

Anonymous, a disciple of Swami Aseshananda, has lived primarily in California.

Interviewed and recorded in California.

Devotee [quietly told, with eyes closed in reverence]:

Probably the greatest blessing in my life is coming into the orbit of Swami Aseshanandaji. He is in my heart and mind. When I wake up in the morning he is with me, throughout the day he is with me, and he's with me when I go to sleep.

In truth, it is Swami Aseshanadaji who occupies my heart. It's a blessing to have known him and to have received diksha [mantra initiation] from him. So many people, when they talk about Maharaj [Swami Aseshananda], will refer lovingly to his scoldings and interchanges they had with him over the years; but I wanted to mention anonymously an experience I had with him which demonstrates the spiritual power that he wielded.

I was in Portland attending a Sunday lecture. Maharaj was giving, as usual, the Sunday lecture. Throughout the lecture he stared at me continuously. For a while I thought it was my imagination, but his eyes were riveted on me throughout the entire talk. After the lecture, people in the congregation mentioned to me, "You know, that entire lecture was given for you." And I smiled and it was a very special time and experience. That was the beginning.

As always, lunch was served later on and somewhere between the lecture and lunch, inwardly I started to feel—I'll call it a jerk—but it was an inward jerk. It's very hard to verbalize. My body wasn't jerking, but inwardly I felt this jerk continuously, continuously.

After lunch, Swami as usual came around to give prasad [food offered in the shrine], and when he got to me, he looked at me and stopped from giving me the prasad. He stared at me for a while. I knew *he* knew that something was going on. He didn't say anything. He then gave me the prasad.

I was up in Portland for a few more days. This jerking that I referred to gradually subsided. I've never been a resident of Portland, so it came for me to leave and go home.

When I was at home, a few days later I got up for my morning meditation. I was not feeling devotional—it was just a typical day of meditating. I sat down, and my mind pulled in—it was definitely separated from my body, yet still connected. It startled me, and I certainly had never experienced anything of that nature before.

At that point, a *tremendous, tremendous* vibration coursed through me and my mind, which had been, I'll say, in part disconnected from the body; my mind was totally pulled into that vibration. *Sucked in!*

The breath dissolved, everything dissolved into that vibration. The breath stopped, but it wasn't holding the breath. The breath *dissolved*. That's the only the word I can use, the sensation was The breath dissolved into that vibration and I was petrified. I clung to Thakur's [Sri Ramakrishna's] feet. The feeling was being pulled *inward, inward, inward*. While clinging to Thakur's feet, I would repeat my mantram, which I clung to as well. Each time I repeated the mantram, when I repeated the bija, it was like the vibration was generated—it became stronger. Each time I repeated the bija the vibration became stronger and stronger, and I was pulled further and further inward. I got to the point where I started to separate from my mind, very similar in a way to when my mind separated from my body. I started to separate from my mind, I was still connected, but also there was a sense that I was separating.

The experience was I was going to a place—not spatially—but going to a place with no boundaries. Infinite expanse but not spatial: no up, no down, no backwards nor forwards, and I couldn't handle it. I'd not totally separated from my mind; the experience was too awesome for me, and I prayed to come out of it. I came out of it very quickly. When I had regained awareness of my body, throughout my body there was this intense, intense vibration felt. Even in my teeth—I could feel my teeth vibrating non-stop.

For me it was a cosmic experience and as soon as it was an appropriate time that day I called Swami Asehananda. I explained to him what happened. Here I had experienced something for me that was so awesome, so unusual. He used to say, "Ya, ya" for "yes." After I explained what happened, he said, "Ya, ya, that's good." I was awestruck by how casual his response was—to him it was *nothing*.

Gradually the vibration subsided in my body but a residual effect has always stayed. Whenever I sit for japam, the vibration starts. Sometimes it is stronger, sometimes not so strong. Always light is seen, sometimes brilliant, sometimes not so brilliant.

Having related all of this, I need to stress that it has nothing to do with me. It's in spite of me. What it has to do with is a *saint* and a spiritual power wielded by a saint. Coming to Vedanta we read how avatars, ishwarakotis [ever free souls who willingly take form] can transmit spiritual experience with a look, or with a touch. I know first hand that Swami Asehananda also had that ability.

I wanted to relay these experiences anonymously because I'm older and only the Lord knows how long I'll be around. These experiences certainly, for one who has had the experience, validate everything that is taught in Vedanta. I didn't want them lost with

my passing. So in that spirit I wanted to offer it at Maharaj's [Swami Aseshananda's] feet as a bouquet of flowers and love.

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EW: [Continuing with the interview questionnaire] How did your relationship with Swami Aseshananda evolve?

Devotee: I guess my answer to that—and I don't mean to be totally humorous, but it's probably going to come across that way—is that it evolved through scoldings, the *blessing* of his scoldings.

EW: How did Swami Aseshananda mold and impact your life?

D: He was always a comfort. He gave me direction—both in the worldly dimension and the spiritual dimension.

EW: Over time did you come to certain conclusions about Swami Aseshananda?

D: The one conclusion I came to is this: he is too great for me to understand.

EW: What were some of the essential teachings of Swami Aseshananda?

D: [sighing] Boy, he was so broad in what he imparted! I think of concrete things, as when one time he told me not to be an obstacle. [laughing]

EW: An obstacle? What did Swami mean?

D: It was after a puja and we were in the inner shrine, just coming out; I was in the hallway taking off my chuddar and I guess I was halfway blocking the hall. Swami barked at me, "Don't be an obstacle, don't be an obstacle!" In retrospect, I found a lot of humor and also a lot of logic to that remark: "Don't be an obstacle!"

EW: Was it a symbolic statement?

D: Absolutely! Not at the time, but as I thought about it more and more, it became *very* symbolic as well as practical in other fields of life. So it was both symbolic *and* practical.

EW: In other words, don't be an obstacle to yourself?

D: Yes, that's the symbolic nature. But it was also practical too, because in life one can find oneself in various positions at work or what not, and you can become an obstacle when you're trying to accomplish something—an obstacle to yourself!

EW: What were some of Swami's memorable sayings?

D: They've been quoted by so many people. I think my favorite—which he told me personally (also I think on the video of memorial service one of the swamis mentioned it): “God vision and television don't go together.” That always appealed to me since I watch a lot of television.

EW: Are there any personal stories you'd care to share?

D: In addition to what I've narrated, there is one I'll share. I'm not sure if I mentioned this one to you. I was up for Shivaratri in the late '70s or early '80s. Portland had a particularly cold winter and whatever year it was, the streets were iced over, and it was getting to the time for my plane to leave. Vera was driving me to the airport. Swami was upstairs and I was down at the bottom of the stairs. My nature is always to be early; I am always early wherever I go, and I wanted to get going to the airport especially since the streets were iced over.

I looked up to Maharaj and said, “Maharaj, can I go?” And he barked down, scoldingly like he did, “No!” And this kept on, and I really started to get worried about making my flight. Finally he looked down and said, “OK, you go, you go!” [He imitates a gruff voice.] So we went to the airport and I *barely* made my flight, but I did make it and got home OK.

For whatever reason, I had never read the story of Mother's disciples visiting in Jayrambati. Years later I read how Mother wouldn't let her disciples, who visited her at Jayrambati, leave; she loved them so much that it was painful for her to let them go. They tried to go, but she wouldn't let them. When I read those stories, it hit home. [In other words, this disciple felt Swami was showing similar regard for him. Others reported similar experiences taking leave of the Vedanta center.]

EW: How would you characterize Swami's pujas, worships, lectures, etc.?

D: All of them were immensely holy, and the pujas and worships were indescribable. I think one would have to have seen Swami do arati and puja to appreciate it. What's done in such a formal fashion in virtually all of the Vedanta centers was performed differently by Aveshanandaji. We used to call the way he would offer the various items “the frisbee method of worship,” how he would in a way toss them at the altar. [Devotee laughing] When someone once asked a senior Indian swami [name provided, but removed] about how Maharaj [Swami Aveshananda] did arati, that swami said that *he*, Swami Aveshananda, could get away with it, but no one else could!

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