

ISKCON Prison Ministry / June 2020 PO Box 2676 Alachua, FL 32615

THE STANDARD FOR A LEADER

The following conversation between His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and some of his disciples took place on an early-morning walk in December 1973 at Venice Beach, California.

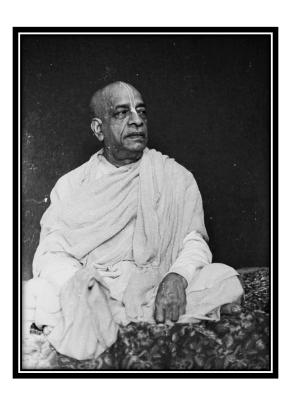
Disciple: Srila Prabhupada, sometimes we argue that although the laws of nature are very powerful, we can overcome such things as disease and death if we surrender to Lord Krishna, since He is controlling nature. But skeptics say we can gradually come to control the laws of nature on our own, without God. **Srila Prabhupada:** No, we are forced to accept the laws of nature. How can anyone say he has conquered the laws of nature?

Disciple: Well, the doctors and biologists have conquered so many diseases.

Srila Prabhupada: But people are still becoming diseased. How have the doctors stopped disease?

Disciple: In Africa and India, for instance, they are inoculating everyone against smallpox, and they've saved many thousands of children from dying.

Srila Prabhupada: But the children will grow up and get old and die eventually in any case. So death has not been stopped. And besides, why do they bother about these children? They don't want overpopulation, so logically the doctors should let them die. But the doctors are illogical. On one side they want to check the death of children, and on the other side they recommend the use



of contraceptives and kill the children in the womb by abortion. Why? Why are they killing? To check the increase in population. Then when children are dying in another part of the world, why are they anxious to save them?

Disciple: Once the child is born, they want to save him. But when the child is still in the womb they feel they can kill him. They say he is not yet a human being.

Srila Prabhupada: But the child is already born as soon as a woman becomes pregnant. Pregnancy means the child is already born. How can they say there is no child? What is this nonsense? When a woman is pregnant, why do we say she is "with child"? This means the child is already born. Therefore, I say this abortion business is simply rascaldom.



Disciple: Well, they've rationalized it.

Srila Prabhupada: How?

Disciple: Sometimes they say they're just doing what they feel is best. And of course they deny that there's any such thing as karma to punish them later. It seems like they have a kind of "rabbit philosophy." When a rabbit closes his eyes so he doesn't see the wolf bearing down on him, he may actually think he's safe.

Srila Prabhupada: So, the abortionists believe in rabbit philosophy. It is not a man's philosophy. It is rabbit's philosophy, frog's philosophy, ass's philosophy. And they have been described in *Srimad*-

Bhagavatam (2.3.19): shva-vid-varahoshtra-kharaih samstutah purushah pashuh. The leaders, who often support abortion, are rascals, and they are glorified by another set of rascals and fools—the people in general. Because the whole population is made up of rascals, they elect a rascal as their leader. Then, being dissatisfied, they throw the first rascal out of office and elect another rascal. This is called punah punash carvitacarvananam: chewing the chewed. The people do not

carvananam: chewing the chewed. The people do not know whom to elect. Therefore they have to be educated to choose a leader who is God conscious, who is actually fit to be a leader. Then they will be happy. Otherwise, they will go on electing one rascal and rejecting him, electing another rascal and rejecting him, and so on.

In America there is a slogan "In God we trust." So, we don't say, "Elect me President." We simply say that the standard for a leader should be that he knows who God is and that he trusts in Him. And if people actually want to know who God is, they can read *Bhagavad-gita*. They should read it with intelligence and try to understand, and then for further progress they may study *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. It is not that we are theorizing. We are taking our information about God from authorized books

Disciple: In our leaflet about politics, we list the qualifications of a leader. First we say he must follow the four regulative principles: no meat-eating, no illicit sex, no gambling, and no indulging in intoxicants. And the one positive injunction we give is that the leader chant the holy name of the Lord. But someone might argue that these requirements violate the constitutional principle of separation of church and state.

Srila Prabhupada: If you believe in God, why should you have any objection to chanting the holy name of God? If you say, "In God we trust," then you must know the name of God and the address of God. Then you can actually trust Him. And if you don't know these things, then learn them from us. We are giving you God's name, address, qualities—everything. And if you say there is no God, then what is the meaning of "In God we trust"? Disciple: They have made propaganda to separate church and state, but they've also separated God and country.

Srila Prabhupada: Those who are making this propaganda do not understand what God is. God cannot be separated from anything, because everything is God (maya tatam idam sarvam). If they study the Bhagavadgita they will understand that God is present everywhere. It is not possible to separate anything from Him. Just as your consciousness is present in every part of your body, so the supreme consciousness, God, is present everywhere in the universe. Krishna says, vedaham samatitani: "I know everything that has happened." Unless He is everywhere, how can He know everything? What do you say?

Disciple: This is logical, Srila Prabhupada. **Srila Prabhupada:** How can you separate God from the government? You may reject any so-called church, any so-called religion that agrees, "Yes, God and the state should be separate." And that is God's instruction—that we reject such so-called religions. *Sarva-dharman parityajya mam ekam sharanam vraja:* "Give up all kinds of so-called religion and simply surrender to Me," Krishna says in *Bhagavad-gita*. People may say they believe in God, but you can know they are ignorant of what God is when they try to separate God from



Need Books or Prayer Beads?

Requests for books, beads or other material should be sent to **<u>your devotee pen pal</u>**. If you do <u>**not**</u> have a pen pal, you can send your requests to: ISKCON Prison Ministry, PO Box 2676, Alachua, FL 32616

- 1) Tell us if you can receive hardbound books and how many at a time.
- 2) Please make sure that you are allowed to receive any of the material you request.
- 3) Please let us know if material need to be sent directly to you or through your chaplain and if you need an authorization form.

Excerpts from inmates' letters

To surrender and have faith for someone like myself who grew up without safety or knowing who to trust, and angry at God for my existence in this material world— can be hard at times. For most of my life, I was in fight or flight mode and to surrender meant death or worse. Of course, I was lost and ignorant of The Truth but even knowing Kṛṣṇa now, I still sometimes fail to surrender and let Kṛṣṇa take over. Yet, He is so merciful that when I do manage to let go of my illusory control, things go much smoother and my devotional service is more easily rendered. I still struggle though to not think I am in control and remember to fall at Srila Prabhupada's feet and beg forgiveness for being such a fallen fool that still struggles many time to be like the trees and the grass as well as have faith that Kṛṣṇa will shelter and care for me as I need if I only surrender.

David B.—Danville, Connecticut

I have not been chanting Maha Mantra in a long while, a little here and there. I did some upon hearing from you and your inquiry. It came on me. The tears flowed, as always. Never fails. I told you about that. It's the only spiritual practice that makes me cry, and believe me I've done a huge amount of spiritual disciplines in my almost 40 years in prison now (38, to be exact.) I do realize the direct link to Kṛṣṇa, His loving touch, through the maha mantra, and that is His love for us and ours for him that bring out the tears in some of us —I guess we cannot get closer to Him in this physical form than via maha mantra. Like a rebellious child who leaves home, then

remembers the tenderness of the parents and cries. The maha mantra reveals a different dimension of existence, in a way that I cannot put my finger on exactly. It's different with Him and the maha mantra than anything else I've experienced. But I think I'm still caught up in the quarreling of Kali Yuga, even though I've met Kṛṣṇa —my little struggles, part of the bigger canvas of Kali Yuga, always in a confrontation with the evils of the world. And at my age (65 next month)! What is it with me, Mother, why can't I let go? I don't know. P.S.: Oh, yeah, I will start chanting daily again. I know I need to cut through the guff of daily life in these places because it really gets me down at times. And I know how chanting can help a lot with that. So I'll start by degrees again. My favorite column in the BTG is the "Books Section: Srimad-Bhagavatam" because it goes so deep. I really put myself there and get lost in that space.

Eva C.—Delano, California

You see, Bhakti-lata, this is where I'm at —being in the world, but not of it. Even before my incarceration I was inclined spiritually, in church three to five times a week. Yet, as I matured, I could not connect with those of you who could and would mercifully guide me deeper into spiritual life. Consequently, I fell. Now I have, and would not hesitate to call on you kind and loving devotees to further assist me in making additional advancement along the pure path of Kṛṣṇa bhakti. In fact, I want to be in association with you devotees- life after life.

Jason M.—Fairfax, South Carolina



POEM CORNER

SOMETIMES I THINK

By Sean C.—St. Peter, Minnesota

I know that God is a Person

Sometimes I think I am Him.

Sometimes I think I am "captain of my own ship"

"Controller of my destiny"

How can this be?

If I am "captain of my own ship"

Why can't I fulfill all of my hopes and dreams?

If I am "master of my destiny"

What am I doing locked up for years?

If I am Boss

Why am I conditioned and

Controlled by material nature

Or age or die?

Just like everyone else?

The sea fades and for my pride I am no longer proud. I sigh in disbelief, thinking of so many wasted years. Intense emotion overwhelms me and I shed so many tears.

From your lotus lips, I hear; the past is gone, let it sleep; Your heart aches, it is true, but no longer weeps. Enter into a new life, serve devotees and the Lord. He will protect you, His nails are sharper than any sword.

But you will soon know He can protect you simply by His desire.

So serve Sri Nrsimha with love and devotion- cessation of the fire.

Light will then shine upon your path, nothing else to fear;

Even the most fallen to Lord Nrsimhadeva, they are dear.

A heavy burden is lifted, good thoughts fill my mind. Spiritual sight a true blessing, no longer wind. Gratitude flows from my heard, feeling the deepest appreciation—

Dissolving the ego a must, dedication and determination.

Surrender, O my soul, give up the illusions so real. Embrace the lotus feet of the lord, and His divine will. Gradually, step by step, I will make it back home—There, never isolated or alone, to feel free or aimlessly roam.

Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Rama! I am chanting eternally in the Holy dhama.

SURRENDER, O MY SOUL By Jason M.—Fairfax, South Carolina

O Lord Nrsimhadeva, I am often so afraid—It's dark, even in the shade.

Wandering alone in this material prison Scored for bad decisions, an object of derision

O Srila Prabhupada, I humbly seek refuge at your lotus feet:

Offering dandavats in the transcendental dust soft and sweet.

Looking up I see your Divine Grace smiling upon me Then I realize there is nowhere else I'd rather be.

Slowly I rise to my knees, palms together and my head bowed.

Would you like to see your STORY and/or ARTWORK in the *Freedom Newsletter*?

If, yes, write the **story** of how you came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Write in your own words, using simple language. Stories should be only about 2 to 3 handwritten pages (or 1 to 2 typed pages).

We also encourage all of you to **draw** topics about Kṛṣṇa, whether you are known as an "artist" or not. With Kṛṣṇa artwork, what is most important is your desire to please Kṛṣṇa.

Send your story and/or your artwork to: **ISKCON Prison Ministry, PO Box 2676, Alachua, FL 32616**And **please** write "MY STORY", or "ARTWORK" on the back of the envelope.

Please be patient: due to the high volume of mail, it may take a few months before you see your submission in the

HOW I CAME TO KRȘNA CONSCIOUSNESS

My Heart Wanted but My Ego Declined

By Isaac B. —Raiford, Florida

When I was about 7-10 years of age, I saw a group of people singing & dancing thru the streets, in downtown Miami. I remember it just felt good and I asked my Grandma if we could join. Being a Baptist she advised me that it wasn't for us,

"They are a cult; it's bad; they're different'.

Twenty years later I saw the "Hare Kṛṣṇa's" on Jacksonville Beach, in Florida. It was a special event; they had the beach flooded with vibrant colors and festive things. I was offered to join them. My heart wanted to but my ego declined.

Later, in 2017, while in prison and searching for truth, I went to the chapel library and the Bhagavad-gita caught my attention. Ever since I've been Kṛṣṇa Conscious and I'm growing more and more.

The camp I'm at now had absolutely no books about Kṛṣṇa so some of what I receive from you and read, I pass to another inmate or donate to the chapel library. It makes me feel good to pass the books along. So in addition to the books I have also previously received I would like Kṛṣṇa Book. One of my favorite stories is when Kṛṣṇa is tied down and then pull the thing between the trees. And I also like when He sucked the life out the demon who breastfed Him. I love reading the stories, pastimes of Kṛṣṇa. Thank you very much. Thank you all! Hare Kṛṣṇa!



Book Distribution Stories!

During the Marathon

By Gopa Vrndesa Dasa

I was on traveling sankirtana during the marathon. I was in Shepperton, two hours north of Melbourne. At one point, not many books were going out, and I was praying for help. Suddenly, a middle-aged lady appeared in front of me, and I introduced myself and offered her a Bhagavad-gita As It Is.

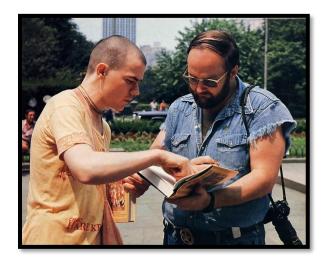
She gracefully accepted the book with a sigh of surprise and excitement and said, "I have to tell you something. A few days ago, I saw a truck full of cows to be slaughtered, and I decided not to eat meat anymore.

I had a dream last night. A yogi came and gave me some instructions, and now here you are, a monk, a yogi, in front of me. I practiced yoga a while ago and then stopped. This meeting is the indication that I need to know more about yoga, and now I have the Bhagavad-gita."

She gave nice donation and happily walked away. 🖏



One hot afternoon I was in Traralgon, two hours east of Melbourne. I stopped a lady and gave her a Bhagavad-gita As It Is. She accepted it and said, "I really need to speak to you. I am going through a bit of a rough patch in my life, and I was thinking that I should read Bhagavad-gita. I went on the internet and found that there are so many editions of the Gita. I was praying to God to give me the right edition. And now here you are, with this authentic edition. Thank you." She walked away with a smile of relief.





Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur called book distribution the "*Brihat-mridanga*", the "*great*" mrdanga (drum) because it spreads all over the world, whereas a mrdanga can only be heard from a few streets away.





Inmate Leland D. —from California— takes small rocks in the prison yard and uses floor wax to glue small pictures of Kṛṣṇa on them. The quarter is in the picture to show the size of the rocks.

Important - if you TRANSFER to a new unit/address:

Subscriptions to the *Back to Godhead* magazine (BTG) are sponsored by the Prison Ministry (IPM), NOT by the BTG Office. So if you have a change of address, please write to IPM, at the address below, to inform us. Please write "*CHANGE OF ADDRESS*" on the outside of the envelope so we can process it immediately. Thank you.

ISKCON Prison Ministry, PO Box 2676, Alachua, FL 32616

The same is goes for the *Freedom Newsletter* (FN). When newsletters are returned we can only assume that the inmate has been released from prison and his/her name is deleted from our mailing list. To make sure you continue receiving the newsletter be sure to notify us of your change of address at the above address.

Devotees on the Frontlines of COVID-19: Chaplain Ghanashyam Das

By: Madhava Smullen for ISKCON News on May 19, 2020

hen Ghanashyam Das first began his chaplaincy service in New York City, little did he know that he would end up on the frontlines of a global pandemic, risking his own health every day to provide spiritual and emotional support for patients dying of Coronavirus.

Ghanashyam, now 42, joined ISKCON in 2000 at 26 2nd Avenue in New York, the movement's first ever temple. Later, he moved to the Bhakti Center in Manhattan, where he lived as a monk for eleven years, and where his empathic nature saw him serve as counselor and mediator for his fellow brahmacharis.

This led to a post as assistant chaplain at Columbia University, and then, at students' request, as official chaplain at NYU. So when he decided to change ashrams and move into family life, it made sense to Ghanashyam to learn how to do what he loved for a living.

In 2018, he was hired as a full-time palliative care chaplain at the main branch of New York-Presbyterian in Manhattan, tending to patients suffering from serious illnesses or dying.



Caring for Patients During the COVID-19 Pandemic

During normal times, Ghanashyam would start his day by meeting with the team, then he would check in with every patient on his list, asking if he could support them by bringing them spiritual resources, a chaplain from their own religion, or if they would just like to talk. Normally, he would spend weeks or months with the same patients, conversing with them and building a relationship.

But after the COVID-19 pandemic hit, everything changed. At one point, the number of palliative care patients in his hospital at a time jumped from twenty-five to nearly ninety. "It was so overloaded, we could hardly handle it," says Ghanashyam, who spends most of his days on COVID positive units. We had to move from one patient to the other much more quickly."

What's more, because they are extremely sick, Ghanashyam can't converse with them as he usually did. "So I just go in the room and pray or chant Hare Krishna for them," he says.

If patients of non-Hindu religions don't request a chaplain of their own faith, Ghanashyam reads their main spiritual scripture, or delivers a broader prayer for them. "Dear God," he prays, "This is a very precarious and scary situation, and we ask that your protection is upon this person, that you're here with him, and that he can experience your presence. Please empower the nurses and doctors to do their best work to help him. And please allow him to experience love coming from his family and your own divine love, whatever his body may be experiencing."

By mid to late March, Coronavirus infections became so widespread that the hospital no longer allowed chaplains to enter patients' rooms. "The best I can do is stand outside the room and chant or pray," says Ghanashyam. Earlier on in the pandemic, in a tragic turn of events families could not even visit their dying relatives. During this time, Ghanashyam would call patients' family members on an iPad so that they could talk and connect visually with their loved ones. Fortunately, since early April select family members have been able to visit at scheduled times, with appropriate precautions. Of course, some patients do not have family to visit them; but they always have Ghanashyam. "I live just a ten-minute walk from the hospital, so I told the nurses, if anybody's dying alone, call me, and I'll come in," he says. "There have been times when I've just sat with a patient and chanted Hare Krishna to them or prayed for them the whole time, so they don't die alone without any support."

Taking Shelter of Krishna

For Hindu or Jain patients, and particularly for devotees of Krishna, Ghanashyam reads from the Bhagavad-gita to them, chants with them, and brings them prasadam, Ganga water, Tulasi leaves and pictures of Krishna.

When Ghanashyam asked one Hindu man in his late seventies who was dying if he had anyone he needed to talk to, or anything he needed to resolve, he responded, "I have no regrets. I've had my family, and my devotion to God, and I feel like there's nothing in the way."

"If you have nothing else to accomplish, and you know you have just a short time left," Ghanashyam advised the man, "Then all you have to do is focus your mind on Krishna."

"How do I do that?" asked the patient, who was a pious Hindu but had not had a regular spiritual practice throughout his life. Ghanashyam experimented with different methods, bringing the man japa beads and chanting with him, then reading the Bhagavad-gita to him; but neither practice seemed to connect.

"Finally, I had the idea to bring him a picture of Sri-Sri Radha-Muralidhara from the Bhakti Center," Ghanashyam says. "I put it on the wall in his room, and as soon as he saw it, he was blown away by how beautiful They were."

"That picture changed everything. He started praying to Krishna, and when his family would come to visit, they'd immediately go to the picture, bow their heads and fold their palms. They began bringing him fruits to offer. The whole atmosphere transformed."

"I wasn't there when he passed away because it happened overnight," Ghanashyam continues. "But his wife later told me that he was looking at the picture, and motioned to her to take it down and give it to him. She took it off the wall and put it in his hands. He held the picture form of Radha-Murlidhara to his face, then to his heart. And he passed away embracing Them. It was incredible."

The Purifying Power of Suffering

In his work as a chaplain, Ghanashyam has developed faith in the transformative power of suffering.

"When I'm with patients, I'm not always trying to stop their suffering, give them good news, and tell them it's all going to be fine," he says. "I trust that it can open up a power that's normally not there. And I have faith that sickness can make people reflect, and make them more mild and humble. Some people turn to God more, some reflect on their life, the mistakes they've made, or things they would like to change. There's a purifying power that's not usually available. So I'm not so much afraid of suffering. Instead I say, let me step into it with them and be supportive, and see what happens."

Supporting Families through Grief

Another important part of Ghanashyam's job is supporting patients' families and guiding them through their grief over the phone.

To do this effectively, he prepares himself by entering into a mindset of empathy. "I think about the background," he prays. "This person's father was healthy, and out of nowhere, he got this disease and now he's in the hospital and very likely to die. So let me enter into his son's world and realize how stressful, difficult and scary it must be for him." When Ghanashyam calls family members and tells them he's there for them if they want to talk, most open up and share. Many express their appreciation and give him blessings when he tells them he visits and prays for their relative every day. Often, they cry, unsure of what to do, and Ghanashyam listens very carefully, empathizes, and holds the space for them.

Although it's difficult, he also has to be able to detach himself afterwards. "When I'm talking with them, I get into it fully, and when I hang up the phone, I completely let it go," he says. "Because it's not healthy to keep it all."

Dealing with Fear

While visiting COVID-positive patients all day, Ghanashyam wears gloves, a mask with protective eye shield, and a protective gown that covers his whole body down to the shins. At first, he felt secure that he was taking all possible precautions, and therefore safe.

But one night, the fear began to get to him. "I woke up in the middle of the night feeling very hot, and thought, 'Oh man, is this a fever? Am I getting the symptoms?" he recalls. "I started freaking out – 'My wife is here, is she going to get sick now?' I became really nervous and couldn't get back to sleep. And I remember looking at all Prabhupada's books on my shelf and thinking, 'How much of this knowledge have I really internalized? When we die, we just have the consciousness we've cultivated throughout our life. I have to go deeper into these books."

The next morning, Ghanashyam did not feel ill anymore. And having had such powerful realizations about death, he decided to simply face his fear. "I thought, 'I'm not going to hide at home, this is my work," he says. "I might get sick, but if I do I'll accept it and deal with it.' And once I decided to just walk through the fear and accept whatever consequences were going to come, that's when the fear started to reduce. Now I feel great about it. If I'm going to do this work, I might as well do it fully, and not resist it."

The Greatest Opportunity to Serve

Although the number of palliative care patients is now beginning to fall every week, Ghanashyam's work is far from over. The blessings of patients and their families give him the strength to continue, as does the opportunity for spiritual growth.

"I see this as a practice for dying," he says. "Because eventually, Coronavirus may go away, but disease will not. Some form or other will be there, and at some point, it will come to me and the people I love too. So this is an opportunity to face those scary things in the heart with integrity; to prepare myself, get in the right mindset and face it without letting fear stop me."

Ghanashyam is also taking shelter of a quote by Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur: "Wherever there is the greatest need, there is simultaneously the greatest opportunity to serve."

"I think a lot about that statement," he says. "There is a great need right now, and I feel like I should seize this opportunity to be there for people and help them at this time."

Drops of Nectar

tat te 'nukampām su-samīkṣamāṇo bhuñjāna evātma-kṛtam vipākam hṛd-vāg-vapurbhir vidadhan namas te jīveta yo mukti-pade sa dāya-bhāk



TRANSLATION

My dear Lord, one who earnestly waits for You to bestow Your causeless mercy upon him, all the while patiently suffering the reactions of his past misdeeds and offering You respectful obeisances with his heart, words and body, is surely eligible for liberation, for it has become his rightful claim.





June 2020

01 June 2020 - Ganga Puja

01 June 2020 - Disappearance Day of Sri Baladeva

Vidyabhusana

01 June 2020 - Appearance Day of Srimati Gangamata

Goswami

02 June 2020 - Pandava Nirjala Ekadasi

04 June 2020 - Panihati Cida Dahi Utsava

05 June 2020 - Snana Yatra

05 June 2020 - Disappearance Day of Sri Mukunda

Datta

05 June 2020 - Disappearance Day of Sri Sridhara

Pandita

06 June 2020 - Disappearance Day of Sri Syamananda

Prabhu

10 June 2020 - Appearance Day of Sri Vakresvara

Pandita

15 June 2020 - Disappearance Day of Sri Srivasa

Pandita

17 June 2020 - Yogini Ekadasi

21 June 2020 - Disappearance Day of Sri Gadadhara

Pandita

21 June 2020 - Disappearance Day of Srila Bhaktivinoda

Thakura

22 June 2020 - Gundica Marjana

23 June 2020 - Ratha Yatra Starts

23 June 2020 - Disappearance Day of Sri Svarupa

Damodara Gosvami

23 June 2020 - Disappearance Day of Sri Sivananda

Sena

26 June 2020 - Hera Pancami

27 June 2020 - Disappearance Day of Sri Vakresvara

Pandita

JULY 2020

01 July 2020 - Sayana Ekadasi

01 July 2020 - Return of Ratha Yatra

05 July 2020 - Guru (Vyasa) Purnima

05 July 2020 - Disappearance Day of Sanatana

Goswami

06 July 2020 - First Month of Caturmasya Begins

10 July 2020 - Disappearance Day of Srila Gopala

Bhatta Goswami

13 July 2020 - Disappearance Day of Srila Lokanatha

Goswami

14 July 2020 - The Incorporation of ISKCON in New

York

16 July 2020 - Kamika Ekadasi

24 July 2020 - Disappearance Day of Sri Raghunandan

Thakura

24 July 2020 - Disappearance Day of Sri Vamsidasa

Babaji

30 July 2020 - Radha Govinda Jhulan Yatra Begins

30 July 2020 - Pavitropana Ekadashi

31 July 2020 - Disappearance Day of Srila Rupa

Goswami

31 July 2020 - Disappearance Day of Sri Gauridasa

Pandita

