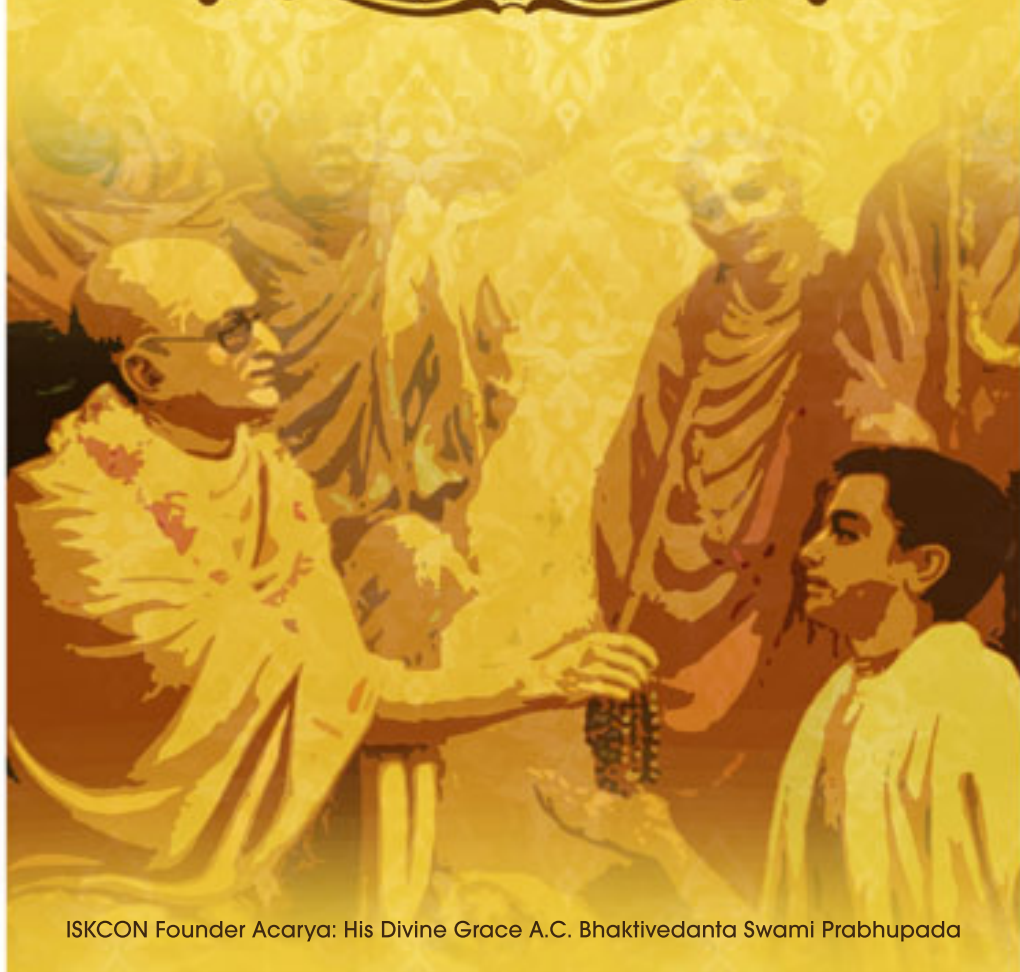


ISKCON Bhaktivedanta Manor's

# Initiation Procedures & Standards Policy



ISKCON Founder Acarya: His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

ISKCON UK  
Guide to Initiation  
**(Updated March 2019)**

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
Initiation Procedures	5
Stage One - A Spiritual Care System	5
Friends	5
Group	6
Mentor	6
Mentee Group	7
Stage Two – The ISKCON Disciple Course (IDC)	9
Stage Three – Aspiring Disciple and The Testing Period	10
Stage Four – Acting in the Relationship (Officially Aspiring)	133
Stage Five – Recommendation	14
Stage Six – Initiation and Lifelong Support	15
Initiation	155
Lifelong Support	166
Standards for Harinama (First) Initiation	177

ISKCON UK Guide to Initiation	
Standards for Brahmin Diksha (Second) Initiation	190
Guidelines for choosing a Diksha Guru	212
Overseas Devotees	223
Frequently Asked Questions	234
<b>Pre-Initiation Exam</b>	<b>277</b>
GBC Statement on the Position of Srila Prabhupada	29
Harmonizing ISKCON's Lines of Authority	322

# Introduction

This is a guide for becoming initiated within ISKCON in the UK. It contains all the details you need to know, and explains the stages you'll go through on your way to initiation.

Please read this guide with an **open mind** and know that any changes you may notice have been made solely with the **interests of you, your fellow devotees, your prospective guru and ISKCON in mind**.

We've produced this guide after long consultation with temple councils, with leaders from other temples, and with other mentors and spiritual leaders. We've revised the standards and separated them into two categories; essential and desirable, making them more **realistically achievable**.

**"Disciple means discipline," Srila Prabhupada said, so we hope you'll understand why** we've maintained the need for a mentor for every aspiring disciple, as well as other means of **measuring your spiritual progress**. A mentor will help you with advice along the way. A mentor is a spiritual companion on your journey in Krishna consciousness; someone you can confide in and discuss things with.

Ultimately, this guide allows you to create, in your own life, the ashram atmosphere that existed when Srila Prabhupada himself was examining a candidate's readiness for initiation. He expected all his disciples to be **strict followers, and that expectation remains just as essential today**. So whether you live in or near a temple community, or whether you live many miles away, there's now one system for everyone. We think it's **fair and will serve as a protection for both aspiring disciple and prospective guru**.

## ISKCON UK Guide to Initiation

Ultimately, the benefits of having this new procedure is to ensure that on the day of your initiation, when you sit to make your vows to your guru, you've been offered as much training, support and helpful guidance as needed. Your guru will be convinced that he is giving initiation to a fully qualified disciple, and you will be happy that you've been fully trained and prepared for your new life. Your guru can also rest assured that **even after initiation** his disciples will be cared for and given sufficient guidance. This is a **crucial need and, as most gurus nowadays cannot provide this personally themselves**, the service of offering you this high level of support both before and after initiation is kindly offered by a mentor of your choice.

We pray that this policy will help to create initiated disciples who can withstand the inevitable future turbulence in their lives and **remain strong in their vows to their gurus for the rest of their lives**. The Spiritual Care Systems has been designed not only to **train devotees in Vaishnava etiquette and more**, but to ensure that devotees are sheltered and supported in all aspects of the disciple's path - right throughout life.

As this spiritual care system develops we anticipate a day in the near future where all devotees will be surrounded by a **strong network of friends; friends who will give them practical help in times of illness and sorrow, whether it's bringing them prasadam or helping them take care of their children. We want to provide whatever support we can so that each and every devotee can practise spiritual life comfortably, chant their rounds without anxiety and remain in ISKCON for the rest of their life.**

If you have any questions about the contents of this guide, please discuss them with your mentor or local Temple President.

# Initiation Procedures

## Stage One - A Spiritual Care System

If you have gradually made progress up to chanting sixteen rounds each day, studying Srila Prabhupada's books regularly, and you've successfully given up your unwanted habits, there's a good chance that you managed to do it with help from other devotees. Whoever helped you this far in your spiritual life is going to be even more important to you after you receive initiation. Initiation is a stage on your journey of spiritual life. Although it is a time of change for you, the change should not include moving away from those who have helped you and supported you so far. Good friends and guides, especially spiritually strong ones, should not be relegated to your past. At the time of initiation you will be making lifetime vows that you will be expected to keep. You'll also be committing to continue to make spiritual advancement just as seriously as you've been doing up until now. In order to be successful, you will need various types of help.

### **Friends**

Firstly, you will need solid, supportive friendships with other devotees who can offer you moral and sometimes practical help. They should be sympathetic to your efforts in spiritual life, and ready to discuss the philosophy and how it applies to their own life. Preferably they should be open and honest and ready to offer you constructive criticism if they feel you need to hear it. Initiation is a time for deepening existing friendships as well as making new ones, because those good friends will be an important part of your future as well.

## Group

In the early days of the Hare Krishna movement, devotees would all live together at the temple. It would be their place of worship, their place of work, and their home. Now times have changed, and the success of Krishna consciousness is that there are many small groups where devotees come together to sing, study and honour prasadam. **Sanga, Bhakti Vriksha and Nama Hatta** groups are thus the basic building blocks of the Hare Krishna movement today. Devotees are encouraged to participate in these groups which are generally open to all regardless of their stage in spiritual life.

## Mentor

It is essential to have one friend who is senior to you who can act as a spiritual guide; we have termed this special friend a **mentor**. He or she will be able to provide you with regular instruction and guidance **once you register within an authorised system. The systems may vary according to your location.**

Prior to initiation, your mentor will assist you in learning about Krishna consciousness – the philosophy, theology, the values and the history – by reading the legacy of words left to us by Srila Prabhupada. He wrote his books not simply for his disciples of yesterday, but for the disciples of today. He is not only the founder of the Hare Krishna movement, but the *acarya*, the spiritual master upon whom all other teachers base their life and teaching.

Regarding Srila Prabhupada as the preeminent shiksha guru for all members of ISKCON, and carefully studying his books, you can discuss any questions that may arise with your mentor. By understanding the standard characteristics of an initiating spiritual master from the scriptures and our founder-*acarya*'s commentaries, you will know what qualities to look for in your own prospective guru.



## ISKCON UK Guide to Initiation

Although you will hear from many senior and advanced devotees, it is **not recommended for you to regard anyone in particular as your future diksha guru** until you have maintained the standard of sixteen rounds and four regulative principles for a minimum of one year and until you have attended the IDC course mentioned in Stage 2.

One additional aid to your ongoing spiritual practise is the **Progress Tracker/Sadhana Chart**. This is your personal written record of your daily achievements in the various aspects of a devotee's spiritual endeavour. It is a self-assessment chart to help you see the flow of your practises. Over the period of a month or two, it will be easy for you to see where you are progressing and where you may have some obstacles. You can then discuss with your mentor strategies for developing more strength in certain areas.

## Mentee Group

Depending on your location it is important to be part of an authorised system for care which will include group meetings. By meeting together as a group of friends you will gain strength and inspiration; by discussing common challenges or questions you will maintain a sense of realistic perspective in your life as you balance your spiritual practice with your study, work and family commitments. These groups are meant to provide the **foundation for sustainable spiritual practise**.

These small groups are an important investment in our existing devotees, all of whom - **initiated disciples included - need a support system**; we have named this support system the **Spiritual Care System**. The waves of the material ocean can sometimes be violent and thus association and support is necessary to remain encouraged, enthused and maintain a sense of belonging.

Given the central importance of the **Spiritual Care System** in supporting one's spiritual life, whether one is aspiring for first or second initiation, it

## ISKCON UK Guide to Initiation

is mandatory that you register with the **Spiritual Care System** and attend mentee group meetings regularly.

***So to summarise: Understanding the basics of the Vaishnava life from Srila Prabhupada's writings; having a circle of supportive friends; not regarding anyone as your future diksha guru until you have maintained the standard of sixteen rounds and four regulative principles for a minimum of one year and until you have attended the IDC course mentioned in Stage 2, registering into the Spiritual Care System and selecting a mentor; participating in regular meetings; and submitting monthly Progress Trackers/Sadhana Charts comprises Stage One.***

## Stage Two – The ISKCON Disciple Course (IDC)

In order to ensure that you get comprehensive information on the many different aspects of initiation, you will need to attend the **ISKCON Disciple Course**. This is a course set by the ISKCON Ministry of Education and is now run internationally. It can be accessed online from several sources and is delivered at many temples. At least 14 hours are required for this course. Only those who have been trained may teach the official version of this course. You will learn more about the qualifications of a guru, the significance of initiation, how to associate with your guru, the characteristics of a good disciple, and what acceptance of a guru practically means in a modern context within an international society such as ISKCON. The course also touches on what may go wrong in the guru-disciple relationship and therefore what pitfalls to avoid.

The course is usually well advertised beforehand. It must be successfully completed and initiation must take place **within five years**, otherwise you will need to attend it again.

Either before or after the course, you will be given a **Pre-Initiation Exam** paper which has been prepared by the **GBC**. Some of the questions are ones that Srila Prabhupada himself wanted initiation candidates to answer. You are allowed to answer the questions at home, in your own time. Then given to your mentor for checking. For your convenience the exam paper is included in this booklet.

***So to summarise: The ISKCON Disciple Course (IDC); the Pre-Initiation Exam; and comprises Stage Two.***

## Stage Three – Becoming an Aspiring Disciple and The Testing Period

Your mentor will continue to encourage you to listen regularly to Srila Prabhupada's recorded lectures, carefully read his books, and in general discover for yourself the teachings of Krishna consciousness directly as taught by the founder-acarya. This aspect of hearing from Srila Prabhupada is crucial, since he is our perfect example of a guru, both in words and living example. Initiation means to be initiated by someone who is a follower of Srila Prabhupada in his teachings and behaviour, so study of Srila Prabhupada will enable you to understand what exemplary teaching and behaviour is. You will be able to make a comparison of any other Vaishnava with the perfect example of Srila Prabhupada.

By this time you will probably know some senior Vaishnavas in whose company you feel particularly inspired and encouraged. You will have listened to them carefully, studied their lives, and felt uplifted by their words and example. Although you will continue to receive the blessings of such teachings and inspiration from these and many other Vaishnavas, for the purposes of initiation, you will be required to choose only one as your initiating guru.

When you feel the time is right for you to cultivate a relationship with someone you wish to regard as your guru, and **upon your satisfactory completion of the above stages** (including attending the ISKCON Disciple course, and chanting sixteen rounds and observing the four regulative principles for a minimum of one year), and **in consultation with your mentor**, you can be approved/registered as an **Aspiring Disciple**. You cannot be **approved/registered as an aspiring disciple** without consulting with your mentor. You should now write to the senior devotee asking if you can begin ongoing correspondence with a view to developing a relationship of teacher-student and possibly guru-disciple.

## ISKCON UK Guide to Initiation

Since this is a stage when many realisations develop within you, previous conceptions are challenged, and sometimes adherence to basic practises increase or decrease it will require a minimum six month period.

Your **first duty** is to **carefully scrutinise the instructions and personal behaviour** of the senior Vaishnava in order to ascertain how **faithfully he represents Srila Prabhupada in word and deed**. You are looking for the many devotional qualities you've learned about up to this point as well as **commitment to Srila Prabhupada's mission and care for others**. In addition to your own observation and discussions with the Vaishnava's **senior disciples**, you will also need to talk to **other senior devotees**. Scriptures recommend this period of examination; it should **not be dispensed with for any reason**. Only when you have adequately tested your prospective guru, and he has tested you, or asked others to test you, will the relationship become strong.

**Even though a guru is approved by the GBC, this does NOT relieve you of the responsibility of testing him for a minimum of six month.**

Testing questions to put to your own prospective guru should also include enquiries on how often he regularly corresponds with his disciples, and offers them relevant and helpful instruction. You need to ascertain how often he visits your country (or your part of the country) and how he tends to deal with **principal life questions** such as marriage, studies, employment, family life, child-rearing and so on. You should satisfy yourself that your prospective guru has **factually been successful** in helping his other disciples move forward in spiritual life and that he will have adequate time and inclination to teach and assist you if you become his disciple. Somehow he must make some kind of **regular assessment of his disciples' progress** within an existing system such as the mentorship structure.

You should also look to see whether he has formed healthy **relationships with his own peers**, and that he is **responsive to the GBC**. You should also check to see whether he has tried hard to push forward the sankirtan

movement. You should be **regularly hearing your prospective guru's lectures in addition to those of Srila Prabhupada.**

During this period **he will also test you** in order to understand your suitability for discipleship. This may be done through correspondence, personal interview or referring to others.

After an indefinite period of time, your faith may have developed to the point where you decide that you would like to formalise your relationship and take initiation as a disciple of the person you now fully regard as your guru. This stage can last as long as required, but the minimum of six months.

***So to summarise: selecting only one senior Vaishnava with a desire to developing a guru-disciple relationship; understanding the need for a minimum six month period; formally registering as an aspiring disciple by obtaining permission from one's mentor; writing to the Vaishnava for permission and receiving permission; testing him carefully, and being tested by him, throughout this one year period; regularly hearing your prospective guru's lectures in addition to those of Srila Prabhupada - all these comprise Stage Three.***

## Stage Four – Acting in the Relationship (Officially Aspiring)

There now begins a period of acting in the relationship of aspiring disciple and prospective guru. **In consultation with your mentor**, you may begin chanting your prospective guru's **pranam mantra in addition to Srila Prabhupada's pranam mantra**, offering flowers or incense to his picture in your home, (somewhere **separate from the main altar on which you offer your food**), and assisting him with various services as and when possible. This period should last a **minimum of six months**. Please note that the offering of food to the guru's picture should properly begin only **after** formal initiation has taken place.

At any stage prior to the day of initiation you may change your mind about accepting a guru or choice of guru; however this must be done with great maturity and in consultation with your mentor. **Please note that the testing period and the acting in the relationship period (officially aspiring) will both have to be repeated if you change your choice of guru. Reciting your prospective guru's pranam mantra and keeping an open mind comprise Stage Four.**

## Stage Five – Recommendation

Your mentor will naturally check to see if you've taken all relevant issues into consideration and assess your suitability for initiation. Your mentor, when satisfied, will ask your service authority for a written assessment of yourself. Once this has been received your mentor will send a **Letter of Request** to the local temple president, temple board, congregational preaching director or initiation committee – whichever is relevant locally - to consider your suitability for initiation.

Devotees should understand that this is an important stage of the procedures for initiation and takes time to complete. **Temple authorities should not be pressurised into reaching decisions quickly.** Devotees are highly discouraged from travelling overseas for initiation before they have received a letter of recommendation. Temple authorities **will not rush** through these procedures and it may take up to three months before a decision is reached by the local temple president or the Temple Board. On the other hand, your request may be decided upon quickly, so patience is needed at this time, as always.

**IMPORTANT: Letter of Recommendation is given on the faith that you sincerely agree to continue to attend mentee meetings after initiation for ongoing spiritual training and inspiration.**

***So to summarise: Assessments by Temple Board, (taking into account interview outcomes and feedback from all mentors, Mentee Meeting Register records, Progress Trackers and fulfilment of UK Initiation Procedures and Standards Policy); and a letter of recommendation make up Stage Five.***



## Stage Six – Initiation and Lifelong Support

### Initiation

On the day of initiation you will be promising to follow the four regulative principles and to chant sixteen rounds of the Hare Krishna Maha Mantra every day.

Your guru will give a talk either on the significance of initiation or on the ten offences to the Holy Name. Three strands of tulasi beads will be placed around your neck; you will be expected to continue wearing tulasi neck beads unless exceptional circumstances prevent you from doing so. You will be asked to perform *acaman*, a purification of sipping water. You will then be called forward to offer your obeisances to Srila Prabhupada; to the Deities, and to your guru. Then you will be asked to recite your vows, handed your chanting beads, and be given a name ending in *dasa* or *dasi*, indicating that you are now initiated.

A fire sacrifice follows during which you'll join in the chanting of prayers to the members of the Vaishnava parampara and the Deities. During the fire sacrifice you will be offering grains into the flames. It is traditional for the new disciple to beg for some alms to give to the spiritual master immediately after the fire sacrifice.

Some months before the initiation takes place, you can ask your mentor to show you how to perform *acaman* and to check your pronunciation of the prayers to the *parampara*. On the day of initiation, men should have cleanly shaven faces. Men should wear dhotis and chadars, ladies saris.

Your local temple will give you more guidance regarding procedures for the day of initiation nearer to the time of initiation.

## Lifelong Support

Whatever standards you meet before initiation will need to be maintained afterwards too; therefore some of the six stages above will be practised side by side, and some should continue beyond initiation for the rest of life. In the distant history of ISKCON all devotees, **both before and after initiation, would be living in a temple-ashram** community and their spiritual standards would be **carefully supervised and supported**. In the past, every devotee had a direct senior who kept track of their attendance of the temple morning programme, their reading and practical service. That is not the case today. Now the greater proportion of devotees have never lived in that situation.

Sometimes after initiation a devotee gradually slips from previously good practise into bad habits. It is the **natural desire** of the **guru and local senior members** to offer relevant support so that this can be avoided; therefore it is **vital that devotees continue to receive the structured support of a mentor, both before and after initiation**. Part of this supportive guidance will be to clarify and reiterate the essentials of personal spiritual maintenance and service to Srila Prabhupada's mission.

***So to summarise: Performing acaman; putting on tulasi neck beads; making your vows to your guru; being given your spiritual name and japa beads; prayers to the parampara; and structured support after initiation - all these make up Stage Six.***

# Standards for Harinama (First) Initiation

Although upon taking initiation you will be required to promise publicly to chant sixteen rounds and follow the four regulative principles, you will not be asked to promise to rise early in the morning or to go for preaching service, or to raise funds for the mission. However, items like these are all corollary functions that serve your main promises. They are helpful for strong spiritual life and were certainly important enough for Srila Prabhupada to ask devotees to do them. In fact, there was no question of not doing these things in Srila Prabhupada's time. It was unheard of for an initiated devotee to rise after six in the morning, or to not attempt preaching, or, if they were working householders, to fail to make a financial contribution.

In order to put those essential things back in place, to protect the spiritual life of all initiates, and to ensure our strong and continued growth as a movement, aspiring devotees must meet the **essential standards** below in order to receive recommendation for initiation. These are standards that all aspiring devotees must meet:

- Chanting a minimum of sixteen rounds of the Hare Krishna maha mantra daily for at least twenty-four months before the mentor /senior devotee recommends the candidate for initiation.
- Following the four regulative principles (refer to your mentor/ senior devotee for further guidance on what is expected regarding these principles).
- Two years participating in an authorised system of care and guidance. Submitting satisfactorily completed monthly Sadhana Charts/Progress Trackers over at least one year.

## ISKCON UK Guide to Initiation

- Receiving a recommendation from a mentor/senior devotee and service authority.
- Co-operating with Temple authorities and accepting the GBC as the ultimate managing authority.
- Attending the ISKCON Disciple Course (this must be attended within five years of initiation , otherwise will need to be attended again) and satisfactorily answering the Pre-Initiation Exam set by GBC of ISKCON, also known as the 16 Questions (formerly the 13 Questions).
- Studying Srila Prabhupada's books daily.
- Performing some regular weekly service for ISKCON either preaching or menial service.

**In addition to the essential standards, the following are desirable standards** that will also be taken **into consideration** by your mentor and local authorities. The list is long, but we understand that some devotees will excel in one area and others in another area, so the whole picture will be taken into account.

- Rising early before 6.30am
- Having some form of a morning programme or at least performing simple arati at one's home altar.
- Only offering food items which are suitable for offering, and only eating food items which are offered.
- Participation in full morning programme at your local ISKCON temple at least once a month.
- Dress Code - Dressing modestly (preferably in devotional clothing) at least whilst at the Temple and outside as much as practical.

## ISKCON UK Guide to Initiation

- Cultivating cooperative relationships with devotees and not having a separatist mentality.
- Having a humble service attitude.
- Attending whenever possible temple festivals, kirtans and classes.
- Having a sound basic understanding of Srila Prabhupada's books.
- Receiving permission from your husband/wife, or if unmarried from your parents, depending upon your age/whether you are living at home etc. This permission must be in the form of a **signed letter**. The spouse of the aspiring devotee will also need to acknowledge in this letter that they are aware of the full meaning of the regulative principles; your mentor/senior devotee should give them further guidance in this regard.
- Your personal situation, for example devotees undergoing any major changes in their life such as marriage, death, divorce, childbirth, etc may be asked to allow sufficient time for adjustment to their new circumstances.

# Standards for Brahmin Diksha (Second) Initiation

Brahmana initiation is given to enhance spiritual development, and it is incumbent upon the initiate to behave in accordance with the standards of living and devotional activities expected of brahmanas. In keeping with the instructions of Srila Prabhupada, there is expectation that a brahmana will be a teacher of the scriptures and will engage in service to the temple Deity.

Following are standards that will be taken into consideration by your mentor and local authorities before recommending devotees for brahmana initiation:

- For at least one year after first initiation, continues fulfilling all requirements for first initiation. Standards required for first initiation will be according to the latest initiation policy.
- Continually develops good relationships with other devotees.
- Demonstrates the qualities of a brahmana (*Bg* 18.42) and a tendency to continually improve in those qualities.
- Practices the threefold austerity of the mode of goodness, as described in *Bg* 17.14 -16.
- Fits into, and represents, ISKCON's organisational structure; i.e. GBC to Regional Governing Bodies (and similar local councils), temple presidents etc.
- Has read significant portions of, and is conversant with the contents of, the following books by Srila Prabhupada: *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*,

## ISKCON UK Guide to Initiation

*Srimad Bhagavatam, Caitanya Caritamrta, Nectar of Devotion, Nectar of Instruction and Sri Isopanisad.* Exceptions may be made on grounds such as language and age.

- Has passed/fully attended Bhakti Shastri course. Exceptions may be made on grounds such as language and age.
- Wherever locally possible, one should be assisting in services for the local temple deities on a regular basis for at least one year prior to receiving recommendation for brahmana initiation.
- Must be prepared to actively take up a weekly brahman service for the deity department after Brahmin Initiation.

# Guidelines for choosing a Diksha Guru

- Regard Srila Prabhupada as your pre-eminent siksha guru in the first instance.
- Study Srila Prabhupada's books, hear his lectures and discuss questions that arise with your mentor and other experienced devotees.
- Learn about the qualities of a bona fide guru.
- Learn how to submissively hear and properly inquire from a guru, according to Vaishnava etiquette.
- Attend classes and listen to lectures by various gurus and discuss with your mentor and other senior devotees their feelings and thoughts about the different gurus.
- Learn what attraction to a guru is due to sentiment and what it is due to intelligent discrimination. Over time one guru is likely to have a more prominent influence on your spiritual life.
- Attend the ISKCON Disciple Course.



# Overseas Devotees

## **Devotees from overseas who are going to be residing in the UK after initiation:**

You can get initiated if you have been residing in the UK for at least six months and you join the local Authorised System and participate in fortnightly mentee meetings (see Stage 1 of the procedures above). You will need to supply a photo of yourself. Please read this policy to familiarise yourself with the expectations of initiated disciples residing in the UK. You must also supply a letter of recommendation from the temple president of the country that you had been previously been residing in.

## **Devotees from overseas who are going to be returning to their own country after initiation:**

You can get initiated without having to satisfy the local initiation procedures and standards, but you will have to be following ISKCON's international standards for initiation. You will need to follow requirements for the day of initiation. You must also supply a letter of recommendation from your local Temple President.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## *Will the changes to the initiation policy benefit me?*

Initiation is a one-time event, while remaining committed to the vows you'll make at initiation is a lifetime undertaking. The changes in policy are to help you be the best disciple you can be for as long as possible – and to offer your guru some much needed assistance. We're all in this together. Please refer to the Introduction section in this booklet also.

## *I am establishing a relationship with my guru, so is it really necessary for anyone else locally to be involved?*

Srila Prabhupada had just under 5,000 disciples, yet he also created a network of communities so that those disciples could live together and have each other for support and inspiration. They had daily classes and offered help and guidance to one another. They also worked together in practical devotional activities. Srila Prabhupada knew what it took to care for a disciple, so he created the necessary structure to make it happen.

In those days, on Srila Prabhupada's instructions, everyone practised their devotional life under the guidance of someone more experienced. And **Srila Prabhupada also depended on the local temple president** to tell him if someone was ready for initiation. So our so-called 'new system' is really just the one that was always there, the one our founder-acarya created.

## *I already keep in touch with senior devotees, so is that sufficient?*

You'll always need as many senior devotees as possible, so whoever is helping you at the moment – please keep in touch with them all. However, you'll find it very helpful if you meet regularly with just one senior devotee, known as a mentor, as part of your systematic spiritual development. That devotee will be trained to prepare you for initiation

## ISKCON UK Guide to Initiation

and to help you afterwards. Not all senior devotees are being trained as mentors, and you will need to select one that is locally approved and known to the local temple president. Without a mentor you cannot be recommended for initiation.

***Actually I am very steady in my spiritual life, having been in ISKCON for many years, so do you still think I need a mentor?***

Yes, because someone who is factually steady in their spiritual life will have enthusiasm to have a friendship with a mentor; and someone who wishes to remain steady throughout life, particularly when the inevitable challenges come along, will definitely need a mentor.

***I have a busy life - how will I get time to fill in a Progress Tracker?***

Life is difficult enough already with so much paperwork to do, isn't it? And now you're being asked to do even more! But don't worry, just a few ticks and numbers is all that's required, and it will really help you to look at your week, or month, and see where your strengths and challenges lie. Your Progress Tracker can be completed in around 20 seconds each day – that still leaves you a lot of time!

***I feel embarrassed to fill in the Sadhana Chart / Progress Tracker, do others feel the same?***

There's no need to feel embarrassed. The Sadhana Chart / Progress Tracker is simply a record of your daily practise and will help you understand what your strengths are, and where you may need to be more attentive. It's mainly a self-assessment tool which, on occasion, you share with your mentor. Besides, embarrassment is one of the emotions given to us by Lord Krishna, and it's meant to help us make positive choices. We all have strengths, and those help to move us forward; but we usually have a few things that hold us back, too. Revealing your mind in confidence to someone who can help you rise to your challenges will make you strong.

***I think all devotees should get attention, and not just the prominent devotees or those who have somehow gained the favour of the guru.***

Yes, that's true, and that is precisely the reasoning behind the system for initiation. This way there is one fair system for everyone, and every single devotee gets the same level of care and attention on their way to becoming a disciple and through the rest of their life.

# Pre-Initiation Exam

The following series of questions forms a short exam for all candidates for initiation. The questions have been set by ISKCON's GBC and were updated in February, 2013 with three additional questions (14-16). Answers to questions 1-13 can all be found in the books of Srila Prabhupada and you can refer to open books as you complete this exam paper.

Once you have completed the exam, you should hand it in or email it to your mentor. Please **keep a copy for yourself**. You will be informed within **four weeks** if you have passed/not passed the exam. **You must contact** your mentor if you have not heard from them within this time.

1. What are the qualifications of a bona fide spiritual master?
2. Why are you convinced to follow the orders of the spiritual master in this life, and even life after life?
3. Why does one worship the spiritual master like God?
4. Do you believe the spiritual master speaks the Absolute Truth? If so, why?
5. Under what circumstances should the spiritual master be rejected?
6. What are the qualifications and responsibilities of a disciple?
7. What is the unique position of Srila Prabhupada in ISKCON?
8. Why do you accept Lord Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead?

## ISKCON UK Guide to Initiation

9. Why do we follow the four regulative principles?
10. Why do we chant Hare Krishna?
11. What is the position of the GBC Body?
12. Explain the difference between the body and the self.
13. What is ISKCON, and why should one remain in ISKCON?
14. Have you read the '*GBC Statement on the Position of Srila Prabhupada*'?  
(see below)
15. Have you read the paper '*Harmonizing ISKCON's Lines of Authority*'?  
(use the link on page 33)
16. What have you understood as the most important points of the '*Harmonizing ISKCON's Lines of Authority*' paper?

## **GBC Statement on the Position of Srila Prabhupada**

(Resolution 303, adopted February, 2013 )

As the Founder-Acarya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and the preeminent teacher and ultimate authority within our society, Srila Prabhupada has a unique relationship with every ISKCON devotee.

Lord Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is the original guru whose Divine Grace descends through the medium of the guru parampara. As such, a devotee is ultimately delivered by Sri Krishna acting through a combination of various manifestations of His mercy. These include, but are not limited to, the caitya guru, Srila Prabhupada, the guru parampara, one's diksa guru, other siksa gurus, the Holy Name, sastra, and the nine processes of devotional service.

Within these cooperative elements, Srila Prabhupada, as the Founder-Acarya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, is the preeminent guru for all members of ISKCON. All members of ISKCON, for all generations, are encouraged to seek shelter of Srila Prabhupada. All members of ISKCON are entitled and encouraged to have a personal relationship with Srila Prabhupada through his books, teachings, service, and his ISKCON society.

All members accepting leadership roles within ISKCON, including diksa gurus and siksa gurus, have the duty of serving together under ISKCON's Governing Body Commission (GBC) to fulfill Srila Prabhupada's instructions as he has given in his books, lectures, and personal communications. [1]

## ISKCON UK Guide to Initiation

Overall, the primary duty of all diksa gurus, siksa gurus, and others in leadership positions, is to assist Srila Prabhupada in his service to his Guru Maharaja Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur, and our Brahma Madhva Gaudiya Sampradaya.

Those who accept the service of diksa guru or siksa guru in ISKCON are required to be exemplary in representing Srila Prabhupada's teaching in their words and personal behavior. The siksa guru gives spiritual instruction and inspiration on behalf of Srila Prabhupada and our guru parampara. The diksa guru gives spiritual instruction, inspiration, formal initiation, a spiritual name, and later imparts the sacred Gayatri mantras to a qualified disciple as a service to Srila Prabhupada and our guru parampara.

Srila Prabhupada has clearly explained that devotees who are strictly following the Krsna conscious principles are acting on the liberated platform, and, as such, are pure devotees, even though they may actually not yet be liberated. [2] (Such unalloyed devotional service is not necessarily determined by one's role or position of service, but by one's realization.)

Those who accept the service of diksa or siksa guru within ISKCON are mandated to be strict followers of the instructions of Srila Prabhupada, and, as long as they follow, they are acting on the liberated platform. Thus they may serve, as Srila Prabhupada ordered, as bona fide representatives of the Lord and the guru parampara and be a via media of their mercy. Yet it should be clearly understood that if such diksa or siksa gurus deviate from strictly following, they may fall down from their position.

Thus, to act as a diksa guru in ISKCON means to serve under the GBC and in cooperation with other ISKCON authorities by functioning as a "regular guru" as Srila Prabhupada has directed.

This statement, while conclusive, is not exhaustive in its discussion of these principles. The GBC may authorize additional statements and



## ISKCON UK Guide to Initiation

papers in the future to further explain the preeminent position of our Founder-Acarya Srila Prabhupada, the role and responsibilities of those who serve as gurus in our society, and the related duties of ISKCON members and initiates.

All GBC members must distribute this resolution to all ISKCON temples, communities and congregations via appropriate means of communication for the education of all ISKCON members. This statement shall also be studied in ISKCON courses including introductory courses, the ISKCON Disciple Course, the Spiritual Leadership Seminar: Being a Guru in ISKCON, and other relevant venues. Reading this statement, and affirming it has been read prior to initiation, shall be part of the test for all prospective initiates.

1. More details on these spiritual relationships and duties may be found in the official *Harmonizing ISKCON's Lines of Authority* Paper approved by the GBC in 2012.

2. "This Krishna consciousness movement directly receives instructions from the Supreme Personality of Godhead via persons who are strictly following His instructions. Although a follower may not be a liberated person, if he follows the supreme, liberated Personality of Godhead, his actions are naturally liberated from the contamination of the material nature. Lord Caitanya therefore says: 'By My order you may become a spiritual master.' One can immediately become a spiritual master by having full faith in the transcendental words of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and by following His instructions." SB 4.18.5, purport

And:

A person who is liberated acharya and guru cannot commit any mistake, but there are persons who are less qualified or not liberated, but still can act as guru and acharya by strictly following the disciplic succession." Letter to Janardana, 26 April, 1968.

And:

"We may not be cent percent perfect, but as far as possible, if we follow the instruction as it is, that much perfect. In this way one will get perfection. So one has to follow. The same example, try to understand, that a perfect, expert technologist or technician or mechanic is working, and somebody is working under his instruction. So this somebody, because he is strictly working under the instruction of the expert, he's also expert. He may not be cent percent expert, but his work is expert. Is that clear? Because he is working under the expert. Do you follow? So if you follow pure devotee, then you are also pure devotee. It may not be one is cent percent pure. Because we are trying to raise ourself from the conditional life. But if we strictly follow the pure devotee, then we are also pure devotee. So far we do, that is pure. So pure devotee does not mean one has to become immediately cent percent pure. But if he sticks to the principle that "We'll follow a pure devotee," then his actions are... He is as good as a pure devotee. It is not I am explaining in my own way. It is the explanation of Bhagavata. Mahajano yena gatah sa panthah [Cc. Madhya 17.186]." Ref. VedaBase => Bhagavad-gita 2.1-10 and Talk -- Los Angeles, November 25, 1968

## Harmonizing ISKCON's Lines of Authority

This GBC paper, adopted February, 2013, forms essential reading for all candidates for initiation. In order to answer questions 15 & 16 you will need to read it all. The paper can be found by visiting the official ISKCON Governing Body Commission website ([www.gbc.iskcon.org](http://www.gbc.iskcon.org)) and clicking on 'Resources' then 'Resolutions 2013' or simply by using this URL:

[http://gbc.iskcon.org/gbc\\_res/Harmonizing\\_ISKCON%27s\\_Lines.pdf](http://gbc.iskcon.org/gbc_res/Harmonizing_ISKCON%27s_Lines.pdf)