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Rituals

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Rituals

Most of us have some concepts of rituals, which we often associate with either religious activities found in places of worship or public symbolic actions. But we partake of many more rituals in daily life, some of them shared, such as handshakes and most of the ways we greet one another, and also the rituals we create for ourselves such as our habits for beginning each new day. With a bit of reflection, we can also find that personal private rituals are essential to our every-day religious experience and are likewise features of our ordinary manner of expressing care and concern for others.

Rituals, large and small, as long as we choose them, help us prevent the necessity of re-inventing ways of expressing our interior dispositions, thereby saving energy that would be expended in constantly creating new practices for communicating our intentions. When we freely engage in rituals, they can carry us forward much like being seated on a conveyance gets us to a destination more efficiently than walking.

Rituals are an important aspect of our lives. And, the more freely and consciously that we choose to participate in rituals, the more effective they are in putting us into fulfilling contact with all that we signify, celebrate or enact through them. From experience, we have learned to distinguish between those rituals that only give the appearance of being meaningful, and those in which we are willing to invest ourselves fully. We have also been pleasantly surprised at times, when, for example, we attended a rather common ritual, with low expectation, and yet found ourselves drawn into a powerful human experience that seemed to touch the hearts of all of us who participated.

Reflecting from time to time upon the organized and repetitive activities in which we participate helps us to ensure that they continue to be relevant and authentic. Even our good habitual activity might become so unconscious that we lose track of our purpose and of the very meaning of what we are doing. As a helpful practice in support of the rituals that are part of our lives, whether those of an organization or those of our own making, we can take the role of a child, and ask ourselves the basic question: "Why are you doing that?" Our honest answers may restore the effectiveness of our repeated types of behavior.

Love makes rules, and some of our rules become private rituals of great value to us in expressing emotions and spiritual movements that cannot be put into words. These are worthy of our reflective consideration, since their origin is likely the result of ordinary inspiration; and treasuring them as the gifts they are, renews their value and usefulness.

Rituals that we ourselves have set into habitual practice and those initiated by others, such as large and small religious and civic ceremonies, are all causes for gratitude. For example, we might call to mind a recent experience of going to a meeting, and consider such features as the common exercise of courtesy, acknowledgement of one another, and a sense of order rather than competition with regard to seating and interacting. Or we can recall attending a religious service or a public celebration in which rituals enable groups of people to easily participate without burdensome directions that would detract from the experiences.

Whether or not we use the word "rituals," we all benefit every day from their effects in our lives.