

Śuddha-bhakti Cintāmaṇi

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Chapter 15- The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- The first two parts of this book describe various aspects of mixed and pure devotional service.
- This topic is like an ocean of nectar, and the account given here but a thimbleful of that nectar.
- By drinking from this thimble, devotees will taste the ocean from which it was drawn and gain further insight into the eternal spiritual science of devotional service.
- Part three traces the awakening of devotional service from the acts that lead to a semblance of faith all the way to pure love.
- While this study deals with common misconceptions and improper practices that arise in the process, throughout it also stresses the importance of the company of pure devotees.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Chapter fifteen will outline the progress of devotional service leading up to the semblance of devotion, including entrance into the association of pure devotees.
- But first, who are the pure devotees?
- The pure devotees are Vaiṣṇavas coming in disciplic succession from Caitanya Mahāprabhu who strictly practise devotional service as the Lord taught it and who dedicate themselves to His mission.
- Sanātana Gosvāmī called Haridāsa Ṭhākura the perfect example of such a Vaiṣṇava:

āpane ācare keha, nā kare pracāra
pracāra karena keha, nā karena ācāra
'ācāra', 'pracāra',—nāmera karaha 'dui' kārya
tumi—sarva-guru, tumi jagatera ārya

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- “Some behave very well but do not preach the cult of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, whereas others preach but do not behave properly.
- You simultaneously perform both duties in relation to the holy name by your personal behaviour and by your preaching.
- Therefore you are the spiritual master of the entire world, for you are the most advanced devotee in the world.” (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Antya-līlā 4.102–3)
- This definition of a pure Vaiṣṇava rules out both those so-called devotees who make a show of devotion without possessing the prerequisite faith, and those who claim to be spontaneous devotees without possessing the prerequisite greed.
- Systematic study of the subject of devotion is meant not only to weed out imitators but to teach honest devotees how to recognize who is advanced and who is not, and who has the qualifications to advance and who does not.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- With this information, sādhakas can seek out and then remain in the company of mature Vaiṣṇavas—Vaiṣṇavas who empower devotees with love of Kṛṣṇa in an authorized way.
- Immature devotees sometimes declare, “I believe in Kṛṣṇa,” as if faith were the be-all and end-all of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- Of course, it is essential to believe in Kṛṣṇa, but belief, or faith, is only the first step in the progressive march to perfection.
- Faith alone is not enough to achieve pure love for the Lord.
- Faith must be accompanied by service, so it is also the devotees’ duty to know how to render favourable service.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Sincere devotees who try to understand the science of serving Kṛṣṇa will surely succeed in their efforts.
- They can be confident of this because Kṛṣṇa will personally assist them. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains, “The practice of yoga, especially bhakti-yoga in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, may appear to be a very difficult job.
- But anyone who follows the principles with great determination surely gets the mercy of the Lord, for God helps those who help themselves.” [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 6.24, purport]
- This brings us again to the original purpose of this book.
- To help readers take fuller advantage of devotional literature such as the Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana series, we felt we needed to provide a separate introductory book as a guide.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Devotees need tools with which they can assess their own advancement so that they can more easily apply the suitable processes of devotional service, especially in hearing, chanting, and remembering Kṛṣṇa.
- This overall understanding will also help preachers assess the level of advancement of those under their care as well as of the various audiences with whom they speak.
- Sometimes devotees argue that “any kind of preaching is good preaching.”
- This argument is as incomplete as the above claim, “I believe in Kṛṣṇa.” Preaching is as much a skill as an art.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- For example, the Padma Purāṇa states that it is an offence to give persons knowledge beyond their capacity to understand: “It is an offence to preach the glories of the holy name among persons who have no intelligence or no faith in the subject matter” (aśraddadhāne vimukhe 'py aśṛṇvati yaś copadeśaḥśiva-nāmāparādhah). [Padma Purāṇa, as quoted in Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 8.24, purport]
- This places a great responsibility on preacher-devotees.
- Surely they are doing the most valuable thing by giving Kṛṣṇa consciousness to others, but if they are careless in their giving and do not gauge the qualification of their audience, then they risk impeding their own advancement as well as the advancement of their listeners.
- Of course, all preaching carries some risk to the preacher, especially in times such as ours when people are generally faithless.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Therefore Śrīla Prabhupāda often said that to preach means to inject faith where there was none.
- And Lord Caitanya will certainly protect the well-meaning, thoughtful preacher in all respects.
- Still, the above verse warns devotees that they must be aware of the audience's qualification and give Kṛṣṇa consciousness accordingly.
- Novices and idealistic devotees sometimes question why there are misconceptions and improper practices in a perfect process.
- We should understand that anomalies are in part a natural consequence of the attempt to practise a perfect spiritual science in an imperfect world full of less than perfect souls.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Misconceptions arise from ignorance and faithlessness; improper practice from ulterior motives for personal gain or prestige.
- Thus as Kṛṣṇa consciousness continues to spread throughout the world, so will impediments to genuine devotion.
- Spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness is like sowing flower seeds.
- It is inevitable that weeds will sprout along with the flowers.
- A gardener must be able to distinguish the desired plants from the weeds and to pull the weeds as soon as they appear.
- Similarly, wherever Kṛṣṇa consciousness spreads, the weeds of impure devotion will sprout.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- All devotees must carefully weed the garden of their heart as well as the greater garden of ISKCON.
- It is the preachers' duty, then—and it is especially the duty of those who take positions of authority as temple presidents, sannyāsīs, spiritual masters, and GBC secretaries—to protect the Society from misunderstandings and the disparities they cause.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda's sincere followers must be properly equipped to protect ISKCON from discrepancies so that the Society's legacy, the path of pure devotion to Kṛṣṇa, may be kept clear.
- As already mentioned, devotional service has two basic divisions, the semblance of devotion (bhakty-ābhāsa) and pure devotion (śuddha- or uttama-bhakti).

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Because of the permutations and combinations of influences that act on conditioned souls, there are innumerable types of mixed devotion.
- Nonetheless, our ācāryas outline the development of such semblance of devotion as follows: First, people generally follow the rules and regulations of the social system given in the Vedic literature (varṇāśrama-dharma), but without knowledge of Lord Viṣṇu.
- Next, they work within the varṇāśrama structure and give the results of their work to the Lord, but for personal gain (sakāma-karma-miśra-bhakti).
- Then they offer the results to Viṣṇu without desire for personal gain (niṣkāma-karma-miśra-bhakti).
- Following that, they offer the results of work in full knowledge of the Lord (niṣkāma-karma-jñāna-miśra-bhakti).

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- And at last they become absorbed in the mood of devotion to Viṣṇu, but do not actively serve Him (aṣṭāṅga-yoga).
- Unlike the semblance of devotion, pure devotion is of only one type in the sense that pure devotees have only one goal—to please Kṛṣṇa.
- They make no demands of the Lord.
- Still, pure devotion has a number of stages.
- Rūpa Gosvāmī delineates the stages of pure devotion, in which spiritual emotions awaken and then gradually intensify to the point of unalloyed love: First, persons develop pure faith (śraddhā).
- Then they associate with pure devotees (sādhu-saṅga).

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Next, they perform unsteady devotional service to Kṛṣṇa (bhajana-kriyā).
- After that, under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master, they give up their unwanted habits (anartha-nivṛtti).
- Then firm faith awakens, by which devotional service fixes itself in the devotees' character (niṣṭhā).
- At this point, a strong taste for devotional service awakens (ruci), followed one after another by attachment (āśakti), ecstatic emotion (bhāva), and finally pure love of God (prema). [Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.4.15–16]
- Turning again to the path leading to the semblance of devotion: The semblance of devotion is born from the seed of impure faith— faith compromised by attachment to fruitive work, the desire for liberation, or a craving for mystic powers.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Fruitive workers follow the path of varṇāśrama-dharma.
- Of these workers, some are ignorant of the purpose of the Vedic social system and follow it merely as tradition.
- Others see the varṇāśrama society as a vehicle for religious life, and still others participate in it out of duty and to set a perfect example.
- Materialistic persons attached to a specific role in the social structure have faith in the efficacy of the varṇāśrama system.
- Their piety is in their obedience to the divine regulations set forth by Śrī Kṛṣṇa.
- For them religion is a means to perfect their social and familial obligations, and therefore they place themselves under the guidance of learned brāhmaṇas and voluntarily restrain themselves from irreligious acts.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Although such people consider their gain to be peace, happiness, and prosperity, in reality they gain something else.
- Whether they realize it or not, the real reward for their piety is their increased eligibility for spiritual life.
- Persons governed by the lower modes of nature are unaware that they should become attracted to Kṛṣṇa and please Him by their work; they are less intelligent (alpa-medhasām). [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 7.23]
- Kṛṣṇa does not condemn such persons, but He recommends that they follow the Vedic injunctions and worship Him according to their individual nature.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

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)
- To elevate nondevotees, the Vedas recommend worship of demigods, who are subordinate limbs of the Supreme Lord.
- By directing people to serve these functional deities, the Vedas teach humankind to cultivate a sense of accountability to superior beings.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Faith in a particular demigod qualifies followers to perform specific types of worship to fulfil their specific desires.
- And when their desires are fulfilled, such materialistic worshippers gain further confidence in the Vedas.
- For instance, persons with faith in the sun god become qualified to worship the sun god for good health, and women are encouraged to develop faith in the goddess Umā in order to attain a good husband. The Vedas contain numerous such prescriptions.
- If the faith of the materialists is not contaminated by Māyāvāda conceptions, it will grow, and over a long period of time, the tendency to accept and follow authority will strengthen, lead to a semblance of devotion to the Supreme Lord, and ultimately to pure devotional service.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- In other words, faith in demigods ultimately leads to faith in Kṛṣṇa.
- Therefore Kṛṣṇa shows demigod worshippers special interest, and as the Supersoul in their hearts He steadies their faith so that they can devote themselves to a particular deity. [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 7.21]
- This raises an important question.
- If demigod worship is a part of the Vedic system, why did Śrīla Prabhupāda preach so vehemently against it?
- In Kali-yuga the Vedic system has all but vanished.
- There are no longer qualified brāhmaṇas to guide people, and no longer the security of a society based on varṇāśrama to facilitate the long-term cultivation of faith.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Māyāvāda philosophy has stolen from the people knowledge of both the demigods and Kṛṣṇa.
- Materialism has distracted ordinary people from adhering to religious codes. Under the circumstances, the ācāryas have discarded demigod worship as ineffectual.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda voiced this same conclusion and strongly encouraged people not to disrespect the demigods, but to worship Lord Kṛṣṇa directly.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda narrated the story of Sanātana Gosvāmī and the touchstone to illustrate how in the Vedic social system, with strong Vaiṣṇava association, demigod worship led to a semblance of devotion and ultimately to pure devotion. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.7.6, purport]

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Once, a Vedic brāhmaṇa worshipped Lord Śiva to acquire the greatest treasure.
- The brāhmaṇa thought he could be happy by religious means, but Lord Śiva did not want his devotee to entangle himself further in the cycle of birth and death.
- One day, Lord Śiva appeared before the brāhmaṇa and told him that Sanātana Gosvāmī would give him the greatest treasure.
- The brāhmaṇa rushed to Vṛndāvana and informed Sanātana Gosvāmī of Lord Śiva's order.
- The Gosvāmī at once went to a nearby heap of refuse, retrieved something from it, and handed it to the brāhmaṇa.
- He told the brāhmaṇa that it was a touchstone, the most valuable thing in his possession. [A touchstone is a divine stone that turns anything it touches into gold.]

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- The brāhmaṇa was overjoyed to receive it, but soon wondered why anyone would keep such a treasure in the refuse.
- Intrigued, he inquired further from Sanātana, “Is this touchstone really the greatest treasure you possess?”
- Sanātana then instructed him in the temporary nature of material objects and the eternal blissful nature of devotional service.
- He offered to give the brāhmaṇa his greatest spiritual treasure, but only if the brāhmaṇa was willing to discard the touchstone.
- The brāhmaṇa did as he was told, and Sanātana gave him Kṛṣṇa’s holy name and pure devotional service, truly the greatest of treasures.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- In the beginning, the brāhmaṇa was a demigod worshipper, ignorant of the path of pure devotion.
- The fruit of his properly worshipping Lord Śiva was contact with the great devotee, Sanātana Gosvāmī.
- As the first effect of Sanātana's company, mixed devotion appeared in the brāhmaṇa's heart, for he had surrendered to the Gosvāmī to acquire wealth.
- But once the brāhmaṇa had acquired the touchstone, the brāhmaṇa became further purified by continuing to think of the Gosvāmī as well as receiving the Gosvāmī's transcendental teachings.
- This gave the brāhmaṇa pure faith, and eventually, pure devotion.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- This is the effect of saintly company, truly the greatest treasure of the varṇāśrama system.
- Without sādhu-saṅga, the varṇāśrama system is merely a physical framework unable to bestow spiritual advancement.
- It is like the perennial “automobile-body” of which Śrīla Prabhupāda so often spoke, a body that has no value without the “driver-soul.”
- In this regard, Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmī says that even Vṛndāvana is empty without the presence of great Vaiṣṇavas like Rūpa Gosvāmī.
- How much more vacant, then, is the varṇāśrama system without pure devotees of the Lord.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

śūnyāyate mahā-goṣṭham
girīndro 'jagarāyate
vyāghra-tuṇḍāyate kuṇḍam
jīvātu-rahitasya me

- “Now that I no longer have the sustainer of my life, Śrī Rūpa, the land of Vraja has become empty and desolate, Govardhana Hill has become like a great python, and Rādhā-kuṇḍa has become like the gaping mouth of a ferocious tiger.” (Śrī Stavāvalī, Śrī Śrī Rādhikāṣṭottara-śata-nāma-stotra 11)
- There is a contemporary example confirming the point made above that is worth noting.
- In the mid-1980s, the head of Coventry, England’s congregational preaching was about to marry.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- He had been a lifelong devout Vaiṣṇava; his prospective wife, arranged for him by his parents, had been a devout worshipper of Lord Śiva.
- When the young woman arrived in the UK, a conflict arose between husband and wife over whether Kṛṣṇa or Śiva would be the family deity.
- Both sides argued from family tradition and their understanding of scripture, yet neither could convince the other.
- One night, Lord Śiva appeared in a dream to the young woman and told her that because she had faithfully worshipped him for many years, she could now worship Lord Kṛṣṇa.
- By serving Lord Kṛṣṇa she would serve Lord Śiva in the best possible way.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- After the dream the young woman became a Vaiṣṇavī, in time took initiation, and now serves Gaura-Nitāi and Lord Jagannātha with exceptional love and devotion.
- This case is as exceptional as the individual involved, yet it shows how under ideal circumstances demigod worship can lead pure-hearted persons to Kṛṣṇa.
- Unfortunately, nowadays, demigod worshippers generally become Māyāvādīs and remain far distant from pure Vaiṣṇavism.
- Therefore Śrīla Prabhupāda consistently discouraged demigod worship, promoting instead the direct service of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
- When the followers of the varṇāśrama system come to the stage of mixed faith in Kṛṣṇa, they are eligible for the semblance of devotion (bhakty-ābhāsa).

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- The mode of nature that dominates the character of each devotee dictates the type of semblance of devotion he or she takes up.
- Lord Kapila explains that due to the innumerable combinations of the modes there are multifarious paths of mixed devotional service. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.29.7]
- Thus practices such as chanting, hearing, and deity worship are performed in diverse ways with various motives.
- The path leading to pure devotion is graded according to the devotees' relative freedom from the modes of material nature.
- Dominated by ignorance, the lowest stage, devotees tend to be lazy, to oversleep, to give up easily, to break the rules, to make foolish mistakes, and so on.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Dominated by passion they are apt to overendeavour, cultivate separate interests, be too attached to results, fight unnecessarily with others, and change services often and whimsically.
- Dominated by goodness, devotees are inclined to remain secluded, be thoughtful, regulated, knowledgeable, happy to the point of self-complacency, and to think themselves better than others.
- Lord Kapila distils the intricate combinations of the modes of nature to give a simple way to assess progress on the path of mixed devotion:

aham mamābhimānotthaiḥ
kāma-lobhādibhir malaiḥ
vītam yadā manaḥśuddham
aduḥkham asukham samam

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- “When one is completely cleansed of the impurities of lust and greed produced from the false identification of the body as “I” and bodily possessions as “mine,” one’s mind becomes purified.
- In that pure state he transcends the stage of so-called material happiness and distress.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.25.16)
- Lust and greed are the prominent symptoms of conditioned life.
- They are the primary characteristics of the false ego, which invokes a false sense of “I-ness” (identification with the body) and “my-ness” (ownership of things).
- In Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words, “This false ego is typified by two attitudes: ‘I am this body’ (ahantā), and ‘Everything in my bodily relationships belongs to me’ (mamatā).” [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.26.1–3, purport]

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- One can tell the degree to which the semblance of devotion is progressing toward pure devotion by how free one is from the sense of “I-ness” and “my-ness.”
- How are the modes of nature and these two symptoms of conditioned life purified by the practice of the semblance of devotion?
- Activities in goodness are common to all types of semblance of devotion, and cultivation of activities in goodness further invokes the mode of goodness.
- This in turn inspires devotees to commit further sāttvika acts.
- As the mode of goodness increases, it gradually displaces passion and ignorance.
- As the heart is purified and transcendental knowledge assimilated, devotees awaken to their true identity, where they are relieved of the false impressions of “I-ness” and “my-ness.”

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- At this stage, they become firmly situated in goodness, the gateway to pure devotion.
- What are the practical things someone does to cultivate goodness and gradually free him or herself from the sense of “I-ness” and “my-ness”?
- Kṛṣṇa says that the mode of goodness becomes increasingly prominent when one studies religious scriptures such as Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, chants mantras such as the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra, performs rituals such as worshipping Kṛṣṇa’s deity forms, and practises meditation such as by remembering Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes. [This paragraph and the next are based on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.13.4]
- Householders can free themselves from material contamination by embracing a way of life that harmonizes with the illuminating quality of goodness.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- This means that gr̥hastha devotees should live in family life without much attachment; they should eat, sleep, dress, and bathe according to brahminical standards; and they should always avoid associating or residing with nondevotees.
- As for employment, they should maintain themselves by honest work, without excessive endeavour, and without becoming overly dependent on others. [Further details on the way of life in goodness is described in the purport to Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.13.6]
- All of these items situate a person in the mode of goodness and elevate the practitioner.
- The great sages who understand Vedic knowledge have therefore given these guidelines to benefit conditioned souls.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Those who follow the varṇāśrama system and who adhere to these regulations rise through the stages of the semblance of devotion outlined below.
- Fruitive workers first recognize their obligation to Kṛṣṇa when they come to know Him as the supreme proprietor.
- To ensure their material prosperity, they offer the Lord the results of their work (sa-kāma-karma-miśra-bhakti) and display the beginnings of detachment.
- As a result, their sense of “my-ness” somewhat slackens.
- But although these materialistic devotees regularly hear that they are not the body, due to ongoing attachment to family and society, their sense of “I-ness” remains entrenched.
- They cannot help but identify with the body.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Next, workers give up their motivation for personal gain, and instead labour for the Lord out of a sense of duty (niṣkāma-karma-miśra-bhakti).
- At this stage, both the sense of “my-ness” and “I-ness” diminish, but the identity remains unclear.
- The newfound role as Kṛṣṇa’s servant is solely in relation to temporary duties, not eternal service.
- Their surrender, though, has gone beyond that of selfish workers because such niṣkāma-karma-yogīs try to offer every act of life, not just their work, to the Lord.
- This is called karmārpaṇam. [Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 8.411]

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- As dutiful devotees advance, they recognize that detached work is incomplete without attentive spiritual practices such as studying scripture and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa.
- At this stage, their devotion is mixed with the cultivation of knowledge (niṣkāma-karma-jñāna-miśra-bhakti).
- As a result of their devotional practices, their sense of “I-ness” and “my-ness” diminishes further, but because their attachment to Kṛṣṇa is weak, they still have no clear sense of their spiritual identity.
- Their sense of being Kṛṣṇa’s servant is more an ideal than a practicality.
- Finally, when devotees revive the awareness that they are Kṛṣṇa’s servant, they reach a stage equivalent to the eightfold path of mysticism (yoga-miśra-bhakti).

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Although they feel themselves to be servants of Kṛṣṇa, they remain attached to their sādhana and to all the conditions that facilitate it—but in a way that obscures active service to Kṛṣṇa.
- As a result, these devotees do not actively serve the deity or take up the missionary activities of Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s movement.
- The four preceding paragraphs demonstrate how increased contact with the mode of goodness gradually elevates devotees from one level of semblance of devotion to another.
- Since these stages have already been discussed in chapters four and five, this section closes with a final comment.
- Devotees should not take up the activities of the semblance of devotion, thinking them easier than the practice of pure devotion.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Neither should they think that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s one-lifetime approach to pure devotion is too demanding or that the gradual route through the semblance of devotion is more realistic.
- Why?
- The hallmark of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s true followers is the conviction that his approach to the path of perfection is the most painless and pragmatic path.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda did not advise us to practise the semblance of devotion.
- To perfect that process requires a stable, global varṇāśrama society that can ensure favourable conditions over many lifetimes.
- Such a varṇāśrama system does not exist at present.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- And even if ISKCON were able to establish a stable varṇāśrama network through self-sufficient farm communities, that would not solve the problem for the majority of devotees who reside in cities.
- One may argue that because the results of devotional service continue from life to life there is no harm in a multi-life approach to perfection.
- While it is true that Kṛṣṇa guarantees that our advancement on the path of devotion is permanent, [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 2.40] He makes no guarantee that conditions we will face in future lives will be stable.
- If devotees consider the present environment troublesome to their spiritual life, then they should assume that the future will be even more troublesome.
- Kali-yuga is drifting into further degradation.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Śrīla Prabhupāda’s approach echoes the will of the previous ācāryas.
- He encourages everyone to make an intense effort to become perfect in Kṛṣṇa consciousness within this lifetime.
- His Divine Grace’s followers, members of ISKCON, should honour his desire by making every effort to aim for spiritual perfection, leaving the results in his hands.
- Full confidence in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s guidance is the symptom of pure faith in him.
- This final point deserves further comment.
- Although faith in Kṛṣṇa is a major topic in this book, faith in Kṛṣṇa’s pure representatives is equally important and can be harvested from the study of faith in the Lord.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Pure faith in Kṛṣṇa is the firm conviction that following His orders will fulfil all one's needs and desires. [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 22.62]
- Any other degree of faith in Kṛṣṇa, although it may be strong, is impure and cannot lead to perfection.
- And faith in Kṛṣṇa's representative is inseparable from faith in Kṛṣṇa, because the hearts of the Lord and His representatives are intimately linked. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 9.4.68]
- Therefore, qualification for membership in ISKCON should be based on pure faith in Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings, which includes his approach to fulfilling Kṛṣṇa's instructions and Lord Caitanya's mission.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Moreover, a pure devotee is convinced that there is no better way to serve Śrīla Prabhupāda than to practically apply his teachings in everyday life.
- Sometimes devotees become absorbed in remembering Prabhu-pāda's pastimes and teachings but neglect to put his teachings into practice.
- Such worship, like śraddhābhāsa and bhakty-ābhāsa, though commendable, is symptomatic of neither pure faith nor pure devotion to Śrīla Prabhupāda.
- Pure devotional service begins with pure faith and thickens in stages to love for Kṛṣṇa.

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- Rūpa Gosvāmī describes these stages:

ādau śraddhā tataḥ sādhu-
saṅgo 'tha bhajana-kriyā
tato 'nartha-nivṛttiḥ syāt
tato niṣṭhā rucis tataḥ

athāsaktis tato bhāvas
tataḥ premābhyudañcati
sādhakānām ayaṁ premṇaḥ
prādurbhāve bhavet kramaḥ

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- “In the beginning there must be faith. Then one becomes interested in associating with pure devotees. Thereafter one is initiated by the spiritual master and executes the regulative principles under his orders. Thus one is freed from all unwanted habits and becomes firmly fixed in devotional service. Thereafter, one develops taste and attachment. This is the way of sādhana-bhakti, the execution of devotional service according to the regulative principles. Gradually emotions intensify, and finally there is an awakening of love. This is the gradual development of love of Godhead for the devotee interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.” [This is Śrīla Prabhupāda’s translation of Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.4.15–16, cited in Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta (Madhya-līlā 23.14–15)]
- As mentioned earlier, Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda consolidates the above nine divisions into six: faith, steadiness, taste, attachment, ecstasy, and love.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- In other words, the Ṭhākura places sādhu-saṅga, bhajana-kriyā, and anartha-nivṛtti in the category of faith (śraddhā).
- These beginning stages of devotion—more or less symptoms of the devotees' struggle against the material energy—are the effects of growing yet unsteady faith.
- This book follows in Śrīla Prabhupāda's footsteps and elaborates on all nine stages.
- We do this in part because devotees who have turned to Kṛṣṇa consciousness from a background of sensual indulgence face serious challenges at the first four stages.
- Why did Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda amalgamate the first four stages into one, śraddhā?
- Mid-nineteenth century India was certainly different from the India we know today.

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- Even though Indian aristocracy had sold out to the British way of life, the influence of Vedic culture, which had survived one thousand years of foreign rule, was still strong.
- The excesses of the Victorian era might be called prudish compared to the excesses of today.
- Looking around him, the Ṭhākura may have seen that his Indian readers of the nineteenth century—more or less free from bad habits—could easily take up steady devotional service.
- But today, devotees generally consider the effort required to free oneself of bad habits and to control the mind and senses akin to the effort needed to climb Mount Everest.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Considering how distant steady devotion is for modern-day Vaiṣṇavas, what can be said about the distance of the goal, pure devotion (prema)?
- Yet love is present to some degree even in the most neophyte devotee.
- Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura thus describes the progressive stages of devotion in terms of the visible symptoms of developing love.
- These can be understood as follows: [Mādhurya-kādambinī, chapter 8]
- To begin with it should be clear that love is not something one can acquire from a source outside oneself.
- Caitanya Mahāprabhu teaches that love is latent in all living entities.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- The devotional process simply awakens it: nitya-siddha kṛṣṇa-prema ‘sādhya’ kabhu naya/ śravaṇādi-śuddha-citte karaye udaya. [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 22.107]
- This reawakening of love by reducing false ego may resemble the process that takes place as devotees advance through the stages of the semblance of devotion, but there is a major difference: in the development of pure devotion, love is gradually awakened, whereas in the development of the semblance of devotion, lust is gradually extinguished.
- In other words, when pure faith emerges the emphasis changes from cleansing lust to developing attachment.
- Prior to pure faith, goodness and knowledge may destroy the sense of “I-ness” and “my-ness,” but they are unable to award even a hint of love for Kṛṣṇa.

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- Only the practice of pure devotional service under the guidance of great devotees can gradually awaken prema.
- Materialistic devotees often liken their semblance of devotion to the service of pure devotees.
- “I am also serving Kṛṣṇa,” they say.
- But appearances are deceiving.
- Although the false possessiveness and false identity of both classes of devotees may be diminishing, the mixed devotee cannot lay claim to the wealth of blossoming love possessed by the pure devotee.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Pure devotional service gradually weakens the influence of the modes, proportionately dissipates the false ego, and awakens the soul to its original state as a loving servant of Kṛṣṇa.
- Again, it is a decrease in either the consciousness of “I-ness” (ahantā) or “my-ness” (mamatā), or both, that indicates dissolution of the false ego and the uncovering of love.
- The living entities experience two extreme poles of identity and hence of love—one in their conditioned state, the other in their perfected state.
- In the conditioned state, their false sense of identity is directed toward the body and things related to it, “I” and “mine” respectively.
- In such a state the soul’s natural affection for Kṛṣṇa is directed solely to these two things.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Such so-called love is actually lust (kāma).
- In perfection, however, the living entities' real identity manifests itself, and the perverted sense of “I” and “mine” are corrected to reveal the real sense of “I am Kṛṣṇa’s servant” (ahantā) and “Kṛṣṇa is mine” (mamatā).
- Real love is fully awakened and directed only toward Kṛṣṇa, where it naturally belongs; reposed perfectly, such love is praised as prema.
- The following study correlates the awakening of love to the spiri-tualizing of the sense of “I-ness” and “my-ness.”
- It reveals to mixed devotees how their bhakti differs from that of pure devotees.

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- Because pure devotees take up devotional service in order to attain love for Kṛṣṇa, the study of the way love manifests itself at different stages is also of great value to them.
- It provides an authorized way by which they can measure the degree of their own attachment to the Lord.
- The process begins with the acquisition of the rare treasure of pure faith.
- Though generally awakened after lifetimes of unwitting association with pure devotees (ajñāta-sukṛti), there are no hard and fast rules that dictate how it develops.
- Sometimes faith appears to manifest itself spontaneously (svābhāvikī), meaning that it appears when past ajñāta-sukṛti matures, even before coming in contact with devotees in this life.

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- It may also be that faith is acquired from ajñāta-sukṛti in this life and ripened solely through preaching. [Mādhurya-kādambinī, chapter 2]
- Everything is possible by the grace of pure devotees.
- Pure faith may also arise by an impartial study of scripture, by careful following of varṇāśrama-dharma, or by the prolonged study of speculative knowledge; or it may spring up all of a sudden. [Śrī Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta, chapter 6]
- However pure faith awakens, it makes a person eligible for pure devotional service and its perfection.

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- Kṛṣṇa explains this to Uddhava:

yadr̥cchayā mat-kathādau
jāta-śraddhas tu yaḥ pumān
na nirviṇṇo nāti-sakto
bhakti-yogo 'sya siddhi-daḥ

- “If somehow or other by good fortune one develops faith in hearing and chanting My glories, such a person, being neither very disgusted with nor attached to material life, should achieve perfection through the path of loving devotion to Me.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.20.8)
- The appearance of pure faith is first noticeable when persons develop trust in the import of scriptures and a desire to practise the devotion they describe.

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Despite this faith, however, beginners have little or no understanding of what the scriptures truly mean.
- Neither do they know what the process of sādhana-bhakti entails.
- But they do understand that devotional service means to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.
- Their faith in the holy name becomes their saving grace.
- Beginners in Kṛṣṇa consciousness are also called materialistic devotees (prākṛta-bhaktas) because they identify completely with their body and the world around them.
- For them devotional service is not yet a way of life but a religion.

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- Such devotees think, “I will continue with my worldly duties and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.”
- The attitudes of neophytes toward spiritual life are like those of separatists in the sense that they cannot see things in connection with the Lord.
- They see Kṛṣṇa only in the deity, and they see only the spiritual masters as Vaiṣṇavas.
- Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda says that because neophytes possess weak faith, the smallest currency with which to purchase the mahā-mantra, they do not have the firm will to chant attentively.
- Therefore the nature of their chanting is the lowest of the three stages—offensive (nāmāparādha).

SBC 15 – The Path to Association with Pure Devotees

- Similarly, their ability to hear the teachings of bhakti is selective and restricted.
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- So devotees who have recently crossed the threshold of faith have only begun to uncover their spiritual identity as Kṛṣṇa’s servant (jīvera ‘svarūpa’ haya—kṛṣṇera ‘nitya-dāsa’). [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 20.108]
- They still have a strong sense of “I” and “mine” in relation to matter; consequently, their love for Kṛṣṇa is weak.
- Such devotees are only slightly eligible (kaniṣṭhādhikāra) to practise devotional service.
- The only thing that saves them from sliding back into gross materialism is the mercy and company of advanced devotees.

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- Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “Without the association of devotees, one cannot advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.” [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.12.37, purport]
- Beginners who stay in the company of real Vaiṣṇavas have a bright future, for they are on the path of perfection.
- But such a future, however bright, is still full of challenges, because it includes the unpleasant task of facing unwanted habits.
- The following chapters describe those challenges.

*ei j-bale bhaktera raddh yadi hayaei ājñā-bale bhaktera ‘śraddhā yadi haya
sarva-karma tyāga kari’ se kṛṣṇa bhajaya*

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- If the devotee has faith in the strength of this order, [Because you are My very dear friend, I am speaking to you My supreme instruction, the most confidential knowledge of all.
- Hear this from Me, for it is for your benefit.
- Always think of Me and 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.] he worships Lord Kṛṣṇa and gives up all other activities.
- Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 22.60