THE JOURNAL OF INDO-JUDAIC STUDIES

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News

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From the Editors

The tenth issue of our journal brings you both familiar and new voices in Indo-Judaic Studies. This issue opens with articles by our founding co-editors. The first, by Nathan Katz, is an overview of encounters between Jewish and Buddhist cultures from antiquity through the modern period, with special focus on contemporary interactions and a trajectory for the future.

Braj M. Sinha's article is an exploration of comparative mysticisms. In particular, he juxtaposes the Tantric concept of *Śakti* with the Kabbalistic concept of *Shekhinah*, both "feminizations" of the Divine.

For some time, we have thought that Israeli scholars have been under-represented in our journal. We are very pleased to introduce three younger scholars from Israel. The first, Ophira Gamliel, is a doctoral student at the Hebrew University who has spent years in Kerala learning Malayalam, and some of the first fruits of her research are presented in this issue.

Dalya Markovich and Ktzia Alon, both of Beit-Berl College in Israel, introduce our readers to the impact of India upon contemporary Israeli culture. We hope to continue to explore these interactions in future issues.

Also new to our journal is Aryeh Wineman, an independent scholar from Massachusetts. Based on his studies of mystical Jewish literature, he reports about a Buddhist story found in an early Hasidic work.

Also new to our journal is Ephraim Nissan, of the United Kingdom, who presents a folkloristic study of tales from the Mughal Court of India.

We present a new section in our journal—"Portraits, Travels, and Accounts"—with an intriguing portrait of a Jewish family of Bassein, Burma. In the future, we will include in this section such portraits, first-person accounts, and other contributions of a more impressionistic or journalistic nature than those in our first, strictly academic, section.

We have two letters and announcements. The first, from Australian anthropologist Myer Samra, reports on a disturbing instance of plagiarism of his work. We felt our readers ought to be aware of such a disreputable practice. The second is an announcement from Liesbeth Hugenholtz about the availability of books from the collection of David Sassoon from the Valmadonna Trust Library in London.

Five new books in Indo-Judaic Studies are reviewed in this issue. Joan G. Roland, a longtime member of our editorial board, reviews a recent memoir by Sadia Shepard, who followed her Muslim maternal grandmother's wish to discover her ancestral community of Bene Israel. Liladhar R. Pendse of the University of California at Los Angeles considers the new book of tribute for Nissim Ezekiel, India's leading English-language poet of the twentieth century, edited by Havovi Anklesaria, with Santan Rodrigues. French scholar Elizabeth Chalier-Visuvalingam presents David Shulman and Shalva Weil's collection of Israeli scholarship about India. Nathan Katz looks at the monumental and long-awaited *India Traders of the Middle Ages* by the late Solomon D. Goitein of Princeton University and completed by his student, Mordechai A. Friedman of Tel-Aviv University. Finally, Katz reviews a collection of stories by Esther David about Ahmedabad's Jewish community since Gujarat state was wracked by Hindu-Muslim violence and Jews found themselves caught in the crossfire.

In issue number 9, we reported on the first Hindu-Jewish encounter in New Delhi held in February 2007. In this issue, for the record, we reproduce their joint statement emerging out of their second meeting, this time in Jerusalem during February 2008.

Finally, we are grieved to include an obituary for Ruth Fredman Cernea, a pioneer in the study of Burmese Jewry and a friend on this journal.

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Buddhist-Jewish Relations throughout the Ages and in the Future[1]

By Nathan Katz

From King Solomon to the Dalai Lama, from Marco Polo to Chaim Potok, from medieval Kabbalists to contemporary JuBus,[2] there have been encounters between Buddhists and Jews for millennia. Ancient interactions are hinted at in sacred texts of both religions, and medieval links are often tantalizingly disguised. It has been only since the middle of the twentieth century—the era of the Holocaust and nuclear weapons—that the Buddhist-Jewish encounter has emerged from the shadows.

Ancient Times

There is no shortage of evidence of commercial and cultural links between India and Israel in even the most ancient strata of history. From the days of Sumer and the Indus Valley Civilization, both archaeological evidence and textual references provide evidence of links between these two civilizations.[3] Sanskrit and Tamil loan words are found in the Hebrew Bible,[4] obscure biblical place names have been identified in India,[5] and first-century Hellenized Jewish authors Josephus Flauvius and Philo of Alexandria wrote admiringly of Indian culture and religion.[6]

The evidence of ancient Indo-Israel links is clear. But what of specific Buddhist-Jewish materials? We can find one such connection.

A Buddhist Jataka story[7] connects the Buddha, the wisest man of India, with King Solomon, the wisest man of Israel. In the *Mahoshadha Jataka* a *yakshini*, or demoness, stole a baby from his mother, intending to eat him. The mother confronted the *yakshini*, but was rebuked by the demoness who claimed the baby as her own. They happened to pass by the judgment hall of the Maharaja of Benares, who was none other than the Buddha in a previous birth. The text reads:

> He heard the noise, sent for them, inquired into the matter, and asked them whether they would abide by his decision. And they agreed. Then he had a   line drawn on the ground; and told the *yakshini* to take hold of the child's arms, and the mother to take hold of his legs; and said: "The child shall be hers who drags him over the line."
>
> But soon as they pulled at him, the mother, seeing how he suffered, grieved as if her heart would break. And letting him go, she stood there weeping. Then the future Buddha asked the bystanders, "Whose hearts are tender to babes? those who have borne children, or those who have not?" And they answered, "O Sire! the hearts of mothers are tender." Then he said, "Whom do you think is the mother? she who has the child in her arms, or she who has let go?" And they answered, "She who has let go is the mother."

The tale concludes happily. The child is returned to its mother, and the remorseful *yakshini* vowed to follow the five fundamental ethical precepts of Buddhism.[8]

This legend of the Buddha is strikingly similar to the judgment tale of King Solomon.[9] It is impossible to say who is borrowing from whom, or whether both Jews and Buddhists were borrowing from a yet older, common source, or whether this striking similarity was simply coincidental.[10]

Medieval Times

One of the inherent difficulties in discerning Jewish-Buddhist relations in the ancient through medieval eras is terminological. In Indian literature, all foreigners are called "Yavanas," "Greeks." Mirroring this conflation, in Jewish literature all things Indian are called "Hindu'a."[11]

There is an inherent ambiguity in the term "Hindu," even today. The word retains its original geographic sense; the word "India" is itself a foreign imposition, as the land is known in Indian literature as "Bharata." It was the British who applied the term to some of the religious traditions of the subcontinent, basically those who derive authority from the Vedas but a few other sects as well, and sought to impose political order or an apparently chaotic subcontinent with the construction of Hinduism. Even now, the term *Hindutva* could be rendered in English as either "Hindu-ness" or "Indianness." The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), a contemporary nationalist political movement, uses the term "Hindu" to mean all religions indigenous to the subcontinent, intending to include what we call "Buddhism," or "Jainism," or "Sikhism," as well as the variety of sects called "Hindu." At the same time, many of India's modern spiritual teachers eschew the term and call their teachings "sanantana Dharma" or "eternal Truth." This ambiguity can be creative or it can be deceptive, and our medieval texts' perceptions reflect not merely a lack of understanding of India, but in a way are more accurate than contemporary terminology.

As we move into medieval times, the documentation of links between Jews and India become increasingly clear.[12] Physical evidence places Jewish communities in India since the ninth century; Goitein's analysis of early medieval documents from the *genizah* at Fustart, Cairo, is replete with numerous letters of Jewish merchants who plied "the India trade";[13] and medieval travelers, from al-Beruni to Benjamin of Tudela to Marco Polo, have described Jewish presence in and interactions with Indian culture.[14]

Medieval cultural interactions between Jews and India have been detailed in two recent, significant studies,[15] but only two indications of a specifically Jewish-Buddhist medieval interaction are to be found. One is found in the travel diaries of "the greatest medieval Jewish traveler,"[16] Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela (twelfth century). Benjamin described a Jewish community of some 23,000 in twelfth-century Kandy, capital of Ceylon, which of course is predominantly a Buddhist country.[17] Benjamin's report· is corroborated by the great Muslim geographer, Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad ibn Idris, known as Idrisi (1099-1154), who wrote: "The king of this island has sixteen ministers, of whom one-quarter are native to that nation, a quarter are Christians, a quarter Muslims, and a quarter Jews."[18] It is indeed suggestive of Buddhist-Jewish encounters of nearly a thousand years ago, but Benjamin's and Idrisi's accounts are not very reliable. There is no real evidence that Benjamin actually traveled beyond the Middle East and he mostly relied on traveler's tales, and Idrisi likely confused the Hindu-centered town of Chendamangalam, near Kochi, with Ceylon. In medieval times, the capital of the area around Kochi was known to Jewish and Arab travelers as Shingly, easily confused with one of the names of Ceylon, Singhala Dipa, or "Singoli" as Idrisi called it.[19]

A most suggestive discovery regarding the early history of Judaism in China was first reported in 1901 by the British-Jewish archaeologist, Sir Marc Auriel Stein (1862-1943). Excavating Dandan-Uiliq, near Khotan in Turkestan, he found a manuscript written in Judeo-Persian and dated 718 CE. Stein also excavated the "Cave of the Thousand Buddhas" at the Silk Road oasis of Tun-huang, Kansu Province, in which colleague, Paul Pelliot (1876-1945), found one page of a Hebrew penitential prayer book with verses from the Psalms and the Prophets, also from the eighth or perhaps ninth century.[20] One can only speculate about the implications of the fact that the oldest Hebrew fragment on paper ever discovered was found in a Chinese Buddhist library. Not so long after, Marco Polo (thirteenth century) described Jewish advisors to the Chinese Emperor.[21]

Perhaps in Ceylon or China at the turn of the millennium, traces of a Buddhist-Jewish encounter can be inferred.

Mysticism

Ideas, of course, travel east to west as much as from west to east, and in Tudela a century after Benjamin, the seminal kabbalist Abraham Abulafia (1240-1291) adapted Indian mystical practices, symbols, and ideas into his system.[22] While in residence at Jerusalem's Shalom Hartman Institute where Moshe Idel is a fixture, the Hebrew University professor described to me numerous kabbalistic manuscripts in his personal library that clearly demonstrate Indian mystical influences and direct borrowings: meditation techniques and even sacred diagrams known as mandalas, all Judaized and incorporated as part and parcel of Abulafia's "ecstatic Kabbalah."

Jewish mystical concepts of reincarnation (*gilgul*) and angelology seem to carry an Indian stamp, and centuries later a nineteenth-century kabbalist named Asher Halevi (1849-1912) left behind very difficult writings that discuss parallels between his Kabbalah and specifically Tibetan Tantra. In his "Book of Visions," for example, he discusses the Judaic *golem*, a teaching of Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel (1525-1609), better known as the Maharal of Prague about constructing a zombie from body parts to serve as a defender of the beleaguered Jews. Significantly, he calls it not *golem*, but uses the Tibetan word *ro-langs*, a teaching for revivifying a corpse.[23] Asher was a cobbler and *mohel* who lived in Darjeeling, a Himalayan summer resort for heat-weary Calcuttans. He left behind at least three manuscripts, including an autobiography or book of visions, a treatise on the circumcision ritual, and an essay on the psychology of religion. His works await analysis.[24]

Modern Europe

Jews, like all European intellectuals, became enamored of "eastern" thought somewhere in the mid-eighteenth century. As a matter of fact, many of the pioneering German and British Orientalists were Jews, who may have been motivated in part by a search for non-Christian paradigms.

From the other side, ever since Aristotle Jews have been viewed as Orientals, an ascription alternately welcomed and disdained by Jews. This ambivalence was manifested in two of the twentieth century's most influential European Jewish theologians: Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1926), who disdained "eastern" thought,[25] and Martin Buber (1878-1965), who relished it.[26]

Specifically Buddhist ideas entered into secular Yiddish culture with the publication of a translation of the *Dhammapada*.[27] As was the nature of the era, this phase of the Buddhist-Jewish encounter remained textual.

The Buddhist-Jewish encounter was also a subtext of a remarkable novel by Chaim Potok (b. 1929), *The Book of Lights*.[28] Potok, one of the century's leading Jewish novelists, juxtaposes Gershon Loran, a rabbinical student who becomes an army chaplain during the Korean War, with Arthur Leiden, son of one of the developers of the atomic bomb. Laron seeks meaning in studying Kabbalah, the Zohar's theology of lights in particular, while Leiden tries to find solace for the destruction wrought by his father's invention by taking up residence in Kyoto, flirting with Buddhism. The two types of lights—the Zohar's lights of mysticism and Hiroshima's lights of destruction—make for a richly symbolic encounter between Jewish and Buddhist consciousness.

The same Jewish ambivalence about things eastern also found its way into the Zionist movement. Mainstream Zionist leaders sought to establish a European-style socialist utopia in Palestine, while others such as Moshe Sharett (1894-1905), who became foreign minister of Israel, envisioned a Jewish return to their Asian, oriental home,

removing themselves from the destruction that was Europe. Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973), although firmly secular as a Jew was more than a dabbler in Buddhism. He developed an especially close personal bond with the prime minister of newly independent Burma, U Nu (1907-1995) and spent time learning *vispassana* meditation in Burma's monasteries. U Nu was the first Asian leader to visit Israel.[29] Even the generally unsentimental Foreign Ministry of Israel characterized early Burmese-Israeli relations as having a "chemistry of mutual affection,"[30] no doubt reflecting the closeness of the leaders of the two new nations.

Asian Nationalism and the Jews

While Jews and Judaism played a significant role in the discourse known as "the Hindu Renaissance" in India, there was only scant parallel in the language of "the Buddhist Revival."

The Hindu Renaissance began in mid-eighteenth-century Bengal. To characterize it very broadly, it was an attempt to counteract the supposed supremacy of British culture and the Christian religion, as well as to "reform" Hinduism. In this discourse, Jews were seen, on one hand, as an Asian people like themselves. What's more, Judaism is nonmissionizing, like Hinduism. Also like Hindus, Jews have a history of oppression. One Tamil leader, Arumuga Navallar, used the "Old Testament" to counter the arguments of the missionaries.[31] And for good measure, Jesus the Jew was spiritual, like Hindus, who recognized him as the Jewish *avatara* (incarnation of G-d). But on the other hand, Judaism was seen as the source of the very western civilization that they claimed to detest, the mother of the despised Christianity and Islam, the very source of monotheistic intolerance and exclusivism. Borrowing from a well-known Christian characterization, Judaism was reviled as "materialistic," contrasted against Hinduism, which of course was "spiritual."[32]

Although there had been very small Jewish communities in such Buddhist countries as Thailand and Sri Lanka, they are absent in the discourse of the "Buddhist Revival." To be sure, the Anagarika Dharmapala was scathing in his comments about the G-d of the "Old Testament." For example, reflecting on the story of Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son Isaac, he wrote that "Every savage race has its own totem deity."[33] As his essay demonstrates, Buddhist polemicists could employ harsh language in their encounters with Christian missionaries, also at the famous Panadura debates,[34] but their real targets were not actually Jews. In this, they mimicked Hindu Renaissance rhetoric in the style of Swami Dayanand Saraswati.

Two mid-twentieth-century Buddhist pamphlets—one in Thai and one in Tibetan— did focus on Jews. The king of Thailand wrote the first. He understood Jews as a parasitic commercial class, self-satisfied and disloyal, a fifth column to be extirpated from his Thailand. In fact, in his work "Jews" was a code word for "Chinese," who tended to dominate Bangkok's commercial and economic life.[35]

In a very similar vein, just two years ago I was channel surfing in my hotel in New Delhi when I heard someone comparing Jews with Brahmins. I smiled, thinking this was a reflection of Aristotle, and expected to hear how Jews, like Brahmins, live a life of special purity, pray in an ancient, sacred language, and serve as priests to the world. It was jarring as I focused on the speaker's words to hear sentiments similar to the King of Thailand's: I heard that the Brahmins were like the Jews, unscrupulous bloodsuckers and usurers who sought to enslave the Dalits ("the oppressed").

Of course, being educated according to missionary and British standards, most Asian elites knew Jews through their syllabi rather than through normal social interactions. They learned that Jews killed Christ and demanded their "pound of flesh" as repayment for a loan. These same elites also imbibed Marx's screed "On the Jewish Question" (1844). So

from their point of view, Jews were simply paradigms for whatever group whom they saw as their oppressors—whether the Chinese of Thailand or the Brahmins of Tamil Nadu.

Jamyang Norbu, their fiery president of the highly politicized Tibetan Youth Congress and editor of *Rangzen*, "Independence," wrote the other pamphlet of note. Published in 1973 on the purported 2100th anniversary of the Tibetan state, "An Outline of the History of Israel" draws inspiration from Jewish experience. His central narrative is Jewish steadfastness in the face of two millennia of oppression and a sense of unity that led to the re-establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. He is lavish in praising Jewish morality, intelligence, industry, and bravery. It is interesting to note that among Zionist groups, he has the highest regard for the most militant, the "Lehi" party, whom the British called "the Stern Gang."[36]

The perception of Jews in Asian nationalist discourses is diverse: a mixed perception among Hindu nationalists, an absence in the Buddhist Revival, a negative image is portrayed in the king's Thai nationalism, and an idealized one in Norbu's Tibetan treatise.

The Holocust Era and the Genesis of the JuBu

Paradoxically, it was the Holocaust era when the first significant nonmediated—which is to say not merely textual—encounters between Western Jews and Buddhists took place.

The first important figure of the era was Sigmund Feninger (1901-1994), a secular Jew from Hanau, Germany, who converted to Buddhism, took the Dharma-name Nyanaponika, and joined a monastery in Ceylon in 1936. Three years later, he brought his mother and other relatives to escape the Nazis. Ironically, since Nyanaponika was a German national, he was interred by the British as an "enemy alien" at Dehru Dun. In the same detention center were the eminent historian of Buddhist art and later professor at Halle, Dr. Heinz Mode,[37] and Lama Anagarika Govinda, prolific author and tantric adept.[38]

After the war, Nyanaponika returned to Ceylon, eventually taking up residence at the Forest Hermitage near Kandy, where he became very involved with the Buddhist Publication Society, which published a number of his authoritative scholarly works. A "monk's monk," Nyanaponika was revered by Theravada Buddhists around the world.

Nyanaponika never mentioned his Jewish background, and his analyses of the Buddha's teachings find the Dharma (or Dhamma) to be incompatible with a belief in G-d.[39]

To complete the circle, Nyanaponika's preeminent disciple is Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, né Jeffrey Block. Bodhi continued his teacher's scholarly interests, doing some of the finest translations ever of Pali texts, and heading the Buddhist Publication Society (BPS) until he returned to the United States about a decade ago.

As I wanted to review Nyanaponika's influential article about G-d, I unsuccessfully tried to find my copy of his pamphlet—it is "somewhere in my office." I searched and found that it had been reprinted in a recent book.[40] The book was edited by his disciple, Bhikkhu Bodhi. The eminent Swiss psychiatrist, another Jew, wrote the introduction, and the back cover featured testimonials by Sharon Salzberg, Sylvia Boorstein, and Joseph Goldstein—all highly regarded Jewish-Buddhist meditation teachers.

Another Holocaust refugee became one of the leaders of the contemporary Buddhist nuns' movement:[41] Ayyah Khema (1923-1997),[42] whose life became emblematic of the quest of contemporary Jews who pursue spirituality through Buddhism. Born in prewar Berlin into an upper-class, highly assimilated Jewish family, she attended the best schools and avidly enjoyed German culture. She grew up with servants and soirees, music and poetry, but very little Jewishness.

Her father had the perspicacity to get his family out of Germany while it was still possible. They found their way to Shanghai where they waited out Germany's madness and where he continued his business amidst a cosmopolitan Jewish community. It was here that

Ayyah Khema first encountered Jewish mysticism. One war followed another. Mao's revolution forced them out of China, and they made their circuitous way to California where she eventually married and raised children and grandchildren.

Whether from innate inclination or because of her remarkable experiences, Ayyah Khema's interest in mysticism grew. Having read Gershom Scholem's studies of Kabbalah, she wrote the professor in Jerusalem, asking for advice as to how to set about studying Kabbalah experientially. She now knows how naive that letter was. Some months later, she received a curt reply. "He told me to forget about it, that a woman—especially one who lacked extensive background in Torah and Talmud—was prohibited from ever approaching these mystical treasures of Jewish tradition," she said. "So I continued to read and study on my own."

Her readings were eclectic and included spiritual masterpieces from the east. She was especially impressed with Buddhist literature. Its directness, its freedom from metaphysical and ritual embellishment, was naturally attractive, especially considering her frustration at the traditional barriers safeguarding Jewish mysticism from the hoi polloi. More important than these theoretical concerns, however, was the openness of Buddhist teachers. One did not have to be of a certain age or ethnicity, or a male, or especially learned or observant, as prerequisite for mystical practices. She seized the opportunity. Her study of Buddhism and practice of meditation grew, and after the death of her husband she took ordination as a Buddhist nun in the early 1970s.

"Of course I'm still Jewish. What else could I be?" she replied to my unasked question. "Jewish is something you *are*, and I am proud of our heritage." Apparently she did not share Nyanaponika's diffidence, either about discussing her past, about her Jewishness, or even about G-d, an idea she found compatible with her own Buddhist practice. Our conversation was punctuated with words from both Yiddish and Pali. Her manner was suffused with Buddhist compassion and Jewish warmth. I reflected that it was too bad she had not been born twenty years later, at a time when Kabbalah could be approached without quite so many barriers. How contemporary Judaism needs powerful, spiritual, female teachers! I felt that the loss was Judaism's, not Ayyah Khema's, since it was evident that her life was so very rich, that her spirit had grown so strong.

Many leading Buddhist teachers are Jews: Zen teachers Philip Kaplau Roshi and Roshi Bernie Glassman; Jodo priest Rev. Alfred Bloom, Theravada teachers Sylvia Boorstein, Harvey Aronson, Sharon Salzberg, Joseph Goldstein, and Jack Kornfield; and Tibetan teachers Alexander Berzin, Lama Surya Das, Lama John Makransky, Geshe George Dreyfus, and the nun Ven. Thubten Chödron.[43]

When considering Jews who adopt Buddhist practice, it is useful to distinguish between two general types: those who, like Nyanaponika, sever ties with Jewish life, and those who, like Ayyah Khema (especially during the last years of her life), affirm their Jewishness. I would suggest that the term "JuBu" be reserved for the latter group; for the former we need no special term; they are simply Buddhists of Jewish background.

Some JuBus go so far as to seek to combine the practices of Buddhism and Judaism, attempting to affirm both. For example, Ven. Thubten Chödron has written about the influence of the JuBu's Jewish social consciousness in their roles in the Buddhist women's movement,[44] and journalist Goldberg has commented on Ayyah Khema's role in the nun's movement in Sri Lanka.[45] Roshi Bernie Glassman founded the Zen Peacemakers Sangha,[46] a prime example of socially engaged Buddhism that draws at least some inspiration from the Jewish background of its leaders. Glassman created the "Bearing Witness at Auschwitz Birkenau" annual retreat, which is described on his web page as:

> We will gather as a multi-faith assembly of practitioners of many cultures. . .
> in Oswiecim, Poland, on the grounds of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the place of personal
> and universal human tragedy during World War II. There, we will be offered many

opportunities to bear witness to the diverse aspects of ourselves and others. The retreat will be guided by an experienced group of international leaders representing diverse cultures and religious traditions. Participants will spend most of the daylight hours each day at the Birkenau camp, practicing periods of silence and meditation, offering prayers, chanting the names of the dead, offering Kaddish (the Jewish Memorial Prayer) and religious services in many traditions.

There are many other examples of how JuBus have brought their social consciousness with them into the worlds of Buddhism.

Of course, the relationship is reciprocal, and many practicing Jews have brought their Buddhist meditation with them as they returned to their synagogues. A prime example is the so-called "Zen Rabbi" of San Francisco, Alan Lew.[47]

It is not surprising that many in the Jewish Renewal Movement (JRM) have a background in Dharma centers and/ or Hindu ashrams. In a nutshell, JRM is a mixture of the neo-Hasidism of Rabbi Zalman M. Schachter-Shalomi, eastern practices of yoga and meditation, the new left social consciousness of Rabbi Arthur O. Waskow, feminism, environmentalism, and the "paradigm shift" of the new age movements.[48] What is less well documented, but none the less vibrant, is a Buddhist influence on the Ba'al Teshuva Movement (BTM), the "return" to Orthodox Jewish practice of secular Jews, many via Dharma centers and ashrams. This phenomenon has also led rabbis and Jewish thinkers to engage Buddhists and Buddhism dialogically, perhaps for the first time.[49]

In short, the other hand of the export of Jewish social consciousness into the worlds of Buddhism is the transfer of Buddhist (and Hindu) practice into Judaism via JRM and BTM, and by now from there into mainstream Conservative and Reform Judaisms in America and elsewhere.[50]

It is not easy to interpret today's globalized spirituality that allows for such easy movement between and among religious worlds. At times I have mused that there is a mysterious hand behind it:

One day I was discussing all of these mysterious matters with. . . one of the world's greater Kabbalists. I had just told him about Ayyah Khema, the Buddhist nun who wanted to study Jewish esotericism but was rebuffed by Professor Scholem. I had commented that it was her loss. "Maybe not," he replied. "Maybe this is what was best for her." I backtracked. Perhaps it was not her loss, but surely her adopting Buddhism was a loss to the Jewish people. "Maybe not," he replied again. "From what you have told me about these Jews who have gone east, I suspect they may be participating in some very deep *tikkun*. They are mending the fissure between East and West, but this is deeper than politics. They may be mending the souls of the Jewish people."[51]

Perhaps.

The Contemporary Buddhist-Jewish Encounter

The first time that a group of Jews met for a formal dialogue with a group of Buddhists was in 1990, when a delegation of eight rabbis and scholars accepted an invitation from His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be his guests for an intensive series of dialogues with himself, Tibetan religious and secular leaders, educators, and—yes—JuBus residing in Dharamsala. The Dalai Lama's manifest question was that he wanted to know the "Jewish secret" about how a people can preserve their religion and culture while living in exile, a question of obvious existential import to Tibetans. The historically significant event was the subject of a very popular and excellent book[52] and a number of articles, including my own reflections.[53]

Each of the delegates presented a partial response to the Dalai Lama's question. As these responses have been described fully in print, below is a tabular summary. It

identifies each speaker, her or his topic, the Tibetans' level of interest in the topic, whether the topic points to Buddhist-Judaic similarities or to Judaic uniqueness, and the impact of this topic for the Tibetans.

Name	Topic	Interest	Similarity/ Uniqueness	Impact
Nathan Katz	Historical background	Moderate	Similarities (historical contacts)	Little
Rabbi Zalman M. Schachter-Shalomi	Mystical theology, Kabbalah	High	Similarities	Little
Rabbi Irving Greenberg	Implications of destruction of Second Temple and development of rabbinic Judaism	Moderate	Unique to Judaism	Little
Paul Mendes-Flohr	Jewish modernism and secularism	High	Uniqueness	Some, especially Jewish summer youth camps
Rabbi Jonathan Omer-Man	Jewish meditation	High	Similarity	Little
Moshe Waldoks	Jewish hermeneutics	Moderate	Similarity	Little
Rebbetzin Blu Greenberg	Home-centered nature of Diasporic Judaism	High	Uniqueness	Highest
Rabbi Joy Levitt	Jewish communal institutions in America	High	Uniqueness	High

Assuming that the reader is familiar with the content of the presentations from other sources, it can readily be seen that several issues were of great interest to the Tibetans. Foremost among these is the role of the Jewish home in transmitting the religion. In Jewish practice, especially traditional Judaism, the home is more central than the synagogue, which follows the Talmudic paradigm that the dining table in the home replaced the altar in the destroyed Temple.[54] For a monastery-centered faith as most of Buddhism is, Rebbetzin Greenberg's presentation was startling. As I noted at the time, "Perhaps this is the most fruitful of all exchanges, especially from a Tibetan point of view. The Dalai Lama's fascination with our home-centered observances makes me appreciate the singularity of Jewish traditions."[55]

Also of high interest were Rabbi Levitt's description of Jewish communal organizations, from free loan societies that assist Jewish immigrants to get started in a

new country, to political lobbying organizations, day schools, federations, old age homes, and burial societies. Mendes-Flohr's description of his formative experiences at a summer youth camp in America was immediately applicable to the Tibetans' situation in India, and in fact just a few years later Rabbi and Rebbetzin Greenberg were able to facilitate three Tibetan educators' six-month internships in the New York offices of such camps, capped off with visits over the summer. Today, Tibetan summer youth camps based on the American Jewish model have been established.

In the areas of the greatest overlap—mystical theology, meditation, hermeneutics, and the like—there was interest but little impact. This ought to surprise no one, as discovering religious similarities is pleasant, but is not particularly meaningful.

But Tibetans are not the only Buddhists in the world. While there have been no corporate dialogues on the level as the one in Dharamsala with Sri Lankan, or Thai, or Japanese Buddhists, nevertheless smaller scale encounters have been taking place around the world. In America, Asian Americans of many ethnicities have encountered Jewish Americans, both formally and informally. Here the issues of modernization and diasporization rise to the fore.

Today we see two kinds of Diaspora: the forced exile of the Tibetans, Vietnamese, and Cambodians, and the voluntary exile of most Hindus, Japanese, Koreans, or Sri Lankan Buddhists for examples. Jews experienced forced exile until 1948, but since the establishment of Israel, *galut* has become home voluntarily. Jewish struggles over nearly 2000 years may inspire Tibetans and Vietnamese, but many Asian American rightly or wrongly see American Jews as role models for their gentle exile: Jews are taken as fully participating in American life while simultaneously maintaining religio-cultural traditions. Hebrew day schools, federations, newspapers, self-defense organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), youth summer camps, and lobbying organizations for both domestic and international issues are serving as models for other minority peoples who fear assimilation and the loss of traditions.

For many newly diasporized peoples—such as Tibetans and Indochinese Americans—diasporization and modernization are simultaneous. In some sense, the two phenomena are interrelated. Diasporization shatters the premodern sense of a nation as a confluence of land-people-language-religion. If one is landless, then the fusion of these four separable factors unravels. Similarly, the essence of modernization is pluralism, wherein one's sacred canopy is seen as a human cultural product rather than as a fabric of sacred, eternal meanings. Diasporization confronts one with the other, with a pluralism of meanings. So does modernization, and in this sense the two phenomena are related. Jews are seen as the first diasporized *and* the first modernized people, even if in the Jewish case the former preceded the latter by 1,600 years. Peoples who are just now becoming diasporized and/or modernized tend to look to Jews for guidance, and this topic has risen to the forefront of contemporary Buddhist-Jewish encounters, especially in America.

Idolatry?

I have reserved the thorniest issue for the last, the question of idolatry. For an observant Jew, idolatry has been the biggest stumbling block to serious encounters with Buddhism, if not with Buddhists themselves. However, a very recent, precedent-setting event may have removed this difficulty.

The Judaic concept that is approximated by the English "idolatry" is *avodah zarah*, or "foreign worship." In the Torah, the Talmud and legal codifications, *avodah zarah* is among the most heinous of sins, and layers of strictures have been rabbinically established to limit, if not prevent, any association with not only the practice, but also the people who perform the practice. It has seemed obvious that Buddhists, most of whom bow down before a statue of the Buddha or other figure, are practicing idolatry.

There has been a counter current in Judaic legal thinking about idolatry. Rabbi Menachem Meir (1249-1316),[56] for example, held that contemporary practices are not the same thing as the idolatry described in the Torah, and that people of his day were merely following ancestral custom, not actually performing idolatry. This has been a minority opinion, but it has been significant.

On February 5-6, 2007, Rabbi Yona Metzger, the Chief Ashkenazic Rabbi of Israel, led a delegation of distinguished Orthodox rabbis to India for a meeting with Hindu leaders from a wide variety of sects who had been convened by Swami Dayanand Saraswati of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha. This was a much higher level and more official encounter than the Dharamsala dialogue, as in a significant sense the Chief Rabbinate of Israel can speak for Judaism in a way that a pluralistic collection of eight scholars and rabbis cannot.

The rabbis and swamis concluded their meetings with a nine-point "Declaration of Mutual Understanding and Cooperation from the First Jewish-Hindu Leadership Summit."[57] The very first point in the declaration stunningly removed the idolatry issue from the dialogical table. "Their respective Traditions [hold] that there is One Supreme Being who is the Ultimate Reality, who has created this world in its blessed diversity and who has communicated Divine ways of action for humanity, for different peoples in different times and places."

As bold as this point is theologically, one cannot but wonder whether it would apply to Buddhists as well, whose beliefs are quite different from those of Hindus, especially on this about a Creator G-d. Some thinkers have tried to identify *shunyata* with a mystically understood G-d,[58] and others have even taken *nirvana* in this light as a kind of negative theology.[59] But when one leaves the domain of mysticism and tries to reconcile a Creator G-d with Buddhist philosophy, the issues becomes murky at best. It is intriguing to note that for years, many JuBus have argued that Buddhism's nontheism make it more palatable Judaically than Hinduism, for example, which could be understood as positing "another" G-d than the G-d of Israel; yet if we correctly apply the principles articulated at this Jewish-Hindu encounter, precisely this nontheism might be a greater stumbling block than the purported polytheism that had for long been ascribed to Hinduism.

But perhaps Buddhist-Jewish understanding would be best left to emerge out of a future dialogical encounter rather than our speculation of the moment. After all, who could have imagined that Orthodox rabbis would affirm the identity of the G-d of Israel with the G-d of the Hindus?

Trajectories

What trends can be discerned from the modern Buddhist-Jewish encounter, and what trajectories can we anticipate for the future?

As in many interreligious encounters, boundary-drawing seems to be a starting point. Areas of overlap are mapped, and at the same time boundaries are drawn. In the Buddhist-Jewish dialogues of recent years, overlaps have been found in mystical theologies and practices, as well as in ethical principles.

Boundaries follow traditional demarcations. The Buddha taught that anywhere the noble eightfold path is found, there his Dharma is to be found.[60] But would a Jewish viewpoint in which the Creator G-d is so central be counted as "right understanding"? Similarly, Judaism has taught that "the righteous of all nations have a share in the world to come,"[61] but that leaves us to ask who might be counted among the righteous? Tradition has held that whoever observes the seven Noahide commandments merits the same ultimate reward as the observant Jew. It must be noted, however, that the first of the Noahide laws is a prohibition against idolatry, and this issue must be honestly considered. Nevertheless, at least some authoritative rabbinic texts have described "Hindu'a" people as bnai Noach and therefore may be counted among the righteous.[62]

So in the case of Hinduism and Buddhism, there is neither so much similarity nor a clear breach of boundaries, and it is at the intersection of neither clear similarity nor well-defined boundaries that is precisely the most fruitful arena for mutual edification and growth.

There are trends and streams within modern Judaism that have absorbed and appropriated Buddhist meditation and spiritual practices. This phenomenon, we have argued above, can be detected on both the right (BTM) and left (JRM) branches of Judaism, and one may also observe the influence filtering into the mainstream.

In the domain of ethics one can posit a complementary relationship. Judaism's ethic of action has found its way, via JuBus largely, into socially engaged Buddhism and the Buddhist women's movement. At the same time, the Buddhism ethic of restraint has influenced Jewish environmentalism. Although the point has yet to be explored, such Buddhist virtues as patience (*ksanti*) have echoes in Judaism's nineteenth-century Mussar movement, a spiritual path based on active reflection and the cultivation of virtues, and the recent upsurge of interest in Mussar may become ripe for interreligious fertilization.

Buddhists have taken Judaism's home-centeredness seriously, as this is one of the most divergent themes in the two religions. Judaism's long experience with diasporization and modernization are significant themes for many Buddhists, as are Jewish social and communal responses to these forces—communal institutions, political activism, and emphasis on education, for examples.

But I would be remiss if I did not note one other contribution Jews have made to Buddhism and a silent contribution at that. I will close with this story.

Some years ago I participated in a public Buddhist-Jewish dialogue in Atlanta, Georgia, with my good friend, Ven. Geshe Lobsang Tenzin, and on that occasion Geshe-la reminded me about the traditional Judaic self-understanding as a "nation of priests, a light unto the nations" in a novel way. As I wrote of that encounter:

> Hearing about the heartless silence of the United Nations to the Tibetan plight, one man in the audience could stand it no longer. He rose to his feet, red-eyed, pained. He asked Geshe-la, "What can we Jews do to help you Tibetans? Should we try to lobby the U.N. to take up your cause? Ought we work through the U.S. Congress?" He reminded Geshe-la about American Jewry's political strength, suggesting we commence a lobbying effort on behalf of the Tibetans. "Just tell us what we can do to help," he implored.
>
> Geshe-la's response was immediate. "Nothing," he said. "You don't have to do anything. Just be who you are, just be Jews." I smiled a deep smile as the interlocutor turned left and right in bafflement. The geshe deigned to elaborate. "You cannot imagine how much encouragement we take from you, just for being who you are. The fact that you are still here, the fact that you still worship in your way—this means more to us than anything you could possibly do. You are a great source of strength to us, and we are grateful to you."[63]

Just like that, Geshe-la revealed our own wisdom to us.

Notes

[1] First read at a conference on "Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions" at the University of Salzburg, Austria, June 9-11, 2007, and published in the conference proceedings edited by Perry Schmidt-Leukel (St. Ottilien, Germany: EOS, 2008), pp. 269-293. It is simultaneously published in the *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* by agreement.

[2] The term "JuBu" was coined by Rodger Kamenetz in *The Jew in the Lotus* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994) to indicate a Jew who practices Buddhism. We shall consider this term in this essay.

[3] See Nathan Katz, "India and Israel in the Ancient World," *Shofar* 17, no. 3 (1999): 7-22.

[4] Chaim Rabin, "Loanword Evidence in Biblical Hebrew for Trade between Tamilnad and Palestine in the First Millennium B.C.," in *Proceedings of the Second International Seminar of Tamil Studies* (Madras: International Association of Tamil Research, 1971), pp. 432-440.

[5] Ranabir Chakravarti, "Reaching Out to Distant Shores: Indo-Judaic Trade Contacts (Up to CE 1300)," in Nathan Katz et al., eds., *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 19-43.

[6] Katz, "India and Israel in the Ancient World," pp. 20-22.

[7] Jataka tales are a very popular Buddhist literature. "Jataka" means "birth story," and Jataka tales are homiletic moral teachings of the Buddha set in one of the Enlightened One's previous births. They are scattered throughout the early texts known as suttas or discourses, and were eventually codified in the Jatakamala by Aryasura. (J. B. Speyer, trans., *The Gatakamala or Garland of Birth Stories by Aryasura*, repr. Kessinger Publishing, 2006 [1900]).

[8] Thomas William Rhys Davids, ed. and trans., *Buddhist Birth Stories; or, Jataka Tales* (London: Trübner, 1880), pp. xxii-xxvi.

[9] I Kings 3:16-28.

[10] There is another significant *Jataka* connection that links Jews and Buddhists, this one very much later and quite accessible to historical inquiry. The entire *Jataka* literature was made known to the Western world by Jewish merchants of the early Middle Ages. T. W. Rhys Davids described: "[The Jews] were naturally attracted by a kind of literature such as this—Oriental in morality, amusing in style, and perfectly free from Christian legend and from Christian dogma. It was also a kind of literature which travellers would most easily become acquainted with, and we need not therefore be surprised to hear that a Jew, named Symeon Seth, about 1080 A.D., made the first translation into a European language, viz. into modern Greek. Another Jew, about 1250, made a translation. . . into Hebrew; and a third, John of Capua, turned this Hebrew version into Latin between 1263 and 1278. . . .The title of the second Latin version. . . is very striking—it is 'Aesop the Old." (Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Birth Stories*, pp. xxx-xxxi.)

[11] As an undergraduate student, I had been taught that the term "Hindu" was first used by Muslim invaders under Mahmud of Ghazni in the tenth century. Since then I have come across the Aramaic version of this term, "Hindu'a," in the Talmud, written about five hundred years before the Afghan invasions of India. In both Muslim and Jewish use, however, the term is geographic, not cultural, and certainly not religious.

[12] Medieval links are surveyed in Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The Last Jews of Cochin: Jewish Identity in Hindu India* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 35-61.

[13] Solomon D. Goitein and Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza—"India Book"* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008).

[14] See Edward C. Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030* (Delhi: S. Chand, 1964), vol. I, p. 206. See also A. Asher, trans. and ed., *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela* (New York: Hakesheth, n.d.), p. 188. And see yet again Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo* (New York: Orion Press, n.d.), p. 301.

[15] Brian Weinstein, "Traders and Ideas: Indians and Jews," in Katz et al., eds., *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 44-56; and Richard G. Marks, "Hindus and

Hinduism in Medieval Jewish Literature," in Katz et al., eds., *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 57-73.

[16] Yosef Levanon, *The Jewish Travellers in the Twelfth Century* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1980), p. 20.

[17] Asher, *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, p. 141

[18] Ibid., p. 188.

[19] Katz and Goldberg, *The Last Jews of Cochin*, p. 37.

[20] Donald Daniel Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), p. 5. See also Michael Pollak, *Mandarins, Jews, and Missionaries: The Jewish Experience in the Chinese Empire* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1980), pp. 260-261.

[21] Marco Polo, *Travels*, p. 301.

[22] See Moshe Idel, *Abraham Abulafia: An Ecstatic Kabbalist* (Benfleet, Essex, UK: Labyrinthos, 2002).

[23] Asher Hallevy, *Sefer Hayasher v'hu Sefer Hachtom* (n.d.).

[24] See David Solomon Sassoon, *Ohel Dawid: Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the Sassoon Library* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1932), pp. 574 and 999.

[25] See Norbert M. Samuelson, "Rosenzweig's Philosophy of Buddhism," *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 1 (1998): pp. 7-12.

[26] See Maurice S. Friedman, "Martin Buber and Oriental Religions," in Nathan Katz, ed., *Buddhist and Western Philosophy* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1981), pp. 149-171.

[27] Aba Kliger, trans., *Der weg tsu layterung: Budha lernt* (New York: Shlusinger Bros., 1958). In fact, the Buddha appears rather frequently in Yiddish literature and journalism.

[28] Chaim Potok, *The Book of Lights* (New York: Ballantine, 1982).

[29] Shimon Avimor, *Relations between Israel and Asian and African States: A Guide to Selected Documentation—No. 5, Union of Burma* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1989), p. 1.

[30] Ibid., p. 4.

[31] D. Dennis Hudson, "A Hindu Response to the Written Torah," in Hananya Goodman, ed., *Between Jerusalem and Benares: Comparative Studies in Judaism and Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 55-84.

[32] Outside of the scope of this essay is the portrayal of Jews in western occultist appropriations of Hinduism and Buddhism, such as Blavatsky's Theosophical Society, or of the complicity of a number of Sanskritists and Tibetologists in Nazi occultism. On this subject, see Peter Levenda, *Unholy Alliance: A History of Nazi Involvement with the Occult* (2nd ed., New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 191-202, and cf. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess: Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth, and Neo-Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

[33] Anagarika Dharmapala, "The Repenting God of Horeb," in Ananda Guruge, ed., *Return to Righteousness* (Colombo: The Anagarika Dharmapala Birth Centenary Committee, Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, Ceylon, 1965), p. 409.

[34] On the Panadura debates, see Nathan Katz, "Buddhism and Politics in Sri Lanka and Other Theravada Nations Since 1945," in Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Gerhard Spiegler, eds., *Movements and Issues in World Religions: A Sourcebook and Analysis of Developments Since 1945* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), pp. 157-176.

[35] Phra Mongkut Kiso Chaoyuha, who became King Vajiravudh (1881-1925), better known as King Rama VI, wrote the pamphlet, "The Chinese are the Jews of Asia." The Sandhurst and Oxford-educated monarch, perhaps not coincidentally, translated Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* into Thai. He is the model for the buffoonish monarch in "The King and I."

[36] 'Jam-dbyangs Nor-bu, *I-si-ral gyi rgyal-rabs snying-bsdus bsgrig-pa* (Dharamsala: Tibetan Information and International Relations Office, 1973). Translation by Nathan Katz, "A Tibetan Language History of Israel by Jamyang Norbu," *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 1 (1998): 81-89.
[37] This story was related to me by Professor Mode during a Tibetology conference in Velm, Austria, in 1981.
[38] Lama Govinda (1898-1982) was born Ernst Lothar Hoffmann in Waldheim, Germany.
[39] Mahathera Nyanaponika, "Buddhism and the God-Idea." Wheel Series No. 18. (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1960).
[40] Mahathera Myanaponika, *The Vision of Dhamma: Buddhist Writings of Nyanaponika Thera*, ed. by Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2nd ed. (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 2000).
[41] On the Buddhist nuns' movement in contemporary Sri Lanka, see Ellen S. Goldberg, "Buddhist Nuns Make Comeback in Sri Lanka—to monks' Dislike," *Christian Science Monitor* (April 2, 1984): http://www.csmonitor.com/1984/0402/040236.html.
[42] This account of Ayyah Khema is taken from my article, "Jews and Gurus," *Midstream* (August/September 1996): 15-17.
[43] By no means is this an exhaustive list.
[44] Thubten Chodron, "Finding Our Way," in Sylvia Boorstein and Thubten Chodron, eds., *Blossoms of the Dharma: Living as a Buddhist Nun* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Press, 1999).
[45] Goldberg, "Buddhist Nuns Make Comeback in Sri Lanka."
[46] http://www.zenpeacemakers.org.
[47] Alan Lew, with Sherril Jaffe, *One God Clapping: The Spiritual Path of a Zen Rabbi* (Woodstock: VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999).
[48] I have discussed JRM at some length in a lecture that is yet to become an article, "Buddhism and American Judaism: Interreligious Mutual Enrichment or a 'Twain Wreck?" I have also learned from Alan Brill of Seton Hall University how the interest in meditation on the part of some in the BTM has spread even into the most insular of *haredi* sects, the Satmars. What we see is that interest in Asian meditation and mysticism is moving from both left (JRM) and right (BTM) extremes toward the center.
[49] A recent book by an Orthodox rabbi and a JuBu has led many in the Orthodox world to consider Buddhist ideas, even if they are presented rather superficially in the book. See Akiva Tatz and David Gottlieb, *Letters to a Buddhist Jew* (New York: Targum/Feldheim, 2004).
[50] See Nathan Katz, "The State of the Art of Hindu-Jewish Dialogue," in Katz et al., eds., *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 123-124.
[51] Katz, "Jews and Gurus," p. 17.
[52] Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus.*
[53] Nathan Katz, "The Jewish Secret and the Dalai Lama: A Dharamsala Diary," *Conservative Judaism* 43, no. 4 (1991): 33-46.
[54] On the replacement of the Temple altar *(shulchan ha-mizbayach)* by the table *(shulchan)* in the home, see Babylonian Talmud, *Tractate Berachot* 55a, and cf. *Tractate Chagigah* 27a.
[55] Katz, "The Jewish Secret and the Dalai Lama," p. 43.
[56] Rabbi Menachem Meir, *Beit Ha-Bechirah*, on *Avodah Zarah*, 26a-b, 38b, and *passim*. On the Meiri's view of "other religions," see the forthcoming book by Alan Brill, *Judaism and Other Religions*. For a critical perspective, see http://www.talkreason.org/articles/meiri.cfm#11.
[57] The declaration is available online at a number of web sites, including World Wide Faith News: http://www.wfn.org/2007/02/msg00073.html.

[58] See the exchange between Richard Rubenstein and Masao Abe in Masao Abe and Christopher Ives, eds., *Divine Emptiness and Historical Fullness: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation with Masao Abe* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1995), and compare with *A Jewish-Buddhist Dialogue between Profs. Masao Abe and Eugene Borowitz* (New York: Sh'ma, 1992). For a very different nonmetaphysical dialogical approach, see Jacob Yuroh Teshima, *Zen Buddhism and Hasidism: A Comparative Study* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995).
[59] Thomas J. J. Altizer, "Nirvana as a Negative Image of God," in Katz, ed., *Buddhist and Western Philosophy*, pp. 18-19.
[60] T. W. Rhys Davids and J. Estlin Carpenter, eds., *Digha Nikaya*, sutta 16, 3 vols. (London: Pali Text Society, 1949, 1938, 1911).
[61] Babylonian Talmud, *Tractate Sanhedrin*, 105a, citing *Tosefta Sanhedrin* 13:2.
[62] So held Rabbi 'Abdullah Sameah (Baghdad, d. 1889) in his *Zevchi Tsedeq Halakha*, Section "Hoshen Musphar," no. 2, posthumously published in 1891.

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Feminizations of the Divine: *Śakti* and *Shekhinah* in Tantra and Kabbalah

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The Eternal Feminine Divine: The Resurgence of the Mother Goddess

Though the idea of the Eternal Feminine as the Divine Mother is a significant element in both Kabbalistic and Tantric theosophical formulations, its eventual acceptance required the incorporation of this idea into the patriarchal language of their respective traditions, which was accomplished by drawing upon the mythological and symbolic canons of both traditions' foundational scriptural sources. In the Hindu tradition, where the idea of the Goddess was already present in the Vedic strata of the Hindu scriptures (albeit in a subdued fashion), the process was somewhat less traumatic. Even there, however, the dominant imagery of the Mother Goddess in the Śakta Tantra[1] can definitely be seen as an affront to the highly patriarchal conception of the Divine. Within the Jewish context this process involved a more strenuous and radical exercise of imaginative engagement with (and interpretation of) Biblical and Talmudic sources, such that its final product in the imagery of *Shekhinah*, so akin to the imagery of *Śakti* in the Hindu Tantra, appeared to be an anathema to the patriarchally-defined religious sensitivities of mainline Jewish thought. It is no wonder that the only Jewish scholar who ever attempted to compare these two images of the Feminine Divine side by side found it necessary to concentrate on articulating what he perceived to be the profound differences between the two conceptions. To this end, Gershom Scholem makes the following statement at the beginning of his insightful but cursory comparative analysis of the two concepts: "Can the *Shekhinah* be described as a cosmic force in the same sense as we find the feminine in the image of *Śakti* in Indian Tantric religion? To my mind, I believe that we can discern quite clear differences between the two conceptions - differences no less profound than their affinities."[2] The present study takes issue with such generalizations, suggesting that they are based on insufficient comparative-phenomenological data and governed by the specific ideological reserve of the scholar in question.[3]

It is our contention that the notions of *Śakti* and *Shekhinah*, the development of which involved a radical transformation of their traditions' respective transcendent principles, seem to have had significant consequences on the predominantly patriarchal and puritanical overtones of orthodox Hindu and Jewish traditions. Employing the tools of comparative-phenomenological approach, this paper seeks to delineate the specific nuances of Hindu and Jewish mysticism with special reference to Tantra and Kabbalah, in order to assess the structural and thematic universes of discourse within which these feminisations of the transcendent took place. In particular, there are many specific elements of the Tantric and Kabbalistic notions of *Śakti* and *Shekhinah* that deserve special attention in our pursuit of the structural congruencies and conceptual affinities between the two notions. For the purposes of this paper, we intend to explore some of the most significant of these congruencies, both in the process and the outcome, between the conceptualizations of the Feminine Divine in the two traditions under consideration.

As a prelude to the comparative-phenomenological exploration of the Feminine Divine, we will also articulate the pre-Tantric and pre-Kabbalistic developments that informed and constituted the background for the later development of the notions of *Śakti* and *Shekhinah* in Hindu and Jewish mysticism. In pursuit of our comparative enterprise we will concentrate on three predominant and interrelated theosophical and ritual motifs that characterize the depictions of both *Śakti* and *Shekhinah* in these two traditions: 1. The Emergence of the Feminine Divine as the Creatrix and the

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Redeemer; 2. The Dangerous Woman: The Other Side of the Feminine Divine; and 3. Mystic and the Erotic: Patriarchal Appropriation or the Revenge of the Feminine Divine.

Part I

Śakti and *Shekhinah*: The Pre-Tantric and Pre-Kabbalistic Context

Śakti, The Supreme Feminine Divine in the Tantra
The three most conspicuous representations of the Feminine Divine in the Vedic Strata are the Goddesses *Uṣās*, *Vāc* (or *Vāgdevī*), and *Aditi*, all three of whom became merged in the later Tantric reconstruction of the Mother Goddess. *Uṣās* is the first significant example of a feminine characterization of the Divine in the *Ṛg Veda* that had the potential to emerge as the Supreme Mother Goddess of the Tantra.[4] There are innumerable Ṛg Vedic hymns dedicated to *Uṣās*, who through various allusions is associated with "light"[5] and is variously called "Mother of the gods,"[6] "Daughter of the Sky,"[7] and "Wife of the Sun."[8] She is the fundamental principle of motion behind all movement and as such she is the dynamic principle that sets in motion all living things: "everything that moves bows down before her glance."[9] Her lustrous ascendance soon became a matter of envy for the Vedic Indra, who struck a definite blow to the Goddess's power by destroying her celestial cart. *Uṣās*, afraid of the god's destructive thunderbolt, was forced to depart, abandoning her heavenly chariot and, in the process, presenting an image of the powerlessness of the Feminine Divine. As we will see, this subordinate characterization is contrasted by the description of the Mother Goddess in the Tantric tradition, where She is raised to the status of Supreme Divinity. Moreover, the original conception of *Aditi* as the mother of Vedic gods (which will be discussed presently) constituted the context for making her the creatrix and mother of the Hindu Trinity (*Brahmā, Viṣṇu* and *Śiva*).[10]

Vāc, the Goddess of Speech in the Vedas, has a paradoxical character.[11] In the *Ṛg Veda Samhita* she appears to be a goddess of immense power and import.[12] Moreover, this stratum of the Vedic literature also states that she was not created by a creator god, as she is nowhere associated with *Prajāpati* or *Brahmā*, the creator god of the Hindu trinity. On the contrary, *Ṛg Veda* X.125 even suggests that she gave birth to the Father on the world's summit.[13] In the later Brahmāna stratum of the Vedic literature, however, *Vāc* is associated with *Prajāpati*, the God of creation, later identified with Brahmā. Born of the mind (*manas putri*) of *Prajāpati*, she was with him at the very beginning of the creative process, making her both a consort and a cosmogonic partner to the god.[14] Herself created as the consort of *Prajāpati* and co-habiting with him in order to create, she is acknowledged as having a secondary role in the creative process.[15] However, the Tantric literature, by making *Prajāpati* himself a created being owing his existence to the Mother Goddess, reverses this role, such that it becomes the Mother Goddess, rather than the Father God, who is seen to be the ultimate source of all existence. What distinguishes the later notion of *Śakti* as the Mother Goddess from Vedic thinking is that it makes the Mother Goddess the source, not only of various mundane and insignificant divinities, but of the Hindu Trinity as well. Thus the Tantra elevates the Mother Goddess to the status of Universal Mother by making her mother of even of the creator God, *Prajāpati* or Brahmā.[16] In some ways, this idea is already present in embryonic form in the Vedic notion of *Aditi* being the mother of gods.

Specifically, the *Ṛg Veda Samhita* extols *Aditi* as the all-inclusive singular divinity. She is the heaven and the atmosphere. She is the mother, the father, and the son too. She is all the gods in their totalities, as well the five classes of beings. She is all that has been born and shall be born.[17] The paradox of the Eternal Feminine Divine simultaneously conceived as mother, daughter and wife is

also strikingly present in the *Aditi* myth of the *Ṛg Veda*. She is the daughter of *Dakṣa* and, paradoxically, is also his mother and consort.[18] *Aditi's* many sons (seven, eight or twelve) are called *Ādityās*. Later mythological works make her mother of *Viṣnu* as well, who was said be her last (or youngest) son.[19]

It seems that *Aditi* provides the most promising conceptual framework for the emergence of *Śakti* as a feminine characterization of the Divine in the earlier strata of Vedic literature. Such an assessment can be made for several reasons: In the first place, she is the "Infinite" Goddess, who, because of a lack of fixed personality or domain, was capable of adopting expanded meanings and personalities – in particular, those which had once been the province of other goddesses. Secondly, unlike *Uṣās*, the other Feminine Divine in the Vedas identified as mother of gods, *Aditi* never suffered the humiliation of being dethroned or vanquished. Though we noted earlier that *Vāc* (or the *Vāgdevī*) had a definite potential of becoming the Supreme Feminine Divine through her association with *Prajāpati*, as well as the Upaniṣadic identification of between Her and the supreme *Brahmān*,[20] the unbounded *Aditi*, given her free flowing character, became symbologically identified with *Vāc*, the Voice or Speech, thus sharing her glory of identification with *Brahmān*. Furthermore, while *Vāc* was associated with *Prajāpati*, the gradual loss of the god's eminent status in the Hindu mythico-religious framework meant that *Vāc* also lost much of the grandeur and majesty that would have allowed her to become a viable claimant for the preeminent place as the Supreme Divine Feminine. In a sense *Aditi*, in her identification with the *Vāc*, gradually came to encompass both the connotation and stature of *Vāc* and thus became the probable forerunner of the notion of *Śakti* in the Tantra. Additionally (and as noted earlier), *Aditi* is perceived to be personification of all-comprehensive Nature, which contains within its bosom all that is born and that will be born. Thus, at an early stage in the development of Hindu thought, *Aditi* foreshadows the idea of *Prakṛti*:[21] Nature as an all-inclusive transcendent reality that contains within it all manifestations as potentiality, with creation being the mere transformation of the potential into the actual.

Aditi, the illustrious daughter of *Dakṣa*, had another definite advantage in terms of her cosmogonic significance as the Supreme Feminine Divine that was not available to *Uṣās* and *Vāc*. This advantage flowed from her undeniably dialectical character, an ambiguity that came from her twining with her antithesis, the *Diti*, the changeable/perishable or destructive element of existence. The dialectic of the *Aditi* and *Diti*, representing the infinite and the finite, eternal and the changeable aspects of all-encompassing Nature, acquired a definite mythological representation as the twin goddesses became associated with the immortal gods (the *adityas / devas*) and their demonic opponents (the *daityas / asuras*) in the later mythological literature. What is important to note here, however, is that *Aditi* and *Diti*, along with all that they represent, remained connected and having a definite place in the grand divine scheme of things.[22]

Thus, the panoramic, all-encompassing portrayal of *Aditi* certainly sets her apart from other Vedic feminine divinities, which led one leading scholar to claim that "in the Vedic mythology, the gods have a limited power and they have ascendancy over the goddesses. *Aditi* however, is an exception to this rule: her sovereignty is unlimited and she is superior to the gods."[23]

While the conception of *Aditi* provides the context for the cosmogonic possibility of the Feminine Divine in the *Samhita* and *Brahmāna* strata of the Vedic literature, it is in the *Upaniṣads* that one finds the first significant impetus towards this possibility becoming manifest. Specifically, the *Kena Upaniṣad* describes the Divine as mediated by *Umā Haimvati*, the revealer of the supreme reality of *Brahmān*,[24] who in the later Tantric tradition becomes characterized as the universal Feminine Divine. In other words, the Tantric literature sees this goddess completely identified with the Truth and Reality of *Brahmān*, to the extent that she eventually came to be seen as the instantiation of such knowledge. For this reason, the Tantra conceives of her as the personification of *vidya* (wisdom) and

declares her to be the *Māhavidyā* (Great Wisdom).[25] This philosophical development led to more religiously inspired notion of the Ten *Māhavidyās* / Ten Wisdom Goddesses, which are seen in the Tantric tradition as ten major representations of the supreme Feminine Divine called *Devī* or *Śakti* (two terms that remain interchangeable in the Tantras).[26] This identification between *Umā* and liberative Wisdom (*Vidyā*) presents a compelling analogue to the notion of *Shekhinah* as the personification of Wisdom in the Jewish philosophical tradition – a contention that will be explored in more detail below.

As outlined in the previous paragraphs, both the early Vedic reflections and later Hindu philosophical developments played an important part in the Tantric reconceptualization of the Feminine Divine as an ontologically independent (or even unitary) Divine Reality imbued with cosmogonic and cosmoredemptive functions. This development certainly constituted a significant moment in the Hindu conceptualization of the Feminine Divine, as neither the Vedic nor the philosophical literature conceived of the Goddess as the sole, independent Divine reality. Moreover, this conception of the ultimate Goddess (*Devī* or *Śakti*) is what fundamentally distinguishes the Tantras from the mainstream of patriarchal Hinduism grounded in the Vedic/Brahmānic tradition. This transformation became feasible only after the development of certain innovative elements in specific strata of Purānic literature, wherein the Feminine Divine was given a much more pronounced role within the cosmic and salvational drama.

The most important example of this development is the *Devī Mahātmya* segment of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, which accords the Feminine Divine significantly elevated status by acknowledging her as supreme mother (i.e., creatrix) as well as redeemer. Other Purānic texts, including the *Kurma Purāṇa*, *Skanda Purāṇa*, and *Śrīmad Bhāgvatam*, all tend to support this position. Though this promotion is accomplished by elevating the status of the Goddess, the early Purānic literature, including the *Devī Mahātmya* segment of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, still sees the Feminine Principle as being dependent on or subservient to the masculine principle/s. This tension between the characterization of the Feminine Divine as an independent, autonomous cosmogonic and cosmoredemptive being and the historically-situated, patriarchal conception of Divinity that depicts the Goddess in contingent terms was evidenced in the majority of the Purānic literature, at least until the development of the *Devī Bhāgvatam* in the later part of the medieval period. Given that by this time the Tantras had already accorded the status of supreme creatrix and redeemer to the Feminine Divine (as *Devī* or *Śakti*), some of the late Purānic literature also reflects this fully crystallized Tantric notion of a unitary, creative and salvific Feminine Divine.

Most of the Tantric literature written in the post-*Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* period, of which *Devī Mahātmya* is an important part, took the cosmogonic aspect of the Goddess to its highest level by making her supreme creatrix, responsible even for the genesis of the Hindu Trinity (*Brahmā, Viṣṇu* and *Śiva*). Thus, as we will see later in this paper, the Tantras make a significant break from patriarchal mainstream Hinduism by proclaiming the complete autonomy and supreme status of the Feminine Divine. The Tantric literature is replete with such claims. For instance, the *Tantra Śāstra* declares *Brahmā, Viṣṇu* and *Śiva* to be ghostly entities (*preta*) by subordinating all of their activities to the *Śakti*, therein described as the fundamental supreme reality whose indulgence alone empowers the male deities to perform their allotted functions. The *Tantra Śāstra* also claims that Nirvāṇa can never be attained without the knowledge of the *Śakti*.[27] The *Mahākāla Tantra* makes similar claims for the cosmogonic power of the *Śakti* by stating that both masculine and feminine are part of the Feminine Divine, namely *Śakti*, which is ultimately responsible for the creation, preservation and, destruction of "untold millions of Brahmāṇḍās."[28] In a like manner, the *Yoginī Tantra* states that "Ādya Śakti gave to Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Maheshwara the charge of creation, preservation, and destruction respectively."[29] The *Nirvāṇa Tantra*, reversing the *Devī Mahātmya* of *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, makes similar claims about the ontological status of the Feminine Divine:

At the time of creation Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Maheśvara, and other Devas are born of the body of that beginningless and eternal Kālīkā.... From a part of Kālīkā, the primordial Śakti, arises Brahmā, from a part only arises Janardana, and from only a part arise Sambhu...Neither Brahmā, nor Viṣṇu, nor Maheśvara knows Her fully...They too are born at the beginning of the creation as Lords of creation, preservation, and destruction, and again disappear in Her at the time of dissolution.[30]

Not only did the post-*Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* Tantra literature make other divinities, including the members of the Hindu Trinity, dependent upon and subservient to the primordial Śakti, but they also extended the claim to subsume even the Vaiṣṇava divinities (including their incarnations) beneath the power and sovereignty of the primordial Śakti. Thus the *Brahmāṇḍa Tantra* claims that, amongst the followers of the Vaiṣṇava tradition, "some meditate upon that great Śakti as Kṛṣṇa, two armed and beautiful with a dark complexion, and others as the husband of Laksmi, four armed and tranquil."[31] Further, the *Muṇḍamāla Tantra* sees the supreme Feminine Divine herself proclaiming: "I am Māhavidyā formed of Hari and Hara, and I am also worshipped of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva."[32] Thus in the Tantric literature the Feminine Divine, namely Śakti, emerged with full grandeur and majesty, and acquired a status and power that was only foreshadowed in the Vedic *Samhitas, Brahmānas, Upaniṣads* and the early *Purāṇas*. The feminization of the Divine was so complete in the Tantra literature that it found reverberations in later Purānic literature, including the *Kuram Purāṇa* and the *Devī Bhāgvatam*, which assert a complete identification of Śakti with supreme *Brahmān*, knowledge of which the *Umā Haimvati* of the *Kena Upaniṣad* was enjoined to reveal. In the Tantra then the Vedic revealer of the Truth becomes the Truth revealed, and knowing her is to have liberative knowledge. No wonder *Niruttara Tantra* declares: "O Devī! Without the knowledge of Śakti, Nirvana is unattainable."[33]

Shekhinah: The Feminine Divine in the Kabbalah

The earliest references to *Shekhinah* as a category of Divinity comes from Talmudic literature circa the 1st century BCE to the 1st century CE.[34] However, the use of the term *Shekhinah* in the ancient Talmudic literature is primarily restricted to the idea of God's presence in the world, such that the *Shekhinah* is rarely personified as an aspect or emanation of God with a separate existence or an ontic status distinct from the Divine, which remains the ultimate and indisputable creator and the source of *Shekhinah*'s being.[35] While the early Rabbinic literature does not generally view *Shekhinah* as an independent personification of one of God's qualities, the characterization in medieval Jewish philosophical literature clearly represents a distinct entity perceived as a manifestation of God or His glory, which was often described using the imagery of light.[36] For most of the pre-Kabbalistic Jewish philosophers of the period, *Shekhinah* is a hypostasis of the Biblical concept of God's glory and is a manifestation of God willed by Him, which implies that *Shekhinah* is a primordial created entity who does not partake of Divine essence or God's being. What is significant here is the claim that, as a created entity, *Shekhinah* does have an existence quite distinct from God himself, which is definitely a different understanding than that found in the early rabbinic literature. This development, coupled with some later Aggadic formulations of *Shekhinah* as a distinct hypostasis of the Divine presence and glory, provide the necessary background and context for the evolution of the Kabbalistic notion of *Shekhinah*. However, while the philosophical formulation of *Shekhinah* conceived as a distinct entity with separate existence was quite different from the Talmudic conception (as it never accorded *Shekhinah* an existence separate from or independent of God), it remained a far cry from the Kabbalistic conception of *Shekhinah*, which looked at *Shekhinah* as one of the sefiroth: a non-created

divine potency that was co-eternal with the Divine. Specifically, the Kabbalistic formulations postulate that *Binah*, called the upper *Shekhinah*, emanates coevally from the *Hokhmah*, the Supernal Wisdom, and is conjugally connected with him, which means that it is not seen as a created entity that belongs to the realm of creatures. By way of contrast, the medieval philosophical conception of *Shekhinah* had nothing to say about the female character of *Shekhinah*. That the Kabbalists of the subsequent period saw this philosophical conception of *Shekhinah* as problematic is amply reflected in their expression of horror at this philosophical description, which tended to overemphasize its creaturely nature and asserted its separation from the realm of Godhead.[37]

As one delves into the Kabbalistic literature one discerns a conception of *Shekhinah* that is radically different from its Talmudic and Philosophical antecedents. Its boldness, and in some ways its freshness, are both impressive and somewhat startling – not only for Jewish religious sensitivities but also for scholars of Kabbalah who have made it their business to translate Kabbalistic thought into the world of academic discourse. Though the authors and thinkers of the Kabbalah tradition indubitably borrowed heavily from the rabbinic tradition in their pursuit of mystical insights and practices, what is noteworthy is how radically they sifted and re-sifted through the conceptual and thematic storehouses of the rabbinical world until they arrived at a completely new vision of these traditional ideas and notions. It is not surprisingly then that, in the deft hands of the Kabbalah authors and thinkers, the notion of *Shekhinah* acquired a completely new form and meaning. The most significant aspect of this development is what has been considered by some Kabbalah scholars to be the unequivocal and highly controversial appropriation of the pre-Judaic imagery of the near-Eastern Great Mother Goddess under the guise of the new Kabbalistic understanding of *Shekhinah* as the Feminine Divine.[38]

Whether this resurgence of the image of the Great Mother within Jewish mystical tradition was a response to a historical situation that found in the imagery of *Shekhinah* an appropriate Jewish symbol through its identification with the notion of *Kenesseth Yisrae'l* is a debatable point.[39] What is clear, however, is that once the idea took hold of the imagination of the Kabbalistic thinkers, it produced results that were far from anything that can be traced to the overwhelmingly patriarchal image of the Divine embedded within Biblical and Rabbinical Judaism.

The most significant development that took place in the Kabbalistic representation of *Shekhinah* is the unqualified and unequivocal feminine character assigned to it, not merely as a metaphorical personification of the Divine presence or glory, but as a real active principle existent within the structure of Godhead and imbued with power of creativity. Thus, within the Kabbalistic framework, *Shekhinah* as a *sefirah* is seen not only as a principle of potentiality; rather she is here conceptualized as a real existent being integrally connected with the Godhead, which manifests itself in and through her.

The affinities between this notion of an Eternal Feminine Divine within the Godhead in the Kabbalistic tradition and the Hindu notion of *Śakti* (introduced above) are remarkable. *Shekhinah*, like the *Śakti* of the Hindu tradition, appears to be simultaneously mother, bride, and daughter. The earliest Kabbalistic text to make this bold assertion is *Sefer ha Bahir*, which makes many allusions to *Shekhinah* as the God's mother, sister and daughter. In one significant passage of this early Kabbalistic text, there is also implied assertion of spousal relationship between God, the Father and Shekhinah, the Supernal Mother. The passage states that *Shekhinah* is the Divine Queen, the Supernal Mother, who her children go to see but are not allowed by the Father to see her then.[40] Though the *Sefer ha Bahir* tends to be somewhat more restrained in making use of the sexual imagery to suggest the consorting relationship between God and *Shekhinah* (who is also called daughter, mother, and sister of God), the notion of sacred marriage between God and *Shekhinah* already emerged in the earliest stratum of Kabbalistic literature, where it is accentuated in a bold manner in the *Sefer ha Zohar*'s clearly sexual imagery of the relationship between *Shekhinah* and God. This sexual imagery

will be discussed in more detail below.

A distinctive development in the post-*Bahir* Kabbalah draws our attention here. Namely, this period saw the application of the term *Shekhinah* not only to the tenth sefirah, as the *Bahir* had done, but to both *Binah*, the third *sefirah* (the upper *Shekhinah*), and to the tenth *sefirah*, called *Malkhuth* (the lower *Shekhinah*). What is important is that, in this doubling of the *Shekhinah* and in identifying *Binah* as the upper *Shekhinah*, a clear move has taken place in which the upper *Shekhinah* is seen to play an active role in primal creation. Significantly, the *Bahir* had already called the third *sefirah* "the Mother of the Universe."[41] What distinguishes post-*Bahir* Kabbalistic thought is the identification of this third *sefirah* as the upper *Shekhinah*. This identification clearly articulates the fundamental Kabbalistic assumption that the Eternal Feminine is to be construed not only as a passive and receptive principle, but as a divine being with a significant role to perform in the overall cosmic creative process. It is important to note that, as the upper *Shekhinah*, the third *sefirah* is the not the source and mother of the external world but of the divine potencies themselves, which emanate from her in unceasing flow culminating in the lower *Shekhinah*, who stands at the edge of the internal manifestation of the God and is the mother of the external world. As such, the lower *Shekhinah* is designated as *Malkhuth*, " the Kingdom," (i.e. God's dominion or power in the world). Analogous to the Hindu notion of *Śakti*, the upper *Shekhinah* is the mother, not only of the cosmos but also of the Divine potencies that flow from Her.[42] The symbolism here also acquires significant sexual connotations as the upper *Shekhinah* is paired with *Hokhmah*,[43] who plays the role of Supernal Father in the creative process, such that the two become conjugally connected, like *Śiva* and *Śakti* in the Hindu tradition. This is precisely the clearly articulated point of departure for the *Zohar*, which attaches great significance to the *Shekhinah* in the role of the Divine Female partner in the sacred union (*zivuga kaddisha*). This being said, the Zohar reserves more pronounced sexual symbolism for the lower *Shekhinah*'s relationship with the sixth *sefirah*, *Tif'ereth*, or the ninth *sefirah*, the *Yesod* (as will be discussed below).[44]

Thus in the Zoharic formulation of the notion of *Shekhinah*, a great stride has been made beyond Talmudic, philosophical and early Kabbalistic conceptions of the nature and character of *Shekhinah*. Here, the *Shekhinah* has certainly emerged as an independent divine force (*koah*) in and through whom the Godhead manifests itself, first through esoteric and internal manifestations within the realm of the Divinity through the upper *Shekhinah*, the *Binah*, and secondly mediated through the tenth *sefirah*, the lower *Shekhinah*, in the realm of cosmic creation that is God's kingdom. In the Zoharic scheme of things *Shekhinah* is not a creaturely entity (as Jewish philosophical thinking would have it); rather she is the coeternal and coeval divine female partner, the Supernal Mother who is eternally united in a sacred marriage with the supernal Father, the *Hokhamah*. The unequivocal female character of *Shekhinah*, with all of its attenuated features, is the very cornerstone of Zoharic Kabbalah, which brings to fore (with almost fervent enthusiasm) all the power of sexual symbolism to drive home this point.[45]

Indeed the Eternal Feminine, the Mother Goddess of the Near Eastern World, has returned here with a vengeance, though in a manner that takes a uniquely Jewish form and content. While pondering the radical elements of this new imagery of the *Shekhinah*, one feels inclined to suggest that what is encountered here is not merely the "resurgence of the idea of the feminine within the Godhead in the heart of the earliest Kabbalists;"[46] rather, what one discerns here could be interpreted as a return of the Goddess, which includes a rich array of symbolic and mythic frameworks that bring to fore the considerable power of Mother Goddess imagery. The fact that such visions took hold of the Kabbalistic imagination problematized the very notion of patriarchal imagery of the Divine, as they did in the case of emergence of *Śakti* in the Tantra of the Hindu tradition.

Part II

Śakti and Shekhinah in a Comparative Perspective

The Emergence of the Feminine Divine: The Creatrix and the Redeemer

The most significant moment in the respective theosophical reformulations of the Feminine Divine in the Hindu and Jewish traditions is the incorporation and appropriation of a function and role that had hitherto been reserved for their respective patriarchal Divinities: namely, their structurally connected cosmogonic and cosmo-redemptive functions. As long as these two aspects of the Divine operation remained the exclusive or predominant prerogative of Divinity depicted through patriarchal imagery, there was very little room for the Feminine Divine to come to the fore as a force to be reckoned with, either as Supreme Feminine Divine or as a Feminine Divine with significant religious function. It is interesting to note that the Tantric and Kabbalistic traditions both arrive at this particular moment of breakthrough by according the Feminine Divine a role in the cosmic drama that involved both elements of creation and redemption. At this point, it may be appropriate to suggest that creative and redemptive dimensions of Divine operation are structurally connected within the theological and mythological traditions under discussion, such that the source of temporal existence, which is subject to mortality and destruction, can alone confer upon the mortal beings immortal life. Indeed, creation without the element of redemption is anathema to the religious sensitivities that seek freedom from the vicissitudes of mortality that characterize the realm of creaturely existence. And indeed it is precisely this logic that is inevitably operating in the ascendance or resurgence of the Feminine Divine in the two mystical traditions under investigation. The redemptive aspect of the Feminine Divine in the Tantra is originally conveyed through the symbolism of light. Specifically, the notion of light, which symbolizes knowledge and emancipation, is at the very root of Tantric imagery of Śakti. The association of the Feminine Divine with light in the *Ṛg Veda*[47] and later in the *Kena Upaniṣad* with *Umā Haimvatī*[48] is (as discussed above) the original source of this identification.[49] The later Tantric literature sees the symbolism of light taken to its logical conclusion by according the Feminine Divine the redemptive role, which is an extremely significant development in as much as it means that liberative power does not exclusively belong to Masculine Divine anymore. Indeed, the Śakti in the Tantric tradition is most potently conceived of in the form of ten *Mahāvidyās* (ten personification of wisdom) that themselves have liberative quality: a quality that originally belonged to the male divinities only.[50] But before this development could take place, the Feminine Divine had to be retrieved as the Creatrix, the Universal Mother capable of bringing forth the creation, engaging in a cosmogonic function, which, in the case of Tantra, occurs without the need of a mediating Father who casts His seeds in the womb of the Mother.[51]

In the case of Kabbalah, the Supernal Mother, the Upper *Shekhinah* called *Binah*, no doubt does need the mediating influence of a Father figure (the *Hokhamah*), but here too she is given a significant role in the creative process along with the masculine aspect of Divinity.[52] Not only is she given a role in creative process, but, like the Śakti in the Tantra as the *Ādya Kālī*, the Upper *Shekhinah* in the Kabbalah becomes a personification of the principle of time as principle of movement and dynamism in all creation, such that she "stands at edge of the seven *Sefiroth* for seven primal days, emitting them from herself and realizing strength in them in this inner, theogonic side of creation."[53] This development within the Kabbalah is the most fascinating side of the story, where one discerns the process of the emergence of *Shekhinah* as the Feminine Divine with a separate ontic status imbued with creative powers and coeternal with the Masculine Divine. In a manner analogous to the emergence of Śakti as the Creatrix in the Tantra, one discerns in the Kabbalah the broader

parameters of the process by which *Shekhinah* came to acquire a distinct and separate ontic status, which is a fundamental requirement of being a creatrix.

As noted earlier *Shekhinah* originally was characterized as presence or dwelling of God that may be manifested in a supernatural glow of light, known as the "radiance (*ziv*) of the *Shekhinah*."[54] Thus in its original formulation the light of *Shekhinah* is nothing other than a derivative light, making her a manifestation of Divine glory without any independent ontic status (or even creaturely) status. This can be contrasted with earlier Kabbalistic writings, where *Shekhinah* is identified as emanating from the primordial great light, namely *Hokhmah*. This emanating light, the Shekhinah, is that which shines upon creatures and fills whole earth.[55] According to these Kabbalistic sources, the sages called this created light *Shekhinah*, and thus ushered in an intermediary stage in which *Shekhinah* came to acquire an independent ontic status with a decisive role in the creative process. This association of *Shekhinah* with light, like the ontic identification of Tantric *Śakti* with Ṛg-Vedic *Uṣās* and *Aditi* and Upaniṣadic *Umā Haimvati*, took on its own life in Kabbalistic imagery. Both *Safer ha-Bahir* and *Safer ha-Zohar*, the two Kabbalistic texts that contain the most decisive breakthrough of mythical consciousness into the sphere of rabbinic Judaism, tended to give pre-eminent place to this symbolism of light in their conception of *Shekhinah* as a distinct entity. Thus she "comes from the place of light," "from His place;" "she is the brilliance taken from the primal light," which is "the good light stored away for the righteous."[56] *Shekhinah*, the primal light emanating from *Hokhmah* assumes a creative role in the Kabbalah as the consort of *Hokhmah*, the Divine Force called Upper Wisdom. This upper *Shekhinah*, known as the *Binah* in the Kabbalistic writings, is unmistakably construed in the *Bahir* as the "Mother of the Universe."[57] Notably, the Spanish Kabbalah features frequent reference to *Shekhinah* in her cosmogonic creative role, almost giving her the status of creator by using the masculine term *Yatser Bereshith* ("Creator" or "Demiurge") in referring to one of her two aspects.[58]

The creative/cosmogonic function accorded to *Shekhinah* is not confined to conceding her the role of mother of the physical and human world alone. Analogous to *Śakti* becoming the mother of the members of the Hindu Trinity, *Shekhinah* as the Mother of Universe is also the mother of the angelic beings. Thus according to the *Zohar* she is the mother of Metatron, the highest potency in the angelic world, who "emerged from between her legs."[59] Quite daringly, the *Zohar* also describes *Shekhinah* as the mother of the demonic figures, who are children of her two malefic daughters, *Lilith* and *Naamah*.[60] Thus, not unlike *Aditi* and *Diti*, the twins of the Indian mythological world, both of whom went into making of the ultimate figure of Tantric *Śakti* as the Universal Mother as well as destructive principle operating in this world, *Shekhinah* has emerged as an independent creative potency that is source of both the angelic and the demonic: an idea that provides us some food for thought.

These metamorphoses of the Feminine Divine – in the case of *Śakti* as the sole cosmogonic power and in the case of *Shekhinah* as the supernal mother with a distinct and separate ontic status – were the necessary intermediary steps in their respective emergences as redemptive powers. Thus, both *Śakti* and *Shekhinah*, once imbued with creative powers, also came to be seen as loci of human redemption. The natural connection between the creative principle and redemptive principle is pre-eminently applicable to the Feminine Divine once she is anointed with the creative function. In this way, the universal creatrix also becomes the saving mother.

The Tantric texts make a distinction between two aspects of *Śakti*: the aspect of bondage and the aspect of liberation. In her creative role *Śakti* is credited with creation of the conditions for human bondage, from which she alone can provide liberation.[61] Similarly it is not without significance that, according to the Zohar, *Shekhinah* is also symbolized by the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil – the Biblical source of humanity's fall. As such, she is also called the Tree of Death.[62] We will have

more to say about this symbolic identification at a later stage in this paper. Suffice it to say that under this imagery *Shekhinah* shares with *Śakti* that paradoxical character of simultaneously being the principle of death and redemption. In the case of *Śakti*, this paradox is captured under the category of manifest *prakṛti* (also called *maya*), the realm of differentiation and division. This is also the case with lower *Shekhinah*, the *Shekhinah* involved in the lower regions of earthly existence and the nether world, where she is in contact with the "Other World."[63] However, the higher *Shekhinah*, which is identified as "the Source of Life" and "the World to Come" (the true dimension of bliss in the Kabbalah), is also called Return (*Teshuvah*), for everything that began in it returns to it at the end when its energy has been fully consumed. Accordingly, the upper *Shekhinah* is explicitly described as the realm of redemption. Gershom Scholem puts it thus: "As the lower mother, the *Shekhinah* is present in the cosmos in the work of Creation; as the upper mother, it constitutes the opportunity for the redemption of the world. In Kabbalistic terms, that place where Creation began as a process within God Himself is identical with the site of redemption and atonement."[64] Indeed the structural affinities between this conception and the Tantric *Śakti* are amazing when one considers that in the Tantric tradition it is affirmed that the *Adya Śakti* (the primal *Śakti*) has two parts, with which She creates and liberates. One of these parts is *Saccidānands Prakṛti*, the realm of truth, consciousness and bliss, and the other is *Māyā Prakṛti*, the realm of worldly entanglement.[65]

The Dangerous Women: The Other Side of the Feminine Divine

One of the most intriguing aspects of the Tantric notion of Feminine Divine is its horrific and destructive side. Not only *Kālī* and *Durgā*, the two most well known manifestations of Feminine Divine in the Tantric tradition, but some of Her other manifestations (such as the ten *Mahā Vidyās*), also share in this gory (and some may consider revolting) imagery of the bloodthirsty, violent and destructive side of the Feminine Divine.[66] What distinguishes the Tantric vision of *Śakti* is its portrayal of the Divine in imagery that tends to bring to fore that specific quality of the Divine that, to use Otto's phrase, is captured in the notions of *"mysterium, tremendum et fascinosum."* Tantra's fascination with the "tremendum" aspect of the Feminine Divine has been seen as problematic by many, both within and outside Hindu religious fold. However, as one delves deeper into this Tantric imagery, one finds a potent dialectic at work that is closely linked with the creative and redemptive functions of the Feminine Divine. *Śakti* in her various manifestations engaged in the cosmic battle against the forces of the evil is indeed the principal redemptive power, who is engaged in this cosmic conflict with the specific purpose of restoring the original ontological condition of a Cosmos turned to chaos by the ascendance of demonic power.[67] Moreover, it is precisely when the Goddess is in contact with the demonic – the creatures of the other world – that she becomes violent and destructive, revealing the *tremendum* aspect of her character. As such, this is not random violence; rather, like the purposiveness of creation, this destruction too is purposive. Within the Hindu context, this portrayal of the "cosmic combat" is an integral aspect of cosmo-redemptive action in which the Mother Goddess, as *Śakti*, is engaged. In a significant way all the episodes of cosmic battle involving the Goddess involve this restorational theme, in accordance with the Hindu cosmological pattern of creation, dissolution, and re-creation of the universe, albeit with one important difference: this entire process is under the purview of the Goddess alone.

Notwithstanding the stern monotheistic character of the Jewish tradition, one discerns strong structural affinities between the imagery of the dangerous and destructive *Śakti* and the Kabbalah tradition's portrayal of *Shekhinah*. We have already noted the dialectical connection between the *Aditi* and *Diti* as the Vedic sources of *Śakti* in the Tantric tradition. Such a dialectic is also apparent in the characterization of *Shekhinah* as the mother of both the angelic figure Metatron and the two females of the demonic region/the underworld, *Lilith* and *Naamah*.[68] This affinity is further accentuated in the

Kabbalistic portrayal of *Shekhinah* that describes her awe-inspiring qualities in language that is instructively reminiscent of the descriptions of *Durgā* and *Kālī* (as manifestations of *Śakti*) in the Hindu tradition. Thus, in a remarkable passage in the *Zohar* we find the following image of *Shekhinah*, who is called the "moon" and "the cattle upon a thousand hills":

A thousand mountains loom before her, and all are like a puff of wind to her. A thousand mighty streams rush past her, and she swallows them in one swallow. Her nails reach out to a thousand and seventy sides; her hands grasp on to twenty-five thousand sides; nothing eludes her rule on this side or the other. How many thousand of potencies of judgment are grasped in her hair.[69]

The *Shekhinah*'s portrayal in this passage reminds one of the Tantric description of the terrifying *Kālī*: she of dreadful face and disheveled hair, who wears the crescent moon on her forehead and is like a mountain of collyrium.[70] Note the clear parallels to the imagery of a tremendous, awe-inspiring *Shekhinah*, both in its magnificent symbolism of all-encompassing form beyond human measures that extends to all the realms, as well as its idea of the Feminine Divine being the ruler and overseer of this world and the other. *Kālī* in the Tantra is considered a manifestation of *Śakti*, the all-encompassing Divinity to whom the gods bow and who unleashes her terrible wrath upon the demonic powers that are wont to destroy or subdue the forces of righteousness. In the Kabbalistic vision, *Shekhinah*, like Śakti's manifestation as *Kālī*, is the source of destructive power, so that "her feet go down to death."[71]

The Zoharic concern with the demonic side of *Shekhinah* representing the forces of death and destruction is picturesquely represented in the symbolism of the "Tree of Death". Significantly within the Kabblistic mode of thinking the "Tree of Death" as a symbol of *Shekhinah* has two distinct connotations and that both of them have significant correlations with the *Kālī* imagery of *Śakti* in the Tantra. First of all the destructive side of the *Shekhinah*, like *Kālī's* blazing, all-devouring anger, is the expression of her infuriated rage, which is aroused by the forces of the other side: demonic forces that, in their arrogant belligerence, are wont to upset the ways of the righteous. Thus in the words of Tishby, "death signifies the kindling of the fire of Judgement, and the dominant power of anger, in the *Shekhinah*."[72] When she is separated from the Sefirothic influence of *Yesod* (the "good") and when she is in contact with the demonic powers of the "other side," the power of Judgment that is within her becomes dominant and bursts forth in all its strength and fury. Then she acts like a raging and devouring fire, casting terror upon the world and its inhabitants. Such a depiction of *Shekhinah* is closely akin to the Tantric imagery of *Kālī*, who is black with death, whose tongue is out to lick up the world, and whose teeth are hideous fangs.[73] Hence, the *Zohar* warns: "Keep far away from her and do not go near her; do not get into the raging fiery furnace. And if you do go near her, do so in fear, like someone who is fearful of death, for the fire is raging and burning the world with its flames."[74]

The Mystic and the Erotic: Patriarchal Appropriation or the Revenge of the Feminine Divine

How can this raging fire of cosmic anger that infests *Śakti* on the one hand and *Shekhinah* on the other, be quenched or subdued? What are its consequences for humanity's existence and survival? Structurally and phenomenologically the answer lies in the reconciliation of the Feminine Divine with the Masculine Divine, for it is precisely their separation that has caused this fiery destruction to come into being. In the case of *Kālī*, *Śakti* separated from *Śiva* is the epitome of that violent upsurge that can only be stilled by arousal in her of the sublime urge of erotic fulfillment.[75] This accounts for the well-known imagery of *Śiva* and *Śakti* (represented as *Kālī* or one of her other manifestations)

engaged in the act of copulation, with *Śiva* lying on the ground and the Feminine Divine presented as the dynamic and active principle in the dominant role, which symbolizes the re-channeling of Feminine energy into the creative mode.[76] This imagery of *Śakti* and *Śiva* reconciled in the erotic/creative act is replicated in the Zoharic understanding of *Shekhinah*'s relationship with *Tiferet*, the power of holiness.[77] The Tree of Death symbolizes the disjunction between *Shekhinah* and the forces of holiness, symbolized in the Kabbalistic tradition by the Sefirah *Tiferet*.[78] This separation between *Shekhinah* and *Tiferet* is a function of *Shekhinah* having come in contact with "the other side," who by its very nature seeks to act as a force of death and destruction, and who waits upon at the door of the *Shekhinah* to take hold of her when she is separated from her husband.[79] Analogous to the Tantric framework of divine copulation of *Śiva* and *Śakti*, what is required here is that *Shekhinah* "be specifically united in intercourse with the *Tiferet*, and to be linked thereby, through the power of the influence that she receives in intercourse, to the forces of the Chariot and the angels that are below it."[80] Thus, within the Kabbalistic framework, it is precisely the separation of the feminine and masculine in the Divine that has caused the fallen state of humanity. As such, the solution, for the righteous, is to engage in imaginative visionary exercise that visualizes masculine and the feminine not as two separate realities but as one unified being.[81] The whole thrust of the imagery of Divine copulation in both Tantra and Kabbalah is precisely restoration of the original union of the supernal Mother and the supernal Father engaged in cosmic creation and redemption. Hence, the Masculine and Feminine Divine must be brought together, creatively, symbolically and experientially, in one image that does not see them as two entities with separate ontic status. This is the task of the mystic in both traditions.

Within the Hindu tradition this creative meditative process involves the symbolism of *Liṅga* and *Yoni* as one unified image-system, as well meditating upon images of *Śiva* and *Śakti* together as Divine Couple. However, in the Tantra this symbolism is further accentuated by giving *Śakti* a dominant role in Divine copulation and thereby asserting the supremacy of the Feminine Divine. This involves the adept in Tantric *sadhana* engaging in imaginative act of meditation on at least three distinct kind of sexual imagery, all of which affirm the supremacy of the Feminine Divine. As already mentioned, the first involves meditation on *Śakti* in her various forms engaged in copulation with *Śiva* or standing on *Śiva*'s corpse-like body[82]. In these two variant images, *Śakti* is always portrayed in a dominant role while *Śiva* becomes a secondary principle, instrumental in bringing to the fore the higher ontic status of the Feminine Divine. The second involves meditation on various *yantras*: stylized geometric designs in which the sexual union of *Śiva* and *Śakti* is represented by various combinations of triangles, circles and lotuses, each of them having both symbolic sexual connotations and higher metaphysical implications. The most famous of these *yantras* is the *Śri Cakra Yantra*, which consists of nine overlapping triangles – four of them upward triangles representing the *Śiva* principle and five of them downward triangles representing the *Śakti* principle, with their overlapping nature suggesting the interpenetrative character of sexual engagement[83]. What is important to note, however, is that the triangles representing *Śakti* are shown occupying a position on the top of the triangles representing *Śiva*, much like the anthropomorphic images of *Śakti* and *Śiva*'s copulation described above. Further, while there are only four triangles representing *Śiva*, there are five upper triangles representing *Śakti*. Both these elements of the *Śri Cakra Yantra* convey the supremacy of the Feminine Divine. Finally, the aspirant (*sadhaka*) may meditate on *yoni*, the feminine generative principle and the womb in which the creation takes place, which is conceived of as the primordial symbol of *Śakti*. As an aside, the *yoni* itself can be interpreted as a *yantra*. Several Tantric texts specifically prescribe *yoni pūjā*, the symbolic worship of *yoni* as the manifestation of the Feminine Divine. Thus, as manifestation of the Feminine Divine, the *yoni* is considered the proper and suitable object of meditation and ritual worship.[84] Each one of the *Mahavidyās* (the ten manifestations of *Śakti*) are specifically identified with different parts of the *yoni*. Meditation on *yoni* without *liṅga* is the

Tantra's way of asserting the supremacy of Feminine Divine, where this feminine force is postulated as the ultimate divine principle whose reverence is the sole and sufficient condition for one's liberation, leading to ultimate bliss and joy. This imagery of Feminine Divine represented by the female generative principle as the ultimate source of the power of the masculine member through a representation of an androgynous phallus is not alien to the *Śakti* Tantra. Heinrich Zimmer in *Philosophies of India* has brought to our attention a startling image in which a *Liṅga* opens up on the four sides to reveal the image of the Goddess with ten arms and five heads residing at its very core[85]. Given that the *Liṅga* represents the divine Phallus (and thus the power of masculine creation), the nestling of *Devī*, the Feminine Divine within it has undeniable symbolic resonances with the Kabbalistic tradition's representation with the Shekhinah identified with the corona of the Divine Phallus. It is equally important to note that well-known icon of the *Liṅga* as the symbol of *Śiva* is always grounded in the *Yoni*. The rootedness of the *Liṅga* in the *Yoni* may be interpreted to suggest that the Divine phallus of *Śiva*, like all created beings, has emerged from the *Yoni*, which is the ultimate source of all existence, or that the *Liṅga* derives its creative power (*śakti*) from the *Yoni*, which is a representation of supreme *Śakti*.

In the context of Kabbalah, the sexual imagery implicated in imaginative meditative visualization also involves a process of reconciling the two sexes in a manner that obliterates their ontic duality. In the Kabbalah the *Shekhinah*, as the feminine potency of the divine, is to be visualized not as a separate entity, but, like the *Liṅga* and the *Yoni* together, as always being one with the Divine phallus. Indeed, the Kabbalistic literature visualizes the *Shekhinah* as part of the overall representation of the Divine, in particular as the corona of the Divine phallus.[86] In such images, the Feminine aspect of the Divine is being identified with the crown (symbolizing divine power and glory) that empowers the Masculine Divine that wears it. In according *Shekhinah* this empowering function, a certain emasculation of the Divine phallus has taken place, as the power and the glory does not belong to the Masculine but to the Feminine Divine who is the object of mystic's imaginative visualization. In the complex gender symbolism of theosophical Kabbalah, *Shekhinah*'s act of crowning the Divine Phallus must be viewed as feminization of the Divine.

Further, the gender metamorphosis implied in this imagery also has significant soteriological import. In both Tantra and Kabbalah the meditative visualization of this integrative sexual imagery results in the achievement of a state of divine bliss. More specifically, in the case of Tantra the visualization of this integrative sexual imagery leads to a blissful existence in which "the devotee experiences deep trance (*samādhi*)"[87] and thereby achieves liberation. Similarly, in the case of Kabbalah one finds reference to both the non-eschatological and eschatological depiction of the blissful state of the mystic who is blessed with the union with *Shekhinah*. The eschatological motif of this union involves the mystic being crowned by the diadem that symbolizes divine Presence, through which the mystic is in constant union with the world to come: "The diadem is a world unto itself, and the Holy One, blessed be He, places a crown of kingship on the head of every righteous person... and the soul of the righteous person is crowned and adorned by the splendor of the Presence and they derive pleasure from her."[88] The non-eschatological motif involving a prescription for the mystic to visualize the divine crown in the form of the corona representing the Shekhinah and experience the mystical union akin to the sexual union of the masculine and feminine aspects is suggested in several passages of the Zohar.[89] Thus,the two respective mystical traditions employ explicit erotic imagery to depict both eschatological and non-eschatological soteriological motifs to symbolize the ontic unity of the Feminine and the Masculine dimensions of the Divine.

Conclusion

In the Hindu Tantra and Jewish Kabbalah the feminization of the Divine appears to have been construed as an affront to the dominant patriarchal imagery of the Divine. Though acknowledgment of the feminine as an element of the Divine may be acceptable, according the Feminine the place of preeminence – to the point that both creative and redemptive role becomes identified with Her – involves the possibility of relativising patriarchal imagery in a manner that can only dilute the power of patriarchal religious institutions. Understandably then in both the cases under discussion, though certainly with differences in the degree of severity, there have been efforts to marginalize and assign a liminal status to these aspects of Tantra and Kabbalah by interpreting them in ways that succeeded in re-incorporating the Feminine Divine in the larger framework of the patriarchal religion. Patriarchal imagery of the Divine in the mainstream Hindu and Jewish traditions have tended to see the God primarily in masculine terms. Where feminine categories have entered the conceptual framework, the tendency has been to assign the feminine a secondary and dependent role. In many ways this holds true of both the Hindu and Jewish traditions, including also Tantra and Kabbalah mysticism which may be seen to be ideologically informed by the patriarchal framework of the respective traditions. However, on closer examination one finds that there is also discernible an intriguing and refreshingly subversive ideological stance of the androgynous Divine in both Tantra and the Kabbalah that constitutes a challenge to the patriarchically informed conceptual framework. Both mystical traditions articulate, in somewhat analogous fashion, an androgynous Divine as a counterpoise to the traditional patriarchal Divine imagery. Their conceptualization of the androgynous Divine involves two related motifs: 1. Both the masculine and the feminine aspects of the Divine are derived from one undifferentiated neutral Divinity which is free from gender nuances, and/or 2. the masculine and the feminine are ontologically located in one androgynous Divinity which is mythically perceived as bisexual. In either case, the mystical Androgynous imagery seeks to challenge the traditional conceptualizations of the Divine which either excludes the feminine or sees the masculine as a backdrop for either a complementary or a secondary role for the feminine. The androgynous character of the Divine articulated both in the Kabbalah and the Tantra mysticism offers a unique conceptual framework designed to affirm the bisexuality of the Godhead without discernment of either a metaphysical or ontological duality.

Notes

[1] Use of the term "Tantra" within the context of the Hindu Tradition has been a matter of immense scholarly debate. The tantra scholarship, however, does accept three major forms of Tantra, namely Śakti Tantra, Śiva Tantra and Viṣṇu Tantra, each with further nuanced subdivisions. In this paper the term Tantra is used primarily to connote the Śakti Tantra.

[2] Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), p. 194.

[3] See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 13. On this particular issue of methodological and ideological reserve resulting in a lack of attention to comparative work involving Kabbalah and other expressions of mysticism, the present author echoes the sentiments expressed by Moshe Idel in the aforementioned insightful work. Idel rightly laments that the current scholarship in general and Jewish scholarship in particular has failed to provide a significant and sustained analysis of Jewish Mysticism in a comparative perspective. Gershom Scholem is a case in point. Undoubtedly a towering personality in the field of Kabbalah scholarship, Scholem's methodological reserve with regard to his willingness to engage in a systematic study of Jewish Mysticism in terms of its relationship to other religious structures of thought has impacted the field tremendously.

One is struck by conspicuous absence of comparative studies involving Jewish Mysticism and any expression of Eastern mysticisms of the stature of Rudolph Otto's *Mysticism: East and West* or R.C. Zahner's *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*. Ironically, even Moshe Idel himself, while censuring Gershom Scholem and the school of thought that has become associated with him for their mistake of concentration exclusively on bibliographical, historical, and textual research without paying attention to non Jewish material including Gnostic, Catharic, or Christian sources, fails to give any sustained attention to comparative treatment of Kabbalah in relation to Eastern religions, specifically Hindu mysticism.

The present work is an attempt to rectify this lack of attention to the conceptual and structural congruencies between elements of Kabbalah and Indian/Hindu mysticism for the purpose of enhancing our understanding of the broader dimensions of mystical phenomena crossing over the boundaries of the East and the West.

[4] For a detailed discussion of various mythological treatments of Uṣās in the *Ṛg Veda*, see Alfred Hildebrandt, *Vedic Mythology*, tr. S. Rajeswara Sarma (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), pp. 21-35.

[5] See *Ṛg Veda* I. XXX.20; I.48.15; I.89; 92.1-5; 124.4; 62.2; 113.1-2; 113.14.

[6] See *Ṛg Veda* I.113.19.

[7] See *Ṛg Veda* I.XXX.22.

[8] See *Ṛg Veda* I.115.2; VII.75.5.

[9] *Ṛg Veda* I.92.9.

[10] See p. 11 ff.

[11] See Wendell Charles Beane, *Myth, Cult and Symbol in Sakta Hinduism*, (Leiden: E. G. Brill, 1977), p. 107-109.

[12] See *Ṛg Veda* X.125, which extols and celebrates the Goddess in most glorious terms. A careful reading of the text of the hymn reveals her to be the constant companion/empowering divinity

on whom all the Vedic gods, including the mighty Indra, depend for successful completion of their missions. The hymn is extremely important in conceiving *Vāgdevi* (*Vāc*) as endowed with all the qualities that later on become associated with Śakti (or Devī in her triune manifestation as *Mahāsarasvati, Mahālakṣami* and *Mahākāli*). Dispenser of knowledge, she is the teacher of men and gods. The supreme sovereign of nations, she is the one who bestows on beings the gift of wealth and prosperity. And it is she who engages in battles for the sake of people. All pervading and endowed with highest glory, she is beyond both earth and the sky. Following Sayana, the great commentator on *Ṛg Veda Samhita*, Griffith has identified her to be the Dhīṣaṇā of *Ṛg Veda Samhita* I.22 and V.41. *Ṛg Veda* I.22 also speaks of *Bhāratī* (the Holy Speech or Prayer), another name for Sarasvati with which Vāc or Vāgdevi ultimately became identified in the Purānic phase of Hinduism. See: *The Hymns of the Ṛg Veda*, translated by Ralph T.H. Griffith, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), pp. 12 & 256.

[13] See *Ṛg Veda* X.125.7.

[14] For the paradoxical relationship between *Vāc* and *Prajāpati*, more specifically the mythological dimensions of the divine incest as a stage in the cosmogonic process involving *Prajāpati* and *Vāc*, see Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 163-164.

[15] See *Satapatha Brahmana* X.6.5.4; *Panchavimsa Brahmana* X.X.14.2.

[16] See p. 13 ff.

[17] *Ṛg Veda* I. 89.10.

[18] *Ṛg Veda* X.27.5 declares *Aditi* to be the daughter of *Dakṣa*. On the other hand *Ṛg Veda* II.27.1 includes *Dakṣa* as one of the *ādityās* (the sons of *Aditi*). *Ṛg Veda* VI.50.2 identifies *Dakṣa* as the father of the gods, while *Aditi* is mentioned as mother of the gods in numerous places: *Ṛg Veda* VII.64. 2-6 makes *Varuṇa* and *Mitra* sons of *Dakṣa* and the *Aditi*; *Ṛg Veda* VIII.25.1-5 declares *Aditi* as the mother and *Dakṣa* as the father of *Varuna* and *Mitra*; *Ṛg Veda* X.72.4 makes the unequivocal paradoxical claim that "*Dakṣa* was born of *Aditi* and *Aditi* was *Dakṣa*'s child."   ·

[19] The *Ṛg Veda* I.113.19 calls *Aditi* the mother of the gods. Moreover, *Aditi*, throughout the *Ṛg Veda*, is constantly called the mother of the *ādityās*, the sons of *Aditi*: five, six, seven, or more in number. The list of the *ādityās* include the high and mighty *Varuna, Indra, Dakṣa, Mitra* and others prominent Vedic deities. *Ṛg Veda* II.27.1 mentions six sons of *Aditi*. *Ṛg. Veda* VIII. 18. 3 lists only five *ādityās*. *Ṛg. Veda* IX. 114. 3 declares that there are divinities called *ādityās*. *Ṛg. Veda* X.72. 8 mentions eight of her of sons; with seven of them, she met the gods while she cast away the eighth, who was allowed to die. While nowhere in the Vedic literature is *Viṣnu* identified as an *aditya*, the *smrti* literature, including the *Mahābharata* and *Rāmāyana*, declare her to be the mother of *Viṣnu* as well. This later development is certainly not without significance, as we will see that Tantra literature does declare *Śakti* to be the Divine Mother whose children even include the members of the Hindu Trinity (*Brahmā, Viṣnu* and *Śiva*).

[20] *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*. I.2.5b.

[21] Notion of *Prakṛti* as a transcendent principle of materiality containing entire material Nature as potentiality that is actualized in the manifest world as the constitutive element of all existence is an important part of Hindu metaphysical and cosmological reflections. While non-theistic system of Sāṃkhya postulate *Prakṛti* as an independent eternal transcendet metaphysical principle most theistic reflections assign *Prakṛti* a secondary status either as an aspect of God or a creation of God. Within *Śakta* tradition, however, *Prakṛti* is identified with the Supreme Divine

(*Devī* or *Śakti*) herself, who is the ultimate source and creatrix of all.
[22] See *Ṛg Veda* I.89.10. Also see Griffith's notes on *Ṛg. Veda* V.62.8. According to Griffith, *Aditi* appears to mean infinite Nature while its dialectical counterpart *Diti*, connected to *Aditi* but without any distinct conception, is only to be seen in contrast with *Aditi* and probably meant the perishable/changing Nature (*The Hymns of the Ṛg. Veda*, p. 272). In similar vein, Muir describes *Aditi* and *Diti* as follows: "the two together, appear to be put by the poet for the entire aggregate of visible nature." See John Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts* (Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1967), V, pp 42-43. In later Purānic mythology the two conceptions have distinctly evolved to indicate the dialectical nature of the feminine divine as *Aditi* and *Diti* fully personified, where they are now seen as twin daughters of *Dakṣa*, *Aditi* being the mother of *ādityās* (gods) and *Diti* being the mother of *daityas* (demons). See *Mahābharata*, *Ādi Parvan*, Chapter 65. Also see *Viṣnu Purāṇa*, Part I, Chapter 3; *Harivamsa*, Chapter 3; and *Bhagvata*, Canto I.
[23] Jean Przyluski, "The Great Goddess of India and Iran". *The Indian Historical Quarterly*, X (1934), pp 412f.
[24] *Kena Upaniṣad*, III.11, 12.
[25] On the notion of the *Māhavidyā* as forms of the Goddess imbued with creative and liberative power, see *Principles of Tantra* by Śiva Chandra Vidyāranva Bhattacharya, edited by Arthur Avalon (Madras: Ganesh & Co, 1960). On the topic of Tantric iconography and ritual worship involving *Māhavidyās* as forms of the Goddess, characterized as creatrix and redeemer, see David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*, (Berkeley & Los Angles: University of California Press, 1997).
[26] On identification of *Uma* with *Vidyā* or *Brahmavidya* in the Indian Philosophical tradition, see Beane, p.120: "Cf. Weber, in Muir, IV, 422ff, who reviews the commentary in Sankara and Sayana on the goddess Uma. The scholar shares Sankara's view that *Uma* is '*Vidyā*' (knowledge) or (Weber) '*Brahmavidya*' (Divine Knowledge)."
[27] See *Tantra Śāstra*, cited in *Principles of Tantra*, *op.cit.* pp 292-293; p 308.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 306.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 311.
[30] *Ibid.*, pp. 327-328.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 329.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 331.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 469.
[34] Gershom Scholem, p.147.
[35] Gershom Scholem has succinctly argued that in the exoteric ancient Talmudic literature *Shekhinah* is used to connote God's presence and glory and that in the ancient aggadah there is no clear evidence of *Shekhinah* being a female personification or hypostasis of God or an aspect of God. He does acknowledge, however, the possibility of certain developments in Jewish linguistic usage during the period that would have opened up the possibility of Jewish Gnostic usage of *Shekhinah* as a separate hypostasis. See Scholem, p. 147-153. While there is some element of truth in Scholem's claim, one finds it hard to accept it without qualifications. The passage that stands out in its clear identification of Shekhinah as a distinct female entity is found in the *Lamentations Rabbah*, where Shekhinah is certainly seen as a female figure that leaves the Holy Temple after its destruction. See *Lamentations Rabbati, Peikhta, #25*, Ed.S. Buber, f.15a. quoted in

Scholem, p. 150. For specific ideological reasons based on a desire to see the Kabbalistic notion of *Shekhinah* as a unique innovation without any root in the Rabbinic Judaism, Scholem goes through significant convulsions to suggest that despite the pronoun "she" being clearly used for the figure of *Shekhinah* in this passage the *Shekhinah* here is nothing but a " bold personification of God's presence" and that the usage here is more of an allegorical nature. See Scholem, p. 150. It is also important to note that Scholem believes that idea of *Shekhinah* having a separate and distinct existence from God in later Midrash may have an oriental source, which would imply that it is not genuinely Jewish.

[36] Saadiah Gaon is representative of this approach. Thus he writes of *Shekhinah* : "....this light would give his prophet the assurance of the authenticity of what has been revealed to him....it is a more sublime form than that of the angels, more enormous in its creation, bearing splendor and light, and is called "the *Kavod* of God" (in the Bible).....and *Shekhinah* in the rabbinic tradition." See Saadiah Gaon, *Emunot we-Deot*, Ed. Ish-Shalom, f. 144b quoted in Scholem, p 154. Even though a distinct entity, *Shekhinah*, for the Jewish philosophical tradition was seen primarily as a creaturely being. This holds true of such distinguished Jewish philosophers as Saadiah Gaon, Judah Halevi and Moses Maimonides. It is also important to note that the philosophical notions of *Shekhinah* did not have any thing to say about the feminine character of *Shekhinah*.

[37] See Gershom Scholem, p 126.

[38] *Ibid.,* p. 160-161.

[39] Gershom Scholem, given his propensities for philological and historical approaches to the Kabbalah scholarship sees the Kabbalistic appropriation of the Mother Goddess imagery incorporated in its notion of *Shekhinah* as a response to an historical situation caused by the Jewish experience of the persecution during the crusades. At best, the identification of *Kenesseth Yisra'el* with the notion of *Shekhinah* met a historical need of the Medieval Jewry for a powerful national symbol that enabled them to make sense of that historical experience as acts and suffering of *Shekhinah* herself, whose body the *Kenesseth Yisra'el* constituted. At worst, Kabbalah recovered ancient Near Eastern Mother Goddess imagery by associating the powerful national symbol of Kenesseth Yisra'el. This was simply unwanted Gnostic influence on the Jewish spiritual heritage. See *ibid.* Thus in Scholem's frame of reference there is no room for a phenomenological/structural analysis which sees this development as integral part of human religious consciousness seeking to conceptualize and express in an intentional way a deeper experience of what is perceived as the principle of Godhead that meets the fundamental human need to experience and express the Divine in feminine idiom too.

[40] See *Sefer ha-Bahir,* S # 43; M # 63; S 90; M # 131.

[41] *Safer ha Bahir,* S #74; M # 104-105.

[42] *Safer ha Bahir,* S #74; M # 104-105.

[43] *Sefer ha Bahir* had already implied this relationship in identifying Binah, the upper *Shekhinah,* as the "Mother of the Universe." See *Bahir,* S # 74; M # 104-105.

[44] See for example *Zohar* I.12a, which refers to the mystery of intercourse between *Shekhinah* and her husband, the *Tiferet.* In many places the *Zohar* depicts the feminine quality of *Shekhinah* specifically in terms of her conjugal relationship with *Tif'ereth* and *Yesod,* the two masculine emanations of the Divine in the Sefirothic scheme of things. The conjugal relatioship of the *Tifereth* and lower *Shekhinah* called *Malkhuth* is conceived as the marriage of the holy king and

the queen. Their union is considered to be the sacred union of the male and the female within the Godhead. *Shekhinah's* relationship with *Yesod* receives even more precise sexual description in a highly charged erotic imagery. For detailed analysis of sexual metaphor in the depiction the relationship of *Shekhinah* with the masculine aspect of the Divine, see Scholem, pp.183 ff; Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, Volume I, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.371 ff; and, Elliot Wolfson, *Through A Speculum That Shines*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 357 ff.

[45] Zoharic passages that draw upon the conjugal life of the Divine are replete with vivid sexual symbolism. For example *Zohar*, III, 296a-b *(Idra Zutta)* talks about God casting his blessings in the Zion, which is conceived as the womb of the Shekhinah. The conjugality of God and the *Shekhinah* is asserted in the *Zohar*, II, 135a where God is clearly identified as the husband of *Shekhinah*, who, despite His immense love for her, lets the children of Israel take her away so that she can dwell among them. *Zohar* III, 214b portrays stages of the Divine union as stages of coupling in a clearly naturalistic manner in its interpretation of the Song of Songs 2:6. *Zohar* III, 5a-b and Zohar III, 21 respectively interpret the Psalms 48 and 52 as hymns to the holy marriage *(tushbahta de zivuga)*.

[46] Scholem, p. 161.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

[48] See *Kena Upaniṣad*, 3.1-4.3 Both Samkara and Sayana, the great commentators on the Upaniṣads, have considered *Uma* to be "*Vidyā*." On *Uma* being the symbol of knowledge *(vidya)* see Muir, IV, p. 422ff.

[49] The Purāṇic phase of Hinduism as the context for the emergence of the notion of *Śakti* in the Tantra has demonstrated a further conceptual affinity between the Feminine Divine and liberative knowledge, *Vidyā*, of which the Goddess is seen as an embodiment. The Goddess *Durgā* is extolled in the *Mahābhārata* (Bhisma Parvan, App. I.1) as the *Brahmavidyā*. The *Sri Mad Devī Bhāgvatam* commences with meditation on the Goddess as the *Vidyā*. In XII.8.11 ff of the text, the Goddess appears as the *Umā Haimvati* of the *Kena*, who instructs the gods in the secret of the Brahman. XII. 8. 62 goes beyond the *Kena* in identifying the Goddess *Umā* with *Brahman*.

[50] For detailed analysis of the ten *Māhavidyās*, see David Frawley, *The Tantric Yoga And the Wisdom Goddesses*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996); and David Kinsley, *The Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Māhavidyās*. Also see Narendra Nath Bhattacharya, *History of Tantric Religion*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1982), p.347 ff.

[51] See *Sri Mad Devī Bhagavatam*, I.2.21-25. This is a very significant development in the post Tantra puranic literature influenced by the distinctively Tantric conception of the Feminine Divine as the creatrix distinguished from that of the earlier Vedic conceptions. In the *Vedas*, both *Vāc* (or *Vāgdevi*) and *Aditi*, while conceived as universal mother and source of all existence, needed a father figure, *Prajāpati* or the *Dakṣa*, to create. As one moves into the Tantric phase of the development the role of the father figure in the cosmogonic process is completely ignored. Even the great Trimurti (Hindu Trinity) conception of *Brahmā* (the creator), *Viṣṇu* (the preserver), and *Śiva* (the destroyer) are themselves conceived as created by the Feminine Divine and are subjected to her will. For details of this process and various textual references to this effect in the Tantra, *Principles of Tantra*, *p.*248 ff. On the cosmogonic aspect and the cosmological dimension of the Feminine Divine as the creatrix, see Beane, p.150 ff.

[52] See *Sefer ha Bahir*, (S #74; M # 104-105); *Tikkunei Zohar*, # 22, f. 65a; *Zohar*, I, 16b; Zohar, III, 296a-b.
[53] Gershom Scholem, p.174.
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 147.
[55] *Sefer ha Bahir*, S # 116; M #171.
[56] *Ibid.*, S #97-98; M # 147.
[57] *Ibid.*, S #74; M #104-105.
[58] See Gershom Scholem, p. 176.
[59] See *Zohar*, I, 223 a-b.
[60] *Ibid*, III, 60b.
[61] See Arthur Avalon (ed.), *Principles of Tantra*, pp.288 ff.
[62] *Zohar*, I. 35b. See also: Tishby, p. 375.
[63] See *Zohar*, III, 74a; I , 12b. On details of Zoharic depiction of the entanglement of the Shekhinah with the forces of "the other side," see Tishby, p. 375 ff; Scholem, p. 189 ff.
[64] Gershom Scholem, p. 176.
[65] See *Sri Mad Devī Bhagavatam*, XII.8.62-83; also see *Mahānirvana tantra*, XIII.4.
[66] The Tantric texts mention ten forms of *Mahavidyās*, the Wisdom Goddesses. These include *Kālī, Tārā, Tripura Sundarī (Soḍasi), Bhuvaneśwari, Chinnamastā, Bhairavī, Dhūmāvati, Bagalāmukhī, Mātaṅgi,* and *Kamalā.* In addition to the well known images of *Kālī* and *Durgā* engaged in battles with the demonic powers, one discerns destructive and dangerous side of the goddess imagery involved in the portrayal of *Tārā, Chinnamastā, Bhairavī, Dhūmāvati* and *Bagalāmukhī.* For details of the discussion of ten forms of *Mahavidyās* see David Kinsley (1997).
[67] The theme of the Goddess engaged in the cosmic battle on behalf of the people goes back to the *Ṛg Veda*. See *Ṛg Veda* X.125. This theme is further appropriated and embellished in the *Smrti* literature's recovery of the Goddess on the side of the divine in the cosmic battle involving divine and the demonic. See *Mahābharata* IV and XXIII.
[68] Zohar I, 223a and Zohar III, 60b
[69] *Zohar* I., 223b.
[70] See *Kālī Tantra* in Krsnanda Agamvagisa, *Brhad Tantra Sara*, (Calcutta: Navebharat Publishers, 1984), p. 461.
[71] *Zohar*, I, 35b, 221b; II, 48b.
[72] Tishby, p. 373.
[73] See *Kālī Tantra* in *Brhat Tantra Sara*, p. 387-388.
[74] *Zohar*, III, 110b.
[75] See *Liṅga Purāṇa* (Delhi:Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), I.106.
[76] See *Kulārnva Tantra* 108-109; also see Kinsley, p. 241 ff.
[77] See *Zohar*, I. 12a.
[78] See Tishby, p. 375.
[79] See *Zohar*, II.186a.
[80] Tishby, p. 376.
[81] See Wolfson, p. 357 ff.
[82] For various iconic representation of Goddess in these postures, see David Kinsley (1997).
[83] For detailed discussion of the importance of *Śri Cakra Yantra*'s symbolism in the *Śakta Tantra* see Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

1990); S.C. Banerjee, *A Brief History of Tantric Literature* (Calcutta: Naya Prakash, 1986); and Ajit Mookerjee and Madhu Khanna, *The Tantric Way: Art, Science and, Ritual,* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1977).

[84] See Krsnananda Agamavagisa, *Brht Tantrasara* (Calcutta: Navabharata Publishers, 1984), p. 701; Biswanarayan Shastri (Ed), *Yoginī Tantra,* (Delhi: Bharatiya Vidyā Prakashan, 1982) Chapter 7; *Kamakhya Tantra,* 36; J.A. Schoterman (Ed), *Yoni Tantra* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1980), 6.5.

[85] Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1964).

[86] While it is true that the *Zohar,* like the *Yoni Tantra,* has described in several places graphic details concerning the feminine genitals of the divine persona, the dominant imagery here is the symbol of *Shekhinah* as the crowning corona worn by the Divine phallus. On the androgynous character of Divine implicated in this symbolism, see Wolfson, p.336 ff. One sees here a significant correlation with the Hindu notion of *Śiva* as *Ardahanārīsvara,* God as half female. Ontic unity of the masculine and the feminine in the Divine phallus that contains within itself the feminine corona symbolizing the *Shekhinah,* may also be seen as analogous to the representation of the *Linga* in the Hindu tradition, which, though called *Linga,* is always presented as union of the *Linga* and the *Yoni,* the Divine masculine and the feminine, namely *Śiva* and *Śakti.* In the Kabbalistic tradition, the androgyny within the Godhead is also suggested by the depiction of *Shekhinah,* an emanation of the Divine herself, as both male and female. See *Zohar,* I.232a.

[87] *Kulārnava-tantra,* 108-109.

[88] Todros Abulafia, *Osar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem,* (Jerusalem:Mathor, 1970), 6b . On the eschatological motif of the mystic's union with the divine Presence, i.e. the Shekhinah also see Moses de Leon *Shushan 'Edut* (Ed), Gershom Scholem in *Qoves 'al Yad,* n.s., 8(1976). pp. 343-344; and *Sheqel ha - Qodesh, (Ed),* A.W. Greenup (London:1911), pp. 97-98.

[89] See *Zohar,* I:168b-169a; 2:57b - 58a, 205b - 206a, 277b; 3:5a, 96b, 148b.

Oral Literary Forms in Jewish Malayalam[1]

By Ophira Gamliel

The coastal strip of southwest India, also known as Malabar,[2] attracted Western traders from times of antiquity. The Western Ghats separate this area from the mainland and detain the monsoon clouds for a considerable part of the year. The lavish rainfall renders Malabar a country rich with water and abundant yield of the land. This long and narrow tropical strip of land below the Western Ghats borders the Arabian Sea and faces the eastern shores of the Arab peninsula. Greek, Roman, and Arab seafarers pursuing trade opportunities traveled via the Arabian Sea to the shores of Malabar that became their gateway to India and the Far East.[3] Malabar was a lively commercial center for at least two millennia, with seaports and international markets spread all over its coastline.[4]

Among the many West Asian traders and migrants who settled in medieval Malabar were also Jews. Jews became integrated in Kerala society while developing a distinct cultural tradition and speaking in their peculiar Jewish Malayalam dialect. Some of the literary culture of Kerala Jews was preserved in writing and some was transmitted orally. In the past few decades, scholars focused on collecting the written remnants of this thousand-year-old cultural heritage.[5] Some oral literary forms were documented too. Unfortunately, the very few samples of oral literary forms are all documented in a foreign language, whether in English or in Hebrew.[6] So far, the critical importance of studying Kerala Jewish culture in its own language was not sufficiently appreciated. Neither was the unique linguistic medium of Kerala Jews, namely Jewish Malayalam, investigated and described. In what follows, I wish to examine Jewish Malayalam as a medium for speech genres and oral literary short forms, like proverbs, riddles, and jokes. The purpose is to afford an intimate glance into the cultural world of this unique and ancient Jewish community. A word about the society in which Jewish Malayalam culture developed is in place.

The oral and written literary culture in Jewish Malayalam belongs to a small Jewish community marginal to the significantly larger minorities of Muslims and Christians and to the majority of Hindus of many castes and creeds. It is also marginal to other Jewish communities in the Jewish Diaspora. Marginal as it may be, its history is long and continuous and unique in many respects. The Jewish community of Kerala is the only Jewish community in the world that enjoyed religious freedom and high social status for such a long period. It is the only Jewish community that existed in a land governed by nonmonotheistic rulers.[7] The eventual decline of this ancient community came about by the mass migration to the modern State of Israel, where the remnants of this unique Jewish culture are retained against all odds.

Social Context of Jewish Malayalam Literature

The society of Malabar is cosmopolitan. It absorbed the traits and trends of south Indian civilization—Buddhism and Jainism during the first millennia and Brahminic Hinduism during the second. It also absorbed West Asian trader communities, officially welcoming Christian, Muslim, and Jewish migrants since the ninth century CE. At the same time, the people of Malabar had their own peculiar traditions to maintain; traditional systems of kinship and sociopolitical organization, folk traditions and ancient rituals and art forms. The society of Malabar is a pluralistic conservative society, ever open to outside influence and at the same time preserving inner sociocultural peculiarities. This cosmopolitan traditional society produced immensely rich and diverse cultural expressions in literature, folklore, and the fine arts.

Kerala society is minutely segregated into social categories and subcategories. The major distinction is between *ambalakkār*, "temple people" and *paḷḷikkār*, "monotheistic shrine people," referring to Hindus and monotheists respectively. These two social categories are further divided into castes and bcastes forming a complex web of sociocultural relations.

Jews (*jūtar*) are a subcategory of *paḷḷikkār* divided in turn into distinct communities and castes. Communal divisions are based on geographical and historical distinctions. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there were five Jewish localities in Kerala—Parur, Cennamangalam, Mala, Kochi, and

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Ernakulam—represented by the categories *kŏccikkār*, "Kochinites," *pāṇukkār*, "Parurites," and so forth.[8] In Kochi and Ernakulam there are further communal distinctions based on synagogue communities— *tĕkkuṃbhāgakkār*, "Southists," *kaṭavuṃbhāgakkār*, "Wharfists." In Kochi there is also an endogamous Jewish community called *paradeśi*, "foreigner." The Jews of Mala, *māḷakkār*, are also nicknamed *palāśakkūṭṭaṃ*, "the Polish folk," by Malayalam-speaking Jews in Israel.[9]

These subcategories reflect sociohistorical developments. The *paradeśi*s are associated with Western foreigners arriving during the colonial period, and the *palāśakkūṭṭaṃ* are believed to have a common Polish ancestor. The *tĕkkuṃbhāgakkār* and *kaṭavuṃbhāgakkār* are associated with earlier settlement patterns somewhere else, where synagogues existed in the remote past on the southern side and close to a harbor or wharf.[10] There is further a subcaste within the *paradeśi* community, *ŏrumakkāran* or *uḷmakkāran*, "freed people."[11] Note that the terms *paradeśi*s and the *uḷmakkār* do not denote a synagogue community, but rather mark endogamous groups in relation to all the other communities. In the mid-nineteenth century, the other communities excommunicated the *kaṭavuṃbhāgakkār* from Kochi, and they too became a separate endogamous group for some time. Consequently, their social contacts with the *paradeśi* and *uḷmakkār* became closer. These social and regional divisions are reflected in the Jewish Malayalam written corpus, affecting various repertoires and lines of transmission.[12]

There are further castelike divisions expressed in Hebrew terminology: *məyuḥasim*, "those of pedigree," *hā'ĕynam məyuḥasim*, "those lacking pedigree," *ləḇānim*, "white," and *məśuḥrarim*, "manumitted." The division into *məyuḥasim* and *hā'eynam məyuḥasim* first appears in a Hebrew document from 1520, a religious query sent from Malabar to the rabbinate in Egypt for clarifying the Halakhic (Jewish code of conduct) status of "those lacking pedigree."[13] These two terms do not have parallel Malayalam terminology. Note that the Hebrew terminology is confined to endogamous groups, while the Malayalam terminology is mainly concerned with communities and their localities.

The origin of the category, "white" appears first in Portuguese, in the records compiled by De Paiva, a Jewish emissary from Amsterdam who reached Kochi in 1686. In listing the household names of the *paradeśi* community, he notes whether a certain individual is *branco*, "white."[14] Interestingly, not all members were noted *brancos*. As their names suggest, they arrived from different places in Europe and West-Asia, though some of them may have been natives of Kerala affiliated with one of the other communities.[15] The basis for dividing this group of people into *brancos* and non-*brancos* is not clear.[16] Was this De Paiva's way to denote *məyuḥasim* and *hā'eynām məyuḥasim*? The term *məśuḥrarim* is a later coinage, but it does have a parallel Malayalam term, *uḷmakkār*, "the freed ones." Both the Hebrew and Malayalam terms refer to an endogamous subcaste within the *paradeśi* community.[17]

Twentieth-century scholars studying Kerala Jews simplified this complex multilayered social stratification and created the categorical dichotomy of Malabaris and *paradeśi*s, with the subcategory of "manumitted slaves" referring to the *məśuḥrarim*. This division reflects endogamous groups, where Malabaris are by far the largest. The Hebrew or the English categories do not express the communal division into groups based on synagogue localities. In the Hebrew sources from the nineteenth century, the Hebrew categories "*məyuḥāsim* /*hā'eynam məyuḥāsim*" are associated with inner divisions between Malabaris, despite the fact that it has no Malayalam equivalent, neither any social category of endogamous groups within the Malabari communities.[18]

Regardless of these social divisions, Jewish Malayalam culture manifests a certain degree of cohesion adhering to the basic category of Jews as a subcaste of *paḷḷikkār*. Some conversational and oral literary forms that the last speakers of Jewish Malayalam still use are expressive manifestations of the largest endogamous group of Kerala Jews, the so-called "Malabari Jews."

Documenting a Fading Language

Contemporary Jewish Malayalam as spoken by Kerala Jews in Israel is a fading language. A language is not merely a matter for linguistic study. It is the medium that carries cultural expressions of different types, all inherently connected and mutually dependent. In the case of Jewish Malayalam, there are only a few dozen speakers left today in Israel. These speakers are the last bearers of Kerala Jewish culture. They carry in their minds the last stages of a fading language with the remnants of a rich literary oral culture.

The importance of documenting Jewish Malayalam speakers was recognized only during 2008, when a project for documenting the natural speech of Kerala Jews was launched.[19] Documenting the last speakers of Jewish Malayalam is important for future studies concerning Kerala Jews, past and present. For that matter, any type of conversation is valuable linguistic evidence. However, the depth and vitality of a culture is beyond linguistic description. A living culture finds its expression in conversational genres like jargon, idioms, and so forth and in oral and written literary genres like proverbs, folktales, and songs. Fifty years after migration, recovering the oral forms in Jewish Malayalam is a difficult task. The few speakers who retain some forms in their memory provide mainly conversational and short simple forms. The current project of documentation is an "archeological excavation" into the collective memory, hoping to find bits and pieces of an older holistic world on the verge of oblivion.

Interestingly, among the few speakers whose language is still rich enough, there is a certain "division of labor." Each speaker specializes in certain genres. For example, Yosi Oren has a rich repertoire of Malayalam proverbs, Zippora Daniel's speech is rich with idioms, and Miriam Dekel remembers mainly nursery rhymes. Each of these speakers may of course remember other forms to a lesser degree. In addition, some forms are more easily traceable in the collective memory of Jewish Malayalam speakers.

Classification and Definitions

Let me roughly sketch out the most popular conversational and oral literary forms that can still be recovered from contemporary speakers of the fading Jewish Malayalam. Based on the data collected so far, three major types of oral forms still exist in contemporary Jewish Malayalam. These are conversational genres, simple short forms, and complex forms.[20]

Conversational Genres. The most well-remembered conversational form is the *blason populaire*, regarding communities, families, and individuals.[21] Idioms are also relatively easy to recover from Jewish Malayalam speakers. To these, I add coinages and technical terms for social categories and certain Jewish cultural items respectively.[22] For example, the term *yonānkākka* denoting a Muslim as "Muslim elder brother" is a coinage, and the term *māssa* (H מעשה) for denoting a folktale about Jews is a technical term. The conversational forms are the basis for more stylized and complex forms. See, for example, the use of the coinage *yonānkākka* in the popular etymology (a simple short form) of the term below.[23]

Simple Short Forms. In this category I include what is conventionally termed "short forms," like jokes, riddles, and proverbs. Certain generic features stylize such forms; say the conditional clause of the proverb or the incongruity of the joke.[24] The more stylized and complex a form is, the more difficult it is to recover it from the fading language, though different speakers may remember some stylized forms. Among the most common stylized forms are proverbs, jokes, and nursery rhymes. As already stated, some individuals retain a relatively rich repertoire of one or two stylized forms.

Complex Forms. Complex oral literary forms are stylized speech forms that are longer than the short simple forms, such as folktales.[25] The most common Jewish Malayalam stories are personal or communal *memorabile*s, and many speakers delight in narrating stories that reflect the passage between two cultures, the Malayali and the Israeli. When asked to tell a folktale (*māssa* or *katha*), speakers often claim that they do not remember any. So far, only three people could narrate a folktale per se. Yokheved Elias could remember three *māssa*s (Jewish folktales). Tamar Abraham and Bezalel Eliyahu told two or three *katha*s (stories) each.

Before we examine some documented samples for each of these oral literary types, I wish to stress that the documentation project is yet in its initial stages. Since Jewish Malayalam is not documented or analyzed, transcription and translation of speech samples is a complicated task. Therefore, I shall focus on simple and stylized forms that are relatively easy to transcribe and to analyze. Complex forms are treated briefly and less thoroughly not only because of the linguistic complication, but also because they are far less represented in the collection of the oral forms currently available.

Conversational Genres

Coinages. Coinages are important for recognizing social structures. They may refer to large groups, smaller groups, and even individuals. In Jewish Malayalam, for example, the Christians are coined *māppiḷḷayāti* (< *jāti*), "The Mappilla Caste," and Muslims are coined *yonoruyāti*, "The Ionian Caste." This may reflect a sense of historical precedence for the Muslims, for the term *yonān* (*jonakan* < *yavana*) is the older Tamil-Malayalam coinage for Western traders, while *māppiḷḷa* specifically refers to medieval traders coming from West Asia. The way Jews coin themselves in relation to the larger social matrix is *jūtar*, specifying certain groups or localities by the term, for example, *jūtappaḷḷi*, "Jewish shrine," *jūtakkamboḷaṃ*, "Jewish Street." Such terms are not restricted to Jewish Malayalam speakers. As is shown above, there are further special terms to distinguish groups according to communal distinctions and synagogue localities among the Jews of Kerala.

Coinages also refer to common social structures within the defined caste and communal group. For example, the Dravidian society is composed of small "ancestral home" units or clans. The coinage for ancestry is *taṟavāṭŭ*, "ground base," denoting the origin of an extended family. The eldest man and woman of a *taṟavāṭŭ* are coined *kārṇṇor*, "ancestor," and *taṟavāṭicci* "mistress of the ground base," reflecting status within an extended family. A cluster of *taṟavāṭŭ*s forms a community defined on terms of locality (e.g., *pāṟukkār*).

Each community has its *ŏnnānkārṇṇorŭ*, "First Ancestor," that holds a unique social position. Before migration, and possibly from the earliest time of Jewish social organization in Kerala, the *ŏnnānkārṇṇorŭ* were the official representatives of their respective communities in intercommunal interactions. Today, this old tradition is reflected in a special ritual role that the *ŏnnānkārṇṇorŭ* still holds in Israel. Kerala Jews in Israel conclude the *Simḥat Torah* holiday in a procession leading to the house of the *ŏnnānkārṇṇorŭ* of the village. His family members serve drinks and snacks to all who come while singing songs for and honoring the *ŏnnānkārṇṇorŭ*.

Coinages may serve as raw material for constructing compounded and stylized speech forms. For example, the Jewish Malayalam coinage for foundation stone, *aṭittaṟa*, "bottom ground base," is used in the idiom *aṭittaṟa kĕṭṭiyā?*, "Did you construct the bottom ground base?" for asking a newly wedded husband whether his wife got pregnant already.

Blason Populaire. When coinages or terms reflect stereotypes concerning certain groups, they become *blason populaire*, for example, *paradeśi*, "foreigner" and *palāśakkūṭṭaṃ*, "Polish Flock." *Blason populaires* can also denote smaller social units like certain families and even individuals. In fact, each individual in Kerala has at least two names, one formal and one "house-name" used only in intimate circles. Jews too had "house names." For example, Isaac Moses Roby was known as *kākkicca*, "dear elder brother."[26] Such nicknames do not necessarily denote a particular trait of the individual.

An example for *blason populaires* denoting a minor group is the family "nickname." A certain family was known as *pāmbŭ*, "snake." To explain this *blason populaire*, some people say that the members of the *pāmbŭ* family have the reputation of being cunning. One of the most fluent Jewish Malayalam speakers recalls that this family was excommunicated a few generations ago. He explains that *pāmbŭ* stands for the Hebrew term of the most severe form of excommunication, נח"ש, *n.ḥ.š.*, an abbreviation of

niduy (נידוי), "dismissal," *ḥerem* (חרם), "excommunication," and *śamṯa'* (שמתא), "curse." The initial consonants of these words compound the Hebrew word *naḥaś*, "snake."[27]

Blason *populaires* of individuals, apart from nicknames, depict a certain personal trait such as the person's occupation. For example, there were two men called Joseph in the same place. One was a tamarind vendor, and the other sold vinegar. To differentiate between them one was nicknamed *puḷiyosephŭ*, "tamarind Joseph" and the other *sīrkkayosephŭ*, "vinegar Joseph."

Personal *blason populaires* are closely related to anecdotes.[28] For example, there was one Abraham Hai who was very sick. Everybody thought he died, and upon burying him, he was found to be alive. He lived for many more years, thereafter known as *kiṭakkŭnna abrāmāyi*, "Laid to Rest Abraham Hai." Another anecdotal *blason populaire* is *pŏsolākka*, "Posol Brother." Once during reading the Torah, he mispronounced the Hebrew word *pesel*, "idol," reading *posol*. Thereafter he was nicknamed *posolākka*.

Technical Terms. Technical terms are coinages that denote religious and cultural items, especially regarding the Jewish lore. They reflect the way in which certain universals are perceived in the regional language variant. The abstract conceptual experience of "Jewishness" is realized through verbalized concretes. For example, the *paḷḷi* is a concrete place of worship realized as Jewish through verbalizing its concrete contents and activities. The technical terms denoting the synagogue conceptual world may be Hebrew loan words, Hebrew-Malayalam compounds and Malayalam words from the different registers of the language. Let me portray some technical terms according to these three groups:

- Hebrew Loan Words: *toṟā* (תורה), "Torah"; *sephar* (ספר), "scroll"; *śophār*, (שופר) "horn"; *minīyān* (מנין), "quorum"; *aphŭttāṟa* (הפטרה), "first reading of Torah"; *paṟaśa* (פרשה) "a reading section in the Bible."

- Hebrew-Malayalam Compounds: *minīyān kūṭṭalŭ*, "joining the quorum," that is, Bar Mitzvah; *sephar muttān*, "to kiss the Torah scroll," a practice of women on *śəmini 'ăṣereṯ* and before the wedding; *śophār ūttŭ*, "the blow of the horn."

- Malayalam Words: *ottumāṭaṃ*, "recital gallery"; *tūśi* (< *sūci*, "needle"), the silver "finger" used for reading the Torah (אצבע); *nuskkāraṃ*, *nutukkāraṃ* (< *namaskkāraṃ*), "prayer"; *kappiyār*, "the synagogue guardian" (שמש).

The Malayalam words used for technical terms reflect the intricate interplay of Kerala pluralism. Some terms are linked with Muslims, some with Christians, and others with Hindus. The term for a synagogue is one example; unless we specify the term *paḷḷi* by compounding *jūta*, "Jewish," it may denote any shrine that is not Hindu. Thus, *nuskkāraṃ*, *nutukkāraṃ* (< *namaskkāraṃ*), "prayer," is equivalent to the Muslim term for prayer but different from the Hindu and Christian term (*prārthana*).[29] *Ottumāṭaṃ*, "synagogue school," is the hall at the entrance of the synagogue where Hebrew language and Scriptures were taught (*ottu* is the verbal noun of *ot-*, "to read sacred texts, especially the Vedas"); *kappiyār*, "the synagogue guardian" (שמש), is a Christian term derived from Syriac.[30]

An interesting Malayalam technical term is *mŏlyārŭ*, "rabbi," to denote a religious authority in matters of study, ritual, and religious guidance. This term has two variations, one in the *paradeśi* community, *mutaliyār*, "leader," and the other in Arabi-Malayalam, *musaliyār*, "religious guide."[31] The terms *mutaliyār* and *musaliyār* may interchange in Malayalam (ṣ t), and the t erm *mŏlyāru* may be derived from each of them.[32] The Arabi-Malayalam term is in fact closer in meaning and usage to the Jewish Malayalam term *mŏlyārŭ*. Contrarily, the term *mutaliyār* is a coinage, rather than a technical term, to denote the political leader of the *paradeśi* community.

Moreover, the Muslim and Jewish technical terms for "religious guide" both have likely originated in the medieval religious milieu of *paḷḷikkār* in Kerala. A Geniza document from the twelfth century denotes Jewish judicial activity in north Malabar reflecting some type of a local rabbinic court.[33] Such local Jewish

judicial activity is expressed in contemporary Jewish Malayalam as well. The technical term *cĕnnamaṅṅalattĕ mŏlyakkanmārŭ*, "the rabbis of Chennamangalam," denotes a congregation of several *mŏlyāru*s to pass judgment on religious matters that concern the whole community. The term *mutaliyār* is in fact a coinage from the Dutch period, possibly parallel to the social coinage for a Malabari eldest person, *ŏnnāṅkārṇṇorŭ*. In the *paradeśi* community, the eldest male member functions as the *mutaliyār* in ceremonious and political matters regarding the other Jewish communities and negotiating with the local non-Jewish authorities.

Idioms. An idiom is an encoded way of reference to a certain situation. They sometimes relay on compounding a technical term with discourse markers. For example, the Hebrew-Malayalam technical term *toṟā ĕṭukkān*, "to take the Torah scrolls," denotes the ritual act of taking the Torah scrolls out of the ark. When someone is late for the service, he uses the idiom *'toṟā ĕṭuttā?*, "Was the Torah taken?," to denote apology for being late. Similarly, the technical term for the Torah scroll wrapped in black during *Tiš'āh Bə'ab* is *śīriya*. During that occasion, mothers warn children to behave themselves with the idiomatic taunt *śīriya mutta untīṭuṃ*, "uncle *śīriya* will push you!"

Jewish Malayalam idioms often contain a Hebrew component. For example, *sīmān kūṭṭaṇṇŭ*, "joining the [vowel] symbols," denotes the initial phase of studying the Hebrew alphabet. To refer to an analphabet the idiom is *ālephinṟĕ vakk aṟiyān pāṭilla*, "He does not know the edge of the letter Aleph." Some Jewish Malayalam idioms may be comparable with contemporary spoken Malayalam in central Kerala, and some may be peculiar to Kerala Jews. For example, the idiom *ā parippŭ vevilla*, "these lentils are not well cooked," passes judgment on another statement as being unsubstantiated. Idioms with Hebrew components do not have equivalents in the speech of other communities around. For example, to denote something worthless the idiom *khabbūṟinṟĕ kaṭṭankallŭ*, "a rough stone of *ḥabbūṛ*," is used. Ḥabur (< חבור?) is the name of a mythical place associated in Kerala Jewish folk memory with stupid and useless people.

Some Jewish Malayalam idioms draw upon common folk knowledge peculiar to Kerala Jews. For example, when someone behaves or speaks disrespectfully toward an older person, the idiomatic taunt by the latter would be *ñĕṉṟĕ maṭītittāṇo periṭṭatŭ*, "is it in your lap that I received my name?" The explicit reference is to the honorific position of the godfather during circumcision, when the child receives its name in the godfather's lap. The metaphoric reference is to the supposed violation of age hierarchy expressed by the rhetorical question.

Popular Etymology. Popular etymologies explain words in their cultural and social context. Yosi Oren explains the meaning of the name of his birthplace, Chennamangalam, as derived from the combination of four words: *caṅṅŭ*, "conch," *vaṅṅŭ*, "muezzin," *kŏmbŭ*, "horn," and *maṇi*, "bell." These words are metonyms for the four religious groups in Kerala, denoting the sounds that arise from the four places of worship; the conch is blown in the Hindu shrine, the muezzin calls the Muslims to the mosque, the horn (*śophār*) is blown in the synagogue during the high holidays, and the bell is the sound of the church. This popular etymology expresses the appreciation of Kerala as a model of pluralism and religious tolerance.

Another popular etymology regards the term *yonān kākka*, "Muslim." The word *kākka*, "elder brother," is a kinship term peculiar to Muslim and Jews. Yosi Oren claims that the term expresses the kinship relations between Jews and Muslims, since Ishmael, the Muslim patriarch, was the elder brother of Isaac the Jewish patriarch. However, he adds that Hindus in Kerala explain the term differently. In Malayalam, *kākka* can also mean a crow. Muslims, he says, are like crows. Whenever one of them is being attacked, they all flock around causing great commotion. Interestingly, the negative view of Muslims is attributed by Oren to the Hindus, while the Jews accept the senior position of Muslims in the mythic history common to both communities.

Short Simple Forms

Proverbs. Proverbs are stylized simple forms used for a variety of speech functions.[34] Jewish Malayalam speakers remember many proverbs current among contemporary Malayalam speakers too. These Malayalam proverbs undergo a certain linguistic transformation that makes them typical to the Jewish Malayalam dialect. Some proverbs are typically Jewish owing to their meaning as well.

Take for example the Malayalam proverb *pŏṇukkān kuṭiccatŭ marikkān iṭay ākki*, "Drinking for healing caused danger of death."[35] In Jewish Malayalam, it undergoes phonetic and semantic transformations: *pŏṛakkān kŏṭattatŭ maraṇattil ĕti*, "Giving shelter brought about death." It refers to a situation when one gets into trouble because of helping someone else. The structure of both proverbs is the same, the infinitive morpheme *–ān* and the nominalizer *–atŭ* form the first part of the proverb, and the second part ends with a past form in /i/. Most lexical choices are the same, and even when transformed they retain certain phonemes common to both variants of the proverb: *pŏṇukkān* and the lexeme for "death" (*mar-ikkān* and *mar-aṇaṃ*) are identical. *Kuṭicc-* and *kŏṭutt-* bear phonetic resemblance.

Few proverbs relate specifically to the Jewish society in Kerala. For example, the proverb *pāṛurkuññu pulikkuññu saveli varumba valikkuññu*, "a lad from Pāṛur is a tiger-lad. When he reaches an assembly, he becomes a puff of air." This proverb is based on the notion that the Jews of Parur are proud people and expresses the communal divisions into subcategorical groups (see above). Another interesting proverb is *kālanṛĕ pĕṛĕ poyāluṃ jūtanṛĕ pĕṛĕ povallĕ*, "Better follow the demon than follow the Jew." It is used when one Jew cheats another. These two proverbs are not found in proverb collections from Kerala and are specific to Jews, expressing their sense of communal peculiarities and interrelations.[36] Note also the colloquial forms peculiar to Jewish Malayalam: *saveli* for *sabhayil*, "in an assembly," and *pĕṛĕ* for *piṛakĕ*, "behind." Also interesting is the semantic shift of the word *kālan*, "Death, Time," that usually refers to Yama, the Hindu god of death. In Jewish Malayalam it denotes a demon or devil.

Riddles. While conversing with Jewish Malayalam speakers, some of them recalled the awkward statement *kaṭukŭ iṭṭā pŏṭṭuṃ iṅgliṣ mŏṭṭa*, "if you put mustard seeds the English egg blasts." Ostensibly, the statement is a proverb, but no one could explain its meaning or use. It was only after interviewing Sarah David that it was recalled as a riddle: *iṭṭā pŏṭṭuṃ iṅgliṣ mŏṭṭa*, "if you add it, the English egg blasts," where the answer is "mustard seed." The expression "English egg" is a metaphor for gun bullets, and the riddle is based on the use of mustard seeds in the Kerala cuisine. When you add mustard seeds to boiling oil, they pop up and produce the sound of gunshots. Interestingly, other speakers remembered the riddle along with the solution, *kaṭukŭ*, "mustard seed," and thus the riddle lost its original generic feature of a statement that requires decipherment.[37]

Jokes. Among the materials collected so far, there are a few jokes and jests. There is one joke that is particularly worthy of attention, as it is told alternately in Hebrew and in Malayalam. The joke is a dialogue between a father and daughter. The father (*vāvā*) picks up the prayer book and starts reciting Psalms (93: 4-5), a customary recital for Saturday night:

miqqolot mayim rabbim	The sound of mighty water….
ĕṭī moḻe ā kaṇṇāṭi ŏnnŭ ĕṭuttĕṭī	**Hey, girl! Get me my specs!**
addirim miśəbbərey yām	So huge are the ocean waves…
vāvā ĕviṭ āṇŭ vĕccirikkaṇṇŭ vāvā	**Dad, where did you put them, dad?**
'addir bammārom 'āddonāy	The God above is mightier than them.
ā almārayi vĕccaṭṭŏṇṭŭ ĕṭī	**I had put them in that closet.**
'edoṯēykā	Your flocks…
vāvā aviṭ ŏnnuṃ kāṇannilla	**Dad! I don't see anything there!**
nĕ'ĕmənu mə'od	Are firmly faithful…

nallonnaṃ nokkĕṭī moḻe	**Search properly, girl!**
ləbeytəkā	To your abode…
ŏnnuṃ kūṭi nokkĕṭī	**Take one more look, girl!**
na'ắwāh qodēś	Which is the dwelling of the Holy…
iviṭĕ ŏnnuṃ kāṇannilla	**I see nothing here!**
'ādonnāy	God…
innā vāvā kaṇṇāṭi	**There, dad, your specs.**
lə'orĕk yāmim	For ever and ever.
ninṟĕ tala tĕṟaccuṃ poṭṭĕ	**May your head blow into pieces!**
ñān cĕllīṃ poyi	**I'm done with the prayer!**

When this joke is told to a crowd of Jewish Malayalam speakers, they giggle at each line, and burst in laughter upon hearing the last line. The tension between the serious Hebrew recital and the colloquial speech incites the giggles. In the punch line, the taunt aimed at the daughter invokes much laughter, but moreover, the father's behavior is absurd—why does he bother his daughter, and disturb his own prayer, to fetch his spectacles, if he actually knows the verses by heart?

Nursery Rhymes. As with other literary forms, some nursery rhymes are not particularly Jewish. Here I would like to examine a purely Jewish Malayalam lullaby, which is also a translation from Hebrew.[38] The following lullaby is a verbatim translation of Proverbs, 1:8:

śəma' bəni, ĕnṟĕ makane nī keḻŭ/
musar 'ābikā, nĕnṟĕ vāvāṭĕ siṭṭa (śikṣa)/
və'al ṭṭittoś ṭṭoraṭ 'immĕkā, nĕnṟĕ ummāna (ummāṭĕ) toṟāna kaiviṭalle/
śādāy cācikko mone (moḻe)//

Hear, oh son!/
Your father's morals (teachings)/
Your mother's Torah/ Do not forsake/
Go ahead and sleep with God, son (daughter)!

This verse alternates between Hebrew and Malayalam and functions as a lullaby. The calque translation is fluid; when the verse is recited to a girl child, the mother would replace *makan*, "son" with *makaḷ*, "daughter." There are also other possible adjustments, *siṭṭa* (<*citta* < *dṛḍha*), "morals," a Sanskrit lexeme that conforms to Dravidian phonology (hence of older Malayalam), would sometimes be replaced by the Sanskrit lexeme *śikṣa*, "teachings," which conforms to Modern Malayalam. Similarly, the archaic form *ummāna*,[39] "of mother," is replaced by the New Malayalam genitive *ummāṭĕ*.

Note the hermeneutic choice of the Hebrew lexeme *toṟā* in the translation. In the Hebrew original, the meaning is simply "teachings," while in the translation the meaning is necessarily the sacred Jewish Scriptures. In this way, the mother is portrayed as the transmitter of Jewish knowledge. Last, the translation is concluded with the performative statement, *cācikko*, "go ahead and sleep," and endowed with verbal protective measures by inserting the divine Hebrew name *śādāy*.

Complex Forms

Complex forms are stylized compositions like tales and songs. Jewish Malayalam songs form a literary corpus of several genres; some are typical folk compositions, while others are deliberate compositions often

attributed to composers.[40] Of all the literary oral forms, oral stories are the most difficult to recover from the collective memory of Jewish Malayalam speakers.

In spoken Jewish Malayalam, there is a distinction between a story, *katha*, and a Jewish story, *māssa* (< H *ma'asse*). In attempting to document Jewish Malayalam, two women, Yokheved Elias and Hemda Tiferet could remember *māssas*. To give the stories in transliteration is not a simple matter, so I shall give a short summary of the two *māssas* they told us.[41]

Elias' language alternates between Malayalam (M), Hebrew (H), and Modern Hebrew (MH). She often uses the Modern Hebrew discourse marker *basoph*, "finally."[42] She also tends to use alternative terms, for example, *ṛabb* (< רב) and *mŏlyārŭ* for "rabbi." The *māssa* she told us is as follows:

There was a king (*rāǰāvŭ* M), who had all the castes (*jāti* M, *'edot* H) in his kingdom. The king was especially fond of the rabbi (*ṛabb* H, *mŏlyārŭ* M), and was always keen on gratifying his wishes. He once declared that Jews should be allowed to be exempted from work during their holidays, including Saturdays. This made his minister (*mantri* M) very jealous.

As the king was childless, the minister provoked him to test the loyalty of the rabbi, and ask him whether he could intervene with fate and help the king beget a child (*ben zakar* H). The king followed his advice, and the rabbi agreed to pray to the Jewish God on behalf of the king. Indeed, a healthy son was born. The rabbi warned the king not to let his son out of the palace until he becomes fifteen years old. Therefore, the king would not let his son leave the palace. The minister waited for an opportunity to lure the son out of the palace.

As the child grew up, he became curious about the outside world. The king, his father, arranged for all possible facilities to be brought into the palace. He even constructed a cinema hall inside the palace to satisfy the curiosity of his only son. However, the minister did manage to lure the boy out of the palace. He cut his head off and threw the body in the area (*śetaḥ* MH) of the Jews.

The king sent his soldiers to search for his son everywhere, but not in the Jewish quarters since his faith in the Jews was so great. Finally, the minister advised the king to search also in the Jewish quarters. The body was found in the rabbi's yard. When the rabbi was summoned to the king, he denied any involvement in the crime and asked the king to allow him some time for revealing the truth. The king agreed to wait for forty days.

The rabbi announced the matter to his congregation, and asked all the Jews to pray to God while fasting and taking vows. After forty days, the rabbi dreamed (*ḥalom kaṇṭu* H+M), and in his dream he saw Rabbi Akiva mounted on a big lion.[43] Rabbi Akiva told the rabbi how to use the divine name (*śəmo* H) in order to revive the boy and reveal who killed him.

The next morning the rabbi called for the king. He arranged a table, laid the body of the boy, and attached the severed head to the body by using a piece of paper scribbled with the divine name that Rabbi Akiva revealed to him in his dream. At once, the boy rose to life and pointed at the minister as his murderer. Once the truth was revealed, the rabbi removed the note from the body, and the boy died again. The king converted to Judaism.

This story is an oicotype of AT *730, "The Miraculous Rescue of a Jewish Community," that has many variants around the Jewish world.[44] The well-known archetype of this story is the book of Esther, where a wicked jealous minister manipulates the king in order to harm the Jews. However, the Jewish Malayalam variant has some peculiar features. First, the king is depicted as benevolent and tolerant, even favoring the Jews. The king grants the Jews permission to observe their many holidays, which is actually a historical fact.[45] Moreover, upon seeing the might of the rabbi, the king becomes a Jew.

Second, there are some peculiar motifs; the barrenness of the king as an important juncture in the story; the motif of the prince locked in the palace; the mythic animal on which Rabbi Akiva mounts. These motifs seem to be peculiarly Indian.[46] It often occurs in Indian stories that barrenness advances the plot.

The most well-known examples for that are the epics the Ramayana and Mahabharata, where the protagonists of the stories are born to barren parents after conducting a special sacrifice or magic deed. The motif of denying the young prince exit from the palace is reminiscent of the story of the Buddha, whose father was afraid of the fulfillment of the prophecy regarding his son's adult life as a spiritual seeker. Last, the motif of a divine being mounted on a mythic animal vehicle is widespread in Indian mythology.[47] Let me emphasize at this point that Kerala Jews are far from being acquainted with Indian mythology. The incorporation of such motifs is unconscious and causal.

The second story was told by Hemda Tiferet. It is an etiology to explain the absence of Cohen descendants from Jewish communities in Kerala:

A friend of mine once found a bundle of bronze and copper vessels buried in a well in Parur. She asked what the reason was and was told that long ago there were Cohen descendants in Parur who wanted to reconstruct the third temple in Parur. They collected many vessels and constructed a beautiful building. But God did not approve, and they were struck with epidemics and disasters. Finally, when they were getting ready to inaugurate the building, a fire blazed and burnt them all. Ever since then, we have no Cohen descendants in our community.

Like Elias' story, this story too is a common Jewish oicotype, "A Religious Offender Is Punished" (AT *771).[48] And like Elias' story, it too has its peculiar regional twist. Unlike the Jewish tale type that represents conflicts between Jews and non-Jews, this story represents a strong sense of belonging to the Kerala Diaspora, and the local Jewish leadership commits the offense toward their own God. It is important to note that the *paradeśi* Jews were keen on maintaining Cohen descendants in their community, often of foreign "import," and claimed that the absence of Cohen descendants from the Malabari communities is a proof of their inferior position as Jews.[49] The above story turns this disadvantage into a claim of historical precedence and superiority.

Conclusion

The brief survey above of the remnants of speech genres and oral literary forms in Jewish Malayalam offers new possibilities in understanding the cultural life of Kerala Jews, past and present. Surely, the materials collected in such a late stage of the living Kerala Jewish culture are but remnants of a much richer and diverse culture that is on the verge of total disappearance. These materials bear implications beyond the study of Kerala Jewish culture. They are important for linguistic studies of Malayalam dialects and Jewish languages. They are important for folklore studies, Jewish and Indian alike.

The observations brought forward in this essay are preliminary. The study of Jewish Malayalam is currently focused on documenting and bringing the materials and their significance to the attention of scholars interested in the culture of Kerala Jews. It might take a few years to accomplish a comprehensive collection and analysis of the materials in Jewish Malayalam, and I hope that this essay will indeed provoke others to take the necessary efforts in this direction.

Notes

[1] I wish to express my gratitude to the Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem for supporting the project of documenting Jewish Malayalam, on which the present study is based.
[2] In medieval accounts of merchants and travelers, the Malabar region is taken in its broader sense stretching from Kollam to Goa. Here I refer to Malabar in its narrow sense more or less parallel to the area where the modern state of Kerala is situated.
[3] During the fifteenth century, also the huge Chinese fleet of Zheng-he reached Malabar several times, and this great Muslim admiral left precious historic records about the area before the colonial era. See Levathes, 1994: 100-102.

[4] See Frenz, 2003: 6-11, 62-67; Deloche, 2001: 317-318; Narayanan, 1972: vii-xii.

[5] See Johnson, 2007.

[6] The late Ruby Daniel was a great storyteller and source for a variety of oral literary forms, but she is the only individual who was extensively documented (Daniel and Johnson, 1995; Johnson, 2006). In the Israel Folktale Archives there are about forty stories told by Kerala Jews in Israel (5327, 8125, 17464-17499, 20403-20405, 20729). However, they are mostly *memorabiles* and anecdotes, and only three of them are folktales or *märchen* (8125, 9335, 5327).

[7] There are only two Jewish communities in polytheistic Asia, the Jews of Kaifeng in China and the Bene Israel from the Bombay area. However, these two communities were assimilated in their home countries, retaining only a loose connection with Jewish lore, whereas Kerala Jews were a distinct Jewish community in any standard (see Johnson, 1994: 33).

[8] The ending *–kkār* is an agent noun marker. For example, it may be agglutinated to the noun *paṇi*, "work," to form the agent noun *paṇikkāran*, "worker."

[9] The majority of Jews migrating from Kerala resettled in five places in Israel: Mesillat Zion, Taoz and Aviezer near Jerusalem, Nevatim in southern Israel, and Kfar Yuval in northern Israel. Interestingly, these settlements became a communal point of reference, somewhat parallel to the old communal divisions in Kerala, though not identical. The old communal divisions are still known to the second generation of migrants, now in their fifties and sixties.

[10] Note that a similar distinction exists among Christians from Kerala. See Kollaparambil, 1992: xxiii; Visvanathan, 1993: 13. The origin place of "Southists" and "Wharfists" is commonly taken as Kodungallur. However, these distinctions might have had their origin in any one of the many internal migrations that occurred during the past millennia in Kerala.

[11] In contemporary spoken Jewish Malayalam, the word is *uḷmakkāran*, possibly derived from *uḷmakkāran*, "field worker." However, it is understood as parallel to the *tamsir* (verbatim translation) word for "freed people" (בני חורין), *ŏrumakkāran*. See Pirqey Avot , 15.

[12] See Gamliel, 2009.

[13] The query regards the status of those "lacking pedigree" as equal Jews in respect to intermarriage and certain ritual privileges. See Johnson, 1975: 24-26. See also Feinstein, 1889: 142.

[14] See Katz and Goldberg, 1993: 142-143.

[15] The major families as described to Jacob Sapir (1874) in the nineteenth century were Zakkay, Kastiel, Ashkenazi, Rothenberg, Raḥabi, and Hallegua. Except for the name Zakkay, all family names reflect Western origins in Spain, Germany, and Syria. The *paradeśis* claimed that the Zakkay family was descended from an ancient Malabari royal dynasty. It might be that the Zakkays belonged to one of the Malabari communities before the sixteenth century, and they joined the European migrants because of rivalries within the Malabari communities.

[16] See Katz and Goldberg, 1993: 142-144; Segal, 1993: 42-43.

[17] See Mandelbaum, 1975: 183-185.

[18] It is not clear whether Malabari Jews were divided into *mǝyuḥasim* and *hā'eynam mǝyuḥasim* or when this terminology appeared. Feinstein claims that the *Kaṭavumbhāgakkār* in Kochi were regarded *hā'eynām mǝyuḥāsim*. However, some Kerala Jews in Israel still remember the scandal that led to excommunicating Kaṭavumbhāgam-Kŏcci community during the second half of the nineteenth century. See Feinstein, 1889: 81. For the social category of *mǝyuḥāsim*, see Walerstein, 1987: 54-61.

[19] The project is under the auspices of the Ben-Zvi Institute in collaboration with Jarmo Förstrom and Miriam Dekel.

[20] This division into conversational genres, short simple forms, and complex forms is based on comparing the materials in contemporary Jewish Malayalam and may not be universal. However, see Koch, 1994 for simple forms and Abrahams, 1976 for conversational genres.

[21] For *blason populaire* see Koch, 1994, 19-25.

[22] Coinages and technical terms can also be regarded as jargon; however, I wish to differentiate social jargon from religious jargon.

[23] Bakhtin (1986: 60-62) specifies primary (simple) and secondary (complex) speech genres, claiming that the first form the base materials for the second.

[24] For the proverb, see Koch, 1994: 227-241; see also Hasan-Rokem, 1993: 15-20. For the joke, see Koch, 1994: 123-130; see also Navon, 1983.

[25] For the definition of the folktale, see Koch, 1994, 106-110. For the Jewish oicotypes, see Noy, 1971: 171-177.

[26] Daniel and Johnson, 1995: 92.

[27] The story behind this *blason populaire* is quite intricate and complex, and it has conflicting versions. It also has to do with the excommunication of the *kaṭavumbhāgakkār* in the nineteenth century. Note how the *blason populaire* is interrelated with other simple forms, the anecdote and the *memorabile*.

[28] See Koch, 1994: 22-23.

[29] So at least in regard to contemporary spoken Malayalam in the Angamaly area in central Kerala.

[30] See Padmanabha Pillai, 1923 [2006], 478. Christians use this term in the same sense.

[31] According to Padmanabha Pillai, 1923 [2006], it is defined as a Muslim guru (*muhammadīyaguru*) and derived from Arabic.

[32] By consonant contraction, as in *mukaḷil > moḷil*, "above"; *pakuti > pāti*, "half"; *matilakaṃ > moloṃ*, "palace, inner compound."

[33] Goitein and Friedman, 2008: 68, 713.

[34] According to Koch, 1994, the definition of proverbs is problematic (227).

[35] Aravind, 2006: 80.

[36] These two proverbs are unknown to contemporary Malayalam speakers in Kerala that are not Jews.

[37] There is indeed a generic overlap between riddles and proverbs. See Abrahams, 1976: 197.

[38] Translations are one of the essential criteria to define a Jewish Language. See Bar-Asher, 2002: 81-83. Kerala Jews had two types of translations, *tamsir* translations and *arttham* translations. The first term denotes verbatim translations of Hebrew Scriptures and paraliturgy propagated by the men. The second type involves female-oriented translations.

[39] Possibly a dialectical form for the old genitive ending *-in* (see Ramaswamy Ayyar, 1939: 30).

[40] The Jewish Malayalam songs were preserved in writing, while at the same time they were orally transmitted. For the Jewish Malayalam songs see Johnson, 1975; Daniel and Johnson, 1995: 145-191; Zacharia and Gamliel, 2005; Gamliel, 2006.

[41] As the project of documenting Jewish Malayalam is still in its initial stages, a systematic method for transcription is yet to be devised. Moreover, for an accurate transcription a native Jewish Malayalam speaker who can also read and write the Malayalam script is necessary.

[42] For the Hebrew component versus the Modern Hebrew component in oral story telling by Ladino speakers, see Held, 2007.

[43] When Elias first told this story, the vehicle of Rabbi Akiva was a serpent with a myriad of hoods. Unfortunately, it was Saturday, and I was not allowed to record her.

[44] See Yassif, 1994: 52-57, 332-339; see also Alexander, 1984.

[45] In nineteenth-century Kochi, Jewish holidays were officially recognized, so that Jews were exempted from work in the government service and from exams and classes in the schools.

[46] According to Alexander (1984: 89), the basic pattern of the story is threefold: (1) murder of a boy; (2) accusing the Jews, who react with fasting and prayers. A mythic savior comes to the rescue (Elijah the prophet or a famous rabbi), revives the child, who tells the truth and dies again; (3) the culprits are punished and the Jews are favored.

[47] In her first telling told in public during Saturday and hence unrecorded, Elias described the animal vehicle as a serpent with many hoods, and in her second and recorded telling, it was a lion. The manifold hooded serpent is the Viw6us vehicle, and the lion is the vehicle of Durga and Ayyappan. A Jewish equivalent might be the white donkey on which the Messiah is supposed to mount at the end of times.

[48] See Yassif, 1994: 52-54, 557.

[49] See Katz and Goldberg, 1993: 139-140.

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The Sterilized Otherness: India in Israel, Israel in India

By Dalya Markovich and Ktzia Alon

The complex cultural connection between India and Israel has been given prominent expression in the Israeli cultural field in recent years. The intensive cultural dynamic between Israel and India has many phenomena, and recently many books by Indian authors have been translated into Hebrew. No small number of works have met with considerable popularity and become bestsellers, positioning their Indian authors within the local cultural tissue. At the same time, in recent years India has become a part of Israeli literary works in many and varied ways. These writings, as they appear in prose, reference books, plays, and even newspaper reporting, will be the focus of this essay.[1]

The tremendous creative outpouring linking India and Israel has given rise to a number of key questions: What are the mechanisms of acceptance of India in Israel? What is the unique voice signature that Indian culture is creating in the Israeli experience? And what new horizons is it spreading before the Israeli reader?

Two principal channels enable the consumption of India in Israel: tourism and spirituality. We claim that these channels, as well as the manner of consumption of Indian and Anglo-Indian literature in Israel are sterilizing the Indian experience from the profound political dimension inherent in it, and are mediating the Indian culture, mainly as a noisy exotic tissue of sounds, odors, and colors.

The Israeli visit to India is made possible by means of two central subject positions: The local ethnocentric perspective and the spiritual Western perspective. The acceptance mechanism of India in Israel is anchored in the actual backpacking trek to the subcontinent that many Israelis take.[2] According to Darya Maoz,[3] the Israeli tourists represent all age groups: young people going on a journey of passage upon completion of their military service, young people in their late twenties who are facing fateful decisions in their lives, people in "midlife" (aged 40-50) who want to bring or restore a little bit of adventure to their lives, and middle-aged tourists who want to prove their capability, power, and confidence. The actual journey into the subcontinent imbues the Indian experience with cultural and symbolic implications alike. The Israeli backpacker's journey of passage appears in many local works in the domains of literature, poetry, and drama. The Israeli backpacker who commits his experiences to paper describes the Indian experience as a "must have" item in the standard biography that characterizes "normative Israeliness." Idit Heichal[4] called the Israeli experience in India "traveling localism." This name hints at the ways in which ethnocentric Israeli culture colors the Indian experience. The average Israeli backpacker brings his local Israeli culture with him to India and doesn't invest much effort to acquire an in-depth knowledge of the local Indian culture. Nachi Alon[5] even claims that Israeli backpackers recreate the patterns of militaristic masculine fraternity that were instilled in them in the framework of their military service. This is how the famous Indian writer Pankaj Mishra describes them in his novel, *The Romantics:* "In more prominent numbers the tourists were devoid of any spiritual ambitions, American adolescents and the suntanned young Israelis, recently discharged from their compulsory army service, who would congregate in the late evenings in the filthy video shack run by elegantly dressed young Tibetans in shiny jackets and earrings."[6]

The imposition of Israeli travel patterns on the Indian space does not enable genuine contact with the Otherness.[7][7] As a direct result of this, the weak contact with Indian culture does not find prominent expression in the ways in which India is imported into Israel. The Israeli space is scattered with various "Indian" phenomena: Indian restaurants, "Indian festivals," Indian music and more. However, most of the Indian products sold in Israel are not authentic products. Many backpackers choose to move the Indian experience to Israel, that is, that selfsame tourist hybrid that they themselves

created during their trip to India. This alternative makes its presence felt in many ways. Thus, for example, restaurants that are created by Israeli backpackers who settled in India for Israeli backpackers who frequent India (restaurants that are light years away from the authentic Indian standard) are reproduced in the Israeli space. In other words, the Israeli restaurant in Israel emulates the Israeli restaurant in India. This is a quotation of a quotation of a quotation; a simulacrum that has long lost the source. A similar trend is also taking place in the domain of attire. The clothing perceived as "Indian" actually reproduces the variation on tradition Indian clothing that Western esthetics have created. Such are the psychedelic sharwals (loose-fitting cotton pants with elastic waistbands) that come from a Western drug culture that developed in the Far East, the sheer and scanty tank tops, etc.

It should be noted that there is an authentic Indian Jewish community in Israel, which emigrated in the 1950s, mainly from Bombay and Cochin. The Indian community settled mainly in the poor city of Ramla and in remote areas of the Negev—the poor southern desert region of the State of Israel. The Indian immigrants were labeled as "Orientals" in Israel, that is, those who emigrated from undeveloped countries. This image adhered to them for many years. However, from the moment a trip to the Orient was adopted as a widespread practice among the middle class, the indicator— India—suddenly became a desirable cultural resource. This change also reflects on the Indian community in Israel. Thus, for example, former residents of Cochin living in the failing moshav (collective farm) decided to abandon agriculture and embark instead on a tourism project based on the Israeli experience in India. "Cochin-Land" is planned as an amusement park that will enable Israelis to recreate "authentic" tourism experiences. Be that as it may, in the popular cultural space, India does not constitute a construct of the existing world, in and of itself.

These blind spots are also manifested in the diverse literary works written about India in Hebrew. Many Israeli writers have turned the trip to India into the central theme of their work. First and foremost is the canonic novel *Return to India* by author Avraham B. Yehoshua.[8] The plot woven by Yehoshua is based on a quotation from the *Bhagavad Gita*, which constitutes a central part of the major Indian epic poem, *The Mahabharata*: "You are given the authority to act, but it alone / and never its outcomes / the outcomes of your actions must never lead you / but you must also not become addicted to inaction (The Song of the Blessed, Chapter 2, Verse 45). The quotation, which constitutes a motto for Yehoshua's book, refers to the various modes of being an active person in the world.

However, despite the novel's salient qualities, India is perceived in the book mainly as a spiritual arena and a basis for forbidden romantic relations, but not as a political arena. Later literature that was written about the Israeli-Indian encounter also fails to address the complexity presented by Yehoshua. Contemporary Hebrew literature, as Omri Herzog claims,[9] perceives the reflection of its face in the Indian mirror. Herzog notes the cultural blindness and lack of reflectivity of Israeli writers who attempt to commit the Indian experience to paper. Herzog claims that India's exotic power enables Israeli writers to cast a partial and one-sided look at India. This look is structured by means of basic premises that operate simultaneously: "mystification of the autobiographical experience; imaginary access to cultural otherness by means of tourism consumer activity; and reification of people and places to negotiable esthetic objects."[10] The biographical experience of the Israeli writers and the global consumer ethos that has taken over the realm of tourism[11] drive the way in which India is written about and overshadows the real India. It is important to note that this disregard of contemporary India also extracts the dark side of the subcontinent from Israeli prose: the rise of nationalism, the poverty, the status of women, the rigid social caste structure, etc.

Another unique literary genre that has recently developed in Israel is based on the experience of Israeli tourists who were incarcerated in Indian prisons.[12] This literature adopts the code that was dictated by the intensive media coverage of such cases in Israel.

Both the documentary narrative and the dialogue created by the local media have committed to paper the narrative of the denunciation and accusation directed against the Indian legal system. At times this narrative ignores the criminal offenses ostensibly committed by the tourists.[13] This message defines the Indian legal system as a failed, arbitrary, and corrupt system, as compared with the Israeli legal and justice systems, which are ostensibly pure and unsullied. This act recreates the national rescue ethos, which developed along with the phenomenon of Israeli backpacking. This ethos is conducted in accordance with the basic premise that countries that are not located in the West are countries devoid of law and order, and therefore Israel has the obligation to rescue its "prodigal sons" overseas at any price. It is not by chance that such "prison literature" did not develop around the experience of Israelis in prisons located in the West. Casting such blame on the non-Western world is based on a narcissistic-Eurocentric perspective that is complimentary to the "Western" Israel and to Israeliness per se.

Ethnocentricity and militarism are also present in the representations of India on the Israeli stage. This attitude is manifested reflexively in the successful play, *The Guide to the Good Life*, which was written and directed by Yael Ronen. Ronen equates the Israeli trip experience in India with the military existence taking place in the West Bank. The play exposes the manner in which the patronizing and rude attitude employed by Israeli soldiers in the Occupied Territories is shifted to the civilian Indian space. The soldiers, who have become backpackers, displace the code of militaristic "comradeship" that unites the soldiers-tourists into a single cohesive entity that is against the Other. The displacement of these patterns to the "big trip" to India establishes the Indians as a type of enemy. This diabolical circle does not enable the backpackers to turn the "trip to the east" into a reflexive moratorial space that exposes the complex character of the Other.[14] Continuing this trend, researcher Gish Amit[15]wonders when the Israeli work will succeed in being written out of reflexive reading. This type of reading will evaluate the manner in which Indian culture is mediated in the Western power field, and on the multiple effects that the presence of India in the West creates.[16]

The spiritual dialogue, which accounts for a significant portion of the New Age literature written in Israel, presents a similar relationship with the Indian subcontinent. Spiritual discourse and practice are booming in Israel. Thousands of Israelis frequent festivals, workshops, yoga classes, and encounters with Indian gurus and monks. This widespread phenomenon has made its mark on the spiritual culture that is being created in Israel. These experiences are translated into Israeli literature in two ways: One attempts to combine Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism into a singly hybrid entity, while the other reduces the spiritual way into instrumental-utilitarian practices. Various spiritual books published recently in Israel attempt to formulatethe points of contact between Jewish culture in Hindi and Buddhist culture. This holds true, for example, for the collection of articles entitled *From India to Here: Israeli Thinkers Write about India and Their Jewishness,*[17] which opens a complex fan of interrelationships between various spiritual phenomena. Another type of interreligious dialogue is the focus of the book, *When Moshe Met Buddha,*[18] which was coauthored by religious Zionist Nachum Langental and Israeli Buddhist priest Nissim Amon. Despite the interest aroused by both books, both appear to reduce the threat inherent in the encounter with Indian spirituality, by means of perceiving the interreligious contact as a bridge for deepening the commitment to Judaism. Literature of this type does not attempt to expand the religious horizon of Judaism to additional spiritual sites, or to formulate a new theological-moral project [19] that intertwines various spiritual dialogues.[20]

Another type of spiritual dialogue generally perceives India as a mine of escapist spirituality. Hebrew translations of Ragnish Osho's books are one example of this widespread trend. These books are generally translated verbatim, remaining blind to the Israeli experience in which they attempt to become assimilated. Spirituality apparently

offers an escape hatch from the stressful Israeli reality. This displacement eliminates any political dimension[21] from the spiritual practice, and thus the spiritual praxis becomes purely an individual activity that cannot contain an explicit political dialogue like the one that Mahatma Gandhi's[22] doctrine provides. Another type of spiritual literature that reduces the spiritual experience into a functional repertoire of practices that are conducted under psychological[23] codes or inexpensive self-help books are of the *Change Your Life in Ten Steps* genre. Some of these books attempt to use the terminology offered by Western psychology in order to bridge the epistemological abyss, and sometimes the ethnological abyss as well, which yawns between the description of "Jewish" reality and the spiritual dialogue imported from India.

The "spiritual literature" shelves are not the only ones that have recently been enriched with translations into Hebrew. In recent years the belles-lettres shelves have also become a cornucopia overflowing with literature written by Indians. The "Indian wave" is a global phenomenon. The accepted point of reference in the historiography of the "Indian wave" is the awarding of the Booker Prize to young Salman Rushdie for his monumental book, *Midnight's Children*. In her article, Yael Meorer analyzes the complex relationship between the English used in Rushdie's works and the rich Indian heritage that is present in his writing.[24] The clash between the English language, with its attendant colonial cultural charge, and the Indian culture, which bears the burden of forced colonialism, places the Anglo-Indian writer in a complex and charged creative space. This tension is clearly expressed in the literature that was created by Rushdie's many successors as well. In many works the postcolonial perspective has become the central outline on which the plot is refracted. Apparently the Indian writers must formulate their identity vis-à-vis the cultural challenge presented by the West. This reality is not characteristic of Indian writers exclusively. Many cultures that are positioned on the fringes of the Eurocentric space cast yearning eyes at the imagined Western center. Other Indian writers, the second generation of Indians who immigrated to the West, view the Indian experience from the Western center of gravity. Jhumpa Lahiri is a salient example of this trend. Lahiri writes about an India that she has never experienced, except through the mediation of her parents. Lahiri's India is the object of yearning, but also a distant and foreign space. In the complex tissue woven by Lahiri, the United States and India are refracted in one another. Her novel, *The Namesake,* and her collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies,* function like two inverted mirrors: one reflects the character of the Indians in America, while the other reflects the character of the Americans in India. The yearning for the West reduces the Indian heritage to the point of exoticism, while the cultural assets of the West are experienced solely as a superficial phenomenon.

The literature written by Indians in the West raises key questions pertaining to issues of creativity, ethnicity, and identity. One topic for discussion raised by the Indian authors who write in the West is that of the Other's options for speaking within the hegemonious space. The issue on the agenda is the very possibility of the Other making his voice heard through the dense thicket of stereotypical images in which the character of the Other has been saturated. Along with the reflexive position offered by Anglo-Indian literature, leading Indian theoreticians have developed the postcolonial dialogue. Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are the most prominent names in this field. While Homi Bhabha evaluated the phenomena of refraction and imitation that are characteristic of the postcolonial situation, Spivak asked a question that is both pointed and rhetorical: "Can the Subaltern Speak?" These researchers posed a tremendous challenge for the discourse that is waging in the West. It should be noted that in Israel as well this trend is enjoying a theoretical repercussion that is arousing interest, but it remains delimited and isolated within the academic ivory tower. While the Indian academic discourse and literature attempt to bring the dichotomous East-West tension to the surface, Israeli literature chooses to ignore the non-judgmental yearning for the Eurocentric center of

gravity.[25] Israel does not adopt the postcolonial perspective that is offered to it by leading Indian authors and theoreticians, in order to use it to analyze its location within the Middle Eastern space. It is the esthetics, the food, the apolitical academic projects,[26] and the hybrid backpacker culture performances that represent India in the Israeli cultural discourse. These representations establish Israel's status as an "advanced" cultural space and as an integral part of the Western discourse.

Notes

[1] This article may have a retrospective nature summarizing 25 years of intensive Israeli presence in the Indian subcontinent according to the article "Shanti, the Next Generation," which was published in the popular newspaper Yediot Ahronot on March 29, 2007: Israeli young people are no longer traveling to India as their destination of choice. The article deals with the attempt to introduce changes in the Boombamela Festival, a festival that has been closely identified with those who have visited India. According to the interviewees, in recent years there has been a sharp drop in the number of merrymakers who visit the festival, due to the character of the new generation of young people, who now seek money and achievements and reject the "spiritual" experience and other moratorial experiences that involve experimentation, trial and error, and search for a way.
[2] Between 50,000 and 60,000 Israeli backpackers visit India each year.
[3] Darya Maoz, "Lifecycle Aspects of the Israelis' Journey to India." 2005. Essay submitted as a requirement for a Ph.D., Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
[4] Idit Heichal, "Israeli Localism Roaming in the East, the 'Trip to the East' Experience, its Effects on the Travelers' Perception of Life." 2000. Essay submitted as a requirement for a master's degree, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
[5] Nachi Alon, "Living and Travelling," *Politics* (34) (1990): 35-38
[6] Pankaj Mishara, *The Romantics*. 2001. Hebrew translation. Translated from the English by Tzila Elazar and Zmora Beitan, p. 208.
[7] A new form of tourism is apparently taking shape, even as we speak, a form that combines volunteerism and a traditional trip. The volunteer system includes saving sea turtles in Greece, rehabilitating wild animals in Bolivia, teaching English in India and Nepal, etc. For further details see Darya Maoz, "Volunteers to the Ends of the Earth," *Another Life* (127) (2007): 35-48.
[8] Abraham B. Yehoshua, *Return to India: A Novel in Four Parts* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 1994).
[9] Omri Herzog, "The Journey to India in Hebrew Literature," *Iton* 77, vols. 320-321 (May 2007), p. 18.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Zigmonet Bauman, *Globalization: the Human Aspect,* translated from the English by Gershon Hazanov (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2002).
[12] Ravit Shirik and Shlomo Avramovich, *In India Nobody Asks Why*, 2003; Gili Haskin, *A Prisoner of her* Charm (Tel Aviv: Proza, 2006).
[13] There is a profound difference between the charge sheet filed against Shriki and the one filed against Haskin. In this article we would merely like to note the basic phenomenon, and not to deal with the details of any one specific case.
[14] It is important to note that alongside the reduction of the Indian experience to the point of cheap exoticism, Israeli culture is also creating a fruitful dialectical relationship with Indian culture. Many perceive India as a source of inspiration. In many cases traditional Indian dance, music, poetry, and prose have served as a genuine bridge for getting to know the Other. This interest is also manifested in academic circles devoted to India

studies at Israeli universities. However, it is important to note that many of these representations are again devoid of a clear political dimension addressing the postcolonial debate and its clear implications on Israel.

[15] Gish Amit, "Dalrymple?" *Iton* 77, vols. 320-321 (May 2007), p. 24.

[16] Amit parallels the lack of sensitivity revealed in Israeli literature with the trip books that were written by Western authors, such as *City of Djinns* by British author William Dalyrmple, translated from the English by Sharona Guri (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2004). Amit claims that Dalrymple succeeds in tracing the Indian experience with a degree of sensitivity and reflexivity that are not characteristic of the Israeli corpus.

[17] Elhanan Nir, ed., *From India to Here: Israeli Thinkers Write about India and Their Jewishness* (Jerusalem: Reuven Mass Publishing House, 2006).

[18] Nachum Langental and Nissim Amon, *When Moshe Met Buddha* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 2005).

[19] It is evident that the JuBu—Jewish Buddhist—option that exists in the American space poses a threat to Israeli Orthodoxy.

[20] Researcher Yohanan Grinshpon, in his book *Silence and Liberty in Classic Yoga* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 2002), presents the Jewish reader with the spiritual option that yoga has to offer—the Sutras of Patanjali. This option could also be known as a leveraging option for the Indian discourse. Other books that attempt to contrast the Indian Otherness with the Israeli reader include the books by Shlomo Biderman, *Philosophical Journeys: India and the West* (Tel Aviv: Miskal Publishing House, 2003), and those of Ofira Gamliel, *Shiva in the Pine Forest* (Tel Aviv: Keter Publishing House, 1999) and *Yogi, Kings and Divine Women* (Tel Aviv: Keter Publishing House, 2001), which present stories from Indian mythology.

[21] Ragnish Osho's students in Israel were among the founders of the Green Leaf political party, which attempted to promote the use of soft drugs. Due to its unconventional nature, this party stood out in the world of Israeli party politics, whose main concerns are the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and the various burning social issues in Israel.

[22] It should be noted that M. K. Gandhi's autobiography, *An Autobiography or the Story of an Experiment with the Truth,* translated from the English by Yantz Levy (Asia Publishing House, 1957) was recently retranslated.

[23] On the attempt to link spiritual experiences with Western psychology, see Daniel Goleman's book, *Destructive Emotions, How We Can Overcome Them*, translated from the English by Baruch Gefen (New York: Bantam Books, 2003; Modan Publishing House, Ben Shemen, 2005).

[24] Yael Meorer, "Mother India and Father Rushdie, or Why We Love to Read Indian Prose," *Iton* 77, vols. 320-321 (May 2007), p. 10.

[25] See the groundbreaking article by researcher Sarah Hinski ("Eyes Half Shut, about the Syndrome of Acquired Albinoism in Israeli Art," in *Colonialism and the Postcolonial Situation*, ed. by Yehuda Shenhav [Jerusalem: The Van Leer Institute, 2004], pp. 257-285), where Israeli plastic art's pursuit of dominant esthetic models originating in the West is discussed. Hinski claims that "the bleaching powder" is the dominant practice that guides local patterns of creativity, at a time when other esthetic traditions that were imported to Israel from the Hindi and Moslem world were rejected to the despised fringes of the local cultural scene.

[26] The studies conducted by Roni Parchak (Tel Aviv University) are a lone voice linking the postcolonial insights stemming from the Indian debate and Israeli reality. Also of note is the book by David Shulman, Israel's most senior researcher on the subject of India, *Bitter Hope* (Jerusalem: Carmel Publishing House, 2007), a diary documenting his experiences in

the activist political organization Tayush, which works for the welfare of Palestinians in the West Bank.

The Prince, the Hermit, and the *Kohen:* [1] Stories from a Buddha-Tradition in the First Printed Hasidic Book

By Aryeh Wineman

Two decades after the death of the Baal Shem Tov ("the *Besht*"), the first Hasidic book appeared in print. That first printed Hasidic work was *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, a collection of homilies on the Torah's weekly portions by Ya'akov Yosef ha-Kohen of Polonnoye (d.1781 or 1782).[2] Alongside the expected standard rabbinic and kabbalistic texts, the library of the extensive collection of sources from which Ya'akov Yosef of Polonnoye quoted in his homilies occasionally included also popular medieval narrative works. Examples include a few fables and parables from *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir* ("The Prince and the Hermit"),[3] which made their way into the preacher's initial collection of homilies. *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir* is a medieval Hebrew translation (or adaptation) in rhymed prose (*maqama*) by the twelfth-century Barcelona translator and poet, Avraham ben Shmu'el ha-Levi Ibn Hasdai, of an earlier, Arabic work that no longer exists. That Arabic work, like Ibn Hasdai's Hebrew version, is viewed today as part of a cross-cultural body of narratives and dialogues attached to a rendition of the traditional legend of the Buddha's coming to reject the values of his father's court. Even though the realization of the basic tale's connection with the actual historical Buddha was long lost, the tale itself together with the stories connected with it became popular in medieval literature in many different languages.[4]

It is not clear to what degree Ibn Hasdai's work is a translation or an embellishment of his source, but many of the fables, parables, and sayings are found in parallel works in other languages similarly inspired by the Buddha-legend. The core story of *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir* follows the general lines of the early life of Buddha in Buddhist tradition as found in the Pali Canon: While most of the king's advisors foretell that his infant son would grow up to be a king of kings, one advisor foresaw a different future for the prince, namely that he would be a holy man and an ascetic. As the infant was the king's only son and potential heir, the king does everything to prevent such an eventuality. He builds a palace for his son where he would know only pleasure and delight and would be sheltered from any awareness of suffering and distress in the world, a strategy that ultimately fails as the prince comes to witness disease and death, an awareness that, upon reflection, brings the prince to reject his royal life and role.

The legend as found in *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir* does not follow Buddhist tradition to the point where the prince escapes from the palace to become an ascetic and ultimately discovers the secret of enlightenment. It consists rather of a series of conversations between the prince and the ascetic figure who becomes his spiritual influence. Within those conversations, the hermit relates many parables and fables to make a case for the futility of all desires, pleasures, and worldly pursuits, stories that bear consonance with the core story of the prince.

Many parables in medieval Jewish philosophical writings were drawn from Arabic sources, though it is recognized that some came to those sources from regions further east such as Persia and India.[5] While it cannot be certain whether those fables have their roots in India or whether some may have been additions accumulated during the course of its earlier translations or renditions, the stories certainly reflect the temper of the Indian Buddhist legend of Buddha's youth which, in its basic aspects, is recounted in Ibn Hasdai's translation. While some of the stories are found today only in the Hebrew text,[6] it is likely that they derived from Ibn Hasdai's Arabic source (and from the latter's earlier source or sources) and may have been included in other later texts in other languages, texts that did not survive.

Ibn Hasdai's work, which appeared in the early thirteenth century, was printed originally in Constantinople in 1518 and was followed by numerous reprintings including,

closer to our own time, A. M. Habermann's annotated and vocalized version.[7] The names of the prince and the ascetic in this multilinguistic body of literature, often Josaphat and Barlaam or variants of those names, vary from language to language, and almost certainly Ibn Hasdai did not identify the prince as Buddha, just as the authors or translators of parallel works in other languages failed to grasp the real subject of the frame tale. Marco Polo, in his travels, was surprised to encounter what was to him a familiar story but one that he would never have thought to relate to Buddha.[8] Ibn Hasdai was presumably drawn to this work both for the power of the central tale itself and for the moral and philosophical reflections on the futility of life's strivings and worldly attainments, a theme voiced in some significant strands in Jewish literature and thought in medieval Spain. As a striking example, note Moshe Ibn Ezra's poem, *ha-Hayyim ve-hamavvet*,[9] and the same type of reflections on the nature of life is present also in other poems by Moshe Ibn Ezra and also in those by Yehuda haLevi in which the influence of the biblical book of Ecclesiastes can be felt. The theme of death is a frequent subject in medieval Hebrew poetry written in Spain.

The work's basic tale is found in *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir*, *sha'arim* 4-8. In that tale, the prince's father, fearful that his son might grow up to be an ascetic and holy man, made all efforts to provide for his son an isolated and protected world of luxury and sensual delight, shielding him from all awareness of life's vicissitudes including disease, aging, and death. His strategy was foiled, however, due in part to the counterstrategy of the ascetic, himself a former prince who, posing as a gem merchant, finds a way to connect with the prince and subtly bring him to an awareness of the more distressful aspects of human experience. Under the influence of the subversive hermit, who placed himself at risk of persecution by the king of that state, the prince outgrows his naïve innocence and comes to question and reject the values of his father's court such as power, pleasure, and wealth, in favor of a deeper, contemplative and ascetic path. The hermit later left the scene to save his life, as the prince's father had banished such ascetics from his kingdom and even assigned them to be burned alive as an example to others who might be drawn to their world-view and their path in life.

The versions of this tradition, found in many different languages and cultures, tend to color the teaching of the ascetic in a way acceptable in terms of the prevailing religious ideology. In European versions, as in the Coptic version, for example, the ascetic is a Christian monk.[10] It is reasonable to speculate that at an earlier point in the migration of the stories beyond the orbit of India, the world-view voiced in the work came to be formulated in terms of more acceptable and conformist concepts and practices, a reformulation that would have made the work more accessible also to Jewish readers where the ascetic's way of life is explained in terms of rather normative Jewish values of 'avodat ha'elohim (worship), Torah study, and *mitsvoth*. The more radical Buddhist sense of Enlightenment and Nirvana acquired a theistic cultural and religious form as immortality in the World-to-Come ('olam haba).

In the first printed Hasidic text, *Toledot Ya'akov Yosef*,[11] a work that both influenced the spread of eighteenth-century Hasidism and incited marked hostility toward the pietistic movement, Ya'akov Yosef ha-Kohen of Polonnoye quoted two stories directly from *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir*.[12] It also included an additional story quoted from Bayha Ibn Pekuda's *Hovot halevavot* ("The Duties of the Heart"), one that however is also found in *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir*. The Hasidic preacher, who was obviously unaware that the medieval work from which he quoted goes back to the tradition centered around Buddha, grasped the fables as an integral part of the network of canonical Jewish sacred texts, including the Talmud, which are interwoven and illuminate one another as though all emanating from a single root in Jewish traditional literature and teaching.

The Dogs, the Corpse, and the Man

Within the course of their conversations as recounted in *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir,* the prince asks his teacher why it is that the pious and ascetics are hated, and more pointedly: Why is it that his own father, the king, drives such people away, expelling them, and even burning them alive? The hermit proceeded to explain such   hatred by means of a parable of dogs that are attacking a dead animal, each one seizing whatever it can obtain from the corpse, and fighting among themselves for the remains of the animal. While the dogs are attacking the animal corpse, they notice a man in the distance on his way to work.   Though that person has no interest in the dead animal, the dogs nevertheless assume that the man is coming to take the corpse away from them, depriving them of what has value in their eyes. A *nevelah*, a sick animal that died and is then attacked by other animals—something that would evoke a sense of disgust—serves as symbol and comment upon worldly desires and strivings.   The ascetic teacher utilizes this parable to convey to the prince why it is that people who worship idols and eat the "bread of nerves," feel such hatred for "people of religion."[13]   E. A. Wallis Budge pointed out that this particular parable is found today only in the Hebrew work and translation and not in any other extant versions of the Buddha-tale and traditions in European or Near Eastern languages,[14] although, as suggested above, it is likely that many versions of this tradition have been lost over time.

The Polonnoye preacher, in one of his homilies, confronted the seeming paradox in that logically the wicked should be jealous of the pious, whereas in reality the wicked are known for their hostility toward the devout.   Since that hatred is illogical and hence stands in need of explanation, the preacher utilized this parable from *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir.*[15]

In the homilist's rendition, the dogs understand the man's presence in one of two ways: Either the man is seeking to take the corpse from the dogs—as explained by the hermit in the earlier source—or in seeing the dogs' seizing the corpse, the man detests the dogs.   In either case, the dogs respond by attacking the man.   The choice of a corpse to represent worldly desires is in itself a very poignant comment on the nature of material desires and strivings, and those pursuing material desires are, by implication, likened to dogs whose drives suggest subhuman values.   Those who are occupied with the pursuit of worldly delights then react with hatred toward the pious who have different values, and the pursuits of the devout serve as commentary on the strivings of others who associate higher delights, spiritual and heavenly in nature, with what is bitter rather than sweet. Many people would intuitively associate "sitting and studying in the World-to-Come with crowns upon their heads"[16] with darkness rather than light.   The real darkness, though, is their very inability to experience delight in Torah study and prayer. That evaluation echoes Maimonides' analysis of illness as involving a distorted sense of taste: What is bitter seems sweet to the ill, while that which is sweet tastes bitter to them.[17]

The Polonnoye preacher also returned to this parable in connection with the Plague of Darkness (Exod. 10:21-23). Going beyond earlier suggestions that the darkness in that plague was not merely the absence of light but was substantive in nature,[18] the homilist understood that plague as other than an objective, physical darkness. He went so far as to maintain, somewhat paradoxically, that the plague was itself light, even though the light was experienced by many as darkness. For the wicked, as for the dogs in the parable, *'oneg* (delight) becomes—through a reordering of the word's letters—*nega'* (plague, affliction), with the result that what would otherwise be experienced as light, sweetness, and heavenly is felt instead to be bitter, dark, and intolerable by those unattuned to the light.

King for a Year

Elsewhere in the *Toldot*,[19] Ya'akov Yosef quoted a parable from Bahya Ibn Pekudah's *Hovot halevavot* ("Duties of the Heart," *Sha'ar 'avodat Elohim*), a parable however which is also found in *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir*, *sha'ar* 13. Bahya, writing in the eleventh century, included many parables in his classic work without indicating their source but which are thought to be taken from the teachings and lore of the Sufis[20] who would have had access to this story prior to Ibn Hasdai's translation.

The parable tells of a practice, observed in a state in India, that upon noting a good-natured and innocent foreigner, the people of the state would appoint him to be king over them. Then after a year they would banish him from the palace and from the state, driving him out barefoot and naked without any sustenance or possessions whatsoever. One such foreigner who was appointed and honored as king, however, was suspicious of his situation, and so he befriended an official and inquired of him concerning the customs of the place. The official complied only after the stranger, now king, took an oath not to reveal what the official would disclose to him of their practice. That friend then advised him to store up for himself gold and silver elsewhere so that he might have recourse to it following his year as king when he will be deposed and driven out from the palace. In relating the story to the young prince, the hermit views the role of the kings' friend in the parable as similar to his own role in conveying the realization that in life we are all such "kings for a year" after which we must leave this world, taking nothing with us.

The Polonnoye homilist explained, by analogy, that the nature of life in this world resembles such a kingdom in which each person, at a certain point in time, is suddenly sent away empty-handed. Ya'akov Yosef explicated the parable to convey that whatever we acquire in this world is not ours, and we leave this world much like the king who is expelled at the end of his year-long reign.   Only what one stores up for himself in the World-to-Come is really his.

The preacher quotes or refers to this parable a number of times in the *Toldot* including homilies #3, 4, and 10 on the Torah portion, *Shoftim*. The third homily on that Torah portion connects the parable with a Talmudic passage concerning Monabaz, a first-century king of Adiabene and a convert to Judaism, who used for the needs of people during years of famine all the money that had been stored up by his fathers. He countered criticism by his family in explaining that his fathers stored up money for this world while, in his charitable deeds, he stored riches for the World-to-Come.[21] Spelling out the parable's implications more precisely,[22] Ya'akov Yosef explained that when death strikes a mortal, either one has belongings of a spiritual nature or he leaves life totally empty-handed. The preacher understands the Torah's regulation that the people select a king *mikerev ahekha* ("from among your brethren," Deut. 17:15) in the sense of the person's knowing the ways of the locality—in this case his being aware that we are but kings for a year and consequently all pride and arrogance are utterly senseless, as in the grave a person lacks all status and position.   The preacher refers to the same parable also in the fourth homily on *Shoftim* together with the comment that "this world is only for the immediate hour, in contrast with the World-to-Come which is a permanent inheritance." The real value of any kind of reward or blessing given in this world—the homilist states—is only to enable one to be able to strive to acquire a portion in the World-to-Come.[23]

In the tenth homily on *Shoftim* in the *Toldot* a much fuller version of the parable is found. "...It is the way of the world that one wants to make this world into something permanent.... If one knows the true custom of the place, however, he will make himself a stranger in this world all his days and seek to acquire the World-to-Come which alone is lasting..."[24] And the foreigner is the person who does not grasp the local custom and fails to realize that each of us is like the person who will be king but for a year after which one leaves this world with empty hands.

The Light Seen in the Night

In his sixth homily on the Torah portion *Shemot* in *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, the preacher included a story quoted from *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir*, *sha'ar* 16, which the ascetic teacher tells to warn his pupil that one must be very careful about speaking with the king about the false nature of his life and beliefs. In the source, one night when the king, who put his trust in idols, could not fall asleep, he walked with his wise and understanding deputy during the night to survey what the people of the kingdom are doing. They came to *sha'ar ha-ashpot* ("the Gate of Garbage"), a huge heap of dung and garbage, and find there a bright light coming from a hole and residence resembling a cave. They notice there two poor, ugly persons, dressed in rags like beggars, singing joyfully with musical instruments, showing intimate affection to one another and referring to one another in the manner of royalty. Observing the scene, the king is utterly amazed at the couple's unbelievable joy even in their wretched situation.

Asked to explain the enigmatic scene, the deputy speaks of his fear that he and the king will attain that kind of joy though others will see them just as the king and his deputy see this couple—as a pitiful picture of persons living with an illusion of light and joy even when their life resembles a garbage heap. Even though the king is living a life of power and physical pleasure, his life and the world of his court more truly resemble a heap of dung and garbage—an analogy that the king, due to his own arrogance, is unable to grasp.

The deputy, who is a parallel figure to the prince's ascetic teacher in the larger frame story, carefully tells his king of another king who had falsely judged a man to be executed, and the man slated to be killed then warns the king that on the following day the king will be in his hands just as he is now in the hands of the king to do with him as he chooses. And the man speaks to him also of King David, who comes across a royal grave at Ziklag.[25] The dead king buried there tells David that though he had conquered many lands and brought them to a state of ruin and had possessed a thousand princesses, he now lies in a bed of dust and ashes, and the dead king expresses his wish that *zman* (the workings of time and fate) not mock David as it had mocked him. What emerges is the distinct sense that the king's glory is but a self-delusion that will burst, insofar as what he experiences as glory more truly resembles a heap of dung and garbage.

The deputy carefully and cautiously answers the king's questions by pointing out to him that "men of faith and asceticism" know the truth about life and have come to understand that ultimately everything lacks value except righteousness and satisfaction with one's lot in life. It is therefore the path of wisdom to cast off all desires and lusts and cease striving always for more, to discard the "garments of envy," and to serve God in love. And he adds the cautionary note that anyone who harms others must then live with fear of those he has harmed.

The deputy goes on to tell his king the story of another ruler who, one hot day, went hunting and ordered the lad carrying his weapons to invite whomever is around to join him in lunch. The lad found only one shepherd some distance away. That shepherd, however, refused the invitation, explaining that he can't eat because another, greater than the king, has invited him: God has called him to fast. When the king proceeded to suggest that the shepherd eat with him that day and fast on the following day, the shepherd agreed on condition that the king could guarantee that the shepherd will live to see the morrow. Embarrassed, the king had to admit that he is unable to make such a guarantee, and the shepherd went on his way.

The deputy took that opportunity to speak with the king concerning the kingdom that, unlike this world, is limitless and lasting joy, light, repose, security, and health. When the king voiced curiosity as to why the deputy had never before approached this subject in conversation with him, the deputy answered that a person has to arrive at

understanding through one's own mind and humility. One can find the World-to-Come, the deputy continues to explain, neither through money nor journeys nor things that are necessary for this world, but rather through one's words and one's heart. Realizing that only those truer treasures can bring true and lasting delight, the king sought the keys to those treasures. That world—the deputy then assures him—is open to all who seek it, but one must first detest the world that is its very antithesis. Under the impact of the continued teaching of his deputy, the king altered his ways, and the deputy influenced him further in the direction of awakening.

In *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, Ya'akov Yosef of Polonnoye made mention of this story in the sixth homily on the Torah portion *Shemot*[26] though the story as presented there differs significantly from what is found in *Sefer ben ha-melekh vehanazir*. We read, for example, that the king was walking at night with his officials to observe whether or not his subjects have heeded his prohibition against kindling a candle at night. Noting a bright light some distance away, the king drew near to find a garbage site, with a table and bench all made of garbage, and utensils of silver and gold upon the table. The king and his officials were able to see there a man and his wife in a very joyous mood; the officials laughed at them, but the king responded that others might similarly laugh at the king himself and his royal party.

It is possible that in preparing this homily the preacher did not have the text of *Sefer ben-hamelekh vehanazir* before him and relied upon his memory, allowing for a rendition that deviated from the written story in a way to lend itself to allusions connecting it to classical Jewish sources. The preacher recreated the story in a way that it connects with the regulation of examining leaven to the light of a candle with the first sign of dawn on the fourteen of *Nisan*, just preceding the *Pesah* ("Passover") festival.[27] He connected it also with the motif of David awakening in the middle of the night to study Torah,[28] explaining "midnight" (*hatsot*) as life's midpoint at which David awakened from his metaphorical sleep, his immersion in the delights of this world, before he proceeded to "saddle his materiality" (*hamoro*).[29] Ya'akov Yosef connected his rendition of the story also to the life-cycle and its fluctuations in a way to reflect the motivations of Torah students at different stages in their lives and offered an involved exposition of the story, one that winds its way through a series of passages and concepts from both Halakhic texts and the Zohar.

Having in mind the association of *Mitsrayim* (Egypt) with the Plague of Darkness and, further, with moral and spiritual darkness, the homilist had the king prohibit the kindling of light. The king, representing the Evil Inclination, had forbidden the kindling of light so that people would not "examine their leaven" (make certain that all leaven is removed from the house in approaching the *Pesah* festival when leaven is prohibited), lest one realize that all the delights of this world are, in reality, on a par with garbage.[30] The decree sought, in this way, to guarantee the continuation of the unexamined life, as Socrates would say. That message would certainly echo the temper of *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir* as a whole and of that collection's basic frame tale in which the prince's father went to tremendous efforts to spare his son any awareness of suffering, affliction, and futility in life.

As the homily continues, the preacher found in the story a key illustration of the darkness that fell over *Mitsrayim* at the same time that the Israelites had light.[31] Ya'akov Yosef interpreted the meaning of the light that the Israelites knew during that plague as an allusion to the Israelites' realization that this world can be likened to garbage insofar as strivings in this world are subject to an inherent futility as "no one dies having fulfilled even half of his desires."[32] In this connection, the preacher went on to convey the importance of *histapkut* (satiety), which he defined as finding joy in what one has in life rather than one's desiring and seeking what one does not have.[33]

What Drew the Hasidic Preacher to that Medieval Text?

The temper represented in *Sefer ben hamelèkh vehanazir* with its negative view of life and of this world echoes in a rather pervasive sense in *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef.* Even after Ya'akov Yosef of Polonnoye abandoned older ascetic practices at the insistence of the *Baal Shem Tov*,[34] he evidently held, at least partly, to an essentially ascetic world-view with roots in post-Lurianic Kabbalah but voiced also in earlier works such as Bahya's *Hovot halevavot.*

In his reading of the biblical Exodus tradition, the preacher of Polonnoye tended to identify the land of *Mitsrayim* with this world (*'olam hazeh*) with its apparent delights and deceiving expectations.[35] He interpreted the Israelites' coming to the land of Egypt in the Torah narrative as their "coming into this lowly world,"[36] reading it, in effect, as a parable of the soul's descent to this material world with its enticements as he understood the darkness of *Mitsrayim* as a comment upon the nature of this world.[37] Furthermore, he claimed that the Evil Inclination rules this world[38] in which the wicked choose worldly desires and lusts, whereas the righteous strive only to acquire the goods of the World-to-Come.[39]

The Polonnoye preacher grasped Matter and Form as mutually antithetical: Whereas the former is associated with physical satisfaction and pleasures, the latter is associated with Torah study and prayer. When the one increases, the other inevitably lessens; when either Matter or Form finds satisfaction, the other is weakened and suffers.[40] "Matter comes from the side of the *kelipah*" (the demonic Shell that emerges within the process of Emanation) and is referred to also as idolatry (*'avodah zarah*), whereas the soul, coming from the Side of Holiness, longs for things of holiness.[41]

By the very nature of desire and the impossibility of satiety, Ya'akov Yosef conveyed in his homilies that the more wealth one has, the poorer he is, for the wealth of this world provides no satisfaction or sense of satiety;[42] and only in things of the spirit can satiety be found.[43] The tenor of much that is found in the *Toldot* would identify with the stance of the *nazir,* the hermit, or ascetic teacher and his teachings in *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir.*[44]

But while many passages of the *Toldot* indicate a deeply ascetic nature akin to the tenor of *Sefer ben hamelekh vehazir*, other passages in the *Toldot* point to a contrasting mindset, and the reader might locate a drama in the tension between these two attitudes both within the *Toldot* and within the mind of the homilist himself.

One reads that enjoying physical delights including eating in connection with the observance of the Seventh Day is one aspect of an unbounded inheritance, the antithesis of *Mitsrayim.*[45] And furthermore, the homilist pointed out that "it is impossible for the soul, being spiritual, to perform any *mitsvah* (holy or commanded act) without the physical limbs (of the body)."[46] "All the activity of the soul in Torah and *mitsvoth* is accomplished through the instruments of the body..."[47] As in Torah study and prayer, similarly in matters of eating and drinking and even sexual intercourse one can be engaged with either of two motivations: either that of satisfying personal desires or that of fulfilling a holy intent in enabling oneself to acquire the strength necessary to serve God.[48]

In some passages in the *Toldot*, the sharp polarity of Matter and Form gives way to a paradoxical relationship between the two in which a person transforms Matter into Form.[49] Duality is further transcended in the homilist's turning to the Lurianic concept of the elevation of hidden, divine Sparks, locating such Sparks within everything including material and physical actions. In the process, physical pursuits serve as paths of holy purpose,[50] and spirituality is expressed and present even in all the material aspects of life.

Contrasting with the tone of so many statements that bear consonance with that of the stories quoted from *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir,* the preacher also emphasized the very opposite: namely that the material and spiritual are not two distinctly separate areas.

"Even during that third of each day that the Torah-student devotes to trade and worldly activity, he engages in Torah with the thought to bind together the material with the spiritual." And in this same vein the preacher explained that even as one engages in worldly matters and is attentive to the needs of the body, he is engaging in Torah.[51] Contrasting with the view that perceived the six weekdays of work as devoid of any real value in themselves, the homilist stressed that within each day there is a hidden goodness that derives from the Light of the Seventh Day.[52]

The Polonnoye preacher stated that "the soul that is in man ascends and, with trepidation, seeks to leave (the body), but it sees the Holy One, blessed be He (within everything), for "all the world is filled with His Presence," and (so) it returns (to the body). The reason both for the will to leave and for its returning (to the body) is that everything has a longing for its Root: accordingly the spirit of man wishes to ascend to God who gave it, but upon perceiving God in all the world...(it remains)."[53] And in the future when the Evil Inclination will be annulled, this world too will then be called the world of the Holy One, blessed be He."[54]

Ya'akov Yosef's attraction to *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir* and to the tenor of that work is a vantage point for ascertaining the preacher's deeply ascetic, pessimistic, and dualistic view of this world which, however, coexisted in the mind of the preacher with a significantly more positive sense of the world transcending that ascetic and dualistic world-view. As a Jewish poet living in the more urbane cultural milieu of medieval Spain, Avraham Ibn Hasdai could find an esthetic attraction to themes depicting life and the world in decidedly negative terms. Though psychologically drawn to that same vein of thought, the Hasidic preacher, in contrast, was also challenged by a sense of the world and life as inherently meaningful insofar as they are inseparable from the divine Presence and from the very real possibility of hallowing life. That drama within the mind of the eighteenth-century Hasidic preacher, Ya'akov Yosef ha-Kohen of Polonnoye, is viewed perhaps in clearer light against the background of his relationship to stories from *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir*.

Surveying the larger landscape and background, another drama also comes into view, one in which stories from a tradition relating to the Buddha reach an eighteenth-century Hasidic preacher and author. The presence of such stories from a tradition focusing upon a central figure in Eastern religion both in medieval Hebrew literature and also in what is perhaps *the* classic eighteenth-century Hasidic homily text is certainly an intriguing detail of intercultural history. That drama testifies to connections between Indian tradition and Jewish literary creativity in a world lacking any semblance of global communication. Though in all likelihood, neither Ibn Hasdai nor Ya'akov Yosef of Polonnoye had no awareness whatsoever of Gautama Siddharta and of the teaching and tradition that centered around him as Buddha; tales from that tradition crossed the cultural divide and spoke both to a Hebrew poet in twelfth-century Spain and to a Hasidic preacher in eighteenth-century Eastern Europe.

Notes

[1] *Kohen*, Hebrew for "priest," member of a priestly family.

[2] First printed in Korets, 1780.

[3] Citations to *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir* by Avraham ben Shmu'el ha-Levi Ibn Hasdai in this essay refer to the number of the chapter (*sha'ar*) as found in all extant editions.

[4] In *The Life of Buddha as Legend and History*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), pp. xx, 271ff., 288), Edward Thomas mentioned von Le Coq's discovery of a Manichaean recension in Turfay, reported in Prosper Alfaric, *La vie chretienne du Bouddha* (J.A., Sept-Oct., 1917), and serving as the bridge between earlier Indian Sanskrit sources

and the Arabic versions as well as translations and adaptations in Greek, Latin, and other languages. Similarly, Charles Allen in *The Search for the Buddha* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2002), p. 26, presumes that the original source was a popular Sanskrit biography of Gautama Buddha that made its way to the West via a Manichaean translation. Also Isamu Taniguchi in his article, "Story of Barlaam and Josaphat as Crucible of International Communication," *The Journal of Human Sciences,* University of St. Andrew, 21:2: 45, notes the role of the Manichaean version preceding the Arabic non-Christianized version that was current in Baghdad in the eighth century. That study claims that the original Arabic version, now lost, was followed by four other Arabic versions as well as by the Hebrew version (by Ibn Hasdai) and a Christianized Georgian version, *The Balavariani,* which was translated into Greek (probably by the Georgian monk, Euthymios of Athos, in the eleventh century), followed by a Latin translation. The names of the prince and his ascetic teacher were altered from language to language to become Barlaam and Ioasaph, and the identity of the prince as Guatoma Buddha was completely lost. A Coptic version is the subject of a study by Sir E. A. Wallis Budge (*Barrlam and Yewaswf—Being the Ethiopic Version of a Christianized Recension of the Buddhist Legend of the Buddha and the Bodhisattwa,* The Ethiopic text edited for the first time with an English translation and introduction, 2 vols. (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1923). See David Marshall Lang's translation of the Georgian work, *The Balavariani*: *A Tale from the Christian East* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), which, the translator posits, is the source of the later Greek translation. G. R. Woodward and H. Mattingly prepared an English translation of the Greek text that was published as *St. John Damascene*: *Barlaam and Ioasaph* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), as part of the Loeb Classical Library. M. Steinschneider (*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft,* vol. 91) identified Ibn Hasdai's *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir* as a Hebrew version of the same tale that spread to various literatures in the medieval world in many different languages, forms, and adaptations.

[5] Joseph Dan, *Hasippur ha'ivri bimei habeinayim—'iyunim betoldotav / The Hebrew Story in the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), p. 143. In the same work, Dan discusses the phenomenon of stories of Indian origin within various medieval Hebrew writings, as those story elements traveled through Persian and Arabic culture (ibid., pp. 29-30).

[6] Budge, *Barrlam and Yewaswf,* xcix.

[7] A. M. Habermann, *Ben ha melekh vehanazir* (Tel Aviv: Mahbarot Lesifrut, 1950).

[8] Budge, *Barrlam and Yewaswf,* xxix.

[9] Hayim Schirman, *Hashirah ha'ivrit besefarad uveprovans* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1954), I, pp. 401-404.

[10] Budge, *Barrlam and Yewaswf,* xii. The prince and the hermit came to be revered as Christian saints and were formally canonized by the Papacy in the sixteenth century (ibid., xxvii).

[11] The pagination of citations to *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef* in this study refer to the 1972 edition (Jerusalem: Agudat Bet Wi'alipali), 2 vols. and is followed by the name of the Torah portion and number of the homily within the portion.

[12] Gedaliah Nigal, *Manhig va-'edah --de'ot umeshalim bereshit hahasidut 'al pi kitve R' Ya'akov Yosef miPolna'ah* (Jerusalem, 1962), p. 144.

[13] *Sefer ben hamelekh vehanazir, sha'ar* 23.

[14] Budge, *Barrlam and Yewaswf,* xcviii.

[15] *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef* I, p. 149 (*Bo,* fifth homily).

[16] Bavli Berakhot 17a; Maimonides, *Mishne torah, Hilkhot teshuvah,* 8.2.

[17] Maimonides, *Shemoneh perakim,* ch. 3.

[18] Nahmanides on Exod. 10:23; Sforno on Exod. 10:21.

[19] *Toldot* II, 715 (*Vayelekh,* fifth homily).

[20] Lawrence V. Berman in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1971) 15:487.

[21] Bavli Baba Batra 11a.

[22] *Toldot* II, p. 655 (*Shoftim,* third homily).

[23] *Toldot* II, p. 657 (*Shoftim,* fourth homily).

[24] *Toldot* II, p. 675 (*Shoftim,* tenth homily).

[25] If the story went back to Indian origins, this association with David at Ziklag, not integral to the story, would obviously have been an addition to an earlier version of the tale.

[26] *Toldot* I, p. 137 (*Shemot,* sixth homily).

[27] Bavli Pesahim, 2a.

[28] Bavli Berakhot 3b.

[29] The word *hamor* (ass), referring to the animal on which Abraham rode on his way to bind Isaac (Gen. 22:3) is interpreted in *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef* and frequently in later Hasidic texts as an allusion to *homer* (matter, materiality).

[30] *Toldot,* I, p. 139 (*Shemot,* sixth homily).

[31] Ibid.

[32] *Midrash Kohelet rabbah,* 1.13, a midrashic statement frequently quoted in certain parts of the *Toldot.*

[33] *Toldot* I, p. 140 (*Shemot,* sixth homily).

[34] Note the letter to Ya'akov Yosef of Polonnoye from the Baal Shem Tov quoted in Samuel H. Dresner, *The Zaddik—the Doctrine of the Zaddik According to the Writings of Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polnoy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), pp. 50-53; Sh. Horodetsky, *Sefer shivhei habesht* (Tel Aviv: 1947), p. 62; Dan Ben-Amos and Jerome R. Mintz, trans, and eds., *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), pp. 63-65; Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism—A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 115. Gershon David Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century—A Geneology of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) p. 174, defines the Besht's message as a "rejection of asceticisms" that represented a turn from the mode of the older pietism that preceded the Baal Shem Tov.

[35] Note *Toldot* I, p. 136 (*Shemot,* sixth homily).

[36] *Toldot* I, p. 133 (*Shemot,* second homily).

[37] Ya'akov Yosef's identification of *Mitsrayim* with this world recalls the gnostic Christian tradition of a much earlier period that appears in the Hymn-Pearl from the *Acts of Thomas,* in which the hero receives the task of going down to Egypt to bring up the Pearl from there (Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion,* Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 113.

[38] *Toldot* I, p. 150 (*Bo,* eighth homily).

[39] *Toldot,* I, p. 407 (*Behar,* first homily).

[40] *Toldot* I, pp. 149-150 (*Bo,* seventh homily).

[41] *Toldot* I, p. 411 (*Behar,* fourth homily).

[42] *Toldot* II, p. 649 (on *Re'eh,* fourth homily).

[43] *Toldot* I, p. 425 (*Behar,* thirteenth homily).

[44] Ya'akov Yosef brought in one of his homilies an even more powerful anecdote and parable, in the same spirit,   quoted from *Sefer even-habohan* by Kolonymus ben Kolonymus, in which a person requiring a cure for his arrogance is shown a toilet so that

he might realize that what he experienced as delightful foods and the like all turns into excrement. (*Toldot* I, pp. 393-394, *Emor*, eleventh homily.)

[45] *Toldot* I, p. 141 (*Va'era*, first homily).

[46] *Toldot* I, p. 135 (*Shemot*, fourth homily).

[47] *Toldot* I, p. 421 (*Behar*, twelfth homily).

[48] *Toldot* I, p. 386 (*Emor*, sixth homily).

[49] *Toldot* I, p. 408 (*Behar*, first homily).

[50] *Toldot* I, p. 150 (*Bo,* eighth homily), also I, 385 (*Emor*, sixth homily).

[51] *Toldot* I, p. 412 (*Behar*, seventh homily).

[52] *Toldot* I, p. 424 (*Behar,* thirteenth homily).

[53] *Toldot* II, p. 648 (*Re'eh,* fourth homily).

[54] *Toldot* II, p. 648 (*Re'eh,* fourth homily).

Eude and Eglon, Eleazar the Maccabee, and Two Early Modern Indian Narratives: Factors Explaining the Convergence of Phylogenetically Unconnected Tales

By Ephraim Nissan

Introduction

Two narratives from *Judges* and *1 Maccabees* are each contrasted to an episode from Mughal chronicles of early modern India. Each pair consists of unconnected tales, yet they conspicuously converge in what goes on in the narrative. It is precisely of interest to us to show how that can be, without the aetiology being diffusionist and phylogenetic. For both pairs of tales, an important factor for the resulting similarities is that elements of material culture in the respective environment favored the protagonist resorting to similar tactics: elephant warfare, common in India and South East Asia, in the Near East was mainly confined to the Hellenistic era, so it is not overly surprising that characters remote from each other targeted those riding on an elephant by attacking the animal from beneath and succumbing in the process. And yet, in the other pair of narratives, it is quite possible that similarity was accentuated in the retelling by the particular chronicler whose own version lends itself to the comparison: the Venetian-born Manucci, transplanted in India and integrated at the Mughal court, may have sent biblical reverberations from the tale of Eude deceiving and slaying the corpulent King Eglon, into the account he gave of how a local prince deceived and killed a general to whom he was supposed to surrender, and who is described by Manucci as having been corpulent.

Method, Purpose, Scope, and Background

It happens sometimes that similar narratives turn out in far away cultures. This is commonplace in folktales, as well known from folklore studies. That there appears to be similarities between tales, is by no means indicative of any phylogenetic relation between them, for example, to the effect that one of them stemmed from the other ("relation": X caused Y) or then that they both are variants of some Ur-narrative (by "correlation": Z caused X, and Z caused Y). There is more interest, to the appreciation of narrative convergence, than the purpose of elaborating some diffusionist theory about how those narratives came into being, supposedly with some connection to each other.

The present article discusses two pairs of examples, such that any similarity within each pair can be safely ascribed to some general factor other than narrative influences within international folklore spreading in a diffusionist manner. As we are going to see, there is some correlation within each pair, but it has to do with cultural factors other than narrative borrowing. Nevertheless, for one of the pairs of narratives we are going to consider, we don't exclude altogether the possibility that a tradent, a chronicler we can name, shaped his retelling to somewhat conform to the other narrative in the same pair, and this because the model was available in his own culture, which was not the culture of the environment where he was transplanted, and in which the narrative he was relating was set.

Sometimes some historical episode that apparently did not undergo extensive modification appears to bear resemblance to a narrative from another culture, other than in some trivial manner. According to a Muslim Arabic tale, angels brought about Moses' death by the ruse of offering him a rose whose scent was poisonous a rose; as I pointed out elsewhere,[1] this is similar to what was related by Luigi Settembrini about his father Raffaele, who in Naples, when the Jacobin Parthenopean Republic fell to the clericals in

1799, was almost lynched, but then taken to prison, where a guard feigned he was pitying him and offered Raffaele a rose to smell. A long needle was hidden inside the rose, and the guard pushed it inside Raffaele Settembrini's nose. Clearly, there was no narrative borrowing, and yet, there are widespread connotations of roses that are ultimately grounded in material culture: a rose smells good, yet it pricks, hence the association with deception; and a rose in bloom is beautiful, yet it will soon wither, hence its association with impending decay and indeed death, as a motif in the vanitas genre: "Memento mori," indeed. Bear in mind, at any rate, that there is a foundation in material culture and in how cultures assess something observed in nature (either wild or tamed). The militiaman in 1799 replaced the rose's own thorns with a more effective needle: effective in handling, and in being made unnoticed at first.

Sometimes a comparison between two narratives from different cultures is worthwhile,[2] even when the similarities are restricted to aspects of two characters. This is what Madhuri Y. Yadlapati has done,[3] by comparing Sita and Sarah, thus, characters from ancient Indian and biblical narratives. The similarities as well as the differences between the two characters, in their respective narratives, are instructive. Comparisons between elements of Indian and Jewish (or biblical) culture have become a subject with enough of a critical mass for this to result in a *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies.* Our main thrust, in the present article, is not so much to claim Indo-Judaic affinity of sorts, as to illustrate how phylogenetically unconnected tales can nevertheless be contrasted in a meaningful way, with convergence providing a pivot for general considerations about how human cultures may sometimes yield a similar outcome in something quite specific.

The two examples of "Indo-Judaic" correspondence between narratives turned out as a byproduct of a project I have been developing, AURANGZEB, in the mathematical humanities. The aim of that project is to capture in so-called *episodic formulae* various aspects of two narratives about the Mughal[4] emperor Aurangzeb (b. 1618, r. 1658, d. 1707). The first one is Aurangzeb capturing his brother and sulking ally Murad during the war of succession that enabled his accession to the throne (this resulted in the MURAD model).[5]

The other narrative (resulting in the AJIT model)[6] is an episode at the beginning of the Rajput revolt, when Aurangzeb ordered the two posthumous male babies of his Jaswant Singh, the Maharaja of the principality of Marwar (with its capital in Jodhpur) who died with no surviving son, to be seized and raised at his court, and presumably converted. According to Khafi Khan's account, the now still acclaimed Marwar leader, Durgadas Rathor, managed to replace and smuggle away Jaswant's actual babies and their respective mothers, and the emperor was duped.[7]

An episode concerning Aurangzeb that is relevant for Indo-Judaic studies is the visit to his court of Abraham Navarro, an episode researched by Harihar Das.[8] Moreover, Nathan Katz[9] has discussed a Mughal courtier who by one account was a Jewish convert to Islam. Dara Shikoh, the son whom Shah Jahan preferred to succeed him, but was defeated by Aurangzeb, was a pupil of that alleged convert. Katz also mentions how the Venetian Manucci, also a Mughal courtier, had described the religious opportunitstic accommodation, on the part of Dara, to please interlocutors from any faith, and among Dara's interlocutors, Manucci listed Jews as well.

Among my own projects that make use of episodic formulae, one that is ongoing concerns the case of an *agunah* (deserted wife) from Damascus from the second half of the eighteenth century, whose husband had moved to Mesopotamia and traveled to Yemen and then India, where during a quarrel with another merchant he was stabbed to death. The analysis is based on a casenote by R. Sedakah Husein (1698/9–1773), the president of the rabbinic tribunal of three members in Baghdad that established that woman's widowhood.[10]

I have also used episodic formulae for representing patterns throughout the history of the imposition of the Jewish badge in various places at various times and compared this to Hindus in Afghanistan being made to wear a distinctive badge under Taliban rule.[11] Once case represented in episodic formulae in detail is the intervention of Joseph Cazès in Teheran in the late 1890s, an intervention that resulted in a decree imposing a red patch on the Jews being commuted with their having to wear the badge of the Alliance Israélite Universelle.[12]

I also applied the same kind of representation in episodic formulae to the analysis of the episode, from the medieval romances of Alexander the Great, of Alexander in disguise meeting Queen Candace in India, and being recognized by her.[13] Whereas the text analyzed is from a Middle English romance, this is quite relevant for the parallels in the Hebrew versions of the romance of Alexander. The formulae can stand, almost unmodified, if applied, for example, to the Hebrew version in Flusser's edition.[14] The reason for such similarity is that both the English and the Hebrew versions ultimately depend on a Greek original romance of Alexander from late antiquity. In that particular example, there is narrative convergence because the narrative was borrowed from a Greek version upstream, and the genetics of the text even extends to the *stemmaton* (genealogical tree) of the extant manuscripts.

Having pointed out the background of the item of research whose end-product is the article you are reading now, it cannot be stressed enough that our present purpose is to derive some general lesson from narrative convergence, *without* such a phylogenetical relation. Quite general factors from human cultures do yield on occasion some *modus operandi* enacted by some individuals in real life, or then (whether or not as an effect of such actual behavior), some narrative that is actually narrated by someone, and we may notice that this has happened more than once, without obvious connection. A verse of classical Arabic poetry says it in a nutshell: It happens sometimes that the hoof of a horse threads on the footpath left by a different horse earlier on.

The Fate of Raja Rup Singh Rathor vs. the Fate of Eleazar the Maccabee

Jaswant Singh, the Maharaja of Jodhpur already mentioned, perished in December 1678 in his command post near the Khyber Pass in Afghanistan, due to the severity of the winter. This was in the line of duty, as he was fighting in the service of Aurangzeb. According to the *Tarikh Mohammad Shahi*, Aurangzeb, on hearing the news of Maharaja's demise, said, "Darwaja-e kufra shikast", that is, "The door of the infidel is broken," an obstacle on the way of his conversionist dreams was gone.

Jaswant Singh had fought against Aurangzeb, still a prince, during the war of succession; two more months, and Jaswant's death would have come exactly twenty years after such a major battle opposing the two. Yet, co-opting adversaries was part and parcel of the expected skills of a Mughal emperor.[15]

One more reason for Aurangzeb to respond with *schadenfreude* to the fate of Jaswant Singh, the royal head of the Rathors (a numerous clan, one of the groups making up the Rajputs, who are part of the Hindu military caste), the leaders of the Rathors may have been the following. There was an episode in which one of the Rajput clan of the Rathors came close to taking Aurangzeb's life. During the decisive battle at Samogarh on 8 June 1658 between Dara (the son favored by Emperor Shah Jahan) and Aurangzeb, a Rathor—a warrior from the clan headed by Jaswant Singh—almost killed Aurangzeb, in the Rajput offensive: Eraly relates (2003, p. 352): "'Raja Rup Singh Rathor', says Khafi Khan, 'sprang from his horse, and, with the greatest daring, having washed his hands of life, cut his way through the ranks of his enemies sword in hand, cast himself under the elephant on which the elephant (Aurangzeb) was riding, and began to cut the girths which secured

the howdah' [inside which Aurangzeb was carried on the back of the elephant]. For a moment Aurangzeb was in mortal danger, then his guards cut down Rup Singh."

If, again, this rings a bell—this bears a resemblance to the manner in which, according to Ch. 6 in the First Book of Maccabees, one of the Maccabee brothers, Eleazar, died, crushed by an elephant whose belly he had cut open, while fighting against the Seleucid royal army—this is so simply because this is part and parcel of warfare when elephants were employed on the battleground. That chapter relates that the royal army consisted on one hundred thousand soldiers on foot, twenty thousand horsemen, and thirty-two elephants. This gives us an idea of how precious, rare, yet useful these animals were considered in the elephantless Near East in Hellenistic times. The text relates that the elephants were made to drink grape and mulberry juice (an alcoholic beverage?) to boot up their mood, and then one thousand soldiers on foot and five hundred horsemen were assigned for accompanying each elephant. In the wooden "tower" on the back of each elephant, four soldiers rode, apart from an Indian driver. Eleazar believes that the tallest elephant carries the king, Antiochus Eupator. Eleazar rushes, slashing his way to the elephant, and when he is under the elephant, he disembowels the elephant, that falls on him, crushing him.

By contrast to the account of the First Book of Maccabees, a different narrative about Eleazar's death is found in the brief Scroll of Antiochus, a Jewish text extant in several versions, in either Aramaic or Hebrew (a translation from the former). According to this source—a critical edition of which is Kaddari's[16]—the cause of Eleazar's demise was different: "And Eleazar was busy killing elephants, and drowned in the excrement of the elephants. And when they [the Maccabees] came back, they sought him and did not find him. Afterwards, they found him in the excrement of the elephants." Whereas the transition between the two accounts is that in the Book of Maccabees, it is the weight of the crumbling elephant that kills the man that is standing beneath it who had cut open its belly,[17] in the Scroll of Antiochus Eleazar is found inside stuff that does originate indeed in the elephant's belly, but the man is engulfed not necessarily because the elephant was disemboweled above him. I recall seeing at the zoo an elephant calf about as tall as a heap of elephant dung was high behind him, and in the room there only were the calf and its mother.

Yet, it would be wrong to interpret the variant from the Scroll as though it must match things observable in the real world. Clearly, that account was only possible because elephants had come to be viewed as gigantic and rather fabulous animals, and the authors of the Scroll (who apparently could not read the Book of Maccabees in Greek) had no idea of the practical side of elephant warfare. Zeev Safrai maintains:[18] "Linguistic analysis indicates that the Scroll dates from some time between the sixth and eight centuries." "Overall, the story adheres to 1 Maccabees, with clear deviations."[19] "The Scroll was apparently written in a period when the stories of the Hasmoneans had already become a vague legend."[20]

The following considerations are in order. We know that the Carthaginians made use of elephants in warfare (with Hannibal famously crossing the Alps with his elephants, with bellicose intent—unlike when a Jewish emissary was sent by the caliph Harun al-Rashid to Charlemagne, and he and the elephant he brought along as a present crossed the Alps near Vercelli). We know that the Abyssinians, during their Arabian campaign one generation before the rise of Islam, employed some rare elephant, and in fact the Day of the Elephant (when an elephant's behavior disrupted the conquest of Mecca) has become famous in Islamic tradition. We know that Alexander the Great put together a larger army than even the Romans ever did at any given time, and we know that Alexander's generals brought back knowledge of elephant warfare from India, and perhaps Iran, to the Near East and the West.

At any rate, the Seleucids made use of elephants, and that was the time when elephant warfare became relevant to Jewish tradition. This was why the Maccabees would be faced with elephants on the battleground, and it is entirely unnecessary to hypothesize that Eleazar already possessed any notion of how to fight a military unit at whose center there was an elephant. Indian warriors did. Eleazar did not. He in all likelihood improvised, if the account in *Maccabees* is historically accurate. It required much courage, but not genius, to realize that by causing the elephant to crumble (which could be brought about by disemboweling it), those riding on it would become more vulnerable to an attacker or would perhaps perish or be otherwise harmed by falling down. By contrast, the more knowledgeable Raja Rup Singh Rathor "began to cut the girths which secured the howdah." Not unlike Eleazar, he perished. And not unlike Eleazar, he had made himself quite vulnerable, for the purpose of reaching the elephant, by letting himself be surrounded by enemy personnel.

Eude (Ehud) from the Book of Judges vs. Shivaji, the Maratha Prince

Consider the biblical Eude (Ehud), from Ch. 3 of the Book of Judges, who tricks the fat king Eglon into a private meeting with no witnesses, then with his left hand disembowels him by means of a previously hidden sword. Abraham Eraly's history of the Mughals includes the following Indian narrative, the Maratha prince Shivaji (a vassal of Aurangzeb who turned rebel), feigning surrender and then slaying Afzal Khan, one of his enemy's top generals, at a previously agreed meeting:

> The meeting was arranged for the afternoon of Thursday, 20th November 1659. [...] Afzal Khan then proceeded to the pavilion in a palanquin, without armour, dressed in a thin muslin garment, attended, as had been agreed, by a single armed bodyguard, [...]. The Khan himself was armed, as usual, with a sword, but his mood was relaxed. He suspected no foul play. He waited in the pavilion, says Manucci, "building, I fancy, many castles in the air." Meanwhile Shivaji emerged from the fort, after prostrating himself before his mother and receiving her blessing. He too was dressed suitably—for his purpose. He wore a steel cap under his turban and chain armour under his cotton gown; a vicious crooked dagger called *beechwa* (scorpion) was concealed in his right sleeve, and on his left hand was fixed the notorious Maratha weapon *wagnuck* (tiger claws), steel claws attached to the hand with rings and kept concealed by closing the hand. From the pavilion Afzal Khan could see Shivaji approaching with seeming timidity, apparently unarmed, as required of a surrendering rebel, accompanied by one armed bodyguard. [...] The Khan, "a tall man, very corpulent", as Manucci describes him, was supremely confident, and had no anxiety at all in confronting the diminutive Shivaji. As Shivaji entered the pavilion, Afzal Khan rose and, advancing a few steps, clasped him in a bear-hug. This was Shivaji's opportunity. Instantly he opened his clawed hand and tore into the Khan's ample abdomen. Startled, the Khan released Shivaji and sprang back, [and so forth].[21]

Eraly, based on his sources, refers to the slain general as being very corpulent and describes how when the rebel reached for his abdomen, the general tried to use his sword but this was wrested from his by Shivaji, and Afzal Khan could not be rescued by his palanquin bearers, who were intercepted by Shivaji's Marathas, who cut off the general's head.[22] It is quite possible that the Catholic Venetian Niccolao Manucci[23] (1639–1717)— who had firsthand experience of life in Mughal India and of Aurangzeb's court (and who

was of the now unusual opinion that Aurangzeb wasn't executing enough people for him to be obeyed)—while recording the episode in his memoirs, was thinking of Eglon's abdomen when relating Afzal Khan's demise.

Eglon, too, rose when receiving Eude, who partly matches the role of Shivaji. The Jewish late antique homiletes and medieval exegetes felt it morally necessary to reward Eglon for his standing up when Eude told him he had a divine message to communicate to him. Therefore, they claimed that a divine decree was issued, that David, King of Israel, would be issued from Eglon, through Ruth the Moabite woman. To the homiletes, she was Eglon's daughter—not something the Bible relates.

R. Levi ben Gershom elaborates about the purpose of Eude's sword being double-edged and not long. This is rather similar to Manucci's account of the effective weapons that Shivaji was carrying. R. David Kimhi elaborates about the semantic shift in the etymology of the Hebrew word *lahav* for the sword's edge. Again R. Levi ben Gershom elaborates about the dynamics of Eglon standing up and being stabbed.

According to the account we have considered, Afzal Khan behaved as gullibly as Eglon in the Book of Judges. Eraly also states however that there also exists a different version of what happened at the meeting between the imperial general and Shivaji, which states that Afzal Khan "pinioned Shivaji in his iron embrace and tried to stab him with a dagger," and that the general had indeed killed a surrendering ruler in another episode.[24]

Arguably, this simply reflects the fact that a trick likely to work is not unlikely to be instantiated more than once in recorded human history. This can also be seen from an episode that was not to be, because events took a different course: the Roman emperor August became very suspicious on seeing a senator coming to meet him, holding a book inside his garment. He thought it may be a sword. He therefore ordered the senator to be tortured and slain there and then in a most cruel manner. This in turn suggests that it would be appropriate for artificial intelligence to treat such analogies in a planning framework. Plans out of a cultural repertoire were recycled, and in Augustus' case, were involved in his making sense of the situation, even though in the event he was proven wrong.

In the pair of narratives about respectively Eude and Shivaji, it is only some very general factors of material culture, as well as social and psychological competence, that prompted the two protagonists (in the respective realistic storyworld) to devise and enact similar plans. One such factor is the availability, in the respective culture, of kinds of personal weapons that could be disguised, yet eventually be effective.

A particular detail that deserves attention is Manucci's remark that the general slain by Shivaji was corpulent. This is functional to the story, as Shivaji was slight-bodied. Being corpulent made Afzal Khan stronger than Shivaji, whereas by contrast Eglon being fat made him more vulnerable. Still, it may be that Manucci's *narration*, rather than the *narrative,* was colored by the biblical story of Eude and Eglon, as biblical narratives were available to Manucci and to his European readers because of their Western culture(s) being steeped in the Bible as a sacred text. Therefore, the narration, rather than the narrative, in this case may, just may have been affected by a diffusionist aetiology.

An anonymous referee pointed out, remarking on our present proposal about (in the referee's own words) "Manucci's narration being shaped by the Bible, so that he saw an Indian event in the form of a biblical tale": "The idea of our own culture shaping our narration of other people's history is a fascinating idea to me." Actually, we can further elaborate on this point. It is now understood and widely accepted that the early modern European making sense of the European encounter with the peoples of the Americas, in the several generations since discovery, was strongly shaped by both the classical tradition[25] and the biblical legacy of the West. Therefore it is unsurprising, when you come to think of it, that in Manucci's own reception and retelling of the episode of Shivaji slaying Afzal Khan, biblical reverberations can be detected. It was bound to happen, here and

there in his output as a chronicler based in India. And it is likely that this was the case indeed of the episode we have been considering.

Conclusions

The two examples we have discussed, of similar narratives from Mughal India and the Hebrew Bible or the Apocrypha, have been found to bear resemblance across cultures for rather different reasons. Elephant warfare may explain out what is shared by the story of Eleazar the Maccabee and the story of the Rathor warrior who tried to kill Aurangzeb by causing him to fall from the elephant carrying him.   By contrast, the episode of the corpulent Afzal Khan being killed treacherously by Shivaji bears resemblance to the story of Eude (Ehud) and Eglon from the Book of Judges, arguably because it is a trick that works.   Moreover, that account of the Indian story comes down through the memoirs of the Venetian-born Niccolao Manucci, who by stressing Afzal Khan being corpulent may have been inspired by the Bible.

It is known to scholarship that viewing an exotic world through lenses tinted by both the classical tradition and the Bible is what happened to Westerner observers after the discovery of the Americas. In this sense, it is compatible with that mindset, that the early modern Manucci—a Westerner based in India and chronicling events concerning the Mughal empire—could retell an Indian episode by coloring it with something he derived from a biblical tale. Arguably, this was the case of the narration of Shivaji's cunning behavior when Shivaji feigned he was surrendering to the corpulent Afzal Khan and recognizing his authority (like Eude did vis-à-vis Eglon), so that he could kill Afzal Khan by means of hidden weapons.

Still, there is more to our discussion than merely recognizing an instance of cultural borrowing. It is also important to identify such narrative convergence that cannot be ascribed to intercultural influence, and then to try to understand why there is such convergence, and which factors were involved in somewhat similar narratives emerging in environments remote from each other, without narrative borrowing.

The discussion will have hopefully made it clear that even without a phylogenetic connection, and without an aim of unearthing such a connection, and without the criterion of considering it a failure if we unearth none—analyzing *narrative convergence* may be rewarding.[26] Consider the following analogy. Both woodpeckers and some long-fingered lemurs hit wood, cause insects who were hidden inside to come out, and then they feed on them. Woodpeckers and lemurs are phylogenetically unrelated, but their being unrelated does not make the similarity of their feeding tactics (itself a narrative pattern) any less interesting. Quite the contrary, as such convergence (namely, the separate development of what is known as a "percussive technique" of foraging) is something that deserves attention and is tantalizing indeed: It is not only functional ecologists who realize that much.

Notes

[1] Nissan (2009c).
[2] Of course, we are referring to an actual comparison based on sources from both cultures, as opposed to some sporadic humorous, self-gratulatory contest from early rabbinic sources such as tales purporting to report about a contest to find out who is smarter, a Jerusalemite or the Wise Men of Athens (see a discussion in Hasan-Rokem 1996), or then how a famous rabbi outsmarts a philosopher at calculating the time it takes a snake to give birth (see Nissan 2007a, ch. 5).
[3] Yadlapati (2007).

[4] Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty of Delhi, claimed descent from both Tamerlane and Gengis Khan. Tamerlane is the protagonist of my TIMUR model, that analyses a particular anecdote (Nissan 2008a). By Aurangzeb's times, the dynasty had been Persianized for generations, and Akbar was the last Mughal emperor whose portraits show him with slanted eyes.
[5] Nissan (2007b).
[6] Nissan (20089b).
[7] See, e.g., the chapters about Aurangzeb in Eraly (2003).
[8] Das (1929).
[9] Katz (2004–2005).
[10] The casenote was first published in print, from the manuscript, in Ben-Yaakov (1979, p. 420).
[11] Nissan (2008b).
[12] Nissan (2009a).
[13] Nissan (2003a). That article of mine belongs in a suite of five articles. The next article (Nissan 2003b) in the sequence was also on a subject that is relevant to India and about a historical character that was significant in the history of Zionism. In that paper, that also sets a narrative in episodic formulae, a notorious controversy in ornithology is analyzed. M, the protagonist of the background narrative, was the pro-Zionist British soldier, spymaster, and ornithologist Col. Richard Meinertzhagen.   His actions in 1917, during Allenby's campaign in Palestine, are related on pp. 473–474.   On 23 April 1948, at age seventy, Meinertzhagen disembarked during a stop in Haifa and, disguised as a private soldier, seized the opportunity and took part in an hour of skirmishing on the Haganah side, hitting enemy snipers (Rabinovich 1997); that much was related in Meinertzhagen's memoirs. He was a person toward whom personal attitudes tended to be either out of opposite feelings. In a portion that sets in formulae the opposite attitudes of intense liking or intense dislike that were aroused in readers by his memoirs, pp. 480–481 discuss the role of a self-identified model of better behavior he appears to convey when relating how he saved a Jewish girl from a pogromist at the British consulate in Odessa, despite opposition he faced there.

Nissan (2003b) sets in formulae the narrative of the controversy concerning the reliability of the lables of stuffed birds in the Meinertzhagen collection. "With the rumours and suspicions that surrounded Meinertzhagen during his lifetime, there was some concern at the acceptance of the collection at the NHM [Natural History Museum] (Cocker 1990). Indeed, J. D. Macdonald, the head of the Bird Room at the time, is reported to have said that the collection should have been burned (Cocker 1990, p. 274).   After the collection passed to the Museum, it was intended that it should be kept separate from the main collection [...]. For many years these were separate drawers marked 'Meinertzhagen specimens', but, with the passage of time, most of the specimens have been incorporated into the main collection" (Knox 1993, p. 323). The controversy was reignited after 1997, after an expedition to India by American ornithologist Pamela Rasmussen. Forensic examinations were conducted on the cotton with which an Indian bird specimen (of the Forest Spotted Owlet) was stuffed (or perhaps restuffed and camouflaged, if the label is false and the specimen actually was taken from a museum): see Lipske (1999). In Bangalore, India, the Deccan Herald (2001), while reporting about the rediscovery in the wild of some Indian species, also devoted some lines of deprecation to the bird collector, yet remarked that "[The late dean of Bombay ornithologists] Salim Ali has some interesting things to say about this dashing and courageous soldier who during World War One, managed to deceive his enemies in many ingenious ways." And who, it may be added, also contributed to Israel's ornithology.

[14] See pp. 479–480 in Flusser's critical edition of the *Josippon,* vol. 1 (Flusser 1981).
[15] Aurangzeb had a personal dislike of Jaswant because of the record of their past relations. Still, the emperor had made Jaswant a commander in the imperial armies in Afghanistan. It is important to realize that in the Mughal system of government, co-opting a capable enemy (i.e., Jaswant Singh for Aurangzeb, as they had fought against each other during the war of succession) was an important part of an emperor's abilities. Being able to recruit talent, even the talent of a former enemy, was important for the empire to function properly. The late Mughal period started with Aurangzeb's death in 1707. Historian Kumkum Chatterjee, discussing eighteenth-century Mughal historiography as written by scholar-bureaucrats, points out (Chatterjee 1998, p. 930) the following about the emperors from the few decades following Aurangzeb's death: "In fact, as these historians saw it, one of the most important duties of a ruler on ascending the throne or of an official on assuming an official post, was to appoint a body of bureaucrats to fill the most important administrative and military positions under him. This function was practically viewed as an acid test of the inherent abilities of a ruler since much merit was attributed to the ruler's power to recognize administrative talent in potential officials and to harness these qualities for the service of the empire. Personal likes and dislikes of the ruler were supposed to be lower in priority compared to the great task of selecting able officials to work for the realm. Thye Mughal Emperor Farrukhsiyar (1714–19), for example, is depicted as distributing the highest offices of his government to nobles like Abdullah Khan and Hussain Ali Khan whose support had enabled him to win the recent war of succession, but also to Chin Qilich Khan who had not been on his side in this war. In this instance, Farrukhsiyar is shown as being willing to forget recent enmities and past alignments in order to avail himself of the services of Chin Qilich Khan, one of the ablest mansabdars [i.e., ranking officials] of the time. Conversely, the selection of unworthy people betrayed the absence of this merit in the ruler and was a pointer to his basic lack of judgement as well as of his commitment to the welfare of the empire." By the eighteenth century, postholders that those scholar-bureaucrats preferred "were people like themselves, i.e. men who came from families with long pre-existing traditions of bureaucratic service, preferably in the upper echelons on the mansabdari cadre" (ibid., p. 931).
[16] Kaddari (1963–1964).
[17] Bear in mind that moreover, the entrails exiting a body are sometimes a pictoresque cliché. In black folklore from the South of the United States, John Henry is a very strong worker who hammers away until he dies in the effort. The ballad *John Henry—The Steel Driving Man*—which I quote here in the form published by James (1993, pp. 85–87), itself excerpted from Johnson (1929, pp. 96–99)—relates: "The hammah that John Henry Swung, / It weighed over none poun', / He broke a rib in his left han' side, / And his intrels fell out in the groun', / And his intrels fell out on the groun'." (Ibid., p. 87.)
[18] Safrai (2006, p. 239).
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., p. 240.
[21] Eraly (2003, p. 445).
[22] Ibid., pp. 445–446.
[23] See Manucci (1709) for the earliest version of his memoirs.
[24] Eraly (2003, p. 446).
[25] See, for example, the relevant essays in *The Classical Tradition and the Americas*, edited by Wolfgang Haasse and Meyer Reinhold (1994). Haase is the director of the Institute for the Classical Tradition at Boston University. For example, consider A. Perrig and S. Tammen's chapter on giants, in Vol. 1, Part 2.

[26] Of course, in folklore studies it is common to trace the occurrence of the same motif across cultures with a more traditional methodological approach. For example, in Nissan (2009c, 2009d) I have discussed the motif of the deadly flower, and examples include one tale about the death of Moses, as well as how the plot of a story by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *The Trail of Your Blood in the Snow* (set in South America and Europe), was adapted ("oikotypised") to present-day Indian culture in N. G. Roshan's 2005 play *Taking on Modern Icons*.

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From Abraham to Abraham—and U Maung Maung: At Home in Bassein

By Ruth Fredman Cernea

Just outside of Bassein, in the rich delta region of the Irrawaddy River, village huts hover above the graves of Baghdadi Jews. Some graves stand openly in the village clearing; others have been incorporated into the huts, their large, rounded tombstones used as tables. A particularly interesting inscription is on the face of one tombstone: Beneath the words, "My Beloved Husband," are two names: "U Maung Maung" and "Abraham Farazh Judah Raphael."[1] Above the inscriptions is a cross, a loving mistake by his Burmese family, who felt the need for a religious symbol to bless the grave. The symbol was selected by Gladys, a devout Roman Catholic[2] and the former companion of Abraham Raphael's cousin, who is buried nearby. Gladys still lives in the large house where the Raphael family long prospered, and framed Hebrew writings still line the walls of the home. Knowing that Abraham was a Jew, like Jesus, it seemed fitting and caring to Gladys to place the cross above his names. This simple gravestone, hidden down a dirt path in a village far from any Jewish residence, is dense with meaning: It reflects many aspects of the Jewish experience in Burma and expresses the separation of Jews from, as well as their integration into, Burmese life.

Three years ago, Abraham Faraj Raphael's sister, Margaret Raphael Glicksohn of Kfar Sava, Israel, returned with her daughter Judy Pasternak to this home of her heart, to light candles at her brother's grave, and to reflect on her past at the graves of her mother, grandfather, two uncles, a cousin, and other Jews. She visited her childhood home and asked her Burmese (i.e., Buddhist)[3] half-sisters Miriam and Ruby,[4] and her brother's Burmese family, to please continue to look after the graves. In the Jewish cemetery in Rangoon, at her father Judah's grave, she whispered, "Papa, I'm back."

The story of the Raphael family reflects the strengths and vicissitudes of existence in West Bengal from the earliest Jewish settlement until the current day. It testifies to the courage and conviction of migrants from the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century as well as to how their descendents faced the exigencies of daily life when placed in very difficult situations. How Abraham Faraj Raphael became U Maung Maung is part of this story, as is his burial in this quiet village in the Irrawaddy Delta.

Margaret Raphael Glicksohn's visit brought forth fountains of memories, some very sad, some frightening, but others more joyful. The Burma she knew is a beautiful land of fruit and flowers, with a kind Buddhist society, where water jars still stand by the roadside to quench the thirst of a casual passerby. While England assumed the role of a potential, political Promised Land, there was no urgency to leave gentle Burma until the catastrophe that was World War II. She recalls her home in Burma with great affection and nostalgia: "Life was wonderful. We mixed with the Christians, Burmese, Hindus, Muslims, and Chinese, and we all got along very well together. There was no anti-Semitism out there. I miss Burma very much."[5]

From Baghdad to Bassein

The port of Bassein (today, Pathein) lies in a lovely area of Burma, an area of bright green paddy fields and verdant foliage, seventy-five miles along the Irrawaddy River from the Bay of Bengal. Bassein has long been a commercial center; ships carry rice and timber to Calcutta across the bay or to further points throughout Southeast Asia or even to Europe, or travel upstream along the Irrawaddy to Rangoon, Mandalay, or Yenangyuang. The potential for trade is what drew Margaret's grandfather, Abraham Raphael of Baghdad, to the small village of Bassein in the mid-nineteenth century. No matter that it was far from

other Jewish settlements in Burma, or three day's travel by ship to the relatively large Baghdadi Jewish community in Calcutta. He carried his Jewish world within him with certainty, like a compass pointed directly to Baghdad and its strong religious tradition. Here he could make a living; here he would create his own Jewish center. His son Judah, born and raised in Bassein, was even more at home in the delta; when his young wife died, at 21, he turned to his mother to care for his two small children, Margaret[6] and Abraham, whom the family called Eddie. In his loneliness, he turned to a woman from the village for affection and companionship. He lived with his Jewish family on Shabbat, the weekend, and holy days, and spent weekdays with his Burmese companion and their three daughters and son.

The history of the Raphael family in Burma is theirs only in its particularity; it also exemplifies the facts and cadences of the Jewish experience in Burma. Whether in cosmopolitan Rangoon or in the smaller commercial outposts throughout Burma where Jews resided—Pegu, Moulmein, Mandalay, Yenangyaung, Toungoo, Akyab, Maymyo, Bassein, Yandon, Mergui-Tavoy, Thayetmyo—Jews in Burma were anchored by Iraqi Jewish religious tradition while simultaneously re-forming themselves to become "Englishmen-in-exile." They lived in a land of dazzling golden pagodas, envisioning the ideal golden Jerusalem and the empire on which the golden sun never set, even while sharing the streets with the diverse populations that inhabited Burma in the latter half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries: Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Christians; Indians, Chinese, Parsis, British, and others; as well as the numerous tribal populations of the area such as the Karen, Shan, Mon, Kachin, and Padaung. They belonged to all these worlds, interacting with these populations on a daily basis, but especially, in the case of the British, also in imagination, desire, and political ambition. Above all, they belonged to the extended Baghdadi community that stretched from Bombay and Poona, through Calcutta to Dacca, Singapore, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Yokohama, and Surabaya.

The Baghdadis themselves were in fact an amalgamation of Jews from all parts of the Middle East. Some were descendants of the Jews exiled to Babylonia when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem in 597 B.C.E.; this forced migration accelerated when the first Temple fell in 586 B.C.E. Other Baghdadis were Sephardim, descendents of exiles from Spain who settled in the lands of the Turkish Empire, which included present-day Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt; others came to Burma via Cochin in India or through marriage to Baghdadis. Some came from Persia. A few Baghdadis even had Ashkenazic (European Jewish) ancestry; Abraham Raphael's wife was the daughter of a Baghdadi mother and an Ashkenazi father who had fled to Baghdad at the time of pogroms in Poland.[7] Over time, these internal differences were subordinated to the strong Babylonian rabbinical authority based in Baghdad and maintained through rabbis sent from Baghdad, as well as by religious emissaries from Baghdad who collected charity for institutions there or in Jerusalem. These emissaries also reinforced history, tradition, and communication among the populations in the ports and trading centers of Southeast Asia. Some 13,000 Baghdadi Jews were scattered throughout the region.

At the time of Jewish settlement in Burma, Calcutta was the seat of the British Raj, and the Calcutta Baghdadi Jewish community—at 3,500—the largest and most prosperous of the Baghdadi settlements. Despite the distances between these communities, the Baghdadi Jews were actually one grand *kehilla*. The traditional ties of religion, trade, marriage, and language that reinforced their common history and destiny were enabled by the means of communication and trade being developed by the mercantile goals of the British Empire. The same ships that carried rice to Calcutta or Europe also carried Baghdadis to their relatives in India; boats carrying products upstream along the Irrawaddy also enabled people living away from Rangoon to convene in the grand synagogue there for holy days or for family and community celebrations and memorials.

Driven from his home in Baghdad by mounting persecution and plague, and drawn to the British Raj by economic opportunities and religious freedom, Abraham Raphael Ezekiel and his brother Judah moved southeast to Burma about 1840. Abraham and Judah were among the very first Jewish settlers in Burma, the first who came to stay, build families, and to cast their future in this unknown land. When they arrived, and for most of the stay of Jews in Burma, Burma was administered by the British as a part of West Bengal, but unlike most of Bengal, the majority of the population was Buddhist, not Hindu. For a few years, the brothers served as bookkeepers in the court of King Mindon in Burma's capital, Mandalay, but when the ruthless King Thibaw ascended the throne in 1878, they left Upper Burma. After a serious argument, Abraham and Judah separated. Judah Ezekiel settled in Rangoon, where he prospered as an agent for the British East India Company, became a benefactor to the synagogue and city of Rangoon, and where a street was named for him, Judah Ezekiel Street; Abraham Raphael further disassociated himself from his brother by dropping the name Ezekiel and settled in Bassein, where he became wealthy by trading in an eclectic range of goods and services: electrical supplies, furniture, guns, and general provisions; as an auctioneer; as the owner of an ice factory that provided ice throughout the delta area, and as the proprietor of two cinemas. He fathered two daughters and three sons, Margaret's father Judah, Jacob (Jack), and Raphael (John), all of whom stayed in Bassein to work with the expanding businesses. Over time, other Jews were employed in the Raphael businesses, and two other Jewish families moved to Bassein,[8] thereby creating a small Jewish community in the delta. Abraham Raphael died in 1906 at the age of 90.

Abraham Raphael's character, spirit, and determination can only be appreciated in context. While his relatives were making their way within the comfort of a growing Jewish community and an increasingly cosmopolitan city, Abraham was settling down in a very rural area of rice mills and paddy fields, 192 miles from Rangoon.[9] After several conflicts, the British had finally occupied Bassein District in 1852, an event that certainly influenced Abraham Raphael's decision to set up business there. The vast majority of the population of the 518 villages in Bassein District—as opposed to Bassein town—were Buddhists.

However, Bassein town had a different religious and ethnic composition. Several other religious and ethnic groups clustered within the town limits, including about 22,400 Christians, most of who were Karens who had been converted by the large American Baptist Mission, as well as a smaller number of Roman Catholics and Anglicans. The town also had sizable populations of Muslims, Hindus, and Chinese. Bassein town's population grew from 20,688 in 1872 to 31,864 in 1901.[10] It was a pretty place, largely wooded, with several grand British public buildings, the Queen Victoria Memorial Library, the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, convent and school; the extensive premises of the American Baptist Mission and beautiful public gardens. And, of course, the town of Bassein had several grand, gilded pagodas, the Shwemoktaw, the Mahabawdi, and the Shewezigon, and graceful pagodas also punctuated the verdant countryside.

Like other Jewish families in Burma, the Raphaels of Bassein carried their religious convictions with them wherever they went. Demographically insignificant in Burma, the Baghdadis might have been swallowed up by the seductive charms of Burmese life and hospitality or by the highly organized activity of Christian missionaries, in Bassein as throughout Burma. The British way of life did attract them and seemed to offer promise of a secure political future. However, unless they traveled the route offered by the missionaries and converted to Christianity—which was unthinkable—they could remain only just outside the door of the exclusive British club. Middle Eastern Jewish tradition not only kept them connected to their history and to the extended Baghdadi Jewish world, it also acted as insulation against such temptations. In this seemingly isolated setting, the Raphaels immediately established a ritually correct way of life. They brought a ritual slaughterer, a *shohet,* from Bombay, who also served as a cantor and the children's

religious and Hebrew teacher, as well as a salaried employee in the Raphael stores. The *shohet* was, however, much more than an employee: He and his family were part of the Raphael family, ate with them, and shared all family events and religious occasions. In creating this mini-Jewish world, the Raphaels acted exactly as did the Saul family in Mandalay, the Samuel family in Akyab, and similarly placed families: *shohet*, Hebrew tutors, and cemetery. Shabbat prayers were said in a *minyan* at home, and on major holidays, the Raphaels, like Jews throughout Burma, journeyed to the synagogue in Rangoon. As years went by, these very traditional Jews also played a role in civil society. In Rangoon in the early twentieth century, merchant Isaac Sofaer held a seat on the Municipal Council, the Sofaer family donated the gates to the Victoria Gardens and Memorial Park and Zoological Gardens, and Mordecai Hayim Isaac Cohen funded an ornate bandstand in the city's central Fytche Gardens. During the 1930s, Margaret's uncle, Raphael Abraham Raphael, MBE, KiH,[11] was honored by King George V and King George VI for services to England, was a member of the local Masonic Palm Lodge, and was mayor of Bassein for seven years prior to World War II.

British-run schools in Burma offered an education that opened the world of the West to young Jews in Burma, teaching them British literature, history, customs, and how to read and write well in English. It also impressed them with the glory of the British Empire and the desirability of a British way of life. British schools were in fact missionary schools, but Jewish children were exempt from religious instruction. In Bassein, Margaret and Eddie attended convent schools in the primary years, but for the upper grades, they moved in with relatives in Rangoon. Like other upper-class Jewish girls, Margaret attended the American-run Methodist Girls High School. In Rangoon, Margaret experienced the full cohesiveness of the Jewish community in Burma, bound tightly together by tradition, marriage ties, and common concerns. She also fully experienced the panoply of cultures that convened in British Burma. She recalls:

> Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, always coincided with the festival of lights of the Hindu people. The streets were lit like fairyland. Sometimes, Christmas also came at this time, and you could see Christmas trees in Christian homes, Hanukkah lamps, lit with oil, in Jewish homes; and candles on the balconies of Hindu families. During this period also, the Burmese celebrated the Harvest Thanksgiving with a big carnival. Beautiful floats passed through the streets for hours, each float decorated with lights and flowers. There were Hanukkah parties, with much food and drink, and parties in the school, with food donated by the wealthier Jews.
>
> We lived in a country ruled by the British and we did take in some of their culture. Also living with Burmese people, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, we sometimes joined in the (non-religious) celebrations. The English New Year comes on the 31st of December. The New Year was celebrated by all. At the stroke of midnight, bells rang from the churches, the trains whistled, and many other noises were made to bring in the New Year. The famous Auld Lang Syne was sung where there was a crowd of friends, in the dance halls, at parties. At that moment it made no difference if you were a Jew, Christian, Hindu or Burmese.[12]

A Pilgrimage to Jerusalem

For these increasingly sophisticated and cosmopolitan Jews, Jerusalem remained their lodestar. In 1934, when she was 15, Margaret, her brother Eddie, her grandmother, her aunts Sarah and Hannah, and Hannah's husband traveled from Burma to Jerusalem on a spiritual/medical trip; they hoped that in this holy space, German Jewish doctors, fleeing Europe, might help Hannah conceive. The trip was, in fact, also a pilgrimage through

Baghdadi Jewish history and belief, for their route took them via Basra and Baghdad, thus investing Burma-born Margaret and Eddie with the religion, history, and memories of their ancestors.   The group traveled from Rangoon to Madras by boat, by train to Bombay, by boat to Basra.   From Basra, they embarked on the time-honored Baghdadi "heritage tour" by going north to the traditional site of the Garden of Eden in al-Qurna, at the junction of the Tigres and Euphrates rivers.   From there, it was a short distance along the Tigris River to the tomb of Ezra the Scribe, a traditional pilgrimage site for Jews of the Middle East. Much more than a respected figure in the Books of Ezra-Nehemiah, in Baghdadi history the priest and scholar Ezra is especially revered for his intellectual and social leadership during the last years of the Babylonian exile, as well as for his later role in the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.[13] And so it was with profound respect and a feeling of connection to the recesses of personal history that Margaret and her family approached the large tomb with its glazed blue-tiled dome, removed their shoes, entered the large chamber leading to the grave, lit candles, and circled the wooden monument atop the grave, reciting the phrase, "I am lighting this lamp in honor of our master Ezra the Scribe." And then they kissed the monument.   Jewish families such as the Raphaels were probably not the only visitors feeling awe at the tomb that day since, in the tradition of the Middle East, persons of other faiths might also pray there, believing in the spiritual power of any holy man.[14]

The trip was timed so that they might arrive at the tomb during the traditional period of visiting, between Passover and Shavuot, and enable them to be in Baghdad during the especially important week of Passover. The large Jewish community provided them with food for the holiday. Then it was three more days across the desert by car to Jerusalem.   Margaret's grandmother cried when she reached the legendary city of Jerusalem, so central to Jewish yearning through the centuries. A surprise awaited them in Jerusalem. So far from home, they met another Jew from Burma, Ezra Saul from Mandalay who was making a similar journey to the Holy Land.   And a seeming miracle did occur, for Hannah stayed behind in Jerusalem to give birth to a son.

A Handbag Made from a Python's Skin

The comfortable life that Margaret recalls came to a cataclysmic end with the Japanese invasion of Burma in 1942. The non-native populations were identified with the British; when the British Army collapsed before the Japanese onslaught, most of these "European" populations fled by boat or by foot to safety in India. In the delta, the Raphael family pondered their options, but when Margaret's grandmother refused to leave, the rest of the family, in turn, refused to leave her behind.[15]   By this decision, they cast their lot with their neighbors and friends among the Burmese populations. Therein began a wartime saga of bombings, burnings, jungle refuge and village kindness, fear and hardship, and even moments of levity, all guided by family loyalty and structured, wherever possible, by the Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law, which they carried with them into the jungle.

Eight members of the Raphael family—Margaret, Eddie, her father, her grandmother, her uncles Raphael and Jacob, her aunt Sarah, and her cousin Abraham—as well as the *shohet*, his wife and grandson, waited out the war. Knowing that the stockpiles of blankets, shoes, foods, and other commodities in their stores would be attractive to the invading Japanese, the Raphaels filled trucks with these materials and sent them to the nearby convent to be hidden and used for refugees from the fighting. Then they watched in horror, hands tied behind their backs, as the retreating British burned their stores and workshops so that nothing of value might fall into the hands of the Japanese.[16] They stood powerless while the Japanese bayoneted their photo of the British king and queen and sliced up their mattresses. The young girls were hidden from the invading troops. To the Japanese, the Raphaels were suspect, not as Jews, but as allies of the British, a charge

that was fomented by villagers jealous of the Raphaels' wealth. The Japanese threatened to confiscate their home; it was only through the intervention of an official in Rangoon, who endorsed the family, was that decree averted. But more than a house was to be lost: Together with the local priest, Margaret's Uncle John, R. A. Raphael, the proud mayor of Bassein, was arrested by the Japanese in late 1942, questioned, and imprisoned in Bassein for several months. He returned a broken man.

While they were permitted to remain in their home, they were required to cater banquets for the occupiers and their Burmese allies. But by 1944, heavy British and American bombing of the docks and storage facilities in the Bassein region also destroyed the back of their house and forced them to take refuge in an outlying village. Soon after, Jacob Raphael died, and was buried in the nearby Jewish cemetery. Despite the threatening situation, the burial followed traditional Jewish practice. The *shohet* knew the ritual procedures for burial and mourning, white cloth was located, and Margaret sewed her uncle's shroud, and despite the increasingly threatened situation, the group waited in the village for thirty days to erect a stone for the grave.

And then, they moved to hoped-for safety deeper into the jungle, where they lived for a year. Traveling by bullock cart, crossing a river by sampan—rowed by Margaret and Eddie—they reached a friendly village, all the while trying to comfort Margaret's distraught grandmother. They bathed in the river, wore shoes made of tire treads, and bartered for food. Though without medicine, they ministered to the villagers as best they could. Margaret's diary of the time marks the war years by their situation each Pesach. Eddie, brought up in luxury, traded the fish he caught for chicken and eggs for their Shabbat dinner, and hunted with the villagers. Python meat was especially prized, but to lure the python from the high trees, it was first necessary to kill a monkey to use as bait. Eddie participated in one of these python kills, but traded his portion of the meat for the skin, and had the skin made into a purse for Margaret. In Kfar Sava today, the python purse recalls a bright spot in this otherwise very awful, very frightening time.

Margaret Raphael Glicksohn, in Kfar Sava, Israel, with the python skin purse made by her brother Eddie during the war.

Late in 1944, the family heard their first outside news of the war via BBC and took heart from the music that was helping to sustain wartime Britain, such as, "There'll Always Be an England." Pesach in April 1945 was marked by extremely heavy bombing, and the family huddled together, repeating the traditional Passover question, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" But Pesach that year also marked the end of their ordeal, for soon after the Japanese retreated; in May the family returned home; and in June, British Army troops entered Bassein. In July, packages of food were dropped from the air, and finally, finally, the family received letters through the Red Cross from relatives in India.

After the War

The war was a watershed for the Raphael family, as for most Jews of Burma. Most Jews who fled Burma moved on to new lives abroad, in India, Israel, or England. Some 400 to 500 returned to Rangoon, hoping to resurrect the happy life they recalled there. After so many years of relative isolation from Jewish community, Margaret's grandmother insisted that she and Margaret move to the city so that finally she might live within a larger Jewish community. In 1948, Burma became independent of Britain, and the proud new nation

required that all citizens of Burma take a Burmese name. Unlike her brother, Margaret never became a Burmese citizen. In 1952, Margaret married a Polish Holocaust survivor whom she met through an international stamp collecting club, and she left Rangoon for London.

Eddie, now U Maung Maung, remained in Burma to care for elderly relatives, but ultimately it seems Burma was too entrenched in his being for him to ever leave Bassein. Eddie's Jewish family left for London, and he lived the rest of his life as a Jew among Buddhists and Christians, until his death in 1990. Like his father Judah before him, he took a Burmese companion, Daw Hla Kyi, and adopted Daw Hyla Kyi's daughter, Taung Taung Tin (T.T.T.). Today, in Pathein, Buddhist T.T.T. wears a gold chain with a menorah and a Star of David around her neck, a gift from Eddie.

By taking Burmese companions, these traditional Jews were acting much like the British. It is estimated that 90 percent of the British in Burma had mistresses.[17] It is uncertain how many Jews in Burma had similar arrangements, although anecdotal stories abound, and children of men who lived in Burma occasionally return looking for half-brothers and half-sisters they know of only through hushed family stories. What is known, however, is that in far-away Bassein, Abraham Faraj Judah Raphael's Buddhist companion, Daw Hla Kyi, and his adopted daughter Daw Taung Taung Tin still *kasher* chickens and light candles on Friday evenings, long after the meaning of these rituals has gone.
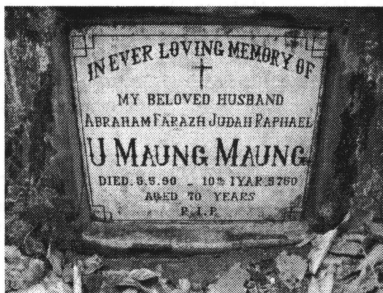
Jewish cemetery near Bassein (Pathein): Eddie Raphael's tombstone.

Acknowledgments

One's life story often seems so ordinary to the teller and so extraordinary to the rest of us. I had the extreme good fortune of corresponding with Margaret Raphael Glicksohn for several years and finally met her and her devoted daughter Judy Pasternak several times in Israel. I spent hours with them listening and appreciating not only the story but their warmth and good humor. They were extremely cooperative while writing my book (*Almost Englishmen*) as well as this account, by letter, personal conversation and e-mail. The story stands on its own, but the lovely people who facilitated my writing deserve to be acknowledged also for their kindness, hospitality, and humanity.

Notes

[1] Abraham Raphael's actual middle name is Faraj. The spelling on the tombstone is a mistake made by the stone carver, who apparently interpreted the sound of the final "j" as he heard it.

[2] Gladys's parents were also Roman Catholic, so she was raised in the religion.

[3] "Burmese" indicates "Buddhist." During the period under discussion, the identification was self-evident and the terminology interchangeable. Ethnic or religious groups within Burma—Christians, Jews, Hindus, Parsis—were never referred to as "Burmese," and tribes kept their own names in distinction from the dominant Burmans. Until Burma's post–World War II independence, there was no concept of inclusive Burmese citizenship or identification.

[4] Miriam and Ruby are names given by their father, Judah Raphael. Miriam's Burmese name is Daw Win May. Margaret doesn't know Ruby's Burmese name.
[5] Ruth Fredman Cernea, *Almost Englishmen*, 68.
[6] In Hebrew, Metuqa, "one who will grow old."
[7] Margaret is named after her great-grandmother, Margaret. Margaret's parents moved from Baghdad to Poona, India, where she was born.
[8] The Sofaer family and Salim Meyer. Both families left before the war.
[9] The distance was "shortened" considerably when a railroad between the cities was opened in 1902.
[10] *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. 7: 117.
[11] MBE—Member of the Order of the British Empire, an award created by King George V in 1917 to reward individuals both in the United Kingdom and throughout the Empire who had contributed to success in World War I. KiH was the Kaisar-i-Hind Medal for Public Service in India.
[12] Cernea, *Almost Englishmen*, 67-68.
[13] Ezra is credited with establishing the primacy of the study of the Law, the Torah, as the most essential mode of Jewish communal thought, worship, and action. "Ezra-Nehemiah contains the memoirs left by the two leaders who organized Jewish life in Judea in the beginning of the Second Commonwealth....The Book of Ezra describes the activities of a new figure in Judaism—the scribe, who took the place of the prophet after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity. The scribes (*sofrim*) made available copies of the Scriptures, and carefully interpreted and taught them to the people." Philip Birnbaum, *A Book of Jewish Concepts*, 462.
[14] In 1910, Farha Sassoon of Bombay, and her children, made a similar trip. Farha Sassoon described the tomb and procedure in detail and also recalled that, "Many give money for someone to bless them at the grave. ... The main time for visiting is between Pesach and Shavuot. ...Originally, the custom was to read by the grave the book of Ezra from a scroll, but this custom has stopped since Rabbi Yosef Hayim printed a book called Mamlechet Cohanim where he made a special order of readings and prayers to be read at the grave." "The Sassoons' Return Visit to Baghdad," *The Scribe*, No. 75: 20.
[15] How unusual this decision was can be appreciated by the fact that by autumn 1942 some 600,000 people had fled Burma. About 80,000 are estimated to have died on the way. Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, 167. One Jewish family remained in Mawbin, but most of the very few Jews who remained in Rangoon and Pegu seem to have been married to native wives.
[16] This was consistent with the general scorched earth policy of the British, who suffered an unprecedented military debacle in Burma.
[17] David Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste*, 285.

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Letter to the Editor—Warning on Plagiarism

By Myer Samra

Dear Editors,

Authors writing on Indo-Judaic matters should be warned that if they are writing about a topical subject, they could find their work being plagiarized.

I was surfing the Web recently looking at fresh material on the Chin-Kuki-Mizo people, whom I have been studying over many years. In the process, I came across an article that seemed interesting to me, with the title "Jewish Movements in the Hills of Manipur and Mizoram," at the following URL: http://tinyurl.com/mt9mfh.

After downloading and reading the article, I was amazed to find that it was a poorly typed and edited version of my article "The Tribe of Manasseh: 'Judaism' in the Hills of Manipur and Mizoram," which appeared in *Man in India*, 71 (1) (1991): 183-202.

Sentences written by me appear verbatim in the Kukiforum Internet article, though frequently with unchecked errors of spelling. My recounting of interviews with some of my informants appear in the article as if they were those of the "author," S. K. Mukherjee. Almost all the references are in fact documents I'd researched, and I doubt that anyone else would have assembled the very same range of reference materials. The author refers to my article three times in the body of his article, referencing it as "Sarma (1991,)" while in the bibliography my name is given as "Samara, Mayer."

At first I felt flattered that someone liked my work enough to want to use it and claim it as his own. However, I became disturbed after I saw the only references in the bibliography that weren't mine, and the only references that postdated my article, which were ostensibly a paper presented at a conference by Mukherjee, and an article written by him which was published in a book called *Social Movements in North East India*, edited by one Mahendra Narain Karna, published in 1998 by the Indus Publishing Company. Information about the book can be found on the web at http://tinyurl.com/knd4ac.

The essays in the book had previously been delivered as papers at a seminar held in Shillong by the North East India Council for Social Research in 1994.

I am concerned at the unauthorized use that has been made of my work, and quite surprised that this could have been allowed to happen, given that my article appeared in a prominent Indian journal.

Yours sincerely,
Myer Samra

Jewish-Indian Collection Now Accessible to the Public

IDC Publishers releases Jewish-Indian treasures from the Valmadonna Trust Library

By Liesbeth Hugenholtz

In 1999, the Valmadonna Trust Library in London acquired part of the collection of bibliophile David Sassoon's books. This anthology formed the world's most comprehensive collection of Hebrew prints from Baghdad and India. In 2004, Dutch publishers IDC began the considerable task of publishing the collection on microfiche. The first release, comprising some 340 titles from Baghdad, has now been augmented by more than 750 monographs, manuscripts, and pamphlets from India. Both collections are now available on microfiche and as an online publication.

The Indian prints, produced between 1832 and 1994, cover Jewish religious material, such as liturgies for various occasions, prayer books, and some twenty haggadot, several of which have been illustrated in Indian style. Selections of Talmud en Mishnah are also represented. Bible stories in the Marathi "verse drama" format stand out: These were clearly intended to both educate and entertain at the same time. There are Hebrew-Marathi grammars, glossaries, and alphabet books. Works rooted in the Arabic cultural heritage are represented by story books and collections of proverbs and poetry.

Also featured in this fascinating collection are numerous periodicals and corporation reports that bear witness to the everyday life of Jews in India. Charities were prolific, as were synagogue funds, Jewish educational funds, and the various branches of the Zionist organization in India. Periodicals titled *Or Emet*, *The Jewish Advocate*, *The Lamp of Judaism*—and some twenty more—reveal the circumstances in which the Jewish community lived in India, what they thought about matters near and far, and the nature of their fears and dreams. *Israel's Messenger*, published in Shanghai between 1904 and 1941, is made available on microfiche as a separate publication, and provides a sharp insight into the relations between the Jewish communities in Shanghai, India, and Baghdad.

Individuals are not simply represented by short news items, reports, and pictures in periodicals, but also shimmer through the authentic handwriting of the early lithographed works and manuscript letters. Every edition of the periodical *Doresh Tov le-Amo*, founded in 1855 in Bombay, was prepared by lithograph, clearly in a Baghdadi hand, while the rare series of *Pizmonim*, little booklets lithographed in Par'ur, can clearly be seen to have been written in a non-Baghdadi hand.

As to language, earlier works show more Judeo-Arabic mixed with Hebrew and Aramaic, reflecting printers' entrepreneurship stemming from Baghdad. Later prints tend to be mixtures of Hebrew, Marathi, and English. A linguistic paradise, this collection provides rich material for researchers of the Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic dialect and reveal how it fared in India. Further research into Marathi and Hebrew, especially at the crossroads of these languages, can start here.

Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic and Marathi Jewish Printing in India
657 titles (more than 750 items including the ephemera) on 1,376 microfiches or online

Israel's Messenger. Shanghai 1904-1941
204 microfiches or online

Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic Printing in Baghdad
346 titles on 617 microfiches or online

For more information about the collections, please contact Liesbeth Hugenholtz, publisher at Brill (lhugenholtz@idc.nl) or visit IDC's website at www.idc.nl where you can find comprehensive introductions to the collections by Brad Sabin Hill as well as detailed title lists.

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Book Review

The Girl from Foreign: A Search for Shipwrecked Ancestors, Forgotten Histories, and a Sense of Hope
Reviewed by Joan G. Roland

Sadia Shepard, *The Girl from Foreign: A Search for Shipwrecked Ancestors, Forgotten Histories, and a Sense of Hope* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008).

Sadia Shepard's wonderfully crafted, beautifully written memoir, is a story about a young woman and her beloved grandmother. As their timelines and journeys intersect, the young woman, endeavoring to unravel mysteries about her grandmother's roots, understands that she is also searching for her own heritage, indeed, for herself. But the narrative of discovery also provides an engrossing account of Bene Israel life in Bombay (Shepard's purposefully chosen term) and the Konkan, as well as fascinating insights into segments of life in modern India and Pakistan.

 Shepard recounts how she was raised, in a suburb of Boston, Massachusetts, by "three parents": her American Protestant father from Colorado, her Pakistani Muslim mother, and the latter's widowed mother, Rahat Siddiqi, known as Nana, who came to live with the family when Shepard was born. It was an open, loving, bicultural home, where Muslim and Christian holidays were celebrated and Sadia and her younger brother Cassim learned about rituals of worship in both faiths. Her father said that although he had embraced Islam to marry her mother, he did not give up his own religion. It was assumed that someday the children would—or would not—choose a faith to practice. Although she grew up in America, annual trips to Pakistan as a child to visit her maternal family left an indelible imprint on Sadia. At the age of 13, Sadia discovers in one of Nana's drawers a pin with the name Rachel Jacobs. "Who is Rachel Jacobs?" she asks. She learns that this was the original name of her grandmother. Nana, it turns out, had been born into the Bene Israel community of Bombay, and had eloped at 16 with a Muslim friend and business partner of her father's, who never knew about the marriage; she saw her husband rarely until after Partition, when she moved with him, his two other wives, and the children to Karachi. There they lived in a joint household. And there, Rahat Siddiqi kept her promise to her husband to raise their five children as Muslims; In turn, it seems he had promised her a Jewish funeral; she could die as a Jew. When young Sadia asks Nana, who is central to her life, "So are you Muslim or are you Jewish?" the answer was "Now I'm a Muslim, but God is the same in both religions." After Nana's death, Sadia will find another object in her grandmother's drawer, which will ultimately allow her to unearth more secrets.

 Nana, toward the end of her life, and encouraged by Shepard, becomes interested in learning about her Jewish roots and Judaism. She talks with the family's Jewish friends about Jewish rituals, visits synagogues, and joins Hadassah, a Jewish women's organization. Her bookshelf contained copies of the *Quran*, a Torah, and books about the Bene Israel. Sadia's mother was more supportive than her brothers of Nana's interest in her past. Nana even expresses a wish to be buried as a Jew. Shortly before her death, she exacts a promise from her grand-daughter to go to India and "learn about your ancestors"—her Bene Israel roots. When Sadia promises, Nana replies, "Then all of this will be worth it, if you tell my story."

 Upon completing her graduate studies in documentary film-making at Stanford, Shepard is awarded a Fulbright to spend a year in India making a film about the Bene Israel. Equally important to her is to forge a connection with the community. Thus begins Sadia's search to fulfill her promise to learn about their customs and traditions, to reclaim Nana's, and her own, past. She ends up spending almost two years in India, unlocking secrets as she progresses. The memoir, although focusing on these two years, is

structured in a way that it draws on events occurring throughout the twentieth century. The narrative is divided into three parts. The first, "Storytelling," sets the stage by moving back and forth in time as Shepard interweaves chapters about her own arrival in India and her early days in Pune with flashback sections introducing us to her family and their intriguing backgrounds. The second part, "Fieldwork," a chronological account of the period in India in 2001 and 2002 where she gets to know and film the community, reveals the most about the Bene Israel, and finally, "Departures," which includes the fascinating story of Shepard's visit, now as a young adult, to her family in Karachi, and an important flashback, integrates the experience.

Shepard arrives in Bombay, en route to Pune in September 2001, fifteen months after her grandmother had died and missing her profoundly. She immediately seeks out and is shown around by its current owners, the house that Nana's husband had built for her in Worli, and in which she lived before leaving for Pakistan. In Pune, Sadia is affiliated with the prestigious Film and TV Institute of India where she is referred to as "the girl from foreign," a term some Indians use to mean "abroad," without designating a specific country. She meets a distant cousin of her grandmother's and becomes immersed in reading about the Bene Israel. She also befriends a fellow student who helps her to understand India and who will become an important figure in her work and life there. Finding it difficult to feel accepted by the small Pune Bene Israel community ("Sadia is a Muslim name," she hears repeatedly), she relocates to Bombay and is able to connect with the large Bene Israel community in that city. She volunteers as a teacher at ORT India, the Jewish vocational training school directed by a distant cousin, and helps teenagers there develop a play about their community's heritage to present in Israel during an upcoming visit. She learns about the feelings and hopes of her students. Now Shepard is welcomed by the community and interviews and photographs many of its members and also photographs synagogues in Bombay and the Konkan coast. She visits the places her grandmother had known and feels more connected to her. She studies Hindi. Her dress of choice is the salwar kameez. Sadia, and her brother when he visits, also connect with Muslims.

In Bombay, Shepard encounters a young Bene Israel couple, both Jewish educators who became more religiously observant when they studied in Israel for a year. They invite Sadia to celebrate the Sabbath at their home and when they learn her story, they explain that although the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Islam and Christianity, have similarities, they are in the long run mutually contradictory. They try to convince Sadia that she must choose which one she will follow, before she gets married. Throughout the memoir, one is exposed to Sadia's reluctance to choose, to make a commitment to any one faith. She feels emotionally connected to all three. Although she has been observing and participating in Jewish rituals and customs in India for almost two years, she still finds comfort in some of the Muslim customs she was raised with. Her mother reminds her that she can pray to God in many ways, in many languages.

Readers who are familiar with Bene Israel history will probably not learn much more on that subject. Her statement toward the beginning of the book that there is very little information about the Bene Israel in print is puzzling. The work of Strizower, Isenberg, Roland, Weil, and Israel was available and Shepard had read some of it. Nevertheless, her efforts to record and preserve the everyday life of the community today, its unique customs such as the *malida* ceremony, its synagogues, its preparations for a wedding and its attitudes toward emigration to Israel are valuable. Shepard visits the Konkan, searching out the villages Bhorupali (which no longer exists) and Chorde, from which her great-grandparents came. Her description of the home of David Waskar, the last Bene Israel oil-presser, in Revdanda and her account of contemporary celebrations of Simchat Torah and Succoth give a rich glimpse of a dwindling community trying to preserve its heritage. Revdanda, where she also has to tell her own story to the Bene Israel, will take on a

special significance for the author.

Shepard's Pakistani Muslim heritage is deftly framed by descriptions of two visits, twenty years apart, to Karachi, during which she attends family weddings. At the age of eight, on a visit with her family, she is swept up into the all-embracing life of the large Siddiqi joint family. When she journeys—from Bombay to Karachi, as Nana did—for the first time by herself, in 2002, to attend a cousin's wedding, she is curious to see how she will now fit into this milieu. At prayer time, she is uncertain of the sequence of movements in Muslim prayer, asks a cousin to guide her, and finds it comforting, but she is dismayed at the increasing religious conservatism she observes in her family. On this trip, Sadia has questions to ask about her grandmother's marriage and practices. She is surprised to find that the younger generation considered Nana to be Jewish. Through talking to relatives and finding certain papers, she manages to clarify certain mysteries about her family; others remain shrouded.

It is the presence of Nana in all that Shepard does and sees—and her response to this presence—that makes this narrative so deeply moving. After attending Magen Hasidim synagogue and fasting, for the first time, on Yom Kippur, Sadia is given a old-fashioned Bene Israel sweet to break the fast which she immediately recognizes as the pastry that Nana gave the children to break the fast of Ramadan. She comes to realize that the foods her grandmother cooked for her, which she had always thought of as Pakistani dishes, were from traditional Bene Israel Konkan recipes. The legacy of kosher cooking was there: Nana used coconut milk, rather than cow's milk in her curries. Throughout her intricate tale, Shepard struggles with unanswered questions about her grandmother's faith. What conflicts did Nana have? She observed Muslim practices but did she formally convert to Islam? Did she want to remain a Jew? What religion did she consider herself? How did she want to die and be buried? What really happened in her last moments? Readers of this compelling memoir will find themselves eager to know the answers—if they are knowable—to these questions, but the circumstances surrounding Nana's death are revealed, poignantly, only toward the end of the book. The question of choice is an underlying motif in Shepard's tale. Must one choose? Will one have regrets?

As Shepard tells Nana's story, and her own, a recurrent theme is that of homelands, mental and physical. Where is home, one's native place? Where does one live or where does one pretend to live if one is transplanted? Is it faith that identifies home, or the cultural traditions and customs associated with it? And what does "foreign" mean? Shepard explores these issues as they pertain to her grandmother—was she "the girl from foreign" when she lived in Pakistan?—to members of the Bene Israel community who are contemplating emigrating to Israel, and eventually, to herself. Her search to understand who Nana was and where she belonged, punctuated by her honest, sensitive self-reflections about her own complex heritage, make this is a lovely book.

Note: Sadia Shepard's documentary film, *In Search of the Bene Israel* is being screened in various film festivals in the United States.

Book Review

Nissim Ezekiel Remembered
Reviewed by Liladhar R. Pendse

Havovi Anklesaria, ed., with Santan Rodrigues, *Nissim Ezekiel Remembered* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2008).

Nissim Ezekiel Remembered edited by Havovi Anklesaria with assistance from Santan Rodrigues is one of the few exemplary compilations in memory of Nissim Ezekiel. Nissim Moses Ezekiel, a poet, political commentator, professor and writer was born in Bombay (modern Mumbai), India, on 16 December 1924. He was the third of five children of Moses and Diana Ezekiel. His father was a professor of biology at Wilson College and his mother a schoolteacher who later started her own school. Nissim Moses Ezekiel belonged to Mumbai's Bene Israel Jewish community. This community is one of the oldest of India's three Jewish communities, the Bene Israel, who are by oral tradition known to have left ancient Galilee and settled at Maharashtra's coastline after a shipwreck off the Indian subcontinent around 150 B.C.E.

Lawerence Joffe referred to Nissim Ezekiel in an obituary that was published in the *Guardian* as the father of post-Indian verse in English. This new volume helps us refresh our memories about the important contributions of Bene Israeli's Nissim Ezekiel to the modern English literary traditions of post-colonial India. This dedicatory volume cannot be defined as a commemorative *festschrift* for several reasons. First, this book was published four years after Nissim's passing. The volume serves as a reminder of Nissim's accomplishments and thoughts on several topics. Second, the volume includes not only honorific essays, but also the selected writings of Nissim Ezekiel on topics varying from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to his several later "found poems." Third, there are several critical book reviews included in it, besides the writings of academics on Nissim and his literary contribution to world literature. In the introduction, the editor defines this volume as a reader and a memoir.[1] As we read this anthology, it becomes clear to us what the editor meant by defining this volume as a memoir, for Santan Rodrigues was Nissim's student at Bombay University.

One important feature of the book that I appreciated was the chronology at the beginning of the book. This chronology helped me trace Nissim's life path as well as his literary endeavors by locating them and correlating them to the contents of the volume. Each of Nissim's literary pieces can be examined as an archival repository of the author's thought and the traces of chronology that can be found in his writing served as evidence of information and the author's possible intentions. This volume is divided into ten different equally important parts that represent various facets of Nissim's cultural productions and reflections as expressed by various other authors and academics. These ten equally important parts are "Nissim, lightly and other pieces," "Personally Speaking: a series of interviews," "Many Poems, two Plays and a Short Story," "The Creative Writer as Critic, and other essays," "On Writers and Books," "Book Reviews," "Art and Artists," "The Politics of Discontent: the Freedom First years," "This and That," and "Academia." This logical yet circular arrangement of the chapters within the anthology, in my opinion, enhances not only the granularity of the narrative, but also introduces the readers to the perception of the totality that Nissim Ezekiel represented. The arrangement of various essays imparts flexibility by which a reader can read the volume without any particular order and still construct his or her own "personal" Nissim. The texture of the narratives that are contained within the volume thus as some may argue almost has a modernist feel to it.

The anthology opens with a dedicatory poem by Adil Jussawalla that is titled, "Have I heard Right, I wonder." In this poem, can we, as readers, extrapolate what Nissim was

about? The personal character of the narrative in the essays that follow this poem imparts a lasting impression on us as viewers of the circumstances in which the poet existed. The opening lines of the essay by his younger sister Asha A. Bhende called "Remembering Nissim," introduces Nissim to us in few lines. The choice of some memories that we keep alive and the others that we archive in deep subconscious is circumstantial. Often times these personal and private circumstances get forgotten in the flurry of remembering someone famous who has passed on. The crowd focuses on the person as a prominent social actor. Nissim, due to his multifaceted role on literary scenes of India, was not an exception. However, it is his sister, Asha, that makes us remember Nissim as her brother. She summarizes his various roles for us in one sentence, but what touched me most was the following: "I would like to remember Nissim, as my brother who made our mother laugh. Our mother needed to laugh with all the burdens she carried—five children, an affectionate husband who was not very practical when it came to money matters...." (Ankelsaria 6). We, like most readers, know Nissim through his poetry; but we can glimpse into his life, into highly personal moments.

The disappearance of Nissim from the house for a week immediately after the death of his mother may seem illogical to us as readers, but Nissim's remarks to Asha, "I just felt that all of you, who crowded this place, took over my life," for me summarized the constant dilemma that Nissim would have faced as a public and private figure.

In the section, "Personally Speaking: a series of interviews," an interview with Imtiaz and Anil Dharker is of special significance as it touches on some of the important questions about Nissim's world-views. I used plural here on purpose as it alludes to the notion of Nissim's faceted identities. In this interview, Nissim is asked the question if the consciousness of being Jewish shaped his work at all.[2]
The answer was quite revealing to me:

> It's a question that has really come to the foreground only in the last few years. I'm little afraid of it. This basically because, from the time I was seventeen, the attempt has been made to become Indian, and that has meant responding to Hindu tradition. The Jewish tended to be one among many other traditions. Now, I think that attempt of thirty years has been a failure. I see great difference between a real Indian and my Indianness. A major Scottish poet recently said to me, at an international poetry festival in Rotterdam, 'You're not a real Indian', and my response was, 'No, we've lived in India only for 2,000 years'. A Jew can never be a 'real' Indian or a 'real' Chinaman. I'd say Parthasarathy and Ramanujan are 'real' Indians (Ankelsaria 44).

I believe that in Nissim we see his connectedness to a way of life that is reinforced by his Jewishness. The recognition of universal Jewish consciousness and 2000 years of syncretic coexistence with Hindus alludes to the uniqueness of Bene Israel's experience in Maharashtra.

In my opinion, it would be unrealistic to expect all of Nissim's prolific writings to be included in this volume. However, it would have been a great help if the editor would have included for us some criteria on which the selections were based.

The question of what it means to be an Indian within the context of a multilingual state that formalizes the construct of citizenry and standardizes our thinking must have presented Nissim with a challenge that he grappled with in his many critiques and essays of the postindependent period. I would leave it for the readers to judge for their own sake the validity of propositions that Nissim has made through his writings that have been included in this volume. The volume itself cannot be considered to be distilled Nissim, but it can be read also as an introduction to Nissim.

I would conclude by asking the reader to look at a small later piece by Nissim called, "Poetry in the time of tempests." I was glad to see that this important piece made it into this exemplary volume. I believe that Nissim speaks to each of us individually. This ability of Nissim to create magic out of his word constructs has had an exceptional effect on me, a product of the lower middle-class Mumbai milieu. The ability of Nissim to invoke in me the memories of the Emergency period, the dilapidated Mahim, my Marathi medium instruction in school, gathers my memories like clouds within my soul as I listen to Nissim asking "What connections have I made between what happened in my life and what went on in the abstract life of the country?"[3]

How do I then, as a transplant in the United States, accept the realities of life? Often, we cannot control the circumstances in which we find ourselves, but how we react to them and what we make of them is totally up to us. This is the personal message that Nissim conveys to me. I invite you to undertake your own pilgrimage through this volume, *Nissim Ezekiel Remembered.*

Notes

[1] Havovi Anklesaria, ed., with Santan Rodrigues, *Nissim Ezekiel Remembered* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2008), p. xxv.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., pp. 223

Book Review

Karmic Passages: Israeli Scholarship on India
Reviewed by Elizabeth Chalier-Visuvalingam

David Shulman and Shalva Weil, eds., *Karmic Passages: Israeli Scholarship on India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008).[1]

The book published by Oxford University Press in 2008 as *Karmic Passages: Israeli Scholarship on India*, confirms that Indian studies in Israel have found a solid academic presence in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Beersheba. The book also confirms the real interest in India for many Israelis.

The title, *Karmic Passages*, is interesting because it clearly announces the complexity of the attention that Israelis have for India. This complexity is perfectly illustrated in the organization of the book, which is divided into three parts whose interrelation appears, however, to be rather thin. We find three distinct parts, the first entitled "Philological and Literary Excursions," the second "Buddhist Voyages," the third "Sojourns in Contemporary India." The contributors have also each his/her own *karma* that seems to have led them along diverse paths. The lack of dialectic and synthesis between the parts is regrettable; it is also to be noted that there is no conclusion.

However this book very much underlines the high standard of Indian studies in Israel. All the aspects of Indian civilization are deeply analyzed from South to North. The book also has a political aspect as it celebrates the "fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Israel" as noted by Arun K. Singh, ambassador of India to Israel.

David Shulman, who with his book *The King and the Clown in South Indian Myth and Poetry* has renewed not only Sanskrit but also Tamil studies, inaugurates this book with Shalva Weil, a pioneer in research on Indian Jews with the title "The Israeli Quest for India." They immediately explain the fascination of young Israelis for India after their military service. Having met them while I was doing my research in Varanasi and Kathmandu, I would not contradict this. Israelis who choose to do Indian studies have for the most part been in India before and some practice meditation especially in the Tibetan Buddhism mode. The Dalai Lama has in this way often come to Israel, and there are Israeli residents in Dharamsala.

David Shulman begins the first part of the book and we embark on a very specific philological journey into the poetry of kings and bees in the sixteenth century, especially around Krishnadevarâya, flanked by his minister Timmarasu and his buffoon Tenâli Ram, who reigned over the Vijayanagara state, noting the great particularity of this Telugu poetry and of the work *Âmukta-mâlyada* that Shulman (p. 13) defines as "a novel-cum-encyclopedia-cum-summatheologica" and explains that in fact this poem was written "as an act of atonement" because Krishnadevarâya has not recognized the grandeur of the poet Nrsimhakavi. Then he continues with a precise study of Tukkâ cycle: "These are the so-called 'Tukkâ' poems ascribed to the king's first and most unhappy queen, who is variably called Tukkâ, Tukkâji, Varadarajamma and Cinnadevi" (p. 16). What is most important for David Shulman is the interpretation of this poetry in the seventeenth century that will project a new image of royalty.

Yohanan Grinshpon draws our attention to a fresh reading of the classic work, the *Hitopadesa* (6th century A.D.). The article articulates well with the book title and can be read on many levels including the political. His article begins with this question, "Can an enemy become a true friend?" The Sanskritists know that the Sanskrit word *ari* designates both friend and enemy. Yohanan Grinshpon focuses on three stories of the section, *Mitra-Labh* ("Acquisition of Friends") and offers a Gandhian reading of one of them (pp. 40-41)

"The story of the Gandhi-like crow Laghupatanaka and the mouse named Hiranyaka (Golden) expresses a metaphysics underlying an infinite scope of possible transformations including that of *svabhâva* itself [...] the Gandhian crow launches a *satyâgraha*, preparing to starve himself unto death. And he succeeds." This is what Gandhi did on numerous occasions to convince his interlocutors whom he however did not consider to be enemies. Human nature (*svabhâva*) is endowed with great violence according to Gandhi but can be transformed through rigorous attention. This contribution perfectly illustrates the Sanskrit term *satya,* which means truth but also the past participle of the verb "to be," the hypocrisy of the lion and the vulture told in the *Hitopadesa*, wavers before the truth of the acts. Action then becomes the sole criterion for the reality of transformation.

Ophira Gamliel invites us to listen to Malayalam songs that also animate the lives of Cochin Jews. These songs are grouped around the Malayalam term *nâtanpâttukal* (p. 46). "The term *nâtanpâttukal* is a modern coinage compounded from *nâtan*, 'of the country' and *pâttukal*, 'songs'." These songs are written in Malayalam but steeped in Sanskrit and Tamil words. The author also mentions (p. 48), "Another type of hybrid involves a different language altogether from Tamil and Sanskrit. These belong solely to the Semitic communities of Kerala: the *Mapillas* composing in Arabi-Malayalam, and the Christians and Jews spicing up their Malayalam and their Hebrew respectively. Malayalam folk songs are not transparent and may require some deciphering, even when the reader is a native speaker." The author has other categories of songs such as songs of possession, songs of clapping hands, and wedding songs in which the prophet Muhammad (p. 69) is cited. These songs reflect a relatively harmonious community life.

Yigal Bronner's contribution celebrates the genius of the Sanskrit language and its inimitable way of saying two things at once through the rhetorical figure called "*slesha*" the evolution of which he retraces. He also retraces the history of the emergence of vernacular languages and their links with Sanskrit, stressing Telugu as the language that could reflect this passage. It would have been interesting if Yigal Bronner could have further clarified the link he sees between sacred language and spoken language and sketched a comparative outline with what is happening in Israel for Hebrew.

Maya Teyet Dayan continues the reflections on Sanskrit poetry by focusing on Nala and Damayanti in the *Naisadhîyacarita* written by Srîharsa and by asking the metaphysical question, how is the visible invisible?

After this trip through the texts we are invited to "Buddhist voyages." Yael Bentor poses the provocative question, Can women Attain Enlightenment through Vajrayâna Practices? And it is indeed the equality of men and women that is so apprehended in Pali literature, Mahâyâna and Vajrayâna. Despite tensions evident in some texts, men and women are equal in attaining liberation because meditation transcends all differences, and this is particularly emphasized in the Vajrayâna. The author affirms that the Dalai Lama has the same perception (p. 131).

Shlomo Biderman, the author of "Compassion and Beyond," wants to differentiate between Buddhist *karunâ* and what might be called "Western compassion." The latter presupposes a moral framework that the shielded subject suspends to identify, at least partially, with the actual or future suffering of the object of this attitude. This is strikingly illustrated at the very outset by the poignant scene from Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* where the frail monk Zosima unexpectedly kneels before the vicious Dmitri, who is oblivious to his eventual doom while confronting his own father. The Buddha's compassion, on the contrary, implies an unbridgeable chasm between the wisdom (*prajñâ*) founded on introspective "subjectivity" and the (existential) suffering of the (ignorant) object of compassion. The ("turning of the wheel" of the) religious "Law" is itself so dependent on a pre- or supra-moral perspective that *dharma* can be ultimately synonymous with *karunâ*. Whereas Western compassion presupposes or institutes a hierarchical disjunction between subject and object that it thereby attempts to bridge, (the

bodhisattva's) *karunâ* instead confers spiritual detachment by distancing the subject from the common bond of ignorance that otherwise binds it to the object. Biderman clinches this East-West opposition by reverting to the external primacy of the moral Commandment in the Jewish Bible as illustrated by God's displeasure with the reluctant prophet Jonah for his unwillingness to chastise the doomed people of Niniveh. Jonah is able to redeem himself only by renouncing decisively an unseemly "compassion" that runs contrary to God's insistence on Justice. This comparative picture is, however, complicated and muddied by God's own "change of heart" toward the repentant Niniveh that now angers Jonah, redeemed by his righteousness only to find his faithful prophecy of doom belied. An additional twist is provided by Jonah's own bitter compassion for the plant that had shielded him from the scorching sun at the gates of the city but is now blighted by the Divine, yet again "arbitrary," Will. God seems to suggest, in his defense, that lurking behind Jonah's (apparent) "compassion" (including toward Niniveh?) is in reality an all-too-human core of "self-pity" (that prevents him from recognizing that it was God's Mercy that had sprouted the plant to begin with). The impersonal equivalent of God in "atheistic" Buddhism would be the implacable Law of Karma, but the soteriological function of *karunâ* is precisely to dissolve its fetters by eradicating the ignorance that is its root cause. The reader is left with a glimpse of a timeless opposition between Moses and the Buddha, or expressed negatively, between "human servitude" and "selfish compassion"! "Compassion and Beyond" so well exemplifies what Karmic passages might have been by way of a groundbreaking confrontation and bridge between the Indian and the Judaic world-views that it indeed deserves a lengthy review. However, the gulf between the two traditions has been perhaps exaggerated, paradoxically, by Biderman not having pressed this opposition far enough.

The Buddhist *karunâ* coexisted and interacted, in India, for more than a millennium with Brahmanism that was also ruled by a (world-affirming) Dharma (reinterpreted by the Buddha), but more closely aligned with the Mosaic Law as a binding system of prohibitions and injunctions. Presumably, lay Hindus increasingly partook to differing degrees in both Brahmanical (law-oriented, as opposed to *moksha*) and Buddhist (*karunâ*-orientated) understandings of dharma despite the tension between these opposed yet overlapping world-views. Compassion plays a central role in Buddhism only because it presupposes the (first noble) "truth" that "everything is suffering" (*sarvam duhkham*): it wells forth spontaneously in the Enlightened One freed from all suffering toward all beings including those unaware of their own suffering. The Bodhisattva, on the other hand, cultivates such *karunâ* not only to stabilize his detached wisdom (*prajñâ*) but also to ensure that he will remain (or "return") postenlightenment to show lesser beings the way. Yet, compassion of the "Western" kind does not seem to have been foreign to ordinary (i.e., unenlightened) Indians when confronted with suffering of the more mundane kind, for it has been deliberately exploited, alongside all the other emotional attitudes, in the classical theater, which distinguishes between "pity" (*dayâ*), *karunâ* as the aesthetic counterpart of worldly "sorrow" (*shoka*), and enlightened *karunâ* as a mode of supreme detachment (*shânta*). The Buddhist achievement has perhaps been to explore the transformative potential of what is indeed a universal human experience by providing the necessary metaphysical framework. This has allowed Abhinavagupta, the theoretician of the profoundly didactic ("morala") brahmanical theater, to not just endorse but raise *karunâ* to the status of the supreme sentiment.

Boaz Amichay in his study of *Srâvakabhûmi* of Asanga takes us back to the complex relationship between the student and the teacher who evaluates him. It would have been interesting to compare these rules with those of the yeshiva in Israel.

Eviatar Shulman brings us back to more metaphysical problems in Buddhism discussing Nâgârjuna's critique of the concept of impermanence in Buddhism. Indeed, according to the author (p.175), "Two important points must be highlighted regarding

Nâgârjuna's reading of impermanence. The first is that he denies the validity of impermanence as a true characterization of the way things exist. Nothing can be said to arise and cease; in emptiness there are no things to be empty. Secondly, the fact that phenomena appear to be impermanent implies they are illusions, or rather similar to an illusion or a dream." However it is difficult to follow Eviatar Shulman when he says (p. 175), "Impermanence functions in Nâgârjuna's system only as a stepping stone to more profound insights." To our knowledge, impermanence functions the same way in Buddhism. But Eviatar Shulman clarifies (p. 177), "Nâgârjuna's 'insubstantiality' is unambiguously distinct from the Buddha's. For the Buddha, insubstantiality means change and a lack of true identity over time. For Nâgârjuna insubstantiality means unreality and a lack of any identity whatsoever."

The third part of the book, "Sojourns in Contemporary India," the most original, most innovative, articulates well with the title and cover of the book that depicts two aspects of Chennamangalam synagogue in Kerala. Ronie Parciak leads his reader in the discovery of the Other and of the Self (p. 192), "This essay wishes to trace the Israeli yearning to encounter the Self in its full realness in one of the more intensive arenas where his passion is articulated—India [...] India [...] is constructed as the archetypal Other of Israeliness, the other against which it achieves priority and defines itself as an entity possessing solid cultural boundaries." The ritual voyage of the Israelis could be interpreted as a quest for identity as it is difficult for most to know where to place Israel: in Europe, the Middle East, or Asia? But a political issue also looms just beyond because as the author states (p. 193), "Unlike the Arab and the Maghreb countries whose Eastern identity was perceived as a threat to hegemony, India has become the signifier of a non-threatening, non-conflictual Easterness." But the author adds cautiously (p. 194), "The roots of the enormous interests developed in Israel toward India in the modern age can not be separated from the Orientalist thought that constructs the Orient as a sheer Other as well as an object of great yearning." This trip to the East is also latent in the Hebrew word *Kadima* (p. 197): "The Hebrew word Kadima (literally onward, as east) fuses two movements: the movement toward the East in the geographical sense and the movement forward, in contrast to decline or regression. At the same time, it is a movement backward, to ancient times. The modern journey to the East has, therefore, become a journey to the source of creation, a move toward an intimate knowledge of the Divine and an attempt to revive it in its full realness within the traveler's consciousness." The author contrasts the two countries (p.202), "Scenes that could be interpreted as 'Biblical' were identified with various Israeli landscapes: huge unbuilt spaces, tents in the desert, ploughing with animals, the *galabia* garment-scenes which are paradoxically link[ed] to the Arab population in Israel." The author also rapidly evokes the Jews of India, stressing their role as a figure of union without developing the idea of self in the other. The author also indicates some historical similarity between India and Israel with regard to confronting the British. She finally understands this passage to India as reflecting an aspect of the current situation in Israel (p. 207), "At the same time India could also hold up a different kind of mirror, one in which Indian Muslims reflected the conflict between Arabs and Jews. If India is often embodied as the Other, then its Muslim citizens might epitomize the other within the Other." T

The analysis of the experience of Israelis in India is pursued by Darya Maoz who says (p. 215) that "Some fifty thousand Israelis travel to India each year." Most Israelis go to India after their military service (p. 216), "Approximately one-third of the interviewees, mainly men, reported experiencing a crisis prior to their trip and ascribed it to their army service, which they defined as frustrating and disheartening." Israelis go to India to escape "what they describe as a materialistic, harsh and stressful society and try to look for refuge in an 'authentic', pure, relaxed, and prime destination" (p. 217). But it is reasonable to wonder about who are the Indians they encounter. Darya Maoz revisits the question of

Israel's situation by writing (p. 219), "India stands in binary opposition to Israel. India is East, while Israel is West." The author states (p. 220), "Many backpackers compared India to an Arab village or town." The Israelis also go to India because they are interested in spirituality (p. 221). "It is almost unacceptable in the Israeli backpacker community in India not to participate in a least one 'course' in Yoga, meditation, Reiki or Kabala (Jewish mysticism)." But the author immediately adds, "There is usually no 'real' interest in the local philosophies," which contradicts what David Shulman and Shalva Weil said in the introduction.

The book ends with an article by Shalva Weil on Esther David (whom we had a chance to meet during the *"Belles Etrangères"* days in Paris in November 2002), who represents perhaps the possibility of understanding the complex relationship between Israel and India because Esther David belongs to the Bene Israel community of Bombay. Her book, *The Walled City*, translated into French, may in fact be the metaphor for her hometown Ahmedabad, India (p. 237) but also, it seems to us, for Jerusalem and can also be, from another perspective, a metaphor of any mental confinement. This book is followed by two other novels *The Book of Esther* (2004) and *The Book of Rachel* (2006), which tell the story of Esther David but also the history of her community, the Bene Israel, which share many values with the Indians but also with the Jews.

The pages of this book illustrate the difficulty of the journey through otherness, the impossible detachment of man and his territory, the complexity of envisaging our destiny otherwise.

Note

[1] This review is dedicated to the memory of Mr. Kolet (Bene Israel), who still led the Jewish community in New Delhi in 1989 and whom I had the chance of meeting several times while I was pursuing my university studies in India. It is also dedicated to the memory of Charles Mopsik, prominent researcher in the field of Kabala, with whom I had the privilege of working in Paris during the preparatory work for our contributions to the book edited by Hananya Goodman, *Between Jerusalem and Benares: Comparative Studies in Judaism and Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994).

Book Review

Indian Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza
Reviewed by Nathan Katz

S. D. Goitein and Mordechai A. Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza* (Leiden, Brill. 2008). 918 + xxix pages. ISBN 978-90-04-15472-8.

Readers of this journal will likely know the story of the fabled Cairo Geniza documents, our most significant source of information about medieval Jewish merchants who plied the sea lanes between western and southern Asia.

Jewish law is very concerned about not desecrating the Holy Name, so any document on which the word "G-d" (or some variant) is written may not be discarded or destroyed, but must be respectfully buried. Even the most secular document that might contain the Name is set aside and conveyed to a storeroom, known as a Geniza, until it is properly interred in a cemetery. In 1890, the synagogue at Fustat in Old Cairo was torn down. Scholars and antique dealers were astounded by the great number of documents preserved in the synagogue's Geniza, mostly from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, including an estimated 1,200 merchants' letters.

The late Solomon D. Goitein devoted much of his life to the study and translation of these letters, which were composed in Judaeo-Arabic. In 1973 he published eighty of them in *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*[1] and others in *The Yemenites: History, Communal Organization, Spiritual Life* in 1983.[2] At the time of his death two years later, was working on his *India Book*, a study of those letters dealing with the India trade. Mordechai A. Friedman of Tel Aviv University, who had been Goitein's research assistant in 1962, was entrusted with the task of bringing his mentor's work to fruition.

The result of their half century of collaborative effort is this masterful work, a treasury of primary documents that will be mined by scholars for decades. In it are translations of 459 documents, including letters, commercial bills, shipping manifests, court records, and the like, most of them written between 1080 and 1160, some as late as 1240.

Friedman provides a context for and analyses of the documents in his 164-page introduction, made up of three chapters.

The first chapter is a history of their massive joint project and an overview of medieval commerce between the Middle East and India. We are introduced to some of the major medieval Jewish merchants who wrote the documents, and we learn something about the commerce itself. Summarizing the ships' manifests, Friedman reports that eastbound products included textiles, vessels of silver, glass and other materials, household goods such as carpets, tables and kitchen utensils, chemicals, medicines, paper, metals for the Indian copper industry, coral, foodstuffs such as cheese, sugar, raisins and olive oil, Yemenite sweets, and linseed oil for lamps. Westbound commodities included primarily spice of course, but also medicines and herbs, iron and steel, brass and bronze, silks and other textiles, pearls, beads and cowrie shells, shoes and other leather goods, Chinese porcelain, ivory, coconuts, and timber.

In the introduction's second chapters, we meet five of the leading Jewish merchants engaged in the India trade. Skillfully, Goitein and Friedman tease out compelling portraits of these men and their families, their lives in India and back at home in Tunisia or Egypt or Yemen, the colleagues, their disputes, their loneliness, their superstitions, and their faith. Among them, no doubt Abraham ben-Yiju is the most interesting to the modern reader. Ben Yiju, it will be recalled, was the subject of a highly acclaimed work of historical postmodern fiction by anthropologist Amitav Ghosh, *In An Antique Land*.[3] Ben Yiju not only sailed to and from India numerous times, he lived in Mangalore for a decade, married an

Indian manumitted convert, and dispatched his slave to transact business on his behalf. A wealthy merchant, Ben Yiju was also a Torah scholar who composed rabbinic documents known as *responsa*, a significant poet, and something of a physician or herbalist.

The third chapter analyzes some of the topics and themes suggested by the documents themselves. There is, for example, a lengthy discussion of the ship owners or ship pilots or ship captains known by the Persian word, nakhuda, or Nauvittaka in Indian languages. There were Hindu, Arab, Persian, Jewish, and other ship owners/pilots/captains, and they apparently formed something of an interfaith, cross-cultural business community notable for multiethnic amity. Friedman follows Goitein in pondering why the western sea merchants of the Mediterranean included no known Jews, whereas those who plied the India trade were much more pluralistic. Goitein had suggested that the western Jews were more fastidious about Jewish law and would have avoided sailing on the Sabbath, unlike their eastern co-religionists. Friedman rejects this reasoning and suggests that Muslims and Hindus did not share the anti-Jewish attitudes found among the Mediterranean Christians.

These merchants were often knowledgeable and observant Jews, and many issues of Jewish law arose in the course of transacting their business. Loans were made, conflicts had to be settled, dietary laws followed, slaves kept and often freed, and contracts signed before Muslim, Hindu, and Jewish judges and witnesses. One is struck by the seriousness such legal and ethical issues evoked, and perhaps these documents ought to be studied with issues of Halakhah and business ethics specifically in mind.

This chapter also included a brief discussion of the dangers of medieval seafaring, reminding us that the most famous of them all, David Maimonides, died in a shipwreck off the coast of India. This topic raises the question of how these intrepid merchants responded to such stresses as pirates and typhoons, and is especially rich in folklore.

The long-awaited publication of *India Traders of the Middle Ages* is a milestone in Indo-Judaic Studies. Most of the book consists of primary documents, and as such will be sifted for years to come. The work is enriched by a fine introduction, which serves to organize the vast collection. It also selects a few themes to explore, establishing a standard and a method for future research.

Notes

[1] S. D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).
[2] S. D. Goitein, *The Yemenites: History, Communal Organization, Spiritual Life,* ed. by M. Ben-Sassoon (Jerusalem: 1983). In Hebrew.
[3] Amitav Ghosh, *In An Antique Land* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1992), originally published by Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

Book Review

Shalom India Housing Society
Reviewed by Nathan Katz

Esther David, *Shalom India Housing Society* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2007). Paper, 230 + ix pages. ISBN 81-88965-09-X.

The Bene Israel comprise the largest Jewish community in India, as readers of the journal likely know. At one time numbering more than 30,000, their ancestral home is the Konkan Coast near Mumbai. As the British developed Mumbai, most migrated there and later established satellite communities in Ahmedabad and Pune.

Novelist Esther David is the Bene Israel's best-known voice. She capably fills a niche in world literature: an Indian, Jewish, woman who writes in English and writes very well indeed. This is her sixth novel, enhancing an international reputation that was launched by her first two acclaimed works, *The Walled City* and *The Book of Esther*. Like all of her works, a strong autobiographical thread runs through her portraits of Bene Israel life.

Ahmedabad, the locale for her latest novel, is home to several hundred Bene Israel. They established their community in a Parsi and Muslim neighborhood, anchored in the art deco Maghen Abraham Synagogue, built in 1933. After Gujarat's Hindu-Muslim riots of 2002, Ahmedabad's Jews lost their sense of security. They became afraid of being taken for Muslims by Hindu mobs and most moved to the city's western suburbs so as to avoid the deadly crossfire. A central theme of this work is how some of Ahmedabad's Bene Israel attempt to re-create a sense of community in a fictional housing project, the Shalom India Housing Society. At the same time, they struggle with forging a new identity: modern yet holding to Bene Israel tradition; divided between India and in Israel, with family in each; and redefining relations with their Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, and Christian friends and neighbors.

One of the most distinctive features of Bene Israel religious life is their very personal relationship with Elijah the Prophet or Eliyahoo HaNabi. Many eastern Jewish communities (and Sephardim in general, as well as Hasidim) venerate a figure from Jewish history who comes to resemble the European "patron saint" or the Indian "village god or *gramma devata*," who becomes a refuge from life's travails, an adjudicator of disputes, a mystical healer, the one to whom undertakes vows, a symbol of the community's very identity. Persian and Bokharian Jews tend to venerate the prophet Daniel, Jews of the far-flung Baghdadi diaspora maintain a similar relationship with scribe Ezra, and the Jews of Kochi bring their cares and petitions to kabbalist Nehemiah Mota.

For the Bene Israel, this role is filled by Eliyahoo HaNabi. A colorful print of the prophet's visit to India adorns a place of honor in Bene Israel homes, and a ceremony to venerate the prophet, known as Malida, is the most distinctive rite of the community. Appropriately, Eliyahoo is the leitmotif of this novel. The first chapter is a fanciful and humorous account of his mythical visit to India. He appears in each chapter, offering solace or advice or magical resolutions for his devotee's heartfelt petitions. Through the eighteen interconnected sketches in this work, one gets a very real sense of the role of Eliyahoo in Bene Israel life, as they confront changing interpersonal and intercommunal relationships, including issues of intermarriage, the conflict between modernity and tradition, and a future in Israel versus a past in India.

Declaration of the Second Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit

The Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit took place in Jerusalem 11to 14 of Adar 1, 5768, corresponding to February 17-20, 2008, and maghacaturdasi suklapaksa during Vikram Samvat 2064 by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel in cooperation with the American Jewish Committee (AJC). An initiative of the World Council of Religious Leaders (WCROL) to promote understanding and mutual respect between the Rabbinic leadership and the major Religious leaders of The Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, this second meeting provided the opportunity to The Chief Rabbinate to reciprocate the gracious hospitality enjoyed at the historic first successful summit in New Delhi last year. The Summit in Jerusalem was followed by meetings in Haifa with the religious leaders of the other official religions of the State of Israel.

Pursuant to the discussions between the delegation of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Hindu religious leadership representing the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, the following affirmations were reached:

1. In keeping with the Delhi declaration, the participants reaffirmed their commitment to deepening this bilateral relationship predicated on the recognition of One Supreme Being, Creator and Guide of the Cosmos; shared values; and similar historical experiences. The parties are committed to learning about one another on the basis of respect for the particular identities of their respective communities and seeking, through their bilateral relationship, to be a blessing to all.
2. It is recognized that the One Supreme Being, both in its formless and manifest aspects, has been worshipped by Hindus over the millennia. This does not mean that Hindus worship 'gods' and idols'. The Hindu relates to only the One Supreme Being when he/she prays to a particular manifestation.
3. Central to the Jewish and Hindu world view is the concept of the sanctity of life, above all the human person. Accordingly, the participants categorically reject violent methods to achieve particular goals. In this spirit, the participants expressed the hope that all disputes be resolved through dialogue, negotiation and compromise promoting peace, reconciliation and harmony.
4. As the two oldest religious traditions of the world, the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha and the Jewish religious leadership may consider jointly appealing to various religious organizations in the world to recognize that all religions are sacred and valid for their respective peoples. We believe that there is no inherent right embedded in any religion to denigrate or interfere with any other religion or with its practitioners. Acceptance of this proposition will reduce inter-religious violence, increase harmony among different peoples.
5. The participants expressed the hope that the profound wellsprings of spirituality in their respective traditions will serve their communities to constructively address the challenges of modernity, so that contemporary innovation may serve the highest ideals of their respective religious traditions.
6. In the interests of promoting the correct understanding of Judaism, Hinduism and their histories, it was agreed that text books and reference material may be prepared in consultation with the scholars' group under the aegis of this Summit.
7. Svastika is an ancient and greatly auspicious symbol of the Hindu tradition. It is inscribed on Hindu temples, ritual altars, entrances, and even account books. A distorted version of this sacred symbol was misappropriated by the Third Reich in Germany, and abused as an emblem under which heinous crimes were perpetrated against humanity, particularly the Jewish people. The participants recognize that

this symbol is, and has been sacred to Hindus for millennia, long before its misappropriation.

8. Since there is no conclusive evidence to support the theory of an Aryan invasion/migration into India, and on the contrary, there is compelling evidence to refute it; and since the theory seriously damages the integrity of the Hindu tradition and its connection to India; we call for a serious reconsideration of this theory, and a revision of all educational material on this issue that includes the most recent and reliable scholarship.

9. The bilateral group of scholars may engage in further elaboration of the foregoing affirmations, exchange material to enhance mutual understanding, clarify the positions of the Hindu and Jewish traditions regarding contemporary challenges in science and society, and identify programs of action for the future.

IN MEMORIAM: RUTH FREDMAN CERNEA (1935-2009)

Ruth Fredman Cernea, a cultural anthropologist who wrote on topics that included the Jews of Burma, died March 31, 2009, of pancreatic cancer.

Dr. Cernea dedicated her scholarly career to the study and interpretation of Jewish culture and symbols. Her books included *The Passover Seder* (1992), an anthropological analysis of the Passover holiday and ritual; and *Cosmopolitans at Home: The Sephardic Jews of Washington, D.C.* (1982), the product of five years of research among Jewish immigrants from North Africa living in Washington.

Her best-selling work was *The Great Latke Hamantash Debate* (2006) is a collection of "scholarly" presentations on behalf of the latke, the potato pancake traditionally served during Hanukkah, and the hamantasch, the triangular filled sweet pastry associated with Purim. "Jews have always been able to use humor to lighten the load," Dr. Cernea told the *Chicago Tribune* in 2005. "Jewish humor is not silly, but it is absurd absurdity. It is the opposite of deep seriousness. In Jewish thought absurdity and humor is particularly an antidote to seriousness. . . . It could only happen at a place that is deeply serious."

Dr. Cernea was on her second honeymoon in 1987 when she discovered a little-known Jewish community in Myanmar (Burma) and the country's only synagogue, the historic Musmeah Yeshua Synagogue in Yangon (formerly Rangoon). Her discovery spurred an enduring interest in the Jewish communities of the former British colonies of South and Southeast Asia. More than 20 years of research went into her book *Almost Englishmen: Baghdadi Jews in British Burma* (2006).

She was born Ruth Gruber in Philadelphia and received a bachelor's degree in English literature in 1956 and a doctorate in cultural anthropology in 1982, both from Temple University. From 1982 to 1996, she served as director of research and publications for the Hillel Foundation and edited several annual editions of the "Hillel Guide to Jewish Life on Campus." She lectured at a number of universities and institutions. She was a former president of the Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists.

This issue of the *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* contains her last publication. She was a kind and warm-hearted person as well as a fine scholar, and she will be missed.

***

This obituary was provided by her husband, Michael Cernea, and it is adapted from the *Washington Post*, April 7, 2009.

Notes on Contributors

KTZIA ALON is the head of Gender Studies, Beit-Berl College, Israel.

RUTH FREDMAN CERNEA has been researching the history of the Baghdadi Jews of Southeast Asia since her first visit to Burma in 1987. She has authored several studies of immigrant Sephardic communities in the United States, as well as other articles on the Jewish experience in Burma and on Jewish ritual and symbolism. Her most recent book is *Almost Englishmen: Baghdadi Jews in British Burma* (2006). For many years, she served as the Director of Research and Publications for the Hillel Foundations in Washington, D.C.

ELIZABETH CHALIER-VISUVALINGAM did her doctoral state thesis at the University of Paris X which was published by Peter Lang in 2003, *Bhairav: Terreur et protection. Mythes, rites et fêtes à Bénarès et à Katmandou*. She wrote the article "The Jews in India," for the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1992). She was Visiting Scholar at Harvard University, and then taught at the universities of Boston and Budapest. She currently teaches at the School of the Art Institute (SAIC) in Chicago.

OPHIRA GAMLIEL teaches Malayalam at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, where she is also a research assistant in the department of Comparative Religions.

NATHAN KATZ, professor of religious studies at Florida International University, is co-editor and co-founder of this journal. One of the leading figures in the field of Indo-Judaic Studies, his most recent book is *Spiritual Journey Home, Eastern Mysticism to the Western Wall* (2009).

DALYA MARKOVICH teaches Sociology of Education at Beit-Berl College, Israel.

EPHRAIM NISSAN is joint co-editor of *Melilah, New Series: The Manchester Journal of Jewish Studies*. He has published ninety articles in various journals in the fields of Jewish studies, the humanities, folklore studies, as well as in artificial intelligence. Some of his computing-oriented work has also been applied to the humanities, for example, to episodes in the reign of Aurangzeb in India.
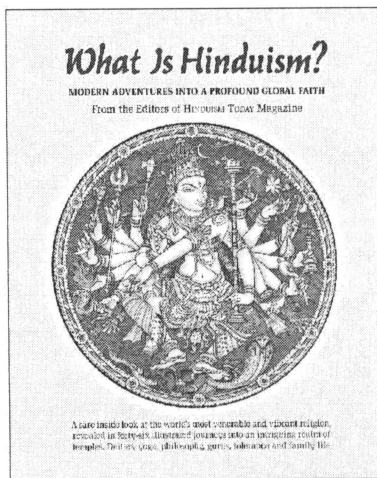
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JOAN G. ROLAND is Professor of History at Pace University, New York City, and is the author of *The Jewish Communities of India: Identity in a Colonial Era* as well as several book chapters and articles on Indian Jews in India and in Israel. She is currently doing research on the Bene Israel community in the United States.

BRAJ M. SINHA, co-editor and co-founder of this journal, has published and presented papers at national and international fora in Indo-Judaic Studies. He is the author of many articles and published monographs and edited works in his primary area of expertise, namely Indic Studies. He has lectured extensively in India, Europe, Mexico, the United States, South Africa, and Canada on a wide range of academic topics. Currently he is Professor and Chair of the Department of Religion and Culture at the University of Saskatchewan.

ARYEH WINEMAN, presently living in Northampton, Massachusetts, has written many articles growing out of his research in Hebrew literature and Jewish mysticism. His books include *Mystic Tales of the Zohar* and *The Hasidic Parable—A Collection with Commentary*.

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