

GBC vs. Prabhupada

Heresies of the Governing Body Commission Rejected

By Vikramasingha das

The Iskcon GBC philosophy on *guru-tattva* and initiations has evolved over the years. In the late 1970s and early 80s, they conceded, due to the insistence of a few leading members, that eleven individuals had been appointed and empowered by Srila Prabhupada to act as zonal *acharyas* in Iskcon. The GBC conceded that these eleven could create their own authority structure called "The Acharya Board". The GBC agreed that only these eleven could be initiating spiritual masters in Iskcon and, in the future, only they could appoint other spiritual masters, or *diksa-gurus*, from among their disciples or Godbrother followers.

In the latter part of the 1980s, after few of the "chosen eleven" fell down and went insane, these contentions were overturned under mounting pressure from a so-called guru reform movement. GBC reformists decided that these eleven "Iskcon *acharyas*" could no longer be zonal autocrats above the authority of the GBC. The GBC resolved that only a majority vote of the GBC body would have authority to sanction and regulate initiating spiritual masters in Iskcon. They resolved that any devotee sanctioned by the GBC could initiate his own disciples in Srila Prabhupada's mission, and they recommended that "*diksa-gurus*" no longer accept elaborate public worship in Iskcon temples and titles and prayers meant for *maha-bhagavatas*. They thus tried to reduce the power and ritual status of "Iskcon *acharyas*" while opening the door for all senior preachers "in good standing" to covet the post of "Iskcon guru". In this way the GBC quelled the "guru reform movement" within Iskcon.

GBC resolutions regarding initiations and *guru-tattva* have been inconsistent and contradictory. It is hard to find two "Iskcon gurus", GBC members, or Iskcon devotees with the exact same views on these topics. New devotees often doubt whether the praises they sing to the spiritual master at *mangala-arotika* and *guru-puja* should be directed toward their so-called Iskcon guru or to Srila Prabhupada. Should they hear primarily from Srila Prabhupada, or more from their "living guru"? Should they offer prayers and worship to a picture of their "guru" on the altar before doing Deity worship or offering food? If so, would he even know? Are all prayers to the spiritual master just ritualistic hyperbole that can be applied to any so-called Iskcon (or gaudiya math) "guru"?

Below is summary of the stance of the GBC today and in the recent past, with samples of their clearly implied philosophical ideas that are against the teachings of Srila Prabhupada. Immediately after each GBC idea, we have provided the correct understanding of *guru-tattva* and *diksa* according the Srila Prabhupada's books, conversations, letters, and classes. Authorized references are cited at the end. Throughout Srila Prabhupada's books there are many dozens of references similar to the few cited below.

GBC: *The spiritual master may be a self-made guru who is nominated by his peers or followers and sanctioned by the GBC, an ecclesiastical board.* There is no need for a direct, specific order from Srila Prabhupada to become a *diksa-guru* in Iskcon.

Srila Prabhupada's *siddhanta*: **"A guru can become guru when he is ordered by his guru. That's all. Otherwise nobody can become guru."** (See below references 1, 2 and 10.)

GBC: *Srila Prabhupada authorized the GBC to sanction and dismiss diksa-gurus in ISKCON.*

SPS: "Mundane votes have no jurisdiction the elect a Vaisnava acharya. A Vaisnava acharya is self-effulgent, and there is no need of any court judgment." Prabhupada authorized the GBC to select (or dismiss) representatives (ritviks), who initiate on His behalf. No one can be guru without the direct order of Krishna or His perfect devotee. (See below references 1, 2, 10 and 15.)

GBC: *Lord Caitanya gave a blanket order for every devotee to initiate his own disciples.*

SPS: Lord Caitanya ordered His followers to become "gurus" by asking everyone they meet to chant Hare Krishna. He never ordered all devotees to initiate their own disciples. Even Lord Caitanya's eternal associates, like Sri Gadadhara Pandita, refused to initiate disciples without a direct order from Lord Caitanya. Many great devotees never initiated their own disciples. (References 2 and 3.)

GBC: *Persons who are not self-realized souls or topmost Vaisnavas can be diksa-gurus if the GBC approves.*

SPS: "Only a topmost devotee, a maha-bhagavata, is eligible to occupy the post of guru." (See below reference 4.)

GBC: *Spiritual masters must be sanctioned, overseen, regulated and, if necessary, disciplined by the GBC.*

SPS: The genuine spiritual master is never to be regulated or disciplined by ecclesiastical boards. (See below reference 5.)

GBC: *A spiritual master may sometimes fall down and become demoniac.*

SPS: "There is no possibility that a first-class devotee will fall down..." -- "The bona fide spiritual master is in the disciplic succession since time immemorial." (See below references 6 and 18.)

GBC: *One may ignore, neglect, or reject his spiritual master who falls from grace with the GBC.*

SPS: A genuine disciple never rejects his spiritual master. (See reference 7.)

GBC: *A student of Krishna consciousness may select any spiritual master, according his or her personal tastes and the ecclesiastical conventions current in Iskcon.*

SPS: "Srila Jiva Goswami advised 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." (See below reference 8.)

GBC: *There are dozens of gurus in Iskcon and each is entitled to his or her own ideas and opinions.*

SPS: *"Guru is one. He has no independent ideas or opinions."* (See reference 9.)

GBC: *Iskcon gurus who have fallen down, if rectified, may be reinstated by the GBC.*

SPS: *"A bona fide spiritual master is in the disciplic succession from time eternal, and he does not deviate at all from the instructions of the Supreme Lord."* (See below reference 10.)

GBC: *There are various levels of spiritual masters, or diksa-gurus, and not all are uttama-adhikaris.*

SPS: *"The spiritual master is always considered either one of the confidential associates of Radharani or a manifested representation of Sri Nityananda." Only such a Vaisnava can impart transcendental knowledge into the heart of a disciple.* (See below references 4, 7 and 11.)

GBC: *The bona fide spiritual master dies, like all mortal men, and thus becomes useless in the matter of initiating and guiding students of Krishna consciousness.*

SPS: *"The spiritual master is eternal..." — "He lives forever through his divine instructions, and his follower lives with him." -- "He reasons ill who tells that Vaisnavas die!"* (See reference 12.)

GBC: *One must accept as one's diksa-guru a man or woman who is living. A posthumous spiritual master, one dead and gone, cannot offer diksa and impart transcendental knowledge.*

SPS: *"The spiritual master is eternal." -- "Although a physical body is not present, the vibration should be accepted as the presence of the spiritual master. Vibration—what we have heard from the spiritual master—that is living."* (See references 10 and 12.)

GBC: *Students of Krishna consciousness whose spiritual masters have fallen from grace with the GBC may shop around for another Iskcon guru and accept "re-initiation" as many times as required for them to find an "Iskcon guru" who is steady.*

SPS: *"A devotee must have only one initiating spiritual master because in the scriptures acceptance of more than one is always forbidden."* (Cc. Madhya, 22.71, Purport)

GBC: *Every senior Iskcon devotee, even a dependent woman or neophyte with no ability to preach, is eligible to initiate his or her own disciples. Srila Prabhupada, however, is ineligible because he cannot posthumously offer diksa. One needs a guru who is alive. A fully transcendental guru with a spiritual body is useless in the matter of initiating devotees after he is dead (posthumous).*

SPS: *"The spiritual master is eternal." He is not limited by material considerations of time and space. "A perfect Vaisnava is all-powerful, just like the Supreme Lord."* (See references 7, 12 and 13.)

GBC: *Not all of Srila Prabhupada's instructions and orders are to be accepted literally or permanently. Some may be interpreted, altered, edited--or rejected as being outdated. For instance, his final order on initiations (July 9th, 1977), which he ordered sent to all ISKCON leaders and temples, is now obsolete and must therefore be rejected in favor of the current system for initiations created by the GBC.*

SPS: A genuine disciple of the spiritual master always accepts his instructions wholeheartedly. He never tries to dodge, ignore or subvert his instructions. (References 7, 12, 13, 14.)

GBC: At the time of his demise, Srila Prabhupada's instructions and ideas regarding the future of initiations in ISKCON were vague or contradictory. He left it to the GBC to sort out the details.

SPS: Prabhupada specifically responded to the question of how initiations would be continued in ISKCON after his departure by dictating, reviewing and signing an official directive establishing *ritvik* initiations. He ordered that this directive be sent to all leaders and GBC members in ISKCON. *Ritvik* initiations were nothing new for ISKCON. The *ritvik* system of initiations and all standards had been current in ISKCON for several years prior. Nonetheless, through this official directive and numerous conversations thereafter, Srila Prabhupada clarified it in detail and institutionalized the procedure to operate without his personal supervision. For sincere disciples, there is nothing vague or contradictory in His numerous instructions. (See below reference 15.)

GBC: Iskcon is meant for recruiting disciples for living Iskcon gurus. Those who claim to be direct disciples or aspiring direct disciples of Srila Prabhupada are deviant upstarts if they accepted initiation or joined Iskcon after 1977. In the history of Vedic culture posthumous ritvik initiations have never been seen.

SPS: In *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and other *Puranas* there are many stories of *ritvik* priests conducting Vedic sacrifices under the auspices of a great *rishis* who were not present on the same planet. There are no injunctions barring so-called "posthumous" *ritvik* initiations. Prabhupada clearly stated that all ISKCON leaders and trustees now and in the future must be "*my initiated disciples*". (See Prabhupada's "Final Order on Initiations", July 9th, 1977, Srila Prabhupada's "Final Will" and "Directions for Management" and Conversation, May 28, 1977 at www.harekrishnasociety.org)

GBC: Post-1977 Iskcon devotees may accept Prabhupada as their instructing guru and param-guru, but they need to take initiation from a living guru to get Prabhupada's blessings and mercy.

SPS: Srila Prabhupada is both the *diksa-guru* and *siksa-guru* for all serious students of Krishna consciousness. Advanced disciples may also act as "*instructing guru*" by teaching devotees to accept Srila Prabhupada and follow his instructions. (See below references 8, 15 and 16.)

GBC: Vaisnava gurus are ordinary men who sometimes make common mistakes, and even great devotees sometimes become degraded under the Lord's external maya-shakti.

SPS: "*One should consider the Acharya to be as good as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. In spite of these instructions, if one considers the spiritual master an ordinary human being, one is doomed. His study of the Vedas and his austerities and penances for enlightenment are useless, like the bathing of an elephant.*" (See below reference 17 and 18.)

GBC: Although Prabhupada accepted what he had at the time, his books had many errors. Although hundreds of senior devotees have chanted these verses and translations in Prabhupada's presence and afterwards for many years, these sayings needed several revisions done by expert pundits.

SPS: “Mistakes, illusions, cheating, and defective perception do not occur in the sayings of authoritative sages.” (See below references 14 and 17.)

GBC: Unless the GBC sanctions *diksa-gurus*, the disciplic succession cannot continue. Srila Prabhupada is dead; he cannot order anyone to become guru.

SPS: The disciplic succession is continued not by the manipulations of blind clerics but by genuine disciples. “The Supreme Lord said, My dear Arjuna, because you are never envious of Me, I shall impart to you the most secret wisdom, knowing which you shall be relieved of the miseries of material existence.” (*Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, 9.1) When repeatedly asked who would be His successor, Srila Prabhupada replied, **“My success is always there. Yes. Just like the sun is there always. It may come before your vision or not—the sun is there. But if you are fortunate you come before the sun... The sun is open to everyone.”** (Conversation, February 12, 1975, Mexico City) – **“Only Lord Caitanya can take my place. He will take care of the movement.”** (Conv., Nov. 2, 1977, Vrindaban.) (See reference 7.)

Summary Conclusions:

It is truly said, *“One bad apple spoils the bunch!”* In this case, at least three or four bad apples polluted the entire GBC body, most Iskcon leaders and most senior preachers. Due to the poisonous ideas introduced by a few foolish individuals, leaders in Iskcon and the vitiated Gaudiya Math temples diverted these institutions from the correct understanding of Gaudiya Vaisnava *siddhanta* and *sadhana-bhakti*, particularly with regards to *guru-tattva* and *diksa*.

In the later part of the 1980s, the GBC officially banned all scriptural and philosophical discussions on the topic of initiations in ISKCON and labeled all devotees who wanted to follow Srila Prabhupada’s system for *ritvik* initiations as heretics, fools or fallen rascals. Today the Iskcon GBC is comprised mostly of disciples and followers of “Iskcon gurus”. Most GBC members and “Iskcon *acharyas*” from the 1980s have resigned, retired, died, become incapacitated, gone insane, or fallen from the path of Krishna consciousness. Others are preaching a *sahajiya* hodge-podge of Krishna consciousness and Hinduism. (Only one former “*zonal acharya*” has admitted his mistake and rectified it.) On the other hand, by Krishna’s grace, almost all of the original proponents for Srila Prabhupada’s *ritvik* system are still actively preaching Krishna consciousness as it is.

Some devotees ask, *“What is the harm if I accept an Iskcon guru as my so-called diksa-guru as long as I follow Srila Prabhupada’s instructions?”* The problem with this approach is that it involves conceding dangerous philosophical misconceptions and contradictions. It involves impure diet and association. The GBC’s disobedience is not an innocent mistake but rather a conspiracy to utilize Srila Prabhupada’s mission for personal prestige and gain. Such motives have polluted Srila Prabhupada’s movement with false ambitions, *guru-aparadha*, *Vaisnava-aparadha* and *sadhu-ninda*. Srila Prabhupada’s name, fame, temples and institutions are being exploited by deviant upstarts, and some of his important teachings are being twisted, minimized or ignored by Iskcon leaders as official policy.

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References:

1. **“Mundane votes have no jurisdiction the elect a Vaisnava *acharya*. A Vaisnava *acharya* is self-effulgent, and there is no need of any court judgment.”** (Cc. *Madhya* 1.220, Purport)

2. "A guru can become guru when he is ordered by his guru. That's all. Otherwise nobody can become guru." (Conversation, Oct. 28, 1975, Nairobi)
3. "Vallabha Bhaṭṭa wanted to be initiated by Gadādhara Paṇḍita, but Gadādhara Paṇḍita refused, saying, *'The work of acting as a spiritual master is not possible for me. I am completely dependent. My Lord is Gauracandra, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. I cannot do anything independently, without His order.'*" (Cc. Antya 7.150,151)
4. "When one has attained the topmost position of *maha-bhagavata*, he is to be accepted as guru and worshiped exactly like Hari, the personality of Godhead. **Only such a person is eligible to occupy the post of guru.**" (Cc. Madhya, 24.330, Purport, citing *Padma Purana.*)"
5. "The spiritual master is never to be an object of disciplinary action..."
6. "A bona fide spiritual master is in the disciplic succession from time eternal, and he does not deviate at all from the instructions of the Supreme Lord..." (*Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, 4.42, Purport.)
7. "He opens my darkened eyes and fills my heart with transcendental knowledge. **He is my lord birth after birth.** From him ecstatic *prema* emanates; by him ignorance is destroyed. The Vedic scriptures sing of his character." (*Sri Guru Vandana*, Verse 3)
8. "Srila Jiva Goswami advised 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." (Cc. *Adi*, 1.35, Purport) -- "One should take initiation from a bona fide spiritual master coming in disciplic succession who is authorized by his predecessor spiritual master. This is called *dikṣa-vidhana*. (*Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, 4.8.54, Purport)
9. "Guru is one. He has no independent ideas or opinions."
10. "A bona fide spiritual master is in the disciplic succession from time eternal, and does not deviate at all from the instructions of the Supreme Lord..." (*Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, 4.42, Purport)
11. "The spiritual master is always considered either one of the confidential associates of Radharani or a manifested representation of Sri Nityananda." (Cc. *Adi*. 1.46, Purport)
12. "The spiritual master is not the question of ['living' or 'dead']... The spiritual master is eternal--the spiritual master is eternal." (Lecture, Oct. 2, 1968, Seattle, WA) -- "I will never die. I shall live from my books, and you will utilize." (Interview, July 16, 1975, Berkeley, CA) -- "Although a physical body is not present, the vibration should be accepted as the presence of

the spiritual master. Vibration—what we have heard from the spiritual master—that is living.” (Lecture, Jan. 13, 1969, LA, CA) -- **“One should consider the *Acharya* to be as good as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. In spite of these instructions, if one considers the spiritual master an ordinary human being, one is doomed. His study of the *Vedas* and his austerities and penances for enlightenment are useless, like the bathing of an elephant.”** (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 7.15.26, Purport)

13. **“Regarding the disciplic succession, there is nothing to wonder for big gaps. We have to pick up from the prominent *acarya* and follow from him.”** (Letter, April 12, 1968.) -- **“...one has to associate with the liberated persons not directly, physically, but by understanding, through philosophy and logic...”** (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.31, Purport.) -- **“Although the physical body is not present, the vibration should be accepted as the presence of the spiritual master. Vibration--what we have heard from the spiritual master --that is 'living'.”** (Lecture, January 13, 1969, Los Angeles.)

14. **“So we follow that 'No Change Policy'. Not that because I think I have become now advanced, I change this to that. That means I am not advanced. My knowledge is imperfect. Therefore I am changing.”**

15. **“They did even consider with common sense—that if Guru Maharaja wanted to appoint somebody as *acarya*, why he did not say? He said so many things, and this point he missed? The real point? And they insisted upon it. They declared some unfit person to become *acarya*. And then another—‘Acarya!’ Another—‘Acarya!’ So better to remain a foolish [simple] person perpetually to be directed by Guru Maharaja. That is perfection. And as soon as he [the upstart] learns that Guru Maharaja is dead, ‘Now I am so advanced that I can kill my guru and I become guru.’ Then he’s finished.”** (Conv. Aug. 16, 1976, Bombay) -- **“If everyone just initiates, then there will only be contradictory results. As long as it goes on there will only be failure.”** (From *Phalguna Krishna Pancami*, 1961.) -- **“I shall recommend some of you to act as officiating *acaryas*. *Ritvik*. Yes.”** (Conv. May 28, 1977, Vrindaban.) -- **“So, deputies... These initiations --I have deputed my disciples. Is it clear or not?”** (Conv. Oct. 18, 1977, Vrindaban.) See Prabhupada’s “Final Order on Initiations”, July 9th, 1977 at www.harekrishnasociety.com .

16. **“I am the initiator guru, and you should be the instructor guru by teaching what I am teaching and doing what I am doing. This is not a title, but you should actually come to this platform. This I want.”** (Letter, August 4, 1975.)

17. ***bhrama pramada viralipsa karanapatava, arsa-vijna-vakye nahi dosa ei saba:***
“Mistakes, illusions, cheating, and defective perception do not occur in the sayings of authoritative sages.” (Cc. *Adi* 2.86)

18. **“There is no possibility that a first-class devotee will fall down...”** (Cc. *Madhya* 22.71, Purport)