

The Wallace Street Journal

By David Bond

(c) 2014

Rituals

Wallace, Idaho – Ritual is these days pretty much ignored or even despised, unless you're a gangsta wannabe who has to shoot a school-aged child to get yourself into the inner circle.

Ritual – the rite of initiation – used to be of great value to this country, at least to its male component. The rite of initiation used to humble us and make us human beings.

I can't claim to surviving Marine Corps boot camp training, as my father can. Nor did I attend the Air Force Academy, as my great kid brother did. But between initiation into Phi Delta Theta and a summer camp doing officer's boot with the USAF, I learned the lesson. Trouble is, the lesson has to be beaten into you.

One purpose of the rite of initiation is to grind you down and humiliate you beyond belief. In this age of artificially pumped up self-esteem, the “attaboy” for showing up for school once or twice a week even as you drool in a stoned stupor on your textbook, it's outright archaic.

Here's why the rite of initiation is not archaic: It turns wild young boys into human beings.

How does this happen?

Your masters, whether military NCOs and officers, or the seniors of your college fraternity, beat the living crap out of your ego. You are, at the end of weeks of physical exhaustion, forced to turn to some guy you never liked and beg him for help. And, funny thing is, he needed your help, too, and so did the chap next to you.

I will give a simple example, from a Phi Delt initiation. We pledges were placed in a circle and forced to do curl-ups until we were all about ready to croak, wearing buckets containing onions about our necks for a week. Not a dandy way to pick up girls from sorority row.

Hours and hours of this, after days of no sleep and all the time being screamed at. We could do no more curl-ups.

Then, one-by-one, a consciousness spread among us. The big asshole Hawaiian football player grabbed my arm and helped me do one more pull-up. By instinct I grabbed the guy on my left, whose name I cannot remember, and grabbed him up, and the three of us got ourselves up, and within the space of a minute we were all of us in that circle, arms locked, together, nobody better than anybody else. It wasn't about me anymore. It was about us, and we could do curl-ups together all night long.

At that moment, we got “it.” We were liberated spirits because we had become united. Ain't nobody better than anybody else. Some went on to greatness and built great things. Others became street bums, legislators or journalists.

It doesn't matter, because the rite of initiation gave us all the same starting line and, I believe, the same humility and sense of humanity. It is a rite sadly missing.