

# Cleanliness In The Home

## ***Essential Items***

- Always bathe after:
  - o Passing Stool
  - o Shaving
  - o Having sex
  - o Going to a crematorium
  - o Cutting your nails or hair
  - o Rising in the morning
  - o Cleaning your teeth
- Always wash your hands before:
  - o Taking *prasāda*
  - o Touching the deities or the altar
- Always wash your hands after touching:
  - o Eating *prasāda* or drinking water
  - o The inside of the mouth, nose or ears
  - o Touching a broom or dust-pan and brush
  - o Toilet & toilet brush
  - o Unclean items
- Always perform *ācamana* before doing deity worship (this includes touching the deities or anything on the altar)
- Do not place your foodstuffs on your lap to eat.
- After one takes *prasādam* the area where the plate was kept must be cleared. One should not step over the area where *prasādam* was taken, because it is considered contaminated. (I have noticed in many temples that after we take *prasāda*, which is usually on the floor, we just step all over. Then without even washing our feet we enter into the temple room. So one should be careful about that. The place where we take *prasādam* becomes contaminated. And if you step on that spot, then you must wash your feet. The place where the *prasādam* has been taken, must be cleaned right after the *prasādam* has been taken. Because the temple must be very clean, we should be careful that we do not unnecessarily contaminate the temple.

## **Becoming a Vaiṣṇava Devotee of Kṛṣṇa<sup>1</sup>**

Here are some basic principles and points from *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* and *The Nectar of Devotion* about the proper activities of one who is a Vaiṣṇava.

- After waking up, first brush your teeth, scrape your tongue and then take a bath.
- If you need to pass stool do so before brushing your teeth.
- Wash with water after passing urine. Also wash hands and feet.
- Wash hands, feet, and mouth before and after taking *prasādam*. (We must at least rinse our mouth and wash our hands. In Western countries it may be difficult to wash

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<sup>1</sup> From *Bhakti-caru Mahārāja's Vaiṣṇava Etiquette Course*, Chapter 2.

our feet. When in India, you can wash both your hands and your feet before and after taking *prasāda*.)

- Wash your plate before and after taking *prasāda*
- Wash hands after drinking water, even if the cup does not touch your lips. (This done because when you hold your cup while drinking, your hands actually become contaminated.)
- Use the right hand for eating and drinking (the left hand is generally used for unclean activities).
- Always wear clean clothes.
- Do not sneeze or yawn without covering the mouth.
- Always avoid a crematorium, a garden, and unchaste women at night (an unchaste woman should be avoided at any time).
- Do not pass urine or stool on the road.
- Do not spit while eating.
- Bathe after shaving, copulating, or going to a crematorium.
- Do not place your foodstuffs on your lap to eat. (Lower half of body is subtly unclean.)
- Do not spit on water. (Because people sometimes drink water from ponds or lakes or rivers, one should not spit on water. This is disrespecting Varuna, the personality of water.)
- *Sannyāsīs* should bathe three times a day, *grhasthas* twice and brahmacārīs at least once a day.
- After taking *prasādam* the area where the plate was kept must be cleaned. Do not step on or over the area where *prasādam* was taken, because it is considered contaminated.
- After touching the inside of the mouth or nose, one must wash his hands.
- After putting on *tilaka*, do simple *ācamana*.

## Impurities of the Self <sup>2</sup>

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 the *Manu-saṁhitā*, 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, earwax, 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

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<sup>2</sup> From the Pañcarātra-Pradīpa Supplement, Chapter 4

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.<sup>3</sup> 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 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 with water from the *ācamana* cup.

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<sup>3</sup> a menstruating female becomes pure by bathing after the menstrual secretion has ceased (to flow) *Manu-saṁhitā* 5.66

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* 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,<sup>4</sup> 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 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.

And *śaucābhyām*, cleanliness. 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*. A brahminical qualification is he is very neat and clean, three times taking bath, and keeping the body very neat, cloth, everything. Where he lives, his bedding, his place—all must be cleansed. And *yamena niyamena vā*: sex control, mind control, and senses control by regulative principles.

-- *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 6.1.13-14 -- Los Angeles, June 26, 1975

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<sup>4</sup> Cloth washed by a *dhobī* (professional launderer) is not considered *śuci*; it should not be worn by *pūjārīs* or cooks. Dry-cleaning is also not *śuci*, since alcohol, which is most impure, is used in the process.