

Śuddha-bhakti Cintāmaṇi

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Chapter 29- Hearing at Ecstasy and at Love

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- Śrīla Prabhupāda was sensitive to the slightest indication that his followers might be speculating about their spiritual identity (siddha-deha).
- He taught devotees to disassociate them-selves from the material body and to think of themselves as spiritual entities, “eternal parts and parcels of Kṛṣṇa.” [Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 2.71, purport]
- When they were further qualified, they could enhance their general identity as Kṛṣṇa’s servants by cultivating an eagerness to follow in the footsteps of the Lord’s associates.
- A devotee thus inclined could pray, “When shall I also become a gopī maidservant of the Divine Couple?”
- But if his disciples foolishly crossed the line of humble aspiration and, while still in the conditioned state, thought, “I am a gopī.

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- My name is Such-and-such and I serve Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in this way,” Śrīla Prabhupāda became indignant and immediately corrected his errant followers.
- This kind of imitative speculation was not only wrong, it was dangerous.
- It was the realm of the sahajiyās, and contact with that realm would poison the devotees’ spiritual lives and wreak havoc in ISKCON.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda taught that the sahajiyās’ fallacy is the belief that spiritual realization can be induced by material means, that Kṛṣṇa’s inferior material energy in the form of the senses, mind, and intelligence can be brought together to invoke the superior spiritual energy, and that by this artifice they can realize their siddha-deha.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda ridiculed this foolishness, exposing it for what it is—wishful thinking.

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- **Pradyumna:** Ah, siddha-praṇālī, siddha-deha?
- **Prabhupāda:** They are smoking and having illicit sex with one dozen women—svarūpa. Rascal. This is called sahajiyā, a rascal. Condemned. Where is your svarūpa? Don't talk unnecessarily. First of all come to svarūpa, then talk of svarūpa.
- **Devotee:** So our motivation should be to get free from birth, disease, old age, and death.
- **Prabhupāda:** That is already explained. But you must be determined how to execute devotional service. Without determined devotional service, how we can attain that position? So what is the use of talking utopian? First business is anartha-nivṛttiḥ syāt. Ādau śraddhā tathaḥ sādhu-saṅgo 'tha bhajana-kriyā tato anartha-nivṛttiḥ syāt. You adopt this means that you have got full faith that “Kṛṣṇa consciousness will save me.”

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- Then you live with devotees who are similarly determined. Then you execute devotional service. Then anartha-nivṛttiḥ syāt, you'll be free from all these....These are the stages....Up to anartha-nivṛtti you have to struggle very hard with determination, and then automatically everything will come. Tato niṣṭhā tato rucis tataḥ, athāsaktis tato bhāvaḥ. So before svarūpa, anartha-nivṛtti, don't expect all these. [Conversation, New Vrindavan, 23 June, 1976]
- We must always keep in mind Śrīla Prabhupāda's warning to those riddled with anarthas, but we must also continually hear his praise of those freed from anarthas, those for whom “everything will come.”
- For such devotees the aspiration for eternal service implies a legitimate spiritual identity more specific than that of a generic servant of Kṛṣṇa.
- The more devotees advance, the more they cultivate their coveted mood of service.

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- The stronger and more defined that mood becomes, the more specific their identity in relationship with Kṛṣṇa.
- This explicit identity is not yet their svarūpa, but it is the identity they desire.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “First deserve, then desire.” [Lecture, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.28.21, Nairobi, 1 November, 1975]
- Now these fortunate souls have come to deserve the legitimate desire for a specific service to Kṛṣṇa.

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- This desire is reflected, for example, in the way we sing to Tulasīdevī:

mora ei abhilāṣa, vilāsa kuñje dio vāsa
nayana heribo sadā yugala-rūpa-rāśi
ei nivedana dhara, sakhīra anugata koro
sevā-adhikāra diye koro nīja dāsī

- “My desire is that you will also give me a residence in the plea-sure groves of Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma. Thus within my vision I will always behold the beautiful pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. I beg you to make me a follower of the cowherd damsels of Vraja. Please give me the privilege of devotional service and make me your own maidservant.” (Śrī Tulasī-pūjā-kīrtana 3–4)

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- Pure-hearted devotees contemplate this song’s inner meaning and how it relates to them as individuals.
- Of the pure, the regulative devotees appreciate the natural consequence of serving Tulasī: eventual residence in Vraja.
- The spontaneous devotees at once begin to cultivate the ambition to become vraja-vāsīs.
- This ambition inevitably invokes the mood of a more specific identity, in this case, that of a maidservant to a gopī.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda expressed this idea with the words, “One should serve the Supreme Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, with a feeling similar to that of His associates.” [The Nectar of Instruction 8, purport]

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- For devotees inclined to spontaneous love, this more specific identity becomes a lasting impression that is reinforced by every aspect of their Kṛṣṇa consciousness lives.
- At maṅgalārati such devotees think of their spiritual master as an ecstatic associate of Lord Caitanya and as a gopī expert in serving Rādhā and Mādhava.
- While chanting the eighteen-syllable Gopāla mantra they offer themselves to Lord Govinda for service in the mood of a gopī with the word svāhā.
- And by chanting the Kāma-gāyatrī mantra they aspire to serve the transcendental cupid as befits only the cowherd damsels of Vraja.

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- Similarly, while singing other songs, such as Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura’s Prayer to the Sakhīs, or recalling these songs as they chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, they aspire for the mood and forms expressed by the authors. [Prārthanā, Sakhī-vṛnde-viṣṭi.]
- For those in the renounced order, perhaps the most compelling of all meditations, the sannyāsa-mantra, beckons them to offer their soul as an oblation into the fire of the gopīs’ conjugal love.
- The natural result of devotees’ cultivating a preferred mood of service is that they identify with the kind of body appropriate for that service.
- For devotees aspiring for the feelings of a gopī, then, it is natural to identify themselves as gopīs.

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- As devotees absorb themselves more and more in vraja-bhakti, their sense of identity as Vraja-vāsīs gradually becomes continuous during all kinds of services, at all times, day or night.
- As a result of relating constantly with their desired spiritual identity, devotees eventually become free from their deep-seated bodily designation.
- Considering Prabhupāda's stern warning not to prematurely enter the realm of siddha-deha, devotees may wonder how they can even entertain the idea of remembering a spiritual body and still remain obedient to His Divine Grace.
- But longing for a spiritual body is the natural consequence of deep absorption in hearing and chanting about the Vraja-vāsīs.
- It is a different thing from the foolish attempt to invoke a spiritual form.

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- This natural yearning for a spiritual body takes place as follows: The characteristic of devotees in rāga-bhakti is that the mind is naturally drawn to the Vraja-vāsīs.
- Absorption in hearing and chanting about Vraja leaves impressions of the Vraja-vāsīs' moods and characteristics in the devotees' minds.
- As these impressions become pervasive, devotees begin to identify with the Vraja-vāsīs.
- This identification leads to the strong ambition to become a Vraja-vāsī, an ambition which naturally includes the desire to have a suitable form.
- In this way devotees become absorbed in yearning for a spiritual body.
- Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam twice uses the same example—that of the grassworm and the wasp—to explain this transformation of consciousness.

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- First Nārada Muni recounts it to Yudhiṣṭhira Mahā-rāja, and then the avadhūta brāhmaṇa relates it to Mahārāja Yadu.
- Because of the importance of this concept, both references are cited here. Nārada Muni says:

kīṭaḥ peśaskṛtā ruddhaḥ
kuḍyāyām tam anusmaran
saṁrambha-bhaya-yogena
vindate tat-svarūpatām

evam kṛṣṇe bhagavati
māyā-manuja īsvare
vairēṇa pūta-pāpmānas
tam āpur anucintayā

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- “A grassworm confined in a hole of a wall by a bee always thinks of the bee in fear and enmity and later becomes a bee simply because of such remembrance. Similarly, if the conditioned souls somehow or other think of Kṛṣṇa, who is sac-cid-ānanda-vigraha, they will become free from their sins.
- Whether thinking of Him as their worshipable Lord or an enemy, because of constantly thinking of Him they will regain their spiritual bodies.” (Śrīmad-Bhagavatam 7.1.28–29)
- And the avadhūta-brāhmaṇa says:

kīṭaḥ peśaskṛtaṁ dhyāyan
kuḍyām tena praveśitaḥ
yāti tat-sātmatām rājan
pūrva-rūpam asantyan

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- “O King, once a wasp forced a weaker insect to enter his hive and kept him trapped there. In great fear the weak insect constantly meditated upon his captor, and without giving up his body, he gradually achieved the same state of existence as the wasp. Thus one achieves a state of existence according to one’s constant concentration.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.9.23)
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- The purport of these verses is that by constant meditation on a particular object, one’s consciousness becomes filled with its qualities.
- The smaller insect, absorbed by fear in the qualities and movements of the larger one, assumed all the characteristics on which it had meditated, even while in its small insect body.

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- Of course, at death this small insect assumed the form of the larger wasp.
- In the same way, devotees drawn to constant thoughts of the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana assume a similar body in the mind, even before they realize their form from the spiritual platform.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda summarizes this process: “The gradual evolutionary progress of the material body depends on psychological changes within the mind.
- The change of the bodily construction of a worm into that of a butterfly and, in modern medical science the conversion of a man’s body into that of a woman (or vice versa) are more or less dependent on psychological changes.” [Easy Journey to Other Planets, chapter 1]

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- It is extremely important to note, however, that this mental impression is not the siddha-deha; it is merely a vehicle by which devotees mentally cultivate pure devotional service, just as the gross material body is a vehicle through which devotees physically cultivate service.
- As to identify with the body made of five senses is an illusion, so to identify with the subtle body made of mind, intelligence, and false ego is an illusion.
- For instance, devotees accept the role of the twice-born to worship the deity but do not identify themselves as brāhmaṇas.
- Similarly, they accept the mood of the Vraja-vāsīs in order to always remember Kṛṣṇa but do not identify themselves as Vraja-vāsīs.

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- This is the proper position from which to cultivate vraja-bhakti.
- Just as thoughts such as “I desire to be the servant of Kṛṣṇa’s servant” are conducive for cultivating regulative devotional service, thoughts such as “I desire to be the servant of the maintainer of the gopīs” are conducive for cultivating spontaneous devotional service.
- Caitanya Mahāprabhu taught His followers this mental discipline:

nāham vipro na ca nara-patir nāpi vaiśyo na śūdro
nāham varṇī na ca gṛha-patir no vanastho yatir vā
kintu prodyan-nikhila-paramānanda-pūrnāmṛtābdher
gopī-bhartuḥ pada-kamalayor dāsa-dāsānudāsaḥ

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- “I am not a brāhmaṇa, I am not a kṣatriya, I am not a vaiśya or a śūdra.
- Nor am I a brahmacārī, a householder, a vānaprastha, or a sannyāsī.
- I identify Myself only as the servant of the servant of the servant of the lotus feet of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the maintainer of the gopīs.
- He is like an ocean of nectar, and He is the cause of universal transcendental bliss. He always brilliantly exists.” (Padyāvalī 74)
- The key to avoiding an artificial imitation of one’s siddha-svarūpa is to follow the example of the ācāryas, whose unassuming prayers and meditations do not presume qualification for direct service.

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- Rather, their songs sound like those of devotees aspiring for such service: “When will that auspicious day come in which I will make a seat for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa?” [Prārthanā 15.1]
- Or, “When will you give me eternal service to Rādhā?” [Gītāvalī, Rādhāṣṭakam 4.9]
- This kind of appeal in its perfect stage is known as lālasāmayī, and Śrīla Prabhupāda says that devotees make such appeals at the stage of “perfect liberation called svarūpa-siddhi.” [Padyāvalī 74]
- However, when devotees begin to imagine their Vraja-vāsī age, form, and dress, they transgress the principles of pure devotion and spoil their chances for perfection.

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- Pure attachment to Kṛṣṇa (rati) and one's spiritual form (siddha-deha) and its eleven constituents (ekādaśa-bhāva) all manifest themselves naturally with the dawning of ecstasy.
- Such perfections descend from the spiritual platform to devotees who sincerely serve Lord Caitanya's mission and who cultivate pure devotional service under proper guidance.
- It is as futile to attempt to induce these things as it is to try to force trees to bear fruit.
- When the appropriate season arrives, flowers will naturally blossom, fructify, and in time become relishable fruit.

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- Similarly, when devotees attain mature Kṛṣṇa consciousness, from either the regulative or spontaneous platform, their devotional service automatically reveals their spiritual form.
- In chapter seventeen of The Nectar of Devotion, Śrīla Prabhupāda introduces Rūpa Gosvāmī's description of ecstatic devotion: “By the process of executing regulated devotional service, one is actually elevated onto the transcendental stage, beyond the material modes of nature.
- At that time one's heart becomes illuminated like the sun.
- The sun is far above the planetary systems, and there is no possibility of its being covered by any kind of cloud; similarly, when a devotee is purified like the sun, from his pure heart there is a diffusion of ecstatic love, which is more glorious than the sunshine.

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- Only at that time is the attachment to Kṛṣṇa perfect. Spontaneously, the devotee becomes eager to serve the Lord in his ecstatic love.
- At this stage the devotee is on the platform of uttamādhikārī, perfect devotion.
- Such a devotee has no agitation from material affections and is interested only in the service of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.”
- Devotees at the stage of bhāva are completely fit to hear Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes.
- They are transcendently situated, they have pure greed for vraja-bhakti, and their only interest is in Kṛṣṇa’s service.
- Such advanced devotees remain always absorbed in thoughts of the Lord, and the meditations they undergo while systematically worshipping the holy name are spiritually inspired.

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- These revelations have two transcendental features: the appearance of Kṛṣṇa and His associates in the mind (sphūr̥ti), and the manifestation of the devotees' own spiritual identity (siddha-deha).
- By the strength of the pure vibration of Kṛṣṇa's names, Kṛṣṇa and His entourage become visible to the spiritual eyes of these pure devotees.
- This means that the pastimes once heard and recalled through the mind actually appear on the mirror of the heart.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda calls this “spiritual television.” [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.6.33, purport]
- There is a difference, of course, between the remembrance of devotees and ordinary television.

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- Ecstatic devotees do more than observe Kṛṣṇa's pastimes; they participate in them. Freed from all material coverings and having received the blessings of the Transcendence, their original spiritual form as a gopa or gopī manifests itself as a participant in the pastimes they are observing.
- It should be clear, however, that the spiritual form of a realized devotee does not manifest itself in every pastime he or she hears.
- That form is present only in the pastimes in which the devotee has an eternal role, as determined by the Lord's pastime potency (līlā-śakti).
- The devotees hear and remember other pastimes of the Lord, but in the mood of separation.
- At the stage of bhāva devotees revive their eternal identity by gradual cultivation.

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- The revelation does not happen all at once, and it is not a one-time event.
- By the grace of the spiritual energy (śuddha-sattva), devotees first gain awareness of their constitutional position (sthāyi-bhāva), which is fixed in a specific relationship, though they do not as yet see their own defining characteristics.
- Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī writes of this gradual introduction to the spiritual body:

dukla bibhram atha kuca-taedeutūlaṁ bibhrāṇam atha kuca-taṭe kañcuka-paṭam
prasādam svāminyāḥ sva-kara-tala-dattam praṇayataḥ
sthit nitya prve vividha-sthitām nityam pārśve vividha-paricaryaika-caturām
kiśorīm ātmānam caṭula-parakīyām nu kalaye

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- “In my siddha-deha I am a maidservant of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. With deep affection She has bestowed upon me Her mercy in the form of clothing She has worn. I will wear this clothing and see myself as an adolescent young girl, always near my mistress, at Her beck and call to cleverly serve Her in various ways. Without a second thought I will abandon my husband and serve day and night, the lotus feet of Rādhā in the groves of Vṛndāvana.” (Rādhā-rasa-sudhā-nidhi 53)
- Chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and remembering Kṛṣṇa’s eightfold daily pastimes reveal further details of the ecstatic devotees’ spiritual identity.
- As they hanker for admittance into Kṛṣṇa’s eternal service, the eleven aspects of their identity (ekādaśa-bhāva) manifest themselves individually, together, or all at once.

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- By the touchstone of the holy name, the mellow or taste of their relationship becomes increasingly thicker as the mood of their constitutional identity combines with four other ingredients, namely, special ecstasy, subordinate ecstasy, natural ecstasy, and transitory ecstasy. [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 23.48]
- From the mature combination of these five kinds of ecstasy, love for Kṛṣṇa arises.
- In this way the taste for hearing, chanting, and remembering Kṛṣṇa's pastimes continues to increase.
- Although at practice and ecstasy the stages of the devotees' hearing are the same—purposeful, practised, or specific—there is a gulf of difference, qualitatively, between the two.
- At practice, the divine realm about which devotees hear is a spiritual reality far distant from the hearers, whereas at ecstasy it is the reality in which they live.

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- Therefore it is known as the stage of application (āpana-daśā).
- No matter how much a person hears about the sweetness of nectar, the joy of hearing these descriptions pales beside the pleasure of actually tasting nectar.
- Similarly, when the senses become spiritually empowered, hearing about Kṛṣṇa's pastimes takes on new, previously inconceivable dimensions.
- Devotees who have revived their spiritual identity gain the shelter of the Vraja-vāsīs.
- While hearing about the Vraja-vāsīs, then, such greatly fortunate souls are no longer hearing about outsiders but about their own kith and kin.

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- Of all the Vraja-vāsīs, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī is foremost, and She bestows on devotees spiritual bliss enhanced with the mood of paramour love and more, inconceivable feelings of separation from Kṛṣṇa.
- Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇīs shelter is not only for devotees in the mood of conjugal love.
- Those in the conjugal mood take shelter of Her in a special way, but every devotee following the Vraja-vāsīs in any one of the four relationships must take shelter of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī.
- She is the queen of Vṛndāvana, the mistress of Kṛṣṇa’s heart, and the source of all transcendental pleasure.
- No one can gain access to vraja-bhakti, Vṛndāvana, or Kṛṣṇa without Her grace.

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- When devotees in ecstasy read the “Song of the Gopīs,” they do so with the same feelings of separation the goddesses of Vṛndāvana have expressed in these songs. [Chapter thirty-one of the Tenth Canto of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam is called “Song of the Gopīs,” or Gopī-gītā]
- They also taste a similar type of bliss.
- Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda advises advanced devotees to cultivate ecstatic devotion by hearing the pastimes of the Vraja-vāsīs in separation from Kṛṣṇa. [Śrī Bhajana-rahasya 7]
- The moods of separation before meeting (pūrva-rāga), such as those described in my book, Veṇu-gītā, and the moods of separation after Kṛṣṇa’s departure from Vraja (pravāsa), such as those described in my Kṛṣṇa-saṅgati, are especially favourable to systematic worship (bhajana).

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- When the bliss derived from hearing and remembering Kṛṣṇa's pastimes agitates the spiritually transformed life-force of ecstatic souls, their bodies display symptoms such as crying or trembling.
- The eight signs of existential ecstatic love, the treasures of completely pure hearts, are: becoming stunned, perspiring, standing of the hairs on the body, faltering of the voice, trembling of the body, changing of bodily colour, shedding of tears, and becoming devastated. [Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 2.3.16]
- Although made spiritually opulent with such ecstasies, highly advanced devotees remain humble like spiritual commoners.
- They always remember Rūpa Gosvāmī's instruction to conduct themselves like neophytes in public.

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- In this regard, Caitanya Mahāprabhu gave the classic example of an adulterous woman who hides all signs of her newfound love:

para-vyasaninī nārī
vyagrāpi gṛha-karmasu
tad evāsvādayaty antar
nava-saṅga-rasāyanam

- “If a woman is attached to a man other than her husband, she will appear very busy in carrying out her household affairs, but within her heart she is always relishing feelings of association with her paramour.” (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 1.211)

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- The wealth of devotees who truly taste the nectar of Kṛṣṇa's names and pastimes is not in the display of ecstatic symptoms.
- They do not need cheap adoration from neophytes or the materialistic public.
- When they hear topics of Kṛṣṇa, they are submerged in an ocean of mellows.
- In such a saturated condition, their body transforms into pure spiritual substance (sac-cid-ānanda).
- To explain this wonderful transformation of matter to spirit, Śrīla Prabhupāda often used the example of an iron rod taking on the quality of fire by continuous contact with fire. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.7.36, purport]

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- Śrī Kṛṣṇa explained the same transformation in a different way to Uddhava: “A person who gives up all fruitive activities and offers himself entirely unto Me, eagerly desiring to render service unto Me, achieves liberation from birth and death and is promoted to the status of sharing My own opulences.” [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.29.34]
- When Kṛṣṇa abandoned the gopīs on the full-moon night of the autumn season after having called them into the heart of the forest, the wives of the gopas became distraught.
- To mitigate the distress caused by separation from their lover, they first searched everywhere for Him.
- Not finding Him, they became overwhelmingly absorbed in Him, so much so that they began to think that they were Him.

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- In that mood they acted out many of His pastimes. Śukadeva Gosvāmī uses the term tad-ātmikāḥ, which literally means that they were “filled with His presence,” to express the gopīs’ transformation. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.30.14]
- This is the topmost perfection—to achieve a oneness with Kṛṣṇa that is both inconceivable to and infinitely beyond the desires of austere Māyāvādīs.
- This oneness is the prerogative of Kṛṣṇa’s companions alone, and a state worshipable by practising and perfect devotees alike.
- These sincere Vaiṣṇavas shun the allurements of being recognized as great devotees, for they know well that their coveted goal of love for Kṛṣṇa is ever distant from the duplicitous heart.

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- Thus by carefully cultivating the holy name and hearing about Kṛṣṇa, the devotees' almost irrepressible greed for service to Him—which for many Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas means service to Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī quickly elevates them to the stage of love.
- Among loving devotees, the first to come to mind is Śrīla Prabhupāda.
- Sometimes there is controversy, sometimes friendly discussion, about what kind of relationship Śrīla Prabhupāda enjoys with Kṛṣṇa.
- Is it the relationship of a friend or that of a lover?

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- Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that Gauḍīya ācāryas are generally in one of these two rasas: “In all the ancient literatures of devotional service and in the more recent songs of Śrīla Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and other unalloyed Vaiṣṇavas, the spiritual master is always considered either one of the confidential associates of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī or a manifested representation of Śrīla Nityānanda Prabhu.” [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 1.46, purport]
- One thing is sure: Śrīla Prabhupāda, for reasons of his own, did not disclose his identity to his followers.
- By contrast, in his song Siddhi-lālasā, Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda reveals his identity as Kamala-mañjarī, and Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura was glorified while physically present as Nayana-mañjarī.
- But Śrīla Prabhupāda, like some other Vaiṣṇava ācāryas, remained silent.

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- It is appropriate, then, that whatever devotees’ speculations or even realizations, ISKCON’s members should respect Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mood and on this topic, observe silence in public.
- Kavi Karṇapūra also indicates this mood in his book, Śrī Gaura-gaṇoddeśa-dīpikā.
- Although the author identifies all of Lord Caitanya’s associates in their roles as residents of heaven, Vaikuṅṭha, or Goloka, about his own spiritual master he writes, “The scriptures state: ‘A disciple should not address his spiritual master by name.’”
- For this reason I have not mentioned the previous name of my spiritual master, Śrī Śrīnātha Cakravartī.” [Śrī Gaura-gaṇoddeśa-dīpikā 210]
- At the stage of love, the rasa-laden worship of great devotees fully matures.

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- The attachment that began to bud at the stage of ecstasy now blossoms with the flowers and fruit of love of Godhead.
- The greatly blissful chanting of such devotees absorbs their mind in the multitude of services they render in their eternal form.
- If gopīs, their services include:

mithaḥ prema-guṇotkīrtis tayor āsakti-kāritā
abhisāro dvayor eva sakhyāḥ kṛṣṇe samarpaṇam

narmāśvāsana-nepathyaṁ hṛdayodghāṭa-pāṭavam
chidra-saṁvṛtir etasyāḥ paty-ādeḥ parivañcanā

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śikṣā saṅgamaṁ kāle sevanaṁ vyajanādibhiḥ
tayor dvayor upālabhaḥ sandeśa-preṣaṇaṁ tathā
nāyikā-prāṇa-saṁrakṣā prayatnādyāḥ sakhī-kriyāḥ

- In the conjugal pastimes of Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa is the hero (nāyaka), and Rādhikā is the heroine (nāyikā).
- The first service of the gopīs is to chant the glories of both the hero and the heroine.
- Their second service is to gradually create a situation in which the hero may be attracted to the heroine and vice versa.
- Their third service is to induce both of Them to approach one another.

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- Their fourth service is to offer Rādhārāṇī to Kṛṣṇa, the fifth to create a jovial atmosphere, the sixth to give Them assurance of Their meeting, the seventh to dress and decorate both hero and heroine, the eighth to cleverly inspire Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa to express Their minds, the ninth to conceal the faults of the heroine, the tenth to cheat their respective husbands and relatives, the eleventh to give instruction, the twelfth to enable both hero and heroine to meet at the proper time, the thirteenth to fan both hero and heroine, the fourteenth to sometimes reproach the hero and heroine, the fifteenth to send messages, and the sixteenth to protect the heroine by various means. [Ujjvala-nīlamaṇi, quoted in Śrī Bhajana-rahasya]
- The Lord's appearing only in a devotee's mind satisfies neither the hero, the heroine, nor Their eternal companions.
- Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī therefore takes Kṛṣṇa by the hand and brings Him to where Their devotee is doing bhajana.

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- The Divine Couple watch for some time as Their devotee, absorbed in confidential services, lovingly chants Their names.
- To draw his attention, the hero and heroine suddenly disappear from the devotee's meditation and refuse to be found either by intense efforts or humble pleas.
- In the agony of separation, the devotee opens his eyes to find his worshipable Deities before him.
- He then erupts in a volcano of ecstatic bliss and bathes Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's feet with nectarean tears of love.
- This is the ultimate goal of life, for which a pure devotee yearns.

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- On receiving this direct vision of the Lord and mistress of their hearts (sākṣādarśana), the minds of such devotees depart for the unmanifest realm of Goloka, never to return to this material realm.
- Although their physical body continues to reside in this world, in reality they only appear to live here.
- Before, they lived in this world and engaged the spiritual body in acts of perfection; now, they live in the perfect realm and engage the material body in service to the conditioned souls.
- Neither the most sumptuous prasāda nor the most potent medicine can sustain them.
- Only hearing about Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and chanting Their names can keep the material and spiritual bodies of such liberated souls together.

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- The Vraja-vāsīs’ lives testify to this state, as the gopīs describe:

tava kathāmṛtaṁ tapta-jīvanam
kavibhir īḍitaṁ kalmaṣāpaham
śravaṇa-maṅgalaṁ śrīmad ātataṁ
bhuvi gṛṇanti ye bhūri-dā janāḥ

- “The nectar of Your words and the descriptions of Your activities are the life and soul of those suffering in this material world. These narrations, transmitted by learned sages, eradicate one’s sinful reactions and bestow good fortune upon whoever hears them. These narrations are broadcast all over the world and are filled with spiritual power. Certainly those who spread the message of Godhead are most munificent.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.31.9)

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- For the perfect devotees of this world, for Kṛṣṇa’s eternal companions, and even for Kṛṣṇa Himself, hearing about Hari is as relishable as being with Him personally.
- Hearing about Kṛṣṇa is an addictive intoxicant that possesses devotees, makes them abandon worldly things, and forces them into the slavery of habitual hearing.
- While speaking to the bumblebee Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī said, “To hear about the pastimes that Kṛṣṇa regularly performs is nectar for the ears.
- For those who relish just a single drop of that nectar, even once, their dedication to material duality is ruined.
- Many such persons have suddenly given up their wretched homes and families and, themselves becoming wretched, travelled here to Vṛndāvana to wander about like birds, begging for their living.” [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.47.18]

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- Topics about Kṛṣṇa are so nectarean that they are nectar for even His ears (kṛṣṇa-karṇāmṛta).
- Although He is the goal of all self-controlled yogīs, when He hears His own pastimes, Kṛṣṇa cannot control Himself.
- Once, while in the gopīs' presence, in order to hear the milkmaids' playful talks, so pleasing to the ear and mind, Kṛṣṇa closed His eyes and pretended to sleep.
- He listened as the gopīs described His fickle glances, witty talk, slow gait, eager embraces, and agitating smile.
- But when they spoke of their verbal duels with Him, disputes filled with loving exchanges, double meanings, and His natural boyishness, Kṛṣṇa could not restrain the gentle smile that came to His lips nor the rising tide of love that caused His hair to stand on end.

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- Seeing these symptoms of ecstasy, the gopīs understood that Kṛṣṇa was listening to their confidential talks and they sank into an ocean of embarrassment. [This paragraph is based on Kṛṣṇa-karṇāmṛta 21, 27, 33]
- When Kṛṣṇa left Vṛndāvana the Vraja-vāsīs followed Him, but their bodies without their minds stayed in Vraja, sustained only by chanting and hearing about Him.
- Similarly, perfect pure devotees live only on kṛṣṇa-kathā.
- When they complete their service in this world, they abandon the only obstacle to entering fully into Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes—the material body.
- At this stage they attain life’s perfection (sampatti-daśā) and become the subject of praise for sādhakas and siddhas alike.

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- This is the ultimate limit of hearing about Kṛṣṇa and the ultimate limit of this book.
- Although the cultivation of rasa continues for those sādhana-siddhas who enter Kṛṣṇa's pastimes, this book will not describe it.
- Readers who desire to know more about it may consult such books as Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta and Jaiva-dharma.
- Otherwise, perfected devotees will receive direct training from Kṛṣṇa's eternal associates, the Vraja-vāsīs.

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- There can be no better form of hearing than that.

yāha, bhāgavata paḍa vaiṣṇavera sthāne
ekānta āśraya kara caitanya-carāṇe

- “If you want to understand Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam,” he said, “you must approach a self-realized Vaiṣṇava and hear from him.
- You can do this when you have completely taken shelter of the lotus feet of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.” [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Antya-līlā 5.131]