

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

Jan/April 2026

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES!

By Bhakti-lata Dasi

Another year under our belt, and a new one starting, full of new opportunities for service! I am so grateful to Srila Prabhupada for giving me this chance to keep serving the prison ministry in this way. Next April will mark 17 years since Mother Shyama Priya left us and her asking her son, Nimai, to give me the reins of the prison ministry. I felt so honored at the time and still feel honored to this day.

One thing I love about this service is that it is always new and fresh; it always presents new challenges and new avenues to be explored. It's a great channel for creativity and for pushing the boundaries of one's comfort zone.



ABOVE: Bhakti-lata Dasi, holding 80 letters from inquisitive inmates eager to learn about Krishna.

The reason I was so attracted to this service in the first place is that I had a great desire to please Srila Prabhupada by distributing his books. However, my introverted and overly shy nature had never allowed me to do so. In 1992, when I first heard about the prison ministry, I felt I had been struck by lightning; I could distribute books and preach one on one, without having to face strangers on the street! I just knew that was the service I had been yearning for.

Still, there were some obstacles I had to overcome. Making phone calls to chaplains was one of them; believe it or not, that was very



intimidating for me (shy and introvert, remember?). But do something enough times and you become accustomed

to it; it's not a big deal anymore. Krsna, from within our heart, gives us the strength, ability, and intelligence to do what we need to do for our service. I have grown so much while doing what was needed for my service. Giving Krsna to others brings about as much growth for oneself as for others. All devotees know that sharing Krsna with others strengthens our own realizations, conviction, and faith.

Preaching gives us one more reason to practice seriously; it spurs us to try harder, be better, because to be in integrity with ourselves, we must live what we preach.

This service colors everything I do. For example, when I read, or hear a class, or even see enlivening spiritual content on Facebook or YouTube, I always make notes of points I can share in my letters to inmates or of what I can print in the monthly *Freedom Newsletter*.

Reading with a view to sharing with others shifts our learning from passive absorption to active engagement; it strengthens our memory and allows us to share what we learn to benefit others. While reading for oneself deepens our individual knowledge and realizations, reading to share with others enriches everyone involved.

The same goes for journaling. For many years I do my best to follow Prabhupada's advice:

"Every one of you. What is your realization? You write your realization – what you have realized about Krishna. That is required. It is not passive. Always you should be active. Whenever you find time, write. Never mind – two lines, four lines, but you write your realizations."

Srila Prabhupada Los Angeles 1970

My experience is that writing deepens and even expands our realizations. I type my reflections so that it is easy to copy and paste them in my correspondence with inmates. What I noticed time and time again is that sharing my own journey touches the inmates on a very personal level and, on occasion, brings them closer to where they're at themselves. For example, when I shared that, while chanting, my mind is often all over the place, one inmate responded that when he read that, he scornfully judged me as not being advanced (he was right on the money on that one). He felt superior, beyond this kind of weakness. But then, during the day, reflecting on the subject, it suddenly dawned on him that he was in the same boat himself. Somehow, sharing my struggles lifted his



veil of self-deception, and he saw where he was truly at. It made him more realistic about himself and inspired him to make

a greater effort to chant attentively. This exchange confirmed to me that sharing our weaknesses is as important as sharing our strengths.

I also encourage inmates to write their own realizations daily. One inmate, in particular, Bhakta David B., follows this advice diligently and his realizations are a pleasure to read. You can read an excerpt from his journal on page 7.

I am so grateful to all the devotees who make this service possible, those who write inmates, help with the website, sponsor items for IPM and donate laksmi and books, type documents, etc. It takes a village to raise souls to the level of bhakti!

[Don't forget to look at IPM's 2025 book distribution results on page 6.](#)

All glories to Srila Prabhupada! 🌸



Most of you are aware that, in 2024, the Florida prison system banned the Bhagavad-gita As It Is. We were first alerted to this ban by inmates, and I later confirmed this by calling many Florida prison mailrooms. This decision was taken by the Literary Review Committee (LRC). The reason given is that “It is written in code or otherwise written in a manner that is not reasonably subject to interpretation by the [prison] staff,” and that it is “a security risk.” It seems that they are referring to the Sanskrit verses.

Our devotee lawyers, Amarendra and Balavanta prabhus, have generously offered to take this case pro-bono, providing IPM pays for the filing fees and traveling expenses. The first step was to try and resolve this problem out of court. After a few attempts at doing so and receiving no reply whatsoever, the court is the only option left. There is a lot of information to gather before taking such an action and Amarendra prabhu recently told me that they will probably be ready to file the lawsuit in a few weeks, in Tallahassee, Florida. Prabhupada liked a good fight for Krsna; this is a chance to please him.

The tricky part is that you will not find evidence of this ban in writing; neither on the FLDOC website, nor on the LRC list of banned books. This means it is not possible to bring this case on their doorstep. However, a viable option is to file a case against one of the prisons in which one inmate, Bhakta Rakesh, accepted to be a plaintiff. This inmate has already gone through the required steps of filing a “grievance” and is ready to be part of this fight in Prabhupada’s service. He is taking a risk of retaliation within his prison, so that is a very courageous thing for him to do. Already, the prison staff recently tried to prevent his wife and nephew from visiting him, as they are used to doing every week. Fortunately, his nephew didn’t back down, and, in the end, they let them in.

In November, I received an email from Richa Ravindra Karmarkara, a reporter for the national outlet, Religion News Service.

“I recently came across your efforts to reverse a ban on the Bhagavad-gita in Florida prisons, and I would love to speak with anyone involved with ISKCON's prison ministry about this!”

We had a long phone interview, and, as a result, Richa published this article in January:

<https://religionnews.com/2026/01/21/florida-inmates-can-not-obtain-a-hindu-holy-text/>

There are a few minor errors (I have been serving IPM only for 22 years, not 40), but the article is really well written and very supportive. Furthermore, the Religion News Service is a wire service which means that many news outlets subscribe to them and publish some of their articles, so the initial audience may grow.

Another organization reached out to us and offered their support in this righteous fight; the Hindu American Foundation, based in Philadelphia. We will be in contact very soon.

Amarendra prabhu feels assured that this suit will attract more and more support from groups of different denominations, because if the Bhagavad-gita As It Is is under attack, it’s only a matter of time before sacred texts from other religions come under the LRC’s discriminatory microscope.

We continue our fundraising to cover the costs of filing and traveling. Up to now, our campaign on the fundraising platform, *betterworld*, has raised \$2,800, thanks to 30 of our well-wishers; you can read all their names on the campaign website (see link at the end of this article), and some have donated through PayPal. My sincere thanks to all of you.

If you haven’t done so already, please help us in this great battle to bring the Bhagavad-gita As It Is to the Florida inmates. And please spread the word!

Another way you can support this cause is by writing a letter of support. What to include in your letter? There are many points you can choose to write on: your own appreciation and effect of BG in your life; your experience seeing others’ lives transform; how widely read and appreciated BG is, how crucial BG is to people in prison, etc., etc. There is no particular format; write what you feel inspired to share. On page 4, you can read the wonderful letter written by an ex-inmate.

If you wish to donate in support of this court case, you can do so either through:

- the *betterworld* fundraising site.
- through **PayPal**.

If you choose the **PayPal** option, please write a note with your donation, specifying that you are donating to help with this court case.

IPM's PayPal handle is:
IskconPrisonMinistry@gmail.com

betterworld fundraising web page:
<https://iskconprisonministry.betterworld.org/campaigns/gitaban>

As things develop, I will keep you updated on the progress of this court case.

Exciting times ahead! 🌸



LETTER OF SUPPORT

To whom it may concern,

My name is Scott and I'm an addict. An addict in recovery. I'll be celebrating 20 years clean this year. As you may imagine, at the end of my using, there wasn't much left of me as a person.

I was very fortunate and by nothing short of a miracle, I found myself in a drug and alcohol treatment center, having been given a charitable bed.

I was introduced to the 12-step program of Narcotics Anonymous. As you may know, this is a spiritual program and has worked for many thousands of people throughout the world since the 1930's and began in the USA.

However, I struggled with this concept because of one little word within the Steps, GOD. I had no concept of God and found the very idea repugnant, especially coming from a life of crime and violence. Yet, the belief in a divine, loving higher Power was crucial for me to recover from such a destructive force from which I was powerless.

In all the 12-step recovery literature, the word 'God' is followed by the words "of my own understanding." For me this was a life saver and gave me the freedom to search for something I could relate to too. The Western belief systems were not working for me, and believe me, I tried.

Then I found the *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is* by A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

As soon as I started reading it, I knew I had found something special that I could not only relate to but also understand. This was the missing connection to my 12-step program and, ultimately, to God. A loving, caring, divine Power that I could look to for inspiration and guidance.

Here in the UK, I work in construction. I work in schools and hospitals and am able to give back to society from which I used to only take. I consider the Bhagavad-Gita the turning point for me. The key that connects me to God and allowed me to recover. God is found in many different ways, when people are lost, but all paths lead to Him, and this was the way for me.

Please don't deny others the chance to turn their lives around. The distribution of the Bhagavad-Gita within the prison system could just be the key for someone to change their lives. This would not only help them but surely this would be helpful to society itself. Thank you for reading. Hare Krishna.

Scott Bayliss —Cambridge, England



THE ELECTRONIC MAIL ERA IS THERE TO STAY —by Bhakti-lata Dasi

In 2019, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PADOC) transitioned to an all-electronic mail system, followed, in 2021, by the Florida Department of Correction (FLDOC). I intuited that it may become a trend, and unfortunately, it has. Most States now have electronic mail. In some institutions, it's only an option; in others, it is the only option.

Unfortunately, it means inmates can no longer hold physical letters from their loved ones or drawings from their kids. All mail is scanned, then uploaded to the inmate's electronic tablet provided by their institution. And if an inmate doesn't have a tablet, they can go to the

prison email kiosk. If they are not allowed to go to the kiosk, their mail is scanned, then printed in black and white and given to him/her in person.

Since the transition to electronic mail, many closed prison email systems were created; CorrLinks, Securus, JPay, TextBehind, GettingOut, SmartMail, and more. I personally created accounts for all the above systems. It's a bit difficult to keep track of them all, but some offer email notifications when a new message is sent. It is not as satisfying for the inmate to receive or for us to write, but we must make the best of a bad bargain. Some systems allow us to upload pictures, and sometimes I do so. Some systems, like GettingOut, only allow about 200 words or less per message, so sending a more detailed letter means sending many small messages. Each message sent costs an electronic stamp, as well as each picture uploaded. Thankfully, these stamps are not as expensive as USPS stamps. Electronic stamps can range between 2¢ to 12¢.

PRABHUPADA'S ELECTRONIC BOOKS

Most inmates are now limited to the books uploaded on their tablets. Thanks to the hard work of Premananda prabhu, in June 2024, many of Prabhupada's books and audio tracks uploaded to *Edovo*, one of the main companies that uploads material on the inmates' tablets. Unfortunately, some States use other uploading companies, so we

cannot reach everyone, but we are reaching 1,428 different prisons with 216 which are pending development.

On the link below, you can see, in real time, statistics of how many inmates opened which book, newsletter, or audio file, and how many completed them. For example, as I am writing this, the book *Beyond Birth and Death* was opened by 4,980 inmates and completed by 851 inmates. It's very encouraging. Among those who didn't complete a book, some may have read most of the content, and some just a fraction, but for all of them, their journey has started; they have read the words of a



pure devotee of the Lord and this benefit is securely locked in their spiritual bank account.



Link to live statistics:

<https://app.periscopedata.com/shared/06a20aa8-f038-4aa0-903f-8788e3b43c50?>

If you are interested in reading more about prison email systems, how they impact inmates and how they work, you can follow the two links below.

https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2024/09/16/prison_banned_book_week/

https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2022/11/17/mail_scanning/#:~:text=We%20found%2014%20state%20prison,in%20some%20of%20its%20facilities



**2025
IPM BOOK DISTRIBUTION**

Śrīla Prabhupāda's Books total: 2,423

Breakdown:

Booklets: 1,390

Small: 952

Medium: 107

Big: 194

Maha-Big: 640

Books by other devotee authors: 157

BTGs: 4,117

Freedom Newsletters: 2,210

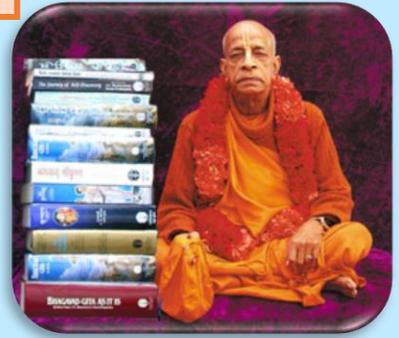
BBT Art Calendars: 70

CDs: 82

DVDs: 16

Japa Malas: 16

Neck beads: 2



**GRAND TOTAL of all
Books and BTGs combined: 6,697**
Śrīla Prabhupāda, ke, Jaya!!!

Chaplains' Appreciation

11/22/25

I want to express our thanks and appreciation for donation material; that has allowed us to significantly increase the number of religious materials available to the inmates. Sincerely,

**Dr. Debra White, Chaplain Services Manager
Broward Sheriff's Office, Fort Lauderdale, Florida**

9/1/25

I'm interested in our Chapel Library receiving copies of the resources that you offer that can be of benefit to the inmates that come to our chapel services and educational programs. They will either be available to check out at the library and if in bulk they will be donated to those interested in the topics you have.

I know that there are men here that find comfort and encouragement in all the books you provide. Your ministry is a valuable tool for helping these men to cope with the situations that the prison environment brings. Also, if there is a way they can get direct mail, it could be looked into approvals to do so.

Thank you for the support your organization provides to the men here.

Okeechobee C.I., Miracle Chapel, Florida

Letter forwarded to IPM from the BTG office, from the same chaplain:

I am writing from our chapel library of the Okeechobee C.I. and would like to enrich the literature that we offer to our camp. I had gotten a magazine from you guys, and it has been welcomed by some inmates. I would like to ask for the possibility to have some donated issues that we can share with them; at this time, they read them in the library. We have Spanish and English population that can take advantage of these great teachings you can provide. Our inmate population is approximately 1,700 inmates at this main institution and 400 at our sister re-entry center. I know that there are men here that find comfort and encouragement in all the books you provide. your ministry is a valuable tool for helping these men to cope with the situations that the prison environment brings.

Thank you for the support your organization provides to the men here at Okeechobee Correctional Institution's Miracle Chapel. May God bless you and keep us in your prayers.

Rev. E. Botley

EXCERPT FROM BHAKTA DAVID'S JOURNAL

May/June 2025

I am shocked and saddened by how much violence surrounds me. It is in the words people speak such as putting each other down, us versus them, and just general conversation of dominating over others. This is not just because I am in federal prison either, as I see on the television, the telephone with family and friends, and in the video games the guys play on their tablets.

I am struggling to not take in this darkness and redirecting my thoughts and trying to correct my speech. I find that the more I chant and read/understand, the more I am recognizing this violence and darkness and the more I want Krsna's light. It is not easy at all, but I keep trying.

When I am feeling down and realize it is my attachment to family, to the past, and what—according to society—I have lost, I find that my reading, especially the Bhagavad-gita, reminds me that societies' bombardment of what life should be is not a path that will bring lasting relief and I should not lament because I gained and not lost by not having such material entanglements. No, the only true relief from it all is surrendering to Krsna and begging His mercy. For me, it is a daily struggle to do this, but I am a fighter and will not give up. If I do, only darkness awaits and I am tired of myself and others being in pain because of it.

I need to read more spiritual material and less materialistic stuff, especially novels. I know they are not beneficial to my spiritual advancement, yet they are like a drug that is hard to quit. Yet nobody who has done major changes has ever said that change is easy.

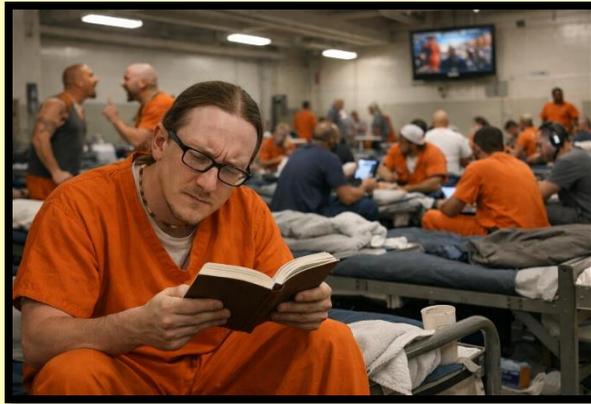
I am struggling right now to chant mindfully, without letting all the distractions around me in. *[At the time David was living in an open dorm, with maybe a hundred inmates, with loud TV and radios, and loud talking and yelling]* I am trying to chant my japa more in the early morning, if possible, but

I need to put in more effort in my rounds and correct my wandering monkey mind more often.

I have been letting my broken relationship with my sister overwhelm me, even to the point of utter despair. I finally realized my foolishness and sought the light of Krsna by reading Srila Prabhupada's books and delving deeper into the Bhagavad-gita, because even though I understand it on an intellectual level, embracing the teachings and following them are not the same thing.

I have come to realize that I want to help bring light into this world. I want to dedicate the rest of this life to such endeavors and spiritual advancement not just for myself but for others too.

I read to remember that the more I devote my time to the spiritual, the more at peace I find myself, and Krsna definitely eases my burdens when I turn towards Him. Yet, I am still a foolish wayward child at times and forget. Thankfully, I am at least reminded, in various ways, and I come to my senses—or rather away from them—and back to what really matters.



I am surrounded by noise in here, with few ways to get away from it. I play a game where I pretend it is all white noise in the background, then my mind begins to believe it is and I can read, chant, and listen to bhajans on my tablet. It is really just dependent on which I want to partake in; the materialistic or the spiritual and which of these I want to pay attention to and which I want to ignore. I have ignored the spiritual for too much and I paid too much attention to the false promises of the materialistic offerings of this society. In doing so I have experienced a lot of pain and caused a lot of pain; neither of which I wanted to do. This is darkness that can only be fought through the spiritual light of Krsna and I now realize this thanks to Srila Prabhupada and his followers who taught me Krsna's mercy is available even to one as fallen as I am.

David Burkman —Danbury, Connecticut



Inmate Artwork



RIGHT and BELOW: "The Sacred Cow" and "India",
by Michael P. —Lima, Ohio



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

For Donations:

- 1) PayPal handle: ISKconPrisonMinistry@gmail.com
- 2) 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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