

# Śuddha-bhakti Cintāmaṇi

by H.H Śivarāma Swami

# Chapter 27- Hearing with Steadiness and with Taste

## SBC 27 – Hearing with Steadiness and with Taste

- The preceding chapter dealt with the relationship between the practices of individual devotees and the activities of the ISKCON mission.
- The spiritual well-being of both individuals and the society depends on the balance maintained between these two obligations.
- History has shown that overemphasis on either side hampers both.
- The goal of ISKCON is both to elevate its own members to love of God and to distribute Kṛṣṇa consciousness to society at large.
- The success of the institution, then, must be measured by its ability to achieve these two goals, and the success of the individual members will be measured by how they achieve personal perfection while helping to sustain and develop the institution.

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- Until devotees reach the stage of steady devotion, their spiritual practices are relatively similar to one another.
- However, at steadiness and taste, devotees become sufficiently advanced to begin individualizing their sādhana.
- As mentioned earlier, the challenge to the society will always be to accommodate varieties of devotional expression as well as degrees of advancement.
- The most notable change in devotees freed from the lower modes is that they begin to perceive their own devotional tastes.
- These devotional tastes are either regulative, spontaneous, or a combination of the two.

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- At the stage of ruci, these various tastes become a major impetus for devotees' spiritual practices.
- This chapter will discuss the cultivation of these tastes, with particular attention to the cultivation of spontaneous devotion, which when wrongly done causes chaos in the life of the practitioner as well as in the Society.
- If properly done, however, the same cultivation nurtures the creepers of devotees strongly attracted to vraja-bhakti as well as of those merely interested in it.
- Devotees who have achieved steadiness have intermediate qualification for pure devotional service (madhyamādhikāra), and those who have achieved taste have topmost qualification (uttamādhikāra).

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- In terms of advancement in love and affection, devotees between the stages of steadiness and attachment are intermediate (madhyama-bhaktas) and those at ecstasy (bhāva) and beyond are superlative (uttama-bhaktas) or mahā-bhāgavatas.
- Chapter eight has elaborately described how Śrīla Prabhupāda correlates spiritual qualification with spiritual advancement.
- Another symptom noticeable in a few devotees at steadiness is eagerness or greed (lobha).
- Thākura Bhaktivinoda categorizes this greed into three, just as he does with faith, knowledge, attachment, and love. [Bhakti-tattva-viveka 4]
- These stages correlate with the general stages of advancement in bhakti.

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- Eagerness prior to steadiness is not sustainable and therefore is not admitted as greed.
- Eagerness at steadiness is diluted with intellectual reasoning and is thus weak (kaniṣṭha).
- Greed at the stages of taste and attachment inspires pure devotion, but because it is still impure, it is intermediate (madhyama).
- And at ecstasy, greed, like all emotions, becomes fully spiritualized and is therefore topmost (uttama). [This correlation of which types of greed qualify devotees for which stage of devotional service is based on our study of the ācāryas' many statements about greed]
- Based on these classifications, this section describes the characteristics of devotees' evolving tastes or dominant moods at niṣṭhā and ruci.

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- It also delineates the kinds of hearing and worship for which such fortunate souls are fit.
- At the stage of steadiness, devotees embrace the Vaiṣṇava mood of humility so dear to Lord Caitanya.
- Only truly humble souls can chant the holy names free from offence.
- Genuine humility is found only in devotees who have given up the bodily conception of life, who have fixed themselves in knowledge of the truths concerning the Lord, and who know how to offer proper respect to other devotees.
- When practitioners cultivate with humility the six principles of surrender, Kṛṣṇa blesses them with the quality of steadiness.
- Consequently, devotees become eager to serve Him.



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- Mahārāja Kulaśekhara reveals this eagerness:

kr̥ṣṇa tvadīya-pada-paṅkaja-pañjarāntam  
adyaiva me viśatu mānasa-rāja-haṁsaḥ  
prāṇa-prayāṇa-samaye kapha-vāta-pittaiḥ  
kaṅṭhāvarodhana-vidhau smaraṇam kutas te

- “My Lord Kṛṣṇa! I pray that the swan of my mind may immediately sink down to the stems of the lotus feet of Your Lordship and be locked in their network; otherwise at the time of my final breath, when my throat is choked up with cough, how will it be possible to think of You?” (Mukunda-mālā-stotra 33, quoted in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 2.4.21, purport)
- The eagerness produced by steady regulative devotional practice results in strong enthusiasm for service.

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- If at steadiness devotees direct that eagerness toward vraja-bhakti, it produces the initial stage of greed (kaniṣṭha-lobha).
- But as long as such increased eagerness remains regulative, devotees direct it to perfecting the limbs of devotion, especially the hearing of the holy name.
- In this way eagerness is of two kinds.
- At steadiness, therefore, devotees may be either vaidhī bhaktas or rāgānuga-bhaktas, depending on their personal inclination.
- Although strong faith, sense control, and freedom from sex desire make all devotees at niṣṭhā eligible to purposefully hear vraja-līlā and thus worship in the mood of Vraja (vraja-bhajana), most do not.

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- Most steady devotees have a grasp of Kṛṣṇa's Vṛndāvana pastimes and they unhurriedly reflect on topics of vraja-bhakti with logic and intelligence.
- In this way they seek to understand and verify the practices of spontaneous devotion with scriptural evidence.
- In the absence of greed, they are satisfied to wait for the time when the spiritual energy descends on them and spontaneous service automatically takes possession of their hearts.
- These are the regulative devotees, the vaidhī bhaktas.
- A few other devotees, however, particularly those who have heard from spontaneous devotees, are eager to cultivate the devotion of the Vraja-vāsīs.

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- When such eagerness is buttressed by steadiness, the passion for vraja-bhakti becomes a sustainable emotion that makes devotees eligible for spontaneous devotion.
- These are the spontaneous devotees, the rāgānuga-bhaktas.
- The difference between spontaneous devotees and regulative devotees can be seen in the way they chant Kṛṣṇa's name.
- The Lord's form may appear in the hearts of both classes of devotees, but regulative devotees meditate on Him as their worshipable Deity whereas the spontaneous devotees seek to serve Him in the ways of the residents of Vraja.
- Chapter ten clearly identified the regulative devotional service of Lord Caitanya's followers as the precursor to spontaneous devotion and as a spiritual cultivation distinct from the regulative devotion leading to Vaikuṅṭha.

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- Devotees who embrace these conclusions can understand the purpose of regulative practice and its connection to spontaneous devotion in practice and perfection.
- Thus vaidhī bhaktas in our line are secure in the conviction that the path back to Godhead is the path to Goloka Vṛndāvana.
- This section continues to study the importance of regulative devotional service as the common practice of ISKCON’s members, even while some of them, individually and privately, cultivate spontaneous devotion.
- When they think of regulative devotional service, many Vaiṣṇava-vas remember the mood espoused in the following verse:

aiśvarya-jñāne vidhi-bhajana kariyā  
vaikuṅṭhake yāya catur-vidha mukti pāṣā

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- “By performing such regulated devotional service in awe and veneration, one may go to Vaikuṅṭha and attain the four kinds of liberation.” (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 3.17)
- The regulative service spoken of in this verse refers to the reverential worship of Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of Dvārakā, or of Kṛṣṇa’s expansions such as Lord Nārāyaṇa.
- This type of regulative service is different than that taught by Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Śrīla Prabhupāda.
- The vaidhī bhakti taught in ISKCON follows the regulations of devotional service given by Rūpa Gosvāmī.
- Its aim, as already mentioned, is the attainment of spontaneous ecstatic devotion.

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- It is, therefore, a preliminary stage of spontaneous devotion, not one of eternal regulative devotion.
- The fundamental distinction between the regulative devotional service described in the above verse and that practised in ISKCON is that they proceed from different types of seeds.
- The first grows from the seed of vaikunṭha-bhakti and the latter from the seed of vraja-bhakti.
- Members of ISKCON receive the seed of vraja-bhakti, and therefore their destination is none other than Goloka Vṛndāvana.
- There are two reasons why ISKCON teaches regulative devo-tional service: it is the best strategy for preaching, and devotees generally do not have the qualification for anything else.

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- History has repeatedly shown that discussions of spontaneous service among unqualified persons—whether the general public or neophyte devotees—invariably cause misunderstandings, abuse, and debauchery in the name of devotion.
- For an institution to remain free from such corruption it must preach and demand strict adherence to the regulative principles, the scriptural injunctions ordained by God, the supreme authority.
- The way of life based on these teachings is the substance of regulative devotional service, the only practice suitable for Gauḍīya institutions.
- Otherwise, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “The preaching work will be hampered.” [A Transcendental Diary, volume 2]



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- It should be stressed, however, that Lord Caitanya’s followers, although initially taught to serve Kṛṣṇa through the regulative practice of devotional service, know Him from the beginning to be the cowherd prince of Vraja, the beloved of the gopīs, and He who is purchased by spontaneous love alone.
- This truth is substantiated every morning before Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam class, when the speaker sings Jaya rādhā-mādhava.
- Thus the regulative devotional practices, what to speak of the preaching, book distribution, and hari-nāma-saṅkīrtana taught in ISKCON, are all in the category of spontaneous devotional service.
- As Śrīla Prabhupāda reveals, “One has to learn Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or pure devotional service, from the authorities by spontaneous loving service.” [The Nectar of Devotion, introduction]

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- Therefore, even though ISKCON's language reflects regulative devotion, the inner substance of all its activities reflects spontaneous devotion.
- The second reason for teaching vaidhī bhakti is that the sinful inhabitants of Kali-yuga do not have the qualification for anything else.
- Not only is it rare to find people fit for pure devotional service, it is rare for those who have taken up devotional service to maintain the regulative principles.
- Devotees have great difficulty controlling the urges of the senses, especially those of the genitals.
- If they are hardly fit for regulative devotion, how then can they be fit for spontaneous devotion, which begins with both freedom from sexual attraction and full self-surrender?

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- As Śrīla Prabhupāda says, “There is no question of desire [for gopī-bhāva] unless one is liberated.” [A Transcendental Diary, volume 2]
- Thus the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is to become purified of material contamination through regulative devotional service and to achieve steadiness.
- If by Kṛṣṇa’s arrangement some devotees acquire greed for vraja-bhakti, they may cultivate it internally with like-minded Vaiṣṇavas, as active servants of ISKCON, not as reclusive worshippers.
- Steady devotees without the inclination for vraja-sādhana continue their regulative practices until they reach ecstasy, at which time spontaneous love awakens naturally.
- It is better for devotees to err on the side of caution when considering the subject of rāgānuga-bhakti.

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- Still, devotees should recognize that ISKCON’s worshipable Deities (iṣṭa-devatās) are Lord Caitanya and Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.
- These are the presiding Deities of spontaneous devotion, not of regulative Vaikuṅṭha devotion.
- True, Śrīla Prabhupāda taught ISKCON’s members to pray to Lord Nṛsimhadeva. He also installed deities of Sītā-Rāma and spoke regularly about Kṛṣṇa’s many incarnations.
- However, these practices were meant to protect and facilitate ISKCON’s preaching, to remove obstacles to pure bhakti, and to keep devotees fixed on the path to Kṛṣṇa.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda did not intend devotees to set a course toward Vaikuṅṭha as Rāma-bhaktas, Nṛsimha-bhaktas, or servants of Lord Nārāyaṇa.

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- Indeed, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains, “For a devotee no form of Kṛṣṇa is important but the original form, two-handed Śyāmasundara...”
- One should understand, therefore, that the purport of this eleventh chapter is that the form of Kṛṣṇa is essential and supreme.” [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 11.55, purport]
- There may be genuine exceptions to this rule.
- Anupama and Murāri Gupta, in whose hearts the seed of vaikunṭha-bhakti had been sown in previous lives are two.
- Yet it should be understood that Lord Caitanya blessed all devotees with the gift of vraja-prema, and they should not be distracted from that legacy, not even by the attractive majesty of Lord Nārāyaṇa.

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- This is the advice of Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmī, who has taught the Gauḍīya sampradāya how to follow Rūpa Gosvāmī’s teachings:

asad-vārtā-veṣyā viṣṛja mati-sarvasva-haraṇīḥ  
kathā mukti-vyāghryā na śṛṇu kila sarvātma-gilaṇīḥ  
api tyaktvā lakṣmī-pati-ratim ito vyoma-nayanīm  
vraje rādhā-kṛṣṇau sva-rati-maṇi-dau tvam bhaja manaḥ

- “O mind! Give up the prostitute of friendship with nondevotees, a prostitute who will steal the treasure of your heart. Don’t listen to the words of the tigress of impersonal liberation, which devour everyone. Give up attraction for Lord Nārāyaṇa, which leads to the world of Vaikuṅṭha. O mind, in Vraja worship Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, two philanthropists who give away the jewel of pure love.” (Stavāvalī, Manaḥ-śikṣā 4)

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- Regulative devotees keep these truths in mind, strictly follow the rules of sādhanā-bhakti, and serve Lord Gaurāṅga’s mission through the disciplic succession.
- Satisfied with their devotional practices, they feel no impetus toward vraja-bhakti.
- Thus even though they may perceive in sequence Kṛṣṇa’s form, qualities, and pastimes when they chant, they prefer to absorb themselves in the sound of Kṛṣṇa’s name.
- Although in the course of their readings, studies, and discussions vaidhī bhaktas investigate vraja-bhakti and vraja-līlā, they rarely try to remember what they have heard.
- Yet these intermediate devotees, who naturally serve as spiritual masters, cannot avoid the purposeful study of the science of spontaneous devotion.

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- Whatever their personal mood of service they must be able to explain all spiritual subjects, including spontaneous devotion, to their dependants.
- At the stage of āsakti, attachment to Kṛṣṇa is so strong that increasing numbers of regulative devotees become inclined to spontaneous devotion.
- At bhāva, when they transcend the boundaries of matter, the touch of the pleasure potency immediately awakens pure greed in their hearts.
- Thus all devotees at the stage of bhāva unhesitatingly take up the cultivation of spontaneous devotional service.
- The desire of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Lord Nityānanda—which defines the mission of ISKCON—is to bestow on devotees the quality of love for Kṛṣṇa found only in the Vraja-vāsīs (vraja-prema).



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- Only by cultivating rāgānuga-bhakti is that spontaneous love awakened.
- Devotees sometimes question whether vraja-bhakti is for everyone.
- What about someone whose eternal relationship is with one of Kṛṣṇa's expansions?
- Doesn't Kṛṣṇa consciousness revive that service attitude with the Lord and nothing more?
- No.
- The followers of Caitanya Mahāprabhu who understand and have faith in the preeminence of vraja-bhakti may be servants of the Nārāyaṇa form of the Lord, but the grace of Lord Gaurāṅga awards them the devotion, residence, and form of Vraja-vāsīs.

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- Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu explains this while speaking to an assembly of devotees, including Advaita Ācārya and Śrīvāsa Ṭhākura:
- “So be it. I will go to Vṛndāvana and there I will accept you as My associates, and with My sweet pastimes I will fill your hearts with bliss.
- To you who have faith in Vṛndāvana I will give splendid spiritual forms like My own.
- That is what I will do for you.
- Those of you whose hearts are bound to Me in this form of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, even if your rasas are friendship or servitude to Śrī Rādhā-Mādhava or Lord Dvārakādiśa, or if your rasas are friendship or servitude to any of My other incarnations, I will make you into My eternally liberated associates in Goloka Vṛndāvana.” [Śrī Caitanya-candrodaya-nāṭaka 10.280–81]

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- The conclusion drawn from this and other such statements by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava ācāryas is that the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement provides for its followers a place in Goloka Vṛndāvana.
- Whatever their constitutional position, devotees are promoted to the topmost abode to relish the topmost mellows of love.
- This is the essence of Lord Caitanya’s mission: to give love specifically for Kṛṣṇa (kṛṣṇa-prema pradāya te). [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 19.53]
- Of course, if devotees have no knowledge of or faith in vraja-bhakti, if their firm devotion is reposed in a Vaikuṅṭha form of Lord Kṛṣṇa, then their destination will accord with their desires.
- Lord Caitanya implies this in the above quote, which states that He awards devotees vraja-bhakti on the condition that they have faith in Vṛndāvana.

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- If, despite ISKCON's directing its members to Kṛṣṇa and Vṛndāvana, some devotees remain firmly attached to another destination, then surely Lord Caitanya will fulfil their desire in that regard.
- However this would be the exception rather than the rule.
- Another frequently asked question: How can one's eternal identity change?
- In addition to the prime consideration that anything and everything is possible by Lord Caitanya's inconceivable grace, the transcendental desires of devotees to serve in a particular relationship, or more than one relationship, are also considerations.
- The Lord may promote devotees to exclusive service in Vraja or to serve simultaneously in multiple destinations, including Vraja.

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- In this way they attain other identities while retaining their original ones. [Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta 2.5.52–5 and 2.6.202–206]
- Lord Viṣṇu’s eternal carrier, Garuḍa, for example, is also an eternal associate of Lord Caitanya called Garuḍa Paṇḍita [Gaura-gaṇoddeśa-dīpikā 117] and is present in Vraja as Śrīdāmā.
- Similarly, the everlasting Ganges River that flows from the Causal Ocean throughout the universe is also present in Goloka as the gopī named Varā-prema-mañjarī. [See prayer by Abhirāma Ṭhākura in Our Merciful Mother Ganga.]
- And of course Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura states that Lord Caitanya’s followers may acquire eternal forms in Vraja as Vraja-vāsīs and in Śvetadvīpa as sādhakas. [Śrī Brahma-saṁhitā 5.5, purport]

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- There is also another way in which the Lord's associates have multiple identities, and that is in their services in Vṛndāvana.
- For instance, Lord Baladeva serves Kṛṣṇa in a conjugal relationship as Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇīs younger sister, Anaṅga-mañjarī, as well as in a fraternal relationship as Kṛṣṇa's elder brother. [Appreciating Śrī Vṛndāvana Dhāma]
- These are but a few of the many variations śāstra describes of perfected or eternally perfect devotees serving the Lord in multiple mellows and multiple forms.
- The essence of the above is that Lord Caitanya invites everyone to enter into the most treasured, most elevated, and most perfect relationship with Kṛṣṇa.
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- Hearing all this, some devotees may feel unfit to think of vraja-līlā even though they have a desire to think of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.

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- What should they do?
- In addition to meditating on the many forms of Kṛṣṇa's incarnations mentioned earlier, these devotees may meditate on Lord Caitanya's eightfold daily pastimes.
- Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda published a booklet called Śrīman-mahāprabhor-aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā-smaraṇa-maṅgala-stotram, which describes the process and substance of systematic worship of Gaurāṅga's pastimes.
- His pastimes are encapsulated in the following verse: [This book is sometimes attributed to Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura.]
- In any case, since Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura published it, it is authorized.]

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rātry-ante śayanotthitaḥ sura-sarit-snāto babhau yaḥ prage  
pūrvāhṇe sva-gaṇair lasaty upavane tair bhāti madhyāhṇike  
yah puryām-aparāhṇake nija-gr̥he sāyaṁ gr̥he ‘thāṅgane  
śrīvāsasya niśā-mukhe niśi vasan gauraḥ sa no rakṣatu

- “At the end of night and before sunrise, Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu gets up from His bed, stretches His body, talks with His wife, and washes His face.
- In the morning, after being massaged with oil, He bathes in the celestial Ganges River, and then worships Lord Viṣṇu.
- In the forenoon period He enjoys discussing topics about Lord Kṛṣṇa with His devotees during visits to their homes.
- At midday He enjoys pastimes in the gardens on the bank of the Ganges.



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- In the afternoon He wanders about the town of Navadvīpa, sporting with all the residents.
- At dusk He returns home to worship Lord Viṣṇu and perform other rituals.
- In the evening He goes with His associates to the courtyard of Śrīvāsa Paṇḍita to chant the holy names and dance in ecstasy.
- And at night He returns home to go to sleep.
- May this Lord Gaura protect us all.”
- The process of meditating on Lord Caitanya’s pastimes is not only bhajana but a special type of bhajana.
- It is a precursor to the bhajana of Kṛṣṇa’s eightfold pastimes.

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- Devotees must always approach meditation on Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa through meditation on Caitanya Mahāprabhu.
- This was Śrīla Prabhupāda’s instruction to his followers when he wrote that devotees must always chant the Pañca-tattva mahā-mantra before chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 8.4, purport.]
- He also said, “Therefore we do not worship Kṛṣṇa directly.
- Through Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu, through saṅkīrtana movement.
- That is the process prescribed in the śāstra.” [Lecture, Bhagavad-gītā 3.6–10, Los Angeles, 23 December, 1968]
- At the stage of steadiness, devotees have the minimum qualification to practise spontaneous devotion.

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- They have substantial faith in Kṛṣṇa but frail greed and immature knowledge.
- Although they are fit to purposefully study vraja-līlā, their efforts at meditating on Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes (dhyāna) are unsystematic and tainted by mundane topics.
- Furthermore, these devotees’ attempts at cultivating spontaneous devotion are dominated by intelligent endeavour rather than spiritual taste.
- Therefore this stage of advancement is actually the juncture between regulative and spontaneous devotional service in practice.
- In other words, because duty is the dominant impetus of steadiness, dutiful feelings tinge devotees’ spontaneity.
- Thus the devotional practices of devotees at niṣṭhā do not truly qualify as rāgānuga-bhakti but as a mixture of regulative and spontaneous devotion.

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- An example of this kind of mixed devotion occurs when devotees dutifully pray to Tulasīdevī: “My desire is that you will also give me a residence in the pleasure groves of Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma,” [Śrī Tulasī-pūjā-kīrtana 3] or when they meditate on the gopāla- and kāma-gāyatrī-mantras while thinking that by chanting these mantras they will develop spontaneous love.
- Śrī Jīva explains that spontaneous devotional service, no matter how well-performed, remains mixed with regulative devotion until ruci appears.
- The word ruci in this context may signify either the stage of taste or the stage of ecstasy.
- On the one hand, compared to the weak impetus inherent in steady practice, the intense attraction for vraja-bhakti at the stage of taste and attachment can be called spontaneous.

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- On the other hand, since the stages of taste and attachment are still in the realm of practice, and practise implies a certain degree of effort, it is also true that spiritually pure rāgānuga-bhakti manifests itself only at ecstasy.
- Jīva Gosvāmī goes on to say that practitioners are not the only ones to display a mix of spontaneous and regulative devotion; advanced devotees also sometimes display it in order to benefit the people of the world. [This paragraph is based on Bhakti-sandarbha, anuccheda 312]
- There are two nice examples of how Śrīla Prabhupāda introduced this type of mixed devotion.
- First, His Divine Grace instructed his disciples to carefully worship the deities of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, for thus they would learn to love Them.

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- Second, he gave his sannyāsī disciples the sannyāsa-mantra, the regular chanting of which would awaken a desire to cultivate the mood of the gopīs.
- In addition to pure and mixed spontaneous devotion, there is another authorized type called imitative.
- This third version is different from the false imitation of the sahajiyās, who indulge in practices far above their qualification.
- Authorized imitative practice occurs when regulative devotees without attraction to vraja-bhakti try to copy the practices of devotees advanced in spontaneous devotion.
- This is also different from the mixed devotion described above, in which regulative devotees have some attraction to the ways of Vraja.

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- Authorized imitative devotion involves devotees who are qualified in terms of faith, knowledge, sense control, and so on, but who lack greed.
- They are intermediate devotees with medium or high qualification for regulative devotion.
- Thākura Bhaktivinoda says that all things considered, such imitative practice is not even mixed spontaneous service but remains in the realm of regulative devotional service. [Śrī Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā, conclusion]
- Such imitative practice is beneficial in that it brings the regulative devotees into the company of spontaneous devotees.
- Emulation of spontaneous practices may then awaken eagerness in the regulative devotees.

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- When such eagerness arises, those regulative devotees will begin to veer toward the path of spontaneous devotion.
- Neophyte devotees, devotees who lack steadiness, should not attempt this practice, however, as it will degrade them.
- In the pages above, we have described different types of hearing appropriate for devotees practising spontaneous devotion, regulative devotion, mixed spontaneous and regulative devotion, and imitative spontaneous devotion.
- The thrust of this description is that whatever their mood, intermediate devotees must hear about Kṛṣṇa and His pastimes.
- In Śrīla Prabhupāda's introduction to Kṛṣṇa book, he emphasizes the need to hear Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.



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- He writes, “It is essential for persons who are actually liberated to hear about the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa.
- That is the supreme relishable subject matter for one in the liberated state.
- Also, if persons who are trying to be liberated hear such narrations as Bhagavad-gītā and Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, then their path of liberation becomes very clear.”
- Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura elaborates further on Śrīla Prabhupāda’s point concerning why all sādhakas must eventually purposefully hear about Kṛṣṇa—even about His aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā. [Gauḍīya Magazine 13.14, 10 November, 1934]
- The Ṭhākura spoke the following words while on Vraja-maṇḍala-parikrama in 1932:

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- Until now, we have not arranged for the public singing of līlā-kīrtana.
- The reason for this is that it is a very secret possession.
- However, it is the ultimate object of our practice.
- But lest anyone make the mistake of thinking that anartha-nivṛtti is the only goal and it is not necessary to enter into artha-pravṛtti, I have had aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā-kīrtana performances started.
- I know that you are not all ready to hear such kīrtana, but I want you to know that such a transcendental ideal exists within the realm of devotion which is the reason that you must engage in anartha-nivṛtti.
- After anartha-nivṛtti comes artha-pravṛtti, or the real world of service to the divine spiritual couple.

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- If we do not know that this is the goal, all our efforts may become transformed into impersonalism.
- Anyone who has been chanting the holy names for fifteen or twenty years should take note of this.
- All those who are just beginners have no need of listening to these kīrtanas.
- They will get the wrong idea of what is being sung.
- These kīrtanas are for those who are sevonmukha, who are eager for service, and not for everyone.
- Don't think that the aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā-smaraṇa is the exclusive property of the sahajiyās.

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- In fact, it belongs to us.
- We have to recover it from all these cheaters.
- My gurudeva heard all these things from Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura.
- That is why he repeatedly told me all these things in many ways in the most confidential manner.
- I had the opportunity to hear one of his last instructions.
- He said, ‘If you could deliver Rādhā-kuṇḍa from the hands of eleven atheistic rascals, it would be pleasant to live there.’
- Now perhaps eleven has increased to 108.

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- Our days pass in trying only for anartha-nivṛtti.
- Artha-pravṛtti is also necessary.
- Anartha-nivṛtti is important, but anartha-nivṛtti is necessary until artha-pravṛtti has started.
- When artha-pravṛtti is present, then anartha-nivṛtti becomes a secondary consideration, because artha-pravṛtti becomes prominent.
- Simply becoming a scholar and instructing others is insufficient.
- It is necessary to go forward and become a practitioner oneself.
- It is also important to examine your own advancement on the path of nonduplicitous bhajana.

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- These instructions of our parama-gurudeva, who vowed to stay a hundred paces from any sahajiyā, are certainly enlightening.
- On the one hand he says that after the stage of anartha-nivṛtti, devotees should hear about Kṛṣṇa's Vṛndāvana pastimes.
- They should even hear Kṛṣṇa's aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā.
- The qualification for these things is fifteen or twenty years of steady, eager service (sevonmukha).
- On the other hand, devotees who lack such qualifications should not hear such things.
- Yet both classes of devotees should know that hearing and remembering Kṛṣṇa's eightfold daily pastimes is the rightful sādhana of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.

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- From these instructions it is clear that devotees free from bad habits must make hearing about Kṛṣṇa's Vṛndāvana pastimes, especially His eightfold daily pastimes, their primary consideration.
- They should not only be professors of devotion but examples of its nonduplicitous practice.
- By doing so, their practice will mature and their attraction to Kṛṣṇa gradually become more specific.
- Eventually they will take shelter of one of the four permanent mellows.
- For instance, devotees inclined to follow the gopīs will keep the mood of the following prayer in their hearts day and night, especially while they worship the holy name:

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mayi prasādaṁ madhuraiḥ kaṭākṣair  
vaṁśī-ninādānucarair vidhehi  
tvayi prasanne kim ihāparair nas  
tvayy aprasanne kim ihāparair naḥ

- “O Lord! Kindly bestow upon me mercy in the form of Your sidelong glance followed by the sweet sound of Your flute. When You are pleased with me, even if others are displeased, it doesn’t matter. But when You are displeased with me, even if others are pleased, then what is the benefit for me?” (Kṛṣṇa-karṇāmṛta 29)
- Devotees who have reached the stage of strong taste (ruci) are fit for this kind of worship.
- Their faith is deep, their knowledge mature, and their qualification superlative (uttamādhikāra).



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- Furthermore, they have a strong relish for the practices of devotion, a taste that qualifies them with intermediate greed when it is directed to vraja-bhakti.
- It is to these devotees—not to the less qualified—that Śukadeva Gosvāmī recommends regular hearing of Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes with the gopīs as a means to further purify the heart.

vikrīḍitam vraja-vadhūbhir idam ca viṣṇoḥ  
śraddhānvito ’nuśṛṇuyād atha varṇayed yaḥ  
bhaktim parām bhagavati pratilabhya kāmam  
hṛd-rogam āśv apahinoty acireṇa dhīraḥ

- “Anyone who faithfully hears or describes the Lord’s playful affairs with the young gopīs of Vṛndāvana will attain the Lord’s pure devotional service. Thus he will quickly become sober and conquer lust, the disease of the heart.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.33.39)

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- Sahajiyās, who take devotional service cheaply, argue that anyone who has faith in Kṛṣṇa can hear about His most con-fi-dential and esoteric pastimes.
- Such hearing, they say, will purify devotees of the grossest types of material contamination and bring them to the platform of realized spontaneous devotion.
- The only prerequisite is faith in Kṛṣṇa.
- And it is true that faith is the only qualification for hearing rāsa-līlā.
- But to which type of faith does Śukadeva Gosvāmī refer?
- The saying “All you need is a horse to win the race” implies that you need the fastest horse on the racetrack.
- Any old nag will not do.

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- Similarly, to achieve transcendental loving service to Kṛṣṇa (parā bhakti) one certainly needs faith in Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes.
- But contrary to the sahajiyās’ opinion, any kind of faith will not do.
- One needs the best kind of faith, the faith characteristic of a devotee with the highest qualification (uttamādhikāra), the faith described by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī not as weak or even strong but as deep (prauḍha-śraddhā).
- One needs extraordinary faith. [Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.17] This is the type of faith of which Śukadeva Gosvāmī speaks.
- All Vaiṣṇavas know the most fundamental, elementary truth of devotional service: “Pure faith is the only qualification for pure devotional service” (yadṛcchayā mat-kathātau jāta-śraddhas tu yaḥ pumān). [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.20.8 and Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.14]

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- They also know that it is the quality and strength of their faith that makes them eligible for different grades of pure devotion.
- Thus Caitanya Mahāprabhu explains that it is according to the degree of the devotees' faith that they are known as first-class, second-class, or neophyte Vaiṣṇavas. [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 22.64]
- Based on these considerations it should be obvious to any honest person that the qualification for the topmost devotion can be nothing less than the topmost faith.
- This is the opinion of the topmost authority, Lord Kṛṣṇa, who requires that devotees be transcendently situated in order to attain the type of devotion of which Śukadeva Gosvāmī speaks:

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- parā bhakti.

brahma-bhūtaḥ prasannātmā  
na śocati na kāṅkṣati  
samaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu  
mad-bhaktim labhate parām

- “One who is thus transcendently situated at once realizes the Supreme Brahman and becomes fully joyful. He never laments nor desires to have anything; he is equally disposed to every living entity. In that state, he attains pure devotional service unto Me.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 18.54)
- It should be obvious to pure devotees—although it is not to the highly motivated sahajiyās—that the elevated state of parā bhakti is only to be had by very advanced devotees.

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- It is beyond the reach of neophytes, devotees incapable of sense control, what to speak of out-and-out debauchees.
- Śukadeva Gosvāmī's instruction should be understood through the teachings of realized ācāryas.
- When properly understood the message is clear: Devotees must be at least madhyama-bhaktas with topmost qualification (uttamādhikāra) in order to engage in systematic hearing and remembrance of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes with the gopīs, and only devotees at the stage of taste (ruci) or above fulfil that criterion.
- To further substantiate this most important understanding Caitanya-caritāmṛta offers invaluable explanation and commentaries on the vikṛīḍitam śloka.

## SBC 27 – Hearing with Steadiness and with Taste

- While speaking to Pradyumna Miśra Caitanya Mahāprabhu prefaced His explanation of Śukadeva Gosvāmī's instruction with these words: “When one hears or describes with great faith the pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa, such as His rāsa dance with the gopīs, the disease of lusty desires in his heart and the agitation caused by the three modes of material nature are immediately nullified, and he becomes sober and silent.” [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Antya-līlā 5.45–6]
- In his purport to these verses Śrīla Prabhupāda points out that Lord Caitanya's use of the word viśvāsa, “great faith,” is meant to emphasize the standard required to hear about or discuss the gopīs.
- Such faith is obviously not that of a neophyte, what to speak of a sense enjoyer. Similarly, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's translation of viśvāsa is “with great faith and a transcendental, spiritually inspired mind.” [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Antya-līlā 5.45–6, purport]

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- The word “great” already qualifies the faith required for hearing rāsa-līlā; however, the next phrase, “[with] a transcendental, spiritually inspired mind,” leaves little doubt that such practices are beyond the prerogative of ordinary devotees.
- It could be argued that devotees at the stage of niṣṭhā are qualified for aṣṭa-kālīya-smaraṇa, but since steady devotees have neither topmost qualification nor strong greed, it is more reasonable to argue that devotees with taste are secure candidates for such advanced worship.
- This last sentence may cause slight differences of opinion about the stage of devotion at which faith becomes deep (uttama), and consequently who should hear rāsa-līlā.
- We have touched on this in the introduction to chapter twenty-four.



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- Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda writes that faith becomes deep at the stage of taste: “The sādḥaka within whom such ruci has developed is called an uttamādhikārī.” [Bhakti-tattva-viveka 4]
- In another place he writes that deep faith appears at the stage of steadiness: “When śraddhā becomes deep by bhajana in the association of devotees, it then transforms progressively into steadiness, taste, attachment, and finally ecstasy.” [Śrī Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta, chapter 1, quoting Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 23.9–13]
- Since most other references indicate that an uttamādhikārī is a devotee at the stage of taste, and because there is no argument that at the stage of taste devotees have the topmost qualification, this book uses this safe standard.
- To conclude the subject of who should hear gopī-līlā, sincere devotees should allow their infallible previous ācāryas to answer the question so often discussed and hotly debated in Vaiṣṇava circles.

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- Less qualified commentators misunderstand, lead their followers into immorality, and plunge the reputation of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas into disrepute.
- Yet according to Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura hearing gopī-līlā is the “property” of Śukadeva Gosvāmī’s judicious followers, who “must” make it a part of their devotional life.
- The only question is when they should do so.
- The answer from ISKCON’s previous ācāryas is, “When they have the topmost qualification of faith.”
- Devotees who disobey this order, who plunge into Kṛṣṇa’s eightfold daily pastimes without being fit, artificially imitate their superiors and uproot their own devotional creepers.

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- For this reason the son of Vyāsa prefaces the vikrīḍitam śloka with the following warning:

naitat samācarej jātu  
manasāpi hy anīśvaraḥ  
vinaśyaty ācaran maudhyād  
yathārudro ‘bdhi-jaṁ viṣam

- “One who is not a great controller should never imitate the behaviour of ruling personalities, even mentally. If out of foolishness an ordinary person does imitate such behaviour, he will simply destroy himself, just as a person who is not Rudra would destroy himself if he tried to drink an ocean of poison.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.33.30)

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- On the other hand, devotees fit for such sādhana eventually enter into Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes in Vṛndāvana.
- In his translation of an invocation verse to Gīta-govinda, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura voices Jayadeva Gosvāmī teaching.
- Jayadeva Gosvāmī states:

yadi hari-smaraṇe sarasaṁ mano yadi vilāsa-kalāsu kutūhalam  
madhura-komala-kānta-padāvalīmśṛṇu tadā jayadeva-sarasvatīm

- “If you at all wish to fill your consciousness with the remembrance of Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and enter into a serving position within Their sublime pleasure pastimes on the banks of Rādhā-kuṇḍa, then listen carefully to this sweet and poignant song of Jayadeva, filled with the narration of Their divine love.”

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- Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī explains: “Within this verse there is relationship (sambandha) and the means of attaining perfection (abhidheya).
- The qualification (adhikāra) for entering one’s constitutional position in the confidential pastimes of Rādhā-Mādhava, rendering Them service, and realizing the highest ecstasy in that position, is attainable by those rasika devotees who are free from all anarthas.
- They are qualified to read this book and thus reach the highest goal (prayojana).” [Gīta-govinda 1.3, as cited in Gauḍīya-kaṅṭhahāra 18.18]
- When sincere devotees read this invocation verse, they are filled with hope and bliss.

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- They cherish the conviction that by proper execution of Kṛṣṇa consciousness they will enter into the pastimes in the spiritual world to serve there forever.

vraja-vadh-sage kera rsdi-vilsavraja-vadhū-saṅge kṛṣṇera rāsādi-vilāsa  
yei jana kahe, śune kariyā viśvāsa  
hd-roga-kma tra tat-kle haya kayahṛd-roga-kāma tānra tat-kāle haya kṣaya  
tina-guṇa-kṣobha nahe, ‘mahā-dhīra’ haya

- When one hears or describes with great faith the pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa, such as His rāsa dance with the gopīs, the disease of lusty desires in his heart and the agitation caused by the three modes of material nature are immediately nullified, and he becomes sober and silent. [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Antya-līlā 5.45–46]