

ISKCON Educational Services

Tips on Looking after Hindu Artefacts

Teachers are often concerned about how to treat religious artefacts in the classroom. On one hand, they wish to avoid offence, on the other, we cannot ask children to treat artefacts as do faith-members.

The following guidelines may be helpful.

For all religious artefacts:

- Cultivate in pupils the attitude of stewardship towards all material items, particularly school property and educational aids.
- Help engender a mood of positive respect towards religious artefacts, particularly getting students to understand that they are special to other people.
- Store your items in a special box or cupboard, away from more secular items.
- Discuss with students the (possible) reasons behind the following guidelines. Get them to ask “what is the meaning behind them?”

For Hindu artefacts:

- Place artefacts on clean surfaces, and specifically not on chairs or on the floor
- Ensure that you are clean before touching them, e.g. do not touch with dirty hands
- Avoid stepping over sacred items (touching with the feet or stepping over are considered offensive within Hinduism)
- Avoid taking artefacts into the toilet (this is particularly relevant to some items of clothing such as prayer shawls)

Please note: the above guidelines relate largely to cleanliness. In many textbooks on Hinduism, the ideas of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’ (as they are usually termed) are often described, largely erroneously, as ‘ritualistic’. Nevertheless, the concepts relating to dirt and cleanliness (even on more subtle levels) are considered by most Hindu people to be real and tangible, e.g. there are certain negative energies associated with the feet. To point them at others is disrespectful.

Looking after your artefacts

In addition to sensible and secure storage, we recommend the following:

- Brass and copperware are best polished occasionally with Brasso or a similar cleaner.
- Posters are best preserved by laminating or by mounting on board.
- Clothes and wall hangings often benefit from a light washing. Please use cold or lukewarm water as we cannot guarantee dye fastness.
- The silk flower garland can be washed in lukewarm soap water, rinsed and hung to dry in a warm place, away from direct heat.

For more information on how to treat your artefacts, please contact ISKCON Educational Services.