

Christie Nicolle was initiated by Swami Aseshananda in 1982 and resides in New York City.

Written submission

The first time I met Swami Aseshananda I'd flown in from New York to Oregon with my dear friend and mentor, Lex Hixon, and his eldest daughter, Alexandra. Alexandra and I both were initiated that weekend in June, 1982. What a memorable event!

While Lex introduced me to Swami outside the Vedanta Society, I recall getting such a kick out of Swami's scruffy J.R.R. Tolkien face, hair, and beard that I giggled and patted him on the head! Everybody laughed at this impropriety but suffice it to say, Swami took it in good spirits. Little did I know what I was soon to discover: that I'd hear roaring Plutonian screams belted out at certain monks and devotees! And yes, eventually at me!

Before Swami accepted me, he called me in privately and yelled like thunder that he didn't want to initiate me--but said he heard Holy Mother's voice telling him to do it!

The initiation ceremony was private and dreamy. I was enthusiastic and wore a long flowing white skirt and flowers in my hair. Swami allowed me to choose Jesus as my *ishta* (ideal) and I also received Ramakrishna and Holy Mother mantras. At the end Swami took obvious delight in the initiation, as though a great mission had been accomplished. The initiation was a humbling and life-changing event. I was joyous to be able to consider Swami my "spiritual father."

The day after I was initiated, Swami welcomed me to sit beside him at a picnic with devotees, and like a mother, fed me off his plate. Even his driver commented on being touched by this gesture. Swami was bonding with me since I'd continue to live across the country.

Even so, we'd speak by phone and Swami would guide me through my endless issues. I saw Swami twice again in Portland and whenever he travelled to New York. I recall him laughing that he scolded me less on phone than in person! Swami was always available, even when his own health was declining, and he instructed Swami Shantarupananda [who was living at the center] to always receive my calls.

One funny story involves Swami Aseshananda and Swami Swami Tathagatananda, who took me under his wing in New York after knowing Aseshanandaji initiated me. Swami Tathagatananda allowed me into his inner circle, which included traveling with him, cooking once a week, and dining with him, until the center's board gave him serious flack for "giving her too much, too soon!" In my immaturity, I went crying to phone Aseshanandaji. The first thing he yelled out was, "I'm dead to the world!" That was a constant phrase with him to deter

us from *maya* and the delusion of world. Then he burst out laughing and reminded me in no uncertain terms, “But, I am your guru!” With that epiphany all was well.

Swami Aseshananda predicted many things that all came true. Although I was 19 when he initiated me, Swami predicted I’d take monastic vows. Once in a car with other devotees, Swami blurted out, “Christie’s going to be monastic someday!” I never believed it. But days later, while visiting the shore on the end of Long Island—doing mantra and a Byzantine Jesus prayer, and asking the Divine for a sign—out of nowhere a swan, the holy emblem of our Vedanta order, appeared. Decades later, Russian Orthodox Elder Hilarion tonsured me as monastic in a rank called the “little schema robe” of the Orthodox Church, a ceremony I wanted after the death of my husband. Swami’s prediction came true.

Swami appeared numerous times in dreams and even came with Ganesh, Holy Mother, and once with Ramakrishna! He once confided that it’s easy to see Holy Mother but much harder to see Ramakrishna. A few years ago, I saw Swami Aseshanandaji in an apparition by my sickbed. I’d just had a melanoma removed from my back and was lying down, in pain. Swami was wearing his tattered brown corduroy jacket and bow tie and nodded up and down with a smile saying, “It will be alright!”

Swami kept his word to be my “spiritual father” until his death. On the very day he died, I witnessed a framed picture of him slam down on the table across my room just before getting the call from Portland of the news!

Swami remains with me now and I believe forever. May it be blessed!

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After reading Christie Nicolle’s reminiscence, Dharmadas (Jon Monday) recalled:

“One night I was filming a Gospel Class, with Mr. Bush reading and Swami deeply listening, with his head down. After a while you could hear the phone ringing in the background. Nobody got up to answer it. It kept ringing and Swami was beginning to look aggravated. With each ring, Swami got more and more wound up. Finally, Sarada [Swami Harananda] got up and went to answer it. Swami looked ready to blow. We could hear Sarada speaking to someone on the phone, but nobody could make out the words. We all just sat tensely quiet, anticipating the explosion that was sure to come. After a while, Sarada poked his head back in the living room and said, ‘Swami, it’s Christie from New York.’ Swami erupted saying at full voice, ‘YOU AMERICANS....’ Just then he caught my video camera out of the corner of his eye. He burst out in a full belly laugh and said, ‘Oh, the video is going,’ pointing at the camera. He then went out to take the call in good humor. This story describes a living example of a holy man’s anger being like a line drawn on water.”