

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

May/August 2024

THE MONTHLY FREEDOM NEWSLETTER —by Bhakti-lata Dasi

Every month I compose a newsletter solely for the inmates. It is called *Freedom Newsletter* (FN). The inmates really enjoy it. It is printed in color, and Bhranti Dasi folds them, puts them in envelopes, add the stamps, and mail them to 160 inmates. Two devotees, who desire to remain anonymous, sponsor the FN's printing and mailing cost.

A few months ago, a chaplain requested 50 copies to be sent to him directly, and he personally distribute them to the inmates of his Nevada facility every month. He volunteered to be a distributor of transcendental news!

Recently, I decided to include the FN on the IPM website, for devotees to look at and for anyone to print and send to inmates they may be writing to. You can see them at this link:

<https://iskconprisonministry.org/freedom-newsletter/>

With this FN, the inmates can keep track of the Vaisnava calendar, read other inmate's writing and artwork, learn about Vaisnava saints, read about different events around the world, such as the first ever Thai bus tour, or food for life distribution in devastated areas.

Below are some of the inmates' words of appreciation for the Freedom Newsletter:

Page 1 of 9

Thank you so much for this advance copy of the newsletter. It is truly a massive improvement! Much more engaging and very inmate-oriented which the previous was lacking. I COULDN'T BELIEVE you saved one of my ancient earlier drawings of Srila Prabhupada. That really blew my mind. What a difference from now. Anyway I really like all the inmate quotes and it gives other inmates perspective of where they're at spiritually. You did a really great job. There was no damage to the newsletter. Really great job! Haribol!

[and a few months later:] I also received the Feb. Newsletter and continue to be impressed with the layout and content. It's very inspiring reading about other inmate's experience with KC and gives me a lot of perspective. It really is an improvement and all of the Petersburg Bhaktas who receive have commented that they like it MUCH better than the previous version. Again, thank you so much for your seva. We all so appreciate it here. You have my word, when I'm released in 2026, I will contribute and serve IPM in any manner in which you instruct me including but not limited to being an advocate for KC inmates.

Krishna Kirtan das —Petersburg, Virginia

I like the modified newsletter, especially the inclusion of inmates' letters and comments. I like everything you have done to the newsletter. PLEASE keep up the good work!!! May Sri Radha-Krishna give you all the strength and resources to continue your devotion and service.

Rakesh P. —Graceville, Florida

As to the Freedom Newsletter, it is amazing and really nice.

David Burkman, Danbury, Connecticut

The newsletters are phenomenal and the other aspiring devotees that get it here absolutely love reading them! Most of the guys here that are

aspiring devotees are intellectually attracted and enjoy reading on the topics.

David Burkman, Danbury, Connecticut

I have received your monthly newsletter "Freedom Newsletter". It was wonderful to read, thank you. I

especially liked the letters from other inmates in prison. You all are providing such a wonderful service to us. I can't describe to you how much it means to get a letter, book, or magazine in the mail from a devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Bless you all. I have also introduced my cell mate to Kṛṣṇa consciousness; he seems to appreciate it. If he is further interested I will give him your address.

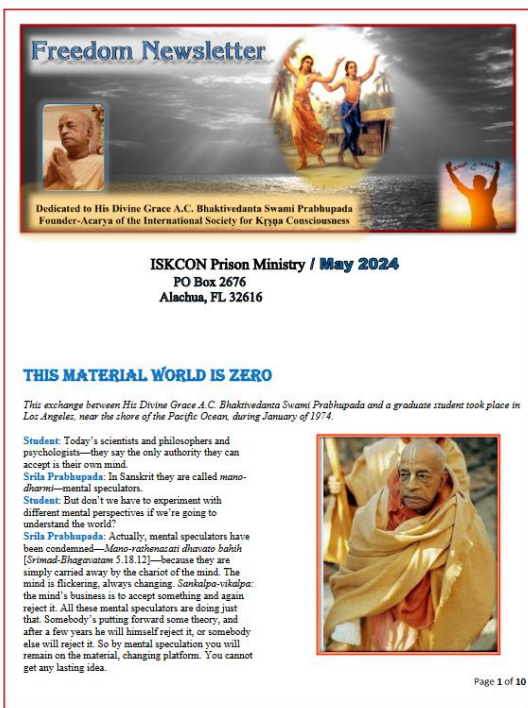
Thank you for your help. May this letter find you in the best of health, blissfully chanting the holy names. Hare Kṛṣṇa! [and a few months later:] I am the only Vaisnava in my area so, when I get to read articles written by other devotees I feel inspired and

supported when trying to get through those difficult times. I am especially thankful to those who dedicate their time and effort in helping prison bhaktas get closer to God/Lord Kṛṣṇa. I eagerly wait each month to hear from other devotees and relish every word written about the Lord and bhakti yoga. I humbly request to stay on the mailing list of the Freedom Newsletter to help me continue to grow and develop in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I am very dedicated to the love of the Lord and to serve the servants of the servant of Lord Kṛṣṇa, even if it is just by reading the heartfelt work of his devotees and writing back when I can. Reading the Freedom Newsletter will help me maintain Kṛṣṇa consciousness and help me associate with other Vaisnavas.

James W. —Susanville, California

I like the new Freedom Newsletter format. It has always been nice to read and very informative but now it is even better. I hope Bhakti-lata receives help soon but in the meantime, I will personally enjoy reading what she does with the newsletter.

David H. —Petersburg, Virginia



Being able to read his [Srla Prabhupada's] lectures and conversations in the newsletter makes me feel closer to him and feels like he is teaching me. His teachings teach me about Krishna consciousness, how to live my life, and how to be closer with Lord Krishna, and so many more things that I enjoy reading and learning about.

Brandon F. —Beeville, Texas

I like to read Prabhupada's lectures in the Freedom Newsletter. I can hear his voice when I read them, just like when I was a little boy, 6-7 years old. It makes me feel better in this place to hear his voice again.

Gregory M. C. —Jamestown, California

A HUMBLE APPEAL:

The cost of printing the 50 newsletters to the Nevada chaplain is \$83.50 a month. This new expense is not sponsored yet. I humbly invite someone to sponsor this important item. 🙏

If you feel inspired to be that sponsor, please write to me at: IskconPrisonMinistry@gmail.com



HOW I CAME TO KRṢṂA CONSCIOUSNESS

AN INQUIRY INTO LIFE AFTER DEATH LED ME TO A NEW SENSE OF FREEDOM

By inmate Andrus T. — Safford, Arizona

I want to formally thank you & 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. 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. Now there are two bhaktas on the yard, enough to register with the chaplain, for services.

At this point I had read the 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. So 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 copy of the Bhagavad-gita, and two more books as well. Bhakta Wes and I now lead a Gita study group every Saturday.

What's more, 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.

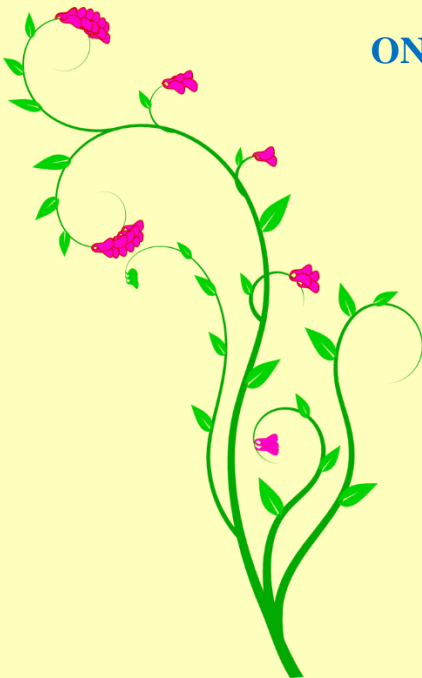
What seemed impossible at first, started to become very real. This yard was completely void of Krishna Consciousness less than three years ago, and now we have a community of seven inmates studying the Gita, with volunteer devotees on their way. If Srila Prabhupada can start a global movement with nothing, 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!

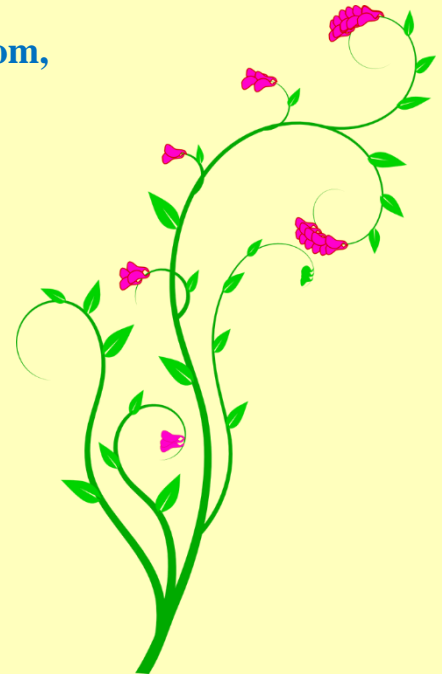
Your Humble Servant, Bhakta Andrus. 🌸



ON THE PAPER —by Jan Holmstrom,



This world is a prison house
Birth and death are real
But if there were not spirit souls
nobody would feel
Our consciousness has always been—
the atma never dies
and smaller than a molecule
is the person' size
Lord Vishnu is the Supersoul
the origin of thought
The universe is personal
It's not some empty pot
Life is not a magazine
and time is not a clock
and Kṛṣṇa's bird Garuda
is not some German hawk



Excerpts from inmates' letters

Dear ISKCON Prison Ministry,
Hare Krsna! I am writing to you today to let you know that I am being released and to let you know to cancel my newsletter and BTG subscriptions. I want to thank you for everything you have done to help increase my awareness of Krsna. The books, magazines, CDs, DVDs, and the Freedom Newsletter, have always been a huge comfort to me, and I have always found something to help me in each of them. I am grateful to Krsna for being with me these past six years, and I plan to continue my realization once I am released. I will be returning to Boston, MA, and I already have the address of the temple and plan to make it one of my first stops.

I also want to thank your organization. In seven years I have seen no one else that supports those of us in prison like you do. I know it can't be expressed fully what you have done to help us, but I want to say Thank You! They are small words, but they come from the bottom of my heart. I hope that one day I may be able to lend you some assistance in your work as a small way to show my gratitude for all you have done. Thank you again for everything you do! Hare Krsna!

Michael C. —Charleston, South Carolina

The All-Attractive feature of KRSNA is starting to draw more and more individuals seeking to know about Krishna Consciousness! I will do my best to offer truthful information and knowledge at the level of my current understanding with Krishna's help. This is how I am repaying the generosity of ISKCON Prison Ministry and all the staff of volunteers assigned to my training and development. It's a small gesture, but an honest and humble one with sincere desire to assist others in their journey back to Godhead. I also intend to donate a few of the titles you sent me to the library so that there may be the beginnings of a section dedicated to Krishna Consciousness learning. Many blessing for all your faithful service, you and your fellow staff provide for the prison community. It is no small task, I know, and I can say that all I have received is a true treasure in terms of my education in spiritual matters and journey back to

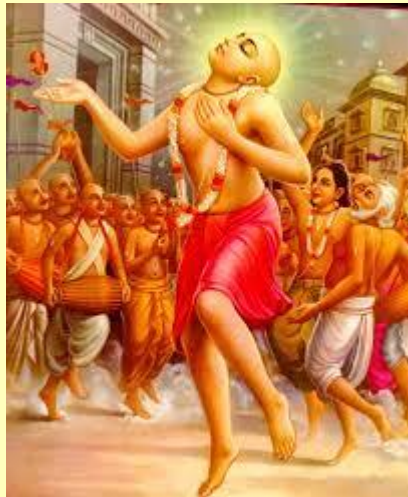
Godhead. Yes, they're just books to most, but to me they are Truth and a message from Creator to creation. Many blessings for continued successful outreach as you share the timeless message of KRSNA's grace with as many as will listen. My humble obeisances and heartfelt gratitude. Hare Krishna!

Our chaplain is still not on board with helping non-Christians acquire additional "items" (such as tilaka) with which to practice their faith. We used to have many catalogs for items such as medallions, pendants, altar items, even stationery. Now, some of those catalogs have been refused or contrabanded as an attempt to stifle the Pagans, the Heathen community, and some Eastern religions. That's not a gripe, it's the truth.

Victor R. —Kingman, Arizona

Sri Krishna, You know me better than I know myself. I wish to know You better than I do now. As you know, I have not been a good devotee, and I recognize that I have been a failure. I seek You now more than ever before. I am lost though. I have all of these ideas about who I wanted to be or become. I paid more attention to other things than I did to

You. As you know, I have proclaimed myself to be many things, but have not consistently claimed to be a Vaishnava. From this day forth, I will claim to be a devotee of Krishna, and all of Your manifestations. I was distracted by the idea that some God or another was different than You. Turns out that all of those gods and goddesses [demigods] were just a manifestation of You for some specific tasks. I thought that there was some kind of separation, but it turns out that the separation was created by Maya to deceive me. I had to look through the illusion to see the truth. All things are You. In some form or another, they are You. The heart of the matter is to chant Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. I still have difficulty with this because of myself always expecting instant results and because I am just me, here by myself. I wish that there were more devotees here so that I can break out of this uncomfortable zone. I am not shy, but for some



reason, I worry about how people will look at me if they saw me chanting. I struggle, but I promise to start doing better. I need your guidance more than before so that I may pull through. I thank You for everything that You have done thus far. I would never have made it to where I am, if not for You. A

lot of what I know is because of Your devotees. I thank You for your consistent help in keeping me on track. Though I may have failed time and again, You were there with open arms every time. And there You are now, arms open. Hare Krishna.
Bhakta Joshua S. —Jasper Florida



PANEL DISCUSSION IN NEW JERSEY

In March 2024, one of our IPM volunteers, Govindanandini dasi, Chaplain Woolever invited to participate in a panel discussion at Saint Peter's Prep School in Jersey City, New Jersey. Below is her invitation to Govindanandini prabhu.

Before I dive into it, I just want to say how moved I am by your work. It is encouraging to know that people who find themselves intertwined in our criminal justice system have access to people like you.

Each spring, St. Peter's has an Arrupe Justice Initiative. Inspired by Jesuit Pedro Arrupe. The annual event strives to raise awareness about different justice concerns and even strategize about how to become involved. Our Arrupe theme for this year is pilgrimaging in and with the prison system. I am working with twenty reflective upperclassmen to create a week of reflections and activities to help guide our Prep community on an introductory journey into the realities of the US prison system. They are really interested in learning from people who have experienced being in prison

firsthand. We understand that rejoining society after being incarcerated comes with many challenges, and thought that we could potentially get closer to the real voice of people who have or are in prison in a panel discussion with persons who have provided religious and spiritual care to inmates.



The school itself is affiliated with the Catholic tradition, but students were enthused by the idea of hearing from people of other religious traditions.

Chaplain Susan Woolever —New Jersey

Below is a description of the event itself, by Govindanandini prabhu.

I have been one of the ISKCON Prison Ministry volunteers since 2013, corresponding with prison inmates via letters, email and phone calls. I assist them in navigating their spiritual journey using Srila Prabhupada's books and Krishna Consciousness. My role involves writing letters, answering questions, encouraging and supporting inmates who show interest in reading Srila Prabhupada's books.

Recently I was invited to participate in a panel discussion at Saint Peter's Prep School in



Jersey City, New Jersey. There, on Wednesday, March 20th, I had the opportunity to speak about ISKCON Prison Ministry's contributions. The Catholic High School arranged a program to introduce their students to the realities of the US prison system and raise awareness about the challenges faced by inmates through an interfaith discussion panel. This panel included individuals who have experience working with the prison population for religious and spiritual care. I represented the Hindu faith and ISKCON Prison Ministry on this panel, alongside a Christian Pastor, a Muslim Imam, and a New Jersey Assemblyman. I elaborated on how ISKCON Prison Ministry provides a holistic spiritual support program to inmates and helps create a platform for them to practice the 'spiritual dimension' in their lives. I also shared how the Ministry volunteers celebrate

inmates' spiritual progress by publishing—in the monthly *Freedom Newsletter*—their devotional expressions through writings, poems, and art. It was a proud moment for me to speak about the IPM volunteer community, which serves the mission of Srila Prabhupada, as encapsulated in his quote, "The holistic cure for society's ills, both individually and collectively, is to give an equal chance to all to practice spirituality and to understand the love of God."

Due to the nature of this student assembly, there wasn't much scope for comments or questions afterwards, though the atmosphere was one of appreciation. The organizers were very grateful and happy that the Hindu faith was represented there, so that their students could have the perspective from a non-Abrahamic religion as well.



CHAPLAIN'S APPRECIATION

1/2024

For your information, so far this year I have given out 40 copies of the Gita and 102 other books that you have sent to me. Thank you for your support!!

David David O'Rourke—Inmate Support Services for Boulder County Jail

1/30/24

I wanted to let you know we received your generous donations and are extremely grateful! Thank you again for investing into our community!

Blessings,

Chaplain Cathy Romero—Denver Women's C.F. Colorado

12/21/23

I have a gentleman who has been bringing in your newsletter and other materials for years for self-study and he was wondering what is available to be sent in for communal use, like DVDs/music/or lectures, that our facility could have available for group worship. We have been talking for a few months and he is hoping to get something started at our Religious Center sometime in the next year. I browsed your website and did not readily see an order form for the items he was talking about, but did see a mention of items on the home page. Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing back.

1/16/24

We can accept all of the items you are able to offer. Just to let you know we have basically four facilities in one. We have the Reception center, the Treatment center, a Medical/Mental health center, and a maximum-security center; all of these groups do not mix or rarely mix due to the necessities of each population. I can share the items you are able to send our way so the men here can have access to the information if you are limited to what can be sent to a single facility. We have a new blue-ray player that accommodates several media formats so CDs, MP3s, and DVDs will all work. The men here are allowed hardbound books, thank you for asking. While I have not had anyone recently ask for books like these in Spanish our Spanish speaking population has been on the rise this last year so I would say that would be a good item to have. Any backorder magazines would be wonderful as well since all of the information would be new to the men in

here. The 18-book volume would be helpful for the Reception and Treatment sides I would think; we might need to revisit this in about 2 or 3 years when our hospital ward is completed.

The men across my facility love having newsletters and we make sure there is room for the newsletters for the men to grab. Since this will be a fairly new belief for many of the men I would think about 50 would be good for now, but we will update you as time goes. We will also make use of our libraries here to reach as many men as possible with your publication..

2/16/24

This is exciting news for sure! Thank you very much for sending these as I know some of the men who have recently asked about the material will be excited when I have the chance to inform them. Thank you for the kindness and compassion for the gentlemen under my care.

3/1/24

We have received a few of the boxes so far and the men here who are interested in ISKCON have been extremely excited for the new material. Thank you very much as this has brought great joy to the men who sincerely wish to practice and learn.

Robert Rucker / Religious Coordinator --Nebraska Department of Corrections Services

3/4/24

I am the Chaplain at a juvenile facility in the Northern region of Indiana. We spoke about 18 months ago, as I was serving in a nearby adult facility (Miami Correctional). I truly appreciate the magazines, DVDs, books and prayer beads you provided at that time. The individuals that received those items were truly grateful, as I constantly rotated magazines around the facility for them. We had about 6 that were Hindu, and many others who were curious of the beliefs.

As we don't have the largest population of Hindu or Buddhist students, we do have a few and I was hoping you could provide a small number of books for us. At this time, I have one Mahabharata, and 3 books on the Hindu beliefs for the students. Being so limited, I can't really give the books to the students. Is there a chance I could ask for a few copies of the Mahabharata, and/or the Ramayana? This would be to give to the students as a gift as they in-process and allow them to keep these books as a gift from the donor organization.

We only receive 2-4 students a year that define as Hindu/ Buddhist, but I believe it would mean a lot for them to have these items to support their faith beliefs. I don't believe we can use a large number of magazines, but maybe 5 or 6 to hold onto for the students to read in the Chapel.

I have 2 library sections. 1 is full of over 1,000 books for the incarcerated to have. Then I have another with about 200 books, I call the Theology Corner, where they can come to chapel just to read about the religions, but can't take them.

That is a great blessing. Always a gift of enlightenment for others. We would enjoy the magazines, the incarcerated students can learn a great deal from them. Some of our students are not well educated, so a magazine may be better for them.

Chaplain Christopher Back — Logansport Juvenile Correctional Facility, Logansport, Indiana

5/23/24

I wanted to let you know I received the materials and am grateful that you are willing to send them to us. I have requests for the Gita's so they will be gone in a few. The men and women who were requesting them will be very happy to receive them. Many places will not donate because they have no hope for this population! Thank you for having both hope and compassion! Thank you for showing it with your donation of materials!

Chaplain Lewis Kyle —Inverness Jail, Portland, Oregon



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:

Anthony Keiser, inmate —Pennsylvania
Ananda Kṛṣṇa Dasi
Bharat Das & Atmanandini Dasi
Cheryl Travers
Casey Heavlin, inmate —Colorado
Govindanandini Dasi
Guillermo Novoa, inmate —Nevada



Hector Colon, inmate —Florida
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Raina Dasa
Rāma Kīśora Dāsa
Śrutadeva Dasa and Deanna
Vikram Kumar
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.

We will send you a **tax-deductible receipt** at the moment of the donation, provided you give us your legal name and mailing address.

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