

Dedicated to His *Divine* Grace
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Founder Acarya of ISKCON

IPM NEWS

ISKCON Prison Ministry / DBA of Vaisnava Outreach, INC.

“In this age, Kali-yuga, to kill the demons means to stop their demonic activities by the weapon of kirtan, Hari-sankirtan, which is spread by Lord Caitanya's associates.”

Srila Prabhupada in London, March 10, 1975

Jan/Feb 2019

CHRISTMAS ALL YEAR LONG

By Bhakti-latā Devi Dasi

As a child, Christmas was a time of great anticipation and excitement. Until my teen years that is, when it became more and more a source of disappointment—but that’s a story for another time.

Christmas, a time of giving and receiving, of goodwill for all mankind, is experienced all year long in devotional service, and it is certainly true of the prison ministry service. It is Christmas every day! And there is no disappointment, no letdown, and no hype about it: it is the real deal and it brings me the pleasure and satisfaction I have been hankering for all my life!



This service became my main occupation ten years ago now (wow; time does fly!), and I still never get tired of it. Overwhelmed sometimes, but never tired of the service itself. I am hooked.

People engage in sense gratification because it releases dopamine in their system, which is associated with feelings of euphoria, bliss, motivation, and concentration. Devotional service is a spiritual dopamine a million times more potent—and fortunately, it is also addictive, eternally. The spiritual addiction to end all material addictions.

Each time I send a book, I feel a thrill of transcendental joy. The whole process of sending books is transcendently enlivening; from typing the invoice and the label, to taking the books from the bookshelf, to putting them in an envelope, to placing them in a USPS bin, to walking up my driveway to the mailbox at the end of the day and filling it up with transcendental packages, to raising the mailbox's red flag, to noticing the mailman picking up these parcels the next day—every step of the process exudes transcendental joy.

After all, it is **Prabhupada and Kṛṣṇa Themselves**, in the form of books, whom I am sending to others!

Sending and receiving a letter to an inmate is just as exhilarating and rewarding: connecting one-on-one with a receptive soul, even more so one who is suffering and conscious of his/her suffering and seeking help, is the most rewarding activity I have ever experienced.

Given that I have in my possession the key that will unlock their prison, the knowledge that will end all their suffering, it follows naturally that it is my duty—and privilege—to make sure that as many inmates as possible get hold of it too.

We were given transcendental knowledge, freely, unconditionally, and I benefit from it every second of every day, for the last thirty-five years; I **must** pass it on to others—I am duty bound. This small endeavor is my insignificant attempt, to repay my debt to Srila Prabhupada.

One of the great secrets of devotional service is that the more you give it to others, the

more pleased Kṛṣṇa is; He then *allows* you to enter more and more deeply into its mysteries. It is the ultimate win-win situation.

Some inmates have been introduced to Kṛṣṇa consciousness before; in their childhood, teenage or adult years. Some have met devotees, or read a book; some even went to a temple, tasted prasadam, or dated a devotee. But for most, IPM is their first introduction, their **first** step on their journey back to Godhead. The prison ministry gives us a front row seat to their spiritual transformation.

At the time I am writing this, one of these inmates, Bhakta Sasha (who has been in contact with IPM since 2009), has terminal cancer. He is very determined to go back to Godhead. He has been chanting and reading assiduously throughout the day, each day, since 2017. Premvilas prabhu has generously sponsored a Srimad-Bhagavatam set for him and I have been sending him one canto at a time. In December 2017 I sent him the first Canto. A few days ago (a year later), I sent him the tenth canto!

Sasha has signed a DNR (*Do Not Resuscitate*) and has recently stopped taking narcotic medication. He is ready and willing to leave, anytime. It may be weeks, months, but probably not years. I am starting to see, in some of his letters, that his mind is sometimes a little bit disoriented, though he stays focused on Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Please pray for his successful transition after death.

Below, in the *Inmate Letters Excerpts* section of this newsletter, you can read some passages from Sasha's recent letters.

Another rewarding part of my service is receiving the selfless offerings from devotees, in the form of laksmi and books. It is a very humbling experience. Devotees assist me in my service and this gives me the opportunity to facilitate them in *their* devotional service; each of us striving to please Srila Prabhupada. It is the most loving cooperation. This prison preaching service requires both the capital to operate and the hands and legs to actualize it. It is a perfect, transcendental teamwork.

I am deeply grateful and indebted to all the devotees who make this program possible, starting with my husband, Mukunda, whom I thank from the bottom of my heart. He not only takes on the whole financial burden of our household so I can be free to do this service, but also, many times, he has to accept simpler cooking and minimum cleaning when I get too absorbed in the office (I haven't learned how to multiply myself yet!) But he tolerates graciously, as book distribution is very dear to him.

I am also grateful to all those who donate books and contribute financially to support this program, as well as the volunteers who give countless hours of their time; to write to inmates; to prepare the BTGs for shipping; and to type quotes from inmates' letters. My gratitude goes also to everyone who encourage me with kind words and prayers.

Above all, I thank **Srila Prabhupada**, who gave us all the opportunity of a lifetime(s) to engage in devotional service; he gave us the mercy to steadily dance our way back to Godhead while bringing as many of Kṛṣṇa's children with us as we can. I bow down to his lotus feet. **Jaya Srila Prabhupada!**

I pray that you will all walk with me during the coming year, together making thousands of inmates the most fortunate souls in the prison system!

With all the humility in my command,
praying to remain your servant,

Bhakti-latā Devi Dasi



Inmate Letter Excerpts

“There are now three Bhagavad-gitas in circulation in my dorm alone. Well, two because I treasure mine and share with people only while in my presence so it doesn't go missing. I've also underlined and made quite a few notations in mine. I'm so very excited from what is being revealed to me through the scriptures. I can't wait to be able to have access to the Puranas, and Vedas, and the Bhagavatam. Oh, how wonderful this will be. Just learning of Kṛṣṇa brings joy and the anticipation of learning more brings even more joy. He is the reservoir of pleasure! Hare Kṛṣṇa!!!”

Vincent C.
Gainesville, Florida

“I was given a copy of the Bhagavad-gita by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. As I've read the scripture and chanted and abstained from meats, I've become Krishna conscious and am becoming

transcendental. As a result of this I'm experiencing a new great feeling in my soul. I need yall's help though to guide me how to live a Veda-centered life. I really feel good and free from bondage for the very first time in my life. Thank you so much for your time.”

David R.
Pine Bluff, Arkansas

“The devotees and I have enjoyed having the BTG, for it does help us staying connected to the outside, making us a part of ISKCON and helping us with our service to Lord Kṛṣṇa and to each other. We really appreciate your kindness of providing something very valuable to us. It may be just a magazine to some, but it's our only window to view ISKCON and the ministry.”

Anonymous

NOTE: *this next excerpt is from **Bhakta Sasha**, who has terminal cancer.*

“As my end days grow closer, my only desire tis to surrender my soul unconditionally to Kṛṣṇa. Hear His name, speak His name, think about His name. With that desire that He gives me the mercy to serve at His lotus feet in His abode. Thank you to the Vaisnava who donated the Srimad-Bhagavatam to this fallen soul [Premvilas prabhu].

It is my desire to take every opportunity to keep reading all of the books in this room—which are only of Kṛṣṇa. That is my opportunity to relish His pastimes and upon my last breath will be Kṛṣṇa. My only devotion is unconditionally to our Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Today my day was filled with joy of reading the BTG. My realization came full circle when reading SB 7.9.28. It had my full attention. My failure to only ask for guidance from Srila Prabhupada is where my way was temporarily swayed. I am so happy to be fully back on the right path again. Even though my daily program did not change, I found myself being tugged by this illusory material life.

I have signed a D.N.R. [Do Not Resuscitate] and today I re-affirmed to the R.N.S. [nurses], as I’ve done daily, that I do not want any more narcotic medication.

Thank you for sending me the information about Lord Nrsimadeva, which lead me to pray for His protection. My purpose is to do nothing more than take this body and do what I can do as Krishna would want me to do until my end time comes. I do not languish anymore. My only desire is to please Krishna and in any way to serve His lotus feet in my next form, may it be an ant, fly, or bird, whatever Krishna knows will bring me to self-realization.

My prayer are the lotus of the lotus feet of Srila Prabhupada whose devotional service has been to spread the true nature of this material maya illusion that engulfs our bodily forms. Through his books, he has given this devotee the self-realization of where my soul is destined. All glories to our Guru, spiritual master who, through his mercy, has shown lost souls like mine where our true love of Godhead belongs.

I do my rounds throughout the day. My focus is on my way back to Godhead. My radio picks up a Kṛṣṇa channel. It is a pleasure to get to hear a live broadcast of the program. Haribol. My closing is in loving friendship.”

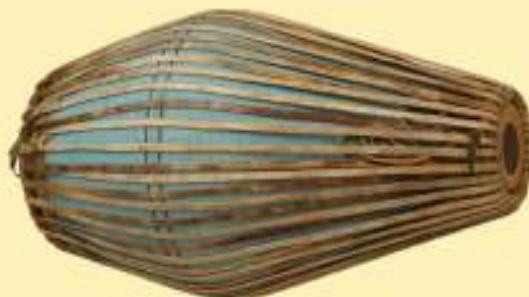
Bhakta Sasha
Vacaville, California



NOTE: *The excerpt below is from **Julia**, who grew up in a devotee family.*

“I have been asked by several people here about my personal “religion” and I only have my Bhagavad-Gita as a source to feed their curious minds. Do you have books you may share with the women who have showed interest in learning about our philosophy? I have suggested that if they desire a Gita of their own they should write you. My hope is that by sharing Prabhupada’s teachings of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in a place like this (prison), where Christianity reigns supreme, it could help bring a little light to such a dim place of suffering. I love to share books with everyone and anyone who shows interest in what I am reading, so please also consider sending maybe a Kṛṣṇa Book and a Science of Self-Realization too! J I appreciate your willingness and love. Thank you, thank you!”

Julia M.
Aurora, Illinois



In Memoriam: Bhakta Jeffery

By Śrutadeva Dasa

Bhakta Jeffery Becker died on September 21st, 2018, in a house fire. He was only thirty-five years old. Jeffery contacted the prison ministry in 2012 and had been chanting Hare Krishna since. In 2018, he was out of prison and doing very well, taking classes at an online university for computer programming, and getting high grades. I had been writing to him since 2013 exchanging emails and speaking with him many times on the phone. Our last conversation was on September 14th, for forty-five minutes, only a week before his death. He was very eager to make advancement in his Krishna consciousness and was a very dear and sweet devotee. He will be sorely missed but we know that Krishna has brought him to a better situation for his advancement in Krishna consciousness, as he was a very sincere soul. Hare Krishna.

Inmate Art!



Painting from Bhakta David B.

POEM CORNER

O Lord Nrisinghadev

By Bhakta Jason M.
Fairfax, North Carolina

O Lord Nrisinghadev, I am often so afraid
it's dark even in the shade.
Wandering alone in this material prison
scorned 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 head bowed
the ego fades and for my pride I am no longer proud.
I sigh in disbelief, thinking of so many wasted years
intense emotion overwhelms me, I shed many tears.

From your lotus lips I hear the past is gone, let it sleep
your heart aches it is true, but, my child, no longer weep.
Enter into a new life, serve devotees with love and devotion to the Lord
as He will protect you, His nails sharper than any sword.

But you will soon know He can protect you simply by His desire
so serve Sri Nrisingha with love and devotion, cessation of the fire.
Light will then be upon your path, nothing else to fear
even the most fallen, to Sri Nrisinghadev they are dear.

A heavy burden is lifted, good thoughts fill my mind
spiritual sight a true blessing, no longer blind.
Gratitude flows from my heart, feeling the deepest appreciation
dissolving the ego a must, determination and dedication.

Surrender O my soul, give up the illusions so real
embrace the lotus feet of the Lord, carry out His divine will.
Gradually step by step I will make it back home—
there never isolated or alone—
as in this material prison to feel fear or aimlessly to roam.

Hare Krishna! Hare Rama!
I chant eternally in the Holy Dham.



Chaplains' Appreciation

"Inmates are grateful every time they receive materials which help them to grow in their spiritual path. Thanks for the opportunity to help inmates getting back to their re-entry efforts and future connection with their families! Thank you also for donating the set of Srimad-Bhagavatam."

Chaplain Juan Cintron
MDC Guyanabo
Catano, Puerto Rico

IPM 2018 Book Distribution

Prabhupada's Books total: 3,027

Breakdown:

Booklets: 715

Small: 1,169

Medium: 292

Big: 128

Maha-Big: 723

Books by other devotee authors: 192

BTGs: 2,863

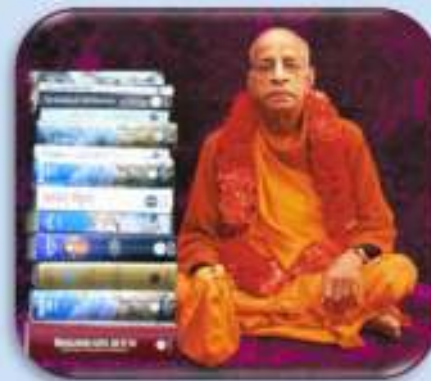
CDs: 308

MP3s: 8

DVDs: 31

Japa Mala sets: 158

Neck Beads: 183



Grand Total of all Books and BTGs in 2018: 6,082

Srila Prabhupada, ke, Jaya!!!

THANK YOU to ALL our SUPPORTERS!

Your generosity is what keeps this program going! 😊 If I forgot anyone, please forgive me and let me know so I can include your name in the next IPM NEWS.

Our donors since last newsletter:

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ISKCON Silicon Valley
Premvilas Dasa
Ramai Nitai Dasa & Radharani Lila Dasi
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Vishal Thakur dasa
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1 anonymous (you know who
you are: thank you!)

3 Donation Options

- 1) Send a check or postal money order to:
ISKCON Prison Ministry
PO Box 2676
Alachua, FL 32616
- 2) Donate through PayPal at: www.paypal.me/IPM
- 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.

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