

IX. SYMBOLS, RITUALS, AND MYTHS AND THE SENSE OF THE SACRED

So far in the course, we have dealt primarily with religion as a set of beliefs. But religion is more. It is also made up of symbols, rituals and myths that give expression to these beliefs, and institutions that perpetuate them. Moreover, to study a religion, we must begin with these visible forms for we cannot learn about beliefs apart from the concrete expressions of them. For the remainder of the course we will deal with these concrete expressions of religion.

1. The Relationship between Religious Beliefs and Behavior

One critical question in the study of religion is what is the relationship between beliefs and behavior? The answer is not easy to determine. Despite years of analysis, there are still fundamental disagreements on the issue. Several fundamental answers have been offered.

1.1. **Belief - > Behavior:**

Most Christian preaching, teaching and instruction is based on this assumption. This view proves that knowledge is not equal to action. Studies show that correlations between belief and behavior are often very low. But this may be because we are testing explicit or stated beliefs. If we take into account unconscious beliefs and ideology, the correlation may be much higher. But then again we can get at these unconscious beliefs only by looking for conceptual patterns that seem to lie behind behavior and the argument becomes circular. Some define belief as that upon which we act. Given this definition, the above relationship hold. Max Weber was the chief advocate of this view (see figures IX-1.1a and IX-1.1b).

1.2. **Behavior - > Belief:**

This is the basis of some schools of psychology and science such as behaviorism, behavior modification and (psychological) determinism. It is the view of Marxist thought. We may illustrate the argument by saying attend church and you will tend to become devout and religious. When you stop going to church your faith will become weak. According to this view beliefs are often rationalizations of behavior.

1.3. **Beliefs \neq Behavior (disjunctive)**

This view holds that beliefs and behavior do not significantly influence one another. Many sociopsychological studies show little correlation between beliefs and behavior.

1.4. **Beliefs \longleftrightarrow Behavior:**

This is a dialectical or reciprocal model. Beliefs give rise to behavior, but behavior reinforces and creates beliefs.

1.5. **Beliefs = Behavior:**

According to Mary Douglas, in many tribal societies beliefs and behavior are not differentiated. The form is the meaning in the symbol. One does not say "I go to church in order to worship," but "In going to church I am worshipping." In the West belief is sustained by books, conferences, classes, sermons, etc. In many other societies it is sustained by ritual and the activity of enacting the belief(s).

FASTING AND ITS FUNCTIONS

1. Functions of Fasting

- 1.1 Penitence: to please the deity or to atone for the violation of divine commandments. Priests in ancient Mexico called for national fasts to seek forgiveness from the deities. Similarly Ahab repented with fasting in I Kings 21:27-19, and the law called for a fast on the Day of Atonement. See also Ezra 10:6ff.
- 1.2 Devotion: to practice poverty, chastity and obedience for the avowed purpose of love for the deity and for service to other human beings.
- 1.3 Magic: to generate powers for use in personal gain or destruction of others in acts of revenge. In Java rain doctors fast to prevent rain on the fields. Zuni rain priests fasted to produce rain.
- 1.4 Mourning: to express sorrow. For example, in China it was customary to observe nocturnal fasting during times of mourning to protect the living from demonic attack. See also I Samuel 31:13 and I Chronicles 10:13, and II Samuel 12:21. Ancient Greeks believed that while the souls of the dead were near, they could infect the living through eating and drinking.
- 1.5 Taboo: to protect a person from powers and spirits. For example a Koita (New Guinea) pregnant woman may not eat certain fish or iguana. In New Britain pregnant women do not eat cuddle fish which are believed to walk backwards - lest the child become a coward. Not all food taboos are complete fasting.
- 1.6 Purification: to purify a person for entry into religious or dangerous activities. Sioux men fasted 24 hours before going into a sweat house for religious rites. Sorcerers and shamen often fast before performing rites.
- 1.7 Initiation: to prepare for initiation rites. Rites of transformation from infancy to manhood are attended with excruciating ordeals, including scourgings, fastings, the knocking out of teeth, scarification, finger sacrifices, the removal of a testicle, cicatrization, circumcision, subincision, bitings, and burnings. During the initiation rite of the Caribou Eskimo shaman, he was not allowed to eat or drink for five days. Then he was given lukewarm water and had to fast for fifteen days without food. Then his instructor returned to fetch him home.
- 1.8 Precipitation: to precipitate visions. Fasting is commonly used to induce dreams, visions, revelations and to receive communications from supernatural beings or higher powers. American Indians of the plains used it to bring visions in which they gained their guardian spirits. Greek oracles fasted a day and night before receiving the oracle. See also I Kings 19:8, and I Sam. 28:20. Also Ex. 34:28; Deut. 9:9; Judges 20:26-28; Daniel 9:3; 10:2-4; Luke 2:37; Acts 13:2; and Acts 14:23.

- 1.9 Social Coercion: to pressure another to doing one's will. Gandhi used fasts to coerce Indians to listen to him. In Ireland the poor fasted at another's door to get them to yield.

2. Fasting in Various Religions

- 2.1 "In Hinduism we can see the greatest ascetical development of fasting. Gandhi states it this way: 'Fasting is a great institution in Hinduism, as perhaps in no other religion, and though it has been abused by people not entitled to fast, it has, on the whole, done the greatest good in Hinduism. I believe there is no prayer without fasting, and there is no real fast without prayer.' . . . A yogi fasts not only from food but also from air in his long-protracted breathing exercises, and from bodily movement in the postures of **hartha yoga**. With an ascetical rigor unmatched anywhere else Hinduism has explored every kind of fasting as a strategy for raising one's consciousness to union with God." (Pierce Johnson, **Religion in Life** 44:332)

- 2.2 "For the majority of Muslims ... the five prayer periods organize the day, while the month of Ramadan organizes the year. For the week there is the Friday holiday with special obligations to attend services in the mosque." (Carmody, Denise and John Carmody, **Religion, The Great Questions**. N.Y.: Seabury, 1983. p. 114).

In Islam the word for fasting is **saum** which denotes a total abstinence from food, liquid and sexual relationships from dawn to sunset. The purpose of Ramadan is to learn a moral discipline in which a person is taught 'the highest moral lessons of his life - the lesson that he should be prepared to suffer the greatest privation and undergo the hardest trial rather than indulge in that which is not permitted to him' (Maulana Muhammed Ali). It also puts rich and poor on the same level and gives the body a rest from digestion. In addition to Ramadan, Muslims are called to voluntary fasts: Muhammed recognized three fast days a month; two months of fasting when a husband divorces his wife (zihar); two months of fasting if Ramadan is intentionally broken; and two months when a Muslim unintentionally kills another Muslim.

- 2.3 "Jainism is a religion of austerities. Its goal - passionless detachment, is reached only through the most severe and disciplined of life-styles, culminating ideally in death by voluntary starvation. And the aim is to achieve it solely by self-effort, without the help of God or gods." (R. P. Beaver, 1982:216).

FASTING AND ITS FUNCTIONS

1. Functions of Fasting

- 1.1 Penitence: to please the deity or to atone for the violation of divine commandments. Priests in ancient Mexico called for national fasts to seek forgiveness from the deities. Similarly Ahab repented with fasting in I Kings 21:27-19, and the law called for a fast on the Day of Atonement. See also Ezra 10:6ff.
- 1.2 Devotion: to practice poverty, chastity and obedience for the avowed purpose of love for the deity and for service to other human beings.
- 1.3 Magic: to generate powers for use in personal gain or destruction of others in acts of revenge. In Java rain doctors fast to prevent rain on the fields. Zuni rain priests fasted to produce rain.
- 1.4 Mourning: to express sorrow. For example, in China it was customary to observe nocturnal fasting during times of mourning to protect the living from demonic attack. See also I Samuel 31:13 and I Chronicles 10:13, and II Samuel 12:21. Ancient Greeks believed that while the souls of the dead were near, they could infect the living through eating and drinking.
- 1.5 Taboo: to protect a person from powers and spirits. For example a Koita (New Guinea) pregnant woman may not eat certain fish or iguana. In New Britain pregnant women do not eat cuddle fish which are believed to walk backwards - lest the child become a coward. Not all food taboos are complete fasting.
- 1.6 Purification: to purify a person for entry into religious or dangerous activities. Sioux men fasted 24 hours before going into a sweat house for religious rites. Sorcerers and shamen often fast before performing rites.
- 1.7 Initiation: to prepare for initiation rites. Rites of transformation from infancy to manhood are attended with excruciating ordeals, including scourgings, fastings, the knocking out of teeth, scarification, finger sacrifices, the removal of a testicle, cicatrization, circumcision, subincision, bitings, and burnings. During the initiation rite of the Caribou Eskimo shaman, he was not allowed to eat or drink for five days. Then he was given lukewarm water and had to fast for fifteen days without food. Then his instructor returned to fetch him home.
- 1.8 Precipitation: to precipitate visions. Fasting is commonly used to induce drams, visions, revelations and to receive communications from supernatural beings or higher powers. American Indians of the plains used it to bring visions in which they gained their guardian spirits. Greek oracles fasted a day and night before receiving the oracle. See also I Kings 19:8, and I Sam. 28:20.

Also Ex. 34:28; Deut. 9:9; Judges 20:26-28; Daniel 9:3; 10:2-4; Luke 2:37; Acts 13:2; and Acts 14:23.

- 1.9 Social Coercion: to pressure another to doing one's will. Gandhi used fasts to coerce Indians to listen to him. In Ireland the poor fasted at another's door to get them to yield.

2. Fasting in Various Religions

2.1 "In Hinduism we can see the greatest ascetical development of fasting. Gandhi states it this way: 'Fasting is a great institution in Hinduism, as perhaps in no other religion, and though it has been abused by people not entitled to fast, it has, on the whole, done the greatest good in Hinduism. I believe there is no prayer without fasting, and there is no real fast without prayer.' . . . A yogi fasts not only from food but also from air in his long-protracted breathing exercises, and from bodily movement in the postures of **hartha yoga**. With an ascetical rigor unmatched anywhere else Hinduism has explored every kind of fasting as a strategy for raising one's consciousness to union with God." (Pierce Johnson, **Religion in Life** 44:332)

2.2 "For the majority of Muslims ... the five prayer periods organize the day, while the month of Ramadan organizes the year. For the week there is the Friday holiday with special obligations to attend services in the mosque." (Carmody, Denise and John Carmody, **Religion, The Great Questions**. N.Y.: Seabury, 1983. p. 114).

In Islam the word for fasting is **saum** which denotes a total abstinence from food, liquid and sexual relationships from dawn to sunset. The purpose of Ramadan is to learn a moral discipline in which a person is taught 'the highest moral lessons of his life - the lesson that he should be prepared to suffer the greatest privation and undergo the hardest trial rather than indulge in that which is not permitted to him' (Maulana Muhammed Ali). It also puts rich and poor on the same level and gives the body a rest from digestion. In addition to Ramadan, Muslims are called to voluntary fasts: Muhammed recognized three fast days a month; two months of fasting when a husband divorces his wife (zihar); two months of fasting if Ramadan is intentionally broken; and two months when a Muslim unintentionally kills another Muslim.

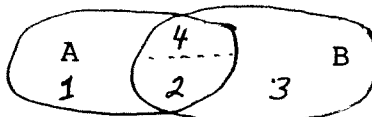
2.3 "Jainism is a religion of austerities. Its goal - passionless detachment, is reached only through the most severe and disciplined of life-styles, culminating ideally in death by voluntary starvation. And the aim is to achieve it solely by self-effort, without the help of God or gods." (R. P. Beaver, 1982:216).

Humans are model builders, trying to explain diversity and complexity of observable phenomena in terms of underlying principles of unity, simplicity and regularity.

Rituals are models based on analogies. Science uses natural analogies. Rituals use organic analogies in many cases. Science uses analogies for explanation. Religion adds to this communion. Both use analogies to help manipulate and change reality.

Analogies are based on similarities. For example, don't ask the color of God's hair.

ANALOGY: A TO B



- areas of meaning:
- (1) belongs to A but not B.
 - (2) common to both (known).
 - (3) belongs to B but not A.
 - (4) unknown area to be explored - is it analogous?

3.4 Types of Rituals

Rituals can be grouped into those in which the individual is the primary focus (although all rituals involved segments or the whole of society) and those in which a group or the society is the primary focus.

Rituals can also be classified as 1) rites of intensification, 2) rites of transformation, and 3) rites of crisis.

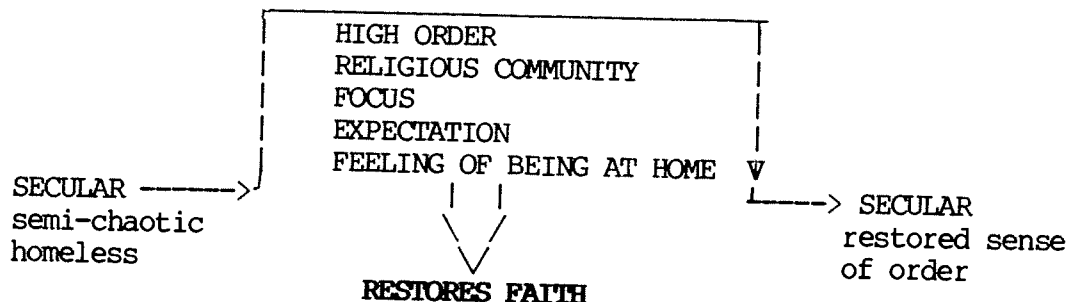
Another division is cyclical rites (happen regularly and their occurrence can be predicted), and noncyclical rites (that happen on special occasions and their occurrence cannot be predicted).

	INDIVIDUAL	GROUP
RITES OF INTENSIFICATION (cyclical)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - birthdays - anniversaries - feeding ancestors (daily, yearly) - etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - festivals - weekly and lunar rites - national holidays - etc.
RITES OF TRANSITION (cyclical in another sense)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - life cycle rites - pilgrimages - conversion - revivals - etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - life cycle of the gods - new year and fertility rites - age grade rites - etc.
RITES OF CRISIS (noncyclical)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - healing - to get success - guidance - etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - end drought - to succeed in war - choose a ruler - etc.

3.41 Rites of Intensification (generally cyclical)

Rites of intensification restore order to a world that is degenerating into chaos and meaninglessness. They do so by providing the worshipper with a high sense of order and purpose in the ritual.

REINFORCES A SENSE OF THE SACRED



- High order. Intensification rites are characterized by a high degree of order and predictability. These may be bulletins or programs, repetition of such things as the Lord's Prayer, songs from printed pages, chants, etc. All are expected and in order. The sense of the sacred is achieved by "bracketing" events. This includes such things as singing the words, praying them, kneeling or bowing when saying them, chanting them or repeating them. Repetition here adds to the meaning of the prayer (such as the Lord's Prayer) or the song because it is a form of bracketing. Other forms of bracketing include wearing special clothing, using special times or places, and postures.
- Religious community. Intensification rites are characterized by a clearly defined social order in which hierarchy and roles are often marked by special clothing, titles, and other social symbols. This serves to intensify and re-inforce the existing social and power structures.
- Focus. Worshippers are expected to leave behind all other concerns and focus on the worship. This intensifies the reinforcement of the beliefs.
- Expectation. People come expecting to reaffirm their beliefs and sense of community.
- Feeling of being at home. There is a feeling of familiarity in intensification rites, a feeling that a person is in an ordered and understood world.
- Order and meaning. Intensification rites can restore a deep sense of order, meaning, purpose, and a feeling at-homeness in the worshipper.

3.42 Rites of transformation (often non-cyclical in character though they may be predictable, such as the life cycle rites of birth-initiation-marriage-death).

Rites of transformation change people from one state to another, or mark some transformation in their belief, status or being. Conversion, for example, changes a person's being. Marriage changes one's status. Transformation rites are characterized by a high degree of freedom, creativity, and newness. Consequently the old order often has to be broken down and a state of anti-order or seeming chaos induced.

INSERT:
THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

160

SACRED: The Ideal State

- high order
- ultimate meaning
- deepest emotions
- fundamental values
- purity

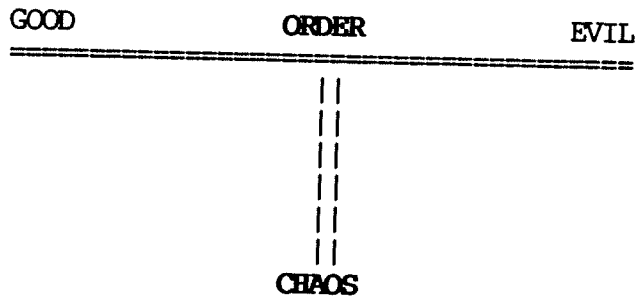
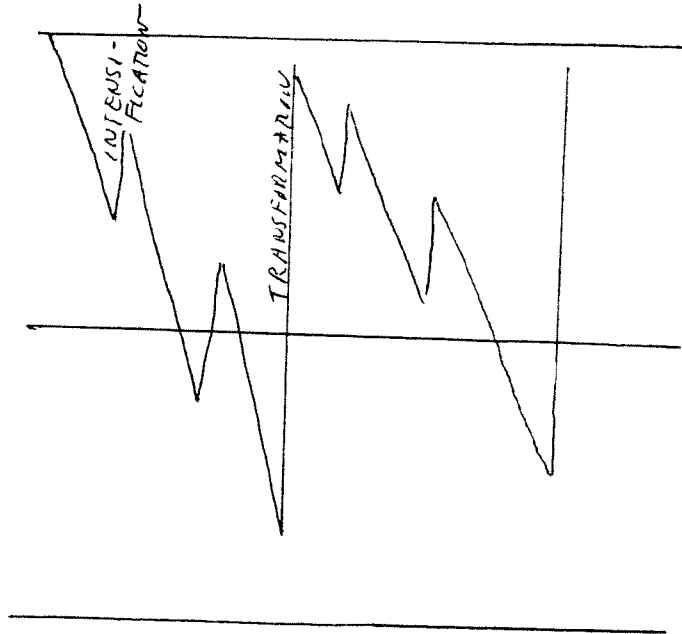
SECULAR: The Normal State

- growing disorder
- loss of meaning
- temporary thrills
- pragmatic norms
- tarnished

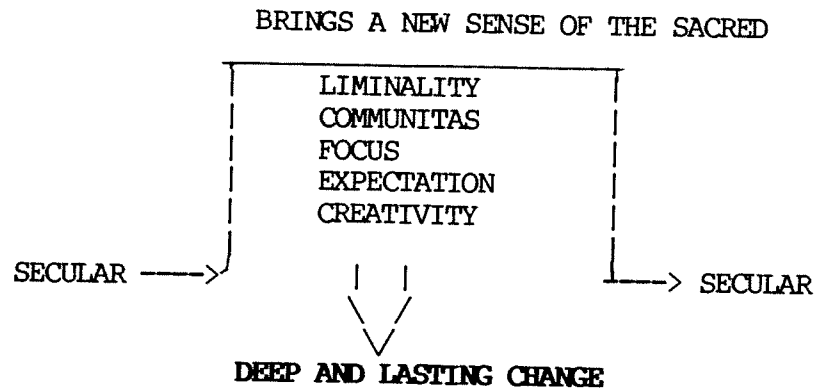
PROFANE: The Evil State

- misused order
- reversed meaning
- counter emotions
- evil values
- polluted

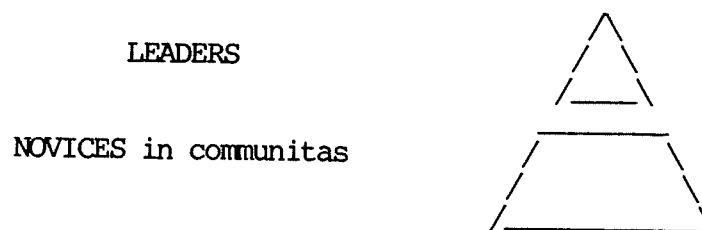
- * 1. Rites of Renewal
- 2. Major Rites of Renewal
- 3. Rites of Transformation



Using an analogy, rites of intensification are like cleaning the house and restoring order and cleanliness. Rites of transformation are like remodeling the house. Before a new order can be created, the old order must be torn apart. In between there is a period of chaos or liminality during which there is nostalgia for the old order, and anticipation of the new order.



- Liminality: a feeling of being rootless, timeless, in space, outside of space, and in limbo. One senses no firm categories. All the normal reference points that give order and meaning to life are gone.
- Highly focused and open to suggestibility. People come expecting to change and looking for it. They are particularly susceptible to symbols and symbolic change.
- Asking ultimate questions. Ordinary life is left behind, and the person is focused on the ultimate. Symbols in this setting are particularly important, for they express the ultimate.
- Communitas. Novices are all equal and have a tremendous sense of fellowship. They are classless and have no roles. Ordinary social differences are lost in the common search. Leaders at the pilgrim site, however, are in community. This is their ordinary life. Consequently there is a two-tiered social order.



- Symbols are highly condensed and multivocal. The rite even may combine opposites into the same symbols, e.g. death and life symbolized by baptism or by isolation in the forest.
- High degree of inner change. Profound and deep level change can take place in the pilgrimage because of the above factors that combine to make the ritual intense and ordering.
- Identity formation. Transformation rites play an important role in creating identity of the person as one who identifies with the group. Examples of this are professional meetings such as those of anthropologists, or of denominations where identity with the denomination takes place by attending a conference.

- Other examples include:

ashrams (in India)	festivals	pilgrimages
camp meetings	retreats	religious fairs
conferences	conventions	evangelistic mtgs.
revival meetings	life cycle rites (rites of passage)	

3.43 Crisis Rites

These are rituals used to prevent or deal with crises such as illness, drought, fire, earthquakes, bad luck, failure in love, evil spirits, curses, witchcraft and sorcery, and the like. They are performed as needed and are not part of some overall order and regularity.

3.5 Rites of Passage or Life Cycle Rites

Van Gennep pointed out that life cycle rites mark transitions between different statuses and roles, changes in membership. These changes are formalized so the individual and everyone else knows about them. Religion is not the fundamental factor, for important events may evoke ritualized action, whether secular or sacred. Rites of passage ease the transitions they mark. For example, adolescence is possibly due to lack of clarity in transition to adulthood. These rites are themselves marked by three stages: (1) separation, or death to the old way of life ("give away the bride"), (2) transition, or adjustment under certain restrictions ("honeymoon"), and (3) re-intergration, a return to normal conditions ("housewarming").

3.51 Birth.

- Pre-birth rites. Often taboos on food or activities. In Japan the mother shouldn't eat shrimp, lest the child be hunchbacked, octopus lest it be boneless, or malformed vegetables lest it be malformed.
- Birth rites. Often use magic ceremonies and isolation. Magic is used to make the delivery easy.
- Post-birth pollution. Japan thirty-three days. India twenty-one or forty-one. No cooking, drawing water, etc. is done.
- Purification rites. In Japan, they sprinkle salt on the mother so she is cleansed and then she lights her first fire. In India, the mother bathes, then new clothes and powders make her pure and drawing water restores her to normal life.
- Naming. Often last, because some people view the first days of life as a shadow or phantom and fear they may leave. So they wait until they are sure the life stays. Then they give it a name and it becomes a personality. A name equals personality and social entity. Sometimes the child is given a negative name to keep spirits away from it, e.g. "cowdung" for a male child, for whatever boys think, spirits don't like girls.
- Couvade. Father takes part in ceremonies. Does this signify identification with the father or is it a magical ruse to protect the mother?
- Sociological father. It is clear who the mother is, but not always the father. So a ceremony may be used to give social identification to the father. For example, among the Todas, who practice polyandry, the first husband can claim the child by putting a small bow and arrow in a nearby tree. If he does not, the second husband can claim the child. Etc.