

Bill Pearson, a disciple of Swami Aseshananda, resides in Eastern Washington.

Written reply to questionnaire.

EW: How did you first meet Swami Aseshananda?

BP: My wife and I first met Swami on our way to visit the Self-Realization Fellowship Center in Los Angeles in 1981. A college friend, living at the Portland temple at the time, told me there was a very interesting holy man I should meet. So we stopped by on our way to Los Angeles and he introduced us to him. I shook his hand, which I have since learned is not common practice. It was a brief encounter.

EW: How did your relationship with Swami Aseshananda evolve?

Later that year, I believe, the same friend asked to come visit him at the temple for a couple of days. Swamiji gave his permission so I visited. I tried to shake his hand again, but unlike the firm handshake of the first time, I received a floppy hand from him. I never tried to shake his hand again. I spent the days there watching Swami and being in awe of the whole experience. It felt like I was in another world which I knew nothing about, but wanted to learn more. My friend asked if I could visit on a couple of more occasions, but it became apparent quite quickly that I was really going to visit Swami Aseshananda.

Each time I went with thoughts or questions, but many times those questions were answered even before I asked them. At times Swami would be speaking to a group of people when his gaze would stop on me, and he would say a sentence or two as if he were speaking directly to me; he would answer one of those questions that were in my mind at the time. During those visits he would grant me an interview to answer questions. I was both scared and awed by those opportunities. I was afraid because I would often get tongue-tied in his presence. I was afraid I wouldn't remember what I wanted to ask him, but, oh, I longed for the time to spend in his presence, even if I had to struggle at times with what to say.

Very soon, I would call to talk with Swamiji, to ask on my own for visits, to spend time at the temple. I lived in the Tri-Cities, so each visit meant, if I were fortunate, that I could stay at the temple; if not, I might have to go to a motel. I was enthralled when I was at the temple. No longer was I searching for my direction spiritually. At last I had found a place and a person who captured my spiritual attention in a genuinely powerful and meaningful way. The fascination grew each time I visited him as well as the longing for the next visit.

EW: How did Swami Aseshananda mold and impact your life?

BP: I guess the best way to describe the impact is to note that when I visited the temple and Swami Aseshananda, my mind turned to thoughts about God. I felt in awe and received comfort unlike anything I previously experienced. He instructed me, counseled me, and gave me a mantra. I felt whenever he spoke to me or had me do something, there was a benefit I would gain. I felt off balance at times in his presence, but when he left the room I felt a little more in balance. After my visits I would go home with a rejuvenated feeling and for several days my focus on self and the world was clearer and more insightful. There was more joy in my life and less fear. My biggest habits of self-destructive thoughts and behaviors began to fall away. Swamiji was bringing Mother into my life.

EW: Over time, did you come to certain conclusions about Swami Aseshananda?

BP: Yes, that he was like no other soul I had ever met in my life. He had such a power of presence. I felt so humbled and quieted in his presence. I felt I was in the presence of someone truly holy, not just someone advertised as holy. In my associations with him I have found a higher purpose for being on this planet, and that purpose has remained strong over these years because, I believe, Swami Aseshananda, as directed by Mother, helped me to find my way despite my tendencies and worldly shortcomings. I cannot speak with authority as to what level of spiritual growth he had attained nor need I, but my sense is he was filled with Mother's grace and light.

EW: What were some of the essential teachings of Swami Aseshananda?

BP: Renunciation, devotion, and the idea that Mother can be experienced in this lifetime were important teachings I received from him. He would say, "Call on Mother. Mother will show the way. Be sincere in your longing for Mother in order to ready yourself for Mother's Grace."

EW: What were some of Swami's memorable sayings?

BP: "God-vision; not television." "We live in a world of time, space and causation." "Find it [truth/realization] now. Do not wait for post-mortem emancipation."

EW: Are there any personal stories you'd care to share?

BP: One event happened more than once, but the first time had the biggest effect on me. It was early in my period of visits at the temple. I would stay for two or three days, so I would eat with the residents of the temple. Mr. Bush, the monks, and maybe a guest, I believe, were all there at this particular time. It was lunchtime in the library. We were all sitting eating and talking together. Swami Aseshanada was moving about the house meeting with guests, doing whatever he did at that time. All of a sudden I heard Swami's booming voice ringing out from the hall as he was striding down the hall saying, "Go home, you Americans! You don't belong here. You think this is a social

club. This is not. Go home! You don't belong here!" I was in shock and fear. Were we to get up and go away? Of course I didn't want to go. This was the most profound place I had been to in my life and I felt I was being told I didn't belong. I was greatly disheartened. I looked to the others not knowing what to do. They had become silent, but looked calm. Soon, Swami quieted down and things went back to normal. I inferred that he was making the point that finding God required absolute effort. Wasting time on worldly matters that were not necessary, such as idle talk, would not help us to reach the God within.

Another incident took place again during one of my early visits as well. It was a Sunday afternoon. Noon worship was over. Lunch with the residents of the temple was over. I was in Holy Mother's kitchen alone finishing up the dishes. I was struggling in my mind with integrating my Christian beliefs I had grown up with and Vedanta during those days. Swami walked quietly by the door to the kitchen. I could feel him coming before he got there. His presence was so radiant. He walked by the entrance and then backed up. He took one step inside the kitchen, looked at me and said, "Jesus and Ramakrishna are the same." He turned and walked out, heading slowly to where he was already traveling. The struggles in my mind as to who is the Lord disappeared. I had, with one sentence from Swami Areshananda, at last realized the Lord is one with many faces: as many faiths, so many paths to God.

EW: How would you characterize Swami's pujas, worships, lectures, etc?

BP: I attend many Sunday lectures, classes, and worships with Swami in the lead. What I found was a soul that was fully focused and dedicated to what he was doing. I felt it was all done for Mother and by Mother. It was hard to tell the difference for me. He exuded an inner peace and joy when he spoke of his past associations with direct disciples and Mother that brought an element of awe and joy to me as well. His lectures and worships could be on the long side for me, but that was because of my shortcomings, I assume. When in the shrine during a puja, the feeling was palpable that Swami was performing puja for Mother and that she was there with us at that moment. We were receiving a blessing by just being there.

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