

THE TOUCHSTONE OF THE HOLY NAME



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4) THE ONE THING TO AVOID: VAIṢṆAVA-APARĀDHA

Whenever you notice that you are not going deeper into your love for God, you must conclude that this is due to some offence. Remember that committing an offence means to displease Kṛṣṇa. When we displease Kṛṣṇa, he will keep himself at a distance, he will not reveal his beauty and wonderful qualities to us. He will still maintain us, but he will not bestow his special mercy upon us. Of all the offences that we may commit, offences against Kṛṣṇa's devotees are the worst. Other offences may harm the leaves on the plant of our devotion, but *vaiṣṇava-aparādhā* completely uproots the whole plant!

Kṛṣṇa is intimately connected to his devotees, as he expresses in *Sṛīmad-Bhāgavatam* (9.4.68): “The pure devotee is always within the core of my heart, and I am always in the heart of the

pure devotee. My devotees do not know anyone else but me, and I do not know anyone else but them.” It is a very intimate bond. Kṛṣṇa thinks, “I will not just give someone who loves me the official treatment of maintaining them – I will move out of this neutral position and become *bhakta-vatsala*, the friend of my devotees.” Kṛṣṇa has a soft heart, he is the God of love. So naturally, because of the closeness of such a relationship, Kṛṣṇa personally becomes disturbed when his devotee is attacked. He is ready to do anything to protect his devotee if someone offends him or her. It is even stated that Kṛṣṇa may not forgive someone for offending his devotee, “A characteristic of a pure devotee is that he excuses any offense by an ignorant rascal. A characteristic of Kṛṣṇa, however, is that he cannot tolerate blasphemy against his devotees.” (Caitanya-caritāmṛta Antya, 3.213)



THE REMEDY FOR VAIṢṆAVA-APARĀDHA

If one has drunk the poison of offending a devotee, one should, with that same mouth, drink the life giving nectar of sincerely praising (and serving) that devotee. Haridāsa Ṭhākura says, “If anyone offends a sādhu in a moment of delusion and madness, he must fall at the sādhu’s feet and bitterly repent; weeping with full contrition, he must beg for forgiveness. He should declare himself a fallen wretch in need of a vaiṣṇava’s grace. A sādhu is very merciful; his heart will soften and he will embrace the offender, thus exonerating [pardoning] him from his offenses.” (*Hari-nāma-cintāmaṇi*, chapter 5)

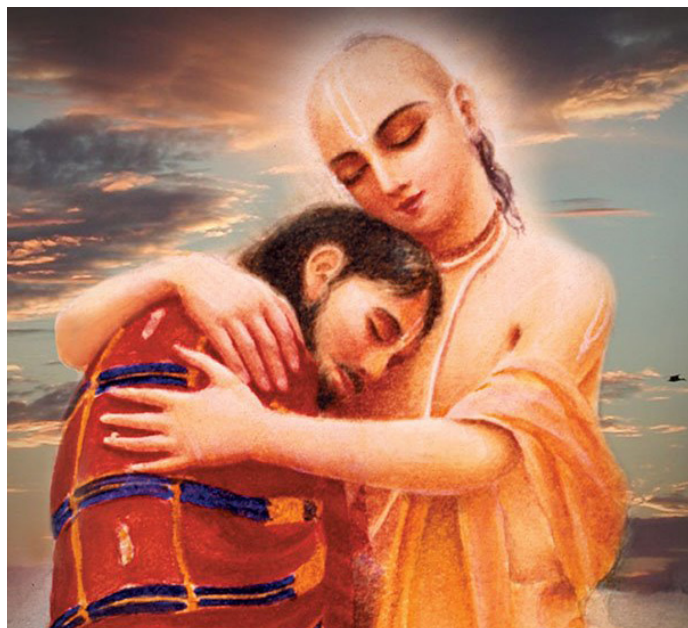
If you have offended a vaiṣṇava, do not simply continue with your life as if nothing had happened. Turn around 180 degrees! Make up for your bad behavior. Repent, ask for forgiveness and offer some service. Be real, honestly feel that your behavior was not at all good. Someone cannot forgive you from the heart if they do not see that you have actually understood what had gone wrong. The river of forgiveness needs a certain slope in order to flow, this slope is the understanding of the mistake made.

It is important to use the insights of our philosophy to support others and not to judge them. We cannot support others by being correct, but by being kind. You should understand that even if a devotee makes mistakes Kṛṣṇa loves him or her, he sees his devotee as his dear friend. Kṛṣṇa easily forgives his devotees. That is the nature of love, you shouldn’t take the mistakes of the beloved so seriously. So even when a beginner does something wrong, instead of punishing the person, we should look at him or her with the eyes of the Lord.

SIDEBAR:

A devotee never misuses the special mercy he gets from Kṛṣṇa thinking, “I’m very dear to Kṛṣṇa, I’m a true sādhu. God loves me, he is on my side.” A person who thinks this way has allowed Kali to enter his or her mind and has become arrogant. The most glorious position is to be a servant of Kṛṣṇa, not a sādhu. A devotee feels he doesn’t deserve Kṛṣṇa’s kindness, but since Kṛṣṇa is kind to the fallen, he or she hopes to also become an object of Kṛṣṇa’s mercy.

In Bhaktivinode Ṭhākura’s words (*Hari-nāma-cintāmaṇi*, chapter 4): “One who considers himself a sādhu is filled with material pride. But one who thinks himself to be the lowest rascal, humbly takes shelter of Kṛṣṇa and sings Kṛṣṇa’s name, is the real sādhu.”



EXERCISE FOR TRANSFORMING ILL FEELINGS

By this exercise you can uproot the tendency of offending a certain person with whom you have a difficult relationship and transform the feelings you have toward that person.

- 1) Relax your body and mind in whatever way you know how – perhaps with the help of *prāṇāyāma* or a simple slow, deep breathing while relaxing the different muscle groups in your body. The goal is to be totally relaxed and incredibly aware.
- 2) Imagine you are sitting on a chair on a beautiful veranda. Across from you stands another chair, it is empty. Invite the person against whom you harbor negative feelings or with whom you have some issues to sit in that empty chair.
- 3) Try to identify the feelings you have towards this person. Observe and accept the feelings.
- 4) Now turn to Kṛṣṇa and pray that he helps you to transform these feelings. Pray that Kṛṣṇa helps you to find some positive feelings towards this person and see that person like he sees him or her. Pray that he will open your eyes to see the person under a different light.
- 5) Think of the positive qualities that the person has. After you have found a few, ask yourself: how can I express my appreciation? What can I do or say?
- 6) Offer your obeisances to that person and send him or her the good feelings you have uncovered.