

Direct and Indirect Knowledge

Greetings Ram!!

How do you interpret this verse?

“This Self cannot be attained by study of the Scriptures, nor by intellectual perception, nor by frequent hearing (of It); He whom the Self chooses, by him alone is It attained. To him the Self reveals Its true nature. We may imagine that by much study we can find out God; but merely hearing about a thing and gaining an intellectual comprehension of it does not mean attaining true knowledge of it. Knowledge only comes through direct perception, and direct perception of God is possible for those alone who are pure in heart and spiritually awakened. Although He is alike to all beings and His mercy is on all, yet the impure and worldly-minded do not get the blessing, because they do not know how to open their hearts to it. He who longs for God, him the Lord chooses; because to him alone can He reveal His true nature.”

James: This beautiful verse is explaining *adhikara*, the qualifications for enlightenment. This kind of verse or words referring to the qualifications appear in every Vedantic text, usually at the beginning. It wants to make it clear that self knowledge is knowledge, not ‘intellectual’ knowledge. Although knowledge takes place in the intellect it happens when the mind is open to a means of knowledge. For example, you will not get the knowledge of an object if the mind is daydreaming. It should be present and alert behind the senses and then knowledge (‘direct perception’ to use the words of the verse) takes place. If you know ‘of’ the self because you have read or heard about it, you will know it indirectly, but not directly. Indirect knowledge is helpful up to a point but it is not self knowledge. Indirect knowledge is “I know the self, I am enlightened. I have realized the self. I am experiencing the self.” In these cases the knowledge is filtered through a media, an unpurified intellect. A pure intellect, one that can say with full confidence, “I am the self” which is free of experience and an experiencing entity is attained by the grace of God. Does this mean that God plays favorites? It seems that way. But the grace of God is not necessarily a dramatic spiritual event because epiphanies can take place in an impure mind and their significance can be easily lost when the mind falls again under the sway of *rajas* and *tamas*. The grace of god that is indicated here is the long term commitment to self realization. The thing that most impressed me about your

story was the amazing perseverance...*bhakti*...that you had. This *bhakti* was the self...God...choosing to wake up. The self will not be denied. When you stick to your path...follow your heart...the mind becomes very subtle and the intellect is capable of inquiry.

Ram: For the self you also need a means. It may be simply a purified intellect that seemingly had no preparation backed by a burning desire to know...like Ramana's...or it may be exposure of the mind to Vedanta over a short or long period. I purified myself for several years before I met Swami Chinmayanada and once I was there it took slightly less than two years until direct knowledge took place. I have taught people for as long as 18 years before direct knowledge took place. With some only a few conversations are required.

James: You have to keep in mind that this verse is in an Upanishad and the Upanishads are the source of the means of self knowledge called Vedanta. Vedanta is a peculiar means in so far as you cannot wield it on yourself. So you need to be taught. But the teaching is not 'intellectual' although it looks like it. It is just the direct transmission of knowledge. You will notice that the verse does not go into the details of direct perception. The Upanishads do not go into the details as they were essentially revelations. This knowledge evolved through the subsidiary literature, the *bashyas* and the *prakarana* texts that were contributed later by various sages. You will notice that it does not say that direct insight that results in hard and fast self knowledge without the aid of Vedanta *pramana*...the *sampradaya*...is not the grace of God. Because Vedanta is a complete and terribly sophisticated means of self knowledge and can bring about enlightenment seemingly quickly and effortlessly if the requirements are met, many people in the tradition say that it is the only valid means of knowledge. But this is not true. It can and does happen through other vehicles, although the nature of enlightenment is simply self knowledge that ends (*anta*) the search for knowledge (*veda*). So in this sense Vedanta refers to the simple knowledge 'I am awareness,' not the whole *sampradaya*.

James: Vedanta has gotten a bad rap as 'merely intellectual' knowledge for two reasons. First, people do not know what knowledge is and how it works. Secondly, people who are thought to have knowledge...intellectuals of all sorts...give knowledge a bad name because so much of what they call knowledge is simply belief or opinion. i.e. ignorance. Knowledge is what you cannot negate. It is always true. It always works. Yes, the intellect...which is just the self

appearing as a knower in the apparent reality...is involved. You cannot have knowledge without it. But knowledge is practical. It is not 'intellectual.' We cannot do one thing here without it. Even in the situation where a person is pursuing ends in *samsara*, he or she will not be successful without knowledge. And people who dismiss knowledge on the spiritual path and tout experience only, frustrate themselves.

You cannot separate knowledge and experience because reality is non-dual. But you have to do it to get to non-dual knowledge.

"He who has not turned away from evil conduct, whose senses are uncontrolled, who is not tranquil, whose mind is not at rest, he can never attain this Atman even by knowledge."

Yama having first described what the Atman is, now tells us how to attain it. Man must try to subdue his lower nature and gain control over the body and senses. He must conquer the impure selfish desires which now disturb the serenity of his mind, that it may grow calm and peaceful. In other words, he must live the life and develop all spiritual qualities in order to perceive the Atman."

James: In this verse and commentary indirect means are indicated. Yoga, purification of the mind by various practices are means of self knowledge but they are not direct. They get you ready and direct knowledge does the rest.

It might be helpful to look into the relationship between perception and knowledge. The purpose of perception is knowledge. It is not some kind of special power situated outside the intellect. Perception means to see, to experience. It is *karma*, action. The self is seeing through the intellect. It is seeing, perceiving for a reason. It does not need to see or perceive objects because it is 'self knowing' without the aid of perception, without the aid of objects like the intellect.

Why is it seeing? It is seeing for knowledge. If it is going to operate in the apparent reality...and why shouldn't it?... it needs to know what is happening. It needs to know the truth. Once it knows the truth of an object, it does not have to perceive it again. It can operate from knowledge alone. When you know who you are you do not have to wake up every morning and perceive yourself to know yourself. It is not necessary to gain the knowledge of how to split an atom

because the knowledge has already been gained. All that is required is to apply the knowledge.