

*“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*

**July/August 2019**

## **THE HARE KRISHNA CLASS**

**By Sarnga Thakur Dasa**

We go through three sliding doors (vertical bars) and two locked gates to enter the reception area. When we get to the classroom building, we have to ask the guard in the control room to announce the *Hare Krishna Class* so that all the different areas can get notified. There are often new guards there and it can take a few times before they pronounce the Holy Names properly. This guard then announces to all the guards in all the cell blocks that the *Hare Krishna Class* is starting. These guards then broadcast it over their PA systems to all the inmates.



**Madan Mohan das (left) and Sarnga Thakur das, with the Raiford prison in the background**

Hundreds of inmates walking by in lines see us chanting and dancing through the windows of our classroom. The class is very interactive. Everyone shares the reading of the verses and purports in the Bhagavad-gita, and they can ask questions or share realizations at any time. This format developed naturally. It's really engaging, keeping us on our toes, balancing speaking with listening. We come with a basic plan for the class, but we want to follow what Krishna arranges. We try to deliver Krishna consciousness in a manner that is personal and respecting of their dignity, which is a rare thing in their environment.

Recently, it was nice to see Clinton, a new inmate attending the class, really concentrating on chanting japa, his eyes tightly closed.

One of our student, Bhakta Gary W., writes: *"My entire experience with Krishna consciousness has been as an incarcerated person. We are most fortunate to be blessed with Krishna's mercy, Prabhupada's love and the world of devotees that Prabhupada sent to us."*

Another student states that *"Because of these teachings [which he has developed a passion for] I am able to perceive life in a different way. I am able to see myself by way of spiritual knowledge, as spirit soul.... Now that I am hearing about Krishna consciousness I want to know more. Everyone is looking for Krishna. I believe that Krishna is always in control and He has my best interest at heart. If we get to know Krishna, become His devotee, worship Him, and offer our homage unto Him – we will always be in a state of Krishna consciousness, a surrendered soul"*.

The student group has really developed an openness to hear and study with us and to share their own realizations, despite their different backgrounds. We can see that over time they have been developing qualities more conducive to devotional life, like tolerance, faith, spiritual vision and humility. The effect of our consistent presence has touched the whole prison in different ways.

As inmate Bhakta Walter W. said, "If you didn't come, I would run out of gas."

Now we are the official representatives of the Hindu faith [in that prison]. Sometimes we get an opportunity to explain things to the guards and

chaplains, reassuring them that we worship the same one Supreme Lord that they do. And the two Chaplains now seem to be more helpful and friendly.

The guards and the officers know us as the Hare Krishna people of ISKCON. Sometimes they return our greeting of "Hare Krishna". One Sergeant who has a tough exterior, called out "Hare Krishna!" to us from behind the bars of his office. He was holding on to the bars as if he was the one confined. We made a little comment to him about it pointing out that he was actually free, and then he asked for a cookie (we told him that we're not allowed to bring them in). But he's familiar with our prasadam distribution from the University of Florida.

Generally speaking, the many inmates we pass on the way to class will share a friendly greeting with us, or call out "Hare Krishna!" We've had a few who wanted to walk with us and get some counseling. It takes about five minutes to get to our classroom, through the halls and the yard outside, and there the inmates also greet us with "Hare Krishna!"

The prison's religious library—for faiths other than Christianity— now has a full set of Srila Prabhupada's books. The librarian said they now have a reference computer, and he would like to install the VedaBase on it.

The inmates who assist the Chaplains really extend themselves to help us. They were very eager to put up the eighteen posters we had to advertise Yadubara and Visakha's movie *"Hare Krishna! The Mantra, the Movement and the Swami that Started it All,"* that we showed at the prison. At first the Chaplain seemed reluctant to allow us to show the movie, but thanks to the years of goodwill we've developed with him and a letter from Yadubara prabhu, he agreed. His staff offered advertising and technical help, including spreading our posters around to all the buildings and even allowing the movie to be shown to the two hundred guys on death row [through a closed video system]. Excitement built up around the showing of the movie. One of the students was concerned that the posters weren't up yet so he made some of his own, just to make sure it was sufficiently advertised.

### Madan Mohan dasa adds:

The movie was well attended and received. There were a few questions after the movie mostly by the prisoner who was heading up the Jewish inmates. He is quite learned and a medical doctor from Sarasota. His question was,

“Why do you deify your Profit and how can you say God has a form?”

I replied to his question quoting what I heard from Srila Prabhupada. For part of this reply I explained how the ambassador is respected like the king and how authority is required to understand knowledge beyond our senses. Everyone seemed to be pleased. We also continued the discussion afterwards. The kirtan

was wonderful as many devotees came with us that day and everyone could feel the mercy.

**NOTE:** *This prison program is following in the footsteps of His Divine Grace Srila Prabhupada, who was challenged by a local government authority to preach Bhagavad Gita to the inmates of Tihar prison in Delhi in 1962 and turn them into ideal characters. Madan Mohan das ACBSP and Sarnga Thakur dasa ACBSP have been carrying on a lively program at the Raiford State prison in Florida. The program was pioneered by Kṛṣṇa Kesava das, Kaliyaphani das and Akuti devi dasi, five years ago, and has carried on continuously ever since.*



## Inmate Letter Excerpts

Our group is studying the Srimad-Bhavatam. I cannot express enough thank yous and appreciation for all the books you sent over the years. My heart and life has been greatly affected by this science. Thank you.

**Charles B.**

**Tennessee Colony, Texas**

I'm writing to thank you for the books. And for helping me get closer to Hare Kṛṣṇa. My teacher, Mr. Dukes, showed me the way to Kṛṣṇa bhakti. Although he is not working in this facility no more, I feel as if he came here so I can have liberation from this material planet. I chant as much as I can in here. But it's hard to stay focused with the environment I'm in. I usually wait until my roommate and the rest of the pod is quiet to do yoga and meditate on Kṛṣṇa. I hope to meet you one day. Cause I

plan on following Krishna and need to find myself around other devotees as well. Thank you for everything.

**Jonathan A.**

**Lake City, FL**

**[The following is from an inmate in a long-term mental hospital]**

Thank you for the books. Here is what I am learning:

- a) God is Kṛṣṇa
- b) I am His servant
- c) If I serve Kṛṣṇa, I will be happy.
- d) That's the only way I will be truly happy.

I chant every day now and I love it. I am going to work really hard on my sadhana, my daily spiritual work. I also received the BTGs. I love Kṛṣṇa. I like to think of Him as a mischievous child, a butter thief! Oh, the stress

He causes momma Yasoda. She loves His so much. I thank you all for helping me. Please pray for me.

**Sean C.**

**St. Peter, Minnesota**

I got your lovely post card today and it warmed my heart. Thank you! To protect me from violence the jail houses me alone, locked away 23 hours a day. Your card is sunshine. I gratefully did get the four books you sent, including the amazing, beautiful *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is*. I am on my third read. ☺

I enjoyed *Chant and Be Happy* thoroughly! I now chant the maha mantra for at least one hour per day, most days more. I have been rewarded with calmness and peace. There is so much more to learn...so much beyond my grasp. I am excited and alive again. A thousand thank yous.

**David M.**

**Phoenix, Arizona**



I would like to first thank you for all you do for us! Knowing someone cares really means a lot.

**Darnell W.**

**Stillwater, Minnesota**

I wish to express my gratitude for having received the latest issue of the *Freedom Newsletter*. I am very grateful to those who help to make this newsletter a reality. I have another year left towards my sentence and

I look forward to reading it every month and to sharing it with others who I certainly hope will find inspiration in its pages. I can say with clarity that I am beginning to understand the phrase written atop every newsletter: "*Devotion is real Freedom.*"

**Troy P.**

**Saint Marys, West Virginia**

I am a man of 60 plus years of age who sought happiness through material gain for the bigger part of this life. Since my arrest in 2006, I have sought knowledge of my inner being, consciousness, meditation, and the path to finding not only answers but a peaceful state within myself. From reading Kṛṣṇa I have found that the path I seek to follow is not beyond my reach. I ask for guidance through such readings as the Bhagavad-Gita and any others to help along my path. At this time I have an out date [release] of 2033 and will remain at U.S.P. for at least ten more years before my custody level will allow a transfer to a lower custody prison. I seek to live a non-violent lifestyle remaining substance free and I will be diligent in my seeking to find spiritual consciousness. With all my best wishes,

**Arthur S.**

**White Deer, PA**

Greetings! The Coffield Chaplaincy has sent notice on the arrival of the materials that you sent. In fact, I have the Gita presently with me. I know I am going to enjoy studying it. On behalf of the Eastern Religion Service members, I would like to send you and the ISKCON Prison Ministry a very big thank you along with hugs. We are very thankful for the gifts and very, very appreciative of the much-needed support for our service. We are aware of the time, the effort, and the cost in providing materials and will treasure these items. The CDs will be a nice addition to our library. Again, we cannot thank you or the ministry enough. May Lord Kṛṣṇa continue to shower his mercy and bless all of your endeavors. Sincerely,

**Charles B.**

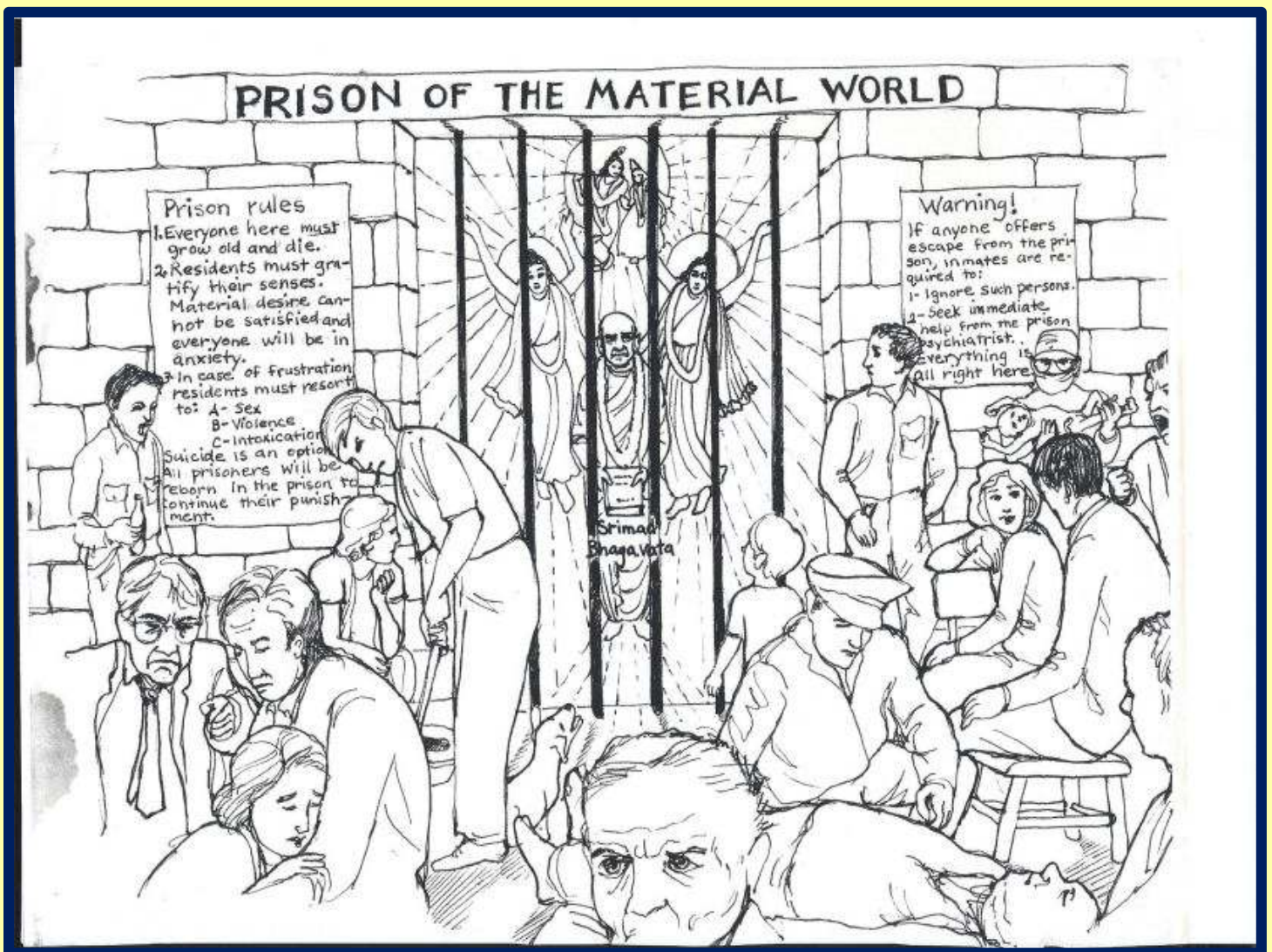
**Tennessee Colony, TX**



## Website Update!

By Kṛṣṇa's mercy, Svarbhanu prabhu, from Arkansas, has generously offered his services to help build a new IPM website. We are working on it diligently. Can't wait to bring it online for Prabhupada's pleasure!

## Inmate Art!



This drawing was made a long time ago by an unknown inmate. If you take the time to read the signs in the drawing, you'll appreciate it even more!



# 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.

## Our donors since last newsletter:

Back to Godhead magazine Office (500 back issues of BTGs)

## And our monthly Donors:

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Anonymous (you know who you are: thank you!)

## 3 Donation Options

- 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](http://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.

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