

NITYA-DHARMA

Our Eternal Nature

śrī śrī guru-gaurāṅgau jayataḥ

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Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Gosvāmī Mahārāja



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Preface

The opening of Gauḍīya Saṅga's Śrī Indraprastha Gauḍīya Maṭha, Delhi, on 30 January 1964, was attended by many great spiritual preceptors, such as Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Mahārāja (Śrīla Prabhupāda), who spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness throughout the world, Śrīla Bhakti Sāraṅga Gosvāmī Mahārāja, the founder of Gauḍīya Saṅga, and Śrīla Bhakti Saurabha Bhaktisāra Mahārāja. In the realm of spiritual relationships, they are the affectionate uncles of Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Gosvāmī Mahārāja and they requested him to address the assembly. He then delivered the following timeless discourse in which he succinctly and scientifically explained the eternal nature and function of the soul, our temporary and acquired nature, the supreme goal of all living entities and the process to attain that goal. Referencing quotes from the Vedas and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, the most exalted of India's ancient sacred texts, he extracted from them the essence of knowledge for the benefit of all.

This lecture was spoken in Hindi and first published in the Hindi magazine *Śrī Bhagavat-patrikā* (Year 9, Issue 9) under the title *Nitya-dharma*. It was later translated into English for *Rays of The Harmonist* (Issue 12, Gaura-pūrṇimā, 2003). Now, this article has been carefully adapted to facilitate readers who are new to Sanskrit terminology and to the tenets of pure Vaiṣṇavism.

It is the heartfelt prayer of the publishers that this book will inspire those sincere souls who are yearning for knowledge of absolute truth.

The PublishingTeam

Simple Sanskrit Pronunciation Guide

Sanskrit pronunciation: a like u in cup, ā like a in father, ī like ea in neat, u like oo in book, ū like oo in root, c like ch in chap, ṇ like ng in hung, ṛ like ri in rip, ś like sh in shy and ṣ like sh in rushed.



nitya-līlā-praviṣṭa om viṣṇupāda
ŚRĪ ŚRĪMAD BHAKTIVEDĀNTA NĀRĀYAṆA GOŚVĀMĪ MAHĀRĀJA



nitya-līlā-praviṣṭa om viṣṇupāda
ŚRĪ ŚRĪMAD BHAKTIVEDĀNTA VĀMANA GOSVĀMĪ MAHĀRĀJA



nitya-līlā-praviṣṭa om viṣṇupāda
ŚRĪ ŚRĪMAD BHAKTIVEDĀNTA SVĀMĪ MAHĀRĀJA



nitya-līlā-praviṣṭa om viṣṇupāda
ŚRĪ ŚRĪMAD BHAKTI PRAJÑĀNA KEŚAVA GOSVĀMĪ MAHĀRĀJA



nitya-līlā-praviṣṭa om viṣṇupāda
ŚRĪ ŚRĪMAD BHAKTISIDDHĀNTA SARASVATĪ ṬHĀKURA PRABHUPĀDA



nitya-līlā-praviṣṭa om viṣṇupāda
SACCIDĀNANDA ŚRĪLA BHAKTIVINODA ṬHĀKURA

The Opening of Śrī Indraprastha Gauḍīya Maṭha,
Delhi (1964)



Standing to the left, speaking this lecture – Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Gosvāmī Mahārāja.

Sitting, from left to right – Śrī Śrīmad Bhakti Saurabha Bhaktisāra Mahārāja, Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Mahārāja and Śrī Śrīmad Bhakti Sāraṅga Gosvāmī Mahārāja.

NITYA-DHARMA

Our Eternal Nature

The Story of Indra and Virocana

The Sanskrit words *nitya-dharma* (inherent spiritual function, or eternal occupation) automatically and unavoidably presuppose that there is a performer of that eternal function. This is due to the inseparable connection between religion and the practitioner of religion. The example is given of the inseparable relationship between water and liquidity or between fire and warmth.

Before considering the inborn religion, or inherent occupational function (*dharma*¹) of any entity, it is essential to first reflect on the fundamental truth of that entity. Thus, first we consider the truth regarding “I”.

The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* narrates the history of Indra and Virocana by which this fundamental principle of the soul can easily be understood.

¹ *Dharma* is the inherent natural function and characteristic of a thing or an entity. It is that which cannot be separated from its nature eternally.

Millions of years ago, at the beginning of the golden age (Satya-yuga), the entire universe was divided into two camps: the demigods and the demons. The head of the demon party was King Virocana, and the leader of the demigods was Lord Indra. They rivalled for the attainment of unparalleled happiness and enjoyment. Thus, bearing envy and spite toward each other, they approached the father of the universe, Lord Brahmā, and asked him how they could fulfil their desires.

Lord Brahmā said, “One can easily attain the enjoyment available in all the worlds and can satisfy one’s every desire when one knows the soul. That soul is free from sin, old age, death, lamentation, hunger and desire, and his every endeavour and resolve is truthful and just.”

With the aim of realizing the soul, both Indra and Virocana resided with Brahmā and practised celibacy for thirty-two years. They then prayed to Lord Brahmā to tell them about the soul. Lord Brahmā said, “That person (self) you are now seeing with your eyes is the soul, and he is fearless and immortal.”

They enquired further, “Is the soul that person (self) seen in water or in a mirror?”

Lord Brahmā told them to look into separate clay pots filled with water, and then asked them, “What do you see?”

Upon seeing their reflections in the water they said, “O Lord, we see the whole soul just as it is, from the hair on his head down to his toenails.”

Lord Brahmā then asked them to cut their nails and hair,² clean themselves and decorate themselves with ornaments. He again requested them to look into the clay pots. “Now what do you see?”

² Since they had not done so for thirty-two years.

“We see that the two persons in these reflections have also been cleaned and decorated in very beautiful clothes and ornaments, just as we have; and thus they resemble us perfectly.”

Lord Brahmā said, “This is the soul and he is fearless and immortal.”

Hearing this, Indra and Virocana departed with satisfied hearts.

Upon reaching the abode of the demons, Virocana, who now understood the body to be the soul and the object of worship and service, declared: “O demons, he who worships his body as the soul attains this world as well as the upper planets. All his desires are fulfilled and he attains full enjoyment.”

Indra, however, deliberated upon Lord Brahmā’s words, on his journey home: “This body takes birth, dies, undergoes transformations and is subject to disease and so forth. How, then, can this be the immortal soul, who is without birth, death, grief and fear?”

Although halfway home, Indra now returned to Lord Brahmā and expressed his doubt to him. Lord Brahmā had Indra live in celibacy for another thirty-two years and then said to him, “That person who is understood to be ‘I’ within a dream is the soul, and he is fearless and immortal.”

Hearing this, Indra left with a peaceful heart, but upon his journey home he again began to reflect, “When someone is awake, his body may be blind, yet in a dream his body will not be blind. Someone’s body may be diseased, yet in a dream that person may remain free from disease. But suppose that within a dream, the person identified with as the self is beaten or killed. He still fears

and cries, but upon awakening, that 'self' ceases to exist. Thus, the form seen in a dream cannot in fact be the soul."

Thinking like this, Indra returned to Lord Brahmā. After having him practise celibacy for another thirty-two years, Lord Brahmā instructed him as follows: "The soul lies in the state of deep sleep, which is devoid of any capacity to perceive or even to experience dreaming."

But as before, Indra began to contemplate Lord Brahmā's words on his way home.

"In the condition of deep sleep," he thought, "there is no understanding of who one is, nor is anyone else being perceived. This condition is therefore a type of annihilation."

Thinking in this way, Indra returned to Lord Brahmā once again. This time, after five years of celibacy, Lord Brahmā instructed him anew.

"Indra, the physical body, which is naturally subject to death, is only the abode of the soul. The soul is connected to the body, just as a horse or bull remains harnessed to a cart. In reality it is the person who has desires, such as 'I shall look,' who is the soul. For this task, there are senses, like the eyes. He who desires 'I shall speak' is the soul, and for the act of speaking there is the tongue. He who wills 'I shall hear' is the soul, and for the act of hearing, there are ears. He who desires to think is the soul, and the mind carries out that act of thinking."



From this true history, it is clear that the soul has three abodes, just as a peanut has three elements (the shell, the skin and the nut itself).

The soul's abodes are

- The gross body, consisting of five mundane elements (air, fire, earth, water and ether).
- The subtle body (mind, intelligence and false ego), which possesses a semblance of consciousness.
- The pure body of the soul. [This pure spiritual body is composed of the three spiritual potencies, *sat-cit-ānanda*, namely pure eternal existence (*sat*), full cognizance (*cit*) and complete spiritual bliss (*ānanda*).]

Each of these bodies has its own separate function, or *dharma*. Both the gross and subtle bodies are impermanent, and thus their respective functions are also temporary. The soul, however, is eternal and everlasting. This is the established doctrine in India's ancient scriptures – the Vedas, Vedāntas, Upaniṣads and Purāṇas.³ Therefore, the function of the soul is indeed its eternal function, or everlasting religion. It is also called Vedic *dharma*, or *bhagavat-dharma*.

³ The word *veda* means 'knowledge', and the Vedas, written in Sanskrit more than five thousand years ago, comprise the entire body of all material and spiritual knowledge. Vedānta is the final conclusion of Vedic knowledge, the Upaniṣads are the last portion of the Vedas, and the Purāṇic literatures are supplementary to the Vedas. The essence of all Vedic knowledge pertains to the ultimate eternal identity of the individual soul. This knowledge has been kept in tact by its safe passage through time via an unbroken disciplic lineage beginning with Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself.

The Soul's True and Acquired Natures

The Sanskrit word *dharma* should be understood in this connection. It is formed from the root syllable *dhṛ*, which is synonymous with *dhāraṇa*, meaning 'to retain' or 'to possess'. *Dharma* thus means 'that which is retained', or in other words, 'the nature associated with an entity'. The nature or quality that a being permanently retains is that being's eternal nature. When, by the desire of the Lord, any entity is created, then that entity's true nature is concomitantly created.

This nature, or quality, indeed is that entity's eternal nature (*nitya-dharma*). Later, either incidentally or because of a connection with another object, if any transformation or distortion takes place in that entity, then that entity's eternal nature also becomes transformed, or distorted. This distorted, or converted, nature gradually becomes steady, and it appears to be eternal like his original nature. Yet this converted nature is not that entity's actual nature. This nature is called *nisarga*, his acquired nature, and it is temporary.

This acquired nature takes prominence over a person's true nature and begins to assert its own identity as the 'real' nature. Water is a substance whose inherent nature is fluidity; but under certain circumstances, water solidifies into ice. At that time, its nature, fluidity, also transforms and becomes hardness. Here, this quality of hardness has become the distorted nature of the water and it now acts in place of the water's true nature of fluidity.

This distorted nature, however, is never permanent but has come about by some cause, or force. Consequently, when this cause is removed, that acquired nature is also automatically removed and the true nature manifests once more, just as ice melts and again becomes liquid when placed near heat.

The Nature of the Infinitesimal Soul

To properly understand this subject (of the true and acquired nature in relation to the soul), it is essential to understand the fundamental truth of the soul and its eternal nature. By this knowledge, one can very easily understand the eternal and temporary function of the living entity.

The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa – the creator, maintainer and annihilator of the universe, the origin of all, the primeval Lord and the cause of all causes – is the undifferentiated Absolute Truth. He is not just formless, or devoid of features. This is only His partial manifestation. In reality He possesses a transcendental personal form. He is the inconceivable possessor of all power, and He is endowed with six opulences: all beauty, all fame, all wealth, all strength, all knowledge and all renunciation.

By the influence of His inconceivable potency, which makes the impossible possible, the Supreme Absolute Entity, Lord Kṛṣṇa, manifests in four aspects:

- as His original, personal form
- as His personal splendour, including His abode and His eternal associates, expansions and incarnations
- as the individual spirit souls
- as the material energy.

To help us understand this, these four aspects can be compared to, respectively,

- the interior of the sun planet
- the surface of the sun globe
- the atomic particles within the sun's rays
- the remote reflection of the sun.

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī states that if we compare Kṛṣṇa, the complete conscious entity, to the sun, then the individual spirit souls may be compared to the localized particles of light in the sun's rays.

[The rays of the sun are not independent of the sun planet, nor can a ray alone be the sun. Rather, it is part of the sun. In the same way, the infinitesimal spiritual conscious souls, who are compared to the atomic particles of light in the rays of the sun, cannot be independent from God, as they are part of Him. Nor can one soul be addressed as God, but rather as an infinitesimal part and parcel of Him.]

The description of the individual soul's eternal identity is found in *Bhagavad-gītā* (15.7):

The eternal individual souls in this material world are certainly My separated parts and parcels.

It is also found in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2.1.20):

Innumerable souls emanate from the Supreme Being,
just as tiny sparks emanate from a fire.

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (5.9) states:

One should know that the soul is the size of one ten-thousandth of the tip of a hair.

It is also found in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (*Madhya-līlā*, 20.108–9):

The living entity is the marginal energy of the Lord, and a manifestation simultaneously one with and different from the Lord, like a molecular particle of sunshine or fire.⁴

God is the possessor of all potencies. These quotes confirm that the soul is a separated part, the result of the transformation of His marginal potency.

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (6.8) states:

A single, supreme potency of God manifests as numerous potencies, of which three are prominent:

- the internal potency (*cit-śakti*), which manifests His transcendental pastimes
- the marginal potency (*taṭasthā-śakti*), which manifests unlimited infinitesimal souls

⁴ Translation by Śrīla A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, copyright Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

- the external potency (*bahiraṅgā-śakti*, or *māyā-śakti*), which manifests the illusory and temporary material universes.

By the Lord's desire, the marginal potency of God, which is situated between the internal spiritual potency and the external material potency, manifests innumerable insignificant, atomic conscious souls. These souls are spiritual by nature and are capable of wandering throughout the spiritual or material worlds. For this reason, this potency is known as the marginal potency, and the souls manifesting from this potency possess a marginal nature.

The Relationship between God and the Living Entity

There is an aphorism from *Vedānta-sūtra* that says, “Kṛṣṇa (God) and His potency are non-different from each other.” Therefore, Kṛṣṇa and the transformation of His potency, the living entities, are also non-different from each other. But this oneness is only from the perspective of their being equal as spiritually conscious beings.

Kṛṣṇa is the complete conscious being and the master of *māyā*, or the deluding material energy. The living entities, however, are atomically conscious. Although pure, because of their marginal nature, the living entities are capable of becoming subject to

māyā. Kṛṣṇa is the possessor of all power and the living entities are devoid of power. Thus there is an eternal difference between God and the living entities.

This difference and non-difference is beyond the scope of human intelligence and therefore, from the philosophical perspective, is known as the doctrine of inconceivable difference and non-difference⁵. Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the original Personality of Godhead, took the contextual doctrines of the Vedas by the previous Vaiṣṇava preceptors such as Śrī Rāmānuja Ācārya, Śrī Madhvācārya, Śrī Viṣṇusvāmī and Śrī Nimbāditya Ācārya and by completely harmonizing them, He revealed their synthesis: the doctrine of inconceivable difference and non-difference, which is the universal, absolute understanding of the Vedas.

God is the source of all expansions, and the living entities are His separated parts and parcels. God is the attractor and the living entities are the attracted. Kṛṣṇa is the object of service and the living entities are the performers of that loving service. Loving devotional service to the completely conscious being, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is the real nature, or *dharma*, of the atomic conscious living entities.

This service is indeed the religion of unalloyed love for God and thus is the eternal nature (*nitya-dharma*) of all living entities. “The constitutional nature of the living entity is to be an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa” (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, *Madhya-līlā* 20.108).

But if that living entity, whose nature is marginal and who is atomically conscious, becomes adverse to the service of God, then God’s deluding material potency (*māyā*) covers that living

⁵ *Acintya-bhedābheda-tattva*.

entity's pure atomic, conscious nature with the subtle and gross material bodies. This *māyā* thus causes these living entities to habitually wander throughout the eight million, four hundred-thousand species of life.

When the souls are reinstated in their service to God, they are released from their bodies imposed by the deluding material potency. As long as the soul fails in his inclination to serve God, he will continue to be scorched by the threefold miseries. [These are caused by (1) our own mind and body, (2) other living entities and (3) the material nature and demigods.]

At this time the living entity's pure spiritual form is covered by the curtains of material illusion, and his eternal nature is also transformed, or becomes perverted. This perverted nature is the living entity's occasional function, just as water becomes solid when transformed into ice. This casual occupation, or temporary religion, of the living entity manifests in many ways according to the time, place and recipient.

Divisions of Religion

All the varieties of *dharma* (occupational religious duty) prevalent in this world can generally be divided into three categories:

- impermanent religion, which does not accept the existence of the Lord and the eternality of the soul

- circumstantial religion, which accepts the eternality of the Lord and the living entities but only prescribes temporary means to attain the Lord's mercy
- eternal religion (*nitya-dharma*), in which one endeavours to serve God by the means of pure love and devotion.

Eternal religion, although known differently according to country, race or language, is one, and it is the sole supreme, absolute function of every living entity.⁶

The religion prevalent as *vaiṣṇava-dharma* alone is the eternal and highest ideal of supreme religion. In the performance of circumstantial religious duties, there is no direct spiritual cultivation, or execution, of eternal religion. Rather, it aims at it indirectly; thus it has partial utility only.

And those processes that comprise impermanent religiosity are devoid of the eternal occupation of the soul and are even likened to the function of animals. They are fit to be rejected.

Human beings are equal to animals in the matter of eating, sleeping, fearing and mating. Yet the quality of being religious is unique to human beings. Without spiritual life, humans are no better than animals.

Hitopadeśa (25)

That religion in which the nature of the self (the soul) is not cultivated; in which endeavours are made to increase eating,

⁶ *Dharma* is only one, not two or many. The living entities have only one *dharma* [true religion], and it is known as *vaiṣṇava-dharma*. Differences of language, country, or race cannot create differences in *dharma*... People may give it different names, but they cannot create a different constitutional function. *Jaiva-dharma* [the nature of the soul] is the unadulterated spiritual love that the infinitesimal entity has for the Infinite Entity. [from Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Jaiva-dharma*, Chapter 2]

sleeping, mating and defending; and in which enhancing one's enjoyment of temporary sense objects is supported as the ultimate objective of human life, is like the occupational function of animals. By this, it is in fact completely impossible to fulfil the goal of human life, which is to escape all sorrow and attain pure happiness. Therefore, it has been stated in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.3.18):

All men in this world are inclined to perform material activities for the purpose of becoming liberated from sorrow and attaining happiness. But the opposite results are seen. In other words, neither sorrow is dispelled nor is happiness attained.

For this reason the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.9.29) gives the highest instruction for all people of the world:

After wandering throughout 8,400,000 species of life, one with great fortune achieves the rare human form of life, which, although temporary, affords one the opportunity to attain the highest perfection. It is for this reason that a sober person does not waste a single moment and constantly strives for the ultimate welfare of life as long as his body, which must inevitably face death, has not fallen down and died.

Some persons accept reward seeking activities (*karma*) to be the means to attain ultimate auspiciousness, others accept *jñāna*, or knowledge of the impersonal aspect of God, while others accept meditation (*yoga*). The value of these goals, however, is refuted in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.5.12):

Even spotless knowledge of *brahma*, the impersonal aspect of Godhead, in the form of freedom from *karma* and its reactions, has no beauty if it is devoid of devotion to the personal aspect of God. How, then, can fruitive and selfless action, if not offered to Bhagavān, be praiseworthy, since they are troublesome in the stages of both practice and perfection?

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (11.14.20) further states:

O Uddhava, meditation, study of the Vedas, austerity and giving in charity cannot overpower Me as does intense devotion (*bhakti*) performed solely for Me.

The meaning of this verse is that pure devotion to God is the only means by which one can attain his ultimate benefit. This instruction is also given in the revealed scriptures:

It is devotion (*bhakti*) that reveals God to the living entities. That Supreme Person is controlled by this devotion only.

Therefore, *bhakti*, or pure transcendental devotion, is superior to all other practices. This alone is the eternal religion of the soul.

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.14.21) Kṛṣṇa, the original Supreme Lord, also says, “I can be attained by pure devotion (*bhakti*) alone.”

The Nature and Science of Pure Devotion

What is the form of pure love and devotion? The *Śāṇḍilya-sūtra* states:

Pure devotion is supreme attachment to, or love for, the Lord. Moreover, it has the propensity to control the Supreme Controller and its nature is immortal.

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī describes the intrinsic nature of pure devotion, or *bhakti*, as follows:

Pure devotional service is the cultivation of activities that are meant exclusively for the pleasure of the Supreme Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. In other words, it is the uninterrupted flow of service to God, performed through all endeavours of body, mind and speech and through the expression of various spiritual sentiments. It is not covered by knowledge of the impersonal aspect of God to attain liberation, reward seeking activity, meditation, or austerities; and it is completely free from all desires other than the aspiration to bring happiness and welfare to the Supreme Lord.

Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu (1.1.11)

Devotion has two stages: (1) the stage of practice (*sādhana-bhakti*) and (2) the stage of perfection (*prema-bhakti*). Eternally perfect love of God is called *prema-bhakti*, and it is the living entity's only eternal religion, or constitutional occupation.

This pure love of God, although eternally perfect, remains in the covered state in those living entities who have fallen into materialism. When someone in this covered state attempts to uncover this love for God by practising devotion with his senses, it is called *sādhana-bhakti*. This practice of devotion is also eternal religion but in its immature state, whereas in the stage of perfection, loving devotion (*prema*), is the fully matured and ripened state of this eternal religion. Thus, although eternal religion is one, it has two stages.

The practice of devotion is also of two types: (1) regulated devotion (*vaidhī*) and (2) spontaneous devotion (*rāgānuga*).

Until a spontaneous attachment and taste for God [Śrī Kṛṣṇa] appears in the heart of a practitioner, he follows the regulations and rules prescribed in the revealed scriptures as obligatory activities.

In this way, by observing the discipline and regulations of the Vedic scriptures, the living entity engages in devotion to God. Such practice of devotion is known as regulated devotion. By contrast, one is engaged in spontaneous devotional practice when a spontaneous attachment and taste arise in the heart for Śrī Kṛṣṇa; when, without regard for the rules and regulations of the scriptures, one becomes intensely eager to possess the moods of the eternal associates of the Lord in Vraja (the topmost spiritual planet), who are full of love and attachment for Him, and when one performs devotional practices to follow in the footsteps of those eternal associates.

The Glories of Chanting the Holy Name – Saṅkīrtana

Generally there are sixty-four limbs of devotional practice. After taking shelter of the lotus feet of a bona fide spiritual master, the prominent limbs of devotion are (1) hearing the glories of the Lord, (2) chanting His names, (3) remembering the names, qualities, forms, attributes, character and pastimes of the Lord, (4) serving His lotus feet, (5) worshipping Him, (6) offering prayers, (7) rendering Him service, (8) making friendship with Him and (9) completely offering Him one's very self.

Of these nine, hearing the glories of the Lord, chanting His names, and remembering His names, qualities, forms, attributes etc., are superior to the others; and of these three, chanting His pure transcendental names is supreme. All the limbs of devotion are fully included in the chanting of the names of God.

According to fundamental philosophical truths, God and God's names are non-different from each other. The glories of the transcendental names of God are found in profusion throughout all the sacred Vedic texts. Especially in this age of quarrel and hypocrisy, the chanting of the holy names of God is the sole religion, or refuge.

The *Bṛhan-nāradya Purāṇa* states:

In Kali-yuga, this dark age of quarrel and hypocrisy, the only means of deliverance is chanting the holy names of the Lord. There is no other way. There is no other way. There is no other way.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (6.3.22) also states that chanting of the names of God is the sole, supreme religion of the living beings:

Devotional service, beginning with the chanting of the holy name of the Lord, is the ultimate religious principle for the living entity in human society.

The Development of Bhakti, or Devotion

The sequential progression of the cultivation of eternal religion as revealed by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī is surely unparalleled and most wonderful in this world:

(1) Faith (*śraddhā*). In the beginning, faith in devotion will arise within a very fortunate person due to his accumulation of transcendental pious activities over many previous lifetimes. This faith is the seed of the creeper of devotion.

(2) Thereafter come association with saintly personalities (*sādhū-saṅga*) and most importantly, the association of a self realized spiritual master, whose heart brims with pure devotion to the Lord and who is therefore transcendently situated. The spiritual master will give the student the powerful *mahā-mantra*, or names of God.

(3) Spiritual practice (*bhajana-kriyā*). Under the guidance of self-realized and empowered saints, one performs the practices of devotional service such as hearing, chanting and remembering the names, form, qualities, attributes and pastimes of the Lord.

(4) Destruction of all unwanted desires and the misgivings of the heart (*anartha-nivṛtti*). As a result of performing devotional practices, the impurities in the heart that prevent advancement on the path of devotion are destroyed.

(5) Firm faith in spiritual practices (*niṣṭhā*). One consequently attains firm faith and constant stability in the practices of devotion.

(6) Transcendental relish (*ruci*). After this, a transcendental taste for devotional practices is attained. When this real spiritual taste awakens, one's attraction for spiritual practices such as hearing, chanting, meditating and other spiritual activities exceed the taste one may have in any type of material activity.

(7) Deep attachment (*āśakti*). This refers to a profound and direct attachment to the process of worship but more specifically to the Lord, the object of one's practice.

(8) Eventually, one attains *bhāva*, the sprout of pure love for God. This is compared to a ray of *prema*, the sun of pure, transcendental love for God. In this stage of devotion, the essence of the internal potency of the Lord, which consists of pure cognizance and spiritual

bliss, is transmitted to the heart of the practitioner from the heart of one of the Supreme Lord's eternal associates. Thereafter, one realizes the transcendental emotions of one's eternal spiritual body⁷.

(9) Pure love for God (*prema*). When the fully matured state of spiritual emotion called *bhāva* becomes condensed, it is called *prema*, pure transcendental love for God. This *prema* alone is the eternal religion, or occupation, of the living entities.⁸

This is also the teaching of the Supreme Lord Himself, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Mahāprabhu. It is the most confidential, established subject matter within all Vedic scriptures (Veda, Vedānta, Upaniṣads and the Purāṇas).

7 Every living entity has an eternal spiritual body and relationship with God, but it is now latent. In the highest spiritual planet, Goloka Vṛndāvana, there are four main relationships with God: (1) servitude mixed with friendship, (2) pure friendship, (3) parental love and (4) amorous love. The living entity is enlightened about his relationship by the divine grace of the Vaiṣṇava saints through the medium of transcendental sound, or *mantra*. Only a genuine *guru*, a self-realized spiritual master of the highest calibre, will be able to impart these internal realizations within the heart of his student.

8 The editors have slightly expanded upon points 2–8 for the clarity of the reader who may be unfamiliar with these terms.

True Religion and Cheating Religions

In the world today the majority of religions are, in the words of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, ‘cheating religions’. In *Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata*, it also states, “According to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, all worldly ideas that go by the name of religion on this earth are nothing more than complete deception.”

Temporary religion is that religion in which prayer for bread and butter is the highest form of worship of the Lord; in which due to selfish interests, the fundamental principle is to change one’s affiliation from that of a Hindu to that of a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Christian and a Hindu once again; and in which one attempts to rid oneself of bodily diseases, considering his body to be his soul (self) and the living entity to be the Lord. Feeding the poor rice and dahl with the misconception that such persons are God in a state of poverty; constructing hospitals and godless educational centres, believing this to be the topmost service to God; thinking that the eternal occupation of the soul, temporary religious duties and all other varieties of religion are one; neglecting the eternal occupation of the soul and propagating secularism; sacrificing harmless animals and birds in the name of love for the world, and service to humanity and the nation, are all temporary religions.

None of these activities ever brings permanent welfare to the world. However, if we consider eternal religion to be like a temple – in other words, to be our highest objective – we

may accept these other religions, or *dharmas*, partially, as steps to reach this temple of eternal religion. Wherever these other religions contradict, cover or dominate the eternal occupation of the soul (*nitya-dharma*), they should be completely abandoned. Morality, humanity or worldly love that is devoid of the eternal function of the soul is meaningless and unworthy of any glorification. The real objective and only purpose of humanity and morality is to attain pure love for God.

If there is just one true performer of this eternal function of the soul who keeps the fire of the chanting of the holy names of God ablaze, then his nation, race and society can never be ruined, even after that nation is oppressed and kept dependent by another country and has had its treasures looted, its scriptures burned to ashes, and its culture, art and prosperity destroyed. This chanting of the names of God,

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa
Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma
Rāma Rāma Hare Hare

makes possible the eternal welfare of the world and of one's country, society, class and self.

I complete my lecture by repeating the final instruction of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the founder of *dharma*, in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.66):

Completely abandoning all bodily and mental *dharma*, fully surrender to Me alone. I shall liberate you from all reactions to your sins. Do not grieve.



Lord Kṛṣṇa saw the unbroken disk of the full moon glowing with the red effulgence of newly applied vermillion, as if it were the face of the goddess of fortune. He also saw the *kumuda* lotuses opening in response to the moon's presence and the forest gently illumined by its rays. Thus the Lord began to play sweetly on His flute, attracting the minds of the beautiful-eyed *gopīs*.

(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.29.3*)

There on the Yamunā's banks Lord Govinda then began the pastime of the *rāsa* dance in the company of those jewels among women, the faithful *gopīs*, who joyfully linked their arms together.

The festive *rāsa* dance commenced, with the *gopīs* arrayed in a circle. Lord Kṛṣṇa expanded Himself and entered between each pair of *gopīs*, and as that master of mystic power placed His arms around their necks, each girl thought He was standing next to her alone. The demigods and their wives were overwhelmed with eagerness to witness the *rāsa* dance, and they soon crowded the sky with their hundreds of celestial airplanes.

Kettledrums then resounded in the sky while flowers rained down and the chief Gandharvas and their wives sang Lord Kṛṣṇa's spotless glories.

A tumultuous sound arose from the armlets, ankle bells and waist bells of the *gopīs* as they sported with their beloved Kṛṣṇa in the circle of the *rāsa* dance.

In the midst of the dancing *gopīs*, Lord Kṛṣṇa appeared most brilliant, like an exquisite sapphire in the midst of golden ornaments.

(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.33.2-6*)



Hare Kṛṣṇa
Hare Kṛṣṇa
Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa
Hare Hare
Hare Rāma
Hare Rāma
Rāma Rāma
Hare Hare

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Beyond Nirvāṇa	Maṇaḥ-śikṣā
Bhagavad-gītā	My Śikṣā-guru and Priya-bandhu
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Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindu-bindu	Navadvīpa-dhāma
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