

What do you suppose is the seed of respect?

by Kris Freeberg, August 18, 2015

For some reason I awoke pondering respect - how it works, when it exists, when it doesn't . . . respect for others, respect for one's self . . . what life is like both with and without it . . . what happens to entire cities, countries, societies, and cultures both with and without it . . . how everyone's lives matter, all colors . . . how it's gained, how it's lost . . . how it's regained

I wondered especially how it begins. What is its seed? You know, normally we say to ourselves that it's earned. We respect success, achievement, feats, deeds. We respect what, and who, is respectable.

But those things happen because someone first respected themselves and tried. Why did they do that, and for those who do not first respect themselves and try, why don't they?

What is it? Childhood? Good parenting? But even that is not the beginning. There's a previous cause. There's something that causes some parents to instill self-respect in their kids and not others, and there's something that causes people who grew up with no respect in the home to overcome and develop it in their own lives.

I don't even think the First Cause of respect is necessarily religion, for I've seen a lot of self-loathing and contempt in religious life . . . indeed self-loathing is actually taught . . . not everywhere, not always, but it's definitely A Thing, an indicator of toxic religion, and vice-versa

As near as I can tell, the seed of respect is Theology; and by that I don't mean any kind of formal religious activity or association, and I don't mean studying or reading about anything.

I mean a direct experience of God; for example, marveling at the cosmos or the order of nature, at how both miraculous and fragile life is; the birth of a child, or the annihilation of a city by flood, fire, or war; an appreciation for how precious and delicate it is; seeing how it REALLY IS - you know, what makes people smile or frown regardless how they may try to fake it; what makes a dog dance with joy or cower in fear; what makes babies laugh or cry; real stuff . . . those sobering moments when we have no other alternative but to push the Truth Button. Those kinds of things command respect.

I'm a [Customer Relationship Management](#) (CRM) nut. I think CRM is awesome because it's a tool that helps caring people care about people and pay good attention to them, to give them the attention they deserve. Among other things, this caring attention can build customer loyalty and tighten vendor-customer relationships, resulting in increased sales and profits.

But I've learned that CRM only works when it's used by caring people, people who feel respect for themselves first, and then for others. Because caring people are in short supply, it usually does not work. Historically, most CRM deployment efforts have been failures. Most people's reactions to it are, "Meh. Looks like work." They don't care enough to appreciate its potential because they don't view it through a

lens of respect.

I'm a [Grammar Nazi](#), too. I feel a profound respect for language because it's how people connect. It's a vital bridge that holds everything together. What would we do without it? Imagine.

One of my pet peeves is the misuse of relative pronouns - particularly the "thatting" of people because it depicts them as things. Why do we do that?

Why do we say "that" instead of "who?" It's a mistake I've noticed both in everyday language, and in church liturgical texts ("Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord"), that I correct whenever I notice it.

It's so easy to get right. Why don't we?

I think it's because we don't respect ourselves, others, humanity, or the sanctity of life because we've never theologized. We've been misled to suppose that Theology means going to school, taking courses, studying books, reading the Bible.

But it's not. Theology is direct experiential knowledge of God. It's not study. It's experience.

Like a spotted owl or a canary in a mineshaft, "thatting" people is a little telltale sign, an indicator, of Respect Starvation. The same thing in us that makes us "that" people is also the thing that accounts for current racial tensions; slavery in all its forms, present and past; partisan political hostility; the abuses of workers that led to the Labor Movement; and the Holocaust.

It's that serious, because it's all about regarding people as though they were things. It's a thought; and thoughts are the seeds of action.

What do you suppose is the seed of respect?

As near as I can tell, it's Theology as I've defined it above; and it's experienced directly and individually during life-changing moments of Truth that can not be taught, or gained vicariously, or via group association.

How about you? What do you suppose it is?