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Forty Verses on Reality (Uḷadu Nārpadu)

The Invocatory (Mangalam) Verses

Commentary by Lakshmana Sarma

Sri Ramana Maharshi's composition Forty Verses on Reality (Uḷadu Nārpadu) is a veritable beacon of light to devotees, containing the essence of Sri Bhagavan's teachings. It indeed is a jnana shastra, consisting of forty profound verses that expound the nature of reality – of That Which Is. Sri Lakshmana Sarma (“Who”), though initially hesitant to study this work citing his inexperience in the Tamil language, was encouraged to do so when Sri Bhagavan himself said that he personally would tutor him and clarify whatever doubts might arise. What grace! What followed were three years of one-to-one instruction for Sri Sarma, given graciously by the endless ocean of compassion, Sri Ramana. Sarma's commentary on Forty Verses on Reality was published as early as 1936. Commenting on the merit of this work, Sri Bhagavan stated, “Everyone is saying that Lakshmana Sarma's commentary on Uḷadu Nārpadu is the best. Nobody has studied Uḷadu Nārpadu the way Sarma has.” Here we present Sarma's comments on the first two invocatory verses, the mangalam verses. The translation into English has been done by “Kays”, to whom we are immensely grateful for bringing this work to a wider audience. It is published by Sri Ramanasramam. The recitation of Uḷadu Nārpadu including the invocatory verses, is available on [YouTube](#).

Exegesis: Numerous indeed are the texts of spiritual instruction graciously bestowed by Bhagavan, but that which claims the pride of place among them is *Uḷadu Nārpadu* which means “The text that expounds ‘THAT WHICH IS’ (*uḷadu*), *The Reality in Forty Verses*”.

Sri Bhagavan, who ever abided in *sahaja samādhi* – the experience of the union of Brahman and Ātman – instructs in this text a direct path to the state he had realized as his constant experience, viz., the state of deliverance, so that devotees or aspirants may seek and dwell in that immaculate state of non-dual Ātman. (This state is different from anything else because it is a state of non-duality. There is no object to be known; nor is there a subject, a knower, the soul, and hence there is no knowing.)

Invocation:

The text has two invocatory verses. The truth of that Ātman, that non-dual, pure being and consciousness – abiding in which and verily as that in the heart-space within us is called *mukti* – is spoken of in the first verse. The second verse speaks of Īśvara, the *saguṇa* form (with name and form) of that same Ātman that confers the self-same deliverance on those who surrender themselves (rather their ego-sense) in all devotion to that Īśvara.

Verse 1:

உள்ளதல துள்ளவுணர் வுள்ளதோ வுள்ளபொரு
ளுள்ளலற வுள்ளத்தே யுள்ளதா – லுள்ளமெனு
முள்ளபொரு ளுள்ளலெவ னுள்ளத்தே
யுள்ளபடி
யுள்ளதே யுள்ள லுணர்

Uḷḷa-dala duḷḷa-vunar uḷḷadō vuḷḷa-porul
 Uḷḷa-lara vuḷḷatē uḷḷa-dāl – uḷḷa-menum
 Uḷḷa-porul uḷḷalevan uḷḷattē uḷḷa-paḍi
 Uḷḷadē uḷḷal uṇar

Padacchedam (Verse-split into its component words):
 uḷḷadu aladu, uḷḷa uṇarvu uḷḷadō? uḷḷa porul uḷḷal ara
 uḷḷattē uḷḷadāl, uḷḷam eṇum uḷḷa porul uḷḷal evan?
 uḷḷattē uḷḷapaḍi uḷḷadē uḷḷal uṇar

Import: Can there be a feeling (awareness of existence) without something that is (exists)? Can there be a true awareness (reality) other than ‘That which is?’ Since ‘That which exists’ dwells bereft of thoughts in the Heart – Itself called the Heart – who is there who can meditate on ‘That which is’ (*satvastu*) and how to meditate? Know that to meditate on ‘It’ is to be as ‘That *satvastu* is’ – to remain in the Heart without thoughts.

Commentary: Though there are three statements in this *venbā* [a type of Tamil verse], as the first affirmation has two different imports, we may deem this verse to have four statements. The mere focus on the content of the text, namely ‘That which is’ (the *satvastu*), itself constitutes the invocation. Further, we are instructed that abiding verily as the content of that *satvastu* – and not as apart from that *vastu* – unceasingly, constitutes its meditation. As Bhagavan himself is ever established as the content of That, he is par excellence the ceaseless meditator of that *vastu*, and we may take this verse to be an invocation to that form of meditation (namely Bhagavan) as well!

i) uḷḷadu aladu uḷḷa uṇarvu uḷḷadō?

Is there a feeling of existence without something that exists?

Herein the considered conclusion – namely, that there exists a *satvastu* (That which is) – is propounded. Considering the unreality of the seemingly real triad, world, God and *jīvā*, as the foregone or established conclusion, there must need be the truth of a substratum that provides the basis for their appearance. Therefore, that there definitely is a *satvastu* (That which is, which is spoken of as Brahman in the Upanishads) is the teaching imparted

here and this forms the first of the two imports of the same sentence.

Bhagavan has explained this content as follows:

“Everybody perceives the world and one's own self who perceives the world. He further considers them both as real. If they are real, they must continue to shine uninterruptedly without disappearing. But they shine only intermittently and not constantly. Appearing in dream and wakeful states they disappear in deep sleep. In other words, they appear when the mind manifests itself and do not appear when the mind is not. Therefore, rising and falling with the mind they are coextensive with it. Hence the *jīvā* who perceives and the world spectacle perceived are but thought-forms of the mind and are not real. That from which the thoughts of the mind emanate and into which they subside is the true *vastu* that shines uninterruptedly.” The same content is elucidated in verse seven as well.

A verse in chapter II of the *Bhagavad Gītā* ‘*nāsatō vidyate bhāvō nābhavō vidyate sataḥ*’ (There is never any (real) existence for the unreal; neither is there any non-existence for the real.) vouchsafes the truth declared here, namely, the distinction between the real *vastu* and mere unreal appearances is that, that which appears intermittently is unreal and that which shines uninterruptedly is real.¹

The averment of Sri Gaudapada that “What had no existence in the beginning and will not exist after some time is not-existent even in the intervening period (during which it seems to exist)” also bears out this truth.

Those who accept this definition of truth are Advaitins [non-dualists]; the others are Dvaitins [dualists]. However, all creeds are acceptable to Sri Bhagavan.

The analogy of a rope appearing as a snake is used to explain the statement declared here that though the world appearance is unreal, a *satvastu* exists as its basis or substratum. Just as the rope is real and the snake a false appearance, the appearance of the triad, the *jīvā* (the individual soul), God and jagat² (the

1. The test of reality is the continuity of existence without change which is the evidence of transcendence of time and other elements of relativity.

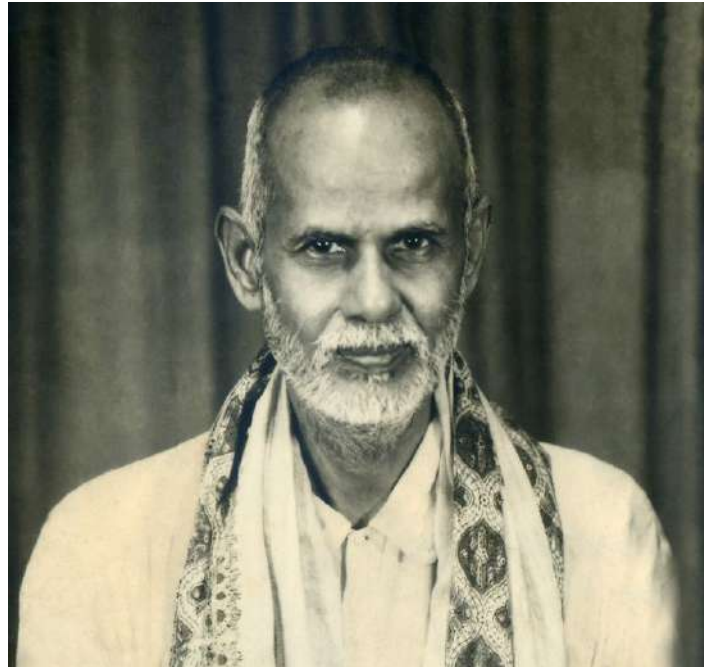
world) is unreal and Brahman alone is the sole reality. Since no snake can appear in the absence of a rope, the rope, the basic reality, is called the *adhiṣṭhāna* (substratum). As the snake is a mere appearance, imagined and projected, it is called *āropitam* (superimposed). Likewise, Brahman – That which is – is the substratum.

This analogy throws light on yet another truth. The appearance of the imagined snake obscures the rope – the substratum – and the rope shines as rope only when the imagined snake ceases to appear, thus proving that it is the nature of superimposition (*āropitam*) to effectively conceal the truth of the substratum (*adhiṣṭhāna*). Since ‘what is’ is just ‘ONE’, the imagined false appearance on it cannot but veil it. In the same way, the superimposed world precludes and prevents the truth of *adhiṣṭhāna* Brahman from shining.

Though ‘what is’ is the sole reality, Brahman, the only one, it appears as the world, not as ‘it is’ in its effulgence.

So long as Brahman is seen as the world, Brahman will not shine as Brahman. Only in the state of knowledge, the state of experience of being the Self when the world appearance gets obliterated, will Brahman shine in its own true form – in all the splendor of one unbroken reality – the Self.

This nature of appearing and veiling is called *māyā*. Its inherent nature is to make the real appear as unreal and the unreal appear as the real. Man, precisely because of this power of *māyā*, stands deluded, taking the unreal world for the real and himself – a *jīvā* – inextricably caught up in it. Though in truth there is no such thing as *māyā*, one becomes aware of this truth only after the experience of being the Self. Nonetheless until the dawn of enlightenment, during the period when the world appears real the notion that *māyā* exists has to be acceded to. Everybody knows by common experience that very often that which remains as something appears as something else. In the same way, while the *satvastu* – ‘That which is’ – remains bereft of names and forms, transcending time and space with absolute non-difference solely as pure being and awareness, we perceive it as the world. The disciple who queries the reason for this distortion is told by the master that it is the function of *māyā*



Sri Lakshmana Sarma

known as nescience (primal ignorance) or *ajñāna*.

But ‘That which is’, the *satvastu*, undergoes no change and ever remains the same, never slipping from its own nature. This truth is called *ajāta siddhāntam*³ (the truth of non-becoming). This is in tune with the truth experienced by sages and the rationale of inferential logic.

The mental delusion of the perceiver (*jīvā*) is the cause for the appearance of a snake in a rope. The perceiver here being sentient – with awareness – (it is seen that) the appearance of a snake is due to the wrong awareness engendered by mental delusion. In what is explained here with an analogy⁴ further questions arise. By what light of awareness do these three, the *jīvā*, God and world, appear? Do they appear by the light of awareness of something that is other than Brahman? Is Brahman then insentient or

2) *Though the world is one of triad, in the absence of the world the other two are not. They exist only when the world exists. Therefore, whenever the world is referred to, it must be inferred that it includes the other two. The jīvā, God and the world are imagined superimpositions on it.*

3) *The Truth of Non-Becoming as categorically stated by sage Gaudapada in Māṇḍukyā Kārika is as follows: the world did not come into being nor will it be destroyed; no one called the individual soul, really was born; there is neither a bound one, nor one that has become free; nor is there any aspirant.*

not? Further, is Brahman with awareness or is awareness just its form? In other words, is consciousness an attribute or a function of Brahman or is it its very nature?

The answers to all these questions constitute the other – the second – import of the same sentence.

ii) ulladu aladu ulla unarvu ulladō?

The Awareness required for the *ulla porul* (*satvastu*) to shine either as it is in truth or as the unreal world is none other than the *satvastu* itself. That *ulla porul* (That which is) is itself the form of awareness; a solid mass of *jñāna*, i.e., *jñāna* personified. In truth there is no other awareness apart from it for it to shine and it shines by its own light of awareness, in its Self-revealing effulgence or, the Self is Self-revealed. The fact that Brahman, the form of awareness, alone remains the revealing light both when Brahman appears as the world during the period of ignorance and also when Brahman shines as it is – as Self – simply as being-awareness is clear.⁵ A further import that is gleaned from this sentence is that as there is no true awareness apart from Brahman; the so-called *jīvā* that has no real existence appearing as if other than Brahman is a spurious awareness. The one, who as perceiver beholds the spectacle of the world, is this spurious awareness, the *jīvā*. Bhagavan has explained that this *jīvā*, the perceiver, is also a part of the world appearance and the same content is further clarified in the first verse as well (that goes *nāmulaham*). Bhagavan christens this *jīvā* as *poliuyir* (spurious or unreal soul or imitation soul) in one of the supplementary verses (verse 17). The *cidābhāsa* (reflected awareness or spurious awareness) that the *Vedāntic* texts speak of is this *jīvā*. Men under the sway of nescience, regard him as the Self or Ātman, name him *jīvātman* and God as *paramātman* and speak as if there are two Ātmans! Other than Brahman, *ulladu* (That which is) there is none other as *jīvā*, is the instruction bestowed. Hence the Ātman that we are, we are Brahman alone and not any other. This is the doctrine of union of Ātman and Brahman, the core teaching of the Upanishads, upheld by Sri Sankara as well. This is the transcendental truth that shines in all its splendour in the state of knowledge or in the state

of experience of being the Self, but we, in the dense darkness of ignorance, unable to comprehend this truth, take the spurious *jīvā* to be the Self and all else as other than that.

It is clear from this that Brahman, *ulladu* (That which is), is the sole truth and it is also the awareness that reveals itself; Brahman alone is the Self (Ātman); and there is nothing, either sentient or insentient, as other than that. That remains without any kind of distinction such as the perceiver and the perceived spectacle. This indeed is the doctrine of Advaita. Advaita means the one *sans* a second.

To be continued...

4) That to explain which an analogy is used is called *dhārshṭāntikam* in Sanskrit and the analogy is called *drṣṭāntam*. No analogy can be totally perfect and it cannot be extended to its logical end.

5) The effulgence of Brahman is indeed the reason for world appearance. It is not totally veiled by the world. The full unbroken awareness of Brahman shrinks as the ego-sense and reveals the world.

Sri Kunju Swami recollects:

On one of my pilgrimages, I visited the Santhalinga Swami mutt of Peraiyur. Swami Veera Subbiah of that mutt was at that time indisposed and resting, but I got his darshan. He made courteous inquiries about Bhagavan and the ashram. Picking up the notebook which I was carrying, he began browsing it and found in it Bhagavan's *Ulladu Narpadu* [*Reality in Forty Verses*] copied neatly by Bhagavan himself. He told me to read it aloud, asking me to repeat its opening stanza three times. It goes '*Ulla-dala duḷḷa-vunar ulladō*,' He was all admiration and appreciation for it. "It is a masterpiece in prosody – meter, metrical links, versification – the style matches perfectly with its substance! I had thought until now that he was only an expert in 'being still'. What poetic caliber he has to be able to compose poetry of such a high order! No one can outdo Bhagavan in the art of abiding in stillness!" he exclaimed. – *Reminiscences*

Going Home, Going Home...

While we walked through the woods after a heavy rainfall recently, I saw many deep crevices that had been made by the running water in the graveled road. While I observed them, I admired the tenacity of the water to return to the river, and eventually its home – the ocean. At that instant, a song made famous by the great American singer Paul Robeson, titled “Going Home”, came to mind. He describes the joy of going home (dying and leaving the world behind), after a life full of tribulations, and entering a joyous burden-free state, which he terms “real life”. The lyrics to the song are as follows:

*Goin' home. Goin' home. I'm a-goin' home.
Quiet like some still day, I'm just goin' home.
It's not far, just close by, through an open door.
Work all done, cares laid by, goin' to roam no more.*

*Mother's there 'xpecting me, father's waiting, too,
Lots of folks gathered there, all the friends I knew.*

*Nothin' lost was gained, no more fret nor pain,
No more stumblin' on the way, no more longin' for
the day, goin' to roam no more!*

Morning star lights the way, restless dream all done.

*Shadows gone, break of day, real life just begun.
There's no break, there's no end, just a-living on;
Wide awake, with a smile, going on and on.
Going home. Going home. I'm just going home.
It's not far, just close by, through an open door.*

(A moving rendition of this song can be heard [here](#), sung by our Dennis Hartel.)

The joy of returning home that is shared in this song is one that is common to all beings, sentient and insentient. Returning to our source means, of course, being absorbed into that from which all beings spring, in which all have their existence and to which all return. The single raindrop, with continual faith and perseverance, rises from the ocean and returns there again. Despite seemingly insurmountable odds, it does not waver in its desire



The raindrops return to their source, no matter what obstacles might lie in their way.

to return to its source, cleaving even the hardest rock as evinced by the deep crevices in the photo, in order to be absorbed again in its source.

We also have this experience of returning to our source every night in deep sleep. There, we experience no mind, body, or thought. Yet, there is no doubt that our deep, abiding and self-luminous existence remains unbroken throughout. Sri Bhagavan says that this is the reason that we all know that “we slept happily” upon awakening. There was nothing of the interesting, attractive world then, nor of our mind or body which keeps us so occupied during our waking and dream states. However, we long to shed these two states of dreaming and waking and return to that state in which we alone exist. This is the common experience of all.

And to abide in that state, what is required? The same perseverance as the water drop displays in its course back to the ocean, the same eagerness to overcome every seeming obstacle that may stand in the way. Of course, most needed is the grace of the guru. Sri Bhagavan’s assurance that his grace is always there gives us the strength required to tread the Mountain Path, to reach our home, the home that we really never left.

– Continued on p 7

Selected Verses from *Guru Vachaka Kovai* (*The Garland of Guru's Sayings*)

by Sri Muruganar

We continue with verses from Muruganar's defining work, *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, containing the teachings of his guru Sri Ramana, that appear in the first chapter titled "The Reality of the World".

It has been lovingly translated from the original Tamil by David Godman, Robert Butler, and Dr.T.V.Venkatasubramanian and is available on [David Godman's website](#).

42. One's true nature is consciousness, the supreme. When the mind is extinguished in that Self, the [three] saktis, beginning with iccha, which are said to exist, will completely cease, being [known to be] an unreal superimposition upon the perfectly pure consciousness that is one's own nature.

The three saktis, or powers, are iccha sakti (the power of desiring, jnana sakti (the power of knowing), and kriya sakti (the power of doing).

43. Sivam, which is consciousness, the supreme, abides as the substratum for the entire universe. Consisting of triputis, this world picture that appears in it is the sport of the supreme power of consciousness. Like a cinema show, it is a superimposed illusion.

The triputis are the groups of the three elements that are essential for perceiving an external world: seer, seeing and seen, and knower, knowing and known. Sivam is another key word in Guru Vachaka Kovai. Siva is the personal God, whereas Sivam is the formless consciousness of Siva. As such it can be equated with other synonyms for the Self, such as Brahman.

44. The world does not exist in the state of ultimate truth [paramartha]. Its appearance, its [apparently] existing nature in maya, is like the imagined appearance of a snake in a rope, a thief in a wooden post, and water in a mirage. Their essential nature is delusion.

45. This world that consists of diverse moving and unmoving objects, which arise and shine in the Self, is like the various ornaments that arise from gold and shine, taking gold as their basis. Just as ornaments that shine as many are, in truth, only gold in essence, the world is not separate and distinct from the Self, consciousness.

46. The Supreme is concealed when the world is seen, and conversely, when the Supreme is seen, the world disappears. Both cannot be seen distinctly, as two separate entities, at the same time, [just as] in a carved statue of a dog, the dog and the stone cannot be seen as separate entities simultaneously.

Bhagavan:

Just as when you see a stone carved into the form of a dog and you realise that it is only a stone, there is no dog for you; so also, if you see it only as a dog without realizing that it is a stone, there is no stone for you. If you are existent, everything is existent; if you are non-existent, there is nothing existent in this world. If it is said that there is no dog, but there is a stone, it does not mean that the dog ran away on your seeing the stone. There is a story about this. A man wanted to see the King's palace, and so started out. Now, there were two dogs carved out of stone, one on either side of the palace gateway. The man standing at a distance took them for real dogs and was afraid of going near them. A saint passing along that way noticed this and took the man along with him, saying, 'Sir, there is no need to be afraid.' When the man got near enough to see clearly, he saw that there were no dogs, and what he had thought to be dogs were just stone carvings. In the same way, if you see the world, the Self will not be visible; if you see the Self, the world will not be visible. A good teacher (guru) is like that saint.

47. The world that veils the Self through names and forms, and appears to be real, is only a dream-like appearance. If, instead, that very same world gets veiled by the Self and appears as consciousness alone, then, as the Self, it too is real.

Going Home, Concluded from p. 5

As Sri Bhagavan sings in the eighth verse of his *Arunachala Ashtakam*:

The waters rise up from the sea as clouds, then fall as rain and run back to the sea in streams; nothing can keep them from returning to their source.

Likewise, the jiva rising up from Thee cannot be kept from joining Thee again, though it may stray many times along the way. A bird which rises from the earth and soars into the sky can find no place of rest except the earth. So indeed must all retrace their path, and when the jiva finds its way back to its source, it will sink and be merged in Thee, O Arunachala, Thou Ocean of Bliss!

**Advent At Arunachala Celebrations
Nova Scotia, Canada**

You, your family and your friends are cordially invited to join us in celebrating the 127th anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Advent at Arunachala. The program will include parayanams, bhajans and talks, followed by prasad (lunch).

Sunday, September 3rd, 2023 – 11:00 AM AST
Arunachala Ashrama
1436 Clarence Road
Bridgetown, Nova Scotia B0S 1C0
Tel: (902) 665 2090
email: NovaScotia@ashrama.org

**Advent At Arunachala
Global Celebrations, New York**

Please join us for the celebration of the 127th anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Advent at Arunachala. The function will be broadcast from Arunachala Ashrama in New York from 6:00 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. EST and will include presentations by Ramana Satsang groups worldwide. The program will be streamed on the [Ashrama's YouTube channel](#).

Sunday, September 17th, 2023 – 6 a.m. EST
Arunachala Ashrama
86-06 Edgerton Boulevard
Jamaica, NY 11432-2937
Tel: (718) 560 3196
email: ashrama@arunachala.org

Updates

For the latest information regarding Arunachala Ashrama, New York, please visit our [home page](#). The Ashrama has been having regular satsangs online which can be found on our [upcoming virtual events](#) page

The Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama (see our home page) is welcoming overnight guests. Guests are required to make arrangements ahead of time by contacting novascotia@ashrama.org. Guests will be responsible for cooking vegetarian food during their stay and ensuring that their rooms have been cleaned and their linens and towels are laundered and replaced before they leave.

Wearing a mask while inside the temple is optional. It is advised that you have health insurance. As usual, the Mandiram is open to daytime visitors for prayers and meditation. Tel: 902 824 2297

For a listing of other centers that are offering virtual satsangs at this time, please see our [online satsangs](#).

For Ramana Satsang locations in the USA and Canada, please see [this listing](#).

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