

# Swami teaches spiritual peace seekers at retreat

By Joe D'Arco

Scappoose has a Swami. He teaches every other Saturday at the 120-acre retreat overlooking Scappoose.

In the last ten years Eastern religions have become popular in the United States, and a number of gurus have jetted West of capitalize on the phenomena. Not Swami Asehananda. He was teaching in Portland and Scappoose long before Eastern religions became all the craze.

Swami Asehananda came to New York from India in 1947. He worked as a spiritual teacher in New York, Boston and California before

coming to Oregon in 1955. Swami Asehananda will not reveal his age—he says it is not necessary to know.

The Scappoose Vedanta temple, which was dedicated in 1954, may be reached by driving west on Wattson Road (the county line road) and bearing left. It is about three miles from Highway 30, and a quarter-mile walk from the no trespassing sign on the locked gate at the end of the dead end road.

There is a view of Scappoose, St. Helens, and the Columbia River from the site of the temple. One of the Vedanta monks pointed down from the temple at "all the cottages full of people sitting around drinking coffee."

The 120-acre retreat is available to members of the Vedanta Society and their friends as a place for reflection and meditation. Every other Saturday the Swami gives a service at the retreat temple which is open to the

public. Every Sunday there is a service at the Portland temple near Mt. Tabor Park.

Vedanta is not a crusading religion. They have been worshipping at the Scappoose retreat for over 20 years, but many local people

still are not aware of their existence. Swami says that his Society concentrates "less on publicity and more on intensity." Swami, which means teacher, says he considers himself a guest in the world, not a missionary.

"There is nothing of popular appeal in Vedanta," says Stuart Busch, president of the Society and a former banker. He says it is only for people who are serious about living a spiritual life. There are approximately 70 members and quite a few others who attend services regularly, according to the Swami. Two caretakers live at the retreat fulltime and members sometimes spend the night there.

In addition to the eight-sided temple with a spire, there are a number of walking paths and shrines. There are Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist and Holy Mother shrines. Shrines to all of the major religions are built at the Vedanta retreat because the Society believes in the validity of all religions.

"Vedanta teaches the unity behind the apparent differences of rituals, mythologies, and creeds of the world," says the Swami. He says that there is a universal truth which is behind all religions.

The "harmony of all religions" was central to the thought of Sri Ramakrishna, the nineteenth century Hindu saint who was the inspir-

ation behind the modern Vedanta movement. Vedanta is over 4,000 years old according to the Swami.

Vedanta was first revealed to Americans at the 1893 Chicago Worlds Fair by Swami Vivenkananda. At the Scappoose retreat, past a footpath called Karma Way, there are shrines for both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivenkananda.

"Man is seeking for something that is permanent, but true satisfaction cannot be found through external achievements or in things that constantly change," says the Swami. "Only through self-discipline, the practice of Yoga, can man find that reality which is infinite knowledge and lasting happiness. Yoga unites a person with the basic reality of his own nature through the disciplines of wisdom, work, love, and meditation."

Anyone is eligible for membership, but the Swami advises person to attend lectures and classes regularly for some time before applying for membership. Members are allowed to eat meat and to marry. A membership card must be approved by the Society's board of directors.

Members are encouraged to share some of the "duties and responsibilities that are involved in the maintenance of the organization." The Swami says there are no tithes but some members do make donations.



SWAMI ASESHANANDA sits with Stuart Busch, the president of the Vedanta Society. The Vedantas have a wooded, 120 acre retreat in the hills overlooking Scappoose.



SWAMI ASESHANANDA sits in front of the Holy Mother shrine which is located three miles southwest of Scappoose. The shrine contains a photograph of the Swami's spiritual teacher in India.