

# Jaiva Dharma

Division One: “The Fundamentals of Nitya and Naimittika Dharma”

## Synopsis

As the division title states, the primary topic pertains to Nitya (eternal) and Naimittika (temporary) dharmas. The first question proposed, pertains to the term “dharma.” There are countless people in this world who give as many definitions to the meaning of this word, yet few are accurate and in concordance with Vedic authority. Even Vedic evidences, when analyzed can create confusion and doubt in the minds and intelligence of those who seek a clear understanding. So, what to do?

Therefore, one must approach a qualified guru (*sad-guru*) who can impart true knowledge on this important existential subject. This method of approaching the truth is established in the Veda sastra itself. Especially famous is the Bhagavad Gita verse 4.34, tad vidhi pranipatena... which directs the materially conditioned soul to seek truth from someone who has directly seen the truth (*tattva-darshi*).

The lead characters in Jaiva Dharma’s opening two chapters are Sri Prema das babaji Mahashaya. Who is a senior resident Vaisnava of Sri Godrumadvipa, and Sri Sannyasi Thakura, a Sankarite sannyasi who has travelled to Sri Navadvipa Dhama from Varanasi in search of such a qualified guru as Babaji Maharaja. From the outset it should be noted that these characters are factual and not fictitious (as some may claim) and the scenes are set around the turn of the 17th century (1600 A.D.) within the span of one hundred to one hundred fifty years after the setting sun of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu’s Bhauma-lila (1486 – 1534 A.D.).

Sannyasi Thakura’s journey, up to the point of meeting Babaji Maharaj, is preceded by an event which sparked the onset of his devotional quest. That incident which occurred in Varanasi, involved his beholding a *premi-bhakta* who was exhibiting ecstatic *sattvika-vikaras* (symptoms of *premabhakti*) as Sannyasi Thakura observed him from nearby. Due to his current status as a high-ranking sannyasi of the Sankara school, he held back from approaching the Vaisnava for fear of being criticized by other high-caste individuals. To his great regret, although he later embarked on a search for that Vaisnava, Sannyasi Thakura lost further opportunity to connect with that *premi-bhakta* who had made such a profoundly deep impression upon him.

After Prema das Babji and Sannyasi Thakura get acquainted and establish their relationship of deep mutual respect, Babaji Maharaja introduces Sannyasi Thakura to his own Gurudev, Sri Pradyumna Brahmachari (aka Sri Narshimhananda Brahmachari, an eternal associate of Sri Gauranga) at Devapalli where he resides near the Southwestern edge of Navadvipa. Through his own observations of Babaji’s interactions with Brahmachari Thakura, Sannyasi Thakura learns the appropriate ways of interaction with one’s spiritual master. He decides to adopt the behaviours he observes as the *sad-achara* (method of conduct) into his own relationship with Babaji, without duplicity.

Once the relationship between Babaji and Sannyasi Thakura becomes established as guru and sisya, the real business of relevant spiritual inquiry begins with timeless questions regarding “dharma.” The answers Babaji gives form the basis of the first and second chapters.

It is important to note how the conceptions surrounding *nitya-dharma* and *naimittika-dharma* are applied and the order in which they are presented, chapter by chapter. As far as possible, it is helpful to maintain a sense of this. Also, it can be observed how the various characters who are newcomers to bhakti make progress on their paths. The way their inquiries develop, the manner in which they respond to situations, the nature of their inner reflections and the developing intimacy in their relationships with their gurus, all indicate their internal growth and is remarkable for the reader to behold. These trends continue throughout the entire book.

The focus on *guru/sisya* relationships in the first four chapters move from Prema das Babaji and Sannyasi Thakura in chapters one and two, to Sannyasi Thakura (who becomes “Vaisnava das Babaji”) and Kalidas Lahiri who becomes Vaisnava das Babaji’s *siksa* disciple. Their interactions continue prominently to the end of Chapter Four.

In Chapter Five, Lahiri’s son and nephew come from Santipura (Lahiri’s home town) to try to convince him to return home. Lahiri’s son Devidasa Vidyaratna enters into a deep discussion, raising a number of doubts with his father regarding Vaisnava dharma. Devidasa is then introduced to Vaisnava das Babaji who assists in clearing Devidasa’s misunderstandings about *tattva*. Just as Devidasa is on the threshold of acquiring some sprout of faith in Vaisnava dharma, a group of Muslims headed by the local Kazi Sahib unexpectedly appear in the *kunja* and are warmly received by the Vaisnavas, due to their descendant relationships with the Chand Kazi and the fact of their being pure devotees of Sri Gaurangadeva, whom they declare, is their life and soul. Being steeped in caste consciousness, Devidasa is shocked and appalled by how respectfully the Vaisnavas receive this group of Muslims and exchange so deeply with them about theological concepts. The next day, he decides to gather a group of learned Hindu pandits to launch a debate with the Vaisnavas in hopes of defeating their excessively liberal views and shaming their social conduct with these outcastes which the pandits regard as heretical and a threat to brahminical culture. The ensuing debate constitutes the drama which unfolds in chapter six.

In Chapter Six, the debate between Vaisnava das Babaji and Krsna Chudamani is witnessed by one hundred Hindu pandits, two hundred Vaisnavas and a large group of curious people. The challenge put forth by Chudamani is that the Vaisnavas cozy conduct with outcaste persons is against Hindu dharma and has no basis in *sastra*. Vaisnava das Babaji shines a bright light on this subject, using a wide range of Vedic evidences to support the eligibility of all souls to acquire bhakti. Bhakti is the *paramartha* (highest acquirement) which elevates people from any birth or background, to attain a level of consciousness and character superior to even that of *brahmanas* who do not possess bhakti for Bhagavan. Such elevated persons are honoured as the most noble associates by all pure Vaisnavas. Vaisnava das establishes the differences between *vyavaharika* (pertaining to karma) and *paramarthika* (pertaining to the Absolute Truth) considerations throughout the discussion. In the end, the *brahmanas* leave the assembly defeated and dejected.

Chapter Seven describes events in the lives of a husband and wife couple (Chandi das and Damayanti) who are retired goldsmiths from Saptagrama. Their lives are beset with misfortune when their adult children and their spouses turn against them, steal their life savings and exile them from their own

homes, preventing them from ever returning for fear of their very lives. Together, they travel to Navadvip where they meet pure Vaisnavas and begin their spiritual lives in earnest. The tragic outcome of their many years of personal sacrifice perpetuates a form of personal grief which impels their inquiry into the purpose of material life and the means to gain relief from its inherent suffering. They discover that association with pure Vaisnavas gives not only freedom from suffering, but awards positive spiritual emancipation as well.

Chapter Eight takes place at Sri Gora-hrada next to a great Banyan tree which had been a favourite sitting place of Sri Nityananda Prabhu many years before. The Vaisnavas from Godruma had been invited for prasadam there and were also joined by Vaisnavas from Baragachi. After singing a sweet *kirtan* together, one of the younger Vaisnavas from Baragachi asks a question regarding Vaisnava conduct. The question, it was decided, would be answered by the elderly Haridas Babaji who had received the *darshan* of Sri Nityananda Prabhu in his youth and whose association had delivered countless souls throughout his life. Haridas Babaji then elucidates on human religious principles, which then evolves into the subject of *vaisnava-adhikara*, describing in detail the characteristics of *kanistha*, *madhyama* and *uttama adhikaris*. This chapter is filled with important concepts and instructions relevant to all who aspire to progress on the *bhakti-marg* (path of bhakti).

Chapter Nine again takes place in Sri Godruma at Pradyumna-kunja where Lahiri Mahasaya receives the new name, "Advaita das" from Prema das Babaji Mahashaya, his *paramaguru*. Shortly thereafter, Advaita prabhu is unexpectedly visited by an old childhood friend named Digambara Chattopadhyaya who had spent most of his adult life in the service of the Muslim government of the time. He was a scholar of Farsi and Arabic literatures and was also learned in the various Tantra Sastras. While at first, Advaita welcomes his childhood friend, having not seen him in many years, he quickly realizes that Digambara is a first class fool in his views on human nature and civilization. Digambara is overly proud of his "cultural" education and condescends to Advaita prabhu as he attempts to discredit Vaisnava dharma as useless while promoting material advancement and objectives as being the goal for humanity and possessing the highest virtues. Advaita masterfully exposes the cheating aspects of modern thinking and defines the noblest objectives of human society and cultural pursuit in the context of divine service to God. In the end Advaita prabhu can't wait to get rid of this annoying fellow.

It is interesting to note how Vaisnavas often encounter similar personal challenges soon after an event in their lives marking the special mercy of *sri guru*.

Chapter Ten begins similar to Chapter Six as a small group of caste-conscious *brahmanas* seek to expose as false, the Vaisnava dharma as taught by Sri Caitanyadeva. They regard His teachings as a new invention, wrongly promoted as eternal. A discussion is first initiated by one Harihara Bhattacharya who was raised as a "Vaisnava," then is handed over to his friend Chaturbhuja Nyayaratna who is a scholar of Nyaya-sastra (material logic and empirical analysis). As they both reflect on the recent crusade of a local proponent of Pancopasana, worship of 5 deities (Surya, Ganesha, Durga, Siva and Visnu) and his efforts to discredit Gaudiya Vaisnava theology, they decide to mount a similar campaign of their own. Although the Godruma Vaisnavas, headed by Sri Prema das Babaji are reluctant to become embroiled in another debate, it is decided that the mood of inquiry is less confrontational than the previous one. Thus Vaisnava das Babaji is selected by his guru to answer the questions posed by the "pandits." Essentially, the inquiries revolve around the fundamental doubt regarding the Vaisnavism practiced and propagated

by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, as compared to the so-called “Vaisnavism” known as Pancopasana (which amounts to little more than *mayavada*). Vaisnava das thoroughly explains the difference between the two versions and quotes many *slokas* from the Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas to substantiate his premise that the Vaisnavism as promoted by Sriman Mahaprabhu is in fact eternal and founded on Vedic truth. Moreover, Mahaprabhu has pointed out that rather than mere acquirement of *brahma-jnana*, *sri-krsna-bhajan* is the highest attainment for the *jivas*, especially in the form of *prema-rasa* as brought about by the chanting of *sri-nama-sankirtana*. Harihara goes on to accuse the Vaisnavas of rejecting Sankaracarya who is widely accepted throughout India as a great authority in Vedic knowledge. Vaisnava das clarifies by describing how Mahaprabhu accepted Sankaracarya as the one who returned India’s populace back to Vedic culture from the grip of Buddhism by bringing the atheistic class back to the Vedas. He only rejected the resulting *mayavada* understanding which followed and which attempts to place Sri Bhagavan as subordinate to the material energy. Vaisnava das then goes on to sensitively explain why most modern *brahmanas* who do not accept the supremacy of Bhagavan are not pandits at all, whereas great *brahmana* pandits like Madhva, Ramanuja, Nimbadiya, Prahlad and countless others do. Other concerns were also addressed such as why Vaisnavas don’t take the *prasadam* of the *devatas*, among other apparent contradictions. Finally, Nyayaratna and Harihara conclude that the Vaisnavas’ scholarship is unparalleled and that Nimai Pandit’s revelations cannot be compared anywhere in India. Thus the discussion ends victoriously for all.

Chapter Eleven concerns the topic of idolatry and is a favourite Division One chapter of many devotees. A joyous festival of *harikatha* is somewhat infringed upon by the unexpected visit of a well-known and highly respected Muslim scholar (*Mullah Badrud-Din Sahib*) from *Satsaika Paragana* and his many associates, all arriving on the backs of majestic stallions. The Mullah is highly respected by the Emperor of Dehli. While being ever-devoted to promoting his own religion, the Mullah’s temperament is portrayed as being not in the least inimical or belligerent towards other faiths. An assembly is convened to discuss interfaith theology, as the Mullah has some questions he wishes to pose to the Vaisnavas of Navadvip. The scene is impressive to behold, as described by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura. Sri Gorachandra das Pandit Babaji of Sri Mayapur is chosen to address the Mullah’s inquiry. The Mullah asks many questions regarding the worship of idols. He states that *Paigambar Sahib* (Mohammed) forbids such worship, defining it as worship of dead matter, *bhut-parasht*. He explains that the *Qu’ran Sharif* describes the Supreme Being as all-conscious and transcendental to matter. Therefore, to attribute matter to *Khoda* (God) is offensive and only arouses His wrath. Gorachandra beautifully explains how worship of matter is also not part of the Vaisnava doctrine, and that worship of the all-conscious form of the Deity is not idolatry. He describes the profound science of worshipping the Deity to Mullah Sahib in a very illuminating way and which gleans his respect. Gorachandra Babaji also suggests to the Mullah that God does not become angered when *jivas* who are ignorant of transcendental reality become inspired with reverential awe upon beholding the many wondrous creatures and things of this world, and that rendering submission to His energies eventually produces a positive effect within such people. He humbly advises that condemnation of anyone’s method of worshipping God is dogmatic, sectarian and will only harm one’s own spiritual progress. In the end the Mullah appears appreciative as he and his party depart for home. As the Vaisnavas returned to their bhajan, they were unclear as to what conclusion the Mullah had come to.

The Twelfth and final chapter of Division One introduces us to Vrajanatha Bhattacharya, a young *brahmana* gentleman from Simuliya, a village located just North of Sri Mayapura. As a youthful student

of the *nyaya-sastra*, he has become an exceedingly well-known scholar around *Navadvip-mandala* and had earned the title "*Nyaya-pancanana*." His scholarship is such that he defeats all other scholars. One of those defeated pandits becomes so threatened by Vrajanath's erudition that he resolves to kill Vrajanatha by using occult knowledge from the *tantra-sastras*. Evoking the presence of Goddess Kali, he begs for the death of Vrajanatha. The goddess assures him that "Vrajanatha will not discuss the *nyaya-sastra* for long." Thus the pandit is satisfied. Meanwhile, Vrajanatha hears about the topmost scholarship of Nimai Pandit who was the best *Nyaya* scholar of His time. While he at first has the spirit of challenging Nimai Pandit's scholarship, Vrajanatha develops a curiosity into Nimai Pandit's literary legacy and begins searching for any writings authored by Him. Gradually, Vrajanatha's fervent investigation into Nimai Pandit turns into obsession as he begins to appreciate Sri Gaura-Hari less so as a scholar and more so as a devotee. His search eventually leads him to the Vaisnava community of Sri Mayapura where he meets Sri Raghunatha das Babaji, the distinguished *sanga* leader and seniormost Vaisnava of *Srivasangan*, the holy tirtha and eternal home of Srivas Thakur. Without delay, Vrajanatha submits himself to Babaji Mahasaya and makes serious inquiries into the Absolute Truth. Babaji resolves many of Vrajanatha's doubts and establishes his faith in the superior knowledge Babaji possesses, compared to the *Nyaya* he has espoused until now. The stage is set for Vrajanatha to advance towards spiritual perfection under the tutelage of Raghunatha das Babaji. Thus, we are brought to the close of Division One and arrive at the threshold of Division Two: "The Fundamentals of Sambandha, Abhideya and Prayojana." There, Vrajanatha will learn all about Nimai Pandita's real teachings.