

Are We Still a Surety for One Another?

Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu

The world is changing very fast. As a child I remember how we watched the names of TV and film stars, directors and producers when the credits rolled, and a Jewish name whizzed past. Or the shame we felt when someone Jewish in public life did something wrong. Nowadays we are all more atomised, cocooned in our private clouds of 'social' media. We think of religion as a kind of quest in search of feeling, of spirituality being completely interior.

Kol Yisrael areivin zeh ba'ze –every one of Israel is a surety for one another. Shevuot 39a

Liberal Judaism has always been rooted in a strong sense of social responsibility. We take our place as modern Jews exactly where we choose; we are rational, ethical, egalitarian. We have grown used to freedom. The process of renewal seems to be towards the cutting edge – driven by social justice. These achievements are so very great that you could almost say that the great reforming movements have fulfilled their historic task.

But where does this drive leave us today, as part of the Jewish people?

How do we react to the legal challenges Jews now face, in the UK and across the European continent, to expressions of our religious particularity such as brit milah and shechita? Is there a place for the views and needs of other Jews in our inclusive ethics? How will we stay the course in our relationship with Israel? Can we stick to our progressive religious and political ideals until and beyond the very point when peace will surely begin? Even when we feel like giving up? Just because we share each other's destiny?

At this time in history, then more than any other, I think we should ask,
Is every one of Israel still a surety for each other?