

**Swami Vedananda**, a senior monk at the Vedanta Society of Northern California, first met Swami Aseshananda in 1972 and received Brahmacharya vows from him in 1980.

*Written submission*

It was the summer of 1972, and approximately twelve swamis from most of the Vedanta Societies in the United States had come to San Francisco for the dedication of the newly constructed Women's Retreat House at the Vedanta Retreat at Olema in Marin County, just north of San Francisco. Among the distinguished invited guests were Swami Vividishananda, the head of the Seattle Center and Swami Aseshananda. Swami Vividishananda was senior and Swami Aseshananda was very deferential and very concerned to avoid the least inconvenience to the elder swami.

The swamis also spent some time in San Francisco where a grand reception had been arranged for them. During this time they also took walks in the neighborhood of the Old Temple where they were staying. Though it was almost summer, San Francisco weather is usually cool and sometimes actually cold, with a chilling wind off the Pacific Ocean. Swami Aseshananda was all solicitude for the elder swami, frequently inquiring if he were warm enough, and urging him to keep his coat tightly wrapped around him, warning him that they were about to cross a street, or about to climb a higher than usual curb, etc. There was no end to his concerns. They spoke in English: "Swami, please watch out for this uneven pavement . . ." Swami Vividishananda also enquired similarly from time to time. "Swami, are you warm enough . . ." The culmination of this took place at the airport on the day that they were both to return to their respective centers. They were to go on the same plane, which was to stop in Portland before continuing on to Seattle.

We took both swamis to the airport. In those days there were no automatic enclosed ramps that project onto the plane and allow passengers to enter directly from the waiting area without ever stepping outside. The passengers had to exit from the terminal, walk out on the airport concrete, and climb into the planes by going up a set of stairs that had been rolled up to the airplane's doorway. Once the passengers had exited the terminal and started to walk on the concrete toward the airplane, the terminal doorway would shut and no further contact with those inside the terminal was possible. On this particular occasion the two swamis took leave of us all, walked out of the terminal, and headed toward the nearest rolling stairway that would enable them to climb on board the airplane. The terminal doors shut behind them and they started toward the rolling stairway and began to climb the stairs to enter the plane. We watched from behind the now closed and no longer openable glass doors as the swamis, fully unconscious of their surroundings except for their concern for each other's welfare and safety, as if they were again in the city, crossing the street next to the temple. There was one important difference, however, in this situation. As they began to climb the stairway, they were not aware of a fact that all of us, watching in helpless horror, immediately saw as they approached the stairway and began to climb: There was, in fact, no airplane at the end of those stairs.

We shouted and clamored, but they could not hear us. We could see them still absorbed in their mutual concern, climbing the stairs, totally unaware of the situation.

Fortunately, an airport employee saw what was happening and brought the two swamis back down and directed them to the proper stairway some distance away.

To look back on such events one clearly sees that the world that these great swamis were living in was only marginally related to this one. Yes, they saw everything in minute detail and very sharply, but in a moment they could become aware that all this floats in a larger and more fundamental reality, of great beauty, that never changes.

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Swami Aseshananda, being the senior swami in America after the passing away of more senior swamis like Swami Vividishananda and Swami Prabhavananda, had the responsibility of officiating at the Brahmacharya ceremonies for monks. In this way, he became the Brahmacharya guru when I undertook that ceremony in 1980. He always considered that San Francisco had bestowed a great privilege on him because it became his responsibility to officiate at these vows and also at Sannyasa vows for the convents in San Francisco and Southern California.

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