

*“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*

**May/June 2016**

## **JANMASTAMI IN HUNTSVILLE, TEXAS**

By Phalini Devi Dasi

One of the most memorable experiences during our last visit to Houston was our trip to the Estelle Unit of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice near Huntsville, Texas on September 19, 2015.

Although we had not planned it into our schedule, Krishna apparently had, so we went along with Krishna's plan. It's always good to cooperate with Krishna's plan.

We were invited to participate by Gopal Krishna Prabhu of the Houston Temple. An enthusiastic and dedicated prison-preacher and alternates



Phalini and Haripada prabhhus during a prison program

with Sridhara Shyama Prabhu from the Dallas Temple, to conduct regular, open-call Hare Krishna services—which comes under the wider umbrella of "Eastern Religions." But this was not just any ordinary program. It was their *Janmastami* celebration, so they had invited a huge number of inmates for the festival.

After clearing security, we entered a room full of men—maybe forty or fifty—who sat ready and waiting for the Hare Krishna Festival to begin. Comfortable sitting cushions were arranged around the edge of the room, and the devotees had set up a microphone and amplifier with speakers.

My husband started the kirtan. The inmates joined in enthusiastically from the very start, singing robustly like old kirtan veterans. As the kirtan picked up to a livelier pace, the men almost all stood up to dance. They bounced and jumped back and forth, up and down the length of the room, chanting more and more loudly and grinning from ear to ear as they felt more and more jubilant with the intoxicating sound of Lord Krishna's holy names. Even His Holiness Bhakti Vikasa Swami joined in the dancing. The men formed a train, each man holding onto the shoulders of the man in front of him. They weaved and hair-pinned around the room like expert dancers from the old Agnideva kirtans of the seventies.

After the kirtan, His Holiness Bhakti Vikasa Swami and Haripada Prabhu took turns speaking about Krishna conscious philosophy and answering the men's questions. They reminded the prisoners how we are all imprisoned in material bodies because of our desires and our actions in the past, and how the chanting of Hare Krishna breaks the chains of our imprisonment in this material world. Haripada Prabhu compared the chanting of God's holy names to a spiritual alarm clock that wakes up the soul to his true identity. Maharaja challenged the men to improve their lives by deepening their relationship with God and making loving service to

Him their life's prime focus. Some of the men asked questions and Maharaja suggested that my husband answer first. After my husband answered, then Maharaja would give his perspective on the topic. So altogether it was an enlightening, enlivening group discussion.

After the pravachan, a delicious and colorful feast of Krishna prasadam was served by the devotees who had come from both Houston and Dallas to help out with conducting the Huntsville Janmastami program. With satisfaction, I watched the eager faces of the inmates as they were served sumptuous helpings of paneer subji, rice, whole wheat bread and carrot halavah, all cooked and offered with love to Lord Kalachandji. The devotees also served generous helpings of sweet, juicy, crisp green grapes that had been brought by Sridhara Shyama Prabhu and his good wife Lalita-sakhi devi dasi.

During the feast, one very nice, sincere young man—I'll call him Haridas—sat with my husband and me and asked deep, soulful questions about how he could become more sincere and serious in his Krishna consciousness. We felt extremely satisfied preaching to Haridas, a deep soul connection.

As we said our good-byes to all the inmates and to the Dallas devotees as well, Haridas shook our hands warmly and looked into our eyes with an expression that said, "Please do come back again."

As we drove back to Houston, we shared our impressions and experiences, which were all positive. We reminisced about the exhilarating kirtan, the exuberant dancing, the heartfelt questions, and how the men enthusiastically honored Krishna prasadam. We vowed to come back to the Huntsville Prison for another preaching program next time we're in Houston, Krishna willing.

*Phalini and her husband Haripada live in India most of the year.*



## Inmate Letter Excerpts

2/8/16

I am now in chemo-therapy. I am very uncomfortable. I am only chanting one round a day these days [Jackie has been chanting sixteen rounds a day for a couple years]. I am always thinking about Krsna. I have lots of books, deities, and deity photos. I am reading Srimad-Bhagavatam online. I've finished the first canto.

2/22/16

I'm at the 2<sup>nd</sup> canto, reading the questions of Pariksit. (...) The 20<sup>th</sup> of February I ate my last egg. I am looking at ingredients and surrendering everything. Lajjadoya taught me how to offer everything I eat to Krsna. I got up at 3:00 AM this morning and chanted sixteen rounds.

3/2/16

I am chanting sixteen rounds a day. Sometimes I lapse. I am [still] in chemo-therapy. I am reading the 3<sup>rd</sup> canto. I gave my Raja-Vidya and my Jagannatha books away. Can you send me other copies?

3/8/16

I chanted three rounds this morning. I haven't been doing sixteen lately. I offer Lord Krsna water and incense every day. I offer my food to Krsna. I'm reading the 3<sup>rd</sup> canto, where Vidura meets Uddhava and they talk about Krsna. Vidura finds out Krsna has left the world. There's a reason why life is so dull and mundane!

**Jackie S.**

**Miami, Florida**



"My prison journey continues. Now at a minimum called "Rifle Correctional." This is a minimum security facility and differs in dramatic ways from the "high side" at Sterling. That said, it's still an outpost in the material world, no? Or is it? Certainly, as I chant my rounds and dig, dig, dig in the scriptures and beg, beg, beg Kṛṣṇa to keep destroying the parts of my mind that resist service, it comes to feel more and more transcendent wherever I am.

Coming up on two years of spiritual work I am surprised by this journey. Without being locked up in prison I truly don't know if I would've slowed down and truly allowed myself to see myself through the Jaiva-Dharma-Sanatana-Bhakti-Sadhana. And if I had looked would I have looked honestly? And even if I had, what would I *have done* with those observations?

There has been a shift Mataji, and I am in the early phases of what feels like a perceptual shift. Mental reigns have been located. New and better ones are being built. Whole vistas of new, Kṛṣṇa-based perceptions are coming online as old thought patterns and habituations are revealed for what they were – material, fear based, eat-sleep-mate-defend garbage. I offer my repeated prostrations at the lotus feet of all the Vaiṣṇavas. Thank you. As I become ever more absorbed in what has only occurred due to causeless mercy, His causeless mercy, I am continually scheming for some way to increase my participation, my devotion, my sincerity, my Bhakti. I'm starting, I think, to see, truly, *that that's what matters.*"

**Bhakta Douglas G.**

**Rifle, CO**

"I found an old copy of your magazine from 2008 at our prison chapel. As I flipped through the pages a huge interest began to grow and now I want to read much more. I have explored many religions but none of them have felt right. As I read your magazine I had an experience of peace that flowed through my body. This is something that is hard to find in a place like this.

I have a strong feeling that this is the way for me."

**Billy van A., Draper, UT**

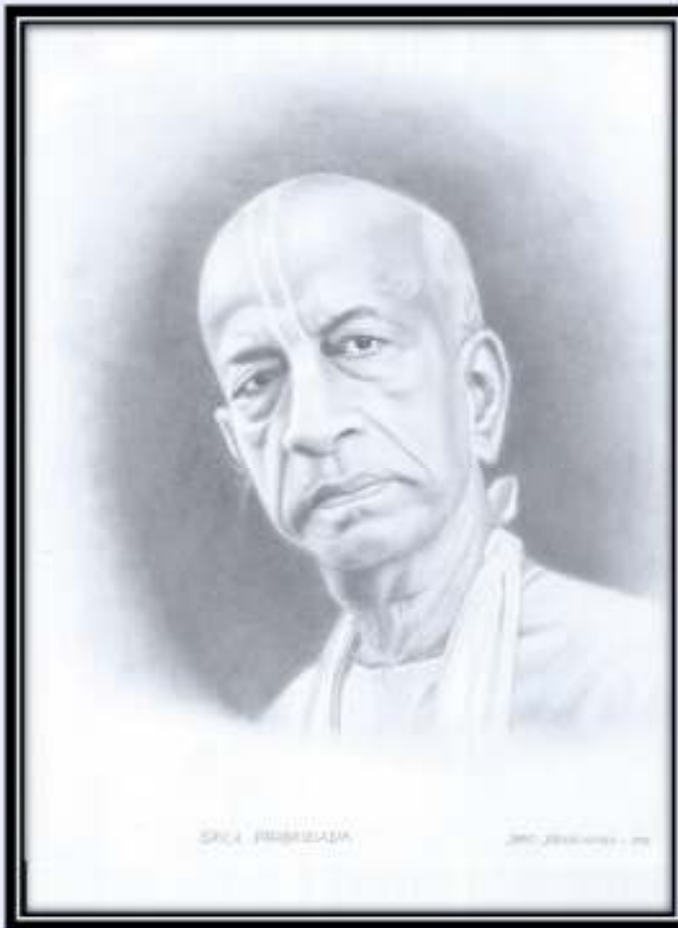
“I write this letter in thanks, once again, for the BTG Back Issues sent 11/17/2015. Not only do I love the articles, but I feel connected to other devotees reading them. Also I’ve been able to talk with more people about the science of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness because they saw me reading, and were naturally attracted. As a matter of a fact, one of those gentlemen will most likely be writing you. He’s read about ½ the books/mags I have & seems to have a sincere interest.”

**Ryan T.**  
**Wasco, CA**

“I have now been imprisoned for 30 years. It sounds like a lot but, it’s shot by in a blur. Never did I imagine or think about being released. I found serving Srila Prahupada in hell be-fitting my karma. It’s all I’ve done since Candra threw me a KC life ring in 93. There was a time when I would read out loud, the Kṛṣṇa book through the ventilation ducts in solitary for 8 years during my time at Pelican Bay. Pretty tough place.”

**Kalki W.**  
**Corcoran, CA**

**Inmate Art!**



Drawing of Srila Prabhupada by Bhakta Brian B.  
Susanville, California



Bhaktin Meera S., from Tallahassee, Florida, made these crochet projects for my granddaughter, to express her gratitude for all the books we sent her. This was her first crochet venture!

## **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 mention you in the next IPM NEWS.**

I apologize for not mentioning **Cliff Middleton** as one of our monthly donor, in the last few newsletter.

### **Our donors since last newsletter:**

Guruprasad & Family  
Elizabeth Joan Elson  
Ramayan das & Murari Mohini dasi (FL)  
Jiva Daya Foundation, Germantown, MD

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### **And our monthly Donors:**

Ravi Jadhaw  
Amala Gaura dasa  
Bhavananda dasa  
Cliff Middleton  
Dina Sharana dasa  
Radha-Jivan dasa  
Kalindi dasi (Hopping)  
Jitarati dasa  
Mickey Singer  
Radha Vinod dasa  
Rene Waisvisz

Shashi Raina dasa  
Stava Mala dasa  
Yudhisthira dasa  
Deepali Mittal  
Aritra Nath  
Satyanarayana dasa  
Thomas Nicholson  
Vishal Thakur dasa  
Sahadeva dasa



# Your Opportunity for more Service!

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

Here are a few ways:

- give a one-time or a monthly donation (we provide tax-deductible receipts)
- donate new **DVDs** and **music CDs** (bhajans, kirtans)
- 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 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](mailto:kirtanras108@gmail.com)

## Special NEED of the moment:

We need 27-beads neem japa malas for those inmates who are not allowed full size japa beads. Please let us know if you can help.



## 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:**

**ISKCON Prison Ministry**

PO Box 2676, Alachua, FL 32616-2676

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