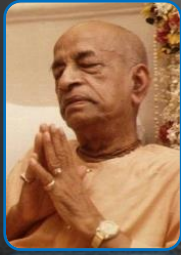


Freedom Newsletter



Dedicated to His *Divine* Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Founder Acarya of ISKCON

ISKCON Prison Ministry / **JANUARY 2020**

PO Box 2676
Alachua, FL 32616

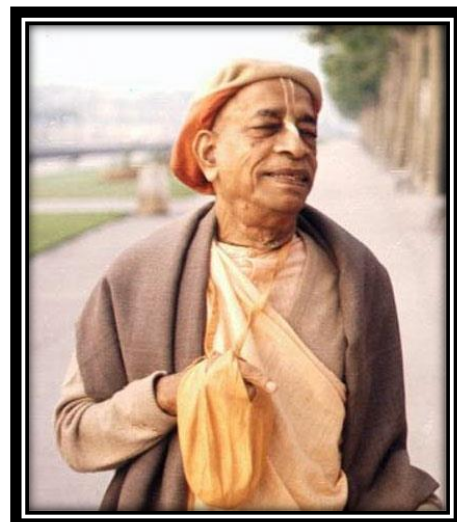
LIVE SIMPLY AND CHANT HARE KRISHNA

The following conversation between His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and two of his disciples took place in New Vrindavan, West Virginia, in June of 1976.

Srila Prabhupada: The Western civilization is a nasty civilization, artificially increasing the necessities of life. For example, take the electric light. The electric light requires a generator, and to run the generator you need petroleum. As soon as the petroleum supply is stopped, everything will stop. But to get petroleum you have to painstakingly search it out and bore deep into the earth, sometimes in the middle of the ocean.

This is *ugra-karma*, horrible work. The same purpose can be served by growing some castor seeds, pressing out the oil, and putting the oil into a pot with a wick. We admit that you have improved the

lighting system with electricity, but to improve from the castor-oil lamp to the electric lamp you have to work very hard. You have to go to the middle of the ocean and drill and then draw out the petroleum, and in this way the real goal of your life is missed.



You are in a precarious position, constantly dying and taking birth in various species of life. How to get free of this cycle of birth and death—this is your problem. And this problem is meant to be solved in the human life. You have advanced intelligence for self-realization, but instead of using your advanced intelligence for self-realization, you are utilizing it to improve from the castor-oil lamp to the electric lamp. That's all.

Disciple 1: People would say that your suggestion is impractical. Besides, electricity does many other things besides produce light. Most of our modern comforts depend more or less on electricity.

Srila Prabhupada: In this life you may be living very comfortably, but in the next life you might become a dog.

Disciple 2: People don't believe that.

Srila Prabhupada: Whether they believe it or not, it is a fact. For example, a boy does not know that he is going to grow into a young man, but his mother and father know. If the boy says, "No, I'm not going to become a young man," that is childish, The father and mother know that the boy will grow into a young man and that they should educate him so he can be properly situated. This is the guardians' duty. Similarly, when we talk of transmigration of the soul, a rascal may say, "I don't believe in it," but it is still a fact.

A rascal, a madman, may say transmigration is not a fact, but the real fact is that he'll have to accept another body according to the quality of his endeavor in this life.

Disciple 2: What if someone says, "This life of growing the castor seeds is very difficult, and farming in general is very difficult. It is easier to go to the factory for eight hours, come home with my money, and enjoy."

Srila Prabhupada: You may enjoy, but by enjoying you forget your real goal in life. Is that intelligent? You have been given the human body to improve your next life. Suppose you become a dog in your next life. Is that success? You must know the science of Krishna consciousness. Then, instead of becoming a dog, you will become like God.

Disciple 1: Once, at John Lennon's estate in London, you said that the tractor is the cause of so much of the trouble today. It took all the work from the young men and forced them to go to the city for work, and they became entangled in sense gratification. I've noticed that life in the country is simpler, more peaceful. It's easier to think of spiritual life.

Srila Prabhupada: Yes. The country is less disturbing, less taxing on the brain. Just work a little for your food, and the rest of the time engage yourself in Krishna consciousness. This is ideal life. [Srila Prabhupada holds up a flower.] See the minute fibers in this flower. Can anyone manufacture this in a factory—such small fibers? And how brilliant the color is! If you study only one flower, you become God conscious. There is a machine that you call "nature," and from this machine everything is coming. But who has built this machine?

Disciple 1: In London you said people don't know that the flowers are painted by Krishna—with thought.

Srila Prabhupada: Yes. Do you think that without an artist the flowers can come out so beautiful? This is foolish. What is nature? It is Krishna's machine. Everything is being done by Krishna's machine. So improve your mode of living at New Vrindavan. Live in an open place, produce your own food grains, produce your own milk, save time, chant Hare Krishna. Plain living, high thinking: ideal life. But if you increase the artificial necessities of your life—your so-called comforts—and forget your real work of Krishna consciousness, that is suicidal. We want to stop this suicidal policy. Of course, we don't insist that people stop the modern advancement of technology. We just present the simple formula given by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu: Chant Hare Krishna. Even in your technological factory you can chant. What is the difficulty? You can go on pushing the buttons on your machine and simultaneously chant Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

Disciple 2: And if people take up the chanting, gradually they will give up the technology?

Srila Prabhupada: Of course.

Disciple 2: So you're sowing the seeds of their destruction.

Srila Prabhupada: No, not destruction; rather construction. The repetition of birth and death, the constant change of bodies—this is destruction. But by our method, you live forever. *Tyaktva deham punar janma naiti* [Bg. 4.9]: you don't get another material body. But without Krishna consciousness, *tatha dehantara-praptih* [Bg. 4.9]: you have to accept another body, which means suffering.

So, which is better? To accept material bodies, one after another, or to accept no more material bodies?

If we finish our suffering with this body, that is intelligent, and if we create another body for further suffering, that is unintelligent. But unless you understand Krishna, you have to accept another body. There is no alternative. 🌸



A BIG THANK YOU to BHAVANANDA DASA!

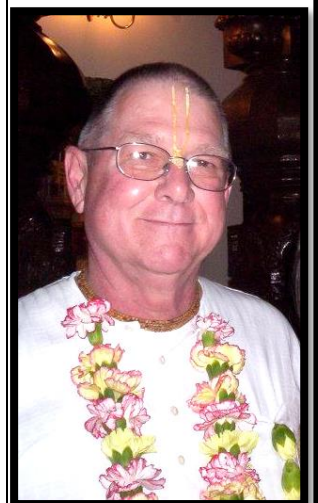
Since 2009, Bhavananda prabhu has dedicated himself to publish the monthly *Freedom Newsletter* (FN) for the pleasure of all of you. Being engaged in a multitude of other services, in 2020 Bhavananda is retiring from his FN service.

Bhavananda cares deeply about the inmates' welfare. He always had a sense of how important this newsletter is to you, and a great desire that the FN continues to 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, Bhavananda!!!

(For the time being, I will be publishing the newsletter, until someone as dependable as Bhavananda prabhu takes over. 😊 As you have noticed, I have made some changes both in appearance and content. You are welcome to share some feedbacks about these changes.)

Your servant, Bhakti-latā Dasi

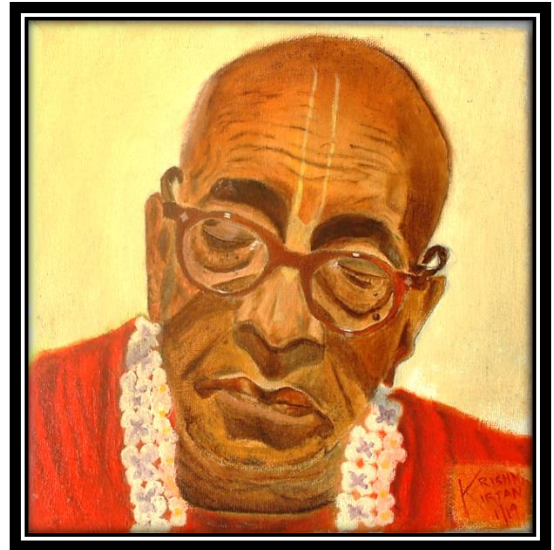


Need Books or Prayer Beads?

Requests for books, beads or other material should be sent to **your devotee pen pal**. If you **do not** have a pen pal, you can send your requests to: ISKCON Prison Ministry, PO Box 2676, Alachua, FL 32616

- 1) Tell us if you can receive hardbound books and how many at a time.
- 2) Please make sure that you are allowed to receive any of the material you request.
- 3) Please let us know if material need to be sent directly to you or through your chaplain.

Artwork



ABOVE: Both drawings of Srila Prabhupada were made by the same person: Kṛṣṇa Kirtan (inmate in Virginia). The drawing on the left was drawn in 2009; the one on the right in 2019, ten years later. This is a wonderful example of what is the most important quality in Kṛṣṇa consciousness: your devotion. Even if you haven't been trained as an artist, or a writer, or anything else, Kṛṣṇa will personally guide you from within. Many devotees have experienced this fact; if you sincerely want to serve Kṛṣṇa in a certain way, He will help you.

"But those who worship Me with devotion, meditating on My transcendental form – to them I carry what they lack, and preserve what they have."

Bhagavad-gita 9.22

Would you like to see your STORY and/or ARTWORK in the *Freedom Newsletter*?

We encourage everyone to write the **story** of how they came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Write in your own words, using simple language. Stories should be about a page or two, due to space availability.

We also encourage all of you to **draw** topics about Kṛṣṇa, whether you are known as a "talented" artist or not. With Kṛṣṇa artwork, what is most important is your *desire* to please Kṛṣṇa.

Send your story and/or your artwork to: **ISKCON Prison Ministry, PO Box 2676, Alachua, FL 32616**

And please write "MY STORY" on the envelope.

Please be patient: due to the high volume of mail, may take a few months before you see your submission in the newsletter.

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare

Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare

HOW I CAME TO KRṢṆA CONSCIOUSNESS

“HERE, YOU SHOULD READ THIS”

By Dan G.

Inmate in Grand Junction, Colorado

I was raised in a middle-class Protestant family. My father, an ordained minister of music, brought the family to church regularly, as far back as I can remember. I have always been drawn towards spirituality but in the church of my youth, only one thing stood out. I could see the glaring effulgence of God behind the pulpit, could almost see His outstretched arms and almost hear His welcoming words, yet there was something blocking my direct sight. It was the man standing at the pulpit, propounding the dogmas of religion. I would squirm in my seat, trying to see past this man and look unto my God, until my mother would nudge me saying, “Pay attention.”

I did “pay attention”, as much as a young boy could, and out of it I nurtured a great faith in God. Always knowing though that God was bigger than the teachings of one church. I once begged my parents to allow me to attend a Catholic Mass with a friend of mine. They reluctantly gave their assent so I went, only to find the same glaring effulgence blocked by another man standing at a pulpit. That experience confirmed what I knew inside, that God was bigger than religion and that man’s words sometimes got in the way.

A monastic life was always appealing to me. Unfortunately for me, before I found an avenue for that life, as a young boy on the streets of Boston in the height of a growing culture of drug experimentation, I found drug instead. At the beginning, there was indeed an experience of spiritual awakening. I thought I found a way around that “man at the pulpit” to a direct experience of the glaring effulgence of God.

As the years passed, I fell away from church and into the drug culture. I am unable to pinpoint when the shift occurred from spiritual journey to journey of the high. But most assuredly, it transpired!

There was many times in my life that I was urged to stop using drugs. I would again become attracted by spiritual matters but the drugs always won.



My first experience with Kṛṣṇa devotees was around age twelve. The streets of Boston one evening on my way home, two saffron clad young men sat singing at the subway station. I let my train pass while I talked with these devotees well past my curfew, for which I was reprimanded. I can’t recall one word of the conversation, only the experience of that calling from God and the appeal of a monastic life devoted to God. Of course, I was too young to run off then and as reluctant as my parents were to allow me to even attend a Catholic Mass, chatting with these “strange” guys dressed in saffron robes was definitely out of the question. Many times after that night, I would see devotees, usually at the Boston Commons, and usually along with my parents who would escort me quickly past them. Their guidance was enough to divert me from the path of Kṛṣṇa consciousness at that time but sadly was not enough to divert me from finding the drug culture. It was around this same time, at a very young age that I found what was to be my life’s nemesis; drugs!

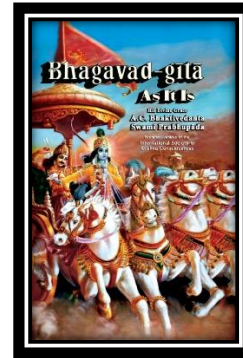
I am determined at this point to pick up my spiritual journey. Drugs have absolutely ruined my life. Sitting here in this prison, I am acutely aware of this fact. They

hold nothing more for me. Almost 30 years ago, I thought they were part of the journey. I'm a slow learner! As a former "junkie", I am well aware of my propensities to take things to the extreme, to jump in head first, and I know I have jumped into KC without looking back. My life is 100% doomed; I have no other shelter but the lotus feet of Sri Kṛṣṇa. Yes, out of the four types of people who seek Kṛṣṇa I was the distressed. Teetering on the brink of suicide, facing six years in prison, dealing with the loss of the mother of my children in a severe car accident, coming down from all the drugs, completely hopeless and lost, I sat in my cell meditating when my neighbor peered in and said,

"Here, **you** should read **this**,"

and tossed me the Bhagavad-Gita. Not a day has gone by that I have not read from that book (or another of Prabhupada's books) since then, two years ago now!

It has been almost 30 long years of fighting with maya before I found once again that path that leads back home, back to Godhead. I can't afford to veer from that path again.



I only pray that Kṛṣṇa may find a place for this fallen soul so blinded by the darkness of ignorance, to serve at His lotus feet, lifetime after lifetime. I pray that this mind may be engaged in remembrance of Him.



When our Failure is a Success by Vraja Bihari Dasa

Where you turn to—when you fail in devotional service—decides the result.

Anyone who comes to ISKCON temples is immediately exposed to the chanting of the Hare Krishna mahamantra. And those who are convinced about the philosophy of Krishna consciousness soon take up the practice of chanting Hare Krishna a fixed number of times daily. If you have been practicing this mantra meditation for some time now, you must have realized how difficult it is to keep the mind fixed and focused on the holy name.

Chanting Hare Krishna can be the most humbling experience, especially if we make it the most important goal of our life. Krishna is inaccessible to the conditioned souls; those who are not qualified do not get access to Krishna's intimate association. He reserves the right of not being exposed to the conditioned souls. Thus chanting can expose us to our own disqualifications; chanting can reveal to us that we are far away from Krishna.

This realization can be a painful experience. If we profess that chanting is the most important activity,

immediately we are exposed to the painful reality of our own poor chanting. It seems hypocritical that on the one hand we declare chanting to be most sacred, but on the other hand, our actions are contrary to the reality we preach about. The more we glorify the holy names, the more we have to face the stark truth of our own inadequacies of chanting. And this revelation is painful because we want to feel a sense of self-worth and success in our spiritual lives. Hence we avoid discussing the importance of good chanting, because these discussions only confirm to us our abject failure in our vow of chanting.

The beauty of Krishna conscious process, however, lies in experiencing this failure. If we can truly feel that I am a failure in chanting, that feeling is a success. If we can feel lowly and inadequate, that is an excellent platform to experience the sweet taste of Krishna. It is fifty percent success; the other fifty percent is experienced when we turn to Krishna for help. Therefore to feel a failure and then turn to Krishna in our career as a chanter of Hare Krishna is spiritual success.

This is important because we attract Krishna's mercy only when we humbly surrender to Krishna. If we have a high estimation about ourselves, how can we humbly beg Krishna for mercy?

Many times we tell other devotees how fallen we are but these expressions could be more out of social etiquette rather than heart-felt conviction. At such times, humility, the most important element in the life of a chanter, remains only a theoretical understanding. It is only jnana (theoretical knowledge) and rarely does it translate into vijnana (practical realization).

Making chanting our number one priority offers us a rare chance to convert this knowledge into realization. When we have a noble aspiration to chant well, we will try hard to achieve it. We may fail initially but good chanting is not some yogic technique that we could acquire by some tips or shortcuts to improve chanting. Most likely we will fall short of the standard.

At this point in time, we have to turn to Krishna and beg Him to help us chant well. The more we endeavor sincerely, the more we'll be exposed to our own poor chanting. At this point, we will be humbled. Often, humiliation comes before humility.

Therefore let us make chanting our number one goal. Never mind the failure, for we shall fail forward! Without this pure ambition, our lives are hollow. Good chanting is the best ideal to strive for; it is our connection to Krishna. This sincerity will lead to humility, and it is humility that eventually gives us a higher taste in the process of bhakti-yoga.

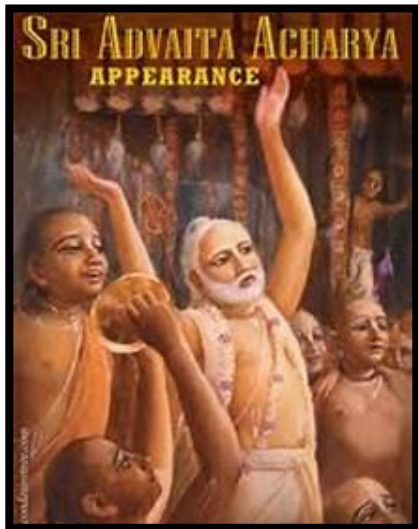
An important point to note: it is important that our sense of failure must *compel* us to turn to Krishna, and only then we can experience the sweetness. Otherwise, a sense of failure by itself leads to despondency. If we can remember Krishna as we fail, that failure is the ultimate success.

Vraja Bihari Dasa holds a postgraduate degree in International Finance and an MBA from Mumbai University. He serves as a resident monk at ISKCON Chowpatty in Mumbai and is an active teacher of bhakti-yoga. You can read his daily reflections on www.yogaformodernage.com

Calendar

January 2020

- 6- **Putrada Ekadasi (fast from grains and beans)**
- 14- Appearance of Gopala Bhatta Goswami
- 15- Disappearance of Jayadev Goswami
- 16- Disappearance of Locana Dasa Thakura
- 20- **Sat-tila Ekadasi (fast from grains and beans)**
- 29- Appearance of Pundrika Vidyanidhi, Raghunatha dasa Goswami, & Visnupriya Devi
Disappearance of Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura
- 31- **Appearance of Advaita Acharya (fast till noon)**



February 2020

- 2- Disappearance of Madhvacarya
- 4- Disappearance of Ramanujacarya
- 5- **Bhaimi Ekadasi (fast from grains and beans)**
Fast till noon for appearance of Lord Varaha; feast tomorrow
- 6- Appearance of Lord Varaha
- 7- **Appearance of Nityananda Prabhu (fast till noon)**
- 8- Appearance of Narottama Dasa Thakura
- 13- **Appearance of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur (fast till noon)**
- 19- **Vijaya Ekadasi (fast from grains and beans)**
Disappearance of Isvara Puri
- 24- Disappearance of Jagannatha Dasa Babaji & Rasikananda Thakura

Book Distribution Stories!

IT WASN'T YOUR TIME...

I was distributing in Germany and approached a man, introducing myself as a monk. I mentioned karma and reincarnation.

He asked, "You are a monk? I'll tell you what. I have experienced something incredible. Let me tell you what happened to me. I had some serious health problems and died — legally dead. My brain was not provided with oxygen for so long that according to conventional medicine it was not possible to survive.



What happened during that time was that I had a near death experience. I saw myself leaving the body. Then I heard voices say, "It's not yet time for you to go." And I came back to life. The doctors called it a wonder and were completely shocked.

I immediately responded, "It wasn't your time, because you're meant to get this book!" I was pointing to the Bhagavad-gita.

He said, "Okay, I will give it a trial." He gave a nice donation to find out why he stayed alive.

Krpa-sindhu dasa

FROM MAHA APPLE TO MAHA BOOKS

I was in Rotarua (New Zealand) desiring to hit a certain goal of Krishna books, I had two sets left and was walking through the mall pondering whether or not Krishna would allow me to distribute them before the day was up.

Then I saw emerging from the crowd of Black Friday shoppers an Indian man working for Bidvest, he had Tulasi wrapped around his neck and was pushing a delivery trolley.

I stopped him and he said loudly "Hey you, you gave me that apple at ISKCON Mandir."

Trying to think back in time I remembered about 10 months ago one of the Pujaris had handed me a Maha apple off the altar one night after Gaura Arati. As I left the temple I handed it to this Indian man who was on his way into the temple. I just told him "Maha Prasad" and that was it.

I didn't think much of that exchange but he was so touched by the simple gift of a Maha apple that when he saw me he was very excited and wanted to know what I was doing.

I pulled out a Kṛṣṇa book set and then his work mate turned up and asked if he could have one too.

After a couple of ATM transactions they told me "selfie



prabhu, selfie". I ran back to the van to get more Krishna books, I was thinking how obvious it was that somehow Krishna had heard my desire to distribute these two sets and then made this perfect arrangement almost instantaneously. All glories to Srila Prabhupada, the devotees and the Sankirtan Yajna!

Aravinda Nabha dasa

Excerpts from inmates' letters

"I took the Nectar of Devotion to school today and I got to break the ice so to speak with a classmate. Who knows, lets pray about it.

At any rate, I have read only a few of Srila Prabhupada's books and currently am in a cell with someone who shares his Gita with me. I also try to do the studies or lessons in every issue of the BTG magazine."

Jerry M.

Richmond, Texas

"Dear Mother Bhakti-lata,

Thank you for writing and it was excellent to hear from you my friend! I wasn't going to write right back but your letter and what you said about everything are so compelling that I am writing this *right* after reading your letter. I'm not even sure where to start.

I actually had/have a little tearing in my eyes when I read it! And I'm not given to that kind of thing, really, but it happened. Kṛṣṇa really is speaking through His devotee and it *is* like nectar just like the books say!"

Kenneth M.

Corcoran, California

"Please know that the work you are doing is so very significant. It can make a life changing difference in a prisoner's life. These teachings are so powerful. Just reading this material seems to elevate my consciousness. How much more so, practicing and applying the principles?

I am so grateful that you folks are still able to help."

Robert H.

Sneads, Florida

"Today I got all the reading material that you sent, and was very excited after going through it, and I could tell just by scanning it that all the enclosed items contain a great deal of knowledge.

I don't have any of the books the other devotees sent me because I read them then gave them to my neighbor. I do an excessive amount of reading."

John Paul M.

Abilene, Texas

"I'm currently reading the book "*Srila Prabhupada is Coming!*" by Mahamaya Devi Dasi. It is very nice reading and I can see myself inside the telling of her personal memories as I read them; as a real witness. This kind of reading adds depth to my desire to have personal face to face dealings and association with devotees."

Bhakta Kevin

Plymouth, Wisconsin

"There are no words to express what joy is within my heart. Material worlds mean nothing on this transcendental road...where "Back to Godhead is the theme song and Kṛṣṇa prema is the goal."

Anonymous



"I do not know how to thank you for these treasures. Thank you so very much for these nectarean books and magazines. They will be read and enjoyed many, many times in the months to come.

All is well with me here. As I continue to seek God and chant His name, my life is improving in every way, at every level. It is very challenging to pursue *sadhana* here in this environment but to return to mundane concerns and material consciousness is no longer a viable option. I'm all in! I now chant every day, sitting in before the pictures you sent me of Radha-Kṛṣṇa. Also, I get up at 4 AM and meditate till 6 AM and then from 7 to 8 PM. Then when I go to bed at 10 PM I meditate and talk with the Lord till 12 PM."

Robert H.

Sneads, Florida

"I really like to think about little Kṛṣṇa being so approachable and playful like my little cousins. God just being a little baby is strangely compelling for some reason- it's excellent!

Actually I've cooled a little on the study of I Ching because it's easier and quicker to approach the Truth directly and since Kṛṣṇa is the touchstone of Truth I might as well go to Him first and last!"

**Bhakta Kenneth
Corcoran, California**

"I was listening to a couple of other guys speaking about the ISKCON Prison Ministry; they spoke with so much genuine passion, my mere curious alerts got the best of my mind!! The next day I ran across the address of ISKCON.

At this stage of my life, I'm on a quest for truth, peace and spiritual balance.

You have explained so much in this missive but more so, you spoke with vehemence and this attracts me to seek more."

**Bhakta Shawn
Susanville, California**

"I don't have any support from my family. You all (the devotees) are my spiritual family"

**Bhakta Burl
Coleman, Florida**

"Now, let me tell you how inmates sit on the edge of their bunks at mail time, hoping so much to receive a letter, and how they always run up to me, letter in hand, so happy and excited to receive a letter from a devotee! They don't care if it's written by hand or by computer. They only care that you took time to write them back."

**Bhakta James
Salem, Oregon**

"I've been reading Kṛṣṇa Book at night before I go to sleep, as Muktakesa told me to do. I like the stories. I also have been adjusting my rounds to avoid the 10 offenses, pronouncing all the names.

I have also gotten a few compliments from different guards lately (I guess Kṛṣṇa has changed my general attitude and demeanor)

I am reading *Kṛṣṇa Book*; tonight I'm on chapter 6, *Putana Killed*. I love it!"

**Paul K.
Pendleton, Indiana**

"Yes, I have a picture of Lord Nrsimhadeva, Lord Caitanya & associates & Srila Prabhupada on a 3 way cardboard frame which I can put on my desk while I chant. I also use "medical dose-glasses" to offer water to the deities (pictures)."

Anonymous

Important - if you TRANSFER to a new unit/address:

Subscriptions to the *Back to Godhead* magazine (BTG) are sponsored by the Prison Ministry (IPM), NOT by the BTG Office. So if you have a change of address, please write to IPM, at the address below, to inform us. Please write "CHANGE OF ADDRESS" on the outside of the envelope so we can process it immediately. Thank you.

ISKCON Prison Ministry, PO Box 2676, Alachua, FL 32616

The same is goes for the *Freedom Newsletter* (FN). When newsletters are returned we can only assume that the inmate has been released from prison and his/her name is deleted from our mailing list. To make sure you continue receiving the newsletter be sure to notify us of your change of address at the above address.