ISKCON Ministry for Sannyāsa Services Policy Manual

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Section 1: Introduction

A sannyāsī, in the varṇāśrama society, is expected to have material and spiritual qualifications even more exalted than those possessed by a brāhmaṇa. According to the Bhagavad-gītā, a brāhmaṇa should possess the following qualities:

Peacefulness, self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, knowledge, wisdom and religiousness – these are the natural qualities by which the brāhmaṇas work. Bg. 18.42

Therefore, a bona fide sannyāsī is expected to possess the above qualities plus others such as renunciation and spiritual wisdom.

If an ISKCON sannyāsī breaks his vows of celibacy, becomes greedy for money, or displays other anarthas, ISKCON devotees' faith in the sannyāsa aśrama is diminished. Therefore, it is a duty of the leadership of ISKCON to correct a sannyāsī's errant behaviour, and when necessary discipline him.

The discipline given to an ISKCON sannyāsī will be determined by ISKCON law and other criteria as will be explained in this manual. Disciplining of sannyāsīs may be done by other ISKCON authorities such as National Councils. The Sannyāsa Ministry must be informed of the disciplinary actions and measures taken.

If the Sannyāsa Ministry receives a complaint against an ISKCON sannyāsīs they will forward them to the appropriate ISKCON authorities to deal with.

A sub-committee of the Sannyāsa Ministry will deal only with deviations that impact the sannyāsī's aśrama. If the sannyāsī's deviations also affect other services and positions held within ISKCON, such deviations will be dealt with by the appropriate authorities.

The 'Guidelines for Simple Investigations' is an outline only, but includes provisions for fair practice of justice.

A sub-committee of the Sannyāsa Committee will deal with weighing evidence and giving judgments. The Disciplinary Steps judges should follow are already established stages of discipline for authorities within ISKCON.

In case of disciplinary action being given to a sannyāsī, there is a process of appeal to higher ISKCON authorities.

Section 2: Reasons for Discipline

Depending on the severity of the improper activity, corrective steps may consist of informal discussions, written warnings or censures, or formal disciplinary measures such as placing the offending sannyāsī on probation, suspension, or removal of the sannyāsī from his position in ISKCON.
The reason(s) for and the process and standards of rectification, if any, must be given in writing to the sannyāsī under discipline. The disciplining body or persons must ensure that the details are entered into the relevant resolutions of the disciplining body.

As with other ISKCON members, an ISKCON sannyāsī may be disciplined for the following transgressions.

Misconduct and Indiscipline

1. Wilful violation of GBC resolutions.

    1.a. Vilification of ISKCON or the GBC Body. Vilification is "abusively disparaging speech or writing." Abusive is "extremely offensive." There is a line between vilification and reasonable criticism. This is not to be used to stifle open debate and healthy criticism.

    1.b. Misconduct in office (physical assault except in self-defence, improper relationships with the opposite sex, improper sexual behaviour, abusive behaviour to devotees, improper dealings with external society, and so on.)

    1.c. Habitually or knowingly making false charges and accusations or other consistent vaiṣṇava-aparādhas.

    1.d. Serious interference in the guru and disciple relationship.

    1.e. Duplicitous or untruthful dealings (giving false promises to devotees, lying to spiritual authorities, and other serious prevarication).

2. Improper Discharge or Neglect of Duty

    2.a. Consistent failure to submit required reports such as a financial report.

    2.b. Disregard of an ISKCON devotee's requirement to accept a spiritual master and serve him.

    2.c. Economic mismanagement of such a nature that it endangers ISKCON's reputation or preaching mission.

    2.d. Failing to make all necessary and prudent arrangements to defend ISKCON's members and spiritual standards. E.g.. Attacks from outside groups.

3. Spiritual Discrepancy

    3.a. Philosophical deviation.

    3.b. Not properly following the standards of sādhana bhakti, such as:

    3.b.i) Failure to follow strictly the rules and regulations as described in Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

    3.b.ii) Consistently irregular attendance at the temple morning and evening programs without bona fide cause.

    3.b.iii) Failure to follow any of the four regulative principles or to regularly chant sixteen rounds of japa.

Breach of Legal and Moral Standards

It is prohibited for any sannyāsī to carry out or undertake any act that constitutes fraud, corruption, bribery or misconduct.

Fraud is an intentional act committed to secure an unfair or unlawful gain to himself or another person or to wrongfully deprive ISKCON or others of their financial interests and includes for the purposes of this Policy. Misconduct consists of giving or offering to give a private benefit in exchange for official, public action. This may be in order to obtain benefits, for example, for the benefit of ISKCON or for one's own private benefit or securing a governmental approval.

1. Fraud

1.a. Fraud

Consists of wilful misrepresentation or deception with the intention of inducing a person to act thereon to their financial detriment as well as acts of common theft. The detriment may either be direct (such as in the case of money that is stolen or embezzled) or indirect (such as in the case of the improper use of valuable information or misrepresentation in financial and other reports and statements).

1.b. Corruption

Consists of giving an advantage to a third party in a way inconsistent with one's official duties or the interests of ISKCON in exchange for some personal benefit. This normally occurs in the acceptance of a bribe.

1.c. Bribery

Consists of giving or offering to give a private benefit in exchange for official, public action. This may be in order to obtain, for example, for the benefit of ISKCON or for one's own private benefit or securing a governmental approval.

2. Misconduct

Misconduct is a violation of law, regulation, ISKCON policy or unethical business conduct that causes or may cause economic harm or loss to ISKCON or others and includes for the purposes of this Policy.

2.a. Waste

Consists of thoughtless or careless expenditure, consumption, mismanagement, use, or squandering of ISKCON owned or operated resources to the detriment of ISKCON, or against ISKCON's stated policy (see Appendix).

2.b. Abuse

Consists of the excessive or improper use of something, or the use of something in a manner contrary to the natural or legal rules for its use; the intentional destruction, diversion, manipulation, misapplication, maltreatment, or misuse of resources owned or operated by ISKCON; or extravagant or excessive use so as to abuse one's position or authority.

2.d. Independence from outside influence

Sannyāsīs must act at all times in a manner that is in the interests of ISKCON. Sannyāsīs must not align their interest with that of a third party unless such interest is clearly and demonstrably for the benefit of ISKCON.

2.e. Honesty and Integrity

A sannyāsī is required to act honestly, with integrity and otherwise in accordance with the Standards of Conduct in his activities with any other devotee, employee, contractor or person in relation to and within the scope of his responsibilities.

3. Participation in Fraud or Misconduct

A sannyāsī has participated in fraud or misconduct if he;

3.a. knowingly lends any assistance to prohibited acts and

3.b. has knowledge of prohibited acts without reporting them.

4. Examples of prohibited acts:

4.a. Any dishonest or fraudulent act.

4.b. Misappropriation of funds, securities, supplies, or other assets.

4.c. Impropriety in the handling or reporting of money or financial transactions.

4.d. Profiteering as a result of insider knowledge of ISKCON's activities.

4.e. Disclosing confidential and proprietary information to outside parties.

4.f. Disclosing to other persons confidential activities engaged in or contemplated by ISKCON.

4.g. Accepting or seeking anything of material value from contractors, vendors, or persons providing services/materials to ISKCON for one's own personal benefit.

4.h. Destruction, removal, or inappropriate use of records, furniture, fixtures, and equipment.

4.i. Any similar or related irregularity.

5. Other

5.1 Dress Code and Appearance

Not wearing the standard dress of a sannyāsī as indicated by Śrīla Prabhupāda and our previous ācāryas. This includes wearing tilaka, neckbeads and sacred thread. One should carry a danda when not inconvenient. Exceptions according to Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions should be approved by the GBC and the Sannyāsa Ministry.

5.2 Conduct

2.a. Exhibiting behaviour that is eccentric or would embarrass Śrīla Prabhupāda or ISKCON.

2.b. Associating beyond what is authorised with outside organisations or their representatives.

3. Preaching

3.a. Classes, seminars and other presentations not in line with Srila Prabhupāda's teachings.

Section 3: Guidelines for Investigations

The Webster definition of allegation is:

An assertion made by a party in a legal proceeding, which the party then undertakes to prove.

When a complaint is made, an investigation may be required.

1. When to conduct an investigation:

1.a. To begin an investigation the allegations should be clear. Then it can be decided which allegations are worth investigating.

1.b. Generally an allegation may be worthy of investigation if there is substantial evidence to support allegations of violations of:

1.b.i) Sannyāsa Codes of Conduct
1.b.ii) Vaisnava Etiquette
1.b.iii) ISKCON Law
1.b.iv) Government Law

1.c. During an investigation, the validity of an allegation is determined by asking the following questions.
1.c.i) What happened?
1.c.ii) When did it happen?
1.c.iii) Where did it happen?
1.c.iv) How many times did it happen?
1.c.v) What is the evidence that it happened? For example, who witnessed it?
1.c.vi) Who or what did it?
1.c.vii) Who or what did it happen to?
1.c.viii) What is the certainty of all the above?
1.c.ix) Other questions:
What are the different possible causes that could have contributed to its happening?
Why did it happen?

1.d. If there are little or no clear answers to these questions, the allegation is probably not substantial and probably cannot and should not be investigated.

2. The accused must be presented with all available allegations and evidence that support the allegations. The accused must also be given the right to reply as well as to provide evidence of their own.

3. Replies by the accused must also be presented to those making the allegations for their comments.

4. When all comments are received, then the evidence can be weighed by the appropriate judge or committee.

5. The evidence has to be examined in terms of the "elements of evidence", which are as follows:

5.a. Comprehensive

5.a.i) The record must contain all the admissible evidence relevant for any particular charge, conclusion, proposition, premise, or element.

5.a.ii) In other words, it must include not only the evidence presented by the prosecution, but also the evidence presented by the defense.

5.b. Credible

5.b.i) Genuine; not distorted or manufactured.

5.b.ii) The presumption of innocence can only be defeated with actual evidence and unreliable evidence is not actual evidence.

5.b.iii) Inadmissibility of certain hearsay evidence. (i.e. indirect testimony)

5.b.iv) Where the chain of custody for the evidence has to be established.

5.b.v) Cannot come from unreliable evaluations such as polygraphs, hypnosis, or 'harsh interrogations'.

5.c. Sufficient

5.c.i) Must consist of enough evidence to establish the truth of the conclusion.

5.d. Consistent

5.d.i) Compare the pieces of evidence and make sure that the stories are on the same channel, i.e., are consistent.

5.d.ii) If one witness says the murderer wore a red shirt, and another witness says the murderer wore a blue shirt, then obviously the evidence is inconsistent, especially if we have already determined that both witnesses have equally good vision and reliability.

6. After examining the evidence there has to be a means of deciding what degree of certainty is necessary before accepting an allegation as being fully or partially valid. Obviously if one factor from the above (comprehensive, credible, sufficient, and consistent) has a low percentage of trustworthiness, then the allegation cannot be easily upheld as valid. The elements of evidence are only as strong as its weakest component.

7. After examining the allegations based on the above there may be mitigating circumstances. These can also be noted.

8. Investigations can be complicated. Human emotions, perceptions, and fallible reasoning make them such. Therefore, unless there is sufficient cause to conduct an investigation, mediation, consultation and other such attempts at reconciliation of differing parties is preferable. But even sometimes mediation is not possible if one or both parties do not agree to conduct a mediation.

9. Generally, formal investigations should only be done when there are allegations that clearly deal with grave violations of ISKCON or other laws, there are properly trained investigators, and sufficient evidence is presented or available by which the validity of the allegations can be assessed.

10. Reports to the Sannyāsa Ministry

10.a. Whoever is doing the investigation should make a report (or reports if there is profound disagreement amongst those conducting the investigation). The report should contain the elements of uncertainty and disagreement amongst those conducting the investigation.

10.b. The report should contain the answers to the questions concerning the allegation for example of "what happened", "who did it", etc.

10.c. If opinions are given, they should be based on the assimilation of the evidence presented and not on intuition or undisclosed information.

Section 4: Determining Jurisdiction

When there are allegations concerning a sannyāsī, the case is within the jurisdiction of the Sannyāsa Ministry. Based upon the outcome of the investigation, and the position(s) within society held by the sannyāsī, additional jurisdictions may be determined. For example, CPO, IDRO, Guru Services Committee and the local GBC representative, RGB, National Council up to the GBC Body.

Section 5: Handling cases where discipline is required

The Sannyāsa Ministry will decide on disciplinary measures in cases that fall under its jurisdiction. It will also consider the discipline of sannyāsīs based on reports and rulings from other jurisdictions. The Ministry should communicate with the investigative team and other appropriate committees if more information is required to make a judgement. After consideration of the allegations and evidence, the Ministry will generally discipline a sannyāsī by the following steps. The verdict will be given in writing either by email or by paper to the sannyāsī. He will be reminded of his right to appeal any decision to the appropriate ISKCON body.

Section 6: Disciplinary Steps

The following are disciplinary steps, which, if necessary, will be applied to sannyāsīs within ISKCON.

1. Censure

Censure is to be understood as a reprimand aimed at reformation of a sannyāsī and prevention of further offending acts. It is the warning voice of pending probation, suspension, or removal.

When ordering the censure, the disciplining authority must clearly spell out in writing to the disciplined sannyāsī the specific actions that were irresponsible, inappropriate, or in violation of ISKCON law and why they were judged so.

2. Probation

If after being censured a sannyāsī does not rectify his behaviour then he may be put on probation. Even without a censure, a probation may be immediately administered if the deviation is of more serious nature. Probation is still an opportunity for the sannyāsī to redress himself and regain his status as an ISKCON sannyāsī in good standing.

When ordering the probation, the disciplining authority must clearly spell out in writing to the disciplined sannyāsī.

2.a The specific actions that were irresponsible, inappropriate, or in violation of ISKCON law and why they were judged so

2.b The specific program of rectification

2.c The specific curtailment of powers, if any

2.d The specific prerequisites for restoration, if any

2.e The time period of the probation, which shall be no longer than six months.

2.f After the period of probation, the disciplining authority must decide as per one of the following.

That the sannyāsī is rectified and that any restrictions imposed for the term of probation are rescinded; or

That further probation under the same or modified conditions is required to complete the rectification process; or

That the sannyāsī has not been rectified and further disciplinary measures may be imposed.

3. Suspension

In the case where there is substantial reason to believe that an ISKCON sannyāsī has acted irresponsibly, inappropriately, or in violation of ISKCON law to the extent that continuation of the sannyāsī in his position will be

injurious to the properties, good name, physical assets or other resources of the society, then a sannyāsī should be suspended from that position.
Suspension is to separate the sannyāsī from their position in ISKCON so that a thorough investigation of allegations may be conducted and the suitability of the sannyāsī to continue in his position is determined.

3.a. The disciplining body must conduct an immediate investigation so as to minimize disruption. After completion of the investigation, the body shall make a determination as to the truth of the allegations and a future course of action. They may order as per one of the following.

3.a.i The suspension shall be revoked and the sannyāsī shall be restored to his original position; or
3.a.ii There shall be a probationary period with a program of rectification as described under probation above, with or without restoration of aśrama position during the period of probation; or
3.a.iii It is not expected that the sannyāsī can be rectified within a reasonable period of time and therefore it will be considered if he will remain as an ISKCON sannyāsī.

4. Removal

a. Under normal circumstances a sannyāsī will be removed from being a sannyāsi in ISKCON only after being put on probation or suspension and has not rectified his situation.
b. In urgent situations, a sannyāsī may be removed from his position of a sannyāsī in ISKCON in case of the following;
c. Any violation of either ISKCON, local or national laws that endangers ISKCON's stability and security locally, nationally or internationally and which cannot wait for the usual process of censure, probation, and suspension.
d. Severe spiritual, philosophical or moral deviation.
e. Rebels against and rejects the authority of Śrīla Prabhupāda, the GBC Body or other regional, national or local ISKCON authorities.

5. Resignation

An ISKCON sannyāsī may step down from their aśrama only after consulting with the Sannyāsa Minister and the Sannyāsa Committee. His resignation from the sannyāsa aśrama should be submitted in writing with an explanation of his reasons for giving up the sannyāsa aśrama and the date of his resignation.

Section 7: Appeals

If the sannyāsī wishes to appeal a decision, he has three months to do so.
After that time period the decision is final. The sannyāsī must first present his appeal to the GBC Executive Committee. The sannyāsī's appeal must made in writing and state all evidences and reasoning why the decision should be over-turned or modified. The sannyāsī should also send a copy of his appeal to the Sannyāsa Sub-committee. If a majority of the GBC Executive Committee agrees, the appeal will be presented to the GBC Body. A decision concerning an appeal will be made by a majority vote of the GBC Body. However, during any appeal, the original decision remains in effect. A sannyāsī who does not abide by the decision shall be subjected to penalties according to ISKCON Law.