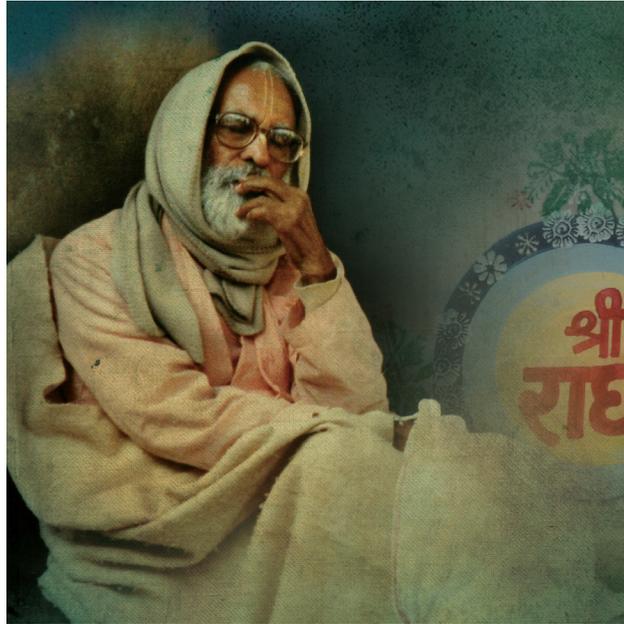


International Pure Bhakti Yoga Society

GURU POSITION PAPER



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INTERNATIONAL SANNYASA
COUNCIL MEETINGS - KARTIKA 2011

— DECEMBER 2011 —

Dear devotees,

Please accept our dandavat pranams. All glories to Sri Guru and Gauranga.

1. The following is a paper compiled by a seva team made up of various sannyasis and senior devotees, regarding what we understand to be the desire of Srila Gurudeva as to how the process of giving initiation for *harinama*, *diksa* and sannyasa should go on within our sanga known as the International Pure Bhakti Yoga Society. This is not a full treatise on the subject of *guru-tattva*. A summary of the major points of *guru-tattva* is given to place the decisions that were made in perspective.
2. When an acarya such as our beloved Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Gosvami Maharaja departs from this world, there is often a period of confusion and uncertainty within the spiritual society that the leader had formed. There are obviously questions about the management of the day to day concerns of the society. But the larger and more pressing issue is how the spiritual traditions that he taught will be preserved and passed on. More to the point, how will we maintain a society that bonded together based on our mutual love for this transcendental emissary of the Divine Couple? How will we sustain that love in our own hearts and the relationships among our brothers and sisters? How will that love be passed on to future generations? What were Srila Gurudeva's directives that will help us to fulfill our purpose in this grand mission of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu?
3. Thus, a few pertinent questions arise. Who will take on the role of *diksa-guru*? What are the qualifications for that role? Will there be a single *acarya* or many initiating gurus? What is the relationship between someone who has taken on the role of guru and those who are his/her godbrothers/godsisters or seniors? How will the new disciples and gurus interact with the existing members of the society? Can we preserve a society that was set up with a single *diksa-guru/acarya* if there are now many different gurus? How do we maintain harmony and unity of purpose among the members? In other words, how do we instill and preserve what could be called the Society's core values and mission, so as not to impede the free flow of Bhakti that is required to nurture the various disciples in their relationships with their gurus.

4. As mentioned in the first paragraph, the scope of this paper is limited to explaining how the process of initiation will go on in our society based on our understanding of the instructions of Srila Gurudeva and the conclusions of *sastra* and our *guru-parampara*. We have thus included a bibliography of lectures and books from Srila Gurudeva that give his instructions on this matter. To further understand and access authentic scriptural statements on this subject, one may read, "*Principle of Sri Guru and Service to Sri Guru*", written by Sripad Bhaktivedanta Madhava Maharaja and other books written by our Gaudiya Vaisnava Acaryas that are included in a bibliography that is being compiled.
5. In 1984, Srila Bhakti Raksak Sridhara Gosvami Maharaja published the book "*Sri Guru and His Grace*." This book was given to help the devotees of Iskcon deal with the complex spiritual/social dynamics that occur in a society after the departure of the *acarya*. It is a timeless classic and gives important insights into our current situation as well. Bhakti flows in a meandering way and we must always be committed to accepting that which is favorable for Bhakti and rejecting that which is unfavorable. The evolution of our society is an ongoing process and will be the subject of continued discussion and adjustment.
6. It is clear that all *sastra* recommends that one seek out and take initiation from the highest class devotee, an *uttama maha bhagavata*. There are many quotations in *sastra* to substantiate this as well as the writings and commentaries of our *acaryas*. No one will argue this point. Even if one has taken initiation from a less advanced devotee, one should still seek *siksa* from such a perfected soul.
7. If one cannot find an *uttama bhagavat* devotee, one may seek out and take initiation from a *madhyama adhikari*. Such a guru should be on the level of *madhyama-madhyama* or preferably *uttama-madhyama*. Substantiation for this may be found in the commentaries of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, in books like *Jaiva Dharma*, and in the writings of Srila Bhakti Raksak Sridhara Gosvami Maharaja, Srila AC Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Gosvami Maharaja.
8. It is also clear from the instructions of Sri Guru and *sastra* that a devotee on the *madhyama* platform should actively seek the association and guidance of an *uttama bhagavata* devotee, both for himself and his disciples. Without that guidance, neither the guru nor the disciple will be able to advance to the highest stages of Bhakti.
9. Over the last few years, Srila Gurudeva spoke repeatedly of his desire that all of his sannyasis and qualified senior devotees take up the task of initiation. He said that they should be qualified on the *madhyama-madhyama* platform, but that *uttama-madhyama* is better. There are

many sound files and transcripts which document this instruction to his senior devotees to take up this task, even during Srila Gurudeva's own lifetime.

10. He was asked repeatedly how it was possible that his sannyasis could be so qualified. His responses were varied; he said that *maha bhagavat* devotees are rare but that *madhyama* devotees are everywhere. Srila Gurudeva even singled out certain devotees by name on different occasions and told them they could take disciples.
11. Along with this encouragement Srila Gurudeva, also gave explicit warnings that if one takes up the role of guru while still in the *kanistha* stage of Bhakti, one may fall down. Once in the *madhyama* stage, that danger is much diminished.
12. The relationship between disciple and guru is personal. It cannot be legislated or controlled by a committee or institution. The responsibility rests in both parties. The disciple should study and understand the qualifications of a guru and the guru should similarly study the qualifications of the disciple. If the aspiring disciple wants to know who is qualified in Bhakti, then they can take input from advanced devotees who are on the *madhyama* or higher platform. What do we ultimately seek from Sri Guru? We want to develop a relationship that will awaken our dormant love for Sri Sri Radha Krsna. First that love will be awakened and directed towards Sri Guru, who will then lead us to the lotus feet of Sri Sri Radha Krsna. That love cannot be invoked by nor contained by institutional rules.
13. There will be devotees who will disagree with one aspect of this paper or another. Some will say that only an *uttama-bhagavat* may initiate. They will suggest that if there is no *maha-bhagavat* that it would be better for the aspiring disciples to simply chant and pray that Sri Krsna will send a *maha-bhagavat* as their guru.
14. Others will accept that one on the level of *madhyama* is qualified to bring one into realm of Bhakti and point the way towards spiritual perfection. Some will have faith in various sannyasis and senior devotees based on the inspiration that they receive from them. Others will say these devotees are not qualified and should not initiate. Our purpose in writing this is only to give Srila Gurudeva's instructions on this topic. In addition to the books mentioned above, there are written transcripts, recorded audio and video material of Srila Gurudeva on this topic. Much of this material is being compiled for reference. Every devotee has the responsibility to educate themselves on this matter and thus be able to reconcile the various statements of Sri Guru and Vedic scripture.
15. To avoid undermining the faith of new disciples and to avoid *aparadha*, Srila Gurudeva made the statement that even if we think someone

unqualified to give initiation, we should refrain from criticizing the guru and the disciples. We may freely speak *guru-tattva*, but we should not disturb the faith of others by criticism. This is especially true for others that are taking the role of guru. He said that if someone does this repeatedly, they may be removed from their position of guru within the Society.

16. In Navadvipa the Sannyasa Council met and agreed that all sannyasis may initiate if they are confident that they are qualified according to Srila Gurudeva's instructions and the guidelines of sastra and our line of spiritual preceptors. In order to preserve harmony within the Vaisnava Society, it is recommended that all who seek to take up the role of guru seek the blessings to do so from sannyasis and other senior devotees. Particularly if one is visiting a math or preaching center managed by other devotees, it is simple etiquette to request blessings from the local devotees to perform initiations there.
17. Although Srila Gurudeva often spoke of his sannyasis taking on the role of initiation, he also spoke of the spiritual qualification for that role, without mention of the sannyasa ashram. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu made no distinction based on social position or sex as to who is qualified to be guru. The qualification is strictly spiritual.
18. However, only one who has heard mantras (such as the *brahma-gayatri* or the sannyasa mantra) from an authorized spiritual authority in disciplic succession may give that mantra. Furthermore, if a sannyasi wants to award sannyasa to a devotee, it is requested that the sannyasa guru present the candidate's name to the body of sannyasis represented by the Sannyasi Board, so they may make further inquiry within the society to assure the qualification of the candidate.

Please forgive the brevity of this paper. It is only a summary of the conclusions of guru, sadhu and sastra as we understand their application in relation to the International Pure Bhakti Yoga Society. Strictly speaking, no institution can regulate or govern the affairs between guru and disciple. We are explaining what we take to be voluntary guidelines within this society of devotees. We are trying to realize a balance that will allow larger numbers of devotees to work harmoniously towards a common spiritual goal.

On behalf of the International Sannyasa Council and the Bhakti Trust
International,

Aspiring for a particle of service to Sri Hari, Sri Guru and Vaisnavas,

Swami BV Vaikhanas

INTERNATIONAL SANNYASA COUNCIL MEETINGS - KARTIKA 2011

During Vraja-mandala parikrama 2011, there were further meetings in Govardhana among the international sannyasa body, along with senior devotees such as Ramachandra prabhu (Delhi) and Brajanath prabhu. The main topics discussed were the development of the International Pure Bhakti Yoga Society as envisioned by Srila Gurudeva and the clarification of how the process of initiations (*harinama* and *diksa*) will be taken up by the devotees within the Society.

The following topics were discussed and accepted as guiding principles as we define ourselves as a sanga and understand our collective purposes moving forward.

1. As per Srila Gurudeva's wish, the collective sanga will be known by the name of The International Pure Bhakti Yoga Society. This Society is a house that is meant to give shelter and guidance to all Vaisnavas who embrace the teachings of Srila Rupa Gosvami in the line of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Prabhupada and his modern followers. This Society will be guided by the Bhakti Trust International, the sannyasis initiated by Srila Gurudeva and an Advisory Council composed of math commanders, and eminent householder devotees who are actively engaged in sadhana and outreach service.
2. Within that society will be many different seva teams and legal trusts that perform various preaching functions and oversee properties and temples for that purpose. Each seva team and trust is an independent entity and will be given assistance and guidance by the Society elders as needed and requested. The purpose of the BTI and Sannyasa Council is not to manage or control, but to advise and support. This is in line with Srila Gurudeva's directives as to the functions and operating principles of the BTI from 2004 onwards.
3. Special care should be given to maintain and nurture the *diksa* and *siksa* disciples of Srila Gurudeva. It has been noted that in the past, when a spiritual *acarya* departs, his disciples are often neglected by senior devotees who are eager to continue the spiritual mission and reach out to the next generation of devotees. Our success as a Society will be determined by how effectively we protect and assist the many thousands of devotees that Srila Gurudeva so lovingly brought into the realm of Bhakti.
4. An open sharing of views, opinions and perspectives is encouraged among all members. This open dialogue is required to stimulate creativity and individual initiative in the advancement of one's personal

spiritual growth as well as for enhancing the Society's spiritual outreach. Both are fundamental to our mission as a Society. As Srila Gurudeva has said, everyone should be free to speak their mind in a respectful way, without fear of reprisals or ostracism.

5. We accept the necessity to seek out the association and guidance of *maha-bhagavata* devotees who are in the line of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Prabhupada, and who are in the same spiritual mood as Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Gosvami Maharaja, Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Srila Bhakti Raksaka Sridhar Maharaja, Srila Bhakti Pramoda Puri Maharaja, and other prominent acaryas. Even advanced *madhyama adhikari* devotees need to hear the *hari-katha* of such exalted persons and to seek their guidance.

Srila Gurudeva stressed this point so beautifully. *"If you find someone whose heart is saturated with love and affection, like that of any of the Vrajavasis or gopis, who possesses the highest type of prema, surrender yourself to that devotee. Fully become his servant. Try to follow him and try to realize his heart. Then your heart will also become saturated with love and affection for Krsna. This is Krsna Consciousness."...Srila Gurudeva - 7 May 2001*

A neophyte devotee generally is not qualified to determine who is an advanced devotee and who is not. Inappropriate association at this time can impede one's spiritual growth. A new devotee may also have difficulty reconciling the specialities of personality and teaching of advanced devotees and thus commit offences to one or the other. Thus, a *kanistha* devotee or new disciple should be careful to take guidance from their guru and advanced devotees within our sanga in this regard.

6. There has been some confusion about the standards for initiation by gurus within our Society. It has been agreed that the following guidelines will be followed.
 - New candidates for initiation should be recommended by devotees who know that person and their character. Where there is an established local sanga, recommendations should come from the senior devotees there.
 - A waiting period of 6 months prior to initiation is requested to allow the prospective disciple and the guru to examine one another and thus acquire sufficient faith and trust.
 - For *harinama* initiation, the minimum requirement is that the candidate has given up meat-eating and intoxication for the six month period and agrees to follow the regulative principles of Bhakti.
 - For *diksa* initiation, the devotee should have been chanting 16 rounds for a period of 6 months and following all the regulative principles for that time.

- In the last year there have been some complaints that gurus are initiating new people without any examination or recommendation, some even the first time they have come into the association of devotees. This may be true in some cases.

However, it was explained by Sripad Vana Maharaja and others, that they often give neem japa beads and a spiritual name to newcomers, without any pre-qualification. This is to encourage them to take up chanting and to aspire for actual *hari-nama* initiation later. It was acknowledged that this practice has resulted in confusion as some devotees think that an initiation has taken place. It was agreed that a clear explanation be given if this practice is continued.

7. Who is qualified to give initiation within the Society?

- Srila Gurudeva gave specific permission to his sannyasis to take up this task. He also said that one who acts as guru should be at least on the platform of *madhyama-adhikari*. Any devotee that wishes to take this order up should seek the blessings of the sannyasis.

8. Is there a zonal system of gurus initiating only within prescribed geographic limits?

- No, there is not. The traditional etiquette in the Gaudiya Math is that if someone desires to give initiation to someone in a temple or math run by another sannyasi or senior devotee, that one request permission and blessings to do so.

9. Can one give *diksa* initiation to one who has received *harinama* from a different person?

- This is not proper etiquette. If for some reason, a prospective disciple desires to take initiation from another, this should be discussed with the *harinama* guru first. The disciple or prospective *diksa* guru should receive permission and blessings for this.

10. Is there a *ritvik* system where a devotee can give initiation on behalf of Srila Gurudeva or another devotee?

- There is no such system in place. It may be noted that sometimes a guru will say that he is giving initiation on behalf of his own gurudeva. This is recognition of one's dependence on Sri Guru and the disciplic succession for the ability to take up the post of guru. However, anyone who gives initiation is doing so on their own behalf. No permission has been given by anyone for others to initiate on their behalf. Srila Gurudeva categorically rejected the idea that anyone could initiate on his behalf during his lifetime or after his disappearance.

These are the main points that were discussed and agreed upon in Govardhana during Vraja parikrama. We are proceeding slowly in implementing policy with a desire to be flexible and adaptable to evolving conditions. At the same time, there is a commitment to maintaining the proper standards of *guru-tattva* and *sadhu sanga* for our society. If there are too many rules, we risk impeding the natural flow of Bhakti. If there are too few, then the Society and its values cannot be defined and preserved.

We welcome feedback from the devotee community to assure that we all move forward together in a way that will please our Srila Gurudeva, thus assuring the development of our Bhakti and the spreading of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's mission.

On behalf of the Sannyasa Council, Bhakti Trust International and Senior Vaisnavas,

Aspiring for the service of Sri Hari, Sri Guru and Vaisnavas,

Swami BV Vaikhanas