

Remembering Ourselves Through Ritual



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Rituals are repetitive forms of actions in which we engage to keep tradition alive. Tradition means the passing on or transmission of a certain body of knowledge or doctrine in an ongoing, uninterrupted, unbroken chain of transmission to perpetuate a lineage.

When we perform a Ritual act, we are generally remembering our relationship in time and space to an original, historically based experience, which we commemorate. For example, on Passover, Jews relive the story of Exodus as if they were crossing the Red Sea in their flight towards freedom and the Promised Land. Likewise, the Ritual eating of the communion wafer and wine in Catholicism is the eating of the body (to become one with) and drinking of the blood (i.e. life force) of Christ, the savior. Such Ritual actions place us together with our ancestors in a no time/space zone, where linear time and space are transcended, and we are one with all who were, are, and will ever be. Thus we establish a unity between past, present, and future.

To remember is to put ourselves back together again: re= again, member refers to our anatomy. Arms and legs are commonly known as members. Recall the ancient Egyptian pharaonic legend of Osiris, god of the realm between life and death, and his consort Isis, goddess of wisdom. Osiris is murdered by his brother Seth and cut up into 14 pieces that are buried in different parts of Egypt. Isis learns of the murder and proceeds to collect the pieces. After doing so, she restores Osiris to life (resurrects him) by putting his body back together. She remembered him by restoring his members back to his torso and head. She re-membered him not only physically, but also mentally – Imaging him back to life.

Another meaning of member is to be part of a community. A community bespeaks a growth of life of a variable number of people. So, we see there is an intimate connection among Ritual, life, remembering (member, memory) and community. Coming of Age Rituals are formal activities marking the transition from one phase or period of development to

another, usually considered to be on a higher level. Through these rites and Rituals – secular or spiRitual – we maintain our membership in a certain group or fraternity (sorority) of like minded souls. Thus, the continuity of tradition is preserved in such Rituals as a Christian baptism, a Jewish bar/bat mitzvah, a wedding, and memorials –remembrances of those who have passed.

To interfere or interrupt tradition creates a rupture in the lineage to which you are connected and is considered a form of murder. Hence, Hitler attempted to murder the lineage of a certain form of Monotheism – Judaism – via the holocaust. The effort was to eliminate that lineage from the Earth. In biblical times, a murder was considered a mass murder because the death of that man or woman had cut off the generation of a lineage. Hence every murder was a mass one and was treated as a capital offense. To cut tradition is to cut off life. Ritual, on the other hand preserves tradition, preserves life.

While most definitions of Ritual focus on the outer action, the inner remembrance is at the heart of most practices. For without connecting to the inner dimension, a physical action becomes mere routine. Imagery is a powerful means to engage in the inner remembrance of ourselves, our heritages, and all that we wish to perpetuate. Our receptivity to the Imagery message is strengthened when we take an action linking the inside and outside – through writing down our responses to the Imagery, drawing the Image, or finding a physical object that we discovered internally. All these serve as reminders for change and transformation.

Here is a set of Imagery exercises to rid us of what we no longer want or need and to imprint in ourselves new possibilities. It is adapted from the *Encyclopedia of Mental Imagery: Colette Aboulker-Muscat's 2,100 Visualization Exercises for Personal Development, Healing and Self-Knowledge*

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Do the exercises every three months (Summer solstice, ~ June 21; Autumnal equinox, ~ Sept. 21; the Winter solstice, ~ Dec 21, and Vernal equinox, ~ March 21). Write down and/or draw your responses and review them at each quarter.

Note: We breathe in a special way to help direct our attention inward and induce a light relaxation. We start with three rounds of slow breathing where we focus on the out breath and let the in breath take care of itself. Physiologically, this out-in breathing stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system to quiet the body down. After the third round of the "out-in" breaths, you breathe as you



normally do, focusing on the Imagery, not the breathing.

Instructions: Sit up, spine straight, in a chair, with your arms in your lap, or on the arms of the chair. Close your eyes and start by breathing out (BO) a long, slow exhalation through the mouth, and follow it with a natural, brief inhalation (BI) through the

nose. To start, do this three times (BO/BI 3X) - an exhalation followed by an inhalation, an exhalation followed by an inhalation, and an exhalation followed by an inhalation. Between the Imagery exercises do only a single round of out-in breathing (BO/BI 1X).

(BO/BI 3X) – Imagine making a vase with clay. Take a stylus and imprint on the turning vase all you want to change in yourself in one year. Break the vase and throw its parts into the sea.

(BO/BI 1X) - Imagine making a vase and draw on it the symbols of what you'd like to change in yourself. Put the vase in an oven. When it is hard, break it and bury the broken pieces.

(BO/BI 1X) – Into a mirror, see your self-portrait as a super-woman or super-man. Push this Image to the right out of the mirror.

Breathe out and open your eyes.

