

Anonymous, while a child, visited Swami Aseshannda several times with his parents, disciples of Swami Aseshananda. Initiated towards the end of Swami's life, he works as executive director of a non-profit organization in California that serves uninsured clients facing life-threatening illnesses. [Description included with devotee's permission]

Written submission.

I realize there is a gap of many years between my actual observations and interactions with Swami Aseshananda and any real efforts to remember and have an appreciation for them. This can mainly be attributed to the fact that most of my interactions with him were from the time I was a young child to my mid-teens, and certainly before I started having any mature or independent thoughts about religion, God, etc. Thus, my first remembrances of him were as simple as this; whenever he would visit my hometown Vedanta Society in Seattle, two things would happen: 1. the number of people in attendance at the temple would increase greatly; and 2. the mothers at the temple would adopt a strict "zero tolerance" policy towards us kids making any noise or running around (to our great dismay). Over the ensuing years, my family also made various trips to Portland to visit Swami Aseshananda, and the last time I actually saw him was when he was close to (or at) the end-of-life stages, and he was connected to a feeding tube. At that time, I remember one of his attendants noting that the doctors would have trouble easing his pain, because whenever they asked him where the pain was, he would simply reply, "No pain, no pain, there is only Mother, there is only Mother."

Swami Aseshananda passed away when I was a college student in California, and, looking back, it is a great regret of mine that I did not make the trip to Portland to attend his memorial service. It was shortly after this time that my interest in theology grew, and I soon found myself immersed in studies of various faiths, from Vedanta and Vivekananda to Christian and Islamic mysticism to many Buddhist texts and authors. Regardless of the tradition about which I was reading, one common theme always showed through—that there are always many imitations and very few genuine articles. More specifically, despite the poor reputation the idea of religion has gained within my generation, due to those who feign spirituality; those who may use it for pride or to boost their egos; those who may utilize it for power, politics or personal wealth; and those who so grossly misunderstand religion that it becomes a vehicle for intolerance and condemnation, it must not be forgotten that there exist those rare individuals who perfectly embody the universal ideals of humility, faith, sincerity, and concern for others. These luminous teachers do not need to say a single word, because they model their teachings so impeccably, by the manner in which they live their lives.

It was during this time, I realized how fortunate I was to have been able to observe, interact with and receive blessings from one such great spiritual being. In this context, I could reflect back clearly on how exacting Swami Aseshananda's dedication and faith were. There were seemingly little gestures, such as how he always started his lectures

with a short Sanskrit prayer and translation, and there were larger ones such as his never going back to India. His faith and reverence to Holy Mother, Ramakrishna and the core tenets of Vedanta were demonstrated both through his words and all of his actions. Anyone can, and many of us do, talk about the grand notions Eastern spiritual thought offers us—the idea of seeing through the veil of Maya, or going beyond pairs of opposites (and so many other similar sentiments), but how many us, when we find ourselves on our death beds, will be answering our doctors with “No pain, no pain?”

It is said that God can actually be realized, and before this realization occurs, all religion is merely speculation (regardless of how sincere, well-intentioned or educated it may be). There is no doubt that Swami Aseshananda had clearly transcended speculation to a point of realization. In doing so, he represented a crystal-clear view of what life’s highest purpose can be for all of us. As grateful as I am for my experiences with him, I only wish I had known him when I was at a more mature stage in life. I can only imagine what it would be like to discuss with him all the existential questions which arose for me in my early twenties. Nevertheless, I know that the way I try to live my life, how I view what my purpose may be and the ideals for which I strive have all been shaped by Swami Aseshananda, and, for that, I am eternally grateful.

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