



**I) TEXTS 187-190: TOPMOST, INTERMEDIATE, AND NEOPHYTE DEVOTEES**

**III) TEXTS 199-202:  
GRADATION OF  
DEVOTEES  
ACCORDING THIER  
PURITY OF PRACTICE**

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**II) TEXTS 191-198:  
SYMPTOMS OF THE  
TOPMOST DEVOTEE**

**LESSON 15, TEXTS 188-202: SPECIFIC  
CHARACTERISTICS OF DEVOTEES**

# LESSON 15, THEME 5, TEXTS 188-202: SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF DEVOTEES SYNOPSIS

- I. **TOPMOST, INTERMEDIATE, AND NEOPHYTE DEVOTEES [TEXTS 187-190]:** Why did King Nimi request the Yogendra Kavi to speak on this topic when just a few verses earlier the sage had already described that topic?
- II. **SYMPTOMS OF THE TOPMOST DEVOTEE [TEXTS 191-198]:** Not disturbed by the senses, freedom from the perturbation of physical nature, desire, material distinction, sustained remembrance of the Lord under all conditions, absolute purity of the heart—binding the Lord with love, and five categories of knowledge.
- III. **GRADATION OF DEVOTEES ACCORDING TO THEIR PURITY OF PRACTICE [TEXTS 198-202]:** Neophytes engage in mixed devotion, Intermediates engage in reverential devotion, Topmost devotees worship with exclusive love—its significance, and other divisions of Vaishnavas.

# I. TOPMOST, INTERMEDIATE, AND NEOPHYTE DEVOTEES [TEXTS 187-190]

## TEXT 187: SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF DEVOTEES

- King Nimi to the Yogendra Kavi: “Now please tell me in greater detail about the devotees of the Supreme Lord. What are the natural symptoms by which I can distinguish between the most advanced devotees, those on the middle level and those who are neophytes? What are the typical religious activities of a Vaiṣṇava, and how does he speak? Specifically, please describe those symptoms and characteristics by which Vaiṣṇavas become dear to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” [11.2.44]
- Why did King Nimi request the Yogendra Kavi to speak on this topic when just a few verses earlier the sage had already described that topic?

- The king hoped to learn some of the specific characteristics—their dearness to the Lord and thereby the gradations of the devotees into the topmost, intermediate and neophyte.

## **TEXT 188: AWARENESS OF THE TOPMOST DEVOTEE— MAHĀ-BHĀGAVATA**

- “The foremost devotee of the Lord perceives his beloved Lord’s presence within all beings, and also sees all living beings within his beloved Lord.” [11.2.45]
- How do we understand **Mahā-Bhāgavata’s love for the Lord?**
- By the symptoms such a love, such as melting of the heart, laughing, crying, and so on ⇒ Three types of his vision
  - i. Everywhere he looks, he directly sees the manifestation of the Lord ⇒ bows to everything

- ii. He directly experiences specific manifestation of the Lord, whom  
↓ he cherishes in his heart, in all other forms
- iii. Sees all living beings as present within that very same feature of the Lord ⇒ perceives all living beings as having taken shelter of the Lord
  - “When the rivers heard the music of Krsna’s flute, their flow was arrested due to an upsurge of love that manifested in the form of their waves, as if embracing them and offering louts flowers.” [10.21.15]
  - “If Lord Hari is addressed even unintentionally, He destroys all sins. One in whose heart the Lord Himself is unable to leave because of His lotus feet are bound by the rope of love is the topmost of all devotees. [11.2.55]

## **TEXT 189: AWARENESS OF THE INTERMEDIATE DEVOTEE**

- “One who loves the Lord, is friendly towards the devotees, compassionate towards the unaware, and indifferent towards the inimical is an intermediate devotee.” [11.2.46]
- Prahlāda’s compassion towards Hiraṇyakaśipu: “I am concerned for the bewildered souls who, remaining oblivious to Your devotion, carry the burden of material existence on account of the illusory pleasure they strive to attain thru the senses.” [7.9.43]

### **Additional characteristics of Mahā-Bhāgavata**

- Lord Śiva to the Pracetās: “Because you are devotees of the Lord you are as dear to me as the Lord. Similarly, for the devotees of the Lord there is nobody dearer than Me.” [4.24.30]

- Sūta: “The venerable Śrī Śukadeva Gosvāmi, whose mind was captivated by the enchanting qualities of Lord Hari, studied this great narration. He is always dear to the devotees of Lord Viṣṇu.”
- When the Mahābhāgavatas offer obeisance to the enemies of the Lord, like Uddhava to Duryodhana [10.68.17], they do so not to the body nor to the person who identifies with the body, but to the Lord situated within the heart of all beings.

## **TEXT 190: BEHAVIOR & MENTALITY OF THE NEOPHYTE**

- “One who faithfully worships Lord Hari only in the form of the deity, but does not render service to the Lord’s devotees or to other living beings is a neophyte devotee.” [11.2.47]



- The neophyte's faith is not the outcome of realizing the conclusion of scripture.
- “One who believes this corpse-like body, which is comprised of the 3 elements, mucus, bile, and air, to be one's self; who regards his wife, children, and others to be his very own; who regards earthen images as objects of worship; or who accepts the waters of a river to be a place of pilgrimage, but who never considers those who have realized the Absolute to be as dear as the self, as intimate relations, as worshipable, or as purifying places of pilgrimage, is to be considered as an ass among animals.”  
[10.84.13]

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## II. SYMPTOMS OF THE MAHĀ-BHĀGAVATA [TEXTS 191-198]

### TEXT 191: NOT DISTURBED BY THE SENSES

- “Even while engaging his senses in contact with their objects, one who sees this whole world as the energy of Lord Viṣṇu is neither repelled nor elated. He is indeed the greatest among devotees.”  
[11.2.48]
- The awareness of the topmost devotee is so focused on the Lord that he or she does not claim proprietorship over the objects of the senses even though accepting them.
- The devotee’s apprehension of sense objects is a physical trait, whereas his perception of the world as a display of the Lord’s Māyā potency is cognitive.

## **TEXT 192: FREEDOM FROM THE PERTURBATION OF PHYSICAL NATURE**

- “Within the material world, one’s material body is always subject to birth and decay. Similarly, the life air [prāṇa] is harassed by hunger and thirst, the mind is always anxious, the intelligence hankers for that which cannot be obtained, and all of the senses are ultimately exhausted by constant struggle in the material nature. A person who is not bewildered by the inevitable miseries of material existence, and who remains aloof from them simply by remembering the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is to be considered bhāgavata-pradhāna, the foremost devotee of the Lord.” [11.2.49]

## **TEXTS 193-195: FREEDOM FROM DESIRE, BODILY MISIDENTIFICATION OF THE SELF, OR MATERIAL DISTINCTIONS**

- “One who has taken exclusive shelter of the Supreme Lord, Vāsudeva, becomes free from fruitive activities, which are based on material lust. In fact, one who has taken shelter of the lotus feet of the Lord is freed from even the desire to enjoy material sense gratification. Plans for enjoying sex life, social prestige and money cannot develop within his mind. Thus he is considered bhāgavata-uttama, a pure devotee of the Lord on the highest platform.”
- “One who never identifies with the body on the basis of lineage, deeds, caste, social status, or propriety of birth, is certainly dear to Lord Hari.” [11.2.51]
- “One who makes no distinction between his possessions and those of others, between his own body and that of others, and who is thus benevolent towards all living beings and peaceful, is the foremost of devotees. [11.2.52]

## **TEXTS 196-197: UNINTERRUPTED REMEMBRANCE OF THE LORD & ABSOLUTE PURITY OF HEART**

- “The lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead are sought even by the greatest of demigods, such as Brahmā and Śiva, who have all accepted the Supreme Personality of Godhead as their life and soul. A pure devotee of the Lord can never forget those lotus feet in any circumstance. He will not give up his shelter at the lotus feet of the Lord for a single moment — indeed, not for half a moment — even in exchange for the benediction of ruling and enjoying the opulence of the entire universe. Such a devotee of the Lord is to be considered the best of the Vaiṣṇavas.” [11.2.53]
- Worldly desires in pursuit of sense objects make it very difficult to fix one’s mind on the lotus feet of the Lord. However, this is not so for an advanced devotee, who is situated in the bliss of serving the Lord.

- “How can the fire of material suffering continue to burn the hearts of those who worship the Supreme Lord? The Lord’s lotus feet have performed innumerable heroic deeds, and the beautiful nails on His toes resemble valuable jewels. The effulgence emanating from those nails resembles cooling moonshine, for it instantly relieves the suffering within the heart of the pure devotee, just as the appearance of the moon’s cooling light relieves the burning heat of the sun.” [11.2.54]
- **TEXT 198: BINDING THE LORD WITH LOVE**
  - “The Supreme Personality of Godhead is so kind to the conditioned souls that if they call upon Him by speaking His holy name, even unintentionally or unwillingly, the Lord is inclined to destroy innumerable sinful reactions in their hearts. Therefore, when a devotee who has taken shelter of the Lord’s lotus feet chants the holy name of Kṛṣṇa with genuine love, the Supreme Personality of Godhead can never give up the heart of such a devotee. One who has thus captured the Supreme Lord within his heart is to be known as bhāgavata-pradhāna, the most exalted devotee of the Lord.” [11.2.55]

- “O King, constant chanting of the holy name of the Lord after the ways of the great authorities is the doubtless and fearless way of success for all, including those who are free from all material desires, those who are desirous of all material enjoyment, and also those who are self-satisfied by dint of transcendental knowledge.” [2.1.11]
- **ALL SYMPTOMS INCLUDED WITHIN LOVE**
  - The 8 consecutive verses [11.2.48-55], taken together, serve to define the Mahā-Bhāgavata devotee. The essence of all definitions, however, is stated in the concluding verse [11.2.55], that a devotee binds the Lord in his or her heart with the rope of love, because this quality forms the underlying basis of all other characteristics described in the preceding verses.



# THE FIVE CATEGORIES OF KNOWLEDGE

- i. The Supreme Lord who is worthy of worship
- ii. The Lord's supreme abode
- iii. The paraphernalia associated with the Lord's abode
- iv. The meaning of the *mantras* depicting the Lord
- v. The nature of the living beings

# III. GRADATION OF DEVOTEES ACCORDING TO THEIR PURITY OF PRACTICE [TEXTS 199-202]

## ■ THE NEOPHYTE [11.11.29-31]

- These verses define a person are endowed with a magnitude of virtue, as the best of the sages.
- Yet, strikingly enough, JīvaG says that this group of verses depict a lower order spiritual practitioner—a beginning devotee who is surrendered to the Lord but still attached to prescribed duties and the qualities they engender. Because this person subordinates bhakti to prescribed duty and the development of virtue, his or her devotion is mixed, and hence of a lower grade.

## ■ **THE INTERMEDIATE [11.11.32]**

- He is aware of prescribed and forbidden action as well as the virtue and vice they induce.
- Yet, he or she sets aside all such consideration, viewing them as obstacles to meditation on the Lord, and engages directly in devotion.
- This person may not have the qualities of the lower order devotee, yet he or she is regarded as superior because of his/her emphasis on devotion.
- Although engaged in pure devotion, the sense of right and wrong, which is prominent in the intermediate devotee, elicits a reverential attitude that impedes the spontaneous flow of love for the Lord.

## ■ THE MAHĀ-BHĀGAVATA [11.11.33]

- While he may not even be aware of the Lord's all-pervasiveness, His identity as the Soul of all beings, and the spiritual nature of which He is constituted, yet the preeminence of such a devotee lies in the exclusivity (ananya-bhāva) of devotion. This is the foundational love for the Lord within the heart, with a specific character amongst any of the moods of servitorship, friendship, parental affection, and conjugal love.
- JīvaG also describes the divisions of devotees on the path of worship, the difference between a jñānī-bhakta and an ananya-bhakta, and other divisions of Vaiṣṇavas.