**About Initiation**

To answer the questions devotes frequently ask about the process of initiation -- how it works, why it’s important, and how one finds a guru -- I have prepared an overview of the subject including several passages from Srila Prabhupada’s books and letters and an essay by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura.

In the Nectar of Devotion Srila Prabhupada explains that initiation connects one with Krsna:

“The connection with the spiritual master is called initiation. From the date of initiation by the spiritual master, the connection between Krsna and a person cultivating Krsna consciousness is established. Without initiation by a bona fide spiritual master, the actual connection with Krsna consciousness is never performed” (NOD, Introduction, p. XXII).

The scriptures all agree that to advance spiritually one must take initiation from a bona fide spiritual master.

For example, the Mundaka Upanisad declares:

tad-vijñānārthaṁ sa gurum evābhigacchet

samit-pāṇiḥ śrotriyaṁ brahma-niṣṭham

“If one is actually serious about understanding supernatural, transcendental subject matters, one must approach a bona fide spiritual master.” (Mundaka Upanisad 1.2.12)

And Prabhudda Yogendra instructs King Nimi,

tasmād guruṁ prapadyeta
jijñāsuḥ śreya uttamam
śābde pare ca niṣṇātaṁ
brahmaṇy upaśamāśrayam

“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.” (SB 11.3.21)

Srila Rupa Goswami gives us this directive in his Bhaktirasamrta Sindhu; ādau gurv-āśrayam, “the first step in understanding spiritual knowledge is to take shelter of a bona fide guru.”

The attached passages list the qualifications of a bona fide spiritual master, define the various types of spiritual masters, explain why initiation is especially important in the Kali-yuga, and describe the five-fold process of accepting initiation. A letter from Srila Prabhupada also describes the “law of disciplic succession.”

Before buying a diamond, an intelligent person first learns by careful study how to tell a real diamond from a fake one. Similarly, those seeking to advance spiritually must study scripture to educate themselves how to identify and approach a bona fide spiritual master.

tasmāc chāstraṁ pramāṇaṁ te

kāryākārya-vyavasthitau

jñātvā śāstra-vidhānoktaṁ

karma kartum ihārhasi

“One should therefore understand what is duty and what is not duty by the regulations of the scriptures. Knowing such rules and regulations, one should act so that he may gradually be elevated.” (BG 16.24)

śruti-smṛti-purāṇādi-pañcarātra-vidhiṁ vinā

aikāntikī harer bhaktirutpātāyaiva kalpate

“Devotional service of the Lord that ignores the authorized Vedic literatures like the Upaniñads, Puräëas and Närada-païcarätra is simply an unnecessary disturbance in society.” (Bhakti-rasämåta- sindhu 1.2.101)

After reading these passages, you may have more questions. If you do, please feel free to contact me. Thank you very much.

With gratitude, Your servant,



(Vaisesika Dasa)