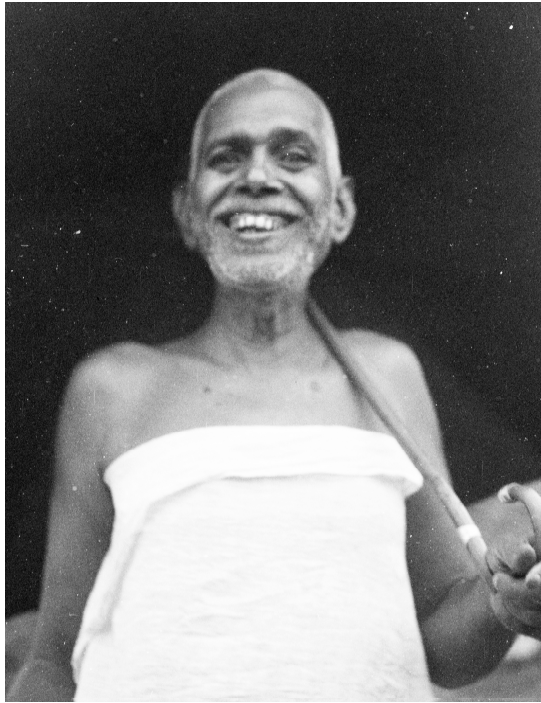


**Ramana Maharshi's
Forty Verses on Reality**
Ulladu Narpadu

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.

Practice Note: What is this natural state? Find out for yourself, right now. Inquire. Dismiss everything that comes and goes, everything that had a beginning, everything that has a cause. What remains? Dive into that.

15. Only the present exists

Only with reference to the present can the past and the future exist. They too, while current, are the present. To try to determine the nature of the past and the future while ignoring the present is like trying to count without the unit.

Comment: When is it? Why, it is now. It is always now. What seems past was once now. What is imagined as future might be now someday. Now is the only time that you exist. All experience, gross or subtle, is now. It is always “here,” too. Now and here are when and where you exist. Always. The past and present exist only in your mind. Now is the direct experience of Being.

Practice Note: Just be here and now. Dismiss any other idea. The doubt, “Can I do this?” is just another idea.

16. Timeless and spaceless are we

Apart from us, where is time and where is space? If we are bodies, we are involved in time and space, but are we? We are one and identical now, then, and forever, here, and everywhere. Therefore we, timeless, and spaceless Being, alone are.

Comment: You are here and now, always. Ideas of past and future only exist in the now. Ideas of other places only exist

here. These both exist for body/minds. Are you a body? Are you a mind?

Practice Note: Who knows “now?” What knows “here?” Who knows the body? What knows the mind?

17. The ‘I’ shines as the limitless Self

To those who have not realized the Self, as well as to those who have, the word “I” refers to the body, but with this difference, that for those who have not realized, the ‘I’ is confined to the body whereas for those who have realized the Self within the body the “I” shines as the limitless Self.

Comment: The body and the world are really part of the same idea. If you see yourself as a body, then the body exists in the world. If you see a world then the body is within it. But if you see yourself as you truly are, the illimitable Self, then the body exists within you, the world exists within you.

Practice Note: Does the world exist without your knowing of it? In deep sleep, does the world exist? When you see the consciousness within, who sees this?

18. The Self shines as the substratum of the world

To those who have not realized (the Self) as well as to those who have the world is real. But to those who have not realized, Truth is adapted to the measure of the world, whereas to those that have, Truth shines as the Formless Perfection, and as the Substratum of the world. This is all the difference between them.

Comment: What you see as true about the world depends on how you see yourself. Without knowing the Self, the reality of the world is the reality of body and senses and objects. When you know the Self, the Reality is in the Self. Always there is Existence. Always there is Consciousness. Nothing exists without these; this is why they are called the Substratum of the world.

Practice Note: What is real? What is always? What just comes and goes? How do you know the world? How do you know your own existence?

19. Know the Self and be free of destiny

Only those who have no knowledge of the Source of destiny and free-will dispute as to which of them prevails. They that know the Self as the one Source of destiny and free-will are free from both. Will they again get entangled in them?

Comment: Cause and effect are for a body. If you are not a body, what is there to be caused? What effect can touch you? The Self is always free, unlimited, and unblemished.

Practice Note: Did you begin? Your body began, are you the body? Will you end? Is there a limit to your awareness, your consciousness, that you can locate? Does anything ever touch this Consciousness that you are?

20. To see God, know your Self

He who sees God without seeing the Self sees only a mental image. They say that he who sees the Self sees God. He who,

having completely lost the ego, sees the Self, has found God, because the Self does not exist apart from God.

Comment: Only the Self can see the Self. No other exists to see anything. Ignorance does not exist, has no reality. Your Self is one, there is no separation, no other. There is no other Self, anywhere, at any time. There is not “your Self” and the “Self of God.” There is only the Self, and you are That. So to see God you do not need to look afar, only look deeply within yourself.

Practice Note: When you inquire into existence, what is your sense of being? Are you many? Or one, without even an idea of one? Are there two Selves? One to know another?

21. To see God, be consumed in his infinite light of “I am”

What is the Truth of the scriptures which declare that if one sees the Self one sees God? How can one see one’s Self? If, since one is a single being, one cannot see one’s Self, how can one see God? Only by becoming a prey to Him.

Comment: Can you ever see the Self as an object? To see the Self this way requires one Self to be, and another Self to see. This cannot be. So how do you “turn around” the light of Consciousness to look back onto itself? Well, you don’t; what you can do is to stop seeing your ego, the world and God as real. Dismiss all three and you are left as the One. This does not need to be made more real; it is already entirely real. Self-inquiry reveals, it does not transform.

Practice Note: To see God, know yourself. How? Inquire, “Who am I?” and trace your identity back to its source. To see God, be God. To See the Self, stand as the Self.

22. Turn the mind inward

The Divine gives light to the mind and shines within it. Except by turning the mind inward and fixing it in the Divine, there is no other way to know Him through the mind.

Comment: How do you know the mind? The mind gets its light from the Self, it does not stand in its own light. The mind is really an illusion, an illusion of a separate entity called “I.” Can you really know something that is illusory? To know the mind, you must know its source, which is Consciousness, the Self. The mind cannot know itself. The mind cannot know the Self. You can know, though. Just dismiss all that comes and goes and hold to that which is always. That is the Self.

Practice Note: Who knows the mind? Does the mind know itself? When you inquire, who inquires? Is it the mind?

23. Inquire whence this ‘I’ emerges

The body does not say “I.” No one will argue that even in deep sleep the “I” ceases to exist. Once the “I” emerges, all else emerges. With a keen mind inquire whence this “I” emerges.

Comment: When you inquire, “From whence does this “I” arise?” you will notice that the body makes no claims of being “I,” of being your identity. The only “I” found in the body is projected onto, due to your own mistaken identity

with it. Our language gives a hint about this; we say “my body, “my arm” etc., indicating that the seeming “owner” of the body or arm is different from the body.

In deep sleep, your mind is dormant, so there is no “I.” In dreams, though, your mind is alert, and each dream has an “I” that is the central character in that dream. Where does this “I” come from?

In both the dream in the waking state, there is this “I,” and with it comes everybody else, the world, and whatever idea we have of a higher power. They all appear together, as a set: “I,” the world and God.

Practice Note: So where does this “I” come from? What about in a dream? You have the same sense of reality in a dream. Where does this come from? It is easier to see in a dream that the “I” is not inherent, since you know that in a dream everything is only from your mind and memory.

Both the dream and the waking state share a subject-object orientation. After inquiring about the source of the “I” in a dream, ask yourself the same questions about the waking state.

24. This inert body does not say “I”

This inert body does not say “I.” Reality-Consciousness does not emerge. Between the two, and limited to the measure of the body, something emerges as “I.” It is this that is known as Chit-jada-granthi (the knot between the Conscious and the

inert), and also as bondage, soul, subtle-body, ego, samsara, mind, and so forth.

Comment: The body does not say “I.” The Self has no “I.” So the metaphor of the “*knot between the Conscious and the inert*” is used to describe what seems to “tie” the Self to the body. What is this “knot?” It certainly is the tangle of assumptions and ideas about who we are, what brings us happiness, what we are like, what the world is like, other people and relationships, and how we feel and think about all this. It is a big mess. It is centered on the “I”-thought.

The core, the center, of this knot is the “I”-thought. After the “I”-thought, the mind organizes thoughts of others, the world, and any higher power, all in relationship to this “I”. This is why Ramana’s emphasis is on Self-inquiry.

Practice Note: This “I”-thought is your idea of your identity. Is it always that same? Has it been different at one time of your life from another? Is it present all the time, every day? What about deep sleep? There is no “I”-thought then, and people find this deep sleep so refreshing.

If the “I”-thought is not present always, what is here always? How can anything that comes and goes be your real identity? Since you are not that which comes and goes, ask, “Who am I?” You know that you exist. You are not what is temporary. Just what is your real identity?

25. Investigate yourself and all forms takes flight

It comes into being equipped with a form, and as long as it retains a form it endures. Having a form, it feeds and grows big. But if you investigate it this evil spirit, which has no form of its own, relinquishes its grip on form and takes to flight.

Comment: The “I”-thought starts with the assumption, “I am this body.” As long as this thought continues, then we are bound, as if by a rope that we ourselves tied. Seeing ourselves with a form, we see others and the world with forms, too.

But what happens if we start to investigate these assumptions and ideas? Looking within we start to see that the body, and all else, are known, and that we must be the knower. We know all form, but we can’t find a form for our real identity. We exist and know we exist, but what actually exists? All we can find is Consciousness and Existence, always together, inseparable. And all objects are known by this Consciousness-Existence. Objects are with form. You are formless.

Practice Note: To start to dissolve your ideas about form, inquire, “Who knows this?” “Look” at your body; the body is objective to you, known by you. Who knows the body? “Look” at your senses; senses are known. Who knows the senses? “Look” at your thoughts; again, thoughts are known. Just who knows these thoughts? “Look” even to your sense of yourself, your ego. This ego is also known.

Who knows the ego? Keep inquiring, “Who am I?” Is this one any different than the one who knows?

26. Inquire “What is this ego?”

If the ego is, everything else also is. If the ego is not, nothing else is. Indeed, the ego is all. Therefore the enquiry as to what this ego is, is the only way of giving up everything.

Comment: Does the ego even exist? It seems to, so long as we hold it to be real. The seeming reality of the ego comes from you. You, the Self, are always real. What appears as a real ego gets the reality from you, not from any illusory ego.

Inquire into the ego and you see that the source of the ego is your own Existence-Consciousness. Is the pot other than clay?

Practice Note: Instead of “Who am I?” inquire “What am I?” or “What is the nature of my existence?” Is it anything physical? Sensory? Mental? Or are you the same during any changes of these? What is real is what remains the same always. What, within yourself, is Real?

27. Abide in one’s true State – the non-emergence of “I”

The State of non-emergence of “I” is the state of being THAT. Without questing for that State of the non-emergence of “I” and attaining It, how can one accomplish one’s own extinction, from which the “I” does not revive? Without that attainment how is it possible to abide in one’s true State, where one is THAT?

Comment: The “I” emerges when we think we are this individual, this body, this mind. It is this unchallenged assumption, this belief, that underlies the “I”-thought. So how do we practice so as to see this “*State of non-emergence of “I”*”? First inquire, “What is the nature of my existence?” When this inquiry is deep, you see that the ego never really existed to begin with. When you know this, how can any imagined “I” ever arise?

Practice Note: What is the nature of your existence? Are you a body? Are you one who acts and thereby has karma? Are you a thinker? Are you a spiritual practitioner? Or are you That which knows these all?

When you come to see the imagined snake as a rope, did the snake ever exist, was it ever real?

28. Dive into yourself to see where the “I” originates

Just as a man would dive in order to get something that had fallen into the water, so one should dive into oneself, with a keen one-pointed mind, controlling speech and breath, and find the place whence the “I” originates.

Comment: Where does this sense of “I” come from? You should thoroughly investigate this. This seeming “I” has only the reality that you give to it.

Control of speech and breath bring a quiet mind. It is with this quiet mind that inquiry can dive deep. It is when you dive deep into yourself that you can see what you are not, and so reveal your real identity as the open, knowing

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consciousness in which everything arises, and that is illuminated by its own light. This is your identity, your only reality.

Practice Note: Inquire. Notice that you exist and know you exist. Then investigate, “Where does this sense of “I” come from?”

Is it the body? How can this be? The body does not say “I.” The only “I” I find is one that I superimpose upon this body.

Does it rise with the sense? I can’t find it in the senses, either.

Is it from the flow or breath and energy through the body? Breath does not say “I.” Prana does not say “I.” I know breath and prana. Who is it that knows?

Is it with thoughts that the ‘I’ comes? I know these thoughts and they do not know me. How then can thought be “I”?

Is it the intellect that makes meaning out of thoughts from which “I” arises? Well, the ego rises from the intellect, and this ego is known, otherwise it would have no effect. Who knows the inconstant ego?

Does this “I” even come from the bliss of deep sleep, in which the ego and mind are silent and from which the world seems to arise when we wake? But I know I slept, and sleep comes and goes. I cannot be anything that is temporary.

So who am I, if not the body, sense, prana, thought, intellect or the bliss of sleep? Who knows all of these?

29. Seek only the source of the “I”

The only enquiry leading to Self-realization is seeking the Source of the “I” with in-turned mind and without uttering the word “I.” Meditation on “I am not this; I am That” may be an aid to the enquiry but it cannot be the enquiry.

Comment: Contemplating “I am That,” or reflecting on it are mental activities. They might help your mind prepare for inquiry, but since they are mental, they are not the inquiry itself. The inquiry goes beyond what is merely mental, into the Knowledge-Existence that is your existence. In the metaphor of the rope-mistaken-as-snake does contemplating the snake and its history help you see it as a rope? No, only ignorance, revealed by the light, is what the snake is made from. Only the Self can know the Self. The mind is an illusion. Illusions know nothing.

Practice Note: Inquire. Dismiss every idea, dismiss anything that has a cause, or has a beginning, or that changes. What remains? That is what you are looking for; dive into That.

30. The Absolute Self emerges when the individual “I” falls

If one enquires “Who am I?” within the mind, the individual “I” falls down abashed as soon as one reaches the Heart and immediately Reality manifests itself spontaneously as “I-I”. Although it reveals itself as “I,” it is not the ego but the Perfect Being, the Absolute Self.

Comment: You do not need to do anything to make the Self more real; the Self is already entirely real. The Self is just hidden, like the sun behind clouds; clear away the clouds and the sun appears. It has always been there.

The “I”-thought is like a ghost, with no form of its own. It seems to have the form of anything onto which it has been projected. This is why investigation into this “I”-thought seems to make it disappear; it was never there to begin with. When the “I”-thought is extinguished, you stand as you are, the Self, one without a second.

Practice Note: Look within. Inquire. Can you find the form of your ego, your sense of identity? You can find attachments of ego, like “The-body-is-me” and “I am a woman” and such. Can you find the “I” or “me?” What do you see when you look into the formless Consciousness that lights up this “I”-thought? Or when you inquire, “Who knows this ego?”

31. Immersed in the Self, nothing remains to be done

For Him who is immersed in the bliss of the Self, arising from the extinction of the ego, what remains to be accomplished? He is not aware of anything (as) other than the Self. Who can apprehend his State?

Comment: For the Self, what is there to accomplish? For the Self there is no other, nothing to gain, nothing to lose, One without a second, so no one who can gain or lose.

Practice Note: How many are you, deep within? Are you multiple, with multiple existences and consciousnesses? Or are you just one? Is there one to know another, or just One.

32. Investigate what you really are, and remain as That

Although the scriptures proclaim "Thou art That," it is only a sign of weakness of mind to meditate "I am That, not this," because you are eternally That. What has to be done is to investigate what one really is and remain That.

Comment: The affirmation "I am That" is entirely mental. Does what you are now and always need any affirmation? Can it be made greater or lesser? Can Reality be made more real? Eschewing this affirmation, what is to be done? Simply investigate the reality of your existence. Finding yourself to be open awareness without any attribute, just remain as That, who you are and always have been. When you see this you know that there is no alternative, nothing else that you ever could be.

Practice Note: How do you get beyond the mental in your inquiry? Sometimes this is hard since the mind turns everything into an object, even the nonobjective reality. When you start to inquire, notice that you exist. You don't need your senses nor your thoughts to know you exist. This existence is self-evident, something that you know at a level deeper than senses or thought. When you start inquiry this way, you are already deeper than the mind. Knowing That, stay with and as That.

33. There is only one Self

It is ridiculous to say either "I have not realized the Self" or "I have realized the Self," are there two selves, for one to be the object of the other's realization? It is a truth within the experience of everyone that there is only one Self.

Comment: This has both personal and universal significance. As far as the personal, Ramana says it well, "Are there two selves, for one to be the object of the other?" Is that your experience? The Self is interior, closer, as they say, than your breath. What do you find within when you inquire, many or one? There are many ideas, many objects, but how many that know?

From a universal view, Sankara said, *Jiva is Siva*, "the individual is the Absolute." This is also from the Upanishads with *Tat tvam Asi*: "Thou are That." Both of these declare the identity of the seeming individual with Absolute Being-Consciousness.

Practice Note: Are you one of many? Look deeply right now and see. What does it feel like? Ramana said that inquiry was more akin to feeling than thought. What does it feel like, one or many? What is your direct experience?

34. Illusion is born of ignorance

It is due to illusion born of ignorance that men fail to recognize That which is always and for everybody the inherent Reality dwelling in its natural Heart-centre and to abide in it, and that instead they argue that it exists or does

not exist, that it has form or has not form, or is non-dual or dual.

Comment: This is easy to discern using the analogy of the rope and the snake. Entering a dark room, you see a snake. When illuminated, what seemed a snake is only a rope. The illusion of the snake is due to the ignorance of its real form. It is as if the illusion of the snake obscured the reality of the rope. When the illusion is gone, when the light is brought in, the ignorance is no more, and the rope is clearly seen as it is and always was. It was never a snake.

Practice Note: What, within yourself, is the inherent Reality? What is always?

35. To abide in the Self is the only attainment

To seek and abide in the Reality that is always attained, is the only Attainment. All other attainments (siddhis) are such as are acquired in dreams. Can they appear real to someone who has woken up from sleep? Can they that are established in the Reality and are free from maya, be deluded by them?

Comment: In the analogy of the rope and the snake, what is the significance of all the attainments of the snake? The truth of Ramana Maharshi's teaching is the utter unreality of the ego. All of these apparent attainments are for the ego. The Self is all, so there is nothing to attain, nothing to gain for the Self. Even abiding in the Self, is no attainment, it is the natural state. For the ego, though, it is the highest attainment.

36. We are always That

Only if the thought "I am the body" occurs will the meditation "I am not this, I am That." help one to abide as That. Why should we forever be thinking, "I am That?" Is it necessary for man to go on thinking "I am a man?" Are we not always That?

Comment: Inquiry is investigating your own Being to see what is true, and what is not. What is true is always true. What is not true is that which comes and goes. Key to inquiry then is discrimination and negation. Discriminate the changeful from the unchanging, the unreal from the real, then dismiss, get rid of, the ideas behind the changeful. One way to do this is with negation. This is where *neti-neti*, "not this, not this" comes into play, to extinguish wrong ideas, ignorance, about yourself. Use of negation, though, should be limited to this purpose. Saying, 'I am not this, I am That' as an affirmation accomplishes nothing, since you are already and always That to begin with. You cannot make the Real more real.

Practice notes: Negation must be done thoroughly to be effective. Just saying (or thinking) *neti-neti* is not enough. You must look deeply within yourself and find the different forms that your misidentification has taken. For example, if you try to discriminate to know the unreality of the body without a similar discrimination on the seeming actor that

seems to act through the body, then you have not finished your work. Be thorough in your inquiry!

37. “Non-dualism in practice, non-dualism on attainment” is false.

*The contention, “Dualism during practice, non-dualism on Attainment,” is also false. While one is anxiously searching, as well as when one has found one’s Self, who else is one but the tenth man?**

Comment: The path must be of the same nature as the destination, otherwise how can it be useful? This is one reason why Ramana’s Self-inquiry is so powerful; inquiry consists of the Consciousness that one is trying to see directly. With truth as the path, then it does not create more ignorance, like expedient teachings that themselves will later need to be overcome. With Self-inquiry the first step is the same as the last step.

Practice Note: Use Consciousness to look at Consciousness. Inquire. Know yourself.

*This refers to a traditional story of a party of ten fools who were travelling together. They had to cross a river, and on reaching the other shore wanted to check whether all of them had got safely across. Each one counted in turn, but each one counted the nine others and forgot himself. So they thought the tenth man had been drowned and began to mourn him. Just then a traveler came past and asked them what was the matter. He at once saw the cause of their mistake and in order to convince them he made them walk past him one by one, giving each one a blow as he passed and telling them to count the strokes.

38. Not the doer, then no karma

As long as a man is the doer, he also reaps the fruit of his deeds, but, as soon as he realizes the Self through enquiry as to who is the doer his sense of being the doer falls away and the triple karma (Sanchita, Agami and Prarabdha, karma from a previous life, from the present life, and that is being worked out in this life) is ended. This is the state of eternal Liberation.

Comment: For whom is the karma? It is for the one who acts. This one receives the fruit of the actions, the karma. The body acts. Do you act? It is only when you clearly understand this question that you will know this truth experientially.

Practice Note: Who is the actor? Who takes action? Are you the doer? Does the Vast Absolute ever act? Does Existence do anything?

39. If no thought of bondage then thoughts of liberation are not needed

Only so long as one considers oneself bound, do thoughts of bondage and Liberation continue. When one enquires who is bound the Self is realized, eternally attained, and eternally free. When thought of bondage comes to an end, can thought of liberation survive? These dualities exist only in our mind. When a duality is seen as one and thereby disappears, where did it go? Was it ever real? When the snake-in-rope is found to be a rope, where did the snake go?

Comment: Dualities, like liberation and bondage appear as pairs of seeming opposites. Without one of the pair, where is the other? Ideas of bondage and liberation are one of these pairs. None of these pairs exist in their own rights; they all depend on the light of Consciousness for their apparent existence. They further depend on the mind for the idea of opposition. What opposition can there be in the Self?

Practice Note: What happens when the dualities you think are real disappear?

40. Escaping all form is the way to Liberation

If it is said, that Liberation is of three kinds, with form or without form or with and without form, then let me tell you that the extinction of three forms of Liberation is the only true Liberation.

Comment: All things with forms have a beginning and have an end. As long as you hold to the form, you will not be able to plunge into the formless. The idea of form obscures the reality that lies beneath all form, which is Consciousness, which is our very Being. Forms rise in our mind as we make ideas of differences.

Practice Note: Does Existence have a form? How about Consciousness? Does the Self have a form? Do you have a form?

Author's note

This text of Ramana Maharshi's *Forty Verses on Reality* was originally published in *The Mountain Path*, published by Ramana Ashram.

I write this commentary as a part of my own practice, as an attempt to better understand the important teachings Ramana Maharshi expressed in his *Forty Verses on Reality*.

I hope that these comments may be of use to others who study, meditate, and inquire about these verses and Ramana's teaching. Ramana shows your real identity, and how to go about revealing it to yourself. Perhaps my comments can assist you in this spiritual practice.

Deep understanding really only comes through the inquiry into your real identity that is invited by each verse, and the resulting Self-knowledge. As Ramana says, real Knowledge comes only through knowledge of your Self.

My knowledge of these verses has come primarily from listening to Nome of SAT in Santa Cruz, CA., teach about them. If there is wisdom in any comment, it is from Nome. Certainly, if there is ignorance, it is surely mine.