

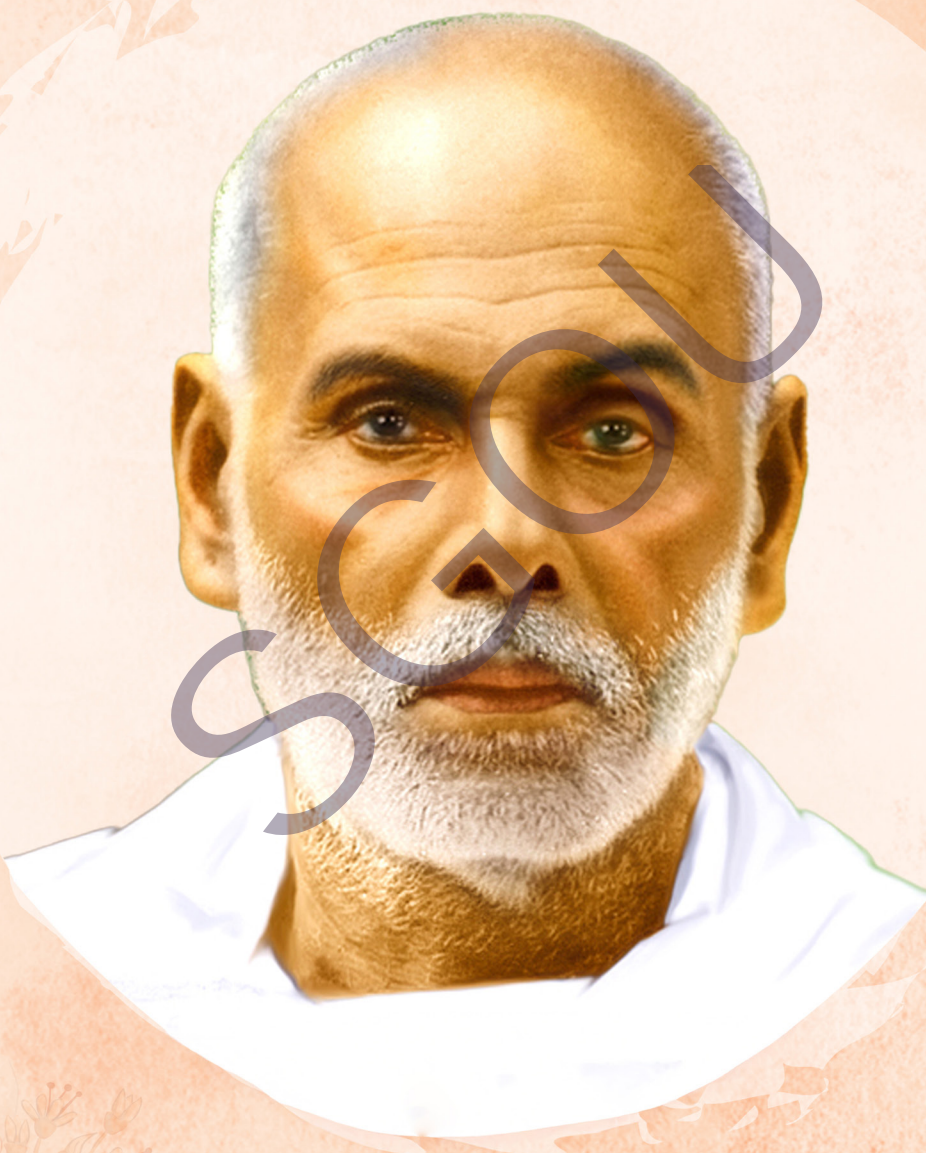
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# Philosophical Reflections in Daiva Dasakam and Atmopadesa Satakam

**COURSE CODE: B21PH07DC**

Undergraduate Programme in Philosophy  
Discipline Core Course  
Self Learning Material



SREENARAYANAGURU  
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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

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**Philosophical Reflections in  
Daiva Dasakam and Atmopadesa Satakam**  
Course Code: B21PH07DC  
Semester - VI

**Discipline Core Course  
Undergraduate Programme in Philosophy  
Self Learning Material  
(Model Question Paper Sets)**



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## PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS IN DAIVA DASAKAM AND ATMOPADESA SATAKAM

Course Code: B21PH07DC

Semester- VI

Discipline Core Course

Undergraduate Programme in Philosophy

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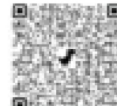
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# MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

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The programmes offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed “blended format,” a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The University aims to offer you an engaging and thought-provoking educational journey. The undergraduate programme in Philosophy has structured its curriculum based on modern teaching approaches. The course integrates current debates into the chronological development of philosophical ideas and methods. The programme has carefully maintained ongoing discussions about the Guru’s teachings within the fundamental framework of philosophy as an academic field. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant examples to facilitate better comprehension.

Rest assured, the university’s student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.



Warm regards,  
Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.

01-02-2026

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**BLOCK**

# **Daiya Daśakam: A Universal Prayer**



# 1

## UNIT

# Prayer of Secular Culture

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the meaning of prayer as presented in Sree Narayana Guru's Daivadaśakam.
- ◆ describe how Daivadaśakam presents a secular and universal understanding of spirituality.
- ◆ compare Guru's concept of universal prayer with religious exclusivism and sectarianism.
- ◆ reflect on the social and ethical implications of secular prayer in Daivadaśakam.

## Prerequisite

Prayer has been a part of human life from the earliest times. People from every culture and religion have turned to prayer to express hope, gratitude, or fear. Whether it is a whispered request for help or a silent moment of reflection, prayer shows the inner need of human beings to connect with something greater than themselves. It expresses both weakness and strength - weakness in facing life's uncertainties, and strength in finding meaning beyond them. Every civilisation has given a different form to prayer, but its purpose has remained the same: to link the individual with the larger order of life. In the modern world, discussions about prayer often raise deeper questions. Can prayer exist without religion? Is it only an act of faith, or can it also be an act of knowledge and ethical awareness? These questions invite us to think beyond traditional forms of worship. They help us to reflect on how spiritual experience connects with everyday life.

## Keywords

Universal humanism, Duality, Non-duality, Secularism, Spiritual humanism, Self-realisation, Universal consciousness

## Discussion

### 1.1.1 Introduction

Sree Narayana Guru is one of the most influential spiritual and social reformers of modern India. His teachings combine the highest ideals of Advaita Vedānta with a universal humanism that transcends all religious boundaries. Among his compositions, Daivadaśakam literally “Ten Verses on God” is a concise expression of his philosophical vision and his understanding of prayer. Written in Malayalam, Daivadaśakam appears outwardly as a devotional hymn, but its deeper structure reveals a universal philosophy of existence. The ten verses move from supplication to realisation, from dependence on a divine protector to identification with the Absolute. The prayer begins with an appeal and ends with total surrender and unity. The Daivadaśakam represents the spiritual progression of humanity itself from fear to fearlessness, from duality to oneness, from external worship to inner realisation.

In the first verse of the hymn, the term “angu” symbolically refers to proximity to the Divine that is, to the non-dual Supreme Abode where no second entity exists. In contrast, “ingu” signifies existence within this world of plurality. Human life, as envisioned by Guru, is a spiritual journey from duality to non-duality. The metaphor of “bhavāb-dhi” (the ocean of worldly existence) is employed to represent saṃsāra, the cycle of birth and suffering. To cross this vast ocean, the Guru presents the feet of Īśvara or the Divine Name as a mighty steamship. God Himself is portrayed as the captain of this ship, guiding the seeker safely across.

Through constant contemplation and internalisation of Advaitic truth, Sri Narayana Guru exhorts humanity to attain liberation (mokṣa), the ultimate freedom from all forms of suffering. The non-dualistic doctrine of Advaita Vedānta is explicitly reinforced in verses 2, 4, 5, 6, and 10 of the poem.

### 1.1.2 The Meaning of Prayer in Daivadaśakam

In most religious traditions, prayer is associated with petition, gratitude, or worship directed toward a personal deity. Guru’s understanding of prayer is broader and deeper. It is a psychological and spiritual act that expresses the fundamental human longing for security, understanding, and unity. When the individual cries out, “Oh God,” it is not merely a ritual recitation but an existential expression of dependence and aspiration. Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, in his commentary, points out that the phrase “Oh God” represents the transparency of the soul. It arises not from intellectual reasoning but from the depths of human emotion and consciousness. This cry, born of helplessness, marks the moment when the individual stands face to face with the divine reality. Prayer thus becomes the means through which the Self reveals itself.

The Daivadaśakam opens with this pure act of prayer. Guru compares the human situation to a voyage across a vast and dangerous ocean - the ocean of worldly existence (*samsāra*). God is the “mighty captain,” and the divine word is the “steamship” that ferries humanity across the ocean



of suffering. Here, the imagery captures both the existential vulnerability of human life and the redemptive function of divine wisdom. Prayer is the bridge that connects these two dimensions.

Guru also interprets prayer as the human march from fear to fearlessness. Fear is the root of bondage; it arises from the illusion of separateness. The cry “Oh God, protect us” emerges from the experience of insecurity in the face of life’s uncertainties. Yet, through prayer, the devotee grows in awareness of the divine presence that pervades all existence. This realisation dissolves fear. In the first verse, the worshipper surrenders completely to divine protection. The act of surrender signifies the recognition that the finite self cannot control the infinite forces of life. As this recognition deepens, prayer evolves into understanding. Fear gives way to insight; dependence gives way to participation in the divine. Guru’s concept of Brahman as the all-encompassing totality means that fearlessness is not merely courage but the awareness that nothing exists outside the Self. The transition from fear to fearlessness is thus identical with the realisation of unity. Every prayer, says Guru Nitya, is a step toward this realisation - the transformation of duality into non-duality.

### 1.1.3 Prayer Beyond Religion: The Secular and Universal Vision

Sree Narayana Guru’s concept of prayer is not confined to any specific religious structure. It is secular not in the sense of denying God but in transcending sectarian boundaries. His famous dictum “*One caste, one religion, one God for humanity*” summarises this vision. For Guru, true prayer arises from the heart of universal humanity, not from any exclusive doctrine. In Daivadaśakam, there is no reference to any particular name or form of God. The divine is addressed simply as *Daivam* (God), allowing every

individual Hindu, Christian, Muslim, or atheist to find a meaning that corresponds to their understanding. The act of prayer, therefore, becomes a common spiritual language of humankind.

Guru recognises that in the depth of human consciousness, there is a shared spiritual experience that unites all. Prayer is the articulation of this shared inner life. It expresses the dependence of the finite upon the infinite, the longing of the individual for the whole. The secular character of Daivadaśakam lies in this universality. It speaks not to a community but to humanity as such. This universality also carries ethical and social implications. By removing the exclusivity of religion, Guru transforms prayer into a practice of social equality. All human beings, irrespective of status, share the same dependence on the divine. In this sense, prayer is an instrument of liberation not only spiritual but also social.

### 1.1.4 Ethical and Humanistic Dimensions of Secular Prayer

The Daivadaśakam integrates spiritual awareness with ethical consciousness. In the third verse, Guru praises God as the giver of food and clothing, the sustainer of all beings. This recognition transforms prayer into gratitude for the interconnectedness of all life. It directs attention to the human responsibility of care and compassion. In this way, prayer becomes an ethical act. To say “You are our only Lord” is not to withdraw from the world but to acknowledge the divine presence in every act of service. Guru extends the meaning of worship to include work, compassion, and justice. As Rabindranath Tagore expresses in *Gitanjali*, “Leave this chanting and singing... He is with the tiller tilling the ground.” Guru’s spirituality shares this vision - the divine is realised not in isolation but in participation with the world.

The secular nature of prayer here means that it is world-affirming, not world-denying. Guru's approach transforms the religious act of prayer into a universal moral discipline. In this sense, Daivadaśakam anticipates modern notions of spiritual humanism, where devotion is inseparable from social responsibility.

In Guru's thought, the secular and the sacred are not opposites but two aspects of the same reality. The secular represents human life in its everyday concerns of hunger, fear, labour, love etc. The sacred is the eternal presence that gives meaning to these experiences. Prayer, therefore, is the meeting point between the two. When one prays for food or protection, one is not abandoning reason or morality but acknowledging the unity of spiritual and material life. Guru's Daivadaśakam refuses to separate the divine from the human. The God who gives food is also the intelligence that enables human creativity. In this sense, Daivadaśakam promotes a spiritual secularism - a worldview where every aspect of life is seen as sacred, and every act of care as an act of worship. This philosophy anticipates modern Indian discussions on secularism as *sarva-dharma-samabhāva* - equal respect for all faiths. Guru's approach is not a denial of religion but a broadening of it to include all dimensions of life and all human beings.

## 1.1.5 Prayer as a Mode of Knowledge

In Daivadaśakam, prayer is not only emotional or ethical; it is also epistemological - a means of knowing reality. Each verse reveals a deeper level of understanding, culminating in self-realisation. The act of prayer transforms perception. As the worshipper prays, consciousness expands from the limited "I" to the universal Self. This process corresponds to the *Advaitic* path of *śravaṇa* (hearing), *manana* (reflection), and *nididhyāsana* (meditation). The repetition of prayer serves as *nididhyāsana*, a contemplative absorption that dissolves the illusion of separation. Knowledge here is not intellectual but experiential - it is the realisation that all is one.

In a world divided by religion and ideology, Daivadaśakam offers a message of unity and peace. Guru's prayer is inclusive and dialogical. It allows believers and non-believers alike to share a common moral and spiritual ground. The prayer's secular spirit aligns with the principles of modern democracy, human rights, and pluralism. By grounding spirituality in universal human experience, Guru bridges the gap between philosophy and life. His teaching encourages to view spirituality not as a separate domain but as an integral part of ethical and civic existence.

## Recap

- ◆ Daivadaśakam means "Ten Verses on God."
- ◆ It expresses Guru's vision of prayer and human unity.
- ◆ The ten verses move from prayer to realisation.
- ◆ Prayer begins with dependence and ends in oneness.
- ◆ Guru sees prayer as a spiritual and psychological act.



- ◆ The cry “Oh God” comes from the depth of human emotion.
- ◆ Prayer reveals the relationship between self and the divine.
- ◆ The ocean image shows the struggle of human life.
- ◆ God is seen as the captain guiding life’s journey.
- ◆ Guru’s idea of prayer goes beyond all religions.
- ◆ “One caste, one religion, one God for humanity” reflects his vision.
- ◆ Daivadaśakam uses the word “Daivam” to include everyone.
- ◆ Prayer expresses the unity of all human beings.
- ◆ True prayer leads to social equality and justice.
- ◆ It turns devotion into compassion and service.
- ◆ Prayer links the secular and sacred parts of life.
- ◆ Every act of care is seen as an act of worship.
- ◆ Guru promotes spiritual secularism - all life is sacred.
- ◆ Prayer is also a means of knowledge and self-realisation.

## Objective Questions

1. Who is the author of Daivadaśakam?
2. What is the meaning of the term Daivadaśakam?
3. In which language was Daivadaśakam originally written?
4. What does Daivadaśakam primarily express about Guru’s philosophy?
5. How many verses are there in Daivadaśakam?
6. What is the starting point of the spiritual journey in Daivadaśakam?
7. What is the final stage described in Daivadaśakam?
8. Who is described as the “mighty captain” in the prayer?
9. According to Guru, what is the root cause of fear?

10. What does the transition from fear to fearlessness represent?
11. What kind of knowledge does prayer provide, according to Guru?
12. What central message does Daivadaśakam offer to humanity

## Answers

1. Sree Narayana Guru
2. Ten Verses on God
3. Malayalam language
4. Vision of unity
5. Ten verses
6. Divine dependence
7. Union with Absolute
8. God
9. Illusion of separateness
10. Realisation of unity
11. Experiential knowledge
12. Unity and peace

## Assignments

1. Reflect on Sree Narayana Guru's view that prayer is not merely a petition but a journey from dependence to self-realisation. How does this understanding transform the purpose of prayer?
2. Examine the symbolism of the ocean and the captain in Daivadaśakam. How does this imagery explain the human condition and the role of divine wisdom?
3. In Daivadaśakam, prayer is seen as a movement from fear to fearlessness. How can this transformation be understood in the context of human experience and spiritual growth?



4. Explore how Sree Narayana Guru connects the secular and the sacred through the act of prayer. What does this reveal about his vision of spiritual secularism?
5. Analyse Daivadaśakam as an ethical philosophy where prayer becomes gratitude and service. How does this link spirituality with social responsibility?
6. Consider Guru's interpretation of prayer as a form of knowledge. How does prayer, according to him, lead to the realisation of unity between the self and the Absolute?

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# 2

## UNIT

# Prayer Through Spiritual Upliftment

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the idea of prayer as presented in Daivadaśakam
- ◆ identify the different stages of prayer that lead to spiritual growth
- ◆ describe how prayer functions as a process of inner transformation
- ◆ analyse the relationship between divine grace and human effort in spiritual upliftment
- ◆ evaluate the ethical and social dimensions of prayer in everyday life

## Prerequisite

Every culture in the world has discovered its own way of expressing reverence toward a higher reality. Some people bow in silence, some sing in joy, and some sit in quiet reflection. These different forms of prayer arise from a common human need - the need to find meaning in life and peace in the midst of uncertainty. When a person prays, something deeper than words is expressed. Prayer reveals the bond between the human and the divine, between the limited and the infinite. It is not only a religious act but also a human experience that connects emotion, thought, and awareness. Across traditions, prayer has served as a means to seek guidance, to express gratitude, and to find inner strength. It opens the mind to wonder and awakens the sense that life is supported by something greater than oneself. In this way, prayer can be seen as a mirror reflecting the human search for truth and peace.



## Keywords

Prayer, Spiritual upliftment, Realisation, Self-awareness, Humility, Liberation

## Discussion

### 1.2.1 Prayer as Inner Growth

Prayer, for Sree Narayana Guru, is not a mere act of asking for divine help or repeating sacred words. It is a process of spiritual evolution. In Daivadaśakam, prayer begins as an expression of human helplessness and ends as the realisation of unity with the divine. It is the gradual movement of the individual from dependence to self-awareness, from duality to oneness, and from fear to freedom. This transformation defines what we call spiritual upliftment. It is not an external ascent but an inward journey. The Guru conceives of prayer as a ladder of consciousness, where every step brings the devotee closer to realising that the divine dwells within. Prayer becomes an instrument of self-knowledge, guiding the mind from emotion to insight, from devotion to wisdom.

The opening verse of Daivadaśakam: “Oh God, protect us here; do not leave us. Oh Mighty Captain, Your word is a steamship that takes us across the ocean of suffering” expresses the initial stage of prayer. It is a cry born of helplessness, reflecting the fundamental human condition of dependence. Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati observes that this cry is the “transparency of the soul.” It emerges not from intellectual calculation but from the depths of human vulnerability. Like a child calling for its mother, the devotee appeals to the divine presence for safety and support.

Daivadaśakam explicate the world of uncertainty - *samsara* - where human beings

are tossed by waves of desire, fear, and ignorance with an imagery of the ocean. God is symbolised as the captain who alone knows how to navigate through the storm. This metaphor shows that prayer is both surrender and trust. The devotee’s dependence is not weakness but the first step toward awareness of the divine order that sustains life. This stage corresponds to the emotional foundation of spirituality. It teaches humility and faith essential attitudes that prepare the individual for deeper realisation. In philosophical terms, it marks the awakening of the moral and emotional self to the reality of a higher principle.

Guru writes: “Counting one by one, when everything perceivable is done with, then the seeing is steadied; even so, let the inner self attain its rest in You.” Here, the focus shifts from the external plea for help to introspective awareness. The devotee begins to realise that the divine is not distant but present within. The verse describes the stilling of perception the mind withdraws from objects and rests in the awareness of the Self. This process is reminiscent of the Upanishadic idea that knowledge arises when the mind turns inward. The Guru’s prayer thus becomes meditation: the transformation of sensory activity into contemplative insight. At this stage, prayer evolves into a form of self-enquiry. The devotee discovers that behind the changing experiences of life, there exists an unchanging witness the Self (*Ātman*). This discovery marks a crucial step in spiritual upliftment. It changes the nature of prayer from external dialogue to inner silence.

As the devotee attains inner stillness and realises the Self within, this realisation does not end in isolation or detachment. Instead, the inner awareness naturally flows outward as a sense of unity with all beings. The vision of the divine within oneself expands into the recognition of the divine in everything around. Thus, the journey inward prepares the ground for an awakened relationship with the world - one marked by gratitude, compassion, and service.

Guru moves from introspection to gratitude. The devotee recognises God as the sustainer of all life and the provider of every necessity. This awareness generates ethical consciousness. To acknowledge divine providence is to recognise one's interconnectedness with others and with nature. The prayer affirms that God acts through the hands of farmers, workers, and all who sustain human society. Hence, serving others becomes an act of worship. Guru's prayer here integrates spirituality with social ethics. By realising the divine presence in all forms of life, the devotee is uplifted from selfishness to compassion. Prayer becomes a way of seeing the sacred in the ordinary. This stage of prayer reflects the humanistic side of spirituality. It teaches that true devotion must express itself in action. As Guru proclaimed elsewhere, "Acts that benefit others are the true forms of worship." Spiritual upliftment thus involves moral awakening the realisation that service to humanity is service to God.

### 1.2.2 The Role of Grace and Effort

In Daivadaśakam, Sree Narayana Guru presents a balanced view of spiritual progress as the combined result of divine grace and human effort. Prayer serves as the meeting point of these two forces. The devotee begins by accepting human limitation and turns to the divine for guidance. This act of humility opens the heart to receive grace. However,

Guru emphasises that divine grace alone cannot bring transformation without sincere human effort. One must actively strive to cultivate virtues, purify the mind, and live righteously. Self-control, compassion, and awareness are the tools through which human effort becomes effective. Guru likens effort to preparing the soil, while grace is the rain that nurtures growth. Without effort, the mind remains clouded by ego and desire; without grace, effort lacks inner power and direction.

Through continuous prayer and disciplined living, the devotee learns to balance both. When one practices patience, truthfulness, and kindness, the resulting peace and clarity are signs of grace. Guru's teaching shows that prayer transforms ignorance into awareness because it combines divine help with human readiness. This harmony between grace and effort has moral importance as well. True prayer expresses itself through moral action and service. A sincere heart that acts selflessly becomes a natural channel of grace. As selfish motives decrease, moral strength increases, and life becomes guided by divine wisdom. In this way, the power of grace and the sincerity of effort together lead to upliftment. Prayer thus becomes not only a spiritual discipline but also a guide for righteous living that moves the individual from dependence to inner freedom.

### 1.2.3 Spiritual Growth as Liberation

For Sree Narayana Guru, the final goal of prayer is liberation - the realisation of one's true nature beyond ignorance and fear. Liberation in Daivadaśakam does not mean withdrawal from life or renunciation of the world; it means living with awareness of the divine that pervades everything. In the beginning, prayer offers comfort in times of difficulty and provides strength to face challenges. Gradually, the devotee begins to perceive that the divine is not



an external being but the inner reality of consciousness. This realisation frees the mind from dependence on external supports. When one sees the divine presence within, fear and sorrow naturally disappear, for they arise only from ignorance of one's own divine essence.

As prayer matures, it becomes continuous remembrance of the divine, even during ordinary activities. Daily life turns into worship, and every action becomes sacred. Guru calls this state of realisation *moksha* - spiritual freedom. The liberated person experiences deep peace, clarity, and universal love. This realisation also transforms ethical behaviour. Seeing the divine in all beings leads to compassion, justice, and non-violence. The person who attains this awareness acts not out of self-interest but from understanding and empathy. Thus, personal liberation becomes the foundation for social harmony. Guru's teaching unites the inner and outer dimensions of existence: an uplifted mind free from ego contributes to a just and peaceful society. In Daivadaśakam, spiritual growth as liberation is therefore both personal and universal, leading to unity, equality, and harmony among all beings.

### 1.2.4 The Dynamics of Spiritual Upliftment

The ten verses of Daivadaśakam outline a complete psychology of spiritual growth. The movement can be summarised in four broad stages:

This progression corresponds to the classical Vedāntic path of *śraddhā* (faith), *dhyāna* (meditation), *jñāna* (knowledge), and *ānanda* (bliss). Prayer is thus both the path and the culmination of spiritual life. For Guru, every human being has the potential for this ascent. Spiritual upliftment is not limited to monks or scholars; it is the natural flowering of human consciousness. Prayer serves as the catalyst that awakens this latent divinity.

One of the unique features of Daivadaśakam is the harmony it establishes between devotion (*bhakti*) and knowledge (*jñāna*). The early verses express emotional devotion, while the later ones reveal philosophical insight. Guru does not separate the two but sees them as complementary. Devotion purifies the heart; knowledge clarifies the mind. Together they lead to realisation. Prayer, therefore, is not an escape from thinking but an integration of emotion and intellect. It trains the individual to feel deeply and think clearly. This synthesis marks the spiritual modernity of Sree Narayana Guru. He interprets ancient wisdom in a language accessible to all, transforming prayer from sectarian worship into universal philosophy. His approach anticipates the inclusive spirituality of thinkers like Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, and Swami Vivekananda, who also viewed religion as the perfection of humanity.

Daivadaśakam is both a hymn and a philosophical treatise. It maps the soul's

| Stage       | Nature of Prayer                | Spiritual Function                 |
|-------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Dependence  | Cry for protection              | Awakening of faith and humility    |
| Reflection  | Turning inward                  | Discovery of the inner self        |
| Knowledge   | Understanding creation and māyā | Dissolution of ignorance           |
| Realisation | Union with the divine           | Attainment of bliss and compassion |

journey from ignorance to enlightenment. Prayer begins as dependence, deepens into understanding, and culminates in unity. This progression defines spiritual upliftment - the gradual awakening of the human spirit to its divine nature. Sree Narayana Guru transforms the act of prayer into a universal method of self-realisation. It transcends religion while

fulfilling its highest aim - the realisation of truth, knowledge, and bliss. For students of philosophy, Daivadaśakam stands as a bridge between devotional literature and metaphysical inquiry, demonstrating that the language of the heart and the reasoning of the mind can unite in the search for ultimate reality.

## Recap

- ◆ Prayer is an expression of the human search for peace and meaning.
- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru sees prayer as a process of inner growth.
- ◆ Daivadaśakam describes the journey from dependence to realisation.
- ◆ Prayer begins as a cry for protection and guidance.
- ◆ The first stage of prayer awakens faith and humility.
- ◆ Dependence is not weakness but the beginning of awareness.
- ◆ Reflection marks the turning of the mind inward.
- ◆ The devotee begins to recognise the divine within the self.
- ◆ Prayer becomes meditation when the mind becomes still.
- ◆ Knowledge arises when ignorance and illusion (*māyā*) are removed.
- ◆ Self-enquiry helps the devotee discover the unchanging Self (*Ātman*).
- ◆ Realisation brings awareness of unity with the divine.
- ◆ The inner journey leads to peace and compassion.
- ◆ Prayer transforms emotion into understanding.
- ◆ Divine grace and human effort work together in spiritual growth.
- ◆ Effort purifies the mind, and grace gives strength and direction.
- ◆ Serving others is seen as service to God.
- ◆ Awareness of the divine in all beings leads to compassion.
- ◆ Liberation means realising the divine presence in everyday life.
- ◆ The liberated person lives without fear and ignorance.
- ◆ Prayer becomes a universal path to self-realisation.



## Objective Questions

1. Who is the author of Daivadaśakam?
2. What is the main theme of Daivadaśakam?
3. In the beginning, what does prayer express according to Guru?
4. What does the first verse of Daivadaśakam symbolise?
5. What does the ocean in Daivadaśakam represent?
6. Who is described as the “Captain” in the opening verse?
7. What is the focus of the introspective stage of prayer?
8. What does the mind withdraw from in meditation?
9. What is the spiritual function of reflection in prayer?
10. What does knowledge in prayer lead to?
11. What is the role of divine grace in spiritual growth?
12. What two forces work together in spiritual progress?
13. What is the final goal of prayer according to Sree Narayana Guru?
14. What is the meaning of liberation or moksha in Daivadaśakam?
15. How does prayer transform daily life?
16. What does true devotion express itself through?

## Answers

1. Sree Narayana Guru
2. The spiritual journey of prayer leading to unity with the divine.
3. A cry for divine protection and help.
4. The first stage of prayer, showing human dependence on the divine.
5. The world of uncertainty or *samsara*.

6. God, who guides the devotee through life's difficulties.
7. Awareness of the divine presence within oneself.
8. The objects of sense perception.
9. Discovery of the inner self.
10. Dissolution of ignorance.
11. It supports and strengthens human effort.
12. Divine grace and human effort.
13. Liberation or *moksha*.
14. Realising the divine presence in all aspects of life.
15. It turns all actions into forms of worship.
16. Moral action and service to others.

## Assignments

1. Explain how Sree Narayana Guru understands prayer as a form of spiritual growth.
2. Describe the stages of prayer as outlined in *Daivadaśakam*.
3. Examine the relationship between divine grace and human effort in spiritual upliftment.
4. What does Sree Narayana Guru mean by liberation (*moksha*) in the context of prayer?
5. Analyse how prayer in *Daivadaśakam* unites devotion (*bhakti*) and knowledge (*jñāna*).
6. Reflect on the idea that “service to humanity is service to God” in the light of *Daivadaśakam*.
7. Explain how the journey of prayer represents the movement from dependence to realisation.



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1. Narayana Prasad, Muni (2006), *Narayana Guru, Complete Works*. New Delhi: National Book Trust.
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# 3

## UNIT

# Causational Theory as Reflected in Daivadaśakam

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the idea of cause and effect as reflected in *Daivadaśakam*
- ◆ describe the relation between the Divine and creation according to Sree Narayana Guru
- ◆ identify the function of *Māyā* in the process of manifestation
- ◆ analyse how knowledge of causation leads to self-understanding
- ◆ discuss the goal of understanding causality in spiritual life
- ◆ relate the concept of divine causation to ethical and social awareness

## Prerequisite

Human beings have always wondered how and why things come into being. From the rising of the sun to the growth of a seed, from the birth of a child to the formation of a thought, every event raises a question about its origin and purpose. Ancient thinkers in different parts of the world tried to find the connection between what is seen and what causes it to appear. Some believed that the universe is a result of chance, while others saw a guiding order that connects all things. This search to know the relation between cause and effect is not only an intellectual exercise but also a deep human concern. It leads us to ask whether life is shaped by accident, necessity, or an underlying unity that gives meaning to all changes. Every culture and tradition has given its own answer to this question, linking it to ideas about creation, existence, and the divine. Understanding causation helps us see how everything in the world is interrelated and how our own lives are part of a greater whole.



In Indian thought, the question of cause and effect is not limited to the physical world. It extends to the moral, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of life. The ancient sages saw a deep connection between knowing the cause of the world and understanding the cause of one's own actions and thoughts. When we know why something happens, we also begin to know our place within it. The reflection on causation invites us to look beyond surface appearances and to discover the hidden order that sustains all forms of existence.

## Keywords

Causation, *Māyā*, Self (*Ātman*), Unity, Dependence, Awareness, Transformation, Introspection

## Discussion

### 1.3.1 Introduction

Causation is a central problem in Indian and Western philosophy alike. It deals with the origin, connection, and transformation of phenomena. For Sree Narayana Guru, causation is not a mechanical relation between two separate realities but an expression of unity through transformation. In *Daivadaśakam*, the mystery of cause and effect is not treated as a speculative theory but as a spiritual insight that emerges through prayer. When Guru writes, “You are the act of creation, the creator, and the manifold creatures,” he presents a holistic vision in which the cause and the caused are inseparable. This verse encapsulates a worldview where the divine is both the source and the substance of existence. God, world, and individual are different expressions of one undivided reality. Guru's approach unites the language of devotion with the precision of philosophy, offering an understanding of creation that harmonises faith and reason.

### 1.3.2 Causation in Indian Thought

Before analysing Guru's view, it is useful to recall the main schools of causational theory in Indian philosophy:

- ◆ Sāṅkhya: Satkāryavāda - the effect pre-exists in its cause. The world evolves from prakṛti when the equilibrium of its constituents is disturbed.
- ◆ Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika: Asatkāryavāda - the effect is new; it does not pre-exist in the cause. Cause and effect are distinct.
- ◆ Advaita Vedānta: Vivartavāda - the world is an apparent transformation (vivarta) of Brahman, like the illusion of a snake in a rope.
- ◆ Viśiṣṭādvaita: Parināmavāda (qualified) - the world is a real transformation of God's body while God remains the unchanging inner controller.

Guru is conversant with these classical models but transcends them. He does not defend any scholastic category; instead, he presents causation as a living relationship between the Absolute and the manifest world. In *Daivadaśakam*, this relation is conveyed through images like the ocean and its waves, the wind that stirs movement, the depth that symbolises the eternal. These metaphors express the inseparability of cause and effect without resorting to technical terms.

### 1.3.3 The Divine as Cause and Effect

In the fifth verse, Guru states: “You are the act of creation, the creator, and the manifold creatures. Oh God, are You not the very stuff of which everything is created?”. This declaration contains the heart of Guru’s causal theory. Creation, creator, and creation’s products are not three separate entities. They are three moments of one continuous reality. The process of creation is itself divine; the creator does not stand outside the creation, nor is the world a product external to the divine essence. Guru’s statement “You are the very stuff of which everything is created” identifies God not only as efficient cause but also as material cause (upādāna kāraṇa). Everything originates in, subsists by, and returns to the same substance. In this way, Guru’s thought parallels Advaita’s affirmation that Brahman is both material and efficient cause of the universe, yet he gives the idea an experiential interpretation accessible through devotion rather than abstract reasoning.

The cause is therefore self-manifesting. Creation is not an event that happened once in time but a perpetual revelation of the divine energy. Each moment of perception, every act of thought, is part of the continuous flow of causation. Prayer in Daivadaśakam recognises this eternal creativity and situates the human being within it.

### 1.3.4 From Creation to Creativity

Guru does not treat creation as a historical act beginning at a fixed point. Instead, he interprets it as creativity - the dynamic self-expression of the Absolute. The same power that produces the galaxies also gives rise to thoughts, emotions, and moral ideals in human life. Creation is both cosmic and psychological. By identifying God as “the act of creation,” Guru highlights this

dynamic aspect. The act itself is divine; hence, the divine is perpetually active, though changeless in essence. The paradox of an unchanging reality that creates without losing its unity is resolved when creation is seen as a manifestation rather than an addition. The world is the visible face of the invisible. This insight redefines causation as manifestation, not as mechanical production. Fire does not produce heat as something separate; heat is its expression. Likewise, the universe is the expression of Brahman’s own being. Understanding this shifts prayer from seeking favours to contemplating the creative process that unfolds through every form of existence.

### 1.3.5 The Role of Māyā in Causation

Immediately after describing the divine as the source of creation, Guru introduces māyā: “You are māyā, the projector of māyā, and the one who takes delight in māyā.” Here, māyā functions as the principle that enables manifestation. It is not a substance but a power of projection that allows the infinite to appear as finite. By calling God both the projector and the enjoyer of māyā, Guru refuses to isolate illusion from reality. Illusion itself is a mode of the divine.

In classical Advaita, māyā is often viewed negatively as ignorance. Guru, however, interprets it neutrally as the creative instrument of expression. Without māyā, manifestation would not be possible; with it, multiplicity arises without affecting the unity of the cause. The illusion of separation is a pedagogical necessity. It enables the individual to embark on the journey back to awareness. In this way, māyā bridges the unmanifest and the manifest. It transforms pure potentiality into perceptible diversity. Prayer, therefore, is an acknowledgment of the divine play (līlā) through which the One reveals itself in many forms. Understanding māyā correctly is the key to spiritual maturity:



it releases one from bondage to appearances while affirming the sanctity of the world.

In the fourth verse, Guru offers the image of the sea, the wave, the wind, and the depth. The sea represents the totality of existence; the wave symbolises individual life; the wind denotes māyā or the dynamic energy that stirs manifestation; and the depth stands for the unfathomable Absolute. This image serves as a philosophical model of causation. The wave does not exist apart from the sea; it's coming and going are merely modes of the ocean's motion. The wind acts as the efficient cause that produces variations on the surface, but the substance remains water throughout. In the same way, God, the world, and the individual are not distinct substances but different expressions of one essence.

This organic model contrasts with mechanistic theories that separate cause and effect. In Guru's vision, cause and effect coexist as aspects of a living continuum. The effect is the cause in motion, and the cause is the effect at rest. Every phenomenon contains the presence of its origin. Thus, causation is not linear but circular and self-referential: the beginning and the end meet in the same reality.

### 1.3.6 Philosophical Implications of Guru's Causation

Guru's causal insight has several philosophical implications:

1. **Non-Dual Unity:** There is no second principle outside the divine. The distinction between creator and creation is functional, not ontological.
2. **Self-Causation:** The Absolute is its own cause. Nothing external triggers its manifestation; it unfolds by its inherent necessity.

3. **Immanence:** Divinity pervades the universe. Every entity is a locus of the divine presence.

4. **Continuous Creation:** Creation is an unending process; each moment renews the manifestation.

5. **Teleological Coherence:** The universe is purposive. Every effect contributes to the unfolding of the divine order.

Through these principles, Guru offers a monistic causal realism: the world is real as an expression of the real, not an illusion detached from truth. This position allows him to integrate scientific reasoning with spiritual insight, making his philosophy compatible with modern worldviews.

### 1.3.7 The Goal of Understanding Causality

The ultimate purpose of understanding causation, according to Sree Narayana Guru, is liberation from ignorance. When a person realises that all causes and effects originate from and return to the same divine source, attachment and fear naturally fade. The devotee no longer sees the world as separate or threatening but as an expression of the divine order. This awareness transforms prayer into wisdom. The devotee begins to live in harmony with the rhythm of existence, accepting joy and sorrow alike as expressions of the same truth. Such understanding does not lead to passivity but to inner peace and moral strength. Life becomes meaningful when one perceives divine unity in all actions and events. Liberation in this sense is not withdrawal from the world but freedom from the illusion of separation.

For Guru, liberation (moksha) is the natural result of understanding the true nature of causation. When the devotee sees that everything arises from the divine and returns to it, the cycle of attachment and

suffering is broken. The individual attains inner peace, free from confusion about what is real and unreal. Guru presents liberation as realisation of unity, not escape from life. The world continues to exist, but the devotee now perceives it as divine manifestation. Every act becomes worship, and every experience

becomes sacred. This understanding fulfils the purpose of prayer in Daivadaśakam: to move from dependence to freedom, from ignorance to knowledge. Liberation through causation means seeing the divine not as separate from the world but as its living essence.

## Recap

- ◆ The idea of causation explains how things come into being.
- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru connects causation with the Divine.
- ◆ The Divine is both the cause and the effect of creation.
- ◆ Everything that exists arises from the same source.
- ◆ The world is a manifestation of the Divine through *Māyā*.
- ◆ *Māyā* is the power that makes the One appear as many.
- ◆ Understanding *Māyā* helps in removing ignorance.
- ◆ The process of creation is both physical and spiritual.
- ◆ Knowledge of causation begins with self-reflection.
- ◆ The Self is the unchanging reality behind all change.
- ◆ The Divine is immanent in all forms of life.
- ◆ When perception is purified, the truth of unity is seen.
- ◆ Ignorance causes the mind to see diversity as separation.
- ◆ True knowledge removes the idea of duality.
- ◆ Guru sees creation as a continuous expression of the Divine.
- ◆ Prayer leads to awareness of the Divine as the ultimate cause.
- ◆ Causation is not mechanical but conscious and purposeful.
- ◆ Understanding causation leads to moral responsibility.
- ◆ Compassion arises from the awareness of interconnectedness.



- ◆ Service to others reflects awareness of the Divine cause.
- ◆ The goal of understanding causality is spiritual liberation.
- ◆ Knowledge of the cause transforms life into awareness.
- ◆ Guru’s vision of causation unites philosophy, faith, and ethics.

## Objective Questions

1. What does the term “causation” mean?
2. What is the main focus of the causal theory in Daivadaśakam?
3. How does Guru describe the Divine in relation to creation?
4. What is Māyā according to Sree Narayana Guru?
5. How does Māyā function in the process of creation?
6. What is the ultimate cause of all things?
7. How is the Divine present in creation?
8. What leads to the removal of ignorance?
9. What is the goal of understanding causality?
10. What is meant by liberation (mokṣa)?
11. How does the Guru link causation with compassion?
12. What is meant by “unity in diversity”?
13. How is causation connected to service to others?
14. What does the world represent in Daivadaśakam?
15. What is the highest outcome of knowing the Divine cause?

## Answers

1. The relation between cause and effect
2. The relation between the Divine and creation
3. The Divine is both cause and effect
4. The power that projects the world of appearance
5. It makes the One appear as many
6. The Divine
7. As the inner essence of all things
8. Knowledge (*Jñāna*)
9. Liberation from ignorance
10. Freedom from ignorance and bondage
11. By seeing the Divine in all beings
12. One Divine reality appearing as many forms
13. By recognising the Divine in all actions
14. The manifestation of the Divine
15. Attainment of liberation and compassion

## Assignments

1. Explain the concept of causation in Daivadaśakam. Discuss how Sree Narayana Guru describes the Divine as both cause and effect.
2. Describe the role of *Māyā* in the process of manifestation.
3. Explain how prayer becomes meditation in the understanding of Guru.
4. Analyse the relation between knowledge and liberation in Guru's teaching. Reflect on how awareness of causation transforms human conduct.
5. Examine the unity of philosophy, faith, and ethics in *Daivadaśakam*.
6. Explain how service to humanity reflects understanding of divine causation.



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**BLOCK**

# Advaitic Thought as Reflected in Daivadaśakam



# 1

## UNIT

# Philosophic Vision in Daivadaśakam

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the philosophical foundations underlying Daivadaśakam in the light of Advaita Vedānta
- ◆ describe how Sree Narayana Guru integrates devotional expression with metaphysical reasoning
- ◆ analyse how Guru's thought reconciles religious pluralism with philosophical monism
- ◆ reflect on the ethical and existential relevance of Guru's Advaitic vision for modern humanity

## Prerequisite

Human beings have long explored questions about the nature of existence, the meaning of life, and the relationship between the individual and the larger reality. Across cultures, thinkers and spiritual teachers have expressed these inquiries through concise reflections, prayerful verses, and contemplative writings that guide us toward deeper understanding. Such compositions often serve as accessible entry points into philosophical inquiry, not by presenting detailed arguments, but by encouraging attention, reflection, and openness to broader perspectives. They demonstrate that philosophy is not separate from life; rather, it arises from the human need to seek clarity, coherence, and purpose. Approaching these writings with a disciplined and attentive mindset prepares the ground for understanding complex themes and helps cultivate a mature engagement with philosophical questions.

## Keywords

Non-duality, Sat-Chit-Ānanda, Māyā, Phenomenology of consciousness, Universal humanism, Immanence, Transcendence, Religious pluralism

## Discussion

### 2.1.1 The Philosophic Foundation of Daivadaśakam

Daivadaśakam is not merely a devotional hymn; it is a compact philosophical treatise that expresses Sree Narayana Guru's entire worldview in ten verses. Beneath its poetic rhythm lies a metaphysical structure derived from Advaita Vedānta yet reinterpreted in the light of modern humanism. Advaita Vedānta, as formulated by Śaṅkara, emphasises the non-dual nature of reality: Brahman is the only truth, the world is a dependent appearance, and the individual self (jīva) is not different from Brahman. Guru shares this vision but reshapes it into a language accessible to all people, believers and non-believers alike. In Daivadaśakam, the philosophical vision is expressed not through technical logic but through the experiential language of prayer, metaphor, and reflection. Guru's genius lies in combining the spirit of philosophy with the simplicity of devotion. The Daivadaśakam begins with a personal cry and culminates in the realisation of the universal Self. Each verse, while devotional in tone, unfolds a layer of philosophical insight revealing the path from duality to non-duality, from ignorance to knowledge, and from dependence to liberation.

Although Daivadaśakam primarily reflects the philosophical core of Advaita Vedānta, one can also discern elements of Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita within it. In the opening verse, the journey of the jīvātman towards the paramātman is beautifully portrayed

through the metaphor of a sea voyage, which reflects a clear Dvaitic perspective. Expressions such as “the glorious feet” and “Your vast ocean of greatness” point towards the principles of Viśiṣṭādvaita, where the individual soul is understood in relation to a qualified Absolute. Nevertheless, despite the presence of these philosophical strands, the central and unifying doctrine of Daivadaśakam remains firmly rooted in Advaita Vedānta.

Daivadaśakam, therefore, becomes more than a lyrical expression of devotion; it becomes the doorway through which Guru leads the devotee from personal longing to metaphysical clarity. As the verses progress, the reader is gently guided from an emotional recognition of dependence to an intellectual and spiritual recognition of unity. It is at this point that the deeper implications of Guru's Advaitic reinterpretation begin to unfold. The apparent diversity of the world, the multiplicity of religions, and the plurality of human experiences all originate from and return to the same source. This idea forms the cornerstone of Advaitic thought and is central to Daivadaśakam. However, Guru does not present this oneness as a mere metaphysical abstraction. He brings it into the sphere of lived experience. The One is not only transcendent but also immanent - present in every being, every form, and every act of life. This double aspect of transcendence and immanence defines the philosophical depth of his prayer. For example, when Guru says, “You are the act of creation, the creator, and the manifold



creatures,” he expresses the Advaitic idea that the Absolute is the substance, agent, and product of all manifestation. There is no second reality outside it. The experience of oneness is thus not attained by rejecting the world but by recognising the divine presence within it. Guru’s Advaitic vision, therefore, is integrative rather than negational. It does not deny the world but interprets it as the expression of the same consciousness that is realised in the Self.

### 2.1.2 The Relation between God, World, and Self

In the seventh verse of Daivadaśakam, Guru describes God as “Truth, Knowledge, and Bliss” - a restatement of the Upaniṣadic formula Sat-Chit-Ānanda. This triad is the philosophical key to his entire vision.

- ◆ **Truth (*Sat*)** signifies existence that is eternal and self-sufficient. Everything that exists derives its being from this fundamental reality.
- ◆ **Knowledge (*Chit*)** denotes the consciousness that illumines all experiences.
- ◆ **Bliss (*Ānanda*)** represents the intrinsic value or perfection that accompanies realisation.

Sat-Chit-Ānanda, in the strict sense, is neither an attribute nor a synonym of Brahman. Brahman cannot be defined through words; to define Brahman is to impose a limitation upon it. Why, then, do the Upaniṣads and Guru employ the expression Sat-Chit-Ānanda? The term Sat (Being or Existence) is used to prevent the misunderstanding that the Absolute Reality is non-existent. The term Chit (Consciousness) is employed to indicate that Reality is not inert or insentient. The term Ānanda (Bliss) is used to communicate that, in the realization of Brahman, there is not even the slightest trace of suffering.

By grounding the Absolute in the lived experience of Sat-Chit-Ānanda, Guru shifts the focus from abstract metaphysics to an intimate understanding of consciousness as the essence of all existence. The seventh verse thus becomes a bridge between the inner experience of the seeker and the larger ontological structure of reality. Once consciousness is recognised as both the source and substance of all thought, speech, and devotion, it becomes possible to reinterpret the relationships that traditionally define the spiritual universe.

It is in this light that the triadic relationship among God (Īśvara), world (jagat), and individual (jīva) assumes new meaning. Guru resolves this triad through the principle of non-dual interdependence. In Daivadaśakam, the ocean and wave metaphor illustrates this relationship. The wave (individual) is not separate from the ocean (God). Its rise and fall symbolise the processes of birth and death, creation and dissolution, yet its substance remains water throughout. The wind that moves the surface represents māyā - the dynamic power that gives form to formless reality. Guru’s philosophical insight lies in showing that the difference between God and individual is not of substance but of perspective. The wave, when conscious of itself as water, realises its identity with the ocean. Similarly, the individual, when freed from ignorance, realises oneness with the divine. This relational understanding makes Guru’s Advaita experiential rather than dogmatic. It explains why prayer is possible in a non-dual framework: devotion is not addressed to an external being but to the same reality perceived through the lens of individuality.

### 2.1.3 From Devotion to Realisation

In Daivadaśakam, the act of prayer gradually transforms into the realisation of identity with the divine. The worshipper

begins with the feeling of separation “Protect us, O God” and ends with the joy of union “Let us dwell in happiness supreme.” This transition represents the experiential realisation of Advaita. Philosophically, this transformation corresponds to the shift from dvaita (duality) to advaita (non-duality). The emotional act of prayer (bhakti) becomes the intellectual realisation of knowledge (jñāna). Guru shows that devotion and knowledge are not two paths but two phases of the same ascent. This synthesis is the hallmark of his philosophic vision. He neither dismisses devotion as ignorance nor isolates knowledge as a privilege of intellectuals. Instead, he presents spiritual evolution as a continuum where emotion, reason, and realisation converge in unity.

The progression of Daivadaśakam reflects a pedagogical structure similar to the traditional Advaitic method of śravaṇa (hearing), manana (reflection), and nididhyāsana (meditation).

- ◆ In the early verses, the devotee hears the truth through prayerful surrender.
- ◆ In the middle verses, reflection arises on the nature of creation, māyā, and the divine.
- ◆ In the final verses, meditation culminates in direct realisation of oneness.

This graded movement shows that Guru’s hymn can serve as a textbook of contemplative philosophy. The individual progresses from faith to understanding, from understanding to insight, and from insight to realisation. Self-realisation, in Guru’s vision, is not the annihilation of individuality but the recognition that the individual is a functional expression of the universal Self (Ātman). The distinction between self and other dissolves in the awareness that all are manifestations of one consciousness.

One of the distinguishing features of Guru’s philosophic vision is the integration of reason and faith. He neither rejects rational inquiry nor diminishes the power of devotion. His approach harmonises critical analysis with spiritual intuition. Guru’s prayerful expressions are rooted in metaphysical insight, and his philosophical conclusions are supported by experiential faith. This synthesis mirrors the Upaniṣadic spirit, where reasoning (vicāra) and contemplation (dhyāna) coexist. For instance, when Guru describes God as both māyā and the liberator from māyā, he combines logical paradox with intuitive realisation. Rationally, this appears contradictory; spiritually, it expresses the completeness of reality, which transcends all opposites. Such balance between logic and love characterises the modern relevance of his philosophy.

### 2.1.4 The Universal Dimension of Guru’s Philosophy

Guru’s Advaitic vision extends beyond the boundaries. His prayer employs universal language, making it meaningful to followers of all religions. The terms “God,” “Lord,” and “Ocean of Kindliness” evoke experiences common to all spiritual traditions. This universality reflects his conviction that truth is one though its expressions are many. By presenting non-dualism in inclusive terms, Guru anticipates the philosophy of religious pluralism. His philosophy is not sectarian but humanistic, embracing all forms of faith as valid paths toward realisation. In the modern context, this universality supports the idea of spiritual democracy - each individual has direct access to the divine without intermediaries. The Daivadaśakam thus becomes a global prayer of humanity grounded in the philosophical vision of oneness.



## Recap

- ◆ Daivadaśakam blends devotion with philosophy.
- ◆ Guru expresses Advaita in simple, accessible language.
- ◆ The hymn leads the seeker from duality to non-duality.
- ◆ Each verse unfolds a layer of philosophical insight.
- ◆ The poem begins with dependence and ends in unity.
- ◆ Guru interprets the world as a manifestation of consciousness.
- ◆ God is described as Sat-Chit-Ānanda.
- ◆ Sat means eternal existence.
- ◆ Chit refers to self-luminous consciousness.
- ◆ Ānanda signifies inherent bliss.
- ◆ These qualities are the essence of the Absolute.
- ◆ Language and thought arise within the same consciousness.
- ◆ God, world, and self are non-dually related.
- ◆ The ocean-wave metaphor explains their unity.
- ◆ Devotion gradually becomes knowledge.
- ◆ Prayer transforms into realisation.
- ◆ The hymn reflects śravaṇa, manana, and nididhyāsana.
- ◆ Guru unites reason and faith in his teachings.
- ◆ Logical insight and intuitive experience complement each other.
- ◆ Reality transcends all opposites.
- ◆ Guru's philosophy is universal and inclusive.
- ◆ All religions express one underlying truth.
- ◆ Daivadaśakam promotes spiritual democracy and human unity.

## Objective Questions

1. What philosophical tradition provides the foundation for Daivadaśakam?
2. What does the triad Sat-Chit-Ānanda signify in Guru's philosophy?
3. How does Guru relate God, world, and individual in Daivadaśakam?
4. Which metaphor does Guru use to explain the relationship between jīva and Īśvara?
5. How is māyā interpreted in the sixth verse of Daivadaśakam?
6. How does Guru redefine the concept of māyā compared to classical Advaita?
7. What form of Advaita is reflected in Guru's affirmation of the world's reality?
8. What does Guru mean by "spiritual democracy"?

## Answers

1. Advaita Vedānta
2. Absolute Reality
3. Non-dual unity
4. Ocean-wave
5. Creative power
6. Creative manifestation
7. Realistic Advaita
8. Direct access



## Assignments

1. Explain how Sree Narayana Guru reinterprets Advaita Vedānta in Daivadaśakam. Discuss the shift from classical metaphysics to Guru's experiential and humanistic approach.
2. Critically evaluate Guru's use of devotional language to communicate philosophical ideas. How does the blend of prayer, metaphor, and reflection enhance the understanding of non-duality?
3. Discuss the relationship between God, world, and self as explained through the ocean-wave metaphor in Daivadaśakam. Reflect on how this metaphor clarifies the non-dual nature of reality.
4. Describe the transformation from devotion to realisation depicted in Daivadaśakam. How does Guru show that bhakti (devotion) and jñāna (knowledge) are interconnected stages of spiritual growth?
5. Examine the universal and inclusive nature of Guru's Advaitic vision. How does Daivadaśakam promote the idea of spiritual democracy and religious pluralism?

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SGOU





## 2 UNIT

# Māyā or Saṃsāra in Daivadaśakam

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the concept of *Māyā* as presented in *Daivadasakam* and its philosophical background in Indian thought
- ◆ distinguish Guru's unique interpretation of *Māyā* from the classical Advaitic notion of illusion
- ◆ analyse how *Māyā* functions as a link between the Absolute and the world of experience
- ◆ discuss the relationship between *Māyā*, *Saṃsāra*, and liberation in Guru's worldview
- ◆ reflect on the practical significance of overcoming *Saṃsāra* through self-knowledge and awareness

## Prerequisite

Human experience often unfolds as a continuous search for clarity in the midst of changing circumstances. Each day presents new situations, expectations, and choices that shape how we understand ourselves and the world around us. As individuals grow, they begin to notice that many of the things they once believed to be permanent gradually reveal their temporary nature. Familiar events pass, relationships evolve, and even personal opinions shift with time. These changes invite a deeper reflection on what truly lasts and what simply appears to last. When we observe these patterns in our own lives, we may start questioning whether the world we see is as stable as it appears. This question does not arise from doubt alone; it emerges from the natural curiosity to understand why life unfolds as it does and what guides its movement. Across cultures and generations, thinkers, poets, and spiritual seekers have attempted

to explore these questions. Their reflections form a body of insights that help us to recognise that the world is not only a place of activity but also a space for thoughtful inquiry. When one begins to observe life with such an attitude, ordinary experiences gain a new depth.

## Keywords

Samsāra, Avidyā, Līlā, Nāma-rūpa, Upādhi, Adhyāsa, Brahman, Ātman, Jīva, Samyag-jñāna, Jīvanmukti

## Discussion

### 2.2.1 Introduction

The term “Māyā” is derived from the expression “yā mā sā māyā”, which means “that which is not as it appears.” Contrary to a common misunderstanding, māyā does not signify absolute non-existence. Rather, it indicates “other-than-what-it-appears-to-be.” Something indeed exists, but it is not experienced in the manner in which it truly is. The doctrine of māyā does not deny the existence of the universe; instead, it asserts that the universe does not exist in the form in which it is perceived. Just as a snake is erroneously perceived in a rope where no snake actually exists, māyā is the power of Brahman that gives rise to the appearance of a universe that is not present in Brahman—that is, in pure Consciousness.

Māyā, the wielder of māyā (māyāvin), the playful manifestation of māyā (māyāvinodan), the remover of māyā who grants sāyujya (identity with the Absolute), and the very substratum upon which māyā depends - all refer to one and the same Brahman. This is precisely what Sree Narayana Guru indicates in the sixth verse of the Daivadaśakam. Here, no distinction exists between Brahman and Brahma-śakti. The philosophical standpoint articulated is unequivocally Advaita, affirming non-duality as the fundamental principle. For Guru, Māyā and Samsāra

are not to be rejected or feared but to be understood as stages in the unfolding of consciousness. The devotee, by recognising the divine presence within all appearances, transcends bondage and realises unity. In Daivadaśakam, māyā becomes a creative principle that expresses the divine play (līlā). Similarly, Samsāra is seen not as a punishment but as an educational process through which the soul evolves toward realisation.

### 2.2.2 Background of Māyā and Samsāra

The origin of the concept of Māyā can be traced to the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. In the Rigveda, Māyā originally meant “supernatural power” or “creative skill.” The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad identifies it as the divine power through which the Lord projects the universe. In Advaita Vedānta, Māyā takes on a more philosophical meaning. It is the power of illusion that veils the true nature of Brahman and presents multiplicity where only unity exists. According to Śaṅkara, it is beginningless, indescribable, and dependent on Brahman for its existence. Samsāra, in turn, represents the empirical world where beings are bound by ignorance and karma. The cycle of birth and death continues until one attains knowledge of the Self. Liberation (mokṣa) is freedom from Samsāra, achieved



by realising that the individual self (Ātman) is identical with Brahman.

Guru accepts this classical foundation but redefines its implications. In Daivadaśakam, he refuses to view the world as false or the human condition as inherently tragic. Instead, he sees Māyā as divine expression and Saṁsāra as a manifestation of the same truth seen through limited perception.

### 2.2.3 Guru's Redefinition of Māyā

In the sixth verse of Daivadaśakam, Guru declares: "You are Māyā, the projector of Māyā, and the one who takes delight in Māyā." This single statement summarises his entire reinterpretation. Guru presents Māyā as a threefold reality:

1. **The Divine as Māyā:** The Absolute itself assumes the form of appearance. The power of creation is not external to God but intrinsic to the divine essence.
2. **The Projector of Māyā:** The divine consciousness is also the agent that manifests this power. Creation is intentional, not accidental.
3. **The Enjoyer of Māyā:** The same divine consciousness delights in its self-expression. The universe is thus not a prison but a celebration of being.

By merging these three aspects, Guru portrays Māyā as the medium of manifestation rather than the cause of bondage. The illusion arises only when individuals mistake appearance for ultimate reality. When one sees the divine behind all forms, Māyā becomes transparent and ceases to bind.

#### 2.2.3.1 Māyā as Creative Expression

Guru's concept of Māyā aligns with the Upaniṣadic idea that the world is the divine's

self-expression. Creation, in his view, is not a deviation from truth but its visible face. The multiplicity of names and forms (nāma-rūpa) is the way the One reveals itself. In this sense, Māyā is like a mirror reflecting the light of Brahman. The reflection is real as an appearance but dependent on the source for its existence. The problem arises when consciousness identifies with the reflection and forgets the original light. This interpretation transforms the traditional pessimistic view of Māyā into a positive spiritual function. It becomes the dynamic principle that enables experience, growth, and realisation. Without Māyā, there would be no world, no knowledge, and no prayer. Thus, Guru's philosophy of Māyā celebrates the world as a divine manifestation, encouraging engagement rather than withdrawal. For him, transcendence arises not by rejecting the world but by recognising its divine essence.

#### 2.2.3.2 The Relationship between Māyā and Consciousness

Guru's thought emphasises that Māyā has no existence apart from consciousness. It is a mode of awareness in which the infinite appears as finite. The transformation is cognitive, not ontological. When consciousness is limited by ignorance, it perceives separation; when illumined, it perceives unity. In this view, Māyā operates as the limiting condition (upādhi) of consciousness. It causes the infinite to be experienced as individual, time-bound, and subject to change. Yet the substratum the pure consciousness remains untouched.

Guru's insight parallels the Advaitic doctrine of adhyāsa or superimposition. However, while Śaṅkara treats adhyāsa primarily as error, Guru interprets it as a necessary stage in realisation. Through interaction with the phenomenal world, the individual gains the knowledge required to transcend it. Therefore, Māyā functions

not as ignorance to be destroyed but as the means through which consciousness becomes self-aware. By engaging the world with right understanding, one moves from fragmentation to wholeness.

### 2.2.4 Saṁsāra: The World of Experience

In Daivadaśakam, the term Saṁsāra is not explicitly used, but the imagery of the ocean and the waves capture its meaning. The ocean symbolises the divine, and the waves represent the cycles of birth and death. Human life, tossed by the winds of desire and ignorance, appears to rise and fall endlessly. Guru's compassionate insight lies in transforming this image of suffering into one of learning. Saṁsāra becomes the field of spiritual evolution. Each wave, though temporary, is an opportunity for realisation.

This approach resonates with the Bhagavad Gītā, which teaches that the world is a place of action and self-knowledge, not of despair. Guru integrates this practical wisdom with Advaitic metaphysics: the same consciousness that appears as Saṁsāra is also the consciousness that realises liberation. The difference is in awareness, not in essence. According to Guru, bondage arises from ignorance of the true Self and attachment to the non-Self. When consciousness identifies with the body, mind, or possessions, it becomes bound to the cycle of cause and effect.

Ignorance (avidyā) leads to desire (kāma), and desire gives rise to action (karma). Actions produce results that generate further desires, continuing the cycle of Saṁsāra. Guru's vision transforms this psychological process into an ethical one: liberation requires awareness and detachment, not ritual or dogma. The prayer of Daivadaśakam functions as a method of purification. Each verse moves the devotee closer to self-awareness. When the devotee realises that

the divine is the source of all experiences, ignorance loses its power, and the cycle of Saṁsāra naturally dissolves.

### 2.2.5 Overcoming Māyā and Saṁsāra

Guru's method of transcendence is not renunciation but right understanding (samyag-jñāna). To overcome Māyā and Saṁsāra, one must see them for what they are - manifestations of the same divine consciousness. In the concluding verses of Daivadaśakam, the devotee prays to dwell "in happiness supreme." This state is not reached by escaping the world but by seeing through it. The veil of Māyā becomes transparent when the mind is pure and steady. This approach of Guru aligns with the idea of jīvanmukti - liberation while living. The realised person remains in the world but is no longer bound by its opposites. Joy and sorrow, gain and loss, appear as passing waves on the ocean of consciousness. This practical Advaita provides a spiritual path suited for modern seekers who live in society yet aspire for realisation.

### 2.2.6 Ethical and Psychological Implications of Understanding Māyā

Guru's view of Māyā carries significant ethical implications. When one realises that all beings are expressions of the same divine reality, discrimination and violence lose justification. Awareness of unity fosters compassion, equality, and service. In this sense, transcending Māyā is not merely an intellectual act but a moral transformation. The individual who understands the play of Māyā no longer seeks selfish gain but works for collective well-being. Guru's social philosophy expressed in his message of "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity" flows naturally from this ethical realisation. Therefore, the philosophical understanding of Māyā becomes a foundation for social



ethics and human unity. Knowledge and compassion merge as two aspects of the same liberation.

Guru's ethical interpretation of Māyā naturally opens into a deeper psychological understanding of the same principle. If recognising the unity behind diversity transforms social behaviour, it is because this unity must first be realised within the mind. The compassion that arises from seeing all beings as one is inseparable from the inner clarity that sees through the mind's habitual projections. Thus, the ethical implications of transcending Māyā rest upon an equally important psychological process—one in which the devotee learns to observe and dissolve the illusions generated by desire, fear, and ego. In this way, Guru's philosophy moves effortlessly from the social to the internal: the same insight that promotes human equality also demands self-knowledge and mental discipline.

Seen from this psychological standpoint, the transition from Māyā to Mokṣa becomes not an escape from the world but a shift in perception. The mind that once fragmented reality into multiplicity now recognises the underlying unity it had overlooked. This inner transformation explains why Guru emphasises that liberation is not spatial movement but a qualitative awakening. The study of Māyā whether ethical, psychological, or metaphysical therefore converges on a single purpose: the cultivation of awareness. As ignorance dissolves, knowledge and compassion emerge as complementary expressions of the same realisation. Ultimately, Guru's teaching shows that to understand Māyā is to understand oneself, and to awaken from Māyā is to live with freedom, unity, and mindfulness within the same world.

## Recap

- ◆ Māyā makes the infinite appear finite.
- ◆ Saṃsāra is the cycle of birth and death.
- ◆ Guru views Māyā as creative expression.
- ◆ Saṃsāra becomes a field of learning.
- ◆ Classical Advaita sees Māyā as ignorance.
- ◆ Guru transforms Māyā into divine play.
- ◆ Māyā originates in Vedic thought.
- ◆ The Upaniṣads treat Māyā as divine power.
- ◆ Śāṅkara calls Māyā beginningless and indescribable.
- ◆ Guru rejects the view of the world as unreal.
- ◆ Māyā is a mode of consciousness.

- ◆ Illusion arises from misidentifying appearances.
- ◆ Saṃsāra continues through ignorance and desire.
- ◆ Karma keeps the cycle of experience active.
- ◆ Awareness dissolves bondage.
- ◆ Prayer in Daivadaśakam purifies the mind.
- ◆ Liberation comes from right understanding.
- ◆ Jīvanmukti means freedom while living.
- ◆ Realising unity fosters compassion.
- ◆ Understanding Māyā leads to ethical transformation.

## Objective Questions

1. What principle makes the infinite appear as finite?
2. Which text reinterprets Māyā as divine expression?
3. In which Vedic text does the term Māyā first appear?
4. Who describes Māyā as beginningless and indescribable?
5. What is the Advaitic doctrine of superimposition called?
6. What is the inner Self known as in Advaita?
7. Which concept functions as the limiting condition of consciousness?
8. What gives rise to karma in Saṃsāra?
9. Which verse of Daivadaśakam speaks of Māyā as delight?
10. Which state signifies liberation while living?
11. What symbolises Saṃsāra in Guru's ocean-wave imagery?
12. What dissolves the veil of Māyā?
13. Which quality arises from realising the unity of beings?
14. What term describes the divine self-expression of the universe?



## Answers

1. Māyā
2. Daivadaśakam
3. Rigveda
4. Śāṅkara
5. Adhyāsa
6. Ātman
7. Upādhi
8. Desire (Kāma)
9. Sixth verse
10. Jīvanmukti
11. Waves
12. Right understanding (Samyag-jñāna)
13. Compassion
14. Līlā

## Assignments

1. Discuss how Sree Narayana Guru's reinterpretation of Māyā transforms the traditional Advaitic understanding of illusion into a medium of manifestation.
2. Explain the relationship between Māyā and consciousness as presented in Daivadaśakam.
3. Analyse the metaphor of the ocean and waves in relation to Saṃsāra. How does this imagery help to understand the cycle of birth and death?
4. "Saṃsāra is an opportunity for learning rather than a punishment." Elaborate this statement based on Guru's philosophy and relate it to any personal or social situation where challenges become opportunities.
5. Evaluate the ethical implications of understanding Māyā as the divine expression of unity. How can this insight influence attitudes toward equality, compassion, and social harmony today?

6. Compare the classical Advaitic view of Māyā with Guru's reinterpretation in Daivadaśakam. Which perspective resonates more with your understanding of reality and why? Justify your argument with personal reasoning.
7. Reflect on the psychological dimensions of Māyā discussed by Guru. How do desire, fear, and ego shape one's experience of the world?

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# 3

## UNIT

# Oneness as Reflected in Daivadaśakam

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the concept of oneness (*Ekatva*) as presented in Daivadaśakam.
- ◆ identify the metaphysical, ethical, and experiential dimensions of oneness in Guru's philosophy.
- ◆ analyse how Guru expresses non-dual unity through the language of devotion and universalism.
- ◆ evaluate the relevance of Guru's vision of oneness in the context of pluralism and modern social life.
- ◆ reflect on the practical implications of realising oneness in everyday experience.

## Prerequisite

Human life often presents situations that draw individuals toward a deeper understanding of their place in the world. As people grow, they begin to notice connections that link their experiences, memories, and relationships. A simple act of kindness, a shared moment of silence, or a familiar gesture from someone close can reveal that human beings are not isolated units moving independently but part of a larger network of interactions. These observations influence how we understand our surroundings and how we relate to others. When individuals reflect on such moments, they may realise that their thoughts, emotions, and actions do not arise in isolation. Rather, these responses emerge in relation to people, events, and environments that shape their inner world. This awareness encourages them to look beyond differences and recognise elements that bind life together. The world then appears not as a collection of disconnected fragments but as a space where

relationships, cooperation, and mutual dependence are constantly at work, guiding individuals to recognise that their actions and choices are linked to the well-being of others and to the harmony of the larger community.

## Keywords

Oneness, Brahman, Immanence, Transcendence, Jñāna, Bhakti, Karma, Spiritual Democracy, Non-duality

## Discussion

### 2.3.1 The Vision of Oneness

In Indian philosophy, oneness is the essence of Advaita Vedānta, where Brahman is described as the single, unchanging reality. Everything else is a manifestation or appearance of that absolute consciousness. Guru inherits this metaphysical foundation but reinterprets it in a holistic, human-centered manner. The core of Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy is the realisation of oneness - the understanding that all existence arises from, abides in, and returns to one undivided reality. Daivadaśakam, though presented as a prayer, is a poetic unfolding of this vision. It begins with dependence on a divine protector and culminates in the awareness that the divine pervades all beings. For Guru, oneness is not a speculative theory but a transformative realisation. It is both metaphysical and moral, combining knowledge (*jñāna*), devotion (*bhakti*), and action (*karma*). In his worldview, the unity of existence forms the foundation for universal love and equality.

In Daivadaśakam, oneness is conveyed through simple yet profound images - the ocean and its waves, the wind and its motion, light and its reflection- each illustrating the unity that underlies apparent diversity. These metaphors show that Guru's vision of oneness is both ontological, as the very nature of being, and experiential, realised directly through consciousness. In the same spirit, the

text affirms that the divine is not distant but all-pervasive: "You are the act of creation, the creator, and the manifold creatures." This statement captures the philosophical depth of oneness. The cause, the process, and the effect are not three separate realities but three expressions of one substance. Existence is a continuum in which every form reflects the same essence. Guru's oneness thus implies the non-duality of God, world, and self. The individual is not apart from the divine but an expression of it. Realising this identity dissolves fear, ignorance, and egoism - the roots of human suffering.

### 2.3.2 The Ontological and Epistemological Basis of Unity

Guru's vision of oneness rests upon a strong ontological foundation: reality is one, without a second. The multiplicity of the world does not contradict unity but manifests it. The ocean metaphor used throughout Daivadaśakam symbolises this truth. Waves differ in shape, motion, and duration, yet each is water. Similarly, beings differ in form, culture, and temperament, yet all share the same essence of consciousness. For Guru, this principle applies not only to the material universe but to the spiritual dimension of life. The divine is both immanent (present within creation) and transcendent (beyond all forms). These two aspects are not opposites but complementary. Transcendence



provides permanence; immanence ensures participation. Thus, Guru's oneness integrates the personal and the impersonal, the divine and the human, the relative and the absolute presenting a comprehensive worldview in which existence is seen as a unified field of consciousness.

This ontological unity naturally leads to the question: What is the fundamental medium through which this unity is realised and experienced? Guru answers this through his emphasis on consciousness as the unifying ground of all existence. The consciousness is the fundamental reality that supports all experience. The world exists as long as it is experienced through consciousness. Guru interprets consciousness not as an individual faculty but as a universal presence that manifests through countless centers. Just as one sun reflects in many pots of water without division, the one consciousness illumines all minds. The appearance of multiplicity is due to limiting conditions, not actual division. In Daivadaśakam, the realisation of this consciousness occurs through prayer. When the devotee calls upon God as protector, the sense of separation begins to dissolve. The repeated contemplation of divine omnipresence leads to the recognition that the Self and the Divine are one. This transformation from dualistic devotion to non-dual awareness is the spiritual essence of oneness. It reveals that consciousness is not confined within the individual but extends infinitely as the very substance of reality.

Once consciousness is recognised as the single essence behind all forms, the next step is to understand how one gains access to this truth. This opens into Guru's epistemology, where knowing itself becomes an act of awakening. Knowledge in Guru's philosophy is not the accumulation of information but the awakening of awareness. True knowledge is self-knowledge, the realisation that the knower, the known, and the act of knowing are one. In Daivadaśakam, this

insight is implicit in the verse: "Even the word with which we praise You is You Yourself." Here, language, thought, and meaning are recognised as expressions of the same consciousness. The separation between subject and object, or between human and divine, is dissolved in understanding. This epistemological oneness transforms the way we relate to the world. Instead of seeing objects as external, one perceives them as modes of one's own consciousness. The boundaries between observer and observed fade, revealing the unity of existence. Such knowledge liberates because it replaces ignorance with direct awareness of the totality of being.

### 2.3.3 Ethical and Social Implications of Oneness

Guru's insight into oneness is not confined to metaphysics; it is the foundation of his ethical and social philosophy. If all beings share one essence, discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, or class has no justification. His well-known declaration, "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity," arises directly from this realisation. Unity in the divine implies unity in humanity. Spiritual realisation thus becomes a call for social justice and equality.

In Daivadaśakam, the same spirit is present in the universality of the prayer. The divine addressed is not a sectarian deity but the common source of all existence. Every verse implicitly affirms that the differences among religions and peoples are superficial expressions of the same truth. By grounding ethics in metaphysical unity, Guru provides a universal moral foundation. Compassion, tolerance, and service are not moral duties imposed from outside but natural expressions of understanding reality as one.

If ethics arises from metaphysical unity, then the natural next question is: What is the emotional force that allows this unity to be felt and lived? Guru answers this through

his emphasis on love as the experiential flowering of oneness. He identifies love (*prema*) as the emotional expression of oneness. When the mind perceives all beings as part of the same divine essence, love arises spontaneously. It is not attachment but a recognition of shared existence. In the final verse of Daivadaśakam, the prayer culminates in immersion in the “ocean of glory” where the devotee seeks to “dwell everlastingly in happiness supreme.” This symbolises union through love. The self dissolves into the whole, not through annihilation but through expansion. Love thus becomes a means of realisation and also its natural outcome. When the ego disappears, what remains is pure love - the joy of unity. This is why Guru considers *bhakti* and *jñāna* inseparable. Knowledge reveals oneness intellectually; love realises it emotionally. Both together complete the human journey.

Once love becomes the lived expression of unity, it naturally reshapes one’s relationship to the world. This transformation extends from emotion to conduct, giving rise to a new understanding of action. In ignorance, actions are motivated by desire and produce bondage. In knowledge, actions become expressions of divine will and lead to freedom. Guru’s philosophy teaches that when one acts with awareness of unity, there is no selfish attachment to results. Action becomes *niṣkāma karma* - activity without egoistic motive. The worker serves all beings as forms of the divine. In this sense, oneness reconciles contemplation and engagement. The realised person does not withdraw from the world but participates in it with selfless love.

### 2.3.4 Oneness as Spiritual Democracy

Guru’s vision of oneness extends to religion and culture. He affirms that all faiths are paths leading to the same realisation. The diversity of religious expressions reflects

the diversity of human temperaments, but their essence is one truth - the recognition of unity. This perspective establishes a spiritual democracy where no religion claims superiority. Every person, regardless of belief or background, has direct access to the divine through inner realisation.

In Daivadaśakam, the universal address to “You” signifies this inclusiveness. The prayer could be uttered by a Hindu, Christian, Muslim, or anyone seeking truth. In this universality lies the global significance of Guru’s oneness: it transcends religious boundaries and affirms the unity of spiritual experience. The realisation of oneness culminates in liberation (*mokṣa*). When the individual recognises that all distinctions are within the same consciousness, bondage ceases. The realised person continues to act in the world but experiences everything as divine manifestation. Liberation, therefore, is not a reward for piety but the natural outcome of insight. It is the fulfilment of the journey from dependence to freedom, from multiplicity to unity, from ignorance to wisdom. The experience of oneness is both the means and the end of spiritual life.

Guru composed Daivadaśakam by viewing the entire human race as one. For him, it was not religion but the human being that held primary importance, as clearly reflected in his famous dictum, “Whatever be the religion, it is enough if the human being becomes good.” Daivadaśakam stands as an embodiment of this vision. The work may aptly be described as going beyond the barriers of wisdom. Professor G. Balakrishnan Nair characterised Daivadaśakam as the “Daiva Upaniṣad.” Indeed, Daivadaśakam can be regarded as a work comparable to the Upaniṣads in both its philosophical depth and spiritual universality.



## Recap

- ◆ Guru's philosophy centres on oneness.
- ◆ Brahman is the single, unchanging reality.
- ◆ Oneness combines knowledge, devotion, and action.
- ◆ Daivadaśakam is a poetic expression of unity.
- ◆ Oneness dissolves fear and ego.
- ◆ Diversity is a manifestation of unity.
- ◆ Consciousness is the ground of all experience.
- ◆ Knowing becomes awakening in Guru's vision.
- ◆ Subject and object merge in awareness.
- ◆ Ethics arises from metaphysical unity.
- ◆ Unity justifies equality and compassion.
- ◆ Love is the emotional expression of oneness.
- ◆ Love expands the self into the whole.
- ◆ Action becomes selfless in realisation.
- ◆ Oneness integrates contemplation and service.
- ◆ All religions express the same truth.
- ◆ Liberation is the natural outcome of realising unity.

## Objective Questions

1. What is the central idea of Advaita Vedānta?
2. What is the single unchanging reality in Advaita?
3. Which slogan expresses Guru's social philosophy?
4. What dissolves fear and ego according to Guru?

5. Name the term that describes action without egoistic motive?
6. What does Guru consider the essence behind all forms?
7. What is the ethical outcome of metaphysical unity?
8. Which emotion expresses the experiential side of oneness?
9. What principle allows religions to coexist as equal paths?
10. What does the experience of oneness ultimately lead to?

## Answers

1. Non-dual oneness
2. Brahman
3. “One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity”
4. Realisation of oneness
5. Nişkāma karma
6. Universal consciousness
7. Equality and compassion
8. Love (prema)
9. Spiritual democracy
10. Liberation (mokṣa)

## Assignments

1. Explain Sree Narayana Guru’s vision of oneness as presented in Daivadaśakam. Using the metaphors of ocean, wind, and light, analyse how oneness is expressed in the text.
2. Discuss the relationship between immanence and transcendence in Guru’s worldview. Describe an observed experience where these two aspects seem to coexist.



3. Reflect on Guru's idea that the knower, the known, and knowing are one. How does this idea change the understanding of learning or self-awareness?
4. Examine how unity becomes the foundation for ethics and social equality in Guru's philosophy.
5. "Love is the emotional expression of oneness." Interpret this statement and illustrate how love can become a transformative force in real-life situations.
6. Evaluate the concept of spiritual democracy in the context of global religions. Share an example or narrative that highlights the value of universal spiritual acceptance.
7. Discuss liberation (mokṣa) as the fulfilment of the journey from dependence to freedom.

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SGOU





# 4

## UNIT

# Prayer of Self-Realisation

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the meaning of self-realisation (*Ātma-jñāna*) as expressed in Daivadaśakam
- ◆ describe how the journey of prayer culminates in realisation of the Self as identical with the Divine
- ◆ analyse Guru's integration of devotion, knowledge, and action in the attainment of self-realisation
- ◆ reflect on the experiential transformation that accompanies liberation (*mokṣa*).
- ◆ evaluate the relevance of Guru's vision of self-realisation for individual and social life in the modern world

## Prerequisite

Human life presents situations that lead individuals to pause and consider the nature of their own thoughts and actions. As people mature, they begin to recognise that their decisions, reactions, and aspirations are shaped by various influences, both external and internal. Quiet moments or unexpected challenges often prompt a deeper look into what guides behaviour and thought. This process reveals that thoughts and emotions arise and fade in ways that are not always predictable, and many responses are shaped by long-standing habits rather than conscious choice. Observing this pattern can generate a search for greater clarity regarding one's inner life. Such inquiry is not dependent on specialised learning; it arises from a sincere interest in understanding how the mind functions. When this awareness develops, questions emerge about what brings balance, stability, and purpose to human experience. These questions form a natural part of intellectual growth and encourage sustained reflection on one's inner world.

## Keywords

Self-realisation, Ātman, Brahman, Non-duality, Dhyāna, Anubhava, Inner freedom, Happiness Supreme

## Discussion

### 2.4.1 From Prayer to Realisation

Sree Narayana Guru's Daivadaśakam is a distinguished Vedāntic text that lucidly and coherently brings together the technical as well as the philosophical dimensions of Advaita Vedānta. The spiritual journey of an ordinary devotee, which begins with the contemplation of the feet, names, words, or the very state of Īśvara, ultimately culminates in the depths of imperishable bliss. The prayer that begins with the invocation "Daivamē" ("O God") concludes with "sukham" (bliss) as its final goal. This bliss is infinite in nature and is that which never comes to an end. Bearing Īśvara, or the Supreme Truth, as the witness, Daiva Daśakam delineates an inner spiritual journey that progresses from prayer to realisation, and from devotion to direct experiential knowledge.

The progression from the first to the tenth verse represents in Daivadaśakam a spiritual ascent from dependence on an external deity to the discovery of the divine within. This inner discovery is what Guru calls self-realisation. It is not a mystical privilege reserved for a few, but the natural culmination of human evolution. The prayerful attitude of surrender gradually transforms into knowledge of unity, and this knowledge matures into direct realisation of the Self (*Ātman*). In the final verse, Guru prays to dwell "everlastingly in Happiness Supreme." This is the state of complete freedom and bliss - the realisation that the Self is not different from Brahman, the Absolute. Through this, Guru redefines prayer itself: it is not merely an act of asking but a process of awakening, a journey from ignorance to enlightenment.

This movement from prayer to awakening naturally raises the question: What exactly is realised when the seeker reaches this final state? Guru answers this by deepening the concept of self-realisation and showing that it is fundamentally a recognition of non-dual consciousness.

Self-realisation (*Ātma-jñāna* or *Ātma-sākṣātkāra*) means the direct awareness that one's inner Self is identical with the ultimate reality, Brahman. It is not the acquisition of new knowledge but the removal of ignorance that hides what is eternally present. In classical Advaita Vedānta, realisation occurs when the individual recognises the non-dual truth expressed in the Upaniṣadic formula *Tat Tvam Asi*. Guru accepts this principle but communicates it through experiential and devotional language. In Daivadaśakam, realisation is depicted as immersion in the "deep ocean of glory," where the distinction between worshipper and worshipped dissolves. The seeker realises that the divine being prayed to was never separate from the self. This transformation from duality to non-duality is the heart of self-realisation. For Guru, self-realisation is awareness of unity in consciousness. It is not an escape from the world but a reorientation of perception in which all distinctions fade and only the eternal Self shines.

### 2.4.2 The Path toward Self-Realisation

Guru presents the journey to realisation as a natural progression through devotion, reflection, and meditation comparable to the traditional Advaitic method of *śravaṇa* (hearing), *manana* (reflection), and *nididhyāsana* (contemplation).



1. **Prayer and Surrender (Bhakti):** The first stage involves emotional surrender. The seeker recognises dependence on a higher power and prays for guidance. This stage purifies the heart and prepares the mind for knowledge.
2. **Inquiry and Understanding (Jñāna):** Through reflection, the devotee begins to inquire into the nature of the divine and the self. Intellectual clarity replaces blind faith.
3. **Meditative Realisation (Dhyāna):** In the final stage, contemplation transforms understanding into experience. The duality between subject and object disappears, and the Self is realised as pure awareness.

This triadic process reveals that prayer is not opposed to philosophy. Instead, devotion matures into insight, and insight culminates in realisation. In Daivadaśakam, Guru weaves these stages seamlessly: the prayerful beginning evolves into philosophical comprehension and concludes in self-realised bliss.

This gradual ascent through devotion, inquiry, and meditation naturally prepares the ground for Guru's deeper insight: that realisation is not merely a cognitive event but a radical reorientation of one's entire being. Self-realisation in Guru's vision involves a total transformation of consciousness. The ego-centered identity, which considers itself separate from the divine, dissolves in the light of awareness. The limited "I" (*ahaṃkāra*) merges with the universal Self (*Ātman*). This transformation is not destruction but expansion; individuality is not negated but illumined by its deeper foundation. The realised individual does not lose personality but transcends its limitations by recognising its root in the infinite. Consciousness becomes universalised - one perceives oneself in all beings and all beings in oneself. In this sense,

realisation is the awakening of the Self to its own boundlessness, an inward blossoming into the fullness of Being.

When the mind becomes sufficiently purified and inwardly refined through this disciplined progression, it becomes capable of recognising its own deepest identity. It is here that Guru introduces the true nature of self-realisation as an existential shift rather than an abstract philosophical conclusion. Guru's psychology of realisation parallels the Upaniṣadic description of the "knower of Brahman" who becomes Brahman. The self is no longer the experiencer of joy and sorrow but the witness of all experiences. In this state, fear, desire, and attachment disappear. The realised person lives with inner freedom, unaffected by external circumstances. This is the essence of *jīvanmukti*, liberation while living, which Guru considers the natural culmination of prayer and self-knowledge.

Having established self-realisation as a transformative mode of being, Guru then clarifies the distinction between merely understanding the doctrine of unity and actually *realising* it. While study and reflection can reveal the concept of unity, realisation (*anubhava*) is a direct, non-conceptual experience of that unity. In Daivadaśakam, realisation is described not through logic but through feeling - the joy of merging, the peace of unity, and the bliss of the divine presence. This experiential dimension aligns with the Upaniṣadic assertion that Brahman is "to be realised by direct intuition, not by reasoning." For Guru, realisation is self-luminous awareness - knowing by being. It cannot be expressed fully in language because words belong to the domain of duality. Prayer therefore becomes the appropriate mode of expression: it uses poetic symbolism to point toward the ineffable. In this sense, Daivadaśakam bridges philosophy and mysticism, presenting realisation as the culmination of both knowledge and devotion.

### 2.4.3 The Ethical Dimension of Self-Realisation

The realisation of unity transforms moral life. When the individual recognises that the same Self dwells in all beings, the basis of egoistic behaviour disappears. Compassion, humility, and justice arise naturally. Guru emphasises that true realisation must manifest as ethical conduct. The enlightened person sees service to others as service to the divine. Equality, non-violence, and love become spontaneous expressions of the realised mind. The awareness of unity leads to social harmony, transcending divisions of caste and creed. Thus, self-realisation is not isolation from the world but active participation in it through selfless love. Liberation and morality become two sides of the same realisation.

Guru's ethical vision naturally follows from his synthesis of devotion and knowledge. While Advaita often emphasises knowledge as the path to liberation, Guru insists that devotion and knowledge are inseparable. In Daivadaśakam, prayer itself becomes the means to knowledge. Devotion purifies the heart, removes pride, and opens the mind to insight. The emotional surrender of the devotee transforms into the intellectual clarity of the philosopher and the intuitive awareness of the mystic. Guru's integration of *bhakti* and *jñāna* shows that love and wisdom are complementary. Love without wisdom may lead to sentimentality; wisdom without love becomes cold intellectualism. True realisation requires both. Therefore, prayer in Daivadaśakam is not a plea to an external deity but a dialogue between the finite and the infinite within oneself. Through that dialogue, the devotee awakens to the truth that the beloved and the lover are one.

Once prayer becomes an inward dialogue that reveals the unity of the lover and the beloved, the same insight begins to reshape one's relationship with the world.

The heart purified by devotion becomes receptive to the understanding of oneness, and that understanding, in turn, blossoms into compassion in action. Thus, the inner awakening described in Daivadaśakam does not remain confined to mystical experience; it flows outward as moral responsibility. When love and wisdom converge, the realisation of unity expresses itself spontaneously as equality, humility, and service. In this way, Guru shows that the inner realisation achieved through integrated *bhakti* and *jñāna* finds its natural fulfilment in ethical life.

Once the ethical transformation born of love and wisdom matures, it naturally deepens into an inner freedom that expresses the very essence of self-realisation. Guru describes freedom as dwelling in "Happiness Supreme," a state beyond pleasure and pain. Philosophically, this freedom arises from detachment. The realised person understands that the body and mind are transient instruments of experience, while the Self is eternal. There is no clinging to results, no fear of loss. This state is not indifference but equanimity (*samatva*). The realised person participates in the world without being enslaved by it. The mind becomes like a still lake reflecting everything clearly without distortion. Guru's idea of freedom therefore combines inner detachment with outer engagement. It is not escape from life but perfect harmony with it - a freedom grounded in understanding.

### 2.4.4 The Unity of Self and the Divine

The culmination of Daivadaśakam lies in the realisation that the Self (*Ātman*) and the Divine (*Brahman*) are identical. This non-dual identity is the essence of Advaitic philosophy and the experiential heart of the prayer. In earlier verses, God is addressed as protector and creator. In the final realisation, these dualistic roles dissolve. The seeker realises, "You are I,



and I am You.” The distinction between subject and object, between prayer and the one prayed to, disappears. This realisation echoes the Upaniṣadic declaration *Aham Brahmāsmi* - “I am Brahman.” However, Guru expresses it in a devotional context, emphasising love and humility rather than metaphysical assertion. The ego does not claim divinity; it surrenders into it. Thus, self-realisation in Daivadaśakam is a union without loss of identity, where the self becomes transparent to the divine presence. This final realisation is characterised by Ānanda, the bliss of completeness. This bliss is not sensory pleasure but the joy of wholeness that arises when all divisions vanish.

Guru’s description of “Happiness Supreme” conveys this state of unconditioned joy. It is self-existent, requiring no external object. The realised person experiences joy in all circumstances because it arises from within. This bliss is the experiential verification of truth. Just as knowledge confirms the intellect, bliss confirms realisation. It is the natural fragrance of awakening, signifying harmony between self and universe. Those who experience this bliss bridges the gap between philosophy and life. It shows that realisation is not dry abstraction but living joy - the fulfilment of human existence.

## Recap

- ◆ Daivadaśakam moves from prayer to realisation.
- ◆ The journey begins with dependence and ends in unity.
- ◆ Realisation is discovering the divine within.
- ◆ Self-realisation removes ignorance.
- ◆ Guru uses devotional language to express non-duality.
- ◆ Worshipper and worshipped merge in realisation.
- ◆ The path includes devotion, reflection, and meditation.
- ◆ Bhakti purifies emotions.
- ◆ Jñāna gives clarity.
- ◆ Dhyāna leads to experience.
- ◆ Realisation expands consciousness.
- ◆ The ego dissolves in awareness.
- ◆ Fear and desire disappear in realisation.
- ◆ The realised person attains jīvanmukti.

- ◆ Realisation unites knowledge and love.
- ◆ Ethical life flows from unity.
- ◆ Compassion becomes spontaneous.
- ◆ Freedom comes from detachment.
- ◆ The Self and the Divine are one.
- ◆ Realisation culminates in Happiness Supreme.

## Objective Questions

1. What does self-realisation reveal about the Self?
2. Why is the ever-present reality concealed, according to Guru?
3. Which Upaniṣadic idea does Guru's teaching draw resonance?
4. What is the first stage in the path to realisation?
5. In what way is blind faith replaced in the second stage?
6. How does the ego transform during self-realisation?
7. Which kind of knowledge is referred to as anubhava?
8. Whose identity is understood at the culmination of the prayer?
9. By what term is the joy of complete unity expressed?
10. How is realisation confirmed through experience?

## Answers

1. That the Self is identical with Brahman
2. Due to ignorance
3. Tat Tvam Asi
4. Prayer and surrender
5. Through intellectual understanding



6. The ego dissolves into the universal Self
7. Direct experiential knowledge
8. The unity of Self and Divine
9. Ānanda (bliss)
10. Through the inner bliss

## Assignments

1. Discuss the movement from prayer to realisation in Daivadaśakam. Explain how this shift may reflect the understanding of spiritual growth.
2. Explain Guru's concept of self-realisation as removal of ignorance.
3. Evaluate the role of devotion, inquiry, and meditation in the path toward realisation. Describe how these three stages might operate in an individual's inner journey.
4. Analyse the transformation of the ego in the process of self-realisation. Reflect on situations where ego-loss contributes to personal clarity or peace.
5. Discuss how realisation leads to ethical living in Guru's philosophy.
6. Examine the significance of jīvanmukti in the context of Daivadaśakam.
7. "Love and wisdom must coexist for true realisation." Explain this idea and relate it to any experience or observation that illustrates the balance of feeling and understanding.

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**BLOCK**

# **Philosophical Terms Used in Atmopadesa Satakam**



# 1

## UNIT

# Arivu and Atma

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain how consciousness (arivu) is the direct awareness 'I am,' which exists independently of the senses
- ◆ describe why the basic awareness of existence continues even in darkness, silence, or states where the senses are inactive
- ◆ explain that Ātman is self-luminous and the source of all awareness
- ◆ differentiate the changing body-mind from the unchanging, universal Self that supports all experience
- ◆ discuss how consciousness (arivu) and Ātman are related

## Prerequisite

It is common that people identify themselves only with the body and mind and assume that all knowledge arises from the senses. Yet many ordinary experiences- such as sitting quietly in darkness, feeling aware even with closed eyes, or sensing an inner presence during moments of deep emotion- suggest that awareness may run deeper than what the senses report. These subtle moments naturally raise questions about what remains when thoughts fall silent, or what enables us to feel 'I am' even without perceiving anything in particular. Such questions spark a genuine curiosity to look inward and examine the source of our own experience. Engaging with this curiosity encourages moving beyond a purely external view of life and noticing the unexplored layers of awareness within oneself. This inward exploration sets the stage for a richer understanding of one's own nature and opens a meaningful doorway into philosophical inquiry and personal clarity.



## Keywords

Arivu, Ātman, Self-luminous awareness, Universal Self, Inner illumination, Witness consciousness, Thought-free awareness

## Discussion

*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* is a philosophical poem in which Sree Narayana Guru explains the nature of the Self and guides the seeker towards inner realisation. The title itself means ‘One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction.’ In these verses, Guru does not present his ideas in a dry, abstract manner. Instead, he uses simple examples, everyday situations, and vivid images to help us see the truth about ourselves. Among the many themes in this work, Consciousness and Ātman (the Self) occupy a central place. We use the word ‘I’ every day, but we rarely stop to ask: What is this ‘I’? Who is the one who knows, thinks, and feels? Verses 10 and 27 are especially important for answering these questions.

Verse 10 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* speaks about Consciousness (Arivu) as the basic awareness ‘I am’, and Verse 27 speaks about Ātman as the deeper, unchanging Self that is the source of this awareness. The discussion here gently moves from how Guru helps us to recognise pure consciousness in our own experience, to the Guru’s explanation of the Self as the ground of that consciousness. Finally, it brings the intimate relation between consciousness and Ātman.

### 3.1.1 Consciousness (Arivu)- Verse 10

#### Verse 10

‘ഇരുളിലിരിപ്പവനാരു ? ചൊല്ക നീ ‘ഈ-  
ന്നൊരുവനുരപ്പതു കേട്ടു താനുമേവം  
അറിവാതിനായവനോടു ‘നീയുമാരെ’  
നരുളുമിതിൻ പ്രതിവാക്യമേകമാകും .

(ആത്മോപദേശ ശതകം -10)

*If a man sitting in the dark asks another,  
‘Who are you?’*

*and the other, out of curiosity, asks in  
return, ‘And who are you?’*

*The answer that comes from both will  
be the same- ‘I am’*

In Verse 10, Guru presents a very modest but powerful situation. Two people are sitting together in complete darkness. One asks the other, ‘Who are you?’ The other cannot see his own body, the other person, or anything around him. Yet, he immediately answers, ‘I am.’ He cannot say ‘I am this or that,’ because no external features are visible. Still, he clearly knows that he exists. The verse shows that even in total darkness, when nothing is seen, the awareness of one’s own existence remains. This basic awareness is what the Guru calls Arivu, or pure consciousness. It is not a special mystical state; it is the simple, direct awareness that ‘I am here,’ which each of us can recognise in ourselves.

### 3.1.2 Consciousness Independent of the Senses

Guru draws an important conclusion from this example, that consciousness does not depend on the senses. In the usual way of thinking, we may feel that we are conscious because we see, hear, touch, and so on. But Verse 10 reverses this idea. The verse suggests that we can see and hear only because we are already conscious. In darkness, the eyes cannot see anything; yet we remain aware of our presence. This shows

that awareness is more fundamental than sensory experience. Sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch are particular contents that appear in consciousness. When they are absent, consciousness remains as a clear sense of 'I exist.' Arivu is like a light that is always on. When objects come into this light, they are seen and known. When there are no objects, the light does not disappear; it simply shines without showing anything in particular. In the same way, awareness does not depend on the presence or absence of sensory objects. It is constant and continuous.

Another essential feature of this Verse is that the 'I am' awareness is universal. It is not limited to any one person, group, or culture. Wherever there is a human being, there is this fundamental awareness of being. When we say 'I', each of us refers to this inner feeling of existence. This 'I' in darkness is not yet the 'I' of social identity. It is not 'I am a man/woman', 'I am a teacher/student', 'I am from this caste or religion.' All these are added later, when the mind brings in memory and concepts. The 'I am' revealed is before all such labels. It is the pure experience of being, without any qualification. In philosophical terms, this is existence-consciousness, the most immediate and undeniable fact of our life. This is why Guru uses such a simple scene. He wants us to notice something we normally ignore. We are usually busy with thoughts about 'what I am' - my role, status, and story. Guru asks us to pause all that for a moment and simply feel the direct awareness 'I am'. In doing so, we begin to recognise consciousness itself, not as an object, but as the living subject behind all our experiences.

Verse 10 also hints at the relationship between consciousness and thought. Thoughts arise and pass away in the mind: 'I like this,' 'I dislike that,' 'I must do this,' and so on. We may think that when thoughts stop, there is nothing. But the example of

sitting in darkness shows that even when the mind is not actively thinking, there is still awareness. Consciousness is not the same as thinking. Thinking is an activity that happens in consciousness. Awareness is the background that makes thinking possible. In deep sleep, for example, there are no clear thoughts or perceptions, but when we wake up, we say, 'I slept well.' This shows that some basic awareness was present even then, allowing us later to recall that state. Thus, consciousness is deeper than mental activity. It is not created by thoughts; it is the space in which thoughts appear and disappear.

### 3.1.3 Ātman (Self) – Verse 27

#### Verse 27

ഇരുളിലിരുന്നറിയുന്നതാകുമാത്മാ -  
 വരിവതുതാനഥ നാമരൂപമായും  
 കരണമൊടിന്ദ്രിയ കർതൃകർമ്മമായും  
 വരുവതു കാൺക ! മഹേന്ദ്രജാലമെല്ലാം.

(ആത്മാപദേശ ശതകം-27)

*The Self is that knowledge which brings illumination of one's existence, even when placed in the thick of darkness.*

*As in the miraculous performance of a magician,*

*the same knowledge assumes name and form and engages in action equipped with inner organs and senses.*

Verse 27 moves from the level of experience ('I am aware') to the level of being ('What is the source of this awareness?'). In this verse, Sree Narayana Guru uses another



beautiful image. He says that the Self (Ātman) is that knowledge which shines even in deep darkness and makes all experiences possible. He compares it to the power of a magician who appears to give life to lifeless puppets on a stage. It simply means that there is a deeper reality in us, called Ātman, which is the true 'I'. This Ātman is not the body or the changing mind. It is the self-luminous, unchanging principle that makes the body move and the mind know. Just as the magician stands behind the show and makes it possible, Ātman stands behind our life and silently supports all activities.

The verse stresses that Ātman is self-luminous. This means that the Self requires nothing further to reveal itself. Other things need light to be seen. Our body needs the mind to be known. Our thoughts need consciousness to be noticed. But the Self, which is the deepest 'I', does not depend on anything else to be known. It is known by itself, because it is pure knowingness. This is related to the teaching of verse 10. When everything external is covered by darkness, the awareness 'I am' still shines. Verse 27 tells us that this shining 'I am' comes from the Self, which is knowledge by nature. The Self is not an object that we come to know later. It is the very ground of all knowing. Verse 27 clearly distinguishes the Self from the body and mind. We often say 'my body', 'my mind', 'my thoughts', and 'my feelings'. This language itself suggests a deeper 'I' who owns these. That owner is not the body or mind; it is the Self.

The puppet moves, speaks, and seems to have a character. But we know that the puppet has no life of its own. It moves because the puppeteer controls it. Similarly, the body and mind appear to act independently, but their life and intelligence come from the presence of Ātman. When the Self is no longer associated with the body, we say that the person is dead. The body remains, but it is lifeless. This suggests that the actual

'person' was not the body, but the Self that once animated it. It means that our real identity is not limited to height, weight, skin colour, age, or even our changing thoughts and emotions. These are all outer layers. The innermost reality is a pure, conscious Self, which does not grow old in the way the body does and does not change moods in the way the mind does.

Another central point in Verse 27 is that Ātman is one and universal. Outwardly, people seem very different. They belong to different communities, speak different languages, and have different talents and preferences. But these differences belong to the body-mind level. When we look at the deepest level of being, there is only one Self present in all. The explanations compare this to one light shining through many lamps, or one space appearing inside many pots. The pots may be big or small, clean or dirty, but the space inside them is not really different from the space outside. In the same way, the Self in one person is not essentially different from the Self in another. Recognising this leads to a vision of equality and unity, which is reflected in Narayana Guru's social message of 'one caste, one religion, one God for man.' Thus, Verse 27 teaches that Ātman is (1) self-luminous, (2) the real inner identity beyond body and mind, and (3) universal and one in all beings.

### 3.1.4 The Relation Between Consciousness and Ātman

There is a natural question that arises: What exactly is the relation between Consciousness (Arivu) and Ātman? Are they two different things, or two names for the same reality? The teachings suggest that there are two aspects, or ways of speaking, about the same inner principle. We can better understand this with a simple comparison. When we look at the sun, we can refer to it as a celestial body in the sky and also as

the sunlight that reaches us and illuminates the world. In truth, the light comes from the sun and is not separate from it. But in usage, we distinguish 'sun' and 'sunlight' for clarity. Similarly, Ātman can be compared to the 'sun' - the fundamental, self-luminous being. Consciousness (Arivu) is like the 'light' of that sun - the awareness that reaches the mind and illuminates thoughts, perceptions, and feelings. Verse 10 focuses on the experience of that light: the immediate awareness 'I am'. Verse 27 focuses on the source of that light: the Self, which is knowledge by nature and which never goes out. In this sense, consciousness is the 'face' of Ātman turned towards experience, and Ātman is the 'depth' of consciousness, its eternal background.

When we say, 'I know,' we are emphasising consciousness. When we ask, 'Who is this 'I' that knows?' and seek its deepest nature, we are searching for Ātman. As we go deeper, we discover that the 'I' who knows is itself nothing but pure knowingness, and at that point, Consciousness and Ātman are understood as one reality. These teachings are not only for intellectual interest. They have several practical implications for how we live and how we see ourselves and others. First, they help us to redefine who we are. If we think of ourselves only as the body or as a bundle of changing thoughts, we will constantly feel insecure. The body can fall sick and will eventually die. The mind can be disturbed by emotions, desires, and fears. But if we begin to recognise ourselves as the awareness in which body and mind appear, we gain a deeper centre of stability. We can then relate to physical and mental changes without feeling completely lost.

Second, by recognising Ātman as universal, we are encouraged to see others not as enemies or strangers, but as expressions

of the same Self. This supports attitudes of respect, compassion, and equality. Many social evils arise from the belief that some people are inherently higher and others lower. The teaching that the same Self shines in all cuts the root of such prejudice. Third, these ideas help us deal with suffering and confusion. When we are fully identified with the mind, every thought and feeling seems absolute. A failure feels like the end of everything. A criticism feels unbearable. But when we cultivate the habit of returning again and again to the simple awareness 'I am' (as in Verse 10) and remembering the deeper Self (as in Verse 27), we gradually learn to witness our experiences rather than be entirely overwhelmed by them. This does not eliminate life's difficulties, but it changes how we hold them within.

### 3.1.5 Conclusion

Verses 10 and 27 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* give a clear and profound picture of Consciousness and Ātman. Verse 10 draws our attention to the basic fact of awareness - the 'I am' which remains even when all outer details are hidden. It shows that consciousness is independent of the senses and deeper than thought. Verse 27 goes further to reveal the Self (Ātman) as the self-luminous ground of this awareness - the true 'I' beyond body and mind, present in all beings as one universal reality. Our true identity is not limited to our physical form or our changing mental states. At the deepest level, we are pure consciousness, or the Self, which is unchanging, luminous, and one in all. This understanding is central to Sree Narayana Guru's spiritual message and underpins ethical living, inner freedom, and genuine equality among human beings.



## Recap

- ◆ Arivu is the direct awareness of 'I am.'
- ◆ Awareness exists even without the senses.
- ◆ In darkness or silence, awareness continues.
- ◆ Arivu does not depend on seeing or hearing.
- ◆ Ātman is the unchanging Self behind all experience.
- ◆ The body and mind change, but the Self does not.
- ◆ Awareness is self-luminous; it knows itself.
- ◆ Awareness is the ground of all knowledge.
- ◆ The senses only bring information; awareness receives it.
- ◆ We wrongly identify it with the body and mind.
- ◆ The real Self is deeper than physical and mental changes.
- ◆ Verse 10 shows awareness shines even in darkness.
- ◆ It is the body that acts, but the Self enables it.
- ◆ Awareness is universal, not personal.
- ◆ The same consciousness exists in all beings.
- ◆ The body is limited; the Self is limitless.
- ◆ Awareness is present in waking, dreaming, and deep sleep.
- ◆ The Self is constant in all states of experience.
- ◆ Mind is only an instrument for awareness.
- ◆ Awareness is the witness of all mental activities.
- ◆ Thoughts rise and fall; awareness stays the same.
- ◆ Arivu and Ātman are intimately connected.
- ◆ Arivu is the experience of awareness.
- ◆ Ātman is the deeper reality of that awareness.

- ◆ Real knowledge comes when we recognise the Self.
- ◆ Awareness cannot be destroyed or weakened.
- ◆ Awareness is our true nature.

## Objective Questions

1. According to Verse 10 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, what continues even in darkness?
2. What is meant by arivu?
3. What remains the same in waking, dream, and deep sleep?
4. What does the puppet in Verse 27 represent?
5. What does the magician represent in Verse 27?
6. What is the deeper ground of awareness?
7. Who remains unchanged even when the senses stop functioning?
8. Which element is universal and present in all beings?
9. Are Arivu and Ātman two separate entities?

## Answers

1. Awareness
2. Direct awareness or the basic sense of 'I am'
3. Awareness
4. The body-mind
5. Ātman
6. Ātman
7. Ātman
8. Consciousness
9. No, they point to the same underlying Self.



## Assignments

1. Explain how Verse 10 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* helps us understand that awareness (Arivu) exists independently of the senses. Use everyday examples to support your explanation.
2. Discuss the relationship between the body, mind, and the Self (Ātman) using the magician–puppet analogy from Verse 27. How does this analogy clarify the unchanging nature of the Self?

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# 2

## UNIT

# Tripuṭi

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the meaning of Tripuṭi as the division of knower, known, and knowledge
- ◆ describe how Verse 4 shows that Tripuṭi arises from one beginningless reality
- ◆ understand how Verse 14 teaches that the Self is beyond all divisions and entirely non-dual
- ◆ explain how Verse 52 describes the dissolution of Tripuṭi in deep spiritual realisation
- ◆ differentiate between the practical functioning of Tripuṭi and the ultimate unity of the Self

## Prerequisite

Are we apart from nature, or are we within it? At first, it may seem that human beings stand separate from the natural world, observing it as if we are different from the trees, rivers, animals, and sky around us. This sense of separation arises because the mind divides experience into a knower, knowledge and a known world. This division leads us to view ourselves as separate from nature, and we soon come to believe that everything around us exists solely for our use. Such a view gradually develops into an attitude of ownership and control. For example, forests become resources, rivers become utilities, animals become objects, and the earth becomes something to be exploited. Once this mental split takes hold, harming nature becomes easier to justify, because nature is no longer seen as a living whole to which we belong, but as something external and separate.



Given that this sense of separateness is only a mental construction, the division between ‘I’ and ‘that,’ which forms the basis of Tripuṭi, creates the illusion that we stand outside the world. This masks the truth that in reality, we are entirely inseparable from nature- our bodies, breath, and very existence arise within it. Recognising this helps us understand why Sreenarayanaguru speaks of transcending the triadic division. When the mind no longer insists on a rigid separation between the knower, knowledge and the known, a sense of unity naturally emerges. This unity does not deny differences but allows us to see all life as interconnected. Such a shift not only deepens our self-understanding but also encourages a more responsible and compassionate relationship with the natural world.

## Keywords

Tripuṭi, Jñātā, Jñeya, Jñāna, Infinite Reality, Vyāvahārika, Pāramārthika, Pure consciousness, Tri-basic segmentation

## Discussion

### 3.2.1 Tripuṭi as the Basic Structure of Human Experience

#### Verse 4

അറിവുമറിഞ്ഞിടുമർത്ഥവും പുമാൻത -  
 നറിവുമൊരാദിമഹസ്സുമാത്രമാകും ,  
 വിരളതവിട്ടു വിളങ്ങുമമ്മഹത്താ -  
 മറിവിലമർന്നതു മാത്രമായിടേണം.

(ആത്മോപദേശ ശതകം-4)

*Knowledge, the object of knowledge, and one’s cognition of both are, in fact*

*only variations of a beginningless Being.*

*By merging in that knowledge of infinitude*

*One should become undifferentiated with it.*

Verse 4 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* states that in every act of knowing, there are three factors: the knower, the known, and the act of knowledge. But Guru explains that these three are not separate realities. They

are only different forms of one eternal and beginningless Reality. When a person understands and lives in this infinite Reality, they are no longer separate from it. Thus, what appears as knower, known, and knowledge is, in fact, one Being appearing in three ways.

Every ordinary experience follows this pattern. When a person says, ‘I see a tree,’ the ‘I’ functions as the knower, the tree becomes the known object, and the act of seeing is knowledge. This structure is so natural to human thinking that we rarely question it. We assume that the subject who knows, the object that is known, and the act of knowing are three clearly separate realities. Our entire everyday life- learning, memory, perception, emotion, and action- seems to depend upon this tripartite framework.

In Indian philosophical thought, especially in Advaita Vedānta, the human experience of knowing is explained through the Tripuṭi, a threefold division of knower (jñātā), known (jñeya), and knowledge (jñāna). Classical Advaita Vedānta teaches that this tripartite

division belongs only to the empirical level of experience (vyāvahārika), and that in absolute reality (pāramārthika) there is no division of knower, known, and knowledge, but only one non-dual Brahman or pure consciousness. Sree Narayana Guru presents the same Advaitic truth in the Ātmopadeśa Śatakam in a deeply experiential and psychological manner. He does not deny the practical usefulness of Tripuṭi in daily life. Instead, he invites the seeker to look deeply into it and question its ultimate validity. Through subtle philosophical analysis, he reveals that what appears as knower, known, and knowledge is in fact a single undivided consciousness functioning in three practical modes. This Advaitic vision forms the foundation of Ātmopadeśa Śatakam.

Verse 4 directly addresses the ontological basis of Tripuṭi. Guru explains that knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the cognition of both are only variations of a beginningless Being. This is crucial because it removes the belief that the three elements of Tripuṭi have independent existence. What are usually treated as three separate realities are shown to be expressions of one single, eternal Reality. The term ‘beginningless Being’ refers to a fact that has no temporal origin. It is eternal consciousness itself. Guru teaches that this eternal Being alone appears as the knower, as the known object, and as the act of knowing. The knower is not a separate ego standing outside the world. The known object is not a completely external entity cut off from consciousness. The act of knowing is not a mechanical link joining two disconnected realities. All three arise only because Being itself shines as awareness.

The world is not first made of inert matter and later illuminated by consciousness. On the contrary, consciousness itself appears as the world, as the individual, and as the knowing relation between them. What we call the ‘object’ is only a form of awareness taking shape, and what we call the ‘subject’

is also awareness appearing as a centre of reference. Thus, Tripuṭi is not a division between three independent substances, but a functional differentiation within one living consciousness. Guru also says that the seeker must ‘merge in the knowledge of infinitude.’ This does not mean physically withdrawing from the world or rejecting experience. It means transforming one’s sense of identity from the limited knower to the infinite ground of knowing itself. As long as a person feels, ‘I am only the knower inside this body’, Tripuṭi remains rigid.

When one begins to feel, ‘I am the infinite awareness in which both knower and known appear,’ Tripuṭi loosens its grip. The division still works for practical life, but it no longer defines one’s deepest identity. Thus, Verse 4 provides the ontological foundation of Tripuṭi. It shows that Tripuṭi is not false at the practical level, but it is not ultimately real. It is a relative structure dependent upon one eternal, beginningless Being.

### 3.2.2 The Self Beyond Tripuṭi

#### Verse 14

ത്രിഭുവനസീമ കടന്നു തിങ്ങി വിങ്ങും  
 ത്രിപുടി മുടിഞ്ഞു തെളിഞ്ഞിടുന്ന ദീപം  
 കപടയതിക്കു കരസ്ഥമാകുവീലെ -  
 ന്നുപനിഷദുക്തിരഹസ്യമോർത്തിടേണം.

(ആത്മോപദേശ ശതകം-14)

*Remember the secret of the Upaniṣads.*

*The Self in its pure state is limitless and indivisible.*

*It is free from divisions of time, and it fills the entire consciousness*

*Without the divisions of the knower, the known, and the knowledge.*

*One does not gain this state by merely making verbal claims.*



In verse 14, Guru teaches that the true Self is infinite and indivisible. It is beyond past, present, and future. In this pure Self, there are no divisions such as knower, known, and knowledge. Merely saying ‘I am that Self’ is not enough; this truth must be personally realised. Thus, at the highest level of reality, Tripuṭi does not exist at all.

If verse 4 explains that Tripuṭi arises from one Reality, verse 14 makes it clear that the pure Self stands completely beyond Tripuṭi. The Self is limitless, indivisible, and beyond time. It fills the entire field of consciousness without the divisions of subject, object, and knowledge. Guru also issues a severe warning that this state is not attained through mere verbal repetition or intellectual assertion. This teaching stands firmly in the tradition of the Upaniṣads, which repeatedly declare that the Self (Ātman) is one without a second, partless, changeless, and all-pervading. By referring to the ‘secret of the Upaniṣads,’ Guru reminds the seeker that non-duality is not merely a theory but a truth to be lived and realised. As long as experience is structured through Tripuṭi, one remains within duality.

The idea that the Self is ‘limitless’ directly challenges the ordinary sense of individuality. In daily life, we feel that the body, history, location, and time limit us. This limited ‘I’ functions as the knower in Tripuṭi. But Guru teaches that this limited knower is not the true Self. The true Self has no boundaries at all. It is not inside the body as an object among other objects. Instead, it is the all-pervading field of awareness in which even the body appears. Guru also teaches that the Self is indivisible. Tripuṭi divides experience into subject, object, and knowledge. But the pure Self has no internal divisions. It cannot be cut into parts. Just as space inside a pot and space outside a pot are not two different

spaces but one continuous space appearing divided by the pot, consciousness seems to be divided into knower and known only because of mental limitation. In reality, it is one.

Traditional explanations emphasise that Tripuṭi belongs to the level of mind and thought, not to the level of the Self. The moment one thinks, ‘I know this,’ division has already begun. Thought itself depends on the subject–object distinction. But the Self exists before thought, beneath thought, and beyond thought. Therefore, Tripuṭi cannot affect the true nature of the Self. Guru’s warning against mere verbal claims is especially important. Many people study Advaita and repeat statements like ‘Everything is one’ or ‘I am Brahman.’ Guru reminds us that if one’s lived experience is still dominated by fear, attachment, pride, and opposition between ‘me’ and ‘others,’ then Tripuṭi is still fully active. True transcendence of Tripuṭi requires inner transformation, not mere repetition of concepts.

When verse 14 says that the Self ‘fills the entire consciousness,’ it means that all experiences- inner and outer- are occurring within a single continuous field of awareness. There is no separate subject standing outside experience. There is only experience happening in awareness. When this is deeply realised, Tripuṭi loses its absolute authority. Knower, known, and knowledge are understood as functional roles rather than ultimate realities. Thus, Verse 14 establishes the transcendence of the Self over Tripuṭi. Verse 4 shows Tripuṭi’s origin in one Being, while verse 14 declares that the pure Self is completely beyond Tripuṭi.

### 3.2.3 The Dissolution of Tripuṭi in Self-Realisation

#### Verse 52

ധനീമയമായ്ഗൃഗനം ജലിക്കുമനാ-  
 ഉണയുമതികലശേഷദൃശ്യജാലം  
 പുനരവിടെ ത്രിപുടിക്കു പുർത്തി നൽകും  
 സ്വനവുമടങ്ങുമിടം സ്വയം പ്രകാശം .

(ആത്മാപദേശ ശതകം-52)

*When the sky of consciousness is enflamed  
 with the vibrancy of sound,*

*All perceptual forms disappear in its  
 radiant blaze.*

*When, in that splendour, the small voice  
 that gives finality*

*To the tri-basic segmentation also ceases,*

*There prevails only the radiance of the  
 Self.*

Verse 52 describes the actual experiential dissolution of Tripuṭi. Guru explains that when the inner space of consciousness is filled with deep spiritual absorption, all separate forms lose their rigidity. At that time, the subtle inner voice that keeps saying ‘I am the knower of this object’ becomes silent. When that voice stops, only the radiance of the Self remains.

The ‘sky of consciousness’ is a powerful image the Guru uses to describe the inner space of awareness. Just as clouds and stars appear within the open sky, all thoughts, sensations, and perceptions appear within consciousness. The ‘vibrancy of sound’ symbolises deep contemplative absorption, in which awareness becomes intensely concentrated and purified. As consciousness becomes absorbed in its own depth, ordinary objects of perception- names, forms, and distinctions- begin to lose their solid character. They are no longer experienced

as rigid, separate entities but as fleeting waves within one luminous awareness. This is why Guru says that perceptual forms disappear in the radiant blaze. It does not mean that the world is physically destroyed, but that the sense of object-separation collapses.

The central teaching of this verse is contained in the phrase ‘the small voice that gives finality to the tri-basic segmentation.’ This small voice refers to the inner commentary that constantly says: ‘I am the knower,’ ‘this is the object,’ and ‘I know this.’ Even when one is outwardly silent, this subtle narration usually continues. It is this inner dialogue that sustains Tripuṭi at the psychological level. Traditional explanation connects this inner voice with language and conceptual thinking. The mind constantly works through sentences like ‘this is that,’ ‘this is mine,’ ‘I am doing this.’ Each such sentence silently reinforces subject-object division. As long as this conceptual activity continues, Tripuṭi continues.

Verse 52 teaches that in deep meditation and inner absorption, this subtle commentary can fall silent. When it stops, the knower no longer stands apart as an observer, the world no longer stands apart as an object, and knowing no longer acts as a bridge between two separate poles. What remains is pure, self-luminous awareness, which the Guru calls the radiance of the Self. This state is not unconsciousness or blankness. It is called radiance because it is intensely awake yet without division. There is knowing, but no separate knower; presence, but no separate object; awareness, but no dividing commentary. This is the complete experiential transcendence of Tripuṭi. From the perspective of spiritual discipline, the Guru makes it clear that Tripuṭi is not destroyed merely through intellectual analysis. It dissolves only when inner silence deepens beyond conceptual thought. The seeker does not forcibly destroy Tripuṭi; instead, Tripuṭi naturally falls away when



awareness rests in its own source.

### 3.2.4 Conclusion

When verses 4, 14, and 52 are examined together, a clear philosophical progression becomes apparent. First, Tripuṭi is shown to arise as a variation of one beginningless Being. Next, the pure Self is revealed as completely beyond Tripuṭi. Finally, Tripuṭi is shown to dissolve experientially in deep spiritual realisation when the inner voice that

sustains subject–object division becomes silent. Thus, in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, Tripuṭi is not treated as a merely abstract metaphysical idea. It is presented as a living structure of experience, as a bondage underlying human suffering, and as a gateway to liberation when rightly understood and transcended. In this way, Sree Narayana Guru unites philosophy, psychology, and spiritual practice into a single, harmonious vision.

## Recap

- ◆ Tripuṭi means the threefold division: knower, known, and knowledge.
- ◆ We usually think these three are separate.
- ◆ Verse 4 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* says all three come from one beginningless Reality.
- ◆ Tripuṭi are only different forms of the same Being.
- ◆ The world, the subject, and the act of knowing arise from consciousness.
- ◆ Tripuṭi is helpful for daily life but not the ultimate truth.
- ◆ The true Reality is one, not three.
- ◆ Verse 14 says the pure Self is limitless and indivisible.
- ◆ In the pure Self, there is no knower, known, or knowledge.
- ◆ The Self is beyond time and change.
- ◆ The feeling of ‘I’ based on the body is limited and not the true Self.
- ◆ The true Self is like space- one and continuous, never divided.
- ◆ Tripuṭi exists only in the mind, not in the Self.
- ◆ When thoughts begin, Tripuṭi begins; when thoughts stop, Tripuṭi weakens.
- ◆ Verse 52 describes how Tripuṭi dissolves in deep meditation.
- ◆ The ‘sky of consciousness’ holds all thoughts and perceptions.

- ◆ In deep absorption, forms lose their separate identity.
- ◆ In that state, there is no knower, no known, and no act of knowing.
- ◆ Awareness remains bright, awake, and without division.
- ◆ Tripuṭi cannot be removed by thinking but only by inner stillness.
- ◆ Tripuṭi falls away naturally when awareness returns to its source.
- ◆ Verse 4 shows the origin of Tripuṭi in one Being.
- ◆ Verse 14 shows the Self is beyond Tripuṭi.
- ◆ Verse 52 shows the dissolution of Tripuṭi in spiritual realisation.
- ◆ Tripuṭi creates the illusion of separation between 'I' and the world.
- ◆ Seeing unity reduces ego, fear, and division.
- ◆ Guru uses Tripuṭi to guide us from separation to unity.
- ◆ Tripuṭi is a practical viewpoint, not the ultimate truth.
- ◆ The ultimate truth is one undivided consciousness.

## Objective Questions

1. What is Tripuṭi?
2. What does Verse 4 teach about the three parts of Tripuṭi?
3. What is the 'beginningless Being' referred to in Verse 4?
4. What does Verse 14 say about the Self?
5. What sustains Tripuṭi at the psychological level?
6. What level of reality does Tripuṭi belong to?
7. What level of reality is free from Tripuṭi?
8. What does the 'sky of consciousness' symbolise?
9. What is the result of deep inner silence described in Verse 52?
10. What is considered the ultimate truth beyond Tripuṭi?



11. What breaks the apparent separation between 'I' and the world?
12. What is the ultimate state after Tripuṭi dissolves, described by Guru?

## Answers

1. The division of knower, known, and knowledge
2. They are variations of one beginningless Reality
3. The one eternal consciousness behind all experience
4. The Self is limitless, indivisible, and beyond all divisions
5. The inner voice that says, 'I am the knower.'
6. The empirical (vyāvahārika) level
7. The absolute (pāramārthika) level
8. The vast field of awareness that holds all thoughts and perceptions
9. The dissolution of the knower-known division
10. One undivided consciousness
11. Realising the unity behind Tripuṭi
12. Pure, self-luminous awareness

## Assignments

1. Explain the concept of Tripuṭi in detail. How does Verse 4 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* show that the knower, the known, and knowledge are only different expressions of one beginningless Reality?
2. Analyse the process described in Verse 52 where Tripuṭi dissolves in deep spiritual realisation. What is the role of the 'small inner voice' in sustaining Tripuṭi, and how does its silence lead to non-dual awareness?

3. Tripuṭi is necessary for practical experience but not for ultimate realisation. Discuss this distinction with reference to Verses 4, 14, and 52.

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# 3

## UNIT

# Para and Aparā

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the difference between para (higher wisdom) and aparā (relative knowledge)
- ◆ explain how para-knowledge brings inner freedom, lightness, and a sense of timeless awareness
- ◆ discuss the relationship between para, aparā, and the functioning of Tripuṭi in everyday experience
- ◆ recognise how Guru uses poetic imagery, like ‘milk of wisdom’, to express the nourishing nature of para

## Prerequisite

Is your happiness tied only to the things of the world, or does it also come from something deeper within you? Many people feel satisfied only when situations go their way- when they receive appreciation, achieve goals, or enjoy comforts. But the moment this change occurs, the mind becomes restless again. This shows how easily we become trapped in aparā, the level of experience in which everything depends on external conditions, constant activity, and the pressure of time. Much confusion arises from living at only this surface level, because the mind continually chases the transient and fears the loss of what may be lost. Guru’s teaching reminds us that there is also para, a more profound inner wisdom that does not depend on changing circumstances. When a person touches this higher awareness, happiness is no longer controlled by the outer world. Instead, clarity, calmness, and freedom arise naturally from within. Para knowledge helps one remain steady even in the midst of change, while aparā keeps one endlessly chasing after it. Recognising this difference encourages an inward search for a more stable and lasting source of joy beyond momentary experiences.

## Keywords

Para, Aparā, Inner wisdom, Restlessness, Transience, Change and impermanence, Self-illumination, Parayude Pal

## Discussion

### Verse 15

പരയുടെ പാലു നുകർന്ന ഭാഗ്യവാന്മാർ -  
കൊരു പതിനായിരമാരെപ്പനേരം  
അറിവപരപ്രകൃതിക്കധീനമായാ -  
ലരനെടി ആയിരമാു പോലെ തോന്നും  
(ആത്മോപദേശ ശതകം-15).

*To those fortunate ones who are enjoying  
the cream of absolute wisdom,*

*Ten thousand years will appear to be a  
short duration.*

*But to those who are caught in the snare  
of relativism,*

*Even a split second will appear as a  
thousand years.*

### 3.3.1 Meaning of Para and Aparā in Verse 15

Verse 15 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* speaks about two very different ways of living and knowing - para and aparā. Para denotes higher, liberating wisdom, whereas aparā denotes lower, relative knowledge that is bound to change, desire, and worldly necessity.

When Guru says, ‘those who have tasted the milk of para’, he is using a very touching image. Milk is the first food a child receives from the mother. It is nourishing and comforting, and it gives life. In the same way, para-knowledge is like a life-giving nourishment for the soul. It is not just information or theory. It is the direct taste of reality as one, whole, and peaceful.

It is the living experience that our true Self is beyond all change, beyond birth and death, and beyond the restless movement of desires and fears. The following line says that ‘for such blessed ones, ten thousand years appear as a short moment.’ This means that when a person lives in para-knowledge, their experience of time changes. Time no longer presses heavily. Even long stretches of time feel light and insignificant, like a brief moment. This is not because the clock stops, but because the mind is no longer anxiously counting gain and loss. The person is inwardly established in a timeless awareness.

Guru then contrasts this with the condition of those whose knowledge is caught in aparā prakṛti. Aparā literally means ‘not-para’, or lower. Prakṛti here denotes the world of constant change, recurring needs, and multiplying activities. When consciousness is entirely absorbed in this aparā field, the mind becomes burdened and restless. Then, Guru says, ‘even half a second seems like a thousand years.’ A short delay, a slight pain, or a minor problem feels unbearable. Time becomes heavy and oppressive. Thus, in just four lines, the verse shows that the same time - the same objective flow of seconds and minutes - can be experienced in two entirely different ways, depending on whether our awareness is rooted in para or trapped in aparā.

### 3.3.2 Para and Aparā: Two Kinds of Knowledge

The distinction between para and aparā has a long history in Indian thought. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* speaks of parā vidyā, the



higher knowledge that leads to the realisation of Brahman, and aparā vidyā, which includes all other forms of knowledge, such as rituals, grammar, logic, and the various sciences. These forms of apara knowledge are helpful and even necessary for the practical life of society, but they do not by themselves free a person from ignorance and sorrow. Sree Narayana Guru presents these traditional forms of knowledge in a simple yet deeply meaningful manner, demonstrating that human beings engage with many forms of knowledge. Still, not all knowledge serves the same purpose. Some forms of learning help us understand and manage worldly life, while another rare form of learning helps us understand the meaning of life itself. Guru does not reject any kind of knowledge; instead, he gently guides seekers to recognise which knowledge leads outward, and which knowledge leads inward toward the Self.

Para, for him, is knowledge of the Self as non-dual - the insight that the same pure consciousness shines as 'I', as the world, and as all experiences. Apara, on the other hand, is knowledge that remains within the subject-object division. It is all the understanding we have about objects, people, events, and systems, while still feeling ourselves as a separate ego at the centre. Apara prakṛti is described as the field in which necessities multiply and recur: hunger, social demands, financial worries, sickness, and emotional conflicts. We satisfy one need, and soon another appears; we solve one problem, and another comes up. Our attention remains tied to this endless chain of demands, and our knowledge is used mainly to manage them. Guru does not condemn apara knowledge. We need it to live in the world, to earn a livelihood, to communicate, and to organise society. Without Apara Vidyā, human civilisation itself could not progress. However, he points out that such knowledge, valuable as it is, remains limited because it cannot free a person from the deeper human problems of fear, attachment, insecurity,

and sorrow. Apara Vidyā enriches life but does not liberate the mind. Guru warns that if our entire consciousness is swallowed by this level alone, we will remain inwardly restless and dissatisfied. Then every minor disturbance looks huge, and time stretches painfully. The tiniest delay at a bus stop, the few seconds before a phone call connects, or the waiting for an exam result can feel like 'a thousand years'.

Para Vidyā, by contrast, turns the seeker inward. Instead of asking 'What is the world made of?' it asks the deeper question: 'Who am I?' It is this shift from outer objects to inner awareness that marks the beginning of higher knowledge. Guru describes Para Vidyā as the knowledge that reveals the ultimate truth of the Self and enables a person to understand their own inner nature. When ignorance fades, one begins to recognise the same divine essence in oneself and in all beings, which naturally leads to kindness, clarity, and fearlessness. Para-knowledge sees the same life from the standpoint of the Self. One still eats, works, studies, and interacts with others, but inwardly one knows: 'I am the witnessing awareness in which all these changing situations appear and disappear.' This knowledge does not depend on changing events; it is rooted in the changeless ground of being. That is why it has the power to make 'ten thousand years' feel like 'a short moment'. There is inner spaciousness and freedom.

### 3.3.3 Para, Apara and the Experience of Time

Verse 15 shows how inner knowledge and the experience of time are closely connected. When apara prakṛti dominates knowledge, time is experienced as fragmented and threatening. The mind swings between past regrets and future worries. It runs commentary such as: 'Why did that happen to me?', 'What will I do if this goes wrong?'. This constant mental movement makes the present

moment feel cramped and suffocating. A single second of fear, humiliation, or intense desire persists indefinitely in our experience. Objectively, the clock moves at the same speed, but psychologically, ‘half a second seems like a thousand years’.

On the other hand, when one has ‘tasted the milk of para,’ attention is no longer fully absorbed in these anxieties. The person lives more in pure presence, with an open, accepting awareness. There is still memory and planning, but they are not loaded with fear. Because the mind is not resisting the flow of events, time flows lightly. Many years can pass in dedicated service, meditation, or love, and yet, when the person looks back, they feel as if it were a brief, joyful moment. Para-knowledge brings the sense of standing in the timeless ground of reality, whereas apara-knowledge keeps us tied to the clock-time of changing situations and mental agitations. The same outer life can thus be lived as either heavy and painful, or light and meaningful, depending on which kind of knowledge dominates.

### 3.3.4 Para, Apara and Tripuṭi

Classical Advaita Vedānta teaches that the triad of knower, known, and knowledge or tripuṭi belongs to the empirical, or vyāvahārika, level of experience and does not apply to the absolute, non-dual reality of the Self. In this background, verse 15 can be read as showing how para and apara relate to Tripuṭi. When consciousness is caught in apara prakṛti, Tripuṭi is very strong. Here, the ‘I’ appears to be a separate subject, constantly measuring itself against objects and situations in the world. The knower worries about results, compares, judges, and clings. Because of this strong sense of separation, the subject suffers intensely. A minor insult, a brief illness, or a short waiting period can become unbearable. Here, Tripuṭi functions as a bondage: the knower

is trapped in its own narrow viewpoint, and apara-knowledge is used mainly to protect or enlarge this ego-centre.

In para-knowledge, the relation with Tripuṭi changes. The knower, known, and knowledge are still present in a practical sense - after all, the realised person also perceives the world and acts in it - but the division is not felt as ultimate. One recognises that the same consciousness shines as subject and object. The ego-centre becomes transparent. The knower no longer stands in intense opposition to the known. Because this inner conflict softens, time also loses its sharp, cutting power. Experiences come and go within a larger, peaceful awareness. We can say, therefore, that apara knowledge keeps Tripuṭi as a hard wall between self and world, whereas para knowledge sees Tripuṭi as a proper appearance within one indivisible reality. Verse 15 hints at this by linking para with lightness and freedom in time, and apara with heaviness and suffering.

### 3.3.5 Para and Apara in Everyday Life

Considering a situation of studying for an exam. Apara knowledge is clearly involved in it: reading textbooks, understanding concepts, remembering facts, and writing answers. These are necessary and valuable. But if the student’s whole identity is tied to marks, comparison with others, and fear of failure, then every hour of study can feel like a burden. The mind is tense, and time passes slowly and painfully. Now, imagine the same student cultivating a para-orientation. Along with study, they remember, ‘My worth is not limited to this result. I am a conscious being learning and growing. Success and failure both pass; what matters is clarity and sincerity.’ This simple shift in inner attitude comes from a touch of higher wisdom. The same hours of study can now feel lighter and even joyful. Time moves more smoothly because the ego is not constantly threatened.



Similarly, in relationships, *apara* knowledge focuses only on roles, expectations, and demands: 'You must behave like this; you belong to me; I cannot be happy unless you change.' From this standpoint, minor disappointments feel huge, and time in conflict stretches painfully. *Para*-knowledge enables us to regard the other person as also a manifestation of the same Self. Compassion and understanding arise. This does not mean that *para*-knowledge removes all problems from life. Difficulties persist, and emotions remain. But *para* provides a larger inner space in which these experiences are held. The person is less crushed by them. In this sense, *para* and *apara* are not two totally separate worlds; they are two orientations of the same mind. Verse 15 encourages us to slowly move from predominantly *apara*-oriented living towards a *para*-oriented understanding.

### 3.3.6 Conclusion: The Inner Choice Between Para and Apara

Verse 15 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* operates on several levels simultaneously. On the surface, it speaks poetically about 'ten thousand years' and 'half a second.' At a deeper level, it reveals a profound truth: the quality of our experience of time and life depends on the quality of our knowledge. When our awareness is entirely absorbed in *apara prakṛti* - the world of recurring needs, worries, and ego-centred calculations - we remain confined within sharp *Tripuṭi* divisions. The knower feels separate and vulnerable; therefore, even small moments of pain stretch into prolonged periods of suffering.

When we 'taste the milk of *para*,' even in a small measure, we discover a different centre of identity: the Self as pure awareness. From this standpoint, *Tripuṭi* is regarded as a passing appearance rather than an absolute reality. Life's events still unfold, but they no longer crush us. Time flows more lightly, and even long years can feel like a brief, meaningful moment. In this way, verse 15 continues the Advaitic vision developed in the earlier verses on *Tripuṭi*. It shows that non-dual wisdom is not an abstract doctrine but a living power that can transform our everyday experience of time, suffering, and relationships. This verse is an invitation to recognise the inner choice we have in each situation: to live only in *apara*, or to open ourselves, little by little, to the liberating light of *para*.

Guru's social teachings gain greater depth when understood through this verse. His famous message- 'One caste, one religion, one God for man' - is rooted in *Para Vidyā*, the vision that the same Self shines in all beings. Without this higher understanding, social reform would lack a spiritual foundation. *Para Vidyā*, therefore, serves as the basis for compassion, equality, and nonviolence. It encourages individuals to look beyond superficial differences and recognise the unity that binds all life. *Apara Vidyā* is necessary for living responsibly, contributing to society, and fulfilling duties. *Para Vidyā* is essential for finding inner freedom, purpose, and peace. When the two are balanced, a person becomes both outwardly efficient and inwardly serene. can be regarded as a work comparable to the *Upaniṣads* in both its philosophical depth and spiritual universality.

## Recap

- ◆ Guru compares para to nourishing milk that strengthens inner wisdom.
- ◆ Apara deals with temporary, shifting experiences of daily life.
- ◆ Para reveals what is timeless and unchanging within us.
- ◆ Apara works through the senses and the busy mind.
- ◆ Para arises when the mind becomes quiet and clear.
- ◆ Apara makes time feel heavy and tiring.
- ◆ Para makes experience feel light and free.
- ◆ The mind in apara lives on the surface of life.
- ◆ Para allows one to see life from a deeper centre.
- ◆ Apara increases confusion and emotional ups and downs.
- ◆ Para brings steadiness and understanding.
- ◆ Guru shows that both para and apara are part of human experience.
- ◆ Apara is useful in practical life, but not enough for inner peace.
- ◆ Para is needed to overcome fear, confusion, and restlessness.
- ◆ Para and apara show two ways of relating to the world.
- ◆ Para unites; apara divides.
- ◆ Para knowledge helps transcend duality and inner conflict.
- ◆ Apara ties a person to constant seeking and dissatisfaction.
- ◆ Para leads to inner fulfilment without dependence on externals.
- ◆ Recognising para and apara helps one make wiser life choices.
- ◆ Para guides the mind from external noise to inner quietness.
- ◆ Apara shows the limits of ordinary knowledge.
- ◆ Para opens the way to a deeper insight into one's own nature.
- ◆ Guru's teaching encourages balance between para and apara.



## Objective Questions

1. What does 'para' mean in Guru's teaching?
2. What does 'apara' refer to?
3. What kind of experience is associated with para?
4. What does Guru compare para to?
5. What helps a person remain steady even during change?
6. Which mode of knowing works mainly through the senses?
7. What does para reveal about human nature?
8. What is the focus of Verse 15 in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*?

## Answers

1. Higher knowledge or inner wisdom
2. Lower, external, or worldly knowledge
3. Calmness, clarity, and inner freedom
4. The nourishing 'milk of wisdom' (parayude pāl)
5. Para knowledge
6. Apara
7. Its deeper, unchanging awareness
8. The distinction between para (higher vision) and apara (lower vision)

## Assignments

1. Explain the difference between para and apara as described in Verse 15 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*. How do these two ways of knowing influence a person's experience of happiness and inner freedom?
2. Analyse how dependence on apara leads to restlessness and pressure, while para brings clarity and calmness. Use examples from everyday life to support your explanation.

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# 4

## UNIT

# Sama and Anya

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain sama and anya as the two basic tendencies of human knowledge
- ◆ describe how the mind unifies differences through the vision of sameness
- ◆ differentiate the analytic function of anya from the synthetic function of sama
- ◆ discuss why cultivating sama leads to clarity, unity, and inner harmony, while excessive anya creates separation and conflict
- ◆ recognise how sama and anya together shape the entire process of knowing

## Prerequisite

The mind constantly tries to understand the world by grouping some things and separating others. At times, we look at people or situations and notice what they share in common- this is the movement toward sama, or sameness. At other times, the mind focuses on differences, distinctions, and boundaries- this is the movement toward anya, or otherness. Both tendencies operate quietly within us and strongly shape how we perceive ourselves and others. When the sense of sameness is strong, we feel connected, open, and at peace; when otherness dominates, we experience separation, defensiveness, or isolation. Sree Narayana Guru highlights these two fundamental movements of knowledge to help us recognise how deeply they influence our thoughts, relationships, and worldview. Becoming aware of sama and anya allows us to understand why unity sometimes feels effortless while division arises so easily, guiding us toward a more balanced and harmonious way of seeing life.

## Keywords

Sama, Anya, Synthetic function, Analytic function, Cognitive tendencies, Vision of sameness, Vision of difference, Inner harmony, Mental conflict

## Discussion

### 3.4.1 Verse 36

അറിവിനു ശക്തിയനന്തമിതെല്ലാ -  
 മറുതിയിടാം സമയന്യയെന്നിവണ്ണം  
 ഇരുപിരിവായിതിലന്യ സാമ്യമാർന്നു -  
 ഉളുരുവിലമർന്നു തെളിഞ്ഞുണർന്നിടേണം.  
 (ആത്മോപദേശ ശതകം-36)

*Innumerable are the powers of knowledge.*

*They can be mainly categorised into two 'sameness' and 'the other'.*

*One should awake to the clarity of vision in which all forms of otherness*

*merge and become one wish 'sameness'.*

Verse 36 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* introduces Sree Narayana Guru's analysis of the basic tendencies of human knowledge. The verse begins by acknowledging that the powers of knowledge are innumerable. Human beings can think, reason, compare, combine, imagine, classify, and interpret the world in countless ways. Although these operations seem complex, Guru states that they can ultimately be grouped into two main tendencies- sama and anya, meaning 'sameness' and 'otherness.' Guru uses these two terms to summarise the entire activity of human cognition. The meaning of this verse becomes clearer when we observe our own experience. When the mind recognises what is common to different things, it is functioning under the category of sama. For example, when we see the variety of people around us yet understand them all as human beings, or when we see the many

leaves of a tree yet grasp them as belonging to one organism, we are operating through the vision of sameness. This tendency unifies, connects, and reveals underlying patterns.

On the other hand, the mind also tends to notice distinctions. It differentiates one object from another, one person from another, and one idea from another. This activity is anya. It helps us analyse, compare, and navigate the world effectively. But Guru goes further and explains that the ultimate spiritual clarity arises when a person awakens to a vision in which all forms of 'otherness' merge back into 'sameness.' This merging of differences into unity is not the denial of diversity but the realisation that all diversity is grounded in one fundamental reality. The verse, therefore, calls the seeker to a deeper understanding. While differences exist at the level of appearance, the wise person trains the mind to identify the unity that lies beneath all forms. This shift from 'seeing the many' to 'understanding the one' gives rise to inner peace and harmony. Verse 36 is thus both psychological and spiritual: it describes how the mind works and how the seeker should refine this working to attain clarity of vision.

### 3.4.2 Verse 40

സമയിലുമന്യയിലും സദാപി വനി -  
 ഞ്ചമരുവതുതതിൻ വിശേഷശക്തി  
 അമിതായതാകിലുമാകെ റിവറ്റിൻ -  
 ഭ്രമകലയാലഖിലം പ്രമേയമാകും .

(ആത്മോപദേശ ശതകം-40)



*Their specific powers alternate between the synthetic and the analytic.*

*Even though innumerable are their contexts of operation,*

*the dual functions of assuming the agency of the subject and the objectivization of knowledge*

*-in their entirety- belong to these two entities.*

Verse 40 continues the teaching of Verse 36 by showing more clearly how sama (sameness) and anya (otherness) work inside our mind. Guru explains that our knowledge appears to function in many different ways, but upon closer examination, all these activities derive from just two basic movements. One movement makes us feel like a 'knower,' the one who sees, thinks, or understands. The other movement leads us to see the world as 'objects,' as things that are known. These two activities- becoming the subject and creating the object- happen again and again in every moment of our experience. Guru states that both functions arise from the mind's continual oscillation between sama and anya. When the mind feels otherness, it separates itself from what it sees and becomes the 'knower.' When the mind experiences sameness, it integrates different objects into a single experience.

In this way, the mind constantly alternates between uniting and separating, between creating the subject and the object. This continuous alternation is what forms our usual experience of the world- sometimes we feel connected to things, and sometimes we feel separate from them. Thus, Verse 40 indicates that the entire subject-object relationship is not fixed or absolute. It is created by the mind's movement between sameness and otherness. When this is understood, we realise that even the basic structure of knowing is shaped by the play of sama and anya, and that this insight is an essential step towards

a deeper vision of unity.

The analytic function arises from anya. When the mind is analysing something, it divides reality into parts. It separates one idea from another, one category from another, and one experience from another. This is essential for day-to-day life, communication, reasoning, and practical problem-solving. Without anya, we would not be able to distinguish danger from safety, friend from stranger, or important from unimportant. But this analytic ability also reinforces the sense of separation. It reinforces the feeling of a rigid boundary between 'I' and 'you,' 'self' and 'world,' and 'inner' and 'outer.' In contrast, the synthetic function arises from sama. When the mind synthesises, it brings many elements together into a meaningful whole. It sees relationships, similarities, and unity. This synthetic vision is essential for deeper philosophical understanding, spiritual reflection, and the experience of connectedness. Sama is the doorway to spiritual insight, because the vision of unity is what ultimately reveals the true nature of the Self.

Verse 40, therefore, explains that the entire structure of human knowledge- the knower, the known, and the process of knowing- arises from the constant interplay of sameness and otherness. The mind moves from unity to difference and back to unity. Guru emphasises that understanding this alternating operation helps the seeker recognise the limitations of the mind and move toward a more profound awareness where the boundaries created by anya gradually dissolve.

### 3.4.3 Sama and Anya

Sama and anya are two fundamental tendencies present in every moment of human experience. Sama is the unifying force. It recognises connection, relatedness, balance, and harmony. It allows us to understand the world as a coherent whole.

It is the mental power that looks beyond differences and grasps the more profound truth. In spiritual contexts, sama denotes the capacity to perceive the one Self in all beings and to recognise that a single consciousness weaves together all existence. This vision promotes compassion, patience, and peace. Anya, on the other hand, is the distinguishing force. It highlights multiplicity, variety, and individuality. It is essential for object identification, decision-making, and analytical tasks. Without anya, life would be impossible because we would be unable to handle distinctions.

But when anya dominates, it leads to separation, ego-centeredness, fear, conflict, and emotional imbalance. The excessive reliance on anya is the root of suffering because it strengthens the feeling of being isolated from the rest of the world. Both tendencies are necessary, but they serve different purposes. Anya helps us survive in the world; Sama helps us understand the deeper reality of existence. Guru's teaching encourages the seeker to recognise both, but to gradually give priority to sama so that the vision of unity becomes stronger than the experience of division.

Verses 36 and 40 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* present a complete picture of how sama and anya operate within human consciousness. Verse 36 provides the foundation by declaring that all forms of knowledge can be summarised as belonging to these two tendencies. It then urges the seeker to cultivate the vision in which all differences dissolve into unity. This verse, therefore, emphasises the spiritual role of sama- it is the

path to clarity, liberation, and peace. Verse 40 complements this teaching by explaining how sama and anya function systematically within the processes of knowing. It shows that these two tendencies are responsible for the formation of both the subject and the object. The analytic functions belong to anya; the synthetic functions belong to sama. Through this explanation, Guru shows that the structure of knowledge itself arises from the interplay of sameness and otherness. Together, the two verses show that while anya is necessary for practical understanding, the seeker must gradually move toward the stabilising vision of sama. The goal is not to eliminate distinctions but to see them without losing the underlying unity. In this way, both verses guide us from an intellectual understanding of cognitive processes toward a more profound spiritual insight.

### 3.4.4 Conclusion

Sree Narayana Guru's teachings in Verses 36 and 40 of *the Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* offer a profound account of how the mind perceives the world. Sama and anya are the two fundamental forces behind all knowledge. Recognising how they work helps the seeker understand not only external reality but also the workings of the inner mind. Guru teaches that, while otherness is natural and necessary, it is ultimately the vision of sameness that brings peace, harmony, and spiritual clarity. These verses remind us that knowledge is not only a tool for understanding the world but also a pathway for realising unity, overcoming division, and awakening to the deeper truth of the Self.



## Recap

- ◆ The mind understands the world through sameness (sama) and otherness (anya).
- ◆ Sama is the tendency to see unity and standard features.
- ◆ Anya tends to see differences and boundaries.
- ◆ Knowledge has many powers, but mainly functions through sama and anya.
- ◆ Verse 36 shows that clarity comes when otherness merges into sameness.
- ◆ Seeing sameness brings a feeling of connection and harmony.
- ◆ Excessive otherness creates division and separation.
- ◆ Verse 40 explains that sama and anya alternate in all thinking processes.
- ◆ The mind uses sama to join things together.
- ◆ The mind uses anya to separate and distinguish things.
- ◆ Subject and object arise from the movement of sama and anya.
- ◆ The analytic function of the mind comes from anya.
- ◆ The synthetic function of the mind comes from sama.
- ◆ All knowledge depends on both sameness and otherness.
- ◆ When anya dominates, we feel isolated and defensive.
- ◆ When sama dominates, we feel open and peaceful.
- ◆ Sama helps one see unity behind diversity.
- ◆ Anya helps one understand specific differences in the world.
- ◆ Both sama and anya are necessary for practical life.
- ◆ A balanced mind uses both tendencies appropriately.
- ◆ Guru teaches that real clarity comes when difference does not hide unity.
- ◆ Sama leads toward a deeper, integrated vision of reality.
- ◆ Anya shows how the mind creates boundaries and divisions.

- ◆ The mind shifts naturally between sameness and difference.
- ◆ Misuse of *anya* leads to prejudice and misunderstanding.
- ◆ Proper use of *sama* promotes empathy and understanding.
- ◆ Knowledge becomes complete only when both tendencies work together.
- ◆ Awareness of these two functions leads to more balanced and thoughtful living.

## Objective Questions

1. What is meant by *sama*?
2. What is meant by *anya*?
3. According to Verse 36, what are the two main categories of knowledge functions?
4. What does *sama* promote in human experience?
5. What does *anya* promote in human experience?
6. What does Verse 40 say about the functions of knowledge?
7. Which function of knowledge is linked to analysis?
8. Which function of knowledge is linked to synthesis?
9. What does the proper use of *sama* lead to?

## Answers

1. Tendency to see sameness or unity
2. Tendency to see difference or otherness
3. Sameness (*sama*) and otherness (*anya*)
4. Connection, harmony, and unity
5. Distinction, separation, and boundaries
6. They alternate between the analytic and synthetic functions



7. Anya
8. Sama
9. Empathy, harmony, and deeper insight

## Assignments

1. Explain the concepts of sama (sameness) and anya (otherness) in detail. How do these two basic movements of the mind shape the way we perceive people, situations, and the world around us?
2. Discuss how Verses 36 and 40 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* describe the functioning of knowledge through the analytic and synthetic tendencies. How do these verses show that subject and object arise from the interplay of sameness and otherness?
3. Analyse how excessive emphasis on anya can lead to division and conflict, while cultivating sama can promote unity and understanding. Use simple examples from daily life to support your explanation.

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**BLOCK**

# **Implications of Atmopadesa Satakam in Practical Life**



# 1

## UNIT

# Oneness and Otherness

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the basic idea of Self and Other in philosophy
- ◆ describe how Nārāyana Guru understands the unity between all beings
- ◆ identify the key message of Verses 23–26 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*
- ◆ understand how compassion and selflessness arise from the feeling of oneness

## Prerequisite

Human life unfolds between two words ‘I’ and ‘You’. From this simple distinction arises the great philosophical question of Self and Other. Who am I, and how do I relate to others? Every culture, every thinker, in one way or another, has wrestled with this mystery. When a person says “I,” it seems natural; but behind it lies a world of meaning of consciousness, of identity, of belonging, and of difference. In Western philosophy, thinkers like Hegel described how the self becomes aware of itself only through its encounter with another self. The “other” reflects one’s existence like a mirror. Emmanuel Levinas went further, saying that the face of the other person awakens us to our moral responsibility. To see another’s vulnerability is to feel called to care. In Indian philosophy, this dialogue takes a different turn. The Upaniṣads declare that the Self (*Ātman*) within one is not separate from the Self in others. *The Chandogya Upaniṣad*’s mahāvākya, “*Tat Tvam Asi*” (“That Thou Art”), points to this oneness. Ignorance (*Avidyā*) makes us imagine separateness, while knowledge (*Vidyā*) dissolves that separateness. Knowledge reveals that all beings are expressions of the same divine consciousness. It is here that Nārāyana Guru’s *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* offers a path of practical wisdom in this direction. Guru speak of oneness as an insight that transforms behaviour, emotion, and relationship. In Verses 23–26, which this unit discusses, Guru explores this in detail.



## Keywords

Self – Other, Oneness , Compassion, Ignorance (Avidyā), Knowledge (Vidya), Moral Responsibility, Consciousness, Relationship

## Discussion

### 4.1.1 Verse -23

#### Original Text:

അപരനുവേണ്ടിയഹർന്നിശം പ്രയത്നം  
കൃപണത വിട്ടുകൃപാലു ചെയ്തിടുന്നു;

കൃപണതയോമുഖനായ്ക്കിടന്നു ചെയ്യു-  
നപജയകർമ്മമവന്നു വേണ്ടി മാത്രം.

#### Transliteration:

*Aparanu vendi aharniśam prayatnam  
krpaṇaṭa viṭṭu krpālu ceytidunnu;  
krpaṇan adhōmukhanāyi kiḍannu ceyyunna  
apajaya karma mavannu vendi mātram.*

**English translation** (source: <https://www.sndp.org/html/atmopadesaSatakam>):

A compassionate man without any vested interest works both day and night for the welfare of others.

On the other hand, a selfish man, desirous of his own good,

toils day and night and comes again and again to his frustration.

#### Meaning

“A knower of Brahman, filled with compassion and free from selfish desire, dedicates both day and night to actions meant for the good of others. On the other hand, an ignorant person motivated by self-interest works continuously with a narrow outlook shaped by a sense of difference. Actions performed only to satisfy personal material

needs ultimately turn life into an experience of suffering.”

#### 4.1.1.1 Compassion Beyond Self-interest

In this verse, Guru describes two kinds of human effort that define the quality of life. The first is narrow and self-centered, driven by personal gain, pride, or fear. Such effort comes from the mistaken belief that one’s own good is separate from the good of others. The second kind of effort is broad and selfless. It arises from love, compassion, and the awareness that life is shared with all beings. The person who acts with this spirit of giving becomes krpālu, one who is kind-hearted and noble. In contrast, the person ruled by greed and selfishness remains krpaṇa, a small-minded being who lives in inner poverty, no matter how much he owns.

Imagine a teacher who works only for a salary and recognition. Over time, the work becomes tiring and empty. But a teacher who teaches out of care for students finds satisfaction even in challenges. The difference lies in the motive, that is, whether one acts to take or to give.

Guru’s insight is practical here. A self-centred life, though it may seem successful outwardly, leads to isolation and unhappiness. Such a life cuts off the self from the living whole. Compassion, on the other hand, widens the sense of self. It allows one to see others as extensions of one’s own being. In caring for others, the self, expands. In selfishness, the self, contracts. For Guru,

true success lies not in competition but in communion. So, participating in the joy of others is very important.

### 4.1.2 Verse-24

#### Original text:

അവനിവനെനരിയുന്നതൊക്കെയോർത്താ-  
ലവനിയിലാദിമമായൊരാത്തരുപം  
അവനവനാത്മസുഖത്തിനാചരിക്കു-  
നവയപരന്നു സുഖത്തിനായ് വരേണം

#### Transliteration:

*Avan ivan ennariyunnath okkey orthāl  
avaniyil ādimayāy orātmarūpam;  
avanavan ātma sukhathin ācarikkunnava  
aparannu sukhathināy varēṇam.*

**English Translation:** (source: <https://www.sndp.org/html/atmopadesaSatakam>):

What is known as that person, or this person, when carefully considered,

is the one undifferentiated form of the primeval Self.

Whatever one does for the happiness of one’s own self should also include the happiness of others.

#### Meaning

“When one reflects deeply on what is truly real behind the distinctions such as “I,” “you,” “he,” and “this,” it becomes evident that the primordial cause of this universe is none other than the Supreme Self, a compact mass of pure consciousness. Therefore, every action performed by an individual for one’s own happiness ought to be undertaken with due consideration for the happiness of others as well.”

### 4.1.2.1 The Same Self in All

In this verse, Guru reveals the deeper truth that the same Self (Ātman) exists in everyone. The differences we see, of body, language, status, or belief, are only outward forms. Within, there is one divine essence shining through all. When we understand this, our way of living changes. We realize that actions done for our own happiness should not harm, but rather help, the happiness of others.

Guru teaches that true joy cannot exist in isolation. When one’s happiness causes another’s pain, it is incomplete and impure. When one’s actions bring comfort and peace to others, joy multiplies. This awareness turns self-pleasure into shared well-being. Consider a simple example: in a family, if one member eats the best food while ignoring others’ hunger, the atmosphere becomes tense and joyless. But if that person shares the food lovingly, everyone feels satisfied, including the giver. What changes is not the food itself, but the awareness of unity.

Guru’s insight is both spiritual and social. Seeing the same Self in all naturally leads to compassion, equality, and justice. In this way, the philosophy of oneness becomes a practical guide for harmonious living.

### 4.1.3 Verse -25

#### Original Text:

ഒരുവനു നല്ലതുമന്യനല്ലലും ചേർ-  
പ്പൊരു തൊഴിലാത്മവിരോധിയോർത്തിടേ  
ണം.  
പരനു പരം പരിതാപമേകിടുന്നോ-  
രരിനരകാണ്ഡിയിൽ വീണെരിഞ്ഞിടുന്നു.

#### Transliteration:

*Oruvanu nallathum anyan allalum  
chērporu*



*thozhil ātmavirodhiyorṭṭitēnam;  
paranu param paritāpam ēkiṭunnōrerī  
narakābdhiyil vīṇeriñṇitunnu.*

**English translation:** (source: <https://www.sndp.org/html/atmopadesaSatakam>):

What is good for one and might cause disaster to another is opposed to the unity of the Self.

Those who grievously hurt others will bring upon themselves the pain of consequential hell-fire.

### Meaning

“Actions performed in a manner that bring advantage to one person while causing suffering to another become obstacles to inner serenity. This is a matter that must be carefully reflected upon and understood. Those who inflict intense sorrow upon others are said to fall into a burning ocean of hell, where they are destined to experience severe torment.”

#### 4.1.3.1 Avoiding Harm to Others

In this verse, Guru turns our attention to the moral consequences of our actions. He reminds us that to cause harm to another is, in truth, to harm oneself. It is because the same Self (Ātman) exists in all. Every act of cruelty or indifference weakens one’s own inner peace. Guru warns that such people fall into narakābdhi, (hell-ocean), the ocean of suffering. This not due to divine punishment, but as a natural result of one’s own inner disconnection.

This example can help here: imagine a workplace where one person spreads gossip or envy to harm another. Outwardly, it may seem like a small act of cleverness, but soon mistrust spreads, and even the one who started it eventually loses peace and respect. The

negativity harms the whole environment, including the instigator. This shows that violence whether in thought, word, or deed, ultimately returns to the self.

When a person acts with hatred or deceit, it first burns within the doer. The pain we give to others echoes back to us because life is interwoven. Guru thus calls such harmful action ātmavirodhi, “against the Self.” The wise person who is aware of the unity of existence, avoids even small actions that cause hurt or humiliation to others. Guru’s message is that ethical living is not based on fear of punishment, but on understanding our shared being. When we protect others from harm, we protect the peace of our own.

#### 4.1.4 Verse 26

Original text:

അവയവമൊക്കെയമർത്തിയാണിയായ് നി-  
ന്നവയവിയാവിയെയൊവരിച്ചിടുന്നു;  
അവനിവനെനതിനാലവൻ നിനയ്ക്കു-  
ന്നവശതയാമവിവേകമാണിനാലെ.

#### Transliteration

*Avayavam okkey amarttiyāṇiāyi  
ninnavayaviy āviyey āvaricciṭunnu;  
avan ivan ennatinalavan  
ninaikkunnavaśatayām  
avivēkam onnināle.*

**English Translation** (source: <https://www.sndp.org/html/atmopadesaSatakam>):

The Self that owns the body keeps all the limbs held together like a bolt by animating it with a vaporous stuff.

Thus having, become identified with one’s physical body,

one loses right comprehension and fancies a separate reality for each person.



## Meaning

“By withdrawing and assimilating all the instruments of cognition and action—namely the intellect (buddhi), mind (manas), senses (indriyas), and the body (śarīra)—the living self, the empirical “I” (jīva), which functioned as the centre of all activities, enters into deep sleep (suṣupti), resting upon the vital force (prāṇa). Upon awakening, the same jīva emerges still covered by the veil of ignorance (avidyā). Because of this ignorance alone, which it unknowingly retains, the jīva comes to apprehend plurality, giving rise to the notion of difference—“he is different” and “this is different”—thereby perceiving multiplicity where, in truth, there is non-duality.”

### 4.1.4.1 Ignorance and the Illusion of Separation

Let us take an everyday example. Think of a community where people cooperate, like neighbours coming together to clean a common well. If each person says, “It’s not my job,” the water soon becomes polluted, and everyone suffers. But when they work together, each gain from the shared effort. Similarly, humanity thrives when we act with the awareness that others’ well-being is part of one’s own.

An imagery from the human body can be used to explain the unity of all existence. Just as the parts of a body such as hands, feet, eyes, and ears are different in form and at the same time, part of one living whole, all beings are parts of the same reality. When the hand is hurt, the whole body feels pain.

When the foot stumbles, the eye quickly responds to help. This harmony comes from an underlying unity.

Guru says that when we divide the world into “I” and “you,” “mine” and “yours,” we act out of ignorance (avivēka), the inability to see the oneness of life. It is this ignorance that causes all suffering, conflict, and selfishness. True knowledge, therefore, lies not in accumulating information but in realizing the wholeness of being, that we are inseparably connected to others and to the world around us. The separate self is an illusion born of ignorance; true selfhood is relational, it includes all. Once we understand this, compassion and humility arise naturally.

### 4.1.5 Guru’s views on Self-other Relation

In these verses, Sreenārāyanaguru guides us from the narrow walls of selfish living to the open field of compassion and unity. He shows that our true growth begins when we act not just for ourselves, but for the good of all. The *kṛpālu*, the compassionate one, sees life as one great body where each being is a part of the same whole. Ignorance makes us forget this truth and creates the illusion of “I” and “You.” But knowledge restores our vision, helping us see that to harm another is to harm oneself, and to love another is to love oneself. Through simple wisdom and everyday examples, Guru turns philosophy into a way of living, where kindness, understanding, and awareness become the real signs of spiritual maturity.



## Recap

- ◆ The distinction between “I” and “You” is the root of human experience. In its higher understanding, this separation is only apparent.
- ◆ Guru contrasts selfish action with selfless action.
- ◆ Compassion (*kṛpālu*) expands the self, while greed (*kṛpaṇa*) shrinks it.
- ◆ The self-centered person imagines others as rivals, while the compassionate one sees all as companions on the same path.
- ◆ Compassion is not mere emotion but a recognition of the one Self in all beings.
- ◆ Ignorance divides, knowledge unites.
- ◆ Self and Other are not two.
- ◆ Compassion and knowledge reveal the unity of being.

## Objective Questions

1. What is the opposite of *kṛpālu* according to Nārāyana Guru?
2. Which quality expands the self—selfishness or compassion?
3. Who said that the Self becomes aware of itself only through the Other?
4. What does *avivēka* mean in the context of Verse 26?
5. Which Upaniṣadic saying expresses the oneness of the Self?
6. According to Guru, what kind of action leads to lasting happiness?
7. What common example does Guru use to explain unity in Verse 26?

## Answers

1. *Kṛpaṇa*
2. Compassion
3. Hegel
4. Ignorance or lack of true understanding
5. *Tat Tvam Asi* (“That Thou Art”)
6. Selfless or compassionate action
7. The parts of the human body working together as one

## Assignments

1. Explain how Guru contrasts the *kṛpaṇa* and *kṛpālu* in Verse 23 with a real-life example.
2. How does ignorance (*avivēka*) create the illusion of separation between Self and Other?
3. In what way do Guru’s ideas connect with the Upaniṣadic vision of unity?
4. Reflect on a situation in your own life, where acting with compassion changed the outcome for the better.

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# 2

## UNIT

# Oneness of Religious Life

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the idea of oneness in religious life from philosophical and Indian perspectives
- ◆ interpret Verses 44 and 49 of the Upanishads and their spiritual significance.
- ◆ understand the importance of ethics, devotion, and practice in religion.
- ◆ appreciate the unity behind diverse religious traditions.
- ◆ connect the teachings to the Guru tradition in Kerala and their practical relevance.

## Prerequisite

The idea of oneness in religious life is central to both Indian philosophy and the philosophy of religion. Philosophers have explored whether all religions point to the same ultimate truth. John Hick, for example, argued that different religions are distinct paths leading to the same ultimate reality. In the Indian context, the Upanishads teach that all spiritual paths, rituals, and practices, when sincerely followed, lead to Brahman, the ultimate reality. In Kerala, Sree Narayana Guru (1855–1928) exemplified this principle of religious unity. He taught that all religions are paths to the same truth, emphasizing spiritual equality, ethical living, and social reform. Through his teachings and actions, he showed that devotion, knowledge, and service are more important than ritualistic differences. Verse 44 emphasizes that diversity of religious practices does not prevent all seekers from reaching the same goal. Verse 49 highlights that true religion is measured by ethical conduct, devotion, and selfless action, not by mere ritual.



## Keywords

Oneness, Brahman, Dharma, Religious pluralism, Ethics, Devotion, Selfless action, Spiritual equality, Interfaith harmony

## Discussion

### Verse 44

പലമതസാരവുമേകമെന്നു പാരാ-  
തുലകിലൊരാനയിലന്യരെന്നപോലെ  
പലവിധ യുക്തി പറഞ്ഞു പാമരന്മാ-  
രലവതു കണ്ടലയാതമർന്നിടേണം

### Meaning

“Assuming that the ultimate truth underlying all religions is one and the same, many people, like the blind men who encountered an elephant and returned with partial and conflicting descriptions, advance diverse arguments based on limited perception. Such individuals, lacking the intellectual clarity required to discern scientific truth through critical reflection, remain trapped in doubt and confusion. Instead of being drawn into this confusion, one must remain calm and engage in a sincere and disciplined search for truth.”

### Verse 49

അഖിലരുമാത്മസുഖത്തിനായ് പ്രയത്നം  
സകലവുമിങ്ങു സദാപി ചെയ്തിടുന്നു;  
ജഗതിയിലിമ്മതമേകമെന്നു ചിന്തി-  
ച്ചാലമണയാതകതാരമർത്തിടേണം.

### Meaning

“All human effort in this world, day and night, is ultimately directed towards finding happiness in the Self. In this sense, there exists only one universal religion in the world. Realising and reflecting upon this truth, one should avoid falling into sinful notions that disturb inner peace. Instead, the

mind must be disciplined through concentration and firmly established in steadfast devotion to the Self.”

### 4.2.1 Philosophical Basis of Oneness

The idea of oneness in religious life is a central concern in the philosophy of religion. Philosophers have long asked whether different religions represent fundamentally different truths, or whether they are diverse ways of approaching the same ultimate reality. This question becomes important in a world where people follow many faiths yet seek meaning, peace, and liberation in similar ways.

In Western philosophy of religion, thinkers such as John Hick argued for the view known as *religious pluralism*. According to this view, different religions are shaped by different cultures and histories, but all of them respond to the same ultimate reality. The differences between religions are therefore not about the final goal, but about the path taken to reach it. No single religion can claim complete ownership of truth.

In Indian philosophy, the idea of oneness is even more deeply rooted. The Upaniṣads teach that there is one ultimate reality, Brahman, which appears in many forms. Human beings follow different spiritual paths, such as devotion, knowledge, or action, but the destination remains the same. Diversity of religious practices is understood as a natural outcome of different temperaments and social conditions, not as a sign of contradiction.

This philosophical outlook suggests that

religious differences belong mainly to the external level, rituals, customs, language, and symbols, while unity belongs to the inner level of spiritual realization. When this distinction is not understood, religion becomes a source of division. When it is understood, religion becomes a force for harmony.

It is within this philosophical background that Sree Narayana Guru's vision of religious oneness must be placed. Guru does not deny religious diversity; instead, he shows that diversity makes sense only when grounded in a deeper unity. His teaching prepares one to see Verses 44 and 49 not as isolated moral statements, but as expressions of a long philosophical tradition that views truth as one and paths as many.

#### 4.2.2. Verse 44: Unity of Religious Paths

Verse 44 presents a powerful message about the essential unity of all religions. In this verse, Nārāyana Guru points out that although religions appear different in their beliefs, rituals, and practices, their inner meaning and final goal are one. People often fail to recognize this unity because they focus only on outward differences.

Guru uses an implied comparison similar to the famous example of blind men and an elephant. Each blind person touches a different part of the elephant and describes it differently, believing their description to be complete. In the same way, followers of different religions often experience only one aspect of the ultimate truth and mistake it for the whole. As a result, they argue, criticise others, and claim superiority for their own tradition.

The verse warns against such narrow thinking. Guru calls those who argue endlessly about religious differences *pāmaranmar*, people lacking deeper understanding. Their arguments are based on partial knowledge

and lead to confusion rather than wisdom. True spiritual insight, according to Guru, lies in seeing beyond external forms to the shared spiritual essence.

This verse teaches an important lesson in religious tolerance and humility. Differences in worship, scripture, or doctrine should not become reasons for conflict. Instead, they should be understood as different expressions of the same search for truth. When this understanding arises, respect for all religions follows naturally.

Thus, Verse 44 encourages us to move away from rigid religious identity and towards a broader spiritual vision. It prepares the ground for ethical living and harmony by reminding us that many paths exist, but the destination is one.

#### 4.2.3 Verse 49: Ethics, Devotion, and Spiritual Life

Verse 49 shifts attention from religious identity and belief to how religion is lived in everyday life. In this verse, Sree Narayana Guru teaches that all human beings naturally strive for happiness. Everything people do such as work, worship, prayer, and service is ultimately aimed at attaining inner peace and well-being.

Guru reminds us that true religion is not merely about rituals or external practices. Instead, it is measured by ethical behaviour, devotion, and selfless action. A person may follow a religion sincerely, but if their actions cause harm, selfishness, or injustice, then their religious life remains incomplete. Religion, according to Guru, must refine character and deepen compassion. This verse emphasises dharma, or right living. Devotion (*bhakti*) is meaningful only when it expresses itself through honesty, kindness, and responsibility towards others. Mere performance of rituals without moral awareness becomes empty,



while ethical action without inner devotion becomes mechanical. True spiritual life requires both inner sincerity and outward goodness.

Verse 49 also discourages narrow religious pride. Guru advises seekers to reflect on the unity of religious life and to avoid actions that increase ego, hatred, or division. When religion becomes a source of arrogance or exclusion, it loses its spiritual purpose. When it promotes humility, service, and love, it fulfils its true role.

Thus, this verse presents a practical test of religion: Does it make a person more ethical, more compassionate, and more selfless? If it does, then it is true religion, regardless of its external form.

#### 4.2.4. Sree Narayana Guru and Kerala's Religious Harmony

The teachings expressed in Verses 44 and 49 find their most powerful expression in the life and work of Sree Narayana Guru. Guru did not present religious unity merely as an abstract idea; he lived it and translated it into social reality. At a time when society in Kerala was deeply divided by caste, ritual hierarchy, and religious exclusiveness, Guru's message challenged both social and spiritual injustice.

Guru taught that all religions lead to the same ultimate truth, and therefore no religion has the right to claim superiority over others. His famous declaration "*One Caste, One Religion, One God for all*" captures the spirit of religious oneness expressed in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*. This statement was not meant to erase religious traditions, but to remove discrimination and inequality justified in the name of religion. Through his actions, Guru showed that ethical living is the true measure of spirituality. By establishing temples open to all, promoting education,

and encouraging self-respect among the oppressed, he demonstrated that devotion must go hand in hand with justice and compassion. Religion, in Guru's vision, was meant to uplift human dignity, not divide humanity.

Guru's approach also created a culture of religious harmony in Kerala. By respecting different faiths while emphasizing a shared spiritual foundation, he encouraged peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding. His teachings inspired later social movements and reformers, making unity in religious life a lived experience rather than a theoretical ideal.

Thus, through Sree Narayana Guru, the philosophical idea of oneness became a guiding principle for social reform, ethical responsibility, and spiritual growth.

#### 4.2.5 Contemporary Relevance

In the present world, religious diversity is a visible reality. People of different faiths live together, interact daily, and share social spaces. At the same time, misunderstandings, intolerance, and conflict often arise when religion is used to divide rather than unite. In this context, the teaching of oneness of religious life found in Verses 44 and 49 becomes especially meaningful.

Guru's message reminds us that religion is meant to guide human beings towards peace, ethical living, and inner growth, not towards hostility or exclusion. When people focus only on external differences such as rituals, customs, or religious labels, they lose sight of the shared moral and spiritual values present in all traditions. Understanding religious oneness helps reduce fear and suspicion between communities.

This teaching has practical importance. It encourages respect for all religions while

remaining sincere in one's own faith. It also helps learners see religion as a force for moral responsibility, social harmony, and personal transformation. Instead of asking which religion is superior, Guru's philosophy invites us to ask whether religion makes us more compassionate, truthful, and responsible.

In a pluralistic society, Guru's vision promotes interfaith harmony and ethical citizenship. By recognising the unity behind religious diversity, individuals can contribute to a more peaceful and just world. Thus, the oneness of religious life is not only a spiritual insight but also a guiding principle for modern social life.

## Recap

- ◆ The idea of oneness in religious life teaches that all religions aim at the same ultimate truth.
- ◆ Philosophers of religion and Indian thinkers agree that different religious paths can lead to one reality.
- ◆ Verse 44 explains that religious differences are external and should not become causes of conflict.
- ◆ Arguments about religious superiority arise from partial understanding, not true wisdom.
- ◆ Verse 49 teaches that true religion is shown through ethical living, devotion, and selfless action.
- ◆ Rituals alone do not make religion meaningful; moral conduct and compassion are essential.
- ◆ Sree Narayana Guru translated religious oneness into social harmony and reform in Kerala.
- ◆ The teaching of religious unity remains important for peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society.

## Objective Questions

1. What is the central theme of Verse 44?
2. According to Guru, what causes people to argue about religions?
3. What does Verse 49 say all human beings seek?



4. Which quality is more important than ritual in true religion?
5. Name the concept that teaches many paths lead to one truth.
6. Who gave the message “One Caste, One Religion, One God for all”?
7. What is the ultimate goal of religious life according to this unit?

## Answers

1. Unity of religious paths
2. Lack of deeper understanding
3. Happiness or inner peace
4. Ethical conduct
5. Religious pluralism / Oneness
6. Sree Narayana Guru
7. Realisation of truth and ethical living

## Assignments

1. Explain how Verse 44 promotes religious tolerance and understanding.
2. Why does Guru give importance to ethics over ritual in Verse 49?
3. How did Sree Narayana Guru practice religious unity in Kerala society?
4. How can the idea of oneness in religious life help in today’s world?

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# 3

## UNIT

# ‘Priyam’ as a Unifying Principle

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the meaning of ‘Priyam’ (love or dear-ness) in Guru’s philosophy
- ◆ interpret Verses 21 and 22 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*
- ◆ understand how love functions as a principle of unity in human life
- ◆ relate self-love and love for others in a philosophical way
- ◆ apply the idea of *Priyam* to ethical and social life

## Prerequisite

Love is not merely an emotion but a key concept connected to selfhood, value, and relationship in philosophy. Philosophers have often asked why human beings are drawn to certain things, people, or ideals, and what this attraction reveals about the nature of the self. In Indian philosophy, love (*priya*, *prema*, *bhakti*) is closely linked to the Self. The Upaniṣads teach that what we love is ultimately connected to our own happiness (*ātma-sukha*). We love objects, people, or ideals because we see our own fulfilment reflected in them. Within this philosophical background, Sree Narayana Guru presents *Priyam* as a unifying principle that binds the self and the world. In Verses 21 and 22, Guru explains that love arises from the Self and naturally extends outward and this unit explores it.

## Keywords

Priyam, Love, Self, Happiness, Unity, Desire, Attachment, Compassion, Ethical life

## Discussion

21

പ്രിയമൊരു ജാതിയിതെൻ പ്രിയം, താദീയ-  
പ്രിയമപര പ്രിയമെന്നനേകമായി  
പ്രിയവിഷയം പ്രതി വന്നിടും ഭ്രമം; തൻ-  
പ്രിയമപരപ്രിയമെന്നറിഞ്ഞിടേണം.

### Meaning

"What is pleasing to one person appears to be pleasing to everyone in the same manner. This is what I like; you like something else; another person prefers something entirely different. The emergence of multiple notions regarding matters of preference in this way is merely an illusion. One must understand that one's own preference is also the preference of others."

22

പ്രിയമപരന്റെയതെൻപ്രിയം; സ്വകീയ-  
പ്രിയമപരപ്രിയമിപ്രകാരമാകും  
നമ്മതിനാലെ നരന്നു നന്മ നൽകും  
ക്രിയപരപ്രിയഹേതുവായ് വരേണം.

### Meaning

"Dharma consists in understanding that another person's preference is one's own preference, and that one's own preference is equally the preference of others. When such an attitude is cultivated, any action performed for the welfare of human beings should be such that it seeks the good of others in the same manner as one seeks one's own good, and enables the fulfilment of the interests of all."

### English Transliteration

21

*Priyamoru jātiyithen priyam, tvadīya-  
priyam apara priyamennanēkamāyi  
priya-viṣayam prati vannidum bhramam; tan-  
priyam apara-priyamenn ariṅṅiṭṭēṇam.*

22

*Priyam aparanteyathen priyam; svakīya-  
priyam apara priyam iprakāram ākum  
nayam athinālē narannu nanma nalguṁ  
kriya apara-priya hētuvāy varēṇam.*

### English Translation

21

Love is one in its nature, yet it appears as "My love" and "your love" in many forms. This confusion arises with respect to the objects of love; one must understand that one's own love and another's love are the same.

22

Another's love is also my love; in this way, one's own love becomes love for others. Therefore, one should act wisely and lovingly, so that one's actions become causes of good for others.

### 4.3.1 Meaning of 'Priyam'

The word 'Priyam' means that which is dear, beloved, or loved. In everyday life, people use the word to describe objects, persons, or experiences they cherish. However, Guru gives this word a deeper philosophical meaning. According to Guru, we love something not because it is separate from us, but because we see our own happiness reflected in it. Love, therefore, begins with the Self. Whatever brings joy to the Self appears as priyam. This insight helps us understand love not as possession, but as recognition of shared being. Priyam is not selfish love; it is the foundation of care, compassion, and unity.

### 4.3.2 Verse 21: Love and the Self

In Verse 21, Guru explains that all love is rooted in self-love, but not in a narrow or



SRIGURUSUKULAM  
SRINIVASAPURAM  
SRINIVASAPURAM

egoistic sense. Every being seeks happiness, and the Self naturally moves toward whatever appears to provide it. This is why people love family, friends, knowledge, and even ideals.

A simple example makes this clear: a student loves learning not merely for marks, but because understanding brings inner satisfaction. The joy experienced is personal, yet it connects the learner to teachers, books, and fellow students. Love thus moves outward while remaining grounded in the Self.

Guru's insight removes the conflict between self-love and love for others. When properly understood, to care for others is to care for oneself, because happiness is shared.

### 4.3.3 Verse 22: From Attachment to Unity

Verse 22 warns against misunderstanding Priyam as mere attachment. When love becomes possessive or selfish, it creates suffering. But when love is guided by awareness, it becomes a force of unity. Guru teaches that love should expand rather than

contract. For example, a parent who truly loves a child wishes not control, but growth and freedom. Such love strengthens both the lover and the beloved. Priyam becomes a bridge between self and other. It dissolves ego boundaries and allows the Self to recognise itself in others.

### 4.3.4 Ethical and Social Significance of 'Priyam'

When Priyam guides human action, ethics becomes natural rather than forced. People act kindly not out of fear or duty, but because they feel connected to others.

In social life, this principle promotes empathy, cooperation, and responsibility. Love becomes the basis of justice, service, and mutual respect. Guru's philosophy shows that unity in society does not arise from rules alone, but from a shared sense of belonging rooted in love.

Thus, Priyam is not only a spiritual idea, but a practical principle for harmonious living.

## Recap

- ◆ *Priyam* means that which is dear or loved, but Guru gives it a deeper philosophical meaning.
- ◆ According to Guru, love is one in nature, even though it appears as "my love" and "your love."
- ◆ The difference in love arises due to confusion about the objects of love, not because love itself is different.
- ◆ Verse 21 teaches that one must understand one's own love and another's love as essentially the same.
- ◆ Verse 22 shows how love should expand from self-interest to concern for others.
- ◆ When love becomes inclusive, it leads to ethical action and goodness.

- ◆ True love is not possessive attachment but a unifying force that connects self and other.
- ◆ *Priyam* thus becomes a guiding principle for harmonious personal and social life.

## Objective Questions

1. What does the term *Priyam* mean?
2. According to Verse 21, is love different in nature for different people?
3. What causes confusion about love, according to Guru?
4. In Verse 22, whose love is said to be the same as one's own love?
5. What quality should guide actions based on *Priyam*?
6. Does Guru treat love as mere emotion or as a principle of unity?
7. What is the result of actions guided by true *Priyam*?

## Answers

1. That which is dear or loved
2. No, love is one in nature
3. Confusion about the objects of love
4. Another person's love
5. Wisdom or ethical awareness (*naya*)
6. A principle of unity
7. Goodness and well-being for others



## Assignments

1. Explain how Guru understands *Priyam* as a unifying principle rather than mere attachment.
2. How does Verse 21 remove the difference between “my love” and “your love”?
3. Why does Guru emphasise wise and ethical action in Verse 22?
4. Reflect on how understanding *Priyam* can improve relationships in everyday life.

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# 4

## UNIT

# Paths of Contemplation

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the meaning of contemplation in Guru's philosophy
- ◆ interpret Verses 7 and 29 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*
- ◆ understand different paths of spiritual practice such as meditation, devotion, and inner discipline
- ◆ recognize the importance of inner awareness over external ritual
- ◆ apply the idea of contemplation to everyday spiritual and ethical life

## Prerequisite

In philosophy and spiritual traditions, contemplation refers to deep inner reflection that leads to self-knowledge and freedom from illusion. Philosophers and mystics across cultures have taught that truth is not discovered merely through external action or ritual, but through inner awareness and discipline of the mind. In Indian philosophy, contemplation takes many forms, *dhyāna* (meditation), *japa* (repetition of sacred sound), *bhakti* (devotion), and *jñāna* (self-inquiry). Though these paths appear to be different, their goal is the liberation from ignorance and realization of the Self. The Upaniṣads emphasize that the restless mind must be calmed and turned inward for true knowledge to arise. Within this tradition, Sree Narayana Guru presents contemplation as a way of transforming ordinary life into spiritual practice. For Guru, true contemplation does not depend on physical isolation, complex rituals, or outward symbols. What matters is the state of the mind. In Verse 7, Guru speaks about inner awakening, discipline, and guidance under the wise. In Verse 29, he explains that true worship is not external offering but inner purity and mental focus. These verses show that different paths of contemplation ultimately converge in inner realization.





must stay awake, attentive, and balanced. Such alertness is essential for gaining true knowledge.

Guru emphasizes awareness (arivu) as the qualification for spiritual growth. Contemplation is not passive withdrawal but a state of conscious presence. When the mind becomes alert, it is capable of understanding deeper truths about the Self and reality.

The verse also highlights the importance of Pranava (Om) as a means of contemplation. Om is presented not merely as a sound to be repeated, but as a symbol of ultimate reality that awakens inner understanding. Through sustained contemplation on Pranava, the seeker gradually becomes free from ignorance and the cycle of repeated birth.

Finally, Guru stresses the need for guidance from the wise (munijana sēva). Self-discipline alone is not sufficient; humility and openness to learning from enlightened teachers help prevent error and confusion. Just as a student needs a teacher to understand difficult subjects, a spiritual seeker benefits from the presence and guidance of the wise. Thus, Verse 7 presents contemplation as a disciplined, guided, and conscious inner journey.

#### 4.4.2 Verse 29: Inner Worship and the Mind as the Temple

Verse 29 presents a powerful teaching on true worship. Guru declares that worship performed by offering the “flower of the mind” is superior to external rituals. When the mind is pure, focused, and devoted, no additional ritual action is necessary.

Guru does not reject ritual altogether, but he clearly places inner devotion above external performance. Plucking flowers,

performing ceremonies, or following elaborate forms of worship have value only when they express inner sincerity. Without inner purity, such actions become mechanical and lose their spiritual meaning.

The verse introduces a key idea: illusion (māyā) is rooted in mental impurity. When selfish desires, ego, and distraction are removed from the mind, illusion naturally disappears. Liberation is therefore not achieved by changing external conditions, but by transforming the mind.

An example clarifies this. Lighting a lamp in a temple has spiritual meaning only when the heart is also illuminated by sincerity and compassion. Otherwise, ritual becomes habit. Guru’s message encourages seekers to see the mind itself as the place of worship, and awareness as the true offering.

#### 4.4.3 Unity of the Paths of Contemplation

Together, Verses 7 and 29 show that different paths of contemplation lead to the same goal. Meditation on Pranava, guidance from the wise, inner awareness, and mental purity are not separate or competing methods, but complementary approaches suited to different temperaments.

Guru removes rigid distinctions between monk and householder, ritualist and contemplative. One need not withdraw from society or perform complex rituals to progress spiritually. What matters is inner alertness, ethical living, and purity of mind.

In this way, contemplation becomes accessible to all. It is not confined to special places or times but can be practiced in everyday life. By cultivating awareness and inner devotion, the seeker gradually overcomes illusion and moves toward clarity, peace, and self-realization.



## Recap

- ◆ Contemplation requires inner alertness
- ◆ Awareness (*aṛivu*) is the basic qualification for spiritual practice.
- ◆ Pranava (*Om*) is a powerful focus for meditation and inner awakening.
- ◆ Guidance from the wise (*munijana sēva*) helps the seeker stay on the right path.
- ◆ True worship is inner devotion, not merely external ritual.
- ◆ The mind itself becomes the temple when it is pure and focused.
- ◆ Illusion (*māyā*) disappears when mental impurity is removed.
- ◆ Different paths of contemplation lead to the same spiritual goal.

## Objective Questions

1. What quality should a seeker maintain according to Verse 7?
2. What does Pranava refer to in this unit?
3. Whose guidance is important for spiritual progress?
4. According to Verse 29, what kind of worship is superior?
5. Where does Guru say true worship takes place?
6. What causes illusion (*māyā*) to disappear?
7. Do different contemplative paths lead to different goals?

## Answers

1. Inner awareness or alertness
2. The sacred sound *Om*
3. The wise or sages (*munijana*)

4. Inner or mental worship
5. In the mind
6. Removal of mental impurity
7. No, they lead to the same goal

## Assignments

1. Explain why Guru advises balance between sleep and restlessness in Verse 7.
2. How does meditation on Pranava help in contemplation?
3. Why does Guru give more importance to inner worship than external ritual?
4. How can the paths of contemplation be practiced in everyday life?

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**BLOCK**

# Imagery in Atmopadesa Satakam



# 1

## UNIT

## Parayude Pal

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ know the meaning of parayude pāl as higher wisdom.
- ◆ explain how higher wisdom brings peace and lightness to the mind.
- ◆ identify the difference between higher knowledge and worldly knowledge.
- ◆ understand why life feels heavy without spiritual wisdom.
- ◆ relate Sree Narayana Guru's teaching to everyday life.

### Prerequisite

Education and worldly knowledge help to manage daily life, but they do not always bring inner peace or lasting satisfaction. Many people experience restlessness, anxiety, and a sense of emptiness even after achieving success, which shows that something more than external knowledge is needed. Philosophy and spiritual teachings help us reflect on this deeper dimension of life and guide us toward inner clarity. Sree Narayana Guru's *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* addresses this inner search through simple and powerful images drawn from everyday experience. In Verse 15, Guru introduces the metaphor of parayude pāl (milk of higher wisdom) to explain how true wisdom nourishes the mind and heart. This verse contrasts the calm that comes from spiritual wisdom with the heaviness experienced by a mind preoccupied with worldly concerns.



## Keywords

Parayude pāl, Para vidyā, Aparā vidyā, Spiritual nourishment, Mental peace, Restlessness, Attachment, Self-awareness, Inner transformation, Wisdom and ignorance.

## Discussion

പരയുടെ പാലു നുകർന്ന ഭാഗ്യവാന്മാർ -  
ക്കൊരു പതിനായിരമാരെപ്പ നേരം  
അറിവപരപ്രകൃതിക്കധീനമായാ-  
ലരണൊടിയായിരമാു പോലെ തോന്നും.  
(ആത്മോപദേശ ശതകം -15)

### Verse 15

*To those fortunate ones who are enjoying  
the cream of absolute wisdom,*

*Ten thousand years will appear to be a  
short duration.*

*But to those who are caught in the snare  
of relativism,*

*Even a split second will appear as a  
thousand years.*

*“Through parā-vidyā, which leads one  
closer to the Self, the wise attain the higher  
nature and experience uninterrupted bliss of  
the Self; for them, even ten thousand years  
pass by like a single moment. On the other  
hand, when consciousness becomes entangled  
in the lower nature through aparā-vidyā,  
which reinforces inertia and materiality, even  
half a moment is experienced as though it  
were a thousand years.”*

### 5.1.1 The Meaning of Parayude Pāl and Its Spiritual Significance

In Verse 15 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, Sree Narayana Guru uses the beautiful image of parayude pāl- the ‘milk of para’- to

describe the nature of higher wisdom. This imagery is not just poetic; it communicates the essential role that higher knowledge plays in nourishing the seeker’s inner life. Across cultures, milk stands for purity, nourishment, and the intimate bond between mother and child. By choosing this symbol, Guru conveys that para vidyā, or higher knowledge, sustains the seeker, just as a mother’s milk sustains a child. Guru employs this metaphor deliberately, as it conveys an immediate sense of the sweetness and life-giving quality of spiritual wisdom.

In this context, ‘milk’ stands for the deep understanding that comes from inner clarity. When a seeker receives even a little of this higher wisdom, the mind becomes peaceful, lighter, and more stable. Guru expresses this transformation through the striking statement that for such a person, ‘ten thousand years feel like a single moment.’ This does not mean that time literally collapses; instead, it means that time loses its oppressive character for a mind nourished by wisdom. When the heart is at peace, the passing of time does not burden us. The mind is not dragged by regrets about the past or fears about the future. It rests naturally in the present. The commentary explains that this lightness of mind arises because higher wisdom reduces attachment, softens fear, and frees the person from the endless cycle of desire and dissatisfaction.

The idea of ‘tasting the milk of para’ therefore refers to a subtle but meaningful inner experience- a moment in which the mind is touched by clarity. The seeker begins to sense that beneath the changing world

lies a more profound truth, and beneath the restless flow of thoughts, a quiet awareness. Even a glimpse of this truth creates inner nourishment. It becomes easier to accept life as it is, respond to challenges calmly, and relate to others with kindness. This transformation does not come through external learning or ritual alone; it comes from recognising one's relationship with the higher wisdom that reveals the Self.

Guru's metaphor also conveys an additional layer of meaning. Milk is not forced upon the child; it flows naturally. Similarly, para wisdom does not arise through pressure or compulsion. It comes naturally when the mind is humble, sincere, and receptive to learning. It is a gift that flows from deep reflection, ethical living, and the cultivation of inner purity. When the seeker becomes receptive, the 'milk' of higher knowledge nourishes the heart effortlessly. This is why Guru says that those who have tasted this milk experience a life of lightness, calmness, and joy.

### 5.1.2 Life Without Parayude Pāl

Guru contrasts the nourishing effect of para wisdom with the dry and exhausting nature of apara knowledge. Apara knowledge encompasses all forms of learning that help us navigate the external world- science, the arts, reasoning, language, and the skills necessary for daily life. Guru never dismisses these forms of knowledge; they are essential for human progress and social development. However, when apara knowledge becomes the only source of understanding, the mind remains tied to the world of constant change. Without the sweetness of para wisdom, worldly knowledge alone cannot remove fear, insecurity, or dissatisfaction. Guru expresses this condition through the opposite image: for those without higher wisdom, 'half a second feels like a thousand years.'

This describes the psychological burden experienced by a mind that has not been spiritually nourished.

When the mind is restless, every moment feels heavy. When one is anxious, lonely, or confused, time seems to pass painfully slowly. Apara knowledge cannot heal this restlessness because it does not address the deeper layers of human experience. It helps us understand the world, but not the meaning of life. It gives us the tools to succeed in society, but not the insight to understand our own minds. A person absorbed only in apara knowledge lives in a state of repeated tension, constantly pulled by desires and pushed by fears. This contrast helps to understand why Guru calls para knowledge 'milk.' Apara knowledge may be helpful like solid food, but without the sweetness of milk, the inner being remains malnourished. One may achieve academic success, social recognition, or wealth, but still feel inwardly empty. When problems arise, the person becomes easily shaken. Even small challenges feel unbearable. This condition is not a moral failure; it is simply the natural result of lacking spiritual nourishment.

Guru's teaching also carries a broader social message. A society that receives para wisdom becomes more compassionate, peaceful, and harmonious. When people understand the unity of all beings and recognise the Self in others, discrimination and hatred lose their foundation. Guru's famous proclamation- "one caste, one religion, one God for man"- is rooted in the vision of para wisdom. Apara knowledge alone cannot produce such unity; it is the 'milk' of higher understanding that softens the heart and widens one's perspective. Parayude pāl is one of Sree Narayana Guru's most expressive metaphors for spiritual nourishment. Through this image, Verse 15 teaches that while worldly knowledge





- ◆ Spiritual wisdom helps us accept life calmly.
- ◆ Inner peace leads to kindness and compassion.
- ◆ Para wisdom supports harmonious living.
- ◆ True knowledge feeds both the mind and the heart.
- ◆ The verse invites seekers to choose the right kind of knowledge.

## Objective Questions

1. What does parayude pāl mean?
2. What type of knowledge is para vidyā?
3. What type of knowledge is apara vidyā?
4. What symbol is used to represent higher wisdom?
5. Which knowledge brings inner peace?
6. Which state makes time feel heavy?
7. For the wise, ten thousand years feel like what?
8. For the restless mind, a second feels like how long?
9. Does apara knowledge alone give inner peace?

## Answers

1. Milk of higher wisdom
2. Higher knowledge
3. Worldly knowledge
4. Milk
5. Para vidyā
6. Anxiety
7. A moment
8. A thousand years
9. No



## Assignments

1. Explain the meaning of parayude pāl and discuss how Sree Narayana Guru uses this metaphor to describe higher wisdom.
2. Distinguish between para vidyā and apara vidyā and explain why higher knowledge is essential for inner peace according to Verse 15 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*.

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# 2

## UNIT

# Sea Metaphor

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain how the sea-wave metaphor illustrates the relationship between temporary mental states and the permanent Self
- ◆ identify the role of perception and ego in shaping human experience and creating misunderstanding about one's true nature
- ◆ analyse the philosophical idea of unity behind apparent diversity using examples from daily life
- ◆ evaluate how clarity, self-observation, and awareness reduce emotional disturbances and promote well-being
- ◆ apply the metaphor to understand ethical behaviour, social harmony, and compassionate interaction with others

## Prerequisite

Images drawn from nature have long been used in philosophical analysis to clarify complex ideas, and the sea has been a recurring symbol across many traditions. Its expanse, depth, and continuous movement provide a natural setting for examining the relation between appearance and underlying reality. The contrast between the calm depths and the shifting surface offers a framework for understanding how different levels of experience coexist within a single phenomenon. Observing the sea makes it possible to recognise patterns of change, continuity, and perception that are relevant to wider discussions on the nature of existence. This unit begins with such an observation, using a simple natural scene as a point of departure for exploring the structure of reality and the processes that shape human understanding.

## Keywords

Metaphor, Self, Ignorance, Unity, Diversity, Experience, Self-inquiry

## Discussion

പ്രകൃതി ജലം തനു ഹേനമാശിയാത്മാ -  
വഹവഹമെന്നലയുന്നതൂർമ്മിജാലം  
അകമലരാർന്നറിവൊക്കെ മുത്തു താൻ  
താൻ  
നുകരുവതാമമൃതായതിങ്ങു നൂനം  
. (ആത്മോപദേശ ശതകം -75)

“Within the ocean of the Supreme Self that encompasses all cosmic phenomena, nature constitutes the water, bodies are the foam, the soul is the shore, and the individual beings -wandering in pursuit of objects through the sense of “I” and “mine” - are the waves. All forms of knowledge that reach the intellect are the gems within this oceanic treasury. Every form of bliss experienced by beings is the nectar drawn from this very ocean. Indeed, this is a certainty.”

### 5.2.1 The Sea-Wave Relationship as a Key to Understanding Reality

Verse 75 presents a powerful metaphor in which human experience is compared to the movements of the sea. The sea is portrayed as a vast and continuous field of activity in which waves emerge, rise, and subside. In this imagery, the waves stand for the varied experiences of life - joy, sorrow, desire, fear, and the many emotional and intellectual fluctuations that occur within the human mind. The verse suggests that these changing experiences are not separate from the deeper reality of the sea, just as the waves are not separate from the waters that give them form.

The use of the sea as a metaphor is grounded in the natural experience of observing the ocean. Anyone who has spent time watching the waves can recognise that each wave appears unique yet remains inseparable from the larger body of water. The Guru employs this common experience so that everyone can understand the philosophical idea in a simple and relatable manner. Each wave rises with energy, moves forward, and disappears, but the sea continues to exist without losing its nature. In the same way, human experiences appear strong and influential at the moment, but they pass and lose their intensity with time. The underlying Self remains unchanged, even though individuals identify strongly with temporary experiences. The verse explains that ignorance arises when one focuses only on the waves and forgets the sea beneath. This ignorance is not permanent; it is simply the effect of not looking deeply enough.

The sea metaphor helps everyone recognise that thoughts and feelings need not control their identity. Instead, they can begin to see the difference between what is permanent and what is momentary. By comparing the restless mind to waves, the verse offers a clear picture of how mental disturbances prevent clarity. The metaphor further emphasises that the ocean does not resist the waves. It allows them to arise and fall naturally. Likewise, the Self remains unaffected by the flow of experiences. This understanding creates a firm foundation for self-inquiry, encouraging learners to observe the nature of their mind without fear or confusion.

In Verse 75, the Guru presents the sea metaphor in a way that links individual experience with a broader philosophical framework. The imagery reflects the Upanishadic insight that the Self is the foundational reality behind all forms of knowledge and existence. By describing the sea as the underlying support of the waves, the verse illustrates that what appears as diversity is sustained by a single, unchanging ground. The waves seem distinct, yet they are nothing other than water in movement. In the same manner, the sense of separation among individuals or between the individual and the world arises from limited perception rather than from any real division. The metaphor becomes a means to question the assumptions that create this sense of difference and to reveal the continuities that lie beneath surface appearances.

The verse also draws attention to the role of the ego in generating restlessness and confusion. Attachments, fears, and personal identifications produce disturbances that obscure the steady background of inner awareness, similar to how turbulent waves conceal the depth of the sea. The metaphor therefore serves as a reminder to observe these disturbances without becoming absorbed in them. Such observation makes it possible to understand the Self as part of an unbroken whole rather than as an isolated entity. The Upanishadic resonance within the imagery gives the verse philosophical depth while retaining clarity through the use of a simple natural example. In this way, the metaphor connects experiential insight with established philosophical thought, offering a coherent approach to understanding unity beyond apparent multiplicity.

### 5.2.2 Philosophical Meaning of the Metaphor

The philosophical meaning of the sea metaphor becomes clearer when the verse explains how human experience is shaped by

perception. The text describes how individuals usually identify with their thoughts, emotions, and actions, believing them to be their true nature. This identification is compared to mistaking a wave for the entire sea. The Guru points out that when external activities, desires, and fears become dominant, the real nature of the Self becomes obscured. This does not mean that the Self disappears; rather, it remains unseen, just as the water beneath a wave remains unnoticed when the wave is high and powerful.

The verse argues that ignorance is simply a failure to recognise what is always present. The sea metaphor serves as a teaching tool for illustrating this misunderstanding. The seeker is encouraged to understand that the ego, formed from memory and expectation, behaves like a wave that rises and falls. It gives the impression of strength and independence, but it cannot exist without the sea of awareness. Understanding this relationship leads to a clearer perception of oneself. The metaphor shows that the mind becomes peaceful when it recognises that its movements are temporary. When the wave recognises itself as the sea, the anxiety disappears.

The text further uses the metaphor to highlight that the nature of reality is not divided into higher and lower levels. Instead, what appears as many is essentially one. The Guru explains that the variety of experiences, emotions, and perceptions do not break the unity of the Self. The sea remains one even when countless waves arise on its surface. Similarly, the Self remains unaffected by the different roles and identities that individuals assume in daily life. This understanding becomes important for anyone trying to make sense of human behaviour. The metaphor clarifies that conflicts, confusions, and emotional struggles occur when the mind focuses only on the surface of experience, ignoring its depth. The Guru shows that wisdom arises when one becomes aware



of the inner continuity beneath the changes. This awareness does not eliminate action but changes the way one relates to it. Actions become meaningful when they arise from clarity rather than confusion. The sea metaphor therefore becomes a guide to understanding ethical behaviour. When one recognises the unity beneath the differences, actions naturally become more thoughtful and responsible. The metaphor inspires learners to look beyond immediate impressions and examine the deeper nature of their experiences. By bringing attention to the distinction between appearance and reality, the verse helps learners develop the ability to think critically and reflectively.

The philosophical discussion in the verse also addresses the issue of suffering. The Guru explains that human suffering does not arise from external conditions alone but from the way the mind interprets those conditions. The metaphor of the sea demonstrates that disturbances occur only on the surface and do not affect the depth of the water. In the same manner, disturbances in life affect the mind only when one identifies with them. When we begin to recognise the difference between the deeper Self and the surface-level experiences, suffering appears less overwhelming. This does not mean that challenges disappear, but the way one responds to them becomes more balanced. The Guru emphasises that the Self is never harmed by the movements of the mind, just as the sea remains intact regardless of the waves. This insight gives strength and stability, allowing one to face difficulties without losing clarity. The metaphor teaches that true peace arises from recognising the unchanging reality within oneself. The verse encourages us to develop a habit of self-observation without judgment. Observing the mind becomes similar to watching waves in the sea - acknowledging their presence but not becoming controlled by them. This strengthens emotional maturity and contributes to overall well-being.

### 5.2.3 Implications of the Metaphor for Self-Realisation

The text extends the sea metaphor into the domain of self-realisation. It explains that the recognition of the Self as the underlying reality becomes possible only when the mind becomes free from unnecessary movements. The waves cannot settle as long as strong winds blow across the surface. Similarly, the mind cannot become clear as long as desires and fears dominate thought. The Guru uses the metaphor to show that inner stillness is not an artificial condition but a natural state that becomes visible when distractions fade. The verse suggests that self-realisation is not something new that must be created; it is the recognition of what already exists. This understanding is central to the Guru's teaching. When awareness deepens, the sense of separation begins to fade. The individual starts to recognise that the Self is not a limited entity but a spacious presence similar to the vast sea. This recognition brings freedom from narrow identities and self-imposed limitations.

The implications of the metaphor reach beyond personal understanding and extend to relationships with others. When one recognises the unity behind apparent differences, conflicts become less intense and compassion becomes a natural response. The Guru uses the metaphor to show that the distinctions people create such as "I" and "you" or "mine" and "yours" are similar to imagining that one wave is independent from another. The sea does not divide itself, but human perception often creates divisions based on habit and misunderstanding. By recognising the common essence behind all beings, we develop a more inclusive and respectful attitude. This contributes to social harmony and reduces the tendency to judge others based on limited impressions. The metaphor thus supports the development

of a broader perspective that goes beyond self-centred thinking. It teaches that wisdom includes recognising the interconnectedness of life. This understanding influences behaviour, promoting cooperation and reducing conflict.

The verse also highlights the importance of knowledge in overcoming confusion. Ignorance is described as the primary cause for mistaking the wave for the sea. In the same way, lack of awareness leads individuals to misunderstand their own nature. The Guru explains that knowledge becomes a light that reveals the reality beneath appearances. This knowledge is not merely intellectual;

it is experiential awareness of the mind's movements and the deeper Self that remains unaffected. The metaphor helps us understand that knowledge does not destroy ignorance in a physical sense. Rather, it removes misunderstanding, just as recognising the nature of a wave removes the belief that it is separate from the sea. The Guru shows that self-inquiry becomes the method for gaining this knowledge. When we begin to question the source of thoughts and feelings, the mind gradually becomes clearer. The waves begin to reduce in intensity, allowing the underlying calmness to appear.

## Recap

- ◆ The verse uses the sea and waves as a metaphor for human experience.
- ◆ Waves represent thoughts and emotions.
- ◆ The sea symbolises the unchanging Self.
- ◆ Experiences appear strong but fade with time.
- ◆ Ignorance comes from focusing only on surface experiences.
- ◆ The Self remains unchanged beneath mental fluctuations.
- ◆ The metaphor shows that thoughts need not define identity.
- ◆ The ocean does not resist its waves.
- ◆ The Self remains unaffected by experiences.
- ◆ Diversity arises from limited perception.
- ◆ Ego creates a sense of separation.
- ◆ Disturbances hide inner awareness.
- ◆ The verse connects simple imagery with deep philosophy.
- ◆ Reality is essentially one despite many appearances.
- ◆ Suffering arises from misinterpreting experiences.



- ◆ Awareness reduces emotional disturbance.
- ◆ Self-realisation emerges when the mind becomes calm.
- ◆ The sea metaphor promotes compassion and unity.
- ◆ Knowledge removes misunderstanding.
- ◆ Self-inquiry helps reveal the deeper Self.

## Objective Questions

1. What does the sea represent in the metaphor?
2. What do the waves symbolise in relation to human experience?
3. What causes ignorance according to the verse?
4. What remains unchanged beneath mental fluctuations?
5. What hides the deeper nature of the Self?
6. What is removed when knowledge arises?
7. What gives unity to diverse experiences?
8. What is described as the root cause of mistaking the wave for the sea?
9. What practice helps reveal the deeper Self?

## Answers

1. The Self
2. Thoughts/Emotions
3. Misidentification
4. The Self
5. Ego
6. Ignorance
7. Self
8. Ignorance
9. Self-inquiry

## Assignments

1. Explain how the sea-wave metaphor clarifies the distinction between passing emotions and the steady inner Self, and discuss why recognising this difference is important for understanding one's true nature.
2. Discuss how the metaphor of waves concealing the depth of the sea helps to explain how ego and emotional disturbances obscure one's true nature.
3. Reflect on how understanding the temporary nature of thoughts and emotions can change one's response to fear, desire, or sorrow. Provide examples.
4. Using the sea metaphor, explain how inner stillness becomes the foundation for self-realisation, and why it is described as a natural state rather than a created one.
5. Discuss how recognising the unity behind apparent differences can transform interpersonal relationships and reduce conflict in daily life.

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1. Narayanaguru, S. (2008). *Narayana Guru Complete Works*. (M. N. Prasad, Trans.) India: National Book Trust.
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2. Omana, S (2018), *The Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru*, Varkala: Narayana Gurukulam.





# 3

## UNIT

# Rope and Garland

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the symbolic significance of the imagery of rope and garland in *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*
- ◆ interpret Verse 20 as an illustration of illusion (*māyā*) and reality in Narayana Guru's philosophy
- ◆ identify the Advaitic underpinnings of the verse in relation to the concept of non-duality
- ◆ differentiate between perception and truth through the example of mistaken identity
- ◆ relate Narayana Guru's poetic imagery to broader philosophical reflections on the nature of the world and the Self

## Prerequisite

Narayana Guru's *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, "One Hundred Verses on Self-Instruction" is a philosophical poem that blends poetry, ethics, and spiritual insight. Each verse is originally written in Malayalam but conveys deep reflections on the Self (Ātman) and the nature of reality. In many of these verses, as we saw in the previous blocks, Narayana Guru uses everyday images such as mirrors, waves, lamps, dreams, ropes to help readers understand subtle philosophical ideas. Among them, Verse 20 stands out for its striking use of the image of a garland mistaken for a snake. This image captures how human beings misperceive the world due to ignorance. It conveys the Advaitic insight that what we call "the world" has no independent existence apart from consciousness. Through this verse, in this unit, we will see how Narayana Guru helps us see that the problem is not with the world itself, but with how we see it.

## Keywords

Illusion, Māyā, Adhyāsa , Perception , Reality, Non-duality, Rope-Snake Analogy, Self-knowledge

## Discussion

### 5.3.1 The Verse No. 20

#### Original Text

ഉലകിനു വേറൊരു സത്തയില്ലതുണ്ടെ-  
ന്നുലകരുരപ്പതു സർവ്വമുഹൂഹീനം;  
ജളനു വിലേശയമെന്നു തോന്നിയാലും  
നലമിയലും മലർമാല നാഗമാമോ?

#### English Transliteration:

“Ulakinu vērōru satthayillathunde –  
nnulakarurappathu sarvamūhahīnam;  
jaḷanu vilēshayamenthu thonniyālum  
nalamiyalum malarmāla nāgamāmō?”

#### English Translation:

*The world has no separate existence  
apart from the Self. What people  
take as real is but sheer delusion;  
Though a garland may appear as a snake  
in dim light, It never truly becomes a snake.*

“The universe does not possess an existence independent of the indivisible consciousness. The common assumption that it stands apart as a separate reality is fundamentally irrational. Even if a person devoid of true discernment, due to ignorance, perceives a beautiful garland as a serpent, does the garland thereby undergo any real transformation into a snake.”

This verse condenses the entire Advaitic worldview into an accessible poetic metaphor. Narayana Guru reminds the seeker that the multiplicity of the world has no existence apart from consciousness. Just as the rope remains a rope even when mistaken for a snake, so too the Self alone exists while the manifold world is but an appearance upon it.

### 5.3.2 The Image of the Garland and the Snake

The imagery of a garland mistaken for a snake has a long philosophical history in India. The older example used in Advaita Vedānta is the “rope-snake” illustration. A person walking in twilight may see a rope on the ground and mistake it for a snake. The fear and confusion that follow are real to the person but arise from an error of perception.

Narayana Guru replaces the example of rope with a garland which is an object that is beautiful and usually used for worship. This change adds poetic and emotional depth. Illusion is not always frightening; it can also be attractive. The garland symbolizes the charm and colour of the world, while the imagined snake stands for fear, attachment, and confusion.

Through this, the Guru reminds us that ignorance can make the beautiful appear dangerous or the unreal appear real. The world, like the garland, is not false in itself. The falsity lies in our wrong understanding of it.

### 5.3.3 The World as Appearance

When the verse says that “the world has no separate existence,” it does not mean that the world is nothing. Rather, it means that the world depends on consciousness for its meaning and existence. Just as the garland exists only because someone perceives it, the world exists as a mental and sensory experience grounded in awareness. From the standpoint of true knowledge, all forms and



names are appearances of one underlying reality, the Self (*Ātman*). When this truth is realized, the world is seen not as an illusion to be denied, but as an expression of the same consciousness that we are. This way of understanding brings together poetic imagery and philosophical clarity. The many are seen as one, and the one as shining through the many.

### 5.3.4 Knowledge and Ignorance: The Role of Perception

The mistake mentioned in the verse occurs because of limited light. It symbolizes limited understanding. In half-light, the eyes and mind fill the gap with imagination, creating the false image of a snake. In the same way, our limited knowledge of the Self makes us project separation, fear, and duality onto the world.

When full light falls, that is, when self-knowledge arises, the confusion disappears. The snake was never there; only the garland existed. This transition from ignorance to knowledge does not change the external world but transforms the way we see it. In everyday life, we experience similar moments: misunderstanding someone's intentions, fearing something harmless, or mistaking appearance for truth. Narayana Guru uses such simple experiences to make a profound philosophical point: wisdom begins when we see things as they truly are.

### 5.3.5 The Philosophical Significance

The imagery of Verse 20 connects directly to the Advaitic vision of non-duality. According to this vision, the apparent division between subject and object, self and world, or inner and outer, is not ultimately real. There is only one reality or pure consciousness,

upon which all distinctions are superimposed.

Narayana Guru's genius lies in making this abstract idea felt through a vivid image. The verse does not preach philosophy; it shows it. The reader who reflects upon the verse participates in the movement from illusion to insight.

In this way, the *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* becomes not merely a text to be studied, but a mirror for self-inquiry. The rope and garland image reminds that truth is already present, hidden only by misperception.

### 5.3.6 The Philosophical Problem of Appearance and Reality

The question of appearance and reality is one of the oldest problems in philosophy. It asks: *How do we know whether what we see is real?* From ancient Greece to India, philosophers have wrestled with the gap between what seems to be and what truly is. Plato's allegory of the cave in the *Republic* shows prisoners mistaking shadows for real objects much like the mistaken snake in Narayana Guru's verse. In Indian philosophy, Śaṅkara's *Advaita Vedānta* and the Buddhist concept of *Māyā* also address how ignorance gives rise to illusion.

According to these traditions, appearance refers to how things are perceived through our senses and mental constructions, while reality refers to what exists independently of those perceptions. The task of philosophy is to move from appearance to reality, from ignorance to knowledge. Narayana Guru's verse can thus be seen as a poetic restatement of this universal problem.

## Recap

- ◆ Narayana Guru uses the image of a garland seen as a snake to show how people mistake what is unreal for real.
- ◆ The world is not separate from the Self; it only appears so because of our ignorance.
- ◆ The garland stands for truth, and the snake stands for illusion or wrong seeing.
- ◆ This idea is similar to the rope and snake example used in Indian philosophy to explain illusion.
- ◆ Ignorance is like darkness, it makes us see wrongly.
- ◆ Knowledge is like light; it shows things as they are.
- ◆ When knowledge comes, we understand that the world and the Self are one.
- ◆ The verse also speaks about the difference between appearance and reality, a problem discussed in many philosophies.

## Objective Questions

1. Who is the author of *Atmopadesa Śatakam*?
2. What does the word *Atmopadesa* literally mean?
3. Which two objects are used as central images in Verse 20?
4. The mistaken perception of the rope as a snake represents what philosophical idea?
5. What does the garland in the verse symbolise?
6. Which Indian philosophy mainly discusses the difference between appearance and reality?
7. What is the main teaching of Verse 20 according to Nārāyana Guru?



## Answers

1. Sreenārāyana Guru
2. Self-instruction or self-teaching
3. Rope and Garland
4. Illusion or *Māyā*
5. The true, divine nature of reality
6. Advaita Vedānta
7. The world has no separate existence apart from the Self; illusion arises from ignorance

## Assignments

1. How does Nārāyana Guru use the imagery of the rope to explain illusion?
2. In what way does the garland image correct the false perception of reality?
3. Explain how the verse connects with the philosophical issue of appearance and reality.
4. What lesson about Self-knowledge does the verse convey for overcoming illusion?

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1. Nair, G.Balakrishna (2018) *Sree Narayana Gurudeva Krithikal-Sampoorna Vyakhyanam*, Vol 1, 2, Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala State Institute of Languages.
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SGOU





# 4

## UNIT

# Metaphor of Five Elements

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain Sree Narayana Guru's non-dualistic vision of the unity between the microcosm (human being) and the macrocosm (cosmos)
- ◆ interpret the metaphors of the ocean, mirror, and five elements used in *Atmopadeśa Śatakam* to express spiritual and philosophical insights
- ◆ analyze how the pañcabhūtas form a conceptual bridge between physical existence (bhaudika satta) and conscious existence (bodha satta)
- ◆ evaluate the intertextual connections between Guru's verses and related Upanishadic and Bhagavad Gita teachings
- ◆ reflect on the relevance of Guru's Advaitic ideas for understanding human nature, spirituality, and the unity of all beings

## Prerequisite

Advaita Vedanta teaches us that the non-dualistic understanding that Ātman (Self) and Brahman (Absolute Reality) are not two. Advaita teaches that the individual self is not an isolated entity but an expression of the same consciousness that permeates the cosmos. It is this point that Sree Narayana Guru appreciates in *Atmopadeśa Śatakam*, in its full refinement. He brings the metaphors of the ocean, cosmos, and the five elements (pañcabhūtas) to illuminate the profound unity between the microcosm (human being) and the macrocosm (universe). A deeper reflection on the similarities of the human – cosmic elements will necessitate us to worship Advaita (non dualism) as the principle of life.

## Keywords

Atman, Pañcabhūta, Microcosm–Macrocosm, Advaita, Paramātma

## Discussion

### Verse 15

പരമൊരു വിണ്ണു പരന്നശക്തി കാറ്റാ -  
മറിവനലൻ ജലമക്ഷമിന്ദ്രിയാർത്ഥം  
ധരണിയിതിങ്ങനെയഞ്ചു തത്വമായ് നി -  
നെരിയുമിതിന്റെ രഹസ്യമേകമാകും .  
(ആത്മോപദേശ ശതകം-77).

“All phenomena that are perceptible are grounded in Chidambaram, the substratum of consciousness. Manifesting through it as five principles are: Prāṇa-śakti, comparable to air, which pervades all; Buddhi, likened to fire, which functions in conjunction with prāṇa; Manas, symbolised as water, which arises within it; and finally the Śarīra (body), bearing gross materiality, represented as earth. Upon enquiry into their ultimate truth, these are found to be one alone.”

Sree Narayana Guru consecrated a mirror with “Om Shanthi” written on it, in Kalavankodam Saktheeswaram temple in 1927. Guru did this to convey a great message of the unity of the finite and the infinite. Guru believed and propagated that one need not search for God in the infinite, rather in the finite, in each one of human beings. Guru’s message to the people, especially in the ban for ezhavas to enter into the temples, was to prompt them to look within and find the God, to look at the universe and find the God.

Guru affirmed that human beings—who are divided into castes and sub-castes in the name of God - should not seek salvation not in lifeless deities but in worshipping one’s own inner self (atman). This means that all human beings are a portion of the Almighty and Parabrahmam resides within

each one of us. Like this, among Guru’s other works, *Atmopadeshasatakam* is a literary and philosophical mirror turned against the humanity.

Muni Narayana Prasad (2019) begins the foreword to *Sreenarayanaguru Krithikal Sampooranam* with the following statement about *Atmopadeshasatakam*: “*Atmopadeshasatakam* is an advice to the Atman/soul.” Atman is a philosophical term from Sanskrit equivalent to ‘I’. *Atmanjanam* means knowledge or realization of oneself like *Atmahathya* means doing hathya (murder) to one’s own self.

He proceeds: “when I know myself, one thing becomes clear; I ‘became’ (exist) only as part of the becoming (existence) of the cosmos. Thus, when I try to know myself minutely, it will become clear that my ‘existence’ and the ‘existence’ of other (cosmos) is not two different things. That the knowledge of ‘myself’ and the knowledge of the ‘other’ are not different, but clearly same. It is this clear and pure sense is Advaita.”

In the foreword to *Atmopadesha satakam: Oru Upanishad Dharppanam*, S. Rameshan Nair observes that reading *Atmopadeshasatakam* is like looking at a clean and clear mirror and getting reflected one’s own image in that in order to purify oneself. The reflection is not that of the body alone, but the very depths of mind and soul. *Atmopadeshasatakam* depicts how Atman and Brahman are residing in every entity, living or non-living, mind or matter. The literary depths of the work is also a symbol of the depths of the spiritual and divine ideas discussed in the work.



Rameshan Nair (a malayalam poet) also refers to Sreekumar Azhikode's statement about *Atmopadeshasatakam*: "Atmopadeshasatakam is the golden work crafted in the last phase of Guru's life, the time of experiential and soulful knowledge. Each verse from *Atmopadeshasatakam* embodies a fire in it."

Viswakumar Krishnajeivanam (a coriter) begins the introduction to *Atmopadeshasathakam: Oru Upanishad Dharppanam* with following statement: "Life is a spiritual war, according to Guru. The war is not fought with weapons. Rather, it is fought with one's spiritual awakening or realization. Any achievement built on the basis of anything other than spiritual realization is not immortal. And, such achievements can be shattered at any time," The spiritual war instigated by *Atmopadeshasatakam* is won only when one absorbs the divine depths in oneself and the universe. In that sense, this spiritual war is a hard and long one.

### 5.4.1 Metaphor of Five Elements in Macrocosm and Microcosm

In the verse 76, Guru compared Paramatma with an ocean to indicate how the knowledge of Paramatma are like the pearls under the ocean and how valuable is the absolute joy (ananda) one attains through this knowledge. The knowledge of Paramatma is like the possession of the diamond pearls from underneath the ocean. Guru describes here the ocean as an absolute reality which is the absolute truth. He also compares the calmness or serenity one could get through the knowledge of Paramatma with the absolute calmness and serenity underneath the depths of ocean.

In verse 77, Guru's moves from the metaphor of ocean to a greater and deeper metaphor; metaphor of cosmos and compares the macrocosm (universe) and

microcosm (human being). Guru's point is that microcosm resides in macrocosm and vice versa. To establish this, he reveals the similarity of five fundamental elements residing in both macrocosm and microcosm.

Guru affirms that cosmos is made up of panchabhuthas (five fundamental elements), the sky, air, fire, water and earth. These five elements also take part in human beings as voice, touch, form, taste and smell respectively. The gunas or qualities mentioned now are the subject of our sensory organs; the ear, skin, eye, tongue, nose. Now, Guru identifies the five fundamental elements out of which the cosmos was made with those five elements in the essence of each human being. The argument is that each human being (microcosm) is part of the cosmos (macrocosm). Whatever elements are fundamental to human life, all of them can be found as fundamental to the cosmic life as well. In Muni Narayana Prasad's words: "Bhauhdhika satta (material/physical essence) and Bodha satta (conscious essence) are not different, but clearly one. Thus, all five elements in bhauhdhika satta become inherent parts of Bodha satta as well."

This is a significant point which can be extended to different seasons as well. The nature has different, contradictory seasons, at least five which are known to us; winter, summer, monsoon, spring and autumn. All these have very contradictory characteristics with fundamental elements such as cold, heat, snow, etc. If the nature is constituted by these contradictory elements, the human being is also made up of the contradictory elements like wise. We are made up of thirst, hunger, anger, sexual desire, calmness, etc. Any human being who is devoid of any of these contradictory elements has something inherently wrong. A human being becomes complete only when he/she is constituted by these very contradictions all at a time.

Viswakumar Krishnajeivanam observes

that this view has a resonance with the Maitreya Upanishadic view that panchabhuthas (of which sky is the primary elements) are also the products of Amtan. In the explanation, we could see a chain of things; reaching from each one to each. To start with the last one in the chain, we will take the food/grains under the earth. While tracing back to food, we will realize that food is the produce of earth, and while tracing back to earth, we will realize that earth is the product of water and that water is the product of fire. The fire will take us back to air, air to the sky, sky to the Brahman. In short, Maitreya Upanishad says that all creatures are created by Brahman, and after the creation, they grow, evolve, transform and end up in Brahman alone. That is the

cycle of all living and non-living entities.

There is a similar verse in Bhagavat Gita as well. The verse 12 of the second chapter of Bhagavat Gita says: “there has not been any time when You and Myself did not exist in this jagat. You, myself and all these kings were always existing and we will never cease to exist”. This means that Bhagavan reveals the fundamental reality of life. Brahman underlies everything and every being as Atman. Everything has an Atman, the divine element. This is to tell that the cosmos is the comprehensive form of human being and both of them are products of Panchabhuta.

## Recap

- ◆ Guru uses the metaphor of a mirror to assert the unity of the finite self and the infinite Brahman.
- ◆ *Atmopadeśa Satakam* acts as a philosophical mirror inviting self-knowledge (ātmajñāna).
- ◆ Guru teaches that divinity is not external but resides within every human being.
- ◆ Muni Narayana Prasad emphasizes that self-knowledge and knowledge of the cosmos are inseparable.
- ◆ Advaita is presented as the realization that “my existence” and “cosmic existence” are one.
- ◆ Reading *Atmopadeśa Śatakam* is gazing into one’s inner depths through a clear mirror.
- ◆ The work reveals how Ātman and Brahman dwell in all entities, living and non-living.
- ◆ Gru’s verse 76 uses the ocean metaphor to express the treasure-like value of Paramātmajñāna.
- ◆ Verse 76 equates the serenity of spiritual realization with the calmness at the ocean’s depths.



- ◆ Verse 77 compares microcosm and macrocosm to demonstrate their shared constitution.
- ◆ Guru asserts that the pañcabhūtas constitute both the universe and the human being.
- ◆ Each element in nature corresponds to a sensory capacity within human beings.
- ◆ Guru presents bodily and cosmic contradictions as essential and complementary realities.
- ◆ Maitreya Upanishad is used to show the chain of creation culminating in and returning to Brahman.
- ◆ Bhagavad Gita 2:12 affirms the eternal continuity of Self, echoing the non-dualistic unity Guru emphasizes.

## Objective Questions

1. Guru's key philosophical vision in *Atmopadeśa Śatakam* aligns with which school of thought?
2. How many fundamental elements constitute the cosmos in Guru's verse?
3. Which element corresponds to the sense of hearing?
4. The metaphor used in verse 76 to describe Paramātmā is the ...?
5. The unity of microcosm and macrocosm is explained using which Sanskrit concept?
6. The sensory organ associated with 'form' is the ...?
7. The Upanishad referenced by Viswakumar in this context is the
8. Guru's philosophical method emphasizes inner divinity using a metaphorical...?
9. The ultimate reality underlying all existence is called as?
10. The individual self or inner essence is referred to as



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**BLOCK**

# **Philosophical Heights in Atmopadesa Satakam**



# 1

## UNIT

# Transformation of Everything into Consciousness

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain how earth, water, fire, air, and space arise, interact, and merge into the Supreme Reality
- ◆ understand the difference between the physical body and the subtle body of mind and consciousness
- ◆ learn how the sense of “I” arises and how awareness of it leads to inner freedom
- ◆ apply Narayana Guru’s teachings to achieve peace, balance, and self-realisation in daily life

## Prerequisite

Human life often begins with simple observations. We see the ground beneath our feet, feel the flow of water, notice the movement of air, depend on the warmth of fire, and live within open space. These experiences appear ordinary, yet they raise certain questions. What connects all these different aspects of the world? Is there a single principle behind the diversity we observe? When we say “I see,” “I feel,” or “I think,” who is this “I” that stands at the centre of experience? From early times, scholars have reflected on such questions. They did not stop with what is visible to the senses but searched for a deeper understanding of existence. Their enquiry was not merely about the outer world but also about the inner world of thought, awareness, and identity. They asked whether the difference between the observer and the observed is final, or whether it hides a deeper unity. Such enquiry forms the heart of philosophical reflection in the Indian philosophical tradition. Teachers of this tradition invited seekers of truth to reflect on the origin of the universe, the structure of human experience, and the meaning of consciousness. They explored how the visible world may arise from subtle principles and how human awareness plays a role in shaping experience. Such reflection does not demand blind belief; instead, it calls for attentive listening, reasoning, and meditation.

## Keywords

Pañca-mahābhūtas, Brahman, Ātman, Samādhi, Prajñā, Ahamkṛti

## Discussion

The verse 50 is

നിലമൊടു നീരതുപോലെ കാറ്റും തീയും  
വെളിയുമഹംകൃതി വിദ്യയും മനസ്സും  
അലകളുമാഴിയുമെന്നുവേണ്ടയെല്ലാ-  
വുലകുമുയർന്നറിവായി മാറിടുന്നു

Along with the earth, water; likewise, air, fire, ether, the sense of ego, the power of knowledge, the inner instrument (antahkaraṇa), waves and the ocean indeed, all cosmic phenomena shed their names and forms and ultimately become pure consciousness.

The universe made of these five elements earth, space, air, fire, and water the ego-consciousness that arises within this one awareness, the functions of the mind, the power of pure blissful knowledge, the waves and the ocean, and all phenomena eventually abandon their names and forms and merge into the knowledge of the Supreme Reality. Everything that appears separately dissolves into Brahman and merges in the state of samadhi known as Prajñā.

This world is perceived through the five great elements, and the human gross body is also made of them. Each of us has two bodies: the gross body and the subtle body. The gross body arises from the five elements, and we live our life within these elements, existing as part of the universe and ultimately merging back into it. Kapila’s Sāṃkhya philosophy also accepts the evolution of elements from space to air, from air to fire, from fire to water, and from water to earth. Plasma is the subtle state of energy; air is the

movement that arises from that subtle energy; fire appears through friction in air; water arises from fire; and even in modern science, we see that condensed liquid becomes solid showing how earth emerges from water. Thus, the Upanishads contain scientific principles discovered thousands of years ago without modern instruments.

തന്മദ്ദാ ഏതന്മാദാത്മന ആകാശഃ സംഭൂതഃ  
ആകാശാദായുഃ വായോരഗ്നിഃ; അഗ്നേ രാപ  
അദ്ഭ്യഃ പൃഥിവീ;

പൃഥിവ്യാ ഔഷധയഃ; ഓഷധീ- ജ്യോതസഃ  
അന്നാത്

പുരുഷഃ; സ വാ ഏഷപുരുഷോജന രസമയഃ  
(തൈത്തിരീയോപനിഷത്-4)

In the Taittiriya Upanishad (Brahmānanda Valli, mantra 4), the sage explains: “From the Self, space arose; from space, air; from air, fire; from fire, water; from water, earth; from earth, plants; from plants, food; and from food, living beings.” Everything arises from this sequence and dissolves back into it. When the body made of the five elements disintegrates, it merges back into earth, and the soul the basis of life returns to Brahman. The body becomes ashes and returns to earth; the soul returns to the source from which it emerged. This is the secret revealed by the sages.

Within the gross body there is the subtle body. If we assume the subtle body is part of the gross body, that is not correct. The subtle body is made of the soul’s life-force and the thoughts that arise from it. It is independent of the gross body and can separate from it at



any time. The inner and outer senses function according to the thoughts emerging from soul-consciousness. These inner concepts become the cause of creation, and through thoughts, concepts, and the senses of knowledge, the world of diverse names and forms merges into Brahmānanda in nirvikalpa samadhi, where one experiences the truth of the Self beyond all forms.

Adi Shankaracharya explains that Prajñā is the highest evolution of the mind, attained through listening, reflection, and meditation. When Prajñā is steady, the soul becomes liberated. A person with steady Prajñā is called a Sthitaprajñā free even while living.

യസ്യ സ്ഥിരാ ഭവേത് പ്രജ്ഞാ

യസ്യാനന്ദോ നിരന്തരഃ

പ്രപഞ്ചോ വിസ്തൃതപ്രായ

സ ജീവന്മുക്ത ഇഷ്യതേ.

(വിവേകചൂഡാമണി -432)

This teaches that one whose Prajñā remains unbroken and whose bliss is continuous becomes a jīvanmukta, forgetting even the existence of the universe. When we reach the essence of thought or surrender all thoughts to the inner Self, we understand that the knowledge present in everything is the Self alone. The Aitareya Upanishad gives this supreme vision through the mahāvākya “Prajñānam Brahma” Consciousness is Brahman. Everything in the world is guided by knowledge; everything arises, exists, and dissolves in knowledge. Knowledge is the pure, eternal light shining in everything, and by uniting thought, action, and knowledge, one realises this truth.

The Guru begins his explanation from the firm earth-nīla, meaning solidity or existence. This is our ground where we sit, walk, work, and rest. Like Jesus’ teaching about building on firm rock and not on shifting sand, nīla shows the firmness of existence, the ground

of life. From this firm base, the Guru points to water (nīru) flowing, flexible, constantly moving. Rain, puddles, streams, rivers, and oceans show the changing nature of water, entirely different from the firm earth.

Next comes air. The gentle breath, the pleasant breeze, the strong wind, the whirlwind, and the hurricane reveal the subtle to powerful forms of air again a new type of experience. Fire follows: the flame of a match, the warmth in the body, hearths, stoves, lamps, lightning in clouds, the sun, and the stars. Fire is indispensable to life, and its nature is distinct from earth, water, and air. Finally comes veli open space the vastness outside us. When we step outside or open our eyes, we see space stretching endlessly to the horizon. Everything outside is also inside our awareness.

Then the Guru asks: Who experiences all this? He introduces ahamkriti the activity that generates the sense of “I.” Just as a lamp light up itself and other objects, the “I” illuminates all experiences. But once the light is present, we forget the lamp. Similarly, we forget the “I” that lights up experience and focus only on the experiences themselves. This ability to experience is knowledge vidya, or cognition. The knower, the known, and the act of knowing together produce “I”, “me”, “my”, and “mine.” When we examine deeply, we find no separate “I,” only the objects known. If everything known is placed in one circle, it becomes the biggest fiction the mind. The mind is a fiction holding facts together. Just as one sees only waves and not the ocean, the mind cannot be seen directly. But like a diver exploring the calm depths beneath the waves, philosophers and psychologists explore the depths of the mind and reveal the unconscious layer beyond thoughts and emotions.

Now we see that earth’s firmness, water’s flow, fire’s warmth, air’s movement, and



space's openness are all like waves. Nataraja Guru, in his inter relation Daiva Dasakam, says that God is like the waves, the power behind them is like wind, and the ocean's depth is immeasurable just as God's glory is immeasurable. All experiences from firm ground to the idea of "I" become one continuous experience of knowledge. This is the essence of the verse.

In the first forty-nine verses, Narayana Guru taught practical living how to relate peacefully with others and the world. These teachings are like Patanjali's instruction to sit steadily so that the body is forgotten. Only when we are free from conflict can we begin the deeper search. Now, sitting quietly, we examine our experiences. The firmness beneath us becomes mysterious when isolated in meditation. Scientists may explain it as gravity, but knowledge of firmness itself is undeniable. We cannot separate the knower from the known; all facts are in the mind, which itself is a fiction.

Water's flow, fire's warmth, and wind's movement are easy in daily life but become mysterious when meditated upon. Everything finally is known only through knowledge, and we divide knowledge into knower, known, and knowing. We have already seen that the "I" in two individuals is not really two. Now we go deeper: everything around the "I" thoughts, feelings, reactions is only consciousness. Praise or insult affects us because our knowledge changes. But these reactions are just knowledge; they can be corrected. Thus, the ego need not be carried

like a burden.

The central issue is ahamkriti the "I-making" process that continuously produces the sense of "I." The Guru teaches us to soften the ego with water, make it free like wind, and finally burn it with fire. Whenever ego becomes strong, pour water on it—soften it. People worry too much about others' words, but this "me" that gets hurt is only a fiction. Realising this brings peace. The "I" is useful for orientation but should not become a prized possession seeking approval.

This insight brings a great inner freedom the freedom not to be disturbed, the freedom to enjoy or not enjoy, the freedom to relate or not relate. We can move from the gross to the subtle and back without getting stuck. In the world of utility, everything has its place, but we need not cling to anything.

Nataraja Guru placed the five elements and the principles of "I", knowledge, and mind in a circle and explained them using the ocean-wave analogy. Pure ocean cannot be seen without waves, and pure consciousness cannot be seen by eliminating thoughts. Trying to remove all thoughts is like trying to wash away soap lather—the more we wash, the more lather appears. To realise pure consciousness, we must understand it through thoughts, not by killing them. We need not destroy the world for peace; even if the neighbour's dog barks, we can remain peaceful. This is the freedom and beauty taught by Narayana Guru.



## Recap

- ◆ The universe formed of the five elements ultimately merges into the Supreme Truth.
- ◆ All names, forms, mind, and ego dissolve into Brahman as Prajñā.
- ◆ The body returns to the elements, and the soul returns to Brahman.
- ◆ The Upaniṣads teach creation as an orderly emergence from the Self.
- ◆ The subtle body of life-force and thought governs perception.
- ◆ In nirvikalpa samādhi, all duality dissolves into pure consciousness.
- ◆ Prajñā is mature awareness, and abiding in it brings liberation while living.
- ◆ Prajñānam Brahma” affirms consciousness as ultimate reality.
- ◆ All elements and experiences are waves in the ocean of knowledge.
- ◆ The ego is an ‘I-making’ mental process, not a real entity.
- ◆ The mind is known through its contents, not directly.
- ◆ All experience forms one continuous field of consciousness.
- ◆ Freedom comes from loosening ego and attachment.
- ◆ Pure consciousness is realised by understanding thoughts, not suppressing them.
- ◆ Peace arises from knowing the world’s place within awareness.
- ◆ The natural inner freedom is the heart of Narayana Guru’s teaching.

## Objective Questions

1. According to the Upanishads, from which element does space (ākāśa) arise?
2. What happens to names and forms at the highest stage of realization?
3. Which Upanishadic mahāvākya declares that Consciousness itself is Brahman?
4. From which elements is the gross body formed?
5. What is ahamkṛti?
6. Who is called a Sthitaprajña?
7. Which philosophy accepts the evolution of elements from space to earth?

## Answers

1. From the Self (Ātman).
2. They dissolve into Brahman or Supreme Knowledge.
3. Prajñānam Brahma.
4. Earth, water, fire, air, and space.
5. The “I-making” process that creates the sense of ego.
6. A person whose Prajñā (steady wisdom) remains unbroken and who is liberated while living
7. Sāṃkhya philosophy of Kapila.



## Assignments

1. Illustrate the ocean–wave analogy and explain how it helps in understanding consciousness and the mind.
2. Compare the Upanishadic theory of the elements with modern scientific observations mentioned in the text.
3. Explain how Narayana Guru uses the five elements as symbols to guide spiritual understanding.
4. Discuss the significance of nirvikalpa samādhi in realizing the truth of the Self.

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## UNIT

# Three Petaled Awareness- Unified into One Absolute

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ understand how meditation reveals non-dual consciousness.
- ◆ recognise all phenomena as expressions of undivided consciousness.
- ◆ appreciate Narayana Guru's Advaitic vision leading to self-realisation.

### Prerequisite

The non-dual spiritual tradition of Advaita Vedānta, explained clearly by Adi Shankaracharya based on the teachings of the Upanishads, teaches that the ultimate reality is Brahman, pure and undivided consciousness. According to this view, the world of many names and forms appears because of ignorance (avidyā). Therefore, spiritual inquiry is not just intellectual study but a path of inner transformation that leads to direct realisation (aparokṣa anubhava). In this tradition, the division of knower, knowing, and known (tripuṭi) finally disappears in true knowledge, as described in the Mandukya Upanishad through the idea of turīya, the fourth state beyond waking, dream, and deep sleep. Practices such as meditation, inner stillness, and turning attention to the “heart-space” are important, and yogic ideas like anāhata nāda and prāṇa describe inner spiritual experiences. The Mundaka Upanishad speaks of liberation (mokṣa) as the cutting of the “knot of the heart,” meaning that doubts and karmas are destroyed through realisation. In the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru, especially in Atmopadesa Satakam, this non-dual truth is expressed in a simple and poetic way, showing that true freedom comes through direct inner experience, not just through thinking or theory.



## Keywords

Advaita Vedānta, Anāhata nāda, Tripuṭi, Devīstavam

## Discussion

ധനിയമയായ്ഗൃഹം ജലിക്കുമനാ-  
ഊനയുമതികലശേഷദൃശ്യജാലം;  
പുനരവിടെ ത്രിപുടിക്കു പുർത്തി നല്കും  
സ്വനവുമടങ്ങുമിടം സ്വയം പ്രകാശം!

In the meditative body, the space of the heart, which appears as the sound-form of the anāhata, shines in a fiery radiance. When this inner radiance emerges, all cosmic scenes visualised in the heart dissolve. The tripuṭi knowledge, knower, and known merges into one pure consciousness. In this state, the anāhata sound resounding within and the unbroken consciousness stand united as a single experience.

When every mental concept dissolves in a meditator, a deep emptiness arises in the heart. From this emptiness, the flow of vital energy and the subtle anāhata sounds emerge. Like a river flowing through a desert, this inner current moves through the body with joy, creating a roar-like experience. For a yogi who has mastered the inhibition of thought, the heart-space shines in the form of the unstruck, unattached sound. When meditation reaches its highest peak, the unstruck sound in the heart and the deep indifference born from the stillness of mind and senses unite like inner music. In this union, the soul's self-luminous consciousness is revealed.

The pleasures, pains, tastes, and weariness of everyday life are illusions projected by the colourful world. We do not know where our desires and dreams will lead us next. A life guided by the right path gives rise to a sublime inner vision rooted in meditation.

When yesterday's dull perspectives fade and one dives into the depths of self-searching, the divine light of inner vision arises, making all external appearances disappear. Just as one who sees the forest as a whole does not notice each tree individually, and one who focuses on the cloth does not separately see each thread, so too do all visual impressions merge into the awakened inner vision.

When the self becomes self-luminous, all temporary appearances lose their value. Through this verse, the Guru teaches that by experiencing the truth directly, all dualities fall away and the nondual reality alone remains.

ഭിദ്യന്തേ ഹൃദയഗ്രന്ഥി-  
ശശിദ്യന്തേ സർവ്വസംശയാഃ  
ക്ഷീയന്തേ ചാസ്യ കർമ്മാണി  
തസ്മിൻ ദൃഷ്ട്ടേ പരാവരേ

The Mundaka Upanishad (2.2.9) proclaims:

When the self-realised Purusha sees within himself both the Supreme and the manifested world as one Reality, the knot of the heart made of desires born of ignorance is broken. All doubts dissolve, and karma ceases. For such a one, the entire world of speech and conceptualisation falls silent, and the truth shines forth like the sun outshining all lesser lights. As darkness disappears in the presence of light, the ignorance in the heart vanishes completely in the radiance of knowledge. This perfectly reflects the Guru's vision.

The Guru addresses the seeker who still believes that the universe exists as a separate



reality and gently guides him to the Advaitic vision. Sri Ramakrishna taught that Brahman, Shakti, and the possessor of Shakti are one. When inactive, It is called Brahman; when active, It is called Shakti. Everything perceived as the phenomenal world is only the manifestation of Brahman.

The Mandukya Kārikā (Vaitathya Prakarana 30) declares:

ഏതൈരേഷോ, പൃഥഗ്ഭാവൈ

പൃഥഗേവേതി ലക്ഷിതഃ

ഏവം യോ വേദ തത്ത്വേന

കൽപയേത് സോ വിശങ്കിതഃ

The Self appears different only because of the varied manifestations arising from It. One who understands this truth knows the Vedas without doubt. All phenomena are not different from the Self; to think otherwise is ignorance. While experiencing the diverse manifestations of Brahman, we foolishly assume the experienced objects are separate from Brahman. The great knowers of the Vedas proclaim that everything in this world is only names and forms arising in the undivided consciousness.

‘ഇദം സർവ്വം യദയാത്മാ’ everything in the world of prāṇa is only the Self. Through this one principle, the Guru leads us to the truth of Advaita.

One of the unique features of Narayana Guru’s works is that they unite profound experience with scientific clarity. Sometimes he emphasises discipline; at other times he blends lived experience, scientific insight, and the sweetness of spiritual poetry. This verse is one such instance. The line from Devīstavam “Your words have come and are resounding among the people!” is another example. No matter how much one explains such verses, the meaning will never be completely captured. One may even feel it is better not to say anything at all. Yet, after

our best effort, what we express is only one meaning not the meaning. The true meaning must be discovered individually in one’s own inner world.

In earlier verses, we saw the heart of the Ātmopadeśa Śatakam, the essence of self-knowledge. It is more accurate to say that this essence is wrapped within those verses, and the secret inside is pure experience. The Upanishads describe this experience as that which words and mind cannot grasp. But here, the Guru performs a miraculous act not limiting the experience to words, but allowing the words to open into the experience.

This inner realisation is filled with both sound and self-luminous light. These are simply two aspects of the same experience. Yoga texts speak of the anāhata nāda, the unstruck sound heard by yogis, while knowledge itself shines as self-luminous truth. The Guru unites these two principles as one lived experience. Sound is to be heard and light is to be seen. The teachings heard from the Guru become inner illumination when realised. In the depth of this experience, hearing and seeing merge into one.

The verse also reveals the five senses. Entering this experience, one sees the sky ablaze as sound, for sound is the quality of space. Air burns as touch, fire as form, water as taste, and earth as smell. The entire universe made of the five elements is experienced through sound, touch, form, taste, and smell, which are nothing but manifestations of knowledge. When this is realised, the world appears consumed in the fire of knowledge. Wherever objects the triod (triputi) seer, seeing, and seen arises. However when objects are resolved into knowledge, the seer and the process of seeing likewise disappear.

The Guru does not reject the scientific categories of the five elements, their qualities, time, or space; rather, he integrates them into the higher unity of knowledge, revealing that



self-luminosity which is at once scientific in its comprehensiveness and experiential in its immediacy. By absorbing these categories into non-dual awareness, he transforms what appears as objective multiplicity into the radiant expression of a single consciousness. In doing so, the Guru gently lifts us into the

transcendental realm of Advaita. Through sustained study of this text and the inner discipline of meditation, we too may gather the necessary strength to ascend into that realm, where all divisions resolve into the indivisible light of knowledge.

## Recap

- ◆ In deep meditation, the anāhata sound reveals the unity of knower, knowing, and known.
- ◆ When thoughts dissolve, self-luminous consciousness shines forth.
- ◆ Inner vision absorbs all sensory distinctions into one awareness.
- ◆ Direct realisation removes all duality, revealing non-dual reality.
- ◆ Self-realisation breaks ignorance, doubt, and karma.
- ◆ The universe appears separate only through ignorance.
- ◆ Brahman, Shakti, and the world are one Reality.
- ◆ Narayana Guru unites experience, clarity, and poetry in Advaita.
- ◆ The verse's truth must be realised inwardly, beyond words.
- ◆ Sound and light are one expression of self-luminous knowledge.
- ◆ The elements and senses are forms of knowledge.
- ◆ When objects dissolve, the tripuṭī also vanishes.
- ◆ Time and space merge in self-luminous awareness.
- ◆ The world is absorbed, not denied, in knowledge.
- ◆ The verse leads the seeker into lived Advaitic experience.

## Objective Questions

1. What merges into one pure consciousness in meditation?
2. What happens when the self becomes self-luminous?
3. According to Sri Ramakrishna, what are Brahman and Shakti?
4. What is everything in the world of prāṇa according to the Guru?
5. Name the five senses experienced as in meditation?

## Answers

1. The tripuṭi—knowledge, knower, and known
2. All temporary appearances lose their value
3. They are one; Brahman is inactive, Shakti is active
4. Only the Self
5. Sound (space), touch (air), form (fire), taste (water), smell (earth)

## Assignments

1. Discuss how the dissolution of the tripuṭi leads to the realization of nondual consciousness.
2. Examine the meaning of “breaking the knot of the heart” with reference to the Mundaka Upanishad.
3. Explain how the five elements and their sensory qualities are absorbed into knowledge in this verse.
4. Discuss how Narayana Guru unites yogic experience, Advaitic philosophy, and scientific clarity in this



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# 3

## UNIT

# Search For The Self

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ understand that forms are expressions of Brahman and appear real due to Māyā.
- ◆ recognise that the universe and all experiences are manifestations of the one Self, and multiplicity is an illusion.
- ◆ appreciate that true knowledge arises through meditation, self-realisation, and disciplined practice.
- ◆ comprehend that the self is not separate from the whole, and the many arise from apparent illusion.
- ◆ relate Upanishadic and Advaitic teachings to daily life, understanding the deeper purpose of existence.

## Prerequisite

From early childhood, we learn to recognise objects, people, and events as separate from one another. We name them, classify them, and relate to them according to their differences. This ability to distinguish is necessary for daily life. Without it, we could not study, communicate, or act responsibly. Yet, as our understanding matures, a deeper question begins to arise. Are these differences final and absolute, or do they rest upon a more fundamental unity? When we observe carefully, we notice that every object depends on many conditions for its existence. Nothing stands entirely by itself. At the same time, we cannot deny that each thing appears with its own identity and function. This creates an intellectual challenge. If everything is one at the deepest level, how do we explain the diversity we experience? If diversity alone is real, how do we account for the sense of underlying order and connection



in the universe? Philosophical enquiry begins at this meeting point between unity and diversity. It invites us to think beyond surface appearances and to examine the relationship between what seems separate and what may be essentially one.

Such reflection also turns our attention inward. We usually trust our senses and mind to give us accurate knowledge of the world. However, thoughtful enquiry asks whether sense perception alone is sufficient to explain reality. Is what we see and think the whole truth, or does it point to something deeper? The wisdom traditions of India encourage us to investigate this question with discipline and clarity. They suggest that the world may not be fully understood either by accepting appearances as final or by rejecting them as unreal. Instead, a careful and balanced understanding is required. This approach trains the mind to see connections without ignoring differences, and to recognise depth without dismissing surface reality.

## Keywords

Brahman, Atman, Supreme Self, Sravana, Nididhyāsana

## Discussion

തനിയെയിതൊക്കെയുമുണ്ടു തമ്മിലോരോ-  
രിനമിതരങ്ങളിലില്ലയിപ്രകാരം  
തനു, മുതലായതു സത്തുമല്ല, യോർത്താ-  
ലനുതവുമല്ലതവാച്യമായിടുന്നു.

We have already understood that forms have no independent existence of their own, and that the multiplicity we see disappears in the unity of truth. Yet, can we say that forms or the self as form are completely non-existent?

To explain this, Guru uses a simple example. When a person enters a jewelry shop to buy a bracelet, he will naturally look only in the bracelet section. He will not search among necklaces. A necklace, a bracelet, and a ring are all different kinds of jewellery. Even within each kind there are countless designs, and a person who likes one particular pattern may not prefer another. This shows that every form has its own distinct identity.

Similarly, in the world we see countless forms. Broadly speaking, the universe may be divided into minerals, plants, animals, and humans. Within each group there are innumerable species and sub-species. Even the fingerprint of one human being differs from another. While the essence behind everything is one, each expression of that essence appears differently. If we classify objects into categories, each category has its own nature and structure. Nothing is identical.

Are these different bodies identical with the essence? No. The essence is one and remains beyond all these distinctions. Therefore, scriptures say that the body, the self, and other such forms do not possess absolute existence. But are they completely non-existent? Again, the answer is no. Every object has a natural place in the cosmic order and serves a particular purpose. Truth is not an empty abstraction; it is a complete system of action and consciousness. Whatever does not participate in this living totality is called

non-being. Since truth expresses itself as an ordered universe, the diversity of forms also has meaning. Hence, forms cannot be dismissed as non-being.

We understand the universe in two ways: through particularity, by observing each object separately; and through generality, by placing objects under various classes or kinds. For instance, when we say “Rama is a human being,” ‘Rama’ stands for the particular and ‘human being’ for the general. Even if we do not consciously think in these categories, things continue to exist as they are. When we speak of “the universe,” we include both particularity and generality. Yet, what exactly is this universe? It cannot be fully defined. It is ineffable neither identical with the essence nor entirely different from it. It exists in a mysterious in-between state.

Each appearance in the universe maintains its own independent presence when viewed separately. But when we ask whether the characteristics of one category apply to another, we find they do not. This makes it impossible to assert that forms exist absolutely, or that they do not exist at all. They remain beyond precise definition. Since the entire manifested universe rests on the foundation of Maya, Guru teaches that forms are so indescribable that we cannot firmly say whether they exist, do not exist, or are both.

Although the world that we see is an appearance, it is still a manifestation of Brahman. Therefore, it cannot be separate from Brahman. But when a seeker, through steady discipline, attains Brahman, all appearances dissolve and the oneness of Brahman alone remains. When forms are understood as expressions of Brahman, they become grounded in true being. Thus, they are not unreal; they continue to exist as the expressions of Brahman. Śrī Śaṅkara in Vivekacūḍāmaṇi also states that Brahman is ever-present and hence cannot be unreal. Even though forms are only appearances, they

cannot be termed absolutely non-existent.

This idea is further supported by the Upanishads. The Kāthopanishad declares:

യദിദം കിം ച ജഗത്തർവ്വം പ്രാണ ഏജതി നിഃസൃതം

മഹദ്ഭയം വജ്രമുദ്യതം യ ഏതദിദുരമ്യ താസ്തേ ഭവന്തി

(കഠോപനിഷത് 6-2)

This universe, which appears both permanent and impermanent, has arisen from the Supreme Brahman, who gives existence to all things. Brahman is the life-principle that moves everything. According to the eternal law and cosmic order, all things are arranged and governed. The infinite Brahman, mighty like a raised thunderbolt, stands within all beings and directs all actions. The sun, moon, planets, and stars shine and move because of the presence of Brahman.

The Kenopanishad deepens this understanding. The disciple asks:

By whose will does the mind think?

By whose power do the eyes see?

How do hearing and speech function?

What makes the vital air move?

These questions arise when the seeker begins to sense that sensory experience alone cannot explain life. The sage replies by pointing to the inner Self, the true source of all faculties:

ശ്രോത്രസ്യ ശ്രോത്രം മനസോ മനോ യദ്

വാചോ ഹ വാചം സ ഉ പ്രാണസ്യ പ്രാണ

ചക്ഷുഷശ്ചക്ഷുരതിമുച്യ യീരോ

ജ പ്രേത്യാസ്മാല്ലോകാദമ്യതാ ഭവന്തി

(കേനോപനിഷത് 1-2)

The Supreme Self is the ear behind the ear, the mind behind the mind, the speech



behind speech, the eye behind the eye, and the life behind the vital force. One who realizes this inner Self transcends the world and becomes immortal. All lights shine because of this one Self-light, which alone is eternal. The central philosophical idea here is the subtle relationship between form and essence. The countless forms of the world—beings, objects, shapes, and movements—seem separate, yet none possess independent reality. Their existence is borrowed from the one absolute essence, Brahman. Just as waves have no existence independent of the ocean, forms have no existence independent of Brahman.

Guru explains this through three insights. First, forms are not absolutely real because they are temporary, dependent, and ever-changing. Second, forms are not unreal either, because they serve definite roles in the cosmic order. Third, forms are ineffable neither real nor unreal, but mysteriously situated in between. They appear real when perceived through the senses, but fade away before the light of realization. Thus, the universe becomes a bridge between appearance and reality: as Maya it is changeful and relative; as essence it is Brahman alone.

For the realized person, multiplicity dissolves into one indivisible truth. For the ordinary person, multiplicity forms the meaningful structure of daily experience. When a seeker truly understands that all faculties function through the power of Brahman, and that the universe moves according to Brahman’s will, then the world of appearance becomes transparent. One no longer identifies with limited forms but recognizes the same Self shining through everything. This realization ends ignorance and reveals immortality the eternal nature of the Self.

**Verse 88**

സകലവുമുള്ളതുതന്നെ തത്വചിന്താ-  
 ഗ്രഹണിതു സർവ്വവുമേകമായ് ഗ്രഹിക്കും;

അകമുഖമായറിയാതുകിൽ മാതയാം വൻ-  
 പക പലതും ഭ്രമമേകിടുന്നു പാരം.

The one who truly understands the philosophy of the universe sees everything as one single whole. When a person possesses this inner knowledge, all names and forms merge in the unity of truth. But if this inward vision is absent, the world becomes full of illusions. The mind, depending only on the senses and intellect, mistakes appearances for reality. Many truths remain hidden, while the person is carried away by delusion.

When one looks at the world only through external or rational understanding, every object seems separate and real. But the one who has realised Brahman knows that all appearances arise from Brahman itself. The knower of truth sees oneness everywhere. The person who has not awakened this knowledge becomes trapped in illusions created by the visible universe and falls into sorrow born of ignorance.

According to Vedanta, the sages have clearly taught that Brahman is the only reality. The diversity we experience arises because the truth is not known. The countless objects and their qualities are perceived only through ignorance (avidyā). The deluded person, confused by names and forms, becomes attached to pleasure and pain and remains caught in the world of illusion. Such a person sees life only in fragments. Driven by the feelings of “I” and “mine,” the desire to possess objects destroys inner clarity. Life becomes wasted without knowing the real essence, as one is pulled deeper into the whirlpool of material attraction.

This universe has no existence apart from undivided consciousness. Just as bubbles exist only because of the ocean, this universe exists only in Brahman. If a bubble knows that it exists because of the ocean, it becomes one with it. If it thinks it is separate, it remains a small bubble destined to



disappear. In the same way, when a seeker holds the firm conviction that the Self alone is real and abandons attachment to names and forms, the seeker realises pure consciousness. Through listening (śravaṇa), reflection (manana), and deep contemplation (nididhyāsana), external appearances fade away, and the one pure Being shines clearly.

Gaudapada teaches this truth beautifully:

ഏതൈരേഷോ പൃഥഗ്ഭാവൈഃ  
 പൃഥഗേവേതി ലക്ഷിതഃ  
 ഏവം യോ വേദ തത്ത്വേന  
 കൽപയേത് സോ വിശങ്കിത  
 (മാണ്ഡൂക്യകാരിക വൈതഥ്യ പ്രകരണം-30)

The Self appears different because of its own qualities, which are actually non-different from it. Whoever knows this truth understands the Vedas without doubt. It is ignorance to think that qualities exist separate from the Self. The wise know that all prāṇa and all manifestations arise from the Self alone. There are no independent manifestations outside the Self. Only those who understand that nothing exists apart from the Self's illumination truly grasp the heart of Vedanta. The Upanishadic truth "Idam sarvam yadayam ātmā" the entire universe is the Self becomes clear when this understanding dawns.

This is also affirmed in the Kaṭhōpaniṣad:

സർവ്വേ വേദാ യത്പദമാമനന്തി  
 തപാഃസി സർവ്വ്യാണി ച യദ്വദന്തി  
 യദിച്ഛന്തോ ബ്രഹ്മചര്യം ചരന്തി  
 തത്തപദം സാഗരേണ ബ്രഹ്മീമ്യേമിത്യേതത്.  
 (കഠോപനിഷദ് 2-15)

All the Vedas point to the Supreme Self as the highest goal. All penances and vows are undertaken to realise this truth. All Upanishads teach only this one message. This

marks the beginning of Yama's instruction to Nachiketas. Vedanta purifies the mind and leads the seeker to liberation. All the Upanishads aim at the fulfilment of human life.

Shankaracharya highlights the importance of tapas:

സർവ്വേഷാം ഹി നിയത  
 സാധ്യവിഷയാണാം  
 സാധനാനാം തപ ഏവ  
 സാധകതമം സാധനം  
 ഇതി പ്രസിദ്ധം ലോകേ

(ആദിശങ്കരൻ)

Here the Acharya explains that penance is the most powerful means for attaining life's highest goal. Sadhana must be practised with self-control and strict brahmacharya discipline, with the Self as its aim. A person becomes a true brahmachari only when he renounces the eight forms of sensual involvement remembering, singing, playing, speaking, hearing, thinking, reaching, and acting. Only one who overcomes sense-attraction becomes a real brahmachari. Such discipline is demanding but essential for Self-realisation.

The distance between sense-based knowledge and Self-realisation is immense. Brahman appears and disappears like a flash of lightning subtle and mysterious. It is called Tadvanam, the One worthy of reverence. The seeker must enter this sacred forest of wisdom. Only this leads to the knowledge of Brahman.

Every being has certainty of its own existence "I am." The universe is the collection of countless beings that feel this "I am." The next question is whether this existence is one or many. Imagine a huge oak tree. Suppose "I" am a leaf on one of its branches. When I look outward, I see countless leaves, flowers, fruits, branches, and twigs. Everything appears different. But



when I look inward, I realise I am only a leaf. The existence of the leaf is not different from the tree. The existence of the parts and the existence of the whole are not two. Similarly, “I” and what is “not I” exist within a single existence. The entire universe is like that oak tree. Seeing oneself in this way is inner knowledge.

“That which is” is one. It is pure knowledge. Everything appears from that One alone. The ideas of “many” and “nothing” have no independent reality. To think that the many came out of the one is an illusion.

When the truth is realised inwardly, even the idea that “many arose from one” disappears. Such questions arise only from Māyā.

Looking outward, everything seems different. It appears as though the world and the Self are separate. But when one looks inward, it becomes clear that the existence of all things is one and the same. Māyā makes the one appear as many. It creates illusions and makes the world appear as an enemy. But knowledge removes all these misunderstandings.

## Recap

- ◆ Forms have no independent existence of their own; multiplicity disappears in the unity of truth.
- ◆ Every form has its own distinct identity, yet all forms express the one essence.
- ◆ Forms are not absolutely real because they are temporary, dependent, and ever-changing.
- ◆ Forms are not unreal either, because they serve definite roles in the cosmic order.
- ◆ Forms are ineffable, neither real nor unreal, but mysteriously situated in between.
- ◆ The universe exists in a mysterious in-between state—neither identical with essence nor entirely different from it.
- ◆ All appearances are manifestations of Brahman; nothing exists independently of Brahman.
- ◆ The countless forms of the world are like waves having no independent existence apart from the ocean.
- ◆ Multiplicity dissolves into one indivisible truth for the realized person.
- ◆ Ordinary perception of multiplicity forms the meaningful structure of daily experience.

- ◆ The universe exists only in Brahman, like bubbles exist only because of the ocean.
- ◆ External appearances fade away when the seeker realizes pure consciousness.
- ◆ The Self appears different because of its own qualities, which are actually non-different from it.
- ◆ All Vedas point to the Supreme Self as the highest goal.
- ◆ Penance (tapas) and disciplined sadhana are essential for Self-realisation.
- ◆ Sense-based knowledge is limited; Brahman is subtle, mysterious, and appears like a flash of lightning.
- ◆ The universe and the Self are one; the parts and the whole are not two.
- ◆ “Many” and “nothing” have no independent reality; all arises from the One.
- ◆ Māyā creates the illusion of multiplicity; knowledge removes all misunderstandings.
- ◆ Seeing the universe as one reveals inner knowledge and the unity of existence.

## Objective Questions

1. According to Vedanta, forms in the universe
2. The universe appears as many due to \_\_\_\_\_
3. The Self appears different because of its own \_\_\_\_\_, which are actually non-different from it.
4. Name three practices that help a seeker realize the oneness of Brahman

## Answers

1. Are expressions of Brahman and neither absolutely real nor unreal
2. Maya



3. Qualities
4. Śravaṇa, Manana, Nididhyāsana

## Assignments

1. Using the oak tree and leaf analogy, explain how individual existence relates to the whole and what it teaches about the Self and the universe.
2. What role does Māyā play in making the one appear as many? How does knowledge remove these illusions?
3. How do practices like tapas, self-discipline, and meditation help in realizing the unity of all forms in Brahman?

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# 4

## UNIT

## Self-realization

### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ understand that Brahman is one, unchanging, and indivisible, with all multiplicity being its expression
- ◆ recognize the Upanishadic mahāvākyas and “Om” as revealing the unity of Self and Brahman
- ◆ relate Neti, Neti and inner reflection to merging personal identity with universal consciousness

### Prerequisite

The great Upanishadic statements (mahāvākyas) such as Tat Tvam Asi (“That Thou Art”) from the Chandogya Upanishad, Aham Brahmāsmi (“I am Brahman”) from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, and Prajnānam Brahma (“Consciousness is Brahman”) from the Aitareya Upanishad clearly teach that the individual Self is not separate from the Supreme Reality. They affirm the essential unity between the human self and the Absolute. These declarations are not merely metaphysical propositions but foundational insights meant to be realised through disciplined spiritual practice.

Accordingly the practices mentioned self-contemplation, meditation (samādhi), and the method of negation Neti, Neti (“not this, not this”) are traditional disciplines in Advaita Vedānta. These practices help seekers remove false identification with the body and mind and realise their true nature as pure consciousness. The tradition also highlights the importance of the Guru, who guides the seeker from intellectual knowledge to direct spiritual experience. Therefore, the background of this content is the classical Advaitic path, which combines scriptural teaching, philosophical reflection, meditation, and the guidance of a realised teacher to reveal the oneness of Brahman.





verse, the Guru instructs us to gradually dissolve into the unbroken consciousness that shines as the essence of all these great teachings. To realise this, one must attain concentration through self-contemplation, renounce ego-centered pride, and worship Pranava the symbol of Brahman.

In the stilling of the mind, in the restraint of the senses, in transcending through the practice of dharma, in enduring the opposites such as heat and cold, in the austerity of inner discipline, in the guidance of philosophy and the Guru, in the peace gained through meditation, in detachment from worldly and spiritual pleasures, in liberation from all attachments, and in the profound silence of unwavering penance in the state of supreme bliss where “I” and all beings are one everything becomes Parabrahman.

ഓം പൂർണ്ണമദ പൂർണ്ണമിദം  
 പൂർണ്ണാദ് പൂർണ്ണമുദച്യതേ  
 പൂർണ്ണസ്യ പൂർണ്ണമാദായ  
 പൂർണ്ണമേവാവശിഷ്യതേ  
 ഓം ശാന്തി ശാന്തി ശാന്തി.

I am neither this nor that. I am neither the body nor anything connected with the body. Nothing can be affirmed as “this” or “that” about me. I am not defined by the meaning of being, nor am I the meaning of all that appears to exist. I am Being itself pure consciousness, nectar-like bliss, imperishable. This experience must become clear and firm, and that alone should stand as the proof. The one who knows this and lives it is truly the courageous one.

Having become such a courageous seeker, without any distinction, argument, interest, or discrimination between being and non-being, between truth and world, or existence and non-existence, let us gently and softly abide in the absolute good the supreme Om, the essence of love. In this verse, the word “being” appears four times, each in a different sense. Each conveys a subtle level of meaning. Knowing this, one should meditate on this verse and firmly establish oneself on the path of truth.

Om Tat Sat.

## Recap

- ◆ Truth is one, unchanging, and indivisible; it is not separate from the Self.
- ◆ Realizing the Self as the bliss of truth dissolves the distinction between being and non-being.
- ◆ Brahman alone is the foundation of the universe; the Guru reveals this supreme principle.
- ◆ The Upanishads teach the method of “Neti - Neti” to establish samādhi and realize the Self.
- ◆ In samādhi, the tripuṭi (knower–knowledge–known) dissolves into Advaita Brahman.
- ◆ The Brahman of the universe resides within oneself, establishing the unity of all beings.



- ◆ The mahāvākyas—“Tat Tvam Asi,” “Prajñānam Brahma,” “Aham Brahmāsmi,” “Ayam Atma Brahma”—affirm the identity of the individual Self and Brahman.
- ◆ The sacred mantra “Om” reveals the consciousness residing in the heart as Brahman.
- ◆ Realization requires self-contemplation, detachment, austerity, discipline, and guidance of the Guru.
- ◆ In supreme bliss, where “I” and all beings are one, everything becomes Parabrahman.
- ◆ “I am neither this nor that; I am Being itself, pure consciousness, and imperishable bliss.”
- ◆ The true seeker abides in the absolute good, the supreme Om, transcending distinctions of being and non-being.

## Objective Questions

1. What is the nature of truth according to the Guru?
2. The method “Neti - Neti” taught in the Upanishads means
3. According to the text, the sacred mantra “Om” reveals
4. In supreme bliss, where “I” and all beings are one, everything becomes

## Answers

1. One, unchanging, and indivisible
2. Rejecting all appearances to realize the Self
3. The consciousness residing in the heart as Brahman
4. Parabrahman

## Assignments

1. Write a short note on how the sacred mantra “Om” symbolizes the inner Self and Brahman.
2. Explain the difference between ordinary perception of the world and the vision of a realized seeker as described in the text.
3. Discuss the method of “Neti - Neti” and how it leads to the realization of Advaita Brahman.
4. How does the Guru describe the experience of supreme bliss where “I” and all beings are one?

## Reference

1. KrishnaJeevanam, Viswakumar, (2018) *Adhmopadesa Sathakam: Oru Upanishad Dharppanam*, Kollam: KrishnaJeevana Publications
2. Muni Naryana Prasad, (2019) *Sreenarayana Guru krithikal Sampooranam*, DC Books

## Suggested Reading

1. S., Omana. (2018). *The Philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru*. Varkala: Narayana Gurukulam.
2. Sanoo, M. (1998). *Narayana Guru*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.



# MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS

SGOU



# SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE: .....

Reg. No : .....

Name : .....

## Model Question Paper Set-I

Fifth Semester – UG Degree Examination

**DISCIPLINE CORE COURSE – B21PH07DC – PHILOSOPHICAL  
REFLECTIONS IN DAIVA DASAKAM AND ATMOPADESA SATAKAM**

(CBCS - UG)

2023 January Admission

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

### Section A (Objective Type Questions)

**I Answer any 10 questions. Each question carries 1 mark**

1. Who is the author of *Daiva Dasakam*?
2. State the language in which *Atmopadesa Satakam* was composed.
3. What does the term “Daiva” mean?
4. State the total number of verses in *Atmopadesa Satakam*.
5. What is the central theme of *Daiva Dasakam*?
6. The term Ātman refers to \_\_\_\_\_.
7. What is meant by “Self-instruction” in *Atmopadesa Satakam*?
8. Which philosophical tradition deeply influenced Guru’s thought?
9. State the ultimate goal of spiritual life in Guru’s philosophy.
10. What does Mokṣa signify?
11. What is the nature of God as described in *Daiva Dasakam*?
12. What is meant by ignorance (Avidyā)?
13. Which human faculty must be purified for spiritual growth?



14. What is the relationship between knowledge and liberation?
15. What does prayer aim at in *Daiva Dasakam*?

(10×1 = 10 marks)

### Section B (Very Short Questions)

**II Answer any 10 questions. Each question carries 2 marks.**

16. Identify the author of *Daiva Dasakam* and explain its importance in Guru's teachings.
17. Explain the meaning of the term "Daiva" in the context of *Daiva Dasakam*.
18. Explain why *Daiva Dasakam* is regarded as a universal prayer.
19. Discuss the moral values emphasised in *Daiva Dasakam*.
20. Describe the devotional tone reflected in *Daiva Dasakam*.
21. Explain the meaning of non-duality in Guru's philosophy.
22. Analyse the reflection of Advaitic thought in *Daiva Dasakam*.
23. Discuss the unity of God and creation in Guru's thought.
24. State the language in which *Atmopadesa Satakam* was composed and comment on its significance.
25. Explain the concept of the Self in *Atmopadesa Satakam*.
26. Define *Maya* in the context of Guru's philosophy.
27. Discuss the influence of self-knowledge on daily life.
28. Explain the ethical relevance of self-realisation.
29. Identify two important images used in *Atmopadesa Satakam* and explain their meaning.
30. Explain the concept of liberation as presented in *Atmopadesa Satakam*.

(10×2=20 Marks)

### Section C (Short Questions)

#### III Answer any 5 questions. Each question carries 4 marks

31. Explain the devotional structure and philosophical depth of *Daiva Dasakam*.
32. Discuss the concept of Self-realization in *Atmopadesa Satakam*.
33. Examine the relationship between knowledge and devotion in Guru's works.
34. Analyse how Guru integrates Advaitic metaphysics with practical spirituality.
35. Discuss the ethical implications of self-knowledge in daily life.
36. Explain the symbolic use of imagery in *Atmopadesa Satakam*.
37. Describe Guru's understanding of ignorance and enlightenment.
38. How does Guru reconcile individual experience with universal reality?
39. Explain the concept of divine grace in *Daiva Dasakam*.
40. Examine the social relevance of Guru's spiritual philosophy.

(5×4 = 20 marks)

### Section D (Essay Questions)

#### IV Answer any 2 questions. Each question carries 10 marks

41. Critically analyse the philosophical vision of God presented in *Daiva Dasakam*.
42. Discuss *Atmopadesa Satakam* as a text of self-inquiry and non-dual realization.
43. Evaluate the synthesis of devotion and knowledge in Guru's philosophy.
44. Examine the relevance of Guru's concept of Self-realization in the contemporary world.

(2×10 = 20 marks)





# SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE: .....

Reg. No : .....

Name : .....

## Model Question Paper Set-II

Fifth Semester – UG Degree Examination

**DISCIPLINE CORE COURSE – B21PH07DC – PHILOSOPHICAL  
REFLECTIONS IN DAIVA DASAKAM AND ATMOPADESA SATAKAM**

(CBCS - UG)

2023 January Admission

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

### Section A (Objective Type Questions)

**I Answer any 10 questions. Each question carries 1 mark**

1. Mention the central spiritual theme of *Daiva Dasakam*.
2. Identify the key metaphysical doctrine underlying Guru's thought.
3. Define Avidyā in one word.
4. Name the concept that denotes liberation while living.
5. State the term used for the illusory appearance of reality.
6. Identify the literary device predominantly used in *Atmopadesa Satakam*.
7. Mention the ultimate state attained through self-realisation.
8. Name the work of Sree Narayana Guru that is regarded as a universal prayer.
9. The illusion that veils ultimate reality is termed \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Identify the spiritual method adopted in *Atmopadesa Satakam*.
11. Mention the ethical outcome of true self-knowledge.
12. State the nature of ultimate reality as described in Guru's philosophy.
13. Name the transformation described as the movement from ignorance to



enlightenment.

14. Name the philosophical school reflected in *Daiva Dasakam*.
15. State the total number of verses in *Atmopadesa Satakam*.

(10×1 = 10 marks)

### Section B (Very Short Questions)

**II Answer any 10 questions. Each question carries 2 marks**

16. State the total number of verses in *Atmopadesa Satakam* and explain the significance of the work.
17. Explain the concept of surrender in Guru's devotional philosophy.
18. Describe the nature of God presented in *Daiva Dasakam*.
19. Explain the philosophical significance of *Daiva Dasakam*.
20. Discuss the unity of existence in Guru's philosophical thought.
21. Distinguish between the real Self and the empirical self.
22. Explain the relationship between knowledge and liberation.
23. Discuss the transformation from ignorance to enlightenment.
24. Examine the connection between spirituality and conduct in Guru's teaching.
25. Explain how self-knowledge removes suffering.
26. Discuss the importance of inner purity in spiritual development.
27. Analyse the role of imagery in conveying philosophical ideas in *Atmopadesa Satakam*.
28. Explain how imagery helps to illustrate non-dual philosophy.
29. Discuss the idea of supreme consciousness in Guru's philosophy.
30. Analyse the relevance of Guru's teachings in contemporary society.

(10×2 = 20 Marks)



### Section C (Short Questions)

**III Answer any 5 questions. Each question carries 4 marks (5×4 = 20 marks)**

31. Discuss the structure and message of *Daiva Dasakam*.
32. Explain the Advaitic elements present in *Daiva Dasakam*.
33. Describe important philosophical terms used in *Atmopadesa Satakam*.
34. Analyse the practical implications of self-realisation in human life.
35. Discuss the role of imagery in conveying non-dual philosophy.
36. Explain Guru's concept of liberation.
37. Examine the transformation from ignorance to enlightenment.
38. Discuss the relevance of Guru's teachings in contemporary society.
39. Examine the concept of divine grace as presented in *Daiva Dasakam*.
40. Analyse the relationship between knowledge and devotion in *Atmopadesa Satakam*.

**(5×4 = 20 marks)**

### Section D (Essay Questions)

**IV Answer any 2 questions. Each question carries 10 marks**

41. Critically examine *Daiva Dasakam* as a synthesis of devotion and Advaita philosophy.
42. Analyse *Atmopadesa Satakam* as a text of self-inquiry and spiritual awakening.
43. Evaluate the philosophical heights attained in *Atmopadesa Satakam*.
44. Discuss the ethical and social implications of Guru's non-dual vision.

**(2×10 = 20 marks)**

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

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BE TOO LATE**

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AND ALWAYS BE  
HEALTHY**



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# Philosophical Reflections in Daiva Dasakam and Atmopadesa Satakam

COURSE CODE: B21PH07DE

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