



International Society For Krishna Consciousness
Founder Acharya His Divine Grace A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada

ISKCON Birmingham initiation standards

Date of last review:	March 2026	Approved by:	ISKCON Birmingham Leadership Committee
Date of next review:	March 2029	Reference:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ISKCON Law Book• ISKCON UK Guide to initiation• Harmonizing ISKCON lines of authority

Introduction:

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) outlines specific standards for initiation in its ISKCON Law Book. These guidelines ensure that both initiates and gurus uphold the principles established by ISKCON's Founder-Acharya, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

All members of ISKCON **have the right to accept Diksha or Siksha from the guru of their choice**, providing that the guru is qualified and approved to initiate (7.1.2 ISKCON Law book).

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 sup

If you want to take initiation, **your mentor must inform any of member from the ISKCON Birmingham Leadership Committee (IBLC)**. The initiation process will **take at least two years from the day you officially have a mentor, chanting 16 rounds and following the 4 regulative principles**. The mentor will then recommend the candidate to IBLC, who can take up to 3 months to decide – all details are documented in this policy.

Stages of an initiated devotee:

1. Spiritual care through friends, community and mentor.
2. Attend ISKCON Guru Disciple Course.
3. Becoming an aspiring disciple and the testing period.
4. Acting in the relationship (shelter).
5. Recommendation by mentor to IBLC.
6. Initiation and lifelong support.

Stage 1: Spiritual care through friends, community and mentor.

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.



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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.

Sanga:

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 groups are thus the basic building blocks of the Hare Krishna movement today. Devotees are encouraged to participate in these groups.

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. 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. 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. ISKCON Birmingham will have a mentorship system where a candidate can choose a mentor from.

Summary: 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.

Stage 2: Attend ISKCON Guru Disciple Course:

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. 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. **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. **The exam paper is included at the end of this policy.**

Summary: The ISKCON Disciple Course (IDC) and the Pre-Initiation Exam (13 questions).



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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-Acharya. 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.**

With encouragement from 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. **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.

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. 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.**



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Summary: 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 (Shelter):

There now begins a period of acting in the relationship of disciple and prospective guru. In consultation with your mentor and IBLC, 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 and IBLC. Please note that the testing period and the acting in the relationship period (shelter) will both have to be repeated if you change your choice of guru.

Summary: Reciting your prospective guru's pranam mantra.

Stage Five – Recommendation

Your mentor, when satisfied, will ask you to write a formal letter to the IBLC along with an official letter from the mentor to consider the request. The letter will contain what services you are currently offering and how you can contribute towards the mission of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. 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 IBLC. The IBLC will then write a Letter of Recommendation to the Guru on the faith that you sincerely agree to continue to attend mentee meetings after initiation for ongoing spiritual training and inspiration.

Summary: Assessments by Mentor and IBLC, taking into account interview outcomes and feedback from all IBLC members and a letter of recommendation make up Stage Five

Stage Six – Initiation and Lifelong Support:

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



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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 (meaning servant), 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 as daksina to the Guru.

On the day of initiation, men should have cleanly shaven faces. Men should wear dhotis and chadars, ladies saris.

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 and community, both before and after initiation.

Summary of timeline:

First 12 months:

Candidates must engage favourably in devotional service, strictly follow the four regulative principles (no meat-eating including no onion or garlic, no illicit sex, no intoxication and no gambling), chanting minimum of sixteen rounds of Japa daily for at least one year. The candidate should also complete the Guru and Disciple course.

Months 12 to 18 (Aspiring):

During this period, aspiring devotees should chant Srila Prabhupada's pranama-mantra and regard him as their siksha-guru (ISKCON Law book 7.2.1.1.2). During this period, if a candidate wishes to aspire from an initiating ISKCON Guru, they must have approval from Mentor and IBLC (ISKCON Law book 7.1.4.1).

Months 18 to 24 (Shelter):

After completing the initial six months, candidates may choose a diksha-guru, obtain permission from that guru. They should then take **shelter** and begin worshiping that guru. Initiation can occur only after at least six months from the date shelter was taken and IBLC notified with a letter (expressing why they want to take initiation, from who and what services are they currently engaged with) from the candidate and mentor. (ISKCON Law book 7.2.1.1.3). The candidate should also have an interview with their mentor and a representative from IBLC. The candidate should also submit their answers to the 13 questions (ISKCON Law book 7.2.1.1.6), which will be marked by the initiation committee. Once all checks are complete, IBLC will then write a letter of recommendation addressed to the Spiritual Master and the candidate will be allowed to take initiation.



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Paperwork: Paperwork from the mentor should initially be sent to IBLC:
iskconbhammanagement@gmail.com

One approval has been given, documents will be sent to the Bham initiation committee:
iskconbhaminitiations@gmail.com

Please note: in exceptional circumstances, IBLC has the final authority to recommend a devotee for initiation, even if this process has not been followed. E.g. a person has terminal illness and they want to take initiation, IBLC have the authority to recommend.

ISKCON Birmingham Second initiation standards

Brahmana initiation is given to enhance spiritual development, and 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:

- **For at least three years 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 Bhagavad Gita, 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 **and** Brahmin initiation exam. Exceptions may be made on grounds such as age, ability or language.
- Where possible, must already be taking up weekly brahman service for at least one year prior to receiving recommendation for brahmana initiation. A list of services can include washing and ironing Srila Prabhupada's clothes, assisting in the dressing Srila Prabhupada, making garlands for the Deities, making ghee wicks for the Deities, maintaining the Deities jewellery (cleaning up the blu tack, fixing if skillset is there) and helping to clean and prepare paraphernalia for Abhishek at festivals. The committee will take on feedback from the Interim / Head Pujari to see if this seva is being carried out.



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Appendix 1:

Checklist for initiation:

Examination and training:

- Give satisfactory answers to ISKCON GBC 13 questions, checked by their mentor and marked by the initiation committee.
- Undertake readiness interview with Mentor.
- Undertake an interview with IBLC / initiation committee.
- Receive letter of recommendation from IBLC.
- Complete the Guru Disciple course by an officially qualified instructor within the first 12 months out of 24 month period.
- Conduct oneself according to Vaisnava Etiquette (Sadacar). Attend a vaisnava sadacar course and study the material and work on conducting oneself as a representative of Srila Prabhupada's movement.

Financial Contribution:

- If manageable, one is recommended to make a regular monetary contribution to support their local centre as per the guidance from Srila Rupa Goswami – that a percentage of income should be used in service to Krsna.

Sadhana:

- Daily chanting of minimum 16 rounds, and strictly following the four regulative principles.
- Morning Sadhna – encouraged to wake up between 4am to 6.30am
- Regular performance of simple arati at home altar
- Chanting four rounds minimum before leaving for work - not to chant while driving.
- Study Srila Prabhupada's books daily – at least 15 minutes a day
- Maintain devotional dress and tilaka during worship at home and visiting the temple.
- Submit Sadhana chart to their mentor. Converse with mentor regularly (at least once a week). The weekly sadhana charts can be used to show evidence (to the initiation committee) of their meeting the sadhana standards.

Sanga Group:

- You are required to be a member of a local Sanga group.
- Develop friendly relationships with other devotees in the group and serve the senior devotees where possible.

Service and service attitude:

- Regular weekly service to the temple (or where there is no temple, direct deity service at home).
- Menial service once a month to the congregation (eg cooking/cleaning/serving prasadam) in order to develop a healthy service mood.
- Required to perform monthly Sankirtan by attending at least one Sankirtan event in a month.
- Cultivating cooperative relationships and not having a separatist mentality.
- 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



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that they are aware of the full meaning of the regulative principles – mentor can give you more guidance.

Guidelines for choosing a Diksha Guru:

- Regard Srila Prabhupada as primary siksa guru in the first instance (study his books and discuss questions that with their mentor and other experienced devotees)
- Learn about the qualities of a bona fide guru (E.g. NOI Verse 1, BG 18.42)
- Learn how to submissively hear and properly inquire from a guru, according to Vaisnava etiquette (BG 4.34)
- Attend classes and listen to lectures by various gurus and discuss with the mentor his feelings and thoughts about the different gurus
- Learn what attraction to a guru is due to sentiment and what is due to intelligent discrimination (if necessary). Over time one guru is likely to have a more prominent influence on his spiritual lif



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Appendix 2:

Pre-Initiation Exam paper for first initiation

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. What is the unique position 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?
14. Have you read the 'GBC Statement on the Position of Srila Prabhupada'?

http://gbc.iskcon.org/gbc_res/Harmonizing_ISKCON%27s_Lines.pdf

15. Have you read the paper 'Harmonizing ISKCON's Lines of Authority'?
16. What have you understood as the most important points of the 'Harmonizing ISKCON's Lines of Authority' paper?

IBLC: ISKCON Birmingham Leadership Committee made up from the following four devotees: Nitai Kirtan Das, Chakradhari Das, Jagannatha Kirtanananda Das and Mayapur Madhava Das.

Role: Recommendation for candidate to take initiation.

ISKCON Birmingham Initiation Committee: IBLC, Vrindavani Devi Dasi and others TBC

Role: Administration and preparing the candidate for initiation.

Mentors for ISKCON Birmingham: There is an official list of mentors for ISKCON Birmingham, this will be posted out after 20th April 2026.

Role: Spiritual care and preparing the candidate for initiation.

ISKCON Birmingham Sangas: This is something we are working on and we hope to formally set up sangas in the next 6 months.

Role: Spiritual inspiration