



I offer my respectful obeisances unto Sri Krsna Caitanya and Lord Nityananda, who are like the sun and moon. They have arisen simultaneously on the horizon of Gauda to dissipate the darkness of ignorance and thus wonderfully bestow benediction upon all. CC Adi 1.2

Nov/Dec 2015

Petersburg Krishna Kirtan Concert

By Phalini Devi Dasi

At 7:00 a.m. on August 22, 2015, my husband and I climbed into the car with Sarva-drik dasa and his wife Sudevi. We all drove to the Petersburg (Virginia) Federal Correctional Complex where we all had gone for a kirtan and preaching program in September of 2014. Our first trip there had been such a positive experience that we were eager to go again.

During the pleasantly scenic drive between Sandy Ridge and Petersburg, we learned that before relocating to Prabhupada Village six years before, Sarva-drik prabhu had lived at the Denver ISKCON Temple for twenty-five years. While living there, he used to regularly go to the prison in Englewood, Colorado to chant, preach and teach the inmates about Krsna Consciousness, as well as to distribute prasadam. He now works in connection with the ISKCON Prison Ministry. Over the last six years, he developed and now follows a regular prison-preaching route. Prison preaching has given Sarva-drik

prabhu such a sweet taste that he goes to at least five prisons every month—one or two per weekend—including facilities in South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia.



Phalini Dasi

We arrived in Petersburg right on time, with our closed-toe shoes (visitors are not allowed to wear flip-flops there) and our otherwise completely devotional dress, tilaka and musical instruments. After clearing security, we were escorted to the chapel. The Prison Chaplain and Bhakta Richard (aka "Krishna Kirtan"--the devotee who is in charge of the Bhakti-Yoga Club at the medium-security facility) met us there and led us into a large room which is part of the vast prison chapel complex.

We were not prepared for what awaited us. *Forty* men greeted us, many of whom were positioned and ready to play various types of musical instruments to accompany the kirtan. We recognized some of the faces and gave nods and smiles of recognition to those whom we had met the previous year—Simon, Louis, and David were a few of the names we remembered.

Bhakta David, the now-famous origami florist, had handmade many more paper flowers this year than he had the previous year (Petersburg Correction Facility still does not allow real flowers on campus). In fact, he had made *more than two-hundred* paper flowers, dozens of which were strung together as garlands. As we entered the concert hall, we were lovingly garlanded by four of the men. Bhakta David had also learned how to make multi-colored origami lotus flowers, which were beautifully arranged in vases on the altar. Their Lordships Sri-Sri Gaura-Nitai, dressed in simple yet lovely outfits, graced the altar with Their effulgent, benevolent forms and were accompanied by an

attractive statue of Sri-Sri Radha-Krishna as well as a set of blissful Jagannatha deities. Bhakta Louis (Krishna Kirtan's cell-mate) is particularly attracted to Lord Jagannatha, so he always makes sure that Jagannatha, Baladeva and Subhadra are prominently placed on the altar and a huge three-foot wall-hanging of Lord Jagannatha's face is hung on the wall behind the altar. We were happy to see the familiar Prabhupada Pastimes video playing on a screen to the right of the altar. It always fills our hearts with joy and makes us smile to see old clips of Srila Prabhupada and his disciples from the sixties and seventies.

Krishna Kirtan prabhu signaled for the kirtan to start. We were amazed by how all the men sang Hare Krishna so enthusiastically and played their instruments so expertly



ABOVE: front row, third from the left; Krishna Kirtan, Sarva-drik, Sudevi, Phalini, and Haripada prabhus

together. I was especially impressed that all the instruments were in tune with each other and even with our harmonium! The kirtan sounded so sweet that I found myself hoping that someone was recording it. Bhakta Simon played the congas and there were even a bass guitar and another harmonium playing along. It was

phenomenal. A veritable Petersburg Krishna Kirtan Concert!

After the kirtan, both my husband and Sarva-drik prabhu took turns speaking. Haripada prabhu reminded the men that there are 8,400,000 species of life and that the human form of life is very rare. He said that we are all lucky to be in human bodies because we have the opportunity to reconnect with Krishna, God. He said that God is known as Yogeshvara—the master of all mystic powers—and that each of us has some powers, but God has all powers—all potencies—to the fullest degree. Krishna can be compared to the unfathomable ocean, and we can be compared to small quantities of ocean water. If you take a drop of ocean water or dip a bucket into the ocean, you'll find salt just like in the vast ocean, but in a small quantity. So we are like Krishna, in that we have a small, minute quantity of powers compared to His unlimited powers.

Recalling for the men the Bible story of the prodigal son, Haripada prabhu painted a mental picture for them, *“Imagine a wealthy family. One of the children leaves home and becomes a drunkard. The family tries to encourage him to come back, but he refuses. But some day he may decide to reconnect with his father, with his family. We are like that prodigal child. We have the wealthiest, most loving father, yet because of our minute independence, we have somehow chosen to leave home, to disconnect from our family and to try to enjoy this material world in a separate way. As in the story of the prodigal son, when we decide to return home to Lord Krishna, we are welcomed with open arms and unconditional love.”*

Sarva-drik prabhu spoke about Canakya Pandita's verse in *Niti-sastra* which explains that time is the most valuable asset for the human being. He emphasized that we cannot buy back even a moment of time, even with unlimited money. He questioned the men, *“How do you invest your time, your most valuable asset? Do you spend time contemplating 'who am I'?”* Then he took that thought further by asking, *“If you don't know who you are, how can you be happy?”* He asked, *“You have all lost your families, your cars, your bank accounts, and your reputations. How can you be happy without these things?”* Then he proceeded to explain how to be happy without material attachments and affluences. He

advised, *“Meditate on who you really are, and what is your relationship with God. Ask yourself, 'Why do I have to be sick and grow old and die?’”* Sarva prabhu told the men that only a fortunate person feels inspired to ask these questions. He concluded by urging the men to become fortunate, and to learn to use the wealth of their time wisely. *“If you misuse wealth, all you have left is sorrow, but if you use your time efficiently to understand what is the soul's relationship with God, you can become happy. That is the actual object of human life, the real wealth of human life.”*

After the devotees spoke, we all joined together in another sweet, melodious kirtan. Although we sang a melody that the inmates had not heard before, they caught on quickly and soon became absorbed in the sound of the holy names. We noticed many of the men closing their eyes and really trying to hear the holy names. Some even accompanied us with their musical instruments. By Sri Nama Prabhu's mercy, we all felt purified and uplifted by the beautiful kirtan of Krishna's holy names.

Following the kirtan, Haripada prabhu spoke again. *“The Vedas tell us that God created two realms, the material realm and the spiritual realm. Both realms originate from Krishna. When we come to the human form of life, Krishna grants us the freedom to choose whether to reside in the spiritual realm or the material realm. In the human form of life, we have the chance to read transcendental literatures which describe both realms. We also have the chance to decide in which realm we want to reside.”* He illustrated a scenario: *“Someone may find himself in a bad neighborhood, a dangerous neighborhood. He may then choose to move to a better neighborhood. The human form of life allows us the chance to choose to move to a better neighborhood, the spiritual world. So how does one go about moving to that better neighborhood of the spiritual world? The method for transferring ourselves to the spiritual world is given by Lord Caitanya in this Age of Kali—the chanting of the holy names of the Lord.”* He compared the chanting of Hare Krishna to a spiritual alarm clock. *“This chanting is a sound vibration that wakes us up from the dream of identifying with our body and everything connected to our body. The chanting is a sound vibration that wakes us up so that we can realize who we are. Lord Caitanya,*

Krishna Himself, came five-hundred years ago to give us this process of mantra-meditation. The chanting of Hare Krishna wakes us up so we can understand our eternal relationship with Krishna."

Because the Petersburg Facility does not allow prasadam distribution, the inmates bought candies and after offering them to Sri Sri Gaura-Nitai, happily distributed them to all.

Many of the men had requested to have their pictures taken with us. Unfortunately, the photographer arrived late, so many participants had already left before the camera was able to capture them. After much picture-taking with those who were still present, we said our

good-byes, feeling very grateful to Lord Caitanya and the Guru-parampara for engaging us in prison preaching.

On the drive home to North Carolina, my husband and I expressed our gratitude to Sarva-drik prabhu for his years of hard work, traveling to prisons and sharing Krishna consciousness with inmates who might otherwise never get a chance to hear the kirtan of Krishna's holy names or Krishna conscious philosophy. We thanked him for encouraging us to come along and experience the nectar that is freely and readily available to those who are willing to take the time and effort to touch prisoners' lives with Lord Caitanya's mercy.



Inmate Letter Excerpts

I think you'll be happy to hear that my overall personality has just brightened right up recently. Happier than I've been in a while. And I think it's due to my chanting. How awesome is that?

Steven G.

Iowa Park, Texas

I wanted to write you and let you know that Krishna hears our prayers and works in our favor...as always thank you for all of your support, with your help my faith has been built and remained strong even in some of the most troubling times of my life. I don't know where I might be without you. Thank you so much.

Cassidy S.



Needless to say, I've been reading and chanting mahamantra first thing in the morning, throughout the day and night. It can be energetic, spark me up. Makes me feel light. I'm drawing a lot from the book *The Perfection of Yoga* by Swami Prabhupada. It solves a lot of questions I used to have about all the different yoga disciplines. Well, I'm getting a lot out of the other one too, *Beyond Birth and Death*. And now that I have BTG, I'm really good to go. What grabbed me the firmest was the book section: '*Srimad-Bhagavatam*', which expounds on topics that are totally new and weird to me. I don't mean weird in the Western sense, but in its original spiritual sense to indicate unheard-of phenomenon that only very few can understand and internalize. I never heard of anything like it, and I've read lots of religious texts. It's tons heavier than anything I've ever read. And this is just an iota of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. I have to study this. It's gotten me real, real curious. Very strange spiritual teachings I never knew of or even imagined. The kind I'm inclined to. I'm currently reading the article on incense, another new field. There's such a lot of energy in this magazine [BTG].

Eva C.

San Diego, California

I look forward to shaping my life in a way where I become real dear to Krsna by spreading Krsna consciousness and hearing about Krsna and chanting!

Sean S., Lucasville, Ohio

Bhaktin Jackie, a very simple and sincere soul, called me in September and I sent her books. She called me later to let me know she was chanting about twelve maha-mantra (not rounds) in a row, but no more than that. She said, "I can't seem to be able to do that (chanting) for some reason, but I can chant OM." Then, a little while later, she called me back with this message:

"Hi, Bhakti-lata, I've gotta say, everything is working out! Last night, I was reading *Chant and Be Happy* and I said to Krsna, "*Krsna, how come this maha mantra is better than my OM mantra?*" and then I felt an instant attraction to chanting. Last night I chanted ten rounds, this morning I chanted ten rounds, and tonight I'm gonna chant ten rounds. Man, it's like all of a sudden I have an attraction. I *did* have an attraction to Krsna consciousness, but now I have an attraction for the holy

name! Thank you for your books, thank you for all of your work, and I'd like to ask you to send me a japa kit with beads, bag and counter beads. Thank you!"

Jackie S.

Miami, Florida

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 [world]. 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

Chat with a Murderer

By Mitrasena Dasa— Boone, North Carolina

He was the most boring person I had ever met. Everything about this guy was 'normal'; he was polite, suburban, healthy, clean-shaven, educated, had a pretty wife. "This guy has never experienced life." I thought, "I have no time for people like this."

One day, he visited our community. I invited 'Mr. Boring' over to play guitars. We sat together sharing chord progressions, singing different tunes. I was shocked to see a crude tattoo on his arm.

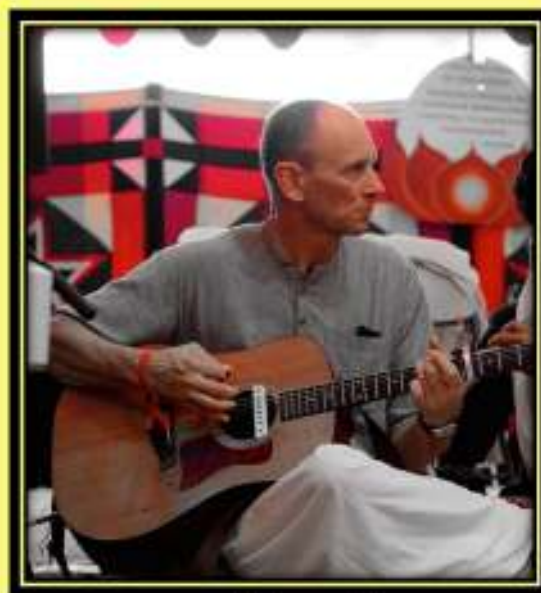
"Where did you get that?"

"In prison," he answered politely.

This was interesting. He always appeared to be such a goody-goody. He was probably jailed for something petty. I couldn't see this guy as a hardened criminal.

"What were you in for?"

"Murder."



Mitrasena dasa

I instinctively scanned the room for escape routes and possible weapons for self-defense, realizing I was alone with a murderer. The soft-spoken ones can be the most ruthless psychopaths. Doing my best to remain calm, I replied,

"Whoa, that was unexpected. What happened?"

"I started hanging out with a bad group and was with them when they killed someone."

"And you were caught. What is prison like? How did you deal with that?"

"Prison is not a nice place. What saved me was a book my father brought to me. From this book I got the understanding I should pray to God for rectification. I knew what I had done was wrong. Rather than pray for relief or protection, I prayed that I learn my lesson. If it means suffering, so be it, I want to learn my lesson so I never repeat such a mistake."

"That's a very mature way to look at life, especially while in prison."

"Yes, but somehow I embraced that understanding at that young age. I'm convinced that's what saved me. Had I been seeking protection, I would have felt fear. I was ready for whatever God was going to give me. I felt fearless, understanding it was coming from Him and was ultimately for my own good."

Chaplains' Appreciation

8/9/2015

Dear ISKCON Prison Ministry,

Thank you for your kind donation of literature. It is a help for those in prison who desire to make a change in their lives and pursue right living. Our inmates appreciate your resources very much.

Again thank you

Chaplain Gault

Santa Rosa Correctional Institution

Milton, Florida

10/7/15

We have received the books you sent to us. I want to say thank you very much for all of your help, you were very generous and more than helpful. This message is to say thank you very much for your generous donation to us your donation was such a great help to us. You have provided us with material that our Hindu men are now able to use. They are more than thankful for it. Once again, thank you, you have been more than helpful and generous.

Wishing you many Blessings.

Chaplain Briana Barcelo

Florence Federal Detention Center



Inmate Art!

The inmates get **very** ingenious and resourceful, creating artwork with the few material at their disposition; paper, floor varnish, glue, strings, Popsicle sticks, etc. Here are some delightful artwork inmates recently sent to me as a token of their appreciation for the help they receive from the prison ministry.

On the right, a tiny rock on which **Leland D., from Chino, California**, has glued and varnished a picture of Krishna he found in a BTG. I placed a quarter next to it so you can see the dimensions. It is very small and delightful! 😊


P.S.: I tacked this rock to the top of my monitor so that all day I am reminded of why I do this service!



On the left is an OM necklace sent to me by Kalki dasa, from **Corcoran, California**. It was made by a fellow inmate. Kalki explained how it was done:

“What is really cool about this necklace is that it’s made with plain blank paper. Cut thinly by hand. Rolled up by hand on a paperclip. Glued and covered with floor wax and strung up. Can’t be wet or it will come apart.”

To the touch, I was sure the necklace was made of small beads! It is impressively and meticulously made.



**THANK YOU to ALL our Well-
Wishers!**

I cannot express how deeply grateful I am to all of you! Thank you for sharing your heart with the inmates.

😊 Please forgive me if I forgot anyone, and let me know so I can add your name in the next newsletter! 😊

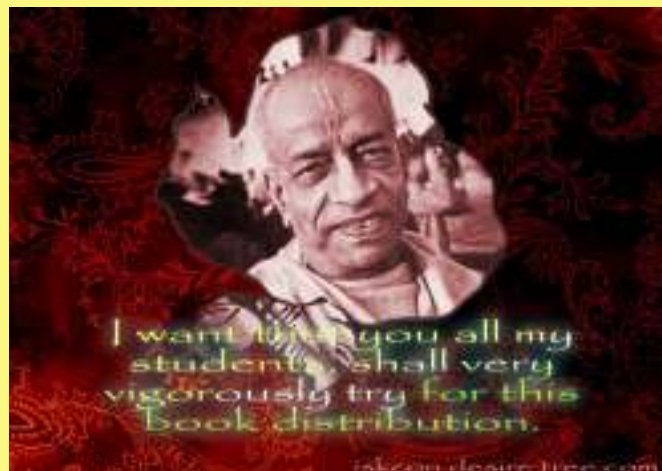
Ishvari Jahnava Dasi
Cliff Middleton
Diane Caunt
The devotees of Silicon Valley
ISKCON Baltimore
BBT

And our monthly Donors:

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Shashi Raina dasa
Satyanarayana dasa
Yudhisthira dasa



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HOW CAN I HELP?

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

Here are a few ways:

- **PRESSING NEED OF THE MOMENT:** One of our donors who, for many years (thank you!), sponsored all the shipping of boxes of books to chapel libraries will be unable to do so for an indefinite time. Without this donation, I am unable to send books to chapel libraries (I am devastated!). This is vital as *hundreds* of inmates have access, *for years on end*, to the material placed in libraries. **Please help!** The yearly cost is \$2,000 a year (or \$500 every trimester/ or \$167 a month). If you can help, please contact me at: iskconprisonministry@gmail.com
- 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 prabhu at: 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
3759 McCreary's Ridge Road
NBU #46
Moundsville, WV 26041



- 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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www.iskconprisonministry.org

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