

Jaiṡa Dharma

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Chapter Five

Vaidhī-bhakti Is Nitya-
dharma not Naimittika-
dharma

Lāhirī Mahāśaya guided Devīdāsa to Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī’s cottage and, after introducing him, left him with his guru and retired to his own room, quietly sitting down to continue his chanting while the following conversation ensued.

Vaiṣṇava dāsa, “Have you concluded your education, my son?”

Devīdāsa, “I have studied up to Mukti-pāda and Siddhānta- kusumāñjali in nyāya-śāstra.”

In smṛti-śāstra I have read all the books.”

Vaiṣṇava dāsa, “I see you have worked hard in your studies of the scriptures.”

What have you learnt? What is the outcome of your efforts?”

Devīdāsa, “...atyanta-duḥkha-nivṛttir eva muktiḥ... ‘One must constantly strive for mukti.’”

I am searching for mukti through the faithful execution my prescribed religious duties.”

Vaiṣṇava dāsa, “Yes, I was like you once. I have also studied those books and sought the release of mukti.”

Devīdāsa, “Am I to presume that you have given up that endeavour?”

Vaiṣṇava dāsa, “Son, tell me, what is your concept of mukti?”

Devīdāsa: “The nyāya-śāstra espouses the existence of an eternal difference between the jīva and Brahman.”

Thus, in nyāya-śāstra it is not clear exactly how mukti, the cessation of all suffering, takes place.

However, the Vedāntic viewpoint holds that mukti is the quest for the undifferentiated Brahman.

To me this is definitely more comprehensible.”

Vaiṣṇava dāsa, “Son, I had studied thoroughly the Vedānta literature in the line of Śaṅkarācārya for a good fifteen years before I entered the sannyāsa order; wherein for a further number of years I endeavoured assiduously for mukti.

I accepted the four mahā-vākyas of Śaṅkarācārya and profoundly meditated upon their purport.

Nevertheless, finally I discarded that discipline and philosophy, having decided that it was shallow and immature.”

Devīdāsa, “What prompted your conviction?”

Vaiṣṇava dāsa, “Certainly it is not easy to describe to others the trials and tests with which one has been confronted. How will others understand?”

Devīdāsa could understand from his conversation that Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī was a profound paṇḍita, guileless and self-realized.

He had not yet studied the Vedānta and so considered that if Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī would kindly consent to teach him, then he could master the Vedānta as well.

Therefore, he said, “Sir, do you think I am an eligible candidate for studying the Vedānta?”

Vaiṣṇava dāsa, “Seeing that you have sufficient knowledge of Sanskrit, you could study Vedānta, if you find a teacher.”

Devīdāsa, “If you would kindly teach me! I am more than willing.”

Vaiṣṇava dāsa, “My present situation is that I am simply a poor servant of the Vaiṣṇavas.”

Paramahansa Premadāsa Bābājī has been very merciful to me, instructing me to always chant harināma.

Therefore I try to do his bidding and have very little other time left.

Besides, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has strictly forbidden the Vaiṣṇavas to read or hear Śaṅkarācārya's exposition upon Vedānta, the Śārīraka-bhāṣya; therefore, I do not read or teach that book.

“Śrī Caitanya, however, the original spiritual master of the entire creation, explained the Vedānta-sūtra-bhāṣya to Śrīla Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya.

This is available amongst a few Vaisnavas in the form of a hand-written manuscript—you may copy this from one of them and then study it. I may help your understanding, if I can.

In fact, you could approach Śrīmat Kavi Karṇapūra of Kāñcana-pallī village and procure a copy from him.”

Devīdāsa, “I will pursue this matter with great care.

Sir, you have vast knowledge of Vedānta, kindly tell me very plainly
if I can find the real essence of the Vedānta by studying the Vaiṣṇava
commentary?”

Vaiṣṇava dāsa, “I have studied and taught the Śaṅkara commentary.

I have also scrutinized other commentaries, including the Śrī-bhāṣya
of Śrī Rāmānujācārya.

The Gaudiya-Vaiṣṇavas study the elaborations of the aphorisms made by Śrī Caitanya and explained by Śrī Gopīnātha Ācārya.

In my experience, I have not yet come across anything superior and more exhaustive.

No further theories, annotations, or new doctrines are necessary after the elaboration given by the Supreme Lord.

The essence of all the Upaniṣads is available in these dissertations.

If someone can take the pains to compile these elaborations systematically, then no other commentaries will be so appreciated by the scholars of Vedānta.”

The words of Vaisṇava dāsa Bābājī gave Devīdāsa profound joy and he offered his prostrate obeisances.

Proceeding from there to his father’s room, he narrated everything to his father, who became jubilant, proclaiming, “Devī, you have read and heard enough, now you must search for the real purpose of life, the ultimate goal!”

Devīdāsa, “Father, I came to Godruma feeling extremely hopeful that I could bring you back with me. If you kindly come just this one time, we would be very happy. Especially, our dear mother is keen to have your darśana, sight.”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “I have accepted the shelter of the lotus feet of the Vaiṣṇavas and have taken a vow not to visit any non-Vaiṣṇava house. First, all of you should become Vaiṣṇavas, then you can take me.”

Devīdāsa, “Father, I do not understand your instructions. We worship the Lord in our house. We have never shown disrespect to harināma. We serve and care for guests and Vaiṣṇavas. Are we not Vaiṣṇavas?”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “I recognize that apparently there are no differences between your activities and those of the Vaiṣṇavas, yet you are not Vaiṣṇavas in the true sense.”

Devīdāsa, “Then please tell me what we should do to become true Vaiṣṇavas?”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “First you must denounce your materialistic mentality, your (naimittika-bhāva) attachment to temporary rituals, and embrace the values of the eternal religion, nitya-dharma. Then you are ready to become Vaiṣṇavas.”

Devīdāsa, “I have this nagging doubt, which you will kindly dissipate.”

The Vaisnava devotional activities of śravaṇam, kīrtanam, smaraṇam, pādasevanam, arcana, vandana, dāsyam, sākhyam, and ātmā-nivedanam appear to be diluted with material activities.

Then, could not these be called naimittika-karma, as well? I detect a certain bias in this matter.

Deity worship, fasting, using material things in worship, all these are part of the mundane nature, so how can they be designated as nitya, eternal?"

Lāhirī Mahāśaya, "Son, it took me a long time to grasp this point, so try to understand it properly. Human beings are of two kinds: aihika, worldly; and pāramārthika, spiritual."

Save Scriptural Affirmation.

Completely materialistic

Worldly men seek only temporal and corporal pleasures, including respect and material advancement.

↓ शुद्धि कामी

→ कृष्ण-भक्ता

Spiritual persons are of three categories: īśānugata, those surrendered to the Supreme Lord; jñāna-niṣṭha, those desiring monistic knowledge with a view to emancipation; and siddhi-kāmi, those aspiring for mystic powers.

↓ शुद्धि-कामी

↓ ज्ञान-निष्ठ

“The siddhi-kāmi are absorbed in the attempt to enjoy the fruits of karma-kāṇḍa, ritualistic performances.

They want to obtain mystic powers and thus display miracles by pressing into service different yāga, rites; yajña, sacrifices; and the system of aṣṭāṅga-yoga, eightfold yogic discipline.

They take the view that if an Īśvara, Supreme Controller, exists then He is subservient to the laws of karma.

Modern scientists belong to this group.

“The jñāna-nistha cultivate empirical monistic philosophy, endeavouring to realize their identity with Brahman.

They do not know, or hardly care, whether an Īśvara exists or not.

Nonetheless, to suit their particular practice of sādhana, they imagine that an Īśvara exists and practice bhakti towards this imaginary form.

Gradually, their endeavours are rewarded with appropriate results and at this point their imagined Īśvara is no longer useful or imperative.

Thus, this bhakti to Īśvara, they believe, is transformed at the time of enlightenment into their particular definition of jñāna, which is monistic identity with the impersonal Brahman.

This philosophy does not accept Bhagavān or bhakti to Bhagavān as being nitya.

“The īśānugata category of spiritual men comprises of those who are actually surrendered to Īśvara.

This group is truly seeking spirituality.

They believe in an eternal, unlimited, and personal Īśvara, who has created both the jīvas and the material nature by His potencies.

They understand that the jīvas are the eternal servants of Īśvara and that an eternal mood bhakti in respect to Bhagavān is the nitya-dharma of the jīva.

→ ईश्वरस्य

They appreciate that the jīva by his own minute potency alone is incapable of attaining spiritual realization.

Karma cannot offer the jīva any eternal results, and monistic jñāna simply warps and distorts the vision of the ultimate, eternal truth.

However, by the mercy of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, all spiritual perfection for the jīva is ensured when the jīva executes bhakti to Him.

“The first two categories of spiritualists are thus known as the followers of karma-kāṇḍa and jñāna-kāṇḍa, respectively.

Only members of the third category can truly be called devotees.

The first two categories claim to be true spiritualists, but in reality they are not seeking the highest goal but are worldly-minded and seeking material gain.

Thus, their religious goals and practices are all ultimately naimittika

“Those who worship Durgā-devī, Gaṇeśa, Śiva, and Sūrya are followers of the jñāna-kāṇḍa.

Their participation in the sravaṇam, kīrtanam, etc., of bhakti is done solely with the motive of obtaining mukti, which they define as the achievement of merging into the impersonal, undifferentiated Brahman.

Those amongst them, who are not desirous of bhukti or mukti, when performing śravaṇam, kirtanam, etc., are factually serving the Supreme Lord, Śrī Viṣṇu, through the medium of these different devas.

Amongst these five deities, the śrī-mūrtī, deity form, of Bhagavān Śrī Viṣṇu is eternal, absolutely spiritual, and omnipotent.

However, if one worships the śrī-mūrtī of Bhagavān Śrī Viṣṇu not accepting it to be non-different from Bhagavān Himself, then the worship is mundane and temporary.

“Dear son, the deity worship you conduct at home is not paramārthika, because you do not acknowledge that the śrī-mūrtī of Bhagavān is eternal and transcendental.

This is probative that you are not an īśānugata surrendered to Bhagavān.

I hope you have been enlightened about the difference between nitya-upāsanā, eternal deity worship, and naimittika-upāsanā, temporary ritualistic deity worship.”

Devīdāsa, “Yes! If one worships the śrī-mūrtī, but does not accept this form as eternal, such worship is material and not spiritual. Nevertheless, could this mundane, ritualistic worship not offer the worshiper clues to the other higher, spiritual truths?”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “That may be true, but still such worship cannot be designated as nitya-dharma.

In vaiṣṇava-dharma, Vaiṣṇavas worship the Lord's śrī-mūrtī as His eternal form; hence their worship is nitya-dharma.

Devīdāsa, “The śrī-mūrtī forms are sculptured by man from matter—how may one see them as absolute and eternal?”

Lāhirī Mahāśaya, “The śrī-mūrtī worship of the Vaiṣṇavas is not the same as that idea.

The Supreme Personality of Godhead is positively not the nirākāra-brahman, the formless Brahman.

He is sat, cit, ānanda, vigraha—the embodied form of eternality, absolute knowledge, and transcendental bliss, endowed with all potencies.

This is the śrī-mūrti of Vaiṣṇava worship.

At first, the form of Bhagavān appears in the spiritual consciousness of the devotee and is reflected within his mind.

The śrī-mūrti is then constructed according to this vision of the devotee, and through the potency of bhakti, Bhagavān is attracted to manifest His sac-cid-ānanda form from within the śrī-mūrti.

- ① Form appears in the SP-consciousness of the devotee
- ② Then it is reflected in his mind
- ③ Then it is constructed according to this vision.
- ④ Through the potency of bhakti, the Lord is attracted to manifest His form in the śrī-mūrti
- ⑤ When the devotee sees the śrī-mūrti of Bhagavān, then that śrī-mūrti unites with the form in his heart.

When the pure devotee sees the śrī-mūrti of Bhagavān, that śrī-mūrti unites with the transcendental form of Bhagavān that the devotee sees within his heart.

“The jñānīs’ conception of śrī-mūrti worship is not the same as that of the Vaiṣṇavas.

The jñānīs believe that the Brahman concept is fused into the material form of the deity by their imagination, and the Brahman remains in that material form as long as is needed for worship.

Later, the form is to be considered a mere material object. Ponder upon these points deeply and try to understand the differences in these approaches to deity worship.

When one, by the mercy of a genuine guru, receives initiation into the path of Vaiṣṇavism, then the different results of these contrasting forms of deity worship become understandable.”

Devīdāsa, “I have gradually become convinced that the Vaiṣṇavas are not fanatics, but are capable of rational analysis and of deeply probing the science of arcanam, deity worship.

On one hand, worshiping the śrī-mūrtī of Bhagavān as non-different from the sac-cid-ānanda form of the Lord and, on the other hand, extrapolating the concept of impersonal Brahman onto matter and then worshiping the deity are certainly opposing processes.

Superficially, the rituals and performances may appear to be the same,
however there is a great distinction in the faith and conceptions of the
worshippers.

Father, you have removed a major doubt in my mind, and I will contemplate
these subjects seriously.

I am now convinced that the jñānīs mode of the deity worship is ultimately a
form of deception and a denial of the eternal form of Śrī Bhagavān.

All is well for now—I will continue our discussion later and pray at your feet
for more answers.”