

Śuddha-bhakti Cintāmaṇi

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Chapter 13- Devotional Service in Ecstasy

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- When the fruit of sādhana-bhakti matures, devotees enter the rarely achieved realm of ecstatic devotional service (bhāva-bhakti).
- This chapter begins with a brief description of the path to that realm and then goes on to explore the wonders of ecstatic devotion.
- Because ecstatic devotional service is extremely rare, Rūpa Gosvāmī instructs practising devotees to be patient in their attempts to attain it.
- Devotees are restless at times, and in some cases despondent about their struggle with material attachments.
- “Purity,” they reason, “the platform of steady service, keeps evading me.
- How will I ever catch even a fleeting glimpse of the love of Kṛṣṇa about which we are always hearing and speaking?”

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- In response, Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s soothing voice resounds in their heart: “I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions.
- Do not fear.” [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 18.66]
- Hearing this, devotees push toward their goal with the same confidence that initially led them to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- Kṛṣṇa’s promise to His surrendered, attentive servants assures both protection and success.
- The Lord vows never to let sincere service go unrewarded.
- Thus devotees are assured of an eventual victory in their struggle with the rebellious mind.

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- This is the most confidential part of Kṛṣṇa’s teachings in the Bhagavad-gītā.

man-manā bhava mad-bhakto
mad-yājī mām namaskuru
mām evaiṣyasi satyaṁ te
pratijāne priyo ’si me

- “Always think of Me, become My devotee, worship Me, and offer your homage unto Me. Thus you will come to Me without fail. I promise you this because you are My very dear friend.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 18.65)
- Of course, patience and confidence are not substitutes for painstaking attention to detail in the discharge of devotional service.

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- Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that the cumulative effect of all three virtues attracts the Lord’s grace and thus assures ultimate perfection in spiritual life: “Why, then, are there severe types of penance for the perfection of devotional service?”
- An easygoing life and attainment of perfection in transcendental realization cannot go together.
- The Lord is more clever than any living entity; therefore He wants to see how painstaking the devotee is in devotional service.
- The order is received from the Lord, either directly or through the bona fide spiritual master, and to execute that order, however painstaking, is the severe type of penance.
- One who follows the principle rigidly is sure to achieve success in attaining the Lord’s mercy.” [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 2.9.24, purport]

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- Ultimate success unfailingly comes to those who follow the process strictly.
- Could Śrīla Prabhupāda, the previous ācāryas, and Lord Caitanya Himself have reassured us with false hopes?
- By meticulous efforts in devotional service, devotees gain mastery over the mind and senses and achieve steadiness in hearing and chanting about Kṛṣṇa and in remembering Him.
- The creeper of devotion then reveals extraordinary foliage.
- First an intense taste (ruci) for the activities of devotional service awakens.
- As devotees cultivate that taste, they develop concentrated attachment for Kṛṣṇa (āśakti).

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- That attachment polishes the heart to such an extent that at times devotees think that Kṛṣṇa has appeared there.
- At other times they intuitively understand their relationship with the Lord, though such realization is still immature.
- Finally, the bud of mature attachment sprouts on the creeper of devotion, and devotees enjoy devotional service in bliss.
- Such mature affection quickly catches the attention of the black bumblebee, Madhusūdana, who constantly buzzes about in His wonderful garden of creepers.
- Attracted by these new buds, He flies toward them, kisses them, and makes them burst with the fragrance of divine love (rati).

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- Completely free from the touch of matter, devotional service in ecstasy (bhāva) then blossoms in the hearts of such fortunate devotees, who no longer lament for anything.
- Perfection has dawned in them and illumined their being with the rays of wonderful bliss.
- They shed tears of gratitude while remembering Kṛṣṇa's words, "Upon gaining this he thinks there is no greater gain." [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 6.22] They think, "How true! How true!"
- Love of Godhead (prema) is the mature fruit of devotional service in practice.
- Prema first appears in an immature form as ecstatic devotional service.

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- Ecstatic devotion, also known as the permanent mood of affection (sthāyi-bhāva), is the reawakening of the devotees' dormant relationship with Kṛṣṇa.
- This relationship may be as an admirer, servant, friend, parental figure, or conjugal lover.
- As their love for Kṛṣṇa develops, so do the moods through which devotees convey their affection.
- Mixed with other transcendental ingredients, these moods become increasingly tasty and eventually assume their ripened form as transcendental loving mellows (rasa).
- The flawless stage of ecstatic devotion, like the stage of practice, is dynamic.

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- Common to both stages are offerings made with the senses, such as chanting and hearing (ceṣṭā), which nourish and cultivate Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- The difference between the two stages, however, is that at practice devotees endeavour to invoke ecstatic devotion, whereas at bhāva their efforts are already the effects of ecstasy.
- In ecstatic devotion, a higher dimension of cultivation becomes manifest, the cultivation of the moods of ecstasy (bhāva).
- The initial stages of devotional practice do not feature this kind of effort, although in later stages of spontaneous practice devotees aspire for such moods.
- That aspiration becomes realized only with the sprouting of love, which provides the spiritual substance with which to cultivate inner sentiments.

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- At this stage, either devotees purposefully cultivate such sentiments with the nine limbs of devotion, or love itself cultivates them through different stimuli.
- Advanced, purposeful cultivation by meditative chanting of the holy names is called nāma-bhajana. Later chapters explain this more.
- At the level of devotional service in practice, advancement is gradual because devotees are still tied to the material world.
- A person trying to advance at this stage is like a man whose hands are bound with rope and who is trying to free himself.
- When devotees serve with ecstatic emotion, however, they are on the spiritual platform.

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- The same chanting and hearing is then free from material encumbrance and is fully potent.
- Endeavours at this stage give rapid results, propelling devotees toward love of God.
- Rūpa Gosvāmī defines ecstatic devotion and its glorious characteristics:

śuddha-sattva-viśeṣātmā
prema-sūryāṁśu-sāmya-bhāk
rucibhiś citta-masṛṇya-
kṛd asau bhāva ucyate

- “When devotional service is executed on the transcendental platform of pure goodness, it is like a sun-ray of love for Kṛṣṇa. At such a time devotional service causes the heart to be softened by various tastes, and one is then situated in bhāva [emotion].” (Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.3.1)

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- The primary characteristic of ecstatic devotion is that it is in pure goodness (śuddha-sattva-viśeṣātmā).
- Its secondary characteristic is that it softens the heart by various tastes (rucibhiś citta-masṛṇya-kṛd).
- The first line of the above verse describes the primary characteristic of ecstatic devotion: “When devotional service is executed on the transcendental platform of pure goodness, it is like a sun-ray of love for Kṛṣṇa.”
- Devotees should not confuse pure goodness (śuddha-sattva) with the material mode of goodness (sattva-guṇa).
- Pure goodness is the spiritual or internal potency by which the Supreme Lord Vāsudeva appears in His transcendental form. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.3.23]

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- Pure goodness is comprised of the essence of the potencies by which Kṛṣṇa maintains the spiritual world (sandhinī-śakti), gives spiritual knowledge (samvit-śakti), and distributes transcendental pleasure (hlādinī-śakti).
- When pure goodness reflects off the mirror of the external energy, it is tainted and is known as the material mode of goodness, which comprises the material counterparts of the above-mentioned three spiritual potencies.
- And because the three modes of material nature always coexist, material goodness always mixes to some extent with passion and ignorance.
- In short, pure goodness is transcendental, and material goodness is mundane.
- Jīva Gosvāmī stresses that the use of the words śuddha-sattva and viśeṣa highlights the importance of the cognitive (samvit) and pleasure-giving (hlādinī) potencies respectively. [See Jīva Gosvāmī's commentary to Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.3.1]

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- The cognitive potency empowers devotees with a full understanding of all truths related to Kṛṣṇa.
- By that potency's grace, conclusive truths can appear in the hearts of even illiterate devotees who have no access to scripture.
- The pleasure-giving potency then empowers such devotees with tender and deep emotions saturated with feelings of possessiveness toward Kṛṣṇa.
- These emotions include all forms of love of Godhead up to and including the topmost stage of sublime ecstasy (mahābhāva).
- These higher states do not manifest themselves at the level of ecstatic devotion but are present in seed form.
- The combined effect of the cognitive and pleasure-giving potencies is wonderful.

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- Before devotees attain the stage of ecstatic devotion, they are situated differently than the Lord; they are on the material platform and their object of affection, Kṛṣṇa, is on the spiritual platform.
- At the stage of bhāva, however, this difference ceases to exist, and both the devotees and Kṛṣṇa are on the same spiritual level of pure goodness.
- The devotees can then fully understand the Lord's name, form, quality, paraphernalia, and entourage because the curtain of deluding energy no longer separates them from the Lord and His internal energies.
- Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda says that when devotees leave the realm of devotional service in practice and approach the realm of ecstatic devotion, they abandon all false designations pertaining to the body, although they have not yet attained their spiritual forms.

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- Because the living beings are quantitatively insignificant, however, there is a risk that in such a state, shorn of all material identity, devotees may succumb to the desire to annihilate their individuality.
- To protect devotees from the desire to merge into the impersonal Brahman, the pleasure-giving potency embraces them, transforms their devotion from that of practice into that of ecstasy, and gives them a taste of their spiritual identity.
- Emboldened by newfound strength, devotees leave behind any thoughts of the brahma-jyotis and plunge into the world of pure goodness. [Śrī Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta, chapter 11]
- The reader may wonder how the body, which is composed of the material senses, mind, and intelligence, can become an instrument to reveal Adhokṣaja, the Lord who is beyond the range of material sense perception.

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- The key to reconciling this apparent paradox is in the understanding of how pure goodness influences matter.
- True, the body, mind, and intelligence are composed of material elements, but when in contact with pure goodness they adopt the characteristics of pure goodness, the spiritual energy.
- To clarify this point, Śrīla Prabhupāda often used the example given by Jīva Gosvāmī of an iron rod placed in fire. [Jīva Gosvāmī cites this example in his commentary on Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.3.4–5]
- By the influence of fire, the rod takes on the qualities of heat and radiance, although constitutionally it is still iron.
- Similarly, in constant touch with the fire of pure goodness, the body of a pure devotee takes on the qualities of pure goodness.

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- Such transformed senses, now on the same spiritual platform as Kṛṣṇa, are empowered to perceive Him.
- Jīva Gosvāmī explains that the word ātmāin viśeṣātmā indicates the proclivity of pure goodness to imbue things it contacts with its own characteristics. [See Jīva Gosvāmī's commentary on Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.3.1]
- This proclivity is called tadātmā-bhāva.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda also uses the word samādhi to define this state of spiritualization: “After the outward appearance of these ecstatic symptoms, they stay within the mind, and continuation of the ecstasy is called samādhi.” [The Nectar of Devotion, chapter 17]
- The influence of ecstatic devotion is so profound that it even colours the consciousness of Kṛṣṇa's eternal companions, who have fully spiritual bodies.

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- To give a crude example, just as a lusty man sees all women as objects of his lust, the Vraja-vāsīs see Kṛṣṇa everywhere and in all things.
- Such ecstatic emotions, which reside eternally in the Vraja-vāsīs, shine into the hearts of qualified devotees and empower them with the sprout of love of God.
- Ecstatic devotion then transforms and moulds the devotees according to its will.
- Still, the appearance of pure goodness in ecstatic devotion is partial, not complete.
- Rūpa Gosvāmī uses the word *aṁśu*, or “ray,” to denote the extent to which pure goodness appears in *bhāva*.
- Love of God (*prema*), the full manifestation of pure goodness, is like the sun.

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- When a single but fully potent ray of the Kṛṣṇa-sun touches a devotee's heart, ecstatic devotion instantly becomes manifest.
- Just as a spark falling onto dry leaves quickly grows into a forest fire, one ray of pure goodness entering a devotees' heart quickly flares into a blaze of love for God.
- The second line of the verse under discussion describes the secondary characteristic of ecstatic devotion: “At such a time, devotional service causes the heart to be softened by various tastes.”
- In ecstatic devotion, absorption in Kṛṣṇa's name, form, and qualities causes an unprecedented joy that softens the heart and inspires ecstatic symptoms such as crying, trembling, and horripilation.

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- Devotees discover their siddha-deha, their true identity as Kṛṣṇa's eternal servant, and gain a wonderful sense of belonging.
- They sometimes lose themselves in the wonder of the pastimes shared between Kṛṣṇa and the Vraja-vāsīs.
- At other times their senses become fully absorbed in the sound of Kṛṣṇa's flute, the touch of His hand, or the scents of Vṛndāvana.
- At still other times they feel despondent when the glimpse of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes disappears.
- Immersed in streams of ecstasy, whether awake or asleep, devotees' absorption is unwavering.

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- Tossed about by divine encounters, kneaded by the outpourings of ecstasy, excited by the touch of pure goodness, the hearts of such fortunate devotees finally melt.
- At that time their tears are no longer water but the liquefied essence of their beings.
- Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam describes Prahlāda Mahārāja’s symptoms of ecstasy in this way: “Because of advancement in Kṛṣṇa con-scious-ness, [Prahlāda Mahārāja] sometimes cried, sometimes laughed, sometimes expressed jubilation, and sometimes sang loudly.
- Sometimes, upon seeing the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Prahlāda Mahārāja would loudly call in full anxiety.
- He sometimes lost his shyness in jubilation and began dancing in ecstasy, and sometimes, being fully absorbed in thoughts of Kṛṣṇa, he felt oneness and imitated the pastimes of the Lord.

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- Sometimes, feeling the touch of the Lord’s lotus hands, he became spiritually jubilant and remained silent, his hairs standing on end and tears gliding down from his half-closed eyes because of his love for the Lord.” [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.4.39–41]
- Pure goodness inspires new varieties of sublime experience.
- As a result, three categories of tastes or desires constituted of pure devotion soften the heart.
- These tastes are called desires (abhilāṣa) because they reflect the flavour of the spiritual aspirations of advanced devotees.
- The three tastes are the desire to attain Kṛṣṇa (prāpty-abhilāṣa), the desire to please Kṛṣṇa (ānukūlyābhilāṣa), and the desire to connect intimately with Kṛṣṇa (sauhārdābhilāṣa).

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- Śrīla Prabhupāda says that these desires fuel the devotees' greed.
- “By various tastes, one’s heart is softened, and there is an awakening of one’s loving propensity to render spontaneous service to the Lord.” [Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.4.1, quoted in Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 23.6, purport]
- Another word for ecstatic devotion is attraction (rati).
- Attraction, like the softening of the heart, is a consequence of attaining the spiritual platform.
- Devotees gradually realize the full strength and various features of this attraction through perfected chanting and hearing in the company of advanced devotees.

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- When such attraction matures it is called *sthāyi-bhāva*, the primary or permanent mood, which, as already mentioned, takes the form of one of five relationships with Kṛṣṇa: admirer, servant, friend, parent, or lover.
- Rūpa Gosvāmī describes two forms of immature attraction visible at the beginning stage of ecstatic devotion: general and transparent. [Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 2.5.9]
- General attraction (*sāmānya-sthāyibhāva*) takes place in devotees who reach the state of ecstatic devotion without the guidance of an advanced devotee.
- Although such attraction is strong, it lacks the specific characteristics that define a devotee’s relationship with Kṛṣṇa.
- By the mercy of great Vaiṣṇavas, devotees with this kind of attraction finally identify with a mood of service—that of friendship, for example—and thus find their place among Kṛṣṇa’s companions.

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- Devotees with transparent attraction (svaccha-sthāyibhāva) are also unaware of their relationship with Kṛṣṇa, but when they are in the company of advanced Vaiṣṇavas, their attraction mirrors that of their superiors.
- When in the company of Vaiṣṇavas in the mood of friendship, for example, such devotees display the symptoms of sakhya-rati.
- When in the company of devotees in the mood of conjugal love, they are attracted to mādhyura-rati.
- The continued guidance of accomplished Vaiṣṇavas assists these devotees to advance in their Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and as with general attraction, these devotees' transparent attraction quickly matures into their true relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

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- Both types of immature attraction are weaker than the attraction displayed by devotees situated in a permanent mood of service.
- Still, immature attraction has something in common with mature attraction: it is self-nourishing.
- In other words, mature or not, attraction generates various kinds of emotions, and these emotions in turn nourish and enhance attraction.
- This is the dynamic of devotion at both the stages of ecstasy and love: it sustains and fortifies itself.
- In this way bhakti-rasa gradually blossoms and continues to thrive unlimitedly, forever dependent on nothing other than itself.

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- Ecstasy always nourishes attraction to Kṛṣṇa, whether its mood seems favourable, causing symptoms such as laughter, or unfavourable, causing symptoms such as anger.
- When permanent ecstasy (sthāyi-bhāva) manifests itself, one of its five moods rules all other spiritual emotions and ecstasies like a king rules his subjects. [Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 2.5.1]
- Each of the five permanent moods of attraction has a dominant characteristic, and each shares the dominant characteristic of the mood preceding it.
- The mood of admiration, for example, has the single quality of being fixed at Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet (kṛṣṇa-niṣṭhā); the next mood, servitorship, has the quality of admiration, kṛṣṇa-niṣṭhā, plus its own distinct quality of menial service (sevana).

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- Similarly, the mood of friendship has the qualities of admiration and servitorship plus its own distinct quality of confidentiality (viśrambha).
- The mood of parental attraction has the three qualities contained in friendship plus its own unique quality of being the maintainer (pālana).
- Finally, the mood of conjugal love has the qualities of all four previous moods plus the distinct quality of wanting to offer the body to Kṛṣṇa for His pleasure (nijāṅga-dāna).
- In addition to the qualities increasing incrementally, all these moods intensify and become more precise as they are expressed in each succeeding rati.
- For instance, the gopīs' conjugal mood is transcendently richer and more perfect in camaraderie than the cowherd boys' fraternal mood.

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- As rati develops into the eternal mellows of devotion (bhakti-rasa), these displays of diverse characteristics in the various types of affection become even tastier and more wonderful.
- Such is the dynamic bliss of perfected devotional service.
- There are two ways to achieve ecstatic devotion: by the special mercy of Kṛṣṇa or His pure devotee, and by rigorous practice.
- As already mentioned, to attain ecstatic devotion is rare, but to achieve it without effort, solely by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa or His devotee, is rarer still.
- In such exceptional cases, the causes of ecstatic emotion are the verbal blessings, personal audience, or direct well-wishes of Kṛṣṇa or His pure devotees.
- There is no need to discuss this subject further.

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- It is the purpose of this book to encourage devotees to discharge devotional service properly, not to wait for Kṛṣṇa’s special mercy to descend.
- Obviously, devotees who persistently aspire for perfection should always hanker for the blessings of higher authorities while working to attain it.
- Such hard-working sādhakas truly deserve Kṛṣṇa’s grace.
- As mentioned in the previous chapter, we will now detail the transition from regulative devotional service in practice to ecstatic devotion. [See chapter twelve of this book, the last paragraph of the section entitled “The Transition to Spontaneous Devotion”]
- Devotional service in practice is either regulative or spontaneous, and both approaches cause ecstatic devotion to develop, but in different ways.

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- Regulative practice is the common way to ecstatic devotion, whereas the path of spontaneous practice is rare and confidential.
- This is the mature deliberation of our ācāryas, from Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda to Śrīla Prabhupāda, a conclusion based on the unfortunate condition of people in Kali-yuga.
- Therefore the best strategy when attempting to expand Lord Caitanya’s movement is to preach the cultivation of regulative devotion.
- Although results on the path of regulative practice come somewhat slower than those on the path of spontaneous practice, the former is more secure.
- A moderate pace on the path of progress is better than a false show of greed on the road to disaster.

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- Full-blown rāgānuga-bhakti requires pure greed, so devotees who take it up at the stage of practice sometimes become embroiled in controversy.
- However, for devotees at the stage of ecstatic devotion, greed arising from transcendental realization shields them from the doubt that they are cultivating spontaneous devotion prematurely.
- For this reason, most devotees choose to purify the heart through the path of regulative devotion, and they take to spontaneous devotion only when they have become free of all human defects.
- Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu gives Nārada Muni as an example of a devotee who achieved ecstatic devotion by serving and hearing from great Vaiṣṇavas according to scriptural injunction.

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- It also gives Candrakānti as an example of someone who developed ecstatic devotion by spontaneous practice.
- Candrakānti was a girl who, after hearing about the rāsa dance, came before the deity of Kṛṣṇa and danced all night without stopping. [Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.3.14]
- It may interest the reader to note that according to Rūpa Gosvāmī, this Candrakānti (who is mentioned in the Padma Purāṇa) is an expansion of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī who appeared as a Gāndharvikā to teach others how to love Lord Kṛṣṇa. [Śrī Stava-mālā, Śrī Vṛndāvaneśvarī nāmāṣṭottara-śata-nāma-stotra 11–12]
- Just as Kṛṣṇa appeared as Caitanya Mahāprabhu to teach spontaneous devotional service, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī appeared in a more ancient time as Candrakānti to do the same.

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- To come to the stage of ecstasy devotees must seriously practise the various limbs of devotion, especially these five: associating with devotees, chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, hearing Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, living in Vṛndāvana (at least in one’s mind), and worshipping the deity.
- The most important detail regarding the last four items, especially hearing Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, is that they should be done in the company of more advanced devotees.
- Caitanya Mahāprabhu declares that devotees should select advanced Vaiṣṇavas to hear from.
- He also says that such advanced devotees should be “endowed with a similar type of affection for the Lord” (sajātīyāśaye snigdhe sādhanu saṅgaḥ svato vare). [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 22.131]

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- Śrīla Prabhupāda comments that the phrase “a similar type of affection” excludes offenders, Māyāvādīs, professional Bhāgavatam reciters, and mantra-peddling swamis.
- It even excludes senior devotees who do not have unflinching faith in their own spiritual masters.
- In the right company, hearing the message of Godhead yields incalculable benefits, benefits that allow devotees to perfect the other limbs of devotional service.
- Lord Kapiladeva says:

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

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- “In the association of pure devotees, discussion of the pastimes and activities of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is very pleasing and satisfying to the ear and the heart.
- By cultivating such knowledge one gradually becomes advanced on the path of liberation, and thereafter he is freed, and his attraction becomes fixed.
- Then real devotion and devotional service begin.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.25.25)
- To hear from great Vaiṣṇavas is compulsory for advanced devotees, just as it is for beginners.
- The last line of the above verse confirms this truth.
- Śraddhā refers to devotional practice, rati to ecstatic devotion, and bhakti to loving devotion.

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- Thus hearing from Vaiṣṇavas is an indispensable item of devotion at every stage of advancement. Again Lord Caitanya affirms:

kṛṣṇa-bhakti-janma-mūla haya ‘sādhu-saṅga’
kṛṣṇa-prema janme, teṅho punaḥ mukhya aṅga

- “The root cause of devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa is association with advanced devotees. Even when one’s dormant love for Kṛṣṇa awakens, association with devotees is still most essential.” (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 22.83)
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- It is a common mistake to equate “associating with advanced devotees” with casual socializing.
- To “associate with devotees” means to sit together and discuss Kṛṣṇa’s glories and the methods of advancing to the perfect stage.

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- Only by holding such serious discussions can one fully realize the potency of devotional service in Vaiṣṇava company.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda elaborates on this idea in a wonderful summary of the above verse spoken by Lord Kapiladeva: “My dear mother, when a person is actually in association with pure devotees, the sublime potency of My devotional service can be experienced.’
- In other words, when a pure devotee speaks, his words act upon the hearts of the audience.
- What is the secret of hearing and chanting?...
- when a realized soul who is engaged in the service of the Lord is speaking, he has the potency to inject spiritual life within the audience.

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- One should, therefore, seek the association of such pure, unalloyed devotees, and by such association and service a neophyte devotee will certainly develop attachment, love, and devotion for the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” [The Nectar of Devotion, chapter 17]
- The softened heart of a devotee in ecstasy sometimes causes uncontrollable physical symptoms to appear.
- These eight symptoms (aṣṭa-sāttvika-vikāra), which occur individually, in groups, or all together, are: becoming stunned (stambha), perspiring (sveda), standing up of the bodily hair (romāñca), faltering of the voice (svarabheda), trembling (kampa), changing colour (vaivarṇya), shedding tears (aśru), and appearing devastated (pralaya). [The Nectar of Devotion, chapter 28]
- Unfortunately, many unscrupulous persons make a business out of imitating these symptoms, which can be induced without spiritual advancement.

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- Just as actors and actresses learn to cry, laugh, or faint as needed, pseudodevotees learn to display these symptoms while chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa or speaking Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.
- In this way such rascals enhance their false prestige in the eyes of the general public and earn a profit by marketing their so-called devotion.
- Rūpa Gosvāmī lists nine symptoms by which one can discern whether persons displaying symptoms of ecstasy have been blessed by pure goodness or cursed with a cheating mentality.
- No one can imitate these nine symptoms for an extended period, so their presence is a reliable test of whether or not a devotee truly has ecstatic emotion.

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kṣāntir avyārtha-kālatvaṁ
viraktir māna-śūnyatā
āśā-bandhaḥ samutkaṅṭhā
nāma-gāne sadā ruciḥ

āsaktis tad-guṇākhyāne
prītis tad-vasati-sthale
ity-ādayo 'nubhāvāḥ syur
jāta-bhāvāṅkure jane

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- “When the seed of ecstatic emotion for Kṛṣṇa fructifies, the following nine symptoms manifest in one’s behaviour: forgiveness [forbearance], concern that time should not be wasted, detachment, absence of false prestige, hope, eagerness, a taste for chanting the holy name of the Lord, attachment to descriptions of the transcendental qualities of the Lord, and affection for those places where the Lord resides—that is, a temple or a holy place like Vṛndāvana.
- These are all called anubhāva, subordinate signs of ecstatic emotion.
- They are visible in a person in whose heart the seed of love of God has begun to fructify.” (Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.3.25–26)
- Each of these qualities deserves volumes of explanation, and many devotees have written extensively on how they observed in Śrīla Prabhupāda all nine symptoms fully and consistently.

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- Forbearance, also referred to as “forgiveness,” indicates that amid the alarming turbulence of this world, devotees are tolerant, humble, respectful, and prideless.
- Not wasting time means not to lose a moment in activities unrelated to Kṛṣṇa, but to use every moment in His service.
- Detachment means complete indifference to sense gratification, mystic powers, or liberation.
- An example of such detachment is found in King Bharata.
- He was so eager to attain the Lord’s company that even in the prime of youth he gave up his attractive wife, obedient children, beloved friends, and opulent kingdom just as one gives up stool after evacuating.

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- Devotees without false pride, even though more spiritually advanced than others, honestly think of themselves as most fallen.
- Hope means the conviction, despite the sense of being the most fallen, that Kṛṣṇa will be kind enough to award loving devotion.
- Eagerness means ardent desire to become the Lord’s loving associate.
- This eagerness is expressed in prayers like, “O Kṛṣṇa, O flute-player, the sweetness of Your early age is wonderful within these three worlds.
- You know My unsteadiness and I know Yours.

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- No one else knows about this.
- I want to see Your beautiful, attractive face somewhere in a solitary place, but how can this be accomplished?” (Kṛṣṇa-karṇāmṛta 32)
- Here the taste for chanting the holy name means a relish so powerful that chanting becomes completely addictive.
- Devotees experiencing such taste feel like chanting twenty-four hours a day.
- Sometimes they even chant in their sleep.
- Similarly, their ecstatic attraction to glorifying Kṛṣṇa’s qualities is like a drug they cannot give up.

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- Love for the places where Kṛṣṇa resides means attachment for Vṛndāvana, a temple, or any place where devotees are purely serving the deity of Kṛṣṇa.
- Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura expresses this attraction: “May I always visit all the holy places associated with the līlā of Lord Caitanya and His devotees” (gaura āmāra, ye-saba sthāne, karala bhramaṇa raṅge/ se-saba sthāna, heriba āmi, praṇayi-bhakata-saṅge). [Śaraṇāgati, Bhakti-anukūla-mātra Kāryera Svīkāra, Song 3]
- Devotees sometimes mistakenly think that the occasional display of some or all of these symptoms indicates the presence of ecstatic devotion, but this is not the case.
- Only when all nine are present in full, and when they do not wane or disappear at any time but rather always increase, can it be said that a Vaiṣṇava has attained the stage of bhāva.

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- Rūpa Gosvāmī describes these and other characteristics of pure devotion so that devotees can objectively determine the stature of other Vaiṣṇavas and treat them accordingly.
- To be carried away by wishful thinking, to see what one would like to see in oneself or in others, is not to be true to our siddhānta.
- We must learn to identify devotion and devotees according to the symptoms the ācāryas have given.
- Devotees fixed in their ability to discriminate have the topmost qualification (uttamādhikārī) for pure devotion, and are suitable candidates for bhāva-bhakti.
- Sometimes neophyte devotees or impersonalists display a semblance of ecstatic symptoms (raty-ābhāsa) without ill intent.

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- Such symptoms are signs of unexpected good fortune caused by the influence of great devotees. Chapter three discusses this topic at length, so there is no need to discuss it further here.
- The rest of this section, however, will stress something related to the topic: devotees must always bear in mind the importance of giving respect to Vaiṣṇavas, especially those advanced Vaiṣṇavas in whom pure ecstasy or love has awakened.
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- The power of pure Vaiṣṇava association is such that it can transform the semblance of ecstasy into the real thing.
- The fortunate beneficiaries of such mercy then abandon all deviant philosophies and irregular behaviour.
- Such reformation of character is proof that a person has received the mercy of pure devotees.

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- By serving such Vaiṣṇavas, a person may be quickly elevated to the perfect stage.
- But the problem, especially in this age, is that the population is generally made up of hedonists and impersonalists whose temperaments depreciate the value of advanced devotees.
- This arrogance, if not checked, induces even devotees to offend the very Vaiṣṇavas who first aroused their ecstasy.
- Since such offences greatly displease the Lord's internal potency, she quickly withdraws even the semblance of attachment from these offenders.
- The Padma Purāṇa confirms that the most grievous of all offences to the holy name is to blaspheme great Vaiṣṇavas, especially those who have dedicated their lives to spreading Lord Caitanya's saṅkīrtana movement.

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- Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that offences afflict the devotees' attachment to Kṛṣṇa in proportion to the severity of the offence.
- “If the offence is very serious, then one's attachment becomes almost nil, and if the offence is not very serious, one's attachment can become second class or third class.” [The Nectar of Devotion, chapter 18]
- Devotees must not only guard against committing offences to great devotees but even to those not so advanced.
- Although the degree of reaction may be less, the result is the same—a lessening of one's attachment to Kṛṣṇa.
- Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda maintains that devotees taste some form of attachment (rati) even at the stage of faith, and that such taste increases as they advance through the stages of sādhana-bhakti. [Śrī Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta, chapter 11]

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- It is this higher taste that enables devotees to resist the lower demands of the mind and senses. Kṛṣṇa explains this Himself:

viṣayā vinivartante
nirāhārasya dehinaḥ
rasa-varjaṁ raso 'py asya
paraṁ dṛṣṭvā nivartate

- “The embodied soul may be restricted from sense enjoyment, though the taste for sense objects remains. But, ceasing such engagements by experiencing a higher taste, he is fixed in consciousness.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 2.59)
- Devotees who disrespect or mistreat Vaiṣṇavas reduce or destroy the very taste that sustains their Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

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- Unprotected from the influence of the modes of passion and ignorance, offenders invariably succumb to their lower nature.
- They then either abandon the path of devotion altogether or compromise their life's goal for some form of mixed devotional service (bhakty-ābhāsa).
- For devotees once committed to the path of pure devotion, this is indeed a falldown.
- Therefore devotees must exercise extreme caution and discrimination in their dealings with other Vaiṣṇavas.
- They should especially resist the temptation to pass judgement on others lest they inadvertently commit vaiṣṇavāparādha.

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- For instance, devotees in ISKCON are prone to project their own level of advancement onto all members of the Society.
- Such persons can be heard saying something like, “Let’s be honest with ourselves, all devotees in ISKCON are neophytes.”
- Or overreacting to a devotee with a different style of Kṛṣṇa consciousness than their own, they may accuse him of deviation or self-aggrandizement.
- Such careless criticism diminishes the critics’ own spiritual prowess and hence their own ability to recognize advanced devotees.
- The most virulent type of offence surfaces when devotees harbour impersonalist views, especially the desire to become God.

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- Svarūpa Dāmodara Gosvāmī warned that in bad company even advanced devotees risk falling prey to the allurements of Māyāvāda philosophy.
- “The Māyāvāda philosophy presents such a jugglery of words that even a highly elevated devotee who has accepted Kṛṣṇa as his life and soul changes his decision when he reads the Māyāvāda commentary on the Vedānta-sūtra” (mahā-bhāgavata yei, kṛṣṇa prāṇa-dhana yāra māyāvāda-śravaṇe citta avaśya phire tānra). [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Antya-līlā 2.96]
- This offensive mentality gradually drains piety and spiritual vitality from the devotees, leaving them with either a mere semblance of attachment or the inclination for self-worship (ahaṅgrahopāsanā).
- In 1970 ISKCON experienced a situation that shows how dangerous the Māyāvāda philosophy is and how it can lead the devotees to offend even Śrīla Prabhupāda.

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- Somehow, four of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s sannyāsīs got the notion that Śrīla Prabhupāda was Kṛṣṇa and began to preach this philosophy.
- When Śrīla Prabhupāda heard about it, his reaction was uncompromising.
- Like a lightning bolt he expelled those sannyāsīs from the Society.
- Only after they had repented, renounced their misconceptions, and begged forgiveness did Śrīla Prabhupāda allow them to again serve in his Society.
- Even though these particular sannyāsīs were some of the most influential and favoured devotees in ISKCON, the contamination of impersonal philosophy is so dangerous that Śrīla Prabhupāda took a drastic step to purge it from his movement.
[Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta, volume 4]

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- Although intense practice generally precedes the appearance of ecstasy, there may be genuine exceptions to this rule.
- A person may display symptoms of ecstasy without having performed any sādhana at all.
- Such an extraordinary development is the result of a devotee having cultivated Kṛṣṇa consciousness in a previous life.
- It takes maturity and knowledge to distinguish this exceptional and real occurrence of ecstasy from a semblance or imitation of ecstasy.
- Onlookers may also wonder at the occasional unorthodox behaviour of a devotee in ecstasy.

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- These behaviours may even include crude habits or an apparent descent into sense gratification.
- But these behaviours do not impede the ecstatic devotees' spiritual advancement or their ability to spiritually influence others.
- Craters on the moon appear as dark spots, but they do not hamper the moon's overall brilliance. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Similarly, a little fault in the midst of volumes of devotional service is not at all to be counted as a fault." [The Nectar of Devotion, chapter 18]
- Why do apparent defects appear in advanced devotees?
- Among other reasons, Kṛṣṇa may desire certain sinful reactions to remain in the heart.

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- Bilvamaṅgala Ṭhākura provides an example of a devotee who was plagued by attraction to the fair sex.
- Kṛṣṇa caused the Ṭhākura to cling to this attachment because the Lord wanted to show the world the incredible determination it takes to achieve His lotus feet.
- Bilvamaṅgala was repeatedly embarrassed by his roving eyes, so he eventually blinded himself and proceeded to Vṛndāvana, where he attained complete success in spiritual life.
- Obviously, no one should use Bilvamaṅgala's example to justify either their misbehaviour or the performance of artificially severe austerities.
- Another reason for lingering defects to appear in advanced devotees is their past offences to Vaiṣṇavas.

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- The example of Mahārāja Citraketu teaches all devotees to be exceedingly careful in how they interact with one another, especially in public.
- Simply by joking with Lord Śiva, King Citraketu was cursed to accept the body and habits of the demon Vṛtrāsura.
- Only when Indra killed Vṛtrāsura and released him from the curse could the king’s soul finally return to the spiritual world.
- Therefore it is said, “Be very careful not to offend Vaiṣṇavas” (vaiṣṇavāparādha karāilā sāvadhāna). [Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata, Ādi-khaṇḍa 1.139]
- This chapter now concludes with a brief summary of bhāva-bhakti, the stage at which a devotee leaves behind conditioned life forever and enters the realm of transcendence.

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- Ecstatic devotion manifests itself when the devotees' practices mature, or when they receive the special mercy of advanced Vaiṣṇavas.
- Whatever the cause, the beginning of ecstatic devotion, a spontaneous urge to serve, introduces regulative devotees to rāgānuga-bhakti.
- They then cultivate that spontaneity by deep absorption in the nine limbs of devotional service.
- Of these ninefold activities, devotees develop a special taste for chanting the Lord's holy names.
- Pure goodness, the nature of bhāva, quickly reveals to them their internal mood of attachment to one of five permanent ecstasies.

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- In sādhana-bhakti physical practices are most prominent, but in bhāva-bhakti the inner cultivation of attachment (rati) is most prominent.
- With identification with the material body erased, devotees' physical necessities diminish and their sole desire awakens—to attain life's ultimate goal, loving service to Kṛṣṇa.
- Devotional service in ecstasy (bhāva-bhakti) is the preliminary stage of devotional service in love of Godhead (prema-bhakti).
- It is the first ray of the sun of prema as it touches the horizon of a devotee's heart.
- As that sun continues to rise, it reveals the ultimate goal of great transcendentalists, the nectar that makes them mad after Kṛṣṇa.

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kṛṣṇe rati gāḍha haile ‘prema’-abhidhāna
kṛṣṇa-bhakti-rasera ei ‘sthāyi-bhāva’-nāma

- When affection for Kṛṣṇa becomes deeper, one attains love of Godhead in devotional service.
- Such a position is called sthāyi-bhāva, permanent enjoyment of the mellows of devotional service to Kṛṣṇa.
- Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 23.4