

**Resolution of the ISKCON Governing Body Commission (GBC)
Regarding Vaishnavi Diksa-gurus**

October 15, 2019

Whereas in 2009 the GBC Resolved:

1. *The GBC accepts the philosophical conclusion presented in the SAC's Female Diksa Guru Paper that a mature, qualified, female devotee may accept the role of an initiating spiritual master.*

2. *The GBC Body authorizes local area committees to put forward for approval as initiating guru any devotee in their area, male or female, who is qualified according to existing GBC Law.*

Whereas, since then, the GBC has worked to achieve consensus and implementation of this resolution;

After much study, dialogue, and research, the GBC has come to the following conclusion.

Resolved that:

1. Vaisnavis are eligible to give diksa in ISKCON provided that they:
 - a. Meet all the qualifications listed for ISKCON *diksa-guru* applicants;

 - b. Are at least 55 years of age and in a stable family situation, living under the protection of a husband, elder son or son-in-law, qualified householder couple or senior Vaisnava or Vaisnavi sanga;

 - c. Receive written permission from the appropriate regional body or its equivalent, or national council, to give *diksa* in that particular part of the world.

2. After five years the GBC shall review this resolution to determine if the number of Vaisnavis initiating in any region or as a total for the world is in keeping with Srila Prabhupada's indication of "...not so many".

(Note: This resolution lifts the abeyance on this matter stated in Resolution 310 of 2015.)

Statement on the Resolution Allowing Vaisnavis to Serve as Diksa-gurus in ISKCON

ISKCON Governing Body Commission
October 17, 2019

“Just adhere yourself to the lotus feet of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Then you become spiritual master. That’s all. So I hope that all of you, men, women, boys and girls, become spiritual master and follow this principle. Spiritual master — simply, sincerely, follow the principles and speak to the general public. Then Krsna immediately becomes your favorite. Krsna does not become your favorite; you become Krsna’s favorite. (...) So if you want to become recognized by Krsna very quickly, you take up this process of becoming spiritual master, present the Bhagavad-gita as it is, your life is perfect.” (Sri Vyasa-puja Lecture — August 22, 1973, London)

“... as far as Krsna consciousness is concerned, everyone is capable of becoming a spiritual master because knowledge in Krsna consciousness is on the platform of the spirit soul. (...) The word *guru* is equally applicable to the *vartma-pradarsaka-guru*, *siksa-guru* and *diksa-guru*. Unless we accept the principle enunciated by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, this Krsna consciousness movement cannot spread all over the world”. (Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya-lila 8.128 purport)

On October 15, 2019, the Governing Body Commission of the International Society for Krsna Consciousness (GBC) at their mid-term general meeting passed a resolution allowing, under certain conditions, mature and qualified Vaisnavis to serve as *diksa-gurus* in ISKCON.

The primary bases for this decision are the expressed desires and instructions on guru qualifications of ISKCON’s Founder-*acarya* His Divine Grace Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

This resolution concludes over 15 years of the GBC’s thorough research and in-depth discussions of:

- the letter and spirit of Srila Prabhupada’s numerous instructions on the subject of the importance and qualifications of various types of spiritual masters for ISKCON as a worldwide movement;

- Srila Prabhupada's expressed desire that all his "sons and daughters" become spiritual masters;
- Srila Prabhupada's well-documented personal dealings with and engagement of his female disciples in various roles of spiritual responsibility;
- Srila Prabhupada's approach to the balance between spiritual and societal roles of *Vaisnavas* and *Vaisnavis* in the context of pure devotional service;
- as appropriate, the broader historical and *sastic* evidence in regards to *diksa* in Lord Caitanya's Gaudiya-Vaisnava *sampradaya*.

While Srila Prabhupada indicated that Vaisnavi spiritual masters had been historically "not so many", he also taught that the service of *diksa-guru* required an equally advanced level of Krsna consciousness for both genders that is achievable by strictly following the authorized devotional practices he prescribed.

Srila Prabhupada also taught that the service of *diksa-guru* naturally stems from fidelity to one's spiritual master and *guru-parampara*, from one's mature preaching of Krsna consciousness (*siksa*) empowered by such fidelity, and from the sense of selfless responsibility for those souls who become inspired to serve Lord Krsna by such preaching.

At the same time, Srila Prabhupada severely criticized and warned against bodily and mundane considerations in regard to the role and eligibility of *diksa-guru* — whether in the form of casteism, selfish motives for profit, adoration or distinction, or as conformity to social, cultural or modern trends and artificial "equality":

"...Generally a spiritual master who constantly instructs a disciple in spiritual science becomes his initiating spiritual master later on. (...) Sri Jiva Gosvami advises that one not accept a spiritual master in terms of hereditary or customary social and ecclesiastical conventions. One should simply try to find a genuinely qualified spiritual master for actual advancement in spiritual understanding". (Caitanya-caritamṛta, *Adi-lila* 1.35 purport)

We, the GBC, are convinced that Srila Prabhupada by his devotional potency and perfect guidance continues to empower many devotees, men and women alike, to properly follow and represent his teachings in the mission of spreading Krsna Consciousness; and that some of them thus become competent to solidify their *siksa* by giving *diksa* as faithful representatives of Srila Prabhupada.

We recognize that some members and friends of ISKCON may object to this resolution based on their own reading of *sastra*, their own social experiences, or deeply held Vaisnava convictions. At the same time, and on the same basis, others will think this resolution does not go far enough or that the additional requirements are unfair. To assuage these concerns, we will further describe the milestones leading to this decision and the philosophical underpinnings of this resolution in an upcoming document.

In the meantime, we humbly request ISKCON devotees to see this resolution in the light of the inclusiveness of Lord Chaitanya and our previous *acaryas*, and as facilitating senior, mature and exemplary followers of Srila Prabhupada in their dedicated service to him and his ISKCON. Please bless them in this new important spiritual responsibility.

“So one who is spreading *krsna-upadesa*, simply repeat what is said by Krsna, then you become *acarya*. (...) Suppose you have got now ten thousand. We shall expand to hundred thousand. That is required. Then hundred thousand to million, and million to ten million. So there will be no scarcity of *acarya*, and people will understand Krsna consciousness very easily”. (Lecture on Sri Caitanya-caritamrta, Adi-lila 1.13 – April 6, 1975, Mayapur)

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