

Dedicated to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta
Swami Prabhupāda
Founder Acarya of the International Society for
Krishna Consciousness (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.”

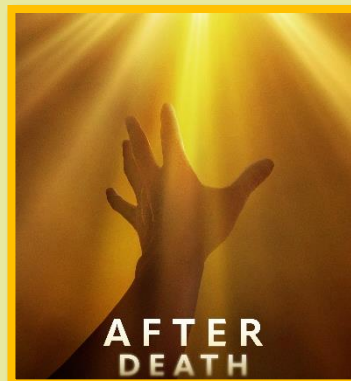
Srila Prabhupada in London, March 10, 1975

Sept/Dec 2023

READING SOMETHING GENUINE AND TRUTHFUL.

By bhakta Andrus T. —Safford, Arizona

Hare Krishna! My journey is now coming to a close and I will be released soon (Andrus was released in 2022). I want to formally thank you and everyone involved in your prison ministry program. You have provided a means for incarcerated souls to break free from the bondage of self [false self; false ego]. What started out as an inquiry into life after death led me to a new sense of freedom, one made possible through the service of great atmas, like yourselves [IPM volunteers]. Many people who seek Krishna in here rarely seek Krishna outside of



prison, as Srutadeva Prabhu would say, but you can rest assured that I will be participating in temple duties in both Chandler & Tucson [once released]. The magnitude to which your service has gone on to help extends far beyond myself and to elaborate I'd like to tell you my story, which if you like have permission to publish in any newsletter.

My spiritual journey began in November 2018 with a search to discover what happens after death. I read many books that didn't click until my sponsor in AA gave me *The Science of Self-Realization* by Srila

Prabhupada. Finally, something made sense and I began to read more from Prabhupada. Jesus says that *ye will know the truth when ye hear it*, and I certainly could feel I was reading something genuine and truthful.

Shortly after I began reading the *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. In 2019 I decided to write you myself and was given Srutadeva Das as my pen pal. I was able to ask questions and learn much more about the Vedas. I was blessed to receive the *Back to Godhead* magazine, *Freedom Newsletter*, and many books, including the *Mahabharata*.

For a while I was the only bhakta on the yard. Then, in early 2021, I saw another inmate meditating and began a conversation. He was involved in Buddhist Monasteries on the streets and so we shared interest in Eastern philosophy. We later became good friends, and I gave him my pen pal's address and a few books to read (including the *Mahabharata*). Now there are two bhaktas on the yard, enough to register with the chaplain, for services.

At this point I had read the *Bhagavad-Gita* four times and the *Mahabharata* from cover to cover. People on the yard knew what I was about and knew me from the classes I teach or taught, such as Morning Meditation, A Path to Virtue, and Redefining Success. My release date was coming, and I couldn't let this yard be devoid of Krishna. I went around the yard to those I knew were spiritual seekers and asked if they would be interested in studying the Gita.

I compiled a list of seven people who were interested in learning more. I wrote to Balabhadra

Dasa in Boise and told him my idea to start a study group here and asked his opinion. He said it was an excellent idea and he poured out his energy into helping us get this thing started. About three months later, the seven inmates interested in study received their own copies *Bhagavad-gita* and two more books as well. Bhakta Wes and I now lead a *Gita* study group every Saturday.

What's more is that I also reached out to the Tucson temple to see if they would be interested in volunteering service here at Graham. I got in touch with Sandamini Dasi, the temple president, and she sounded very sincere and interested. I linked her to our complex chaplain and soon there will be a community of Krishna Consciousness inmates to attend Kirtan and further their study in the presence of devotees.

What seemed impossible at first, started to become very real. this yard was completely void of Krishna Consciousness less than three years ago and now we have a community of seven inmates studying the *Gita*, with volunteer devotees on their way. If Srila Prabhupada can start a global movement with nothing, surely a sincere inmate can gather a group of inmates in prison for a higher purpose.

I ready myself for release now feeling like I did something to make a difference. The Krishna Consciousness that began here will continue in my absence and for me there is no greater joy. Hare Krishna! Jaya!

Your Humble Servant, Bhakta Jason 🌸

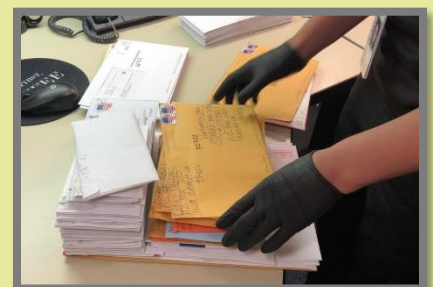
Bad News, Good News

by *Bhakti-lata Dasi*

THE BAD NEWS

You may remember that last November all Florida state prisons transitioned to an electronic mail delivery format. Unfortunately, more and more states will follow suit. As of last July, the state of Texas has already made the transition.

With this new system, inmates, apart from a few exceptions, are no longer allowed to receive books, magazines, or newsletters. All paper correspondence letters are scanned and emailed to the different institutions. From there the mail is read, approved, and sent electronically to the individual inmates, on their tablets.





Some institutions lend tablets to their inmates. In prisons where they don't lend tablets, inmates either have their own tablets,

or, they can access their mail at a prison kiosk.

The inmates who, as a result of their housing designation or status, are not permitted to access tablets or kiosks services, have their mail scanned, printed, and delivered to them. You can just imagine the heartache it causes the inmates who are no longer able to hold a letter handwritten by their loved ones, or a drawing made by their children, what to speak of not being able to receive a hard copy of Prabhupāda's books.



If you are interested to read more about this, you will find a number of articles online about the reasons why prisons chose that alternative.

What does it mean for the prison ministry?

With this electronic system, we have to correspond with the inmates through closed prison email systems, such as CorrLinks, JPay, Securus, TextBehind, GettingOut, and more. Different institutions/states will use a different system.



institutions, though some make exceptions for religious material.

What about newsletters? The institutions who use the TextBehind system allow us to upload the newsletter for their inmates.

What are the good news?

What about books? Books are prohibited in many of these

THE GOOD NEWS

Lately, by Kṛṣṇa's mercy, more and more chaplains have reached out to receive books for their chapel libraries. And eight chaplains have accepted my offer to monthly receive a stack of back issues of *Back to Godhead*, totaling, at the moment, 205 copies per month. I expect the demand to increase in the coming months. That's not counting the 150 BTGs sent to individual inmates each new issue.

The pictures of the boxed books are from three different days this week only. Sometimes I bring the books to the post office myself. Other times, I schedule a pickup



and the mailman comes and gets them. It's pure nectar to see so many books going out! And, of course, each time the mailman gets a prasadam cookie! Book and prasadam distribution at the same time! 😊



On a related note, this is the perfect time to make all of Śrīla Prabhupāda's digitized books available to the prison system's digital store, along with as many kīrtana/bhajans recordings, Kṛṣṇa narrations, and Kṛṣṇa podcasts as possible.

To make this happen is a *huge* project; a veritable "rhino" to shoot for Śrīla Prabhupāda.



Caitanya Vishnu prabhu, from

Nairobi, Kenya, made some headways in the right direction, but he is unfortunately not free to continue working on this project. Another devotee will try his hand at it. If you would like to devote some time to help catch this rhino for Prabhupāda, please email me at:

IskconPrisonMinistry@gmail.com



and write "Digital books" in the subject line. 🌸



THE SADHANA SERVICE —UPDATE

The ladies of the Sadhana Service group, in an Ocala prison, are still meeting regularly. Devaki Dasi and I (Bhakti-lata dasi) are taking steps to go visit them. Devaki prabhu just received her authorization; she applied to be an occasional volunteer, so it went faster, though it still took a few months. My authorization is slower to come, as I applied to be a regular volunteer. Navigating the prison system's bureaucracy can be akin to hiking through three feet of mud with ten-pound weights around one's ankles; it is very slow progress and requires the patience of an angel. After making numerous phone calls, filling forms online, and sending emails in all directions, I am inching my way to be accepted as a volunteer. I am hoping to give you illuminating updates in the next IPM NEWS in January 2024. Please send a prayer so we can visit these enthusiastic bhaktins! 🙏

Excerpts from inmates' letters

Dear ISKCON Prison Ministry, Hare Krsna! I am writing to you to say "thank you" for the recent shipment of back issues of magazines of BTG and for the book Srila Prabhupada Lilamrta. I had written to you so that I could get back on the newsletter mailing list, as I hadn't received one for the past few months, but I wasn't expecting to receive what you sent me. It was a great highlight to my week. So thank you very much. I also wanted to share with you the reaction from others in my unit. When I returned from picking up my packages, of course everyone was wondering what I got, and why I had a huge smile on my face. I explained about falling off the mailing list and writing to you, then showed them the items I received. People were floored. They couldn't believe all that you sent me or that you sent me anything at all. Everyone asked how I found your organization, and I passed on my story. People still couldn't believe it. Most of them have been trying to find contact information for their religion but with little luck. Then, at the end a friend spoke up and said, "You know those Hare Krishnas are amazing. You are very lucky to have found them".

And my reply was, "You have no idea just how lucky I am. Krishna has changed my life". So, bottom line: thank you for all you do for me and others like me. I hope that once I'm released, I can do something to help or assist others like you guys do.

Thank you once again. Hare Krsna!

Michael C. —Charleston, South Carolina

Dear Bhakti Lata, Hare Krishna!! With much love and respect I write this letter. Thank you so much for your

support! I received books and even an art calendar! Everything was great! We were able to request fasting, bags and vegetarian food items for the appearance of Lord Ramacandra (Rama). We have an observance schedule that's approved through the Florida Dept of Corrections (It does not approve of them all but I will send you the ones they allow us to observe). We were given a time (at sunset) to meet and chant and perform prasadam. I was provided a small battery-operated candle and a cloth and I used a small picture of Swami Prabhupada and Lord Krishna and set up an altar. We did not have special utensils, dishes so we used paper plates and flowers. We did our best and it was beautiful. I have my own library now of books and magazines. I give and exchange with all the ladies. We have ten who have changed their religion and are devoted! We have a 30-minute study time each week as well as an hour of service every Wednesday. We chant for most of the hour. We all wrote individually for beads and are awaiting your response. We are growing each week. We have almost 30 who come each week and six of them have asked to become devotees and requested for their religion to be changed through the chaplain. Yes, I do understand about the prejudice with some chaplains. Ours does not exactly like it but it is her responsibility to allow us to practice our faith and character compound : D. Now they are used to me and the Holy days ISKCON provided to FLDOC that all on the approved calendar are mandatory so we are here :). Hare Krishna!! Again I am so grateful to you for all your help, guidance and direction. I will gladly accept! We all send our love! I look forward to hearing from you. Till then. Hare Krishna.

Ps. I also received back issues of the Freedom Newsletter and Godhead Magazines. Thank you.

Kimberly S. —Brooksville, Florida

Recently on a fateful day back in March I was handed three separate issues of your publication/outreach magazine called “Back to Godhead” the articles, teachings, meditations with faith. Principles grabbed my mind first and now gently my heart. The man I was serving prison time with has unfortunately now transferred elsewhere and I have zero access to your organization. Would you be willing to donate monthly issues for one year to me, an indigent prisoner with no money so I may continue my journey-search/exploration of the Hare Krishna beliefs and way of life maybe? Our Chaplain and library have next to nothing about you to read and check out unfortunately. No volunteers come to my prison either. Love to have you send religious/education materials and the “Back to Godhead” monthly magazine to me graciously at the address above. Be kind, be peaceful, know you are blessed.

Rob B. —Chipley, Florida

[*Note: of course, we sent him books and a BTG subscription!*]

I want to say thank you all for everything you sent to me. I am very grateful. I have been fighting this system for the things I need to study. This prison does not have a lot of things at all to offer me. I have been through a lot just to have the things I have now which is not much. So am very thankful for everything you all sent me to continue my study in becoming more Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Thank you and I’ll continue to become a servant of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Thank you. Hare Kṛṣṇa .

Eddie C. —Huttonsville, West Virginia

I received two Back to Godhead magazines yesterday and read both cover to cover. That’s usually how I am when BTG arrives; non-stop reading. Also, I am very much interested in reading the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. I have only read what’s in the BTG, after 20 years being involved with ISKCON, I’m far overdue to read it.

Bobby G. —Whiteville, TN

Inmate Artwork



ABOVE: Crocheted Hare Krishna banner by inmate Rakesh P. — Alden, New York



LEFT: Drawing from inmate Michael P. —Lima, Ohio

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam & Caitanya-caritāmṛta SETS in chapel libraries

We are pleased to share with you that up to date, forty-two prison chapel libraries have received a set of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, and fifteen have received a set of Caitanya-caritāmṛta.

"On the other hand, that literature which is full of descriptions of the transcendental glories of the name, fame, form and pastimes of the unlimited Supreme Lord is a transcendental creation meant to bring about a revolution in the impious life of a misdirected civilization. Such transcendental literatures, even though irregularly composed, are heard, sung and accepted by purified men who are thoroughly honest."

SB 1.5.11

AN ARMY OF ONE —FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

Inmate Bhakta David B., from Connecticut, has taken it upon himself to fight for the imprisoned bhaktas' rights to practice their Kṛṣṇa consciousness. After exhausting all the in-house prison recourses, he has brought his claims to court. It is a long process, especially since he doesn't have any help. In his own words:

As to the legal battle, yes, there are certainly times when I doubt and want to just go away but I cannot go against my convictions and I cannot stop fighting. Even if I wanted to do so, Kṛṣṇa has made it clear to me that I cannot. I am a warrior and I guess that means that it is my calling to be in such situations for Kṛṣṇa . I removed the Juhu fight [from Giriraja Maharaja's book, "I'll Build You a Temple"] and so many others that so many devotees fought that were worse than mine, so these examples help me to carry on when I really want to just bury my head in the sand. Unfortunately, hyenas have a nasty habit of munching on your tail feathers if you do that little stunt.

I am also still seeking counsel and writing to many attorneys that say they do Federal civil cases but no takers at the moment. I even wrote that ISKCON temples in Hartford, Connecticut and other temples as well. I am over my head but not indigent so I cannot get a lawyer appointed to me. Defendants are able to sling paper my way but I am limited in my ability to handle this very complex case by myself. Even the DA agree with me on this being a complex case but I will keep trying to do my best and leave the rest to Kṛṣṇa . Definitely a "rhino" [to chase for Prabhupāda].

Bhakta David's goals are:

Requesting that defendants (prisons in the BOP system) accommodate Nationally, BOP-wide: (BOP=Bureau of Prison):

- 1) Meals that are vegetarian/vegan through the Certified Religious Diet that currently nationally accommodates Jewish Kosher and Muslim Halal (it won't be garlic/onion-free nor made by devotees, but still better than the other options that would have cross-contamination of animal products as an issue).
- 2) Personal altar
- 3) Offering all foodstuffs outside of the contaminated chow hall (cafeteria) with non-devotees present (that is already allowed for Jewish inmates).
- 4) Allowed to procure and wear kunti mala at all times in the BOP facilities and transit.

- 5) Acquire and use: japa bead bag, Brahmin thread, tilak clay, non-leather BOP mandated work/daytime boots, deities, deity paraphernalia, arati set, camara fan, peacock feather, handkerchief, Tulasi leaves/plant, personal kartals.
- 6) Commissary special Purchase Orders for spices, ghee, yogurt, , Tulasi leaves, holy water, etc. (for aratis).
- 7) Holy days -all 15 and Ekadasi as work prosumption days as per BOP rules.
- 8) Fast days -all as Public fasts days as done for other faith groups per BOP rules.

If you feel inspired to help David in this fight, you can either sponsor a lawyer to help Bhakta David, or—if you are a lawyer—you can offer him your services, Pro Bono. If you feel moved to do this service, please contact the prison ministry at: ISKCONPrisonMinistry@gmail.com with “David's court case” in the subject line. Thank you everyone for your support. 🌸

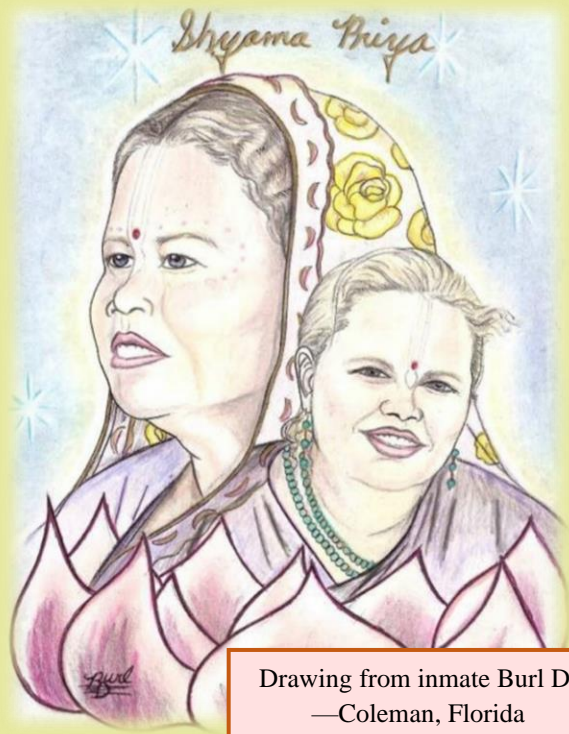


POEM CORNER

SWEET REMEMBRANCE OF MOTHER SHYAMA PRIYA

Her causeless mercy continuously uplifting me.
 My dear mother Shyama Priya you are surely missed,
 Though your grace within the heart eternally exists.
 your words of instruction, enlightenment and elevation,
 To me and many others, remaining a great inspiration
 Faithfully serving Srila Prabhupada and Lord Shri Krishna -
 the beauty of your transcendental love and devotion.
 all-encompassing compassion for every conditioned soul -
 deeper than the deepest ocean.
 Immensely grateful to have come into contact with you,
 closer to Shri Krishna in all I think, say and do.
 The blessings of a pure Vaishnava or Vaishnavi never die,
 eternal in this journey back to the Spiritual sky.
 Please accept my humble obeisances unto your grace,
 within my heart you have a very special place.
 My dear mother Shyama Priya I sincerely thank you for caring.
 this glorious gift of Krishna Consciousness ever sharing.
 boundless, causeless, truly is your genuine mercy,
 All glories to you Mother Shyama Priya, Krishna's dear pure
 devotee.

Your humble servant
Bhakta Jason M. — Fairfax, South Carolina



Drawing from inmate Burl D.
 —Coleman, Florida

Mother Shyama Priya served ISKCON Prison Ministry for twenty years and incorporated it as *Vaisnava Outreach, Inc.*, of which she was the director. She left her body in April 2009. She touched the lives of countless of inmates in the course of her service.

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:

Bhakti Rasa Dasi
Dhira Govinda Dasa
Joseph Powell
Kenneth Pastore
Krishna Kanta Dasi
Pradyumna Dasa (Scotland)
Shefali Majmudar
Uttamaśloka Das



And our monthly Donors:

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Raina Dasa
Rāma Kīśora Dāsa
Śrutadeva Dasa and Deanna
Vikram Kumar
Vraja Kishore Dasa
Yudhisthira Dasa
Anonymous (you know who you are:
thank you!)

4 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 or look for IskconPrisonMinistry@gmail.com
- 3) Donate through pay.google.com to iskconprisonministry@gmail.com
- 4) 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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