

# IPM NEWS

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



ISKCON Prison Ministry / DBA of Vaisnava Outreach, Inc.

**Nov/Dec 2014** Changing Lives from the Inside Out!

[ISKCONPrisonMinistry@gmail.com](mailto:ISKCONPrisonMinistry@gmail.com) Website: [www.iskconprisonministry.org](http://www.iskconprisonministry.org)

Address: PO Box 2676, Alachua, FL 32616-2676

## **MY JAIL EXPERIENCE--KRSNA WILL PROTECT YOU**

by Srutadeva dasa, San Diego, CA

In 1994 I spent my first week of incarceration in a downtown jail, in a cell with 3 other guys. It wasn't too bad. The cell block was small and we ate there with a TV going all the time. We got to go up on the roof once or twice for exercise.

I was then transferred to a medium security prison for three weeks. That was pretty tough. Each cell block had 4 glassed-in sections with probably 30 three-tier bunks. Three tier bunks don't give you much room. So that's about 90 guys in each section.



Srutadeva dasa

Once a week they gave you clean clothes and toilet paper for the whole section which never lasted the week. We got out to the yard almost every day to play basketball or just hang out. There were fights and nobody went to sleep until 2 in the morning and then they woke us up at 4:30 for breakfast. Who the hell wants to eat at 5 in the morning?!?! Everybody in the cell block ate chow together so that was probably three hundred guys. I don't remember for sure because it is almost 20 years ago. I would trade my meat for veggies. I had a Bhagavad-gita and chanted *japa* on my fingers. I shaved my head and kept a *sikha* so everybody knew I was a Hare Krishna. I never was harmed in any way. Lord Nrsimhadeva was very kind and protected me.

Then I was transferred to a work camp. Transfers were pure hell. Sometimes sitting in a crowded waiting tank for 13 hours. Sometimes without any food or toilet paper. Then on a bus to who knows where. Then more waiting to get a cell or a bunk. I think one transfer took me almost 24 hours with only a 45 minute bus ride. The rest was just waiting. Anyway, I got to the work camp. There it was kind of like staying at a summer camp. It was in the mountains. There were dormitory buildings with bunks and TV and movies. No bars, walls, cells. Not even around the outside (just mountains). There was ping pong and volleyball and pool tables. The cafeteria even had a salad bar. The guys went out 6 days a week to work at county parks or highways, you know, stuff like that. I had a bad back so I stayed back and cleaned the staff quarter which was considered the best job at the camp. There was a wood shop (I made a couple of clocks in natural wood). So in one sense it really wasn't bad. I even was allowed to have my *japa* beads sent to me after a while and more books to read.

But as you know, in another way it was torture. It's kind of hard to explain for someone who hasn't been there. Everything you did was totally controlled and observed by the PO's (probation officers) and all the "rules"... *Step here NOT THERE! NO sitting during work hours. Don't sit down! Eat now. Sleep now. Siren - COUNT!* Everyone on their bunks. Or everyone at the count area. Count in

the morning. Count in the afternoon. Count right in the middle of the best part of a movie. *You can't use the phone now.* And of course for me, no friends, no devotees. I had no "homeboys" to hang out with. Thinking back I'm trying to remember what it was that made it so horrible. I guess part of it was just the feeling that you are not part of the "normal world". It is like you are on a different planet or something. There is never a feeling of being comfortable or "at home" or even safe and secure. Not a decent bed to sleep on. Not a decent pillow. Not a decent chair to sit in (when they "allow" you to sit!). Always surrounded by people you ordinarily wouldn't be around.

There was this guy, Pete, who had visited the temple in San Diego and really liked *prasadam* (spiritual food). So at first he was friendly. But then he started trying to get me upset. While waiting in line for lunch he would say stuff like, "*Did you hear? The temple burned down.*" Stupid things like that that I knew weren't true so I just ignored him. One day I was sitting by myself and just starting to offer my lunch by praying to Krishna and he comes and sits down next to me and his friend across from me. As I am praying he said, "*Oh look at this nice sandwich, delicious slaughtered cow. How nice.*" Well that did it. I stood up and start swearing at him and knocked over his drink all over his sandwich and onto his lap! I don't even remember what I said. Well, I am a small guy - 5'9" and about 160 pounds - and this guy was well over 6 feet tall and strong. But when I did this his jaw dropped open and he just sat there completely stunned. His friend asked him if he wanted another sandwich but he said no and just got up without eating and left the cafeteria. My heart was pounding and I could hardly eat. All I could think of was that when I got outside I was going to get beaten half to death. When I finally went outside, nothing happened. I was completely nervous the whole day but I didn't see Pete at all for the rest of the day. Late that night after everyone was asleep I heard a sound outside. I couldn't figure out what was going on but it sounded like a helicopter or something. The next morning a friendly PO told me, "*You know that guy Pete, he was not feeling well so he went to the nurse and she gave him some Sudafed and he had an allergic reaction to*

*it; his face swelled up like a balloon. They had to call in a Medivac helicopter to rush him to the hospital!"* The hairs on my arms stood up and I just stayed there totally stunned. Hare Krishna!! Later that day some guys who liked me and respected the fact that I was a Hare Krishna and not afraid to show it, came up to me. They had heard what had happened at the cafeteria and they offered to help me and "take care of Pete." I smiled and said, *"Thanks but don't worry about it. Krishna has already taken care of him."* We never saw him again.

So although on the one hand prison was hell, in another way my faith and devotion to Krishna grew in a way that it never had before that time. Krishna knew what medicine I needed and he administered just the perfect dose. Anyway, I

am sure most inmates' prison experience is a lot worse than my 7 months "easy time." Still, it is good for me to remember what that experience was like. It reminds me not to re-offend, and how kind Krishna was to me. It could have been so much, so much worse! It also reminds me of how actually everyone in this material world is in prison. This material world is not our home. Just like I was feeling in jail - I should feel the same way about this material world. This is not a comfortable place for the eternal spirit soul. The only place that is comfortable is our real eternal home in the spiritual sky at the lotus feet of our beloved Lord Krishna and all His pure devotees.

*Srutadeva dasa is a very dedicated and active IPM volunteer.*



## Inmate Letter Excerpts

"Everything here is coming along very nicely. I try to plant as many seeds of Krsna Consciousness as I possibly can. At the moment, I have one inmate in my pod with whom I am studying KC with. I put him in touch with Balabhadra Prabhu in Boise. When I received the C.C. he also received some wonderful books. He was really excited, he ran to my cell to show me what he had received. It was beautiful to see his utter joy! Hare Krsna!

**Benjamin B., Buckeye, Arizona**

"I had fallen away from chanting the Maha Mantra over the years, after losing the good association of bhakta Jason, and had eventually passed on all the books I had on Krishna Consciousness to other interested bhaktas at the various prisons in which I've sojourned.

I feel like the prodigal son spoken of in the Holy Bible, as I've been wandering to and fro, lost in the world of Maya. Yet, by Krishna's boundless mercy, I am once again on the same yard (prison) as bhakta Jason, and a devotee has begun coming here once a

month to share Krishna's love for us. I am rejoicing over this great blessing and am beginning to feel alive again! We're allowed to spend 2 hours in the presence of this devotee and are in the process of getting approval for a weekly study group for seriously interested inmates. I wonder if you could kindly provide for me a copy of Bhagavad Gita As It Is? I am certain that this one book would put me back on track. I have begun chanting again lately. It's wonderful to have purpose in this life again. Krishna's mercy and love have been there for me all along!"

**Bhakta Edmund G., Columbia, SC**

"Dear Mother Bhakti-Lata Dasi,

Thank you for the books "*Life comes from Life*" and "*Chanting Hare Krsna*". They are beautiful. I love Prabhupada's books. I love what how they are put together, illustrated, organized; I love everything about them, especially Krsna's mercy which flows freely from them. The Holy Scriptures are alive as are Prabhupada's books. Hare Krsna. I love to remember the story of the devotee of Lord Chaitanya who was illiterate, but followed the instructions of his spiritual master to read the Gita, and he was sitting with the book open upside down with tears pouring down his face. Books are such beautiful forms of Krsna, and glory to following the instructions of Sri Guru.

I began to read parts of "*Chanting Hare Krsna*", and found the stories of Haridas Thakur. Thank you again, this is just the food I need. Thank you for this prasadam. May we all be so dedicated in our service to Krsna. May Krsna bless you always"

**Bhakta Joel S., Coaltownship, PA**

"Dear friend, first and foremost allow me to extend my deepest gratitude for your receiving my letter with and open heart, thank you. My

name is Bryant. I am a friend of an inmate here, Kalki Das, who has referred me to you. I've been studying Buddhism for the last five years, meditating, learning and practicing the

"dharma". I have been doing my best to spread loving kindness to others, but I still felt empty... until I found Krsna about a year ago, and now I met Kalki Das. I want to learn from him. He recently told me about Lord Nrsimha; I can't wait to hear more, learn more. I want to be with Krsna and bask in Krsna's love, and light. As I write now I listen to the sounds of my soul and I know Krsna is in my Heart, I can feel it. I want to dance and chant. I feel awakened, over-joyed and filled with love, but also humbled. I do my best to abide by the laws; I do not eat meat, fish or eggs. Could you send me books, perhaps even CDs? I do not have any money, so maybe you could help me a little?"

**Bryant Mau, Corcoran, CA**





# Chaplains' Appreciation

10-28-2014

Dear Bhakti-lata Dasi,

I received your package yesterday. Thank you so very much for your ministry, through your donations, to your fellow Hindu brothers who are detainees here, and for the enrichment and education of the general population of the facility. It is appreciated more than words can say.

**Rev. Richard G. Barnes, MDiv, Chaplain  
MTC Imperial Regional Detention Facility  
Calexico, California**

10-2014

Wow, your generosity is amazing. The books listed below arrived today, expecting the others any day now. Thank You again for caring so much!

We have had a very positive response about Krishna from some of the institutions. We are distributing your literature, tapes, DVD's and music.

Beads will be a great pleasure to the Inmates during their prayers! If you could send 30 sets, we will distribute them as needed by the Inmates. Also, all Inmates have access to DVD and SC players within the Chapel at the various institutions.

I want to thank you again for your response to the request of the inmates! I am relying on you to help me provide them with anything and everything that they might require for their Worship Services. I enjoy talking with the Inmates and hearing of their Spiritual progress. Chris L. has even started a small Worship Group at his Facility and I am proud to help him and the other Inmates on their paths!

I wish to thank you again for helping out! Most organizations are too willing to turn their backs on these unfortunate people. That is why I am so pleased by your response! Thank you again, and Peace and Blessings,  
Namaste.

**Reverend Michael Sims  
Assembly of Ancient Paths Church  
Ellendale, Tennessee**

10-21-2014

We received the material you sent. Thank you for all you do. It really makes a difference.

Haribol,

**David Muchin  
Clinical Social Worker  
Napa State Hospital  
Napa California**

# 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 correct my mistake!

## Our donors since last newsletter:

Champak & Tarunika Patel  
Dhira Govinda dasa  
Guru Prasad dasa (Canada)  
Henrika Hartsuyker  
Ken Pastore  
Pradyumna dasa  
Satyanarayana Bodeda  
Shefali Majmudar  
Tom Shipley (inmate)

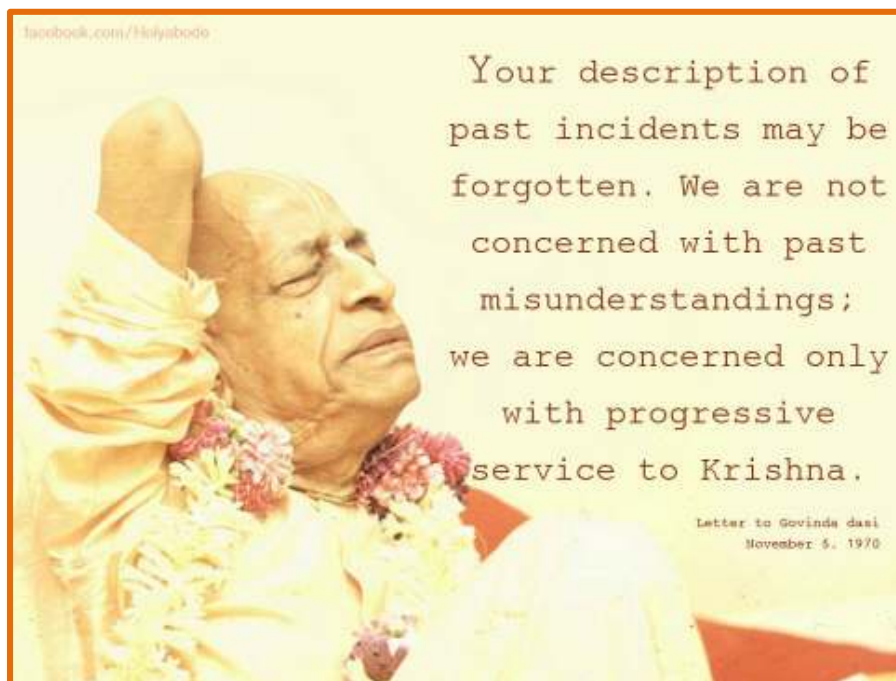


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## And our Monthly Donors:

Amala Gaura dasa  
Aritra Nath  
Bhavananda dasa  
Deepali Mittal  
Dina Sharana dasa  
Jitarati dasa  
Kalindi dasi (Hopping)  
Maya Sudana dasa  
Mickey Singer

Radha-Jivan dasa  
Ravi Jadhaw  
Rene Waisvisz  
Satyanarayana dasa  
Shashi Raina dasa  
Stava Mala dasa  
Vaninatha dasa (AZ)  
Yudhisthira dasa



# Help change the inmates' lives!

Many devotees feel inspired by this prison program and want to know how to participate. Here are a few ways:

- If you have Krsna conscious pictures you do not use, the inmates will be happy to have 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)
- Give a one-time or a monthly donation (we provide tax-deductible receipts).
- Donate **DVDs** and **music CDs**: bhajans, kirtans (new or like new).



### 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  
[ISKconPrisonMinistry@gmail.com](mailto:ISKconPrisonMinistry@gmail.com)  
[www.iskconprisonministry.org](http://www.iskconprisonministry.org)