

ISKCON Deity Worship Ministry



DEITY WORSHIP IN THE TEMPLE

The Six Divisions of Purity



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**DEITY WORSHIP
MINISTRY**

The Six Divisions of Purity (ṣaḍ-śuddhi)

Purity and cleanliness are essential in deity worship. The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* describes six divisions of purity which must be established:

1. Purity of Place (sthāna-śuddhi)

A pure place for worship is essential; if the place is impure, then the *pūjā* (worship) will be ineffective. Care must therefore be taken before the *pūjā* begins to ensure that the place is clean. One should then decorate the place of worship with auspicious items and purify it with mantra. As the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* enjoins, *sammārjana-lepanādinā vedika-maṇḍala-nirmāṇādinā*: “Clean the place of worship properly, purify it with cow dung, and decorate it with nice arrangements.”

2. Purity of Articles (dravya-śuddhi)

All the articles used in offerings must be physically pure in accordance with scriptural standards. When physical purity is established, the articles are then spiritualized with mantra and *mudrā*. The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* directs us to clean the articles and sprinkle them with sanctified water: *śodhana-prokṣaṇādinā*.

3. Purity of Body (ātma-śuddhi)

Because a person cannot approach the Lord in a contaminated state, he must first purify his physical body by waking at the proper time, bathing, wearing the ornaments of a Vaiṣṇava (*tilaka*, *kaṇṭhī-mālā*, and *upavīta*), and putting on fresh cloth. The devotee then establishes a finer state of purity through the mental process of *bhūta-śuddhi*. Finally, he spiritualizes his body by means of *nyāsa* and *mantra*.

4. Purity of Mind (citta-śuddhi)

For the worshiper, the mind is the most important element. If the mind is impure, then all other purificatory processes become insignificant. The other processes of purification are actually assistants to purification of the

mind. The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* describes *citta-śuddhi* as *cintāntara-parityāgādinā*, giving up of thoughts other than those concerning Kṛṣṇa. This purification finds its perfection in meditation on the form of the Lord (*dhyāna*) and in worshiping the Lord in the mind (*mānasa-pūjā*).

5. Purity of Mantra (mantra-śuddhi)

The mantras that the *guru* gives to his disciple for using in his deity worship are most important in *pañcarātriḥ-pūjā*, for sound is the best means of associating with the Lord. The worshiper, desiring to utilize the full potency of the *mantras* in his service to the Lord, must receive them, however, from a bona fide spiritual master. If *mantras* are covered by impurity due to offensive chanting or worship, then their effect will be lessened. By avoiding offenses and pronouncing the *mantras* properly, the worshiper maintains the purity of the *mantras*.

6. Purity of the deity (mūrti-śuddhi)

The worshiper must cleanse the deity with scented water, a fine cloth, and *mantra* before worship can begin.

When these six *śuddhis* are perfectly executed, the *pūjārī* may offer the external articles of worship, and the deity worship is then a success.

Consideration of Purity and Impurity (śuddhi-vicāra)

Vedic society is highly aware of purity, both gross and subtle. Objects have been classified according to their grades of impurity and the methods necessary to purify them. This is called *śuddhi-vicāra*, an understanding of how to maintain purity. What follows is a summary of these principles, as Lord Kṛṣṇa outlines them to Uddhava in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.21.7-15):

O saintly Uddhava, in order to restrict materialistic activities, I have established that which is proper and improper among all material things, including time, space and all physical objects.

Among places, those bereft of the spotted antelope, those devoid of devotion to the *brāhmaṇas*, those possessing spotted antelopes but bereft of respectable men, provinces like Kīkaṭa and places where cleanliness and purificatory rites are neglected, where meat-eaters are prominent, or where the earth is barren, are all considered to be contaminated lands.

A specific time is considered pure when it is appropriate, either by its own nature or through achievement of suitable paraphernalia, for the performance of one's prescribed duty. That time which impedes the performance of one's duty is considered impure.

An object's purity or impurity is established by application of another object, by words, by rituals, by the effects of time, or according to relative magnitude.

Impure things may or may not impose sinful reactions upon a person, depending on that person's strength or weakness, intelligence, wealth, location, and physical condition.

Various objects such as grains; wooden utensils; things made of bone; thread; liquids; objects derived from fire; skins; and earthy objects are all purified by time, by the wind, by fire, by earth, and by water, either separately or in combination.

A particular purifying agent is considered appropriate when its application removes the bad odor or dirty covering of some contaminated object and makes it resume its original nature.

The self can be cleansed by bathing, charity, austerity, age, personal strength, purificatory rituals, prescribed duties, and, above all, by remembrance of Me. The *brāhmaṇa* and other twice-born men should be duly purified before performing their specific activities.

A *mantra* is purified when chanted with proper knowledge, and one's work is purified when offered to Me. Thus by purification of the place, time, substance, doer, *mantras*, and work, one becomes religious, and by negligence of these six items one is considered irreligious.

The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* provides further details concerning *śuddhi-vicāra*. Below is a summary of these details:

Impurities of the Self

Since contamination spreads by touch, the *pūjārī* must be careful to avoid touching impure items such as the holes of the body, hair, the lower part of the body, the cloth covering the lower body, feet, the floor, or any impure substance. Offered articles are considered impure for one who is going to offer fresh articles. Therefore the worshiper must be careful to avoid touching offered items.

According to Manu, there are twelve impurities (*mala*) exuding from the body. A person must purify himself by cleansing the body with earth (or soap) and water after he contacts the first six impurities: fat, semen, blood, marrow, urine, or stool.

Water alone purifies a person after he contacts the second six impurities: nose mucus, phlegm, tears, perspiration, ear wax, and exudations from the eyes.

Other contaminating agents are alcohol; low animals such as pigs, donkeys, dogs, and crows; low-class people (*caṇḍālas* and *mlecchas*); hair; nails; bone; corpses (human or animal); the smoke from a funeral pyre; a menstruating woman; eating; sleeping; sex; passing urine or stool; sinful activities; *ucchiṣṭa* (food remnants); and the birth or death of close relatives.

Contagious disease is also contaminating. A person suffering from a skin disease, such as eczema, should not enter the kitchen or worship the deity. If one has sores or wounds that could contaminate the paraphernalia or the deity, one should also refrain from cooking and worship. A person suffering from a respiratory disease should not enter the kitchen.

Purifying the Body

After waking, a devotee should cleanse his body and its orifices by employing water and earth (or soap), by brushing the teeth, and by submerging himself in water.

When the parts of the body below the navel and the forearms become contaminated by wine or the first six bodily impurities, one should purify them by scrubbing the affected area with earth (or soap) and water.

If the upper body is contaminated, one should purify the whole body with earth (or soap) and water and then bathe fully.

A person should bathe to purify himself after sex, a bad dream, shaving, vomiting, purging, or after touching a dead body, a woman in her menstrual cycle, a *caṇḍāla*, or a dead animal or its fat or bones.

A woman purifies herself during her menstrual cycle by bathing on the fourth day.¹ A woman possessing a bad mind is purified by her menstrual flow.

One should perform *ācamana* after coughing or sneezing, after sleeping, eating, drinking, bathing, dressing, spitting, or walking on a road, after urinating or passing stool, and after talking to *caṇḍālas* and *mlecchas*.

One should also perform *ācamana* before eating, studying *śāstra*, or performing any religious activity.

The man of knowledge purifies himself of sin by endurance, by charity, by *japa*, and by austerity. A *brāhmaṇa* is purified by accepting *sannyāsa*.

A devotee purifies himself of an uncontrolled mind by the decision to follow the path of truth. He purifies himself of body consciousness by knowledge and austerity, and he purifies his ability to discriminate by receiving spiritual education.

Purification of Consciousness (citta-śuddhi)

One's consciousness is purified first by Vaiṣṇava initiation, by which one receives Vaiṣṇava *mantras* for worshiping the Lord; then it is purified by one's performing daily *sādhana* and practicing Vaiṣṇava *ācāra* (proper

¹ If a woman's menstrual period lasts more than three days, it is better if the woman refrains from touching the deity or anything related to the deity worship until her period is actually over. The reason for this prohibition is that, at the very least, menstrual contamination is like having passed stool without bathing afterward. In a letter Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that for the worship of a deity to continue uninterrupted it may be allowed, as an exception, for women to perform the worship during their menstrual period, but that "it is better if they don't." This allowance should be understood to refer to a rare exception, or to worship of household deities. Temple managers should encourage male devotees to engage in the temple deity worship, minimizing difficult situations that may arise due to women devotees' periods of contamination.

Vaiṣṇava behavior). Purification of consciousness is very much interrelated with physical purification. The *Viṣṇu-smṛti* lists the purifying agents for the contaminated body and mind as spiritual knowledge, austerity, certain prescribed activities (such as chanting Gāyatrī at the *sandhyās*), fire, certain eatables (such as *pañca-gavya*), earth, water, cow dung, air, the sun, time, and cooked grains.

Among these, the foods are very important. If a person eats pure food he becomes pure, and if he eats impure food he becomes impure. Even though a person undertakes other forms of purification, if he eats impure food he remains impure. Therefore one must always be careful to partake only of pure food at all times.

By performance of *yajña* one's eatables become sanctified, and by eating sanctified foodstuffs one's very existence becomes purified; by the purification of existence finer tissues in the memory become sanctified, and when memory is sanctified one can think of the path of liberation, and all these combined together lead to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the great necessity of present-day society (Bg. 3.11, purport).

Pure items

A person does not need purification after contacting the following items, for they are considered pure: items for sale in the market; goods received by begging; the mouth of a goat or a horse; mongooses; cows (except a cow's mouth, which is impure); elephants; horses; bees; a calf taking milk; cow urine, dung, milk, yogurt, ghee, and *rocana*; fried or roasted foods (other than meat, fish, or eggs); the hands of a craftsman, such as a potter; rays of the sun or moon; fire, wind, dew, or running water; the shadow of a tree; *kuśa* grass, honey, fruit, or essences; or anything certified as pure by an authoritative person.

Because deity *prasāda* is pure, a Vaiṣṇava is careful to eat only deity *prasāda* if at all possible. Since *prasāda* is pure, after taking *prasāda* one does not

have to take a bath before worshiping the deity.² If when taking *prasāda* a devotee does not touch his mouth with either his hand or a utensil, such as a cup or spoon (when taking a small portion of *mahā-prasāda*, for example), then he does not have to change his cloth before worshiping the deity. However, if his hand touches his mouth when he is eating, he must put on clean cloth to worship the deity.

Purification of Articles (dravya-śuddhi)

Contamination occurs when an article contacts any of the impure items listed previously. Serious contamination takes place when an article contacts the first six impurities from the body, or when it contacts any other heavily contaminating substance, such as alcohol. Before touching an unoffered item during worship, the *pūjārī* should purify his hands by performing *samānya-arghya* with water from the *pañca-pātra*.

The left hand, which is considered impure, should not touch the deity directly while He is being bathed. (If the deity is made of metal, during the polishing, the *pūjārī* may hold or touch the deity with a cloth held in his left hand.)

Articles become free from contamination in different ways, depending on their nature. In the case of serious contamination, things made of iron and similar metals are purified by fire (by bringing the object to a red-hot state); jewels, stones, and conch shells by being buried for seven nights in the ground; objects of horn, ivory, and turtle shell by planing the surface; and cloth by removing the contaminated portion. When things made of wood or earthenware are seriously contaminated, however, they should be discarded.

When articles are mildly contaminated through contact with impure items such as food remnants, they may be purified in the following ways: gold, silver, conch shells, jewels, stones, and spoons are purified by water; *yajña*

² However, the *pūjārī* must thoroughly rinse his mouth and wash his hands and feet; then he must perform full *ācamana*. He may not brush his teeth unless he takes a bath afterward. It is best not to eat prior to worshiping the deity, since one may offend the Lord by belching! Also, with a full stomach one cannot concentrate properly on one's services to the Lord. Service performed directly in the deity room should be done with full attention, not in a routine manner, for the *pūjārī* should always be aware of being in the direct presence of the Lord.

utensils, such as the *sruk* and *sruva* (wooden ladles), by rinsing with warm water; other *yajña* utensils by scrubbing with *kuśa* grass and water; an *āsana*, bed, and vehicle by water; and grains, deerskin, cloth,³ thread, linen, fruits, flowers, grass, and leaves by washing them in water if extensively contaminated, or simply by sprinkling if the contamination is slight.

We continue with purification methods for mildly contaminated objects: Blankets are purified by soap berries (*rīta-phala*), silk by saline earth, linen by mustard seeds; cotton cloth is purified by washing with soap and water, then drying in the sun and wind. Iron and bell metal are purified by ash; tin, copper, and lead are purified by tamarind and water. Wood and floors are purified by planing or scraping. Liquids are purified by straining; containers of gourd or coconut are purified by scrubbing with the hair from a cow's tail. Earthenware, if glazed, is purified by water; different types of items altogether are purified by sprinkling with water. Raw rice is purified by discarding the bad part; boiled rice is purified by discarding the impure part, chanting *Gāyatrī*, and sprinkling the rice with water. The ground is purified by 6 sweeping and smearing it with cow dung and water, by sprinkling with cow urine and dung, by burning, by the treading of cow hooves, by time, and by digging. Boats, paths, grass, and brick constructions are purified by wind and sun. Water for one's own bath or for deity worship is purified by flowing water, which should be clear, sweet-tasting, and sweet-smelling. In order of preference, water should be taken from the following sources: the Gaṅgā or Yamunā, other *tīrthas*, a river that flows directly to the ocean (that is, not a tributary), a tributary river, a natural spring, a lake, a pond, a large man-made reservoir, a small man-made reservoir, a well, and a pot.

³ Cloth washed by a *dhobī* (professional launderer) is not considered *śuci*; it should not be worn by *pūjārī* or deity cooks. Dry-cleaning is also not *śuci*, since alcohol, which is most impure, is used in the process.