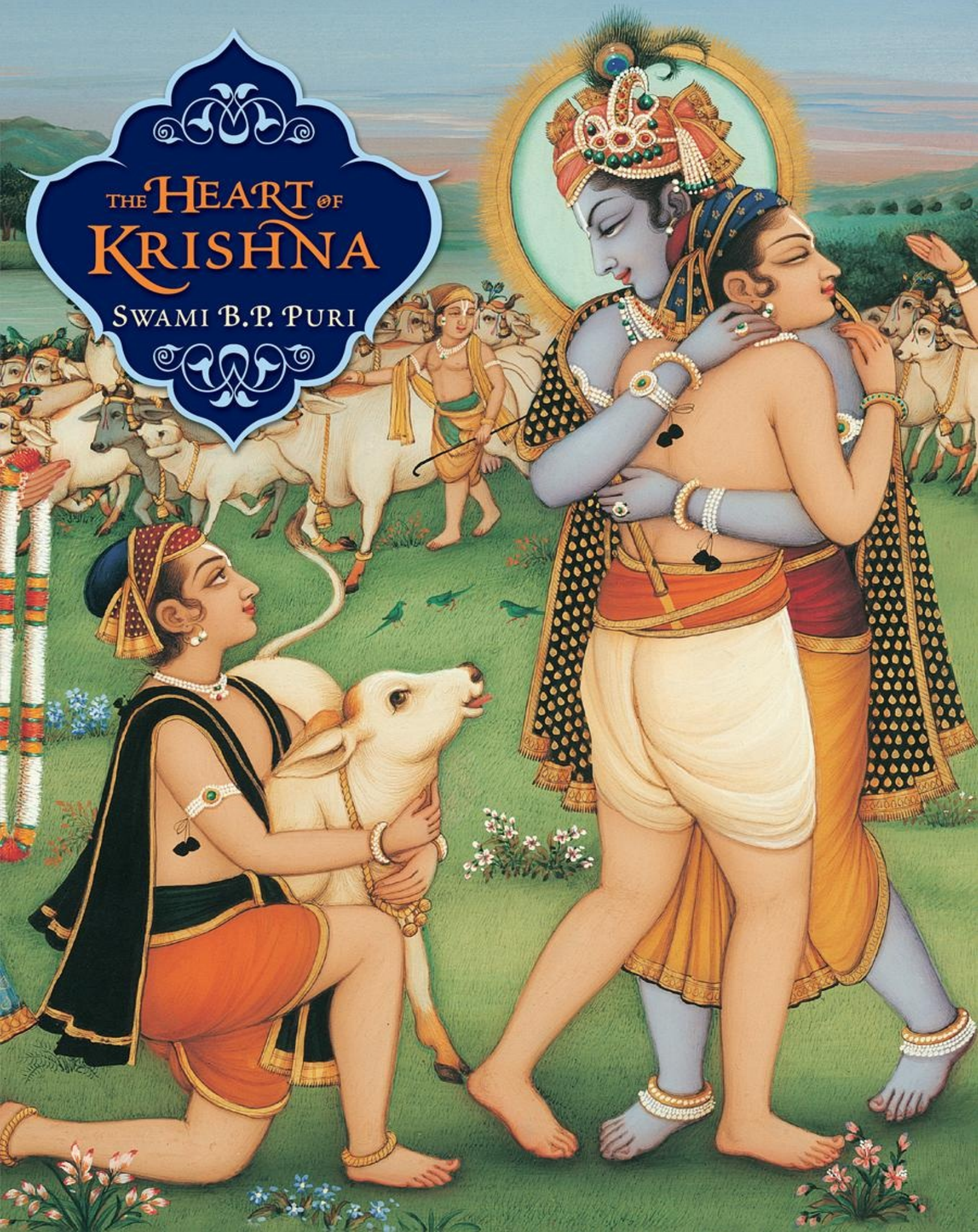


THE HEART OF
KRISHNA

SWAMI B.P. PURI



The Heart of Krishna

Vaishnava Aparadha & the Path of Spiritual Caution

**Om Visnupada Paramahansa Pujapada Vaisnava Sarvabhaumah Sri
Bhakti Promode Puri Goswami Maharaja**

Based upon articles written by Srila Bhakti Promode Puri Goswami



- [Contents](#)
- [About the author](#)
- [Introduction](#)
- [The vaishnava king Ambarish Maharaja](#)
- [Namacarya Haridas Thakur & the liberation of the prostitute](#)
- [Mahadeva Shiva & Sati's sacrifice](#)
- [Sri Narada Muni & the Sons of Daksa](#)
- [Sri Garuda the divine carrier of Vishnu](#)

- [Vaisnava aparadha. The path of spiritual caution](#)
- [Spiritual suicide. Guru aparadha](#)

About the author

Vaishnava Sarvabhauma Sri Srila Bhakti Promode Puri Goswami Maharaja

Om Vishnupada Srila Bhakti Promode Puri Founder President & Acharya Sri Gopinath Gaudiya Math.

In the village of Ganganandapur, District Jessore (now Bangladesh), Tridandi Swami Srimad Bhakti Promode Puri Goswami Maharaja appeared as the son of Sri Tarinicharan Chakraborty and Srimati Ramrangini Devi. Born October 8, 1989, during the auspicious hour of brahma-muhurta, he was called Sri Promode Bhusan Chakraborty.

Along with the study of Sanskrit, Promode Bhusan was engaged in worshipping family Deities of Sri Sri Radha Gopinath. His reverent service mood was evident even as a young man. Once he forgot to cover the Lord with a blanket on a winter night. That night he shivered uncontrollably with chills and fever. The Lord appeared in his dream and showed him that he was without his blanket. The young Promode Bhusan woke up and only after he covered the Lord did the fever subside.

Promode Bhusan completed his education in Jessore then went to Calcutta where he attended Bangabasi College, graduating with honors in Chemistry. In 1917, he met his Guru, Prabhupada Srila Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Goswami Thakur. From the first meeting, an eternal bond was made. Sri Promode Bhusan accepted Prabhupada in his heart as his eternal master.

His strong attachment to spiritual life brought him regularly to his Guru's lectures at the Calcutta ashram of Sri Gaudiya Math. In 1923, on the holy occasion of Sri Krishna Janmastami, he surrendered at his Guru's lotus feet and simultaneously took Harinama and Brahmin initiations. He became known as Sri Pranabananda Brahmachary - a fullfledged member of Sri Gaudiya Math.

Sri Pranabananda's service attitude was so exemplary that soon Prabhupada Srila Saraswati Thakur established him as the editor of Gaudiya Math publications. Pranabananda Brahmachary synopsised Srila Saraswati Thakura's lectures, elaborated on them, and with Prabhupada's approval, they were published in various periodicals including the only daily spiritual newspaper, Dainik Nadia

Prakash.

In recognition of his scholarship, Saraswati Thakur honored him with the title, Sri Pranabananda Brahmachary Mahopadeshak Pratna Vidyalkar.

Srila Puri Maharaja served in close association with his Guru for thirteen years. Srila Prabhupada requested that Sri Pranabananda Brahmachary accept Tridandi *sannyasa*. Humbly considering himself unfit, he declined.

At the time of Prabhupada's *aprakatalila*, Sri Pranabananda Brahmachary held his guru's lotus-feet to his chest so that they might remain forever enthroned in his heart. After Srila Prabhupada's disappearance Sri Pranabananda Brahmachary Mahopadeshak Pratna Vidyalkar began extensive traveling and preaching.

In 1942 Srila Prabhupada Saraswati Thakur appeared in a dream and gave his divine order that Sri Pranabananda accept Tridandi *sannyasa*. *Sannyasa* initiation and the danda were given by his Godbrother Srila Bhakti Gourava Vaikhanasa Maharaja in Champahati Sri Sri Gaura-Gadadhara temple.

For more than seven years, Tridandi Swami Bhakti Promode Puri Goswami Maharaja served as the head *pujan* and temple president of Sri Sri Yogapith, the birth place of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, discovered by Srila Bhakti Vinode Thakur. During that time, the Deities were internally urging him to take up scriptural research and deeper meditation.

He moved to a humble cottage on the banks of the Ganga in Kalna, living with his beloved Deities

Sri Sri Radha Gopinath. During that time, the King of Burdwan (a district of West Bengal) was extremely impressed with his saintly character and on the appearance day of Sri Radhika, 1958, he offered his large temple to Srila Puri Maharaja. He engaged in service at that temple for several years.

Later, his Godbrother, Srila Bhakti Dayita Madhab Goswami Maharaja, requested that Gurumaharaj come to his Math to edit spiritual periodicals and books. Gurumaharaj entrusted the temple in Kalna to his younger brother and went to Calcutta to take up his new service. Additionally, His Holiness Om Visnupada Tridandi Swami Sri Bhakti Dayita Goswami Maharaja requested that he take full charge of his monthly magazine, Sri Chaitanya Vani, as president of

the editorial board. He also became editor-in-chief of the monthly magazine Sri Gaudiya published from Sri Chaitanya Math, Mayapur. At the age of 97, Srila Puri Maharaja continues to fulfill this role with great care and devotion. Presently, Gurumaharaja is the senior most living disciple of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur. Additionally, he was the lifelong, intimate associate of His Divine Grace Srila Bhakti Raksaka Shridara Dev Goswami Maharaja, who he considered the benign guardian of the celestial wealth of Srila Rupa Goswami.

Srila Puri Maharaja was well known as the best *kirtana* leader in the early days of Sri Gaudiya Math and often sang on radio programs. He is well known for his extensive knowledge and meticulous practice of deity worship and installation. His service to Srila Saravati Thakur installing deities in new temples made him known as Pujapada.

In addition to his high position and qualifications, many are attracted to Tridandi Swami B.P. Puri Goswami Maharaja's divine personality. He emanates sweetness and love. He is seen as our well-wishing guide to the spiritual domain. The opening of the Gopinath Gaudiya Math, during the 1989 Gour Purnima Tithi, provided a doorway to that spiritual domain.

Introduction

The etymological development of the word *aparadha* is *radhat arthat aradhanat-apagatah*, which means "to be distanced from worship."

Offenses committed at the lotus feet of Vaishnavas, the Devotees, distance one from devotional service to the Supreme Lord. But in a higher sense it means to be removed from the service of Sri Radha. All divine service to Krishna is being conducted under her direction. To offend her servitors is to make one unfit for her divine service. The whole aim of Krishna consciousness is *radha-dasyam*, the divine service of Sri Radha, and offenses at the lotus feet of Vaishnavas make one unfit for such service.

The Lord is overly protective of his devotees (*bhakta-vatsala*). He cannot tolerate any offenses against them. They have *bhakti* (devotion), and they can awaken it within us. *Bhakti* is the sole means to attract Krishna, who is a slave of devotion. The same is true of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The Caitanya-Bhagavata states:

A person can attain the shelter of Mahaprabhu only by the grace of a higher Vaishnava. Religious practices and even chanting the Holy Name without devotion is useless.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prabhupada writes in his commentary:

Without developing a spirit of service, chanting the Holy Name is vain. Real devotion can only be cultivated when one receives the blessings of an unalloyed devotee.

Bhakti means devotion. Vrndavana dasa Thakur says:

If a person commits an offense at the lotus feet of a Vaishnava, even though he may have received Krishna's mercy, he will never attain divine love, *prema*. (Chaitanya-bhagavata Madhya-lila 22.8)

Srila Prabhupada writes:

Even if one is a Vaishnava, if he commits offenses to the Holy Name, he becomes unfit to render pure devotion. Although it may appear that he is still

being shown favor by the Lord as he continues to make a show of chanting without difficulty, the Lord is actually very displeased with him because of his antagonism toward devotees. Therefore, to give up nama-aparadha we must first give up sadhu-ninda or finding fault with devotees.

Regarding the phrase *krsna krpa hoileo* ("even though he may receive Krishna's mercy"), Srila Saraswati Thakur comments:

People may think that because an offender appears to continue to chant without difficulty, the Lord must still favor him, but they are wrong. The Lord is not even slightly moved by their sham devotion.

The author of Sri Caitanya-bhagavata, Vrndavana dasa Thakur, says that these statements are not his alone; they are the verdict of the Vedas. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur did not tolerate any disrespect towards genuine Vaishnavas. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu also emphatically denounced any insults directed at Vaishnava devotees. To understand the seriousness of vaisnava-aparadha, offending devotees, one must grasp the multi-faceted, multi-dimensional nature of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Mahaprabhu is the source of all incarnations in Kali-yuga and the savior of all souls. He is Krishna, the son of Maharaja Nanda, fully enriched with the mood and radiance of Sri Radha. Srila Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami offers prayers to all of these manifestations in the preface of Sri Caitanya-caritamarta:

vande gurun isa-bhaktan isam isavatarakan tat-prakasams ca tac-chaktih krsna-caitanya-samjnakam

I offer my obeisances unto all the gurus, the devotees, the Lord's avatars, his expansions, his saktis (energies), and the primeval Lord Himself, Sri Krishna Chaitanya. (Caitanya-caritamrta, Adi-lila 1.1)

In the same way that Mahaprabhu is Krishna, he expands as Nityananda Prabhu (prakasa), who is Balarama. Balarama's partial expansion is Sadasiva, Mahavishnu Avatara, whose counterpart in Chaitanya-lila is Advaita Acarya. What is left of Sri Radhika after Krishna has plundered her emotions and lustre is Sri Gadadhara Pundit. Sri Gadadhara and Svarupa Damodara are his sakti (energies). Bhakta means Srivasa Thakur who is Sri Narada Muni in Krishna-lila. Isa, Divinity means Mahaprabhu Himself. The complete conception

of Divinity must include the predominating moiety and the predominated moiety. The slightest disregard to any one of these is equal to disregarding the Supreme Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Himself. There are two aspects to the guru principle: the siksa or instructing guru, and the diksa or initiating guru. Both are represented in Srivasa Thakura.

In the beginning of the second chapter of the Antya-lila of the Sri Caitanya-caritamrta, Srila Krishnadasa Kaviraja offers the following invocation:

*vande ham sri-guroh sri yuta-pada-kamalam sri-gurun vaisnavams ca sri-rupam
sagrajatam saha-gana-raghunathan vitam tam sa jivam sadvaitam savadhutam
parijana-sahitam sri-krsna-caitanya-devam sri-radha-krsna-padan saha-gana-
lalita-sri-visakhanvitams ca* (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya-lila 2.1)

I offer my obeisances unto the lotus feet of my Guru and to all the preceptors on the path of devotion. I offer my obeisances unto all the Vaishnavas and to Sri Rupa Goswami and his associates Raghunatha dasa, and Sri Jiva. I offer my obeisances to Advaita Acarya, Nityananda Avadhuta, Gadadhara Pundit, and to Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu with all his devotees, headed by Srivasa Thakura. I then offer my obeisances to the lotus feet of Sri Radha and Sri Krishna, and all the gopis headed by Lalita and Visakha. (Caitanya-caritamrta, Antya-lila 2. 1)

In the above invocatory prayers (mangala-carana), the Vaishnavas are venerated. Kaviraja Goswami writes further:

Before beginning the narration of the pastimes of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, simply by meditating on Sri Guru, the Vaishnavas, and Divinity, I invoke their benediction. Such meditation destroys all detriments on the spiritual path, and helps one to fulfill all their desires.

We must note very carefully that the Vaishnavas have been included within the full conception of Divinity.

These writings describe the Vaishnava's extraordinary qualities, and the spiritual benefit resulting from serving them. There are also several warnings regarding the disastrous effects of vaisnava-aparadha.

The Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya-lila 19.156 states:

If a devotee commits vaisnava-aparadha, his offense is like a mad elephant

uprooting and trampling his creeper of devotion; afterwards the creeper's leaves dry up and become lifeless.

There are three categories of Vaishnavas: kanistha (neophyte), madhyama (intermediate), and uttama (advanced) described in the Caitanya-caritamṛta. Kaviraja Goswami states that to gain shelter of a Vaishnava, it is imperative to first receive the mercy of Nityananda Prabhu:

All of the Vaishnavas who live in Vrndavana are absorbed in singing the all-auspicious name of Sri Krishna. Sri Mahaprabhu and Nityananda are their life and soul. They do not know anything but devotion to Sri Radha and Krishna. My shelter at the Vaishnavas' lotus feet has been granted only by the mercy of Nityananda Prabhu.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prahupada corroborates this fact:

All of the Vaishnavas living in the holy dhama of Sri Vrndavana are very fortunate souls. They have taken shelter in the Holy Name of Krishna. Srīman Mahaprabhu and Nityananda are their life and soul. They know nothing but the eternal service of Sri Radha and Sri Krishna.

Krishna's mercy descends only through the Vaishnavas.

Srila Bhaktivinode Thakura, a nitya-siddha (eternal associate) of the Lord, instructs the devotees to pray to Mahaprabhu. He says that we should seek shelter in the shade of a Vaishnava's lotus feet, shed tears of remorse with total humility, submitting to him the plight of our material existence, which is the result of turning away from Krishna. The Vaishnava is an ocean of compassion and feels the pain of others. When he pleads on our behalf to the Lord, Krishna responds and kindly accepts us as the followers of his favorites. Krishna's mercy descends only through the Vaishnavas.

There is Krishna and karsna. Krishna's mercy is embodied in pure devotees, who are known as karsna. The lotus feet of a Vaisnava guru represents the mercy of the Lord. Krishna is the priceless treasure enthroned in Sri Guru's heart. The Lord can easily give this treasure to those who are surrendered to his devotees. There is no other way to receive Krishna's grace than to serve and take shelter at the lotus feet of a Vaishnava. Sri Kaviraja Goswami discusses the importance of honoring the Vaishnava's remnants, using the example of Sri Kalidasa, the uncle of Raghunatha Dasa Goswami:

Taking the food remnants of Vaishnavas is so potent, it forced Mahaprabhu to give his mercy to Kalidasa. Don't hesitate-eat the Vaishnava's remnants, and you will fulfill your heart's desire.

Food offered to Krishna is called maha-prasadam. After maha-prasadam is taken by a devotee, his remnants are glorified as maha-maha-prasadam. The dust of a pure devotee's feet, the water of his foot bath, and his food remnants are three extremely potent spiritual substances. By honoring these three, one will be filled with ecstatic love for Krishna. All the scriptures declare this again and again. My dear devotees, please hear me: believe in these three and honor them in a mood of service, and you will achieve the purpose of your existence-ecstatic love of Krishna. This is the greatest mercy of Krishna, and Kalidasa is living proof.

In Kalyana-Kalpataru, Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur writes:

When will Mahaprabhu shower his mercy upon me so I may have shelter in the shade of the Vaishnava's lotus feet? I will humbly stand before the Vaishnava holding a straw between my teeth, weeping I will tell him of my miserable life, and I shall give up all self-deception. I will admit that my life is one never-ending misery and beg him to put an end to all of this. The kind Vaishnava will beg Sri Krishna with all his might, and Krishna, moved by the Vaishnava's sincerity, will shower his divine grace.

And in Saranagati, Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur writes:

O Vaishnava, you are an ocean of mercy. Please shower your compassion upon me. Give me the shade of your lotus feet and purify my polluted heart. I am following you, begging-Sri Krishna is yours-you have the power-give him to me!

Narottama dasa Thakura sings a similar song:

I am so sinful; how can I possibly serve the Lord? I have no love for my guru. I have no love for the devotees and I am constantly deluded. I am so absorbed in material life that I have forgotten who I am. The witch Maya is waiting to hang a noose around my neck. I have no power to resist her on my own. I am helpless without your mercy. I know that you never see the faults of anyone, so I'm begging you-please save me." (Prarthana)

Narottama's songs are filled with wonderful glorification of Vaishnavas. They

are treasured by all devotees as priceless instructions for increasing one's devotion. From his childhood, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Prabhupada chose Narottama's songbook as his constant companion on the path of devotion. Vrndavana dasa Thakura considered himself to be the last direct servant of Nityananda Prabhu. He has glorified the Vaishnavas throughout his masterpiece Sri Caitanya-Bhagavata. In his introduction he writes:

I first offer my unlimited obeisances at the feet of Sri Krishna Chaitanya's dearest associates, the devotees. And then I pray to him, who appeared in Nabadwip and was also known as Visvambhara.

Sri Vrndavana dasa offers his humble obeisances unto Mahaprabhu's devotees, and then to Sri Mahaprabhu. He explains:

The Supreme Lord has boldly declared in all the scriptures that 'The worship of my devotees is higher than worshipping me.' By first glorifying the Vaishnavas, I am guaranteed success in writing my book. (This statement was made by Krishna to Uddhava in the Srimad Bhagavatam.)

The next statement is from the Itihasa-Samuccaya :

If one wants God's mercy, he must first serve his devotees. Only this will satisfy the Lord; of this there is no doubt.

The following verse, from the Pausayana-Sruti, is quoted in Srila Madhvacarya's commentary on the Brahma-Sutra :

Worship the devotees, serve them, hear from them, and they will protect you.

The Mundaka-Upanisad states:

If you want the real treasure of liberation you must serve the Lord's pure devotee.

In his Govinda-Bhasya commentary, Baladeva Vidyabhusana quotes Srimad Bhagavatam :

jnane prayasam-udapasya namanta eva jivanti sanmukharitam bhavadlya-vartam sthane sthitah sruti-gatam tanu-van-manobhir yeprayas'o jita jito'py asi tais tri-lokyam (Srimad Bhagavatam 10.14.3)

Brahma prayed to Krishna,

My dear Lord, those who have given up abstract thinking and armchair philosophizing, start hearing about you from devotees and begin divine service with their body, mind, and words. Although you are unconquerable and rarely attained, you are conquered by them.

In the Padma Purana, Shiva says to his wife Parvati:

O Goddess, higher than the worship of all the gods and goddesses is the worship of the Supreme Lord Vishnu. But higher still is the worship of everyone and everything that is dear to Him, including Ganga devi, Tulasi devi, the book Bhagavata and the devotee Bhagavata.

Vrndavana dasa cautions us against seeing Vaishnavas externally. Such superficial vision is condemned:

In order to teach us the absurdity of judging devotees externally according to race, color, family, or other considerations, the Supreme Lord arranged for Haridasa Thakura to take birth in the lowest section of society. All the scriptures emphasize that if a pure devotee appears even in the lowest social circumstances, he is still to be worshipped by everyone.

A Vaishnava may appear in any family or section of society, yet he is still the most elevated person by the decree of the scriptures.

God is the protector of all living entities, and he cannot tolerate insults and disrespect shown to his devotees. Extremely mindful of his dear devotee's well-being, he refuses to accept any worship from those who slight them. The Lord loves his devotees so much that he not only accepts food and gifts from them, but sometimes he even steals their offerings! Whereas he is repulsed by offerings from a non-devotees.

In one pastime, Krishna was very eager to eat plain chipped rice cooked by Vidura's wife, and ignored a royal feast set by Duryodhana. Similarly the Lord could not resist eating the few morsels of flat rice offered by Sudama. He told him:

O Brahmin! What wonderful things have you brought for me from your home? Even a small offering from a devotee is a grand feast for me, whereas a non

devotee's feast cannot satisfy me in the least. Anything offered to me with love, I accept with love.

Sriman Mahaprabhu quotes from the Itihasa Samuccaya, recorded by Srila Krishnadasa Kaviraja:

A person may learn all the Vedas, but if he has no devotion, how can he be my devotee? Whereas if a person born into the lowest section of society has devotion, he is very dear to me. All respect must be given to such an elevated soul. His offerings must be accepted by all, for he is as much worthy of worship as I am.

Mahaprabhu also quotes Hari-bhakti-sudhodaya:

A Brahmin's sins are burnt to ashes by the powerful fire of krsna-bhakti. Whereas if a Vedic scholar is an atheist, he is derided. Anyone devoid of devotion may take birth in a great family or nation, have extensive knowledge of the scriptures, perform austerities, or chant Vedic mantras, but such things are like ornaments on a dead body. Only fools will be impressed.

When Mahaprabhu went to embrace Haridasa Thakura, with all humility Haridasa said to him:

My dear Lord, please do not touch me. I am most fallen, the lowest of men. Mahaprabhu replied: I want to touch you just to purify myself. You are so pure, it is as if at every moment you are bathing in all the sacred rivers, visiting all the holy places of pilgrimage, and performing every sacrifice, austerity, and charity imaginable. You are more exalted than any Brahmin or sannyasi.

The Lord then recited this sloka from the Srimad Bhagavatam:

One who always chants your Holy Name, even though born in the worst circumstances, is a saint. We can understand that he must have performed all austerities and sacrifices, bathed in all the holy rivers, and mastered the Vedas. Therefore he is a true Aryan (one who is pure).

In the Padma Purana, Uttara-khanda, it is declared:

When a person is admitted into Vishnu's family, he is called a Vaishnava. It has been said that of all people, the Vaishnava is certainly the most exalted.

The Dvaraka-Mahatmya states:

A person who is devoted to Janardana, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is a saint even if he is born into a low-class family; whereas if a person is born into an aristocratic family of noble lineage and is not a devotee of the Lord, he is of bad blood.

Any association with non-Vaishnavas or with Brahmins who lack devotion is categorically denounced. The Padma Purana states:

The association of meat-eaters is strictly prohibited because their lifestyle goes against scriptural regulations; in the same manner, contact with a non-Vaishnava Brahmin must be avoided. Whereas a Vaishnava-one who is initiated and who is affectionate to the Lord and his devotees--even if born into a low-class family, is capable of purifying all three worlds.

Vrndavana dasa says that intimate association with non-Vaishnavas, regardless of their parentage, is suicidal. According to the Padma Purana, the characteristics of a Vaishnava are as follows:

One who is dedicated to worshipping Vishnu, who has received initiation into a Vishnu-mantra, is classified as a Vaishnava by spiritual preceptors; all others are non-Vaishnavas." (Hari-bhakti-vilasa 1.55)

Those who are simply born into a Brahmin family but are non-Vaishnavas, and who are inimical towards Vishnu and Vaishnavas, are condemned. Vrndavana dasa cries out against these namesake Brahmins, citing the Varaha Purana:

In Kali-yuga, demons will be born in smarta Brahmin families to harass and torture the righteous devotees of the Lord. The demons choose Kali-yuga to be born in, so they can torment those rare persons who adhere to the path enunciated by the Vedas (sruti). They viciously attempt to disrupt the devotee's service to the Supreme Lord.

These Brahmin impostors view Vaishnavas who have a bad background with contempt. They scoff at their spiritual practices, or when they see them receive honor and respect, they vainly try to expose the Vaishnava's background, and other mundane trivialities. The Brhad Aranyaka Sruti describes them, saying:

One who leaves the world fully understanding the Absolute Truth is honored as

a Brahmin, but one who does not has wasted his life.

According to Sri Krishnadasa Kaviraja, not only should one not consider the form of God to be mundane, but the same is true of his devotees. As written by Srila Krishna-Dvaipayana Vyasadeva, the author of Srimad Bhagavatam:

There is no greater blasphemy than to think that the body of Vishnu is material. And Mahaprabhu says: The Vaishnava's body is never mundane; it is supramundane, and supercharged with ecstasy. (Caitanya-caritamrta Adi-lila 7.155, Antya-lila 4.191)

The use of the term *atmasama* does not imply that pure devotees are equal to the Supreme Lord in every respect. The Supreme Lord is the only one who possesses transcendental qualities to an infinite degree. The *jiva* can only possess these qualities to a finite degree.

Mahaprabhu says: "The finite and the Infinite can never be considered equal, just as a tiny spark is never equal to a fire." The following verse is found in the Bhagavat Sandarbha and also in Sridhara Swami's commentary to the Srimad Bhagavatam:

The Supreme Lord is the embodiment of eternality, knowledge, and bliss. Two of his multifarious spiritual energies are: *hladini-sakti*, the pleasure-giving potency, and *samvit*, perfect knowledge of the self and all other things, while the *jivas* are cocooned in ignorance, and deeply anchored in suffering.

Only by taking complete shelter of Sri Radhika and her serving group, the *hladini sakti*, can we realize our innate spiritual identity and service to the holy lotus feet of Sri Guru, Gauranga, and Krishna. Srila Krishnadasa Kaviraja explains further why a pure Vaishnava's body is *aprakṛta*, or supramundane:

At the time of *diksa* (initiation), the devotee surrenders to Krishna with body and soul. In reciprocation, Krishna accepts him, elevating him, body and soul, to a status equal to his own. The Lord transforms the Vaishnava's body and makes it a repository of transcendental emotions." (Caitanya-caritamrta, Antya-lila 8. 192-193)

He then quotes the Srimad Bhagavatam:

When people reject materialism and conduct their lives under my direction, they

attain immortality. They become eligible to be with me and share spiritual emotions (rasa) with me in their spiritual identity." (Srimad Bhagavatam 11.29.34)

But what is meant by surrender, Srila Saraswati Prabhupada writes in his Anubhasya commentary:

Although one who has completely renounced the world (akincana) and one who is completely sheltered in Krishna (saranagatah) may appear to be the same externally, the devotee who has given up the world has also offered his soul. At the time of initiation, the devotee gives up material conceptions while he begins to understand sambandha-jnana, one's eternal relationship with God and those who are part of the family of God. When the devotee gives up the shelter of maya, he takes shelter of Krishna and is Krishnized. At this stage, the devotee's delusion as enjoyer of material pleasures dissipates, and his real self merges with his new identity as an eternal servant of Krishna. The devotee attains his spiritual body (sac cid ananda svarupa)and his eternal service to Krishna, serving him in his own transcendental form. The pure devotee's ecstatic service is an elevated stage of devotion which is often misinterpreted and misunderstood by those unacquainted with the science of devotion. For this kind of aparadha one is deprived of the shelter of a Vaishnava guru." (Anubhasya, Caitanya-caritamrta, Antya 4.193)

Mahaprabhu taught everyone that a Vaishnava's transcendental body is unlike that of an ordinary person, or even an extraordinary person. The Lord did not view personalities like Haridasa Thakura, who took birth in a low-class family, or Sanatana Goswami, whose body was diseased, or Vasudeva Vipra, who was suffering from acute leprosy, as social outcasts or disease ridden beggars. Instead he embraced them, proving that a pure devotee's body is never impure. The pure devotee's body is transcendental, infused with spiritual bliss, and best suited to serve Krishna. As the Lord himself says:

mad-bhakta-pujyabhyadhika sarva-bhutesu man-matih

The worship of my devotees is the real worship of me. In fact it is higher than worshipping my very self. (Bhag. 11.19.21)

My dear devotees, please read and listen carefully to the divine stories and instructions that follow, and pray to the Supreme Lord and his devotees-the

Vaishnavas-that we may always worship and adore them, and thereby enter The Heart of Krishna.

“The worship of My devotees is the real worship of Me. In fact it is higher than worshipping My very Self”.

One can chant the holy name birth after birth but if one is chanting with offenses, he will never love Krishna or experience a taste for the holy name.

The vaishnava king Ambarish Maharaja

We often hear devotees lament, "why is it that i have no taste for chanting the holy name (krsnanama.)! Krishna Dasa Kaviraja Goswami answers this question in the Eighth Chapter of the *Adi-lila* of Sri *Caitanya-caritamrta*. If we want to sincerely absorb ourselves in bhajana, we must take his instructions seriously, Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur writes in the summary of this chapter

"The eighth chapter describes the glories of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Nityananda Prabhu One can chant the Holy Name birth after birth, but if one is chanting with offenses (*nama-aparadha*), he will never love Krishna If one exhibits symptoms of ecstasy (*asta-sattvika-vikara*), but is chanting with offenses, those symptoms are phony However, one who repeats the names of Mahaprabhu, Nityananda Prabhu, and the Panca-tattva in full surrender will be freed from aparadhas by the mercy of the Panca-tattva, and will then experience growing love for the Holy Name and for Krishna."

Srila Krishnadasa Kaviraja writes: "The vibration of the pundits is like the croaking of frogs

Without *krsna-bhakti* there is no *krsna-krpa*, mercy Despite their vast learning and intelligence, because they do not accept Krishna's divinity they are in illusion And even if they accept Krishna's divinity, if they do not accept the divinity of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, they are also in ignorance."

Bhaktivinode Thakura explains in his *Amrtapavaha-bhasya*: "One who does not recognize the Panca-tattva, although culturing devotion, can never attract Krishna's mercy."

Krishna, the embodiment of the Panca-tattva, was overwhelmed by the mood and radiance of Sri Radhika and appeared as Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Even God himself wants to be a devotee, and he shows by his example the perfection of devotion.

According to Mahaprabhu's teachings, only one who is humble, tolerant of others, and treats others respectfully, while expecting nothing in return, can escape the clutches of the Ten Offenses. Their very lives are situated in *krsna-nama* and divine love of God.

To illustrate the gravity of vaisnava-aparadha, which is the first of the ten nama-aparadha, the story of Ambarisa Maharaja and Durvasa Muni from the Srimad-Bhagavata Purana is especially helpful.

Approximately halfway in to the life cycle of the universe, according to *Vedic* time calculation, the seventh *manvantara*, Vaivasvata Sraddhadeva was the seventh Manu. His son was Nabhaga, and his grandson was called Nabhaga. The exalted pure devotee Ambarisa was his son His purity could ward off even the inescapable curse of a Brahmin

Ambarisa Maharaja was an extremely fortunate soul He ruled over the entire Earth, and he was the proprietor of inexhaustible wealth, yet he treated his material possessions with disdain Having cultivated deep love for the Lord and his devotees, he looked upon the world and all its allurements as trash Ambarisa Maharaja completely absorbed his entire being, within and without, in Krishna The lotus feet of Krishna were ever present within his pure mind His voice was filled with krsna-katha. He cleansed his soul by cleaning the temple His ears continuously drank the nectar of krsna-katha, and his eyes were filled with beautiful visions of the Dieties. The only aromas he knew were of Tulasi, incense, and flowers offered to Krishna He relished food tasted by Krishna, he walked to and from the temple and holy places Ambarisa Maharaja's entire being was saturated with Krishna consciousness His only motive was to please Krishna And anyone who saturates their body, mind, senses, and words in the Lord's service as he did will develop a deep attraction to the Lord and his pure devotees.

The ministers and Brahmins who were the King's well-wishers advised Ambarisa Maharaja on running the affairs of his empire The emperor did not personally perform any religious rituals, but left them to be done by the exclusive Brahmins He kept aloof so that he could immerse himself in devotion to the Supreme Lord Sri Hari, being extremely pleased with Ambarisa's devotion, gave him the protection of his Sudarsana-cakra, who is always ready to shield the Lord's devotees from harm Sudarsana was always by Ambarisa's side.

To satisfy Krishna, Ambarisa Maharaja and his queen observed Ekadasi and Dvadasi vows for one full year in Mathura, on the banks of the Yamuna. At the end of the *vrata*, in the month of Karttika, after a three-night fast, Ambarisa bathed in the Yamuna and went to Madhuvana in Vrndavana to worship Krishna Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura writes in his commentary: "Maharaja

Ambarisa observed the vow of Ekadasi throughout his life, yet he developed the yearning to observe the same for a year in Mathura-dhama. At the end of this vrata, fasting for three nights is recommended. This means to eat simple *prasadam* (*havisyanna*) on the Dasami and Dvadasi once at midday, and to maintain a dry fast throughout the whole of Ekadasi, day and night "

Ambarisa Maharaja performed the *maha-abhisekham* bathing ceremony of Krishna on a grand scale according to Vedic rituals, with *panca-gavya*, *pancamrta*, *sarvausadhi*, *mahausadhi*, and so on. He decorated the Lord with jewelry and fineries, and gave away silk clothes, cows, and other expensive gifts to the Brahmins. At home, he distributed to the *sadhus* and Brahmins millions of cows whose horns and hooves were gilded with gold and silver, and he held a grand feast for all the Brahmins.

While Ambarisa Maharaja was preparing to break his fast under the directions of the Siddharthan Brahmins, the mystic Durvasa Muni arrived at his house. Ambarisa respectfully received the exalted sage. He sat at the sage's feet and begged him to honor *prasadam* at his home. The sage graciously accepted the invitation saying that he had to first complete his daily ablutions, and thereafter he would be ready to eat. The sage went to bathe in the Yamuna, and after his rituals he went into deep meditation.

Meanwhile, the auspicious time for Ambarisa to break his fast was ending, but for a host to eat before a Brahmin guest is a transgression of proper etiquette. The emperor turned to his advisors.

The Brahmins were perplexed and remained silent. Ambarisa decided to drink water because the Vedas have declared that *apo'snati tan naivasi, tam naivanasitam iti* drinking water can either be considered eating or not eating. The Brahmins consented to this course of action. The king then meditated on the Supreme Lord, drank a little water, and waited for the sage's return.

After Durvasa Muni had completed his rituals he returned to the palace. Durvasa had seen with his mystic powers that the emperor had drunk water, and he was outraged. He began to chastise the emperor, who stood before him with folded hands: "Look at this cruel man. Intoxicated with the pride of wealth, you think that you are God, although actually you are not even a devotee. You have transgressed the laws of religion. First you invite me as your guest to eat, but because you have eaten without feeding me, I will punish you."

Durvasa Muni tore a hair from his head and created a demon. The fearsome fire demon held a trident in his hand and stomped around, making the entire Earth tremble, but Ambarisa remained calm. Then the Supreme Lord's Sudarsana *cakra*, already residing with Ambarisa on the Lord's order, immediately consumed the demon in flames.

Durvasa Muni was stunned by the destruction of his demon. He then saw the ominous Sudarsana rushing towards him. He ran in fear of his life, but wherever he ran the Sudarsana disc followed right behind, scalding his back with incinerating heat. Durvasa sought shelter in the caves of Mount Sumeru, in the sky, on the Earth, in the palaces of kings, and in the ocean, yet everywhere he went he felt the naming disc bearing down on him.

He went to Brahma and Shiva begging for shelter, but they refused, knowing that he was an *aparadhi*. Shiva advised him to surrender to the Supreme Lord, Vishnu. Durvasa Muni left the universe and entered Vaikuntha, the spiritual abode of Sri Narayana, and threw himself at the feet of the Lord, who was relaxing with his consort Sri Laksmidevi, the goddess of fortune. With his body trembling and constantly feeling the heat of Sudarsana, Durvasa prayed at the Lord's feet.

"O my Supreme Lord - I have offended one of your favorite devotees. Please forgive me. If even a person living in hell becomes liberated simply by vibrating your name, then nothing is impossible for you. Please save me."

The Lord replied: "I am completely under the control of my devotees. I have no freedom. I live happily within their hearts. Even those who are devotees of my devotees are very dear to me. Without them I am nothing:

*aham bhakta paradhino hy awatantra iva dvija sadhubhir grasta hr
dayo bhaktair bhakta jana pnyah*

Srimad Bhagavatam 9.4.63

-My devotees are my life. I am a prisoner of their love. Even their devotees are very dear to me."

"By offending Maharaja Ambarisa you are ruining yourself. When one's power is used against a devotee, it harms only the one who employs it. It is the subject, not the object, who is harmed

"For a Brahmin, austerity and learning are certainly good, but for a person who is not qualified they are dangerous Therefore you should go to him immediately and beg forgiveness "

Immediately upon receiving the Lord's instructions, Durvasa Muni rushed back to Ambarisa Maharaja, fell at his feet, and clasped them tightly The emperor was extremely embarrassed at having a sage touch his feet, so he prayed to the Sudarsanacakra, his heart overflowing with sympathy for the sage:

"O protector of the devotees! O destroyer of all weapons, O most powerful Vaishnava, you are an expansion of divine power. You dissipate ignorance and reveal devotion to the Lord. You terminate the jiva's warped vision of being *Maya's* master and give him the beautiful vision of servitorship in the form of *sambandha-jnana*. You are the most beloved devotee of the Lord I have forgiven him, you please forgive him too."

The Sudarsana-cakra was pacified and saved Durvasa Muni from the pain of its scorching heat Durvasa Muni repeatedly blessed Ambarisa Maharaja saying: "My dear king, today I have experienced the greatness of devotees, for although I have committed an offense, you prayed for my good fortune:

"For devotees, nothing is impossible. Simply by hearing the Holy Name, one is purified You are so merciful that you overlooked my offense and saved my life I am eternally indebted to you."

Durvasa Muni expressed his deep gratitude to Maharaja Ambarisa. The emperor had been waiting all this time for the sage's return and had not eaten for almost a year. He fell at Durvasa's feet and begged him to eat. He fed him sumptuously, and with great satisfaction the sage requested that the emperor also take *prasadam*.

"My dear king, I am so pleased with you. At first I thought that you were simply an ordinary person. Now I understand that you are an extremely exalted devotee. Therefore simply by seeing you, touching your feet, and talking to you, I feel purified and blessed. May you be glorified in heaven and on Earth until the end of time."

In this way Ambarisa Maharaja realized the Absolute Truth to be one - Vasudeva - Brahman, Paramatma, and Bhagavan. Always absorbed in acts of devotion, he considered even the topmost material planet of Brahmaloaka with all

of its opulence and pleasures to be nothing more than a royal version of hell.

At the conclusion of this story Sukadeva Goswami tells Pariksit Maharaja, "Any person who narrates or meditates on this sublime pastime of Ambarisa Maharaja will become eligible to engage in pure devotional service at the lotus feet of Krishna."

The point being emphasized in this lila is that if we have committed an offense, we must submissively approach the same devotee whom we have offended and beg his forgiveness. Then the Supreme Lord, who is a slave to his devotee's love, will accept our prayers. Humbly taking the position of a servant of the Lord's servant, we will attract the mercy of the Lord. This is the ultimate gift of a pure devotee only they can give us Krishna.

In the case of Durvasa Muni, although he possessed mystic power which allowed him to physically enter Brahmaloaka, Shivaloka, and even Vaikuntha loka, he still could not escape the menacing rage of Sudarsana. Only after unconditionally surrendering himself at Ambarisa's feet did the Lord's personal weapon withdraw.

Our distorted perception of divinity cannot be rectified without the grace of sudarsana, which means real vision. The proper comprehension of the esoteric principles of Vishnu and Vaishnava elude us without it.

Embellishing himself with the sublime mood and radiance of Sri Radha, Krishna appears as Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu with his confidantes Ramananda Raya and Svarupa Damodara Goswami, who are the supreme teachers of the science of *rasa*. But the Lord himself says, "If you want to taste this *prema-rasa*, then you will have to be more humble than a blade of grass, more tolerant than a tree, and expect no respect for yourself while offering all respects to others."

By chanting the sixteen names of the thirty-two syllabled Hare Krishna mahamantra - without committing the ten kinds of nama-aparadha - one becomes eligible to enter the spiritual abode of Goloka and find the highest treasure, *vraja-prema-rasa*. Otherwise we may chant until our tongues fall out and gain nothing. Prior to the advent of Sri Chaitanyadeva, this confidential knowledge had never been revealed. He not only revealed it, but distributed it freely. So everyone must avoid the ten kinds of nama-aparadhas, especially the first - to offend a Vaishnava, because a Vaishnava has taken shelter in the Holy Name

and is giving his shelter to others. Violation of this principle destroys devotion.

Namacarya Haridas Thakur & the liberation of the prostitute

Haridas Thakura, is Namacarya or supreme teacher of the Holy Name Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's bliss multiplies without limitation when he describes the extraordinary qualities of his devotees. Haridas Thakura is one such devotee, and is described as follows by Kaviraja Goswami in the Antya lila of Sri Caitanya-caritamrta: "Haridas Thakur's greatness is immeasurable It is impossible to describe even a small aspect of his magnanimous character."

If we try at all to describe him, it would merely be for our own personal purification. Vrndavana dasa Thakura has also tasted the nectar of Haridas Thakura's sublime persona.

Haridas Thakura left his home in Budhana village and traveled to Benapola, which is in West Bengal. He built a small hut in the woods and spent his time serving Tulasi devi and chanting three hundred thousand names of God daily Like a honey bee, he collected a little food from each righteous Brahmin home to maintain himself The villagers were impressed with his devotion and they loved and respected him.

Ramacandra Khan was the leader of that village. He was an atheist who despised Vaishnavas. He could not bear the villagers love for Haridas. Although he was born in a Brahmin family, Ramacandra Khan was a disgrace, a drunkard and a womanizer.

Wanting to bring dishonor to Haridas, he plotted to ruin Haridas's reputation. However, Haridas could not be easily seduced.

In a final attempt to discredit Haridas, Ramacandra Khan ordered prostitutes be brought to him. He asked them to break Haridas's spiritual resolve, thereby tarnishing his character. One beautiful young prostitute said that she required but three days to accomplish the task. Pleased, Ramacandra Khan promised to compensate her well. He commanded his guard to accompany her to catch Haridas with her in a compromised position and then bring him back in chains.

The prostitute suggested that she go alone the first night and then on the second night the guard could escort her. She returned home and waited for nightfall. She

dressed seductively and went to Haridasa's hut. Pretending to be devout she bowed before Haridasa and *Tulasi devi*, and then sat down directly in front of him and tried to tempt him with seductive movements and gestures Haridasa remained unaffected. Quite desperately, she finally made an indecent proposal to Haridasa, to which he replied, "I shall accept you without a doubt, but you will have to wait until I have finished chanting my rounds on my beads. Until then, please sit and listen to *krsna-nama*. As soon as I am finished, I shall fulfill your heart's desire. "

Haridasa continuously chanted before the prostitute, who remained sitting by the door. The night ended, and as the eastern sky became roused by dawn, she returned home. Later, she went and reported to Khan that she had visited Haridasa's hut the previous night and was promised by Haridasa that he would fulfill her wishes that night. Keeping Khan's hopes alive, she left for Haridasa's *bhajana-kutira*, meditation hut. Seeing her, Haridasa spoke encouragingly: "Last night you were disappointed. Please excuse my offense I shall certainly be with you soon. Please sit down and hear Krishna's name. When my designated rounds are finished, your desire will be fulfilled." (Caitanya-caritamrta Antya 3 120-121).

The real meaning of Haridasa's words could not be fathomed by her because her consciousness was clouded by lust. However, a distinct change was already visible in her. That night, she offered obeisances to Tulasi Devi and sat down by the door listening to the soft chanting of Haridasa. Soon she also began to chant, "Hari Hari Hari ." Once again, night ended and it was dawn. She became restless and Haridasa said: "I have vowed to chant ten million names this month, and now it is nearing its end. I thought that today I would complete this vow, but in spite of chanting through the whole night, I am still not finished. However, I am sure that tomorrow I will finish, and my vow will be fulfilled. Then it will be possible for me to enjoy you in full freedom."

The prostitute returned to Khan and informed him of what had happened. The next day she went earlier in the evening and stayed with Haridasa. After offering obeisances to Tulasi and Haridasa, she sat on the threshold of the room. She heard Haridasa's incessant chanting, and she also began to chant "Hari, Hari, Hari," the Holy Name of the Lord. Haridasa told her: "Today I will complete my vow - then I will satisfy all your desires."

The association of a great soul for three nights, and the good fortune to hear the

pure name from his lips could never go in vain. The third night passed with Haridasa's continuous chanting of the Holy Name. But with the coming of the third dawn, a new awakening also dawned in the heart of the young prostitute. The gloom of ignorance shrouding her consciousness lifted, and a fire like the blazing sun burnt up all of the impurities in her heart.

She fell to the ground at Haridasa's feet. Weeping, she pleaded for her sins to be forgiven. She confessed that Khan had employed her to seduce him and said: "Because I am a prostitute I have performed many sinful acts. Dear master, please be merciful to me. Deliver my fallen soul."

Haridasa replied: "I know everything about Khan's conspiracy against me. He is an ignorant fool, but that doesn't bother me. I would have left this place the day Khan began plotting against me, but because you came to me I stayed here for three days just to deliver you."

The prostitute said: "Please be my guru. Tell me what I should do to get relief from material existence."

Srila Haridasa replied: "Go home and immediately distribute all your possessions to the Brahmins; then return here and forever be in Krishna consciousness. Always chant the Holy Name of Krishna and serve Tulasi by watering her daily and offering her prayers. Quickly you will find shelter at Sri Krishna's lotus feet."

Haridasa Thakura left the village after initiating the prostitute with *krsna-nama*. Understanding that the guru's instruction must be executed without hesitation, she gave away all of her belongings. She gave up her home, shaved her head, and lived in her guru's *bhajana-kutira*. She eagerly engaged in devotional practices, chanting day and night three hundred thousand Holy Names, serving Tulasi devi, eating frugally, and observing the various fast days.

Sri Caitanya-caritamrta says: "She gradually subdued her senses, and symptoms of divine love manifested in her. She became a celebrated devotee and many Vaishnavas came to visit her. Seeing the sublime transformations in her character everyone was astonished. They glorified the potency of Haridasa and offered him obeisances."

By receiving a Vaishnava's blessings, even a prostitute can become a pure and advanced devotee. Whereas Ramacandra Khan, a Brahmin by birth, was so

fallen that he was malicious to Haridasa Thakura. For this *aparadha* he had to undergo severe suffering. We must all ponder the seriousness of *vaisnava-aparadha*.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prabhupada writes:

"Although born in a Brahmin family, Ravana, the son of Visrava, hated the Supreme Lord, and for this offense Ravana was called an asura, or demon. Similarly, Ramacandra Khan, by offending a great devotee, was also known as an asura." The results of Ramacandra Khan's offenses took terrifying shape in him. It so happened that the Lord Nityananda Prabhu was traveling all over Bengal with a large group of disciples and associates, intent on propagating the Holy Name and subduing demoniac forces. One day he arrived at Ramacandra Khan's house and sat down in the *candi-mandapa*, or a covered area for goddess Devi's worship. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati writes that wealthy non-Vaishnava families built separate areas to worship the goddess Durga, and that this area was used for entertaining guests when it wasn't being used for puja.

Lord Nityananda's large party filled up the entire courtyard. As a host, Ramacandra Khan should have personally come out to welcome him. He should have been filled with gratitude at his immense good fortune that his house was sanctified by the touch of Nityananda Prabhu's lotus feet. But instead, he sent one of his servants to meet Nityananda Prabhu, thereby insulting him and his exalted followers. In a curt message to the Lord, the servant informed him that since he was with a large group that could not be properly accommodated, arrangements had been made for all of them to go elsewhere.

What followed is described in the Caitanya-caritamrta: "When Nityananda Prabhu heard this order from Ramacandra Khan's servant, he became very angry and came out of the *mandapa* laughing madly and said, "Ramacandra Khan is right. This place is unfit for me. It is only fit for cow-killing meateaters."

Nityananda Prabhu stormed out of Khan's house. Khan was so demoniac that he ordered his servants to dig up the earth where the Lord had sat, and he had it filled up again after it had been cleansed with water and cow dung. Even the courtyard where the Lord's followers were sitting was cleansed. However, it was not long before the consequences of offending the Supreme Lord and the Vaishnavas took effect.

It so happened that Khan had been cheating the local magistrate by tax-evasion. Enraged by Khan's dishonesty, the magistrate stormed into his house one day and sat on the *Durga-mandapa*. He ordered that a cow be slaughtered and that its flesh be cooked on the spot. For three days Khan's family was bound and held captive. His household and the entire village was pillaged by the magistrate's men. On the fourth day, the magistrate and his men left the village, its properties destroyed and everyone shocked and in agony. Khan was completely ruined and forsaken. Kaviraja Goswami writes:

"Wherever an advanced devotee is disrespected, for the fault of one man, everyone in connection with him will suffer."

In spite of hearing about or even experiencing the fatal consequences of offending the Supreme Lord or his devotees, we are so deluded that we still need to be reminded not to commit offenses.

After leaving Benapola, Haridasa went to Candapura. According to Bhaktivinode Thakura, Candapura lay north of Saptagrama at the Triveru, and was the home of Hiranya and Govardhana Majumadara, Raghunatha Dasa Goswami's family. Candapura was also the residence of Balarama and Yadunandana Acarya, family priests of the Majumadaras of Saptagrama.

It is here that Haridasa lived in Balarama Acarya's house, and where Balarama Acarya was favored by Haridasa's grace. Balarama Acarya was a very devout Brahmin and a great devotee. He offered all hospitality to Haridasa while Haridasa spent his time chanting three hundred thousand Holy Names in a hut.

Raghunatha Dasa Goswami, the son of Sri Govardhana Majumadara, was a schoolboy. He regularly visited and associated with Haridasa, who showered his blessings upon him. Later, as the ultimate act of mercy he brought Raghunatha Dasa to the lotus feet of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu.

Raghunatha Dasa Goswami is a nitya-siddha, or an eternal confidante of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who descended into this world as part of Mahaprabhu's entourage. His associating with Haridasa exemplifies that *bhakti* is only attainable by the mercy of an exalted devotee of the Lord.

One day, Balarama Acarya, after begging Haridasa to attend a religious assembly at the Majumadara residence, got his wish. Both the brothers, Hiranya and Govardhana, received him with respect. The assembly was attended by

many pundits and respectable gentry. Everyone in the assembly generously expressed their appreciation of Haridasa.

They praised Haridasa for his vow to chant the Holy Name. Someone in the assembly said that chanting the Holy Name absolves all sins. Another observed that the Holy Name bestows liberation. Hearing people speaking of only the external effects of krsna-nama, Haridasa pointed out that these were not the principal results of pure nama: "What you say is not the true result of krsnanama. The real effect is that ecstatic love of Krishna awakens.

"Even the Lord loves his own name. As one continues his vow to chant, the Lord becomes more dear to him, and so does his Holy Name. With increased enthusiasm, he becomes deeply attached to Krishna and he loves the name of Krishna so much that he sometimes cries in separation, or even exhibits loving anger. Sometimes the ecstasy is so intense that he chants the name of Krishna and dances like a complete madman, not caring for anyone or anything."

evam-vratah sva-priya-nama-kirtyd jatanurdgo druta-citta uccaih hasaty atho roditi rauti gdyaty unmada-van nytyati loka-bahyah.

Srimad Bhagavatam 11.2.40

Visvanatha Cakravarti says that *evam-vratah* means that the vow to chant krsna-nama regardless of circumstances, gives *prema-bhakti-yoga*, union in devotional love. The person who upholds such a vow is beyond any of the concerns of this world. He states further that among the nine limbs of devotion, *nama-kirtana*, or chanting the Holy Name, is the highest. *Sva-priya-nama-kirtyd* - "Krishna's name is very dear to Krishna" - this Sanskrit phrase refers to any person who through chanting Krishna's name has fallen in love with him. At this stage the heart has become like gold due to the heat from the fire of yearning to see Krishna.

Just as in *Vraja-lila*, Krishna the butter-thief slips into a *gopi's* house early in the morning, and *Jarati*, an older *gopi* sitting near the door, warns the other *gopis* that *Yasoda's* son has snuck into the storeroom. She cries, "Catch him! Catch him!" The devotees in deep meditation on Krishna's pastimes laugh in joy at the thought of Krishna running away to escape.

The next moment, when the devotee awakens from his *-vision-* he laments: "Oh no! The unlimited ocean of bliss was within reach and now I have lost him!" He

cries pathetically in separation from Krishna. He screams, "Where are you? Talk to me!"

When Krishna hears such a devotee's plea, he reassures them: "Here I am - I came running to you as soon as I heard you call." Then the vision is regained, and the devotee resumes praising the Lord. Dancing madly, he shouts, "I am so happy, today my life is perfect."

At this stage, the devotee couldn't care less about praise or criticism. This condition has been described: "Drunk on the wine of rasa we become like madmen rolling on the ground, and sometimes dancing wildly. People may think that we are crazy, but who cares?"

The awakening of *krsna-prema* is the natural and direct result of *krsna-nama* - not the destruction of sin or achieving liberation. Haridasa cited the example of a sunrise. The result of sunrise is light; the dissipation of darkness is secondary. He quoted a verse from the *Nama-kaumudi* of Sri Laksmidhara Swami and asked the scholars to explain it. But they preferred to have Haridasa enlighten them.

Haridasa said: "Just before sunrise, before the sun is even visible, it eliminates the darkness of night. With the first glimpse of sunlight, all fears vanish; and when the sun is actually visible, everything is revealed and a new day begins. Similarly, with the first hint of *krsna-nama*, the reactions of sinful life are instantly terminated. And when one chants the Holy Name offenselessly, ecstatic love of Krishna is awakened. Although it is offered by Krishna readily, liberation is nothing to a pure devotee. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* it is stated, - While dying, Ajamila unintentionally chanted the Holy Name of the Lord by calling for his son Narayana and he entered the spiritual world. What, then, can be said of those who chant the Holy Name with deep faith."

Krishna says: "My real devotees want nothing from me. They don't want to live where I live, have the same wealth I have, nor have a body like mine - they just want to serve me."

One of the Brahmins present was Gopala Cakravarti. He was the chief tax-collector and official messenger of the Muslim ruler. He couldn't stand Haridasa's explanation that even a shadow of the Holy Name could give liberation. He spoke angrily: "You are all supposed to be pundits and you sit here listening to this fool rave about *krsna-nama*. Do you really believe that

after millions of births one who is in complete, absolute knowledge will still not attain liberation, but a devotee will get it by a mere touch of the Holy Name?"

Haridasa replied: "Why do you doubt it?" The scriptures say that one can become liberated simply at the first semblance of offenseless chanting.

"My dear Lord, you are so beautiful that I feel like I am drowning in an ocean of nectar just looking at you. Whatever other concepts I had of happiness, are now like puddles of mud." (Caitanya-caritamṛta, Antya 3.139-199)

The Brahmin said: "If you are lying, I'll cut your nose off."

Haridasa replied: "If I'm lying, then I'll cut my nose off." Everyone was shocked. The Majumadaras were outraged, and they began to chastise Gopala Cakravarti. Balarama Acarya reprimanded: "You are just caught up in absurd rhetoric; what do you know about the process of devotion? And you have the audacity to insult Haridasa Thakura? You're committing spiritual suicide!"

Gopala Cakravarti exposed himself as an offender to the Holy Name. He did not have faith that the Holy Name is omnipotent and supramundane. When he left the assembly, everyone fell at Haridasa's feet begging forgiveness. But Haridasa never saw the faults of others and smiled compassionately, saying: "None of you are at fault. Even this ignorant Brahmin is not at fault because he is accustomed to dry speculation and logic. One cannot understand the glories of the Holy Name simply by logic and argument. Therefore that man cannot possibly fathom the glories of the Holy Name. Do not be sorry because I was insulted. Return to your homes, and may Krishna bless you."

The reactions for committing *aparadha* did not take long to manifest. "Within three days the Brahmin was infected with leprosy, and as a result his nose melted and fell off. His toes, limbs, and fingers, which were as delicate as flower buds, withered into stumps. The people were astonished to see this phenomenon, and they were in awe of Haridasa's spiritual potency and offered obeisances to him.

"Although Haridasa did not take the Brahmin's offense seriously, the Supreme Personality of Godhead did, and the Brahmin suffered the consequences. A characteristic of a pure devotee is that he excuses the offenses of the ignorant, but Krishna never tolerates an offense to the lotus feet of his devotee."

When Haridasa learned about Gopala contracting leprosy, he was deeply

sorrowful. He left Balarama Acarya's house and traveled to Sri Advaita Acarya's home in Santipura. Haridasa prostrated himself before the Acarya, and Advaita picked him up and embraced him lovingly. Sri Advaita built a hut for Haridasa on the bank of the Ganga and arranged for him to conduct his meditation and worship there.

Haridasa continued his daily routine of krsna-nama, honoring prasadam at Advaita's home, and hearing krsna-katha. Together they drowned in an ocean of bliss discussing Krishna and Mahaprabhu.

Krishna says, "My real devotees want nothing from me. They don't want to live where I live, have the same wealth I have, nor have a body like mine. They just want to serve me."

"Any person who, upon hearing blasphemy against the Supreme Lord or His Devotee, does not leave that unholy place, is implicated- in the offense and loses all sukrti, spiritual merit." (Srimad Bhagavatam)

Mahadeva Shiva & Sati's sacrifice

King Daksa blasphemed the topmost Vaishnava Shiva by not inviting him to a royal sacrifice. The *SrimadBhagavatam* tells the story of how Vishnu the Supreme Godhead, refused to grace Daksa's yajna. Shiva's devoted wife Sati could not refuse Daksa's invitation because he was her father, so she attended despite her husband's disapproval.

At the assembly, her father began to publicly malign her husband. She was deeply pained and thought, "Feeling sentimental I ignored my husband's warning and came to my father's house only to be tormented by hearing blasphemy against an elevated Vaishnava. Shame on me a thousand times! I don't know what to do. I cannot continue to live in this wretched body of mine, which was conceived by my blasphemous father. I will abandon it and purify my soul by bathing it in my godly husband's feet-dust.

She then addressed her father Daksa, "My Lord Shiva is dear to all living beings; he loves everyone. He has no enemies - to such a godly personality, you alone could behave in such a despicable manner." A saintly person's nature is to overlook other's faults and only appreciate their good qualities. But an envious person like you sees even the good qualities of others as faults. The madhyama-adhikari Vaishnava properly discriminates between good qualities and bad qualities.

The uttama-adhikari discovers everyone's smallest good qualities and praises them as if they are traits of greatness, whereas a fool decries a great personality who possesses all divine qualities.

The nature of fault-finders is to only look for other's faults. They disregard the many good characteristics in others and attempt to portray them as shortcomings. Ants will search for little holes and cracks even in a beautiful temple. Such people are like sieves who conveniently overlook their own thousand perforations but ridicule a pinhole and try to magnify it.

A saintly person is free from fault-finding. The Caitanya-caritamrta defines a first-class Vaishnava as:

uttama hana vaisnava habe nirabhimana jibe sammana dibe jani ' krsna

adhithana

Caitanya-caritamria, Antyd 20.25

"Although a Vaishnava is the most exalted person, he is prideless and respects everyone, knowing that Krishna is within them."

om bhur bhuvah sva tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyo yah nah prachodayat om

Anyone who limits his concept of the self to the body, mind, or intellect is deluded. It is not surprising that such fools malign exalted persons. However, elevated souls calmly tolerate all blasphemies hurled against them. They are undisturbed by praise or criticism, honor or dishonor although their followers, who are like particles of pollen clinging to their lotus feet, never tolerate blasphemy. They want to destroy the offenders.

The two syllables forming the name 'Shiva- - si and va - are so auspicious that by their mere utterance all inauspiciousness and evil is removed. Shiva's instruction is law, and his pastimes are most holy and glorious. Therefore, only an envious fool could even think of criticizing the best friend of all living beings.

Daksa responded, "You have described the sublime characteristics of saints and warned against finding faults in others, but what about me? I am a Brahmin. Even as a prajapati (progenitor), I am worshiped by everyone. I am your father and should be highly respected by you, my daughter. Do you think criticizing me is not an offense?"

Sati replied, "How can you, an enemy of Shiva, speak of blasphemy? As a party to this heinous offense I should kill you, and by not doing so I am worsening my own offense."

So dear devotees, please hear the instruction of the scriptures in this regard:

karnau pidhaya nirayad yad akalpa ise dharmavitary asmibhir nrbhir asyamane chindyat prasahya rusatim asatmi prabhus cej jihvam asun api tato visrjet sa dharmah.

Srimad Bhagavatam 4.4.17

"Upon hearing blasphemy of the Lord, one should plug their ears and go away if they are unable to punish the blasphemer. But if one is not in a position to enforce corporal punishment, then they should give up their own life."

In his commentary to this *sloka*, Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti writes: "In the ancient times of India, the ksatriya-dharma, or rights and responsibilities of the military class, dictated that a *ksatriya* was empowered to punish blasphemers. The other classes of Vedic society - Brahmin, *vaisya*, and *sudra* - were not permitted to mete out physical punishments. So the *vaisyas* (merchants) and *sudra* (workers), as a reaction to hearing blasphemy, may give up their lives. It is not right for a Brahmin to give up his life, and so he will cover his ears, chant the name of Vishnu, and leave the company of the blasphemer, feeling deeply saddened."

Since Vaishnavas are at least equal to the Brahmins, they will follow the Brahmin code. Srila Jiva Goswami writes in his *Bhakti-sandarbha*, in the context of *sadhu-ninda*, the first of nama-aparadhas: "To even hear *vaisnava-ninda* is damaging. The Bhagavatam states:

nindam bhagavatah srnvams, tat-parasya jandsya va tato napaiti yah so 'pi yaty, yadhah sukrtac cyutah

Srimad Bhagavatam 10.74.40

"Any person who, on hearing blasphemy against the Supreme Lord or his devotee, does not leave that unholy place, is implicated in the offense and loses all *sukrti* (spiritual merit)."

The instruction to leave the place of offense is solely directed at those who are weak. Those who are strong and powerful must retaliate."

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura Prabhupada writes in his purport of the Srimad Bhagavatam 4.4.17: "The Brahmins are the gurus of the entire *varnasrama* society. The Brahmin's guru is the *Vaishnava Acarya*, or the spiritual preceptor and protector of Vaishnava theology. At the first sign of blasphemy against an Acarya, it is one's duty to leave. If one is not in an appropriate position to enforce corporal punishment, he should give up his body, feeling unbearable distress and shame.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Prabhupada's says that not only is the vaisnava- aparadhi's

association to be strictly avoided, but also the associates of vaisnava-aparadhis.

Sati, the exalted wife of the greatest Vaishnava, Lord Shiva, continued: "I can't stand living in this rotten body born from your seed. If one mistakenly drinks poison, doctors recommend vomiting.

My poisoned body needs to be rejected and burned. You are so vile I am ashamed to be your daughter. My husband addresses me as -Daksayam,- the daughter of Daksa. When I think of that and how the name binds me to you I feel disgusted and my heart breaks. I want to kill myself."

Sati suddenly went into a deep meditation, and by her mystic power, left her body. Shocked, everyone began to wail while Daksa remained silent. Sari's bodyguards prepared to kill him. The powerful sage Bhrgu, seeing the attacking guards advancing, chanted a potent mantra and offered oblations into the sacrificial fire. Out of the fire arose hundreds of powerful Rbhus, (heavenly warriors) armed with magical weapons who disseminated the bodyguards. Outnumbered by superior warriors, Sari's guards fled in all directions. Meanwhile, Narada Muni, who was observing the entire incident by mystic vision, went to Lord Shiva and told him everything. Lord Shiva, in a fit of rage, tore a hair from his head and dashed it on the ground. The hair morphed into a monstrous warrior named Virabhadra, who bowed in deep reverence to his master and prayed for instructions. Shiva said, "You are my anger - destroy Daksa!" Virabhadra immediately raced to the sacrifice and arrested Daksa. He tore Bhrgu Muni's mustache off of his face, because he had twirled it while derisively laughing at Lord Shiva. Virabhadra slammed Bhagadeva to the ground and ripped his eyes out, because Bhagadeva had encouraged Daksa by winking at him while he was insulting Lord Shiva. And because Pusa had smiled, baring his teeth while Shiva was being abused, Virabhadra knocked his teeth out, just as Balarama had done to Dantavakra.

Then Virabhadra sat on Daksa's chest and severed his head. Virabhadra threw the bloody head into the sacrificial fire as an oblation and set the whole arena on fire. Then he called for Shiva's soldiers and left for Kailasa. Any sacrificial ceremony in which there is blasphemy of a pure Vaishnava will face the same destruction.

The sacrificial priest and the attending gods, all severely wounded, reverently approached Brahma and narrated the gory episode to him. Brahma and Sri

Narayana had stayed away from Daksa's sacrifice, knowing beforehand the terrible outcome. Brahma patiently heard their pleas and advised: "Those who vilify a powerful personality and then desire to live in peace will find their lives extremely inauspicious. You have offended Shiva, who is a recipient god of the sacrificial oblations. You must be sincerely remorseful and throw yourselves at his feet. He is Asutosa, very easy to satisfy - so try to please him. When he is angry he is capable of destroying the entire universe. He has been deeply hurt and enraged by the death of his beloved consort. I see no recourse other than sincerely begging forgiveness at his lotus feet."

Brahma then led Indra and the other gods to Lord Shiva's abode, Kailasa. They found him sitting under a tree and meditating on the Supreme. They offered their respectful obeisances to Shiva who reciprocated. Brahma prayed and begged him to excuse Daksa, and to find a way to complete the yajna. He further pleaded with him to forgive the other gods who were a party to the heinous crime, and to heal the maimed and wounded guests.

Shiva was appeased by Brahma and the gods. By his mystic power he placed a goat's head on Daksa and brought him back to life, and the others who were wounded were also healed. Shiva accompanied them to Daksa's sacrificial arena, where Daksa fell at his feet and begged for mercy. The yajna resumed, Narayana came to receive oblations, Shiva and Brahma were worshiped and received the remnants of the sacrificial offerings - Daksa's yajna was completed. In time, Sati reincarnated as Parvati, the daughter of Menaka and Himalaya, and married Shiva again.

By hearing this sacred tale of Shiva, who is the crest jewel among Vaishnavas, we advance on the path of devotion.

"Any person who, upon hearing blasphemy against the Supreme Lord or His devotee, does not leave that unhoty pface, is implicated in the offense and loses all *sukrti*, spirituat merit". (Srimad-Bhagavatam)

Sri Narada Muni & the Sons of Daksa

In Christian theology there are the ten commandments; in vaishnavism there are the ten offenses against the holy name. To blaspheme one who has taken complete shelter of the Holy Name, and who shelters others in *krsna-nama*, is so serious that it is first and foremost. A devotee must be extremely cautious, otherwise he could be committing spiritual suicide. An offender may chant the Holy Name for millions of lifetimes without receiving the blessings of Nama Prabhu, the Holy Name himself.

The scriptures inform us that Daksa was beheaded because he offended Shiva. Yet after he pleased Shiva with sincere remorse, he was forgiven. Vaisnava-aparadha is so insidious that if even a trace of it remains in the heart, there will be remission. Daksa, who committed *vaisnava-aparadha* in the time of the Svayambhuva-manvantara, had to suffer its consequences eons later. As the Srimad Bhagavatam states: "Following the order of the creator Brahma to procreate, all the Pracetas accepted Marisa as their wife. From her womb Daksa took another birth. Daksa had to take birth again due to his offenses to Mahadeva Shiva. Consequently he had to die twice."

Srila Visvanatha Cakravaripada gives his opinion, "In Svayambhuva Manu's era, Sri Narayana gave birth to Brahma from the divine lotus that sprouts from his navel. Daksa was Brahma's son, yet even so, because of offending Mahadeva Shiva, he had to suffer taking birth again from the womb of Marisa. Daksa first died in the hands of Virabhadra, and a second time by natural death."

The material universe is destroyed at the end of the fifth manvantara. Daksa was born in the Svayambhuva-manvantara. Desiring immense opulence, he performed austerities for a period of five manvantaras. During the sixth manvantara, *Caksusa*, he achieved his immense wealth. Visvanatha Cakravarti states that it was by the mercy of Shiva that Daksa acquired his fabulous wealth.

In *Caksusa* manvantara, on the orders of the Supreme Lord Hari, the progenitor Daksa accepted *Asikni* as his wife and fathered ten thousand sons. He instructed his sons to increase the population. He advised them to visit the holy place of Sri Narayana-Sarovara, where there have been many saints since the beginning of time. By the purifying influence of the water of the Sarovara, Daksa's sons were freed of material desires and became paramahamsas.

Remembering their father's instruction to populate the world, they began to undergo a process of selfpurification. The great sage Narada found them performing their penances and examined them by asking them ten esoteric questions. Understanding the import of these questions, they became detached and pursued a life of devotion. They expressed their appreciation to Narada and began their devotional path.

When Daksa heard that his sons had become renunciates he was overcome with lamentation;

"Alas! Even good sons can be the cause of great sorrow."

Brahma managed to console Daksa, who fathered another thousand sons. Daksa gave them the same instruction to increase the population. Following in the footsteps of their elder brothers, they traveled to the same holy place. Its waters cleansed their hearts of all material contamination, and they also became devotees of the Supreme Lord.

Daksa's anxiety increased with several inauspicious omens. When the news reached him that these sons too had taken up the path of renunciation and disappeared, Daksa was again overwhelmed with grief. Once more Narada Muni was the cause, and in great anger Daksa cursed him. "You wear the dress of a saintly person, but you are not actually a saint. I may be a family man, but I am a real saint. By showing my sons the path of renunciation, you have ruined my life.

"You have made me lose my sons once, and now you have done it again. You do not know how to treat people properly. So you may continue to travel all over the universe, but I curse you to never have a home anywhere."

It is said that at birth, a Brahmin is indebted to the *rsis*, to the gods and goddesses, and to his father. According to the scriptures, a Brahmin can be cleared from his debts to the *rsis* by observing *brahmacarya* (celibacy) until marriage, to the gods by performing *yajna*, and to his father by producing sons. Daksa argued that his sons had not yet absolved their debts, and therefore were not eligible for renunciation. Daksa felt that Narada's instruction made his sons apathetic to family life, which disqualified them from receiving benediction in this life and the next. Further, Daksa felt that Narada confused their immature minds. He told Narada that his association with the Supreme Lord was a blemish

on the Lord's reputation.

Narada, who is respected by all saintly persons, responded to Daksa's curse indifferently, without protest. If one accepts a curse and allows it to take effect, even though he is capable of counteracting it, then such tolerance should be enough to win over the person who cursed him. The truth is that for those who are mired in materialism, Daksa's viewpoint has value, whereas Narada's teachings on pure devotion are outside their grasp. And this leads to *vaisnava-aparadha*.

Meanwhile Daksa, lamenting the loss of his sons, was consoled by Brahma. Encouraged by Brahma and afraid that he might remain childless, he fathered sixty daughters who were very devoted to their father. They all married, and their children and grandchildren populated the universe.

Vaifnava-aparadha severely damages one's spiritual progress. When Daksa offended Lord Shiva, he asked forgiveness, but half-heartedly. The disease of *aparadha* remained in Daksa's heart and resurfaced as an offense to the lotus feet of Sri Narada Muni.

Even if one worships the Lord for millions of lifetimes, if he has offended a Vaishnava it will be impossible to gain the Lord's mercy. This is a warning to all devotees.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prabhupada writes in his Gaudiya-bhasya commentary.

"The Supreme Lord Krishna manifests himself in the material world in four forms. The Vaishnava, Tulasi, the Ganga, and Srimad Bhagavatam are four of the Lord's divine expansions (prakasa-vigraha). Although they may not appear to be divine, they are nondifferent from Divinity and are worthy of worship.

"Generally people think that the deity form of the Lord is only worthy of worship after being formally installed (prana-prati-stha). However this does not apply to the Vaishnava, Tulasi devi, Ganga devi, or Srimad Bhagavatam. These four constitute Krishna's paraphernalia, and although they are enjoyed by him, he enjoys serving them. These representations of divinity must never be denigrated, otherwise all one's devotional endeavors are useless.

Mahaprabhu himself says: "Those who worship me directly but neglect my

devotees are in illusion and cause me pain. Their offerings feel like a shower of burning cinders on my body. He who criticizes and offends my devotees will be destroyed by chanting my name. Just because one is chanting is no guarantee of success. I destroy anyone who tries to hurt my devotees”.

"Even if a *sannyasi* offends a pure devotee he falls down Gaurachandra declared to the world:

“Give up criticizing Vaishnavas and take shelter of *krsna-nama*. If one utters Krishna’s name even once without offense, I will deliver him immediately.”

Srila Vrndavana dasa Thakura has condemned the offenders of Vishnu, Krishna, and his devotees, the Vaishnavas. He quotes Narada Muni in the Caitanya-Bhagavata: "One who is openly fallen hurts only himself, whereas a phony saint is worse, because he drags all of his followers down with him."

Pretenders usurp the elevated seats of saints and misguide the general populace in the name of religion They encourage the public to engage in false practices and to criticize the actual representatives of religious principles, Vaishnavas They destroy themselves as well as their unfortunate followers Unwary people gather to hear spiritual instructions from these charlatans, but end up hearing insults against actual saintly persons. Believing in such teachings, followers of false gurus pave their path to hell. Vrndavana dasa says: "People eagerly hear spiritual instructions from a man who they think is a saintly person by his external appearance. Instead they hear criticism directed against real saints, and due to this offense they plunge deep into the abyss."

The Vedas unequivocally declare that if anyone hears insults against a Vaishnava he loses all his accumulated piety and is cast into abominable conditions birth after birth.

If one offenselessly chants Krishna’s name even once, then Krishna will liberate him from material bondage. However, a person may be well-versed in all the Vedas, but if he still maintains an offensive attitude towards the Vaishnavas, he is eternally doomed. Gaudiya-Bhasya states with regard to Sri Caitanya-Bhagavata: "When one stops his offenses against the Vaishnavas and utters Krishna’s name even once, he easily receives the Supreme Lord’s grace. Criticizing the *sadhu* is the same as criticizing the lotus feet of Sri Guru, and that is an offense against the Supreme Lord. Gradually degrading to the level of

Bhagavad-ninda, an offender of the Supreme Lord is not only deprived of receiving *prema*, but due to his *nama-aparadha* he does not even come anywhere near achieving the benefits of religion, wealth, or material enjoyment."

And this is why we often hear people say: "Although I have been chanting for years, I have no taste." Kaviraja Goswami offers an answer: "There are offenses to be mindful of when approaching *krsna-nama*. Offensive chanting never brings about the desired change of heart.

"If by vibrating the Holy Name of Krishna our hairs do not stand on end, our eyes do not flood with tears, and there is not a volcanic eruption of ecstasy in our bodies, our hearts must be covered in steel."

It is written in the *Caitanya-caritamrta* that "Simply vibrating the name of Krishna once destroys all sin and then devotion gradually develops into love, *krsna-prema*. When the heart is saturated with *prema*, it pounds, the body sweats and shivers, speech falters, and the eyes are flooded with tears. When we take the name of Krishna in the mood of divine service, so much wealth is gained that the struggle for existence is over without our even trying. However, if one repeatedly takes the name of Krishna and is not moved to tears, it is obvious that *aparadha* is preventing the seed of *krsna-nama* from sprouting."

Then what is our recourse? Kaviraja Goswami says that in chanting the name of Krishna, there is the consideration of offenses, but in chanting the names of Mahaprabhu and Nityananda Prabhu, the most magnanimous manifestations of Divinity, there are no offenses.

"If one chants the names of Mahaprabhu and Nityananda Prabhu with even a little faith, he is immediately cleansed of all offenses. Then when he chants *krsna-nama*, he feels ecstasy. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is unlimitedly magnanimous. Without worshipping him what hope is there for liberation?"

This does not imply that Mahaprabhu and Nityananda Prabhu bestow *prema* in the presence of *aparadha*. They are so magnanimous that whoever seeks shelter at their lotus feet receives their mercy. Soon the offenses disappear and the offender feels love for Krishna.

Bhaktivinode Thakura says: "If we surrender to Mahaprabhu and Nityananda Prabhu, all our previous offenses are instantly absolved. Then the merciful Holy Name showers us with divine love."

Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura writes:

"Krishna and Gauranga are their names, and their names are them. To consider Krishna as subordinate, or inferior to Gauranga is ignorance. But the fact is, Gauranga and Nityananda are especially helpful to the fallen souls. The more the jivas become fallen, the more merciful becomes the Lord. Gauranga and Nityananda are the ultimate manifestation of divine kindness.

Access to *krsna-lila* is limited to the highest liberated souls. Mahaprabhu and Nityananda Prabhu have stolen the *madhura-rasa* of Vrndavana and are distributing it freely to the most unqualified souls. The nectarean current flowing from the lotus feet of Gauranga and Nityananda carries those souls to the sanctuary of Krishna's lotus feet."

"Worship of Gauranga does not exclude the worship of Krishna. Neither is it inferior to the worship of Sri Radha and Krishna. That kind of so-called devotion is fictitious, and is devoid of even a drop of the divine nectar of *krsna-prema*."

Mahaprabhu never tolerated *vaisnava-aparadha*. Ramachandra Puri, Devananda Pundit, and others are vivid examples of this truth. Even Mother Saci had to beg forgiveness from Advaita Acarya before the Lord would bless her with prema. Only when one sincerely approaches the offended Vaishnava and begs forgiveness will he be forgiven. Then offenses disappear; otherwise the consequences are fatal. As long as the heart is covered by offenses it is impregnable.

Bhaktivinode Thakura sings: "Offenses have made my heart as hard as steel, and as cruel as thunderbolts. O Lord, even your Holy Name has no effect. I feel hopeless and helpless, so I loudly cry your Holy Name." He prays to Sri Gaura and Nitai: "I am the most fallen, and you are oceans of mercy. Please save me!"

This is the critical difference between *Krsna-lila* and *Chaitanya-lila*. Sri Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami concludes the *Madhya-lila* of *Sri Caitanya-caritamrta* with this secret revelation:

*krsna-lila amrta'sara tara sata sata dhara, dasa-dike vahe yaha haite se
caitanya-lila haya, sarovara aksaya mano-hamsa caraha- tahate*

Madhya-lila, 5.271

"Krishna-lila is the cream of all nectar, only the confidantes of Sri Radha and Krishna and the eternally perfect souls can enter there. So how then should we conceive of Chaitanya-lila? The pastimes of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu are an infinite reservoir, from which thousands of streams of the nectar of Krsna-lila are flowing in all directions, inundating everyone - everywhere. May the swan of my mind swim there eternally, and dive deep into its infinite waves of nectar.

*tad idam ati-rahasyam gaura-lilamrtam yat khala'samudaya-kolair nadrtam tair
alabhyam ksatir iyam iha ka me svaditam yat samantat sahrdaya-sumanobhir
modam esam tanoti*

Madhya-lila 25.283

"Gaura-lila is deeply mysterious and confidential. It is the secret to devotion and love of Krishna. Those who are envious of Krishna and his devotees are like animals unable to taste its nectar. But I do not lament having described Mahaprabhu's lila because nothing is lost. Rather something is gained, because those devotees who are pure of heart expand the *lila* by tasting and relishing it again and again."

"If by vibrating theholi name of Krishna our hairs do not stand on end, our eyes do not flood with tears, and there is not a volcanic eruption of ecstasy in our bodies, our hearts must be covered in steel".

"Krsina-lila is the cream of all nectar, only the confidantes of Sri Radha an Krisna and the eternally perfect souls can enter there. How then should we conceive Sri Chaitanya lila? The pastimes of Sri Chaitany Mahaprabhu are an infinite reservoir, from wich thousands of streams of the nectar of Krisna-lila are flowing in all directions, inundating everyone and everywhere. May the swan of my mind swim there eternally, dive deep into its infinite waves of nectar.

Sri Garuda the divine carrier of Vishnu

Even a great yogi becomes lusty and falls down if he offends a *vaishnava*. The consequence of offending an elevated Vaishnava is extremely grave. The story of *Saubhari Rsi* from the *Srimad Bhagavatam* illustrates this point.

Saubhari was practicing severe austerities for many years, sometimes levitating above the Yamuna River and sometimes deeply submerged within it. One day Garuda, the winged carrier of Vishnu, was hungry and dived into a lake in the middle of the Yamuna River. He swooped down and plucked a large fish that he thought would be ideal for his lunch. The smaller fish were frightened upon seeing their leader so easily consumed. Saubhari Rsi felt sorry for them and cursed Garuda: "If you ever dare to come here again - you'll die!"

The great commentator on the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura, gives his interpretation: "Unfortunately Saubhari Rsi committed two offenses against the great devotee Garuda: giving orders to a superior personality (*ajnapradana*), and exhibiting a malicious attitude (*tadistapratikulya*). Garuda on the other hand, could not be indicted for such offenses as disobeying orders (*ajnalanghana*), and violence against others (*prani-himsana*), because of his powerful position.

Saubhari committed a third offense by cursing *aparsada*, an associate of the Lord. He did this to protect the helpless creatures living in the lake, but his compassion was in vain because Kaliya's venom poisoned those waters and all the fish died anyway. Saubhari's curse was that if Garuda ever came to the lake to eat fish he would die immediately, but the implication was that even if he simply came there and did not eat fish, he would still perish. Knowing that, Garuda never ventured near the lake. Kaliya also knew about this curse and later took shelter in that lake to escape Garuda. In an attempt to show mercy to the fish, Saubhari brought upon himself the terrible consequences of *aparadha*. It is said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Saubhari was then deviated from the spiritual path and began a hellish nightmare of sexual exploits culminating in the slavery of family life. He traded the unlimited joy of soul for the fleeting pleasure of the flesh. This dragged on for years. However, because he took shelter in the waters of the Yamuna which are spiritual and purifying, he became deeply repentant and was again able to take

up his spiritual practices, which ultimately lead to liberation.

The ways of the infinite are mysterious and unknowable. It so happens that while Saubhari Rsi was performing his austerities, the great king Maharaja Yuvasva, ancestor of Ambarisa Maharaja, was trying to produce an heir. He tried every possible means to conceive a child through his hundred wives, but remained unsuccessful. Totally dejected, he entered the forest with his wives.

The compassionate sages of the forest initiated the *Indra-yajna* to satisfy Indra so that he would bless the king with a son. They performed the sacrifice with great caution. A chalice filled with water, meant to be drunk by the king's principal queens in order to fertilize them, was left within the sacrificial arena. One night, the king awoke from his sleep feeling thirsty, found the chalice and drank its contents. The next morning the sages saw the empty chalice and were alarmed. When they discovered that the king had drunk the water they understood that this could only happen by God's intervention. They offered prayers to the Lord condoning his divine act, and glorifying his mysterious ways.

In time, an exquisite son with all the marks of a powerful prince appeared from the lower right side of king , Yuvasva's abdomen The baby cried continuously, hungering for breast-milk, and the sages were in a dilemma about how to feed the baby just then Lord Indra, who was worshiped in the yajna appeared and comforted the crying baby. He offered his index finger for the baby to suck, saying *mam dhata* - "You may drink me." Thus prince became known as Mandhata.

Although the baby was born from the abdomen of King Yuvasva, the king did not die due to the blessings of the sages. He remained in that spot and performed severe austerities, finally achieving yogic perfection.

The baby grew up and ruled the world. He drew strength from Vishnu and ruled the seven islands that comprise the Earth - Jambu, Plaksa, Salmali, Kusa, Kraunca, Saka, and Puskara. Powerful demons like Ravana were always fearful of him, and hence Indra called him "Trasaddasyu," one who scares away rogues.

Emperor Mandhata gave immense charity and performed yajnas to worship Vishnu He fathered three sons and fifty daughters through his wife Bindumati, the daughter of Sasabindu. The sons were Purukutsa, Ambarisa, and the great mystic Mucukunda.

Meanwhile Saubhan Muni was performing austerities under the waters of the river Yamuna. One day his attention was diverted by a pair of fish mating. The Rsi's heart filled with lust. He came up from the river bed and went to Mathura, where he approached Emperor Mandhata and requested the hand of one of his daughters in marriage. The emperor said that any one of them would be free to choose the sage as her husband.

Saubhan Rsi thought to himself: "I am old, wrinkled, and gray because of my austerities, and I am not attractive to a young princess. I must make myself so handsome that even the heavenly damsels will dream of having me as their husband." So by his mystic power he transformed himself into a handsome young man.

When he was escorted in by royal guards, all fifty princesses found him so irresistibly attractive that they quarreled amongst themselves, all wanting to marry him. Saubhan Rsi thus married them all, and built fifty magnificent palaces so full of splendor that the palace of Lord Indra himself paled by comparison. The Emperor Mandhata was awestruck by Saubhan Rsi's opulence. In comparison to the Rsi's royal lifestyle, he was humbled despite his own huge empire.

Although Saubhan was surrounded by fantastic luxury and enjoyment, he did not feel satisfied or at peace with himself. Just as butter fuels fire, sense gratification increases a man's lusty desires. He began to reflect: "What have I done! Just by seeing fish mate I abandoned the path of self-realization just for sex. Because of my offense to Garuda, I have destroyed myself. Look at me! No one should waste their time dwelling on sense objects. Save your heart and mind for constant meditation on the Supreme Lord. And if you're lonely, associate with saints who have taken complete shelter at the Lord's lotus feet.

"Previously I was in meditation on Hari, but sex desire dragged me into endless family entanglement. I married fifty wives and fathered a hundred sons through each wife. Material nature corrupted my conscience to such an extent that there was no end to my desires."

Saubhan Rsi passed his days in lamentation. Trying to detach himself from his family entanglement he retired and entered the forest followed by his devoted wives. Once again he began to practice austerities. At the time of his death he offered himself totally in the service of the all pervasive Supersoul, and his

wives also attained the same spiritual goal because of their devotion to him.

This incident gives insight into the subtle workings of *vaisnava* *aparadha*. The powerful sage Saubhari committed an offense at the feet of Garuda in an act of sympathy to a fish. Because of his actions, he not only indirectly orchestrated the mass extinction of every living creature in the Yamuna River, but was also the cause of harassing the exalted residents of Vrndavana (Vrajabasis) by creating a haven for Kaliya. Thus Saubhan offended even the Vrajabasis, who are the most dear to Krishna.

As for his personal life, Saubhan fell from the spiritual path. He degenerated into a lecherous fool for years, caught in an inescapable web of illusion.

Ultimately he regained his spiritual status by the mercy of Vrndavana-dhama and Yamuna devi. But as far as relishing the nectar of *krsna-bhakti* was concerned, he could not obtain it. Kaliya, on the other hand, although envious and capricious, was aided by the good wishes of his devoted wives, who attracted the mercy of Krishna and brought him all auspiciousness.

It is almost impossible to be released from the consequences of *vaisnava-
aparadha*. Without feeling deep remorse, and without surrendering at the feet of the offended devotee, one can never be forgiven. Without such forgiveness, the goal of life is lost.

Even Brahma and the gods sing the glories of Srivas. By worshipping him one attains Krishna's lotus feet, which are inaccessible to even Shiva or Ananta Sesh. There is nothing greater than to serve him. He is more dear to Krishna than Ananta Sesh, Lakshmi, Brahma, and Shiva. He is even more dear than the Lord is to himself.

On his way to Mathura, mahaprabhu visited the town of ramakeli for a few days. Instead of traveling towards Mathura, he went south toward the ancient city of Jagannatha Puri. On the way, he stopped at Sri Advaita Acarya's home in Santipura. There a leper came to visit Mahaprabhu. The leper threw himself before the Lord, crying for mercy.

"My Lord! You are supremely compassionate. You have appeared in this world to save the most unfortunate souls. Your heart is naturally pained to see people suffer. I am a leper. Please tell me how to get free from my excruciating pain."

Mahaprabhu screamed: "Get out of my sight! I'm becoming polluted just looking at you. You have blasphemed a Vaishnava. Whatever you are experiencing in this life is nothing. I can't even think of what is going to happen to you."

"You have insulted a Vaishnava, whose very name sanctifies the universe. Even Brahma and the gods sing the glories of Srivasa. By worshipping him one attains Krishna's lotus feet, which are inaccessible to even Shiva or Ananta Sesa. There is nothing greater than to serve him. He is more dear to Krishna than Ananta Sesa, Laksmi, Brahma, Shiva, and even the Lord himself.

"Krishna says in the Srimad Bhagavatam to his beloved friend Uddhava. 'Even though Brahma is my son, Shiva is my other self, Sankarsana is my brother, and Laksmi is my wife, they are not as dear to me as you are.'

"Anyone who blasphemes such a Vaishnava suffers untold misery birth after birth. The offender's learning, high birth, and religion are useless. All his worship is refused by Krishna Mother. Earth is purified by the touch of this Vaishnava when he dances. He purifies all directions just by his glance. Srivasa Pundit is a *maha-Bhagavata*, and you criticized his spotless character. Therefore your body is in burning pain from leprosy, but this punishment is nothing compared to what is in store for you. I hate having to even look at you. Even I cannot deliver you."

Sri Chaitanyadeva's words shocked the leper, who fell down praying.

"I must have been mad to blaspheme a Vaishnava. I didn't realize the seriousness of my actions. Now I am suffering. But I know it is the nature of *sadhus* to relieve suffering. They are compassionate even to offenders. So I beg you to give me shelter. Besides you, who can save me? You know all the remedies and penances for the different offenses, so as the omnipotent universal father, please tell me what penances I must perform."

Mahaprabhu said: "What you are experiencing is just an immediate reaction for the offense, but the suffering that follows life after life is unimaginable. You have offended Srivasa Pundit, so it is from him that you must beg forgiveness. Go fall at his feet. Only if he excuses you can you become absolved from your offense. A thorn in the body is removed from the same cut it makes when entering. A thorn stuck in the foot can't come out of the shoulder. "One

must approach the Vaishnava he has offended and plead forgiveness. Only if the Vaishnava agrees will he be forgiven. Srivasa Pundit's heart is absolutely pure, fall at his feet and beg for shelter. He never sees faults in others and will forgive you. You will be liberated and your misery will disappear."

All the devotees began to cheer. The leper bowed to Mahaprabhu in appreciation of his unlimited mercy and left in search of Srivasa Pundit. When he found Srivasa, he threw himself at his feet and begged forgiveness. That magnanimous and compassionate crest-jewel among Vaishnavas, Srivasa Thakur then pardoned him - the leper was liberated.

Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu emphasizes the consequences of blaspheming a Vaishnava. But in spite of his warning, if anyone insults or criticizes a Vaishnava, the Lord personally punishes him.

If we witness a quarrel between higher Vaishnavas, it is in our interest not to see it as mundane squabbling but as a vehicle to broadcast and enhance each other's love for Krishna, much like the verbal fights between Queen Satyabhama and Queen Rukmini. The transcendental subject of their fights was always the same - Krishna.

The differences of opinion between Vaishnavas are inspired by Sri Chaitanya in order to instruct us. If anyone foolishly takes sides in such a debate, he becomes an *aparadhi* by contradicting and criticizing the other Vaishnava, and the results are most harmful to him. It's like someone serving Krishna with one hand and slapping him with the other. When a person understands that Vaishnavas are the different limbs of Krishna's transcendental body, he understands that the Lord and his devotees are inseparable.

If we worship Krishna and his devotees as one, and remain immersed in serving Krishna's lotus feet, then we will become immortal. Any person who sincerely narrates or hears these auspicious instructions will always be protected from committing *vaisnava-aparadha*.

The point to consider here is that sometimes the dissension between pure Vaishnavas gives pleasure to Krishna because they are fighting over him. But if a devotee is infected by *nama-aparadha* and is driven to offend a humble Vaishnava, then no sympathy can be extended to him.

There are numerous instances in the scriptures which describe such self-

destruction. The Hari-bhakti-vilasa cites a *sloka* from the *Skanda Purana* which was spoken by Markandeya Rsi to Bhagiratha:

"Those rascals who criticize a Vaishnava not only drag themselves down, but their fathers with them. And anyone who does not feel joy upon seeing a Vaishnava, must live in hell."

In regard to the necessity of avoiding bad association, the Hari-bhakti-vilasa quotes the Srimad-Bhagwatam:

"Persons with developed consciousness and high intellect must completely reject bad association and seek the company of devotees, because their instructions alone can end the anxiety caused by desire." Hari-bhakti-vilasa 10.318

Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur says that even a guru who blasphemes Vaishnavas must be rejected. "At first one may be a qualified guru. But if for some reason he becomes an offender to the Holy Name, he gradually begins to lose his power of discrimination. He then blasphemes a Vaishnava and loses his taste for *krsna-nama*. Gradually he sinks into the clutches of materialism, and the exploitation of women."

Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakur explains that "bad association" means attachments that drag one down. Srila Sanatana Goswami's commentary on Hari-bhakti-vilasa, Dig-Darsini, states:

"The term 'saints' refers exclusively to the devotees of the Supreme Lord - not to fruitive workers, philosophers, or yogis. Bad association means excessive attachment to family, friends, and home. It also means relationships motivated by exploitation. Only the wisdom of Saints can save us from our tendency to exploit and lead us on the path of spiritual service."

"If you Want to Understand Srimad Bhagavatam, You Must Hear From a Real Vaishnava."

One day, Mahaprabhu was walking through the village of vidyanagar and arrived at a dike by a rice paddy. The great scholar Devananda Pundit had built his dwelling by the side of the embankment. Devananda was a celibate Brahmin who performed austerities and was very scholarly. He had earned a reputation as a teacher of the Bhagavata Purana. Unfortunately, due to a strong desire for liberation and a lack of devotion, he could not comprehend the real import of

the Bhagavatam which is an ocean of liquid love, *bhakti-rasa* Mahaprabhu's secretary Svarupa Damodara tried to give him some guidelines.

"If you want to understand Srimad Bhagavatam, you must hear from a Vaishnava. But you can do this only when you have completely taken shelter of the lotus feet of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. So associate regularly with devotees of Mahaprabhu, for only then will you truly understand devotion. You possess *jnana*, the ability to understand, but due to *aparadha* you have not realized that Krishna is the ultimate goal."

The Gaudiya-bhasya commentary to this verse states: "Every living entity is potentially a Vaishnava Devananda Pundit had the ability to know the imports of the Srimad Bhagavatam, but this knowledge was dormant in him because of *aparadha*, and his insight was Krishna knows everything, the type of *aparadha* which was at the root of Devananda's ignorance was known only to Krishna.

Mahaprabhu was passing by just as Devananda Pundit was delivering a lecture on Bhagavatam. Not hearing a devotional commentary, Mahaprabhu became enraged and spoke out:

"How dare this rascal interpret the Bhagavatam! He is completely ignorant of its essence. On what authority does he speak? The Bhagavatam is the literary incarnation of Krishna. The ultimate goal is pure devotion. The Vedic scriptures have declared that the Bhagavatam is saturated with devotion. The Vedas are like yogurt. They were churned by Sukadeva Goswami and served to Pariksit Maharaja Sukadeva is very dear to me, and he is fully conversant with the esoteric truths revealed in the Bhagavatam. The Bhagavatam is full of descriptions about my absolute position and nature. Whoever makes the slightest distinction between me, my pure devotees, and the Bhagavatam is doomed."

Although the Lord spoke these words in anger, the Vaishnavas were greatly pleased with the instructions. He continued:

"Anyone who does not recite the teachings of the Bhagavatam in the light of *bhakti* is wallowing in ignorance. This rascal is continuously talking without a single mention of *bhakti*, I will shred his book!" The Lord stepped forward to carry out his threat, but the Vaishnavas pleaded with him not to.

Srimad Bhagavatam is eulogized throughout the Vedas as the most profound and esoteric literature. Poisoned by education and pride, a so-called pundit cannot

grasp this truth. One who boasts of fully comprehending the Bhagavatam completely misses its essence. One who knows that it is nondifferent from the inconceivable Supreme Lord is enlightened about its purport - pure devotion.

Devananda Pundit was resplendent with all good qualities Rarely does one meet a personality of such high stature. However, those persons who have a false understanding of the Bhagavatam, as well as those who praise such persons, are punished by Yamaraja, the universal judge.

Gaudiya-bhasya commentary on the above incident states:

"In spite of being a scholar, one may not understand the essence of the Sri Bhagavatam. When scholars strive for fame and glory, then the universal judge Yamaraja, who judges punishes them."

If a scholar like Devananda Pundit misunderstood the purport of the Bhagavatam, then surely if we pose as learned scholars of that transcendental literature, we will face the same consequences.

The reason for Mahaprabhu's anger towards Devananda Pundit had its roots in the past. The Lord remembered that Devananda had committed offenses against Srivasa Thakur, the incarnation of Narada Muni. This happened before Mahaprabhu's appearance when the Earth was devoid of devotional ecstasy At that time there were only a small number of devotees scattered here and there. The scholars of Nabadwip were engaged in studying the Gita, Bhagavatam, and other literature, but unfortunately none of them were teaching the essence of these scriptures, *krisna-bhakti*. Since these pundits never cultivated a service attitude, they were unable to appreciate the devotional conclusions of these literatures.

Devananda Pundit was foremost among the scholars who lectured on the Bhagavatam. The public held him in high esteem. Ignorant of the path of pure devotion, he committed *vaishnava-aparadha* at the feet of an exalted pure devotee of the Lord.

One day the great devotee Srivasa Thakur wanted to hear a discussion on the Bhagavatam, so he came to Devananda Pundit's lecture and sat in the audience. The entire Srimad Bhagavatam is composed of transcendental syllables steeped in devotional relish of love of Godhead. Upon hearing the Bhagavatam *slokas*, Srivasa Thakur entered a deep state of ecstasy. The eight manifestations of deep

spiritual emotion (*asta-sattvika-vikara*) such as shivering, hairs standing on end, weeping, and other symptoms overwhelmed him. The audience felt disturbed by these transformations. Srivasa Thakur exhibited these symptoms oblivious to his surroundings and so the students dragged him outside. Devananda Pundit raised no objection to this act of malice. Gradually, when Srivasa Thakur regained consciousness, he realized what had happened and went home greatly disturbed.

Sri Chaitanyadeva, the Supreme Lord residing in everyone's heart, knew of Devananda's abuse. As he saw Devananda, he was reminded of the *aparadha* and thought that the disciples of such a guru would eventually become just like him. So he chastised him:

"You there, Devananda Pundit- One time Srivasa Thakur came to your lecture. He was dragged out of your house by your students while he was deeply absorbed in Krishna's pastimes. What was his offense? Was such manhandling a proper response to someone whose heart is saturated with *bhakti-rasa*? Ganga devi herself is eager for his association. You may lecture on the Bhagavatam, but you can never fathom its true import. When a person eats to his full satisfaction he loses all hostility. When one tastes the divine nectar of the Bhagavatam he becomes a friend to everyone, what to speak of Vaishnavas. As for you, although you teach others about the Bhagavatam, you yourself cannot taste its nectar."

Devananda silently listened to the Lord's chastisement, which made him feel ashamed and dejected. Although Devananda was criticized in this way, he was truly a very fortunate soul because the Lord's chastisement is a rare blessing. Even demons who are slain by the Lord attain the spiritual realm of Vaikuntha. Anyone who faithfully and sincerely accepts the Supreme Lord's warnings or chastisements will soon be blessed with pure devotion to his lotus feet. Others who disregard the Lord's punishment revolve eternally in the material cosmos.

By chastising Devananda Pundit, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu teaches us a very important lesson. If one commits *vaisnava-aparadha*, then even if he endeavors to serve and surrender to Krishna, he will never attain *prema*, because he is devoid of *vaisnava-krpa*, or the Vaishnava's mercy.

On another occasion while touring Nabadwip, Mahaprabhu went from Vacaspati's home in Vidyanagara to Chakri Cattopadhyaya's house in Kuliyagrama, which lies on the other side of the Ganga from Sridhama Mayapura. At that time a Brahmin came to meet the Lord. He held the Lord's

lotus feet against his breast and pleaded.

"My Lord, kindly hear my plea I am a notorious sinner I have criticized Vaishnavas and the chanting of the Holy Name, thinking that there are no real Vaishnavas in *Kali-yuga*, and doubting the power of *krsna-nama*. Now, my soul is burning. You are the most powerful of personalities.

Please, tell me what to do."

The Lord was pleased with the Brahmin's confession. Smiling, he said:

"O Brahmin, when nectar, the drink of immortality, is given to one who has been poisoned, the toxicity in his system gradually dissipates, and his body becomes immortal. You have unwittingly drunk poison by criticizing Vaishnavas. The Holy Name of Krishna and his transcendental attributes are the highest nectar of immortality. Only by constantly relishing this nectar and glorifying Vaishnavas with the same tongue that criticized them will you be forgiven. So glorify the wonderful qualities of Vaishnavas with song, poetry, or any other means, and I will personally absolve you from your offenses and neutralize all of their poisonous effects. For one who unknowingly commits *vaisnava-aparadha*, the only recourse is to incessantly glorify the Vaishnavas and the Supreme Lord and simultaneously stop making further offenses. This is the only way to counteract the effects of *aparadha*. Penances and other practices are useless. So return to your home and delight in glorifying the Lord's devotees."

The assembled Vaishnavas were overjoyed to hear the Lord's merciful words, and they responded with resounding cries of "Hari! Hari!" Sri Gauranga instructs all unwitting Vaishnava-offenders in the same way, and anyone who disregards these instructions and continues to offend and criticize sadhus is drowned in an ocean of sorrows. Those who take his advice, understanding that it is the cream of the Vedas, will easily cross over the vast sea of nescience and enter the eternal spiritual domain:

"When the offender uses the same tongue that blasphemed the Vaishnava to express remorse and glorify the Vaishnava, it becomes auspicious. Poison gradually debilitates one's body functions, but the antidote brings the body back to its natural healthy condition. In the same way, to correct *vaisnava-aparadha*, neither avoiding further offenses nor millions of penances will be truly effective. Only honest and humble glorification of Vaishnavas can bring

redemption.”

"Those who follow Mahaprabhu's instruction, believing it to be the infallible truth, who throw themselves at the Vaishnava's feet to beg forgiveness, reap enormous benefit. They develop unflinching faith in Mahaprabhu and easily cross over the vast ocean of nescience."

Just as Mahaprabhu finished instructing the Brahmin, Devananda Pundit entered Devananda, despite his noble characteristics, could not develop faith in the Lord or his teachings. In spite of extensive study and teaching of the Srimad Bhagavatam, he was unable to perceive its transcendental message of surrender to the Supreme Godhead. His heart was impaled by the desire for liberation, so he could not taste the sweetness of *bhakti*, nor could he teach *bhakti* to others.

After Mahaprabhu accepted sannyasa and left for Jagannatha Puri, fate arranged for Devananda to meet Srila Vakresvara Pundit, a great devotee and an eternal associate of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. This was a windfall of good fortune for Devananda. A pure devotee's association is like touchstone, so Devananda quickly developed ruci, (spiritual taste) and an unassailable faith in Mahaprabhu.

Srila Vrndavana dasa Thakur describes how the highly elevated Vaishnava Vakresvara Pundit came to Devananda's hermitage. Devananda was struck with wonder seeing his wonderful appearance, and his ecstatic singing and dancing with deep emotion. The desire for liberation disappeared from his heart, and he fell at Vakresvara's feet, smearing the dust all over his body. Reverence for Mahaprabhu blossomed within him, showing the wonderful result of serving a maha-Bhagavata pure devotee.

Srila Saraswati Thakur writes: "As a direct result of service to a pure Vaishnava, unflinching faith in Mahaprabhu was aroused in the heart of Devananda Pundit Vakresvara's taking up residence in Devananda's ashram brought immense good fortune to Devananda. Although Devananda was a ritualist, he was very learned and self-controlled. His studies of scripture were solely dedicated to Srimad Bhagavatam. He was aloof from the dictates of his senses, but he lacked faith in Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. However, by Srila Vakresvara Pundit's grace, his misconceptions were eradicated and he developed regard for Mahaprabhu."

Srila Vrndavana dasa Thakur writes: "Service to Vaishnavas is higher than service to the Lord - this is the verdict of the Bhagavatam and all other revealed

scriptures. The Bhagavatam states: 'There may be doubts as to whether service to the Supreme Lord will give perfection or not, but there is absolutely no doubt about obtaining perfection by serving his devotees.' Thus, service to Vaishnavas is the most effective and sure method to reach Krishna for everyone." (Caitanya-Bhagavata, Antya 3 485-487)

Devananda Pundit's *darsana* of Mahaprabhu had a direct correlation to the purifying association of Vakresvara Pundit. Humility and all other Vaishnava attributes were manifest in Devananda as he prostrated himself at the Lord's lotus feet. He got up and meekly remained standing in a corner. The Lord was satisfied to see Devananda, and asked him to come and sit near him. The Lord had forgiven all his previous offenses and spoke to him intimately

"You have had the great fortune of serving my beloved devotee Vakresvara is a full-blown expansion of *krsna sakti*, or divine potency. Whoever serves him attains Krishna. His heart is Krishna's favorite place. Wherever he is becomes holy, and that place becomes my abode."

Devananda folded his palms and began to glorify the Lord: "O merciful Lord! You have appeared in Nabadwip to liberate everyone. I am miserable and fallen. Unfortunately I could not recognize you, and so I was deprived of the supreme bliss of your association and mercy. But it is your nature to be compassionate to all. I only pray that I may love you. Please tell me what to do. I am a fool."

The Bhagavatam is meant only for the most learned, astute scholars, so how can I teach it to others?"

Being pleased with Devananda, the Lord said: "Do not try to explain the Bhagavatam in any way other than in the light of *krsna-bhakti*. From beginning to end the message of the Bhagavatam is love Krishna. In the entire material creation *krsna-bhakti* is the only Absolute Truth, and at the end of the world only this truth remains."

The Srimad Bhagavatam is the only scripture in which devotion to Krishna is established as the ultimate goal of existence. No other scriptures promote this conception. The Bhagavatam is not a mundane composition, it is a transcendental literature which appears and disappears like the incarnations of God. Recently it has manifested itself by Sri Krishna's mercy through Srila Vyasa-deva and by the transcendental potency of *bhakti*. Vrndavana dasa Thakur

warns that considering that the Bhagavatam is Krishna himself, one must not foolishly think that he knows and fully understands it.

The Lord continued: "Even if an ignorant person submissively approaches the Bhagavatam, its purport is automatically revealed in his heart. Embodying pure spiritual love, it is identical with Krishna. The sublime pastimes of Krishna are living within it. Although Vedavyasa compiled the four *Vedas*, the *Mahabhdrata*, the *Puranas* and other literature, he felt empty and incomplete. But after compiling the Bhagavatam, he felt completely satisfied. Yet there are those unfortunate souls who, even after reading this crest-jewel among the scriptures, are deprived of krsna-bhakti.

"Simply emphasize bhakti when teaching the Srimad Bhagavatam. Then you will remain free from aparadha, and your heart will fill with bliss. The essence of all scriptures is devotion to Krishna, but the Bhagavatam is unique in that it is saturated with *krsna-bhakti-rasa*. Splash the water from this ocean of nectar upon everyone."

Devananda Pundit was overwhelmed by Mahaprabhu's wonderful instructions. After offering obeisances at Mahaprabhu's lotus feet he left for his hermitage.

Through Devananda Pundit, Mahaprabhu broadcast to the world the glories of Srimad Bhagavatam. The ultimate conclusion of the 18,000 verses of the Bhagavatam is devotion to Krishna. That home which is graced by this auspicious literature is free from misfortune. Worship of *Srimad Bhagavatam* is equal to worship of Krishna. Pure devotion to Krishna is obtained through regular hearing and recitation of this extraordinary book. Teaching any meaning other than *bhakti* is a waste of time, and leads to aparadha.

There are two bhagavatas: grantha-bhagavata - the book form of Divinity, and bhakta-bhagavata -the devotee form of Divinity. Daily hearing, reciting, and worshipping of the Bhagavatam results in realizing the truth about the Lord and his devotees. Srila Krishnadasa Kaviraja writes:

eka bhagavata bada-bhagavata sastra ara bhagavata-bhakta bhakti-rasa patra

Caitanya-caritamrta, Adi I.99

"One of the Bhagavatas is the great scripture Srimad Bhagavatam, and the other is the pure devotee who is absorbed in the mellows of loving devotion, rasa."

Devananda Pundit became enlightened about the exalted position of Srivasa Thakur by receiving the mercy of Mahaprabhu and his eternal associate, Vakresvara Pundit. With heartfelt remorse and utmost humility he repeatedly begged forgiveness at Srivasa Thakur's lotus feet. Thus he received the blessings of Srivasa Thakur as well as all of Mahaprabhu's devotees.

The Lord says:

sabda-brahma param-brahma mamobhe sasvati tanu

Srimad Bhagavatam 6.16.51

"The Supreme sound vibration and the Supreme Being are one and the same."

No one is able to attract the mercy of the book bhagavata without first being blessed by the grace of the devotee bhagavata. Without this we remain forever incapable of relishing the nectar of krisna-bhakti. The slightest aparadha against the bhakta-bhagavata will prevent anyone from achieving the mercy of the Bhagavatam, the literary incarnation of God.

Advaita Avatar, Sachi Ma & her Nimai

Mother Sacai is the Universal Mother, the embodiment of Vishnu bhakti. Her name is so potent that anyone uttering it will become free from all fears. The holy Ganges and Mother Sachi are nondifferent. Mother Sachi is the equal of Yasoda and Devaki.

Mahaprabhu will not tolerate any offense to his devotees regardless of who the offender is. In fact he was even once displeased with his own mother, Sacidevi, because she offended Advaita Acarya. Mahaprabhu said that until she begged the Acarya's forgiveness, she would never attain *krsna-prema*. Mahaprabhu used this incident to illustrate the dangers of committing nama-*aparadha*, especially *vaisnava-aparadha*. This is truly an important and unique pastime, for how can the mother of God be denied *krsna-prema*?⁷ The special mercy of this pastime is that by hearing it faithfully, one develops the understanding to avoid *vaisnava-aparadha*. The details of this pastime are recorded in the Caitanya-Bhagavata, Madhya as the Mahaprakasa-lila (The Great Revelation).

One day Mahaprabhu sat on the deity throne and gathered his expansions, and said, "In Kali-yuga, I am Krishna, I am Narayana, and I am Rama. One day I was floating on the milk ocean when Advaita Acarya's thunderous calls awakened me I then descended at his request to inundate the world in a flood of *krsna-prema*."

Nityananda, the direct incarnation of Balarama, was in awe of Mahaprabhu's opulence and his magnanimous mood. He ran to his throne and held an umbrella above him. Gadadhara Pundit stood to Mahaprabhu's left and began to prepare *tambula* for the Lord. The other devotees surrounded him. Some began to fan him with camaras. Like a desire tree, Mahaprabhu began to give devotion to everyone. They begged the Lord for devotion for themselves, for their mothers, their fathers, some for their gurus, for their disciples, and so on. Always ready to fulfill the wishes of his devotees, the Lord smiled and dispensed boons for attaining pure devotion.

Seeing that the Lord was inundating everyone with a flood of *krsna-prema*, Srivasa Pundit requested that Mahaprabhu shower *prema-bhakti* on his mother, Sacidevi. Mahaprabhu replied: "O Srivasa, do not make such a request. I will not offer her the ecstasy of divine love. She has committed *vaisnava-aparadha* and is being denied entry into the realm of divine love." Srivasa Pundit was shocked and said: "Your words are like knives stabbing our hearts and killing us!"

Mother *Saci* is that divine personality who has given birth to you. She is the devotee's sustaining life-force, the Universal Mother - and you refuse to give her *prema*? If this is one of your jokes, I think it has gone far enough. Now shower Mother *Saci* with *prema*, my Lord. How can she possibly be guilty of *vaisnava-aparadha*? Even if you think that she is guilty, then kindly absolve her from it and give her your mercy." The Lord replied: "I can advise on how to be forgiven of *vaisnava-aparadha*, but I cannot excuse an *aparadha* personally. The only way to be absolved of *vaisnava-aparadha* is to approach the offended Vaishnava and beg forgiveness, as in the case of the powerful sage Durvasa Muni, who committed offenses at the feet of the saintly King Ambarisa. He was finally exonerated from his offense only when he approached that Vaishnava whom he had offended. So *Sacimata* has committed an offense at the lotus feet of Advaita Acarya Prabhu, and she has to sprinkle the dust from his feet on her head and beg forgiveness. By his grace she will then receive my blessings in the form of *prema*; not otherwise."

The point is that even the Supreme Lord himself cannot waive *vaisnava-aparadha*. The Lord's position is clear: "Although I am absolutely independent, I am dependent on my devotees. I am their captive. They are my heart and soul, and I am their heart and soul. I always protect them, and they are willing to die for me."

Therefore, how can the Lord forgive an offender of his beloved devotees? The only recourse for the offender is to throw himself at the feet of the Vaishnava who he has offended and beg forgiveness. When the compassionate Vaishnava forgives the offender, then the Lord, who relishes the magnanimity of his devotees, becomes pleased with the offender and blesses him.

As soon as the devotees heard the Lord's instructions, they ran to Advaita Acarya Prabhu and narrated everything to him. Hearing the Lord's instructions, Advaita Acarya was astounded. He said to the devotees: "I'm ruined. Are you trying to kill me? Don't you realize Mother Saci's supramundane position? My beloved Lord has appeared from her womb, she is my mother too. I consider it my great fortune to be a humble recipient of her foot dust. She is the Universal Mother, the embodiment of *vishnu-bhakti*. I am surprised that all of you are unaware of her spiritual potency and talk like this. Her name is so potent that anyone uttering it, even if under the illusion that it is a mundane sound, will become free from all fears. The holy Ganges and Mother Saci are nondifferent. Mother Saci is the equal of Yasoda and Devaki."

While glorifying the divine attributes of Mother Saci Devi, Sri Advaita Acarya became ecstatic and fainted. Mother Saci came out of hiding and quickly smeared Advaita's foot-dust on her head. Unable to contain her intense rapture, she lost consciousness and fell to the ground.

At that moment Mahaprabhu began to laugh very loudly, extremely satisfied with his mother. He said: "Now I will bless you with devotion to Vishnu, all offenses to Advaita Prabhu are absolved." The devotees were completely overwhelmed with ecstasy.

In this way, Lord Gaurasundara used his own mother as an example to instruct everyone on the immense gravity and danger of committing *vaisnava-aparadha*. Vrndavana dasa focuses our attention on this crucial point: "If someone even as powerful as Lord Shiva offends a Vaishnava, then according to the scriptures he is destroyed. As for those foolish persons who are ignorant of this fact and

commit *vaisnava-aparadha*, they must suffer untold pains, birth after birth. Even the Supreme Lord Gaurasundara's mother was not spared the reaction for committing *vaisnava-aparadha*."

Srila Saraswati Thakur writes in his purport: "If even the Supreme Lord's mother - most blessed among women - had to face the consequences of *vaisnava-aparadha*, one can only imagine the outcome for an ordinary soul."

In analyzing Mother Saci's alleged offense, her deep sorrow caused by separation from her son must be taken into consideration. Obviously, She did not really commit an offense, yet Sri Mahaprabhu condemned her action as offensive and denied her *prema-bhakti*.

How Mother Saci offended Sri Advaita Prabhu must certainly be explained. Her eldest son Visvarupa became completely detached from material life and accepted *sannyasa* under the influence of Advaita Acarya. Seeing her younger son Visvambhara also becoming aloof from family affairs, Mother Saci was worried and began to think that Advaita Acarya was encouraging him to leave home as well.

Visvarupa was the elder brother of Mahaprabhu, the expansion of Balarama and Nityananda. He is also Lord Maha-sankarsana of Vaikuntha. He was extraordinarily beautiful and effulgent, the embodiment of all scriptural conclusions, and extremely equipoised. Nabadwip, the seat of scholarship in India at the time, didn't have a single scholar who could fathom either the depth of Visvarupa's learning, nor his use of aphorisms. Yet he played like an ordinary boy with his friends.

One day Visvarupa's father, Sri Jagannatha Mishra, took him to an assembly of pundits who were very pleased to see him. His exquisite charm captivated everyone. One pundit asked Visvarupa,

"My dear son, what are you studying?" Sri Visvarupa replied, "I have extensive knowledge of many scriptures." Considering him to be a mere boy, the pundit deferred from further questioning, but Jagannatha Mishra felt embarrassed. Finishing his work there, he took his son home. On the way his father boxed his ears and reprimanded him. "Why didn't you name the books that you study? Everyone must have thought that you are stupid. You made me a fool out of me." After reaching home, Visvarupa slipped out of the house and returned to

the assembly. He addressed the pundits and said, "When I was here earlier, you did not ask me any specific questions about my studies, so I gave you a general answer, but my father chastised me for appearing foolish. So now if anyone has any specific question, please ask." One of the pundits inquired: "Please explain in detail what you learned today." Visvarupa began by presenting a thesis, then strongly refuted it with an antithesis, and then established another thesis in favor of the first. The pundits were amazed and praised him profusely.

Though the teachers and pundits regularly studied and lectured on the Bhagavad-gita and Srimad Bhagavatam, their explanations were devoid of *bhakti*. A general lack of devotion among the residents of Nabadwip caused great distress to the young Visvarupa. The sole exception was that there were regular assemblies in Advaita Acarya's house, where all scriptures were discussed in the light of *krsna-bhakti*. These assemblies gave immense pleasure to Visvarupa, and so he spent long hours listening to the spiritual conclusions discussed there. Often Mother Saci would send Visvambhara to call Visvarupa home for *prasadam*.

Gradually Visvarupa lost interest in family affairs and the world. He left home, took *sannyasa*, and became Sripada Sankararanya. Visvarupa's absence was a source of constant pain in Saci Ma's heart. The pain of separation and the thought that Advaita Acarya was the cause of Visvarupa leaving home constantly occupied her mind. But fearing *vaisnava-aparadha* she kept her feelings inside; she would embrace Visvambhara and bear the pain of separation.

Then her darling Nimai began to also spend long hours at Advaita Acarya's house. He began to neglect his beautiful young wife Laksmipriya. Seeing this, Mother Saci became extremely apprehensive. He was the youngest and only son left and had also begun to withdraw from the family. In anguish Mother Saci lamented: "Who says he is Advaita? To me he is *dvaita*, a doubledealer. He has already driven away my beautiful son with the moon-like face. Now he is not allowing my only son to settle down at home. I feel so alone, no one has any sympathy for me. To the world he may be the famous Advaita, but for me he is *dvaita*, or the creator of separation."

This was Mother Saci's offense, and for this the Supreme Lord Gaurasundara refused to bless her with *prema-bhakti*. The Supreme Lord's own mother merely thought offensive things and never even expressed them - and consequently was denied *bhakti* by the Lord. Just imagine what happens to an ordinary person who

openly offends the *sadhu*, guru, or Vaishnava. Simply thinking about it makes one shudder. Therefore devotees must be extremely cautious. By the Lord's will, this pastime was enacted to emphasize the severity of committing *vaisnava-aparadha*, and the urgency of having it absolved.

Elsewhere Vrndavana dasa Thakur writes: "Lord Gauracandra, the soul of the universe, delivered Jagai and Madhai, and the merciful Lord saved everyone except the Vaishnava-blasphemers, who are considered the worst Blasphemy against the Lord's devotees is a horrendous offense. According to scripture, even if the offender is as powerful as Lord Shiva, the consequences are severe."

In the Srimad Bhagavatam, King Rahugana says to Jada Bharata: "I have committed a grievous offense by insulting a great devotee like yourself. Because of this, I, who am as powerful as Lord Shiva, shall be vanquished without delay for offending the lotus feet of a Vaishnava."

Even if the offender is extremely learned, he will be hurled down to the lowest hell. The Holy Name of Krishna is the most potent of purifying agents, but the Vaishnava-offender cannot be acquitted of his offense even by chanting the Holy Name. Blasphemy or criticism of saintly persons is the most damaging offense a person can commit against the Holy Name. The Holy Name of God is God, the Nama Prabhu.

The Padma Purana states that to exonerate one's sins, the purifying power of the Holy Name is far more potent than all the methods of penances recommended in the scriptures. However, if one who chants the Holy Name offends or blasphemes a devotee of the Lord, he cannot even be protected by chanting. When *vaisnava-aparadha* is committed, the offender can not benefit from *namabhasa* or from *suddha-nama* until the *nama-aparadha* is absolved.

At Yudhisthira Maharaja's *rajasuya-yajna* (royal sacrifice), the question was brought up as to who in the assembly should be the first to receive worship. The youngest of the Pandavas, Sahadeva, immediately pointed to Krishna, the Supreme Lord of lords. Krishna's avowed enemy, Sisupala, could not bear to have Krishna receive such glorification, and began a tirade of abuses against him.

The entire assembly was shocked. The Srimad Bhagavatam describes how the members of the assembly covered their ears in disgust and marched angrily out

of the hall. If upon hearing blasphemy one does not leave immediately, he becomes a party to it, loses all piety, and goes to hell.

Sisupala, unfazed by the departure of the followers of Krishna, began insulting them and picked up his sword. Krishna tried to pacify and restrain his followers, but when he saw Sisupala rushing toward him with his sword drawn, he released his Sudarsana disc and cut off his head. Sisupala's supporters ran for their lives. As Sisupala breathed his last, a brilliant ray of light from Sisupala's body merged into Krishna's transcendental body, but not a drop of blood was shed, so the sacrifice continued, uncontaminated.

Shortly after this incident, another demon named Dantavakra was slain by Krishna and was liberated. Sisupala and Dantavakra were actually the third and final incarnations of Jayanta and Vijaya, the eternal associates of Narayana. With their deaths they were eligible to return to Vaikuntha. Krishna, the Lord of yajnas (Yajnesvara), stayed and protected the sanctity of the sacrifice until its conclusion.

The Caitanya-Bhagavata describes the famous incident of Jagai and Madhai offending Nityananda Prabhu and how they were subsequently saved. "Two notorious brothers, Jagai and Madhai, committed every conceivable immoral act, but they had never blasphemed a Vaishnava. Because they were always drunk, they never knew what they were doing and so somehow they avoided offending devotees. Even the most sacred assembly loses its sanctity with the slightest criticism of pure devotees. In fact, a party of rogues (dacoits) is far better than such an unholy assembly. At least a rogue still has a chance someday to be excused for his sinful behavior, but an offender is bound for hell."

Bhaktisiddhanta Prabhupada comments: "If we make the mistake of engaging in fault-finding and criticizing others, indulging in one's baser instincts, we drag our souls down. Without being free from envy, no one can climb out of this inauspicious abyss."

"Mahaprabhu liberated drunkards and debauchees, but rejected anyone who offended his devotees. Faultfinding can never enhance one's devotion or spiritual realization, it simply brings severe reactions. This is one of the reasons why great souls avoid criticizing anyone, especially devotees." (Caitanya-Bhagavata Madhya 13.311-312)

"An ignorant fool who first worships a Brahmin's feet and then kicks him on the head paves his way to hell. Similarly, one who worships the deity of Vishnu but does not revere the presence of Vishnu within every living being also goes to hell." (Narada Pancaratra)

"Setting aside *vaisnava-aparadha*, if anyone harasses even an ordinary living being, he must suffer severe consequences. If a person worships the deity of Vishnu but torments his creation, he does not benefit from his worship and experiences terrible agony. Such a person is ignorant of the truth that Lord Vishnu resides in all living beings. The horrible results of *vaisnava-aparadha* are a thousand times worse than offending a non-Vaishnava.

"A person who worships the deity but does not respect the Lord's devotees, or is not compassionate to the fallen people, or worships one aspect of divinity and not others, making mundane distinctions between Krishna and Ramachandra, or does not revere Balarama, or Shiva, is designated in the scriptures as a third-class devotee." (Caitanya- Bhagavata, Madhya 5 140-149)

Srimad Bhagavatam states: "One may give up bad association, take initiation, and worship the deity in the temple, but if he does not worship the devotees he is nothing more than a pseudo-Vaishnava."

"One who has taken initiation in the Vishnumantra and is worshipping Vishnu's deity with faith is a Vaishnava, others are non-Vaishnavas." (Padma Purana 1.55.)

A devotee of Vishnu is a Vaishnava, and the Supreme Lord, who is the protector of his devotees, will not tolerate any blasphemy against such devotees. If we want to enter the Lord's heart the only passage is through the hearts of his devotees.

"Mahaprabhu liberated drunkards and debauchees, but rejected anyone who offended His Devotees. Fault-finding can never enhance one's Devotion or Spiritual Realization; it simply brings severe reactions. This is one of the reasons why Great Souls avoid criticizing anyone, especially Devotees." (Chaitanya-Bhagavata)

Vaisnava aparadha. The path of spiritual caution

Once, a brahmin poet wrote a play about sri chaitanya mahaprabhu. He went to the holy city of Jagannath Puri to see an old friend and associate of Mahaprabhu, Sri Bhagavan Acarya. The poet wanted him to hear the play, and so he read it aloud to the *acarya* and a gathering of Vaishnavas. They praised the composition, and thought it would be nice for Mahaprabhu to hear it.

But before anything was read to Mahaprabhu it was first presented to his secretary and confidante Svarupa Damodara. This was to ensure that the spiritual exchanges of *rasa* presented in the composition were not distasteful, or that the esoteric principles of devotion were not misinterpreted. If such faulty writing was presented to the Lord, he would become deeply disturbed.

Bhagavan Acarya approached Svarupa Damodara and requested that he read the composition first and then present it to Mahaprabhu. In Krishna-lila. Svarupa Damodara is Lalita-sakhi, the principal confidante of Srimati Radharani and therefore most expert in the science of *rasa*. Knowing that the poet was a pure and simple Vaishnava, Svarupa Damodara gently chastised:

"My dear Bhagavan Acarya, you are a very liberal Vrndavana cowherd boy, and the desire to read any literature presented as scripture sometimes overpowers you. When unqualified poets write about *rasa*, their poetry does not arouse the desired emotion when heard; it is *rasabhasa*, a mere semblance of *rasa*. Such writing is contrary to spiritual reality. Anyone who cannot properly identify and mix *rasika* mellows will forever be on the shore of the *bhakti-siddhanta-sindhu*. He is fooling himself and others. And Mahaprabhu's pastimes are particularly difficult to grasp. So only persons who have enshrined Mahaprabhu's lotus feet within their hearts as their life and soul are qualified to narrate *krsna-lila* and *gaura-lila*"

"Mundane love stories sadden me; but the writings of an expert devotee steeped in ecstatic love brings great joy. Srila Rupa Goswami has set the standard for writing drama. Simply hearing the introductory passages to his works gives one great spiritual pleasure."

Despite Svarupa Damodara's caution, Bhagavan Acarya repeatedly requested that he read the poem at least once before making a judgment. After repeated

entreaties, Svarupa Damodara reluctantly agreed. He assembled all the Vaishnavas and sat down to listen to the drama about Mahaprabhu.

The poet read the prologue: "The Supreme Personality of Godhead who radiates a golden complexion has become the soul of the body named Jagannatha. His lotus eyes are in full bloom.

He has appeared in Jagannatha Puri and brought dull matter to life. May that Lord, Sri Krishna Chaitanyadeva, bestow all good fortune upon you."

After the *nandi-sloka* (benedictory prologue) was recited, everyone praised the composition.

Svarupa Damodara asked the poet the meaning of the *nandi-sloka*. The Brahmin explained, "Lord *Jagannatha*'s body is exquisite and beautiful, and Mahaprabhu is the soul of that body. Mahaprabhu has appeared in Nilacala, Jagannatha Puri, to awaken the spiritual consciousness of the 'soulless-material world."

In spite of the approval of the group, Svarupa Damodara was outraged and said: "You fool! Are you trying to destroy yourself? Don't you understand that both of them are Divine? Jagannatha is the embodiment of transcendence and absolute spiritual bliss, yet you described his body as material, dull, and inert. And Mahaprabhu, the Supreme Reality, you describe as an ordinary mortal. He is the 'supreme Fire- from whom everything emanates, yet you have portrayed him as a mere spark. So you have offended Jagannatha and Mahaprabhu and are doomed. Hell isn't even good enough for you. Those who are ignorant of the principles of divine love yet dare to comment on them are fools!

"You are in total illusion. You have discriminated between the body and soul of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This is a great offense. There is absolutely no distinction between the body and soul of the Supreme Lord. The Lord's personal identity and his body are one and the same.

"There is never any difference between the body and soul of the Supreme Godhead. (This sloka is from the Kurma Purana quoted in the LaghuBhgdavatdmrta of Sanatana Goswami.)

"I do not see any form superior to your transcendental body full of ecstasy. I surrender unto you because you are the original cause of the cosmic manifestation. And although you have created everything, you are untouched by

it. There are those who are fascinated by the radiance emanating from your beautiful jewel-like body, but your devotees penetrate beyond that to approach your beautiful form. Those who neglect your personal form due to mundane perception will live in the misery of separation from you eternally.'

"Krishna is the Lord of the deluding energy may a. He is the absolute embodiment of spiritual opulence and infinite bliss, whereas the living entity is infinitesimal and is always suffering as the slave of maya."

When the Vaishnavas heard this admonishment from Svarupa Damodara, the master of subtle philosophical analysis, they were stunned. The poet was extremely ashamed, and apprehensive.

Like a buzzard among swans, he hung his head. But Svarupa Damodara was moved by the poet's dejection and said sweetly: "Go and study *SrimadBhagavatam* from a Vaishnava, and take complete shelter of Mahaprabhu's lotus feet. Always seek the association of Mahaprabhu's devotees, only then will you be able to navigate the waves of the ocean of devotion. Everything will be revealed to you. Then you can be a real pundit and describe krsna-lila without fault."

We should note that Mother Saraswati, the goddess of learning, transforms the deluded ravings of those who are devoid of proper spiritual understanding into eulogies of her Lord Sri Krishna. We find in the Sri *Caitanya-caritamrta* "There is no difference between Jagannatha and Krishna, but in Puri, Jagannatha is fixed in one place as the infinite appearing as wood, unmoving Jagannatha and Mahaprabhu, although appearing separately, are one because they are the same one Krishna in two forms. The desire to deliver the world burns inside their hearts.

"To save everyone, Krishna descended as Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. By seeing Jagannatha, one is freed from material existence, but not everyone can be admitted into his temple in Jagannatha Puri to see him Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, however, moves from one country to another, personally or through his representatives. In this way he delivers all the people of the world."

The Brahmin understood his mistakes and with great humility begged for shelter at the feet of all the Vaishnavas. The Vaishnavas were moved and arranged for him to meet Mahaprabhu personally. The poet later took *sannyasa* and continued

to live in Puri. So we see that in order to receive the Lord's mercy, we must first obtain the mercy of his devotees.

Vishnu and Vaishnavas, or Krishna and *Karsneya* are beyond mundane scrutiny. Krishna says in the *Bhagavad gita*:

avajananti mam mudha manusim tanum asritam param bhavam ajananto mama bhuta-mahesvaram

"Fools think that I am an ordinary human being, or at most that God may have descended in a bag of flesh; but I am transcendental - body and soul - the Supreme Controller of everything."

It is stated in the *Sri Caitanya-caritamrta*. Although God has innumerable forms and pastimes, his highest pastimes are performed as Krishna, appearing in human form, dressed as an ever youthful cowherd boy dancing brilliantly and playing on his flute." (*Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 21.101*)

The Supreme Personality of Godhead is the fully independent Lord, and the master of unlimited potencies. As the controller of *maya* he uses his spiritual illusion (*yogamaya-sakti*) to assist him in manifesting his pastimes in the world. Although these pastimes appear to be mundane, they are supramundane.

"The transcendental form of Krishna as revealed by Krishna's internal spiritual energy, is the secret treasure of the devotees. This form is manifest from Krishna's eternal pastimes in the spiritual domain."

To consider the infinite Supreme Lord on the same level with the finite *jiva* soul, or to distinguish between the Supreme Lord's body and soul as if he were an ordinary person is to come under the influence of the warped philosophy *mayavada*. Krishna condemns the *mayavadis* failure to accept his eternal, infinite, blissful body.

Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura writes: "What becomes of those who think that the Lord's body is matter?"

moghasa mogha-karmano mogha-jnana vicetasah raksasim asurim caiva prakrtim mohinim sritah

Bhagavad-gita 9.12

"Those who deny the existence of God seek shelter in the world. But ultimately their hopes and aspirations, their advancement of science and technology, leaves them empty, confused, and lost.

"If these offenders are devotees there is a different meaning. That their hopes and aspirations are crushed means, their thirst for liberation (*salokya*) is unattainable. If they are *karmis* (fruitive workers), they are deprived of being elevated to the heavenly planets, (*Svarga-loka*). As for *jnanis* (philosophers), they cannot obtain *moksa*, or *sayujya* (liberation of merging with Brahman). Then what do they actually gain? They acquire a demoniac mentality and nature, and end up hating the Lord and his devotees."

The *Bhagavad-gita* states:

mahatmanas tu mam partha daivim prakrtim asritah bhajanty ananya-manaso jnatva bhutadim avyayam

Bhagavad-gita 9.13

"On the other hand, the really great souls of this world are those who have completely taken shelter in me. Under the direction of my superior energy they are constantly absorbed in loving me, knowing that I am the inexhaustible source of everything."

These great souls realize that although the Supreme Lord appears in human-like form, he is the embodiment of *sat*, *cit*, and *ananda*, and is indestructible and infinite. This *ananya-manas*, or constant absorption in *bhajana*, is the *raja-guhyam* - the king of all secrets. The following sloka from the *Gita* elaborates on the nature of *bhajana*:

satatam kirtayanto mam yatantas ca drdha-vratah namasyantas ca mam bhaktya nitya-yukta upasate

Bhagavad-gita 9.14

"Always absorbed in *kirtana*, with the greatest sense of purpose, my devotees are bowed before me perpetually worshipping me."

Generally speaking, the devotees must observe the rules and regulations of devotion. However, the *Vishnu-dharma* states that: "In chanting the Lord's name

there is no consideration of time and place."

In the aforementioned *Bhagavad-gita* sloka, the Lord deliberately hints at *raganuga-bhakti*. The behavior of a *raga-bhakta* may bewilder those in the lower stages of devotion, so the scriptures warn that such *mahatmas*, or great souls, must never be judged according to mundane considerations: "A person who considers the deity of the Lord to be a statue, or the guru and Vaishnavas as ordinary people belonging to a particular social class or caste; the foot-bath water of Vishnu or the Vaishnavas as dirty water, the all-purifying Holy Name of Vishnu or Krishna as mundane sound, or the Supreme Lord of lords, Hari, as being on the same level as the gods, is a resident of hell." *Padma Purana*

Mahaprabhu has confirmed that eternal service to Krishna is our real occupation:

jivera swarupa hoy krsnera nitya-das Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 20.108

"The *jiva*'s inherent identity is that he is the eternal servant of Krishna."

The deluded *jiva* is in forgetfulness of his real identity. Thus he becomes completely absorbed in family, making money, pursuing mundane education, and physical beauty (*janma, aisvarya, sruta, sri*). These four feed his pride and often precede offensive actions against Vishnu and the Vaishnavas.

Sri Parankusa Muni says that negligence in cultivating the following four qualities in particular, propels the *jiva* towards committing the *aparadha* of *arce visnau siladhir*, or seeing the deity of the Lord as an ordinary sculpture.

The *jiva* must cultivate a positive outlook, and give up bad association while seeking the company of pure devotees. Desire leads to bad association which influences the *jiva* to develop an atheistic

mentality. The scriptures implore us to keep good association: "Deceiving oneself and others is called *kaitava*. Associating with people who are lying to themselves is called *duhsanga* (bad association). Those who think that things other than service to Krishna will satisfy them are also called *duhsanga*."

"A person must reject bad association and keep the company of genuine devotees. They tell us how to cut the knots of attachment to things bad for devotion."

Even if one's guru is inimical towards Vaishnavas, he must be given up. The scriptures instruct that such mundane gurus must be abandoned in favor of a bone fide guru. Bad association of any kind must be avoided like disease. Generally speaking, there are two types of *duhsanga* or *asat-sanga*.

"The proper conduct for a Vaishnava is to avoid materialistic company. Persons who are slaves to their senses, who are not devotees, or who do not accept Krishna, are bad association."

According to this statement a sincere soul must avoid *asat-sanga* and always seek the association of pure devotees, otherwise devotional endeavors bear no fruit. Bad association results in *aparadha*, *Vaisnava-aparadha* and *guru-aparadha*, disobeying the guru, are the two most serious offenses.

The devotee must strive to remain within the protection of *sadhu-sanga*, or saintly association.

A sincere devotee will carefully abstain from indulging in any disparaging thoughts about a Vaishnava's external qualifications. This is particularly important regarding exalted persons who are the real saviors of mankind. Even a neophyte who has recently taken shelter of a Vaishnava guru should be respected and must not be judged by mundane standards. Vrndavana dasa Thakura writes that even a veteran Vaishnava has to suffer the consequences for disrespecting another Vaishnava.

Even a person born a Brahmin due to previous pious deeds does not have a right to act or speak arrogantly or to harbor disparaging thoughts about a Vaishnava. Such thoughts will cause chaos in his life. He becomes controlled by lust, greed, and anger, and madly chases after women, fame and fortune. He becomes totally absorbed in material life, and his attachments so thickly cover his vision that even death cannot open his eyes to the truth of the hell that awaits him.

For example, a powerful yogi like Saubhari Rsi, due to his *aparadha* against Garuda, had to succumb to material allurements, and Prajapati Daksa had to suffer untold misery because of his offenses to Shiva. And when Devananda Pundit and Gopala Capala offended the purest of devotees Srivasa Thakura, and when Ramachandra Khan and the Brahmin Gopala Cakravarti offended the most exalted Vaishnava Haridasa Thakura - all these offenders experienced horrendous miseries. In Mahaprabhu's pastimes there are many incidents of such

offenses and their dramatic consequences.

Vaisnava-aparadha can be absolved only when the offended Vaishnava chooses to forgive the offender. Serving a different Vaishnava or begging the Supreme Lord for forgiveness will not excuse the offender. For example, it is well known that the great mystic Durvasa Muni offended the magnanimous King Ambarisa and was harassed by the avowed protector of Vaishnavas, Sudarshana-chakra. Even the Supreme Lord could not pardon his offenses; Durvasa Muni had to return to the Vaishnava he offended, and only after surrendering at King Ambarisa's feet were his offenses excused.

An offender may chant and perform acts of devotion, but they are merely play-acting: in a million lifetimes they will not bear the fruit of devotion. What is the use of such *bhajana* and *sadhana* if the only medium through whom Krishna's mercy descends is denigrated? It is impossible to receive the Supreme Lord's grace if the blessings of the guru and the Vaishnava are ignored.

The Supreme Lord is *bhakta-vatsala*, or the guardian of devotees. He does not pay the slightest heed to the offenders. Deprived of the Lord's grace, they become subjected to demoniac and atheistic mentalities which gradually degrade their nature, and they become a burden to the world.

During a discussion between Mahaprabhu and Ramananda Raya, Mahaprabhu inquired: "Of all that is good and beneficial to the *jiva*, what brings him the optimum benefit?"

Ramananda Raya replied: "For the *jiva*, there is no greater benefit than *krsna-bhakta-sanga*, or association with Krishna's pure devotees." Mahaprabhu also instructed everyone through Sanatana Goswami: "A person born outside of India is not unfit for devotion to Krishna, nor is one considered fit for devotion simply because he is born in a family of Brahmins. Anyone who takes to devotional service is exalted, whereas a sworn non-devotee is always condemned.

Therefore, in devotional service to the Lord, there is no consideration of family status. Krishna is always extremely kind to the meek and humble, whereas the aristocrats and learned scholars are too proud of their material qualifications.

"Among the various acts of devotion, nine-fold *bhakti (nava-vidha)* is the best as it bestows ecstatic love for Krishna. Of those nine limbs of *bhakti*, chanting the Lord's Holy Name is foremost. If one chants without committing the Ten

Offenses, he obtains the treasure of love of God." (*Caitanya-caritamrta, Antya lila*)

By birth, Brahmins possess sole rights to perform sacrifices, penance, and austerities. But they also seek elevation to the heavenly planets, which are undesirable to a devotee of Krishna. Among the general population, the Brahmins however, are still considered to be the elite, and so it behooves us remember the Vedic dictum, *bhakta-matrasya-adhikanta* not only human beings, but every living entity has a God-given right to engage in *bhakti*. Therefore a Vaishnava devotee, even if born in the West, is accepted as the best of Brahmins in a spiritual society. However, if one is a Brahmin by birth and is a non-devotee, then he is considered very degraded: "If a meat-eater becomes a devotee of the Supreme Lord Hari, he is far superior to a Brahmin, but if a Brahmin has no devotion, he is worse than a meat-eater "

The most effective religious practice in the present age of *Kali-yuga* is the *sankirtana-yajna*, or singing of the Holy Name of Krishna under the guidance of pure devotees. Anyone who is initiated into this process of *nama-yajna* is elevated among humankind. The *SrimadBhagavatam*, the fully ripened fruit of the tree of Vedic knowledge, concludes that only one possessed of superior intellect can grasp that *sankirtana-yajna* is the sole means in *Kali-yuga* to worship the Supreme Lord. Instruction on the process of *sankirtana-yajna* and *nava-vidha bhakti* abound in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*:

krsna-varnam tvisakrsnam, sangopangastra-parsadam yajnaih sankirtana-prayair, yajanti hi su-medhasah

Srimad Bhagavatam 11.5.32

"In the age of Kali, the most intelligent persons worship Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and sing the Holy Name of Krishna. Although Mahaprabhu's complexion is not blackish like Krishna's, he is nonetheless Krishna himself. He is accompanied by his associates, servants, weapons, and confidential companions. Real intelligence means to worship Krishna exclusively."

Below are three *slokas* which clearly emphasize the efficacy of *sravanam*, *kirtanam*, and *smaranam* or hearing, chanting and remembrance:

tasmad ekena manasa bhagavan satvatam patih srotavyah kirtitavyas ca dhyeyah pujoyas ca nityada

"Being completely focused, one should constantly hear about, glorify, remember, and worship Bhagavan Sri Krishna, who is the guardian of his devotees."

*tasmat sarvatmana rajan harih sarvatra sarvada srotavyah kirtitavyas
ca smartavyo bhagavan nmam*

Srimad Bhagavatam 2.2.36

"It is essential that every human being hear about, glorify, and remember Krishna always and everywhere."

*tasmat bharata sarvatma bhagavan isvaro harih srotavyah kirtitavyas
ca smartavyas cecchatabhayam*

Srimad Bhagavatam 2.1.5

"One who wants to be free from this miserable existence must hear about, glorify, and remember Krishna, who is the Supersoul, the Supreme Controller, and our savior from all miseries."

The next *sloka* establishes that *nama-sankirtana* is the best means for success whether one be a *karmi*, *jnani*, or *yogi*:

*etan nirvidyamanaanam icchatam akuto-bhayam yoginam nrpa rarnitam harer
namanukirtanam*

Srimad Bhagavatam 2.1.11

"Whether you are full of desire or completely free from desire, the only way to end all doubt and fear is to take shelter of the Holy Name of Krishna under the guidance of a pure devotee."

Srila Jiva Goswami has profusely glorified the process of *nama-kirtana* in describing the Supreme Lord's name, qualities, beauty, and pastimes. In his *Bhakti-sandarbha* he explains that the highest principle is for one to be completely and irresistibly devoted to Krishna. This alone will completely satisfy the soul (*atma-suprasidati*). He quotes from the *Bhagavatam* regarding *nama-sankirtana* as the prime occupation of the *jiva*. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* the *Mahajana* Yamaraja declares that the twelve *mahajanas*, the

supreme authorities on religion are unanimous in agreement that devotion to Krishna is the highest religion and that it begins with chanting the Holy Name of Krishna.

*etavan eva loke 'smin pumsam dharmah parah smrtah bhakti-yogo
bhagavati tan-nama-grahanadibhih*

Srimad Bhagavatam 6.3.22

"The ultimate purpose of existence is to love God - Krishna. The path of devotion begins with chanting his Holy Name."

According to one's individual proclivity one is categorized as a *karma-yogi*, *jnana-yogi* or *bhakti-yogi*, but without bhakti, no one can attain the supreme destination. Thus, the other yoga systems are dependent on *bhakti*, while *bhakti* is dependent on none. It is also stated in the Srimad Bhagavatam:

*na sadhayati mam yogo na sankhyam dharma uddhava na svadhyayas-tapas-
tyago yatha bhaktir-mamorjita*

Srimad Bhagavatam 11.14.20

"Mystic yoga, philosophy, religion, humanitarianism - none of these can satisfy me But I am a slave to devotion."

Bhakti, service saturated with love, is most adored by the Lord. He says: "The fortunate yogi is one whose heart naturally flows towards me and who is united with me in love. Knowledge and renunciation are insufficient means for achieving spiritual perfection.

"Whatever you can obtain in this world by work, austerity, education, renunciation, mystic yoga, altruism, religion, or any other apparently auspicious path, is easily attained by my devotee. He can have whatever he wants - life in the heavenly planets, *brahman* realization, even admittance into Vaikuntha. But since my devotees love me dearly, they even refuse to accept my offer of liberation from the cycle of birth and death." (*Srimad Bhagavatam 11.20.31-35*)

Why is *krsna-prema* the utmost necessity and the prime human goal? Even the sharpest of pundits, after extensive study of Vedanta, cannot perceive this truth. Thus Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami has written: "According to our karma we

are wandering in the world aimlessly. Only the most fortunate souls find a real guru by the mercy of Krishna. And by the mercy of the guru, the seed of devotion is carefully planted in our hearts. Then, like a vigilant gardener, the devotee cares for it, watering it with Krishna's name and acts of devotion.

"As the *bhakti-lata-bija* (the seed of devotion) grows, it gradually becomes a creeper that penetrates the covering of this material universe, extending into the spiritual world. It grows beyond the *brahmajyoti* and enters the *paravyoma*, or spiritual domain. Finally it reaches the highest spiritual realm of Goloka Vrndavana and entwines itself around Krishna's lotus feet which fulfill all desires. There it bears the fruit of prema love of God. Even though the gardener lives within the world, he continues to nourish the creeper with Krishna's name and service.

"However, if by chance the devotee commits *vaisnava-aparadha* it is like letting a mad elephant loose in his garden of devotion. This offense will uproot his *bhakti* creeper and destroy it.

Therefore, the gardener must build a protective fence around his creeper of devotion and avoid committing *vaisnava-aparadha*.

"The other threat is weeds choking the creeper. The desires for sense pleasure, liberation and numerous other mundane desires are weeds. Duplicity, violence in the form of meat eating, and the desire for fame and fortune, are all weeds that will choke the creeper."

These weeds thrive when they sap the energy spent in nurturing the *bhakti-lata*. Therefore the observant and introspective devotee cuts them down and protects the creeper's growth until it reaches Vrndavana. There the creeper bears the fruits of *prema* and the devotee reaches the lotus feet of Krishna, which are like a kalpa-vrksa (desire fulfilling tree). He becomes totally absorbed in tasting the fruit of *prema* and in serving Krishna's lotus feet. This fruit is the supreme perfection of human aspiration which makes all other goals appear tiny and insignificant." (*Caitanya-caritamria, Madhya 19.151-164*)

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu revealed the esoteric principles of *bhakti* to Rupa Goswami and those who have realized this are indeed rare and fortunate. What could be more unfair than to persecute such a person on the basis of race, color, or social status? Everyone interested in spiritual progress must avoid *vaisnava-*

aparadha.

Worshipping the Holy Name, *nama-bhajana*, is certainly the highest form of devotion. One's level of Vaishnavism is ascertained by the depth of his absorption in *nama-bhajana*. Whether one is a neophyte, intermediate, or advanced devotee - the fact that he has committed himself to *krsna-nama* puts him in a position worthy of appreciation and respect. He may come from a bad background, but to judge him on the basis of any material factors is *vaisnava-aparadha*.

trnad api sunicena taror api sahisnuna amanina manadena kirtaniyah sada harih

Sri Siksastaka, Verse 3

"One who is humbler than a blade of grass more tolerant than a tree, and ready to offer all respects to others without expecting any in return can be constantly absorbed in *krsna-kirtana*."

Failure to understand this instruction increases one's arrogance, and his devotional discipline suffers. Service in the association of higher Vaishnavas should not create pride in an individual, nor cause him consider himself a Vaishnava. This type of pride leads to *vaisnava-aparadha*.

The brilliant example of Namacarya Haridasa Thakur is worthy of emulation. Qualifying as a Vaishnava does not depend on individual strength, wealth, or knowledge. Everyone must keep in mind that Krishna is generous with his mercy to the meek and humble.

If a person witnesses an offense to a pure Vaishnava, he must vehemently protest. If he is unable to do so, with deep regret he must leave the place at once and cut off all connection with the offender. We must never minimize the seriousness of *vaisnava-aparadha*. Neither should we attempt to defend the offender on the basis of mundane considerations, as this will become an act of complicity which will destroy our spiritual progress and even our material well-being. Therefore devotees must always be extremely careful not to become an accomplice to *vaisnava-aparadha*. We must always remember how Lord Shiva's wife Sati went so far as to relinquish her body upon hearing offensive words about her Vaishnava husband.

A person is recognized as a Vaishnava only when he has established himself in Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's teachings. He must live by the following verse which is found in the Padydvali of Rupa Goswami. It is so important that it also appears in *Sri Caitanya-caritamrta*: "I am not a Brahmin or a king. I'm not a businessman or a member of the working class. In fact, I don't identify with any class. I'm not a monk, I'm not married. I'm not retired. All I am is an insignificant servant of the servants of Krishna, who resplendent with the highest pleasure, is an endless reservoir of nectar who takes care of his gopis."
(*Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 13.80*)

When Vaishnavas born to higher-class families look down upon the Vaishnavas born to lower-class families, then they do not even understand common courtesy, what to speak of proper Vaishnava etiquette. On the other hand, embracing Vaishnavism in order to pass judgement on Brahmins is also forbidden by the scriptures. The verbal attacks of so-called Vaishnavas towards Brahmins and vice-versa can only degrade societal values. There is nothing spiritual about such conflicts, they only lead to chaos and disruption.

One of the most absurd examples of *aparadha* took place in Krishna's hid. Once, a king named Paundraka claimed that he was Vasudeva, Krishna. He sent a messenger to Krishna in Dvaraka that he should step down from his position as God, or he would challenge him in battle. Upon hearing such ravings, Krishna laughed and sent a message that if Paundraka did not stop this insanity he would have to face the consequences. The Lord followed up on his threat, killing both Paundraka and his ally, the King of Kasi. To pretend that one is Krishna is the height of insolence and leads to doom, similarly, posing as a Vaishnava while being intoxicated with pride is disastrous.

The final decree of Mahaprabhu is not just the renunciation of bad association. He says that the renunciate and the surrendered soul have similar characteristics, but the devotee not only gives up the world, but offers himself to the Lord. A devotee takes complete shelter in Krishna with full dedication. This is the culmination of surrender - *atma-nivedanam*.

If one's renunciation lacks soul-surrender, then gradually it becomes superficial and false. False renunciation (*phalgu-vairagya*) invites the ghost of impersonalism to attack the intellect.

The Bhagavad-gita states:

visaya vinivartante niraharasya dehinah rasa-varjam raso 'py asya param drstva nivartate

Bhagavad-gita 2.59

"We may refrain from sense enjoyment, but the taste for it remains. Only by experiencing the higher taste of bhakti-ras do we become fixed in higher consciousness."

This means that as one increases his commitment to Krishna consciousness, automatically his attachment to mundane concepts and identities diminish. At the same time, Vaishnava qualities in a commensurate degree blossom in his character. Such a fortunate soul is embellished with all good qualities. The *Caitanya-caritamrta* says that a devotee of Krishna is decorated with Krishna's qualities. When a devotee develops love for Krishna, he loves everything connected to Krishna (*karsna*) and surrender to Krishna's lotus feet becomes his only interest.

As the devotee begins to identify himself as the servant of the servants of Krishna, bad association begins to disappear. Pure attraction for Krishna and karma awakens. Envy and pride do not exist in this state of consciousness. The heart's yearning to seek Krishna intensifies to the degree that the devotee sincerely cries out Krishna's name day and night. Everything else fades into oblivion.

Therefore, pure Vaishnava theology has nothing to do with social position. Mahaprabhu's teachings formulate the pure Vaishnava religion. At its very root is service to Krishna and *karsna* through the process of complete surrender, and therein lies the true satisfaction of the senses.

If a person from the lower rungs of society desires the respect of a Brahmin and outwardly accepts Vaishnavism as his religion, then his spiritual pursuit is materially motivated. Materialistic motivation does not equate with pure Vaishnavism.

It is a grave offense to treat a Vaishnava as a non-Vaishnava, or to judge him by mundane standards. Equally offensive is to praise a non-Vaishnava and worship him as a Vaishnava, or to glorify a neophyte devotee as an advanced devotee.

Only when one is fixed in the Krishna conception in his inherent spiritual

identity, and is devoted to Krishna and karsna under the direction of Sri Guru, can he find relief from the clutches of *vaisnava-aparadha*. Our predecessor *acaryas* have warned us that our chanting will never become pure if we keep bad association, at best such chanting is only mere shadow of the pure name or *namabhasa*, and *nama-aparadha* is always lurking. Bad association is always a detriment to the path of *krsna-bhakti*. So if one desires to chant Krishna's name purely he must associate with Vaishnavas. Simultaneously, he must stop craving carnal pleasure, liberation, mystic power, and other material things.

*bhukti-muka-sprha yavat, pisaci hrdis vartate tavad-bhakti-sukhasyatra katham
ahhyudayo bhavet*

Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu 1.2.22

"There is no question of experiencing the pleasure of devotion as long as the twin ghosts sense pleasure and liberation haunt us."

According to spiritual authorities, *asat-sanga* is comprised of non-Vaishnavas. They are *karmis* (sensualists), *jnanis* (empiricists), and mystics whose real desire is to achieve power. Advancement in bhakti is directly connected to avoiding bad association, and seeking and keeping good association.

The predominant *guna* (quality) of a Brahmin is *sattva-guna* (the mode of goodness). The *ksatriyas* (governing class) are under the influence of a strong *raja-guna* (passion), mixed with a weak *sattva-guna*. The *vaisyas* (businessmen) are controlled by a mixture of *raja* and *tama* (passion and ignorance), while the *sudras* (working class) are predominantly in the clutches of *tama-guna* (ignorance). So the Brahmins are considered to be the highest class in human society because they are endowed with noble qualities like sense control, truthfulness, and the ability to discriminate between matter and spirit. They are the gurus or spiritual guides in the *varnasrama* system of social order.

In the ancient *Vedic* social stratification there are four spiritual orders of life, or *ashrams*: *brahmacarya*, *grhastha*, *vanaprastha*, and *sannyasa*, or celibate students, householders, the retired, and the renunciates. Of these, *sannyasa* (renunciation) is preeminent because it facilitates freedom from mundane entanglement, thereby making it easier to elevate oneself to the transcendental plane. However, Kaviraja Goswami is quick to warn those who think that the *sannyasa* order gives a person special status: "If the followers of the *varnasrama*

system simply observe the regulations and responsibilities of their social and religious orders but neglect to worship Krishna, they fall into degraded conditions."

The *SrimadBhagavatam* states that: "The followers of the *varnasrama* system who neglect the worship of Lord Vishnu become arrogant and obsessed with their social positions, and fall down."

The most important quality of a devotee is that he serves Krishna, indifferent to what or whom is superior in this material world. The scriptures state that devotees of Krishna are the most elevated members of society, whereas non-devotees are degraded regardless of their social position. In order to worship and serve Krishna, material qualifications are not necessary, everyone is eligible.

The *Srimad Bhagavatam* makes constant reference to the fact that work without devotion is useless. The same principle applies to education, philosophy, yoga, or anything else. Pure devotion is above and beyond devotion mixed with karma, *jnana* or yoga.

Those who understand the true meaning of these statements in the scriptures are beyond any social restriction. However, this cannot be used as an excuse to not follow the rules and regulations of devotion.

"As long as one has not awakened a taste for devotion, one is obliged to adhere to the regulative principles of the Vedic injunctions."(*Srimad Bhagavatam*, 11.20.9)

A faithful devotee is not inspired by any activity other than devotion because his faith has been aroused by hearing Krishna's wonderful pastimes. According to the degree of his surrender, he will ignore social order (*varnasrama*). At the same time he realizes the need for establishing a structure to keep society from falling into a state of anarchy and chaos.

Deviations from the Vedic injunctions are the bane of modern society. Plagued by uncontrolled and irresponsible habits in diet and sex, the ideals and benefits of the *varnasrama* system have been for the most part lost, even within India. The erosion of moral standards which reflect all human interaction should alarm anyone who is concerned with the ultimate good of human society. Vaishnavas cooperate with persons who are like-minded and have similar habits, but they cannot support the present-day society's capriciousness - and more importantly,

its apathy to God consciousness.

In the pursuit of devotion even one's eating habits are important. It has been said that: "You are what you eat." The *"yoga-sastra"* of Patanjali Rsi prohibits the yogi from accepting food cooked by persons with mentalities contrary to their own. Such food causes wavering of resolve in those who desire to elevate themselves in yoga, and may yield a disastrous result. Regulations in every aspect of preparing and taking food directly affects the levels of purity in one's consciousness. The Vedas say:

ahar suddhau sattva-suddhi, sattva-suddhau dhruvasmrtih

"A pure diet purifies the consciousness, and focuses the mind in constant remembrance of the ultimate goal of life."

For this reason, strict devotees won't even accept food cooked by Brahmins if they are nondevotees. In the *Itihasa-samuccaya* the Lord says: "A person who has no devotion is not dear to me even if he is learned in all the Vedas, but if a reformed meat-eater performs devotional service then he is dear to me.

Therefore one should give charity to such a person and receive gifts from him, for he is as worshipable as I am." (*Hari-bhakti-vilasa* 10.127)

Devotees relish *prasadam*, or food offered to the Supreme Lord, with love and devotion, and never refuse *prasadam* from any Vaishnava regardless of his family background. Such refusal is another form of *vaisnava-aparadha*. Srila Raghunatha Dasa Goswami has shown that Krishna consciousness is not limited to Krishna, but includes where he lives, his family and friends, his devotees, the Brahmins, his Name, our guru, and his better half, Srimati Radharani herself.

"My dear mind, I humbly bow before you I beg you to please give up all pride and surrender fully to Sri Gurudeva, to the spiritual abode of Vraja *dhama*, to the residents of *Vraja*, to all the Vaishnava devotees of the Lord, to the *sattvika* Brahmins, to the Holy Name of the Supreme Lord, and to the ever youthful. Divine Couple of blossoming beauty Sri Gandharvika-Gindhari and in this way quickly develop sublime attachment to them." {Manah-Siksa 1)

Srila Raghunatha Dasa Goswami addresses his own mind in order to speak to us, and his teachings are indispensable to our spiritual progress. A Vaishnava must remain prideless like Raghunatha Dasa. Even though he was fully conversant with the esoteric conclusions of pure devotion, he exemplified proper Vaishnava

conduct. Even if a Vaishnava is very elevated, he always thinks of himself as lowly and meek. We must constantly remember Mahaprabhu's instruction of *trnad api sunicena*, that we should feel humbler than a blade of grass. If one thinks of himself as an elevated

Vaishnava then he cannot remain prideless.

The desire for fame and adoration (*pratistha*) will contaminate his consciousness. If he purposely leaves his food-remnants for others, his consciousness will become weighed down by arrogance. In order to avoid these pitfalls, the Vaishnava must always think of himself as the humble disciple of his spiritual master who is simply accepting worship on his guru's behalf.

Once the devotee is able to feel himself to be an insignificant servant, then nothing will divert him from the path of *suddha-bhakti*. His heart will always shine with humility and there will be no room for the darkness of deceit. To feel pride internally while making a show of humility is dishonest and absolutely foreign to a pure devotee.

One who has developed pure love for the Supreme Lord, who is immersed in meditation on the Holy Name, whose heart is constantly searching for Krishna while sincerely crying out to him -such a person is undoubtedly a Vaishnava who can purify the entire world. Under no condition does pride, honor, or even worship affect him. He is always ready to offer obeisances to everyone because he sees all living beings as part of Krishna. Such an exalted person would never insult even an ordinary *jiva*, what to speak of a Vaishnava. He is the embodiment and the protector of Mahaprabhu's teachings:

jibe sanman dibe jani krsna adhisthan

"Offer respect to all living beings knowing that Krishna resides in their hearts."

If we can emulate such an elevated mood, then by the Vaishnavas' mercy, we can acquire the great fortune of relishing the nectarean ocean of pure devotion.

Sri Parankusa Muni says that negligence in cultivating the following four qualities propels the *jiva* towards, committing the *aparadha* of *arceye visnau siladhir*, or seeing the deity of the Lord as an ordinary sculpture.

Saulabhya: The Lord appears on Earth in his deity for all to see, so the *jiva* must

develop the qualification to see him in this form and take shelter. Sausilya: To realize that the Supreme Lord is infinite and the jiva is finite thus becoming humbled and seeking the Lord's mercy. Svamitva: To believe firmly that the Lord will fulfill our every desire. Vatsalya: In spite of noticing faults in others, the ability to overlook them, and offer them shelter, thereby increasing their faith.

Spiritual suicide. Guru aparadha

Srila Kaviraja Goswami movingly describes the disappearance of Srila Madhavendra Puri in Sri Caitanya-caritamṛta. At that time one of his disciples, Ramacandra Puri, saw that his guru was chanting the Holy Name and weeping, crying out "*Mathurapainu*," which means "I could not attain Mathura." Madhavendra Puri was actually exhibiting symptoms of vipralambha bhava, or the mood of intense separation.

Ramacandra Puri was by nature a fault finder, and consequently could not receive Sri Guru's grace. Although he was Madhavendra Puri's disciple, his vision was warped and he saw his guru as a mundane person. In utter disregard of the transcendental status of his guru, he said: "If you are full of transcendental bliss, what are you crying about? You should be absorbed in meditating on Brahman."

Madhavendra Puri was enraged. "Get out you sinful rascal. I don't want to see your face!" Then he began to lament: "O Krishna, I could not reach you, nor your abode, Mathura. I am dying in unhappiness, and this rascal comes to give me even more pain. I am dying without your shelter and now this fool comes to instruct me about Brahman." Ramacandra Puri was rejected by his guru and material desires gradually appeared in his heart.

Ramacandra Puri had the audacity to offer instructions to his guru - a *mahabhagavat* - who personified *kṛṣṇa-prema*. He failed to understand that his guru was immersed in *viraha*, or separation from Mathura, the transcendental abode of Krishna.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prabhupada writes in his commentary: "Realizing that his disciple was a fool, Madhavendra Puri withdrew his connection and any responsibility towards him."

Srila Bhaktivinode elaborates on the meaning of the word *vasana*, or 'desire' in his *Amṛta-pravaha-bhasya* commentary: "Here, 'desire' indicates attachment to knowledge and analysis, which ultimately leads to *vaiṣṇava-āparadhā*. The real cause of *ajiva*'s misfortune is his offenses against guru and Vaiṣṇava."

Rejected by his guru, Ramacandra Puri went to visit Mahāprabhu in the

Gambhira temple in Puri. While waiting, he saw ants crawling outside Mahaprabhu's door. Without thinking, Ramacandra Puri said, "Last night there was sugar candy here, and therefore ants are everywhere. This *sannyasi* is attached to sense gratification."

After saying this, Ramacandra Puri got up and left. He made the effort to see the Lord every day, and yet he could not stop finding faults in the Lord's character. Further, he would publicly broadcast his criticisms. Reports of Ramacandra's criticism against the Lord reached him. Nevertheless, because Ramacandra Puri was a godbrother of his guru, Isvara Puri, Mahaprabhu always offered him respect. Accepting the criticism of his eating habits, Mahaprabhu changed his diet. He told his servant Govinda: "From now on it will be a rule that I shall accept only one-fourth of what I have been eating of Jagannatha's *sprasadam*. If you bring any more than this, I will leave."

When Govinda disclosed Mahaprabhu's self-imposed austerities to other intimate followers of the Lord, they felt as if the world had ended. That day a Brahmin came to offer Jagannathaprasadam to Mahaprabhu. Acting on Mahaprabhu's orders, Govinda accepted only one-fourth of a pot of rice and vegetables. Mahaprabhu then took only half of that amount and left the other half for Govinda. The Brahmin was horrified.

Seeing Mahaprabhu eating so little, the devotees were overcome with despair and stopped eating altogether. Mahaprabhu, however, ordered Govinda and Kasisvara Pundit to beg food from somewhere else to compensate for their smaller portions of food. This continued for a few days, and finally the news reached Ramacandra Puri, who rushed to see Mahaprabhu. Mahaprabhu received him with due honor, offering him obeisances and a seat. Ramacandra Puri laughed and instructed the Lord.

"It is not the business of a *sannyasi* to gratify his senses. He should fill his belly somehow or other.

I heard that you have cut down your eating by one-half. I can see that you are skinny. Such dry renunciation is also not the religion of a real *sannyasi*. A *sannyasi* eats only as much as necessary, but he does not try to please the senses."

Mahaprabhu replied: "I am just an ignorant boy and like your disciple. It is my

great fortune that you instruct me."

Ramacandra Puri left, and Mahaprabhu learned that the devotees were either fasting completely or had reduced their eating by one-half for many days. Then one day Srila Paramananda Puri, with his disciples, came to meet Mahaprabhu. He humbly said to the Lord.

"My godbrother Ramacandra Puri is by nature a critic. If you give up eating because of his criticism, what will you gain? He encourages one to eat to his full satisfaction, and then to eat more than necessary. Then, after he has induced one to overeat, he criticizes him saying, 'You eat too much. How much money do you have? By setting a bad example for other *sannyasis*, you ruin their vows. It's easy to understand why you have not made any spiritual advancement.'

"Ramacandra Puri always inquires about how others are eating and conducting their daily affairs. The two kinds of activities rejected in the scriptures constitute his daily *sadhana*. It is written in the Bhagavatam: 'One should see this world as being under the control of Krishna and neither praise nor criticize the characteristics and activities of others. One who praises or criticizes others is trapped in duality, and soon deviates from the ultimate goal of life.'

"Of these two rules, Ramacandra Puri obeys the first - he never praises anyone - although he knows that the second is more important, he continues to criticize others."

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prabhupada writes in his Anubhasya commentary: "In the Bhagavatam we find that -to not praise- is the first rule, and -to not criticize- is the second. If the second rule is given prominence over the first, then the conclusion is that it is not so bad to praise, but it is imperative not to criticize. Ramacandra Puri observed the first rule, but he failed to adhere the second."

Srila Paramananda Puri continued: "Even where there are hundreds of good qualities, a critic does not consider any of them. Rather, he attempts to cleverly point out faults in those attributes. One should avoid the example of Ramacandra Puri, but something should be said against him because he is breaking our hearts. Please don't give up eating on account of this fool."

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu replied: "Why are all of you angry at Ramacandra Puri? He is simply stating the standard principles of *sannyasa* life. Why condemn

him? For a *sannyasi* to over-indulge in pleasures of the tongue a great offense. The duty of a *sannyasi* is to eat only as much as is needed to keep body and soul together."

After this, the devotees fervently requested that the Lord resume his normal eating. At first the Lord refused, but later agreed to take only half of his original portion instead of a fourth.

On the days when Gadadhara Pundit, Sri Bhagavan Acarya, or Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya invited him to take *prasadam*, the Lord had no choice because he is subjugated by his devotee's love for him. The Supreme Lord is like a desire-tree, in order to satisfy his devotees he submissively accepted *prasadam* according to the devotee's desire. The prime reason for the Lord's descent is to give pleasure to his devotees. The Supreme Lord always acts in ways which he deems appropriate to the time and circumstances. Kaviraja Goswami writes: "Because of the absolutely independent position of Divinity, Mahaprabhu sometimes acted like a common man and sometimes he manifested his godly opulence. Sometimes he accepted Ramacandra Puri as his master and considered himself his servant, and other times the Lord would see him as no more than dirt. Although it may baffle our intelligence, we must remember that God can do anything he likes, and whatever he chooses to do is always irresistibly charming.

Ramacandra Puri left Nilacala after a few days for pilgrimage. His departure lifted a heavy burden from the devotees and they were happy and relieved. They resumed enjoying *prasadam* to their full satisfaction. The Lord once again filled himself with the bliss of *kirtana* and dancing. Kaviraja Goswami concludes: "If one's guru rejects him, one becomes so fallen that he commits offenses even against the Lord. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu did not take Ramacandra Puri's offenses personally, for the Lord considered him to be on the level of his guru. However, through his behavior, the Lord taught everyone about the result of offending the guru."

On the other hand, total devotion to the guru is exemplified in Isvara Puri. He personally served his guru Madhavendra Puri, knowing that he was a pure devotee of the Lord and that he was in his *aprakata lila*, or the pastime of leaving his body and entering the spiritual world.

Isvara Puri, the guru of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, personally waited hand and foot on Madhavendra Puri, even cleaning his stool and urine with his own hands,

while chanting the Holy Name and recounting the pastimes of Krishna for Madhavendra Puri to relish. In this way he helped his guru to remember Krishna's Holy Name and pastimes at the time of his passing from this world.

"Pleased with Isvara Puri, Madhavendra Puri embraced him and gave him the treasure of *krsna-prema*. Isvara Puri was filled with an ocean of ecstatic love, whereas Ramacandra Puri dried up and became a critic of everyone. Isvara Puri received the mercy, whereas Ramacandra Puri was rebuked. They are living examples of receiving a great personality's benediction and chastisement."

Madhavendra Puri revealed to the world the treasure of sublime love of Krishna while relishing divine love in separation (*vipralambha*). While singing the following verse he entered into the pastimes of Sri Radha:

ayi dina-dayardra natha he mathura-natha kadavalokyase hrdayam tvad-aloka-kataram dayita bhramyati kim karomyaham

Caitanya-caritamrta, Antya 8.34

"O Mathuranath! When will I see you again? You are supposed to be kind to the poor. I am nothing without you. Now my heart is filled with anxiety and I don't know what to do."

There are four Vaishnava traditions Madhavendra Puri accepted sannyasa in the line of Madhva. From Madhva to Laksmipati (Madhavendra Puri's guru) this disciplic line lacked the mood of *srngara-rasa* or erotic love. The spiritual mood which was prevalent in the line was revealed in Mahaprabhu's discussion with the *tattvavadis* when he was touring South India. Until Mahaprabhu's time the popular conception of the Absolute Truth was *vishnu-bhaka*, worshipping the Lord in the mood of awe and reverence.

Madhavendra Puri sowed the seed of *srngara-rasa-bhakti* in the spiritual mood expressed in this verse. He was in the mood of Sri Radhika. After Krishna leaves Vrndavana for Mathura, Sri Radhika experiences intense separation from him. To cultivate her feelings is the highest mood of devotion. A devotee immersed in this *rasa* or mood considers himself very poor and humble, and always begs Krishna to be kind to them. Inasmuch as we are separated from Krishna, this mood is the most natural way to feel while performing acts of devotion.

After Krishna departs for Mathura, Sri Radhika's heart is trembling with anxiety

from not being able to see him. Yearning to behold his beautiful face, she laments: "My love, my heart is sorrowful and agitated because I can't see you. What do I have to do to see you again? You know that I am helpless, please be kind to me!"

This is the mood expressed by Madhavendra Puri. It is the same as Mahaprabhu in the mood of Sri Radha in Vrndavana. Our preceptors have said that the root of the tree of *srngara-rasa* is Madhavendra Puri, Isvara Puri is its sapling, Mahaprabhu is its trunk, and his followers are its branches.

When Mahaprabhu went to Remuna to have *darsana* of the deity of Ksira-cora Gopinatha, he recited this verse. The Lord then entered the highest state of ecstasy. Krishnadasa Kaviraja comments that aside from Sri Radha, Mahaprabhu, and Madhavendra Puri, no one else can relish this rasa: "By grinding sandalwood, its aroma increases. By pondering this verse, its meaning deepens. The *kaustubha* gem appeared within the cream of the ocean of milk, and this verse is the cream of all poetry because it expresses the highest concept of rasa. These are Radharani's own words, and her mercy was manifest in the words of Madhavendra Puri. Only Chaitanya Mahaprabhu fully relished it. No one else is even capable of understanding it."

The *SrimadBhagavatam* states that remembrance of Krishna's lotus feet - meaning the eagerness to serve him - removes all inauspiciousness from our lives. In other words it removes the offensive attitude of not wanting to serve, which is the only means to attract the benediction of the Lord's grace. It awakens in the *jiva's* heart the desire to serve the Lord. Through service, he is freed from mundane influences and becomes situated in pure goodness or visuddha-sattva. Unalloyed devotion for the Lord dawns in his heart as he relinquishes his slavery to the material modes. He naturally becomes detached to things unrelated to Krishna and receives the highest grace. But by blaspheming Sri Guru and Vaishnavas, all is forfeited and destroyed.

By offending a devotee who has taken shelter in the Holy Name, the taste for chanting disappears. One hovers on the material plane of consciousness plagued by desires which bring misfortune and inauspiciousness. The real benediction for everyone has been nicely delineated in *Sri Caitanya-caritamrta* in the discussion between Mahaprabhu and Srila Ramananda Raya.

Ramananda Raya says that devotion to Krishna is the ultimate realization in

transcendental knowledge. The highest fame anyone can achieve is being a devotee of Krishna. The most precious possession is divine love for Srimati Radharani and Sri Krishna, and the greatest suffering is separation from Krishna's devotees. A lover of Krishna is the most exalted, liberated person. Ecstatically singing about the sublime pastimes of Radha and Krishna is the highest religion. The association of Krishna's devotees is the only real good for everyone. Krishna's transcendental name, qualities, beauty, and pastimes, are the only subjects worthy of constant remembrance, and the lotus feet of Sri Radha and Krishna are the only things we should worship and adore. The only place worth living is Vrndavana. There Radha and Krishna revel in their divine dance of love, the *rasa-lila*. The eternal pastimes of Radha and Krishna are the only topics worth hearing. The singing of the Holy Names of the Divine Couple is the highest form of *kirtana* and the most exalted form of worship. This is real culture and should be the ultimate goal of human civilization. But if *aparadha* against Hari, guru, and Vaishnava infect the heart, then we digress from the spiritual path and are dragged onto the miserable path of hedonism.

Bharata-varsa, India, is an expansion of the spiritual world, Vaikuntha, where gods and goddesses compete to take birth as humans; a birth that offers the best opportunity for association with Vaishnavas and a service-connection with Krishna. That precious gift is destroyed by *aparadha* and one's life becomes a burden.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu descended from the innermost quarter of the transcendental abode of Sri Radha and Krishna to remind us of our actual identities as their eternal servitors. But if we allow our innate nature to become diverted from serving Radha and Krishna, becoming slaves of illusion, the rare opportunity offered by the human birth is wasted.

My dear devotees,

I humbly beg all of you, please, do not commit vaishnava *aparadha*.

"My love, my heart is upset and agitated because I can't see you. What do I have to do to see you again? You know that I am helpless, please be kind to me!

Devotees, please hear this most secret of off secrets:

The most precious possession is divine love for Sri Sri Radha and Krishna, and the greatest suffering is the separation from Krishna's devotees. A lover of

Krishna is the most exalted, liberated person.

Ecstatically singing about the sublime pastimes of Radha and Krishna is the highest religion. The association of Krishna's devotees is the only real good for everyone. Krishna's transcendental name, qualities, beauty, and pastimes, are the only subjects worthy of constant remembrance, and the lotus feet of Sri Radha and Krishna are the only things we should worship and adore. The only place worth living is Vrindaban. There Radha and Krishna revel in their divine dance of love, The Rasa Lila.

The eternal pastimes of Radha and Krishna are the only topics worth hearing. The singing of the holy names of the divine couple is the highest form of Kirtan and the most exalted form of worship. This is real culture and should be the ultimate goal of human civilization.