

## **Tradition connects**

### ***Thought for the Day***

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***Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 6 August 2003***

Ritual is important to us all, even those far removed from formal religion. The 4th of July, or Bastille Day on the 14th, are cases in point, and it's not for nothing that new states create special ceremonies to mark particular dates. We in Britain sometimes poke fun at ourselves for our collective love of pageantry, from the Trooping of the Colour to the kirkin' o' the cooncil!

But just because a ceremony has no practical payoff, that does not mean it has no value. It may connect us with a collective past, or give public and symbolic recognition to some important truth. A judge as an individual may be just as incorruptible without a wig, but it still serves a purpose, to signify that it is not the individual judge but that huge abstraction, *Justice*, to which one has to answer.

I've been struck this week by how different rituals can be, while serving the same purpose. Yesterday I attended the funeral of a former colleague and friend. After the ceremony we repaired to the bar, and shared stories of his achievements and his mishaps. How different, I thought, from Jewish ritual, when we sit on the floor, neglect everyday activities, and receive condolences in words laden with history, as we wish the bereaved consolation amongst those who mourn the destruction of Jerusalem.

These are not just empty words. Tomorrow is in many ways the most solemn day of the Jewish year, when we commemorate the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians almost 2500 years ago. Jews still mourn that loss as a personal tragedy, sitting on the floor, turning down the lights, and abstaining from food and drink. In some communities they illuminate the synagogue with only a single candle.

Is that not a beautiful metaphor? A single light can dispel the deepest darkness. We all use rituals – whatever they may be – to see ourselves as part of a history and to a society. Without them, we are alone and unconnected, and what is that but a form of darkness.