

to be found. *Yesterday she was calm and focused, but today she's out of control.*

"Don't be consistent," was my husband's favorite Buddhist slogan. Life's not consistent. In fact, doesn't living according to our old routines feel like a life lived under glass? When the glass is shattered, there's a blast of cool air, and with it the raw freshness of being alive. We enjoy that sensation so much we immediately try to bottle it up, taking the same actions and expecting the same results, until the glass breaks once again and we discover that there's no new normal.

What do I depend on? All I have, all I ever have, is *now*. I can be completely present in this moment, or I can go into the stories in my head, sink into memories of how things were, get upset over how they've changed, and become apprehensive about the future.

Buddhist teacher Joan Halifax likes to say about her retreats and workshops, "The schedule is subject to reality." We can have any schedule we want, a daily regimen of greetings, medications, and appointments that remains the same one day after the next, but aren't they all subject to reality? Aren't they all subject to change?

You're not the person I married, you're not the person I knew. So tell me, who are you?

Dr. Ann Falls into a Trap

When you think you know, it's a trap.

When you don't know, it's a trap.

When you go beyond knowing and not-knowing, it's a trap.

Watch out!

KOAN

Before entering her new patient's room for the first time, Dr. Ann read his medical charts. Chet had an aggressive rectal cancer. He was not responding to chemotherapy and radiation treatments, his kidneys were obstructed by tumors, and he had returned to live with his parents because his wife could not care for him. She pictured an angry young man in a lot of pain from obstructed kidneys. As the medical expert, Dr. Ann decided that her new patient was ready for hospice.

Upon entering Chet's room, Dr. Ann was determined to carry out her plan. She said, "Good morning, Chet. How are you this morning?"

Chet greeted her with a big, beautiful smile. "Oh, so good, doc," he said. "That was the first night in months that I slept all night. I didn't have to get up to pee once!"

Dr. Ann experienced a shift.

REFLECTION

Does the attitude that you know exactly what is needed in a situation conceal what is right before you? This mindset of *I know what to do because I am the expert* or *because I just know better than you* is deeply ingrained; you are conditioned to know. Knowing can blind you to the ever-changing, ever-unfolding aspects of life. Not-knowing is not ignorance; it is life-affirming wisdom.

When Dr. Ann's new patient, Chet, flashed her a big, beautiful smile saying that he'd had the best night in months, his aliveness penetrated through Dr. Ann's authoritative knowing mind. In that moment, she experienced the living Chet. Tell me, what does it mean to know something? For many people, knowing often means figuring out a situation in their thoughts and then executing the plan. Do you approach situations and other people from your ideas of who they are and what is needed? This approach is guaranteed to fail, and yet, when it does fail, people are surprised, frustrated, and angry.

Knowing isolates and separates; not-knowing situates us in direct, intimate relationship to others and to the very nature of life. Not-knowing calls forth openness and deep listening, leading to a genuine connection without which you are apt to superimpose your ideas on others. Agendas, personal or professional, are hard to shake loose because they solidify the sense of who you are—*I am the expert, I can fix this, I know what is best*. Who I am is, in fact, permeable and not fixed at all. When confronted with *don't know*—or even a different point of view—can you recognize that the spaciousness of possibility has opened up, that more facets of

life are being revealed? Or do you dig your heels into the mud and muck of what you know and insist that your way is the right way, dismissing the living ingredients that are right in front of you?

It's a common habit, albeit a limiting one, to reduce each other to a bundle of facts, information and opinions. This kind of knowing often ignores emotions, intuition or other aspects of life's mystery. Each of us is alive—a living being! You are not someone's idea of who you are; you are who you are. Other people are not your idea of who they are; they are who they are. Eyes seeing, ears hearing, nose smelling, tongue tasting, body touching, and consciousness are alive—vividly arising and passing away in unceasing movement.

It takes many years on the meditation cushion to be completely open to life as it is, not as you think it is. You may have had glimpses of not-knowing, just as when Chet's smile cut through Dr. Ann's agenda and she experienced a shift, a startling moment of aliveness, right here, now—*Who is this lying in the bed before me with a big, beautiful smile on his face?* The habitual knowing mind often quickly dismisses such insights. For Dr. Ann, however, this shift upended her usual functioning and marked the beginning of a lifelong spiritual practice of not-knowing.

Here, now, in this moment, can you rest in the space before any opinions are formed? To meet the present moment, set aside your knowing.

Demonstrate the intimacy of not-knowing. Show me your big, beautiful smile! Right now, present who you truly are.