

Do I know you?

Our sources of knowledge are the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body. The mind processes all the data that comes through these senses, and as such can itself be regarded as a source of knowledge, too. However, of these senses, we, as a rule, use only two of them to really know others, that is, seeing and hearing.

We know others mostly by looking and listening to them. Of course, we can add the body to this knowing if we work or play closely with others, too, or if we correspond or communicate with them. Nowadays we can also know, or virtually know, others through the Internet. In this case, it mainly involves the body (typing the keyboard, chatting, etc) and the mind that guides and processes our activities.

Further, we know others from yet others, mostly through verbal exchange or by some other means, especially the mass media. In short, we never really know others directly, unless we are able to read their minds. Since we are unable to read minds, we must rely on vision and speech to know others and communicate with them.

Such means of knowing and communicating are clearly not perfect. Very often our vision, to say the least, is flawed, even at close range. For example, if we saw someone from the back and thought that he was our friend, and we slapped him on the back, but to our embarrassment, it was someone else!

Even if we know someone well enough, we tend to process this person (or persons) by past knowledge and experiences. Indeed, here knowledge and experience are really the same thing: they both refer to the past. Knowledge is an experience of the past. If we said we know someone, it means that we have met this person in the past and remember how this person looks like (we have seen him in the past) and “know” what he’s like (we have experienced him in the past).

Wisdom, on the other hand, can be said to be present knowing. We should not, or should try not to always judge or perceive a person by our past experience of him. If we were to do so, then we are dealing with something that is absent, that is, false or dead selves. If we keep thinking of people only in terms of how we “knew” them, it would be difficult, even impossible, to *know* them.

To know someone, in this positive sense, is to be present to the person’s presence, not just as a body, but also as a mind that is always changing and growing. We tend to put on a persona (a mask) that our audience or the other expects of us. This is not our real self. Indeed, we might take a really long time to know who we really are, and if that means anything to us, when we are confronted with such a knowing.

To really know a person we must go beyond all knowing by way of the physical senses, even our mental faculties. For, the mind is a master creator and illusionist who simply projects and imposes itself upon others, so that the person before us is but a positive or negative image of our own selves.

The irony is that we might still not be able to recognize that image we have projected onto another. We often fall in love with that person as a projection of ourselves, or reject him because we think we see our own bad qualities in him. We tend to see ourselves in others and not even know it. This way, we do not really know others.

How then can we really know others if we cannot really rely on our physical senses or our thoughts. We can only wholesomely know others with our hearts. Or, to be more exact, a heart of lovingkindness, an all-embracing unconditional acceptance of others, the love mode.

Notice how easily we confess our deepest secrets to those we love. We even want to unburden our darkest secrets with those we truly love. Indeed, only with unconditional love can we really share another's burden without burdening ourselves. For, such unburdening entails speaking of what we fear most. Having expressed it in words, we exorcise it, as it were, from our being. This is spiritual friendship.

A spiritual friend is one who is inwardly strong and outwardly compassionate. He has truly learned from suffering because he has himself gone through the mill of pain. He has been ground down to his very moral molecules like a shaman on his magical journey of dismemberment and coming together again into a new and wiser being.

When we accept others as they are, we empower our own selves with self-knowledge and self-acceptance. True self-knowledge is able to see the clear difference between the power mode and the love mode. With "power mode," we move others mostly through fear or favour. The love mode moves people towards what we all share and see as pure (beyond the body), beautiful (mentally joyful), and liberating.

With such self-knowledge, we cultivate other-acceptance or lovingkindness, which empowers others with self-knowledge and self-acceptance, too. That person is able to see what has been hindering his growth, to abandon these hindrances, and to see goodness within himself. The love mode benefits both the giver and the receiver.

The love mode especially applies to our own selves. If we lack unconditional self-acceptance, then we would forever be looking for endorsement from others and are dependent on the approval of the crowd. We are always looking for an audience to hear us out, but we do not even hear ourselves. We have become emotionally dependent.¹

Unconditional self-love means that we accept ourselves just as we are. Only then, we are in a good position, indeed, the best position, to know what are good and bad in us. Only then can we fix the bad and free the good. We have become emotionally independent.² We are happy for ourselves, we accept others easily, we rejoice in their goodness, and we see the world as it is.³ Only then we can fix what is wrong.

Not everything needs fixing, of course, especially when they are in good working order. The great works of art and the masterpieces of literature do not need fixing. Old as they may be, they are as good as they come. The Buddha's teaching, too, does not need any fixing. It is fine just as it is. We only need to see and accept it as a daily part of our lives. The Dharma needs no fixing; it is we who need fixing.

¹ Further see R222 "Power mode, love mode," Simple Joys 3: Loving Words, 2013: 129-132: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Simple-Joys-3-Loving-Words-by-Piya-Tan-2013.pdf>

² See **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/40a.8-Emotional-independence.-piya.pdf>

³ These 4 qualities are the 4 divine abodes: see **Brahma, vihara**, SD 38.5: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/38.5-Brahmavihara-piya.pdf>

How do we fix ourselves? This may seem ironic (at first). We begin by seeing our own good: they don't need fixing. We only need to recognize these qualities and allow them to show their genius. Good tends to attract good, especially within ourselves.

In the same way, others, too, have good qualities. Our task is to educate and inspire them to touch these spaces for truth and beauty, so that they show them. As we together cultivate these spaces in our lives, the other weak or troubled areas would eventually phase themselves out.⁴ We are then nearer self-awakening.

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⁴ You might like to further read on “the 3 kinds of learning”: see SD 40a.4 (6):
<http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/40a.4-Levels-of-learning.-piya.pdf>