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Discipleship in ISKCON

7.1 Right of Devotees to Choose their Guru

7.1.1 Rights of ISKCON Members to Worship their Gurus

As it is enjoined in scripture that a devotee must honor his spiritual master as much as he honors the Lord, every devotee in ISKCON accordingly has the right to worship, glorify, and serve his guru. So long as the guru is in good standing, no ISKCON Leader shall curtail or abrogate that right. Temple Presidents must provide devotees the necessary time and facility for them to worship their gurus. The disciples, however, must carry out their devotions to guru in harmony with the orderly running of temple affairs and without imposing their own guru-seva upon disciples of other gurus.

7.1.2 Right to Accept Instruction and Initiation

All members of ISKCON have the right to accept diksa or siksa from the guru of their choice, provided that the guru is qualified and approved to initiate, the candidate is eligible to accept initiation, and that all the relevant procedures set forth in ISKCON laws have been strictly observed.

7.1.3 Right to Take Association from Any Approved Guru

Any uninitiated devotee in ISKCON has the right to read the publications, hear the recorded talks and bhajanas, take darsana of, correspond with, or associate in other various feasible ways with any authorized ISKCON guru.

7.1.4 Right to Become an "Aspirant for Shelter and Initiation"

1. Someone who has been connected with the Krsna consciousness movement for more than one year, either as a congregational member or as a mature child brought up in a Krsna conscious devotee's household, shall be allowed to accept an ISKCON guru as a siksa-guru and be accepted by that guru as an aspirant for shelter and initiation in the future, provided the Temple President or gurukula principal (for gurukula students) gives his approval, and, in the case of a minor child, a parent gives approval.
2. Someone who has accepted an ISKCON guru as siksa-guru and is an "aspirant for shelter and initiation" may cultivate a personal spiritual relationship with the spiritual master and, by taking personal guidance, try to progress further in Krsna consciousness.
3. Someone who has accepted an ISKCON guru as siksa-guru and is an "aspirant for shelter and initiation" and who wants to subsequently accept another ISKCON guru as siksa-guru, etc., should inform both gurus and follow the procedure as provided for in above (1).

7.2 Responsibility of Candidate for Initiation

It is the personal responsibility of candidates for initiation to correctly decide, by the exercise of their own intelligence, to surrender to a particular devotee as spiritual master. Candidates for initiation should accept initiation from a spiritual master only after developing firm and mature faith in that

devotee and in his ability to take them back to Godhead. Sadhu, sastra, and guru are the authoritative references to apply in ascertaining the level of advancement of a devotee.

Receiving official ISKCON guru approval signifies that the devotee has successfully completed the authorization process set forth in ISKCON law, and that in the judgment of certain senior devotees the candidate measures up to the standards and guidelines given in ISKCON law. However, such approval is not automatically to be taken as a statement about the degree of God-realization of the approved guru, and it is not intended to replace the intelligent discrimination of the candidate.

7.2.1 First (Harinama) Initiation

7.2.1.1 Qualifications for First Initiation

7.2.1.1.1 *One Year Preparatory Period*

In order to receive first initiation one must have been engaged favorably in devotional service, strictly following the four regulative principles and chanting sixteen rounds a day, for at least one year without interruption.

7.2.1.1.2 *First Six-month Period*

During the first six months of following the four regulative principles and chanting sixteen rounds daily, a new devotee who is aspiring for initiation should not commit himself to a particular initiating guru. Rather, he should chant Srila Prabhupada's pranama-mantra and worship him as Founder-Acarya of ISKCON and as his siksa-guru.

7.2.1.1.3 *Second Six-month Period*

After successfully completing the first six-month preparatory period, and after passing the required examination, the candidate may choose his future diksa-guru. Receiving permission from that guru, and notifying the local Temple President, the candidate should take shelter and begin to worship that guru as his own spiritual master and chant his pranama-mantra. Actual initiation may take place only after a minimum six-month period from the date shelter was taken and the local Temple President notified.

7.2.1.1.4 *Devotees Residing Within Temple Communities*

In addition to satisfying the above requirements, devotees residing in temple communities must, during the one-year preparatory period, regularly attend the full morning program.

7.2.1.1.5 *Devotees Residing Outside of Temple Communities*

Devotees who do not live in a temple community and who cannot come daily to the temple programs may be initiated provided they have regular morning programs at home or attend regular morning programs at the *nama-hatta* center.

7.2.1.1.6 *Pass Examination*

Before a devotee can be permitted to formally take shelter of a particular ISKCON spiritual master and be subsequently recommended for initiation, he or she must demonstrate a basic understanding of Srila Prabhupada's teachings by answering an oral or written test administered by the Temple President or other recommending authority. The questions to be answered are:

- 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 Krsna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead?
9. Why do we follow the four regulative principles?
10. Why do we chant Hare Krsna?
- 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?

7.2.1.2 Change of Prospective Guru

Sometimes a candidate for initiation who had formally accepted shelter from one spiritual master as a prospective initiating guru may subsequently decide to change to another. Such a candidate must communicate this change to the former prospective spiritual master, new prospective spiritual master, and local Temple President. The candidate must also remain fixed under the shelter of the newly proposed initiating guru six continuous months prior to receiving initiation, starting from the time of newly accepting formal shelter.

7.2.1.3 Procedure of Formal Recommendation

This formal recommendation process is not intended to replace or overshadow the (more important) need for other regular contact among the various ISKCON devotees guiding the candidate and his prospective spiritual master regarding the spiritual progress of the candidate. Furthermore, the prospective spiritual master is under no obligation to initiate a devotee because a proper recommendation has been given.

7.2.1.3.1 *Guru Receives Recommendation in Writing*

Before a candidate can receive first initiation, his prospective guru must receive a formal written recommendation from the appropriate ISKCON spiritual authority, as determined by the candidate's situation.

7.2.1.3.2 *Contents of Recommendation*

The recommendation of the recommending ISKCON authority must certify that the candidate has fulfilled the qualifications for initiation to the best of his understanding. The recommending authority must specifically attest that the candidate has been engaged in favorable devotional service, has chanted sixteen rounds of japa daily, has adhered to the four regulative principles, and has regularly attended a morning program, all for the previous twelve months.

The recommender must also attest that the candidate is sufficiently knowledgeable in the philosophy of Krsna consciousness and in the structure and purpose of ISKCON to have passed the prescribed examination, and that he has accepted shelter of the guru for at least six months.

7.2.1.3.3 Recommender Contacts Previous Authorities

If the candidate has not been serving continuously within the jurisdiction of the recommending ISKCON authority for the previous twelve months, then the recommender must still satisfy himself with the activities of the candidate for the full twelve-month period by contacting other ISKCON authorities with knowledge of the candidate's activities during the balance time.

7.2.1.3.4 Devotees Residing In Temple Communities

Before a candidate can receive first initiation, the guru must receive a written recommendation from the Temple President under whom the candidate is currently serving.

If the Temple President is also the prospective initiating guru, then the following special procedures must be observed: Either the local GBC shall write the recommendation himself, or he shall establish a local Board of Initiations, which does not include the prospective guru as a member, to review the qualifications of the candidates. The chairman of this Board of Initiations may then prepare the necessary written recommendations. In the extreme case that the local GBC, Temple President, and prospective guru are all the same person, the GBC Executive Committee shall establish the appropriate procedures to be followed.

7.2.1.3.5 Devotees Residing Away from Temple Communities

Qualified candidates for initiation who reside away from temple communities may be recommended for initiation (in the manner prescribed above) by one of the following spiritual authorities (excluding the prospective initiating guru) who knows them well: a local GBC, the nearest Temple President, the local Regional Secretary, the concerned congregational preaching director, or an ISKCON sannyasi who is regularly preaching in that area.

7.2.1.4 Vows of Disciple

All new initiates must take the following vows at the time of initiation:

- 1 . To chant a minimum of sixteen rounds daily without fail.
2. To strictly follow the four regulative principles of no meat eating, no illicit sex, no intoxication, no gambling.
3. To accept the order of the spiritual master as one's life and soul.
4. To accept discipleship into the Brahma-Madhva-Gaudiya-sampradaya through the Founder-Acarya of ISKCON and to remain faithful to their order and teachings.
5. To remain faithful to Srila Prabhupada's order by maintaining loyalty to ISKCON and its ultimate managing authority, the GBC.

7.2.2 Second, or Brahminical, Initiation

7.2.2.1 Qualification for Second Initiation

7.2.2.1.1 One-year Wait Between First and Second Initiation

To be qualified to receive second initiation, a first-initiated devotee must have been steadily engaged in favorable devotional service, chanting sixteen rounds a day without fail, and strictly following the four regulative principles for a period of at least one year from the time of receiving first initiation. In addition, the candidate must have regularly attended a morning program, whether in a temple, preaching center, *nama-hatta* center, or at home.

7.2.2.1.2 Two-year Wait for Those Who Fall Severely

A devotee who, after receiving first initiation, falls severely from the spiritual standard by neglecting or forsaking his initiation vows in a serious way or by rejecting the association of ISKCON devotees for a prolonged time, shall, after he returns to normal practice, be required to wait for at least two years before being given second initiation.

7.2.2.1.3 Examination Option of Initiating Guru

It is the responsibility of the initiating guru to determine the fitness of his disciple for brahminical initiation. To help do this, he may require his disciple to pass a suitable examination.

7.2.2.2 Procedure for Formal Recommendation

7.2.2.2.1 Guru Receives Recommendation in Writing

The guru of a candidate for second initiation must receive a written recommendation from the appropriate ISKCON authority. The appropriate authority is determined in the same manner as described above for first initiation.

7.2.2.2.2 Contents of Letter of Recommendation

The recommending authority must certify that the candidate has fulfilled the qualifications for second initiation to the best of his understanding. The recommending authority must specifically attest that:

1. the candidate has been steadily engaged in favorable devotional service, has chanted sixteen rounds of japa daily, adhered to the four regulative principles, and regularly attended a morning program, all for the previous twelve months (having received first initiation more than twelve months before) and
2. the candidate has either not fallen severely since first initiation or has been in good standing for at least two years since returning to normal practice.

7.2.2.2.3 Recommender Contacts Previous Authorities

As in the case of a recommendation for first initiation, if the candidate has not been serving continuously within the jurisdiction of the recommending ISKCON authority for the previous twelve months, then the recommender must still satisfy himself with the activities of the candidate for the full twelve-month period by contacting other ISKCON authorities who have knowledge of the candidate's activities during the balance time.

7.2.2.3 Restoration of Brahminical Status

If an initiated brahmana falls severely from the spiritual standard by neglecting or forsaking his initiation vows in a serious way or by rejecting the regular association of devotees for a prolonged time, and then later returns to the spiritual standard, the following procedure is to be observed:

1. The devotee should not wear a sacred thread, chant gayatri-mantra, or serve the Deity until he has strictly followed and practiced devotional service for a period of no less than six months.
2. He may put on the sacred thread, resume chanting gayatri, and serve the Deity only after he proves himself fit in the judgment of his spiritual master and local spiritual authority.
3. If, in the judgment of his spiritual master, the deviation was exceptionally severe or prolonged, the spiritual master may again give the disciple gayatri-mantra. If the spiritual master is beyond mortal vision, the local GBC representative shall decide the proper course of action.

7.2.4 Initiation Only from Approved Gurus

Devotees who live or serve in ISKCON may take initiation only from ISKCON approved gurus.

7.2.4.1 Violators

7.2.4.1.1 First Initiation Outside

ISKCON members who in violation of ISKCON law take initiation from gurus who have not been approved to initiate in ISKCON shall not be permitted to serve within ISKCON. If the non-approved guru has an institution or asrama outside ISKCON, then according to standard etiquette, his disciples should serve within the institution of their guru and should not serve within ISKCON. (This rule does not apply to persons who were already initiated before they became ISKCON members.)

7.2.4.1.2 Other Initiations Outside

Anyone initiated in ISKCON who has taken any further initiation, or reinitiation, from a non-approved guru must renounce their initiation from the non-approved guru in order to work within ISKCON. Their ISKCON spiritual master (or if their spiritual master is beyond mortal vision, the local GBC) shall decide the proper procedure for reinstating them in ISKCON, including the need for taking any further initiation.

7.2.4.2 Prior Initiation by Non-Bona Fide Gurus

Persons who have taken initiation from non-bona fide gurus before becoming members of ISKCON should follow the injunction of Srila Jiva Goswami that such a useless guru, a family priest acting as guru, should be given up, and that the proper, bona fide guru should be accepted.

7.2.5 Srila Prabhupada's Disciple by First Initiation

A devotee who has received first initiation from Srila Prabhupada has become Srila Prabhupada's disciple. By accepting second initiation from a Godbrother after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance, the disciple further confirms his relationship with Srila Prabhupada and also becomes a disciple of that initiating Godbrother. The second initiation strengthens, not diminishes, one's standing as Srila Prabhupada's disciple. A disciple should always respect a worthy Godbrother from whom he has received second initiation. What such a devotee and the second-initiating guru expect from one another in their relationship shall arise from their own mutual understanding.

7.2.6 Reinitiation

A devotee whose guru has fallen and who seeks re-initiation from an approved guru must observe the following requirements:

1. a six-month period of formally taking shelter,
2. a formal letter of recommendation from the appropriate local authority, and
3. acceptance by the initiating guru.

7.3 Guidelines

7.3.1 Unauthorized "Initiation" Ceremonies

In cases where the formal guru-disciple relationship has not been properly sanctioned by procedures given in ISKCON Law, no ISKCON member shall engage in giving any of the elements of the initiation ceremony — such as:

giving a devotional name, giving sanctified chanting beads, or neck beads, or participating in some ceremony or ritual of commitment — in any number or combination, to other devotees in ISKCON or its congregations, with the stated or unstated purpose or effect of creating the resemblance of a formal guru-disciple relationship.

When such unauthorized activities have already taken place:

- a. all participants should be informed that no initiation has taken place, nor any binding pledge leading towards initiation.
- b. The junior devotee in the transaction should seek to establish a relationship with an authorized initiating guru whom he can place full faith.
- c. All devotees must cease using any names given, if any. (96)