

Bill Parmenter, Ph.D, a disciple of Swami Aseshananda from 1977, visited Swami for extended stays through about 1990. A teacher of English and previously professor of journalism, Bill currently is affiliated with the Hollywood Vedanta Center.

Written submission.

I was initiated by Swami around 1977, at a time when I was living in Seattle and studying for a Ph.D at the University of Washington. He insisted that I complete my degree, which I did with difficulty, as after the first year I was terminated from the program. At the same time I was having marital problems; Swami insisted that I treat my wife with love and kindness.

In short, he had a profound influence on my life. I remember at the time of my initiation I told him that I was happy because now I would be 'saved.' He corrected me and said, "No, you are going to be liberated." Having been doing spiritual practice on and off since that time, I understand more clearly than ever that he was an agent for Holy Mother to redeem and liberate souls from worldly bondage.

Between 1977 and about 1990 I would go to the Portland Center for weekends and for longer stays, up to one month at a time. I got to know all the regulars and the residents of the center during those years. I also used to take handwritten notes on Swami's lectures. Sometimes, even years later, I would review the notes, and I would feel the satisfaction of having been there in his presence and of having heard him lecture.

He asked me to write a review of his biography of Swami Saradananda, which I did, and which he thought was well done. Swami gave me a complimentary copy of that biography, *Glimpses of a Great Soul*, and wrote the following inscription in it: "May the Divine Mother bless you and fill your heart with Her love and wisdom." I found these words to be very moving as they reminded me of Swami's great and indescribably sweet love, which so affected and inspired me.

After I went to India as a Fulbright scholar in 1986 to study M. Gandhi's methods of peaceful conflict resolution, Swami asked me to follow Lex Hixon (who talked about his pilgrimage to Mecca) on the lectern, giving my impressions of India. The audience paid rapt attention, but I heard from one of the monks that Swami did not much like my talk because it was not devotional. That was the only time Swami asked me to give a lecture.

On another occasion in the early 1980s, Swami was the invited speaker at the big spring puja in Ganges, Michigan, the retreat for the Chicago Vedanta Center. As I was visiting there, and Swami was my guru, I was appointed the task of being his attendant. Swami delivered a very spiritually charged and powerful lecture to the large assembled audience. Upon completing his talk, he stepped down from the lectern to accept the respectful wishes of the listeners. Many of them were crying and got down on their

hands and knees to take the dust of his feet. As I was standing directly behind Swami I could well see the reaction of the audience. It was as though he had spiritually electrified everyone and they were overcome with divine fervor, tears streaming down their cheeks. I, myself, felt like I had been spiritually electrified. That experience, as much as any other I had with Swami, made me understand he was a spiritual instrument of a very high order.

In the summer, we would go to the Portland retreat, where Swami would give a lecture and then we would have a potluck lunch. The flowers would be blooming, the sky was intensely blue with a few white puffs of clouds and the air warm and pleasant. Swami would be full of gracious smiles and be uncommonly friendly. I felt that those events were great fun and great blessings. Here we were mingling with a great soul, enjoying the best days of our lives.

Dominant impressions of Swami were that he was extremely devoted to Holy Mother; he was a very pure human being who was intensely devoted to his spiritual practice; he was a stern taskmaster with his intimate devotees—harshly shouting at them when they misbehaved; he was extremely intuitive to the point that he knew what was going on with the devotees even without verbal communication; he was an excellent platform lecturer; his discussions of the early days with Brahmananda and Saradananda were very interesting since he was a participant observer; he was interesting on the subject of Aldous Huxley, whom he knew from his days in Trabuco. (In a personal conversation with Swami, when I asked him about Huxley's idea that mescaline could enhance spiritual growth, Swami replied that it was nonsense: one needed to concentrate on one's spiritual practice). Swami was highly intelligent, with an excellent grasp of Eastern and Western doctrines and paradigms and could speak to their reciprocal influence and their effect on man and culture with fluency and authority.

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