

## Devotional Attire

Devotees of the Lord are often recognized by different signs. Along with the obvious robes, the distinguishing marks of a devotee will be Tulasī wood neck beads, the small tuft of hair called a śikhā, and the clay markings, called tilaka, that designate the body as a temple of the Lord.

A śikhā is the tuft of hair left on the back of the shaved head of a male devotee of Krishna. There are two types of transcendentalists, the personalists and the impersonalists. Traditionally, the devotee of the Lord, the Vaiṣṇava or personalist, had a shaved head and śikhā. The impersonalist transcendentalist, who does not recognize that the Supreme Lord is a person, generally keeps a shaved head with no śikhā. So, a śikhā shows devotion to the Lord. Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted that his male disciples kept a shaved head and śikhā, or if it was required for hair to be kept, like for business, that it was short and gentlemanly, and that a śikhā was maintained. Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged a small, simple, relatively short śikhā that should be knotted once, not left loose, not braided, and not involving a huge clump of hair. He said that a Vaiṣṇava śikhā should be not more than 1 ½ inches in diameter.

Devotees of the Lord wear neck beads made from the wood of the sacred Tulasī plant. To have Tulasī wood on the body is very auspicious. Śrīla Prabhupāda likened the neck beads to a transcendental dog collar, that we are the dogs of the spiritual master. A person not yet spiritually initiated should wear 1 strand of Tulasī, and an initiated person, at least 2 strands, but best 3 or possibly even 4 or 5 can be worn. Śrīla Prabhupāda set the standard at a longer strand of Tulasī neck beads that wrapped around the neck three times. These will usually be available strung about 51 inches long. Neck beads should be fairly tight but not strangulating. In the early days of the movement, the neck beads were on a nylon filament and were actually knotted and the knot burned closed with a lit incense stick. It is convenient now that the neck beads are available with a clasp if there has to be easy removal, like for massage or other treatment.

There is a statement in the Skanda Purāṇa, which Śrīla Prabhupāda gives us in chapter 9 of the Nectar of Devotion, which says, “Persons who are decorated with tilaka or gopī-candana [a kind of clay resembling fuller’s earth that is produced in certain quarters of Vṛndāvana], and who mark their bodies all over with the holy names of the Lord, and on whose necks and breasts there are Tulasī beads, are never approached by the Yama-dūtas.” The Yama-dūtas are the constables of King Yama (the lord of death), who punishes all sinful men. Vaiṣṇavas are never called for by such constables of Yamarāja. In the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, in the narration of Ajāmila’s deliverance, it is said that Yamarāja gave clear instructions to his assistants not to approach the Vaiṣṇavas. Vaiṣṇavas are beyond the jurisdiction of Yamarāja’s activities.

Nectar of Devotion, chapter 6, tells us- One should decorate the body with tilaka, which is the sign of the Vaiṣṇavas. The idea is that as soon as a person sees these marks on the body of a Vaiṣṇava, he will immediately remember Krishna. Lord Caitanya says that a Vaiṣṇava is he whom, when seen, reminds one of Krishna. Therefore, it is essential that a Vaiṣṇava mark his body with tilaka to remind others of Krishna.

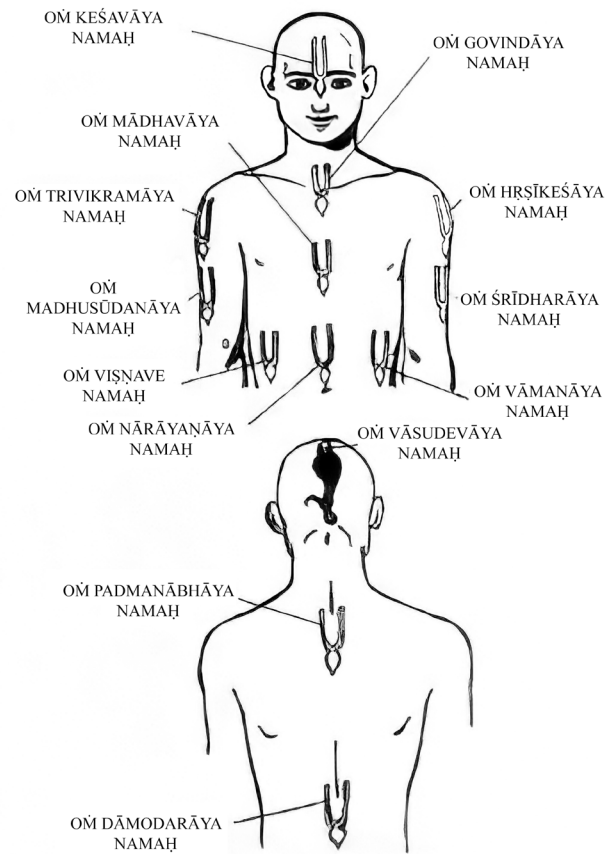
To apply tilaka, put some water in your left hand, and rub the hard tilaka into the water, making a fairly wet paste out of the clay. You can also keep a little container with the tilaka and some water already in it. Begin by putting your ring finger of the right hand into the clay, and starting between the eyebrows, bring the finger straight up to the hairline, making two straight lines. It should look like a long, narrow U-shape with a clean space in the middle, between the lines. You will have to use a little pressure so that the space between the lines is clean. It should not extend over the head. When Śrīla Prabhupāda saw some devotees do that, he remarked that tilaka was not a racing stripe! Use some more tilaka to make the Tulasī leaf shape on your nose, it should extend about 3/4 of the way

down your nose according to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s direction, and there is no space between the Tulasī leaf shape on the nose and the lines above. As you apply the tilaka to your body, chant the following mantras:

**Where to apply tilaka and the mantra chanted**

|                      |                                |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Forehead             | OM KEŚAVĀYA NAMAḤ              |
| Stomach              | OM NĀRĀYAṆĀYA NAMAḤ            |
| Chest                | OM MĀDHAVĀYA NAMAḤ             |
| Hollow of the throat | OM GOVINDĀYA NAMAḤ             |
| Right side           | OM VIṢṆAVE NAMAḤ               |
| Right upper arm      | OM MADHUSŪDANĀYA NAMAḤ         |
| Right shoulder       | OM TRIVIKRAMĀYA NAMAḤ          |
| Left side            | OM VĀMANĀYA NAMAḤ              |
| Left upper arm       | OM ŚRĪDHARĀYA NAMAḤ            |
| Left shoulder        | OM HṚṢĪKEŚĀYA NAMAḤ            |
| Upper back           | OM PADMANĀBHĀYA NAMAḤ          |
| Lower back           | OM DĀMODARĀYA NAMAḤ            |
| Crown of the head    | OM VĀSUDEVĀYA NAMAḤ (Optional) |

who put Tulasī beads on the neck, who mark twelve places of their bodies as Viṣṇu temples with Viṣṇu’s symbolic representations [the four items held in the four hands of Lord Viṣṇu – conch, mace, disc and lotus], and who have viṣṇu-tilaka on their foreheads, are to be understood as the devotees of Lord Viṣṇu in this world. Their presence makes the world purified, and anywhere they remain, they make that place as good as Vaikuṅṭha.”



Lord Shiva says to Pārvatī that in the middle of the tilaka marking there is a space, and in that space reside Lakshmi and Nārāyaṇa.

It became popular for the early devotees to try to apply the tilaka without a mirror when it became known that Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura did not use one. Those who knew him said that he never looked into a mirror. It is fine to use a mirror, and there is a lovely photograph of Śrīla Prabhupāda applying tilaka using a mirror. It was a big ego thing, that one could make a perfect tilaka marking without a mirror. That is not the goal of Krishna Consciousness. Our activities must become devoid of false ego and aligned with the will of the Lord in all respects. The more we can do that, the more spiritual potency we will have for our own benefit and for the preaching mission.

In the Padma Purāṇa there is a statement, given to us by Śrīla Prabhupāda in the ninth chapter of Nectar of Devotion, describing how a Vaiṣṇava should decorate his body with tilaka and beads: “Persons

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