

Habits, Regimens, Traditions

Sometimes in the morning I feel that I haven't had enough sleep and really don't want to work out. But, out of habit, I put on my workout clothes, have a light breakfast, collect email, and proceed downstairs for my morning regimen. My exercise session happens five times a week except when I am on vacation or traveling for a seminar. It is not yet a tradition, but it is a habit that serves me well. The habit itself breaks the all too negative habit of not exercising. Usually after a few minutes of warm-up, I am ready to get into the swing of things, glad that my habit of at least putting on exercise duds started me down a positive path that day.

Regimens may vary depending on what they are intended to accomplish, but the very word "regimen" suggests unvarying rules and strictures — habits that have become more ritualized.

Let's examine each of these concepts to see how they flow one to the other. A *habit* is "a regular tendency or practice". You can, of course, have bad habits, but in order to stay on the bright side of the force, let's assume it is a good habit. That habit can become a *regimen* when it becomes "a prescribed course of treatment, a way of life, or diet for the promotion or restoration of health". In other words, conscious habits that are good for you are regimens. When regimens are passed on such that they become unconscious again, they have a chance of becoming traditions. A *tradition* is "the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation".

When you meet at Nana Rosannadanna's cabana for Thanksgiving and kvell over her rice stuffing, you are participating in an unconscious tradition. Uncle Tanoose's kvetching at the hardback chairs, although negative, is still part of the tradition. That Thanksgiving tradition occurs because of other conscious traditions, starting accidentally with a dietary regimen that Nana Rosannadanna was placed under as a child when she found she was allergic to most bread. The hardback chairs were the only practical way to sit 17 people in the dining room, so they became part of the tradition, too.

The regimen of no bread stuffing occurred because of Nana's habit of stuffing bread into her mouth after which Nana's nana noticed that she broke out in hives and started plumping out in the wrong places. A negative habit was addressed, changed to a positive habit, which became a regimen, which became a family tradition.

A *custom* is "a widely accepted way of behaving that is specific to a particular society, place, or time". Notice that customs, which one could say are the building blocks of habits, regimens, and especially traditions, are specific to a particular situation. The Catholic custom of blessing oneself with holy water upon entering a church would not go over well if one dipped one's fingers in the open punch bowl when entering a house party.

The irony is that traditions also work backwards. They employ customs that influence individuals to adhere to regimens, thus creating positive personal habits. In other words, although mindless traditions can work to stultify a person's growth (Bruce Lee was right about that), those same traditions can go along way to influence a person's habits in order to make him/her grow. Let's look for a moment at a martial practice, adherents of which think themselves without a tradition, yet its unconscious customs are traditions in the

making. In MMA, no one wears a gi anymore; instead the contestants customarily wear shorts and go bare-chested. The gloves are regulated. The match has rules (regimens). It is customary to make an entrance with theme music and an entourage. The fighters have their specialized but nonetheless customary victory symbols: dances, jumps, flips, hand signs, etc. There are a lot of traditions in MMA that we have seen forming over the last two decades.

Careful, guys, you may just create the traditions those rebels in “the traditional martial arts” will have to break away from.