

Choosing our Association

The Power of association in general

Association is very important. It acts just like a crystal stone, which will reflect anything which is put before it." Similarly, if we associate with the flowerlike devotees of the Lord, and if our hearts are crystal clear, then certainly the same action will be there.

Nectar of Devotion, Chapter 12

Problems with non-devotee association

By association with worldly people, one becomes devoid of truthfulness, cleanliness, mercy, gravity, spiritual intelligence, shyness, austerity, fame, forgiveness, control of the mind, control of the senses, fortune and all opportunities.

Madhya 22.88–90

It is better to accept the miseries of being encaged within bars and surrounded by burning flames than to associate with those bereft of Krsna consciousness. Such association is a very great hardship.

Madhya 22.91

Special benefit of association with devotees

“association of devotees” occurs 636 times in the Vedabase

The process of advancing in Krsna consciousness and devotional service is described here. The first point is that one must seek the association of persons who are Krsna conscious and who engage in devotional service. Without such association one cannot make advancement. Simply by theoretical knowledge or study one cannot make any appreciable advancement. One must give up the association of materialistic persons and seek the association of devotees because without the association of devotees one cannot understand the activities of the Lord. SB 3.25.25 purport

How to associate with devotees

One should mentally honor the devotee who chants the holy name of Lord Krsna, one should offer humble obeisances to the devotee who has undergone spiritual initiation [diksa] and is engaged in worshipping the Deity, and one should associate with and faithfully serve that pure devotee who is advanced in undeviated devotional service and whose heart is completely devoid of the propensity to criticize others.

Nol: verse 5

Three levels of devotees (from Nectar of Instruction)

1. Definition by initiation
2. Definition by dealings with others, especially devotees

3. Definition by strictness and dedication to preaching (pages 50-51, bottom page 57)
4. Definition by attachment to chanting
5. Definition by degree of faith
6. Why is the criterion of avoiding criticism so essential?

Association with people in general

Every man should act like this: when he meets a person more qualified than himself, he should be very pleased; when he meets someone less qualified than himself, he should be compassionate toward him; and when he meets someone equal to himself, he should make friendship with him. In this way one is never affected by the threefold miseries of this material world.

PURPORT

Generally when we find someone more qualified than ourselves, we become envious of him; when we find someone less qualified, we deride him; and when we find someone equal we become very proud of our activities. These are the causes of all material tribulations. The great sage Narada therefore advised that a devotee should act perfectly. Instead of being envious of a more qualified man, one should be jolly to receive him. Instead of being oppressive to a less qualified man, one should be compassionate toward him just to raise him to the proper standard. And when one meets an equal, instead of being proud of one's own activities before him, one should treat him as a friend. One should also have compassion for the people in general, who are suffering due to forgetfulness of Krsna. These important functions will make one happy within this material world.

SB 4.8.34

Those who have attained the second stage of realization are called madhyama-adhikaris. These devotees observe the distinctions between four categories of being: (1) the Supreme Lord; (2) the devotees of the Lord; (3) the innocent, who have no knowledge of the Lord; and (4) the atheists, who have no faith in the Lord and hate those in devotional service. The madhyama-adhikari behaves differently toward these four classes of person. He adores the Lord, considering Him the object of love; he makes friends with those who are in devotional service; he tries to awaken the dormant love of God in the hearts of the innocent; and he avoids the atheists, who deride the very name of the Lord. (Iso mantra 6)

Special problems when we are obliged to have regular contact with people we would otherwise choose to avoid

Family
Work/school
Temple