

## INTUITIVE UNDERSTANDING

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Let me, if you please, begin with a quotation from Ramakrishna Puligandla on Indian Philosophy:

All the systems hold that ultimate reality cannot be grasped through the senses and intellect, but can only be experienced in direct, nonperceptual, nonconceptual, intuitive, mystical insight.<sup>1</sup>

This experience is non-dual. It is a natural occurrence. There is no correlate. Intuitive understanding is not something external to be grasped. It is immediate understanding. Perception, inference and testimony are mediate understanding.

I discovered an experience of intuition which displays an immediate intuitive understanding: One summer I was walking my Peugeot bicycle around Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco moving along slowly, taking in all the serenity, when it happened in a 15 to 20 second segment of time. As I was approaching the boathouse I saw two young children, a girl about four years old and a boy about six years old and their mother feeding the ducks that inhabit the lake. As I moved along the pathway and got closer to them I heard the mother say to the two children, "if one of those big white ones gets out of the water drop the bread and get back." The boy who was feeding the ducks on the pathway turned and heard the mother. While the little girl who was totally engaged in feeding the ducks on the pathway and in the lake did not hear the mother. A few seconds later a big white one, which was a goose, paddled up onto the pathway. It was zeroing in on the little girl. I could see it and feel it moving in for the strike. I was about to say something. Just then the mother yelled, "drop the bread and get back." The boy did so. The little girl was focused on the goose while it was moving in closer. The mother yelled again, "drop the bread and get back, that big one is going to strike you." The goose was now poised and just about to strike the little girl when she dropped the bread and got back. The little girl began to cry. I was then quite near to the mother by that time, when she said to the little girl, "I think that big white one was going to strike you." I was alongside the mother now, as she felt my presence, she turned and looked at me. I said, "they will!" She said, "really?"

I kept moving along the pathway, all the time wanting to tell the mother she just displayed a classic example of intuitive understanding. But when I said, "they will!" and she replied, "really?" I saw her shift to

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cognitive understanding. Knowing that if I approached this woman she might become even more frightened, I continued, all the time wanting to say something. I knew if I told her I was a philosopher that probably would have gotten me plunged into the lake. So I just moved on with the gift of intuitive understanding which both of us experienced. Neither of us could have probably told the other what it is, although both of us have come to know it.

This was a moment of intuitive discovery for the mother. When the mother shifted to cognitive understanding she was viewing the moment within a temporal gap. This example is “Experience,” the highest intuition displayed in everyday life. It is an immediate reflexive consciousness of self. This would be what Srinivasa Rao calls “full” perception, there is neither selection or exclusion:

When one employs “Experience” to know the world, there is a content that is known just as certainly and in the same way as the Self is known.<sup>2</sup>

This is direct intuitive understanding. It is a nonperceptual, nonconceptual grasp of reality. It is in this wholeness that the cognitive understanding is silent. Puligandla puts it very clearly:

Such consciousness, is like the sun, self-luminous and illuminates all objects, internal and external, without the mediation of the senses and the mind.<sup>3</sup>

The self, says Rao, is self-luminous in the sense that one is never in need of a verification of one’s own existence.<sup>4</sup> Puligandla says there are no two realities, there is only one. This is:

...the inexpressible, invisible, inaudible and unthinkable ground of all existence. ...but can only be experienced in a flash of the highest mystical intuition.<sup>5</sup>

There is no reality apart from intuitive understanding. What is expressed in cognitive understanding is intuition itself appearing through the multiplicity of names and forms.

Having written what I wanted to say regarding intuitive understanding I thought it best to ask an Indian scholar to look at the path I am attempting to follow out. Puligandla writes:

My suggestion to you is to give considerable attention to the experience of Self as objectless—non-intentional—consciousness. In addition, you may want to distinguish different meanings of “intuition,” “understanding,” and

“knowledge,” and then discuss knowledge of Self as intuitive in the appropriately clarified sense.<sup>6</sup>

Let me begin with the *Bhagavad-gita*:

Eternal Brahman is supreme;  
 Yet Brahman, Atman, they are one.  
 The primal cause of all that be  
 Is Karma, actions and their fruits.<sup>7</sup>

The approach of this presentation will be to stay with the Upanisads fundamental insights, which are the foundations of all Vedantic schools. From Brahman proceeds the universe. Brahman created the scriptures, the vehicles of right knowledge. The only source of the knowledge of Brahman is scripture. Brahman is the First Cause of the universe. The scriptures acknowledge Brahman as Atman, teaching this truth to all. Brahman is the ultimate reality. Atman is the innermost self. They are one. Brahman and Atman, in the Upanisadic teaching is what is within is what is without, what is without is within.

Brahman, as ultimate reality is objectless—non-intentional—consciousness. Returning to Puligandla, “both Atman and Brahman, being beyond names and forms, are inexpressible and are to be experienced only in intuition.”<sup>8</sup> Brahman and Atman are not two different realities but are two different labels for one and the same. This Self is Brahman. Pure Consciousness is Brahman. Brahman is that which is not seen by intuition but by which intuition sees. In this way it is Experience.

The Upanisads distinguish between two kinds of knowledge. Puligandla brings this to light:

The higher knowledge, unlike the lower, is nonperceptual, nonconceptual, and intuitive. It is immediate and direct and is attained only by those who have stilled their senses and intellect. Further, the higher knowledge is neither objective nor subjective, for it transcends all three categories of empirical experience, namely, the knower, the known, and the act of knowing.<sup>9</sup>

The Self is not known by studying the scriptures or through the intellect. It is known by one who longs to know. Truth is revealed in one’s true being. This truth in everyone of us is Brahman. The cloud of ignorance destroys one’s real being and true nature. The Upanisads call us to cut through this cloud and discover ourselves to be Brahman, infinite, eternal, immortal. This knowledge of Self is intuitive.

Puligandla clearly states that, “Advaita means nondualistic and is not to be translated as monistic.”<sup>10</sup> Now with this in mind it is possible to dispel the idea that lower knowledge is only knowledge of appearances. The world of appearance is not useless. Lower knowledge is a truth but cannot be claimed to be absolute truth. Lower knowledge is useful in dealing with the world of objects. It is here that we have the knower, the known and the act of knowing.

Now I can clarify my use of the term intuitive understanding. Intuitive understanding within lower knowledge is always “at this time, I am seeing this.” It is not absolute, things change. With mystical intuition, which is the highest intuitive understanding, one experiences a glimpse of the absolute. It is beyond one’s intellectually grasped mediate knowledge. It is immediate experience. In this way understanding is to know. The Self who understands all, knows all.

When speaking of lower knowledge, the knower, the known and the act of knowing come into play. Let me make some East and West distinctions. From a phenomenological approach one considers intentionality to be primordial. Intentionality is being directed towards something other than oneself. Cognition is based upon intentionality. Intuition emerges out of the cognitive. From the East, intuition is primordial. Cognition is within intuition. Cognition draws from itself more than it has, as it is within intuition. One can begin concentrating on an object yet move beyond it in meditation. Intuitive understanding, within lower knowledge, when amplified in Yoga overcomes the subject/object duality of consciousness. With this the chatter of the cognitive mind, senses and intellect are stilled or silent. One moves to mystical intuition.

So if we now speak of an inclusive East West approach, intuition is primordial. Intentionality is located within intuition and cognition is based upon intentionality. This would be in the lower knowledge. Intentionality would be, specifically, being directed towards something. With higher knowledge it can only be intuition.

#### Notes

- 1) Ramakrishna Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1975), p. 25.
- 2) Srinivasa Rao, *Advaita: A Critical Investigation* (Jnana Bharati: The Indian Philosophy Foundation, 1985), p. 81.
- 3) Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy, op. cit.*, p. 43.
- 4) Rao, *Advaita: A Critical Investigation, op. cit.*, p. 62.

- 5) Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy, op. cit.*, p. 201.
- 6) Written communication from Ramakrishna Puligandla, Toledo, Ohio, 8 March 1994.
- 7) Bhagavad-gita, 8:3.
- 8) Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Thought, op. cit.*, pp. 202-203.
- 9) *Ibid.*, p. 204.
- 10) *Ibid.*, p. 223.