

[From the Agamas: How Do We Know What We Know?](#)

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FROM THE AGAMAS

How Do We Know What We Know?

True knowledge comes only from the power of pure consciousness

The following is a lucid translation of passages from the Paushkara Agama, chapter 9, verses 3 to 18, entitled "On the Means of Valid and True Knowledge." Responding to a question from the sages, Lord Siva addresses the philosophical issue of the means of bona fide knowledge, a topic of discussion in all schools of Hindu thought.

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SAGES: O LORD, WE NOW DESIRE TO LISTEN TO YOUR INSTRUCTIONS and expositions on the means of valid knowledge, without which our knowledge of things would be uncertain. Therefore, O Lord Ishana, kindly be favorably disposed to speak on pramanas, the means of acquiring valid knowledge.

Lord Siva: Twice-born sages, there are four common means of valid knowledge: perception (pratyaksha), inference (anumana), verbal testimony (shabda) and presumption (arthapatti). But the power of consciousness itself (chit-shakti), free from doubt and other defects, is said to be the impeccable means of valid knowledge.

The cognition that is unable to distinguish between two similar things, for lack of sufficient differentiating information, is known as doubt (for example, a thin curved object could be perceived as a snake or a rope, with closer inspection required to decide). Error is the "otherwise-than-what-it-is cognition" (anyatha jnana),

There is a common usage in the world, "I see through my eyes." This is due to the help rendered by the eyes (to chit-shakti). But the knowledge gained is only acquired through the power of consciousness using the eyes. The eyes themselves do not convey the knowledge to the Self.

The sense of sight is not the means of the hearing of sound. The sense of hearing is not the means of the cognition of color or form. Consciousness is always the cognizer everywhere. Therefore, that alone is considered to be the means of knowledge. By the manifestation of chit-shakti, there is the cognition of all this. By the non-manifestation of chit-shakti, nothing is known.

But why cannot intellect (buddhi tattva), which is the ultimate cause of all cognition, be accepted as a means of knowledge? Buddhi cannot be so. Buddhi cannot be a means of knowledge, because, being not different from the products of prakriti (tattva), it is insentient, like the sense of sight and others. Moreover, buddhi is characterized by various states, such as happiness and sorrow. Therefore, the state of invariably being a means of knowledge is not accorded to buddhi.

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