

## Cleanliness is Godliness

Śrīla Prabhupāda would sometimes quote, “Cleanliness is next to Godliness.” There were also a couple of occasions on which Śrīla Prabhupāda said that cleanliness IS Godliness. Cleanliness refers to both the internal and the external aspects. The Sanskrit word “śuci” refers to cleanliness and to the brahmanas, who are expected to be always exhibiting cleanliness. The word “muci” refers to uncleanness and those who are unclean.

The development of brahminical cleanliness will automatically invite auspiciousness and an uplifting atmosphere in the home. Some of the things that will be mentioned in this segment can easily be applied immediately, and some may take more time and conscious effort to imbibe if we choose to do so. Most of us have been raised in a society that has no sense of cleanliness of body or spirit, or even of proper behavior, so some things here may appear very foreign or even uncomfortable at first. Yet, human life is meant for some austerity by which the topmost goal can be achieved. For one who is looking to seriously apply oneself to the pursuit of spiritual life, it will be valuable to address both internal and external cleanliness protocols as we go about our daily lives.

It is very important to maintain internal cleanliness by staying in devotional association. Association with non-devotees is contaminating. So is association with Māyāvādīs, impersonalists, as they are inclined to criticize the Lord and His devotees. If we are in a situation, such as a work environment, where we have to be around non-devotees, we can try to limit that association, or even better, be good association for them and gradually bring them to Krishna Consciousness. That does not mean to impose our philosophy or lifestyle choices on them. That would be preaching to the faithless and will invoke offenses on their part. Our own ladylike or gentlemanly behavior will be our best preaching in those instances, and maybe we can bring them some prasādam, which Śrīla Prabhupāda called “the secret weapon.” To

associate means to take association, but to give association is something else, and can have very nice results for everyone involved.

It is also very important not to engage in gossip, or unnecessary speech. This is called prajalpa, and is contaminating to both the speaker and the listener. We need to neither hear it nor speak it. Better to chant the Hare Krishna Mahāmantra, other songs in glorification of Krishna and His devotees, relay the pastimes of the Lord, or be silent of tongue while remembering Krishna in the mind in a situation where that might be best. Hearing or speaking prajalpa could also refer to hearing any mundane sound vibration, like popular music. It does us no good, and is, in fact, detrimental to our devotional process.

It is also very important to take only Krishna prasādam, or foods first offered to Krishna. This keeps the consciousness pure. The practice of Krishna Consciousness starts with the tongue, taking only the remnants of foodstuffs offered first to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and speaking only on topics that glorify Krishna and the devotees of Krishna. Of course, there are practical subjects that must be addressed in the course of life, and we do not lose any spiritual advancement from taking care of what is necessary.

So, internal cleanliness essentially means to take to the process of becoming Krishna Conscious.

There are some basic practices of external cleanliness. When Śrīla Prabhupāda arrived in the United States, he noticed that in some instances it was hard to find proper bathing facilities. Some city apartments still have no bathrooms or showers, and there are facilities in the hallways for communal use. Even though it is proper, by brahminical standard, to bathe or shower three times a day, Śrīla Prabhupāda made the exception according to available facility. He instructed us to bathe three times a day, and then added, “But in your country,

at least twice.” He was referring at that time to the United States, having newly arrived in the western world and making time and circumstance adaptations. There should be bath upon rising in the morning, usually after evacuation. A shower should always be taken after having a bowel movement, and clean clothing should be put on after each shower. In some cases, the clothing that was worn before bathing is still clean and can be worn again.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was not a fanatic. In the early days of the Hare Krishna movement in Germany, before the temple Deities were installed, he told the devotees that they could take bath every other day so that they would not get sick in the cold winter weather. Once there are installed Deities, there must be a strict cleanliness standard. Śrīla Prabhupāda told us that the two most important things in Deity worship were cleanliness and punctuality.

The bathroom is a mucī place. In traditional India, the bathroom was not located inside the main housing, but in most places in the world now there are indoor bathrooms. Even in India, to accommodate the upbringing of his western followers, Śrīla Prabhupāda included indoor facilities in the temple compounds that he constructed. The bathroom is an unclean place, so we should not drink water from bathroom faucets, and clean clothing and other items should not be stored there. Tilak should not be brought into the bathroom, nor should water from there be used for tilak application or Deity worship.

Śrīla Prabhupāda had noted that westerners think that they have sufficiently cleaned after passing stool or urine if they use toilet paper. In the early days of the temples, there was no toilet paper, just a water bottle for washing. However, that proved to be unnatural and uncomfortable for most of the western devotees, according to their upbringing, to simply use water and have no facility to dry. In the home, there can be water and a clean cloth to dry, or bathroom tissue can have its use for drying after using plentiful water. Paper is an expense, it uses natural resources, and that is up to individual

choice. Most western devotees are more acclimated to use bathroom tissue, and there is no need to create an artificial disturbance to the mind by forbidding it. In any event, paper should not be the only means to clean after using the bathroom. There has to be water.

The mouth is mucī, unclean, and so there should be no putting the fingers in the mouth and then touching other things, opening things with the teeth, holding things in the mouth like a third hand, and so on. Śrīla Prabhupāda told us that muciness spreads like electricity, an act of uncleanliness spreads to other things. After taking prasādam, we wash the hands, mouth, and feet, even just a sprinkling of water on the feet is OK. Any association with the mouth, like taking vitamins and so on, requires hand washing. We don’t always have to use soap. Water alone has cleansing and antiseptic properties, and is fine for a quick hand wash. We should wash the area when we are done taking prasadam, be it the table or where we were seated on the floor.

Since the mouth is unclean, we do not want to blow on things, not even to put out a flame. For example, if we light a stick of incense, it may make a flame at first, but a quick pull on the stick through the air is sufficient to put it out. Or to put out a candle, we can make a couple of waving motions with our hand in the air above it, or cut the air to it by placing a small dish over it for a few moments.

Slept-on bedding is also unclean. When we were younger and slept on the floors in the temple facilities, we rolled up our bedding, washed the floor where we had slept, and then went to take bath. Touching the bedding thereafter was an unclean act. In more recent times, devotees often sleep on beds that cannot be rolled up and put to the side. But the bedding is still mucī once it has been slept on, and touching it or sitting on it after bathing should be avoided. Clean laundry should not be folded or placed on the bed, or it is no longer clean. Of course, bedding should be cleaned regularly, but that still does not mean that the bed is śuci.

Fingernail and hair clippings are also unclean and will attract ghosts. They should not be left outside near the house, nor should they be put into the regular trash unless it will be removed right away for disposal. Nail clippings can be flushed or taken out to the woods, hair clippings should be bagged and removed as soon as possible. Some gardeners put hair clippings into old socks and place them around the garden to keep deer away, thinking that the smell of the human hair is what deters the deer. That is not the real reason that the deer stay away. They are sensitive animals, and that which attracts ghosts will repel the deer. Ghosts feed on the vibration of unclean materials, and we do not need these near our homes.

The left hand is considered *muci*, as it is generally used in washing the lower parts of the body, especially after evacuating. The right hand is used for taking prasadam, for offering items to the home or temple deity, and for handing something to someone or receiving something from someone. In a cultured society, to eat with the left hand, or to offer something to someone or receive something from someone with the left hand, is considered greatly disrespectful and will be taken as an insult.

The feet are the lowest part of the body, and we not to touch or move things around with the feet. It is unclean and disrespectful. Everything is the Lord's paraphernalia and must be respected as such. In the same way, it is disrespectful to point the feet at anyone while sitting, and this also applies to the Deity forms of the Lord.

There may be situations where the highest external cleanliness standards cannot be followed. It is just about impossible when we are dealing with young children, and there may be illness or disability that impede the external efforts. We have to do our best, and have faith that Krishna sees our efforts and our struggles to please Him. Those efforts alone promote our spiritual advancement. In any event, we have to always remember Krishna and never forget Him. That is the core essence in the development of our Krishna Consciousness.

There are many practical guidelines in The Nectar of Devotion. Cleanliness and respect are attributes of a God Conscious society. We are looking to recreate this culture of Krishna Consciousness, where all behaviors, rules, and regulations were meant to gradually elevate society to the platform of reawakening love of Godhead. These are not rules and regulations for the sake of rules and regulations, but are meant to assist us on the path of rediscovering our eternal, blissful nature in association with the Lord and His devotees.

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