappropriate hearing exposes a devotee to frightful dangers: cheap, imitation devotion that does nothing to please Kṛṣṇa and sets a bad example for others; and worst of all, defiance of the opinions of one's gurus.
- Devotees should with all care steer clear of these pitfalls.

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- They should think carefully about how various degrees of adhikāra for hearing and chanting kṛṣṇa-līlā come naturally by the step-by-step development of devotional practice.

satām prasaṅgān mama vīrya-saṁvido  
havanti hṛt-karṇa-rasāyanāḥ kathāḥ  
taj-joṣaṇād āśv apavarga-vartmani  
raddhā ratir bhaktir anukramiṣyati

- “In the association of pure devotees, discussion of the pastimes and activities of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is very pleasing and satisfying to the ear and the heart. By cultivating such knowledge one gradually becomes advanced on the path of liberation, and thereafter he is freed, and his attraction becomes fixed. Then real devotion and devotional service begin.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.25.25)

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- By proper practice, one after another, firm faith, then real attraction, and finally loving devotion will arise.
- In Śuddha-bhakti-cintāmaṇi, Śivarāma Swami is making a major statement to the devotees of ISKCON as he traces the progression of faith, attraction, and devotion through regulated devotional practice.
- What he says here is invaluablely useful for all who have strayed from Kṛṣṇa and are serious about going back to Him.
- He explains how the adhikāras for various depths of hearing kṛṣṇa-līlā are acquired in the course of this standard cultivation.
- In this way he gives us the information we need to decide for ourselves what we are ready to hear and speak about. And he does this with strict adherence to guru, śāstra, and sādhu.

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- Although I have never visited Śivarāma Swami's prabhu-datta-deśa of Hungary, from what acquaintance I have had with him, from reading his books, and from my few opportunities to see him in action in GBC meetings and sitting briefly with him, I have become confident that he is as fit as anyone in our ISKCON assembly of exalted devotees to make thoughtful presentations on such crucial matters of siddhānta as the questions addressed in Śuddha-bhakti-cintāmaṇi.
- He is without doubt one of the most profound thinkers in ISKCON, and what he thinks about is closely centered on the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa.
- Please, everyone who now has this book in hand, read it attentively.

Gopīparāṇadhana Dāsa