



Home Deity Worship Course

Getting ready for worship



ISKCON Deity Worship Ministry

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Getting ready for worship

In this chapter we will discuss the activities performed from the time you wake in the morning up until the point you start worshipping the deity. The chapter is broken into two sections. In the first section we will look at how to prepare yourself for worship. Beginning with rising in the morning, cleansing the body, dressing, what type of cloth to wear, how to apply *tilaka* and how to sip water for purification. Then in the second section of this chapter we will describe how to prepare the various items of worship that will be offered to the deity during your daily worship. Also where necessary we will describe what the different articles offered represent. This book is for devotees worshipping the deity at home and as such only the essential procedures have been included. The elaborate procedures more suited for temple deities are described in the handbook for temple worship.

In this section, as throughout the book, we will be quoting from the books of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, particularly from the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya-līlā*, chapter 24. This section was the first deity worship book in ISKCON and was called, “The Perfection of Deity Worship.”

You should discuss the qualifications necessary for receiving a *mantra*, the perfection of the *mantra*, the purification of the *mantra*, initiation, morning duties, remembrance of the Supreme Lord, cleanliness and washing the mouth and other parts of the body.

Rising early

In the purport to the above quotation Śrīla Prabhupāda says,

...in the early morning hours (known as *brāhma-muhūrta*) one should get up...

The *brāhma-muhūrta* is generally accepted as the most auspicious time of the day to perform spiritual practices. During this time of day the world is peaceful and the influence of the modes of passion and ignorance are less thus enabling us to focus more on our spiritual practices. The *brāhma-muhūrta* begins approximately one and a half hours before sunrise. Although this may be difficult for some devotees, due to pressures of work etc., rising early and regulation are beneficial for the development of spiritual life. If you cannot rise this early it is still good to rise as early as possible and at the same time everyday.

In the *Bhagavad-gītā* Lord Kṛṣṇa says,



*yuktāhāra-vihārasya yukta-ceṣṭasya karmasu
yukta-svapnāvabodhasya yogo bhavati duḥkha-hā*

He who is regulated in his habits of eating, sleeping, recreation and work can mitigate all material pains by practicing the yoga system.

Leading a regulated life helps us to overcome the influence of the modes of material nature and thus be situated in a position more conducive to developing transcendental consciousness.

Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa or remembering Kṛṣṇa

When you wake in the morning you should chant the name of the Lord. This helps to clear the consciousness of the influences of sleep or any bad dreams you may have experienced during the night. You can chant the names of the deities you are worshipping or the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*. In the purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā 24.331 Śrīla Prabhupāda says,

Concerning *prātaḥ-smṛti*, remembrance of the Lord in the morning, in the early morning hours (known as *brāhma-muhūrta*) one should get up and immediately chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*, or at least “Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa.” In this way, one should remember Kṛṣṇa. Some *śloka*s or prayers should also be chanted. By chanting, one immediately becomes auspicious and transcendental to the infection of material qualities. Actually one has to chant and remember Lord Kṛṣṇa twenty-four hours daily, or as much as possible:

*smartavyaḥ satataṁ viṣṇurvismartavyo na jātucit
sarve vidhi-niṣedhāḥ syuretayor eva kiṅkarāḥ*

“Kṛṣṇa is the origin of Lord Viṣṇu. He should always be remembered and never forgotten at any time. All the rules and prohibitions mentioned in the *śāstras* should be the servants of these two principles.” This is a quotation from the *Padma Purāṇa*, from the portion called *Bṛhat-sahasra-nāma-stotra*.

Evacuating, rinsing mouth, brushing teeth and bathing

“You should describe how in the morning one should regularly brush his teeth, take his bath,



The word *prātaḥ-kṛtya* in the present verse of the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* means that one should evacuate regularly in the morning and then cleanse himself by taking a bath. One has to gargle (*ācamana*) and brush his teeth (*danta-dhāvana*). He should do this either with twigs or a toothbrush—whatever is available. This will purify the mouth. Then one should take his bath. Actually householders and *vānaprasthas* should bathe two times a day (*prātar-madhyāhnaṇayoḥ snānaṁ vānaprastha-grhasthayoḥ*). A *sannyāsī* should bathe three times daily, and a *brahmacārī* may take only one bath a day. Whenever one is not able to bathe in water, he can bathe by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*.

After waking, evacuating, and appropriate cleansing, brush your teeth, scrape your tongue and then take bath. Without taking bath one remains impure and cannot perform deity worship. Everything you touch before bathing becomes as impure as your body. Morning bath is compulsory for all, except those who are ill. In Vedic culture bathing is considered a sacred act to be accompanied by meditation on the Lord and recitation of prayers.

Rules for bathing

- Do not bathe naked. Wear a *kaupīna*. This shows respect to the personality of the water and shows that one recognizes bathing to be a sacred act. One should be particularly careful to observe this injunction when bathing in a river or other public place.
- *Grhasthas* should bathe wearing two cloths. (Besides a *kaupīna*, they wear a second cloth (*gāṁchā*), usually tied around the waist.) *Brahmacārīs* and *sannyāsīs* should wear at least a *kaupīna* when bathing.
- Do not take unnecessary baths. Twice a day, and after any occasion of impurity is sufficient.
- Do not bathe in impure water.
- If you must evacuate, do so before bathing. Otherwise you will be like the elephant who completes his bath by throwing dust on his body.¹
- After bathing, do not shake your hair to dry it and do not shake water from your cloth or legs. Water thus shaken may fall on a clean place, or on items gathered for worship.

¹ Under certain conditions one may avoid taking a bath after passing stool. Such conditions may be that only very cold water is available and sickness may result (especially if it's winter), or one may be on a journey and have no bathing facility. In such cases one should follow, as far as possible, the rules of *śauca* and do *mānasika-snāna*. But under no circumstances should one enter a kitchen or deity room without having taken a bath with water after passing

- Do not rub oil on your body after bathing. (Oil on the body is considered impure, and thus if you require it you should apply it before taking a water bath.)
- Wring out your bathing cloth and then dry your body with a separate, dry cloth; wiping yourself with your bathing cloth will contaminate you again. However, if you wash and wring out your bathing cloth before drying yourself off with it, you will not become impure.
- After bathing, dry your body with a clean cloth; do not wipe your body with your hands, a dirty cloth, or the edge of the damp cloth you are wearing. The cloth used for drying should be washed after every use.

Dressing as a Vaiṣṇava

While worshiping the deity one should wear appropriate Vaiṣṇava dress. Vaiṣṇava dress helps us to identify ourselves as a servant of Kṛṣṇa.

Unclean and improper cloth

A devotee should not wear dirty cloth, especially when cooking or worshiping the deity. Used cloth that has not been washed and dried again is considered unclean. Cloth worn while sleeping, passing urine or stool, or worn during sexual intercourse is unclean. Cloth that touches anything impure, such as wine, meat, blood, a dead body, or a woman in her menstrual period, is also contaminated. Cloth washed by a public laundry service and cloth that, though washed, has become stale are also unclean and therefore unfit to wear during deity worship.

While worshiping the deity, you should not wear the following types of cloth: brightly-colored cloth (for men), damp cloth, cloth that is too long or too short to be worn properly, stitched or sewn cloth (for men), torn cloth, oil or dirt-stained cloth, soiled cloth, burnt cloth, or cloth chewed by animals or insects. However, you may wear silk many times before washing it, provided it has not contacted anything impure or been worn in impure places.

Unbleached, raw *matkā* (*ahimsā*) silk is the best for *pūjā*. Sheep's wool is said to be always pure, but still, you should not wear ordinary woolen cloth when worshiping the deity, because wool particles may fall on the deity's paraphernalia. However, you may wear wool cloth if it is very fine, "nonshedding" wool, in which case you should reserve these items only for *pūjā*. Synthetic cloth should not be worn when worshiping the deity.



Marking the body with tilaka and other symbols

You should also describe how one should paint one's body in twelve places with *ūrdhva-puëòra* [*tilaka*].

Place some water in the palm of the left hand, then taking a piece of *gopécandana* (*tilaka*) in the right hand rub it in the water in the left hand until a smooth paste has been formed.

The following prayer from the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, quoted in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya-līlā*, 20.202, lists the forms of the Lord to meditate on while applying *tilaka*.

(om) *lalāṭe keśavam dhyāyen nārāyaṇam athodare
vakṣaḥ-sthale mādham tu govindam kaṇṭha-kūpake
viṣṇum ca dakṣiṇe kukṣau bāhau ca madhusūdanam
trivikramam kandhare tu vāmanam vāma-pārśvake
śrīdharam vāma-bāhau tu hr̥ṣīkeśam tu kandhare
pr̥ṣṭhe ca padmanābham ca katyām dāmodaram nyaset
tat prakṣālana toyam tu vāsudeveti mūrdhani*

When one marks the forehead with tilaka, he must remember Keśava. When one marks the lower abdomen, he must remember Nārāyaṇa. For the chest, one should remember Mādhava, and when marking the hollow of the neck one should remember Govinda. Lord Viṣṇu should be remembered while marking the right side of the belly, and Madhusūdana should be remembered when marking the right arm. Trivikrama should be remembered when marking the right shoulder, and Vāmana should be remembered when marking the left side of the belly. Śrīdhara should be remembered while marking the left arm, and Hr̥ṣīkeśa should be remembered when marking the left shoulder. Padmanābha and Dāmodara should be remembered when marking the back.

While chanting the following *mantras* and meditating on the Lord, apply *tilaka* to the forehead and upper body with the ring finger of your right hand.

om keśavāya namaḥ — forehead
om nārāyaṇāya namaḥ — navel
om mādhamāya namaḥ — chest
om govindāya namaḥ — hollow of the neck
om viṣṇave namaḥ — right abdomen



oṃ madhusūdanāya namaḥ — right arm
oṃ trivikramāya namaḥ — right shoulder
oṃ vāmanāya namaḥ — left abdomen
oṃ śrīdharaāya namaḥ — left arm
oṃ hr̥ṣīkeśāya namaḥ — left shoulder
oṃ padmanābhāya namaḥ — upper back
oṃ dāmodarāya namaḥ — lower back

Wash the excess *tilaka* from your hands with water, and then wipe your *çikhā* with the palm of your right hand while chanting:

oṃ vāsudevāya namaḥ śikhā

Applying *tilaka* is a spiritual activity and therefore *tilaka* is normally applied in a sitting position after having sipped *ācamana*.

Marking the body with other symbols and the names of the Lord

Sometimes devotees also like to decorate their bodies with the names of the Lord or pictures of the Lord's feet. For this metal stamps that are purchased in India are used.

... as well as how one should stamp one's body with the holy names of the Lord or the symbols of the Lord, such as the disc and club.

“After this, you should describe how one should decorate his body with *gopīcandana*,

Sipping water for purification (*ācamana*)

Ācamana, or sipping water, is a means of purification. As immersing the body in water brings about physical and subtle cleansing, so sipping water infused with *mantras* into the body performs a similar function. Thus where purification is required but it is inconvenient to bathe, *ācamana* is prescribed.

The general process of *ācamana* is as follows: While looking into water cupped in your right hand, chant a *mantra* directed into that water and then sip the water.

A devotee should perform *ācamana* to achieve physical and mental 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.



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

The water should be cool, fresh, without bubbles or foul odor or taste, and untouched by fingernails, hair, or any impure item. Rainwater, considered to be in the mode of passion, should not be used.

Out of respect for a spiritual activity, do not perform *ācamana* with your head or throat covered; without having your *kaupīna* or cloth tucked in at the back; without first cleaning your hands and feet; with shoes on; while standing; or while sitting on shoes or sitting with your knees or feet showing.

Chanting Gāyatrī

One also has to perform his *sandhyādi-vandana*—that is, one has to chant his Gāyatrī *mantra* three times daily—morning, noon and evening.

One may chant Gāyatrī at the three *sandhyās*, sunrise, noon and sunset. Also it is acceptable to chant Gāyatrī in the morning after applying *tilaka*. See conversation, January 18, 1976, Māyāpur.