

What happened to the “essentiality” of the Formal Initiation Ceremony in the Final Order ?

by Nimai Pandit das

A few years back a paper called the Final Order had become quite popular. It gave a logical and systematic presentation of Srila Prabhupada as the current bona-fide Spiritual Master of ISKCON, the diksa-guru of all the future entrants in the society. It also succeeded in cutting through the many false philosophies and Bogus “Gurus” doing the “bhogi” round. Like many other preceding papers on the subject, it also has been of great help to many devotees worldwide including myself.

The Final Order(TFO) states on Page 51 “Of course we are also subject to the four defects and thus warmly welcome any comments or criticism”. In that constructive spirit, here we will look at a certain part of the Final Order. Our humble attempt is not to discount the service done by these senior devotees for Srila Prabhupada nor to override them by writing on the same subject again. Here the attempt is to show a philosophical sidhantic deviation in the document which should be corrected. Otherwise the writers, propagators, readers, followers and supporters will all not be fully following the orders of Srila Prabhupada and hence will not achieve the full pleasure of His Divine Grace. *Yasya aprasadat na gatih kuto api*. Also many innocent followers may be deviated from the instructions of His Divine Grace.

The Final Order gives the following comments on the importance of the formal initiation ceremony. We will look at each statement and show comparative quotes from Srila Prabhupada. You can judge for yourself how on this point this document is deviating from the parampara.

1. “Srila Prabhupada never defined diksa in terms of any ritualistic ceremony, but as the receipt of transcendental knowledge that leads to liberation.” (TFO pg.-27)

It is true that Srila Prabhupada never defined diksa in terms of any ritualistic ceremony but he defined it as the receipt of transcendental knowledge (as the author states) AND ALSO as a TRANSCENDENTAL FORMAL CEREMONY(which the author **does not state!**).

Srila Prabhupada states “Diksa means the initiation to begin transcendental activities.” He uses the terms interchangeably. Initiation is also a ceremony to initiate transcendental activities.

Read for yourself.

“Diksa 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 diksa.”

(C.c. Madhya, 15.108, purport)

“Diksa actually means initiating a disciple with transcendental knowledge by which he becomes freed from all material contamination.”

(C.c. Madhya, 4.111, purport)

“That very word initiation suggests, “This is the beginning.” Diksa, diksa. Di... Divya. There are two words, divya-jnana. Divya-jnana means transcendental, spiritual knowledge. So divya is di, and jnanam, ksapayati, explaining, that is

ksa, di-ksa. This is called *diksa, diksa*, the combination. So diksa means the initiation to begin transcendental activities. That is called initiation.

Therefore we take promise from the disciple that "You chant so many times," "Yes, sir." "You observe these rules and regulations," "Yes, sir." That is initiation. He has to observe; he has to chant. Then everything comes automatically. In the beginning he is faulty; then how he can make progress? "
(Lecture Srimad-Bhagavatam 6.1.15 -- Auckland, February 22, 1973)

So don't think that after the official ceremony of initiation your business and my business is finished. No. The business begins. It is not the finishing; it is the beginning. ... So today some of you are going to be initiated. This is the beginning of your spiritual life.

(Initiation Lecture 28th Jan, 1974 Hawaii)

"This initiation means this boy is being accepted as initiated in order to give him Vedic instruction.."

(Initiation of Hrsikesa New York, September 5, 1968)

And the formal initiation ceremony is not "ritualistic". It is an essential transcendental ceremony.

Revatinandana: "The eighth offense is comparing the holy name to material piety."

Prabhupada: Yes. And another thing, just like we are holding this ceremony, initiation ceremony. It should not be accepted just we are functioning some ritualistic ceremony. No. It is different from ritualistic ceremony. Although it appears like ritualistic, it is transcendental. Ritualistic ceremony, they are meant for giving you advantage of become pious, from impious life. It also gives that, but this is not the ultimate aim. The ultimate aim is to give you love of God, which is far, far transcendental to the pious and impious activities. That is a different thing that belongs to the spiritual world--love of God. It is not that it is a function to nullify your sinful activities. That is automatically done. Just like if you get one million dollars, the purpose of ten dollars automatically solved. Similarly, this acceptance of holy name of God will automatically wash off all your sinful reaction. That's a fact. But it is not meant for that purpose. It is meant for higher purpose, to attain to this platform of loving God, rendering transcendental loving service to the Lord. That is the aim. Yes.

(Talk, Initiation Lecture, and Ten Offenses Lecture
Los Angeles, December 1, 1968)

The authors statement ""Srila Prabhupada never defined diksa in terms of any ritualistic ceremony, but as the receipt of transcendental knowledge that leads to liberation"" is thus INCOMPLETE. And it has the connotation that the formal initiation ceremony is indeed an unnecessary ritualistic ceremony as is proved by his later statements as we see ahead.

2. "Diksa normally involves a ceremony, but it is not absolutely essential, more a formality:"(TFO, Pg 27)

Now the author starts to really deviate from the parampara. The next two statements will show the wide jump the author takes from the simple instructions of His Divine Grace A.C.Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

Here he says the ceremony is "not absolutely essential."

Then he says, ""Srla Prabhupada has clearly stated that the formality of the ceremony is just that, a formality, not an essential.""(TFO, Pg 28)

Now he waters it down to "not an essential"!

The next statement shows how he evaporates the whole ceremony into thin air and makes it "an unnecessary element".

"" Thus, to put into perspective the use of ritviks, it has been shown that we are dealing with the details of a formalisation ceremony; a ceremony which itself constitutes but one element, and an unnecessary element at that, of the transcendental process of diksa."" (TFO, Pg 28)

Srla Prabhupada definitely gives more importance to the PURPOSE of the whole process, namely to get transcendental knowledge.

"Initiation is a formality. If you are serious, that is real initiation. My touch is simply a formality. It is your determination, that is initiation."
(BTG, Search for the Divine)

"Well, initiation or no initiation, first thing is knowledge... knowledge. Initiation is formality. Just like you go to a school for knowledge, and admission is formality. That is not very important thing."
(SP Interview, 16/10/76, Chandigarh)

And although one CAN receive knowledge constantly without formalising the relationship with the teacher, Srla Prabhupada still prefers that the knowledge be received in a formal way from the disciplic succession as he showed by giving scores of his valuable hours personally conducting the initiation ceremonies, chanting on the beads, chanting Gayatri on the Brahman thread, selecting names and sending them thousands of miles, and even taking the trouble of appointing ritviks - his representatives for the purpose of performing initiations via the July 9th, 1977 letter to all GBCs and Temple Presidents. It would be foolish to think he was doing this "unnecessarily". A pure devotee does not waste even a single moment.

Prajapati: ...Srla Prabhupada. You're very, very regulated, almost down to the minute in your activities. This is also a big help in utilizing time?

Prabhupada: **Yes. Avyatha kala tam(?) That explains the... This is... This should be our aim. Not a single moment is wasted. If you try that "How I'm wasting my time," then you'll utilize it. You should always remember. Not a single moment should be wasted. That is advised by Rupa Gosvami. Avyatha kala tam. Vyatha means spoiling. Avyatha means not spoiling. Avyatha kala. He should be always conscious that "I am not wasting my time." Then it will be done. Krsna...** (break)

(Morning Walk January 5, 1974, Los Angeles)

Srla Prabhupada definitely considers the ceremony as valuable and authorizing.

"The chanting Hare Krishna is our main business, that is real initiation. And as you are all following my instruction, in that matter, the initiator is already there. Now the next initiation will be performed as a ceremony officially, of course that ceremony has value because the name, Holy Name, will be delivered to the student from the disciplic succession, it has got value, but in spite of that, as you are going on chanting, please go on with this business sincerely and Krishna willing, I may be coming to you very soon.

(Letter to Tamal Krishna 19th Aug 1968)

Yes, there is definitely a vast difference between initiated and non-initiated. One who is initiated is authorized, and one who is not initiated is not authorized. Just like, for example, Pradyumna is attending class in Sanskrit in a college, he is given chance to learn Sanskrit, but he is not equal with the regular students. One who becomes initiated is channelized to the authorities in the disciplic succession. One who isn't initiated may chant Hare Krishna (and should certainly be encouraged to do so) and serve in his own way, and gradually by doing so he may want to be initiated. But otherwise he may fall away from following the rules and regulations.

(Letter to Satsvarupa 14th Nov. 1968)

Initiation ceremony is the admittance in the school of Brahma-Madhava-Gaudiya Sampradaya to learn the disciplic conclusion taught by His Divine Grace A.C.Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

"Just like a student is admitted in the school for learning ABCD, and if he follows the rules and regulations and continues his studies regularly, then one day he would be able to pass M.A. examination,.. So it is not a formality. It is a process to become free from this material bondage and go back home, back to Godhead. Tyaktva deham punar janma naiti mam eti. We should be very serious, not that to take initiation as a matter of fashion, but it should be very carefully and seriously done."

(Lecture Bhubaneswar, January 21, 1977)

Srila Prabhupada even goes on to say the ceremony is "required" and "essential".

23rd Nov, 1968

My Dear John Darsinos,

..In answer to your question about the importance of initiation, it is to be understood that initiation means that power is coming from the Supreme by the bonafide disciplic succession. This is required. Of course, for anyone to hear the message of Srimad-Bhagavatam will produce a favorable result but formally one should receive this knowledge from the disciplic succession. For example, Arjuna and Krishna were friends but still Arjuna submitted himself formally as Krishna's disciple. This is essential. We should take example from these great Personalities. Arjuna was hearing Krishna speaking Bhagavad-gita but still he submitted as Krishna's disciple. "Now I submit unto You, please teach me." So this is the process. I hope this will clear up your question sufficiently.

Your ever well-wisher,

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

"Actually this is Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's initiation of Dabira Khasa and Sakara Mallika. They approached the Lord with all humility, and the Lord accepted them as old servants, as eternal servants, and He changed their names. It is to be understood from this that it is essential for a disciple to change his name after initiation."

(Madhya 1.208 The Later Pastimes of Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu)

The details of how diksa guru-disciple relationships are formally bonded may be adapted by an acarya, according to time place and circumstance, but the principle remains the same:

"Srimad Viraraghava Acarya, an acarya in the disciplic succession of the Ramanuja-sampradaya, has remarked in his commentary that candalas, or

conditioned souls who are born in lower than sudra families, can also be initiated according to circumstances. The formalities may be slightly changed here and there to make them Vaisnavas."

(S.B. 4.8.5, purport)

Here again we see that the "formalities" are "slightly changed" but not given up.

In conclusion, the author states that the formal initiation ceremony is "not absolutely essential", "not an essential" and "an unnecessary element". Whereas Srila Prabhupada, not only carefully performed the ceremony himself but, states that the ceremony is "valuable", "authorizing", "required" and "essential". The reader can decide whom to accept as an authority!!!!

3. "Thus the ceremonial initiation is a formality performed to solidify in the mind of the disciple the serious commitments he has made to the process of diksa." (TFO, Pg 28)

Where does Srila Prabhupada say this ? That the ceremony is just to "solidify in the mind of the disciple". Even though the author does not actually say "just" but by not giving any of the other reasons which Srila Prabhupada gives and instead giving only this reason he does imply the same.

Let us see what reasons Srila Prabhupada actually gives for performing this ceremony. We hope this will solidify in the mind of the author the importance Srila Prabhupada gives to the initiation ceremony.

a. Disciple accepts Srila Prabhupada formally as his spiritual master and agrees to abide by his order.

"I thank all of you very much for accepting me as your spiritual master, and I promise that I will take you back to home, back to Godhead.

(Letter to Nityananda 12 November, 1971)

Therefore this formal initiation ceremony is performed. He promises, "My dear sir, I shall abide by your order."

(Lecture 23rd March, 1969 Hawaii)

b. Srila Prabhupada formally accepts a devotee as a disciple and "never lets go" of him.

"I have accepted as my disciples, those devotees recommended by you.."

(Letter to Damodara 16 January, 1974)

"I thank all of you very much for accepting me as your spiritual master, and I promise that I will take you back to home, back to Godhead.

(Letter to Nityananda 12 November, 1971)

"But a bonafide spiritual master never lets go a devotee once accepted."

(Letter to Umapati 23 November, 1967)

c. Takes up all the remaining previous sinful reactions and promises to accept all the future reactions.

"When we initiate disciples we therefore tell them, "Now the account is squared. Now don't commit sinful activities any more."

(TQK 23 Natural Prosperity)

"The spiritual master accepts the sinful activities of his disciples from the first initiation. I may give initiation very easily, but what can I do? I am prepared to go to hell for service of Lord Caitanya."

(Letter to Jadurani 4 September, 1972)

d. Srila Prabhupada delivers the Holy Name to the initiate.

"When a mantra is chanted by a great devotee, the mantra becomes more powerful. Although the Hare Krsna maha-mantra is powerful in itself, a disciple upon initiation receives the mantra from his spiritual master, for when the mantra is chanted by the spiritual master, it becomes more powerful."

(SB 4.24.32 P Chanting the Song Sung by Lord Siva)

e. Beads are sanctified for chanting

"The beads has to be sanctified, I shall do that when I come there. Keep them until then. For chanting on them, they must be sanctified."

(Letter to Brahmananda 21 March, 1968)

"If there are broken beads, they may simply be replaced without that I have to chant on them. Once sanctified by the Spiritual Master, your chanting of Hare Krishna is eternally blessed."

(Letter to Upendra 8 December, 1971)

"I think now you may be appointed by me to give first initiations to new disciples by chanting on their beads on my behalf.. They shall, of course, still be considered as my disciples, not that they shall become your disciples, but you will be empowered by me to chant their beads and that is the same effect of binding master and disciple as if I were personally chanting."

(Letter to Ravatinandana 4th January 1973)

f. Disciple promises in front of witnesses

"Not that, "Now I have got a spiritual master and I have got the initiation, my business is finished. Let me do all nonsense." No. This initiation process, we take promise from you that no illicit sex, no meat eating, no gambling, no intoxication--before the fire... So there is fire, there is spiritual master, there is sastra, there is Krsna, before--they are all witness."

(Initiation Lecture 28th Jan, 1974 Hawaii)

"Now instruct them very seriously about their responsibilities. To promise to follow the four prohibitive rules and to daily chant sixteen rounds means they cannot deviate. You can hold a fire yajna and inform them that in promising before the Deity and before the spiritual master, one cannot later break the rules without being punished, just as in the law court one is held for perjury."

(Letter to Damodara 16 January, 1974)

g. Name is changed to :

- i) remind him of Krishna
- ii) remove bodily conception

"In our Krsna consciousness movement we therefore change a devotee's name to a form that reminds him of Visnu. If at the time of death the devotee can remember his own name, such as Krsnadasa or Govinda dasa, he can be saved from the greatest danger. Therefore the change of names at the time of initiation is essential."

(SB 6.2.32 P Ajamila Delivered by the Visnudutas)

"After initiation, the disciple's name must be changed to indicate that he is a servant of Lord Visnu. .. A member of the sahajiya-sampradaya does not change his name; therefore he cannot be accepted as a Gaudiya Vaisnava. If a person does not change his name after initiation, it is to be understood that he will continue in his bodily conception of life."

(Madhya 1.208 The Later Pastimes of Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu)

Becoming prepared for brahman initiation; to worship the deity.

"Regarding your questions, second initiation is real initiation. First initiation is the preliminary, just to make him prepared, just like primary and secondary education. The first initiation gives him chance to become purified, and when he is actually purified then he is recognized as a brahmana and that means real initiation...."

(Letter to Jadurani 4 September, 1972)

"If someone needs to receive Gayatri mantra, which is necessary for caring for Lord Jagannatha, then at your recommendation they can be initiated by mail."

(Letter to Bhakta dasa 18 August, 1971)

Summary :

It has been conclusively proved that the Final Order - though logically and systematically presenting how Srila Prabhupada is the current Diksa Guru of ISKCON devotees - has not properly dealt with the importance of formal initiation according to the instructions and desires of Srila Prabhupada.

Final order makes it "not essential", "an unnecessary element" whereas Srila Prabhupada says "it is required" and "it is essential".

I hope the author can correct the paper to be in line with our acarya Srila Prabhupada and earn more pleasure from His Divine Grace.

Also all the **qualified** followers of Srila Prabhupada should undergo the initiation ceremony according to the bona-fide method "as soon as" possible which is "immediately", as Srila Prabhupada instructs.

"As far as the time of diksa (initiation) is concerned, everything depends on the position of the guru. As soon as a bona fide guru is received by chance or by a program, one should immediately take the opportunity to receive initiation.

(Madhya 24.331 The Sixty-One Explanations of the Atmarama Verse)

Otherwise:

"..and gradually by doing so he may want to be initiated. But otherwise he may fall away from following the rules and regulations."

(Letter to Satsvarupa 14th Nov. 1968)

Note :

1. In this article the various reasons for performing the initiation ceremony are only briefly dealt with. A detailed analysis has been done in our article "The necessity of Formal Initiation Ceremony."

2. Srila Prabhupada's new disciples are to be initiated by ritviks - representative of the acarya (July 9th Letter). Our paper "RITVIK" deals with the duties and qualifications of a ritvik and how to find a bona-fide ritvik.

3. Here only the necessity of the formal initiation ceremony is discussed. The various qualifications of the disciple and the ritvik and other details will be dealt with separately.