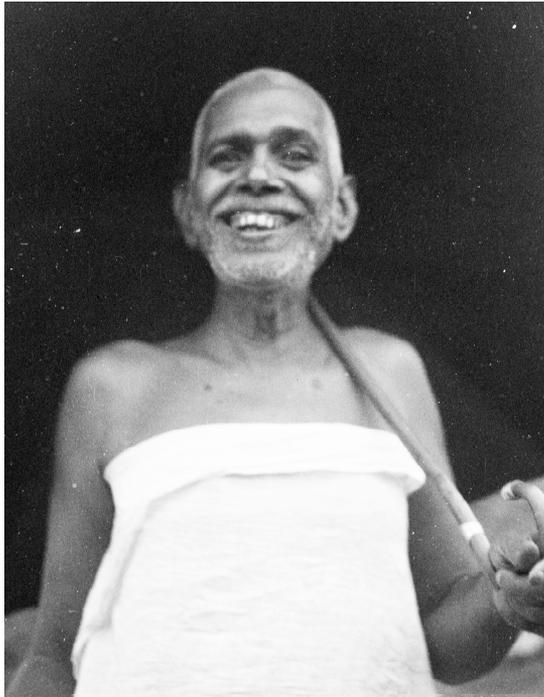


**Ramana Maharshi's
Forty Verses on Reality**
Ulladu Narpadu

A synopsis of his teaching



With comments and practice notes
by Richard Clarke

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A Brief Overview

Forty Verses on Reality was written by Ramana Maharshi at the request of Muruganar, who wanted a concise synopsis of Ramana's teaching, and wanted 40 verses to fit a classical Hindu poetic form. Ramana wrote the verses as they came to him, and Muruganar arranged them in a particular order. Later, Ramana wrote 40 additional verses, and the original 40 verses were put into a supplement to the 40 verses. The final verses are in this booklet.

Advaita, non-duality, Identity, is the supreme doctrine expressed in these verses; Jnana marga, the path of knowledge, is the approach to it. Self-inquiry, "Who am I?," is the technique Bhagavan taught for this path. There is no more profound and comprehensive statement of it than his *Forty Verses on Reality*, or *Ulladu Narpadu* in Tamil.

About the comments

Each verse is given a short title. These comments are intended to support the reader in coming to understand experientially what Ramana Maharshi taught. Notes for practice are included to assist the reader in meditation and inquiry to make each verse a part of their own experience.

Richard Clarke has been a follower of Ramana Maharshi since 1990, under the superb teaching of Nome at SAT in Santa Cruz, CA. Before this he had studied Zen and Chan Buddhism for 25 years. He lived in Tiruvannamalai, home of Ramana Ashram from 2007 to 2015. He now resides in Mexico, near Lake Chapala.

Invocation

i. Reality exists as the Heart, your very Being

If Reality did not exist, could there be any knowledge of existence? Free from all thoughts, Reality abides in the Heart, the Source of all thoughts. It is, therefore, called the Heart. How then is one to contemplate it? To be as it is in the Heart, is Its contemplation.

Comment: This verse sets out the entire teaching. First is Reality. If there was no Reality would you even exist? But you do exist, and you know you exist. You know Reality, directly and immediately. To notice this Reality all you have to do is to look within yourself. Reality is everywhere. If we trace this Reality to where it comes from, we find it from deep within, deeper than any thought. This Reality is there even when thoughts are not. Thoughts appear in Reality, not the other way around. So if you trace the origin of the sense of Reality within you will find the open space of consciousness. This open space of consciousness is also your own real identity. It remains always, and it is untouched by everything that you think affects you. It is at the core of your being, the Heart.

Practice Note: What we really are seeking, what we really want to know, is within ourselves. One way to find it is to inquire, look deep within, questioning, "Is this who I am?" and noticing everything that comes and goes. What is it that does not come and go? That is with you always. Just notice.

ii. Deathless are they who know the Self

Those who know intense fear of death seek refuge only at the feet of the Lord Who has neither death nor birth. Dead to themselves and their possessions, can the thought of death occur to them again? Deathless are they.

Comment: This shows the basis for Ramana Maharshi's own realization, which started when he searched within for the answer to life and death at the age of 14. He found within himself that which never dies, and is his deepest identity. He was free, free from old ideas, free from gain or loss, and free of all possessions. Free of the body and ego.

Who dies? The body is born and so must die. Within us, as our very Self, is the Existence and Consciousness that lights up our mind, our senses, and our body. Does Existence ever die? Consciousness? Do you die? When you know yourself as this unlimited Existence–Consciousness, then of what value is any transitory thing; what you have and are is always. You know you were never born and so will never die.

Practice Note: Do you exist? How do you know this, except by your own inner light? Where does this light come from? This is a good inquiry: "Who knows this?" Knowing this you find something, not a thing, but consciousness vast and without boundary. It is Consciousness-Being (or Existence). Being and Consciousness are not two separate things, but one thing, indivisible. Can you ever find one without the other? Look and see within yourself. Does this Existence

ever die? If this is your own nature, do you die? This leads to freedom and peace. How can you want anything since you are vast and partless? No separation means there is no other thing to want.

Verses

1. You are all

From our perception of the world there follows acceptance of a unique First Principle possessing various powers. Pictures of name and form, the person who sees, the screen on which he sees, and the light by which he sees: he himself is all of these.

Comment: Since we exist and perceive an external world there must be a cause, a higher power, something greater than our individual self, one Reality which underlies the appearance of both the seer and what is seen: Existence-Consciousness.

Perceptions play out on the “screen of consciousness,” as does everything with a name or form. This includes this seeming person that sees the screen, the screen itself, and the light by which is screen is lit. All of this, the seer, the screen, and what is seen, is your Self, your deepest identity, not the imagined identity that you hold to as real, and who you are. It’s like we are at the movies, only to discover we are the screen, not the movie. Is the screen ever burned by the fire in the movie?

This Self is the “First Principle” written about in the first sentence.

Practice Note: Right now, do you exist? You do exist and you know you exist. Without using mind or senses you know you exist. If you are looking within for who you are, how can any of these changing things be you? You feel like you, the same one, all the time. What is it that is present all the time, within yourself? When you look “through your senses” you see myriads of objects and complexities. When you “look” directly into yourself, what you find is most singular. Do you have two existences, or just one? Are there two selves within one to see the other? Or just one?

2. Not three, but only One

All religions postulate the three fundamentals, the world, the soul, and God, but it is only the one Reality that manifests Itself as these three. One can say, “The three are really three” only so long as the ego lasts. Therefore, to inhere in one’s own Being, where the “I,” or ego, is dead, is the perfect State.

Comment: First we imagine that we are a separate self, then we see a world populated by others. Thinking how this all happens, we imagine a god. We usually do not notice that all three of these sprang from ourselves. When, through Self-inquiry, we discover this, there is only peace, the peace that comes from there being no “other” to fear, and no thing we do not have, so there is no desire, nothing to want.

Desires come from the ego. There is nothing separate for the Self to desire. Peace is freedom from desire, so to gain real peace, you must “kill” the ego. When you know who you are, your identity as the Self, you also see that the ego, being unreal, had no existence to begin with. This is how the ego is said to die. How can something that never existed have any hold on you?

Practice Note: Notice that you exist. Investigate just what this means, just who or what exists, and where? Discard all that comes and goes, and dive into what remains. Do you sense “three” here, or only one? Existence is singular, so are you. You just need to discover for yourself that no individual exists now, nor did it ever.

3. Take a nonobjective outlook

*“The world is real.” “No, it is a mere illusory appearance.”
“The world is conscious.” “No.” “The world is happiness.” “No.”
What use is it to argue thus? That State is agreeable to all,
wherein, having given up the objective outlook, one knows
one’s Self and loses all notions either of unity or duality, of
oneself and the ego.*

Comment: Dualities are just mental constructs. To debate the reality of the world is like arguing over the scales of a snake that is finally found to be just a rope. The entire point of spiritual practice is to find out just who (or what) you are. This, called above, “having given up the objective outlook,” brings peace and happiness to everyone. That is why Ramana said, “That State is agreeable to all.”

Practice Note: When your mind gets quiet, you feel calm and at peace. Where does this peace come from? When your mind is quiet you are no longer conjuring up the thoughts, memories, ideas, and projections that you usually seem to live in. What is different in these mental states? And if it is not conjured up, where does this peace come from? And why is this felt by everyone? Could it be that everyone is looking within, to what is always there, for everyone? What is to be found by such investigation? Who am I?

4. The seeing Self is the Eye of the Eye

If one has form oneself, the world and God also will appear to have form, but if one is formless, who is it that sees those forms, and how? Without the eye can any object be seen? The seeing Self is the Eye, and that Eye is the Eye of Infinity.

Comment: How you see yourself determines how you see anything else. If you have a form, then so do others, the world, and God. If you, though, are formless, so are the world and God.

Practice Note: Inquire into yourself, “Who knows?” Use this inquiry to dive into your own consciousness. If you think it is the mind that knows, then ask, “Who knows this mind?” and “Does this knower have a form?”

5. Do you see a world without a body?

The body is a form composed of the five-fold sheath; therefore, all the five sheaths are implied in the term, “body.”

Apart from the body does the world exist? Has anyone seen the world without the body?

Comment: The five sheaths are, from outer to inner, 1. Physical, the Body and senses, 2. Energy, the life force that moves within the body, 3. Mental, the mind and thought, 4. Wisdom, the intellect, and 5. Bliss, the “subtle body,” experienced as happiness, delight, and bliss. Your own Being, your Self, is within, the innermost, deeper than all five sheaths.

Practice Note: How do you know the world? It is only through the senses. How do you know the senses? It is only through the mind. How do you know the mind? You can “see” your thoughts, which means that thought is “external” to you. What within you knows your thoughts? What within you knows?

6. The world and the mind exist together

The world is nothing more than an embodiment of the objects perceived by the five sense-organs. Since, through these five sense-organs, a single mind perceives the world, the world is nothing but the mind. Apart from the mind can there be a world?

Comment: Your idea of a world and mental model of that world is based only on your sense perceptions of it. For you, the world is really only this mental model. Your senses, also, are filtered through this mental model. When the mind is not active, like in deep sleep, do you even know of any

world? So the world rises and falls based only on your mind.

Practice Note: When you are dreaming, where does the world in the dream come from? This world has the same sense of reality as the world in the waking state. What do these two worlds have in common? It is only the mind that knows them. Who knows the mind?

7. That which does not rise or set is the Reality

Although the world and knowledge thereof rise and set together it is by knowledge alone that the world is made apparent. That Perfection wherein the world and knowledge thereof rise and set, and which shines without rising and setting, is alone the Reality.

Comment: All things come and go. Something knows all these transitory things. If you look within right now there is something that is the same as in your oldest memory. What is this? The sense of reality is in each moment and in last night's dream. Trace out, where does this sense of reality come from?

Practice Note: If you inquire, and first ask yourself, "Do I exist?" the same answer will come no matter how many times you ask. You must exist; otherwise you could not ask that question. What is this existence? Does it ever change? Is it sometimes more and sometimes less? The sun rises and sets. Do you?

8. Realization is knowing identity with Reality

Under whatever name and form one may worship the Absolute Reality, it is only a means for realizing It without name and form. That alone is true realization, wherein one knows oneself in relation to that Reality, attains peace and realizes one's identity with it.

Comment: Only the Self can know the Self. The mind can never know; the mind is in the Self, not the other way around. When you turn your own light of consciousness upon itself, you find this light that is “lit up” by itself. Nothing else is needed. What is this Self-effulgent light? Is it any different from you?

Practice Note: When you look outside your body and inside, all you perceive is objective to you, it is an object of perception. You are the subject. When you look within at more subtle experiences, like feelings, moods, and thoughts, these are still objective, known to you. Who is the knower of all of these? The knower never appears as the known, how could it? Who is this “unknown knower of all that is known?” Does this need any other “light” than itself to be known?

9. Dualities and trinities are only the one Reality

The duality of subject and object and trinity of seer, sight, and seen can exist only if supported by the One. If one turns inward in search of that One Reality they fall away. Those who see this are those who see Wisdom. They are never in doubt.

Comment: The Self is the substratum on which dualities and trinities exist. They seem to obscure, to cover, the Self, like clouds cover the sun. When the clouds part the sun shines, unabated. So it is with the Self. Remove the obscurations and the Self shines, by itself. When this is known directly, doubts and misconceptions can stand no longer.

Practice Note: When you look deep within, how many do you find? How many existences do you have? Are there two of you, one to know and the other to be known? These are examples of the common experience that at our heart, we are just one.

10. True Knowledge only knows the Self

Ordinary knowledge is always accompanied by ignorance, and ignorance by knowledge; the only true Knowledge is that by which one knows the Self through enquiring whose is the knowledge and ignorance.

Comment: Only the Self can know the Self. What is not the Self is not real. It comes and goes like dust in the winds. How can what is not real ever know anything?

What is called in this verse “ordinary knowledge” is mental, conceptual; a “model” of reality, a model made with desires, aversions, attachments and fears. The Self is direct knowledge. How do you know the Self? Why through Self-inquiry, using forms of the inquiry such as, “Who knows this?,” and “For whom is this?”

Practice Note: Consider the story of the snake seen in a dark room. When turning the light on it is seen only as a rope. What is the benefit in wondering about the snake's history, and the color of its scales? What is unreal is unreal and has no existence. Ignorance is unreal.

When you inquire, "Who knows?" what do you see? Is it the mind? Who knows the mind? When you look to know your existence, who knows that you exist? When you inquire, "For whom is this?" is it for the mind? Or something deeper, that knows the mind? This knowledge, deeper than mind, does not depend on mind, this is True Knowledge.

11. Ignorance is not knowing the knower

Is it not, rather, ignorance to know all else without knowing oneself, the knower? As soon as one knows the Self, which is the substratum of knowledge and ignorance, knowledge and ignorance perish.

Comment: We know so much in our life: ourself, our loved ones, our home, our city, our job, what we like and dislike, we know just about everything—but who we really are. All that we can know cognitively, with our mind, are things of senses and feelings – objects, gross and subtle. But existence is not an object. Consciousness is not an object. You are not an object. How can the mind know something that is nonobjective? The mind, so to say, rests within the substratum of you. You know the mind; it does not know you. Yet you can know yourself, directly and immediately, even right now. Self-inquiry is a way to know yourself.

Practice Note: You exist, and you know you exist. Who knows? In your deepest meditation, who knows? Is it the mind, or deeper than than mind? When you are happy, who knows? Who is this knower? The unknown knower of all that is known, who know this? Who am I?

12. True Knowledge is beyond anything known

That alone is true Knowledge which is neither knowledge nor ignorance. What is known is not true Knowledge. Since the Self shines with nothing else to know or to make known, It alone is Knowledge. It is not a void.

Comment: What is the "light" of you own consciousness? Does it need another source of "light" to know? Or is it self-effulgent, lit by its own light? That which is seen with this light is true Knowledge. Your knowledge of your own existence is true Knowledge. In true Knowledge there are no divisions such as ignorance and knowledge. True Knowledge is nondual, without pairs of opposites.

What is known by the mind are objects, gross and subtle. The mind does not provide its own light: rather it is the same self-effulgent light, which is who you are, that illumines everything. What is known through the mind is indirect and filtered and shaped by desires, fears, and conditioning. What is known by the mind always is centered around this "I"-thought, the imaginary character that we assume ourselves to be. This knowledge is all relative, with its relationship with this imagined person. This is not true Knowledge.

True Knowledge never changes, it is knowledge of your existence, knowledge of the Self. It is Self-known. There is no other light.

Practice Note: You know you exist. By what light do you know? What about when you are dreaming? Who is the “Unknown knower of all that is known?”

13. The Self is the only Reality

The Self, which is Knowledge, is the only Reality. Knowledge of multiplicity is false knowledge. This false knowledge, which is really ignorance, cannot exist apart from the Self, which is Knowledge-Reality. The variety of gold ornaments is unreal, since none of them can exist without the gold of which they are all made.

Comment: Even ignorance is lit by self-effulgent consciousness. For ignorance to be ignorance, it must be known.

Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, *Sat,-Chit-Ananda* is who you are. Is there any possible alternative to your existence? Is there some other reality other than what is real? This is the substratum upon which your ego, others, the world and your idea of a higher power all exist. Are they other than “gold,” the substratum itself?

Ramana says the Self is Knowledge. What does he mean by this? Perhaps it is understood better to say the Self is Consciousness. As you inquire you see that everything is only Consciousness. Consciousness is always there with

Existence, they are not two, but two names for the same thing. This is your very Self, your only Existence.

Practice Note: Inquire, “Where does this sense of reality come from?” Now, make the same investigation about the sense of reality in your dreams. Who knows the waking state? Who knows the dream?

14. Find the real “I” and “others” perish

If the first person, “I,” exists, then the second and third persons, “you” and “he,” will also exist. By enquiring into the nature of the “I,” the “I” perishes. With it “you” and “he” also perish. The resultant state, which shines as Absolute Being, is one’s own natural state, the Self.

Comment: The ego can only disappear if it is not real. What is real is true always. We all have experiences where the ego is no more. These include our nightly sleep, also various internal states, including meditation and *samadhi*, where the ego just vanishes. If this ego comes and goes, if the ego is not permanent, is it real? Notice that when the ego vanishes, so do all others and the world, as is the case in deep sleep. There is something, though, within us, that never disappears; what is that? Ramana calls this the “natural state.” It is the natural state since it is what is present when all the various ideas, suppositions and misidentifications fall away. It is natural since there is nothing to do to produce it, rather it is what always remains.

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