

# Direct Knowledge and Karma Yoga

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**Carlos:** Hi, Arlindo. How can we know if our self-knowledge is direct or indirect knowledge?

**Arlindo:** Hello, Carlos. It is very simple: all knowledge takes place in the intellect. Worldly knowledge of objects of experience is dualistic knowledge by nature and definition: "the intellect and the object of knowledge." It is always in reference to something other than *jiva's* intellect. Knowledge of objects is always subject to error and correction. Why? Because the objects in the field are constantly changing and the same happens with the intellect of the *jiva*. What seems to be a logical consensus knowledge today may be proved wrong or imprecise in the future. Indirect knowledge is always subject to doubt and revision.

Direct knowledge is equal to non-dual knowledge. What kind of knowledge could it be? A knowledge that does not involve objects. It is the intellect understanding and knowing that the *jiva* in its essential nature is the self. We call it self-knowledge: I am the only self there is – the self, knowing and experiencing "itself" through *jiva's* intellect.

In order to understand direct knowledge, we need to acknowledge that the intellect is also an object, and hence it is not the self but a reflection of the self. The self, on the other hand, is "also" the intellect, since all there is is the self existing in two orders of reality of the same reality. How so? The intellect is the instrument by which the self (*satya*) contacts the apparent world of objects (*mithya*) and gains objective knowledge. The self does not know anything – it is not a knower or experiencer. Without the intellect, the self is only the "knowing principle" – pure knowledge, pure intelligence, without which knowledge of objects, as well self-knowledge, is not possible. The self associated with the intellect "becomes" the knowing/experiencing entities we call *jivas*.

Having said that, knowledge of the self can be indirect or direct. It is said to be indirect when it is objective – a theoretical, mental knowledge of the fact that the self does exist. It is like the intellect trying to know itself through the scriptures but looking for it as something other than itself. But a day comes when, due to good *karma*, the intellect gets in contact with the Vedanta scriptures, and after some contemplation it realizes and assimilates that in fact the self it was seeking is nothing but the very "light" of consciousness (the knowing principle), bouncing and reflecting off the intellect itself, to illumine and know the world of objects.

Many *gurus* (maybe most of them) make their fame teaching indirect knowledge of the self. How so? They have what is called "experiences of the self or non-duality," and when they come down from their epiphanies they talk about the self as an object that can be contacted, known and experienced. They speak about the self in dualistic terms and in a language of action and experience – as if self would be something other than the intellect itself.

They miss the point! They do not get that an experience of the self is the ordinary self, experiencing itself 24/7 through the intellect of the *jiva*. The bottom line: all

experiences are experiences of the self. But if one insists on an experience of the self, we may say that *jivas* are always already experiencing the self as the self. Direct knowledge is equal to a shift of identity from the “not-self” to the self. And if we want to look at it in an experiential way, we may say that self-knowledge is an experience of “identity” as the self.

You see, Carlos, an intellect, when predominantly operated by *rajas*, is an intellect with an extroverted tendency. Such an intellect, when purified of its excess of *tamas*, develops enough *sattva*, which combined with *rajas* will tend to explore and know the objective world of phenomenal objects. These are our scientific minds. But an intellect predominantly operated by *sattva* develops the tendency to inquire into the nature of the mind as no other than the self. These are the introspective-contemplative minds of the Vedantins seeking self-knowledge – the direct and immediate knowledge “I, the intellect, in my essential nature, am the limitless, ever-present, universal self.”

Once this knowledge is clearly apprehended it is never forgotten, because the self is ever-present, self-luminous and self-evident. You will no longer look for it, because you have it, you are it. The seeking for self-knowledge ends.

**Carlos:** Okay, but if all objects in *mithya* are in truth the self, why call it *mithya*, “not-self”?

**Arlindo:** Good question, Carlos. The methodology in our tradition works by first “negating” or discriminating *satya* from *mithya*, i.e. consciousness from the objects appearing in it. Once the self-knowledge is clear and firm (hard and fast), one can effortlessly navigate through *mithya* knowing that objects are also awareness appearing as such, no more need to discriminate *mithya* as “not-self,” because the knowledge that all is the self is firm and beyond doubts.

**Carlos:** Thank you. On another note, do you have any tips for the practice of *karma yoga*? I know what *karma yoga* is: not caring for the results of your work, offering your work to *Isvara*, but the daily practice itself is difficult. I mean I can of course dedicate the results of my work to *Isvara* each time I start doing something. The problem is that after less than five minutes this attitude is forgotten already and my mind is occupied with other things (not even necessarily with the results of my work). Would, for example, a kind of timer be a good idea, a timer to remind me of the *karma yoga* attitude? Or is this too forced? Any other tips?

**Arlindo:** Unfortunately or fortunately, *karma yoga* is knowledge *yoga*, or “*Isvara*-knowledge.” What does that mean? It means that it is not a practice, or *sadhana*, to be exercised outside of our day-to-day, ordinary experience of life, but instead the hard and fast knowledge of what *Isvara* is, how *Isvara* governs the apparent reality with its laws and rules, and how *jiva* can intelligently participate in order to live a happy and fruitful life conducive to contemplation and self-knowledge. That’s why *karma yoga* is an integral part of Vedanta, the pathless path of contemplation – understanding – knowledge.

*Karma yoga* is the knowledge of creation and its physical, moral and psychological principles that once clearly assimilated will transform one’s ordinary desires and

fear-oriented actions into spiritual actions (ordinary actions dedicated to *Isvara* with the spirit of gratitude and appreciation). But this spiritual attitude is only possible when *jiva* has understood the relationship between *Isvara*, *jiva* and the *dharma* field. *Karma yoga* is knowledge *yoga*. *Isvara*-knowledge is a great purifier of the mind, hence it usually precedes self-knowledge, but it may also occur in a transposed order.

But that does not mean that you cannot integrate activities (actions such as *pujas*, *mantras*, devotional rituals, etc.) in your daily life. That would provide you with some grounding practices, which would not only purify the mind but also qualify it for knowledge *yoga*. Devotion to God is a very powerful tool. If you look into James Swartz seminars on the *Narada Sutras (The Yoga of Love)*, you will understand that *bhakti*, or devotion, can be expressed on different levels, from a very practical and experiential dualistic form of devotion to God to a very profound non-dualistic love of *Isvara* as your own self. I hope this helps.

~ Love, Arlindo