

Dedicated to His *Divine* Grace
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Founder Acarya of ISKCON

IPM NEWS

ISKCON Prison Ministry / DBA of Vaisnava Outreach, INC.

"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

September/October 2018

CRAVING TO READ ABOUT KRSNA OVER THE MUNDANE

by **Bhakta David Burkman** [Excerpts from two of his letters]

Dear Mother Bhakti-lata,

Hare Kṛṣṇa! My most humble obeisances to you.
Jaya Srila Prabhupada!

I am so very grateful for all the books you sent me and I wish there was more time in the day, but I try to read at least fifty pages each day from a few of them. I am learning and enjoying the process so much! I actually find that now I crave reading this Kṛṣṇa conscious material over the mundane. Still, I am but an infant and have very far to go.



Ujjvala Dasa has been able to come to this prison for about a month now and his association is most wonderful! We have a nice program on Thursdays, during our scheduled weekly time in the chapel. I know he says he is new to this role but he is deeply sincere and passionate as well as humble and honest. I am learning much from his association and while I am a bumbling fool, he helps guide me patiently, sometimes sternly if need be, in pronunciation and rhythm of the bhajans. I look forward to and yearn for his next visit so I can learn more.

I still write to Śrutadeva Dasa and enjoy his association as well. He puts a lot of time into his correspondence and teachings and I relish reading his letters. We have a great relationship and I will be sure to ask him questions, like I do with Ujjvala. I really like both of them.

I have sent you three paintings. Thank you again for everything; your service to Kṛṣṇa helps so many of us leave our erroneous path of foolishness and find our way back to Him. I deeply and humbly thank you and the work Kṛṣṇa does through you and all the other volunteers.

Yes, I do have access to the Srimad-Bhagavatam and Caitanya-caritamṛta you so generously donated to the chapel library, along with all the other literature. I am currently reading Srimad-Bhagavatam, third Canto, volume three and I love it. I want to finish Srimad-Bhagavatam at least once before starting Caitanya-Caritamṛta. I really look forward to it! Thank you for providing such divine nectar. It is truly wonderful!

I gave the book *Chasing Rhinos with the Swami* (by Syamasundara Dasa) to Ujjvala so he could pass it on to another prison devotee he thought would like it. I loved it, but I knew I could not keep it, as I want others to enjoy it like I did. My mother is still reading her own copy that she bought on her Kindle.

I did indeed watch all the DVDs you so kindly donated and really enjoyed them. I plan on watching them all again soon as I am able to do so; perhaps on a day Ujjvala cannot make it up here.

It is bitter sweet the association with Ujjvala because of the restricted environment, but still I relish whatever time we do get; it helps me remember the deepest need I feel to give service to

all of you devotees of Kṛṣṇa and to encourage others in here to have a relationship with Him.

Daily I am talking to others in here about Kṛṣṇa Consciousness and some are interested although not as much as Bhakta Justin was when I first got him to try it. I am not at all discouraged; like Srila Prabhupada said, 'it is like selling a diamond.' Yet, I know it is worth the price and will keep trying.

The chaplain services here (and in many other prisons) have been problematic and at times downright against accommodating persons of our faith. But I do my own devotional programs outside of the chapel as best I can and only go there to check out one of the books or view one of the DVDs you donated and to associate with Ujjvala when he is able to drive the distance to come up here. I know I am not alone in this struggle either. I saw in the prison ministry newsletter that fellow bhaktas I know from the Petersburg prison are filing a suit against the BOP (Bureau of Prison) on some of these issues....

I just keep doing my best to serve Kṛṣṇa and His devotees and to not focus too much on all the problems. I observe all the Holy days and Ekadasi days the best I can by doing deity worship, bhajan, offering arati, etc. I follow the regulative principles and chant japa. I do all this as though I was initiated and no one bothers me anymore on any of it. In fact, usually it is now curiosity that comes up, such as asking about my altar; it gives me a chance to expose them to Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. Hopefully these conversations with others will help them find their relationship with Kṛṣṇa again.

Even though I must be austere and eat out of my locker by buying from the commissary (instead of going to the chow hall), at least I am able to offer bhoga and take prasadam; in this way I can work within a non-accommodating and illegal system without making too many waves. I tried to fight that system and got nowhere and my only option that way is to take it to court.

Right now I am managing and at least I get to associate with devotees such as Ujjvala, Śrutadeva and yourself. I do wish I was not such an ignorant fool and knew the pronunciation better, knew more of the melodies of some of the songs, could offer nicer food, and could properly do arati with all the correct paraphernalia. Still, I do what I

can and I at least have the association of Kṛṣṇa's devotees. Kṛṣṇa's mercy is great!

I see Kṛṣṇa's mercy in so many places and that alone gives me the conviction to stay on this path and forget all the other nonsense.

Thank you too for the encouraging words about not being alone. I have that 'Vaisnava is never alone' quote, (by Prabhupada) up on my bunk as well as other photos you and Ujjvala sent me of Srila Prabhupada, Kṛṣṇa and Panca Tattva, and the calendar prints of various paintings of the Lord's pastimes! I see them when I lay down at night and wake up in the morning. I keep some pictures to meditate on while chanting my rounds, when I chant with my eyes closed and then lose focus and Maya tries to intrude. My PTSD does not help.

Maybe someday I will be able to grow Tulasi like I once did, years ago, before really understanding the divine nature of whom I nurtured and cared for. She reciprocated by thriving, which delighted the Indian family I lived with at the time. If I had only known then, what I know now.

I miss taking care of Tulasi, and I miss the prasadam. I regret having been so foolish as to not see the mercy Kṛṣṇa was bestowing through the devotees I was associating with 'on the street', years back. Still, I am finally starting to wake up and can only hope to keep trying to wake other up as well. Prison is a great repository of souls who need it and want it – they just do not realize their foolishness.

I like the Prabhupada's conversation in Paris, August 11, 1973. I really enjoyed it! I love how Prabhupada defeats much thoughts and foolishness. Reading such talks helps me in my own discussions with others, inspiring me to appeal to their logic.

The 'Divine Form' article (by Ananta Shakti Dasa) you sent me was also very interesting and inspiring. I did not paint (fine art) much, until I came to this facility. But Kṛṣṇa has been so kind to give me this outlet to offer service while in prison and I am thankful for your help in encouraging me to continue onwards. Also, giving me Pushkar's book (Windows to the Spiritual World), further encouraged me to carry on this service.

Your personal reflections are sweet nectar and I really enjoyed reading them. Not only did I connect with what you wrote, but it really got me to

think about some things in my life too. Thank you for sharing such personal insights!

I enjoyed Prabhupada's lecture, *Death means sleeping for seven Months*. There is a great deal of distilled nectar in that article and Prabhupada touches on many connected subjects and sumps up each very nicely, I believe. From dharma to the arrangement of the universe, to how we relate to all, and our purpose in it. Thank you for sharing such a powerful talk of Srila Prabhupada.

You have given me much to read, be inspired by, and think about. I am deeply grateful for all of it and despite your busy schedule you have so kindly devoted a huge chunk of it to give me such kindly association. You do a great job and I cannot begin to express how affected I am by your great mercy. Your service to Kṛṣṇa has impacted my life and that of many others. Thank you again for everything. If you need anything that I can help with (you got more paintings definitely coming), please ask. If it is something I am able to do, I will do my best to help.

Thank you for sharing with me about the reality of the devotees. I appreciate your humility and honesty. Śrutadeva and Ujjvala have also both been kind in sharing their stories and struggles with me. I am glad that the honesty and openness is there, otherwise I would be extremely wary; all of us cannot be Srila Prabhupada.

I enjoy the Bhagavad-Gita and years ago I read it through, twice, within a few months. Yet, the Srimad-Bhagavatam seems to be tough for me. I enjoy reading it and once I get to reading it I hate to put it down. However, a character flaw of mine is the impulsivity of my "all-or-nothing" attitude (got me in trouble with the legal system too) and it is a good lesson for me to learn that all of it will come in time.

I am blessed to have access to so much reading material and I have always loved to share. After I finish reading them, I give the books to others who are interested, instead of just keeping them for myself (save for a few, of course). It helps me keep with the mission that was so dear to Prabhupada and Bhaktisiddhanta.

Tonight my mother told me (before I could ask) that she was sixty percent through

Syamasundara's book; she's at the point where they are with the Beatles. She says she is enjoying it and although she has little time to read right now, when she does, it is this book. Jaya!

The book *Forbidden Voices* is beautiful and I enjoyed reading it. Of course I could relate to many inmates' letters in it and I know some of the inmates too.

Srila Prabhupada said—about accepting Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati as his spiritual master— “unofficially but in the heart”. I am doing my best, as if I am officially initiated. Does that make sense? In the early morning I perform at least mangal arati, prayers to Lord Nrsimha, Tulasi puja by chanting Sri Tulasi pranam three times and singing Sri Tulasi kirtan; I sing Sri Sri Guruvastaka and Sri Guru Vandana, then Jaya Radha Madhava; and I also apply tilak. Then, I offer a breakfast of nuts, honey and rice cake in the formal manner. While Prabhupada and Kṛṣṇa enjoy, I chant at least a few rounds of japa before partaking in the prasadam. I have most of the songs and ceremonies committed to memory but I am still very much a novice. I do all this in the morning, before beginning the rest of my day.

Around noon I offer bhoga for lunch, at my altar, which is in the locker in my room. In the evening I do the same for dinner. And at night I chant at least Sayana arati and sing Gaura arati and Jaya Radha Madhava and I put Them away in a folding altar Ujjvala gave me some years ago when I was at another facility in Alabama. And I read at least for an hour each day, no matter what

the rest of my crazy schedule is like. I chant at least sixteen rounds a day, but usually more.

The other inmates do not bother me anymore as I have a decent reputation here about the way I am. My willingness to help others without strings attached (as is the norm in prison), has endeared me to many. Being an instructor and mentor in the *Skills Program* has also worked in my favor. And my open-mindedness to other religions has unlocked many doors.

Prisoners, for the most part, are good judges of character (don't BS the Bser's). As such, my sincerity and devotion to my beliefs show (or so I have been told) and so I am able to just be me and no one really gives it a second thought; be it the tilaka, the bead bag, the paintings (people dig them!).

My painting of Prabhupada—‘*the Swami*’ or ‘*the Guru*’ as some have called it— is in the paint room, on a shelf, and it is with reverential respect that everyone speaks about Srila Prabhupada, despite not knowing who he is (many think it is Gandhi). And they embrace my other ‘eccentricities’ as well. So, yeah, despite a few staff members, everyone else is great!

Thank you so much for helping with this whole process. May you be most blessed.

Your servant, Bhakta David
Galesburg, Illinois

Note: You can see David's painting on the next page.





David Burkman's painting of Srila Prabhupada

IPM's PRABHUPADA MARATHON!

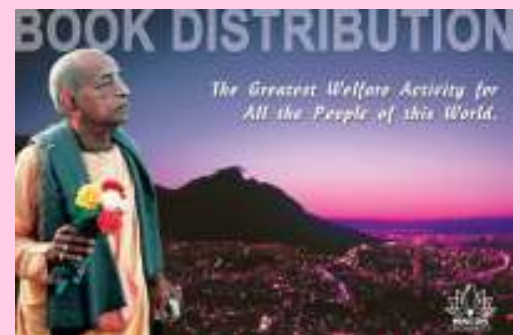
Two months ago, a devotee generously donated **eleven** sets of Srimad-Bhagavatam to the Prison Ministry. **All of them** have already been placed in chapel libraries in different prisons in the USA!

Now, in preparation for Srila Prabhupada's book distribution marathon, we have the opportunity to acquire **eleven** more such sets, at the low price of **\$95 each**—*including* the cost of shipping them to the prisons!

Would you please consider making this marathon a **SUCCESS** by sponsoring one or more sets (or even part of a set)?

To donate toward this **IPM Prabhupada Marathon**, you can either:

- 1) Send a check or postal money order to:
ISKCON Prison Ministry
PO Box 2676
Alachua, FL 32616
- 2) Donate through PayPal at: www.paypal.me/IPM



THANK YOU to ALL our SUPPORTERS!

Your generosity is what keeps this program going! 😊 If I forgot anyone, please forgive me and let me know so I can include your name in the next IPM NEWS.

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1 anonymous (you know who
you are: thank you!)

3 Donation Options

- 1) Send a check or postal money order to:
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- 2) Donate through PayPal at: www.paypal.me/IPM
- 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.

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