



Rituals as Promoters of Autonomy

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Where possible, quotations have been adjusted to reflect original English publications, particularly for TA publications.

Abstract

For Eric Berne, the psychiatrist who developed transactional analysis, Ritual is a form of time structuring that provides less recognition in relationships. This article aims to re-signify the concept by bringing the understanding that ritualization can be understood not as submission to patterns programmed by tradition and social customs, but as an action that provides an environment that stimulates the development of autonomy. The reflections of authors in the fields of anthropology, psychology and sociology, including van Gennep, Terrin, Bell, Zoja, Tambiah and Turner are used to illustrate and explain the study of rituals as practices replete with symbolism and meanings. Through Eliade and Bateson the notions of the sacred and consecration are considered. Autonomy is referred to as Berne perceived it, implying capacity for awareness, intimacy and spontaneity.

Key words

Transactional Analysis; Rituals; Consecration; Autonomy

Introduction

The study of rituals is a constant theme in Western social and anthropological research, which is far from being exhausted. Rituals have existed in various cultures throughout history and over time have been losing space and meaning in the modern world. Changes in our lives and closings of cycles are constant and rituals had as their objective demarcating and consecrating them. Within transactional analysis (TA) (Berne, 1988), ritual is identified as one of six

possible forms of social structuring of time. This article proposes to re-signify the concept by bringing the understanding that ritualization can be understood not as submission to patterns programmed by tradition and social customs, but as an action that provides an environment that stimulates the development of autonomy.

What are rituals?

Berne (1988) conceptualizes ritual as one of the six forms of time structuring. Following withdrawal, Berne views rituals as the second most secure form of social action. He writes that these are highly stylized exchanges that may be informal or formalized in ceremonies that are completely predictable and of little information. In this concept, the transactions constituting rituals are signs of mutual recognition. The units of a ritual are called strokes, by analogy with the way in which babies are recognized by their mothers. These are programmed by tradition and social customs. Rituals understood in this way seem simple acts with limited meanings in which little information is available to those involved. The understanding of rituals as submission to patterns programmed by tradition and social customs limits its potency, since the existence of rituals goes beyond simple formalities. Analysis of rituals encompasses a vast exposition of meanings.

In van Gennep (2011) it is observed that if on the one hand there is protocol, the rituals go beyond limited information because they are filled with symbolisms, as for example, in commensality. This concept is based on the notion that a meal offered and shared can be a stage of great importance between a foreigner and a tribe, in which the act of eating together is part of a rite of aggregation, considering the acceptance of the intention behind the gesture, the entry of a new member into the tribe gradually, and that non-acceptance of the meal may be perceived as a refusal to engage. From this analysis, it is clear that rituals contain symbolic acts that, when experienced with their purpose, carry within themselves a sense of

legitimizing moments. The symbolic act demonstrates this richness found in rituals: "In the context of the rituals of *ndembo* (a society that lives in small and mobile villages in Central Africa), every object used, every gesture performed, every chant or prayer, every unit of space and time represents, by conviction, something different from itself. It is more than it seems to be and often much more "(Turner, 1974, p.25). So we can say that symbolism is full of meanings. The action is not merely representative, it is an autonomous act, and not an automatism, when this significance is present.

In order to conceptualize rituals and rites, this work uses the view of Terrin (2004), in which the use of the term "rite" refers to an action performed in a certain time and space (initiation makes the child an adult, baptism makes the child Christian). These are actions, with beginning, middle and end, which are different from the actions of ordinary life. Already, the word ritual refers to a general idea, of which the rite is a specific instance. Ritual is an abstraction, while the rite is what is something you do and experience in a particular religion or culture. Terrin (2004) describes the rite as a concept of culture, perceiving that it runs through several dimensions: theological, phenomenological, historical, religious, anthropological, linguistic, psychological, sociological, ethnological and biological. For this author, the act of ritualizing is the process by which rites are formed or created - actions that, over time, are ritualized (a person is led to have a ritualistic behaviour and ritualizes himself to act, becoming formal and repetitive). It is seen as a positive process. Ritualism, in turn, is when there begins to be a negative connotation to the process. A stereotyped behaviour, devoid of any symbolic content. Terrin cites behaviours in major religions as they become repetitive, standardized, and formal, and when a client resorts to ritualized ways to combat distress, such as washing their hands several times. Nowadays, however, the term rite is so broad that it includes any activity performed in a standardized, formalized and repeated way.

Today's society deals with some important passages of life in a celebratory and sometimes ceremonial way, using formalities and rituals, but the ritualistic act often loses its significance and deep meaning, ending up being stereotyped repetitions, emptied of its symbolic significance. This merely celebratory perception makes it impossible to experience these ceremonies in a ritualistic way.

Bell (1992) creates a framework of analysis of the types of activities generally understood as ritual. On a fundamental level, this structured attempts to return such ritualistic activities to the context of human action in general. She proposes that we may see a ritual as

a way of acting, as the ritualization of activity. Ritualization, in this sense, is a way of doing things to provokes the perception that these practices are distinct, and the associations they generate are ritualized and differentiated from other acts. A ritualistic process is thus used to bring intensity to the experience. Ritualization has purpose and meaning that communicate beyond words. We can see rituals as a way of being an interaction that resists, repeating patterns of little meaning, referred to by Terrin (2004), as ritualism, or we can use them to seek the opposite, ritualization (Bell, 1992), with a deep meaning and the surrender of a moment of autonomy through a ritualized action. A rite, according to Tambiah (1985) is defined as: "culturally constructed systems of symbolic communication." (p.124), continuing that therefore the performative character of the rite validates its expression: "Efficacy derives from the performative character of the rite in three senses: what is said and done a conventional act, in a performance that uses various means of communication through which the participants intensely experience the event, and finally, in the sense of referring to values which are linked or inferred by the authors during the performance as the link between form and content" (p.128).

Ritual action is not mere representation; as the ritualistic actions are said and done, they are consummated in the act itself, such as the "yes" spoken by the bride and groom at the altar. How important is it to ritualize celebrations and life passages? "Legitimation is one of the most powerful things that ritual does" (Bell, 1992, p.196). For the author, rituals are political. Ritual is a thing of its own. It is the power of ceremony and interaction. Ritualization as a strategic mode of practice produces subtle relationships of power, relationships characterized by negotiated acceptance and resistance, redemptive appropriation and reinterpretation of the hegemonic order. "Ritualization involves the differentiation and privilege of particular activities." (Bell, 1992, p.197). The ritualistic process happens this way, precisely demarcating passage, change, something beyond the ordinary and trivial, that needs a special framework to be effective. Efficacy is the consummation of the rite which, as it is experienced, carries within it its purpose. From the definitions of rituals Tambiah (1985) brings an open definition and is at the same time, precise when he says: "The events that anthropologists define as rituals seem to share some traits: an ordering that structures them, a sense of collective fulfilment with definite purpose, and also a perception that they are different from the everyday. But ritual is part of a cosmology." (p.130)

The realization of ritualistic events as a collective needs a collective that sees itself as a community. The

community in the ritual acts so that the subject assimilates and experiences its passage. For example, at a funeral the ritualized collective role will have a tendency, as van Gennep (2011) points out, in the direction of marking and symbolizing separations. In a marriage, collective action tends to dramatize the aggregation of the subject who is changing the group, whereas in a marginal period, such as pregnancy, engagement, initiation, the sequence of ritualistic actions of the community apply across the margins of the subject to go through the ritualistic moment such that it is seen in an individualized way. There is a dialogue between community and subject, supporting the action of transition of the passage itself, and the rite fulfils the functions of assimilation, surrender and legitimacy.

Zoja (1992) notes that through rites, the psychic and social life of all communities is structured and ordered to seek organization. Rules also exist to assist in the development of the psyche. From this perspective, the author perceives the lack of rites today as a psychic prejudice since they have occupied a place of great value and expression in all traditional societies that were not yet industrialized; the disappearance of rites is a recent phenomenon within our modern Western culture. Changes in our lives and the closing of cycles are constant and rituals were intended to demarcate and consecrate them.

Rituals as Instruments of Consecration

Consecration can be seen as one of the purposes of rituals. A consecration is about making sacred what was profane; in the case of the rite, to make sacred the moment and its meaning. Eliade (1992) says: "To consecrate is to seek communion with the sacred." (p.25) and we can speak of the sacred and the profane as two forms of being in the world, two possible dimensions of human existence. The very word consecration has as one of its meanings "to legitimize, to make legitimate." by making it sacred, legitimacy happens.

In this sense, making a ritual sacred would be like legitimizing it for oneself. The sacred form of existence is consecrating, making ritualistic action sacred. To see reality in a totally de-sacralised way is a recent discovery in the history of humanity. Legitimacy happens, for while in the profane one takes up the automatism of daily life, in the sacred there is a deep contact with the present moment and relationships in the here-and-now. In this sense, rituals work toward this purpose, letting abundance enter, providing contact between structure and meaning, for all this psychic change occurs through and in contact with the here-and-now. "Between the profane world and the sacred world there is incompatibility, to such an extent that the passage from one to the other cannot be made

without an intermediate stage." (van Gennep, 2011, p.23). The intermediate stage seeks a ritual. Thus we can think of the ritualistic process as a collective action of consecration in which the people involved are aware of their purpose, of witnessing change, of facilitating it, and of blessing it. Studying the sacredness of a phenomenon requires the study of its relationships.

How does a group-become sacred? In the combination of the analogical information of the more verbal and analytical field of the left brain, with the right, more intuitive and non-verbal through the experiential, the symbolic is produced in a significant density that words alone cannot express, inviting the sacred to establish itself, bringing possibilities of personal interpretation and sense to the subject that passes through the ritual. The ritualistic form provides an experience beyond dialogue and reason. It enables sensations through the symbolic, the dramatizations, the poetic image, establishing the sacred.

Ego States and Living a Ritual

Berne (1988), when referring to personality structure, brings the understanding of three psychic organs: extero-psyche, neo-psyche and archo-psyche, which present themselves phenomenologically and operationally through three types of ego states called Parent, Adult and Child, with these being considered states of mind and their related patterns of behaviour. Every person will transition between these states. Thus, the Child, Adult and Parent are phenomena based on concrete realities. As we relate with others, we encourage certain ego states in our communication and that of others. The ceremonies experienced only as a series of rituals coordinated by parental stimuli - this is how it happens, it is time, it is what is expected - it leads the person to live moments of change in a repetitive and unconscious way, in which the one in charge is the Adapted Child, not promoting autonomy. Here we have an Adapted Child that tends to repeat moments experienced by their parents or by a certain institution. Thus the subject who passes through the ritual can easily submit, but the act in itself ceases to be an action that ritualizes and becomes a mere ritualism. In ritualism the presence of the subject becomes a simple passage of an undifferentiated time and nothing happens in the development of the psyche. Script is repeated, and the obedience is to a disciplinary culture that reinforces validation of an introjective attitude. A Critical Parent tends to stimulate an Adapted Child.

In order for awareness to expand requires a moment of passage, and contact with the here-and-now is fundamental for bringing purpose into focus. The foreseeable ceremony, with merely standardized, formalized and repetitive rituals emptied of symbolic content, is more a disciplinary practice that does not promote autonomy for change; the celebration alone

does not legitimize or change status. Psychic change requires expansion of consciousness. In the celebratory moment, in a profane way, resistance to change is reinforced. In a creative and intuitive ritual in which the sacred is incorporated, the Little Professor is invited to participate, and the parental part serves as an anchor to bring the individual into deep contact with the experience of the moment and its meaning, anchoring the moment of passage like a midwife, who shelters and anchors the rite so that the baby and the mother can pass through the experience - the passage always requires a sacrifice. If the subject loses the power of contact with the present moment and its profound sense, the transition, the change, the unconscious fear of the dissolution of the way of being, means the possibility of a psychic change occurring decreases, being restricted to a practice without any sense of internalisation. If the subject recognizes and engages in ritualistic experience, they will be conducted through the process, and affected by it, so the possibility of a psychic change happening increases. Sacred rituals depend on a Protecting Parent - we need to validate what is happening in the sacred through the symbolism provided by the four entrance doors of being: feeling, significance, sensations and thinking - so the Child can pass through the unknown - since it is a passage - through the collective function: of providing separation, if the ritual is of separation; of aggregation if it is aggregator; or boundary if it is a threshold (van Genneep, 2011). This allows a greater assimilation of the subject - the adult person who is experiencing the recognition of the change that is to come, making contact with their emotions, validating the intensity of the impact, the meaning of the situation for themselves and, when sharing with the collective, legitimizing this change. It provides the "give-and-take" - "I'm changing". The richness of the contact experience depends on a person's ability to perceive its full impact.

The symbolic experience brings the invitation so that there is no hesitation but rather surrender. The preparation, the ritual, invites the personal presence, the subtle accompaniment of the here-and-now, facilitating ritualization and consummation. The community facilitates the process, witnesses the walk.

Autonomy

For Berne (1977) autonomy is directly related to the improvement and re-establishment of three aptitudes: awareness, spontaneity and intimacy.

The capacity of awareness requires living in the here-and-now. What Berne conceptualizes as a more visible ability in children, to observe birdsong with delight, and being less intellectualized, is also what we treat as sacred. Bringing awareness into the here-and-now may be the ultimate goal of ritual action, so that the person can consciously perform its actions of

change. Sacralising would be a way of dealing with reality without denying its greatness, being affected by it in the here and now.

"The aware person is alive because he knows what he feels, where he is and the moment he lives." (Berne, 1977, p.157). The ritualistic format provides an experience beyond dialogue and reason. It enables the intense experience of the present through sensations, through the symbolic, the dramatizations, the poetic image. By enabling the establishment of the sacred, this "affirms itself as the experience of reality and the origin of the consciousness of existing in the world" (Bateson, 1993, p.34). The purpose of living a ritualistic moment is to choose to leave a profane moment and bring awareness of its importance.

The ability of spontaneity means, for Berne, choice, freedom to choose and express existing feelings. Bell (1992) promotes the idea that often the work practiced through ritualization is mistakenly understood by the notion of control. Social ritualization is not a matter of transmitting shared beliefs, instilling the dominant ideology as an internal subjectivity, or even giving participants the concepts to think about a particular construction. The interaction of power relationships effected by ritualization defines, empowers, and constrains. Ritualized practices, by necessity, require the external consent of the participants. They do not function as an instrument or symbols of control. Ritualization, like any form of social control, even if indirectly defined, will only be effective when control can afford to be a bit loose. Ritualization will not function as social control if it is perceived as not amenable to some degree of individual appropriation. If practices deny all forms of individual choice, or all forms of resistance, they would take a different form of ritualization.

For Berne the capacity for intimacy is a frank Child-to-Child relationship with no mutual exploration psychological game. It is established by the Adult ego states of the parties involved, so that they understand their contracts and reciprocal commitments very well, sometimes without uttering a single word on the subject. As this understanding becomes clearer, the Adult gradually leaves the stage, and if the Parent does not interfere, the Child becomes more and more relaxed and free. Intimate transactions happen between two Child ego states. The Adult remains in the background as an observer to ensure the maintenance of commitments and limitations. The Adult also has the task of keeping the Parent away so that this ego state does not interfere with or spoil the situation. In fact, the suitability for intimacy depends on the Adult and Child ego states' abilities to keep the Parent at bay if necessary, and it is even better if the benevolent Parent gives permission or, better still, encourages the relationship. "In an intimate

relationship, each party returns to the original naïve Child ego state ... can see, hear and taste in its purest form what the world has to offer" (Berne, 1976a, p.104 - in English Berne, 1973, p. 128).

The community in ritualistic action is focused on the purpose and experience that consummates the rite. It serves as a witness. To witness is to really look at the other person. "... any two people who really look at each other, and rarely see each other, and talk straight to each other, always (as far as these and similar 'encounters' go [the intimacy experiment] end up liking each other." (Berne, 1976a, p.166 – in English Berne, 1973, p.129). Elsewhere Berne (1976b) writes: "Pastimes and games are substitutes for the real living of real intimacy. Because of these they may be regarded as preliminary engagements rather than as unions, which is why they are characterised as poignant forms of play. Intimacy begins when individual (usually instinctual) programming becomes more intense, and both social patterning and ulterior restrictions and motives begin to give way. It is the only completely satisfying answer to stimulus-hunger, recognition-hunger and structure-hunger. Its prototype is the act of loving impregnation." (p.22 – in English Berne, 1968, p.17).

In intimacy, when preparing and executing a ritualistic ceremony for the purpose of consecrating a moment, the whole collective is witness to this opportunity. The speeches, the actions, the context, everything is full of meaning.

When we experience a celebration in a ritualistic way we are contracting with the collective and the person involved that the ground will be constructed starting from their preparation with respect and witnesses - who truly look at the person who goes through the rite - bringing through the ritual the permission and paternal benevolence, so that the person is in a naïve state, capable of feeling and witnessing, seeing, hearing, savouring the rite as one who crosses a fertile ground that is gradually fertilized with love for all individuals who recognize and legitimize passage, which happens at the same time as it is experienced.

Final Understanding

This paper proposes the rethinking of two important terms based on the proposed objective of re-signification of the concept of ritual in TA and bringing the understanding that ritualization can be understood not as submission to the patterns programmed by tradition and social customs, but as the enabling action of an environment that stimulates the development of autonomy. Referring to the term ritualism, (Terrin, 2004), we can see rituals with little meaning, not a priori but by the absence of the action of ritualization, (Bell, 1992) where the meaning is experienced deeply. Ritual may have turned into ritualism, but it can be

redeemed in its original sense and intention. For example, in a rite of passage ceremony, we can introject it as if swallowing without chewing, and therefore incorporate external patterns, as for example a generalization such as – "That's how it is, as soon as I've learned, so it will be." We can project, for example – "It's time to be a mother. It's what they expect of me" - and live through a celebration without taking responsibility for change. We can deflect, treating the moment in a dispersive and superficial way, without realizing the true meaning of the moment, discounting the emotions and the abundance of the encounter, substituting for tiresome speeches. We can come together, seeking relevance and belonging and the necessary individuation from the experience but without the proper sense of ritual or internalization of the process.

We can, however, seek the meaning of rituals and transform a moment of passage into a ritualistic act. The ritual experience facilitates the contact with what needs to be lived, since the whole collective gets involved and prepares to welcome. By passing unconsciously as something repetitive, the function of the collective and the individual purpose present in the rite are discounted. We can thus think that the ceremony can lead to consecration or not, depending on how it is experienced. When ritualization occurs, formalizing a rite brings the invitation to live the moment from the Adult (choice and purpose) and with the engagement of the Child. A ritual transforms a ceremony, a celebration into something sacred, significant, and by giving space to symbolism, creates the space necessary for the Adult to recognize choice and, through the identification of purpose, to bring awareness to the realization of it. The ritual's process is experienced as a call to the Adult to experience, in the here-and-now, the necessary transformation. In this sense, ritual, as well as ceremonial, is also psychic, legitimates a consecration, a remembrance of what is experienced, and a collective and individual provision of change. Rituals can facilitate collective organization between the person, the family and the community, and between the past, the present, and the future.

The ritual consecrates because it aims to make sacred the moment and its meaning through a series of ritual actions with symbolic purposes and gestures, experienced by those who pass through the rite and by the community that witnesses and participates in the consecration. Through the act of consecrating, it legitimates itself, because by making it sacred, legitimacy happens. The promotion of autonomy is made a part of the ceremony. The community conducts the person to experience what must be experienced in a conscious way, so the ritual can be a moment of deep intimacy that is shared with others,

who witness this moment of change and collaborate to make it happen. The ritual experienced as such provides autonomy, and through it change is possible, for it is lived with awareness, spontaneity and intimacy.

From this reflection, the understanding of ritual differs from ritualism; it is not understood only as submission to patterns programmed by tradition and social customs, but also as providing an environment that stimulates the development of autonomy when experienced in a symbolic way through a genuinely ritualistic process.

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