

INTUITION

1. HOW INTUITION IS NORMALLY EXPERIENCED

There are different ways of experiencing / discerning one's intuition. Here are a few:

It's detecting a certain sympathy or antipathy, a certain confidence or diffidence which just comes up in oneself without having passed through a rational thought process. Or again, feeling certain "vibes" from another person (the mood, spiritual, moral or psychological state or health situation of that person). Some people sense the presence of evil in a very specific manner: the presence of evil spirits, or evil in relation to a certain person, or in a specific area of that person's life...

Some people experience intuition **as soon as they wake up**: *they feel that there's "something there"*, in relation to a family member, or other people (which comes *immediately to mind*, without having any reason to think of that person). Or again, **in whatever moment**, e.g. when one is walking peacefully, suddenly *something comes to mind as a sort of alert*, there's "something there" leading one to ask oneself: "what is it?" until it gradually becomes clearer, or until somewhat later on, one discovers that indeed there *was* something happening to someone one knows and loves (a tragedy, a problem or particular need), which one somehow sensed without having direct (sense) knowledge of it nor communication concerning the matter.¹

Other people feel it when they **look somebody in the eyes**: they can sense if the person is doing well or badly, if she is truthful or not, or if he / she is carrying a weight of bitterness or hurts.

Another way is **when one is speaking with a person, or praying for them, or listening to them**, "something" *comes* to one's mind to say, ask or suggest, without that something having been thought out by the person intuiting, and which one feels might be what could most help that other person (and in fact it turns out to be so). Others perceive a certain *image* interiorly (such as a broken pot, a part of the body, or a scene) which comes to one in a split-second, and gives a clue to understanding the other person's situation. Or in other cases, one "sees" what the future situation of the person will be (e.g., concerning a person suffering from depression and many grave problems, one sees them living in great peace in a future moment, and can speak to that person from the conviction one has that one day they *will* be liberated from their terrible problems).

Sometimes (but not always) there are *physical sensations associated with intuition*:

- **feelings of anxiety, palpitations of the heart**, deep concern felt in the chest (which, if suppressed, becomes even more vehement and insistent);
- **spontaneous tears** (crying whose origin one does not know oneself) when a certain person approaches. One may understand what that means in the other person's life, or may not (only senses that "something's going to happen to him / her");
- **strong physical sensation of aversion, repulsion, or on the contrary, sympathy and well-being** in the presence of another person (e.g. St. Catherine of Siena who felt nausea in the presence of somebody in the state of mortal sin);
- **headaches or pain in a certain part of the body**: a sort of **physical sensitivity** to people who suffer or have suffered in a particular way (without knowing that the other person has suffered in that way), especially in relation to the healing of such ills, or to repentance / liberation from sins related to those bodily members).
- **One experiences these phenomena especially when one is in inner harmony**, and one is in a healthy prayer relationship with the Lord.

2. INTUITION AND REASON

Intuition is not an idea or thought, at least not as the result of a logical deduction or argument, but rather a feeling, a sensation, a visceral reaction, an unexplainable "grasp" or "perception" of something, i.e. a "knowledge" whose origin one cannot explain.

Intuition, inasmuch as it is a non-rational perception, cannot be achieved by means of the reason; rather, too much reasoning may suppress, dim, or disqualify the contributions of intuition. **Reason**, even when it follows its own method (a logical, ordered rational process), with its apparently inexorable results (believing itself to render *the* definitive and irrefutable interpretation of things) *can also be mistaken, twisted or ill-oriented* within the individual by certain strong

¹ In Japanese the term for intuition is *chokkan*, which is composed of two ideographs: "choku" which means *direct* or *immediate*, and "kan", which means *feelings*. So it is about something that arrives directly to the feelings, or feelings provoked unmediated by sense impressions...

emotions or attachments (for example, fear, resentment, shame, sexual attraction) such that it no longer judges correctly, despite still *believing* that it is true and right. This is what we refer to as a “rationalization” (seeking reasons to do or approve what one wants to do, or to believe what one wants to believe).

Intuition, vis-à-vis this rational process, is an alternative voice, vision or conviction, which puts us in touch with the deep or spiritual reality of a situation in a more immediate way, and at times in a truer way than the reason can (which still insists on its being “right”). “The heart has reasons which the reason cannot know” (Saint Exupery).

When reason is liberated from the influence of strong feelings / passions which distort it, **the two faculties (reason and intuition) can be integrated**, even though each faculty operates in a different way and on a different ‘level’, so to speak. Although they proceed in very different ways, reason and intuition are not per se *contrary* or *opposed* to each other. Rather, they can and should coexist and complement each other in an individual’s Christian life, as well as in the dynamics of a pastoral or formation team, any given ministry, and in the growth of the Christian community as a whole. Authentic intuition can validate the conclusions drawn by sense knowledge and rational judgment, and on the other hand, factual observation and rational analysis can verify the authenticity of intuition.

Let us now consider two definitions of intuition offered by some dictionaries of psychology; they will help us to clarify the concept of intuition and its various nuances in different authors:

Intuition (from the latin *Intuitio*, from *intueri*: to look or consider with attention)

1) Originally: observation, examination; and then also: intellectual vision by inspiration, not by experience or reflection, but rather by a mystical means, with the immediate perception of the essence of a reality, analogously to the knowledge acquired by revelation, in a discovery, which is experienced as a feeling, of the profound truth which neither needs demonstration nor is demonstrable. In another sense, intuition signifies a knowledge born of experience which is obtained rapidly without passing through conscious intermediate stages of reasoning, such as occurs, for example, in many cases of diagnosis by an experienced doctor. Or again, the immediate comprehension of some thing, a state or situation; knowledge of the relationships, causes and effects of some happening, of an action or of a specific matter.

2) According to C.G. Jung, one of the principal psychic functions, distinct from sensation (but irrational like this latter function). It knows the external world by unconscious perception and is the proper function of sleep. [F. Dorsch, *Dictionary of Psychology* (Spanish edition: Herder, Barcelona, 1985. p. 419)]

Intuition

A mode of operating of the intelligence and its fruits. As a mode of operation, intuition denotes a form of knowledge characterized by its direct and sudden nature. It is based upon a spontaneous, external organization of a perception, an idea or an image. The intuition, as a “sympathy” with the object (H. Bergson) can be valid for non-conceptual knowledge, although it can also be a rapid analytical comprehension of a system of reference whose current analysis would require a large discursive development (E. Brunswik). Intuition is related to an externally (empirical) or internally (metaphysical) perceptible phenomenon. In all these cases existential nature of the object is apprehended by the mind. M.J. Borel [Arnold-Eysenck-Neili (eds.) *Dictionary of Psychology*, Spanish edition: Rioduero, Madrid, 1979, vol II, p. 240]

3. HOW TO ‘WORK ON’ THE INTUITION TO CLARIFY IT

Normally *closeness* (living together, daily contact, looking another person in the eyes, noticing his / her gestures, profound listening, etc.: in a word, loving attention) *helps and fosters the clarification of one’s intuition*. Intuition is a *perception* sometimes initially *amorphous* (unclear), but which can be clarified or concretized, paying detailed attention to a person or situation.²

In some cases (especially in clairvoyant intuition), it may be necessary to *act* upon a first datum of intuition (step out in faith, initiate the action suggested by the intuition) **in order to receive in greater clarity the rest of the intuition** and finally manage to comprehend the matter.

Another manner of clarifying an intuition is **to ask the person** about whom one has had an intuition if the word or image one has received ‘says’ something to him / her; if the person says “no”, then one should leave the person in peace, and not pursue the matter, but if the person responds affirmatively, then it opens a way of investigation as to the meaning of what one experienced intuitively.

² There’s also another, more extraordinary sort of intuition which we could call clairvoyant, when one “knows” something about someone with whom one has had little or no contact – such as when one has mentally “seen” someone or some place which they have just met or visited for the first time. But in this paper we are dealing principally with *ordinary* intuition. (Yet another form of intuition, more noble than any of these, is the ‘gift of knowledge’, a work of the Holy Spirit.)

4. INTUITION IN RELATION TO GOD

Intuition can be experienced as a “good” or “bad” feeling, without explanation or evident reason, but in both cases, [so testified a religious who had frequently experienced intuition:] *it unites us to God* and throws us at his feet: “joy which has his characteristic mark” or sadness “which makes us rely on him”. It is not that something “bad” that we intuit comes from God, but rather one perceives it in order to act contrariwise to such a mistaken or tragic path, or we’re led to warn the person about whom we have had the intuition of physical, moral or spiritual danger, or at very least pray for that person.

Intuition seems to be *a sort of feeling or perceiving on the part of the soul itself* (not of the physical sense organs, although sometimes it is *felt* in them, nor is it of the material world; it has to do with the inner world of memory and the unconscious); for this reason it perceives the true spiritual value of a thing, and causes us to give thanks to God; it is something for our good and especially for that of our neighbor.³

St Theresa of the Child Jesus spoke of a sort of intuition which gave her to understand what Jesus wanted of her; “I have observed frequently that Jesus does not want to give me *provisions*. He sustains me at each moment with an entirely new food, just made on the spot; **I find it in me without knowing where nor how it comes...** I believe, simply, that it is Jesus himself, hidden in the depths of my poor heart, who gives me the grace of working in me, giving me to understand what he wants me to do in the present moment.”⁴

It’s good to persevere in asking God to reveal “what’s there” in a person about whom one has felt “something” without knowing what it is. Also to *turn over and over in one’s mind (heart) the matter* (what one observes or feels about so and so) *until the Lord reveals to you or clarifies the matter to you in prayer*, or perhaps in the moment in which you’re dealing with that person. [Cf. Mary’s attitude in Lk 2:19.51; Jn 2:3.5]

One should put his gift or capacity of intuition at God’s service. This requires a purification of the heart and involves “giving over” the gift to the Lord in prayer. The gift of intuition may awaken in the one who has it attitudes of superiority or the desire to police or interfere in another’s freedom, or it may provoke in others attitudes of envy or resentment toward one who seems to be a “spy”, etc. Both of these reactions are unhealthy, and are not from God. If God’s gifts are used well they should produce fruits of mercy, love for the sick or troubled person, and joy at seeing that person healed and led towards fullness of life. Without love, one cannot help another person, even if one has a lot of intuition!

5. VERIFICATION AND CONFIRMATION OF INTUITION

One can also make mistakes in what one *believes* to be intuition.

A person can *confuse the projection of one’s own self (one’s blind desires*, one’s opinions or personal experience) with the intuition, --- whether it’s a question of *prejudices* (either positive or negative, personal or social), or simply *supposing that “it ought to be this way”* (for example, when one generalizes one’s own experience, and *believes* that he / she “knows” the other person, or what he / she ought to do in such a situation.) For this reason it is crucial that a person who experiences “intuitions” be aware of self, know one’s own psyche and its processes, to distinguish between what is a subjective projection and what is an authentic (albeit non-demonstrable) intuition about another.

Intuition is not the same as distrusting everyone. Distrusting / suspecting everyone is a rational projection of our own prejudices, tendencies or fears upon other people. Intuition is not always thinking ill of others, nor imagining the worst whenever we’re in the dark about something, but *feeling, perceiving* something bad (or good) about a particular situation or person.

For this reason it’s good to try to free our mind / spirit of presuppositions, and sometimes to *doubt one’s own intuition*; is it *really* that way, or not? --and then check the objective indications of the matter. In general it’s important always to be monitoring one’s intuition by means of a subsequent “reality check”, to see if what we intuited turns out to be fact or fiction! If other people deny or reject what we think we “know” about them by intuition, *watch out!* It could be that (unconsciously) you want to impose *your* own idea of other people upon them. In such a case, we will need humility to recognize and accept what other people say about *themselves*.⁵ But, *if one discovers that what one intuited*, despite having

³ However, one witness shared that intuition as a gift can also be **utilized by someone who is not in the grace of God** (even someone in the state of mortal sin), but then, --without ceasing to be true— **it could cause damage** and not achieve the good for which this intuition was meant. That is to say, it may be misused or distorted, and put “at the service of corruption” (Rom 8:21); for this reason one must use it under grace, in order that its fruits be according to God.

⁴ St. Theresa of Lisieux, *Complete works* (Spanish edition: Monte Carmelo, Burgo, 1980, p. 198; my emphasis)

⁵ Generally, in these cases it’s better to err on the side of ignoring our intuition (i.e. not paying attention to what one feels) instead of insisting with a person who denies what one *believes* one knows by intuition. *Only* a long history of *proven* accurate intuitions gives one the right to insist upon something in the inner life of a person which that person flatly denies..

had no external indications of it, *is in fact true, especially if it occurs repeatedly, then one can begin –provisionally, though with growing certitude– to trust in one’s intuition.* Also, when someone (about whom one has had intuitions) reveals something of his / her inner self, and then one *“understands why” one felt such and such a thing concerning that person,* this also *confirms the previous intuitive experience.*

With patience, prayer, eucharistic life, reconciliation & mercy towards our neighbor, and obedience to the will of God, **time (experience) will teach us how to perceive and discern the “content” of our intuition.** This must be told to people who are complaining that they don’t know what to do with the intuitions they receive, or how to help others through their intuition (those who are learning how to use their gifts).

Above all, it is good to seek God’s will in every moment (Eph 5:15-17). We must try to discover God’s will not only in transcendental moments, but also in the most ordinary and undramatic events of daily life.⁶ A practical exercise, in face of an upcoming activity would be to pray and think about it, but then to remain quiet and see if anything “comes” to one’s mind / heart by way of intuition, and then discern, choosing what is good, what seems to be the best path, and then *do* it. The intuition is, in one form or another, an invitation to *do* something, a warning about something that is about to happen, or something which needs healing / attention, something to say.... One should, then, follow one’s intuition in the majority of cases, especially where one has tested and confirmed the legitimacy and basic accuracy of what one intuits, even when it may seem to be imprudent by a strictly rational judgment. “Obey your first intuition” is a generally valid rule of thumb; “Don’t rationalize it away: listen to it”, especially if on previous occasions you wish you *had* paid attention to it... Too much rationalizing can act as a restraint on carrying out one’s intuitive inclinations, because intuition *cannot* be “justified” rationally, except in retrospect. Of course, when intuition suggests something very extraordinary, or something apparently sinful, one must use much more caution and think it over thrice!

6. INTUITION IN A MINISTERIAL CONTEXT

Intuition is a very valuable, even necessary faculty in a ministerial context, and certainly for the formation ministry in religious life, since this has to be guided, not principally by rational criteria, but by the superior wisdom of God, although ideally it involves rather an integration of the two faculties (reason and intuition) in something like what theology calls “right reason” (reason illuminated by faith and revelation). So, we can and ought to desire it, pray for it, and above all, try to cultivate and develop whatever forms of intuition we have.

Intuition seems to occur / be developed along the lines of one’s predominant gifts and capacities. If a person has administrative / organizing gifts, he / she might experience intuition in terms of structuring workshops or organizing the community in the best way for all involved. If one is a contemplative religious, it may come as a deep knowledge of others needs in order to intercede for them. If one is a counselor, an intuitive “flash” may come during the act of counseling, to make one a much more, supernaturally effective counselor. If one is a nurse, he / she might intuit others’ ailments even when they try to hide or dissimulate them, and so on.

A common complaint among those who have a notable gift of intuition –a complaint so frequent that it seems to be indicator of the presence of intuitive capabilities– is that they “would rather not have it”. This is because it burdens them with an oftentimes thankless responsibility, it involves them in the lives of other people, they find out things they’d rather not know about, and they are often mortified by the lack of openness in the very people they are sent to warn, help, or invite to something. Many times their warnings are in vain.⁷

However, **it is not necessary that each person involved in ministry** (religious formation or any other sensitive ministry such as counseling, education or health-care) *have personally developed this gift. It is enough that in each ministry team there be someone who has this gift, and that the rest value it for its great and irreplaceable utility, and pay attention to the warnings, suggestions or recommendations that such a team member can give* from time to time, even when it’s “only an intuition”, and not wait until “things come out in the open” to act, because oftentimes by then it is too late. Intuitions are given for a *timely* response to otherwise unperceived problems, challenges or opportunities. Obviously what was said above about personal verification and confirmation of intuition also applies here in a communitarian fashion. If such intuitions were more often heeded than spurned or treated with amused curiosity, there would be less scandals, and much more well focused pastoral work in the Church, indeed more audacious, Spirit-led ministry.

⁶ Mother Theresa of Calcutta let herself be led by her intuition in many of her foundations.

⁷ Things get worse still when other people (in the face of intuitive warnings or gentle reproaches which can’t be backed up by “evidence”) label them as “witches” or something similar, and look upon them with suspicion and mistrust. Those with gifts of intuition ought to know in this case that it is *not* something weird or strange, but rather is one of the forms in which human beings can perceive the condition of other persons around them, always in function of helping them or doing them good. Even more so when seen from a faith perspective: we know that God can illuminate whomever he wills, and in the form that he wills, for the good of others.

Although, like the charismatic gifts, intuition is no sign of personal holiness as such, ***it is convenient that a person with this gift seek to be wholly submitted to God's will and plan, in a word, to be holy.*** Because without holiness of life, the more striking uses of this gift may result problematic, either because of pride, non acceptance by others who look askance at one because of one's spiritual immaturity, or because of the interference of Satan, who may try to block or to counterfeit the gift and so to either neutralize the gift or lead one astray... There is also ***a certain culture of courtesy and gentleness*** which a person with a strong intuition needs to develop, lest a too abrupt advance toward a person (laying bare the secrets of his / her life before their eyes) provoke rejection or self-justification on their part. Always, the goal is not to prove one's 'hunch' right, to be victorious in a dispute over one's secret source of knowledge, but to help the other person, and for that purpose, a gradual approach and much ***tact*** may be equally as important as the knowledge arrived at by intuition. Finally, ***one can learn a great deal from other people who have more experience in dealing with the gift and burden of intuition*** both for developing and for exercising of the gift.

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