



IPM NEWS



*Dedicated to His Divine Grace
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada*

January/February 2013

Changing Lives from the Inside Out!

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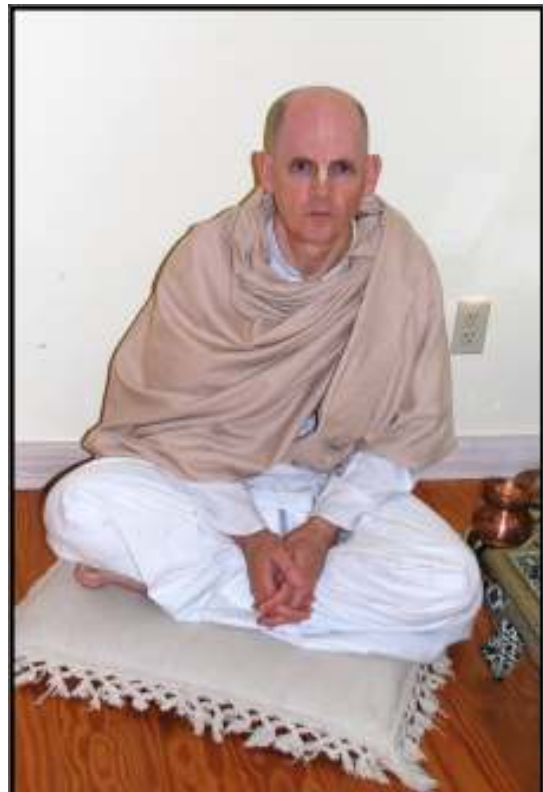
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THE LONG ARM OF THE LAW

by Sarva-drik dasa

Ever hear the phrase, “The long arm of the law”? Most of you probably have. But just in case you haven’t, this phrase refers to the tendency for legal authorities to always, “Get their man”. Well in my experience Lord Krishna’s “arm” is much longer than the law, and He has extended it through His beloved representative Srila Prabhupada, and Srila Prabhupada’s faithful servants, to reach out to devotees in every circumstance of life. And that includes those fortunate souls who practice Krishna Consciousness, yet somehow or other, find themselves incarcerated in one of the thousands of state and federal prisons that operate in the United States.

I remember the first time I entered a federal prison. It took some time since there is a lengthy background check process, but when the large, heavy steel door closed shut behind me during my first visit, I thought to myself, “I’m glad that I’m just visiting.” But there are hundreds of devotees of Lord Krishna whose visit to these correctional institutions is not so brief. They live there, and some of them will die there. In the



meantime, while they spend time as inmates, many of them, by their good fortune, come in contact with devotional service through one of Srila Prabhupada's wonderful books, through another incarcerated devotee, or by attending an in house devotional program. Prison is a microcosm of the outside world. And as there is a certain percentage of the outside population that are undiscovered devotees, so also in the prison environment there are devotees waiting to be discovered by the process of thoughtfully presenting Lord Krishna and our way of devotional life.

Preaching Krishna Consciousness in prison is really quite natural since there are so many parallels to life in Federal and State prisons and our own individual incarceration within the prison of our own mind and senses. Inmates live in the small prison inside the big prison and all of us live in the big prison of material life, Maya's kingdom, and we all need to get out. How does that happen? How is it possible? Our ultimate release begins when we acknowledge our criminal behavior in relation to the Lord, rectify ourselves, behave ourselves and expect to be on "parole" for some time. Taking up devotional life is like being on parole. We have a relative degree of freedom which will mature to complete freedom in due course of time, but if we fall back down to non-devotional activity we are again sentenced to another term of birth and death in the Maya's kingdom, the real "big house".

For the last six months I have been traveling to the Petersburg Prison in Richmond, Virginia. After arriving, getting checked in and being escorted to the Chapel, I was surprised again to see the, "long arm" of Srila Prabhupada and Lord Krishna. The devotees there transform a vacant room into Vaikuntha twice weekly with their devotional attitude and all the paraphernalia you would expect to find in any Iskcon temple. They have two mridangas, several sets of kartals, most of Srila Prabhupada's books, deities of Gaura-Nitai and Radha-Krishna, and about a dozen devotional photos are hung on the wall. Sweet incense perfumes the room and candles illuminate the whole scene. And the most amazing thing... they had never met a devotee face to face until I had come. Needless to say, I was quite amazed and very impressed with their devotional commitment.

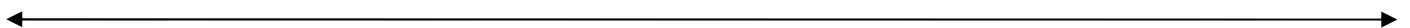
When it was time for kirtan I requested Bhakta Richard Chase to lead, and was again very pleasantly surprised. Because they have never heard a regular

temple style kirtan the melody and style was unique, but what enthusiasm! These devotees were diving deep into Hari Nam rasa in their own individual way. It made me realize that this is really what chanting is about, not just the particular rhythm, style and melody, but much more importantly, the substance, feeling and absorption in the process. In contrast it made me think of supermarket fruit that has beautiful color and form but when you taste it you might as well be eating cardboard. What matters in every aspect of life, and in devotional life in particular, is substance, how substantial the experience is, and not the external appearance or form. Ultimately it is this quality, the quality of Bhakti that attracts the merciful glance of the Lord. And it is His mercy alone which nourishes and maintains our spiritual life.

After a lively kirtan we had a stimulating discussion touching a variety of subjects from the practical aspects of devotional life like applying tilak, dealing with other inmates, and learning to offer prasadam to more esoteric topics concerning our spiritual identity, karma and the nature of the spiritual world. Many of the bhaktas are not very experienced in devotional life and are still exploring Srila Prabhupada's books and the process of chanting japa on a regular basis. Still, as I left I felt so blessed that I was able to help encourage the devotees there, strengthen their faith and encourage their practice of Krishna Consciousness. By doing so I hope the "long arm" of the Lord will also pull me to His lotus feet where I may remain eternally serving Him and all His wonderful devotees.

There are literally thousands of correctional institutions in America alone. If you live near one, or even if you don't, (I drive four hours one way to Petersburg), I strongly recommend making whatever arrangement you require to visit these institutions to extend a helping hand to the devotees that live there. By showing mercy to them in this way, we also become the object of the merciful glance of the Lord. Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu stated emphatically that this chanting of Sri Harinam Sankirtan would spread to every town and village, which includes the prisons too! Hare Krishna.

Sarva-drik dasa lives in Prabhupada Village, NC, with his wife Sudevi Dasi and is engaged in many preaching programs in prisons as well as in other venues.



New Inmate Letter Excerpts



How I came to Krsna

by Bhakta Ben

Allow me to share with you how I came to become a *bhakta*. I am sitting in a cell on the close custody level of the Fourth Avenue jail that is in Maricopa County, AZ. I am currently awaiting trial for a capital death penalty case. And in all honesty, I may very well spend the rest of my life on Death Row. But that does not hold the anxiety for me that it once did. Allow me to share with you what changed in my thinking.

To read the rest of Ben's story, please go to: <http://www.iskconprisonministry.us/node/392>

I See Gradual Changes Inside Myself

by Bhakta Mark, Iowa Park, Texas

I can see gradual change inside myself. I respond to things with less anger (as evidenced by the last confrontation I had), and I feel less frustration over events that I obviously can't control. I am learning to be still inside, and listen to the mantra that seems to be going on all the time in my head. I have repeated it so much that it seems to be going on without any effort on my part, as if it was a constant refrain running just on the other side of my conscious mind. As I stated before, this is a comfort and my only refuge at this time.

To read Mark's whole letter, go to: <http://www.iskconprisonministry.us/node/393>

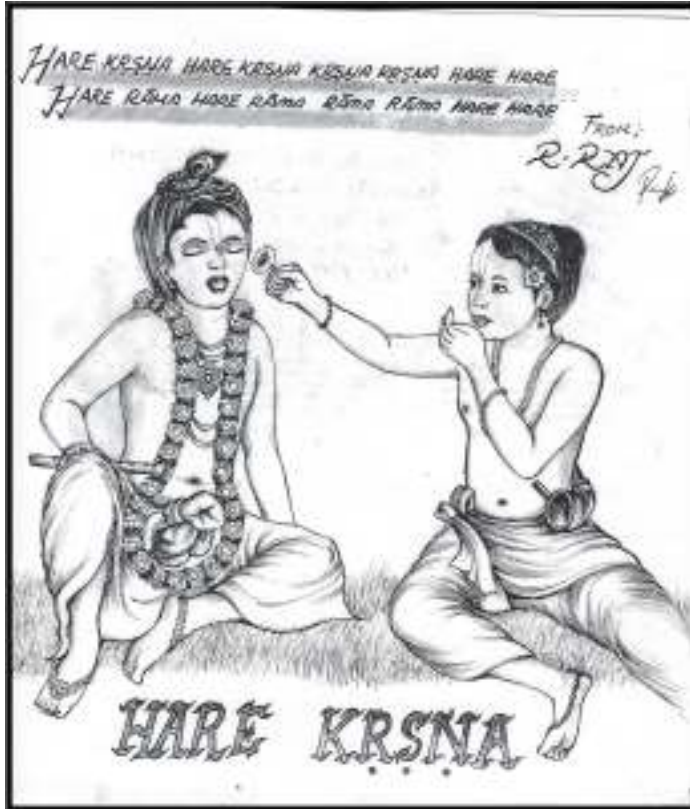
Honoring the memory of Mother Shyama Priya

by Bhakta Abner, Madras, Oregon

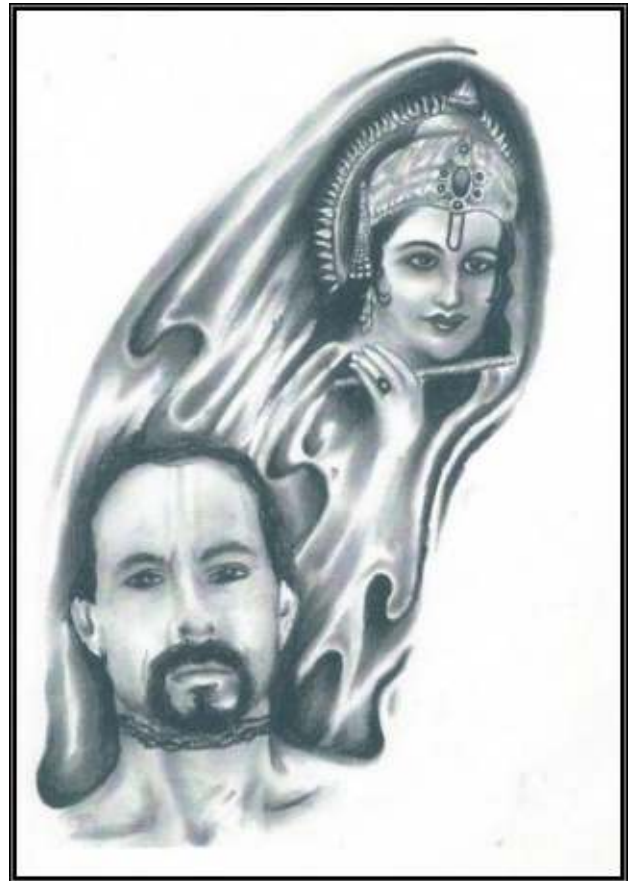
The prison has allowed us to donate to the "Relay For Life" program by the American Cancer Foundation in any one of the following ways: in honor of a cancer survivor, in memory of one who hasn't survived it and in association with groups and/or care providers. A 4x5 inch placard or a 5 inch round circle placard is used and put up on the wall in the visiting room and includes the donor's name and the person memorialized or honored. So, there's a placard that reads: In memory of Mataji Shyama-Priya Devi Dasi and we just saw it tonight! It's almost perfectly centered on the wall at about head height. I'm also going to donate \$ 10 in association with the Gaudiya Vaisnava of New Raman Reti, who cared for Mataji Shyama Priya Devi Dasi, devotees of Sri Sri Radha Krsna, one and all.

Bhakta Abner, Madras, Oregon

There is some new *artwork* on the website, in all 5 categories; Srila Prabhupada, Lord Caitanya's Pastimes, Krsna's Pastimes, Incarnations, and Miscellaneous. Although not all of them are works of art, they are all works of devotion. Many inmates, although not having any artistic training or background, will spontaneously feel compelled to express their appreciation of Prabhupada and Krsna by drawing Them. Their heartfelt appreciation is why these drawings, even those not expertly accomplished materially, have great value and are worth seeing. See two of these creations below:

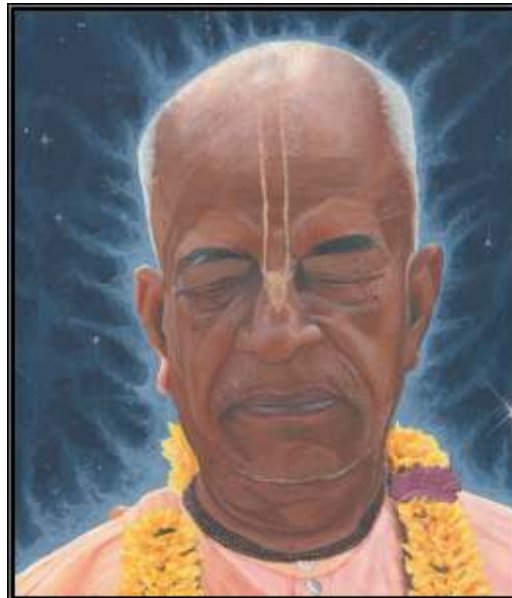


by inmate Bhakta R. Raj



by unknown inmate

To see more of those artwork gems, please go to: www.iskconprisonministry.org



By inmate Bhakta Krsna Das Perez

IPM Volunteers: The Inside Story

A Sense of Contentment

by Bhakta Bruce Gatten

I have been serving the Prison Ministry for about 3 years and while this service can be overburdening at times, I find great joy in preaching to the bhakta inmates and I can always rely on the prisoners for lessons in devotion and humility. This brings me a sense of contentment which, despite all the burdens that this life entails, gives me a reason for joy and thankfulness to His Lordship Sri Krsna Caitanya Mahaprabhu.

“Be Their Friend and Repeat the Words of Srila Prabhupada”

by Bhakta David Ehler

As a congregational member of the New Dwarka (Los Angeles) community, I wondered how I could help this noble cause. As I lived and worked outside the temple, I began collecting up books and sending financial donations to Shyama Priya. With great enthusiasm she would relate stories of how my contributions had helped bring Krishna Consciousness to the lives of countless individuals.

By 2008 I had met several other IPM devotees across the country like Hari Priya in Tucson, AZ and Bhakta Jerry in Chicago, IL. Chandrasekhara encouraged me to begin writing inmates myself. Although I was initially hesitant (due to lack of preaching experience), he asked me to simply “Be their friend, and repeat the words of Srila Prabhupada and Lord Sri Krishna”.

With these words, I became an active member of IPM. Over a year later, I have written to 119 different inmates in 29 states (9 states of which have no ISKCON temple and/ or rural farm community). By the mercy of Srila Prabhupada and Sri Sri Gaura-Nitai, prison preaching has taken off in Los Angeles.

To read all of David’s article, please go to: <http://iskconprisonministry.us/node/417>



THANK YOU!

Thank you to our December donors:

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Sridhara-Syama dasa

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Yudhisthira dasa

CORRECTION: In the November IPM NEWS, I forgot to mention that Mahattama dasi gave IPM a box of Spanish books, which were very much needed and appreciated. I apologize for this senior moment! ☺



2012 Book Distribution Report

Below are the books and other material that were sent to inmates and prison libraries in the US, through the Alachua IPM office this year. These numbers don't include the books distributed by volunteers and other devotees whose scores have not been compiled. If you are also sending books to inmates and would like them reported by IPM, please contact us.

2012:

Srila Prabhupada's Books: 2,251

Books by Other Devotees: 583

(a total of 2,834 books)

BTGs: 1,911

BBT Calendars: 60

Audio Tapes: 40

Audio CDs: 152

DVDs: 26

Japa Beads: 48

Neck Beads: 31



WE NEED YOUR HELP!

At the moment, we are very much looking for **back issues of BTGs!**

Most of us have many of those BTGs lying around the house, doing nothing. Why don't you send them to the prison

ministry? We guarantee that the inmates will devour those like hot cakes! Not only that, but a single copy often gets passed around to dozens of inmates!

Here are a few other ways you can serve the prison ministry:

- become a transcendental pen-pal for one or more inmates
We always need more devotees to correspond with inmates. To be successful in this endeavor, you need to be motivated, to feel truly inspired by this service, and you need to like/love writing. Of course, you also need to practice Krsna consciousness yourself, so your words have potency.
- give a one-time or monthly donation (we provide tax-deductible receipts).
- donate **new DVDs** and **music CDs** (bhajans, kirtans).
- in the next few months we will need some extra japa and neck beads, along with bead bags and counter beads.

3 Donation Options

- 1) Send check or postal money order to:
ISKCON Prison Ministry
PO Box 2676
Alachua, FL 32616-2676
- 2) Donate through PayPal at: www.iskconprisonministry.org
- 3) For automatic, monthly donations, you can do so on our website (with the PayPal button), or through your bank "Automatic Bill Pay" option, which is free and easy.

We can send you a **tax deductible receipt** at the moment of the donation or at the end of the year, as you wish.

Questions? Inquiries? Please contact Mukunda Dasa or Bhakti-lata Dasi at:

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