

Jaiiva Dharmma

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Chapter Eleven

Nitya-dharma and Deity Worship

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- On the western bank of the Gaṅgā, the peaceful hamlet of Kuliya Pāhārpura basked in its recently acquired glory.
- This pastoral community of Navadvīpa-dhāma is situated within the transcendental island of Koladvīpa, where the renowned Śrī Mādhava dāsa Caṭṭopādhyāya—also known as Chakaurī Caṭṭopādhyāya—resided during the era of Śrī Caitanya.
- His son, Śrīla Vaṁśīvadanānanda Ṭhākura—thus named because he was the incarnation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s vaṁśī, flute—became an eminent personality of immense influence.
- All this was possible by the grace of Śrī Caitanya.
- Śrīla Vaṁśīvadanānanda was also highly honoured for another reason.

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- He was greatly favoured by Śrīmatī Viṣṇupriyā devī, the wife of Śrī Caitanya.
- After the disappearance of Śrīmatī Viṣṇupriyā devī, Vamśīvadanānanda transferred the Deities she had personally worshiped from Śrī Māyāpura to Kuliyā Pāhārpura, and he and his descendants continued to worship the Deities there.
- Although Vamśīvadanānanda and family later moved from Kuliyā Pāhārpura to Śrīpāṭ Bāghanāpārā—being fortunate enough to receive the blessings and association of Śrī Jāhnavā Mātā, the wife of Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu—
- the family arranged for Vaiṣṇavas from Mālañcha to continue worship of the Deities of Śrīmatī Viṣṇupriyā devī in the temple at Kuliyā Pāhārpura.

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- In the time of Śrī Caitanya, the original town of Navadvīpa was on the eastern bank of the Gaṅgā.
- Kuliya was across on the western bank and now consisted of several notable hamlets, among them Cināḍāṅgā.
- Once a certain devotee from the Cināḍāṅgā merchant community organized a spiritual fair on the premises of the celebrated Kuliya Pāhārpura temple to which many brāhmaṇa paṇḍitas and all Vaiṣṇavas from within a thirty-two mile radius were invited.
- The festival day saw a teeming mass of Vaiṣṇavas pouring into Kuliya from all around.
- Ananta dāsa Bābājī and others came from Nṛsimhapallī;

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- Gorācānda dāsa Bābājī and his group came from Māyāpura; Nārāyaṇa dāsa Bābājī with his associates from Bilva-puṣkarinī; the famous Narahari dāsa led his group from Śrī Modadruma; Śrī Paramahaṁsa Premadāsa Bābājī, Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, and so on, came from Śrī Godruma; and Śrī Śacīnandana dāsa with his group arrived from Samudragadh.
- They and many hundreds more of other Vaiṣṇavas began to arrive for the festival, resplendent with ūrdhva-puṇḍra, vertical tilaka markings, upon their foreheads indicating that their bodies were temples of Śrī Hari.
- Strands of tulasī beads were around the necks of the Vaiṣṇavas and the names of Śrī Caitanya and Śrī Nityānanda were finger-painted in luminescent tilaka paste upon different parts of their upper limbs and foreheads.

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- They all carried a japa-mālā beadbag with their right hand or slung down from their necks.
- Many were loudly chanting the mahā-mantra:

*hare kṛṣṇa hare Kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rama rāma rāma hare hare*

- Groups of Vaiṣṇavas mingled in the crowd singing gaily and marking time with mṛdaṅga and karatālas to sweet bhajans describing the pastimes of Śrī Gaurāṅga.
- Some devotees were lifting up their arms while dancing and chanting:

*śrī-kṛṣṇa-Caitanya prabhu-nityānanda
śrī-advaita gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura-bhakta-vṛnda*

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- Many Vaiṣṇavas spontaneously expressed their overwhelming, indescribable joy with silent unrestrained tears, while all the hairs of their bodies stood upon end.
- The exhilarating rhythms of the mṛdaṅgas pulsed like volcanic shock waves throughout the rapturous throng.
- Some Vaiṣṇavas cried out in sublime anguish intermingled with ecstatic weeping, “Oh my dearest Śrī Gaurāṅga!
- When will my eyes be qualified to behold Your divine pastimes that are eternally performed here in Navadvīpa?”
- The women of Kuliya, all devotees of Śrī Gaurāṅga, were amazed to see the wonderful ecstatic symptoms exhibited by the pure Vaiṣṇavas and praised their great spiritual good fortune.

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- The moving mass of Vaiṣṇavas surged slowly forward and soon arrived at the nāṭya-maṇḍira, the kīrtana hall directly attached to the Deity altar of the Kuliyā Pāhārpura temple, where previously Śrī Gaurāṅga would perform saṅkīrtana and dance.
- The businessman devotee sponsoring the festival rushed out to meet the Vaiṣṇavas.
- He wore a piece of cloth around his neck as a sign of submission upon welcoming his honoured guests, and falling at their feet he rolled upon the ground to express his heartfelt gratitude and humility.
- The Vaiṣṇavas were then ushered into the nāṭya-maṇḍira, where they gradually settled down.

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- Immediately, a group of temple sevaites came forward to garland the Vaiṣṇavas with prasādi-mālā, previously offered Deity garlands.
- The lead singers began the Śrī Caitanya-maṅgala-gītā—sublime invocatory songs narrating the nectarous pastimes of Śrī Gaurāṅga, which further filled the hearts of the Vaiṣṇavas with divine exultation.
- However, as the Vaiṣṇavas reached the heights of ecstasy, the temple gateman came in to make an announcement to the temple authorities.
- A new group of guests, led by the chief Muslim priest, Mullah Badrud-dīn Sāhib, of Sātsāika Paraganā had just arrived unexpectedly.

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- Requesting an audience with a few Vaiṣṇava paṇḍitas, the group was waiting in the outer courtyard reception area of the temple.
- This news spread fast, arousing a murmur of disappointment at such an untimely intrusion into the exhilarating recital.
- Upon the enquiry of Śrī Kṛṣṇa dāsa Bābājī Mahāśaya of Śrī Madhyadvīpa further detail was revealed,
- “The respected Mullah Sāhib—considered the most eminent religious scholar of the entire Muslim community—desires a spiritual discussion with Vaiṣṇava scholars.
- The Mullah Sāhib though dedicated to disseminating his Muslim dharma nevertheless declares that he holds no antagonistic feelings towards other dharmas.

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- He is held in high regard even by the crown in Delhi and solicits the opportunity to have an exchange upon scriptural topics with a few Vaiṣṇavas.”
- The temple authorities humbly suggested that a number of Vaiṣṇava paṇḍitas could come forward for a śāstric discussion to display the excellence of vaiṣṇava-dharma.
- A number of Vaiṣṇavas responded quickly, realizing that a talk with the Mullah Sāhib provided a wonderful opportunity to broadcast vaiṣṇava-dharma.
- After taking counsel, they decided to send four Vaiṣṇava paṇḍitas as representatives: Gorācānda dāsa Bābājī of Śrī Māyāpura, Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī of Godruma, Prema dāsa Bābājī of Jahnu-nagara, and Kali-pāvana dāsa Bābājī of Campahaṭṭa.

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- This four should start the discussion with the Mullah Sāhib, while the other Vaiṣṇavas could also join the discussion after the completion of the Śrī Caitanya-maṅgala-gītā.
- The four selected Bābājīs arose, loudly glorifying, “Jaya Śrī Gaurāṅga! Jaya Śrī Nityānanda!” and left the assembly following the mahānta, head temple priest, for the outer courtyard, where the Mullah Sāhib with his group was waiting.
- The outer courtyard was a large area cooled by the shade of a huge peepul tree.
- When the Mullah Sāhib saw the Vaiṣṇavas approaching, he and his followers stood up as a sign of respect and graciously welcomed them.

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- Knowing that the all-pervading Supreme Lord Śrī Vāsudeva resides within the heart of all jīvas in the form of the Paramātmā and that all jīvas are the servitors of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Vaiṣṇavas reciprocated their sincere greetings and gave respect to the Paramātmā within by performing daṇḍavats before the visitors.
- They then sat down facing their respected Muslim guests.
- The scene was indeed extraordinary. On one side, fifty Muslim scholars were sitting finely attired with white flowing beards, several yards behind them their regally ornamented horses stood tethered to posts.
- Opposite them, four self-realized Vaiṣṇava saints of divine aura were sitting with placid humility as the open space behind and around filled rapidly with inquisitive local people.

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- Paṇḍita Gorācānda dāsa Bābājī spoke first, addressing the Muslim scholars with a steady voice, “O great souls, why have you summoned people as insignificant as us?”
- The famous Mullah Badrud-Dīn Sāhib humbly replied, “Salām! We wish to ask you a few questions.”
- Paṇḍita Gorācānda replied, “As far as our knowledge allows we will attempt to answer your profound enquiries.”
- The Mullah Sāhib started, “Dear brethren! History shows that Hindus have since the dawn of time worshiped many devas and devīs.
- However, we read in our sacred book, the Koran-sharīf, that Allah is one, not many. He is formless, and that to sculpt His image and then to worship such an image is a grievous sin.

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- To eradicate this doubt, I have inquired among many brāhmaṇa paṇḍitas.
- They all agree with us that Allah is nirākāra, formless, but they argue that since it is impossible to meditate upon a formless entity, so an imaginary form of Allah must be made to facilitate meditation.
- Allah should then be worshiped in that form. However, we are not satisfied with this answer.
- “The Koran states that an invented material image of Allah—we call it byūt, matter—is the work of Satan.
- Byūt-parasta, idol worship, is absolutely forbidden. Far from pleasing Allah, it rather brings down His wrath.

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- We have heard that the original propagator of your religion, Śrī Caitanya deva, has pruned out the discrepancies in the Hindu religion. Yet, He, also, supports byūt-parasta.
- Therefore, we have come to ask the Vaiṣṇavas why they have not given up byūt-parasta, despite having delved so deeply into the scriptures.”
- The Vaiṣṇava paṇḍitas were inwardly amused by the thoughts of the Mullah Sāhib.
- However, they requested Gorācānda Bābājī to reply, who quickly accepted this responsibility, “The Great One, whom you call Allah, is known to us as Bhagavān.

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- The Supreme Being is one and of the same absolute nature even though the sacred texts of the Koran and the Purāṇas have designated Him by different names according to their different languages and countries.
- Naturally, whatever nomenclature describes the Supreme Godhead in the best and most accurate manner is to be preferred.
- For this reason, we prefer the name Bhagavān to other names such as Allah, Brahman, Paramātmā, and so on.
- “Allah means the One Being who is the greatest above everyone and everything.

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- However, we do not consider that a name indicating the quality of unsurpassable greatness alone can be considered the ultimate name for the Absolute Supreme Personality since we do not consider greatness as the highest or most inclusive description of the Lord.
- Rather, we consider that the name that indicates most comprehensively the *camatkāritā*, infinite wonder and uniqueness, of the Supreme Lord's unlimited opulence should take precedence.
- “A name indicating unsurpassable greatness definitely does indicate a certain amount of this uniqueness and wonder; however, the complement to greatness, ultimate minuteness, conveys a further aspect of this uniqueness and wonder.

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- Although the name Allah indicates ultimate greatness, it does not indicate ultimate minuteness, which is a further opulence of the Lord.
- Therefore, the word Allah does not completely convey the complete camatkāritā of all the opulences of the Supreme Lord.
- In contrast, the designation Bhagavān does denote the entire camatkāritā of the opulences of the Supreme Lord.
- “Samagra aiśvarya, absolute unlimited opulence, which includes absolute magnitude and infinite minuteness plus unlimited further opulences, is only the first of the aspects of Godhead indicated by the name Bhagavān.
- “Sarva-śaktimattā, omnipotence, is the second aspect of the Lord indicated by the name Bhagavān.

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- Impossibility, referring to limitations of consciousness and activity, is not applicable to the acintya-śakti, inconceivable potency, of the Supreme Lord.
- By His acintya-śakti, the Lord is simultaneously nirākāra and sākāra, with form, and thus personal.
- To say that the Lord is exclusively nirākāra impinges upon this inconceivable omnipotence.
- Through the agency of His omnipotence, He simultaneously manifests His nirākāra manifestation as well as His sākāra manifestation, which is His eternal transcendental form as the very embodiment of His eternal pastimes.
- Allah, Brahman, and Paramātmā are generally understood and worshiped solely as nirākāra; therefore, in this light, they are surely deficient in uniqueness and mystical wonder.

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- “The third aspect that the name Bhagavān indicates is that He is eternally maṅgalamaya, all-auspicious, and yaśa-purna, all-famous; thus, His pastimes are fully nectarous.
- “The fourth aspect denoted by the term Bhagavān is unlimited saundarya, beauty.
- The devoted living entities by acquisition of spiritually purified vision can behold this beatific form of the Supreme Personality as the reservoir of all beauty.
- “The fifth aspect indicated by Bhagavān is that the Supreme Person is the embodiment of aśeṣa-jñāna, unlimited knowledge.
- This implies that He is absolutely immaculate, perfect and complete, the embodiment of transcendence, the supreme spiritual object, and materially inscrutable.

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- His beatific eternal form as the Supreme Deity is the very embodiment of consciousness, beyond, as you say, byūt, the material time and elements.
- “The sixth aspect indicated by Bhagavān is that even as the Īśvara of the entire creation, the Lord remains disentangled, aloof from everything, and fully independent by virtue of His excellence of renunciation.
- Thus, I have enunciated the six primary characteristics of Bhagavān: opulence, power, fame, beauty, knowledge, and renunciation.
- “Furthermore, the Supreme Lord, Bhagavān, has two prakāśa, manifestations: aiśvarya, opulent majesty; and mādhyurya, sweetness.

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- The mādhyama prakāśa is the Supreme Well-wisher of the living entities; He comes to His devotees as the dearest Lord of the heart, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, or as Śrī Caitanya.
- “If we consider byūt-parasta to be a term describing the improper worship of a fictitious imaginary form of the Supreme Lord then this is certainly not contrary to our Vaiṣṇava viewpoint.
- In vaiṣṇava-dharma, our practice is to worship the eternal, absolutely spiritual, fully conscious Deity form of Śrī Bhagavān.
- Therefore, the Deity worship of the Vaiṣṇavas certainly cannot be defined as byūt-parasta, satanic material idol worship.

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- The description of byūt-parasta given in certain texts is not an absolute and all encompassing law to be applied without discrimination to bona fide Deity worship of the transcendental form of the Lord.
- “Furthermore, everything depends on the intensity of faith and attachment of the worshiper.
- The freer the worshiper is from the forces of byūt, the purer and more transcendental will his Deity worship be.
- For example, you are the Mullah Sāhib; as a high priest and learned scholar, your heart is free from the influence of byūt, but can your novice disciples be characterized like that?
- Are their hearts devoid of intimate contact with byūt?
- And their level of their attachment to byūt reflects in their standard of worship and meditation.

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- They may offer lip service to the nirākāra form, but their thoughts are contaminated with the forms of byūt.
- “The pure method of worshiping the Supreme Lord’s transcendental Deity form is certainly not possible for the general populace.
- Only those qualified persons who having overcome the influence of matter are transcendently situated and can thus conceptualise spiritual form should perform Deity worship.
- I earnestly entreat you to give this subject deep thought.”
- Mullah Sāhib, “I have seriously considered your points and I can say that the six primary absolute attributes possessed by He who is called Bhagavān are likewise mentioned in our Koran-sharīf in describing Allah.

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- Therefore, let us not overly dissect and analyse the etymology of the name, Allah.
- Allah is Bhagavān, the possessor of unlimited opulence.”
- Gorācānda Bābājī, “Very good! Then you accept that the Supreme Being possesses divine beauty.
- Thus, you affirm that beyond this material creation a spiritual world exists where the Supreme Lord resides as the embodiment of beauty.
- This very form of sublime transcendental exquisiteness is the Deity that we worship.”
- Mullah Sāhib, “Our holy Koran-sharīf also states that the Supreme Being possesses an absolute spiritual body—hence there is no cause for rebuttal.

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- However, when one tries to make an image of that absolute transcendental form of Allah, or Bhagavān, the image becomes a material replica—this we call byūt.
- Worshiping byūt is not the same as worshiping the Supreme Lord. Now kindly explain your viewpoint on this subject.”
- Gorācānda Bābājī, “The Vaiṣṇava scriptures espouse the worship of the pure and transcendental Deity form of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.
- The elevated devotees are not permitted to worship material objects. The Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 10.84.13, states:

*yasyātma-buddhiḥ kuṇape tri-dhātuke
sva-dhīḥ kalatrādiṣu bhauma ijya-dhīḥ
yat-tīrtha-buddhiḥ salile na karhicij
janeṣv abhijñeṣu sa eva go-kharaḥ*

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- “One who identifies his self as the inert body composed of mucus, bile and air, who assumes his wife and family are permanently his own, who thinks that an earthen image or the land of his birth are worshipable, or who sees a place of pilgrimage as merely the water there, but who never identifies himself with, feels kinship with, worships, visits, or hears from those sādhus residing at the place of pilgrimage who are wise in spiritual truth—such a person is no better than a cow or an ass.’
- “Furthermore, in the Bhagavad-gītā, 9.25, we find:
...*bhūtāni yānti bhūtejyā*...
- “Those who worship ghosts and spirits will take birth amongst such beings.’
- “These statements clearly indicate that the worship of material objects and ghosts and spirits is strongly censured.

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- Yet, one fact must be noted: Human beings acquire varying degrees of eligibility in spiritual activities according to their level of knowledge and saṁskāra, purification.
- Therefore, the devotee who has realized śuddha-cinmaya-bhāva, pure transcendence, is alone worthy of worshiping the cinmaya, transcendental, Deity form of the Supreme Godhead.
- Accordingly, lower eligibility is indicated by the lower degrees of knowledge and purity.
- “A neophyte kaniṣṭha-adhikārī, who is at the bottom of the scale of eligibility, is unable to perceive śuddha-cinmaya-bhāva.
- If he meditates upon the Lord within his mind, the image of the Lord he construes within his consciousness being a fabricated form is clearly endowed with mundane qualities.

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- To assume Divinity in a sculpted earthly Deity form is ultimately identical to the neophyte's meditation upon an image of the Supreme Lord created within his mind from his contaminated material consciousness.
- This is not the pure form of Deity worship; nevertheless, for the neophyte such Deity worship is beneficial.
- Indeed, the absence and prohibition of such Deity worship for the general ignorant mass of people is inauspicious.
- For when spiritually neophyte people somehow become inspired to approach the Supreme Lord, if they do not find a Deity form of Him, they may feel disappointed and disconsolate.

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- “The religions which have no provision for Deity worship face the danger that those children born into the religion and those just beginning spiritual life—both of whom may have little or no understanding, or deep faith in Godhead—may become overtly materialistic and even develop aversion towards the Supreme Lord as a result of the absence of a Deity form upon which to fix their minds.
- Therefore, Deity worship is the foundation of religion for general humanity.
- “The mahājanas, highly elevated, unalloyed devotees of the Lord, perceive the beautiful spiritual form of the Supreme Lord by dint of their pure consciousness and perfect realization.
- These mahājanas constantly meditate upon and worship this sublime and transcendental form of the Lord, whom they see within their hearts saturated with prema-bhakti.

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- After long and deep meditation upon the transcendental form of the Lord, eventually the consciousness of the pure devotee extends to see the Lord's presence within all objects of even the material world.
- Out of mercy, these pure devotees delineate the transcendental divine form of the Lord both verbally and physically in the Deity form.
- Thus, on the basis of the instruction of the realized pure devotees who are forever guided from within by the Lord Himself, the Deity form—an exact replica of the spiritual form of the Lord—is portrayed externally in the material world as non-different from the transcendental Supreme Lord.
- “The self-realized *uttama-adhikārī* always perceives the Deity form as *cinmaya*, a transcendental and direct manifestation of the Lord.

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- The madhyama-adhikārī perceives the Deity form as manomaya, conscious of his prayers, worship, and devotion;
- however, his perception of the wholly transcendental nature of the Deity form is constricted by the immaturity of his spiritual consciousness.
- The prākṛta-bhakta sees the Deity form initially as jaḍamaya, material, but as his consciousness and intelligence are gradually cleansed by the awakening of prema he begins to worship the Deity form with increasingly spiritual perception and understanding.
- Thus, we see that worship of the Deity is essential and beneficial to all categories of devotees.

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- Certainly, however, worshiping an imaginary and concocted idol of Bhagavān as the Supreme Lord is forbidden in vaiṣṇava-dharma.
- “The Deity image of the actual eternal form of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is all-auspicious.
- Therefore, the Vaiṣṇava sampradāyas have recommended and established Deity worship for all the three levels of devotees: *uttama*, *madhyama*, and *kaniṣṭha*.
- There is no fault in this process and by this arrangement human beings benefit at every step, ushering in sublime sanctity.
- This is substantiated in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.14.26:

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*yathā yathātmā parimṛjyate 'sau
mat-puṇya-gāthā-śravaṇābhidhānaiḥ
tathā tathā paśyati vastu sūkṣmam
cakṣur yathaivāñjana-samprayuktam*

- “Medicated salve, collyrium, when applied to the eye, helps one see even the finest of objects.
- Similarly, when the heart of the jīva is cleansed of impurities by hearing and discussing transcendental topics about Me, he perceives the most esoteric knowledge about My original spiritual form and the purport of My pastimes.’
- “Jīvātmā is covered by material energy in the form of the material mind and senses.

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- Therefore, he is unable to understand properly his actual spiritual nature and thus serve the Paramātmā feature of the Supreme Lord.
- Nevertheless, through sādhana-bhakti, the elevating devotional process of hearing and chanting, the jīva gains spiritual strength, which concomitantly weakens the grip of material energy upon him.
- With the decrease of material influence, the original nature of the jīva comes into brighter focus and direct perception of Īśvara and activity in relationship to Īśvara become more distinct and natural.
- “Some thinkers consider that one should endeavour to realize the Absolute Truth by the process of discarding all that is not Truth.

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- This phenomenon they describe as, ‘Discarding all objectives unrelated to actual truth—the self,’ and ‘Endeavouring to realize the self.’
- Speaking this kind of word-jugglery indicates that one has adopted the impotent process of dry empirical knowledge.
- From where will the captivated jīva acquire the strength and discrimination to remove the ultimately unreal illusion that powerfully covers his very self?
- Can a prisoner confined to a cell be set free merely by desiring freedom?
- The primary purpose of imprisonment is to evoke self-improvement in the offender.

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- By nature, the jīva is an eternal servant of Bhagavān and in disregarding and thus forgetting this eternal truth he has committed a cardinal offence, thus causing his own imprisonment.
- Removal of this offence is therefore the prerequisite for his release from the material imprisonment.
- Since time immemorial, the jīva has been entangled in the birth and death, happiness and distress, of material life by the insurmountable pressure of Māyā as a result of maintaining this offence of disregard of Īśvara.
- “Nevertheless, if he somehow or other cultivates even a slight interest in the spiritual activity of devotional service to the Īśvara by regularly taking darśana of His Deity form and hearing līlā-kathā, narrations of Īśvara’s pastimes, then he can very soon perceive the transcendental form of the Deity.

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- The devotional process of hearing and chanting steadily revives his original spiritual nature, which gradually becomes firm and steady.
- The more the sādḥaka grows in purity and spirituality, the more he progresses along the path of realising his innate bhāva, true spiritual mood and identity in relationship to the Lord.
- Consequently, the sole recourse open to the absolute novice and neophyte in spiritual life is to serve the Deity with faith and to hear and chant the Deity's transcendental glories and pastimes.
- This is the prime reason why our mahājanas have established the process of devotional service to the Deity.”

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- Mullah Sahīb, “Is it not better to meditate in the mind upon the Supreme Being rather than to model a form from the inert material elements?”
- Gorācānda Bābājī, “Both are the same. The mind, albeit a subtle material element, is still a part of the mundane nature.
- The thoughts of the materially engrossed mind are always contaminated by matter; thus, every product of the mind is inert.
- For example, when we pronounce, ‘Brahman is all-pervasive,’ does this indicate that we are actually able to fathom completely this quality of Brahman’s ubiquity?

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- I think not, the conditioned mind recoils from the infinite all-pervasiveness of transcendental Brahman and grasps at the closest material comparison of our experience—the vast, yet still limited, material sky.
- Again, if an ordinary person should say, ‘I am meditating upon Brahman,’ his perception of Brahman will inevitably be limited by time and space, both mundane conditions.
- If the meditating mind cannot break the bonds of material time and space and reach beyond them, how then can it perceive transcendence?
- By rejecting a Deity formed of the gross elements such as earth or water and then creating a mental image of Īśvara, we still find that we are worshipping an image of Īśvara composed of the material elements.

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- Therefore, both these forms of worship, internal or external, involve the material elements.
- “Ultimately, no material element can act as a vehicle to bring us into contact with the transcendental platform.
- The one indispensable element is bhāva, faith and devotional feeling for the Supreme Personality of Godhead; such bhāva resides only within the spirit soul—the jīva.
- Hearing and chanting harināma and the pastimes of the Supreme Lord and worshiping His Deity form provide the jīva with the inspiration to be steady in devotional practice and thus strengthen his bhāva.
- Eventually, this practice ascends to true śuddha-bhakti. At this point, the purely spiritual form of the Supreme Godhead is revealed to the sādḥaka.

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- Therefore, through this process of pure devotional service the transcendental form of the Lord is revealed—an impossible task for the methods of karma or jñāna.”
- Mullah Sāhib, “Matter is distinct from God.
- Our tradition proclaims that Satan has introduced the worship of Deities formed of material elements just to enslave the jīva in material existence.
- In our opinion, it is better to avoid such idol worship.”
- Gorācānda Bābājī, “Īśvara is one and unsurpassable; He has no rival.
- Everything in the entire cosmic creation is created by Him and is subordinate to His will.

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- Therefore, He can be satisfied by any object when it is properly employed in His worship.
- In fact, none of the objects or persons that are other than Īśvara that a jīva may worship in forgetfulness of Īśvara can make Īśvara jealous or envious in any way for He is Bhagavān, the fully renounced, all-auspicious Supreme Benefactor and Well-wisher of everyone.
- Even if there were a Satan, then certainly he could not possess even the slightest power to act against the supreme will of Bhagavān.
- Ultimately, he could only be another jīva and subservient to the Supreme Lord.
- However, according to our Vaiṣṇava understanding such a gargantuan monster as the ‘Devil’ or ‘Satan’ does not exist.

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- Nothing can occur in this world contrary to the Lord's plan, nor is it possible for anyone to be independent of the Lord's control.
- “At this point one may pose the question, ‘If nothing is independent of the Īśvara, then how was sin created?’ This is our answer: Jīva is the servant of the Supreme Lord.
- Acknowledgement of this truth is called jñāna, or vidyā, but forgetfulness is known as avidyā, nescience.
- For whatever reasons, certain jīvas act in avidyā and thus sow the seed of sin in their hearts.
- However, the eternal associates of the Supreme Lord, the nitya-pārṣada jīvas, do not sow the seed of sin in their hearts.

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- Instead of inventing the extraordinary myth of Satan and further imagining a certain object as him, it would be more fruitful to recognize and understand the avidyā within our own hearts as the cause of our sinful activity.
- “Therefore, to worship the śrī-mūrtī of Īśvara in the material elements is not an offence.
- Actually, such worship is most essential for those of low devotional qualification and particularly auspicious for those of high spiritual eligibility.
- To consider Deity worship as unbeneficial is futile rhetoric and mere dogma—scriptural evidence and logic cannot be found to support such a view.”

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- Mullah Sāhib, “The worship of the Deity formed from matter cannot increase the spiritual perception because the mind of the worshiper remains confined thus to the properties of matter.”
- Gorācānda Bābājī, “If we study the ancient historical accounts of those who became great devotees of the transcendental Lord we can understand your proposal to be mistaken.
- It is a matter of record that many neophyte devotees began their devotional practice by worship of the Deity form.
- As they continued their Deity worship in the association of pure devotees their devotional mood gradually deepened, they increasingly realized the transcendental and conscious nature of the Deity form, and eventually they plunged deeply into the ocean of transcendental devotional love.

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- “Therefore, the unavoidable conclusion is that sat-saṅga is the root of all devotional advancement.
- The association of pure devotees intoxicated with kṛṣṇa-prema naturally awakens one’s innate affection for Śrī Hari.
- As this affection gradually increases, one progressively discards the material conception of the Deity.
- This unfolding of spiritual consciousness brings the greatest good fortune.
- In contrast, the followers of non-Āryan religions generally oppose the worship of the Deity form.
- However, how many of them have actually realized cinmaya-bhāva, the transcendental all-conscious nature of Bhagavān and His spiritual creation.

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- Instead they are spending their time in sophistry and malicious argumentation—when can they expect to experience true devotion to the Lord?”
- Mullah Sāhib, “To perform Deity worship in divine devotional consciousness may be considered living without aberration.
- However, how can the worship of dogs, cats, snakes, and even of promiscuous men be permissible and considered as a devotional process?
- Our divine prophet has especially castigated such byūt-parasta.”
- Gorācānda Bābājī, “Generally, human beings are by nature grateful to the Supreme Lord.

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- They may wallow in sinful life, yet on occasion they consider a Supreme Being as the actual ultimate controller of everything and bow down in awe to the mighty and inexplicable wonders that occur in the world.
- Thus, the ignorant and foolish—prodded by their innate gratitude to the Supreme Being—generally revere rivers, mountains, the sun, giant and powerful beasts, etc.
- They confide their inner thoughts and feelings to these objects and display surrender to them.
- Actually, cinmaya-bhakti, the divine process of devotion to the transcendent Lord, on the one hand, and this type of worship of objects and spirits, on the other, are irreconcilably different.

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- Yet, the ignorant person's acknowledgement of and grateful obeisance to the Supreme Godhead through these material objects certainly give him much pious benefit, which gradually bestows a positive spiritual effect.
- A little deliberation upon this topic will verify that these less intelligent seekers cannot be condemned.
- “Worshiping, meditating upon, and offering prayers—as the Muslims do in namāz—to the all-pervasive, formless, impersonal feature of Godhead is also bereft of pure divine love of the transcendental Supreme Person.
- Where then, ultimately, lies the distinction between such worship and the worship of, say, a cat or a mountain?

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- Our Vaiṣṇava view is that enhancing one's attachment and affection for the Supreme Lord—by whatever method—is crucial to one's eventual realization of the transcendental Absolute Truth.
- If, on the other hand, such less-enlightened seekers are simply ridiculed and repudiated this may close their portal to gradual elevation.
- “Those who become sectarian by obstinately locking themselves into dogmatic cults are soon diverted from lofty idealism, munificence, and liberality.
- They deride and rail at anyone who does not follow their particular methodology in religious practice. This is a serious aberration on their part.”

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- Mullah Sāhib, “Are you suggesting then that everything is God and that all types of worship to any object are tantamount to worshiping God?”
- Is worshiping something sinful also worshiping God? Moreover, is revering immoral proclivities equivalent to devotion to God? Is God pleased with all these things?”
- Gorācānda Bābājī, “We do not designate everything as God. Certainly, the Supreme Personality is distinct from all things—all that exists is created by God and is under His divine sovereignty.
- However, as everything is related with the Supreme Godhead, it is the natural prerogative of everyone to enquire about the presence of God in all things.

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- Repeated and sincere enquiry about the presence of the Supreme in all things will gradually bestow increasing perception of the Supreme Transcendental Person, thus leading to ultimate success according to the Vedic aphorism: ...jijñāsāsvādanāvadhī... ‘Inquiry leads to experience.’
- Therefore, even indirect enquiry about the Supreme Lord will one day result in the realization of transcendence.
- “You are all very learned theologians. If you kindly consider these points with a noble and open mind, then you will understand.
- We are poor and simple Vaiṣṇavas and are not keen on participating in lengthy debates.

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- With your permission, may we return to hear the musical narration, Śrī Caitanya-maṅgala-gītā, songs glorifying the all-auspicious pastimes of Śrī Caitanya?”
- Mullah Sāhib’s reaction regarding the discussion was not discernible from his demeanour.
- He sat placidly for a short time, then said, “I am pleased to hear your analysis and explanations. I will return another time and ask more questions. It is late now and I desire to go back to my home.”
- Mullah Sāhib walked at the head of his small group of followers to their patiently waiting horses, mounted, and rode off to Sātsāika Paraganā.

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- The Vaiṣṇavas chanted kṛṣṇa-nāma in jubilant chorus and rejoined the others, who were still engrossed in the kīrtana of Śrī Caitanya-maṅgala-gītā.

*Thus ends the eleventh chapter of Jaiva-dharma,
entitled: Nitya-dharma and Deity Worship*