



IPM News



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

July 2012 ISKCON Prison Ministry Newsletter

Changing Lives from the Inside Out!

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More Artwork, and Words of Wisdom and Gratitude from the Inmates

By Bhakti-lata Dasi

Hare Krsna, dear devotees!

Below is a beautiful and moving letter from inmate Bhakta Mark. I hope you will be as touched as I was when I read it. This is the type of letter that inspires me to keep doing this service. There are real people out there, who are in such a dreadful situation, people who suffer, locked in with the worst of characters and under very severe, oftentimes brutal conditions, and they long for something more, something that will help them transcend the miseries they are forced to endure day in and day out, for years, and sometimes for life. As we all know from experience, Krsna consciousness is the only real refuge they can have and it is a privilege to be allowed to play even a small part in Prabhupada's great plan to re-spiritualize society by inundating it with his transcendental books.

After reading this letter, please visit the IPM website to view the **NEW ARTWORK** I have added today. When Mother Shyama Priya entrusted me with her IPM service, in 2009, she gave me a three ring binder with a collection of inmate art. I always wanted to share it with the devotee community worldwide and, with the newly donated IPM scanner, I can do just that, by Krsna's grace. I will add more artwork as times passes. I have grouped the artwork into 4 categories: Srila Prabhupada; Krsna Pastimes; Lord Caitanya Pastimes; and Miscellaneous. Please take the time to go over these 4 categories to see all the new additions.

IN LOVE AND GRATITUDE, I OFFER MYSELF AND MY HEART

1-15-12

Dear Bhakti-lata,
Hare Krsna!
All glories to Srila Prabhupada!
All praise to IPM!
Please accept my humble respects and obeisances.

Thank you for your letter dated 1-10-11. There really is no way for me to fully express my appreciation for your time and especially patience in writing me, answering my questions, and providing me with so much good KC information. Your letters are always filled with so much information and are very much looked forward to. Your love of Krsna and the strength of your convictions are evident and I feel especially blessed by the Lord to be in your association. I'm sure this seva can be very frustrating, at times, especially when the same questions are asked, again and again. If I do this, please accept my apologies.

First, let me say that I did indeed receive the very nice calendar. Also I received the Caitanya-caritamrta, and the copy of On Chanting Hare Krsna. This is FULL of good, sweet nectar, a real asset to my japa. In fact, it answered a question I had on my mind the same day I got it in the mail!

What I was blown away by the most was Holy Jail. I cannot tell you how much this book lifted me up. My only experience of this path is Prabhupada's book, and the association of my devotee friends via the postal service. I had an idea, of sorts, that there must be prisons that accept devotees, but my experience here on this unit was different. I learned, to my great delight, that there are many prison bhaktas. In fact, some prisons actually assist their devotees in their pursuit of KC. Encourage it, even! When I read the letters from various prison Chaplains to IPM, I saw what a sad difference our own Chaplain is, here. I Was embarrassed and, to be honest, felt sorry for him.

It was just sort of a nice surprise to see that prisoners, not just in this country, but others, too, were chanting, and seeking the feet of the Lord. This boosted my spirits, a lot, for often I feel like the only kid in a big swimming pool, despite my pen-pal association....

In prison, as in the free-world, some days are better than others. Often it is quite routine, but there are moments when stark terror can rule. A few weeks ago I found myself in the center of one of those times. I will not go into the horrid details of what went on; suffice it to say that I found myself at my wits end, my nerves all but shattered from the stress. This rollercoaster ride of prison life was telling on me and my heart felt like a lead weight. I finally escaped the chaos and went back to the relative peace of my cell. There I fell down on my face before a picture of the Deities Sri Sri Radha-Govinda. Tears rolled down my nose and fell on the floor. I cried out before the Lord. I am so tired, Lord. So very tired. I do not know how much more I can take of this. I am trying to be strong, but my strength is failing. I am ashamed to be asking you for anything. I am a miserable devotee, and truly have nothing that you would find worth of at all. But I am your creature, Lord, and this place has me in distress. I am in dire need of help. Your servant needs you. Lord, this system has me found in chains. The system is too strong for me, and they do not want to let me go. Lord, I am sorry that I cannot put tougher words in such a manner as the saints, or that my efforts are without the poetic sounds I know that you deserve. But, Lord, if I am ever to have a shred of hope of leaving this place, then I must humbly ask your help. I am not asking, Lord, that you make it easy on me; I am only asking that, somehow, you make a way. I am not so bold as to try to tell you how, my Lord, I just ask that, if you have found anything deserving in me, at all, that you help me leave this place when my time for parole comes. I am destitute, Lord, and have only two things to offer you. In love and gratitude I offer myself and my heart. And I offer my family. I will bring my children to your feet, Lord. I am just asking for the opportunity to be with them again where I can live as an example of your mercy.

Now, I do not claim to know if this was right and proper, I only know that I poured out my heart to Lord, Krishna. I prayed to Srimati Radharani, knowing that if She found my prayers acceptable,

then the Lord would, as well. I did my best to envelope myself in Her compassion. I ran to Her and fell at Her feet.

After I had totally spent myself in this kind of prayer, I wiped the tears off the floor and went about the rest of my day. In fact, I felt a bit awful for asking the Lord for anything, when it is I that should be giving to Him. Still, I had my back against the wall and turned to the only fountain of strength that there is.

The next day I was called to the Head Warden's office. Now, this was a shock. Normally, a visit to the Warden's office is NOT a good thing. The Warden told me, without preamble, "You're an Outside Trusty." I asked him how this happened, since to get such status you must request it, then the Head of Classification, the Warden and the Administration in Huntsville must approve it. The Warden answered my question simply, "Because I put you there."

Within an hour my entire situation changed. I was moved to the best dorm on the farm. I was given Trusty status. My job is to work outside the unit. I am actually outside the main fence with freedom to go where I wish. The best part is that this Trusty Status looks very good to the Parole Board, and will only be a major benefit when I finally come up for parole.

Everyone I speak with about this is shocked. The guards are disbelieving because the Warden, for some strange reason, up and personally picked me to take this job. I have never spoken to the man in my life and I cannot fathom how he might have chosen me.

There can be only one explanation.

The whole thing really hit me the other day. It was cold outside, and I was busy shoveling rocks, filling in holes in a road. Suddenly it hit me. The Warden called me into his office exactly 24 hours to the hour that I made that plea to the Lord.

TO THE HOUR!

Now, I did not ask that the Lord make it easy, and He didn't. Five degrees outside, and me shoveling rocks. But as the realization hit me, I shoveled with pleasure and said, "Hare Krsna!" with every breath.

Now, there is the story. I know that some would call it mere coincidence. But I can assure you that no one I speak with has ever heard of the Warden just up and putting an inmate in a job outside the fence or in the best dorm on the unit, just all the sudden. No one can figure out how it happened. I do not care what anyone says. The Lord took pity on me. Or else Radha smiled at me. Regardless, my chance at parole has improved dramatically. Now, it is not certain, but it's much encouraging.

In your Reflections (6-10-08) you said, "Lord, please drive my chariot today." I can see how this is a deep secret, a mystical truth, and a lesson for me. It is an "open secret." That Mark must step out of the way and stop trying to interfere in his own affairs. In some ways, I feel badly for begging the Lord to help me out of a situation of my own devising. And I know that I should not be making deals with God. I know that it was wrong me me. But I am convinced, without a shred of doubt, that I was heard. The Absolute heard and acted. I believe this.

I have never before experienced such a dramatic thing. It was almost as if He had suddenly appeared in front of me.

I can tell you that I am not one to ask the Lord for things. I see other religions doing this and preaching "prosperity" and such and it makes me ill. God is not a "wishing well." Perhaps He just wanted me to have a little uplifting moment, I don't know. I do know that my situation has changed dramatically 24 hours to the very same hour I prayed. That I know.

And I know something else: When I am released—whenever that may be—I will pack as many of my family as I can get into a car and go to the Temple. My intention is to offer my services in the least appealing chore that can be found. One thing for sure is that Mark is humbled. I will clean toilets, wash dishes, take out garbage—whatever. Because I will not ever forget the moment I realized that Govinda heard my sad little prayer.

Another uplifting thing, though MUCH less dramatic, involved the placing of two KC books in the library.

Quite some time ago, perhaps a year, I think I read in the IPM prison newsletter that Chandrasekhara was offering to put copies of the Krsna book in the prison chapel library. I thought this was a good thing, as there are NO KC books in the Chapel library. There are Christian, Muslim, Catholic, and Jewish, but Prabhupada is not represented. I wished to change that.

As required, I got letters of permission from the Chaplaincy to place the books in the library. I then sent the letters to Chandra, and he had the two books mailed to me. Upon receiving he books, I contacted the Chaplain. To my surprise, he told me quite bluntly, and without explanation, “You need to bring these books to the chapel library.”

A lot of emotions went through me, not the least was shock at bigotry of the whole thing. I tried to reason with them, to no avail. Well, what to do? The books were not mine, but were acquired for a specific reason. Finally, I decided to donate them to the main, General Population library. I did this. But the library never put them on the shelf. No explanation was forthcoming. Finally, I went to check on them, once again (call me determined, if nothing else) and to my delight, there they are on the shelf! The first KC books on Allred Unit!

Now, my first feelings of disappointment were unnecessary. I can see the Lord driving the cart again. Had the books been placed in the chapel library, as was first planned, they would likely have only collected dust. And they cannot be checked out to study or enjoy. But they can be in the Main Library. The librarian finally told me that they were simply behind in getting them on the shelf. But there they are! Jaya!

My question now is, is it possible to get a hard-cover copy of the Gita? If it is I will donate it to the library. I think it would be awesome to get this jewel someplace where it can be accessed, and now that I know that they can be put in the library, I am more than ready to do so. It made me so happy to see the two Krsna (Vol. 1&2) on the shelf. Progress!

Again the lesson: Get out of the way, Mark, and let the Lord drive! He knew what He was doing, huh? Still it makes me sad that these men claim to be representatives of God and attempt to stifle anyone reaching for the Light (unless it's the “Light” that they approve of, of course).

I was surprised (and pleased) that you saw fit to post something I wrote on the IPM web site. Though I have to admit that I'm perplexed as to what I could have written that might affect anyone else. Especially an experienced devotee. Often I feel as if I am sort of stumbling around in the dark. Thank you, Krsna, for IPM and the devotees who you have sent to me to guide and uplift!

I really got into the good nectar you sent about Radharani. I do not know why it is that I am so drawn to this side of God. And, even though I still do not fully understand all the things behind it, I am not going to question it much. I'm just going to “go with it,” and allow myself to fully fall in love with this aspect of Krishna. It may be that I feel that Radha is more approachable than the Lord is. Whatever, I'm head over heels for Srimati Radharani!

I have begun applying tilaka. I am unable to use anything but water, at this time, however. I can only imagine the reaction of the guards were I to have clay tilaka. It would take me about 20 seconds to get thrown in the lockup! But, I am using what I can, and it is amazing what it does to my mental outlook. The Lord, and I know it's there. He can see it, and I can feel it, and for now that is enough....

In your letter you defined “dharma” as “the supreme occupation.” I thought dharma meant something like “right action” or ethics. And I see in this SB 1.2.6 just how far from real, pure KC I am. Unmotivated? No, I admit that I am motivated by so many selfish reasons. I do not want to die, I want to live forever, I want to go live with God in the place I came from, I want to hang out in paradise, I'm beginning to see the misery that this world is and I dislike it, I'm tired of being tired, worried, sickly, addicted, confused. I don't want to grow old I feel a longing for...for something. Something I have never been able to find in all my years of searching. Some satisfaction to vague, nagging, desire. I've searched for it in drugs, money women, things—the craving is still there. It may diminish for a short

time, but it always comes back. I know that God Krsna is real; I know that He is not some concept or idea. And I know that I should be some unmotivated devotee, happily working with the least care of going back to that eternal place where he came from. But I am not this person.

I AM motivated. I DO have an ulterior motive. Lord help me, but I do. Wrong or not, there it is Mark wants to go home (and I mean my ORIGINAL home).

The other day I was reading in the “song of God” about karma. For some reason, in the West we tend to find the thought of coming back and being born in this putrid place somehow comforting. But as I began to really think on it—being born yet again in who knows what circumstances, pooping in diapers once again, all the horrors of childhood, then those even worse teen years, and the whole thing going on and on and on and...the massive insanity of it just fell on top of me. I actually became afraid. And what is even worse is that, somehow, following this path if NOT making my enjoyment of life any better. I know that my life should be becoming free of worries and such, or that is supposed to be one of the effects of chanting, but to be honest, the more I learn of KC, the LESS I like this existence. In some respects I feel like I’m just sort of “doing my time” and going through the motions of this life. And it’s even more so being in prison (within a prison!).

No, Mother Bhakti-lata, I am totally motivated. This world is crap. Oh, we find our little joys, here and there. Like a band-aid on a gaping wound, but mostly, it’s all crap. And I suspect that if I were released from prison today, given a zillion dollars, and all the wonderful goodies life has to offer, it would STILL be crap, only crap in a different way.

Desires? Yep, I got them. I desire to be free of this place, to return to my mother and children. To find a nice companion that will not look down on me because of my past and will be a part of my KC life. I desire to do SOMETHING to promote KC—write something worthy, distribute books, clean the “john” in the Temple, mow the grass or sweep the floor—whatever. And I desire to disappear from this crap place and return to the One. I want to hang out with the Lord—or even just see Him from a distance!

So, there it is. Mark is an awful, conniving devotee that has a bunch of selfish desires. I’m terrible but there it is in all its base ugliness. NOT the “pure devotee,” am I?

Yes, I received the BTG’s. The article about Radha was uplifting. You know, this may sound strange to you, but when I made that plea on the floor of my cell, and the next day I was promoted and such, well, that was the first time I’d even made such an emotional prayer to Radha. I mean, I’d never included Her to such a degree. Do you think that She had a greater role in the answer than I’m giving Her credit for? I’m saying, really, that only recently have I been studying and speaking to Her. She is supposed to be the MOST compassionate. Was all that Her doings?

You know, I’m so grateful that I have you to discuss such things. The world would consider me mad, for considering such things. But, who is insane? Us (the devotees), or the world?...

Constant, attentive prayer is something that, unfortunately, comes with years of practice. My version of this has been to “talk” to the Lord. Often my sort of one-sided conversations would to most seem to be a bit casual or familiar. I mean, here is the All-In-All,, The One, The Supreme Lord, and I’m in the chow-hall [cafeteria]commenting to Him about the quality of the beans that I’m having for dinner. Or walking a long having a nice chat, really about not much at all, with the Lord of Creation. I know that, once again, the world might view it as mad, and in fact, many here see me talking to myself (??) and thin me strange. How many times I’ve been asked, “Hey, who are you talking to?” What to say? (Oh, well, I’m just discussing the color of the pretty blue sky with Radharani, because She is so pretty and sweet and She loves Krishna so much and I wish I had a fraction of her devotion. Nope, mostly I just say, “Myself” and let it go at that.)

But in that article (which really should be straighten out because it is infused with what I believe to be good, solid core, nectar on prayer and chanting; it should be almost required reading) it says “inattentive chanting is my main defect.”

I have long believed that emotion is necessary to prayer. Words repeated by rote do nothing to attract or bend the ear of God. In fact, words actually are not needed in prayer. I believe that words are

for OUR benefit. The Absolute needs no words to know what you mean. Heart-felt prayer. In fact, some of my most intense prayers used no words. When spirit cries out, Spirit responds! And I recall you saying that I could bring any emotion into japa. Perhaps this is the key that I am missing. Prayer IS japa, and japa is prayer. Am I correct in this? That emotion is the ingredient that will supercharge my chanting?

My mind wanders, I bring it back. Someone is screaming down the run, I bring my mind back. What time is it? Bring it back. Am I done yet? Bring it back. I have to pee. Bring it back. What did that guard yell? Chow time? Bring it back.

The Buddhists have a name for it. They call it “Monkey Mind.” And that is how it feels. I try to do my rounds quickly. Get them done. Sometimes I get 9 or 10. Sometimes I get the required 16, but not so often. I make excuses, and believe them to be good ones.

Perhaps, what I should do, actually, is slow down. Concentrate on allowing the holy Names to resonate inside me. Concentrate on the vibration that it makes as I say it. Perhaps I need a bit of “mindfulness” in order to keep the mind from doing what it wants, which is a lot of busy, thinking activity. I know that many say that a certain number of rounds should be done in a certain time period. So many seconds per repetition of the mantra. But maybe I need to slow down a bit, in order to seep up. I’m certain that you have heard this before. What is your response to this? I know it sounds weird—slow down in order to speed up—but I think you get what I’m saying....

However, I know that chanting is the foundation of bhakti. It’s a habit that needs to be developed. The monkey mind does not want to let go of this illusion we are mired in. I wonder why this is?...

When I am finally released, I will have to go to the temple (Dallas, most likely, since that will be the closest to my home, that I am aware of), as fast as I can get there. I cannot allow the outside world to take away all that I learned. I have built a small foundation. Through my pen-pal association, the efforts of IPM and the books, papers, and BTG’s, I have done much studying, and that is good to build something on.

But it is ONLY a start!

I have never even heard a traditional Hare Krsna melody, not to mention sankirtan! When I get out, IF I am allowed to parole, then the State will have so many requirements that I will be busy almost every moment. I know this. They will have classes, and meetings and such. I will have to find a job (My family has a business, and I may work for the, IF parole allows it). The pressure will be intense. They design parole to try to make one to fail, in Texas. Despite all this, I know that I MUST get to the temple. If I’m going to stay out of prison, and if I’m going to keep on the path, then my spiritual life MUST be a priority.

The good thing is that my family is supportive of my faith. My mother has placed pictures of Krsna in my room that she has made for me in her home (bless her heart!)/ She does not fully understand KC, but she sees me seeking God, and to her, and rightly so, this path is a good thing for her son.

I wish to bring my kids to KC. I have 4 children. The youngest is 13, the oldest is 22. My oldest and my son (20 years old) will likely be driving me to the Temple, since when I get out I will not instantly have transportation. This is also part of my secret method to introduce them to Krsna.

From what I have read, sankirtan can be very exciting. My prayer is that they will enjoy it as much as I am sure that I am going to. This is a dream of mind, anyway.

But for now I keep pressing on. Just another prisoner of the Lord’s, fumbling his way towards the Light, and perhaps eventually, to the feet of Krsna.

I will end this letter now. I hope you enjoyed the story I related about my answered prayer. Still, kids freaked out by it.

One thing is for some, prabhu, I will never forget to include “the feminine side of God” in my prayers. I suppose this is why we first say “Hare” when we address “Krsna.”

Thank you for all that you do to help this poor prisoner in his quest for KC. Hare Krsna!

Mark Davis

Iowa Park, TX

Service Opportunity:

Lately, the refurbished laptop I had purchased for IPM in 2009 has been acting up again. Ramai Gaasbeek has very kindly repaired it, but it is doubtful it will last another year. My desire is to purchase a desktop computer; they seem to last longer and be sturdy and reliable. This computer has been recommended to me:

Asus - Essentio Desktop - 4GB Memory - 500GB Hard Drive

www.bestbuy.com

This desktop it is right now on sale for \$300.00, plus a 2 years warranty for \$50.

I will also need a flat screen like this one: <http://www.bestbuy.com/site/RCA+-+19%26%2334%3B+Class+-+LED+-+720p+-+60Hz+-+HDTV/5573529.p?id=1218665501035&skuId=5573529>

If you would like to assist the prison preaching in this way, I will be very grateful. Please contact me at: iskconprisonministry@gmail.com

Thank you!

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