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She put down the receiver. She had been talking to a client who was in the jail system for embezzling money to gamble with. She took the call in the main office since she was there when the call came through. The secretary who had been listening to what was being said turned to the counselor and said: "I'm so impressed, that was so respectful!"

She was surprised at the counselor's attitude towards the client. When they talked about it further, the secretary admitted that she would not have had that attitude towards that particular client. She said; "A lot of people pay lip service to respect, but I had not seen it demonstrated so clearly before".

### ***What is respect? Who do we respect? How do we show respect?***

Respect, according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary means: "regard with deference, esteem or honor, avoid degrading or insulting or injuring or interfering with or interrupting, treat with consideration, spare, refrain from offending or corrupting or tempting". The Webster Dictionary says about respect: "to consider deserving of high regard, esteem; to refrain from interfering in a (another's privacy); to have reference to, concern".

The predominant things are high regard, esteem, honor, consideration, non-intrusion and protection. What kind of person do we give these considerations to? What kind of person deserves our respect? Each one of us will give a different answer to this. We have all heard others, even ourselves, say: "They do not deserve my respect!" "I could never respect a person like that". While this is valid and understandable, it does not have anything to do with respect! It has to do with the way we feel, and probably our anger and our desire to "punish" that person, and not to associate with him. For real respect is given to the person and not the actions.

It is necessary for us to separate the person from the actions. With this formula then, every person is deserving of respect! Remember not the actions, just the person. Therefore, when we say we respect, we need to see whether we are referring to the action or the person. It is absolutely possible to respect the person, and condemn the action. For without respect, people will go further down in their actions and may become lost to themselves and to society, never really learning about the good things that they are capable of. Sometimes all it takes is for another person to show respect to them, so they may be able to see themselves in a different light, and make them want to change. This does not happen all the time, nor with all people.

This is a very difficult task. How can we make that division between the person and the action? After all aren't humans the sum total of their actions? Again a very valid point. The truth of the matter is that, we can only tell what other people are like through their actions, through their behavior. And if these do not comply with our expectations of them, or don't fit in with what society dictates at the time, then we do not like it and we decide that this person is not worthy of our respect.

Let's look at what we have done in this case when we decided that this person is not worthy of our respect: we saw the person's actions, or heard about them, we judged them to be "wrong"

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or “bad” or “inappropriate”, and we pronounced this person “unrespectable”. What right do we have to judge anybody? No matter how powerful the evidence is, and nothing excuses certain behaviors, we have no right to judge anyone. This right is not ours!

Therefore it is important to realize that the lack of respect is not towards the person, but towards the behavior. If we can give respect to that person no matter what the behavior, it does not mean that we approve of the behavior. And having said that, what do we mean by respect and how do we show it?

Traditionally, respect is shown by giving a person value;

- ***by showing her to good places to sit when they come to visit or when they are in a public place;***
- ***by meeting all his needs;***
- ***by making her comfortable;***
- ***by going out of our way to give him what he wants;***
- ***by feeding her the best food;***
- ***by going out of our way not to hurt him.***

We can show respect by countless ways that we deem to be appropriate for the person in question, depending on how we see that person, what we know about that person, and what we want from that person. It also depends on how society sees that person, and on what other people are saying about him.

Our attitude of respect or lack of it then is dependent totally on what we observe or what other people have observed. But which one of us observes objectively? Which one of us sees things as they really are? Which one of us does not put on her own interpretation to events according to his own values and expectations, or even according to the ones that society dictates, or the ones given to each during the growing years?

In this manner, therefore, respect in one generation is conditional to the values of the times, the rules that society has, and the behaviors which society tolerates at that time. Since social mores, values and rules are changing all the time, then the rules for respect change all the time too, if respect is dependent on just external assessment with no value being given to the “personhood”.

Well then, whom do we respect? And what are the rules that we need to use to consider whom to respect? Do we respect the office of the person, or the person? Do we respect her because she is a police officer, a prime minister, a parent, a teacher, a doctor, etc.

There is one basic rule to consider when we show respect to another person. That rule is that the person is a human being created by God like all the rest of us. The way we choose to show that respect differs with different people. It is important to realize that respect is not about the external things that we do to show others that we respect them, but an inner attitude, and to this extent it is a spiritual experience. Once we have that internal attitude, somehow it translates itself into action, and makes the other feel respected.

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We respect the being of another human, not her intellect, or her beauty or her money, or his successes, but the very being of that person. We can of course respect a person for all of the above, but that's exactly what it is, respect for other than the "person".

If we have that basic respectful attitude towards another human being, it comes through in everything we do, and in the way we respond to that person. Just remember that if a person is intelligent, it is a gift she has, if she is not then it is not her fault. We come to this world with a lot of givens, which we cannot control or dictate, and we must learn to accept it, not only in our own lives, but in other people too. Therefore, once we learn to accept that these are the givens we have come to this world with, we can spend our time trying to understand them, instead of wasting our time judging, criticizing, accusing or blaming people.

We all have a reason for our behavior, for doing the things we do, the way we do them. Some of these reasons are known to us. In other words, we act consciously—we are consciously aware of the reasons we do some things. Yet some other reasons are not known to us, meaning that we are unconscious or unaware of the reasons of specific actions. If we try to understand what those reasons are, we are likely to be less critical and more accepting; less judgmental and more loving; less blaming and more understanding; less accusing and more open to hearing explanations and understanding.

By this very attitude, we give others the example of real respectfulness. Stand warned though that the world may not understand what you are doing and may not appreciate your stance, but if you can live with it, then you can really start making some big changes in your own life and those of others too.

The person, whom we have chosen not to give respect to because of his actions, is the same person who is capable of action that is highly valued. Well then what do we do in that case? Do we respect her one day and not the other? How many "good" or "right" things does a person need to do before we can pronounce him respectable? And after we have pronounced her respectable, how many bad or wrong things does she have to do to deserve our lack of respect?

And once we pronounce a person respectable, do we constantly keep a watch on this person in case he does something wrong? Does this also mean that she is not capable of doing anything wrong? Is it all right for him to do all manner of wrong, as long as other people do not find out? What are the rules? Being human, we invariably will do some wrong things, and some right things; who, then, will decide if I am to be respected? This brings in self-respect, which is where it all starts.

What is self-respect? How do we respect ourselves? How do we show others that we respect ourselves?

Self-respect is that attitude we have towards ourselves that says we are very special and valuable human beings. If we have managed to internalize the concepts that we find in the above definitions, then we definitely have self-respect. We respect ourselves in many different ways. It can be as simple and basic as:

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- ***showering daily and dressing in clean clothes;***
- ***eating healthy foods in appropriate amounts;***
- ***giving our body what it needs in terms of rest and medication and exercise;***
- ***understanding what our needs (not wants) are and tending to them;***
- ***dressing ourselves appropriately for the weather, for our age and the occasion.***

Once we've mastered the basics, we show self-respect by working on ourselves and learn to live more consciously. This means learning to think before we act and before we talk. This is a big task and is likely to take all our lives.

If we cannot do all the above, then we cannot expect our children to do them either, because our children's greatest teacher is modeling, especially parental modeling. In actual fact, showing respect to our children, really starts by showing respect to ourselves!

When we are growing up, if we are not shown respect, we never learn to respect ourselves. If we cannot respect ourselves, we can never expect others to respect us. As human beings we start developing from the moment we are born, and our childhood years are the most formative of our lives. In the first few years, we receive the blueprint of what we will be like in our later years.

What we receive in our early years become the unconscious motivators of our actions in our later years. This does not mean we cannot change later; we can, with a lot of hard work. This is why it is desirable to give the important things humans need in their early childhood, so that they can live a satisfying life, and do it right in their adulthood for the next generation too. Therefore as parents we need to look at our role in giving our children the basic tools with which they will get their lives in order. And respect is where it all starts, respect for the precious humans that our children are, respect for their very being regardless of whether they do the right or wrong thing.

As children are growing up, parents are the ones who become their mirrors reflecting to them what they really are like. If this mirroring is faulty, then the children will grow up with faulty images of themselves. If this mirroring is accurate, then the children will grow up with a correct view of themselves and the capacity to live life more fully.

Let's look at the definition of respect again: according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary it means: "regard with deference, esteem or honor, avoid degrading or insulting or injuring or interfering with or interrupting, treat with consideration, spare, refrain from offending or corrupting or tempting". The Webster Dictionary says: "to consider deserving of high regard, esteem; to refrain from interfering in a (another's privacy) to have reference to, concern".

Let's look at each aspect in turn and apply it to how we as parents can do it right for our children, for that is where it all starts. "To consider deserving of high regard, esteem", "regard with deference, esteem or honor". If we see our children deserving of high regard and esteem

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and honor, how do we treat them? Have we stopped long enough to think if what we are doing with our children, actually fits with the above statement? How do we show our children high regard, esteem, honor; keeping in mind that they are really demanding, and require a lot of hard work?

The hard work that children demand does not only consist of providing for their material needs, or washing or cooking for them, or the myriad other things that they require us to do for them. It also consists of our attitudes towards them. Our attitudes which we brought with us from our own childhood and our own experiences, and from what the society at the time says to be right, are not necessarily the correct ones with which to bring up our children. This is where the real work starts; in looking at these existing attitudes and practices one by one and checking that they are the correct ones for our children.

We might correctly ask how do we decide what is the right way to do it? After all, I was brought up this way and I didn't turn out too badly! Well let's look at it this way. If we were brought up a certain way and we consider ourselves OK, then let's ask ourselves the question: "Is there anything in my childhood that I would have liked to be different, the way I was treated, or regarded or dealt with?" Or ask the question: "If someone were to treat me right now the way I am treating my children, would I like it?" "Why?" Well then, if I won't like it, what makes me think another human will like it any more than I do? And if I don't know how to go about changing behavior and treatment of my children, would I be brave enough to go and ask for help?

Having said all this, it does not mean that we let our children get away with anything that is not acceptable or appropriate. It just means that there is a different way of doing it apart from hitting, bashing, "punishing", putting down, humiliating, threatening, or terrorizing our children. None of this constitutes respect for the person, no matter how bad was the action of the child. Remember, punishing children only teaches them to learn how not to get punished, and nothing more. We need to foster positive behaviors in our children, and violence does not do this. All it does is release the parents' anger, and teach the children that it is OK to hit others to get what they want, or to get them to do what they want.

Little bullies grow up to become big bullies. And no one likes to be called a bully, but what we do to our children is no less than bullying, and we wonder why it is that our children bully at school!

Another part of the definition says: "to refrain from interfering in (another's privacy)". This is so important that there are many laws about privacy. We would never consider intruding on other people's privacy, walking into their houses without being invited in, asking questions that would cross the boundaries where we are not meant to go. We keep away from delicate subjects in order not to offend. Yet when it comes to our children we do not extend the same courtesy to them. Why is that so? Are they not human like all the other people we associate with, with the same rights? Are they properties of ours? We need to be vigilant and observant, and know exactly what our children are about. But we must also respect their space and privacy so they learn that they are people who are respectable, and can expect to be respected, who learn to respect themselves, and this goes a long way to helping them act in a responsible and

“respectable” way.

Some ways we can demonstrate this is by allowing them to have boundaries where they feel safe. For instance, if they have their own rooms, then we must not invade their space without being invited to do so. We can knock first and wait to be asked in, and not barge in. We can ask the other children in the family to do the same thing to each other, and not frustrate each other by not respecting each other’s space. We can be sensitive to their needs and moods and time our requests accordingly. Instead of demanding them to help us right now, having dropped everything they are doing, we can say something like: “ I know that you have a lot of work to do, and you are really stressed out with your exams that are coming up, I was wondering if you could find some time to help me out with some housework (cooking, tidying, cleaning, baby-sitting, tidying your room, preparing a meal, etc.)

This approach is age specific and you may need to modify the way you say things according to the age of the children. I have discovered that there is no human being who is not willing to respond to being treated gently and humanely and respectfully, yet at times firmly. In fact, the feed back that I get is that children like it when parents are “in control” of what’s happening at home and with their children rather than wanting to control them and their actions.

Having said this, you have taken in your needs, their needs, and respectfully asked for help, which you deserve. The more we approach our children respectfully, the more responsive they are likely to be. We must avoid yelling, shouting or screaming. I can hear some parents saying that the only time children respond is when we scream. The only reason this happens is that we ourselves have taught or conditioned our children to behave this way. Therefore we are the only ones who can change this. We must be patient with them, especially if we start to introduce something new that they are not used to. We have to give them and ourselves the chance to learn how to use this new tool of interaction.

Yet another part of the dictionary definition says: “to have reference to, concern”. This means that when we do something, we need to take into account other people and how what we do affects them; to have concern for them. By other people we mean people who will be directly affected by a particular action. For instance, respect dictates that we do not smoke near non-smokers; that we do not push our ideas on other people; that we take into consideration what other people’s needs are around us before we decide to meet our own without worrying about others. If we have a respectful attitude, we will refer to our children and/or partner, and concern ourselves with their needs as well. For instance if we choose to go out every night and leave the children at home, we are not giving our children the benefit of having us close by in case they need us. We are not considering the fact that they may be afraid by themselves. We are actually endangering their safety and well-being, regardless of the fact that we may think that they are used to it or that they do not need us.

To have reference to, concern, does not mean that we decide what is right for other people, but we respectfully ask them, and decide according to their responses. The same goes for our children. We cannot automatically decide what is right for them all the time, we need to be sensitive to their opinions, personalities, likes and dislikes, moods and so on. We need to check things out with them before we make a final decision.

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I'm sure we all know of times when we have got things for our children, only to have them rejected and have them sit in the bottom of the cupboard. This, however, does not mean that they get whatever they want, whenever they want it! All it means is that they ought to be consulted about their needs, and decisions made, will take them into account. And children need to be told which aspect of their contribution helped with the decision making process, and why that particular decision was taken (where possible), and why their suggestion was used or not (as the case may be). This is necessary so that they feel that they are valuable members of the household, and that their opinions count. This also teaches them how to think, and they learn from an early age that a lot of things need to be taken into consideration before any decisions are made, and that things don't just happen.

Showing concern does not mean acting dramatically, or exaggerating things, it just means that we are taking the other person's needs into consideration, and that we care. When we approach human interaction from a perspective of respect, it is easy to see how a lot of other major principles of interaction come into play, and are implicit in this concept.

The Concise Oxford is very specific about what constitutes respect: "regard with deference, esteem or honor, avoid degrading or insulting or injuring or interfering with or interrupting, treat with consideration, spare, refrain from offending or corrupting or tempting" A very tall order indeed. Do we perform all this with people we show respect to? Do we perform all this with ourselves? If we look at each part of the definition can we honestly say that we apply each part of it to our children, or children in general? If we cannot honor and esteem our children and protect them from being degraded, insulted or injured by us, especially emotionally, what chance do they have to learn to have self-respect? Can we consider our children highly enough not to interfere with their emotional and spiritual development in a negative way, by not degrading them, by not insulting them but by helping them see the marvelous creatures that they are? For every time we call them a name we are injuring them, (whether it is lazy, or slob, or silly or anything negative for that matter) and causing permanent damage to their very being. Can we see them as important enough in themselves, and not necessarily as extensions of ourselves, to listen to them without interrupting them, or allow them to continue an important task without being interrupted? For they have the same rights as adults do, and deserve the same consideration as any human does!

Do we see our children as precious enough, for us to give them special consideration to spare their feelings, and avoid offending them by not subjecting them to offensive material. This refers to bad language as well as bad company, bad literature, bad games and bad movies. For in sparing our children all of this, we also stop them from being corrupted and minimize the temptations in their lives. A lot goes into the process of making a child into a fully functioning mature adult, and as parents we are responsible for a lot of it. How will we handle our responsibility and not blame other people for the way our children have turned out?

In conclusion then respect is not just an action we perform, but a deep inner attitude we have towards human beings. While we can never know anyone completely, we do not need to, in order to respect her/him. None of us are perfect, and we all have a part in us that we need to keep private. This also does not mean that we do not keep ourselves away from people we consider unsafe for whatever reason, in order to protect ourselves physically or emotionally.

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We must do this however, without judgment or criticism.

Respect is suspending all judgment and accepting people as they are. Respect is also the very basis for the highest form of “communication”, hence it is a spiritual experience, since we are not only dealing with the physical part of the human being, but the very core of what makes a person what he/she is. People will always respond favorably when they are treated with respect. In order for us to be respected by others, we must first show that we respect ourselves.

Therefore to the question “How do I respect thee and me?”, what will be your answer?