

# Honoring the Law of Disciplic Succession

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A PĀÑCARĀTRIKA PERSPECTIVE ON THE APPOINTMENT OF  
DĪKṢĀ-GURUS IN ISKCON WHILE THEIR GURU IS PHYSICALLY  
PRESENT

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## Dedication



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## Abbreviations

BG	Bhagavad-gītā
BRS	Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu
CB	Caitanya-bhāgavata
CC	Caitanya-caritāmṛta
NOD	Nectar of Devotion
NOI	Nectar of Instruction
SB	Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam
SPL	Śrīla Prabhupāda Līlāmṛta
SBV	Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava

## Executive Summary

- “The Law of Disciplic Succession” (TLODS) is a *paramparā* etiquette that disallows an otherwise qualified disciple from accepting his own disciples during the lifetime of his spiritual master but afterwards allows him to accept disciples without limitation (letter to Tuṣṭa Kṛṣṇa, 2 Dec. 1975). (1)
- The disciples of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura and Śrīla Prabhupāda followed TLODS. (13)
- But *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* and *Nārada Pañcarātra* explicitly allow a qualified disciple to accept disciples on the order of his spiritual master. Works such as *Jaiva-dharma* and *Śrī Rasika-maṅgala* give such examples. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura himself initiated disciples in the presence of both Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and Gaura Kiśora dāsa Bābājī. (42)
- And Śrīla Prabhupāda himself indicated that he could have allowed it (room conv, 22 Apr. 1977). (1)
- Therefore, TLODS cannot absolutely disallow disciples in ISKCON from accepting their own disciples while their gurus are still living. (8,22,25)
- But since Śrīla Prabhupāda himself followed TLODS and never instructed his disciples to initiate in any way other than TLODS, to do otherwise requires the current process in ISKCON to be brought strictly in line with the rules and regulations of *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*, especially as given in *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* and *Nārada Pañcarātra*. (12)
- Otherwise, the process is neither following guru nor any established *vidhi* and would therefore be against the principles of devotional service. (8)
- Current ISKCON procedure for appointing gurus does not require that a guru be an *uttama-adhikārī* and is biased toward appointing *madhyama-adhikārī* gurus. (6)
- But *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* requires that candidates for *dīkṣā-guru* be *uttama-adhikārīs*. (9)
- Śrīla Prabhupāda also says that candidates should be *uttama-adhikārīs*. (6)
- Pāñcarātrika* standard of *uttama-adhikārī* is easier to assess and attain than the *bhāgavata* standard. (8)
- Minimum qualification: a candidate for guru must be both *pāñcarātrika uttama-adhikārī* and *bhāgavata madhyama-adhikārī* simultaneously. (1)
- Majority opinion: TLODS must be followed until candidates in general are *pāñcarātra uttama* and *bhāgavata madhyama* and procedures follow *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* and *Nārada Pañcarātra*. (10)
- Minority opinion: ISKCON should move away from TLODS to gurus appointing their disciples as gurus with limited numbers of disciples, as per *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* because: (21 onwards, all subsequent points covered)
  - Present TLODS model in ISKCON produces a small number of gurus who are generally on the *vaidhi-bhakti* platform but also tend to have large numbers of disciples.
  - They are more susceptible to falling down on account of accepting the sins of too many disciples (see CC Madhya 22.118).
  - Gurus with small numbers of disciples are less likely to fall down.
  - They can more accurately assess their own disciples for becoming *ācārya* than a bureaucracy.
  - More personal oversight and training are given to fewer disciples, improves the quality of the *paramparā*.
  - Vyāsa-pūjās* and worship are performed with less pomp, does not compete with pomp and worship accorded to Śrīla Prabhupāda, better centers his instructions and standards in devotees’ minds.

## Introduction

This paper presents the results of research on the question as to whether the disciples of currently living gurus within ISKCON's *saṃpradāya* may be permitted to accept their own disciples.

The starting point for our research was the following query:

Even though for some of us it is clear that this could happen only in very exceptional circumstances, and that Śrīla Prabhupāda wasn't in favor of it, the general understanding is that this is "more or less" the tradition in our *paramparā*, and therefore, after some cases have already been approved, there is a trend to liberalize the process, basically with the blessings of one's *dīkṣā-guru* and a no-objection by the GBC Body.

A couple of papers were commissioned by the GBC Body, but they are not conclusive, in my opinion.

A question then is the following: are there any direct scriptural evidences that could override all other "opinions" and establish authoritatively that this \*is not\* our modus operandi within the *paramparā*?

The terse response is that *bhakti-yoga*, especially in the stages of *sādhana-bhakti*, must be performed in accordance with the rules and regulations of the *śāstras*, as accepted by *mahājanas*, or great saintly persons, and according to one's *adhikāra*, or fitness, to follow them.

*śruti-smṛti-purāṇādi-pañcarātra-vidhiṁ vinā  
aikāntikī harer bhaktir utpātāyaiva kalpate*

"Devotional service of the Lord that ignores the authorized Vedic literatures like the *Upaniṣads*, *Purāṇas* and *Nārada-pañcarātra* is simply an unnecessary disturbance in society." (BRS 1.2.101)

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in his *Durgama-saṅgamanī* commentary on the above verse quotes *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.21.2, *sve sve 'dhikāre yā niṣṭhā sa . . .*, "Steadiness in one's own position is declared to be actual piety, whereas deviation from one's position is considered impiety. In this way the two are definitely ascertained." And he further says, "among the scriptures, one should accept the Vaiṣṇava scriptures, for one should accept only those things for which one is qualified and not other things."<sup>1</sup>

In other words, even among the *Vaiṣṇava śāstras* there are many different prescribed rules and regulations, and there are many different examples set by saintly persons, but all these must be accepted according to one's *adhikāra*, or eligibility to follow them.

Hence, our research was guided by these two questions:

- What generally is the *adhikāra* of the devotees who might become candidates for *dīkṣā-guru*?
- What set of instructions from the *śāstras* are in accordance with that level of *adhikāra*?

The results of our research motivated by these two questions are presented here in this paper.

The first section, "Should a disciple of a living guru be allowed to initiate his own disciples?" sets out to answer both questions, first establishing the general *adhikāra* of the candidates and then identifying what instructions from the *śāstras* and *ācāryas* are applicable. Then it is shown how both the Law of

<sup>1</sup> Bhanu Swami (trans.), *Bhakti Rasāmrta Sindhu* (Chennai: Sri Vaikuntha Enterprises, 2006) 1.2.101.

Disciplic Succession forbidding it and *pañcarātrika* injunctions allowing it can be reconciled. An assessment is made for the fitness of disciples in present-day ISKCON to be appointed as *ācārya* is given, and recommendations for improvement of the current process are made.

The second section, “*Abhiṣeka: Guru Appoints His Disciple as Guru*,” presents the *pañcarātrika* process for an existing *ācārya* to appoint his disciple as an *ācārya*. *Pramāṇas* from *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* and the different *pāñcarātra śāstras* are presented.

The third section, which closely complements the previous section, is titled “Qualities of Different Levels of Disciples.” This is a list of qualities of disciples from the *Sātvata-samhitā*, a *daiva pāñcarātra śāstra* that is followed in some communities within the *Śrī sampradāya*. Therein, disciples are divided into four different levels, with the topmost level designated by the name *ācārya*; at this level, disciples are empowered by their *ācārya* to accept their own disciples. The list of qualities that a disciple is expected to develop is detailed and extensive, and descriptions of the different levels of disciples make it clear that the process for training a new initiate to become an *ācārya* is rigorous.

The fourth section, titled “*Practices in Different Sampradāyas*,” presents brief summaries of how, from an institutional perspective, *ācāryas* are appointed in the *Śrī* and *Mādhva sampradāyas*. *Ācāryas* from each of these *sampradāyas* were interviewed.

The fifth section, “*The Minority Opinion: Guru ordering his qualified disciple to become guru should be the norm*,” is an alternative result of churning and discussing evidences of our research among our research members and has formed a minority report. It gives another perspective to look at the same evidences presented in this paper. It also elaborates some interesting practical changes and plans to improve the overall condition of gurus in ISKCON. It is authored solely by *Dāmodara Dāsa*.

The sixth section, titled “*Pāñcarātrikī-dīkṣā as an ISKCON Practice*” shows how the current ISKCON initiations derive from *pāñcarātra śāstras* and demonstrates the eligibility to accept disciples within ISKCON is also governed by *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*. It also shows that *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* has its own definitions for *uttama*-, *madhyama*- and *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī* devotees that are different from those of *bhāgavata-vidhi*, which are more familiar to ISKCON’s members.

And the Appendices cover various related topics that help illuminate the discussion in the rest of the paper.

Finally, it should be understood that *dīkṣā* is a broad and complex topic that generally requires years of study, and the mercy of guru and Kṛṣṇa, to understand clearly. This paper itself is far from complete in its research; there were other areas we wanted to investigate—especially the *Purāṇas*, more of the *Pañcarātras*, more of the *granthas* of the Six *Gosvāmīs*—but did not have the time or resources for it. The faults in this paper are ours, and they are certainly numerous. But we nonetheless hope that this will be of some use to the *Vaiṣṇavas*.

Your servants: Kṛṣṇa-kīrti Dāsa (BVKS), Delhi, Dāmodara Dāsa (BVKS), Nandagram, Gujarat, Dāmodara Caitanya Dāsa (BVKS), Vadodara, Gujarat, Kamala Caraṇa Dāsa (BVKS), Baruch, Gujarat

## 1. Should a disciple of a living guru be allowed to initiate his own disciples?

Keep trained up very rigidly and then you are bona fide Guru, and you can accept disciples on the same principle. But as a matter of etiquette it is the custom that during the lifetime of your Spiritual master you bring the prospective disciples to him, and in his absence or disappearance you can accept disciples without any limitation. This is the Law of Disciplic Succession. I want to see my disciples become bona fide Spiritual Master and spread Krishna consciousness very widely, that will make me and Krishna very happy.

(Letter to Tusta Krsna -- New Delhi 2 December, 1975)

In 1969, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote to one of his senior disciples, expressing his wish that on passing a series of examinations, his disciples “will be specifically empowered to initiate and increase the number of the Krishna Consciousness population.”<sup>2</sup> And six months before he departed this world, he said, “Yes. I shall choose some guru. I shall say, ‘Now you become ācārya. You become authorized.’ I am waiting for that. You become all ācārya. I retire completely. But the training must be complete.”<sup>3</sup> But before he left, he never appointed any of his disciples to initiate.

This raises a question: Was the training of those who began initiating after his departure “complete” in the same sense that he used the word? Possibly, but the high number of fall downs among gurus in those days suggests otherwise. Hence, he never authorized any of his disciples to start accepting their own disciples in his presence. This raises another question: how qualified would one have to have been for Śrīla Prabhupāda to have authorized him to initiate others?

In response, some may say we can never know—*vaiṣṇavera kriyā mudrā vijñeha nā bujhaya*—because no one can understand the mind of a pure Vaiṣṇava.<sup>4</sup> But since there is serious consideration now of introducing the practice of allowing disciples to initiate in the presence of their spiritual masters, an authoritative answer to this specific question has to be obtained. Otherwise, it is likely that the action is unauthorized and therefore a departure from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *paramparā*.

So, who can be an exception? The answer we propose here, and which we argue for in the rest of this paper, is formally stated as follows:

**An ācārya may appoint a disciple as ācārya only if his disciple is an *uttama-adhikārī* according to *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* and at least a *madhyama-adhikārī* according to *bhāgavata-vidhi*. The process for preparing and appointing such an ācārya must also be according to *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*. Otherwise, the appointment would transgress the Law of Disciplic Succession, which states that one may only accept disciples in his guru’s absence or departure.**

This definition attempts to directly answer the question posed above, “How qualified would one have to have been for Śrīla Prabhupāda to have authorized him to initiate?”

<sup>2</sup> 12 Jan. 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Room conversation, 22 Apr. 1977, Bombay.

<sup>4</sup> CC Madhya 23.39.

It is seen here that both the guru's order and qualification are equally important. According to *Bhāradvāja-saṁhitā*, which is part of *Nārada-pañcarātra*, qualification of the disciple is a necessary condition for a disciple to become a guru. Qualification is not optional. In the below statements, the qualities of *jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *tyāga* are emphasized.

*svayāṁ vā bhakti-sampanno jñāna-vairāgya-bhūṣitah /  
sva-karma-nirato nityam arhaty ācāryatāṁ dvijah ||1.40||*

“Even if a twice-born *brāhmaṇa* (*dvija*) happens to have some non-devotees in his family line, or has not been fortunate to take birth in a renowned family of pure devotees, he nevertheless always deserves to be an *ācārya* if he is endowed with all good qualities like knowledge and renunciation, is engaged in his prescribed duties (*sva-karma*), and is steeped in loving devotion to the Lord.”

*nācāryaḥ kula-jāto 'pi jñāna-bhakty-ādi-varjitaḥ /  
na ca hīna-vayo-jātiḥ prakṛṣṭānām anāpadi ||1.41||*

“On the other hand, one cannot become an *ācārya* even if one is born in a great family line (as mentioned before) but is devoid of *jñāna*, *bhakti*, good qualities, etc. Also, unless there is an emergency, an *ācārya* from a lower birth or age should not initiate a person from a higher birth or age.”

If either the guru has not ordered or the disciple is not qualified, then the appointment is against *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* and therefore invalid.

As the definition we have given suggests, there are in fact different definitions for *uttama*-, *madhyama*- and *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī* devotees, depending on which set of rules and regulations are being consulted. In this regard, it is important to note that the definition of the *vaidhi-bhakti uttama-adhikārī* given in the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* is similar to that of the *pāñcarātrikā uttama-adhikārī* in that learning in *śāstra* is a requirement in both:

*śāstre yuktau ca nipuṇaḥ sarvathā dṛḍha-niścayaḥ  
prauḍha-śraddho 'dhikārī yaḥ sa bhaktāv uttamo mataḥ*

One who is expert in logic and in understanding the revealed scriptures, and who always has firm conviction and deep faith that is not blind, is to be considered a topmost devotee in devotional service. (*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 2.17)<sup>5</sup>

*tatra mahattvam—  
tāpādi pañca-saṁskārī navejyā-karma-kārakaḥ  
artha-pañcaka-vid vipro mahā-bhāgavataḥ smṛtaḥ*

“The characteristics of the *uttama* or *mahā-bhāgavata* according to the *arcana-mārga* are as follows: ‘A *brāhmaṇa* who has undergone the five kinds of *saṁskāras*, or purificatory processes, like *tāpa*, who has executed the rituals of worship, and who has understood the *Artha-pañcaka* is called a *mahā-bhāgavata*.’ (*Padma Purāṇa*)<sup>6</sup>

In *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* and *Padma Purāṇa*, the *uttama-adhikārī* differs from the *madhyama-adhikārī* in that expertise in *śāstra* is a unique qualification of the *uttama-adhikārī*. In either *śāstra*, the

<sup>5</sup> Qtd. in CC Madhya 22.66.

<sup>6</sup> Qtd. in *Brāhmaṇa O Vaiṣṇava*, by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura.

*madhyama-adhikārī* is not an expert in *śāstra*, he is not a *śāstra-yutki*.<sup>7</sup> This means that the *pañcarātrika uttama* is also situated on the platform of *vaidhi-bhakti* and a candidate for further advancement. And due to the rigorous training in *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*, which qualifies him at least on the level of the “monitor-guru” Śrīla Prabhupāda describes in *Easy Journey to Other Planets*, he is therefore also qualified to be an *ācārya*, who can then initiate others.<sup>8</sup>

For example, “Obeying the orders of the spiritual master with faith and devotion” corresponds to item number 9 in *Sātvata-saṁhitā*, *gurv-ārādhana-niṣṭhaḥ*, “eager and determined to follow guru’s orders.” Similarly, item 4, “Following in the footsteps of great *ācāryas* under the direction of the spiritual master” corresponds to item 21, *dhārmikānām pathi sthitāḥ*, which is “steadfast on the path of those who strictly follow dharma.” And “inquiring from the spiritual master how to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness” corresponds to item 55, “being free from laziness or sleep, he requests his guru to teach him.” These and other items in the list from *Bhakti-rasāṁṛta-sindhu* are supported directly or indirectly in *pāñcarātra-vidhi*.

As to why the definition we propose also requires that the candidate be at least a *madhyama-adhikārī* according to *bhāgavata-vidhi*, this is simply because ISKCON follows both *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* and *bhāgavata-vidhi* simultaneously. Therefore, everyone will have a “score” according to each of these two *vidhis*. In *Brāhmaṇa O Vaiṣṇava*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura notes that the *pañcarātrika uttama-adhikārī* and the *bhāgavata kaniṣṭha-adhikārī* are practically on the same level.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the definition we propose recommends that someone fit to be appointed as a guru be a *pañcarātrika uttama* and at least a *bhāgavata madhyama*.

How do we explain Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī equating the *pañcarātrika uttama* with the *bhāgavata kaniṣṭha*? If this is true, then it explains why the *pañcarātrika uttama* doesn’t preach, as he has regard for the Lord in Deity-form only (*arcāyām-eva haraye*), and thus has little interest in the non-devotees. This we have seen in some of the scholarly devotees in other Vaiṣṇava *saṁpradāyas*. Although they are very cultured and scholarly, they are nonetheless disinterested in preaching. (But only after seeing ISKCON, some have started preaching.)

Thus, it is seen that not only is the *pañcarātrika uttama-adhikārī* nearly on the same level as the *bhāgavata kaniṣṭha-adhikārī*, his characteristics are also similar to the *vaidhi-bhakti madhyama-adhikārī* described in *Bhakti-rasāṁṛta-sindhu*. This is because the *pañcarātrika uttama* has very firm faith based on the *śāstras*. This fixes them in their own devotion, and they can preach to those who surrender to them. However, they cannot preach to unsurrendered souls because they cannot defeat their opposing arguments, and this is exactly the qualification of the *vaidhi-bhakti madhyama-adhikārī*. In the commentary to *Bhakti-rasāṁṛta-sindhu*, 1.2.18, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī says – “*anipuṇa* here means almost like

<sup>7</sup> Section 6, [Pāñcarātrikī-ḍikṣā as an ISKCON Practice](#) gives more detail on the different levels of *uttama*, *madhyama* and *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī* devotees.

<sup>8</sup> In *Easy Journey to Other Planets*, Śrīla Prabhupāda says, “a candidate who has successfully followed the first twelve items can also become a spiritual master himself, just as a student becomes a monitor in class with a limited number of disciples.” These items correspond to the first twelve of the list of 64 items of *vaidhi-bhakti* given by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī in *Bhakti-rasāṁṛta-sindhu*.

<sup>9</sup> See [Pāñcarātrikī-ḍikṣā as an ISKCON Practice](#) for further reference.

*nipuṇa*. It means that when confronted with formidable arguments from *sāstra*, he is unable to counter them. Still he remains *śraddhāvān*, that is he remains determined and fixed up in the mind.”<sup>10</sup>

But it is the *bhāgavata madhyama-adhikārī* who is similar to the *vaidhi-bhakti uttama-adhikārī*, though there is some difference. Two characteristics are common to both: one is that the devotee considers Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa the supreme object of love, and the other is that he is “fully trained to preach.”<sup>11</sup> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.2.46 mentions *prema* (for the Lord) and *kṛpā* and *upekṣā*, showing mercy to the innocent and avoiding the envious, which are the actions of a preacher. In this respect, the *bhāgavata madhyama* and the *vaidhi-bhakti uttama* are nearly equivalent.

Note that a *bhāgavata uttama-adhikārī* does not preach, because he makes no distinction between the devotees and non-devotees. He sees them all connected with the Lord. Therefore, Śrīla Prabhupāda said numerous times that in order to preach, the *bhāgavata uttama-adhikārī* must act on the platform of the *madhyama-adhikārī*. In this respect, the *bhāgavata madhyama* is equivalent to the *vaidhi-bhakti uttama*. But because the *vaidhi-bhakti uttama* is still situated on the platform of *sādhana-bhakti*, he is not the same as the *bhāgavata uttama*, who is a *bhāva-bhakta*, not a *sādhana-bhakta*.

Finally, the Law of Disciplic Succession is a part of the definition because it cannot be abandoned or transgressed. Because Śrīla Prabhupāda gave so much emphasis to it, followed it himself, and did not appoint any of his own disciples to initiate during his own lifetime, this is no ordinary etiquette. It is practically on the level of a regulative principle. Śrīla Prabhupāda distinguished it as such by calling it the Law of Disciplic Succession.

Since the etiquette has the authority of a regulative principle, only another regulative principle can allow for it. Therefore, we have recommended that if someone has to be appointed as an *ācārya* during the lifetime of his guru, he will have to be made *ācārya* according to the rules and regulations of *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*, since the process of creating *ācāryas* who can initiate others is described only in this system. Thus, we have adopted the nomenclature of describing the fit candidate in terms of both *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* and *bhāgavata-vidhi*.

### Gurus appointing disciples should be very exceptional

Here, we restate our original proposition once again, with the understanding that the candidate who is *pāñcarātrika uttama* and *bhāgavata madhyama* is the same as the *vaidhi-bhakti uttama*.

An *ācārya* may appoint a disciple as *ācārya* only if his disciple is an *uttama-adhikārī* according to *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* and at least a *madhyama-adhikārī* according to *bhāgavata-vidhi*. The process for preparing and appointing such an *ācārya* must also be according to *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*.

<sup>10</sup> *anipuṇa iti nipuṇa-sadṛśaḥ / balavad-bādhe datte sati samādhātum asamartha ity arthaḥ / tathāpi śraddhāvān manasi dṛḍha-niścaya evety arthaḥ*

<sup>11</sup> Śrīla Prabhupāda says, “He understands perfectly that the ultimate goal of life is to attain to the transcendental loving service of Kṛṣṇa, and he knows that Kṛṣṇa is the only object of worship and love.” And that that this person “who has strictly followed the rules and regulations under the training of a bona fide spiritual master and has sincerely obeyed him in accord with revealed scriptures” is “fully trained to preach” and “become a spiritual master himself.” (*Nectar of Devotion*, Ch. 3).

Otherwise, the appointment would transgress the Law of Disciplic Succession, which states that one may only accept disciples in his guru's absence or departure.

Implicit in the proposition above is that the disciple must act as *ācārya* on the order of the guru. Even if one is very qualified, the Law of Disciplic Succession must not be transgressed. This is suggested in the below statement of his (emphasis added):

First of all follow the orders of *ācārya*, and you become mature. Then it is better to become *ācārya*. Because we are interested in preparing *ācārya*, but the etiquette is, at least for the period the guru is present, one should not become *ācārya*. Even if he is complete he should not, because the etiquette is, if somebody comes for becoming initiated, it is the duty of such person to bring that prospective candidate to his *ācārya*. Not that "Now people are coming to me, so I can become *ācārya*." That is *avamanya*. *Nāvamanyeta karhicit*. Don't transgress this etiquette. *Nāvamanyeta*. That will be falldown. **Just like during the lifetime of our Guru Mahārāja, all our Godbrothers now who are acting as *ācārya*, they did not do so. That is not etiquette.**<sup>12</sup>

This follows from the principle of avoiding *maryādā-vyatikrama*, or surpassing a superior personality. In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, third canto, Vidura meets Uddhava and begs for his instruction in transcendental knowledge. But because Maitreya was nearby and had also received the same knowledge from Lord Kṛṣṇa, Uddhava requested him to seek Maitreya for instruction. "The Lord never tolerates the impertinence of *maryādā-vyatikrama*," says Śrīla Prabhupāda. "One should never pass over the honor due an elderly spiritual master in the interests of one's own personal gain and fame."<sup>13</sup> This is the basis of the etiquette of the Law of Disciplic Succession.

A further point to keep in mind is that in considering the failure of the Gauḍīya Maṭha, the devotees who attempted to don the mantle of *ācārya* were very highly qualified, both as scholars and preachers. Yet Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura never appointed any of them.

Why this Gauḍīya Maṭha failed? Because they tried to become more than guru. He, before passing away, he gave all direction and never said that "This man should be the next *ācārya*." But these people, just after his passing away, they began to fight, who shall be *ācārya*. That is the failure. They never thought, "Why Guru Mahārāja gave us instruction so many things, why he did not say that this man should be *ācārya*?" They wanted to create artificially somebody *ācārya*, and everything failed. They did not consider even with common sense that if Guru Mahārāja wanted to appoint somebody as *ācārya*, why did he not say? He said so many things, and this point he missed? The real point? And they insisted on it. They declared some unfit person to become *ācārya*. Then another man came, then another *ācārya*, another *ācārya*. So better remain a foolish person perpetually to be directed by Guru Mahārāja.<sup>14</sup>

So, this emphasis on not accepting disciples in the presence of one's guru, along with the refusal of both Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura and Śrīla Prabhupāda to appoint any of their disciples as *ācārya* in their manifest presence makes the Law of Disciplic Succession very strong. Only a very exceptionally qualified person should be considered as an exception. But currently, the qualification of devotees that have been put forward as candidates has generally been unexceptional. That is, as devotees and preachers they are competent but not extraordinary. The next section discusses this level of candidate.

<sup>12</sup> Lecture on CC Adi-lila 1.13 -- Mayapur, April 6, 1975.

<sup>13</sup> SB 3.4.25 purport.

<sup>14</sup> Room conversation. August 16, 1976, Bombay.

## The Madhyama-adhikārī Preacher as Guru

At present, there are gurus in ISKCON who would like to see some of their own disciples start initiating. And the argument given is that they are now in the position of *dīkṣā-guru* and therefore have the prerogative to give their blessings for them to go ahead, provided they are judged fit according to current procedures in ISKCON.

However, the Law of Disciplic Succession is not so easily overridden, as the following statements from Śrīla Prabhupāda will demonstrate.

Indeed, the advanced *uttama-adhikārī* Vaiṣṇava devotee should be accepted as a spiritual master.

Everything one possesses should be offered to him, for it is enjoined that one should deliver whatever he has to the spiritual master.<sup>15</sup>

One should not become a spiritual master unless he has attained the platform of *uttama-adhikārī*.

A neophyte Vaiṣṇava or a Vaiṣṇava situated on the intermediate platform can also accept disciples, but such disciples must be on the same platform, and it should be understood that they cannot advance very well toward the ultimate goal of life under his insufficient guidance. Therefore a disciple should be careful to accept an *uttama-adhikārī* as a spiritual master.

A guru should be an *uttama-adhikārī* and should not be a *madhyama-* or *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī*, but are the disciples being put forward as candidates also *uttama-adhikārīs*? Śrīla Prabhupāda says that an *uttama-adhikārī* “can be recognized by his ability to convert many fallen souls to Vaiṣṇavism.”<sup>16</sup> Hence, current ISKCON laws for assessing the fitness of a candidate for guru require that the candidate be a successful preacher. But by definition, preaching is the work of *madhyama-adhikārīs*, so one can be a successful preacher yet still not be an *uttama-adhikārī*.

Yet as a spiritual master, the guidance of a *madhyama-adhikārī* is insufficient. As per Śrīla Prabhupāda, the disciples of such a guru “must be on the same platform” and “cannot advance very well toward the ultimate goal of life under his insufficient guidance.” This is the deficiency of the *madhyama-adhikārī* guru, but he is an initiating guru nonetheless.

Since the training of both the *madhyama-adhikārī* guru and his disciple are incomplete, if he appoints his disciple, he is appointing someone who is *not an exception* to the Law of Disciplic Succession—even if current ISKCON procedures for approval are carefully followed. In order to become a guru, the candidate’s spiritual master would have to first depart.<sup>17</sup> Otherwise, the appointment of such a disciple

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<sup>15</sup> NOI text 5 purport.

<sup>16</sup> NOI text 5 purport.

<sup>17</sup> A question may be raised as to why a *madhyama-* or *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī* is even allowed to accept disciples if it is not favorable for advancing in devotional service. Pending a more authoritative answer from the *śāstras*, it seems to be the case that preaching has to go on—even under less-than-optimal circumstances. It would be worse to have no guru at all, as it would mean a break in the *paramparā*. This appears similar to how Śrīla Prabhupāda conditionally allowed some of his female disciples to engage in Deity worship during the time of month when the *śāstras* say woman is unclean. Circumstantially, it had to be done; the Deities had to be worshipped. But he did not make such a practice a regulative principle to be continued when the irregular circumstance subsided. That would be transgressing the *śāstras* and would therefore be an offense.

as guru is against the regulative principles of devotional service. The result will be *pratikūla*, or unfavorable.

### The Adhikāra of Society

In *Bhāgavad-gītā*, Chapter 3, there is a discussion about the importance of self-realized people, who have no prescribed duty to perform, performing prescribed duties in order to lead people on the path of self-realization. Beginning with verse 3.17, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa declares that a self-realized person “has no duty” to perform. But Lord Kṛṣṇa says that if He Himself did not perform prescribed duties, people would follow His example, and that He would be the source of so much ruination.

Therefore, Lord Kṛṣṇa says (BG 3.25),

*saktāḥ karmany avidvārīṣo yathā kurvanti bhārata  
kuryād vidvāṁs tathāsaktaś cikīrṣur loka-saṅgraham*

As the ignorant perform their duties with attachment to results, the learned may similarly act, but without attachment, for the sake of leading people on the right path.

This conveys a sense that there are a common set of social norms that all members are obliged to follow—even if personally one may otherwise be fit to be exempted from them. This can be called the *adhikāra* of society.<sup>18</sup>

At the present time, the successful, *madhyama-adhikārī* preacher as guru is a familiar part of ISKCON. This does not mean that there are no *uttama-adhikārī* gurus in ISKCON. Nor does it mean that those who are *madhyama*- gurus are not making progress toward becoming *uttamas*. Nor does this mean that *madhyama-adhikārī* gurus are in the majority. But for historical reasons, few in ISKCON today think of ISKCON’s gurus as being “liberated acharya and guru [who] cannot commit any mistake.”<sup>19</sup> Hence, the prevalence of the *madhyama-adhikārī* guru sets the *adhikāra* for the ISKCON society.

This perception is somewhat subjective and therefore subject to dispute, and some will undoubtedly dispute it. But on what basis could it be disputed? The fact is that in the 40 years since Śrīla Prabhupāda’s departure, many of ISKCON’s gurus have fallen down. Not all, not even most, but a substantial proportion have nevertheless fallen away. This is a historical fact. It is not subjective.

In accounting for this, it makes less sense to believe they were *uttama-adhikārīs* that somehow fell down than to believe they were *madhyamas* and *kaniṣṭhas* who often enough acted on their own insufficient knowledge and against their true interests. Certainly, there are other factors, but being on the lower stages of devotion accounts for much. Thus, while the current situation is improved, the basic problem has not gone away. The *madhyama*- and *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī* gurus will be with us in significant

<sup>18</sup> The word *adhikāra* means “eligibility.”

<sup>19</sup> See Śrīla Prabhupāda’s letter to Janardana, April 26, 1968 for further context of the quoted text.

numbers for a long time to come, and with regard to guru-related policies they will set the *adhikāra* of ISKCON.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, with regard to the Law of Disciplic Succession, the *adhikāra* of ISKCON as a society is that no one should be appointed guru during the lifetime of his spiritual master—even if someone is felt to be exceptionally qualified. This will be ISKCON's *adhikāra* for the foreseeable future.

### Appointing *Dīkṣā*-gurus through *Pāñcarātrika-vidhi*

As a matter of policy, ISKCON examines prospective gurus before allowing them to accept disciples, which means ISKCON's GBC is also in the business of recommending them. At the very least, the GBC's formal approval tells the rest of ISKCON, “we think this person is fit to accept disciples.” But if “a disciple should be careful to accept an *uttama-adhikārī* as a spiritual master,” shouldn't the GBC also be careful to recommend only *uttama-adhikārīs*?

Current ISKCON Law (section 6.2, Qualifications of a Guru), however, does not have a rule that says that a guru must be an *uttama-adhikārī*. On innumerable occasions, Śrīla Prabhupāda said that the guru must be a *mahā-bhāgavata* or an *uttama-adhikārī*. But under this section of ISKCON Law, a successful *madhyama-adhikārī* preacher would also qualify as a candidate. There is nothing in it that would rule him out. Thus, while the qualifications listed in section 6.2 generally reflect qualities that gurus should have, the list is nonetheless deficient.

Correcting this deficiency would then *legitimately* allow for the possibility of appointing gurus in the presence of their spiritual masters while also honoring the Law of Disciplic Succession. And the only way to do that is to bring ISKCON's process of preparing candidates more in line with *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*.

There are many reasons for this, but three are particularly notable in this connection:

1. Devotees at the level of *sādhana-bhakti* have the *adhikāra* to follow *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*.
2. *Pāñcarātrika-vidhi* gives detailed instructions and guidance on how to train a candidate from initiation up to being appointed as a *dīkṣā-guru*.
3. It is easier to assess who is an *uttama-adhikārī* of *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* by utilizing the elaborate descriptions as given in the *pāñcarātrika śāstras*.

Since we follow *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* in accepting initiations, then we must also follow it in appointing others who will be giving initiations. ISKCON's members are familiar with *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* in the matter of receiving first- and second-initiations, which are according to *pāñca-sāṃskāra* (*tāpa-*, *ūrdhva-puṇḍrā-*, and *nāma-sāṃskāras* for first initiation, and *mantra-* and *yāga-sāṃskāras* for second

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<sup>20</sup> There is also the fact that many ISKCON gurus who are Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples are in their late 60s, 70s and 80s now, and they are the gurus for the vast majority of ISKCON's devotees today. Those who are anxious that the otherwise competent preachers under them are not currently allowed to initiate can take some cold comfort in the fact that five years from now this will be much less of a problem, and in 10 – 15 years the problem will have practically vanished—at least until the next large cohort of ISKCON gurus reaches old age.

initiation).<sup>21</sup> But less well known are the *pañcarātrika* regulations connected with examining and appointing an *ācārya*, or *dīkṣā-guru*. These are briefly described in *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, and in this connection Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī quotes extensively from *Nārada-pañcarātra*. Further detail is provided in *Nārada-pañcarātra* and in other *sāttvika pañcarātra sāstras*. Because as a society we have the *adhikāra* to follow *pañcarātrika-vidhi*, it is these processes that we have to strictly follow.

This does not transgress the Law of Disciplic Succession for two reasons: the first is that the process for appointing someone as an *ācārya* is also on the level of regulative principles. As already mentioned, though etiquette, the Law of Disciplic Succession has the authority of a regulative principle. As with the regulative principle against illicit sex, it is absolute. It doesn't allow for indulgence in sex unless otherwise prescribed by another regulative principle. Arguments based on time, place, and circumstance and practical outcomes are insufficient to overcome the prohibition, because they are not on the level of regulative principles. Therefore, if one is fit for initiation *according to the regulative principles given in the pañcarātra-sāstras*, then he can be appointed as an *ācārya* during the lifetime of his spiritual master and accept his own disciples.

The second reason the appointment of an *ācārya* through the *pañcarātrika* process does not violate the Law of Disciplic Succession is that the process itself *requires* that a candidate be an *uttama-adhikāri*. This is a necessary condition in order to be considered an exception to the Law. "Yes. I shall choose some guru. I shall say, 'Now you become *ācārya*. You become authorized,'" says Śrīla Prabhupāda. "But the training must be complete." Given Śrīla Prabhupāda's insistence that a guru should be an *uttama-adhikāri*, complete training means reaching this stage of advancement.

In his commentary on *Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura defines the *uttama-adhikāri* within the *pañcarātrika* process. After performing the *pāñca-saṃskāras* (first- and second-initiations), "those who perform *navejyā-karma*, or nine forms of *arcana*, and master the knowledge of *artha-pañcaka* are called *uttama-adhikārīs*."<sup>22</sup> *Artha-pañcaka* is a small book by Śrī Pillai Lokācārya from the Rāmānuja *saṃpradāya*. The book is comprised of "extremely esoteric treatises" covering five principles: *sva-svarūpa*, *para-svarūpa*, *upāya-svarūpa*, *puruṣārtha-svarūpa*, and *virodhī-svarūpa*.<sup>23</sup> Similar criteria are given in the *pañcarātras*, though there is some difference as to which *sāstras* must be mastered before a candidate may be appointed as *ācārya*.

*Pañcarātrika-vidhi* comes with its own definitions of an *uttama*-, *madhyama*- and *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī*, and they should be used in assessing whether someone is a fit to become an *ācārya*. In *Brāhmaṇa O Vaiṣṇava*, Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura notes that the *pañcarātrika* definitions are different from the *bhāgavata* definitions (SB 11.2.45 – 47) and indicate a lower level of *adhikāra*. "The *kaniṣṭha-adhikārīs*

<sup>21</sup> 6. See [Pañcarātrikī-dīkṣā as an ISKCON Practice](#) for further discussion as to how these are implemented in ISKCON.

<sup>22</sup> CB Ādi-khaṇḍa 17.106.

<sup>23</sup> *Jaiva Dharma*, Chapter 23, Part Eleven: The Initial Discussion of Nāma-tattva. Also note: "Pillāi Lokācārya, who wrote a book named *Artha-pañcaka*. The five subjects described by him are different from those described by Śrī Jīvapāda." – Brāhmaṇa and Vaisnava, Hari-jana-kanda, by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. Seems that Bijoy kumara met followers of Lokacarya Pillai.

in the *bhāva-mārga* explained in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* are practically equal to the *mahā-bhāgavatas* of the *pañcarātrika-arcana-mārga*, although there is some difference.”

But Śrīla Prabhupāda’s expectation that prospective candidates must first pass a set of exams before being allowed to initiate suggests that we use *pañcarātrika* standards to assess candidates.

*Pañcarātrika-vidhi* requires a candidate to have certain level of mastery of the *śāstras*, *bhāgavata-vidhi* does not. Otherwise, we have to assess that someone is an *uttama-adhikārī* according to *bhāgavata-vidhi*, and with that criterion almost no one is going to be a fit candidate. Such *bhāgavata uttama-adhikārīs* cannot preach because they do not see anyone as a non-devotee. As Śrīla Prabhupāda said many times, a *bhāgavata uttama* has to come to the platform of *bhāgavata madhyama* in order to preach and become guru.

Therefore, it is an important principle that a guru has to judge the *adhikāra* (eligibility) of his disciples in order to guide them. Neither a *bhāgavata uttama* nor a *vaidhi-bhakti kaniṣṭha* does this. Thus, only *bhāgavata-madhyamas* or *vaidhi-bhakti uttama-adhikārīs* can preach. A *vaidhi-bhakti madhyama-adhikārī* may preach and become guru, but his guidance will be very insufficient. But generally, candidates will be situated on the level of *sādhana-bhakti*, not *bhāva-bhakti*, and thus *ācāryas* should be created according to *pañcarātrika-vidhi* and assessed according to both *pañcarātrikī*- and *bhāgavatī* regulations as a *pañcarātrika uttama* and *bhāgavata madhyama*.

### Educating Ācāryas

In practice, the training in *śāstra* received by *ācāryas* in other *saṃpradāyas* that follow the *pañcarātrika-vidhi* is much more rigorous than what is offered in ISKCON or required of its candidates. *Pañcarātrika-vidhi* also suggests that an *ācārya* must have broad and deep knowledge of the *śāstras*. Of course, the ongoing efforts within ISKCON to develop its own courses for the same purposes is a step in the right direction. But the rigor, depth, and breadth of study as implied in the *śāstras* and envisioned by our *ācāryas* shows that ISKCON has a long way to go in preparing *ācāryas* who are sufficiently learned.

For example, in Māyāpur in 1927, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Saravatī Ṭhākura himself instituted the Parā-vidyā-piṭha, an educational institution primarily for teaching Gauḍīya *siddhānta*. The medium of instruction was Sanskrit, and the Bhakti-Śāstra course included the following areas:

... there were eight areas of study: *śruti* (the four Vedas), *Vedānta* (*Vedānta-sūtra* and *Bhagavad-gītā*), *Bhāgavatam*, *sāhitya* (literature, particularly written by Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas*), *aitihya* (Vedic history), *bhakti-śāstra* (*śāstras* that specifically delineate topics of *bhakti*), *tattva*, and *rasa*.<sup>24</sup>

A curriculum with that breadth and high level of rigor would directly address some of the concerns raised against allowing disciples to initiate disciples while their gurus are still present. For example, there is some worry that this might trigger “turf wars,” in which gurus with mixed motives use their initiating disciples to compete with each other for men, property, political power, etc. This is just one example of some of the concerns that have been raised.

<sup>24</sup> Bhakti Vikāsa Swami, *Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava*, vol 1 (Surat, India: Bhakti Vikas Trust, 2009) 405.

But a high level of absorption in the *śāstras* and *bhakti-siddhānta* does in fact help mitigate such impure desires. In *Bhāgavad-gītā As It Is* (6.23), Śrīla Prabhupāda remarks that there are two kinds of *samādhi*: *samprajñāta samādhi* and *asamprajñāta samādhi*. “When one becomes situated in the transcendental position by various philosophical researches, he is said to have achieved *samprajñāta samādhi*.” And it is for this reason that Śrī Sarvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya initially wanted to instruct Lord Caitanya in *Vedānta*, for the sake of subduing sexual desire.<sup>25</sup> So, if prospective gurus put a greater emphasis on study of *śāstras*, that would not only bring their qualifications more in line with *pañcarātrika* standards, it would also help reduce impurities of thought and action.

Thus, for approving gurus, standards should be brought in line with *pañcarātrika-vidhi* and *vaidhi-bhakti-vidhi*, both of which *require* that the candidate first be an *uttama-adhikārī*, according to the standards of either system. Indeed, since the *vaidhi-bhakti-vidhi* *requires* that one be initiated by a spiritual master, that means the *pañcarātrika-vidhi* must be used to assess the candidate. Additionally, not only must the candidate be a *pañcarātrika uttama* but at least a *bhāgavata madhyama* as well. That would mitigate a number of problems connected with the institution of gurus in ISKCON.

But until such *pañcarātrika-uttama-bhāgavata-madhyama-adhikārī* gurus can be created as a general convention, the Law of Disciplic Succession must be strictly observed. No guru should appoint his own disciple by any procedure as a guru until this level of candidate within ISKCON becomes normal.

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<sup>25</sup> “Sometimes there is criticism that our men are not sufficiently learned, especially the brahmanas. Of course second initiation does not depend upon passing an examination. How one has moulded his life—chanting, attending arati, etc., these are essential. Still, brahmana means pandita. Therefore I am suggesting examinations.” Śrīla Prabhupāda, letter to Satsvarupa, Mayapura, Feb 3, 1976.

## 2. Abhiṣeka: Guru Appoints His Disciple as Guru

This section demonstrates that a disciple must become highly qualified

In *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 1.48 some requirements for becoming guru are mentioned as follows.

śrī-nārada-pañcarātre śrī-bhagavan-nārada-saṁvāde—  
bhāvitātmā ca sarvajñah sāstrajñah sat-kriyā-parah /  
siddhi-trayam āyukta ācāryatve'bhiṣecitah ||1.48||

*bhāvitātmā*—pure in mind; *sarvajñah*—knows all injunctions and procedures regarding initiation; *sāstrajñah*—well versed in Vedic literatures; *sat-kriyā-parah*—always engaged in pious deeds (or devotional service); *siddhi-trayam āyukta*—who has been endowed with three perfections: mantra, guru, and *devatā*, through the process of *puraścaraṇa*; *ācāryatve*—in giving mantras and becoming guru; *abhiṣecitah*—has been coronated by his own guru

It is said in *Nārada-pañcarātra*, by Lord Kṛṣṇa to Nārada—

“(One who is to be appointed as guru should be) pure in mind, knowing all injunctions and procedures regarding initiation, well versed in the Vedic literatures, always engaged in devotional service, endowed with the three perfections of mantra, guru, and *devatā* through the process of *puraścaraṇa*, and **should have been appointed by his own spiritual master in the position of being guru through the coronation ceremony.**”<sup>26</sup>

Sanātana Gosvāmī continues in the commentary:

tac-coktaṁ tatraiva puraścaraṇānataram-abhiṣekānte—  
“tato ‘bhiṣicya vidhinā svādhikāre niyojayed /  
grhitvā tena kartavyam gurutvam-itareṣu ca ||” iti /  
svādhikāre upadeṣṭṛtvādike niyojayed-guruḥ tena śiṣyeneeti /

There itself it is mentioned, after *puraścaraṇa* and before *abhiṣeka*—“After duly performing coronation guru should appoint his disciple in his own eligibility (*adhikāra*) and then disciple, taking this can initiate others into mantra and become their guru.” Here **sva-adhikāra** means giving initiation mantras etc., **niyojayed** means guru should appoint, and **tena** means by the disciple.

This takes us to *Jayākhyā-saṁhitā* (*Nārada Pañcarātra*) from where *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* quotes these verses. In *Jayākhyā-saṁhitā* there are two full chapters (17 and 18)<sup>27</sup> dealing with the issue of whom to appoint as guru and the procedure for doing it.

These chapters describe four levels of devotees, elaborating on the qualities of each:

1. Samayī (who has just been initiated by a guru)
2. Putraka (matured with given qualities)
3. Sādhaka<sup>28</sup> (still more matured)
4. Ācārya (*dīkṣā-guru*)

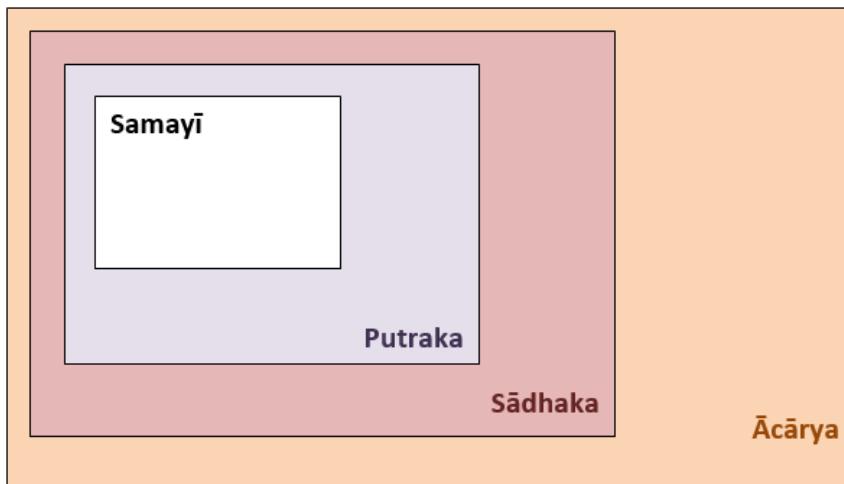
<sup>26</sup> From Sanātana Gosvāmī’s commentary: *ācāryatve mantropadeṣṭṛtve niṣaguruṇā abhiṣiktaḥ*

<sup>27</sup> <https://archive.org/details/jayakhya>

<sup>28</sup> Not to be misunderstood with a performer of *sādhana-bhakti*. This is a technical term and should be taken as nomenclature used in the *pañcarātras*.

These are the four levels of devotees in considering eligibility to become *dīkṣā-guru* (*ācārya*).

Detailed qualities for each of these classes of disciple are given in the section [Qualities of Different Levels of Disciples](#). Here we may be satisfied seeing from the below chart that first one has the qualification of a *samayī*, then with more qualities one becomes *putraka*, who is considered dearer to the guru than his own son. Then on acquiring still more qualities one becomes a *sādhaka*. And finally, after acquiring some more qualities one becomes eligible for becoming *ācārya*, or *mantra-guru*.



Also, the *Nāradīya-saṃhitā*<sup>29</sup> says:

dīkṣāyāṁ saṃskṛto yo'sau samayī saṃprakīrtitah | viḍinānena samayī yo'bhiṣiktaḥ sa dīkṣitah || dvidhaivaṁ cakravartī syāt yo'bhiṣiktastu vaiṣṇavah | yastvevamevaṁ triḥkṛtvā so'bhiṣiktaḥ udāhṛtah || yo'bhiṣiktaścaturdhaivamātmatattve niyojitaḥ | vijñeyah sa gururnāma sarvaśāstrārthatattvavit || yo'bhiṣikto gurustvevaṁ vidyātattve niyojitaḥ | ācāryaḥ sa tu vijñeyah sarvavandyah sadā bhavet || ācāryaḥ paratattvastho yo'bhiṣikto bhaveddvija | bhagavān iti saṃprokto yasmāt bhāgavato bhavet || 10.16-20 ||

One who has been initiated in *dīkṣā saṃskāra* is known as *samayī*. A *samayī* who has been duly given *abhiṣeka* is called *dīkṣita*. A *vaiṣṇava* who has been given this *abhiṣeka* twice he is called *cakravartī*. One who is given *abhiṣeka* thrice is called *abhiṣikta*. One who has been given *abhiṣeka* four times and is also appointed in *ātmatattva* is to be known as *guru*, who is full in knowledge of truths of the *śāstras*. A *guru* who has been given *abhiṣeka* and appointed in *vidyātattva* is to be known as *ācārya*, who is worshipable by all men in all times. When an *ācārya* is steadfast in *paratattva* and is given *abhiṣeka*, he is to be respectfully called *bhagavān* from where he will become *bhāgavata*.

Thus, at each level there is an *abhiṣeka* ceremony, and on the fourth *abhiṣeka* a disciple is given eligibility to accept disciples.<sup>30</sup> We will not touch the detailed procedure mentioned in *Jayākhyā-*, *Sātvata-*, and *Nāradīya-saṃhitās* to keep this document short, but here are the ending *ślokas* from

<sup>29</sup> <https://archive.org/details/NaradiyaSamhitaRaghavaPrasadChowdhry>

<sup>30</sup> This is also confirmed in *Jayākhyā-saṃhitā* 10.46-7—*guruṇā vai so 'abhiṣecyaḥ tataḥ śiṣyaḥ prasādataḥ* || *kṛtvā yāgaṁ caturtham tu tad-vittena tu pūrvavat* ||

Such a disciple (having qualities of *ācārya*) should be mercifully coronated by his guru, who performs sacrifice for his disciple for the fourth time as it was performed on previous occasions.

*Nāradīya-saṁhitā*, which indicate that the end result is that the disciple is now authorized to accept his own disciples:

*ācāryatvam grhāṇedam mayā-dattam tavādhunā | yathāham-adya-prabhṛti śiṣyānugrahakṛt-tathā ||  
kuruṣva tvamapi hy-evam śiṣyāṇāmapyānugraham | guroḥ sakāśāl-labdhvāsau tadācārya-padaṁ tataḥ<sup>1</sup>  
||10.31-2||*

Then he (guru) should say (to his disciple) "Kindly accept this *ācāryatvam* as now is being bestowed upon you by me. As up until now I have been accepting disciples, similarly you also start accepting disciples." Thus, accepting *ācārya-pada* (position of *ācārya*) from his guru, this disciple is instated in the position of guru.

This appears to reflect a wish Śrīla Prabhupāda expressed on one occasion, that he would like to appoint some highly qualified disciples as *ācārya* and himself retire.

**Yes. I shall choose some guru. I shall say, "Now you become acarya. You become authorised." I am waiting for that. You become all acarya. I retire completely. But the training must be complete.** (Room Conversation, 22 April, 1977, Bombay)

### 3. Qualities of Different Levels of Disciples

The following qualities are from the *Sātvata-saṁhitā* (Chapter 22), which is a *daiva pāñcarātra śāstra* (*daiva* means spoken directly by the Lord). A similar list of qualities (not included here) is also given in the *Jayākhyā-saṁhitā*, which is part of *Nārada Pañcarātra*.

A word about the translation is in order here. Many of the terms are technical and not easily translated, so in most cases the original Sanskrit terms are supplied along with an English approximation. The full list from *Jayākhyā-saṁhitā* was not included because it was even more difficult to properly translate on such short notice.

But the list from *Sātvata-saṁhitā* has nonetheless been provided here<sup>31</sup> in order to demonstrate that the *pañcarātrika* process is rigorous and conducive to creating qualified *ācāryas* who are also staunch devotees of the Lord.

#### Samayī

A *samayī bhakta* is a newly initiated devotee. The new initiate is expected to develop the below 71 qualities in order to be recognized at the next level of disciple, called *putraka*. Above *putraka*, there are two more levels that have their own additional qualities the *bhakta* is supposed to develop. On attaining the topmost of those levels, *ācārya*, a disciple is then empowered to initiate others.

In order to advance to the next level, *putraka*, a *samayī* must develop the below 71 qualities.

1. Opulent (*śrīmān*).
2. Faithful.
3. Intelligent (*matimān*).
4. Determined (*drḍhavrataḥ*).
5. Always speaks the truth.
6. (Is a) devotee.
7. Eats only as much as necessary to maintain body and soul together<sup>32</sup> (*mitāśī*).
8. Devoid of non-devotee association (*saṅga-rahita*).
9. Eager and determined to follow guru's orders (*gurv-ārādhana-niṣṭhah*).
10. Steady intelligence.
11. Devoid of laziness.
12. Born in a devotee family (*sad-vaiṣṇava-kule-jātah*).<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> <https://archive.org/details/SatvataSamhitaDr.SudhakarMalaviya>

<sup>32</sup> "Another word here is *mita-bhuk*. This means that one should eat only as much as necessary to maintain the body and soul together." – SB 3.27.8, purport | Also is one of the 26 qualities of pure devotee mentioned in SB 11.11.29-32

<sup>33</sup> Such requirements are adjusted according to time, place, and circumstance in accordance with other *sāstras*. For example, in *Bhāradvāja-saṁhitā*, which is a part of *Nārada Pañcarātra*, a similar requirement is there, that an *ācārya* must be from a pure Vaiṣṇava family (BS 1.39). However, the next verse (1.40) affirms that one not born in a pure Vaiṣṇava family may also become an *ācārya*: *svayam vā bhakti-sampanno jñāna-vairāgya-bhūṣitah / sva-karma-nirato nityam arhaty ācāryatāṁ dvijah* || "Even if a twice-born *brāhmaṇa* (*dvija*) happens to have some non-devotees in his family line, or has not been fortunate to take birth in a renowned family of pure

13. Has undergone proper purificatory ceremonies or *sarṇskārās* (*susaṁskāraih susaṁskṛtaḥ*).
14. Has already been brought to a certain good eligibility by his parents (*purā mātāpitrbhyāṁ tu nītah sadyogyatāpadam*).
15. Devoid of fault that arises from being *varṇa-saṅkara* (*vimukta-saṅkarah*).
16. Sense-controlled.
17. (Acting properly) being afraid of bad results in next life (*paraloka-bhaya-śaṅkita*).
18. Always longing for devotee association.
19. Extremely attached to taste the nectar of Vedic literatures (*śāstrārthāsvāda-lampaṭah*).
20. Addicted to collect deeper and deeper meanings of Vedic literatures.
21. Steadfast on the path of those who strictly follow dharma (*dhārmikāṇāṁ pathi sthitah*).
22. Always engaged in auspicious activities (*śubha-karma-rato nityam*).
23. Not wretched or of bad quality (*adīnah*).
24. Enduring<sup>34</sup> (*sattva-vān*).
25. Forgiving (*kṣamī*).
26. Patient or sober (*dhīrah*).
27. Compassionate (*dayāparah*).
28. Committed to benefit devotees or *sādhus* (*sādhūnām-upakārakṛt*).
29. Wears clean clothes (*nirmalāmbara-dhārī*).
30. Always pure or clear in body parts (*vimalāṅga*).
31. Expert in speaking sweetly (*priya-bhāṣī*).
32. Jolly or happy minded (*prasanna*).
33. Not at all interested or greedy for others wealth or possessions (*para-dravyeṣv-alolupah*).
34. Free from desire to enjoy other's wives or anyone else than his own wife (*para-dāra-sprhā-muktaḥ*).
35. Sheltered by good sense of discrimination (*sad-viveka-padāśritah*).
36. Not interested in eating meat, intoxication, illicit sex, or gambling (even if) he is born as a *kṣatriya*, *vaiṣya*, or *śūdra* (*kṣatra-viṭ-śūdra-jātiyo madya-māṁseṣv-alampaṭah*).
37. Engaged in cleanliness rituals and study of Vedic literatures (*śauca-svādhyāya-nirataḥ*).
38. Satisfied in whatever profit he gets following his duty (*santuṣṭah*).
39. Always endeavoring for executing his duty<sup>35</sup> (*satatodyataḥ*).
40. Always washes hands, mouth, and feet after eating<sup>36</sup>, or does not eat remnants of foodstuffs of anyone else than his own guru or senior devotees<sup>37</sup> (*ucchiṣṭa-varjana-parah*).
41. Body branded with the sign of the *cakra*, made with a heated metal brand<sup>38</sup> (*cakrāṅkita-tanuh*).

devotees, he nevertheless always deserves to be an *ācārya* if he is endowed with all good qualities like knowledge and renunciation, is engaged in his prescribed duties (*sva-karma*), and is steeped in loving devotion to the Lord.”

<sup>34</sup> *sattva-vān*—enduring; From SB 7.13.37

<sup>35</sup> Qualities no.38 and 39 are translated a little differently with gloss because otherwise these two qualities become contradictory – how can one who is satisfied want to endeavor more and more unless he is endeavoring not for result but to execute his duty. Similarly, whatever profit he gets from such endeavors, he remains satisfied and doesn't go outside the scope of his duty to earn more.

<sup>36</sup> Translation from SB 6.18.60

<sup>37</sup> Normal translation with added clarification that remnants of foodstuffs of senior devotees and guru are never to be rejected but aspired for.

42. Gives up fame, miserliness, and enviousness (*māna-mātsarya-kārpaṇyaparityāgaparo mahān*).
43. Engaged in works of *daiva* and *pīṭī*<sup>39</sup> .
44. Devoid of pride in his activities and behavior.
45. Completely gives up all kinds of unfit, prohibited materials (*niḥśeṣāṇām-akarmṇya-dravyāṇām parihārakṛt*).
46. Dear to mother, father and good friends (*mātu-janaka-niṣṭhānām sad-bandhūnām ca vatsalah*).
47. Accomplishes tasks and carries out orders exactly as have been told (*ukta-nirvāhaka*).
48. Fearless (*abhīḥ*).
49. Always likes to take seat below his guru's seat (*nitya nīcāsanapriyah*).
50. Always ahead in fulfilling the orders [of the guru], fully considering all situations (*sarveśām-urdhvato-nityam sthiti-kāma-parāyaṇah*).
51. Always endowed with one-pointed intelligence to render ultimate deliverance to the generations of his own family (*vamśoddhāraikaratayā sudhiyālaṅkṛta sadā*).
52. Satisfied in receiving the *darśana* of his guru (by guru's mercy) either at his own home, at his guru's home or anywhere else. Similarly satisfied in getting the *darśana* of the Deity or *mantramūrti*. Just by seeing his guru, or deity, or being seen by guru, or just getting sprinkled (by holy water) by his guru, he feels "my life has now become successful.".
53. Satisfied with the duration of discipleship that he has had the opportunity for.
54. Satisfied with his guru.
55. Being free from laziness or sleep, he requests his guru to teach him.
56. Hearing lessons from his guru, he meditates on their meaning while situated in a secluded place.
57. Even after remembering full lessons, he doesn't become proud.
58. Neither he teaches lessons to others for fulfillment of his own purposes.
59. He never gives his own meanings of *śāstras* but always requests his guru to explain.
60. Even if being accused in meetings, he doesn't become disturbed or agitated, and his behavior and body language does not change.
61. He does not consider the thought "I will win over the opposite party in argument" to be good.
62. Knower of *kunda*, *maṇḍala*, *mudrā*, *astra*, *pīṭha*, *bimba* and *devālaya*.<sup>40</sup>
63. He worships the Lord of Lords through *mantras* on occasions like *uttarāyaṇa*.
64. On being ordered by his guru, he worships the lotus feet of other gurus and personalities like his guru.
65. He doesn't inquire about anything by which they will become displeased.
66. After pleasing them and after taking their permission, he asks about things that he (the disciple) doesn't know or has forgotten.
67. He doesn't reveal the *mudras* that have been received from the gurus .
68. For knowledge in Sanskrit and Vedas he prays to his guru.

<sup>38</sup> According to Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura, for *kaliyuga* use of *gopīcandana* is recommended instead of hot metal brand

<sup>39</sup> Śāddha, *tarpaṇa*, etc. are *pīṭī* works; and *daiva* works mean worshipping demigods according to Vedic injunctions. According to Gopāla-bhatta-gosvāmī, in the Gauḍīya *sāmpradāya*, worship of demigods and *pīṭīs* has been replaced by worship of *guru-paramparā*.

<sup>40</sup> These are technical terms related to worship not translated here due to insufficient knowledge of procedures.

69. In the absence of his guru, he prays to his guru's disciple who has been instated as a *putraka* by his guru through the medium of a sacrificial ceremony to the Lord.
70. In the absence of a *putraka*, he prays to other Vaiṣṇavas in good standing, better standing vaiṣṇavas first.
71. He doesn't pray (for learning Sanskrit and Vedas) to anyone who is not a Vaiṣṇava.

### Putraka

When the guru is satisfied with his disciple (who has developed the above-mentioned 71 qualities) and notices his disciple's success and gratitude, through appointing him and through understanding his level of success in study of the scriptures (*āgamas*) – good, better, and best—then, with the intention to give him mercy, the guru should call his disciple into the temple of Lord Acyuta and should again observe him. The guru should then keep him in *deva-dhāma maṇḍala* and, being satisfied with him, should make him create, in his palms, *pūrṇākāra-maṇḍala* with *arghya*, flowers and *akṣata*, and then bestow upon him the mantras. But his guru should not instruct him in mantras related to *dhyāna* and *nyāsa*. The guru should instruct this disciple just in worshipping the mantra, without *agni-tarpāṇa* mantras.

For success of his eligibility, his guru should instruct him with the general process that “you worship Lord Acyuta in birība’s water or land.” Then the disciple, happy being instructed by the guru, should say “be it so.” Then he should purify his scriptural understanding by the *mudrā* he has received for his own self. As per his capacity, he should go on serving his guru, seeing to his welfare and always be absorbed in worshipping his guru and eager to serve him.

Then, being ordered by his guru, the disciple should speak out the best meaning of *śāstras* that he has learnt from him without using mantra or *mudrā*. He should always consider that he should not become an object of envy in the assembly of Vaiṣṇavas and ordinary people.

Such a disciple is known as “*Putraka*,” who is dearer to the guru than the guru’s own son.

### Sādhaka

Being initiated like before (as in case of a *putraka*), and being engaged in all kinds of baths and divine works, the *sādhaka* disciple is eager to serve the mantra for his own perfection and not for worshipping people in general. Staying in a forest, a temple, his own house, or some other peaceful place, he should follow the vow of the great mantra, through mantra, service, and giving *arghya*.

In this way, a *sādhaka* is

72. Faithfully engaged with *ātmīya mudrā*.
73. Always extremely careful in executing his duties.
74. Absorbed in thinking of the Lord.

### Ācārya

75. He is appointed by his guru to give mercy to other devotees.
76. He knows padas and *pada-mantras*, with their meanings, with or without knowing their parts (*aṅgas*), and in perspectives of *vācyā* and *vācaka*.

77. He knows the proper position of Deities (as told before) according to his own *varṇa* and that of *śabda-brahma*.
78. He knows the divisions of different *āgamas* (in *sattva*, *raja*, and *tamo-guṇa* and *divya*, *muni-proktā*, and *pauruṣa*) and can properly judge their mixtures.
79. He is knower of *vyākaraṇa*, *mīmāṃsā*, and *nyāya* *śāstras*.

## 4. Practices in Different Sampradāyas

In appointing gurus, the below examples show that the role of institutions is significant, ancient, and widespread, and they provide a precedent for ISKCON to review candidates and appoint gurus.

### Śrī Sampradāya

- *Dīkṣā* given is primarily *pāñcarātrika* with some *vaidika* mantras.
- Successor gurus are selected by the current guru, after seeing their qualities, and they are ordered to start giving initiations.
- There is no standard rule accepted widely for the guru to appoint his successors. But it is generally understood that he should try to do so before he passes away.
- If an *ācārya* passes away before appointing a successor, there is usually some committee of persons affiliated with the *ācārya* who may appoint a successor.
- The procedures of these committees in deciding the next *ācāryas* are not standardized and vary from *ācārya* to *ācārya*.
- Succession is primarily by *kiñkara*, or who has been servant, not *jātī*, or race, birth, etc., though these may be factors to consider.
- Successor gurus do start giving initiations in the presence of current guru on his order.
- Allowance of more than one successor guru, takes care of increasing the number of followers.
- In case of more than one successor guru, they are allocated particular areas to take care of.
- In some cases (this was the case when there was not much travel facility) when the guru cannot travel to their followers' places, he could appoint someone else to give initiation on his behalf.

### Mādhwā Sampradāya

- There are eight primary *māthas* and the leader of each *māṭha* is a guru.
- Families connected to a particular *māṭha* get *dīkṣā* from the current guru of that *māṭha*.
- Madhvācārya himself has set the system that every *māṭha* guru has to appoint a successor well before he passes away so as to be sure of an unbroken lineage.
- For this, Madhvācārya has set the system of *dvandva-māṭha*, where he has paired the *māthas*. For instance, Pejāvara *Māṭha* & Kāñiyoor *Māṭha* are *dvandva-māṭhas*. If somehow the Kāñiyoor *Māṭha*'s guru passes away without leaving a successor, then the successor for the Kāñiyoor *māṭha* will be selected and appointed by the guru of the Pejāvara *Māṭha*.
- There is no separate ceremony for appointing a guru, but the *sannyāsa*-giving ceremony itself confers the *adhikāra* for becoming a guru.
- The appointed successor guru starts giving mantra (on the order of his guru) even while his guru is present and is giving mantras.
- About a century back, in Kāñcipuram Śaṅkara *Māṭha*, where three generations of guru were staying together – senior guru, middle guru, and junior guru.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> The *māṭha-ācārya* we spoke with at Udupi mentioned this in the interview. This is not yet confirmed by us from interviewing persons from the Kāñcipuram *māṭha*.

## 5. The Minority Opinion: Guru ordering his qualified disciple to become guru should be the norm

(By Dāmodara Dāsa)

This research paper is a result of a query (added gloss in brackets)—

A question then is the following: are there any direct scriptural evidences that could override all other "opinions" and establish authoritatively that this (disciples initiating in the presence of his own guru) \*is not\* our modus operandi within the paramparā?

### **Śāstra or Scriptural Evidences:**

Evidences, as seen in [section 2](#) (of this paper), leaves no doubt that, according to śāstras, guru appointing his disciple as guru in his presence was a norm, to the extent that the *pañcarātras*<sup>42</sup> dedicate many chapters for the process of this appointment, technically called *abhiṣeka* into *ācāryatva*. The ending quote of section 2 from the *Nāradīya-saṃhitā* is crystal clear—

ācāryatvam grhāṇedāṁ mayā-dattāṁ tavādhunā | yathāham-adya-prabhṛti śiṣyānugrahaḥ kṛt-tathā ||  
kuruṣva tvamapi hy-evaṁ śiṣyāṇāmapyanugraham | guroḥ sakāśāl-labdhvāsau tadācārya-padaṁ tataḥ  
||10.31-2||

Then he (guru) should say (to his disciple) "Kindly accept this *ācāryatvam* as now is being bestowed upon you by me. As up until now I have been accepting disciples, similarly you also start accepting disciples." Thus, accepting *ācārya-pada* (position of *ācārya*) from his guru, this disciple is instated in the position of guru.

It appears at the end of ceremony for the guru appointing his disciple as guru. This perfectly matches with Sanātana Gosvāmī's *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 1.48 with his own commentary (emphasis mine)—

"...should have been **appointed by his own spiritual master** in the position of being guru **through the coronation ceremony.**"

Commentary—"After duly performing coronation guru should appoint his disciple in his **own eligibility (sva-adhikāra)**, **meaning in giving mantras to others etc.** as he himself is doing, and then disciple, taking this, can initiate others into mantra and become their guru."

### **Sādhu (or Paramparā) Evidence:**

[Section 4](#) clearly establishes that this process is being followed as norm by at least two of the Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāyas* till date. Appointing guru was a norm is clearly seen from the fact that Śrīman-Madhvācārya has formed a system of dvandva-maṭha so that in case one maṭha fails to appoint the next guru(s) then the other maṭha can help it out.

### **Conclusion from śāstra and paramparā:**

<sup>42</sup> Although there are such śāstric evidences for *Vaidika-vidhi* also, because ISKCON's initiation process is primarily *pāñcarātriki*, I have not discussed them here.

Thus, as far as *śāstras* and *sādhu* (or *paramparā*) are concerned, it fully supports guru appointing his qualified disciples as guru in his presence. Hence, as per the question itself it should “override all other ‘opinions’ and establish authoritatively that” it is a norm that guru appoints his qualified disciples as guru in his presence.

### What about the guru’s, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s, opinion? Why did he establish “The Law of Disciplic Succession” which seems to oppose *śāstras* and *paramparā*?

We will have to do *samanvaya* or harmonization of these statements to understand in depth. Śrīla Prabhupāda says—

Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says, *sādhu-śāstra-guru-vākyā, cittete kariyā aikya*. One should accept a thing as genuine by studying the words of saintly people, the spiritual master and the *śāstra*. The actual center is the *śāstra*, the revealed scripture. If a spiritual master does not speak according to the revealed scripture, he is not to be accepted. Similarly, if a saintly person does not speak according to the *śāstra*, he is not a saintly person. The *śāstra* is the center for all.<sup>43</sup>

I do not say that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements are to be rejected if they don’t match with *śāstra* or the *paramparā*, which may otherwise be immaturely inferred from above quote. The word *aikya* in the above quote is what I am emphasizing, which means one has to harmonize and the center for harmonizing everything is *śāstra*. This establishes the need for harmonization, thus we proceed.

The hierarchical order of authenticity<sup>44</sup> is—

1. Direct order of the Lord
2. Śruti (Veda)
3. Smṛti (like *purāṇas*, *pañcarātras*, etc)
4. Paramparā or practice of tradition (here referred to as *sādhu*)
5. Guru
6. One’s own *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*.

Any statement will have a direct meaning (*mukhya-vṛtti*) and indirect meaning (*lakṣaṇā-vṛtti*).

If there is a bona fide clash<sup>45</sup> between direct meanings of two statements of differing authenticity level, the statement of the authority higher in hierarchy will be accepted with direct meaning and the other will have to be interpreted (according to rules) to fit the direct meaning of the first one. If level number 6 clashes with anyone then it is rejected as defective.

In the case under discussion, the statement of Śrīla Prabhupāda, who comes under level number 5 of infallible nature, clashes with many evidences from the levels 2, 3, 4. His statements under discussion

<sup>43</sup> CC Madhya 20.352 purport.

<sup>44</sup> Extracted from SB 7.11. 7.

Nos. 1 to 4 are infallible authorities (devoid of mistake), while 6 is fallible. 5 depends on the qualification of guru, if he is liberated then it is infallible otherwise fallible. In case of Śrīla Prabhupāda, it is infallible

<sup>45</sup> Bonafide clash means that it is impossible to resolve it keeping the direct meaning of both intact by bringing some śāstric evidence which, in its direct meaning, harmonizes both the statements.

also clash with one of his own statements (actually matching exactly with the evidence from *Nāradīya-samhitā* we mentioned in the beginning)—

Yes. I shall choose some guru. I shall say, 'Now you become ācārya. You become authorized.' I am waiting for that. You become all ācārya. I retire completely. But the training must be complete.<sup>46</sup>

Hence, we need to consider Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements in the context of the direct meaning of *pañcarātras* as well as the *paramparā* in order to understand his real intention (which can never be different from *paramparā*, lest he becomes divorced from the *paramparā* and thus unauthoritative). Let us proceed and see.

Here are two important statements from Śrīla Prabhupāda (note the yellow highlighted words):

So we have to follow the ācārya. Then, when we are completely, cent per cent follower of ācārya, then you can also act as ācārya. This is the process. Don't become premature ācārya. First of all follow the orders of ācārya, and you become mature. Then it is better to become ācārya. **Because we are interested in preparing ācārya, but the etiquette is, at least for the period the guru is present, one should not become ācārya.** Even if he is complete he should not, because the etiquette is, if somebody comes for becoming initiated, it is the **duty of such person to bring that prospective candidate to his ācārya.** Not that "Now people are coming to me, so I can become ācārya." That is *avamanya*. Nāvamanyeta karhicit. Don't transgress this etiquette. Nāvamanyeta. That will be falldown. **Just like during the lifetime of our Guru Mahārāja, all our Godbrothers now who are acting as ācārya, they did not do so. That is not etiquette.** Ācāryam mām vijānīyat na avaman... That is insult. So if you insult your ācārya, then you are finished. Yasya prasādād bhagavat-prasādo yasya aprasādāt na gatiḥ kuto 'pi—finished. If you displease your ācārya, then you are finished.<sup>47</sup>

Keep trained up very rigidly and then you are bona fide Guru, and you can accept disciples on the same principle. **But as a matter of etiquette it is the custom that during the lifetime of your Spiritual master you bring the prospective disciples to him, and in his absence or disappearance you can accept** disciples **without any limitation.** This is the Law of Disciplic Succession. I want to see my disciples become bona fide Spiritual Master and spread Krishna consciousness very widely, that will make me and Krishna very happy.<sup>48</sup>

A disciple may become a candidate for *dīkṣā-guru* for two reasons:

1. His own guru or higher authority has ordered to do so
2. Out of his own desire<sup>49</sup>

I propose that the above statements made by Śrīla Prabhupāda belong to the second case, where a disciple wants to become guru out of his own desire because then only there is a case of *avamānanā*, or deriding the authority, meaning that disciple thinks himself better than or equal to guru. Thus, the disciple breaches the etiquette Śrīla Prabhupāda described.

<sup>46</sup> Room conversation, 22 Apr. 1977, Bombay.

<sup>47</sup> Lecture on CC Adi-lila 1.13 -- Mayapur, April 6, 1975.

<sup>48</sup> Letter to Tusta Krsna -- New Delhi 2 December, 1975.

<sup>49</sup> Pride or desire to be worshiped are implied here. However, there may also be other, legitimate reasons compatible with Vaiṣṇava humility for wanting to become a guru.

What is the etiquette? A disciple should not take any respect or worship in front of his own guru; he should not even lecture in front of his own guru. He should always consider himself fool.

This is supported by *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*:

*guror agre pṛthak-pujāṁ advaitam ca parityajet  
diksāṁ vyākhyāṁ prabhuṭvarāṁ ca guror agre vivarjayet ||HBV 1.89||*

“One should not allow oneself to be worshiped in the presence of his spiritual master, nor should one claim that one is as good as his spiritual master. In the presence of one's spiritual master one should not give initiation, give explanations or lectures, or assume the role of a master or a powerful person.”

The words *parityajet* and *vivarjayet* suggest that the action is initiated from the side of disciple. Thus, it forms the part of breaching the etiquette because the main etiquette is that one should not disrespect the position of the spiritual master.

What if the spiritual master himself orders his disciple to give a lecture in his presence, in front of him? On many occasions Śrīla Prabhupāda did order like this. In such cases, giving a lecture in the presence of one's spiritual master, and on the order of the spiritual master, does not violate the etiquette.

There are many examples of this in the *śāstras*. From Caitanya Caritāmṛta 3.7.104-8 there is the example of Śrī Vallabha Bhaṭṭa asking how it is possible to chant the Lord's name when doing so appears to contradict other religious principles:

Vallabha Bhaṭṭa: “It is the duty of a chaste wife, devoted to her husband, not to utter her husband's name, but all of you chant the name of Kṛṣṇa. How can this be called a religious principle?”

Advaita Ācārya responded, “In front of you is Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the personification of religious principles. You should ask Him, for He will give you the proper answer.”

Hearing this, Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu said, “My dear Vallabha Bhaṭṭa, you do not know religious principles. Actually, the first duty of a chaste woman is to carry out the order of her husband. The order of Kṛṣṇa is to chant His name incessantly. Therefore one who is chaste and adherent to the husband Kṛṣṇa must chant the Lord's name, for she cannot deny the husband's order. Following this religious principle, a pure devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa always chants the holy name. As a result of this, he gets the fruit of ecstatic love for Kṛṣṇa.”

Thus, in case number 1, when the spiritual master orders a disciple to become guru, it is *avamānanā* if the disciple doesn't become guru because *gurorājñā balavān* (CC 2.10.144). So, we see that the etiquette is not broken if one becomes guru by the direct order of the guru.

If one carefully looks at collection of quotes of Śrīla Prabhupāda for not initiating in presence of one's own guru, it can be shown that they apply to the second case, where the disciple has approached his guru with a desire to accept his own disciples (see highlighted parts in the texts quoted in the beginning of this section). For instance, Śrīla Prabhupāda's letter to Acyutānanda on August 21, 1968, suggests that Śrīla Prabhupāda was trying to quell some illicit ambition to seek disciples.. Seeing the sections in *pañcarātras* describing the guru appointing his disciple as a guru, one finds that in no case has the

disciple approached his guru to become guru himself. It is the guru who desires that the disciple becomes a guru. Indeed, as prescribed in the *pañcarātra sāstras*, the qualities a candidate for becoming guru is expected to develop should nullify such mundane ambition by the time he is considered fit to be a *dīkṣā-guru*.

Thus, there is no contradiction between *The Law of Disciplic Succession*, which says that a disciple must not accept disciples during the lifetime of his guru, and the case where a spiritual master orders his disciple to accept disciples, provided, of course, the disciple is qualified according to the *pañcarātra sāstras*.

One may say that Śrīla Prabhupāda called it “The Law” and not just an etiquette and thus is binding upon everyone. To this I answer—in the same quote Śrīla Prabhupāda has described in detail what that law is and has used the word etiquette. At other places, describing the same thing, he has repeatedly used the word etiquette only. Thus, it suggests that Śrīla Prabhupāda has used the word “law” to indicate that this etiquette is a part of the body of *dharma* related to guru and disciple. The word “law” is many times used by Śrīla Prabhupāda for the *dharma-sāstras* like the *Manu-saṁhitā*<sup>50</sup>, which also contains many points of etiquette to be followed.

Thus, if harmonized in this way, we don’t need to adjust to say that Śrīla Prabhupāda brought some new law which goes against the *sāstras* and the *paramparā*. We have only to adjust our understanding of one word in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s one statement. If we don’t do this, then we have to try to reconcile our own understanding with volumes of bona fide statements from the *sāstras* and the *paramparā*, and a few of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s own statements. That will probably not succeed. Moreover, this harmonization follows the standard procedure of Vedic Hermeneutics.

### Why did Śrīla Prabhupāda not appoint any of his disciples as gurus?

As stated by Śrīla Prabhupāda, “the training must be complete,” and he didn’t find it was. Thus, for current time he had to make some adjustment. But such adjustments do not form the law for the next 10,000 years to come.

But if we do take this adjustment as a “law” for next 10,000 years then—

- Each initiating guru has to accept thousands of disciples in the course of his own preaching and that of his disciples’.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda says in his purport to CC 2.22.118—  
This is risky because when a spiritual master accepts a disciple, he naturally accepts the disciple’s sinful activities and their reactions. Unless he is very powerful, he cannot assimilate all the sinful reactions of his disciples and has to suffer the consequences. Therefore one is generally forbidden to accept many disciples.
- If, as explained in [Section 1](#) under [Adhikāra of Society](#), the collective eligibility of current gurus and candidates for guru in ISKCON is nowhere that of near liberated souls, then we should not be surprised if we see gurus continuing to fall down.

<sup>50</sup> As for behavior, there are many rules and regulations guiding human behavior, such as the *Manu-saṁhitā*, which is the **law of the human race**. Even up to today, those who are Hindu follow the *Manu-saṁhitā*. — Bg 16.7, purport

- Thus, we would be arbitrarily selecting which of the teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda we want to accept instead of accepting all of them. We would be violating another teaching of Śrīla Prabhupāda, as quoted above (CC 2.22.118).
- The only solution may be that we drastically reduce the pace of preaching and “boil the milk.” Each guru accepts only a limited number of disciples and trains them thoroughly to produce more and more bona fide gurus for future.

#### If the harmonization proposal of this section is accepted then—

We do not violate the etiquette established by Śrīla Prabhupāda, even if we allow gurus to appoint their disciples as gurus, subject of course to current procedures<sup>51</sup> for approving them in ISKCON. At the same time, we can limit the number of disciples a guru in ISKCON can accept personally. Thus, both instructions are not violated. This will create a tree-like structure of gurus and disciples to accommodate the reduction of pace of expansion that will result by limiting the number of disciples a guru can have in ISKCON.

#### But the most Important point to keep in mind is—

- As we are taking all instructions from the *pañcarātras*, and as ISKCON’s *dīkṣā* is strictly based on the *pañcarātras*, the candidate guru must strictly fit the qualifications mentioned therein. His guru should also be, at least, strictly fitting those criteria. If not, then his recommendation cannot be carried out without breaking the Law of Disciplic Succession, and it would also violate other conditions dictated by *guru, sadhu, and the śāstras* themselves.
- We are doubtful of the eligibility of current gurus in recommending his own disciples as gurus. Neither the gurus keep records of their disciples’ qualities, nor has such thorough check as recommended in the *pañcarātras* ever been carried out—either by the guru or institutionally. Thus, the eligibility of both the gurus and disciples is insufficiently verifiable<sup>52</sup>.
- Thus, I am not proposing that gurus start appointing their own disciples as gurus from this generation on. **We should follow the Law of Disciplic Succession for this generation of gurus.**
- What we should do is that, from now onwards, drastically reducing efforts for expansion current gurus and the GBC should put immense efforts into training likely guru-candidates vigorously to conform to the standards mentioned in *pañcarātras*. Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted do this way back in 1972—

Now I want that we shall concentrate on making our devotees Krishna conscious and ourselves becoming Krishna conscious, and not be so much concerned with expanding ourselves widely but without any spiritual content. Just like boiling the milk, it becomes thicker and sweeter. Now do like that, boil the milk.  
 >> Letter to Rupanuga, Honolulu, May 9, 1972

- This improves our next generation of gurus and thus improves the overall spiritual quality of ISKCON. Even though implementing a stricter standard might appear to be a hindrance to preaching, meaning fewer rather than more gurus, are likely to be created, this cannot be called

<sup>51</sup> These procedures need to be improved to conform to *pāñcarātrikī* qualities as suggested in section 6

<sup>52</sup> This is with reference to the new eligibility criteria as has been explained in the paper

stopping the preaching, as preaching also means preaching not only to outsiders but to increase the quality of insiders also.

- Current gurus should give a list of candidate gurus, who are ready by qualification, to the GBC, who will appoint them as gurus after their guru has departed
- From then onwards, we can start following the *pāñcarātrika* structure of the guru appointing his disciples as gurus. The law of accepting only a limited number of disciples should still hold, as we do not expect collective eligibility of ISKCON to turn into liberated souls. Thus, a tree-like structure of gurus and disciples can emerge from then on to speed up expansion.

#### **Limiting number of disciples a guru can initiate can have these side benefits—**

- The race to initiate many disciples and guru-groupism may get curbed to a large extent.
- It will drastically reduce the pomp that is connected with being a *dīkṣā-guru* and thus—
  - it will filter out (reduce) the candidates wanting to become guru out of desire for honor
  - the guru will be more cautious and serious to train his disciples as he has a limited lot from which he has to also appoint future gurus. This will help bring them to the standards acceptable to the GBC (as per *guru-sādhu-sāstra*)
  - gurus will be able to efficiently train their disciples as they don't have to extensively travel and thus can spend more time with them
  - the position of Śrīla Prabhupāda as *jagad-guru* will be highlighted more, as he will clearly appear to be exceptional in the eyes of ISKCON followers in general
- It is not unfair to say that the pomp that goes with becoming *dīkṣā-guru* should be drastically reduced from the level of pomp that we give to Śrīla Prabhupāda, as Śrīla Prabhupāda was unquestionably a liberated soul and Founder-Ācārya of the ISKCON. Śrīla Prabhupāda says—

If a man who does not factually possess the attributes of a great personality engages his followers in praising him with the expectation that such attributes will develop in the future, that sort of praise is actually an insult. (SB 4.15.24, purport)

- If we look at Śrī Rāmānujācārya's *saṁpradāya*, they have many *dīkṣā-gurus*, but they do not celebrate their own *Vyāsa-pūjās* with great pomp. But on the appearance day of Śrī Rāmānujācārya, they and their disciples honor him in the grandest way.
- This will also safe-guard gurus from initiating unqualified disciples (who do not chant 16 rounds or follow four regulative principles or who are not serious or who have not been tested for one year) which otherwise is a cause for the destruction of the *saṁpradāya*.

In a part of his commentary to *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (which Śrīla Prabhupāda quotes in CC 2.22.118) Śrīla Jīva-gosvāmī says— “this indicates not to accept unqualified disciples in order to increase one's *saṁpradāya* because that will pollute the knowledge of the *saṁpradāya* and will also destroy the *saṁpradāya*<sup>53</sup>.”

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<sup>53</sup> etac cānadhikāri-śiṣyādy-apekṣayā | śrī-nāradādau tac-chravaṇāt | tat-tat-saṁpradāya-nāśa-prasaṅgāc ca | anyathā jñāna-sāthyāpatteḥ | ataeva nānubadhnīyād iti sva-sva-saṁpradāya-vṛddhy-artham anadhikāriṇo'pi na saṁgrhṇīyād ity arthah | (Jīva-gosvāmī's commentary to *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.113)

## 6. Pāñcarātrikī-dīkṣā as an ISKCON Practice

Initiations within ISKCON are offered according to *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*, and it is by this process that *dīkṣā-gurus* conduct initiations. As will be shown in this section, eligibility to accept disciples as a *dīkṣā-guru* is also regulated by *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*.

Regarding *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* in ISKCON, this is the standard for initiations.

Therefore the Pāñcarātrikī-vidhi is accepted. *Nārada-Pāñcarātra. Tathā dīkṣā-vidhānenā*. This *dīkṣā-vidhāna*, recommended by Sanātana Gosvāmī, means *Pāñcarātrikī-vidhi*. (NOD, Vrindavana, Oct 27, 1972)

This initiation is offered not according to the Vedic rules, because it is very difficult to find out a qualified *brāhmaṇa*. *Dīkṣā* is offered to a qualified *brāhmaṇa*. Therefore this *dīkṣā* is offered according to *Pāñcarātrikī-vidhi*. That is recommended in this age. My spiritual master inaugurated this *Pāñcarātrikī-vidhi*, and we are following his footsteps. (BG 7.3, Bombay Mar 29, 1971)

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura in his commentary on Vṛndavandāsa Ṭhākura's *Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata* describes the *pāñcarātrika pañca-saṁskāras* as they are practiced within ISKCON today.

The phrase *mantra-dīkṣā* is defined in the *Bhakti-sandarbha* (207) as *mantra-dīkṣā-rūpaḥ anugrahaḥ*—“receiving mercy in the form of initiation.” According to the passage, *mananāt trāyate yasmāt tasmān mantraḥ prakīrtitah*, a mantra is that which delivers one from *manana*, or absorption in the separate temporary objects of the temporary, external, enjoyable world, or that which delivers the material enjoyer from the principle of enjoying material existence. It is stated in the *Viṣṇu-yāmala*:

*divyāṁ jñānam yato dadyāt kuryāt pāpasya saṅkṣayam  
tasmād dīkṣeti sā proktā deśikais tattva-kovidaiḥ*

“*Dīkṣā* is the process by which one can awaken his transcendental knowledge and vanquish all reactions caused by sinful activity. A person expert in the study of the revealed scriptures knows this process as *dīkṣā*.” According to regulative principles, the initiation ceremony has five factors. Among them, the three *saṁskāras*—*tāpa-saṁskāra*, *ūrdhvā-puṇḍra-saṁskāra*, and *nāma-saṁskāra*—are found in the gross material world. Apart from these three, those who are *madhyama-adhikārīs* can undergo *mantra-saṁskāra* and *yāga-saṁskāra* and thus become fully initiated with the five *saṁskāras*. Thereafter, those who perform *naveyā-karma*, or nine forms of *arcana*, and master the knowledge of *artha-pañcaka* are called *uttama-adhikārīs*. Persons who have received *pāñcarātrika* initiation are qualified to worship the Deities. By the influence of *mantra-dīkṣā*, a living entity attains freedom from the bondage of material existence. Then, by attaining perfection in chanting one's mantra, knowledge of the Lord and His holy names awakens in one's heart and one becomes qualified to serve the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>54</sup>

Externally, *tāpa-saṁskāra*, stamping the symbols of Lord Viṣṇu with a hot brand on one's body (as in the *Śrī saṁpradāya*) or stamping *harināma* with sandalwood paste and a wooden stamp are not followed in ISKCON. But internally, these *saṁskāras* are followed by devotees in ISKCON as according to Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, internal significance of *tāpa* is that the disciple realizes that he is burning in the fire of material attachment and that he wants to come out of it; while internal significance of *puṇḍra* is

<sup>54</sup> CB Ādi-khanda 17.105.

that the disciple is ready to take troubles to advance spiritually by fully trying to give up material attachments for sake of achieving Vaikṇṭha.<sup>55</sup>

*Nāma-saṁskāra* is receiving the Lord's Holy Name in the form of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* from one's guru and also changing the disciple's name to a name that signifies service to Lord Hari. In ISKCON, this is informally called "first initiation." However, it should be noted that the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* is not a *pāñcarātrika-mantra*, they are not on the same level. As indicated above by Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, after making spiritual advancement through chanting the Lord's Holy Names, when one comes to the platform of a *madhyama-adhikārī*, then one receives *mantra-saṁskāra* (2<sup>nd</sup> initiation), which are the mantras one must receive in order to perform *arcānam*, which is the fifth *saṁskāra*, the *yāga-saṁskāra*.<sup>56</sup>

*Artha-pañcaka* is small book by Śrī Pillai Lokācārya, in which five principal points of Rāmānuja's philosophy are explained at length. According to Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura in his *Jaiva Dharma*,

"*Artha-pañcaka* [is a] small book of extremely esoteric treatises from the Rāmānuja *saṁpradāya* covering the five principles: *sva-svarūpa*, the true identity of the *jīva*; *para-svarūpa*, the identity of the Supreme Being; *upāya-svarūpa*, the process of attainment; *puruṣārtha-svarūpa*, the highest goal; and *virodhī-svarūpa*, the antithesis of spiritual endeavour."<sup>57</sup>

ISKCON currently does not require its spiritual masters to study this text, but courses based on a more advanced study of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, like *Śrimad-Bhāgavatam* and especially *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* will impart the same knowledge. Although these top-level courses for making *ācārya* have not been implemented, progress is being made toward producing them.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, it still should be noted that Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura said that mastery of the knowledge of its five principles is one of the characteristics that distinguishes one as an *uttama-adhikārī* within *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*.<sup>59</sup>

Who is an *uttama-adhikārī*? Quoting Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī from his *Bhakti-sandarbha*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura gives the definitions of the *uttama*-, *madhyama*- and *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī bhaktas* from both the *pāñcarātrikī*- and *bhāgavata-vidhis*. [emphasis added]

And in the *Bhakti-sandarbha*, Śrī Jīva Prabhu says:

*tataḥ prema-tāratamyena bhakta-mahattva-tāratamyāṁ mukhyam. yair liṅgaiḥ sa bhagavataḥ priya uttama-madhyamatādi-vivikto bhavati tāni liṅgāni. tatraiva arcana-mārgे tri-vidhatvarāṁ labhyate. pādmottara-khaṇḍoktaṁ mahatvarāṁ tu arcana-mārga-parāṇāṁ madhya eva jñeyam.*

<sup>55</sup> Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, "Pancha Samskara: The Process of Initiation", accessed 1 Oct. 2018.

<http://bvml.org/SBTP/postpo1.html>

<sup>56</sup> Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, "Panca Samskara: The Process of Initiation", trans. Shukavak Dāsa, ISKCON Journal, Vol.1, No.1, 1990, posted at VEDA 19 Sep. 2018. <<http://www.veda.harekrnsna.cz/bhaktiyoga/samskara.htm>>.

<sup>57</sup> *Jaiva Dharma*, Chapter 23, Part Eleven: The Initial Discussion of Nāma-tattva.

<sup>58</sup> Even in designing these courses, it may be useful to consult *Artha-Pañcaka* and other *śāstras* in order to check that all necessary categories of knowledge have been covered or that the *uttama-adhikārī* devotees produced from such courses conform broadly to the different descriptions of an *uttama-adhikārī* across many different *śāstras* and *ācāryas*.

<sup>59</sup> In *Brāhmaṇa O Vaiṣṇava*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura gives a further description of *Ārtha-pañcaka*.

"Next, we consider that a Vaiṣṇava is known as an *uttama*, *madhyama*, or *kaniṣṭha* primarily according to his advancement in love of God. The symptoms for differentiating the *kaniṣṭha*, *madhyama*, and *uttama* devotees, which reveal whether one is dear, more dear, or most dear to the Lord, are all criterion for establishing the position of devotees. **In the *pañcarātrika-arcana-mārga* there are three categories of devotees. The glories of the Vaiṣṇavas mentioned in the *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttara-khaṇḍa*, refer only to the followers of the *pañcarātra-arcana-mārga*.**

*tatra mahattvam—  
tāpādi pañca-saṁskārī navejyā-karma-kārakaḥ  
artha-pañcaka-vid vipro mahā-bhāgavataḥ smṛtaḥ*

"The characteristics of the *uttama* or *mahā-bhāgavata* according to the *arcana-mārga* are as follows: 'A *brāhmaṇa* who has undergone the five kinds of *saṁskāras*, or purificatory processes, like *tāpa*, who has executed the rituals of worship, and who has understood the *Artha-pañcaka* is called a *mahā-bhāgavata*.'

*madhyamatvarī—  
tāpah puṇḍram tathā nāma mantra yāgaś ca pañcamaḥ  
amī hi pañca-saṁskārāḥ paramaikānti-hetarvāḥ*

"The characteristics of the *madhyama* according to the *pañcarātrika-arcana-mārga* are as follows: 'The five kinds of *saṁskāras* are *tāpa*, *puṇḍra*, *nāma*, *mantra*, and *japa*. According to the *pañcarātrika* teachings, one who performs these five activities is called a *madhyama-bhāgavata*.'

*tatra kaniṣṭhatvarī—  
śaṅkha-cakrādy-ūrdhvā-puṇḍra-dhāraṇādy-ātma-lakṣaṇam  
tan-namaskaraṇāṁ caiva vaiṣṇavatvam ihocaye*

"The characteristics of the *kaniṣṭha* according to the *pañcarātrika-arcana-mārga* are as follows: 'One who marks his body with the four signs of Viṣṇu—the conchshell, cakra, club, and lotus—and who offers obeisances to other Vaiṣṇavas whose bodies are marked with these signs is called a *kaniṣṭha*.'

From this point on, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī enumerates the qualities of the *uttama*-, *madhyama*- and *kaniṣṭha-adhikārīs* from the side of the *bhāgavata-vidhi*, as described in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.2.45 – 47) and other *śāstras*.

One important point to note in this connection is the superiority of the *bhāgavata-vidhi* to the *pañcarātrika-vidhi*. "Actually the arrangement for *arcana* in the path of *bhāva* is not completely in agreement with that found in the *pañcarātrika* system," says Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura in *Brāhmaṇa O Vaiṣṇava*. "The *kaniṣṭha-adhikārīs* in the *bhāva-mārga* explained in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* are practically equal to the *mahā-bhāgavatas* of the *pañcarātrika-arcana-mārga*, although there is some difference." Though one path is superior to the other, we still follow both processes in parallel.

Those who wish to initiate according to *bhāgavata-vidhi* must be *mahā-bhāgavatas* not bound by the Vedic rules and regulations. For example, Śrīla Gaura-kiśora Dāsa Bābājī did not wear an *upavīta*, nor did he give one to Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura at the time of initiation. Thus, the Caste Goswamis tried to allege

that the initiation was invalid.<sup>60</sup> But the initiation was according to *bhāgavata-vidhi*, which takes place when a highly qualified person becomes enlightened by hearing from a *mahā-bhāgavata*.<sup>61</sup>

But ISKCON is not going to conduct initiations on this platform—certainly not as a matter of policy. It will conduct initiations according to *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*. Hence, qualifications for both disciple and spiritual master must be assessed according to *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*.

In a letter to all Governing Body Commissioners, Śrīla Prabhupāda has given this list of examinations: *Bhakti-śāstri - Bhagavad-gītā*, *Nectar of Devotion*, *Nectar of Instruction*, *Īśopaniṣad*, *Easy Journey to Other Planets*, and all other small paperbacks, as well as *Arcana-paddhati*. *Bhakti-vaibhava - Bhakti-śāstri* plus the first six cantos of *Śrimad-Bhāgavatam*. *Bhaktivedānta - Bhakti-vaibhava* plus cantos 7 through 12 of *Śrimad-Bhāgavatam*. *Bhakti-sarvabhauma – Bhaktivedānta* plus the entire *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. In ISKCON, for studying the *śāstras*, this is how this requirement from the *pāñcarātras* is fulfilled.<sup>62</sup>

In the same letter, it is stated that “extra marks” will be given for “authoritative answers.” This is similar to how the *Sātvata-samhitā* states that a disciple’s study of *śāstra* should be evaluated as “good”, “better” or “best.”<sup>63</sup> This, of course, is not required if the guru is a *mahā-bhāgavata*.

In this regard, there is one final list of *uttama*-, *madhyama*- and *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī bhaktas* that needs to be discussed. This comes from *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (2.17 – 19) at the beginning of the 2nd wave, which discusses the eligibility of the candidate for *vaidhi-bhakti*, or devotional service performed according to the rules and regulations of the *śāstras*.

*śāstre yuktau ca nipuṇaḥ sarvathā dṛḍha-niścayah  
praudha-śraddho 'dhikārī yaḥ sa bhaktāv uttamo mataḥ*

One who is expert in logic and in understanding the revealed scriptures, and who always has firm conviction and deep faith that is not blind, is to be considered a topmost devotee in devotional service.<sup>64</sup>

*yah śāstrādiṣv anipuṇaḥ śraddhāvān sa tu madhyamaḥ*

He who does not know scriptural argument very well but who has firm faith is called an intermediate or second-class devotee.<sup>65</sup>

*yo bhavet komala-śraddhaḥ sa kaniṣṭha nigadyate*

One whose faith is not very strong, who is just beginning, should be considered a neophyte devotee.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>60</sup> H.H. Bhakti Vikāsa Swami, *Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava*, Vol. 2 (Surat, India: Bhakti Vikas Trust, 2009) 228.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 229. Also see section in this paper on *Bhāgavata-vidhi* for further discussion.

<sup>62</sup> Letter to: All Governing Body Commissioners — Nellore, South India 6 January, 1976.

<sup>63</sup> See [Qualities of Different Levels of Disciples](#).

<sup>64</sup> Qtd. CC Madhya 22.66.

<sup>65</sup> Qtd. CC Madhya 22.68.

<sup>66</sup> Qtd. CC Madhya 22.70.

Both *śraddhā* (faith) and *śāstra-yuktatva* (competence in *śāstra*) are emphasized in this list. And in this regard, there is some similarity between it and the *pañcarātra* list for the three classes of devotees, as already discussed. Śrīla Prabhupāda discusses the role of *śāstra-yuktatva*:

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has stated that if one has developed faith in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he is to be considered an eligible candidate for further advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Those who have faith are divided into three categories — *uttama*, *madhyama* and *kaniṣṭha* (first class, second class and neophyte). A first-class devotee has firm conviction in the revealed scriptures and is expert in arguing according to the *śāstras*. He is firmly convinced of the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The *madhyama-adhikārī*, or second-class devotee, has firm conviction in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but he cannot support his conviction by citing *śāstric* references. The neophyte devotee does not yet have firm faith. In this way the devotees are typed.<sup>67</sup>

But *śraddhā* or faith is even more important than expertise in *śāstra*. In his commentary on *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.2.19, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī and Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura both say,

*yo bhaved ity atrāpi śāstrādiṣv anipuṇa ity anuvartanīyam śraddhā-mātrasya śāstrārtha-viśvāsa-rūpatvāt | tataś cātrānipuṇa iti yat kiñcīn nipiṇa ity arthaḥ | komala-śraddhāḥ śāstra-yukty-antareṇa bhetturūṇaśākyāḥ ||19||*

*komala-śraddhāḥ śāstra-yukty-antareṇa bhetturūṇaśākyo, na tu sarvathā bhinnah | tathātve bhakttvānupapatteḥ | bahirmukha-kṛta-balavad-bādhe sati kṣaṇa-mātrām cittasya dolāyamānatvam eva komalatvam | paścāt svakṛta-vivekena gurūpadiṣṭārtham eva niścinoti ||19||*

[gist translation] Here *komala-śraddha* is mentioned. Since real *śraddha* comes from *śāstra* only, it is to be understood that he [the *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī*] is not expert in *śāstra* but still has some expertise. Thus, when there is a very strong argument based on *śāstra* or in *śāstrārtha* by an opponent, his own *śraddha* becomes shaken and then needs to be re-established.

Thus, those who have weak *śraddha* not fully based on the *śāstras* acquire *śāstric* expertise from non-devotees, they become bombarded by *śraddha-virodhi* statements, which are meant to shake one's *śraddha*. Then they acquire so-called expertise in *śāstras*, and thus it becomes difficult to revive them.

This is the danger that ISKCON is facing in some cases. Thus, Śrī Svarūpa Dāmodara's statement to learn *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* from the person *bhāgavata* is very important. Unless one is at least on the level of a *bhāva-mārga madhyama-adhikārī*, one should not dare to learn the *śāstras* from non-devotees.

Nonetheless, since Śrīla Prabhupāda himself insisted that future candidates for guru pass a series of exams, and since examination of a candidate's mastery of *śāstra* is a *pañcarātrika* requirement as well as a criterion for eligibility in *vaidhi-bhakti*, Śrīla Prabhupāda's order indicates that the *adhikāra* of future candidates in ISKCON for becoming guru should be judged according to the rules and regulations of the *pañcarātras*. Additional criteria such as success in preaching may be there, as required by the rules of *vaidhi-bhakti* and *bhāgavata-vidhi*, as is also the current practice.<sup>68</sup> But this is in addition to *pañcarātrika* requirements, not instead of them.

<sup>67</sup> CC Madhya 22.71 purport.

<sup>68</sup> Success in preaching would be an example of a *bhāgavata-mārga* requirement, since preaching is *śravanam* and *kīrtanam*. Since Kṛṣṇa-consciousness movement follows the *bhāgavata-* and *pañcarātrika-mārgas* in parallel, evaluating a candidate's following of *bhāgavata* principles is to be done.

## Appendix I – Chart: Authorization to initiate according to vidhi

<p><b>Definitions:</b></p> <p><i>Sastra-yukti</i>—Ability to harmonize different scriptures and come to conclusion (for preaching and guiding)</p> <p><i>Drdha-sraddha</i>—Unflinching faith due to its being based on sastras</p> <p>Table is developed based on comparison of descriptions given in SB, CC, and Padma-purana</p>	Based on Bhagavata-bhava (from SB)	Based on Sraddha+sastra (Described in CC)
<p><b>Maha-bhagavata</b> == doesn't see anyone non-devotee</p>		
<p><b>At this level -- Guru Acts</b></p> <p><i>Madhyama of SB and Uttama of CC</i></p> <p><b>Drdha Sraddha</b></p> <p>+</p> <p><b>Sastra Yukti</b></p>		
<p><b>Drdha (Unflinching) Sraddha</b></p> <p>(faith based on Sastras)</p> <p>+</p> <p><b>No Sastra Yukti</b></p>	Based on Bhagavata-bhava (from SB)	Based on Pancaratriki-vidhi
<p><b>Komala (soft) Sraddha</b></p> <p>(faith not based on sastras but laukika)</p> <p>+</p> <p><b>No Sastra Yukti</b></p>	Based on Pancaratriki-vidhi	Based on Sraddha+sastra (Described in CC)
<p>One who marks body with marks like sankha etc. and offers obeisances to Vaisnavas who are with such marks</p>		

## Appendix II – Statements from Hari-bhakti-vilāsa

### Etiquette

#### First vilāsa, Text 89

devyāgame śri śivoktau (In the *Devī-āgama*, Lord Śiva says)

गुरोरग्रे पृथक्पूजां अद्वैतं च परित्यजेत् ।  
दिक्षां व्याख्यां प्रभुत्वं च गुरोरग्रे विवर्जयेत् ॥

*guror agre pṛthak-pūjāṁ advaitam ca parityajet  
dīkṣāṁ vyākhyāṁ prabhutvam ca guror-agre vivarjayet*

"One should not allow oneself to be worshiped in the presence of his spiritual master, nor should one claim that one is as good as his spiritual master. In the presence of one's spiritual master one should not give initiation, give explanations, or assume the role of a master or a powerful person."

#### First vilāsa, Text 93

Śrī manu-smṛtau (In the *Śrī Manu-smṛti* (chapter 2, verse 205) it is stated)

गुरोर्गुरौ सन्निहिते गुरुवद्वृत्तिमाचरेत् ।  
न चाविसृष्टो गुरुणा स्वानुगूरुभिवादयेत् ॥

*guror gurau sannihite guruved vṛttim ācaret  
na cāvīśrṣṭo guruṇā svān gurūnabhivādayet*

"If a disciple sees the spiritual master of his spiritual master, he should respect him just like his spiritual master. A disciple should not offer obeisance (अभिवादन = स्तुति) to his father and other elderly people without sent by his spiritual master."

### Qualities of the Guru

The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 1.32 and 1.38 – specifies these qualifications for a guru:

"Therefore any person who seriously desires real happiness must seek a bona-fide spiritual master and take shelter of him by initiation. The qualification of the bona-fide guru is that he has realized the conclusions of the scriptures by deliberation and is able to convince others of these conclusions. Such great personalities, who have taken shelter of the Supreme Godhead, leaving aside all material considerations, should be understood to be bona fide spiritual masters."<sup>69</sup>

"A genuine spiritual master is saintly, born in a pure family, diligent in performing his prescribed duties, a follower of varṇāśrama, devoid of anger, learned in the Vedas and scriptures, faithful, free of envy, a pleasing speaker, pleasing to the eye, pure, well-dressed, young, a person who works for the welfare of all living beings, intelligent, humble at heart, perfect, non-violent, thoughtful, virtuous, intent on worshiping the Lord, grateful, affectionate to his disciples, capable of both punishment and mercy, devoted to mantras

<sup>69</sup> HBV 1.32, quoting SB 11.3.21.

and *yajñas*, examining all sides of an issue, pure at heart, and merciful. A genuine spiritual master has these and many other virtues. He is a treasure-house of virtues.”<sup>70</sup>

“A genuine spiritual master is a worshiper of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, peaceful, free of material desires, aware of the spiritual truth, a teacher of the spiritual truth, learned in the Vedas and scriptures, able to deliver others, able to surmount obstacles, the best of *brāhmaṇas*, expert in yantras and mantras, one who goes to the heart of the matter, aware of the secrets of spiritual philosophy, a performer of *purścaraṇa*, expert at chanting mantras in *yajñas*, aware of what is needed, austere, and truthful. These are the qualities of a householder spiritual-master.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> HBV 1.38 – 41. Quoting *Śrī Mantra-muktāvalī*.

<sup>71</sup> HBV 1.42 – 44. Quoting *Agastya-saṁhitā*.

### Appendix III – Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements on Pañcarātrika-vidhi

It is therefore recommended that initiated devotees follow the principles of Nārada-pañcarātra by worshiping the Deity in the temple. ...

By chanting the holy name of the Lord, one can reach the platform of love of Godhead. One might ask, then what is the necessity of being initiated? The answer is that even though the chanting of the holy name is sufficient to enable one to progress in spiritual life to the standard of love of Godhead, one is nonetheless susceptible to contamination because of possessing a material body. Consequently, special stress is given to the *arcana-vidhi*. One should therefore regularly take advantage of both the *bhāgavata* process and *pāñcarātrikī* process.<sup>72</sup>

So our process is to make dvija. Pāñcarātrikī vidhi. Pāñcarātrikī vidhi. That is recommended.

*śruti-smṛti-purāṇādi-pāñcarātrikī vidhīm vinā  
aikāntikī harer bhaktir utpātayaiva kalpate* [Brs. 1.2.101]

Rūpa Gosvāmī gives this direction that the initiation must be done according to *śruti*, *smṛti* or *pāñcarātrikī vidhi*.<sup>73</sup>

This initiation is offered not according to the Vedic rules, because it is very difficult to find out a qualified brāhmaṇa. *Dīkṣā* is offered to a qualified brāhmaṇa. Therefore this *dīkṣā* is offered according to *Pāñcarātrikī-vidhi*. That is recommended in this age. My spiritual master inaugurated this *Pāñcarātrikī-vidhi*, and we are following his footsteps.<sup>74</sup>

So in the Kali-yuga especially, there is no Vedic system of reformatory process. It is the *pāñcarātrikī-vidhi*, that anyone has got a little qualification for becoming brāhmaṇa, he is accepted by the spiritual master and he is trained up, he is initiated, just to make him a complete brāhmaṇa.<sup>75</sup>

Therefore the *Pāñcarātrikī-vidhi* is accepted. Nārada-Pañcarātra. Tathā *dīkṣā-vidhānena*. This *dīkṣā-vidhāna*, recommended by Sanātana Gosvāmī, means *Pāñcarātrikī-vidhi*.<sup>76</sup>

Formerly, initiation was offered to a person who is actually born of a brāhmaṇa father. Otherwise... Or the higher caste, the *brāhmaṇas*, the *kṣatriyas*, and the *vaiśyas*, they were offered initiation, and the *sūdras* were not offered. That was the Vedic system. But in this age the *śāstra* says that *kalau śūdra sambhava*. In this age of Kali practically there is no more any *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, or *vaiśya*. Maybe by name, but in qualification they are not existing. Everyone is supposed to be *śūdra*. So in Kali-yuga the *pāñcarātrikī-vidhi* is accepted. The *pāñcarātrikī-vidhi* is also Vedic vidhi, corollary, given by Nārada Mahāmuni. But it is accepted by the Vedic followers, *pāñcarātrikī-vidhi*.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup> HBV 1.32, quoting SB 11.3.21

<sup>73</sup> HBV 1.38 – 41. Quoting Śrī *Mantra-muktāvalī*.

<sup>74</sup> HBV 1.42 – 44. Quoting *Agastya-saṁhitā*, 1974.

<sup>75</sup> Quoting *Agastya-saṁhitā*.

<sup>76</sup> NoD, Vrindavana, Oct 27, 1972.

<sup>77</sup> Initiation of Jayapataka Dasa, Montreal, July 24, 1968.

So you are going to take the responsibility of brahmanism. This system is introduced according to *pāñcarātrikī* system.<sup>78</sup>

So our initiation, our accepting a disciple as *brāhmaṇa*, they are all strictly according to Vedic injunctions. In this Kali-yuga, there is no *vaidika dīkṣā* because *vaidika dīkṣā* depends on the persons being a—I mean to say—sanctified *brāhmaṇa*. A sanctified *brāhmaṇa* means that before his birth, the *garbhādhāna-saṃskāra* is observed. If it is not observed, then he immediately falls down to the category of *śūdra*. *Kalau śūdra sambhava*. But there is *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* given by Nārada, who said that one should be accepted in the category of *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra* according to symptoms. *Yasya hi ya svabhāvaya*.

*yasya hi (yal) lakṣaṇam (proktam) (puṁso) varṇābhivyāñjakam  
yad anyatṛāpi dṛṣyeta tat tenaiva vinirdīset [SB 7.11.35]*

There are symptoms of brahminical qualification, there are symptoms of *kṣatriya* qualification. So if these symptoms are observed in a different place, namely if the brahminical qualification is observed in the person of a *śūdra*, then that *śūdra* should not be called a *śūdra*, he should be accepted as *brāhmaṇa*. Similarly, if the *śūdra* qualification is observed in the family of a *brāhmaṇa*, then that person should be accepted as *śūdra*. This is the definition given by Nārada Muni while he was speaking about *varṇāśrama-dharma* to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhīra.

So this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, the initiation ceremony, the marriage ceremony, the sacred thread ceremony, whatever we observe, they are strictly according to the *śāstra*. That is our point.<sup>79</sup>

The students and disciples are initiated according to authorized Pancaratriki regulations. According to Srimad-Bhagavatam and Bhagavad-gita, anyone, including so-called low born men, who may take shelter unto the Lotus Feet of Lord Krishna or His devotees, is sanctified by initiation process.<sup>80</sup>

“Why do you believe in rumors, that first initiation is not so important as second? I have already said that it is equally important, but you say rumor. Actually first initiation is more important. You can go without second initiation; if the first initiation is executed very thoroughly that is sufficient. First initiation stands strong. The spiritual master accepts the disciple’s sinful reactions upon giving first initiation. The Vedic system was to give the sacred thread at the first initiation. We are following Pancaratriki. Vedic initiation was given to a person born to a brahmana. That is not possible in this age. Therefore he has to be prepared by Hari Nam initiation and then second initiation. He is given a chance. Therefore others protest that I am giving initiation: He is not born of a brahmana, how can he be initiated?”<sup>81</sup>

In this way, on this condition, these boys and girls were accepted as my disciples. According to *pāñcarātrikī viddhi*, when they are fairly advanced they are given the sacred thread, *upanayana-saṃskāra*, following the path and instruction of my Guru Mahārāja, His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, Gosvāmī Prabhupāda....

So they are all purified according to the *pāñcarātrikī viddhi*, and many of them have got this sacred thread.”<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Brahmin Initiation Lecture, New Vrindavana, May 25, 1969.

<sup>79</sup> Wedding Lecture, New Delhi, Nov 17, 1971.

<sup>80</sup> Letter to Whom it may concern, Montreal, Jun 12, 1968.

<sup>81</sup> From Secretary’s Letter to Sat-svarupa, Vrindavana, Aug 7, 1977.

<sup>82</sup> SPL, 37.

## Appendix IV – Bhāgavata-vidhi

*Bhāgavatī-dīkṣā* is the transmission of transcendental knowledge between a *mahā-bhāgavata* and a highly advanced disciple. An example of this is Śrīla Gaura-kīsora Dāsa Bābājī’s initiation of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. The initiation did not follow *pāñcarātrika* principles, and a number of Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura’s enemies tried to discredit him on this account.

Nonetheless, it was Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura who demonstrated the principle of *bhāgavatī-dīkṣā* by showing that *pāñcarātrikī-dīkṣā* also results in the transmission of transcendental knowledge—*divyam jñānam yato dadyāt kuryāt pāpasya saṅkṣayam, tasmād dīkṣeti sā prokta deśikais tattva-kovidaiḥ*. Thus, he showed that the essence of *dīkṣā* is the transmission of transcendental knowledge, *divya-jñāna*, whether by *pāñcarātrikī*- or *bhāgavatī-dīkṣā*.<sup>83</sup>

### Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmrta 2.103

*kevalam tat-padāmbhoja- sākṣād-īkṣāvaśiṣyate  
taj-jape ‘rhati nāsaktim kintu tan-nāma-kirtane*

#### SYNONYMS

*kevalam*—only; *tat*—His; *pada-ambhoja*—of the lotus feet; *sākṣāt*—directly; *īkṣā*—seeing; *avaśiṣyate*—remains; *tat*—His; *jape*—in the quiet chanting of the mantra; *arhati*—he requires; *na*—not; *āsaktim*—attachment; *kintu*—rather; *tat*—His; *nāma-kirtane*—in the *nāma-saṅkīrtana*.

#### TRANSLATION

“All that remains for him to achieve is to see directly the lotus feet of the Lord. He needs to become attached not so much to the solitary chanting of the Lord’s mantra but to the *saṅkīrtana* of His names.

#### COMMENTARY

When received by Pañcarātric initiation in a Vaiṣṇava *saṁpradāya*, *viṣṇu-mantras* deliver the chanter from illusion and provide him liberation and entrance into the divine life of devotional service. But the highest standard of pure love of God is obtainable not by the *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* but by the *bhāgavata-vidhi* of *nāma-saṅkīrtana*, worship of Kṛṣṇa’s names without material motives. The Prāgjyotiṣa-pura *brāhmaṇa* had been chanting the ten-syllable Gopāla mantra for some time with good effect, but only after he heard the *śuddha-nāma* from Gopa-kumāra was he able to chant the same names of Lord Gopāla in the perfect consciousness of *saṅkīrtana*. Offenseless *saṅkīrtana* with concentrated attention naturally develops into spontaneous attraction to Kṛṣṇa and His loving service.<sup>84</sup>

### Statements from Śrīla Prabhupāda

There are two different ways of approaching the Supreme Lord. One is called *bhāgavata-mārga*, or the way of *Śrimad-Bhāgavatam*, and the other is called *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*. *Pāñcarātrika-vidhi* is the method of temple worship, and *bhāgavata-vidhi* is the system of nine processes which begin with hearing and chanting. The Kṛṣṇa conscious movement accepts both processes simultaneously and thus enables one to

<sup>83</sup> H.H. Bhakti Vikāsa Swami, *Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava*, Vol. 2 (Surat, India: Bhakti Vikas Trust, 2009) 228 - 230.

<sup>84</sup> *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmrta*, 2.1.104 – 105, with *Dig-darśanī* commentary, by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī.

make steady progress on the path of realization of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This *pāñcarātrika* procedure was first introduced by the great sage Nārada, as referred to here by Vidura.<sup>85</sup>

Generally the worship of the Lord begins with the worship of Nārāyaṇa, or Viṣṇu, whereas the worship of Lord Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā is most confidential. Lord Nārāyaṇa is worshipable by the *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*, or regulative principles, whereas Lord Kṛṣṇa is worshipable by the *bhāgavata-vidhi*. No one can worship the Lord in the *bhāgavata-vidhi* without going through the regulations of the *pāñcarātrika-vidhi*.<sup>86</sup>

*Pāñcarātrika-vidhi* and *bhāgavata-vidhi* go hand in hand. By participating in these two processes, the neophyte can gradually attain the intermediate stage.<sup>87</sup>

So the *pāñcarātrika-vidhi* and *bhāgavata-vidhi* must go parallel. Then one, even one is a neophyte, gradually he will come to the intermediate stage between the neophyte stage and to the advanced stage. And of course, it is very difficult to find out one in very advanced stage. But there are.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> SB 4.13.3 purport.

<sup>86</sup> SB 4.24.45-46 purport.

<sup>87</sup> TLK Vs 36.

<sup>88</sup> SB 3.25.36 -- December 5, 1974, Bombay.

## Appendix V – Vaidika-vidhi

This section gives information on the qualification of someone to be a *dīkṣā-guru* according to the *vaidika-vidhi*.<sup>89</sup>

### Mahābhārata

It is understood in *Mahābhārata*, *Ādi (Pauṣya) Parva*, 3.81 that Āyoda Dhaumya Muni's disciples, on successfully completing their duties at their guru's *āśrama*, accepted the *saṁvartana saṁskāra*. This *saṁskāra* marks the completion of a student's *gurukula* training. In some ways it is like the graduation ceremony that modern universities have for their graduates. For further brahminical life, the students are then permitted to enter the *grhastha āśrama*, where, if they are *brāhmaṇas*, they can accept their own disciples.

स उपाध्योयेनानुज्ञतः समावृतस्ताद् गुरुकुलवासाद् गृहाश्रमं प्रत्यपद्यत । तस्यापि स्वगृहे वसतस्त्रयः शिष्या बभूवः  
स शिष्यान् न किञ्चिदुवाच कर्म वा क्रियतां गुरुशुश्रूषा चेति । दुःखाभिज्ञो हि गुरुकुलवासस्य शिष्यान् परिक्लेशेन  
योजयितुं नेयेष ॥ ८१ ॥

Translation: "Thereafter, on the order of his spiritual master, Āyoda Dhaumya, after completing the *saṁvartana saṁskāra*, the disciple named Veda became a *snātaka* and returned from his guru's home. On returning to his own home, he entered the *grhastha āśrama*. While living at home, there were three disciples staying with him. However, he never said things like 'work hard,' or 'keep on doing your service to your guru,' or issuing any other such commands, because he was aware that disciples must necessarily endure so much hardship while staying at the spiritual master's house. So, he never desired to engage his disciples in any troublesome service."

### Taittirīya Upaniṣad

The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* speaks about the rules of conduct beginning from the student's life up to the fourth *āśrama* (*sannyāsa*), in a well-ordered, graduated manner, revealing the depth of the significance of each stage and its culmination into the next.

In this regard, the eleventh *anuvāka* details instructions given by the guru to his disciples during their *saṁvartana saṁskāra*. In the very first verse, one of the instructions given is *svādhya-  
pravacanābhyam na pramaditavyam*, "Let thee not stray away also from the study and teaching of the *Vedas*." Since teaching a student the *Vedas* requires that the student first be initiated according to the *upanāyana-saṁskāra*, the *adhikāra* to act as an *ācārya* and hence be a *dīkṣā-guru* is implied.

<sup>89</sup> One may question why the *vaidika-vidhi* is included in this paper, as Śrīla Prabhupāda many times said that in the present age of Kali it is not possible to follow. Nonetheless, some aspects of this process are still relevant to our own practice of *dharma* and *bhakti*, and we need to know about it. Thus, not only has Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī (BRS 1.2.101) warned us that devotional service that ignores the *Śrutis*, *Smṛtis*, *Purāṇas* and *Pañcarātras* is simply a disturbance in society, but Śrīla Prabhupāda himself also extensively refers to these *śāstras* that prescribe the *vaidika-vidhi*. For example, in CC 1.1.46, commenting on the verse *ācāryam mām vijānīyān* . . . , notes the definition of an *ācārya*, "The *Manu-saṁhitā* (2.140) explains the duties of an *ācārya*, describing that a bona fide spiritual master accepts charge of disciples, teaches them the Vedic knowledge with all its intricacies, and gives them their second birth." This definition applies directly to *dīkṣā-gurus* in ISKCON.

### Manu-samhitā

It is noted that not all gurus who teach the Vedas are necessarily *ācāryas*. *Manu-samhitā* defines the following types of gurus:

उपनीय तु यः शिष्यं वेदमध्यापयेद्द्विजः ।  
सकल्पं सरहस्यं च तमाचार्यं प्रचक्षते ॥ २.१४० ॥

“They call that brāhmaṇa who initiates a pupil and teaches him the *Veda* together with the *Kalpa* and the *Rahasyas*, the teacher (*ācārya*, of the latter).

एकदेशं तु वेदस्य वेदाङ्गान्यपि ।  
योऽध्यापयति वृत्त्यर्थमुपाध्यायः स उच्यते ॥ २.१४१ ॥

“But he who for his livelihood teaches a portion only of the *Veda*, or also the *Āṅgas* of the *Veda*, is called the sub-teacher (*upādhyāya*).”<sup>90</sup>

That means it is not necessarily the case that all qualified teachers of the Vedas are necessarily *ācāryas*.

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<sup>90</sup> Translation by G. Buhler.

## Appendix VI – Examples from our immediate ācāryas

This section presents examples of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura and his disciples on the matter of initiations in the presence of their spiritual masters. The examples are taken from volume 2 of H.H. Bhakti Vikāsa Svāmī's *Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava* (2009).

### Disciples of a disciple were reinitiated but overseas preachers allowed to initiate

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī did not approve of his disciples initiating during his presence. One of his first *sannyāsis* had for some time dissociated himself from the mission and was doing so. When later he rejoined the mission, he offered those disciples to his guru-*mahārāja*, who again initiated them. Yet as a pragmatic extension of his compassion, when sending preachers overseas Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī told them that as his representatives they should confer *hariṇāma* on deserving candidates. Thus Śrīmad Bon Mahārāja initiated two German recruits, and Bhakti Sāraṅga Prabhu gave initiation to one woman in London.<sup>91</sup>

### Honorific Titles

Several devotees were conferred the designation of Ācārya [by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura] to indicate their learning and paradigmatic devotional behavior. Bhakti Sudhākara Prabhu and Jadubara dāsa Adhikārī were entitled Ācāryadvika (ācārya twice over), and Kuñja Bihāri Vidyābhūṣaṇa Prabhu was designated Ācāryatrika (ācārya thrice over). Distinctions like Vedāntācārya (exemplary teacher of Vedānta), Satācārya (exemplary teacher of truth), and Vidyābhūṣaṇa (one whose decoration is knowledge) were conferred in appreciation of devotional scholasticism and to demonstrate that a devotee is learned and aware of all scriptural conclusions.<sup>92</sup>

Note: Though it may be a coincidence, the titles of *ācārya*, *ācārya* twice over and *ācārya* thrice over resemble the *pañcarātrika* convention of conferring status on a disciple through *abhiṣeka* once, twice over, thrice over, and with the fourth *abhiṣeka* conferring the status of *ācārya* and the *adhikāra* to accept disciples. See section 2, [Abhiṣeka: Guru Appoints His Disciple as Guru](#), and section 3, [Qualities of Different Levels of Disciples](#), for references and further discussion.

### Śrīmad Bhakti Pradīpa Tīrtha Mahārāja

Śrī Rajanīkānta Basu, a government employee from a village in Noakhali District, East Bengal, and his wife Śrīmatī Bidhumukhī became disciples of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura after rejecting their *jāta-gosāñi* guru. At the close of his life Śrī Rajanīkānta accepted the dress and vows of a *bābājī* from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. Bidhumukhī spent her last days as a widow in Navadvīpa. Śrī Jagadīśa Basu, born in 1877, was the first of their five sons, the youngest of whom later became the famed Ananta Vāsudeva Prabhu.<sup>93</sup>

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That same afternoon Śrī Siddhānta Sarasvatī delivered *Hari-kathā* to Jagadīśa for several hours and advised him to ask permission from Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura to meet Śrīla Gaura Kiśora dāsa Bābājī at Kuliyā. Early the next morning Jagadīśa went to Kuliyā, where he offered *danḍavat* and a watermelon to Bābājī Mahārāja. Although normally Bābājī Mahārāja refused anything brought by outsiders, when he understood

<sup>91</sup> H.H. Bhakti Vikāsa Swami, *Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava* (Surat, India: Bhakti Vikas Trust, 2009) 247.

<sup>92</sup> SBV, vol 2, page 252.

<sup>93</sup> SBV, vol 2, page 290.

that Jagadīśa was sent by Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda, he graciously accepted this presentation. After speaking to Jagadīśa for some time he told him to chant a selection from *Prārthanā*. Jagadīśa sang the *kīrtana* that begins *gaurāṅga balite have pulaka śarīra*.

Bābājī Mahārāja instructed Jagadīśa to have full faith in guru and Vaiṣnavas, to become as humble as a blade of grass and more tolerant than a tree, to avoid the association of dishonest persons, and to ceaselessly chant the Lord's holy names. When Jagadīśa said that he had not yet been initiated, Śrīla Bābājī Mahārāja posited that since Māyāpur is the place of self-surrender and there Jagadīśa had already surrendered to Śrīla Bhaktivinoda, in what other way would he obtain the shelter of a guru? "Go!" he told Jagadīśa. "The Ṭhākura is waiting for you." He then blessed Jagadīśa to take *sannyāsa* and preach the name of Mahāprabhu throughout the planet, although at that time there was no indication of either *sannyāsa* in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism or worldwide preaching. Jagadīśa then touched Śrīla Bābājī Mahārāja's lotus feet—although usually whoever dared try to do so was angrily forbidden by Bābājī Mahārāja with a promise of destruction.

Following Śrīla Bābājī Mahārāja's advice, Jagadīśa returned to Māyāpura. At midday on the fifth day after *gaura-jayanti*, having shaved his head and bathed in the Gaṅgā, he and three other devotees were given *kāma-gāyatrī* and *kāma-bīja* mantras by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura at his cottage in Godruma.<sup>94</sup>

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When Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura returned to Calcutta, Jagadīśa Prabhu accompanied him. After some days the Ṭhākura ordered Śrī Siddhānta Sarasvatī to perform *upanayana-saṁskāra* and give further mantras to Jagadīśa and two of Jagadīśa's former fellow students who also were disciples of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda. Accordingly, Śrī Siddhānta Sarasvatī bestowed upon them Brahma-*gāyatrī*, guru-mantra, guru-*gāyatrī*, Gaura-mantra, Gaurāṅga-*gāyatrī*, and *brāhmaṇas'* threads, employing the rites of *Sat-kriyā-sāra-dīpika*.

On that day Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura gave Jagadīśa varied directions on *varṇāśrama-dharma* and advised him to accept the many more indications on this topic that he would receive from Śrī Siddhānta Sarasvatī in the future. Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura repeatedly told Jagadīśa to follow Śrī Siddhānta Sarasvatī, who he said would eventually perform multifarious wonderful activities and guide numerous devotees.<sup>95</sup>

## Śrīmad Bhakti Svarūpa Parvata Mahārāja

A child born and raised next to Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's residence in Godruma often awoke well before dawn upon hearing the Ṭhākura loudly chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *māhā-mantra*, as if calling someone from a distance. Seeing this boy's budding interest in *śuddha-bhakti*, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura told him to daily cross the river and walk to Māyāpura playing *karatālas* and singing songs such as *nadiyā-godrumē nityānanda māhājana* and others that the Ṭhākura had composed for *nagara-saṅkīrtana*. Each day upon the lad's return, the Ṭhākura would give him *bātāsā prasāda*.

Appreciating the boy's faith in *bhakti*, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura ordered Śrī Kṛṣṇadāsa Bābājī to award him *harināma*. After doing so, Bābājī Mahārāja supplicated Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, "Because you ordered me, I gave him *harināma*, although I am unfit. But if he is to take *dīkṣā*, it should be from Śrī Siddhānta Sarasvatī."<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> SBV, vol. 2, page 291.

<sup>95</sup> SBV, vol. 2, page 293.

<sup>96</sup> SBV, vol. 2, page 296 – 297.

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