

The First Step: Knowing That You Don't Know

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

—William Shakespeare

One of my favorite spiritual texts says, “He who thinks he knows, knows not; while he who thinks he knows not, truly knows.” This statement implies that the person who thinks he knows is the most ignorant. Why is this?

The truth is that humans don't and can't know everything. Countless layers of reality can be unraveled in every direction you look, from a seemingly infinite sea of galaxies to the invisible atoms on this page.

As a human being, you live and walk upon this floating pebble of water, rock, and moss that is called earth. You've come equipped with a body and approximately three pounds of electrochemical jelly, called your brain.

With these inherent limitations, you'll never be able to completely understand everything about this very big universe. Everyone knows this deep inside, but sometimes people find it more comfortable to try and convince themselves and others that they have it all together and know what's happening.

Spiritual Wisdom

Quotes by smart people who knew they didn't know

The funny thing about knowledge is that it just goes on and on. Every aspect of knowledge in this world opens into entire new vistas, with seemingly endless divisions and forms. Some great thinkers discovered this tricky truth and shared their wise humility in these quotes:

- "We don't know a millionth of one percent about anything."
—Thomas Edison
- "I know only that I do not know. "
—Socrates
- "None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free."
—Goethe
- "The more I know, the more I realize I don't know. "
—Albert Einstein
- "The fool thinks he is wise . . . The wise man knows himself to be a fool."
—William Shakespeare