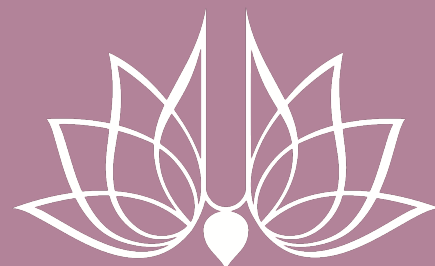


ISKCON Deity Worship Ministry



TEMPLE DEITY WORSHIP COURSE

Principles of deity worship



ISKCON[®]

DEITY WORSHIP
MINISTRY

Principles of deity worship

Effective deity worship is based on:

- 1) Cleanliness & punctuality (purity)
- 2) Exemplary character and behavior
- 3) Training and education
- 4) Sound spiritual practices (good sadhana)
- 5) Preaching spirit
- 6) Consistency with Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions
- 7) Cultivating the mode of goodness
- 8) Seeing the deity as Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.
- 9) Harmony with other services (co-operation and communication)
- 10) Balanced adherence to rules and regulations

Principles of deity worship — explained

1) Cleanliness & punctuality (purity)

Śrīla Prabhupāda constantly emphasized two things in deity worship – cleanliness and punctuality. Śrīla Prabhupāda was always very concerned that the cleanliness and punctuality should be maintained to the highest standard otherwise our worship would be offensive. Regulation is also important in helping us to advance in spiritual life, as Kṛṣṇa explains in the *Bhagavad-gītā* 6.17. One can overcome all material pains by regulation in devotional service.

There are also different aspects of purity – internal and external purity. External purity means to keeping our body, the surrounding environment and all the articles we offer to or use to worship the Lord clean. Internal purity means that we purify ourselves through the practice of *vaidhī sādhana bhakti*.

It is necessary for devotees to understand how this is essential in deity worship, and that this will be ultimately satisfying to the Lord.

2) Exemplary character and behavior

Not only should the *pūjārīs* focus on the cleanliness, punctuality etc. but they must also focus on becoming ideal persons. Because the *pūjārīs* are dealing directly with the supreme pure they must also become pure.

Becoming an ideal person means understanding and living Vaiṣṇava behavior. Śrīla Prabhupāda presented Kṛṣṇa consciousness as the means to “Culturally respiritualize the whole world.” Traditionally the *brāhmaṇas* are the leaders of the society and by their instructions and ideal behavior others in the society were guided.

Therefore the *pūjārīs* need to set an ideal example for the whole devotee community to follow. This will help to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

3) Training and education

Systematic training and education is essential to equip devotees with knowledge of deity worship, the necessary skills to perform deity worship, and the values and attitudes consistent with a devotee who is engaged in the direct service of the Lord. A *brāhmaṇa* is also a teacher; therefore it is necessary that *brāhmaṇas* be trained to teach others the practices of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, both by teachings and example.

Our *pūjārīs* should have thorough knowledge of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and also know how to apply it in their lives. The application of Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings is our *Vaiṣṇava* culture.

4) Sound spiritual practices (good *sādhana*)

Śrīla Prabhupāda often emphasized the need for good *sādhana*. The example of the iron rod in the fire is very relevant. As long as we can remain absorbed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness we will remain in association with Kṛṣṇa. Without being attentive in our hearing and chanting it is not possible to make progress in the path of devotional service and the worship of the deity will become a burden. We will see the deity as dead stone and the worship as a burden that we do not want to maintain.

Pūjārīs must be extra attentive to their *sādhana* as the nature of the service means they are engaged at the time when all other devotees are chanting. Without developing a taste for hearing and chanting then all aspects of ds will become a burden in time.

5) Preaching spirit

When engaged in the worship of the deity we should always keep the public, who are coming to see the Deity, in mind. Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasized cleanliness, punctuality, dressing, *bhoga* offerings, and nice flower decoration as important in deity worship. If we analyze these items we see that they are all related to the public's interaction with the Lord. One of the main principles of temple deity worship is to attract the general public to the lotus feet of the Lord. *Pūjārīs* should see their service as a very powerful way of attracting people to the Lord. With this in mind we

should try to serve the Lord as opulently as possible, and by this opulent service we will attract the hearts and minds of the conditioned living entities.

Pūjārīs should try to avoid the tendency to become insular and think that they do not need to preach. If we have this mentality then there is the danger of remaining a neophyte.

6) Consistency with Śrīla Prabhupāda’s instructions

As followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda, it is our duty to see that all the practices of deity worship we follow in ISKCON are not contradictory to the instructions of Śrīla Prabhupāda or the previous *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava ācāryas*. Śrīla Prabhupāda himself said that the danger will come when we add or subtract, therefore we should be careful not to add or invent anything.

Śrīla Prabhupāda also gave very clear guidance on the appropriate mood that should be there in the temple worship. The deity in the temple is worshiped in the mood of awe and reverence. If we can adopt the correct mood and relationship, then deity worship will be very helpful in reinstating us in our constitutional position.

7) Cultivating the mode of goodness – Long term vision and sustainability

The benefits of deity worship are realized by steady practice of deity worship. In order to appreciate the need for self-realization a devotee needs to come to the mode of goodness and deity worship is a very effective means of helping a *sādhaka* come to the mode of goodness. We must also be very careful to avoid capriciously taking up deity worship, only to give it up after a short while. This is considered offensive.

A *pūjārī* needs to be well organized, well prepared and peaceful in mind. These are all symptoms of one influenced by the mode of goodness.

8) The deity is directly Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

The deity, Kṛṣṇa, is directly the Supreme person around whom we need to center our lives. He is fully capable of reciprocating with us according to our surrender to Him. The more we can look after Him in a personal way and deal with Him as a person, the more this will become apparent to us.

This means in all our activities, both on and off the altar, we should understand that our ultimate purpose is to act to please Kṛṣṇa. All the items we offer to the Lord should be first class, endeavoring to be clean and punctual, being committed to our service to the Lord, taking responsibility for the Lord and developing the appropriate service attitude. In this way we will find it possible to always remember Kṛṣṇa and never forget Him.

9) Harmony with other services (co-operation and communication)

A mature devotee appreciates the value of each devotee and their unique contribution to our society and comprehends how all services are interdependent because of their connection to Kṛṣṇa. The service of being a *pūjārī* is not superior or inferior to any other service. If we center all our activities Kṛṣṇa then there is no need for competition.

10) Balanced adherence to rules and regulations

There are many rules and regulations that govern the worship of the deity in the temple. Once Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “If I told you all the rules you would faint.” One symptom of a neophyte is an imbalanced absorption in the rules forgetting the goal of this practice or thinking that there is no need to follow the rules and regulations of deity worship, not understanding their necessity in helping us to maintain our purity. It is essential in the immature stage of devotional service to have a balance of *vaidhī* and *Bhāgavata*. This will assist our rapid advancement in devotional service.

Knowing the practical utility of the rules and how it assists us in developing our loving relationship is important, as we are engaged in this service as a *pūjārī*, to follow the rules and regs because it is pleasing to Kṛṣṇa without becoming fanatical or elitist.