

Zen Center

O F S A N D I E G O

ZCSD Newsletter

November-December 2021



The Sangha Reflects

For this second sangha issue, we asked our community to reflect on the practice of not knowing, or resting in "don't-know mind." Sangha is a treasure, and we appreciate the participation of all who responded. Here are their voices:

Recently I have become aware that the older I grow, and the longer I sit, the more I don't know. I notice that the less I cling to what I think I know, or worry about what I don't know, the more relaxed and less complicated I am. There is a sense of liberation, a sense of opening and just allowing an acceptance of how everything comes and goes, with no need to make assumptions or judgments; no need to know. It is enough just to be Here and Now.

I hope I will have the perseverance to continue to practice "not knowing." It is not an easy practice, because my conditioned being wants to know. ~

I have long appreciated this phrase, "Not knowing is most intimate." Hearing it now is like having a visit with a dear old friend who

December

Sesshin Enrollment for online participation in the December 28-31 sesshin is open through December 22. You can apply [here](#) if you would like to participate (full time or part time).

Sesshin Dates for 2022

March 18-21, 2022
June 17-20, 2022
September 16-19, 2022
December 28-31, 2022

[Announcements](#)

[Sesshin Application](#)

...consistently practicing with "resting in not knowing" has

reminds me that everything cannot be figured out and invites me to chill out and to rest in this vast experience we call life. The friend tells me the great mystery of life is close at hand, in this moment, in this breath, and, lastly, she smiles warmly towards me, and the flush of compassion opens my heart. ~

*left me less
desperate to
know what
comes next in
life.*

Previously, times of change would feel like an impenetrable fog that would bring me intense angst. It still feels this way, but this year my practice has helped me navigate through the fog more skillfully and peacefully than ever before.

It's not that I'm able to "see" better now, but consistently practicing with "resting in not knowing," to use the phrase I've heard in several practice talks this year, has left me less desperate to know what comes next in life. So now, rather than dreading this fog, I often find myself more at peace with being enveloped by it. There are even a few moments where I genuinely enjoy the sensation, something that would have been unimaginable just a year ago.

I hope to continue cultivating this newfound perspective as we all hurtle into the great unknown together. ~

My mind, unreflected, tends to drive toward conclusions. Instead, daily, patient cultivation of this present-moment experiencing of not knowing slowly opens me to a range of other, more satisfying possibilities. For that, I am grateful. ~

I work carefully every day to try to have control over my life. I plan, I schedule, I set goals and check things off my lists. And I work every day to address the existential threat of climate change. It has arrived, and we have seen unrelenting climate impacts in the increased fires, heatwaves, storms and drought. I don't know and can't know what

the impact of my work will be, but I continue to do it because I must. It helps me to have a sense of agency and not to despair.

When I sit and let down the walls of protection to experience the "not knowing," I encounter anger, fear, grief and anxiety. Breathing into the body I feel a tightness in my chest and pain in my stomach. Sometimes I cry. There is no choice but to feel it and let it be. ~

Until recently, "Not knowing is most intimate" was poetic and mystical to me but didn't mean that much. Lately, I have begun to appreciate a bit of its many levels. For example, I can think I know a person with a few (often dismissive) adjectives that "capture" them, without ever being able to glimpse who they really are.

We are all organisms that have difficulty with a universe that continuously arises anew, so we invent artificial frameworks that project a stable world with an even more stable "me" at the center. This obscures the world instead of revealing it. When the "knowing" of my busy mind can drop enough even to feel the touch of my seat or the movement of air in my lungs, I'm that much more intimate with our life. ~

This morning I woke up too early.

I will have to take a nap this afternoon and will probably be grumpy all day.

I make my way to the kitchen to turn on the electric kettle, taste buds anticipating the sweet, milky Earl Grey tea I will enjoy.

I hear a racket around my recycling bin. Today is pickup day. I'm pretty sure it's the elderly woman who lives on the corner—she always rifles through my recycling. I think she sells what she collects. I hope she is

okay.

I turn on my laptop and join an early-morning online sitting session. As my thoughts begin to churn, the plan is to practice with not-knowing mind.

Ha! What a Fool! ~

Life is not always easy, whether we plan it or not. I have a vague plan for my life, but it really doesn't matter one way or another if my personal plan pans out.

I have no idea what life will bring next year, next week or in the next hour, and it is all okay. Do we have to know what the future will bring to be happy? I don't think so.

What is personal success to me? I think it is feeling that my life is good enough just as it is and I am good enough just the way I am. I do not have to have a goal that I need to achieve.

I have the intention to be awake to life and to have a positive effect on others. Jane Goodall said, "We cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around us. What we do makes a difference, and we have to decide what kind of difference we want to make." Keeping the intention to wake up and make a positive difference is enough. I don't know more than that, but that is enough. ~

As I sit, each moment of returning to present awareness, to Just This, is an opportunity to let go of the mind's obsession with trying to figure it all out: planning, worrying, naming, judging, explaining—and just be, if only for a bit, in what might be called Stillness, or Not Knowing. It's a slippery process; even now, writing this, there is a compulsion to name it, and in that naming/describing/categorizing, a separation arises. ~

"Not knowing" took on real meaning for me during a sesshin some years ago. Six of us women were sleeping in the apartment over the garage. The first night, I felt like I got no sleep because of all the snoring. During daisan the next day, I mentioned to my teacher that I was worried that without enough rest, night after night, sesshin would become a huge struggle for me. I could feel the panic rising in me.

My teacher simply stated, "What makes you think that you know what tonight or tomorrow night or any other night will bring?" Though skeptical, I was able to settle down a bit and, interestingly, I slept soundly every remaining night.

I have remembered this simple message over the years and, particularly during the last six years or so, when life has felt so precarious, uncertain, and sometimes hopeless; it has lifted me to a softer and more settled place. I continue to be soothed remembering, "What makes me think I know . . . *anything?*" ~

7 Friends Gone in One Year
See How This Could Be You
Not Knowing What Comes Next
The Great Mystery
Feel It!

More and more I've come to realize that there is very little I know. Most of what I think I know are theories about what is, rather than actual facts. These theories are somewhat reassuring because they lead me to think I know what's going on and can develop strategies for managing the challenges in my life without being harmed by them. In reality, the theories, masquerading as knowledge, give me a false sense of security, which—at a deeper level—I sense but avoid looking at, resulting in a persistent underlying anxiety.

My practice with not knowing is to label the thoughts as they arise in awareness and to experience the physical sensations of emotion that arise concurrently in my body.

~

Not knowing has become a cornerstone of my practice. Lately I have been giving particular attention to this in dealing with intimates. Each time I interact with family members, I try to look at them with fresh, new eyes. How much better will my relationships become if I can always remember to do this?

This practice began as a distress point in relating to my daughters, who tend to hold a rather static sense of who their mother is. I am well aware how static the image of my mother is to me. I suspect we form notions early in life. Sometimes I wonder if, due to these images, someone I have known a far shorter time sees me more clearly. Couples who divorce often cite how they simply grew apart; I wonder if seeing each other with fresh eyes daily would change this outcome.

~

“By not knowing, not hoping to know and not acting like we know what’s happening, we begin to access our inner strength.”— *Pema Chödrön*