

**THE  
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY  
FOR  
KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS  
(ISKCON)**

**CODE OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOR**

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**RATIFIED AND VOTED INTO ISKCON LAW  
BY THE  
GOVERNING BODY COMMISSIONERS (GBC BODY)**

**AUGUST 21, 2021**

## PREAMBLE

WHEREAS Srila Prabhupada wished his followers to exhibit exemplary ethical behavior; and  
WHEREAS the GBC Body seeks to encourage ISKCON devotees in such behavior; and  
WHEREAS since 1975 the GBC has created meaningful ethical guidelines; and  
WHEREAS there is need of consolidating these guidelines into a concise document—

THEREFORE, the following Code of Ethical Behavior has been drafted to define standards of ethical behavior in ISKCON.

While every effort has been made to ensure thoroughness, the Code is not meant to be exhaustive but rather is a document that covers broadly, with as much details as possible, the fundamentals of ethical principles and guidelines. The Code is a living document that may be supplemented in the future by GBC resolution.

All devotees are expected to exhibit behavior in line with this Code. Temple authorities may sanction devotees for failure to adhere to the Code provided such sanctions are permitted by ISKCON rules and local laws.

ISKCON representatives—those devotees holding office or authority in ISKCON, as opposed to the general devotee population—shall be sanctioned for failure to adhere to this Code. Such sanctions shall be imposed by the GBC. These sanctions are described in Part Two of the Code. ISKCON recognizes that violations of the Code may be of different weight and that individual circumstances need to be considered in imposing sanctions. ISKCON and its officers and representatives shall not be held liable for any failure to sanction violations of the Code unless they would otherwise be liable under applicable secular law or other ISKCON rule.

*NOTE: Supporting excerpts from GBC resolutions are listed as footnotes.*

**PART ONE**

**THE ISKCON CODE OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOR**

## 1) ETHICAL BEHAVIOR AND THE LAW

1a) ISKCON devotees—who include, among others, GBCs, sannyasis, gurus, temple presidents, project leaders and initiated devotees—are expected to behave as model Vaishnavas. As such, there are certain ethical lines they should never cross and other ethical lines they are to honor as far as possible.

1b) While there may be exceptions in the execution of devotional service, as far as possible, devotees agree to honor local and national law.<sup>1</sup>

1c) If any such laws conflict with devotional principles, ISKCON devotees are expected to discuss with senior ISKCON officials what to do and how to behave under such conflicting conditions. They are not expected to take independent action without such prior discussion and agreement. As a general rule, devotees must be law-abiding.<sup>2</sup>

1d) The GBC does not recognize any form of immunity on the pretext of “following orders.” ISKCON devotees are responsible for their actions, and there is no exemption from legal or

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<sup>1</sup> **1978:** No GBC can knowingly or unknowingly permit his men or himself to engage in illicit, illegal activities.

**1979:** Standards of Action: Resolved: That a GBC committee for investigation and prevention of illegal practices be formed.

**1992:** No court in ISKCON shall hear cases which are recognized as being of a criminal nature in the outside world. Examples of this are child molestation, assault and battery, grand larceny, murder, embezzlement and fraud. Certified cases of an obvious nature should be turned over to the local governmental authorities and follow the normal criminal system of justice. The local GBC men and the Regional Courts may determine when a case should be sent to the police if there is some dispute whether this should be done or not.

**2002:** The Temple President should ensure that all local, state and national laws are abided by all temple and community members.

<sup>2</sup> **2002:** ISKCON members are law abiding citizens. However, where demonic laws interfere with the execution of bona fide preaching duties then one can resist such orders. In such cases Srila Prabhupada recommended to do the needful taking into consideration the circumstances of the laws of the country, the customs of the local people, the reputation of our society and the example which will be set for the future devotees to follow.

ecclesiastical consequences by arguing that an unethical or illegal act was committed at the behest of an ISKCON senior devotee.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> **1993:** Followers who continue to accept instructions from deviant [ISKCON authorities] cannot claim to be exonerated from personal responsibility by virtue of obediently or blindly following that authority.

## 2) ETHICAL BEHAVIOR IN DEVOTEE RELATIONSHIPS

2a) ISKCON devotees are expected to treat one another as respected members of one unified ISKCON family, support one another in devotional service, encourage one another in spiritual life, interact in an open and honest way, and care for one another in accordance with the standards of Vaishnava seva.<sup>4</sup>

2b) To appreciate the importance of these interpersonal relations, the GBC recommends that ISKCON devotees complete a course of training in community care.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> **1999:** One of Srila Prabhupada's final orders was that his followers show their love for him by cooperating with one another. Within Vaishnava culture, such cooperation should be based on the principle of humility. Lord Chaitanya prayed *amanina manadena*, we should offer all respects to others and expect none for ourselves. Within our Vaishnava society it is essential that devotees learn to offer appropriate honor and respect to all living beings, especially to all devotees, including all generations of men, women and children. All leaders of ISKCON shall make it a top priority of our Society that all devotees are systematically educated in the sacred principles of Vaishnava etiquette. They should implement specific local programs to offer love and care to all devotees who have taken shelter of the lotus feet of Srila Prabhupada. All devotees of ISKCON are meant to live together as one wonderful spiritual family connected by our sincere desire to please Srila Prabhupada by assisting him in his glorious service to his Guru Maharaja in the line of Sri Rupa and Raghunatha. Let us cooperate together and humble ourselves to be their instruments in flooding the world with love for Sri Krishna through the congregational chanting of the Holy Name.

<sup>5</sup> **1999:** it is resolved that all ISKCON leaders are encouraged to undergo systematic training to foster within themselves continuing improvement in humility and the skills, attitudes and vision necessary to make the care of Vaishnavas within their charge their topmost priority. **2017:** Resolved: That the GBC encourages all ISKCON Temples to hold the four-day Devotee Care Course entitled, "Embedding Care in Krishna Conscious Communities" for all caregivers and administrators.

### 3) ETHICAL BEHAVIOR CONCERNING SEXUAL CONDUCT

3a) ISKCON devotees, in particular officers and directors, are expected to scrupulously refrain from even the appearance of sexual misconduct in its many forms.<sup>6</sup> The following categories of behavior are specifically criminal:

- Child sexual abuse, including any sexual activity, involvement or attempt of sexual contact by an adult with a person who is under the applicable legal age of consent.
- Sexual activity with a person who is legally incompetent or otherwise unable to give consent.
- Sexual assaults or violence of a sexual nature, such as rape, sexual battery, abuse, or any attempt to commit such acts.

3b) In addition, ISKCON devotees agree to avoid inappropriate physical, verbal or visual contact with another person, even if reciprocated. Examples include touching; introducing topics of a sexual nature including sexual innuendo, lewd jokes, and flirtation; and observing others without their knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

3c) While sexual misconduct is inappropriate for all initiated devotees, repercussions from such behavior will be more severe for ISKCON officers and directors.

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<sup>6</sup> **1996:** An ISKCON Manager (Temple President, Regional Secretary, Project Leader) may be censured for . . . misconduct in office (physical assault except in self-defense, improper relationships with the opposite sex, improper sexual behavior, abusive behavior to devotees, improper dealings with external society, and so on.)

<sup>7</sup> **2020:** It was resolved that the ISKCON International Office for the Prevention of Leader Misconduct (PLM), established in 2018, will submit its policy and procedure guidelines to the GBC Executive Committee by the 2020 GBC Mid-term General Meeting. These will include protocols for preventing leader sexual misconduct across ISKCON, responding to complaints, and conducting investigations. Until this document is ready, the PLM Office Director will have the authority to accept complaints on a case-by-case basis at his or her discretion, using protocols from a working policy document.

#### 4) ETHICAL BEHAVIOR CONCERNING PERSONAL BIAS

4a) ISKCON devotees agree to treat all, regardless of race, age, physical traits, gender, religion, disability, marital status, or nationality, with the service and respect that are the hallmarks of Vaishnava behavior.<sup>8</sup> While strong words may be needed when responding to *apasampradaya* assertions or other offensive attacks, ISKCON devotees agree to not engage in unnecessary harassing behavior or demeaning language as far as possible.

4b) However, such service and respect do not negate devotees' responsibility to exercise discretion in determining who is to be barred from entering an ISKCON or ISKCON-related facility, for instance persons who exhibit dangerous or potentially dangerous behavior.

4c) ISKCON devotees agree to not neglect or exclude anyone from temple attendance or ISKCON public functions, initiation, or service within an ISKCON project due to bias or prejudice.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> **1996:** Wherever we have powerful leaders — whether GBC members, gurus, sannyasis, or temple presidents — they ought to impress upon their followers that everyone must be brought into the congregation and empowered to preach Krishna consciousness purely.

<sup>9</sup> **2000:** The Women's Ministry presentation on March 1st, 2000 to the GBC Body brought a clearer understanding of the mistakes of the past and the need to provide equal and full opportunity for devotional service for all devotees in ISKCON, regardless of gender. . . It is clearly following in the line of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada that all people are welcome to join Lord Chaitanya's sankirtana movement and are capable of developing full love of God. **2000:** All ISKCON temples are to allow all qualified devotees, regardless of gender, to speak on Srimad Bhagavatam, Bhagavad-gita, etc. during the regular temple class.



## 5) ETHICAL BEHAVIOR CONCERNING BULLYING

5a) ISKCON devotees agree to refrain from bullying in any manner, including unwanted or hostile behavior either as a single act or repeated over time, with the intent to degrade, humiliate or oppress another person. Bullying can include verbal misbehavior such as threats, comments intended overtly or subtly to belittle others, and taunting; social misbehavior such as spreading rumors and purposeful exclusion; physical misbehavior, which involves hurting a person's body or possessions; and cyber bullying. An ISKCON devotee observing such behavior is obligated by this Code to intercede either by reporting such behavior to an appropriate ISKCON authority or by offering protection when needed to those being bullied.<sup>10</sup> Protection as intended here refers to helping someone to escape if there a threat of physical harm or providing information about where protection and support can be found such as through ISKCONResolve.

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<sup>10</sup> **2005:** Diversity is welcome. It strengthens ISKCON. Srila Prabhupada was proud of his international society and welcomed devotees from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, gender and economic backgrounds. It was said that Prabhupada "built a home in which the whole world could live," and thus he taught us the importance of developing "unity in diversity." Our diversity is evidence of the vitality of Lord Chaitanya's sankirtana movement and its ability to attract people from all nations and walks of life. Our diversity will continue to expand and be manifest in varieties of realizations, services, applications of philosophy and cultural environments within our society. Such diversity is not only welcome, it is to be celebrated. Conclusion: It is recommended that serious time and thought be allotted in ISKCON communities, and during the annual international GBC meetings in Mayapura, to carefully consider Srila Prabhupada's statements regarding unity in diversity. Practical application of this principle enlivens devotees and will empower us to fulfill the desire of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, our founder-acharya and eternal guide.

## 6) ETHICAL BEHAVIOR CONCERNING FINANCES AND ADMINISTRATION

6a) ISKCON devotees, including all initiated devotees but particularly office bearers in ISKCON such as trustees and directors, agree to act ethically in conducting financial affairs, both in their service and personal lives. This includes agreeing to disclose any conflicts of interest and not using ISKCON funds for personal profit.<sup>11</sup> Devotees should refrain from exploiting the service of others for their own gain. Such behavior constitutes a conflict of interest with ISKCON policy and a misuse of positional powers. Any financial actions that call into question ISKCON devotees' motives or their ability to act unselfishly and in the best interests of ISKCON create a potential conflict of interest and must be disclosed.

6b) This disclosure requirement includes, for example, running a personal business in the name of ISKCON; ownership in, investment in, or a compensation arrangement with any entity with which ISKCON has or may have a transactional or business relationship; and hiring workers based exclusively on personal friendships rather than job qualifications. ISKCON devotees agree to refrain from accepting bribes, refunds, discounts, or payments in exchange for favorable action.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> **1989:** OATH OF LOYALTY: I understand that all the Society's funds and properties under my control or direction, and anything the Society may have acquired under my direction, shall accrue solely to the Society. Should I either resign from or be relieved of my responsibilities, at that time I shall have no claim on them whatsoever.

<sup>12</sup> **1981:** Temple funds must not be used to invest for making money through speculative real estate deals, jewels, gold, etc. **1993:** When an ISKCON entity is registered as a religious, charitable, or non-profit organization under the laws of its particular state or country, if those laws prohibit such an entity from engaging in activities of a commercial nature, then, of course, the ISKCON entity must comply. Such businesses, though, cannot be contained as part of the ISKCON entity's activities when the ISKCON entity is constituted as a non-profit corporation. The managers of such businesses may decide to donate funds from their business activities to ISKCON. Such donations cannot encumber ISKCON with any obligations toward the donor or the business. . . It may be seen that certain activities like prasadam distribution, restaurants, temple stores, book distribution, life membership, or soliciting of donation with devotional paraphernalia, are carried out by ISKCON non-profit organizations as part of their missionary activities. As long as these activities are not of a primarily commercial nature, are not for the benefit of individuals, are not in violation of local law, and do not endanger the ISKCON entity with unnecessary liability, they may be conducted by the ISKCON entity directly. If the activities develop such that the primary focus is profit rather than preaching, such that local laws would be violated by the non-profit ISKCON entity, or such that unnecessary liability is risked, then they must be legally separated.

6c) ISKCON assets are not to be held in a devotee's personal name.<sup>13</sup> Individuals who prepare, maintain, review or have custody of official ISKCON records and reports, financial or otherwise, should ensure that such documents are accurate and complete; that they are safeguarded from loss or destruction; and that they are maintained in confidence. ISKCON devotees agree to maintain records according to standard practices and to assure that all administrative matters comply with national, state, provincial and local laws, rules and regulations.

6d) ISKCON devotees are not prohibited from accepting money or other gifts from each other when motivated by team building or friendship, provided such gifts are not (i) excessive in value, (ii) otherwise illegal (iii) intended to seek favorable treatment or (iv) intended to induce or conceal illegal activity, breach of fiduciary duty or financial misconduct.

(Note: As of this writing there is important GBC-level work in progress concerning guru-dakshina. Once that work has been established, it will be added to this document.)

6e) If money or goods are donated to ISKCON, then ISKCON devotees must behave ethically in recording, spending, and reporting such funding. Ethical reporting in this context means accurate and timely. Ethical spending in this context means appropriate and necessary.<sup>14</sup>

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**1995:** Every Temple President is to ensure his temple is operating at acceptable standards in all legal, tax, and accounting matters according to local law.

**1996:** Government statutes, income tax regulations for recognized non-profit organizations, and all regulations for bookkeeping shall be complied with. Temple funds shall be invested in book distribution, prasadam distribution and other preaching activities as well as property purchases and recurring expenditures which support temple programs. They shall not be advanced, loaned or invested in speculative enterprises or personal projects. **1996:** Srila Prabhupada wanted the character and behavior of the Presidents to be above suspicion. Except in unavoidable cases the Temple President or his/her spouse should not be the Treasurer.

<sup>13</sup> **1988:** Anyone holding ISKCON's assets in his private name, in the name of another, or in the name of a corporate entity and controlled by himself or another shall provide an annual detailed confidential declaration of such assets and the reasons for the holding arrangements to his GBC representative. When the GBC representative holds such assets, he shall disclose the same information to the GBC body in the manner provided by it.

<sup>14</sup> **1993:** Any individual or group wishing to advertise that ISKCON or an authorized affiliate or project of ISKCON is a recipient of proceeds from a particular business or fundraising scheme must adhere to the following standard: There must be a written contract between the individual or group conducting the business or fund raising scheme and the ISKCON authorized affiliate or project which clearly spells out the names of the proprietors, owners, directors of the business or scheme; the legal name of the authorized affiliate or project; and exactly how ISKCON

6f) Ethical fundraising as defined here refers to honesty and accuracy in communicating with donors, keeping accurate records, and providing periodic financial reports to ISKCON authorities and donors and to use designated gifts as promised to any donors.

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will benefit from the proceeds. For example, if a monetary contribution is pledged, is it to be a fixed amount, or calculated as a percentage of gross revenue, of gross profit, or of net profit. Will the devotees involved in working in the business or scheme be supported by the business directly or by ISKCON? If so, how much devotee support or salary is paid to them? The business or scheme will follow all relevant government laws and regulations.

## 7) ETHICAL BEHAVIOR CONCERNING PHILOSOPHICAL DOUBTS

7a) As doubts are a function of intelligence, it is expected that intelligent and inquisitive devotees may experience doubts concerning the statements of guru, sadhu or sastra. ISKCON devotees agree to express their doubts respectfully and clearly so that they may be properly examined, understood and resolved.<sup>15</sup> Devotees responding to such doubts shall do so in a respectful and caring mood, understanding that revealing one's doubts is a natural and healthy part of progressing in Krishna conscious.

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<sup>15</sup> **2000:** ISKCON members should be careful to adhere to the proper process of expressing doubts within the community of Vaishnavas. . . . Our tradition has established a proper process within the community of devotees for resolving doubts. This process allows a devotee to express misgivings while protecting the devotee from checking his or her spiritual progress through committing offenses. When handled in the proper manner, doubts become a basis for growth in spiritual understanding and the deepening of faith. The guidelines for expressing and resolving doubts are as follows: (a) Doubts should be placed before a proper authority in whom one has faith and confidence. That is, inquiry should be humble and submissive in spirit. (b) There should be a presupposition that the doubts should be resolved successfully. (c) Doubts should be expressed in a way that is careful to be respectful of guru, sadhu and sastra. (d) Doubts should be expressed in a way that is careful to avoid causing unnecessary disturbance to the faith of other devotees. (e) Apparent contradictions should not be taken as prima facie evidence that the authority is wrong. Rather, they should become the grounds for pursuing a deeper understanding.

## 8) ETHICAL BEHAVIOR CONCERNING OPPOSING IDEOLOGIES

8a) With regard to doubts about or objections to philosophies and ideologies that oppose Vaishnava *siddhanta*, ISKCON devotees are encouraged to speak candidly using logical arguments, authoritative sastric references, and personal realization. However, “speaking candidly” does not justify unnecessarily insulting behavior. Consequently, when critiquing opposing ideas—in religion, philosophy, science, politics, ethics, etc.—ISKCON devotees agree to present their arguments in a mature manner. Further, ISKCON devotees should take care to assure that whatever aspects of opposing ideologies they wish to critique are being presented accurately.

## 9) ETHICAL BEHAVIOR CONCERNING OTHER RELIGIONS

9a) While ISKCON devotees naturally hold the Gaudiya Vaishnava theology as the highest expression of theism, they are expected to act with respect toward people from other traditions and behave in a manner that favors cooperation and dialog when appropriate. ISKCON devotees may challenge those who put forward misleading ideas in the name of religion or truth, but they should avoid unnecessary denigration.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> **2010:** Whereas ISKCON is an international religious, cultural and spiritual movement; whereas ISKCON has ongoing interactions with other religious and spiritual organizations on the international, national, and local levels; whereas His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada himself valued interactions with leaders of other faiths and did so on many occasions; whereas ISKCON needs to have, and will benefit from, an active commission that provides leadership in interfaith relationships and coordinates such activities; whereas a former ISKCON committee on interfaith established by the GBC has become inactive according to GBC procedures—RESOLVED, The reestablishment of the ISKCON Interfaith Commission under the ISKCON Ministry of Communications, with the following mandate: 1. To establish policies to guide the entire ISKCON society in its interfaith activities. 2. To officially represent the society at the highest levels of interfaith relations with other religious and spiritual institutions. 3. To be the official voice of ISKCON to other traditions of faith. 4. To encourage and facilitate international, continental, national, and local ISKCON entities in the conduct of their interfaith programs. 5. When appropriate, to appoint official representatives to interact with designated religious institutions, churches, etc. 6. Where appropriate, to consult with ISKCON/GBC legal counsel before agreeing to, or making public, an issue with possible legal consequences.

**2021:** From “ISKCON In Relation To People Of Faith In God,” published in ISKCON Communications Journal #7.1 - January/June 1999, by Shaunaka Rishi Dasa:

In ISKCON we consider love of a Supreme personal God to be the highest form of religious expression, and we recognize and respect this expression in other theistic traditions. We respect the spiritual worth of paths of genuine self-realization and search for the Absolute Truth in which the concept of a personal Deity is not explicit. Other communities and organizations advocating humanitarian, ethical and moral standards are also valued as being beneficial to society.

ISKCON views dialogue between its members and people of other faiths as an opportunity to listen to others, to develop mutual understanding and mutual trust, and to share our commitment and faith with others, while respecting their commitment to their own faith.

ISKCON recognizes that no one religion holds a monopoly on the truth, the revelation of God or our relationship with God.

ISKCON’s members are encouraged to be respectful to people of faith from other traditions and to see the need for people of different faiths to work together for the benefit of society as a whole and for the glorification of God.

ISKCON affirms the responsibility of each individual to develop his or her relationship with the Supreme Lord.

## 10) ETHICAL BEHAVIOR CONCERNING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

10a) ISKCON's ethical standards condemn domestic violence. Should ISKCON devotees become aware of domestic violence allegations, they should deal with the matter in a responsible way as deemed appropriate by their local situation and bring all incidents of domestic violence to the attention of the proper authorities. ISKCON devotees are expected to familiarize themselves with the types of domestic violence that must be reported to legal and/or social services, as well as the GBC policy on domestic violence. Domestic violence is against the ethical standards of ISKCON and includes but is not limited to abuse, rape, assault, and similar behavior.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> **2021:** The International GBC adopted a Statement Against Domestic Abuse.



## 11) ETHICAL BEHAVIOR CONCERNING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

11a) ISKCON devotees have an ethical responsibility to protect others who appear to be victims of abuse or neglect, particularly minors. ISKCON officials are expected to report to appropriate authorities (including the ISKCON Child Protection Office, police, and child welfare agencies) whenever they have reasonable concern that a minor in their community is being abused, neglected, or is living in an unsafe home. ISKCON devotees are encouraged to familiarize themselves with local laws and learn how to recognize basic indicators of child abuse and neglect.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> **1990:** Suspected or confirmed cases of child abuse must be reported to local government authorities for investigation and/or prosecution. In India, the ISKCON Board of Education may authorize a waiver of this requirement if the perpetrator is willing to sign a statement authorizing the Board of Education to publicize the incident to all ISKCON-related educational projects and other concerned parties.

All suspected or confirmed incidents of child abuse must be reported immediately to the local GBC secretary and within thirty days to the ISKCON Board of Education. The ISKCON Board of Education shall review the investigation and give a finding as to the status of the alleged perpetrator as confirmed, suspect, or innocent/not-suspected.

The perpetrator or alleged perpetrator must be immediately segregated so that he has no possible contact with the victim or other children. This segregation may take the form of relocating the perpetrator to another part of the project, away from children; banishment from the project (and possibly from other ISKCON projects with children); or in severe cases, banishment from all ISKCON projects. The degree of segregation will be determined by the nature and severity of the offense; the attitude of the perpetrator; the feasibility of protecting the children from further abuse or intimidation; and the sentiments of the local devotees, especially the parents.

In no case should a confirmed or suspected perpetrator remain in the local community unless the local ISKCON authorities obtain the written authorization of no less than 3/4 of the parents of children at the project or in the community. The local government authorities and/or the ISKCON Board of Education will make the final determination of the appropriate degree of segregation. Any confirmed child abuser may never again serve in association with children in any ISKCON project.

The Board will also make available to all ISKCON educational projects and temples the names of all accused, admitted, confirmed or convicted child abusers. Abused children must get appropriate professional counselling so that the serious ill-effects of the abuse can be minimized. All ISKCON educational projects must have preventative programs which train children how to avoid and report child abuse incidents. The local GBC man (or men) are directly responsible to implement the measures outlined above. Should the GBC Body find a GBC man or other ISKCON manager responsible for suppressing or covering-up complaints of child abuse, or supporting intimidation of those who might complain, the GBC man shall be open to censure or probation, and the ISKCON manager shall be open to appropriate disciplinary action.

**2005:** "Zero Tolerance." Some incidents of child abuse are of such severity that the judges' decision would be to invoke a "zero tolerance" sentence. In other words, the abuser would not be allowed to visit any ISKCON property, attend ISKCON functions, or have any contact with ISKCON properties or functions of organizations affiliated with ISKCON for the remainder of the abuser's lifetime. Cases that would be eligible for a zero-tolerance sentence

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include serious sexual or physical abuse where the evidence is clear and persuasive. Considerations in determining “serious sexual abuse” would include evidence of some of the following elements: The sexual abuse includes instances where violence, force, or the threat of violence is used; the sexual act itself is of a very invasive nature, the acts are repeated, and where there is great physical or psychological distress experienced by the victim. Serious physical abuse would include some of the following elements: The act is of a very violent nature, there is long term physical harm to the victim, the acts are repeated, and there is great physical or psychological distress to the victim.

## 12) ETHICAL BEHAVIOR CONCERNING CONFIDENTIALITY

12a) *Prajalpa*, or gossip and rumors, erodes relationships and weakens the integrity of ISKCON communities, and ISKCON devotees agree to refrain from such unethical behavior and honor confidentiality.<sup>19</sup> Confidentiality here means not revealing to others information intended to remain private. Details concerning an individual's personal, financial or family situation, for example, are confidential and should not be discussed publicly or disclosed except with the express permission of the individual concerned.

12b) Discussion is needed to determine when exceptions to this standard would be acceptable, for instance when reporting an ISKCON representative who is found to be repeatedly breaking the regulative principles. While the Code of Ethical Conduct cannot encompass all exceptions, ISKCON devotees agree to make best effort to assure that any exception to the standard of confidentiality is justified by consulting with other senior devotees.

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<sup>19</sup> **1981:** Rumors are against Vaishnava principles. Vaishnavas will act in such a way as to enable any fallen Vaishnavas to return to the association of devotees. Nothing shall be circulated about the fall-down of a senior Vaishnava except by the GBC Chairman, who can also be approached for information when in doubt.

### 13) ETHICAL BEHAVIOR CONCERNING THE ENVIRONMENT

13a) Vaishnava theology recognizes the Earth as part of the Lord's creation, to be honored with appropriate ethical behavior.<sup>20</sup> ISKCON representations are consequently expected to implement, as far as possible, environmentally friendly standards in their temples and projects.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> **1995:** Fostering a more simple and natural way of life is one of the founding principles of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. The members of the Society are therefore committed to helping solve the planet's environmental problems. These include water pollution, air pollution, toxic waste, nuclear and chemical accidents, destruction of wildlife, and desertification. While appreciating the good intentions of those working to solve these problems by individual and group efforts of a material nature, we believe the environmental crisis is ultimately a spiritual one requiring a spiritual solution. The environmental crisis is a product of a society that has become overly dependent upon destructive industrial technology. This dependency is rooted in reductionist science, which has removed God and the soul from the forefront of human concern. When people forget that nature is the propriety of God, they are driven to exploit it unlimitedly for their own material gratification.

Scholars of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness are therefore introducing an alternative culture based on the Vedic teachings of ancient India. This philosophical system acknowledges the fundamental reality of a nonmaterial conscious self, or soul, present in each individual. All souls have their source in a Supreme Conscious Self, God. Nature also emanates from God as a perfectly balanced system capable of sustaining all living things. When humans fail to properly understand their total identity as body-mind-soul and the connect of nature with God, the system becomes unbalanced . . . . To reduce the urge to excessively exploit and consume material resources, ISKCON teaches people methods for experiencing nonmaterial happiness from the soul. Chief among these is the time-honored practice of Hare Krishna mantra meditation. Without elevating desires from material to spiritual, the basic impetus to environmentally destructive behavior will remain intact. We recognize the major detrimental effect of the meat industry, particularly the cattle industry, has on the environment. ISKCON's model programs for protecting cows and using bulls for transport and agriculture, based on the Vedic spiritual teachings, are thus environmentally beneficial. Such programs are now operating in ISKCON rural communities around the world. The spiritual vegetarian diet followed by ISKCON members saves scarce resources and has a far less negative impact on the environment than a meat-based diet. Since its founding in 1966, ISKCON has provided over 900 million vegetarian meals through its restaurants, temples, and Food for Life program (for the homeless, hungry, or disadvantaged). The Society has also sold over 10 million vegetarian cookbooks. While working to make this world a better place, ISKCON also encourages people to understand their identity as spirit souls and return to the spiritual world, which is the natural environment of the soul.

<sup>21</sup> **2019:** Whereas plastic is often used once-off and then thrown away; whereas the lifetime of plastic varies from 50 years to more than 1000 years; whereas plastic contaminates mother earth and her inhabitants; whereas many ISKCON temples use plastic and foam cups, plates, spoons, water bottles, *maha-prasadam* packages, plastic bags, etc., once-off and then discard them despite there being biodegradable alternatives; whereas Srila Prabhupada states that first you become conscious and then you become Krishna conscious; whereas there is an increasing awareness in the general public about such issues and ISKCON should set a proper example--Resolved: That ISKCON centers and members are strongly encouraged to not use single-use plastic.

**2021:** The GBC approved "Three Tiers of Environmental Sustainability for ISKCON."

#### 14) ETHICAL BEHAVIOR CONCERNING SOCIAL MEDIA

14a) ISKCON devotees agree to exercise good judgment when using any communications technology. This especially applies to social media, including blogs, message boards, chat rooms, electronic newsletters, online forums, social networking sites, and other sites and services that permit users to share information with others.

14b) The GBC encourages ISKCON devotees to make positive use of the internet and welcomes the wide dissemination of Krishna-conscious ideas that this mode of communication makes possible. Nonetheless, ISKCON devotees agree to post only information that is truthful, respectful, and beneficial to others. ISKCON devotees acknowledge that what they post on social media may have an impact on the Society's reputation.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, they agree to not misrepresent ISKCON or its beliefs and practices in social media or any other public forum.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> **1977:** All Presidents will instruct the devotees in their temple that when they approach people [in public] they are acting as a public relations representatives for Srila Prabhupada.

<sup>23</sup> **1988:** No ISKCON member, including GBC members, may make public statements on ISKCON's position or policy on major issues affecting ISKCON's image or policies across an entire nation or groups of nations, unless such a policy or position has already been established and is available in written form or unless the devotee wishing to make such a statement does so with permission from either the GBC executive officers or the Minister of Public Affairs. Further, neither the Minister of Public Affairs nor the GBC executive officers may grant such permission without consulting first with one another.

**PART TWO**

**ENFORCEMENT**

## 15) CONSEQUENCES OF UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR

15a) Ethical behavior is so central to devotional life in ISKCON that there are consequences for those who transgress the ISKCON ethical behavior guidelines as described herein.<sup>24</sup> For particularly egregious transgressions, the consequences may include removal from ISKCON.<sup>25</sup>

15b) ISKCON devotees are expected to familiarize themselves with these consequences and the kinds of unethical behavior that trigger them, prior to assuming office in ISKCON.

15c) Causes and consequences to breach of ethical behavior have been spelled out in GBC resolutions.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> **1993:** ISKCON has a moral obligation to Srila Prabhupada, as well as a legal right to pursue deviant managers who encumber ISKCON entities with liabilities stemming from unauthorized acts. If ISKCON representatives cannot convince deviant managers to accept personal liability through reason and argument, or through the ISKCON Judicial System, they have the right to pursue them through the competent courts.

<sup>25</sup> **1983:** The following may be removed from ISKCON: 1) The member is openly deviating from the fundamental tenants of the society's teachings; 2) The member is openly and flagrantly antagonistic to the GBC or other ISKCON authority; 3) The member is engaged in illegal activities.

<sup>26</sup> **1993:** An ISKCON official may be disciplined for the following transgressions: misconduct and indiscipline; willful violation of GBC resolutions; vilification of ISKCON or the GBC Body; misconduct in office (physical assault except in self-defense, improper relationships with the opposite sex, improper sexual behavior, abusive behavior to devotees, improper dealings with external society, and so on); habitually or knowingly making false charges and accusations or other consistent *vaisnava-aparadhas*; serious interference in the guru and disciple relationship; duplicitous or untruthful dealings (giving false promises to devotees, lying to spiritual authorities, and other serious prevarication).

**1996: CENSURE**—A vote of censure is to be understood as a reprimand aimed at reformation of the member and prevention of further offending acts. It is the warning voice of suspension or removal. If the motion to censure is adopted, it shall be entered into the Divisional Council Minute Book or the censuring body's minutes. Furthermore, it will be strongly impressed upon the offender the meaning of the censure note which may be worded as follows:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ Maharaja/Prabhu,

Please understand that a Temple President / ISKCON Manager is a representative of Srila Prabhupada and has the responsibility to act in a manner befitting such a position. Due to the reasons stated below you have been censured by vote of the Divisional Council (ISKCON Governing Body Commission/ a GBC Judicial Committee / GBC's) for the reasons contained in the resolution. A censure expresses disapproval of your conduct. A censure is an official warning. It is

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the warning voice of suspension or removal. Please take due notice thereof and rectify the situation. [insert reasons for censure] [signature(s) of censuring authority]

A member who has been censured three times shall be placed on probation. If, during a period of three years, no motion to censure is adopted against a member, then his slate of censures is wiped clean.

**PROBATION**—AN ISKCON Manager censured three times shall be placed on probation. That body shall also assign the offending member a specific program of rectification for the period of his probation. They may determine to what degree he may continue his service. The period of probation shall normally be for one year or until the problem is deemed rectified by the censuring body or the Divisional Council.

**SUSPENSION**—If he has been on probation for at least one year and the situation has not been rectified the Divisional Council by 2/3 Majority vote can recommend to suspend a ISKCON Manager which if approved by the local GBC(s) concerned and other GBC's (totaling a minimum of 3 GBCs, preferably from the same region) he may be suspended from his present position until revoked or he is removed. In addition, the ISKCON Manager's local GBC Zonal Secretary along with two consenting GBC's, or an authorized ISKCON Judicial Committee, or the GBC body, shall also have the power to suspend an ISKCON Manager. In emergencies the GBC Executive Committee can suspend an ISKCON Manager.

The terms applying to a suspended ISKCON Manager for the duration of his period of suspension shall be as follows: a) He may not exercise any authority of his previously held position. b) He may not vote as an ISKCON Manager. c) He must be assigned a specific program of rectification.

The rectification and proper engagement of a suspended ISKCON Manager shall be a primary concern. As a result, the suspending body shall assign the offending ISKCON Manager a specific program of rectification for the duration of the period of suspension. The assigned program of rectification shall be understood as an opportunity for the suspended ISKCON Manager to redress himself and to regain his status as an ISKCON Manager in good standing. The suspending body shall personally or through a delegated council/committee carefully monitor the progress of the ISKCON Manager throughout his period of suspension. This committee shall submit quarterly progress reports to the suspending body.

The period of suspension shall not exceed one year at which time the GBC body at its annual meeting shall carefully consider the case of the suspended ISKCON Manager in order to either reinstate, or remove, or relocate and to give whatever directions or conditions deemed appropriate.

**REMOVAL**—Under normal circumstances an ISKCON Manager will be removed from his position only after being suspended and unable to rectify his situation. Such cases should be resolved by the GBC body. There should ideally be no change of Presidents or ISKCON Managers. If there are any difficulties they should be resolved by careful mediation. However, in an urgent situation the Executive Committee in conjunction with the local GBC Zonal Secretary (if he is in good standing, and if not they may do it on their own) shall be empowered to remove an ISKCON Manager. An urgent situation shall be defined as: a. Any violation which endangers ISKCON's stability and security locally, nationally or internationally which cannot wait for the usual process of suspension and removal; b. Severe spiritual, philosophical or moral deviation. c. Rebellion against the authority of Srila Prabhupada and the GBC body.



**PART THREE**

**RECOURSE**

## 16) CHANNELS FOR REPORTING AND APPEAL

16a) The GBC has approved various mechanisms for anyone in ISKCON who wishes to report possible breaches of ethical standards.<sup>27</sup> Any ISKCON member can talk confidentially with an ISKCON Resolve ombudsman to discuss such breaches, including those they experienced or may have done themselves. Other mechanisms have also been approved for resolving disputes and for those who have been sanctioned and wish to appeal those sanctions.<sup>28</sup> The Offices under the Ministry of Justice can, when necessary, investigate and adjudicate alleged breaches of this Code.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> **1981:** If a devotee has any grievances regarding the management of a temple, his complaints should be properly aimed to the local temple president, regional secretary and / or the local GBC representative. The matter should not be acted on or brought before the devotees in general.

<sup>28</sup> **1993:** In personal dealings between individual devotees and their authorities, appealing the decision of a lower authority to a higher authority for reaching a final solution is a standard principle in ISKCON. In such cases, if a devotee feels aggrieved by a decision, or the lack of a decision, of his Temple President for something which affects him in his personal spiritual life (initiation, marriage, transfer, removal, permissions, etc.) the devotee may appeal the matter to the local GBC Zonal Secretary, or an assistant of the GBC approved for this purpose. While the appeal is being considered the concerned devotee must follow the decision of the Temple President unless the GBC has given a stay order for the duration of the appeal. During an appeal, all concerned parties should be heard and the decision in the appeal shall be considered as final. If requested, decisions should be given in writing.

**1996:** Mediation Services have also been instituted for such reporting and appeals. Mediation involves an independent (neutral) third party who acts as a facilitator, hears both sides of the problem and helps devotees achieve a satisfactory resolution to the issues at hand. The mediator's primary function is to provide a forum where disputants can construct their own mutual agreement. Mediators work directly and in-depth with the parties in dispute and encourage discussion. No decisions are imposed by mediators, who work to help devotees make their own decisions about what solutions will work for them.

Arbitration is more formal than mediation. In arbitration, the parties to a dispute select one or more neutral persons to serve as arbitrators for the dispute. As part of the arbitration, the parties usually agree in advance to accept the decision of the arbitrators as binding, although the decision may be merely a recommendation. Parties to the dispute present their case to the arbitrators in a common meeting. The arbitration proceeding may be informal or almost as formal as a legal trial, depending on the agreement of the parties.

**2005:** Resolved, that any ISKCON member may appeal to the GBC Executive Committee against a decision taken by an ISKCON authority pursuant to any specific powers that have been delegated to that authority by the GBC Body. This rule applies to decisions made by Zonal Secretaries, Ministries, Regional Governing Bodies, etc., except where provided for otherwise, e.g. CPO decisions. For decisions of Temple Presidents or other local officials, other rules apply. The following are the pertinent procedures:

The ISKCON Member wishing to submit such an appeal (the appellant) shall first communicate the same in writing to the Corresponding Secretary of the Executive Committee. The appeal shall spell out in as complete detail as

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possible the specific decision(s) of the ISKCON authority that are being appealed, the reasons why it (they) should be overruled, and the specific relief requested.

The Corresponding Secretary shall, after verifying the admissibility of the appeal, forward the same to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee shall conduct a preliminary investigation and decide whether to adjudicate the appeal or not. If it is a multipart appeal, then it may decide to adjudicate only some parts.

<sup>29</sup> **2002:** Whereas, The GBC Body seeks to demonstrate its interest in the concerns of ISKCON devotees, and seeks to encourage the timely voluntary resolution of disputes within ISKCON; whereas, international organizations almost universally provide a system for prompt resolution of internal disputes; whereas, ombudsmen provide an effective and confidential means of addressing individual concerns with an organization; whereas, voluntary mediation undertaken by two disputant parties with the help of a trained mediator is proven to resolve interpersonal disputes to the mutual satisfaction of the disputants—RESOLVED, that the GBC Body announces their strong support for establishment of a voluntary dispute resolution system to facilitate the resolution of ISKCON members' concerns. To this end the GBC Body urges regions and local temples to establish regional based ombuds and mediation systems.

## **PART FOUR**

### **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

### **18a) Ethical Behavior**

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, ethical behavior means behavior that conforms to a standard of what is right and good. For our purposes, “what is right or wrong” has its meaning within the context of commonly understood norms within ISKCON, and with regard for the Vaishnava principles of truthfulness, cleanliness, mercy, and austerity. Ethical behavior for ISKCON may consequently differ from what is ethical in non-ISKCON environments, which espouse other accepted notions of right and wrong. Ethical behavior for ISKCON speaks to the basic values of the ISKCON community. Those basic values may involve difficult or subtle questions of rightness, fairness, or equity, and in such cases the collective opinion of the GBC would provide rulings.

### **18b) Ethics vs Morals: Is there a difference?**

Ethics and morals are both used in the plural and are often regarded as synonyms, but there is some distinction in how they are used. Morals usually connotes an element of subjective preference, while ethics tends to suggest aspects of universal fairness and the question of whether or not an action is responsible. In the present context, “ethical behavior” is intended to address the more universal fairness of an action as commonly understood within the Gaudiya Vaishnava community, rather than the subjective preference of any individual.

### **18c) Respect**

According to Merriam-Webster, respect is a feeling or understanding that someone or something is important, serious, etc., and should be treated in an appropriate way; also to act in a way which shows that you are aware of someone's rights and are willing to treat them accordingly.