

# The History of our Vaishnava Heritage

## Seminar – Part 1

**THE FOLLOWING LECTURE GIVEN BY HIS HOLINESS BHAKTI CHARU SWAMI IS THE FIRST OUT OF NINE IN A WONDERFUL SERIES ON THE HISTORY OF THE VAISHNAVA HERITAGE.**



(Click on the pictures to discover the Treasure House Of India's Spiritual Wisdom as presented by ISKCON Founder Acharya Srila A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada)

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A Vaishnava is a person who has given himself in serving the Supreme Personality of Godhead. So in reality everyone is a Vaishnava, every soul is a part and parcel of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and in its constitutional position every spirit soul is engaged in serving God. And in the spiritual sky everyone is serving the Supreme Personality of Godhead and therefore in the spiritual sky everyone is a Vaishnava. So it is important to remember that ISKCON is not really introducing some new religion, or some sectarian Indian religion. What ISKCON is introducing is the natural characteristic that we have, taking us back to our original constitutional position. The purpose of ISKCON is to train us to be what we actually are.

What we are now is not what we actually are. Some of us are thinking that we are Indians, and others are thinking that they are South Africans, and still others that they are white, black, men, women, animals, insects, and so on. But these are our mistaken identities – the ones which we develop due to our forgetfulness.

Although this Vaishnavism started at the beginning or creation of this universe, it is not that it originated just at that point. It always existed in the spiritual sky. So in the spiritual sky everyone is a Vaishnava. So when we go back to the spiritual sky, we will find out that everyone is serving Krishna, and therefore everyone there is a Vaishnava. And when we are here, it will be very important for us to try and become Vaishnavas. And when we become Vaishnavas then we go back to the spiritual sky, not otherwise. Unless and until you become a Vaishnava, a servant of Vishnu or Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, there is no way you can go back to the spiritual sky. So this is what Srila Prabhupada came and gave us

and if we take full advantage of this we will be able to make our life successful. So actually we have a very unique heritage. Sometimes people get into a conflict in India and in the West also, thinking, "My religion is better than yours." Don't they? There is a constant conflict all over it. Even in India the people are fighting. Those who are worshippers of Shiva say that Shiva is greater than Vishnu. Those who are worshippers of Durga say that Durga is greater than Vishnu and so on. Similarly in the west the Christians are saying that you all are Hindus, all nonsense, Christianity is the only way. Similarly the Muslims are saying that convert everyone to Islam otherwise they are doomed. But actually the real religion of every living entity is to become a servant of Vishnu. It is unfortunate that in today's world people are making this discrimination on religion.

Actually Jesus Christ also came to make his followers Vaishnavas, and Jesus was a Vaishnava himself. He knew God whom he addressed as his father, and asked everyone to love Him, and when somebody loves someone else then automatically he becomes engaged in his service. So what did Jesus preach? What is the real teaching of Jesus Christ? Become a servant of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. So where is the problem? We don't have any problem, but unfortunately those who develop a misunderstanding of Jesus' teachings have a problem.

So do Mohammad's followers. Mohammad had to come, teach and preach to people who were not very advanced. You can very well imagine how the desert people are! And how must the people have been thousands of years ago? Therefore he gave them very basic understanding. But when somebody considers that basic understanding as the ultimate way, then the whole world will be in trouble. Like if a primary school kid thinks that primary school education is the ultimate education, you can imagine what is going to happen to the educational system. And then these primary school kids will go to the university and force everybody, "you have to accept the primary school education." So this is how today's spiritual education is facing such an acute crisis.

And that is why it is very important that we understand scientifically what real religion is. Religion actually means the inherent characteristic of a substance. The Sanskrit word for religion is "Dharma". Now, what's the meaning of the word "Dharma"? "Dharma" actually means the inherent characteristic of a substance. For example, water is a substance; wherever there is water, it is liquid. So this liquidity of water is its inherent characteristic. When water loses its liquidity and becomes solid, we don't call it water but ice. Or when water becomes vaporized, we call it vapor. Similarly, fire is a substance and wherever there is fire there is heat and light. Therefore, light and heat are the inherent characteristics of fire and thus are the "dharma" of fire.

Similarly, spirit soul is a substance and the inherent characteristic of spirit soul is its dharma. What is that inherent characteristic? That is to love God. Just like when water becomes solid it becomes something else, similarly when a living entity stops to love God, he becomes a conditioned soul. That is what has happened to us. As pure spirit souls we should be loving God. Although we may stop to love God, the propensity to love is always there. Wherever there is a soul there is the propensity to love someone. A man loves a woman; the servant loves his master and so on. This tendency to love is always there, so much so that even a lion loves its cub. Even a snake loves his female counterpart. So this tendency to love is there in every living entity. But unfortunately they forgot whom to love. Through this love they actually want to derive joy.

Actually love and joy are interrelated. Through love one enjoys or through love one wants to enjoy. But until and unless one loves Krishna one cannot enjoy, his experience of joy will always be frustrated. When a young man falls in love with a young girl, what does he think? He thinks that through this love he is going to become the happiest man in the world, but what happens at the end of the day? I don't have to tell you that. So this is the reality. But as soon as one begins to love Krishna, he immediately begins to experience joy. So this desire to love Krishna is actually the dharma of the living entity. Therefore it is called "Sanatana Dharma". Sanatana means eternal. Why it is called eternal dharma? Because the living entity is eternal, therefore the inherent characteristic of the living entity is also eternal. Is it not a logical conclusion? Therefore the eternal religion of a living entity is called "Sanatana Dharma".

When we come to the material nature, it is because of our own volition that we come here; we choose to come to this material nature. Sometimes people ask why Krishna sent us to this material nature. The answer is that Krishna never sent you; it is you who opted and desired to come to the material nature. And that is why we want to stay in this material nature. My answer to them is that now Krishna has shown you the way to the spiritual nature, then why don't you get out of this material nature and go back to Krishna? Why don't you do that? Krishna says "Sarva dharmana parityajya mam ekam sharanam vraja, give up all your nonsense and just surrender unto Me and you will go back to Godhead." Then why don't you do that? Why you came to the material nature is not important. That shows that we want to stay in this material nature. People generally worry about what would happen when they get out of this material nature. "What will happen to my family, my business, to this world?" But everything will go on fine, just wonderfully without us. And some day we have to go out of this material nature. Then what? Whether we like it or not, whether we want it or not, one day we will have to leave. Therefore it is wise not to be attached to the material nature, but rather to go back to the spiritual world.

In order to go back to the spiritual sky one has to become a Vaishnava. And how does one become a Vaishnava? That has been pointed out by Krishna. At the beginning of creation, Krishna actually gave the process as to how one can become a Vaishnava. And that knowledge is called Veda. The knowledge that Krishna gave is called Veda. He imparted that knowledge to Brahma, and so Brahma is the first Vaishnava and then Brahma gave this knowledge to Narada. This knowledge came from Narada to Vyasa, and in this way through the disciplic succession it is flowing down and the process of becoming a Vaishnava is going on. Anybody can become a Vaishnava. Anybody can become situated in his constitutional position. Isn't it a natural right that we all have? Everybody can actually become what he really is. So this is our heritage that Krishna the Supreme Personality of Godhead gave for us to become purified and freed from our material bondage. So we will be purified straight away.