

RELATING INSIDE OUT

Research has shown that weak social connections can be a significant danger to our health, as much as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day, and is **greater** than the risks of obesity, excess alcohol consumption, and lack of exercise. (1)

Vivek Murthy, writing in *Together* indicates that self-knowledge is essential in having the healing power of human connections in a sometimes lonely world. In the New Testament self-knowledge is reflected in the parable of “neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.”

Knowing oneself is both more challenging and more important for connecting with others than it may seem. Indeed, it is often much easier to gain insight and perspective into others than into ourselves. That is because knowledge requires a degree of objectivity, which is difficult to summon when we are the subject of concern. It is also a lifelong process, as the very act of looking deeply into ourselves gives us insights that in turn affect who we are. (2)

To begin to know ourselves better, we need to take a step back and allow ourselves to think about questions that reveal what we value and why we respond to the world and others as we do: *What do you most love doing, and why? What do you dread? How do you respond to stress? What are you most grateful for? What do you yearn for?* We need to examine our own personality, to consider how our particular traits and tendencies differ from, conflict with, and complement other people’s. We also need to appreciate that humans have varying degrees of anxiety, social needs, and moodiness. To make sense of our own beliefs and interests, we need to understand the cultural attitudes that surround us so that we can assess what is “true” to us and what we may have accepted reflexively from others. These are just a few aspects of the self that can make self-awareness so elusive.

The idea of self-knowledge is not to shine with perfection but to gain insight and self-acceptance. Knowing ourselves doesn’t require us to solve all our problems. Nor does it rule out change. **Self-knowledge is not egotistical or self-aggrandizing.** The goal is to examine our natural instincts, feelings, and behaviors honestly, to come to understand them better so that they inform our choices instead of colliding with them. **We may still feel uncomfortable with certain traits of personality or behavior, but self-awareness can help us find constructive ways to address that discomfort.**

(1) Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Timothy Smith, and J. Bradley Layton, “Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-Analysis Review,” *PLOS Medicine* 7, no. 7 (July 2010), <http://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316>.

(2) Vivek H. Murthy, *Together*, (New York: Harper Wave, 2020), pp. 204 – 205