

Rites – Entry into the intermediate space of religion

“Life is 10% what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it.” - John C. Maxwell.¹

Ritual cements human life.²

Abstract: There is an intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute. Space in-between is a peculiar phenomenon, because we live in it without noticing it. It cannot be described, because the world present in it is in a blurred, half-formed stage, where inside and outside, the personal and collective, cannot be distinguished from each other. Religion (like art and culture in general) belongs to this intermediate space.

In this study we investigate from anthropological and psychological point of view how rites help the believer to enter the intermediate space of religion.

Keywords: rites, religion, intermediate space, habits

Van egy olyan átmeneti tere a tapasztalásnak, amelyben a belső realitás és a külső élet egyaránt formáló erő. A köztes tér sajátos jelenség, hiszen mindig benne élünk, mégsem „tudunk róla.” Megfoghatatlan, hiszen benne a valóság elmosódik, kiformálatlan valamiként létezik, melyben nem lehet szétválasztani a külsőt a belsőtől, a sajátot a közösségitől. A vallás (csakúgy, mint a művészet és a kultúra általában) ehhez az átmeneti térhez tartozik.

E tanulmány vallásantropológiai és valláslélektani szempontok alapján a valóságnak a köztes terével foglalkozik és az azzal, hogy a rítusok miként segítenek a vallás köztes terébe belépni.

Kulcsszavak: rítusok, vallás, átmeneti tér, szokások

It might have already happened to us that we were listening to a presentation and for some time we were not completely present as active listeners. Perhaps we were thinking of past events or tasks ahead of us. We were present in body; however we paid less attention to the events taking place around us as our minds were wandering and we were immersed in our thoughts. From the time we wake up until we fall asleep at the end of the day, we spend a significant part of our awake time having our thoughts and minds not only in the „here and now”. According to certain research studies daydreaming and mind wandering make up at least 30 percent of our awake time.³ It is an intermediate space-time that is created between the “me” and “not-me”, the dream world and the awake world. This world between space and time may have various forms and contents.

This study aims to examine the intermediate area of reality from anthropological and psychological point of view, and how rites help entering the intermediate space of religion.

Intermediate area of experiencing

¹ Zakari, Dotchamou: 251 best quotes of one the greatest motivators: John C. Maxwell. 2017. 3. p.

² Solomon, Solomon, David – Lo, Ping-Cheung – Fan, Ruiping – Engelhardt, H. Tristram: „Ritual as a Cardinal Category of Moral Reality: An Introduction.” 2012. 1. p.

³ Weinschenk, Susan: 100 Things Every Presenter Needs to Know About People. 2011. 68-69. p.

In our everyday life, there are and there can be different transitional phases between wakefulness (the state of focused presence) and night sleep. One of them is when we are aware of where we are in real time and space, but our minds wander in different time or space. It is not only daydreaming, but our minds can also be taken by wandering in virtual reality, by a good movie or a children's story. We do not necessarily forget about real space and time, although a transitional area, or so to speak, a play area, to which we attach importance in our life can be experienced as a real-life world. The transitional area is a certain phenomenon, since we constantly live in it, yet we are "not aware of it". It is incomprehensible as the reality blurs and this area exists as something without an exact shape, where inner and outer, personal and collective cannot be distinguished. As Winnicott writes: "My assumption is that if we need this dual division, we need a third as well: the third part of the life of a human being, a part we cannot ignore, is an intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute."⁴

This is a transitional space of experiencing, where inner and outer lives are both formative powers. Based on Winnicott's theory, Dávid Németh writes: "(...)Winnicott calls the illusionary area of experiencing 'intermediate' or 'potential', within which the symbolical object is called 'transitional object' (...) The significance of transitional objects is in their simultaneous belonging to the objective reality and to the inner world of a child; therefore those objects are able to mediate between fantasy and reality. Everyone needs an intermediate area in their whole lives; however later the intermediate area will be filled less by objects of the fantasy than by that of creativity, play, art, religious rites and ideas. Without this, we could not relate to the experienced but directly unreachable reality."⁵

By the end of kindergarten, or first years of elementary school, most people are able to distinguish and experience the dual reality of "here and now", and the intermediate area at the same time.⁶ For example, a little boy can immerse into a role play with his entire being to chase Indians in the courtyard yet he is able to answer the question of the postman, who has just arrived and is looking for his parents. After he said that his parents were in the house, he immediately returns to the play area and continues chasing Indians. At the same time, he is able to be present in real space and time, and to dive in as well as attach meaning and significance

⁴ Winnicott Donald W.: *Játszás és valóság*. 1999. 102.p.

⁵ Németh Németh Dávid: *Hit és nevelés - Valláslélektani szemléletmód a mai valláspedagógiában*. 2002. 146. p.

⁶ Kodácsy-Simon Eszter – Szabóné László Lilla: *Kisgyermek a családban – A család és a koragyermekkor valláslélektani megközelítése*. 2019. 92. p.

to the equally existing play area and time.⁷ This 'intermediate area'⁸ is special in peoples' lives since it is a „play area” that has rules, and it is both personal and serious.

Multiple „play areas” such as this exist during our lives. For example when we go to the theater, the acting area of the stage transforms for two hours and we attach meaning and significance to what comes to life there and that involves us. There are play areas where we do not need to be present in person yet those still have an effect on us. For example when we watch a football game on television. The course of the game and the victory or defeat of our favorite team influences the way we feel even for the following days because we attach meaning and significance to that game. By the emergence of internet, the fantasy world of the possible areas offers multiple opportunities and it has a great effect on our perception of the real 'here and now' time space. Due to the spread of smartphones the intermediate area is only a click away from many.

Intermediate space of religion

The factual data of reality are only part of how we as human beings perceive reality. The way we see the world around us as rational and our life as livable is woven into a chain of thought by our opinions on and interpretations of the facts. Gerkin states: „Language constructs world. To have a world, to live in a world, means, for humans, to inhabit a time and place in which a certain language is connected with experience to give meaning to that experience. More than anything else, the capacity to make meaning marks the human as human.”⁹ It is not only part of, but also a necessity of our lives to step out of the everyday world and recharge, and to gain new viewpoints, and experiences in this transitional area. In today's society, there are different forms of this need for secession and transition. In the course of human history, it has opened multiple opportunities and „gates” to enter the meaningful and significant transitional areas.

Religion is a specific intermediate space; while a theater play occupies the stage and the auditorium only for two hours, the “stage” of religion is the entire universe and its time and space reaches from before creation to eternity. Eliade points out that for a religious man the “experience of this religious space” is not only one of the optional fantasy worlds, but: „For religious man, this spatial nonhomogeneity finds expression in the experience of an opposition between space' that is sacred-the only real and really existing space and all other space, the

⁷ Paloutzian, Raymond F.: „Invitation to the psychology of religion.” 2017. 146.p.

⁸ Winnicott: 2.

⁹ Gerkin, Charles V.: The Living Human Dokument - Re-Visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode. 1984. 40. p.

formless expanse surrounding it.”¹⁰ Thus, for a religious person the space of religion is the space of reality.

Religion creates a new reality while it does not break away from the profane reality. Even despite of life’s fragmentation it does not get stuck in the hopelessness of the visible world: „In the certainty of the omnipresent God we are always in the sanctuary. We are in a holy place when we are in the most secular place, and the most holy place remains secular in comparison with our place in the ground of the divine life. ... If one always experienced the divine presence, there would be no difference between sacred and secular places.”¹¹

The intermediate space of religion not only brings new perspective for viewing our lives, it also shapes our lives. As Grözinger writes: „The particularity and task of the church is not to let her surplus, originating from her relationship with God, become an abstract, alien postulate, but integrated into a specific story into the story of human experiences with God.”¹²

In this collective space of gaining and sharing experiences, the religious person as an interactive participant impacts the space of religion and in their own understanding that reacts on the person as well. In their experience, a religious person does not reconstruct but discovers the sacred reality of the truth or the Truth finds them. They enter such a space of religion that exists in parallel to the tangible reality as well as outside of the individual.

Myth and rite

The historical dimension of intermediate space is framed by myth or metanarrative and rites have a role to illustrate it. As Kluckhohn says: „The myth is a system of word symbols, whereas ritual is a system of object and act symbols.”¹³

The intermediate space of religion has a story and we can enter this metanarrative personally or collectively as well. „Membership is only enhanced by reflection into the articulate form of a “we” identity when it is deliberately brought to the surface – for example, through initiation rites – or when it rises spontaneously, for instance through a confrontation with different societies and other ways of life. According to our understanding, a collective identity is a reflexive form of social belonging, whereas cultural identity correspondingly entails conscious participation in or recognition of a specific culture.”¹⁴ From this point of view, being religious

¹⁰ Eliade, Mircea: *The Sacred And The Profane: The Nature Of Religion*. 1961. 20. p.

¹¹ Tillich: *Systematic Theology*, Volume 1, 2012, 278.

¹² Grözinger, Albrecht: *Die Kirche - ist sie noch zu retten?* 1998. 47. p.

¹³ Kluckhohn, Clyde: *Myths and Rituals – A General Theory*. 1942. 58. p.

¹⁴ Assmann, Jan: *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. 2011, 115.

means taking up a criteria system and being in such a story-flow, which moves from before birth to the end of time and creates order in the macrocosms as well as provides opportunity for the individual to create order in their own microcosms too. By entering the intermediate space, the religious person becomes part of a meta-story that helps interpreting life, gives names to personal desires, and provides vocabulary for expressing feelings: „Every group which considers itself constant or important develops shared stories that not only define the identity of the group, but offer guiding tools for individuals to discover the meaning of their own lives.”¹⁵

The inherited and received way of interpretation sets out our experiences in order to answer basic and final questions of life such as: „What is prime reality? What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us? What is a human being? What happens to a person at death? Why is it possible to know anything at all? How do we know what is right and wrong? What is the meaning of human history?”¹⁶ In the reality that is interpreted in this way, in our own life-world, faith becomes the basis of experiencing. So, religion transcends personal life through interpreting by looking at it from the end, and through integrating it into an interpretive community. The ritual metanarrative is a system that is continuously changing yet constant in regard to its perspectives. On one hand, it is a tradition that provides a set of rules on the life of Christian communities, and on the other hand, it also integrates the life of the individual person into the story of salvation.

For a religious person, the intermediate space not only has the dimension of time or timeless dimension, but also the dimension of space. Symbols and signs refer to the presence of the intermediate reality: churches, roadside crosses, statues, sacred scriptures, candles, clothes, bells, sleigh bells, but even nature - and the list goes on because many things are present in our lives as symbols inviting us into the intermediate space. If we answer their invitation, then the sacred series of actions and rites will have a role in our lives.

Habit loop in rite practice

Christianity also offers multiple thresholds and rites for people today to enter this intermediate space. At times of significant change in our lives, one-time rites (e.g. forgiveness, affiliation, conversion, baptism, wedding, and funeral) can help us. Beside this we have repeated rites such as Sunday worship, holy days, as well as weekday rites. Some of them are collective others are personal habits.

¹⁵ Pataki, Ferenc: Élettörténet és identitás. 2001. 298.p.

¹⁶ Sire, James W.: Naming the Elephant – Woldview as a Concept. 2004. 20. p.

Rites are personal or collective habits through which we can enter the intermediate space of religion.¹⁷ An important component in experiencing a rite is the threshold experience when the one entering the sacred space leaves behind something in order to enter another space.¹⁸ Even if they do not leave the space physically they find themselves in a for-them-transubstant parallel play area. These thresholds can be tied to time and/or space. Examples for being tied to time are when someone prays every morning at a usual time or goes to church on Sunday. Being tied to space is when a roadside cross reminds the one passing by to make the sign of the cross or pray. There are thresholds that the community passes on to us, some are passed on to us by family traditions (e.g. saying a grace at the table), and there are individually formed religious rites (such as praying for that day's meetings when crossing the threshold of the apartment, praying during washing up for those around the table, etc.)

Rites such as religious habits also include the elements of the profane habits' scenario, the habit loop applies to them as well.¹⁹ Its first component is a cue: a moment appearing in time or space that triggers the habit's mechanism of action.²⁰ (e.g. bell ringing at noon or prayer bench.)

For a person practicing religious habits, the cue jump-starts a routine action that is followed by the second component: a routine.²¹ A certain cue triggers such a mechanism of action that runs through consciously or even less consciously in the person practicing a religious habit, for example when one sees a cross and automatically makes the sign of the cross/ sees a prayer bench and feels the lack or the desire to pray/ a daily Bible verse appears on the mobile's screen and reads it automatically.

If the routine runs well, the third component of the habit loop appears and that is called a reward. The need has been satisfied, some kind of good feeling takes over the person, who solves the task ahead by following the steps of the religious habit, passes the threshold and the person enters from the profane world into the sacred space. Passing through the mechanism of habit is like guessing a pre-invented riddle. I get from one space to the other by following the rules of the game pre-invented by others or myself. Of course in life it can happen that I meet the Sacred without expecting it or being prepared for it, but in most of the cases preparation, being tuned in, and taking the necessary steps can help so the meeting with the Sacred becomes part of

¹⁷ Rites have always been helpers for transition in human life, illustrations of secession or transition. Máté-Tóth András: *Vallásnézet – A kelet-közép-európai átmenet vallástudományi értelmezése*. 2014. 142.p.

¹⁸ Leaving behind doesn't always happen physically, it can be about leaving behind the „noise of the world” and a focused attention to the Sacred (E.g. prayer, meditation).

¹⁹ Spilka Spilka, Bernard: *Religious Practice, Ritual, and Prayer*. In: Paloutzian, Raymond E. – Park, Crystal L. (ed.): *Handbook of Religion and Spirituality*. 2005. 365. p.

²⁰ Duhigg Duhigg, Charles: *A szokás hatalma – Miért tesszük azt, amit teszünk, és hogyan változtassunk rajta?* Solymár: Casparus Kiadó, 2015. 19. p.

²¹ Paloutzian: 269.

everyday life. Which systems of habit come to life and become stronger depends on our personality, our life journey, the effects of our environment, and the formation of our faith as well. Motivations and rewards are different at different stages of life and of faith development.²²

Rites as synthesis

„Ritual involves the synthesis of habit, image, symbol, movement, and emotion.”²³ – writes David Solomon together with his co-authors on how many things rites incorporate. This can happen due to the rules of “self-talk” in the rites.

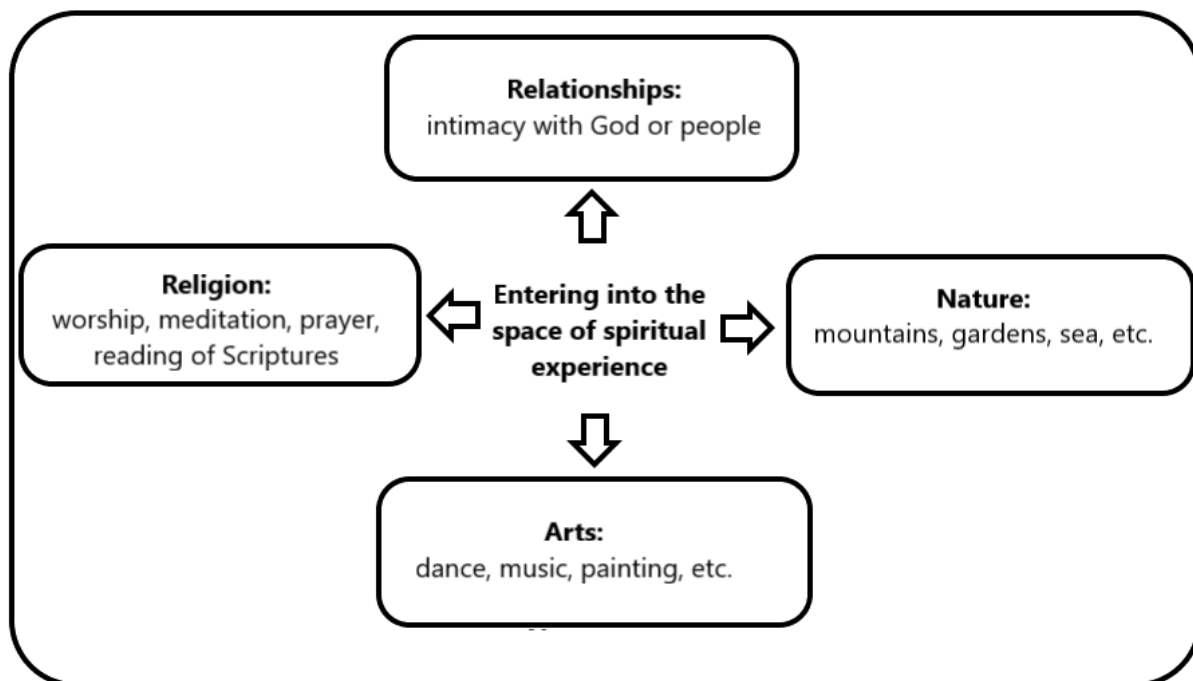
Lev Vygotsky writes that thinking and speech are related to each other. In the course of a young child’s life the use of language, loud speech, and thinking develop together but in time the use of language splits to social speech and inner speech: “Written speech is a separate linguistic function, differing from oral speech in both structure and mode of functioning. Even its minimal development requires a high level of abstraction. It is speech in thought and image only (...). In learning to write, the child must disengage himself from the sensory aspect of speech and replace words by images of words.”²⁴ The rules of inner speech are different from those of social speech, namely inner speech does not require speaking out loud everything in order to be understood. The language of our thoughts includes meanings, symbols, metaphors, feelings, impressions that are impossible to describe in everyday language.

We can understand rites without being able to rationally describe it in its fullness. We may be present in the intermediate space of religion yet our intuitive empathy cannot be described by human words. Colors, fragrances, images of internal emotions may be present actually in the individual experience without the internal events being realized into external communication. As an external observer we may conclude based on nonverbal cues that something is happening in the other person during religious experience. But even at verbal sharing or drama play (e.g. Bibliodrama) a significant part of the experience remains an inner secret or cannot be described by the social speech’s toolkit. The following image shows through what gates we can enter into the intermediate space, and most of them are accompanied by rites.

²² For each person there is a for-them-foreseeable world. In this „play area” our image of the Infinity undergoes development, and is filled according to a different scheme at each stage of development. Cf: Streib Heinz: Hermeneutics of Metaphor – Symbol and Narrativ in Faith Development Theory. 1991. 37.p.

²³ Solomon, et al.: 1. p.

²⁴ Vygotsky, L.S.: Thought and Language. 1986. 180-181. p.



1. figure²⁵

For entering the intermediate space of the relationship with the transcendence of God, a cue for the rite can be the individual or collective practices of religion. It can appear in different forms of human relationships and even the nature and arts can open a gate to the Infinity.

It is a question of whether, what the rites that previous generations were accustomed to have been passed down to the next generations, and whether they have actually acquired them. Whether new generations will have vision to decode cues that can give possibility for entering the intermediate space of religion?

Conclusion

In the course of human history people have worked out multiple entry points and have given models for forming our own entry habits. These signs are not observed as by everyone, but for those who enter through them, a new world opens up. This phenomenon and opportunity has been pictured by C. S. Lewis in his novel titled *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. For illustrating the theme of entering the intermediate space may you read the following passage of the novel here:

„And shortly after that they looked into

²⁵ MacKinlay, Elisabeth: *Spiritual Growth and Care in the Fourth Age of Life*. 2006. 14. p.

a room that was quite empty except for one big wardrobe; the sort that has a looking-glass in the door. There was nothing else in the room at all except a dead bluebottle on the window-sill. "Nothing there!" said Peter, and they all trooped out again—all except Lucy. She stayed behind because she thought it would be worth while trying the door of the wardrobe, even though she felt almost sure that it would be locked. To her surprise it opened quite easily, and two moth-balls dropped out. Looking into the inside, she saw several coats hanging up—mostly long fur coats. There was nothing Lucy liked so much as the smell and feel of fur. She immediately stepped into the wardrobe and got in among the coats and rubbed her face against them, leaving the door open, of course, because she knew that it is very foolish to shut oneself into any wardrobe. Soon she went further in and found that there was a second row of coats hanging up behind the first one. It was almost quite dark in there and she kept her arms stretched out in front of her so as not to bump her face into the back of the wardrobe. She took a step further in—then two or three steps—always expecting to feel woodwork against the tips of her fingers. But she could not feel it. "This must be a simply enormous wardrobe!" thought Lucy, going still further in and pushing the soft folds of the coats aside to make room for her. Then she noticed that there was something crunching under her feet. "I wonder is that more moth-balls?" she thought, stooping down to feel it with her hand. But instead of feeling the hard, smooth wood of the floor of the wardrobe, she felt something soft and powdery and extremely cold. "This is very queer," she said, and went on a step or two further. Next moment she found that what was rubbing against her face and hands was no longer soft fur but something hard and rough and even prickly. "Why, it is just like branches of trees!" exclaimed Lucy. And then she saw that there was a light ahead of her; not a few inches away where the back of the wardrobe ought to have been, but a long way off. Something cold and soft was falling on her. A moment later she found that she was standing in the middle of a wood at night-time with snow under her feet and snowflakes falling through the air."²⁶

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²⁶ Lewis, S. C.: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. 1987. 5. p.

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