

# Śuddha-bhakti Cintāmaṇi

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# Chapter 18- Steady Devotion and Taste

## SBC 18 – Steady Devotion and Taste

- Chapters sixteen and seventeen discussed anartha-nivṛtti, the removal of unwanted habits, especially at the stage of unsteady devotional service.
- This chapter discusses the general principles of steadiness and the role these principles play in the awakening of devotion, especially at the stages of niṣṭhā and ruci.
- Before devotees attain steadiness, the presence of abundant unwanted habits makes them lightning rods for the modes of passion and ignorance.
- Awake or asleep, such devotees are easy targets.
- When passion predominates, they feel sexually disturbed and therefore humiliated.
- When goodness defeats passion they find themselves hoping for imminent deliverance from material life.

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- But when ignorance defeats goodness and passion, such devotees despair.
- Until most of their bad habits leave the heart, devotees are unable to become steady in their spiritual practices no matter how hard they try.
- This summarizes the relatively unfulfilling state of unsteady devotional service (aniṣṭhita-bhajana-kriyā).
- But as unwanted habits leave the heart, passion and ignorance decrease proportionately and the mode of goodness becomes increasingly dominant.
- The five obstacles—sleep, distraction, indifference, the inclination to sin, and thirst for sense enjoyment—dwindle to insignificance, and devotees finally achieve steadiness (niṣṭhā).
- Unlike the lower modes, goodness is conducive to spiritual life.

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- In a spiritually enlivened state, devotees then become happy. Sūta Gosvāmī describes this accomplishment:

tadā rajas-tamo-bhāvāḥ  
kāma-lobhādayaś ca ye  
ceta etair anāviddham  
sthitam sattve prasīdati

- “As soon as irrevocable loving service is established in the heart, the effects of nature’s modes of passion and ignorance, such as lust, desire, and hankering, disappear from the heart. Then the devotee is established in goodness, and he becomes completely happy.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.2.19)
- Śrīla Prabhupāda translates the word anāviddham as “without being affected.”

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- This indicates that although the symptoms of passion and ignorance may still linger in the heart, albeit with ever-diminishing force, they no longer influence a devotee's behaviour.
- This is indeed a welcome state of affairs.
- When devotees achieve steadiness they no longer expend most of their energy battling their conditioned nature; instead, they direct their full attention to serving Kṛṣṇa with devotion.
- The unwavering, undivided standard of service to the Lord characteristic of niṣṭhāis equivalent to the state of self-satisfaction Kṛṣṇa calls brahma-bhūta. [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 18.54]

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- Devotees in such a state qualify to perform transcendental service (parā bhakti).
- In other words, the platform of steady devotional service (niṣṭhita-bhajana-kriyā), although not a transcendental state, is still a wonderful springboard from which devotees can dive into the sea of devotional bliss.
- The significant thinning of unwanted habits at the stage of steadiness indicates the last skirmish in the conquest of the unruly mind.
- Clear intelligence visibly dominates the steady devotees' behaviour, as does the consequent spiritualization of their attitudes of “I-ness” and “my-ness.”
- However, their attraction to Kṛṣṇa still lacks the spontaneity that will eventually arise from unimpeded devotion at the stage of real taste (ruci).

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- And although transcendental knowledge spiritualizes the devotees' bodily identification—and along with it, attachment to the body's paraphernalia—material conditioning, like a belligerent prisoner of war, still makes its influence felt, at times without warning.
- According to Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda, after the initial awakening of pure faith the next major development in sādhana-bhakti is steadiness.
- He considers the purification of unwanted habits by unsteady devotion to be nothing more than expressions of budding faith.
- Whereas pure faith is the minimum currency by which one can purchase the privilege to chant the holy name, steadiness purchases the name related to Kṛṣṇa's form.



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- That is, when qualified devotees reach steadiness, they perceive Kṛṣṇa’s form in their mind’s eye.
- In this way the transition from unsteady to steady practice significantly increases the mind’s absorption in the Lord, enabling devotees to realize the preeminent injunction, “Always remember Kṛṣṇa” (smartavyaḥ satataṁ viṣṇuḥ).
- At the beginning of unsteady practice, devotees rarely fix their mind on the Lord, and when they do, mundane thoughts generally intrude.
- In contrast, steady practice brings substantial meditation on Kṛṣṇa, meditation in which devotees’ thoughts are more or less free from contamination.
- Even then, however, the unruly mind occasionally diverts their attention from Kṛṣṇa to mundane things.

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- Such distractions come unannounced and leave devotees perplexed about how and when they took place.
- Absorbed in the bliss of remembering how Kṛṣṇa enters the forest in the morning with his friends and cows, devotees may suddenly find themselves absorbed in past fruitive exploits and wonder, “What happened?”
- The word “steady” relates especially to the consistency of devotees’ acts of devotion—to their chanting, hearing, and remembering—and it also refers to how consistently they display the qualities favourable to devotion—to their humility, mercifulness, and tolerance.
- There are various opinions about the order in which steadiness develops in physical, vocal, and mental activities.

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- Śrīla Prabhupāda praised devotees for their solid achievements in preaching, even if their chanting was not steady.
- If a devotee’s mind was flickering between remembrance and mundane thoughts, he would encourage the devotee to remain steady in chanting and hearing.
- “If you chant and hear, then remembrance will automatically come.” [Lecture, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.8.22, Los Angeles, 14 April, 1973]
- From such teachings we can deduce that steadiness appears first in service done with the body, then in one’s words, and finally in the mind.
- This is also the opinion of Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura. [Mādhurya-kādambinī, chapter 4]

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- Daily experience bears out that devotees may be steady in services such as book distribution or deity worship, yet gossip during japa or doze during Bhāgavatam class.
- In such cases, physical steadiness appears to be easiest to achieve.
- And many devotees capable of sitting, apparently focused, in japa or dancing in kīrtana will readily admit that their minds often wander.
- Therefore steadiness in controlling the mind is most elusive. [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 3.42]
- This conclusion is consistent with Kṛṣṇa's metaphysical analysis of the relationship between the senses and mind.
- He states that the mind is superior to the working senses.

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- It follows logically that the more subtle the covering over the soul, the more difficult it is to regulate.
- In the end, all ācāryas agree that steadiness becomes complete when all three—body, words, and mind—are fixed in their spiritual functions.
- Control of the gross and subtle senses is the primary characteristic of steady devotional service.
- Its secondary characteristic is the consistency with which the qualities favourable to devotion become fixed in the devotees' character.
- Some devotees are humble, tolerant, and kind but not at all steady in the primary activities of devotion such as chanting and hearing.

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- They are consistent in the qualities favourable to devotion, the secondary characteristics of steadiness, but because this steadiness is not matched by steadiness in sense control, it may be more a sign of piety from previous good deeds than one of serious Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- Other devotees exhibit intolerance, pride, and anger, yet show all the signs of steadiness in their devotional practices.
- This is a display of the primary characteristics of steadiness in the absence of the secondary ones.
- Devotees with such characteristics are serious about their Kṛṣṇa consciousness, yet immature in their development of Vaiṣṇava traits.
- Ideally, of course, devotees should be steady both in devotional practices and in their display of qualities favourable to devotion.

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- In evaluating the advancement of devotees, materialistic persons and neophyte devotees tend to place more emphasis on the presence of devotional qualities than on the strict observance of devotional practices.
- Therefore they are more likely to be attracted to a kind, soft-spoken devotee who neglects his sixteen rounds than to a strict sādḥaka who lacks Vaiṣṇava etiquette and culture.
- It is a mistake, however, to compare a person refined in culture—one who has refined personal qualities—with a devotee who displays steady attachment to the practices of pure devotional service.
- Cultured persons cannot advance in spiritual life until they become serious about their devotional practices.

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- Similarly, if a strict devotee with an unrefined character proudly offends Vaiṣṇavas by his immature dealings, even his steady sādhana will not bear the fruit of spiritual advancement.
- Ultimately, any devotee who is truly sincere and humble and who is steady in sādhana will soon be free of all rough edges and become an ideal person.
- This is the import of the following verse, often quoted by Śrīla Prabhupāda to stress this point:

yasyāsti bhaktir bhagavaty akiñcanā  
sarvair guṇais tatra samāsate surāḥ  
harāv abhaktasya kuto mahad-guṇā  
mano-rathenāsati dhāvato bahiḥ



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- “One who has unflinching devotion for the Personality of Godhead has all the good qualities of the demigods. But one who is not a devotee of the Lord has only material qualifications that are of little value. This is because he is hovering on the mental plane and is certain to be attracted by the glaring material energy.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 5.18.12, as quoted in Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 1.28, purport)
- Over and above the primary and secondary characteristics just mentioned, fixed determination in chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa is the unequalled test of steadiness.
- Devotees firmly connected to the source of all spiritual strength, the holy name, will quickly rise to the stage of niṣṭhā and beyond.

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- The Skanda Purāṇa states:

kali-kāla-kusarpasya  
tīkṣṇa-damṣṭrasya mā bhayam  
govinda-nāma-dānena  
dagdho yāsyati bhasmatām

- “Have no fear of the sharp-fanged serpent of the Kali Age. Apply to him the name of Govinda, and he will be burnt to ashes.” [Quoted in Prema-vivarta, chapter 20]
- This verse enjoins sincere devotees to leave aside all other means for liberation and to take full shelter of the holy name.
- In the dark Age of Kali, this is their only duty.

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- There is unlimited bliss to be found in chanting Kṛṣṇa's various names, such as Hari, Keśava, Govinda, and Vāsudeva.
- Devotees who chant constantly with unflinching faith are purified in heart and unaffected by the reverses of Kali-yuga. [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 9.31, purport]
- Steady chanting begins with the vow to repeat the mahā-mantra a fixed number of times daily (nirbandha).
- This fixed number, which is determined by the ācārya, may be sixteen, sixty-four, or one hundred and ninety-two.
- Whatever the prescribed vow, devotees reach the stage of niṣṭhā when they unfailingly chant their prescribed number of rounds without offence.

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- This is the sign of real steadiness.
- Thākura Bhaktivinoda elaborates on the word nirbandha, [Śrī Hari-nāma-cintāmaṇi, chapter 12] which appears in this instruction from Lord Caitanya: “This is the mahā-mantra.
- All of you go and chant this mantra a prescribed number of times,” (kahilāṇa ei mahā-mantra ihā japa’ giyā sabe kariyā nirbandha). [Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata, Madhya-khaṇḍa 23.77]
- The essence of Bhaktivinoda’s comment is that neophyte devotees must steadily increase their rounds to a minimum of sixty-four, although three times that number is recommended for those eager to quickly achieve perfection.
- Once devotees are committed to chanting a certain number of rounds, they must stick to their vow.

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- Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura said that one who does not chant sixty-four rounds is considered fallen, but because Westerners could not concentrate for the long period required to complete so many rounds, Śrīla Prabhupāda kindly lowered the minimum number of rounds to sixteen.
- Devotees who strictly chant sixteen rounds daily without fail attain the stage of steady devotional service; otherwise, spiritual advancement will surely elude them.
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- Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “If one cannot complete the fixed number of rounds he is assigned, he should be considered to be in a diseased condition of spiritual life...”
- In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement we have fixed sixteen rounds as the minimum so that the Westerners will not feel burdened.

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- These sixteen rounds must be chanted, and chanted loudly, so that one can hear himself and others.” [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Antya-līlā 11.23, purport]
- Prior to attaining steadiness, devotees can at best chant the semblance of the name (nāmābhāsa).
- Such chanting mixed with offences does not give the realization that Kṛṣṇa’s name is nondifferent from Himself.
- But chanting under the expert guidance of guru, sādhu, and śāstra nullifies the devotees’ bad habits.
- They then acquire full, firm faith, and they become free of all offences.
- Devotees are then fit to chant Kṛṣṇa’s pure name, and as they do they advance rapidly toward love of God.

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- Taste, like faith and love, is present to some degree at every stage of devotional service.
- Even neophyte Vaiṣṇavas can attest to having had some wonderful experiences in the course of serving Kṛṣṇa.
- Such taste is the mercy of Bhaktidevī, who nurtures devotees as they march toward Kṛṣṇa by sprinkling them with a taste for the Lord’s service.
- Neophyte devotees have little attraction to the Lord.
- To inspire them on the path to Kṛṣṇa, Bhaktidevī gives them extraordinary taste for acts of bhakti, especially for kīrtana and preaching.
- New devotees tend to be selfish.

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- They want nothing more than to enjoy the bliss of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- Driven by a thirst for service, neophytes eagerly engage in the activities of pure devotion, which purify them and inevitably awaken in them attachment to Kṛṣṇa.
- As they become free of unwanted habits, achieve steadiness, and finally acquire a deep taste, their attachment to Kṛṣṇa becomes substantial.
- When it does, Bhaktidevī, like a faithful servant, withdraws from the forefront, and attachment to Kṛṣṇa becomes the dominant sentiment.
- In short, Bhaktidevī purifies devotees, attracts them with the sweet taste of service, and teaches them to love Kṛṣṇa.
- With this merciful support, the devotees' attachment for the Lord awakens.



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- The taste relished in the stages prior to steady devotion has two main functions: First, it fortifies faith and intelligence, enabling devotees to resist temptation; and second, it destroys ignorance, the root cause of material affection.
- Kṛṣṇa describes the first function:

viṣayā vinivartante  
nirāhārasya dehinaḥ  
rasa-varjaṁ raso 'py asya  
paraṁ dr̥ṣṭvā 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)

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- Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī describes the second function, the ability to destroy material affection:

syāt kṛṣṇa-nāma-caritādi-sitāpy avidyā-  
pittopatapta-rasanasya na rocikā nu  
kintv ādarād anu-dinaṁ khalu saiva juṣṭā  
svādvī kramād bhavati tad-gada-mūla-hantrī

- “The holy name, character, pastimes and activities of Kṛṣṇa are all transcendently sweet like sugar candy. Although the tongue of one afflicted by the jaundice of avidyā [ignorance] cannot taste anything sweet, it is wonderful that simply by carefully chanting these sweet names every day, a natural relish awakens within his tongue, and his disease is gradually destroyed at the root.” (The Nectar of Instruction 7)

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- Lord Kṛṣṇa explains that spiritual taste gives a superior pleasure (param dṛṣṭvā) that purifies the devotees' vision and enables them to endure the urge for sense enjoyment without succumbing to it.
- When properly absorbed in unsteady service, devotees experience the wonderful taste inherent in the limbs of devotion.
- This taste fixes the consciousness.
- When such absorption recedes—as it typically does in unsteady devotional service—so does the devotees' spiritual taste.
- In fact, under the strong influence of the modes the taste may even become bitter.
- Rūpa Gosvāmī responds to this extreme situation with the comforting words in the above-cited verse.

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- He says that devotees with purified intelligence who faithfully and patiently execute their sādhana will again taste nectar and eventually rise to the stage of perpetual relish.
- Rūpa Gosvāmī's example of curing jaundice by regularly consuming sugar candy is most appropriate.
- Sweet things taste bitter to a jaundiced person, but sugar is the cure for jaundice.
- Similarly, Kṛṣṇa's sweet names taste bitter to a conditioned soul, but chanting the Lord's names is the only cure for the material malady.
- Even if chanting at first tastes bitter, devotees must continue to chant.

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- By the curative effect of the holy name, devotees will gradually taste its natural sweetness; when they are cured of their ignorance, they will savour the holy name's nectarean sweetness in full.
- Before the state of steadiness, spiritual taste passively holds material attachment at bay.
- After steady devotion, this taste matures and becomes proactive; its perpetual sweetness then nourishes attachment for devotional service and for the object of devotion, Śrī Kṛṣṇa.
- Before devotees attain the long-awaited release from the material energy there are two final stages of devotion in practice: taste (ruci) and attachment (āśakti).

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- In truth, these two are divisions of the same stage of devotion, namely, attachment, but Rūpa Gosvāmī makes this division to emphasize how attachment develops through two important phases. [Mādhurya-kādambinī, chapter 6]
- In the first, the distinguishing feature of taste is attachment to the practices of devotion, especially chanting and hearing.
- Devotees at this stage are more attracted to the activities of sādhana than to the object of sādhana, Śrī Kṛṣṇa.
- In the second phase, attraction, the reverse is true.
- Devotees' attachment to Kṛṣṇa supersedes attraction to anything else.
- This transformation, like all advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, takes place by Bhaktidevīs mercy.

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- How can devotees tell when their taste has fully blossomed?
- At ruci the attachment for devotional practices is so great that attraction for anything material dwindles to insignificance.
- In this way, devotees' attraction to Kṛṣṇa consciousness naturally curtails their attraction for the enjoyments found in the material world.
- Sometimes devotees argue that they as well as others should only take up devotional practices and services for which they have a liking.
- To do otherwise, they say, would be to deny the natural inclination of the heart, in effect making Kṛṣṇa consciousness a forced practice.
- Is this point valid?

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- Spiritual life is founded on the principle that devotional service must always be performed under an authority's guidance.
- Such authority should be infallible (apauruṣeya), free from the four defects of conditioned life: the tendency to commit mistakes (bhrama), to be illusioned (pramāda), to cheat others (vipralipsā), and to be limited by imperfect senses (karaṇāpāṭava).
- However, if conditioned souls make their inclination for service—which may or may not be a forerunner of taste—their authority, they are not above these defects.
- Only liberated souls whose taste comes from ecstatic devotion, the infallible platform, are free from such faults.
- Therefore practising devotees should not allow taste alone to determine their service.



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- The infallible authority of scripture, saints, and gurus should always confirm their direction.
- Prior to niṣṭhā taste is sporadic and influenced by unwanted habits.
- It cannot be relied upon for guidance.
- Taste at steady devotion up to āsakti, though more reliable, is still influenced by the material mode of goodness.
- Therefore higher authority should still confirm the guidance such taste offers.
- Only devotees who have reached the stage of transcendence have infallible taste.
- Yet sometimes they too forgo their preferred service in order to satisfy the Lord.

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- Such was the case when Caitanya Mahāprabhu requested Nityānanda Prabhu to give up the pleasure of His company in order to preach the Lord’s message in Bengal.
- In conclusion, if that which is pleasing to the heart, that which tastes right, runs contrary to the will of authority, it should be rejected.
- That said, Vaiṣṇava authorities must be sensitive not to stifle devotees’ genuine enthusiasm for specific services.
- They should keep in mind Sanātana Gosvāmī’s instruction: “Whatever the devotional method by which a man with true spiritual taste feels satisfaction and complete joy, that is the method saintly authorities deem most excellent and effective for him. It is not only the best of methods but the very aim of his endeavour.” (Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta 2.3.152)

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- Coming to an aspect of the discussion directly related to the theme of this book, devotees inspired by their own feelings often support their reading of Kṛṣṇa’s Vraja pastimes, especially narrations of the rāsa dance, with the argument, “It’s so pleasing to the heart.”
- Yet His Divine Grace says that even if such narrations are pleasing, nonliberated souls should not hear them.
- “Although these affairs may be very pleasing both to conditioned and to liberated souls, the conditioned soul should not try to hear them.” [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 8.255, purport]
- Some devotees respond to this statement with the argument that the very substance of spontaneous devotion is to follow the inclination of one’s heart, one’s instinctive taste for service.

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- Since spontaneous devotion is the goal of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we should not be discouraged from doing what feels right.
- Our previous ācāryas address this argument.
- They substantiate the point that even spontaneous practice must follow the authorized methods given by sages in scripture.
- Jīva Gosvāmī, for example, writes,
- “The state of being an unalloyed devotee of the Lord is attained by having faith in devotional service. A person attracted to the Lord (ruci), naturally respects the rules and regulations described in the scriptures. Attraction to the Lord is very rare. A person who has no respect for the rules and regulations of the scriptures and yet thinks himself an unalloyed devotee is merely a proud hypocrite.” [Bhakti-sandarbhā, anuccheda 312]

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- “Spontaneous” does not mean whimsical.
- It does not mean that conditioned souls can simply do whatever they feel is right.
- More often than not such action will prove wrong.
- But the emotions and consequent behaviour of devotees cent percent sheltered by the spiritual energy at the platform of bhāva or prema always conform to the teachings of authorities.
- In other words, they spontaneously know the right thing to do.
- This is because the same spiritual potency from which the sacred words of revealed scripture flows empowers advanced devotees. [Bhakti-sandarbha, anuccheda 312]

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- Those who imitate this empowerment, however, are sahajiyās.
- No devotee may take cheaply the exalted states of spontaneous devotional service; rather, all devotees should learn to be perfect followers of their authorities.
- When the heart of the devotee is completely pure, he or she will spontaneously know what the authorities desire.
- These answers reconcile the argument traditionally called “If it feels good, do it.”
- There are two primary symptoms of the stage of ruci: First, all impediments to chanting and hearing, such as fatigue and hunger, are no longer visible; and second, an insatiable appetite for even seemingly insignificant devotional practices awakens.

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- Śrī Nārada describes to King Prācīnabarhi the first of these symptoms:

tasmin mahan-mukharitā madhubhic-caritra-  
pīyūṣa-śeṣa-saritaḥ paritaḥ sraṁvanti  
tā ye pibanty avitrṣo nṛpa gāḍha-karṇais  
tān na sprṣanty aśana-trḍ-bhaya-śoka-mohāḥ

- “My dear King, in the place where pure devotees live, following the rules and regulations and thus purely conscious and engaged with great eagerness in hearing and chanting the glories of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, in that place if one gets a chance to hear their constant flow of nectar, which is exactly like the waves of a river, one will forget the necessities of life—namely hunger and thirst—and become immune to all kinds of fear, lamentation, and illusion.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.29.40)

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- Devotees at ruci are so absorbed in the taste of their devotional practices that while chanting and hearing about Kṛṣṇa they sometimes lose track of who they are.
- Of course, this kind of merging is apparent and has nothing to do with the false aspirations of the Māyāvādīs.
- The fortunate state of ruci spiritualizes almost completely the egocentric principles of “I-ness” and “my-ness,” and thus the general conduct of devotees so absorbed is nearly perfect.
- Still, the influence of false ego, although substantially reduced, is still present and is visible in two ways: as attachment to the happiness of devotion, and in the presence of unwanted habits caused by offences.
- As an example of the first, Lord Kṛṣṇa says, “Goodness conditions one to happiness” (sattvaṁ sukhe sañjayati). [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 14.9]



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- The constantly increasing happiness devotees feel at the stage of ruci is such a vivid contrast to the hardship and struggle they underwent at the stage of unsteady devotion that they are sometimes distracted by the revelries of their newfound achievement.
- An example of the second visible symptom of conditioning is the presence of unbecoming thoughts due to past offences.
- Devotees at the stage of ruci systematically cultivate their chanting of the holy name, and they feel a relish that empowers them to absorb their minds in the wonders of chanting.
- Still, the effects of offences continue to haunt them.
- Like persons trying to run waist-deep in water, the results of their practices are disproportionate to their efforts.

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- Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura points out that at the stage of taste devotees have twice the spiritual power they had at steady devotion. [Śrī Godruma Kalpatavi, part 1]
- Boundless relish for the practices of devotion adds new dimensions to their ever-increasing faith.
- Up to steady devotion, faith comes predominantly from intellectual conviction.
- At taste, however, direct perception through relish (pratyakṣa) continually reinforces that conviction.
- Devotees then taste surrender to Kṛṣṇa through devotion, direct perception, and detachment from other things.

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- This experience is similar to that of a hungry man’s eating: it simultaneously and increasingly gives pleasure, nourishment, and relief from hunger. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.2.42]
- The relish devotees perceive as they advance in devotional service is ever-increasing; still, at the stage of taste two phases are visible.
- In the first the devotees’ taste depends on the material quality of their devotional practices, and in the second it does not.
- The phrase “material quality of devotional practices” refers to the expertise with which devotees perform the various limbs of devotional service: how melodiously they chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, how systematically they present Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, or how artistically they decorate the deity.

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- This kind of taste is found in most devotees below the stage of attachment.
- These devotees have not yet fully realized that Kṛṣṇa is attracted by devotion (yo me bhaktyā prayacchati), [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 9.26] not necessarily by how devotion is packaged.
- For example, a disharmonious kīrtana may actually distract beginners from the holy name. As a result they cannot fully taste the transcendental sound vibration.
- Such devotees are like guests with a weak appetite who inquire from their hosts about the preparations about to be served.
- The point is that up to the stage of attachment, due to impurities, devotees' appreciation for Kṛṣṇa consciousness depends to some degree on the way it is presented.

## SBC 18 – Steady Devotion and Taste

- In time, their hearts further purified, devotees' attraction matures.
- They realize that material expertise—important for attracting newcomers to Kṛṣṇa consciousness—does not necessarily enhance Kṛṣṇa's pleasure.
- Such devotees are said to have attained real taste.
- Of course, the best combination is pure devotional service done with expertise.
- That is most pleasing to Kṛṣṇa.
- For this reason devotees always try to become expert at their services.
- In fact, expertise (dakṣa) is one of the qualities of a devotee. [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 22.78–80]

## SBC 18 – Steady Devotion and Taste

- The more devotees hear about Kṛṣṇa, the more they note the loving proficiency with which Kṛṣṇa’s eternal associates serve their beloved.
- This is because love inspires devotees to offer to Kṛṣṇa the best of everything in the best possible way.
- However, devotees should always be careful that in becoming expert in activities like kīrtana, they do not get carried away by the music and forget the essence of kīrtana, spontaneous attraction for the holy name.
- Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has given much guidance in this regard.
- He writes, “The preaching of the name shall be performed with khol and karatālas, accompanied by favourable discourses and public lectures.

## SBC 18 – Steady Devotion and Taste

- At the time of chanting, one may dance in ecstasy.
- The singing of the glories of the holy name and dancing in ecstasy should correspond to the devotees' spontaneous emotion, and not just according to tempo, beat, and tune.
- One should avoid excessive preoccupation with musical tune and beat.
- The music and tune should have an effect on the hearts of the listeners similar to the action of borax in the melting of gold.
- It is good to express ones feelings for the Lord through song and dance according to ones natural rising of transcendental emotions.” (Śrī Godruma Kalpatavi, part two, Ācāra-vyavahāra 6).

## SBC 18 – Steady Devotion and Taste

- Attraction driven by selfless taste is very intense, sufficiently so to alarm materialists who think that religion should be expressed in a subdued manner.
- The opulence of real taste allows devotees to condemn their past sins and lament their previously motivated devotion (bhakty-ābhāsa).
- Hearts overflowing with repentance, they sing beautiful songs like those of Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura.

hari hari biphale janama goñāinu  
manuṣya-janama pāiyā, rādhā-kṛṣṇa nā bhajiyā,  
jāniyāśuniyā biṣa khāinu

- “O Lord Hari! Lord Hari! I have spent my life uselessly. Although I have obtained a human birth, I have refused to worship Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and in this way I have knowingly drunk poison.”



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golokera prema-dhana, hari-nāma-saṅkīrtana,  
rati nā janmila kena tāya  
saṁsāra-biṣānale, dibā-niṣi hiyā jvale,  
juḍāite nā kainu upāya

- “The treasure of love of God has descended from Goloka Vṛndāvana in the spiritual world and appeared in this world as the saṅkīrtana movement of the chanting of Hari’s holy names. Why am I not attracted to it? Day and night I burn from the poison of material existence, but still I refuse to take the antidote.” (Prārthanā 4.1–2)
- Wandering here and there, devotees intoxicated by ruci cry and cry until they come into the presence of Vaiṣṇavas discussing topics of their beloved Lord.

## SBC 18 – Steady Devotion and Taste

- As they listen to the nectarean words of mahā-bhāgavatas, devotees' distress flies to a distant place and they drink the Lord's glories like parched cātaka birds.
- The discourse finished, such fortunate devotees enter into a celestial festival of singing and dancing, a festival that amazes even the demigods.
- While they chant Kṛṣṇa's names, Bhaktidevī empowers them to spontaneously meditate on His qualities and form.
- Gradually Kṛṣṇa's qualities, His kindness, compassion, and partiality toward His servants, expand into their hearts and rivet their attraction to Him.
- In this way the potencies of the name, form, and qualities of Kṛṣṇa combine to nurture the devotees' taste and attachment.

## SBC 18 – Steady Devotion and Taste

- When such attachment becomes fully reposed in the Lord, it brings about a kind of obsession great souls call āsakti.