

ISKCON CONSTITUTION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

General, about the whole document; Specific to each Article; Specific to each Appendix.

GENERAL

1. Why does ISKCON even need a Constitution when we already have Śrīla Prabhupāda's books?

Srila Prabhupada books remain the basis of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. The Constitution serves a different purpose: to provide a **practical framework** for how ISKCON as an institution should operate in service to those teachings. It ensures that our organizational structure remains **aligned with his vision** and can endure across time, leadership changes, and cultural shifts—while always remaining rooted in his instructions.

Srila Prabhupada's book are **not structured as a legal or institutional framework** for governance or organizational continuity. While his teachings form the philosophical and spiritual basis of the Constitution, the Constitution itself serves a **complementary purpose**: to provide a **clear, practical, and legally coherent document** that helps in creating consistent legislation, guiding leadership, and preserving Śrīla Prabhupāda's vision in a **systematic and enduring format**.

Having a formal Constitution provides several advantages and fulfills multiple needs:

- a. **Cohesive Regulation**: the Constitution provides a unified framework to govern ISKCON's diverse membership and activities, ensuring consistent application of rules.
- b. **Defined Rights and Duties**: It clarifies the rights, obligations, and authority of ISKCON constituents while defining the principles on which its laws are based.
- c. **Clarity in Governance**: It outlines ISKCON's tenets and governance principles, offering members and the public clear direction.

- d. **Stability and Integrity:** The Constitution creates a foundation for governance that is resistant to frequent changes, protecting ISKCON's integrity.
- e. **Fostering Unity:** It safeguards the unity of the movement by clearly defining roles, responsibilities, and boundaries, enabling decisions to be accepted in good faith.
- f. **Alignment with Tradition:** By quoting extensively from *śāstra* and Srila Prabhupada, the Constitution reinforces ISKCON's theological roots and his central role in the movement.
- g. **Protecting GBC's Mandate:** It ensures the GBC operates within the powers Srila Prabhupada intended by embedding his will in ISKCON's overarching law.
- h. **Addressing Gaps:** The Constitution fills gaps in current ISKCON laws, providing a robust foundation for future governance.
- i. **Guidance on Key Issues:** Appendices can address critical matters such as ritvikism, *varṇāśrama*, and child protection, aligning ISKCON with Srila Prabhupada's guidance.
- j. **Legal Efficiency:** A documented governance system can save time and resources in court proceedings by providing a legal framework.

2. Why does ISKCON even need a Constitution when we already have ISKCON Law?

The Constitution provides a **foundational framework**—a clear statement of ISKCON's identity, purpose, core values, and guiding principles—while ISKCON Law deals with operational rules and policies. The Constitution anchors the spirit behind the laws.

3. Did Śrīla Prabhupāda want ISKCON to have a Constitution?

Yes. Śrīla Prabhupāda explicitly mentioned the need for a **written constitution** that defines ISKCON's purpose and safeguards its spiritual integrity for future generations. He wrote in a letter to Giriraja on 12 Aug 1971: "We are in the experimental stage but in the next meeting of the GBC members they should form a constitution how the GBC members manage the whole affair."

4. What was the process followed to compile and ratify this Constitution?

The process began in 2006 and was significantly revitalized in 2017 with a dedicated team that built upon earlier work and GBC feedback. Since 2017, five drafts were developed, each shaped by input from GBC members, Deputies, SABHA members, and others. Draft Four was open to feedback from the broader, global ISKCON community, which was incorporated in Draft Five. Weekly Zoom meetings by the ISKCON Constitution Project team ensured steady progress. The GBC ratified the Constitution on 16th April 2025, marking the successful culmination of over 18 years of collaborative effort.

5. Is the Constitution considered as sacred as Śrīla Prabhupāda's original writings?

No. The Constitution is a **guiding institutional document** meant to serve the mission and protect fidelity to Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings.

6. Why is the Constitution called a "living document"? How easily can it be amended?

It's called "living" because it can be amended to **adapt to changing contexts** while staying faithful to core principles. **Amendments require a higher threshold of scrutiny and GBC approval** (see Article 14).

7. How to ensure that amendments won't deviate from Śrīla Prabhupāda's original vision for ISKCON?

We hope and pray that all future leaders entrusted with this responsibility will approach any proposed amendment with **deep humility, reverence, rigorous research and careful reflection**. The process is designed to encourage thoughtful dialogue, consultation with śāstra, and sincere alignment with Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings. While no system is perfect, it is our aspiration that amendments will arise not from convenience or pressure, but from a **genuine desire to preserve and serve Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission with integrity and devotion**.

8. Why so many philosophical quotes throughout the Constitution?

The numerous philosophical quotes are intentional and essential—they reflect the **immense richness of our Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition** and **ground the document in**

śāstra and Śrīla Prabhupāda’s teachings. These references remind us that ISKCON is not simply a legal or organizational entity, but a **spiritual movement grounded in transcendental knowledge.** The quotes are not ornamental—they are **foundational,** reinforcing that our identity and direction must always remain rooted in our tradition. They remind us of our purpose as a Society: to serve Krishna, develop love for Him, and spread pure devotional service.

9. What are the various “voices” of the ISKCON Constitution?

The ISKCON Constitution speaks in **multiple distinct yet harmonized voices,** each serving a specific purpose in guiding the movement’s identity and trajectory. These “voices” could also be understood as **modalities, tones, or dimensions** of expression.

- a. **Scriptural & Spiritual Authority Voice:**
Rooted in śāstra and Srīla Prabhupāda’s teachings, this voice anchors the Constitution in **eternal truths and Vedic authority.** It ensures alignment with Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava siddhānta and conceptual authenticity.
- b. **Inspirational & Aspirational Voice:**
This voice expresses a vision of ISKCON as an effective **global spiritual society,** while also encouraging each devotee to **grow in character, devotion, and realization.** It reflects Srīla Prabhupāda’s empowering call for **personal transformation,** urging members to rise to their highest potential in Krishna consciousness. This voice sets **ideals to strive toward,** noble goals such as Daiva Varṇāśrama. It acknowledges that while we may not have fully realized these goals, they remain **non-negotiable guiding stars.**
- c. **Legal & Structural Voice:**
This provides the **institutional framework,** the **organizational backbone** — outlining roles, responsibilities, rights, and processes. It offers the movement stability and continuity, ensuring **accountability, order, and governance.** It brings **clarity, order, and consistency,** supporting the practical functioning of a global movement, in a language recognizable and enforceable by courts of law.
- d. **Unifying Voice:**
Promoting **“unity in diversity,”** this voice fosters harmony across cultures, languages, and service areas — ensuring diversity enriches rather than divides.

Together, these voices make the Constitution **more than a legal text** — it becomes a **spiritual charter**, an **ethical compass**, and a **living expression** of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s legacy.

SPECIFIC TO EACH ARTICLE

Preamble

10. What’s the function of the Preamble?

The Preamble sets the **spiritual vision** and **legal foundation** of the Constitution. It declares ISKCON’s divine purpose, aligning its structure with Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mission. While not legally enforceable, it serves as an interpretive guide for all articles.

Article 1: Citation

11. What’s the need for this Article, for a “Citation”?

Citation legally anchors the Constitution as the **official governing document** and it ensures formal recognition.

Article 2: Definitions and Interpretations

12. Why is "ISKCON devotee" defined broadly (2.1.7)? Shouldn't stricter criteria be set?

The Constitution defines “ISKCON devotee” broadly to establish a **stable, inclusive legal identity** that applies across time and place. A broad definition maintains **spiritual inclusivity**, reflecting ISKCON’s mission to encourage all souls; it also supports gradual participation at different commitment levels. While individuals may vary in their personal standards or level of practice at different stages in life, the definition in the Constitution must remain **clear and consistent** to ensure unity, legal clarity, and fairness

in institutional matters. This approach honors both the **dynamic nature of personal growth** and the need for a **fixed reference point** in governance.

13. Why is "ISKCON Law" separate from the Constitution (2.1.4)? Isn't that confusing?

The Constitution provides the **framework**, while ISKCON Law fills in the **specifics**. This distinction ensures adaptability without compromising foundational principles.

14. How was it decided which quotes would be used in which places?

Given the **oceanic quantity of quotable statements** from Śrīla Prabhupāda, some degree of **subjectivity was inevitable** in the selection process. Quotes were chosen for their **relevance, clarity, and thematic alignment** with each section of the Constitution. However, to avoid the impression of exclusivity, the document itself explicitly states: “Quotations selected among similar ones should be taken as representative of the principle, not as Śrīla Prabhupāda’s exclusive statement on a particular topic.” (2.2.2) This ensures that the selected quotes are understood as **illustrative samples**, not the only authoritative references on each subject.

15. (2.3.1) Why does the English version have supremacy over translated versions?

Legally, designating the English version as supreme ensures a **single authoritative text** for resolving disputes or ambiguities, especially since ISKCON’s foundational documents and Śrīla Prabhupāda’s teachings were primarily composed in English. This avoids misinterpretation due to **translation errors or cultural nuances**, maintaining fidelity to the original intent. **Uniformity and precision** in legal matters require a standard reference.

Article 3: Scope and Jurisdiction

16. (3.1.1) What happens if there is conflict between local laws and ISKCON Constitution?

In situations of conflict, **local legal jurisdiction takes precedence**, as ISKCON seeks to function lawfully within each country. The Constitution operates within the framework of civil law, and ISKCON encourages compliance with local regulations wherever possible. At the same time, the spiritual principles outlined in the Constitution serve as a **guiding ideal**, and ISKCON aims to harmonize them with local laws in a respectful and practical manner.

17. Isn't it contradictory to say ISKCON Organizations are "self-governing" but under the Constitution (3.1.2)?

Not contradictory—like states in a federal system, local units have autonomy **within the spiritual and institutional framework** of the Constitution. “Self-governing” refers to an organization’s ability to manage its **day-to-day affairs independently**, but being part of ISKCON also means **agreeing to align with certain global spiritual and organizational standards** set forth in the Constitution. This balance allows for **local autonomy within a shared international framework**, ensuring unity in mission and values while respecting regional diversity and needs.

Article 4: Theological Elements of Krishna Consciousness

18. (4.1) Why distill complex philosophy into 10 points? Is there a risk of oversimplification?

These ten points ensure **uniformity of core beliefs**. While simplification has limits, it offers a clear foundation for unity in practice and doctrine without replacing deeper scriptural study. These ten points result from an extended, in depth discussion by the GBC.

19. (4.5) Why emphasize "Vedic knowledge"?

"Vedic knowledge" forms the **philosophical backbone** of ISKCON’s teachings and practices. In the Gaudiya-Vaiṣṇava tradition, this refers not only to the original Vedas but also to texts that are in **pursuance of Vedic conclusions**—such as the *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, and writings of previous ācāryas. Emphasizing Vedic knowledge

establishes a **clear epistemological standard**, safeguarding ISKCON’s teachings from dilution and ensuring that its theology remains anchored in **authoritative sources**. Legally, it also clarifies the scriptural basis for ISKCON’s identity and mission.

Article 5: Founder-Ācārya

20. (5.4) Why does the Constitution stress Śrīla Prabhupāda as the “foundational instructing spiritual master”? Does this limit current gurus?

This designation honors Śrīla Prabhupāda’s unique role as the **visionary founder, primary teacher, and system-builder** of ISKCON. It provides a **unifying anchor** for future generations, ensuring that the society remains rooted in his teachings, mood, and mission. Rather than limiting current gurus, it offers them a **shared foundation**—a spiritual compass by which their guidance aligns with the original intent of the movement.

21. (5.6) Why explicitly make the title “Founder-Ācārya” exclusive?

The exclusivity of this title honors Śrīla Prabhupāda’s **unique spiritual and historical role** in establishing ISKCON’s global mission and structure. Spiritually, it affirms that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s role was not just that of a teacher or guru, but of the **visionary who established the global structure, articulated its purpose, and set its theological and cultural direction**. Legally, it prevents reinterpretation or appropriation of Prabhupāda’s unique spiritual and organizational position, preventing **confusion or competing claims** of foundational authority. It also aims at ensuring that ISKCON’s identity remains **firmly rooted in his unique contributions**, while allowing future leaders to serve within that legacy—not redefine it. They can guide and inspire, but always in **continuity with the framework he created**.

Article 6: The Seven Purposes of ISKCON

22. Where did the Seven Purposes of ISKCON come from?

The **Seven Purposes of ISKCON** come from the **original incorporation document** of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, filed on July 13, 1966, in New York. Śrīla Prabhupāda himself **articulated these purposes and approved the wording**.

The Seven Purposes represent a **condensation of ideas** Śrīla Prabhupāda had already delineated in earlier institutional attempts, such as the **League of Devotees**, established in Jhansi, India, in 1953. Carrying forward those ideas, in early 1966, Śrīla Prabhupāda prepared the draft “**Constitution of Association**” for his planned society in New York, listing objectives nearly identical to the League’s original prospectus. That draft was never legally registered. Finally, for the legal incorporation of ISKCON in New York, Śrīla Prabhupāda selected **seven representative purposes** from these earlier visions.

Article 7: ISKCON Deities

23. (7.1.3) Why make Deities the legal property of ISKCON Organizations? Shouldn't Deities be treated independently of legal ownership?

While the Deity is **transcendental**, manifesting to accept service from devotees, the Lord resides in a **visible, tangible form**—made of wood, metal, stone, etc. This sacred form, though worshipped with deep reverence, is still subject to **earthly risks**: theft, neglect, illegitimate claim, unauthorized relocation, or disputes. Legally assigning the Deity's form to an ISKCON Organization ensures **continuity of worship, proper care, and protection** from personal or factional claims. It establishes custodianship, not ownership in a proprietary or philosophical sense.

24. (7.3.2) Why such strict restrictions on Deity paraphernalia ownership? Could this cause practical difficulties at smaller temples?

Strict rules prevent **misuse or commercialization**. While smaller temples may face challenges, the goal is to preserve **sacredness over convenience**, with exceptions possible through proper channels.

Article 8: ISKCON Membership

25. (8.1.1) Isn't the Affirmation Statement too general? Shouldn't chanting 16 rounds daily be mandatory?

The Affirmation Statement is intentionally broad to maintain **inclusivity** and accommodate devotees at various stages of spiritual life. Personal practices—such as chanting 16 rounds—may **fluctuate due to health, circumstances, initiation status, or personal struggle**, but that should not disqualify one from belonging to the community. A legal definition of membership requires **clarity and stability**, not constant adjustment based on individual performance. The present Affirmation Statement is a development from the one contained in the 2014 GBC resolution no. 320, entitled “General Membership.”

26. (8.2.1.2) Why only "encourage" following the four regulative principles instead of making it obligatory?

The Constitution uses the word “encourage” to reflect a **compassionate and realistic approach** to spiritual development. While the four regulative principles are central to ISKCON’s ethos, individuals may **struggle or progress at different paces**. Making them legally obligatory for all members could lead to exclusion or concealment, undermining sincerity and growth. By **encouraging** rather than mandating, the Constitution invites commitment while recognizing human fallibility. It allows space for **honest effort and personal transformation**, ensuring that membership remains **accessible yet aligned** with ISKCON’s core values. Encouragement fosters inspiration rather than fear-based compliance, which may stimulate hypocrisy and pretense.

27. (8.4.1.9) What if a devotee sincerely struggles but fails to maintain vows — are they still members?

Yes, sincere struggle does not disqualify a devotee from membership. ISKCON recognizes that **spiritual life unfolds over time**, often through ups and downs. A devotee who falls short in practice but remains **humble, honest, and committed to improvement** continues to be valued as part of the community. The Constitution emphasizes **perseverant aspiration over performance**, allowing for support rather than rejection. However, for certain **formal roles and responsibilities**, strict adherence to

vows is required, as certain positions and services demand exemplary conduct and spiritual steadiness.

28. (8.5) Why not have more defined rights for women members?

While perhaps the Constitution could benefit from a clearer articulation of women's rights, **women in ISKCON have access to nearly all forms of devotional service**. Apart from sannyāsa, which is traditionally reserved for men, **there is no philosophical barrier** preventing women from fully engaging in the mission of Śrīla Prabhupāda as teachers, counselors, pujaris, kīrtana leaders, writers, managers, temple presidents, national and international board members, GBC members, initiating spiritual masters, etc.

Article 9: The Governing Body Commission (GBC)

29. Why is so much emphasis placed on the GBC role?

In his **Last Will and Testament**, Śrīla Prabhupāda established the GBC as the **ultimate managing authority** of ISKCON. The GBC's function is to ensure ISKCON remains unified in its core teachings, mission, and structure, safeguarding doctrinal purity and organizational coherence across a diverse, global movement. The positioning of the governing at the helm of ISKCON affirms Śrīla Prabhupāda vision of **collective leadership over individual charisma**. Emphasizing its role helps maintain **central accountability**, and prevent fragmentation.

30. (9.2.1.13) Does the GBC claim infallibility?

No, the GBC does not claim infallibility. Its authority is **functional, not absolute**. Its decisions are to be made in line with **guru, śāstra, and sadhus**.

31. What are the checks and balances on GBC authority?

The GBC is bound by **the ISKCON Constitution itself**; coupled with their personal and collective loyalty and fidelity to Srila Prabhupada. In addition to **scriptural accountability** and **internal peer review**, the Constitution envisions broader oversight through **representative bodies**—as outlined in **Article 10**, consultative assemblies

composed of ISKCON members. These bodies are intended to **reflect the will of the community**, providing feedback, advice, and, potentially, corrective input. In principle, feedback from senior devotees, other ISKCON members, and ISKCON Organizations can also act as potential safeguards.

32. (9.3.1.7) Isn't it risky giving the GBC the power to declare members "unfit"?

While this authority carries risk, it is a **necessary function** in any organized religious society. Like all communities with shared beliefs and practices, ISKCON must protect its **core values, spiritual standards, and institutional integrity**. This sometimes requires formally addressing behavior that threatens the mission—such as abuse, doctrinal deviation, or misconduct—by **suspending or removing individuals** whose actions are seriously harmful. Sociologically, all durable religious movements establish mechanisms to **maintain internal coherence**, especially when entrusted with spiritual leadership and public trust. The provision must follow **due process** and is meant to **preserve integrity**, not suppress dissent, and must be applied judiciously and transparently.

33. (9.4.1) Why does tenure seem lifelong? Shouldn't there be a term limit for GBC members?

Śrīla Prabhupāda clearly stated that GBC members are to serve “**for good,**” (as cited in 9.4.3.a) meaning for life, unless disqualified. He envisioned the GBC service as a potentially **lifelong responsibility**. However, lifelong tenure does not imply **unchecked authority**—it carries the expectation of **ongoing spiritual accountability and practical functionality**. The potentially lifelong tenure doesn't preclude **evaluation or change**. Regular assessments of a member's relevance, health, and capacity could maintain effectiveness and avoid stagnation—**honoring long-term dedication without neglecting institutional responsibility**.

34. (9.4.3) How does the GBC practically assess the "physical, mental, and spiritual capacity" of its members?

So far, such assessments have been largely **informal, case-by-case, and internal**, relying on peer observation and self-reporting. As the Constitution mandates a “periodic or

individual appraisals of its members to determine their continued qualification and/or to help improve their service” (9.4.5), we anticipate, going forward, a more **structured and criteria-based process**.

Article 10: Representation of ISKCON Membership

35. Why doesn't the Constitution specify how these representative bodies are chosen?

The intention is to leave flexibility for future elaboration by the GBC without locking it into rigid formats. This avoids prematurely creating **impractical models** and allows adaptation based on context, maturity, and organizational growth.

Article 11: ISKCON Organizations

36. (11.1.3.4) Why must all property be legally dedicated to ISKCON? Could this discourage new projects?

This clause ensures that **assets serve the collective mission**, protecting them from private appropriation or legal disputes. While it may seem restrictive, it **preserves the ownership by the Society** and continuity beyond individual life spans. New projects can still thrive—provided they align with ISKCON's shared vision and accept protection under this umbrella.

37. (11.2.2) Why can't local temples mortgage land if urgently needed?

Mortgaging temple property carries significant risks to **sacred assets and public trust**. The restriction reflects a **conservative approach to protecting Deity property** from financial jeopardy. In urgent situations, the GBC or a designated body can approve carefully reviewed exceptions, ensuring that **devotional integrity and financial responsibility** go hand-in-hand.

38. (11.3.3.1.7) What does "individual, spontaneous, and voluntary service" mean in today's structured environment?

This phrase emphasizes that **bhakti must remain personal, alive, and joyful**, even within institutional frameworks. It reminds leaders to **inspire, not coerce**; that creativity, initiative, and devotion cannot be micromanaged. In practice, it safeguards the **personalism at the heart of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism**, encouraging every devotee to serve according to capacity and realization.

Article 12: Discipline and Dispute Resolution

39. Why is “fair process” important?

Fair process is a **foundational principle** in any legal or organizational disciplinary system, ensuring that decisions are made objectively, consistently, and without prejudice. It protects the rights of individuals by guaranteeing notice, an opportunity to respond, and an impartial hearing. In ISKCON, this promotes procedural integrity, minimizes misuse of authority, and upholds both legal defensibility and the movement’s ethical standards. A fair process strengthens institutional credibility and reduces potential conflicts, grievances, or appeals.

40. (12.3.15) Why is "preponderance of evidence" (not "beyond reasonable doubt") used for disciplinary matters?

ISKCON uses the "preponderance of evidence" standard because **its disciplinary matters are internal and administrative, not criminal**. This standard—meaning that something is more likely than not to be true—allows decisions to be made efficiently and reasonably without requiring an excessively high burden of proof while still honoring due process. It is more practical where access to trained legal professionals, such as lawyers or judges, may be limited. Using a lower evidentiary threshold enables the community to address issues fairly while maintaining order and accountability.

Article 13: Constitutional Council

41. (13.1.2) Why does the Council not function like a Supreme Court? Isn't there a need for one?

The Council serves as an **interpretive body** for the Constitution rather than a final adjudicator of disputes like a secular Supreme Court. Its role is **consultative and protective rather than judicial**. Final decision-making power remains with the GBC, in line with Srila Prabhupāda's vision of the ultimate decision-making function of the GBC. **The Council's authority is thus interpretive**—providing clarity and recommendations—rather than legally binding.

42. (13.5.5) If the Council dismisses a petition as "without merit," why is there no appeal?

Dismissing a petition as “without merit” reflects the Council's judgment that the case lacks sufficient constitutional substance to proceed. Allowing appeals in such cases would risk **overburdening the system** with frivolous or poorly grounded challenges.

The Council is composed of seasoned members entrusted with protecting the Constitution, and its gatekeeping role ensures efficiency and focus on serious matters. However, this does underscore the need for initial clarity and accountability in their dismissals. However, in theory, a concerned party could still bring the matter to the GBC's attention through other channels, especially if broader organizational or doctrinal implications are involved.

43. (13.5.9) If the GBC overrules the Council, doesn't that undermine constitutional checks?

While the GBC has the authority to overrule the Constitutional Council, this power is expected to be exercised with **great caution and responsibility**. The Council's recommendations reflect careful constitutional interpretation and dismissing them should not be taken lightly. Rather than undermining checks and balances, this provision honors the GBC's role as the ultimate managing authority while assuming that its members will uphold the spirit of the Constitution. The expectation and intention are that the GBC would overrule the Council only in rare, exceptional cases, after thorough deliberation and in alignment with Srila Prabhupāda's vision of cooperative and principled leadership.

Article 14: Amendments

44.(14.2) Why are amendments restricted to proposals by five GBC members? Shouldn't there be grassroots channels?

Requiring five GBC members to sponsor a constitutional amendment ensures that proposed changes undergo a **preliminary filter** before reaching the full body. This maintains organizational stability and **avoids impulsive or poorly developed amendments**. However, this structure doesn't preclude grassroots influence—it simply channels it through the GBC.

45.How can ISKCON members influence or propose amendments?

Though only GBC members can formally submit amendments, **any devotee can initiate the process** informally by engaging in dialogue, submitting well-reasoned proposals, or organizing community support to convince one or more GBC members. When persuaded by the value of the proposed amendments, that GBC—or those GBCs—can, in turn, help gather the additional sponsors needed to arrive at five. In this way, grassroots concerns can be translated into formal proposals, provided there is sufficient backing and alignment with ISKCON's core principles. **Thoughtful, civilized advocacy** remains a powerful tool within the system.

Article 15: Ratification

46.(15) Was the ratification process inclusive of broad devotee consultation or just top leadership?

The first three drafts were primarily discussed with ISKCON's top leadership, particularly the GBC and other devotees involved with ISKCON legislation. The fourth draft was broadly circulated, in multiple languages, requesting devotees to offer **feedback and suggestions** through the website established for that purpose. Hundreds (if not thousands) of comments were received. As a result of these consultations, and

upon incorporating inputs from the various constituencies, the ISKCON Constitution Project team produced the fifth draft, which was ratified by the GBC on 16 April 2025.

SPECIFIC TO EACH APPENDIX

Appendix A: Commitment to Preserving Disciplic Succession

47.(A.4) If Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted all disciples to become gurus, why so much restriction today?

Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged qualified disciples to become gurus, but **always emphasized spiritual principles, scriptural knowledge, and exemplary behavior** as prerequisites. Today's restrictions aim to ensure that anyone assuming such a serious role is prepared to guide others responsibly. In a growing global society like ISKCON, formal safeguards protect both aspiring gurus and disciples from misunderstanding or misuse of spiritual authority. The intention is not to limit but to preserve the integrity of guru-paramparā **in alignment with Śrīla Prabhupāda's standards.**

48.(A.6) Ritvikism is banned — but how are questions around it addressed compassionately?

ISKCON officially rejects ritvik philosophy as a **deviation** from Śrīla Prabhupāda's clear instructions on guru-paramparā succession. Those with sincere doubts are encouraged to voice them respectfully, within forums where they can receive **scriptural and historical clarification.** Compassion is especially extended to innocent devotees who may be confused or misled—**not to validate the deviation,** but to guide them back to proper understanding. At the same time, the sampradāya must remain **firm in upholding siddhānta.** Vaiṣṇavas are instructed to be kind and patient, yet uncompromising when it comes to preserving the integrity of theology, philosophy, and devotional practice. True compassion includes **helping others align with eternal truths,** not accommodating doctrinal errors.

49.(A.7) What safeguards are in place to ensure proper training of dīkṣā-gurus?

Candidates must demonstrate years of committed devotional service, scriptural study, and personal integrity, and must be endorsed by the **Local Guru Approval Committee (LGAC)**, which assesses the candidate’s character, spiritual maturity, community standing, and teaching ability. They also undergo mandatory training and are encouraged to continue developing through mentorship and feedback. Importantly, ISKCON envisions this process becoming even more robust in the future—with greater emphasis on structured preparation, ongoing education, and accountability—reflecting the seriousness of the guru’s role in transmitting the paramparā.

50. How does the Constitution protect from "zonal acarya" type of deviations recurring?

The Constitution has taken specific steps to prevent the re-emergence of “zonal ācārya” patterns by clearly defining the **role of the guru within ISKCON’s cooperative structure**. It affirms that **initiation and spiritual guidance are personal choices**, stipulating, as a right of every ISKCON member, to “Seek guidance and inspiration, as well as śikṣā and dīkṣā relationships, from qualified ISKCON devotees of their choice.” (8.5.1.2) This clause **safeguards personal spiritual autonomy**, ensuring no leader or zone can monopolize influence over discipleship. Unlike the past, where individual diksa-gurus **wielded near-absolute authority** over geographical regions. Today no diksa-guru can claim **initiation monopoly** over a zone or territory.

Appendix B – A Garland of Instructions

51. (B.3) How do we balance "mission expansion" with "inner spiritual growth"?

The Constitution emphasizes both **mission expansion** and **spiritual authenticity** as inseparable dimensions of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s vision. This balance reflects the principle that **external success without internal depth risks becoming hollow**. Śrīla Prabhupāda set the example: constantly teaching and establishing centers, yet always grounding the mission in **daily sādhana, śāstra study, and Vaiṣṇava etiquette**. The Constitution envisions communities where **leaders support both growth and care**. Proper training, nurturing environments, and spiritually qualified leadership are key to making sure that **growth outward is matched by growth inward**—keeping ISKCON strong in both substance and scale.

52. (B.4) (Open to all) — How do we maintain high spiritual standards while being inclusive?

Section B.4 stresses that “everyone is welcome” regardless of background, caste, gender, or religious affiliation. This broad inclusivity reflects Śrīla Prabhupāda’s vision of a global spiritual movement. However, **openness does not mean dilution**. Newcomers are encouraged to begin where they are, while being gently guided toward higher practice. Inclusivity is about **access and encouragement**, not compromising on essential principles like chanting, sādhana, guru-sādhū-śāstra alignment, or ethical conduct. By creating **welcoming, non-judgmental spaces** that teach **the beauty of spiritual growth**, ISKCON can nurture both newcomers and serious practitioners.

53. (B.5) Why is "Scriptural Basis" emphasized when often the interpretation can vary?

The emphasis on *scriptural basis* in ISKCON arises from Srila Prabhupāda’s **clear instruction that all teachings and practices must be rooted in śāstra**, not on sentimentality or mental speculation.

This ensures **continuity, authenticity, and alignment** with the paramparā (disciplic succession), protecting the movement from speculation or unauthorized innovations. While **interpretations may vary about details**, ISKCON maintains fidelity to the theological and sociological **principles** highlighted by its Founder-Ācārya. A strong scriptural basis helps us navigate change **without compromising core values**, much like a compass amidst varied terrain. It’s also a protective measure: in a spiritual organization with diverse voices, grounding discussions in śāstra reduces the risk of **personal opinion or charisma overtaking siddhānta** (established truth).

54. (B.7) Why so much emphasis on opening new temples — shouldn't strengthening existing ones be the priority?

Both opening new temples and strengthening existing ones are essential to Srila Prabhupāda’s vision. The emphasis on **opening new temples** reflects the **missionary spirit** of ISKCON — to make Krishna's holy names, teachings, and prasāda accessible

across the world. Each new temple serves as a **spiritual lighthouse**, bringing the movement to new towns, cities, and hearts.

However, **quantity without quality is unsustainable**. Srila Prabhupāda also emphasized "**boiling the milk**" — a metaphor for **deepening and refining** the quality of spiritual practice among existing devotees. A weak foundation in current centers can lead to burnout, mismanagement, and even disillusionment.

Ideally, **the two should go hand in hand**: expansion should be **strategic**, based on available resources and trained manpower. As per ISKCON's Constitution and guidance from GBC resolutions, there's a growing awareness that **temple development should include leadership training, financial stability, and devotee care**. So, the emphasis isn't on expansion for its own sake, but on **expansion with integrity**.

55. (B.9) (Children's Education) — Why isn't it mandatory that ISKCON children get formal Krishna conscious education?

While ISKCON places **great importance on Krishna conscious education for children**, it stops short of making it mandatory due to several practical and philosophical reasons. ISKCON is a **global movement** with members with different backgrounds, local circumstances, and degrees of commitment to bhakti-yoga. Also, at present ISKCON lacks a widespread network of educational institutes for children that could serve all communities and families worldwide. That said, the movement **strongly encourages** all parents to give their children a **Krishna-centered education**, whether through **gurukulas, homeschools, Sunday schools, or home practices**.

56. (B.11) Book distribution is stressed — but what about digital outreach? Should that be included?

Yes, **digital outreach should certainly be practiced** — not as a replacement for distribution of printed books, but as a **powerful extension** of Srila Prabhupāda's

mission. It's important to recognize that Srila Prabhupāda's emphasis on book distribution came at a time when the internet, e-books, audiobooks, podcasts, apps, and social media didn't exist. His focus was on mass dissemination of transcendental knowledge using the best tools available in his era — the printed word. In that same spirit, today's devotees are called to use whatever tools are available to reach people.

57. (B.13) How do we practically implement "Simple Living, High Thinking," especially in urban life?

In urban life, *simple living* means reducing consumption, avoiding debt, eating only prasāda, limiting digital distractions, and minimizing our harm on the environment. *High thinking* involves regular sādhanā, studying Srila Prabhupada books, spiritual association, meaningful service, and staying focused on devotional goals.

Rural life supports simplicity through natural surroundings, fewer distractions, self-sufficiency, and stronger community bonds. The key is to adapt the principle according to one's context, not abandon it.

Appendix C – Unity in Diversity

58. (C.1) How do we avoid "disunity" while allowing diversity?

We avoid disunity by anchoring diversity in a shared commitment to Srila Prabhupāda's teachings and the authority of śāstra. Diversity is welcome in expressions of culture, outreach strategies, and leadership styles, but only when it serves the mission. **Unity doesn't require uniformity** — it requires **alignment in purpose**, even if the methods differ. Diversity should **support**, not dilute, our common goal.

59. (C.1.2) What if diversity starts conflicting with core Gaudiya Vaisnava principles?

Diversity must always remain **within the boundaries of Gaudiya siddhānta**. If practices or ideologies begin to deviate from śāstra or Srila Prabhupāda's standards, **correction is required** through dialogue, education, or if needed, GBC guidance. True unity

means **flexibility in form but firmness in philosophy**. When diversity becomes a cover for deviation, it's no longer healthy pluralism but a drift from spiritual authenticity.

60.(C.1.5) How will diversity in leadership styles be accommodated without compromising philosophy?

Leadership styles can differ — some leaders are more relational, others more administrative — and ISKCON benefits from such diversity. What's essential is that **all leadership aligns with Krishna conscious values**, remains **transparent, humble, service-oriented, and people-centered**, and upholds Prabhupāda's teachings. Personal style should **never override spiritual substance**, preserving unity in objectives, inner values, God consciousness—within a variety of approaches. Difference of *emphasis* doesn't necessarily means difference of *essence*.

Appendix D – God-Centered Society and Daiva Varṇāśrama-dharma

80.(D.1) How practical is daiva-varṇāśrama in today's multicultural societies?

The occupational divisions of varṇāśrama — intellectuals, administrators, merchants, and workers — **already naturally exist in every society**. Daiva-varṇāśrama is **not about artificial labels** but about organizing society around **natural tendencies (guṇa) and work (karma)** in harmony with spiritual advancement. Daiva-varṇāśrama doesn't impose something new; it **centers one's social roles and stages of life on Krishna and spiritual progress**. “daiva” means aligning one's natural inclinations and stages of life with devotional principles.

81. (D.2) Why not define more detailed steps toward establishing Daiva Varṇāśrama?

The purpose of the Constitution is to **establish foundational principles**, not to prescribe a fixed, step-by-step plan. Daiva-varṇāśrama must be implemented with sensitivity to **time, place, and circumstances**. Over-specifying details prematurely could lead to rigidity or impractical models. As communities mature and realization deepens, **context-specific strategies** will naturally develop, guided by the Constitution's core vision of aligning society with **Krishna-centered living and devotional progress**.

82. (D.4) How will ISKCON avoid caste-like discrimination in implementing varṇāśrama?

ISKCON emphasizes **daiva-varṇāśrama**, which is based not on birth but on **qualities (guṇa) and work (karma)** — as taught by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad-gītā (4.13). The aim is to **help individuals engage according to their nature in Krishna's service**, not to label or limit them. The Constitution safeguards this by rejecting hereditary privilege and promoting **spiritual equality**, where **everyone is a servant of Krishna and each other**, regardless of social role.

Appendix E – Protecting Children

83. (E.2) (Declaration) — How is the protection of children being enforced practically today?

ISKCON now enforces child protection through the **ISKCON Child Protection Office (CPO)**, which has **global, regional, and local branches**. Policies include **background checks, mandatory training, reporting mechanisms, and independent adjudications**.

84. Why doesn't the Constitution directly mention measures against past abuses?

The Constitution's role is to **set forward-looking principles** and establish a framework for governance. Its focus on **guiding values**. Addressing **past abuses**, while essential, is handled through **dedicated policies, legal processes, and the work of the ISKCON Child Protection Office (CPO)**. Including detailed historical measures in a constitutional document wouldn't be viable or desirable; however the Constitution does affirm principles such as that “children should be protected, nurtured, and guided. They should be provided an environment free from exploitation and abuse.” (E.2.2) “The protection of children is paramount in ISKCON. ISKCON is therefore committed to making every reasonable effort to protect its children and to prevent their abuse.” (E.2.3) “ISKCON shall endeavor to prevent abuse and harassment to the fullest extent possible, to provide preventative education and guidance and to promote healing as needed.” (E.2.4)

85. How will ISKCON rebuild trust among parents?

Rebuilding trust requires **consistent action, not just policy**. This includes **strict enforcement of child protection standards, transparent communication, and genuine remorse for past failures**. Empowering parents to participate in safety protocols, providing education on rights and reporting, and ensuring **swift, impartial responses to complaints** are crucial steps. Most importantly, creating **devotee communities where children are respected and nurtured** will naturally restore confidence over time.

Appendix F – ISKCON-Related Entities

86. (F.2) Why are BBT and ISKCON legally separated?

The legal separation between the **Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT)** and ISKCON was **personally established by Srila Prabhupāda** to safeguard his books and ensure their uninterrupted publication and distribution, not vulnerable to internal disputes or external legal issues affecting ISKCON. Nonetheless, they are also strongly linked legally as, according to the May 1972 trust deed, the BBT “is created and shall be operated exclusively for the benefit” of ISKCON.

87. (F.4) What is the Bhaktivedanta Swami Charity Trust exactly funding?

The BVSCCT’s objectives are: “To rediscover and restore the holy places in Bengal connected with the pastimes of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu ... ” and “To unite the followers of Lord Caitanya, especially those descended from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Goswami Prabhupāda.” The Trust also plans, among other things, to build a digital database, to produce multilingual plaques, and to publish a book on the various holy places: <https://bhaktivedantaswamicharitytrust.com/>

Appendix G – ISKCON and Other Religious Traditions

88. (G.1) Isn’t this Appendix too... soft toward religious groups that practice voidism and impersonalism?

This Appendix may seem accommodating, but it is based on **direct quotes from Srila Prabhupāda**, who modeled a careful balance: **strong philosophical clarity** combined with **seeing the good** in other traditions. Prabhupāda clearly identified voidism and impersonalism as coming way short of the personal understanding of God, yet he also emphasized that **we should recognize and honor the sincere efforts of others** where appropriate. The purpose of the Appendix is not to blur siddhānta, but to reflect **Srila Prabhupāda’s own nuanced approach** — one that allows for cooperation on shared dharmic goals while remaining rooted in **pure devotional theism**.

89. (G.2) How should ISKCON devotees view other Gaudiya groups?

Srila Prabhupāda himself acknowledged the legitimacy of the broader Gauḍīya tradition, often speaking of it as a shared spiritual heritage. Many of these groups preserve valuable practices, scholarship, and devotion that enrich the wider Vaiṣṇava world, and therefore should be **respected**, recognizing that they also worship Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu and follow the essential path of bhakti.

However, ISKCON has its **distinct identity and mission**, shaped by Srila Prabhupāda’s specific teachings, standards, and global outreach vision. This includes his emphases on strict sādhana, outreach, publishing, Deity worship, and the role of the GBC as the collective spiritual leadership; therefore, the degree and flavor of the interactions should be carefully applied on a case-by-case basis

Thus, while we **appreciate and honor the sincerity of others**, ISKCON devotees are guided to remain loyal to **Srila Prabhupāda’s instructions and societal framework**, not out of sectarianism, but out of **faithful service to the legacy entrusted to us**.