

Jaiṅva Dharma

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Chapter Four

The Nitya-dharma Is
Vaiṣṇavism

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- The kuṭīra, cottage, given to Lāhirī Mahāśaya was next door to that of Śrī Vaiṣṇava dāsa.
- A number of mango and jackfruit trees stood around nearby, and small flowering betel plants beautifully decorated the surroundings.
- Outside the kuṭīra in the centre of the courtyard was a large circular platform, a sacred monument from the time when Śrī Pradyumna Brahmācāri had first taken up residence here.
- Vaiṣṇavas had been circumambulating and offering prostrated obeisances to this platform, affectionately named Śrī Surabhīcabutarā, for many, many years.

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- Shortly after dusk as the darkness of night gradually deepened, Vaiṣṇava dāsa was sitting upon a straw mat inside his kuṭīra, chanting harināma.
- The fortnight of the waning moon held sway, and from the nearby kuṭīra of Lāhirī Mahāśaya, a flickering lamp feebly probed the black shadows of the courtyard outside.
- Seeing a dark and shining snake-like object lying coiled in front of the door of Vaiṣṇava dāsa, Lāhirī Mahāśaya jumped up in a flash and armed himself with a strong stick.
- Brightening the flame, he picked up his lamp, ready to move upon the snake. However, by the time he had stepped outside, the snake had already disappeared.

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- From the doorway, Lāhirī Mahāśaya whispered a caution to Vaiṣṇava dāsa: “Please be very careful; a snake may have just entered your hut.”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa replied placidly, “Lāhirī Mahāśaya, why do you bother about snakes?”
- Kindly come inside and sit down without fear.” Hesitatingly, Lāhirī stepped inside and sat down upon the mat, but he could not calm his mind, saying at last, “In this respect our Śāntipura is far better; it is a township, so there is no danger of snakes.
- Nadia is infested with snakes, especially here in Godruma, where the woods are all around, making it slightly inconvenient for us urbanized folks.”

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- Śrī Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī placated him, saying, “Lāhirī Mahāśaya, is it absolutely necessary to agitate your mind with such trivialities?”
- You must have heard of the Parīkṣit Mahārāja episode from Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam: Parīkṣit Mahārāja totally ignored the threat of impending death from snakebite.
- With a placid mind he absorbed himself in the nectarean pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as narrated by the great devotee Śrīla Sukadeva Gosvāmī, thus attaining divine bliss.
- Snakes cannot reach the spiritual body of the living entity, what to speak of biting it.

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- Furthermore, the snakebite of separation from the topics of Kṛṣṇa consciousness causes the greatest harm to the body!
- “This material body is impermanent and will surely have to be discarded one day.
- Physical labour is the only thing preordained for this material tabernacle.
- When by Kṛṣṇa’s will this body decays, nothing can save it, but as long as the body is not destined to die, it cannot be harmed even while sleeping next to a snake.
- Therefore, one of the symptoms of a Vaiṣṇava is that he is freed from the fear of snakebite and the like.

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- If you are constantly distressed by such imagined forebodings, how will you dovetail your love towards the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord?
- Simply abandon your fear of snakes and the attempt to kill the one that you just saw.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya spoke with deference, “Respected Sir, your words of wisdom have driven all fears out of my heart.
- I now know that only when I elevate my heart and thoughts can I become eligible for self-realization.
- Those great sages who dwell in caves and meditate upon the Supreme Lord in loving devotion are not afraid of wild beasts.

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- They peacefully coexist with even the fiercest forest creatures, but nonetheless are greatly afraid of association with worldly-minded people.”
- Śrī Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī continued, “When Bhaktidevī, the goddess of pure devotional service, enters the heart, the jīva automatically becomes elevated, making him dear to all living entities of the world.
- A pure devotee is always loved and revered by saints and worldly-minded people alike.
- Therefore, a man must strive to become a Vaiṣṇava.”

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- Lāhirī Mahāśaya immediately replied, “Sir, you have evoked a strong faith in me for nitya-dharma, and you have convinced me of the many similarities existing between nitya-dharma and vaiṣṇava-dharma.
- Nevertheless, somehow or other I am still in doubt about the exact equivalence of vaiṣṇava-dharma with nitya-dharma.
- I beg you to kindly explain these principles to me more exhaustively.”
- Śrī Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī began to speak, “In the name of vaiṣṇava-dharma two separate dharmas are practiced in the world: the śuddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma, pure and proper; and the distorted, viddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma.

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- The śuddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma is a singular spiritual principle, but is divided into four sections according to the different rasas, devotional mellows: dāsya, servitorship; sakhya, friendship; vātsalya, parenthood; and mādhyura, conjugality.
- Indeed, śuddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma is one without a second and is further known as nitya-dharma, or also as parama-dharma, the supreme function.
- “In the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, 1.1.3, we find:

vijñāte sarvam idaṁ vijñātaṁ bhavati

- “By realizing Him in truth, everything becomes known.’

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- “This aphorism factually describes śuddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma, which will be revealed to you gradually.
- “Viddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma, impure vaiṣṇava-dharma, is of two varieties: karma-viddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma, polluted by fruitive work; and jñana-viddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma, contaminated by empirical knowledge.
- The practices of the orthodox brāhmaṇas, known as smārtas, wherein there is a stress on rules, rituals, and methodology in the performance of vaiṣṇava-dharma, are to be known as karma-viddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma.
- In this branch of vaiṣṇava-dharma, one is initiated with vaiṣṇava-mantra, but one worships the all-pervading Lord of the Universe, Śrī Viṣṇu, only as a component of the process of karma.

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- Although Śrī Viṣṇu is actually the supreme independent controller of the devas, the smārta philosophy proposes that He is nothing more than a constituent part of the rituals of karma-kāṇḍa and is Himself subject to the results of such fruitive, ritualistic performance.
- In other words, Śrī Viṣṇu is under the influence of karma, rather than the law of karma being dependent upon the supreme will of Śrī Viṣṇu.
- “Further, they claim that upāsanā (the process of worship), bhakti (devotional surrender), and sādhana (spiritual practices) are all different rituals ultimately consisting of karma because the law of karma is the highest principle, unsurpassable by any other.

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- The Mīmāṃsakas, materialistic philosophers and logicians, have practiced this brand of Vaiṣṇavism from time immemorial.
- In India, such philosophers often arrogantly declare themselves Vaiṣṇavas, not acknowledging the sincere followers of śuddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma as the actual Vaiṣṇavas.
- Certainly, this is their misfortune.
- “Jñāna-viddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma is also very widespread in India.
- In the opinion of these empiricists, Brahman, the incomprehensible, all-pervading Absolute Truth, is the highest philosophical principle.

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- They say that in order to attain impersonal Brahman realization one must worship the personal forms of Sūrya, the sun god; Gaṇeśa, the remover of obstacles; Śakti, the goddess of the material nature; Lord Śiva; and Śrī Viṣṇu in the process known as pañcopāsanā, the worship of the five deities.
- One is to discard the worship of these personal forms upon acquiring full jñāna, realization, which occurs upon the final achievement of impersonal Brahman realization.
- Similarly, many followers of this philosophy deride the actual pure Vaiṣṇavas.
- Their worship of Śrī Viṣṇu, initiation into viṣṇu-mantra, and other rituals pertaining to Śrī Viṣṇu may sometimes include the worship of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, but still it can never be categorized as śuddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma.

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- “If these varieties of viddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma are separated from the vaiṣṇava-dharma, then śuddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma remains, which is the real vaiṣṇava-dharma.
- However, as a result of the ill influence of Kali-yuga, many people cannot understand śuddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma and mistake viddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma for real vaiṣṇava-dharma.
- “From the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (1.2.11) the conclusion can be drawn that the spiritual quest of man branches into three directions: brahman-pravṛtti, the impersonal Brahman; paramātmā-pravṛtti, the all-pervasive Supersoul; and bhagavān-pravṛtti, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.
- “Some persons, with a pravṛtti, inclination, towards Brahman, veer towards impersonal realization and embrace the path of pañcopāsanā to achieve their goal.

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- Jñāna-viddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma is born out of this practice.
- Whilst worshiping Paramātmā, some are attracted to pursuing the eightfold path of mystic yoga and meditation upon the Supersoul within the heart.
- This philosophy propagates the belief that Śrī Viṣṇu, initiation into viṣṇu-mantra, and meditation are all part of the rituals of karma.
- Karma-viddhi-vaiṣṇava-dharma arises out of this philosophy.
- “Followers of bhāgavata-pravṛtti, on the other hand, are the fortunate jīvas who develop an attraction for unalloyed devotion to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

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- Their worship of the Supreme Lord is a part of neither the process of karma nor of jñāna but of the principle of śuddha-bhakti, pure devotion.
- This philosophy is the real vaiṣṇava-dharma, known as śuddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma.
- As stated in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 1.2.11:

*vādanti tat tattva-vidas
tattvaṁ yaj jñānam advayam
brahmeti paramātmēti
bhagavān iti śabdyate*

- “Learned transcendentalists who know the Absolute Truth call this non-dual substance Brahman, Paramātmā, or Bhagavān.’

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- “Please observe that the bhāgavata principle, surpassing and inclusive of both Brahman and Paramātmā, is the highest principle.
- This bhāgavata principle is the personal conception of the Absolute Truth and is thus the pure viṣṇu-tattva, the highest category of pure transcendence.
- The followers of this principle are pure, rare souls, and their nature is inclined towards bhakti.
- Some of the numerous names of hari-bhakti, devotion to Śrī Hari, are śuddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma; nitya dharma, the eternal function; jaiva-dharma, the eternal religion of the pure soul; bhāgavata-dharma, worship of the Supreme Person; paramārtha-dharma, religion that leads to the highest realization; and parama-dharma, the supreme function.

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- “All the religious rites and activities emanating from both the Brahman nature and the Paramātmā nature are defined as naimittika.
- The search for the impersonal Brahman realization is motivated by material desire; hence, it is naimittika, not eternal.
- A person who realises his suffering in the material, conditioned state becomes eager to sever his bondage.
- Thus, his struggle against the misery of material bondage is the motive to take up the path of impersonal realization wherein all such distressful material qualities are extinguished.
- This striving is said to be naimittika, as it is impelled by a nimitta, material cause, in this case material bondage.

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- Thus, it is not an eternal path.
- “The jīvas, who desire the subtle enjoyment and bliss of samādhi in paramātmā-dharma, total meditative absorption in the Paramātmā, embrace the process of naimittika-dharma, materially motivated by the desire to attain this subtle happiness.
- Therefore, even the tendency towards paramātmā-dharma is motivated by selfish material desire and is thus also temporal, leaving only unalloyed bhāgavata-dharma as the sole eternal dharma.”
- Having listened patiently to the words of Vaiṣṇava dāsa, Lāhirī Mahāśaya then said, “Dear master! Kindly explain to me the nature of pure Vaiṣṇavism.

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- Rather late in my life, I am receiving spiritual guidance from someone who has kindly accepted me under the shelter of his lotus feet.
- I have heard that after having taken initiation from an unqualified person, an aspirant must again accept spiritual initiation and scriptural instructions, but this time from a bona fide spiritual master.
- For the past few days, I have taken to heart your delineation of scriptural conclusions; they have given me faith in the Vaiṣṇava thought.
- Therefore, out of compassion for me, first kindly instruct me in Vaiṣṇava theism and then initiate me into the Vaiṣṇava fold, thus purifying me.”

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- A trifle unsettled by this statement, Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī said, “Dear Sir, I will indeed try to teach you everything within the scope of my realization, but I am not eligible to become a dīkṣā-guru, initiating spiritual master.
- However, for now, just school yourself in the pure Vaiṣṇava theology.
- The original and primeval spiritual preceptor of the universe, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, has declared that Vaiṣṇava theology has three fundamental principles: sambandha, relationships; abhidheya, the means of attainment; and prayojana, the prime necessity and goal.

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- One who has not just understood theoretically, but has also practically realized this knowledge and who thus disciplines his life accordingly is a pure Vaiṣṇava, an unalloyed devotee of the Lord.
- “The sambandha tattva, the inter-relational principle, has three main aspects: (1) jaḍa-jagat, the material creation, and māyā, the illusory energy; (2) the jīva soul, the servitor and controlled; and (3) Īśvara, the Supreme Controller, the Personality of Godhead.
- “The Supreme Lord is one and unsurpassable; omnipotent; all attractive; the only abode of unlimited aiśvarya, opulence, and madhura, sweet tenderness; and the only shelter for both the jīva-śakti and the māyā-śakti, the external potency of the Lord.

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- Although He is simultaneously the shelter and the ultimate source of both the jīva-śakti and the māyā-śakti, He marvellously maintains His unique and fully independent status.
- “The Lord’s bodily effulgence, known as the brahma-jyotir, radiates unlimitedly from Him and manifests as the impersonal Brahman.
- By His divine powers, He has produced the material cosmos and the jīvas. He is represented by and controls His creation by His partial expansion as Paramātmā.
- In the section of the paravyoma, spiritual sky, known as Vaikuṅṭha, where His aiśvarya, opulence, predominates, He presides as Śrī Nārāyaṇa.

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- While in Goloka Vṛndāvana, His madhura, sweetness, potency is pre-eminent, which He relishes as Śrī Gopījana-vallabha, the lover of the gopīs, the cowherd damsels, as the all-attractive Supreme Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇacandra.
- “The Lord’s expansions, such as His prakāśa, identical manifestations, and vilāsa, pastime forms, are eternal and unlimited.
- Nobody and nothing can even approximate to Him in any feature, what to speak of surpassing Him.
- All His different manifestations and pastimes are a result of His parā-śakti, supreme divine power.

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- The vikrama, potency, of this parā-śakti is displayed in innumerable variegated manifestations of which, the jīva is introduced to three:
- (1) the cid-vikrama, spiritual potency, by which all of the Lord's līlās, pastimes, are directly produced;
- (2) the taṭasthā-vikrama, the marginal jīva potency, by which the jīva is created and maintained; and
- (3) the māyā-vikrama, the illusory potency, the external energy which manifests the mundane universes, material time, and material fruitive activity.

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- “Thus, sambandha-tattva is comprised of these three relationships: (1) between the Supreme Lord and the jīva; (2) between the Supreme Lord and material nature; and (3) between the jīva and material nature.
- Complete comprehension of these truths leads to sambandha-jñāna, transcendental knowledge.
- One cannot become a true and pure Vaiṣṇava without this knowledge.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya further enquired, “I have heard it said about the Vaiṣṇavas that they are controlled by feelings and emotions and that they have no need for knowledge.

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- How may this statement be best explained? While I was carefully tuning my feelings in chanting harināma, I never cared for sambandha-jñana.”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī replied, “Cultivating and seasoning bhāva, spiritual emotion, to the ultimate stage is indeed the highest goal of a Vaiṣṇava, but the emotion must be pure and transcendental.
- Those who consider the impersonal Brahman as the final destination and try to develop bhāva in the course of achieving Brahman are far off the mark.
- Their bhāva and spiritual endeavours are impure, merely false representations of real bhāva.

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- A miniscule drop of pure bhāva brings spiritual perfection to the jīva, but mundane sentimentalism—further poisoned by empirical knowledge—introduces chronic chaos into the spiritual pursuit of the jīva.
- He who nurtures in his heart the monistic path of Brahman realization is merely deceiving the world with his postured attempts at bhakti and bhakti-bhāva, devotional emotion.
- Therefore, the cultivation of sambandha-jñāna is imperative for Vaiṣṇava devotees.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya spoke in an awed voice, “Is there any truth higher than Brahman? If the Supreme Godhead is the cause of Brahman, why do the empirical philosophers not discard their search for the Brahman and take up devotional service to Bhagavān, the Personality of Godhead?”

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- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī laughed shortly and replied, “Be they be either Lord Brahmā, the four Kumāras, Śukadeva Gosvāmī, Śrī Nārada Muni or Lord Śiva—all these spiritual aspirants have ultimately sought the supreme sanctuary of the lotus feet of Śrī Hari, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.”
- Trying to fathom the subject more deeply, Lāhirī Mahāśaya asked, “If Bhagavān is endowed with a form this presupposes spatial limitations, how then could Bhagavān be the source and superior to the unlimited, all-pervasive Brahman?”
- Bābājī Mahārāja replied, “Even one of the mundane ingredients of this material creation, called ākāśa, space, is practically unlimited.”

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- Is then the unlimited ākāśa superior to Bhagavān? Actually, Śrī Bhagavān is also limitless by virtue of His infinite potency, one aspect of which is the Brahman, which is manifested as His bodily lustre and is infinite and omnipresent.
- However, simultaneously, Bhagavān accepts a definite form. Have you ever experienced any entity of parallel potency?
- “By this unparelled, unsurpassable nature, Bhagavān is superior to the Brahman concept.
- Bhagavān personifies a wonderful, all-attractive, personal quality, which is complimented by His omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence.
- Bhagavān manifests boundless compassion and is the source of paramount bliss to the absolute degree.

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- Furthermore, is not such a clearly defined personal identity ideal? Would you prefer an entity that possesses neither characteristics, nor potencies, and simply has an impersonal, omnipresent existence?
- “In truth, the Brahman is the impersonal manifestation of Bhagavān.
- Both the personal and the impersonal aspects of Bhagavān exist harmoniously and simultaneously.
- Brahman is but a fractional manifestation of Bhagavān, but philosophically myopic persons are overwhelmed by this formless, tasteless, impersonal, inscrutable, endless aspect of the Absolute Truth.

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- Farsighted persons demand the full vista and are not satisfied with anything less than the complete whole, the entirety of the Absolute Truth.
- The Vaiṣṇavas are not impressed by this impersonal concept, because it is contrary to the eternal theistic principle and to the edicts of prema.
- Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the source and shelter of both the personal and impersonal concepts.
- He is the shoreless ocean of sublime joy, drawing close to Himself all pure souls.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “Śrī Kṛṣṇa took birth, grew up, performed activities, and finally relinquished His body, how then can His form be eternal?”

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- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s body is sat, eternal; cit, fully cognizant; and ānanda, absolutely blissful.
- Without connection to mundane energy, Kṛṣṇa’s form does not experience material birth, activities, death, and so on.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “Why then are there contrary descriptions in the Mahābhārata and other scriptures?”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “The transcendental, Absolute Truth is beyond words and descriptions.
- The advanced self-realized souls behold the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His pastimes on the screen of their pure consciousness, but when this transcendental perception is expressed in words it automatically degenerates into mundane historical facts for those in the grips of mundane consciousness.

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- Those readers who are able to extract the transcendental essence from scriptures like the Mahābhārata will perceive Śrī Kṛṣṇa's pastimes as spiritual.
- However, people of gross intelligence will view them as mundane.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “When meditating upon Śrī Kṛṣṇa's form I get the feeling in my heart as if I were bound by time and space.
- Is there any method of meditation upon the Lord that can overcome this feeling?”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “Meditation is an activity of the mind.
- As long as the mind is not on the pure spiritual plane, meditation cannot touch the divine.

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- However, when the consciousness is imbued with bhakti, gradually the mind becomes spiritualised, at which point meditation is naturally transcendental.
- Vaiṣṇavas who relish the bliss of serving Kṛṣṇa and chanting harināma cannot be influenced by the material energy.
- They attain the supramundane state and are transported to the spiritual realm, where they meditate upon the daily activities of the Lord and enjoy rendering intimate service to Him in meditation.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “Please be merciful and give me a taste of that transcendental experience.”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “First, you must drive away all mental speculations and materialistic concepts.

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- Then, when you begin to chant harināma incessantly, very soon spiritual perception will awaken in your heart.
- The more you engage in debates and arguments, the more the mind will be entangled in gross profanities.
- However, if greater endeavour is made to increase the taste for chanting, material inebriety will decrease and transcendence will seep into the heart.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “Kindly describe this spiritual experience in detail—this is my earnest desire.”
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- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “If the mind is unable to experience spiritual consciousness through words and discussion, it shies away in doubt.

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- However, the spiritual platform can be attained only by the sincere application of the transcendental process—the culture of cid-ānanda, spiritual bliss.
- Curb all argumentation and chant harināma continuously for a few days, then you will find that all doubts have been dissipated and all questions have ceased by the power of the mantra.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “I have now understood that if one develops faith in Śrī Kṛṣṇa and tastes the nectar of harināma, one attains the supreme destination.
- I will thoroughly learn about sambandha-jñana and take full shelter of harināma.”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “Wonderful! Yes, study sambandha-jñana properly.”

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- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “I feel I have understood the truth about the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Bhagavān. Bhagavān is the one and only Highest Truth.
- Brahman and Paramātmā are subordinate to Him.
- He is omnipresent, yet He resides in the spiritual world with a wonderful spiritual form.
- He is the embodiment of eternality, absolute knowledge, and unlimited bliss and is the fountainhead of all energies.
- Although He is the self-satisfied controller of all potencies, He is driven by the urge for exhilaration in the company of His hlādinī-śakti, pleasure potency.
- May I request you to kindly tell me about jīva-tattva, the principle of the individual souls.”

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- Vaiṣṇava dāsa, “Śrī Kṛṣṇa possesses countless potencies of which the taṭasthā-śakti, marginal energy, is one.
- This energy is located in the buffer region between the spiritual sky and the material nature and enjoys the facility of close communication with both.
- The jīva-tattva is produced from this taṭasthā-śakti. The form of the jīva is cit-paramāṇu, an infinitesimal particle of spiritual energy.
- The miniscule form of the individual jīva makes him vulnerable to the sway of the jaḍa-jagat, material energy.
- Simultaneously however, because of his innate spiritual constitution, even with a slight spiritual support the jīva can become an eternal resident of the transcendental abode of the Lord and experience supreme joy.

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- “There are two kinds of jīvas: mukta, liberated; and baddha, materially conditioned.
- The mukta-jīvas are eternal citizens of the spiritual world, and the baddha-jīvas are imprisoned in the material world.
- The conditioned jīvas are again two-fold: uditā-viveka, those with awakened consciousness; anuditā-viveka, and those with unawakened consciousness.
- Human beings that have no aspiration for self-realization belong, along with the entire animal kingdom, etc., to the category of anuditā-viveka and as a result are materially conditioned.
- However, those jīvas that have embraced the path of Vaiṣṇavism possess uditā-viveka.

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- “Besides the Vaiṣṇavas, no one is genuinely interested in attaining the supreme spiritual goal.
- Hence, the scriptures declare that service to and association with Vaiṣṇavas is by far superior to any other activity.
- Implicit faith in the scriptures inspires the uḍita-viveka to relish the chanting of harināma, which then creates an eagerness to associate with and serve the Vaiṣṇavas.
- The jīvas with anuḍita-viveka have not yet developed enough faith in the scriptures to take up the chanting of harināma.
- Their religious activities are restricted, at best, to worshiping the Deity form of the Lord in conformity with previously established family traditions and rules; therefore, their hearts lack the religious sentiment required to serve and associate with Vaisnavas.”

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- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “Master, I have grasped kṛṣṇa-tattva, the truth about the Supreme Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and have also understood jīva-tattva.
- Kindly elaborate upon māyā-tattva, the principle of the illusory material creation.”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “Māyā, the illusory material energy, is unique among the energies of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.
- This potency is also designated as the aparā-śakti, inferior potency, and further as the bahiraṅgā-śakti, the external potency.
- Darkness is always far away from the light; similarly, māyā remains at a good distance from Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His devotees.

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- The māyā-śakti has created this material world with its fourteen planetary systems and the material ingredients of earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intelligence, and the mundane mistaken identification with the material body known as ahaṅkāra, false ego.
- The gross and subtle bodies of the conditioned jīva are both products of the māyā-śakti, but liberation removes this material contamination that covers the spiritual identity of the jīva.
- “As deep as the jīva is in the clutches of māyā, to the same extent he is also alienated from Śrī Kṛṣṇa.
- To the degree he has shrugged off the mantle of servitorship to māyā, he can advance towards the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

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- The material world has come into existence by the desire of Kṛṣṇa to assist the jīva in his attempt to exploit and enjoy māyā.
- However, this mundane universe is not a permanent residence for the jīva but merely a prison-house lodging him temporarily.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “O master! Kindly enlighten me on the eternal relationships between māyā, jīva, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa.”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “The jīva is a minute spiritual spark; hence, he is eternally a servant of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.
- The material nature acts as a dungeon wherein he is held captive; however, whilst imprisoned he can also take advantage of saintly association to help him begin the process of chanting harināma.

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- Then, gradually, by the mercy of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, he becomes situated his svarūpa, eternally perfected spiritual identity, and relishes the sweet nectar of devotional service to the Lord in His transcendental abode.
- This is the confidential truth about the eternal relationship between these three principles.
- How can one actually engage in pure devotion without this knowledge?”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “If knowledge is acquired through education and study, is it imperative to first become a scholar before one becomes a Vaiṣṇava?”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “To be a Vaiṣṇava, neither formal education, nor fluency in a particular language is necessary, but it is essential for the jīva to eradicate the nescience of material illusion.

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- This can only be accomplished when he takes complete shelter of the lotus feet of a bona fide spiritual master who is a pure Vaiṣṇava saint and who infuses the heart of the disciple with the knowledge of sambandha-tattva through his teachings and exemplary actions.
- This is the correct explanation of dīkṣā, initiation, and śikṣā, spiritual instruction.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “What follows dīkṣā and śikṣā?”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “One must cultivate an ideal moral character and practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- This stage of development is known as abhidheya-tattva, the process by which one achieves the ultimate desired goal, kṛṣṇa-prema.

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- The Vedas and all corollary scriptures, have repeatedly stressed the importance of this endeavour for self-realization; and hence Śrī Caitanya has termed this endeavour the abhidheya-tattva, that which needs to be done.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, his eyes brimming with tears, continued, “O master! I will take shelter of your lotus feet.
- Your wonderful instructions have made me grasp the knowledge of sambandha-tattva.
- Concurrent with this process of learning and by your mercy, my previous misconceptions have gradually disappeared.
- Now kindly teach me the abhidheya-tattva.”

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- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “Now at last, you can stop worrying! Your humble attitude is a sure indication that Śrī Caitanya has blessed you.
- For the captive jīva in the material world, sādhu-saṅga, saintly association, is the only recourse.
- The guru and saintly Vaiṣṇavas instruct people about the science of self-realization out of their inherently compassionate nature.
- By carrying out this science of devotional service, the sādḥaka, aspirant, gradually approaches the sādḥya, ultimate realization of the essential truth.
- Devotional service to the Supreme Lord, Śrī Hari, is the only abhidheya, means, to achieve that ultimate goal.”

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- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “What must one do to serve the Supreme Lord, Śrī Hari, thus engaging in hari-bhajana?”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “Hari-bhajana means to engage in bhakti. Bhakti is divided into three stages: sādhana, the stage of practice; bhāva, the first awakening of divine emotion; and prema, the mature state of transcendental love.
- One must practice sādhana-bhakti in the beginning, which then leads one to the stage of bhāva-bhakti.
- When bhāva-bhakti matures to kṛṣṇa-prema, it is known as prema-bhakti.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “Please elaborate upon the form and application sādhana-bhakti.”

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- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has extensively researched this subject in his book, Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu, which I will now try to summarize as succinctly as possible.
- Sādhana-bhakti has nine limbs, as enumerated in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 7.5.23:

*śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ
smaraṇam pāda-sevanam
arcanam vandanam dāsyam
sakhyam ātmā-nivedanam*

- “Prahāda Mahārāja said, “Hearing, chanting, and remembering about the transcendental names, forms, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of Śrī Viṣṇu;

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- serving the lotus feet of the Lord; worshipping the Lord; offering prayers and obeisances to the Lord; becoming His servant; considering the Lord one's best friend; and surrendering everything to Him—in other words serving Him completely with body, mind, and words—constitutes pure devotional service.'
- “Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has further divided these nine limbs into branches and sub-branches, arriving at a total of sixty-four practices.
- An important fact about sādhana-bhakti is that it has two divisions: vaidhī-bhakti, directed by the rules and regulations of scripture; and rāgānuga-bhakti, impelled by spontaneous attraction.
- Vaidhī-bhakti has the nine limbs aforementioned.

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- In rāgānuga-bhakti, one must surrender to the guidance of a vrajavāsī, an eternal associate of Kṛṣṇa in transcendental Vraja, and thus serve Kṛṣṇa internally, imbued with the devotional mood of that vrajavāsī.
- The level of devotion of an aspirant will decide his adhikāra, eligibility, to practice one form or the other of sādhana-bhakti.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “Gurudeva, what are the criteria for determining the adhikāra to perform sādhana-bhakti?”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “The guru judges the ability of a sincere neophyte to adhere to scriptural rules and regulations.
- Accordingly, he initiates him into the process of vaidhī-sādhana-bhakti.

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- If and when the neophyte is inclined towards rāgānuga-bhakti, then the guru guides him on the esoteric path of bhajana in rāgānuga-bhakti.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “How does one discern the levels of adhikāra, Gurudeva?”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “A neophyte who neither possesses a purified intellect, nor the ability to grasp the philosophical precepts of rāgānuga-bhakti, but is nevertheless attracted to Deity worship and following the scriptural injunctions is eligible for vaidhī-bhakti.
- Whereas, someone who desires to worship and serve the Supreme Lord without having to overtly depend on scriptural stipulations and whose heart is naturally drawn to hari-bhajana is a fit candidate for rāgānuga-bhakti.”

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- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “Revered master! Kindly ascertain my level of adhikāra, so that I may understand this principle.
- I am as of yet unable to comprehend precisely the two concepts of vaidhī-bhakti and rāgānuga-bhakti.”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “You have but to test your own heart to know your level.
- Do you firmly believe that—without strictly following scriptural edicts—worshiping and serving the Supreme Lord is possible?”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “I feel that, when conducted according to scriptural instructions, great benefit from sādhana and bhajana can be gained.

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- However, another view is strongly emerging in my mind, namely that sincere hari-bhajana opens up an ocean of transcendental rasa.”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “You see? Scriptural injunctions are your supreme command; hence, you should embrace the path of vaidhī-bhakti.
- Gradually, however, the precepts of rāgānuga-bhakti will begin to crystallize further within our consciousness.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya could not restrain the tears slowly swelling in his eyes.
- Getting up and touching the feet of Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, he said, “O master! Initiate me into your divine wisdom, according to my eligibility.

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- I do not want to dabble in philosophy outside my limitations.”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī also stood up, embraced Lāhirī quietly, and indicated for him to sit down.
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya then said, “Kindly instruct me in the precise method of bhajana I should take up.”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “Begin by seriously chanting harināma. Amongst the different limbs of bhajana, chanting is the most efficacious.
- Harināma and the proprietor of harināma are the one and same person.
- Chanting without committing offences will quickly lead one to complete perfection.

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- Take up chanting with full faith.
- The other branches of devotional practices, all included within chanting, are hearing, remembering the Lord's pastimes, serving His lotus feet in meditation, worshiping His Deity form, offering prayers, becoming His servant, becoming His friend, and totally surrendering to Him.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “O master! I am eager to begin. Please shower me with your mercy.”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “Dear Sir, please always repeat the following mantra and avoid the nāmāparādhas, offences against harināma:
- Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.”

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- As Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī uttered this, the mahā-mantra, he gently pressed a set of chanting beads made of tulasī wood into the hand of Lāhirī Mahāśaya.
- When the latter began to chant the mahā-mantra on his new beads, he felt tears of jubilation streak down his face.
- He exulted, “Dear master! I am unable to express the joy that I feel!” and collapsed at Bābājī’s feet.
- Carefully Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī lifted him up and held him steady.
- After a period of stunned silence, Lāhirī Mahāśaya said, “I am indeed blessed! I have never before experienced such exhilaration.”

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- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “Revered Sir! Truly, you are blessed! You have sincerely taken shelter of harināma.
- Thus, you have showered great fortune upon me, also.”
- Lāhirī Mahāśaya returned to his cottage.
- Having received initiation, he started chanting harināma upon his new beads, pushing aside all fears and doubts.
- Days went by in chanting and Lāhirī Mahāśaya began to decorate his body with the vaiṣṇava-tilaka markings in the customary twelve places.
- He refused to eat anything other than prasādam, food offered to the Lord, and steadily increased his daily chanting up to two lakhs, two hundred thousand names of the Lord.

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- He offered prostrated obeisances to pure Vaiṣṇavas as soon as he saw them.
- He would begin his daily routine by first offering worship to Paramahansa Premadāsa Bābājī and then he would serve his spiritual master, Śrī Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, constantly and diligently.
- He lost all interest in trivial talks, as well as classical music.
- Thus, a metamorphosis took place in Lāhirī Mahāśaya.
- He was now a Vaiṣṇava.
- One day, Lāhirī Mahāśaya approached Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, prostrated himself humbly, and enquired, “O master! What is the prayojana-tattva, the principle of the ultimate spiritual goal and necessity?”

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- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “Kṛṣṇa-prema is the prayojana-tattva for the jīva.
- Constant sādhana in devotional service leads to bhāva. When bhāva matures, it is called prema.
- Kṛṣṇa-prema is the eternal occupation of the jīva, his eternal opulence, his source of supreme joy, and his absolute necessity.
- The absence of prema results in the sufferings of the jīva, material entanglement, and attachment to matter.
- Nothing is superior to prema, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the embodiment of transcendental Absolute Truth, is subdued by prema alone.
- Ānanda, spiritual bliss, when intensified and condensed, turns into prema, the essence.”

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- Lāhirī Mahāśaya, choking with tears, asked, “Will I ever be eligible to experience prema?”
- Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, firmly embracing him, responded, “Behold! In a matter of days, you have elevated yourself from sādhana-bhakti to bhāva-bhakti.
- Śrī Kṛṣṇa will soon benedict you further.”
- These utterances from his guru had a magical effect upon Lāhirī Mahāśaya.
- He began to roll in the dust in joy and exclaimed, “Ah! Nothing can surpass the guru in importance.

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- Alas, how foolishly I have wasted so much of my life.
- My guru has lifted me out of the dark well of materialism by his unlimited mercy.”

Thus ends the Fourth Chapter of Jaiva-dharma,
entitled: The Nitya-dharma Is Vaiṣṇavism