

Accepting the consequences of imperfection

Thought for the Day

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Aren't we wonderful?

Surgeons have succeeded in separating the Ibrahim twins; a maverick American geneticist offers childless couples clones for a mere \$100k; we have eradicated smallpox, and every day brings news of progress in the battles to cure or prevent other killer diseases. We have come to expect medicine to have the answer to all our physical complaints, and we would like other public services to be infallible.

Of course, what we might like or expect and what is reasonable are not the same question.

From this side of the Atlantic we tend to mock the more irrational verdicts of the American courts - the recipients of the so-called "Stella Awards", named in honour of the diner who received damages after slipping on coffee that she herself had spilled. Nominations have included the animal-lover whose new microwave did not warn her not to use it to dry her dog, and the man who was run over by his neighbour's car while he tried to steal its hubcaps.

The fact is that no system is infallible, whether it's the law, a supposedly 'ultra-safe' car, medicine, or social services. It's a tragedy that we can't protect a baby from being shaken to death, regrettable that we can't relieve the physical pain suffered by around one in five of the population, and a reproach that so many crimes go unsolved.

We should never give up striving to make life better, safer, fairer, less imperfect - but such imperfection is part of the human condition.

This week Jewish people throughout the world have turned from the soul-searching of our New Year to the festival of Tabernacles - what the Bible refers to as *the* festival. At this time, even as we rejoice, we remind ourselves that we're not in full control, by leaving the comfort of our homes to eat or sleep in temporary and often ramshackle structures. There is a universal lesson there – that we are not invincible or infallible, not as individuals, not as nations, not as institutions – and in the final reckoning, we have to accept the consequences of our own imperfection.