

CHAPTER 6

Respect in Relationships

Each of us is a unique individual, and we each have our own opinions and perspectives. Yet we should respect other people even if we disagree with their views. Respect makes people feel good because it affirms their sense of value. A person who is able to respect others has a certain dignity because she has something to offer others. A person who disrespects others has virtually nothing to offer.

If we want other people to respect us, we should respect others. We may think we are better good-looking and smarter than a friend, but how can we be so certain that we truly are?

If we value someone, we spend time and effort to prepare to meet them. We want to glow, to look good for them. And when we do that, we surely project much more self-confidence. We communicate more effectively and our respect for ourselves and

for them shows! But when we do things half heartedly, our shortcomings tend to show. It is because we do not get totally involved. This may backfire when we realize that we are not as appreciated as we would like to be.

Remember that respect is an attitude. It shows that we value the other person. Respect means having a good attitude toward a person in spite of his mistakes or shortcomings. It is possible to adopt this kind of attitude only when we learn to recognize their good qualities.

One young man said, "My father is never disappointed because he always tries hard to discover traits he can respect in every person. He claims that he always finds more than he originally expected!"

Some people expect others automatically to be a certain way and become sorely disappointed when that does not happen. It is far better for us to judge a person based on what he is, not on what he is not. If we become disappointed, instead of becoming angry with the person who did not meet our expectations, why not reflect on those expectations? Maybe the person lived up to his own expectations of himself. He did the best he could, and hence is worth respecting on that basis.

When we show respect for those around us, we



naturally renew and develop those relationships. Problems occur when we fail to show respect. Then we see only the stains on their clothing, notice their messy hair, and become offended by their behavior. We get easily annoyed when he stands in our way, takes the chair we were going to sit in, or eats the piece of fruit we were planning to eat. But if we have love and respect, we simply don't notice anything bad, and the features that used to cause bad feelings can even seem attractive!

Respect and love

When we speak about respect, one can't help noticing that this attitude is important not only in a relationship between two people. Today whole societies are disintegrating because there is a lack of respect and love. Students do not respect their teachers while teachers do not respect their students. In the workplace employers and employees show disrespect for one another. Disrespect in relationships is propagated by the media every day through TV, movies and songs. All social behavior begins in the family. If a husband and wife do not respect one another, their children will adopt that kind of behavior and disrespect their parents and others. Many children today yell at their parents, swear at them, and even order them around. We have forgotten basic rules of civility, which are based on respect and love. Respect should be established first. On that foundation love can develop.

An attitude that is closely connected with respect is forgiveness. Genuine forgiveness is not a formality but is expressed sincerely from the heart. This is the kind of forgiveness that was taught by the founder of Christianity, Jesus. He called upon people to forgive their enemies and those who were far from the path of righteousness.

The ability to forgive reflects a parental heart of love. How many times have our parents forgiven us, despite our many mistakes and faults? How important it is for each of us to inherit such a parental heart of love and forgiveness, not only towards our own children, but towards all people.

Only then will arrogance and the desire to dominate someone else be absent from our relationships.

By this time in your life your ability to see from another person's point of view should be well developed. So, instead of concentrating on what we think of other people, we should consider and reflect on how other people view us. This can help us think about our own behavior and attitudes.

We need to learn to relate to others heart-to-heart. We do this by cultivating our respect for others, as well as by being sensitive to and perceiving their emotions and needs. One important way to do this is by being a good listener. People feel appreciated and genuinely valued when someone else shows courtesy and love by listening to them. Listening means much more than just hearing the words being spoken. Listening involves being interested in and receptive towards the other person. If he feels you are genuinely interested in what he has to say, he will also relate to you with respect and gratitude. Merely pretending to be interested in another person





doesn't work, because relationships are mostly influenced by the degree of our sincerity rather than by our words.

Some people can't look each other in the eye while having a conversation. They prefer to stare at the ceiling or the floor. Why is it that we often pass each other without acknowledging the other? Is it out of embarrassment? When we respect something, we naturally handle it with care. We should be even more careful when relating to people! All of us know what it's like to experience pain and suffering. Why then should we cause more pain in others? If we have respect for a person we would not talk behind his back. We would care enough to think and formulate a respectful answer before speaking.

All of us need affirmation. Our feelings need to be acknowledged. So affirm someone and recognize his goodness! All it takes to begin with is a smile and a simple "hello". If you respect somebody, don't be afraid to show it.

Individual Exercise



Make two lists with numbers one through five. Label the first list "people I respect the most." Label the second list "people who I feel show me the most respect." Before making each list, think carefully about the people and what they do that elicits your respect and, in turn, makes you feel respected.

Who are these people—your family members, close friends, teachers, famous actors or singers? Is it more or less difficult to respect people you know very well? Is the respect you feel for a famous figure the same as the respect you feel towards your friend?

For Your Journal



“Problems begin to arise in relationships when we fail to show respect.”
Do you agree with this statement? What may cause us to lose respect for someone?

See the Appendix for the psychological test pertaining to this lesson.

The Old Grandfather and His Little Grandson

by Lev Tolstoy

The grandfather had become very old. His legs would not carry him, his eyes could not see, his ears could not hear, and he was toothless. When he ate, bits of food sometimes dropped out of his mouth. His son and his son’s wife no longer allowed him to eat at the table. He had to eat his meals in the corner near the stove.

One day they gave him his food in a bowl. He tried to move the bowl close, it fell to the floor and broke. His daughter-in-law scolded him. She told him that he spoiled everything in the house and broke their dishes, and she said from now on he would get his food in a wooden dish. The old man sighed and said nothing.

A few days later, the old man’s son and his wife were sitting in their hut, resting and watching their little boy play on the floor. They saw him putting together something out of small pieces of wood. His father asked him, “What are you making, Misha?”

The little grandson said, “I’m making a wooden bucket. When you and mama get older I’ll feed you out of this wooden dish.”

The young peasant and his wife looked at each other and tears filled their eyes. They were ashamed because they had treated the old grandfather so meanly, and from that day they again let the old man eat with them at the table and took better care of him.