



Child Sacrifice: Playing Sarah, Jake Goodman

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I understand the Akedah, the story of the binding of Isaac, in the context of a people beginning to break away from an age-old tradition of child sacrifice. Science played little role in the world in which they lived. What caused earthquakes? Gods. What caused storms? Gods. What caused famine? Disease? Pestilence? War? Gods. What could one do to gain any sense of control over the chaos of life? Appease the the gods. How? Offer up as a sacrifice the thing that you loved more than anything else: your child. Let the gods know: we understand how insignificant we truly are, how completely at your mercy we are, how much we desire to be in your favor. What could be more important than this? Our survival as a human race depends on it. (The stakes are Battlestar-Gallactica-high.)

Somehow, a shift occurred. For some reason—it seems incomprehensible—some people decided that they were no longer willing to sacrifice their children to the gods – not even if it was to the one true God. Perhaps too many famines failed to end. Perhaps they had lost too many children. Perhaps too many lost their own brothers and sisters, and refused to visit the sins of their parents upon their own children.

Eventually, the tribal leaders faced a crossroads: insist upon child sacrifice and face losing support of the people, or re-frame the narrative away from child sacrifice to keep the people, but do it in a way that is sure to please the one true God. We know which road they took.

Today, we continue to sacrifice our children. For many of us, it is more shameful to have gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT, or queer) kids than it is to reject them completely and throw them on the street like trash. According to a reportⁱ by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, between 20-40% of all homeless youth identify as LGBT. (Given the fact that only 3-5% of the general population identifies as LGB, this is especially alarming.) Upon coming out, 50% of gay teens experienced a negative reaction and a full 26% were kicked out of home. The Center for American Progress reportsⁱⁱ:

“Family rejection of gay and transgender youth often leads to attempted suicide. According to a 2009 study, gay youth who reported higher levels of family rejection in adolescence were 8.4 times more likely to have attempted suicide than their gay peers who did not experience family rejection. They were also 5.9 times as likely to have experienced depression, 3.4 times as likely to have used illicit drugs, and 3.4 times as likely to have had unprotected sex.

“Suicide becomes more of a danger when a gay and/or transgender youth becomes homeless. Sixty-two percent of gay and transgender homeless youth attempt suicide compared to 29 percent of their heterosexual homeless peers.”

This is child sacrifice. It is being practiced today. But to what end? To appease the gods. Scientific advancements do not stop people from believing, or hoping, that they can do

something, anything, to help tame the chaos of life. Some still believe that homosexuality and, by extension, bisexuality and gender non-conformity are abominations because the Torah tells them so. God tells them so. Just as God told Abraham to sacrifice his one son — and to reject the other.

When will we reach our crossroads? When will we have seen too many families ripped apart? Lost too many children? Too many brothers, sisters, cousins, friends? When will we finally stop visiting the sins of our parents on our own children? When will we finally, once and for all, reframe the sacred narrative away from child sacrifice, away from the rejection of our youth, and toward a healthier, fuller, more empathic life for all?

Until that time, we are all still living out the Akedah — and most of us are playing the role of Sarah: unaware, excluded from the decision-making process, faultless. Dying from grief. Over and over again. Until we can no longer pretend to be unaware. Until we insert ourselves into others' decision-making processes, no matter how uncomfortable. Until we no longer believe that we are faultless doing nothing.

--**Jake Goodman** is a champion of human rights, with a particular emphasis on LGBTQ activism and Jewish education. He is an outspoken voice for tolerance and open communication and understanding between people of different ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, political persuasions, and sexual identities. He is a founding member of Queer Rising, a grassroots organization that demands queer rights through direct action, and his related writing can be found on The Daily Kos & Alef: The NEXT Generation.

<http://www.shma.com/2011/09/shma-blog-child-sacrifice-playing-sarah/>. **This blog was published on September 22nd, 2011, the one year anniversary of the day Rutgers University student Tyler Clementi committed suicide after he learned that his roommate used a webcam to spy on him as he kissed another man in their dorm room.*

ⁱ Ray, Nicholas. (2006). *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness*. New York: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and the National Coalition for the Homeless. <http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/HomelessYouth.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Sifra Quintana, Nico, Josh Rosenthal, and Jeff Krehely. (2010). *On the Streets: The Federal Response to Gay and Transgender Homeless Youth*. Washington D.C.: Center for American Progress. http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/06/on_the_streets.html

Shelter of Peace is a multi-faith initiative advocating safe shelter for LGBTQ homeless youth, organized by Congregation Beit Simchat Torah's Koleinu LGBT Rights Action Team. Visit www.cbst.org/shelterofpeace.