

31. The Nature and Function of Intuition

To understand the real function of intuition *vijnan* we must know the constitution of man. Man has his purely physical nature and with it the vitality principle. Then he has his desires and the concrete mind. Beyond these there is the abstract mind or, as it is called, the formless Manas. Beyond this again there are the Buddhi and the Spirit of man, and so on. Intuition really begins where the sphere of operation of the concrete mind ceases. In this age when the lower mind dominates all our activities it is quite natural that the function of intuition is not properly recognized.

The function of intuition is so much at variance with that of the concrete mind that it is almost difficult for an ordinary intellectual man to value intuition at its proper worth. Intuition is something like a sudden illumination, it floods all the aspects of man and gives a perception remarkable in its width and depth. To illustrate the difference between the function of the mind and that of intuition, let us consider how the mind works. The process employed by the mind is essentially analytical while intuition is fundamentally synthetic. The mind perceives through various senses the outer phenomena, collects them, tabulates them, arranges them, and from all these data, draws inferences, and these inferences are stated as scientific laws. Obviously, no scientific law can be absolute Truth. A law may hold good for a long time, but if a new phenomenon turns up which disobeys the law, the law has to be so altered as to explain the new phenomenon also. That has been the way of all scientific advancement. But intuition works in a different way. In some mysterious way in which

imagination plays an important part, it gets at the truth in a flash without having to go through all the intermediary stages incidental to analysis. Suppose I am led into a dark room and asked to prepare a list of all the articles in that room. Being in the dark I cannot see anything in that room, but I shall grope my way about, contact with my senses the various objects, and laboriously make out a catalogue of all the articles in that room. Still there is a possibility of my catalogue being defective or even erroneous. But suppose that I have an electric torch in my hand, and I switch it on. Then the whole room is visible to my gaze and I have only to perceive what all there is in the room without moving or groping about. This more or less illustrates the essential difference between mind and intuition. Intuition is something like the electric torch. If one is able to use it one knows things by a sudden illumination rather than by laborious mental processes.

Intuition may be said to be of two kinds. Now, I was speaking of the abstract mind beyond the concrete mind. The peculiar feature of the abstract mind is that it does not deal so much with forms as the concepts which are clothed in various forms. While there may be thousands of chairs in the world, the idea of the chair, *i.e.*, the abstract chair, is only one. You may draw millions of triangles but the quality of the triangle or that which makes a triangle what it is, the idea behind all these various triangles, is only one. In other words, the abstract mind deals in types out of which numberless forms are built in the concrete mind. It follows from this that the abstract mind is in one sense a synthesizing agent getting at the one idea behind various forms which clothe the idea. Intuition, at times, comes from the region of this abstract mind. While we are struggling here with various forms without being able to get at the common type behind, intuition may flash down and give us the idea. It is the play of such an

intuition that enabled great men of the world to formulate laws or possible hypotheses which would cover a multitude of phenomena. The law of gravitation as enunciated by Newton was an act of such intuition. And again it is the play of this intuition that led to the enunciation of the famous principle of Archimedes.

Then there is a higher intuition which originates from even a higher level, the level of Buddhi, that is, the principle in man which unites the various apparently disorganized and disunited elements down here. The essence of this Buddhi is union. A person dominated by the play of Buddhi is one who always seeks unity and similarity even behind apparently irreconcilable elements. Now this faculty, when it functions, goes to the very root of things automatically, and views everything from that supreme standpoint of unity. Intuition playing from this region enables **a man to put himself *en rapport*** with every one and every thing in this universe. Thus he gets at the root of things and perceives everything in its true relationship, and so he is able to see things as they actually *are* and not as they *seem*. A person who is dominated by the activity of this Buddhi aspect is naturally a highly evolved soul. He lives and rules his personality from a centre which is not reached by ordinary mortals. To him everything seems to be like an open page. Apparently discordant things reveal a harmony to his eyes. Apparently insoluble problems seem quite easy of solution.

Though at present the faculty of intuition is not so normal as the faculty of mind, a time will come when the average man will have this intuition at work in him more frequently. Man is always evolving. From a piece of granite to a tree is a far cry. From a tree to an animal is a further cry. From animal to man is a still further cry. But the human Soul has evolved through all these stages in course of time, taking perhaps millions and millions of

years to pass from one step to another. Now we have reached almost the culmination of our mental development. The next step, as even the most advanced scientists say at present, is to develop a new faculty which will interpret the phenomena of this world in a new way, and that faculty is intuition. Already in cultured men and women this faculty is dawning. One may almost say that one of the essentials of a cultured human being is this faculty of intuition functioning in him at least to some extent.

When this faculty of intuition functions, its force seems to be almost irresistible. You dare not disobey its mandate. You feel so sure about it. You do not feel inclined to stop and question. But there is one danger in this matter. Very many people are merely dominated by impulse and may mistake this impulse for intuition. Some impulsive people do not stop to think. They feel so sure of their position. They go headlong into what their impulse dictates them to do. Bishop Leadbeater has suggested one or two methods by which we can distinguish impulse from intuition. In the case of impulse you will generally find something in the nature of a personal gratification involved, while intuition is essentially impersonal. Then in the case of impulse, if you fail to heed it there is generally a reaction of resentment. In the case of intuition it is not so. A third remarkable difference is that in the case of impulse, if you keep quiet for some time, it loses strength and gradually wears away. But intuition is insistent and does not lose strength by lapse of time.

One may ask how to develop intuition. Of course, it will come in due course to every one. But if we want to quicken its growth we may do it in one or two ways. First, by getting into the habit of thinking more abstractly, more universally, and more in terms of types, we may develop this faculty. In fact, in all meditation, part of our

thought is directed towards this habit of abstracting our attention from the concrete world of forms into the abstract world of ideas.

Another method of rousing this faculty of intuition is through Art. Great artists are highly intuitive. In great works of art one always finds this faculty of intuition standing out. A work of real art sums up varieties of human experiences and generalizes them for us. Whether it is a portrait or a piece of sculpture or a line of poetry this quality of generalization will be evident. When a great artist paints the portrait of a person he not only paints that particular person but in some mysterious way he gets at the type to which that person belongs and represents that type also in his portrait. That is where a good portrait differs from a photographic reproduction. While the latter gives us the physical appearance of a person at a particular time, the portrait of the same person drawn by a great artist represents the real man that he is, not only what he is at a particular moment but what he has been and he is and perhaps will be in the future. The greatest dramas of the world are attempts at portraying human experiences in a generalized impersonal way. Through art one will be able to achieve in a very short time, in a sort of vicarious way, what ordinarily will take years and years to achieve in the ordinary course. Therefore those who work along the line of art will inevitably develop this faculty of sensing the type behind the forms, getting at the root of things, and generalizing particular human experiences into universal experiences. To them persons and things will appear to be much fuller and much more significant than to the ordinary individual.

Then another and perhaps a surer method is to develop the habit of perceiving **similarity and unity in apparently contradictory and diverse things.** This is best achieved through Love and its various phases, such as friendship.

sympathy and so on. When a person is habitually of a loving nature he will naturally work more towards unity than towards diversity. Love enables one to transcend barriers, to seek contacts in all possible ways, and to put oneself *en rapport* with other people. Through this process Buddhi is developed and therefore the higher intuition. If we develop our Buddhi and make the mind a willing and efficient tool in its hands it will be found that the quality of intuition is rapidly developed in us.