

RITES AND RITUALS

The words “rite” and “ritual” are similar, but they have different shades of meaning.

Rite are mostly activities connected to religion and to people’s trusted gods. They were used since ancient times to remember important events, but also to make religious experience accessible at the folk.

Rituals are symbolic activities that help human beings to express their thoughts and feelings about life’s important events. They are an infinite research of perfection, in acts and words and, at the same time, a continuous reflection on why human is not perfect.

“Rite” and “ritual” have also another same meaning that suggest a tradition, a routine. For example, tennis players are used to make the ball ricochet for 3 times before hit it or check that shoelaces are okay.

Since ancient times people felt the need of remember the death of someone loved, so it began the tradition of the funeral rituals. We can summarize his function in 6 points:

- First of all, funerals make people acknowledge the reality of the death and help people to see and greet a loved person for the last time.
- People feel the loss in their hearts and react by crying and suffering internally: indeed, funerals help people to concentrate on the fact of the death.
- People will soon shift their relationship with that person from one of physical presence to one of memory; funerals are meaningful because they allow people to highlight individually the major events and characteristics of the deceased and, later, share with other people some memories spent with that person and learn something else about him or her. It is very important that the memory of that person will remain vivid.
- People tend to reflect about the reason of the death, life and death’s meanings; funerals communicate a cultural view about these relevant themes and reinforce the idea that everyone will die. It’s the reason why our culture is afraid of the death and undervalue the importance of the funeral rite.
- People develop a ‘new-self identity’ when someone loved dies and funerals represent a way for providing social acknowledgment.
- People receive supports from friends and family, we are supported by other people. Funerals serve as the central gathering place for mourners.

WAR MEMORIALS

Memorials, such as a funeral, are a ritual and represent a way for remembering someone dead, they are mainly monuments like statues or a buildings.

The first kind of memorial is the Oxford University’s All Souls College that were made to glorify the soldiers died in the Hundred Years War and never buried.

After the WW1 many countries saw massive devastation and loss of life and people become aware of war’s negative aspects. As it was almost impossible to take the fallen back to England and bury

them, lots of people and families felt the need to gain a place where they could mourn. The result was that small village communities made lots of memorials. Differently from the previous ones, these memorials for the first time didn't glorify war: their aim was to commemorate the fallen and preserve their memory enlisting their names. They became pacifist memorials and quickly spread in churches, public buildings, factories, railway stations, collieries, schools and so on. For example, the unknown soldier in Westminster Abbey represents any British fallen soldier during the First World War and it became a symbol of hope for the living.

But lots of memorials continued to be exploited for a political aim and not for moral reason. This is the example of the Cenotaph (in England), which became a sort a compromise for pleasing the population and calming down the clash between the social classes of that time. The Cenotaph - erected in Whitehall, in central London- was designed by the architect Edwin Lutyens and quickly became a focal point of national grief for all those many thousands of people who had lost loved ones in the war.

Cenotaph became popular and lots of nations adopted an own model that commemorated the fallen in tragic events.