

the Real Heart



Children living at 15,000 feet in the Andes.

Among the traditional people of the Andes, research psychologist DR. OAKLEY E GORDON found a new way of understanding the world around him. Neither scientific nor religious, this consciousness is activated by a deep heart connection with Creation.



The Urubamba River Valley

In 1994 I became involved in a project to create a 'psychological model' of how healers from indigenous cultures cure people without the use of medicines or drugs. Our task was to discover the pattern of verbal and nonverbal behaviors of the healer that create a relationship with the patient where healing can occur.

The healer brought in for the project was a paq'o ('healer/mystic/ shaman') from the Andes of Peru who agreed to demonstrate his approach to healing for the purposes of our project.

As I listened carefully to what he said he was doing, however, and compared that to the 'model' we were

creating, I became increasingly concerned about the validity of our approach. I detected a deep, fundamental difference in how we psychologists and the paq'o understood reality, and that *difference* was not appearing in the model. I became intrigued with the idea of understanding the world the way he did, rather than understanding what he did through the filters and perspectives of my own culture and discipline. When I approached him to talk about this he offered me the opportunity to work with him.

Since that time I have been exploring the way Andean paq'os understand reality. As I have moved back and forth between the two worlds--traveling to Peru to work with paq'os in the high Andes and then returning to my family, my society, and my position as a professor of psychology--I have sought ways to achieve clarity on

how a culture with a completely different philosophical heritage understands reality and I have struggled to integrate the two different culturally-based understandings of reality within myself.

From this endeavor I have come to better understand the nature of understanding itself as well as the role that differentiating truth from illusion has in the search for clarity. These issues are, I believe, of relevance whenever we attempt to understand how another culture, particularly an indigenous culture, experiences reality, and they are of particular relevance regarding how they experience 'the sacred'.

TRUE OR FALSE

Western culture usually defines 'understanding' and 'knowledge' in terms of the *intellect*. Intellectual knowledge involves using symbols--such as words or numbers--to represent reality. By this definition both science and Western religion are primarily intellectual in nature for they both define themselves in terms of their representations of reality; science has its theories and formulas and Western religions have their dogma. If the words or formulas accurately represent reality then we validate them as 'true', if they don't, then they are 'false'; if they *appear* to represent reality but actually don't then they are 'illusions'.

In my Western culture we do recognize that there are other types of knowledge, but they are usually seen as being not as important as intellectual knowledge, or are viewed as being a stretch of the meaning of the term 'knowledge'.

For example, a single, fertilized, human egg 'knows' how to grow into a system of billions of interacting cells. It is an impressive feat, but we don't award a PhD. in biology for accomplishing it, for we draw a distinction between being able to do something and being able to use words or formulas to describe or explain how it is done. Theories of physiological development, and statements about the role of evolution versus God in determining the process, are intellectual in nature and can be evaluated as being relatively true or false. Your body itself, however, seems outside of the issue of true or false, it is 'real' but it doesn't quite make sense to say that your body is 'true'.

There is some level of my existence that is above both the heart and the intellect, for whom the two are simply different ways of understanding the world.

It is there that my heart knowledge has established its credibility--after years of hard work, confusion, pain, joy and profound experiences.



Paq'os returning from a sacred ceremony at 16,000 feet

ANOTHER KIND OF KNOWLEDGE

The Andean culture also recognizes and values other types of knowledge in addition to intellectual knowledge. In particular, that culture supports a type of knowledge and understanding this is accessible through the area of the heart (the 'munay' in Quechua, the language of the Andes). This knowledge is non-intellectual in nature, and rather than involving words and numbers, it involves love.

My Western scientific culture has long abandoned the idea that love is located in the heart. We *know* that the heart is simply a biological pump and that emotional responses are orchestrated by the brain. The concept of

a 'heart knowledge' that evokes love seems a quaint metaphor of a bygone era. Although the modern, intellectual, representation of physiology may hold its truth, it completely misses the point; the heart knowledge of the Andes resides *outside* of the intellect, and thus is of a realm where true and false have no meaning or relevance. Heart knowledge of reality is available when consciousness is moved from our head to our heart. In the West we so identify with our intellect that the idea that consciousness can reside anywhere but in the head can be hard to comprehend. When we are being intellectual our experience is that our consciousness is located in the area behind our eyes.

THINKING WITH THE HEART

The movement of consciousness from the head to the heart is the best description I can give of the effect of the various meditative processes I have learned in the Andes, and of the effect of the ceremonies I have attended with the *paq'os*. When consciousness moves from the head to the heart a different understanding of reality emerges. Like all ways of understanding--whether it be intellectual, athletic, artistic, or something else--the way of the heart leads into a realm where new distinctions may be learned and new skills developed and where over time the experience becomes richer and deeper. The foundation of this experience is love.

'Love' associated with heart knowledge does not refer to romanticism, or sentimentality, or affection, in fact the term does not refer to an emotion at all. It refers instead to the experience of being interconnected with the rest of the Cosmos, an experience that is available when consciousness is in the heart.

From this sense of interconnectedness the Andean *paq'os* interact with Nature in a way that is intimate, mutually-supportive, and therapeutic. They interact with the *Pachamama* (the great spiritual mother who is the planet Earth), with the *Apus* (the great beings who are the tall mountain peaks), and with other elements of Nature such as the stars and the wind and the rivers and the trees.

It is a relationship that intertwines the sacred into their daily life in a way that is hard for us, those of us who are the philosophical children of Descartes, to understand. The Andean *paq'os* appear to be as developed in heart knowledge as my culture is in intellectual knowledge.



Sisters at Tinki

INTELLECTUALIZING

So what happens when a person from my culture attempts to make sense of it by turning the experiences of the heart into words in order to form theories, or descriptions, or beliefs? This predilection to translate the heart into something the intellect can understand is not just found in academics, but in the general public, for this is how we have been taught to 'understand' the world. The first thing the intellect wants to know is whether or not all of this--heart consciousness, the existence of the *Pachamama* and the *Apus*, the ability to interact with them in love--is actually true. The answer is that there is something wrong with the question, for to evaluate it as true or false is to move out of the heart and into the realm of the intellect, and so the heart experience of the sacred is gone.

THE SACRED APPROACH

The mythologist Joseph Campbell addressed this issue of the relationship between the intellect and the

sacred in a discussion of the use of masks in sacred ceremonies. Within the ceremony the mask is said to transform the wearer into the deity that the mask represents. But is that true, does the mask *really* transform Uncle Charlie into a god? Campbell warns that the skeptical scientist, the spoil sport for whom the mask can only *represent* a deity must be *kept out of the ceremony*. But, he adds, those who take the mythology as being literally true are also not invited. The experience of the sacred flees out the door when faced with a skeptical scientist, but flees out the other door when faced with a true believer.

The anthropologist Gregory Bateson made a similar point when discussing how the Protestants and Catholics were willing to kill each other, and be killed, in the 1500's over beliefs concerning the nature of the sacrament. The Catholic view was that the bread of the sacrament actually *was* the body of Christ and the wine *was* the blood of Christ, while the Protestant view was that the bread stood for the body and the wine stood for the blood in a *metaphorical* sort of way. Bateson's conclusion was that both views were somehow anti-sacred, and that the sacred could be approached in a way that brought the two, logically-incompatible, views together.

From this sense of inter-connectedness the Andean paq'os interact with the Pachamama, the Apus and with other elements of Nature such as the stars and the wind and the rivers and the trees.



Apu Asangate and his family.

NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET

The problem is simply this, the heart and the intellect are two different ways of understanding reality and they are incomprehensible to each other. Bateson warns to not try to translate the sacred into terms the intellect will understand (e.g. into prose), it can't be done, and worse, it might lead to the creation of a monster. To experience the understanding of the heart the intellect is not invited.

We have examples in our own culture where we know that the intellect is not invited yet we also recognize that something important is going on. Attending a ballet is such a context. When a dancer appears on the stage dressed as a swan, the scientist does not leap up and claim 'wait a minute, that is not really a swan!' Nor does the true believer leap up and exclaim 'where did that giant swan come from?'. Nor does the dancer stop

upon entering and announce 'it is important that you believe that I am a swan'. Nor does he or she say 'do not be alarmed for I am not really a swan'. The ballet is *real*, it may or may not evoke an aesthetic experience, but the question of 'true versus false' seems irrelevant, and to analyze the experience is to lose it.

To understand from the heart we must temporarily and gently set the intellect aside, being neither skeptical nor gullible, but simply open to the experience without analyzing it as it occurs. The intellect and its propensity to analyze can be given its turn when the experience is over.

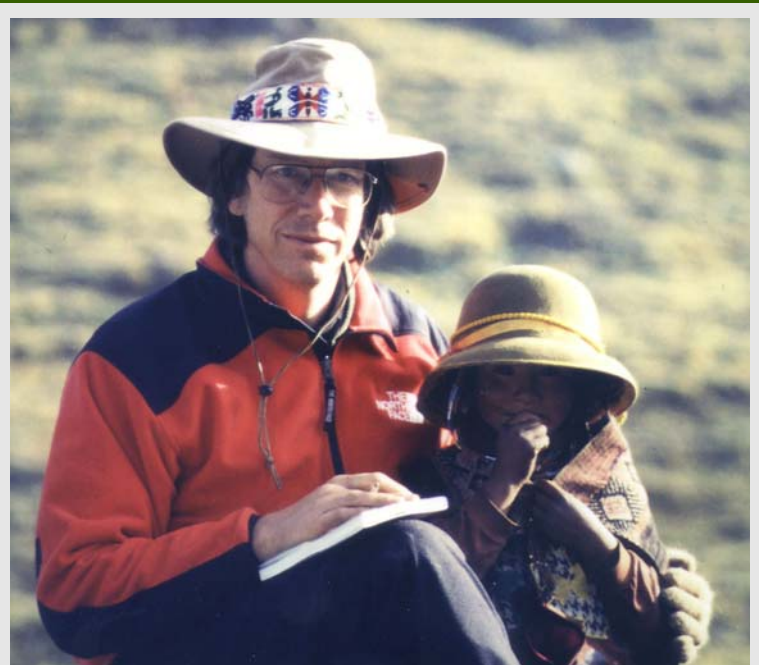
ANOTHER LEVEL OF SELF

But I am a 'professional intellectual', my intellect is how I communicate with my discipline. I don't seem to be able to help trying to make sense intellectually out of the experiences I've had in Peru, or trying to establish that there is some 'truth' in them. But translation, even after the fact, from one way of understanding to the other cannot be done. Translating heart knowledge into prose kills it (poetry is better suited), and searching for 'proof' of its truth leaves one grasping at the wind.

My intellect, however, recognizes that there is some level of my existence that is above both the heart and the intellect, for whom the two are simply different ways of understanding the world, and it is there that my heart knowledge has established its credibility -- after years of hard work, confusion, pain, joy, and profound experiences. Recognizing the preeminence of that greater aspect of myself that values both the intellect and the heart, my intellect is willing to acknowledge that heart knowledge is 'real', whether or not it is 'true'.

The challenges I have faced in my own explorations are mirrored by many others who seek clarity in their understanding of indigenous cultures, particularly in attempting to understand how these cultures experience the sacred.

We have been taught, both by our science and by our religions, that the most important task we have in such an endeavor is to differentiate what is true from what is just an illusion, when really the most important task we have is to open our hearts.



The author doing research in Peru

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