



IPM News



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

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Changing Lives from the Inside Out!

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It Doesn't Matter Who, Where, or When You Are

by Bhakti-lata Dasi

Hare Krsna!

The year is coming to a close, but the activities of ISKCON Prison Ministry are not slowing down in the least. As always, inmate letters keep pouring in, some from newcomers to Krsna consciousness, asking for help and guidance; others from regulars, or even veteran of devotional service, seeking continued support and association. Each letter is precious and represent one of Krsna's child, fallen to a very miserable material condition and somehow, answering Lord Caitanya's call.

Below an extraordinary letter from inmate Bhakta Dan Green, about how he came to Krsna consciousness. I hope you will be as inspired as I am to read it!

The artwork is from inmate Bhakta Brian Babinski; Rupa and Sanatan surrender to Lord Caitanya.

“My life was crazy, something out of a Hunter S. Thompson book. Chaos is a word barely suitable but the closest of one word descriptions. In every aspect of my life action brimmed to its fullest. Work, friendships, girlfriends, even leisure was a fireball of activity in a constant state of flux. I told myself I worked better under pressure, with as many pokers in the fire as I could grasp...and then a few. Add to this hectic lifestyle a strong pursuit of carnal pleasures and mind-altering substances and my life was a ticking time bomb; WAY out of control, but not a minute out of character. This was a recipe with which I was very familiar. Whipping it up many times in the kitchen of life, putting it in the oven, baking it at 350 degrees (most the time hotter) and every time the buzzer went off I woke up staring at the concrete walls of a 6x9 cell.

This time was the umpteenth time and I swore to myself never to return. It was a pretty solemn oath, a firm oath, not just some fleeting thought of, “*God, I'll never do that again,*” but a deep-rooted conviction that death would come before a return visit to this hell on earth. Nonetheless, somewhere during the baking process, the cake of disaster rose and the buzzer went off again.

The first few days I sat in disbelief, “*this must be a dream.*” Hell, everything else up to this point seemed like a dream too. Anger arose; “*What the hell is wrong with the world, what is wrong*

with these cops, I am a victim of a complete societal breakdown.” Eventually that blaming anger wore off, and the exact nature of the events that got me there are well perhaps topics in a different story. Here, I am, wanting to describe how I came to Krsna, that Beautiful Light at the end of the tunnel which made all the screwed up paths I took to get there worthwhile.

As I was saying when the blaming anger wore off, there I sat in a cell with nothing but ME. It was not a pretty sight. Is this what life is about? If it is, f it...I'm done, game over, let's try this again from the beginning, hit the reset button, do over, I'm outta here. Well, as I sat a few weeks before sentencing, when I was told by my lawyer (although being a public defender I could hardly call her “my” lawyer) that I was sure to get the full six years of my presumptive sentence, my mind came back to that pact I had made. No way in hell am I gonna live like this for 6 years. Let's just be done. I was upstairs in a small jail in solitary confinement where the jailers walked every couple hours at most. I sat miserably seeking exit from that room, not physical exit but an exit for the spirit whose departure was imminent. I found it. A long cord in the form of a twisted sheet tied through a hole of the unoccupied upper bunk. The other end around the neck of this wretched damaged body and spirit could easily, once the feet were off the floor, climb the rope, pass through the hole to which it was secured and from there concrete walls held no imposition to its travel.

So here I am looped up ready to go, shampoo bottle in hand to spread on the ground to dispel the traction of my feet which may still barely reach the floor, in case I changed my mind. Midstream, ready to go, I took one last look around the room and saw the open Bhavagad-gita, with the picture of Radha-Krishna. But wait, I jumped nearly to the end of my story and skipped the vital events leading here.

Sitting in that cell with nothing but me was probably, in retrospect, a good thing. I pretty much immediately took to meditation; although I didn't know what I was doing, I sat quietly. I sat and sat and sat. I read every philosophical books in the small library a small town jail has to offer, which mostly consisted of Western thought; Kant, Hume, even early stuff of Plato, Aristotle, and the such. I even read the Confessions of Augustine. All of it was an exercise of the mind but really nothing more than dry speculation. It left me craving more. Through the vents of the jail I shared my thoughts and reflections with one of the other very few inmates in my block. One day he said, “I've had this book in my cell for a while you might want to read.” The next day on his hour out for a shower and phone call, he left it by the phone for me to pick up on my hour out. Back to my cell I brought with me the Bhagavad-gita As It Is.

I had heard about this book many times, or at least other translations, probably even read some of it, but this one was different. From the first page I read, a satisfaction filled my soul. Something instantly glued my attention. I couldn't put it down. I read it a couple of times over and finishing it, I didn't want it to end. I read every page from the copyright page to the “centers around the world.”

Centers around the world? What...Denver? A phone number too? I called, “*Dude from the Prison Ministry just walked by. I'll give him your address.*” Krsna! A brief encounter set up by Providence. A week later a letter from Candrasekha Prabhu. An invitation to Sunday Feast. And more nutrition for a starving soul. Was he serious? An invitation to Sunday Feast. Doesn't he realize I'm doomed to incarceration? Staring at a sentence which I was sure I'd never finish before death. Still it was a warm sentiment, so I kept the invitation.

It didn't seem possible, nor was it, entirely, but I tried to turn my attention from the circumstances at hand and focus on learning all I could about Krsna consciousness. Candra and I corresponded, he sent me books. I read and asked questions. Slowly I began to learn a bit. Started chanting and spending my time in devotion instead of quiet meditation.

So I definitely felt an affinity for this lifestyle. Maybe it was only my preconceived notions of the “Hare Krsna” of the 70's or maybe it was my extreme hatred for this life and my desperate desire for a different one. A life of renunciation. A life in which I could turn my focus towards something besides my “self.” Forget the “needs,” “wants,” whatever of this body and act blissfully in devotion. Whatever it was it was enough to keep my attention. There was still misery. Every time I woke up or looked up from a book and saw myself in that 6x9 cell I was miserable. But then I began to chant. The holy names gave me peace. I didn't know what I was doing. I was sure I was doing it all wrong.

I thought the guards thought I was going crazy, destined for the loony bin instead of prison. But I could not deny the feeling of peace. Candra prabhu gave direction and I followed best I could. Progress was slow, if at all, but a growing conviction was born in me and I continued. I began to enjoy my solitary confinement. No distractions, no interference, only study time and devotion. I had pictures sent from Candra of Lord Nrsimhadev, Protector of the devotee. I was sure He would protect me too. I offered prayers, I offered a toothpaste cup full of water, I offered fruit and veggies from my tray. I humbly fell at His feet. And I began to feel a love in this devotion. It was a tainted love, a love so far from pure love of Godhead that I read about. But nonetheless a love. I prayed that this love be purified; I prayed that this love may grow. Still, this wretched self-centered body wanted relief. It found relief in devotion and so I selfishly pursued.

I never expected Krsna to “save” me from going to prison. Although I thought of ways to ask that would not be so self-seeking I could never do it. I prayed only that I may serve. Deep down those things persisted. How many lives have I lived caring only for myself and so, so far away from Krsna. From time immemorial! Those karmic strings don’t fall away easy. So as I sat drawing close to sentencing I thought more and more of the end. I figured now that Krsna has touched my lips certainly the next life will be better. I had read that attachment to “de”-tachment is still attachment, but the pain of being in this body won.

That fateful night as I twisted up a sheet I was torn nup. Torn up! I was convinced the next body would be better; Krsna would certainly give me birth, closer to Him. I made up my mind, and as I said, when I was ready to go, I looked around the room and the open Gita was open to a picture of Radha-Krsna. It was as if He spoke to me. Whether in my mind or whether He was sitting next to me I heard, *“I give you a new body right now. Why go through the pain of birth again, and many years growing up before you can again speak My name. It doesn’t matter where you are, who you are, when you are, all you have to do is speak My name and I am there.”*

I stopped, changed my mind, decided to live for devotion, pay the karmic dues this body has accrued and see what happens. I decided that all my life was a process to end up here, and I was right where I was supposed to be. I had fallen so far down, so far away from Krsna, that drastic measures were needed for me to find the path back home. However, selfishly motivated the intentions were, I was given the chance to speak Krsna’s name. How lucky. How fortunate. I decided that prison is not too different from a monastic life. I will use it as such, learning all I can, spending every minute to better myself and to serve Krsna.

Oh, how so very far I am still away from home. How weak is this body and how unworthy of a servant I am, but even if it is only with one foot, I have at least found the path home and the other foot will follow. Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare”

Dan Green

Grand Junction, CO

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