

Tridandisvami Sri Srimad Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja
TASTE

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The fourth yam (stage or period) of sadhana is ruci, taste. In this stage of ruci, especially the second kind of ruci, it does not matter whether or not the Deity is decorated, or whether or not His face, mouth, hands, and so on are complete. Even though Jagannatha has only two round eyes and no hands, Caitanya Mahaprabhu saw Him as Krsna and cried out to Him, "O Vrajendranandana, I want to meet You. My heart is breaking; I cannot tolerate separation from You," and He ran to embrace Him. If a sadhaka has reached that stage of ruci, symptoms like this will manifest. Most of his offences have actually gone. Anarthas are still present at this time, although only to a very minute degree, but they can attack if the sadhaka is not careful.

In this second stage of ruci, the sincere sadhaka offers many prayers. He hankers, "When will I see Krsna?" He has not yet taken darsana of Krsna, but he desires to take birth in Vrndavana, to see Krsna, and to serve Him. He will pray like Brahma:

tad astu me natha sa bhuri-bhago
bhava 'tra vanyatra tu va tirascam
yenaham eko 'pi bhavaj-jananam
bhutva niseve tava pada-pallavam

["My dear Lord, I therefore pray to be so fortunate that in this life as Lord Brahma, or in another life, wherever I take my birth, I may be counted as one of Your devotees. I pray that wherever I may be, even among the animal species, I can engage in devotional service to Your lotus feet." (SB 10.14.30)]

Brahma is praying to the Lord, "Tad astu me. I will be very fortunate if I can take birth anywhere in Vrndavana, or anywhere in the world, as long as I can be Your devotee. If I take birth in Vrndavana I will be fortunate; but I'm not so fortunate. So if I take birth anywhere else, even as tirasya, trees or creepers, still there is no harm; still I will be fortunate if I become your servant. I only want to be one of Your servants. I will not mind being even a dog or a cat, but I must be the servant of your servants. Bhutva niseva tava pada-pallavam. I only desire to serve Your lotus feet."

There is a history behind this prayer. Krsna was playing with His cowherdboys somewhere in Bhandiravana, along with His millions of cows and cowherdboys. During the course of playing hide-and-peek and other games, Krsna entered with all His cowherdboys in the stomach of the demon Aghasura. Then, as He came out from Aghasura's mouth, the demon's brahmarandra (the topmost part of the head) broke open and his soul shot out. Aghasura's soul was whirling here and there in the sky, but when Krsna came out from his body, his soul at once entered Krsna's lotus feet. Brahma thus thought, "Krsna is not an ordinary boy. I want to see more of His very sweet pastimes, but how will I be able to do this?"

Brahma then did something wrong. He thought, "I should do something to induce Krsna to play some sweet pastimes. I should steal His friends and cows and quickly hide them somewhere."

As Krsna continued playing, Brahma considered, "He is now careless, absorbed in playing with the cowherdboys; so this is a very good opportunity." He took away all the calves and hid them in a cave near the Yamuna River, and when the cowherdboys saw that the calves were no longer nearby, they became worried. Krsna assured them, "All of you remain here. I will be able to discover them very quickly, and then I'll bring them back. I'll climb on a tree, and playing My flute, I will call, 'Syamali! Dhira! Kalindi! Come on! Come on!' And they will come."

Krsna called them, but as there was no response, He began to search for them here and there. He was holding some yogurt mixed with rice in His hand, but He was not able to eat because of worry, and His mouth was dry out of fear for His calves. He thought, "What will happen if I do not find the cows and bring them home? What will father, mother, and everyone else think? All our wealth will be gone! I must search for them!"

It was not actually Brahma who had stolen the cowherdboys and calves. He is not able to do so. He thought, "Oh, I have done this," but actually Yogamaya had arranged the stealing by the wish of Krsna. In one sense this is our misunderstanding as well. We think, "I have done this; I have done that. I am the doer." In the case of Brahma, however, 'his' actions were actually performed by Yogamaya, and in our case, 'our' actions are performed by maya.

After stealing the calves and cowherdboys, Brahma hurried to his planet, Brahmaloaka. When he tried to enter, however, the guard came and said, "Who are you, disguised as Brahma? Get out from here. My Prabhu, Brahma is here, sitting on the throne. Get out!" Brahma then meditated and understood, "My Prabhu, Krsna, has come here in my form." Thus thinking, he realized his mistake and returned to Earth.

In the meantime, one year had passed, and when Brahma reached Vrndavana he saw that Krsna was still playing with His cows and cowherdboys. He thought, "How can this be? I'd kept them in the cave." He then looked towards both sides at the same time, saw that they were in both places simultaneously, and he could not understand which of the groups were real. This was the opulence of Krsna Himself. Brahma then approached Krsna and fell at His feet. He began to see Krsna everywhere, even in the trees and creepers, and Krsna then became catur-bhuja, (four-handed.) Brahma then again saw Krsna alone, taking a handful of yogurt and rice, and searching, "Where are My cowherdboys?" He began to pray:

naumidya ke bhra vapuse tadid ambaraya
gunjavatamsa-paripiccha lasan mukhaya
vanya sraje kavala vetra visana venu
laksma sriye mrdu-pade puspanangajaya

["Oh Lord, you are the only Person in the whole world worthy of our prayers. O Vrajendranandana, Your body is like a fresh new raincloud, looking very elegant and adorned with a pitambara which sparkles and shimmers like lightening, gunja berry ornaments embellishing your ears, and a peacock feather on your head. Your lotus face emits a bright luster, and a garland of many colored forest flowers and leaves hangs around your neck. The cowherding stick and buffalo horn under Your arm and Your venu tucked into Your cummerbund look splendid. In your soft lotus hand are morsels of rice and yogurt. Appearing in this sweet attire of a cowherdboy, You attract everyone. Your delicate lotus feet, softer than lotus flowers, are marked with auspicious symbols. To these lotus feet I offer dandavat pranas again and again." (SB 10.14.1)]

Brahma offered many other good prayers, and among them is this:

tad astu me natha sa bhuri-bhago
bhava 'tra vanyatra tu va tirascam
yenaham eko 'pi bhavaj-jananam
bhutva niseve tava pada-pallavam

"My dear Lord, I therefore pray to be so fortunate that in this life as Lord Brahma, or in another life, wherever I take my birth, I may be counted as one of Your devotees. I pray that wherever I may be, even among the animal species, I can engage in devotional service to Your lotus feet. I will hear hari-katha from Your devotees and I will serve them. I will take their remnants, and thus I will very soon attain prema-bhakti." (SB 10.14.30)

This kind of prayer or mood will come in that sadhaka who is at the stage of that second ruci: vastu-vaisistha-anapeksini ruci. Try to be like this. Anyone can enter this stage very quickly if he is in the association of sadhus, and if he wants to sincerely follow his guru and the guru-parampara. At that time many kinds of prayers enter his heart. For example, the devotee may pray, "O Caitanya Mahaprabhu, my only hope is in Your lotus feet. It is now Kali-yuga, the iron-age, and all are quarreling. In this age there are many difficulties and obstacles in the attempt to do bhajana. What shall I do? I have only one hope; that You are very merciful. Your mercy is glorified everywhere, so be pleased with me."

The sadhaka who has developed to the second stage of ruci may also pray in this way:

pracinanam bhajanam atulam duskaram srnvato me
nairyasena jvalati hrdayam bhakti-lesalasasya
visva-dricim aghahara tavakarnya karunya-vicim
asa-binduksitam idam upety antare hanta saityam
(Stava-mala, Tribhagipancakam, by Srila Rupa Gosvami)

Srila Rupa Gosvami prays, "I have heard about the severe austerities of devotees who lived in ancient times, like Prahlada Maharaja, and also like Vasudeva Maharaja and Devaki (in their previous lives) who stood on their thumbs for millions of years. Dhruva Maharaja did not take water or air for six months, but Vasudeva and Devaki (in their

previous births as Kasyapa Muni and Aditi) did not eat or drink or breathe, and they 'stood' for thousands of years upside down with their thumbs on the ground and their feet in the air. They did not stand on two thumbs, but only one, and not even fully. They 'stood' on the tips of their thumbs. Hiranyakasipu stood on the tips of his toes, but Kasyapa Muni and Aditi stood on the tips of their thumbs." [*See end note]

Sri Rupa Gosvami and Sri Sanatana Gosvami also performed austerities, of a different nature, and their austerity is untouchable by us. We cannot touch their glory. In comparison to their austerities, the austerities of Kasyapa and Aditi are easy.

he radhe vrajadevike ca lalite he nandasuno kutah
sri govardhana kalpa pada padapatale kalindi vanye kutah
gosantav iti sarvato vraja pure kedhair mahavivalau
vande rupa sanatana raguyugau sri jiva gopalakau

["I offer my prayers to the six Gosvamis, who were always calling out, 'O Radhe! O Queen of Vrndavana! Where are you? O Lalite! O son of Nanda Maharaja! Where are you? Are you seated beneath the kalpa-vrksa trees of Sri Govardhana Hill? Or are you roaming in the forests along the soft banks of the Kalindi?' They were always lamenting, overwhelmed and burning in feelings of separation as they wandered throughout all of Vraja Mandala."]

It would be very difficult to perform austerities like those of Hiranyakasipu, Kasyapa Muni and Aditi, and others, but it is far more difficult to follow Sri Rupa Gosvami, Sri Raghunatha dasa Gosvami, and Sri Sanatana Gosvami. They were always weeping, in the highest stage of transcendental madness. Still, for our benefit, Rupa Gosvami is praying in his Stava-vali, "When I remember the austerities of the devotees of ancient times, I become hopeless. My only hope, therefore, is in knowing that Your kindness and mercy is everywhere, in the air and in every atom, and that You are eager to sprinkle that mercy. This is my only hope, without which I would die. Without Your causeless mercy I can never attain this kind of love."

If you practice like this, repentance will come, and this is the symptom of that stage of ruci. So ruci is not an ordinary thing.

cittam sukhena bhavatapahrtam grhesu
yan nirvisaty uta karav api grhya-krtye
padau padam na calatas tava pada-mulad
yamah katha vrajam atho karavama kim va

["Until today, our minds were absorbed in household affairs, but You easily stole both our minds and our hands away from our housework. Now our feet won't move one step from Your lotus feet. How can we return home? What would we do there?" (SB 10.29.34)]

This verse is spoken by Srila Sukadeva Gosvami in Srimad-Bhagavatam, but it is actually the words of the gopis. Krsna played on His flute on the full moon night, and by this He called the gopis, "Radhe! Radhe! Sri Radhe!" All the gopis were thinking, "He is calling only my name." Klim, vamaḍrsam maṇoharam. That sound entered the ears and hearts of millions of gopis and stole away their most valuable treasure; their hearts. Quickly running as though flying, they began to search for their valuable jewels. Those gopis who were in the midst of putting on their garments left that, and those who were putting kajala on their eyes left with the kajala on only one eye. Those who were cooking left that, and those who were making capattis left them to turn black and smoke on hot plates. And, those who had been decorating themselves with ornaments put their waist belts on their necks and their necklaces on their waists or feet.

When they reached Krsna, the gopis became very happy as they thought, "We have come here, and now we will serve." But Krsna told them, "Oh, I'm very happy. Perhaps you have come to take My darsana. Now you have taken My darsana; so you should return to your home and serve your husbands, children, and all other relatives."

I have explained in my Bhajana Rahasya commentary that when a sadhaka is in the last stage of ruci and is about to enter asakti, he meditates on the meanings of these above-mentioned slokas as he chants. He remembers how the gopis said, "Krsna is vidagdha. He is very tricky. He is dhurta siromani, the crown jewel of the cheaters. Oh, He has called us by the sweet melody of His flute." These gopis are parakiya, meaning they are married to other gopas. If their father, mother, and other relatives would find out they have gone out at night to meet Krsna, they would punish them and say, "Do not enter in my house. Get out!" The gopis were in a very difficult position, but they never cared. Similarly, the sadhaka in the advanced stage of ruci will also never care about his relatives and anyone else who is against his bhakti. He will think, "If they are suffering due to their misconceptions, let them suffer. I will not follow them." The sadhaka who has ruci will at once run away to Vrṇḍavana. His relatives will weep for him, and he will weep for Krsna: "Where are You? O Lalite! O Visakhe! Where are You?"

Before all the gopis assembled in the presence of Krsna, each had thought, "Only I am coming," but now they all saw that millions of gopis were present with Him. That forest scene was very calm and quiet. The rays of the full moon were like nectar, and the entire forest was taking bath in the rays of that full moon. Yamuna flowed beautifully and, although it was night time, seeing Krsna and hearing the beautiful and sweet melody of His vamsi, the peacocks danced and sang, "Ke ka, ke ka." All the cuckoos also sang, "Cookoo, cookoo, cookoo."

Seeing that all the gopis had come to meet Him near Vamsi-vata, Krsna told them, "You have now seen me. You were very eager for this, and that is why I called you from your homes. Now you have taken My darsana, and now you can return home."

Prema-rasa is very crooked. The greatest rasika Vaisnavas, like Srila Rupa Gosvami, Srila Sanatana Gosvami, and Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura have written that when a nayaka (lover) becomes daksina (submissive), then the nayika (beloved) becomes

contrary (in vamyabhava). When the most beloved gopis (nayikas) manifest daksina-bhava, Krsna manifests vamyabhava.

There are various kinds of gopis. Some have a mood of grtasneha and some of madhusneha; some are anuragavati, some mahabhavavati, and some have still higher moods. These gopis are very tricky and intelligent, more so than Krsna, and that is why they can control Krsna, the Supreme Lord, by their love and affection. They know what Krsna really wants and how to make Him happy, more so than anyone else.

The sadhaka in the stage of ruci meditates on these pastimes of Krsna and the gopis, and he remembers their mood. He has heard the definitions of raga, anuraga, bhava, mahabhava and so on, and he remembers them. This very high class of mood is called ruci; it is not an ordinary thing. Immediately desiring to 'jump to the top of the tree', some persons think, "What to speak of ruci, we have come in the stage of prema, and it is very good!" But prema is not an ordinary thing. It is hankered for by both Brahma and Sankara.

There were so many varieties of gopis standing before Krsna. Some are pragalba (bold and outspoken) and they can chastise even Krsna and Radhika. Some are madhya, in the middle, and there are some who are very, very polite (mrdu). Krsna advised them all, "I know that you were very eager to be with Me, and that is why I called you."

A gopi replied, "You called us at night. Why didn't You call during the day?"

"Your husbands and others would have created a problem, and therefore I have kindly called at night. You have taken My darsana, so now you should go and serve your husbands. This is your duty as told in the Vedic literature. If one's husband is lame, blind, or ugly, if he cannot earn money, and even if he is old, and even if the wife is a very beautiful teenager, she should return home and serve her husband. Don't delay here; at once return." When they heard this, they experienced newer and newer moods of love and affection (anuraga).

Another gopi said, "O 'Prabhu', if You think we have come to offer You prayers, You can just forget it. We have not come for this. We are very happy and doing very well in our homes, and we never wanted to take Your darsana. You are black externally and also in Your heart. We have come here because You forcibly stole our hearts, and if You don't return them, we'll not go. You are a thief, and the sweet sound of Your vamsi is also like a thief. You should return our hearts at once; and if you don't, how can we return? As long as our minds and hearts are here with You, then, even if we return home, what will we be able to do there? No, without our wealth, our precious jewel, we cannot return. If you want Your welfare, then give us back our wealth; otherwise we will have to adopt another means to get it."

Another gopi told Krsna, "O Mohan!" Mohan means enchanting or charming. "You think that we have come to take Your darsana and serve You, but forget this idea. We have not

come due to the sound of Your flute, and we will never do so. Your vamsi cannot do anything and You also cannot do anything. Even now, our hearts reside in our home.

"You have no power to take our hearts, nor will we ever give them to You. Don't think that I will ever take rest here with You. What will we do in this bad place, in this dark forest, with a black personality like You?"

Krsna replied, "Then why have you come?"

"O Syamasundara, You are very eager to take our darsana. Very eager. We know that You may die without our darsana, and You should always remember that. Now You have taken our darsana and we are going; we will not stay here for even a moment. Even if you fall down at our lotus feet, still we will not stay."

The sadhaka in the second stage of ruci remembers these pastimes as he chants Hare Krsna. He chants and remembers the slokas of Srimad-Bhagavatam and always remembers the sweet pastimes of Krsna as he weeps and rolls on the earth. If this is the symptom of a sadhaka in the stage of ruci, what can we say about the symptom of one in the stage of asakti and rati?

So try to follow the instructions of Srila Rupa Gosvami. Adopt that which is favorable for bhakti and try to very firmly reject that which is not.

[Devotee:] Srila Gurudeva, you said that Brahma thought he had stolen the cows, but actually it was Yogamaya who'd done it, and we think, "I am doing something," but our activities are actually done by maya. So suppose I distribute a book and I think, "Oh, I've distributed a book." Who has really distributed the book?

[Srila Narayana Maharaja:] Gurudeva has done it. How will you do it? You cannot do anything. You cannot even make one blade of dry grass. Guru gives this energy to a disciple, but sometimes a disciple becomes bewildered and thinks, "I am the doer." This is wrong thinking, and it forces that disciple to fall down. All of you must be very careful.

[Ramacandra das:] Guru gives opportunity and capacity.

[Srila Narayana Maharaja:] He gives both. He gives both the meal and the power to digest it.

Gaura premanande

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[*End note: In this class, Srila Maharaja did not complete his translation of the verse beginning with the word 'pracinanam.' We are therefore including an excerpt of a class he gave about ten years earlier, in which he explained it more thoroughly:]

In Srimad-Bhagavatam we have read how Kasyapa Muni and Aditi performed severe austerities. While standing on their hands with their feet up in the air for thousands of years, they did not eat or drink anything, even water, and ultimately they stopped breathing as well. Narayana then appeared before them and asked, "What do you desire?"

They replied, "We desire a son like You. We desire a son like You. We desire a son like You." They prayed three times.

Narayana answered, "Since there is no one like Me, I Myself will become Your son. Moreover, because you have asked three times, I will be your son for three births." He therefore came as Vamanadeva in that birth, and in their birth as Prsni and Sutapa He came as Prsnigarbha. Lastly, in their birth as Devaki and Vasudeva, He came as Vasudeva Krsna.

Devotees like Dhruva Maharaja also performed severe austerities. Narada Muni performed very severe austerities for several thousand years, and then he received only a very brief darsana of Narayana. When Narayana vanished, Narada began to cry, and then the Lord told him as a voice from the sky, "You will not be able to see Me with your material body and material eyes. I am invisible by material senses. While seeking Me, you should travel through the entire world: singing about Me, chanting My name, and remembering Me. One day this prarabda-karma sarira, this material body, will vanish, and then I will be visible to you forever."

This was the mercy of Narayana. He wanted to instill a special eagerness within Narada Rsi by vanishing. He wanted to increase Narada's longing to see Him. Without this eagerness, Bhagavan cannot be attained, and this eagerness brings the qualification to attain Him.

The gopis were so eager for Krsna that when He merely blew a brief vibration on His flute, they overcame so many difficulties and met with Him. And, those who were not so eager were checked by their husbands. Without eagerness one cannot perform bhajana, and when eagerness reaches its highest limit, nothing can check that devotee.

We have also heard about the austerities of Prahlada Maharaja, Bilvamangala Thakura, Rupa Gosvami and Sanatana Gosvami. Rupa Gosvami and Sanatana Gosvami were like princes in their childhood, but they left everything and only wore dor-kaupin; no beautiful cloth. On the other hand, although we are sannyasis, we are wearing beautiful cloths. We have no shame at all. We should have shame. Everybody has shame, but we sannyasis and brahmacaris do not have even a little shame. We have no wisdom. We are always sinking in material activities, even though we are sannyasis. We think, "This will be good for me, this will be good for me." Raghunatha dasa Gosvami left everything:

eating, sleeping, and all other material activities. Can we do so? We would die in one day.

Pracinanam bhajanam atulam duskaram srnvato me. Rupa Gosvami writes that he has heard how the devotees of ancient times performed severe austerities and strict bhajana. Nairyasena jvalati hrdayam bhakti-lesalasya. "My heart is burning. I do not have a scent of bhakti, no genuine renunciation, nor any qualification whatsoever. I have nothing. What to speak of raganuga-bhajana, even those who embody vaidhi-bhakti exhibited such impressive standards. Prahlada Maharaja's father tried to murder him numerous times, but he never cared. Everything was supplied for his murder, but he had no care at all, at any time.

Srila Rupa Gosvami then says, "My heart is burning because I do not see how I will ever attain bhakti."

If someone says to him, "Then you should die!" he will reply, "I cannot die."

"Why?"

"Because I have a little hope, and this hope makes me live in this world."

"Why do you have hope?"

Visva-daricim aghahara tavakarnya karunya-vicim. Rupa Gosvami now refers to Krsna as the enemy of Agha: Aghahara. The general meaning of Aghahara is killer of Agha, but there is another meaning here. Krsna took (hara) the agha, sin, of Aghasura by His mercy and great compassion. Agha was in the shape of a serpent and he was the murti of agha, the image of sin. Still, he wanted to take Krsna in his heart. Brahma prays for darsana of Krsna's feet in his meditation. Brahma wants only His feet, but Aghasura was not satisfied with that. He wanted 'the whole' Krsna, with all His associates and cows. He was very eagerly waiting for Krsna. Not looking here and there, desiring to swallow Him at once, he was only looking toward Krsna.

Krsna is all-giving. He thought, "Oh, I will fulfill your desires. I will come to you with all My associates." At first He entered within the eyesight of Aghasura. Still, even after seeing Krsna directly, not merely in meditation, Aghasura was so eager that he wanted to swallow Krsna with His flute and peacock feather.

Krsna therefore entered Aghasura's mouth, with all His cowherd friends and calves, and killed him. He made his body very beautiful and sinless, and now it emanated a sweet fragrance. Generally, if a snake or any other being dies, there will be a foul odor. However, Krsna purified this serpent in such a way that for one year its rotten corpse emitted a nice fragrance, and the cowherdboys enjoyed many games by continuously entering inside it, hiding, and then coming out again. In his next birth Aghasura attained salvation.

Mayavadi sannyasis perform severe austerities and yet they don't attain this. Although in this world, they don't eat anything. They have eyes, but they don't see anything. They have feet, but they don't walk. They have ears, but they don't hear. All their indriyas, senses, have stopped. When, after performing these austerities for several thousands or lakhs of years, if they are pure and all of their senses become completely inactive, they can attain salvation. On the other hand, Aghasura attained salvation in only one moment by the mercy of Krsna. Moreover, Aghasura's attainment was not sayujya-mukti, impersonal liberation, which is considered a curse for a bhakta. Even if Krsna wants to give it, his devotee will not accept it. He wanted to give that mukti to Aghasura, but Aghasura said, "No, I will not take it." Instead he accepted sarupya-mukti. Both he and Bakasura were brothers of Putana, and therefore they both attained sarupya-mukti. They obtained forms similar to that of Bhagavan.

Rupa Gosvami concludes, "If even a sinful person like Aghasura received the mercy of Krsna, and if I am trying to love Him, if I am chanting His name and hearing narrations of His pastimes, will Krsna not bestow His mercy upon me? I have heard that His mercy is like a rain shower. Clouds, by means of their showers, fall on every part of the world. By chance that shower may fall anywhere, and anyone may be touched by it. Besides this, that shower has no cost. If there was a cost, it is sure that because we are poor we would not be able to have it. Only a rich person would be able to take advantage of it.

"Like the rain, Krsna's mercy has no discrimination. In fact, I have heard that His mercy is like karunya-vicim, the waves of a sea." Waves are everywhere in the sea, and everyone who stands near its shore can experience this. If a sea has no waves, we will not be able to touch the water merely by standing nearby. The water will remain in its same position, away from us.

If you are in Jagannatha Puri, even if you are fifteen feet away, or even a hundred feet away from the water, if you keep your clothes on the bank, you will see in a moment that nothing is there. The sea will have taken it all, and its water will come to your feet. Rupa Gosvami says, "The rain of Krsna's mercy is falling throughout this world, and therefore I have hope that His mercy will one day touch me." *Asa-binduksitam idam upety antare hanta saityam*, "Only this hope is keeping me alive. This is my consolation, and for this I am waiting and doing bhajana. One day Krsna will bestow His mercy upon me."