

Śuddha-bhakti Cintāmaṇi

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Chapter 24- Hearing at Unsteady Devotion

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- Various types of hearing and worship are suitable for various types of souls with pure faith, depending on the level of their spiritual advancement.
- At the stage of faith, devotees aspire for systematic worship; at the stage of steadiness their worship is systematic but materially tainted; and at the stage of ecstasy their systematic worship is realized and spiritual.
- There are slight variances in the opinions of bona fide authorities on how the levels of qualification in terms of faith and knowledge correlate with the stages of advancement.
- In determining the types of bhajana suitable for different grades of devotees, this book accepts the following standard given by Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda:
- From the stage of faith (śraddhā) through the clearing of unwanted habits (anartha-nivṛtti), devotees are kaniṣṭhādhikārīs.

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- At the stage of steadiness (niṣṭhita-bhajana-kriyā) they are madhyama-adhikārīs, and from the stage of taste (ruci) up to pure love of God (prema) they are uttamādhikārīs.
- Of the devotees with topmost qualification, the Ṭhākura says, “The uttamādhikārīs is the sādḥaka within whom ruci has developed.” [Bhakti-tattva-viveka, chapter 4]
- After describing the general principles of worship, this chapter discusses the first of three types of bhajana, the one suitable for kaniṣṭhādhikārīs, as well as the dangers neophytes face when they attempt a level of bhajana beyond their qualification.
- The ability of devotees to engage in worship of the name (nāma-bhajana) depends on how purely they chant, how eligible they are to hear, and how adept they are at remembering Kṛṣṇa.

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- At the level of simple faith, devotees generally chant with offence and incidentally hear pastimes in the course of their reading.
- Such devotees have little ability, if any, to focus the mind.
- Their worship, though hardly systematic, does gain strength, however, in proportion to how well they can adhere to the regulative principles of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- Up to the stage of steadiness they are more absorbed in the activities of bhajana than they are in the goal of bhajana, Śrī Kṛṣṇa.
- As these neophytes become purified, they acquire knowledge, deepen their faith, and finally succeed in steadying the restless mind. .

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- In this way they advance to the intermediate platform and become fit for systematic worship of the holy names and purposeful hearing of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.
- Steady devotees chant the holy names without offence.
- Their relative freedom from material ties makes them fit to purposefully hear Kṛṣṇa's pastimes and to fix the mind on the object of their meditation.
- They are now fit for spontaneous devotional service, although their bhajana is still dominated by reason rather than by spiritual emotion.
- In time, however, as the ways of Vraja become more relishable to them, reason gives way to inspiration.

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- In contrast, steady devotees not drawn to vraja-bhakti, whose hearts are governed by regulative devotional service, reverentially concentrate on the sound of Kṛṣṇa's names.
- Eventually, both vaidhī and rāga-bhakti liberate systematic worshipers, who then gain entrance into the spiritual kingdom of spontaneous love.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda describes the transformation of regulative practice to spontaneous devotion: “The bhakti process, as performed under the regulative principles of vaidhī bhakti, or devotional service following the prescribed rules and regulations, is defined by the revealed scriptures and confirmed by great ācāryas.
- This practice can help the neophyte devotee to rise to the stage of rāga-bhakti, in which the Lord responds from within as the caitya-guru, or the spiritual master as Super-consciousness.” [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.5.4, purport]

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- At the stage of ecstasy bhajana is purely spiritual, and the things devotees perceive while chanting, hearing, and remembering are transcendental revelations.
- Their chanting of the holy names is imbued with rasa, and they spontaneously hear and remember Kṛṣṇa's Vṛndāvana pastimes.
- For such fortunate souls, meditation on the exchanges between Kṛṣṇa and His eternal companions is done through their own revealed spiritual forms.
- This meditative trance, realized through the medium of the Lord's names, is reality; the realm inhabited by the material body becomes an increasingly burdensome shadow of reality.

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- At the dawn of creation, Kṛṣṇa taught this full realization to Lord Brahmā:

ṛte 'rtham yat pratīyeta
na pratīyeta cātmani
tad vidyād ātmano māyām
yathābhāso yathā tamaḥ

- “O Brahmā, whatever appears to be of any value, if it is without relation to Me, has no reality. Know it as My illusory energy, that reflection which appears to be in darkness.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 2.9.34)
- Systematic worship done at the stages of ecstasy and love fully incorporates all nine limbs of pure devotional service. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.5.23–24]
- Before, at the stage of steadiness, the eighth and ninth limbs—considering Kṛṣṇa to be one’s best friend and surrendering everything to Him—are immature.

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- Moreover, at the stage of unsteadiness, these two limbs remain inaccessible to sādhakas who cultivate the other seven, and even then without the ability to clearly harmonize them with the chanting process.
- According to their level of spiritual attainment, devotees worship the holy name in three stages: unsteady, steady or systematic, and perfectly realized.
- At each of these stages, devotees cultivate the limbs of devotion to attain steadiness, ecstasy, and Kṛṣṇa’s eternal shelter, respectively.
- At each stage they adhere to the six principles enunciated by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī: enthusiasm, confident endeavour, patience, action according to the regulative principles [such as śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ smaraṇam—hearing, chanting, and remembering Kṛṣṇa, etc.], abandonment of the company of nondevotees, and following in the footsteps of the previous ācāryas. [The Nectar of Instruction 3]

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- Deity worship (arcana) is an example of how devotees cultivate a limb of devotion to awaken attachment to hearing.
- It is a mistake, however, to think that ordinary deity worship is the same as mature nāma-bhajana.
- On the one hand, reverential deity worship performed by devotees absorbed in their material body classifies as unsteady worship (aniṣṭhita-bhajana).
- On the other hand, materially tainted deity worship in which devotees increasingly hanker for transcendental service classifies as steady worship (niṣṭhita-bhajana).
- And worship rendered by devotees who have realized their spiritual form, worship in which the deity is the object of eternal service, is the substance of mature nāma-bhajana.

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- It is also a mistake to think that systematic worship of the Lord’s name is practised only in solitude (nirjana-bhajana).
- This is simply not the case.
- Congregational chanting, chanting in public, and many preaching activities are within the scope of nāma-bhajana.
- In fact, Lord Caitanya requested His followers to combine personal devotional acts with those that bless conditioned souls.
- In his Gītāvalī, Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda expresses the essence of this teaching: “Showing mercy to all souls and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa is the essence of all religious practice” (jīve doyā, kṛṣṇa-nāma-sarva-dharma-sāra). [Gītāvalī, Śrī Nagar-kīrtan 1.4]

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- Pure devotees are of two types: those who concentrate exclusively on their own spiritual advancement (bhajanānandī), and those who in addition to perfecting their own bhajana make continual efforts to elevate others (goṣṭhy-ānandī).
- Both Śrīla Prabhupāda and Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura criticize the selfish attitude of immature bhajanānandīs who have not received the Lord’s blessings for solitary worship; these persons neglect Lord Caitanya’s order to distribute Kṛṣṇa’s names throughout the world.
- In the opinion of both ācāryas, such devotees are not “strict followers of the Caitanya-sampradāya,” and their premature attempt at secluded worship (nirjana-bhajana) is a form of “cheating.” [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.30.37, purport, and Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 7.92, purport]

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- This verdict is a strong warning to neophytes who might wish to imitate the practices of exalted and authorized bhajanānandīs like Haridāsa Ṭhākura.
- Indirectly, it is also a strong endorsement of the outstanding example set by true mahā-bhāgavata goṣṭhy-ānandīs like Prahlāda Mahārāja, an example beautifully reflected in his own words:

naivodvije para duratyaya-vaitaraṇyās
tvad-vīrya-gāyana-mahāmṛta-magna-cittaḥ
śoce tato vimukha-cetasa indriyārtha-
māyā-sukhāya bharam udvahato vimūḍhān

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- “My dear Lord, I have no problems and want no benediction from You because I am quite satisfied to chant Your holy name. This is sufficient for me because whenever I chant I immediately merge in an ocean of transcendental bliss. I only lament to see others bereft of Your love. They are rotting in material activities for transient material pleasure and spoiling their lives toiling all day and night simply for sense gratification, with no attachment for love of Godhead. I am simply lamenting for them and devising various plans to deliver them from the clutches of *māyā*.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.9.43, as quoted in Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 7.92, purport)
- Some devotees argue that the mood of preaching—enthusiasm for distributing Kṛṣṇa consciousness, especially in spiritually indifferent or hostile environments—runs contrary to their nature.
- “Karmīs are bad association,” they say.

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- Śrīla Prabhupāda’s attitude toward those who for some reason cannot preach is that they should at least support the activities of those who can.
- “One should be sympathetic to the propagation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- There are many devotees who are engaged in the propagation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and they require help.
- So, even if one cannot directly practice the regulative principles of bhakti-yoga, he can try to help such work.” [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 12.10, purport]
- Bhajanānandīs who make no effort to fulfil Lord Caitanya’s mission deprive themselves of His mercy.
- Their spiritual advancement then becomes solely dependent on the power of their sādhana.

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- They are like travellers embarking on an arduous journey on only one leg.
- Bhajanānandīs fixed in solitary ways should try to chant with purity and avoid criticizing the more transcendently elevated goṣṭhy-ānandīs.
- If bhajanānandīs find fault with those who risk everything to fulfil the Lord’s mission, or if they argue that preaching obstructs their own advancement, then they should expect nothing but trouble from the reactions to the inevitable offences that spring from such a mentality.
- Further debilitated, they will have to make their spiritual journey as if crawling on their hands and knees.
- In vivid contrast, the personal practices of perfect devotees always complement their preaching.

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- Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “One who is not very expert in preaching may chant in a secluded place, avoiding bad association, but for one who is actually advanced, preaching and meeting people who are not engaged in devotional service are not disadvantages.” [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 7.92, purport]
- Preaching greatly benefits neophyte and intermediate devotees alike.
- Having to confront obstacles that result from contact with degraded people infested with bad habits inspires devotees to face whatever bad habits still linger in their own hearts.
- In other words, convincing others to change gives devotees the conviction to change themselves, and this conviction strengthens their evolving devotional practices.

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- This section discusses how unsteady devotees should hear, chant, and remember.
- Evident will be the irregular nature of their worship and the topics for which they are eligible to read and hear.
- Sincere beginners in Kṛṣṇa consciousness strive to improve the quality of their weak faith through regulative chanting of Kṛṣṇa's holy names.
- They start by chanting with offence (nāmāparādha), and after sustained effort come to the clearing stage (nāmābhāsa), in which they chant without offence but are still shrouded by the results of past deeds.
- To perform regulative chanting means to chant at least sixteen rounds of the mahā-mantra daily while following the guidelines given by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

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- For instance, it is best to chant in the early morning during the brāhma-muhūrta period, one and a half hours before sunrise.
- It is best to chant in the temple room with other devotees, and in the presence of Śrīmatī Tulasīdevī.
- It is best to chant loudly enough that others can hear, and clearly enough that the mahā-mantra's syllables and words can be distinguished.
- And especially, it is best to chant in a spirit of humility as Lord Caitanya taught: feeling oneself insignificant, and with tolerance, selflessness, and respect. [Śrī Śikṣāṣṭaka 3]

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- Before chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa it is best to chant at least once the Pañca-tattva mahā-mantra (śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu-nityānanda śrī-advaita gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura-bhakta-vṛnda), because Lord Caitanya and His associates are so magnanimous that they do not consider one's offences; in fact, they remove them.
- Thus turning to Lord Caitanya and His associates helps one purify his or her chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra.
- Of course, it is essential to strictly follow the four regulative principles and to consciously try to avoid the ten offences against the holy name.
- Devotees should always aspire to become free from offences and to chant the holy name purely, with loving affection.
- As already mentioned, Śrīla Prabhupāda advised us not to introduce beginners to too many rules and regulations.

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- But as devotees show signs of advancement, they may be trained to come to the standard of initiation.
- Hari-bhakti-vilāsa gives detailed instructions for devotees serious about devotional practices.
- For instance, devotees should not touch their beads (mālā) with the forefinger, shake or swing their beads while chanting, touch their beads with their left hand, or drop their beads.
- These rules help elevate the personal habits of beginners to the mode of goodness.
- Even more important are the instructions that touch on the techniques that bring about the proper devotional mood in the chanter.
- Sanātana Gosvāmī states:

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manaḥ-samharaṇamśaucam
maunam mantrārtha-cintanam
avyagravam anirvedo
japa-sampatti-hetavaḥ

- “These are the causes of success in chanting: subduing the mind, cleanliness, avoiding unnecessary talk, remembering the meaning of the mantra, patience, and not becoming disappointed.” (Quoted in Śrī Bhajana-rahasya 1.33)
- Devotees should understand the meaning of the mahā-mantra.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda defines it as follows: “My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa! My dear Lord Rāma! O energy of the Lord, Hare!
- Kindly engage me in Your service.” [Śrīmad-Bhagavatam 4.24.69, purport]

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- This meaning applies to beginners and advanced devotees alike.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda’s simple but profound explanation of the mahā-mantra is uniquely empowered to guide all classes of devotees.
- Neophyte devotees chant with a desire to engage in Kṛṣṇa’s service with their physical senses.
- Advanced devotees chant with a desire to serve in their siddha-deha.
- The key that unlocks the many meanings contained in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s single statement is the devotees’ particular degree of faith, knowledge, attachment, and love.
- Devotees should also understand the meaning of the individual words of the mahā-mantra.

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- These have been explained in various ways by the ācāryas.
- Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda, for instance, offers the following explanation, citing Gopāla-guru Gosvāmī:
- The Personality of Godhead, who has a form of eternity, knowledge, and bliss, has manifested Himself in the form of His name.
- Śrī Rādhā, the Lord’s own pleasure potency, steals the mind of Kṛṣṇa.
- She is therefore praised as Harā, and the vocative form of Harā is Hare.
- Because Kṛṣṇa takes away ignorance and its influence, the devotees also remember Him as Hari.
- Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the eternal beloved of Rādhā, bliss personified.

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- He is the beautiful dark son of Nanda, with eyes like lotus petals. And He is the only happiness for the residents of Gokula.
- He is therefore known as Kṛṣṇa.
- Śrī Kṛṣṇa is also the chief among experts in loving affairs, the worshipable Deity of amorous pastimes, and He always enjoys Rādhā.
- He is therefore also called Rāma (rādhā-ramaṇa rāma). [Bhajana-rahasya 34]
- To increase the quality of their chanting, devotees must try vigorously to free themselves from the four root causes of unwanted habits: offences, material desires, weakness of heart, and ignorance of spiritual truths.

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- Those who fail to make such efforts miss the opportunity to gain the holy name's mercy, without which no one can surmount the obstacles to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- Great Vaiṣṇavas have given many instructions on how to become free from such anarthas.
- Following the instructions given in the first, second, and fourth verses of Śrī Upadeśāmṛta purifies the first three causes of anarthas listed above.
- Transcendental knowledge acquired by studying śāstra and hearing from advanced devotees overcomes the fourth, ignorance of spiritual truths.
- Beginners fortify their devotion with transcendental knowledge gleaned from authorities.

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- Those who neglect such hearing, who rely solely on the power of their own fragile faith, certainly fall from the platform of pure devotion.
- In an attempt to help the members of his Society avoid this calamity, Śrīla Prabhupāda made morning and evening hearing compulsory.
- Through that compulsory hearing, devotees would be protected by acquiring knowledge of Kṛṣṇa, the jīva, the Vaiṣṇavas, the holy name, the illusory energy, yukta-vairāgya, and the rules and prohibitions of devotional life.
- Beginners should also hear topics that inspire them to progress through the successive stages of devotional service.
- For instance, persons whose faith has just awakened may hear about the importance of associating with Vaiṣṇavas and accepting initiation.

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- This will prepare them for initiation and for moving to the next stage of devotional life.
- Once they have learned to depend on Vaiṣṇavas for spiritual sustenance and have heard about the importance of devotional practices, they will naturally aspire for regulative devotion.
- In the unsteady stage of devotional practice, devotees should concentrate on hearing topics that elevate them beyond bodily identification and any lingering aspirations for material happiness.
- Since the material conceptions of “I” and “mine” are the over-whelming obstacles to steady devotion, neophytes should be taught that “we are not this body,” “we are spirit soul,” “material possessions are temporary,” “spiritual life is eternal,” and “Kṛṣṇa is the supreme proprietor.”

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- Hearing, studying, and assimilating such subjects helps build a strong foundation for a devotional life.
- Pseudopractitioners and uninformed critics mistake spontaneous devotion for a whimsical affair, one that tries to validate the old philosophy: “If it feels good, do it.”
- But the Vedas treasure pure spontaneity and reject whimsy.
- About fanciful forms of devotion Kṛṣṇa says:

yaḥśāstra-vidhim utsṛjya
vartate kāma-kārataḥ
na sa siddhim avāpnoti
na sukham na parām gatim

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- “He who discards scriptural injunctions and acts according to his own whims attains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme destination.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 16.23)
- Although pure faith qualifies devotees to hear Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes, there is a proper sequence to hearing that serious devotees are expected to know and follow.
- Spiritual life is systematic, never whimsical, even at the spontaneous stage.
- There is a proper sequence of topics that leads to hearing about Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes, and a proper way to hear the līlās themselves.
- These pastimes also have two divisions, the eternal (nitya) and the occasional (naimi-ttika), and different grades of devotees are meant to hear them in different ways.

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- The term “occasional pastimes” refers to pastimes such as Kṛṣṇa’s taking birth in Mathurā, His appearing in different incarnations, His killing of demons in and outside of Vṛndāvana, and any other pastimes that occur only during His līlā in the material world.
- The term “eternal pastimes” refers to His tending cows, playing with His friends, dancing with the gopīs, delighting His parents, and enjoying other pleasure sports that take place in eight periods of the day in the spiritual world.
- It is necessary to hear both types of pastimes if one wishes to develop kṛṣṇa-prema.
- The occasional pastimes clear impediments from the heart, and the eternal pastimes enable devotees to taste the mellow of pure devotion.
- Until devotees reach the stage of ecstasy, they should especially hear and contemplate the significance of Kṛṣṇa’s occasional pastimes.

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- Thākura Bhaktivinoda recommends the purposeful hearing of the occasional pastimes. [Śrī Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta, concluding words to chapter 6, and concluding words to chapter 7]
- This instruction is good for both unsteady and steady devotees.
- For example, the occasional pastimes of Kṛṣṇa's other incarnations found in the first nine cantos of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam guide devotees to better understand the challenges facing their spiritual lives.
- Kṛṣṇa appears to protect His devotees, kill the miscreants, and re-establish religious principles. [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 4.8]
- Similarly, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam makes its appearance to protect aspiring devotees from bad habits and nondevotional influences.

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- It also gradually removes all obstacles to spiritual life and finally situates devotees in their original glory—love for Kṛṣṇa.
- For example, the Ninth Canto describes Rāvaṇa, the lord of Laṅkā, who represents devotion’s foremost enemy, insatiable lust.
- Rāvaṇa abducted Sītādevī, Lord Rāma’s faithful servant.
- To protect His devotee’s spiritual chastity, Lord Rāmacandra, the embodiment of religious principles, slays Rāvaṇa and reclaims Sītā as His own.
- From this pastime, thoughtful devotees understand that the Lord protects from sensual allurements all those who strictly follow the regulative principles of devotional service.

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- The Tenth Canto also includes occasional pastimes, including Kṛṣṇa's killing of the demons that enter Vṛndāvana.
- Study of these pastimes removes from the heart specific unwanted habits.
- For instance, Tṛṇāvarta, the whirlwind demon, represents false scholarship, something that potentially blinds pure devotees engaged in Kṛṣṇa's service with the dust of wrangling, debates, and dry logic.
- To save simple-hearted devotees from disloyalty to pure devotion, the breeding ground of offensive philosophies such as the Māyāvāda philosophy, Kṛṣṇa strangles the demon.
- Careful meditation on the significance of this pastime relieves and protects devotees from this obstacle to their spiritual practices.

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- Because knowledge of the twenty obstacles to vraja-bhakti is of great value to practising devotees, the entire list, as revealed by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, is given below. [Śrī Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta, chapter 6]
- Hearing how Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma kill these demons frees sincere devotees from the following impurities: (1) Pūtanā (the false nurse) represents the pseudoguru, who may be embodied as a person or as one's own conditioned mind;
- (2) Śakatāsura (the cart demon) represents the tendency to carry on with bad habits such as lethargy and dullness that accumulate in this life and from previous lives;
- (3) Tṛṇāvarta (the whirlwind demon) represents the false pride that arises from material scholarship, which gives rise to deviant philosophies;

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- (4) Nalakūvara and Maṇigrīva (who became the twin Arjuna trees) represent arrogant pride arising from aristocracy, which is rooted in madness for wealth;
- (5) Vatsāsura (the calf demon) represents the childish greed that results in wicked mischievousness;
- (6) Bakāsura (the crane demon) represents cunning duplicity, deceptiveness, and false behaviours;
- (7) Aghāsura (the snake demon) represents cruelty and violence;
- (8) Lord Brahmā's theft of the cowherd boys and calves represents mundane activities and speculative scholasticism;
- (9) Dhenukāśura (the ass demon) represents materialistic intelligence, which is the same as ignorance of spiritual knowledge;

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- (10) Kāliya (the snake demon) represents brutality and treachery;
- (11) the two forest fires swallowed by Kṛṣṇa represent intracommunal discord among Vaiṣṇavas;
- (12) Pralambāsura (the demon disguised as a calf) represents lusty inclinations and desires for gain and prestige;
- (13) The yajñic brāhmaṇas' sacrifice represents callousness toward Kṛṣṇa caused by pride in one's position in the varṇāśrama system;
- (14) the humbling of King Indra represents demigod worship and the tendency to think “I am Supreme”;
- (15) Varuṇa's abduction of Nanda Mahārāja represents the mentality that spiritual life can be enhanced by intoxication;

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- (16) killing the snake that attempted to swallow Nanda Mahārāja represents the rescue of the truth of eternal Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which has been swallowed by impersonalists;
- (17) Śaṅkhacūḍa (the conch demon) represents desire for name, fame, and sensuous enjoyment, all on the plea of devotion;
- (18) Ariṣṭāsura (the bull demon) represents the pride that arises from indulging in false religions invented by cheaters, the result of which is the neglect of bhakti;
- (19) Keśī (the horse demon) represents the feeling that “I am a great devotee and spiritual master”;
- (20) Vyomāsura (the sky demon) represents associating with thieves and other rascals and with people who put themselves forward as avatāras.

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- Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda advises devotees not only to hear and contemplate the occasional pastimes but to carefully discuss them among themselves.
- Furthermore, before chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa or engaging in nāma-bhajana, devotees should pray to Kṛṣṇa for the power to overcome the debilitating defects represented by the demons killed by Kṛṣṇa.
- The Ṭhākura adds, “By doing this, the heart becomes purified.”
- Both unsteady and steady devotees are advised to purposefully read Kṛṣṇa’s occasional pastimes, but unsteady devotees are not advised to scrutinize His eternal pastimes.
- However, Śrīla Prabhupāda allowed and even encouraged all of his followers to read the eternal pastimes as they naturally occurred in the books he translated.

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- For example, when a child asked how he could serve Śrīla Prabhupāda, His Divine Grace replied, “Read Kṛṣṇa book daily.
- Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa!” [Room conversation, New York, 4 July, 1972]
- He even encouraged his disciples to use the Kṛṣṇa book as a gurukula textbook. And to an audience of disciples he said, “If you simply read Kṛṣṇa book...then you become delivered from these clutches of repetition of birth and death.” [Lecture, Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 4.9, Bombay, 29 March, 1974]
- At the same time, Prabhupāda made it painfully obvious that as long as his followers remained immature in their devotion they should be careful about reading the eternal līlās, particularly the gopī-līlās.
- This instruction is well-documented as it relates to the “Gopī-bhāva Club” incident.

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- At that time Śrīla Prabhupāda directly commented on the inappropriate reading and discussing of Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes with the gopīs, even when such reading was done from his own books.
- Early in the summer of 1976 Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote to a disciple he suspected of dabbling in “higher things” in the company of a Rādhā-kuṇḍa bābājī.
- “Here in Los Angeles, we have found that there is a group of about 40 devotees who privately meet to discuss the intimate pastimes, artificially thinking that they can enter into the understanding of the gopis prematurely.
- This will create havoc in our society, and the result will be that if this is allowed to go on, our preaching work will be greatly hampered.

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- This premature desire to understand the lila of Krishna is due to mundane sex-life desire as we have seen amongst many of the babajis and sahajiyas in Vrindaban.”
[Letter to Nitāi Dāsa, Los Angeles, 7 June, 1976]
- When Śrīla Prabhupāda finally met representatives of the Gopī-bhāva club, he compared their attempt to focus exclusively on the gopīs to the “jumping of monkeys.”
- When the leader of the group explained that their intention was to study the behaviour of the gopīs in order to develop their mood, Śrīla Prabhupāda became angry.
- He explained that such study was for liberated souls who had no pinch of material desire, not for spiritual novices.
- He repeated his famous edict: “First deserve, then desire.”

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- Śrīla Prabhupāda explained that devotees should qualify themselves by intense service and full surrender before they cultivate such elevated aspirations.
- He then concluded the meeting by explaining that just because his books glorified the gopīs' exalted devotion, the subject was not meant for premature study.
- “It is not forbidden,” he said, “but it is not for neophytes.”
- Śrīla Prabhupāda's grave warning about premature purposeful reading of Kṛṣṇa's dealings with the gopīs may appear at odds with his simultaneous eagerness for his followers to read his Kṛṣṇa book.
- How is it that Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted his immature followers to read the Kṛṣṇa book daily?

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- Prabhupāda wanted them to read it as it was written—following the natural chronology of Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes.
- In this way he indirectly encouraged the incidental hearing of the Lord’s eternal pastimes.
- The Kṛṣṇa book, like Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, presents both occasional and eternal pastimes in their natural sequence.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted his disciples to follow this sequence without dwelling on any particular eternal pastime, especially the five chapters that discuss the rāsa dance. [These chapters are found in the Tenth Canto, chapters 29–33]
- This sequence is described in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and is faithfully followed by its true exponents.

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śrī-śuka uvāca

atra sargo visargaś ca
sthānam poṣaṇam ūtayaḥ
manvantareśānukathā
nirodho muktir āśrayaḥ

- “Śrī Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: In Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam there are ten divisions of statements regarding the following: the creation of the universe, sub-creation, planetary systems, protection by the Lord, the creative impetus, the change of Manus, the science of God, returning home, back to Godhead, liberation, and the summum bonum.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 2.10.1)

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- Although all ten subjects listed above are referred to in every canto of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, the first nine cantos prepare the reader to properly understand the tenth subject, Kṛṣṇa, described explicitly in the Tenth Canto.
- However, devotees who are not liberated, who have material desires, and who are unsteady in devotional service, should not purposefully read these pastimes.
- In other words, they should not skip over the first nine cantos to exclusively read Kṛṣṇa's vraja-līlā or gopī-līlā, because these līlās are the most confidential.
- Devotees should read Kṛṣṇa's eternal pastimes in the natural course of hearing the entire work.
- If they want to remember and discuss Kṛṣṇa's pastimes, the occasional ones serve this purpose well.

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- Otherwise, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, the immature hearing and sharing of gopī-līlā are expressions of mundane sexuality.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda also warned devotees about reading and singing songs for which they are unfit.
- Vaiṣṇava ācāryas such as Jayadeva Gosvāmī, Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura, and Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda composed many songs that poetically present the truths and pastimes of the Lord.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda taught his followers how to sing many of them.
- However, his Divine Grace instructed devotees not to sing the more intimate songs, those exclusively about Kṛṣṇa's pastimes with the gopīs. In the letter below, Śrīla Prabhupāda refers to a song from Gīta-govinda, which he says is suited to liberated souls, not immature devotees, and certainly not the public.

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- “Regarding the songs by Jayadeva, ‘Srita Kamala’ is not approved. Sometimes our Krsnadasa Babaji sings, but it is not approved by Prabhupada.
- Those songs are for siddha-bhaktas, not for us who are sadhana-bhaktas or learning bhaktas.
- Lord Caitanya never divulged in public, he enjoyed them in the company of his selected three or four devotees.
- There is one song by Jayadeva, ‘Worshiping the Ten Incarnations,’ that song is all.”
[Letter to Acyutānanda, London, 15 July, 1972]
- The festivals that commemorate the Lord’s appearance and pastimes, such as Janmāṣṭamī, Rādhāṣṭamī, Ratha-yātrā, Govardhana-pūjā, and Gaura-pūrṇimā are exceptions to the rule.

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- Speaking, singing, and hearing about Kṛṣṇa's līlā should not be avoided at such times.
- But devotees who conduct such festivals and those who speak at them must present Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in a way that appeals to the participants yet remains chaste to the principles of hearing.
- In addition to describing appropriate pastimes, speakers should explain the philosophical truths underlying them.
- For example, in 1968 Śrīla Prabhupāda began his Rādhāṣṭamī class speaking at length about Rāmacandra and Kṛṣṇa, based on a verse from Rāma-carita-mānasa.
- When he finally spoke about Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, he explained the philosophy regarding Kṛṣṇa's pleasure potency and the truths of Her pastimes with Him.

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- Finally, Śrīla Prabhupāda sang the song about Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī that begins with the line dāmodara-rati-varadhana-veśe, and then briefly described Her beauty, greatness, girlfriends, and dominion over Kṛṣṇa’s heart.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda kept this method of making simple and chaste presentations of Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes at major festivals for as long as he remained with us, setting an example for his followers.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda’s warnings about premature hearing of eternal līlā were primarily concerned with Kṛṣṇa’s gopī pastimes.
- Although Śrīla Prabhupāda did not explicitly restrict devotees from hearing Kṛṣṇa’s Vṛndāvana pastimes with His friends and parents, his instructions apply to all impulsive hearing of vraja-līlā in two ways:

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- First, those without a clear understanding of the truths of Kṛṣṇa (kṛṣṇa-tattva) can easily mistake His humanlike pastimes to be ordinary and thus commit offences to the Lord.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda explained this in Vṛndāvana: “But if we do not go through the authorities, we shall take Kṛṣṇa as ordinary boy or man, as it is warned in the Bhagavad-gītā, avajānanti mām mūḍhā mānuṣīm tanum āśritam.
- Because He’s acting just like a young boy, if we do not try to understand tattvataḥ...we shall be misled.” [Lecture, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.2.11, Vṛndāvana, 22 October, 1972]
- Second, premature interest in Kṛṣṇa’s associates leads to artificial preoccupation with one’s own spiritual identity, siddha-deha—a preoccupation that is the root of sahajiyāism.

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- Such rash curiosity often leads devotees to seek guidance outside ISKCON from bābājīs about most of whom Śrīla Prabhupāda had nothing good to say.
- “There are many bābājīs.
- They are collecting capātīs and smoking biḍi, and have one or two women.
- That’s all.
- It is going on...
- All these bābājīs should be employed. ‘Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and draw a plough.’
- Then it will be nice.” [Morning walk, Vṛndāvana, 15 March, 1974]

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- Following the maxim “better safe than sorry,” devotees at stages prior to steadiness should avoid focusing on the study of Kṛṣṇa’s eternal pastimes with the gopīs or with any of the residents of Vraja.
- And what about reading Kṛṣṇa’s eternal pastimes in books other than Śrīla Prabhupāda’s?
- There are many books, from those of the Gosvāmīs to those of current authors, appropriate for devotees aspiring for steadiness to read.
- They should be read, however, under the guidance of one’s spiritual master. Meanwhile, readers should remain faithful to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s guidelines: read other books secondary to reading his books, and read other books in proper sequence, without premature study of confidential subjects.

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- Śrīla Prabhupāda did want devotees to read books other than his; he wanted them to read the books of the ācāryas and the books of his disciples.
- An important conversation in Australia confirms this:
- **Paramahaṁsa:** Śrīla Prabhupāda, I remember once I heard a tape where you told us that we should not try to read the books of previous ācāryas.
- **Prabhupāda:** Hmm?
- **Amogha:** That we should not try to read Bhaktivinoda’s books or earlier books of other, all ācāryas. So I was just wondering—

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- Prabhupāda: I never said that.
- Amogha: You didn't say that? Oh.
- Prabhupāda: How is that?
- Amogha: I thought you said that we should not read the previous ācāryas' books.
- Prabhupāda: No, you should read.
- Amogha: We should.
- Prabhupāda: It is misunderstanding.
- Paramahansa: I think maybe he was thinking that there were some things about some of the Gauḍīya Maṭha books.

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- **Prabhupāda:** Maybe.
- **Paramahaṁsa:** And sometimes you said that better not to..., better to read your books.
- **Amogha:** When the devotees went to India this year, they said that Acyutānanda Swami very...chastised them that “You should never... If I catch any of you buying Bhaktisiddhānta’s books from Gauḍīya Maṭha then I will take it away,” something like this.
- **Paramahaṁsa:** Yeah, that was, the reason was because of...he didn’t want the devotees going to Gauḍīya Maṭha. But there’s nothing wrong with the idea of studying the previous ācāryas’ books.
- **Prabhupāda:** No. Who said? That is wrong. We are following previous ācāryas. I never said that.

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- **Paramahansa:** All of your commentaries are coming from the previous ācāryas.
- **Prabhupāda:** Yes.
- **Jayadharmā:** But that wouldn't mean that we should keep all the previous ācāryas' books and only read them.
- **Prabhupāda:** That is already there. You first of all assimilate what you have got. You simply pile up books and do not read—what is the use?
- **Jayadharmā:** First of all we must read all your books.
- **Prabhupāda:** Yes.
- **Paramahansa:** Practically speaking, Śrīla Prabhupāda, you are giving us the essence of all the previous ācāryas' books in your books. [Morning walk, Perth, 13 May, 1975]

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- At various times Śrīla Prabhupāda gave further warnings about the devotees' incidental reading of Kṛṣṇa's eternal pastimes.
- He said that if they feel their respect for Kṛṣṇa's divinity waning or their senses becoming agitated, they should put aside what they are reading.
- In other words, to responsibly read scripture, devotees must be well-versed in the rules of devotion, and they must also be introspective about what they try to assimilate.
- Honest self-assessment is vital to progressive devotion. Devotees must, therefore, carefully observe the effect that hearing Kṛṣṇa's eternal pastimes is having on their mind and respond accordingly.

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- Śrīla Prabhupāda expected such maturity from his followers.
- “So if you actually hear about Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes with Rādhārāṇī, then hṛd-roga-kāmān apahinoti, then our heart disease, lusty desires, will vanish.
- That is the result. I have repeatedly said.
- So if you become more lusty by seeing the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa with Rādhārāṇī, or hearing, that means you are not fit. Stop it. Stop it. Don’t be foolish.” [Lecture, Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 1.6, Māyāpur, 30 March, 1975]
- Although Śrīla Prabhupāda qualified how devotees should hear about Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs, he nonetheless recommended the therapeutic power of these pastimes.

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- It is common knowledge that Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed some disciples who were agitated by sex desire to apply the remedy of thinking about Kṛṣṇa’s rāsa-līlā.
- “The deity worship must be continued by everyone. Another secret of success is that when one is very much sexually disturbed he should think of Lord Krishna’s pastimes with the gopis, and he will forget his sex urge.
- To think of Krishna’s pastimes with gopis, but not to try to imitate.” [Letter to Hayagrīva, Los Angeles, 8 November, 1968]
- The reader should note that even when Śrīla Prabhupāda did instruct his disciples to think about Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes with the gopīs, he did not intend that they make an exclusive study of them.
- The ability to think about pastimes comes from a purified heart arising from, among other things, reading Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books properly in sequential order.

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- The degree to which devotees can remember pastimes and take shelter of them is indicative of their increasing qualification for hearing nitya-līlā.
- Even then, when such thoughts prove to be counterproductive, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s general instruction to “stop it” should prevail.
- From Śrīla Prabhupāda’s teachings and example, we now have a set of guidelines for how unsteady devotees should hear, along with hints for steady devotees.
- Unsteady devotees should carefully read Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, purposefully studying Kṛṣṇa’s occasional pastimes.
- Their reading of the eternal pastimes in Vṛndāvana, however, especially those Kṛṣṇa enacts with the gopīs, should be incidental.

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- Unsteady devotees should not discuss eternal pastimes among themselves or, for that matter, in a public forum, as do undignified Bhāgavata-saptāha reciters.
- If, when agitated by sensual thoughts, such devotees are able to remember Kṛṣṇa's pastimes with the gopīs, they may thus counteract the degrading influence of lust.
- If, however, such meditation proves counterproductive—if the pastimes further disturb the mind—devotees should discontinue such hearing until a more opportune time.
- Selfless service, attentive chanting, and diligent study of scripture, all gradually purify unsteady devotees.
- At the purified stage of steadiness, devotees are freed of most bad habits, aloof from affinity for the body, and free from the sex urge.

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- Fixed up in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, such Vaiṣṇavas may begin the systematic study of Kṛṣṇa's eternal Vṛndāvana pastimes.
- This is the way of pure devotion.
- As devotees advance in spiritual life they are entrusted with ever more confidential topics to read and hear.
- Thus devotees must be introspective and honest enough to recognize their own level of advancement and practise Kṛṣṇa consciousness accordingly.

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- In Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words, “First deserve, then desire.”

prabhu kahe,—“kṛṣṇa-nāmera bahu artha nā māni
'śyāma-sundara' 'yaśodā-nandana,'—ei-mātra jāni

- Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu replied, “I do not accept many different meanings for the holy name of Kṛṣṇa.
- I know only that Lord Kṛṣṇa is Śyāmasundara and Yaśodānandana.
- That’s all I know.” Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Antya-līlā 7.85