

What connects us?

Beloved person,

With a cheerful wave and a ‘Good morning!’ our neighbor greeted me this morning. Naturally I did the same. It is an everyday custom that resonates all over the world and in all languages during the morning hours. Starting the day by wishing one another *well* is a ritual passed down from generation to generation and signifies the basic feeling that we wish each other *well*. A symbol consisting of three things: the wave, the ‘good morning’, and the wish itself. In this way, we establish connections that form a bridge between people.

Rituals – whether everyday or more religious – have functioned since time immemorial as symbolic glue connecting societies, communities, and generations. From grand rituals like a baptism, a wedding, or a funeral to the small ones, such as shaking hands at the door or chatting over a cup of coffee. These established habits function as anchors in daily life. They provide structure and give meaning to ordinary life. That can offer comfort when the rest of life is sometimes so chaotic. And if everything runs smoothly, it is just as much of a source of stability.

We know them in everyday life too: family customs, ‘that is just how we do things’. The special customs that you have developed and cultivated as a family, which time and again evoke a sense of special connection. The security of reading a bedtime story every evening, the joy of gathering at the annual Christmas dinner, or the endless celebration of a significant event: the indispensable dialogue between generations within families or communities.

Incidentally, this can extend beyond your own family or community. Rituals create a sense of recognition and connection in everyone else. That *other* person who, in many ways, might well be a stranger to you. But no matter how you differ from, for example, your neighbour, we probably feel the same disappointment when we lose the FIFA World Cup. And now we are sitting in front of the television again with renewed hope... 😊

Yet we see that in a highly individualised society, rituals are slowly disappearing. On the one hand, because there are alternatives to traditional rituals such as marriage; on the other, because we are less dependent on others in our daily lives. Online, you can always find someone who agrees with you and with whom you could form a digital community, without the need for a shared habit or ritual. There is more choice and freedom to express yourself as an individual and to join ‘communities’ in which you feel most comfortable. If you really wanted to, you would hardly have to leave your front door or your own ‘bubble’ anymore.

At the same time, loneliness is increasing in every generation, with all the associated health problems. After all, as human beings, we are not made to be alone at all and – perhaps despite ourselves – always go in search of that other person, for rituals and habits to feel part of something greater than ourselves. It is not about the age of the ritual, but about the attention and dedication with which we give it form and, at the same time, value. Recent research shows that even new, self-invented rituals quickly obtain meaning when performed with sincere intention.

In this way, rituals can become a practice of conscious living; moments when we stop, take a deep breath, and remember what is truly important. Like with these questions:

Which rituals are of (great) value to you?

Do you still recognise them, or are they so rooted in daily practice that you perform and experience them without thinking?

What connects us when it comes to rituals?

In the weekly letter for Sunday, April 12, 2026, there was a call to be present in life with sufficient time and attention. It makes me reflect on who I feel connected to and increases my sense of gratitude for life. But also, for what I can pass on to future generations. That powerful mission is inherent in my humanity, and in the ritual of the communion, I once again feel the invitation to say yes to it.

With a warm-hearted greeting,

Janne Friedrich Zwart

