

Idols Abound: Contemporary Golden Calves

by Aaron Hahn Tapper • March 9th, 2007

Eons ago, I spent my senior year of college writing a thesis on Yeshayahu Leibowitz, one of the most scathing Jewish Israeli critics *of* the Jewish Israeli world. Leibowitz was ahead of his time, a devoutly religious Jew who railed against those who treated anything as either supra- or sub-human. Whether attributing holiness to the land of Israel or violating a non-Jew's human rights, thereby raising or lowering the perceived value of anything in our world to the heights of God or the depths of nothingness, Leibowitz maintained that creating 'others' is one of the worst sins of the Jewish community. It did not matter to him whether the 'other' was the alleged holiness of the Western Wall or the denigration of an 'other' piece of property. He said that attributing holiness or hatred to anything in the physical world is engaging in idolatry.

Throughout my various religious incarnations, I have been comforted by Leibowitz's ideas. For me, idolatry is all around us. The Golden Calf of the Biblical Hebrews continues to plague the Jewish community, *my* community. Everytime I see my community place ourselves up on a pedestal, privileging our tragedies or successes above others, I am reminded of the ancient golden heifer. For me, idolatry is not only about raising something above others. It also manifests in the lowering of an 'other' beneath oneself.

I wish for all of us this Shabbat to take a moment to think about how we each raise and lower the world around us, thereby creating Golden Calves abound. Social justice speaks to the antithesis of this act, striving to create a world that rests upon equality.

Shabbat Shalom.

[Aaron Hahn Tapper is the Founder and Co-Executive Director of Abraham's Vision, a conflict transformation organization working with Jews, Muslims, Israelis, and Palestinians].