

ISKCON Prison Ministry / APRIL 2021
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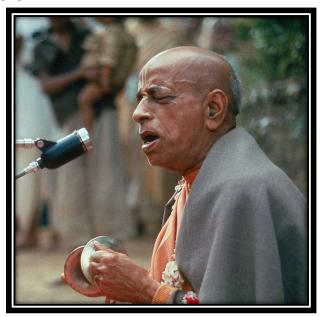
THIS MATERIAL WORLD IS ZERO

This exchange between His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and a graduate student took place in Los Angeles, near the shore of the Pacific Ocean, during January of 1974.

Student: Today's scientists and philosophers and psychologists—they say the only authority they can accept is their own mind.

Srila Prabhupada: In Sanskrit they are called manodharmi—mental speculators.

Student: But don't we have to experiment with different mental perspectives if we're going to understand the world? Srila Prabhupada: Actually, mental speculators have been condemned—Mano-rathenasati dhavato bahih [Srimad-Bhagavatam 5.18.12]—because they are simply carried away by the chariot of the mind. The mind is flickering, always changing. Sankalpa-vikalpa: the mind's business is to accept something and again reject it. All these mental speculators are doing just that. Somebody's putting forward some theory, and after a few years he will himself reject it, or somebody else will reject it. So by mental speculation you will remain on the material, changing platform. You cannot get any lasting idea.



Student: But the scientists feel strongly about their research. They're convinced they've done some real good for the world.

Srila Prabhupada: They think, "This is bad; that is good." But they do not know that in this material world, saying, "This is bad" and "That is good" is all mental speculation, all a mistake. They do not know that in this material world, "bad" and 'good" are the same thingbecause both are simply matter.

Student: How can you say that "bad" and "good" are the same thing?

Srila Prabhupada: For instance, when we are walking on this road, sometimes we say, "This is very good," and sometimes we say, "This is very bad." But the road is the same. So how is it both "good" and "bad"? This is simply speculation. Today we may say, "This road is dry; it is dusty. Bad." Tomorrow we may say, "This road is dry; it is not at all muddy. Good." It is simply mental speculation.

Student: It's still a bit hard to understand what you're saying.

Srila Prabhupada: Here is another example. In India the villagers pass stool out in the open fields. By the end of the day, the sun has left the top part of the stool dry. So when some fool sees the dry part of the stool, he may say, "Oh, this part is very nice." He forgets that after all, it is stool-so what is the difference whether it is dry or moist? In the same way, the scientists are making great advancement, but death is still there. So we have to ask, "What is the difference whether you make advancement or no advancement? One who has not advanced in science will die, and you so-called advanced people will also die. Then what is the use?" Neither the scientist nor the ordinary person can protect himself from death. Then what is the meaning of "good"-"This is good," "This is advancement"—or "This is not advancement"?

Student: But I think the distinction between "good" and "bad" depends on the consciousness of the individual.

Srila Prabhupada: "Relativity"—the "law of relativity": "One man's food is another man's poison." So how can you distinguish whether this is "food" or "poison"? One man will say, "No, it is food!" Another man will say, "It is poison!" So how will you distinguish? You see? This "good" and "bad" is simply mental speculation. Because it is on the material

platform, there is nothing good. All that the scientists and philosophers are doing is cheating. They say, "We are advancing." In what way are you advancing? The problem of birth and death is still there—so what is the meaning of your advancement?

Student: So we have to get off the chariot of the mind? Srila Prabhupada: Yes. If you remain on the chariot of the mind, then whatever you accept you'll have to reject again. And that is just what they are doing. The so-called scientists and philosophers—they are putting forward some theory, and after some time they reject it. So if you remain on the mental platform, then this business of accepting and rejecting will go on. You'll never come to a lasting conclusion. One has to rise to the spiritual platform. That is nityah sasvato 'yam—eternal, everlasting.

Student: Are you saying everything in this world is worthless?

Srila Prabhupada: Just try to understand. It can have value and meaning. For instance, you can add thousands of 0's together, one after another, but the value will still be 0. It will never become 1. But by the side of 0, if you bring 1, immediately that becomes 10. Add another 0, immediately you have 100. You have increased it ten times. But that 1 must be there—that is ekam brahma, the one Supreme Spirit. Then 0 increases in its value. Similarly, this material world is zero. Bad. But if there is Krsna consciousness, then it has value. Then it has value.

Student: Doesn't the chariot of the mind have any value at all?

Srila Prabhupada: No. It has no value.

Student: But the whole Western philosophical—Srila Prabhupada: Mano-rathenasati dhavato bahih: by mental speculation you'll remain in this temporary field. Asat means "that which does not exist." You take anything in this material world-some day it will not exist. Anyone knows it. A skyscraper is constructed, but everyone knows that it will not exist; some day it will fall down. Everyone knows. It will not endure. Therefore Prahlada Maharaja says, mayasukhaya bharam udvahato vimudhan: for illusory happiness people are making huge, gorgeous arrangements and working day and night. For something that will be zero. It has begun as zero, and it will end as zero; in the middle they're busy. Just see'. Therefore they're vimudhan—fools and rascals.

Srila Prabhupada's spiritual master had told him years before not to be despondent if few people attended the *kirtan* (chanting) or lecture. "Even if no one attends," Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati had told him, "you can go on chanting to the four empty walls." Thus it was Srila Prabhupada's personal duty to glorify Lord Kṛṣṇa in whatever setting He had provided.

BECOMING ONE OF "THEM"

By Nataka Candrika Devi Dasi

I FIRST MET Hare Krsna devotees in the winter of 1971. I was a sophomore (second-year student) at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado, about sixty-five miles north of Denver. I saw four or five devotees with shaven heads and saffron robes chanting in front of the Student Union building.

"Wow!" I thought. "What next?"

I started walking the other way, when suddenly I was face to face with one of "them."

Smiling, he held out a magazine.

"No, thank you," I said quickly.

"At least take one of these," he said, as he handed me a small card.

I looked at it and back at him, noticing the white vertical marking on his forehead. I took the card and walked away.

I couldn't pronounce the strange words on the card: Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. Then I noticed that the card was an invitation to visit their center in Denver. Uninterested, I tucked the card away and forgot about it.

My next contact with Krsna consciousness came two years later. I had dropped out of school to travel, and having run out of money, I got a job at a newspaper in Boulder, Colorado. A friend of mine had a son my age who had been reading Bhagavad-gita and wanted to join the Krsna consciousness movement. As a concerned mother, my friend kept asking me to try talking sense into her son so that he would give up "this nonsense" about becoming a devotee.

One day I was at my friend's home and her son was there, explaining the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I had no idea what he was talking about, but he sounded sincere, so I listened. Then he asked me to listen to an album he'd just bought, called *The Radha Krsna Temple*.

I'll never forget the feeling that overtook me as I sat there. I got goose bumps, and tears welled up in my eyes. It was the most beautiful music I'd ever heard. I thought, "This is not of this world!"



I soon visited the temple in Denver, where I saw the film *The Hare Krsna People*. The devotees' kindness impressed me, and when a devotee sat down with me and answered all my philosophical questions with references from the Bhagavad-gita, I was convinced. Although I had been reading the Gita, I couldn't explain what it said. When the devotee explained everything to me, it made perfect sense.

Feeling confused, elated, and exhausted, I returned to my little apartment and began to face what I knew I had to do; quit my job, move into the temple, and take up Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The next two weeks were difficult for me, as I told my friends and family about my desire to be a devotee. My parents thought I'd been drugged; my boyfriend thought this was a passing fad I'd get over. But I didn't.

I arrived at the temple door about three weeks from the day I'd heard *The Radha Krishna Temple* album. I had only my car, my sewing machine, and one box of personal belongings. That was more than twenty years ago, and never for a moment have I regretted the decision to move in and become one of "them."

Nataka Candrika Devi Dasi has been teaching in ISKCON pre-schools and elementary schools for nearly than thirty years. She is now retired and lives in Alachua, Florida, USA, with her husband, Radha-Damodara Dasa.

STORIES FROM THE SRIMAD-BHAGAVATAM

THE APPEARANCE OF LORD NRSIMHADEVA

All glories to Lord Nrsimhadeva the half man half lion incarnation of Lord Krishna. He appeared to save the great saint Prahlada Maharaja from his demonic father Hiranyakasipu.

he demon Hiranyakasipu performed rigorous austerity of standing on the tips of his toes for one hundred and twenty-five years. Due to this severe austerity Lord Brahma appeared to offer him benedictions. At first, Hiranyakasipu requested to

become immortal. Lord Brahma explained to him that even he, Lord Brahma, must die. So Hiranyakasipu tried to trick Brahma into giving him immortality: he asked that he not be killed in the day or in the night; that he not die on land or in the air or in the water; that he not be killed by anything alive or dead; that he not be killed by any man or beast; that he not be killed by any weapon, and that he not be killed inside or outside.

After receiving these boons, Hiranyakasipu, thought himself immortal and began conquering the material universe. With each new victory and increase in his power the Demigods became more and more worried.

In time Hiranyakasipu had a son called Prahlada. Prahlada was a great devotee of Lord Krishna even from birth. As a small boy of five he would preach about Krishna to his school friends any time the teachers left the room. Prahlada's preaching infuriated his father, Hiranyakasipu. When his father demanded to know what this foolishness was, who was this Krishna, Prahlada explained that because his father was too attached to his own sense gratification, he was determined to deny Krishna's existence. Due to this he could not understand even if he took lessons. To understand Krishna, one must first surrender to Krishna then Krishna reveals Himself.

Hiranyakasipu became so angry that he ordered his guards to kill Prahlada, although he was his own son.

Prahlad was first thrown into a circle of *raksasas* (cannibals) but Prahlada kept chanting Hare Krishna and the cannibals had no power to harm him. Prahlada was then thrown into boiling hot oil, thrown in the path of a hurricane, pushed off a cliff, thrown under the

under the feet of an elephant to be trampled, placed in a snake pit. Because Prahlada was steady in his faith and continued to chant Hare Krishna, nothing could harm him.

Hiranyakasipu thought that his son must have some mystic power. He pretended to be sorry for trying to harm Prahlada and invited him to lunch. In desperation, Hiranyakasipu poisoned Prahlada's food, with enough poison to kill hundreds of full-grown men. Prahlada first offered the food to Krishna and it became prasadam, as pure as God and free from all poisonous effects. When the poisoned food had no effect on Prahlada, Hiranyakasipu became enraged;

he demanded to know where he got his superhuman powers from.

Prahlada replied that he received his strength from the same place as Hiranyakasipu did—from God. Hiranyakasipu demanded to know where this God was.

Prahlada explained that God is everywhere Hiranyakasipu demanded, "If God is everywhere, is He in this pillar?" Prahlada replied, "Yes, my Lord is in that pillar," Hiranyakasipu smashed the pillar with his club. As he did so, a terrifying sound came out and the demon felt fear. Lord Nrsimhadeva, the half-man, halflion incarnation of Krishna, jumped out of the broken pillar and pounced on the stunned demon.

After a ferocious fight, Nrsimhadeva stretched Hiranyakasipu across His lap and with His long nails, He ripped apart the demon. Lord Nrsimha kept all of



Lord Brahma's boons intact; He was killed neither on the land, sea nor in the air but on the lap of the Supreme Lord. He was killed neither during the day or the night but at dusk. He was killed neither by beast nor a man, but by a half-lion, half-man. He wasn't killed by any weapon but by the Lord's nails. He wasn't killed by anything alive or dead, but with the Lord nails (nails are

considered neither living, nor dead). He wasn't killed neither inside, nor outside, but on the threshold. Nobody can outsmart the Supreme Lord. All glories to Lord Nrsimhadeva!

PRAYERS TO LORD NRSIMHA

namas te narasimhaya prahladahlada-dayine hiranyakashipor vaksaha shila-tanka-nakhalaye

I offer my obeisances to Lord Narasimha, who gives joy to Prahlada Maharaja and whose nails are like chisels on the stonelike chest of the demon Hiranyakasipu.

ito nrisimhah parato nrisimho yato yato yami tato nrisimhah bahir nrisimho hrdaye nrisimho nrisimham adim sharanam prapadye

Lord Nrsimha is here and also there. Wherever I go Lord Nrsimha is there. He is within the heart and is outside as well. I surrender to Lord Nrsimha, the origin of all things and the supreme refuge.

tava kara-kamala vare nakham adbhuta-shringam dalita-hiranyakashipu-tanu bhrigam keshava dhrita-narahari-rupa jaya jagadisha hare

O Kesava! O Lord of the universe! O Lord Hari, who have assumed the form of half-man, half-lion! All glories to you! Just as one can easily crush a wasp between one's fingernails, so in the same way the body of the wasp-like demon Hiranyakasipu has been ripped apart by the wonderful, pointed nails on your beautiful lotus hands.

Excerpts from inmates' letters

I'm writing to thank you for the books. And for helping me get closer to Hare Kṛṣṇa. My teacher, Mr. Dukes, showed me the way to Kṛṣṇa bhakti. Although he is not working in this facility no more, I feel as if he came here so I can have liberation from this material planet. I chant as much as I can in here. But it's hard to stay focused with the environment I'm in. I usually wait until my roommate and the rest of the pod is quiet to do yoga and meditate on Kṛṣṇa. I hope to meet you one day. Cause I plan on following Krishna and need to find myself around other devotees as well. Thank you for everything.

Jonathan A. —Lake City, FL

Thank you for the booklets. I enjoyed them. The letter and the booklets you sent made me understand more than I have known before. I have been into Hatha Yoga for many years. This is new and so far I have enjoyed learning and reading about Bhakti Yoga and chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa. It's relaxing while I meditate. I hope we can keep this up. I would also like to know if you have any ministries in Conroe, Texas at all. If so, I would like to go to one when I get out and continue to learn this path to spirituality. I hope my letter finds you in the best of health. May Lord Kṛṣṇa bless you! **Anthony M.**

I have made so many mistakes in my life it has finally led me to prison.

I would like everything you have to offer. I am trying to devote my life to Krsna but in prison it is hard. So I need strength and please pray for me. Thank you.

P.S. Maybe you can pray for my bad luck and my destructive ways to leave me.

Sapan K. —Clallam Bay, WA

Hare Kṛṣṇa! Thank you for the books. I received them gladly. I've learned that the world in which we live in is a vast illusion and that I should not become attached to its material existence. Prior to reading the books, I had some knowledge on Karma, but now it has expanded. One other thing I learned is that by chanting the Maha Mantra, I can free myself from distrust, misdoubt, and anxiety. I've studied a little of the *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is*. The inmate who had a copy of this book was later transferred to another unit.

Johnny F. —Pine Bluff, AR

Greetings! The Coffield Chaplaincy has sent notice on the arrival of the materials that you sent. In fact, I have the Gita presently with me. I know I am going to enjoy studying it. On behalf of the Eastern Religion Service members, I would like to send you and the ISKCON Prison Ministry a very big thank you along with hugs. We are very thankful for the gifts and very, very appreciative of the much-needed support for our service. We are aware of the time, the effort, and the cost in providing materials and will treasure these items. The CDs will be a nice addition to our library. Again, we cannot thank you or the ministry enough. May Lord Kṛṣṇa continue to shower his mercy and bless all of your endeavors. Sincerely,

Charles B. —Tennessee Colony, TX

I am a man of 60 plus years of age who sought happiness through material gain for the bigger part of this life. Since my arrest in 2006, I have sought knowledge of my inner being, consciousness, meditation, and the path to finding not only answers but a peaceful state within myself. From reading Kṛṣṇa I have found that the path I seek to follow is not beyond

my reach. I ask for guidance through such readings as the Bhagavad-Gita and any others to help along my path. At this time I have an out date [release] of 2033 and will remain at U.S.P. for at least ten more years before my custody level will allow a transfer to a lower custody prison. I seek to live a non-violent lifestyle remaining substance free and I will be diligent in my seeking to find spiritual consciousness. With all my best wishes,

Arthur S. —White Deer, PA

After an issue with the warden about my altar today, I came to realize that being put into so much difficulty tested my sincerity. I have struggled for years for the federal prison system to acknowledge and

accommodate my faith. It continues to be a struggle and there have been so many times where I have wondered why I bother, why not just give up my practices and go with what the staff want from me. Yet that very thought immediately strikes me and I feel sad at such a possible loss.



It is then I realize what matters to me. I was struggling with choosing material attraction versus spiritual and wanted them both. After today's difficulty, I realized that in that moment, I was being given a choice then and there. Either to pick the material or the spiritual. Once I chose, things began happening to, not only help my wanting to make progress in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, but also in helping so many others. That one event affected many, some who do not yet know and some that personally witnessed it, they do not know the changes I see in them. Kṛṣṇa is so wonderful and merciful.

David B. —Danville, CT

VERSE OF THE DAY

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. Srimad-Bhagavatam 10.14.8

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Two Devotees Share Their Surprisingly Blissful Lockdown Experience

By: Madhava Smullen for ISKCON NEWS

RIGHT: During lockdown Sarah (left) does morning mangala arati back-up services, while Sharaniya (right) distributes books via 'tele-sankirtan'

Although 2020 has been a tough year for us all, some have discovered silver linings amidst the challenges. When ISKCON New Vrindaban, West Virginia went into a two-week lockdown on Thanksgiving Day to keep the community safe, two women from opposite sides of the world found themselves in an unexpected quarantine. However the experience

turned out to be a blissful one, as they learned new skills, nourished their spiritual lives, and forged a strong friendship.

Sharaniya Nathan, originally from the UK, had been living and working as a dentist in Sydney, Australia, and had received an exemption to COVID-19 travel restrictions so that she could attend a work conference in the U.S.

Meanwhile Sarah Ferrer from Florida had previously worked in substance abuse prevention, and was in a



transitional phase in her life, pursuing a "grand adventure in Bhakti."

The two had been visiting New Vrindaban when a member of the greater New Vrindaban community (not



a temple resident) tested positive for COVID-19. As the community member isolated with their family, ISKCON New Vrindaban closed the temple property and buildings to the public and the rest of the community until further notice. All resident devotees tested for COVID-19 and remained in quarantine inside the temple. Continuing to wear masks and social distance, the greatly reduced personnel took on all the services required to take care of the deities and maintain the temple throughout the lockdown.

Sarah, who had never lived in a temple before, says, "Because it was such a small group of people, I was engaged in services that I probably would have never been engaged in otherwise. I feel like it was a personal gift from Krishna to show me what life so connected to a temple can be like, and all of the different ways one can serve Krishna."

LEFT: Devotees in lockdown learn how to worship Srila Prabhupada (left to right) Bhakta Jacob, Bhaktin Ryna, Sarah, Sharaniya, and teacher Ekanta-sevika Dasi

According to Sharaniya, management of the lockdown and resident personnel was handled

very well by temple president Jaya Krsna Das, Communications Director Anuradha Dasi, and the rest of the management team.



ABOVE: Sharaniya leads a Tulasi Devi workshop

"There was a great feeling of inclusiveness," Sharaniya says. "If we weren't confident in whatever services needed to be covered, they took the time to train and support us. And although we were all doing things we probably hadn't done before, there was never any criticism."

Anuradha also partnered devotees up as "service buddies," helping to keep up their spirits, provide support, and make them feel like they were not alone. "That allowed some great associations and friendships to develop," says Sarah. "My service buddy was Sharaniya, and I think her participation and association in all of my services helped my personal sadhana grow and strengthen so much."

In addition, Anuradha organized "enrichment courses," which provided devotees opportunities to learn new skills during lockdown that would enrich their bhakti.

For instance, Sarah and Sharaniya systematically learned from Anuradha and Ekanta-sevika Dasi how to bathe, dress and perform arati for Srila Prabhupada, incorporating the right prayers, mood, and practical steps.

From main Tulasi Devi caretaker Moksha, they learned how to care for Tulasi Devi, Lord Krishna's intimate servant who appears in the form of a plant and resides in a beautiful new 600-square-foot greenhouse at New Vrindaban. During this course they learned how to chant the appropriate prayers to Tulasi Devi, how to pick leaves and Manjari flowers, how to make Manjari

RIGHT: Sarah picks Tulasi manjari flowers and makes manjari garlands

garlands for the deities of Sri Sri Radha Vrindaban Chandra, and more. In the mornings, they attended Zoom Srimad-Bhagavatam classes in the temple room, broadcast on a big screen and featuring various guest speakers such as Brahmatirtha Das (Bob Cohen) of Perfect Questions, Perfect Answers, Vraja Vihari Das of ISKCON Resolve, and professor of philosophy and religion Gopal Hari Das. Also broadcast live on Facebook and Mayapur.tv, the classes benefitted not just the few devotees in lockdown in the temple, but upped morale among those in the greater New Vrindaban community who could no longer come for darshan and felt isolated from the temple.

Wanting to contribute to the Prabhupada marathon and Gita Jayanti Live to Give campaign safely from their quarantine, Sharaniya and Sarah received training from a resident book distributor and distributed books over the phone. Although ISKCON New Vrindaban's goal had been 1,000 Bhagavad-gitas, they far surpassed it, distributing 4,600 Gitas through "tele-sankirtana."

Finally, devotees under lockdown also started a pilot wellness program, making green juices for devotees in the temple. The juicing, which Sarah says, "helps one's overall health, gives the body energy, and helps devotees focus on chanting and seva," has continued beyond lockdown and may eventually grow into a broader wellness program.

Although ISKCON New Vrindaban has since reopened (with continued safety precautions), Sarah and Sharaniya take away a lot with them from the lockdown period.

"It was really nice to be able to work together with Sarah," Sharaniya says. "To develop that friendship,



which would never have happened otherwise, was really quite magical."

Sarah agrees, adding, "Part of my takeaway is that this was a great real-life example of how in times of stress, change and uncertainty, when people come together to

serve something higher, and do it in a way that supports each other, then the process and the outcome can be amazing."



RIGHT: Drawing on a cloth doily, by **Dale B.** —Texas



BELOW: Ceramic bowls, and tiles with devotional words on the back. by **Jason M.** —South Carolina







Calendar Calendar

APRIL2021

- 04 April 2021 Appearance Day of Sri Srivasa Pandita
- 07 April 2021 Papamochani Ekadashi
- 08 April 2021 Disappearance Day of Sri Govinda Ghosh
- 14 April 2021 Beginning of Salagrama and Tulasi Jala Dana
- 17 April 2021 Appearance Day of Sri Ramanujacharya
- 21 April 2021 Rama Navami
- 23 April 2021 Kamada Ekadashi
- 24 April 2021 Damanaka Ropana Dvadasi
- 27 April 2021 Sri Balarama Rasayatra
- 27 April 2021 Sri Krishna Vasanta Rasa
- 27 April 2021 Appearance Day of Sri Vamsivadananda Thakura
- 27 April 2021 Appearance Day of Sri Syamananda Prabhu

MAY 2021

- 03 May 2021 Disappearance Day of Sri Abhirama Thakura
- 06 May 2021 Disappearance Day of Srila Vrndavana Dasa Thakura
- 07 May 2021 Varuthini Ekadashi
- 11 May 2021 Appearance Day of Sri Gadadhara Pandita
- 14 May 2021 End of Jala Dana
- 15 May 2021 Aksaya Tritya Candana Yatra Starts
- 17 May 2020 Appearance Day of Sri Sankaracharya
- 19 May 2021 Jahnu Saptami
- 21 May 2021 Appearance Day of Srimati Sita Devi
- 21 May 2021 Disappearance Day of Sri Madhu Pandita
- 21 May 2021 Appearance Day of Srimati Jahnava Devi
- 23 May 2021 Mohini Mahadvadasi (Ekadashi)
- 24 May 2021 Rukmini Dvadasi
- 24 May 2021 Disappearance Day of Sri Jayananda Prabhu
- 25 May 2021 NARASIMHA CATURDASI APPEARANCE OF LORD NARASIMHADEVA
- 26 May 2021 Krishna Phula Dola, Salila Vihara
- 26 May 2021 Appearance Day of Sri Sri Radha-Ramana Devji
- 26 May 2021 Buddha Purnima Appearance Day of Lord Buddha
- 26 May 2021 Appearance Day of Sri Madhavendra Puri
- 26 May 2021 Appearance Day of Sri Srinivasa Acharya
- 26 May 2021 Disappearance Day of Sri Paramesvari Dasa Thakura
- 30 May 2021 Disappearance Day of Sri Ramananda Raya

