

# Respect

What is respect?

How do others react when you show genuine respect?

In this culture, especially, there is a deep rooted habit to see ourselves as separate individuals. We work hard to be 'self-sufficient' and 'independent'. But when we look, really look, we know this is not true.

"The average breath contains about  $6 \times 10^{21}$  atoms... There are  $4 \times 10^{23}$  atoms of oxygen in the atmosphere. This means that the fraction of the total atmosphere today made up of oxygen atoms in Caesar's last breath is 5 parts in about 1021. This very small fraction [nevertheless] implies that you are taking in, on average, about 3 of the oxygen atoms in Caesar's last breath in each of your breaths!" -L. Krauss, [Atom: Odyssey from the Big Bang to Life on Earth and Beyond](#).

"When we survey our lives and endeavors we soon observe that almost the whole of our actions and desires are bound up with the existence of other human beings." -Albert Einstein

Although absolute reality is one of connection, we naively build our relative reality based on a seemingly solid, separate self. This process of self-building is undertaken primarily through the use of opposition. The concept of respect regards our evaluation of these territories of identification that we have created.

Respect: a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements. (Oxford English Dictionary). "I am fond of pigs. Dogs look up to us. Cats look down on us. Pigs treat us as equals." — Winston S. Churchill

Respect thus emphasizes status, either one's own (i.e., self respect) or another's. "Respect was invented to cover the empty place where love should be."— [Leo Tolstoy](#)

In our relative, conventional existence, respect is conditional. Because Buddhism points to absolute reality, it asks us to go further. Respect can be unconditional. "I speak to everyone in the same way, whether he is the garbage man or the president of the university." — [Albert Einstein](#)

"Giving and receiving respect feels good." -16 Guidelines for Life. However, giving respect is not always so easy. Consider if we are culturally conditioned to respect or if we feel if everyone really merits our respect.

Ethnocentrism was originally introduced by Sumner (1906) and defined as "devotion to the in-group, which carries with it a sense of superiority to any out-group" (1911, p. 11). Ethnocentrism normalizes our own viewpoint and denaturalizes the viewpoints of others.

It is group-level egoism. As we all have egos and all belong to groups, we are all ethnocentric. However, the degree of our ethnocentrism is variable, with more powerful groups and more powerful people more easily falling victim.

This country has been forged on a foundation of deep disrespect. In what ways is this carried on?

We are often so wedded to our evaluations of these territories that to judge otherwise can be shocking and upsetting! Buddhism directs us to respect life in all of its forms, even those that don't appear deserving of our (conditional) respect. Thus... we should attend to our own shock and upset as we deepen our practice of respect- from conditional to absolute.

Nacirema culture is characterized by a highly developed market economy which has evolved in a rich natural habitat. While much of the people's time is devoted to economic pursuits, a large part of the fruits of these labors and a considerable portion of the day are spent in ritual activity. The focus of this activity is the human body, the appearance and health of which loom as a dominant concern in the ethos of the people. While such a concern is certainly not unusual, its ceremonial aspects and associated philosophy are unique.

The fundamental belief underlying the whole system appears to be that the human body is ugly and that its natural tendency is to debility and disease. Incarcerated in such a body, man's only hope is to avert these characteristics through the use of the powerful influences of ritual and ceremony. Every household has one or more shrines devoted to this purpose...

While each family has at least one such shrine, the rituals associated with it are not family ceremonies but are private and secret. The rites are normally only discussed with children, and then only during the period when they are being initiated into these mysteries. I was able, however, to establish sufficient rapport with the natives to examine these shrines and to have the rituals described to me.

The focal point of the shrine is a box or chest which is built into the wall. In this chest are kept the many charms and magical potions without which no native believes he could live. These preparations are secured from a variety of specialized practitioners. The most powerful of these are the medicine men, whose assistance must be rewarded with substantial gifts. However, the medicine men do not provide the curative potions for their clients, but decide what the ingredients should be and then write them down in an ancient and secret language. This writing is understood only by the medicine men and by the herbalists who, for another gift, provide the required charm...

The daily body ritual performed by everyone includes a mouth-rite. Despite the fact that these people are so punctilious about care of the mouth, this rite involves a practice which strikes the uninitiated stranger as revolting. It was reported to me that the ritual consists of inserting a small bundle of hog hairs into the mouth, along with certain magical powders, and then moving the bundle in a highly formalized series of gestures.

In addition to the private mouth-rite, the people seek out a holy-mouth-man once or twice a year. These practitioners have an impressive set of paraphernalia, consisting of a variety of augers, awls, probes, and prods. The use of these objects in the exorcism of the evils of the mouth involves almost unbelievable ritual torture of the client.. The holy mouth-man opens the client's mouth and, using the above mentioned tools, enlarges any holes which decay may have created in the teeth. Magical materials are put into these holes. If there are no naturally occurring holes in the teeth, large sections of one or more teeth are gouged out so that the supernatural substance can be applied. In the client's view, the purpose of these ministrations is to arrest decay and to draw friends. The extremely sacred and traditional character of the rite is evident in the fact that the natives return to the holy-mouth-men year after year, despite the fact that their teeth continue to decay.

It is to be hoped that, when a thorough study of the Nacirema is made, there will be careful inquiry into the personality structure of these people. One has but to watch the gleam in the eye of a holy-mouth-man, as he jabs an awl into an exposed nerve, to suspect that a certain amount of sadism is involved. If this can be established, a very interesting pattern emerges, for most of the population shows definite masochistic tendencies. It was to these that Professor Linton referred in discussing a distinctive part of the daily body ritual which is performed only by men. This part of the rite involves scraping and lacerating the surface of the face with a sharp instrument. Special women's rites are performed only four times during each lunar month, but what they lack in frequency is made up in barbarity. As part of this ceremony, women bake their heads in small ovens for about an hour. The theoretically interesting point is that what seems to be a preponderantly masochistic people have developed sadistic specialists...