

I know your face

By [Kelvin Wright](#)

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There is a scene in *The Lord of The Rings: The Return of the King* in which Peter Jackson improves on Tolkien. At the battle of Pelennor Fields, King Theoden leads the Riders of Rohan to assist in the defense of Gondor. His niece, Eowyn, whom he loves more dearly than a daughter is forbidden, because of her gender, to fight. She disguises herself as a man and rides to battle where, by a mighty deed of arms she guarantees victory for the men of the West. Her uncle, King Theoden, redeems himself from the cowardice and corruption by which he has been enslaved, but in the process he is mortally wounded. As he lies dying, Eowyn finds him. He opens his eyes and sees her and looks at her with joy. "I know your face. . . . Eowyn," he whispers.

I know your face. In that tiny phrase is contained all the love between them; all the long years of connection they have. It is a scene that, despite my having seen it a dozen times, still moves me deeply. *I know your face.* To know and be known. This is perhaps the real goal of all wholesome human interaction.

I have sometimes thought knowing was a synonym for love, but this is not so. It is possible to know someone you don't love, or even someone to whom you are antipathetic. But knowing is a synonym for connection. The more you know someone, the more you are connected to them for good or ill. So the whole process of bonding in romantic love or in friendship is about acquiring knowledge of the other. The knowledge, of course, can be conscious and cerebral: lists of facts and impressions and memories of the other. It can also be intuitive and instinctive and unconscious: that deep understanding of who the other is, and why they are as they are, that sometimes defies explanation. When people are enemies, or when one person oppresses the other, there is also acquisition of knowledge and this knowledge, too, bonds the antagonists together. This is one reason why prisoners sometimes are so attached to their captors or a beaten spouse to her tormentor. It is the reason for forgiveness: to relinquish knowledge of the one who has hurt you so that you can cease being connected to them. To dwell on the hated one, obsess over

them, think of them day and night means in a perverse sense to know them and therefore to bind yourself to them ever and ever more tightly.

I am deeply connected to my little grandson, but he is less connected to me. Why? because I am more capable of knowing him than he of knowing me. At 21 months, once separated from me he forgets about me, for all intents and purposes, in a matter of days. I on the other hand who witnessed (at long distance admittedly) his gestation and see in him shades of myself at his age, and who can compare him to his mother and look in him for the echoes of his father, and for whom every word of his and every action is a delight, know him well and grieve his absence.

Of course sometimes we think we know someone but don't. Sometimes we have a projection which we have laid on the other: a mask of our own design which fits the other only approximately if at all. We can know our projection and thus be very connected to it, while simultaneously not knowing and not being connected to the one on whom we have laid it. This dynamic is at the heart of many, many relationship problems.

When someone truly knows us we are validated, affirmed, accepted. If no one truly knows us we quickly lose our place in the world and can eventually descend into madness. When we know we are known, we know we are connected. So the recipe for growing in connection is to maximize knowing: listen to, watch, spend time with, think about, talk to the other, dismantle the walls that keep you safe and alone. Share time and experiences each with the other. To disconnect means to lessen our knowing: ignore, lie to, guard yourself from, forget, unlearn the other. Don't talk to them and don't talk about them. This holds true for spouses, lovers, and friends, parents and children.

I know your face. It is one of the most powerful, healing things in the world we can hear. Or speak.

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