



# IPM NEWS



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

**July/August 2013**

**Changing Lives from the Inside Out!**

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## **BRINGING KRSNA TO THE LOWELL PRISON**

**by Caitanya Dasi**

A team of four ladies received permission to teach a volunteer program on bhakti yoga and mantra meditation at a women's prison in Florida.

It took a couple of months to get through the red tape like back ground checks, etc. Once this was completed, we coordinated with the prison wardens and chaplains. In this particular state prison there are three separate facilities run by different chaplains and wardens, which made it a bit unclear how their system works.

After several phone calls and emails, I was directed to the Wellness Director of the Annex section of the prison. I was not certain how we were going to present ISKCON, as far as what we would be teaching as volunteers. We presented our program as Bhakti-yoga of love; Journey of Self-Discovery and mantra meditation. The word "yoga" later on caused a lot of confusion, as they thought we were going to teach yoga exercises. Because of this experience, my advice is to not use 'yoga' in an introductory prison presentation for devotees.



Caitanya Dasi

I was required to send photos of the instruments we would bring, and we also got permission to bring Srila Prabhupada's books. The morning we were scheduled to go to the prison, I realized that the inmates were expecting to learn

some hatha yoga. I called the Wellness director, and explained that there was some confusion, that we actually do not teach yoga exercises. However, I agreed to start the program off with some basic yoga asanas, and then we would go into our regular program of mantra meditation, singing, and dancing. I knew I was going to have to rely on my past years of yoga training and teaching gurukula children over 35 years ago, as well as my theatrical background to pull this off.

Even though the prison is only an hour's drive, we left at 11:30am knowing it takes at least half an hour to get checked in, and taken to the space we would be doing our program. Sure enough, around 1pm we were finally in the exercise/wellness program room. I asked if many people had signed up, and the director said that the list outside the door was filled up. We took that as a fairly good sign.



A few minutes after we got settled, an elderly black lady sort of limped into the room. She had rather unkempt gray hair and looked very sad. It was obvious she needed a chair, and one of the helpers got a chair for her, way at the back side of the room. I asked her name (Julia) and if she wouldn't mind sitting up front where we were sitting. She smiled and agreed. Julia turned out to be a very enthusiastic individual. Amazingly enough, on her first try, she perfectly pronounced each word of the maha mantra and our Sanskrit names. She was born in 1939 and I asked her how long she had been there. She lowered her head and embarrassed to reply "*Over two decades.*" Akuti displayed Srila Prabhupada's books on a table and also set up the harmonium. I took Julia over to the table; she said inmates can have books, but we would have to give them to her, so she picked out a few, which I handed to her.

Gradually, more ladies started to filter in. They sat in the back but, using my outgoing personality I invited them to sit up front with us. Before too long, there were 25 women sitting on the meditation mats. I explained that we really didn't teach hatha yoga/exercise, but since there had been a mix up, I would start out with some yoga asanas and then go to mantra meditation and philosophy.

Something happens to me when I get in front of people, especially a crowd; the entertainer/performer in me has a field day! I like to make eye contact with as many individuals as possible, to personally connect with the soul. I asked each ladies' name, and then I started with hands folded, saying *Namaste* explaining that it is a traditional greeting in India but that devotees say, *Hare Krishna* out of love and respect for the soul within the body, as we are all equal on a spiritual level. I instructed the women to do a little deep breathing and taught a few basic asanas. I could feel that Supersoul was definitely empowering me to recall things from my past years of experience in order for us to preach.

Now keep in mind that it is total agony for me to sit on the floor; my knee and back just cannot handle this anymore, however, for weeks I had been fervently praying to Lord Caitanya to please empower myself and the other ladies to allow us to engage in His service at the prison so that these suffering souls could receive His mercy and Srila Prabhupada's books. One of the devotees who came with us has also her physical challenges; she needs a hip replacement and struggled on the incredibly long walk we had to take to get to the room. Lord Caitanya can get a lame woman to walk and a blind woman to see!

While I taught the asanas the other three devotee ladies sang a mellow kirtan. I showed the ladies the mudra of a lotus and compared it to our heart. I explained and showed with my hands the closed bud, and through the mantra meditation we do, saying *Hare Krishna*, that gradually the bud opens up (and they all did this with me) and the bud becomes the most beautiful lotus flower, as our heart becomes filled with love. I explained how God is in our heart and that there is a soul in every living being: plants, animals, birds, fish, etc., and that we can show our love and respect for everyone through the process of glorifying the Names of the Lord. I explained that there is only one Supreme God.

The inmate ladies were very receptive; they were smiling and hearing the Holy Names as they did some yoga asanas. They learned to say the maha mantra, and then we started up a full force kirtan. Madhumati was inspired to gather all the ladies into a circle, like the women do in the temple, and hold hands while they chanted. This really got them going, and then she had them dancing into the center, and then back. They were smiling, laughing and the room was filled with so much transcendental joy. I looked at Akuti and Laxmimoni and we were all grinning from ear to ear, amazed at the Lord's potency and at how much bliss these ladies were experiencing.

I then introduced Laxmimoni as a very accomplished teacher of Bhakti yoga and philosophy who travels around the world teaching courses. She spoke on a Bhagavad-gita verse about controlling the mind and senses. Although some ladies were attentive, there were many wandering minds in the room, but the eternal benefit of hearing was there. A couple of questions were asked, and we then gave Srila Prabhupada's books. When we left, the entire box of books Akuti had brought was empty! The women were so grateful and asked when we were coming back again.

It seemed to us that we had a greatly successful program, but the Wellness director told us that because we mentioned God and religion, this kind of program had to be put on in the chapel. State laws, etc. So before we can book another date, she has to speak to the warden and chaplain and they will determine if we can do our program in the chapel. All in all, we concluded that Yoga maya had covered over the warden and chaplain so that through all the emails we had exchanged with them, they seemed to only have read the word "yoga" and as a result we got into the exercise program that day!

To date, we have not been officially invited to return. I have been speaking and corresponding with the chaplains and wardens, and upon their request have sent documentation stating what ISKCON is and a basic outline of what we will teach and how the inmates will be benefited, as well as an explanation on the difference between hatha and bhakti yoga. It seems it is better to be known as the *Hare Krishnas*, and to explain that we teach mantra meditation and philosophy from the ancient texts of the Vedas.

Stay tuned for updates on how to successfully be accepted into doing preaching programs in the USA prisons. All your blessings are greatly appreciated!

Your aspiring servant, Caitanya dasi

## UPDATE ON BHAKTA TERRY

If you remember from the May issue of IPM NEWS, Bhakta Terry is an inmate in solitary confinement, and he wasn't allowed to receive any books. Inmates in confinement were only allowed one Bible. For this reason, I was printing the Bhagavad-gita chapter by chapter and sending it to him.

By Krsna's grace, however, after a long discussion with his chaplain, Bhakta Terry was allowed to receive, as *his* Bible, a Bhagavad-gita As It Is! This is great victory. Bhakta Terry is very grateful.



Above, another of Bhakta Terry's very artistic envelopes

## Update on the prison ministry in Australia: AU IPM

By Radha Dasi

By the Mercy of Sri Caitanya and the desire of Srila Prabhupada, this week we have completed placing books in all of the 102 prisons across Australia!

Sadhu Seva Prabhu, a devotee in Melbourne - Victoria, has officially become a Chaplain, and is working with the Hindu Council of Victoria. He mentioned he has already been into a Remand Center as well as a Psychiatric facility to meet with inmates.

There are quite a number of devotees across the country in different states who are enthusiastic to serve the AU IPM but at the moment we still only have our one pen-pal, Steve.

We are ready to move onto stage 3 of our mission strategy of going into the prisons and holding preaching programs. Many devotees here are eager to hold Prison Preaching Programs, but we just need to learn how to get into the system. Hari Hari!

Your servant, Radha Dasi



### *Inmate Letter Excerpts*

4-29-13

"Dear Bhakti-lata,

I am currently incarcerated at the South Dakota Women's Prison. I was looking through some magazines and came across yours [BTG]. About 10 minutes later, the "owner" of the magazine saw me reading it and said, "*I should have known you would end up with this!*" She brought out the books and other information you had sent her. I read some of it. I am working and practicing meditation, yoga and being more mindful. I was wondering if you could send me some information and a book. I would like to study and read more. I would truly be grateful!"

**Bhaktin Shem B.**

**Pierre, South Dakota**



5-28-13

"I have to get the *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. Swami Prabhupada is the only one who has the right to translate it. I would not want to have or read any other."

**Bhakta Guy**

**Homer, Louisiana**

7-2013

"Dear Sridhara-syama,

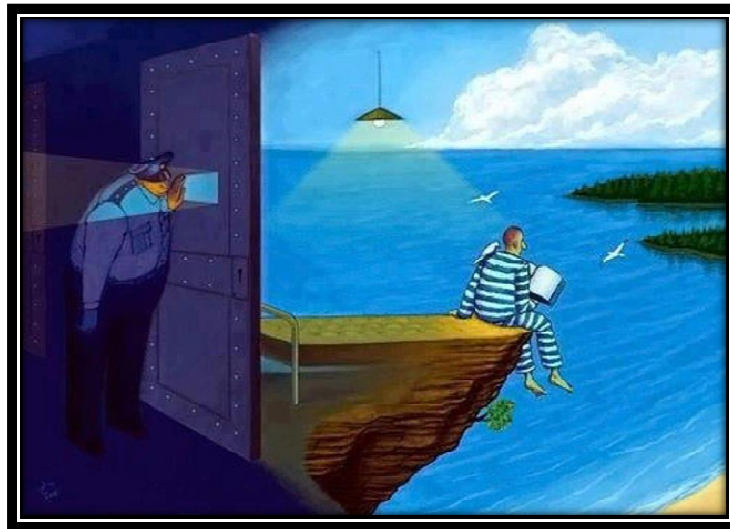
By the mercy of Krsna, the timing of the last set of books you brought was most fortunate and I have been able to read *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, *Teachings of Lord Kapila* and *Nectar of Devotion*. I have read each of them more than twice (except NOD, which I have found to be on an entire other level). I readily admit that I might sit with these texts, along with the *Bhagavad-gita*, an entire lifetime and not fully understand their transcendental message. But I am wholeheartedly trying.

I actually began a letter to you with the goal of posing some questions for clarification. After about the first page, I reviewed it only to realize that even I couldn't understand my own questions! So I abandoned the idea and sat down to do more chanting which is my go-to solution when I'm confused. Which is often, I assure you.

My background is in the medical sciences and as a professor for some years. I am not used to being unable to articulate my questions. But with each repeated reading of the *Gita*, things become a bit more clear and even the Sanskrit sounds beautiful."

**Bhakta David N.**

**Huntsville, Texas**



4-17-13

"Dear Bhakti-lata,

A man let me borrow *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, first canto. I think that this may have changed my life. I now thirst to leave behind the material. Lord Krsna has given me vision as well as showed me the ignorance in this age of Kali. I have no teachers, no books or guidance. Please help. All I seek is to learn."

**Daniel D.**

**Los Angeles, California**

"Dear [Srutadeva](#), I love receiving your letters. They aren't letters to me, but more of an event. Your missives always seem to touch, move, inform and inspire me all at the same time. Thank you for all of those things my dear teacher and friend!"

**Bhakta Shane M., North Carolina**



5-5-2013

"Dear Bhakti-lata,

I am thankful for just having the ability to think, breathe, and give thanks. In prison I hear so much negative talk it is amazing. One day I decided to conduct an experiment. I wanted to see how many times I heard the word "hate". Early I went to breakfast and at the table; "*I hate this food*"; an officer walked by, "*I hate that C.O.*" All day- hate, hate, hate. I think that is very destructive thinking. So I strive to look for things I love. Things that make me smile. Things to be thankful for having.

I pray that everyone at ISKCON Alachua and around the world is well and in constant remembrance of Lord Krsna. Thank you again for your advice, guidance and your service."

**Bhakta Robert C.**

**Elmira, New York**

5-20-13

"I can't wait to get to the next prison. There may be a devotee there. I hope not, only because prison is not humane. To be honest, I wouldn't wish this kind of punishment on my worst enemy. On a lighter note, I am still chanting. Now when someone asks what I am doing, I embrace the question, desiring the chance to tell them about Krsna. To my surprise not everyone rejects or frown up. It is encouraging."

**Jabari V.**

**Terre Haute, Indiana**

"Dear **Srutadeva**,

I can't wait to hear from you again; your letters are like Christmas! I thank Krishna for you often. Have a wonderful day. Hare Krishna."

**Bhakta Jason K.**

**Waynesburg, PA**



## THANK YOU!

We want to sincerely thank and acknowledge all of you who donated to IPM since the last IPM NEWS 2013:

Indradyumna Swami

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Mickey Singer

Shashi Raina dasa

Maya Sudana dasa

I also want to thank my husband, Mukunda dasa, for tending an IPM awareness table at the Sadhu-sanga retreat in Texas last June. And thank you for all the devotees who stopped by!

# We can't do it without your help!

All the wonderful preaching activities that IPM is able to perform are due to your kindness! Your monthly contributions are our only source of income. If you want to help us keep this steady program going smoothly, please consider joining forces with us! No contribution is too small!

Here are a four ways you can help IPM:

- give a one-time or monthly donation (we provide tax-deductible receipts).
- donate new **DVDs** and **music CDs** (bhajans, kirtans).
- donate japa and neck beads, along with bead bags and counter beads.
- 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! ☺

### 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](http://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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