

17. How do we know?

Frees us from limiting belief systems

I was an intellectual as a child and taught myself to read at the age of three. My nose was always stuck in a book and when I went to school at age five, I was already wellversed in children's literature. Being inclined towards academics, I naturally became a good and enthusiastic student and went on to university to get my degree in Business Studies with German. Being in my head was a safe and comfortable place for me. It was my arena of competence and security, where I knew I could shine and outperform others. The only trouble was, I was so well trained in the academic arena that this attitude of "I know" spilled over into my everyday life and colored my existence. I was so sure I was right that I often would not be open to exploring other possibilities. And of course, I was very often not right.

I have since learned the price I paid for being in my known. "I know," says "I will not learn". It keeps us stuck, fixed in our position, rigid and limited in our current reality without inviting in the possibility to look at other options. This is because all absolutes like *never*, *always*, *can't* and *I'm sure* are based on the small amount of knowledge and experience that we have gleaned from our life to date. There is always going to be an infinite bank of knowledge and possibility out there that we have yet to discover which would potentially change our perspective.

Who's right?

"I know" breeds the attitude of "I'm right". When we are around people who know they are always right, we can probably attest to the fact that there is no room for anyone else in a relationship with them. It gets hard to be around them and it's quite a barrier to intimacy. Many people who are always "right" get to be alone a lot. My friend Jayne always tells me that when she was single she got to be right about everything!

What's the assumption?

The other aspect of knowing that we encounter is assumptions. When we assume we know what someone wants without first asking we take away that person's choice. For example, my grandmother would always assume that I wanted dessert and would give it to me without checking with me first. I would feel obliged to eat it whether I wanted it or not. If we are not sure, it's better to ask the person and get clarity rather than assuming we know what's right for them. We have to resist the temptation to project our ideas, needs and wants on others around us.

Inviting the clarity...

The opposite of "I know" is "I don't know", that is, playing in our unknown, where we are more open to experiencing whatever arises without prejudice. There are now an infinite number of possibilities for us. We are no longer limited. In this place, clarity can show up. At first it might be just a little bit of clarity, and then with

time and patience we can open up a space in our life for more and more clarity to appear, so we can get clearer and clearer about the courses of action available to us.

I am reminded here of a Bruce Lee movie where our hero is trapped in a seemingly impossible situation with no way out. In the realm of his known, certain death awaits. However, instead of panicking, he calmly sits down on the floor and meditates until the solution for escape presents itself! He allows the solution to arise from within his unconscious rather than relying on his limited mind to provide the answer!

Letting go of belief...

As we explore our unknown more and more, we eventually we hit up against our belief systems. We might call this “thinking in the box”. For example, I may think I know that eating chocolate is bad for me and that if I drink two margaritas I always get a headache. I tell myself that my body can’t bench press two hundred pounds and my brain is not capable of learning Chinese. If we continue to think in this way we will undoubtedly stay stuck in the same reality. But what if we are wrong? What if we are selling ourselves a fiction? People used to believe the world was flat and if we kept on sailing west we would fall right off the earth. No one thought it was possible to run a four- minute mile until Roger Bannister proved otherwise. Once that belief was busted, lots of people began to run that fast. So we see that as we begin to drop our belief systems and our conversational use of absolutes, more and more miracles can enter our life and what is possible can start to show up.

Challenging situations can make us feel like we can’t cope or do not have resources to deal with our situation. This is not true. We all have unlimited resources within. The ego keeps this in check so we stay in our limited perspective of “I can’t” and “I don’t know how”, which prejudice our lack of ability. What if we do know how and we can? As with the Bruce Lee example, maybe resources can show up from unconsidered sources.

“I don’t know” invites us to pause and face our emptiness. It’s only apparently empty. If we can get past the fear of remaining empty and powerless and start from a place of innocence, we can begin to take baby steps out of it, forming intentions of what is needed and focusing on desired outcome without having to know the means with which we will achieve it. We can simply ask that the universe support us in this intention over time. Rather than needing to see the entire big picture solution, we can ask to see the next step. We can be present with that, then ask for the next one and so on, remaining in our center and our unknown as the mystery continues to unfold.

Intuitive knowing...

Knowing in our heads is different from the inner knowing of our hearts, that place of intuition. We need to learn to differentiate between that gut feeling

“knowingness” that guides us from within, and the voice in our heads that tells us something based on past experience. For example, my friend Jill was exploring the dating scene and got a call from someone with a foreign accent who had seen her ad in the personals and wanted to go out with her. Her mind told her that this person is from a different culture and may therefore be very incompatible for her. But somehow her inner knowing overruled that idea. “There’s something there for me,” she thought. “This just feels right.” She met the person and discovered that they were absolutely delightful.

Knowing v. faith...

If there’s no uncertainty in our life, there is no room for trust and faith. What if we could lead our lives with so much faith that we expected miracles to occur?

Surrendering the need to know “how”, we can pray for a desired outcome, offer it to God, let it go and see what happens. Then allow ourselves to be delightfully surprised!

Examples:

I first came over to the U.S. at the age of twenty-one and hitch-hiked around the country for ten weeks with my boyfriend. I loved our trip but when I returned to England and was asked how it was, I said, “Great, but I’d never want to live there”. Fortunately, I did not stick to this particular absolute! Ten years later I married an American and we moved to California. I’ve been here ever since and I love it!

My Mother always used to say she hates foreign food. She wouldn’t even try it. It was good, plain British fare or nothing! She “knew” she wouldn’t like anything else! This changed when she came to visit me in the States. We went to visit a friend of mine who is Korean. My friend had cooked an incredible feast of Korean delicacies for us! My Mom had no choice but to eat it – and guess what? – she loved it! Now she is less resistant to new foods and new experiences!

I used to be a vegetarian and swore I would never eat red meat again as long as I lived! But after a severe bout of anemia I now have a high protein, low carbohydrate diet that serves me very well and I do occasionally eat lamb!

I work with a psychic healer friend teaching seminars on developing intuition. The first time we set about planning our seminar, we worked out a format and I said, “Great. I will write this down and this can be what we will present.” I had a definite “need” to know what we were going to do. He, on the other hand, was not of the same opinion! “This could all change by tomorrow – a better way may show up”, was his thought. It turned out he was right! On the day a whole new piece of information came into our consciousness that felt more appropriate for us to share! It was a great lesson to me to let go of my need to know.

A few years ago I attended a fire-walking seminar. We spent the first couple of hours raising our energy with team-building exercises and getting more and more excited about challenging our fears. Then came the moment of truth – the coals

were ready! In order to walk across we had to ignore our minds, which said, "Don't be crazy – you'll burn yourself if you do that!" Instead, we watched our instructor go across the coals and in a frenzy of "can-do-ness" followed him into the fire. We all did it just fine – without any burns at all!

Exercises:

Immediate action: For one day, cut out the phrases, *I'm sure, I know, never and always* from your speech. Replace them with words that invite more possibility, such as "*maybe, possibly, perhaps or as of yet.*"

Ongoing awareness: Can you build a relationship with uncertainty and stay in your "I don't know?" Cultivate an attitude of listening instead of having strong opinions.

Opinions are mans' main limitations – Barry Long
Believe in nothing – let everything be sacred. Yogi Baba

The unknown – a stepping off point for the mind to let go
THE unknowable – questions that have no answers
THE inconceivable – the question disappears

There once was an old lady who was at the airport waiting for a plane. She had a box of cookies with her. She started reading the paper to pass the time. Presently a man came and sat down next to her. There was a little table between them and the box of cookies were on that table. The lady looked out of the corner of her eye with some amazement as the man reached over and took one of the cookies. "Well," she thought, "He must be hungry. I won't say anything." She took another cookie. And then he took another. And so on, until there was just one cookie left. At this point the man took the last cookie and broke it in two and offered her half. She accepted, while thinking, 'Of all the nerve!'

A few minutes later they boarded the plane. As she loaded her carry-on bag into the overhead rack, her unopened box of cookies fell out. She had absent-mindedly been eating his cookies the whole time!

"The Queen said to Alice, who was standing in a world she did not believe, "I dare say, you have not had much practice. Why, sometimes I have believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." Lewis Carroll, Alice Through the Looking Glass.