

Letter to Prospective Disciples

If you would like to accept me as your diksa guru - and have been in Iskcon for six months - you can now begin reciting my pranam mantra. My pranam mantra is a generic mantra, the same as is offered to all gurus:

namah om visnu padaya krsna presthaya bhuta-tale srimate mahatma prabhu iti namine

You first recite the above pranam mantra and then recite the pranam mantras to Srila Prabhupada whenever there is occasion to offer obeisances (entering the temple, offering food, seeing me, etc.).

Titles such as Gurudeva, Guru Maharaj, and Maharaj. are meant to be used only by disciples (including aspiring disciples, and also siksa disciples if they choose), but may not always be appropriate in public when many are present who are not disciples (in which case you would address me as Mahatma Prabhu). Otherwise, the above mentioned forms of address are used when addressing me in person or in letters. Also, when referring to me in a conversation with others, the proper etiquette is to say, "my spiritual master ..." (Of course, this infers that the person you are speaking to knows who your spiritual master is.) When asked who is your spiritual master, you can reply, His Grace Mahatma Prabhu.

The GBC resolution in this regards is as follows.

“No one in ISKCON will be addressed published with honorific title “ His Divine Grace “, nor be addressed either publicly or privately, the honorifics ending in “ pada “ or “deva’ (for example gurupada, acaryadeva, etc). Disciples may address their ISKCON diksa or siksa gurus as “gurudev” or “gurumaraj”

They used to call Prabhupada “Swamiji” and one day he said it’s not such a good title. Similarly, although Ji is a title of respect, in devotee circles we use the word Prabhu rather than Prabhuji. Mahatma Prabhu, rather than Mahatmaji and gurudeva or guru maharaj rather than guruji.

If you are not certain about the finer details of etiquette between a disciple and a guru, you can ask some knowledgeable devotees about this and also observe how other disciples deal with their gurus. The relationship is very intimate and at the same time formal. Your spiritual master is your friend and servant, but he also represents Krsna to you and is thus honored as God's representative.

The disciple always wants the best for his spiritual master, but blessings go from higher to lower, so the higher offers blessings and the lower asks for blessings. You can pray to Krsna for the health and success of your spiritual master but it is not proper to bless him with such things.

Prabhupada would begin his letters by saying, "Please accept my blessings" and end his letters by signing, "Your ever well wisher," because as the guru his duty is to bless, and one way he does this is by praying to Krsna for our advancement (this also means he is also our well wisher). The disciples, in writing to Prabhupada, would offer their obeisances, something like, "Please accept my humble obeisances (and sometimes add more to this, like "at the dust of your feet" or something similar). And sometimes they would also offer some praise like, "All glories to your service of And they would sign the letter, Your servant" or "Your humble servant" or "Your worthless servant," etc.

Of course, it was rare for most of us to write to Prabhupada, and if we did we would be careful to address him respectfully as mentioned above. However, email is common and informal, and often a continuing conversation, especially if we are working on something and going back and forth. But in any case, keep these points in mind and some formality should be there, something as simple as:

Dear Guru Maharaj,

Please accept my humble obeisances.

Blah, blah, blah

Your servant,

So and So das

Of course, sometimes we may be going back and forth with many emails discussing a topic (this usually happens with those who are working on projects with me) so we may sometimes omit this protocol.

I know some disciples like to write longer introductions, and I don't want to stop them if this is how they feel. If they don't feel exactly like this, then why write it? Be real. When I feel a disciple is not real, and then I read such things, I also feel "what's the point unless you are real." So write what you are feeling, and that is best.

If you in a rush and you just need to send a message, keep it short and sweet. If you are writing and asking some important questions and you feel more in the mood of the disciple inquiring, then sure, humble prostrated obeisances etc. is probably the mood you are in. And that's great. So write it. If you failed at following an instruction, you probably feel like singing. "Your worthless servant," or Your aspiring servant."

I appreciate disciples being real with what they are feeling. It's a real relationship.

Prabhupada also said the disciple should pay obeisances every time he sees his guru. So if we saw Prabhupada go for a walk from the temple, we paid obeisances. When he came back to the temple, we paid obeisances. This is the etiquette. Most devotees did that when they went in and out of his room. Again, if you are working with your guru, going in and out and serving him a meal or bringing some work, back and forth, it may not always be practical to do this (of if you are pregnant, or have a bad back, or your guru is living with you and you are walking in and out of the living room where he is sitting, etc.).

It is also sometimes inappropriate to do this in public, In such cases we offer our prostrated obeisances in our minds. Still there is the story of the disciple who paid dandavats to Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur during the rainy season and when he arose he was full of mud. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta asked why he did this and he said, "These obeisances are my only wealth."

Also, if a disciple is showing such honor that he is offering obeisances forty five times a day because his guru is living with him, that can also make it uncomfortable for the guru.

Many devotees have spiritual masters who have had disciples for twenty or thirty years and they have worked out these kinds of dealings, so you may sometimes wish to take guidance from them in these matters.

Pictures

Attached is a picture myself (in case you don't have it) that was shot specifically for use on your altar (and, of course, you can use it anywhere elsewhere you like). Srila Prabhupada said that the picture of your spiritual master on your altar should be of his full body, so this is a full body shot. Of course, if there are other pictures you prefer to use, that is fine as long as it is a shot of the entire body.

On your altar, my picture should always be smaller than Srila Prabhupada's picture, and either on the same level or level.

If and when you do puja in a temple or preaching center, the temple will designate where you place the picture of your guru (usually a table near the altar). Once your finish the puja, the picture must be removed. In other words, in public places in Iskcon (this does not include your home), no guru's pictures remain permanently displayed on the altar and in other places in the building, (aside from pictures of other devotees on posters advertising events or personal pictures of yours displayed in private places such as your desk, cabinet, etc). GBC law even prohibits wearing buttons or t-shirts of your guru in temples.

The GBC resolutions in this regard are as follows:

"ISKCON Temple resident Members may keep the photographs of ISKCON diksa or siksa gurus privately in their asrama quarters but are not to display them publicly on ISKCON premises. Promoting occasional special preaching events may be an exception. Disciples of ISKCON diksa and siksa gurus should not wear or publicly display guru t-shirts, posters, bead bag buttons, athletic caps etc. (other than Srila Prabhupada.)."

"ISKCON devotees shall offer arati and bhoga to Lord Krsna through both their diksa or siksa guru and Srila Prabhupada as their pre-eminent siksa-guru. A Temple Pujari shall keep a smaller picture of his diksa guru on the arati tray or table instead of on the altar and remove it after the arati. Subsequent generations of devotees shall continue in the same manner of respecting both their own diksa or siksa guru and Srila Prabhupada."

"ISKCON Temple resident members may keep the photographs of ISKCON diksa or siksa gurus privately in their asrama quarters but are not to display them publicly on ISKCON premises. Promoting occasional special preaching events may be an exception. Disciples of ISKCON diksa and siksa gurus should not wear or publicly display guru t-shirts, posters, bead bag buttons, athletic caps etc. (other than Srila Prabhupada.)."

If you have pictures of me elsewhere in your home, car, office, etc. whenever possible please always have a picture of Prabhupada near it, either the same size or bigger. Let us always remember the foundational position of Srila Prabhupada in Iskcon, and in our lives, and that you and I exist as devotees only because of him.

Your Help

My present work involves many services and your help is appreciated. If you are not yet engaged in helping and would like to be, please contact me.

Of course, my work also requires financial support to be maintained and expanded, and this kind of support is not only greatly appreciated, but necessary for me to maintain my service to you. Therefore financial support, big or small, is also an important way you can contribute to my work. And whether or not you are in a position to help now, you can also consider raising funds from others (asking for donations to support the many educational programs we are doing which are outlined in the Bhakti Life fundraising document attached to this email).

Initiation procedures

When your initiation date has been settled, you will need new *japa* and neck beads (three strands). I need to receive these a few days before the initiation or I can provide for you if you can't, but please let me know you need them). You also should have a new *sari/dhoti* and a new *harer nam chaddar* (for men.) Ideally, men should be shaven headed with a *sikha* (or at least their hair should be short).

Srila Prabhupada wrote me that initiation is not complete without *guru daksina*. *Daksina* means donations or gifts. Of course, one is free to personally offer the *guru* whatever gifts or donations he likes, but in addition to this, the system is that after initiation the disciple asks donations for his spiritual master from the public (from friends, from those that attended the initiation, devotees in general, etc.).

If you need more clarification on this topic, please contact me.

I hope this meets you blissfully engaged in devotional service.

Your ever well wisher,

Mahatma das

My websites-

1. [Mahatma's wisdom](#)
2. [Women Of Bhakti](#)
3. [H G Mahatma Prabhu's Youtube Channel for audio-video presentations, workshops, & lectures on Bhakti](#)
4. [Sacred Indian Retreats](#)
5. [Music of H G Mahatma Prabhu](#)
6. [Mahatma Das Blog](#)
7. [Yoga of Forgiveness Blog](#)
8. [Face Book Page for H G Mahatma Das Prabhu in Spanish](#)
9. <http://www.yogaofforgiveness.com/>