

# Śuddha-bhakti Cintāmaṇi

by H.H Śivarāma Swami

# Chapter 9- Qualities of Pure Devotional Service

## SBC 9 – Qualities of Pure Devotional Service

- As with any activity, pure devotional service has both a goal (sādhya) and a process to attain it (sādhana).
- In the chapter on devotional service in practice, however, Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu breaks pure devotional service into three stages: “The three categories of devotional service are devotional service in practice, devotional service in ecstasy, and devotional service in pure love of Godhead,” (sā bhaktiḥ sādhanam bhāvaḥ prema ceti tridhositā). [Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.1]
- The reader may wonder whether devotional service in ecstasy (bhāva-bhakti) is a part of practice or a part of the goal.
- Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura responds by saying that because ecstatic emotion is the goal of devotional service in practice, it cannot be considered completely within the category of practice.

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- Furthermore, devotional service in ecstasy does not have all the qualities of perfection, such as complete freedom from impediments.
- Therefore it cannot be considered completely within the category of perfection. [Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu-bindu]
- More will be said about this in later chapters.
- But we can conclude that devotional service in ecstasy is a distinct category, belonging neither to practice nor perfection, although it shares some qualities of each.
- It has mature emotions that result from devotional service in practice as well as the seedling of perfection to be found in the blossoming stages of love.
- Vaiṣṇava ācāryas therefore accept three categories of pure devotion.

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- Rūpa Gosvāmī describes six distinguishing characteristics of pure devotional service, two for each of the above categories:

kleśa-ghnīśubha-dā mokṣa-  
laghutā-kṛt su-durlabhā  
sāndrānanda-viśeṣātmā  
śrī-kṛṣṇākarsīṇī ca sā

- “Pure devotional service brings immediate relief from all kinds of material distress.
- It is the beginning of all auspiciousness.
- It minimizes the value of liberation. It is rarely achieved, it automatically puts one in transcendental pleasure, and it is the only means to attract Kṛṣṇa.” (Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.1.17)

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- Two of the above qualities become manifest at the stage of devotional service in practice: it relieves one from material distress and bestows all auspiciousness.
- When one practises devotional service in ecstasy, two additional qualities arise: a devotee derides the happiness of liberation and finds that he has attained a most rare jewel in the symptoms found only at this stage.
- Devotional service in love of God brings with it two more qualities: it imbues one with transcendental pleasure and has the unique ability to attract Kṛṣṇa.
- From the stages of practice to perfection, then, pure devotional service has six qualities in all.
- Devotees in Kṛṣṇa consciousness must be patient, because relief from the sufferings of material life does not come all at once.

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- In fact, the first two qualities reveal themselves in proportion to devotees' progress in sādhana, and only at the stage of firm practice do they become fully manifest.
- Moreover, the second quality, attaining auspiciousness, depends on the first because it appears only to the degree that relief from material distress has been attained.
- As one's practice matures, however, spiritual progress accelerates, and the second pair of qualities immediately appears in full with the dawn of ecstatic devotion, as does the third pair when ecstasy matures to the stage of loving devotion.
- The only way to gain relief from the distress (kleśa) caused by past deeds is to take full shelter in the potency of devotional service.
- Once enlightened through transcendental knowledge, devotees must also avoid creating further misery for themselves.

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- No one can gain release from the labyrinth of cause and effect without abstaining completely from sin.
- That labyrinth begins in ignorance (avidyā), the root cause of suffering.
- From ignorance come two subsidiary causes: sin (pāpa) and material desire (bīja). The reactions to sinful activity are two, those already visible (prārabdha) and those in the unmanifest, formative stage (aprārabdha).
- The material body is an example of the fully manifest reactions to sin.
- Formative sinful activity is also of two kinds: The first causes further sinful acts to become manifest (prārabdha), and the other produces the inclination to perform further sinful acts (kūṭa).

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- This inclination to sin then forms into a seed (bīja), which in turn produces further sinful activities in the same above-mentioned two divisions, manifest (aprārabdha) and formative (prārabdha).
- The following hypothetical example shows how this chain reaction works and how it causes even devotees to suffer.
- Say a person is destined for punishment by the laws of nature because of promiscuity.
- The reaction for such sins does not appear immediately but remains formative (aprārabdha) until the next birth.
- As the next body develops the sinful effects make the person highly inclined to sensual behaviour (kūṭam).

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- This inclination intensifies until the person, who perhaps has by now become a devotee, is overwhelmed by a desire for sex (bījam).
- If the devotee succumbs to such illicit desires and engages in uncontrolled, irreligious sex (prārabdha) with himself or someone else, he suffers further.
- On one side, his sinful acts nourish his sinful inclination, which matures into more seeds of desire—desire that relentlessly impels him to have more sex.
- On the other side, he also receives direct reactions in the form of shame and censure from the devotee community.
- A practising devotee can only break this vicious cycle of sin and punishment by tolerating the influence of past sinful activities and stopping any further sinful acts.

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- This is possible only by taking full shelter of the all-purifying potency of devotional service.
- Serious practitioners may ask how they can remain enthusiastic, patient, and tolerant in the face of such reactions.
- Patience and enthusiasm seem so incongruous.
- To overcome the above cycle of sinful reactions and tangibly advance in spiritual life, devotees must first understand and then become convinced of the extraordinary potency invested in pure devotional service.
- Uttama-bhakti, even at the early stages of practice, is, like Kṛṣṇa, all-powerful.
- No other spiritual practice described in the Vedas or any other scripture, whether in the karma-, jñāna-, or upāsanā-kāṇḍa, can completely purify its followers' hearts.

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- On this topic two Bhāgavatam verses are the favourites of the Vaiṣṇavas.
- These verses fill devotees' hearts with the conviction that their suffering will soon be driven out by the matchless influence of devotional service.
- The first verse describes how the seed of sinful desire (pāpa) is neutralized, and the second how the impetus for sinful desire, ignorance in its many forms (avidyā), is uprooted. [See chapter sixteen for a description of the four types of ignorance]

tais tāny aghāni pūyante  
tapo-dāna-vratādibhiḥ  
nādharma-jaṁ tad-dhṛdayaṁ  
tad apīśāṅghri-sevayā

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- “Although one may neutralize the reactions of sinful life through austerity, charity, vows, and other such methods, these pious activities cannot uproot the material desires in one’s heart. However, if one serves the lotus feet of the Personality of Godhead, he is immediately freed from all such contaminations.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.2.17)

yat-pāda-paṅkaja-palāśa-vilāsa-bhaktyā  
karmāśayaṁ grathitam udgrathayanti santaḥ  
tadvan na rikta-matayo yatayo 'pi ruddha-  
sroto-gaṇās tam araṇaṁ bhaja vāsudevam

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- “The devotees, who are always engaged in the service of the toes of the lotus feet of the Lord, can very easily overcome hard-knotted desires for fruitive activities.
- Because this is very difficult, the nondevotees—the jñānīs and yogīs—although trying to stop the waves of sense gratification, cannot do so.
- Therefore you are advised to engage in the devotional service of Kṛṣṇa, the son of Vasudeva.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.22.39)
- While preaching in India, Śrīla Prabhupāda was often confronted with a common misconception.
- Traditionalists considered his Western disciples to be untouchables by birth (mlecchas or caṇḍālas) and thus unqualified to become brāhmaṇas, even if purified of past sins.

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- To conduct Vedic sacrifices, the Hindus argued, Westerners would have to take birth in a brāhmaṇa family in India.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda responded to such superstition and explained the conclusive opinion of revealed scripture. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.33.6]
- He battled valiantly to establish that even persons born in families of dog-eaters can become qualified to perform Vedic sacrifices.
- That qualification came, he argued, by living the life of a pure brāhmaṇa: chanting the holy name, praising Kṛṣṇa, hearing about His pastimes, offering Him obeisances, and remembering Him. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.33.7]
- It was spiritual practice, not birth, that determined who was a Vaiṣṇava-brāhmaṇa.

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- And if self-righteous brāhmaṇas, though born in the best of families, neglected their spiritual duties, scripture considered that they were nothing more than the semblance of brāhmaṇas (brahma-bandhu). [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.7.19, purport]
- Śrīla Prabhupāda's preaching was successful.
- Most spiritual authorities in India now accept ISKCON's members as bona fide Vaiṣṇavas.
- They accept that all devotees duly initiated and following the guidelines of their founder-ācārya are purified of past sins and endowed with brahminical qualities.
- That said, it must also be admitted that some members of ISKCON, or rather some individuals who identify themselves with ISKCON, are determined to undo Śrīla Prabhupāda's preaching.

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- Even in places like Vṛndāvana or Māyāpur these devotees do not conduct themselves like brāhmaṇa-Vaiṣṇavas.
- In the most sacred places of the universe they perform illicit activities, indulge in power politics, and even engage in acts of violence.
- Obviously, such behaviour ruins both ISKCON's reputation and the performers' spiritual lives.
- Their behaviour is also the source of virulent offences to Śrīla Prabhupāda, the Vaiṣṇavas, and the holy dhāmas.
- There is another dishonouring of Śrīla Prabhupāda's attempt to advocate for Western Vaiṣṇavas.

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- While not as grievous as the ones mentioned above, it nonetheless misrepresents His Divine Grace.
- It is the widespread failure of devotees to embrace the cultural ways of pure Vaiṣṇavism.
- A few of the many aspects of Vaiṣṇava tradition that have fallen by the wayside include the wearing of Vaiṣṇava attire outside the temples, men's shaving their head and maintaining śikhās and women's braiding their hair, brahminical standards of cleanliness and education, regular attendance at the spiritual programmes, maintaining the teachings of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam as the value system governing the devotees' lives, and, most serious of all, the neglect of the very spiritual practices that transform us into pure devotees.

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- Vaiṣṇava culture as devotees practise it in the West, which Śrīla Prabhupāda happily cited as evidence that his Western followers were becoming purified, has been watered down to become a hybrid culture in which Kṛṣṇa consciousness is no longer a full-time way of life.
- In some parts of the world Kṛṣṇa consciousness now appears to have joined other sects and become simply a belief system.
- Thus for many of Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers, the prediction of His Divine Grace's critics has come to pass.
- By transforming Kṛṣṇa consciousness into an impotent semblance of itself, these devotees fail to become purified of past habits and remain sadly victimized by past deeds and sins.

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- Another important topic must be stressed here; that is, the distress that comes as a reaction to offences committed against Vaiṣṇavas (vaiṣṇavāparādha).
- The steady practice of devotional service certainly subdues distress arising from material desires.
- But even when such distress is subdued, vaiṣṇavāparādha can continue to afflict the heart and impede the flow of devotion.
- In fact, offences to devotees impede even ecstatic devotion from immediately blossoming into loving devotion.
- Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura states that reactions to offences against advanced Vaiṣṇavas are removed completely only when devotees meet Kṛṣṇa face to face when they go back to Godhead. [Mādhurya-kādambinī, chapter 3]

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- Thus even advanced devotees must patiently wait for their offences to be nullified.
- The goddess of loving devotion, Śrī Rādhā, does not tolerate even the slightest scent of offence to Her devotees.
- Dear reader, please always remember this great threat to spiritual life.
- Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu warned us that this offence is “the mad elephant” that uproots the creeper of devotion.
- He says,

yadi vaiṣṇava-aparādha uṭhe hātī mātā  
upāḍe vā chiṇḍe, tāra śukhi' yāya pātā  
tāte mālī yatna kari' kare āvaraṇa  
aparādha hastīra yaiche nā haya udgama

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- “If the devotee commits an offence at the feet of a Vaiṣṇava while cultivating the creeper of devotional service in the material world, his offence is compared to a mad elephant that uproots the creeper and breaks it.
- In this way the leaves of the creeper dry up.
- The gardener must defend the creeper by fencing it all around so that the powerful elephant of offences may not enter.” (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 19.156–57)
- The second symptom of pure devotional service, all-auspiciousness (śubha-dā), like the first, freedom from distress, manifests itself at the stage of steadiness in devotional practice.

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- If devotees are still suffering from sinful reactions or do not perceive the appearance of auspiciousness, they should know that they have not yet attained steadiness.
- Such analysis is possible because the nature of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is systematic.
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- Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī says that bhakti is all-auspicious because it produces good qualities, bestows superior happiness, and benefits and attracts everyone.
- Other than devotional service, no spiritual practice meets all four of these criteria. [Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.1.27]
- The next two symptoms appear at bhāva-bhakti.

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- The first is that ecstatic devotion is a very rare and difficult-to-achieve treasure (sudurabhā), and the second is that it makes liberation seem insignificant (mokṣa-laghūtā-kṛt).
- In this regard Śrīla Prabhupāda describes the story of Kholāvecā Śrīdhara, a simple devotee who eked out a living by selling plates and cups he had fashioned from banana leaves.
- Despite his meagre earnings, Śrīdhara managed to give half of whatever he earned for devotional service.
- When Śrīdhara tasted the happiness of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he became disinterested in every kind of pleasure, including that obtained from liberation.
- Why is ecstatic devotion so rare?

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- It is rare for two reasons: one cannot attain it by one's own effort, and Kṛṣṇa is reluctant to give it.
- True, devotional service in practice polishes a devotee's heart and gives rise to an insatiable desire to achieve Kṛṣṇa and His ecstatic loving service.
- These are good qualifications indeed, but they are still not enough to acquire ecstatic devotional service.
- Devotion in practice is devotion tainted by matter.
- Thus no amount of effort or desire can transform it into the ecstasy of purely spiritual devotion.
- Only when Kṛṣṇa's mercy, in the form of a ray of prema, descends on a practitioner does ecstatic devotion become manifest.

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- But because ecstatic devotion is the first bud of love, devotion that eventually brings Kṛṣṇa under His servants' control, He does not easily bestow it.
- Thus when devotees shed torrents of tears in separation from the Lord, when they give everything for His loving service, when they are ready to die if they cannot attain Him, only then does soft-hearted Kṛṣṇa arrange for the greatest fortune to descend.
- At that time, devotees taste transcendental ecstasy.
- The final two qualities of pure devotion appear at the stage of loving service (prema) and are exclusive to that stage.
- First, prema tastes of incalculably condensed bliss (sāndrānanda-viśeṣātmā).
- Second, it is the only means to attract Kṛṣṇa (śrī-kṛṣṇākarṣiṇī ca sā).

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- What to speak of materialists, even practising devotees cannot conceive of the happiness premi-bhaktas taste.
- Yet Rūpa Gosvāmī gives us a hint of what it is like:

brahmānando bhaved eṣa  
cet parārdha-guṇī-kṛtaḥ  
naiti bhakti-sukhāmbhodheḥ  
paramāṇu-tulām api

- “If brahmānanda, or the happiness of becoming one with the Supreme, were multiplied by one trillionfold, it still could not compare to an atomic fraction of the happiness derived from the ocean of devotional service.” (Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.1.38)

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- Devotees find happiness in all three stages of devotional service: practice, ecstasy, and pure love.
- But in loving devotional service happiness finds an unimaginable pinnacle of intensity.
- Eager devotees therefore think, “Someday, by the grace of Kṛṣṇa, guru, and the Vaiṣṇavas, I too must taste that bliss.”
- With that hope, with strong determination, and with vigilant practice they surely will.
- When at the stage of bhāva a ray of love of God descends on a devotee, it spreads through him like sunlight in a darkened room and quickly pervades his being.
- Love of God is of the nature of Kṛṣṇa’s internal pleasure potency (hlādinī-śakti).

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- Personified in Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, it attracts and controls Kṛṣṇa.
- Therefore loving devotion is so great that it brings the greatest person under the devotee's control.
- Thus Nārada Muni praises the affection of Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja and his brothers.
- They drew Kṛṣṇa into their intimate family circle and kept Him there by their love.

yūyaṁ nṛ-loke bata bhūri-bhāgā  
lokaṁ punānā munayo 'bhiyanti  
yeṣāṁ gṛhān āvasatīti sākṣād  
gūḍhaṁ paraṁ brahma manuṣya-liṅgam

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- “My dear Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, all of you [the Pāṇḍavas] are extremely fortunate, for the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, lives in your palace just like a human being.
- Great saintly persons know this very well, and therefore they constantly visit this house.

sa vā ayam brahma mahad-vimṛgya-  
kaivalya-nirvāṇa-sukhānubhūtiḥ  
priyaḥ suhr̥d vaḥ khalu mātuleya  
ātmārhaṇīyo vidhi-kṛd guruś ca

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- “The impersonal Brahman is Kṛṣṇa Himself because Kṛṣṇa is the source of the impersonal Brahman.
- He is the origin of the transcendental bliss sought by great saintly persons, yet He, the Supreme Person, is your most dear friend and constant well-wisher and is intimately related to you as the son of your maternal uncle.
- Indeed, He is always like your body and soul.
- He is worshipable, yet He acts as your servant and sometimes as your spiritual master.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.10.48–49)
- The activities of devotional service, such as chanting Kṛṣṇa’s names [kīrtana] and remembering his pastimes (smaraṇa), are functions of Kṛṣṇa’s internal potency (svarūpa-śakti).

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- The Lord's eternally liberated associates constantly and spontaneously engage in these activities out of love.
- Whether they are in the spiritual world with Kṛṣṇa or descended to the material world to propagate devotional service, such confidential devotees stay fully absorbed in Him.
- To propagate devotional service means to convince wayward living entities to adopt the practices of pure devotion and thus return back home, back to Godhead.
- When conditioned souls begin to practise pure devotional service with their materially moulded senses, mind, and intelligence, they are said to be engaged in sādhana-bhakti.
- Such pure devotion in practice is distinct from the same activity done for sense enjoyment or liberation (the semblance of devotion).

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- The motivated practices of the semblance of devotion do not warrant the distinguished name of sādhana-bhakti.
- Only when living entities abandon selfish interests and develop pure faith in devotional service can they be said to be true practitioners (sādhakas).
- Śrīla Prabhupāda’s translation of Rūpa Gosvāmī’s definition of devotional service in practice follows.
- First, the verse from the Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu:

kṛti-sādhyā bhavet sādhyā-  
bhāvā sā sādhanābhidhā  
nitya-siddhasya bhāvasya  
prākāṣyam ḥṛdi sādhyatā

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- “When transcendental devotional service, by which love for Kṛṣṇa is attained, is executed by the senses, it is called sādhana-bhakti, or the regulative discharge of devotional service.
- Such devotion eternally exists within the heart of every living entity.
- The awakening of this eternal devotion is the potentiality of devotional service in practice.” (Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.2, quoted in Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 22.105)
- The first sentence of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s translation clearly distinguishes two types of pure devotion.
- “Love for Kṛṣṇa” refers to sādhya-bhakti, devotion in perfection, and “transcendental devotional service...executed by the senses” to sādhana-bhakti, devotion in practice.

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- The second sentence states that loving devotion is dormant in the heart of conditioned souls and that it becomes manifest by sādhana-bhakti.
- In Rūpa Gosvāmī's threefold division of pure devotion—practice, ecstasy, and love—the term sādhya-bhāvā refers to ecstasy and love. [See Jīva Gosvāmī's commentary on Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.1]
- Therefore the sequence of spiritual development is that devotional activity performed by the senses (sādhana-bhakti) awakens ecstasy, and continuous devotional activities invoke love.
- The phrase “transcendental devotional service...executed by the senses” should not be misunderstood.
- Although the external, sensual, activities of bhāva-bhakti and sādhana-bhakti are the same, there is a gulf of difference in the consciousness that underlies them.

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- Activities such as chanting and hearing at the stage of sādhana-bhakti awaken bhāva, but those same activities practised at the stage of bhāva are the effects of loving ecstasy (anubhāva).
- For instance, in devotional service in practice devotees make a systematic effort to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra with the hope that they will soon rise to the spiritual platform.
- When they achieve their goal, ecstatic devotion makes the holy name dance spontaneously on their tongue.
- Thus although chanting in sādhana and chanting in bhāva appear the same, they are in fact the means and the end, respectively.

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- In addition to vibrating the sound of the holy name, the physical movements of the body like that of the tongue, lips, and hands are also in the category of devotional service in practice.
- Jīva Gosvāmī explains that just as the preliminary activities of collecting ghee, firewood, and other paraphernalia are part of performing a Vedic sacrifice, so the physical movements through which sādhana-bhakti is expressed are integral parts of the process of performing devotional service in practice. [See Jīva Gosvāmī's commentary on Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.2]
- A serious student may challenge the above statement: “How can the activities of devotional service in practice, which are performed by the physical body in time and space, be the cause of something transcendental and eternal, beyond time and space?”

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- The practice of devotional service by the physical body is not the cause of the inherent and transcendental quality of the soul—love for Kṛṣṇa.
- Sādhana-bhakti is only the means to uncover it.
- As Śrīla Prabhupāda puts it, “This practice is not for developing something artificial.” [The Nectar of Devotion, chapter 1]
- Indeed, love for Kṛṣṇa is the eternal, intrinsic asset of every living entity—a truth described in scriptures.

nitya-siddha kṛṣṇa-prema ‘sādhya’ kabhu naya  
śravaṇādi-śuddha-citte karaye udaya

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- “Pure love for Kṛṣṇa is eternally established in the hearts of the living entities. It is not something to be gained from another source.
- When the heart is purified by hearing and chanting, this love naturally awakens.”  
(Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 22.107)
- Śrīla Prabhupāda compares awakening love for Kṛṣṇa by sādhana to a child learning to walk by repeated effort.
- He explains that if the ability to walk were not inherent in the child, no amount of practice could cause the child to walk. [The Nectar of Devotion, chapter 1,]
- Similarly, if love for Kṛṣṇa was not already dormant in the heart of a living entity, no amount of practice could invoke it.

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- And as explained earlier, the awakening of love of God requires Kṛṣṇa's mercy to augment even the sincerest effort.
- The way in which divine grace combines with sādhana to awaken love can be understood by the following examples.
- Love of Godhead is like a wonderful flower fragrant with intense possessive attachment for Kṛṣṇa.
- When the living entity turns away from Kṛṣṇa (kṛṣṇa-bahirmukha) that flower regresses to a seed, which is then covered by behaviour averse to the Lord. [Prema-vivarta, chapter 6]
- Devotional service in practice gradually prepares and waters the seed, which sprouts when touched by the sunlight of Kṛṣṇa's grace.

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- That sunlight of pure goodness (śuddha-sattva) infuses the seed of love with Kṛṣṇa's cognitive potency (samvit-śakti) and devotional potency (hlādinī-śakti).
- Thus empowered to know and please the Lord, the seed sprouts to manifest the bud of love. In this way, bhāva manifests itself.
- In summary, although fire is latent in firewood, the wood must first be prepared and dried.
- When touched by fire, the wood then bursts into flame. Similarly, devotional service in practice prepares and purifies the heart so that Kṛṣṇa's internal potency can arouse the love lying dormant there.
- This is the sense in which devotional practice has the potential to awaken ecstatic emotion.

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- Devotees must always keep in mind that Kṛṣṇa's internal potency descends through the disciplic succession only to those who have an intense desire for loving devotion.
- They must practise Kṛṣṇa consciousness with ever-increasing enthusiasm for loving service.
- Staid, mechanical sādhana cannot awaken such longing.
- It may be true that bhāva can be achieved by the special mercy of Kṛṣṇa or His empowered devotees, but such cases are extremely rare.
- Prabhupāda likens the expectation that this will happen to us to the hope that one will receive an honorary degree from the university.

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- Some Vaiṣṇavas are of the opinion that Kṛṣṇa’s mercy in the form of śuddha-sattva can only be acquired through a physically present mahā-bhāgavata.
- Without the association of such a realized soul, they say, devotees cannot perfect their sādhana and therefore cannot attain bhāva.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda, however, did not share this view.
- In addition to the mercy of great souls, he cites the direct mercy of Kṛṣṇa as well as the potency of the holy name as means to reach the spiritual platform. [See purports to Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 9.19.25. and 6.2.11]
- Certainly it is necessary for a sādḥaka to be properly connected to the disciplic succession.

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- It is also necessary that a devotee’s spiritual practices and way of life be authorized by a bona fide guru and the Vaiṣṇavas.
- However, the paramparās grace cannot be restricted to physical presence.
- Bhāva can become manifest in one of many ways.
- Indeed, Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasized offenceless chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra and preaching “in constant association with pure devotees” as the most potent paths to perfection. [The Nectar of Devotion, chapter 17]
- Will these activities truly awaken bhāva-bhakti?

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- Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda’s purport to a verse from his song Ājñā-ṭahal (4) speaks for itself:

kr̥ṣṇera saṁsāra koro chāḍi’ anācār  
jīve doyā, kr̥ṣṇa-nām-sarva-dharma-sār

- “Giving up all sinful activities, carry on your worldly duties only in relation to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Show compassion to other souls and loudly chant the holy name of Kṛṣṇa, the essential forms of all religion.’ Purport: The essence of religion is to live purely, show mercy to all living beings, and chant the holy name of Kṛṣṇa. There is no difference whatsoever between Kṛṣṇa’s name and Kṛṣṇa Himself. By the mercy of the holy name, in a few days your spiritual form will awaken and you will float in the ocean of eternally sweet kr̥ṣṇa-prema. Then Kṛṣṇa in the form of His names, forms, qualities, and pastimes will personally reveal Himself to you.”

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- How often did Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasize that serving the holy name would give aspirants all perfection?
- It was his great faith in the potency of the holy name that set Śrīla Prabhupāda apart from other contemporary Vaiṣṇavas.
- By that faith Śrīla Prabhupāda inspired Western mlecchas to become pure Vaiṣṇavas.
- And by that faith he inspired them to dedicate their otherwise opulent but miserable lives to the service of the saṅkīrtana movement.
- His Divine Grace wrote of his faith in the conclusion of his poem, Mārkiṇe Bhāgavata-dharma: “I have no devotion, nor do I have any knowledge, but I have strong faith in the holy name of Kṛṣṇa.

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- I have been designated as Bhaktivedānta, and now, if You like, You can fulfil the real purport of Bhaktivedānta.”
- Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda expresses the extraordinary potency of the holy name to bring the worshipper to perfection in another wonderful song: [Śrī Nāma Māhātmya, Śaraṇāgati] “How much power does the name of Kṛṣṇa possess?”
- My heart constantly burns in the fire of worldly desires, like a desert scorched by the sun.
- The holy name, entering my heart through the holes of my ears, showers unparalleled nectar on my soul.
- The holy name speaks from within my heart, moves on the tip of my tongue, and constantly dances on it in the form of transcendental sound.

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- My throat becomes choked up, my body violently trembles, and my feet move uncontrollably.
- Rivers of tears flow from my eyes.
- Perspiration pours from my body.
- My body thrills with rapture, causing my hair to stand on end and my skin to turn pale and discoloured.
- My mind grows faint, and I begin to experience devastation.
- My entire body is shattered in a flood of ecstasies.
- While causing such an ecstatic disturbance, the holy name showers liquid nectar on my heart and drowns me in the ocean of divine love of Godhead.

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- He does not allow me to understand anything, for He has made me truly mad and has stolen away my heart and all my wealth.”
- The Ṭhākura continues, “Such is the behaviour of He who is now my only shelter.
- I am not capable of describing all this.
- Kṛṣṇa’s holy name is independent and thus acts at His own sweet will.
- However He becomes happy is also my happiness.
- The holy name is the bud of the flower of divine love, the abode of devotion’s wonderful mellows.

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- Such is the power He manifests—that although He displays His power only slightly, He reveals His own divine form and qualities, and steals my heart and takes it to Kṛṣṇa.
- Being fully manifest, Kṛṣṇa’s holy name takes me to Vraja and reveals to me His own love dalliance.
- He gives to me my own divine, eternal body, keeps me near Kṛṣṇa, and completely destroys my mortal frame.
- Kṛṣṇa’s name is touchstone, a mine of all devotional mellows, eternally liberated, and the embodiment of pure rasa.
- When all impediments to the pure chanting of the holy name are taken away and destroyed, then my happiness will know its true awakening.”

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- A die-hard sceptic may doubt whether in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s physical absence, and in apparent isolation from other senior Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, there are examples of ISKCON devotees achieving perfection.
- Have any devotees achieved the realization of which Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings?
- Have any of ISKCON’s followers, by serving its mission, gone back to Godhead?
- 
- The following example of an apparently ordinary devotee’s ascent to perfection should amply answer this question.
- North of England, the wife of a temple president became terminally ill.
- She was locally a well-known and well-liked Vaiṣṇavī who kept the temple’s accounts, guided the women, and raised two children.

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- She was not what devotees generally understand to be a “big devotee.”
- First initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda, she did not even have brāhmaṇa-dīkṣā.
- She was a wife, a mother, a steady devotee, but not someone to whom devotees offered obeisances when she passed by.
- This devotee bore her disease with dignity, and in the few months before her death confidentially revealed to her husband the unfolding of her spiritual identity.
- She said that she was a gopī in Nandagrāma.
- While lying in utmost physical discomfort she disclosed some of the services she was rendering to Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana, her favourite being to pack His lunch.
- This woman had no access to a mahā-bhāgavata on the physical plane.

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- She always prayed to Śrīla Prabhupāda, and she was awarded spiritual success simply by sincerely serving his order and mission.
- So the answer is yes, it does happen in ISKCON. [The details of this Vaiṣṇavī's departure can be found in the book, Simple for the Simple]
- We have faith in Śrīla Prabhupāda that by following his instructions we will become lovers of Kṛṣṇa.
- Of this there can be no doubt. Anyone who challenges this premise should be kept at a distance—a far distance.

rgahna jana bhaje strera jyarāga-hīna jana bhaje śāstrera ājñāya  
'vaidhī bhakti' bali' tāre sarva-śāstre gāya

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- Those who have not attained the platform of spontaneous attachment in devotional service render devotional service under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master according to the regulative principles mentioned in the revealed scriptures.
- According to the revealed scriptures, this kind of devotional service is called vaidhī bhakti. Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 22.109