

# Chapter 2

## Ritual as the Creation of Social Reality

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### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter considers four principal ways through which rituals can create social reality for those who participate in the rituals as well as for those who stand outside as mere observers. Rituals are performative acts that create social boundaries both including and excluding humans.

Societies are marked by a range of rituals explicit and implicit, formal and informal. They range from the sacred to the secular, the public to the private. Rituals create and mark social reality in four principal ways. First, by creating a social reality, rituals establish or reinforce expectations, relationships, and roles; they create a web of social bonds. Second, by inviting participation in a social reality, rituals maintain social stability and harmony; they create sustaining social structures. Third, rituals by placing individuals within a social reality enable individuals to understand themselves as part of specific groups invested in particular activities, commitments, and traditions; rituals by creating social reality allow individuals to understand their position within the social geography of the world. Fourth, rituals by placing humans within a social reality disclose the significance and meaning of time, including the passages of human life, from reproduction, birth, marriage, and suffering to death, thus aiding individuals to appreciate their location in history.

For those who stand outside of rituals as mere observers, rituals declare social boundaries. As a result, the observers appreciate themselves as either excluded from a social reality or invited to enter into it, if not both. Rituals by creating a social world declare those outside the social world as to some extent an other.

This chapter gives special accent to the extent to which the social reality created through rituals not only effects the supervention of a new perspective, but in addition should be understood as disclosing the meaning of the reality

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addressed through the ritual. That is, there are good grounds to hold that a number of rituals not only create a social reality that is contingent and could have been otherwise, but a number of rituals may have a more substantive force. They make explicit a reality otherwise unnoticed.

Before I consider the performative force of rituals and their role in creating and shaping social reality, I will speak briefly to the question: what is ritual and how is ritual bound up with tradition? Ritual denotes “the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers” (Rappaport, 1999, p. 24).

Rituals can range from the sacred to the secular, the informal to the formal. Some religious rituals, coronations of kings and queens, and the installation of heads of state, in which particular protocols are followed and in which adherence to the prescribed form is considered important, are formal. Rituals may be institutionalized, as the rituals of the Roman Catholic or Orthodox Christian churches, or non-institutional, as the Confucian rituals described by Fan (Chapter 9). Rituals may be highly structured and there may be written instructions as to how to proceed. For example, on the first night of the Passover holiday, the Jewish people follow specific guidelines about what to eat, in what order to serve food, which prayers to read, and who should read them. It is understood that specific acts must be performed, statements made, clothing worn, and so on. In other cases, there is no written set of rules about how something is done, but a ritual is passed on through experience. For example, a family may have a particular way of celebrating the birth of a child, or a holiday. The ritual is learned by being a member of the family. Similarly, for many young children, a particular ritual before bedtime signals that the day is ending and that soon they will go to sleep. Parents may bathe a child, help him brush his teeth, read a certain number of books to or with the child, and then give a goodnight kiss. When that is done regularly, it becomes a ritual. There is no written rule. There is simply a custom – a routine – that is imbued with meaning. The actions serve as signs of what is to come.

As we explore ritual, it is important to recognize that there are hierarchies of rituals. Some are major, such as an Orthodox Christian Wedding or a Jewish naming ceremony. Others are what we might call minor rituals, such as the bedtime ritual described earlier. Yet others are somewhere in between. The classification is not important for our discussion except insofar as readers should understand that in examining different rituals – from the major to the minor – we are not suggesting that they are all equally significant. It also is important to recognize that grandeur is not necessary for a ritual to be a ritual. Events need not be on a large scale or conducted in public to be rituals. The concept of ritual covers a broad range of human experiences discussed here together because they share important elements. Discussion of different types of rituals – major and minor, secular and religious – in the same chapter and volume does not diminish the significance of the major rituals.

Scholars of ritual have identified characteristics of ritual and attempted to establish categories of ritual. Two explorations of the characteristics of ritual, of

what makes a ritual a ritual, stand out. Both help us to distinguish rituals from routines, a distinction explored below. First, Klapp (1965) identifies five characteristics of ritual.

1. Practicality: “Ritual often occurs in areas of life where practical control is lacking – crises, the weather, the supernatural, and so on – but that it substitutes for practical control is no reason for saying that it is the same kind of thing as practical control” (Klapp, 1965, p. 10); “. . . much ritual has no practical effect whatever – and the participants know this, but nonetheless perform it (as in the familiar anecdote of the Englishman in the tropics who, no matter how hot it was, always dressed for dinner)” (Klapp, 1965, pp. 10–11).
2. Regularity: Ritual “adheres to some pattern, formula, method or role, which is considered as the correct or best one. Originality is not welcomed in ritual once established” (Klapp, 1965, p. 11).
3. Periodicity or Repetition: Ritual requires that “[a] thing must be done rightly and at certain times” (Klapp, 1965, p. 11).
4. Meaningful: Ritual “belong[s] to a class of significant gestures” (Klapp, 1965, p. 11) and involves “behavior which communicates something. . .” (Klapp, 1965, pp. 11–12). “Ritual is . . . essentially mnemonic, that is, it retains a memory-image, as does language or some music” (Klapp, 1965, pp. 11–12). Ritual “give[s] living immediacy to certain vital ideas on which society is based” (Klapp, 1965, p. 12).
5. Dramatic: Ritual is performed for an audience, even if the audience consists only of the person performing the ritual (Klapp, 1965, p. 12).

Second, Bell (1997) identifies categories of attributes of ritual action. Among the important categories noted are:

1. Formalism: Rituals involve different degrees of formality (1997, p. 139).
2. Traditionalism: Traditionalization is “[t]he attempt to make a set of activities appear to be identical to or thoroughly consistent with older cultural precedents” (Bell, 1997, p. 145). Traditionalization is a “powerful tool of legitimation”; repetition or adaptation of old activities in or to new settings.
3. Invariance: Rituals involve repetition and physical control (1997, p. 150).
4. Rule Governance: “[C]odes of orchestration” govern rituals (Bell, 1997, p. 153).
5. Sacral Symbolism: Often times, “Activities that explicitly appeal to supernatural beings are readily considered to be examples of rituals. . .” (Bell, 1997, p. 155).
6. Performance: “[D]eliberate, self-conscious ‘doing’ of highly symbolic actions in public – is key to what makes ritual, theater, and spectacle what they are” (Bell, 1997, pp. 159–160).

These descriptions of ritual help differentiate rituals and routines. In examining Klapp’s criteria for ritual, for example, we see why a bedtime ritual for a child may be a ritual and not merely a bedtime routine. Insofar as it meets all five criteria Klapp establishes, it is a ritual. In some households, a bedtime routine might be merely a routine. In many homes, however, it may be a ritual

because, for example, it includes bedtime prayers that reflect religious commitments the parents are passing on to the child. Particular elements of the ritual may be meant to communicate a parent's love for the child. They are not meant simply to put the child to bed. Mere routines, unlike rituals, lack the meaning associated with rituals. Routines are mechanical, such as the way a person slices a banana into his cereal each morning. The practice may be repeated regularly, but it is not filled with meaning or performed for an audience.

Examining some of the categories of ritual identified in the literature helps us understand the ways in which rituals create and shape social reality, which is the focus of the next section. Although these categorizations of types of ritual are not definitive, they are informative. Bell (1997) identifies various types of rituals, including:

- Rites of passage (Bell, 1997, p. 94)
- Calendral rites, which “give socially meaningful definitions to the passage of time, creating an ever-renewing cycle of days, months, and years” (Bell, 1997, p. 102).
- Rites of exchange and communion, such as “offerings to a god or gods with the practical and straightforward expectation of receiving something in return. . .” (Bell, 1997, p. 108).
- Rites of affliction, which “seek to mitigate the influence of spirits thought to be afflicting human beings with misfortune” or “attempt to rectify a state of affairs that has been disturbed or disordered; they heal, exorcise, protect, and purify” (Bell, 1997, p. 115).
- Feasting, fasting, and festivals, which involve “public display[s] of religious-cultural sentiments” (Bell, 1997, p. 120).
- Political rites, which “comprise those ceremonial practices that specifically construct, display and promote the power of political institutions (such as king, state, the village elders) or the political interests of distinct constituencies and subgroups” (Bell, 1997, p. 128). Such “rituals actually construct power,” according to Bell (1997, p. 128).

In all of this discussion of ritual, it is obvious that rituals are rituals in part because they have meaning. Identical actions could be performed by various people and these actions would be ritual for some and not for others. Those that fail to meet the criteria of ritual fail, in part, because they are not imbued with meaning. As meaning-filled activity, ritual is a form of communication, though it may be a unique form of communication. As Rappaport argues: “To say that ritual is a mode of communication is hardly to suggest that it is interchangeable with other modes of communication. It is a special medium peculiarly, perhaps even uniquely, suited to the transmission of certain messages and certain sorts of information” (Rappaport, 1999, p. 52). The information communicated shapes and creates social reality by, for example, (1) marking an individual as an adult or as a member of a church, (2) signaling the end of a season of feasts, (3) or vesting the authority of the state in a new judge as he is sworn in to office.

That rituals are rituals in part because they are meaning-filled, communicative activities has important implications for attempts to renew or reintroduce rituals. Rituals and the commitments that they reflect are bound up with one another. Thus as the commitments that ground and are communicated by rituals are weakened, we should expect to see the practice of the associated rituals dwindle. Once the underlying commitments are lost altogether, we should expect rituals associated with them to become extinct. Similarly, if the practice of particular rituals becomes weak, we should expect a weakening in the underlying commitments. This bi-directional dependence raises important questions for how cultural renewal can be undertaken effectively. Assuming that cultural renewal involves renewing both the commitments and the ritual practices associated with those commitments, how may we engage in cultural renewal if there has been a loss of both the underlying commitments that ground and are reflected in a ritual and the ritual itself no longer is practiced? Is it necessary or possible to introduce ritual practices, make them highly visible, and use the curiosity they might generate as a starting point for cultural renewal? Can rituals communicate meaning to those who do not already share the underlying commitments reflected in the ritual? Can those who stand outside be drawn in and come to share new commitments as a result of observing a ritual? Is it necessary or possible to reintroduce particular commitments first so that persons may engage in a ritual only after already understanding them, believing in them, or in some other way recognizing and accepting their meaning? These questions are variations of the classic question: which came first, the chicken or the egg? Do or must shared commitments precede ritual practice or vice versa? These are some of the many questions that should be considered as part of an overall effort of cultural renewal. My purpose in the remainder of this chapter is to characterize some of the particular ways in which rituals uphold tradition, maintain culture, and function in society as well as to explore the relationship between rituals, traditions, and routines.

## 2.2 Establish or Reinforce Expectations, Relationships, and Roles

The social power of ritual – that is, the power of ritual to create and mark social reality – is captured in this summary definition of ritual:

...the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers logically entails the establishment of convention, the sealing of social contract, the construction of the integrated conventional orders . . . , the investment of whatever it encodes with morality, the construction of time and eternity; the representation of a paradigm of creation, the generation of the concept of the sacred and the sanctification of conventional order, the generation of theories of the occult, the evocation of numinous experience, the awareness of the divine, the grasp of the holy, and the construction of orders of meaning transcending the semantic (Rappaport, 1999, p. 27).

I turn to examine the four principal ways in which ritual creates and marks social reality.

First, ritual marks social reality by establishing or reinforcing expectations, roles, and relationships, thus weaving the fabric of society. Rituals from the informal to the formal, the secular to the sacred, can have this effect, as suggested by some of the examples above. Among the informal, secular rituals, consider the bedtime ritual for children and the bridal shower for a young woman. A bedtime ritual, which may involve a bath and stories, signals to a child that he or she must soon separate from his parents and go to sleep. Although in some families a bedtime routine merely is a routine, it may be a ritual for some, i.e., when the children understand that their bedtime “routine” reflects their parents’ love and the security of their parents’ presence. Or, when the bedtime “routine” includes nightly prayers, families participate in something that is not merely mechanical. In the United States, perhaps no ritual traditionally has made it more clear to a young woman about to be married that she would be expected to care for the home and to cook than the bridal shower. Traditionally, bridal shower gifts revolve around the home, and the kitchen in particular. With pots, baking pans, kitchen gadgets and other housewares before them, no young bride should have missed the social cue that she would be expected to cook and care for the home. In recent years, many people have recast the bridal shower as a couples shower, where men and women are invited and household gifts are given jointly to the bride and groom, suggesting that domestic responsibilities will be shared. Although traditional shower gifts continue to be given, many other gifts have come to be seen as appropriate shower gifts, including alcohol and home bar items, and home entertainment items. Many preserve the traditional bridal shower ritual – women gathering to give a bride housewares – but we also have seen the ritual change. The new shower reflects new customs and beliefs. It also reflects the fact that many couples cohabit before they are married and already have many of the basic kitchen items that traditionally have been given as shower gifts.

Consider also the ways in which clothing or accessories have meaning; the donning of such articles can signal (1) one’s place in society or in the universe or (2) a role one has assumed and can evoke expectations in others. Physicians typically wear white coats, and medical schools often have white coat ceremonies for entering students. The white coat is a symbol and wearing it carries duties and evokes expectations. When patients see a person in a long white coat, they may make certain assumptions about that person’s abilities, motives, and role. The physician, it generally is presumed, will act in the patient’s interest and will not harm the patient. Rebecca Dresser (2002) has noted that this ritual of wearing the white coat can be dangerous in some circumstances because it delivers a powerful yet wrong message. When physicians who are acting as medical researchers wear their white coats, they suggest to patients that their interactions with the physician are “business as usual.” Yet this may not be the case. A physician-researcher has different primary objectives than a physician acting strictly as a clinician. The researcher may offer interventions, perform

tests, or withhold interventions not because they are in the best interest of the patient but because they are necessary for the conduct of research. The patient may mistakenly believe that the physician is providing treatment, a phenomenon known as the therapeutic misconception. Therapeutic misconception refers to situations in which individuals are participating in research as subjects but mistakenly believe that research is an extension of or is comparable to clinical care and that the patient's best interest is the guiding principle of research (Appelbaum, Roth, and Lidz, 1982). Patients seeing a physician in a bright red coat, for example, would be much less likely to assume that the physician was providing them treatment based on what the physician thought was best for the patient.

Ritual clothing also can play an important role in reinforcing religious beliefs about persons' roles and responsibilities. Consider the various head coverings worn by married Orthodox Jewish women, Orthodox Christian women in church, Muslim women, and by Orthodox Jewish men. For a married Orthodox Jewish woman, a head covering is a sign of modesty and serves to separate her from men other than her husband. For Orthodox Jewish men, head coverings serve as reminders of God's presence and power and as signs of respect. For Muslim women, head coverings are part of an obligation to cover their bodies when in public or with men and to be modest. For Orthodox Christian women, covering their heads in church is a sign of submission. Rituals communicate information, and ritualistic clothing is no exception. Much of that information concerns the social world, the roles and responsibilities of individuals within them, and the expectations others have of individuals who occupy specific roles. In doing so, rituals mark the social world in a powerful way, creating and reinforcing a web of social bonds.

### **2.3 Promote or Signal Stability or Harmony**

Rituals mark social reality in a second way; they may serve as social signals or cues that indicate stability or continuity and as such shape the social world and one's perspective of it. They generate and enable individuals to experience and affirm such beliefs (Bell, 1992, p. 20). Some of the most powerful rituals may be very simple, everyday rituals. In some cases, one may not notice the ritual until it is absent, and its absence is our sign of change or trouble.

Consider this example. In many offices, it is customary to say "Hello" when one passes a coworker in the hall. One expects the other person to respond similarly. When someone fails to greet a coworker, it is noticed. The failure may indicate that some harmony has been disrupted. Participating in greeting rituals signals stability and harmony in a workplace and participation in these rituals promotes further stability and harmony regardless of how minor or mechanical the process may appear to outsiders.

A British lord chief justice once noted that the reason British judges wore what he called "outmoded attire" rather than plain black robes (as in the U.S.) is

that Britain has no written constitution. According to a British lord chief justice, the tradition of the judicial regalia helps maintain a sense of stability because “Traditions play an important role in providing continuity of powers and responsibilities” (quoted in Poders, 2000, p. 103). Such attire suggests that judges are part of a tradition and are making decisions in accord with that tradition and hence keeping the tradition alive. When judges don their garb, they don their tradition. To break with that tradition would indicate a general willingness to break with tradition, which could yield instability.

Traditional family rituals are among the most powerful examples of the ways in which rituals can promote and signal stability, and the breakdown of such rituals can signal disharmony or change. The movie *The Lost City* explores the Cuban Revolution with emphasis on the life of one family. Throughout the movie, we observe the family gathering for Sunday dinner at 6 p.m. sharp. As grown sons marry, their wives join the family meal. Each child greets mother and father with a kiss, each person occupies a particular seat, and it is obvious to the outsider that this gathering is not optional. As the Revolution progresses, one son joins Castro and another an anti-revolutionary group and goes in to hiding. The pro-Castro son ceases to attend family dinners; this seems in part due to his own rejection of his family and its beliefs, as well as a rejection of tradition altogether and in particular of a tradition that values duty to and love of family. His absence is poignant, a sign that the family no longer is one. But the fact that the rest of the family continues to gather at the same time each Sunday evening also reflects an important sense of stability and continuity among the other family members. The ritual of gathering serves as a sign of family unity and harmony and further cements that bond. Disruption of the ritual is equally meaning-filled; to reject the ritual is to reject what it represents, namely the family.

In reinforcing traditions, rituals can link the past, present and future. They sustain the social fabric and expand it by connecting generations, thereby creating and marking social reality.

## **2.4 Establish or Reinforce Identity as Part of a Group**

Third, rituals by placing individuals within a social reality enable individuals to understand themselves as part of specific groups invested in particular activities, commitments and traditions. Moreover, in some cases, rituals actually change an individual’s identity making that person someone or something he previously was not. Participating in ritual activities can help individuals recognize themselves as being part of a defined group, organization or tradition. With this sense of belonging to something larger than themselves can come a recognition of responsibilities to the group and responsibilities that derive from being a group member. Rituals allow individuals to understand their position within the social geography of the world. In this way, rituals are performative acts – they shape individuals and relationships and thus establish and maintain social structures.



One of the most powerful secular rituals through which a person's identity changes is the citizenship ceremony in which naturalized U.S. citizens become U.S. citizens. The naturalization ceremony is a ritual that culminates the long process of becoming a citizen and at the end of the ceremony individuals who arrived as non-citizens leave as citizens. With that identity change come new rights and responsibilities. The ritual has powerful implications for social reality; it is a performative act, one that changes fundamentally who a person is and what that person's place is in society.

Some rituals may not change a person's identity or status in the social world but may remind individuals of their membership in particular groups or communities. For example, it is common at some sporting events in the U.S. to sing the national anthem prior to the event. This ritual serves to remind those who participate that they are members of a particular community. Religious rituals sometimes transform identities or reinforce membership in a community. According to believers, some religious rituals change the identity of some participants. For example, Orthodox Christians believe that the bride and the groom are changed by the ritual of the marriage ceremony from single persons to husband and wife. They are placed in a social structure with asymmetrical authorities and obligations. Orthodox Christians understand that the marriage comes into existence not as the result of bridal agreement or betrothal contract, which are at best desirable but not sufficient conditions. Indeed, the marriage itself is not at all contractual but the result of the power of the ritual. It reflects a new category of unity through which a man comes to have duties and authorities over a woman who had been single and is now his wife, just as the woman who had been single now becomes a wife with duties to and claims over him and his body. That some rituals do or are thought to change the identity of those who participate does not mean that all rituals do this or that a practice must involve such changes to be considered a ritual. Altering metaphysics is not a necessary condition for a practice to be a ritual, but it is important to understand that some rituals are thought to have this power.

In addition, the religious implications of rituals shared among members of particular religious communities can reinforce a person's awareness that he is a member of a community, one that in some cases extends over many generations. Certain religious practices also remind individuals that they are members of a community whose integrity they must protect. For example, in Roman Catholic churches marriage banns are printed several weeks before a wedding is scheduled to take place. This gives members of the community the opportunity to come forward if there are reasons for which the proposed wedding should not take place, such as knowledge that one member of the couple had a secret marriage to another person or that the members of the couple are closely related to one another. Members of the church are responsible for helping to maintain the integrity of the community and the sacraments. For Christians, baptisms and weddings fundamentally transform the identities of those who are baptized or married.

## 2.5 Signal the Passage of Time or a Change in Circumstances

Finally, rituals can signal the passage of time or changes in life circumstances and thus disclose the significance and meaning of time. Rites of passage serve as obvious examples. High school graduations in the United States traditionally have been seen as pivotal moments when children become recognized as adults. Students who graduate from a school that does not have a graduation ceremony but merely marks transcripts to indicate that a student has completed high school still go into the world as high school graduates. A ceremony is not a necessary condition for being a graduate, but the ceremony is an outward sign that communicates to students and others present that the students have met an important milestone and are at a time of significant change. Without participating in the ritual, it is unlikely that those present will otherwise experience an “Ah-ha” moment when they realize that life has changed. A school registrar marking a transcript indicating that a student has graduated does not communicate the passage of time and change in life circumstances that a graduation ceremony conveys. At the same time, the graduation ceremony is not a sufficient condition for becoming a graduate. If a student participates in the ritual but in fact has not completed all the requirements and the school does not mark on his transcript that he has graduated, his participation in the graduation will not make him a graduate.

In some Latin American countries, the quinceañera is a celebration marking a young girl’s transition to adulthood. A young girl will turn fifteen with or without the ritual, but the ritual marks an important time in her life. Other ritualized events also may serve to mark the passage of time and shape the social space as a result. For example, celebrations surrounding Mardi Gras mark the final days before Lent, a period of fasting and penitence that precedes the joyful season of Easter. The cycle of feasting and fasting repeated each year in special ways marks the passage of time. Moreover, by being immersed in the rituals associated with the seasons, the meaning of the seasons is learned.

## 2.6 Impact on Outsiders

When persons observe but do not participate in rituals, they experience a social boundary and know themselves to be in some sense outsiders. This sense of being outside may evoke, among other feelings, a sense of relief that one is not a part of a group or community, yearning for membership, loneliness, disgust or repulsion, curiosity, confusion, or awe. For example, in some communities, a recently deceased person is washed by family members and prepared for burial. Persons unfamiliar with this practice may see it as repulsive and disrespectful. Regardless of how the outsider responds, knowing that he stands on the outside speaks to the communicative power of ritual. Rituals declare boundaries and mark individuals off from one another – they draw lines in the map of social geography. Because of this power, it should be of greater importance to

philosophers, who strive to understand human reasoning, interaction and so on. Moreover, rituals define boundaries in unspoken ways, they establish, reinforce, or remind us of divisions and differences. As such, rituals are an important element of the social world, an important way in which people understand themselves as part of and apart from others, and hence should be the focus of greater philosophical consideration.

## 2.7 Conclusion

Rituals, from the implicit to the explicit, from the informal to the formal, from the secular to the sacred, from the public to the private, are performative acts. They both create and enforce social reality for those engaged in them and those who stand outside them in four principal ways. First, they create and sustain a web of social bonds by establishing and reinforcing expectations, relationships and roles. Second, rituals play an important role in maintaining stability and harmony by creating and sustaining social structures. Third, rituals mark people as members of specific groups and they enable individuals to understand themselves as being part of some groups and as being excluded from others. Rituals demarcate the social geography of the world and the boundaries that separate us from one another. One who observes a ritual of which he is not a part clearly senses his otherness. Finally, rituals disclose the significance and meaning of time and of significant life events.

We should recognize not only the power of ritual but be acutely aware of the fragility of ritual, i.e., the extent to which even well-established rituals can be disturbed and even lost. Rituals communicate meaning and reflect and perpetuate commitments or beliefs. As those underlying commitments or beliefs erode, we expect the practice of rituals associated with those commitments and beliefs to decline. This relationship between ritual behavior and particular commitments and beliefs suggests that a failure to engage in ritual practices, a weakening of ritual, may not only reflect a weakened appreciation of particular commitments and beliefs but also may contribute to the erosion of those commitments and beliefs. If the practice of rituals is weakened, for example, because they are seen as too time-consuming, then over time we may expect that even those who lament the loss of ritual and who aim to uphold traditions may eventually find that their commitments and beliefs have changed. Loss of commitment can lead to loss of ritual, and loss of ritual can erode traditional commitments. Many chapters in this volume address the practice of Confucian rituals in China and lament the circumstance that many Chinese no longer participate regularly in Confucian rituals. This decline in ritual practice reflects and perpetuates a changed way of life, which many see as detrimental.

Ritual is an important mechanism for maintaining ways of life, customs, traditional relationships, and established understandings of duty, virtue and morality. The loss of ritual is the loss of the social world known and sustained through ritual. Because rituals can be so central to maintaining a particular

social order, we should expect that those who wish to change the social order will not only abandon specific rituals but attack them so that the old order might be erased. This happened not only in China but in other regimes, such as the USSR and Cuba, where rules aimed to destroy the previous social order by, among other things, intimidating persons who participated in religious rituals, forbidding various religious practices, and confiscating church property. These same rulers who understood the power of rituals and hence worked to eliminate old rituals often established new rituals to create and sustain a new social order. For example, in Cuba, Fidel Castro routinely held public rallies, participation in which is mandatory, where children (the Pioneers) wear uniforms and chant support for their ruler.

In other cases, rituals are altered or abandoned not out of hostility but as a result of apathy. As new ways of life seep into a culture, attention to the practice of traditional rituals may be lost. Such rituals may be seen as too time-consuming, or perhaps they require the presence of family members who have moved to far away cities. Imagine a contemporary family in the United States. John plays soccer and sometimes has games on Sunday mornings. Sarah is a gymnast and sometimes has competitions several hours away on Sunday afternoons. If the family allows these activities to interfere with church attendance, they might find over time that they rarely if ever attend church. Over time, the family no longer participates in the rituals of their faith and the children will grow up without learning the rituals or learning from the rituals. This loss of ritual reflects the loss of a way of life.

Insofar as we are concerned with maintaining traditional ways of life, commitments and beliefs, we should recognize the importance of protecting the integrity of rituals through the regular practice of rituals. We must guard against the danger of apathy, and antipathy should be guarded against if traditional cultures are to flourish. The important role ritual can play in transmitting meaning and maintaining traditional cultures should not be under-estimated.

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