

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

Jan/Feb 2020

A GOOD YEAR

By Bhakti-latā Dasi

When farmers have a good harvest, they say it was a good year. That’s the feeling I have at the end of each and every year; “it was a good year.” For the prison ministry, it’s **always** a good year! The IPM harvest is always aplenty; this is confirmed by the inmates’ wonderful testimonials and the wonderful things that happen in their lives.

Yesterday I was sharing with two friends some anecdotes to illustrate why I love this service so much, what inspires me to keep going, despite the heavy load of responsibilities that come with being the director of this prison ministry. So many stories enliven me and keep my enthusiasm level way up, even after ten years plus.

Please allow me to share some anecdotes with you also.



- ❖ Inmate Gerald warns me to not send books to inmate Daniel anymore because Daniel doesn't read the books; he is "selling" them to other inmates in exchange for cigarettes. [*In prison cigarettes and stamps are called "prison bucks"; they are used to "buy" items from other inmates.*] I write Gerald that I am delighted to hear that; Daniel is doing book distribution! If someone is willing to part with their precious cigarettes, it means they *really* want to read the book. Also, Daniel is finding people interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, people I wouldn't be able to reach otherwise. Gerald's understanding of Kṛṣṇa consciousness expands.
- ❖ Inmate Richard tells me that many inmates are wearing the Tulasi neck beads I sent to the prison chapel, even though they are not interested in practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness; they just like how the neck beads look. Richard is wondering if he should forbid them to wear those neck beads. I explain to Richard that it is a wonderful thing to wear Tulasi neck beads and that anyone wearing them will benefit tremendously.
- ❖ One inmate tells me that he goes everywhere with the pocket Bhagavad-gita in his shirt pocket because when others approach him with questions he likes to answer directly from the Gita.
- ❖ Many bhaktas told me that guards and other inmates commented that they had changed; these bhaktas are no longer getting into fights, no longer responding with violence when provoked. That is the transformational results of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and reading Prabhupada's books!
- ❖ Inmates tell me that they figured out things to cook in their cell; with items bought at the commissary and the very hot water available to them, they cook anything from Ramen noodles, to fudge, offer that to Kṛṣṇa, and engage in prasadam distribution in their cell block.
- ❖ Many bhaktas are greeted by other inmates with enthusiastic shouts of "Hare Kṛṣṇa!"
- ❖ Many Hare Kṛṣṇa programs are going on in the chapel libraries; sometimes newcomers pop up, by curiosity, and while there, they get swept away in a kirtan; singing and dancing with the bhaktas.
- ❖ An inmate in solitary confinement asks for books, saying that he needs them to keep his sanity. [*in solitary one is alone 24 hours a day; 23 hours alone in a cell, with half hour to shower alone, and half hour to walk alone in the yard*] After reading a few books, he writes back saying that he had a vision of Kṛṣṇa who asked him for his heart. He comes out of this vision, prostrate on the floor of his cell, tears running down his face. He is more interested than ever to read and learn about Kṛṣṇa.
- ❖ An inmate can't find anyone to answer his questions about God. He is told to ask the "crazy guy", the one who is always talking to himself. To his shock and surprise, this "crazy guy" answers all the questions he ever had in his life! The guy was not crazy or talking to himself; he happened to be a devotee chanting japa.

Inmate Letter Excerpts

I am writing because I am on trial [again]. A postcard with the beautiful visage of Lord Kṛṣṇa that you sent a few years ago [while I was in prison] reminded me of the shelter the prison ministry so graciously provided me during my previous incarcerations. I wanted to seek that solace again. Candrasekhara prabhu told me that Kṛṣṇa keeps me incarcerated over and over because it is the only way to keep me surrendered at His lotus feet. So, here I am gain, begging for Vaisnava association. I pray that you are happy and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa as always.

Timothy Shipley

Kaukauna, Wisconsin

I am interested in bhakti. I have had some trouble finding inner peace and calming my sole. Please if you could help me find myself, my true self, I would be ever so grateful. Thank you for all you do for us behind these walls.

Daniel Lowry

Jasper, Florida

Thank you for all your help. I study the BTG daily, I chant and listen to the CDs almost daily. It is the only good association I have. I am stuck here with bad association and also, downright "asuras". Please pray for me. If I make it to Kṛṣṇaloka when I die, I am "blaming" you. ☺ Honestly, each day I feel better and better. All thanks to you, Prabhupada and ISKCON, and also, IPM.

Sean Mckay Curry

St. Peter, Minnesota

So many poor and lost souls in prison are just wanting love. Sure, there are plenty of souls in the world that are in similar positions but overwhelmingly so it seems in here. Atheists abound while others cling to ritualistic religion without grasping that love is required. How many

relish meat in here as if it is the main food group and something they clamor for? Those who try the offered prasadam food that I mane are amazed by the taste from such simple ingredients and though I try to explain that it is more than that, many refuse to accept that it is not me by Kṛṣṇa's doing. I wish I was a stronger soul to not be pulled down into maya through associations with such people. Yet, I am fallen and struggle to not fall into my old ways. It is a miserable, suffering world I chose to come to and so I need to stop my foolishness and accept what is Kṛṣṇa's way and quit wishing I was in a better situation. I can attain that better situation if I just purify myself and I need to remember that in these moments of doubt. The love I am seeking is there in Kṛṣṇa if I just surrender unto him.

David Burkman

Danville, Connecticut

To surrender and have faith for someone like myself who grew up without safety or knowing who to trust and angry at God for my existence in this material world can be hard at times. For most of my life, I was in fight or flight mode and to surrender meant death or worse. Of course, I was lost and ignorant of The Truth but even knowing Kṛṣṇa now, I still sometimes fail to surrender and let Kṛṣṇa take over. Yet, He is so merciful that when I do manage to let go of my illusory control, things go much smoother and my devotional service is more easily rendered. I still struggle though to not think I am in control and remember to fall at Srila Prabhupada's feet and beg forgiveness for being such a fallen fool that still struggles many time to be like the trees and the grass as well as have faith that Kṛṣṇa will shelter and care for me as I need if I only surrender.

David Burkman

Danville, Connecticut

Chaplains' Appreciation

"On behalf of the Chaplain's Office I would like to thank you for your generous donation of the Bhagavad-gita in the different languages that you provided us with.

We were really happy to receive them and be able to distribute them among our detainees. They appreciate very much the opportunity to have their Scripture in their language. The word of God is immensely helpful to the detained persons as they wait for their deportation or release.

At this time I would like to request more literature in Punjabi if you have any books or magazines it would be really appreciated.

In the name of our detainees I thank you for your attention to our request and ask God's blessings on your wonderful ministry."

Rebeca Marrufo
Chaplain's Office
El Paso, Texas

Inmate Art!



Beautiful homemade thank you card made by Jason B. and Rakesh P.— **Graceville, Florida**

A BIG THANK YOU to BHAVANANDA DASA!

Since 2009, Bhavananda prabhu dedicated himself to publish the monthly *Freedom Newsletter* for the pleasure of the inmates. Not only did he put the newsletter together, but he was sponsoring the printing cost as well.

Being engaged in a multitude of other services with his good wife, Rangavati dasi, Bhavananda is now retiring from his *Freedom Newsletter* service.

Bhavananda cares deeply about the inmates' welfare. He has always had a sense of how important this newsletter is to them, and has a great desire that the *Freedom Newsletter* be published, no matter what. I am so grateful for his ten years of steady dedication. Please pray for his welfare.



Bravo for ten years of steady service to IPM, Bhavananda prabhu!!!

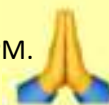
NEEDED URGENTLY: A SPONSOR TO PRINT THE MONTHLY FREEDOM NEWSLETTER

Until Kṛṣṇa sends someone to put the newsletter together every month, I am very happy to do so myself. What is needed urgently though is a sponsor to cover the cost of printing 150 monthly newsletters.

This cost is \$122 a month.

The inmates are so looking forward to receive it every month; for many, the only mail they receive is from IPM.

If you would like to be that sponsor, please contact me at: IskconPrisonMinistry@gmail.com



Your servant, Bhakti-latā Dasi



IPM 2019 Book Distribution

Prabhupada's Books, total: 5,063

Breakdown:

Booklets: 535

Small: 3,185

Medium: 626

Big: 140

Maha-Big: 577

Books by other devotee authors: 235

BTGs: 1,996

CDs: 207

MP3s: 1

DVDs: 29

Japa Mala sets: 37

Neck Beads: 21



Grand Total of all Books and BTGs in 2019: 7,294

Srila Prabhupada, ke, Jaya!!!



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:

Candramauli Maharaja
Ishani Chowdhury

Nartaka Gopal
Anonymous

And our monthly Donors:

Amala Gaura Dasa
Aritra Nath
Bhavananda Dasa
Deepali Mittal
Dina Sharana dasa
Jitarati dasa
Kalindi Dasi (Hopping)
Maya Sudhana dasa
Mickey Singer
Pritam De
Radha Vinod Dasa
Rene Waisvisz



Richard House
Sahadev Dasa
Satyanarayana Dasa
Shashi Shefali Majmudar
Raina Dasa
Vegavati Dasi
Vikram Kumar
Vraja Kishore Dasa
Yudhisthira Dasa
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
- 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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