



13. USE A HAMMER



Many indigenous cultures mark the transition from youth to adulthood by orchestrating initiation rituals where the younger self is ritually killed or destroyed, so that a new and larger self can emerge.

These powerful ceremonies often involve psychoactive plants, fasts from food and water, solitary time in the wilderness, physical scarification, and other demanding ordeals.

In our modern American culture, we lack definitive rituals to mark the transition from youth to adulthood, relying instead on the “bar mitzvah,” the “sweet sixteen,” the prom, the driver’s license, the army draft, and the buying of booze.

Without a clear transition between youth and adulthood, adolescent behavior can linger on indefinitely — as evidenced by our cultural obsession with fame, sex, money, material acquisition, and other adolescent pursuits.

When asked in our culture “who are you?” it is customary to rattle off a chronological list of accomplishments — habitually reciting the all-too-familiar life story that keeps our sense of self comfortably (if speciously) intact.

This egoic sense of self is precisely what is targeted by traditional rites of passage, so that participants are forced to go beyond their egos to connect with something universal.

As mythologist **Joseph Campbell** explains:

The tribal ceremonies of birth, initiation, marriage, burial, installation, and so forth, serve to translate the individual's life-crises and life-deeds into classic, impersonal forms. They disclose him to himself, not as this personality or that, but as the warrior, the bride, the widow, the priest, the chieftain; at the same time rehearsing for the rest of the community the old lesson of the archetypal stages.

In this ritual, I use simple framing lumber to build a large wooden easel, and place it at the edge of the field outside the old **High Acres Farm** cow barn, lit by twin pairs of halogen work lights.

One at a time, I place nine body-length mirrors onto the shelf of the easel. I choose nine different outfits representing nine distinct identities that defined me over the years: *the Baseball Card Collector; the Comic Book Lover; the Porn Concealer; the Deerfield Boy; the Water Polo Star; the Princeton Man; the Young Bachelor; the Data Artist; the naked body.*

One at a time, I put these outfits on, approach the mirror, and use my grandfather’s hammer to smash its reflection, before removing the outfit and discarding it on the growing heap.

Once all nine mirrors have been shattered, I use a butane torch to set the pile alight. I sit by the fire as the identities rise into the darkness, mingling together in sparks.

Performed in 2015 — Duration 5:53

