



IPM NEWS



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

September/October 2013

Changing Lives from the Inside Out!

ISKCONPrisonMinistry@gmail.com

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Recipe for the Suffering Soul

by Candra Das

Please accept my humble obeisances.
All glories to Srila Prabhupada!
Hare Krishna, Jai Sri Sri Radha Bankebihari Ki Jai,

My Initiated name is Candra Das. I am a disciple of H.H Bhakti Tirtha Swami Maharaja. I am currently employed as a correctional counselor at Snake River Correctional Institution in Ontario, Oregon (Snake River Correctional Institution is located 11 miles east of the Idaho/Oregon state line). I have been employed with the Oregon Department of Corrections for 18 years.

I first became interested in starting a prison-preaching program during my second year of employment. I sought the assistance of the Gupta family who currently run the Boise Hare Krishna (Idaho) temple. I felt I had no qualification, therefore I determined they would be more qualified to conduct this prison-preaching program. In 1996 the Gupta's had serious reservations about conducting a program at a prison but when I approached them again in the summer of 2003, they committed themselves to doing this service and I helped to facilitate the means for them to do so. However, due to all the service they had in maintaining the temple, they could not

continue the prison preaching. As a result, I had to become rapidly qualified to take over this program.



Candra Dasa

I was not sure how the employees would view me now that I was becoming a religious volunteer. My concerns revolved around openly advertising that I was a Hare Krishna Devotee.

What I discovered was that most employees had no clue what a Hare Krishna was! As it turns out, Ontario, Oregon is not the “Mecca” of cultural/religious awareness.

Very quickly, I forged ahead with the full “devotee” attire; tilak, dhoti, and kurta. Of course, I got the strange looks, but, since the body that I occupy is black, I was accustomed to strange looks. My current bodily condition prepared me for tolerating being stared at. In due course of time, staff and inmates became accustomed to my foreign attire and even accept prasadam, which is an extra means to defuse their bias, pacify their trouble minds and extend Krsna’s mercy.

Years later, the program is running strong and expanding. Due to the mercy of Sri Sri Radha Bankebihari, we now have our own altar, conduct Gaura Arati on an occasional Friday evening, read from the Bhagavad-Gita As It Is, and share prasadam (bananas, oranges and apples).

I could not have anticipated the benefits the IPM program could have made on the lives of the inmates. Some inmates learned slokas, others committed themselves to drawing art and others were simply drawn to the holy name. Just recently, one of our new members joined the program because of hearing the holy name. He attended another religious service program and heard the chanting from our program when he walked by. Weeks later, he approached me and asked, “What was that you were singing?” I responded, “What are you referring to?” He said, “You were signing in that class and playing the drum... what you were signing touched my heart, so I would like to join your class”. Another example is from an inmate member who worshiped Buddha. He had many doubts about his own belief, let alone subscribing to Bhakti Yoga. He now chants 9 rounds a day and reads and memorizes slokas from the Bhagavad-Gita. In the ten years of the program, he is the first inmate who, with or without prompting, is motivated to learn slokas.

When dealing with the inmate population, I am reminded of a statement that my Guru Maharaja would say in his many lectures: “You’ve got to have an attitude of gratitude.” My attitude is that I am very grateful to have this service and it pulled me through some of my own trials and tribulations. I can conclude that the recipe for the suffering soul is service to Sri Krsna. After all, we too are inmates in this material prison or macrocosm called the material universe.



Chanting Inside the Barbed Wire Walls

By Inmate Bhakta Carl S.

“Since September 2012, each week at Union C.I. (a state prison facility in Raiford, Florida) the spiritual world descends. Starting about three months ago, some wonderful Vaisnavas from the New Ramana-Reti farm community in Alachua, began visiting some of the inmates at Union C.I. and giving us their mercy and association. Our original visitors were Mother Akuti and Desava das. Through their influence they recruited even more volunteers, including Kalyaphani das, Madan-Mohan das, Nrsimha Tirtha das, and Saranga Thakur das. They will all now take turns holding our services each week.

As they enter the prison, clad in the flowing robes of a Vaisnava or the colorful drapes of a sari, the atmosphere is immediately purified by their presence. All heads turn, and the inmates unknowingly cleanse themselves as they say, "*Here come the Hare Krishnas.*" The melodious sound of the mrdanga wafts through the air, attracting even more attention to the arrival of these visitors from the spiritual realm. I know they will be humble and say, "This is not true," but it sure seems that way to us.

Although our gathering is small, usually just less than 10 inmates, we all know that this chance to chant, dance, and learn spiritual truths is the association of true practitioners of bhakti-yoga is the most valuable time we will spend each week.

We start each week with a lively kirtan, and believe me, there is not a face in the room that lacks a smile. We follow that with a class and some time for discussion. Many of the inmates are new to Krsna consciousness, so their questions may be very basic and simple, but it's still very wonderful to see their sincere interest. When an inmate asks what he should say when he makes an offering, because he wants to start to make offerings himself, it becomes quite obvious that everyone's heart is fertile ground for the seed of bhakti to be planted in, and that these devotees are tilling the soil of the inmates' hearts each time they visit.

All of the devotees who visit are full of the qualities of kindness, compassion, and patience. They sincerely listen to our questions and try to provide us with answers of a level that we can understand. They have recently begun to give us little homework assignments from the Bhagavad-gita. I feel these will become one of the highlights of each week's meetings.

When we can we try to bring a little something to offer to the Lord. We don't have much available here, but seeing the offering process gives the new devotees the right ideas and understandings. Then we distribute the prasadam to other inmates in our housing areas. As one of the devotees put it, we carry little exploding morsels of Krsna's mercy back to the other conditioned souls.

I know that each and every inmate feels the association of the devotees has increased their devotional service in one way or another. One mentioned that his concentration during japa has improved. The question and answer sessions make it clear that everyone is gaining spiritual knowledge.

For me, the change that I've most noticed is perhaps the most valuable gift they could bring me. Lord Caitanya tells us that the purpose of all devotional practices can be summed up in two simple rules; always remember Krsna and never forget Him. Since the devotees have been visiting us, I find myself remembering Him more and more, and for this I am deeply in their debt.

Another thing that we have been doing since the devotees started coming to see us is this: some of us have begun to meet up on the days between their visits. In that way we can keep up the Krsna-katha and build devotional friendship.

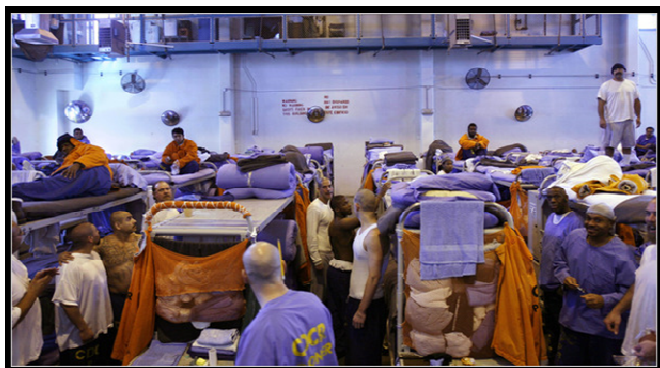
Although most of the inmates are new to Krsna consciousness, I was familiar with it prior to coming to prison. By the mercy of Srila Prabhupada I had learned of Lord Caitanya's mission quite a few years ago. I have even lived in temple on two occasions. When not in temples I would try to maintain my association with devotees (especially for Sunday Feasts!), but I must be honest; I was not strong and Maya always won out. She would use her showcase of illusions to expertly drag me away from the association of devotees.

I have now been in prison for over a decade. In the past I have been at facilities where inmates would meet for Krsna consciousness gatherings, but these were held without volunteers. So these last few months have provided me with my first real opportunity in a long time to associate with initiated devotees. Having regained this blessing has helped me to feel and understand the great difference that association makes in one's devotional life.

I'm not counting on the future yet, because I'm not due to hatch my way out of prison for a few more years, but I'm hoping and praying that the next time I join a temple I can fully surrender and escape Maya's clutches for good.

We close each week's meeting with a kirtan. During I feel both great joy and a sense of sorrow because I know that in only a few more minutes our visitors from the spiritual world will depart. Still though, the beautiful sound of the ringing karatala and the mrdanga will last in my mind, and hopefully carry my heart through the week, until we're blessed with their association again.

Inmate Letter Excerpts



"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-Caritamrta. 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 also were 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 or 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."

Bhakta Richard C.; Petersburg, VA

"While I've been here in prison, I met a devotee who introduced me to this Hare Krsna philosophy. I've become really interested and was hoping you can send me a copy of Bhagavad-gita. I have been a vegetarian for a month now and I would like to know more about it; why it's wrong to eat meat. I feel this is for me and that this is who I want to become. I want to live a righteous pathway of life and discipline myself from wrong doing. Thank you for your time."

Maurice L.; Eloy, Arizona

"Where only a few months ago I only heard "Hare Krsna" every now and then, it is now heard all over this prison! What a fine group of devotees that are coming in here. I am just amazed at the power of the kirtan that we are having.

We have only 7 or 8 inmates attending regularly now but I expect this number to increase as soon as some start overcoming their inhibitions."

**Bhakta Gary W.
Raiford, Florida**

"My release is coming shortly, April 10th. This will probably be my last letter you receive from me...At least while I'm in prison, as I do plan on staying in contact with ISKCON when I am released. I want to thank you for all that you have done for me in the short time that I've been in contact with you. The scriptures of Krsna, the teachings of Srila Prabhupada and all the literature I have received have shown me that, left to my own devices, I am a rascal; that without trusting in Krsna, praising His name and serving Him and allowing Him to have His will with me, that I am doomed to continue living an unfulfilling and wasteful life."

**Vaughn S.
Windham, Maine**

"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**

"Thank you for the books you sent me. I have been carefully reading all of them. I've also been sharing some of them with my friends. Having a direct line of communication to God is a beautiful thing. I was dead spiritually prior to coming to state jail, consumed by alcohol, unhealthy relationships, poverty, and homelessness. I feel alive inside now. I have a lot of questions to ask and I'm grateful that

there is a center here in Austin. I plan to go upon my release. "

Bhakta S.

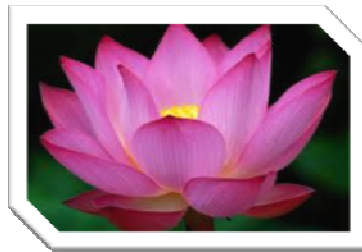
Austin, Texas

"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 his 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 one on to someone else! My chanting is going very well and I'm so happy and feel so fortunate to have developed some sincerity in Krsna consciousness and feel blessed to have the association and aid of devotees such as yourself, Srutadeva, and Bhranti. You're all wonderful people and have made me feel so welcome and I'm grateful to all of you for all you do for me."

Bhakta Jason K.

Somerset, Pennsylvania



INMATE ART

If you haven't yet seen the inmate *artwork*, please visit the website: www.iskconprisonministry.org



Rupa and Sanatan by Bhakta Brian Babinski

MERCY NEEDED: inmate Jared B., in Warner Creek C.F, in Lakeview Oregon, has apparently been practicing Krsna consciousness for 10 years. He is very much desirous of devotee association. If you live close enough and would like to visit him, please contact Bhakti-lata dasi at: iskconprisonministry@gmail.com

THANK YOU! 😊

We want to thank all our donors without whose help this IPM program wouldn't be a reality. While reading the inmates' quotes above, know that the hope that entered their life and the gratitude they feel is directly due to your generous **heart!**

Thank you to our August and September donors:

Shefali Majmudar
Bhagavati dasi
Prem-Vilasa dasa
Tapasvini dasi
Gangagati dasi
Lila Sukha dasi
Karuna dasi

Radha-Jivan dasa
Kalindi dasi (Hopping)
Jitarati dasa
Maya Sudana dasa
Mickey Singer
Ravi Chandu Jadhaw
Rene Waisvisz
Shashi Raina dasa
Stava Mala dasa
Yudhisthira dasa
Deepali Mittal

and to our monthly donors:

Ravi Jadhaw
Amala Gaura dasa
Bhavananda dasa
Dina Sharana dasa

A special thank you to Amala Gaura dasa and his wife Sharmila who, on their recent pilgrimage to Mayapur have purchased 250 sets of japa malas (with bead bag and counter beads) and also neckbeads! We all know how inconvenient it can be to shop in the holy dhama and travel back with these items, so I am **very** grateful!

Please forgive me if I inadvertently forgot to mention anyone.



Opportunity for Service!

We're excited! We have the opportunity to purchase boxes of pocket-size Bhagavad-gitas. There are 96 books in each box, and we can get the boxes for \$108 each. So for \$108 you can give the gift of a Bhagavad-gita to **96** inmates!

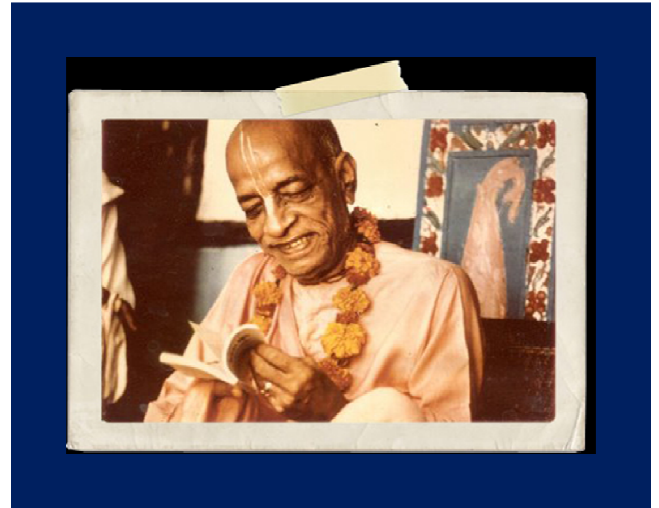
We plan to buy 10 boxes at \$108 each; can you help us by sponsoring part of a box, one or more?

Thank you!

Contact us now! Mukunda or Bhakti-lata dasi at:

iskconprisonministry@gmail.com

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Want to be Involved with IPM?

Here are a few other ways you can serve the prison ministry:

- become a transcendental pen-pal for one or more inmates
We always need more responsible 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. Contact us if the Paramatma is nudging you to do this service!
- give a one-time or monthly donation (we provide tax-deductible receipts).
- donate new DVDs and music CDs (bhajans, kirtans).

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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