

Who is a Vaishnava?

Dictation by Svami Sadananda Dasa
to Vamandas in the internment camp in India

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Even the most sympathetic non-Vaishnava observer is puzzled by the apparent or real inconsistencies in the life of the Vaishnava, the inconsistency of the rule of conduct and the actual conduct. The problem is rather complicated, because according to the degree of the progress of the individual Vaishnava the explanation has to differ.

There are however a few things the Vaishnava-s of all degrees have in common: They believe, respectively know, that their external physical and mental appearance and ego consciousness is not their real nature. They feel, respectively know, that they are actors with a certain individually varying mask, dress, behaviour of an actor, and the degree of their progress is determined by the extent to which they realise their individual human nature as the costume of the role and their real eternal nature as something quite different from it, whereas the non-Vaishnava identifies himself with his empiric character, that is, he is only actor without private life, not knowing even that he plays merely a role, i.e. his role is compulsory his role and that there is no chance to know what he is really, unless he is willing to know it with all the consequences such knowledge involves.

The non-Vaishnava is completely under the sway of the deluding aspect of the centrifugal or diverting aspect of the Power of Krishna. She makes him believe that *he lives* – and he acts under the impulse of his empiric ego and is affected as believing himself to be the ego of the empiric self by all the physico-mental changes of the *physico-mental body* from birth to death.

A person who decides to realise what his *real* nature is even at the price of sacrificing his empiric physical-mental frame – i.e. a person who likes to become a Vaishnava, is also under the same erroneous impression that he is a certain *man* and is affected by the changes of his body, mind and environment, i.e. he actually suffers, but he believes that this will end as soon as he has realised who he is actually. He is aware of the fact that his joy and sufferings are the result of his

own actions and thoughts in this or previous lives. He knows also that he will be free from the clutches of the deflecting and diverting aspect of the Divine Power and completely in the care of the attracting, centripetal aspect of the Divine Power as soon as he is a real Vaishnava.

A person *is* a Vaishnava from the moment he sincerely dedicates himself to the service of Vishnu not expecting anything in return, no improvement in his physico-mental state and environment now or any future time, being rather prepared to serve Truth on *His* terms. Though Truth is not bound by this attitude to respond in any way, He is yet always prepared to reveal Himself to him in the form of the Divine Master and His Shakti. In the degree his willingness to serve Truth increases, ex- and intensifies, more and more energy to serve is infused into him, and gradually he starts to relish this sort of service. The centrifugal power ceases to influence him in the degree of the perfection of his service.

His service is determined by the rules of the *vaidhi-bhakti* with strict rules of the external and internal conduct of his life. But these rules do not and should not tie down or cripple his initiative to serve. There is full scope left for his initiative and joyful loving service in excess to his duties as a beginner. Moreover, he exercises his duties not as a burden, but with the grace and joy of the service of the Beloved One Who is pleased by his service and accepts it. As result of the *vidhi-bhakti* he will realise like a flash of intuition his real nature or being. He knows then who he really is, ceases to consider his body and mind as essentials of his existence, recognises them as instruments of service only, he himself in his real personality a trustee responsible for the proper utilising of his body, but being fearless regarding death and rebirth.

As Krishna has taken full charge of all his affairs, it is *His* outlook what He does with it. He may allow him to continue with his service using the present body or Krishna may take it away *at once* or by *instilments* (disease). He considers all things as meant to serve Krishna and has a great affection for all things which are used for the *direct* service of Krishna, greater than the ordinary non-Vaishnava for his property. In an indirect way all things serve Him, there can be nothing, which does *not* serve Him, everything accrues to His pleasure, but those things used directly in *His* service are especially *dear* to him. But he regards himself to be the least fit to serve and only the fact that his body belongs to

Krishna induces him to minister to its needs, not because he has any attachment to it.

Once his *atma* or *real* personality is awakened, he understands the nature of the soul, world and God. But this knowledge is just the start of his *real* service as an *atma*-personality, and the knowledge of his own *self*, *God*, *His* lila and the world increases, intensively and extensively, infinitely with the increasing *intimacy* of his *seva*. It will never come to the point when He and he are satiated, because the *bhavas* of God and the *bhakta* are infinite and never exhaust neither in *progressive intensity* nor in dynamics. When he becomes a *mukta*, i.e. when there is *not the least* deflection from the service of Krishna, he is a *raganuga-bhakta*, who has overcome all *the* rules, which regulate the *form* of his *service*. He may continue always or for certain times to abide by the rules of the *vaidhi-bhakti*, but he is by no means bound to do so. Everything he does, he does for the sake of Krishna and everything is therefore *fully* perfect and holy.

To sum up: The non-Vaishnava should follow the rule of the *daiva varnashrama-dharma* or the ethics of the society and if he fails he will suffer the social and metaphysical consequences of his ill behaviour. If he is loyal to his own *self* *irrespective* of *all* the consequences and fulfils his own *dharma*, he is sure to have fulfilled his life and prepared the way for the future – i.e. a sincere criminal has always the chance to respond to the voice and impulse of the *sadhu*, because he lives a natural life away of hypocrisy, while the hypocrite moralist is covered by the veil of show and cowardice to be what he is and can hardly be touched by anything. Society may punish a person not fulfilling the law but in spite of that he acquires some sort of *prakata* [initial] *sukriti* [positive predisposition]. The *essential* criterion to judge a non-Vaishnava is how far he is prepared to be at least tolerant to people who do live a spiritual life or prepared to help or associate with them. A non-Vaishnava is a fool. A non-Vaishnava [who is] a-Vaishnava [negative to Vaishnavas] is a criminal. A non-Vaishnava [who is] pro-Vaishnava [positive to Vaishnavas] is acquiring *sukriti*, which will help him become a Vaishnava in future. The latter should be encouraged and little heed should be paid to his apparent moral defects [cf. *Jaiva Dharma*, ch. 8].

The man who likes to become a Vaishnava is a really wise man. He should be encouraged to become one and all efforts should be made to direct his attention to the beauty of the *seva* of Krishna and the *sambandha-jnana*. By the degree his

interest in seva is awakened, all other interests proportionally vanish till he is exclusively interested in Krishna and His bhaktas. [...]