

**Gale Loof, Ph.D**, has been a disciple of Swami Aseshananda since the early 1980s. She lives in Malibu, CA, where she devotes her time to caring for her elderly mother and playing with her grandchildren.

*Written submission.*

I came to know Swami Aseshananda, and to be initiated by him, in an unexpected way. In the early 1980s I was living in Malibu (as I do now), about midway between Hollywood and Santa Barbara, so Swami Swahananda (whom I knew) would have been the logical person to initiate me. However, a close friend and spiritual mentor, Lex Hixon, kept insisting that I must go to Portland and seek initiation from Swami Aseshananda. I had just completed a doctorate in cultural anthropology.

I had never meet Swami and was very reluctant to just turn up in Portland asking for initiation. It seemed very unlikely to me that he would agree to initiate a complete stranger. Finally I got up the nerve to call. Part of me hoped that he would refuse to speak to me so I could just tell Lex I'd tried and failed; then he would stop nagging me about it. To my utter surprise and consternation he came to the phone. I didn't know what to say; small talk seemed inappropriate, so I just blurted out that I was seeking initiation from him. He said something to the effect that my request was a bit premature but if I could come up to Portland we could at least meet. He then made arrangements for me to stay with some of his disciples who lived a block or so from the center and arranged for me to see him as soon as I got there. So that's how it happened. I got off the plane and went directly to the center where he saw me immediately. We had a very warm interview: he sat in a chair and I at his feet, and from time to time he would give me a blessing. The meeting was quite long and the next day he initiated me.

When Swami Aseshananda initiated me he not only gave me my mantras but also told me to go to daily mass! It so happened that at the time I was already going to daily morning mass and staying after to pray the rosary. I was also deeply into studying Swamiji's teachings and occasionally I went up to Santa Barbara for arati, or vespers, as they call it there. So when Swami Aseshananda offered to initiate me I felt he needed to know about my involvement with the church. His response was to ask me what I thought about Jesus and Mary and I said I believed that they were the same eternal light of Love and Wisdom that also manifested as Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. And he said, "Good! Continue going to mass!" or words to that effect.

Let me tell you about a couple of endearing memories from that visit. My baptismal name is Marie and Swami liked calling me Gale-Marie only he pronounced the G like an H and accented the first syllable of Marie, so when he called me it sounded like he was saying "Hail Mary!" Picture him coming down the hallway calling for "Hail Mary," and often rather brusquely; he had that way about him.

One time he found me in the library talking to one of the monks and became very angry. Fortunately he directed the anger at the monk: “Out!” he shouted, “Out! Out!” And the monk hurried away. I discovered later that he did not allow any fraternization between the monks, who lived in the center, and the lay nuns who lived in houses surrounding the center. What an amazing blessing to be in the presence of a direct disciple of Holy Mother!

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