

OMM BULLETIN APR.08

Year 9, Issue 82, New Series 5

1. A Moment of reflection on the Spheres of Biking by Paola Volpara, OMM 2008

Time to move to the third sphere^(*) of biking: the response-ability and a note from OMM founder in Ankara, Selim Demirel, come to help.

The word "risk"-Selim writes- needs a definition which is understandable and acceptable to the most of the people who are interested in assessment of this magic concept. The risk must be transparent, not apparent. This motto helped me always, to try to make my risks, in every sense, transparent and so be able to see the danger and make a realistic cost/benefit analysis. Solid knowledge and saturated training in the field of specific risk, is the only way to achieve transparency. It is then up to me to decide whether to take the risk or skip it. Otherwise the risk becomes all of a sudden apparent and this is the next close thing to accident, again in every aspect of the life, not only on the bike.

I could not agree more not only in life experience but specifically on bike experience: it is what I call the ability to respond (responsibility) that makes the Risk transparent: ignorance generates fear and makes the Risk apparent. The UK magazine "Ride" in the spring of 2008 presented a splendid article titled "Why do so many new born bikers get killed?" Here some quotes:

Steve Kirkbright works in the Collision Investigation Unit for North Yorkshire Police, covering an area criss-crossed by some of the most attractive and challenging roads of Britain. In the majority, he says, of bend collision the motorcycle is well capable of getting around the bend: it tends to be that the riders run wide, or the possibility we consider is that the rider has decided that he's not going to negotiate the bend, applies the brakes, the bikes comes more upright, runs wide, more braking, upright, straight on. In the age group that we are talking about we would apply a reaction time of 1.4-1.9 seconds. As a hazard develops, you have to recognize it as one ... then make a decision. At a speed of 90 kph, which equates to 26.8 meters per second, in the time it takes you to decide it's a hazard and react you have traveled 37-50 meters. If you panic brake, too much too fast, even if you do not lock the wheels and lose control, the bike goes upright and starts running wider. In everyday life you only get one reaction"

The last one is a very intriguing expression although I cannot judge the contest it was pronounced: I take it as a philosophical statement that expresses a fundamental truth: in life you only get one chance of a first reaction. From the saddle, from the couch, from the bed, from your desk the first reaction is the fundamental one. Here a book you should not miss: Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking by Malcolm Gladwell. When the author was asked what the book is about the answer was engaging for all, impressive for bikers: *It's a book -he said- about rapid cognition, about the kind of thinking that happens in a blink of an eye. When you meet someone for the first time, or walk into a house you are thinking of buying, or read the first few sentences of a book, your mind takes about two seconds to jump to a series of conclusions. Well, "Blink"*

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is a book about those two seconds, because I think those instant conclusions that we reach are really powerful and really important and, occasionally, really good. You could also say that it's a book about intuition, except that I don't like that word. In fact it never appears in "Blink." Intuition strikes me as a concept we use to describe emotional reactions, gut feelings--thoughts and impressions that don't seem entirely rational. But I think that what goes on in that first two seconds is perfectly rational. It's thinking--its just thinking that moves a little faster and operates a little more mysteriously than the kind of deliberate, conscious decision-making that we usually associate with "thinking. In "Blink" I'm trying to understand those two seconds. What is going on inside our heads when we engage in rapid cognition? When are snap judgments good and when are they not? What kinds of things can we do to make our powers of rapid cognition better? ...What we've always been told is that we make the best decisions when we take the time to carefully evaluate all available and relevant information. We live in a society dedicated to the idea that we're always better off gathering as much information and spending as much time as possible in deliberation. As children, this lesson is drummed into us again and again: haste makes waste, look before you leap, stop and think. But I don't think this is true. There are lots of situations--particularly at times of high pressure and stress--when haste does not make waste, when our snap judgments and first impressions offer a much better means of making sense of the world.

A lot of bikers riding with seasoned OMM observers often talk about the power of intuition we have developed on the Turkish road: "It is like you know what is going to happen in advance... a sixth sense quite magic" commented a rider in one of our recent outings. Intuition? As Mr.Gladwell, Selim and I do not like that word. It is a pure sphere of response ability the continuous exposure of an intelligent and memorizing mind to a large set of situations: the theory (RoadCraft system) applied permanently to the practice revealing a new world of links invisible to the ignorant rider or to the rider using the bike for few hours on week-ends.

This is the process of making risk transparent; leaving to the others the apparent.

Peter Mason Coordinator in UK for Yorkshire BikeSafe spends hundreds of hours on the road assessing riders seeing the same mistakes and their results time and again. In the same article quoted above he says: "Some of the more mature riders don't have the riding skills... they only ride the bikes for four or five months a year, they jump on them in April and expect to be going as quickly as they were last August. They come up to a bend, think, "Oh golly, it's tightening up a bit" and panic... not happy with counter-steering... they hit the back brake and lock the things up... they run wide and hit whatever's coming towards them. If only they'd had the confidence to lean it over a bit more..."

Lack of confidence blinds the eyes making the risk apparent and not transparent: so where do you get this so-needed confidence? How do you pass from apparent to transparent, ready to face the risks with a new look.

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Geoff Crowther (same article) from Motorcycle Consumer Research Unit at the University of Huddersfield (UK) takes over: *"There's been a change in our culture as what's deemed allowable and where the boundaries are, and motorcycling isn't marginalized in anything like the way it was in the '50s and '60s. But it still has a rebellious edge that's appealing to a lot of motorcyclists, which is why someone can be entirely 'normal', shall we say, driving a car, but then get on the bike and behave very differently. They're taking on a different role. This is also part of an identity search, which is important. The riders sometimes feel the need to test themselves and explore an idealized image of themselves. They have the kit and that enables them to assume the role. But this is a role that, in terms of skills and experience, many riders are ill equipped to play"*

And here is the answer: to explore an idealized image of themselves instead of spending time and talent in the real knowledge of the self. Instead of working on education, instead of moving with intelligence through experience, instead of spending time in exposing what learned to long periods of practice (long distance riding anybody?)

The ability to respond, the response ability is that difficult-to-get sphere of biking eluding most of us: after many years of motorcycling, after long hours, months, years on the saddle I am still wondering how is my "blink", how can I make the risk transparent and forget the apparent.

The conclusion is left again to Mr. Mason: "A lot of people will say, 'Oh, I've had a great ride today' The following week they'll go out and ride exactly the same road and come back and say 'I just wasn't on it today.. Some days they'll get it right through pure luck, other days it goes completely wrong because something they didn't expect happened. They should be having a good ride every day"

Yes, we should but often we don't: we do not see risk transparent, our ability to respond has not been tuned to come out "in a blink"

*I use the concept of sphere in the etymological sense: *from Latin sphaera, from Greek sphaira, literally, ball... (5) Natural, normal, or proper place. (6) An area or range over or within which someone or something acts, exists, or has influence or significance.*

2. A moment of meditation on the death of a friend.

This is how they told me the story of the death of a distant friend in Turkey. I really do not know if reality was like the story but the fundamental are there: nothing change the results, nothing mitigate the pain. Just take it in and try to learn.

He was in traffic, in heavy traffic; not unusual for a big city. And not unusual he was in hurry. We are always in hurry for a reason or another: for business or for family, for an appointment or for an "I-am-faster-than-you" bravery. So my friend was in hurry and he took a "normal" (for bikers) decision: instead of queuing he moved into the emergency line filtering between traffic and the guardrail.

Was the traffic stationary? This I do not know but I can imagine slow

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moving lines of cars, trucks, vans and busses starting, stopping, moving at snail pace. I can also imagine drivers completely disconnected with the reality, reading newspapers, on the phones, chatting, fuming, cursing... thinking about everything but driving. For one of them the waiting was too much, he was in hurry and suddenly decided that the emergency line was a good, clever option. Unfortunately there was my friend coming at good speed, considering how free bikers are. Brakes, collision, slide, down to ground. Hit the guardrail support with the neck, die.

It may look cynic to take lesson from tragic events. Still life is tragic in many aspects and lessons come from everywhere.

Wrong decision to filter on the emergency line? Yes, not only illegal but also more dangerous than filtering between cars. The emergency line sucks you in a false sense of safety: all empty in front, check the back for service vehicle and gain speed.

Filtering between cars is more precarious and it gives the real sense of danger keeping the pilot on permanent alert: out of this position you can also see better the movements of the lines and predict what drivers may do (as changing line when a space in the cue appears).

Guardrails are a static and unforgiving enemy of bikers: legislation in Europe are now trying to modify the construction technique (read "Guardrails: great victory for motorcyclists worldwide" at www.fema.ridersrights.org/news)

Emergency lines, like everything that promises a "safe way out", are a trap: filtering is risky and it requires a long experience and an exercised fantasy. Even with those two elements you should stay away from it.

Experience to read the in advance the movements of the drivers; those subtle indications that "this driver" will move to take an empty slot without signaling, the previous behavior in the cue, the sharp moving of the vehicle, the open space in front as a temptation... a combination of signals that tell you "he/she will go at first opportunity"

Fantasy to imagine "what if?" What if the car swerves to the right? Do you have enough space to brake or to maneuver? Fantasy to imagine that every single driver in the lines wants and can kill you.

Experience and Fantasy make the risk transparent, and this is how it should be, because apparent is not enough.

3. A biker's story just for a laugh

A biker was riding by the zoo, when he saw a little girl leaning into the lion's cage. Suddenly, the lion grabbed her by the cuff of her jacket and tried to pull her inside to slaughter her, under the eyes of her screaming parents. The biker jumped off his bike, ran to the cage and hit the lion square on the nose with a powerful punch.

Whimpering from the pain the lion jumped back, letting go of the girl; and, the biker brought her to her terrified parents, who thanked him

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endlessly.

A reporter had seen the whole scene, and addressing the biker, said,

- "Sir, this was the most gallant and brave thing I saw a man do in my whole life."

- "Why, it was nothing, really, the lion was behind bars. I just saw this little kid in danger and acted as I felt right."

- "Well, I'll make sure this won't go unnoticed. I'm a journalist, you know, and tomorrow's papers will have this on the first page. What motorcycle do you ride?"

- "A Harley Davidson."

The journalist left. The following morning, the biker bought the paper to see if it indeed brought news of his actions; and, read on the front page of the New York Times:

"BIKER GANG MEMBER ASSAULTS AFRICAN IMMIGRANT AND STEALS HIS LUNCH"

4. OMM Events Ahead

21-Jun-08	Roadcraft Ride	Istanbul
03-06.07.2008	Emok-Festival	Bilecik
12-13.07.2008	Ara-Road (TT,TT)	Istanbul
9-Aug-07	Ara-Control	Istanbul
16-23.08.2008	Black Sea - Touring Tour	
30-Aug-08	Roadcraft Ride	Istanbul
13-14/9/2008	4 Corners of Marmara Touring Tour	
20-21/09/2008	Ara Road International Ride	Istanbul
23-Sep-08	IAM	Istanbul
24-Sep-08	IAM	Istanbul
25-Sep-08	IAM	Istanbul
27-28/9/2008	Ara Road International Ride	Izmir
4-Oct-2008	Ara-Control	Istanbul
11-Oct-08	Roadcraft Ride	Istanbul
18, 19, 20-Oct-08	Ara-Road National Ride	Istanbul
15-Nov-08	Roadcraft Ride	Istanbul

The OMM Calendar and list of activities is presented in www.ommriders.com and invitations are sent to the ARA Yahoo Group open to everybody who wants to sign up at **ARA Yahoo Groups**

OMM communities are riding in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Bursa and Trabzon.