

## Atmosphere

I speak not of the air at the moment, though it is something to consider, something to protect from those who would trash it for a few more billion petrodollars.

Atmosphere is a metaphor for what surrounds us, invisible (mostly) but carrying a thousand scents, strong or subtle; touching the skin with warmth or chill, dampness, dryness...and it all adds up to a feeling, hard to quantify, but real enough.

Taverns, restaurants, coffee houses, neighborhoods, even whole cities can have atmosphere. So can social websites. Part of it is created, and part of it just happens. It's just as important as the brick and mortar, or the code that creates the virtual wall upon which the moving fingers write.

The functionality of Shmoozezone has improved nicely, but what of its atmosphere? Is it a place that encourages free expression, controversy, debate? Is it a melting pot of cultures and ideas, or merely a microwave of molten meatloaves?

I have not forgotten an attitude I once described as a Lynch Mob perpetrated upon a fellow member, whose only crime was enthusiasm for the causes he spoke up on. Of course it was only a virtual lynch mob. No free speech was actually suppressed as far as I know. After all, if I don't care that there will be a few people ill-informed enough to disagree with me, why should I care whether some may not like the way I express myself?

Nevertheless, the atmosphere-- the feeling of compatibility with the spirit of free expression-- matters.

--cosmicrat April 11, 2014