

Program –Danie & Wendy
December 7, 2010
Rituals

1. Introduction to Program – 2 Parts (Tonight and Spring) Wendy
2. Setting the Stage Danie

What is a Ritual?

A ritual is a set of actions, performed mainly for their symbolic value. It can be prescribed by a religion or by the traditions of a community on specific occasions or at the discretion of individuals or communities. They can be held in arbitrary places, or in places especially reserved for it; either in public, in private, or before specific people.

Scientists had thought human intelligence had not evolved the capacity to perform group rituals until perhaps 40,000 years ago. However, a startling discovery of 70,000-year-old artifacts and a python's head carved of stone appears to represent the first known human rituals.

The discovery was made in a remote region of Botswana called Tsodilo Hills, the only uplifted area for miles around. It is known to modern Sanpeople as the "Mountains of the Gods" and the "Rock that Whispers." Their legend has it that mankind descended from the python, and the ancient, arid streambeds around the hills are said to have been created by the python as it circled the hills in its ceaseless search for water.

Inside a cave archeologists found a stone snake that was carved long ago. It is as tall as a man and 20 feet long.

More significant, when they dug a test pit near the stone figure, they found spearheads made of stone that had to have been brought to the cave from hundreds of miles away. The scientists conclude that the spearheads were burned in what only could be described as some sort of ritual,

"Stone age people took these colorful spearheads, brought them to the cave, and finished carving them there. Only the red spearheads were burned. It was a ritual destruction of artifacts. There was no sign of normal habitation. No ordinary tools were found at the site."

Rituals have their integral place in the human psyche. We can say that it is the way of human beings to have rituals. Ritual can direct the journey of a community or an individual through significant events. Traditions and customs vary greatly between cultures, ethnic groups, religions, countries, and social classes. Ritual touches the lives of many of us. Mundanely, we engage in ritual for holidays, special occasions, meditation, and to mark the routine aspects of day-to-day living and life's milestones.

It starts at birth with rituals such as Baptism, Christening, Brit milah or simply the naming of a child and continues in every major event in a person's life. As children we understood the rituals of friendship so much better than we do as adults. As little children we swore allegiances of friendship in the most sincere possible way and some of us never forgot those early promises of eternal friendship. Others put them aside and remember them late in life; forgotten and dusty promises.

Many of us have probably heard of the act of becoming "blood brothers" or "blood sisters". This has always been a popular ceremony to show the loyalty and dedication of friendships. Childhood friendship rituals carry all the weight

of grown up vows, which is probably why we remember them into our old age. Those immature overtures of friendship are made without any cynical or self centered thought of 'what's in it for us' - for children, friends are ' friends forever'".

As young adults, friendship rituals gave us our sense of belonging. We bonded through rituals of sharing confidences, having long conversations, and engaging in activities and adventures. Seldom did we notice or recognize that we've created a new ritual—they sort of developed while we're in the process of having fun. We would have weekly, monthly, and even yearly rituals. These rituals were vital in keeping that friendship connection.

The ancient Celts often practiced a ritual they called Anamchara', formalizing friendships in the same way that marriage rituals formalize the bond between lovers.

As we grow up, we lose so many of the sentimental emotions that accompany our devotion in early friendship. Our simple affections and friendships in childhood and early adulthood lay in a neglected and yellowing photo album as we move away, find work and make families; leaving our friends at the station and promising to write every week, then every month, and finally sending the occasional sad Christmas card to mark one of the deepest and most valuable friendships of our lives.

As we mature, we begin to recover our values when it comes to keeping friendship alive. Aside from friendship rituals, probably one of the most important rituals in everyone's life is related to family. Family rituals have been

identified as powerful organizers of family life that provide stability during times of stress and transition.

Ask any adult what they remember about childhood and they'll recall an event that centered on a family tradition or ritual. The family meal, a holiday gathering or even a nightly bedtime routine are all memorable events in a child's mind.

A rite of passage is a ritual event that marks a person's progress from one status to another. It is a universal phenomenon which can show what social hierarchies, values and beliefs are important in specific cultures. Rites of passage are often ceremonies surrounding events such as milestones within puberty, coming of age, marriage and death. Initiation ceremonies such as baptism, confirmation and bar or bat Mitzvah are considered important rites of passage. A major goal of death rites is to ensure that the individual who has died leaves the realm of the living for the realm of the afterlife. In some religious traditions physical death is said to be the basis for a new and spiritual life either in future transmigration of the soul or in some form of resurrection.

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| 3. | Group Activity – Match Rituals to Country | Wendy |
| 4. | Canadian Traditions – Open & Read | Danie |
| 5. | Group Plenary | Danie/Wendy |

Questions for discussion:

1. What is the importance of rituals?
2. What ritual do you uphold the most?
3. In what rituals do you find the most meaning and why?
4. What traditions and rituals would you refuse to give up?
5. What tradition or ritual do you think of as rote or stale and how might you reinvigorate them?
6. What are the benefits of ritual?
7. What are the downsides of ritual? Has there been a ritual in your personal experience that you would want to let go of?

8. Have you held onto any family rituals?
9. Do you remember some of your childhood rituals?
10. Do you agree that a family ritual is a way of connecting generations?