

Daily Meditation 6-8-26

Recovering Creation, Gratitude and Ritual

Good morning.

For several daily meditations now, GG and myself have been discussing ritual. I alluded in an earlier daily meditation last week, to a wonderful work by British scientist Rupert Sheldrake in his book *Science and Spiritual Practices*. And one of the chapters there, chapter five, is entitled “Rituals and the Presents of the Past.” I’d like to share with you some of the high points of this important chapter in today’s video. He says,

All human societies have rituals, including religious rituals and sacraments, national rituals, seasonal festivals, rites of passage and initiation, like the rituals surrounding birth, marriage, and death. These are generally community-based, and follow a traditional formal pattern. Rituals imply a kind of continuity, a memory transmitted from past generations to the present generation through the practice of ritual.

And he talks about myths as stories of origins, and how these are often ritualized, especially among indigenous peoples, and what the Aboriginal people call Dream Time, which is still about being enacted in the present. The Dream Time is of the past creation, but it’s of present creation too, or what I would call ongoing creation, or continuous creation.

He has a section on “Rituals of Remembrance,” and among the rituals of remembrance he emphasizes, is the Jewish feast day of Passover, recalling the original Passover dinner on the night before the Jews began their journey out of bondage from Egypt, from the wilderness to the Promised Land. And he talks about how the Christian Mass, the Eucharist, connects participates with the original Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples, along with a Passover dinner. So the Christian tradition picks up on the Passover tradition.

And he talks about what he calls morphic resonance, which is a way of understanding the past. Because morphic resonance for him is a kind of memory that is embedded in nature itself. He says,

Ritual activities are related to deep-seated ideas about how minds and nature work. They make much more sense if nature, societies, and minds contain a kind of memory. They admit they make less sense if they do not. He says we’re used to talking about nature’s

laws as fixed, but in fact he proposes that because our cosmology is now radically evolutionary, we speak less in terms of eternal laws and more in terms of what he calls habits.

It's a less anthropomorphic metaphor. The so-called laws of nature may be more like habits. Memory may be inherent in nature, stars, atoms, molecules, crystals, and living organisms. They behave as they do because their predecessors behaved that way before. Each biological species may have a collective memory on which each individual draws, and to which it contributes. Instincts may be like habits of the species. A young orb web spider may know how to spin its web without being taught, because it has inherited the memory of web-spinning from countless previous spiders.

And he says, My own hypothesis is that nature's habit-memory works through a process I call morphic resonance, which involves the influence of like upon like across space and time. The more repetition, the deeper the grooves of habit. When habits are very deep-seated, like the behavior of hydrogen atoms or nitrogen molecules, they look as if they are changeless, as if they are governed by eternal laws. It's impossible to tell the difference between eternal laws and long-established habits. By contrast, if habits build up in nature, the substance may be very hard to crystallize for the first time. Eventually there is a cumulative memory that will lead to crystallization following a deep groove of habit.

And he points out how in behavioral patterns, laboratory rats, for example, find it easier to learn what other rats have already learned. There's scientific evidence for this. In morphic resonance, rituals bring the past into the present. The greater the similarity between the present ritual and the past, the stronger the resonant connection. So there is a repetition often, in ritual.

So I think with his thesis on morphic resonance, that Rupert Sheldrake has provided a very important dimension to rituals: why repetition carries a lot of energy and strength with it, and how a ritual is not just looking to the past, it's preparing for the future. And of course it does evolve, because evolution is evolving, everything is evolving in evolution. And so for me, there is a delicate art, if you will, of bringing past ritual into the present, not in a frozen way, as if the habits are eternal laws, but bringing the essence of it forward.

One example I give is 12th-century stained glass. It was a revolution in architecture, the Gothic revolution of the 12th century, moving out of the defensive, thick-walled, small-windowed Romanesque architecture, into the open, lofty, high, full of sunlight and color, revolution of the Gothic architecture in the 12th century, which engineers made possible

by flying buttresses that opened the space, not only to light and more air, but to color. And the stained glass revolution of the 12th century brought about a whole new experience of worship into Western ritual, ceremony, liturgy.

So today, I think with our postmodern language, electronic media, and so forth, with DJs and VJs and Rap, we can bring the body back, which is an ancient way to pray, the way in which our oldest ancestors prayed. We could bring it all back, keeping the essence of the Mass, which actually is the Four Paths of Joy and Gratitude, of Silence and Grief, of Creativity, and of the Via Transformativa of the prophetic energy and dimension. All of those were central to the Mass in its full expression over the centuries, in that particular expression was put forward.

So, just as it was a revolution of stained glass in the 12th century, so in our time, what we call the Cosmic Mass, which brings in these new postmodern art forms and pre-modern prayer of dancing, bringing our bodies to prayer, communal prayer. All this is an exciting step forward in terms of renewing, what for many has become a very dull thing: reading prayers from a book over a page and sitting in a pew daring the preacher to keep you awake. There are other ways to pray within this context of the Mass. And in our Cosmic Masses, I think that we have brought that forward.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.