DIFFERING INTENTIONS IN VEDIC AND JEWISH SACRIFICE

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Those of us who study Hinduism and Judaism recognize that these two traditions represent and categorize human experience differently than Christianity does. Yet Christianity—particularly western Protestant Christianity—has shaped the academic study and presentation of religion in general. One of the most important contributions we can make to this study, therefore, is to present comparative work that illuminates differences between religious traditions at the same time that it provides an avenue for thoughtful comparison across traditions. Such research recognizes the unique personalities of various religious traditions while affirming our ability and responsibility to compare and contrast different religious communities around the world and across the centuries.[1]

For example, Hinduism and Judaism both have rich, well-developed sacrificial traditions.[2] Ancient sacrificial practices inform other strands of these traditions, strands that persist to the present. At the same time, sacrifice in these two traditions is a very different phenomenon than in Protestant Christianity. The purpose of this essay is to examine one aspect of ancient Hindu (Vedic) and Jewish sacrifice. Specifically, we will ask, what are the various intentions that participants brought to specific sacrificial events? How does the possibility of these different intentions shape the information provided in (and omitted from) the sacrificial texts themselves? Finally, what do these intentions suggest—either directly or indirectly—about what the ritual participants assumed about the nature of sacrifice? While we can only touch briefly on general responses to these questions, relevant Vedic and Jewish texts recognize a wide variety of intentions that, in turn, shape sacrificial practice. The study of these intentions and what they reveal about Vedic and Jewish sacrifice suggest future avenues of exploration for the study of religion.

This essay will focus primarily on texts in brahmanical Hinduism and biblical and rabbinic Judaism that describe sacrificial procedures, specifically the Śrauta-Sūtras (ca. 800-300 BCE) in Vedic literature and the Mishnah (ca. 220 CE) in Jewish literature. The discussions of sacrifice in the Mishnah build on the biblical injunctions given to the Israelites in the Torah, but these injunctions are fleshed out in much more detail in the Mishnah. The opinions presented in the Mishnah are grounded in a tradition that had centuries of practical experience with sacrifice. The Mishnah itself, however, is not a record of this experience. Rather, it includes a compilation of rabbinic opinions about sacrifice. These opinions were compiled after a century and a half of Jewish life without sacrificial practice (after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE). The Mishnah, then, presents elaborately detailed discussions of what the rabbis thought *should* have happened in different sacrificial situations, not a record of what *did* happen.

Like the Mishnah, the Śrauta-Sūtras are elaborately detailed. In other ways, however, the Śrauta-Sūtras differ markedly from the Mishnah. Jan Gonda notes, "the *śrautasūtras* are manuals compiled for a practical purpose, viz. giving directions to those who officiated at the several solemn sacrificial rites that were performed or recommended in Vedic times. Their authors provide us with many detailed and meticulously accurate descriptions of these ceremonies."[3] The different Śrauta-Sūtras reflect distinct priestly schools' traditions regarding public or "solemn" sacrificial practices. In addition, they comment on ongoing ritual practices rather than on one that was interrupted by the catastrophic destruction of a single central ritual space, since Vedic sacrifice, while not widespread, continues to be practiced in India today. It would be tempting to treat the Śrauta-Sūtras as records of actual Vedic practice, but it is more accurate to read these *sūtras*, as priestly representations of what Vedic sacrifices should look like. Both the Mishnah and the Śrauta-Sūtras, then, present theoretical characterizations of sacrifice, not historical records.

Both of these textual traditions reveal concerns that the priests and rabbis had about sacrificial practice. Their discussions anticipate four distinct possible sacrificial scenarios: 1) the sacrificial paradigm, in which the sacrifice progresses as it is described in the texts; 2) sacrifices that include unconscious or inadvertent errors, only some of which can be remedied; 3) sacrifices that include deliberate changes that still attempt to fulfill the stated ritual purpose; and 4) sacrifices with deliberate changes that attempt to subvert the ritual's paradigmatic purpose. The primary texts implicitly anticipate these four possible scenarios, and they suggest that these different scenarios arise as a result of the differing intentions that ritual participants bring to ritual performances. The specific intentions behind specific ritual performances are important because intentions influence—and alter—how ritual participants act. For example, my behavior in a ritual will be different if I intend to sabotage the ritual than if I intend to perform it correctly.

The remainder of this essay will examine several specific ritual scenarios, demonstrating that various intentions shape ritual practice and, by extension, the descriptions of ritual practice presented in the primary texts.

Four factors contribute to a ritual participant's intentions: individual human desire, the traditional purpose of a particular sacrifice, elements of the execution of a specific ritual, and cultural obligation. The first element, "individual human desire," refers to what the ritual participants want to get out of the sacrifice, specifically the priest(s) and the ritual patron (the one who benefits from the sacrifice). In simple terms, an individual's behavior depends on what that individual desires as a result of the ritual.

The second element, "traditional purpose," refers to the intended result of the ritual according to the tradition, either specifically or more generally. Sacrifices, for example, are often intended to generate wealth, offspring, and atonement for sins or, more generally, maintenance of the cosmos. What one does in a sacrifice is affected directly by the traditional purpose of the sacrifice.

The third element, the "ritual execution," refers to the actual performance of a specific ritual. As we are all aware, actual ritual performances often differ from the ideal procedures described in manuals. Alterations in the execution of a sacrifice reflect the specific intentions brought to the sacrifice.

Finally, "cultural obligation" refers to the attending social factors that influence a sacrifice. For example, cultural obligation may force an individual to participate in a sacrifice at a given time of the year because of the community's liturgical calendar or his socially prescribed role, not because he particularly wants to participate or because he directly benefits from the sacrifice.[4] Frequently, for example, church attendance swells at Easter and Christmas, only to diminish again in subsequent weeks. Some who attend church on these holidays frequently do so because it's culturally appropriate, not because they feel committed to the Christian tradition as a whole. Cultural obligation brings external social pressure to bear upon individuals to act in specific ritual ways. As a result people participate in certain rituals because it is expected, not necessarily to obtain spiritual fulfillment or to fulfill a specific religious requirement. Cultural obligation can also place social pressures upon ritual participants in relationship to one another, in particular in the relationship between the priest and the ritual patron. The way an individual responds to his cultural obligations influences the actual ritual scenario.

These four factors influence individual ritual participants. As a result, participants bring different intentions to specific ritual performances. These intentions, in turn, generate different ritual scenarios. We turn to these now.

1. The Paradigmatic Sacrifice

The first scenario is the paradigmatic sacrifice. The Śrauta-Sūtras and the Mishnah exist principally to describe paradigmatic or ideal sacrifices, rituals that unfold exactly as they are supposed to, that go "by the book." Both traditions present models for sacrificial activity, describing the way to execute the sacrifice, explaining its purpose, and identifying the principal participants. The underlying assumption of the sacrificial texts in both traditions is that, when everything goes according to plan, each sacrifice accomplishes its intended specific purpose. In a perfect ritual, individual participants and the community attain their desires or fulfill their religious or cultural obligations. In this scenario, the intention is to execute each ritual according to a prescribed model in order to achieve its stated purpose.

Note that "intention" here has nothing to do with having the right attitude toward God or toward humanity. Vedic and Jewish sacrifices are generally understood to be mechanical processes; if performed correctly, they can't help but generate the promised results. Other strands of each tradition express concerns about the individual participant's inner attitudes, spiritual "fitness," and so on, but the results of sacrifices are generally determined by accurate ritual execution, not by any internal, invisible spiritual state.

While both the Mishnah and the Śrauta-Sūtras focus on the procedures involved in sacrifice, they also reveal differences between the Vedic and Jewish understandings of the mechanics of sacrifice. The Vedic texts assume that their sacrifices have a theurgic efficacy related to their cosmic function.[5] In other words, the sacrifice keeps the universe running. According to the creation stories, the creator deity, Prajāpati, established the paradigm for sacrifice through his own actions at the inception of the universe. Prajāpati originated the sacrifice as its creator, as the original sacrificer, and as the original sacrificial victim.[6] Thus Prajāpati introduced sacrifice into the Vedic imagination by modeling it, not by commanding it. As a

result, sacrifices are assumed to be efficacious in the Vedic tradition because the cosmic order assures their efficacy. A sacrifice brought the universe into being, and sacrifice will keep it running. The ritual patron, or *yajamāna*, and the priests manipulate the sacrificial substances just as Prajāpati did.

However, Prajāpati is not in control of the forces in the universe that allow sacrifice to work. Although he is credited with being the first to initiate sacrifice, he does *not* determine the rules that govern its performance. Sacrifice works because its activities resonate with forces and relationships on the macrocosmic level.[7] Prajāpati may have performed the first sacrifice, but he is not ultimately the source or object of continuing sacrificial practice in the Vedic tradition.

Vedic sacrifices have two purposes. First, they generate and maintain the cosmic order. Second, they can generate specific rewards for the ritual patron, such as rain, children, or cattle. The specific purpose of any particular sacrifice is generally articulated by the *yajamāna* at the beginning of the sacrifice.[8] This purpose determines many of the materials and procedures used in the sacrifice.[9] For example, the Kātyāyana Śrauta-Sūtras (KŚS) notes, "the quantity or size of the sacrificial material should be fixed...according to the purpose it is going to serve."[10] The sacrifice is understood to be efficacious because of the stringent cause-and-effect cosmic laws to which even the deities themselves are subject.[11]

In the Vedic imagination individual sacrifices may benefit human beings, but sacrifice in general was not designed for that purpose. Sacrifice does not exist for the sake of those who perform it. Rather, sacrifice grows out of and reflects the nature of the cosmos. Humans may participate in sacrifice, but they are by no means the center of sacrificial activity.

The Jewish characterization of ritual activity is somewhat different. First, in the Jewish tradition individuals or the community perform sacrifices to fulfill God's command, not to imitate God's behavior. Nothing in the Jewish creation story compares to Prajāpati's model of self-sacrifice and reconstitution. Rather, the Torah makes it clear that the created world is fundamentally "other" than the Creator God. The Torah begins by explaining, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."[12] God already exists, without explanation. God's people sacrifice precisely because they are different from God, not to follow his example. Second, as far as I have been able to discern, Jewish sacrifices do not attempt to generate earthly goods such as wealth or cattle.[13] Rather, the sacrifices address various kinds of guilt within a very detailed system of atonement. Certain kinds of guilt require certain kinds of offerings.[14] Third, rabbinic discussions about sacrifices tend to focus on whether or not specific offerings are valid (*kosher*), not whether the sacrifice as a whole is "efficacious."[15] The texts describe different degrees of invalidity: sacrifices that are invalid (*pasul*) but that do not incur guilt as a result, and sacrifices that are invalid and also incur a severe penalty.[16] Many passages in the Mishnah describe activities that invalidate a sacrifice.[17] Ultimately rituals are valid when they are executed in accordance with divine commands, not because they correspond with the cosmic order.[18]

In both of these traditions, then, the paradigmatic model of sacrifice, sacrifice "by the book," occurs when the individual desires of the human participants, the traditional ritual purpose, the ritual execution, and the attending cultural obligations

work together. In this scenario, the intention of all the participants is to accomplish the traditional ritual goals by executing the sacrifice correctly, thus fulfilling their cultural obligations. When these four factors are in consonance, the ritual accomplishes its intended goal.

2. Unconscious/Inadvertent Errors in Execution of the Sacrifice

So far we have assumed that rituals always proceed as planned. Both traditions, however, recognize a second scenario in which errors occur during the execution of rituals. For example, the Mishnah refers to a priest who accidentally spilled a basin of consecrated water on his feet rather than on the altar.[19] Everyone agrees that the priest made an error in this instance. The type of "intention" we see in these situations is unintentional error. In these cases human desire, the stated ritual purpose, and cultural obligation are all "in sync," but the actual execution of the ritual fails. Both traditions provide for such situations and discuss extensively which errors, under which circumstances, can be remedied, and which errors cause irreparable damage to the sacrifice.

The Vedic material presents an entire category of expiatory rites specifically meant to redress errors in ritual performances. The texts that describe these expiations (or *prayaścittas*) also make it clear that certain errors can be redressed, but others cannot. "There is instruction laying down the expiatory rites in the case of the principal rites (being) performed improperly."[20] If, for example, the ritual patron's wife begins her menses during the course of the New or Full-Moon sacrifice, several of the Śrauta-Sūtras describe expiatory steps to be taken.[21] Or, if one of the performers of the sacrifice dies in the midst of the sacrifice, another person may be substituted in his place.[22] The substitute performer is paid, and it is understood that the benefits of the sacrifice accrue to the deceased performer. We see, then, that the brahmanical texts provide plenty of opportunities to remedy types of errors that occur in sacrifice.

The Jewish material also discusses ritual errors, generally in terms of a sacrifice's validity. In many cases errors do not invalidate a sacrifice, but they limit its impact.[23] For example, Zev. 6.7 asserts that if a priest drains the blood of a bird being used as a whole burnt offering (*'olah*), but "not under its own name," the offering is valid, but cannot be counted as having fulfilled the presenter's obligation (*lo yatza*). In other words, no expiation is required, but the presenter needs to bring another bird and make sure the procedure is performed correctly. Other, more extreme errors, however, can invalidate a sacrifice. In general, if the animal offering is slaughtered improperly,[24] if the victim is not valid as a sacrificial offering,[25] or if the sacrificial activity is performed incorrectly,[26] the sacrifice is invalid. For example, Zev. 1.1 states, "All sacrifices that have not been slaughtered as the sacrifice for which they were intended (lit., "slaughtered not under their own name," *she-lo lishman*) are valid, but they are not credited to the owner in fulfillment of his obligation, except for a Passover offering and a transgression offering." In other words, the offering substance may be sacrificed, but the sacrifice will not fulfill the owner's ritual obligation. In another example, Zev. 4.1 and 2 debate whether or not a priest has effected atonement (*kipper*) if he has failed to perform one act of sprinkling, "Therefore, though he carried out all the acts of sprinkling in the manner

ordained, and only one not in the prescribed manner, the offering is invalid (*pasul*)." Men. 1.2 notes, "If the priest took the handful with his left hand, it is invalid."[27] Thus errors can affect sacrifices to varying degrees.

As in the Vedic case, a substitute may be required for personnel as well as for a material offering. For example, one paragraph of the Mishna discusses what should be done if the high priest dies:

> The offering cakes of the high priest were not brought in half-portions. Rather he had to bring a whole tenth, which was divided. Half was offered in the morning and half in the afternoon. If the high priest who offers the half in the morning dies, and they appoint another high priest in his stead, he must not bring a half-tenth from his own house or the half-tenth of the first high priest, but he must bring an entire tenth [of his own], which is halved. He (the new high priest) offers one half [in the afternoon] and allows the other (the first high priest's) half to perish.[28]

Thus even the high priest can be replaced if the proper procedure is followed.

In both the Vedic and Jewish material some errors are too great to be expiated. Men. 13.1, for example, notes that the sages say, "Even [for] the one who slaughters the sacrifice within the Temple courtyard and offers it outside, once he has taken it outside, he has rendered the offering invalid." In the Vedic material similar situations arise in which the error is too great and no expiation can remedy the situation. For example, if the milk collected in the evening for the New- or Full-Moon sacrifice is stolen or becomes defiled, the Kātyāyana, Baudhāyana, and Āpastamba Śrauta-Sūtras all agree that there is no adequate expiation.[29]

In our second scenario, then, when an unconscious error occurs, individual desire, the traditional ritual goal, and cultural obligation are in consonance with one another, but the actual execution of the ritual fails. An unintentional change occurs in the performance of the sacrifice. In some situations, the unintentional flaw in the execution of the ritual overrides the other three factors and, as a result, the ritual fails to accomplish its stated purpose. In other cases, the unintentional error can be expiated, and the texts describe how. Not only do expiations allow inadvertently flawed rituals to move forward, but the possibility of fixing errors also paves the way for a third scenario in which conscious, deliberate changes are made to sacrificial procedures.

3. Conscious, Deliberate Changes in the Execution of the Ritual

Occasionally the texts in both traditions mention that an individual may deliberately change a procedure in the ritual. The clearest example of this occurs when a ritual participant substitutes one offering substance for another. In these situations participants make conscious, deliberate variations in the ritual procedure, yet they expect the sacrifice to generate the same results.

Extensive discussions regarding allowable substitutions are included in the primary material of both traditions. The Vedic texts imply that substitutions are permitted when a required substance is unavailable. For example, the Kātyāyana Śrauta-Sūtras states, "The Vedic texts have prescribed substitutes for materials that

were not available."[30] Many, many passages explain which materials may be used to replace specific substances and under which circumstances.

However, substitutions are restricted. For example, greater leeway is granted regarding substitutions for required rites than for optional rites.[31] Presumably this is because individuals *had* to perform the required rites, so adjustments had to be made to allow those sacrifices to occur. Optional rites were just that—optional, so if an individual lacked certain offering substances, he simply didn't perform the ritual. Certain rituals can accommodate substitutions; others cannot.

The ability to substitute one offering substance for another should not be taken lightly. Certain ritual elements never have substitutes. One passage states, "a substitute cannot be used in place of the deity, fire, words (of the mantra) and the particular acts...of a rite, since they generate unseen results."[32] Presumably an attempt to use a substitute for any of these things would render the sacrifice ineffectual. Being allowed to employ a substitute for certain offerings in many situations is significant.

The Jewish tradition also allows substitutions for some sacrificial animal victims, but there is no sustained explanation of *why* substitutions might be necessary. Certain passages suggest one reason that we don't find in the Vedic texts. The Torah states that substitutions may be used when a specific individual cannot afford an offering. For example, one passage states that if a man cannot afford a lamb for a transgression offering, he should bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons.[33] No other reason is given for substitution, but nowhere does the text explicitly state that this is the *only* reason a substitute would be allowed.

The Mishnah deals at length with sacrificial substitutions in tractate Temurah. In this tractate, we find certain similarities to Vedic practices. For example, some elements in Jewish sacrifice cannot be replaced by a substitute. Tem. 1.6, for example, notes that bird offerings and grain offerings cannot have valid substitutes "because the law (permitting) the substitute was given only for cattle." In addition, substitutions can only be made under certain circumstances. Tem. 1.6 also explains, "neither the congregation nor joint holders can bring substitutes...only an individual can bring a substitute."[34] Thus various restrictions limit the substitution of one offering substance for another.

The one thing the text never makes clear is *why* substitutions might be needed. We can conclude from the biblical passage cited previously that substitutions were permitted in some cases because an individual could not afford an animal offering. But the texts never state explicitly that this is the only reason for permitting a substitute. Temurah goes on at length about *how* and *when* substitutes are permitted, but it never mentions *why*.

In fact, neither the Jewish nor the Vedic texts we are examining seem particularly concerned with explaining why a substitution might be necessary. Presumably this was not the concern of the religious elite who authored or edited these texts. Rather, these religious leaders were more concerned with addressing potential problems with substitutions than explaining their existence. In general the Vedic texts suggest that substitutions are permitted when certain materials are unavailable. The Jewish texts state clearly that substitutions are permitted when an

individual cannot afford a particular animal offering. But neither the Vedic nor the Jewish texts explicitly *limit* substitution to these circumstances.

We have seen, then, that the discussions of substitution indicate that conscious, deliberate changes were made in both Vedic and Jewish sacrifices. Both traditions developed ways to vary the ritual performance from the ritual paradigm while still generating an effective or valid sacrifice. The "intentions" in these sacrifices are intentional changes in the execution of certain rituals. Participants intend to accomplish the ritual's traditional purposes and to fulfill their cultural obligations to one another—as in the paradigmatic sacrifice—but they also intend to alter the methods involved in achieving these goals. In some cases, however, human participants have darker intentions, including subverting the ritual goal itself. These final cases make up our fourth scenario.

4. Conscious Subversion of Sacrifice

Up to this point, we assumed that ritual participants always intend to accomplish the paradigmatic goal of the rituals in which they participate. We have seen that individuals may make errors during sacrifices, or they may intentionally alter the *means* by which certain goals are achieved (as we have just discussed), but in both these cases individuals do not intend to alter the outcome of the sacrifice. At times, however, some participants try to subvert specific rituals. In these situations a participant alters how a ritual is executed specifically in order to alter the final results of the sacrifice. The intent to subvert the sacrifice thus alters the procedures as well as the ritual's outcome.

As Brian K. Smith pointed out in his research on Vedic sacrifice, certain Śrauta-Sūtras describe how sacrificial priests can subvert a ritual in order to produce unwanted effects in the lives of their patrons.[35] For example, the Taittirīya Samhitā describes how a priest can take away a ritual patron's livestock by substituting a piece of meat without fat for the prescribed piece of meat with fat.[36] Smith notes that some changes in the ritual are so slight as to escape the notice of the ritual patron. As a result, a patron may be aware only of the possibility of ritual sabotage, without knowing how to prevent it. He is ritually powerless to prevent the priest's wrongful intent from subverting the sacrifice.

The Śrauta-Sūtras do not discuss why a priest would (or should) want to subvert a ritual. Certain passages seem to indicate that priests could subvert a sacrifice if the sacrificer was not a good man.[37] Another suggestion is that the priests publicized their ability to subvert a sacrifice to remind the ritual patrons that the priests wielded their own kind of power, a supraworldly power that countered the worldly power of the *kśatrīya* or warrior class. A priest's ability to sabotage a sacrifice provided a kind of challenge to the worldly advantages of his local ruler.

The problem is that these Vedic texts include oral traditions that were controlled by the priests, not the *kśatrīyas*. If the references to priestly sabotage were publicized in a daily paper, read by local kings over their morning coffee, we might be able to understand these passages as subtle threats-cum-warnings to the ruling class. The ritual traditions, however, were maintained and circulated almost exclusively within the priestly schools. If rulers knew that the priests could sabotage a sacrifice, it was

only because the priests chose to let them know. But why would priests choose to let this be known?

One possibility suggests itself. Passages referring to ritual subversion provide easy explanations for past ritual sacrifice performances that did *not* generate the desired results (children, victory in battle, agricultural fertility). In his article "Ritual Perfection and Ritual Sabotage," Smith raises a point that we scholars must address: some rituals simply don't work. We are presented with texts that claim that rituals work. Yet we know that, at least occasionally, rituals do not generate the results they promise. This disjuncture deserves our attention as scholars of the primary texts that discuss religious practices. I am suggesting that the notion of ritual sabotage within the Vedic tradition is helpful precisely because it provides an explanation for rituals that didn't deliver. That is, the possibility of ritual sabotage strengthens the position of Vedic priests because it explains past seemingly ineffective rituals, not because it threatens future harm. Suggesting that a ritual has been sabotaged still asserts that priests have control over the results of sacrifice, which is better than suggesting that priestly activity is ineffective.

This is speculation, to be sure. No passage in the Vedic material indicates that priests developed revisionist strategies to explain ineffective rituals. But, secular scholars assert, if at least occasionally ritual performances did not generate the desired results, a contemporaneous theory of subversion explains things nicely.

The Torah and the Mishnah do not present us with this thorny interpretive problem. Jewish texts do not discuss ritual sabotage—but they do not preclude the possibility, either.[38] In fact, what is most striking is the *absence* of any concern that a Temple priest might ever want to undercut an individual's sacrificial efforts. The Mishnah does refer to wrongful intentions regarding the actions performed during rituals, not the overall purpose of the ritual. Zev. 1.4, for example, explains that an animal offering can be invalidated if the priest intends to perform certain procedures in the wrong place. Men. 1.3 explains a general principle regarding grain offerings: "If the priest took a handful or put it into the vessel or brought it to the altar or burned it intending to eat any of what is customarily burned outside of its proper place, the offering is invalid." Note that the text never states that the priest intended to invalidate the sacrifice; rather, it states that he intended to perform one of the procedures of the sacrifice in an inappropriate place. The result, however, would be that the offering would become invalid—and any priest worth his salt would know this. Since the priests made offerings on behalf of the community as a whole, the entire community could be affected by a priest's wrongful intentions.

We need to be clear here. The Mishnah never suggests that priests would intentionally desire to invalidate a sacrifice. In fact, the Mishnah does not even raise the possibility that a priest would intentionally try to harm an individual through ritual activity.[39] The closest we come to any concern about this is in Sukkah 4.9. The passage indicates that a priest had spilled water on his feet in the past, and onlookers seem to fear that he would do it again. But most scholars assume that onlookers fear another accident, not an intentional act of sabotage. The furthest the Mishnah goes is to acknowledge that some priests, sometimes, wrongfully intend to perform ritual actions in an inappropriate location or at an inappropriate time.

For several reasons, no secondary scholarship on Jewish material parallels Smith's research on Vedic ritual sabotage in the Jewish material. The most obvious reason is that the Mishnah deals with sacrifice as a past—rather than a continuing—practice, since Temple sacrifice had been suspended for about 150 years by the time the Mishnah was compiled. Thus the passages describing sacrifice present an ideal picture, presumably drawing at least somewhat upon past experience but unconcerned with contemporary situations. Because the Temple had been destroyed, the priests of ancient Judaism disappeared as a social force within Judaism in the early third century. Consequently, no reason existed to threaten the possibility of sabotaging a sacrifice when, in actuality, no possibility existed of even performing one. The Mishnah highlights the abilities and authority of the rabbis rather than the priests. While some of the rabbinic disputes concerning ritual practice had real-world consequences (e.g., domestic observance of Shabbat), the discussions regarding Temple sacrifice primarily provided a forum for the demonstration of rabbinic knowledge and authority.

None of this, however, proves that priests did *not* willfully subvert rituals when Temple sacrifice occurred. Clearly, priestly sabotage was possible. For example, one passage notes that if a priest "pinches off the head of a bird with his fingernail from the side, the act of pinching off is invalid."[40] Although this could happen accidentally, it is possible that a priest would do this intentionally. A number of passages that seem to refer to inadvertent errors do not preclude the possibility of intentional sabotage. For example:

> (When blood) must be sprinkled on the inner altar, if the priest failed to perform even one of the acts of sprinkling he has not brought about atonement. Therefore, although he performed all the acts of sprinkling in the prescribed way, and only one not in the prescribed way, the offering is invalid, but the penalty of cutting off is not thereby required.[41]

Given the complexity of Jewish sacrifice, it would have been remarkably easy for a priest to render an offering invalid without being detected. The Jewish texts, therefore, do not preclude priestly sabotage, they simply do not discuss it. They are concerned with the results of the sacrifice, which depend upon execution, not motivation.

In our final scenario, then, a ritual participant brings wrongful intentions to the sacrifice, intentions that run counter to his cultural obligations. These wrongful intentions manifest themselves in the execution of the sacrifice. The specific motives behind these malicious intentions do not concern the Mishnah or the Śrauta-Sūtras. These texts are concerned with method, not motive. But whatever the reason, participants who alter the performance of a ritual do so in order to alter its results. The alterations of the performance conflict with the cultural obligations of the participants, and the newly generated results conflict with traditional ritual goals.

Concluding Remarks

This overview of how various intentions affect sacrifice is in no way comprehensive. We can imagine many other scenarios, scenarios in which a

participant intends to perform a destructive sacrifice correctly, for example.[42] But we have reviewed enough examples to generate a few conclusions.

First, we have seen that one's "intentions" can be directed toward different elements of the sacrifice. A participant's intentions may be focused on the overall outcome of the ritual or on specific procedures performed during the sacrifice. In addition, a participant's intentions can be good or bad, benefiting or harming those who receive the outcome of the sacrifice. All of these factors lead to different ritual scenarios.

Second, comparing the Śrauta-Sūtras with the Mishnah, we note some significant differences between their respective understandings of sacrifice. The Vedic texts are primarily concerned with ritual efficacy. That is, rituals are supposed to accomplish something, to have an impact on the visible—and invisible—world around us. Sacrifices can have this kind of impact because they are directly linked to the cosmos; actions and relations in the earthly realm parallel and are intertwined with actions and relations in the macrocosmic realm.[43] As Francis X. Clooney states, "the sacrifice is a microcosm, wherein the reality of the universe is presented in a pure, intense form."[44] For a Vedic sacrifice to be "efficacious," it must be consonant with the universe on the macrocosmic level.

Jewish sacrifice is not described as "efficacious" but rather as "valid." This distinction reflects the fact that Jewish sacrifice is not directed at maintaining the universe, but at generating very specific results for the Jewish people. Jewish sacrifice accomplishes results (just as Vedic sacrifice does), but these results are focused on the relationship between God and his chosen people. Nowhere does the Jewish literature suggest that sacrifice is rooted in the nature of the universe. Rather, it is rooted in the nature of God, who is distinct from the created universe. He inaugurates sacrifice at a specific point in human history to address the specific needs of the Jewish people.

The distinctions between "efficacy" and "validity" raise a third point. Vedic sacrifice exists principally to sustain the cosmos, and while human beings participate in sacrificial activity, they are not the reason for its existence. The fact that people benefit from certain sacrifices may be a nice result, but it is certainly not the reason sacrifice was created. Vedic sacrifice does not revolve around human beings. Jewish sacrifice, however, *does*. It restores the community's relationship with God via an elaborate system of offerings that counteracts specific behavioral errors.[45] Human beings are at the center of Jewish sacrifice; in fact, they make sacrifice necessary.

Our fourth insight has to do with ritual sabotage. By noting the Vedic discussions regarding ritual sabotage, we have opened a new avenue of investigation of the Jewish material, or at least the obligation to revisit the Jewish texts to determine whether or not the possibility of ritual sabotage exists in the Jewish sacrificial system. The absence of any reference to ritual sabotage is interesting in and of itself; the texts, obviously, present a certain picture of ritual life, ritual roles, relationships, and social obligations that each member of the community is required to fulfill. The texts offer a world of "ought" more than "is," a presentation of what the ritual community was supposed to be, rather than what actually occurred.

What do any of these observations matter? I began this essay by asserting that the study of Hinduism and Judaism should have an impact on the discipline of

religious studies in general, a discipline that has been shaped largely by categories derived from western Protestant Christianity. What issues does our study of intention in Vedic and Jewish sacrifice raise for the study of religion in general?

First, it places the roles different individuals play in sacrifice in the forefront of consideration. Discussions of sacrifice tend to focus on how the sacrifice of the offering benefits an individual ritual patron or the community as a whole. But it is also important to pay attention to the intentions and behaviors of the ritual "technicians," the priests. The texts that describe what priests do have as much to teach us as the texts that describe why they do it. Also, focusing on what is supposed to happen in a sacrifice reminds us that rituals don't always proceed as described in ritual manuals. How do the possibilities of substitution, unintentional error, and intentional subversion manifest themselves in other sacrificial traditions? Do we find "substitution" of any kind in other communities? Are there teachings that hint at the fear (or threat) of ritual sabotage?

Perhaps most importantly, Vedic and Jewish sacrifices challenge the assumption that sacrifices are always bloody and dramatic, an assumption that grows out of Christian theology. Sacrifice is far more complicated than a single violent act, especially in the Vedic and Jewish sacrificial systems. Various animal and non-animal offerings are used, and many, many elaborate procedures must be performed correctly for a sacrifice to accomplish its stated ritual purpose. Elsewhere I have argued that *all* of these procedures, most of which are neither bloody nor dramatic, deserve further scholarly attention.[46] The less dramatic activities—such as measuring grain, flaying goats, and pounding plant stalks—are overlooked in general studies of sacrifice.[47] Yet we have seen even in this brief essay that the intentions that one brings to these mundane activities fundamentally influence the outcome of sacrifice as a whole. The general study of religion can only benefit by recognizing that non-Christian traditions should not simply contribute data to existing categories of study, but should reshape the fundamental categories of our discipline, including the category of sacrifice.

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NOTES

[1] I would like to thank Francis X. Clooney, S.J., Robert Goldenberg, Richard Hecht, Barbara Holdrege, Brian K. Smith, and David Gordon White for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay. The original version of the paper was presented in 1998 at a panel of the Comparative Hinduisms and Judaisms section at the American Academy of Religion conference in Orlando, Florida. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[2] Ample work has been done to demonstrate that the comparative study of sacrifice in Vedic and Jewish literature is significant for the broader field of religious studies. Note, for example, the landmark work of Henri Hubert and Marcel Maus, *Essai sur la nature et la function du sacrifice*, translated into English as *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Functions*, trans. W.D. Halls. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964.

[3] Jan Gonda, *The Ritual Sutras, A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I. 2, Wiesbaden, 1977, p. 489.

[4] I use male pronouns throughout this essay because both the Vedic and the Jewish texts presume that the priests and ritual patrons are men.

[5] A well-developed theory of theurgic efficacy existed by the time of the Śrauta-Sūtras. Though this theory is not discussed explicitly in the *sūtras*, it provides the background for the directions given regarding sacrificial activity.

[6] See, for example, Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (AB) 5.32, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (ŚB) 6.3.1.11, 6.1.2.11.

[7] For further discussion of this point see Brian K. Smith, *Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[8] This articulation is called the *samkalpa*. It is a public announcement of the sacrificer's intentions made at the beginning of the sacrifice.

[9] Note that the inclusion of the ritual patron's resolution indicates that the participants of the ritual recognize that the ritual has a purpose. This contradicts Frits Staal's argument that Vedic sacrifice is "meaningless." Each sacrifice does, in fact, have a specific meaning that is publicly announced at its commencement.

[10] KŚS 1.3.13.

[11] Note that Sir Monier-Williams indicates that this is, in fact, the original meaning of the word *karma*: "any religious act or rite (as sacrifice, oblation, etc., esp. as originating in the hope of future recompense and as opposed to speculative religion or knowledge of spirit)." Sir Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993), p. 258. See also Chitrabhanu Sen, who defines *karman* as "a sacrificial act, which must produce a result," in *A Dictionary of the Vedic Rituals* (Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1978), p. 60.

[12] Bereshith (Ber.) 1:1.

[13] This is according to the texts; we have no idea what the "man on the street" thought as he offered the daily sacrifices in Jerusalem, and it would not be surprising to find that participants expected some kind of earthly prosperity in return for regular sacrificial offerings. The Torah and the Mishnah, however, never address this possibility.

[14] For detailed discussions of the Jewish sacrificial system see Samuel S. Driver, "Offer, Offering, Oblation," in *Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 3, ed. J. Hastings. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900; Baruch Levine, *Leviticus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989); Jacob Milgrom, "Leviticus 1-16," Vol. 3, in *The Anchor Bible Series* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

[15] One of the significant issues with regard to guilt in the Jewish literature is the individual's intention with regard to sin. In other words, did he know he was sinning

when he did so or not? This is significant because intentional sin must be addressed differently than unintentional sin.

[16] This penalty is "cutting off" (*karet*), which has been interpreted to mean punishment by death, expulsion from the community, or the inability to produce descendants; see Vayyikra (Vayy.) 19:7-8, for example. One also finds the phrases "he has fulfilled" (*yatz*, Men. 13.10) or "not fulfilled" (*lo yatza*, Men. 13.8) his obligation.

[17] See, for example, Men. 1.1 and Zevachim (Zev.) 9.3.

[18] The Mishnah also uses a phrase translated "effects atonement" (*kipper*, Zev. 4.1, 2) when discussing the sprinkling of blood on the altar. The shift in vocabulary might suggest a difference in thinking about sacrificial activity, and this particular discussion is the closest the Mishnah comes to articulating anything akin to Vedic efficacy. But the discussions are so brief and so specifically delimited that there is no reason to think that any significant distinction is drawn between the sprinkling of blood and other acts connected with sacrifice.

[19] Sukkah 4.9; see also B. Sukkah 4.8b.

[20] KŚS 1.1.19.

[21] The *Śrautakośa* records four different expiation rites according to the Baudhāyana Śrauta-Sūtras, the Vaikhānasa Śrauta-Sūtras, the Vārāha Pariśiṣṭa, and the Atharvaveda Prayaścitta. See, R.N. Dandekar, *Śrautakośa* Vol. I, Part 1, English section (Pune: Vaidika Samśodhana Maṇdala, 1958), p. 440.

[22] Jaimini Śrauta-Sūtras (JŚS) 6.3.22.

[23] In addition to the examples given in the text, see also Bechorot (Bech.) 5.5.

[24] See, for example, Chullin 1.6.

[25] See for example Chullin 3.2-7, Bech. 6.3 and throughout Bech., Temurah (Tem.) 6.5, and Meilah 2.2.

[26] See for example Kinnim 1.1.

[27] See also Chullin 1.6 regarding valid and invalid methods of slaughtering a red heifer and a calf.

[28] Men. 4.5.

[29] *Śrautakośa*, p. 446.

[30] KŚS 1.2.20; see also KŚS 1.4.5.

[31] For example "in the absence of the required material one should not perform an optional rite, because its accomplishment depends on the availability of that material. In the obligatory rites, a substitute (for a required offering substance) is to be made according to the similarity of the substance." (KŚS 11.3.35-36)

[32] KŚS 1.6.6.

[33] Vayy. 5:7; see also 5:11.

[34] See also Tem. 2.1: "the offerings of the individual can have a substitute, but the offerings of the congregation cannot be replaced by a substitute."

[35] Brian K. Smith, "Ritual Perfection and Ritual Sabotage," in *History of Religions* 35, No. 5 (1996), pp. 285-306.

[36] TS 6.3.11.5f; see also ĀpŚS 7.26.4.

[37] See, for example, Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (AitB) 3.3.

[38] Numerous references concern different opinions regarding how to perform a sacrifice correctly (often reflected in different rabbis' opinions), but the priests still presumably wanted the sacrifice to be performed correctly—they simply disagreed on what "correct" looked like. See, for example, Yoma 4.5.

[39] In fact, when I mention this possibility to colleagues who study Jewish sacrifice, they are generally appalled that I would even consider the possibility.

[40] Chullin 1.4.

[41] Zev. 4.2.

[42] Such sacrifices do exist; the Śyena and the Iṣu sacrifices, for example, are supposed to be performed by someone intending injury to another party. The "intended harm" associated with these sacrifice is not a result of change in the ritual procedure, but rather a result of correct ritual performance.

[43] For more on this see Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[44] Francis X. Clooney, *Thinking Ritually: Rediscovering the Pūrva Mīmāmsa of Jaimini*, publications of the DeNobili Research Library, XVII, Gerhard Oberhammer, ed. (Vienna: Gerold and Co., 1990), p. 125.

[45] Sacrifice is associated with atonement at the very beginning of the sacrificial code in Vayy. 1.

[46] Kathryn McClymond, "In the Matter of Sacrifice: A Comparative Study of Vedic and Jewish Sacrifice" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1999).

[47] The dominant theories of sacrifice limit themselves to animal offerings, and they present killing as the essential and defining characteristic of sacrifice. See Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans*, trans. Peter Bing. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972; Marcel Détienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Cuisine of Sacrifice Among the Greeks*, trans. Paula Wissing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989; Rene; Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977; Henri Hubert and Marcel Maus, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Functions*, trans. W.D. Halls. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.