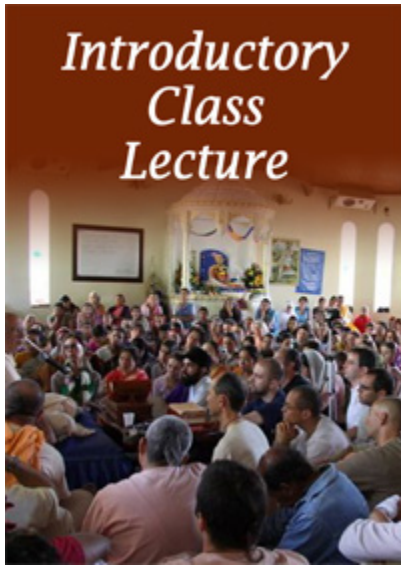


# Introduction



I'd like to welcome you all to our classes on Vaishnava Etiquette. Thank you for coming. I'll begin by reading some quotes from Caitanya Caritamrta, the instructions of Caitanya Mahaprabhu to Sanatana Gosvami, on **Sadacara**-*the activities of a Vaishnava*.

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu instructed Sanatana Gosvami to write Vaishnava Smrti (Hari-bhakti-vilasa) in **CC. Madhya-lila 24.324-344**:

Folding his hands, Sanatana Gosvami said, "My Lord, You ordered me to write a directory about the activities of Vaishnavas. I am a most lowborn person. I have no knowledge of good behavior. How is it possible for me to write authorized directions about Vaishnava activities?" Sanatana Gosvami then requested the Lord, "Please personally tell me how I can write this difficult book about Vaishnava behavior. Please manifest Yourself in my heart. If You would please manifest Yourself within my heart and personally direct me in writing this book, then, although I am lowborn, I may hope to be able to write it. You can do this because You are the Supreme Personality of Godhead Yourself and whatever You direct is perfect."

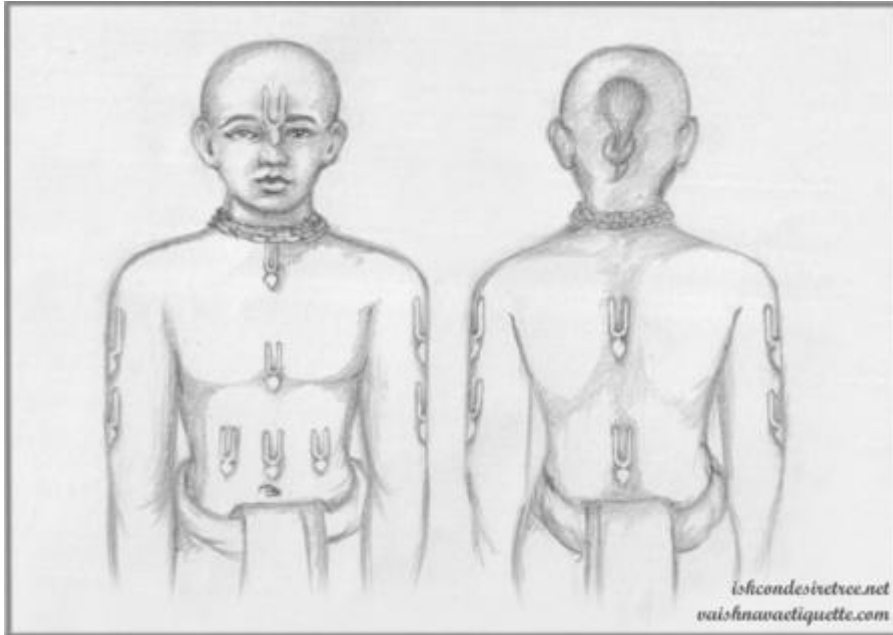


Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu replied, "Whatever you want to do you will be able to do correctly by Lord Krsna's favor. He will manifest the real purport. Because you asked Me for a synopsis, please hear these few indications. In the beginning one must take shelter of a bona fide spiritual master. In your book there should be the characteristics of the bona fide guru and the bona fide disciple. Then, before accepting a spiritual master, one can be assured of the spiritual master's position. Similarly, the spiritual master can also be assured of the disciple's position. The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krsna, should be described as the worshipable object, and you should consider the (bija) mantra for the worship of Krsna, Rama, or any other expansion of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

"You should discuss the qualifications necessary for receiving a mantra, the perfection of the mantra, the purification of the mantra, initiation, morning duties, remembrance of the Supreme Lord, cleanliness, and washing the mouth and other parts of the body. In the morning, one should regularly brush his teeth, take his bath, offer prayers to the Lord and offer obeisances to the spiritual master. One should render service to the spiritual master and paint one's body in twelve places with urdhva pundra (tilaka). One should stamp the holy names of the Lord on his body, or one should stamp the symbols of the Lord, such as the disc

and

club.



"After this, you should describe how one should decorate his body with gopicandana, wear neck beads, collect tulasi leaves from the tulasi tree, cleanse his cloth and the altar, cleanse one's own house or apartment and go to the temple and ring the bell just to draw the attention of Lord Krsna. "Also describe the Deity worship, wherein one should offer food to Krsna at least five times daily. One should in due time place Krsna on a bed. You should also describe the process for offering arati and the worship of the Lord according to the list of five, sixteen or fifty ingredients.



"The characteristics of the Deities should be discussed as well as the characteristics of the salagrama-sila. One should also discuss visiting the Deities in the temple and touring holy places like Vrndavana, Mathura, and Dvaraka.

"You should glorify the holy name and carefully give up offenses when chanting the holy name. One should know the symptoms of a Vaishnava. One must give up or nullify all kinds of seva-aparadha, offenses in Deity worship.

"The items of worship, such as water, conchshell, flowers, incense and lamp, should be described. You should also mention chanting softly, offering prayers, circumambulating, and offering obeisances. All these should be carefully studied.

"Other items to be considered are the method of performing purascarana (purification), taking krsna-prasada, giving up unoffered food and not blaspheming the Lord's devotees."

This is also a very important point that devotees should remember. A Vaishnava is not suppose to take anything that has not been offered to Krsna. We should be very careful about that. Because I have seen practically all over the world we are developing a tendency to eat things that are not offered. The only consideration has become if the food is vegetarian. But we are supposed to only take Krsna prasada.

Try to avoid it as much as possible. When you are traveling or if you are on sankirtana, then it is different. But still try to offer everything to Krsna before you take it.



One should know the symptoms of a devotee and how to associate with devotees. One should know how to satisfy the devotee by rendering services, and one should know how to give up the association of nondevotees. One should also regularly hear the recitation of Srimad-Bhagavatam.

We can see how Prabhupada actually implemented all of these instructions of Sanatana Gosvami in our Society. You should describe the ritualistic duties of every day, and you should describe the fortnightly duties-especially observing Ekadasi fast, which comes every fortnight. Now here also it's an important thing to consider, like we generally think that just by not taking grains we are observing Ekadasi. But actually when we talk about observing Ekadasi, it actually means fasting. And fasting means not taking anything. Fasting does not necessarily mean just fasting from grains. In the beginning of course, devotees may just abstain from grains on Ekadasi day. But as one makes advancement, one should try to fast completely. Also as it has been described that one may also stay awake for 24 hours. Stay up during the day and the night.

When I give class on observing Ekadasi, devotees often raise the point that Prabhupada never really instructed us to observe Ekadasi in this way. But actually in The Nectar of Devotion Prabhupada says that devotees may stay awake the whole night singing the glories of the Lord fasting. So Prabhupada actually did instruct us to stay up all night as well. It's actually not a very difficult thing.

You should recommend the avoidance of mixed Ekadasi and the performance of pure Ekadasi. **CC Madhya 24.342**

Perhaps you've noticed that sometimes we don't fast on the Ekadasi but we fast on the Dvadasi. The reason we do this is that the Ekadasi is mixed. That is, dasami enters into Ekadasi. When the tenth day overlaps the eleventh day it is to be mixed or penetrated. And one does not fast on that Ekadasi but instead fasts on the next day which is Dvadasi, the twelfth day. And it has been described that fasting on a Maha-Dvadasi is a thousand times more potent than fasting on an Ekadasi.

"You should also describe the fault in not observing this. One should be very careful as far as these items are concerned. If one is not careful, one will be negligent in executing devotional service."

"Whatever you say about Vaishnava behavior, the establishment of Vaishnava temples and Deities and everything else should be supported by evidence from the Puranas."

"You should give general and specific descriptions of the behavior and activities of a Vaishnava. You should outline things that are to be done and things that are not to be done. All this should be described as regulations and etiquette's."

**Here are some other quotes from Srila Prabhupada on etiquette:**

"All the inhabitants of Vrndavana are Vaishnavas. They are all-auspicious because somehow or other they always chant the holy name of Krsna."

So here we also must understand one thing that all of the devotees in ISKCON are Vaishnavas because somehow or other they are chanting the holy name. Prabhupada is giving the qualification of a Vaishnava. One should consider all of the inhabitants of Vrndavana Vaishnavas. Why? Because somehow or other they chant the holy name of the Lord. So what to talk of the devotees of ISKCON, we should be very respectful of all of the devotees knowing well that they are all Vaishnavas.



The biggest hindrance to our spiritual progress is Vaishnava aparadha. It's actually a very dangerous offense. We must be very careful about committing Vaishnava aparadha.

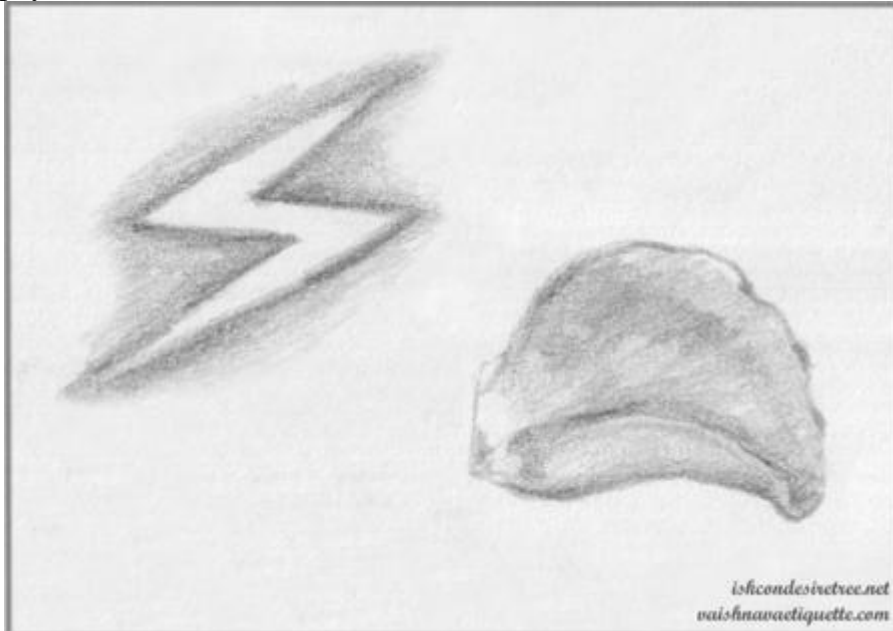
"Even though some of them do not strictly follow the rules and regulations of devotional service, on the whole they are devotees of Krsna and chant His name directly or indirectly."

**CC Adi-lila 5.232, Purport**

This is a very important instruction. Actually the whole Vaishnava etiquette or the whole Vaishnava culture is founded on this principle.

*A Vaishnava should be tolerant like a tree and submissive like grass...* Nevertheless the author of this instruction, Caitanya Mahaprabhu, did not tolerate the misbehavior of Jagai and Madhai. When they harassed Nityananda Prabhu, He immediately became angry and wanted to kill them. One should be very meek and humble in his personal transactions, but if there is blasphemy against one's guru or another Vaishnava, one should be angry as fire. One should not tolerate blasphemy against a Vaishnava but should immediately take one of three actions. If someone blasphemes a Vaishnava, one should stop him with higher arguments and higher reason. If one is not expert enough to do this he should give up his life on the spot, and if he cannot do this, he must go away. But we should never listen to blasphemy against a Vaishnava. **CC Adi-lila 7.50, Purport**

Although Vaishnavas are very humble and tolerant, that is not weakness. Vaishnavas are not weak. Vaishnavas are as hard as a thunderbolt. If it is necessary they can become as violent as a lion. Prabhupada would often say that a Vaishnava is as soft as a rose petal and as hard as a thunderbolt. A Vaishnava is not only soft, but if necessary he can become hard. That shows that Vaishnavas are not weaklings. Vaishnavas are very, very powerful. Both physically and spiritually. Actually it is the spiritual power that endows them with the physical power.



Vaishnavas should not be disrespectful to anyone. One should always be respectful to others but should not demand respect for himself. *Amanina manadena.*

A Vaishnava is *adosa darsi*. A Vaishnava never sees other's faults. Of course, every human being has good qualities and faults. Therefore, it is said *sadhyana guna mitsanti*. A Vaishnava accepts only a man's glories and not his faults. *Adosa darsi* means one who does not find faults in others. He simply sees the other's good qualities and he finds faults with himself. He is very strict with himself and he is always watching himself very scrutinizingly, detecting all of the defects he has in himself.

A Vaishnava always follows the order of guru and Krsna. Anyone, who attempts to write about Krsna, must first take permission from the guru and Krsna. One must first become a pure devotee and then he must take permission from the spiritual master and that permission must be confirmed by Krsna from within his heart.

Sanatana Goswami followed the instructions of Caitanya Mahaprabhu and wrote a book on Vaishnava Etiquette. This book is the guidebook that directs a Vaishnava's activities. The *Hari-bhakti-vilasa* describes Vaishnava etiquette as the behavior of a pure Vaishnava.

Everybody should follow that standard. Here is how the Hari-bhakti-vilasa defines Vaishnava etiquette, its philosophy, and some basic Vaishnava principles.

*"Since nothing can be successful without sadacara or etiquette, every action should be performed with proper etiquette."* We must act according to proper etiquette. The heart of a saintly person is free from contamination. The way a saintly person acts is known as proper etiquette. A way a saintly person acts is known as sadacara.

"If a person reads the six branches of the Vedas without practicing proper etiquette, he does not get purified, just as a bird flies away from the nest as soon as it grows wings, the Vedas leave him at the time of his death.

"Although one may have acquired the knowledge of all of the Vedas, but if one is not practicing the proper etiquette or if he did not become a Vaishnava, then all of this knowledge which he has acquired, will be lost at the time of death.

"Proper etiquette increases fame, opulence, longevity and destroys all inauspiciousness.

"O king, proper etiquette gives the results of dharma, artha and kama. Therefore a wise man very carefully performs the proper etiquette described in the scriptures.

"Thus one can understand that Vaishnava etiquette purifies the heart and the consciousness."

Now here are some basic principles and points that I've compiled from Hari-bhakti-vilasa and The Nectar of Devotion about the proper activities of one who is a Vaishnava. A Vaishnava-  
**01.** Offers respect and obeisances to the guru, to the Lord and His devotees, and to other superiors. (One must offer respect and obeisances to the superiors, like the guru, the Lord and His devotees. We must also respect superior relatives, like the parents.)



**02.** Get up before 4 a.m. and attend mangala-arati.



**03.** After waking up, first brush your teeth and afterwards take a bath.

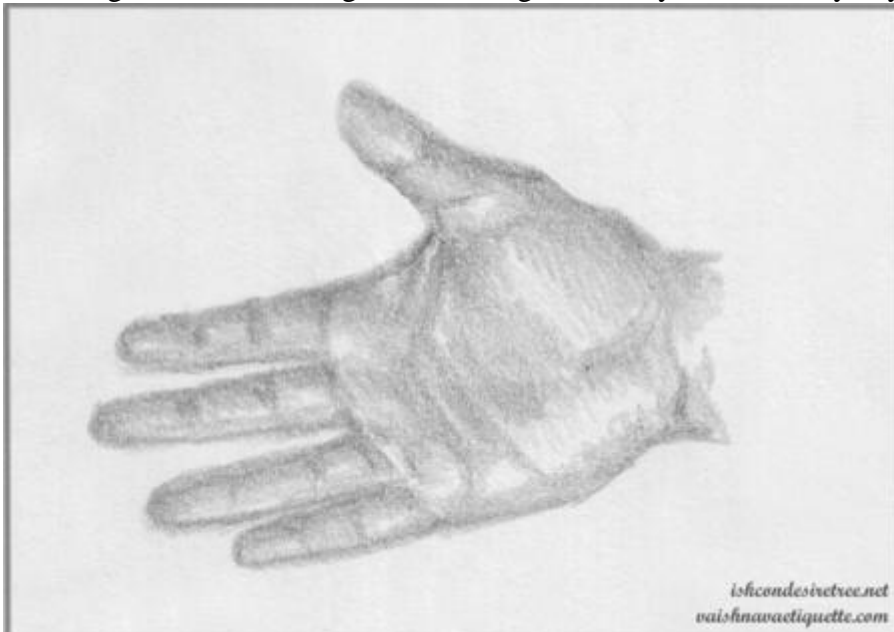
**04.** Bathe after passing stool.

**05.** Wash with water after passing urine. Also wash hands and feet.

**06.** Wash hands, feet, and mouth before and after taking prasadam. (We must at least wash our hands. In the Western countries it may be difficult to wash our feet. But when in India, you should wash both your hands and your feet before and after taking prasada.)

**07.** Wash hands after drinking water. (This done because when you hold your cup while drinking, your hands actually become contaminated.)

**08.** Use the right hand for eating and drinking. Even if you are a lefty, try to use your right



hand.

**09.** Always wear clean clothes.

**10.** Never steal anything.

**11.** Never use unpleasant words.

**12.** Never tell a lie, even if it is pleasant. (That is don't even tell a pleasant lie.)

**13.** Never speak ill of others.



**14.** Do not become inimical to others.

**15.** Do not develop friendship with people who are envious, fallen, insane, inimical, extravagant, deceptive, lying or illicitly related with women. Do not develop friendship with



unchaste women.

**16.** Do not travel alone.

**17.** Do not sneeze or yawn without covering the mouth.

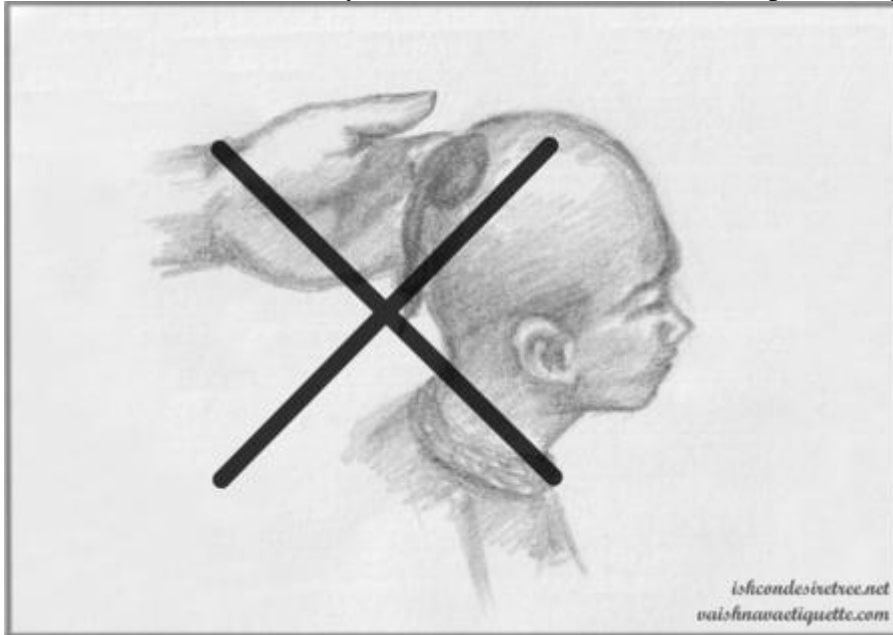
**18.** Do not laugh loudly.

19. Do not pass air loudly.



20. Always avoid a crematorium, a garden, and unchaste women at night.
21. Do not take shelter of a fallen person.
22. Neither sleep too much nor stay awake too much.
23. Do not outstretch your legs in front of your elders.
24. Do not pass urine or stool on the road.
25. Do not spit while eating.
26. Do not insult women.
27. Do not become envious of women.
28. Never cause any harm to anyone; instead, always try to do good to others.
29. Do not associate with unscrupulous people or read "scriptures" that are not bona fide. (Scriptures are in quotes, which means they are so-called scriptures.)
30. Do not mock people who are foolish, insane, distressed, ugly, cunning, lame, or fallen.
31. Do not chastise anyone except sons and disciples to educate them.
32. Bathe after shaving, copulating, or going to a crematorium.

33. Do not hit anyone on the head or pull anyone by the hair.



34. Do not eat yogurt or chickpea flour at night. (Actually Srila Prabhupada instructed us about yogurt but we are not so sure about the chickpeas. So you be careful about that now. Don't eat chickpeas at night. In the morning they are good, but not at night.)

35. If someone insults you, leave the place silently.

36. Never praise yourself.

37. Never look at a naked woman or man.

38. Do not place your foodstuffs on your lap to eat.

39. Do not quarrel with your wife.

40. Do not spit on water. (Because people sometimes drink water from ponds or lakes or rivers, one should not spit on water.)

41. Do not sleep in the temple room.

42. Sannyasis should bathe three times a day, grhasthas and brahmacaris at least twice a day.

43. After one takes prasadam the area where the plate was kept must be cleared. One should not step over the area where prasadam was taken, because it is considered contaminated. (I

have noticed in many temples that after we take prasada, 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 prasadam becomes contaminated. And if you step on that spot, then you must wash your feet. The place where the prasadam has been taken, must be cleaned right after the prasadam has been taken. Because the temple must be very clean, we should be careful that we do not unnecessarily contaminate the temple.

**44.** After touching the inside of the mouth or nose, one must wash his hands.



**45.** After putting on tilaka, one must do acamana by saying, om kesavaya namah, om narayanaya namah, and om madhavaya namah.

So those are some of the basic principles by which a Vaishnava acts. We'll be going over many of these points in detail later in our classes.