

ISKCON Temple Abhisekas

Position Paper - ISKCON Deity Worship Ministry

Position Statement

Abhisekas in ISKCON centers may only be performed by suitably qualified brahmanas according to the same pancaratrika standards as Srila Prabhupada established for daily temple worship.

The only exception, per Srila Prabhupada's instructions, is bathing Jagannatha, Baladeva and Subhadra annually for Snana Yatra.

Supporting Information

This applies to any deity in an ISKCON center, whether the understanding of some may be that the deities are installed or not. Temple worship standards apply in the temple; not that home worship standards are appropriate to be observed in ISKCON temples.

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī writes in his Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu (1.2.101):

*śruti-smṛti-purāṇādi-
pañcarātra-vidhiṁ vinā
aikāntikī harer bhaktir
utpātāyaiva kalpate*

"Devotional service of the Lord that ignores the authorized Vedic literatures like the Upaniṣads, Purāṇas and Nārada-pañcarātra is simply an unnecessary disturbance in society."

Only suitably qualified devotees may bathe, touch, or worship deities in ISKCON centers. The appropriate qualification includes following the four regulative principles, chanting at least 16 rounds daily, having received pancaratrika gayatri diksa within the Gaudiya sampradaya, and following appropriate dress and cleanliness standards in preparation for performing any worship.

The focus must be on serving and pleasing the deities, not personal satisfaction.

The notion of liberally distributing the mercy by allowing everyone to bathe is not supported by guru, sadhu, and sastra. Lord Caitanya's process was freely giving the holy name. Indeed, the arca-vigraha is the mercy form of the Lord and the way the Lord reciprocates with us depends on our qualification. Those who are not brahmana-initiated receive the Lord's mercy through darsana, honoring remnants, etc. However, only one who has received the qualification of pancaratrika gayatri diksa can receive the Lord's mercy by touching, bathing, and worshiping the Lord.

Suggestions on How to Engage Non-brahmanas

If temples wish to generate income via kalash sponsors who are not qualified for offering direct deity worship in ISKCON temples per Srila Prabhupada's and sastric instructions, then the following procedure is recommended:

1. Educate kalash sponsors how to come properly prepared in terms of purificatory and devotional dress for the event. This could include the sponsors observing the following vows:
 - a. Fasting the whole day before the event;
 - b. Bathing and wearing clean devotional clothing;
 - c. Following the four regulative principles on that day;
 - d. Chanting a set number of rounds (maybe not 16 but at least 4 or 8)
2. Perform sankalpa with sponsors.
3. Have sponsors form a cue with kalash in hand, filled with bathing substance .
4. Sponsors may be guided to do one of two options by temple authorities:
 - a. Each sponsor will present the filled kalash to the qualified pujari performing the abhiseka, wherein the pujari purifies the kalash and either pours directly onto the deity or otherwise first into a bathing conch, depending on preference and/or size of the deities being bathed..
 - b. Each sponsor may pour the bathing ingredients from their kalash directly into the bathing conch that the pujari is holding to the side. Then only the pujari bathes the deities.
 - i. The pujari may not hold the conch above the deity while the sponsor pours onto the conch which simultaneously is pouring onto the deity.
5. The pujari may then immediately collect caranamrta back into the sponsor's kalash, along with possibly some other prasadam for the sponsor to then take with them.

**** The principle is that the sponsor is being given the special opportunity to be engaged as a direct and active assistant to the qualified pujari(s)—as a servant of the servant of Their Lordships being worshiped.*

References

Krishna's instructions to Uddhava regarding deity worship

SB 11.27.8: Now please listen faithfully as I explain exactly how a person who has achieved twice-born status through the relevant Vedic prescriptions should worship Me with devotion.

SB 11.27.9: A twice-born person should worship Me, his worshipable Lord, without duplicity, offering appropriate paraphernalia in loving devotion to My Deity form or to a form of Me appearing upon the ground, in fire, in the sun, in water or within the worshiper's own heart.

SB 11.27.10: One should first purify his body by cleansing his teeth and bathing. Then one should perform a second cleansing by smearing the body with earth and chanting both Vedic and tantric mantras.

Srila Prabhupada's instructions

In our Krsna consciousness society, unless one is twice initiated – first by chanting Hare Krsna and second by the Gayatri mantra – he is not allowed to enter the kitchen or Deity room to execute duties.

Srimad Bhagavatam, 4.31.10 purport

Last night I have given comments that Madhavendra Puri, he was performing the Annakuta ceremony and installing the Deity. So everything was being brahmana, done by brahmana, qualified brahmana, but Madhavendra Puri initiated them again to become Vaisnava. Then he gave them in charge of the Deity worship. So the Vaisnava functions cannot be done even by a brahmana.

Lecture: Bhagavad-gita 1.40 -- London, July 28, 1973

You should see that the Deity is tended for and cooked for only by the duly second initiated brahmanas.

Letter to: Bahudak — 19 December, 1974

The pancaratrīki-vidhi... Just like we are introducing in this temple for worshipping Deity, but actually the Deity can be worshiped by the bona fide brahmanas.

Sri Sri Rukmini Dvarakanatha Deity Installation -- Los Angeles, July 16, 1969

Regarding the exact date for celebration of Rathayatra Festival, it is on the 5th July until the return journey of Lord Jagannatha on the 14th July. Before Rathayatra, on June 19, there is a ceremony of bathing Lord Jagannatha after which Lord Jagannatha falls sick with fever from too much bathing. Then He takes rest and no one is allowed to visit, but He reappears on Rathayatra day.*

***This ceremony you can observe by bathing a small deity on the day participated by all devotees.** But there is no need of closing the temple for fifteen days. ACB

Letter to: Syamasundara -- Los Angeles 21 February, 1970

We shall touch the Deity altar and Deity in very clean condition, after taking bath and washing mouth nicely.

Letter, 20 April 1970

In general we do not allow anyone without sacred thread to attend to the deity, but if there is lack of qualified brahmanas, men without sacred thread may be employed to cleanse the floor and other things which do not require their touching or gazing upon the deity at close quarter.

Letter to: Bhakta dasa -- Calcutta 5 March, 1972

Foolish people think that devotional service is flattering the Lord to get special mercy. Factually the pure devotees who are engaged in the transcendental loving service of the Lord are not a mercantile community. A mercantile house renders service to someone in exchange for something valuable. The pure devotee does not render service unto the Lord for such exchange, and therefore the full mercy of the Lord is open for him.

SB 1.8.29 purport