



# Home Deity Worship Course

## Week 2 FAQ



ISKCON Deity Worship Ministry

# Week 2 FAQ

## Topics:

## Purity, Getting Ready for Worship, Ācamana

### Purity

**1. Śāstra recommends that *grhasthas* bathe twice daily, but there is also a list of activities after which one should bathe. How do I understand this?**

*Brahmanas* generally bathe before chanting the Gāyatrī mantra at each *sandhyā*: morning, noon, and night. If this is not practical, bathe at least twice a day. Additionally, bathe after any occasion of impurity such as passing stool, cutting your nails, hair, etc.

There are regulations for the minimum number of daily baths required for different individuals according to *varṇa* and *āśrama*. It is also necessary to bathe after any occasion of impurity such as those mentioned above.

**2. For deity worship at home, is it alright to bathe only after passing stool but not after passing water?**

It is necessary to fully bathe after passing stool, but not necessary after passing water.

Before passing water, remove your clean clothing and put on a *gāmchā* or towel. After passing water, at least rinse your private parts, then wash your hands, rinse your mouth, wash your feet, and legs up to the knee. Then put back on the clean clothes you removed before passing water and finally do *ācamana*. Then you are ready to go back on the altar.

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains:

Cleanliness means if you go to the latrine, the injunction is that you will have to wash your hands, legs, so many times. Not with water, but with earth. Nowadays it is soap. So if we cannot wash our hands and legs for many times, at least we should wash once or twice with soap. This is called *śaucam*.



Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.1.13-14 — June 26, 1975

**3. The scriptures direct us to bathe after certain activities. Does that include washing our hair also? Is there any rule about how often ladies should wash their hair?**

For men, bathing includes washing their hair. For ladies, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains:

The word *kṛta-śiraḥ-snānam* appears here. According to the *smṛti-śāstra*'s directions for daily duties, ladies are allowed to bathe daily up to the neck. The hair on the head does not necessarily have to be washed daily because the mass of wet hair may cause a cold. For ladies, therefore, taking a bath up to the neck is ordinarily prescribed, and they take a full bath only on certain occasions. On this occasion Devahūti took a full bath and washed her hair very nicely. When a lady takes an ordinary bath, it is called *mala-snāna*, and when she takes a full bath, including the head, it is called *śiraḥ-snāna*. At this time, she needs sufficient oil to smear on her head. That is the direction of the commentators of *smṛti-śāstra*.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.23.31, purport

**4. What are the guidelines for cleanliness and deity worship for ladies during their menses?**

Generally *Vaiṣṇavīs* will not cook or do deity worship during their menses. However, if there is no one else to do the service, then better they continue with the worship and cooking. But, as Śrīla Prabhupāda says in the following letter, “better not to do it.”

According to the *smārta vidhi*, women cannot touch deity during menstrual period but the *gosvāmī viddhi* allows. But it is better not to do it. One thing is that the *sevā* can never be stopped for any reason. This also for the cooking.

Letter to Aṁśu, Vṛndāvan August 13th 1974

There are minor variations of standards observed by different ISKCON temples. If you are doing service at a temple, check with local authorities to see what the standards are.



### 5. Do I need to bathe and change into clean clothing after honoring *prasādam*?

There is no need to bathe after honoring *prasādam*, but the clothing you wear when eating becomes contaminated and therefore unsuitable for wearing for cooking or altar service.

### 6. Sometimes *pūjārīs* drink water or honor a small amount of *prasāda* without touching their fingers to their mouth, thereby avoiding needing to bathe. Is this alright?

Technically it is alright. If you eat and drink in this manner you still maintain purity.

However, it is better if *pūjārīs* are regulated to honor *prasādam* outside the time when doing *pūjārī* services.

Hydration is important for maintaining good health. We encourage devotees to maintain good hydration when engaged in deity worship.

## Getting ready for worship

### 1. Is it alright to get dressed in the bathroom where the toilet is also located? Any practical advice on taking clean clothes to the bathroom?

The toilet area is unclean, therefore it is better to put your clothes on in a clean place outside the bathroom.

## Ācamana

### 1. If I can't sit comfortably on the floor when doing *ācamana*, may I stand, or maybe sit on a chair?

Sitting cross-legged on the floor is ideal as it aids concentration. However, if it is not possible for you to sit on the floor to do *ācamana*, then make whatever reasonable adjustments as needed in order to do *ācamana* with concentration—such as sitting on a chair, or standing.



## 2. Must I use 3 drops of water each time I sip water when doing *ācamana*?

When you do *ācamana*, place a small amount of water in the palm of your right hand. Look into the water and chant the appropriate mantra before sipping the water silently from your right hand.

There are no rules about the quantity of water.

## 3. When doing *ācamana*, do I need to rinse my hands with water and discard it in between each sipping of water?

You may, but it is not necessary.

## 4. Is it true that only Ganges water can be used for *ācamana*?

If you have Ganges water or water from any sacred river, that is good, but any pure water may be used. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in the 4th Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*:

*Tulasī* leaves are very important in the method of worshiping the Supreme Personality of Godhead. In this verse the word *salilaiḥ* means “by the water.” Of course, Dhruva Mahārāja was worshiping on the bank of the Yamunā. The Yamunā and the Ganges are sacred, and sometimes devotees in India insist that the Deity must be worshiped with water of the Ganges or Yamunā. But here we understand *deśa-kāla* to mean “according to time and country.” In the Western countries there is no river Yamunā or Ganges — water from such sacred rivers is not available. Does this mean that the *arcā* worship should for that reason be stopped? No. *Salilaiḥ* refers to any water — whatever is available — but it must be very clear and collected purely. That water can be used.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.8.55, purport

## 5. I don’t have a *kuśa* mat to sit on. What should I do?

You may use a mat made from natural material to sit on such as cotton, wool, silk, jute, etc. These materials are pure.



## 6. What do I do if my entire home is carpeted?

Be very careful with flames and burning incense as most carpet will burn easily.

As you will see in a later section, when bathing and dressing the deities, the worship is done in the kitchen because the floor is made of a material which can be cleaned with a damp cloth.

If doing the worship in the kitchen is not an option, then cover the carpet with a large clean cloth, which is best washed after each use. Alternatively, you could also do the worship sitting at a table.

## 7. How often should I change the *ācamana* water?

It is a good practice to clean the *ācamana* cup and spoon and fill it with fresh, clean water each time before you do *ācamana*.

