



Celebrating the Sizzle: National Bacon Day

National Bacon Day, observed on December 30, celebrates the beloved smoky, crispy delight that has earned a special place on breakfast plates and beyond. Food lovers across the country honor this day by cooking, sharing, and savoring bacon in all its forms, from classic strips to innovative dishes. Beyond its irresistible taste, the day is a tribute to culinary creativity, as chefs and home cooks experiment with bacon in sandwiches, desserts, and gourmet recipes. National Bacon Day also brings together communities of bacon enthusiasts, encouraging everyone to indulge responsibly while appreciating the savory tradition that continues to inspire kitchens everywhere.

#SWASTIKA

The Swastika Lived And Lives

Threads of Time: The Symbol and Shared Heritage Between India, Iran, and Ukraine



Across the vast expanse of Eurasia, from the steppes of Ukraine to the deserts of Iran and the plains of India, ancient civilizations left behind more than just ruins and relics, they etched symbols, stories, and beliefs into the objects they crafted. One of the most striking examples of this shared cultural thread is the swastika, a symbol that appears in artifacts across these three seemingly distant regions, often carrying remarkably similar meanings.



and sky, the living and the divine. Paired with the swastika, this figurine becomes a powerful artifact of prehistoric cosmology.

**India: The Swastika Still Lives**

Unlike in the West, where the swastika's reputation was irreparably damaged in the 20th century, India has preserved the symbol's ancient meaning. In Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, the swastika is ubiquitous, drawn on thresholds during festivals, etched onto temple walls, and used in rituals. It represents the sun, auspiciousness, the four directions, and the cyclical nature of time.

Its continued use in Indian culture provides a living link to the symbol's ancient, pan-Eurasian roots, showing that the swastika was once a powerful spiritual motif shared across continents.

**The Swastika: A Global Ancient Symbol**

Long before the swastika was co-opted and distorted in the 20th century, it was a revered symbol across many ancient cultures. The name itself comes from Sanskrit: 'svasti-ka', from su (good) and asti (to be), meaning 'well-being' or 'good existence'. Its form, usually a cross with bent arms, appears in countless early civilizations, especially those connected by Indo-European roots.

**Iran's Golden Necklace: A Glimpse into Ancient Beliefs**

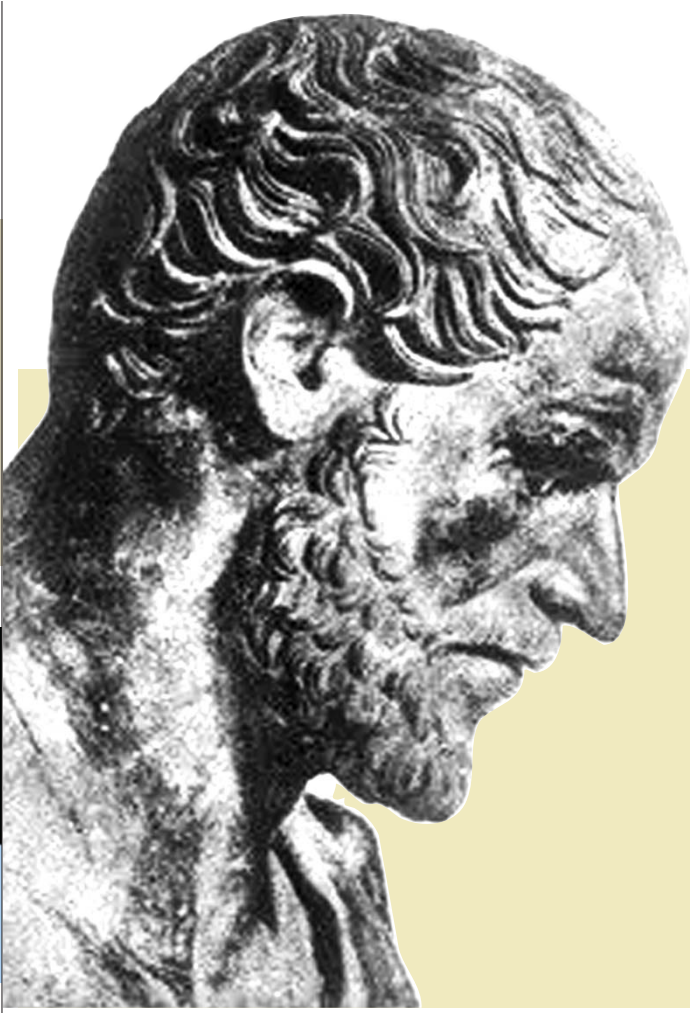
In ancient Persia (modern-day Iran), the swastika was part of a symbolic language that expressed divinity, cosmic power, and the eternal cycle of time. Archaeologists have unearthed a golden necklace adorned with the swastika symbol, possibly dating back to the Bronze or early Iron Age. Found in burial sites or temple contexts, such jewelry wasn't just decorative, it was often spiritual, serving as a talisman or symbol of social status and divine protection.

In Iranian Zoroastrian traditions, too, symbols representing light, eternity, and the struggle between order and chaos were central, and the swastika likely functioned in this symbolic realm.

**Ukraine's Mammoth Ivory Bird: Echoes from the Ice Age**

Even further back in time, archaeologists in Ukraine discovered a bird figurine carved from mammoth ivory, estimated to be over 12,000 years old. What astonished researchers was the presence of swastika-like engravings on the bird's surface. The figure likely held spiritual significance for the Ice Age communities who lived in the region, possibly representing a connection to the sun, the sky, or migratory cycles.

The bird itself is symbolic in many cultures, often seen as a messenger between earth



● Bulbul Joshi

Aristotle, one of the greatest philosophers of ancient Greece, devised a political theory that has been foundational to the understanding of political systems and their inevitable cycles.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle added many ideas to political thought which continue to influence governance today. He explored everything from the relationship between happiness and virtue to the best forms of governance to the relationship between freedom, happiness, and citizenship. According to Aristotle, political systems tend to go through cycles: from one form of good governance to its degeneration into corruption, and eventually to another system. This cycle of Monarchy, Aristocracy, and Democracy, often followed by their corrupt counterparts, Tyranny, Oligarchy, and Mob Rule, illustrates a pattern of governance that is deeply influenced by the imperfection of human nature.

By examining historical examples, from the reign of Marcus Aurelius to the rise of Caesar's dictatorship and Lincoln's democracy, we can see how Aristotle's cycle of political change has unfolded throughout history. These examples also reveal how human flaws in leadership, ambition, and governance perpetuate this cycle.

**Monarchy to Tyranny: Marcus Aurelius and Commodus**

Aristotle's concept of monarchy is one of rule by a single, virtuous leader, ideally working for the good of the people. Marcus Aurelius, the Roman Emperor from 161 to 180 AD,

is often regarded as a philosopher-king, embodying the ideal of the wise and just ruler. A Stoic philosopher, Marcus Aurelius, ruled with wisdom, virtue, and a sense of duty to his people. His reign, marked by relative peace and stability, is seen as the pinnacle of Roman governance.

However, according to Aristotle's political cycle, even the best of monarchies can degenerate into tyranny. Marcus Aurelius' son, Commodus, succeeded him and epitomized the shift from virtuous monarchy to oppressive tyranny. Commodus was indulgent, corrupt, and cruel, contrasting sharply with his father's stoic and temperate leadership. His reign was marked by extravagance, self-glorification, and a blatant disregard for the welfare of the Roman Empire. Commodus' tyrannical rule serves as a direct example of how monarchy can be corrupted into tyranny when leadership is not aligned with virtue and public service.

**Aristocracy to Oligarchy: The Florentine Renaissance**

Aristotle's idea of aristocracy refers to rule by the best citizens, typically those who possess both virtue and wisdom. The Florentine Renaissance provides an example of how an aristocratic system can transition into an oligarchy-rule by a small elite interested more in preserving their wealth and power than promoting the common good.

During the 15th century, Florence was ruled by powerful families, most notably the Medici family. Under Lorenzo de' Medici, known as Lorenzo the Magnificent, Florence flourished as a hub of culture, art, and intellectual achievement. The Medici were viewed as

#ARISTOTLE'S POLITICAL CYCLE



The French Revolution.

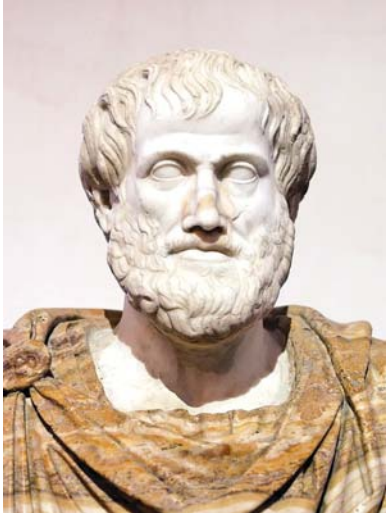
aristocrats in the ideal sense, wealthy, cultured, and capable of governing the city with wisdom. However, over time, the Medici rule shifted from a system focused on civic virtue to a more corrupt form of oligarchy. The family's power became more entrenched, and the government focused less on serving the needs of the populace.

The once vibrant and idealistic aristocracy turned into a closed, self-interested elite, concentrating power among a few and ignoring the needs of the people. The Medici family's gradual shift from aristocracy to oligarchy exemplifies the degeneration Aristotle foresaw in his political cycle.

**Revolution Against Aristocracy: The French Revolution**

Aristotle suggested that when aristocracies become corrupt, they often provoke popular uprisings, leading to a revolution. The French Revolution of 1789 provides a perfect example of how a corrupt aristocracy can lead to violent change. For centuries, the French aristocracy had lived in luxury, while the common people faced dire poverty, heavy taxation, and political disenfranchisement.

The French Revolution was a reaction against the aristocracy's privilege and the monarchy's oppressive rule. The storming of the Bastille and the subsequent overthrow of King Louis XVI and his government



Roman copy (in marble) of a Greek bronze bust of Aristotle by Lysippos (c. 330 BC), with modern alabaster mantle.

marked the fall of the old aristocratic regime. The revolutionaries sought to replace the aristocracy with a new government that represented the will of the people. However, as Aristotle predicted, revolutions are not without their flaws. The ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity soon gave way to the Reign of Terror, where figures like Robespierre led a government that became equally oppressive, eventually culminating in the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte.

**Democracy and Leadership: Abraham Lincoln's Vision**

According to Aristotle, democracy, in its ideal form, is government by the many, working for the common good. Abraham Lincoln's leadership during the American Civil War is an example of democracy at its best, as he worked to preserve the Union and end slavery. Lincoln believed in the core democratic principles of liberty and equality and sought to reconcile the divided nation through his leadership.

However, even democracy is not immune to the dangers Aristotle warned of. In times of crisis, democratic systems can face challenges that push them towards authoritarianism. Lincoln's use of executive power during the Civil War, such as the suspension of habeas corpus, was controversial and raised questions about the balance between leadership and civil liberties. While Lincoln's leadership preserved the United States as a democratic nation, it also reflected the tension between democratic ideals and the pragmatic realities of governance.

**Caesar's Dictatorship: The Fall of the Roman Republic**

Julius Caesar's rise to power offers an example of how democracy can be corrupted into dictatorship. The Roman Republic, once based on elected officials and checks on power, fell into disorder due to internal corruption, civil wars, and political instability. In this environment,

Caesar emerged as a strong leader, promising to restore order.

In 49 BC, Caesar crossed the Rubicon with his army, defying the Roman Senate and beginning a civil war. After defeating his rivals, Caesar was appointed dictator for life. While he implemented some reforms, his rise to power marked the end of the Roman Republic and the beginning of autocratic rule, leading eventually to the Roman Empire. Caesar's dictatorship highlights how democracy can give way to tyranny when political institutions become too weak to maintain control.

**A Flawed Human System**

Aristotle's political cycle underscores a fundamental truth about human governance: political systems, no matter how well designed, are ultimately vulnerable to the flaws of human nature. Whether monarchy degenerates into tyranny, aristocracy into oligarchy, or democracy into dictatorship, the imperfection of leaders and institutions ensures that every system is subject to decay.

The political cycle is not an inevitability but a cautionary tale. History teaches us that political systems must constantly adapt and be vigilant against corruption and the concentration of power. Aristotle's insights remain as relevant today as they were in ancient Greece, reminding us that while human systems of governance may strive for justice, they will always be shaped by the imperfections of those who lead.

**What is the best form of government?**

The best form of government, according to Aristotle, is polity because it best allows the middle

class to govern the greater political community. Aristotle argues that middle class governance is ideal when he writes:

"Thus, it is manifest that the best political community is formed by citizens of the middle class, and that those states are likely to be well-administered in which the middle class is large."

He justifies this claim by warning: "For the addition of the middle class turns the scale, and prevents either of the extremes from being dominant."

The two extremes Aristotle references here are the wealthy (with their associated vices), and the poor (with their vices). He describes the vices as such:

"He who greatly excels in beauty, strength, birth, or wealth, or on the other hand, who is very poor, or very weak, or very much disgraced, finds it difficult to follow rational principle. Of these two, the one sort grow into violent and great criminals, the others into rogues and petty rascals."

He then contrasts the extremes with the middle class, saying: "The middle class is least likely to shrink from the rule, or to be over-ambitious for it."

The middle class has the virtuous balance necessary for good governance. Aristotle finally labels this form of government when he says:

"It is clear that the admixture of the two elements, that is to say, the rich and poor, is to be called a polity."

Hence, Aristotle considers polity to be the best form of government.

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Lincoln delivering his famous Gettysburg Address in 1863.

#PROPHECY

The Red Heifer

The Prophecy of the Red Heifer, an Ancient Ritual and a Modern Sign

For thousands of years, the Red Heifer, known in Hebrew as the Parah Adumah, has captured the imagination of believers, scholars, and theologians alike. Mentioned in the *Book of Numbers* in the Hebrew Bible, this rare animal is tied to one of the most mysterious and sacred purification rituals in Jewish tradition. Yet, in recent times, it has also become the focus of renewed religious anticipation, with some viewing its reappearance as a prophetic sign of the world's spiritual renewal, and even the coming of the Messiah.

**Biblical Origins**

The story of the Red Heifer originates in the Book of Numbers, Chapter 19, where God commands Moses and Aaron to find a perfect, unblemished heifer that is entirely red in color and has never been used for work. This animal was to be sacrificed outside the camp, and its ashes mixed with pure, running water to create a solution used for purification rituals, specifically to cleanse those who had become impure through contact with the dead.

The ritual of the Red Heifer was unique in its paradox. While it cleansed the impure, it simultaneously rendered the priest who performed it impure himself. The ceremony served not only as a physical act of purification but also as a profound symbol of the human struggle between purity and impurity, life and death. In ancient Israel, these ashes were considered essential for temple service and for the spiritual cleanliness of the people.

**The Prophecy and the Promise**

As centuries passed, the Red Heifer took on a deeper symbolic role in Jewish thought. According to Maimonides (Rambam), the great medieval Jewish philosopher, only nine Red Heifers had ever been sacrificed from the time of Moses until the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. He wrote that the tenth Red Heifer would appear in the Messianic Age, when the world would be restored to purity and divine order. This belief transformed the Red Heifer from a ritual animal into a sign of redemption, a prophetic harbinger of the



Messiah's arrival. This idea has persisted through generations. In modern times, many devout Jews and Christians view the search for a flawless Red Heifer as a sacred mission, a necessary step towards the rebuilding of the Third Temple in Jerusalem, which according to prophecy, will usher in a new era of peace and divine presence on earth.

**The Quest for the Perfect Heifer**

Finding a truly perfect Red Heifer is extraordinarily difficult. The Torah's criteria are precise: the animal must be entirely red, with no more than two hairs of a different color. It must never have been yoked, never used for labor, and must be free from any physical blemish. Because of these strict requirements, no verified Red Heifer has existed for nearly two millennia.

In recent years, however, reports of potential candidates have reignited excitement. Some organizations in Israel, including the Temple Institute in Jerusalem, have worked to identify or even breed red heifers that meet biblical standards. Occasionally, animals are discovered that seem to qualify, but upon close inspection, they are disqualified due to minute imperfections, such as a few non-red hairs or small blemishes. Still, each new birth of a red calf sparks renewed hope among believers who see



it as a possible fulfillment of ancient prophecy.

**Modern Controversies and Expectations**

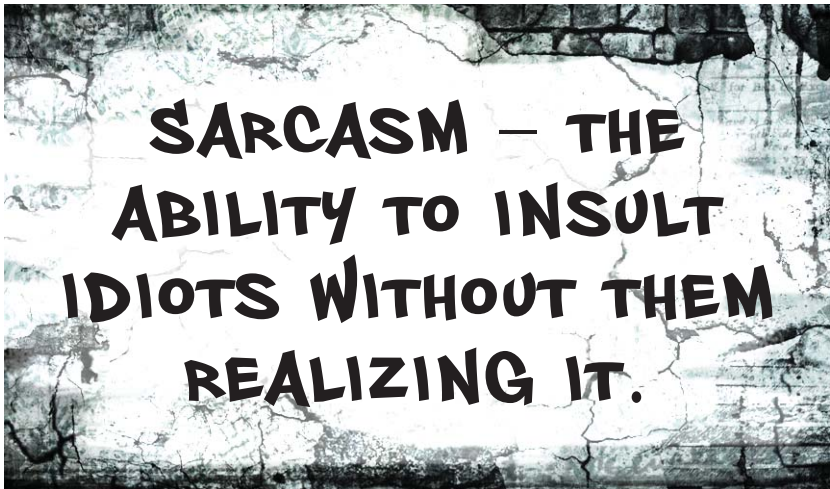
The Red Heifer prophecy also touches on complex religious and political issues. The Third Temple, which some see as a necessary part of the prophecy, would be built on or near the site of the ancient Jewish temples in Jerusalem, an area that is also sacred to Islam. This has made any discussion of temple reconstruction deeply controversial. Many Jewish scholars caution against treating the appearance of a red heifer as an immediate prophetic sign, emphasizing that divine timing, not human planning, will determine when prophecy is fulfilled. Among Christian theologians, particularly those focused on biblical prophecy, the Red Heifer is often seen as a symbol of the approaching end times. Some interpret it as a precursor to the fulfillment of apocalyptic prophecies in the *Book of Revelation*, while others view it as a metaphor for spiritual purification and the ultimate redemption of humankind.

**The Symbolism of Purity and Renewal**

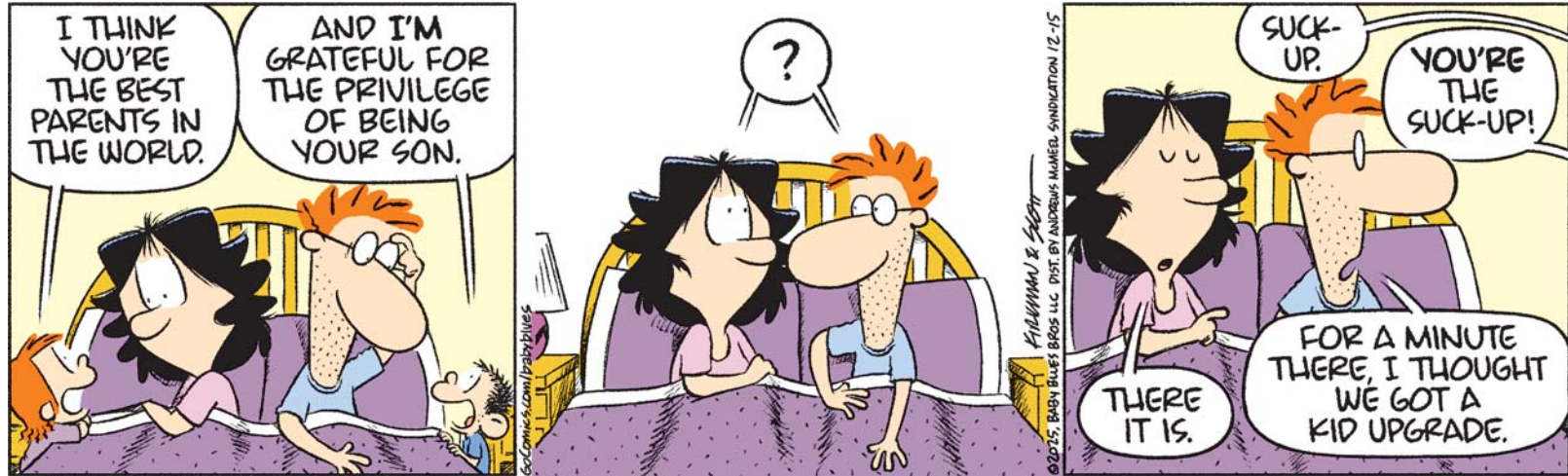
Beyond its prophetic implications, the Red Heifer carries enduring spiritual meaning. In the ancient ritual, the ashes symbolized purification from death, restoring what was lost, both physically and spiritually. The act of cleansing through sacrifice represents humanity's longing for renewal, forgiveness, and divine closeness. The heifer's striking red color, associated with blood, life, and sacrifice, reflects the idea that true purity often comes through struggle and surrender. In a broader sense, the Red Heifer reminds humanity of the eternal cycle of impurity and restoration, death and rebirth. It embodies the hope that, even in times of moral or spiritual decay, cleansing and renewal are possible through faith and obedience.



THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



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