

“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

March/April 2021

SOME REALIZATIONS

By David B. —Danbury, Connecticut

Other inmates see my altar and practices and the discussion that usually follows sometimes leads to more inquiries. I have always enjoyed being a teacher but in these matters I know I am not a master and, while I know such interactions are not coincidental nor accidental in nature, I sometimes wonder if I am not just a beginner swimmer trying to save another soul who is drowning.

I witness so much drama in here; for what do these souls waste so much energy in their actions? I see that their frustration of wanting their needs met but not understanding how to do so translates into anger and gets them into trouble.



I know I myself am dealing with not only anger, but also its uglier brother, rage, but it rarely, if ever, controls me anymore. I suppose it is due to realizing that we are all just acting as actors, not controllers, except to choose Kṛṣṇa. If I spill something, break something, or lose something, I go ahead and live in the moment of cleaning it up or finding a solution if need be, and I don't expend energy getting angry or any of the emotions that I used to let control my thinking and actions. In fact, it is this shift that allowed me to wrangle free from depression's grip and to have a healthy mental outlook to my existence in this world. I am trying to help others in this and learning to love Kṛṣṇa again and in doing so finding peace in all situations.

I guess this week's lesson for me is in socializing and all its intricacies and how a Kṛṣṇa Conscious outlook changes everything. I used to wonder why I always had some sort of drama with others, and being incarcerated in the situation I am in has provided me with some wonderful lessons. I used to really struggle with know-it-alls, bullies and persons acting/being idiots. To say I didn't suffer fools lightly would be a gross understatement. However, in the recent years I have been surrounded by such people, thanks to Kṛṣṇa's mercy, and have learned through observation, study and introspection while studying the śāstras and enlightened souls such as Srīla Prabhupada, I have been learning how to get along with everyone and... gasp!... even love them! Considering my upbringing and continued experiences in my life, it is a breakthrough for me to be able to do this and realize I can meet everyone where they are at; not where I think they should be. Without getting into exactly how, I find I have no enemies and many that want to help however they can and not in a maladaptive way but out of love, all because of my developing love for Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa has made all this possible and some to also find the same path back home. Jaya Kṛṣṇa!

By materialist's cognizance the current environment around me is only degrading and becoming less logical and crazier with stuff being ordered by administration to come down on the

inmates in retaliation for the administration losing a lawsuit on the COVID-19 situation here. I have finally realized though that I don't have to participate in the rollercoaster ride and can choose any reality by taking the shelter of Kṛṣṇa. No matter what happens, my soul will be okay—nothing else and no one else have any real power over me without Kṛṣṇa's say, so as long as I take shelter of Kṛṣṇa I realized I can be equanimous and be in the eye of the storm around me, instead of a contributor to the situation.

I notice the lack of mindfulness in here and how much they are like animals. Many inhale their food, water, and throw out much of it; low patience levels; must be first to the cafeteria, etc. Their emotions/sense rule them. I also had some of these traits like low patience in the past. Still, I see how degraded we, as beings, have become and these displays in here remind me how many are ignorant of the most basic aspects of the purpose of the human form. It also inspires me to try to shine some light; even if only a guttering flicker of a flame, of a greater reason for being. Some have been attracted to that light at varying levels while others have recoiled from it. Still, it always awes me to see such ignorance but also such potential—especially as the majority in here are just wanting to be validated and loved.

Whoa, boy! It seems every time I make a vow, especially when I share such or a spiritual experience, maya comes calling to test me. I understand it is the law but boy those tests certainly keep me humble and in touch with reality.

Some guys in here are never happy and constantly miserable. I have noticed how so many things go against them and realized that they are attracting such events by the energy they project. It reminds me that to escape the suffering of this world I must take shelter of Kṛṣṇa as even the perceived material wealth is a curse without proper knowledge and use of such for Kṛṣṇa and not oneself. This is the only way for us all to free ourselves of the anxiety and stress of this world and return to where we belong.



Inmate Letter Excerpts

I read the BG and I feel good for the first time in my life. Eight months ago, I borrowed a *Bhagavad-Gita* from a friend to pass some time and a fundamental change happened when I started chanting and studying. Shortly after, I stopped eating meat. I didn't tell my family for about three months until my 94 year old grandmother, on prison visitation, told me I look so much better lately, healthier. Kṛṣṇa is my goal. I've never served God in my life until I found y'all. Y'all through the many books y'all sent have given me knowledge to render devotional service to KRSNA. It even hurts me to see people eat meat. Cheese and milk are such a blessing and people slaughter the ones who give them to us. People who used to be scared of me exhorting violence towards them now say I've completely changed. People say something has happened to this used-to-be hateful, hardened, violent convict. I'm now a peacemaker amongst the inmates and a protector of the weak. I, nor family, nor others, cannot believe the change that has taken place. I just want to serve and love KRSNA.

David R. —Pine Bluff, Arkansas



I knew I had to drop this note to let you know how I really appreciate the four books you send me and I really have been longing to get the book *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is*. I read it back in 2012 or 2013 and ever since then I wanted my own [copy of] *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is*.

I'm still on *The Science of Self-Realization*. I would have been finished with it if I had just read one book at a time. I was like a child that gets too many toys at once and does not know which one to play with first. I began to read from all of them until I made up my mind to just read "Self-Realization."

I like how it sees Jesus as who He came to be ~~or claim to be~~. Anytime I read things about GOD I do

measure it by the Bible and I see the Bhagavad-Gita As It is saying the same thing. When it comes to how to really surrender to God, the Bhagavad-Gita is the best I done come across. The Holy Bible does not break it down like that. So, now I got two Bibles—So, thanks again for the books and I know I am going to enjoy them all because it is what I have been looking for.

Paul McP. —Raiford, Florida

I have not been chanting Maha Mantra in a long while, a little here and there. I did some upon hearing from you and your inquiry. It came on me. The tears flowed, as always. Never fails. I told you about that. It's the only spiritual practice that makes me cry, and believe me I've done a huge amount of spiritual disciplines in my almost 40 years in prison now (38, to be exact.) I do realize the direct link to Kṛṣṇa, His loving touch, through the maha mantra, and that is His love for us and ours for him that bring out the tears in some of us—I guess we cannot get closer to Him in this physical form than via maha mantra. Like a rebellious child who leaves home, then remembers the tenderness of the parents and cries. The maha mantra reveals a different dimension of existence, in a way that I cannot put my finger on exactly. It's different with Him and the maha mantra than anything else I've experienced. But I think I'm still caught up in the quarreling of Kali Yuga, even though I've met Kṛṣṇa—my little struggles, part of the bigger canvas of Kali Yuga, always in a confrontation with the evils of the world. And at my age (65 next month)! What is it with me, Mother, why can't I let go? I don't know.

P.S.: Oh, yeah, I will start chanting daily again. I know I need to cut through the guff of daily life in these places because it really gets me down at times. And I know how chanting can help a lot with that. So I'll start by degrees again. My favorite column in the BTG is the "Books Section: Srimad-Bhagavatam" because it goes so deep. I really put myself there and get lost in that space.

Eva C. —Delano, California

I sit here contemplating what should I say about Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. I want to share the impact that these teaching are having upon my life. I have been incarcerated the majority of my life. Being in

search of a better life, I came upon the teachings of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness in the year of 2013 and my journey began. Since that time I have been studying and trying to practice Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. To some degree I have developed a passion for the teachings. It hasn't been easy for me to search for the truth and to try to understand these teachings. I believe that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead and I totally accept as Truth all that He says in the Bhagavad-Gita.

There are many things that I don't understand at this stage of my development in Kṛṣṇa

Consciousness but I know that Kṛṣṇa is always in control and that He has my best interest at heart. All I have to do is surrender unto Him. What I know I try to share with others. In due course of time, everything will become clear to us. Children have complete trust in their mother and so it will be when we come to learn of Kṛṣṇa, we develop complete trust in Him. Get to know Kṛṣṇa, become His devotee, worship Him, offer your homage unto Him, thus you will always be in a state of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, a surrendered soul.

Walter W. —Raiford, Florida

POEM CORNER

KṚṢṆA IS MY REFUGE

Dancing in the cooling rays of full moonlight
Kṛṣṇa is softly swaying in the gentle breeze, giving His pure devotees transcendental delight.

There is a smile on my face, a song in my heart.
Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Lord, from Him I want never to be apart.

So I go on meditating on His super wondrous childhood pastimes in the holy dhama-
Kṛṣṇa is boundless in His causeless mercies, allowing this very fallen soul to chant
His holy names... thank you Sri Rama.

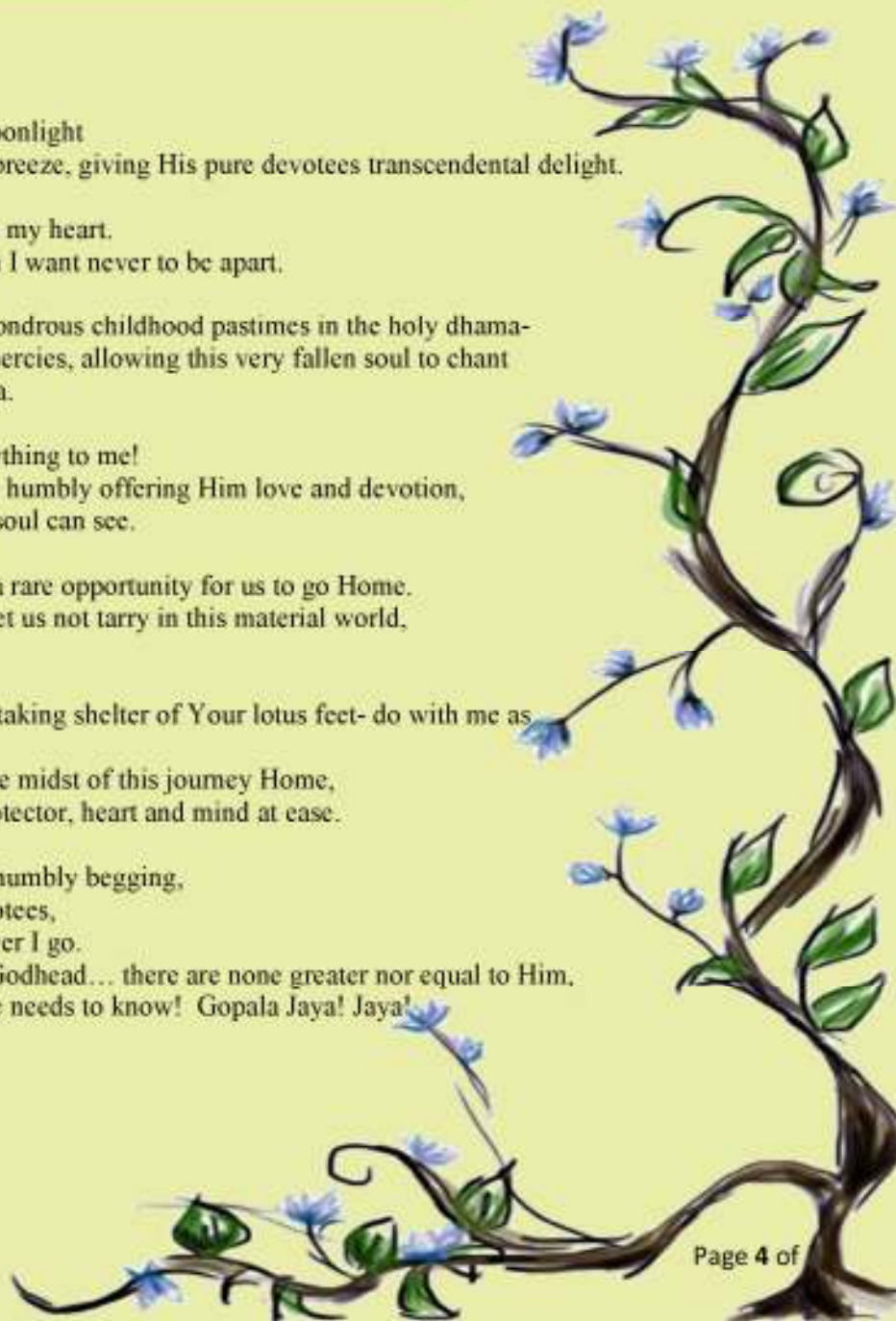
Sri Harinam is my life and soul, everything to me!
Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Absolute Truth, humbly offering Him love and devotion,
With spiritual vision the surrendered soul can see.

This human form of life but a vapor, a rare opportunity for us to go Home.
Kṛṣṇa is awaiting our arrival, please let us not tarry in this material world,
Where in darkness only to roam.

No more illusions for me, I Lord, am taking shelter of Your lotus feet- do with me as
You please.
Kṛṣṇa is my Refuge indeed, thus in the midst of this journey Home,
Realizing Kṛṣṇa is my Master and Protector, heart and mind at ease.

Crying out to You, O Lord Govinda, humbly begging,
Just let me serve Your very dear Devotees,
To proclaim Your holy names wherever I go.
Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead... there are none greater nor equal to Him.
I will tell whoever will hear, everyone needs to know! Gopala Jaya! Jaya!
Your humble servant,

Jason Matthews
Columbia, South Carolina



Inmate Art!



ABOVE: Drawing by **Jiva Dasa** —Talladega, Alabama



LEFT: Drawing by **Gerald Schutt** —Sheridan, Illinois

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