

# Śuddha-bhakti Cintāmaṇi

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# CHAPTER 2 - Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1

- The first sprout to appear from the seed of the creeper of pure devotion is śraddhā, the original eternal pure faith of the living entities, the faith that impels them to engage in eternal loving service to the Lord.
- Other kinds of faith, which sprout from the seeds of mixed devotion, provide impetus for the countless mundane activities and materialistic religious practices of this world.
- Pure faith alone qualifies the conditioned living entity for pure devotional service.[See the explanation of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.20.27–28 in Bhakti-sandarbha, anuccheda 172]
- How and why does pure faith sprout from the creeper of pure devotion?
- It begins to sprout when the results of the unwitting devotional acts (ajñāta-sukṛti) of innocent souls accumulate and awaken in them an interest in the Lord.

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- That interest leads them to saintly persons, whose teachings and behaviour make lasting impressions on their hearts.
- As they contemplate these impressions, they develop trust in the Vaiṣṇavas.
- Confirmed and fortified by the Supersoul, that trust solidifies into a commitment to truth.
- This awakening of firm commitment is the first sprout of the creeper of devotion—pure faith (śraddhā).
- Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu gives the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava conception of faith:

‘śraddhā-śabde——viśvāsa kahe sudṛḍha niścaya  
kṛṣṇe bhakti kaile sarva-karma kṛta haya

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- “Śraddhā is confident, firm faith that by rendering transcendental loving service to Kṛṣṇa one automatically performs all subsidiary activities.
- Such faith is favourable to the discharge of devotional service.” (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 22.62)
- A person who has this quality of faith thinks, “Pouring water on the root of a tree automatically satisfies the trunk, branches, and twigs.
- Supplying food to the stomach nourishes the life airs and satisfies the senses.
- In the same way, worshipping and serving Kṛṣṇa will automatically satisfy all the demigods and fulfil my needs.”
- This train of thought reflects the mood of exclusive dedication and complete dependence characteristic of pure faith.

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- This mood does not lead to blind faith as empiricists would have us think.
- Rather, because faith is born of transcendental knowledge, it is directly and systematically perceivable.
- Kṛṣṇa states in the Bhagavad-gītā that spiritual knowledge gives direct perception of the self by realization (pratyakṣāvagamam dharmyam). [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 9.2]
- In fact, pure faith and pure devotional service give direct experience of the self at each stage of their development.
- In addition to the two characteristics of pure faith mentioned above, pure faith has three other qualities: trust in scripture, a distinct taste for devotion, and increased strength to practise devotional service.

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- The next three paragraphs will briefly describe each of these qualities.
- Faith in scripture: While instructing candidates for devotion, Vaiṣṇavas constantly refer to sacred texts such as the Bhagavad-gītā in order to establish that the revealed scripture is the foremost authority (pramāṇa) in a devotee’s life.
- In the process they expose the futility of humankind’s attempts at material happiness and make clear that misidentification with the body is the root cause of suffering.
- Hearing all this, candidates develop firm trust in scripture and the path it prescribes.
- As Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī writes: śraddhā hi śāstārtha-viśvāsaḥ, “Śraddhā is faith in the scriptures.” [Bhakti-sandarbha, anuccheda 173]

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- A distinct taste for devotion: Persons who receive transcendental knowledge at once recognize the futility of their past fruitive deeds and are relieved to contact the truth.
- The inner joy arising from this relief along with the increasing relish derived from continued acts of devotion combine to give aspirants a taste that makes faith deeper and more concentrated. [Bhakti-tattva-viveka, chapter 4]
- As Kṛṣṇa says, the taste of transcendental knowledge is su-sukham, very joyful.
- Increasing strength to practise devotional service: The first sprout of pure faith is generally tender, or weak, but acts of devotion and further cultivation of transcendental knowledge gradually reinforce one's faith until it becomes as immovable as the Himalayas.
- This steadily increasing strength is another characteristic of pure faith. Caitanya Mahāprabhu says that a madhyama-adhikārī is one who has reached the stage of firm faith (śraddhāvān).



## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Semblance of Faith)

- The characteristics of impure faith stand in vivid contrast to those of pure faith.
- Impure faith rests on distorted knowledge and material desires, whereas pure faith rests on knowledge of one’s relationship with the Lord and the desire to please Him.
- Impure faith is the first sprout from the creeper of mixed devotion, just as pure faith is the first sprout from the creeper of pure devotion.
- And as explained at the end of chapter one, the seed that produces the mixed creeper is false “knowledge.”
- Some characteristics of impure faith—trust, taste, and strength—may resemble those of pure faith, but because impure faith lacks exclusive dedication to and full dependence on Kṛṣṇa, it does not lead to the ultimate goal of life.

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- Exclusive devotion and full dependence on Kṛṣṇa are unique to pure faith.
- Thus while materially motivated persons may sometimes imitate the behaviour of pure devotees, they can never imitate the purity of their hearts.
- By misfortune or lack of discrimination, conditioned souls receive seeds other than the bhakti-bīja.
- By even greater misfortune or a greater oversight, they receive the seed of pure devotion and then allow its creeper to become stunted by nondevotional weeds.
- The result of such neglect is impure faith, and impure faith leads to a tainted perspective of the goal of life.
- In summary, faith connected to bhakti is of two types, pure or transcendental faith (śraddhā), and the semblance of such faith (śraddhābhāsa).

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Semblance of Faith)

- The seed of the creeper of the semblance of devotion (ābhāsa-bhakti-latā-bīja) is planted in the hearts of living entities through contact with incomplete, imperfect, or distorted knowledge.
- Once sown in the heart, or once accepted by the aspirant, this seed sprouts into the semblance of faith (śraddhābhāsa), which then impels its recipients to practise the semblance of devotion (bhakty-ābhāsa). [Jaiva-dharma, chapter 25]
- At this point the reader may question the relevance of studying the semblance of faith—also known as the indirect path to devotion—when Śrīla Prabhupāda undoubtedly gave ISKCON’s members pure faith.
- But understanding the indirect path is relevant because even though members of ISKCON receive the seed of pure devotion, they still need to carefully examine whether or not they have fully accepted it, properly cultivated it, and carefully protected it from the influence of unwanted creepers.

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Semblance of Faith)

- If for some reason devotees stray from the path of pure faith and pure devotion, they must be able to recognize such deviations by their symptoms and rectify them.
- What are the possible causes of distraction from the path of pure faith?
- Śrīla Prabhupāda mentions the following: not properly accepting the seed or the spiritual master's instruction, not watering the seed properly, and not uprooting unwanted creepers and therefore succumbing to their influence.
- His Divine Grace makes clear that devotees must carefully accept the seed of pure devotion.
- As already mentioned, he defines the bhakti-latā-bīja as the instructions that give the methods, rules, and regulations by which one is perfectly trained in devotional service.

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- If devotees do not take the spiritual master’s instructions as they are given, if instead they succumb to the bias of personal motivation, they cannot properly water the seed.
- As a result, the creeper of devotion will not sprout.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “One who has not properly heard from the spiritual master or who does not follow the regulative principles is not fit for chanting [kīrtana].”
- In short, improper hearing results in impotent chanting, the effect of which is a heart devoid of pure devotion.
- Moreover, if while watering the seed of devotional service devotees engage in unbecoming behaviour, they may uproot the very creeper they are trying to cultivate. Śrīla Prabhupāda does not mince words when spelling out the disastrous consequences of such unseemly conduct.

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- “Giving up the regulative principles and living according to one’s whims is compared to a mad elephant, which by force uproots the bhakti-latā and breaks it to pieces...Such an offence is especially created when one disobeys the instructions of the spiritual master...As soon as one is deviated from the spiritual master’s instructions, the uprooting of the bhakti-latā begins, and gradually all the leaves dry up.” [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 19.156, purport]
- When devotees hear topics unrelated or offensive to pure devotion, unwanted creepers grow alongside the bhakti-latā.
- Lord Caitanya emphatically warns His followers about the creepers of worldly desire and liberation, which embrace and strangle the bhakti-latā.
- The varieties of such fearsome creepers are unlimited.
- Therefore devotees must be painstakingly attentive to recognize them.

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion -Part 1 (The Semblance of Faith)

- To assist us in identifying the unwanted creepers, Lord Caitanya classifies them into broad categories: behaviour unacceptable for those trying to attain perfection, diplomatic behaviour, animal-killing, mundane profiteering, striving to be adored, and striving for mundane popularity.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda comments: “All these obstructions have been described in this verse as unwanted creepers.
- They simply present obstacles for the real creeper, the bhakti-latā.
- One should be very careful to avoid all these unwanted things.
- Sometimes these unwanted creepers look exactly like the bhakti creeper.
- They appear to be of the same size and the same species when they are packed together with the bhakti creeper, but in spite of this, the creepers are called upaśākhā [unwanted].”

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- If devotees do not pay strict attention, the water of their hearing and chanting will go to the weeds instead of the devotional creeper.
- In this regard, to stress the importance of avoiding offences and to help us further identify unwanted creepers, Śrīla Prabhupāda includes Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's commentary on the above verse (Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 19.159) in his purport to the next verse:
- He states that if one hears and chants without trying to give up offences, one becomes materially attached to sense gratification.
- One may also desire freedom from material bondage like the Māyāvādīs, or one may become attached to the yoga-siddhis and desire wonderful yogic powers.
- If one is attached to wonderful material activities, one is called siddhi-lobhī, greedy for material perfection.



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- One may also be victimized by diplomatic or crooked behaviour, or one may associate with women for illicit sex.
- One may make a show of devotional service like the *prākṛta-sahajiyās*, or one may try to support his philosophy by joining some caste or identifying himself with a certain dynasty, claiming a monopoly on spiritual advancement.
- Thus with the support of family tradition, one may become a pseudo guru, or so-called spiritual master.
- One may become attached to the four sinful activities—illicit sex, intoxication, gambling, and meat-eating—or one may consider a Vaiṣṇava to belong to a mundane caste or creed.
- One may think, “This is a Hindu Vaiṣṇava, and this is a European Vaiṣṇava. European Vaiṣṇavas are not allowed to enter the temples.”

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- In other words, one may consider Vaiṣṇavas in terms of birth, thinking one a brāhmaṇa Vaiṣṇava, another a śūdra Vaiṣṇava, another a mleccha Vaiṣṇava, and so on.
- One may also try to carry out a professional business by means of chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra or reading Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, or one may try to increase his monetary strength by illegal means.
- Also, one may become a cheap Vaiṣṇava by trying to chant in a secluded place for material adoration, or one may desire mundane reputation by making compromises with nondevotees concerning one's philosophy or spiritual life, or one may become a supporter of a hereditary caste system.
- All these are pitfalls of personal sense gratification.
- Just to cheat some innocent people, one makes a show of advanced spiritual life and becomes known as a sādhu, mahātmā, or religious person.

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- All this means that the so-called devotee has become victimized by all these unwanted creepers and that the real creeper, the bhakti-latā, has been stunted.
- To learn to identify and avoid unwanted habits is the first reason one should study the semblance of faith.
- The second reason is to help persons who may not have had the good fortune to have awakened pure faith.
- Just as common persons purchase gold-plated instead of solid-gold jewellery, worshippers with meagre piety are drawn to the indirect path instead of the direct one.
- Effective preachers recognize the symptoms of impure faith and know how to patiently guide persons to pure faith.

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Semblance of Faith)

- Despite the inferiority of the indirect path, at times Kṛṣṇa recommends it to the faithless and ignorant.
- He tells Arjuna: “So as not to disrupt the minds of ignorant men attached to the fruitive results of prescribed duties, a learned person should not induce them to stop work.
- Rather, by working in the spirit of devotion, he should engage them in all sorts of activities [for the gradual development of Kṛṣṇa consciousness].”
- Kṛṣṇa Himself does not begrudge those who pay lip service to Vedic mantras, nor those who work for Him only to quench their lust.
- Liberal and patient, as the Supersoul in their hearts He cultivates and steadies the impure faith by which materialists pursue their goals.

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion -Part 1 (The Semblance of Faith)

yo yo yām yām tanum bhaktaḥ  
śraddhayārcitum icchati  
tasya tasyācalāmśraddhām  
tām eva vidadhāmy aham

- “I am in everyone’s heart as the Supersoul. As soon as one desires to worship some demigod, I make his faith steady so that he can devote himself to that particular deity.”
- And Kṛṣṇa does more than just steady the faith of materialists; He actually fulfils their desires.
- Even though apparently upstaged by lesser beings such as Indra and Agni, it is only Kṛṣṇa who directs and empowers these lesser beings to fulfil their followers’ whimsical desires.
- Why does Kṛṣṇa reciprocate with the misplaced trust of foolish demigod worshippers, who overlook the real goal of life?

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- Kṛṣṇa's purpose in speaking and propagating the Vedas is to instil some kind of faith in every type of person, because trust in the Vedic system, even if that trust is not in the Lord, is better than no faith at all.
- Thus directly or indirectly, by following scriptural injunctions, people commit to a path that ultimately leads to Him. [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 4.11]
- ISKCON's devotees must therefore be observant in their preaching.
- Sometimes they must temporarily concede to the intransigence of motivated worshippers, souls who cannot convert overnight.
- These conditional devotees may accept Kṛṣṇa's divinity, worship Him, chant His names, and even avoid certain sinful habits, but their acceptance of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is selective and does not accommodate full surrender.

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- They don't want to hear that they should give up all duties and surrender everything (sarva-dharmān parityajya); they want to hear that they have a right to perform prescribed duties (karmāṇy evādhikāras te).
- This is the extent of their spiritual conviction, and efforts to artificially accelerate their conviction often prove counterproductive.
- If pressed too hard, materialistic devotees often withdraw from service to ISKCON or give up Kṛṣṇa consciousness altogether.
- They may then become demigod worshipers or adopt a religion that demands less of them, a religion with its sights more on this world than on the next.
- For these reasons, it is important to have an understanding of the semblance of faith. In Śrīla Prabhupāda's words, "A pure devotee can distinguish between the bhakti creeper and a mundane creeper, and he is very alert to distinguish them and keep them separate."

**SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion -  
Part 1  
(The Effect of the Modes)**



## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Effect of the Modes)

- In understanding the semblance of faith, it is important to recognize how the all-pervading modes of material nature influence the creeper of devotion.
- The original, constitutional faith of the living entity is pure and transcendental, reposed only in Kṛṣṇa, but in contact with material nature that faith becomes distorted, influenced by many other things.
- In the conditioned state, faith is a semblance of the real thing, somewhat like a mirage in a desert.
- It is an effect of the modes of nature—goodness, passion, and ignorance—just as a mirage in the desert is the effect of the sky, heat waves, and sand.
- Mixed with the permutations and combinations of the three modes, the semblances of faith are innumerable.

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Effect of the Modes)

- Devotees desiring to fully understand the subject should know how the modes influence faith.
- Lord Kṛṣṇa elaborates on this topic to both Arjuna and to Uddhava.
- To Uddhava Kṛṣṇa says:

sāttviky ādhyātmikīśraddhā  
karma-śraddhā tu rājasī  
tāmasy adharme yāśraddhā  
mat-sevāyām tu nirguṇā

- “Faith directed toward spiritual life is in the mode of goodness, faith rooted in fruitive work is in the mode of passion, faith residing in irreligious activities is in the mode of ignorance, but faith in My devotional service is purely transcendental.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.25.27)

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Effect of the Modes)

- A natural corollary of Kṛṣṇa’s instructions on faith is that everyone has it.
- People may have faith in different things in different ways, but because everyone is either under the modes of nature or transcendental to them, everyone possesses some type of faith—even those who deny that they do.
- Empiricists may argue that religion is defective because it is based on faith.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda’s answer, as already mentioned, is that every action is based on the contemplation of a plan, which forms a seed or bīja.
- Because no plan is carried out without confidence in its success, every activity is based on faith.
- Thus all living entities have some type of faith
- As Kṛṣṇa explains, the type of faith each person has is either in goodness, passion, or ignorance depending on the dominant mode they have acquired from material nature.

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Semblance of Faith)

- Although the living entities and their faith are by nature transcendental (nirguṇa), when the jīvas turn away from Kṛṣṇa and enter the material world, they contact the modes, whose influence is all-pervasive and all-powerful.
- Whatever they see, hear, or conceive of in their minds is constituted of the modes of nature.
- In this way the living entities are conditioned by contact with matter and forced into a quagmire of material actions and reactions (karma) governed by the laws of material nature.
- Kṛṣṇa says that those whose faith is in goodness worship demigods, those whose faith is in passion worship demons, and those whose faith is in ignorance worship ghosts and spirits.
- However, because all material forms are combinations of the three modes of nature, it is most correct to say that the jīvas are predominantly rather than exclusively under a particular mode.

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Semblance of Faith)

- Lord Kapila describes how the modes of nature touch even the faith of the Supreme Lord’s devotees.

śrī-bhagavān uvāca  
bhakti-yogo bahu-vidho  
mārgair bhāmini bhāvyate  
svabhāva-guṇa-mārgeṇa  
puṁsām bhāvo vibhidiate

- “Lord Kapila, the Personality of Godhead, replied: O noble lady, there are multifarious paths of devotional service in terms of the different qualities of the executor.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.29.7)
- Kapiladeva’s teachings on devotional service elaborate on the varieties of faith in Kṛṣṇa.
- There is pure faith born of the mode of pure goodness, as well as varieties of mixed faith born of the material modes.

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- He explains that impure faith arises in the hearts of those who are overwhelmed by past bad habits and are unable to dedicate themselves exclusively to the Lord.
- Serious devotees are naturally interested in knowing the details of how and why the Vaiṣṇava's faith is influenced by the modes of nature.
- Simply put, practising devotees who do not take full shelter of liberated Vaiṣṇavas and their liberating instructions are victimized by their own previous conditioning.
- They then succumb to their lower nature. Rather than the mercy of pure Vaiṣṇavas dominating the development of their faith, such things as the results of offences, thirst for the impermanent, and weakness of heart infiltrate.
- The conditional faith acquired under such circumstances—which resembles pure faith but is not based on exclusive dependence on Kṛṣṇa—is called the semblance of pure faith (śraddhābhāsa).

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Semblance of Faith)

- Śrīla Prabhupāda elaborates on how the mercy of liberated Vaiṣṇavas insulates devotees from the influence of the modes.
- “A conditioned soul is hampered by four defects: he is sure to commit mistakes, he is sure to become illusioned, he has a tendency to cheat others, and his senses are imperfect.
- Consequently we have to take direction from liberated persons.
- This Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement directly receives instructions from the Supreme Personality of Godhead via persons who are strictly following His instructions.
- Although a follower may not be a liberated person, if he follows the supreme, liberated Personality of Godhead, his actions are naturally liberated from the contamination of the material nature.” [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.18.5, purport]

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Semblance of Faith)

- Even after hearing how the modes of nature contaminate pure faith, a reader may still question how faith connected with Kṛṣṇa's service can be a mere semblance of faith, since anything connected to Kṛṣṇa is pure.
- Anything connected to Kṛṣṇa is pure as long as the under-lying purpose is to serve and please Him.
- When another, even slightly selfish, motivation underlies faith, the connection with Kṛṣṇa is compromised by contact with the material energy.
- It is then called mixed faith, or a semblance of faith.
- This semblance of faith reflects the desire of the soul to taste Kṛṣṇa's separated material energy, a characteristic in keeping with its marginal nature (tatastha-śakti).



## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Semblance of Faith)

- Some persons understand that the ultimate goal of life is devotional service but at the same time think that their immediate purpose must remain to fulfil their own necessities.
- Others reject the spiritual supremacy of devotional service and practise it merely to realize their own selfish ambitions.
- These kinds of mixed intentions, accompanied by a thirst for the impermanent, are symptom-atic of a semblance of faith related to devotional service.
- Can devotees free themselves from the influence of the modes of nature and regain their pure faith?
- Their only hope to do so is to stay with and hear from Vaiṣṇavas who have pure faith and transcendental knowledge.

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Semblance of Faith)

- The company of Vaiṣṇavas is so powerful that it can free sincere aspirants from the influence of the lowest of modes.
- Rendering service to liberated devotees gives neophytes the strength to resist their lower conditioned nature and to stick to the higher, pure ideal of pleasing the Lord.
- Devotees who neglect to keep company with superior Vaiṣṇavas, however, are unable to control their lower nature, and their impure faith leads them away from the path of pure devotion to the path of a semblance of devotion. In this regard, Caitanya Mahāprabhu quotes the following verse to Sanātana Gosvāmī:

rahūgaṇaitat tapasā na yāti  
na cejyayā nirvapaṇād gṛhād vā  
na cchandasā naiva jalāgni-sūryair  
vinā mahat-pāda-rajo-'bhiṣekam

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Semblance of Faith)

- “My dear King Rahūgaṇa, unless one has the opportunity to smear his entire body with the dust of the lotus feet of great devotees, one cannot realize the Absolute Truth.
- One cannot realize the Absolute Truth simply by observing celibacy [brahmacarya], strictly following the rules and regulations of householder life, leaving home as a vānaprastha, accepting sannyāsa, or undergoing severe penances in winter by keeping oneself submerged in water or surrounding oneself in summer by fire and the scorching heat of the sun.
- There are many other processes to understand the Absolute Truth, but the Absolute Truth is only revealed to one who has attained the mercy of a great devotee.” At the present time, people are confused by religious zealots.
- For a purported religious cause, fanatics are not only ready to sacrifice their own lives but to take the lives of others.

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Semblance of Faith)

- What kind of faith impels people to engage in this type of behaviour?
- Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam declares that violence done in the name of devotional service is in the mode of ignorance.
- Faith distorted by a wrong understanding of the Lord's will, no matter how strong that faith is, has insignificant spiritual value.
- Such worshippers may think they are sacrificing everything for the Lord's pleasure, but if their understanding of the Lord's will is wrong, then they neither please the Lord nor advance in spiritual life.
- On the contrary, they are punished for whatever violence they commit.
- A person with weak faith in the right conception of religion is better than one with strong faith in the wrong conception.

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- In summary, faith is not merely a crutch for the religious-minded but a requisite impetus for every activity performed by all persons.
- Since the constitutional activity of all living entities is to serve Kṛṣṇa, the original pure faith of all beings is based on serving Him.
- Most souls have forgotten this.
- Driven by misplaced faith they set countless goals in the pursuit of religiosity, economic development, sense gratification, and liberation.
- The purpose of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is to purify humankind's semblance of faith by redirecting it to the unmotivated devotional service of the Lord.

kintu yadi latra sage uhe upakhkintu yadi latāra saṅge uṭhe 'upaśākhā'  
bhukti-mukti-vāñchā, yata asaṅkhya tāra lekhā

## SBC 2– Eligibility for Devotion - Part 1 (The Semblance of Faith)

- Sometimes unwanted creepers, such as the creepers of desires for material enjoyment and liberation from the material world, grow along with the creeper of devotional service.
- The varieties of such unwanted creepers are unlimited. Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 19.158