

Respect

LET'S DEFINE RESPECT. But first, let's admit that we all operate from the point of view that *we* come first. Call it self-interest, ego, self-preservation; it's unconscious—we *are* separate individuals. Because we are essentially selfish, we have a widely varying level of interest in, or compassion for, other people. Again, self-interest — “what they can do for me” — is the key factor.

So, what constitutes Respect is the need to have others give proper regard to our feelings and the space we occupy. Disrespect is an offense, and when the offense is especially egregious, some might say their Honor has been violated. Note that the range of socially acceptable reactions to such dishonor is perhaps the one thing that divides different cultures more than any other. I don't need to recount horror stories, I don't think any of us forget them.

How does this relate to motorcycling?

Glad you asked. We might be tempted to believe, when we are transported by such a delightful device as a motorcycle, that we are entirely free of the bonds of Earth and therefore all its constraints; that governments and rules are for lesser mortals.

But what are rules and regulations, if not a way to encourage agreed-upon “civil” (read, respectful) behavior that can be determined to the finest point of law?

We want our feelings and space to be appreciated. We are righteously resentful of rules that don't respect our uniqueness. Rightfully so.

Now, ask yourself honestly, do you return respect in equal measure to what you require?

Some clearly do. Motorcyclists as a group are some of the best people you'll ever meet, warm-hearted, sharing and incorruptable. But, as in every group, there are some who are rude and self-absorbed, and only too happy to give the defiant digit to anyone who might complain. You can call it juvenile or adolescent, but chances are you did it yourself at least once in your youth. Are you doing it still?

There are ways to filter through gridlock in California without angering or even mildly irritating car drivers. There are ways to pass on winding roads or long straight-aways that don't involve making the move into a gesture of put down. A mutually respectful relationship with the rest of the driving public makes life easier for all of us. Car drivers that carry a grudge will not support us against unnecessary legislation. Admit it, we need them...self-interest.

Also, we need to remind ourselves from time to time that none of us are immune to



difficulties, and some of the drivers you meet on the road may be balancing incredible difficulties without showing it. We all do the best we can. Show respect.

One of the best ways to ride that can minimize any sense of disrespect is to ride very smoothly. After reading *Smooth Riding The Pridmore Way* I've been trying to do this very deliberately on every ride (and drive). A concentration on smoothness has much the same focusing effect as a concentration on pure speed, but is a safer game in today's traffic. And, because you're smooth, you give off a mellow, purposeful vibe that doesn't confront. So they're okay with it when you pass, you're being “safe.”

Try it the next time you go for a ride. Combining Respect with Smoothness makes for a great riding meditation. Eventually, you may find that you are actually riding more quickly, but without coming so close to the machine's limits. The smoother your riding; the lighter your inputs and more precise your line, the less you ask of the tires and suspension, raising the limits.

I was reading a science fiction story, *Amnesty* by Octavia Butler, on the plane back from the Vegas dealer shows. It was about an invasion of what looked like enormous blobs of foliage or vegetable matter (actually symbiotic communities of small life forms). They built enormous domes in the world's deserts, and a few humans, to avoid the effects of the resulting worldwide economic depression, have a chance to become “translators” and be paid well for very little work. The war was short, resistance was futile.

The tale is told by a translator who lives with the aliens, and who is interviewing

applicants for a position similar to her own.

Abducted during the extraterrestrials' arrival on Earth and their first efforts to understand humankind, she was often unintentionally injured during experiments, but eventually allowed to leave. But afterward, her country's government could see her only as either a spy or potential intelligence source and were merciless when she couldn't help them more. She finally returned to the alien's domes when she realized that the difference was that the humans *knew* when they were hurting her. She “translated” she said, to encourage understanding and to prevent an annihilating war.

However, the odd relationship between the two life forms is ultimately revealed to be that the “Communities” take a particular and hitherto unknown joy out of *embracing* humans, enfolding them tightly in their “branches,” like holding the “orb” in the old Woody Allen movie, *Sleeper*. And, after the initial claustrophobic experience, it turns out the embrace is pleasurable for humans as well. In fact, it's revealed that the companionship of people is actually an *addiction* for the aliens. Insights abound.

In the same sense, motorcycles are an “addiction,” too. We transfer our psychic energy into a favorite bike's metal, rubber and plastic, giving it a conscious presence all out of proportion to what we imbue more mundane objects. We take a unique pleasure in its touch, its feel, its sound and its riding. This enhanced sensory dimension has a telltale parallel. The heightened sense of one's physical body that riding gives is another. The obsessive, even furtive attention we pay to our bikes sounds familiar, too. So what if a motorcycle is a mind-altering substance? It's still a completely legal way to adjust your attitude.

The Chinese, overwhelmed with motorcycles, most of them smokey two-strokes, are actually banning *all* motorcycles from major cities. Sounds like sci-fi, but it's true. I just hope it wasn't about disrespect. How tightly do a people need to be packed before the odd flagrant insult becomes intolerable to the greater group?

Wrap your mind around the idea that we really *are* vulnerable to intolerable constraints, if simply agreed to by the majority.

Motorcycling is my drug of choice.

Let's keep it legal.

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—Dave Searle
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