

Barbara Elsasser was initiated by Swami Aseshananda after spending eighteen years at Eknath Easwaran's Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, Ramagiri Ashram, where she was advised to base her life on that of St. Therese of Lisieux. Living in the Sri Sarada Devi House for the last ten years of Swami's life, Barbara felt irrevocably blessed. Swami Aseshananda told her St. Therese was a saint and Holy Mother was a saint-maker.

Both Swami Bhashyananda and Swami Chetanananda, separately, came to visit Eknath Easwaran. Meeting the minister-in-charge of the Chicago Vedanta Society, Swami Bhashyananda, was remarkable. Strong as a lion and delicate as a flower, he possessed a palpable aura of joy. Swami Bhashyananda established the Vivekananda Retreat in Ganges, Michigan, and started over 40 "satellite" Vedanta groups throughout the United States and Canada.

After corresponding with Swami Chetanananda, I moved to a studio apartment near the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco. Taking a walk a few minutes after arriving, I was awestruck by the radiant purity of a young man heading to the Society's Old Temple. After asking if he were a Vedanta monk, he replied in the affirmative. Looking at me he said, "You need to be with Swami Aseshananda. He is the only one who can help you." Not knowing how to act on his suggestion, I asked God to act on those words for me if He desired. The next year was spent attending the functions of the San Francisco minister-in-charge, Swami Prabuddhananda.

On Swami Chetanananda's suggestion I moved to a studio apartment owned by the Vedanta Society of Southern California opposite the convent. The minister-in-charge was Swami Swahananda. A year later Swami Aseshananda came from Portland, Oregon, to give a lecture. After a short one-on-one meeting with him, Swami Aseshananda suggested I move "in one month" to Portland and live in the Vedanta-owned Sarada Devi house.

Soon after moving to Portland, I drove to the temple to find Swami watering the garden with his hose draped across the driveway. Not knowing whether to drive over the hose or not to park the car, I decided to do so. Swami immediately scolded me and it took about seven years to recover. I read in the [reminiscences](#) of Swami Aseshananda that when he scolded it was because he could see obstacles blocking a person's divine light. The scoldings were given to remove the obstacles.

It is not possible to talk of Swami Aseshananda without mentioning Mr. Stuart Bush who served as president of the Vedanta Society of Portland. Mr. Bush was born into a prominent family in Salem, Oregon, whose home and 100-acre property were eventually donated to the City of Salem. The Bush House is now a public museum on the National Historic Registry and served as the location where the movie "St. Therese of Lisieux" was filmed. Formerly a banker, Mr. Bush joined Swami shortly after his arrival to the U.S. and remained with Swami for more than 50 years. Every cell in Mr. Bush's body was composed of manners: he was genial, even-minded, a gentleman, and a scholar. Mr. Bush's counsel was critically important to ensuring the success of Swami's work in the U.S. He was able to help Swami navigate outreach into the American community, and he helped Swami with activities at the Vedanta Society. For decades, seven nights a week, the two of them taught the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Mr. Bush read out loud and Swami Aseshananda commented as appropriate.

Revered President Swami Bhuteshananda, the Twelfth President of the Order, flew from Belur Math to Portland to hear Swami Aseshananda speak of his contact with Holy Mother and the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Aseshananda said I could also meet Swami Bhuteshananda at the airport where I soon saw he was no ordinary person. Swami Aseshananda phoned the Sarada Devi house and asked the residents to wait in the living room for Swami Bhuteshananda to come over. After twenty minutes passed, one woman left to go shopping, then one by one they all left, leaving me alone in the house. The phone rang and Swami Aseshananda said they would be right over. A few minutes later, Swami Bhuteshananda and Swami Aseshananda were at the front door. They came in and the look on Swami Aseshananda's face strongly indicated he had something to accomplish. Quickly drawing a chair in front of the shrine, Swami Aseshananda asked Swami Bhuteshananda to sit down, and then he asked me to kneel in front of Swami Bhuteshananda. Not knowing quite what to do, I just stood there until finally, with his ten fingertips, he gently pushed me to my knees. After asking Swami Bhuteshananda to bless me, Swami Aseshananda's face relaxed: he had accomplished his mission! Over the ensuing 40 years, I have continued to go to the temple daily. When things get difficult I simply say to Holy Mother, "Whatever it takes."

The ease I felt with Swami Aseshananda reminded me of the rapport I felt with my father, a theoretical physicist who was elected to the [National Academy of Sciences](#) and later received the National Medal of Science Award, the highest recognition the nation can bestow on a scientist, for his contributions to physics, meteorology, and geophysics in establishing quantum mechanics, atmospheric radiation transfer, planetary magnetism, and plate tectonics. [His work](#) was utilized by several Nobel prize-winning physicists. Daddy kept three books out to read: *Imitation of Christ*, *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, and *Meister Eckhart*. His non-dual scientific work is now finding its way online.

But growing up in a highly intellectual milieu without a mother (or relationships with women), I experienced imbalances. Swami introduced me to Holy Mother and gradually helped me overcome some of these deficits. The rapport that began with my father continued with Swami so that I felt completely at ease with him.

Sometimes I would phone Swami when something dire appeared to be happening, giving him the gist in a few seconds. He would say in a firm booming voice, "It never happened" and slam the phone down, ending the conversation. This unique blessing and teaching method had the uncanny effect of resolving each situation. Only once my heart did not want him to say, "It never happened" and immediately he intoned in a gentle voice, "Don't dwell on it." Once Swami apparently wanted me to understand something without using words. He was absolutely silent for several seconds on the phone. The message came through so loud and clear that it still reverberates in my consciousness.

Swami Aseshananda was considered "a living saint," "a jivan mukta," and "established in Brahman." However, Swami's humility and fearlessness abounded; there were no such accolades in his presence.

The subtle and prolific grace pouring from Swami Aseshananda, the humble servant of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, defies description.

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