

Sipping Water for Purification (*ācamana*)

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* we find this statement:

The *gopīs* first executed the process of *ācamana*, drinking a sip of water from the right hand. They purified their bodies and hands with the *nyāsa-mantra* and then applied the same *mantra* upon the body of the child. [*Bhāg.* 10.6.21]

Ācamana, or sipping water, is a means of purification. As immersing the body in water brings about physical and subtle cleansing, so taking water infused with mantras into the body by sipping 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. Then, as you recite more *mantras*, purify your senses by touching different parts of the upper body. The basic procedure is the same in all types of *ācamana*. The difference lies in the mantras that are chanted while sipping the water. Thus there are Vaidic, Paurāṇic, Śāivite, Tantric, and Vaiṣṇava *ācamanas*, which are used in corresponding ceremonies.

In giving the rules for Vaiṣṇava *ācamana*, the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* quotes from the *Kāśī-khaṇḍa*, the *Yājñavalkya-smṛti*, the *Bharadvāja-smṛti*, the *Kūrma Purāṇa*, and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. These rules are summarized as follows:

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. It is also recommended to perform *ācamana* after rising from bed, bathing, dressing, touching the lips, eating, going to an impure place, spitting or coughing, speaking improper words, touching something impure, and returning from a journey. One should perform *ācamana* twice before performing a *homa*, chanting *Gāyatrī*, worshiping, eating and giving in charity, as well as after going to cremation grounds, touching the lips, and talking to a *caṇḍāla*.

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. Rain water, being in the mode of passion, should not be used.

Out of respect for a spiritual activity, you should not perform *ācamana* with your head or throat covered; without wearing the sacred thread (for men); with your *śikhā* untied; 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.

Always perform *ācamana* before entering the Deity room to worship the Lord.

Sit on a proper sitting place (*āsana*). (If there is no *āsana*, kneel with your right knee touching the floor and your left foot flat on the floor.)

With an *ācamana-pātra* filled with water clean both hands by sprinkling them with water; holding the *ācamana* spoon in your left hand, pour a few drops into the right palm. While looking at the water chant the appropriate *mantra* and then silently sip the water from the base of the right thumb (the *brāhma-firṭha*).

The procedure for basic *ācamana* consists of the first three steps below. If time and circumstances permit, you may perform the complete *ācamana*:

- Chant **oṃ keśavāya namaḥ** and sip water from the *brāhma-tīrtha* of your right hand.
- Chant **oṃ nārāyaṇāya namaḥ** and sip water from the *brāhma-tīrtha* of your right hand.
- Chant **oṃ mādhavāya namaḥ** and sip water from the *brāhma-tīrtha* of your right hand.
- Chant **oṃ govindāya namaḥ** and sprinkle water on your right hand.
- Chant **oṃ viṣṇave namaḥ** and sprinkle water on your left hand.
- Chant **oṃ madhusūdanāya namaḥ** and touch your right cheek with the fingers of your right hand.
- Chant **oṃ trivikramāya namaḥ** and touch your left cheek with the fingers of your right hand.
- Chant **oṃ vāmanāya namaḥ** and wipe above your upper lip with the base of your right thumb.
- Chant **oṃ śrīdhārāya namaḥ** and wipe below your lower lip with the base of your right thumb.
- Chant **oṃ hr̥ṣīkeśāya namaḥ** and sprinkle water on both hands.
- Chant **oṃ padmanābhāya namaḥ** and sprinkle water on your feet.
- Chant **oṃ dāmodarāya namaḥ** and sprinkle water on the top of your head.

While chanting the following *mantras*, perform the hand motions:

- Chant **oṃ vāsudevāya namaḥ** and touch your upper and lower lips with the tips of the fingers of your right hand.
- Chant **oṃ saṅkarṣaṇāya namaḥ** and touch your right nostril with your right thumb and forefinger.
- Chant **oṃ pradyumnāya namaḥ** and touch your left nostril with your right thumb and forefinger.
- Chant **oṃ aniruddhāya namaḥ** and touch your right eye with your right thumb and ring finger.
- Chant **oṃ puruṣottamāya namaḥ** and touch your left eye with your right thumb and ring finger.
- Chant **oṃ adhokṣajāya namaḥ** and touch your right ear with your right thumb and forefinger.
- Chant **oṃ nṛsiṅhāya namaḥ** and touch your left ear with your right thumb and forefinger.
- Chant **oṃ acyutāya namaḥ** and touch your navel with your right thumb and little finger.
- Chant **oṃ janārdanāya namaḥ** and touch your heart with the palm of your right hand.
- Chant **oṃ upendrāya namaḥ** and touch your head with all the finger tips of your right hand.
- Chant **oṃ haraye namaḥ** and touch your right upper arm with the fingertips of your left hand.
- Chant **oṃ kṛṣṇāya namaḥ** and touch your left upper arm with the fingertips of your right hand.

Now chant the following mantra from the Ṛg Veda while showing the *praṇāma-mudrā* (palms together in front of your heart):

(oṃ) *tad viṣṇoḥ paramaṃ padaṃ
sadā paśyanti sūrayaḥ
divīva cakṣur-ātataṃ
tad viprāso vipanyavo
jāgrvaṃ saḥ samindhate
viṣṇor yat paramaṃ padam*

Just as those with ordinary vision see the sun's rays in the sky, so the wise and learned devotees always see the supreme abode of Lord Viṣṇu. Because those highly praiseworthy and spiritually awake brāhmaṇas can see that abode, they can also reveal it to others. [Ṛg Veda Saṃhitā]

Establish General Arghya Water (samānya-arghya-sthāpana)

Establish *samānya-arghya* before starting the worship.

Set an empty *ācamana* cup (*pañca-pātra*) in place and fill it with fresh water. After pouring a few drops of water from the *ācamana* cup or a spouted water pot onto the fingers of your right hand, purify the water in the *ācamana* cup by *prokṣaṇa*:

- While chanting **om̐ astrāya phaṭ**, sprinkle water on the water in the *ācamana* cup.
- Invoke the Gaṅgā and other holy rivers by showing the *aṅkuśa-mudrā* and chanting:

gaṅge ca yamune caiva godāvari sarasvati

narmade sindho kāveri jale ṛsmin sannidhiṁ kuru

May water from the holy rivers Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Godāvari, Sarasvatī, Narmadā, Sindhu, and Kāveri kindly be present.

Now invoke the *bīja*-syllable *om̐* into the water, chanting it eight times silently while holding the *bijākṣara-mudrā* over the *ācamana* cup.