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Shaman in Chicago



Profiles Philip John Neimark, a successful financial analyst who has become a babalawo, or high priest, in the Ifa religion, an ancient system of belief in which animal sacrifice is one of the most sacred rituals. Also discusses increasing recognition of the limitations of conventional religion.

By Jill Neimark, published on September 1, 1993 - last reviewed on June 9, 2016

The letter arrived at our offices a few months ago. "This spring," it began, "the Supreme Court will decide whether animal sacrifice as a religious rite is against the law. Believe it or not, the Presbyterian Church, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Baptist Joint Committee, Creation spiritualist Matthew Fox, and scores of mainstream religious officials are lobbying the court to uphold this primitive rite. Why? The case cuts to the very heart of freedom of religion--and the American way of life. It impacts on the use of peyote in Native American rites, which was ruled against last year and caused an uproar among religious activists."

"It also impacts on the use of prayer in Christian Science, the legality of kosher Jewish practices, even the practice of Holy Communion, where wine and wafers are fully believed to be the blood and body of Christ."

Few would be awaiting the Supreme Court's decision more eagerly than Philip John Neimark, the letter continued. "Dr. Neimark is a successful financial analyst who has become a babalawo, or high priest, in the Ifa religion, an ancient system of belief in which animal sacrifice is one of the most sacred rituals.

"He also happens to be my uncle. He's literally a shaman." Right there in the American heartland. And if we dared, the author would witness and write about the sacred ceremonies from which outsiders are usually banned.

Neimark may be an example of Americans' restless search for transcendence. Then again, as we asked him, maybe he's just depressed--or going through an unusual midlife crisis. Certainly, many people have strong feelings against blood sacrifice, yet much of our experience stems from films such as the cult thriller *The Believers* and the boy-scout adventure *Indiana Jones and The Temple of Doom*. There are few opportunities to hear firsthand from people who actually practice such rituals.

We know that almost every American who reads this account will struggle to understand what motivates belief like Neimark's, or whether to trust it. Some see in the sacrifice a sacrilege and hubris. Some suspect a sinister cult, not only imported but "primitive"--maybe one arbitrary cut above (or below) human sacrifice.

Few articles have divided our staff as this one. Nor did the debate end in June, when the Supreme Court ruled animal sacrifice protected under the Constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion.

But this much we did agree on: There is a spiritual hunger among Americans and the quest for meaning is taking many people in many unorthodox directions. Philip John Neimark's is one.

-The Editors

Reporting has often taken me to some strange, far places--from the slums of Puerto Rico (where a drug dealer threatened to cut my throat), to the home of a deposed Communist leader in Romania, to the bowels of a Mayan temple buried in Honduras. But the farthest, strangest place of all was my uncle's garage in Chicago, where I went last spring.

There, in a neighborhood of wellkept brownstones on quiet streets, I participated in an ancient religious ceremony, complete with prayers to a nature deity and the sacrifice of a baby goat--whose soft, fine face I held in my hands before my uncle slit its throat and let its blood spray on a bowl of stones. Later I was asked to pray over those stones in a dark shrine of a room, and the next day to help my uncle's lovely wife, Vassa, wash them clean.

I'll tell you now that I cried for two hours after watching that goat die (even though I grew up a meat eater); that while washing the stones I felt like a murderer cleaning up evidence (and in some bewildered, perilous corner of my soul, I still do); and that I keep circling round the memory, wondering why it was so unsettling, why one animal penetrated me more than the names on the Vietnam Memorial or the photos of Sarajevo.

"It's the absolute, existential kick in the ass," my uncle had warned me. "It changes your whole concept of life, death, and your position in the universe." Indeed, for those who practice the Ifa religion, as my uncle does, blood sacrifice is a necessary sacrament that leads to actual miracles.

At least it did for him. Philip John Neimark is a 53-year-old white, Jewish businessman who made his first million by age 30; he's a recipient of honorary doctorates, listed in Who's Who in the World--and a high priest, or babalawo, in a religion that first flourished in Africa millennia ago. His book about the religion, The Way of the Orisa, was published last May by HarperCollins.

For more than a decade he was one of Chicago's most successful commodities traders, and he still manages \$40 million of other people's money, giving them about a 20 percent return every year. And, for a long time, my uncle was our family's most

brilliant cynic, the guy cruising down the street in an antique Jaguar with a license plate bearing Aristotle's empirical dictum, A is A.

"I was totally committed to the Cartesian, Newtonian universe," he says, "and I lived my life absolutely on that basis. If you couldn't prove God, He didn't exist. In fact, I militantly attacked and dismissed any other paradigm." So how did he end up praying to nature deities and casting the answer to others' fates with a chain of cowrie shells? How did he become a man who saved his wife's life (doctors were afraid she was bleeding to death during her pregnancy) with ritual ceremonies and prayers?

It's a baffling, miraculous, blasphemous, and ultimately sacred journey he made from atheist to shaman. The Ifa religion now has hundreds of affluent, educated, Caucasian followers-many of them my uncle's "godchildren."

As oddball as his choice may be, abandoning institutionalized Western religions and choosing an alternative path to God is emblematic of our times. As a friend recently said to me, "We want to dial God direct, we don't want to go through the operator."

This was the year that a weeping madonna made the cover of U. S News & World Report, nine teenagers in Arizona said they'd spoken to the Virgin Mary, a crucifix in Texas supposedly wept, and 83 percent of Americans reported they believe in miracles. As writer Anne Roiphe put it, in an essay inspired by the massacre at Waco: "The thirst for God runs deep, and none of us are truly free of it."

Especially now, especially in America--where, as sociologist Wade Clark Roof, author of A Generation of Seekers (HarperCollins) notes, more and more of us are becoming "believers but not belongers." We're dropping out of church and synagogue, and beating our own path to God. The transcendent dimension is often missing in organized religion and so, notes Roof, there has been a real "awakening of new and living-although often quite ancient-images of the divine."

These images were never really available to us before, according to Roger Walsh, M.D., Ph.D., a psychiatrist-philosopher-anthropologist who is professor of psychiatry at the University of California at Irvine. Now we can meditate with Buddhist monks, undergo initiations with Tibetan lamas and Native American shamans, practice t'ai chi, study kabala. "For the first time in human history we have all the world's religious traditions available to us. And this is also a time when there's increasing recognition of the limitations of conventional religion. We have a greater cultural sophistication now." And so there has been a movement towards personal, direct experience of the divine, which leads to an open search of alternative religious traditions.

In short, Walsh concludes, "We are exploring things that a few hundred years ago might have gotten us burned at the stake. I personally feel very excited by this new era of spirituality."

My uncle's conversion took years and--by his own estimation--nearly killed him before it saved him. It all began on a whim one Sunday in Miami in 1974, when he had nothing to worry about but his tennis arm and the fact that his second marriage was beginning to unravel. His wife asked him to join some friends who were going to get a reading from a babalawo. "I didn't have the slightest idea what that was. To mollify my wife, I went. If I'd known where we were going, I would have told her it was not only nonsensical, it was inherently evil. I would have compared their beliefs to the hallucinations of a person who'd just dropped LSD and decided to walk an imaginary bridge out the 10th floor window. I did not think that they were perceiving objective reality."

They drove to a funky Cuban neighborhood in South Miami and a home crowded with a hundred Latino devotees of Santeria--a hybrid of Catholicism and Ifa created by African slaves in Cuba who were at genuine risk of death for practicing a "pagan" religion. "I found myself in a room filled with candles, statues, and containers, with little men wearing robes and strange hats sitting cross-legged on mats."

The chief babalawo cast Phil's fate with palm nuts in the dust. (The nuts fall in a certain pattern, signifying one of 256 odus, or paths, interpreted with the aid of thousands of fables that specifically divine the future.) The reading indicated my uncle would probably lose everything he had, that he must sacrifice and follow the orisa (deity) of knowledge, Orunmila, and that someday he must become a babalawo or he would die.

"If at that time I'd listed 2,000 things I wanted to be," my uncle recalls, "babalawo would not have appeared on the list." Also perturbing was his daughter Tanya's reading, who was then 14, a straight-A student, and a virgin. The babalawo asked her if she ever thought about suicide; he also told her to be careful not to have any abortions. "My reaction was disbelief mixed with a touch of anger and fear. They'd told me what people would come into my life, their number and gender, and the problems they would cause. I decided to forget about it."

A year later, driving down Biscayne Boulevard, "the realization hit me that almost everything these men had predicted had happened or was in the process of happening. I tried to examine it in the same objective, Aristotelian manner. How much could have been a self-fulfilling prophecy? How much could have been subconsciously driven?" Curious and unsettled, he began to research Santeria, and its mother religion, Ifa, finally contacting the Western world's foremost Ifa authority, Berkeley anthropologist William Bascom. "After an hour on the phone, I finally blurted out, 'Dr. Bascom, you sound as if you believe in it!' He answered, 'Mr. Neimark, all I can tell you is, it works.'

"I went back to the babalawo the way most of my clients do--because I wanted to get out of trouble and I figured the religion couldn't hurt." His feelings began to change when he attended his first animal sacrifice. "When the animals were brought in and the babalawo reached for his knife, a kind of horrible dread rushed through me." Then the babalawo told him to touch his forehead to the forehead of the animal, thank it for giving its life, and state clearly the problem he needed solved. "That added to the almost

overwhelming fear inside me. Yet when I bent over and pressed my forehead to the animal's, I suddenly no longer felt as if I were being forced to witness death. Instead, as my head made union with the animal's head, I sensed its life and energy. I was filled with a combination of sadness and gratitude."

OVER THE NEXT DECADE, DIFFERENT BABALAWOS kept telling him the same thing: that Orunmila, the orisa of knowledge, was waiting for him to become a babalawo. Occasionally, the readings were almost wrathful; one said he would be taken piece by piece until he came. "I considered it absolute nonsense. By that time I felt I was using the energy of the orisa, but my life was controlled by my decisions, not theirs." Happily remarried, ensconced again in his native Chicago, he saw his daughter, Tanya, through a difficult period. She is now a television executive and an Ifa priestess in the religion. His wife, an interior designer, didn't participate in the religion for eight years, but was gradually attracted to it. After my uncle was hospitalized and nearly died of appendicitis, it was she who yelled at him, "Phil, don't you get it? You've got to become a babalawo!"

He did, in an eight-day-long ceremony, and he and Vassa were married again within the Ifa religion, after a reading indicated that they must because though they were of one mind, they were two bodies. Indeed, they often work as a team with clients. It's my uncle who has the "genius" for divining (he calls it his art form), and who as a high priest conducts any sacrificial rite; it's his wife Vassa who carries out many of the other ceremonies and rituals in their orisa room. It was she who held my hands as I sat in the orisa room crying after witnessing the ceremony performed for me.

My uncle charges about \$40 for a reading. That's a lot less than the \$750 an hour he can charge for 15 minutes of financial advice; nonetheless, being a babalawo can be lucrative. "Some babalawos," says my uncle, with a skeptical laugh, "do 10 readings a day, six days a week, make \$300,000 a year. I'd like to do fewer readings, spend more time writing, lecturing, doing Ifa retreats, talking to theologians." On the other hand, Vassa calls him Robin Hood, since he gives readings for as little as two dollars to those who can't afford them.

That, in brief, is my uncle's story. And now the structure of this article is going to change, as I tell you our story, which took place over four days last spring. That Christmas, I'd seen my uncle for the first time in eight years, and was so surprised by the change in him that I asked if I could come write about him and the religion. The uncle I'd once known never really cared to talk to me. Now he sat down, asked questions, was interested.

Above all, he'd become intensely conscious of family. He'd tracked down his own, long-lost aunt and uncle. Delighted to reconnect, they'd visited on Christmas day. We watched scratchy films, a half-century old, taken of my grandparents, father, uncle, and other family members. Since we're a typically postmodern American family fragmented by feuds, divorces, and geographical distance, I wondered what the hell was going on.

It turned out that one of the cornerstones of Ifa is ancestor worship. Once again, it comes down to blood--in this case, blood ties. Family--both our lineage and our present, living family--is our greatest blessing. Practitioners pray to their ancestors for help, set up shrines with pictures of the dead, and believe that they will be reincarnated in the same family.

Yet I'm no different from most Americans--and I was fascinated and appalled by what I'd heard of this religion and its practice of ritual sacrifice. I knew that Judaism and Christianity were only a gleam in God's eye when the Ifa religion was born. In this century it spread with the slave trade, spawning hugely popular offshoots: Santeria (Cuba), vodun (Haiti), and Candomble (Brazil). Santeria inspired *The Believers*, a 1987 dark thriller about a satanic cult. And that movie, in turn, is said to have triggered one of the most terrible incidents in recent memory: a ritual slaughterhouse in a Mexican border town was operated by a drug smuggler who falsely claimed he was a babalawo. In April 1989, police uncovered 13 mutilated corpses on the smuggler's ranch, including that of a 21-year-old Texas student.

No wonder, I thought, that animal rights activists were outraged, that citizens in Miami complained about animal carcasses from "bloody Santeria rituals" polluting the streets, and that the religion had become so controversial that it finally had to be litigated by the Supreme Court. (On June 11 it ruled that ritual animal slaughter is permissible in religious context.) Yet while babalawos around the country breathed a sigh of relief, pointing out that "animal sacrifice is like our holy meal," animal rights activists compared the philosophy of "needlessly" slaughtering animals to Nazism. The religion seemed to have a macabre sparkle. Had my uncle gotten caught up in a cult with bizarre rituals?

And so, on a Thursday evening in March I came back to my uncle's home to view Ifa up close. That first night we seemed just like any noisy, hypercerebral Jewish family. One son, Josh, a 19-year-old with an open, ingenuous, talk-a-mile-a-minute style, was soon to be initiated as a babalawo. Occasionally he'd say something like, "Dad, does Guillermo have my sheep yet?" and Phil might answer, "I called him from the car on the way home and there was no answer. Try him again." Repeatedly that weekend I was bemused and a little unnerved by the way Ifa had been transposed and adapted to their affluent American lives. Offerings were placed discreetly throughout the house, fruit was laid at the base of trees as gifts to the orisa, arrangements were made by cellular phone from cars and restaurants when necessary. My uncle believes he has learned to integrate the spiritual and the temporal.

From that first night, Phil and I argued--in the manner of a passionate Socratic dialogue about the basic tenets of this religion that has made him so happy. Blood sacrifice is only a portion of the practice, but it's the most powerful, and it reflects a world view that is deeply unsettling to the average Westerner. It hints at wanton violence, satanic ritual, and worse. Indeed, by some semantic shift, "ritual slaughter" has become code for every atrocity of the modern era, pooling every drop of blood into one dark stream.

During blood sacrifice, according to the religion, energies are released that somehow unblock us and/or please the gods, who are happy then to help us. But to me, killing done in the name of God, even with pure and sacred intent, implies that God approves or even wants killing. And what does that mean about the world we live in?

"Blood sacrifice is as old as Cain and Abel," Phil explained. "Jews sacrificed animals until the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed. When the kosher rabbi prays over an animal, he's imbuing its death with sacred significance. That's blood sacrifice."

"But," I argued, "many people feel Jesus was supposed to be the last blood sacrifice. That was the whole point of the crucifixion--the idea that we could move from the actual to the symbolic, from blood sacrifice to bread and wine. And what will you do if the Supreme Court forbids it?" At the time my uncle and I spoke, the court had not yet ruled on animal sacrifice. "Will you give up your religion?"

"Of course not. I'll keep practicing, just as Jews kept practicing their religion in Russia. But everybody always comes back to the animals when they talk about this religion. It's the easiest way not to confront the real issue, which is about energy, getting in touch with and using it. When a healing ritual uses blood it focuses a laser-like beam of energy on the issue at hand."

"But there are a lot of ways to do that. Why do you have to kill an animal?"

"Sacrifice is a law of the universe."

"That's sounds ruthless."

"But how can you deny it? This is a universe where lions eat antelopes."

"They do, but maybe I don't want to."

"You do it one way or another. You're living in an industrial society, Jill. You use parts of your environment the same way the lion or the coyote or the bird uses parts of his environment--to survive. Even the vitamins or the medicines you take were originally tested on animals. You wouldn't be here to write this article if things weren't killed for you many times over--the tree that provided the paper you write on."

"But the level of consciousness of a tree is different from that of an animal."

"I think you're taking a very big responsibility to decide at what level of consciousness it's okay to kill something. Roosevelt, who was a great conservationist and a hunter, once said that most people have no idea how the world works. We don't really see the

natural order of things anymore. Do you wonder why we have the highest criminal rate, so many suicides and murders and divorces?"

The next day, after my ceremony, I stood staring at the china bowl of stones spattered with goat's blood. And I knew, with a kind of sinking dread, that no matter what I felt about animal sacrifice, my uncle was right about the importance of direct experience.

David Lukoff, Ph.D., professor of psychology at the Saybrook Institute in San Francisco, writes of the shaman's capacity for "ecstatis--union with and understanding of higher forces." How often do we experience ecstatis? We are an utterly anesthetized society, where the Gulf War appeared on television like a video game, where a lush and distant sheen glazes images of murder and violent sex, where we buy our dead animals as clean, hairless body parts in plastic packaging. My own father flatly states, "What Phil is doing is evil." But in his freezer are prime ribs.

The difference--and it's a big one--is that the frozen ribs mean simply a meal, While the goat, who is dead in the name of God, seems to ask me again and again, "Who are you? What is your real nature? Why did you do this to me? What do you believe about your place and my place in the universe?"

I called Matthew Fox, a renegade Catholic priest who founded Creation Spiritualism and is a leading religious philosopher. His institute employs a woman who teaches dances of the orisas.

"I often write about the fact that everything here in the universe seems to eat and get eaten, and we need to pay attention to this," Fox said. "The idea of the Eucharist is that when divinity passes through this universe it, too, gets eaten. So it's not a question of what is being eaten, it's a question of what reverence we eat with. If we sacrifice with gratitude, perhaps the things we sacrifice can be transformed, even resurrected. But I don't think we have to be overly literal about this. I see sacrifice as a dimension of spiritual existence. We can sacrifice our privileges, our fears, our racism, our sexism--sacrifice for the sake of a greater vision of compassion."

Westerners, and our psychology, traditionally view shamans as disturbed or, at best, primitive. So I then called psychiatrist-philosopher-anthropologist Roger Walsh, author of *The Spirit of Shamanism* and editor of a new collection of scientific essays on psychology and spirituality, *Paths Beyond Ego* (Tarcher). I asked him about the difference between psychosis or schizophrenia, for instance, and the shamanic experience. Walsh, who began his career as a self-described hard-core neuroscientist with no faith in anything spiritual or mystical, now spends his time studying our "inner universe, which is as vast and mysterious as the outer one."

He views shamans as "neither saints, nor madmen, nor fools, but people who have developed a technology of transcendence that is thousands of years old. This

technology--which uses techniques like ritual drumming, dancing, fasting, withdrawing into nature, intense prayer, focussed attention--allows the shaman to induce a state of mind in which he or she can access inner intuitive wisdom and bring it back for the benefit of others."

Our tendency to view shamans as disturbed, contends Walsh, "reflects our own ignorance and cultural bias, along with a widespread tendency to pathologize unusual behaviors. Shamans have been labeled hysterics, saints and sages have been regarded as neurotic, and advanced meditators have been diagnosed as suffering from an artificial catatonia. Yet when you look closely these people do not seem sick at all. Shamans tend to be leaders. They are unusually creative, the myth bearers, the social leaders and healers.

"The mentally ill, on the other hand, tend to require care and help. They create disruption in society rather than cohesion. Their inner world is fragmented, a nightmare of pain and suffering. And, most important, they have no voluntary control over their experiences. The shaman's experience is coherent and meaningful and provides insights others feel is of value."

I called Justine Cordwell, an anthropologist and curator at the May Weber Museum of Cultural Arts in Chicago, who has studied the Yoruba peoples from whom Ifa sprang, and curated exhibitions of its art and artifacts. She knows my uncle.

"Your uncle has divined for me. All I can say is, everything he said was right."

My uncle did a reading for me after the ceremony, and it indicated that although I was in good fortune, I was, as he said with a laugh, "all shook up." He reads with a chain of coconut shells, which he shakes and "throws," and the pattern of dark and light in which the shells fall indicates an odu. Often as he throws he laughs at what he sees, and talks to the chain as if it were an old friend and a perfect teacher. "It talks to me," he explains of what he feels is indeed a living oracle. "Sometimes I'm asking stupid questions, and the chain lets me know." Unlike the babalawos of old, who could recite by heart the thousands of fables, his are cataloged and translated in a large, bound notebook.

He relies on readings to guide himself in most decisions. And for many clients he sees himself a "last stop" because Ifa is so unusual. "They come to me when they've already been to the therapist, the doctor, the astrologer, and nothing has worked." As a result, many of the problems are so dire they require animal sacrifice.

My uncle has learned to trust the orisa completely, even when they don't seem to work. "There are times I can't help people," he admits. "But I think that's my fault, because I'm not advanced enough."

"Is that an easy way out when the religion fails?"

"We don't believe in the vale of tears or karma. Nature makes mistakes, but overall the human race has evolved in the best possible way for its survival. You're supposed to be happy and healthy. If you aren't, and you came to me for help, the fault is mine. The paradigm is not that you have to suffer because of some divine law. That concept sets up a whole world of violence and nastiness."

"Your philosophy might work in an affluent society where you can go to the babalawo or the mountaintop or wherever you please," I said, recalling what sociologist Roof told me--that Americans practice supply-side spirituality. Our sense of entitlement, of self-betterment, is so strong it influences our religious attitudes. Most Americans believe that abundance is our true spiritual condition. "But when you travel, you see that most of the world has no choice. They live in Somalia or Russia or Sarajevo, and their circumstances are so terrible the only response is to ennoble the suffering or else how can they bear it?"

"The best I can do is try to help people, and hope for a ripple effect."

"But if the orisa are so powerful why aren't they worshiped the world over? Why is there still so much suffering?"

"I think they are worshiped. They are forces of energy we all have access to, and different cultures give them different names. And I think over the last 50,000 years of Homo sapiens, we've been in touch with them. You're only looking at the last thousand years of mankind."

THAT NIGHT, AS I FLEW HOME To NEW York, I thought about the goat, which had seemed like an orphaned child when I held its face in my hands. It had been too quiet, as if it knew it were about to die. My uncle said that was a sign of its acceptance. I disagreed. Each of us has different truths. I myself do not want to take life, animal or human, as the path to God. As the Dalai Lama told Bill Moyers, he lets the mosquito bite him and then shoos him away.

But this experience did shake me to the core of my being and make me question my place in the universe. I remember how my uncle had called Western religions "a kind of Great Books club"--so intellectualized they'd lost a lot of their power. The real lesson, he'd told me, was not the way you choose, but that you choose a way.

"I don't care how you do it," he'd said. "I don't care how anybody does it. just connect to that divine energy. Otherwise you will not get out of this lifetime nearly what you should."

PHOTO: Philip Neimark

PHOTO: The recent Supreme Court decision allows Babalawo Philip Neimark to practice his animal sacrifices.

Reported by Mario Ruiz

A CONVERSATION WITH PHILIP NEIMARK, BABALAWO

PT: What do you say to those who dismiss your adherence to this religion as the product of depression, or even insanity.

PN: I say look at my life. Do I appear to be a genuinely happy person? Do I appear to have a genuine working, reciprocal, mutual adult relationship with another human being? Do I have children that love me and that I love? Am I hurting anyone in any way? If you find satisfactory answers to the questions then simply decide if Ifa has any purpose for you. You know what happy is. You don't need to have a university to make graphs about what's happy. You know who's happy and who isn't.

PT: Why publicize yourself? Is this simply self-promotion?

PN: Why would I want to be quiet about it? Nothing in my life has ever made me happier. My life, my relationships, and every facet of what I do is just better today than before as a direct result of what we believe and what we practice. So why would I want to keep that a secret?

PT: Why is blood sacrifice necessary?

PN: We only sacrifice when nothing else will work. It's a kind of...I don't like to use the phrase "last resort" but it's the ultimate weapon for accessing the transcendent--a very powerful energy force for specific changes that need to take place. There are many rituals and offerings in Ifa that don't involve animal sacrifice.

PT: Such as?

PN: Lets say that a guy approaches me and says his wife is leaving him. The first thing I would ask is, "Is getting her back the right thing?" It's just a pragmatic issue that you have to put the energy to work appropriately. I try desperately to make people contemplate this question seriously.

Let's assume that getting her back is the right thing. That for their own energy components and for the children it would be better if they were together. Then maybe that man would have to give honey to Oshoon, Arisha (Goddess) of sweet water, love, and conception. He would go and find a river and pour honey into the pond and ask Oshoon to sweeten the relationship and to bring his wife back in order to form a

reconciliation. If other kinds of energy accesses didn't work, you may have to offer a blood sacrifice. Regardless, I'm trying to help another human being.

PT: And why would blood sacrifice bring about a more immediate result than pouring honey in a river for instance?

PN: Think of it as an antenna in those simplistic terms. If the reception is really bad or you're really out of touch, you'll need to hoist a very large something up there to receive the signal. And honey may simply not be enough to do that.

If something dies, it damn well better be for something important and worthwhile and not capricious. And if I believe blood sacrifice can demonstratively accomplish changes that traditional or other kinds of methodology cannot, then not only is it justifiable, I think it is imperative.