

**We The People**  
Program 44  
Rite of Passage



Just imagine you are in a tribal village in Africa or South America and it's a small structured community where everyone knows their place and duty. Wisdom is passed from the elders to the youth so lessons are learnt and responsibility expected. The family and the community all play a role in keeping the tribe cohesive and functional. Perhaps it's a primitive tribe by our standards but its orderly, consistent and enduring. There is a sense of belonging and a reason for work and celebration and the family unit is held paramount. As the children grow into adulthood the family and the community make their youth aware of their duties through ceremony as they grow and mature. This orderly handover of responsibility is seen as fundamental in village society. These milestones events are known as *rites of passage*.

By definition a 'rite' is a ceremony celebrating an event in time. In that village it may have been the fetching of water or the washing of clothes or the tending of crops or cattle. Today our rites of passage in our so called civilised society on the Gold Coast are diminished to the great loss of our community as wisdom and knowledge is not passed on in our modern tribe. The problem first begins with latch key kids and entrenched child minding as a mother's time is spent working or the father finds little time to spend with his children as he works long hours. Our rites of passage today may include graduation, marriage, gaining a driver's license, drinking age, puberty, age of consent, voting, baptism, citizenship, a promotion at work and many others. A good example of a rite of passage would be the presentation of the various coloured belts in martial arts which denote skill and self control and are presented in the group environment for worthy acclamation.

Our current diminished offering of rites tend to be unrelated milestones sometimes not connected to wisdom and as an example take the annual 'schoolies' event in Surfers Paradise. On one hand it's a celebration having finished school and new found freedom but the link to unbridled drinking does not reflect any wisdom at all. More the point it's a reflection of society and wayward self indulgent thinking without any consideration for the human spirit or common sense. I like the idea of all the young people congregating together but the link to alcohol is a learned step where excessive drinking and dangerous behavior are inseparable. Being drunk is a dreadful way to start adulthood and a corrupted rite of passage.

Rites of Passage occur throughout our lives really but it's the meaningful rites that are not celebrated that worry me with young people. Surely we can find a way to pass on our hard earned knowledge and wisdom in a way where youth sees how important it is to gradually take the reins of their own life based on our own successes and failures. The education system is so full of academic nonsense that it fails to properly execute any meaningful rites of passage and yet school is a place where that should happen on a regular base. Nonetheless it doesn't take away the responsibility from parents, family or society.

To slowly pass on responsibility over time sets a person up for life. Surely we can encourage every young person by acknowledging honesty, integrity and reliability and rewarding them in the presence of others but not with physical gifts which only serve to defocus the purpose. It's no wonder so many young people are lost and can't make a go of life as we seem to focus on material aspects and not on creating a brand new adult with the skills for living. Let's not forget too that the rights of passage should include our spiritual growth as well. The rites of passage through life throws up ceremonies that embrace the changes of life and help us accommodate them. These well founded rites provide the social architecture for tomorrow and form a social contract with the community that bind us together. When society lacks cohesion and freedom of speech is lost as it is now, governments try and control or manage morality and society with legislation which will never work. In fact.....the sign of a society in decay is that is over governed. Rites of passage are a key for civilisation and for a better more cohesive society.

**Until next time this is Kent Bayley**