

LIVING THE INITIATED LIFE

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The well-known anthropologist Mircea Eliade bemoaned the fact that “one of the characteristics of the modern world is the disappearance of any meaningful rites of initiation.”¹ Many cultures not yet affected by our technological way of life still retain certain ceremonies which mark life passages and bring the person involved in these passages into an awareness of the responsibilities of the new state of being. Those societies which also retain the full understanding of these initiation rituals are most successful in conveying their true meanings. In our society, we have kept the “shells” of certain initiation practices (such as baptism, marriage, etc.), but the true meaning of these powerful life passages has become lost to many of us in these fastpaced times. Nevertheless, the human need for meaningful initiation is still very much a part of us.

The Rosicrucian Order participates in the “Initiatic Tradition.” As stated in the *Mastery of Life* booklet, there are certain requirements and results which make up a true initiation:

No rite or ceremony... is a true initiation if it does not... (a) cause you to engage in introspection... (b) engender within you a feeling of aspiration and idealism; and (c) exact from you a sacred obligation or promise that you will try to fulfill your aspirations.²

These principles, which we will explore in this article, are applied here to ritualistic initiations, but they can be relevant to other types of initiations as well.

What other types of initiations are there? There are those experiences which occur within our life process – sometimes called “life passages,” such as adolescence,

reaching the age of adulthood, getting married, having a child, and so forth. These passages, which often highlight the cycles of life, can also be thought of as types of initiatory experiences which conform to the steps which we will discuss.

Then there are the events in life which catch us by surprise – the sudden death of someone we love, the illness we hadn't expected; or, perhaps an emotional confrontation which precipitates the healing of a relationship; or a series of events which act to alter one's direction in life.

The secret is learning to recognize these experiences and to identify them as initiations.

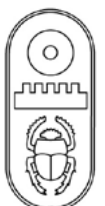
All of these phenomena participate in a process which, if it is experienced consciously, can serve to bring us to a higher realization of life and its laws. This state of inner awareness and wisdom occurs gradually, over a long period of time; the process is characterized by a progression through a variety of initiations which demonstrate a definite pattern.

So, for Rosicrucians, living the initiated life means consciously applying the lessons learned from ritualistic initiation to the initiations of life – those passages, changes, and benchmark experiences which mark our progress on life's journey.

Relevance of Ritualistic Initiations

Ritual initiations done with understanding are rare in today's world, and we who are members of the Rosicrucian Order are very fortunate to have these ceremonies as part of our heritage. But, as the *Mastery of Life* goes on to say, "Participation in initiation rituals does not, in itself, make you a true initiate."³

Rituals are not ends in themselves; they are demonstrations of the soul's progress through life and evolution. They typically consist of dramatic portrayals of truths and admonitions which will inspire the candidate to pursue his own realization of these truths. They can also dramatize symbolically the other form of initiations, those we go through in living a human, incarnated life – the ones which make us "true initiates."





The Latin word *initiare* means “to inspire,” an “initiative is a beginning, inspired by an idea. If we describe someone as having “initiative,” we feel that she has the power and ability to begin a task and complete it. We who aspire to true initiation desire to embody this sense of power to accomplish. How do we do this consciously so that each stage and transformative event in our lives is met with an awareness of its possibilities?

Before an initiation occurs – the actual event of initiation --- there is always some form of preparation. In cultural initiations the candidate had to go through an orientation period for the stage of life he was approaching. As students on the path, we naturally approach initiation, whether it be ritual or a life event, as a consequence of our studies and experiences. We subconsciously prepare ourselves to move on to another level. In other words, the initiation comes because of a desire for it. This desire may be conscious, as in the degrees of Rosicrucian study – in which case our work has prepared us – or in a life choice, such as marriage, or unconscious, as in a life experience. The desire could be stimulated by an event, by a piece of music, an experience in nature, or something similar. This longing, whether

conscious or unconscious, will act to create the circumstances we require to grow. In ritual initiations this stage is depicted by the candidate’s asking to continue, even though he is encouraged to “go back” – for once the candidate has stepped over the threshold, he has entered into the initiatory process and cannot retract his actions.

The next thing that happens is an encounter, on the outer and inner levels, with a new step in life or study. This is often an “encounter with the sacred,” a process which involves death to old ways, acceptance of the new, and a moving up to a higher plane of consciousness, thus enabling new energies to be received. In cultural and symbolic initiations this can be “acted out” by a ceremony depicting the taking on of the symbols of a new life. In life passages we often “encounter” the new through a traumatic experience (e.g., death) or a sudden awakening (as in an enlightenment experience). In rituals we “encounter” a guardian of the threshold whom we must pass in order to continue. This propels us on to the following step in the process.

This next experience, the one we pass through after encountering the power of

event and circumstance, that which we will be up against, is often termed the “dark night of the soul” and involves what may be described as a flailing about in the dark, not knowing where to turn, not receiving any inspiration, feeling depressed, as if nothing will ever go right again!

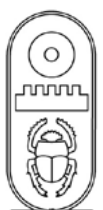
In rituals, the candidate, having spent some time in an “outer darkness” or perhaps even a real cave or underground chamber, now moves into a darkened room, seeking Light. We have all been there, but if we can see this experience as part of a process and identify the steps before and after it, we will be able to distance ourselves from it enough to make it an easier passage. This step is essential in the scheme of things, for it gives us time to “chew over” the details and come up with our own ways of dealing with the problem. In rituals, advice is often given concerning this. The more we are able to empower this advice, as well as the exercises given to us, including meditation, visualization, and so forth, during this time, the shorter and more useful the time will be.

Pulling ourselves up from the pit, as it were, in trying to learn this life lesson, we begin the next step. We begin (initiate) passing through the experience of the

initiation itself. In a ritual, we will be led on a path through the temple, all the while encountering symbols and words which stimulate our inner power to act and to change. We are often asked to make a resolution so that this can be realized. In a life initiation, we also begin a path: moving through the new ways of thinking and living which will become characteristic of our life in the future. The key here is awareness: the degree to which you are awake in the process will determine how consciously you will be able to use these new energies in your life! As you near the end of the journey, it is essential that you make a resolve or promise to try to live on this new level, having learned the lessons of this experience.

Then, of course, comes the reward. Passing into the “Golden Dawn” of realization and peace is the result of our inner work during the initiation process. We realize that we are on a new level, and we exult in it, joyfully moving ahead without fear into our new consciousness, for we have earned it by our hard work.

This spelling out of the initiation process can help with identifying and coping with key life events. As an exercise, it can be useful if you will take an event





or passage in your life and try to identify how it passed through these steps, how you felt before and after it, and how it changed your life. Then, as you approach even higher levels in the future, steps, how you felt before and after it, and how it changed your life. Then, as you approach even higher levels in the future, you can be conscious of going through this process, hopefully more smoothly each time, for life itself is a series of graded initiations.

How then do we live the “initiated life” beyond being aware that we have been initiated in some way? It is, of course, by working with the truths just realized, whatever they may be, to make our lives more aware of the divine powers which are within us. Ask yourself: How is my consciousness different from before the event? What have I learned about myself that will serve me in the future? How can I apply these lessons to my everyday life, in my spiritual studies, in my relationships with others? As we attain a new level of awareness, we permit our intuition, which has now developed to this new level, to guide us.

But to leave the process here would not fulfill the natural order of things. In

the Rosicrucian Order, we are taught the Law of AMRA, giving back part of what we have received. So an act of service is essential for the new way of life to succeed. We can, for instance, do something for someone as a gift of thanks for our initiation – in the process perhaps stimulating that someone to approach a new level in his or her life as well.

Each of us is traveling a path which will lead us to our goal. Each journey is different, and each traveler will be waylaid by various distractions; but we are all alike in that the way we deal with these experiences will determine their outcome. Through the process of identifying and moving through these initiation experiences in an enlightened manner, we can arrive at new planes of understanding in our quest for the Light.

Endnotes

¹ Eliade, Mircea, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, (New York: Harper, 1958).

² *Mastery of Life* (San Jose: Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, 1996).

³ *Ibid.*