

Marlina Rinzen first met Swami Aseshananda in the early 1950s when he served as assistant minister of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. She also visited him several times at the Vedanta Center in Portland Oregon after he had assumed leadership there. Swami Aseshananda continued to be a spiritual friend to Marlina throughout his life.

Remembering Swami Aseshananda

A friend used to go to teachings at a little temple in the hills of Hollywood. I would drive her over for the evening classes; and, dropping her off one night, decided to join her. As I stepped inside the temple, I felt an atmosphere of peace, yet at the same time a depth of anticipation. There were long comfortable benches with backs, and in front was a large dias with a low table, a small table lamp and a cushion; and far behind was an altar with pictures and flowers. On the hour, the lights dimmed, and a small dark-skinned man in saffron colored robes came from behind the side curtain of the dias, to sit on the cushion behind the table in lotus posture facing us. There was silence--a period of meditation--ending with the swami chanting a Vedic prayer. Then the lights came up a bit, the swami turned on the reading light. I looked at this monk astounded. I had never before seen such happiness. He had a smile of the heart. I had never seen such, and knew that this is how I, too, wished to feel, to be.

There he was teaching, all lit up from inside. Meanwhile, his beautiful saffron-colored outer robe kept slipping from his shoulders, and he would be tossing it back without a thought--just going on speaking with deep joy.

I was attending all the classes and Sunday lectures, from that point on. Alternating classes and lectures was this teacher who was the assistant minister, Swami Aseshananda, and the head minister and founder of this temple, called The Vedanta Society of Southern California, Swami Prabhavananda. Swami Aseshananda helped new people who showed an interest in learning about Vedanta; then if they wished to become more deeply involved, perhaps wishing for initiation, he would send them on to Swami Prabhavananda.

One Sunday, I drove out to the monastery at Trabuco Canyon for a lecture by Swami Aseshananda. After, I saw some of the congregation was lining up. I asked why they were doing so and was told that they were waiting for personal interviews with the Swami. So I joined the line.

When my turn came, I went into the room where Swami Aseshananda was standing, and he kindly invited me to sit on a chair, then he took a seat on the couch opposite. I had no idea what to say, and kind of stammered, "How do I begin? Do I do breathing exercises?" Swami laughed, and laughing, said, "Well, it's not about breathing in one nose and out the other!" Then becoming still, he spoke warmly, saying he would teach me how to meditate.

At the end of classes at the Hollywood Temple, Swami would stand by the door, greeting and speaking warmly with each person. After one evening class, as I came to say goodbye, he asked me to wait over to the side and he would speak with me in a moment. After everyone had left, he came over and asked me what was wrong. I replied, "Nothing, Swami." He asked again, and

then again, so I admitted tearfully that I had a hard time walking up the hill to the temple, feeling very weak. Swami gently said not to worry, to wait there, and he went off, coming back shortly with the name and address of a doctor who was a long-time member of Vedanta. He said, "Go to him and follow his orders implicitly!" I did as he asked, and under the good doctor's care, recovered. After that, I felt Swami Aseshananda was my mother as well as my teacher. I learned that he was a direct disciple of Sri Sarada Devi, known as "Holy Mother," and that he was so deeply devoted to her that his mind and her mind had become one.

Swami Aseshananda cared for every person as a mother cares for her child. We could all feel his loving-kindness as if he were our very own mother. Never had I felt such love. His compassion and care were uplifting. We knew without a doubt that we were loved.

I was a bohemian type, a loner, so Swami, started sending me to be with other people, for instance having me ride with a devotee going out to the Trabuco monastery. One time he came over to the woman's car and said to her, "Drive carefully! Every devotee is worth a million dollars!"

Another time, he told me to go to the temple's library and wait for him. When I got there, I saw that Dr. Frank Herman and his wife Alali were there, and I thought, "Oh here we go again, he is putting me with people." But then I saw how sweet a couple they were and liked them instantly. After a bit, Swami came in. He noticed Dr. Herman was standing there reading one of the books and asked him what he was reading, whereupon Dr. Herman turned beet red! Alali and I grinned at each other, eager to hear what the name of the book was. Dr. Herman reluctantly said, "It's a book on hypnotism, Swami." Swami laughed and laughed, and said, "We are already hypnotized! We want to become *de*-hypnotised!"

One time when Swami was speaking out at the Trabuco Canyon Monastery, his robe kept slipping off his shoulders even more than usual. Several tosses later, Swami gave one big toss-the-robe back, and the robe stuck high onto the brick wall behind him. He was oblivious to this, so engrossed was he in opening our hearts to wisdom.

Sri Sarada Devi, Holy Mother, loved sweets. This seemed to have inspired Swami. The first time I went to visit Swami in Portland after he had left Hollywood to take charge of the Portland Temple because Swami Devatandanda was returning to India, some of us were meditating, and we would hear sounds from a little room off the meditation room: chop chop chop, chop chop, chop. Swami was in there cutting up fruit and candies to offer to Holy Mother. At the end of the meditation, he would pass the *prasad* on a platter with a loving smile to each devotee present.

In the front of my book: *Sri Sarada Devi, The Holy Mother*, Swami Aseshananda wrote an inscription that truly was his prayer for each one of us: "*May Holy Mother bless you with pure love and devotion and keep you under the wings of her compassion and joyous presence.*"

August 2018