

Sandra (Raley) Longmore, artist, teacher, and disciple of Swami Aseshananda, resided in Holy Mother's House with her first child for seven years during the 1970s. Sandra cites Swami's spiritual perspective and approach to daily life as an ongoing reminder of the higher ways of approaching her day-to-day life. Sandra and husband Tom reside in Washougal, WA.

Written reply to questionnaire.

EW: How did you first meet Swami Aseshananda? Was there anything memorable about the occasion or your first impression?

SL: I still vividly remember my first meeting. I thought that the Vedanta center looked like it wouldn't be much fun and questioned why I chose to come. Yet at the same time I was so intrigued and deeply affected by Swami Aseshananda, Vedanta, and this unusual way of life. There was something there for me: I could *feel* it, but my conscious mind resisted. I am so grateful that that deeper part won! Swami's approach to daily living was wonderful and fulfilling. I remain very grateful and appreciative for this time with him. When I am troubled, confused, or even happy, I feel the *constant companionship of the spiritual presence that Swami represented. I am never without this assurance that Holy Mother is always with me.*

EW: How did your relationship with Swami Aseshananda evolve?

SL: It evolved daily as I watched Swami approach *his* daily life. For example, when a cat killed a bird he held a funeral, and with great respect we were taught to honor all living things. When I was troubled, Swami would say, "Just take Holy Mother's hand and all will be OK . . . not just in your mind, but *feel* the hand, *she is a living presence.*" I felt God was alive in every plant, animal, and person, and that God had my highest interest in mind, no matter what challenge I was currently facing.

I could also see that feeling reflected in the people around Swami. There was a deep connection to the Divine even though many of us were not acting very divinely. Nevertheless, you always knew this connection was there.

Small things built our relationship. However, Swami's relationship with me was not with me as an individual personality but with my higher, divine nature. If he felt the relationship were inappropriate from the devotee's side, he gently—or explosively—corrected anyone who complimented him or sung his praises. *He wanted nothing to do with any of that!* He only wanted us to have an active relationship with our higher selves, for us to *know* our higher selves!

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

SL: Swami didn't mold or impact my life. The *spiritual presence within him* did everything and it made considerable impact. Like many young people in their early thirties, I was seeking a meaningful way of living and answers to spiritual questions. The old institutions like marriage and family were crumbling while counterculture was on the rise. The news, my friends, and past experience were not giving me the answers I sought.

By living and molding my daily life around Vedanta, attending lectures, talking with other spiritual devotees, and listening to Swami talk with others, a new awareness started to develop; I became more satisfied, happy, and able to cope emotionally with all challenges that arose. To this day, the deep happiness that comes with my connection to Spirit is *all* that makes good, solid sense in my life. *Nothing else satisfies like this core "anchor" that Swami laid in my life.*

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

SL: Swami was exactly as he presented himself to be. Nothing less, nothing more! He was true to himself and his spiritual connection, and nothing altered that. I observed him in many different situations but he never deviated from what he lectured or talked about. He was deeply spiritual, compassionate, and loving—even though he could correct, discipline, or explode. Even at these times, you always knew that at the core was a deep, spiritual connection that loved you with all your faults.

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

SL: We are all spiritual beings who can touch the hand of God. We are all *capable* of the highest spiritual attainment in this life: illumination.

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

SL: "God always ends with something sweet," "God is a living presence," "Take the name of Holy Mother," "Give all your good fruits to Holy Mother," "Take ten steps toward God and He will take 100 steps toward you," "Do more japa, do more japa, do more japa!" "Don't worry, everything will be alright—everything will be alright!" "You must be self-supporting!" "God doesn't want sad nuns."

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

SL: One day, on approaching the temple I saw Swami watering the flowers. He called, "Come over here, Sandra. See these flowers? They would die without water. Similarly you must water your life with higher thoughts of God or your life will become dry and unhappy."

On another occasion, as I was leaving my car, Swami asked, "Did you lock your car?"

“No, Swami.” “You must lock your car. If you leave it open someone might steal something and it would be your carelessness that caused it. This is Holy Mother’s property and you must always respect her presence and not be careless.”

Swami once explained the implications of picking up the wrong brand of bread from the store. “Sandra, this isn’t what I told you to get. That shows a crack in the mind. You must stay focused and not be distracted. A focused mind always remains in God.”

Swami found a way to teach us using the presidential election as an example. He didn’t like the candidate that won and we all knew his dislike of the new President-elect. After a few words expressing his political views, he concluded, “You must respect the office of president even if you don’t like the person holding the presidency. The office came from God.” I have always remembered this when something happens where I don’t like the person or I think they are not acting well: I should still respect their role. This memory, as all memories of my time with Swami, has always served me well.

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

SL: All puja details were carefully attended to. Swami once told me sweep the back porch as if an important guest were coming, Holy Mother herself! After the puja, others (and I) experienced many emotions from relief, to happiness, to contentment, as reflected in the devotees’ eyes. We all knew we had participated in something special and were better off because of it.

Swami’s lectures always addressed something I was thinking about or challenged by. Others would say the same thing. At first I had a hard time understanding because of Swami’s accent, and the vocabulary was new to me; but as I became accustomed to his manner of speaking, I found the lectures to be very inspiring and informative. Swami made use of real stories from his life. *This made the ways of Spirit a real, living presence.*

Submitted October 2008