

ISKCON Deity Worship Ministry



DEITY WORSHIP IN THE TEMPLE BHAKTI SASTRI COURSE

Sipping Water for Purification (ācamana)



Sipping Water for Purification (*ācamana*)

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* we find this statement:

The *gopīs* first executed the process of *ācamana*, drinking a sip of water from the right hand. They purified their bodies and hands with the *nyāsa-mantra* and then applied the same *mantra* upon the body of the child.

Ācamana, or sipping water, is a means of purification. Immersing the body in water brings about physical and subtle cleansing. Taking water infused with *mantras* into the body by sipping brings about subtle and spiritual cleansing. When there is an extreme emergency and purification is required, but it is not possible to bathe, *ācamana* is prescribed.

The general process of *ācamana* is as follows: While sitting on an *āsana*, take some water in your right hand, and while looking into the water cupped in your right hand, chant a *mantra* directed into that water and then sip the water. Then, as you recite more *mantras*, purify your senses by touching different parts of the upper body. The basic procedure is the same in all types of *ācamana*. The difference lies in the *mantras* that are chanted while sipping the water. There are Vaidic, Purāṇic, Śaivite, *tantric*, and Vaiṣṇava *ācamanas*.

In giving the rules for Vaiṣṇava *ācamana*, the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* quotes from the *Kāśī-khaṇḍa*, *Yājñavalkya-smṛti*, *Bharadvāja-smṛti*, *Kūrma Purāṇa*, and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. These rules are summarized as follows:

A devotee performs *ācamana* to achieve subtle and spiritual purity before performing spiritual activities such as applying *tilaka*, chanting *Gāyatrī* and *japa*, performing *pūjā* and *homa*, observing a *vrata*, taking *prasāda*, reading or reciting *śāstra* or *mantras*, and meditating.

You should do *ācamana* twice before performing a *homa*, chanting *Gāyatrī*, worshiping, eating, giving in charity, as well as after going to a cremation grounds, touching the lips, and talking to a *caṇḍāla*.

It is also recommended to perform *ācamana* after sleeping or rising from bed, bathing, dressing, drinking, touching the lips, going to an impure place (such as cremation grounds), spitting, coughing,

yawning, sneezing, speaking improper words, touching something impure, returning from a journey, walking on a road, urinating, passing stool or semen, and talking to *caṇḍālas* and *mlecchas*.

Using rainwater:

Even though *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* places a restriction on the use of rainwater for *ācamana*, Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, in his *Saratha Darsini* commentary on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.21.10, explains that rainwater is considered pure and may be used after ten days.

Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavas commonly perform *ācamana* before performing spiritual activities, as described above. It is less common to perform *ācamana* after the bodily activities mentioned, unless one also intends to perform some spiritual activity. Devotees who worship the deity should know these rules so they can maintain the principle of cleanliness.

The place where a devotee performs *ācamana* should be pure—free from hair, bones, ash, or any other impure item.

The water should be cool, fresh, without bubbles, without foul odor or taste, and untouched by fingernails, hair, or other impure items. Rainwater should not be used.

Out of respect for a spiritual activity, do not perform *ācamana* without first cleaning your hands, with shoes on, while standing, or sitting with your feet showing. In this regard, *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* states:

It is impure to perform *ācamana* with head and throat covered, with *śikhā* and *kaccha* untied, without clean feet. The intelligent person does not perform *ācamana* wearing leather shoes, while standing in water or while wearing a turban. He does not perform *ācamana* using rainwater, with hands contaminated from eating food, using only one hand for both putting water in the hand and drinking, without wearing a *gāyatrī* thread, while sitting on shoes or with his knees uncovered.

Śāstra recommends facing east or north in *padma-* or *svastika-āsana*.

Contrary to custom in Bengal, do not take your *upavīta* thread in your hand or wrap it around your thumb when performing *ācamana*, as your lips will contaminate it.