

Self-Regard

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This week's conversation focused on self-regard, which we strove to distinguish from self-worth. Though we did not pinpoint the difference, we agreed that self-regard, meaning "to examine oneself again," is something we practice while self-worth is more of a feeling.

Self-worth is often derived from our assumptions about how others see us. It often shifts depending on who's in the room with us and what we think they value. Our criteria for self-worth can change over time as our health, mental abilities, jobs, and values change.

However, we can come to *regard* ourselves as having inherent worth and dignity by recognizing the ways in which we are connected to the rest of the universe. We are enmeshed in the web of life just through our unconscious breath, the carbon dioxide we exhale feeding the growth of plants and fungi. While our work in this world, no matter what it is, can be performed with worth and dignity, we need not derive our worth solely from what we do, valuing ourselves as human doings rather than human beings. Mary Sarton writes in her poem *Now I've Become Myself*:

Now I become myself. It's taken

Time, many years and places;

I have been dissolved and shaken,

Worn other people's faces,

Run madly, as if Time were there,

Terribly old, crying a warning,

"Hurry, you will be dead before –"

(What? Before you reach the morning?)

Breaks from our mad running and mask-wearing, I think, are vital to practicing regard, not just of ourselves, but of our relationships with each other. Stillness allows us to appreciate the manner of conversing, almost as one would appreciate music; the quality of the tone almost more important than the words. This is something often true of Young Adult Group. In fact, I think Sartre could easily have been describing our time together when she wrote:

O, in this single hour I live

All of myself and do not move.

I, the pursued, who madly ran,

Stand still, stand still, and stop the sun!

Of course, having inherent worth and dignity doesn't mean we don't make mistakes. So what happens when we receive criticism? My instinct is often to "re-guard" myself— in other words, defend myself through rationalizing or distracting myself from thinking about it. I put up walls. But what if I chose to "regard," to "re-examine," myself instead? What if I took it as an opportunity to change and grow into the person I want to be, rather than bemoaning the fact that I'm not there yet? If I stand still, stand still, I might not be able to stop the sun. But perhaps I can stop my own patterns of avoiding my shadow side.