

Media Release

Bhakti Charu Swami, ISKCON Guru and Senior Disciple of Srila Prabhupada Passes Away

For Immediate Release

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His Holiness Bhakti Charu Swami Maharaja, a beloved disciple of Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the Founder-Acarya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), passed away in Florida the morning of July 4th due to complications related to COVID-19. He was 74 years old.

His passing coincided with the auspicious beginning of the Caturmasya season and the observance of Guru Purnima.

Bhakti Charu Swami was initiated into the Gaudiya Vaishnava sampradaya, or tradition, by Srila Prabhupada in 1976. Just a few months later Prabhupada awarded him the sannyasa ashrama, the renounced order of life. Receiving the sannyasa order so quickly was unprecedented in ISKCON, and no one since has been so recognized.

Bhakti Charu Swami served as a member of the Governing Body Commission (GBC) of ISKCON from 1986 until his passing. He began accepting disciples of his own in 1986, and initiated several thousand disciples.

Anuttama dasa, a GBC colleague said, “Bhakti Charu Swami was one of the dearest disciples of Srila Prabhupada. Although he joined ISKCON just before Prabhupada passed away in November 1977, he was entrusted by Prabhupada with many essential services, including the translation of Prabhupada’s many books and commentaries on traditional Vaishnava texts into Bengali. In addition to being a powerful leader, he was a soft-hearted and gentle soul, and was loved by all.”

Bhakti Charu Swami had recently flown from his home base in Ujjain, India, to Florida. He became ill soon after, tested positive for COVID-19, and was taken to a hospital. He was placed on a ventilator on June 17th. He remained under careful monitoring while ISKCON devotees around the world prayed intensely and held online kirtan events for his benefit. On the morning of July 4th he passed away, with recordings of Krishna katha, songs and talks by Srila Prabhupada, playing continuously, and with the sacred Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam texts nearby.

In a statement, the GBC Executive Committee wrote, “There are no words that provide solace when facing separation from such a glorious Vaisnava, but we can take some comfort...that His Holiness Bhakti Charu Maharaja lived constantly in meditation on how to serve Srila Prabhupada and his mission.”

One of Bhakti Charu Swami's most cherished instructions from Srila Prabhupada was, "Your love for me will be shown by how you cooperate together after I am gone."

In Maharaja's absence, during multiple ceremonies and online events, ISKCON leaders and members have pledged to take that instruction to heart by reaffirming their dedication to Lord Krishna, and to Prabhupada's mission to relieve the suffering world by sharing the principles of spiritual knowledge given in the Bhagavad-gita.

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A Glimpse at Bhakti Charu Swami's Life of Devotion

Born in Bengal, India in 1945, Kishore Das, later known as Bhakti Charu Swami, spent most of his early life in the city of Calcutta. In 1970, he left India to study chemistry in Germany. Coming across Vedic literature while in Europe, he discovered the richness of India's spiritual heritage. In 1975, he returned to India to pursue his spiritual life.

After travelling to the Himalayas and searching for one year for a guru, he came across a book, The Nectar of Devotion, by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Becoming engrossed in the book, he realized that he had found his teacher.

In late 1976, Bhakti Charu Swami joined the ISKCON temple in Mayapur, India. He met Srila Prabhupada personally in January 1977. Srila Prabhupada initiated his new disciple on Gaura Purnima 1977, the Appearance Day of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Three months later, Prabhupada awarded him the renounced order of sannyasa. Prabhupada gave Bhakti Charu Swami the assignment of translating his books into Bengali and made him his Secretary for Indian Affairs. Maharaj travelled with, and personally served Srila Prabhupada, for the final year of Prabhupada's life.

In 1987, Bhakti Charu Swami became an initiating guru in ISKCON and joined the society's Governing Body Commission, serving as its chairman in 1988 and again in 2017. By 1995, Maharaj had translated into Bengali all of Srila Prabhupada's works on major Vedic literatures, consisting of more than fifty volumes of books including Bhagavad-gita, Srimad-Bhagavatam, Chaitanya Charitamrita and Nectar of Devotion.

In 2004, at the invitation of the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Bhakti Charu Swami built a magnificent ISKCON temple in Ujjain – the ancient holy city known as Avantika, where Lord Krishna went to gurukula. The marble temple features three large altars; a goshala for cow protection; and a midday meals facility for school children. Today, the Ujjain ISKCON temple feeds more than 23,000 school children per day from its 6,000 sq ft industrial kitchen. At one point Maharaj served as the chairman of the Annamrita Foundation, ISKCON's midday meals programme, which feeds over 1.2 million children across India daily.

Bhakti Charu Swami was the GBC Zonal Secretary for ISKCON in India, Bangladesh and parts of the USA. For decades he traveled across India, US, UK, South Africa, the Middle East and Australia, holding spiritual retreats and seminars, and fulfilling Srila Prabhupada's instruction to assist him in spreading the teachings of devotion to Lord Krishna.

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), is a worldwide confederation of more than 650 temples and centers, 110 vegetarian restaurants, and a wide variety of community projects.

ISKCON belongs to the Gaudiya-Vaishnava, a monotheistic sampradaya (tradition) within the broader Hindu culture.

More info:

Bhakti Charu Swami's official website: <https://www.bhakticharuswami.com/>

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