

The Effect of the Modes on faith (Suddha Bhakti Cintamani, Ch 2, HH Sivarama Swami)

Serious devotees are naturally interested in knowing the details of how and why the Vaishnava's faith is influenced by the modes of nature.

Simply put, practicing devotees who do not take full shelter of liberated Vaishnavas and their liberating instructions are victimized by their own previous conditioning. They then succumb to their lower nature. Rather than the mercy of pure Vaishnavas dominating the development of their faith, such things as the results of offences, thirst for the impermanent, and weakness of heart infiltrate. [Sri Hari-nāma-cintamani, chapter 3]

The conditional faith acquired under such circumstances—which resembles pure faith but is not based on exclusive dependence on Kṛṣṇa—is called the semblance of pure faith (*çraddhābhāsa*).

Çréla Prabhupāda elaborates on how the mercy of liberated Vaishnavas insulates devotees from the influence of the modes. “A conditioned soul is hampered by four defects: he is sure to commit mistakes, he is sure to become illusioned, he has a tendency to cheat others, and his senses are imperfect. Consequently, we have to take direction from liberated persons. This Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement directly receives instructions from the Supreme Personality of Godhead via persons who are strictly following His instructions. Although a follower may not be a liberated person, if he follows the supreme, liberated Personality of Godhead, his actions are naturally liberated from the contamination of the material nature.” [Srimad-Bhāgavatam 4.18.5, purport]

Even after hearing how the modes of nature contaminate pure faith, a reader may still question how faith connected with Kṛṣṇa service can be a mere semblance of faith, since anything connected to Kṛṣṇa is pure.

“Anything connected to Kṛṣṇa is pure as long as the underlying purpose is to serve and please Him. When another, even slightly selfish, motivation underlies faith, the connection with Kṛṣṇa is compromised by contact with the material energy.” [Srimad-Bhāgavatam 2.9.34] It is then called mixed faith, or a semblance of faith. This semblance of faith reflects the desire of the soul to taste Kṛṣṇa separated material energy, a characteristic in keeping with its marginal nature (*taöastha-çakti*).