



# **RAMANA MAHARSHI'S**

# **Forty Verses on What Is**

**Introduction by MICHAEL JAMES**

A compilation  
of the writings  
and talks on  
*Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*  
by MICHAEL JAMES

**The ultimate  
truth on  
being as you  
actually are**

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THE ULTIMATE TRUTH ON BEING AS YOU ACTUALLY ARE

A compilation of the writings and talks  
on *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* by  
MICHAEL JAMES

Compiled and edited by  
Sandra Derksen

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*Annamalai Swami: Je Echte Zelf - I*

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*Annamalai Swami: Je Echte Zelf - II*

(translation of *Living by the Words of Bhagavan*, part 'Diary Extracts' and 'Conversations' by Annamalai Swami, edited by David Godman)

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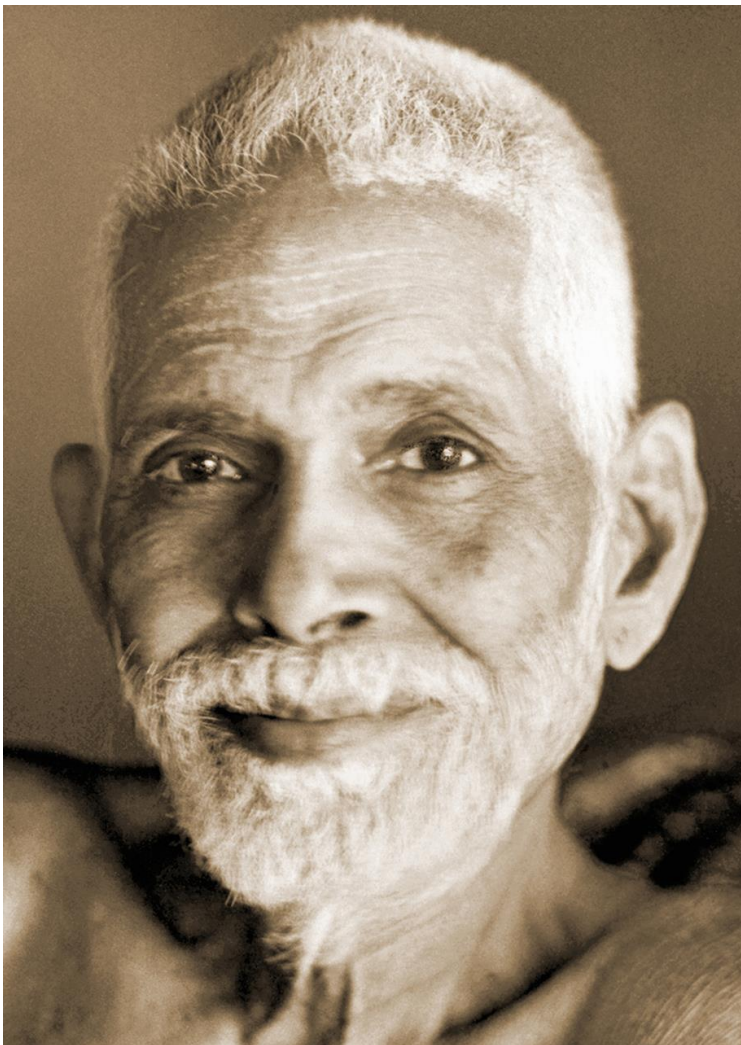
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Om Namo Bhagavate  
Sri Arunachala Ramanaya



Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879 – 1950)

# Contents

	Editor's note and acknowledgements	xvii
	Introduction by Michael James	xxv
	Introductory verse composed by Muruganar	1
Benedictory verse 1	What exists is only thought-free awareness, which is called 'heart', so being as it is, is alone meditating on it	6
Benedictory verse 2	By surrendering to God, who is devoid of death and birth, the ego, who fears death, will die, and what will remain is deathless	17
Verse 1	Because we see the world, it is best to accept that one fundamental, which is ourself, is what appears as all this multiplicity	25
Verse 2	Instead of the ego arguing whether there is just one fundamental or three fundamentals, standing in the real state of oneself by destroying the ego is best	36
Verse 3	The state in which the ego has died by investigating itself, leaving aside the world and all differences and disputes, is agreeable to all	42
Verse 4	If one perceives oneself as a form, one will perceive everything else as form, but one's real nature is infinite (hence formless) awareness, so it perceives no forms at all	48
Verse 5	The body is a form consisting of five sheaths, and without such a body has anyone ever perceived any world?	54

Verse 6	The world consists of nothing but the five kinds of sense-impressions, and the mind alone perceives it, so is there any world besides the mind?	61
Verse 7	The world shines only by the mind, but what shines as the space for the appearing and disappearing of the world and mind is the real substance, the infinite whole	68
Verse 8	Worshipping in name and form is the way to see in name and form, but seeing oneself and thereby becoming one with the real substance is true seeing	77
Verse 9	Dyads and triads depend on one thing (the ego), so if one sees within the mind what that one thing is, they will all cease to exist and what is real will be seen	81
Verse 10	Knowledge and ignorance of other things are mutually dependent, but only the awareness that knows the reality of the ego, to whom they appear, is real awareness	88
Verse 11	Knowing anything other than oneself is ignorance, but when one knows the reality of oneself, knowledge and ignorance of everything else will cease	93
Verse 12	Oneself is real awareness, which shines without anything else to know, so it is devoid of both knowledge and ignorance of other things, but it is not void or nothingness	97
Verse 13	Oneself, who is pure awareness, alone is real, so awareness of multiplicity is ignorance and unreal, and hence it does not exist except as oneself	105

Verse 14	If one investigates the reality of the first person, it will cease to exist along with all second and third persons, and what then shines as one is one's real nature	113
Verse 15	Past and future depend on the present, the only time that actually exists, so trying to know the past or future without knowing the reality of the present is like trying to calculate without knowing the value of one	119
Verse 16	If we are a body, we are ensnared in time and place, but if we investigate ourselves, there is no time or place but only ourselves, who are the same one always and everywhere	126
Verse 17	For those who do not know themselves and for those who do, the body is 'I', but for the former 'I' is limited to the body, whereas for the latter 'I' shines without limit	131
Verse 18	For those who do not know themselves and for those who do, the world is real, but for the former reality is limited to the world, whereas for the latter it pervades without form as the substratum of the world	136
Verse 19	Dispute about which prevails, fate or will, arises only for those who do not discern the ego as the root of them both, but if one knows the reality of the ego, one will thereby discard them	141
Verse 20	Seeing God without seeing oneself is seeing a mental vision, so only one who has seen oneself, the origin of one's ego, is one who has seen God, because oneself is not other than God	149



Verse 21	Since oneself is one, how is oneself to see oneself, and how to see God, except by becoming food to him?	154
Verse 22	How to know God, who shines within the mind illumining it, except by turning the mind back within and thereby immersing it in him?	158
Verse 23	This body is not aware of itself as 'I', and 'I' does not cease to exist in sleep, but after something called 'I' rises, everything rises, so keenly discern where it rises	171
Verse 24	The <i>jaḍa</i> body is not aware of itself as 'I', and <i>sat-cit</i> does not rise, but in between something called 'I' rises as the extent of the body, and this is <i>cit-jaḍa-granthi</i> , the ego, mind and so on	179
Verse 25	Grasping form the formless phantom-ego comes into existence, stands, feeds itself and flourishes, but if it seeks itself, it will take flight	186
Verse 26	If the ego comes into existence, everything comes into existence, and if it does not exist, nothing exists, so investigating what it is, is giving up everything	194
Verse 27	The state in which the ego does not rise is the state in which we are that, but without investigating the place where it rises, how can one annihilate it and stand as that?	200
Verse 28	Like sinking to find something that has fallen in water, sinking within by a keenly focused mind it is necessary to know oneself, the source where the ego rises	206

Verse 29	Investigating by an inward sinking mind where one rises as ‘I’ alone is the path of <i>jñāna</i> , whereas thinking ‘I am not this, I am that’ is an aid but not <i>vicāra</i>	213
Verse 30	As soon as the ego dies by inwardly investigating who am I, one thing appears spontaneously as ‘I am I’, which is not the ego but the infinite substance, namely oneself	220
Verse 31	When the ego is destroyed by <i>tanmayānanda</i> , there is nothing to do, because one is not aware of anything other than oneself, so who can conceive such a state?	228
Verse 32	When the Vēdas proclaim ‘That is you’, instead of knowing and being oneself by investigating what am I, thinking ‘I am that, not this’ is due to lack of strength	234
Verse 33	Saying ‘I do not know myself’ or ‘I have known myself’ is ridiculous, because there are not two selves for one to know the other as an object	241
Verse 34	Instead of merging the mind within and thereby knowing and standing firmly as the real substance, quarrelling about its existence and nature is mischief born of <i>māyā</i>	250
Verse 35	Knowing and being the ever-accomplished real substance is the real <i>siddhi</i> , whereas all other <i>siddhis</i> are unreal, like <i>siddhis</i> experienced in a dream	256

Verse 36	If we think that we are a body, thinking ‘No, we are that’ will be just a good aid, but since we are already that, why should we always be thinking ‘We are that’?	262
Verse 37	Even the contention ‘Duality in spiritual practice, non-duality in attainment’ is not true, because even while one is searching for the tenth man, who is one other than him?	267
Verse 38	If we are the doer of action, we will experience the resulting fruit, but when one knows oneself by investigating who is the doer, actions and their fruits will cease to exist	273
Verse 39	Thoughts of bondage and liberation exist only so long as one seems to be bound, but when one looks at oneself to see who is bound, one will see that one is ever liberated	283
Verse 40	If it is said that liberation is with form, without form, or either with form or without form, I will reply that only destruction of the ego is liberation	288
Appendix	<i>Upadēśa Kaliveṇbā</i>	295
	Glossary	340
	Book Recommendations	



# Editor's note and acknowledgements

In March 2022 I approached Michael James, the premier interpreter of the teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, with the proposal to put together a book based on his translations and explanations of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* (*Forty Verses on What Is*). I especially wanted to immerse myself in the text as *sādhana* (spiritual practice). Since I am familiar with book writing and publishing, it was not only helpful for me to commit myself to a book project; I also hoped that this book could be beneficial to some other people who are interested in Bhagavan's core teachings. Michael responded that it was 'a very good idea', and not only did he give me his approval, he also graciously wrote the introduction for this book.

Based on Michael's writings from his website, and talks that can be found on his YouTube channel<sup>1</sup>, which nowadays constitute a considerable amount of material, I made an effort to compile a book that contained what I thought to be the essential teachings of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* — a book that I would like to read myself over and over again to deepen my understanding.

Though every word in this book besides of course, the verses written by Bhagavan himself, is from Michael only, I did take some editorial freedom. For example, here and there I have shortened very long sentences to two or more shorter sentences, and there are also sentences that are a combination of his writings and talks. Also, the footnotes and some personal comments in the explanations between curly brackets are mine. If any errors remain in the text, I take full responsibility.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael's writings can be found on his website, [happinessofbeing.com](http://happinessofbeing.com), and his blog, [happinessofbeing.blogspot.com](http://happinessofbeing.blogspot.com). His talks can be found on the YouTube channel, [youtube.com/sriramanateachings](https://www.youtube.com/sriramanateachings).

### **Michael's explanation about not capitalising 's' in 'self'**

There is one point I would like to mention in particular and on which I had to ask Michael's advice. I noticed that he did not capitalise the 's' in 'self' or 'self-investigation', among other terms, something I was used to doing myself and encountered when reading texts by others who write and talk about 'the Self'. I want to share his detailed explanation with you, because it provides an important clarification that can deepen your understanding of Bhagavan's teachings and who you actually are; to my knowledge, he is unique in this usage.

Michael avoids the term 'the Self' as it is usually written in English books. One reason is that there is no such term in either Sanskrit or Tamil, because they contain no definitive articles ('the') and, secondly, there are no capital letters.

Another reason is when we talk of 'the Self' we are reifying it. We make it sound like 'the Self' is something, but obviously there is no such thing as 'the Self' other than the thing whose self it is. *Everything is itself*. The lamp post is itself, the road is itself, the water in the lake is itself, you are yourself, I am myself. From where can we extract some separate thing called 'the Self'? If we talk about something, 'the Self', then it seems to imply something other than ourself. So we do not naturally talk about 'the Self': 'the Self' is now going for a walk, 'the Self' is now leaving a message. We do not talk like that, we say 'I': I myself am doing it. So, using the word 'Self' as a noun with a definitive article, 'the', reifies it.

'Self' is better understood as a pronoun, because the word 'self' refers to something. Whose self is it? You are yourself, I am myself. So if you use 'self' it can have a meaning only in a particular context, like any pronoun. If you say 'he', 'she' or 'it', that has to refer to something, and if it is not clear from the context what it is referring to, it is meaningless. If you have got a group of fifty people and you say, 'He and she are the ones I am looking for', which he and she? There are so many he's and she's. So we can use pronouns only in

context where it is clear what the pronoun is referring to. Pronouns do not have a fixed referent, their referent is determined by the context.

The only pronoun that could arguably have a fixed referent is 'I', because when we each use the term 'I', we are always referring to ourself. But if you say 'I' you are referring to someone different than when I say 'I'. That is, when we use the word 'I' in the usual sense, in the superficial sense that we usually use it, for me 'I' refers to Sandra, for Michael 'I' refers to himself. That is, of course, not the real meaning of 'I', but that is the sense in which we usually use the word 'I'. So 'self' is like that, 'self' is regarded as a pronoun, which is why Michael generally translates the Sanskrit term *ātman*, and the equivalent term in Tamil, namely *taṇ*, as 'oneself' or 'ourself'. That is a more natural way of expressing it in English.

Also, when we use capital letters, when we talk about 'the Self' with a capital 'S' and another 'self' with a small 's', there is implied duality there, as if there are two selves. Something that Bhagavan repeatedly said is that there are not two selves, there is only one self. What we actually are is the pure awareness 'I am' without any adjuncts. But now we experience ourself mixed and conflated with adjuncts, as 'I am Michael', 'I am Sandra', 'I am whoever'. That is the same 'I am', but the 'I am' in pure condition is our real nature, the 'I am' mixed and conflated is ego. So it is not that there are two selves, it is ourself as we actually are and ourself as ego, just like the rope and the snake are not two different things. There is only one thing there. What is actually there is just a rope. But the difference between the snake and the rope is not a difference in substance, it is a difference in appearance. So in some places it may be useful to make a distinction between ego and our real nature.

Often when we use the word 'self', or when Bhagavan uses the word 'self', it is not specifically referring to ego or to our real nature. For example, in the word *ātma-vicāra*, is the *ātma* in *ātma-vicāra*

ego or is it our real nature? Well, it is not necessary to say, because we begin by investigating what seems to be ego and we discover it to be our real nature. That is, if you look carefully at the snake, you see it is a rope. If you look carefully at ego, you see it is pure awareness. It ceases as ego and it remains as pure awareness. That is, it ceases to appear as ego. So *ātma-vicāra* is usually translated as 'self-enquiry'. Michael thinks a more useful and accurate translation is 'self-investigation'. But whether you use 'self-enquiry' or 'self-investigation' most people will put a capital 'S' for that. But why put a capital 'S' there? We are not investigating some big self that we do not know, we are investigating the very self that we are. So by introducing capitals that you sometimes use and sometimes do not use, you are limiting the meaning, because when you put a small 's' it means ego, if you put a big 'S' it means our real nature. It just creates an unnecessary dichotomy, an unnecessary and false duality, that does not actually exist. Sometimes *ātma* means ego, for example, in the term *ātma-samarpaṇa*, which means self-surrender. What is the self that needs to be surrendered? Obviously that is not our real nature, it is ego. So that is another reason why Michael prefers not to use capitals.

Then people sometimes uses capitals, for example, for 'consciousness' or 'awareness'. Sometimes they put a capital and sometimes they do not. But again, you make it sound like there are two 'consciousnesses', two 'awarenesses'. That is just creating a confusion. Bhagavan did distinguish between pure consciousness and the adjunct-mixed consciousness that we call 'ego'. But that does not mean that there are two 'consciousnesses'. It is one consciousness: one in its pure condition and one and the same consciousness mixed and conflated with adjuncts, which is called *cidābhāsa*, the semblance of awareness. So as soon as you start using capitals you have to decide in each case whether you are referring to what is real or to what is unreal — whether you are referring to the reality, or whether you are referring to the appearance. If it is the



reality, you have to put a capital ‘S’, if it the appearance you have to put a small ‘s’. But what if you do not want to specify if you are talking about the reality or the appearance, you are just talking about the thing in general? So it creates an unnecessary confusion that is not there.

All duality is false. That is, thinking in terms of two selves, a big ‘Self’ and a small ‘self’, is not helpful, because it is missing the whole point of Bhagavan’s teachings. Michael affirms this is an important point. It is not just a matter of literary style, it is a matter of conveying what Bhagavan is saying in the clearest and most accurate way that is true to how he expressed himself.

### **Acknowledgements**

Since this book could not have been compiled without the writings and talks by Michael James, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to him. Now, usually when someone thanks Michael for his explanations about Bhagavan’s teachings, his humble reply is, ‘As always, all thanks to Bhagavan, because I am just pointing out what Bhagavan has taught us’. But since many regard him as the leading scholar on Bhagavan’s teachings and wish to know more about him, I included some personal information (which can also be found on his website).

Michael James was born in 1955 in England. He came to know about the spiritual teachings of Bhagavan in 1976, while travelling around India in search of something that would give a meaning and purpose to his life. The little that he first heard about Bhagavan’s life and teachings aroused his interest, so he decided to visit Tiruvannamalai (the town in south India where Bhagavan lived for fifty-four years) in order to learn more. Michael eventually ended up living there for the next twenty years.

The first book of Bhagavan that Michael read was an English translation of Bhagavan’s brief treatise *Nāṇ Ār?* (Who am I?), and he

was immediately attracted by the simple and clear yet very profound truth expressed in it. It was sufficient to convince him that what Bhagavan was saying in this small booklet was the ultimate truth.

Therefore Michael started to read every available book about the teachings of Bhagavan. In particular he wanted to understand clearly how to practise *ātma-vicāra* or 'self-investigation', which Bhagavan taught as the direct means to attain true self-knowledge. However, some of the most popular English books that were then available gave confusing and misleading explanations about the practice of self-investigation, so even after reading several such books, he was still unsure about the exact 'method' or 'technique' of practising self-investigation.

Fortunately, after Michael had been just a few weeks in Tiruvannamalai, he was lent the book *The Path of Sri Ramana* by Sadhu Om. In this book, Sadhu Om clearly explained that self-investigation is simply the practice of self-attention, that is, the practice of turning our attention or power of knowing away from all thoughts and objects, towards our fundamental consciousness of our own being, which we always experience as 'I am'. So clear and convincing was this explanation of Sadhu Om that Michael was left in no doubt that this was the real meaning of the term self-investigation used by Bhagavan.

Soon after reading his book, Michael met Sadhu Om, and he found that he was able to answer in an extremely clear, simple and convincing manner all the questions that he asked him about the philosophy and practice of the teachings of Bhagavan. For the next eight-and-a-half years, until his passing away in March 1985, Michael was fortunate to be able to spend most of his waking life in the company of Sadhu Om, and to imbibe from him a clear understanding of the philosophy of true self-knowledge as taught by Bhagavan. Through his close association with Sadhu Om he was blessed with a very rare opportunity to become intimately acquainted

with many profound and subtle insights into the fundamental teachings of Bhagavan.

Michael assisted Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan's Tamil writings and Muruganar's *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*, and since then he has continued to write about Bhagavan's teachings. Many of Michael's writings and translations have been published, for example, in *The Mountain Path* and his book *Happiness and the Art of Being*, and some of them are also available on his website. For many years he has also been giving talks about Bhagavan's teachings, which can be found on the YouTube channel, 'Sri Ramana Teachings'.

Thank you, Michael, for all the advice and tips you gave while I was putting this book together.

Several people read the book before it was published, pointing out errors and making useful suggestions. Since I am Dutch and not a native English speaker, their help was very valuable. I wish to thank Anjali Bhalla, Andrew Cochrane, Deepti Dasari, John Kilbo, Satish Krishna, Jeremy Lennon, Nuno Lopes, Murali Mahadevan, Ron Noranha, Melvin Pasternak, Heather Paulson, Sandra Lee Redbloom, Rajat Sancheti, Prasad Sethuraman, Geetha Shamanna, Ashwin Sharma.

I wish to thank Ramana Maharshi Foundation UK for helping me to get in touch with all the above-mentioned readers.

The final in-depth proofreading and editing was done by my partner Sean Slocum who I gratefully thank for his contribution and supporting love.

In conclusion of my note and acknowledgements, I would like to quote an apt comment left on one of Michael's YouTube videos: 'Arunachala sent me to Bhagwan because I couldn't understand His silence. So Bhagwan spoke a few words. I couldn't understand them either. So Bhagwan sent me to Michael ji. So that I could grasp it finally'.

I hope this book will be helpful for all seekers of the ultimate truth, peace and eternal happiness. May Bhagavan's grace be with you.

Sandra Derksen  
25 July 2023



# Introduction by Michael James

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879 - 1950) taught us that infinite and eternal happiness is our own real nature, and that the reason we are not aware of ourself as such is that we now mistake ourself to be a finite person consisting of body, life, mind, intellect and will, which is not what we actually are. Therefore in order to know and to be the perfect happiness that we always actually are, it is necessary for us to be aware of ourself as we actually are, and the means for this is for us to investigate ourself and thereby surrender the false 'self' (namely ego) that we now seem to be.

His teachings therefore represent the simple but extremely deep essence and practical implication of all of *vēdānta*, the philosophical conclusion of the Vēdas, particularly the non-dualistic interpretation of it called *advaita* ('non-twoness', meaning that what actually exists is '*ēkam ēva advitīyam*', 'one only without a second'). However, though his teachings are in perfect accord with the heart of *advaita* and *vēdānta* more generally, they are nevertheless a very fresh and original presentation of them, because he diagnosed very precisely the root cause of all our problems, namely ego, he clearly explained its nature like never before, and in doing so he clarified and emphasised the practical implication of the basic principles of *vēdānta*, namely that to achieve the removal of all suffering (*duḥkha nivṛtti*) and the attainment of happiness (*sukha prāpti*) we need to eradicate ego, and since ego is a false awareness of ourself (an awareness of ourself as something other than what we actually are), it can be eradicated only by our investigating who am I and thereby knowing ourself as we actually are.

Bhagavan discovered all this from his own experience, without any prior study of *vēdānta*, when he was just a sixteen-year-old schoolboy. One day in July 1896, when he was sitting alone in a

room in his uncle's house in the south Indian town of Madurai, an intense fear of death suddenly arose within him for no apparent cause. Instead of trying to put this fear out of his mind he decided to investigate and discover for himself whether he himself would cease to exist with the death of his body. He therefore turned his entire attention back within, towards his own being, 'I am', thereby withdrawing it from his body and all other phenomena, both mental and physical. Because his attention was so keenly focused on his own being, his fundamental awareness 'I am', the true nature of that being-awareness (*sat-cit*) revealed itself instantaneously as a clear, direct and certain knowledge. This destroyed in him forever all trace of ego, the false awareness 'I am this body', because he discovered himself to be just the pure awareness 'I am', which is the one infinite, eternal, indivisible and immutable whole, the only existing reality, the source and substance of all things, and the real nature (*svarūpa*) of every living being.

### ***Uḷḷadu Nārpaḍu* and its essential import**

*Uḷḷadu Nārpaḍu* is a Tamil poem that Bhagavan composed between 21<sup>st</sup> July and 11<sup>th</sup> August 1928 in response to a request made by Muruganar, his foremost disciple, to teach us the nature of the reality and the means by which we can attain it so that we may thereby be saved. In the title of this poem, 'uḷḷadu' means 'what is' or 'what exists', in the sense of what actually exists rather than what merely seems to exist, and it also means 'being' in the sense of both 'existence' and 'existing'. As Bhagavan says in the seventh paragraph of *Nāṇ Ār?* (Who am I?), 'யதார்த்தமா யுள்ளது ஆத்மசொருப மொன்றே' (*yathārthamāy uḷḷadu ātma-sorūpam ondrē*), 'What actually exists is only *ātma-svarūpa* [the real nature of oneself]', so when he uses the word 'uḷḷadu' he is referring to ourself as we actually are. Though 'nārpaḍu' means 'forty' and in this context implies 'forty verses', *Uḷḷadu Nārpaḍu* actually consists

of forty-two verses, two of which form the *maṅgalam* or ‘auspicious introduction’ and the remaining forty of which form the *nūl* or ‘text’.

Though Bhagavan has expressed many of the fundamental principles of his teachings in his other works such as *Nāṇ Ār?* (Who am I?), *Upadēśa Undiyār* and *Āṇma-Viddai*, nowhere has he expressed some of the most important and practical of them as clearly and coherently as he does in *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, so this work shines as the core and crest-jewel of his teachings, being the quintessence of all of them. Therefore studying this work carefully and trying to put into practice all that he teaches us in it is essential for anyone who aspires to follow the path he has shown us to eradicate ego, the root cause of all our problems, because unless we have clearly understood and imbibed all the principles that he teaches us here, it is not possible for us to adequately grasp and appreciate the real depth and radical import of his teachings.

The essential import of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* is very simple: What we actually are is *sat-cit*, because we are both pure existence (*sat*) and pure awareness (*cit*), which are one and indivisible. The existence or being that we actually are is described as ‘pure’ because it is existence itself and not the existence of any particular thing. In other words, it alone is what actually exists (*uḷḷadu*), so though other things may seem to exist, they do not actually exist, and hence they all derive their seeming existence only from the one real existence of ourself as *sat-cit*. Likewise, the awareness that we actually are is described as ‘pure’ because it is awareness itself, meaning that it is awareness that is just aware without being aware of anything other than itself (as he implies, for example, in verses 12 and 13), because in the clear view of ourself as *sat-cit* nothing other than ourself actually exists for us to know. As *sat-cit*, therefore, we are not aware of anything other than our own existence, ‘I am’, so *sat-cit* is what shines eternally as ‘I am’, and since it shines thus by its own light of awareness, it is described as ‘self-shining’ (*svayam-prakāśa*).



Being the only thing that actually exists and shines, therefore, *sat-cit* is infinite, indivisible, eternal and immutable, so this alone is what we always actually are. However, in the distorted view of ourself as ego, this is not what we seem to be, because whenever we rise and stand as ego we are always aware of ourself not just as ‘I am’ but as ‘I am this body’. So what exactly is this ego that we now seem to be? As he points out in verse 24, it is neither the body, which is non-aware (*jaḍa*) and therefore does not know itself as ‘I’, nor is it *sat-cit*, which is eternal and immutable and therefore does not ever rise or come into existence. Though it is neither of these, it rises as an awareness ‘I’ limited to the extent of a body, so it borrows its seeming form from the body and its substance (namely its existence and awareness) from *sat-cit*. It is therefore *cit-jaḍa-granthi*, a knot (*granthi*) formed by the seeming entanglement of awareness (*cit*) with a body, which is non-aware (*jaḍa*). In other words, it comes into existence as an erroneous conflation of what is aware, namely ‘I am’, with what is not aware, namely a body, because it is what is always aware of itself as ‘I am this body’.

Therefore, since ego has no form or substance of its own, in verse 25 he describes it as ‘உருவற்ற பேய் அகந்தை’ (*uru-v-atra pēy ahandai*), the ‘formless demon [phantom or evil spirit] ego’, and points out that it comes into seeming existence grasping the form of a body as itself, it stands or endures by continuing to grasp that form as itself, it feeds itself and flourishes by grasping other forms, and leaving one form it grasps another form. Its very nature, therefore, is to grasp forms, and since it itself is formless, whatever forms it grasps are things other than itself, namely objects or phenomena, and it can grasp such things only by attending to and thereby being aware of them. Therefore it is only by trying to grasp itself so firmly that it thereby stops grasping anything else whatsoever that ego will cease to exist in such a way that it can never rise again, as he implies in this verse by saying: ‘தேடினால் ஓட்டம் பிடிக்கும்’ (*tēḍiṇāl oṭṭam piḍikkum*), ‘If seeking [that is, if ego seeks its own reality by

investigating who am I], it will take flight'. That is, when we as ego attend to ourself so keenly that we thereby cease to be aware of anything else at all, we will cease to be ego, whose very nature is to be always aware of things other than itself, and will remain as we actually are, namely just as pure awareness, whose nature is to never be aware of anything other than itself.

Thus in this verse Bhagavan reveals that the nature of ego is to rise, stand and flourish by attending to things other than itself, but to subside and dissolve back into its source (namely *sat-cit*) by attending to itself alone. This is one of the fundamental principles of his teachings, and is a fact that was never expressed so clearly and explicitly in any older text or by anyone else before him. The practical significance of this principle cannot be overemphasised, because it explains why self-investigation (*ātma-vicāra*), which is the simple practice of being keenly self-attentive, is the only means by which we as ego can surrender ourself completely and thereby be eradicated.

The reason why we as ego will subside and dissolve back into our own being, 'I am', to the extent to which we attend to ourself is that ego is not what we actually are, so we seem to be ego only so long as we do not attend to ourself keenly enough to see what we actually are. In other words, we seem to be ego only so long as we are looking elsewhere (attending to anything other than our own being), but if we look at ourself, there is no such thing as ego to be found, because what we actually are is just pure being-awareness (*sat-cit*), as we shall see if we look at ourself carefully enough. This is why Bhagavan says that ego will take flight if we investigate ourself. As he often used to say, ego seems to exist only because of *avicāra* (non-investigation, meaning our not attending to ourself), which is what is also called *pramāda* (negligence or inattentiveness, meaning self-negligence or self-inattentiveness), so it will cease to

exist only by *vicāra* (investigation, meaning self-investigation or self-attentiveness).

Since everything other than our own being, ‘I am’, seems to exist only in the view of ourself as ego, when ego ceases to exist as a result of self-investigation, everything else will cease to exist along with it, as he explains clearly and unambiguously in verse 26, and as he also implies to a greater or lesser extent in many other verses, such as 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 14 and 23, so this is another one of the fundamental principles of his teachings.

That is, nothing other than *sat-cit* actually exists, so all other things are not real but just an illusory appearance, and since they appear only in the view of ourself as ego, our rising and standing as ego alone is the root cause for their appearance. Therefore, since ego will cease to exist only when we investigate ourself keenly enough, the only means by which we can permanently put an end to the illusory appearance of ego and all other things is for us to patiently persevere in the practice of self-investigation (*ātma-vicāra*) until we are able to attend to ourself keenly enough to see ourself as we always actually are, namely as *sat-cit* alone.

In sleep we do not rise as ego, and hence nothing else seems to exist. In waking and dream we rise and stand as ego, and hence everything else seems to exist. Since other things include pain, suffering, misery, dissatisfaction and problems of all kinds, we experience such things only in waking and dream but not in sleep. However, since sleep is just a state of *manōlaya* (temporary dissolution of mind), sooner or later we will certainly rise again as ego from sleep, so it is not a permanent solution for all our problems. Only *manōnāśa* (annihilation or permanent dissolution of mind) can solve all problems and put an end to all suffering forever, and since the root of the mind is ego, mind can be annihilated only by eradication of ego.

As ego we are always aware of ourself as ‘I am this body’, which is not what we actually are, so ego is just a false awareness of ourself, and hence it can be eradicated only by our being aware of ourself as we actually are, namely as ‘I am’ alone, bereft of all adjuncts (*upādhis*), the first and foremost of which is whatever body we currently mistake ourself to be. Therefore, since we can be aware of ourself as we actually are only by attending to ourself so keenly that we thereby cease to be aware of anything else whatsoever, self-investigation is the only means by which we can eradicate ego, annihilate the mind and thereby permanently free ourself from all problems and all forms of suffering.

Therefore the essential import of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* and all of Bhagavan’s teachings is that:

1. what actually exists is only ourself as we actually are;
2. what we actually are is just pure existence-awareness (*sat-cit*), which is what always shines as our own being, our fundamental awareness ‘I am’, and which is the infinite fullness of perfect happiness (*ānanda*);
3. we seem to be not aware of ourself as we actually are only because we now seem to have risen as ego, whose nature is to be always aware of itself as ‘I am this body’ and consequently aware of the appearance of other things;
4. since ego is an erroneous awareness of ourself, it can be eradicated only by correct awareness of ourself, which means awareness of ourself as we actually are;
5. since we seem to be ego only so long as we attend to and are therefore aware of anything other than ourself, we can be aware of ourself as we actually are and thereby eradicate ego only by attending to ourself so keenly that we thereby cease to be aware of anything else whatsoever;
6. everything other than our own being, ‘I am’, is just an illusory appearance that seems to exist only in the view of

ourself as ego, so all such things seem to exist only when we rise and stand as ego, and hence none of them exist at all when we do not rise as ego;

7. our rising as ego is therefore the root cause for the appearance of all other things, including all problems and all forms of suffering;
8. and finally, since ego will cease to exist only when we investigate ourself keenly enough, investigating ourself is the only means by which we can permanently put an end to the illusory appearance of all other things and thereby free ourself forever from all forms of suffering.

### **Why and how should we study *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* and other writings of Bhagavan?**

In *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* Bhagavan has expressed the fundamental principles of his teachings in the style of *sūtras* or aphorisms, meaning that he has done so using minimum words. Therefore, though each verse is relatively short, they are packed with deep meaning and rich in implications, so it requires careful thought and consideration to understand and appreciate their deep meaning and implication.

Bhagavan said that his teachings are an open secret, but in order to see the secret that he has expressed so openly we need to open our eyes and look very carefully at what he is teaching us, meaning that we need to open our mind and heart in order to be receptive to what he offers us, which is a radically different interpretation of our experience than the one we have hitherto been accustomed to. If we are not willing to question deeply and if necessary let go of all the beliefs, assumptions and preconceptions that we had previously cherished, it is very easy for us to misunderstand him, so we need to study his teachings carefully, patiently and with discrimination (*vivēka*), considering with due care the meaning of each word,

phrase, clause and sentence in order to understand exactly what he intends to teach us.

For example, whenever he uses words such as ‘I’, ‘we’, ‘oneself’ or ‘ourselves’, we need to carefully consider and understand from the context whether he is referring to himself as we actually are (namely *ātma-svarūpa*) or to himself as ego. In many places in *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* where he uses these and other such words to refer to himself as ego, many translators and commentators have wrongly assumed that he was referring to himself as we actually are, so they misunderstood and misinterpreted what he intended to convey, and they did so because they failed to understand that one of his principle aims in *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* is to explain that everything other than ourselves seems to exist only in the view of ourselves as ego, and therefore does not exist at all independent of ego, so all other things seem to exist and to be as they are only because we have risen as ego and therefore mistake ourselves to be a body consisting of five sheaths, namely the physical body, life, mind, intellect and will (as he points out, for example, in verse 5).

Since the verses of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* are intended to teach us a logically coherent set of fundamental principles, they are all closely interconnected, so we need to carefully study the entire text and recognise those fundamental principles in order to understand the meaning and implications of each verse correctly. If we read each verse in isolation without considering its meaning and implications in the context of what he is teaching us in all the other verses, our understanding of its import will be limited and perhaps incorrect, whereas if we read every verse in the context of the whole and recognise the logical connections that exist between them, then the meaning and implications of each individual verse will become much clearer to us.

What Bhagavan teaches us in *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* and his other original writings is actually extremely simple, so it is not difficult for

us to understand, but it is nevertheless very deep and subtle, so it is only by putting it into practice that we will gradually be able to imbibe and appreciate the full extent of its depth and subtlety. To understand his teachings we do not need a brilliant intellect, because the concepts we have to grasp are not complex, but we do need deep clarity of mind and heart, which we can gain most effectively by the practice of self-investigation and self-surrender, because his teachings are pointing our attention back within ourself to see ourself as we actually are, namely pure existence-awareness (*sat-cit*), which is the infinitely deep and subtle reality that underlies the appearance of all other things, namely both ego (the subject or knower) and all phenomena (the objects or things known by ego).

To understand the simple but profound principles of his teachings, we need to be willing to simplify our understanding of the basic nature of this entire appearance of subject and objects, and to simplify our understanding we need to be willing to jettison all that we previously assumed and believed about such things. If we are not willing to give up any of our old ideas and beliefs about the nature of these things, we will not be able to grasp the pure simplicity of his teachings, but if we are willing to give them up and replace them with the simple, reasonable and logically coherent ideas he teaches us in *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* and elsewhere, the nature of all that we experience will become clear to us, and we will understand why and how we should investigate ourself and thereby surrender ourself in order to know and to be what we always actually are.

Bhagavan does not ask us to blindly believe what he teaches us, so he begins his exposition of this philosophy of pure non-duality (*advaita*) by asking us to critically analyse our own experience of ourself in our three states of waking, dream and sleep, in order to understand why we cannot actually be what we now seem to be. In waking we experience ourself as one body, and in dream we experience ourself as another body, so neither of these bodies can be

what we actually are, because we cannot be anything that we are aware of in one state but not in another state. However, we are aware of ourself as the same mind in both these states, so is this mind what we actually are? It cannot be, because we are aware of our existence in sleep without being aware of this mind or anything else whatsoever. Since the only thing that we are aware of in all these three states is our own existence, 'I am', what we actually are can only be this simple existence, the nature of which is to be always aware of itself as 'I am'. What we actually are, therefore, is just pure existence-awareness (*sat-cit*), even though we now experience ourself as if we were this person, who is a bundle consisting of five sheaths, namely a physical body, life, mind, intellect and will. Therefore, since we are not what we now seem to be, we need to investigate ourself, this fundamental awareness 'I am', in order to be aware of ourself as the one pure, immutable and indivisible existence-awareness (*sat-cit*) that we actually are and thereby put an end to our present illusory awareness of ourself as something other than this. All that he teaches us in *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* and elsewhere, therefore, follows on logically from the conclusions that we can thus arrive at by means of this simple critical analysis of our own experience of ourself in these three states of waking, dream and sleep.

When we study and try to understand his teachings, we should always bear in mind that all he teaches us has one purpose and one purpose alone, namely to direct us, motivate us and encourage us to turn back within to see ourself as we actually are and thereby surrender everything that we are not. All his teachings are therefore centred around and focused on this simple but deep practice of self-investigation and self-surrender. If we overlook this fact, we will not be able to understand his teachings in the correct perspective. What is of utmost importance is this practice, and we will be able to understand his teachings only to the extent to which we go deep in this practice, because the clarity required to understand them can



come only from deep within our heart, where it is always shining silently as our own being.

Therefore we should not expect to be able to understand his teachings perfectly from the outset, but if we sincerely wish to understand them ever more deeply, we should not only try to put our present imperfect understanding into practice but should also continue to study his teachings carefully and repeatedly. As our practice of self-investigation and self-surrender grows progressively deeper, we will be able to understand what we study with increasing clarity. This is why it is said that *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* (study, careful consideration and practice) should continue hand in hand in our life until we as ego lose ourself entirely in the infinite clarity of pure self-awareness (*ātma-jñāna*).

Though *śravaṇa* literally means hearing, in this context it includes reading and studying, because when we read or study Bhagavan's teachings we are metaphorically 'hearing' them. However, when we read or hear them, we should not do so passively, because just as we need to chew and digest whatever food we eat in order to assimilate it, we need to metaphorically chew and digest his teachings in order to assimilate them.

This process of chewing and digesting them is what is called *manana*, which means thinking, considering, reflecting, pondering or meditating, and which entails carefully considering all that we learn through *śravaṇa*. The main aim of *manana* is for us to understand clearly the basic principles of his teachings, all their implications, the logical connections between each of them, and most importantly of all, why and how we should and can put them into practice.

However another important benefit of careful *manana* and the clear understanding it gives us is that they will enable us to distinguish the grain from the chaff (the genuine teachings from the spurious ones) when we read any of the various recordings of his

answers to questions or come across any other sayings attributed to him. The reason why this is necessary is twofold. Firstly, because when he replied to questions asked by those who were not yet ready to understand or accept the basic principles of his teachings (which was the case with the majority of those who asked him questions), he had to modify his teachings to suit their strongly held preconceptions, beliefs, desires and aspirations, which in most cases was not complete self-surrender and annihilation of ego, so the purpose of whatever he replied to such people was to draw them gently and gradually towards his teachings without trying to compel them to accept what they were not yet willing to accept. Secondly, because in most cases those who recorded his replies did so in English, even though he generally spoke in Tamil, or occasionally in Malayalam or Telugu, and very rarely spoke more than a few words in English, so they did not record his exact words, and since they recorded from memory sometime after he had spoken, they could only record what they had been able to understand, which was often not actually what he had said or meant. This is not surprising, because if we listen to a conversation and afterwards try to record what was said, we will at best be able to record only the gist of it, and if we failed to understand any of it correctly, we will record what we understood rather than what was actually said or meant. Therefore there are many inaccuracies in what is recorded in books such as *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, so when we read such books we need to use our understanding of the fundamental principles of his teachings as expressed by him in his own original writings such as *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, *Nāṇ Ār?* (Who am I?), *Upadēśa Undiyār* and *Āṇma-Viddai* to judge for ourselves whether or not each statement attributed to him actually reflects his real teachings.

Deep and careful *manana* is essential, because it enables us to form a clear understanding of his teachings, and whatever practice (*nididhyāsana*) we do will only be in accordance with what we have been able to understand. If our understanding is at all confused,

unclear or imperfect, our practice will be equally confused, unclear and imperfect.

In order to deepen and clarify our understanding, repeated *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsa* are necessary. When we practise *nididhyāsa*, which literally means ‘deep contemplation’ and which in this context means self-contemplation or self-investigation (*ātma-vicāra*), namely the simple practice of being self-attentive, we are looking at our own being, ‘I am’, which is the light of pure awareness by which everything else is illumined, so we are thereby bathing our mind in this light, so to speak, and thus we are cleansing, purifying and clarifying it. Self-attentiveness is therefore the most effective way to deepen and clarify our understanding, so the more we practise being self-attentive the more we will thereby be able to understand whatever teachings of his we hear or read, and thus the deeper and clearer our *manana* will become, which in turn will enable us to go deeper in our practice of being self-attentive. Therefore *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsa* are all necessary, and each one feeds and nourishes the other two.

Bhagavan’s teachings are like a map. When we travel to a land we have never visited, we need to study a map of the route and the layout of our destination before departing, but when we start on our journey we do not leave the map behind. We take it with us and refer to it often as we proceed. Before departing we understood the map to a certain extent, but as we proceed on our journey and refer to it as we go along, not only does it guide us but it also becomes more meaningful to us when we actually see for ourself the places and features represented on it. Likewise, before we can start to follow that path that Bhagavan has taught us, we first need to study and think about his teachings in order to understand them enough to begin following them, because if we do not have at least a rudimentary understanding of them we will not know in which direction we should proceed, nor how we can go in that direction.

Once we have gained a sufficient degree of understanding, we can and should start trying to go within, but when we do so we will inevitably be confronted with obstacles, dilemmas and uncertainties that we had not anticipated, so we need to refer to his teachings again to understand how to circumvent the obstacles, solve the dilemmas and clear away the uncertainties. If we frequently refer to his teachings and consider them carefully, they will not only guide us on our inward journey, but will also become more meaningful to us to the extent that we sink deep within.

Though our understanding of his teachings will grow deeper and clearer as we go deeper in our practice of self-investigation and self-surrender, we will never be able to say that we have understood his teachings completely or perfectly, because the deeper we sink within, the more we will be able to see fresh layers of meaning and implication in what he has written in works such as *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* and *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*, so we should always allow our practice of his teachings to be accompanied, supported and encouraged by frequent *śravaṇa* and *manana*.

Bhagavan is an expert doctor who has precisely diagnosed the root cause of all our problems, namely ego, and he has prescribed the perfect medicine to eradicate this root cause, namely the simple practice of patient and persistent self-investigation and self-surrender. Therefore, if we want to be benefited by his teachings, our primary duty to ourself is to try our best to subside deep within by patiently persevering in our practice of self-investigation and self-surrender. When we do so, we will face many obstacles in the form of our *viṣaya-vāsanās* (inclinations to seek happiness in objects or phenomena), but we should never give up, because as Bhagavan often said, ‘Nobody has ever succeeded on this path without perseverance’. No matter how many obstacles we may face, and how many times we may seem to fail, if we patiently persevere in trying our best to cling firmly to self-attentiveness, by his grace we will

surely succeed eventually in sinking back into the innermost depth of our heart, where he shines eternally as the infinitely clear light of pure awareness, waiting like an old lion to devour us as soon as we enter his abode.

### **Bhagavan's teachings are *advaita vēdānta* in its purest form**

The teachings of Bhagavan Ramana are therefore an extremely refined, simple and clear expression of the essence of *advaita vēdānta* in its very purest and most practical form, because not only did he explain the core philosophy of *advaita* far more simply, clearly and radically than it had ever been explained before, but even more importantly, in doing so he made clear what the true practice of *advaita* actually is. However, to appreciate clearly the great contribution that he has made to *vēdānta* in general and *advaita* in particular, it is necessary for us to understand where his teachings stand in the broader context of *vēdānta* as a whole.

The primary texts of *vēdānta* are the *prasthānatraya*, the ‘triple origin’ or ‘triple source’, namely the *Upaniṣads*, *Brahmasūtra* and *Bhagavad Gītā*, and these contain a wide variety of spiritual teachings suited to the needs of people at different stages of spiritual development, so they can be and have been interpreted in many different ways by the various schools of *vēdānta*. One such interpretation is *advaita*, and there is abundant support for this view in the *prasthānatraya*, but other schools of *vēdānta* can equally well find plenty of support for their views in the same texts. There is a good reason for this, and it is how it should be, because different teachings are appropriate for us at different stages of our spiritual development, so *vēdānta* caters for our needs at each of the successive stages of our spiritual growth, like a loving mother catering for the needs of her children at each stage of their growth, nurturing them first in her womb, and after their birth feeding and

nurturing them appropriately from their earliest infancy till they are fully grown.

From the perspective of *advaita*, therefore, particularly in its purest and deepest form as taught by Bhagavan Ramana, each of the many interpretations of *vēdānta* is appropriate for those who are attracted to it, and will gradually lead them to deeper levels of understanding and practice, so in verses 2 and 3 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* he teaches us that it is not appropriate for us as spiritual aspirants to engage in disputation with those who cherish views, beliefs and interpretations that are contrary to our own. Let anyone believe and follow whatever spiritual philosophy and practices that they want to believe, because what they believe and follow is what is best suited to them at their present level of spiritual growth.

Though *advaita* is the ultimate import of *vēdānta*, at least from the perspective of those of us who are attracted to it, we should not expect others to be attracted to it as we are, or to agree with us that it is the ultimate import of *vēdānta*. However, if *advaita* is the view that appeals to us most, we can find plenty of support for it not only in a deep and careful rational analysis of our experience of ourself in our three states of waking, dream and sleep, and in our practice of the path of self-investigation and self-surrender taught by Bhagavan, but also throughout the *prasthānatraya* of *vēdānta*.

For example, in the *Chāndōgya Upaniṣad* 6.2.1-2 it is said that before this (implying before the appearance of this or any other world) what existed was ‘एकम् एव अद्वितीयम्’ (*ēkam ēva advitīyam*), ‘one only without a second’, namely ‘सत् एव’ (*sat ēva*), ‘existence only’, or ‘सत्त्व एव’ (*sattva ēva*), ‘beingness only’. Other interpretations of *vēdānta* would argue that though existence was originally ‘one only without a second’, it later transformed itself into all this multiplicity, whereas according to *advaita* it has always remained as ‘one only without a second’, so all this multiplicity is just an illusory appearance (*vivarta*). Strong support for this *advaita*

interpretation can be found in the *Bhagavad Gītā* 2.16, in the first line of which Bhagavan Krishna says 'न असतः विद्यते भावः; न अभावः विद्यते सतः' (*na asataḥ vidyate bhāvaḥ; na abhāvaḥ vidyate sataḥ*), 'There is no existence (*bhāva*) of the non-existent (*asat*); there is no non-existence (*abhāva*) of the existent (*sat*)', which Bhagavan Ramana translated into Tamil in verse 9 of *Bhagavad Gītā Sāram* as 'இல்லாததனுக்கு இருப்பு இல்லை; உள்ளதனுக்கு இல்லாமை என்பது இலை' (*illādadanukku iruppu illai; uḷḷadanukku illāmai eṇbadu ilai*), 'For *illādadu* [what does not exist] there is no existence. For *uḷḷadu* [what does exist] there is not what is called non-existence'. In other words, what does not exist cannot ever exist, and what does exist cannot ever not exist, so as Bhagavan Ramana often used to say: 'What exists must always exist, so if something exists at one time and not at another time, it does not actually exist even when it seems to exist'. Applying this principle to what is said in the *Chāndōgya Upaniṣad* 6.2.1-2, since existence (*sat*) existed alone as 'one only without a second' before this, it must exist eternally, because it can never be non-existent. Likewise, since nothing other than that eternal existence existed before this, nothing other than it can ever actually exist, because what is once non-existent can never be existent. Therefore what actually exists must always be 'one only without a second' (*ēkam ēva advitīyam*). Whether we want to accept this or not, this is the basic contention of *advaita*, and it is supported by these and many other passages in the *prasthānatraya* of *vēdānta*.

So according to *vēdānta*, what is this existence (*sat*) that is eternally 'one only without a second'? According to the *mahāvākya* (great saying) of the *Chāndōgya Upaniṣad* (6.8.7), 'तत्त्वमसि' (*tat tvam asi*), 'That you are', we ourselves are that one existence other than which nothing exists.

What, therefore, is the practical implication of this teaching? In classical *advaita* there has been a strong tendency to interpret this to

mean that we should meditate that we are that, but in verse 32 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* Bhagavan explains that when we are told ‘அது நீ’ (*adu nī*), ‘That is you’, our immediate response should be to try to know and be what we actually are by investigating எது நான் (*edu nān*), what am I, and he adds that meditating that we are that (namely *brahman*, the one real existence) and not this (namely this body) is due to non-existence of strength (namely the strength of *vivēka*, discernment or ability to distinguish what is real from what is unreal, *bhakti*, love to be as we actually are, and *vairāgya*, freedom from desire to be aware of anything other than our own being).

That is, before we are told ‘That you are’, it is natural for us to look for that (namely *brahman* or God) outside ourselves, so the aim of *mahāvākyas* (great statements that reveal our true identity) such as ‘*tat tvam asi*’ (that you are) is to turn our attention back towards ourselves by making us understand that what we are seeking is not actually anything other than ourselves. Therefore if we understand such *mahāvākyas* correctly, we will not just meditate on ideas such as ‘I am that’, because like all other thoughts, such ideas are things other than ourselves, but will only meditate on our own being, which always shines within us as our fundamental awareness, ‘I am’.

In other words, once we have been told that *brahman* is ourselves, we should understand that we can know *brahman* only by knowing what we ourselves actually are, and we can know what we actually are only by turning our entire attention back within to face ourselves alone. Thus, by making this clear to us, Bhagavan has fulfilled the real aim of each of the *mahāvākyas*, which are key statements by which the *Upaniṣads* declare *jīva-brahmaikya*, the essential *aikya* (oneness) of *jīva* (the soul or ego) and *brahman* (the one real existence or God).

In classical *advaita* we are taught that the root cause of all our problems is *avidyā* (ignorance), namely ignorance of our own real nature, and that the only remedy for *avidyā* is *vidyā* (knowledge), namely knowledge of our own real nature. However, the means to



attain *vidyā* has been widely misunderstood, because it is generally believed that it can be gained only by studying the *prasthānatraya*, commentaries on them and other *vēdānta* texts under the guidance of a properly qualified teacher belonging to an established *sampradāya*, a tradition that hands down its doctrine through a *paramparā* (a lineage or succession of *gurus* or teachers).

Some people believe this idea so strongly that they even claim that Bhagavan Ramana was not a proper *guru*, because he did not belong to any such *paramparā* and he had not studied *vēdānta* in the traditional manner. However, this is a very crude and superficial understanding both of the meaning of the term *guru* and of the real role of *guru*, whereas Bhagavan has given us a much deeper and more refined understanding about the real nature and role of *guru*. According to him *guru* is not a person but the eternal reality that always exists and shines in our heart as our own being, ‘I am’. As he says in the twelfth paragraph of *Nāṇ Ār?*, ‘கடவுளும் குருவும் உண்மையில் வேறல்லர்’ (*kaḍavuḷ-um guru-v-um uṇmaiyl vērallar*), ‘God and *guru* are in truth not different’, and as he often used to say, God, *guru* and *ātman* are one, meaning that God and *guru* are nothing other than *ātma-svarūpa* (the real nature of ourself). However, though *guru* always exists in us as our own real nature, and though its grace is therefore always working in our heart to purify our mind and thereby gradually prepare us to eventually turn back within to merge forever in our source, at a certain point in this process it is necessary in most cases for *guru* to appear outwardly in human form in order to teach us to turn back within. Therefore, though *guru* appears in human form (in our case in the human form of Bhagavan Ramana), the role of *guru* is never in any way limited to that form, because the *svārūpa* or real form of *guru* is *ātma-svarūpa*, so the real locus of the role of *guru* is deep within our own heart, where it is always performing its extremely subtle *aruḷ-seyal* or act of grace by just being as it always actually is. Hence, since *guru* is not actually a person, even though it appears in human form,

there is no need for any *paramparā* (lineage of *gurus*), because having once appeared in human form to teach us to turn within, the purpose of that human form has been fulfilled by leaving us with the precious legacy of its verbal teachings (which in the case of Bhagavan he has left us primarily in the form of his own original writings such as *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*). After that, it is up to us as disciples to always cherish *guru* and its verbal teachings in our heart by trying our best to follow the path he has taught us, namely the simple practice of self-investigation and self-surrender, which entails clinging firmly to self-attentiveness and thereby sinking deep in our heart, where his real teachings are always shining as the silence of our own being.

In his teachings Bhagavan has clarified the nature of both *vidyā* and *avidyā* in an extremely practical manner, thereby dispelling the mistaken belief that *vidyā* is a knowledge that can be gained from books or any other external source. Firstly he clarified that *avidyā* is nothing but ego, the false awareness ‘I am this body’, and that *vidyā* is *sat-cit*, the pure awareness that always shines as our own being, ‘I am’. The knowledge that can be gained from books or spoken words is only conceptual knowledge, and since such knowledge is known only by ego, it exists only in the realm of *avidyā*, and hence it cannot eradicate ego, whose very nature is *avidyā*.

So long as we rise and stand as ego, conceptual knowledge is necessary and useful, but in the spiritual path it is useful only to the extent that, firstly, it enables us to understand why we should investigate and know ourself, why we should thereby surrender ourself, and what exactly is the self we need to investigate and know and the self we need to surrender, and secondly, it encourages and motivates us to persevere in this practice of self-investigation and self-surrender. To gain this understanding and encouragement, we do not need to study many books, but only a few very relevant texts like *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* and the other original writings of Bhagavan, in

which he is constantly urging us to turn back within to see ourself as we actually are. As he says in the sixteenth paragraph of *Nāṇ Ār?*:

எந்நூலிலும் முக்தி யடைவதற்கு மனத்தை யடக்க வேண்டுமென்று சொல்லப்பட் டுள்ளபடியால், மனோநிக்ரகமே நூல்களின் முடிவான கருத்து என் றறிந்துகொண்ட பின்பு நூல்களை யளவின்றிப் படிப்பதாற் பயனில்லை. மனத்தை யடக்குவதற்குத் தன்னை யாரென்று விசாரிக்க வேண்டுமே யல்லாமல் எப்படி நூல்களில் விசாரிப்பது? தன்னைத் தன்னுடைய ஞானக்கண்ணாற்றானே யறிய வேண்டும். ராமன் தன்னை ராமனென்றறியக் கண்ணாடி வேண்டுமா? 'தான்' பஞ்ச கோசங்களுக்குள் ளிருப்பது; நூல்களோ அவற்றிற்கு வெளியி ளிருப்பவை. ஆகையால், பஞ்ச கோசங்களையும் நீக்கி விசாரிக்க வேண்டிய தன்னை நூல்களில் விசாரிப்பது வீணே. பந்தத்தி ளிருக்கும் தான் யாரென்று விசாரித்து தன் யதார்த்த சொரூபத்தைத் தெரிந்துகொள்வதே முக்தி. சதாகாலமும் மனத்தை ஆத்மாவில் வைத்திருப்பதற்குத் தான் 'ஆத்மவிசார' மென்று பெயர்; தியானமோ தன்னை ஸச்சிதானந்த பிரம்மமாக பாவிப்பது. கற்றவை யனைத்தையும் ஒருகாலத்தில் மறக்க வேண்டிவரும்.

*ennūlilum mukti y-aḍaivadaṛku maṇattai y-aḍakka vēṇḍum-  
endru solla-p-paṭ tuḷḷapaḍiyāl, maṇōnigrahamē nūlgaḷiṇ  
muḍivāṇa karuttu eṇ ḍṛarindu-gonḍa piṇbu nūlgaḷai y-  
aḷaviṇḍri-p paḍi-p-padāl payaṇ-illai. maṇattai y-  
aḍakkuvadaṛku-t taṇnai yār endru vicārikka vēṇḍum-ē y-allāmal  
eppaḍi nūlgaḷil vicārippadu? taṇnai-t taṇṇuḍaiya ṇāṇa-k-  
kaṇṇāl-tāṇ-ē y-aṛiya vēṇḍum. rāmaṇ taṇnai rāmaṇ-endrariya-k  
kaṇṇāḍi vēṇḍum-ā? 'tāṇ' pañca kōśaṅgaḷukkuḷ ḷ-iruppadu;  
nūlgaḷ-ō avatrīṛku vēḷiyil iruppavai. āhaiyāl, pañca kōśaṅgaḷai-  
y-um nīkki vicārikka vēṇḍiya taṇnai nūlgaḷil vicārippadu viṇē.  
bandhattil irukkum tāṇ yār endru vicārittu taṇ yathārtha*

*sorūpattai-t terindu-koḷvadē mukti. sadā-kālam-um maṇattai ātmāvil vaittiruppadaṛku-t tāṇ ‘ātma-vicāram’ eṇḍru peyar; dhiyāṇam-ō taṇṇai saccidāṇanda birahmmamāha bhāvippadu. kaṭravai y-aṇaittaiyum oru-kālattil maṛakka vēṇḍi-varum.*

Since in every text [of *advaita vēdānta*] it is said that for attaining *mukti* [liberation] it is necessary to make the mind cease, after knowing that *manōnigraha* [restraint, subjugation or destruction of the mind] alone is the ultimate intention [aim or purpose] of [such] texts, there is no benefit [to be gained] by studying texts without limit. For making the mind cease it is necessary to investigate oneself [to see] who [one actually is], [but] instead [of doing so] how [can one see oneself by] investigating in texts? It is necessary to know oneself only by one's own eye of *jñāna* [pure awareness]. Does [a person called] Raman need a mirror to know himself as Raman? ‘Oneself’ is within the *pañca-kōśas* [the ‘five sheaths’ that seem to cover and obscure what one actually is, namely the physical body, life, mind, intellect and will]; whereas texts are outside them. Therefore, investigating in texts [in order to know] oneself, whom it is necessary to investigate [by turning one's attention within and thereby] setting aside [excluding, removing, giving up or separating from] all the *pañca-kōśas*, is useless. [By] investigating who is oneself who is in bondage, knowing one's *yathārtha svarūpa* [actual own nature] alone is *mukti* [liberation]. The name ‘*ātma-vicāra*’ [refers] only to always keeping the mind on *ātmā* [oneself]; whereas *dhyāna* [meditation] is considering [thinking or imagining] oneself to be *sat-cit-ānanda brahman* [the one ultimate reality, which is existence-awareness-happiness]. At one time it will become necessary to forget all that one has learnt.

Therefore, since *avidyā* (ignorance of one's own real nature) is just ego, the false awareness ‘I am this body’, the *vidyā* (knowledge) that

alone can dispel it is only awareness of ourself as we actually are, which cannot be achieved by any means other than self-investigation (*ātma-vicāra*).

Though the philosophy and practice of *advaita vēdānta* are understood by people in many different ways, and though there are many different levels of explanation given within *advaita vēdānta* to suit the needs of people at different levels of spiritual development, there are certain foundational principles on which all adherents of *advaita vēdānta* are agreed. One of these is that what actually exists is ‘one only without a second’ (*ēkam ēva advitīyam*), and that we ourself are therefore that. Another is that, since the real nature of ourself (*ātma-svarūpa*) alone is what actually exists, everything else (all multiplicity) is *vivarta*, an unreal and illusory appearance. Whereas most other interpretations of *vēdānta* explain the appearance of multiplicity by espousing *pariṇāma vāda*, the contention (*vāda*) that *brahman* has actually transformed itself into all this, so all this is a transformation (*pariṇāma*) of *brahman*, *advaita vēdānta* explains it by means of *vivarta vāda*, the contention that all this is an illusion or unreal appearance (*vivarta*), because *brahman* is immutable and can therefore never become or be transformed into anything else.

However, what is the practical implication of *vivarta vāda*, this contention that everything other than our own real nature (*ātma-svarūpa*) is just an illusory appearance? In classical *advaita vēdānta* this important question is seldom considered in as much depth as it should be. However, as Bhagavan pointed out, when we are told that all phenomena are just an illusory appearance, should we not consider to whom they all appear? Nothing can appear without appearing in the view of something, so in whose view do all these things appear? Since phenomena appear to us only in waking and dream, when we have risen as ego, and since no phenomena appear to us in sleep, when we do not rise as ego, it is clear that they appear

and seem to exist only in the view of ourself as ego. Therefore, since an illusory appearance depends for its seeming existence upon the one in whose view it seems to exist, Bhagavan taught us that the practical implication of *vivarta vāda* is that we should investigate ourself, the one to whom all this appears.

To illustrate how all this multiplicity can be just *vivarta*, an illusory appearance, meaning that though it seems to exist, it does not actually exist, various analogies are given in classical *advaita*. One such analogy is dream. Though a whole world populated with people and numerous other phenomena seems to exist in a dream, it does not actually exist, because it is only in the view of the dreamer that it seems to exist. Likewise, our present state, which now seems to us to be our waking state and therefore distinct from dream, is actually just a dream, and we as ego are the dreamer, because the dreamer is the one in whose view all the dream phenomena seem to exist.

What actually exists and is therefore real is only ourself as we actually are, but in a dream we as ego seem to be a body, so since we are real (albeit not as ego but only as we actually are), whatever body currently seems to be ourself therefore seems to be real, and since that dream body is a part of the dream world, the whole dream world seems to be real. Therefore while we are dreaming our dream body and dream world seem to us to be real, and therefore we seem to be awake, even though we are actually just dreaming. However, as soon as we wake up from a dream, we instantly recognise that it was just a dream and therefore not real. What a moment before seemed to be so real, on waking is immediately seen to be unreal. The reason for this is that while we were dreaming we experienced ourself as ‘I am this body’, so that dream body and hence the whole dream world seemed to be real, but as soon as we wake up from that dream, our identification with that dream body is severed, meaning that we cease to experience it as ourself, and hence we cease to experience it

as real. Applying this to our present state, we can understand that the reason why our present body and the whole world of which it is a part seem to be so real, and why this state therefore now seems to be our waking state and not just a dream, is that we now experience this body as if it were ourself. This is why whatever dream we are currently experiencing always seems to us to be real and therefore not just a dream. Since we do not and cannot experience anything in our present state that we could not equally well experience in a dream, we have absolutely no evidence or other adequate reason to suppose that our present state is anything other than a dream, so it is perfectly reasonable for us to conclude that this is just a dream and that all phenomena are therefore just an illusory appearance (*vivarta*).

However, though in classical *advaita* it is argued in some texts (such as by Gaudapada in his *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*) that there is no difference between waking and dream, meaning that what appears to be the waking state is actually just a dream, in many other texts it is argued that though waking is analogous to dream in some respects, it is actually more real than dream, because the waking world was created prior to our perception of it and therefore exists independent of ourself as the mind that perceives it. The former view is called *dr̥ṣṭi-sṛṣṭi vāda*, the contention (*vāda*) that perception (*dr̥ṣṭi*) is itself creation (*sṛṣṭi*), meaning that there is no creation independent of our perception of it, just as nothing perceived in a dream exists independent of the dreamer's perception of it, whereas the latter view is called *sṛṣṭi-dr̥ṣṭi vāda*, the contention that creation precedes perception and therefore exists independent of it. Since most people are not willing to accept that their entire life is just a dream and that nothing that they experience therefore has any existence independent of their experience of it, by far and away the most popular view in classical *advaita* is *sṛṣṭi-dr̥ṣṭi vāda*, but this is a very diluted form of *advaita* and is taught only for the benefit of those who are not yet

willing to accept all the implications of the much deeper, simpler and clearer teaching of *advaita vēdānta*, namely *dr̥ṣṭi-sr̥ṣṭi vāda*.

An illusory appearance is a misperception, a perception of something as something other than what it actually is, so it appears and seems to exist only in the view of whoever perceives it as such. Therefore, if all this is just an illusory appearance, as *advaita vēdānta* contends, how could it exist independent of the perceiving mind's perception of it? Therefore *sr̥ṣṭi-dr̥ṣṭi vāda* is a profoundly unsatisfactory and inherently inconsistent explanation of the primary contention of *advaita vēdānta*, namely that what actually exists is 'one only without a second' (*ēkam ēva advitīyam*), and that the seeming existence of all this multiplicity is therefore just an illusory appearance (*vivarta*). Hence, in order to safeguard us from all the conceptual confusion and complications that inevitably arise from and follow in the wake of *sr̥ṣṭi-dr̥ṣṭi vāda*, in texts such as *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* and *Nāṇ Ār?* Bhagavan clearly and unequivocally teaches us *dr̥ṣṭi-sr̥ṣṭi vāda*, and he explained that this is the view we must be willing to accept if we genuinely seek to know the one reality that underlies the unreal appearance of all this multiplicity.

Another analogy that is frequently used in classical *advaita* to illustrate how all this can be just an illusory appearance (*vivarta*) is the snake that a rope is mistaken to be. What actually exists in such a case is only a rope, but what it seems to be is a snake. Though the snake seems to be very real, it is actually just an illusory appearance, because no snake actually exists there at all. The snake seems to exist only in the view of the mind that sees it, so as a snake it has absolutely no existence at all independent of that mind's perception of it. Likewise all phenomena seem to exist only in the view of ourself as ego or mind, so as phenomena they have absolutely no existence at all independent of our perception of them. Whenever we rise and stand as ego, as we do in waking and dream, phenomena seem to exist, and whenever we do not rise as ego, as in sleep, no



phenomena seem to exist, so all phenomena depend for their seeming existence upon the seeming existence of ourself as ego. Since ego (the subject or knower) and phenomena (the objects or things that are known) both appear and disappear, neither of them is real, but though they appear and disappear simultaneously, phenomena shine or seem to exist only because of ego, as Bhagavan points out in verse 7 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*.

What seems to be a snake is actually just a rope. Likewise, what seems to be both ego and all phenomena is actually just the one underlying reality, namely *brahman*, which is the real nature of ourself (*ātma-svarūpa*), meaning ourself as we actually are. Therefore in the *Chāndōgya Upaniṣad* 3.14.1 it is said ‘सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म’ (*sarvaṁ khalvidaṁ brahma*), ‘All this is actually [truly or certainly] *brahman*’. However, in verse 26 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* Bhagavan says: ‘அகந்தையே யாவும் ஆம்’ (*ahandaiyē yāvum ām*), ‘Ego itself is everything’. Though it may appear on superficial observation that he is here contradicting what is said in the *upaniṣad*, this is actually a clear example of the way in which he clarified the truth of *vēdānta* by re-expressing it in a more carefully nuanced and refined manner.

That is, though the ultimate truth is that all this is actually *brahman*, just as what seems to be a snake is actually just a rope, in our experience as ego or *jīva* all this seems to include birth, death, pain, suffering, misery and all the other problems of *saṁsāra* (embodied existence), so we do not experience all this as the infinitely blissful *brahman*, which is one, indivisible and immutable, and being told that all this is *brahman* does not enable us to see it as such. Therefore we need to consider why we see *brahman* as all this and consequently not as it actually is. Since *brahman* sees itself only as *brahman* and not as all this, the reason we see *brahman* as all this is because we do not see ourself as *brahman*, and we do not see ourself as *brahman* because we see ourself instead as ego, this

seemingly limited ‘I’ that rises in waking and dream as ‘I am this body’ and that subsides and ceases to exist in sleep. What we actually are is only *brahman*, but whenever we rise as ego we see ourselves as all this, so in order to see ourselves and everything else as the one infinite and indivisible *brahman* that we actually are, we need to permanently cease rising as ego. Since ego is just this false awareness of ourselves as ‘I am this body’, it can be eradicated only by our being aware of ourselves as we actually are, and we can be aware of ourselves as we actually are only by keenly investigating ourselves.

Therefore, in order to clarify the implication and fulfil the purpose of this statement in the *Chāndōgya Upaniṣad*, ‘सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म’ (*sarvaṁ khalvidam brahma*), ‘All this is actually *brahman*’, in verse 26 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* Bhagavan explains: ‘அகந்தை உண்டாயின், அனைத்தும் உண்டாகும்; அகந்தை இன்றேல், இன்று அனைத்தும். அகந்தையே யாவும் ஆம். ஆதலால், யாது இது என்று நாடலே ஓவுதல் யாவும் என ஓர்’ (*ahandai unḍāyin, aṇaittum unḍāhum; ahandai indrēl, indru aṇaittum. ahandai-y-ē yāvum ām. ādalāl, yādu idu enḍru nāḍal-ē ōvudal yāvum eṇa ōr*), ‘If ego comes into existence, everything comes into existence; if ego does not exist, everything does not exist. Ego itself is everything. Therefore, know that investigating what this [namely ego] is alone is giving up everything’. That is, all this seems to exist only in the view of ourselves as ego, so it comes into seeming existence only when we rise as ego, and it does not exist at all when we do not rise as ego. Since it therefore does not exist independent of ego, what ego sees as all this is only itself (just as in dream we see ourselves as an entire dream world), so ego itself is all this. Therefore, since we as ego will subside and cease to exist if we investigate ourselves keenly enough, and since everything else will cease to exist when ego ceases to exist, investigating what this ego is is the only means by which we can give up and thereby free ourselves from ego and everything else.

If we look keenly enough at what seems to be a snake, we will see that it is not actually a snake but only a rope. Likewise, when we as ego investigate ourself keenly enough, we will see that we are not actually this finite ego, whose nature is to be always aware of the seeming existence of other things, but only *brahman*, which is ‘one only without a second’ (*ēkam ēva advitīyam*), and whose nature is therefore to be aware of nothing other than itself, because nothing other than itself exists for it to be aware of.

Therefore, since everything is only ego, and since ego is nothing other than *brahman*, it is true that ‘all this is actually *brahman*’. That is, the immediate source, ground and substance of all this is ego, and the source, ground and substance of ego is *brahman*, so the ultimate source, ground and substance of all this is *brahman*. Thus we can see that Bhagavan has not contradicted the statement ‘All this is actually *brahman*’ (*sarvaṁ khalvidaṁ brahma*) by saying ‘Ego itself is everything’ (*ahandaiyē yāvuṁ ām*), but has clarified its meaning and significance by introducing into this equation the crucial missing link, namely ego. Without this important clarification, on its own this teaching, ‘All this is actually *brahman*’, seems to lack any practical value, because it does not explain or clearly imply how we can actually see all this as *brahman*, but with this essential link that formerly seemed to be missing until Bhagavan pointed it out, the practical implication of this teaching immediately becomes clear to us, particularly when we consider it in the context of the fundamental principles of his teachings as expounded by him in *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* and his other original writings.

As we can see from the examples above, in his teachings Bhagavan has not only clarified the meaning and philosophical implications of the core teachings of *vēdānta* by expressing them afresh in a much simpler, clearer, deeper, more refined and more radical manner, but most importantly of all he has clarified and highlighted the practical implications of them. If we understand it

correctly, *vēdānta* is an extremely practical philosophy, which is why it can be and has been adapted so well to suit the needs of aspirants during different stages of their spiritual development, and why it has therefore given rise to so many different interpretations, but unfortunately many followers of *vēdānta*, particularly those who claim to be followers of *advaita*, fail to recognise the practical implications of *vēdānta*, and therefore mistake the mere study and exposition of *vēdānta* texts to be the actual practice of *vēdānta*. This is why it was necessary for Lord Arunachala Siva himself, who had earlier appeared in the form of the *ādi-guru* (original *guru*), Dakshinamurti, to appear once again in modern times in the human form of Bhagavan Ramana in order to clarify the correct practice of *vēdānta* in general and *advaita* in particular.

Since *advaita* means ‘non-twoness’ (*a-dvi-tā*), the correct practice of *advaita* cannot be any practice that entails more than one thing, such as the distinction between subject and object. In other words, it cannot be meditation on anything other than oneself. Therefore being self-attentive is alone the correct practice of *advaita*, and this is what is called self-investigation (*ātma-vicāra*), as Bhagavan made clear in the sixteenth paragraph of *Nāṇ Ār?*, where he defined *ātma-vicāra* by saying: ‘சதாகாலமும் மனத்தை ஆத்மாவில் வைத்திருப்பதற்குத் தான் ‘ஆத்மவிசார’ மென்று பெயர்’ (*sadā-kālam-um maṇattai ātmāvil vaittiruppadarku-t tāṇ ‘ātma-vicāram’ eṇḍru peyar*), ‘The name ‘*ātma-vicāra*’ [refers] only to always keeping the mind on *ātmā* [oneself]’. ‘மனத்தை ஆத்மாவில் வைத்திருப்பது’ (*maṇattai ātmāvil vaittiruppadu*), ‘keeping the mind on oneself’, means keeping our attention fixed firmly on ourself, so this definition clearly implies that being self-attentive alone is the practice of self-investigation (*ātma-vicāra*). This is therefore the same practice that Bhagavan Krishna described in the *Bhagavad Gītā* 6.25 as ‘आत्मसंस्थं मनः कृत्वा न किञ्चिदपि चिन्तयेत्’ (*ātma-saṁsthaṁ manaḥ kṛtvā na kiñcid api cintayēt*), ‘Having made the mind *ātma-saṁstha* [self-

standing or self-situated, namely fixed firmly on, in and as oneself], one should not think of anything at all’, which Bhagavan Ramana translated in Tamil in verse 27 of *Bhagavad Gītā Sāraṁ* as ‘சித்தத்தை ஆன்மாவில் சேர்த்திடுக; மற்று எதுவும் இத்தனையும் எண்ணிடாதே’ (*cittattai āṇmāvil sērttiḍuka; matru eduvum ittanaṇiyum eṇṇiḍādē*), ‘Fix the mind on *ātman* [yourself]; do not think even the slightest of anything else at all’.

Another crucial contribution that Bhagavan Ramana made to *vēdānta* more broadly was to clarify the inseparable oneness and mutual interdependence of *bhakti* and *jñāna*: deep love and clear awareness. As he often used to say, ‘*bhakti* is the mother of *jñāna*’, because *jñāna* is the perfectly clear awareness (namely *sat-cit*, pure being-awareness, ‘I am’) that alone remains when we as ego have surrendered ourself entirely, and without *bhakti*, which is all-consuming love to give ourself entirely to God, who is our own real nature (*ātma-svarūpa*), we will not be willing to surrender ourself entirely to him.

In other schools of *vēdānta* it is generally believed that in *advaita* there is no room for real *bhakti*, and that followers of *advaita* at best pay only lip service to the need for *bhakti*, and this belief of theirs is at least partially justified by the fact that many who consider themselves to be followers of *advaita* do indeed look down on *bhakti* as an inferior path, but Bhagavan not only taught that heart-melting and all-consuming love (*bhakti*) is absolutely essential, being the only driving force that can enable us to persevere and go deep in the practice of self-investigation and thereby surrender ourself entirely to God, but also exemplified such love in *Śrī Aruṇācala Stuti Pañcakam* (the Five Hymns to Arunachala), particularly in *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai* (the Marriage Garland of Syllables to Arunachala), which he sang in the *madhura bhāva* (the sweet state of heart-melting love in which the lover yearns for eternal and inseparable union with her beloved Lord), which is considered in the

*bhakti* schools of *vēdānta* to be the deepest and purest form of love (*bhakti*). More than in any of his other works, in *Akṣaramaṇamālai* Bhagavan has taught us by example the real nature of deep *bhakti* and its indispensable importance in the path of self-investigation and self-surrender, and he has also shown us that the imperishable marriage (*akṣara maṇam*) or union with God for which the true devotee yearns is the state of absolute and eternal oneness with him that can be achieved only by complete self-surrender and consequent eradication of ego. Thus he exemplified in his life, poetry and teachings the inseparable oneness of *bhakti* and *jñāna*, thereby bridging the gulf that formerly seemed to separate *advaita* from the other schools of *vēdānta*.

True love is giving, not taking. If we truly love someone, we will not be concerned about what we can take or gain from them for ourself but only about what we can give to them. So long as we seek to gain anything from God for ourself, our love for him is still impure. If our love for him is pure, we will want nothing but to give ourself entirely to him. Therefore pure *bhakti* is heart-melting and all-consuming love to give ourself completely and unreservedly to God. Few of us have such *bhakti* in its fullest form, but if we are following the spiritual path this is what we should be aspiring for and working towards. Complete surrender of ourself to God, the one infinite and eternal reality that always exists and shines in our heart as our own being, ‘I am’, alone is the true and ultimate goal of *bhakti*.

When we start on the path of *bhakti*, God seems to be something other than ourself, so we try to express our love for him through actions of body, speech and mind, namely *pūjā* (worship of him), *stōtra* (singing his praises) or *japa* (repetition of his name) and *dhyāna* (meditation on him) respectively, and by the love with which we do such actions our mind is gradually purified, meaning that it is cleansed of all its inclinations to seek happiness in anything other than love for God, as Bhagavan explains in verses 3 to 7 of *Upadēśa*

*Undiyār*. As our mind is thereby purified, we gain the clarity to recognise that we cannot actually be anything other than God, the one infinite whole, the fullness of being, the only thing that actually exists, so since we have thereby come to understand that he alone is what we actually are, we cease seeking him outside ourself and instead begin to seek him only in the depth of our own heart. That is, instead of meditating on him as something other than ourself, as we were doing previously, we start to meditate on him as none other than ourself, with the clear understanding that he is I.

Since the nature of ourself as ego is to rise, stand and flourish by attending to things other than ourself, we will subside and sink back into the depth of our heart only to the extent to which we attend to ourself alone, as Bhagavan makes clear in verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, so by meditating on ourself we are surrendering ourself to God, and hence in verse 8 of *Upadēśa Undiyār* he says that *ananya-bhāva*, meditating on nothing other than ourself, is ‘அனைத்தினும் உத்தமம்’ (*aṇaittiṇum uttamam*), ‘best among all’, implying that it is not only the best practice of *bhakti* and most effective means to purify the mind but also the only means by which we can eradicate ego and thereby surrender ourself completely to God. Since we as ego will subside back into our being to the extent to which we attend to ourself, when by persistent practice our self-attentiveness becomes strong and stable enough, we will thereby be firmly fixed in our true state of being (*sat-bhāva*), which transcends all mental activity, so being in this state is *para-bhakti tattva*, the true state of supreme devotion, as Bhagavan says in verse 9 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*, because it is the state in which we have given ourself wholly to God and therefore do not rise as ego to know anything other than ourself.

The path of *bhakti* is therefore a gradual progression towards this state of complete self-surrender, as also is the path of *jñāna*, so the goal of both these paths is identical, even though the followers of each may describe it in different terms. What is called complete self-

surrender in the path of *bhakti* is what is called eradication of ego and consequent removal of *avidyā* in the path of *jñāna*. If we go deep in following either of these paths, the superficial differences that others see between them will dissolve and disappear, and we will clearly recognise that they are one and inseparable, not only in their ultimate goal but also at deeper levels in their practice.

In the early stages of the path of surrender we recognise by the grace of God that what stands between him and us is our own will. Since he is all-knowing, nothing can happen without his knowing it. Since he is all-powerful, nothing can happen without his allowing it. And since he is all-loving, he will not allow anything to happen that is not for the ultimate good of all concerned. Therefore whatever may happen in our life is happening with his knowledge and consent and in accordance with his will, so if we want to surrender ourselves to him, we must be willing to accept wholeheartedly our present circumstances and whatever happens as his sweet will for our own benefit and the benefit of all concerned, whether or not we are able to understand how each particular thing is for the benefit of all concerned. In order to wholeheartedly accept everything as his will, we need to surrender our will to his, meaning that we need to give up all our own likes, dislikes, desires, attachments, hopes, fears and so on, and we will be able to do so only to the extent that we have genuine love for him.

In order to have true and deep love for him, we need to trust him, and our trust in him and consequent love for him are born out of clarity of mind and heart, which naturally arises from within to the extent that our mind is purified, meaning cleansed of its impurities, namely its likes, dislikes, desires, attachments, hopes, fears and so on. All this happens by his grace, but his grace needs to work through us in order to bring about these changes, and it can work through us only to the extent that we are willing to yield ourselves to it, thereby allowing it to cleanse us of our impurities and thereby give us the



clarity to trust him and love him wholeheartedly. This process of our surrendering our will to his is therefore a gradual one, and it happens by us progressively learning to trust and cooperate with the working of his grace.

However, though by going through this process we can gradually learn to surrender our will to him, we can surrender it only to a certain extent so long as we continue to rise as ego, because it is the very nature of ourself as ego to have a will of our own to a greater or lesser extent. Therefore, in order to surrender our will entirely to him, we need to surrender ourself entirely to him, so this gradual process of learning to surrender our will to him eventually leads us to self-surrender, which is the pinnacle of this path of *bhakti* and surrender.

But how can we surrender ourself? The self we need to surrender is ourself as ego, and since the nature of ourself as ego is to rise, stand and flourish to the extent to which we attend to anything other than ourself, but to subside and dissolve back into our being to the extent to which we attend to ourself alone, we can surrender ourself as ego only by being so keenly self-attentive that we become aware of ourself as we actually are, thereby eradicating ego and merging back forever in God, who is what we actually are, like a river merging back in the ocean. That this is the only means by which we can ultimately give ourself entirely to God is pointed out by Bhagavan in the first sentence of the thirteenth paragraph of *Nāṇ Ār?*:

ஆன்மசிந்தனையைத்	தவிர	வேறு	சிந்தனை
கிளம்புவதற்குச்	சற்று	மிடங்கொடாமல்	
ஆத்மநிஷ்டாபரனா	யிருப்பதே	தன்னை	ஈசனுக்
கனிப்பதாம்.			

*āṇma-cintaṇaiyai-t tavira vēru cintaṇai kiḷambuvadaṙku-c  
caṭṭrum iḍam-koḍāmal ātma-niṣṭhāparaṇ-āy iruppadē taṇṇai  
īṣaṇukku aḷippadām.*

Being *ātma-niṣṭhāparaṇ* [one who is firmly fixed as oneself], giving not even the slightest room to the rising of any *cintana* [thought] except *ātma-cintana* [thought of oneself, namely self-attentiveness], alone is giving oneself to God.

Thus the pinnacle of the path of *bhakti* is self-surrender (*ātma-samarpaṇa*), and the pinnacle of the path of self-surrender is self-investigation (*ātma-vicāra*), which is the path of *jñāna*, so the path of *jñāna* is in no way contrary to or incompatible with the path of *bhakti* but is the concluding stage and culmination of it. Without wholehearted *bhakti* that has matured into a deep and heart-melting love to surrender ourselves completely to God, we cannot succeed in going deep in the path of self-investigation, because we will be willing to investigate ourselves only to the extent that we have such love. That is, since we as ego will subside back into our heart to the extent to which we attend to ourselves, we cannot attend to ourselves without thereby surrendering ourselves, so we will be willing to attend to ourselves only to the extent to which we have love to surrender ourselves.

Therefore through his life, teachings and writings Bhagavan has clarified not only the philosophy and correct practice of the path of *jñāna*, namely self-investigation (*ātma-vicāra*), which is central to the *advaita* school of *vēdānta*, but also the nature of the ultimate practice of the path of *bhakti*, namely complete surrender of oneself to God, which is central to all the other *bhakti* schools of *vēdānta*.



# Introductory verse composed by Muruganar

மெய்யி னியல்புமதை மேவுந் திறனுமெமக்  
குய்யும் படிமுருக னோதுகெனப் – பொய்யுலகின்  
கள்ளமறு மாற்றாற் கனரமணன் கட்டுரைத்தா  
னுள்ளது நாற்ப துவந்து.

*meyyi niyalbumadai mēvun tiraṇumemak  
kuyyum paḍimuruga ṇōdukeṇap — poyyulahiṇ  
kaḷḷamaru mātrāṭ gaṇaramaṇaṇ kaṭṭuraittā  
ṇuḷḷadu nārpa duvandu.*

***Padacchēdam*** (word-separation): *meyyiṇ iyalbum, adai mēvum  
tiraṇum, emakku uyyumpaḍi murugaṇ ṇōduka eṇa, poy ulahiṇ kaḷḷam  
arum ātrāl gaṇa ramaṇaṇ kaṭṭuraittāṇ uḷḷadu nārpadu uvandu.*

**Translation:** When Muruganar asked, ‘So that we may be saved, reveal to us the nature of reality and the means by which to attain [reach or join] it’, the noble Ramana, because he is free from the delusion of the unreal world, joyfully and with certainty, composed *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*.

## Explanation

This introductory verse is important because it explains the context in which Bhagavan composed the Tamil poem *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*. When Muruganar, the foremost devotee of Bhagavan, asked him to teach us the nature of the reality and the means by which we can attain it, Bhagavan composed *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*. In the title of this poem, the word ‘*uḷḷadu*’ means ‘that which is’ or ‘being’ (either in the sense of ‘existence’ or in the sense of ‘existing’, so ‘that which

exists'), or more simply 'what is' or 'what exists'. It is an important term that is often used in spiritual or philosophical literature to denote 'reality', 'truth', 'that which is real' or 'that which really is'. Hence in a spiritual context the meaning clearly implied by 'uḷḷadu' is 'ātman' or our real nature (*ātma-svarūpa*). Though 'narpadu' means 'forty', *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* actually consists of a total of forty-two verses, two of which form the *maṅgalam* or 'auspicious introduction' and the remaining forty of which form the main 'text'.

At that time Muruganar had collected twenty-one verses that Bhagavan had composed at various times, and he suggested that these could form the basis of such a text. Bhagavan began composing on 21st July 1928 and over the next two to three weeks Bhagavan discussed many ideas with Muruganar and composed about forty new verses. As he composed them they arranged them in order, and while doing so they decided that for one reason or another most of the previously existing twenty-one verses were not suitable to include in the text that he was writing. In the end, they decided to include in *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* only three of the original twenty-one verses, namely verses 16, 37 and 40. Of these three, verse 16 was not actually included in its original form, which Bhagavan had composed in August 1927 (and which is now included in *Upadēśa Taṇippākkaḷ* as verse 13), but was modified by him while he was composing and editing *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*.

The principal reason why they decided not to include the other eighteen of the original twenty-one verses was that most of them were not entirely suitable to the central aim of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, which was to teach us 'the nature of reality and the means by which we can attain it'. In addition to these eighteen verses, they also decided not to include three of the new verses that Bhagavan composed during the three weeks that he was composing and editing *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*. However, since Muruganar did not want the twenty-one verses that they had thus decided not to include in *Uḷḷadu*

*Nāṛpadu* to be forgotten or neglected, he suggested to Bhagavan that they should arrange them in a suitable order and append them as an *anubandham* (an ‘appendix’ or ‘supplement’) to *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*.<sup>2</sup>

Like many of his other works, Bhagavan composed *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* in a poetic metre called *venḇā*, which consists of four lines, with four feet in each of the first three lines and three feet in the last line. However, since devotees used to do regular recitation of his works in his presence, he converted the forty-two verses of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* into a single verse in *kalivenḇā* metre. By lengthening the third foot of the fourth line of each verse and adding a fourth foot to it, he thereby linked it to the next verse, making it easy for devotees to remember the continuity while reciting. Since the one-and-a-half feet that he thus added to the fourth line of each verse may contain one or more words, which are usually called the ‘link words’, they not only facilitate recitation but also enrich the meaning of either the preceding or the following verse. Since Bhagavan formed this *kalivenḇā* version of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* by linking the forty-two verses into a single verse, the term ‘*nāṛpadu*’ or ‘forty’ is not appropriate for it, so he renamed it *Upadēśa Kalivenḇā* {see Appendix }.

Muruganar asked Bhagavan to reveal the nature of reality and the means to attain it, but the main subject matter of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* is not the nature of reality but the means to attain it. However, Bhagavan gives us in many verses pointers to the nature of reality, despite the fact that little can be said about it. The main topic throughout *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* is about that which does not exist,

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<sup>2</sup> When *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu Anubandham* was first published in 1928, it consisted of only twenty-one verses, but by 1930 or ‘31 it contained thirty verses, in 1938 it contained thirty-seven verses, and finally in 1940 it contained forty-one verses. On Micheal’s advice I decided not to include the supplement in this book, because it is a completely separate text and of quite a different calibre in terms of depth and significance than *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* itself. Whereas most of the verses of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu Anubandham* are ones that Bhagavan translated from Sanskrit or Malayalam, all of the verses of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* are his own original compositions.

namely ego. Bhagavan describes in a clear and detailed manner how it rises, the effects of its rising and the means to prevent it rising. So he makes it clear how to get rid of that which does not exist and when that which does not exist is removed, what remains is what does exist, which is ever self-shining and also our real nature. His purpose is that we turn our attention away from anything else back towards ourself, so that the only truly worthwhile enterprise for us is to investigate who or what we actually are. If we want to attain the nature of reality by knowing it, the practice is thus most important.

Though there is a lot of deep and meaningful philosophy in *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, it is not a philosophical poem just for the sake of philosophy. It is philosophy for the sake of showing us how to experience what we really are, how to experience that reality. The very word philosophy derives from the ancient Greek *philosophia*, which means loving (*philos*) wisdom (*sophia*) or ‘love of true knowledge’. So philosophy and love are not only complementary but also inseparable, because love is the motivating force behind any real philosophy.

One of the Sanskrit terms for philosophy is *darśana*, which means ‘view’ or ‘seeing’, because the ultimate aim of all philosophy is *tattva-darśana*, seeing (in the sense of directly knowing, experiencing or being aware of) what is real. So wisdom or true knowledge is not merely some intellectual or theoretical knowledge, which can be attained simply by logical analysis and reasoning, but is actual knowledge of the absolute truth or reality, which can be attained only through direct and immediate experience. Thus if someone is a true philosopher, a person who truly has passionate love to attain true knowledge, he or she will not be satisfied merely with forming speculative hypotheses about the reality, no matter how well-founded and reasonable such hypotheses may be. A true philosopher will also seek an effective means to test those hypotheses, and will diligently apply that means in order to attain

direct and immediate knowledge or experience of the nature of reality.





# Verse I

In the first verse of the main text Bhagavan establishes the truth that there is one absolute reality underlying the false appearance of all multiplicity. Everything that exists is only this one reality, which is our own real nature. He says that because we see the world, accepting *mudal* — one primal reality, origin, source, base, substratum, ground or first cause — with a power that can appear as if it were many different things is indeed certainly the best option. This ‘one primal reality’, which is our real nature (*ātma-svarūpa*), is that which appears as everything: the seeing mind, the world-picture that it sees, the light of consciousness by which it sees, and the ground or underlying being that supports its seeing.

நாமுலகங் காண்டலா னானாவாஞ் சத்தியுள  
வோர்முதலை யொப்ப லொருதலையே – நாமவுருச்  
சித்திரமும் பார்ப்பானுஞ் சேர்படமு மாரொளியு  
மத்தனையுந் தானா மவன்.

*nāmulahaṅ kāṇḍalā nāṇāvāṇ cattiyaḷa*  
*vōrmudalai yoppa lorutalaiyē — nāmavuruc*  
*cittiramum pārppāṇuṅ cērpaḍamu māroḷiyu*  
*mattaṇaiyun tāṇā mavaṇ.*

**Padacchēdam** (word-separation): *nām ulaham kāṇḍalāl, nāṇā ām*  
*śatti ḷa ōr mudalai oppal orutalaiyē. nāma uru cittiramum,*  
*pārppāṇum, sērpaḍamum, ār oḷiyum — attaṇaiyum tāṇ ām avaṇ.*

**Translation:** Because we see the world, accepting one fundamental that has a power that becomes many is certainly the one best option. The picture of names and forms, the one who sees, the cohesive screen, and the pervading light — all these are he, who is oneself.

**Explanatory paraphrase:** Because we [as ego] see the world, accepting one *mudal* [first thing, origin, source, base or fundamental reality] that has a power that becomes many [appearances, namely ourself as ego, the seer or perceiver, and all the manifold phenomena that constitute this or any other world that we may see or perceive] is certainly the one best option. The picture of names and forms [namely the world and whatever other phenomena appear in the mind], the one who sees [this picture] [namely ego], the cohesive screen [namely the mind as the background on which it appears], and the pervading light [namely the mind as the reflected light of awareness, which is what illumines its appearance] — all these are he [the one original thing], who is oneself [one's real nature].

## Explanation

Though in this verse Bhagavan seems to affirm the existence of the one non-dual absolute reality based on our experience of this world-appearance, he actually begins the Tamil version of this verse with the word *nām*, which means ‘we’, thereby placing emphasis not upon the world as such, but only upon ourself who seem to perceive the world. By saying, ‘because we see the world’ (*nām ulaham kāṇḍalāl*), he begins his teaching from our perception and experience, talking about what merely seems to exist without actually existing.

The aim of his teachings is to know who am I. What then is the relevance of bringing in the world? There is a deep reason for that, which is that ‘we’ who see the world are the ego. So the ‘we’ Bhagavan is referring to here is not our real nature, but the problem that we face. We seem to be a person experiencing what seems to exist, the false awareness of ourself ‘I am this body’, the ego, and consequently we seem to be aware of other forms. All the other forms that we are aware of are physical forms, which make up the seemingly outer universe, the outer world, and mental forms, which

make up the inner universe, the inner world, such as perceptions, memories, thoughts, feelings, emotions, intellectual processes, likes, dislikes, desires and so on. If ‘we’ as ego did not see a world, there would be no problem, and therefore, there would be no need for any spiritual teachings. So from our seeming perception of the world Bhagavan works backwards to what is the truth and real, to that which is.

After stating ‘because we see the world’, he aims to establish that because of this, we can plausibly infer that there is ‘one fundamental that has the power that becomes many’. The one fundamental (*ōr mudal*) that Bhagavan refers to here is our real nature (*ātma-svarūpa*), which actually exists or that which is (*uḷḷadu* in the first benedictory verse), the existing substance (*uḷḷa-poruḷ* in the first benedictory verse), or *brahman*. It is also Mahēśaṇ (the Great Lord, Śiva or God), that he referred to in the second benedictory verse.

This one fundamental, our real nature, is immutable — it never becomes anything, it merely appears as all that we see. So when he says that this one fundamental has a power, *śatti* in Tamil and *śakti* in Sanskrit, that becomes many, we have to consider carefully what that power is. That power is what is generally called *māyā*. But Bhagavan has also clarified in other texts that *māyā* is nothing but our mind, or in other words, ego itself.

**Bhagavan:** The awareness that rises as ‘I’ referring to the body in this way, being intermediate, alone is what is called variously as *tat-bōdham* [egotism, self-conceit], *ahamkāra* [ego], *avidyā* [necscience], *māyā* [the power of self-deception or delusion, namely the mind], *malam* [impurity] and *jīva* [soul].<sup>3</sup>

**Bhagavan:** What is called mind is an *atiśaya śakti* [an extraordinary power] that exists in *ātma-svarūpa* [the ‘own form’ or real nature of oneself]. It makes all thoughts appear [or

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<sup>3</sup> *Vicāra Saṅgraham*, first sub-section of section 1

projects all thoughts]. When one looks, excluding [removing or putting aside] all thoughts, solitarily there is not any such thing as mind; therefore, thought alone is the *svarūpa* [the ‘own form’ or very nature] of the mind. Excluding thoughts [or ideas], there is not separately any such thing as world.<sup>4</sup>

**Bhagavan:** There is only one substance, you, the heart, the light of awareness. In you exists an extraordinary power, which is not other. From, along with awareness, series of subtle shadowy thoughts in the whirl of destiny are seen, the mirror, that mind-light, as a shadowy world-picture both inside and outside via senses such as the eye, like a shadow-picture that stands out by a lens. Hill of grace, let them cease or let them go on, they do not exist at all apart from you.<sup>5</sup>

The example Bhagavan often used was the dream-experience. When we dream, the whole dream is our own mental fabrication. As soon as we begin dreaming, we are aware of ourself as a body. We do not suppose that the body was already there and that we come in the dream and become aware of it. As soon as we began dreaming, we projected that body and through the five senses we projected the world. That world seems to us as external, real and existing, independent of our perception of it.

While we are dreaming it does not seem to us to be a mental fabrication. So long as we are dreaming, the dream seems to be real and we experience it as if we are awake. As a consequence, we experience a world with other people who are also having a body and are aware in that dream world. As we asked the other people in the dream, ‘Do you see the world?’ or ‘Are you aware?’ they would probably confirm this and would experience the dream world exactly as we do.

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<sup>4</sup> *Nāṇ Ār?*, first part of fourth paragraph

<sup>5</sup> *Srī Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam* verse 6

But as soon as we leave that dream and come to this waking state, as soon as we wake up, we recognise that the dream was only our own mental projection. It was just a creation of our mind. In other words the dream did not exist independent of our perception of it. We do not wonder what happened to all the people we left behind in the dream, because we know after waking up from a dream, that they were just our mental projection. Bhagavan says that this waking state is nothing but a dream.

However, our belief in the existence of a world and other perceivers is merely an assumption. And it is an extremely dubious one, because as soon as we wake up from any dream we are able to recognise that the entire world we saw then was just our own mental projection. All the other people in that dream world were accordingly not actual perceivers but only phenomena projected and perceived by us.

When we see a dream, the power that becomes all the phenomena that constitute our dream world is our mind, ego or *māyā*. But when we dream there is only one, ourself as ego, in the dream. In the view of that one dreamer, there seems to be so many other things that only exist in the view of the dreamer. Everything that is seen in a dream is nothing other than the dreamer. So the dreamer has become the dream; the dreamer sees itself as the dream. Likewise, according to Bhagavan, the waking state is also a dream where our mind is the power that has become all the phenomena that constitute this current world. That is why Bhagavan says, ‘that power becomes many’, and that power is the mind, ego or *māyā*.

However, all the phenomena that we perceive, that seem to exist, exist only in our view. Regardless of anyone’s philosophy, religion, science or whatever outlook, nobody can deny that it is our experience that the world, all phenomena, only exist in our own view. Who sees all those many things? I do. In whose view does this world exist? In my view. We all have to accept that in the experience

of each one of us there is one seer (experiencer or perceiver, also the subject) and many things seen (experienced or perceived, also the objects). This is why we have to collapse the multiplicity back to one perceiver, because all phenomena, including all the other seeming perceivers, exist only in the view of one perceiver, one ego. So we all know at least there is one — that is, ‘I’ — who perceives this world, in whose view multiplicity exists.

There are many ways of interpreting our experience of the world. One of the views is that the world exists independent of our perception of it. In other words, the world was there before we were born. When we are born into this world we see the world and when we die the world keeps on existing. That is not the view Bhagavan is teaching us here.

Bhagavan’s teachings are the purest form of *advaita* philosophy and he did not ask us to believe anything that is not supported by our own experience. *Advaita* claims that reality is ‘one only without a second’ (*ēkam ēva advitīyam*). As its name implies, *advaita*, ‘non-twoness’ (*a-dvi-tā*) or non-duality, is the view that there are not two things but only one. Since there is only one, the purest form of *advaita* is what is called *ajāta*, which literally means ‘not born’, but it can also mean ‘not become’, ‘not appeared’, ‘not happened’. So *ajāta* is a complete denial of anything. It simply denies any multiplicity, any duality — no two things, no dream or anything else has ever come into existence. So no creation has ever occurred even as an illusory appearance, because what actually exists is immutable and is therefore ever as it is; and hence in its clear and unchanging awareness no event such as creation, appearance or perception could ever occur. Bhagavan has said that this is the ultimate truth, the final experience.

The ultimate truth is *ajāta vāda* as Gauḍapāda (Śaṅkara’s teacher’s teacher) says unequivocally in *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* 2.32 and

Śaṅkara (7th-century father of modern non-dual philosophy) repeats in *Vivēkacūḍāmaṇi* verse 574:

**Gauḍapāda:** There is no destruction, and no *utpatti* [birth, origination, arising, occurrence, appearance or coming into being], no one bound, and no one who does *sādhana*, no one seeking liberation, and even no one liberated. This is *paramārthatā* [the ultimate truth].

In his Tamil prose translation of Śaṅkara's *Vivēkacūḍāmaṇi* Bhagavan translated this verse as follows:

**Bhagavan:** There is no *utpatti* [arising, birth, origination, appearance or coming into being]; no *nāśam* [destruction]; no one bound; no one who does *sādhana*; no one seeking liberation; not even one who is liberated; this indeed is *paramārtha* [the ultimate truth].

Since Bhagavan often cited this verse and explained its significance, Muruganar composed a Tamil translation of it, which is now included in *Guru Vācaka Kōvai* as verse 1227. On seeing that four-line verse Bhagavan condensed its meaning as a two-line verse, which is included in *Guru Vācaka Kōvai* as verse B28 and in *Upadēśa Taṇippākkaḷ* as verse 24:

**Bhagavan:** There is no becoming [or coming into existence], destruction, bondage, desire to untie [bondage], effort [made for liberation], [or] those who have attained [liberation]. Know that this is *paramārtha* [the ultimate truth].

This is what is meant by *ajāta*, so according to *ajāta* neither any dream nor even any dreamer has ever come into existence or been destroyed, because there is neither any *utpatti* (coming into existence) nor any *nirōdha* (destruction). By saying that there is no *baddha* (one who is bound), no *sādhaka* (one who does *sādhana*) and no *mumukṣu* (one who is seeking liberation), Gauḍapāda,



Śaṅkara and Bhagavan imply that the ultimate truth is that there is no ego. It is ego alone who is in bondage and who therefore seeks liberation by doing *sādhana*, so since there is no dreamer other than ego, there is also no dream. Though it is useful to understand *ajāta*, it has no practical value because we are faced with a problem: we are now aware of ourself as this person, as ‘I am this body’, and we see all this multiplicity, this duality. Therefore, so long as we rise as ‘the one who sees’, namely ego or the mind, all this multiplicity needs to be explained.

The deepest and most radical explanation of the appearance of multiplicity is what Bhagavan teaches us in *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* and elsewhere, and is what is called *dr̥ṣṭi-sṛṣṭi-vāda*: the contention (*vāda*) that perception (*dr̥ṣṭi*) is causally antecedent to creation (*sṛṣṭi*). Whenever we rise as ego in waking and dream we are aware of ourself as ‘I am this body’. Consequently we are aware of other phenomena, which constitute whatever world we currently perceive. This rising as ego, creating (projecting) phenomena and perceiving them do not happen in a chronological sequence. Our perception of something and its creation are simultaneous, which is called simultaneous creation (also known as *yugapat sṛṣṭi* or *vivarta vāda*). Creation is nothing but a mental projection, and we project phenomena by perceiving them.

One of the basic implications of *dr̥ṣṭi-sṛṣṭi-vāda* is *ēka-jīva-vāda*, the contention that there is only one (*ēka*) ego (*jīva*) or perceiver who perceives this world, which does not exist except in the view (the perception or experience) of that one ego. As Bhagavan says in the fourth paragraph of *Nāṇ Ār?*, ‘Just like the spider spins out thread from within itself and then withdraws it back into itself, the mind [ego] projects the world from within itself and again withdraws it back into itself.’ So all the phenomena that constitute this world, anything that we see as if it is outside ourself, including our own

body, including the person we seem to be, is all our own mental projection.

*Dr̥ṣṭi-sr̥ṣṭi-vāda* and *ēka-jīva-vāda* are complementary theories, because each implies the other, and according to *dr̥ṣṭi-sr̥ṣṭi-vāda* creation does seem to exist but is just a false appearance. Though there is ultimately no creation according to this pair of theories, they therefore do accept that there seems to be a world that has come into existence. And they say that it has been created only by ego's perception of it, just as the world we see in a dream is created only by our perception of it.

So if we carefully consider our own experience, which is always Bhagavan's recommendation, we can infer from our own experience that there is one sole fundamental. Because we know 'I am', we know that this one original, fundamental and absolute reality, which is our own real nature or essential being, does indeed exist. Therefore, Bhagavan says, 'accepting one fundamental that has a power that becomes many is certainly the one best option'.

Bhagavan aims to emphasise even more strongly in the final words of this verse that everything that seems to exist, including ourself as the one who perceives it all, is only that one fundamental reality, which is our own real nature. The *nām* or 'we' whom he refers to in the first sentence when he says, 'because we see the world' (*nām ulaham kāṇḍalāl*), and the 'seer' (*pārppāṇ*) or 'one who sees', whom he refers to in the second sentence, are both only ourself as the ego whom we now seem to be.

So when he concludes this verse by saying, 'all these are he, who is oneself', he clearly implies that the picture of names and forms (the world consisting of numerous phenomena that appear in the mind), we who see it (namely this ego), the screen on which it appears (the mind as the background on which it appears) and the light of awareness (the mind as the reflected light of awareness) that

illumines it, are all in substance only the one fundamental reality, God or our own real nature.

So what is experienced in all these three states of waking, dream and sleep is only this one fundamental awareness 'I am'. From this fundamental awareness 'I am', ego rises, and as soon as ego rises it experiences itself as the seer and it experiences a world that is seen. So what makes this seemingly possible is only ego, which in reality is 'he, who is oneself', the one fundamental that we now experience as the seer, as the picture, as the screen and as the light.

However, though our ego and everything else is in substance only our own real nature, our own real nature is not in fact any of these things. All these things are only an illusory appearance, and they seem to exist only in the view of ourself as this ego, and not in the view of ourself as we actually are, pure being. If we see a rope and mistake it to be a snake, we are seeing the snake in the rope. The snake is nothing but the rope, but the rope is not a snake.

Likewise, this power which we see as multiplicity is nothing other than the one fundamental, but the one fundamental is not that power. This power cannot be other than the one fundamental because what actually exists is only that one fundamental. Hence the snake cannot exist without the rope, but the rope exists very well without the snake, because the snake is just a false appearance. Likewise, the one fundamental also exists independent of this power, but the power does not exist independent of the one fundamental.

When Bhagavan says 'all these are he, who is oneself', this does not mean, 'He, who is oneself, is all these'. That would be like saying that the rope is the snake and the snake is the rope. But the rope is never a snake; the rope is always only a rope, even when it seems to be a snake. Likewise, I am only I and all these other things are nothing other than I. There cannot be anything other than myself, because in whose view do they all exist? They exist only in the view of me. So when we rise as ego this whole universe expands.

However, when we turn our attention back within and thereby merge back into our source, the whole universe collapses with us and what remains is that one fundamental. This is not stated explicitly in this verse, but we can clearly infer it from many of the later verses of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, because this verse is only intended to be an introduction to the subject of the entire text, so the analysis is less deep than in later verses.

In this verse Bhagavan establishes the existence of the absolute reality based not upon the seeming existence of the world, but only upon the indubitable existence of our own real nature, which is the one fundamental and absolute reality.

## Verse 2

In verse 2 Bhagavan says that all disputes about the nature of this one reality — whether the soul, world and God are in essence all just this one reality, or whether they are eternally three separate realities — are possible only so long as our ego exists. He then tells us that abiding in our own natural state (of pure thought-free self-awareness ‘I am’) is the highest achievement.

மும்முதலை யெம்மதமு முற்கொள்ளு மோர்முதலே  
மும்முதலாய் நிற்குமென்று மும்முதலு – ம்முதலே  
யென்னலகங் கார மிருக்குமட்டே யான்கெட்டுத்  
தன்னிலையி னிற்ற றலை.

*mummudalai yemmatamu murkoḷḷu mōrmudalē*  
*mummudalāy nirkumenḍru mummudalu — mummudalē*  
*yeṇṇalahaṅ kāra mirukkumaṭṭē yāṅkeṭṭut*  
*taṇṇilaiyi nītra talai.*

**Padacchēdam** (word-separation): *mum mudalai e-m-matamum muṅ koḷḷum. ‘ōr mudalē mum mudalāy nirkum’, ‘eṇḍrum mum mudalum mum mudalē’ eṇṇal ahaṅkāram irukkum maṭṭē. yāṅ keṭṭu, taṇṇilaiyil nītra talai.*

**Translation:** Each religion initially accepts three fundamentals. Contending ‘Only one fundamental stands as three fundamentals’, ‘Three fundamentals are always actually three fundamentals’, is only so long as ego exists. ‘I’ perishing, standing in the state of oneself is best.

**Explanatory paraphrase:** Each religion [or theistic system of belief] initially accepts three fundamentals [namely the soul, world and God]. Contending that only one fundamental stands as [these] three fundamentals or that [these] three fundamentals are always

actually three fundamentals is [possible] only so long as ego exists. [As a result of] ‘I’ [ego] perishing [or being destroyed], standing in the [real] state of oneself is best.

## Explanation

In the first sentence Bhagavan gives a statement of fact: all spiritual or religious philosophies accept three fundamentals, namely — as he tells us in the *kalivenḃā* version of this verse — the soul, world and God. First the soul rises, that is ego, then we see the world and next we infer the existence of God. Even the spiritual philosophies that do not have a concept of God have some third entity, something that lies beyond ourself and the world, whether you call it *mokṣa*, *nirvāṇa*, *brahman* or whatever it is.

Philosophy is generally understood in India as a system of belief that is not only a theoretical philosophy but also includes practices leading towards some goal. Reasoning, logic and conceptual analysis have their role to play in philosophy, but it is not just an intellectual exercise. Any deep philosophy provides guidance on how we should live our life and how we should seek what lies beyond the soul, the subject, the world, and the objects. Materialists will say that there are only material things. They even reduce the soul or the mind to matter and try to explain that the mind is nothing more than a brain. To believe that the world is more real than we are, is a very narrow and shallow point of view, because it is overlooking the importance of the primary experience of our own existence, of ‘I am’. All other things are based on our primary experience, the awareness of our own existence.

The problem with expressing any set of beliefs is that there will be people who will disagree with them. We all have different ways of seeing the world and of interpreting our experience. Thus, these three fundamentals give rise to arguments, as Bhagavan says in the

second sentence. Some people contend that there is only one fundamental, and it is the one fundamental that appears as these three fundamentals. Dualists and pluralists claim that these three fundamentals are always actually three fundamentals. In other words, if the soul is different, the world is different and God is different, then they are always different.

Bhagavan says that all philosophical disputes can exist only so long as ego exists. Why does he say this? He is giving us a warning. In *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* he is teaching us the purest form of *advaita* philosophy which is the deepest of all philosophies, according to which there is only one fundamental. What seems to be three fundamentals is actually just this one fundamental. So it is this one fundamental that is appearing as three fundamentals. The one fundamental or original thing, as he said in verse 1, means one's own real nature (*ātma-svarūpa*).

However, *advaita* is not just a philosophy. A true *advaitin* has no problem with anyone believing anything else. From the perspective of *advaita*, different beliefs are appropriate to different people at different stages of their spiritual development. So, for example, if people want to believe that God is something other than oneself, that we can never become one with God, that is appropriate for them.

However, this is not the ultimate truth. Anyone who is truly following *advaita*, that means not just following the philosophy of *advaita* but following the practice of *advaita* as generally taught by Bhagavan, will have no inclination to argue with those who disagree with his teachings. If you tell the vast majority of the people in the world about his teachings, either they will not be interested or they will strongly object and argue against it. That is fine. Let everyone believe whatever they want to believe.

What Bhagavan is teaching us in this and the next verse is for our salvation. If people wish to disagree with us, that is of no concern to us, let them disagree with us. We have no problem with that at all,

because if we understand his teachings correctly, all this is just a dream. In our dream, people may want to argue with us and tell us that the waking state is real, that the world exists even when we are sleeping and that the world exists even before we were born. However, when we wake up, we will find that all those people who wanted to argue were only our mental fabrication. This includes the person we take ourself to be in a dream.

So Bhagavan's teachings are not for arguing with others. We should apply these things in practice by turning within instead of jumping out and arguing with others who disagree with us. This will only give rise to unnecessary disputes which are of no use to anyone. If people are genuinely interested in his teachings, we may tell them about his teachings, but there is no point in telling people who do not want to know about his teachings.

Bhagavan never sought to give teachings to anyone. If someone came to him and just sat in his presence, Bhagavan was not going to start giving him a lecture. If they kept quiet, he was quiet. It was only if they started asking some question that he answered, and then not even always. Sometimes he answered, and every so often he kept silent. Understanding this, we should understand that it is not appropriate for us to go out and seek to convince or convert others. However, if people come to us and ask about his teachings and really want to know, then we answer. If they come to us to argue, we respect whatever they want to believe, but we want to avoid getting involved in arguments.

All philosophical contentions and disputes are possible only so long as we rise as ego. In sleep, when we do not rise as ego, where is there any philosophical dispute? In the absence of ego there is no room for philosophical disputes, because what exists when there is no ego is only oneself, namely 'I am'. As we can see from our experience in sleep, the fundamental awareness 'I am' is all that



exists in the absence of ego. So for the spiritual aspirant, philosophy is not for arguing and engaging in disputes, but for living.

That does not mean that we should not consider other points of view. Other points of view may be challenging our beliefs. Sometimes it is useful to consider the points of view of people who argue against Bhagavan's teachings. It may enable us to think more deeply about his teachings, and sometimes we may discover some weaknesses in our reasons for believing what we believe. So if what we were believing until now was wrong, we can reject it. If what we are believing is right, then we can find stronger reasons for it. This is what is called *manana*, thinking deeply about it.

However, understanding his teachings is a means, not an end. We are not here just to learn a philosophy and to understand it. We need to remember what our primary aim is. Why have we come here? We have come here to find out who am I, to be aware of ourself as we actually are, because that is the essence of what Bhagavan is pointing at. He is telling us that what is real is only 'I am'. We have to put his teachings into practice by trying to see who am I. A deep and clear understanding will strengthen our conviction and, therefore, encourage us to go deeper in the practice by turning within and investigating ourself.

To turn deep within, we need to leave behind all the words, all the conceptual understanding. A conceptual understanding points us in the direction we should go, but we need to actually go in that direction. When we go in that direction, we are leaving the conceptual understanding behind and practising actual investigation of who am I. So all this philosophy, all this conceptual understanding is useful to the extent to which it encourages us to turn within. When we hold on to 'I am' so firmly that we thereby let go of anything else, the verbal teachings will go.

This is why he says in the last sentence that if the 'I' perishes, standing in the state of oneself, or one's own state, is best. The 'I' he

refers to is ego. What he means by standing in the state of oneself or one's own state is being as one actually is, abiding in our own natural state of pure thought-free self-aware being. So instead of the ego arguing whether there is just one fundamental or three fundamentals, subsiding back into the heart and standing in the real state of oneself — that fundamental awareness 'I am' — by destroying the ego, best.

## Verse 3

In verse 3 Bhagavan reiterates the same truth as in verse 2, asking what is the use of arguing whether the world is real or a false appearance, whether it is knowledge or ignorance, or whether it is a source of happiness or not. He points out the simple truth that the egoless state, in which we have given up all thought of the world and know only the real nature of ourself, thereby freeing ourself from our false ‘I’ (the mind or ego) and its thoughts about ‘one’ (non-duality) and ‘two’ (duality), is agreeable to everyone.

உலகுமெய்ப்பொய்த் தோற்ற முலகறிவா மன்றென்  
றுலகுசுக மன்றென் றுரைத்தெ – னுலகவிட்டுத்  
தன்னையோர்ந் தொன்றிரண்டு தானற்று நானற்ற  
வந்நிலையெல் லார்க்குமொப் பாம்.

*ulahumeypoyt tōtra mulaharivā mandren  
ḍrulahusukha mandren ḍruraitte — ṇulahuviṭṭut  
taṇṇaiyōrn donḍriraṇḍu tāṇatru nāṇatra  
vannilaiyel lārkkumop pām.*

**Padacchēdam** (word-separation): ‘*ulahu mey*’, ‘*poy tōtram*’, ‘*ulahu arivu ām*’, ‘*andru endru*’, ‘*ulahu sukham*’, ‘*andru endru uraittu en?*’, ‘*ulahu viṭṭu, taṇṇai ōrṇdu, onḍru iraṇḍu tāṇ atru, ‘nāṇ’ atra a-n-nilai ellārkkum oppu ām.*

**Translation:** What is the use of disputing: ‘The world is real’, ‘An unreal appearance’, ‘The world is sentient’, ‘It is not’, ‘The world is happiness’, ‘It is not’? Leaving the world and investigating oneself, one and two ceasing, that state in which ‘I’ has perished is agreeable to all.

**Explanatory paraphrase:** What is the use of disputing: ‘The world is real’, ‘[No, it is] an unreal appearance’, ‘The world is sentient’, ‘It

is not'; 'The world is happiness', 'It is not'? Leaving [all thought about] the world and investigating [or knowing] oneself, [thereby] putting an end to [all disputes about] one and two [non-duality and duality], that state in which 'I' [ego] has [thereby] perished is agreeable to all.

## Explanation

Some people who read this verse superficially jump to the conclusion that Bhagavan says that it does not matter whether we think the world is real or an unreal appearance, or we think the world is sentient or not, or whether the world is happiness or not. That is clearly not what he is intending to say here.

The idea that the world is unreal, being a creation of our mind like any world we see in a dream, is one of the fundamental principles that underlies Bhagavan's entire teachings. The reason he taught us this simple truth about the world is that if we understand this, we will understand that we should not waste our time thinking about the world but should instead focus all our interest and attention only on investigating ourself who now seem to be experiencing this world. So long as we cherish the idea that the world is real, our mind is motivated to go after it. However, if it is our aim to experience what we really are, it is necessary according to Bhagavan for us to consider the world unreal, as he says in *Maharshi's Gospel* (2002 edition, p. 64):

**Bhagavan:** There is no alternative for you but to accept the world as unreal, if you are seeking the Truth and the Truth alone. For the simple reason that unless you give up the idea that the world is real, your mind will always be after it. If you take the appearance to be real you will never know the Real itself, although it is the Real alone that exists.

Therefore, the sooner we accept at least intellectually that the world is unreal, the faster we will be able to progress in our practice. It will be of great value to us to question the reality of our body and this world. Now we seem to be a person living in a material world because we believe that we are what we seem to be. However, if we doubt whether we are what we now seem to be, we will also have to doubt whether the world and all the other things that we experience are what they now seem to be.

In the first verse, Bhagavan describes the world as ‘a picture of names and forms’. The world is nothing more than a mental picture, a mental impression. This is just like whatever world we perceive in a dream is our own mental fabrication, not caused by anything external to oneself, it is solely an impression in our mind. Likewise, this world {in our waking state} is only a mental picture. As such it is not real, it is not sentient, and it is devoid of happiness. So long as we take the world to be real and take it as a source of happiness, our mind will always be going after it. The unreality of the world is clearly implied and explained in many verses of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, including the next verse.

If we have really understood that the world is unreal, we will have no inclination to argue with others about it. The interest in arguing, in asserting our standpoint as the correct point of view, will arise only if we take this world to be real. If we wake up from a dream wherein the dream people wanted to argue with us that the dream world was real, and we wanted to refute that, we will see that the whole dream including ourselves as the dream person was all a mental fabrication.

So it is out of egotism that we want to assert our point of view, that whatever we believe is right. All disputes arise because people want to assert their view. Let anyone have any view, what does it matter to us? We aim to free ourselves from the ego, which is what

engages in such disputes. And we cannot free ourselves from the ego so long we have a taste for engaging in all such disputes.

Of course we can begin to practise self-investigation (*ātma-vicāra*) even if we consider the world to be real. However, if we want to go deep into this practice and thereby experience ourselves as we actually are, we must eventually come to accept Bhagavan's teaching that the world is unreal, being just a creation of our mind. So to investigate and thereby know ourselves, we have to cease knowing the world. How do we investigate and thereby know ourselves? Only by turning our attention within. So long as we know the world, we are looking away from ourselves towards other things. Thus we have to leave all thoughts about the world and be unconcerned about the world. By doing this, we are turning our attention back towards ourselves.

When we give up the world and disputes about it, we also put an end to all disputes about one and two, about duality and non-duality. Because who is it that engages in disputes about duality and non-duality? That is only this 'I', ego, that rises as a separate entity. Only giving up all thought about the world and turning our attention within to know who am I will bring about the destruction of ego. Hence in the absence of ego, there is no one to argue about whether the world is real or unreal. That is why that state in which 'I', namely ego, has perished is agreeable to all.

All disputes (whether philosophical, religious, political, scientific or otherwise) exist, according to Bhagavan in the previous verse, 'only so long as ego exists'. If we put an end to ego, leaving aside the world and all differences and disputes, that is a state that is agreeable to all. And why does Bhagavan say it is agreeable to all? Every day we all experience a state devoid of ego, namely dreamless sleep, that we all find very pleasant. We wake up and say, 'Oh, I slept very happily, I had a very peaceful sleep'. Nobody objects to sleep, nobody says, 'I do not like sleep, I do not want to go to sleep'. We

all welcome sleep. It is a welcome respite from these states of mental activity, these states of ego, namely waking and dream.

So his practical reason is to help us cultivate an inward attitude of indifference towards the world and our life in it. What such an attitude means in practice is not that we should behave outwardly as if we do not care about others or their difficulties or sufferings, but only that we inwardly should remain indifferent to the seeming pains or joys of our own life. We should not try to avoid and should not be dejected by whatever seemingly adverse things may happen in our life. Nor should we strive for or be overjoyed by any seemingly favourable things that may outwardly happen to us.

We should cultivate detachment or desirelessness (*vairāgya*), knowing that whatever happens is not real but just part of an unsubstantial dream. Such an inward attitude of indifference and desirelessness are essential prerequisites if we are to succeed in turning our mind within and merging forever in our source and substance, our real nature. Merging entails experiencing oneself alone, and this is not possible so long as we still have desire to experience anything else.

What we now see as this entire appearance of ego and world is only oneself, but so long as we experience this appearance, we cannot experience oneself as we actually are. As Bhagavan said in *Maharshi's Gospel* (2002 edition, p. 64):

**Bhagavan:** This point is illustrated by the analogy of the ‘snake in the rope’. As long as you see the snake you cannot see the rope as such. The non-existent snake becomes real to you, while the real rope seems wholly non-existent as such.

So long as we see the snake, we cannot see the rope as it really is, and when we see the rope as it really is, we will no longer see any snake. Likewise, when we experience oneself as we really are, we will no longer see any world. The fundamental misapprehension that gives rise to the appearance of the world is only oneself as ego,

because ego is nothing but our misapprehension of ourself, that is, our error of experiencing ourself as something that we are not. Having misapprehended or mistaken ourself to be this ego, we expand ourself as the mind and all its thoughts, of which the entire world is just a part. So long as we see the world as independent of us, we are not experiencing ourself as we really are. When we see ourself as we really are, there will be no world for us to see.

So there is a reason why Bhagavan puts verses 2 and 3 near the beginning of this work, before going deeply into the subject that *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* is dealing with. All that is taught in *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, the implication of it and what we have to infer from this, is for our own benefit. With these verses Bhagavan is giving us a warning. If we understand *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* correctly, we should turn our mind within and investigate who am I. This is not just a nice philosophy that we use to engage in disputes or debates with others. *Advaita* is not for disputing or debating, *advaita* is for experiencing. So long as we turn outwards, we are experiencing duality. If we want to experience non-duality we should not attend to anything other than ourself, we should attend to ourself alone. That is the aim of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*.



## Verse 4

The core teachings of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* really begin from verse 4. From verses 4 to 7 Bhagavan discusses in a sequential manner how the world seems to exist only by our perception of it, and therefore all that we see is a projection of our mind.

He teaches us a subtle but essential truth in verse 4, by asking a rhetorical question, ‘is the sight other than the eye?’, saying that the ‘sight’ (whatever is seen or experienced) cannot be other than the ‘eye’ (the consciousness that sees or experiences it). Hence he says that if we are a form (a body), the world and God will be likewise, but if we are not any form, who could see their forms, and how could we see them? He then ends this verse by saying that the real eye is only our real nature, ourself as we actually are, which is the ‘endless eye’, the infinite fundamental awareness ‘I am’.

உருவந்தா னாயி னுலகுபர மற்றா  
முருவந்தா னன்றே லுவற்றி – னுருவத்தைக்  
கண்ணுறுதல் யாவனெவன் கண்ணலாற் காட்சியுண்டோ  
கண்ணதுதா னந்தமிலாக் கண்.

*uruvandā nāyi nulahupara matrā*  
*muruvandā nandṛē huvatri — nuruvattaik*  
*kaṇṇurudal yāvaṇevan kaṇṇalāl kāṭciyuṇḍō*  
*kaṇṇadutā nantamilāk kaṇ.*

***Padacchēdam*** (word-separation): *uruvam tāṇ āyiṇ, ulahu param*  
*atru ām; uruvam tāṇ andṛēl, uvatrin uruvattai kaṇ urudal yāvaṇ?*  
*evan? kaṇ alāl kāṭci uṇḍō? kaṇ adu tāṇ antam-ilā kaṇ.*

**Translation:** If oneself is a form, the world and God will be likewise; if oneself is not a form, who can see their forms? How?

Can the seen be otherwise than the eye? The eye is oneself, the infinite eye.

**Explanatory paraphrase:** If oneself is a form, the world and God will be likewise; if oneself is not a form, who can see their forms, and how [to do so]? Can what is seen be otherwise [or of a different nature] than the eye [the awareness that sees or perceives it]? [Therefore forms can be perceived only by an ‘eye’ or awareness that perceives itself as a form, namely the ego or mind, which always perceives itself as the form of a body.] The [real] eye is oneself [one’s real nature, which is pure awareness], the infinite [and hence formless] eye [so it can never see any forms or phenomena, which are all finite].

## Explanation

What Bhagavan teaches us in this verse is one of the fundamental principles of his teachings, so let us carefully consider what he says here. We need to think deeply about what he means by, ‘If oneself is a form, the world and God will be likewise; if oneself is not a form, who can see their forms?’

In the *kaliveṇbā* version he explains explicitly what he is referring to when he says ‘if oneself is a form’, namely ‘which is composed of flesh’. The form he is referring to is the form of the body. However, as he says in verse 5, ‘the body is composed of five sheaths’, namely body, life, mind, intellect and will. All these five together are the form of the body that he is referring to here.

However he is not just talking about physical forms but phenomena in general, because every form is a phenomenon (in the original sense of what appears or is shown). By ‘forms’ he means any kind of phenomenon, anything that has distinguishing features and is thereby distinguishable from any other thing. He is not just talking about physical forms, he is also talking about mental forms

(thoughts, emotions, likes, dislikes, etc.). So every phenomenon is a form of one kind or another.

Our real nature (*ātma-svarūpa*) is pure awareness, which is not only formless but also devoid of and not limited by forms. Therefore, what he implies in this first sentence is that we perceive phenomena only because we mistake ourself to be a phenomenon. It is only when we rise as ego and thereby mistake ourself to be the form of a body consisting of five sheaths that we are aware of other forms, as he says in verse 25.

When he asks, ‘If oneself is not a form, who can see their forms, and how [to do so]?’, he means that if we do not rise as ego — as we clearly can know from our experience in sleep — and consequently do not perceive ourself as a body, the forms that constitute the world and God cannot be perceived, because there will be no one to perceive them. Forms or phenomena seem to exist only in the self-ignorant view of ourself as ego. Only as ego, the false awareness ‘I am this body’, do we perceive ourself as a form, and without perceiving ourself as a form, we cannot perceive any other forms. Thus the root problem that Bhagavan is describing here is the false identification ‘I am this body’, in other words, ego. Why do the world and God appear as separate entities? They appear as separate entities because we rise as ego. When we do not rise as ego, there is no separate world and no separate God.

In the next sentence, ‘Can the seen be otherwise than the eye?’, Bhagavan explains a deep and important principle. Here he uses the term ‘eye’ as a metaphor for the seer, that which is aware or knows. What he is pointing out with this rhetorical question is that the nature of whatever is perceived cannot be different from the nature of the awareness {seer or perceiver} that perceives it. So if the eye is a form, what it sees will be a form; if the eye is formless, what it sees will be formless. It is the eye or awareness that determines what appears. The nature of what we know is determined by the nature of

the knower. If the knower knows itself as ‘I am this body’, or ego, then it will know only forms; it cannot know what is formless. If the knower is the formless pure awareness ‘I am’, then it cannot know any forms.

It could be objected that in this verse Bhagavan does not actually say that the world of forms does not exist when we do not mistake ourself to be the form of a body. Hence he may not mean that forms are created only by our perception of them. However, he answers this objection in verse 5 by implying that there is no world except when we mistake ourself to be a body composed of five sheaths.

Finally, in the last sentence Bhagavan explains the nature of our real ‘eye’ or awareness, saying, ‘The [real] eye is oneself, the infinite eye’. At the beginning of this verse he is talking about form, while in this last sentence he is talking about the infinite. What is the connection? Whatever has form or phenomena of any kind whatsoever is distinguished from every other form. All forms are finite and limited because that is how a form is distinguished from another form, and is therefore separate from all other forms. We can establish from this that whatever is formless is infinite and hence is not separate from anything.

This means that the real ‘infinite eye’ in the last sentence is the formless eye. If the eye is infinite, it cannot see separate finite things (forms), it can only see what is infinite, that is, formless. In other words, it cannot see anything other than itself. Oneself is the formless eye, the formless and infinite awareness. Since we are actually limitless and hence formless awareness, we can as such never be aware of any form or any limitation whatsoever. So our real nature, the real and pure awareness ‘I am’ that we actually are, does not know any form. We are never aware of anything other than ourself, the one infinite and hence formless pure awareness, as Bhagavan states explicitly in verses 12 and 31. What is infinite cannot see anything finite, and what is finite can never see the

infinite. It is therefore only by just being our infinite self-awareness, and thereby ceasing to rise as this finite form-grasping ego, that we can see our infinite real nature.

Now that Bhagavan has pointed this out to us, we can recognise that what he says is actually in perfect accord with our experience. In waking and dream we rise and stand as ego, and consequently we are aware of ourself as ‘I am this body’. We are also aware of numerous other forms, both subtle (such as likes, dislikes, desires, fears, feelings, moods, emotions, memories and concepts) and gross (such as physical objects and events). In the dream world we seem to be physical, and we seem to be a small part of that physical world, namely a physical body. Likewise, the world we perceive in waking seems to be physical, and we seem to be a small part of it, a body located within it. But this world is actually no more physical than the seemingly physical world that we perceive in any other dream. However, in {deep} sleep we do not rise as ego, and consequently we are not aware of ourself as a body or of any other forms.

In the view of the infinite eye, our seeming existence as this ego is not real but just an illusory appearance. And since this illusory appearance seems to exist only in its own view — being, therefore, an inexplicable enigma — it is actually non-existent, as we shall discover if we investigate ourself keenly. Therefore, the root and origin of all forms or phenomena is only our form-projecting ego. When we rise and stand as ego, we are not only aware of ourself as if we were the form of a body but are also consequently aware of other forms. Whereas when we do not rise as ego, no forms seem to exist. We are aware of ourself just as ‘I am’, and consequently we are aware of nothing other than ‘I am’, which is the one infinite awareness.

So if we understand this verse correctly, we should conclude that pure awareness does not know anything other than pure awareness. Being infinite, it cannot know anything finite. So the world and God

as separate entities appear only in the view of ego, the finite and limited awareness of ourself as a body. They do not appear in the view of our real nature, the reality behind all these, which is the one infinite eye — the pure, immutable and unchanging awareness ‘I am’, the awareness that is without form.



# Appendix:

## *Upadēśa Kaliveṇbā*

Since devotees naturally wanted to include *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* among all his other works that they regularly chanted in Bhagavan's presence, in order to make it easier for them to memorise the verses in the correct order, Bhagavan linked all forty-two of them (the two benedictory verses and the forty verses of the main text) together as a single *kaliveṇbā*, as he did in the case of all the other works that he composed entirely in *veṇbā* metre, namely *Ēkāṇma Pañcakam*, *Dēvikālōttaram*: *Jñāñācāra-Vicāra-Paṭalam*, *Sarvajñāṇōttaram*: *Āṇma-Sāṭṣātkāra-p-Pirakaraṇam*, *Bhagavad Gītā Sāram* and *Āṇma-Bōdham*. Since *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* means 'Forty Verses on What Is' and since the *kaliveṇbā* version of it is not forty verses but just one, Bhagavan named it therefore *Upadēśa-k-Kaliveṇbā*, 'Teachings in *Kaliveṇbā*'.

### Introductory verse by Muruganar

உள்ளதொன் றன்றுபல வென்பார்க ளுட்கொளுமா  
றுள்ளதொன் றென்றேதா னோதியவவ் – வுள்ளது  
நாற்பதுவெண் பாக்களையோர் நற்கலிவெண் பாவாக்கி  
யேற்பவளித் தான்ரமண னெண்.

*uḷḷadoṇ ḍṛandrupala veṇbārga ḷuṭkoḷumā*  
*ruḷḷadoṇ ḍṛeṇḍrēṭā nōḍiyavav — vuḷḷadu*  
*nāṛpaduveṇ bākkaḷaiyōr naṭkaliveṇ bāvākki*  
*yērpavaḷit tāṇramaṇa neṇ.*

***Padacchēdam*** (word-separation): '*uḷḷadu onḍru andru, pala*'  
*eṇbārgaḷ uṭkoḷumāru*, '*uḷḷadu onḍru*' *eṇḍrē tāṇ ḍōḍiya a-vv-uḷḷadu*



*nārpadu veṇbākkaḷai ōr nal kalivenbā ākki ērpa aḷittāṇ ramaṇaṇ;  
eṇ.*

**Translation:** To say that what exists is one so that those who say that what exists is not one but many may understand, consider that Ramana aptly gave [this *Upadēśa Kalivenbā* by] making those forty *veṇbās* on what exists into one fine *kalivenbā*.

Lines 1-4: the extended version of the first benedictory verse

Lines 4-8: the extended version of the second benedictory verse

Lines 8-12: the extended version of verse 1

[...] – பார்வைசேர்  
நாமுலகங் காண்டலா னானாவாஞ் சத்தியுள  
வோர்முதலை யொப்ப லொருதலையே – நாமவுருச்  
சித்திரமும் பார்ப்பானுஞ் சேர்படமு மாறொளியு  
மத்தனையுந் தானா மவன். [...]

[...] — *pārvaisēr*  
*nāmulahaṇ kāṇḍalā nāṇāvāṇ cattiyaḷa*  
*vōrmudalai yoppa lorutalaiyē — nāmavuruc*  
*cittiramum pārppāṇuṇ cērpaḍamu māroḷiyu*  
*mattaṇaiyun tāṇā mavaṇ. [...]*

**Padacchēdam** (word-separation): *pārvai sēr nām ulaham kāṇḍalāl,*  
*nāṇā ām śatti ḷa ōr mudalai oppal orutalaiyē. nāma uru cittiramum,*  
*pārppāṇum, sērpaḍamum, ār oḷiyum — attāṇaiyum tāṇ ām avaṇ.*

**Translation:** Because we, **who have become sight-joined**, see the world, accepting one fundamental that has a power that becomes

many is certainly the one best option. The picture of names and forms, the one who sees, the cohesive screen, and the pervading light – all these are he, who is oneself.

**Explanatory paraphrase:** Because we, **who [by rising as the ego] have become joined with sight**, see the world, accepting one *mudal* [first thing, origin, source, base or fundamental reality] that has a power that becomes many [appearances, namely ourself as the ego, the seer or perceiver, and all the manifold phenomena that constitute this or any other world that we may see or perceive] is certainly the one best option. The picture of names and forms [namely the world and whatever other phenomena appear in the mind], the one who sees [this picture] [namely the ego], the cohesive screen [namely the mind as the background on which it appears], and the pervading light [namely the mind as the reflected light of awareness, which is what illumines its appearance] — all these are he [the one original thing], who is oneself [one’s real nature].

## Lines 12-16: the extended version of verse 2

[...] உலகு – கர்த்தனுயிர்  
மும்முதலை யெம்மதமு முற்கொள்ளு மோர்முதலே  
மும்முதலாய் நிற்குமென்று மும்முதலு – மும்முதலே  
யென்னலகங் கார மிருக்கும்ட்டே யான்கெட்டுத்  
தன்னிலையி னிற்ற றலையாகும். [...]

[...] *ulahu — karttanuyir*  
*mummudalai yemmatamu murkolḷu mōrmudalē*  
*mummudalāy nirkumēndru mummudalu — mummudalē*  
*yēṇḷalahaṇ kāra mirukkumaṭṭē yāṇkeṭṭut*  
*taṇṇilaiyi nītra ṭalaiyāhum. [...]*

**Padacchēdam** (word-separation): *ulahu, karttaṇ, uyir, mum*  
*mudalai e-m-matamum muṇ koḷḷum. ‘ōr mudalē mum mudalāy*

*nīrkum*’, ‘*eṇḍrum mum mudalum mum mudalē*’ *eṇṇal ahaṅkāram irukkum maṭṭē. yāṇ keṭṭu, taṇ nilaiyil niṭral talai āhum.*

**Translation:** Each religion initially accepts three fundamentals, **the world, God and soul**. Contending ‘Only one fundamental stands as three fundamentals’, ‘Three fundamentals are always actually three fundamentals’, is only so long as the ego exists. ‘I’ perishing, standing in the state of oneself is best.

**Explanatory paraphrase:** Each religion [or theistic system of belief] initially accepts three fundamentals, **the soul, world and God**. Contending that only one fundamental stands as [these] three fundamentals or that [these] three fundamentals are always actually three fundamentals is [possible] only so long as the ego exists. [As a result of] ‘I’ [ego] perishing [or being destroyed], standing in the [real] state of oneself is best.

### Lines 16-20: the extended version of verse 3

[...] – கொன்னே

யுலகுமெய்பொய்த் தோற்ற முலகறிவா மன்றென்  
றுலகுசுக மன்றென் றுரைத்தெ – னுலகுவிட்டுத்  
தன்னையோர்ந் தொன்றிரண்டு தானற்று நானற்ற  
வந்நிலையெல் லார்க்குமொப் பாம். [...]

[...] — *konṇē*

*yulahumeypoyt tōtra mulaharivā maṇḍren*  
*ḍrulahusukha maṇḍren ḍruraitte — ṇulahuviṭṭut*  
*taṇṇaiyōrn donḍriraṇḍu tāṇatru nāṇatra*  
*vannilaiyel lārkkumop pām. [...]*

**Padacchēdam** (word-separation): *konṇē* ‘*ulahu mey*’, ‘*poy tōtram*’, ‘*ulahu arivu ām*’, ‘*andru*’ *eṇḍru*, ‘*ulahu sukham*’, ‘*andru*’ *eṇḍru uraittu eṇ?* *ulahu viṭṭu, taṇṇai* *ōrṇdu, oṇḍru iraṇḍu tāṇ atru*, ‘*nāṇ*’ *atṛa a-n-nilai ellārkkum oppu ām.*

**Translation:** What is the use of disputing **futilely**: ‘The world is real’, ‘An unreal appearance’; ‘The world is sentient’, ‘It is not’; ‘The world is happiness’, ‘It is not’? Leaving the world and investigating oneself, one and two ceasing, that state in which ‘I’ has perished is agreeable to all.

**Explanatory paraphrase:** What is the use of disputing **futilely**: ‘The world is real’, ‘[No, it is] an unreal appearance’; ‘The world is sentient’, ‘It is not’; ‘The world is happiness’, ‘It is not’? Leaving [all thought about] the world and investigating [or knowing] oneself, [thereby] putting an end to [all disputes about] one and two [non-duality and duality], that state in which ‘I’ [the ego] has [thereby] perished is agreeable to all.

#### Lines 20-24: the extended version of verse 4

[...] ஊனே – துன்னு  
முருவந்தா னாயி னுலகுபர மற்றா  
முருவந்தா னன்றே லுவற்றி – னுருவத்தைக்  
கண்ணுறுதல் யாவனெவன் கண்ணலாற் காட்சியுண்டோ  
கண்ணதுதா னந்தமிலாக் கண்ணாமே. [...]

[...] *ūṇē — tuṇṇu*  
*muruvantā nāyi nulahupara matrā*  
*muruvantā nandrē luvatti — nuruvattaik*  
*kaṇṇurudal yāvaṇevan kaṇṇalāṭ kāṭciyuṇḍō*  
*kaṇṇadutā nantamilāk kaṇṇāmē. [...]*

**Padacchēdam** (word-separation): *ūṇē tuṇṇum* *uruvam tāṇ āyiṇ*,  
*ulahu param atru ām*; *uruvam tāṇ andrēl*, *uvattiṇ uruvattai kaṇ*  
*urudal yāvaṇ? evaṇ? kaṇ alāl kāṭci uṇḍō? kaṇ adu tāṇ antam-ilā kaṇ*  
*āmē.*

**Translation:** If oneself is a form, **which is composed of flesh**, the world and God will be likewise; if oneself is not a form, who can see

their forms? How? Can the seen be otherwise than the eye? The eye is actually oneself, the infinite eye.

**Explanatory paraphrase:** If oneself is a form [namely a body], **which is composed of [or packed tight with] flesh**, the world and God will be likewise [that is, they will also be forms]; if oneself is not a form, who can see their forms, and how [to do so]? Can what is seen be otherwise [or of a different nature] than the eye [the awareness that sees or perceives it]? [Therefore forms can be perceived only by an ‘eye’ or awareness that perceives itself as a form, namely the ego or mind, which always perceives itself as the form of a body.] The [real] eye is actually oneself [one’s real nature, which is pure awareness], the infinite [and hence formless] eye [so it can never see any forms or phenomena, which are all finite].

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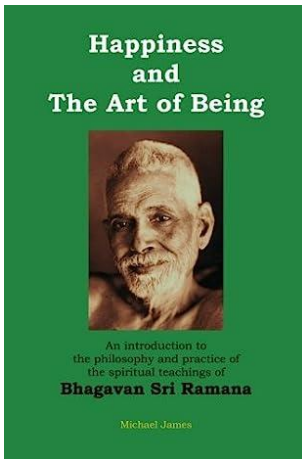
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# Happiness and the Art of Being

## An introduction to the philosophy and practice of the spiritual teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana

By Michael James



Happiness is our true nature, our essential being. The transient happiness that we seem to derive from external experiences actually arises only from within ourself, and is experienced by us due to the temporary calming of our mind that occurs whenever any of our desires are fulfilled. So long as our mind is extroverted, attending to anything other than our own essential self-conscious being, we can never experience perfect, permanent and unqualified happiness. To experience true and eternal happiness, we must

attain the experience of true self-knowledge — that is, absolutely clear consciousness of our own essential being, ‘I am’. Such is the truth revealed by Bhagavan Sri Ramana.

The philosophy of Sri Ramana derives solely from his experience of true, absolute, non-dual self-knowledge, an experience that transcends all thought, both rational and irrational. However, since we imagine the existence of duality, multiplicity and relativity, we seem to lack the non-dual and absolute knowledge of our own essential self-conscious being that Sri Ramana experienced as his natural state. Therefore he presented his philosophy to us in terms of a rational and logical analysis of our present experience of ourself as a finite individual consciousness, in order to enable us to be firmly

convinced of the absolute reality that underlies and supports this finite consciousness that we now mistake to be ourself.

However, the spiritual teachings of Sri Ramana are not only a rational philosophy, but are also a precise science and art. He intended his philosophy to serve only as the theoretical foundation upon which we should practise the empirical science of self-investigation (*ātma-vicāra*), which is the art of keenly self-attentive and therefore perfectly thought-free being.

This book, *Happiness and the Art of Being*, is an in-depth exploration of both the philosophy and the practice of the spiritual teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana. Though it is intended primarily to be an introduction to his teachings, it is not a brief one, because in a clear and simple manner it provides a very detailed and deep insight into their core. Therefore though it has been written with the intention that it should be easily understood even by readers who have no previous acquaintance with any form of spiritual philosophy, it should also be useful to readers who already have a good understanding of his teachings.

Like the aim of his teachings, the aim of this book is to prompt each one of us to think more deeply about the reality of all that we as a seemingly limited individual consciousness experience and know, to help us to understand that the only absolute reality in our entire experience of duality and relativity is our fundamental consciousness of our own essential being, 'I am', and thereby to reinforce our love and effort to attend keenly and exclusively to this essential self-consciousness 'I am' in order to discover its true nature.

The author of this book, Michael James, spent more than eight years studying the original Tamil writings of Sri Ramana and of his foremost disciple, Sri Muruganar, in minute detail under the clear guidance of another close disciple, Sri Sadhu Om. Therefore the central focus of this book is on the teachings of Sri Ramana as expressed in his own original writings, and hence it contains accurate



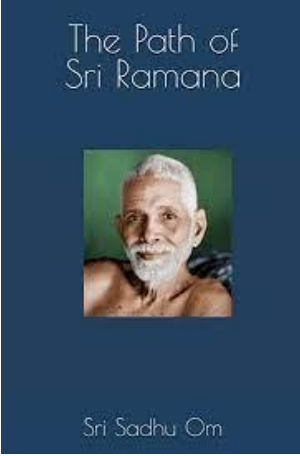
and carefully worded translations by the author of the whole of Sri Ramana's prose treatise *Nāṇ Ār?* (Who am I?) and of most of the verses of his philosophical poems such as *Upadēśa Undiyār*, *Uḷḷadu Nāṇpadu*, *Ēkāṇma Pañcakam*, *Āṇma-Viddai* and *Upadēśa Taṇippākkal*.

*This book is available through Amazon.*

# The Path of Sri Ramana

By Sri Sadhu Om

Newest edition: January 18, 2023



Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi has revealed to the world that self-investigation, seeking to know who am I, alone is the direct path to infinite and eternal happiness, which is our real nature. He attained self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna*) while but a sixteen-year-old schoolboy, after which he lived for fifty-four years in Tiruvannamalai as the *sadguru* of countless people from all countries and religions.

This book's author, Sri Sadhu Om, having reached the pinnacle of desirelessness at an early age, came to Bhagavan Ramana, receiving from him the spiritual instruction, 'Attend to that for which you have come', and composed thousands of verses elucidating his gracious teachings. Sadhu Om's Tamil prose and poetic writings have been published as many books.

*The Path of Sri Ramana* is a lucid exposition of the non-dual teachings that Bhagavan graciously bestowed upon the world, and has been widely acclaimed by sincere devotees of Sri Ramana, including such senior disciples as Sri Natananandar, to be a definitive work on Bhagavan's teachings and a rare treasure of his grace! Those who wish to achieve the real purpose of their birth, namely eternal happiness, can do so by following the path of Sri Ramana as expounded in this book.

This edition, which is a revised and more complete translation of the Tamil original, translated by a team of volunteers supervised and coordinated by Kumar Saran (Sri Ramana Center of Houston) in collaboration with Michael James, combines what were previously referred to as Part One and Part Two of *Path of Sri Ramana*. The former is now the main part of this book, and the latter is referred to as the ‘Supplement’.

*This book is available through Amazon.*

## **This work shines as the core and crest-jewel of Ramana Maharshi's teachings, being the quintessence of all of them.**

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To deeply understand Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's teachings, his philosophical poem *Forty Verses on What Is (Uḷḷadu Nāṇpadu)* is key. In no other place does he give the core of his metaphysical philosophy of pure non-duality (*advaita*) in such a simple, complete and coherent manner as he does here. This work shines as the core and crest-jewel of his teachings, being the quintessence of all of them.

The principle aim of this work is to teach the nature of reality and the means to attain it. The nature of reality is equivalent to what we always are: pure, infinite, indivisible, eternal and immutable awareness, which is aware of nothing other than itself. It is the perfectly clear non-dual state of true self-knowledge, which always shines within us as the existence-awareness 'I am'.

However we do not experience ourself as what we really are, because we rise as ego, the false awareness 'I am the body'. This ego is the root of all duality and problems, and it is only in the view of ego that duality, multiplicity and problems seem to exist. Hence getting rid of ego is getting rid of duality and, by doing so, the solution to all problems.

Ramana Maharshi thus explains in a clear and detailed manner the nature of ego, how it rises, the effects of its rising and the means to prevent its rising. He makes it abundantly clear why the simple and direct means of self-investigation (*ātma-vicāra*) is the only means by which we can eradicate ego. In doing so he clarifies in a clear and unique way what the true practice of the entire *advaita* philosophy actually is. In the absence of this false ego-awareness our problems cease and we alone remain as infinite and hence eternal peace and satisfaction.

*This edition is a compilation of  
the writings and talks of Michael  
James, the premier interpreter of  
Ramana Maharshi's teachings,  
by Sandra Derksen.*