



ISKCON[®]
MINISTRY OF
EDUCATION

Chronological Instructions for Writing Scriptural Examinations

by

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada
Founder *Acharya* of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness

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“If you become preacher member, in that case you will have to pay once Rs 10/- only for the degree of ‘Bhakti-sastri’ which will be awarded to you by registered certificate of degree for your becoming preaching member of the League and doing the necessary preaching work on behalf of the League. The preaching work is conducted as follows: (1) As soon as you get the certificate of degree of ‘Bhakti-sastri’ at once you become a bona fide preacher of this institution and for this you will have to read ‘Bhagavad-gita’ regularly.”

*Letter to Brother –
Unknown Place
September 1955*

“Regarding the examination, you are already a passed student so don't be afraid of it. When the examination will be held, you will find the questions so easy that within a few minutes you shall be able to answer them all. I wish to introduce this examination system so that in the future our students may not remain unconcerned with these books we are publishing. These books are not material knowledge. To a sincere student, all of the contents of these books become revealed from within, even if he has not thoroughly studied them all.”

*Letter to Hamsaduta,
Los Angeles,
12 January, 1968*

“In addition to our chanting our 16 rounds daily, we must all read at least one chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. Read one chapter one day then go on to the next chapter the next day and in this way, after 18 days, we will have completed one reading. After four or five such complete reading we will know Bhagavad Gita as it is and our questions and doubts will be answered. We are printing these books not for money but so that all devotees will read and understand. ... On Janmastami day, next September, those students who wish may take an examination on Bhagavad Gita. Those passing will receive a certificate and title of ‘Bhakti Shastri’, an official ministerial status. Guests may also take this exam for a fee of \$10.00.”

*Memo to all temples:
New York,
November 24, 1968*

“I request you all to keep one copy of this Bhagavad-gītā, every one of you, and read it carefully. And there will be examination in the coming September. So... Of course, that is voluntary. But I request you to prepare for the examination next September. And one who will pass the examination will get the title Bhakti-śāstrī.”

*Lecture on BG 2.8-12 –
Los Angeles,
November 27, 1968*

“You'll get designation, ‘Bhakti-śāstrī’ So you read carefully Bhagavad-gītā. Everything is there. Every word, every line is so, I mean to say, instructive. It is simply... That is the basic principle of spiritual knowledge. Now we have presented. Every one of you should very carefully read. Every one of you must have one book and read it carefully and appear in the examination next Janmāṣṭamī. You'll get designation, Bhakti-śāstrī.”

*Lecture on BG 2.26,
Los Angeles,
December 6, 1968*

“Next January there will be an examination on this Bhagavad-gita. Papers will be sent by me to all centers, and those securing the minimum passing grade will be given the title as Bhakti-sastri. Similarly, another examination will be held on Lord Caitanya's Appearance Day in February, 1970 and it will be upon Srimad-Bhagavatam and Bhagavad-gita. Those passing will get the title of Bhakti-vaibhava. Another examination will be held sometimes in 1971 on the four books, Bhagavad-gita, Srimad-Bhagavatam, Teachings of Lord Caitanya, and Nectar of Devotion. One who will pass this examination will be awarded with the title of Bhaktivedanta. I want that all of my spiritual sons and daughters will inherit this title of Bhaktivedanta, so that the family transcendental diploma will continue through the generations. Those possessing the title of Bhaktivedanta will be allowed to initiate disciples. Maybe by 1975, all of my disciples will be allowed to initiate and increase the numbers of the generations. That is my program. So we should not simply publish these books for reading by outsiders, but our students must be well versed in all of our books so that we can be prepared to defeat all opposing parties in the matter of self-realization.”

*Letter to Hamsaduta,
Los Angeles,
3 January 1969*

“So you have now taken charge of the sunrise of New Vrndavana. Our program is there for constructing seven temples. One Rupanuga Vidyapitha—that is a school for educating *brahmanas* and Vaisnavas. We have enough of technological and other types of educational institutions, but perhaps there is none where actual *brahmanas* and Vaisnavas are produced. So we will have to establish an educational institution for that purpose. A first examination will be held sometimes next January on Bhagavad-gita As It Is, and those passing will have the degree of Bhakti-sastri. Next year we will hold an examination on Srimad-Bhagavatam, and the person who passes will have the title Bhakti-vaibhava. And the next year we shall hold an examination on Teachings of Lord Caitanya, Nectar of Devotion and Vedanta Sutra, and those who will successfully pass will be awarded with the title of Bhaktivedanta. By 1975, all of those who have passed all of the above examinations will be specifically empowered to initiate and increase the number of the Krishna Consciousness population.”

*Letter to: Kirtanananda,
Los Angeles
12 January 1969*

“Read Bhagavad-gita As It Is very carefully, and we are going to hold an examination next year in January upon this book. I hope that you will be enough expert in this Krishna Consciousness science to pass the examination and be awarded with the title of ‘Bhakti-sastri’, one who knows the principles of devotional service. So think over these matters discussed herein very carefully, and Krishna will help you in all respects.”

*Letter to Kanupriya
Los Angeles
15 January 1969*

“Regarding Brahma-samhita, this book shall be included in the examination of the second year along with Srimad-Bhagavatam. I don't know why you are so concerned with starting the Bhakti-Rasamrta-Sindhu already. First study carefully the Bhagavad-gita As It Is. This is the most important book for you to learn at first.”

*Letter to Hamsaduta,
21st January, 1969*

“Regarding your questions about the examinations to be given, the girls will also be able to take these. In Krsna consciousness there is no distinction between girls and boys. The girls also may become preachers if they are able.”

*Letter to Himavati,
24th January, 1969*

“We wish to hold examinations and award titles such as Bhakti-sastri, Bhakti-vaibhava, and Bhaktivedanta. The whole program will continue for seven years, and the students who will be fully engaged in this study of a seven year course will be classified in the 4-D section of the draft board. Such students will not be called for military activities. In January of 1970 we will be holding an examination among all of our students on this book, and those who will pass shall be awarded with the title of Bhakti-sastri.”

*Letter to Aniruddha
Los Angeles
4th February, 1969*

“I think you may have already heard that in January of 1970 we will be holding an examination among all of our students on this book, and those who will pass shall be awarded with the title of Bhakti-sastri. With these examinations I wish to encourage all my disciples to very carefully learn this philosophy of Krishna Consciousness because there is so many preachers who will be required to bring this message to all of the corners of the earth. Caitanya Mahaprabhu has predicted that this movement of Krishna Consciousness will one day be spread into every village and town, and everywhere there will be found chanting of Hare Krishna. ‘Bhakti-sastri’ is awarded after extensive study of Bhagavad-gita, Easy Journey, and Nectar of Devotion.”

*Letter to Mahapurusa
Los Angeles
7th February 1969*

“This is my idea of the general plan for the questionnaire: You can work it out more elaborately as may be required.

Q. 3. Curriculums: Study of Bhagavad Gita As It Is; Srimad Bhagavatam; (3 vol.); Nectar of Devotion; Teachings of Lord Chaitanya; Vedanta Sutra. (In this way, arrange the curriculum program around these our books, and the professors, those who have been with us ample time, such as Brahmananda, Hayagriva, Kirtanananda, and have also academic qualifications). This is the complete course requiring to study 7 years. When the first exam is given the student making passing grade is given the title of Bhakti-sastri, second exam, Bhaktivaibhava, 3rd exam, Bhaktivedanta.”

*Letter to all temples Hawaii,
14 March 1969
(in response to letter to Prabhupada
from California headquarters selective service..)*

“Yes, we must set up our society as a school as best we can—I have already sent you letter. Please formulate the whole curriculum because we have to immediately submit to the Draft department and if this is accepted that will be great gain for our society. ‘Bhakti-sastri’ is awarded after extensive study of Bhagavad-gita, Easy Journey, and Nectar of Devotion. ‘Bhakti-vaibhava’ is awarded after study of Vedanta-sutra and Srimad-Bhagavatam on a preliminary basis; and ‘Bhaktivedanta’ the highest title, is awarded after extensive study of Caitanya-caritamṛta.”

*Letter to Brahmananda
Hawaii
23 March, 1969*

“Now you read Bhagavad-gītā very carefully. In our examination next January... Yes. From Bhagavad-gītā for title of bhakti-śāstrī. Now we have to make our organization regularly a spiritual institution so that we may be recognized, and our students may be freed from this draft board requisition.”

*Room Conversation,
Boston,
April 27, 1969.*

“I have signed the certificate and sent it to New York for counter signature of the president, entitling you as Bhakti-sastri. The certificate was finally made a little hastily, so the printing is not to my full satisfaction. I have asked Aravinda to make a nicer copy, and if you like, we can give you this nicer copy later on. You remark that in New Vrindaban the capacity is lacking for taking care of the children. If you can organize a higher level school of theology under your care, I shall very much appreciate it. In Los Angeles, although the place is nice, it is already almost congested. We are planning ministerial status documents through the lawyer here, and it is almost prepared. This document will be submitted to the draft board, and copies will be sent to other centers for doing the necessary arrangements. Bhakti-sastri is actually recognition, accepting a person that he knows the principles of devotional service.”

*Letter to Rupanuga,
Los Angeles,
24 July 1969*

“Regarding the higher school of theology, according to the Vedic system it is not at all difficult. The students are taught by the spiritual master, or the teacher, and the students themselves go from door to door for begging alms, and because everyone's son is in the asrama, nobody declines to give alms. So there is no financial difficulty at all; but I do not know what to do in your country. There are so many laws. We have to adjust things to the circumstances. I think as soon as our Institution becomes formal, as Tamala Krsna is doing through the lawyer, it will be easier to start a theological school.”

*Letter to Rupanuga,
8th August, 1969*

FIRST YEAR BHAKTISASTRI EXAMINATION

September 4th, 1969

time: 9:00 AM to 12:00 Noon

Janmastami Ceremony

Answer any ten of the following questions with reference to the context of scriptures like Bhagavad-gita As It Is, Brahma Samhita and Isopanisad. The full mark for each question is 100.

1. Who is Krsna?
2. What is your relationship with Krsna?
3. What are you expected to do with your relationship to Krsna?
4. What is the aim of Krsna Consciousness?
5. What do you mean by religion?
6. Is Krsna Consciousness a type of religion or religious faith?
7. How do you distinguish between religion and faith?
8. Can religion or faith be changed from one type to another?
9. How do you distinguish between changeable and eternal religion?
10. What are the different types of religious faiths?
11. Can religion be manufactured by philosophical speculation? Who created religion first?
12. What is the greatest common engagement of religious men?
13. Do you believe that Krsna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead?
14. If you believe, how do you substantiate? If not, what is your reason?
15. What is Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan?

NB: Answer papers with some contribution to my book fund may be submitted to me. I shall personally examine the papers, and those who will pass will be sent a certificate of Bhaktisastri in due course. The minimum passing mark is 300 out of 1,000.

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami
*Letter to Bhakti Sastri Examination,
Los Angeles,
4 September 1969*

“I am pleased to note that you will be giving four classes in Los Angeles universities this year, and everyone is welcome to appear in the Bhakti-sastri examination and take the title. But one must be acquainted with Krishna philosophy at least for one year. So the students may attend class for one year as you have already arranged, and if they learn this philosophy, even if they don't become initiated students, it will be a pleasure for us. Regarding the tests you are holding there in Los Angeles, keep them there, and when I return I shall see them personally.”

*Letter to Tamala Krsna
Tittenhurst,
14 September 1969*

“You will read all these things in our book, the Nectar of Devotion, and Bhagavad-gītā also. You should read all these books and appear in the next year examination. Just like this year, so many boys have appeared. They're going to get the title Bhakti-śāstri. So utilize you life.”

*Initiation Lecture,
London,
August 22, 1971*

“This membership program is so nice that you can make members all over the world. So this temple should be subscribed by money raised all over the world and it must be very unique. The aim is to make it an international institute for taking perfect spiritual order of life; we shall give titles like Bachelor of Divinity, Master of Divinity, Doctor of Divinity. Besides that as I have already told you all several times in India, respectable gentlemen want to educate their children through the English medium. If we can organize such an institution as St. Xavier's College in Calcutta and Bombay and we can give them instruction through the English medium and raise them in a Krsna conscious culture, we shall get unlimited number of students from respectable families of India. Such institution will be very much welcome especially in Bombay and Delhi. So think over this matter how best to organize such an institution as St. Xavier's College. Our mission is solid. Our philosophy is not Utopian. Our men are being trained for exemplary character. So we shall have a unique position all over the world provided we stick to the principles, namely unflinching faith in spiritual master and Krsna, chanting not less than sixteen rounds regularly and following the regulative principles. Then our men will conquer all over the world.”

*Letter to Tamala and Gurudasa,
23rd August, 1971*

“Syamasundara has passed on your telephone message that you wish to open a Vedic college or school of higher Krsna consciousness education there at Houston. That is not very much desirable. Actually, every center should be a college, and this is our training, singing, dancing, working, temple worship, like that... Try to understand the subject matter from different varieties or approaches. For example, we know from Bhagavad-gita that Krsna says He is the taste in water. Now try to understand just how Krsna is that taste in water, that is the high-class education.”

*Letter to Hridayananda,
9th July, 1972*

“When mentioning your qualifications, you can also mention that you are a Bhakti-sastri from ISKCON”

*Letter to Svarupa,
Mauritius
24 October 1975*

“Your idea for the scholastic institution as discussed with you and Siddhasvarupa Maharaja is a very good idea. Now we have got so many books—almost 50 books of 400 pages—so this institution can be affiliated with some nearby university. Then the students will get their degrees of Bachelors and Post Graduates Ph.D.. We have enough matter to qualify a person in academic career. At least we can offer the degree of DD—Doctor of Divinity by affiliating ourselves with some neighboring recognized university.”

*Letter to Tusta Krsna Swami,
9th November, 1975*

“The Nectar of Instruction has come out very nice. It is very important and must be immediately read by all devotees. In the near future we shall introduce the Bhakti-sastri examination for second initiation and this shall be one of the required books of study. Anyone who reads it will immediately understand what Krishna Consciousness is.”

*Letter to Radhavallabha
Nellore
5 January 1976*

“Shortly we shall be introducing the system of examinations for those students who are ready for second initiation as well as *sannyasa*. According to the degree, devotees will be expected to read and assimilate our different books.”

*Letter to Satsvarupa
Nellore
5 January 1976*

“**Prabhupāda:** Whatever books we have got, it should be studied. Bhakti-śāstrī means Nectar of Devotion, Bhagavad-gītā, Nectar of Instruction, Beyond Death—in this way we select some ten books. That is bhakti-śāstrī.

Acyutānanda: So when will that...

Prabhupāda: Then we come to Bhāgavata, then we come to Caitanya-caritāmṛta, in this way. So from next year, unless one passes bhakti-śāstrī, he cannot be second initiated. First initiation is open for everyone. ‘Come on. Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.’ That will purify him. Then let him understand what is bhakti.”

*Morning Walk
Nellore
January 6, 1976,*

To All Governing Body Commissioners

Re: Examinations for awarding titles of Bhakti-sastri, Bhakti-vaibhava, Bhaktivedanta and Bhakti-sarvabhauma. Your response is requested immediately by Srila Prabhupada.

Dear Prabhus,

Please accept my most humble obeisances. Srila Prabhupada has requested me to write you in regard to the above examinations which he wishes to institute. Here in India many persons often criticize our *sannyasis* and *brahmanas* as being unqualified due to insufficient knowledge of the scriptures. Factually, there are numerous instances when our *sannyasis* and *brahmanas* have fallen down often due to insufficient understanding of the philosophy. This should not be a point of criticism nor a reason for falldown, since Srila Prabhupada has mercifully made the most essential scriptures available to us in his books. The problem is that not all the devotees are carefully studying the books, the result being a fall down or at least unsteadiness.

His Divine Grace therefore wishes to institute examinations to be given to all prospective candidates for *sannyasa* and *brahmana* initiation. In addition he wishes that all present *sannyasis* and *brahmanas* also pass the examination. Awarding of these titles will be based upon the following books:

Bhakti-sastri - Bhagavad-gita, Nectar of Devotion, Nectar of Instruction, Isopanisad, Easy Journey To Other Planets, and all other small paperbacks, as well as Arcana-paddhati (a book to be compiled by Nitai Prabhu based on Hari-bhakti-vilasa on Deity worship);

Bhakti-vaibhava - All of the above plus the first six cantos of Srimad-Bhagavatam;

Bhaktivedanta - All of the above plus cantos 7 through 12 of Srimad-Bhagavatam;

Bhakti-sarvabhauma - All the above plus the entire Caitanya-caritamṛta;

Anyone wishing to be initiated as a *brahmana* will have to pass the Bhakti-sastri exam and anyone wishing to take *sannyasa* will have to pass the Bhaktivaibhava examination as well. This will prevent our Society from degrading to the level of so many other institutions where, in order to maintain the Temple, they accept all third class men as *brahmanas*. Any *sannyasis* or *brahmanas* already initiated who fail to pass the exams will be considered low class or less qualified. Anyone wishing to be 2nd initiated will sit for examination once a year at Mayapur. Answers will be in essay form and authoritative quotations will be given a bigger score. During the exams books may not be consulted.

Srila Prabhupada wishes to begin this program at this year's Mayapur meeting. He requests that you all send your opinions and comments here immediately so that everything may be prepared in time.

Hoping this meets you in the best of health and Krsna Consciousness.

Approved:
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

Your servant,
Tamala Krsna Goswami
Personal Secretary

*Letter to All Governing Body Commissioners,
January 06, 1976*

“Also you must see that the *brahmanas* are given sufficient time to read the books. Soon we shall be introducing the Bhakti-sastri examination which all *brahmanas* will be expected to pass. It will be based on Bhagavad-gita, N. O. D., Nectar of Instruction, Isopanisad, and the small paperback books like Easy Journey. A *brahmana* should be *pandita*.”

*Letter to Brisakapi,
Nellore,
7 January, 1976*

“We have got so many books now and I want all of my disciples to read them carefully. Soon we shall be instituting Bhakti-sastri examinations and all *brahmanas* will have to pass. So utilize whatever time you find to make a thorough study of my books. Then all your questions will be answered.”

*Letter to Upendra,
Nellore,
7 January, 1976*

“Now beginning from this year's Mayapur festival the devotees will begin preparing for Bhakti-sastri examination. Therefore we require a guidebook for Deity worship, Arcana-paddhati, based on Hari-bhakti-Vilasa. All *brahmanas* will be responsible to learn this book. I would like to have the manuscript ready as soon as possible, preferably my Gaura Purnima. If they pass the examination they will be awarded Bhakti-sastri certificate.”

*Letter to Nitai,
Bombay,
9 January, 1976*

“Bhakti-sastri, Bhakti-vaibhava, Bhaktivedanta, and Bhakti-sarvabhauma. All our *brahmanas* and anyone wanting to become *brahmana*, will have to sit for examination once a year at Mayapur. They will be expected to know Bhagavad-gita, Nectar of Devotion, Nectar of Instruction, Sri Isopanisad, a book soon to be published on Deity worship, as well as all the small paperbacks. If they pass the examination they will be awarded Bhakti-sastri certificate. *Sannyasis* will be asked to sit for Bhakti-vaibhava examination which will include the first six cantos of Bhagavatam. In our Vedic Universities we will not encourage anyone to be merely a bookworm. There must be life — rising early in the morning, attending mangala arati, taking prasadam, etc.”

*Letter to Tusta Krsna,
Bombay,
9th January, 1976*

“I have also suggested for the GBC's consideration, that we introduce a system of examinations for the devotees to take. 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 molded his life — chanting, attending arati, etc., these are essential. Still, *brahmana* means *pandita*. Therefore I am suggesting the following examinations: Bhakti-sastri: (for all *brahmanas*) based on Bhagavad-gita, Sri Isopanisad, The Nectar of Devotion, Nectar of Instruction, and all the small paperbacks. Bhakti-vaibhava: the above plus first six Cantos of Srimad-Bhagavatam. Bhakti-vedanta: the above plus cantos 7-12 Srimad-Bhagavatam. Bhakti-sarvabhauma: the above plus Caitanya-caritamrta. These titles can correspond to entrance, BA, MA, Ph.D. So just consider how to organize this Institute. At Mayapur we shall finalize everything.”

*Letter to Svarupa Damodara,
10th January, 1976*

“The *brahmins* must practice cleanliness, internally by chanting the Lord's glories and externally by bathing regularly. In addition the *brahmanas* should study carefully, especially Gita, Isopanisad, Nectar of Devotion and Nectar of Instruction as well as all the small paperbacks. Soon we will have yearly examinations for *brahmanas* based on these books and those who pass will be awarded Bhakti-sastri titles. *Brahmana* means *pandita*. Therefore I am suggesting examinations. Bhakti-sastri—for all *brahmanas*) based on Bhagavad-gita, Sri Isopanisad, Nectar of Devotion, Nectar of Instruction, and all the small paper backs.”

*Letter to Locanananda,
Bombay,
10 January, 1976*

“In addition they should regularly study Bhagavad-gita, Nectar of Devotion, Nectar of Instruction, Isopanisad and all the paperbacks because soon we shall be holding examinations based on these books for the *brahmanas*. Those who pass will be given the title Bhakti-sastri.”

*Letter to Bahudak,
Bombay,
11 January, 1976*

“*Brahmin* also means *pandita*, so they must be able to support their preaching by quoting *sastric* references. Particularly, they should study Bhagavad-gita, Sri Isopanisad, Nectar of Devotion and Nectar of Instruction as well as all the small paperbacks. There will be a yearly examination for all *brahmins* based upon these books.”

*Letter to Yasomatinandana,
Mayapur,
18th January, 1976*

“All of the leaders should study my books very carefully, since now everyone will have to appear for the examination.”

*Letter to Jayatirtha,
Mayapur,
22nd January, 1976*

“In the tentative course outlines some additions are as follows: In the philosophy section there should be a class dealing with all the Vaisnava philosophies (the four *sampradayas*). Music class can be based on the Sama-Veda. In the Political Science class Maharaja Prthu's life may also be studied. There should also be a discussion with the GBC regarding what titles should be awarded to students who pass.”

Letter to Svarupa Damodara,

29th January, 1976

“Regarding the examinations, the idea is that anyone, after studying the books, who wants to gain the title of Bhakti-sastri, can take the exam. This is academic. Just like a *brahmana* with *sastric* knowledge and *brahmana* without. It is optional—one who wants may take. The real purpose is that our men should not be neglectful of the philosophy. The examinations will begin on Gaura Purnima, 1977, not this year, so there is no reason why any of the devotees should give up their normal engagement.”

*Letter to Satsvarupa dasa Goswami,
3rd February, 1976*

“Regarding publishing books, these books can be published by you and men in your rank. Ordinary man cannot write such books. So therefore if a book is written by one man with 'Bhakti-vedanta' or 'Bhakti-sarvabhauma' and it is of high quality then it may be considered by me for publishing.”

*Letter to Svarupa Damodara,
11th February, 1976*

“It will be held first next year. The examination is meant for the intelligent class, not all. Neither it is compulsory. So to pass the examination means one must have knowledge. There are higher intelligent class of disciples, otherwise it is not compulsory. So how to organize it, how to do it, you GBC can decide. I have given the idea, now how to do it is up to the GBC.”

*Letter to Rupanuga dasa,
21st February, 1976*

