

The Lamb of God

Sacrifice in the Hindu tradition

In Nepal, as elsewhere in South Asia, deities are usually worshipped in one of two ways. In the one, which is directed to Vishnu and Shiva, Lakshmi and Parvati, for example, positive, devotional *pujā* is offered. These deities are considered vegetarian and therefore an offering usually includes such elements as fruit and flowers as well as vermilion. In the other, blood sacrifice is offered to Durga, Bhagavati, Taleju, Bhairava and others, which are considered blood-drinking deities [*hitvādyah*]. Sacrifice is the most important element of the rite for these dangerous deities. The purpose of the former offering is to draw the worshipper closer to the deity. The purpose of the latter, however, is to separate the worshipper from an angry deity or a malevolent demon. It is the offering of life.

Swami Dayanand Bharati says this:

In the Hindu tradition every sacrifice needs three elements—a *devata*, a *drivya* and a *tayāgi*. Generally sacrifices are offered to a particular deity so the need for a *devata*, in every sacrifice something is offered so the *drivya* (material), and the *jajmān* or the owner of the sacrifice is the one who is a *tayāgi* as he gives up something.

In the classical Hindu text, *Manusmriti*, no meat was to be consumed unless it was sacrificed. Otherwise the consumer was guilty of sin [*pāp*]. For this reason, then, in Nepal the Newar Butchers [Khadgi] always slaughter the water buffalo in the course of a short ritual sacrifice. This makes the eating of their meat by their customers the taking of what is considered *prasād*.

Throat cutting and death through the resulting loss of blood is considered a uniquely Newar method of sacrificing. It is said that the animal should have life in him to witness the sacrifice he is making to the deity, and that this is not possible through decapitation.

This method is sometimes taken further. On the occasion of Yēnyaḥ at Cāka Bahi a special *pujā* is done to Tripurasundāri (one of the Dashmahāvidya). In it a buffalo is sacrificed slowly to the deity with the animal's entrails being pulled out from its neck before it is dead. It is a particularly gruesome method that is repeated elsewhere.

It is important for us to understand the meaning of sacrifice. Why are sacrifices offered to a deity? By examining the sacrifices in detail I shall try to demonstrate the Newar view of sacrifice and then relate it to the way the Bible explains sacrifice.

Sacrifice as voluntary offering

In order to distinguish between sacrifice and murder the victim must give his assent to his death, which he does by shaking his head or (in the case of the goat) his entire body. Ritually pure water is sprinkled over the animal and into the ear, which usually quickly has the desired effect. So a proper sacrifice is one in which the victim willingly offers himself to be sacrificed.

Sacrifice as propitiation

Animal sacrifice in the Newar community is considered propitiatory in the sense that by it the deity is caused to be favourable to the worshipper. If there is any sense that the deity is angry with the worshipper then it is hoped that the sacrifice will appease the deity's wrath, even though the exact offence is not known and may have been made by someone else. This can be seen particularly during two of Lalitpur's annual festivals—the Bungadyaḥ Jātrā and Yēnyaḥ.

Yēnyaḥ Pujā (Indra Jātrā) is a festival for the worship of the Vedic god Indra. Indra, however, is considered somewhat remote and his worship is not as important at this time as the worship of the dangerous gods, such as Bhairava and the various forms of the Goddess, the Eight Mother Goddesses [Ashtamātrika] and Ten Great Knowledges [Dashmahāvidya]. Special *pujā* is offered to these deities during the festival. Likewise, residents worship local Power-Places [*pitha/pigandyah*].

In the chariot festival of Bungadyaḥ [Jātrā], sacrifices are offered especially to Bhairava. This is clearly propitiatory. Bhairava is considered easily angered. He is one of the dangerous deities that are thought to be necessary because the non-dangerous deities are considered lacking in strength to fight evil. According to the myth of the Jātrā, Bungadyaḥ had to be brought from Kāmarup in order to bring salvation to the nation in its desperate drought. But he had to be carried by the four Bhairavas. The Bhairavas are then symbolised in the wheels of the chariot.

According to the symbolism of the Jātrā, the Bhairavas must carry the deity that brings salvation in the form of rain for the crops. But the Bhairavas may be angered by something and they may manifest their anger by taking the life of one of the participants, running him over while the chariot is being pulled. So they must first be appeased with animal sacrifice. Furthermore, a special propitiatory rite is performed during the building of new wheels with a number of young rams being sacrificed. So there is a clear idea that a wrathful deity can be pacified by sacrifice.

Sacrifice as substitution

The ultimate sacrifice is that of one's own self. It seems very likely that the practise of human sacrifice was common in Licchavi times. It may have persisted right up to Rana times. It has probably died out in Nepal but persists on occasion in parts of India even today. There is a tension, however, between the efficacy of offering oneself to the gods and the problem of reaping the earthly benefits of such generosity. What is the point of sacrificing oneself if one cannot get any blessing in this life? So there has always been a tendency to substitute something for oneself.

Animals make a good substitute because they are like humans in many ways. The ancient Aryans practised many forms of animal sacrifice. Among them were even horse and bull offerings. Sometimes the substitutionary nature of a sacrifice is clear as at the welcoming of a new bride to the home of the Tāmraḥars of Naḥ Bāhāḥ, Pwāḥsyāḥ, Jhvaḥchē, and Cabāchē lineages [*khalah*]. These lineages are unique in practising this scapegoat ritual [Dugucā Cwekegu]. As the bride enters the house a goat is brought out of the house and taken out of the city to the Mahālakshmi *pitha* where it is sacrificed to the

deity. One elderly woman told me, “We do the scapegoat ritual because the bride might bring evil spirits [*bhut, pret*] with her”. It is thought, therefore, that the goat can be a substitute for the bride.

The Lineage Deity [*digu dyaḥ*] is another dangerous deity who must be appeased with the offering of life. Like the Power-Places of the Mother Goddesses [*Ashtamātrika pithas*], the Lineage Deity is always both outside the city boundaries and represented by a plain stone. Clearly the Lineage Deity, like the Devi, is regarded as a dangerous deity that requires propitiation with blood. This is shown by some of the Sanskrit names that have been given the deity—Ugracandimai and Siddhilakshmi Purnacandi. The identity of the Lineage Deity is, therefore, joined to that of the Devi.

The central element in Lineage Deity Worship [*digu dyaḥ pujā*] is the sacrifice of a pure black goat [*nyākhuru dugu*].¹ The goat in this case is a substitute for the lineage. The worshippers, then, demonstrate this notion of substitution through the common eating of the *sikaḥ bhu* feast. By sacrifice any terror that the Lineage Deity held for the lineage [*khalah*] is propitiated and the lineage is once more put into a right relationship with the deity. This takes place immediately before the onset of the monsoon when the natural and civic order is upset and people often fall ill with serious diseases such as cholera, typhoid and, at one time, smallpox. There is a real threat to the continuation of the lineage. Through the sacrifice, however, it is hoped that the threat might be withdrawn.

But other things are often substituted for animals in the course of rituals. Many Newars consciously substitute an egg, for instance, for the animal. Other times, such as at Mohani, a vegetable is substituted. On Cālā (Vijāya Dasami) many households call a Citrakār to come and paint the face of a demon [*daitya*] on a large unripe pumpkin. They then do Daitya Pujā to it and sacrifice [*phāsi palyu*] it by cutting it with a sword [*khwā*].

Substitution is clearly important in the Newar ritual. So why don't people often see the substitutionary nature of their own sacrifices? Children have a strong sense of empathy

and identification with the sacrificial animal. This sometimes persists into adulthood. People will say something like, “What if I were killed and given in sacrifice in that way, what would happen to me?” But such empathy creates a tension in the mind of the worshipper. As he grows up he becomes identified more with the community of sacrificers. This often happens as the child comes of age, often at the time of their Loincloth Worship [Kayta Pujā] or Confinement [Barha Tayegu]. He no longer has the same feelings that he had when he was a child.

Sacrifice as expiation

The Newar sacrificial system is not explicitly an expiatory one. That is, animals are not sacrificed specifically to atone for sin. In the Newar worldview, sin must be atoned for by some righteous act—some act of *dharma*.

Even though animal sacrifice can be considered an act of *dharma* Newars do not believe that a simply ritual act is sufficient to remove the worshipper’s sin. One man expressed it like this: “You can’t get forgiveness by doing sacrifice.... I don’t like that idea at all.” I quizzed him further: “Then what is the sacrifice to Durga for?” “Security,” he replied, “... success in some endeavour.”

The purpose of the sacrifice may be expressed simply as the ‘pleasure’ [*khushi*] of the deity. But it has to be asked: Why is the deity unhappy? What has caused the deity to look unfavourably upon the worshipper? Lineage Deity Worship gives us a clue here. The ritual is often called *chemā pujā*. It is performed to bring forgiveness to the worshippers. The worshippers do not seem to have a clear understanding of what they might have done to upset that relationship. But they do believe that forgiveness is needed and that the sacrifice in some way accomplishes that.

There is, therefore, in the Newar mind a notion that the relationship of deity with humanity is not as it should be. Sin has been committed. What that sin is exactly is not

¹ Some suggest that a pure white goat is also acceptable. The important thing is that it must be without blemish, or be mixed in colour. A duck or duck’s egg may be offered as a substitute.

clear. But a sacrifice is thought to restore the worshipper back into a right relationship with the deity.

The beginning of sacrifice

Up to this point I have tried to demonstrate the Newar view of sacrifice. Sacrifices are a very important part of Newar religious life. The notions of a voluntary offering, propitiation, substitution, and expiation are all present. These notions are also clearly present in the Bible.

Any account of sacrifice in the Bible must start right at the beginning in the Garden of Eden. The first man and woman sinned against their creator. They have rebelled against their creator by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which the Lord had told them not to eat. They knew they were guilty and felt ashamed of their nakedness, which up to that point had given them no shame. So they sewed coverings of fig leaves for themselves.² But a covering of fig leaves was not good enough for the Lord; “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21).

There are two important things that we must learn from this event. Firstly, an animal had to die to cover the shame of Adam and Eve. Secondly, any attempt by the man and his wife to cover themselves was doomed to failure. There was no covering that the man and his wife could make for themselves that could adequately cover the shame of their rebellion. God had to make a covering himself. That covering then, could only come as a result of a sacrifice. Something had to die as a substitute for Adam and Eve. That something had to be like the man and woman. The piercing of leaves was not a clear enough analogy to convey the seriousness of the people’s sin. Blood had to be shed.

The LORD will provide

Abraham was chosen by the Lord to receive his grace even though he was a sinner just like everyone else. He was not chosen because he was good but because God wanted to

² See Genesis 3:7.

choose him. God made a covenant with Abraham. In the covenant God promised to bless Abraham, to give him a land and a family. That family would live in the land of promise and grow to be a great nation, which in turn would bring blessing to the whole world.

But Abraham was an old man and childless. He wondered how the Lord could make his descendants into a great nation if he did not even have one son. But after much waiting God gave him Isaac. Isaac grew up. But then the Lord gave Abraham a test.

Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." (Genesis 22:2-14)

We cannot begin to appreciate the turmoil that must have been in Abraham's mind as he walked to Mount Moriah with his promised son to sacrifice him as an offering of worship to the Lord. But in spite of the difficulty Abraham had in understanding the Lord's command he was prepared to carry out the gruesome task. He reasoned that God could raise the dead back to life.³ What a relief when the angel stopped him from killing his son. Let us note two key observations from this story:

1. A substitute was acceptable to the Lord.
2. The Lord himself provided the substitute.

We will see as we read on through the Bible how these notions are repeated.

The Passover lamb

Generations later the descendants of Abraham had indeed become a great nation. But they were yet to inherit the land that the Lord had promised them. They were slaves in Egypt. The king of Egypt did not want to let them go. But God was determined to bring them out of the land of slavery and take them to the Promised Land. So he inflicted plagues on the people of Egypt. Each time the king said he would let them go if only Moses, the leader of the Israelites would remove the plague. And each time he retracted his commitment. The last plague was a plague of death. Death was to come in every house in Egypt as God's judgement on the land.

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb⁴ for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbour, having taken into account the number of people there are. You

³ See Hebrews 11:19.

⁴ The Hebrew word can mean *lamb* or *kid*; also in verse 4.

are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire-head, legs and inner parts. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover.

“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn-both men and animals-and I will bring judgement on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD -a lasting ordinance. For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat-that is all you may do.

“Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day. For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses. And whoever eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is an alien or native-born. Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread.”

Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning. When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood

on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

“Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’ “ Then the people bowed down and worshiped. The Israelites did just what the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron.

At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead. (Exodus 12:1-30)

The key thing to observe here is that something had to die in every household because in God’s sight no household was without sin. In the Egyptian household the eldest son was put to death. But among the Israelites a young male goat or sheep was put to death in place of the firstborn son. Here again we see the principle of substitution. Furthermore, the blood of the slain animal was to be painted on the doorframe of the house. The household that sheltered in that house came under that blood. They were covered by the blood. And so they were saved from the destroyer.

A sacrificial system

The Israelites left Egypt, crossed the Red Sea and arrived at Horeb, the mountain of God in the desert. The Lord called Moses up the mountain where he made a covenant with the people of Israel.

‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagle’s wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession. (Exodus 19:4-5)

The stipulations of the covenant described the attitudes and behaviour that was acceptable for the people who belong to God. This was called the Law of God. In it also the Lord stipulated rules for the continuation of sacrifice. There were to be various types

of sacrifice offered at various times of the day and various seasons of the year. The key principle that the Lord laid out here was that he is holy: “I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy” (Leviticus 11:45). God is pure and without defect. Therefore, God says, his worshippers are also to be holy.

To make this principle clear the Lord laid down a whole system of regulations concerning his worship. Among these were regulations for sacrifices. Only certain clean animals were acceptable and they were to be without blemish and free from any kind of defect. These sacrifices were to be repeated on a regular basis. Certain sacrifices, the whole burnt sacrifices, were intended purely as an offering of worship. Others were meant to express fellowship with God. The most important of these sacrifices, however, was the sacrifice of atonement.

Sacrifice of atonement

The sacrifice of atonement was to be offered once a year by the high priest. As I have already pointed out, only Aaron, the high priest was given permission to enter the Most Holy Place in the Lord’s temple. And this was the only time he was allowed to enter. This was how the sacrifice of atonement was to be offered:

“This is how Aaron is to enter the sanctuary area: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

“Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat.⁵ Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat.

⁵ That is, the goat of removal; also in verses 10 and 26.

“Aaron shall bring the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household, and he is to slaughter the bull for his own sin offering. He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die. He is to take some of the bull’s blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover.

“He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull’s blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it. In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness. No one is to be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel.

“Then he shall come out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it. He shall take some of the bull’s blood and some of the goat’s blood and put it on all the horns of the altar. He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times to cleanse it and to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites.

“When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.

“Then Aaron is to go into the Tent of Meeting and take off the linen garments he put on before he entered the Most Holy Place, and he is to leave them there. He shall bathe himself with water in a holy place and put on his regular garments. Then he shall come out and sacrifice the burnt offering for himself and the burnt offering for the people, to make atonement for himself and for the people. He shall also burn the fat of the sin offering on the altar.

“The man who releases the goat as a scapegoat must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water; afterward he may come into the camp. The bull and the goat for the sin offerings, whose blood was brought into the Most

Holy Place to make atonement, must be taken outside the camp; their hides, flesh and offal are to be burned up. The man who burns them must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water; afterward he may come into the camp.

“This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work—whether native-born or an alien living among you—because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins. It is a sabbath of rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance. The priest who is anointed and ordained to succeed his father as high priest is to make atonement. He is to put on the sacred linen garments and make atonement for the Most Holy Place, for the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and for the priests and all the people of the community.

“This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites.” (Leviticus 16:3-34)

The sacrifice of atonement was the single most important of all the sacrifices instituted by the Lord. It is important then to understand the meaning of this sacrifice. What was it for? The sacrifice is one of atonement [*prayascitta*]. When the Lord gave his people the law he understood that they would not keep that law but would transgress it. Nevertheless, he would not lower his perfect standards. Instead he made provision for the sin of the people to be dealt with. The Lord is a holy God. But his creatures are unholy. They are sinners. They transgress his law. But their sin can be atoned for through sacrifice. This is very clearly, then, a sacrifice of expiation—the bearing of sin. To make this clearer he had the high priest enact the scapegoat ritual. Of two goats chosen for the sacrifice only one would actually be slaughtered. The other would be brought forward and the high priest would place his hands on the goat’s head and confess all the sins of the community over the goat. The goat would then be taken outside the camp and led away into the desert. In this way, figuratively, the sins of the people would be removed from them.

The inefficacy of the blood of animals

Not all the sins of the people of Israel, however, were covered by the provision of sacrifice. Some were so bad that the offender had to be put to death. The blood of an

animal was not sufficient to cover the sin of the murder of a fellow human being. King David recognised this. He had sent a man to his death in battle with the intention of seizing his wife for himself. And when he was confronted by a man of God he recognised his sin. In the book of Psalms David's penitential prayer to the Lord is recorded for us.

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
Save me from bloodguilt, O God,
the God who saves me,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise. (Psalm 51:1-2, 14-17)

We are told that animal sacrifice is not enough to make a person right with God. The one who thinks that the mere ritual of shedding blood will make him right with God is wrong. God desires a broken spirit, a contrite heart. The broken spirit does not rely on mere ritual. It casts itself at the feet of the Lord and cries out for forgiveness. It knows that God has no obligation to give mercy and does not argue that the good deeds it has done outweigh the bad deeds.

Animal sacrifice is not good enough

The prophet Isaiah added one crucial element to the Bible's developing ideal of sacrifice. An animal, we are told, is not close enough to us to be a sufficient substitute. If we are to be cleansed by blood then that blood must be of one like us. The one to be sacrificed must be a man. This is how Isaiah describes the one he calls the Servant and tells how he would be sacrificed:

Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
He grew up before him like a tender shoot,

and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.
Like one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.
He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before her shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
By oppression and judgement he was taken away.
And who can speak of his descendants?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was stricken.
He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.
Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.
After the suffering of his soul,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.
Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53)

Up to this point in the Bible story all the sacrifices were of animals. They were unwilling and unsuspecting. But the Servant was a man. In Isaiah's vision that man went willingly to the place of sacrifice. He knew what was coming but he did not argue or bargain: 'He did not open his mouth'. We know that an animal cannot really make a willing sacrifice. But in his prophecy Isaiah saw that the ultimate sacrifice would have to be human in order to be willing. The Servant would offer the ultimate sacrifice of his own self. In that way he would bear the sin of many. But who would that suffering servant be? The people of Israel had to wait hundreds of years to find out.

The Lamb of God

The prophet John, whom we have already seen giving the water initiation [*jal samskāra*] in the River Jordan, pointed the people to the Lord Jesus. One day John saw Jesus coming toward him and this is what he declared,

“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.” (John 1:29-31)

The Lord Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! All the sacrifices of Israel's history were shadows of this one sacrifice. All the lambs were mere models of the great sacrifice that was to come. Here was the reality. So when the Lord Jesus was put to death by cruel hands it was not only a wicked crime but also a great sacrifice.

The Lord Jesus was the ideal sacrifice. As we have already seen, every sacrifice needs three elements: a *devata*, a *drivya* and a *tayāgi*. In the great sacrifice of Jesus we see all these elements belong to God himself. God is not only the *devata* to whom the sacrifice is offered. He is also the *tayāgi* and the *drivya*. God offered himself as a sacrifice to satisfy his own demand for a perfect offering. The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is voluntary, propitiatory, expiatory, and substitutionary. It was voluntary in that he offered himself of his own accord. It was propitiatory in that by it God's anger against sinners was satisfied. And it was expiatory in that by it the sin of his people was dealt with, taken away.

Finally, because Jesus was a man, he was a perfect substitute for us in a way that an animal never could be.

The end of all sacrifice

If the Lord Jesus has offered himself as the perfect sacrifice then what of all the sacrifice people continue to offer? If we have come under the covering of the blood of the Lord Jesus and eaten of his flesh by trusting that his sacrifice offered once and for all time is enough for our salvation then why do we need to sacrifice animals anymore? Who looks at the middleman [*lahmi*] when the bridegroom has arrived? A few years after Jesus' ascension into heaven his disciple, writing to Hebrew Christ-*bhaktas* answered these questions:

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.
Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—
I have come to do your will, O God.’”

First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them” (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to

be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

“This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”

Then he adds:

“Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”

And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:1-22)

The way of devotion [*bhakti marg*] as it has been revealed to us in the Bible is not the way of continued sacrifices. It is the way of heartfelt love of the devotee [*bhakta*] to his *guru*. We accept by faith that the Lord Jesus' death is enough to make atonement [*prayascitta*] for our sin and make us one with God. We confess that we have failed to love him as we should have done and seek with his help to give him alone the *bhakti* he deserves.

