

## "The Secret Thoughts of a Ritual" By Edward King.

Below are excerpts from this most timely article dealing with Ritual.

There are many of us around. Some of us are very informal and loose structures, others are VERY formal and precisely worded. Whether you are aware of it or not, your whole life is based on certain ritualistic patterns. The way you get up in the morning, the way you study, the way you organize your social life, the way you speak and write - they are all based on certain habits and routines that you develop and are performed, by and large, in an informal ritualistic way.

I would like to share with you some thoughts on another kind of ritual... the one that is considered very private and is often called esoteric. I am the sorority/fraternity ritual, one that you will find locked in a file in the corner of some dark office. Because I don't get used or opened up very often, I have a lot of time to think, and I'd like to share with you some of my thoughts. Sometimes, I go through a real identity crisis. Who am I? Why am I? In order to know what a thing is, you must know what it is for. You can tell what a thing is for, by the way it is used.

- way we view ritual is by the way we use ritual

Although there are some exceptions in the way I am used, let me tell you how the majority of sororities and fraternities use me. The vast amount of my time is spent in a dark cabinet, locked up and gathering dust. About once every semester there comes a mad rush for my existence, people literally scrambling and all of a sudden I become very important. A mild panic sets in until finally they dig me out from under the stack of constitutions, bylaws, and chapter minutes. Once I am found, I'm under 24 hour surveillance. It's almost as if I'm digested, but that's not really it; what's happening is that I'm being memorized. I'm literally studied word for word, phrase for phrase, and sometimes people even argue that it's not legal to copy anything out of our ritual, but some people go ahead and fudge a bit and copy some things.

After being up almost all day and all night for a week, I am taken to a dimly lighted room where a number of people are gathered. There I am presented with much feeling and serious drama. It is obviously a moment of great climax for some of the people, for they are seeing and hearing me for the very first time. Shortly after the ceremony, I am brought back to the dark room and placed in the locked file drawer and I am not seen or heard of until the end of the next semester. In this case, as a ritual, what am I? Well, as I see it, I am a perfunctory service that must be performed in order to get new members into an organization. Once the initiation is over, I'm pretty much pigeonholed until the next class is to be initiated.

However, in some sorority/fraternity houses, I exist in quite a different fashion. Shortly after initiation, the members come in one by one, get me out of the drawer and look me over very carefully. Some just like to read me; others try to memorize me. Whatever the case, I like it when they use me. Sometimes they even argue over me, and this gets exciting because, you see, that's what I am about. I'm meant to be read carefully, discussed, and even argued about.

In order to know what I'm really about, I need to be perpetually used and studied. (Too often the members mention me only at initiation time, and I'm really meant for much more than that.) In fact, one of my most important missions is to help the chapter at its weekly meetings. If I am understood and used properly at the weekly meetings, I can really help the chapter get things together. There are always a few members who don't like to use me and put up a big argument about having an informal meeting. What a joke that usually turns out to be; most informal chapter meetings last a heck of a lot longer than formal chapter meetings where I'm used. As I've listened to people and watched how they use me, a couple of important thoughts have crossed my mind. First, the sororities and

fraternities have done an excellent job in keeping me an esoteric document to the outside, but I am a secret to most of the members as well. They really don't know or understand because they have never really studied me. Some people, I suspect, would like to keep me very secret because if non-members found out what I stand for, they might expect the members to live by it and that would be very difficult. Therefore, they keep me secret, and they won't have to change their lifestyle.

Although I can be used in different ways and for different things, when you boil me down to my fundamental essence, I'm essentially one thing: a system of values. I don't change very much because I am the product of history and the spirit of man and how he relates to his fellow man and to his God. This relationship between man and man, and God and man, has never been a static one. It is confusing and illuminating, painful and exciting, and a separation and a reunion. And although I appear to be a contradiction, I am really no more of a contradiction than man himself. Too frequently, we forget that man is both animal and spirit in nature, and to reconcile the two can often be painful, confusing and frightening. And that is why it is so critical that man understand who I am and what I am for.

Because I am a system of values, I am therefore an instrument of self evaluation. My values are clear and absolute, and yet difficult to emulate. To state a few I am honor, courage, integrity, fidelity, courtesy, and I demand self-control as well as ambition and humility.

The worst thing of all is for me to be ignored. It is the indifference to and the ignorance of my essential message that continues to stifle the growth of the greek system. Never has the time been so ripe as this period in our history when the young people of today on our college campuses are crying out for the kind of message, guidance, value and leadership that has been so long hidden in my pages. If you would just realize that by better knowing and understanding we, many of our day-to-day problems would simply fade away and not exist.

To threaten or fine a member is an anathema to my very being. If a member slips and becomes derelict, he/she should be asked to review the organization's oath and charge, and if so chooses not to obey and follow that oath and charge, be allowed to leave the brotherhood/sisterhood. Too frequently I see you caught up with the numbers in our chapter rather than the quality of members.

Basically, I am a road map to help a person along his/her journey of life and assist him/her in his/her communication with fellow travelers. Who am I? YOUR RITUAL. What am I? A SYSTEM OF VALUES. What am I for? MY PURPOSE IS NOT TO MAKE YOU A BETTER FRATERNITY/SORORITY MEMBER, BUT RATHER TO MAKE YOU A BETTER HUMAN BEING.

→ constantly following the values & ritual in all activities helps show members the importance of what we do