

Śuddha-bhakti Cintāmaṇi

by H.H Śivarāma Swami

CHAPTER 5

The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2

- The study of the semblance of devotion in three categories—karma, jñāna, and yoga—gives a piercing, nonsectarian insight into the world’s multifarious religious systems and philosophies.
- The terms used in non-Vedic religions and philosophies may differ from terms used in our bhakti literature, but the universal principles espoused in that literature are easily recognizable in all religious systems.
- Therefore this study is helpful to understand pure devotion and essential for those who want to explain it to others.
- Almost all spiritual teachers are asked, “If God is one, why are there so many religions in the world?”
- The general answer given to laymen is that the one Supreme Lord has given people of various natures in various countries a multitude of ways to come to understand the one eternal truth that brings everyone to Him—loving devotional service.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2

- But introspective Vaiṣṇavas know that the more complete answer goes much deeper than that.
- In addition to religions having dissimilar cultural appearances, they also differ in terms of the quality and quantity of their teachings.
- They are not all equal. Therefore different religions attract adherents with different levels of spiritual qualification.
- These differences do not mean, however, that one religion is better than another. Rather, the differences are like those between grade levels in school.
- Each grade only signifies a level of education students pass through on their way to graduation.
- The various religious systems are meant to complement one another to help their adherents progress in faith and to elevate conditioned souls to perfection.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2

- Each religion is an indispensable step on the indirect path to the Lord.
- However, beyond the countless faiths of conditioned souls lies the true eternal religion, pure devotional service.
- Ultimately, like the innumerable creeks that enter into many streams, the streams into great rivers, and the rivers into one ocean, all authorized forms of religion end in pure devotional service (śuddha-bhakti).

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2

(More on the Semblance of Devotion)

- As a shadow’s shape corresponds to the form of the object casting it, so mixed devotion corresponds to pure devotion. At this point in the discussion, to help identify and contrast the various semblances of devotion from their one original form, mention will be made of devotional service free from the touches of karma, jñāna, and yoga.
- Jīva Gosvāmī defines pure devotional service, also known as svarūpa-siddha-bhakti, as follows:
- “Svarūpa-siddha devotional service is manifested when devotional service is no longer mixed with jñāna or karma and when the devotee has pure and unwavering devotion for the Lord.
- This kind of devotional service is characterized by the various devotional activities that begin with hearing and chanting the glories of the Lord.” [Bhakti-sandarbhā, anuccheda 217]

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (More on the Semblance of Devotion)

- While this depiction includes the stage of love for Kṛṣṇa, it also portrays the types of devotion and activities that invoke love.
- The activities to which Śrī Jīva refers are the same as the ones praised by Prahlāda Mahārāja:

*śrī-prahrāda uvāca
śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ
smaraṇam pāda-sevanam
arcanam vandanam dāsyam
sakhyam ātma-nivedanam*

*iti puṁsārpitā viṣṇau
bhaktiś cen nava-lakṣaṇā
kriyeta bhagavaty addhā
tan manye 'dhītam uttamam*

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2

(More on the Semblance of Devotion)

- “Prahāda Mahārāja said: Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia, and pastimes of Lord Viṣṇu, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of the Lord, offering the Lord respectful worship with sixteen types of paraphernalia, offering prayers to the Lord, becoming His servant, considering the Lord one’s best friend, and surrendering everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him with the body, mind, and words)—these nine processes are accepted as pure devotional service.
- One who has dedicated his life to the service of Kṛṣṇa through these nine methods should be understood to be the most learned person, for he has acquired complete knowledge.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.5.23–24)
- Śrī Prahāda’s words portray the uncluttered world of pure devotion.
- In contrast, the semblance of devotion is a bewildering labyrinth.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2

(More on the Semblance of Devotion)

- Even worldly experience testifies to the disparity between the results of honesty and the results of deceit.
- There is no end to the complexities that result from lying and cheating.
- Similarly, there is no end to the embarrassing intrigues that result from devotees' injecting dishonesty into the realm of the Lord's service.
- Kṛṣṇa is so kind, however, that He gradually reforms the cheating processes until devotees are free from duplicity and have acquired the kind of integrity that attracts Him.
- This chapter further investigates the semblance of devotion and how it is reformed.
- What are the results of the three kinds of semblance of devotional service?

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2

(More on the Semblance of Devotion)

- According to the principle that “The result is determined by the combination of its efficient and ingredient causes” (yathā-yoni yathā-bījaṁ), [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.1.54] devotees receive results corresponding to their faith and accomplishments.
- In his writings on the history of Nalakūvara and Maṇigrīva’s return to heaven, Śrīla Prabhupāda distils the results achieved by the practice of the semblance of devotion into three broad categories.
- “By karma-miśra-bhakti one is elevated to the celestial kingdom, by jñāna-miśra-bhakti one is able to merge in the Brahman effulgence, and by yoga-miśra-bhakti one is able to realize the omnipotency of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.10.20–22, purport]
- These three results are secondary rewards for the semblance of devotion.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2

(More on the Semblance of Devotion)

- They are Vedic enticements meant to trick people into practising devotional service, the primary and only worthwhile reward.
- By the company of pure devotees, all three types of religionists gradually acquire a taste for bhakti.
- As that taste matures, their mixed devotion is gradually purified of all traces of karma, jñāna, and yoga, and in time it reverts to its original, unalloyed form. As pure devotees they forget their aspirations for heaven, for instance, and ultimately redirect their vision to Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa's abode, Vṛndāvana.
- This is the final result of any type of semblance of devotion.
- While Kṛṣṇa was present on earth, many devotees performed devotional service for personal gain.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2

(More on the Semblance of Devotion)

- One such devotee lived in Dvārakā, where he had the good fortune to regularly see Kṛṣṇa by the grace of the Lord’s associates.
- This devotee accepted Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Lord, yet maintained his desire to merge into Kṛṣṇa’s effulgence.
- But by seeing the Lord’s beauty, his heart changed, his selfish desire faded, and in its place stood a desire to serve the Lord.
- Freed from conditional devotion, the devotee lamented: “In this Dvārakā-dhāma I am being attracted by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, who is personified spiritual bliss. Simply by seeing Him I feel great happiness.
- Oh, I have wasted so much time trying to become self-realized through impersonal cultivation. This is a cause for lamentation!” [Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 3.1.34]

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (More on the Semblance of Devotion)

- Scripture and Vaiṣṇava ācāryas stress the importance of the company of pure devotees.
- Without it, mixed devotees cannot find their way clear of material desires. The following verse gives further evidence of this truth:

*aho mahātman bahu-doṣa-duṣṭo
'py ekena bhāty eṣa bhavo guṇena
sat-saṅgamākhyena sukhāvahena
kṛtādya no yena kṛśā mumukṣā*

- “O great learned devotee, although there are many faults in this material world, there is one good opportunity—association with devotees.
- Such company brings about great happiness.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (More on the Semblance of Devotion)

- Due to this good quality, our strong desire to achieve liberation by merging into the Brahman effulgence has become weakened.” (Hari-bhakti-sudhodaya) [Quoted in Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 24.125]
- According to the mature opinion of great Vaiṣṇavas, not all practitioners of the semblance of devotion are worthy to be called devotees.
- Neither are they all elevated to pure devotion. Some stagnate.
- Others slide into a state devoid of bhakti.
- Their fate depends on the degree to which devotion is present in their spiritual disciplines.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2

(More on the Semblance of Devotion)

- Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “Bhakti may be considered in three stages, called guṇī-bhūta, pradhānī-bhūta, and kevala, and according to these stages there are three divisions, which are called jñāna, jñānamayī, and rati, or premā—that is, simple knowledge, love mixed with knowledge, and pure love.” [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.3.31, purport]
- Here Śrīla Prabhupāda is talking about the semblance of devotion mixed with empiric knowledge.
- In such a case, when devotion (love) is dominated by knowledge, it is called guṇī-bhūta-bhakti and the practitioner is called a jñānī.
- When devotion subordinates knowledge, however, it is called pradhānī-bhūta-bhakti and the practitioner is called a jñānamayī, or jñāna-miśra-bhakta.
- And of course, pure devotion is called kevala-bhakti and the practitioner a bhakta, a pure devotee.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2

(More on the Semblance of Devotion)

- In their commentaries on Bhagavad-gītā, Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura use the same terms to describe the three kinds of mixed devotion. [See those ācāryas' commentaries to Bhagavad-gītā 7.16–18]
- Thus the technical name for the semblance of devotion in which devotion dominates karma, jñāna, or yoga is pradhānī-bhūta-bhakti.
- If closely supervised by advanced Vaiṣṇavas, this type of devotion quickly becomes elevated to pure devotion.
- All four pious men described in the seventh chapter of Bhagavad-gītā are pradhānī-bhūta-bhaktas.
- The distressed, inquisitive, and seeker of wealth are in the karma-miśra category, and the wise in the jñāna-miśra category.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2

(More on the Semblance of Devotion)

- In this way, the four Kumāras are accurately known as jñāna-miśra pradhānī-bhūta-bhaktas.
- In place of this longer name, however, the general terms used to describe this class of devotee are jñāna-yogīs or jñāna-miśra-bhaktas.
- The technical name for the semblance of devotion in which the nondevotional qualities of karma, jñāna, or yoga dominate is guṇī-bhūta-bhakti.
- Yogīs under the sway of these qualities generally will not humble themselves before pure Vaiṣṇavas.
- They take devotional service as a means to attain heaven, liberation, or mystic power. They are not devotees.
- They are karmīs, jñānīs, or yogīs.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (More on the Semblance of Devotion)

- Unfortunately, in their so-called efforts at perfection, they are like farmers who beat the husks of rice after the kernel has been removed.
- They endure many hardships but gain nothing.
- Lord Brahmā says,

*śreyah-sṛtiṁ bhaktim udasya te vibho
kliśyanti ye kevala-bodha-labdhave
teṣāṁ asau kleśala eva śiṣyate
nānyad yathā sthūla-tuṣāvaghātinām*

- “My dear Lord, devotional service unto You is the only auspicious path.
- If one gives it up simply for speculative knowledge or the understanding that these living beings are spirit souls and the material world is false, he undergoes a great deal of trouble.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (More on the Semblance of Devotion)

- He only gains troublesome and inauspicious activities. His actions are like beating a husk that is already devoid of rice. His labour becomes fruitless.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.14.4)

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (Subdivisions of Mixed Devotion)

- All three categories of the semblance of devotion (karma, jñāna, and yoga) contain to varying degrees the common ingredient, devotion.
- In addition they have their own unique traits: work, knowledge, and contemplation respectively.
- These four ingredients combine to form innumerable subdivisions in each of the three broad categories of the semblance of devotion.
- In this regard Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “Actually the path of devotional service is one without a second, but according to the devotees’ condition, devotional service appears in multifarious varieties.” [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.29.7, purport]
- Lord Caitanya’s explanation of the famous ātmārāma verse is an exposition on some of the many kinds of mixed-devotee and nondevotee spiritualists. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.7.10]

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (Subdivisions of Mixed Devotion)

- Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu describes the verse to Sanātana Gosvāmī in only sixty-one ways.
- By his own admission He has spoken of only a few of the unlimited kinds of mixed devotees.
- Of the self-satisfied sages the Lord describes, the following thirteen types of jñānīs and yogīs give an idea of the varieties in mixed devotional service: [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 24.163, purport]
- (1) the sādḥaka, or the neophyte performer;
- (2) the brahma-maya, or the one absorbed in the thought of impersonal Brahman;
- (3) prāpta-brahma-laya, the one who has truly attained Brahman perfection;
- (4) mumukṣu, the one who desires liberation;
- (5) jīvan-mukta, the one who is liberated in this life;
- (6) prāpta-svarūpa, the one who has attained his original constitutional position;
- (7) nirgrantha-muni, the completely liberated saint;

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (Subdivisions of Mixed Devotion)

- (8) *sagarbha-yogārurukṣu*, the yogī meditating on the four-handed Viṣṇu form and desiring yogic perfection;
 - (9) *nigarbha-yogārurukṣu*, the one who is trying for perfection in impersonal meditation;
 - (10) *sagarbha-yogārūḍha*, the one who has been elevated to the platform of yogic perfection by meditating on the Viṣṇu form;
 - (11) *nigarbha-yogārūḍha*, the impersonalist yogī on the platform of perfection;
 - (12) *sagarbha-prāpta-siddha*, the one who has attained the perfectional stage by meditating on the Viṣṇu form; and
 - (13) *nigarbha-prāpta-siddha*, the one who has attained perfection by practising impersonal meditation.
-
- The following calculations are meant to give the reader a further indication of the complexity of mixed devotion.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (Subdivisions of Mixed Devotion)

- The four basic ingredients of the semblance of devotion can be combined in twenty-four ways. [In mathematics, four things can be combined in $4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1 = 24$ ways]
- Add to them the influence of the three modes of nature and the combination increases to at least seventy-two, a conservative estimate considering that the modes interact unlimitedly.
- By Śrīla Prabhupāda's calculation the influence of nature is responsible for at least eighty-one categories of devotion. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.29.10, purport]
- In addition, there are three kinds of devotion: āropa-siddha-bhakti, saṅga-siddha-bhakti, and svarūpa-siddha-bhakti.
- That brings the combination to 216. Śrī Jīva declares that a practitioner of bhakti can be either improperly motivated (sakaitava) or not (akaitava).

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (Subdivisions of Mixed Devotion)

- This additional twofold division brings the combinations to 432.
- Then there is a second twofold division based on the relative proportion of karma, jñāna, and yoga mixed with the bhakti; either devotion dominates or one of the other ingredients dominates.
- This brings the combinations to 864.
- And as a final eye-opener, there are both qualitative and quantitative possibilities for each of the four basic elements.
- For instance, a person may have knowledge of the soul but no knowledge of Kṛṣṇa.
- Or if he knows Kṛṣṇa, he may know Him either as the Supersoul, the Lord of Dvārakā, or the moon of Vṛndāvana.
- In short, the varieties of the semblance of devotion are endless.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (Subdivisions of Mixed Devotion)

- The calculations given in the above paragraph are, no doubt, approximations.
- They are not meant to be precise but to give the reader a glimpse of the scope of the phenomenon.
- Many other factors can both modify and amplify the calculation.
- And just imagine how many names there are to describe these innumerable categories.
- We have tried to give a hint of this above.
- For instance, in karma-miśra-bhakti, also known as karma-yoga, when a practitioner is attached to the fruits of work he is said to be engaged in sakāma-karma-yoga.
- When he is detached from the fruits of his work but is attached to the work itself, he is said to be engaged in niṣkāma-karma-yoga.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (Subdivisions of Mixed Devotion)

- If the niṣkāma-karma-yogī, like Arjuna, is engaged in jñāna in lesser proportion than his practice of devotion, he is engaged in niṣkāma-karma-jñāna-miśra-pradhānī-bhūta-bhakti-yoga.
- But if his practice of jñāna is in greater proportion than his practice of devotion, then he is engaged in niṣkāma-karma-jñāna-miśra-guṇī-bhūta-bhakti-yoga.
- And because this type of bhakti is only practised to achieve perfection in jñāna, it is strictly speaking not bhakti at all!
- Dear reader, the above three paragraphs are not meant to confuse or overwhelm you, but simply to give you an idea of the technical details mentioned earlier in this chapter.
- Please know that this section only touches on the subject of the semblance of devotion.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (Subdivisions of Mixed Devotion)

- It is beyond the scope of this book to describe in detail the many varieties and nuances that distinguish these varieties of devotion from one another.
- Neither is it necessary to know all these details.
- But the basic principles underlying the semblance of devotion have been explained in plain English with the hope that you will be able to avoid the allurements of the semblance of devotion and remain fixed on the path of pure bhakti.
- In Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words, “To analyse [pure] bhakti-yoga minutely one has to understand these other yogas [karma-yoga, jñāna-yoga, aṣṭāṅga-yoga].” [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 6.47, purport]
- Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura provides a simple formula by which one can understand the causes of the many varieties of the semblance of devotion:

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (Subdivisions of Mixed Devotion)

- “Karma arises from lust, jñāna arises from indifference, and bhakti arises from faith in the Supreme Lord.” In this way impure devotion in any form can be distinguished from the real thing, pure devotion. [Śrī Bhaktyāloka 2.1]
- Sometimes devotees think, “I am satisfied by practising a semblance of devotion.
- Why should I exert myself for pure devotion? Let it come naturally.”
- But we must realize that without making an effort to elevate ourselves, the material allurements of the semblance of devotion will distract us.
- Bhakty-ābhāsa can award all the perfections of religiosity (dharma), economic development (artha), sense gratification (kāma), and even a semblance of liberation (mokṣa), but Vaiṣṇavas must be aware that these enticements only lead to repeated birth and death.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (Subdivisions of Mixed Devotion)

- They cannot award the real perfection of life, pure love for Kṛṣṇa (kṛṣṇa-prema).
- Serious devotees exert themselves under expert guidance to purify their devotion and go back to Godhead in this life.
- In Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words, “It is the duty of the transcendentalist to try strenuously to control desire...” [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 5.23, purport]
- Devotees interested in more details about the different types of karma-miśra-bhakti, jñāna-miśra-bhakti, and yoga-miśra-bhakti can find them in the commentaries on the Bhagavad-gītā by Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura.
- The semblance of devotion has almost endless varieties, but two characteristics are common to them all.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (Subdivisions of Mixed Devotion)

- The first is the practitioner's spirit of independence from Kṛṣṇa, and the second is the invaluable ingredient of devotional service.
- Broad-minded Kṛṣṇa, the ever well-wisher of His devotees—even those with dishonest motives—arranges for the potency of devotional service to gradually dissolve the independent spirit and lead His devotees to the altar of pure devotion.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- Pious living entities who come in touch with devotional service, even though they are still tinged with selfish motives, are nearing the end of their long sojourn in material existence.
- They are more or less at the gates of Vaikuṅṭha.
- Still, lingering dishonesty can rob them of awareness that their greatest good is nigh.
- Such devotees continue to desire material enjoyment or liberation instead of taking shelter at Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet.
- Yet Kṛṣṇa does not want His devotees to fall again into the material abyss.
- He therefore takes special interest in them and schemes how to give them shelter at His lotus feet.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- Kṛṣṇa’s partiality to His devotees, even when they are not fully surrendered to Him, is the expression of the Lord’s special mercy. [The Lord’s partiality is described in Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 9.29 and Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.88.8]
- “Kṛṣṇa says, ‘If one engages in My transcendental loving service, but at the same time wants the opulence of material enjoyment [or liberation], he is very, very foolish.
- Indeed, he is just like a person who gives up ambrosia to drink poison.
- Since I am very intelligent, why should I give this fool material prosperity?
- Instead I shall induce him to take the nectar of the shelter of My lotus feet and make him forget illusory material enjoyment.” [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 22.38–39]

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- Kṛṣṇa’s strategy to reform mixed devotees and make them pure Vaiṣṇavas is simple: He awakens pure faith in their hearts.
- Pure faith then inspires devotees to take up pure devotional service and to abandon all its mixed forms.
- Kṛṣṇa enacts this strategy in one of two ways: indirectly by inspiring devotees to continually refine and purify their semblances of faith, and directly by intervening in their lives to enable them to immediately accept pure faith.
- When do mixed devotees take the direct path and when the indirect?
- They take the direct path when, under the protection of a realized Vaiṣṇava, they embrace the Gītās conclusive order: mām ekaṁśaraṇaṁ vraja, “just surrender unto Me.” [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 18.66]

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

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

- “As long as one is not satiated by fruitive activity and has not awakened his taste for devotional service by śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ, one has to act according to the regulative principles of the Vedic injunctions.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.20.9)
- The Lord guides devotees on the indirect path in the same way as He guides those on the direct path.
- He speaks to them face to face through the medium of learned Vaiṣṇavas and from within the heart as Paramātmā.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- Thus mixed devotees, either gradually or without delay, come to realize that temporary delights are futile and that devotional service is potent.
- Uddhava glorifies Kṛṣṇa’s efforts to save the fallen: “O my Lord!...You appear in two features—externally as the ācārya and internally as the Supersoul—to deliver the embodied living being by directing him how to come to You” (yo ’ntar bahis tanu-bhṛtām aśubham vidhunvann ācārya-caitya-vapuṣā sva-gatiṁ vyanakti). [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.29.6]
- Not only Kṛṣṇa but Bhaktidevī also guides devotees.
- By her influence, the practices of devotional service such as hearing, chanting, and deity worship remove the obstacles to devotion and anoint the heart with unprecedented sweetness.
- Devotees thus rejoice in the ever-increasing taste of service to Kṛṣṇa.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- This sweet relish lures them from the thorny bushes of sense indulgence and liberation and fixes their purpose in spiritual growth.
- In this way, although the pious sometimes take up devotional service to serve themselves, kind Kṛṣṇa overlooks their selfishness.
- Instead, He takes their show of devotion as an excuse to bestow His mercy.
- By arranging circumstances, bestowing inspiration, and revealing the power of devotion, Kṛṣṇa tricks impure devotees into abandoning the very motives that prompted them to worship Him in the first place.
- He makes them selfless, and then He makes them mad for Him. The demigods once said:

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

*satyaṁ diśaty arthitam arthito nṛṇāṁ
naivārthado yat punar arthitā yataḥ
svayaṁ vidhatte bhajatām anicchatām
icchāpidhānam nija-pāda-pallavam*

- “The Supreme Personality of Godhead fulfils the material desires of a devotee who approaches Him with such motives, but He does not bestow benedictions upon the devotee that will cause him to demand more benedictions again.
- However, the Lord willingly gives the devotee shelter at His own lotus feet, even though such a person does not aspire for it, and that shelter satisfies all his desires. That is the Supreme Personality’s special mercy.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 5.19.27)
- At any stage of mixed devotion, devotees empowered to tread the path of the mahājanas are fortunate; they are eligible to go back to Godhead in this life.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- Anyone associated with ISKCON should know that Śrīla Prabhupāda maintained an open-door policy, inviting into his mercy all those eager to walk the direct path to pure devotion.
- One question that has reverberated in ISKCON since Śrīla Prabhupāda’s departure is whether devotees can go back to Godhead in this very lifetime.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda and Lord Kṛṣṇa have consistently answered this question: Yes.
- For instance, Śrīla Prabhupāda comments on Kṛṣṇa’s promise *mām upaiṣyasi* (“he comes to Me”): “[H]ere it is specified that the devotee who has always lived his lifetime here under the direction of the Supreme Lord, as stated, has evolved to the point where he can, after quitting this body, go back to Godhead and engage directly in the association of the Supreme Lord.” [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 9.28, purport]

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- But when devotees face the vast army of their unwanted desires, or when they take advice from outside Prabhupāda's line, they are beset with doubt.
- So a better question might be whether one has full faith in Śrīla Prabhupāda's words and in the potency of pure devotional service.
- Devotees in whom that pure faith does not exist can go in one of two directions: they can either acquire pure faith in the company of those who have it, or they can continue to wallow in the mud of doubt and scepticism, the breeding ground for superfluous desires.
- The real question, then, is this: Do devotees want to go back to Kṛṣṇa, or would they instead prefer to enjoy the material benefits of devotional service?

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- Since all living entities are endowed with free will, no one can be forced to become perfect.
- If devotees truly want to go back to Godhead, nothing can obstruct their path.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda even reconciles the position of a sincere devotee with minor shortcomings.
- He writes, “Also inform Jayananda I have received his letter and the difficulties of life may come as seasonal changes but we should not be disturbed by all those difficulties.
- Our process is to chant and that process will gradually clear everything in due course.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- There is nothing to be disrupted—you should go on with your work with enthusiasm and everything will be solved. We are on the sound footing of Krishna consciousness.” [Letter to Mukunda, New York, 6 June, 1967]
- In other words, the mercy of all-merciful Lord Gaurāṅga is all-powerful and readily available to those who choose to rely on it exclusively.
- Though the path to loving devotion may be a difficult one, difficult things become easy by Lord Caitanya’s mercy.

*kathañcana smṛte yasmin
duṣkaram sukaram bhavet
vismṛte viparītaṁ syāt
śrī-caitanyaṁ namāmi tam*

- “Things that are very difficult to do become easy to execute if one somehow or other simply remembers Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- But if one does not remember Him, even easy things become very difficult. To this Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu I offer my respectful obeisances.” (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 14.1)
- Śrīla Prabhupāda’s definitive conclusion on whether devotees need to take many lives to reach Goloka or whether they can, by their desire, achieve the spiritual world in one life is contained in the following statement.
- “The lesson from the life of Dhruva Mahārāja is that if one likes, one can attain Vaikuṅṭhaloka in one life, without waiting for many other lives.
- My guru mahārāja, Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Prabhupāda, used to say that every one of his disciples could attain Vaikuṅṭhaloka in this life, without waiting for another life to execute devotional service.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- One simply has to become as serious and sincere as Dhruva Mahārāja; then it is quite possible to attain Vaikuṅṭhaloka and go back home, back to Godhead, in one life.”
[Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.12.43, purport]
- Devotees unwilling to take the direct route to pure devotion but willing to follow the indirect path are also fortunate, but their fortune may only bear its fruit in another life.
- In traditional Vedic society, the natural course of such devotees’ lives would mature their faith through the successive stages of the semblance of devotion, from sakāma-karma-yoga to niṣkāma-karma-yoga, jñāna-yoga, aṣṭāṅga-yoga, and finally to bhakti-yoga.
- This gradual transition is described in the following paragraphs, but in a modified way that is more in keeping with the postmodern world.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- Śrīla Prabhupāda’s followers do not enjoy the benefits of living in the Vedic culture as did Arjuna or even Lord Caitanya’s associates.
- The majority of devotees who work and live outside temples, as well as the minority who live in temples, especially in the West, do so courtesy of a non-Vedic host society. Yet somehow or other, despite living in an environment that is not conducive for bhakti, they must become pure devotees.
- Devotees begin to evolve through the stages of devotional service by faithfully following the religious codes of the Gītā and the Bhāgavatam. Religious fidelity is sustained in the company of Vaiṣṇavas, which is the essence of the varṇāśrama social system, a system meant to instil faith in the Lord’s supremacy.
- Moreover, in such a society even materialistic persons take up devotional practices as a means to legitimize their material enjoyment (kāma) and receive the Lord’s blessings.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- The passionate semblance of devotion born of this kind of faith is called sakāma-karma-miśra-bhakti.
- Practitioners of this kind of bhakti gradually purify their hearts by regulating their sense gratification, offering the results of their work to Kṛṣṇa, and performing devotional rituals.
- In time, enriched with the knowledge that they are not the body, they develop the faith to abandon their selfish ways.
- Such devotees then work in a spirit of detachment (niṣkāma) and offer the results of their work to Kṛṣṇa.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- Attached to the work itself rather than the results, devotees now think that the performance of duty and the offering of the results of that work are the best things they can do for the Lord.
- This semblance of devotion is called niṣkāma-karma-miśra-bhakti.
- Such dutiful devotees then cultivate transcendental knowledge (jñāna) in the company of Vaiṣṇava saints and gain further enlightenment about the urgency of spiritual life.
- As their faith grows, they become convinced of the importance of devotional practices such as hearing and chanting to purify their conditioning.
- Such devotees may think of renouncing the world, but at this stage renunciation is not usually recommended.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- Their faith is better suited to the pursuit of perfection while engaging in detached dutiful work.
- Motivated by attachment to spiritual knowledge, this kind of semblance of devotion mixed with a desire for liberation is called niṣkāma-karma-jñāna-miśra-bhakti. [Bhakti-sandarbha, anuccheda 229]
- Śrīla Prabhupāda, following Kṛṣṇa’s teachings, does not recommend the eightfold path of mysticism to devotees.
- But control of the mind, which is at the core of yoga, assists the essence of bhakti, which is to remember Kṛṣṇa.
- To perform detached work in the knowledge that one is part of the Lord, but with Kṛṣṇa as the object of meditation instead of the object of loving service, is also a type of semblance of devotion, though almost pure, called yoga-miśra-bhakti.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (How Mixed Devotion Leads to Pure Devotion)

- In summary, in the beginning Kṛṣṇa strengthens His devotees' faith, which is weak because of the desire to enjoy.
- He molds such devotees into selfless workers.
- When they are steady in their duties, Kṛṣṇa inspires them with urgency for devotional practices.
- And when they are determined to be free from material contamination, Kṛṣṇa moves them to fix the Supreme Lord as their worshipable object.
- All that remains to reach the stage of pure devotion is the conviction that service to Kṛṣṇa is higher than all other forms of worship.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (The Transition to Pure Faith and Devotion)

- The remainder of this chapter describes the point of transition from mixed to pure faith.
- The realization that the semblance of devotion should be left behind comes only in the company of pure devotees.
- At this point, the hearts of mixed devotees, like those of Dhruva, the Naimiṣāraṇya sages, Gajendra, and the Kumāras, attain states of purity in which the rays of pure faith shine through the clouds of past conditioning.
- Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī summarizes the conditions under which pure faith finally manifests itself in a devotee:

*yaḥ kenāpy ati-bhāgyena
jāta-śraddho 'sya sevane
nāti-sakto na vairāgya-bhāg
asyām adhikāry asau*

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (The Transition to Pure Faith and Devotion)

- “A person who by some good fortune has developed faith in the service of the Lord, who is not overly attached to material enjoyment nor overly renounced, such a person is a qualified candidate for pure devotional service.” (Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.14)
- There should be no doubt that the good fortune Rūpa Gosvāmī speaks of is the company of pure devotees.
- Caitanya Mahāprabhu and prominent ācāryas cite many verses to this effect, such as this one:

*bhavāpavargo bhramato yadā bhavej
janasya tarhy acyuta sat-samāgamaḥ
sat-saṅgamo yarhi tadaiva sad-gatau
parāvareṣe tvayi jāyate matiḥ*

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (The Transition to Pure Faith and Devotion)

- “O my Lord! O infallible Supreme Person! When a person wandering throughout the universes becomes eligible for liberation from material existence, he gets an opportunity to associate with devotees.
- When he associates with devotees, his attraction for You is awakened.
- You are the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the highest goal of the topmost devotees, and the Lord of the universe.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.51.53) [As quoted in Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 22.84]
- Jīva Gosvāmī and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, in their comments on this verse, point out that the company of the Lord’s devotees enables one to transcend material existence.
- Nothing else has such potency.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (The Transition to Pure Faith and Devotion)

- About the awakening of pure faith—the essential prerequisite for pure devotion—a few points need further clarification to conclusively establish the glories of pure faith and pure devotion.
- Smārtas, jñānīs, and yogīs argue that work, knowledge, and meditation are also prerequisites for faith and pure devotion.
- Lord Caitanya’s followers emphatically disagree.
- To prove their point, they cite the following verse written by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, which is based on many statements from revealed scripture. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.11.32, 11.14.20–21, 11.20.31–32]

*jñāna-vairāgyayor bhakti-
praveśāyopayogitā
īṣat prathamam eveti
nāṅgatvam ucitaṁ tayoh*

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (The Transition to Pure Faith and Devotion)

- “Knowledge and renunciation may sometimes be useful while a devotee is entering the initial stages of devotion, but they can never be said to be limbs of bhakti.” (Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.248)
- In other words, neither knowledge nor renunciation enhances pure faith; to the contrary, pure faith gives life to karma and jñāna.
- Therefore it cannot be dependent on them. Pure faith, and pure faith alone, is the self-sufficient prerequisite for pure devotion.
- Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī confirms this understanding: “Faith is the sole cause of the qualification to perform pure devotional service” (tad evam ananya-bhakty-adhikāre hetumśraddhā-mātram uktvā sa yathā bhajeta tathāśikṣayati). [Bhakti-sandarbhā, anuccheda 172]

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (The Transition to Pure Faith and Devotion)

- And as the ācārya also says in this text, when scripture mentions devotion in connection with knowledge or renunciation, it is “only a figure of speech.”
- That point concluded, devotees naturally inquire, “How can we know that pure faith has appeared in devotees?”
- The answer is that a unique quality is visible in their behaviour: surrender, śaraṇāgati or śaraṇāpatti.
- Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī uses the term śaraṇāpatti, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura uses both terms, and Śrīla Prabhupāda always uses śaraṇāgati.
- The two terms are synonymous, and because devotees are familiar with the word śaraṇāgati, this book will use it.
- “What are the visible symptoms of surrender?”

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (The Transition to Pure Faith and Devotion)

- Jīva Gosvāmī says that one can discern surrender in the devotees’ character by their constant endeavour to serve Kṛṣṇa without a trace of fruitive intent. [Bhakti-tattva-viveka, chapter 4]
- Sanātana Gosvāmī says that the symptom of surrender can be recognized by six additional characteristics, which he lists in Hari-bhakti-vilāsa:

*ānukūlyasya saṅkalpaḥ
prātikūlyasya varjanam
rakṣiṣyatīti viśvāso
gopṭṛtve varaṇam tathā
ātma-nikṣepa-kārpaṇye
ṣaḍ-vidhāśaraṇāgatih*

- “The six divisions of surrender are the acceptance of those things favourable to devotional service, the rejection of unfavourable things, the conviction that Kṛṣṇa will give all protection, the acceptance of the Lord as one’s guardian or master, full self-surrender, and utter humility.” (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 11.417)

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (The Transition to Pure Faith and Devotion)

- “The six divisions of surrender are the acceptance of those things favourable to devotional service, the rejection of unfavourable things, the conviction that Kṛṣṇa will give all protection, the acceptance of the Lord as one’s guardian or master, full self-surrender, and utter humility.” (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 11.417)
- Surrender is the last teaching and the conclusion of sambandha-jñāna.
- Persons who study the science of Kṛṣṇa’s relationship with His energies must come to grips with the reality that they are Kṛṣṇa’s very tiny and very insignificant servants.
- When they do—whole-heartedly and unconditionally—the teachings of saints, scriptures, and gurus have borne fruit and the Vaiṣṇavas rejoice.

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (The Transition to Pure Faith and Devotion)

- Kṛṣṇa concludes His instructions to Arjuna with the most famous, authoritative, and heartfelt call for surrender: “Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me.
- I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions.
- Do not fear.” [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 18.66] This is Kṛṣṇa’s open invitation to humankind, a summons to take shelter of His lotus feet and a plea to at once begin the process of pure devotional service.
- And it is an expression of Kṛṣṇa’s preference for the direct path to pure devotion.
- A devotee with a semblance of devotion may hear these famous words and think, “I am not ready to surrender fully.”

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (The Transition to Pure Faith and Devotion)

- But Kṛṣṇa says, “Do not fear.”
- This means that devotees need not have freed themselves from the results of past deeds nor acquired the faith for pure devotion nor exhausted desires for fruitive activity nor given up hopes for salvation nor even freed themselves from the lower modes of nature; they need only take shelter of Kṛṣṇa, the supreme saviour.
- By accepting this special mercy-concession, devotees can take to pure devotion from any stage on the yoga ladder.
- The reader may ask, “How can a devotee with a mere semblance of devotion take to pure devotion without the qualification of pure faith?”

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (The Transition to Pure Faith and Devotion)

- In his commentary on Bhagavad-gītā 18.66, Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura paraphrases Kṛṣṇa’s promise to Arjuna: “By my causeless mercy I bestow on you the qualification to perform pure devotional service.”
- The reader may reply, “That was fortunate for Arjuna, but Kṛṣṇa is not here to personally give me pure faith in Him.”
- Therefore Viśvanātha gives us Kṛṣṇa’s further assurance: “I have also empowered My exclusive (ekāntikaḥ) devotees to bestow the qualification for pure devotion.
- Do not fear!”
- What more do we need than such words of encouragement from Kṛṣṇa?

SBC 5 – The Semblance of Devotion - Part 2 (The Transition to Pure Faith and Devotion)

- The indirect path may appeal to ease-lovers, but its gradual approach is misleadingly difficult.
- Better to follow the direct, one-step path to pure faith certified by the Gītā, taught by Caitanya Mahāprabhu, recommended by the ācāryas, and distributed worldwide by Śrīla Prabhupāda.
- It requires only that devotees chant the holy name without offence and at once receive pure faith from Kṛṣṇa, the qualification for pure devotion. Devotees need not worry.