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Written submission.

My First Personal Meeting With Swami:

In August of 1980, a friend and I drove up from California to meet the swami whom I had heard about and seen from afar for many years prior. As we drove nearer and nearer to the temple, my heart pounded harder and harder. I finally was able to meet the special man whom the Southern California Vedantists so lovingly spoke of.

Upon arriving at the Portland temple, we were greeted by one of the monks who immediately directed us to the library. My friend and I looked at each other and cautiously proceeded as directed. After about ten minutes, we heard someone coming down the steps barking orders at the monks all the way. “Yes, Swami, yes, Swami,” were the endearing responses. From what I previously knew about Swami, I surmised that must be Swami Aseshananda. This was confirmed as he entered the library, greeting us kindly and openly.

Swami gave his kind regards to my family, asked many questions about our travels, and gave us a short history lesson about the Portland temple. We were captured by his focus and warmth as he looked directly into our eyes when speaking and as he smiled so freely. He had a certain peace about him that we had never experienced before.

It was then time for prasad. Swami left the library, taking a well-worn path to the pantry to chop the fruit and prepare the plates of food. Upon his return, he gave us a plate of sliced oranges, nuts and one See’s candy, and then he led us in the offering chant. Swami’s voice was strong and filled with conviction and devotion. I realized that even though he had done this thousands of times, it had not become mundane. Instead, his dedication to the chant and the message behind it had grown stronger and stronger. This was obvious by the strength in his voice, his posture and the power behind the words. I soaked up every minute of it. Swami left shortly afterwards to attend to other devotees. Then alone, I looked at my friend and said, “Wow! He is one powerful dude!” That first impression has lasted to this day.

Swami and Children:

After I landed a teaching job in St. Helens, I moved to Portland. I was filled with excitement as I could now be with Swami, find more holy company, and enjoy the great Northwest—all at the same time! I had learned from my experiences in Southern California Vedanta temples that the way to get to know fellow devotees was to become involved with Vedanta activities on a regular basis. I was drawn to the Vedanta children and their parents whom I’d met—welcoming, open, and committed to Vedanta and

Swami. I wanted to be part of that scene. Becoming a Sunday school teacher was a natural fit.

The philosophy of the Vedanta Sunday School resonated with me as the learning environment was centered on Holy Mother's teachings and the children's emotional and spiritual growth. Swami would always direct the teachers to “Do a little worship, do a little chanting, and offer teachings about Holy Mother.” That we did! The routine was welcomed by both the teachers and children. After taking a short walk around the temple to cut flowers from the gardens (weather permitting), we started our formal class. A short worship (with waved incense and chanting), readings from elementary books about the avatars and singing took much of the time. Crafts were also included to enable the children to express themselves and provide an open environment for discussion. It was always special to see the children show off their creative art to Swami. He was quick to give them a sweet smile and plenty of prasad with extra cookies and sweets.

Learning about Karma Yoga:

My teaching experiences, both when working with learning-disabled junior high students and teaching “tweens” in the Vedanta Sunday School, provided challenges. To focus on my active social life and continued professional responsibilities, I wanted a break from children on my weekends. I decided to ask Swami if I could take a leave from teaching the Vedanta Sunday School.

As I met with Swami, I flooded him with my thoughts. He listened patiently and then closed his eyes and thought deeply, as if connecting to a higher power before responding. He then advised, “Think of your daily work with children as karma yoga. Offer all that you do up to Holy Mother and you will find more peace in what you do.” Hmmm. That was a paradigm shift; I could make my work with all children part of my spiritual practice. We talked about the practicality of that for the rest of the meeting and I left with excitement in my heart. I immediately put that suggestion into practice. It made a huge difference in my attitude toward addressing challenges with youth. There was a higher purpose for my teaching. I was then excited to continue teaching Sunday school, so I could consistently practice karma yoga.

Following Swami’s Advice:

One summer day, my sister (who is a nun in the Santa Barbara Vedanta convent) and another nun came to Portland to see Swami and attend one of the summer antar yogas (women’s workdays at the Scappoose retreat). The day before we went to the retreat, Swami wanted to treat the nuns to a sightseeing tour. All four of us—Swami, the two nuns and myself—packed in my car and headed for Multnomah Falls. What a memorable drive and visit—sharing conversation with ones I loved and seeing one of the most spectacular sights in the Northwest’s beautiful Columbia Gorge.

We spent longer than we expected there, soaking up the sights and walking with Swami. We needed to get back in time for the evening worship. As I was driving home on the

freeway, Swami told me which exit to take. I tactfully let him know that I was very familiar with the Portland area and that I knew how to get back. He said nothing in response, even though my sister was mortified at the thought that I would not immediately follow Swami's advice. One of my intentions was to enable Swami to visit more with the nuns rather than giving directions. I must admit the other intention, though, was to protect my ego from having someone tell me directions. That was my first mistake! I proceeded to get off on an exit that took me further west than we needed to be. As I retraced my steps to go east, I became hopelessly lost! That was my second mistake! When all in the car noticed that I was lost, Swami calmly stated, "Now, follow my directions to get back to the temple." With a lesson so humbly learned, I did follow his advice and we got back safely—just in time to prepare for worship. Lesson learned and applicable upon many subsequent occasions!

Swami made a tremendous impact upon my life through his words and, more importantly, through his actions. His faith and trust in Holy Mother consistently and continuously radiated from him and, as a result, he deeply touched everyone who was fortunate enough to have met him. He was, and continues to be, an inspiration in my daily spiritual life.

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