

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 2022**

## “I ONLY SEE THE NECK OF THE BIRD.”

By Bhakti-lata Dasi

There is a story in the Mahabharata, about Dronacarya testing the young Kauravas’ and Pandavas’ skill at archery. An artificial bird was placed in a tree and, as each of his students came forward, one by one, Drona asked,

“Do you see the bird at the top of the tree?”

“Yes, I do.” each replied.

“Do you see anything else?”

“Yes, I see the tree, myself, my brothers and the me.”

Drona was not pleased and ordered, “Stand aside!

You are not fit to strike the target.” Only Arjuna

pleased him by replying,

“I only see the neck of the bird.”

With his hairs standing on end out of ecstasy, Drona ordered, “Release your arrow!”

I often recall this story when I see how fixed up some of our inmates are. They learn to ignore all obstacles, serving Kṛṣṇa in whatever ways they can; chanting, reading, and giving Kṛṣṇa to others. Disregarding all the distractions around them (temptations, quarrels, tensions, and injustices), they remain fixed on their service to Kṛṣṇa.



This year, the spread of the infamous “Coronasura” virus made an already difficult situation (prison life) a hundred times more challenging for the inmates.

In some prisons, there has been months-long lockdowns (there are still some going on as you read this), during which inmates were not allowed to leave their cells at any time, for any reason, not even to go to the cafeteria. Meager meals of peanut butter sandwiches (the vegetarian option during this emergency period) were brought directly to the inmates.

In other prisons, as cells were gradually filled with sick inmates, the rest were packed together in open halls, where privacy became non-existent. Rivals had to live side by side, with no bars separating them. Loud music was played, each group listening to a different music genre; you can just imagine the unbelievable cacophony it created. With frustration rising due to a lack of privacy, comforts, and freedom of movement, tensions grew with each passing day. Although inmates can normally buy extra items from the commissary (the prison store) such as food, hygiene items, cigarettes, and more, due to the pandemic, the commissary was closed, depriving inmates from the few luxuries they had. And, with everyone piled on top of each other, hostilities increased; between inmates, and between inmates and guards. In such a hectic and stressful environment, you can just imagine how difficult it has been for the bhaktas to try and maintain a minimum of chanting and hearing. But, to their credit, many managed to do just that. Their determination and faith were direly tested and they succeeded.

I myself had the virus and was out of commission for a few months. I was so sick I felt like I would have to retire from my service. I was very concerned about what

would happen to the prison ministry, since, up to now, I have yet to find a devotee who has a burning desire to be trained up to take over when my time comes. However, by Kṛṣṇa's mercy, I recuperated and He allowed me to continue giving His mercy to the sincere souls. Please give me your mercy so I can keep serving Prabhupada's prison ministry for many years to come.

I thank all the volunteers who have worked with me, by either writing inmates, sending books, mailing the BTGs and newsletter, or typing: Śrutadeva prabhu; mother Bhranti, mother Ramaniya, Balabhadra prabhu, mother Govindanandini, mother Nandini Radha, Bhakta Arturo, Jhadu Thakur prabhu, Premananda prabhu, Svarbhanu prabhu, mother Brajarani, Anupama prabhu, mother Jamuna Jaya, Ekanatha prabhu (UK), mother Manmohini and her husband Raghava prabhu, mother Lila Kishori, and two volunteers who wish to remain anonymous but that want to acknowledge here. 😊

I probably forgot someone so please excuse me and let me know so I can acknowledge you in the next newsletter.

I also thank all our well-wishers who have donated all the material and funds that allow us to distribute Kṛṣṇa's mercy to hundreds of inmates.

May you all be blessed with an increasing taste for the holy name! 🙏

Below are the book scores for 2021. 🌸

## 2021 IPM BOOK DISTRIBUTION

**Prabhupada's Books total: 2,102**

**Breakdown:**

Booklets: 493

Small: 1,126

Medium: 30

Big: 101

Maha-Big: 352

**Books by other devotee authors: 94**

**BTGs: 2,021**

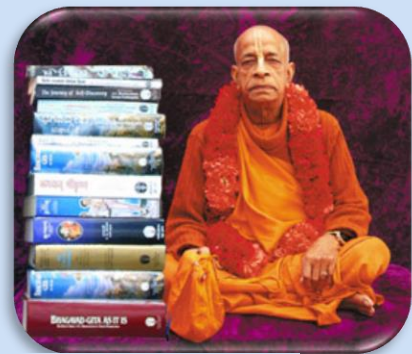
**BBT Art Calendars: 51**

**CDs: 152**

**MP3s: 9**

**DVDs: 14**

**Japa Mala sets: 12**



**GRAND TOTAL of all Books and BTGs in 2021: 4,217**

**Srila Prabhupada, ke, Jaya!!!**



## Inmate Letter Excerpts

Dear Sriman Balabhadra Prabhu,  
Please accept my humble obeisances, Hare Krishna! I am writing you to inform you that everyone has received their books, Jaya! We start study next week, which is great because the visitation process for getting approved is severely backed up, therefore it may be months before the Tucson devotees can come visit and preach. We are so grateful and indebted to your service. We will certainly encourage our participants to correspond with you. You have no idea how incredible of a thing you



have done for us here. You have provided a source of truth and wisdom for those who are seeking, one that is not contaminated by ego. You have given a few souls the opportunity to truly advance themselves and have aided in creating a platform that will hopefully be here for years and years to come. Never before has there been a place to study and worship Krishna at this prison unit before. It is because of

your contributions that this has been made possible. I am so overwhelmed with emotion that tears flow from my eyes as I write and reflect upon the gravity of your selfless contribution. We Bhaktas here at Graham extend our most humble obeisances to you. Thank you so much for your support and your time. Great acts performed by great individuals like yourself make a true meaningful impact on oneself. I can't thank you enough. Much love. Your humble servant,"

**Bhakta Andrus T. —Safford, Arizona**

Hare Krishna! Very cool that you add my letter in the Freedom Newsletter this month. Like we say in Spanish, "Que Gufiao". Thank you so much. I want to update about my spiritual progress. Since I stopped the nonsense of eating meat, this is now my life: I wake up at 3:10 AM, clean my teeth, drink 40 oz of water (I drink it in between the rounds of the mantra), and chant twenty rounds (till 5am). then I have breakfast and then I go to the dorm study, from 6 am to 8 am, then take a nap. At 10:30 AM I start to work out: 2500/jumping jacks, 1500squads, 600 pushups, 600sit ups. If they open the yard I do 17 laps jogging nonstop and, if they give more time, I do 21 laps nonstop and chant in the yard 1 round to thank Krishna for His mercy to give in me the strength to run. and between every count 10am/3pm/6pm/10pm, I chant three rounds. [I chant 32

chants every day] Every BTG magazine that I receive I read it at least three times, back-to-back, and put it in a large envelope with the newsletter and send it to my sister Clarissa and she reads it with my mom and my kids and also my Kids are chanting with my Mom. I feel good in my heart every day because if I leave this body I know I am going with Krishna I know every day when I wake up that I am giving my best. What can be better than that? Thank you so much Ms. Bhakta-lata Dasi for your help and motivation. I wish you know how much happiness I have in my heart when I see that Krishna is using me to encourage more people to do what is right because eat meat is not right at all. Love and respect. Always your servant

**Bhakti Eloy M. —Wewahitchka, Florida**

*[Below KK is explaining what holy days "meal replacements" means in prison]*

Actually, we're served all three meals of the day at the dinner meal. We take the food back to our cells and break the fast at the appropriate time.

As I had mentioned, now I'm living with another practicing bhakta who is highly intelligent and enthusiastic - Bhakta Pryce D. *[see excerpt below]*

The wonderful thing is food service **and** the chapel know how absolutely important it is and now everyone asks, "What's the Holy day THIS time?"

and I have a chance to teach them about our saints, sages, and customs. Jai Gopal! Jai Sri Ram! Jai Prabhupada! How grateful I am to Srila Prabhupada for his mercy of bringing us this most wonderful dharma. Can you just imagine being without it? I would be empty, cold, and hopeless. Krishna Consciousness gives us all such hope filled with Sachidananda! Haribol!

**Krishna Kirtan Dasa, Petersburg, Virginia**

I am cellmate with Krishna Kirtan. We read/talk about Kṛṣṇa and chant daily, my cell is now a sacred place full of pictures of our dear Lord Gopal. We are hopeful the yard will open up so Kṛṣṇa consciousness can spread to the other units. We are never afraid for our future; we know the appearance of happiness and distress are just time to changing seasons, they are non-permanent and have no "real" effect on us. Thank you again for all you do for us all here in prison.

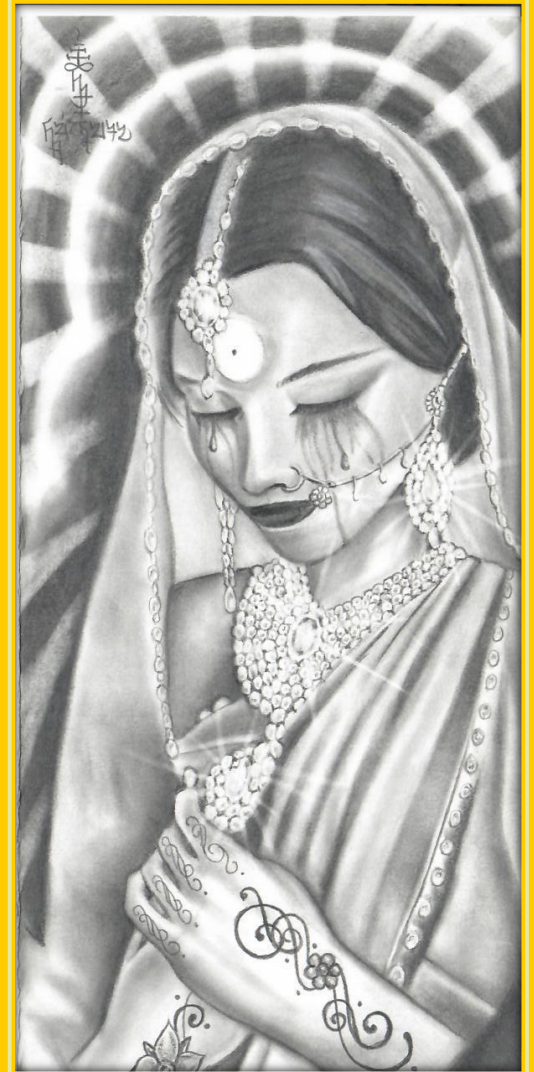
**Pryce D. —Petersburg, Virginia**



# Inmate Art!



**RIGHT:** Drawing of Srimati Radharani  
by inmate Myo Naing Swe



**LEFT:** Drawing by inmate  
Michael Pichler —Ohio



## SEEING THE INMATES' INSPIRED SIDE

By Jamuna Jaya Dasi —New York

Bonni's letters are written on yellow lined paper. Her writing is as neat as a pin, and there is an air of innocence and curiosity to her words and questions. I can almost see her biting her lip as she writes her questions to me.

This is what I love about writing to inmates as part of ISKCON Prison Ministry. In writing to Bonni, I have an opportunity to see her as a spirit soul, as I am a spirit soul, and to express that back to her. Having done some performing in prisons and having a nephew who barely missed out on finding himself behind bars, escaping this fate due to a good lawyer, and compassionate judge, I am familiar with how people who "do time" are sometimes judged. They are treated as if they ARE their deeds, and we, as devotees, know that we are not our minds, our bodies, and certainly not our deeds. As my Gurudev says, we should see a person's "inspired side". Writing to inmates like Bonni gives me a chance to do that. To let them know that Krsna ALWAYS sees their



"inspired side". That Krsna ALWAYS is waiting to be in loving association with them.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gita, Krsna says, "The humble sages, by virtue of true knowledge, see with equal vision a learned and gentle brahmana, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a dog eater." Writing to those who are labeled "criminals" allows me to check my judgement at the door and see to the innermost parts of a person – their pure sat-chit-ananda selves – their truest selves. I am blessed that I have MANY people in my life, who see past my many flaws and mistakes, and see my original nature, my spark of divinity, to quote BKS Iyengar. And while I can never pay them back for their faith in me, I can pay it forward to people like Bonni, who are no less a child of Krsna's than I am.

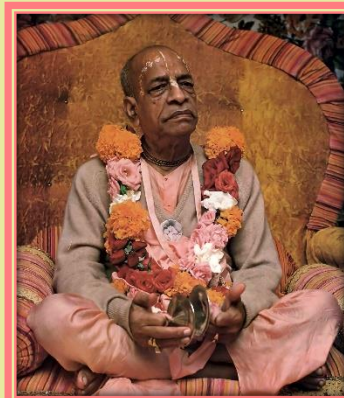
I am grateful for this service, and I ask for the prayers for all who read this, that I may do it well, and inspire the "inspired sides" of all those who receive my letters. 🌸

## POEM CORNER

### A TOAST TO PRABHUPADA

By Jivananda Dasa

Lift your cups of nectar Prasad  
And let's have a toast.  
To our pride in our wonderful  
guru  
And Kṛṣṇa let us boast.  
Kṛṣṇa hears every maha-mantra  
And he sees every devotional act.  
He will never forget them, my  
Prabus  
And that's an honest fact.  
He is always calling us  
But it might take a million years.  
Our hearts push us playfully



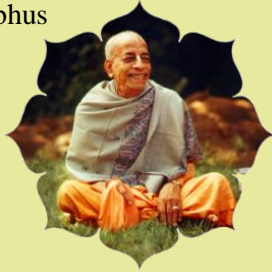
To Him we hold so dear.  
Don't wonder why we find ourselves in prison  
It's all part of Kṛṣṇa's plan.  
By guru's mercy we'll come to Him  
It's by Prabhupada's grace we can.  
We've roamed the many universes  
So many lives we have spun.  
But the distance we've come to find guru  
Is much greater than from here to the end.  
But let's not tip our cups in our victory  
It's by nothing that we've done.  
Because it's all by his causeless mercy  
It's by guru's grace that we've won!

# THANK YOU to ALL our SUPPORTERS!

Your generosity is what keeps this program going! ☺ Because of a senior moment, I may forget someone, so please forgive me, and let me know so I can include your name in the next IPM NEWS. 🙏

## Our donors since last newsletter:

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

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- 2) Donate through PayPal at: [www.paypal.me/IPM](http://www.paypal.me/IPM) or [ISKconPrisonMinistry@gmail.com](mailto:ISKconPrisonMinistry@gmail.com)
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