



IPM News



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

APRIL 2010 ISKCON Prison Ministry Newsletter

Changing Lives From the Inside Out!

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Remembering Shyama Priya Dasi

by Bhakti-lata Dasi

No one will argue that Prabhupada's books are the foundation of IPM's preaching work. His books are the time bombs that will explode in the heart of the conditioned soul when they are ready.

We need spiritual soldiers to make these bombs/books available to hundreds of inmates thirsty for this knowledge. That is where IPM volunteers come in. They send Prabhupada's books to inmates, correspond with them one on one, answer their questions, encourage them in their daily devotional practices and help them understand the importance of sharing the treasure of Krsna consciousness with others. Many set up spiritual programs at their chapel and in this way help develop a small group of bhaktas. There are also many who are alone and whose only outside contact is with an IPM volunteer. For all inmates, corresponding with IPM volunteers is vital.

Working from their homes, the service of these volunteers often goes unnoticed. Shyama Priya was such unnoticed IPM volunteer.



Drawing by inmate Burl Dees

It's been almost a year now, that Shyama Priya Dasi, aka *Mama Shyama* passed away, on April 16, 2009. For those of you who haven't heard of her, she had been relentlessly serving ISKCON Prison Ministry for over 20 years. She touched the lives of hundreds of inmates around USA, urging them to take to the chanting of the holy name and helping them transform into devotees of the Lord. And she pushed to do her service through thick and thin, happiness and distress. Even a couple weeks before her cancer forced her to stop, and although very weak, I witnessed her searching all over her apartment for a particular book she wanted me to send to an inmate.

I myself feel particularly indebted to Shyama Priya. Although I had corresponded for years with inmates, it is only through her association that I realized that I could sink much more energy into IPM, that it was truly a service to which I could dedicate myself fully.

I am saddened that she left not long after that realization. However, I "inherited" her service, and I have been fully engaged since then. In that way, as I continue her service here, in Alachua, FL, not a day goes by when I don't think about her, and I often wish she was here to advise me. Many times a week I open inmates' letters with the letter opener she herself used, and I weigh the letters I send on the scale she had and am reminded of her. Mama Shyama is very present in my IPM office.

I also think about her each time I accomplish something new for IPM; I think of how tickled she must be, I think "That one is for you, Shyama!", and it warms my heart. She wanted the inmate newsletter to be revived and the website reestablished; it is now a reality.

The second reason I feel indebted to Shyama Priya is that she allowed me to assist her during her transition from this world. I had never been close to anyone dying before, and it was one of the greatest lessons of my life. I admired the steadiness of her consciousness. A few days before passing away, she asked me to give her beads and she slowly whispered the maha mantra. Later on, even without her beads in her hand, her fingers kept moving while she was mouthing the mantra. She taught me that her years of Krsna conscious practice do pay off when it was time for the final test. Her experience made this a reality for me and every day it continues to help me to remember what is truly important.

All IPM volunteers think about Shyama Priya often, as she was a great inspiration and was always available to chat and encourage everyone.

Inmates have not forgotten about her either, as you can read from the letter below. This is only one inmate, but his sentiments are representative of that of numerous inmates all over the US who often re-read her letters for guidance and who regularly refer to her in their own letters.

"Dear Mother Bhakti-lata,

Please accept my humble obeisance. All glories to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

Mother Shyama Priya Devi's love was unconditional for even up to her last breath, she encouraged us to make progress in devotional service. Although, she suffered from pancreatic cancer, she was steady in her devotional service. Her offerings of love have enabled many of us prisoners to release ourselves from the prison of material life. May we always share her love for Krsna with others, for this is the grace of giving the mercy of the Lord to those who are suffering in worldly life.

"A devotee is compassionate", said Mother Shyama Priya, "for the suffering of the souls in this world. Everyone has some type of suffering to endure. The material world is built that way. The suffering is built-in and there is no escaping it. Either war, disease, suffering brought on by others, the

weather, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes; it is endless.” These teachings concerning suffering were dated February 18, 2009, at a time Mother Shyama Priya Devi was soon to disappear from our vision but not our hearts, on April 16, 2009.

I honestly admit that I have all her old letters which I re-enjoy over and over again; I never got rid of them because I knew they would one day become the encouragement I would need when I no longer had a mother. In this way I am fully dependant on our mother Shyama Priya Devi to care for my soul.

Mother was an enduring soul; nothing could interfere with her service. O Mother Shyama Priya, getting your association for so many years has been a blessing, for you have placed your lotus feet in my heart; leave them there forever as an offering of love.

You taught me that the only way is the Holy Name of the Lord. So I have hidden these instructions in my heart, only releasing them to offer them to others as an offering of love that will give them the way, the only way back home, back to Godhead.

As your spiritual son I will freely share the instructions you gave me. What greater lesson is there than the example you have shown us through living for Krsna?

“Changing the world inside and out by reaching out to others.”

“Respectfully, your humble servant, Bhakta Kevin”

Kevin Brown
Jackson, GA

BRAND NEW IPM WEBSITE!

We finally have a website you can visit to read the nectar of inmates’ letters, hear what the chaplains say about IPM, and share in our joy of witnessing so many inmates in their change of heart. You can also give a donation very easily through PayPal.

Please visit us today and tell your friends! www.iskconprisonministry.com



Drawing by Inmate Bhakta Brian



IPM in SOUTH AFRICA

This past month, I received an e-mail from Nama Cintamani Dasi, who lives in Durban, South Africa. Below, is an excerpt of her letter describing the prison program she is participating in:

“The librarian at the prison, Rajeev Sewnarain is a congregation member. So we have placed quite a bit of Srila Prabhupada's books in the library.

We are only allowed to distribute a few tablespoons of halava on Friday after the service.

I manage to include a piece of maha prasad every week.

On Diwali day in Karttika last year, we were allowed to do a full program for a duration of about 3 hours. The program consisted of Arati to a deity of Sri Damodara, Accompanied by an ecstatic kirtana (with harmonium, Mridanga, Kartalas). This was followed by a talk on the significance of Kartika and the glories of Lord Damodara. Then each of the 70 odd prisoners offered a ghee lamp to the deity of Sri Damodara.

We were amazed how devotionally the prisoners offered their lamps.

The highlight of the program for them it seemed was the vegetarian feast consisting of breyani, dahl, halava, and a variety of biscuits and sweets and regular Vedic sweets also.

One inmate very feelingly commented that it was about 13 years ago that he ate this kind of a feast.

Anand Maharaja who has been doing this program for the last 2 years is presently in hospital having undergone a triple by pass operation. He had encouraged an inmate to paint on canvas our presiding Deities Sri Sri Radha Radhanath, Sriman Mahaprabhu, and all the personalities on an ISKCON altar plus he wrote the pranam mantras ETC. on a separate canvas. So, during the programs the prison room is transformed and a few other calendar pictures are also put up.

We are now preparing for our annual Ratha-Yatra festival so I may not be able to do much until after the first week in April.

Recently a 20 -25 year old inmate told me that during the kirtan, he remembered how as a child, while looking out of his father's car, on many occasions, he saw the sticker " I love Krishna." He wanted us to bring him those stickers. He said he wanted to stick them on his prison door and at strategic places in the prison. Then, in this way he would get a chance to preach to people who inquired about the stickers. If people showed an active interest, he would invite them to our weekly Friday Program.

Once again thank you for your kindness and mercy.”

Nama Cintamani Dasi

Durban, South Africa

NEW! Book on prison ministry:

Holy Jail; Freedom Within Captivity

Candramauli Swami compiled a book called HOLY JAIL, documenting the history and activities of ISKCON Prison Ministry.

It is a full sized book containing 264 pages with many full color photos.

Hardbound: \$20 + shipping 16 Euros) / more than 10 copies: \$16 USD

Softbound: \$16 + shipping (12 Euros) / more than 10 copies: \$13 USD

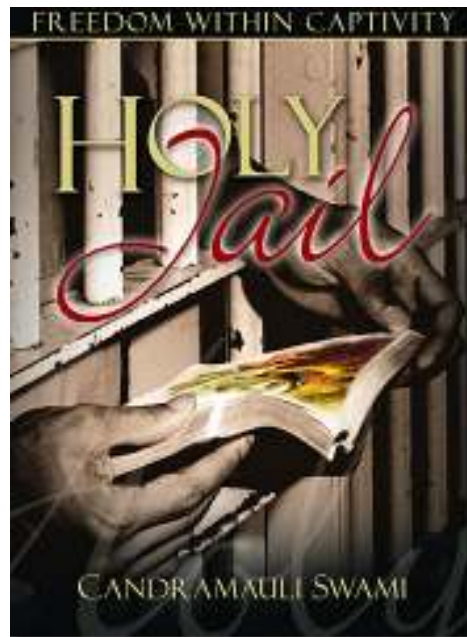
To buy this book, please contact Bhakta David at:

davidehler@hotmail.com

310-202-9054

If you have any question about the book itself, please contact Candramauli Swami at:

Candramauli.Swami@pamho.net



Thank You to Our Donors!

We want to thank the following devotees for their support:

Bhavananda: \$150

Linda, Radha and Mickey Singer: \$300

Kanva Dasa: \$30

Inmate Michael Williams: \$10

Inmate Hieu Truong: \$10

Atita Guna: \$51

Mathura Dasa: \$70

Richard Boyden: \$5

Jeff M. Cornia: \$20

Abhaya Dasi for typing inmate quotes

Pancaratra Dasa for helping with the website
Sakti Pati for donating a box of many boxes of books (\$674 from K. Culture)

Mother Danette for coupons for color copies

Radha-Jivan for paying for the shipping of boxes and for donating two boxes of books: \$133.83

Bhaktivedanta Archives for a box of audio tapes

Gopipatni Dasi for some stamps

Inmate Dan Green for a book of stamps

What Inmates Have to Say

“I just thought I would let you know, N got the books, thanks so much. Of course, she will pass the books out. Angie, who is in process to writing Bir Krsna Swami, was THRILLED to get the Prabhupada life story book; she was so happy she started singing Gurudeva at mail call. We were all singing (about 3 or 4 of us); the Vishnujana tune, *Jaya Prabhupada*, and *Gurudeva, Gurudeva*. It was cute, not disruptive. Nancy says that when we are having fun like that, she knows everyone wants to “play” with us too...you know, desires in the heart, waiting to sprout.”

Chandra Dasi
Coleman, Florida

“Dear Bhakti-lata,
Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Sri Guru and Gauranga!
Hare Krsna! Hey! I’m reading *Krsna Book*. I love it! Tonight I’m on chapter 6, “Putana killed”. I love it! At any rate, I am moving along to the point where I actually chanted in a dream I had, in order to avoid a fearful situation.”
[next letter] I am about through volume II of *Krsna Book*. I’ve been reading it at night before I go to sleep, as Mukta Kesa told me to do. I like the stories. I really liked the long chapter “Prayers by the Personified Vedas.”

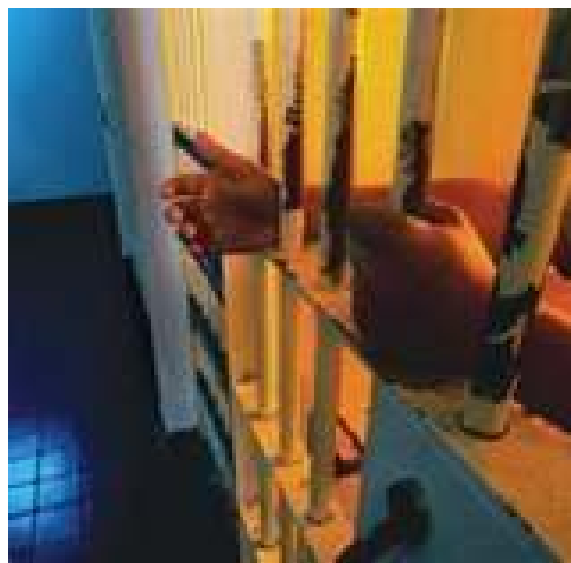
Also, I have been adjusting my rounds to avoid the 10 offenses.

Yes, I have a picture of Lord Nrsimhadeva, Lord Caitanya and associates, and Srila Prabhupada on a 3 way cardboard frame which I can put on my desk while I chant. I also use medical dose as “cups” to offer water to the deities.

You know, when I started reading Prabhupada’s books my skeptical mind led me to check what he wrote about scriptures, time frames (etc). I

would track down things at the library and have my daughter check on things. I never found one single erroneous fact. I no longer have a need to research what Prabhupada says. I began offering obeisances to him prior to chanting and asking him to please accept my food as an offering to Lord Krsna. Without ever having met him physically, when I think about him, I’m overcome with love and reverence. My chanting and studying are going very well.”

Bhakta Gary Winters
Raiford, Florida



“Bhakta James Mendel, Robert Sager the Buddhist and I were at the chapel this morning. The electrical outlets for the tape player worked this week, so we were able to hear the Radha-Krsna Temple tape. After nice sankirtan and prayers Robert read to us from the *Krsna Book*, the chapter “*Krsna Kills Kamsa*”. We plan to read about Krsna the Butter thief next week. Bhakta James set up the altar and distributed prasadam (water, flower and jolly ranchers).

Gerald Niles
Daytona Beach, FL

March 2010 Book Report !



Maha-Big: 15
Big **Hard**: 1
Big **Soft**: 18
Medium: 4
Small: 91
Magazines: 46

BTGs: 252

Freedom Newsletters: 52

BOOKS written by devotees other than Prabhupada: 34

Other Material (beads, CDs, etc.):

2x neckbead
2x japa beads
2x japa bag
11 audio tapes
2010 BBT Calendar

This is the activity report of, Bhakta David, Bhakti-lata Dasi, and Candra Dasa.

Want to help?

ISKCON Prison Ministry has a variety of needs you can help with:

1) We need enthusiastic **pen-pal preachers**. You can write one or more inmates: please contact us if interested.

2) You can become part of our *Adopt-an-Inmate* program by:

- Becoming a regular IPM monthly donor.
- Giving an occasional or even a one-time donation (every dollar makes a difference in an inmate's life).

3) DONATE

- **books**:
- All books are welcome. Hardbound books are not as widely accepted as softbound, but we do distribute both kinds.

- Krsna conscious **CDs and DVDs**: give the gift of transcendental sound! At the moment we have no music CDs and no DVDs
- Krsna conscious **pictures**, so inmates can look through these windows to the spiritual world.

4) Have a little bit of time and know how to type? Please contact us: we have a lot of quotes from inmate letters that need typing.

Contact Mukunda Dasa or Bhakti-lata Dasi at:

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