



THE TEMPLE OF THE HEART

Five Paths to the Temple of the Heart

INTRODUCTION

In our hearts a great treasure lies hidden. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (8 *Prapāthaka*) compares the human body to a city. In this city the house of the heart stands out, and within the house of the heart is a special room called the *dahara ākāṣa*. Materially speaking this room is tiny, but spiritually speaking it's huge. This is the room where the eternal *ātmā* resides with the Lord. The *Upaniṣad* declares that one who finds this room will discover his or her true desires. This room has been designated in various ways and is known to any truly spiritual tradition. Some call it “sky of the heart” (*antarākāśa*), others “lotus of the heart,” “sacred space,” or “temple of the heart.” They all refer to this *dahara ākāṣa*.

We walk past this room regularly but never enter it because we are in illusion. Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura compares our behavior with someone who lives near a place where gold is buried but isn't aware of it. Ignorance of the treasure means we constantly walk over the gold but can never enjoy it.

Like any room in the outside world, the inner room of the heart has a path leading to it – the path of absorption in the Lord. Anyone can enter this room by absorbing him or herself in Kṛṣṇa, who is present in the room but who is also accessible in this world. Pleased by our absorption the Lord will open the door for us from within. Like a bridge that connects two banks of a river, Kṛṣṇa connects the spiritual and material worlds. By truly absorbing our consciousness in Him, we cross from the material to the spiritual dimension and enter the sacred space. It is Kṛṣṇa who takes us to “the other side.”



The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* have described various ways to become absorbed in the Lord and enter the temple of the heart. Of all of them, these five practices are superior:

sādhu-saṅga, *nāma-kīrtana*, *bhāgavata-śravaṇa*
mathurā-vāsa, *śrī-mūrtira śraddhāya sevana*

One should associate with devotees, chant the holy name of the Lord, hear Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, reside at Mathurā, and worship the Deity with faith and veneration.

(Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya 22.128)

In *The Nectar of Devotion* (chapter 13) Śrīla Prabhupāda promises that these five kinds of devotional service “are so potent that a small attachment for any one of these five items can arouse devotional ecstasy even in a neophyte.”

These five practices are the topic of this *Amṛta Vāṇī* training letter series called “The Temple of the Heart.” The goal of this series is to help you on your way to the sacred space inside.

PAÑCĀNGA BHAKTI – FIVE PATHS LEADING TO THE TEMPLE OF THE HEART



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| 1. <i>sādhu-saṅga</i> | association with devotees |
| 2. <i>nāma-kīrtana</i> | chanting the holy name of the Lord |
| 3. <i>bhāgavata-śravaṇa</i> | hearing <i>Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam</i> |
| 4. <i>mathurā-vāsa</i> | residing at Mathurā |
| 5. <i>śrī-mūrtira śraddhāya sevana</i> | worshiping the deity |



BHAKTI COMES FROM A BHAKTA

The first path leading to the temple of the heart is *sādhū-saṅga* – association with devotees. By associating with devotees in the right way the qualities of those devotees enter our heart and open it. But associating with devotees is a science; it must be done in a certain way so that it nourishes *bhakti* and brings us into the sacred space. Maybe you have noticed that associating with devotees can bring different outcomes. Sometimes we are enlivened by it, but at other times we feel empty or even hurt. In the latter case, something went wrong during the association.

How can a conditioned soul end his or her material life and come into the safety of devotion? The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.51.53) answers this question:

*bhavāpavargo bhramato yadā bhavej
janasya tarhy acyuta sat-samāgamaḥ
sat-saṅgamo yarhi tadaiva sad-gatau
parāvareṣe tvayi jāyate matiḥ*

When someone attains the association of Your devotees, O Acyuta, the material life of a wandering soul ceases. And when he associates with them, there awakens in him devotion unto You, who are the goal of the devotees and the Lord of all causes and their effects.

As this verse explains, when a conditioned soul comes into contact with the devotees of the Lord his or her *matiḥ* is awakened. *Matiḥ* is the inclination to serve. It's an inner orientation, or devotion. Through the association of devotees we start to feel "I should also start my spiritual life or improve in certain areas." This *matiḥ* is awakened, and it is crucial, because it helps us overcome all obstacles. We need this *matiḥ* in order to find the inner room in the heart. For the *matiḥ* to flow from the heart of a devotee into our own heart we need to be conscious of who it is we are associating with and how we should associate with that person.

1) With whom should we associate?

In the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.2.91) Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī advises that we should associate with devotees who are

- like-minded,
- affectionate, and
- superior to us.

When these three conditions are met, the *matiḥ* can flow better from the devotee's heart into our own. Affection is especially important. Just as oil makes a machine run better, so affection will help the qualities of the devotee enter our heart more easily.

To explain how *matiḥ* and the devotee's other qualities enter our heart, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī quotes a verse from the *Hari-bhakti-sudhodaya* that explains that we will acquire the qualities of those with whom we associate "just as a crystal takes up the color of the object next to it." (quoted in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.2.229).

2) How should we associate with devotees?

Since we may not know how to associate with devotees, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī explains how it should be done:

*dadāti pratigṛhṇāti
guhyam ākhyāti prcchati
bhuṅkte bhojayate caiva
ṣaḍ-vidham pṛiti-lakṣaṇam*

Offering gifts in charity, accepting charitable gifts, revealing one's mind in confidence, inquiring confidentially, accepting prasāda and offering prasāda are the six symptoms of love shared by one devotee and another.

(Nectar of Instruction, verse 4)





The thoughts of My pure devotees dwell in Me, their lives are fully devoted to My service, and they derive great satisfaction and bliss from always enlightening one another and conversing about Me.

(Bhagavad-gītā, 10.9)

It is so important to consider which thoughts and sounds to allow into our lives. These things decide what our life will be like. If we think and talk about Kṛṣṇa, our lives will become auspicious, and all unpleasant things will leave us.

We can safely conclude that on our spiritual journey we need devotees in the beginning, the middle, and the end. Therefore, the *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha-rāmāyaṇa* tells us:

In all circumstances, one should approach saintly persons. Even if one receives no teachings, spontaneous dialogue with them imparts valuable lessons. When one approaches persons who have real knowledge, emptiness overflows with fullness, death becomes immortal nectar, and disasters can seem like good fortune.

Even if we don't receive specific instructions from saints but simply speak spontaneously, our empty hearts will overflow, and by this *matih* we can become absorbed in Kṛṣṇa and enter the temple of the heart.

These six forms of exchange open the heart and help us connect with the devotees in a mood of affection. Simply talk is not enough; we have to connect. Then the door to the temple of the heart can open.

To make a clay pot we need two things: clay and a potter. For *sādhu-saṅga* to work we also need two things: *kṛṣṇa-kathā* and a *sādhu* (advanced devotee). Real *sādhu-saṅga* needs *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. As Śrī Kṛṣṇa explains, it is natural for devotees to speak about Him:

EXERCISES

1) Take a moment to remember how the *sādhus* helped you overcome a major obstacle in your life or helped you make progress.

2) You can associate with *sādhus* in two ways:

- By spending time with them physically (*vapuḥ*), or
- By connecting with their words and mood even in their physical absence (*vāñī*).

The important point in both types of association is to hear and learn from them.

By hearing from *sādhus* – whether they are present or absent – our heart becomes free from the disturbing influences of the lower modes of nature and filled with nectar. Hearing from *sādhus* cleanses the heart. If you place a clay pot filled with different unwanted things into the Gaṅgā, the pot is cleansed inside and out and the nectarean Gaṅgā water enters.

Please practice *sādhu-saṅga* by hearing from advanced devotees either by reading their writings or listening to their recorded lectures.

3) For hearing to be effective we must either apply the new information or increase our service to the *sādhus*. Apply something you have heard from a *sādhu* (carefully! Not too much at once) recently or today, and serve the *sādhu's* mission.



4) Read and sing (if possible) *Vaiṣṇava Śaraṇa*,
by Devakīnandana Dāsa:

vṛndāvana-bāsī jata vaiṣṇavera gaṇa
prathame vandanā kori sabāra caraṇa (1)

First I offer my worship to the feet of all the Vaiṣṇavas
of Vṛndāvana.

nilācala-bāsī jata mahāprabhura gaṇa
bhūmite poḍiyā vandoṅ sabāra caraṇa (2)

Praising all of Mahāprabhu's associates in Nilācala,
Jagannātha Purī Dhāma, I prostrate myself at their feet.

navadvīpa-bāsī jata mahāprabhura bhakta
sabāra caraṇa vandoṅ hañā anurakta (3)

I pray for loving attachment to the lotus feet of
all of Mahāprabhu's bhaktas in Navadvīpa.

mahāprabhura bhakta jata gauḍa-deśe sthiti
sabāra caraṇa vandoṅ koriyā praṇati (4)

I worship all of Mahāprabhu's devotees in
Gauḍadeśa, Bengal.

ye-deśe ye-deśe baise gaurāṅgera gaṇa
ūrdhva-bāhu kari' vandoṅ sabāra caraṇa (5)

With upraised arms I pray to the feet of all of Gaurāṅga's
bhaktas, wherever they may reside.

hañāchena haibena prabhura jata dāsa
sabara caraṇa vandoṅ dante kori ghāsa (6)

Holding a straw between my teeth, I submit at the feet of all
the servants of Mahāprabhu that ever were in the past and
ever will be in the future.

brahmāṇḍa tārite śakti dhare jane jane
e veda-purāṇe guṇa gāya jevā śuṇe (7)

The Vedas and Purāṇas proclaim that each one of His
devotees has the potency to deliver the entire universe.

mahāprabhura gaṇa-saba patita-pāvana
tāi lobhe mui pāpī lainu śaraṇa (8)

Hearing of their glory, I have come with great eagerness
to surrender to Mahāprabhu's devotees, who are all
patita-pāvana for sinners like me.

vandanā korite mui kata śakti dhari
tamo buddhi doṣe mui dambha mātra kori (9)

What power do I have to glorify them? Being engrossed in
ignorance, it is only out of pride that I attempt to do so.

tathāpi mūkera bhāgya manera ullāsa
doṣa kṣami' mo adhame kara nija dāsa (10)

Even though I am dumb and unable to express their greatness,
still I am feeling great joy in my heart. Please overlook my
faults and make me your servant.

sarva vāñchā siddhi haya yama-bandha chūṭe
jagate durlabha hañā prema-dhana luṭe (11)

The devotees award the great wealth of prema, which is
very rare in this world, and thus fulfill all desires, including
freedom from death.

manera vāsanā pūrṇa acirāte haya
devakīnandana dāsa ei lobhe koya (12)

Being intensely eager that all of his pure and heartfelt
desires will be fulfilled soon, Devakīnandana Dāsa glorifies
and prays to the Vaiṣṇavas.



5) Find advanced devotees near you and associate with
them according to the guidelines given by Rūpa Gosvāmī:

dadāti pratigṛhṇāti
guhyam ākhyāti pṛcchati
bhūṅkte bhojayate caiva
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