

Jaiṅva Dharma

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Chapter Four

The Nitya-dharma Is
Vaiṣṇavism

The kutīra, 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 kutīra 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 Surabhī-cabutarā, for many, many years.

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.

From the doorway, Lāhirī Mahāśaya whispered a caution to Vaisnava 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.”

Śrī Vaiṣṇava dāsa Babāji 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.

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.

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.

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.” → jagat Prīṇane.

A pure devotee is always loved and revered by saints and worldly-minded people alike.

Therefore, a man must strive to become a Vaiṣṇava.”

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 Vaisnava 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.”

The śuddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma is a singular spiritual principle, but is divided into four sections according to the different rasas, devotional mellow: dāsyā, servitorship; sakhyā, friendship; vātsalyā, parenthood; and mādhuryā, 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 sarvaṁ idaṁ vijñātaṁ bhavati

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

“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.

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-kānda 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.

The Mimamsakas, materialistic philosophers and logicians, have practiced this brand of Vaiṣṇavism from time immemorial.

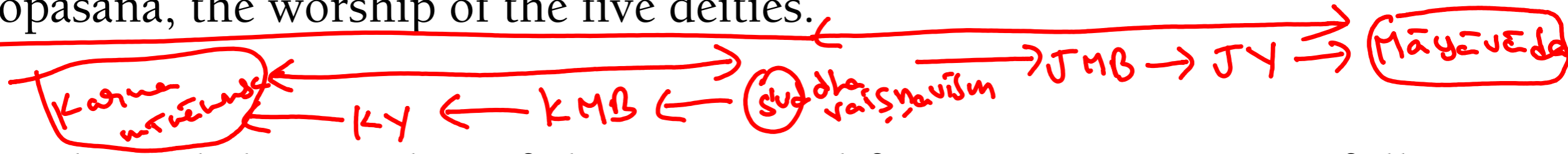
In India, such philosophers often arrogantly declare themselves Vaiṣṇavas, not acknowledging the sincere followers of śuddha-vaiṣṇava-dharma as the actual Vaiṣṇavas.

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.

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.

“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.

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.

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.’

“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.

- ① nitya dharma
- ② jaiva dharma
- ③ bhāgavata dharma
- ④ paramārtha dharma
- ⑤ parama dharma

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.

“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.

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.

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 Vaisnava theism and then initiate me into the Vaiṣṇava fold, thus purifying me.”

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.

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.

Sambandha tattva

“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.

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 ^{manifested} produced the ^{energy → eternal} material cosmos and the ^{eternal} 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.

While in Goloka Vr̥ndāvana, 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.

Asamodhva

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.