

On Choosing A Private Preceptor. From Satyaraja

Note there is a small difference between the men's and women's processes -see point 8
If someone is asked to become a private preceptor, they write to Punyamala (on behalf of the UK/Ireland?mainland Europe Kula) and she then lets the Kula know and is in touch with the Dharmacharini concerned

The essence of Private Precepting is to be found in the private Ordination ceremony, which symbolises the Ordinand's preparedness to go it alone, even if no-one else was doing so. And the Private Preceptor witnesses and affirms that movement of going for refuge to the three jewels, which includes his own understanding of going for refuge.

10 Points for Choosing a Private Preceptor follow from this. They are not exhaustive and there may be other points which I have missed which could be added.

1. What gives the Private Ordination its weight and depth is that the Ordinand's going for refuge is being witnessed and attested to by someone whose Dharma practice they deeply respect. So the Mitra is looking for someone whose Dharma practice they respect. He/ she is not looking for a 'special relationship'. They may not be close friends or 'mates' and that may even obscure the fundamental relationship and get in the way. There needs to be a clear vertical element in the relationship.
2. The Private Preceptor relationship can take many forms, some relationships may be close and intimate, others more 'formal' or 'essential'. The particular form it takes is largely to do with the 'chemistry' between the two people involved and not what is important. What is important is a continuous 'witnessing' of going for refuge in the man /woman being Ordained by the Private Preceptor. This means that the Private Preceptor needs to keep their own momentum of going for refuge alive, before, during and after Ordination.
3. The Private Preceptor needs to be someone who is imbued with the living spirit of the Dharma as taught by Bhante Sangharakshita, in all aspects of their lives. It is much more than just a connection through study or meditation. This is especially so with their practice of the 10 Precepts, since the Ordinand takes the Preceptors from the Private Preceptor at the time of the Private Ordination Ceremony and trains in them under his/ her guidance. The Private Preceptor needs to be someone who lives out both the Private and Public dimensions of the Ordination Ceremony and takes an active part in the life of the Order.
4. The Mitra is looking for a Private Preceptor who he/ she can easily open up to, reveal himself/ herself to and feel seen, encouraged and understood by, and not someone who they are going to polarise with. It is very important that the connection is not broken or closed down. The Private Preceptor may need to go into difficult areas or challenge the Mitra and this requires a basis of trust.
5. The Private Preceptor needs to be someone the Mitra has easy access to, someone who is available. They will need to be able to meet face-to-face. Some years ago Bhante conducted a Kalyana Mitra ceremony for myself and Paramabandhu to become Kalyana Mitras to Nityabandhu. He kept stressing the importance of meeting face-to-face, despite Nityabandhu moving to Poland, and saying that electronic ways of communicating were not enough in themselves, we needed to make sure we also actually met.
6. The Private Preceptor needs to be someone who is well-connected in the Order, so that if he/ she does not have experience in a particular area, he/ she can refer the person they are Ordaining to another Order member who has that experience. (for example, experience of a particular meditation practice of sadhana).
7. The Private Preceptor needs to be someone who can commit to the relationship once the connection has been made. It is important that there is consistency and constancy in the way the Private Preceptor relates to the person they have Ordained. This is especially so after

Ordination, where there is less institutional underpinning or structure and not such a clear goal. If there is not this consistency, it is difficult for the new Order member to rely on the Private Preceptor. This is the case especially during the Nissaya period –the years immediately after Ordination - when the new Order member is finding their feet in the Order. It is important the Private Preceptor does not lose interest or become overly critical, if it is not working out as they had hoped. Both the Private Preceptor and the Mitra need to see a trajectory in the relationship that goes well beyond Ordination. It is a lifelong connection and commitment.

8. The Private Preceptor relationship needs to be viewed in a greater context than the two people involved. Someone may ask you to be their Private Preceptor. You need to discuss this request with your chapter and Ordination teams. You need to ask yourself if you are the best person. See the request in the overall context of the Mitra's life and practice. Ask yourself if you have the right temperament or character to become their Private Preceptor. If the Mitra later changes their mind and asks someone else, it is important not to take offence. In a sense, it is not really about you.
9. It is not a good idea for the Mitra to ask too soon, before they know what they are really asking for and what the Private Preceptor relationship really means. It is much better that they get established in the Ordination process first. Then the proposed relationship needs testing; discussing in chapters, getting to know each other, seeing if it is an appropriate relationship. It is usually best not to agree straightaway if asked. Get them to write, or meet, keep in contact, see how much initiative they are going to take, before agreeing. That they can take initiative in keeping up contact is crucial after Ordination. Act 'as if' before agreeing and see how that goes, then review the request and see if it is appropriate to proceed to a formal preceptor relationship.
- 10 The Private Preceptor is someone who can encourage, challenge, give perspective, someone who the Mitra can consult about decisions and before making important changes in their lives, while at the same time knowing that the man/ woman is responsible for their own decisions. The balance may change, sometimes your role may be more hands-on, at other times they may need more space or autonomy.