

Rites of Passage for Global Citizens

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グローバル人材のための通過儀礼

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This paper is based on a presentation given in late October for The Japan Association for Global Competency Education 5th annual conference. Prior to the offer to present at the event, the author had been contemplating the idea of how rites of passage done properly could be used to create positive change. Thus, it would appear synchronicity was giving the perfect opportunity to explore rites of passage for global citizens. This paper is an overview of the presentation with some additional depth into the research conducted for the presentation. It should be seen as the initial stage of research into rites of passage.

Before unpacking the meaning of a rite of passage it is necessary to unpack the underlying beliefs that led to this author's desire to explore rites of passage. Rites of passage are based on mythology. Joseph Campbell points out a rite is made up of ritual and imagery, and that "a ritual is an organization of mythological symbols; and by participating in the drama of the rite one is brought directly in touch with these" (Walter, 2011, loc. 1892). So, rites are long-held tradition passed down to us through mythology trying to communicate something to those taking part the rite through symbols. On the most basic level, symbols serve as metaphors. The reason people choose to use metaphor is the depth that can be expressed in few words. For example, when Shakespeare wrote "Juliet is the *sun*," we can see Juliet's beauty. It was not necessary for Romeo to say just how beautiful she is or that she has become the center of his universe, or that by flying too close to her, he is risking his own life. All those meaning, as well as others can be interpreted. The reader, or watcher of the play, is left to infer what the metaphor means. And, back to the mythological symbol found in rites—they are even more powerful metaphors meant to communicate something even deeper, transcending language. Unfortunately, people take the metaphors of

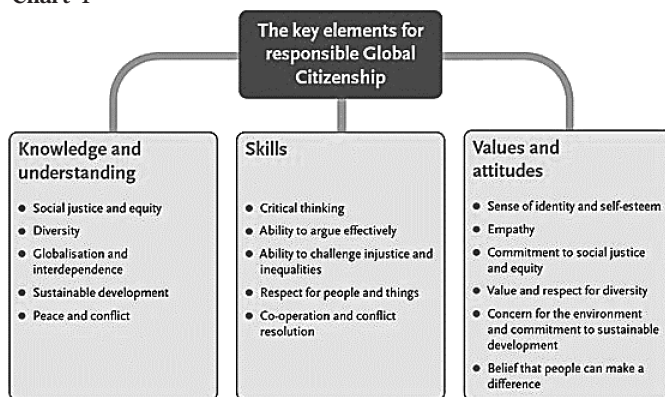
mythology (read religion) and either try to prove them as truths or lies. They are neither true nor false and they cannot be explained in either way. They need to be experienced through rites. "The value of an effective rite is that it leaves everyone to his own thoughts" (Walter, 2011, loc. 1892) Thus, the author believes there is power to be found in rites, and if reinstated into contemporary society, they may help us overcome the differences that are being sown through misunderstanding. If used right, rites may allow people to transcend our differences. To those who would say people would never buy into something they cannot define, or don't believe in, the author would have them think about how many superstitions people cling to without questions. In a small informal survey taken during the presentation (a more rigorous survey to be conducted in future), around 90% of the subjects surveyed (the audience of 25) had in their possession an Omamori charm, despite the fact less than 5% believed in them. This desire to believe could be put to better use. Rites of passage may be such a use.

Before proceeding, readers need to expand their notions of a rite. The concept, rite of passage conjures up images of land diving by young men on the Pentecost Island, Vanuatu, or of Aboriginal ceremonial circumcisions. But, these are a narrow form of rite, specifically rites of puberty, and only in isolated tribes. In the book *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth* by Mircea Eliade, it is made clear that different Aboriginal tribes have different versions of puberty rites—some lasting months, some only weeks; some violent, some not more than a series of lectures. "Their function is to reveal the deep meaning of existence to the new generations and help them assume the responsibility of being truly human and hence of participating in culture" (1984, loc. 4046). Moreover, other than just rites of puberty, there are many more rites of passage to be had in a lifetime. Geppen points out, "the life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another" (2019, p. 3). For example, we can think of entering a new school, or graduating from one, or taking on new occupation, or marrying as rites of passage. The one consistent theme in all these instances are that before the ritual of the school ceremony, new job orientation or wedding, the main actors enter as one type of person and leave as another. They were high school students, now they are university students; they were university students, now they are graduates; they were unemployed, now they are employed; they were single, now they are married. Even a funeral could be considered a rite of passage as Geppen points out. However, cultural patterns for funerals differ "since they depend on local beliefs concerning man's fate after death." Accordingly, they "may consist primarily of defensive procedures against

the soul of the deceased and rules of prophylaxis against the contagion of death" (2019, p. 193). But, often in earlier funeral rites the deceased is not beyond consideration since he "must make a voyage, his survivors are careful to equip him with all the necessary material objects...which will ensure him a safe journey or crossing" (2019, p. 153). The ceremonies modern man take part in are residuals of the rites. Unfortunately, they are much too watered down in modern society—people do not feel the proper weight of the rites. Therefore, they are not transformed as they should be. Grof refers to such modern pseudo rites as substitutes. "These substitutes are often either superficial, not particularly significant or transformative" (1998, p. 9). Rites should be modes of transformation. The period of transition is what is known as a liminal period. In the introduction to Gennep's seminal title *The Rites of Passage*, Kertzer is most concise when he explains the three stages of a rite as "separation from the old role, a liminal period between roles, and then the assumption of the new role" (2019, p. 1). It is when initiates of a rite are in the liminal period that they are transformed into the new role. Once transformed by way of a rite, they have different roles to perform. They cannot act as we were before the rite. They are expected to be responsible adults in the case of puberty rites. They are expected to be true to spouses in the case of a wedding. However, young adults and adults these days are still acting as children, as in the case of Halloween revelers who caused trouble in Shibuya in 2018 when police arrested 13 "men ranging from their teens to their 40s" (thejapantimes, 2018, par. 5). Divorce rates remain around 40 percent across the world. (Myriad factors make overall-world figures difficult to pinpoint.) So, the short liminal ceremonial wedding is not fulfilling its function. For those who would cite data that current divorce figures are actually on the decrease, the author would say this may be due to a long liminal period before marriage, i.e. living together. Romei points out that "in 2019, almost nine in 10 couples were cohabiting before marriage" (2019, par. 4). Thus they are creating their own ritual because of the lack of a suitable ritual available in modern society. Another problem in Japan is the well-known phenomena of the socially withdrawn (引きこもり), which reached 541 thousand in 2019 among 15 to 39 year olds. (日本経済新聞, 2016). On the other side of the Pacific, Americans are struggling with the opioid crisis and mass shootings. The author thinks these issues could be because people do not understand their new roles. Therefore, they act in antisocial, and often dangerous ways. Somé writes that the Dagara people of West Africa see the "disappearance of ritual" as causing "the general alienation of people from themselves and each other" and "frightening violence" (1998, pp. 19–20). If everyone realized the

necessity of rites in this way, then they would be more accepting to the change promised by effective rites. These changes could extend beyond just the participants, out to the community, and even onto a global scale.

Chart 1

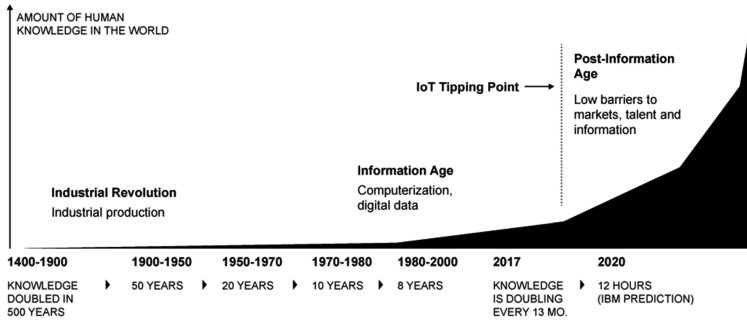


(Sinay & Ryan, 2016)

This led to the next section of the presentation to evaluate standards to measure global citizenship. Anywhere you look online there is an infographic like Chart 1 above. So, we are shown that to find if a person can be considered a global citizen, all one need do is ASK if they have the appropriate Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge. The problem is, everyone is coming up with their own list of global competencies, beyond those found in Chart 1, in an attempt to create the ideal definition of a global citizen. And, the lists keep getting longer, and they vary based on different societies. And, even globally recognized names such as Jeff Bezos, Amazon founder, would not be able to fulfill all the requirements that are stacking up. So, the quest remains, what do the next generation of global citizens need to know. The author feels the knowledge we hope to impart will be obsolete between the time a student enters university and graduates four years later. This is because of the concept created by Buckminster Fuller—the knowledge doubling curve, which states that the amount of time it takes knowledge to double is shrinking incrementally. Thus, pre 1900, it took about 500 years for the amount of knowledge available to humans to double, but with the coming Internet of Things, IBM estimates it will take about 12 hours for the already vast troves of knowledge we have to double. (see Chart 2) So, teaching skills such as how

to find and verify and apply knowledge will be meaningful, along with the plethora of other soft skills, which our school systems should be teaching. That leaves the value and attitudes which cannot be taught, but must be experienced. That is where rites could help. Values and attitudes could be experienced by our youth through rites if we can come up with a new global mythology on which to base these rites. As Campbell points out, "By absorbing the myths of his social group and participating in its rites, the youngster is structured to accord with his social as well as natural environment, and turned...into a defined and competent member of some specific, efficiently functioning social order" (Walter, 2011, loc. 957). Defining a global mythology is where difficulties arise.

Chart 2

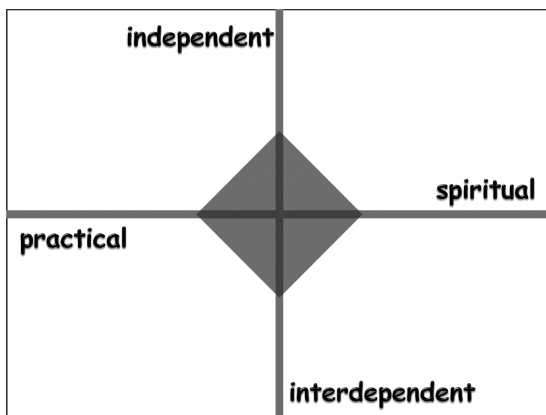


(Hietala, Harju & Kuosmanen, 2019)

Although there is still much to be researched on the possibility of using rites of passage to mold the next generation into global citizens, for the presentation the author proposed two dichotomies to be considered when creating such rites. One dichotomy has the faith-based thinking of religion on one side and the question-based thinking of science on the other. The other dichotomy has people only focusing on their own needs on one side and people focusing on the needs of the entire Earth on the other. What is necessary is to find a point of compromise along each dichotomy, away from the one-sided extremes. Sliding toward a middle point between absolute faith in God and absolute skepticism we can imagine a space where the spiritual meets the practical. Likewise, the middle point between thinking about only oneself and thinking about the entire planet can be imagined as a space where independence meets interdependence. The author thought that creating a zone of tolerance where

these two middle points intersect may be a way for people with differing views to compromise. Chart 3 is a representation of the overlapping of these two dichotomies, the diamond center being the zone of compromise within which rites of passage acceptable to the largest number of people may be possible. Our society is “up against a survival problem, and the individual who is initiated into the social order must be initiated in such a way that his spontaneous responses will be in accord with the needs of that society. The society shapes him to order: he’s being trimmed and cut into being an organ of a certain organism” (Walter, 2011, loc. 507). This sounds like a good reason for implementing such rites of passage. However, the author has left off the last part of the quote—namely: “No independent thoughts, please.” That is the way rite of passage had to be in the past. Initiates had to fill the role for society and were not allowed to question. That is another reason the author proposed finding a middle way between the dichotomy of independent and interdependence. The quote above was in reference to traditional cultures. Accordingly, a balance of the individual and the collective has become necessary. How to do that best will require more research. However, the need for something to be done to address the issues we face is necessary. We cannot go on the way we have been because of the above instances of people who are not becoming competent members of society. To maintain the status quo will be to create more such people. As Dr. Paul Batalden says, “Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets” (IHI, 2015, par. 1). Clearly our current results are proving we need to create a different system.

Chart 3



There are countless people proposing countless proposals for making the world a better place. The author acknowledges this position of proposing a needle as being the best 'solution' from among myriad haystacks. Additionally, current literature on rites of passage is written by people with a similar mindset, making the idea seem all the more legitimate. Despite the undecided issues, the participants of the lecture were open to the ideas contained herein and the research continues on rites of passage and the possibility of a global mythology.

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