

Anonymous is a disciple of Swami Aseshananda.

Written submission.

Initiation Accounts

After a few summers of visiting with Swami Aseshananda on trips with my parents, I approached the swami for initiation with all the gravity a ten year-old boy could muster. “I shall have to ask the Mother,” was his reply. For the next few days, in the familiar style of an annoying little kid, I would tug on his shoulder and ask, “Did you talk to Mother yet?”

Repeated pestering finally brought Swami to my parents. “This boy thinks that I can just walk into a room and talk to the Mother. It takes four or five hours of meditation to achieve this.” At the time, I thought nothing of this response, but now, decades later, this seems hard to even believe. To think that after four or five hours of meditation Swami Aseshananda could converse with the Divine Mother . . . it is beyond my comprehension.

A few more days rolled around, and one morning he came down the stairs from his room, glowing and stammering almost incomprehensibly. He told my father, “Go and buy new clothes and bring the boy to the shrine before he eats breakfast.”

“Swami!” my father burst out, “You talked to the Mother!”

“Shhh!!” Swami hissed back. “Never say that!”

My story is by no means unique. I know a devotee who, about five years after these events, started coming around the center and eventually decided he wanted to be initiated. He finally got up the courage to approach Swami and ask for initiation. Swami snapped at him: “Mother hasn’t said anything about you yet!” A few weeks later he was initiated.

Again, when he told me this back in the late 1980s, I didn’t think much about it. Now, it seems, like the previous anecdote, too much to digest, and the idea that I took it for granted seems impossible. Still, that’s how it was.

Around this time (circa 1989), two women came to meet Swami. They managed to get a private audience with him, and as far as I recall it was their first meeting. One of the women was telling Swami about herself, when Swami said, “Shhh, Holy Mother is saying something.” There was a long pause, as Swami looked off into the distance.

I've seen these pauses myself and watched Swami look off into some middle distance many times in my own interviews with him, and I always had the feeling he was being "Informed" or "Instructed" or something. On one occasion, I watched him even semi-audibly respond to what seemed like the "News" he was being given about me.

Anyway, after looking off in the distance for a while, he turned to the other woman (not the speaker) and said, "Would you like to be initiated?"

Aside from the obvious and staggering implications of these stories, the chronology is interesting. It seems as though, over those ten years, Swami's perception of Holy Mother became increasingly immediate: from four or five hours of meditation, to waiting for her word, to being stopped in mid-sentence.

It seems quite probable that Swami consulted the Divine Mother for all his initiations. Many people came to him for initiation after he got sick in 1990, and they were uniformly turned down. This went on for a few years, until one unknown Indian boy showed up, whom Swami initiated in his room without hesitation. [Editorial note: One or two devotees mentioned they were given mantras without a shrine initiation during this period.]

Swami's scoldings were also interesting in their allocation. I never got scolded, and this was always a source of anxiety to me. Other people got scolded, but at times (over the years of pilgrimage after my initiation) it seemed that Swami just ignored me. Finally one day, at the age of twenty, I had the temerity to more-or-less intentionally anger him, and it worked. It worked better than I could ever have hoped or feared! I felt like the whole house was shaking, and the very foundations of my egotistical self were in jeopardy of collapsing. I wept, sobbed, groveled, prayed, and finally threw myself at his feet and begged his forgiveness. At this, all his anger was gone, and he was full of grace, as the Master [Sri Ramakrishna] says: "Just like a line on water."

I say interesting in allocation, because the man in the second anecdote told me that he had hardly set his foot in the door for the first time before Swami started chewing on him. I myself occasionally saw that their relationship was a series of scoldings.

During one extended visit, probably of about two weeks, Swami came down from his room everyday for breakfast, said the chant, and then said, "Mr. Thomas, you go call (some woman)." Mr. Thomas would then get up from the table, go to the phone, call the woman saying, "Swami is calling." He would then go find Swami and say, "Swami, (some woman) is on the phone." Swami would then go pick up the phone and proceed to rip (some woman) to shreds for what seemed like forever. Probably it lasted only a few minutes, but to me it was an unbelievable pounding. But then, obviously, my skin is thin, which I think is why Swami never scolded me like that. That's my only explanation, since I know I've earned as many scoldings as any of his other disciples.

It seems to me, and I thought this in other contexts over the years as I watched Swami, that he simply did not see the same world, or the same people, that I saw. He said one day to Mr. Bush, "I see you all as though you were painted on glass." Swami knew who couldn't take his scoldings, and he knew who could.

Obviously we were fantastically lucky to have come in contact with such a soul. I hope that these initiation stories will provide some inspiration for those who read them. Conceivably many disciples of his know these things, but if there's even one disciple to whom these stories are a revelation, I will be very grateful that I could share them. I know that now, in India, people are initiated hundreds at a time, and that's really the only option given the numbers. How lucky we were to have had this uniquely intimate contact with such a man!

Submitted April 2008