

***Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam, Asher Kideshanu BeMitzvotav
VeTzivanu, La'asok BeDivrei Torah. Hafoch Bah!***

- Text 1:** **Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson, *Why do we beat the willow?*** (Conservative Judaism, Summer, 1996, p. 26-33)
As we now practice the ritual of the aravah [willow that is beat on Hoshanah Rabbah], additional aravot [willows] are provided to the worshipers just after the seven hakafot [processions around the synagogue] with the lulav and etrog, the last time the Arba'ah Minim are used that year. As the leader recites, "A voice brings tidings and says," the congregation strikes their aravot on the floor or against a solid object. It has become customary to strike five times, assuring that some of the leaves fall from the stem. There is no brachah to be recited for beating the willows, and no uniformity about the required number of willows or beatings necessary. The silence that surrounds this practice, the diverse ways it can be implemented all underscore how strange this ritual is. With no real context, how is this momentary violence to be explained? Why do we beat the willow?
- Text 2:** **Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth***, p. 103
A ritual is the enactment of a myth. By participating in a ritual, you are participating in a myth. ... The confirmation ritual is the counterpart today of these rites. ... The Jewish counterpart is the Bar Mitzvah. Whether it actually works to effect a psychological transformation will depend on the individual case, I suppose. But in those old days there was no problem. The boy came out with a different body, and he had really gone through something.
- Text 3:** **Yitzhak Buxbaum, *Jewish Tales of Mystic Joy***, p. 205
An Ecstatic Passing: ...On the final day of his life, when Rabbi Yitzhak was close to death and his family, friends, and many other people crowded around his bed, he saw that all their faces were sad. He rebuked them saying, "You should be happy! As the Torah says, '*She laughs on her final day!*' (Proverbs 31:25)'" He then told members of his family to get the gold and silver candlesticks and to light candles as for a holiday. He also asked them to bring musicians and singers, to play hymns and praises of God, and to sing sweet Hasidic melodies – as he put it – "to accompany my soul, as it leaves, with joy." Then, in a state of holy ecstasy and Hasidic joy, his soul exited in holiness and purity.
- Text 4:** **Rabbi Laura Geller, in *Lifecycles, Vol. I*** (ed. Rabbi Debra Orenstein), pp. 61-62
[Before a *simchat bat* (covenant ceremony for girls), a baby is simply the child of particular parents--even referred to only as "the baby." But, after such a ceremony,] a Jew linked through ritual to covenant and messiah, and transformed through ritual into so-and-so [the child of] particular parents within the context of the Jewish people....The infant is transformed, named, given tribe and history, roots and purpose, baggage and wings.
- Text 5:** **Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought***, (ed. P. Mendes-Flohr)
Mitzvot as a way of life, as a fixed and permanent form of human existence, preserve religion as a goal in itself and prevent it from turning into a means for attaining a goal. Indeed, most of the mitzvot have no sense unless we regard them in this manner, as an expression of selfless divine service. Most of the mitzvot have no instrumental or utilitarian value and cannot be construed as helping a person fulfill his earthly or spiritual needs. A person would not undertake this way of life unless he sees divine service as a goal in itself, not as a means to achieve any other purpose. Therefore, the Halacha directs its attention to one's duties and not to one's feelings.

Text 6: Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew*

In the matter of ritual observance, as in so many other phases of life, it is necessary to strike a balance between the interests of the group and the interests of the individual. This is implied in the fundamental principle that Judaism is a religious civilization. For a religious civilization is one which not only identifies the individual with his group, but makes the group responsible for the salvation of the individual, for helping him to experience life as supremely worthwhile or holy, and thus to commune with God. *A satisfactory rationale for Jewish usage is one that would recognize in it both a method of group survival and a means to the personal self-fulfillment, or salvation of the individual Jew.* Through it, the individual Jew will know the exhilaration of fully identifying himself with his people and, thereby, saving his own life from dullness, drabness and triviality. Jewish tradition brings to the daily living of the Jew, to his holiday celebration, to the celebration of turning points in his life, a wealth of beautiful and meaningful symbols embodying the sancta of his people, expressive of its ideals and native to its culture. These should be retained and developed; for no creed, no value, no self-identification of the individual with his people is effective, unless it is translated into action of a systematic and habitual nature.

Text 7: Rabbi Marc Wolf, *JTS Torah Commentary Shoftim 5767*

With regards to the kosher slaughterhouses, championed by Rabbi Morris Allen of Mendota Heights, Minnesota, the Conservative Movement has begun to recognize we do have a significant responsibility for those without voices. His Hechsher Tzedek is a symbol that hopefully will be affixed to kosher products. It will certify that the product has met standards that recognize that our reach for holiness extends beyond the blade of the slaughterer.

Text 8: Jay Michaelson, *Kashrut and Nonduality*, (*Zeek: A Journal of Jewish Thought and Culture* Nov. 06)

I think most of us carry on with our religious practices for emotional, rather than intellectual, reasons. The explanations come later. These are myths, after all. Of course, within the system, things are quite rational indeed, thanks to exhaustive scientific and pseudo-scientific reasoning that extends the basic norms of kashrut into the molecular details of modern kitchen chemistry. But the foundations themselves? Notwithstanding a few hundred years of rationalist philosophy, I find religion to be a matter of love and fear, not reason.

Text 9: Alan Elsner, *CNN: Lieberman's Sabbath has deep spiritual meaning* (August 12, 2000)

And on the seventh day he rested. This Saturday, the first Sabbath after he was selected as Democratic vice presidential candidate, Connecticut Sen. Joseph Lieberman, an Orthodox Jew, stepped off the campaign trail and retreated into a world of prayer and celebration, as he does most Saturdays unless interrupted by official business... Lieberman has often spoken of how meaningful he finds the Sabbath. In a 1997 interview with Reuters, he said: "It provides me ... with a sense of sanctuary in my week which has become more important to me as I've gone on in life and become busier."