

The Place of Imagination, Beauty, and Ritual in the Spiritual Life

Week seven

The Psychology of Ritual

Sangharakshita, *Ritual and Devotion* Chap.2, pp25 – 35

Objectives for Week Seven

- Explore influences from our Western heritage affecting our attitudes to ritual
- Understand value and importance of ritual as part of our spiritual life
- Application of Fromm's definition of 'rational ritual' to our practice
- Qualities needed as a performer of rituals

The Place of Imagination, Beauty, and Ritual in the Spiritual Life (Handout 7.1)

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Questions

1. What does it mean to be *attached* to 'ethical rules and religious observances as ends in themselves'? How can we practice ritual without relating to them as ends in themselves?
2. In what way is ritual action important in our own life? Do we value ritual as much as ethics as a vital part of our spiritual life? Do you believe it's necessary for making progress?
3. Sangharakshita lists the qualities of a good performer of rituals: mindfulness, attention to detail, an aesthetic sense, understanding the meaning, and physical stamina. Which of these are your strengths? Which, if any, need more attention?
4. Are we aware of any resistance, however subtle, in relationship to rituals? If so, do you know what your resistance is about?
5. Do you experience a sense of *common striving* in pujas?
6. How can we experience ourselves fully (given that ritual is a symbolic expression of thoughts and feelings by action) and also be part of a 'common striving'?
7. In what other ways than ritual do you effectively express your depths?
8. "not only do we externalize and make conscious our deep spiritual feelings; we also strengthen and intensify them" . p32 What would we be like if we fully trusted these feelings and gave them space to grow? Why is it a 'big step' to put our trust in these feelings?

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Home Practice for following week

If you take part in a ritual or puja during the week, you might like to spend some time reflecting afterwards:

- Which aspects or sections of the puja you felt engaged with, and what helped?
- Which aspects you felt less engaged with, and possible causes?
- Which of the qualities of Sangharakshita's list of a performer of rituals were present ?

Or

You could try doing a puja every day and keep a puja diary for the week. See what happens!

Optional further reading for week 7:

1. **'Everything that Lives is Holy'**, p46 *Crossing the Stream* Sangharakshita
2. **'Faith, Devotion, and Ritual'** Tejananda pp5-10, in booklet *Puja and the Transformation of the Heart*,