

# What is Ritual

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Presented February 25, 2024

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# What is Ritual?

What makes ritual important?

When you hear the word “Ritual”  
what is the first thing that comes to your mind?

Was the first thing that came to your mind...

Was it Religious?

Was it Social?

Was it Festive?

Was it Commemoration?

The need for ritual is innate.

Ritual is born of a deep need  
to articulate times of profound experience and transition,  
and is an essential part of what makes,  
and, keeps us human.

Throughout human history

As we have encountered life-changing events.

We have naturally highlighted them by adorning them  
with art, music, poems, and prose.

We create meaning in the collection of activities  
that heighten the moment of change,  
as we mold the activities into ritual.

Rituals can act as the punctuation marks in our lives,  
by providing us with a sense of structure and order.

On the grand scale,

rituals support a narrative of our lives,

building a bank of shared memories and shared experiences.

On a smaller scale,  
rituals are a chance to take time out from the routine,  
and chaos of our day-to-day lives,  
and express those things not often expressed.

Rituals also have the power to bring disparate individuals  
together to collectively celebrate or  
memorialize national or international events.

There are hardly any  
limits or restrictions  
to what may or may not be incorporated into a ritual.

The Rites and Rituals of past and present societies have typically involved;

special gestures and words

recitation of fixed texts

ceremonial performance

ceremonial processions

usage of certain objects

usage of special costumes

ceremonial consumption of food, drink, or drugs,

and much more.

So what are the Characteristics of Ritual



Catherine Bell an American religious studies scholar  
argues that

Ritual can be characterized by the following areas;

Formalism

Traditionalism

Invariance

Rule-governance

Sacral symbolism

Performance

## Formalism

Rituals utilizes a limited and rigidly organized set of expressions which anthropologists call a "restricted code" (in opposition to a more open "elaborated code").

## Traditionalism

Rituals appeal to tradition and are generally concerned to repeat historical precedents accurately. Traditionalism varies from formalism in that the ritual may not be formal yet still make an an appeal to historical.

Thus, the appeal to history is important rather than accurate historical transmission.

## Invariance

Ritual is also invariant, implying careful choreography.

This is less an appeal to traditionalism than a striving for timeless repetition.

The key to invariance is bodily discipline, as in monastic prayer and meditation meant to mold dispositions and moods. This bodily discipline is frequently performed in unison, by groups.

## Rule-governance

Rituals tend to be governed by rules, a feature somewhat like formalism.

Rules impose norms on the chaos of behavior, either defining the outer limits of what is acceptable or choreographing each move.

## Sacral Symbolism

Activities appealing to supernatural beings are easily considered rituals, although the appeal may be quite indirect or subtle, expressing only a generalized belief in the existence of the sacred demanding a human response.

## Performance

The performance of ritual creates a theatrical-like frame around the activities, symbols and events that shape participant's experience and cognitive ordering of the world.

# Genre of Rituals

For simplicity's sake, the range of diverse rituals can be divided into categories with common characteristics.

NOTE: Rituals can fall in more than one genre.

## **Rites of Passage**

A rite of passage is a ritual event that marks a person's transition from one status to another.

## **Calendrical and Commemorative Rites**

Calendrical and commemorative rites are ritual events marking particular times of year, or a fixed period since an important event.

## **Rites of Feasting, Fasting and Festivals**

Rites of feasting and fasting are those through which a community publicly expresses an adherence to basic, shared religious values, rather than to the overt presence of deities as is found in rites of affliction where feasting or fasting may also take place.

## **Rites of Affliction**

Rites of affliction are usually non-calendrical and unplanned. Normally classified as healing rituals or petitions for supernatural intervention, these rites seek remedy or compensation for the affliction.

## **Rites of Intensification**

a ritual or ceremony performed by a community in a time of crisis that affects all members.

What Characteristics does Masonic Ritual Have?

What Characteristics does Masonic Ritual Have?

# Formalism

Because this formal speech limits what can be said,  
it induces "acceptance, compliance, or at least forbearance with regard to any overt  
challenge".

The opening or closing of a lodge,  
The ritual of initiation,  
Degree lectures and charges  
The Officers jewels and aprons,  
The installation of Officers,  
The Funeral Service

# Traditionalism

Traditionalism varies from formalism in that the ritual may not be formal yet still makes an appeal to historical.

The appeal to history is important rather than accurate historical transmission.

The the signs and due guards,  
The Masonic Apron,  
The address of the Master as Worshipful,  
The names of the officers,  
Festival Board,  
St. Johns' Feast

# Invariance

That it is done with careful choreography. This is less an appeal to traditionalism than a striving for timeless repetition. The key to invariance is bodily discipline.

The floor work of masonic ritual,  
The Rod work,  
The Due guards and signs

# Rule-Governance

Governed by rules, a feature somewhat like formalism. Rules impose norms on the chaos of behavior, either defining the outer limits of what is acceptable or choreographing each move.

The entering or retiring from a tiled lodge,  
The addressing the Master,  
The Balloting,  
Festival Board,  
St. John' Feast

# Sacred Symbolism

Particular objects become sacred symbols through a process of consecration which effectively creates the sacred by setting it apart from the normal world.

The point within the circle,  
The masonic apron,  
The working Tools,  
The Great Lights,  
The three lesser lights,  
The Square and Compasses

# Performance

It creates a theatrical-like frame around the activities, symbols and events that shape participant's experience and cognitive ordering of the world, simplifying the chaos of life and imposing a more or less coherent system of categories of meaning onto it.

The Circumambulation,  
The Opening or closing a Lodge,  
The Degrees,  
The Funeral Service,  
The Proficiencies,  
Festival Board

So What genre(s) does Masonic Ritual fit into?

# **Rites of Passage**

The Degrees,  
Installation of Officers,  
Funeral Service

# **Calendrical and Commemorative Rites**

Installation of Officers,  
St. John's Feast,  
Thanksgiving dinner,  
Christmas dinner,  
Seder dinner,  
Munday Thursday

# Rites of Feasting, Fasting and Festivals

Festival Board,  
Table Lodge,  
Installation of Officers,  
St. John' Feast,  
Thanksgiving dinner,  
Christmas dinner,  
Munday Thursday,  
York Rite Festivals  
Lodge of Instruction

So why is Ritual important to Freemasonry?

- . It allows the teaching of Freemasonry to take on new and important meanings by the actions, words, symbols and movements of the participants in the ceremony.
- . It assists the teaching to be transmitted over time without allowing the addition of meaning by the participants.
- . It provides a communal connection to all who have participated in the ritual.
- . It provide a personal meaning to the participant without losing its impact or having to be modified for the individual.
- . It brings together men of different religions, beliefs systems, creeds
- . It separates the fraternity from other service organizations.

## Its demonstrates its importance to the man and to society

- . It provides tools, viewpoints and friendships that allow those who have participated to go and affect not only their lives, but also the lives of those that they come into contact with.
- . It provides a communal connection to all who have participated in the ritual and teaches the importance of society.
- . It provide a view of how a masons actions can affect the world and society
- . It provide a support system that can assist the man in his journey through life.

**Questions?**