



JULY/AUG 2018

VOL 28, NO. 4

The Need for Total Surrender to Grace

by Suresh Natarajan

There's a story told that during the life of Sri Ramana Maharshi a group was chanting the Vedas as they went around Arunachala on a moonlit night when they suddenly encountered a leopard in the middle of the road. They froze in fear as the leopard just looked at them quietly for a long time before slowly disappearing into the jungle. They finished the rest of the walk around the mountain quickly and related this adventure to Maharshi immediately upon their return. He listened calmly and then simply replied that there was no need for them to have panicked as the leopard was a jnani who had come only to listen to their chanting! Well now, I have a story of a bear who came to listen to "Lalita Sahasranamam" in the picturesque Arunachala Ashrama in Canada.

NOTHING had prepared me for this encounter with the bear that happened at the end of my nearly three-week stay in the beautiful Ashrama set in a sprawling farm in Nova Scotia. The 130-acre farm has a lovely shrine, a house and a cottage on a lush green lawn and then woods running for miles with a trail that leads to a small cabin, appropriately named Skandashrama, and farther up the hill to a small cave named Virupaskha.

My days began very early, at 4:30 a.m., with a short walk from the house to the shrine in the early morning cold, crisp spring air over grass made moist by dew. We listened to the recorded chanting of the Taittiriya Upanishad, then read the reminiscences of Devaraja Mudaliar, followed by a recorded chant of "Lalita Sahasranamam", and ended with a long, silent meditation. Dennis, Shunya and I were the only ones staying at the Ashrama and Darlene would join us for part of the morning program. After a light breakfast, we almost always had some work on the lawn or in the garden

with Dennis showing the way with the various tools stored in the huge barn in the Ashrama. We cleared brush and fallen branches, mowed the lawn, chopped wood, spread manure for the garden, removed weeds, tilled the garden and so on, while Shunya would fix a delicious lunch every day. Afternoons were spent either relaxing with a book or going to the public library in town for internet connectivity. Otherwise we were offline throughout the day which in and of itself added to the undisturbed calm of the place. We would take long walks in the evening into the woods and retire early for the night.

After this idyllic routine of almost three weeks, toward the end of my stay, a large group led by two Swaminis of the Sarada Mutt in India was visiting the Ashrama on a weekend retreat. Since they needed all the available rooms for that one night, I volunteered to stay in the cabin Skandashrama in the woods. I thought I could join Dennis who often spends nights there, but he told me the experience

would be more fulfilling if I stayed in this forest retreat alone. Dennis spent the night in the temple shrine. I walked to the cabin which is about a kilometer into the forest covered completely on all sides with a thick, quiet jungle. There I had a relaxed time lighting a few incense sticks, reading and sitting silently watching the trees and the streams around. I went to sleep later than usual due in part to what felt like a very vibrant energy of the cabin. I had to get up at 4 a.m. to walk a kilometer back to the Ashrama so I forced my eyes shut and drifted off.

I woke up once around 2 a.m. only to realize it was too early and went right back to sleep. After a while, about 3:30 a.m., I woke up suddenly to the sound of wood creaking. My first reaction, while half asleep, was to dismiss it as somebody walking in the house only to realize that I was not in the house now but in the cabin and there was nobody else here! That jolted me to sit up straight and now I heard the heavy footsteps of someone climbing up the wooden stairs of the cabin. He was then going through the firewood stacked up in the small four by five foot porch outside and making a ruckus, apparently looking for food. I immediately realized that this was a bear that had found its way to the cabin. I was suddenly hit with the raw fear of being alone in a small cabin with flimsy wooden walls that had no chance to hold, should the bear who was likely very hungry in early spring after a long hibernation, choose to enter.

It is one thing to read a thousand philosophical discourses on fear and quite another to experience it in a situation that can potentially lead to certain death with a huge bear just a few feet away. I found myself sitting in the dark cabin with my heart pounding like a drum, teeth chattering and body almost shaking in fear. I did not even want to use a flashlight to avoid drawing any attention. I immediately realized that the bear was going to sense my fear which could cause him to react violently. So, I told myself to calm down but to no avail. I then visualized the image of Sri Ramana Maharshi in the dark of the cabin and it helped a bit, but I was still not anywhere close to being calm.

At one point, in desperation, I quietly called the emergency 911 number on my cell phone though I knew that I had no cell-phone service in Canada. Surprisingly, it worked! I was asked about my emergency and



Skandashrama at the Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama explained how I was trapped in a cabin by a bear. Right after that the line went dead. I tried calling again but was unable to reconnect.

Then it occurred to me to inquire into who is having this fear. Again, this helped a bit to dis-identify from the body's actions but the body was at such a heightened state of stress that it kept pulling attention back to itself. This tug of war in attention went on for a while until the body calmed down slowly which, to be honest, was mainly due to the realization that the bear was not moving anymore or making any noises rather than any effort to calm down on my part!

It was then that I remembered Dennis telling me earlier that bears normally go away when they hear any loud sound. All I had was a rendition of the "Lalita Sahasranamam Stotram" on my laptop. So, I played it at a high volume. But lo and behold, rather than leaving the cabin, the bear fell into a deep sleep on the porch while listening to the chant and I could now hear the heavy breathing of the big fellow sound asleep against the door of the cabin. By this time, I relaxed and resigned myself to the fact that I had company in the middle of this thick jungle. Dawn had broken by then and with the soft morning light entering the cabin, I picked up a book and started reading while waiting for the unannounced visitor to leave. I pondered the option of going onto the porch to wave him off with a stick. But given that the porch was so small and the door would literally bump into him causing him to react unpredictably, I dismissed that idea right away. Finally, I

just decided to bide my time and meanwhile it started to rain.

Listening to the loud rhythmic breaths of the bear sleeping, I also seemed to have dozed off for a while. When I awoke I no longer heard the bear breathing and it appeared to have left on its own while I had drifted off during the short period.

After giving some time to be certain, I gingerly stepped out of the cabin onto the porch to ensure that there was nobody in the vicinity. Then I hurried back to the Ashrama, relieved that the eventful four-hour encounter was now over!

Thus ended my memorable morning with the jnani bear who seemed to have come only to listen blissfully to Lalita Sahasranamam while blessing me with a taste of death. More than any amount of intellectual understanding,

it revealed to me how deeply ingrained is body consciousness (*dehatma buddhi*) and that all of one's efforts while seemingly necessary are ultimately to only realize one's helplessness and therefore **the need for total surrender to grace**.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Unfortunately – or perhaps fortunately because of the valuable experience he had — the author was not aware that our Nova Scotian black bears are vegetarian and quite shy by nature. Also, he was not aware that the walls and door of the cabin are just as sound as any house. He was also not told that this bear usually visits the cabin every year during the first week of June and that Dennis had left two dried corn cobs in a plastic shopping bag hanging on the porch for him to munch on while on his annual visit – a visit that Dennis had been much anticipating.*

Predestination

by Devaraj Mudaliar

ONE summer afternoon I was sitting opposite Bhagavan in the old hall, with a fan in my hand, and said to him: "I can understand that the outstanding events in a man's life, such as his country, nationality, family, career or profession, marriage, death, etc. are all predestined by his *karma*, but can it be that all the details of his life, down to the minutest, have already been determined? Now, for instance, I put this fan that is in my hand down on the floor here. Can it be that it was already decided that on such and such a day, at such and a such an hour, I shall move the fan like this and put it down here?"

Bhagavan replied: "Certainly." He continued: "Whatever this body is to do and whatever experiences it is to pass through was already decided when it came into existence."

Thereupon I naturally exclaimed: "What becomes then of man's freedom and responsibility for his actions?"

Bhagavan explained: "The only freedom man has is to strive for and acquire the *jnana* which will enable him not to identify himself with the body. The body will go through the actions rendered inevitable by *Prarabdha*

(destiny based on the balance sheet of past lives) and a man is free either to identify himself with the body and be attached to the fruits of its actions, or to be detached from it and be a mere witness of its activities."

This may not be acceptable to many learned people or philosophers, but I am sure I have made no error in transmitting the gist of the conversation that took place between Bhagavan and me. Though this answer of Bhagavan may upset the apple cart of our careful reasonings and conclusions, I am satisfied that what Bhagavan said must be the truth. I also recall in this connection the following lines that Bhagavan once quoted to me from *Thayumanavar* on another occasion, which means: "This is not to be taught to all. Even if we tell them, it will only lead to endless discussion."

It may be well to remind readers that Bhagavan has given his classic answer to the age-old question "Can free will conquer fate?" as follows in his "Forty Verses":

Such questions worry only those who have not found the source of both freewill and fate. Those who have found this source have left all such discussions behind.

The usual reaction of Bhagavan to any such question would be to retort: "Who is it that has this fate or freewill? Find that out and then this question will not arise."

The Self is Always in You, Around You and Everywhere

by N. N. Rajan

I have had many opportunities to talk to Bhagavan and one of them I mention here. One day I went to see Gurumurtham and the garden near it. These two places are well known to those who have read his biography. It was in this garden that Bhagavan's uncle recognized him as his nephew Venkataraman, who had left his home some three years earlier. After visiting the two places, I returned to the Asramam and told Bhagavan that the place now was more or less an open ground and was not a garden as described by B. V. Narasimhaswami in his book *Self Realisation*. Bhagavan immediately began to describe how the garden had been then and proceeded further to describe his life during his sojourn there. He said that he was taking shelter in a lamb pen where it was hardly high enough for him to sit erect. If he wanted to stretch his body on the floor, most of it would be out in the open. He wore only a kroupina and had no covering over the rest of his body. If it rained, he remained on the wet and sodden ground where sometimes water stood a couple of inches deep! He did not feel any inconvenience because he had no 'body sense' to worry him. He felt that sunrise and sunset came in quick succession. Time and space did not exist for him! He then tried to describe the state of his awareness of the Self and his awareness of the body and things material. To him, the sun of absolute Reality made the phenomenal world disappear and he was immersed in that light which dissolves diversity into the One Without a Second!

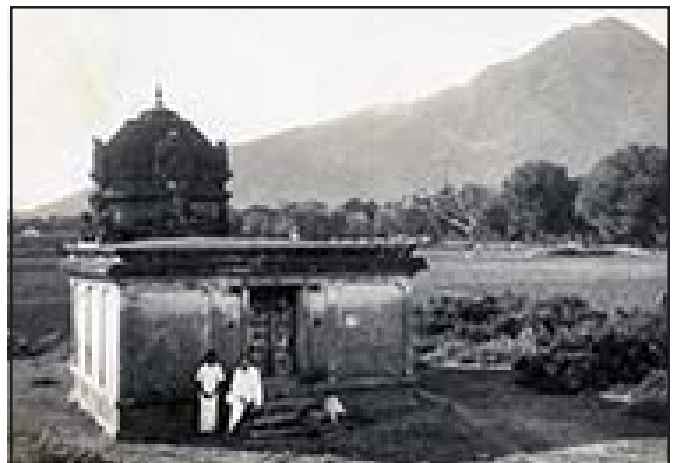
It is not possible to express exactly the thrill felt by all of us who were listening to him. We all felt transported into that condition for which we are striving. There was a deep silence in the hall for some time and everyone present felt peace and happiness. It occurred to me then that Bhagavan, while narrating any incident of his life, was taking the opportunity to teach us, and I told him that when he spoke we felt as if it were easy to experience the Self and as if we had glimpses of it. We asked him exactly how one has to proceed to be in that state of continuous awareness which he had described. Bhagavan, with his sparkling eyes, looked at me benevolently, raised his hands and said:

"It is the easiest thing to obtain. The Self is always in you, around you and everywhere. It is the substratum and the support of everything. You are experiencing the

Self and enjoying it every moment of your life. You are not aware of it because your mind is on things material and thus gets externalized through your senses. Hence, you are unable to know it. Turn your mind away from material things which are the cause of desires, and the moment you withdraw your mind from them you become aware of the Self. Once you experience the Self, you are held by it, and you become 'That' which is the One Without a Second."

When he finished his words I again felt as I had felt on the first day I met him. that Bhagavan is a big powerhouse and his power or grace overwhelms us, whatever our ideas may be, and leads us into the channel flowing into the Self. It became clear to me that we can have the knowledge of the Self if only we take the path on which a realized person or guru directs us.

In conclusion. I wish to say that one should constantly meditate that one is not the body or the mind. Unless the mind is in contact with the senses, we cannot get any report from our ears, eyes, etc. We must therefore still the mind by disconnecting it from the senses and thus get beyond them to experience the Self. What we learn from sense perception is only relative knowledge. Knowledge of the Self can be learnt only by sitting at the feet of one who has realized it; what others tell you is mere talk. Bhagavan Ramana is one of those Masters who has realized the Self and like all other Masters who preceded him, he helps us proceed rapidly to attain Self-knowledge.



Gurumurtham in 1935

My Heart's Journey

A Pilgrim's Diary

by Evelyn Kaselow

December 18, 1982:

Kunju Swami recounted how he was given the mission to accompany the Princess Prabhavati to Kerala following her marriage. She spent a month in the home of friends; Kunju Swami lived in a mutt. At the end of the planned time period the princess wished to extend her stay. In the meantime, Kunju Swami decided to go on yatra to various holy places in Kerala. When news of Kunju Swami's intent reached Bhagavan, Bhagavan expressed annoyance that Kunju Swami had neglected to do the job for which he had been sent, i.e., to look after the princess.

Immediately on hearing this, Kunju Swami moved into the house where the princess was staying and stayed as long as she wished. "Thus, Bhagavan was always kind and considerate to women," Kunju Swami remarked, "but we (men) received his reprimands!"

Kunju Swami said the person who goes round Arunachala barefoot is indeed blessed according to Hindu mythology. When the person goes to heaven, the bruises on his feet will be worshipped by all the deities of heaven! Moreover, when they bend over to touch the bruises with their heads, their crowns will bloody the pilgrim's feet even more! The pilgrim will then be doubly blessed! "Therefore, you're not selfless for wishing to walk around Arunachala barefoot. On the contrary, you're selfish!" Kunju Swami concluded laughingly. So saying we took our seat on a flat rock, one of the few places before Gautama Ashram where Bhagavan would customarily stop when going by the inner path.

Far from the road or any visible habitation, Kunju Swami remarked that on the hill Bhagavan would tell them, "This is our kingdom; that (i.e., the town) is their kingdom." On the hill the devotees could sing, dance and act with complete freedom. In Bhagavan's presence, day and night they enjoyed an extraordinary feeling of intoxication. He alone had to bring them back to the world from time to time.

Once a devotee asked Kunju Swami, jokingly, "What would you do if Lord Siva appeared before you right now as a column of light and offered you heaven?" Kunju

Swami replied without hesitation, "I would refuse it. The happiness of heaven could in no way equal the happiness of being in Bhagavan's proximity here on earth!"

He further said that on the day of Sri Bhagavan's Mahanirvana the devotees' minds were filled with grief, yet within a day they discovered that, when speaking of Bhagavan, they would feel the same infectious joy that they felt in his physical presence! Bhagavan, though no longer in the body, continued for them as before!

Being with Kunju Swami on the hill and talking of Bhagavan, I felt I too am Bhagavan's direct disciple, enjoying the same happiness his presence imparted to his most intimate companions! Ganesan then commented that coming out on the hill and talking of Bhagavan, he finds that for him the Ashram and all its related concerns disappear; moreover, the worries related to the body disappear. I said this was my experience too, for I had not even taken note of the fever I'd developed in the afternoon.

Among his devotees, Sri Bhagavan established the rule while going round the hill, that once they reached Eesanya Mutt they must be quiet. Bhagavan was so particular never to create trouble or disturbance to anyone that he would have the devotees split up and take different routes back through the town. He himself would walk with a towel over his head to avoid notice. All would regroup behind the temple of the town. Bhagavan would make sure they were all there, and they would return up the hill together, to their "Kingdom".

Bhagavan did not have a rigid ethical code. Kunju Swami was very young when he first came to Bhagavan. At times Kunju Swami and a friend, for fun, would see how many times they could run from Skandashram to Virupaksha Cave and back. Chinnaswami would object: "This boy is so irresponsible! It is his duty to bring us food from the town. What if he falls and breaks a leg!" Bhagavan would tenderly say, "It is not he who is doing it... It's his age that is doing it!" In speaking of a misdeed, the strongest word Bhagavan would use was "mischief".

Kunju Swami described Bhagavan's state of mind as "all-knowing", yet without an element of personal will; that is, he did not "read" minds nor would he give any indication or display of this ability. It was simply his natural state.

The thoughts and past deeds of all were immediately apparent to him. About this facet Bhagavan once

commented, "It is true I know the innermost thoughts of you all, but if I brought them all to light would any of you stay here?" Kunju Swami narrated this with a laugh.

Bhagavan's complete and total disregard for siddhis set him apart from virtually all other saints, Kunju Swami noted. It seems on one occasion Bhagavan said he had experienced his body dissolving into the five elements, yet called it back. "There has never been a saint so unique as Bhagavan, who remained so human, so simple and so ordinary to all appearances," Kunju Swami exclaimed in ecstasy, "and I don't think there could ever be another one like him again!"

Since our talk continued after sunset we returned to the Ashram by the road and Ganesan filled me in on a few details about our venerable friend. As a boy Kunju Swami was found to be very intelligent, possessing a prodigious memory.

At one time he wished to take up a study of Vedantic texts and told Bhagavan, "Not for myself, but for the sake of others!" He had the gift of eloquence and could easily quote from any number of scriptures. Bhagavan, however, forbade him pursue this study. In subsequent years when Bhagavan saw Kunju Swami talking to devotees he would now and then chide him by asking, "Are you doing it for

yourself or for others?!" Thus, Kunju Swami came to understand that it was he himself who was helped when he spoke with others of Bhagavan's teaching and life. Therefore, I must thank you for helping me remember Bhagavan, Ganesan concluded!



Evelyn, Kunju Swami and V. Ganesan

Sri Ramana Jayanti Retreat in Tampa

Saturday Morning, December 29th – Tuesday Morning, January 1st

This year's retreat will have periods of meditation, chanting, readings, presentations, satsang and quiet time for reflection and relaxation, and will once again be held at the Franciscan Center of Tampa, Florida.

Participants are requested to arrive by Saturday morning to attend the special Arunachala-Ramana worship at the Hindu Temple and the program in the Old Hall replica.

If you would like more details and a registration form emailed to you, please write to:

dbatistajimenez@gmail.com

Or call: (516) 768-8996 or (902) 665-2090

The Franciscan Center's accommodation capacity is limited to 65 guests, which will soon be met. We therefore recommend all genuinely interested individuals to request a registration form, complete it and immediately return it. The final registration date is November 30th. Details related to the cost for lodging and food will be provided along with the registration form.

The retreat will be held at:

The Franciscan Center, 3010 N. Perry Avenue, Tampa, Florida 33603

Website: <http://www.franciscancentertampa.org/>

Meditation on “One Thought” Clarified

MR. P. C. Desai asked Bhagavan, “In verse 14, they have translated the second line of the Sanskrit verse as ‘If the mind is continuously fixed on meditation of the Self, etc.’ Is that all right, seeing that neither ‘continuously’ nor ‘Self’ is found in the original?”

Bhagavan: *Eka chintana* involves continuous thought. If no other thought is to come, the one thought has to be continuous. What is meant by the verse is as follows. The previous verses have said that for controlling the mind breath-control or *pranayama* may be helpful. This verse says that the mind so brought under control or to the state of *laya* should not be allowed to be in mere *laya* or a state like sleep, but that it should be directed towards *eka chintana* or one thought, whether that one thought is of the Self, the *ishta devata* or a *mantram*.

What the one thought may be will depend on each man’s *pakva* or fitness. The verse leaves it as one thought.

– *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 21-1-46

प्रानबन्दनात् लीनमानसम्।

एकचिन्तनात् नाशमेत्यदः ॥१४॥

prānabandanāt līnamānasam ।

ekacintanāt nāśametyadaḥ ॥14॥

Breath controlled and thought restrained,
The mind turned one-way inward
Fades and dies.

– *Upadesa Saram*, v. 14

Ramana Satsangs in the USA and Canada

Regular satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation are conducted in or near large cities. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please contact the individuals below for more information.

Atlanta Area — Mangalam Kalyanam (678-546-0378 / smoothcutter@hotmail.com)

Birmingham, AL — Sai Kand (205-441-6859 / kandsai@yahoo.com)

Boston, MA — David & Anna (617-928-1487 / annaklegon@gmail.com)

Canada, Ottawa — Anantha Padmanabhan (613-733-8250 / madhupaddy@rogers.com)

Canada, Toronto — Thiru (416-876-1942 / thirusivasamy@hotmail.com)

Canada, Vancouver — Akash (778-321-4499 / eternalshiva@hotmail.com)

Canada, Victoria — Saibish (250-818-2875 / saibish@gmail.com)

Chicago Area — Jean-Luc & Rita (719-480-3530 / blueskyvalley@mac.com)

Connecticut Area — Aruna & Ram (860-284-0078 / rsankaran2000@yahoo.com)

Chapel Hill, NC — Ranjani Ramanan (919-338-2551 / ranjanil@yahoo.com)

Detroit, MI Area — Murali & Kalpana (248-210-7543 /

Dublin, Ohio — Abilash & Madhavi (614-789-9058 / mungamuru@hotmail.com)

Florida, Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet Robinson (954-600-1967 / arunahill@gmail.com)

Florida, Tampa — Rohit (813-766-0145 / rohitkvaidya@yahoo.com)

Florida, Palm Coast — Shriram & Rekha (904-347-3434 / ssmarathemd@gmail.com)

Houston, TX — Kumar Saran (832-435-3761 / saran01@earthlink.net)

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