

Recollections of Srila Prabhupada in Hawaii, 1976

Letter from Syamasundara dasa

Please accept my best wishes, and most humble obeisances. All glories to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Where would any of us be had He not so mercifully come to the West? What would any Westerner know about Krishna, Vrindavan, the Maha Mantra, or Prasadam? So many things...

I was living on the East coast of the United States in 1976 when I heard that Prabhupada was going to Honolulu. I was ready to “get warm”, and also spend some time with my most merciful Guru. I flew to California to visit the devotees in San Francisco; my old stomping grounds. Jayananda was there, and so many devotees that had helped shape my Spiritual life. Then I flew to Honolulu, and was delighted to see Prabhupada again. I wasn’t planning on staying for long, but I got to sleep just outside His door on the balcony. I could lay down, and tilt my head back, and watch Him working at His desk almost the whole night long. He did so much translating there at that Temple.

One morning I think it was May 1976; Siddhasvarupa dasa came to visit. I have never had good interactions with Him, and I honor Him from a distance. I had met Him in Lahaina, Maui previously, and had always been treated with disrespect from Him. I was pretty “delicate”, and have always had a very long sikha. I used to hear comments from Siddha about it, and the attachment He thought I had about it whenever He saw me. Prabhupada said not to worry. That there were worse things to have attachment for. I heard Him say that on several occasions when someone criticized one of us for the length of our sikhas.

One day Prabhupada was trying to gently persuade Siddha to “get with the program”. Siddha used to actually challenge Prabhupada; that maybe Siddha’s ideas were superior to His Spiritual Master’s plans. It was really immature, and un-believable how He carried on. Anyway one day I was standing by Prabhupada’s window overlooking His private garden; when Siddha came in. He was whining about all of the “pretty boys”, and Homos in ISKCON. Prabhupada just let Him vent, and didn’t say much of anything. After a while Siddha just left. He didn’t get the reaction He had wanted.

Prabhupada sat at His desk for a while.



I was feeling really angry at Siddha, but also self-conscious about my own sexuality.

Prabhupada just sat there quietly, and deep in thought for awhile. He looked over at me briefly and said, “What is the difference if a person is held in this Material World by a gold chain, or a silver chain?”

I said “I don’t know Prabhupada.”

He then said “I am glad that Siddha Swarupa is chanting, and reading my books.

“But He is always focusing on everybody else, and not on the Supreme Person.

“That’s the important thing.”

From the early days in San Francisco I saw so many people come to the Temple, Kirtans, etc... There were many Gay, and Lesbian people. Prabhupada was always aware that these people were among His audience.

He always seemed to not give it a whole lot of notice. I know it probably seemed a bit “strange” to Him at some level, but He didn’t like any of His disciples to make comment about it. I hope this little slice of ISKCON History is interesting to you. I know that Prabhupada knew my sexual identity; but I never, ever felt anything but love; equal in every way with the love He displayed, and felt for any other person so fortunate to come to Krishna Consciousness in this lifetime. That’s the real thing, isn’t it?

Your friend, supporter, and servant.

Syamasundara dasa

