

Śuddha-bhakti Cintāmaṇi

by H.H Śivarāma Swami

Chapter 32- *Achieving* Perfection

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- The parikrama finished as successfully as it had begun, and at the conclusion of the month of Kārttika the devotees left Vṛndāvana-dhāma and returned to the West.
- They were sad to leave Rādhā-Mādhava, Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma, Māyāpur, and Vṛndāvana, but they were also happy to be returning to their services in their preaching fields.
- Back at the preaching centre Acyutānanda served with renewed vigour and studied Caitanya-caritāmṛta with the purpose of understanding both reasons for Lord Caitanya’s mission, the external and the confidential.
- Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa had told him, “Don’t make the mistake of thinking that what is internal, or confidential is more important than what is external.
- It’s not that one is material and the other spiritual.

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- They are two sides of the same coin. Therefore, preaching and tasting vraja-bhakti are inseparable.”
- Acyutānanda was careful to follow this advice as he cultivated the process of remembrance.
- He fixed his mind attentively on the Gāyatrī mantras, and while chanting japa recalled the pastimes he had heard in Vṛndāvana and the other holy places they had visited.
- He knew these to be the activities of spontaneous devotion and hoped that by performing them his attraction to Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes would increase.
- Acyutānanda felt safe hearing Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes through the pastimes of Lord Caitanya, but he also began to regularly read Kṛṣṇa book because Śrīla Prabhupāda had encouraged it.

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- Sometimes when he and Gaura Hari would meet or talk by phone, they would speak about Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes.
- [The Kūrma Purāṇa, as cited by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī in his Anubhāṣya comments to Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta (Ādi-līlā 5.41–48), says deha-dehi-vibhedo ‘yam neśvare vidyate kvacit: there is no difference between Kṛṣṇa’s soul and His body.
- In the same way, from the point of view of siddhānta there is no difference between the external and confidential aspects of Lord Caitanya’s appearance.
- By understanding this, Acyutānanda has the proper perspective with which to practise spontaneous devotion while engaged in preaching and regulative devotion.]

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- By studying Śrīla Prabhupāda’s instructions on cultivating vraja-bhakti it became clear to Acyutānanda that His Divine Grace did not want neophyte devotees dabbling in it.
- Devotees free from most unwanted habits could cultivate it, provided their efforts did not conflict with their services and with ISKCON’s preaching mission.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted devotees to subordinate their inner development, their tasting of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, to the all-important mission of spreading the chanting of the holy names.
- Acyutānanda also found through his research that Śrīla Prabhupāda supported cultivation of spontaneous devotion by qualified devotees.

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- But he wanted them to follow Lord Caitanya’s example and perform the external and confidential aspects of Kṛṣṇa consciousness side by side, being careful to keep the confidential aspect really confidential.
- Prabhupāda definitely did not want devotees to make confidential cultivation a visible sādhana, or worse, a public spectacle.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda said that devotees could only engage in spontaneous devotion full time when they had completed their service to Lord Caitanya’s mission.
- In their old age such devotees could retire for nirjana-bhajana, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, think of Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes, “and write books.”
- As a preacher, Acyutānanda saw the wisdom of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s approach to spontaneous devotion.

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- He felt no overwhelming greed to cultivate vraja-bhakti even internally, yet he accepted that it was his goal in life.
- He applied himself to remembering Kṛṣṇa's pastimes and bit by bit learned more from his personal studies.
- He saw that some devotees feared even hearing about Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.
- To Acyutānanda that seemed like paranoia.
- Others knew about vaidhī bhakti and rāga-bhakti but were not drawn to spontaneous devotion.
- Still other devotees felt as he did.

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- These devotees seemed to apply certain aspects of spontaneous devotion to their overall regulative service.
- The only devotee he knew who displayed real greed for vraja-sevā—who seemed irresistibly drawn to thoughts of Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes—was Gaura Hari.
- As for his spiritual master and Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa, they were too grave, too senior, for Acyutānanda to evaluate.
- He could only know what they were willing to reveal to him.
- [Lord Kapiladeva says, “There are multifarious paths of devotional service in terms of the different qualities of the executor” (bhakti-yogo bahu-vidho mārḡair bhāmini bhāvya-te/ svabhāva-guṇa-mārḡeṇa puṁsāṁ bhāvo vibhidya-te).

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- In Bhakti-sandarbha, anuccheda 234. Jīva Gosvāmī quotes this verse to substantiate that there are many types of spontaneous devotional service in practice.
- Acyutānanda observes at least four types of such spontaneous practice in ISKCON.
- The first is found in the fully regulative devotees.
- These devotees fear the pitfalls of rāga-bhakti and avoid it, sometimes unreasonably avoiding talk of it, not knowing that their vaidhī bhakti is actually a form of spontaneous service.
- The second is found in learned regulative devotees who are not averse to spontaneous devotion but who have neither eagerness nor a feeling of duty to cultivate it.

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- The third resembles Acyutānanda's devotion, where he takes up some of the practices of spontaneous devotion with the hope that from such cultivation, greed will come.
- The fourth is like Gaura Hari's devotion.
- Gaura Hari cultivates spontaneous service, even at the stage of practice, out of strong eagerness or greed.]
- A few years after the Vṛndāvana parikrama, Acyutānanda visited Govinda Mahārāja, who was resting at a farm community a day's drive away.
- His spiritual master was in poor health and at seventy-six had significantly curtailed his travelling.
- Acyutānanda was eager to have his holy association.

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- When Acyutānanda entered Govinda Mahārāja’s room he was taken aback by his spiritual master’s gaunt appearance.
- Old age and a lifetime of travelling had taken their toll. Govinda Mahārāja spoke with a weak voice.
- “It happens to everyone,” he said.
- Acyutānanda bowed his head and collected himself.
- They spoke for many hours.
- Govinda Mahārāja was relaxed, more informal, and more open than Acyutānanda had ever known him to be.
- “What was your conclusion?” asked his guru.

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- For a moment Acyutānanda was uncertain what Govinda Mahārāja meant.
- Then he understood that his guru mahārāja was referring to their conversation in Vṛndāvana about spontaneous devotional service.
- Acyutānanda explained his understanding of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s teachings and his approach to rāgānuga-bhakti.
- “Thank you,” his guru replied.
- “You have understood Śrīla Prabhupāda and have made a wise decision. Continue forward.
- Preach and chant purely.
- In time everything will be revealed.” Acyutānanda then asked a question.

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- “I am not overly concerned. Still, I am curious. How will my eternal spiritual identity be revealed?”
- Govinda Mahārāja answered without hesitation, “I am waiting for the empowerment from Śrīla Prabhupāda and Lord Caitanya to reveal such things.
- If it does not come to me by the time you are ready to know your siddha-deha, then the holy name or Caitanya Mahāprabhu will personally reveal it to you.
- Do not be anxious.
- Have faith in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s line.”
- Then again he repeated his assurance: “In time everything will be revealed.” And he added with a smile “Māśucaḥ.”

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- The conversation that followed was sweet, intimate, and unprecedented, but it had an unsettling sense of finality.
- Acyutānanda had the same uneasy feeling in their daily meetings that followed the evening Bhagavad-gītā class.
- The last meeting before Acyutānanda left was especially sweet.
- Govinda Mahārāja spoke of Śrīla Prabhupāda, Lord Caitanya’s mission, and of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.
- “I always pray,” Govinda Mahārāja said, “that Śrīla Prabhupāda and Lord Caitanya will bless me with service to Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī.”
- There was a pause, and then Govinda Mahārāja continued.

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- “The best service to Kṛṣṇa is service to Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, and the best service to Her is to preach about Kṛṣṇa.
- If a devotee’s preaching pleases Her, then She will accept that devotee.
- In that case all desires are fulfilled.
- I tried my best to serve Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mission. You do the same.”
- Acyutānanda could not bring himself to ask why his spiritual master was speaking as if he were bidding him farewell.
- When he finally offered his obeisances, Govinda Mahārāja pulled him to his chest and embraced him.
- “I am proud that I have disciples like you to offer at Śrīla Prabhupāda’s lotus feet.”

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- As Acyutānanda was leaving, Govinda Mahārāja waved to him.
- “If you have questions, ask Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa Prabhu.
- He is an advanced devotee.
- He does not speak everything he knows, but if you prompt him he will guide you. Māśucaḥ.”
- That was the last instruction Acyutānanda was to receive from Govinda Mahārāja.
- Two months later Acyutānanda received news that his guru mahārāja had passed away.
- For the first time in his Kṛṣṇa conscious life, Acyutānanda felt alone.

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- He cried, chanted in his room, and reread the letters he had received from his spiritual master.
- A week later he received Govinda Mahārāja’s copy of Caitanya-caritāmṛta in the post.
- It was sent by his personal servant and was signed by Govinda Mahārāja, “To my beloved disciple, Acyutānanda Dāsa Brahmācārī.”
- In the years that followed, Acyutānanda tried to fulfil his gurudeva’s final instruction.
- He preached with great enthusiasm to introduce pure devotion into the lives of conditioned souls.

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- Many young men and women became full-time devotees, and even more became practitioners at home and supported the movement in various ways.
- Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa, Acyutānanda, and the president of the farm, with the guidance of their GBC, were a powerful team.
- They guided the yātrā to unprecedented success.
- The city centre was the hub of book distribution and preaching, the farm the focus of varṇāśrama development and self-sufficiency.
- Ordinary people respected the Hare Kṛṣṇas as true spiritualists, and they acknowledged Śrīla Prabhupāda's spiritual solutions to the seemingly irresolvable ills of materialistic society.
- All in all it was a good time for ISKCON. And it was a good time for Acyutānanda.

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- Now past his mid-forties, Acyutānanda preached with the compassionate desire to give Kṛṣṇa to others.
- Gone were the days of his trying to impress or defeat opponents.
- Gone too were the days of his trying to use superior knowledge to lord it over juniors.
- He empathized with the plight of foolish materialists and the struggles of neophyte devotees. He wanted to help them.
- Those who came in contact with Acyutānanda felt at ease.
- From the tone of his voice, the softness of his glance, the truth of his words, they instinctively understood that he was not out to exploit them.

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- Acyutānanda had become a true sādhu, a friend to all—devotees and conditioned souls alike.
- Though recognition as a saintly devotee brought the allurements of fame, distinction, and worship, Acyutānanda did not succumb to these subtle impediments to his spiritual life.
- Rather, he remained strict in his spiritual practices and pure at heart.
- He never forgot that he was the servant of others.
- Acyutānanda’s spiritual activities had given him great strength. [Even when devotees succeed in overcoming the influence of gross material desires, like the desire for sex, intoxication, and so on, they must be very careful about subtle bad habits and desires such as duplicity or faultfinding (kuṭināṭi), the desire for high position (pratiṣṭhāśā), and the hankering for popularity (pūjā).]

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- He systematically studied Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, and as he felt the need and with Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa’s permission, he read translations of books by previous Gauḍīya ācāryas.
- He read Caitanya-caritāmṛta with great relish, and when he remembered the places of the Lord’s pastimes it was as if he were actually in Māyāpur or Purī.
- He also read books about Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes and gradually became familiar with Kṛṣṇa’s companions and their moods of devotion.
- While he chanted japa or kīrtana, the forms of Lord Caitanya and Lord Kṛṣṇa appeared in his mind.
- Sometimes when he was alone he would chant into the late hours of the night, never satiated by the sweet sound of Kṛṣṇa’s names.

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- Many senior devotees visited the yātrā, but Acyutānanda would talk confidentially with only those he knew well, Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa, Gaura Hari, and another elderly devotee.
- With Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa he would speak philosophy and with Gaura Hari, about Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.
- Inevitably, however, Acyutānanda's talks turned to all-merciful Lord Caitanya. [Devotees at the stage of steadiness chant the holy name imbued with the form of the Lord. Acyutānanda's mood of service, which was ruled by regulative practice, drew his absorption more to Lord Caitanya than to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Such attraction is natural. But devotees should not minimize one form of the Lord to favour the other. Gaura and Kṛṣṇa are simply different forms of the one Godhead, who possesses different moods. They are both equal and both eternal.]

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- Acyutānanda had given up material enjoyment, and Kṛṣṇa, true to His promise, had reciprocated by bestowing on him a taste for pure devotional service.
- Acyutānanda performed his duties as before but actually lived by the taste he derived from preaching, chanting, and hearing.
- He could not get enough.
- Yet he was careful not to enter realms of sādhana that were over his head.
- He continued to chant japa with the devotees and to concentrate on hearing the sound of the holy names.
- At times, before chanting he would remember the occasional pastimes of Kṛṣṇa, and while chanting he would remember the meaning of the mantra and beg for eternal service.

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- Yet he dared not think of what service that would be or what form he would have in which to render that service.
- Acyutānanda had memorized a short book published by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describing Lord Caitanya's eightfold daily pastimes.
- Sometimes these pastimes would appear in his mind while he was chanting japa. Still, he would make no effort to invoke these remembrances.
- What did come of its own accord was an irrepressible joy from his remembrance of Lord Caitanya's and Lord Kṛṣṇa's qualities.
- He cried when he considered Caitanya Mahāprabhu's kindness in giving the topmost treasure to the lowest of men.

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- As Acyutānanda’s absorption in Kṛṣṇa’s divine qualities increased, his reticence to think about the Lord’s Vṛndāvana pastimes melted away. [At the stage of taste, devotees chant the name of Kṛṣṇa imbued with His form and qualities. Devotees on the path of regulative devotion are reserved in their meditation on the Lord’s pastimes. For example, they may avoid Kṛṣṇa’s Vṛndāvana pastimes and think only of Lord Caitanya’s. Or they may avoid making an effort to remember pastimes altogether, waiting for them to spontaneously appear in their minds. Or, even when pastimes appear spontaneously, such devotees may be afraid to delve into them. As the heart becomes purified, however, attraction to Kṛṣṇa increases, because all devotees naturally hear of Kṛṣṇa, directly and through Lord Caitanya’s pastimes. As attachment (āśakti) dawns, even the mind of a regulative devotee becomes drawn to thoughts of Kṛṣṇa and His companions.]

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- One day Gaura Hari said to Acyutānanda, “Lord Caitanya’s desire is that His followers think of Kṛṣṇa’s eternal pastimes.
- You’re a mature gaura-bhakta.
- You should do what He wants.”
- Acyutānanda replied, “Sometimes I do think of those pastimes, yet I feel shy to plunge into them as you do.”
- Gaura Hari just laughed. Acyutānanda continued, “I enjoy singing the songs of Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, and I have read every book you have given me, but my heart tells me to wait.
- Maybe it is because I worship Gaura-Nitāi and you worship Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.”

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- “Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote in Kṛṣṇa book,” Gaura Hari pressed with a sweet smile, “that devotees can read Kṛṣṇa-bhāvanāmṛta-mahā-kāvya.”
- “But he said it was for exalted devotees,” replied Acyutānanda, “not for me.”
- Gaura Hari chuckled and looked at a life-size picture of the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa altar on his wall.
- “But don’t you feel separation from Them?”
- As usual, Gaura Hari had pressed a button that opened the door to an unexplored chamber in Acyutānanda’s heart.
- That night, Acyutānanda sat alone in his small downtown room and gazed at a painting of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa seated beneath Vṛndāvana’s autumn moon.

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- He chanted softly on his beads. The temple was quiet because everyone else was asleep.
- Yes, he had to admit that he had begun to feel strong separation from the Divine Couple.
- A verse by Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī Ṭhākura hung beneath the picture: “Service to Lord Caitanya bestows service to Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī.”
- “Is this happening to me?” he murmured.
- Acyutānanda looked at a picture of Lord Caitanya embracing the leper Vāsudeva, whose deformed body was transforming into a spiritual one.
- Would this also happen to him? Acyutānanda’s heart was a battleground of contradictory emotions.

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- On one side, he yearned for Vraja, for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and on the other, his mind constantly constrained him with reservations.
- “To imagine one’s spiritual form in the conditioned state is material desire, māyā.”
- But he was not imagining his spiritual form.
- He was simply hankering for the shelter of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet.
- Thinking and hearing of Their pastimes would mitigate the pain of his separation.
- The more his intelligence protested, the more his heart yearned for Vraja.
- In the end Acyutānanda resolved to speak with Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa Prabhu.

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- “That was guru mahārāja’s order.” [Prabhodānanda Sarasvatī writes in Caitanya-candrāmṛta (88): “One who is extremely fortunate may get the mercy of Caitanya Mahāprabhu. As much as a person can devote full attention to the lotus feet of Lord Caitanya, to that extent the taste of nectarean service of the lotus feet of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī in Vṛndāvana will manifest itself. And the more a person engages in the service of Śrī Caitanya, the more the nectarean taste of service to Śrī Rādhā in Vṛndāvana manifests itself” (yathā yathā gaura-padāravinde vindeta bhaktim kṛta-puṇya-rāśiḥ/ tathā tathotsarpati hr̥dy akasmād rādhā-padāmbhoja-sudhāmśu-rāśiḥ)]
- But during the morning programme, before Acyutānanda could speak to Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa, he received a phone call from Śīlavatī.
- She was full of anxiety as she related a conversation she had had with Gaura Hari.

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- “On his last shopping trip to Vṛndāvana, my husband took reinitiation from a Rādhā-kuṇḍa bābājī.”
- Acyutānanda was shocked. Śīlavatī pleaded, “Please come and talk to him.
- He says that since the temple will kick him out anyway, he’s going to India as soon as he can.”
- Acyutānanda gathered his wits enough to reassure her, and after she had hung up he went straight to his room.
- How was this possible?
- Gaura Hari was impulsive, but not crazy.
- He was rasika, but he knew the Gauḍīya siddhānta.

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- “He’s too eager to know his siddha-deha,” Acyutānanda thought.
- He remembered the disciple who had asked Śrīla Prabhupāda’s blessings to take initiation from a Rādhā-kuṇḍa bābājī.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda had become furious and had cursed him, something he had never done before.
- “I must save Gaura Hari from this offence to Śrīla Prabhupāda, to his own guru, and to ISKCON.”
- Acyutānanda packed some clothes, thought again, and then added some relevant books.
- Gaura Hari was stubborn.

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- If Acyutānanda were to be successful in his mission, it would take more than a few hours.
- And he wanted scriptural ammunition to present to Gaura Hari.
- This would not be an easy task. [Devotees, even spontaneous devotees, must only read, chant, and remember topics for which they are qualified (sve sve 'dhikāre yā niṣṭhā). When for any reason devotees stray from this principle, especially out of a premature desire for siddha-deha, like Gaura Hari they disturb their own spiritual life as well as the spiritual lives of others]
- Acyutānanda was right—it wasn't easy to convince Gaura Hari that he had strayed from the path of pure devotion, much less convince him that his learned, realized bābājī guru was not fully representing Lord Caitanya's mission.
- “You just don't know what you're talking about!” argued Gaura Hari.

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- But Acyutānanda did know what he was talking about.
- Without personally attacking Gaura Hari or his newfound bābājī guru, Acyutānanda presented two objective and substantial arguments.
- The first was that the bābājīs considered Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī and his followers, namely Śrīla Prabhupāda, deviants from Lord Caitanya’s line.
- The second was that the bābājī practice of offering siddha-praṇālī and mañjarī-bhāva to conditioned souls, a practice that at one time was suitable for advanced intermediate devotees, had proven itself to be too prone to corruption and thus no longer viable.
- The Achilles’ heel in Gaura Hari’s argument was his attachment to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

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- “Everything else aside, Gaura Hari, do you really think Śrīla Prabhupāda is a deviant?”
- Gaura Hari would not reply.
- He stubbornly fingered his beads.
- But when pressed, he answered amid a shower of tears, “No! Śrīla Prabhupāda could never deviate an inch from the truth.”
- From this point on, Gaura Hari’s defences crumbled.
- After three days of discussion he conceded that he had been a fool and had made a grave mistake.
- “I wanted to know my mañjarī-svarūpa and got carried away.”

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- By Kṛṣṇa’s mercy Gaura Hari’s illusion dispersed and he finally fell at his friend’s feet, crying, “Please help me!”
- Please save me from my offences to my guru mahārāja and to Śrīla Prabhupāda.
- I don’t want any svarūpa outside Śrīla Prabhupāda’s line.”
- The only other devotee to know about Gaura Hari’s brush with the bābājīs was the president of the farm.
- He spoke at great length with Gaura Hari to ensure that his head pūjārī was really back to his old self and not only pretending.
- When he was convinced, he instructed Gaura Hari to call his spiritual master in India and explain everything.

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- He also told Gaura Hari to write a letter to the bābājī repudiating his initiation and his connection with him.
- “Just tell him you made a mistake.
- Everything you want is in ISKCON.
- Once you do that,” he continued, “I will tell our GBC what has happened.”
- There would be no need for anyone else to know.

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- “As far as making it up to Śrīla Prabhupāda and Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa,” he concluded, “you will have to do that yourself.” [In the conditioned state, even advanced devotees can make mistakes or become illusioned. Still, if devotees transgress Vaiṣṇava conduct they must acknowledge their mistakes, regret them, and beg forgiveness from all the devotees who were affected by the offence. By the Vaiṣṇavas’ grace devotees may then be reinstated in their original position.]
- Acyutānanda stayed on for an extra week with Gaura Hari.
- Normally confident and happy-go-lucky, Gaura Hari seemed insecure and despondent.
- As the gravity of his mistake and the errant psychology behind it sunk in, he felt the increasing burden of his guilt.

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- But a second call to Bhakti-prabhāva Swami gave him hope for the future of his spiritual life.
- It would take time for Gaura Hari to again sport his ready smile and twinkling eyes, but when they did return they carried a kind of maturity and gravity they had lacked before.
- Some devotees said that he had finally grown up.
- Others joked, “Well, at fifty, it’s about time!” It took some years for Gaura Hari to regain the level of taste and absorption he had once had for remembering Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes or reading books about them.
- In the meantime, he took full shelter of his service to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.
- But his spontaneous attachment could not be subdued forever.

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- In time, he again began to remember Kṛṣṇa’s eightfold daily pastimes—carefully.
- When he did, vivid scenes of vraja-līlā appeared in his mind and he knew that such remembrance was only possible because merciful Śrīla Prabhupāda and Lord Caitanya had forgiven him.
- The bābājī incident was a warning not only to Gaura Hari but to Acyutānanda as well.
- At least, Acyutānanda took it as such.
- It reinforced his already cautious attitude about meditating on Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes and entering the realm of relationships (rasa).

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- But his śikṣā-guru, Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa, advised him that knowledge of the prayojana, the truths of the goal of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, would not only familiarize him with his desired objective but protect him from the many pitfalls that arise from ignorance.
- He also advised Acyutānanda to study the history and tradition of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and the evolution of the saṅkīrtana movement.
- Acyutānanda took the advice.
- It was a good assignment.
- His intelligence felt sharpened yet always in touch with Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and Their pastimes.

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- He studied Kṛṣṇa’s eightfold daily pastimes, not to remember them but to understand—according to the ācāryas—how, why, and when they were meant to be read and remembered.
- By doing so his purified mind became more and more absorbed in Kṛṣṇa’s eternal pastimes and how Lord Caitanya had tasted them.
- One night as he lay down to sleep, his mind brimming with thoughts of Kṛṣṇa, Acyutānanda realized that Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa had tricked him.
- “By asking me to study prayojana-tattva, Prabhu has cleverly bypassed my reluctance to hear Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes and immersed me in them instead.”
- Acyutānanda spoke to his mentor, who just smiled and replied, “You’re a pure-hearted Vaiṣṇava.”

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- Kṛṣṇa wants to display His pastimes in your heart. To be careful is good, but don't boycott the Lord or His gopīs.” [Practices of devotional service at any stage of advancement should be undertaken with clear knowledge of foundational principles, methods, and purposes. This will ensure that devotees avoid obstacles to devotion and achieve the best results from their efforts.]
- Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa's reassurance invigorated Acyutānanda's already burgeoning attraction for hearing vraja-līlā.
- As he again began to hear, his attachment to Kṛṣṇa and the Vraja-vāsīs suddenly blossomed like a dormant spring flower bud.
- It seemed to Acyutānanda that the devotional acts of kīrtana, japa, Bhāgavatam class, as well as preaching were rivulets leading to a common ocean, Kṛṣṇa, and attachment for these practices, like a magnifying glass, simply expanded his attachment to the Lord.

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- The many things he had dutifully studied about Lord Caitanya and Śrī Kṛṣṇa now seemed to possess his mind, which like a leaf tossed by a gusty wind would be spontaneously carried away by thoughts of Them.
- Sometimes during the japa period he would be lost in reverie, which younger devotees mistook for sleep.
- Sometimes during kīrtana he felt overwhelmed and tears flowed down his cheeks.
- Sometimes he felt the plight of conditioned souls so much that his humble, heartfelt pleas to them to surrender would startle his listeners.
- Some devotees were puzzled by Acyutānanda's behaviour, but Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa reassured them.

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- “Don’t worry. He is advancing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and will soon master his emotions.”
- As always, Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa’s words came true.
- Acyutānanda soon realized that without systematizing his remembrance of Kṛṣṇa, he would be hard-pressed to control it and the emotions it stirred in him.
- At first he recalled verses and prayers from the books of Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmī and Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, and later on remembered Lord Caitanya’s eightfold daily pastimes followed by those of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
- Although he felt his heart to be like an active volcano ready to erupt at any moment with lavalike emotion, Acyutānanda gradually gained mastery over it.
- He regained his composure and appeared to devotees and guests to be his old self.

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- But he was far from that old self.
- He could feel Kṛṣṇa's presence, though he could not see Him.
- He could perceive that Kṛṣṇa was calling him though he was yet unable to hear Him.
- No, he could never be his old self.
- Acyutānanda was now intent on being his real self, his original self.

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- And as careful as he was in his practice, Acyutānanda could not help but feel that his original self was that of a gopī. [At developed stages of attachment (āśakti), attraction to Kṛṣṇa becomes so strong that it begins to overpower the regulative motives—such as reasoning and adherence to rules—for hearing about and remembering the Lord. Acyutānanda’s devotion thus became increasingly governed by rāga and less so by vidhi. By Lord Caitanya’s grace the devotees’ moods of vraja-bhakti become so substantial that devotees are naturally drawn to certain service moods—in Acyutānanda’s case, to that of a gopī.]
- Acyutānanda did not broadcast his realizations, and he continued his service and sādhana as he always had.
- He led Saturday hari-nāma through the tourist district, helped organize yearly Ratha-yātrā festivals, and played an active role in celebrating special days like Janmāṣṭamī.

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- He gave wonderfully realized and inspired classes.
- But he never strayed into realms of līlā in his speaking—nothing beyond the understanding of his average listener.
- Once he gave a class on Rādhāṣṭamī that he thought had crossed the line, although no one else agreed.
- After that he preferred to serve in the kitchen on Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇīs appearance day and listen to others’ classes over the speaker system.
- Some devotees persistently suggested that he take sannyāsa and become the temple’s “home-grown” renunciant, but Acyutānanda declined.
- Taking sannyāsa would not increase his preaching but would simply push him more into the limelight.

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- After all, young devotees already wanted him to become their initiating spiritual master, and convincing the leaders of the yātrā that this service was not for him was enough of a chore as it was.
- The only role Acyutānanda wanted was that of a humble servant of the Vaiṣṇavas.
- He had no aspirations other than to become a maidservant of Śrī Rādhā. [Because neophytes often equate position, like that of guru, sannyāsī, GBC, or temple president with spiritual advancement, and because more mature devotees consider such services already amply provided for by other devotees, Acyutānanda did not want to accept such responsibilities.]
- Although he had been blessed with good health, as Acyutānanda passed through midlife and headed toward old age, he began to feel the aches and pains and more frequent ailments that characterize a worn body.

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- Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa, who was a few years his senior, had stepped aside as temple president for the same reason.
- He was now busy training a younger devotee, his disciple, to manage the temple and guide devotees.
- One evening Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa proposed, “Why don’t we go to Māyāpur and Vṛndāvana this coming Kārttika?”
- Acyutānanda was hesitant.
- He did not have the same energy to lead youthful pilgrims through the holy dhāma as he used to.
- How many such pilgrimages had he led?

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- Perhaps more than ten! “I mean just you and me,” Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa continued.
- “We can rest and absorb ourselves in chanting and hearing about the Lord.”
- This proposal appealed to Acyutānanda.
- The two aging sādhus agreed at last that the place they could have the most restful, peaceful, and productive pilgrimage would be Śrīdhāma Māyāpur.
- Māyāpur was nondifferent from Vṛndāvana-dhāma, but by the Pañca-tattva’s mercy love for Kṛṣṇa was more easily accessible in Māyāpur.
- They would go to ISKCON’s spiritual city on the bank of the divine Ganges and beg for Lord Caitanya’s mercy.

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- “Surely the leader of the saṅkīrtana movement will answer our prayers,” Acyutānanda concluded.
- As usual, ISKCON’s Māyāpur project had developed significantly since their last visit.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda’s world headquarters was beginning to look more like a city than a campus.
- The first phase of the main temple was nearing completion, and shops, restaurants, devotees’ homes, temple embassies, and preaching stalls filled the landscape.
- The days of walking beside rice paddies on the way from one part of the project to the other were gone.
- Everywhere were wide roads lined with trees and neatly maintained gardens.

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- Of course, the roads, lanes, and squares were teeming with visitors, not only from Bengal and India but from all over the world.
- Every year, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s vision for Māyāpur was being realized.
- When Acyutānanda and Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa entered the large temple room they bowed before Śrīla Prabhupāda, Lord Nṛsimhadeva, the Pañca-tattva, and Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Mādhava.
- As usual the darśana was awe-inspiring, and as usual Acyutānanda thought, “Now I have come home.”
- Before Acyutānanda had left for this pilgrimage, Gaura Hari had come to visit him.
- “My heart tells me that the Pañca-tattva will shower their mercy on you.

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- You will achieve the fulfilment of your desires.”
- Acyutānanda put his hand across his friend’s mouth.
- “Do you want to deprive me of even a drop of mercy by contaminating my mind? Just bless me that I can become a Vaiṣṇava in this life.”
- His mouth still covered, Gaura Hari murmured, “To bless you, first I have to become a Vaiṣṇava.”
- Acyutānanda and Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa wanted to stay alone.
- They refused the kind offer of an assistant and stayed in the spacious guesthouse managed by their GBC zone.

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- Since most devotees were in Vṛndāvana for Kārttika they had the entire house to themselves.
- It was clean and secluded.
- Acyutānanda had planned to chant sixty-four rounds daily, bathe in the Ganges, and absorb himself in the songs of Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda.
- Of course, they would also walk to the temple for darśana of the Pañca-tattva, and when asked, give class to the devotees.
- Their meals were simple, their schedule relaxed.
- In the evenings the two would sing songs and talk about Lord Caitanya and Lord Kṛṣṇa.

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- Although Acyutānanda had always seen Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa as his śikṣā-guru, now their relationship was sweeter and more intimate than ever before—like that of two brothers. [Devotees should see no difference between the dīkṣā- and śikṣā-gurus. (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 1.47) By service and surrender the relationship between spiritual master and disciple may become intimate, although it always remains respectful (viśrambheṇa guroḥ sevā)]
- The holy dhāma, the Pañca-tattva, the solitary worship—all were having a profound effect on Acyutānanda’s spiritual emotions, especially during his meditation on the holy name and on Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes.
- He found the hours after his nightly talks with Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa to be most conducive for systematic worship.
- Chanting softly under a solitary lamp, Acyutānanda would think of Kṛṣṇa’s late evening and nighttime pastimes.

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- He remembered how Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī would dress in a way that pleased Kṛṣṇa but would also conceal Her stealthy journey from her husband's home to where Kṛṣṇa was waiting.
- He remembered how She would hurry down the forest path to meet Kṛṣṇa at a preassigned grove by the Yamunās shore.
- He remembered how after enjoying an evening festival in Nandagrāma Kṛṣṇa would feign sleep, slip out of bed, and run to meet Śrī Rādhā.
- He remembered how the Divine Couple would roam the moonlit forest with the gopīs and then sing and dance to Their heart's content.
- He remembered how Kṛṣṇa and His princess would become fatigued from their festive pastimes and would rest on a bed of flowers, drowning Their girlfriends in the ecstasy of loving exchanges.

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- Acyutānanda’s meditation was complete and detailed.
- He could feel the moonlight and smell the kadamba flowers.
- He could see the detailed embroidery on Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇīs sārī.
- Day by day this meditation became longer and more continuous, flowing spontaneously into Kṛṣṇa’s early morning pastimes and beyond.
- At last Acyutānanda lost awareness of the world around him—time, his body, the fact that he was meditating—and became situated in perfect absorption, samādhi. [In meditating on Kṛṣṇa’s eightfold pastimes, Acyutānanda passed through the stages of meditation (dhyāna), constant remembrance (anusmṛti), and trance (samādhi). These are the concluding stages of kṛṣṇa-smaraṇa, after which comes the stage of application (āpana-daśā).]

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- After a few evenings of such wonders, Acyutānanda feigned illness and excused himself from the temple programmes and the evening talks with Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa.
- The elderly Vaiṣṇava visited Acyutānanda to see what was ailing him, but when he looked into Acyutānanda’s eyes he said, “Get well soon,” and left Acyutānanda alone.
- In the early morning, Acyutānanda would wander on the banks of the Jalāṅgī in the direction of Jagannātha’s temple, crying for Lord Caitanya’s mercy.
- He would pray to the holy waters of the Sarasvatī, roll in the sacred dust of the dhāma, and address the singing birds, “Please give me your mercy.”
- His heart cried out for direct service to Vraja’s princess.

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- He wanted more than simply to remember such grace; he wanted entrance into the pastimes.
- In a small forest he fell to his knees crying out to Lord Gaurāṅga.
- As he considered his fallen state, he felt hopeless that he would ever attain his goal.
- He wanted to die. Then he remembered Lord Caitanya’s infinite kindness and regained hope, wondering, “When will that day come?” [To the degree that devotees become attached to Kṛṣṇa, to that degree they feel separation from Him. Such separation culminates in the shedding of tears, which is described in its perfect stage in the seventh verse of Śrī Śikṣāṣṭaka: “Tears flow from my eyes like torrents of rain” (cakṣuṣā prāvṛṣāyitam). Without crying for Kṛṣṇa, even the most ardent sādḥaka cannot induce the Lord to reveal Himself.]

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- By many years of loyal service to the Lord’s mission and to the pure devotees, by having abandoned any desire for material happiness or liberation, by the ardent longing for eternal service taught by the ācāryas, Acyutānanda finally achieved Lord Caitanya’s mercy.
- One night, while Acyutānanda was in trance, Kṛṣṇa’s holy name, which is completely spiritual and endowed with all the potencies of the Godhead, touched him with but one divine ray of pure goodness.
- At once Acyutānanda’s heart was illumined with a spiritual potency he had never before experienced, a potency that expanded throughout his being and caused him to cry, tremble, and swoon.
- Swept away by the oceanic waves of ecstasy, the holy name was his only anchor.
- But that very name continued to toss him from one wave of bliss to another.

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- Not knowing what else to do, Acyutānanda continued to chant until the waves of ecstasy subsided.
- Then within his heart he perceived not the mental impression of Kṛṣṇa’s pastime but Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma.
- He saw the Divine Couple surrounded by gopīs, who were glowing with ecstatic love for Them.
- He also saw, somewhat distant from the scene, one young gopī whom he knew to be himself.
- Govinda Mahārāja had assured him, “In time everything will be revealed.” Now Acyutānanda, by the potency of the ecstatic devotion even Lord Brahmā desires, achieved his spiritual body (siddha-deha).

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- By the mercy of Kṛṣṇa’s pleasure-giving potency, Acyutānanda remained absorbed in his heart’s vision (sphūr̥ti), tasting many forms of continuous ecstasy, ecstasy that caused wonderful transformations in his body.
- Although Acyutānanda would have revelled in this bliss forever, he had not yet achieved perfection.
- To increase his desire for perfection, the holy name withdrew the vision of Vraja, although not the ecstasy (bhāva) in Acyutānanda’s heart.
- Once having awakened, bhāva was now his forever, his to cultivate into love (prema) and the full-blown mellow of relationship with Kṛṣṇa (rasa).

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- When the ecstasy of finally attaining his heart's desire was heightened by its disappearance, Acyutānanda fainted. [When a ray of love of God, which is composed of pure goodness (śuddha-sattva), descends on a sādḥaka, he is elevated to the stage of ecstatic devotion, at which time his eternal mood of service (sthāyī-bhāva) is revealed.
- At this stage a devotee comes to realize the general nature of his eternal form (siddha-svarūpa), and from this stage on devotees are spiritually situated and their chanting of the holy name while remembering Kṛṣṇa's pastimes gradually cultivates the mellow of devotional service (bhakti-rasa)]
- It was late morning when Acyutānanda felt the warm rays of the sun caress his body. He sat up, spiritually invigorated, reflecting on the night's events.

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- “Was it a dream or was it real?”
- There were many questions to be answered.
- He would need Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa Prabhu’s help.
- In the weeks that followed, Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa Prabhu answered his questions and guided his beloved friend and disciple.
- During the day Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa would instruct Acyutānanda in the transcendental worship of the holy name, and from night till dawn, his heart full of pure greed for vraja-bhakti, Acyutānanda would continue to cultivate ecstatic chanting.
- The holy name Acyutānanda now chanted was imbued with rasa, and the pastimes he perceived came from the spiritual realm.

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- Acyutānanda’s first perfection was to awaken his permanent mood as a maidservant (mañjarī) of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī.
- As he continued to chant, the actual mellow of devotion gradually awakened.
- In one nocturnal encounter Acyutānanda met his spiritual master in his gopī form and came to understand the eleven aspects of his own spiritual identity, such as his name and services.
- In another encounter, he perceived himself as a gopī serving Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vraja. [The eleven details of a devotee’s siddha-svarūpa are revealed either by the spiritual master from his spiritually realized position (if he has realized it), or by the holy name as described in Śaraṇāgati: “Blossoming fully, the flower of the holy name takes me to Vraja and reveals to me His own love-dalliance.

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- This name gives to me my own eternal spiritual body, keeps me right by Kṛṣṇa’s side, and completely destroys everything related to this mortal frame of mine,” pūrṇa vikāśita hoiyā, braje more jāya loiyā, dekhāy more svarūpa-vilāsa/ more siddha-deha diyā, kṛṣṇa-pāṣe rākhe giyā, e dehera kore sarva-nāśa. (Nāma-māhātmya 7)]
- Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa was very pleased.
- “You have entered the spiritual realm.
- Now you must ascend by stages to the topmost perfection and go back home, back to Godhead.”
- And Acyutānanda, who had now become somewhat conversant with the divine energy that guided him, was also confident that such perfection was close at hand.

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- His gurus, the holy name, and Lord Caitanya Himself were guiding him.
- He was sure that they would answer all his questions and that in time everything would be revealed.
- “But there is still one decision you must make,” said Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa.
- “Will you stay here in Māyāpur and continue your bhajana, or will you return to the yātrā and complete it there?”
- Acyutānanda did not know, but Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa insisted that it was for him to decide.
- In Māyāpur, Acyutānanda could continue solitary worship, undisturbed, under the Pañca-tattva’s shelter.
- Constant bhajana would surely bring him face to face with Rādhā and Śyāma.

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- But in the West, his preaching left him with little time for such bhajana.
- How would he progress on the path to perfection?
- Śrīla Prabhupāda preached until the end.
- Acyutānanda’s heart, like iron to a magnet, was drawn to the pursuit of his quest—his service to Śrī Rādhā.
- Yet his guru mahārāja had said, “I tried my best to serve Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mission.
- You do the same.” Had he completed his service to Prabhupāda’s mission? Acyutānanda did not know.
- And for the first time in forty years Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa would not give him an answer.

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- “Go to the Pañca-tattva! Pray to them for guidance.
- Lord Caitanya leads the saṅkīrtana movement, just as He is leading you to Vraja. Ask Him which path to take—preaching or solitary worship.” [Śrīla Prabhupāda said that devotees would have to decide for themselves whether to retire for nirjana-bhajana when they are qualified or to continue preaching until the end of their lives.]
- The next morning during maṅgalārati, Acyutānanda prayed to Lord Gaurāṅga.
- Caitanya Mahāprabhu, as always, looked merciful.
- But when Acyutānanda returned to his room he was still uncertain about what to do.
- There were only a few days left until their scheduled return to the West.

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- Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa would go. What should he do?
- Leaning against a cushion, his legs crossed, listening to the singing birds, Acyutānanda dozed off.
- In his sleep he was again before the altar of the Pañca-tattva, this time alone. Again he prayed for guidance.
- This time Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda stepped forward off the altar and onto the temple room floor, towering above Acyutānanda.
- Acyutānanda was overcome with bliss.
- He fell flat before the two Lords and then looked up.
- Lord Nityānanda said, “Return to your place of service.

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- Continue to serve Us there.
- By the grace of My Lord Gaurāṅga you will achieve ultimate perfection.
- Do not doubt it.”
- Acyutānanda bowed before the two Lords and felt Their lotus feet on his head.
- Overcome with ecstasy he fainted.
- After he came to external awareness and calmed himself, he informed Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa about his dream.
- “The Lord has answered your question and given His order.
- Better make the most of the next few days.”

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- When the time came to return to the West, the two elderly Vaiṣṇavas departed from Māyāpur with heavy hearts and eyes filled with tears.
- Once in the West they continued their services, helping to spread the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.
- Acyutānanda related his attainment confidentially to Gaura Hari, who bathed his friend in tears of honest joy.
- During the day Acyutānanda offered his service, and at night he continued to cultivate the rasa he had begun in Māyāpur.
- As long as he remained in this world, Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa continued to guide him, and when the inevitable happened and his greatest guide and well-wisher passed away, Acyutānanda continued to receive his guidance—as he had that of his initiating spiritual master—from the transcendental plane.

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- But because he continued to serve as a practitioner, relating to this world for the world's benefit, Acyutānanda felt great pain at being separated from his well-wishers; he experienced that greatest pain of which Rāmānanda Rāya had spoken—separation from the Vaiṣṇavas.
- Compounding this was the pain of separation he felt from Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and Their companions.
- When these two sorrows combined, they softened Acyutānanda's heart until it was like flowing honey, honey that constantly anointed his eyes.
- Thus Acyutānanda's inclination to leave this world grew daily.
- Despite this, he continued to perform his regular temple services—to benefit the conditioned souls, to please Śrīla Prabhupāda, and to fulfil his gurus' orders.

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- At last Acyutānanda's service to Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission was also complete, and he received the blessings of Gaura-Nitāi for eternal service.
- Acyutānanda had come to the platform of prema.
- He could advance further in loving devotional service only in a body unhampered by material coverings—in his original spiritual body.
- Thus to the sorrow of many hundreds of devotees Acyutānanda at last left this world and went to the place in the material world where Kṛṣṇa was displaying His pastimes.
- Gaura Hari offered an emotional tribute at the festival honouring Acyutānanda's departure.
- He was the only person left who knew the details of Acyutānanda's perfection.

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- But Gaura Hari followed Acyutānanda’s last instruction to him and did not reveal these details.
- At the end of describing Acyutānanda’s life he said only, “He was a pure devotee.
- He loved Śrīla Prabhupāda and ISKCON, and he had unflinching faith in the path of perfection Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us.”
- The obituary section in Back to Godhead included these last words of Gaura Hari.
- The ISKCON world, most of which had hardly known Acyutānanda, took momentary notice that another devotee had gone back to Godhead.
- It was a wonderful thing.

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- But it was not unusual.
- In Śrīla Prabhupāda’s movement it was happening all the time. [Acyutānanda did not want Gaura Hari to reveal to the devotees anything about the details of his inner spiritual life or his attainment of perfection.
- Like chaste women, devotees keep their personal relationship with Kṛṣṇa secret.
- Thus as Lord Caitanya says, it is difficult to understand the actual position of a perfect devotee: “Even the most learned man cannot understand the words, activities, and symptoms of a person situated in love of Godhead,” yāñra citte kṛṣṇa-premā karaye udaya/ tāñra vākya, kriyā, mudrā vijṣeha nā bujhaya. (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 23.39)]