

IPM NEWS

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



ISKCON Prison Ministry / DBA of Vaisnava Outreach, Inc.

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DEPENDING ON KRSNA'S PROTECTION

by Inmate Bhakta Joseph P.
Galesburg, Illinois

The time I spend chanting the Mahamantra in the quiet early mornings is one of my most favorite times of the day. It is that special time spent in direct association with our dear Lord Sri Krsna. But there are days when I don't feel anything special, that even in this most auspicious transcendental activity, I feel alone, and oh, so far from my dear Lord. When this happens, it is easy to wonder if I am actually receiving His mercy; if there is purpose to my chanting or if I am just wasting my time.

Recognizing my own faults in this process is Krsna's merciful way of allowing me to become more sincere and attentive towards Him.



Bhakta Joseph

I must be considered is the fact that we are never actually apart from Him (BG 15.15); sometimes it just feels that way. But even in this, we are receiving Krsna's divine mercy in that we, by missing Him, are connected through feelings of separation. Any time we are thinking about Him, He is present in our thoughts; whenever we feel deeply His absence, He is strongly in our hearts; and when we chant His name, Krsna dances on our tongue. Even the blessed Gopis of Vrndavan relished Krsna's presence in separation when they couldn't find Him in the woods that late autumn evening.

Whether in joyful closeness, or despairing separation, we are always with Him. In our thoughts and words, He manifests; He exists personally in our very heart. I absolutely know this, so there is no question of Krsna not being present, though I sometimes have that impression. So when my chanting seems a failure, when I feel no connection to dear Krsna, I can at least relish that I am thinking of Him, and that is His mercy. I should never forget that. He is everywhere- in my hopes and dreams, in the love of my heart. And even if Krsna bestowed no mercy upon me, ever, isn't He still worth my most sincere efforts?

I am set to be released from prison in about 6 years, and after over two decades behind bars, the world I will be entering will seem quite foreign to me. The way people work, communicate, and even shop, has changed (not to mention the changes within myself). Not only that, but the people I knew and cared about have either passed from this world, or rejected me (with good reasons). I will leave here penniless, homeless, unsupported, and with little chance to fit well into this new society. It is truly daunting, and I have asked myself many times how I am supposed to survive on the outside. How do I achieve any level of security and happiness in a world I don't understand, and which doesn't want to understand me?

In September of 1965, another man, a truly great soul, found himself in an externally

similar condition. With only a few dollars in his possession, and little experience of the customs and practices of our society, Srila Prabhupada arrived in New York. Far from his home, he was separated from the common man in the way he dressed, spoke, ate, and even thought. Truly a daunting condition and one I can hardly imagine.

The truly amazing thing is that, unlike most anyone else, he welcomed this condition as an opportunity. Srila Prabhupada came here, no under threat or exile or any other such thing. No, he came freely and willingly. In order to fulfill the mission given to him by his Guru Maharaja, and to offer the only means of salvation to a degraded people, His Divine Grace eagerly sought the means to come here.

So what made him so willing to take this dangerous and scary chance, to risk homelessness, starvation, and death just to help those who he had never met?

"In all activities just depend on Me and work always under My protection. In such devotional service, be fully conscious of Me. If you become conscious of Me, you will pass over all the obstacles of conditional life by My grace." BG 18.57-58

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada came, not worrying about his personal needs or condition, because he was assured of success. Home, food, money...everything, he knew, would be provided; he trusted absolutely in the promise of Krsna to care for His devotees, and Prabhupada is truly a pure devotee of Sri Krsna. No matter what happened, regardless of the hardships, he willingly and eagerly jumped into the fire of Americanism because he absolutely knew God would provide and care for him.

Such faith is so rare and amazing that it defies our logic. But for those with this conviction, no place, no danger can deter them. For most of us, for me, this trust doesn't come easily, and the idea of stepping out into a world unknown to me, with no support, is a scary proposition. But even as my faith may be lacking, I can look to this example of Srila Prabhupada, and know that Krsna does indeed

care for His devotees. I needn't simply trust and believe, because the Lord, in His divine mercy, has shown us a practical example by sending His pure devotee to not only teach us, but also to show us the glories of Krsna.

As my release date draws nearer, my fears may grow about what will happen to me. But even in this, I can be assured that as long as I depend and trust in Krsna to help me, my ultimate success is guaranteed. I will be OK, and my path, though certainly difficult, will lead me back to my divine Father, Sri Krsna.

Quick News of Two Prison Programs

1 Union Correctional Institution Raiford, Florida

by Sarnga Thakur dasa

Hare Krsna prabhuh,
Please accept my humble obeisances.
All glories to Srila Prabupada!

Here is an update from Saturday, Jan 11.
We had six attending: Gary, Charles, Walter,
Anthony, Thomas, and Stephen.

We first sorted out questions about the
Vaisnava calendar, and subscribing to the IPM
newsletter and BTG. We need to email the Chaplain
to see if the inmates can meet by themselves
on Sat. Feb 1st, as none of us can go on that date.

We discussed the need to balance our
steady practice and gratefulness for what we have
with our yearning for more.

Then the meeting went off on an intense
track. Walter was describing his difficulty with the
company he keeps (or is forced to keep). He finds
that he is changing, his values, his habits, and what
he wants to talk about. But if I understood him
right, his group makes it difficult. There are certain
pressures to conform, and secret societies in the
prison, and a need to protect oneself - which
sometimes requires anger and aggressiveness. This
conflicts with Walter's desire to leave his old ways
and life behind.

In this connection, we mentioned the story
of the serpent who was told by Narada Muni to
raise his head and spread his hood to scare away
people that were still abusing him once he had

become a devotee. We try to help the inmates deal
with an often hostile environment; they can't
exactly sell their house and move to another
neighborhood!



We then we took turns reading each verse
in chapter 16 of Bhagavad-gita, "The Divine and
Demonic Natures". Charles said he was
uncomfortable labeling people. I hope we can touch
on this next time and continue our regular class in
chapter 4, and chant some japa as well.

While they were enjoying their prasadam,
we brought up different verses to help them realize
Krsna's presence and the need for transcendental
consciousness like- Bg. 2.66, 6.30, 9.27, and 18.58,

This was a good lesson for me. We need to
be able to go with the flow of what comes up, and

not necessarily insist on a preset direction if it doesn't meet their needs of the moment, although sometimes it is necessary to bring the discussion back on track.

Also, I find it important to always stay connected to Krsna within, because I found myself at one point being affected by the environment. Krsna puts us in situations in which we wouldn't normally be, and if I think I am the doer, the one

responsible for everything, then I will find that I can't keep my head above water; He is the one in control, not I.

The overall theme of the meeting was to stay in the constant association of Krsna and His devotee and thus be purified to develop the necessary wisdom, compassion, and tolerance. Srila Prabhupada ki jaya!

2 FCI Petersburg
Petersburg, VA 23804



Haribol Bhakti-lata mataji,
Obeisances. Jay Srila Prabhupada!

I just received the following letter from Bhakta Richard from Petersburg. I thought you would enjoy it as much as I did...the fruits of our labor.

Sarva-drik dasa

Prabhu, just thought I'd take a sec and let you know about Saturday. At the beginning of the kirtan, I did a puja to Lord Gaura-Nitai and Srila Prabhupada with the dipa lamp. We used some of our Ayurvedic oil for it and it worked perfectly. We offered the lamp, then everyone ran their hands (which I cleansed with the acaman cup while saying the appropriate mantras) through the flame for the blessings. Then I offered ganga-jal and then cut up apples on a special offering plate. The room became CHARGED with shakti as we began the kirtan and two of us got up and danced in bliss. Everyone in the chapel seemed to notice and a few people came up to us after the service and commented on how good it sounded. Our new format of having a bhakta teach a lesson was on our 2nd week and this time bhakta Brad did the lesson, showing all of us (I was blown away) how much he has learned from Vaisnavism. He did the lesson on "The Principles of Devotional Service" drawing from the 1st chapter of The Teachings of Lord Caitanya. (The GOAL, he said, was "To go back home.") The lesson was simply

amazing. Brad is quite a teacher; my Lord, he has a talent for it and just a natural ability. Bhakta Mark is teaching next week on the glories of Srimati Radharani which I am so looking forward to.

I'm encouraging the attendees of the kirtan to stand and dance as that truly seems to be part of Lord Caitanya's Sankirtan movement. Perhaps next time you attend we can try that as well with you. We run a DVD of Prabhupada's darshan and kirtans and we dance along with it as if the Vaisnavas are in the room with us. It is truly ecstatic and transcendental---HARIBOL--- Jaya Jaya to Lord Caitanya's Sankirtan movement.

It was SUCH a good service; I just had to relate it to you. I want you to know how amazing it was so you may know that your influence and association is having a transcendental effect on the bhaktas here at Petersburg!

Haribol!

Your servant, Bhakta Richard



THANK YOU *to ALL our SUPPORTERS!*



Your generosity is what keeps this program going! Please forgive me if I forgot anyone and let me know so I can add your name next time!

Our donors since last newsletter:

Vrindavan Bihari dasa
Ajay Gajar dasa
Vrindavan Bihari das
Bhagavati dasi

Maya Sudana dasa
Mickey Singer
Ravi Chandu Jadhaw
Rene Waisvisz
Shashi Raina dasa
Stava Mala dasa
Yudhisthira dasa
Richard Boyden
Richard House
Deepali Mittal
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Our monthly Donors:

Ravi Jadhaw
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Inmate Letter Excerpts

"I have life in prison, plus 40 years. I have been reading about Krsna for about 6 months now. I got back into it. I thought about it when I would hear a song or read a story in the newspaper, or see something about India; I would miss Krsna consciousness. So I got back into it. "

Winford C. H.

Maury, NC

"Even though I have not been physically in the association of devotees, inside of me I feel a true, transcendental separation from devotees. Each morning, I wake up to silence. I pray, *"When will be able to wake up one morning to the loving glorious chanting of Hare Krsna; that sweet, sweet nectar filling my ears in the association of Radha-Krsna/Gaura-Nitai bhaktas?"*"

Bhakta Brendan, B.

Mayo, Florida



"Thank you for the books you sent me. I have been carefully reading all of them. I've also been sharing some of them with my friends. Having a direct line of communication to God is a beautiful thing. I was spiritually dead prior to coming to state jail, consumed by alcohol,

unhealthy relationships, poverty, and homelessness. I feel alive inside now. I have a lot of questions to ask and I'm grateful that there is a center here in Austin. I plan to go upon my release. "

Bhakta Stephen

Austin, Texas

"I have been reading *Chanting Hare Krsna* and decided to write a letter to get all the knowledge needed for fully devoting myself to a life that is peaceful and stress free. I am done living a life that is fueled by material things and false promises. I've been placed here for a reason. When I picked up *Chanting Hare Krsna*, I found out exactly why. I have been soul-searching, which is easier now than before. All my so-called friends and associates have ventured off, which is a good thing. Makes for more room and there is no unnecessary negativity. I would like to get some help on how I go about receiving literature to expand my knowledge, as far as the Supreme will allow! I want to be fully prepared when my God calls for me! If I could get some assistance I would greatly appreciate it!"

Derric E.

Lovelady, Texas

"I received the 3 BTGs. Thank you so much for sending them to me. I also want to take the time to say thanks for your service that has helped to open my eyes to hope. Hare Krsna"

Bhakta Joe, S.

Tulia, Texas

"I am in constant worry now, just waiting for my possible release but I am constantly chanting and praying. That's all I know to do right now. Hare Krsna!"

Bhakta Steven B.

Pittsburg, PA

“Chanting in the early morning hours have made my days in prison so much better. The good thing about being in prison; I’ve got a lot of time to meditate, chant and read.”

Justin D.
Hillsboro, WV

“Thank you kindly for the prompt response. I am open to learning more, I came across a copy of the Bhagavad-Gita in our prison library and hand written inside was ISKCON’s address. I will not lie to you and make myself sound the fool by pretending to comprehend all that I read in the short period before I had to return the book, but what I did grasp was a new and beautiful way to open my eyes and heart to see the world around me in a different light. I am very interested in further exploring and taking this path of enlightenment. My whole life I have spent earnestly seeking a way to understand what is going on around me, and now I am starting to see maybe the reason nothing

around me is making sense is maybe I first need to understand myself. As far as the switch (which I yet need to apply) to vegan/vegetarianism diet, I know and have used this way of life in the past for health reasons.”

Michael, P.
Amarillo, Texas

“Where to begin? I have come across a copy of Bhagavad-gita As It Is and have really been enjoying it. I also have a copy of Sri Isopanisad and it is also helping in my search for enlightenment! This study and yoga practice has given me a fresh start and outlook on my much troubled life! Please, if possible, grant my request of any other books. I’d very much appreciate to further my spiritual reach and practice; so far it has showed me a very rewarding and promising outlook in life and the future. Bless you!”

Thomas C.
Raiford, Florida

Book Distribution in 2013!

(Books and material sent from the Alachua, Florida IPM Office)

Prabhupada’s Books total: 2,717

Magazines (10 to 50 pages): 864

Small: 816

Medium: 242

Big: 311

Maha-Big: 484

Books by other devotee authors: 332

BTGs: 2,198

Audio tapes: 104

CDs: 343

DVDs: 24

Japa Mala Sets: 97

Neck Beads: 25

GRAND TOTAL of all Books and BTGs in 2013:

5,247 !!!

Srila Prabhupada, ke! Jaya!!!



Your Opportunity for more Service!

Many devotees feel inspired by this prison program and want to know how to participate, and we *do* need your help! 😊

Here are a few ways you can help:

- Give a one-time or monthly donation (we provide tax-deductible receipts).
- Donate (new or like new) **DVDs** and **music CDs** (bhajans, kirtans). *This year we would very much like to make more DVDs and CDs available to the inmates!*
- You have BTGs lying around the house? Send them to IPM; the inmates love them!
- Correspond with one or more inmates:

To be successful in this service of writing inmates, you need to be motivated, to feel truly inspired by this service, and, also, to like/love writing. Of course, you also need to practice Krsna consciousness yourself, so your words have potency.



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 easy and free.

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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