

Barbara Smith, a disciple of Swami Bhaskarananda, saw Swami Aseshananda in Portland and Seattle several times beginning in the early 1980s. A long-time member of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington, Barbara is also dedicated to supporting the work of women Vedantists in the West.

Written submission.

We lived in Bellingham, WA, when our bookstore, Akasha Metaphysical Bookstore, opened around 1980, and where my husband, Stafford, tended his small law practice. We were attending the Seattle Vedanta Center when the thought came to drive along the west coast through California to meet the folks at the wholesale book companies that supplied our books, and at the same time visit the Vedanta centers along the way.

A plan was made to drive through Portland and visit a friend, David, who was studying at the Portland School of Naturopathic Medicine. At the end of the trip I would stay at the Hollywood convent for a few days before returning home.

David and I met at the Portland Vedanta Center for the Sunday service a little before 11 AM. The lecture was given by Swami Aseshananadaji who—through his riveting words—captured my being immediately. We sat in the front row and his energy seemed to pierce the very essence of my soul. No escape!

After the lecture as folks were strolling out the door, one of the members approached me and asked if I were a visitor. When I explained the journey underway he intently insisted that I should meet with the swami and turned to get his attention. It was clear that David and I were not going out the door without doing so! Not that we wanted to leave—we just had no idea we'd be meeting with the swami. The man took us to a room and asked us to wait. Shortly I was shown to a smaller room while David waited outside for his session with the swami.

A little nervous, I sat quietly not knowing what to expect or do when I should meet the man who, in the past hour, had certainly made a huge impression on my mind. In a short time, we were meeting face to face. Swamiji found the nearest chair and set it directly in front of me—so close! He asked me where I lived and where I was going. I explained that my husband and I attended the Vedanta Center in Seattle and the purpose of my present trip.

Swami quickly inquired whether I had been initiated and when I replied that we had indeed asked, but it hadn't yet occurred, he stood up and leaned over me. Out of him came a hearty and loud proclamation to go back to Seattle and seek initiation!

Swami's temperament had changed so quickly that I became overwhelmed, but also concluded that through his demonstrative love and caring, he wanted me to come closer

to Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi—and not to waste one minute!! He gave *such a command to dive deep* into the mind in order to know my true Self!! He counseled that moving from place to place would offer little benefit, and that even he hadn't been back to India since the day he'd left! What to say or do? Should I promise never to travel again when I didn't think I could keep that promise? I sat quietly staring at him.

David and I met in the car and for the next forty-five or so minutes I simply could not drive. Aha! The swami had made his point and I could go nowhere! We sat there together, spiritually paralyzed, as if stung by a swarm of bees, trembling yet joyous. Why did the swami take his time that busy day to talk with David and me when we didn't wish to trouble him? I believe Swami Aseshanandaji imparted to us the kind of caring a father gives his children to insure that they take advantage of an important opportunity.

Shortly thereafter, Stafford and I were initiated by Swami Bhaskaranandaji in Seattle and David by Swami Aseshanandaji in Portland. The journey along the west coast during those next two weeks was interesting; however, the spiritual journey we've been "traveling" for the past 26 years has been a blessed one.

Swami Aseshanandaji would visit Seattle often and when he came, I always felt close to him, and never did I forget the day I met him. *He stung me indeed!* And I have been ever so grateful—it was a memorable day.

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