



From the Editor's desk....

## The Power of Unknown

He who knows and knows he knows, he is wise ; follow him  
 He who knows and knows not he knows, he is asleep; wake him  
 He who knows not and knows not he knows not, he is a fool; shun him  
 He who knows not and knows he knows not he is a child; teach him”

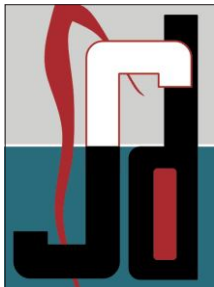
--Arabian Proverb

This proverb was told to me by my daughter, who seems to be very impressed by its meaning. But this proverb initiated a stream of thought in me, mostly in contradiction, which I thought I shall pen down in this page. Feedbacks are welcome from readers who have a different interpretation. My thoughts are as follows:

My first contradiction is the third statement. There are no fools in nature's creation, but only ignorant ones. How would one possibly know, what one does not know, if one does not know? So as a teacher I shall first reach out to them, not to teach them, but to make them aware of what they don't know that they ought to know. This responsibility necessitates that I have to be a constant learner, or more importantly be aware of the unknowns around me.

Thus logically, in my interpretation, the first line of the proverb becomes meaningless, because there can never be someone who knows everything, only more knowledgeable than the others. Becoming faithful followers of the so called authorities, though helps us learn a lot, but alas, it stops us from learning to think; a unique gift bestowed upon the six-sensed human beings. The (relatively) knowledgeable ones or the wise-ones as mentioned in this proverb, if they are really wise, would indeed least prefer, the blind/ irrational followers. The real wise ones would prefer to be the supporting railings to climb the steep steps of learning; to guide or to impress upon or to inspire others. They shall prod us towards self-learning by teaching us the 'power of why'.

Being unceasingly quizzical is an innate quality of the children who seek answers to everything they observe in their world. They have neither ego, nor prejudices, nor shame in seeking an answer. They are constantly aware of what they don't know, always hungry to know, absorbing a day's data like a quick sponge. I contradict the last statement of the proverb, that these learners don't need teachers! In reality, teaching them or in terms of the current school education, feeding them with established facts, catastrophically ceases their ability to constantly learn. A child-like enthusiasm for learning can only be kindled with more



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#### The Power of Unknown (contd..)

questioning, that lead to answers, and not by providing merely the answers.

However, if the process of accumulation of multi-layered facts continues, we tend to think we know all, attributing it to our long tails of educational accolades, or worse, we lose track of what we know. I have experienced this in my students' viva-voce, where I can get a straight answer with a straight forward question. But if the question is even slightly modified, the answer is 'I don't know'. With more questioning/ prodding when I get the same answer from them, I see glow on their faces, 'oh yes, I know!' Such is the impermeability of their conventional learning that it does take more than just a wake-up call ( as mentioned in the second line!) to make them realise that they know. This kind of apathy to our own knowledge stems from the inability to relate one known concept to the other. We generally do not realise that all knowledge that is available in this expansive universe is all interrelated; a knowledge gained in one field is best used when it is applied to another field (application knowledge).

Finally, I realised from this proverb or more precisely, from my interpretation of this proverb, that in contradiction to the popular belief that 'Knowledge is power', it is the 'Unknown' that is more powerful. The constant awareness of this power of unknown will certainly inculcate humility in us and also make us the child we once were, with an unending thirst for learning. I shall conclude by reiterating a Tamil saying

*'What we know is just a handful and what we don't know is as vast as the sea.'*

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