

ISKCON

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS INC.
FOUNDER -- ACARYA, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada



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NEWSLETTER CONCERNING INITIATIONS AND INITIATING GURUS

Dear Mahadyuti,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All Glories to Srila Prabhupada.

Here is some information as I understand it regarding initiations and initiating gurus. Last May, when the GBC body in entirety was present at Vrndaban with Srila Prabhupada, we asked him how initiations would take place in the future. He said he would pick a number of men who would initiate as gurus. As the secretary for the GBC, I then asked, on behalf of the others, whether these gurus would take disciples on his behalf, or would they be disciples of that guru. Prabhupada said they would be disciples of the new gurus. Then, about a week later, Srila Prabhupada himself gave eleven names of devotees who would be those initiating gurus. The list of the names was circulated, and at that time they were to act as rityic, or representative, gurus on Prabhupada's behalf. But upon his disappearance these men have become designated initiating gurus. The conversation in which Srila Prabhupada discusses these things with the GBC has been recorded on tape.

But how can some of Prabhupada's disciples presume to become gurus after Prabhupada? The answer is that there's no way that they can become acaryas equal to His Divine Grace, Srila Prabhupada. Probably no one like him will appear for centuries. If any of his disciples think that now they have become acaryas like Srila Prabhupada, they would commit a great offense. But that they can become gurus is already a fact since he has empowered them to do so. I thought of the historic example of Ramanuja. After Ramanuja there was no question of anyone immediately equaling him, but this did not mean that there were not gurus in his line following Ramanuja. Still gurus and disciples of that line worship the great acarya Ramanuja, although only those who were living at the same time as he could accept him as their initiating guru.

Therefore, acknowledging that no one can presume to imitate Srila Prabhupada, it does not mean that there will be no new disciples. If we view what we may call the minimum requirements for guru, we will find that it is not an impossible proposal. On page eighty-seven of Teachings of Lord Kapila Srila Prabhupada says: "If we stick to this principle we can become gurus. We don't need to change our position to become a guru. All we have to do is follow in the disciplic succession stemming from Sri Krsna. One may think, 'I am illiterate and have no education. I was not born in a high family. How can I become a guru?' Caitanya Mahaprabhu says that it is not very difficult. Simply speak whatever Krsna speaks. Then you become a guru." Then on page fifty-three of the same book Prabhupada says: "Instruction has to be taken from one who is in knowledge. It doesn't matter

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what his position is. One should simply learn from one who knows. Whoever is qualified in Krsna consciousness can become a guru. His family or material identity does not matter. He simply must know the science. If one knows the science of Krsna, he can be a guru. We need only repeat what Krsna has said or what has been said about Krsna in Vedic literatures."

When Srila Prabhupada first made disciples in America, he was the only person responsible for taking care of the new disciples. As ISKCON grew, however, he began to share the responsibility of upbringing his disciples with the temple presidents and GBC and sannyasis. In many cases the new initiating guru will not be the sole devotee responsible for taking care of the new disciples, to insure their going back to Godhead. For example, in your temple you have recruited men and they are naturally indebted to you or to the bhakta leader. And of course they are also indebted to Srila Prabhupada. It is Srila Prabhupada's books they are learning from. It is Prabhupada's ISKCON which protects them, although they cannot become Prabhupada's disciple. The initiating guru of such a new man is therefore only one of a number of devotees who are caring for his spiritual life.

There will, of course, be different kinds of relations ^{between the} ~~the~~ gurus and their disciples. In a situation like New Vrindaban, or perhaps the Radha-Damodar party, where the guru may actually recruit the man and stay with the man, such a disciple will have a great deal of personal dependence and receive intimate instruction and even worship his guru. But we will have to accept disciples in other situations in order to maintain and increase ISKCON. This is Prabhupada's desire. However, according to the sastra, the guru-disciple relation is real and personal so we cannot reduce it to nothingness. It is to be hoped that an actual relationship will develop between the guru and the disciple. The disciple will be grateful to his guru for bringing him in contact with the great acarya, Srila Prabhupada, and thus thru disciplic succession in touch with Lord Caitanya and Krsna. He will appreciate that he is situated in Krsna consciousness by the grace of his initiating guru. Hopefully the guru will regularly visit or the disciple may wish to visit to be with his guru, and the guru will want to see to his progress. These things will have to happen naturally and develop with time.

As for myself, my policy would be that I would only allow worship of Srila Prabhupada in any ISKCON temple, and not the worship of any new initiating guru. Only Srila Prabhupada's picture should be on the Vyasasana and Gurupuja should be to Srila Prabhupada. At least that is my opinion. It may be that disciples will be present of a guru, although the other devotees in the temple will be worshipping Srila Prabhupada. We've seen this work in a natural and harmonious way in Vrindaban. There, one sannyasi, Narayana Maharaja performs Gurupuja to his guru, Kesava Maharaja (the sannyasi who awarded sannyasa to Srila Prabhupada). During this worship disciples of Narayana Maharaja are present and it appears that they take pleasure in seeing their guru worship his guru. So what is the harm if, in an ISKCON temple everyone worships the greatest guru, Srila Prabhupada, to whom we are all eternally indebted? In some situations it may be natural that a new guru will receive more formal worship.

For myself, I do not intend to initiate any disciples until at least after Gaura-Pournima. If you want, you can wait. This initiation, however, is not necessarily a zonal function, and perhaps other gurus will accept new disciples from your temple. I would think that as part of your training up a new man, you would want to advise him as to who you think he should take as a guru, but it should not be forced. After all the man has to have full faith, and we hope he will develop a loving relationship with his guru. So if a devotee wants to take as guru someone other than you advise, it can be discussed and he should be allowed to choose with good reasons.

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The above reflections are my own, which I have arrived at in discussion mainly with Hrdyananda Maharaja and Tamala Krsna Maharaja. They do not form any official policy. The official policy is simply that the eleven chosen men may initiate disciples and they are actually the guru of that disciple. Some gurus will probably take disciples before Gaura-Purnima, and we can gain some experience by then, and perhaps the GBC will have something further to say on the matter when they meet. If you have any further questions feel free to ask me.

Let us continue strongly and harmoniously in Krsna consciousness now that this great new responsibility has been thrust upon all of us by Srila Prabhupada's disappearance. "How much you love me," Srila Prabhupada said in his last months, "will be demonstrated by how you cooperate amongst yourselves after my disappearance." Before we speak of any expansion at this time, let us at least dedicate our lives to maintaining what Srila Prabhupada has given us, and not allowing it to deteriorate. The good son looks after the property of the father, and the good disciple does also. Prabhupada's main spiritual legacy is this ISKCON movement itself, in terms of temples, books, and the sankirtan program. That is our main duty now, to see that it continues to go on nicely.

Your servant,

Satsvarupa das Goswami

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