

Arivu: The Epistemology of Gnosis

by Narayana Guru

Written in Malayalam between 1887—1897

Translation and commentary by Nitya Chaitanya Yati

Foreword

Western philosophy has a branch of study known as epistemology, which investigates the origin, structure, methods and validity of knowledge. Each school of thought has its own epistemological doctrine. Though the Indian systems of philosophy are also very much concerned with the origin, method and validity of knowledge, epistemology has not developed as a branch of philosophy in India.

The school of Vedanta expresses the mature insights of Indian philosophy. Vedanta is *brahma vidya*, Science of the Absolute, and *atma vidya*, Science of the Self, at the same time. The Self and consciousness or knowledge are not different according to Vedanta. We see special emphasis on this aspect in the philosophy of Narayana Guru. Thus *atma vidya* naturally turns out to be the science of knowledge. The two functional aspects of knowledge are sense perception and the state of awareness in which knowledge knows itself, where subject and object become interchangeable.

We are aware of the incessant flow of the states of consciousness, and also of the vast variety of change that happens to one and the same consciousness. What is the essential content of this consciousness which is always one and changeless, yet appears to be constantly changing? How is this

consciousness understood in Vedanta as awareness of the Self? What is it which is understood to be an object of knowledge? How does the same knowledge function simultaneously as subject, object, and knowledge of the total context? These are all epistemological questions proper to Vedanta.

Vedanta gives finalized answers to philosophical questions, and its certainty relies on one's own Self-awareness. Therefore the answers Vedanta gives to epistemological problems also have to be the last word on them. In the West, where epistemology has developed as a branch of philosophy, epistemological problems have not been given a final answer. In India the necessity for presenting the philosophy of Vedanta with an epistemological point of view did not arise at all. The times have changed, however, and Narayana Guru felt the need to present a Vedantic epistemology. He has done so in the fifteen stanzas titled *Arivu*, which is translated and commented on in this booklet. The intuitive clarity this work leads us to is unprecedented. Narayana Guru's contribution to the world of philosophy is also an original contribution of his to Vedanta.

This is not a work to be read all at one sitting. Each stanza demands intense contemplation to make the clarity of vision the author has behind it one's own. Only intensive and extensive contemplation will disclose the inner clarity the Guru had in mind while composing it.

What Nitya Chaitanya Yati has expressed here is not a conventional commentary on the work but an attempt to make a pilgrimage to the interior of the Guru's vision, lending a helping hand to the reader at the same time. It is a series of meditative attempts to merge with the vision of the original author. We request the reader to go through it with such a precaution and anticipation.

—The Publishers

Verse One

What is known here, when carefully considered,
Is not anything other than knowledge.
As knowledge in this, (as the knower and the known), is
one,
There is not anything apart from knowledge.

What impresses us in knowledge is the mark of the known. The known is experienced both as objective factors outside one's body and as a subjective consciousness of feeling, cogitation, volition and so on, within one's own body-mind complex. As the outside objective world is mainly comprehended by one's sense organs, and as the external factors are manipulated by the organs of action, the knowledge of such objects seems to be more distinct than subjective notions experienced within oneself.

The outside factors are recognized as belonging to a time-space frame. An object experienced as belonging to a particular space, being seen again and again in the same space in spite of the passing of time, is assigned individual existence and relative permanence by us. Such objects are also considered as independent factors that can never be affected by somebody's private opinion or wish. For this reason, objects are considered unique. As we are impressed by such uniqueness, we forget that things are first of all translated into ideas before we comprehend them.

According to the Vaiseshika philosophy there are six categories: *dravya* (substance), *guna* (quality), *samanya* (generality), *visesha* (particularity, as in kind or species),

sambandha (relationship), and *samavaya* (inherence). To this the Naiyayikas add a seventh, *abhava* (absence). The *dravya* or substance of a thing does not enter into our body-mind aggregate. Rather it is only the qualities of the object—such as tall or short, thick or thin, heavy or light, the physical outlines, color, and the like—which are presented in the form of ideas. The consciousness that is directed to comprehend the outside object transforms itself into these ideas. Thus the interpretation of an object is happening through an identification of the subjective consciousness with an objective phenomenon. What is presentative is known to us only through an act of representation. This is the case whether a thing is outside the body or inside the body-mind complex.

When the existence or nature of anything is questioned, it evokes memory and a decision-making judgment. The recognition of an object brings a duality within the consciousness, of the knower and the known. In fact, there is only a modulating consciousness, which the Guru here calls knowledge, *arivu*.

A vivid picture of the activity of mentation or cogitation comes only when the inertia of consciousness is removed through a self-induced activization of consciousness. This naturally results from the very *dharma* or nature of consciousness. *Dharma*, according to Jaimani, is of *chodana lakshana*. *Chodana* has two meanings. One is that which is provocative and so causes us to question its nature and validity. Another meaning is that which inspires and evokes energy.

When the mind changes from passivity to activity, it questions anything newly presented to its sphere. There are a number of possible questions, such as what, where, when, how, which, why, for whom and by whom, what for, etcetera. This questioning aspect is called *manas* or mind, and the modulations within the mind-stuff of such questions arising

are called *mano-vritti*, mental modifications. Questions are immediately followed by the recalling of previous memories, and therefore the mental modifications naturally lead to *chitta-vritti*, or memory recall. *Chitta-vritti* leads to the problem of decision making. The mind cannot leave anything without passing a judgment. This judgmental aspect of the mind is called *buddhi-vritti*. *Buddhi-vritti* is the modified aspect of consciousness when a judgment is made. The natural consequence of a judgment is affection, *ahamkara-vritti*, and the body-mind system of an individual is affected by its own judgment, grounded in an 'I' awareness or ego sense.

Thus from the periphery of consciousness to the center of consciousness we have nothing but one stretch of knowledge. Therefore in this first verse of Arivu, Narayana Guru denotes the subject matter of the discussion to be knowledge or gnosis, and he assigns to it the dignity and status of the Absolute, the One without a second.

Verse Two

If there is no knowledge, then the known is not,
even if such exists.

If that one knowledge is not existing,
What knowing of which knowledge
Is there that can be known for certain?

What we know at any given moment has its own limits. With our eyes we can look into the farthest space we know and there we see shimmering stars fainter than fireflies. We presume that beyond these almost invisible stars, there are many galaxies each containing several billions or trillions of

stars. Our ears cannot reach to such far off distances as are accessible to the eyes. Even the loudest blast is heard only within a small space of a few hundred square miles. The sensation of touch is experienced only when another object is in direct contact with our body. Even when something which is very bitter or sweet is placed in our palm or on the forehead, one does not know its flavor. It has to be tasted with one's tongue only. To experience odor the gross molecules of the object have to go into the nostrils to stimulate our olfactory buds.

As our sense organs have such limitations, at each given moment we do not know even one trillionth of the existing world. Considering this, one can legitimately presume that outside our knowledge there exists a vast universe whose manifoldness and magnitude is never fully comprehended by anyone. But in this second verse Narayana Guru puts a pertinent question to such a presumption: "If there is no knowledge whatsoever of an unknown entity or world, how can conjectures of it even be made?" If there is no knowledge, nothing can be affirmed or denied.

When we are asleep, we do not have any knowledge of the bed or mattress we sleep on. We become oblivious to all the details of the room in which we are sleeping. Even a person sleeping on the same bed does not exist to one who is in deep sleep. But when we wake up, we do not have the least doubt that we were sleeping on the same bed on which we went to sleep. Further, in deep sleep no one has any consciousness of their own name or identity. That is also recollected only on awakening.

Such lapses in knowledge do not prevent us from having a satisfactory knowledge about the world, because we have three sources of knowledge: immediate, mediate and intuitional. Immediate knowledge comes from the direct contact of senses with objects of interest. Mediate knowledge

comes through the reporting made by others. The vast source of mediate knowledge is the recorded experiences of millions of people in so many languages. What cannot be directly seen can be conjectured through the testimonies of inference, comparison and mathematical pondering. Thus our knowledge is not limited to the capacity of our sense organs. It is being continuously complemented from all sides by the knowledge of others with whom we are sharing our lives.

Bishop Berkeley of England said, "*Esse est percipi*." (To be is to perceive, in Latin). Berkeley's idea of perception is not a materialistic concept. To him perception is the recognition of an idea or sensation presented to the mind. There is a story about Berkeley's substantiation of ideas. Johnson became furious about Berkeley's theory and kicked at a stone saying, "I will kick off Berkeley's idea like this." But Johnson's toe was hurt and it bled. Johnson asked, "Are the stone, this toe and this blood mere ideas?" When Berkeley heard this, he smiled and said, "Johnson, the stone, the toe, the blood, and his anger are all ideas." Berkeley held the view that even when one person is not seeing this world another is seeing it, and even when nobody is seeing it, God is seeing it.

In the present verse the Guru is not taking his theory to any inconceivable subtlety. To know, there should be knowledge. Even to know that there is nothing to know there should be knowledge. If knowledge is denied, then there is nothing to know of knowing or not knowing.

Verse Three

What is known to be unbounded knowledge,
That also shines as knowledge.
As the dream that arises from knowledge

Becomes experiential knowledge, so everything else.

First of all let us consider the difference between seeing and looking. When our eyes are open, things which exist in a nearby space become automatically presented to our vision. To most of those impressions, which are being mechanically registered upon our eyes, we have only a passive indifference. Attention is an experience which is radically different from indifference. Some of the impressions registered by the eyes can be recognized instantaneously as symbols of pleasure or pain, love or hatred, hope or fear. When a symbol becomes pronounced in the mind, a gestalt happens. The formation of a gestalt is always evoked by an interest. As we have already seen, interest arouses questions such as "What is this?" From there on we are not only seeing but looking. A few objects of interest loom large in our attention and push the rest to the periphery. Thus every object of interest has its vague or relatively unimportant environmental background.

If a needle is dropped into a stack of hay, we look into the hay with minute care to reclaim the needle. To a far greater degree than simply seeing objects presented to the eye, the mind focuses on the needle and holds before itself a very clear image of it with special reference to its exact length, shape, glittering quality, and any other attributes. Thus inside us there is a picture, and we are looking for an outside object which can have a one-to-one correspondence with the image clearly projected in the mind. Although innumerable forms of the hay fall onto the eye, they will all be rejected as irrelevant at that moment. The only attention of the eye is to discover the lost needle, by finding a match for that specific image.

Here in the vast matrix of immeasurable or uncountable presentations, we are looking for a measurable, definite object. Even though this universe of ours is of infinite dimension, the

person who is standing face to face with it is one who is bent upon measuring everything that is presented to his or her consciousness. In the Mandukya Karika of Gaudapada, the agent of perception—or the I-consciousness that functions as the knower, the doer, and the enjoyer—is called *visva abhimani*, the measuring agent of the universe. The ‘present’ in what is presented, suggests the here and now aspect of experience. In the here and now, anything presented to the mind is transformed into a definitive impression by this measuring agent. The Sanskrit word *vartamanam* means “the here and now where measuring can take place.”

Even though we are always passing from one definitive experience to another, there is always behind them a backdrop of indefiniteness or of unscrutinized images. The finite is in the foreground and the infinite is in the background. Here an intellectual objection may be raised by certain modern astrophysicists, though not all, that space is finite and not infinite. Yet we cannot think of the relative without thinking of the Absolute. The finite is always compared with the infinite and vice versa.

From an amorphous infinity of undefined and unformed possibility, definite forms arise, and we are continuously in interaction with such forms. When we focus our attention on a point where two lines intersect, in spite of the importance given to the point, the lines also become relevant. Thus finite knowledge with perceivable characteristics, and imperceptible background consciousness are both presented to us simultaneously. Just as the finite awareness is knowledge, the all-filling background is also knowledge.

When a person sleeps alone in their private chamber with eyes closed, inside the skull there is nothing but the white and gray matter of the brain. In that brain dreams are secreted. In those dreams so many images arise, such as towns and hamlets, men and women, and situations that are dreadful and

ludicrous. No item in a dream has gross substantiality. All are only images woven out of and by consciousness. That does not prevent the mind from enjoying the forms of the dream and reacting to the situations projected by it. The way we react to gross objects presented in wakefulness is the same as how we react to subtle objects in the dream.

The magical way by which variegated dreams are fabricated out of the single formless knowledge, even so are all the experiences in the wakeful and deep sleep generated.

Verse Four

If knowledge is all-filling,
Where will non-knowledge dwell?
Where does that knowledge exist which goes in search of
knowledge
And knows knowledge where it is?

People articulate sounds. These days, as an extension of human sounds, we hear recorded speech from machines. On hearing such intentionally made sounds belonging to a language system, we expect every word to connote a meaning. Similarly, there are written words. If one can intelligently read a deciphered script, that will also connote a meaning to the reader. Even sounds which do not produce any verbal connotation can still become interesting if they are musical. If a sound neither indicates a word meaning nor produces a musical affection, then it is dismissed as sheer noise. Any ponderable sound will bring to our mind its corresponding mental image packed with a concept.

From the beginning of the printed carbon forms of scripts on a sheet of paper in a book, there has bloomed in our minds a world of meaning which has gone on expanding into variegated imageries. Thus, from the pages of books there arise the worlds created by our great geniuses, like the Ramayana by Valmiki, the Mahabharata of Vyasa, the comedies and tragedies of Shakespeare, and the poetic plays of Kalidasa. Each work presents before our mind's eye several rich and varied themes of human life and gives us many shades of romantic, historical, lyric and philosophical visions of beauty and truth. After coming into intimacy with the characters of these books, we will shed tears for a Sita, marvel at an Arjuna, or sympathize with a Hamlet or Dushyanta.

It is a wonder how such thematic visions and philosophical exaltations can crouch behind the structured grouping of the alphabet of any given language. This is because the standardized conceptual image of a word is kept as precise as possible so that all those allied to a particular language cannot escape the dictates of formally recognized words and their semantic implications.

Certain words, denoting systems of thought, are dictators. Such words rule the movement of the intellect and will not compromise to be rendered into a meaning other than that which is publicly recognized by all who subscribe to that language system. Such words rule the minds of people, transform and revolutionize the minds of their votaries, and compel people to stand by their pledges even though such a confirmation can spell suicidal tragedies.

Such a word is *advaita*, the non-dual, the One without a second. The non-dual philosophy cryptically laid within this compound word rejects any claim of postulating the existential verity of a second.

Contradiction is considered to be illogical, and it is the nightmare of all philosophers. The uncompromising mind that

insists that light and darkness cannot coexist, pitilessly decrees that knowledge and non-knowledge cannot exist together. In verse one we have already seen that there is only one knowledge and there is nothing else to fall outside its scope. In the second verse it is insisted that knowledge is the only coping stone of existence. In the third verse we saw that all relativistic and finite knowledge is within the ambit of the one and infinite knowledge. After taking such a stand, now if we conclude that there can be instances of non-knowledge in all the given instances of consciousness, it becomes pertinent to ask, "Where can such a consciousness exist? If everything is knowledge and knowledge is all-filling, where should we look for non-knowledge? What could be its locality?" To say that non-knowledge exists in knowledge is illogical. That is opposed to our primary stand.

Narayana Guru is a philosopher who stands with both feet firmly fixed on terra firma. Although Narayana Guru, like other Vedantins, recognized the validity of verbal testimony, he gives his teaching only when it has total relevancy to sound reasoning and possible human experience.

Our knowledge is not static. It is experienced as a flow. The Ganges originates in the Himalayas, and it finally flows into the Bay of Bengal more than 1,000 miles from the Himalayan peaks. A person who enters the Ganges at Hardwar, Benares or Patna can claim to be standing in the entire Ganges River. However, that person sees only a very small segment of it and experiences only a few gallons of water washing their body. Similarly, a person experiences the stream of consciousness as only the awareness of the here and now of a given situation, and there are vast areas of that stream lying in oblivion. What is in oblivion is non-knowledge, so nobody can say that there is no non-knowledge. This position brings us to the contradiction of postulating non-knowledge after proclaiming that there is nothing other than knowledge.

We are always asking questions like: What is? Where is? How? and so on. Such questions indicate that we are looking for knowledge that was hitherto not known to us. When a particular knowledge is not available at a certain place, people of that locality go to another place in search of it. When knowledge is not available from one person, we seek another person who can reliably impart it. Disciples seek gurus because they are convinced that they do not have certain knowledge, and they want to find out from their gurus the how and why of their search.

The present knowledge is the same knowledge that is dissatisfied with itself and undertakes a search by scrutinizing through observation and experiment. What is that knowledge in us which recognizes that it is not perfect and is to be perfected? How does this knowledge know where and how to seek? When knowledge arrives at a place and becomes complemented with further knowledge, how does it know that it is the same knowledge that was sought after? If wrong knowledge comes as a result of a fallacious search, how does this knowledge realize itself to be wrong and correct its mistake? If knowledge is not mere awareness but also implies the dynamism of search and the principle of illumination, with these and all such qualities, where does that knowledge reside? This verse is mainly intended to help contemplatives to guide their thoughts so that they may put the right questions to themselves and arrive at pertinent and useful knowledge which can help them attain realization.

Verse Five

If knowledge does not extinguish in knowledge
Where does it descend (disappear) to?

Knowledge is not known; when known
Both (knowledge and knowing of knowledge) become
one.

When we listen to another person talking, our attention is fixed on each word that succeeds the previous one. The relationship of that word to the previous and successive ones registers its meaning, and a whole sentence is thus treated as a unit. Even in the shortest sentence that we listen to, the conceptual image of the word that is first listened to is retained in the focused attention so that it can be complemented with the successive words and a unit of meaning can be structured. Mind cannot hold too many things in its focal center in the process of perceptual knowledge, and therefore what is already understood and appreciated is allowed to pass, and its place is assigned to what is yet to be perceived, cogitated or known. Apparently when such a thing happens there is no trace in the present of what has come and vanished into the past. It is as if the light that has illuminated the present extinguishes and in its place a new light comes. If that is how it is, then we may ask, "Into what depth does what is already experienced enter to vanish from surface consciousness?"

A total extinguishing of any experience cannot be considered valid because even after the present has vanished into the past, the memory of that experience can be recalled. A re-presentation proves the temporary concealment of an experience which was hiding out from the present. In the previous verse we have seen the movement of knowledge from the present to the future in search of a hitherto unrevealed knowledge. In the present verse we are considering the movement in a reverse order: from the present to the past. Just as it is a riddle that out of non-knowledge knowledge arises, it

is also a riddle that knowledge becomes reconverted to non-knowledge.

As there is an alternation in the emphasis between the two statements “I am knowing” and “This is known,” the fact that one is knowing knowledge is not automatically recognized. In perceptual knowledge, knowledge is a process of identification in which the light of consciousness is becoming like a feature of the illumination that is happening in the act of knowing.

Only on reconsideration of what has come to pass does one say, “This is what is known.” With a similar reconsideration one also says, “I am now knowing the knowledge that is presented in this manner.” Even when such logical ascertainments are possible, before anything becomes known to one’s own mind, the modulating consciousness of the knowing process and the knowledge ushered in from non-knowledge must merge into one. This merger of active consciousness with what is prospectively and retrospectively envisioned can be cited only as an already integrated factor.

Verse Six

Prior to knowledge, what? If we should ask,
Other than knowledge nothing here is found.
The unknowing, what boundary could it have?
And as for knowledge, nothing here is seen.

Our mind is very much interested in physical events. We see carpenters giving shape to pieces of furniture from planks and we know the planks are cut from trees. We can even imagine how a tree comes from a seedling or a cutting.

Similarly we see how various things before us have come into being. It has become habitual for the mind to ask for the beginning of things. Considering this habit of tracing the beginning of things, Guru asks, "What is the beginning of knowledge? What is there before the emergence of knowledge?"

These questions, however, cannot be answered adequately. It is like asking, "What was there before time?" or, "What is beyond space?" All sequential things are happening within time. Within a system where change is the order, the implication of time is happening all through and to every event. A specific event has a before and an after, but time as such cannot be subjected to beginning and ending. Within space there are relative dimensions in accordance with the relative and conditional existence of objects. But space as such cannot have frontiers.

Similarly the function of a conscious being is an event happening within the matrix of knowledge. There can be formations of thoughts and disappearances of ideas. Such beginnings and ends are not applicable to knowledge as such. Even though there is justification for treating a person's knowledge as the private experience of a single individual, no conscious being is an island of knowledge segregated from the socialized collective knowledge that is perpetuated through millennia by the construction of languages and the sharing between persons and groups through the several media of communication. Thus even the first inquisitive look of the newborn is a stir on the surface of the boundless ocean of consciousness. So Guru says, "Prior to knowledge, what is?" When that question is asked, it has to be answered, "Other than knowledge, nothing else is found here."

Of course, there is a prior and an after of the specific registration of a particular sensation or the arousal of an idea. And there is a legitimacy for unknowing to exist prior to the

conscious recognition of what is specifically presented as this or that knowledge. But that unknowing is not a quantifiable factor. It is also to be located within the overall knowledge within which both the individual and the history of one's collective existence reside. This knowledge is here termed *arivu*. Guru is neither using the time-honored philosophical term of Vedanta, *brahman*, nor the term God. Rather he uses *arivu*, which is translated here as knowledge and is to be understood as the all-encompassing Absolute, which is at once the ground and content of all. The Guru, however, does not want us to confuse this with the cosmic phenomena of the visible universe, so he places it beyond the objective and the subjective and clearly says, "That *arivu* is not anything to be seen here."

Verse Seven

Of knowledge we are aware; of its absence
We have no awareness here.
In this, which is ascertained from which?
Even when there is knowledge of non-knowledge,
That does not make non-knowledge specific.

Specific knowledge is focusing attention on some distinct aspects. That can also in principle mean the dismissal of everything irrelevant to that context. When a table is recognized as "table," it implies that the table is not "chair." In the list of irrelevancies, a million items can be included, as "This is not..., This is not...."

In substance we do know that this is a table and not a chair, but in the actual course of knowing, we do not

experience the mind categorizing, classifying and promoting one in contradistinction to another. Such a process is postulated only when we make a psychological analysis. Even then one cannot say for sure whether it is the assertion that is leading to the illumination of the irrelevant or the illumination of the irrelevant leading to the assertion of the relevant.

In Vedantic parlance such discernment is called *bhava nischaya*, the ascertainment of existence, with a dialectical ascertainment of non-existence, *abhava nischaya*. In this matter Indian philosophers usually take sides, favoring either the positive aspect of mind or its negative functioning. In this verse Narayana Guru leaves it open.

In the course of a day's cogitation there are a number of instances when we are confronted with situations in which we cannot make out for certain what the exact nature of the situation is. We know several cases of non-knowledge requiring our attention to make further probes and know more details of a given thing or situation. Thus even when we are placed within knowledge, the mere recognition that there are things to be known does not create specific knowledge within such all-embracing knowledge. That is a matter of common experience.

Verse Eight

Even from the time of the occurrence of knowledge,
“this” also exists.

As knowledge is the real, where can “this” separately
exist?

An item of knowledge has no separate existence
apart from knowledge, which is one.

So what is there other than knowledge?

When a person says, “I exist,” “this cat exists,” “I know I am knowing the existence of this cat,”—all such explicit statements are to be counted as logical psychological reductions of actual acts of knowing. Perception is not happening without the full participation of the percept and the percipient. The distinction made between the knower and the known is not in the first order of experience, but comes as a secondary derivative in which analysis is ushered in for making the components of knowledge logically more explicit. In fact such a reduction falsifies to one’s own mind the true nature of gestaltation.

In the statements given in the verse above, two aspects of knowledge are considered: the subjective and the objective. In the statement, “I exist,” the central focus of consciousness, self-styled as “I”, is further objectified and treated as a specific knowledge of the individuated functional consciousness. Even when such reductions are made, there cannot be any separation between the seemingly subjective consciousness, “I am,” and the consciousness that is animating the individual. Only when an objectification of the “I” is made, circumscribing its specificity, does a false notion of the two aspects of knowledge arise.

In the engineering of perception a similar confusion also arises in the postulation of the independence of the object, such as “cat,” from the perceiving mind of “I”. This is a confusion that has caused serious problems in philosophy even from the Platonic period.

The photographic device and the analogy drawn in modern physiology of the functioning of the eye and the brain as similar to the functioning of the camera and the cameraman has strengthened the postulation that the percipient is not seeing the presented object but only its representation. Even

the famous theory of Einstein that the universe is like a watch in a concealed case which can never be opened, and that we are only standing outside making shrewd guesses, has in it this inherent flaw. This implies that only an untutored person in the street in their common sense is not creating any unwarranted separation between the reality of the object and the perceptual experience of it. The common person sees a thing as it is and does not make logical surmises as to its possible existence prior to its being known, or posterior existence when attention is withdrawn.

To exist is a simple fact, and it is not a philosophical entity. Knowledge and the object of knowledge occur simultaneously, and it is only later that “I am” and “this is” are drawn out of that experience as philosophical commentaries of experience. Here the distinction between pure idealism and pure realism is annulled. Such being the case, it does not matter in the least whether the experiential fact is spiritualistic or materialistic in its content. The here and now in such an understanding is as much ideally valid as it is pragmatically valid. The physiology of perception, etc., is a secondary theorization, and that should not be allowed to take the place of primary experience, which admits of no separation between the knower, the known, and knowledge; or existence and the knowledge of existence.

Verse Nine

There is a habitation for knowledge.
The known has no habitation distinct from that.
If so, when cogitated on
How can knowledge enter the known?

In an individual's experiencing of consciousness, two main characteristics can be noticed. It is expansive, like unlimited space, with a central region that is in focus. Secondly, the central focus of consciousness is sequentially moving from one theme of experience to another. In that sense, time and space can be considered the warp and woof of consciousness.

Everything known has its given time and space in the stream of consciousness. To exist means to have an allotted habitation in space. For this reason, in the Indian philosophical school, space is called *akasa*. *Akasa* is defined as "that which donates habitation." Time and space, together with everything happening within the time-space continuum, have to necessarily be within knowledge. Thus knowledge has its habitation.

From the previous verse it is now clear how an individual's consciousness is afflicted with an erroneous sense of tri-basic division, such as the knower, the act of knowing, and the known. Even all languages admit binary terms like subject and object. Most people tend to think that only subjective consciousness comes through knowledge. Because of such a notion, knowledge is exclusively treated as spiritual and the object of knowledge is assigned to another realm conceived as materialistic. Such a view was responsible for the Cartesian division of mind and matter. It inevitably brings the need for separate habitations for knowledge and the object of knowledge. Here Guru wants to say this is not true. He categorically declares that the known does not have a habitation separate from knowledge.

If the known has no separate existence, it must occur within the habitation of knowledge. That can raise two questions: "How does the known enter into the realm of knowledge, and how does it transform itself into a communicating medium of a specific knowledge?" The last line

of the ninth verse, which can be rendered with two meanings, is a direct restatement of the question just alluded to, "Considering that knowledge alone has the sole habitation, from where and how do items of knowledge present themselves sequentially, as if each item has a separate objective validity?"

The second problem that arises is, "How can we place quantifiable items of knowledge within an infinitude which can neither decrease nor increase in its magnitude? The alternative meaning that can be assigned to the last line would mean that knowledge does not admit of another habitation for the known, and if that is the case how can it be reconciled with the mounting plurality of objects, when objects are quantifiable and can be on the increase when counted?

Verse Ten

On that occasion when knowledge is not functioning
The known too is totally consumed.
In functional knowledge what is there not known?
And as for knowledge, how could it arise at all?

Although mind in general is the same for all people, the object of interest that catches one's attention can be considerably different from that which attracts another. Whereas a physicist is preoccupied with the study of atomic particles and the forms of energy which they emit, a musician may give all their time to understand musical notes and forms of music.

Actually the object of knowledge in itself may not prevent anyone from knowing it. Even when the possibility of knowing

such knowledge abounds all around, if the agent of knowledge has no inclination to give attention to the several avenues of knowledge surrounding it, they will simply pass unnoticed. Even in a physical sense, when countless stimuli are already confronting the senses, it is surprising that a number of them are not even given the slightest attention. It remains a riddle what promotes certain stimuli to the status of being known, while certain others are not promoted.

Knowledge alone is capable of revealing itself. Only the Self is luminous, whereas the non-Self remains hidden before being revealed. How can any knowledge come if non-specific knowledge does not have within it a device by which pure awareness can change into an object of knowledge? In the previous verse there was reference to the dialectics of the one and the many, in which the conversion of the one into many is looked upon with awe. The same mystery is kept alive in this verse as well.

Verse Eleven

What remains as knowledge of knowledge
And makes (itself) known here, we are that.
Considering thus, to which category does knowledge
belong?
And how does it function and what is that called the
known?

Humans have five types of sense objects. If we pour aromatic coffee out of a jug into a cup, we can hear the sound and see how the space in the cup is filled with the thick iodine-colored coffee. We can feel even from outside the cup that it is

hot. Black coffee with lathering foam on the surface can be a pleasing sight. Even from a distance the smell comes. It is tasty when sipped. Each sense organ is bringing a different report about what is presented to our perception, such as sound, touch, form, taste and smell. All these, however different, are complementary, and our mind can appreciate the sipping of the delicious coffee.

Considering the information coming through the five channels of sense organs, we can say that each item of knowledge is different from the other. In the final synthesis of all the five types of sense data, mind treats it as a single unit. The distinctive features of the different senses do not offer any problem to the mind at all.

In one of the old Upanishads this question is raised, “Who sits behind the ear and hears, behind the eye and sees, etcetera?” In the final analysis, it is shown that the Self or *atman* identified with the universal Self or *brahman* is the one knowledge which is behind every item of knowledge.

The same subject is discussed in Shankara’s *The Discerning of the Knower from the Known*. In that study Shankara first calls our attention to external objects and calls them the known, *drisya*. What relates to the known as the knower is the eye, *drik*. If the eye is defective, as in color blindness, one gets a wrong impression of the object. From this it is conjectured that the image produced within the eye is only the objectivized knowledge, and the knower is the mind. Again, if the mind is not in a state of good health, what is seen may be hallucinative. From this it is further conjectured that even the mind is only what is seen and the real seer is the knowledge behind the mind, the knowledge that animates the mind. The knowledge that animates the mind is only a modulated knowledge. What is primary to modulated knowledge is pure knowledge. Pure knowledge is the Self. So whatever is seen here is only a specific modulation of the Self.

In another of Narayana Guru's works, *Atmopadesa Satakam*, he defines the Self as "the knowledge which sits in the dark and knows." In this verse Guru says that primary knowledge, which is the only knowledge behind all forms of knowledge and which reveals to us all the several items of perception and conception, is in reality ourselves.

When knowledge is to be considered, one should ask, "Which category of knowledge is under consideration and how does it function?" He asks us to focus our attention on the arising of the various items of the known that are presented in our knowledge.

Verse Twelve

What is knowledge, you are that.
It is by investing your own knowledge that it becomes the known.
What is known here is of two classes:
One is conscious of knowing and the other is not conscious of knowing.

By eliminating the duality between the known and knowledge, self-identity has now become expansive to include the knower as the core and the known as its continuing radiance or illumination. This can be better understood in the light of the first verse of the *Atmopadesa Satakam*, according to which the central core, the *karu*, is shining both as the inner knowledge and the outer world.

In this verse the distinction between the inner world and the outer world is further minimized or even dismissed. In a colorful fountain with picturesque designs, the water that

surges up from its core forms the spectacle. The water that is pumped into the device and the spectacle are not two. Just as Spinoza speaks of nature-naturing and nature-natured, it is admissible here to think of knowledge in the process of knowing and the knowledge that is becoming manifestly known.

Despite the central unity of the knowledge and the known, a distinction remains between self-conscious knowledge and the unconscious. An analogy that can illustrate the distinction can be of the sun that does not know the grand illumination it makes and the eye that is in fully conscious appreciation of the panorama illuminated by the sun. In the second verse of the *Atmopadesa Satakam*, Narayana Guru speaks of everything perceptual and conceptual as a transformed image of the one light that comes from the sun shining in the void of the firmament of consciousness.

Verse Thirteen

Thus knowledge also proceeds
To fill the knower.
Thereafter one spark of this knowledge
Falls into one category of the known and splits into five.

The one sun shines in the sky. When it is mirrored in a still lake, however big, only one reflection of the sun appears. But if a wave arises in the lake and creates some froth with a million bubbles in it, each bubble will show a separate reflection of the sun. The phenomenon may not last long, but it is a good enough example to illustrate how the one can be seen as many without causing any change whatsoever to the

original. Like the one sun which can reflect in many lakes, the universal Self animates all individuated selves.

The original unmodulated Self, according to Vedanta, is pure consciousness, *pratyang chaitanya*. When it reflects in the individuated psychophysical organism, its purity is afflicted with the triads of nature. From it issues forth the spark of interest, the compulsion to enjoy (which in consequence can also lead to suffering). The reflected light in the individual is the individual consciousness, *jiva chaitanya*, also called *jiva jnana*. When it is directed towards the one category of the object of interest that is knowable, as shown in the previous verse, the *jiva jnana* splits into five types of sensory knowledge, *indriya chaitanya* or *indriya jnana*. Thus the one without a second changes into the knowing mind fed by its five channels of perception.

Verse Fourteen

Such a cognizer who knows that knowledge is,
Knows also that he is the knower of it.
Thus (based on subjective consciousness) knowledge is
eight-fold:
Knowledge is one, knower is another, and six comprise
objective knowledge.

In the awareness, “I am knowledge,” as well as in the knowledge that, “I am knowing this object,” there is the conscious experience that “I am the knower of it.” In the act of knowing there is an oscillation of the cognizing intelligence between the perceived object and one’s sense of agency. This is called *bhana vritti*. In the *Bhana Darsana* of Narayana Guru’s

Darsana Mala he compares this oscillation to the fluttering of the wings of a bee. The wings are moving so rapidly that one cannot say when they are up and when they are down. Like that, for one moment the knowledge is with the object of knowledge and in the next it is with the knower. Thus there is a constant alternation of consciousness between “This is” and “I am.”

When it says, “This is,” two faculties of the mind— the interrogating consciousness and the recalling of memory—fuse into one. These can respectively be called *manas* (interrogating) and *citta* (memory recall). From “This is,” knowledge shifts to “I am.” That is the ego sense or *ahamkara*. For convenience the whole process can thus be taken as an alternation between the subject and the object, and *manas* (questioning mind), *citta* (remembering and associational faculty), *buddhi* (intelligence), and *ahamkara* (ego) are different stages in the oscillation of consciousness between the subject and the object. In other words, what is called the internal faculties or *antahkaranas* are only various aspects of the cognizing process of consciousness. The cognizing process and the internal organs are not different entities.

Knowledge could be analyzed from the standpoint of subjective consciousness and also from that of the objective consciousness. From the side of subjective consciousness, knowledge could be understood as having eight elements or aspects: knowledge, the knower, and the six kinds of knowledge based on objects, i.e., the knowledge of the five senses which rely on the object that is knowable and the one object that is unknowable, as mentioned the two previous verses.

Based on the known
This knowledge is seen as seven and one, making eight.
Knowledge thus will become known separately.
And this is only true when unfurled.

Realization is not a theoretical possibility of an after-death “immortality”. For men and women the actualization and realization of the Self should have a one-to-one correspondence in the here and now of life.

A person is at once one with the Supreme Consciousness and at the same time a finite spark which represents within itself a microcosmic version of the flux of becoming and the unchanging reality of being. In its finitude it functions relativistically and is conditioned with the special characteristics of the five attributes that correspond to the elemental stuff of this universe—space, air, fire, water and earth. These are experienced as sound, touch, form, taste and smell, respectively. These five are actualized when the mind uses them to fabricate the tapestry of perceptual experience.

Thus the mind and senses are on the plus side of actuality. They are not mere phantoms occurring in the void. They manifest as superimpositions on the ground of universal existence. Universal existence is realized in the here and now as the conscious recognition of an imperishable value.

Consciousness, to begin with, is of the ego, which is the recipient of all information. This individuated consciousness knows the five kinds of objects and is also aware of the unknowable object. These are all objectively known, and there remains the knower or witness of all these, which makes the number of manifested principles eight. As the individual has no existence apart from the Absolute, these eight conditioned

aspects exist only as dependent factors of unconditioned knowledge.

Passing from the conditioned to the unconditioned is realization. And reverting from the unconditioned to the conditioned is the actualization of the One in the many. This has a close resemblance to the Zen story of Hoti, the happy man of China. The Zen master Hoti used to beg for small coins. Whenever someone gave him a coin, he bought toffee with it and stacked the toffee in a gunny sack. After filling the bag, he shared the toffee with street children. One day someone asked him, "What is *nirvana* (liberation)?" At once he threw down his toffee bag. Then the same person asked, "Master, how do we practice it?" Hoti picked up his toffee bag and placed it over his shoulder again. Thus realization and actualization go hand in hand.