

Va-yikra 5780

KT Shabbat

Rabbi Aaron Goldstein
28 March 2020



D.H. Lawrence

The Old Idea of Sacrifice

The old idea of sacrifice was this:
That blood of the lower life must be shed
For the feeding and strengthening of the handsome, fuller life.

O when the old world sacrificed a ram
It was to the gods who make us splendid
And it was for a feast, a feast of meat, for men and maids
On a day of splendour, for the further splendour of being men.

It was the eating of little lives,
Even doves, even small birds
Into the dance and splendour of a bigger life.

There is no such thing as sin.
There is only life and anti-life.

And sacrifice is the law of life which enacts
That little lives much be eaten up into the dance and splendour
Of bigger lives, with due reverence and acknowledgement.

Appears in 'Modern Prose on The Bible,' a JPS Anthology.

It is unclear that D. H. Lawrence was writing of the sacrificial system of our ancient Israelite ancestors and perhaps on his many travels he personally witnessed equivalent practices. His brutal honesty rings true for ritual when it is wielded as a tool of power.

It is also true when the ritual consumes *us*; we lose focus on the connection between our communication with the Divine or the purpose of our observance and the catalyst, the mechanism of ritual becomes our obsession.

I reflected upon this when I spoke on the Voice of Islam Breakfast Show (#whatrabbisdo) this week, responding to their query, "Is coronavirus coming between people and their faiths?" The ancient Israelite cult required pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem, for what we now know as Sukkot, Pesach and Shavuot, the *shelosh regalim* – three pilgrim/harvest festivals. Rabbinic Judaism requires *minyan* – ten adult males - for a full, communal prayer service. The parallels in Islam are clear.

This week, many orthodox rabbis railed against those who met in private *minyanim*, in contravention of isolation laws, calling this obsession, idolatry; threatening in the future to withdraw the honour of an *aliyah* to those who attended. The mechanism was being worshipped, its original intent, to connect the worshipper with God was being desecrated.

In such trying times, we are all challenged as to how to behave and communicate with each other and God. What are the rituals we must suspend and what with the use of technology, in our case employed thanks to Leo Mindel and Jon Fiber, are vital to the life of our community.

This Shabbat we were to be celebrating the Kabbalat Torah, the services to mark the completion of a year group's formal religion school education; the opportunity to affirm their acceptance of Torah, and place of responsibility within our Kehillah Kedoshah, our sacred Jewish community. From now on as KT Members of NPLS, they can be assistant teachers in our Cheder and will receive their own weekly update and so decide upon the communal rituals and activities that are important to their Jewish identity. They will receive bereavement notices with the opportunity to support mourners; and they can vote at our AGM, being part of the decision-making process of our community. As Liberal Rabbis, we are not forcing them in their practice and hope that their experience, the values that their family and we have encouraged them to observe, they treasure, seeing themselves as links in our chain of tradition.

We have had to suspend the ritual with the sincere intention of rearranging the KT Shabbat services for healthier times. Yet this morning we can still celebrate our young people. We invite NPLS members to join them in the Kiddush Room to them make Kiddush and for us all to wish them 'Mazel Tov!'

And we hope and pray that as Rabbi Lea and I recite these ancient words for us all, you will feel their power intrinsic in their direct connection between you and the Divine Presence. May those in need of comfort, be comforted and consoled; may those in need of hope be inspired; may those in need of celebration, be joyful; all of us proclaiming and affirming life.

יְבָרֶכֶּךָ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ:

May God bless you and keep you!

יֵאָר יְהוָה | פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי וַיִּחַנֶּךָ:

May God look kindly upon you, and be gracious to you!

יֵשָׁא יְהוָה | פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי וַיִּשֶׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם:

May God reach out to you in tenderness, and give you peace.

And to that, let us all say, Amen!