

The GBC Meet about Female Diksa Gurus.

Where We Stand

By Mahatma Das

Recently I read the report about the discussion on female diksa gurus that took place in October (2014) during the mid-term GBC meeting in Tirupati. You can read the article here:

[http://gbc.iskcon.org/2014/11/02/gbc-completes-three-day-special-session-on-vaishnavi-diksa-gurus/ - on-vaishnavi-diksa-gurus/](http://gbc.iskcon.org/2014/11/02/gbc-completes-three-day-special-session-on-vaishnavi-diksa-gurus/-on-vaishnavi-diksa-gurus/)

I would like to share a few thoughts on female diksa gurus from the perspective of guru tattva in general. These are my personal observations which I share as a catalyst for further discussion on this issue. I welcome your comments.

As a general principle, if someone is qualified to make disciples, and if such a person already has aspiring disciples, a third party should not prevent those disciples from being initiated by the person in whom they have the most faith - be it a man or woman - unless the guru one is aspiring for is fallen, will not cooperate with Iskcon authority, has some serious moral or psychological discrepancies or has some other obvious disqualifications that would prevent them from becoming a diksa guru in Iskcon.

We tried to legislate faith during the zonal guru days by forcing devotees to take initiation from the zonal guru, and this caused many problems. We have learned from those mistakes, but the restriction of female gurus is similar because we are restricting a disciple from taking diksa from a qualified guru of his or her choice. Sastra instructs an aspiring disciple to choose a guru in which he has faith, someone he can surrender to. Sastra does not say if you see Krsna coming through a qualified female you are not allowed to ask her for diksa.

The zonal acarya era taught us that legislation of faith doesn't work because it is not the way healthy human interaction functions. Sastra tells one to personally seek out a qualified guru because, as Bhaktivinoda says, the guru and disciple should test one another not only to see if both are qualified, but to see if they are compatible with one another. In the zonal acarya era, devotees who didn't find the zonal guru compatible were often made to feel guilty. In some cases, such devotees were asked to leave the zone - or even forced to take diksa from him. If a devotee has faith in a vaisnavi who is as qualified to give diksas as her godbrothers, management does not have the right to interfere with that faith by causing (actually forcing) that devotee to take diksa elsewhere.

When it comes to receiving siksa and diksa, managing projects or a temple, or even becoming a GBC, in most parts of the world Iskcon does not discriminate against women. Still, not all are happy with this, and those not happy with this are more unhappy about the idea that women could also be gurus. I have heard many "reasons" why women cannot or should not be gurus in Iskcon. But you could make those same arguments against women being in any position of authority in Iskcon (and some devotees do make those arguments). However, I have found no evidence, either from sastra, our tradition or Srila Prabhupada to indicate unequivocally that qualified women cannot, or must not, be diksa gurus.

This being the case, it seems we need to be clear that the role of guru and disciple is a personal relationship that should not be interfered with by any managerial body without good reason. So if a section of devotees have concerns about women in general being guru, that is one thing (there are also concerns about men in general becoming guru), but if the few women in Iskcon today that are inspired to become diksa gurus are spiritually qualified to do it, then on what basis, other than personal bias, do we have a right to interfere with that woman's relationship with her disciples by not allowing her to give them diksa?

Since Srila Prabhupada didn't speak of guru tattva in terms of men only, what right do we have to discriminate against females who have the same qualifications as male initiating gurus?

It seems those opposed to women being diksa gurus are opposed to women in positions of high authority in Iskcon. For the sake of argument, if anyone is opposed to women as leaders, then let them discuss what they see as the negative social ramifications of this, but we should not interfere in a relationship between a female guru and her siksa disciple by not allowing her to become their diksa guru if her disciple so chooses (our sastra says it is a natural outcome that a siksa guru becomes the siksa disciple's diksa guru) if she has the same qualifications to do the job as other Iskcon diksa gurus.

Ultimately, the real question is whether Prabhupada wanted his female disciples to be guru. I have found no evidence that he didn't. When Prabhupada said he wanted us to be guru, he always referred to both "boys and girls." So if now we are saying the boys can do it but the girls cannot, are we not treating women differently than Prabhupada did and thus not representing him properly?

Those opposed to women diksa gurus are giving credence and attention to the role of diksa over siksa. If we say qualified women can have siksa disciples but not diksa disciples, we are supporting the misconception that the diksa guru is above the siksa guru. This misconception has, and continues to cause, problems in our movement.

The article says that most GBC men are in favor of female gurus. This seems to indicate that it is a just a matter of time before women will be allowed to initiate, although there may be some restrictions placed on them that don't apply to men. I am sure the meeting was healthy and productive, but personally I find that that since we still need such meetings, it indicates that Iskcon's health in relation to both guru appointments and women's issues in general is in need of improvement.