



this issue

- Pratyaksha Pramana **P.1**
 Imperfect Senses **P.2**
 Anumana Pramana **P.4**
 Shabda Pramana **P.6**
 Acquiring Knowledge **P.7**

Panchatatva Mantra

jaya sri-krishna-chaitanya
 prabhu nityananda
 sri-adwaita gadadhara
 shrivasadi-gaura-bhakta-vrinda

“I offer my respectful

obeisances unto Sri Caitanya

Mahaprabhu, Lord

Nityananda, Sri Advaita,

Gadadhara Pandit, Srivas

Thakur, and all the devotees
 of Lord Caitanya”.

Maha Mantra

**Hare Krishna
 Hare Krishna
 Krishna Krishna
 Hare Hare**

**Hare Rama
 Hare Rama
 Rama Rama
 Hare Hare**

**Chant Hare
 Krishna Mantra
 and be happy...**

Acquiring Knowledge

Hare Krishna Friends,

Please accept our respectful obeisance!

After having defined God, we need to understand God and for this we need to gain or acquire knowledge about God. We acquire knowledge by different methods. We rely on someone who already has understood to explain to us, we sometimes understand by observation and there are times when we understand by feeling or touching.

There are 3 methods of acquiring knowledge and understanding God. These three methods are the most predominant ways of understanding God. Let us explore each one of them.

I. Pratyaksha Pramana (Direct Sensual Perception)

Knowledge gained directly with the help of the senses is known as Pratyaksa Pramana (perception). The gross senses are the eyes (vision), ears (sound), nose (smell), skin (touch) and tongue (taste). In addition, mind is regarded as the subtle and sixth sense and one can also acquire knowledge with the help of the mind. The best example for this is how children learn. Their mothers carry them around, point to a bus and say this is a bus, bus, say bus? ya bus - so the child understands that this is a bus. Anything which has four wheels and is big - is a bus. This is a chair - ha chair. So, you show something an object, you relate a word and say ok this is how it is. This is called Pratyaksha Praman.

The logic of atheists is based on perception (Pratyaksha Pramana), which was propagated by the sage Charvaka. Perception means the knowledge derived from the observation with the naked eyes.

Can you show me God? - A fundamental mistake in the understanding of God.

God is not our order carrier to come in front of us whenever we desire. We can understand easily that at all times "Seeing is believing" which is a very famous dictum of people arguing about God's existence has its own limitations.

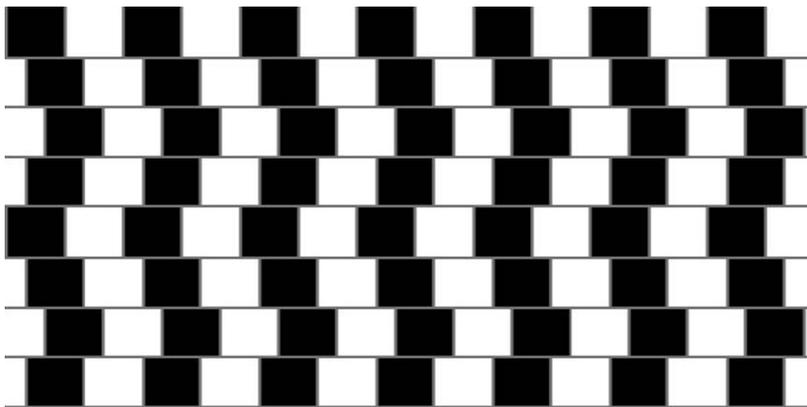
For example:

1. Is the sun just a plate of half-a-meter diameter as we see it with our eyes?
2. A stick appears broken when we insert half of it into water (Refraction)
3. Why do our faces look ghostly in a concave mirror? (Is seeing believing?)

Thus, we can see that the knowledge we achieve through direct perception is limited and not reliable. The very fact that the theories in science are changed, updated and modified everyday is proof that we are attaining higher and higher imperfect relative truths by the pursuit of our scientific research. The absolute Truth, however, is fixed. It never changes. We cannot understand the Absolute Truth through our blunt material senses because of the following four defects:

Spreading of the epidemic. But within a few days after this the scientists realized their folly and said that the cause of plague was not cats, but rats! But it was too late. Rats started multiplying in large numbers as all cats were wiped out.

Imperfect Senses:

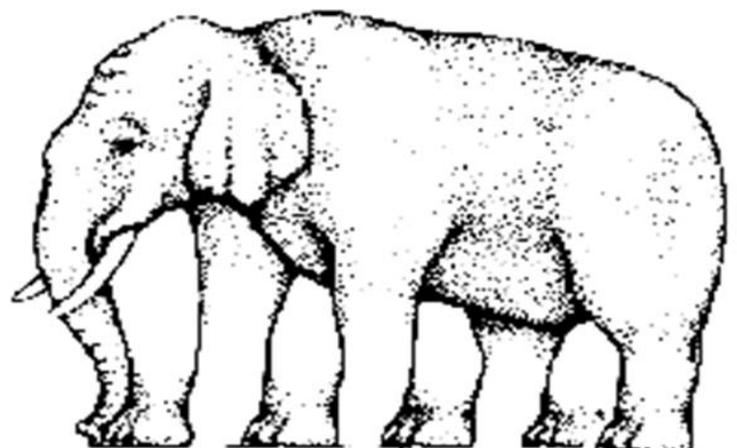


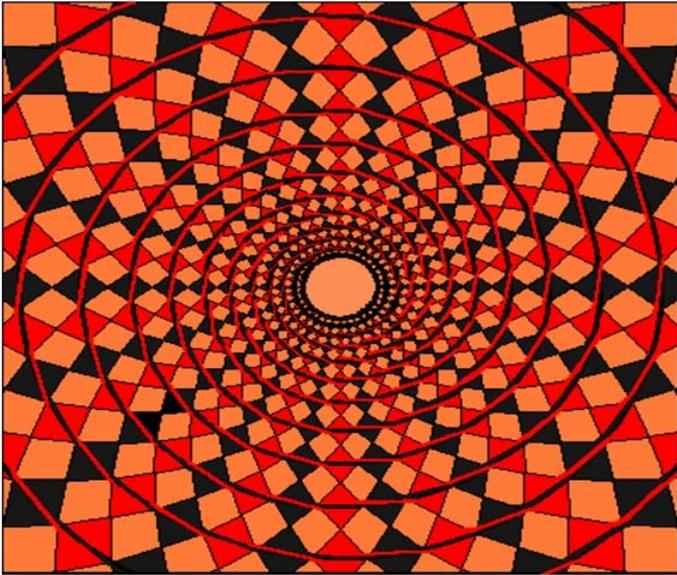
In this illusion, we show you a set of lines which are drawn on alternate black and white squares, you have to decide whether these lines are parallel or not ..

**Answer : All these lines are parallel .
Although they do not seem to be so...**

This is one of the all time favorite optical illusion. It is known as 'Count the elephant's legs. You have to count the elephant's legs in this illusion.

This will make you go nuts definitely.





In this one, watch the spiral carefully

But there is no spiral, these are all concentric circles

Our senses have a very limited range of perception. Our eyes can neither see distant objects, nor the objects closest to them - our own eyelids; we cannot see beyond the wall. How can we be proud of the eyes made of flesh, blood and water, and expect to see the truths beyond the matter, when we cannot even see this world properly? Our ears have a range of 20 Hz to 20 kHz. If we blow a dog's whistle, we ourselves cannot hear it, although all the street dogs will be able to hear it and will come running. Thus every one of our senses has inherent limitations.

Tendency to be Illusioned:

You see mirage in the desert, think there is water. So, the eyes sometimes will be under illusion. This is what we mean by saying Optical Illusion. You may hear a sound, think that my friend has come and you may open the door and realize that there is somebody else. This is also called illusion. Our senses are limited. Many a times they see some illusion or you hallucinate something. When one takes a pain killer medicine, one thinks in illusion, "I am alright now. My disease is gone". But the pain killer tablet doesn't cure the disease. As the effect of the pain killer comes down, one feels the pain again and observes the same old symptoms of disease, and then one realizes that the medicine has just covered the problem temporarily, like covering an untidy room with a blanket to make it look nice.



Tendency to Commit Mistakes:

We may mistake a rope for a snake due to illusion. Science, with all its dramatic successes, has from its beginnings also generated widely incorrect accounts; the brain was considered to be an organ to cool the blood just as there is a radiator in a car to cool the hot water. This is a dramatic deviation from what we now see as truth. Now when scientists commit a mistake, it can affect millions of people who faithfully follow them. During the bubonic plague in Europe, scientists found the cause of plague spreading to be the cat. So, the government at once ordered all the cats in the whole country to be caught and killed to avoid the spreading of the epidemic. But within a few days after this the scientists realized their folly and said that the cause of plague was not cats, but rats! But it was too late. Rats started multiplying in large numbers as all cats were wiped out.

Tendency to Cheat:



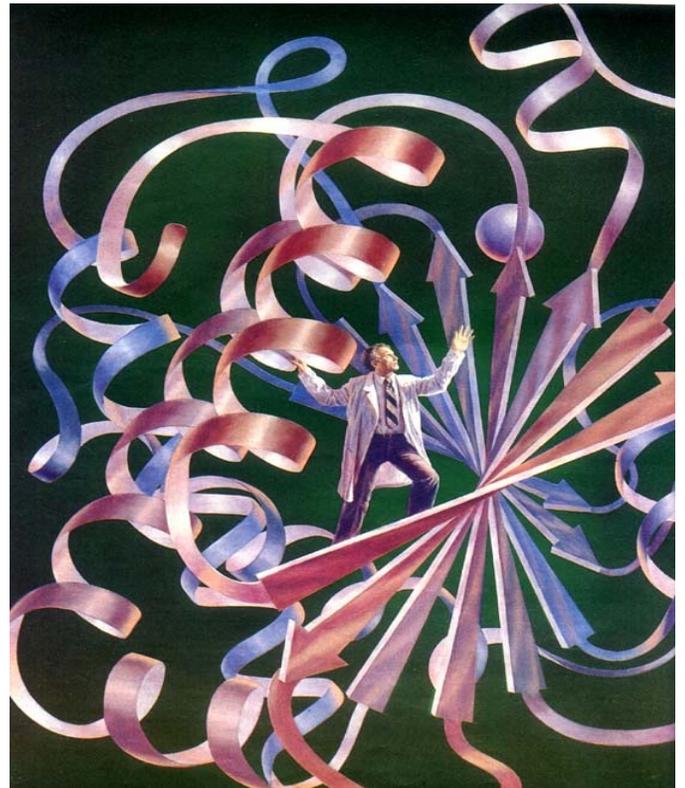
"To err is human", the saying goes. But unfortunately, human sometimes go beyond innocent error and deliberately propagate untruths. Scientists are not immune to this short coming. For many years, text books on evolution routinely cited the Piltdown man as evidence that human beings have descended from an Ape like ancestor. In 1912, archaeologists excavated a human like skull and an ape like jaw from a gravel pit at pilt down, in the British Isles. Bones were deemed part of the same creature, which was dully reconstructed in full and placed in the British museum as an example of a transitional face between ancient ape and modern man. In 1953, however, investigators discovered that the jaw bone of the Piltdown man

Was actually of very recent origin and had simply being filled to look like a fossil. In other words the Piltdown man was a fraud, apparently engineered by one of the original "Discoverers".

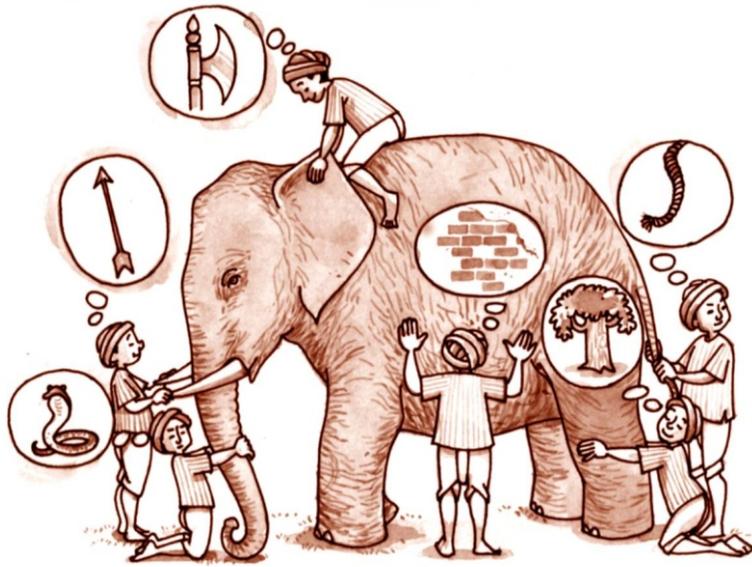
So, we understand that Pratyaksha Praman is not the right method of acquiring knowledge about God. So let us now see the next method...

II. Anuman Pramana (By Inference)

Anumana means - you see one event and you see another event, and because of your previous experiences of the world, you infer. Okay something like this must have happened in between, therefore this has happened. So this is called Inference. In fact in the inference also, the fire on the hill is inferred by its smoke. But the relationship between the fire and smoke is perceived with the naked eyes only. Similarly other means of knowledge are also based on the perception only. We find so many scientists all over the world and they are seeing the world and all these different scientists, give different understanding of how life was created, about how the whole creation came about. They all differ in their opinion and each of them claims that "I am right". How can it be possible? A practical example of Anumana Pramana, or wild speculation, is Darwin's theory that proposes the idea that human beings might have evolved from Apes. Darwin tried to find out how life came into this universe with all his researches, when he couldn't make out, he admitted that he resorted to wild imaginative speculation. This he himself says in the introduction to his book, "The Origin of Species".



Story: Blind Men and the Elephant



Once six blind men came across an elephant for the very first time in their life. After touching the different parts of the elephant, each one of them started describing enthusiastically what they thought the elephant was like.

One man who had touched the side of the elephant exclaimed, "It is like a wall, which appears that it may fall anytime". The second man who had touched the tusk said, "O! It is so very round, smooth and sharp. The elephant is like a spear". The third man who had touched the trunk said, "Don't you understand that the elephant is like a snake?"

The fourth man who had grasped one of the legs of the elephant felt that the elephant was like a tree. The fifth man had touched one of the ears of the elephant and stated that it was like a fan. The sixth man who had caught hold of the swinging tail of the elephant commented, "Why don't you all understand that the elephant is like a rope!"

In this way, they went on arguing until they resorted to the help of a learned man with proper eyesight. The learned man felt pity for them and told them the complete description of the elephant and then all the six blind men felt satisfied.

Do you think they are wrong? No. They are perfectly right. But all of them are absolutely wrong, because they are getting one aspect of the truth. But they are not getting the whole truth, because their sense of see is limited. Even if we have the eyes 20/20 vision, we can't see everything, we can't feel everything, we can't experience everything. Therefore you have to speculate. So, one fellow may speculate, I am only seeing the trunk. But it may be a five mile long hose pipe. Somebody may touch the leg and say, I am only touching one aspect and speculate that the elephant is a five mile long pillar and therefore some part of it makes sense but some of it is speculation. Where they start speculation and where they end, their sense perception stops.

Just as the blind men could not understand the elephant completely just by their endeavour because of their blindness, we cannot understand the material world or the Absolute Truth completely and correctly by any amount of personal endeavour because our senses are defective and limited. Just as one of the blind men grabbed on to the tail and called the elephant a rope, sometimes we may grab on to a particular part of the truth and our understanding may even be correct; still our limited understanding does not give us the complete truth.

Therefore we find so many scientists coming out it with so many opinions about one phenomena which has obviously only one reason. We can understand this much better by this joke about a **Limping Man**.

One day there was a gathering of top scientists from all fields. They had come for a conference and then there was a lunch. So all of them went out and were having their lunch. On the other side of the compound, they saw a man limping. This man was limping on one side and walking. So being topmost scientists, very specialized in their respective fields, immediately each one started diagnosing what his problem could be. They were so experts. So the topmost orthopedic surgeon said, I know what his problem is. That's because - and he started to use hi-fi medical language, this particular muscle of this particular bone, of this joint this

ligament has tender, therefore this has caused the limb to walk like this and therefore this is called - and some big definition. Hi-fi - everything goes above our head. Right - because expert is talking. Then a neurologist came, absolutely wrong, all his tendon and bones are alright. Actually he has got something called as Cerebral palsy. Where the cerebellum is affected by this neuron and the dendrites are not communicating to the neuron and therefore this results in - blah blah blah and therefore he is going on like this. Everyone said ya, makes sense. And in this way - each one came about and they all gave their explanation about the phenomena.

Ultimately all of them decided, let us confirm with that fellow. So, they all decided to call him, and they called him - please come here. Yes sir, he walked and he said he is so and so - world famous neurologist, psychologist - etc and said that this is their opinion about his problem. So, we would like to confirm which of us is right and what is the problem?

Problem, what problem? I have no problem.

Then why are you limping?

He says "**my slipper is broken and I am looking for a cobbler. I am dragging my feet because my hawai slipper is broken**".

This is a very small funny incident. But if you think about this incident in a very deep way, we realize how each of us is watching the same world, each of us is watching the same laws, each of us is seeing the same thing, but according to previous understanding, previous conceptions, we are speculating and filling the rest of the gap with our own nonsense. We ultimately find super specialists giving different opinion on the same subject and most probably that may be totally different from everything that is told. Therefore we can't rely on such a changing truth for understanding the absolute truth. Therefore this method of speculating or inference cannot be the best method for understanding God.

III. Shabda Pramana (Word of Authority)

Shabda is most important in receiving a valid knowledge and the other two epistemic elements, pratyaksa and anumana are to assist the sabda pramana. Objects beyond material nature cannot be known experimentally. These objects are therefore called Achintya. That which is Achintya cannot be known by speculation or by argument but only by shabda, the process of hearing from Authority. A revealed knowledge is transmitted from the Supreme Authority, God, to the bonafide and sincere recipients. The qualification of the recipient is that he should be a completely surrendered soul to the Supreme Lord and he should be eligible to receive the transcendental mercy of the Lord. As mentioned earlier this process is also called a top down approach in receiving knowledge (avaroha-pantha). A simple example is to make an investigation about the true answer to the question, "Who is the father of child A?" In a scientific or the bottom-up process, one can make an extensive research work by matching the DNA profile of several candidates with that of the child. However, it will be extremely difficult to find a real answer by this process. Most likely, needless to say, a real answer may never be found by this approach. This is because the real person may not be tested for a variety of causes. So, the easiest and most reliable approach will be to simply ask the GENUINE MOTHER, and her answer will be the final verdict. The fact is that a genuine mother will never tell a lie to her loving child. If somebody wants to confirm this answer scientifically, a DNA test can still be done. In this way, the matter is resolved.



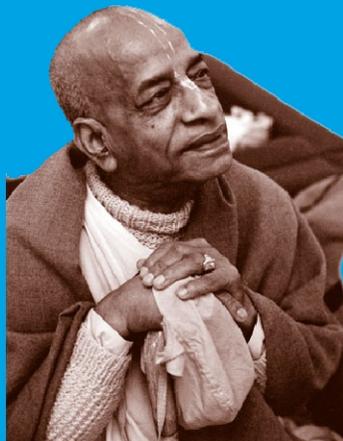
Similarly, you want to know about such an important subject with which you want to solve the problems of your life, to know who created everything and also about God. There is one way, which is called the word of authority. And what is that authority? That authority is the Veda. Veda doesn't mean what Indians or the Hindus follow. No. It is a misunderstanding of the term Veda. Veda is a very broad term. Veda comes from the root word - vid. Vid means to know. The word vidya means knowledge, vidwan - means one who knows and veda means, the original infallible source of knowledge, house of knowledge. It is not the monopoly of only Hindus or those who know sanskrit. Veda doesn't mean some books which were written by some sages sitting in some caves. No - Veda means absolute knowledge. Original infallible knowledge. It has been documented in Sanskrit by Lord Himself. Vedas are the body of knowledge of the laws and what is behind everything. We can't be restricted to some Hindus, Muslims, Christians. Its like science - $2+2$ is 4. It is not that for Hindus 2 and 2 is 4 and for muslims it is 3.5 or for Americans it is this and for Africans it is 2.5 These are some principles, fundamental principles. This is the Truth and they have been postulated by the great sages after deep realization in books.

Thus we can see for ourselves that Shabda Praman is the only reliable and recommended method for acquiring knowledge and understanding God since this does not depend on inference or on our limited senses but, it is thoroughly dependent on the original source of knowledge - the Vedas - the infallible source. We shall understand in our next issue - How these Vedas are infallible.

Srila Prabhupada Speaks out

Acquiring Knowledge

The Vedas state that there are three kinds of evidence for gathering knowledge. They are called **pratyaksa**, **anumana**, and **shabda**. **Pratyaksa** refers to direct evidence as obtained by our imperfect senses. As it is based upon one of the four human defects, it cannot be relied upon for anything beyond our immediate sphere of existence. **Anumana**, or inductive knowledge, is a little more advanced; but can be greatly misused



as well. **Inductive knowledge** takes whatever knowledge a person has, and speculates or hypothesizes what they don't know based on suggestion. Knowledge received from authoritative sources is called **Shabda-pramana** or **Sruti**. **Sruti** refers to knowledge, which has to be received through aural reception. The Vedic literatures state that in order to receive knowledge beyond the purview of the limited senses, we have to hear from authorities.