

IPM NEWS

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



ISKCON Prison Ministry / DBA of Vaisnava Outreach, INC.

I offer my respectful obeisances unto Sri Krsna Caitanya and Lord Nityananda, who are like the sun and moon. They have arisen simultaneously on the horizon of Gauda to dissipate the darkness of ignorance and thus wonderfully bestow benediction upon all.
Caitanya Caritamrta Adi-lila 1.2

January/February 2015

Joyful Prison Program

By Phalini Devi Dasi

Early in the morning on Saturday, September 13, 2014, my husband Haripada dasa and I picked up a couple of friends--Sarva-drik Prabhu and his wife Sudevi dasi--and headed north. We arrived at the Medium Security Facility of the Petersburg Prison in Virginia around 11:15 a.m. We were checked through security, our hands were stamped, and we were escorted through several heavy, metal doors until we found ourselves in the prison chapel.

The chapel of the Petersburg facility is a carpeted room with a simple yet lovely altar at one end. Our eyes drank in the beauty of the Deities. Gracing the altar were Sri Sri Radha and Krishna, Sri Sri Gaura-Nitai, Sri Sri Jagannatha, Baladeva and Subhadra, and a beautiful murti of Srila Prabhupada. Handmade origami flowers (real flowers are

not allowed) and decorative burning candles helped to create a devotional atmosphere. On the wall behind the altar was a screen playing a film of Srila Prabhupada's pastimes accompanied by recorded kirtans of long ago.



We were warmly greeted by all the devotees (about twenty) in the room and invited to take our seats on cushions at the foot of the altar. We were introduced to the group by a man who is considered the leader of the prison bhaktas, affectionately called "Yogi" by the others. Yogi glorified Mother Bhakti-lata, saying that it is only because of her help that everything we saw there had

become a reality. With obviously deep appreciation, he added, "Every letter I ever wrote to her, she wrote a letter back to me."

We led kirtan--the inmates all knew how to chant Hare Krishna and they chanted enthusiastically--then my husband spoke about how we are all prisoners in this material world and that the best use of human life is to extricate ourselves from this prison and go back home to Krishna. Sarva-drik Prabhu commented, "You men are all lucky because you've had everything taken away--wives, homes, jobs, bank balances--so now you are in a perfect position to surrender fully to Krishna." They've all heard this type of preaching before, but somehow they all expressed appreciation for my husband's and Sarva-drik's words.

After the program at the medium-security facility, we made our way to another section of the prison, the low-security facility. There were four men there, all soon on their way out of the prison, with just a little time left. We

led kirtan there also, and spoke about how we all make mistakes in this world, but Krishna consciousness helps us to improve, stop making fools of ourselves, and realize the highest goal of human life. The men all appreciated our visit and expressed a desire to meet with us again.

As we drove away, the four of us talked joyfully about our experiences there at the prison and how we could hardly wait to go back again. We all expressed our appreciation for the efforts of devotees who have reached out to prisoners all over the country, providing Srila Prabhupada's books, harmoniums, CDs, DVDs, deities, devotional pictures and other paraphernalia to encourage the efforts of Krishna conscious inmates to share Krishna consciousness with others and in doing so, grow and nurture their own bhakti-lata creepers of devotion.



Krishna Kirtan's Journey

I have been corresponding with Krishna Kirtan for seven years now and have seen him blossom beautifully under the Krsna sun! He is very enthusiastic not only to practice Krsna consciousness but also to share it with others. His sincerity rubs off on the other inmates, awaking their own desire to serve Krsna. He is a good soldier in Lord Caitanya's army!

Sarva Drik prabhu (from North Carolina) has been visiting his institution in Virginia for a few years now, to lead a small group of sincere souls. Although Krishna Kirtan's name is Richard, Sarva Drik affectionately calls him Krishna Kirtan due to his passion for kirtan.

Recently, Krishna Kirtan has been transferred to another institution in Ohio. Transfers can be quite challenging, as is getting established in a new prison. Here is his account, in his own words, of this recent transitional period.

12/12/2014

I was severely saddened to leave such a flourishing program in Virginia. During the transit process I chanted the maha-mantra non-stop and, needless to say, it made a VERY uncomfortable process much more comfortable. Nobody really said anything to me; they just kind of looked

on with curiosity. A few asked me about my sikha and it gave me a chance to distribute the Holy Name.

The prison I'm going to in Ohio is different from the one I just left in that it is an open environment. We're not locked in cells and the caliber of inmate is more laid back. Because we have set precedents in Virginia in regard to a Hare Krishna program, it should be much easier to start a

program there. I'm also at lot more knowledgeable about the process and I've grown in Krsna consciousness, so while there may be some obstacles, I'm sure Lord Nitai's mercy will be enough to help me go through them.
Your servant, Krishna Kirtan das

12/22/2014

After ten very difficult days of travel, I've finally arrived in Ohio. Needless to say, it is profoundly different from where I was, in many, many ways. For the last nine years I've slept in a locked cell at night and last night was the first time in a very, very long time I've slept in an open dorm environment. It is a little bit of culture shock, having lived in a higher security environment for so long. However, I know that after a month or so, I'll definitely be in my element.



I wrote the chaplaincy a detailed email directing them to Krishna.com for in-depth information about our faith. As expected, there is no Hindu program at the chapel, but as you know, there was no Hindu program in Virginia when I got there and look how that blossomed!!! I know all of this is Lord Krsna's mercy. I know that for a fact, deep within my heart. Lord Caitanya has so blessedly given me the service to bring the Holy Name to inmates in the federal prison system. This is a calling I take very seriously and enthusiastically. Once my head is shaved closer and my sikha (growing since August of 2011) is more prominent, I'm sure I'll be asked all kinds of questions about it, which will enable me to dispense the Holy Name, the desperately needed spiritual pill.

I am so grateful to Srila Prabhupada for bringing this blessed path to the West. I know I must simply spread the joy!! May I say JAYA, JAYA JAGANNATHA!!!! HARIBOL!!!!!!

Your servant, Krishna Kirtan das

12/29/2015

I've been here for one week and have spoken with two of the chaplains here. Chaplain Culp, an Anglo Baptist, will be the one who is going to be our advocate. I'm meeting with him on Saturday.

There is a 73 years old Shaivite gentleman here who meditates with the Buddhists. He told me he is ready to change his religious preference to Hindu so we can have enough inmates to start a program [it takes a minimum of three inmates to be allowed to start a group]. Same thing with this other kid here that came from Virginia and who came to a few of our services there. So that will give us three.

The only option available on the official BOP record is "Hindu." We cannot specifically designate Vaishnavism as a religion, although we can name our group that way. In Virginia there was no other Hindu services so now the only Hindu service that will be available to inmates there is Gaudiya Vaisnavism.

1/08/15

Finally prabhu, I am settled in! I really had to turn to Lord Krsna for strength to endure this incredibly difficult period of readjustment. I cried to Him, I meditated on His form and went to sleep with His name in my mind - the only means to attain sleep - repeating the Holy Name, knowing that He is in charge, that being in a difficult situation just helps me surrender to Him all the more. I thought of how Srila Prabhupada came across the ocean on the Jaladuta and felt ashamed of myself for thinking my difficulties was troubling to my soul. Thinking of Srila Prabhupada gave me strength and I knew that Lord Krsna wouldn't let me down. He never has. So after three weeks in a horrible - absolutely horrible living space with two other humans who must have just come from the animal kingdom, and with Lord Nrsimhadeva looking out for me every step of the way, I was then moved to a wonderful spot with two other really decent guys. I can devote all my time to Krsna consciousness, and today I finally got my property back...my sastras!! How I missed them, how I missed them...the nectarean *Caitanya Bhagavata* and of course my well-travelled *Bhagavad-gita As it Is*, along with my *Mahabharata*, and my giant *Back to Godhead* early edition.

So now, my next task is to get the Krsna conscious service started. I already have a new student named "Rooster." He is changing his religion to Krsna Consciousness (Hindu) so that will now make four of us: Bill, a Shaivite (for now ☺), Aaron from Virginia, Rooster, and myself. We are well on our way. The Lord reciprocates with His devotees!! HARIBOL, HARIBOL, HARIBOL!!!!!!

Your servant, Krishna Kirtan das

1/10/15

I taught my first student how to sing kirtan today!!! How wonderful. Rooster did a wonderful job. See? Krsna consciousness is already growing here!!! Haribol!!! Your servant, Krishna Kirtan das

1-12-15

Hare Krsna Mataji! Rooster is taking to Krsna Consciousness very nicely and very quickly. We have begun morning Gita studies. This morning was his intro to the Gita. I explained the whole back story to him then we began reading together from Chapter One and afterward we discussed. I asked him, "*What do you think Lord Krsna is going to tell Arjuna to do? Arjuna doesn't want to fight.*" Rooster said that he thinks Krsna will tell him to fight because Arjuna is a soldier and that's what soldiers are supposed to do. How do you like that!!!???? Hari bol!!!
THANK YOU MATAJI!!!

Your servant, Krishna Kirtan das

1/13/15

Prabhu, this is incredible. You know Bhakta Rooster is starting to grow a sikha and some guy in the chow hall [cafeteria] asked him about it and Rooster said he was a Hare Krishna and he should talk to me. So I'm sitting in the chow hall at lunch today and this guy comes up to me and says "*Hey, I recognized you by your sikha and neck beads. My dad lives in New Vrindavan dhama and I used to go there and do kirtan!*" I'm like, *oh, my God!!!!* He says there are two, three guys here who have Bhagavad-gitas and tried to start a service but didn't know how. His name is James. He said he would be going over to

the chapel to change his religion and he'll tell the other guys to do it as well. I also suggested we do a Bhagavad-gita study in the library or even in the chapel until they give us formal time slots. This is absolutely amazing! I just know in my heart of hearts that the Krsna program here is going to be HUGE!!! It will dwarf the one in Virginia and now Krishna Consciousness will be established within two regions of the BOP [Bureau of Prison]: the mid-Atlantic (Virginia) and the Northeast (Ohio). Any prisons within these regions will now have precedents in case there are any other prison bhaktas who wish to start a Krsna program. This is amazing! And it is thanks to you prabhus – Sarva-drik, Bhakti-lata, and Devaki, most wonderful friends to all of us, the most fallen and conditioned. Your service has given the Holy Name to more inmates that you'll ever know. I'm absolutely sure you will have some pretty awesome rewards in Goloka. I'm going to be the one who does the best "*MOOOO*" when we're playing with Krishna and His friends in Vrindavan!!!

Anyway, as you might be able to tell, today is going extremely well. Lord Krsna is so close, reciprocating so much, it brings tears to my eyes as I type...I am so grateful to be a Vaisnava and it is because of you prabhus. I offer full dandavats at your lotus feet.

Your servant, Krishna Kirtan das

Please pray that this Krsna allows Krishna Kirtan to establish this program without too many hurdles, and stay tuned for new developments in the coming months!



Chaplain's Appreciation

12/30/14

Dear ISKCON Prison Ministry,

I again want to thank you for your generosity with our institution. The detainees have enjoyed the magazines, and we have some that are using the sacred texts you sent as well. When you have more magazines you feel would be helpful, I would greatly appreciate you sharing them with our facility. The reason I am writing today is to request a copy of the "Higher Taste" book for my personal use. If you could point me to where to purchase a copy, I would appreciate it. [*Of course, I sent him a copy!*]

Thank you,

Rev. Richard G. Barnes, MDiv, Chaplain
MTC Imperial Regional Detention Facility
Calexico, CA 92231

Inmate Letter Excerpts

“Dear friend, I am writing to ask your association if I may please have a copy of the Bhagavad-gita as it is, a spiritual friend of mine, who is helping me in my spiritual practice lent me his copy but he left and took it with him, if you could I would greatly appreciate. I am serving a two year county sentence consecutive to a 40 year prison sentence, I am so thankful for this experience, I have grown and matured so much. I am sober and happy, my journey continues, every moment a gift.”

Louis M., Colorado Springs, CO

“This letter is being sent with one from Bhakta Matt. He is one of the few students that have sought us, the devotees, out. He is so hungry for learning Vedic philosophy, Krsna-consciousness. It’s what keeps me going.”

Kalki Das, Corcoran, CA

“Here’s the thing, I need at least two more Gitas in here for other people who have become interested and whom are definitely intelligent enough and reading enough to take advantage of and gain understanding from the Gita. They are both indigent and lack paper and envelopes right now so I’m taking this on in their interest. Both of these dudes have been in the system or living the hard life for a long time but they’re older and in their own ways that has made them softer and more reflective too if that makes any sense.

Anyway, as I’ve started to become more engrossed in Krsna activities and haveve started to trade off my unhealthy foodstuffs for the simple stuff such as oats, farina, grits, and vegetables. I then combine these with my vegetarian diet stuff that remains, to use for a nightly prasadam distribution. I only get to do about 3-8 people a night, but the effect in here has been amazing. I offer as sincerely as I can and people have really enjoyed the nectar. Especially the two older dudes whose info I’m going to give you.

The two books you sent me: “Beyond birth and death” and “The Perfection of Yoga” have been enjoyed like mango lasis by a pair of starving men (Adam and I). I’m going to be brutally honest: I AM STARVING FOR MORE LIGHT ON THE VAISNAVA TRADITION. STARVING. Everything that I am reading is finally coming together. Maybe I had to mature as a man, I had to be in this vulnerable position, to finally see that I suck as a

controller/God-complexed limited soul, in order for all of this stuff to finally come together, but it is. Finally.”

Bhakta Douglas G., Colorado Springs, CO

“Without the blessing of Shree Krishna and your help it would be very, very difficult to do my time. Once again thank you all for your time and sending me the necessary things I need to keep my devotion going.”

Maharaja K., Susanville, CA

“I was put in a holding cell to go to another prison. Every morning I got up and meditated and chanted my mantra. Despite the bleak conditions I remained upbeat knowing that Lord Krishna would indeed send me somewhere better. This facility is much better. It is an open facility meaning all you have to do is sign out and you can walk around outside.

I am just reading Bhagavad-Gita and the books I have and doing my best to remain in a positive mood. The mahamantra helps immensely. I also try to surround myself with like-minded people.”

Robert C., Sonyea, NY



“I’m writing to just say thank you for sending me another Lord Nrsimha poster, as well as such a beautiful portrait of Srila Prabhupada in black and white. Between Srutadeva Das and his correspondence course, as well as his answering so many questions I have, along with a letter from you occasionally with a beautiful picture every time, it makes me really feel I am not alone in here as far as practicing Krsna consciousness.

Coming to Krsna consciousness has been the best blessing in my life and I am so grateful for your prison ministry. In about three months or so I will be released to the community and that will be the real test for me with my Krsna consciousness. Srutadeva is really helping me prepare for this and for that also I am so grateful :).

I just finished watching the *Festival of India* documentary – definitely way cool! Thank you. They look like they have so much fun dancing and chanting! :) I wanted to start dancing right here in the chapel! ☺ (lol). Thank you for writing Richard and sending him an introductory pamphlet. We do Gita studies every day and take turns reading. He chants with me and has the other japa mala beads you sent here. So his Krsna consciousness is going well and he is serious about his practice. He's the only other vegetarian along with me."

Jeffery B., Chippewa Falls, WI

"All the books, magazines, pamphlets etc. that I receive I share with as many people as I can. Inmates and even some of the staff when I get a chance. Some of the inmates even return and ask for more books to read. Sometimes we engage in small conversations about Krsna consciousness and other beliefs. Since I've been sharing the literature I've noticed a difference in speech and attitude between certain inmates and by some of the conversation and questions I've been asked I think some are wanting to convert their religious titles, but by being in the situation we're in, which is segregation, they just stick to the title they have but believe in Krsna consciousness. For the most part that's alright with me as long as I've shed some "light" on their situation because this situation would make any living being miserable."

Jeremiah M., Menard, Illinois

Books Distributed in 2014!

Prabhupada's Books total: 2,356

Breakdown:

Magazines (10 to 50 pages): 403

Small: 563

Medium: 332

Big: 206

Maha-Big: 852

Books by other devotee authors: 121

BTGs: 1,695

CDs: 271

DVDs: 23

Japa Mala Sets: 112

Neck Beads: 37

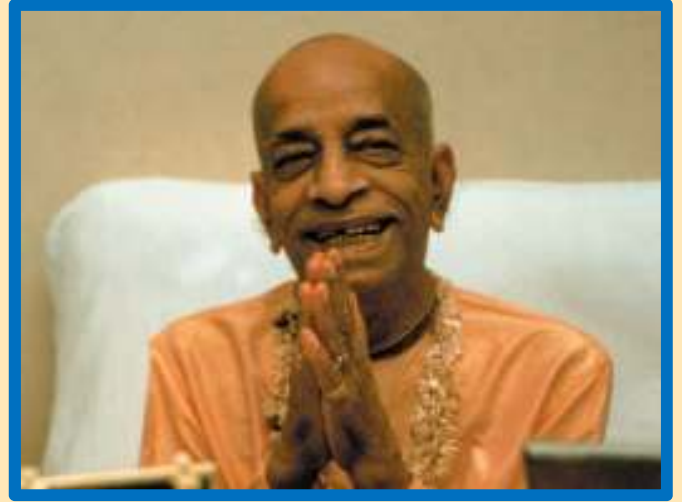


GRAND TOTAL of all Books and BTGs in 2014:

4,173

Srila Prabhupada, ke! Jaya!!!

THANK YOU to all our Supporters!



Thank you for sharing your heart with the inmates. 😊 Please forgive me if I forgot anyone (and let me know).

Our donors since last newsletter:

Candramauli Swami/ Chicago temple
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And our monthly Donors:

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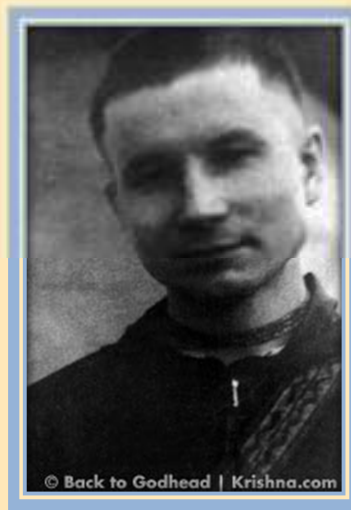


HOW CAN I HELP IPM?

Many devotees feel inspired by this prison program and want to know how to participate.

Here are a few ways:

- Correspond with one or more inmates: To be successful in this endeavor, 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. If you would like to correspond with inmates, please email Kirtan Rasa Dasa at: kirtanras108@gmail.com
- Give a one-time or a monthly donation (we provide tax-deductible receipts).
- Donate **DVDs** and **music CDs**: bhajans, kirtans (new or like new).



Ananta Shanti dasa, the first Russian devotee, was sent to prison for a few years, for practicing Krsna consciousness.

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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