

Requirements For First Initiation by Bhakti Vikasa Swami

Those who request the great boon of initiation must demonstrate their commitment to reciprocate with the trust they desire be placed in them. For at least one year prior to consideration candidates should:

1. Strictly follow four regulative principles.
2. Daily chant at least sixteen rounds of the Hare Krsna mahamantra. The quality of chanting should be ascertained. Simply mumbling or making a sound vaguely resembling the mahamantra is not acceptable.
3. Be committed to Srila Prabhupada's instructions and movement and to practicing devotional service throughout their lives.
4. Have faith that Bhakti Vikasa Swami is a bona fide representative of the parampara and that he is competent to guide the candidate on the path back to Godhead. Be aware that he is considered by some as highly orthodox and conservative, and be accepting of his strong disapproval of divorce, womens' so- called liberation, and similar controversial topics. Be willing to hear from, obey, and be guided, instructed, and possibly chastised by him.
5. Have a general attitude of cooperation with ISKCON authorities.
6. Participate in temple or Nama Hatta programs, unless residing too far away, in which case they should otherwise perform sadhana in their residence. Congregational devotees unable to attend daily classes should regularly attend a temple class, cell program, or equivalent, at least once a week, and should daily hear cassettes of lectures by Srila Prabhupada and other ISKCON devotees, or should otherwise daily read Srila Prabhupada's books.

7. Have a humble service attitude towards Vaisnavas, and amicable dealings with them, and not cultivate a tendency to faultfinding.
8. Have a basic understanding of Krsna conscious philosophy. If literate, they should minimally have read Beginner's Guide to Krsna Consciousness, Bhagavad-gita As It Is, Science of Self Realization, Nectar of Devotion, and the first two cantos of Srimad Bhagavatam. (Please note: reading of the above-mentioned books has to be finished one month prior to the date of initiation.)
9. Be committed to honoring Krsna prasada only and not eating karmi food.
10. Not watch TV, listen to commercial style bhajan cassettes, listen to or read the books of Mayavadis or questionable devotees, indulge in mundane sports, or go to cinemas.
11. If temple residents, daily rise by four a.m. Congregational devotees obliged by work commitments to rest late at night should nevertheless not rise very late. Those who regularly rise later than five a.m. should consider adjusting their lifestyle.
12. If congregational devotees, as much as possible follow Vaisnava dress codes when visiting the temple or participating in devotee functions. Men should wear dhotis and women saris. All should wear tilaka. Men should not have mustaches or beards. Women unless widowed should braid their hair and not cut it.
13. If resident in a temple community and unmarried, should not receive financial remuneration.
14. Follow other stipulations as required by ISKCON law.

Congregational devotees should be under the guidance of at least one approved senior devotee who monitors their progress.

Congregational devotees whose home atmosphere is not conducive for practicing devotional service should seriously consider if they will be able to maintain their commitment throughout life. Common examples of difficult family situations are: TV blaring loudly all day and late into the night; family members opposed to Krsna consciousness; spouse not wanting to observe Krsna conscious rules of married life.

A young unmarried man not living or intending to live as brahmacari in an ISKCON ashram should be confident that he will only marry a devotee girl and that there is no possibility of interference to this by relatives. Similarly for women in Western countries. Young unmarried women of Indian families should be initiated only if her parents assure that they will marry her to an initiated devotee.

More leniency can be extended to persons above sixty years of age, especially those from pious Hindu backgrounds who have not been grossly sinful throughout their life. For such persons the main criteria are only sixteen rounds and four regulative principles. They may be encouraged to participate in temple activities as much as possible, but need have only minimal philosophical understanding. There may also be more flexibility for mothers with young children, it being understood for instance that domestic commitments may hinder their participation in temple activities.

Recommendations for candidates with a history of mental illness should only be given after discussing with Bhakti Vikasa Swami, because often such candidates relapse.

However all candidates should be have full faith that Krsna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and that Lord Caitanya is Krsna. Candidates should be assessed to see if they are wholly free of the following misunderstandings:

- the soul and God are equal
- the guru is entirely nondifferent from God
- after leaving the body the soul merges into God

- punya and bhakti are equal
- Mayavadis and bogus avatars are innocent saints; we should not criticize them
- social service is better than chanting God's name

These standards are not meant to discourage or intimidate, but to encourage sincere candidates to rise to a level that will make their initiation truly meaningful as a platform from which to seriously advance in devotional service. Persons reluctant to come to this level should not be recommended to Bhakti Vikasa Swami for initiation.

Requirements for Brahminical Initiation by Bhakti Vikasa Swami

Candidates should:

1. Have observed all requirements given above for at least two years after first initiation.
2. Be exemplary in sadhana and behavior.
3. Have a strong service attitude and not have a tendency to waste time or indulge in idle talk.
4. Have passed a Bhakti-sastri degree. Brahminical initiation can be given to devotees who are not very intellectual or educated and have not passed the Bhakti Sastra degree, if they have a strong and selfless service mood and it is perceived that they are particularly suitable for deity worship, including cooking for deities. In such cases, they should serve in the deity department for at least six months in services that do not require brahminical initiation. Other stipulations, such as not working for payment, are still applicable.

5. Should not earn money by employment; this should be maintained throughout life.

6. Be engaged in preaching, teaching, or Deity service.

7. Brahminical initiation may be offered with first initiation to men who having received smarta upanayanam have been regularly chanting Gayatri japa. Such initiation is not in recognition of any supposedly special status, but to save them from smarta attachments.

8. After accepting brahminical initiation, should maintain a sikha and maintain it throughout life (any exception should be with the express permission of Bhakti Vikasa Swami).