

Bhakti Master Class

Introduction

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by David Bruce Hughes
(Gaurahari Dāsānudās Bābājī)

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Why Study Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu?

This Bhakti Master Class series is a detailed, verse-by-verse study of Śrī *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. We know *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* in the West as *The Nectar of Devotion*, by A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, which is a summary study of the original work. Śrīla Prabhupāda also did this with Śrī *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* to publish *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*, and the Tenth Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* was published as a summary study known as *KṚṢṆA Book* or *KṚṢṆA, the Supreme Personality of Godhead*.

Unfortunately Śrīla Prabhupāda didn't have the time to finish translating the complete *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. There were also other books he wanted to translate, such as *Vedānta-sūtra*, and gradually his disciples are finishing the work for him. This translation work is a great contribution to the Vaiṣṇava literature.

This series is based on an edited version of a translation of Śrī *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* by my Godbrother Bhānu Svāmī. It includes two important commentaries, one by Jīva Gosvāmī and another by Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, that illuminate the intended meaning of the text.

Sometimes devotees ask why we focus on the study of Śrī *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. After all, Śrīla Prabhupāda preached mostly from *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*; his classes on Śrī *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* are comparatively few. The short answer is that without a deep understanding of Śrī *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, our knowledge of *bhakti* is insufficient to attain the higher stages of the path chalked out by Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

If, however, Kṛṣṇa consciousness is properly understood as a transformation of consciousness and meaning, from the mundane to the transcendental ontological platform, then all gross and subtle *anarthas* (polluted desires in the heart) are easily vanquished and the higher stages of ecstatic devotional service are easily reached.

The primary subject of *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* is *rasa-tattva*. *Tattva* means a division of knowledge or a certain set of truths. The *Vedas* describe various *tattva* such as *jīva-tattva*, *viṣṇu-tattva* and *śakti-tattva*, but the most important *tattva* is *rasa-tattva* because it completely describes the field of possible relationships between the soul and the Lord.

There is nothing more important than this relationship, because this is the actual substance of our eternal life. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa presents *bhakti* as the final conclusion:

*man-manā bhava mad-bhaktō
mad-yājī mām namaskuru
mām evaiṣyasi satyaṁ te
pratijāne priyo 'si me*

“Always think of Me and become My devotee. Worship Me and offer your homage unto Me. Thus you will come to Me without fail. I promise you this because you are My very dear friend.”
[[Bhagavad-gītā 18.65](#)]

Furthermore, Kṛṣṇa doesn’t want us to divide our attention between Him and other things. He demands:

*sarva-dharmān parityajya
mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja*

“Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me.”
[[Bhagavad-gītā 18.66](#)]

That is Kṛṣṇa’s requirement for His mercy. Yet *Bhagavad-gītā* only gives a basic explanation of the principle of surrender and devotion. It doesn’t describe all the details or possibilities of this relationship.

Once a devotee passes Kṛṣṇa’s test of total surrender, what comes next? This is described in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, which is a vast encyclopedia of *bhakti*. It contains numerous accounts of the lives of pure devotees, describing various aspects of their relationship with the Lord: their background, devotional mood, spiritual practice and the result of their spiritual practice.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam is also the history of the appearances of the Lord throughout the material creation. It is striking that every appearance of the Lord is part of a relationship between Him and His devotee. The Lord doesn't arbitrarily appear in this world; He comes to perform pastimes in relationship with His devotees. When He leaves this world it is also in relationship with His devotees, and then He goes back to the spiritual world—where He has eternal relationships and beautiful loving pastimes with His devotees.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam is not just a collection of stories; it is an ontological literature designed to lift us from the mundane to the transcendental platform of consciousness. Śrīla Prabhupāda very clearly stated this key fact as follows:

“The human society, at the present moment, is not in the darkness of oblivion. It has made rapid progress in the field of material comforts of life, education and economic development of the entire world. But it suffers a pin-prick somewhere in the social body at large and therefore there is large scale quarrel even on less important issues. Therefore there is the want of the clue as to how they can become one in peace, friendship and prosperity by the common cause. **Srimad Bhagwatam will fill up this gap by ontological aspect of human education.** It is therefore a cultural presentation for re-spiritualisation of the entire human society.” [*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, original Delhi edition, Preface. Emphasis added.]

Our ontology is the lens through which we evaluate our experience; it determines **how** we look at the world. An ontology contains categories of perception, and our experience is the substance of perception. Experience is the content and ontology is the context that gives it meaning. Together they define our consciousness.

The stories in our ontology determine the value we assign to our experiences. If we do not have any stories about a particular type of experience, we tend to assign little or no value to it. The effect of this is almost as though we never had the experience at all.

This is why ontology is tremendously important. In spiritual life, we are trying to cleanse our hearts and change our consciousness. Specifically, we are trying to establish a loving service relationship with the Lord. How are we going to do this unless we know how the relationship works, unless we have an ontological background with which to understand the meaning of the different things that happen in this process? If we don't have this background, we can very easily be cheated; we can very easily miss significant spiritual experiences.

Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu gives us this background. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* describes relationships between the Lord and His devotees in the form of stories. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has ontologically analyzed these stories in *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, following the instructions of Lord Caitanya. So *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* presents an ontological system of classification by which all different *rasas*, or types of relationship with the Lord, can be described. The different varieties, permutations and even the different methods of attaining these relationships are all explained in tremendous detail.

Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu teaches pure devotional service, *uttama-bhakti*. If you want to be a pure devotee then *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* is your step-by-step manual. If you want to satisfy and please Kṛṣṇa, then here's how you do it: everything you need to know is in *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*.

The Ocean of Bhakti-rasa

Rasa means taste, nectar—spiritual nectar. What is this nectar? It is the flavor of ecstatic love between the devotees and the Lord. This relationship is very sweet, very affectionate, very ecstatic; it's full of charged devotional energy. It's dynamic, going through different phases and moods, and is always expanding.

Therefore, Rūpa Gosvāmī titled his analysis of Lord Caitanya's teachings the *bhakti-rasa-amṛta-sindhu*.

- **Bhakti** is devotional service.
- **Rasa** is the taste of this devotional relationship between the devotee and the Lord.
- **Amṛta** is a special word with two meanings: *a-mṛta* means 'no death' or 'immortal'. *Amṛta* also means the nectar of immortality drunk by the demigods. Although it doesn't give them actual immortality, it gives them a lifespan equal to the duration of the material creation. But even better than that *amṛta* is the nectar of this devotional service, *bhakti-rasa*, because it is eternal.
- And there is so much of this nectar it's called an ocean, **sindhu**.

So *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* means 'the ocean of the nectarean taste of the immortal eternal relationship of devotional love between the devotees and Kṛṣṇa'. The title is very descriptive, for that's precisely the subject matter of this book. It's not merely poetic or metaphorical, but an exact description of the contents. Rūpa Gosvāmī's style of writing is very exact and scientific. Although he uses poetic or metaphorical statements at times to

describe things that are very difficult to describe in ordinary words, he always does so with great exactitude. Every word is used with mathematical precision to describe a particular state of consciousness or transcendental emotion.

Since *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* discusses the relationship between the *jīva* and the Lord, everything in this book is on the spiritual platform. Although the conditioned soul has a material body, the instructions and philosophy in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* include how to engage the material body in the transcendental service of the Lord.

Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu gives the process for reviving this close devotional relationship with the Lord. It gives a process based on a transcendental ontological analysis of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Everyone wants to know the secret of spiritual life, so here it is: you need to have a transcendental ontology.

I can hear the comments already: “A what? Can’t I just give money or distribute books?” No. That won’t get you where you want to go. You have to change your consciousness; you have to change your mood. You must have a mood of pure love toward Kṛṣṇa. And when you have this mood of pure love, then Kṛṣṇa reciprocates that mood.

It’s simple for the simple: just love Kṛṣṇa. Love Kṛṣṇa in whatever mood that you want to love Him, and He will respond. For those who are still very complicated, they have to purify themselves. There is a preliminary process that they have to go through to get to that stage.

We want to teach devotional service on this platform of spontaneous love for Kṛṣṇa, because this is the actual platform of pure devotional service, *uttama-bhakti*. This is the actual kind of devotional service that pleases Kṛṣṇa. We want Kṛṣṇa to be pleased with our service.

But before one can reach the platform of *rāgānuga-bhakti*, spontaneous devotional service, Rūpa Gosvāmī gives the preliminary qualifications in the Eastern Ocean of *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, the 64 *aṅgas* of *vaidhī-bhakti*. When one has mastered these preliminaries then they can enter into the Southern Ocean of *bhāva-bhakti*, actual transcendental devotional service itself.

Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu is divided into four divisions or four Oceans: the Eastern, Southern, Western, and Northern. And within each of these oceans there are several chapters or Waves. Each Wave is a specific topic in the study of devotional service that brings us closer to Kṛṣṇa. By reading and studying *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* we're surfing on these waves in the ocean of ecstatic bliss. This is our mood as we study this great scripture, which is the foundation of our lineage, the foundation of the Kṛṣṇa Consciousness movement.

There's nothing higher than this, no higher knowledge, no higher topics in all the *Vedas*. If you understand this *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, then you can understand everything else. And if you don't understand this *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, then everything else will be a mystery to you because you won't have the background knowledge; you won't have the ontology to decode the meaning properly.

Before approaching *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, some preliminary studies and preparations are necessary. You should have a general background in Vedic philosophy, *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrī Īsopaniṣad*; if you have read the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, that's even better. However, the main qualification is to have a strong desire to be a pure devotee. If you don't have this desire you will wonder, "Why are they talking about all this?" It won't make sense. But if you desire pure devotional service, then this study of *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* will be very meaningful and valuable for you.

Uttama-Bhakti: Pure Devotional Service

The most important *śloka* in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* gives the definition of *uttama-bhakti* (pure devotional service):

*anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyam
jñāna-karmādy-anāvṛtam
ānukūlyena kṛṣṇānu-
śīlanam bhaktir uttamā*

“The highest *bhakti* is defined as continuous service or emotions directed towards Kṛṣṇa, His expansion forms or others related to Him, with a pleasing attitude towards Kṛṣṇa. It should be devoid of desires other than the desire to please the Lord, and unobstructed by impersonal *jñāna*, the materialistic rituals of *karma* or other unfavorable acts.” [[Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.1.11](#)]

The characteristics of *uttama-bhakti* given in this *śloka* are divided into *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa*, essential or primary characteristics, and *taṭastha-lakṣaṇa*, secondary characteristics.

Svarūpa-lakṣaṇa:

There are three primary characteristics of pure devotional service:

- Pure devotional service is for Kṛṣṇa or those related to Him.
- Pure devotional service is an active engagement.
- Pure devotional service is executed with positive intent.

Tatāstha-lakṣaṇa:

There are two secondary characteristics of pure devotional service:

- Pure devotional service is free from ulterior motive.
- Pure devotional service is not covered by *jñāna* or *yoga*.

Each word in the *śloka* is significant in describing these characteristics. Let's take a closer look at them:

Kṛṣṇa—Pure devotional service is for Kṛṣṇa or those related to Him

The most essential attribute of pure devotional service is that it is performed only for the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa, and no one else. However, Kṛṣṇa is also pleased when we serve His intimate servants, and therefore such service is included in the definition of *uttama-bhakti*. Jīva Gosvāmī comments:

“Because this definition also includes persons related to Kṛṣṇa as well as Kṛṣṇa Himself, it avoids the fault of being too narrow. Thus, *aṅgas* of *bhakti* such as taking shelter of *guru's* lotus feet may be included in *bhakti*.”

Anuśīlanam—Pure devotional service is an active engagement

Anuśīlanam means ‘cultivation by following the previous teachers.’ There are two aspects of this: *pravṛtti*, or activities favorable to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and *nivṛtti*, avoidance of activities unfavorable to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Pure devotional service is possible only by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa and His pure devotees; thus in the *śloka* under discussion, the prefix *anu* [by following] links *śīlanam* [activities] to Kṛṣṇa. Therefore initiation by a bona fide spiritual master is an indispensable feature of the spiritual path.

All activities in Kṛṣṇa's service are directly under the control of His internal pleasure potency. Therefore the spiritual masters of the lineage de-

scending from Kṛṣṇa are all servants of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. To reach success in attaining pure devotional service, we must connect ourselves with Her by accepting initiation into the *guru-paramparā*. In this way all our life energy can become spiritualized by connection with the original source.

Ānukūlyena—pure devotional service is executed with positive intent

Sometimes Kṛṣṇa derives pleasure from fighting with demons, but the activities of the demons are not considered devotional service because of their inimical intent. Therefore Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī qualifies his definition of pure devotional service with *ānukūlyena*, positive intent. It indicates that a favorable attitude toward Kṛṣṇa is an essential attribute of pure devotional service.

Although the demons' activities sometimes please Kṛṣṇa, they are not accepted as devotional service because they lack positive intent. On the other hand, sometimes Kṛṣṇa's devotees perform activities that apparently displease Him. However, these activities are accepted as devotional service because they are performed with love. For example, Mother Yaśodā sometimes chastises her son, but this is accepted as pure devotional service because it is done out of love for Him.

Anyābhilāṣitā-sūnyam—pure devotional service is free from ulterior motive

Anyābhilāṣitā-sūnyam means 'devoid of any other desire.' Any desire other than the devotional service of the Lord is material desire. Even if a desire is apparently spiritual, such as the desire for liberation, it is considered material because its motive is selfish benefit and not devotional love. Ordinary desires such as the instinct for self-preservation, to eat or take reasonable care of the body are not out of the range of devotional service, as long as they do not become the motivational focus of our life. The body must be

kept fit to engage in meaningful service to Kṛṣṇa. The point is, the objective of even ordinary desires must ultimately be the pleasure of the Lord.

Jñāna-karmādy-anāvṛtam—pure devotional service is not covered by jñāna, karma or yoga

It is not that we must completely abstain from all philosophical speculation or rational thought, as long as the aim of such reasoning is to confirm the conclusions of the śāstra and the instructions of the spiritual master and other great souls. Philosophical defeat of opposing systems of thought is also valuable in preaching, although not necessary for pleasing Kṛṣṇa Himself.

Similarly, we can engage in ordinary social and religious activities (*karma*), as long as these engagements do not become more prominent than our direct engagements in *bhakti*. One should not be a full-time fruitive worker, philosopher or speculator and a part-time devotee, but a devotee who occasionally engages in karmic activity to maintain himself and his family responsibilities.

In conclusion, Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī's definition of *uttama-bhakti* is perfect. Each word is so precise and exact that once we understand it, we cannot mistake anything else for pure devotional service. His definition is neither overly exclusive nor overly inclusive, and it applies perfectly to all stages of devotion, from the neophyte stage of practice to the exalted stage of *prema-bhakti*. The entire content of *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* is based upon this scientific definition of pure devotional service. Every bona fide student of this path of *bhakti* must be completely familiar with it and able to apply it in practice.

Qualities of Pure Devotional Service

In the First Wave of *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī explains that there are three categories of pure devotional service:

- *Sādhana-bhakti*: devotional service in practice.
- *Bhāva-bhakti*: devotional service in ecstasy.
- *Prema-bhakti*: devotional service in pure love of Godhead.

It is also described that pure devotional service displays six transcendental qualities:

- *Kleśaghñī*: pure devotional service brings immediate relief from all kinds of material distress.
- *Śubhadā*: pure devotional service is the beginning of all auspiciousness.
- *Sudurlabhā*: pure devotional service is rarely achieved.
- *Mokṣa-laghutākṛta*: Those in pure devotional service deride even the conception of liberation.
- *Sāndrānanda-viśeṣātmā*: pure devotional service automatically puts one in transcendental pleasure.
- *Śrī kṛṣṇākarṣiṇī*: pure devotional service is the only means to attract Kṛṣṇa.

Each successive stage of devotional service generates two of these transcendental qualities.

- *Sādhana-bhakti*, in its pure stage, displays the qualities of *kleśaghñī* and *śubhadā*.
- *Bhāva-bhakti* displays the same qualities as *sādhana-bhakti*, plus *sudurlabhā* and *mokṣa-laghutākṛta*.
- *Prema-bhakti* displays all the previous qualities, with the addition of *sāndrānanda-viśeṣātmā* and *śrī kṛṣṇākarṣiṇī*.

This explains the following statement by Śrīla Prabhupāda in the *Nectar of Devotion*:

“Generally it is understood that in the category of devotional service in practice there are two different qualities, devotional service in ecstasy has four qualities, and devotional service in pure love of Godhead has six qualities.” [[Nectar of Devotion, Chapter 2](#)]

These are the wonderful transcendental results of following the path of *uttama-bhakti* as defined in *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. Any other standard of *bhakti* is a deviation, and therefore such results cannot be guaranteed.

Transcending Mixed Bhakti

Śrīla Prabhupāda gave great mercy to the fallen inhabitants of the West; he brought them to the authentic Vaiṣṇava path and revealed the confidential methods that lead to the highest attainments of *bhakti*. He gave them the opportunity to attain the transcendental qualities that accompany pure devotional service.

However, very few of his disciples have followed this path to its ultimate conclusion. Many of them have become attached to management and politics; too much money and not enough good sense. Therefore many have fallen down, if not into sinful activities then into the misconception that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is just another mundane religion. Thus their spiritual lives remain incomplete.

Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu appeared in this world to teach the remarkable process of *uttama-bhakti*, pure devotional service to Kṛṣṇa, whose benefits are inconceivably greater than *vaidhī-bhakti*, mixed devotional service to the Lord. To appreciate this, one must understand the distinction between mixed and pure devotional service.

In my experience most devotees are in the neophyte stage of *bhakti*, laboring under the misconception that if they perform a sufficient quantity of mixed devotional service, they will attain the incomparable benefits of pure devotional service. But *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* clearly states:

*sudurlabhā —
sādhanaughair anāsangair alabhyā sucirād api
hariṇa cāśvadeyeti dvidhā sā syāt sudurlabhā*

“Pure *bhakti* is rarely attained. *Bhakti* is difficult to attain in two ways: if undertaken in great quantity but without attachment [*āsakti*], *bhakti* cannot be attained even after a long time; and even if practiced with attachment, Kṛṣṇa does not give *bhakti* to the practitioner immediately.” [[*Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.1.35](#)]

The stage of *āsakti* is very high, even beyond *anartha-nivṛtti* or complete cessation of material desire. If one cannot rid oneself of all material desires, both gross and subtle, there is no question of attaining the special benefits of pure *bhakti*.

We don’t want devotees to repeat the error of our Godbrothers and others who think that the exalted qualities of pure *bhakti* are obtainable by casual, neophyte or even offensive service. This is why we are taking up this great study of *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, and everyone should follow along carefully to get the incomparable benefit of transcendental confidential pure loving service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Without the proper ontological background, one can very easily be cheated. Some spiritual teachers take scriptural statements out of context and present them as, “This is what you should do,” and one may not realize there is a much broader range of choices. There are many incompetent people who misrepresent themselves as great authorities on spiritual life. But because they don’t know the complete science of *bhakti*, they present their lower level of understanding as the complete Absolute Truth.

So when people approach them, they give some very simple, easy instruction: “Chant a little Hare Kṛṣṇa, take a little *prasādam*, read a little *Bhagavad-gītā* and just do your work—and don’t think about it because Kṛṣṇa will take care of everything.” That sounds very good, just like it sounds really good to most people when the minister says, “Just believe in

Jesus Christ and you'll be saved." That's it; that's all you have to do: just believe. You don't have to know anything and you don't have to do much of anything. There's no process; just believe.

Of course there's actually a lot more required to attain any meaningful advancement, but the sales pitch is, "Just believe, give money, be a loyal member, and you will get all the benefits." This kind of cheating business goes on only because people do not know the science of spiritual life and consciousness. They don't know the methods or the expected results. But all this knowledge is given in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*.

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* there are many very exact, highly technical statements about devotional service; but because they're in the form of stories, if one doesn't have the analytical background knowledge presented in *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, they won't be able to apply the wisdom in their own life; they won't get pure devotional service, *uttama-bhakti*. The means of recognizing and attaining *uttama-bhakti* is precisely the subject of *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*.

Uttama-bhakti is very confidential, difficult and rare to attain. It is so powerful that Kṛṣṇa Himself becomes controlled by it. Therefore, He does not give it out very easily. Attaining *uttama-bhakti* requires transcendental knowledge, technical skill and dedicated personal practice over a long span of time. But what's the alternative? Being cheated by engaging in some materialistic process of religion.

Almost all of the devotees we meet are like that. They pray to Kṛṣṇa, they chant Kṛṣṇa's Holy Name, but actually their desire is, "Kṛṣṇa please help me with my work, with my business, with money, with my family problems. Kṛṣṇa do this for me; Kṛṣṇa do that for me." What's the difference between them and the naïve Christian who approaches Jesus for some mate-

rial benediction? There’s a song, “Oh Lord, won’t you buy me a Mercedes-Benz?” which mocks this materialistic approach to religion. But actually most devotees aren’t a whole lot different.

Most devotees are in the neophyte stage because they maintain some material attachment and perform their devotional service to further their material process. The Lord fulfills the desires of everyone and so they obtain their material benefits—but they don’t obtain Kṛṣṇa.

But pure devotees are only interested in achieving the transcendental service of the Lord, which is nondifferent from Him in quality. Therefore the Lord is the only desire of the pure devotees. Devotional service is the only perfect spiritual process for achieving the highest result: direct association with the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Devotees whose objective is to associate personally with the Lord have no desire to accept the activities of *karma-kāṇḍa* or *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, for pure devotional service is above both. The devotees accept only the *upāsana-kāṇḍa* process of pure devotional service.

*iti bhāgavatān dharmān
śikṣan bhaktyā tad-utthayā
nārāyaṇa-para māyām
añjas tarati dustarām*

“Thus learning the science of devotional service and practically engaging in the devotional service of the Lord, the devotee comes to the stage of love of Godhead. And by complete devotion to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Nārāyaṇa, the devotee easily crosses over the illusory energy, Māyā, which is extremely difficult to cross.” [[Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.3.33](#)]

Merely executing one’s external religious duty according to *varṇa* and *āśrama* is not as good as offering all the results of one’s activities to the

Lord. When one gives up all fruitive activity and occupational duty he attains *sva-dharma-tyāga*, wherein he takes to the renounced order. That is certainly better. However, better than the renounced order is cultivation of knowledge mixed with devotional service.

Yet all these activities are external to the activities of the spiritual world. There is no touch of pure devotional service in them. *Uttama-bhakti* devoid of *karma*, *jñāna* and *yoga* is a different subject matter; it is the highest transcendental platform. This ultimate perfection cannot be attained by empiric philosophy, nor merely by good association.

In *Jaiva-Dharma*, Śrīla Bhaktivinod Ṭhākura quotes *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* and comments:

“Now I can truly realize the importance of these wonderful words composed by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī ...

*sarva thaiva durūho 'yam abhaktair-bhagavad-rasaḥ
tat pādāmbuja-sarvasvair bhaktair evānurasyate
vyatītya bhāvanā-vartma yaś camatkāra-bhāra-bhuḥ
hṛdi sattvojjvale bādhaṁ svadate sa raso mataḥ*

‘Those who are convinced that the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa are the summum bonum of life are the purest of devotees, and they alone are capable of relishing *bhakti-rasa*. Those whose hearts are bereft of *bhakti* and rampant with mundane emotion are generally contaminated by impure habits and are fond of logic and argumentation. They can never perceive this transcendental *rasa*. The person who has transcended the noumenal plane and whose consciousness and heart have been enlightened by the brilliance of pure goodness that ushers the dawn of magnificent transcendental *bhāva* is alone able to experience *rasa*.’ [[Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 2.5.131-132](#)]

“True *rasa* is not available upon the material plane; it is of the spiritual world. As the *jīva* is *cit-kaṇā*, a spark of spiritual energy, *rasa* manifests within his consciousness. *Rasa* appears only in deep *bhakti-samādhī*, devotional meditation. Those who have received the grace of Śrī Gurudeva and have realized the distinction between *śuddha-sattva* [pure goodness] and *miśra-sattva* [mixed goodness] are free from all doubts.”

There is a profound difference between the ordinary goodness found in the material world and the pure goodness of the transcendental plane. The root of this difference has to do with our intention. When our intention is to benefit ourselves, we are capable of action in the mode of goodness, but such action is still contaminated with the conception of selfishness. Pure goodness, on the other hand, is bereft of all sense of self-benefit, and seeks only to benefit the Beloved or object of service, namely Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself.

We can neither understand this subtle distinction nor purify ourselves from the desire for self-benefit by any process other than pure *bhakti*. *Karma*, *jñāna* and *yoga* are all predicated on the assumption of activity for the purpose of benefiting oneself. Pure *bhakti* is the only platform on which action is performed in pure loving service without desire for oneself. One only desires more and more service for the Beloved, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa reciprocates by arranging more and more facility for the devotee to engage in His transcendental loving service.

Śrī *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* details all the steps from the beginning of devotional service through the highest perfection of *prema-bhakti*. Therefore every devotee who sincerely wants to attain the highest perfectional stage of Kṛṣṇa consciousness must study this great transcendental literature.

My concern has always been that devotees do not give enough attention to Śrī *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. This process of pure devotional service is a very confidential topic, and although mentioned in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, it is not

explained there in detail. Actually, it is very difficult to understand Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam properly without *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. The fact that so few of my Godbrothers have attained authentic transcendental consciousness is proof of this.

However, *uttama-bhakti* is the principal subject matter of *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, which discusses it more elaborately than any other Vedic literature. Hopefully this detailed study of Śrī *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* will bring some balance to the devotional society. It will clarify the understanding of pure devotional service and will certainly provide a powerful impetus to make one's life and consciousness perfect.

Spontaneous Love of Godhead

There are two ways to foster *bhakti*:

- *Vaidhī-bhakti*: regulated devotional service inspired by scriptural rules.
- *Rāgānuga-bhakti*: spontaneous devotion inspired by *lobha*, or greed.

While there is ample explanation of *vaidhī-bhakti* in other works, only *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* elaborately discusses spontaneous devotion and higher stages such as *bhāva-bhakti* and *prema-bhakti*. Moreover, of these two methods, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī gives more importance to *lobha*, as expressed in his *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*:

*tat tat-bhava-ādi-mādhurye śrute dhīr-yad-apekṣate
nātra śāstraṁ na yuktiṁ-ca tallobhotpatti-lakṣaṇam*

“After the devotee has heard the detailed descriptions of the sweetness of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s loving spiritual sentiments [*bhāva-mādhurya*] with His associates, he is spontaneously drawn towards those sentiments of Kṛṣṇa’s beloved associates. Such a devotee, desiring to possess those feelings, shakes free the shackles of logic and scriptural bindings. Liberating himself from these bonds is the devotee’s first symptom of *lobha*.” [Śrī *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.292]

Regarding this verse Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākur says:

“When a devotee becomes greedy for Kṛṣṇa while hearing about the different ecstatic emotions displayed by a *parikāra* [confidante] participating in Kṛṣṇa’s Vraja pastimes, the devotee thinks, “Let this spiritual emotion also bloom in my heart.” Such meditations are never interrupted by a need to seek consent from either the scriptures or logic. If by chance a devotee feels any uncertainty, then his desire to possess the spiritual emotions of a *parikāra* cannot be called *lobha*. No one can ever develop *lobha* from following scriptural injunctions, nor can one obtain the desired spiritual object if the mind is endlessly analyzing

whether or not one is eligible. Real *lobha* appears spontaneously when one sees or hears about Kṛṣṇa.

Lobha has two divisions according to the two sources from which it may develop: the pure devotee’s mercy and the Supreme Lord’s mercy. The first division of *lobha*, that which is owing to the devotee’s mercy, is of two kinds: ancient and modern. Ancient *lobha* appears by the mercy of pure devotees steeped in the same sweet, eternal devotional mellows relished by the constant associates of Lord Kṛṣṇa. When *lobha* originates from the grace of pure devotees in the present time it is known as contemporary, or modern. When *lobha* starts from the previous birth and begins to bloom in the present life, then the devotee must take shelter of a *guru* who is a *rāgānuga* pure devotee. The second kind of *lobha*, or *modeni-lobha*, is developed only after the devotee takes shelter of his spiritual master. *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* confirms:

*kṛṣṇa tat-bhakta kārūṇya-mātra lobhaika hetukā
puṣṭi-mārga-tayā kaiścid iyaṁ rāgānugocyate*

‘Lobha is produced solely by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa and His pure devotees. Devotion initiated by such *lobha* is defined as *rāgānuga-bhakti*; sometimes it is termed *puṣṭi-mārga-bhakti*.’ [[Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.309](#)]

“When both kinds of devotees—the one yearning for ancient *lobha*, the other for modern *lobha*—hear how to acquire the devotional mellows possessed by Kṛṣṇa’s eternal associates, or *nitya-parikāras*, they seek guidance from the proper scriptures. This is because the authorized method for attaining *bhāva* is delineated in scriptural injunctions and purports; no other sources for receiving this information are indicated anywhere.

“The following analogy illustrates this point: A person becomes greedy for milk and its products, but first he must want to know how to procure milk. He then has to seek advice from a trustworthy person con-

versant with the subject who will tell him how to purchase a cow and how to take care of her properly. In other words, knowledge on a subject cannot be simply invented—proper guidance is necessary. As Lord Brahmā explains in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*:

*yathāgnim edhasy amṛtaṁ ca goṣu
bhuvy annam ambūdyamane ca vṛttim
yogair manuṣyā adhiyanti hi tvām
guṇeṣu buddhyā kavayo vadanti*

‘As one can derive fire from wood, milk from the milk-bag of the cow, food grains and water from the land, and prosperity in one’s livelihood from industrial enterprises, so by practice of *bhakti-yoga*, even within this material world, one can achieve Your favor or intelligently approach You. Those who are pious all affirm this.’ [*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 8.6.12]

“For a *rāga-bhakta* (the devotee following the path of *rāgānuga-bhakti*) this intense eagerness for hearing and chanting about the all-purifying qualities and activities of Kṛṣṇa begins with the *rāga-bhakta*’s surrender to the lotus feet of his *guru*, and continues to flourish until he attains his spiritual goals. The more a devotee is purified by hearing and chanting, the more spiritual realizations he will have; just as medicine applied correctly to diseased eyes cures them, hearing and chanting cures the devotee of material ignorance.” [*Rāgavartma-candrikā*]

The formula for this concentrated medicine is only found in *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. It is described very nicely in the five Waves of the Southern Ocean as a combination of five *bhāvas*: *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, *sāttvika-bhāva*, *vyabhicārī-bhāva* and *sthāyi-bhāva*. This transcendental prescription coming from the original physician, Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, is powerful enough to cure all our material diseases and restore us to full spiritual health.

Only when in full spiritual health will we be able to satisfy Kṛṣṇa. As we previously discussed, mixed devotional service does not satisfy Kṛṣṇa. In fact, even pure devotional service is not enough to satisfy Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa desires devotional service on the platform of *rāga-mārga*, spontaneous love driven by pure attraction for His beauty and sweetness:

aiśvarya-jṣānete saba jagat miśrita
aiśvarya-śīthila-preme nāhi mora prīta

“Knowing My opulences, the whole world looks upon Me with awe and veneration. But devotion made feeble by such reverence does not attract Me.” [[*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Ādi 3.17](#)]

vrajera nirmala rāga śuṇi' bhakta-gaṇa
rāga-mārga bhaje yena chāḍi' dharma-karma

“By hearing about the pure love of the residents of Vraja, devotees will worship Me on the path of spontaneous love, abandoning all rituals of religiosity and fruitive activity.” [[*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Ādi 4.33](#)]

prema-rasa-niryāsa karite āsvādana
rāga-mārga bhakti loka karite pracāraṇa

rasika-śekhara kṛṣṇa parama-karuṇa
ei dui hetu haite icchāra udgama

“The Lord's desire to appear was born from two reasons: He wanted to taste the sweet essence of the mellows of love of God, and He wanted to propagate devotional service in the world on the platform of spontaneous attraction. Thus He is known as supremely jubilant and as the most merciful of all.” [[*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Ādi 4.15-16](#)]

Notice the prominence of the term *rāga-mārga* in these *śloka*s. A devotee may follow all the rules and regulations of the scriptures very strictly, and

may even be promoted to the Vaikuṇṭha planets, but that's no guarantee that they can actually satisfy Kṛṣṇa. They may have opulences, mystic powers, and great attainments of spiritual life, and may even be engaged in pure devotional service without material activities, but because they have selfish desire for opulence, Kṛṣṇa is not fully satisfied.

Kṛṣṇa is fully satisfied with the residents of Vṛndāvan who are in pure love with Him, with no desire for material or spiritual opulence, or personal benefit. They just love Kṛṣṇa with all their hearts, without any feeling of awe and reverence. This is the essential nature of *uttama-bhakti*.

The love of the residents of Vṛndāvan for Kṛṣṇa is very intimate, devoid of any hint of fear. And what is awe and reverence but a certain flavor of fear, "O God, You're so great and I'm nothing, please help me." It's a kind of pathos. But the devotees in Vṛndāvan are completely in love with the Lord in servitude, friendship, parenthood, or conjugal love. They have no feeling of awe. They think of Kṛṣṇa as their equal, as their dearest friend. The Lord's parents think they're Kṛṣṇa's superiors. Kṛṣṇa loves this; He enjoys it.

Why? Because nothing can threaten Kṛṣṇa. Nothing can detract from His supreme position. He is constitutionally the Supreme Personality of Godhead, eternally. There's nothing that can unseat Him from that position or threaten His supremacy, His absolute mastery of everything and everyone. So He doesn't mind taking a subordinate position, even to the rascal living entities in this material world.

We often see that someone desires to enjoy a material position and Kṛṣṇa fulfills his desire. It doesn't matter whether they are pious, whether they worship Him, or even if they are atheistic. Kṛṣṇa, as the dearest friend of every living entity, fulfills their desire. It says in the *Upaniṣads*:

*nityo nityānām cetanś cetanānām
eko bahūnām yo vidadhāti kāmān*

“Among all the eternal, conscious beings, there is one Supreme who fulfills the desires of everyone else.” [Kāṭha Upaniṣad 2.2.13]

That's the difference between the *jīva* and Bhagavān: the *jīva* is desiring and Bhagavān is fulfilling that desire. God is fulfilling that need as the dearest friend situated on the same tree of the body. This is His unconditional love for His creations. We're all sons and daughters of God. So He's fulfilling whatever desires we have. The difference between devotees and non-devotees is that the devotee recognizes this friendly relationship and acts appropriately toward the Lord by offering devotional service.

Devotees in the neophyte stage are in the mood of awe and reverence because they realize the tremendous difference between themselves and the Lord, “I'm nothing and He's everything.” And this is true. But the Lord is always the Supreme Personality of Godhead. What does He gain by someone's awe and reverence? And what does He lose if they are in a more familiar mood of friendship to Him? Absolutely nothing. He doesn't lose anything if the devotee relates to Him as an equal, or even as a superior.

It's no problem for Him if the devotees are in a friendly mood. Respect is automatically there when there is love. The devotees love Kṛṣṇa so much that they would never do anything to hurt Him. Not that they could hurt Him, but this is their attitude: always favorable toward the Lord. This is one of the integral qualities of pure devotional service. It's always favorable and from the intention to benefit the Lord: to help Him, and to give Him pleasure and service.

All the devotees in Vraja feel that the Lord is their best friend. And the Lord is our best friend; He is everyone's best friend. But only the *rāga-mārga* devotees have realized it, because only they have given up all distance or separation and become intimate devotees of the Lord.

The path of devotional service must not be reduced to an external religious process based on the rules and regulations of scripture. Although it may begin from there, it must help the aspiring devotee advance to *rāgānuga-bhakti*, spontaneous loving service. Ultimately, by relentless determination to make progress on this path and avoid complacency and *niyamāgraha* (attachment to a lower stage), the devotee should reach the perfectional stages of *bhāva* and *prema*.

Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu gives this progressive path, beginning from the regulative principles of scriptural injunctions up to the highest platform of pure spontaneous devotional service. Therefore it is unique, even in the Vedic literature, for it educates the devotee in the highest and most esoteric science of *rasa-tattva*, or how to satisfy Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu



Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu

Generally devotees concentrate on Kṛṣṇa, chant the Holy Name of Kṛṣṇa, think of Kṛṣṇa and consider Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. But many devotees, especially in India, do not realize the importance of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu reveals Kṛṣṇa to the aspiring devotee. In fact, were it not for Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu we would not even know the places of Kṛṣṇa's earthly pastimes in Vṛndāvan, because they had become covered over by the passage of time (over 4,000 years) since Kṛṣṇa's appearance. Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu went to Vṛndāvan, remembered and rediscovered the locations of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes and instructed His disciples to renovate them. Thus today we are able to visit these places and experience the transcendental bliss of Vṛndāvan-dhāma.

Moreover, Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu also revealed the inner moods of Kṛṣṇa and His devotees to an unprecedented extent. Normally the transcendental pastimes of the Lord and His intimate devotees are very confidential. When Kṛṣṇa was present on this planet, not even Kṛṣṇa's family members, the Yadu dynasty, knew of them in detail. But Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu revealed these pastimes, explaining their deep meaning through His disciples like Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, thus opening these pastimes to all sincere devotees.

*sei pañca-tattva mili' pṛthivī āsiyā
pūrva-premabhāṇḍārera mudrā ughāḍiyā
pañce mili' luṭe prema, kare āsvādana
yata yata piye, tṛṣṇā bādhe anukṣaṇa*

“The characteristics of Kṛṣṇa are understood to be a storehouse of transcendental love. Although that storehouse of love certainly came with Kṛṣṇa when He was present, it was sealed. But when Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu came with His associates of the Pañca-tattva, they broke the seal and plundered the storehouse to taste

transcendental love of Kṛṣṇa. The more they tasted it, the more their thirst for it grew.” [[Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi 7.20-21](#)]

In fact, Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is the Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself:

*yad advaitam brahmopaniṣadi tad apy asya tanu-bhā
ya ātmāntar-yāmī puruṣa iti so 'syāṁśa-vibhavaḥ
ṣaḍ-aiśvaryaḥ pūrṇo ya iha bhagavān sa svayam ayaṁ
na caitanyāt kṛṣṇāj jagati para-tattvaṁ param iha*

“What the *Upaniṣads* describe as the impersonal Brahman is but the effulgence of His body, and the Lord known as the Supersoul is but His localized plenary portion. Lord Caitanya is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa Himself, full with six opulences. He is the Absolute Truth, and no other truth is greater than or equal to Him.” [[Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi 1.3](#)]

Although Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is Kṛṣṇa Himself, He has appeared in the mood of His greatest devotee, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī:

*rādhā kṛṣṇa-praṇaya-vikṛtir hlādinī śaktir asmāḍ
ekātmānāv api bhuvi purā deha-bhedaṁ gatau tau
caitanyākhyam prakāṣam adhunā tad-dvayam caikyam āptaṁ
rādhā-bhāva-dyuti-suvalitam naumi kṛṣṇa-svarūpam*

“The loving affairs of Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are transcendental manifestations of the Lord’s internal pleasure-giving potency. Although Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are one in Their identity, They separated Themselves eternally. Now these two transcendental identities have again united in the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. I bow down to Him, who has manifested Himself with the sentiment and complexion of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, although He is Kṛṣṇa Himself.” [[Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi 1.5](#)]

Kṛṣṇa appears in the form of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu to understand Himself from Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī's point of view:

*śrī-rādhāyāḥ praṇaya-mahimā kīdṛśo vānayaivā-
svādyo yenādbhuta-madhurimā kīdṛśo vā madīyaḥ
saukhyam cāsyā mad-anubhavataḥ kīdṛśam veti lobhāt
tad-bhāvādhyāḥ samajani śacī-garbha-sindhau harīnduh*

“Desiring to understand the glory of Rādhārāṇī's love, the wonderful qualities in Him that She alone relishes through Her love, and the happiness She feels when She realizes the sweetness of His love, the Supreme Lord Hari, richly endowed with Her emotions, appeared from the womb of Śrīmatī Śacī-devī, as the moon appeared from the ocean.” [[Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi 1.6](#)]

All these important concepts are explained in detail in the opening chapters of *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*; I am only giving a summary here. But before beginning our detailed study of *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, we must understand the ontological significance of this book. *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* is the ocean of immortal nectar, issuing from the lotus mouth of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself. He is giving the esoteric key to unlock the mysteries of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and relish the sweetness of *rasa*.

Therefore it is stated in the *śloka* quoted above, “...when Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu came with His associates of the Pañca-tattva, they broke the seal and plundered the storehouse to taste transcendental love of Kṛṣṇa.” If we follow the process of pure devotional service [*uttama-bhakti*] with the understanding of *rasa-tattva* given in *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, then we shall certainly be successful in reaching the highest spiritual perfection.

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī



Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī

Music Video

om ajñāna-timirāndhasya
jñānāñjana-śalākayā
cakṣur unmīlitaṁ yena
tasmai śrī-gurave namaḥ

śrī-caitanya-mano-‘bhīṣṭaṁ
sthāpitaṁ yena bhū-tale
svayaṁ rūpaḥ kadā mahyaṁ
dadāti sva-padāntikam

“I was born in the darkest ignorance, and my spiritual master opened my eyes with the torch of knowledge. I offer my respectful obeisances unto him. When will Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī Prabhupāda, who has established within this material world the mission to fulfill the desire of Lord Caitanya, give me shelter under his lotus feet?”
[\[Bhagavad-gītā, Introduction\]](#)

Of the many great *ācāryas*, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has been given the honor of establishing the *mano-bhīṣṭam* (the heart’s innermost desire) of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

prema-rasa-niryāsa karite āsvādana
rāga-mārga bhakti loke karite pracāraṇa
rasika-śekhara kṛṣṇa parama-karuṇa
ei dui hetu haite icchāra udgama

“The Lord’s desire to appear was born from two reasons: the Lord wanted to taste the sweet essence of the mellows of love of God, and He wanted to propagate devotional service in the world on the platform of spontaneous attraction. Thus He is known as supremely jubilant and as the most merciful of all.” [\[Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi 4.15-16\]](#)

Lord Caitanya met Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī at Prayāg, the confluence of the rivers Yamunā and Gaṅgā. There the Lord instructed him for ten days con-

tinuously on the most intimate secrets of *uttama-bhakti*, pure devotional service. The Lord told him:

*pārāpāra-śūnya gabhīra bhakti-rasa-sindhu
tomāya cākhāite tāra kahi eka 'bindu'*

“The ocean of the transcendental mellows of devotional service is so large that no one can estimate its length and breadth. However, just to help you taste it, I am describing one drop.”

[Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya 19.137]

Later, Lord Caitanya instructed Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in Vārāṇasī. Therefore, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī’s and Sanātana Gosvāmī’s understanding and realization of the mellows of devotional service, and specifically the mellow of conjugal love, were extremely exalted.

Lord Caitanya Himself only left eight verses of written instruction, known as *Śrī Śikṣāṣṭaka*. Everything else He gave to Rūpa Gosvāmī, and instructed him to write books to propagate this Esoteric Teaching, which is the essence of *rasa* or devotional mellows.

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī wrote many books on the science of Kṛṣṇa and *rasa-tattva*, such as *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, *Śrī Ujjvala-nīlamaṇi*, *Śrī Vidagdha-mādhava* and *Śrī Lalita-mādhava*. He clarified Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s inner meaning by revealing the importance of *parakīya-rasa*: the mood of paramour love between Lord Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*. Therefore Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī is the person who established within this world the innermost desire of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s heart—His *mano-bhīṣṭam*.

The fact that Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī could understand and realize the confidential heart’s desire of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu indicates that he is an eternal associate of the Lord, specifically empowered to reveal this great

teaching to the denizens of Kali-yuga. Whenever the Lord descends, He brings His eternal associates because factually only they can understand and help Him in His pastimes.

“When we speak of a king it is naturally understood that the king is accompanied by his confidential associates, like his secretary, private secretary, aide-de-camp, ministers and advisers. So also when we see the Lord we see Him with His different energies, associates, confidential servitors, etc. So the Supreme Lord, who is the leader of all living entities, the Lord of all devotee sects, the Lord of all opulences, the Lord of sacrifices and the enjoyer of everything in His entire creation, is not only the Supreme Person, but also is always surrounded by His immediate associates, all engaged in their loving transcendental service to Him.” [[Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 2.9.15, Purport](#)]

As an eternal confidential associate of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī could understand His deepest intentions, and also explain them in logical and highly poetic *śloka*s. Rūpa Gosvāmī’s books express the highest, most confidential truths of Vaiṣṇava philosophy and practice.

Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu is the ontological analysis of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī shows how all the categories of ecstatic spiritual consciousness are described in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. He backs up all of his points by extracting authoritative quotations from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and other bona fide Vedic literatures. His powerfully persuasive style of presentation, which he himself called ‘quiet conviction’, is also the manner of exposition followed in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books and our own writings.

These esoteric deliberations and philosophical conclusions are extremely deep and difficult to understand. Therefore it is essential to come under the guidance of a self-realized *guru*, associate with pure devotees, and give

one's full time, energy and enthusiastic work in service and in chanting the Holy Names of Kṛṣṇa. One should also make a great effort to understand and realize why Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī appeared, and why he wrote so many wonderful transcendental books

Of all the books by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, this *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* is his most celebrated work because of its transcendental significance as the key to the secrets of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and the Vṛndāvan pastimes of Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, all sincere devotees in the line of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu must study it carefully, scrutinizingly, to understand His real mission.



The sacred Samādhi (tomb) of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī
at the Rādhā-Dāmodara Temple in Vṛndāvan

David Bruce Hughes



Bhakti-sarvabhauma Śrī Gaurahari Dāsānudās Bābājī (aka David Bruce Hughes) is one of the greatest exponents of the Esoteric Teaching, the science of higher consciousness, in the world today. David is a prolific, deeply thoughtful and provocative [author](#), a Vedic astrologer, and an evocative spiritual musician, composer and recording artist, with many [books](#) and [CDs](#) on themes of devotion and spiritual life. He spent over 30 years at the feet of his exalted guru, studying the esoteric Vedic wisdom in the most sacred places of pilgrimage in India.

He is also a profound spiritual Master Teacher and an engaging presenter who has held audiences all over the world spellbound with his fascinating

talks. He combines an inclusive, broad-minded analytical approach to spirituality with the transcendent faith and passionate devotion of the Vedic line. He says, "The direction of my life was set at age three, when I sincerely prayed to the Lord to send me a teacher on the level of Jesus Christ so I could learn how to have a direct personal relationship with Him."

David is very sensitive to the quality of consciousness in the people he works with. He says, "Faith is prerequisite to spiritual advancement. But to develop faith, people need certainty. Many people have lost faith because sectarian religion cannot answer their natural questions about life, love and how to attain real happiness. Before faith can take root, we need deep clarity on spiritual life. This can only come from understanding of the Esoteric Teaching. This transcendental knowledge gives us the certainty we need to recover our faith and make tangible progress toward spiritual enlightenment."

David was born in Florida and grew up near New York City. His family members were dedicated Episcopalians, very active in the local church ministry. He showed a strong attraction to both spiritual life and music at an early age. He began working with electronics and computers in high school, where he taught himself digital logic and won several science fairs with his innovative projects. After he received perfect 800 scores in 3 of his SAT examinations, MIT offered him a scholarship in Nuclear Physics, but David turned it down to pursue his first love: music.

A talented and largely self-taught musician, David won First-Chair Flute in the All-American High School Band competition in his senior year, and toured the US and Canada with the group. David went on to earn a BA in Musical Composition from Montclair Conservatory, working his way through school by playing jazz gigs and repairing early computers. While at Montclair, David won the gold medal of the prestigious NYU Young Com-

posers' Contest for three years running. This exposure led to a job with New York's Ames Agency as a television commercial and film composer. At Ames, David wrote and produced the award-winning score for Armstrong Tire's 'Tiger Paws' spots, one of the longest-running advertising campaigns in television history.

Not satisfied with commercial success, David moved to New Mexico, where he worked with early digital computers and test systems in research programs at Sandia, Los Alamos National Laboratories and White Sands/Alamogordo Proving Grounds. With the help and advice of senior Los Alamos scientists, he performed a series of groundbreaking laboratory experiments in the silence of the desert, exploring the effects of music and sound on living beings. The results of this work inspired him to study Vedic music and *rasa-tattva* (the art of transcendental emotions) with Indian maestro Ali Akbar Khan in San Rafael, California. He quickly became expert in Indian *raga* composition and improvisation, using voice, flute, *esrāj*, *sārāṅgī*, *mṛdāṅga* and other exotic instruments.

At this time David made a broad survey of Eastern philosophical and spiritual teachings. Besides reading very widely in the Indian spiritual traditions, he met and studied Vedic teachings with many *svamis* and *yogis* teaching on the West Coast. By great good fortune he met his spiritual master, His Divine Grace A.C Bhaktivedānta Svāmī (Śrīla Prabhupāda), a fully self-realized pure devotee and renunciant, prolific author, profound devotional musician and philosopher in the Brahma-Madhva-Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava lineage of Bengal, and was inspired to study *bhakti-yoga*, the profound wisdom path of the Esoteric Teaching of the *Vedas*, with him.

David became a Vedic monk, accepting formal *hari-nāma* initiation as Dāsānudās Brahmācārī from Śrīla Prabhupāda in New Orleans in 1974, and ordination as a Vedic *brāhmaṇa* (priest) in Vrndavana, India in 1977.

He lived and studied in traditional Vaiṣṇava and Tantric communities in India and various other parts of the world for over 20 years. He learned Sanskrit, deeply studied *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, performed traditional temple music and dance, and led fire sacrifices and other Vedic ceremonies all over India.

As a philosopher, he specialized in Vedic ontology and the epistemology of [Vedānta-sūtra](#), and became a major interpreter of the esoteric devotional scripture Sri Caitanya-caritamṛta, assisting his guru by editing the first English translation of the work. He also studied different forms of *yoga* including *haṭha-yoga*, *rāja-yoga*, *tantra-yoga*, *mantra-yoga* and many more. Traveling four times around the world on teaching tours, he received many advanced initiations in esoteric philosophy and practices from important Vedic spiritual teachers.

After David completed preliminary studies in *yoga*, Sanskrit, *Saṅkhya* philosophy, temple worship, devotional music and dance, and Vedic mantras, his *guru* formally ordained David as a *brāhmaṇa* or Vedic priest. David is one of few Westerners ever to be awarded this eminent Vedic distinction. Because of this uncommon initiation, acknowledging his penetrating knowledge of Vedic spiritual wisdom—unparalleled qualifications for a Westerner—and the personal recommendation of his *guru*, David was invited to study at a Tantric esoteric school in Nainital, India, in 1979. This school, situated near the source of the Ganges, is not only a fully-functional traditional Tantric community; it also safeguards a comprehensive repository of the Vedic and Tantric literatures. David was thus privileged to study both the complete theory and the esoteric practices of *Yoga* and *Tantra* at their source. His attainment in *Tantra* was recognized by formal initiation into *Madhyamika*, the most esoteric of all Tibetan Tantric mysteries, under the direction of the Dalai Lama in 1983.

A powerful presenter, during the 70s and 80s David led classes and workshops on Tantra and the Vaiṣṇava way of wisdom in Santa Cruz and Harbin Hot Springs, California; led a week-long Tantra retreat in Waimea, Maui; presented a 3-day workshop on sacred chants in Soho, London; taught Puranic wisdom and Sanskrit in Paris, France; toured and lectured in places as diverse as Alexandria, Greece; Constantinople, Turkey; Hamburg, Germany; Bern, Austria; Belgrade, Yugoslavia; Tehran, Iran and Kabul, Afghanistan; and spoke on *bhakti-yoga* to substantial audiences all over India, from Mumbai to Kalakata and from Badrinath to Shivarandram.

In 1984-5 David hosted a radio show on transcendental music, Sacred Sounds, on the American Radio Network in Los Angeles. From 1985-1988 He was Co-Chairman of the Music Department at the Māyāpura Chandrodaya Gurukula, a traditional Vedic academy in West Bengal, India. He also presented a 10-day international seminar in sacred Vedic music there in 1988. Over the years he appeared on numerous radio and television programs explaining *bhakti-yoga*, devotional meditation practices and Vedic spiritual philosophy.

In 1985 he wrote [*Sapta Svarah*](#), his thesis for his Bhakti-vaibhava degree (the Vaiṣṇava equivalent of a Doctor of Divinity) on the correspondence between the esoteric Vedic musical system and the mathematical laws of Quantum Mechanics. He was also instrumental in creating the Usenet forum alt.religion.vaisnava, the first international Internet conference for Vedic bhakti-yogis.

From 1989-1991 David was based on Guam, exploring the roots of traditional South Pacific island cultures such as the Chamorros and Micronesians. He visited traditional native communities in Yap, Palau, Ponape,

Majuro and the Solomon Islands, studying these ancient cultures and artifacts to research their forgotten links to the Vedic civilization.

In 1988, during prolonged deep meditation in a Himalayan cave, David received a mystical transmission of the Esoteric Teaching, the confidential meta-knowledge behind all genuine spiritual paths. This revelation, recounted in his book *Search for the Absolute Truth*, completed his education in the transcendental mysteries of spiritual life, opening to him the secret pathway to complete self-realization.

Over the next decade, David implemented the secret practices of the Esoteric Teaching, completing the process of self-realization begun by his first initiation in 1971. This resulted in a confidential spiritual experience of the highest attainment on Kaua'i in January 2002 during a [six-month solitary meditation retreat](#), successfully completing the quest for the highest degree of self-realization that he had begun more than fifty years before.

David maintained a keen interest in aviation, science, computers and technology throughout his monastic life, keeping up with new developments and finding unique ways to apply technology in spiritual life. In Mumbai, he used computers to pioneer direct-mail fundraising for food relief for the poor, raising over 16 million rupees in less than a year. One of his direct-mail campaigns netted a 42% response! He uses computer technology extensively in his spiritual teaching work, maintaining contact and relationships with a worldwide network of students.

Returning to the US Mainland in 1992, David used his technological expertise to establish a career as a senior technical writer and illustrator, writing and publishing books on advanced computer and software technologies for companies like Apple Computer, Digital Research, Westinghouse, and Hughes Technologies. An early adopter of the Internet, he built Web sites

for clients such as Weyerhaeuser, Georgia-Pacific, Solutia, Equifax, First Data Corporation and many more. At this time he also became aware of the exciting spiritual potential of computers and nanotechnology, and helped found the first Internet forum for discussions on advanced Vedic spiritual topics.

Since returning to the US, David published several [books](#) on traditional Vedic philosophy: [Śrī Viṣṇusahasranāma](#) and [Śrī Nṛsīṃsahasranāma](#). He also wrote and published original works such as [Here Be Wisdom: 108 Aphorisms on Advanced Topics in Spiritual Life](#), and [Search for the Absolute Truth](#). He issued several [solo CDs](#) of Vedic music and chanting: [Friend of the Heart](#), [Vipralambha](#), [RagaJazz](#), [Hare Kṛṣṇa Kirtan](#) and companion CDs to [Śrī Viṣṇusahasranāma](#) and [Śrī Nṛsīṃsahasranāma](#).

David's publishing company, Esoteric Teaching Seminars, publishes and distributes his books and CDs online. David is working on several upcoming book and video projects. He currently lives in a rural retreat center in India with his close disciples.