

# Śuddha-bhakti Cintāmaṇi

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# Chapter 23- Hearing With Impure Faith

## SBC 23 – Hearing With Impure Faith

- Persons who have awakened a measure of faith in Kṛṣṇa are to be known as devotees.
- Chapter five explained that the quality of Vaiṣṇavas with whom these beginners associate, along with the strength of their conditioned nature, determines whether they become mixed devotees or pure devotees.
- This chapter discusses the topics appropriate for mixed devotees to hear—or, to be more specific, the topics for mixed devotees attached to fruitive work.
- Fundamental to all devotees is faith in the divinity of their worshipable Lord.
- Kṛṣṇa describes this basic conviction:

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janma karma ca me divyam  
evam yo vetti tattvataḥ  
tyaktvā dehaṁ punar janma  
naiti mām eti so 'rjuna

- “One who knows the transcendental nature of My appearance and activities does not, upon leaving the body, take his birth again in this material world, but attains My eternal abode, O Arjuna.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 4.9)
- Devotees who have faith in Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Lord, who have faith that His incarnations are transcendental, but who cannot devote themselves fully to Him, are known as mixed devotees.
- This means that pleasing Kṛṣṇa is not the only goal of their lives.
- They want to serve the Lord, but they also want to fulfil their own desires.

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- The majority of these devotees (sa-kāma-bhaktas) want to enjoy a good life and simultaneously follow the practices of devotion.
- The few detached souls (niṣkāma-bhaktas) in the mixed devotee category work independently of Kṛṣṇa's direct service but sacrifice the results of their work for His pleasure.
- Fruitive devotees fall into two categories.
- Less advanced are those who view devotion as a vehicle to fulfil their material desires; more advanced are those whose acts of devotion are unmotivated but who still cling to their selfish plans.
- Kṛṣṇa advises preachers not to discourage such attached devotees from working, but rather to teach them by example how to increase the devotional quality of their work. [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 3.26–28]

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- By learning to dedicate the results of their work to Kṛṣṇa, and by acquiring transcendental knowledge, fruitive devotees are gradually purified.
- As they become increasingly aware of their own selfish ways in their quest for unmotivated devotion, like Dhruva Mahārāja these devotees begin to correct themselves.
- The elevation to pure devotion takes place by the regular and systematic infusion of transcendental knowledge.
- The more saturated with knowledge one's devotional practices are, the more potent they become—and this increased potency shows in the devotees' increasing detachment from material enjoyment, which in turn further enhances the quality of their devotion.

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- In other words, fruitive devotees, though still influenced by the mode of passion, should be encouraged to study and hear the philosophical teachings found in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books.

### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- Conditional devotees, if they are able to uphold vows, may also take initiation and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa under a spiritual master’s guidance.
- On the one hand, initiation should be offered to those devotees whose spiritual development is progressive—increasing in knowledge and detachment.
- On the other hand, initiation should not be offered to devotees who maintain a tenacious hold on their attachments and whose ability to progress is therefore negligible.

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- Unable to uphold their vows, such devotees will only embroil themselves and their gurus in reactions to their offences.
- Better they first receive systematic training in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and thus gradually qualify themselves for official recognition by the disciplic succession.
- The education of fruitive devotees should include hearing the pastimes of the Lord's incarnations as they are described in the first nine cantos of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, as well as the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa imbued with divine majesty and opulence.
- Kṛṣṇa Himself confirms that such hearing inspires devotees to tread the path of pure devotion:



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etām vibhūtim yogam ca  
mama yo vetti tattvataḥ  
so 'vikalpena yogena  
yuḥyate nātra saṁśayaḥ

- “One who is factually convinced of this opulence and mystic power of Mine engages in unalloyed devotional service; of this there is no doubt.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 10.7)
- Until motivated devotees accept the Lord’s absolute pro-pri-e-torship, they should be encouraged to hear the kind of philosophy and līlāthat helps them surrender their false sense of proprietorship and independence.
- Those who have not surrendered to Kṛṣṇa’s omnipotence lack the qualification to hear the details of His sweetness.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- Therefore devotees practising mixed devotion should not engage in purposeful hearing of Kṛṣṇa’s humanlike pastimes in Vṛndāvana (nara-līlā).
- If the unsundered cannot understand Kṛṣṇa’s godhood even when He displays it, how can they be expected to understand His divinity when it is hidden by His abundant sweetness?
- Instead, they will see Kṛṣṇa as ordinary—as a mortal, a womanizer, a mythological figure.
- Such distorted vision invariably prompts impure hearts to criticize or doubt the Lord, and that mentality leads mixed devotees to commit offences that uproot their hard-earned spiritual advancement.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- Part four of Śuddha-bhakti-cintāmaṇi repeatedly emphasizes a most important rule in the cultivation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness:
- devotees should only adopt spiritual practices for which they are fit; as their spiritual credentials increase proportionately to the transparency of their faith, they may adopt higher practices.
- The Lord explains this principle to Brahmā:

dharmān anyān parityajya  
mām ekaṁ bhaja viśvasan  
yādṛśī yādṛśīsraddhā  
siddhir bhavati tādṛśī

- “Abandoning all meritorious performances, serve Me with faith. The realization will correspond to the nature of one’s faith.” (Śrī Brahmā-saṁhitā 5.61)

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- Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura encapsulates this verse in his comment on this text: “The more transparent the faith, the greater the degree of realization.” [Śrī Brahmā-saṁhitā 5.61, purport]
- The Mahābhārata is a good example of the type of literature materialistic devotees should hear or read in order to gain illumined faith.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda often refers to women, the labourer class, and fallen members of the higher classes (strī-śūdra-dvija-bandhus) as persons who lack the qualification to understand Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam in truth. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.5.12, purport]
- No one should feel offended by this grouping because today, more or less everyone in the world fits into one of these three categories.

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- Virtually everyone labours under the false conception of the body as the self. Attracted by mundane histories, philanthropy, and adventure, hardly anyone is interested in transcendental subject matter.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “Such misguided persons...could better take advantage of the Mahā-bhārata, which was specifically compiled by Śrīla Vyāsadeva for their benefit.
- The great author has compiled the Mahābhārata in such a way that the less intelligent class of men, who are more interested in mundane topics, may read the Mahābhārata with great relish and in the course of such mundane happiness can also take advantage of Bhagavad-gītā, the preliminary study of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.” [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.5.12, purport]

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- Thus by reading the Mahābhārata, fruitive devotees fulfil their propensity to hear mundane topics, but they do so in a way that purifies them by contact with Kṛṣṇa, especially when they read the gem hidden in the Mahābhārata, the Bhagavad-gītā.
- In this way devotees become further qualified to inquire and enter into the more elevated topics of transcendence described in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.
- Should ISKCON devotees therefore read the Mahābhārata?
- Śrīla Prabhupāda did not forbid it. Indeed, he expressed a desire to translate it himself. [Letter to Dinanatha N. Mishra, Laguna Beach, 26 July, 1975]
- But even if devotees choose not to read the Mahābhārata, the First Canto of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam gives a summary of the book along with an explanation of the devotional essence of the Bhagavad-gītā.

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- Therefore a careful study of the First Canto qualifies devotees for further reading in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.
- In summary, devotees with fruitive desires should not be encouraged to hear about Kṛṣṇa's confidential pastimes.
- For them, suitable hearing and reading include the pastimes of the Lord's incarnations from the Purāṇas, adventures from the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa, and narrations depicting the Lord's omnipotence.
- Such devotees should meet Kṛṣṇa's vraja-līlā only through incidental reading.
- Attached as they are to material enjoyment, these devotees chant Hare Kṛṣṇa as a ritualistic practice or as a means to increase their sense gratification.
- Therefore they naturally commit offences to the holy name.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- If they attempt to perform bhajana, remembering Kṛṣṇa's Vṛndāvana pastimes while chanting, their efforts may degrade them to a materialistic way of life.
- Instead, they should be encouraged to purify their devotion by cultivating service enriched with knowledge and detachment.
- Only when their faith becomes pure by such devotion, and only when they surrender, may they take up the higher forms of sādhana practised by pure devotees.
- Vaiṣṇavas often observe and discuss the following phenomenon: Older devotees, who tend to be more experienced, knowledgeable, renounced, and culturally fit, sometimes have greater difficulty taking up pure devotional service than apparently less fit younger devotees.



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- Many devotees of Indian origin are examples of this phenomenon.
- Because of their cultural roots, they may have been free of gross vices since birth, have a grasp of the Sanskrit language, have extensive knowledge of the Vaiṣṇava tradition, and may even be well versed in scriptures such as the Bhagavad-gītā.
- Despite being endowed with such opulence, however, they are often unable to commit themselves fully to the path of pure devotion.
- They remain conditional devotees with mixed faith.
- In contrast, their Western counterparts generally come from backgrounds without spiritual training, and of course, have not been previously exposed to Vaiṣṇava culture.

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- They do not have the advantage of birth in India, and by the time they reach their teens they have usually indulged in unspeakable sins.
- Despite these apparent disadvantages, however, Western devotees often heed Kṛṣṇa's message of deliverance sooner and more easily than their more cultured Indian counterparts. [Kṛṣṇa's message of deliverance is Bhagavad-gītā 18.66]
- They may even be more ready to dedicate their lives to serving Lord Caitanya's mission.
- The cause of this paradox lies in the difference between the quality of faith of the two categories of devotees.
- The Western neophytes mentioned above are fit for more advanced surrender because their faith is pure.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- Despite their struggles with sense control, they deserve the respect of even the more learned and self-controlled devotees of mixed faith.
- However, as long as these less-experienced Western devotees remain in the neophyte stage (kaniṣṭhādhikāra), their position, though advantageous, is still dangerous.
- Until their devotion becomes fixed, their passionate nature and lack of spiritual knowledge make them prone to falldown.
- Only when they come to the stage of niṣṭhā do they acquire advanced spiritual qualification.
- And only then does their youthful daring in spiritual life bear its first major fruit—freedom from past bad habits.

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- At this point only do they attain the elevated status of steady pure devotees, madhyama-bhaktas.
- Another example of the same phenomenon is the class of neophyte devotees who took to pure devotional service but were unable to transcend their conditioned natures and fell down.
- History bears out that “falling down” for pure devotees generally means retreating to a life of mixed devotion.
- Only in exceptional cases do devotees abandon Kṛṣṇa consciousness altogether.
- Devotees unable to uphold their vows generally back off from the level of dedication they once had to the activities of pure devotion, especially full engagement in ISKCON’s missionary activities.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- Generally, the problems encountered by neophytes stem from struggle with sense control, especially illicit sex.
- Equally common is the devotees' sense of existential uncertainty, an unease that results from being unable to fully depend on Kṛṣṇa.
- Unable to plan for the future, especially in the gṛhastāśrama, and disturbed by the unfavourable experiences of an institution's rough embrace, devotees without suitable guidance often end up compromising their pure faith with personal desires.
- With the passage of time these devotees of mixed faith become older Vaiṣṇavas themselves.
- They have more experience and more knowledge than the new recruits who have since taken to pure devotion with the same zeal the older devotees once had.

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- But even though they are senior, Vaiṣṇava elders of mixed faith must acknowledge the superiority of their juniors' conviction, and the pure faith that qualifies junior devotees to render a higher grade of devotional service than themselves.
- Devotees of mixed faith may be more knowledgeable and experienced than devotees of pure faith.
- However, while knowledge is an asset in spiritual life, it is not the primary one.
- The essential prerequisite for spiritual practice is pure faith, the cultivation of which causes knowledge and realization to become, in the words of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura, “more transparent.”

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī also explains this point:

jñāna-vairāgyayor bhakti-  
praveśāyopayogitā  
īṣat prathamam eveti  
nāṅgatvam ucitaṁ tayoh

- “Some scholars recommend that knowledge and renunciation are important factors for elevating oneself to devotional service, but actually that is not a fact. Actually the cultivation of knowledge or renunciation, which are favourable for achieving a footing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, may be accepted in the beginning, but ultimately they may also come to be rejected, for devotional service is dependent on nothing other than the sentiment or desire for such service. It requires nothing more than sincerity.” (Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.248)

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- In other words, no amount of knowledge, theoretical or applied, can make impure faith equal to or superior to pure faith.
- Therefore even though devotees with impure faith may be wise, they are less fit than immature devotees with pure faith.
- For this reason seniors should show a measure of respect even for their juniors.
- And of course junior devotees must continue to show respect to their seniors.
- Devotees often disagree about the etiquette between junior devotees of pure faith and senior devotees of impure faith, and vice versa.
- Unfortunately, at times this disagreement has even boiled over and caused physical confrontation.



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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- Vaiṣṇava etiquette dictates that junior devotees always offer respect to those senior to them by age, initiation, and learning, even if the seniors are less strict in their devotional practices.
- In turn, senior devotees must offer respect to juniors whose spiritual practices are purer than their own.
- Some senior devotees challenge this proposal, arguing that these junior devotees may also fall down in the future.
- “Therefore,” they question, “is it not artificial to offer respect to devotees whose efforts may be impetuous and possibly short-lived?”
- The answer is no.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- We should respect devotees for what they are in the present, not for what they may or may not become in the future.
- The present conviction and practices of such devotees warrant respect.
- As Śrīla Prabhupāda states in the following quote, a hypothetical tomorrow should have no bearing on how Vaiṣṇavas are viewed today.
- **Prabhupāda:** No, this argument is not very strong. Just like one foodstuff, freshly made, it is fresh. But if somebody argues that if it remains four days more, it will become bad, that is surmising. Now it is fresh. We take it fresh. What will happen in future, that is no consideration. In future, everyone may fall and everyone may become elevated. But we have to take his present situation, what he is at present.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- **Father Tanner:** But couldn't it be the difference between appearance and reality?
- **Prabhupāda:** This is reality. If at the present moment he is free from all sinful activities, that is reality. In future, everyone is susceptible to fall down. If he does not carry the principles strictly that proneness is there. But that is not consideration. What he is at present, that is consideration. [Room conversation with Father Tanner and other guests, London, 11 July, 1973]
- In addition to the above reasoning, elder devotees should show respect to their juniors because offering respect to all living entities is the general conduct of every Vaiṣṇava.
- If Lord Caitanya expected us to show respect even to ants, then how much more so should we be ready to show respect to one another?

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- The rest of this chapter deals with the systematic worship (bhajana) of Kṛṣṇa's holy names and pastimes, and explains who is qualified to engage in such bhajana and who is not.
- Persons either without faith in Kṛṣṇa or with faith mixed with material desire are in the category of the unqualified.
- They may chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and hear about Kṛṣṇa according to their abilities, but such practice does not constitute true systematic worship of the name.
- In reality even faithful devotees free of material desire but still conditioned by the modes of nature cannot practise all aspects of pure worship.
- That prerogative, as will be described later, is reserved for fully liberated Vaiṣṇavas.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- How skilled devotees perform systematic worship, how hearing Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes plays a role in such worship, and how the perfection of such worship manifests itself will be discussed in the following chapters.
- What is the systematic worship of Kṛṣṇa?
- Kṛṣṇa defines bhajana as serving Him with pure faith and love while being constantly absorbed in thoughts of Him.

yoginām api sarveṣāṃ  
mad-gatenāntar-ātmanā  
śraddhāvān bhajate yo mām  
sa me yuktatamo mataḥ

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### What Fruitful Devotees May Hear

- “And of all yogīs, the one with great faith who always abides in Me, thinks of Me within himself, and renders transcendental loving service to Me—he is the most intimately united with Me in yoga and is the highest of all.
- That is My opinion.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 6.47)
- Because chanting Kṛṣṇa’s holy names is the method of service prescribed in this age, worship actually means to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra with pure faith and love while being absorbed in thoughts of Kṛṣṇa.
- When the techniques used in this chanting are mature and follow the path chalked out by previous ācāryas, such chanting is “systematic worship of the Lord.”
- This means that both devotees in bondage and those in the liberated state can systematically worship Kṛṣṇa.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- Performed by those still influenced by material nature, this bhajana is practised (sādhana); performed by those in the liberated state it is either advanced (bhāva) or perfect (prema).
- And as already mentioned, devotees in ecstatic devotion are still subject to stumbling blocks.
- Thus like the devotees still in bondage, they are classified as practitioners (sādhakas).
- Only devotees at the stage of love (prema) can truly perform perfect systematic worship (bhajana-siddhi).
- Worship of Kṛṣṇa at the stage of practice takes two forms, steady and unsteady.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- The activities and moods of devotees in unsteady worship (aniṣṭhita-bhajana) are more or less free from the effects of past sinful activities; but such devotees' faith is weak, their knowledge meagre, and their identification with the body strong.
- They know that they are Kṛṣṇa's servants, but their heart is still very much a servant of the mind and senses.
- Thus they can hardly concentrate on the sound of Kṛṣṇa's name, what to speak of think of His pastimes while chanting.
- Because this form of worship is based on pure faith and affection, it may be called bhajana, but because it is weak and sporadic it can hardly be called systematic.
- With further purification of the heart comes steady worship of the holy name (niṣṭhita-bhajana).



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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- At this stage, attraction for the mundane, the effect of past sins and offences, fades.
- As material attraction fades, faith and knowledge, along with the sense of being Kṛṣṇa's servant, grow proportionately.
- The devotees' purified mind enables them to concentrate on the holy name and to think of Kṛṣṇa's form, qualities, and pastimes.
- This level of cultivation of the holy name, though still not mature, is actually systematic worship (sādhana-bhajana). [Lecture, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.2.6, Vṛndāvana, 17 October, 1972]
- The two terms, aniṣṭhita- and niṣṭhita-bhajana, describe something different than the two stages of sādhana-bhakti, namely aniṣṭhita-bhajana-kriyā (unsteady devotional service in practice) and niṣṭhita-bhajana-kriyā (steady devotional service in practice), elaborately described in chapters sixteen through eighteen.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- Here, the two terms refer to divisions of a single aspect of the two stages of sādhana-bhakti, namely the purposeful, systematic chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.
- In ISKCON this purposeful chanting generally refers to the time devotees spend exclusively trying to improve their chanting in what is commonly known as the “japa period.”
- At that time devotees make extra effort to put aside all distractions and carefully concentrate on the sound of the holy name.
- Yet ideally, systematic worship is not limited to the time spent chanting japa.
- The ability to practise bhajana matures in proportion to one’s ability to remember Kṛṣṇa.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- As one’s ability grows, bhajana increasingly pervades all aspects of one’s devotional practice.
- For instance, later, when devotees attain the stages of taste and attachment, their ability to concentrate on Kṛṣṇa becomes steady and spontaneous.
- Because of natural attraction, everything the devotees do at these stages is full of Kṛṣṇa consciousness; that is, everything they do becomes the kind of bhajana Kṛṣṇa speaks about in the Gītā.
- This is the standard of devotional service taught by the Lord when He tells Arjuna, “Always think of Me...and at the same time carry out your prescribed duty of fighting” (mām anusmara yudhya ca). [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 8.7]
- At that time the distinction between the execution of other devotional activities and worship of the holy name evaporates.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- In short, all activities of niṣṭhita-bhajana-kriyā become niṣṭhita-bhajana.
- By now it should be clear that nondevotees and mixed devotees are not fit to perform true bhajana.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda confirms that only devotees at the stage of pure devotion can perform systematic worship. “If we want to enjoy something material, oh, there is no question of bhagavad-bhajana, because even if you have little pinch of desire to enjoy material comforts, you’ll not be admitted.
- Therefore Kṛṣṇa says, sarva-dharmān parityajya. Fully. Anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyam.” [Lecture, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 5.5.25, Vṛndāvana, 12 November, 1976]
- That being the case, devotees who have not yet come to the stage of pure devotion should not be encouraged to engage in purposeful hearing of kṛṣṇa-līlā.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- Worship performed with the body but devoid of pure faith is, in fact, merely ritualistic activity.
- It does not even qualify as devotional service in practice. Still, such ritualistic activities done in the company of pure devotees, with time, bring mixed devotees to the stage of pure devotion.
- And pure devotional service eventually qualifies them for systematic worship.
- Efforts at bhajana with mixed devotion do not lead to perfection, however, but to rebirth in the material world.
- Devotees should also note that even if their faith is pure, they do not have carte blanche to perform systematic worship.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- Those who have not reached the stage of steadiness, who are not freed from sensual distraction, should consider the following emphatic statement made by Lord Caitanya to Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya:

niṣkiñcanasya bhagavad-bhajanonmukhasya  
pāram param jigaṃṣor bhava-sāgarasya  
sandarśanam viṣayiṇām atha yoṣitām ca  
hā hanta hanta viṣa-bhakṣaṇato 'py asādhu

- “Alas, for a person seriously desiring to cross the material ocean and engage in the transcendental loving service [bhajana] of the Lord without material motives, seeing a materialist engaged in sense gratification and seeing a woman who is similarly interested is more abominable than drinking poison willingly.” (Śrī Caitanya-candrodaya-nāṭaka 8.23) [Quoted in Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 11.8]

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- The purport of this verse is that devotees still attached to sense gratification—specifically to the form of the opposite sex and the company of materialistic persons—cannot perform systematic worship of the holy name.
- Such petty indulgences offend the holy name, so the devotional service of such Vaiṣṇavas is corrupted.
- Their agitated minds can never engage in systematic worship of the Lord; the best such neophyte devotees can hope for is a partial semblance of the same.
- Serious sādhakas, on the contrary, strive for self-realization and voluntarily restrain their senses from sense objects. Real bhajana requires spontaneous attraction to Kṛṣṇa.
- As the strength of that attraction grows, so does their disinterest in mundane affairs.

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- Finally, devotees with advanced attraction easily absorb their mind in Kṛṣṇa's names and savour a taste so sweet that they turn away from sense gratification with disgust.
- In fact, at the most advanced stages they fear the sight of materialists and the opposite sex in the same way one fears a live serpent.
- They do not even glance at such representations of the material energy. [Śrī Caitanya-candrodaya-nāṭaka 8.90]
- Devotees should also keep in mind that at the stage of bondage systematic worship is still immature and materially tainted.
- Until pure goodness appears in a sādḥaka's heart, subtle forms of material identification continue to exert their influence.



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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- One should not, therefore, confuse an immature mood of devotion with pure emotion—with bhāva or rati.
- Only genuine ecstatic devotion can transform into a relationship with Kṛṣṇa and thus invoke the true taste of bhakti-rasa.
- Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda calls the moods displayed by conditioned devotees “imposed.”
- They may be phases of progressive bhajana, but they are by no means its goal or perfection. [Jaiva-dharma, chapter 4]
- To misidentify one’s imposed meditations with pure emotion leads to the degradation of worship rather than to its goal.

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### What Fruitive Devotees May Hear

- Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura wrote a book called Prākṛta-rasa-śata-dūṣaṇī to warn devotees of the dangers of imitating systematic worship and to explain how to avoid such imitation and those who teach it.
- In the first verse he writes, “O brothers! Transcendental mellows (rasa) cannot be awakened by any material effort” (prākṛta ceṣṭate bhāi kabhu rasa haya nā).
- Śrīla Prabhupāda repeatedly echoed this understanding with statements such as, “In the material world, there cannot be any real love.
- Therefore the real love cannot be appreciated with our material senses.
- Whatever we appreciate or experience by the material senses, that is not love; that is lust. Motive.
- There is some motive.” [Lecture, The Nectar of Devotion, Bombay, 1 January, 1973]

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- Wise practitioners follow the ācāryas’ advice and do not identify the mood of their bhajana with rasa; that is, they do not identify their inclination to serve Kṛṣṇa in a particular way with a perfected spiritual relationship.
- This point has already been established as the fifth premise of systematic worship: “Spiritual practices relating to a devotee’s spiritual form (svarūpa) are possible only at the stage of ecstasy (bhāva).”
- In summary, the mood of systematic worship (bhāvarūpa) is favourable to devotional practice only as long as it develops naturally through the activity of chanting (ceṣṭārūpa).
- Even then, until the internal potency confirms and spiritualizes this mood, sādhakas should not directly cultivate it by any method.
- Such artificial cultivation is counterproductive.

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- Only at the stages of ecstasy and love is the cultivation of the moods of devotion spontaneous and natural.
- It is essential for devotees practising systematic worship to hear Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes, whether their spiritual moods of devotion are awakened or not.
- Even regulative devotees not attracted to spontaneous devotion should hear Kṛṣṇa’s Vṛndāvana pastimes.
- In fact, it is the responsibility of all Vaiṣṇavas—regulative or spontaneous, intermediate or advanced—to be familiar with the principles of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes.
- How various types of devotees incorporate hearing and remembering these topics into their sādhana remains an individual affair.

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- Neophyte devotees, mixed devotees, and nondevotees, however, should not attempt systematic worship, nor should they hear Kṛṣṇa's pastimes systematically.
- Neither should they be instructed in the details of those topics, which are reserved for more elevated Vaiṣṇavas.
- Hearing this conclusion, some devotees may argue that very advanced Vaiṣṇavas, by their spiritual influence, can empower even unqualified audiences to hear the intimate details of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.
- Since it is all-powerful Kṛṣṇa who empowers devotees, there is no use arguing what advanced Vaiṣṇavas can or cannot do.
- They may have such sway over their listeners, but the real question is whether they deem it appropriate to elevate an unqualified audience.

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- The answer, of course, is that they do not.
- Empowered devotees bestow on their audiences the kind of knowledge by which they can elevate themselves.
- They also always set an example for less advanced preachers.
- As mentioned earlier, when speaking in public Vaiṣṇava ācāryas generally speak to the lowest common denominator among their audiences—the members with the least qualification in terms of faith and knowledge.
- Again, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura speaks out against the practices of speaking above the qualification of an audience and trying to bestow instant qualification on an audience.

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- He writes:

aśakta-komala-śraddhe rasa-kathā bole nā  
anadhikārīre rase adhikāra deya nā

- “A devotee should never speak on the topics of devotional mellows to one who has weak, pliable faith. Neither should he attempt to bestow the qualification for rasa upon one who is unfit to receive it.” (Prākṛta-rasa-śata-dūṣaṇī 60)
- Authorized Vaiṣṇavas, be they speakers or listeners, must honour this principle during Kṛṣṇa conscious discourses.
- They should keep in mind the example of Śukadeva Gosvāmī, the original speaker of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.

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- When the great sage observed that the members of his audience still attached to karma and jñāna were disturbed upon hearing about Kṛṣṇa's rāsa-līlā, he concluded that part of his discourse. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.33.26–27]
- He then began to narrate how Kṛṣṇa saved Nanda Mahārāja from being swallowed by a snake.
- This is the conduct of the greatest devotee, conduct that is humbly followed by all sincere disciples.
- It was certainly the conduct Śrīla Prabhupāda displayed, and it is the tradition of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.
- Recently, a few senior ISKCON devotees have begun performing weeklong discourses advertised as Bhāgavata-saptāhas in the Society's temples.



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- This has resulted in a controversy.
- Devotees want to know whether these performances constitute a breach of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s instructions.
- The answer to this question lies not in the name given to such discourses but in the propriety of the topics discussed.
- When Śrīla Prabhupāda derided Bhāgavata-saptāha performances, he was directing his comments to faithless men who speak about the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs to materialistic audiences for financial gain.
- But on several occasions Śrīla Prabhupāda himself discussed giving lectures billed as Bhāgavata-saptāha.

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- For example, in 1972 Śrīla Prabhupāda rented a hall in London, advertised the programme as a Bhāgavata-saptāha, and charged admission to raise funds for a new temple.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “Now, to have a temple here, we shall hold a meeting on the Indian gentlemen to raise the fund.
- You find out some place, immediately, so that while I am remaining, by performing Bhāgavata-saptāha, I’m influencing the Indian rich men here, they can purchase...
- She will also contribute...” [Room conversation, London, 5 July, 1972]
- Guests may have attended these functions under the impression that they would hear kṛṣṇa-līlā, but Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke to his audience, as always, about the basic principles of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

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- Devotees who follow Śrīla Prabhupāda’s example and advertise as Bhāgavata-saptāhas seven-day lectures on the basic principles of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, are neither in contravention of Vaiṣṇava tradition nor of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s instructions.
- But if they speak about Kṛṣṇa’s intimate pastimes, then, as described by Śrīla Prabhupāda below, they are guilty.
- “So in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam every line is so interesting. Therefore, vidyā bhāgavatāvadhīḥ, ‘Knowledge means up to the knowledge of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.’
- But generally people do not discuss Bhāgavatam in this way.
- They go immediately to the Tenth Canto and rāsa-līlā.
- You see?

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- That is the subject matter of [chuckles] Bhāgavatam.
- And Bhāgavata-saptāha means that Kṛṣṇa is kissing the gopīs.
- That's all.
- And there are so many nice instructions—that is not nothing.
- They have neglected because they do not like to hear such instructions.
- Kṛṣṇa's dealings with the gopīs, that is very much liked.
- But Bhāgavata, in order to understand Kṛṣṇa, nine cantos have been written.
- And Kṛṣṇa's activities have been inserted in the Tenth Canto, after understanding Kṛṣṇa. Vetti mām tattvataḥ.

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- And it is said in the Bhagavad-gītā, manuṣyāṅāṁ sahasreṣu kaścīd yatati siddhaye yatatām api siddhānām.
- So first of all one has to become liberated person by understanding Kṛṣṇa; then he can understand what is Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes with the gopīs.
- It is for the liberated person. It is not a thing to be explained in the marketplace.” [Lecture, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.1.40, Surat, 21 December, 1970]

kera svarpa-vicra una, santanakṛṣṇera svarūpa-vicāra śuna, sanātana  
advaya-jñāna-tattva, vraje vrajendra-nandana

- “O Sanātana, please hear about the eternal form of Lord Kṛṣṇa. He is the Absolute Truth, devoid of duality but present in Vṛndāvana as the son of Nanda Mahārāja.” Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 20.152