

Śuddha-bhakti Cintāmaṇi

by H.H Śivarāma Swami

Chapter 16- Unsteady Devotional Service

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Chapter fifteen discussed devotional service from the semblance of devotion up to the attainment of pure faith and entrance into the association of pure Vaiṣṇavas.
- This chapter studies the beginning of devotional service in practice up to, but not including, the stage of steadiness.
- A prominent symptom of unsteady devotional service is the presence of unwanted habits (anarthas), which continue to linger like ghosts in the hearts of even those with pure faith.
- Devotees serious about purifying the heart cannot afford not to deal with unwanted habits; they must root them out.
- To do so effectively, however, they need to know how to identify anarthas, how to recognize their effects, and how to monitor their presence through the stages of pure devotional service in practice.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- In his writings, Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda exhaustively analyses all the things that are superfluous to the true cultivation of pure devotion.
- In the Āmnāya-sūtra the Ṭhākura describes four types of anarthas: offences (aparādha), material desires (asat-trṣṇā), weakness of heart (hṛdaya-daurbalya), and the misunderstanding of spiritual truths (tattva-vibhrama). [Śrī Āmnāya-sūtra 74]
- In Śrī Bhajana-rahasya he subdivides these anarthas: [Śrī Bhajana-rahasya, chapter 2]
- There are four types of offences: offences to the holy name, to the Lord's deity form, to devotees, and to other living entities.
- Material desire is also of four types: desire for material objects, for heavenly comforts, for mystic powers, and for liberation.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Likewise, weakness of heart has four subdivisions: envy, the desire for fame, deceitfulness or fault-finding, and attachment to objects unrelated to Kṛṣṇa.
- And the misunderstanding of spiritual knowledge is of four kinds: misunderstanding one's own identity, misunderstanding the Supreme Lord, misunderstandings about the process of devotional service, and misunderstandings related to subjects un-favourable to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- The above anarthas give birth to six enemies: lust, anger, greed, illusion, pride, and envy (kāma, krodha, lobha, moha, mada, and mātsarya).
- These enemies in turn inundate the living entity with six waves: distress, illusion, hunger, thirst, old age, and death (śoka, moha, kṣut, pipāsā, jarā, and mṛtyu).
- As long as one has these unwanted habits, the creeper of pure devotion remains stunted.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- However, as stated at the outset of the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, performing offenseless nāma-saṅkīrtana drives away all anarthas:

āpannaḥ saṁsṛtiṁ ghorāṁ
yan-nāma vivaśo gṛṇan
tataḥ sadyo vimucyeta
yad bibhetti svayaṁ bhayam

- “Living beings who are entangled in the complicated meshes of birth and death can be freed immediately by even unconsciously chanting the holy name of Kṛṣṇa, which is feared by fear personified.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.1.14)
- In this verse the unconscious chanting spoken about is offenseless.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- He first defines the degrees of nullification.
- When only one of the many, many anarthas in the heart is nullified, the nullification is called limited (eka-deśa-vartinī).
- When many unwanted habits are nullified, the nullification is called pervasive (bahu-deśa-vartinī).
- When almost every anartha has been destroyed, the nullification is called almost complete (prāyikī).
- When all anarthas are destroyed, the nullification is called complete (pūrṇa).
- And when every anartha is gone with no chance of their recurrence, the nullification is considered absolute (ātyantikī).

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Viśvanātha goes on to analyse how these stages of nullification correspond to the stages of advancement in devotional service. [Mādhurya-kādambinī, chapter 3]
- Chapter seventeen in this book will study that analysis.
- Since the nullification of unwanted habits and the purification of the sense of “I” and “mine” are both directly proportionate to the rise of the mode of goodness, it follows that the above analysis also applies to the purification of the false ego discussed in chapter fifteen.
- Since the development of prema is proportionate to the purification of the false ego, the analysis also indirectly applies to the development of love of God.
- The first major step for faithful neophytes on the path of pure devotional service is to attain the company of pure devotees (sādhu-saṅga).

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- The spiritual masters who introduce devotees to Kṛṣṇa consciousness (vartma-pradarśaka-gurus) encourage beginners to associate with more advanced Vaiṣṇavas, and in such company, neophytes naturally come in contact with self-realized souls.
- Transcendentally situated devotees are sources of divine inspiration for spiritual fledglings.
- In the hearts of advanced devotees resides pure devotion, which is a blend of the spiritual hlādinī and saṁvit potencies.
- In the physical presence of mahā-bhāgavatas, faithful neophytes, free from envy, absorb this devotional energy and at once feel ecstasy.
- Thus blessed with pure devotion, neophytes are eager to chant and serve in like-minded company. [Śrī Hari-nāma-cintāmaṇi, chapter 1]

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Less fortunate are the beginners who lack the association of advanced devotees or whose envy prevents them from taking advantage of such company when they have it.
- Hearing and chanting in the company of intermediate devotees may dissipate doubts and awaken a mood of service to Kṛṣṇa, but the concepts of “I” and “mine,” which rule the hearts of narrow-minded persons, obstruct the neophytes’ spiritual progress.
- It is difficult for such neophytes to improve their attitudes toward others, even toward senior devotees.
- Although beginners befriend some Vaiṣṇavas, their critical mentality makes them offensive toward others.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- In effect, these offences either partially or fully obscure the joy the neophyte devotees once felt in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- Without a higher spiritual taste, the minds of young devotees again turn to material life.
- If advanced devotees do not teach beginners about sambandha-jñāna, and if they do not show mercy by encouraging them to seriously practise devotional service, then neophytes will generally abandon the path of pure devotion.
- Embracing their own misfortune, such kaniṣṭhādhikārīs stay aloof from pure Vaiṣṇavas and inevitably concoct some distorted philosophy, like one condoning illicit sex and intoxication in Kṛṣṇa's service.
- In the company of equally ill-fated souls, their faith degrades to an impure facsimile of what it once was.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- The serious reader may justifiably ask why neophytes—who by definition can neither respect Vaiṣṇavas nor avoid committing offences to them—should be encouraged to enter the company of superior Vaiṣṇavas at all.
- Doesn't entering such company jeopardize their meagre spiritual assets?
- It is true that the neophytes' position is tenuous.
- They fall down when they stay away from devotees, and they risk falling down when they mix with devotees.
- But because they can make no advancement without sādhu-saṅga, the challenge for neophytes is to stay in superior company.
- Beginners must carefully avoid ingratitude.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- They must control their rebellious nature even during periods when doing so is difficult, and they must stay among devotees.
- With the strength derived from their devotional practices, especially from chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa in the company of pure Vaiṣṇavas, neophytes must tolerate the inconvenience they feel from the reactions to their offences.
- If they persevere, in time they will overcome their lower nature and rise to the status of intermediate devotees.
- What is the fate of those unsuccessful neophytes who fall away from the devotional path because of weakness or offence?
- Falldowns bring misfortune in the short term, and fallen devotees both struggle with recurring bad habits and lose their taste for devotional life.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- But the long-term effects are auspicious because the devotional service they performed remains an eternal asset, a foundation on which will rest their future success.
- As Śrī Nārada says,

tyaktvā sva-dharmaṁ caraṇāmbujam harer
bhajann apakvo 'tha patet tato yadi
yatra kva vābhadram abhūd amuṣya kim
ko vārtha āpto 'bhajatām sva-dharmataḥ

- “One who has forsaken his material occupations to engage in the devotional service of the Lord may sometimes fall down while in an immature stage, yet there is no danger of his being unsuccessful. On the other hand, a nondevotee, though fully engaged in occupational duties, does not gain anything.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.5.17)

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Persons just beginning to keep company with devotees may take up spiritual life (bhajana-kriyā), but until they commit themselves to the rules and regulations they cannot be considered sādhakas, true practitioners.
- They remain simply believers.
- According to Śrīla Prabhupāda, devotional service in practice (sādhana-bhakti) begins only after serious commitment to Kṛṣṇa and the disciplic succession—that is, at the time of initiation.
- When referring to the path to perfection and the cleansing of the heart, Śrīla Prabhupāda would often say, “[I]nitiation is the beginning.” [Initiation lecture, Montreal, 29 July, 1968]
- Furthermore, in his translation of the phrase bhajana-kriyā, Śrīla Prabhupāda calls initiation the cornerstone of serious practice.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- “Thereafter one is initiated by the spiritual master and executes the regulative principles under his orders.” [Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.4.15–16, quoted in Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 23.14–15]
- Still, neophytes may not be able to strictly follow the rules and regulations even as they seriously try to practise bhakti-yoga and aspire to commit themselves to receiving initiation.
- But no one is expected to be perfect in the beginning of any endeavour, and the same is true of devotional practice.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda was extremely patient with new disciples as they passed through the first stages of devotional life.
- Bhajana-kriyā has two stages: unsteady (aniṣṭhitā) and steady (niṣṭhitā).

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- As long as the effects of past sins dominate the heart, neophytes' devotional practices remain unsteady no matter how hard they try.
- However, when most of the impurities are removed, novices become steady in service.
- Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam describes this transformation:

śṛṇvatām sva-kathāḥ kṛṣṇaḥ
puṇya-śravaṇa-kīrtanaḥ
hṛdy antaḥ-stho hy abhadrāṇi
vidhunoti suhṛt satām

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- “Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Personality of Godhead, who is the Paramātmā [Supersoul] in everyone’s heart and the benefactor of the truthful devotee, cleanses desire for material enjoyment from the heart of the devotee who has developed the urge to hear His messages, which are in themselves virtuous when properly heard and chanted.”

naṣṭa-prāyeṣv abhadreṣu
nityam bhāgavata-sevayā
bhagavaty uttama-śloke
bhaktir bhavati naiṣṭhikī

- “By regular attendance in classes on the Bhāgavatam and by rendering of service to the pure devotee, all that is troublesome to the heart is almost completely destroyed, and loving service unto the Personality of Godhead, who is praised with transcendental songs, is established as an irrevocable fact.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.2.17–18)

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- The first line of the first verse refers to unsteady regulative practice (aniṣṭhita-bhajana-kriyā) followed by the cleansing of impurities in the heart (abhadraṇi vidhunoti), the stage of anartha-nivṛtti.
- The phrase “all that is troublesome to the heart is almost completely destroyed” indicates that although the cleansing is not complete it is sufficiently complete to inaugurate steady practice; hence, “irrevocable” service comes into being.
- Thus according to Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, purification of unwanted things from the heart follows the stage of unsteady practice.
- When devotees are relatively free from obstacles they enter the stage of steady practice (niṣṭhita-bhajana-kriyā).

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- At the time of initiation devotees vow to refrain from sinful life, regulate their devotional practices, avoid offences to the holy name, and chant a minimum of sixteen rounds daily.
- Strict adherence to these vows gives the necessary spiritual strength to brave the rigours of purifying the heart.
- Neophyte devotees who fail to uphold their vows fall again into the clutches of illusion.
- Fighting with Māyā (illusion) is certainly trying, but succumbing to her is intolerable.
- Initiated devotees who keep close company with their peers and seniors, and who take guidance from transcendental knowledge, inevitably see the dawn of steady devotion.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Technically, initiation is the process that infuses devotees with transcendental knowledge, frees them from sinful reactions, and blesses them with mantras that bring them closer to the spiritual master and Kṛṣṇa.
- In defining initiation (dīkṣā), both Sanātana Gosvāmī [Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 2.9. Quoted in Gaudīya-kaṅṭhahāra] and Jīva Gosvāmī [Bhakti-sandarbhā, anuccheda 283] cite the following verse from the Viṣṇu-yāmala:

divyaṁ jñānaṁ yato dadyāt
kuryāt pāpasya saṅkṣayam
tasmād dīkṣeti sā proktā
deśikais tattva-kovidaiḥ

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- “Dīkṣā is the process by which one can awaken his transcendental knowledge and vanquish all reactions caused by sinful activity.
- A person expert in the study of the revealed scriptures knows this process as dīkṣā.”
- Initiation is not a one-time ceremonial act; it is the beginning of a process. Therefore Śrīla Prabhupāda uses the phrase “process of initiation.”
- He writes, “This is the process of initiation.
- The disciple must vow that he will no longer commit sinful activity—namely illicit sex, meat eating, gambling, and intoxication.
- He promises to execute the order of the spiritual master.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Then the spiritual master takes care of him and elevates him to spiritual emancipation.” [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 24.256, purport]
- The process of initiation begins well before the formal ceremony.
- Before aspiring disciples make their vows, they must display steadiness in at least the external acts of devotion.
- For this, the scriptures recommend a testing period of one year.
- During that time, the spiritual master imparts sambandha-jñāna to the prospective disciple and ensures that all aspirants have embraced this knowledge with proper faith.
- Disciples with a superficial understanding of transcendental knowledge cannot rid themselves of unwanted habits.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Thus their spiritual practices remain a semblance of the real thing.
- In short, without a clear understanding of devotional principles, devotees can neither free themselves from nāmābhāsa nor steady themselves in practice.
- Initiation given to ignorant persons is therefore impotent.
- After the initiation ceremony, disciples must accept further training from their spiritual master.
- This training includes receiving a schedule of services to regulate the wandering mind and senses as well as further instructions on how to perform devotional service in the ways most pleasing to Kṛṣṇa.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- To provide such schooling, Śrīla Prabhupāda introduced a core of prescribed duties, such as public hari-nāma, book distribution, and preaching, sandwiched between morning and evening programmes of chanting and hearing before the deities.
- This strict regimen would steady his followers by giving them the best opportunity to free themselves of unwanted habits.
- It is up to the devotees to avail themselves of Prabhupāda’s perfect arrangement. Some do and some do not.
- To those who neglect the ācārya’s training Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura says, “One who is lazy in properly understanding the Vaiṣṇava philosophical conclusions can never become free from anarthas, the unwanted bad habits and philosophical misconceptions that impede devotional service. [He]...can never render actual service to the Lord.” [Prākṛta-rasa-śata-dūṣanī 28]

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Therefore it is the duty of the spiritual master to give his disciples knowledge of relationship, practice, and perfection, and it is the duty of the disciple to embrace and apply these teachings.
- If gurus and disciples perform their duties properly, they will both advance in the Lord's service.
- If, however, they neglect these duties, then both guru and disciples will suffer the consequences: by committing such an offence to the holy name, they will each fall from their position.
- Devotees may be surprised to hear that spiritual masters are punishable if they do not adequately perform their duties, but this is the teaching of śāstra.
- Vaiṣṇavas who collect disciples but fail to ensure their dependants'

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- welfare are certainly sinners.
- What do the scriptures say in this regard?
- The ninth offence to the holy name is to teach the glories of the holy name to the faithless. [Padma Purāṇa, Brahma-khaṇḍa]
- The converse of this injunction is that one must teach the glories of the name to the faithful.
- Gurus who collect disciples but fail in their duty to train them are offenders to both the holy name and the disciplic succession (paramparā).

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Quotations in support of this conclusion: “If a guru, disregarding the standard for giving dikṣā, gives the mantra to his disciple out of greed or mundane affection, he, along with that disciple, is cursed by the gods,” snehād vā lobhato vāpi yo gr̥hṇīyād dīkṣayā/ tasmin gurau sa-śiṣye tad devatāśāpa āpatet; [Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 2.7, quoted in Gaudīya-kaṇṭhahāra] “One who cannot deliver his dependants from the path of repeated birth and death should never become a spiritual master, a father, a husband, a mother, or a worshipable demigod,” gurur na sa syāt sva-jano na sa syāt pitā na sa syāj jananī na sā syāt/ daivaṁ na tat syān na patiś ca sa syān na mocayed yaḥ samupeta-mṛtyum. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 5.5.18]
- Accepting disciples is no different from any other service in that it must be done properly.
- Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda writes, “If, without paying heed to [Lord Caitanya’s] instructions, a guru initiates an insincere pretender, he commits a grievous offence for which he goes to hell.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- The nāmāparādhas committed by the charlatan disciple slowly but surely diminish the guru’s spiritual potency, and finally the guru is ruined.
- This offence has a devastating effect on both the guru and the disciple, who must both enter hell.” [Śrī Hari-nāma-cintāmaṇi, chapter 10]
- This section examines more closely the stage of unsteady devotion in practice, its relation to unwanted habits old and new, and the process by which devotees overcome these habits.
- Devotees should not ignore these aspects of the practical application of devotional knowledge (abhidheya-jñāna), thinking them too detailed or trifling.
- This knowledge will help the reader pass through the clouds of pernicious habits to the clear sky of effortless devotional service.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- At the stage of unsteady practice, only a few aspects of a devotee's behaviour are spiritualized, or freed from the sense of “I-ness” and “my-ness.”
- For instance, beginners sometimes feel themselves servants by developing an affinity for the temple deity or by identifying with a Vaiṣṇava society such as ISKCON.
- But despite this budding sentiment to perform service, selfish habits and attitudes continue to dominate their lives.
- They struggle with the oppressive influences of false identity and false proprietorship like weak swimmers who tread water to keep from sinking.
- Even though such devotees want to be steady, the influence of past habits obstructs their desire.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Those among them who are properly determined certainly succeed, but before they do they must defeat five enemies: sleep (laya), distraction (vikṣepa), dis-interest (apratipatti), behaviour unbecoming of a Vaiṣṇava (kaṣāya), and the taste for material enjoyment (rasāsvāda).
- Sleep is the influence of ignorance that engulfs devotees while they chant their rounds, hear Bhāgavatam class, and concentrate on the Gāyatrī mantra.
- Distraction is the tendency to engage in activities unrelated to devotional practice, such as idle talk while chanting japa.
- Indifference refers to the indolence that obstructs concentration even when one is neither drowsy nor distracted.
- Unbecoming behaviour refers to un-Vaiṣṇavalike traits such as lust, anger, greed, and pride.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- The lingering taste for material enjoyment is the ghostly effect of past sins; even in the midst of practising sādhana one is either tempted to commit these sins again or tortured by indecent thoughts, perhaps of past sexual encounters.
- Obstacles to steady practice persist, albeit with decreasing strength, until neophyte devotees' hearts are sufficiently purified.
- As weeds go to seed and proliferate, so these obstructions spread into six kinds of erratic behaviour symptomatic of the beginning stages of devotion: false confidence (utsāha-mayī), sporadic endeavour (ghana-taralā), indecision (vyūḍha-vikalpā), struggle with the senses (viṣaya-saṅgarā), the inability to uphold vows (niyamākṣamā), and enjoyment of the conveniences of devotional service (taraṅga-raṅgiṇī). [These six obstructions and the analysis in the following three paragraphs are based on Mādhurya-kādambinī, chapter 2]

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- False confidence is the initial burst of enthusiasm felt by neophytes who, on learning a few devotional practices, think themselves masters of the science of bhakti.
- As the reality of their spiritual infancy dawns on them, however, their childlike self-assurance fades and their devotional efforts become sporadic.
- In this state they are sometimes attentive in their devotional service and sometimes not.
- Face to face with the actual depth of their conditioning, such devotees become unsure how to situate themselves in the long haul to prema and struggle to make decisions.
- If they choose the gr̥hasthāśrama, the many arrangements to maintain family and home might distract them from their sādhana.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- If they try to practise renunciation, their intelligence tells them, “Your passions reveal you to be a hypocrite.”
- Wearied in battle with an enemy who remains on the offensive twenty-four hours a day, devotees become complacent and passively observe the mind and senses under the siege of temptation.
- Sometimes they resist temptation and sometimes they do not.
- Although neophytes try to renounce thoughts of selfish pleasure, they are unable to do so.
- To gain strength they vow to chant extra rounds, eat only once a day, fast completely on Ekādaśī, sleep only five hours a night, and so on.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- But no matter how hard they try, they cannot sustain their vows and thus fail to make advancement.
- Finally, distracted by the superficial benefits of devotional service—wealth, position, and respect—neophytes foolishly delight in these pleasures—pleasures that are but mere ripples in the great ocean of pure devotion.
- These six facets of unsteady service are formidable enemies.
- They make the initial stages of Kṛṣṇa consciousness more a battle with māyā than a dip into the ocean of ecstasy.
- Still, the overall picture is neither bleak nor hopeless.
- A higher taste is available to all devotees.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- There is great joy in tasting the auspiciousness (śubha-dā) and freedom from suffering (kleśa-ghnī) that come from devotional service at any stage of practice.
- Furthermore, chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and preaching the philosophy give unparalleled happiness.
- These joys entice beginners forward and reassure them with glimpses of the halo of perfection.
- Astute, determined devotees thus remain inspired even while they struggle toward Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet.
- They cultivate proper knowledge, guard against the pitfalls caused by their own shortcomings, and with patience and determination gradually rise to the stage of steadiness.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- It is important to note that the stages of unsteady practice (aniṣṭhita-bhajana-kriyā) and the removal of unwanted habits (anartha-nivṛtti) go on concurrently.
- Although devotional activities done at the unsteady stage have limited potency, they are still agents to help neophytes give up most of their unwanted habits. [Lecture, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.2.18, Los Angeles, 21 August, 1972]
- The complete removal of unwanted habits happens only after devotees pass through the stage of attachment (āśakti) and enter the realms of ecstasy and love.
-
- If, however, neophytes are not alert to correcting themselves, and if they succumb to the handicaps of their station, then the very acts of devotion meant to free them from obstacles create even greater ones.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- In other words, devotional service, the means to overcome all impediments to joyful life, if improperly performed can be the source of more obstacles and sorrow.
- These newly created obstacles add to the store of unwanted habits and make the next stage of devotion, anartha-nivṛtti, even more difficult to complete.
- Newly formed unwanted habits are a consequence of offences (aparādhottha) and mistakes made while practising devotional service (bhakty-uttha).
- Unwanted habits arising from offences usually come from offences committed against the holy name (nāmāparādha), not those committed in deity worship (sevāparādha).
- Reciting prayers for forgiveness or even carelessly chanting the holy names nullifies the effects of offences committed during deity worship.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- But committing any one of the ten offences against the holy name, especially those against Vaiṣṇavas great or small, results in further obstructions on the devotional path.
- What are the ten offences to the holy name?
- Most devotees are familiar with this all-important list: To be envious of or to criticize the pure devotee; to think that the demigods are equal to Kṛṣṇa; to disrespect or disobey the guru; to disrespect the scriptures; to think that the glorification of the holy name is empty praise; to interpret the holy name in a devious way; to commit sins on the strength of chanting the name; to consider chanting the holy name to be on the same level as mundane pious actions; to give the name to unqualified persons; not to have faith in or a taste for the holy name even after hearing its praises; and to accept the name without giving up material attachment. [Padma Purāṇa, Brahma-khaṇḍa]

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- What should devotees do if they commit any of these offences?
- If they know the specific act that caused the offence, they should immediately rectify it.
- Reaction to an offence against a Vaiṣṇava, for example, is removed by falling at the feet of the offended Vaiṣṇava and sincerely begging for forgiveness.
- If for some reason the Vaiṣṇava fails to offer that forgiveness, then the offender should menially serve the Vaiṣṇava until the Vaiṣṇava does offer his or her forgiveness. [Mādhurya-kādambinī, chapter 3]
- Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura advises similar measures to mitigate the other nine kinds of offences.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- For instance, a devotee who has inadvertently vilified the revealed scriptures should sincerely praise the same scriptures.
- For details on measures for the other eight offences, the reader can consult Śrī Hari-nāma-cintāmaṇi.
- Sometimes devotees bear the inauspiciousness that results from having committed offences, yet even after careful analysis they cannot determine the specific offensive act.
- The remedy for these souls is to take shelter of the holy name and to chant incessantly—or as much as possible.
- In time, the effects of the offences will diminish and once again the offending devotees will gain the holy name's mercy.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Later chapters discuss the unfortunate effects of offences to the holy name and the intricacies of their removal.
- Sometimes devotees make the mistake of thinking that offences to the holy name are committed only during kīrtana or while chanting japa, but in fact a person may commit offences at any time of the day while engaged in any type of activity.
- All devotional practices are the loyal subjects of the king, saṅkīrtana, the religious process for this age.
- Just as a king takes as an affront to himself an offence made to any of his subjects, the holy name takes as an affront an offence made during the performance of any devotional activity.
- We previously mentioned that by accepting unqualified disciples a spiritual master becomes an offender and is punishable. This is a case in point.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- The holy name takes offence at the spiritual master's behaviour because it transgresses proper Vaiṣṇava conduct, displays lowly desires for worship and followers, and brings disgrace to the guru-paramparā and the saṅkīrtana movement.
- One offence in particular deserves special mention, because it is both very serious and very common: inattentive chanting of the holy name (pramāda).
- Despite avoiding all other offences and being attentive to all other details of devotional service, if devotees are inattentive to the Lord's name, their chanting will not bear fruit.
- These offenders do not experience the ecstasy of the pure name; rather, they sow the seeds of bad habits that soon sprout into weeds of material desire.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Haridāsa Ṭhākura, the ultimate authority on the holy name, describes three kinds of inattentiveness: apathy (audāsīnya), laziness (jāḍya), and distraction (vikṣepa). [Śrī Hari-nāma-cintāmaṇi, chapter 12]
- These three are a synthesis of the five aforementioned obstacles to steady devotion: sleep, distraction, and so on, applied specifically to chanting.
- We stress them here again because inattentive chanting is the most common impediment to pure devotion.
- Apathy refers to indifference or a lack of enthusiasm in chanting; laziness refers to dozing or not caring to pronounce the Lord's names properly; and distraction refers to allowing the senses and mind to wander to sense objects.
- All of these, especially distraction, which is extremely difficult to overcome, result in a loss of interest in chanting and other devotional practices.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- When devotees lose interest in receiving Bhaktidevīs shelter, they are beset by an intense hankering for wealth, sex, position, and other anarthas.
- Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura provides the following formidable list of the anarthas that result from chanting without trying to give up offences—and particularly from inattentive chanting: desires for liberation, desires for yoga-siddhis, desires for material enjoyment, diplomatic behaviour, illicit connection with women, making a show of devotional service, caste consciousness, spiritual pride, attachment to sinful activities, classifying Vaiṣṇavas according to birth, making business from devotional service or illegal profiteering, desiring mundane reputation or cheap recognition, desiring adoration, and philosophical deviation. [Summarized from Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 19.160, purport]
- How can devotees stop chanting inattentively?

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Surely every individual and collective problem in our society has stemmed from this root anartha.
- The first step is to desire a solution. Once devotees realize that they need to improve, they should chant daily and for prolonged periods in the company of advanced devotees who have spontaneous attraction (anurāga) for the holy name.
- They should study the behaviour of offenseless chanters, emulate their mood, and inquire from them how to overcome inattentiveness.
- The example and guidance of advanced devotees will certainly inspire neophytes to cast off the shackles of apathy, laziness, and distraction.
- Neophyte devotees should also beg for the mercy of the holy name and the owner of the holy name, Lord Kṛṣṇa.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Chanting regularly before Tulasīdevī, serious neophytes empowered by great devotees and by the Lord Himself will certainly come to the stage of offenseless chanting.
- In this way, by saintly association, freedom from distractions, and determined, confident enthusiasm, the neophytes' devotional practices become steady.
-
- In addition to avoiding or correcting offences to the holy name, devotees must carefully discharge their prescribed duties. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is systematic.
- When properly carried out, it produces the desired result.
- Failure to follow the prescribed rules and regulations not only spoils one's advancement in devotion but it creates further obstacles.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- While instructing Rūpa Gosvāmī, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu warned of the bad habits that arise from improperly performed devotional service.
- For instance, even sincere devotees tend to delight in veneration and fame, trappings that come with being recognized as a Vaiṣṇava.
- These weeds grow beside the creeper of devotion.
- If not curtailed, their influence can overwhelm beginners and distract them from the path of pure devotion.
- The Lord Himself names a few of many possible unwanted habits.

“niṣiddhācāra,” “kuṭīnāṭī,” “jīva-hiṃsana”
“lābha,” “pūjā,” “pratiṣṭhādi” yata upaśākhā-gaṇa

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- “Some unnecessary creepers growing with the bhakti creeper are the creepers of behaviour unacceptable for those trying to attain perfection, diplomatic behaviour, animal-killing, mundane profiteering, mundane adoration, and mundane importance. All these are unwanted creepers.” (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 19.159)
- To eradicate these weeds, devotees must listen to well-wishers who can pinpoint specific unwanted habits and distinguish them from the real creeper of devotion.
- Neophytes must then take the necessary steps to cut down unwanted creepers and curtail any whimsical behaviour that may arise from the neglect of essential spiritual practices.
- Early rising, attending the morning programme, and maintaining strict Vaiṣṇava conduct—such as avoiding mundane movies and food cooked by nondevotees—exemplify these essential practices.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- In unsteady devotional service (aniṣṭhita-bhajana-kriyā), devotees oscillate between doing things correctly and incorrectly.
- As already mentioned, the results of incorrect practices, offences, and negligence are inauspicious.
- But when devotees practise properly, their service clears away the unwanted habits that have arisen from previous acts, pious or impious, as well as those that have arisen from mistakes made while performing devotional practices.
- The creeper of devotion can then flourish.
- But newborn unwanted habits, habits that arise from offences committed while still on the stage of unsteady devotion, are not so easily removed.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Though their effects are easily incurred and quickly stockpiled, their eradication, one by one, requires diligent effort over time.
- In short, although bhakti surely frees devotees from reactions to past deeds, carelessness in the discharge of devotional service may cause more anarthas to build up than unsteady service clears away.
- As a result, new unwanted habits may discourage devotees and choke their devotional creepers.
- Thus weakened, many souls have turned their back on cultivating pure devotion and returned to material life.
- Unfortunately, ISKCON's history in this regard is replete with examples.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Even senior leaders—GBC secretaries, sannyāsīs, and gurus—have succumbed to the effects of offences and carelessness.
- In the name of serving the preaching mission, leaders have rationalized their own misdeeds, even as they trample on the feelings of other Vaiṣṇavas in the name of spiritual authority.
- The downfall of these devotees proves the defectiveness of such methods.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted ISKCON’s leadership to concentrate on helping its members advance as well as spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- He wanted to see his followers increase in both quality and quantity—but in that order.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- Whenever Śrīla Prabhupāda saw quality being sacrificed for quantity, he instructed his leaders to “boil the milk,” that is, to concentrate on solidifying the Kṛṣṇa consciousness of the devotees already present in the movement.
- We have quoted a letter to this effect below.
- It expresses Śrīla Prabhupāda’s desire that the training he imparted to his disciples always provide immunity from the material energy, even at the cost of slowing the preaching.
- “So I want you leaders especially to become very much absorbed in the philosophy of Bhagavad-gita, Srimad-Bhagavatam, and become yourselves completely convinced and free from all doubt.
- On this platform you shall be able to carry on the work satisfactorily, but if there is lack of knowledge, or if there is forgetfulness, everything will be spoiled in time.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- So especially you must encourage the students to read our books throughout the day as much as possible, and give them all good advice how to understand the books, and inspire them to study the things from every point of view.
- In this way, by constantly engaging our tongues in the service of the Lord, either by discussing His philosophy or by chanting Hare Krishna, the truth is that Krishna Himself will reveal Himself to us and we shall understand how to do everything properly.
- Now we have got so many students and so many temples but I am fearful that if we expand too much in this way that we shall become weakened and gradually the whole thing will become lost.
- Just like milk.

SBC 16 – Unsteady Devotional Service

- We may thin it more and more with water for cheating the customer, but in the end it will cease to be any longer milk.
- Better to boil the milk now very vigorously and make it thick and sweet. That is the best process.
- So let us concentrate on training our devotees very thoroughly in the knowledge of Krishna consciousness from our books, from tapes, by discussing always, and in so many ways instruct them in the right propositions.” [Letter to Hamsadūta, Los Angeles, 22 June, 1972]