



IPM NEWS



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

November/December 2013

Changing Lives from the Inside Out!

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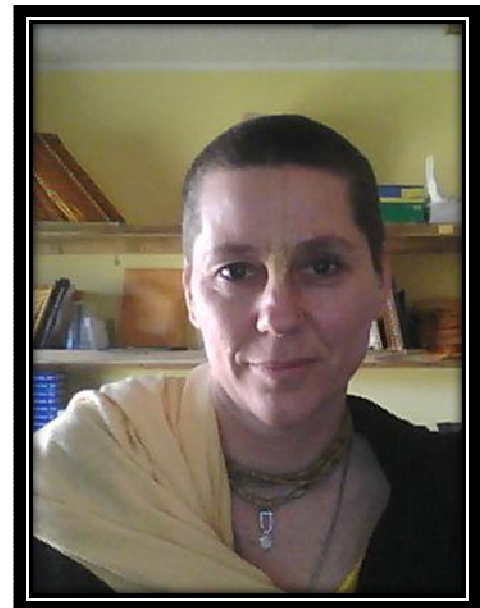
The Ripple Effect of IPM

by Bhakti-lata Dasi

As usual when the year is coming to a close, I look back at how IPM has impacted the lives of hundreds of inmates and I feel humbled and awed at having the great privilege to be part of this most compassionate program; giving Krsna to some of the most distressed souls on this planet.

Recently though, I had started feeling a bit worn-down in this service. It coincided with 4 devotees letting me know that they were not going to be volunteers anymore, for various reasons. Some felt discouraged at the constant turnover of inmates, sometimes giving the impression that IPM is not having much of an impact.

This momentarily brought doubts in my own mind. Like everyone else, I am not keen on wasting my time and energy. For what, exactly, was I spending so much time and energy? I felt a bit old and tired.



Bhakti-lata Dasi

These feelings, however, led me to a very healthy reassessment this service which had captured my heart in 1991 and to which I have dedicated myself pretty much full time since 2009. My questioning stirred in me some very satisfying reflections which have infused me with new energy and enthusiasm.

For a start, I realized that I was suffering from a mild case of “compassion fatigue”. It’s easy to feel that way when you see how *much* the inmates and their families are suffering and how much more they ask from you than what you can give them. When they tell you that it’s 90 F degrees in their cell and would you please send them a fan to make it bearable? Or when an inmate tells you that a gang member from outside beat up his wife and would you please collect some funds for food, diapers, and other necessities for her and their two small children? When an inmate is released and would like you to help him find housing and employment. Or even when an inmate tells you about a despot chaplain who does everything to impede the inmates’ practice of Krsna consciousness while giving all facilities to the Christian groups, and you don’t have the necessary energy, time, manpower and resources to change the situation. Given enough time and requests, it’s easy to come to feel that you are not doing enough, like a drop in the bucket, like you’re running, running, but the finish line is always further and further away.

So the first adjustment I did was to consider not only what IPM can offer the inmates, but also its limits and then be okay with these limits. I added a couple of paragraphs to my introduction letter to new inmates, stating very clearly what they could and what they couldn’t expect from IPM; the best way to avoid disappointment is to clear expectations. It’s also the best way to avoid getting too much pressure.

Now that I am clear about what I, as a volunteer, can and can’t offer, and that I keep that in the forefront of my mind, my service has become much lighter. I am enthused once again about what I *can* give the inmates, and I don’t put energy in what I can’t do. I feel like a surgeon in the emergency room; even if everyone around is panicked, the surgeon keeps calm, proclaims the diagnostic, and does the needful. I reserve my energy to give what I am in a position to give and I give it joyfully.

Once this was cleared up, I considered how I felt about the frequent turnover of inmates in the IPM program. Although a fact, it is only one part of the

equation; it is also true that there is a core of inmates who stay in contact with us for years on end, and whose practice of Krsna consciousness is the rock of their life; the one element that gives sense to their life. As Shelby L. from Soledad, California expressed recently:

“I want once again to thank you very much for sending me the BTG magazines. They bring a much needed joy & light into an otherwise dull and dreary existence.”

Through this prison ministry, the devotees send rays of transcendental sunshine in the dark existence of prison life, where senseless violence and ignorance of all kinds abound. If one inmate reads just one of Srila Prabhupada’s books, or even just part of one; if he chants the mantra, for one year, one month, one week, or even one *day*, he has *started* his devotional journey! How can that not count? How can that not be a worthy endeavor?

Srutadeva dasa, one of IPM’s most active volunteers, kindly sent me a very nice quote from Prabhupada, explaining the process of getting the good fortune of associating with devotees and receiving the mercy of a spiritual master:

“These boys who are playing with Krsna as cowherd boys, they are not ordinary boys. Sukadeva Gosvami says. They are krta-punya-punjab. For many, many lives, they accumulated their pious activities and thus now they have got the association of Krsna to play with Him. Krta-punya-punjab. Similarly, these ajnata-sukrti, when they are accumulated... Just like you deposit in the bank, four annas, two annas. In this way, one day it becomes one hundred rupees. Similarly, these ajnata-sukrti, when they're accumulated, that makes the fortune of a person to associate with guru and Krsna.”

Ref. VedaBase--Srimad-Bhagavatam 1.2.19 -- Vrndavana, October 30, 1972

Through his contact with IPM, one inmate puts one “ana” in his spiritual bank account; another puts a few rupees, another amasses a small fortune...

I may perceive that one inmate writes me for a few months or a few weeks, and then vanishes, **but that’s just the tip of the iceberg**. What I *don’t* see are all the wonderful, mysterious ways in which Krsna gradually works His way into people’s heart. I can’t see what is happening *behind* the curtains of Lord Caitanya’s Sankirtan movement. I am blind.

An inmate lends a book to a curious cell-mate, who tells someone else, who feels a deep stirring in his soul upon receiving this knowledge and so starts chanting Hare Krsna. He shares this in passing with a guard, as he waits in line to enter the "chow hall" (cafeteria). That guard now says, "Hare Krsna" each time he sees this inmate, thus, unsuspectingly starting *his* own spiritual bank account. An inmate takes Krsna consciousness so seriously that, upon release he takes initiation and renders steady service from then on. An inmate sends a picture of Radha to his mother; she loves it, puts it on her altar and prays to "the lady" every day. One inmate engages his wife to type entire hardbound books he is not allowed to receive, etc., etc., etc.

Not only inmates and guards but also wardens, chaplains, gardeners, family members, and so many more I am not aware of, are affected in so many different ways.

Just like the ripples created in a pond of water by a rock, Prabhupada's transcendental books, thrown

in the ocean of the prison system, create their own ripples in hundreds and thousands of souls; not only ripples but also waves, and, in some cases, veritable tsunamis which *completely* transform people's lives! And more often than not, we are not aware of when, where, or how this happens.

One inmate once told me that it was his third time around in the prison system and that it took that for him to finally become serious about Krsna consciousness. That is the way of the illusory energy; maya will do whatever it takes to bring the conditioned souls back to Krsna; and there is often suffering involved. But just like a touchtone turns iron into gold, Krsna consciousness turns suffering into spiritual wealth. Suffering is often a blessing in disguise; there is really nothing to lament about.

IPM gives the inmates the most powerful medicine available for nursing the eternal soul back to health, back to his original, pure Krsna consciousness. How can I not love my service?! 😊



Quick News of Two Prison Programs

In 2013, a few devotees from Alachua, Florida started a program at a local prison. These devotees take turn to go once a week, on Saturday. Sarnga Thakur describes one of those programs:

Union Correctional Institution, Raiford, FL

by Sarnga Thakur Dasa

That morning, before heading toward the prison, I felt spiritually fortified with a complete morning program. I prayed to be protected and to be an instrument of the Lord, without my false ego getting in the way. I felt comfortable.

There was a change from our usual classroom, from D to B section. A couple of inmates got to do some service by helping to move the chairs and books we needed back and forth. We had 3 students attend.

In class we started a new format we read the last 34 verses to chapter 2, each inmate and volunteer taking turn reading one verse and then passing the Gita to the next person. This allowed for a constant flow of interaction from everyone - whether comments or questions. We also covered more material that way than when we read only one verse and they got a better idea of how the subject matters are connected.

That day we talked about the benefits of Krsna consciousness in their daily lives, particularly chanting. And we discussed how we can take shelter of Krsna more and more. As usual, we had a short kirtan at the beginning and then at the end.

The whole class was enlivening. It is liberating to realize that there is not need to put on airs, or worry about always knowing the right answer - just by being myself and being available is enough to render service and bring Krsna consciousness to others. **Your servant, Sarnga Thakur dasa**



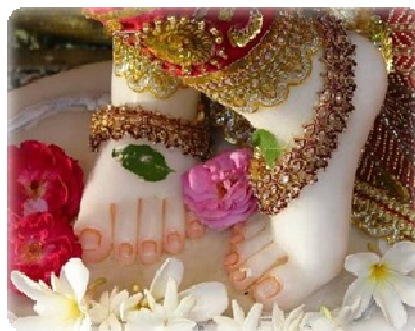
For the last two years, Sarva-drik prabhu has been offering programs in a few prisons. His preaching was featured in the Jan/Feb 2013 IPM NEWS issue. Here is a summary from one of these programs:

Federal Correctional Complex, West Virginia

by Sarva-drik Dasa

The FCI Petersburg program has been going on well. The devotees, organized by Bhakta Richard, are enthusiastic and, although most are not very strict in their practice yet, they are making progress. At the last meeting we had a group of ten devotees. Since they had run out of japa beads, I sent some to the chaplain, who is very accommodating. He has put me in touch with the Chaplain at FCI Butner, who is looking for a volunteer. They are Northwest of Raleigh, which is only about a two hour drive.

I have been corresponding with inmate Bhakta Steven also, who was recently initiated by H. H. Bir Krsna Maharaja, and is now known as Satyaraja das. We have exchanged letters a couple of times so far. He's about six hours drive away so I am encouraging him to try and arrange for a devotee from Atlanta to come, otherwise step up to the plate himself and organize a program with other inmates. He strikes me as a pretty, "can do" guy. Hare Krishna. **Dasanudas, Sarva-drik dasa**



Gold Nugget !

“Bhakta Michael, who is very new to KC, is starting to teach people in his new dorm! He sent me a thank-you letter, but someone else had to write it because he doesn't know how to write! Lord Caitanya and His devotees are so kind!”

Gangagati Dasi, IPM volunteer

Inmate Letter Excerpts

"I am very interested in Krsna consciousness. I acquired a copy of The Science of Self-Realization by Srila Prabhupada and I am very inspired; want to learn more and begin integrating some of the Hare Krsna ideals into my lifestyle. I would appreciate any books or any form of help you could give me in these matters. Thanks you for taking the time to read this letter."

Kristian R.

Cape Vincent, NY

"I'm so grateful for receiving the books. At first I took it lightly, however to find out about the Hare Krishna maha-mantra is the very best thing to ever happen to me. Please allow me to say thank you with total sincerity, from within my heart. I am committing myself to aim for total Krsna consciousness. I'm already over here studying hard on what I have received from you. If only I knew then what I know now, I wouldn't even be here."

Bhakta Gary A.

Somerset Pennsylvania

"Hare Krsna! Please accept my humble obeisances. Jaya Jaya Srila Prabhupada!

I just wanted to thank you on behalf of the Petersburg bhaktas for the CDs you sent. We did receive them and are putting them to good use. I'd also like to quickly update you on the amazing blessings of Laksmi we our group has been given by the chapel. We now have an entire set of the Srimad-Bhagavatam *and* the Caitanya-Caritamrita. We had the blessing of ordering about a thousand dollars' worth of books and the Vaisnava section of the chapel library is truly expanding into an impressive collection. We were also blessed with a wonderful harmonium which I am learning to play. Right now I've got the F-C-G chords mastered for the Hare Krsna kirtan. We have a DVD and book on how to play it and we also got books on how to speak Hindi, Bengali, and Sanskrit in 30 days...although my own Sanskrit improves with every reading of the BG and SB.

Anyway, my enthusiasm for KC is at its highest ever. Sarva-drk prabhu comes regularly on every 3rd Friday of the month. The association with a 40+ year Vaisnava such as Sarva is an amazing blessing. Srila

Prabhupada and Lord Caitanya have truly showed me the most amazing mercy. I hope all is well for you, your hubby, and your daughter and that IPM continues to thrive in this wretched Kali yuga. Your service is such a blessing to all of us! Your servant,"
Bhakta Richard C.
Petersburg, VA



"Srila Prabhupada has such a beautiful way of expressing and explaining things."

Bhakta Clay S.

Crawfordville, FL

"You sent me this beautiful hardback Gita! I wish I could tell you how huge my smile was all night as I poured over it like a 16 years old who just got surprised with their first car, and how such an act of kindness really, really made my night. I read it a lot and I love all the beautiful pictures and I just wanted to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the gift and the best part is that one day I'll be able to pass my small Gita on to someone else! My chanting is going very well and I'm so happy and feel so fortunate to have developed such sincerity in Krsna consciousness and feel blessed to have the association and aid of devotees such as you, Srutadeva, and Bhranti. You're all wonderful people and have made me feel so welcome and I'm grateful to all you for all you do for me."

Bhakta Jason K.

Somerset, PA



Here is a splendid example of one of the ripple effects of IPM:

Bhata Dale B. engaged another inmate, Miguel, in drawing this picture of Krsna for him; Miguel didn't know anything about Krsna!

THANK YOU to ALL our SUPPORTERS!

Your generosity is what keeps this program going! ☺ Please forgive me if I forgot anyone!

Our donors since last newsletter:

Shefali Majmudar
Drutakarma dasa
Rupa Manjari dasi/Belgium
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Clare Durina
Eddie Garcia

Tapasvini dasi
Ballhavi dasi
Srutadeva dasa
Danette Adams
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And our monthly Donors:

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Mickey Singer
Ravi Chandu Jadhaw
Rene Waisvisz
Shashi Raina dasa
Stava Mala dasa
Yudhisthira dasa
Deepali Mittal
Aritra Nath

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.



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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