



तव कथामृतं तसजीवनम्
tava kathāmytam tapta-jīvanam

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FORBIDDEN TO WEAR TILAK

From a story told by
His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta
Swami Prabhupada



There was once a factory in India where all the workers were Hindus and mostly *vaiṣṇavas*. The *vaiṣṇavas* had freedom, therefore, to wear their *vaiṣṇava tilaka* to work, and they also displayed other *vaiṣṇava* paraphernalia.

After some time, however, the factory went to new management and the new proprietor was a Muslim. On taking over the business, the Muslim owner declared that he would no longer allow the workers to come to work wearing *vaiṣṇava tilaka*. Most of the workers obeyed, and on the given date announced by the owner, they appeared at the factory without their *tilaka*. One employee, however, thought that he would take his chances and depend on Kṛṣṇa, so he went to work wearing very clear, white, *vaiṣṇava tilaka*. After seeing all the workers assembled, the new Muslim proprietor said, "This one devotee who has worn *vaiṣṇava tilaka* is very courageous. He may be permitted to continue wearing the *tilaka* to work, but all others are forbidden to wear it any more."

In this way, Prabhupada encouraged the devotees to not unnecessarily abandon the markings of a *vaiṣṇava*. Where situations forbid it, Prabhupada said that it was not absolutely necessary to wear *tilaka*, although

a devotee should at least put water *tilaka* on his body in the morning and consecrate his body with the names of Vishnu. But if the paraphernalia is permitted, then a devotee should not unnecessarily do away with the dress or beads of a *vaiṣṇava*. ❀

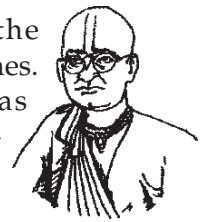
— Srila Prabhupada Nectar, chapter 3, number 6. Satsvarup Das Goswami. Gita Nagari Press. 2003.

TWICE BORN INITIATES SHOULD ALWAYS WEAR TILAKA

Srila Vrindavan Das Thakur's
Śrī Caitanya-Bhāgavata, ādi-khaṇḍa 15.5-15
With Purports of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta
Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada

TEXTS 5-8

Mukunda Sanjaya was the Lord's servant for many lifetimes. His son was known as Purushottam Das. Gaurachandra daily went to teach at the house of this fortunate person. The Lord arrived first and sat in the *caṇḍī-maṇḍapa*. Thereafter the students would gradually arrive there. During this period, sometimes by chance a student would forget to mark his forehead with *tilaka*.



PURPORT

The word *tilaka* refers to when a person who is initiated as a *vaiṣṇava* marks twelve parts of his body above the waist — his forehead, stomach, chest, throat, right waist, right arm, right shoulder, left waist, left arm, left shoulder, upper back, and lower back — as

temples of Hari, with *ūrdhva-puṇḍra*, two vertical lines. The forehead is one of these twelve places. In the *Nārada Purāṇa* it is stated: “A *vaiṣṇava* who marks his forehead with *ūrdhva-puṇḍra* immediately purifies the entire world.” The devotees of Vishnu always apply *ūrdhva-puṇḍra tilaka*, and the devotees of Shiva, who are averse to devotional service to Vishnu, apply *tri-puṇḍra*, three lines.

The scriptures state that a king should take any initiated twice-born who does not wear *tilaka*, sit him backwards on an ass, and have him driven out of town. Therefore, every initiated *vaiṣṇava* must always wear *tilaka*. That is why the Lord, who is *jagad-guru*, the teacher of everyone, gave such instructions in His childhood pastimes. If one wants to worship Lord Vishnu, then he must accept the five *saṁskāras* related to initiation. Generally, a twice-born undergoes ten kinds of *saṁskāras*. Those who are lower than the twice-born undergo fifteen types of *saṁskāras* to become *vaiṣṇavas*. Just as a *brāhmaṇa* is obliged to maintain a pure *brāhmaṇa* thread, an initiated *vaiṣṇava* is obliged to maintain *śikhā*, *brāhmaṇa* thread, *tilaka*, and *mālā*.

For a description on how to apply *tilaka*, one should refer to the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.66-98). It is stated in *Padma Purāṇa, uttara-khaṇḍa*: “A practitioner should decorate his body with twelve marks while chanting the names of the Lord such as Keshava.” The process for decorating the twelve parts of the body with the twelve *tilaka* marks is as follows:

*lalāṭe keśavam dhyāyen nārāyaṇam athodare
vakṣaṇi-sthale mādhavam tu govindam kaṇṭha-kūpake
viṣṇum ca dakṣiṇe kuṅṣau bāhau ca madhusūdanam
trivikramam kandhare tu vāmanam vāma-pārśvake
śrīdharam vāma-bāhau tu hṛṣīkeṣam tu kandhare
pṛṣṭhe ca padmanābham ca kaṭyāṁ dāmodaram nyaset
tat prakṣālena-toyan tu vāsudevāya mūrdhani
ūrdhva-puṇḍram lalāṭe tu sarveṣāṁ prathamam smṛtam
lalāṭādi krameṇaiva dhāraṇan tu vidhīyate*

When one marks the forehead with *tilaka*, he must remember Keshava. When one marks the lower abdomen, he must remember Narayana. For the chest, one should remember Madhava, and when marking the hollow of the neck one should remember Govinda. Lord Vishnu should be remembered while marking the right side of the belly, and Madhusudana should be remembered when

marking the right arm. Trivikrama should be remembered when marking the right shoulder, and Vamana should be remembered when marking the left side of the belly. Sridhara should be remembered while marking the left arm, and Hrishikesha should be remembered when marking the left shoulder. Padmanabha and Damodara should be remembered when marking the back. Then one should wash with water and remember Vāsudeva while wiping the hand on the head. One should put *tilaka* on the forehead first. This is the rule. Then one should put on *tilaka* according to the above-mentioned procedure.”

If one does not decorate his body with *tilaka*, he will incur sin. It is stated by Narada Muni in *Padma Purāṇa*: “If one performs sacrifice, gives in charity, undergoes austerity, studies the Vedas, or offers oblations to the forefathers without putting on *tilaka*, then all these activities will be useless. If a person does not decorate his body with *tilaka*, he is not to be seen, because his body is as impure as a crematorium.” It is mentioned in the *Āditya Purāṇa*: “A king should put a fallen *brāhmaṇa* whose body is devoid of *vaiṣṇava* marks of *tilaka*, conch, and wheel on the back of donkey and drive him out of his kingdom.” It is stated in *Padma Purāṇa, uttara-khaṇḍa*: “A person who performs any activity like worshiping deities without putting on *tilaka* achieves no benefit. There is no doubt about it. Know for certain that a person who performs *sandhyā* without wearing *tilaka* is simply demonic and surely goes to hell.”

Prohibition for wearing crooked or three-lined *tilaka*: It is stated in the *Padma Purāṇa, uttara-khaṇḍa*: “A person who wears three-lined *tilaka* instead of *vaiṣṇava tilaka* is the lowest of men. Because of breaking the rules for marking *tilaka* on the body, which is the abode of Lord Vishnu, such a person certainly goes to hell.” It is stated in the *Skanda Purāṇa*: “A person should not wear crooked *tilaka*, even if he is about to die, nor should he chant any names other than the holy names of Narayan. He should wear *vaiṣṇava tilaka*, using *gopī-candana* if available.” Elsewhere it is stated: “Learned persons know that there are prescriptions for the *brāhmaṇas* and devotees to wear *vaiṣṇava tilaka*, and other people should wear three-lined *tilaka*. If one sees or touches a *brāhmaṇa* who has put on three-lined *tilaka* rather than *vaiṣṇava tilaka*,

he should take bath with his clothes on. A *vaiṣṇava* should not wear three-lined *tilaka* rather than proper *vaiṣṇava tilaka* because such an act does not please Lord Hari." In the narrations about the month of Kārtika in the *Skanda Purāṇa*, it is stated: "One should not see a person whose forehead is not decorated with *vaiṣṇava tilaka*. If one happens to do so, he should immediately look at the sun, for Lord Hari and Lakṣmīdevī reside within the *tilaka*." It is stated in the *Padma Purāṇa*, *uttara-khaṇḍa*: "Marks of *tilaka* resembling a banyan leaf, a bamboo leaf, and the bud of a lotus are most enchanting."

The glories of decorating the body with *tilaka* are as follows: "The beautiful vacant space within the mark of *tilaka* is the sitting place for Sri Lakṣmī and Sri Janārdana, the Lord of lords. Therefore, know for certain that the body marked with *tilaka* is a sanctified temple of the Lord." It is mentioned in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*: "If a person who is impure, ill-behaved, and engaged in sinful activities, decorates his body with *tilaka* even with his mind, he certainly becomes pure forever. One should mark one's forehead with *tilaka* while seeing one's face in a mirror or in water, but never touch the *tilaka* with one's fingernails."

The rules and regulations for applying *tilaka*: It is stated in the *Padma Purāṇa*, *uttara-khaṇḍa*: "The most fortunate unalloyed devotees of Hari should decorate their bodies with marks of *tilaka* resembling the lotus feet of Hari with a vacant space between the two lines. They should begin to mark from the tip of the nose up to the end of the forehead with *tilaka* or other suitable clay. The tip of the nose refers to three-quarters down the nose. One should draw two separate lines beginning from the middle of the eyebrows upwards." The prescription for keeping space within the mark of *tilaka*: "A fallen twice-born who applies *tilaka* without keeping a vacant space between the two lines certainly abandons Sri Hari and Lakṣmīdevī, who reside within that space. There is no doubt that a fallen twice-born who applies *tilaka* without keeping a space maintains the feet of a dog on his forehead. Therefore, O beautiful one, *brāhmaṇas* and women should always mark their foreheads with *tilaka* resembling two sticks with a space between."

The symptoms of *tilaka* as temples of Hari: "The mark of *tilaka* that starts from the nose and stretches up to the hair on the head with a beautiful space in between the lines is called a temple of Hari. Lord Brahma resides on the left side, Sadashiva resides on the right side, and Lord Vishnu resides in the middle of such a *tilaka* mark. One should not apply anything in the middle." The clay used for preparing *tilaka* is described in the *Padma Purāṇa* as follows: "One should collect clay for *tilaka* beneath flowing waters that have bathed Lord Vishnu. One can also collect clay from the transcendental abode of Hari. One should devotedly collect clay from the Venkata Hill, from Sri Rangam, from Sri Kurma-kshetra, from Sri Dwarka, from Sri Prayaga, from Sri Nrisingha-kshetra, from Sri Varaha-kshetra, or from Sri Vrindavan [or any forest of *tulasī*] and then mix it with the water that has washed the lotus feet of Vishnu. In this way one should decorate one's body with such *tilaka* and come before the Lord. O Maharaja Ambarish, to minimize your sinful reactions, just see one whose forehead is decorated with *tilaka* made of *gopī-candana*." In the *Skanda Purāṇa*, Dhruva Maharaja speaks as follows: "If you see a person decorated with the *tilaka* marks of a conch and wheel, adorned with *tulasī mañjarīs* on his head, and his limbs smeared with *gopī-candana*, then why should you fear sinful reactions? A *vaiṣṇava* should mark his forehead with attractive *tilaka* of clay collected from the root of a *tulasī* plant. One should mark his forehead with *gopī-candana* and wear the garland that has been offered to the Lord. In this way, one should decorate one's forehead with one of the three kinds of *tilaka*. One should also decorate his body with various shapes like Matsya and Kūrma and various weapons like the wheel in order to please Lord Hari."

The Vedic injunction regarding applying *tilaka*: It is stated in the *Hiraṇyakeśīya* branch of the *Yajur Veda*: "A person who wears *tilaka* marks resembling the lotus feet of Hari becomes very fortunate and dear to the Supreme Brahman, Sri Hari. A human being who wears *tilaka* with a space in the middle becomes eligible for liberation." In the *Kaṭha* branch of the *Yajur Veda* it is stated: "The great soul who after applying *tilaka* meditates through mantras on Sri Vishnu, who holds a *cakra*, who is the Supreme Absolute Truth, who is greater than the greatest, and who

resides in the hearts of His devotees, certainly becomes pure." It is stated in the *Atharva Veda*: "The fortunate practitioner who throughout his life decorates his body with *tilaka* marks like the wheel, certainly attains the all-pervading Lord Vishnu's supreme abode, which is the ultimate goal of the devotees."

TEXTS 9-15

As *sanātana-dharma* Himself, the Lord establishes the principles of religion. In order to protect people's religious principles, He would not tolerate any transgression.

The very moment such a delinquent would appear, the Lord would put him to such shame that he would never again come without first completing his morning worship. The Lord would say, "O brother, why I do not see any *tilaka* on your forehead? What is your explanation? The Vedas say that if a *brāhmaṇa*'s forehead is not decorated with *tilaka*, it is as good as a crematorium. I can understand that you have not performed your daily worship. Therefore, dear brother, your morning has become fruitless. Go back home and perform your morning duties again. Then you may return to study." In this way, all of the Lord's students were conscientious about performing their religious duties. ❧

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A SYMBOL OF UNSHAKEABLE FAITH

The *tilaka* as a symbol of unshakeable faith and steadfastness appears in a few stories of saints who resisted attempts by Muslim rulers to suppress Vaishnavism. Among these is Bhagavan Das, a pupil of Yuta Khojiji and Shyamdas, who lived in Mathura. Priya Das says that the Mughal emperor, noticing that many of his subjects were wearing *tilaka* and *mālā*, which he considered to be a refutation of his authority, issued a proclamation to the effect that no one should wear them. Many *vaiṣṇavas* gave up wearing them for fear of losing their lives, but one devotee, Bhagavan Das, was so filled with the blissful ocean of *bhakti* that he dared to present himself before the emperor wearing his *tilaka* and *mālā*. The emperor was so impressed and pleased by this display of faith and courage that he permitted Bhagavan Das to continue to reside in Mathura. It is also said that the saint subsequently founded a temple dedicated to Harideva.

A similar story is told about Biharinadeva (or Biharina Das), a follower of Hari Das, though it is not related in *Nijamatasiddhānta*, a work containing biographies of the *ācāryas* and saints of the sect. The emperor Akbar, who had a reputation for broad-mindedness in religious matters, decided to test the faith of the *vaiṣṇavas*. He summoned them all to attend his *darbār*, but warned that none of them must appear wearing a *tilaka* or *mālā*. Among the saints and mahantas, Biharinadeva alone decided that he would nevertheless present himself before Akbar wearing the signs of his faith. This was not on account of any egotism. It is said that Radha had appeared to him in a dream and told him not to be afraid. Accordingly, Biharinadev put on extra *tulasī-mālās* and enhanced his *tilaka* by smearing it with his thumb so that it extended down to the tip of his nose. This is how the ascetic followers of Hari Das account for their wearing of extra *mālās* and the fact that their *tilaka* is an elongated version of that of the Nimbaraka *sampradāya*. At the *darbār*, Akbar proclaimed that Biharinadev was foremost among the *vaiṣṇavas* on account of his steadfastness. ❧

— Pages 40-41 of A.W. Entwistle, *Vaiṣṇava Tilakas; Sectarian Marks Worn by Worshipers of Viṣṇu*. International Association of the Vrindaban Research Institute. London. 1982.