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From the editors

When we began this journal three years ago, our concern was whether we would receive enough quality submissions to carry us beyond the first two issues. We knew that we could solicit enough submissions personally to get us started. But for this journal to succeed, we knew we had to draw from a wider pool of academic talent.

Our third issue demonstrates that quality scholarship in Indo-Judaic studies is being done at a number of centers. In fact, we receive so many submissions that our acceptance rate hovers around forty percent, a figure in line with other selective academic journals.

This issue contains six articles, two which deal with Indian-Jewish communities, two in the field of comparative religions, and two which explore Indian-Israeli relations. Also found is a continuation of a bibliographic column, a feature book review, two intriguing communications, and three obituaries.

The author of the first article, Arthur M. Lesley of Baltimore Hebrew University, has uncovered two manuscripts from 1503 and 1504; the first is an eyewitness account of Shingly's Jews and the latter is a letter written by a Shingly Jew. Shingly, or Cranganore, is the ancestral home of the Cochin Jews. These are the first eyewitness accounts to be discovered and published, and they offer a new perspective on the traditions and memories of the Cochin community.

Joan G. Roland, a Pace University historian, analyzes the contemporary ritual life of Bene Israel Jews in Israel. She observes how their religious life in general and their ritual life in particular serves as a performance of identity in their new, Israeli context.

Richard G. Marks of Washington and Lee University surveys traditional interpretations of the story of Abraham's sons' mythic peregrinations in India (Gen. 25:6). His survey of rabbinic and kabbalistic commentaries indicates deeply-held medieval Judaic impressions of Hinduism. Marks' analysis concludes with two contemporary Orthodox commentaries, indicating the significance of the Indic-Judaic encounter for the *ba'alei tshuvah* movement.

Lylene S. Fein of the University of Iowa compares two texts: the *Yoga sutras* by the Indian sage Patañjali, and *The Ten Luminous Emanations* by the seminal kabbalistic Isaac Luria. She focuses her study on the two texts' understanding of how desire arises.

Dinesh Kumar of the Hebrew University surveys the difficult story of diplomatic relations between India and Israel and their precursors, the Swarajists (members of the independence movement) of India and the Zionists of Europe and elsewhere. He views India's lack of diplomatic support for Israel despite deep cultural resonances as an example of how national interests often prevail over cultural and political affinities in international relations.

P. R. Kumaraswamy of Jawaharlal Nehru University provides background to the diplomatic saga by analyzing the perceptions of the Shoah on the part of the Indian National Congress. He argues that lack of understanding of this watershed event in Jewish history was reflected in lack of sympathy for Israel.

Nathan Katz of Florida International University and Frank Joseph Shulman of the University of Maryland continue their Indo-Judaic bibliography. This issue lists materials published during 1998.

Harold Kasimow of Grinnell College reviews a book by a rabbi who claims to blend Zen Buddhism with Judaism. The issue concludes with two communications of note. The first, by Bezalel Naor, describes the first mention of a Dalai Lama in Hebrew literature, and offers tantalizing hints about the role of Buddhism in HaRav Kook's thought. His Highness Shatrushalyasinji's letter describes the heroism of his father, the late Maharaja of Jamnagar, in providing refuge for more than one thousand Polish Jewish children and women during the Shoah.

Even as issue number three goes into production, we are working on number four. As always, we welcome submissions and communications.

SHINGLY IN COCHIN JEWISH MEMORY AND IN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

Arthur M. Lesley

Many traditions of the Jews of Cochin, on the Malabar coast of southwestern India, attest that their community continues the heritage of Shingly, a nearby Jewish settlement in the city of Cranganore that was destroyed in the sixteenth century. Both the remembered character of Shingly and the connection between Shingly and Cochin have long provoked questions. The various inconsistent Cochin traditions make it difficult to form a picture of historical Shingly in the absence of solid external confirmation. According to some traditions, the Shingly Jews arrived in India before the First Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, in 586 B.C.E., but, according to others, the Jews arrived after the destruction of the Second Temple, in 70 C.E. Other traditions mention a later immigration from Mallorca. The founding of Shingly is variously attributed to the earliest Jewish settlers, to a later wave of arrivals, and to the grant of nobility to a Joseph Rabban and his descendants. In some accounts Shingly was an independent Jewish state under a dynasty of seventy-two kings, beginning with Joseph Rabban and ending with Joseph Azar, although such complete independence sounds implausible. Cochin traditions recall several destructions of the Shingly Jewish settlement in the 16th century and the flight of the last Shingly king to Cochin. Cochin Jews also have proudly preserved "Shingly songs," distinctive religious rituals and customs that they trace to Shingly. These memories have been effective communal myths for Cochin Jews, but are they accurate? The scarce evidence about Shingly from outside Cochin traditions has made it impossible to decide.

Aside from the legends and brief, scattered reports by medieval travelers, the major evidence about that time in Shingly is the set of copper plates kept in the Paradesi, "foreign," synagogue in Cochin, and claimed by other Cochin Jews, the Malabaris. The plates record the privileges that the Hindu ruler, "King of Kings" Bhaskara Ravi Varma, of the dynasty of Cheraman Perumal, granted to Joseph Rabban in about 1000 C.E. Joseph Rabban and his descendants received the ceremonial honors of a high caste, such as "tolls on female elephants, ...a lamp in daytime, a cloth spread [in front to walk on], a palanquin, a parasol," and exemption from "[the dues] which the [other] inhabitants of the city pay to the royal palace." They received "*Añjuvannam* [as] an hereditary estate for as long as the world and the moon shall exist." Some scholars have interpreted *Añjuvannam*, or *Ancuvannam*, to be a village, others a guild.¹ Who were the descendants who benefitted from this grant? How had the Jews arrived in Malabar in the first place? Were Judean refugees from First or

Second Temple times connected with Joseph Rabban and with the port city of Shingly in a single historical sequence? Or did Cochin Jews, or perhaps only a faction among them, at a fairly recent time harmonize the available stories of glorious antiquity into the unilinear story? Or are none of the traditions reliable as history? Answers to these questions require more evidence.

New evidence about the character of Shingly and its connection with Cochin is now available, from three long-forgotten Hebrew documents that I had the good fortune to find. The autograph manuscript of the notebooks of Yohanan Alemanno, a rabbi, physician, teacher and writer in Florence, Mantua and Padua in the late fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth, contains three hitherto ignored accounts of Shingly. One document is a letter written in Jerusalem in 1496; the second records the oral testimony of a Portuguese converso who was probably a member of Vasco da Gama's second expedition to India; the third is a letter written by a Shingly Jew early in 1503 to represent the community to European Jews. These documents confirm some Cochin memories, contradict others, and raise entirely new topics.

The recovered documents about Shingly are found in marginal notes on leaves 41a and 41b of the Hebrew manuscript, *Reggio 23*, in the Bodleian Library in Oxford.² Alemanno recorded all three in Hebrew, although the oral testimony probably was given in another language. The letter from 1496, written by Rabbi Abraham of Siena, a student in Jerusalem of the eminent *Mishnah* commentator, Rabbi Obadiah Yare of Bertinoro, transmits Jewish travelers' reports about Shingly.³ The oral testimony is from a Portuguese converso whom Jews knew as Hayim Franco. In Mantua in 1503-1504, he told Alemanno about his voyage from Portugal, by way of the Cape Verde Islands, to Shingly. The Hebrew letter from Shingly itself is signed by "Moses, son of Abba Mori," and dated "Sunday, the 25th of the month of *Shevat*, 5263" (Winter, 1503). The letter briefly surveys the origins of Shingly, manifestations of its independence, its external relations, and details of its Jewish scholarship and observances.

How do the newly recovered reports affect our knowledge of Shingly and its connections with Cochin? First, they supply incidental details that adjust the established picture of the community. For example, they give the names of the first "king" of Cochin and the names of two rulers of Shingly. The Shingly letter asserts that priests arrived among the refugees from Jerusalem, although no priestly families remained in more recent times. Also, contrary to the statement by Moses Pereyra de Paiva, in 1686, that "They do not wear *sisit* for the reason that they do not use dress of four corners. (Their dress is of Eastern fashion.),"⁴ Hayim Franco observed two rabbis to wear fringed garments, one in an eccentric fashion: "And under his robe one of them had a small fringed *talit*, and the second wears it on his head like a turban, and its fringes hang here and there." Such incidental observations add to the general circumstantial evidence which must be integrated into the history of the Shingly Jews.

More substantially, the newly recovered documents offer evidence from before the destruction of Shingly that is pertinent to four central questions about the settlement:

1. When, and from where, did Jews come to Shingly?
2. Was Shingly actually independent and under a Jewish king?
3. Did Cochin religious practices indeed continue those of Shingly?
4. Did the division of Cochin Jews into Paradesis and Malabaris begin in Shingly?

The documents substantially confirm much of the legendary continuity between Shingly and Cochin in religious observance, as well as in the memory of an independent Jewish community. Their accounts of the origins of Jews in Malabar and of the independence of Shingly deviate significantly, however, from the Cochin Paradesi account and agree with traditions of the Malabaris. The documents offer only indirect testimony about the internal divisions of Cochin Jews. The age of these documents offers the best available control on the reliability of the later memories and conflicting traditions of the Cochin Jews.

I. ORIGINS OF SHINGLY

Do the various Cochin stories about the origins of Jewish presence in Malabar, and specifically in Shingly, reliably transmit traditions from Shingly? The Shingly letter gives an account of the arrival of Jews in India:

Before the destruction of the First Temple, in the days of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, nine-and-a-half tribes went and settled in Cush until this day. We who live in the land of Shingly are from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

The statement emphatically distinguishes the ancestors of these Jews, pre-exilic arrivals in India from the two tribes of the Kingdom of Judea, from the nine and a half tribes of the Kingdom of Israel who were exiled (ca. 820 B.C.E.) to an area north of India, as divine punishment for idolatry:

In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria. He deported the Israelites to Assyria and settled them in Halah, at the [River] Habor, at the River Gozan, and in the towns of Media... (II Kings 17:6) [This happened] because they did not obey the Lord their God; they transgressed His covenant—all that Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded. They did not obey and they did not fulfill it. (II Kings 18:12)

Hayim Franco's testimony conforms to the letter: "And they...come from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin and first left Israel before the exile of Nebuchadnezzar and did not return during the time of the Second Temple."

To the account of the first arrival of Jews in India in biblical times, the letter adds a second arrival of exiles from Israel, 800 years later: "After the destruction of the Second Temple, our revered master and teacher, Samuel Halevi, and Israelites and priests came into the land of Melibara." As in the first account, Jews fleeing a catastrophe in Judea, in 70 C.E., took refuge in India. Shingly Jews were doubly connected with the generally known history of the Jews, from both biblical and rabbinic times. These stories of successive waves of Jewish refugees, like Hindu stories of origins, perform a second function:⁵

These Jewish groups also resemble many Hindu *jatis* in holding to two kinds of origin story. One explains the cosmos and the nature of human society, the other justifies the actual or sought status of one's group in the social order. The cosmic explanation of the Cochin Jews came from the Hebrew rather than from the Sanskrit scriptures.

The letter and Hayim Franco's informants connect the cosmic origins of the community with the ancient exile from Judea, and the origins of the Jews' status in Malabar with exile in the time of the Second Temple. To explain the community's high status in the Hindu social order and the institutional form of the Shingly community, the letter narrates:

At that time all the land of Malabar and the land of Calicut and the land of Keshi were all in the hand of one king. Samuel Halevi asked the king for a place in which to build the synagogue. What did the king do? He gave each king a separate city. To the King Samri he gave the city, Calicut. And to Rabbi Samuel he gave Shingly. To King Bevili he gave Keshi.

Rabbi Samuel Halevi led the second wave of exiled immigrants to India, where he received permission from the Hindu ruler to establish a synagogue. (Moses Pereyra de Paiva noted, in 1686, "the tomb of Reby Samuel Levi is seen even today," in Cheringandaram.)⁶ The letter treats the permission to found a synagogue as equivalent to the grant of autonomy to two other port cities, Calicut, the rival of Shingly, and Cochin, its ally. The parallel of "the King Samri" (*Samrudi Rajah*, "Lord of the Sea"), ruler of Calicut, and "King Bevili," of Cochin, to Rabbi Samuel Halevi implies granting a rank equal to royalty to the Jewish founder of a synagogue. As one scholar has remarked, "The support and protection of temples was one of the defining acts of south Indian kingship."⁷ Permission to found a church that was given to the leader of a group of Christian refugees from Iran in the middle of the ninth century was recorded on copper plaques.⁸

The newly recovered documents do not mention Joseph Rabban or the grant of nobility on the copper plates. This silence may be explained by Barbara C. Johnson's distinction between Malabari and Paradesi historical

legends in Cochin: "From what is now known of the Malabari Jews, it seems that the symbols of Cranganore, Cheraman Perumal and Joseph Rabban are present in their folklore, but not emphasized to the extent that they are by the Paradesi." The inference is reinforced by other incomplete agreements between the Shingly letter and Malabari traditions:⁹

Another Malabari chronicle states that the original Kerala Jews came to Calicut before the destruction of the First Temple, an oral tradition which I have heard from Malabari Jews, but which is not found in Paradesi sources. According to the same account, Joseph Rabban came to Cranganore after the destruction of the Second Temple and Cheraman Perumal is not mentioned.

Hayim Franco evidently encountered and transmitted what later would be considered Malabari traditions, even though the Paradesi tradition of origins may also have been current in Shingly at the time. The striking differences between the account of the city's origins in the Shingly letter and in the Cochin Paradesi tradition may reflect older divergences between the communities that bore these traditions. These divisions may have been among the Jews inside the city of Shingly, between Jews in the city and those who were scattered throughout "the land of Shingly," or among groups from various places who later settled together in Cochin. The Paradesi story that traces Jewish autonomy to Joseph Rabban and the copper scrolls may have become prominent only in Cochin, after Shingly disappeared.

II. INDEPENDENCE

Hayim Franco says, "They are independent of anything and anyone." The letter adds:

And we are loved by the king of Keshi and he is loved by us, but not the king of Calicut. And our governor is Master Joseph Hasar, son of Master Sa'adia Hasar. And we collect taxes from Ishmaelites and gentiles and from all the nations of the earth and we live here like a kingdom and they cannot do us any harm.

The letter illustrates the independence of Shingly by noting that Shingly has its own ruler, the power to tax other peoples, external alliances and enmities, military prowess and miraculous divine protection. An important sign of independence is their ruler. Both Hayim Franco and the Shingly letter call the current ruler "Joseph Hasar," which resembles the name of the traditional last "king" of Shingly, "Joseph Azar." What may be a vernacular family name also resembles the Hebrew title, *Sar*, "Ruler," "Governor," or "Chief." Hayim Franco calls him a "king" ("*Hamelekh hamoshel aleha nikra Yosef.*") and describes Joseph as presiding over trade in a manner that resembles

Portuguese accounts of the behavior of the ruler of Cochin and of the samrudi of Calicut.¹⁰ The Shingly letter, in contrast, avoids the term, "King," and keeps to the less definite "Sar." "Our ruler is Master Joseph the ruler, son of Master Saadia the ruler. (*Hasar shelanu R. Yosef Hasar, ben R. Saadia Hasar.*") Abraham of Siena reports the name of the "reigning" Shingly ruler in 1496 to be a Master Joshua (*"hamolekh aleihem nikra R. Yehoshua"*). If this news was accurate and current, in 1503 Joseph had only recently attained his office, and apparently not by inheritance.

The fighting ability of Shingly's forces and the divine providence that miraculously sank the fleet of its Muslim enemies guarantee the city's independence: "And we fight with Ishmaelites and kill them with a great blow. And many of their ships gathered to fight us, but a miracle occurred for us and they all sank in the sea." One ruler of Calicut, which was dominated by Muslim merchants and opposed to Cochin and Shingly, had the title *Samrudi Rajah*, "Ruler of the Sea." The Shingly Jews believed that God, "Ruler of The Universe," had defeated the mere "Ruler of The Sea." The letter of Abraham of Siena more prosaically mentions that shallow water prevents enemy ships and even boats from attacking Shingly. Shallow water, their own strength and miraculous storms, protected the Shinglians.

The Jews of Shingly express pride in their independence through another practice that the letter-writer describes as the concluding celebrations of Purim:

...And on the day of Purim, after the prayer, they read the *megillah* and drink and are happy and get drunk and fall asleep. And afterwards they make an effigy and take it out into the city street and burn it and stone it with rocks, all Israel. And all of the nations of the world and Ishmaelites and Christians and everyone is embarrassed and ashamed by this act. (Or, "stone it with rocks. All Israel and all of the nations of the world...are embarrassed and ashamed")

The unclear grammatical connection of "all Israel" with either the stoning or the embarrassment does not obscure the zeal some Shingly Jews demonstrate in expressing their political sentiments without constraint or the specifically Jewish significance that they give to their local conflict.

The degree of independence that the letter describes for Shingly was remarkable among pre-modern Jews, even though it was ultimately guaranteed by another ruler. Shingly appeared to confirm, to its own Jews and to Jews elsewhere, the medieval apologetic contention that the existence of an independent Jewish community demonstrates that the exiled Jewish people has not been abandoned by God.¹¹ The Shingly letter describes the status of the city with a more cautious nuance: "We live here like a kingdom and they cannot do us any harm." Much of Shingly's autonomy appears to have continued for the Cochin Jews, as Walter J. Fischel, for example, has described:¹²

[T]he Rajah of Cochin...granted them religious and cultural autonomy. He appointed a hereditary *mudaliar* ("chief") from among the Jews as their recognized spokesman and invested him with special privileges and prerogatives and with jurisdiction in all internal matters of the communal organization of the Cochin Jews, though without any political power. This office continued in force under the rajahs and even the Dutch.

Our newly recovered documents substantiate to a surprising extent, then, the legendary independence of Shingly that medieval Jews admired and that Cochin Jews proudly recalled. The special configuration of "the typically south Indian overlord/'little king' relationship" between the Nayar ruler and the leadership of the Jews allowed the Jews to show and feel themselves independent to a degree that was inconceivable to Jews from Europe.¹³ Although the unusually ample privileges that the Jews received roughly correspond to the grant recorded on the copper plates, the Shingly letter does not mention the plates. Did the Jews of Shingly emphasize the glory of their independence by avoiding mention of the grant of privileges by Hindu rulers? If so, the pride with which Cochin Jews preserve the copper plates reflects a different attitude towards their granted autonomy. The possible difference between the attitudes of the two communities may be worth examination.

III. CONTINUITY WITH SHINGLY RITUAL: SIMHAT TORAH

The Cochin community's distinctive Jewish practices prominently include the custom, on *Simhat Torah*, of performing three afternoon *haqafot*, processions, outdoors with specially decorated Torah scrolls and special songs. These afternoon *haqafot* are unique to Cochin among all Jewish communities of the world. "The entire liturgy for the afternoon *haqafot* was composed in Cranganore, according to local tradition."¹⁴ The Shingly letter describes the practice as being distinctive to that community.

And we have a custom, and the second holy day of *Shemini Atzeret*, after praying the additional service (*musaf*), they bring out eight Torah scrolls, in precious drapes and chains and golden pomegranates, outside the synagogue, and utter song and praise and thanks in a loud voice and circle three times and pray *minchah* (the afternoon prayer).

The distinctive ritual of Cochin and, it now appears, of Shingly, expresses the Jews' independence and God's sovereignty, both in Jewish forms that Hindus could understand, as Nathan Katz and Ellen Goldberg have explained:

Three singular aspects of the Cochin *minhag* for *Simchat Torah*-displaying the *Sifrei Torah* on a temporary ark, adding

afternoon *haqafot* outside of the synagogue building, and ritually dismantling the ark—are the Jews’ creative responses to their Hindu environment in Malabar. Specifically, Hinduized symbols and metaphors of royalty and nobility have been adopted.¹⁵

The clear continuity from the documented features of Shingly practice to the distinctive Cochin Jewish religious practice lends trustworthiness to other assertions of continuity between Cochin and Shingly.

IV. CASTE DIVISIONS FROM SHINGLY?

Scholarship is divided over whether the divisions in Cochin between Paradesi and Malabari Jews, which have been compared to Indian caste divisions, were old and traceable to Shingly, or took shape only after large numbers of Iberian refugees arrived in Cochin during the sixteenth century. J. B. Segal reports Cochin stories about Shingly in which opposition of “White” and “Black” Jews went back to the fourteenth century and significantly affected struggles between the ruling Azar brothers, Aaron and Joseph.¹⁶ David G. Mandelbaum, however, doubts that the division is so old:¹⁷ “[I]n the seventeenth century both divisions of the Cochin Jews knew this story of the exodus from Cranganore to Cochin, but there was no mention of caste divisions among Jews during the centuries when they had lived in Cranganore.” He says, “The earliest account known so far of caste-like divisions among the Jews of Cochin,” is the halachic question to Rabbi David Ibn Abi Zimra, from about 1520.

The newly recovered documents do not mention communal division in Shingly. Hayim Franco’s brief observation that the Jews of Shingly are “black and white, like the (other) Indians” (*vehem shehorim ulevanim kahodim*), may mean as little as that the Jews were indistinguishable from other Indians in their appearance, or as much as that they, like other Indians, were divided among themselves according to color. Remarks of other travelers to India do not clarify the meaning of the statement. The Spanish-Jewish traveler, Benjamin of Tudela, remarked in 1167 that in Khulam (Quilon), “The inhabitants are all black, and the Jews also.”¹⁸ The Portuguese chronicler, Duarte Barbosa, wrote in 1516, “...The Kings of Malabar are...brown, almost white, others are darker.”¹⁹ Moses Pereyra de Paiva reported from Cochin in 1685, “Their colour is brown which is due to the climate as they are totally separated from the Malabarees in rank and consider it a disgrace to marry them. They allege that the Malabarees are the slaves of slaves and are mixed with the Cannanites, Gentiles and Ismelims.”²⁰

Although the new documents do not mention caste divisions in Shingly, they do provide information that bears upon the *responsum* of Rabbi David Ibn Zimra. The questioner noted that self-styled *meyuhasim* (“well-born”) in Cochin found reasons to avoid marrying Malabari Jews and accepting their

standards of propriety (*kashrut*) for food. The *meyuhasim* claimed that the Malabar Jews might have been descendants of foreign women, and lacked proper documents of conversion; that they might have been descendants of slaves, and did not have proper documents of manumission; and finally, that the Malabaris might have been voluntary converts and could neither provide proof nor be presumed to have undergone the proper ritual of conversion. Such allegations look like a collection of all the reasons that a self-segregating group of Jews would adduce to refuse to marry or share religious rituals with another group of Jews.

In addition to prejudice, *meyuhasim* may have been motivated by some rabbinic texts that suspect the halachic acceptability of Jews in this region of the world. The other Jews could be suspected of descending from the ten tribes of the ancient kingdom of Israel that were exiled in the time of the First Temple. Legends located those tribes north of India, near the legendary Sambation River, and some authorities in the Talmud judged that such an ancestry would make them doubtful as Jews:²¹ "Our Rabbis taught: The ten tribes have no portion in the world to come." The Shingly Jews' tracing of their own ancestry to the two tribes of ancient Judea appears intended to anticipate and disarm such suspicions. In his *responsum*, Rabbi David Ibn Zimra mentions that earlier letters from India indicated that Jews there were deficient in rabbinic scholarship:²²

Their earliest ancestors did not know the oral law, only the written law, according to what we have heard. They were not known until recently, about twenty years ago, at the time when the Portuguese conquered India, and I recall that writings came from there asking to be sent books that they did not possess, neither *Mishnah* nor Talmud, nor codes; so how could they have known the law of the non-Jewish servant?

Our Shingly letter does not fully agree with Rabbi David's recollection. It says, "Sixty tractates [of the Talmud] are not among us, only a few of them, and all of the *Maimuni* (Maimonides' code, the *Mishneh Torah*) is in our hands, and the *mishnayot* of our holy rabbi (the *Mishnah* of Rabbi Judah the Prince, ca. 200)." Rabbi Abraham of Siena reports more generally that the Jews of Shingly "know the written and oral Torah," and Moses de' Rossi's letter, from 1535, confirms that Shingly Jews "conduct themselves according to Maimonides." Maimonides' code evidently served in Shingly, as in other medieval Jewish communities that lacked local rabbinic authorities, as the ultimate reference for legal opinion. Our documents, then, contradict Rabbi David by testifying that Shingly around 1500 had the oral law, in the *Mishnah* and Maimonides' code, although only parts of the Talmud. Rabbi David either had not seen these documents, did not remember them well, or considered the absence of Talmud study to be a decisive obstacle to proper rabbinic establishment of conversion, legitimation and manumission among Cochin Jews.

Silence in the Shingly letter about internal social division does not prove that such division was not present. Contrasting Malabari and Paradesi traditions of origin stories may reflect different groups-factions, regional groups, or castes-that may already have existed in Shingly. The resemblance of the stories in the Shingly letter to those of the Cochin Malabari Jews and the absence in the letter of even a trace of the important Paradesi stories, suggest that factions did already exist in Shingly. It is not surprising that the letter does not mention internal division, because silence on the subject would be prudent in an address to outsiders. As Mandelbaum notes about Cochin, "However bitter the internal struggle for status might be ...in facing the external society, the antagonists were inclined to present a smoother image than an insider would see."²³ The same motive would have led the Shingly writer to avoid mentioning internal divisions. The external eyewitness, Hayim Franco, who during his brief visit apparently did not even notice the thousands of St. Thomas Christians in Cranganore, could also simply have been unable to discern division among the Jews.

These documents offer important evidence about the vanished settlement of Shingly. They confirm some continuities between Shingly and Cochin and provide details that reinforce the legends of the unusual degree of independence of Shingly. The silence of the two "Malabari" documents about the copper plates and Joseph Rabban could reopen fundamental questions about the ways in which Cochin Jews formulated their history and defined their character in the shadow of Shingly.

Among the earliest surviving records of the Portuguese arrival on the Malabar coast, the two documents from 1503-1504 provide direct evidence about Jewish Shingly from the last year of its secure, independent and prosperous existence; in April, 1504, during fighting against Calicut, Portuguese forces that were allied with Cochin attacked Jewish and Muslim buildings in Cranganore. Portuguese pressure on the Jews increased in 1507, with establishment of a fort at Palli, close to Cranganore.²⁴ Jewish and Christian sections of Cranganore were burned by Muslims from Calicut in 1524, and Jewish Shingly finally disintegrated after another Portuguese attack, in 1565.²⁵

APPENDIX

1. Oral testimony of Hayim Franco, 5264:

GOOD NEWS from a distant land about the seed of Israel who have not disappeared, in the year 264 of the sixth millennium (=1503-04). ...And when they went into the Indian Ocean they found great Ishmaelite places. One is a large city called Calicut, whose ruler is very great. Near it is another kingdom called Cochin. Some among the Hebrews who had become Portuguese wrote such things as these: Near Cochin is a land the length of a fifteen-day walk, inhabited entirely by Jews. The king who rules it is named Joseph, and the

capital city is called Shingly and gives its name to the whole realm. And they are black and white, like the other Indians. And their dress is... and below. And they are independent of anything and anyone and come from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin and first left Israel before the exile of Nebuchadnezzar and did not return during the time of the Second Temple. And all the pepper comes from that country. The Jews pick it and sell most of it in Cochin, in particular to four great Ishmaelite merchants who live there and pay a tax to the king so that no one else in Cochin can buy from the Jews except them. And they sell it to the Portuguese.

All these things were told me by one of the previously mentioned Portuguese, Hayim Franco. He personally talked to two rabbis from among them who came to the boat to speak with him. And the rabbis—turn the leaf and you will find—[41b]...appearance of the aforementioned rabbis. For their modesty they wear white robes over their clothes, like Ishmaelites. And under his robe one of them had a small fringed *talit*, and the second wears it on his head like a turban, and its fringes hang here and there. With them was a dignified man, a Jew, one of the servants of the King Joseph, sent to speak with the four Ishmaelite merchants who buy the pepper, so that they would post bond for the aforementioned Hayim to the captain of the ship, up to ten thousand ducats, to return him to him so that he could go speak with King Joseph. Hayim did not want to speak about this, because he was afraid for his life because of an incident that occurred, and he did not speak with them in public, because of his fear of the master of the ship.

In their whole kingdom there is no wheat, only rice. They make efforts to buy wheat for making matzah. There is also only a little wine there, and plentiful fruits of many kinds that are not found among us.

2. Letter from Shingly:

Here is the text of what the people of Shingly wrote in the year 263 of the fifth millennium:

Before the destruction of the First Temple, in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, nine-and-a-half tribes went and settled in Cush until this day. We, the inhabitants of the land of Shingly, are from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. After the destruction of the Second Temple our revered master and teacher Samuel Halevi and Israelites and priests came into the land of Melibara, where is the city in which we live, Shingly. At that time all the land of Melibar and the land of Calicut and the land of Keshi were all in the hand of one king. Samuel Halevi asked the king for a place in which to build a synagogue. What did the king do? He gave each king a separate city. To the king Samri he gave the city, Calicut. And to Rabbi Samuel he gave Shingly. To King Bevili he gave Keshi. And we are beloved of the king of Keshi and he loves us, but not the king of Calicut. And our lord is Master Joseph Hasar, son of Master Sa'adia Hasar. And we collect taxes from Ishmaelites and gentiles and from all the

nations of the earth and we live here like a kingdom and they cannot do us any harm. And we fight with Ishmaelites and kill them with a great blow. And many of their ships [once] gathered to fight us, and a miracle happened and they all sank in the sea. And we keep 613 commandments. And with us are the five books of the Torah and eight prophets, and *Tanhuma* and the commentaries of Rashi the Frenchman on them all, and the Writings. Sixty tractates [of the Talmud] are not among us, only a few of them, and all of the *Maimuni* is in our hands, the *mishnayot* of our holy rabbi, *midrash yom hakippurim*, *Breshit Rabba*, the book of Eldad the Danite is with us, and the *Mikhlol*. And there is with us a custom and the second holy day of *Shemini Atzeret*, after they pray the additional morning service (*musaf*) and bring out eight Torah scrolls in precious coverings, and chains...and golden pomegranates, outside the synagogue, and utter song and praise and thanks in a loud voice and circle three times and pray the afternoon prayer (*minhah*). And on the day of Purim, after the prayer, they read the scroll (*megillah*) and drink and are happy and get drunk and fall asleep. And afterwards they make an effigy and bring it out into the city street and burn it and stone it with rocks, all of Israel. And all of the nations of the world and Ishmaelites and Christians and everyone is embarrassed and ashamed by this act. Written, Sunday, 25 *Shevat*, 5263, Moses b. R. Abba Mori.

3. From a letter of Rabbi Abraham of Siena, 1496:

...He wrote further that he heard (from) a scholar and trustworthy man that in the lands of the East, in the sea, there is an island named Shingly. In it are about forty thousand Jewish householders, great, wealthy men, who know the written and oral Torah and have a Jewish king. This island is situated close to the kings of India, and opposite them is a very large state called Calicut, who are fire and sun worshipers. They cannot pass that island because the passage is hard and very bad, and with difficulty small ships and boats pass. Were it not for this, the kings of India would already have overcome them. And our teacher, the rabbi, Rabbi Obadiah spoke with Jews who had been there, who said that the spices come from that island and the ruler over them is called R. Joshua.

NOTES

¹ Walter J. Fischel, "Cochin," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1971), Vol. 3, cols. 621-622. M. G. S. Narayanan identifies "the *Ancuvannam*" to be a Jewish guild, not a "village." *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala* (Trivandrum, 1972), pp. 4, 29, 35, 58, 91. Cited from David G. Mandelbaum, "Social Stratification among the Jews of Cochin in India and Israel," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 17, 2 (1975): pp. 167-8, 204, nos. 9, and 14. See also Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The Last Jews of Cochin. Jewish Identity in Hindu India* (Columbia, SC, 1993), pp. 42-45.

- 2 Adolf Neubauer, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian and College Libraries of Oxford* (Oxford, 1886), no. 2234. For further details about the documents and Alemanno, see A. M. Lesley, "The Shingly Jews: Unknown Documents from 1496-1504," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* (forthcoming).
- 3 *From Italy to Jerusalem. The Letters of Rabbi Obadiah of Bertinoro from the Land of Israel* (Hebrew), eds. Menachem Emanuele Artom and Abraham David, (Ramat-Gan, 1997), p. 26, n.151.
- 4 S. S. Koder, "Saga of the Jews of Cochin," in *Jews in India*, ed. Thomas A. Timberg (New Delhi, 1986), p. 127.
- 5 Mandelbaum, "Social Stratification," p. 189.
- 6 S. S. Koder, "Saga," p. 129.
- 7 Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 56. Cited in Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *Last Jews*, p. 189, n.30.
- 8 Mandelbaum, "Social Stratification," pp. 166-7.
- 9 Barbara C. Johnson, "The Emperor's Welcome: Reconsideration of an Origin Theme in Cochin Jewish Folklore," in *Jews in India*, ed. Thomas A. Timberg, (New Dehli, 1986), p. 166.
- 10 For example, Duarte Barbosa, *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century*, trans. Henry E. J. Stanley, Hakluyt Society, first series, Vol. 35 (London, 1866), p. 147.
- 11 For this line of argument see, for example, Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial. Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages* (London, 1993), pp. 105-108.
- 12 Fischel, "Cochin," col. 623.
- 13 Katz and Goldberg, *Last Jews*, p. 43.
- 14 Katz and Goldberg, p. 186.
- 15 Katz and Goldberg, p. 189.
- 16 J. B. Segal, *A History of the Jews of Cochin* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1993), pp. 17-18.
- 17 Mandelbaum, "Social Stratification," p. 174.
- 18 "Benjamin of Tudela," in *Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages. 19 Firsthand Accounts*, ed. Elkan Nathan Adler (New York, 1987), pp. 59, 92.
- 19 Barbosa, *Description*, p. 104.
- 20 Koder, "Saga," p. 125.
- 21 For example, Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 110b with Rashi.
- 22 Alexander Marx, "Contribution à l'histoire des Juifs de Cochin," *Revue des Études Juives* 89 (1930): p. 299. My translation.
- 23 Mandelbaum, "Social Stratification," pp. 170, 189.
- 24 Segal, "Saga," p. 16.
- 25 Segal, p. 16; David G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin," *Jewish Social Studies* 1, 4 (1939): pp. 429-30.

Observations of Hayim Franco

שמועה טובה מארץ מרחק על זרע ישראל אשר לא כלו - שנת רס"ד לאלף הששי זה כמה שנים אשר אנשי פורטוגל נכנסו בים אוקיינוס לצד מערב ומצאו איים רבים וסבבו את הים ההוא לצד דרום והלכו שנים רבות על סביבות הים ומצאו עם רב על סביבו הים נקראי אנשי כינאייה הנוי לעיל ובאלו הימים עברו ומצאו מקום אשר שם נכסי ים אוקיינוס בתוך הארץ מצד דרום נעשה ים גדול מאוד נקרא ים הודו הנוי גכי לעיל ומאותו נעשה ים פרס ומסופו לשון ים גדול נקרא ים סוף אשר בסופו עברו בני ישראל ובלכתם בים הודו ומצאו מקומו גדולי משמעאלי האחת היא עיר גדולה לאי נקראת קלינגיטיי והמולך עליה גדול מאד . קרוב לה מלכות אחר נקרא קוגין וכתבו מהעבריי שכבר היו בפורטוגאלי כמו אלה הדברי קרוב לקוגין יש ארץ ארכה טיין ימי ומיושבת כולה מיהודי והמלך המושל עליה נקרא יוסף ועיר המלוכה נקרא שינגילי ועל שמה נקרי כל מלכותם והם שחוריי ולבני כהודיים ומלבושם _____ ולמטה . והם בני חורין מכל מה והם משבט יהודה ובנימין ויצאו קודם גלות נבוכד נצר ולא חזרו בבית שני וכל הפילפל בא מהארץ ההי והיהודי לוקטיי אותו ומוכרי אותו רובו בקוגין ובפרט לדי תגרי גדולי ישמעאלי היושבי שם ופורעי מס למלך ששום אדם יוכל לקנות היהודי כי אם הם בקוגין . והם מוכרי אותו לפורטוגאליים . - את כל אלה ספר אחד מפורטוגלי הני לפנים חיים פרנקו והוא בעצמו דבר אל שני רבנים מהם שבאו אל האניה לדבר בו . והרבנים הפוך הדף ותמצא [דף 41 ב] תארי הרבני הנוי לצניעותם לובשיי חלוקי לבני על בגדיהי כישמעאליי ותחת החלוק תלת קטן מצוייך לאחד להם והשני נושא אותו על ראשו כמצנפת וצציותו תלויי מפה ומפה . עמהם איש נכבד יהודי ממשרתי המלך יוסף שלוח לדבר עם הדי תגריי מהישמעאליי קוני הפלפל שיעשו ערבו בעד חיים הנוי [למלך קן] לשר הספינה עד עשרת אלפי דוקי להחזירו אליו ושילך לדבר עם המלך יוסף ולא רצה חיים לדבר מזה כי ירא היה לנפשו ממקרה קרה לו ולא דבר עמהם בפרהסיא מיראתו מאדו הספינה . בכל מלכותם אין חטה כיא אורז ומשתדלי לקנות חטה לעשות מצה גם יין איי שם כייא מעט ופירות הרבה ממניי רביי מאשר אין אתנו -

ר' יוחנן אלימנו, ליקוטיס, כ"י אוכספורד רג"ו 23 דף 41 א-ב, למעלה בשוליים השמאליים

Shingly Letter

ז"ל כתב כתבו אנשי שינגיליי רס"ד לאלף ה'

קודם חורבן בית ראשון בימי ירבעם בן נבט תשעה שבטי וחצי הלכו ושכנו בכוש עד היום הזה . ואנחנו היושבי בארץ שינגיליי משבט יהודה ובנימין . אחר חרבן בית שני בא כמר' שמואל הלוי וישראליי וכהניי בארץ מלינקאך ושם העיר שאנו יושביי שינגילי . באותו הזמן כל ארץ מליבאר וארץ קולינגיטיי וארץ קשי הכל ביד מלך אחד שמואל הלוי בקש מהמלך מקום לבנות בית הכנסת . מה עשה המלך נתן לכל המלכיי עיר לבריה . למלך סמריי נתן עיר קליגוט . ולרי שמואל נתן שינגיליי . למלך קיולי נתן קישי . ואנחנו חביביי למלך כישיי והוא חביב לנו אך לא מלך קוליקוייטי . והשר שלנו ר' יוסף השירי ב"ר סעדיה ה"ש . ואנו לוקחיי מכס מישמעאליי וגוים ומכל אומות העולם וכמו מלכו אנחנו יושביי פה ואינם יכוליי לעשות עמנו רעה ואנו לוחמיי עם ישמעאליי הורגיי בהם נוכח רבה ואניות רבו מהם נאספו להלחם בנו ונעשה לנו נס וטבעו בים כלם . ואנו שומריי תרייג מצות . ועמנו הי חומשי תורה ושמיני נביאי ותנחומה ופירושי רשיי הצרפתי על כלם וכתוביי ששיי מסכתוי אי עמנו אלא קצת מהם והמיימוניי כלו בדיניי המשניי מרבנו הקדוש מדרש יום הכפורי בראשית רבה ספר אלדד הדני יש עמנו וספר מכלול ויש עמנו מנהג ויום טוב שני של שמני חג עצרת אחר שמתפלליי תפילת מוסף ומוציאי חייט במטפתחו חמודיי ושלשלאוי ורמוניי זהב חוץ לכנסת ואומריי שיר ושבח והודיה בקול רם וסובביי גיפ ומתפלליי מנחה . וביום הפוריי אחר התפילה קוראי את המנילה ושותיי ושמיחי ומשתכריי ויבדחי ואחר עושיי כצורת אדם ומוציאי אותי ברחוב העיר ושוּרפי אותי וסוקליי אותו באבני כל ישראל וכל אומות העולם וישמעאליי ונוצריי והכל מתבישין ומתכלמיי בזה המעשה . וכתב באחד בשבת כ"ה שבט ה' אלפיי רס"ג משה ב"ר אבא מורי

ר' יוחנן אלימנו, ליקוטיס, כ"י אוכספורד רג"ו 23, דף 41



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RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES OF THE BENE ISRAEL: PERSISTENCE AND REFASHIONING OF TRADITION

Joan G. Roland

Perhaps 45,000 of the some 50,000 Indian Jews now living in Israel, are Bene Israel, originally from Maharastra. They have settled throughout Israel, but particularly in the south in towns such as Beersheva, Dimona, Yerucham and Ofakim, as well as in the center in Lod and Ramleh, and in the north, in some of the suburbs of Haifa. The largest concentration is now in Ashdod, about twenty-five miles south of Tel Aviv. In India, they were considered to be Jews; in Israel, the "land of the Jews," they are Indians. This phenomenon can be applied to other Jewish groups who emigrated from the Diaspora to Israel. The Hebrew term *eda* (community) refers to the country of origin of various segments of the Israeli population; one speaks of the Moroccan, Romanian, Egyptian, Russian or Indian *eda*. The dialectic between preserving the culture of one's country of origin while assimilating into (or creating) Israeli society underlies some of the major political, social and economic tensions in the country. Thus the issue of ethnic identity is at the forefront of this nation composed largely of immigrants. Elsewhere, I have presented an overview of the transformation of Indian identity among the Bene Israel in Israel and have explored the adaptation and identity of second-generation Bene Israel in their new homeland.¹

Religion played an important role in the identity of the Bene Israel in India and their religious life was naturally conditioned by the social and cultural environment in which the community lived. Nathan Katz has pointed to "the role of religion not merely as a template of ethnic identity but as a system of rituals and norms which defined and celebrated the very identities of India's Jews."² Now that they have immigrated to Israel, the Bene Israel, like other Jewish groups, have had to "refashion their native understandings, interests and symbols as they accommodate to their new Israeli circumstances."³ This includes their ritual practices. In this article I discuss some of the religious observances and practices of the Bene Israel in Israel and the concerns and questions they themselves have raised about some of these. I have supplemented published and unpublished primary and secondary sources with responses to questionnaires and extensive informant interviews I administered throughout the 1990s. Through the use of on-going snowball sampling (initial respondents, whose names were given to me by friends in Israel and India, referred me to others who would be interested in

answering the questionnaire and/or being interviewed), I currently have data from approximately two hundred Bene Israel living in Israel. They range in age from seven to eighty-two, and reside all over the country. They include students, teachers, physicians, clerks, kibbutz members, army officers, technicians, shopkeepers, housewives, factory workers, lawyers, social workers, engineers, computer experts, and retirees. I have included some of their stories and responses so that their voices can emerge.

This article argues that the preservation of some of their distinctive Bene Israel patterns of ritual represents a refashioning of ethnic identity in the Israeli context. On the other hand, their desire to drop other traditional customs which might be considered "too Indian" manifests their wish to assimilate to normative Judaism as practiced in Israel.

In the early 1960s, the Bene Israel in Israel went through a very difficult period in which they were questioned by the Chief Rabbinate as to whether or not they had observed *halacha* (Jewish law) in relation to marriages and divorces in India. Directives were issued that if officiating rabbis had any doubt whether Jewish law had been followed by the ancestors of a Bene Israel person who was applying to marry a non-Bene Israel, the Bene Israel would have to undergo a ritual conversion. The situation was extremely painful for the Bene Israel, who saw it as a slur on their community's orthodoxy and even on their "Jewishness" and "purity," an important concept in India.⁴ Government intervention finally affirmed that the Bene Israel were Jews in all respects and had the same rights as all other Jews, including in matters of personal status. This led to the deletion of references to the Bene Israel in the Rabbinate's directives.⁵ The immediate crisis was resolved, but the experience affected their early adjustment, and the memory of the humiliation was implanted in the minds of even the second generation of Bene Israel. Occasionally, the problem reappears.⁶

The issue was particularly devastating for the Bene Israel because most are devout believers, regardless of their degree of outward observance. Many consider themselves religious, or traditional (*Masoreti*) Jews, but not orthodox (*dati*).⁷ They believe, they pray, they say *kiddush* (a blessing over wine) and bless their bread on the Sabbath, and adhere to the laws of *kashrut* (dietary laws) to varying degrees. They are probably less observant than most *Sephardic* or *Mizrachi* (oriental) Jewish communities and certainly less so than Orthodox *Ashkenazis*, but most are more devout than most western Reform or even Conservative Jews. Many Bene Israel feel that the *datis* (the ultra-Orthodox, sometimes referred to as *haredim*) are fanatically religious people who brainwash others, without understanding the values of religion. Bene Israel want their children to retain close ties to religion and not become secular. They donate to the synagogue. One young high school teacher who did not consider herself particularly religious was shocked that so many of her (non-Indian) students were atheists. "How can you be Jewish and not

believe in God?" she asked. Her impression was that it was more the *Ashkenazi* than the *Sephardic* children and she surmised that a lot of *Ashkenazis* had lost their faith in God because of the Holocaust, having lost their families; she could understand that.

Some informants feel that when the Indian Jews first came to Israel they were not guided properly with respect to their religious needs. In the 1950s and even early 1960s, the Jewish Agency sent both Cochinis and Bene Israel to secular kibbutzim (communal settlements), where they discovered that the only ones who were religiously observant there were themselves. No one else was doing very much in the way of saying prayers, lighting candles, keeping *kashrut*, etc.⁸ They were surprised, because they thought that "being in a Jewish state, everyone would be religious, but that was not the case." So gradually some of the Indians stopped being "so religious" and assimilated into the milieu around them. Only if Bene Israel children were sent to a religious kibbutz could they maintain their observances. But most immigrant children were sent to secular schools.

Bene Israel often compare attitudes toward religion in Israel and India. The religious pluralism in India enabled the Bene Israel to live in an environment of mutual tolerance among Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Christians and Jews. One informant stated:

"In India they had such respect. In the villages, the non-Jews would refrain from making noises during Yom Kippur and stop playing music during a religious procession of their own when they passed a synagogue when the Jews were praying. Hindus and Jews would never play music in front of a mosque, even if it was a wedding procession. I will never forget such tolerance and respect. It doesn't exist in Israel."

Degree of Observance

When seventy-two Bene Israel respondents were asked if they themselves were more religiously observant in India or Israel, forty percent said more in India, twelve percent said more in Israel, and twenty-eight percent said the same (the percentages do not add up to one-hundred because not all responded to this question on the form). But when asked if members of their community in general were more observant in India or Israel, fifty-three percent said more in India, twenty-two percent said more in Israel, and fourteen percent said the same. For those who said they or other Bene Israel were more observant in India, reasons given included the need to assert one's identity and sense of belonging, the fear of assimilation, family or community pressure, the desire to keep the community unified, the fact that India was a more religious country, the authority exercised by the head of the family who saw to it that all observed, and the greater cohesion among Jews in India.

They felt people were less observant in Israel because the community was too spread out, society as a whole was less religious in Israel than in India, life was hard in Israel and there was no time or energy for religion, people resented religious coercion in Israel, and Israel had too much western culture and too many alternatives and life styles. "In Israel you can be Jewish without being religious. This is less true in India," said one informant. Shlomo Deshen and Moshe Shokeid have also observed the difficulties North African Jews faced when they discovered that in the Israeli environment, religion was no longer the main criterion and expression of Jewish life.⁹ One Bene Israel who was highly respected for his knowledge of religion said,

I sent my children to government religious schools from the beginning, but they are still less religious than I am because they live in a secular neighborhood. They started out going to synagogue on Friday nights and Saturday mornings, but then stopped when they realized that their friends were going to parties.

Of those who felt that people were more observant in Israel, the reasons cited included easier access to synagogues and kosher food, living in a Jewish nation in a Jewish environment, better religious education and understanding of Hebrew, pressure to observe, and *Shabbat* (Sabbath) and festivals as public holidays where no work was required. One informant noted:

After living in a state where religion and state were separate...now living in a state where both are one creates a kind of religious coercion not easy to accept. Our children are changing to become more observant. Being in Israel all their lives in completely Jewish surroundings they have never been exposed to cosmopolitan society like us to know any other views.

A very few Bene Israel have become extremely religious in Israel, generally as a result of having been educated in ultra-orthodox schools.

Practices

When seventy respondents were asked which rituals were important to them, fifty-nine mentioned *brit* (circumcision), fifty-four *bar* and *bat mitzvah*, forty-two *Shabbat*, forty *kashrut*, thirty-nine unique customs of Indian Jews and thirty-one attending synagogue.

As in most other communities in Israel, there is a process of secularization. It seems that the older people are more observant than the younger ones. (When seventy-two respondents were asked if they were more religiously observant than their parents, fifteen percent said they were more observant, thirteen percent the same, and sixty-one percent said less so.) Although limited space prevents a discussion of all Bene Israel practices, comments on a few are in order.

Synagogue Attendance

Synagogues, with their primary function as centers of worship, are markers of Jewish identity in the Diaspora; in Israel they have become markers of ethnic identity, particularly among the Eastern communities. Like other communities, the Bene Israel have built their own synagogues so that they can hear the familiar melodies, celebrate certain holidays according to Indian customs, speak in their own language, and maintain their accustomed decorum. Israel has approximately forty Indian synagogues in Israel. Some towns, where there are large concentrations of the community, have three or four. This topic will be taken up in a separate article.

Many people who do not necessarily go to the synagogue nevertheless observe certain practices.

Shabbat (Sabbath)

Even those Bene Israel who were the least observant in India often celebrated the Sabbath in one way or another. For most this generally meant lighting candles (in India it was often oil lamps in glasses) and having a special meal—usually consisting of a mixture of Indian and western style food—with the ritual prayers and hymns, especially on Friday night, but not necessarily on Saturday, and perhaps going to the synagogue. Most Bene Israel will travel and use money (strict Sabbath observers would do neither). Shalva Weil pointed out that during the Yom Kippur war, most of the Bene Israel employees of the Israel Aircraft Industries agreed to work on Saturday.¹⁰ One informant says she doesn't cook on *Shabbat*, but she travels and watches television. One family in Dimona lights candles, does not cook on Saturdays, makes *kiddush*, and reads Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible). Their children say they would continue with candles and *kiddush*. Some young people have discontinued even this, in some cases because their non-Bene Israel spouses (often husbands) "don't believe in it." One young couple does not consider themselves particularly religious or observant but they light the candles, say *kiddush* and have a nice family meal together with their three children to "make it something special to honor *Shabbat*." They see this as being Jewish rather than Indian. Another problem is that on Friday nights, young people want to be with their friends, and not come home for *Shabbat* dinner and *kiddush*.

An informant who claimed that she was not very observant, but did *kiddush* at home and observed *Shabbat*, discussed an incident that occurred when her son was in the army. The usual rabbi couldn't come one *Shabbat* and there was a question of who could say the *kiddush*. The only one who volunteered was her son, and he said it the way it was done at home, in the Indian style. His own commander was surprised and asked, "how do you know that?" The boy replied, "I'm not religious but I know it. I've heard my father say it." The same boy, as a young man living in Australia, was the only one who volunteered to say *kiddush* when the Israelis there came together to celebrate Passover.

Kashrut (dietary laws)

On the whole, most Bene Israel keep some form of *kashrut*. They generally do not eat forbidden foods, do not eat milk and meat together, and may or may not keep separate dishes and cooking utensils for milk and meat. In some cases they just keep separate Passover dishes, particularly the older generation. Like many other Sephardic communities, the Bene Israel consider fish to be a meat product and therefore will not eat dairy at the same meal. In India it was believed that fish and milk together caused some kind of “disorder.”¹¹ One woman volunteered,

“In my son’s house they mix up all the dishes, but in my own flat, I keep them separate. In my son’s house I do it their way, in my house, mine. If my son eats meat at my house, I serve tea without milk rather than coffee with.”

Sometimes a young person will marry someone (usually non-Bene Israel) who is strictly observant and not only will the Bene Israel spouse become more observant, but so will his or her parents. The Bene Israel will make the parents observe *kashrut* more strictly than they ordinarily would have, so that the spouse can eat at their house. Guy reported that because of the Bene Israel reputation for *halachic* laxity, the Orthodox Jews who constituted the majority of the population in her Negev development town were unable to eat in Indian homes.¹² Yet, one Bene Israel informant felt that it was important to love your religion, but not to be too fanatical. He was angry that when his sister and her husband came to visit, the husband (a Bene Israel) who was “very *dati*,” would not eat in his home, because although his wife “cooks kosher, it’s not kosher enough for my sister and her husband. But they were willing to eat in the hotel. They’re hypocrites.”

Brit (circumcision)

In all communities, Elijah the prophet is invited to the *brit* and honored: his chair is ready. The Bene Israel, along with some other communities, traditionally recited the *Eliahu Ha-navi* prayer after the *brit* and they still do so in Israel. One young woman had an Indian *mohel* (ritual circumciser) for the *brit*, who knew to give the baby wine, honey and milk (in the Indian tradition) when he performed the circumcision (In Israel, *mohels* often have cards spelling out what each community needs). The Bene Israel also sing a special song in Hebrew after the circumcision, in addition to the customary one performed by other Jewish communities.

Head-shaving

It was a Bene Israel custom to shave the head of a newborn boy after forty days and that of a girl after eighty days. Hindus and Muslims in India generally shaved the head too, unless they made a vow that they would keep the hair for three or five years (for example, if they had a boy). The mother is purified on those days.¹³

The younger generation of Bene Israel in Israel sees this as a cultural, not a religious custom. Most women say they would not stay at home forty days, but some will shave the baby's head. Many won't, however, even though the mothers ask if they will and promise a big party after it. "You have a *malida* (see below); the mother gets new clothes and a big portion of the *malida* for her prosperity and fertility. Then there's a big dinner," one grandmother-to-be explained to her daughter. One young wife said "absolutely not" to her mother. Another young woman told her mother when she was pregnant that she would not shave the head of her baby and warned her that if she asked her about it, she would take the baby and her mother would never see it. But in another, large working class family from Haifa, the young people, when they have children, observe this custom. Some will do it even if they prefer not to, just to make the parents happy, because they know they are expecting it. In another case, the baby didn't have much hair anyway and the daughter-in-law was willing to do it, having been told that the hair would grow in thicker afterwards! It is less likely that a Bene Israel husband can persuade his non-Bene Israel wife to perform this ritual.

UNIQUE CUSTOMS

Eliahu Ha-navi or *malida* ceremony

This is a custom unique to the Bene Israel and reflects their strong belief in the powers of the Prophet Elijah—a Biblical hero honored by Jews, Muslims and Christians—whom the Bene Israel believe will return as a precursor to the Messianic era. The ceremony consists of reciting specific prayers invoking the prophet and blessings, accompanied by the *malida* ritual, an offering to God of certain foods, including a special mixture of rice, coconut, fruits, nuts, cardamom, sugar and rosewater. It is usually followed by a festive meal. Traditionally, an *Eliahu Ha-navi* or *malida* was sponsored by a family as a calendrical or life cycle rite as well as at other times: in the seventh month of the first pregnancy; on the day of purity of a new mother; on the day of removing the hair of the newborn; at the time of a circumcision, bar mitzvah or wedding. It was also done as thanksgiving after recovery from illness or the occurrence of good events, or for the redemption of a vow to perform the offering if a particular goal was achieved. And it was performed on *Tu B' shvat*, the Jewish New Year for trees, a holiday that has a special significance for the Bene Israel as they believe that on that day Elijah appeared to them at Khandala, a village in the Konkan where the footprints of his horse are said to be found.¹⁴ In Israel the Bene Israel commonly perform an *Eliahu Ha-navi* on some of these occasions as well as when moving to a new home or upon the departure to and/or safe return of a soldier from the army. This latter occasion is seen as being similar to the custom in the past whereby people in India would make a *malida* when someone was going on some kind of pilgrimage or leaving

the country and traveling by sea or air, and also when the person returned. As one informant explained,

Malida is the symbol for prosperity. If you wish that good things will happen to your family or that any good occasion or ceremony will pass without troubles or problems, you do a *malida* before it. It can only be held on "auspicious" days according to the Jewish calendar.

Weil points out that this ceremony "remains a religious expression which is nowhere prescribed in the Jewish religion, and yet, which is in no way in contradiction to it." She cites it as "one of the core symbols of Bene Israel identity".¹⁵ It is certainly a key item in the persistence of ethnicity. The Bene Israel point to the Jewish origin of the *Eliahu Ha-navi* ceremony. Some say it symbolizes the *Minchah* (offerings) that Jews used to bring to give the priests at the temple before it was destroyed. Elements in the ceremony are similar to those performed by Hindus (the offering and distribution of *prasada*) and Muslims (offerings at the grave of a saint known as *durgah* or commemorations of dates connected with the Prophet Muhammad in India).¹⁶ Guy has offered an analysis of how this ritual operates as a South Asian cultural strategy for the creation and intensification of the participants' Jewish identity and communal affiliations: she argues that by eating of the food which Elijah has partaken, i.e. absorbing Elijah's substance, the participants in this ritual are imbued with Elijah's nature.¹⁷ In Israel, Bene Israel maintain that their community is different from other communities by stressing their unique relationship to Elijah: only they truly pray for his return as a precursor of the Messiah. He is said to visit Bene Israel homes at the end of the Sabbath and drink the wine left in the *kiddush* cup.¹⁸ Traditionally the communal meal that followed a *malida* ceremony performed at home was omitted if the occasion was a circumcision celebration because the mother was considered unclean and should not be preparing food, but in Israel some Bene Israel couples follow the Israeli custom of holding big catered parties in rented halls, where the food is not cooked by the mother. Also in Israel, if a large number of non-Bene Israel are being invited to a big party for a circumcision, a *bar mitzvah*, or a wedding, the *malida* ceremony might take place separately, in the Indian home, with just Bene Israel present and the larger, mixed, party might be held later in a rented hall, rather than the two being continuous.¹⁹ (This is similar to the practice of other *Mizrachi* [Eastern Jewish] communities in Israel, where a private *henna* ceremony for the family and a larger marriage ceremony are held in separate arenas.) In Israel at the close of the *malida* rite, a collection is taken for the synagogue. Also, on occasions which involve the whole community, such as the celebration of *Tu B' shvat*, the synagogue, rather than a single family, sponsors the rite.²⁰

Guy sees the performance of the *malida* ritual as a means by which the Bene Israel constitute their community as an *eda* (a distinct ethnic community) within the larger Jewish entity:

The oneness and uniqueness of the BI community can no longer be maintained by the traditional conjugal and commensal strategies with which the Bnei Israel differentiated their community as Jews from the Hindu, Christian and Muslim milieu of India.²¹

Now everyone is Jewish. Therefore it is appropriate that they mix in commensally and conjugally with non-Bene Israel. They resent what they see as attempts to restrict this mixing by certain Orthodox Jewish dietary and marital restrictions.

...while the Bnei Israel insist on their Jewishness, nevertheless they view their Jewish community to be different from non-Bene Israel communities. The need to be both Jewish and Bnei Israel underlies the continuity of the *malida* rite as a compelling and powerful Bnei Israel ritual practice. In the *malida* rite, the Bnei Israel enhance the uniqueness of their community and renew its oneness.²²

Yet, since the ritual is accompanied by prayers and blessings taken from the standard Jewish prayer book of the Sephardic tradition, the prayer book which other communities use in their services and observances, the *malida* rite also makes the Bnei Israel more Jewish, better Jews, Guy argues.²³

When Bene Israel in Israel asked whether it was acceptable to use wheat bread for the *malida* instead of the typical parched rice grain or, in the past, rice bread, N. S. Efraim, a Bene Israel who had made a deep study of Jewish texts, said they should use parched grain, not wheat bread since wheat was offered at the temple in the time of Solomon. He mentioned that when other communities in Israel saw how the ceremony helped the Bene Israel, they wanted to do it too, and sometimes people did it with the help of the Bene Israel.²⁴

Weil sees the flexibility of the purpose of the ceremony as the main reason for its persistence. "*Eliahu Ha-navi*, the complex of religious activity performed in his name, is at once a statement of personal belief and an important boundary-marker reinforcing ethnic distinctiveness in a country where all Jews share the same religion."²⁵

Many young Bene Israel in Israel seem to think that the custom is important and would preserve it. They will often go to their parents' home for the ritual or invite the parents to their home to perform it. Some young women do it with the *henna* ceremony before the marriage and wear saris as well. Since it is necessary to have a *minyan* (quorum) of ten men to perform an *Eliahu Ha-navi*, some young people think that when the generation of their parents passes, it may disappear. Others disagree, saying, "If you're going to have a big celebration for something wouldn't you have twenty people?" Some young Bene Israel say it will all depend on themselves, how much they're willing to carry it on. I asked people if they saw the *Eliahu Ha-navi* as a religious ceremony or just as a cultural one, suggesting that perhaps if

they saw it as part of their Bene Israel cultural heritage, the younger generation might wish to preserve it. The older generation saw the rite mainly as a religious ceremony, but the younger generation sees it as both, and may continue it because their parents did it. Indeed, some young Bene Israel do it only to honor their parents, such as when children are born or when they move into a new home, but would not do it at other times, "although my parents look for occasions on which to do it," one young woman said. In another instance, a rather secular family did it rarely: in one case to give thanks that the family wasn't hurt when they were in a very bad auto accident. Another young woman commented,

My parents did an *Eliahu Ha-navi* when I was pregnant, although I don't believe in all this. They also did it for my brother when he got out of the army and moved into a new house at the same time, so they did one for both occasions at the same time. They do it for the right occasions.

Another couple had a *malida* when they moved into their new house mainly because the wife's parents asked her to.

Some young Indians in Israel who were not too well acquainted with Indian Jewish ceremonies asked about the *malida* when the author was discussing it with their parents, who did not perform it. One mother explained, "It's when you make a vow, or a thanksgiving, like when you come back to Israel after your travels, I'll make one, or when your brother passes his *bagrut* (high school final examination), or goes into the army." Another mother, from Delhi, where the old traditions were observed less than in Bombay and the villages, and who had only performed an *Eliahu Ha-navi* once, also explained it to her son as a "thanksgiving ceremony." Her father had done it once in Israel after the Lebanese War.

Pilgrimages

In India, it was customary for Muslims and Hindus to make pilgrimages to shrines, tombs of pious individuals, mosques and temples. Bene Israel did make pilgrimages to a few sites at times, particularly on the Jewish New Year for Trees, to the village of Khandala, near Alibag, where it was thought that Elijah's chariot had left imprints in the stone, and to the synagogue in the small town of Panvel, which was thought to have special power. They would recite the *Eliahu Ha-navi* prayer and perform a *malida* ceremony there. Muslims and Hindus also considered Khandala a holy spot. Hindus believed that one of their own goddesses appeared there and Muslims thought the prophet Muhammad's chariot was sent there.²⁶ Other than going to Khandala or Panvel, Jews could not participate in this major form of religious expression in India. In Israel, however, pilgrimages to the tombs of holy men also take place, and now many Indians also choose to perform these rituals, which have not been dislodged by the forces of modernity.

A particularly interesting phenomenon has been the participation of many Bene Israel in pilgrimages to the tomb of Baba Sali (Rabbi Israel Abu-Hatzera, a pious Moroccan sage renowned for the miracles he performed, who died in 1984) near the town of Netivot in the Negev desert, and to that of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai (a mid-second century C.E. student of Rabbi Akiva who became a great spiritual leader in his own right and-according to legend-was the author of the *Zohar*, a book of Jewish mysticism) in Meron in the north in order to ask for blessings and for fulfillment of wishes. These sites have attracted an increasingly large number of pilgrims over the last twenty years. The tomb of Baba Sali draws primarily North Africans, for whom the worship of saints is an important part of their religious experience. They celebrate their cultural heritage and express their ethnic identity and solidarity by participating in the *hillulot* (pilgrimages to celebrate the rabbi's death anniversary). However, many Bene Israel also have been going there on organized bus tours.²⁷ A group from Dimona, for example, might make this pilgrimage, and then continue on to Ramleh to see an old synagogue. The tomb of Shimon Bar Yohai is a popular pilgrimage site, which attracts Jews of European as well as Eastern origin, especially on the holiday of *Lag b'Omer*. Young Indians in particular are interested in going to his tomb, often camping overnight, as do people from other communities. The popular belief in Shimon Bar Yohai is evidenced by the fact that some Bene Israel in Israel have a picture of him at home and light candles in his memory throughout the year. Most Bene Israel object to this practice, arguing that the second commandment forbids the worship of anyone except God and therefore to light candles for another is wrong and disrespectful to God.²⁸

Bene Israel especially make pilgrimages near Haifa to the Cave of Elijah (which they call *Kisei Eliahu*, Elijah's chair), where Elijah was said to have lived for fourteen years, fed by ravens, at the time of his conflict with King Ahab and Jezebel, as well as to a special place near Jerusalem, a custom shared with many other groups, particularly North Africans. At the cave, the Bene Israel recite the *Eliahu Ha-navi* prayer and often perform a *malida* ceremony. Although they may visit on any day considered auspicious, a very popular time to go is at *Tu B'shvat*. They come from all over Israel, as family groups or in buses chartered by a community organization. Weil reported a pilgrimage where the Bene Israel primarily stuck to themselves, not mixing with other pilgrims, as a way of maintaining the separation. They lit a candle which they purchased there, were blessed by a rabbi and then performed *Eliahu Ha-navi* inside the cave with foods and spices which they had brought from home. Weil makes an important point that, unlike the pilgrimages to Meron which integrate Moroccans with Ashkenazi Jews, the Bene Israel pilgrimage to Elijah's cave is an enactment of their particular ethnicity, reinforcing group identity.²⁹ Similarly Stephen Sharot wrote about the *hillulot* for the North Africans:

The revival of pilgrimages to saints' shrines has not been part of a comprehensive revival of the tradition of North African Jews, but the custom provides a sense of continuity with a valued past, and as ceremonies of ethnic renewal. Participants celebrate their specific ethnic identities as part of an overarching Jewish identity.³⁰

These pilgrimages, enabling Bene Israel to participate in a very Indian ritual but within a Jewish context, have become sufficiently popular that community members wrote to *Yad*, a Marathi publication that discusses Bene Israel religious customs and their relationship to normative Judaism (see below), asking whether or not they should perform a *malida* ceremony when they go to these sites. N. S. Ephraim, the editor of *Yad*, replied that it was fine to go to the spots but that they should perform the *malida* ceremony at home, and then make the pilgrimage to recite the prayer. He saw the *Eliahu Ha-navi* prayer and the *malida* ceremony as two different things. The prayer to Elijah is to invoke his aid to ask God for help with various matters, or to give thanks. But the *malida* offering is to God. It should not be performed at the holy site as it would appear to be a form of worship of Elijah. Ephraim, incidentally felt the same way about the pilgrimage to Khandala: people should say the prayers there, but not do the *malida*. Nor should they burn incense, as they had traditionally done when they performed the *malida*, as that is a Hindu custom. On the other hand, it was okay to bring a coconut to this site as this is a typical Bene Israel food. His views were similar on the pilgrimage to the synagogue at Panvel.³¹

Kirtans

Because the Hindu scriptures were in Sanskrit, "God's language," ordinary people could not read them. One way of familiarizing people with the scriptures was to translate the stories into the vernacular in the form of religious musical dramas, known as *kirtans*. The word *kirtan* means "song," but the term also denotes a form of story-telling, largely through song, to an audience.³² The Bene Israel, realizing that their people did not know Hebrew, similarly translated religious or Biblical stories about Moses, Joseph, Ruth, Jacob, or Hannah and her Seven Sons into Marathi, added songs, and performed these musical plays in India at special functions, such as charity shows (but not in a synagogue). There was a famous *kirtan* writer named Awaskar, whose son-in-law had lived in Lod, Israel, until he died in the early 1980s. The latter had wanted to revive the *kirtans* and have the Bene Israel in Israel perform them, and so he gave Flora Samuel, the dynamic head of the Lod Women's Association, a booklet of the songs written by his father-in-law in Karachi in 1912.

Until she died in 1998, Flora Samuel persisted in her work of documenting and writing down the *kirtans*. She had collected from all over about nine or ten of these Bene Israel religious plays in Marathi from the nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries, including some rare ones. She xeroxed the Marathi songs, transliterated them into English so that people would know how to pronounce the Marathi, and then translated the songs into English with footnotes. She wrote the connecting narrative in Marathi, just as the original *kirtankars* had. Then the Lod Women's Association performed the *kirtans*, singing the Marathi songs either in standard melodies that they used or sometimes to other familiar tunes that people would know. At the time of her death, Mrs. Samuel had just about finished compiling the *kirtans* into a book. One *kirtan* was published in *Pe' amim*.³³ The Lod Women's Association has performed these *kirtans* not only in Lod but also in Kiryat Gat, Kiryat Shmona, Ramleh and Haifa. They have been recorded and they have also been performed with Hebrew narratives (including broadcasts on Israeli radio) or with English narratives (as at the Jewish Museum in New York).

Celebration of Holidays

High Holidays

Weil points out customs practiced exclusively by the Bene Israel which make them distinct, and raises the question of what factors influence the retention or abandonment of religious symbols. She concludes that as with all Jewish communities in the world, the Bene Israel adopted or stressed those items of religious behavior which best conformed to the prevailing environment, comparing it to the American stress on Hanukkah as a Jewish alternative to Christmas. Most of the festivals and rites which the Bene Israel stressed in India could fit into a Hindu conceptual scheme. Thus they emphasized certain festivals and rites which enabled them to accommodate that society as "outsiders who were accepted 'in'".³⁴

Rosh ha Shanah (the New Year)

On *Rosh ha Shanah*, the Bene Israel in Israel go to synagogue on both days of the festival, although in India they used to celebrate only one day. They wear their best clothes and a lot of jewelry. On the afternoon of the first or second day, they practice the custom of casting away their sins in running water, a *Tashlich* ceremony. Weil observed that they would ride to the sea if necessary to have real running water, even though orthodox Jews would not ride on these holy days.³⁵

Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement)

Yom Kippur is extremely important to the Bene Israel; most of those whom are physically able observe the fast. They tend to arrive early at the synagogue, observe strict decorum, and stay all day. In India, they removed their shoes and belts because these were leather. In Israel, they wear rubber or canvas (sneakers) shoes. They still wear white (many women wear saris) on *Yom*

Kippur as it is necessary to come before God very clean and pure to ask for pardon and mercy. They have their own melodies for the prayers they recite. Weil has analyzed what she refers to as the unconscious symbiosis with and acculturation to Hindu symbolism in Bene Israel observance of *Yom Kippur* in India.³⁶

Shila San (festival of stale things)

On the day after *Yom Kippur*, the Bene Israel celebrated a holiday they called *Shila San* ("festival of stale things"-so named because the foods used in the celebration of this holiday had to be prepared before *Yom Kippur* and were thus stale by the time they were consumed), as a day of rejoicing, during which they visited and entertained family and friends. After chatting with them, they would say "if we have offended you in any way, please forgive us." Benjamin Talker, writing in *Yad*, says they should continue with this custom in Israel: "If you have discord with some family or family member, you can go to meet him, you are expecting God to forgive you. You pay your respects to this person and start afresh." The Bene Israel believed that the souls of the dead visit their relatives on the day before *Yom Kippur* and remain with them until the night of *Shila San*.³⁷

Simhat Torah (Rejoicing of the Law)

This festival, coming at the close of the Jewish high holidays, is the most popular holiday for the Bene Israel, after *Yom Kippur*. The Torah scrolls are removed from the Ark and people dance around the synagogue with them in seven circuits. Among the Bene Israel in India, this had been a day for getting even for offenses suffered during the year. To say "I'll see you on *Simhat Torah*," was a threat. Drinking and fighting were common, as old enmities, either familial or between neighborhoods, surfaced. Some synagogues requested police security. Although this custom of fighting seems to have died out in India by the 1960s, it was apparently imported to some towns in Israel where the Bene Israel are concentrated. The president of a Bene Israel synagogue in a Negev town in the late 1970s claimed at one point that he could not attend the celebration of *Simhat Torah* because he had received so many threats from people planning to get drunk and beat him up. Two years later, the celebration was even canceled because the police refused to supervise and many people would not set foot in the synagogue without the police present.³⁸

Passover

Bene Israel say it is easier to observe this holiday in Israel. "In India it was difficult as all the foods had to be prepared at home and you had to avoid eating in hotels, restaurants and other people's houses." Few Bene Israel households maintain separate dishes and utensils for Passover, although some families *kasher* their everyday dishes so that they can be used at Passover, by dipping

them in boiling water. A few still paint their houses before Passover; in India they white-washed them.

Tisha b'Av

This fast, commemorating the destruction of the First and Second Temples, is an important holiday for the Bene Israel. Men and women often sit on the ground shoeless as a sign of mourning, not on low stools as many other communities do and sing special Bene Israel melodies. Like most orthodox Jews, they abstain from meat nine days prior to the fast.³⁹

Concerns about Bene Israel Customs

The Bene Israel were aware that some of their beliefs and practices were different from those of other Jews they encountered in Israel. Weil has pointed out that although all Jewish communities have their special customs,

The religion of the Bene Israel is particularly striking for two reasons: because the Bene Israel were ignorant, until comparatively recently, of the Oral Law: and because Bene Israel thought and praxis has been influenced by different conceptual systems than that of other Jewish groups.⁴⁰

As with any other Jewish group, Bene Israel religious practices were influenced by the social environment in which they lived. Katz has pointed out that Indian Jews had maintained a distinct identity while adapting creatively into their cultural milieu.⁴¹ In Israel, Bene Israel practice is coming into line with that of other Jews, although certain customs remain. The Bene Israel have been particularly sensitive that they not be thought of as having assimilated Hindu practices which might compromise their Judaism in the eyes of others. When a Bene Israel leader in Israel saw bronze and ivory statues of the Indian deities Shiva Nataraj and Saraswati in the home of a community member who appreciated Indian art, he was angry: "Why should a Jew have Hindu Gods in his home?" he asked.

In the olden days in Indian villages, the Bene Israel performed a cradle ceremony, called the *barsa* ceremony, for the naming of a baby girl. The newborn was placed in a decorated cradle, and sweets and coconuts were placed around the baby. Neighborhood women and children would come and sing that when this baby grew up, she would play with all these children. They rocked the cradle and at the end, the participants were served some of the food. At one point, the Lod Women's Association staged such a ceremony, which is not generally performed in Israel and is almost extinct in India, to be filmed by the Israel Museum and shown in conjunction with its Jews of India exhibition in 1995. In preparing for this, the women were concerned that since some of the songs they sang were related to Krishna-e.g. about the child being naughty, the mother hitting the child and then loving it again-the Bene Israel might be considered to have absorbed Hindu practices. They decided that they would

explain where the customs came from, that they were Krishna-related, but they would change the name in the songs, and instead of referring to Krishna, they would use the name Jacob.⁴²

This fear of being associated with Hindus is unfortunate, although understandable. Although Israelis seem to understand and accept that Jews in the diaspora adopted certain Muslim and Christian customs, they seem less tolerant of what they see as Hindu customs. And yet as Hananya Goodman has pointed out,

Judaism and Hinduism represent two highly developed cultural modes of being that comes from the reaches of ritual and meditation, study and prayer, service and sacrifice, charity and generosity, joyous dance and modesty, spontaneity and memory. An immersion in ritual and devotional acts, a zealotry for correct behavior, a passion for communal unity, a search for the remythologizing of lived events—all of this is part of the legacy that Jews and Hindus share.⁴³

He goes on to analyze how Judaism and Hinduism are both “home religions:” they share an appreciation of the symbolic power of seeing the home as a temple and therefore stress the role of the family and domestic rituals, while also emphasizing ethnicity as the encompassing network of extended family relations.⁴⁴

Despite the concerns over being seen as “too Hindu,” one Bene Israel said, “We have to preserve our customs. All our customs are traditionally Jewish and now that the youth are less interested in ritual these things are getting lost! In India we didn’t have this secular-religious divide, all these stereotypes...”⁴⁵ Younger Bene Israel ask, “Why do we call ourselves Bene Israel? We’re all Jews.” They don’t want to be considered separate. But one Bene Israel leader feels it is important to retain the identity that they had in India. He said,

In India, we used to read the prayers, although we didn’t understand the meaning. Whenever the word B’nai Israel appeared, we said, ‘Oh, this is about us. We’re the chosen people.’ It makes them feel they’re Jews, connected to the Torah.⁴⁶

He knows that not all agree with his views.

Thus Bene Israel in Israel are concerned about whether their particular customs, some of which were similar to those of their Hindu and Muslim neighbors in India, could or should be maintained or not. Some say that if certain practices are not part of normative Judaism, they should be dropped. Others, however, in explaining the origin of such customs, argue that the Bene Israel should be proud of their traditions and demand respect for them from other communities, as long as these rituals are not contrary to *halacha*, Jewish law. Katz has discussed how the Cochin Jews had adopted many Hindu practices without violating Jewish ethical or legal principles. Sharot has

pointed out that generally as long as religious differentiation did not go against basic patterns of Orthodoxy, particular ethnic religious customs have been acceptable in Israel.⁴⁷ These issues were debated in a Marathi journal, edited in Israel, called *Yad*, which appeared three or four times a year, and which, in the 1990s, dealt purely with religious questions.

Most of the articles were written by N. S. Efraim of Kiryat Shmona, the publisher until his death. But at least a dozen other Bene Israel, men and women living in Israel and one woman from India, who were considered by the community to be knowledgeable in religious matters, were regular contributors to *Yad*. Aaron Sorgawker of Dimona, for example, has a large library of religious books in Hebrew. He did not study in a Yeshiva but rather in a religious *ulpan* (Hebrew language school) after working ten-and-a-half hours a day in a textile factory. He is considered a religious authority in the town and often translates Hebrew texts into Marathi for publication in India. Another individual who writes for *Yad* is Chaim Kolet, the *Chazan* (cantor) of the Sha'are Shalom Synagogue of Lod. He was trained for two years in the early 1960s at Mahon Gold, an institution for training young Jews from the diaspora to be able to lead prayers, do ritual slaughtering and circumcision, and teach Hebrew in their own communities. After returning to Bombay for a period, he eventually immigrated to Israel. While studying at Mahon Gold, he learned that certain Bene Israel customs deviated from Israeli observance and so he changed his practices. By 1995 there were some twenty-three people on the managing committee of *Yad*, many of whom had contributed articles. After N. S. Efraim's death, Rachel Gadkar, who still resided in India, and also edited a Marathi women's magazine called *Shaili* (Hebrew: "my gift"), played a major role in editing the magazine. *Yad* discusses why the Bene Israel followed certain customs and whether or not they should be continued. Efraim tried and other contributors still try to reassure their readers that many of these customs have Jewish significance and sources, such as Biblical references, and so can be maintained, although they might not be obligatory. When Biblical or other Jewish references cannot be found *Yad's* position is that the Bene Israel may discontinue them, but not necessarily that they should.⁴⁸

Questions Raised in *Yad* About Specific Bene Israel Customs

"Unclean" Women

The Bene Israel custom of keeping a menstruating woman away from the synagogue is not according to *halacha*, which says she can attend. In India, she was not permitted to touch anything holy (similar to Hindu menstruating women not being allowed near a shrine). This custom is no longer observed in Israel.

Hath Boshi (Kiss of Peace):

The Bene Israel had a traditional way of greeting each other by touching their own lips with palms held together and then touching the tips of another person's similarly held hands. They did this in the synagogue, at the end of the Sabbath services. In Israel they had noticed that in the synagogues of other communities, people kissed each other on the cheek and the Bene Israel, perhaps wanting to conform to the mainstream, asked if it is okay to do this: "We do it outside of the synagogue, so why not inside?" they wondered. Efraim replied that that even though it is common in Israel to kiss on the cheeks, it is mentioned in the *Shulhan Arukh* (a summary code of Jewish law) that it is not proper to kiss anyone in the synagogue. It was not allowed in the Temple of Solomon. He wrote:

Your love of God must be foremost when coming to the synagogue, even more than your love for your child. If you show so much affection to your loved one, your affection for God is overshadowed. The kiss of peace of the Indian Jews is a good one and should be continued.⁴⁹

Funeral Ceremony:

In India, when a person died and was dressed and placed in the coffin, the coffin was brought out and everyone lined up to see the face of the deceased. Other religious communities in India did the same. The Bene Israel did eventually cover the face, but before they did, everyone looked at it. It was considered very important to pay last respects in this manner, and before the coffin was closed, those in charge asked if there was anyone who had not yet done so. In Israel the face of the deceased is covered and before burial only the closest relatives are allowed to see the face-just to confirm the identity of the person. Efraim confirmed that this latter practice was spelled out in the *Shulhan Arukh* and that the Bene Israel should conform to it. He also stated that although it was alright to circle the dead body as was their custom, they should neither put Jerusalem mud on the eyes of the person nor kiss the body. He cautioned them not to mourn too loudly because the spirit of the deceased is still attached and hovers around the body and mourning too loudly will disturb the soul and make it difficult for it to depart.⁵⁰

Efraim was also against people burning incense when they do the *Hashkaba*, the seven-day ceremony for a dead person, as it is a custom adopted from Hindus and it is not right to create that kind of atmosphere.

Weddings:

People both in India and Israel have been concerned wedding customs the Bene Israel had adopted from other communities should be discarded. Efraim and Gadkar discussed the questions in *Yad*.

Bene Israel asked whether it was okay to continue the *mehndhi* (*henna*) ceremony-the tradition of coating the finger or painting the hand of the bride

with henna the evening before the wedding—a custom not performed by Ashkenazi Jews. The answer was that “it is done in other communities (mainly Sephardic) as well, people like it, the atmosphere is festive, and it brings the families together, so why not do it?”⁵¹

Traditionally, the Bene Israel did an *Eliahu Ha-navi* on the morning of a wedding, so that the event would go off well. But since people nowadays want to keep the morning free, they perform the *Eliahu Ha-navi* in the evening after the *mehndhi* ceremony. The bride is given extra fruits and *malida*, in her skirt. Afterwards, she and the bridegroom are to go home and eat one fruit of each type and are not to share those fruits, so that the bride will be fruitful. In Israel, people ask if this extra portion is a Hindu custom, but Efraim’s explanation was that it goes back to when Joseph invited his brothers to a banquet, he gave his youngest brother Benjamin, whom he loved the most, extra food. “When you love a person more than the others, you always like to give that person an extra share of what you have. It is not a Hindu custom,” he wrote.⁵² Guy, however, sees in this tradition the desire to have the couple benefit from a particularly powerful and concentrated ingestion of Elijah’s substance-code, by eating the whole fruit directly from the offering plate.⁵³

During the preparations for the wedding, it was customary to invite the departed souls and to say the *Hashkaba*, invoking their blessings for the wedding preparations. Incense was burned in the house. Bene Israel in Israel inquired if they could just give money in the synagogue or to charity instead. *Yad* replied that they should continue with the custom of inviting the departed souls and doing the prayers at home, not just finding short cuts.⁵⁴

An important part of a marriage ceremony is to repeat *Sheva Barachot* (seven blessings) on the bride and groom. The old Indian custom was to do these seven blessings on seven different nights, a tradition observed by other orthodox communities. Now, in Israel, the *Sheva Barachot* are recited at the wedding ceremony, all at once. In India, the practice was that one of the elders on the bridegroom’s side, the father, grandfather or uncle, would say it. But in Israel, it is not always elders of the family who recite it, but rather people who have a really good voice. When Bene Israel asked about this change, Efraim and other writers agreed that this was okay, but counseled that the person should be religious and a Sabbath observer, because it is a very important blessing.⁵⁵

Book of Psalms

In India, Bene Israel read the book of Psalms frequently, generally in a prayerful manner and in a private place. In Israel, Bene Israel had noticed people reading the book in public, even on a bus, and asked if this was permissible. *Yad* answered no. You should always be fully covered if you read it and in a private, clean, quiet place. To read it in public, on a train or bus, is distracting and one cannot concentrate.

Interest in Broader Spiritual Questions

While doing my research, I discovered a few individuals, all males older than sixty, who had been strongly influenced by Hindu and other eastern spirituality. They were familiar with Hindu religious and philosophical thought, but were reluctant to let this be known in the Bene Israel community as a whole. I put some of these individuals in touch with each other since they shared similar interests. Weil points out that the Bene Israel have maintained that Jewish and Hindu mystic beliefs are complementary, although most Jews have refused to accept this. Goodman also feels that Jewish motifs of exile and cyclic return as well as devotional Hindu motifs of separation and union “express the desire to return to the home of being in and with God.”⁵⁶ A number of Bene Israel have told me that they believe in reincarnation and that this is not contrary to Jewish belief. (Some Kabbalists also believe in the transmigration of souls.)

One individual, Mr. Jacob Aaron Jhirad, came from a fairly orthodox family in Jebalpur, India, where his father, a military doctor, used to lead the prayers. Jacob himself has made a serious study of many religions, searching for the harmony among them. He is not observant of Jewish ritual: “I do not attach any importance to rituals. I have strong faith in the oneness of God and the universal brotherhood of man.” He has written a book entitled *God, Man and Religion* (which is dedicated: “in loving memory, to Sri Ramana Maharishi—the great Indian sage, whose thoughts have greatly enlightened the author”) in which he outlines his belief in the inevitability of destiny and discusses traditional religious questions from the point of view of many faiths. In the introduction he writes:

All religions are justified, having been inspired by God, and hence need not be treated as barriers between man and man.

A man may follow any of the religions or follow none. Even as an atheist he is the carrier of God’s will and is therefore not to be misunderstood or ridiculed.⁵⁷

Another informant wrote that he became familiar with Hindu (*Vedanta*) or Buddhist thought only when he picked up books on those religions that he spotted in a Jerusalem bookstore. He was fascinated and this led him to read a lot of books on other religions as well. He wrote:

To me a religious person is one who not only practices his beliefs in accordance to his religious precepts, but reflects, contemplates and meditates in solitude to acquire true spiritual tranquillity, intuition and wisdom, reasoning and discrimination, by diving deep into his soul to understand his true nature. Meditation is practiced in some way or the other by every religion, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and they all agree on the same point. To know God one must learn the art of Self Realization.

Yet another respondent wrote that he had a huge collection of books on religion comprising Indian Yoga, Sufism, Kabbala, Judaism and Islam. According to a fellow Bene Israel who shared his broad interests in religion, he was a practicing Sufi.

Conclusion

The immigration to Israel of the Bene Israel of India entailed, as for all immigrant groups, a great many adjustments. Coming into contact with Jews from all over the world, each community discovered that it brought along its own cultural constructs, some of which were different from those of their co-religionists from elsewhere. Diaspora Jews had naturally assimilated certain customs from their non-Jewish environments and these contributed to each community's sense of ethnic distinctiveness. In the early years of the state especially, *Ashkenazi* (Eastern and Central European) traditions—in particular those of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Jewish settlers in Palestine who eventually founded the State of Israel—were upheld as the norm and immigrants from Asia and Africa were expected to conform to them. Partly as a result of this policy of encouraging assimilation to Ashkenazi cultural values, the issue of ethnic distinctiveness and identity amongst Jews became one of the major concerns in Israel.

Ritual was an enactment of identity, just as religion served to establish, define, and maintain identity,⁵⁸ but when it came to deviations from normative Jewish religious ritual (which was practiced by *Mizrachi* and *Sephardic* as well as *Ashkenazi Jews*) the key element to be considered was whether or not the practice in question was contrary to Jewish law. If it was, a community was likely to discard it; if not, it might be kept. In the latter case, it would become a marker of the ethnic identity of that particular community. A conscious concern with the traditions of a community is an aspect of ethnicity, and religion is an important part of the heritage.

For the Bene Israel, the religious issue was a particularly sensitive one. As devout as they were, some of their practices (or lack of them) had already been criticized in India by Baghdadi Jews and when they arrived in Israel, they were subjected to the humiliating doubts of the Chief Rabbinate. Furthermore, many Israelis seemed less tolerant of what they suspected might be Hindu accretions in Jewish customs than they were of Christian, or even Muslim, influence. In their eagerness to prove that they were truly Jewish, the Bene Israel were particularly concerned about conforming to mainstream Jewish norms, even if this meant shedding time-honored customs. Those particular traditions, such as the *Eliahu Ha-navi*, which were uniquely Indian and yet not in conflict with Jewish law, assumed special importance.

Partly because of the "religious crisis" of the 1960s, the Bene Israel were slower than many other *Mizrachi* communities to begin to assert their pride in their own ethnic identity. It was only when they felt confident that they were

fully accepted as Jews that they could begin to publicly display some of their "Indianness" through annual festivals, demonstrations of their customs, and other manifestations. To what extent the Bene Israel will maintain any of their distinctive cultural and religious traditions will, of course, depend on the second and third generations, which are both more secular and more "Israeli" than the immigrant generation. Many of the younger people take pride in their Bene Israel heritage but they express it mainly through their fondness for Indian food, films and music. Whether or not they will incorporate the maintenance of distinctive Bene Israel religious customs as they refashion their identity as Israelis remains to be seen.

NOTES

- ¹ See Joan G. Roland, "Adaptation and Identity among Second-Generation Indian Jews in Israel," *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, 37 (1) (1995): 5-37; and "The Transformation of Indian Identity among Bene Israel in Israel," in *Israel in the Nineties*, eds. Frederick Lazin and Gregory Mahler (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1996), pp. 169-193. On Bene Israel identity in India, see Joan G. Roland, *The Jewish Communities of India: Identity in a Colonial Era* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction, 1998); Shirley Berry Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel: A Comprehensive Inquiry and Sourcebook* (Berkeley, CA: Judah L. Magnes Press and Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1988); Schifra Strizower, *The Bene Israel of Bombay* (New York, Schocken, 1971); Benjamin J. Israel, *The Jews of India* (New Delhi: Mosaic Books, 1998); Nathan Katz, ed., *Studies of Indian Jewish Identity* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995); and Thomas Timberg, ed., *Jews in India* (New York: 1986).
- ² Nathan Katz, "Introduction," in *Studies of Indian Jewish Identity*, ed. Nathan Katz (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995), p. 10.
- ³ Alex Weingrod, ed., *Studies in Israeli Ethnicity: After the Ingathering* (New York, London: Gordon and Breach Science, 1985), p. xii.
- ⁴ See, Roland, *Jewish Communities of India*, pp. 249-251; Benjamin J. Israel, "The Bene Israel Struggle for Religious Equality in Israel," in *The Bene Israel of India* (New York: APT Books, 1984); *Truth* (The Voice of the Bene Israel Action Committee) November 2, 1961, February 2-March 3, 1962: 2. See also Shalva Weil, "The Influence of Caste Ideology in Israel," in *Cultural Transition: The Case of Immigrant Youth*, ed. Meir Gottessmann (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988), pp. 156-168. For the importance of purity in the Indian religious context, see Katz, "The Ritual Enactments of the Cochin Jews," in *Studies of Indian Jewish Identity*, ed. Nathan Katz (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995), p. 17.
- ⁵ See Israel, "Bene Israel Struggle," pp. 90-97; I.I. Shapurkar to Rabbi Norman Lamm, August 20, 1962, I.I. Shapurkar Collection, Bombay;

"Statement of the Government on the 'Bene Israel' Problem," special session of the Knesset, August 17, 1964; *Jerusalem Post*, September 1, 1964, 1.

- 6 The most recent incident occurred in November, 1997, in the Israeli town of Petach Tikvah when a rabbi refused to marry a Bene Israel woman to a non-Bene Israel man unless she underwent ritual conversion. The young couple had to find another rabbi in a nearby town who would sign the certificate. See Alison Kaplan Sommer, "Indian Jews Fight for Recognition-Again," *The Jerusalem Post*, 14 November 1997.
- 7 Cynthia Guy reported that most of her Bene Israel informants in a Negev development town described themselves as *hofshi* (free) as opposed to *dati*. Cynthia Guy, "The Bnei Israel Indian Community of Midbarit, Israel," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1984), p. 161.
- 8 See Ruby Daniel and Barbara Johnson, *Ruby of Cochin: An Indian Jewish Woman Remembers* (Philadelphia and Jerusalem: the Jewish Publication Society, 1995), ch. 9.
- 9 Shlomo Deshen and Moshe Shokeid, "Introduction," in *The Predicament of Homecoming* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 35.
- 10 Shalva Weil, "Bene Israel Indian Jews in Lod, Israel: A Study in the Persistence of Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity" (D. phil. diss., University of Sussex, England, 1977), p. 296. Abraham cited that seventy-one percent of her informants reported at least some observance of the Sabbath. See Margaret Abraham, "Ethnic Identity and Marginality, a Study of the Jews of India" (Ph.D. thesis, Syracuse University, 1989), p. 211.
- 11 Abraham reported that sixty-seven of her informants said they maintained strictly kosher kitchens with another fourteen percent maintaining some kosher observances. See Abraham, "Ethnic Identity," p. 211.
- 12 Guy, "Bnei Israel Indian Community," p. 164.
- 13 A woman with no male offspring might vow that if she bore a boy, his hair would not be cut until after a specified time. Then the shaven hair was weighed against gold or silver which was given in charity or presented to the synagogue: the hair was then thrown by the Bene Israel into the sea, there being no Temple altar on which to burn it, as provided in the Book of Numbers 6:18. This is called *Korban Neser* or the Offering of the Nazrite. Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, pp. 116, 131, 144, note 7.
- 14 For an excellent discussion of the importance of Elijah, see Isenberg, pp. 111-117.
- 15 Weil, "Bene Israel Indian Jews in Lod, Israel," p. 317, ch. XII.
- 16 See Weil, who discusses its similarity to the Islamic *slametan*: "Bene Israel Indian Jews in Lod, Israel," pp. 325-27; and Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, pp. 115-117.
- 17 See Guy, "Bnei Israel Indian Community," pp. 140-141. A knowledgeable Bene Israel informant disagreed with this interpretation.

- ¹⁸ For a description of a *malida* as performed in Israel, see Guy, pp. 173-175, 179-180.
- ¹⁹ Guy, pp. 177-178, 183-84.
- ²⁰ Guy, pp. 185-186. Guy saw this as an Israeli innovation. In Ahmedabad, however, the Bene Israel would do a *malida* ceremony once a year at the synagogue during the festival of the New Year for Trees, *Tu B'shvat*, because they felt that the community should participate in rejoicing for the new fruits. Since not everybody could afford the new fruits, they could join in this communal ceremony. Noreen Daniel, private communication, June, 1998.
- ²¹ Guy, "Bnei Israel Indian Community," p. 199.
- ²² Guy, p. 200.
- ²³ Guy, p. 187.
- ²⁴ *Yad*, Sept., 1993, no. 6. There is a similar Moroccan custom at least for a house warming. I am grateful to Noreen Daniel for translations from *Yad*, which is in Marathi.
- ²⁵ Weil, "Bene Israel Indian Jews in Lod, Israel," p. 334.
- ²⁶ Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, p. 123, note 4. Isenberg points out that it is not uncommon in the Konkan that the *padukas* (footprints) of Hindu saints and ascetics are worshipped after their death and that there are also "footprint" features in Islamic legend.
- ²⁷ Stephen Sharot, "Traditional, Modern, or Postmodern? Recent Religious Developments among Jews in Israel" (paper presented at the Israel in the Nineties Conference, Ben-Gurion University, Beersheva, Israel, 1994) p. 11. On the veneration of sainted rabbis and the pilgrimage tradition among North African Jews, see Alex Weingrod, *The Saint of Beersheba* (Albany: State University New York Press, 1990); Issachar Ben-Ami, "The Folk Veneration of Saints among Moroccan Jews," in *Studies in Judaism and Islam*, eds. S. Morag, I. Ben-Ami, and N. Stillman (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981), pp. 283-345; Harvey E. Goldberg, "The *Maskil* and the *Mequbbal*," in *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries*, ed. Harvey E. Goldberg (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press), pp. 168-180.
- ²⁸ *The Friend of Israel*, Aug.-Sept. 1973, pp. 26-7. When Shimon Bar Yohai and his son, Eliezer, were sentenced to death by the Romans, they escaped to the caves of Meron, where they lived until the day when the Romans were defeated and they were liberated; that day was *Lag b'Omer*.
- ²⁹ Weil, "Bene Israel Indian Jews in Lod, Israel," pp. 331, 332; Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, p. 231, note 5. Sometimes young Bene Israel couples make a vow to visit the Cave of Elijah and perform the circumcision there if a son is born to them.
- ³⁰ Sharot, "Traditional," p. 17. See also Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Stephen Sharot, *Ethnicity, Religion and Class in Israeli Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

- 31 *Yad*, no. 1, May, 1991, pp. 8-10.
- 32 Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, p. 91.
- 33 *Pe'amim*, September, 1997 (in Hebrew).
- 34 Weil, "Bene Israel Indian Jews in Lod," pp. 306-307.
- 35 Weil, pp. 297-298.
- 36 Weil, "Yom Kippur: The Festival of Closing the Doors," in *Between Jerusalem and Benares: Comparative Studies in Judaism and Hinduism*, ed. Hananya Goodman, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 85-100.
- 37 *Yad*, August, 1995, p. 28. On *Shila San*, see Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, pp. 5, 15 note 12, 120.
- 38 Romiel Daniel, private communication, May, 1999; Guy, "Bnei Israel Indian Community," p. 153.
- 39 Weil, "Bene Israel Indian Jews in Lod," pp. 304-305.
- 40 Weil, p. 288 and see ch. IX, *passim*.
- 41 Katz, "Ritual Enactments," p. 23; Weil, p. 315.
- 42 See Flora Samuel, "The Bene Israel Cradle Ceremony: An Indian Jewish Ritual for the Birth of a Girl," *Bridges* 7 (Eugene, OR, 1997-1998), no. 1, pp. 43-44.
- 43 Hananya Goodman, "Introduction: Judaism and Hinduism: Cultural Resonances," in *Between Jerusalem and Benares*, ed. Hananya Goodman, p. 9.
- 44 Goodman, "Introduction," p. 9.
- 45 David Saralkar, quoted by Vera Weisz, "Jewel in the Promised Land," *Jerusalem Post Magazine*, 9 July 1993, p. 16.
- 46 Noah Massil, private communication, January, 1994.
- 47 Katz, "Ritual Enactments," ch. 1; Sharot, "Traditional," p. 10.
- 48 One highly respected member of the community questioned whether *Yad* was really necessary, pointing out that the older generation knew how to pray and what the customs were and that the younger generation didn't read Marathi. She wondered for whom it was really being published. If a question was asked and if a knowledgeable writer, such as Chaim Kolet, gave answers for which he cited authoritative sources, that was one thing. But if the answers were given by people who were not recognized as authorities, what was the point? (This individual also felt that there was a certain inconsistency in the attitudes of the editor who, in *Yad*, seemed to be urging people to become more religious but then, in another magazine [*Shaili* published in India], wrote a story about a family whose son became *ba'al tshuva* and would no longer eat at his parents' house. So he seemed, on one hand, to be telling people to be more observant but, on the other hand, he criticized people who had become "too orthodox.")
- 49 *Yad*, no. 6, September, 1993, pp. 24-25.
- 50 *Yad*, no. 4, July, 1992.

- ⁵¹ *Yad*, no. 3, March, 1992, p. 2.
- ⁵² *Yad*, May, 1991, p. 11.
- ⁵³ Guy, "Bene Israel Indian Community," p. 178.
- ⁵⁴ *Yad*, no. 3, March, 1992, pp. 2-3.
- ⁵⁵ *Yad*, May, 1993, p. 25.
- ⁵⁶ Weil, "Bene Israel Indian Jews in Lod," pp. 313-314; Goodman, "Introduction," p. 9.
- ⁵⁷ Jacob Aaron, *God, Man and Religion* (Bombay, Delhi: Jaico Publishing House, 1995), p. viii.
- ⁵⁸ Katz, "Introduction," p. 10.

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ABRAHAM, THE EASTERNERS, AND INDIA: JEWISH INTERPRETATIONS OF GENESIS 25:6

“But to the sons of the concubines whom Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts and sent them away from his son Isaac while he still lived, eastward to the east country.”

Richard G. Marks

This is the verse from Genesis that I heard quoted several times by Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem when I asked them about the relationship between Judaism and Asian religions. They meant the verse to explain that Hinduism and Buddhism derive from gifts of knowledge which Abraham gave to children whom he sent east, and “east” means India. Two Torah commentaries currently on the Internet make similar allusions. Rabbi Kalman Packouz, writing from Miami Beach, states that Abraham sent his sons east “with the knowledge of mysticism,” and Yaakov Fogelman, an American-born resident of Jerusalem, thinks that Abraham sent his sons to India, but that the influence worked in the opposite direction: “He sent all his kids from concubines east...These Easterners may later have influenced Jewish mysticism—e.g., the belief in reincarnation and haircuts for three year olds!”¹

In its biblical context and Aramaic translations, Gen. 25:6 speaks of neither knowledge nor India. Nor do all medieval Jewish commentators define the gifts as knowledge. Rashi (Rabbi Shelomo Yīṣḥāki), the influential eleventh century commentator, cites an interpretation that has Abraham giving his sons the gifts which he himself received when he married Sarah. Abraham ibn Ezra (twelfth century), another commentator, thought Abraham had given gifts of money and sent his sons somewhere vaguely east of the Land of Israel. Then how did the verse become an Orthodox statement about the relation of Jewish to Indian wisdom? Was there a logic to this development? What do such interpretations show us about traditional Jewish views of “foreign wisdom?” What are the implications for interreligious dialogue?

The aims of this study are both historical and theological: to discover and understand the history of this verse’s interpretation by Jews, and to learn whether the verse, with its specific history of allusions, can serve as a foundation for dialogue with other religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism. Hence, we shall not examine the history of Jewish thinking about India, a much broader topic, but focus upon the history of this one verse, which gained an association with India only in the last several hundred years.

Let us first note the function of the verse in its biblical context: it differentiates Abraham's relationship with Isaac from that with the children he begot through Keturah, the woman he married after Sarah's death (Gen. 25:1) and the "concubine" of Gen. 25:6.² In the previous verse Abraham had given "all that he had" to Isaac, the son of Sarah; in this verse he gives merely "gifts" to the sons of Keturah. The verse also establishes a spatial distinction: Isaac remains in the land promised to Abraham, whereas the later children live "east" of it. "East" signifies the lower importance and locale where the rejected relatives, the black sheep, live.³

But the verse simultaneously maintains Abraham's relationship with them. Though lower in worth, they remain his relatives and have received his gifts. Because of this particular function, Jews, viewing the world through Torah, employed this verse of Torah to explain the presence of valid knowledge or of real power among foreigners. (Gen. 25:6 has never been applied to Christianity or Islam.)

The verse has a fascinating history of interpretation, winding through worlds of menace, suspicion, impurity, evil powers, mysterious Easterners with their own ancient scriptures, and Jews searching for hidden sparks of Torah among foreigners. But the man who explicitly connected the verse to India, Menasseh ben Israel, chose to ignore earlier interpretations and took the verse in a new direction reflecting the great European explorations of his time, for a new purpose fitting his polemical needs in the seventeenth century. His interpretation reappears in two Orthodox books written recently in Jerusalem.⁴

This history began with the Babylonian Talmud, where "the children of Keturah" appear as sly competitors for ownership of the Land of Israel (b.Sanh. 91a) and as a taunting name for ignorant Jews (b.Zevah. 62a-b). When the question arises of what Abraham gave to Keturah's sons, Rabbi Jeremiah bar Abba, apparently on the basis of the faulty way in which *matanot*, "gifts," is spelled in the biblical text, and to belittle this inheritance, infers that the gifts were faulty. "This teaches," he said, "that he passed to them a name of impurity (*shem tum'ah*)," which Rashi later explains as a name to be used for "sorcery and [dealings with] demons" (b.Sanh. 91a). This interpretation then becomes the major current of meaning surrounding Gen. 25:6.

Two medieval commentators take up the theme, concerned particularly with the issue of ritual impurity. Hezekiah ben Manoah, writing in the mid-thirteenth century, asks in his *Hizzekuni* how such a saint as Abraham could transmit a holy name to "wicked ones" (as these sons are now called). He replies, reading the talmudic phrase as "a name in impurity," *shem b'tum'ah*, that he gave them merely a profane name to conjure demons through the powers set over them (rather than God), even when the sons were in an impure bodily state. Hezekiah identifies the "east" of the verse as the land of Aram, related to Uz where Job lived among "the Easterners" (Job 1:3). The *Tosafot* (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) express similar views.

1. *The Zohar and Me'or Eynayim*

The Zohar (thirteenth century, Spain) moves the interpretation to another stage by connecting the children of Keturah in Gen. 25:6 with the “wisdom of all the Easterners” (literally, “Children of the East,” *benei kedem*) mentioned in 1 Kings 5:10—“And Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the Easterners and all the wisdom of Egypt.” Three passages in the Zohar employ Gen. 25:6 to prove that these “Easterners” inherited their knowledge ultimately from Abraham.

Two of them connect the Easterners with sorcery and evil, their main characteristic in the Zohar. The first (Zohar 1:133b) asserts that Abraham gave Isaac the doctrine of high faith, *m'hemnuta 'al'ah* (that is, insight into the mystery of the Sefirot), whereas he gave the sons of Keturah “names of the sides of the unclean spirit” and sent them east. The writer then infers, because *kedem*, “east,” appears also in 1 Kings 5:10, that this latter verse shows that “the descendants of the children of Abraham’s concubine are the Easterners, who inhabit the ‘mountains of the East,’ where they instruct human beings in sorcery (*harshin*).” Here another scriptural verse has been adduced, to connect the menacing “Balaam the Wicked” (a talmudic phrase) with these Easterners: “Balak, the king of Moab, has brought me [Balaam] from Aram, out of the mountains of the East (*me-hararei kedem*)” (Num. 23:7). Since Balaam worked an evil magic and came from the mountains of the East, the writer infers that *ereš kedem*, the east country, is a place of “unclean sorcerers” and that “the wisdom of all the Easterners” (1 Kings 5:10) consisted of unclean magic. This also expands upon the talmudic interpretation of Gen. 25:6.

A second passage (1:223a-b) fashions the Easterners into archetypal practitioners of evil detached from any sense of real geographical location. It interprets Abraham’s gifts as two types of wisdom—a “higher wisdom” for Isaac, attained through knowing the holy name of God, and a much lower wisdom for the sons of Keturah, based on “knowledge of the lower crowns,” that is, the emanations of the *sitra aħra*, “the Other Side.” This is the domain of dark and demonic powers and the source of the “unclean spirit,” mentioned in the previous passage, which bring temptation and destruction upon the world. The Zohar speaks elsewhere of ten crowns of sorcery and uncleanness below, calling them “wisdoms,” which correspond to the ten holy sefirot above (3:70a). Abraham’s gift to Keturah’s sons thus consists of demonic knowledge enabling them to practice sorcery.⁵

A third and much longer passage employing Gen. 25:6 (99b-100b), however, offers a different view of the Easterners and their wisdom, related perhaps to a more favorable image of Easterners found in rabbinic midrash.⁶ In it Rabbi Abba, one of the main teachers appearing in the Zohar, speaks approvingly of teachings he personally heard from them.

Once I happened to be in a town of the descendants of the Easterners, and they told me some of their ancient wisdom.

They also possessed books of their wisdom, and they brought me one book in which it was written that, according to the goal that a human being intends in this world, so there is drawn to him a spirit (*ruah*) from on high. If he intends a high and holy object, he draws that thing to himself from above, and if he cleaves to the *sitra ahra*, he brings down that thing upon himself. They said that it essentially depends on the words, deeds, and intention to which one attaches oneself, for the side to which one attaches oneself is drawn down from above... It is the same for one who wants to attach himself to the Holy Spirit (*ruah kodsha*) on high.

Rabbi Abba approves also of what the Easterners teach about the afterlife: "In accord with that which a human being seeks in this world, so he will be further drawn after he leaves this world. In that to which he attaches himself in this world, so will he be drawn in the other world: if holy, holy, and if unclean, unclean ('*i b' kodsha b' kodsha, 'i bimsa' aba bimsa' aba*)." Hence, if a person cleaves to holiness in this life, she or he will minister to God among the angels, and if a person clings to evil and impurity, the *sitra ahra*, then she or he will join the unclean spirits in Gehinom. The writer is thus presenting his Jewish readers with doctrines which he has Rabbi Abba later call "close (*k' riba*) to the words of the Torah." These Easterners understand the difference between holy and impure and how these categories structure the world, know a law of consequences operating in the universe and how the cosmos works to respond in kind to human thought and action, and they believe in an afterlife with reward and punishment. Like Jews, they possess an ancient wisdom written in books.

But in the end these books hold a serious danger to Jews. For Rabbi Abba also found written in them "rites for the worship of stars and constellations." His full response to Eastern wisdom takes the following form:

My children, this is close to the words of the Torah, but you should keep far away from these books lest your hearts stray after their rites and all those sides (*sitrin*) just mentioned. Be on your guard lest, God forbid, you turn aside from the rites of the Holy and Blessed One, for all these books lead human beings astray.

Rabbi Abba then explains this wisdom as ultimately Jewish wisdom gone bad: "For the Easterners possessed a wisdom which they inherited from Abraham, who transmitted it to the sons of the concubine, as it is written (in Gen. 25:6). But later they were drawn in that wisdom in many [wrong] directions." Isaac, in contrast, received "all" that Abraham possessed (Gen. 25:5), meaning a "holy heritage of faith," which, presumably because it was a fuller inheritance (Abraham's "all"), prevented Isaac's descendants, the Jews, from distorting it. Finally, Psalm 24 is cited to suggest that the Easterners worship man-made

images, turn their hearts to the *sitra aḥra*, and defile their bodies with their own hands.

This interpretation of Gen. 25:6 offers a more complex view of the Easterners than the passages connecting them with sorcery. Easterners are portrayed here with valid doctrines and commendable ethics, founded in a kabbalistic theory of correspondence and reciprocity and the distinction between holy and profane forces in the world. Their “wisdom” derives from the same source as Jewish wisdom. Yet their religion is judged wrong because it does not worship the God of Israel and so stands ultimately aligned with the *sitra aḥra*. Its wisdom, lacking the revealed faith of the Torah, wanders away from its inherited truths. Indeed, its sharpest danger consists of its hidden mixture of truth and falsehood, since the truth in its confused teachings works an attraction upon the innocent soul.

Easterners appear in many later kabbalistic writings, mainly in association with Gen. 29:1 and 1 Kings 5:10, and usually in the image of sorcerers.⁷ We turn now to one more interpretation of Gen. 25:6, also mentioning Easterners, found in the still-popular Hasidic work, *Me’or Eynayim* by Menahem Nahum ben Evi of Chernobyl (1730-1787), published in 1798 and frequently reprinted. In the book’s homily on *Parshat Noah*, Nahum develops the concept of a fallen Torah hidden in the languages of all the non-Jewish nations—scattered fragments of Hebrew, the original language spoken by all humankind before separate languages emerged at the time of the Tower of Babel: “There remained in all the tongues something from the Holy Tongue, certain combinations written in the Torah, and from this is their existence.” That is, the nations survive through these incomplete elements of Torah found in their languages, just as everything that exists does so only through the presence of God: “There is no place empty of him, for his life and his divinity are everywhere...so that all the worlds and all the nations have life only through the Torah.” Holding on to its holiness, the nations “enslave the Torah that fell from the Torah.” Nahum turns to Gen. 25:6 as another example of this phenomenon. When the Talmud says that Abraham gave the children of Keturah an impure name, *shem tum`ah*, this means that “they contaminate the holy combinations among the nations of the world, for the Torah is called *shem* (name) for the entire Torah consists of the names of God.” That is, the children of Keturah took the holy Torah of their father and mixed it into the cultures of other nations, so that in a sense, it is no longer pure and whole.

Nahum assigns Jews the important task of reclaiming this fallen Torah: “The offspring of Isaac would have the power to sift out and purify it,” just as Jacob, in heading “to the land of the Easterners” (Gen. 29:1), the location to which Abraham had sent the sons of Keturah (proved by Gen. 25:6), descended to their low rung of existence in order to raise the fallen sparks of Torah back to their roots in the Torah. “For this purpose was Israel exiled among the nations: to sift out the holy letters from the Torah mixed up among the nations,

doing this by means of their dealings and speech with them.” Nahum describes the process of “lifting up” in several ways:

The principle is that one must draw everything near to the Torah... And this occurs by means of engaging in Torah for its own sake, for the sake of showing a path to observe and practice it ...The sage understands that the engaging in Torah spoken of here, takes place in all things, and also when one converses with the Gentiles, so long as one remains directed to the proper intention.

Nahum then interprets Ps. 106:35 as King David urging Jews to “fashion teaching and Torah through their deeds, and engage with the nations.” In relation to the fallen Torah, this means that “what was swallowed among the seventy languages from the Torah is given to Israel to draw near to the great source [the higher Torah] by means of the good which they will do by their deeds.”

A later homily in *Me'or Eynayim* offers an example of what Nahum means by “engaging with the nations.” There he says that Israel was scattered among them “so that through dealing with them in such matters as business and in conversation with them, we would be able to bring forth the sparks garbed in those things.” Business must be conducted in absolute honesty, and God gains greater joy from acts of raising the holy sparks through honest business dealings and other lowly things than even the direct study of Torah, for after all, Torah exists in all things.⁸

This homily marks the first time that Gen. 25:6 appears in a kabbalistic passage urging Jews to approach, rather than ignore or reject, the people who inherited Abraham’s gifts to Keturah’s sons. On the one hand, the nations contaminate the pure higher Torah and by holding onto it, prevent the coming of the Messiah and an end to Jewish suffering. Yet on the other hand, Jews should struggle against them in the paradoxical manner of serving them—conversing, absolute honesty in business transactions, doing good deeds, teaching Torah through their conduct. Only this will release the sparks of Torah entangled among the nations. Yet we should also notice that the nations remain the realm of the impure, having no valuable wisdom or holiness of their own, but only sparks of Torah hidden in their culture.

2. Isaac Abravanel and Menasseh ben Israel

The exegetical history of Gen. 25:6 now changes abruptly. The meanings which Isaac Abravanel and Menasseh ben Israel found in the verse reflect not the Zohar but Classical and Christian literature and a new sense of geographical and historical realism.

Writing his *Commentary on the Torah (Perush Ha-Torah)* in Venice around 1505, Abravanel shows particular interest in the origin of mathematics and the natural sciences when he discusses the descendants of the three sons of

Noah.⁹ The nations that descended from Ham, he writes, lack political life and the ability to reason, whereas the descendants of Yafet, namely, Greece and Rome, are beautiful in their manners, bravery, and political life. "But among the sons of Shem...are to be found the investigative sciences (*he-ḥokhmot ha-mekariyot*) in their entirety, for the Hindus, Babylonians, and Assyrians are founders of mathematics (*he-hokhmot ha-lamudiyot*), people who first investigated the natural and divine sciences."¹⁰ Then Abravanel explains how the knowledge of Shem, having reached Abraham, was transmitted to the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans:

And from Abraham to the children of Ishmael and the children of Keturah came the science of magic (*ḥokhmat ha-kishuf*) and the hidden elements and astrology and the rest of the investigative sciences. They are the ones who brought these sciences to Egypt. According to the sages, "Abraham gave gifts to the children of the concubines" (Gen. 25:6) means that he passed to them a name in impurity, for by means of these names they wanted to acquire all the science and knowledge which will not come through the paths of divine prophecy pure from every dross and error. Yet the children of Esau were the ones who brought the sciences to the Romans and Greeks, the children of Yafet.

In contrast to the other writings we have examined, Abravanel's commentary sees nothing evil in the magic obtained by the children of Keturah; it is clearly as valid as "the investigative sciences" and astrology. This attitude may reflect the respect for "high magic" and the occult held by many European intellectuals of the late Renaissance.¹¹ Abravanel also ignores the negative moral connotation of "impurity" intended by the exegesis of Gen. 25:6 which he quotes from the Talmud.

Yet he does consider the knowledge of the children of Keturah, and indeed all the sciences, contaminated with the impurity of "dross and error" and thus inferior to the knowledge which Jews have received through divine prophecy.

And over all of them, like the height of the heavens over the earth, the wisdom of the children of Israel was raised high. And the glory of God shone on them and in its light they saw the light of the sciences and their attainments, and they (Israel) were all holy descendants praising God [from Isa. 6:13, 44:13].

The knowledge achieved by the descendants of Shem, such as the Hindus and sons of Keturah, and of people who inherited this tradition, such as the Greeks and Romans, is knowledge gained by human investigation and therefore inherently fallible, whereas the knowledge held by the Jews, including "the sciences and their attainments," derives from prophetic

revelation and is, hence, complete and perfect. In the background of this passage stands the concept of Hebrew revelation as a higher and different order of knowledge than that available to the limited human mind, for the sciences acquired solely through human reason are merely preparatory and subservient to revelation derived from beyond it.¹²

Menasseh ben Israel, living in Amsterdam a century and a half later, studied Abravanel's writings closely and often quoted them. It is therefore not surprising that the theme of Jewish priority reappears in Menasseh's citation of Gen. 25:6 in his book, *Nishmat Hayyim (The Soul of Life, 1652)*, although he applies it to a specific psychological doctrine. In the fourth section of the book, in Chapter 21, in the course of arguing for the truth of "the survival of the soul and the transfer of souls from body to body," he demonstrates that these beliefs are acknowledged over most of the world, including China and India, and are evidenced particularly in the books of the great classical writers like Plato, Virgil, and Plotinus, and the Church Fathers. Menasseh, however, also seeks to show that the doctrine of rebirth originated with Abraham even though it has commonly been associated with Pythagoras: "For the whole world believed that souls disappear and 'a man is no better than a beast' (Eccl. 3:19), until Abraham our father came and spread in the world the subject of survival and transmigration (*ha-hisha'arut v'ha-gilgul*)." For the Egyptians, who preceded Pythagoras in their belief in transmigration, learned this truth from Abraham. Pythagoras himself either learned it from Ezekiel or was himself a Jew, so that "all that he compiled, he stole and took over from our holy Torah and true Kabbalah."

In Menasseh's educated circle in Amsterdam, in an age of exploration and increasing awareness of the world outside Europe, it was generally known that the people of India also believed in rebirth. So Menasseh proceeds to defend his claim that Abraham originated the doctrine:

Afterwards, the sons of the concubine whom he had, he sent away from his son Isaac while he still lived, eastward to the east country (Gen. 25:6), which is India. They too spread this belief. Behold, you will see that the Abrahamites (*abrahaminim*), who today are called Brahmins (*brahaminim*), are the children of Abraham our father. They were the first in the land of India who spread this belief, as Apollonius of Tyana testified, who spoke face to face with them and with King Iarcas about the truth of this belief in transmigration, and who said that they [the Abrahamites] were the ancient priests and sages who taught them this principle. And they spoke the truth because from the sons of Abraham our father this belief was newly established there and from them, it extended to all the land of India, as is known to all writers of the times.

Menasseh's interpretation of Gen. 25:6 follows from his new "insight" that "eastward to the east country" must refer to India, since that meaning solved the question of how Abraham could have fathered the doctrine of rebirth if he had never traveled to India. He sent east his sons begotten by Keturah. Menasseh also takes as a clue the similarity of the words *abrahamini* and *brahamini*, concluding that the descendants of Abraham are now Brahmins teaching rebirth.¹³

Menasseh intends Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* as indirect corroboration, for the book portrays Apollonius, a first-century Greek who adhered to monastic rules ascribed to Pythagoras, journeying to India where he observed Brahmins who lived inland at a mysterious high castle and instructed kings in how to rule their kingdoms (2:33, 3.10, 3.15). He also conversed at length with a King Iarchus about rebirth (3.19-22). Although nothing appears in the book about a Hebrew named Abraham, Iarchus does claim that the Egyptians knew the doctrine before Pythagoras did (3.19). Menasseh's entire picture of India in this chapter comes from this third-century source.

The children of Keturah thus perform a valuable role in world history, according to Menasseh. They have transmitted one of the most important Jewish doctrines to the people of India, playing their part in the spread of this belief to the whole world. The Brahmins of India appear in this chapter as people adhering to a profound truth.

Although Menasseh read widely in the Zohar, recommending it repeatedly in *Nishmat Hayyim*, and was well-versed in the classic rabbinic writings and commentaries, his use of Gen. 25:6 ignores the earlier interpretations in every way other than the general view that Abraham had transmitted knowledge to his sons. Most remarkably, the recurring and traditionally essential issue of impurity is nowhere to be found.

India appears also in the next chapter of *Nishmat Hayyim*, which addresses the doctrine of human rebirth into animal bodies. Menasseh constructs an argument for the truth of this doctrine again on the basis of consensus, and his evidence comes again from classical writers such as Pythagoras, Homer, Plato, and Empedocles, but a large segment of the chapter comprises information taken from a contemporary report about Indian customs.

And even today Indians living between the Gihon River and the Indus, believing in transmigration, act according to his [Pythagoras'] custom. And they show great compassion for animals. They walk to the streets of the city and purchase birds from their captors and send them away free. And among them when a bull mates with a cow, it is their custom to spend a great expenditure [in celebration], as Pedro Teixeira testifies. And in their hour of death, they take in their hands the tail of the cow which they have fed in the thought that they would immediately enter inside it [when

they die]. And in Cambay there are buildings full of all good things which will cure all their [the animals'] wounds and illness, all this in their thought that they would perhaps not only help an animal but also perhaps the soul of a human being reborn there [in the animal]. And thus they say that according to the merits and sins of a man, so he is reborn into an animal of good and healthy body or thin and bad, wounded from the afflictions of God. In the Kingdom of Gujarat, the men called among them Banians do not eat any animal at all. And there are among them pious ones and men of deeds who put a mask on their faces because they fear to kill with their breath the small flying creatures which for their smallness cannot be seen by the eye. And thus almost all the people of India believe in the transmigration of animals.

The Pedro Teixeira cited by Menasseh was a Portuguese who visited South Asia and the Middle East in the late sixteenth century and recorded his observations on Indian customs as an aside in a book on Persia published in 1610.¹⁴ Teixeira expresses only disdain for the religious practices he observed, calling them "absurdities," "follies and superstitions," and "diabolical ceremonies," and saying of Yogis, "What pains they take to go to hell," whereas Menasseh records the same practices with approval because they attest to an underlying doctrine which he considers universally true. At the end of the chapter, however, he draws one distinction between Jewish and Indian knowledge: "We have sufficiently proven that also among the nations of the world, the matter of transmigration in animals is accepted, although they did not speak of the matters of *Ibbur*¹⁵ and of transmigration in minerals and vegetation, because the rabbis already said that God swore never to reveal this matter of *Ibbur* to the nations. And a secret of God is for His believers."

These two chapters from *Nishmat Hayyim* show how Menasseh identified all the deepest knowledge of the world with Jewish knowledge, possessed by Abraham and revealed to Jews "from our holy Torah and true Kabbalah." Menasseh defined this ancient knowledge as theories of the human soul, whereas Abravanel identified it more with the sciences. Both, however, held that all valid science and philosophy derived ultimately from the Jewish people. In this contention, as Benzion Netanyahu and Moshe Idel point out, they were repeating a claim made by important Christian, Muslim, and Jewish thinkers before them.¹⁶ Justyn Martyr, for example, contended that Plato had borrowed his ideas from Moses and the prophets, and Clement of Alexandria asserted "the plagiarizing of the dogmas of the [Greek] philosophers from the Hebrews,"¹⁷ a thesis appearing later in Augustine's *The City of God* (18.37). Roger Bacon declared that Prometheus, Atlas, and Apollo had studied with Abraham, and that Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle derived their philosophies from Solomon; and also that the nations of the world obtained their sciences

from the Hebrews, who were especially skillful in astronomy.¹⁸ Al Ghazali made the same claim about Greek philosophy, and Averroes asserted the origin of all sciences from the Israelites and “their perfection in the sciences.”¹⁹ The Jewish writer who stated this theory most forcefully, and in a form closer to Abravanel than Menasseh, was Judah Ha-Levi in the twelfth century:

Did he [Solomon] not, with the assistance of divine, intellectual, and natural power, converse on all the sciences? The inhabitants of the earth traveled to him, in order to carry forth his learning, even as far as India. Now the roots and principles of all sciences were handed down from us [the Jews] to the Chaldeans, then to the Persians and Medians, then to Greece, and finally to the Romans.²⁰

Seen, then, from the perspective of this long tradition of thought about the Jewish origins of philosophy and science, Abravanel’s and Menasseh’s views on the role of the children of Keturah in spreading Jewish knowledge to the non-Jewish world is not exceptional, or even pretentious. To them Jewish priority and preeminence were a long- and widely-acknowledged fact of history. Menasseh simply extended the notion to the customs and beliefs being discovered in India and China.

We can, however, recognize a social utility to this notion for a European Jew living in the middle of the seventeenth century. *Nishmat Hayyim*, unlike Menasseh’s other books, was written in Hebrew specifically for a Jewish audience, at a time when the Inquisition in both the Old and New Worlds was still torturing New Christians and burning them at the stake, and Cossacks had massacred a terrible number of Jews in the Ukraine. England and most of western Europe still excluded Jews from residence, while the churches excluded them from salvation, and millenarian-inspired Christians in England and Amsterdam were increasing their proselytizing efforts. Skeptical Jews such as Spinoza and Uriel de Costa, moreover, were challenging basic traditional beliefs. To demonstrate, then, particularly from Christian and classical writings and from observations drawn from world explorers, that nearly the whole world agrees with the most fundamental Jewish doctrines, that Jews originated these doctrines and spread them to the world, and hence, that Jews have a great and splendid role in world history, reaching even to India and China, is to reassure discouraged Jews and sustain their sense of worth in a hostile world, even as Menasseh in his other books pointed to signs of imminent messianic redemption.²¹

We should, finally, notice in these two chapters of *Nishmat Hayyim* the underlying tolerance in Menasseh’s approach to other religions. What essentially concerns him in his picture of India is not the religious rituals he describes, which differ from Jewish law, and not the divergent scriptures which he would infer to exist, but a doctrine, an understanding of the human soul. Although he did not think that non-Jews had acquired the whole truth, as he states in

concluding Chapter 22, they nevertheless had been given a very important truth. This view accords with the tolerance appearing in another form in Menasseh's *Piedra gloriosa*, written mainly for a non-Jewish audience. According to Henry Mechoulan and Gerard Nahon, he thought it right and reasonable that all good people of every nation would partake of the World To Come. "The non-Jew," he wrote, "who is virtuous and has the Law fresh in his mind, will not fail to gain his reward." However, by "Law" he meant a universal natural law of morality, the demands of which he defined in the following manner: "live with fairness and justice, do wrong to no one, do not encroach on the good of another...behave charitably to others, live soberly."²² Thus, a place in the World To Come is gained through high moral standards rather than through any specific Jewish ritual or doctrine, although Menasseh does foresee a higher position for Jews during the preceding period of the messianic age.²³

3. *Two Jerusalemites Today*

After 1652 *Nishmat Hayyim* was not printed again until the nineteenth century, when it was printed four times between 1852 and 1862 in eastern Europe—in Lemberg (Lvov), Leipzig, and twice in Stettin.²⁴ Although I lack the resources to find an answer, we might wonder whether Menasseh's interpretation of Gen. 25:6 influenced Jewish thinking in those areas.

A book published in 1990, however, opens with an English translation, printed in large bold type, of the section in *Nishmat Hayyim* explaining how Abraham's sons brought his knowledge to India, and even employs Menasseh's theory of Hindu dependence on Judaism as the recurrent motif of its 110 pages, expanding this dependence, however, from transmigration to all higher truth.²⁵ This book, *From Hinduism Back to Judaism*, was written by Rabbi Matityahu Glazerson, an Israeli who directs much of his teaching efforts toward *ba'alei teshuvah*, Jews converting to Orthodoxy from a secular life or from other religions. In the book's introduction, Glazerson speaks of Jews returning to "staunch observance of the Jewish faith after encounters with...Eastern schools of spiritual practice" and their failure to attain "the total bliss promised to them by their mystic teachers." Glazerson places the main thesis of his book into his summary of what Jews returning from Hinduism discovered: "We never knew that the Torah deals with all matters found in the Eastern teachings...and not only this, but it is our view now that Judaism is the source of the wisdom of the East."²⁶

The first part of this thesis, that Judaism possesses the resources to address all the issues that Asian religions address, occupies most of the book. Glazerson shows with topics like absolute bliss, karma, self-discipline, use of the mind, higher consciousness, divine illumination, and inner contentment that the same issues are addressed by Torah, Kabbalah, or (his main method of argument) the very form of Hebrew letters and words, and that Judaism often teaches the same

answer as Hinduism. Happiness and joy are the most important goals discussed. Defining the relationship between the two traditions, Glazerson uses the terms, "same philosophy," "similar," "both," "also," "comparable with," "also found in," and "common to both." But this similarity lies for Glazerson in comparable goals and concepts rather than in the means of attaining them. Since Jews possess an innately different soul from that of non-Jews, "the Jewish soul...can attain happiness only through allegiance to the whole Torah and the 613 commandments."²⁷ This is why meditation and other eastern disciplines, though effective for non-Jews, cannot bring happiness to Jews. Within isolated chapters Glazerson uses this theory to portray Hinduism and Judaism as merely different means to similar goals, suited to different types of people.

But when demonstrating the second part of his thesis, Hinduism's reliance on Judaism, we learn that this deep distinction between Jews and other human beings corresponds to his view of a general and critical difference between the two religions. This is where Gen. 25:6 enters. Glazerson speaks of the children of Keturah six times in the book. For example,

Abraham transmitted to his sons, from his wife Keturah, keys to understanding creation and the spiritual forces which are at work within the framework of nature...Abraham presented the sons of Keturah with wisdom in a form which could be used within the framework of nature and which was appropriate for their spiritual level... It is true that eastern religions' attempt to bring man to a state of harmonious balance with the forces of nature, thus enabling him to promote the good in himself and in others. This method was bequeathed to Avraham's sons by [sic] Keturah...Hindu concepts consist of those less advanced methods of implementation which Abraham communicated to Keturah's sons in order that their binds on the material world be lessened.²⁸

Like Menasseh, Glazerson uses linguistic similarities to support his claim of Jewish influence: the word "Veda" resemble the word *yada*, knowledge, in Hebrew; "Abraham" resembles "Brahman;" the Sanskrit word *tamas*, impurity, resembles the Hebrew word of comparable meaning, *tame*.²⁹ Glazerson asserts repeatedly that various Hindu concepts and names "have their source in," "are derived from," "stem from," or are "based on" Judaism. In the book's conclusion he writes, "We have attempted to isolate certain details that shed light on the wisdom of Judaism as the well from which other cultures of the world draw their ideologies"—cultures which "only have the seeds of truth which were taken from Judaism."³⁰

Glazerson's statements about Keturah's sons show his ultimate theory of how the two religions differ. "While the Hindu disciple is taught to identify with the flow of nature to achieve innocence, a Jew does so only by elevating himself above nature through keeping the Torah and mitzvot... The laws

governing the Torah and the Jewish soul totally contradict the logical and natural flow of events.”³¹ Glazerson believes that Hinduism focuses on gaining happiness through harmony with nature and moral behavior, whereas Judaism focuses on higher worlds “above nature” and seeks to influence the state of the universe as a whole (as understood by Kabbalah) rather than directly helping other human beings.

Although he once calls “eastern wisdom” a “pathway to truth for non-Jews,”³² and usually respects Hinduism’s value for the non-Jewish soul, he nevertheless characterizes Abraham’s gifts to India as “less advanced methods” and a wisdom “appropriate to their [lower] spiritual level.” His final view appears at his book’s end as a statement of Judaism’s absolute superiority: “While both Judaism and Hinduism maintain the importance of closeness to G-d, only the path of G-d’s Torah reveals to humanity the true and therefore the best way to come near to Him.”³³ This is the path given only to the descendants of Abraham’s son, Isaac.

This use of Gen. 25:6 fits the general structure of the verse’s history of interpretation, its force of distinguishing the knowledge possessed by real Jews from that of distant relatives, but, oddly enough for a rabbi claiming to present Jewish tradition and Kabbalah, it reflects no specific influence from earlier Jewish exegesis, including the Talmud and the Zohar, except Menasseh’s. Also like Menasseh, it totally disregards the issues of impurity and magic. On the other hand, Glazerson employs the verse for purposes far beyond what Menasseh intended.

Another assertion of Hindu reliance on Judaism, again proved by Gen. 25:6, appears in *There is One*, published a year earlier than Glazerson’s book but clearly not its source. Gutman Locks, the American author, spent nine years studying and meditating in Japan and India, eventually traveling internationally to teach his insights. But he now says that he was just performing tricks without any deep wisdom. He did not discover real truth until he ended up in Jerusalem at the Western Wall, discouraged and disillusioned, and a Jew suggested “laying tefillin” and attending a yeshivah. He learned much of value from his Jewish teachers and yet, he writes in the book’s introduction, “I have found this point, God’s Omnipresence, to be completely hidden from the majority of even ‘learned’ Jews...they cannot understand that He is All.” He wrote *There is One* to demonstrate this concept “so a Jew can hear” (in an Orthodox theological idiom) and also to convince assimilated Jews, with special attention to those pursuing Asian wisdom, “to seek out your roots.”³⁴

Section 126 of the book, in which Gen. 25:6 is cited, opens with the question of whether Indian gurus really possess the power to “materialize diamonds” and “zap devotees.” Locks replies, citing Gen. 25:6 and Rashi’s explanation, “These definitely do occur! Not only are they really happening, but this power comes through the hand of Abraham, our father, as explained in

the Torah. These gifts are defined as the names of unclean powers.” Locks demonstrates this Abrahamic source of Hinduism in a manner similar to Glazerson’s but with different evidence: One of Abraham’s grandsons descended from Keturah was named Asshurim (Gen. 25:3), which became the *ashram* of a guru with “mystical powers.” Another grandson, Sh’va,’ is the source of the Hindu deity Shiva. The Hindu chant, *AOM*, is “one of the mystical names of God revealed in the Torah... Aleph Vav Mem.” “Hebrew” and “Hindu” both mean “from the other side of the river.” This all shows that the ancient fair-skinned people from beyond the Indus river who brought the religion practiced in India today were the sons of Abraham, and thus teaches an important lesson for Jews today:

When a Jew travels to India to seek out the knowledge of this power and even acquires it, he has spiritually ceased being Isaac the son of Abraham and his wife, Sarah. Rather, he becomes *Asshurim* the son of Abraham and his concubine. In effect he gives up the inheritance of “everything he had he gave to Isaac” and instead inherits, “But unto the sons of the concubine that Abraham had he gave gifts and sent them away...unto the east country.”³⁵

So Hinduism derives from Judaism. The problem is, however, that “most spiritual practices today, although possibly stemming from truth, have degenerated into harmful distortions.”³⁶ The truth in its purest form is to be found in the Torah, but the truths found in Hinduism and Buddhism are mixed with many errors and are therefore confusing and dangerous.³⁷

One danger is that the guru replaces God, and “the guru’s private brand of spirituality” replaces truth and ethical behavior. This is Locks’ interpretation of the “unclean name” of Rashi’s exegesis of Gen. 25:6. Locks tells several stories in his book about misery resulting from “Eastern spiritual practices,” such as being unable to rid oneself of an inner light attained through meditation,³⁸ and about corrupt gurus. For example, “The *gurus* became rich while the devotee was left with a perpetual half-smile. Many Jews ended up wasting ten to fifteen years of their precious lives cleaving to leaders who, when ultimately exposed, were seen to be demented.”³⁹ Locks concludes his Section 126 by arguing that although “Eastern wisdom” may induce real supernatural powers in the Jewish seeker, these are only lower powers compared with what the Torah offers, and they are “spiritually unclean” and never bring the happiness sought.

In contrast, Locks demonstrates the supernatural power of traditional Jewish practice by telling many stories of miracles occurring to Jews who practice the commandments or follow the instructions of Hasidic rebbes.⁴⁰ And through a series of touching portraits of the Jewish ritual life practiced in the Old City and its pious holy men, Locks conveys his own appreciation of the simple beauty and contentment to be gained from a traditional Jewish life—a

far deeper joy than he found in Zen or Hinduism: "How simple holiness is. How easy and pleasant are Your ways!"⁴¹

The meaning given to Gen. 25:6 by *There is One* reflects the history of its interpretation far more than does Glazerson's book. Along with the theme of Hindu dependence, we find the old sense of menace, uncleanness, and dangerous powers. The Zohar's image of Easterners offering Rabbi Abba a deceptive mixture of truth and falsehood echoes strongly in Locks' own image of "Eastern teachings." The book thus represents, probably without its author's knowledge, a fitting summation of the verse's exegetical history.

Before leaving this book, however, I should like to speculate about affinities between the Judaism which Locks teaches in it and the Hinduism he explicitly rejects. For Locks clearly believes in rebirth in a kabbalistic form, and he insists often on explaining life's events through a theory phrased in a way less like retribution and more like a law of karma: "good brings good and evil brings evil."⁴² The issues of how perspective shapes our experience and of overcoming the ego's self-important views of the world echo, I surmise, his Hindu meditational experience,⁴³ and he also teaches a Jewish mode of meditation the second step of which involves discovering the emptiness of all things. His theological disagreement with other Orthodox Jews consists of the assertion, supported by a long series of vividly reasoned passages based mostly on physical analogies, that "the One that exists in all, as all, is God"⁴⁴—a view resonating with the *Bhagavadgita*'s concept of Krishna in Chapters 7-11, but also, as Locks knows, with the Hasidic assertion that "there is no place empty of Him," which he interprets as "God is within everyone and everything" and "there is nothing else besides God."⁴⁵ At the same time, however, he seems to be rejecting conclusions reached in his Indian period when he argues for the validity of the perspective of distinct existence apart from God, and insists that we must not entirely reject the ego, for it has its own value and role in creation. Buddhism's mistake, he told me, is that in teaching "emptiness" as the ultimate reality, it misses the larger picture of things. Yes, from a certain perspective we are nothing, just atoms and mostly space; but all of those atoms also form a larger pattern that has reality when seen from beyond—the reality of the One. Another important theme of *There is One* is the contrast between the physical and the spiritual, but Locks argues strongly that the physical should not be overcome (through ascetic exercises) but "rather we are to elevate the physical until we are able to see the spiritual in it."⁴⁶ His own form of meditation ends with integrating the experience of nothingness with the physical realities of everyday life, family and friends, and Jewish ritual, realized most fully through the Sabbath.⁴⁷

4. *Interreligious Dialogue*

In the texts we have studied, the foreign knowledge associated with Gen. 25:6 has a validity and power, but is always inferior to the knowledge

possessed by Jews. We have seen a range of interpretations. Jeremiah bar Abba considered it powerful but unclean. The Zohar connected it with the formidable realm of evil, the *sitra ahra* and its "unclean spirits," but adds the new theme of Easterners luring innocent Jews by a deceptive mixture of truth and falsehood, corrupted wisdom supporting idolatry. Nahum of Chernobyl viewed this knowledge as contaminated sparks of truth hidden in foreign cultures. For Abravanel, however, the contamination was merely the fallibility of human reason unsupported by revelation. Menasseh saw Jewish knowledge taking an Indian form, true but derivative. Glazerson, too, views foreign knowledge as derivative, but also as a lower and less-advanced knowledge suitable for foreigners. Locks recapitulates earlier themes by portraying it as powerful, impure, derivative, and deceptive. These scholars also locate this foreign knowledge variously in a specific Aram, the cosmic realm of the *sitra ahra*, a vague "East," and a geographically realistic India.

One strand of these interpretations of Gen. 25:6 totally rejects any truth in foreign knowledge, finding it totally alien. Foreigners possess a real power but it is absolutely profane and evil, and deeply menacing. The Zohar carries this line of thought furthest. Another strand of interpretations recognizes in foreign cultures a lower degree of truth which is independent of Judaism. The main example is Abravanel's judgment that Babylonian and Hindu science is useful human knowledge, but far below that acquired by Jews through revelation. A third strand discovers a mixture of Jewish truth and foreign falsehood in other cultures. This is represented in the Zohar by R. Abba's discovery of profound truth in Eastern scripture, yet a truth derived from Judaism and corrupted into dangerous paths. Locks' picture of Hinduism echoes this idea. Nahum of Chernobyl also discovers a mingling of the holy and profane, truth and emptiness, in foreign cultures, which hold value only insofar as they distantly reflect Jewish truth. A fourth strand, represented by Menasseh ben Israel, sees only Jewish knowledge, although in dimmer form, in foreign cultures. He finds validity in Hindu knowledge only because it is Jewish, but, in the chapters we studied, he finds no fault in its foreign form. Glazerson portrays Hinduism as lower and incomplete Jewish knowledge, but not dangerous or corrupt.

Could these conceptions of foreign knowledge support any sort of open-ended dialogue with Hindus and Buddhists?⁴⁸ The first strand, demonizing the other, obviously cannot, but even the other strands assume flaws and inferiority from the beginning. The inferiority might be the inherently lower source of knowledge held by others (Abravanel), or it might be the totally derivative nature of another's religious traditions (Menasseh, Glazerson, Locks). One might consider the other religion a sad tangle of Jewish truth and foreign falsehood (R. Abba in the Zohar, Nahum, Locks). But in all cases, one denies the possibility of an independent validity, wisdom, or piety in the other religion. One could only try to show Hindus how their religion points faintly to a fuller light shining most brightly in Judaism.

Some limited support for dialogue, however, is offered by Nahum's advice to Jews to actively engage with non-Jews in conversation and practical exchanges in everyday life. His view that foreign cultures hold sparks of hidden truth could be developed into a rationale (which he himself would reject) for learning about and from them.

These are not at all the only views of foreigners or foreign religions expressed in traditional or Orthodox Jewish thought, but simply a line of thinking associated with one biblical verse, when Abraham's gifts are defined as knowledge.⁴⁹ We have examined some of the long and diverse history of this thinking, speculated on the logic of its development, and asked what it implies about how Jews have envisaged their relationship to other religious communities.

NOTES

- 1 As of January, 1998: Kalman Packouz, Shabbat Shalom Weekly, Oct. 29, 1994, Chayei Sarah, "<http://aish.edu/shabbat-shalom>." Yaakov Fogelman, on the weekly Torah reading, "Chaye Sarah," no date of first publication, "<http://www.israelvisit.co.il>." Most Internet commentaries ignore Gen. 25:6 or interpret it otherwise, as one would expect considering the audience and exigencies of the World Wide Web.
- 2 Among traditional Jewish commentators, Rashi and Nachmanides thought *ha-pilagshim*, a plural form of "concubine," referred only to one person, Keturah, but Rashbam thought it referred to both Keturah and Hagar. Most of the interpretations in this study follow Rashi, and the preceding biblical verses, listing the sons of Keturah, seem to support this.
- 3 In biblical geography *eres kedem* might have referred to a specific area called *kedem*, possibly east of the southern Lebanons, or more loosely to desert areas on the eastern fringes of the Land of Israel.
- 4 My subject thus differs from that of David Flusser in his article, "Abraham and the Upanishads," *Immanuel* 20 (Spring 1986): pp. 53-61; also in *Between Jerusalem and Benares*, Hananya Goodman, ed. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).
- 5 Balaam, the *b'nei kedem*, and impure names appear together in another passage. This one (2:180b) defines three levels of powerful names that people can call upon: upper holy names, lower holy names, and lower impure names, the last of which derive from the *sitra aħra* and "the impure side," and work only on the level of worldly profane actions that make the agent impure, namely, through sorcery "in the way of Balaam and those Easterners and all those who engage in the *sitra aħra*." See also 3:208b.
- 6 This tradition recurs in midrashic works edited from the fourth or fifth centuries to the twelfth—Midrash Gen. Rabbah 64.2, *Pesikta d'Rav*

Kahana Piska 4.3, *Tanĥuma Ĥakah* 5, Midrash Eccl. Rabbah 7.19 on Eccl. 7:23, and Midrash Num. Rabbah 19.3 on Num. 19:2, where both the terms *b'nei kedem* and *b'nei ha-mizrah* are used. For example, Eccl. Rabbah, discussing 1 Kings 5:10, says: "What was the wisdom of the Easterners (*b'nei kedem*)? They knew astrology and augury with birds and were experts in divination." Then R. Simon b. Gamaliel praises Easterners (*ani m'shabeaĥ et b'nei ha-mizrah*) for three practical customs—kissing on the hand instead of the mouth, cutting food with a knife, and taking counsel in an open field (to maintain privacy).

⁷ One example with a contemporary twist appears in Part 3, ch. 19, of the often-reprinted *Avodat Ha-Kodesh* (late eighteenth century) by Hayyim Yosef David Azulai. "The wisdom of all the Easterners," according to Azulai, is a superficial, analytical, and self-contradictory rationalism harnessed to "the stubbornness of the heart," attacking faith and undermining the deeper Inner Wisdom of Kabbalah.

⁸ *Parshat Vayetze*—See Arthur Green, trans., in *Upright Practices, the Light of the Eyes* (NY: Paulist Press, 1982), pp. 236-39. For his translation of Nahum's homily on *Parshat Noah*, see pp. 89-102.

⁹ *Perush Ha-Torah* (Venice, 1542), comments, "These are the generations of the sons of Noah" (Gen. 11:19), 58b.

¹⁰ Note that I translate *Ĥokhmah* here as "science," based on the new context of Abravanel's thought, whereas in earlier passages in this essay I translated it as "wisdom."

¹¹ See Richard Cavendish, *A History of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), pp. 83-107, and D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).

¹² "Investigation is proper for man as such in order to prepare his reason to emerge from a potential to an actual state, but that association with God which was manifest on Mount Sinai, and especially prophecy, was not given to man as such, but to man as higher than man, as similar to the first separate intelligence or to the uppermost sphere" *Yeshu'ot Meshiho*, 73b, quoted by Benzion Netanyahu, *Abravanel, Statesman and Philosopher* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1953), p. 291.

¹³ Could Menasseh have been influenced by Guillaume Postel's interpretation of Gen. 25:6, a century earlier in *De Originibus*, according to which Abraham sent his sons to India with knowledge of astrology, founding the Brahmins whose very name reflects their Abrahamic origin? See William Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi: the Career and Thought of Guillaume Postel*, (Harvard Press, 1957): p. 61. Since Menasseh, who tends to gather as many sources as possible for authority, does not cite Postel, we might doubt a direct borrowing. And was Menasseh aware of Nachmanides' identification, in the mid-thirteenth century, of *kedmet eden*, "east of

- Eden,” with India and its environs? In *Sha àr Ha-Gemul*, a text similar in subject-matter to *Nishmat Hayyim*, Nachmanides recounts the story of Ispalkinus seeking the Garden of Eden *me èver l’hodu*, “across (from) India,” which he identifies with “the land of the Easterners” (*aršah b’nei kedem*) of Gen. 29:1.
- 14 *Relaciones de Pedro Teixeira del origen, descendencia y succession de los reyes de Persia, y de Harmuz, y de unviage hecho por el mismo avtor dende la India oriental hasta Italia por tierra* (Madrid: Miraguano Ediciones, 1994), ch. 22, particularly pp. 80-89; John Stevens, trans., *A History of Persia* (London: Jonas Brown, 1715), pp. 93-95, 104. Teixeira mentions Pythagorean belief, charity for animals, celebration when a cow and bull-mate, the animal hospital, the idea of behavior determining rebirth, and abstention from meat (although he actually says that while some sects in Cambay abstain, others do not). I could not find, however, in either this book or his other book mentioning India, the customs of releasing birds, holding a cow’s tail at death, or using masks. William Sinclair, trans., *The Travels of Pedro Teixeira [from India to Italy by Land]* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1902). We might guess, then, that Menasseh either read about them elsewhere or, more likely, heard oral reports from travelers coming to Amsterdam. The word “Banian,” which Menasseh finds in Teixeira’s text, comes from the Gujarati word, *vaniyo*, man of the trading class. Many merchants in Gujarat were Jains.
- 15 Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), pp. 348-49. On the theory of *Ibbur* (literally “impregnation,” but meaning the entrance of a soul into the body of a living person), see this source.
- 16 Netanyahu, pp. 99-100; Moshe Idel, “Kabbalah, Platonism, and *Prisca Theologia*: the case of R. Menasseh ben Israel,” in *Menasseh ben Israel and His World*, Kaplan, Mechoulán, and Popkin, eds. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), pp. 207-14.
- 17 William Wilson, trans., “The Miscellanies,” I21. in *Clement of Alexandria*, Ante-Nicene Library, Vol. 4 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867), p. 421.
- 18 Robert B. Burke, trans., *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1928), I:4 (p. 65) and IV:16 (p. 301).
- 19 Cited by Netanyahu, p. 100
- 20 Judah Halevi, *Kitab Al Khazari*, Hartwig Hirschfeld, trans. (London: M. L. Cailingold, 1931), II:66 (p. 109). See also I:63 (pp. 46-47). In contrast, Abraham ibn Ezra quotes “the sages of India” as valuable sources of scientific information in his astronomical works.
- 21 I refer to *Piedra gloriosa o de la estatua de Nebuchadnesar* (1655), which interprets the five monarchies appearing in the second chapter of Daniel, and *Esperanca de Israel, (The Hope of Israel)* (1650), inspired particularly by explorations in South America and the good fortune that individual Jewish communities were beginning to experience in several parts of

- Europe, including Amsterdam. The Jews of India and China appear in the latter book as proof that Jews, in the form of the lost Ten Tribes, have spread to nearly all parts of the world, thereby fulfilling messianic prophecy.
- ²² Menasseh presumably finds authority for this idea in the “seven laws of Noah” (b.Sanh. 56a), and in Tosefta, Sanh. 13, where Rabbi Joshua states, “There are righteous people among the [foreign] nations who have a place in the World To Come.”
- ²³ Henry Mechoulan and Gerard Nahon, eds. and introduction, *Menasseh ben Israel: the Hope of Israel* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 42-44. Mechoulan, “Menasseh ben Israel and the World of the Non-Jew,” in *Menasseh ben Israel and His World*, pp. 87-90. Quotations from the *Piedra*, p. 43 of the book, p. 87 of the article. During the messianic age, says Menasseh, “the peoples will serve us,” which Mechoulan explains as an exclusive Jewish prerogative for “holy service”: p. 90 of the article. Apparently, natural moral law was a truth discernible to all, without need for Jews to reveal it, unlike doctrines such as survival of the soul and transmigration.
- ²⁴ Yeshayahu Vinograd, *Osar Ha-Sefer Ha-Ivri*, 2 Vols. (Jerusalem: Institute of Computerized Bibliography, 1993). *Nishmat Hayyim* was also printed in Jerusalem in 1968, based on the Amsterdam text, which is my own source.
- ²⁵ Himelstein Glazerson, *From Hinduism Back to Judaism* (Jerusalem: Himelstein Glazerson, 1990), 2. Glazerson’s translation of *Nishmat Hayyim* includes only the terms “this faith” and “this philosophy” without identifying the doctrine of transmigration as their sole reference, even though he includes Menasseh’s statements about Pythagoras and Apollonius of Tyana. Glazerson’s summary of Rashi’s commentary on Gen. 25:6 is also very loose, lacking any reference to impurity and magic.
- ²⁶ Glazerson, p. 1. The book cover states that he was born and educated in Israel, and is associated with the yeshivah, *Ohr Somayach*, in Jerusalem. He has now written fifteen books, his latest being *Above the Zodiac: Astrology in Jewish Thought*, published in 1997. In early 1999 “Amazon.com” listed eight of his books.
- ²⁷ Glazerson, p. 7.
- ²⁸ Glazerson, pp. 6, 51, 86, 23. See other references to the sons of Keturah on pp. 16-17, 22-24, 27.
- ²⁹ Glazerson, pp. 16-17.
- ³⁰ Glazerson, p. 110.
- ³¹ Glazerson, pp. 51, 86-87.
- ³² Glazerson, p. 106.
- ³³ Glazerson, p. 109.
- ³⁴ Gutman Locks, conversation, June 22, 1994, Old City, Jerusalem; and Introduction, *There is One* (Jerusalem: published by author, 1989), p. 11-

13. For me, this book has more personality and liveliness, and the feel of hard-won insights, than Glazerson's better known book.
- 35 Locks, p. 173.
- 36 Locks, p. 39 n.67.
- 37 Locks, Interview.
- 38 Locks, *There is One*, pp. 97-100, 151, 174.
- 39 Locks, p. 61. See also p. 174.
- 40 Locks, pp. 121-22, 125-27, 161, 164-65, 177-78, 185-86, 191-93.
- 41 Locks, p. 153. See Sections 38, 70, 82, 83, 112, 113, 114, 142, and 143.
- 42 Locks, p. 78. Rebirth: 34-35, 114, 160. Good brings good: 32, 47, 68, 159, 160.
- 43 Locks, pp. 67-68, 91-92.
- 44 Locks, p. 136. His main arguments appear in the first sixteen sections of the book.
- 45 Locks, p. 56. Locks alluded to the *Gita* in his conversation with me. He told me that when Krishna says that he is in all things everywhere, there is truth in that, but not the whole truth. Not Krishna, but the one immaterial God is all things everywhere.
- 46 Locks, p. 37. See also pp. 39-40, 90-91.
- 47 Locks, pp. 139-43.
- 48 Leonard Swindler, "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious, Interideological Dialogue," in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20:1 (Winter 1983). I define such dialogue in the way of Martin Buber's "I-Thou" relationship, and along the lines of Leonard Swidler's system.
- 49 Harold Kasimow, "The Jewish Tradition and the Bhagavadgita," in *Journal of Dharma* 83 (July-Sept., 1983): pp. 298-301, 310. For references to Jewish sources from a range of historical periods which assert value in foreign religions or their adherents, see the opening of this essay.

Origins of Desire

LURIA

fundamental oneness: Divine Consciousness
(YHWH)

divine Will-To-Impart (*hesed*)

divine self-restriction which is the emergence of
duality as Being-and-Nonbeing or Light-and-Dark
(*tsimtsum*)

nonbeing's urge to reunite with the divine, to undo
separation: the impulse for oneness manifested as the
Will-To-Receive

oneness attempted, bungled

smaller sub-units condense into themselves
(*hesechekh*)

individual sub-units see in themselves a spark of
consciousness, and misidentify those sparks as the
original fundamental consciousness

the longing for unification persists and is experienced
as isolation and incompleteness

status prior to manifestation

primary cause of manifestation

primary result

*primary reaction: desire arises in response
to first result and motivates next
happening*

*secondary cause of manifestation: the
(botched) effort to restore the unmanifest*

*secondary result: discreet entities arise
(including human selves)*

what the human "I" sense is

*secondary reaction:
conceptual desire is translated into concrete
desires*

PATAÑJALI

fundamental dyad:
consciousness (*purusa*) and the non-
conscious (*prakriti*)

agitation of consciousness and the non-conscious in
proximity to one another (*nirodha*)

consciousness' mis-identification of itself with the
non-conscious: the erroneous conflation of the two
into one conglomerate identity (*avidya*)

consciousness' urge to undo the conglomerate
identity: the impulse for separation

separation attempted, bungled

smaller sub-conglomerates are distinguished from the
whole by consciousness (*buddhi*)

distinct sub-conglomerates misidentify with the
original fundamental consciousness

the longing for separation persists and is experienced
as attraction and aversion

LIMIT AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The Origins of Desire As Discussed by Patañjali and Isaac Luria

Lylene S. Fein

Introduction

The scope of this paper is intentionally narrow. Its task is to examine two texts from two different traditions in regard to one aspect of human religious concern. That aspect is broadly conceptualized, in a variety of belief systems, as *desire*. The understanding of what desire is and of its part in human suffering as discussed in Patañjali's *Yoga Sutras* and in Rabbi Isaac Luria's *Ten Luminous Emanations* is this particular paper's focus.

This paper does not purport to constitute a comprehensive study of either Yoga or the Kabbalah. Nor is it an effort at an in-depth analysis of either man's general philosophical or religious position. Rather, it is intended as an exploration of the phenomenon of *desire* in light of the insights presented in the two texts mentioned above.

Both texts, each understood to be of normative importance within its own tradition, have been widely commented on in their respective contexts. Naturally, this brief study will make use of commentaries considered by the yogic and kabbalist traditions to be of primary importance. In the case of Patañjali, Vyasa's commentary will provide us with elucidation. In the case of Luria, we will consult with Rabbi Yehuda L. Ashlag.¹

Both Patañjali's *Yoga Sutras* and Luria's *Ten Luminous Emanations* concern themselves with the common human experience that things in this world, or life, are not as they ought to be. Furthermore, both texts diagnose this human problem as a misunderstanding (on our part) regarding the relationship between that which is consciousness,² on the one hand, and that which is the non-conscious, on the other. Both texts also prescribe solutions to this state of affairs which are directed toward resolving a confusion that exists in our own human understanding of the relationship between our individual human awareness', the phenomenal world, and a consciousness which is in some way foundational to the cosmos.

The focus of this paper is on the dynamic of tension that characterizes the human experience. This state of tension, called desire, is generated by a simultaneous attraction to two mutually exclusive states of being: that state in which individual experience is dissolved into a unity of all that exists, and that state in which discreet entities (one of which is the human self) are experienced as ultimate. The manifestation of this impossible attraction appears in human experience in the form of an incessant, and maddening, alternation in our own physical and mental behaviors.

Each author situates his description of this dramatic tension on a different stage within the playing-out of the story of existence. Patañjali casts his description in terms of the psychology of individual human beings. Luria casts his description, on the other hand, in terms of the origins of the entire universe. Whether psychological or cosmological, however, each description is an example of mythologized ontology: an analysis of being that is presented via the symbolic medium of language and constrained by the structures that are particular to the narrative format (first such-and-such is, then this-and-that happens).³ In this light, a comparison of their respective descriptions yields a single assertion regarding the primary ontological structure that is expressed and experienced as human suffering.

Prior to Manifestation

Patañjali's text asserts a fundamental ontological distinction between the foundational principle of consciousness (*purusa*) and that which is non-conscious, namely matter (*prakriti*). Likewise, Luria states that the fundamental ontological nature of Divine Consciousness (Light) separates it from the generated universe, which "gradually descended by evolution" from that Light into a state of *relative* darkness.⁴ In the *Yoga Sutras* (2.5-9) the matter is stated like this:

(5) Ignorance (*avidya*) is the (mis)taking of the non-eternal, the impure, the painful, and that which is not the self as being the eternal, the pure, the pleasing, and the self. (6) Egoism is that apparent identity of consciousness with the powers of the instrument [by means of which there is perception]. (7) Attachment arises/results from pleasure. (8) Aversion arises/results from pain. (9) Attachment to life, even in the wise [just as is the case for the rest of us], is self-perpetuating.⁵

In this passage, Patañjali defines five categories of suffering/affliction (*klesa*): ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion, and attachment to life. Ignorance (*avidya*) is located by Patañjali as the source of the four subsequent afflictions⁶ and is characterized as the result of conflating the identities of things that are in reality, the text asserts, separate from one another. This failure to properly recognize the distinctions that define substantive differences facilitates other varieties of boundary-blurring as well, including the instantiation of the ego or the "I" sense .

Luria, on the other hand, describes the problem in terms that seem to be in direct opposition to Patañjali's analysis:

"All substances come from One Origin, and all powers, potential and actual, are related to the One—the Creator... What caused the soul to be severed from its Origin?...when the Soul assumes a new form and bears the name of "soul" it possesses some particular quality which estranges it from the

Origin. Because of this peculiar quality the soul is considered as a separate part of God. Were it not for this differentiation the soul would remain identical with God Himself...⁷

The 'problem,' as Luria would have it, is not the collapse of discrimination, but the emergence of it. From the kabbalist's perspective, discrimination is constitutive of the created universe. The thing that distinguishes Creator and created, "the will, or desire, to receive,"⁸ constitutes matter itself.⁹

From this we can see that, despite Luria's insistence on the primordial unity (and identity) of the Divine Consciousness with the created objects within its field of awareness, he nonetheless asserts a categorical difference between his God and the universe—as they stand in relation to one another at *this* (post-creation) point in time. It is a distinction which recalls the distinction between the primordial consciousness (*purusa*) and the primordial non-conscious (*prakṛti*) asserted by Patañjali.

Despite the incredible variety that we perceive to exist in the world, both men claim that everything is a manifestation of, and reducible to, two fundamental substrata: one called *purusa* by Patañjali, Light by Luria, the other called *prakṛti* by Patañjali, emanated being by Luria. Additionally, Luria asserts:

“...the will to receive...is inherent in every created thing and naught but this will to receive was revealed in the Creation.”¹⁰

Unlike Patañjali's dualism, Luria's universe does, ultimately, originate and resolve itself in an absolute unity. But despite the theological differences between these two visions of ultimate reality and of the human relation to that reality, the description offered by each text (of what characterizes the experience of beings who find themselves somewhere in between original emergence and final resolution) presents significant analytical resemblance to that presented in the other.

Patañjali's Primary Cause of Manifestation

Beginning with a fundamental and irreducible dyad of consciousness and the non-conscious,¹¹ Patañjali's universe apparently originates in an (unfortunate?) conjoining of the elements of the dyad with one another. The result of this is a restriction (*nirodha*) of the scope of consciousness. From this binding or restriction flows the cosmos.

Patañjali's Primary Result and Reaction

Having somehow placed themselves—two things which cannot be united (categorically)—together into one category, consciousness and the non-conscious form a kind of conglomerated entity, like vinegar and oil in well-agitated salad dressing. At least, that is how it appears to consciousness. So, consciousness makes a fundamental error in assessing the nature of its own identity. It is this error that Vyasa defines as the restriction (*nirodha*) of

consciousness, picking up on Patañjali's use of this concept in his description of how one works one's way back to the original state of the unmanifest in which consciousness accurately understands itself to be utterly one with itself and utterly separate from the non-conscious.¹²

This state of perceived conjoinment is uncomfortable for consciousness. It senses that something is not right and there arises, in reaction to this discomfort, the urge to sever the (perceived) unity that has come to be.

Patañjali's Secondary Cause of Manifestation and Its Results

However, instead of enacting the discrimination which would rectify the situation, what seems to "break off" is a conglomerated portion of the conglomeration, a microcosmic portion of the cosmic conjoinment. That is to say, discrimination does occur, but it is the wrong discrimination. Rather than achieving the separation of consciousness from the non-conscious that would result in a return to the unmanifested state in which *purusa* and *prakṛti* are utterly separate from one another, what does result is the separation of many small bundles of the *purusa-prakṛti* mix from the rest of the cosmic stuff. This breaking-off occurs in much the same way that the splitting of a holographic image occurs: When the image is divided in two, the result is two complete, half-sized images. The constitutive components of the larger image are not separated from one another.

According to Patañjali's schema, at the moment when the distinction between consciousness and the non-conscious is blurred within the field of awareness, consciousness incorporates the qualities inherent in the non-conscious into its own self description. It is from this confusion that the mistaken notion of discreet identities—including the notion of an "I" that is distinct from pure consciousness (*purusa*)—results. We can see the sense of this readily when we consider for a moment that divisibility is a quality possessed by entities that have extension in space and/or time—and neither realm is one in which consciousness has its being.¹³ The apparent division of consciousness into discreet localized identities can only occur as the result of *purusa*, in its proximity to *prakṛti*, having assumed the characteristics of *prakṛti* onto itself.

Patañjali's "I" and Its Desires

The ego, at this point in Patañjali's cosmogonic description, seeks to literally create bonds of attachment in the hope of alleviating its experience of partial being. This experience of partial being is pain and the effort to unite with that which is perceived to be extra-egoical appears to be an effort to assuage that pain by creating/reinstating a state of wholeness...like the wholeness of a quilt that is the result of drawing many separate entities together and securing them to one another. Of course, as in the case of the quilt, separate

bits and pieces of manifest existence that are brought together do *not* achieve union with one another. They are merely joined, attached at the edges.

In Vyasa's commentary on *sutra* 2:18, the reactionary urge that arises from the erroneous conflation of primal elements is described as being awake (*buddhi*), which is normally understood to signify that phase of awareness in which the individual mind is capable of establishing categorical discriminations between that which is consciousness (*purusa*) and that which is the non-conscious (*prakriti*). This state of being awake or mentally present, is frequently used throughout Sanskrit literature to connote a person who is capable of distinguishing between what is real and true about the self and what is not. But that connotation of wisdom and achievement seems to be precisely not what Vyasa is trying to communicate: "It is being awake (*buddhi*) itself that is bound," he says.¹⁴

We might re-translate Vyasa's statement as: "Having-awoken (*buddhi*) itself is (the ontological activity of) boundary-making." Stated in this manner, having-awoken (*buddhi*) is the value-neutral activity of making discriminations, which can be seen operating at different evolutionary stages of both suffering and liberation. The moment that concerns us here is the discrimination (*buddhi*) that occurs immediately following that first creative moment in which the erroneous conflation of consciousness (*purusa*) and the non-conscious (*prakriti*) occurs.

In addition, rather than providing any lasting sense of completion, some of these bonds are apparently felt to be binding, and there arises the experience of negative desire (aversion) which in turn inspires increased activity. Vyasa's commentary explains that "the painful causes the aversion-afflictions (*klesas*) and become the field for the growth of actions (*karmasaya*)."¹⁵

From this point, what follows is a continuation of the back-and-forth movement between erroneous synthesis and erroneous discrimination. Our passage mentions the karmic results of "pleasure" and "pain" without giving an explanation of the meaning of these words. It is left to the reader to understand the origins of these experiences and their relationship either to egoism or to *avidya* (or to both). This vital information is left out, I want to suggest, precisely because the previous verses do provide us with the information needed to draw the appropriate inferences.

The perspective of the text is that desire arises from pain which itself arises from confusion, the erroneous lumping together of things which cannot be united. In addition to this, the text implies another source of pain and desire: the confusion of erroneously discriminating between things which cannot be separated. The ego, that broken-off conglomerated piece of the larger conglomeration, senses its broken-off non-whole state and seeks to enact some type of synthesis by uniting itself with other broken-off pieces of the greater conglomerated entity.

The upshot of this all is that our experience of desire is the problem in us that needs to be rectified. And this problem, desire, has come to be because of

a collapse of discrimination. Thus we see the sense in Patañjali's statement that "removal of bondage is the disappearance of conjunction...the means of removal is discriminative knowledge."¹⁶

Egoism, then, is the outcome of an erroneous division which itself is the result of an erroneous union. It is almost as if the experience (on a cosmic scale) of putting two things together that don't belong together gives rise to a compelling urge to take things apart again. Without *accounting for* the initial collapse of distinction that gives rise to the conflation/confusion, Patañjali seems to *describe* a kind of chain reaction that begins with one of the primary constitutive functions of the human mind, synthesis, and bounces reactively into that other cognitive operation, discrimination...and then back again.¹⁷

When we take a look at the kabbalist's cosmogony we see there, as well, the notion that the universe itself *is* the binding or restriction of consciousness. This occurs, to use his language, as the result of the divine Will-To-Impart. Luria describes the beginning of creation as the creation of discrimination:

"The restriction of Light occurred...and following this first restraint, the function of limiting became operative in all the worlds... In whatever place it reveals its action, it blocks the Light from that particular space, concealing It so that It stops at that boundary...every boundary or limit...results from the power of the first restriction."¹⁸

Unlike the view of Patañjali, which takes as a given the ultimacy of the principle of difference (embodied in the primordial pair), Luria feels that it is necessary to somehow account for difference in such a way that the realm of the Divine Consciousness is not implicated by the limits implied in a dualism of creator-created. Despite their varying degrees of dis/comfort with the logical problems of asserting an unqualified consciousness that coexists with that which is non-conscious, both thinkers concur that discrimination, separation, limit, boundary, and absence or lack are all related closely (both causally and conceptually) as slightly different (human) interpretations of a single phenomena: our perception/experience of multiplicity.

We are all familiar with the experience of attempting to find orientation in the midst of an experience of existence in which multiplicity and fragmentation seems to define the reality of our world—physically, emotionally, and even psychologically. According to both Patañjali and Luria (and rightly so, I think), this is a fundamentally negative experience because our own sense of self is necessarily implicated as limited in such a fragmented world (the "I" is merely one of the many fragments). It is this experience of limit that is articulated as desire, the urge toward sufficiency.

In identifying the negativity of human experience as this state of desire, Patañjali and Luria locate the source of our suffering as inherent in the distinction and limit which constitute the situation of individual human beings *qua* individuals. Doing this enables both to recommend, quite logically, that

the alleviation of suffering requires that the seat of a person's identity be shifted—from that which is limited and fragmentary to that in which the existence of limit and of fragmentation is impossible. For both Patañjali and Luria this latter has to consist of something radically different than what characterizes the manifest universe, for “only the vessel is subject to the manifold diversities and states of expansion.”¹⁹

Luria's Primary Cause of Manifestation

The cosmogony described by Luria and his commentator, Ashlag, begins (not temporally, but causally) with the Divine Consciousness' “Will-To-Impart”. This Will necessitates the existence of a vessel (that is to say, an entity which is defined by its emptiness) that can be the recipient of the infinite abundance which characterizes Divine Consciousness. Thus the divine Will-To-Impart paradoxically executes a withdrawal of Divine Consciousness into Itself, called contraction (*tsimtsum*) by Kabbalah.

Luria's Primary Result and Reaction

This withdrawal or contraction is the creative act, the bringing into existence of both Being and Non-being. It is the genesis of difference and of the perception of that difference, discrimination:

“The only new factor which was revealed in the Creation [was] labeled by the sages “existence from non-existence” (*yaish m'ayn*)... Light and all that is comprised in It...is emanated as ‘existence from existence.’”²⁰

That from which the Divine Consciousness withdraws is longing itself, a vacuum of dense darkness. This creation of Non-being, the state of lack and of desire, is necessary in order for there to be that to which the Divine can impart It's abundance. Just as the divine desire is spoken of as the Will-To-Impart, the desire felt by the created beings is understood as the Will-To-Receive.

The emergence of Being and Non-being is all of a piece. They are phases of existence which arise simultaneously. For Luria, it makes little sense to discuss the existence of Being in a context in which Non-being does not exist. Prior to the divine contraction that *is* creation, there is neither Being nor Non-Being. The “new factor” revealed in the creation is the potential-for-Being. It is this potential—this simultaneous knowledge of emptiness and of what fulfillment could be—which is the essential nature of the creation and of all the creatures in it.

This reading of Luria's work is reinforced by Ashlag's discussion of darkness. Darkness, he tells us, is ontologically rooted in the Will-To-Receive. It, like any kind of emptiness or vacuum or nothingness, is non-existent prior to the divine creative urge. “Darkness was newly revealed with the creation of the universe.” In addition, while desire is characterized as darkness by Ashlag,

he also points out that this is only the case when the Will-To-Receive is viewed relative to the Will-To-Impart. In other words, that which comprises our substance, and which characterizes the direction of our consciousness, is also Light, though “a little darker than the Heavenly Light.”²¹

For Ashlag “darkness” is characterized by the same kind of ambiguity that we saw in regard to Vyasa’s “being-awake” (*buddhi*). Both are, in some respect, constituted of the light of consciousness. Yet both are “a little darker” than the Absolute Consciousness that exists as the ground of the universe. Both commentators thus describe the human situation as: being awake enough to know that we are not awake. We are imbued with enough consciousness to kindle the fire of desire for more.

While none of this can be said to be problematic from the perspective of the Absolute Consciousness, Luria and Patañjali are primarily concerned with what it is like for us to experience being that-which-consciousness-is-not: dark, limited, empty, lacking, separated out, etc. Our identification with/as lack itself appears then, for both Patañjali and Luria, to be that of which our suffering is composed, and that from which our experience of desire directly arises.

It is clear, also, that Patañjali’s view of this identification is that it originates in a mistake—or in a chain of mistakes that compound one-another’s effects on consciousness. On the other hand, Luria attributes this state of affairs, at least in the initial stages of cosmic evolution, to a intentional ‘act’ of Divine Consciousness.²²

Luria’s Secondary Cause of Manifestation and Its Results

The response to this act of contraction (strikingly similar to Patañjali’s account of the emergence of egoism which occurs as a reaction to the experience of Non-being that results from the constraint of consciousness), is a kind of coagulation—a further contraction—in the substance of that which experiences itself as the Will-To-Receive. In the face of the experience of its own incompleteness—the experience of having been separated from the Divine Light—that being which is constituted of the Will-To-Receive is gripped by an urge toward self-completion. Ironically, this desire—which we could think of as the active phase of Non-being—frustrates its own purpose.

The dense vacuum that is created matter, in a confused effort to ameliorate its emptiness (the absence of the Divine Light), executes a further contraction. Withdrawing into itself, the created absence-of-Being (which was created to *be* lacking, and thus in desire, and thus receptive) makes an effort to pull itself together, as though pulling itself together might result in some sort of experience of self unity. But the very opposite results. For the coagulation of Non-being into a solid object, as it were, with definite boundaries is the very thing which makes the darkness of Non-being even more impervious to being penetrated by the Light!²³

The response to this intensification of its isolation from God, this deepening of its own darkness, is a kind of panicked repetition of the contractive impulse on the part of the created dense vacuum. With each successive act of contraction—an act which is made in the effort to attain some sort of unity by virtue of drawing the multiple elements of existence closer to one another—only further division is generated.

There is a somewhat neo-Platonic ring to Ashlag's explanation of this process of "involutions down to the mundane world."²⁴ It appears that each successive contraction, in addition to solidifying the boundary that separates the Creator from the creation, introduces a dimension of depth to created multiplicity by actually evoking divisions and separations *within* the creation. "Gradation to gradation" levels of dense matter emanate, until that which is most dense, most impervious to and deficient in the Divine Light and thus most capable of receiving it, takes shape: the world of human action.²⁵

Luria's "I" and Its Desires

We see here in Luria's analysis the description of a mistake on the part of fragmented consciousness which is the mirror image of that mistake described in the *Yoga Sutra*. There, the response of consciousness to its erroneous identification with matter is to affect a subsequent (and equally erroneous) division. The process that results in Luria's ego-formation, however, is described as a series of erroneous self-unificatory acts that result from an initial discrimination (the divine *tsimtsum*).

Luria attributes to the created universe an essential will, and thus infuses that universe with the dynamics of desire: the capacity for experience, for discrimination, and for intent. The cosmos itself desires a return to the oneness that existed prior to the creation. Acting under the direction of this desire, the dense vacuous matter of the created universe draws closer into itself, in a grotesque and imperfect imitation of the original divine act. The consequence of this is an ever-increasing distance between the multiple elements of a self-fragmenting creation and each other, and between the creation and the Creator. The response to this distance, which is the manifestation of separation, is desire. By congealing itself—that is, by responding to its own emptiness and attempting to enact at least some sort of unification (cosmic, or local) by means of an effort at self-constitution—the Will-To-Receive plays a role in the further fragmentation of the cosmos (which is precisely the opposite of what it intended).²⁶

The formation of the human sense of self occurs as the apex of the original divine urge to create something to which It can impart Its Light. It is the human sense of self-unification, the density of our being, which establishes a vacuum into which the Divine Light may pour Itself. As a receptive vessel, the boundaries of the ego are rigid and well-defined, like a perfect bowl that is neither chipped nor cracked. The human ego is the realization of receptivity.

Yet this solidification of identity (which accentuates the difference between the Will-To-Receive and the Divine Consciousness in Luria's discourse) results, as we have all experienced, in distance. To Luria, this simultaneous manifestation of distance from the Divine Light coupled with the longing for that Light is the irony—and gift—of being human.²⁷

Conclusions, Prescriptions, Future Projects

We have seen that both Patañjali and Luria describe the operation of desire as an almost rhythmic pattern of reactionary movement between two powerfully attractive, but mutually exclusive, ontological poles: utter unity, and multiplicity. In Patañjali's thought, this pattern commences by virtue of a paradoxical descent into fragmentation on the part of consciousness—a fragmentation which ironically results from the obfuscation of the genuinely irreducible multiplicity that characterizes the most fundamental level of reality: the coexistence of *purusa* with *prakṛti*. For Luria, on the other hand, this back and forth pattern is driven by successive attempts to unify that which has been generated into multiplicity by virtue of the divine *tsimtsum*.

The constituent elements of these two analyses move in opposite directions. In Patañjali's schema, an infinite and indivisible consciousness (*purusa*) has erroneously adopted the characteristic of divisibility, thus engendering the suffering of constraint, as well as the desire for the alleviation of that suffering. In Luria's schema, a finite and divisible creation attempts to introduce from within itself the characteristic of oneness, thus further solidifying the suffering of its separation from the Light.

On the one hand, an infinite being mistakenly assumes itself to be possessed by the qualities of finitude. On the other hand, a finite being mistakenly assumes that it has internal access to the qualities of the infinite. These are clearly two very different pictures of the source of the desire which seems to define ordinary human existence for both thinkers. Yet the dynamic substance of that desire is described in terms which bear significant structural resemblances to one another. In addition, for both Luria and Patañjali, the solution to our suffering, the fulfillment of our desire, is to be achieved by means of exercising a series of discriminations which, when perfected, will give way to a re-synthesis of the individualized consciousness with an absolute primordial consciousness that is the ground of real Being, the state of desirelessness.

The proper means of addressing this desire, for Luria, is for each of us to willfully transform our way of existing (experienced by us as the absence of Being) from being characterized by the Will-To-Receive to being characterized by the Will-To-Impart. The process of this transformation is to be conducted by means of cultivating a fine-tuned capacity for meditative discrimination. This discriminating awareness will enable the individual to understand the distinction between the Light and that which came into existence as the result

of the Light's contraction.²⁸ That is to say, through the discipline and restraint of the mind, the difference between consciousness and the non-conscious will become apparent. The perception of what is to be attributed to the Will-To-Receive as distinct from what is to be attributed to the Will-To-Impart becomes clear. In this way, we ourselves are able to break down the only thing which separates our individual selves from God. When our individual awareness no longer posits its identify as that which is lacking the union with Divine Consciousness can be affected.

The parallels here to Patañjali's well known prescriptive *sutras* should not be overlooked. In 1:32-38, 2:1-2, and numerous other places, Patañjali advises the practitioner to purify his body and his thoughts and habits. The practitioner is explicitly told to cultivate certain kinds of behavior—physical and mental purifications which correspond to several of the self-regulating disciplines advocated by Luria. These purifications, along with the practice of austere exercises, are to pave the way for a mental clarity that is capable of accurately discriminating *purusa* from *prakṛti*.

Regardless of the differences (which should not be minimized) in their positions regarding the metaphysical characteristics of the original state of ultimate reality, Patañjali and Luria both appear to share a great deal on the practical level. We who study their works also share in these: every one of us finds herself or himself neither at the point of original Being, nor at the point of resolving our existence back into that Being. We find ourselves somewhere in between, caught in the tug-of-war of desire and fragmented incompleteness. We live out sufferings that take the shape of a ricocheting back and forth between desires that are unfulfilled precisely because we are driven to pursue simultaneously opposing ends. For this reason alone, I have addressed my attention in this paper to the descriptions offered by these two men of what life is like for us, now, in the midst of desire and suffering. To my mind, this is germane. Clearly there is room for greater examination and comparison of Luria's and Patañjali's thought, as well as for wider comparative consideration of the Kabbalah, in all of its varieties, with yoga, in all of its varieties. I hope that this paper, rather than being construed as some attempt at arriving at the definitive understanding, will be taken as a jumping-off point, an inspiration for further critical discussion of the matters raised.

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NOTES

- ¹ Ashlag's two commentaries, *Inner Reflection* and *Inner Light*, appear in the Krakovsky translation published by the Research Centre of Kabbalah.
- ² This consciousness is referred to by Patañjali as *purusa*, and by Luria as God.
- ³ While these differences in themselves make for fruitful comparison, such a project is not within the scope of this paper and must be left for a future effort.
- ⁴ Luria, *Ten Luminous Emanations*, p. 62ff.
- ⁵ In quoting the *Yoga Sutras* in English, I consulted both the Radhakrishnan and Moore translation and that of Bangali Baba (as well as incorporating my own reading of the text).
- ⁶ Here and in *sutra* 2:4.
- ⁷ Luria, *Ten Luminous Emanations*, p. 9.
- ⁸ Luria, p. 15.
- ⁹ The discussion of this involves some mind bending, as we are generally accustomed to thinking of matter as having substance, and of emptiness as being that space in which matter is absent. Luria's cosmology asks us to invert our understanding of the relationship of matter and substance, so

that we envision matter as being lacking in substance. Because of its density matter is impervious (to varying degrees) to being penetrated by Light—which is the only thing of substance—and is thus in a state of emptiness which makes it capable of being receptive.

10 Luria, *Ten Luminous Emanations*, p. 19.

11 There is, of course, a third prime principle for Patañjali: *Isvara*, or God. It would be the subject of a paper other than this one to explore the vast differences between the god concept presented in the *Yoga Sutras* and that presented in the tradition that has arisen from the description of the divine found in the opening chapters of Genesis (namely, Judaism). Here, I will only comment briefly to say that the two concepts do appear to be quite different—so much so that it is unclear to me why they are both signified by the same word in their English translations (the word “God”). But these types of reflections are beyond the scope of the present effort.

12 For example, compare Vyasa’s commentary with Patañjali’s sutras in the first part of Chapter 1, and in subsequent sections such as 3:9.

13 Clearly, then, divisibility is a characteristic of the material realm *insofar as* physical division is concerned. Whether or not, from our present understanding of consciousness, the same thing can also be said of *distinction*, that is to say of conceptual division, is unclear.

14 Radhakrishnan and Moore, eds., *Yoga Sutra*, p. 465.

15 Radhakrishnan and Moore, p. 455.

16 Patañjali, 2:25-26. We should probably take a moment here to note the irony that this discriminative knowledge is acquired “by means of Concentration (*Dhyana*),” *sutras* 2.10-11.

17 This “back again” would be, loosely speaking, the erroneous tendency of the separated “I” to equate itself with the cosmic *Purusa*. This equating is, once more, an employment of the synthesizing function—that function of the human mind which, along with discrimination, constitutes our sense-making.

18 Luria, *Ten Luminous Emanations*, p. 41.

19 Luria, p. 65.

20 Luria, p. 1.

21 Luria, p. 20.

22 This ‘act’ must be understood metaphorically, for as Luria points out, “Regarding the Light Itself, It is always found in a state of absolute rest; motionlessness.” See Luria, p. 65.

23 Luria, pp. 75-76ff.

24 Luria, p. 46.

25 Luria, pp. 67-70.

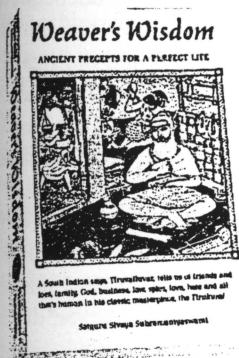
26 Luria, pp. 45-46ff.

27 Luria, p. 86.

28 Luria, p. 76.

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INDIA AND ISRAEL: FROM CONFLICT TO CONVERGENCE OF INTERESTS

Dinesh Kumar

India and Israel represent two old civilizations with noteworthy similarities in their cultural values and practices. Both countries won their independence from the same colonial power in parallel circumstances, and then adopted parliamentary democracy and mixed economy as models of their political and economic development. Most significantly, their foreign policy orientations were at first the same. In spite of this striking affinity, the political and diplomatic relations between the two countries, until recently, remained cold and unfriendly.

As a whole, Indians knew little about Jews and were not fully aware of the intensity of their problems in Europe and their connection to the "Land of Israel," though admiring the Jewish contributions to mankind and showing sympathy for their plight. This admiration and sympathy, however, did not translate into political support for the Zionist or Israeli cause. For a long time, Indian leaders persistently felt that the establishment of normal diplomatic relations with Israel would harm India's interests domestically, regionally and globally. This perception, created by a variety of factors, was the main constraint preventing normal relations between India and Israel.

The new world order of the 1990s sharply eroded this Indian perception of conflicting interest with Israel. Instead, a new perception of shared interests has grown between Delhi and Jerusalem. The existing undercurrents in form of socio-cultural and political affinities provided a solid foundation for an India-Israel rapprochement. Consequently, after the normalization of diplomatic relations in January, 1992, the two countries have rapidly developed close relations and are cooperating in many areas of mutual interest: cultural, economic, politico-strategic as well as defense and security. In the light of more than four decades of a history of strained relations, the current phase of warm and special relations reflects the growing convergence of interests between the two countries.

Thus, India's pro-Arab policies and her negative attitude towards the Zionist movement and Israel, in the past, should not be viewed as anti-Semitism or antipathy towards the Jewish state, but rather as the result of clashing national interests. The history of international relations has often demonstrated that national interests can prevail over cultural-political affinities and ideals in shaping relations between two countries.¹ This proposition also holds true in the context of India-Israel relations in the years preceding the new world order of the 1990s.

To understand the complexity and uniqueness of India-Israel relations properly, the study of the historical context is imperative. This paper attempts to analyze the evolution, the development and changing patterns of India's relations with the Zionist movement and Israel. Why did a negative attitude towards the Jewish cause developed among Indian leaders even before their country's own independence? What were the constraints preventing normal relations between them and to what extent were they justified? And what made the two countries come closer in the early 1990s and develop a special relationship over a short time? These are some of the specific questions addressed in this paper.

The focus of the investigation, as is evident from the last paragraph, is more on the question of *why* India followed a particular policy towards Israel and what factors influenced this choice, and generally avoids the question of *how* these choices were reached. The Rational Actor Model² has been preferred as the theoretical tool for this analysis. This simplified model assumes national government as the unified and rational decision-maker. Decisions are taken as a calculated solution to a problem in relations to the goals. Rationality is defined either as the value-maximization choice of the decision-making unit or adaptations within specified constraints. The value-maximization choice is generally conceived in terms of national interest.³

Admittedly, this model of foreign policy analysis suffers from some serious drawbacks, especially as it reduces the organizational details and political complications in decision-making to a unified rational actor. However, these constraints in our research problem appear to have less impact because of the following two features of the Indian decision-making. First, there was not much organizational control on the foreign policy matters in India, especially in the early years of independence. Secondly, the strong hold on foreign policy matters of the charismatic leaders like Nehru and Indira Gandhi reduced the political bargaining in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, without going into the details, the complementary organizational and political variables have been briefly discussed in this paper, wherever necessary.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (1920-1948)

The roots of India's Israel policy can be traced to the political developments in India and Palestine after the World War I. Soon after this War, a major direct confrontation between the Arab and Jewish nationalisms in Palestine emerged. Almost simultaneously, the Palestine issue first surfaced on the Indian sub-continent. During the subsequent years preceding the independence of India (1947), Palestine was the subject of numerous discussions and resolutions by the Indian National Congress (INC). Its stand was influenced chiefly by the political goals of the INC, but also by the attitudes of its leaders towards Zionism and their perceptions of political realities in Palestine.

The Moslem Factor

The Moslem minority assumed a crucial role during the Indian struggle for freedom. The leaders of the INC regarded its participation as vital. However at the same time, the British colonial administration tried to project the Moslem minority as a counter political force to the growing influence of the INC. Comprehending this, the Congress leaders made efforts to check the increasing Moslem loyalty to the British and draw them into the mainstream of the Indian national movement.⁴

Gandhi gave topmost priority to Hindu-Moslem unity as a prerequisite to achieving the ultimate goal of independence. In 1920, he was successful in turning scattered Moslem resentment on the issue of removing the Caliphate from Constantine, the temporal seat of the Moslem world, into a nationwide movement against the colonial power in India. Incorporation of this issue into the INC's political program proved to be a strong, though temporary, bridge to the Moslem community.⁵ In the context of India-Israel relations, the Caliphate campaign clearly indicated, as early as the 1920s, that Moslem sensitivities would influence INC policies, especially in West Asia.⁶

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the INC tried to appease Moslem opinion. Since communal and religious issues motivated the Moslem League's political offensive for separation, the INC shifted its focus to the secular issue of self-determination in West Asia.⁷ It passed a number of resolutions expressing sympathy with Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Iraq in their struggle against the imperial powers. On September 27, 1936, Congress observed 'Palestine Day,' holding meetings and demonstrations throughout the country in support of the Arab cause. But despite the sensitivity of Congress to Moslem feelings, the secular nationalism of the Hindu-majority INC clashed with the political aspirations of the Moslem minority. This led to frequent communal riots and increased support for the Moslem League, which in 1930 adopted a resolution to partition the country into Hindu and Moslem states.

Interestingly, during the same period, similar communal trends had emerged in Palestine, where the Arabs were the majority and the Jews, a minority. Arabs wanted to establish an Arab state in the entire mandatory Palestine. The Zionist leaders, on the other hand, were determined to fulfill the dream of a "national home" as promised to them under the Balfour Declaration of 1917. Such a clash of nationalist aspirations often resulted into violent riots between the two communities.

Finding the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine intractable, the British-appointed Peel Commission (1937) recommended the partition of Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish states.⁸ The Arab Higher Committee rejected the report outright and demanded an independent Arab state in the whole of Palestine. The Jewish leaders, after some hesitation, accepted the 'principle of partition' as the only workable solution to the irreconcilable conflict with Arabs.

The INC strongly denounced any move towards the partition of Palestine, fearing it would constitute a precedent for helping the separatist Moslems in India. It invariably argued that the Jews in Palestine were a religious minority and the solution to their problems should be found in the framework of a 'pluralist Arab state.' The Moslem League of India condemned the report as a threat to the desires of all Moslems. It warned the British Government of India that allowing Jewish immigration into Palestine would have disastrous repercussions throughout the Islamic world, including India.⁹

Thus, since the late 1930s, the Jewish nationalists in Palestine and the Moslem nationalists in India were committed to independent statehood for remarkably similar reasons. The dialectic communal and political realities of the Indian national movement and the Zionist movement led the INC to side with Arabs and oppose the Jewish position in Palestine. Moreover, there was some affinity with the Arabs due to the long history of cultural links with them and the existence of a significant Moslem minority in India. On the other hand, the Jewish population in India, largely isolated from the mainstream of the Jewish Diaspora, was too small to influence the INC's decision-making.

Zionism and Imperialism

Another major factor that contributed to the INC's attitude towards the Palestine issue was its strong opposition to colonialism and imperialism, and Zionism's identification with them. A year after the Brussels Congress (1927), the INC became an associate member of the 'League Against Imperialism' and proclaimed its own national struggle as the part of worldwide struggle against imperialism and colonialism. The INC extended its full support to the Arab national movement for Palestine's independence from British imperialism.¹⁰ But, it did not consider the Zionist movement, whose ultimate aim was to achieve nationhood for Jews in Palestine, a national liberation movement.

Instead, many Indian leaders shared the Arab position that the Zionist movement was a manifestation of Western imperialism. The European background of the Zionist leaders, their close collaboration with the British imperial power, and the large scale, mostly white, Jewish immigration into Palestine created such a negative image of the Zionist movement among Indian leaders. However, for the Zionist leaders, close cooperation with the British was vital, more a necessity than a choice.¹¹

Conversely, the Zionist leaders' dependence on the mandatory power constrained them from supporting the Indian freedom movement. They also ignored or failed to cultivate Indians for their cause in Palestine. There were virtually no formal links between Zionist and Indian leaders until the first quarter of the twentieth century. The belated efforts of the Zionists to present Indian leaders with the Jewish viewpoint on the Palestine issue failed to cut much ice and produced little of any significance.

Gandhi: Zionism and Moral Nationalism

Gandhi often showed concern about the miserable plight of Jews in Europe and considered that they were treated worse than the untouchables of India. But he strongly criticized Zionist leaders' connections with the British and the violent methods adopted by some Zionist groups. He explicitly challenged Jewish geographical and national claims in Palestine, when he wrote,

The Palestine of the Biblical conception is not a geographical track. It is in their hearts. But if they must look at the Palestine of geography as their national yoke, it is wrong to enter it under the shadow of the British gun. A religious act cannot be performed with the aid of the bayonet or the bomb.¹²

Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French... Surely it would be a crime against humanity to reduce the proud Arabs so that Palestine could be restored to Jews partly or wholly, as their national home. The nobler cause would be to insist on a just treatment of the Jews, wherever they are born and bred. The Jews born in France are French in precisely the same sense that Christians born in France are French. If the Jews have no home but Palestine, will they relish the idea of being forced to leave the other parts of the world in which they have settled? Or do they want a double home where they can remain at will? This cry for the national home affords a colorable justification for the German expulsion of the Jews.¹³

Gandhi's statement about Jews on November 29, 1938, was a blow to the Zionist leaders. They were expecting support for their cause in Palestine from him, especially in view of increasing Nazi atrocities against Jews in Europe. Gandhi's moral nationalism was, to a large extent, favorable to the Arabs. Nevertheless, the Zionist leaders tried to influence Gandhi and other prominent Indians to moderate their pro-Arab stand on the Palestine issue.¹⁴ Efforts were also made to counter Gandhi's views in the Indian and the Jewish press. However, a considerable damage to the Zionist cause in Palestine had already been done.

Gandhi, basically a moralist and a religious man, never questioned the Jewish longing for Jerusalem but mainly opposed the Zionists' resort to violence and their dependence on the British. From the very outset, his position was that religion could not be a criterion for the creation of states. But after the Holocaust, when the creation of Pakistan already seemed inevitable, Gandhi moderated some of his views on the Palestine issue.¹⁵

Nehru: Zionism as Imperialism

Jawaharlal Nehru, the main architect of the INC's foreign policy, took a special interest in getting Congress to pass resolutions on international issues. Like Gandhi, he also admired and sympathized with the Jews. In May, 1933 he wrote,

They (the Jews) had no home or nation, and everywhere they went they were treated as unwelcomed and undesirable strangers. They were humiliated, reviled, tortured and massacred; the very word "Jew" became a word of abuse, a synonym for a miser and grasping money-lender. And yet these amazing people not only survived all this but managed to keep their racial and cultural characteristics, and prospered and produced a host of great men... Most of them, of course, are far from prosperous; they crowd in the cities of Eastern Europe and, from time to time, suffer 'pogroms' or massacres. These people without home or country have never ceased to dream of Old Jerusalem which appears to their imaginations greater and more magnificent than it ever was in fact.¹⁶

Yet, Nehru did not see the Palestine issue as communal, but only as nationalist. He regarded the Arabs as fighters against imperialist control and alleged that instead of joining hands with them to end the colonial rule in Palestine, the Jews took sides with the foreign ruling power.¹⁷ In his view, nobody could support the Zionist movement if it was aiming to establish a "Jewish National Home" under the protection of British imperialism. He also drew a parallel between the Palestinian and Indian freedom struggles in the sense that in both countries the British were playing their traditional policy of divide and rule.¹⁸ Nehru's solution to the Palestine problem was close to the Arab solution (based on the concept of *Dhimma*), providing for an Arab state in Palestine and the protection of Jewish minority rights.¹⁹ He openly took the stand that Palestine was essentially an Arab country and must remain so.

Nehru viewed the complex reality in Palestine by judging all events in relation to the paradigm of imperialism. He did not moderate his political support for the Arabs, though he continued to sympathize with the miseries of Jews. It seems that besides his preoccupation with the ideology of anti-imperialism, Nehru envisioned that friendly relations with the Arab world would serve India's interests in the long term.

The Asian Relations Conference, 1947

In March, 1947, a few months before India attained independence, Nehru, her future Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, convened the first Asian Relations Conference (ARC) in the hope that it would help the understanding of Asia's problems and promote cooperation among Asian people. A ten-member Jewish delegation²⁰ from Palestine was also invited to the conference. During the conference, the Zionist delegation tried to argue that the people it represented belonged to the family of Asian nations. As in the past, Nehru expressed his deep sympathy for the Jews, but reaffirmed his political stand that Palestine was essentially an Arab country and that no decision should be made without the consent of the Arabs.²¹

The conference yielded no concrete political mileage to the Jewish delegation, but it gave them the rare opportunity to present their case to the Asian leaders while sitting on an equal level with them. During their stay in India, they were also able to cultivate connections with some Indian leaders and persuade them to support the Jewish cause.

The United Nations Special Commission on Palestine, 1947

Meanwhile, in the same year, the struggle between Arabs and Jews in Palestine had reached a stage of deadlock. Having failed to reconcile the conflicting interests in Palestine, the new Labor Government in London transferred the Palestine issue to the United Nations. India, though not yet independent, was included as one of the eleven neutral representatives in the United Nations Special Commission on Palestine (UNSCOP).²²

While the UNSCOP was still conducting its investigations, India achieved independence on August 15, 1947, and was simultaneously partitioned into the dominions of India and Pakistan. The report of UNSCOP was released in September, 1947. India, Iran and Yugoslavia recommended a federated Arab-Jewish state, known as the 'minority plan.' The 'majority plan' recommended the partition of Palestine into independent Arab and Jewish states with an international regime for Jerusalem. The Indian representative Abdur Rehman explained that the minority plan was based on the belief that partition based on religion was undesirable and impractical.²³

Knowing India's attitude, the Zionist leaders focused increased diplomatic efforts on dissuading India from leading the anti-partition campaign when the UNSCOP report was put to vote in the General Assembly of the United Nations. Despite their efforts, India voted against the majority plan, which was passed by a vote of 33-13 with ten abstentions on November 27, 1947. Except for the Philippines Republic, a former colony of the United States, no Asian country²⁴ supported the partition plan. Nehru reaffirmed India's stand in the Constituent Assembly that the federal plan was the only real solution to the Palestine problem,²⁵ a stand to which India adhered throughout the Arab-Jewish war of 1948-49.

RELATIONS AFTER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

After it attained independence, the State of Israel tried to cultivate friendly relations with India, despite Congress' negative attitude towards the Zionist movement. Israel hoped that close diplomatic ties with India would help the newly born Jewish state gain acceptance in the family of Asian nations and would further legitimize its existence on the world map. Israel also saw India as a potential great power, expecting it to play an important political and economic role in world affairs.

There was some optimism among Israeli leaders about relations with India. They hoped that the emergence of new realities in both countries would replace past ideological prejudices with pragmatic cooperation in areas of mutual interests. Looking at the striking similarities between the two countries strengthened these feelings.²⁶ Nehru's invitation to the Jewish delegation to the ARC was interpreted as a prelude to better ties. However, contrary to Israeli expectations, there was no positive change in India's West Asia policy, though India's continual involvement in the Palestine issue before 1948 was replaced by a preference for keeping a low profile. India did not react when the State of Israel was born. Similarly, Nehru found himself constrained from heeding Israel's request for recognition. The following factors delayed it for 16 months:

1) The Moslem Minority

After independence, new realities reinforced India's reasons for its negative attitude towards the Zionist cause in the past. The partition of India was a painful experience and the presence of a large Moslem minority with many apprehensions about its safety, future, and loyalty to the Hindu-dominated secular Indian government assumed additional significance. Moslem leaders and intellectuals from time to time reminded the Indian government not to ignore the sentiments of the Moslem population and made it clear that the recognition of Israel would hurt them.²⁷ Acknowledging the importance of Moslem concerns about Indian leadership, Eliahu Elath wrote in October, 1949,

...Pakistan, however, became a theocratic state preventing the national assimilation of Moslems (in) India. Hence, the Indian government must treat its thirty million Moslems most carefully. Palestine was a source (of) constant agitation and made a deep impression (on) Moslems everywhere...²⁸

In a similar vein, India's Ministry of External Affairs said that the recognition of Israel would come sooner or later, but added that the sentiments of the large Moslem minority could not be completely ignored.²⁹ Some scholars, however, hold a different view, claiming that the average Moslem in India was not interested in the Palestine issue.³⁰ Notwithstanding the differences among scholars, the sensitivities of the traumatized Moslem minority were an important concern for the Indian leadership, and constrained it from recognizing Israel.

2) India's Need for the Arab Support

Since ancient times, India had many interests in the Arab world, but after World War II, it assumed greater economic and political importance. Economically, the Arab states were attractive potential markets for India, while Arab oil was regarded as crucial to India's ambitious industrial

development. Moreover, free passage through the Suez canal, the route carrying two-third of India's total trade, has always been a concern of Indian leaders.

Politically, the Indian Government was very eager to secure Arab support in the Kashmir dispute with Pakistan. It did not want to antagonize the Arabs by making any hasty move towards the Jewish state. Arabs were pressuring India, wherever and whenever they could, not to recognize Israel. Nehru himself admitted the importance of the Arab factor as regards this issue when he said, "We refrain because of our desire not to offend the sentiments of our friends in the Arab countries."³¹

Pakistan's attempts to create a pan-Islamic alliance also predisposed Delhi to forge stronger ties with the Arab world. Nehru saw the pan-Islamic movement as a reactionary force. He feared that it would divide the Asian movement against the colonial powers and might stimulate separatist tendencies among Indian Moslems. He tried to check pan-Islamic trends by asserting India's position in Asian affairs and promoting pan-Arabism. In these circumstances, any conciliatory move towards Israel was perceived as detrimental to Indian interests.

3) The Dream of Third World Leadership

Nehru always had a vision of India's big role in world affairs. The concept of non-alignment, his brainchild, was gaining popularity among the newly independent states. His ambition to make India the leading power of the third world necessitated the support of the Arab states and they demanded reciprocity from India. A cold attitude or an antagonistic policy towards Israel was an inexpensive price for India to pay in order to solicit Arab support. This explains why Nehru, at the last moment, asked the Indian delegation to cooperate with the Islamic states and vote against Israel's admission to the United Nations, though his earlier instructions were to abstain.³² The motive behind India's negative vote at the United Nations was more to demonstrate support for the Arabs than to keep Israel out of the family of nations.

The Recognition of Israel

India followed a very cautious approach towards the recognition of Israel. On the personal level, Nehru seemed convinced that the State of Israel was a living entity and would remain so on the world map.³³ But in his capacity as head of the Government of India, he preferred a 'realpolitik' approach to ensure that Indian interests would not suffer in the process of recognizing Israel. He expressed his dilemma in the Indian Parliament as follows,

Any action that we may take must be guided not only by idealistic considerations but also by a realistic appraisal of the situation. Our general policy in the past has been favorable to the Arabs and, at the same, not hostile to the Jews. This

policy continues. For the present we are not recognizing Israel. But this is not an irrevocable decision and the matter will no doubt be considered afresh in view of subsequent developments, including the final decision of the United Nations.³⁴

From time to time, Nehru tested the reactions of the Arab states and Indian Moslems by hinting that India might recognize Israel in the near future. Finally, after Israel had existed for sixteen months, India decided to accord recognition to the *Government of Israel* on September 20, 1950. This decision can be attributed to the following factors:³⁵

- Israel had become a *fait accompli* and had become a full-fledged member of the United Nations. It had been recognized by a large number of states, including Moslem Iran and Turkey, as well as by Yugoslavia, the co-sponsor of the United Nations Federal Plan.
- India's recognition of the People's Republic of China justified a similar move towards Israel to avoid criticism for adopting double standards.
- There was some support for this decision in certain sections of the Indian population.
- Israeli and Zionist leaders lobbied skillfully for this cause.
- Increasing close relations between Pakistan and Arab states and, in particular, the vote of Farouk's Egypt against India on the issue of Hyderabad in the United Nations, made India feel less restrained.

However, to salve Arab feelings and prevent any possible Moslem backlash at home, the government of India decided not to establish normal diplomatic relations with Israel. Immediately after the recognition, Nehru assured the Arab world that India's recognition of Israel means no particular change in the policy. The government, it seemed, was working under considerable pressures and constraints in this regard, and any subsequent step favoring Israel was viewed with apprehensions.

The Reactions

By and large, India's fear of harming its national interest by recognizing Israel proved unfounded. At home, no major political party, including the ruling Congress, which had a long history of pro-Arab resolutions, opposed this step. Except for a few mild protests by some Moslem leaders and Arab diplomats, there was no Moslem outcry and no Arab state severed its ties with India. Some scholars interpreted this reaction as an illustration of India's excessive concern for Moslem and Arab sensitivities, and its imaginary fears in dealing with Israel. However, it can also be argued that the low key reaction

to this decision from Arab states and Moslems at home was the result of Nehru's careful handling of the issue.

The Years of Lost Opportunities: 1950-55

Soon after recognizing Israel, the government of India declared in the Parliament in reply to a question about normalizing relations with Israel, "Owing to reasons of financial stringency, the case of Israel will presumably have to wait for a propitious time."³⁶ Some reports from the *South Block*³⁷ and speeches by Nehru also indicated that there was no major objection to opening a mission in Tel Aviv.

The Indian recognition of Israel again created optimism in the Israeli camp. This optimism was strengthened by the fact that Israel's cause was receiving some support in the Indian Parliament as well as the Indian press. Significantly, despite its coolness towards Israel, India had never denied the need to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel.

Walter Eytan in Delhi and the Promise

Encouraged by these positive signs, the Israeli Foreign Ministry worked hard to promote the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The favorable mood in India was reflected during the Delhi visit of Walter Eytan, then the Director-General of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as an official guest of the Indian government. Eytan observed that on the merits of the case, Nehru believed it was not logical to balk at diplomatic relations after India had recognized Israel a year ago. He wrote that Nehru had agreed to reconsider the question of diplomatic relations. Before his departure from Delhi, Eytan was informed that the Prime Minister had approved the proposal to establish normal diplomatic ties with Israel. However, the final decision to establish diplomatic relations was left to the Cabinet that would be formed after India's first general elections in 1952.³⁸

Why could normal diplomatic relations not be established? Unquestionably, financial constraints and the lack of diplomatic personnel contributed to the Indian government's decision to postpone the opening of its mission in Tel Aviv. However, more importantly, professor Michael Brecher explains that Nehru was cautioned by his Cabinet colleague, Maulana Abdul Kamal Azad,³⁹ not to take such a big risk of annoying the Indian Moslems as well as the friendly Arab states unless India received significant gains from normalizing relations with Israel.⁴⁰

The Role of Moshe Sharett

Moshe Sharett, Israel's Foreign Minister, was very keen to integrate Israel into the family of Asian nations. Understanding Indian constraints, he preferred not to prod India too much. He instructed the Israeli missions in the United Nations, the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union to

promote relations with India indirectly.⁴¹ Even on the issue of China's membership in the United Nations, Sharett decided on the spur of moment to defy the USA by joining India, Pakistan, Burma, and the East European bloc in supporting China's entry. He hoped that would improve Israel's chances of establishing formal diplomatic relations with these four Asian states, emphatically re-emphasizing Israel's policy of non-identification or non-alignment.⁴²

Notably, soon after Eytan's Delhi visit, Nehru was reportedly willing to allow establishment of an Israeli diplomatic mission in Delhi but claimed he was unable to open an Indian mission in Tel Aviv.⁴³ Moshe Sharett insisted on the "principle of reciprocity." His rejection of the proposal to open a mission in Delhi without India's reciprocal action was partly due to national pride⁴⁴ and partly, but more significantly, to his assessment that India was increasingly leaning towards establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel. But, as the history of India-Israel relations tells us today, Sharett's decision based on these assessments backfired.

The Strategic Changes Dictating India's Policy

The supposedly temporary postponement of normal diplomatic relations between India and Israel was followed by many international developments that proved harmful to India-Israel rapprochement. Pakistan launched a new political offensive against India. It joined military pacts sponsored by the West, hoping to gain its support over the Kashmir dispute and also sought such support in Moslem states. This state of affairs further prevented Nehru from extending a friendly hand towards Israel æthe archenemy of many Arab states, including Egypt, which played a major role in foiling Pakistan's pan-Islamic propaganda.

Moreover, during this period, Israel virtually abandoned the policy of non-alignment and began to lean towards the West. This was revealed by its behavior during the Korean crisis (1950-53) and later by its attempts to buy Western arms.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Nehru's admiration for socialism, some changes in Middle East regimes and the Western military's aid to Pakistan, caused India to sympathize with the Soviet bloc. Resultantly, as soon as the early 1950s, the basic foreign policy interests of India and Israel began to move in opposite directions.

The Bandung Conference

At the Bogor meeting, Nehru was in favor of Israel's participation as an Asian country in the Bandung Conference of Asian and African states in 1955. Thereupon, Pakistan launched a diplomatic attack against India, claiming that India was favoring the Zionist state. The Arab states threatened to boycott the conference on this issue.⁴⁶ In this situation, India again succumbed to Arab and Pakistani pressure and Israel was excluded from the Bandung Conference. G. H. Jansen cited this event as follows,

Mr. Nehru agreed that Israel ought perhaps to be invited, but pointed out that if she were present, the Arab states would stay away which would mean that almost the whole of West Asia would be absent. The conference would therefore become so unbalanced that India would have to reconsider whether her own attendance would be worthwhile.⁴⁷

Nehru admitted that it was illogical⁴⁸ not to invite Israel to the conference and took a moderate stand on the resolutions against Israel. Nevertheless, this conference further demonstrated the importance India had attached to its relations with the Arab world.

The early 1950s, thus, proved crucial in the history of India-Israel relations. The initial affinity between the two countries could not be positively utilized. India, perceiving that its national interests clashed with Israel, delayed the normalization of diplomatic relations. But, the longer India delayed normalizing relations with Israel, the more difficult it became to do so without giving the impression of offending the domestic Moslems and the Arab states.⁴⁹ Later, Nehru himself admitted that diplomatic ties should have been established soon after recognition,⁵⁰ a view also shared by his Defense Minister, Krishna Menon.⁵¹ Thus, a historical opportunity was missed.

The Warm Undercurrents

In January, 1953, Israel provisionally opened a consular office in Bombay, where the majority of India's small Jewish community, called 'Bene Israel,' lived, though no Indian consulate was opened in Tel Aviv. This arrangement was justified as a way of helping Bene Israels' immigration to Israel. The presence of the Israeli Consul in Bombay evoked no hostility. It played an important, though low key, role in building up India-Israel friendship at the non-official level. As previously mentioned, there was already some sympathy for Israel in India, especially among rightwing intellectuals and leaders. Thus, despite the lack of normal diplomatic relations between the two countries, good ties were established between individuals, organizations and institutions at the non-official level. Many Indian delegations visited Israel, while Israeli delegations visited India. The visits of S. K. Patil and Moshe Sharett⁵² were at the highest level. Some visits by journalists, student exchanges, cooperative art exhibitions and other cultural activities also took place.

The *Jana Sangha*, a rightwing Hindu nationalist party suspicious of Moslems and Arabs, saw in their adversary, Israel, a potential ally of India. The rightist *Swatantra* party was also persistently critical of India's West Asia policy because it gave too little weight to the claims of pro-Western Israel against the left-leaning Arabs. Close ties were instituted between the Indian Socialist party and the ruling *Mapai* party of Israel. Links were also created between the cooperative and trade union movements of the two countries. The *Histadrut* (Israel's General Federation of Labor) cooperated closely with the

Indian National Trade Union Federation in the late 1950s.⁵³ However, Yigal Allon's efforts to establish ties between the *Ahdut Ha 'avoda* faction and the ruling Congress party of India proved futile.

These contacts may seem important, especially, in the absence of normal diplomatic ties, but they failed to create a political constituency for Israel in India. Nehru was able to convince the Indian public opinion that his West Asia policy was serving India's interests the best possible way. Nehru's strong hold on foreign affairs and the Congress party's dominant position in the Indian parliament made his job easier.

THE WATERSHED

The Nehru-Nasser Friendship

The growing friendship between India and Egypt influenced India-Israel relations negatively. Nehru and Nasser held similar views on many issues. Both were particularly critical of military pacts in southern and southwestern Asia. The Baghdad Pact of 1955 (later CENTO) proved a catalyst for strengthening Indian and Egyptian perceptions of common political and strategic interests. Nehru found Nasser a progressive and secular Arab leader who had suppressed the Moslem Brotherhood movement and was interested in espousing the doctrine of non-alignment. This convergence of interests increased the cooperation between the two countries, which culminated in the Treaty of Friendship signed in April, 1955. Nasser's fierce hostility towards Israel also dissuaded Nehru from making any conciliatory move towards Israel. Commenting on this, one Indian author described the history of India-Israel relations during this period as the history of India-Egypt relations and of the relationship between Pakistan and the USA.⁵⁴

The Sinai Crisis

Soon after the signing of the India-Egypt Friendship Treaty, the Suez Canal crisis erupted and put the treaty to a test. As a major user of the canal, India had a big stake in the developments taking place in the region.⁵⁵ It tried to avert the crisis by mediating over the Suez canal control issue. Nehru and Krishna Menon were successful in persuading Nasser to adopt a less aggressive posture toward Britain.⁵⁶ But when Israel started a 'preventive war' on October 29, 1956, an action followed by a joint Anglo-French attack, India explicitly took the side of Egypt.

Nehru termed this as a 'clear naked aggression' and regarded Israel as a source of trouble in the heart of the Arab world.⁵⁷ Israel's collaboration with the colonial powers against a country of the newly emerging Afro-Asian bloc was unacceptable to Nehru. India cosponsored the UN resolution denouncing the tripartite attack on Egypt, urged an unconditional withdrawal of the British, French and Israeli troops from the Sinai, and deplored Israel's non-compliance

throughout the crisis. However, despite his vehement condemnation of Israel, Nehru turned down Nasser's request for arms.⁵⁸ Few would disagree with Krishna Menon's view that the Sinai war was a watershed in India-Israel relations.⁵⁹ After this war, the Indian attitude towards Israel began hardening and the possibilities of normalizing bilateral relations dimmed.

Israel also realized the difficulties of getting acceptance on the Asian continent. By the late 1950s, Israel had overcome the 'psychological barriers' to its existence: international recognition and legitimacy. Therefore, the country decided to concentrate its diplomatic efforts on its fundamental needs, namely immigrants, arms and money. Clearly, Asia did not fit into this framework of Israeli priorities. At this time, the process of decolonization in Africa had started and Golda Meir, the new Foreign Minister known for her interest in Africa, favored cultivating friendly relations with the newly independent African states.⁶⁰ This resulted in Israel's more or less dropping Asia from its foreign policy priorities.

Arabs Fail to Reciprocate

Nehru's foreign policy, based on the concept of *Panchseela* suffered a big jolt when China attacked an unprepared India in 1962. At this time of national crisis, India appealed for help from all countries, including Israel. Sharing India's concern and finding a fresh opportunity to reopen a friendly dialogue, Israel supplied some arms to India.⁶¹ On the other hand, the cold attitude of supposedly friendly Arab states disappointed India. Nasser's neutrality during the war certainly fell short of the spirit of the India-Egypt Friendship Treaty. Yet again, during the India-Pakistan war of 1965, the general Arab attitude was pro-Pakistan, whereas Israel provided some military help to India.⁶²

Nevertheless, India still regarded Nasser as a valuable Arab leader who could help the newborn Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) and thwart Pakistan's pan-Islamic designs, the two fundamental concerns of Indian foreign policy. This assessment of Delhi once again allowed the Arab factor to torpedo the chances of a new beginning in India-Israel relations. During all these years, despite frozen official relations between the two states, gracious non-official contacts persisted. But, as in the past, such positive manifestations were sidelined by India's political constraints.

During Indira Gandhi's prime ministerial term, India's official attitude towards Israel became openly antagonistic. She reaffirmed Indian support for the Arab cause, expressing concern over the plight of the Palestinian refugees and demanding their right to return to their homeland. In 1966, India's alleged diplomatic discourtesy to Israeli President Zalman Shazar during his inevitable stopover in India while on an official visit to Nepal, was another illustration of Indian eagerness to please the Arabs.⁶³

India and the Six-Day War

The Six-Day Arab-Israeli war further undermined India-Israel relations. The Indian Government had taken a pro-Arab stand even before hostilities broke out on June 6, 1967. This generated a lot of criticism in India. The opposition leaders urged Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to be as judicious and cautious in maintaining neutrality as Nasser was during the China-India and India-Pakistan wars.⁶⁴ But the Government continued to express unqualified support for the Arab position and, at Nasser's request, withdrew the Indian contingent to the United Nations Emergency Force. After the war broke out, India left no stone unturned in condemning Israel. It blamed Israel for the killing of the Indian soldiers during the crisis. Later, it was revealed that Arabs were more responsible for their deaths than Israel is (Israelis).⁶⁵

The Rabat Conference, 1969

In 1969, the burning of the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, the third-holiest Moslem shrine, by an insane Australian Christian, was termed by India a "direct consequence of the illegal occupation of Jerusalem and other Arab territories by Israel." Sharing Arab concern on this issue, India tried to participate in the Rabat Conference of Islamic countries, but Delhi's viewpoint turned out to be a fiasco and a big embarrassment. Not only was the Indian delegation denied participation, but the conference also condemned India for the Hindu-Moslem riots on its territory.

The India-Pakistan War, 1971

The war between India and Pakistan in 1971 provided another opportunity to test Arab goodwill towards India and evaluate Delhi's West Asia policy. The Arab states were indifferent to India's appraisal of the situation in the East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), whereas Israel showed concern over the genocide committed there by the military junta from West Pakistan. After the war broke out in December, 1971, Egypt, Syria and Algeria remained neutral, while Kuwait, Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Saudi Arabia condemned India. Jordan and Saudi Arabia even provided some military help to Pakistan during the war. Israel, once again, supplied India some military hardware,⁶⁶ and was one of the first countries to recognize the new state of Bangladesh. The war strengthened the feeling that India's West Asia policy had failed to win her support from the Arab nations, who would side with fellow Moslem countries in any serious crisis. For the first time, India formally expressed its disappointment in the Arab attitude.

The Lack of Consensus over Israel Policy: 1962-73

As already mentioned, there was some opposition to the official Israel policy from the very beginning. During Nehru's ascendancy, this opposition kept a low profile since there was broad consensus that India had much at

stake in the Arab world. Nehru's stature as a world statesman also tended to leave dissident voices virtually unheard. Moreover, Nehru, except in 1956, avoided a rigidly harsh position against Israel.

After Nehru, Indira Gandhi took a strong stand favoring the Arabs without being able to obtain reciprocity from them. This lack of reciprocity was particularly vexing during India's wars with China and Pakistan. The record of Arab support during the Kashmir dispute was also disappointing from the India's viewpoint. Consequently, resentment against the official policy towards Israel was increasing in public as well as in the press.

Soon after the 1962 war with China, some intellectuals and leaders urged the government of India to rethink its West Asia policy and argued that India could support the Arabs without being unfriendly to Israel. The gap between the official position and public opinion surfaced during the Six-Day War of 1967 as the government's stand was widely questioned in the press. After the Rabat fiasco of 1969, opposition to the Israel policy became even more vocal.

The Government of India responded by recalling its senior envoys from Morocco and Jordan, and hinted at its willingness to review its West Asia policy. Pro-Israel parties, pressure groups and individual leaders argued that India was not acting as a regional power in West Asia by allowing its relations with Israel to be influenced by third parties. They also asked why Moslem states like Iran and Turkey could have normal relations with Israel without severing their ties with the Arab world, while India could not.

Some leaders held the view that, due to not having normal relations with Israel, India had failed to understand the complexity of the Arab-Israel dispute. Information which came only from Arab sources did not give India an objective picture of the region. Some also contended that establishing ties with Israel, or at least showing an inclination to do so, would give India some leverage in dealing with the Arab states. For many others, the possibilities of trade and exchanges in industrial and technological fields were sufficient reasons for normalizing relations with Israel.

Notwithstanding the criticism, Delhi remained reluctant to change its West Asia policy. The Government still believed that its pro-Arab policy best served national interests in the region. Delhi maintained that, though the Arab states supported Pakistan during the India-Pakistan wars, they were not necessarily anti-Indian. It tried to differentiate between India's Arab policy and its policies towards individual Arab states. The Arab policy was regarded as successful in maintaining India's status as a leader of the NAM and in meeting the aspirations of Indian Moslems.⁶⁷ The political and economic clout of more than 150 million Arabs, as compared to three million Israeli Jews, impelled India to continue a policy based on "hope for future support" instead of considering its past failures to obtain Arab reciprocity.⁶⁸

In the 1970s, pro-Israel voices in Indian political circles were muted again. The 1969 split in the Congress party removed most of the foreign

policy dissidents from the government, giving Indira Gandhi a freer hand to follow her pro-Arab policies. The decisive military victory over Pakistan in 1971, followed by a massive success in the parliamentary elections, strengthened her position and thus reduced criticism of her policies in the Parliament. Against this background, it was no surprise when India took the Arab side during the 1973 Yom Kippur war, though this time it was clear that Egypt and Syria had initiated the conflict. The Indian position was also influenced by the Soviet Union's hostility to Israel during this war.⁶⁹

Economic Diplomacy (Dependency)

Though the Indian Government never openly admitted that its Arab policy had failed to meet political and diplomatic expectations, there were some undercurrents of realization of this failure among foreign policy makers. Efforts were made to give a new direction to West Asia policy by reducing its dependence on Egypt. Steps were taken to cultivate friendship with states such as Algeria, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, etc. New areas of immediate importance were also identified in the Persian gulf and India began to pursue vigorous economic diplomacy.⁷⁰ This proved successful as India signed many favorable economic agreements with Iran, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other countries in the region. However, the nature of the trade-oil from West Asia in return for Indian manufactured goods left Delhi in a vulnerable position since the Arabs could purchase manufactured goods elsewhere, while India had few alternative energy sources.

These economic deals were more or less based on mutual bargaining and equal partnership. But the oil crisis of 1973 forced India to compromise the freedom of this economic cooperation. The astronomical rise in oil prices affected the Indian economy severely. The relatively small help provided by some oil and petroleum exporting countries during this crisis was considered a big gesture by the Arab lobby in Delhi.⁷¹ The threat of an oil embargo and the remittances and the welfare of more than a million Indians in the Arab states further pushed Delhi to demonstrate its support to the Arab world.

Consequently, India fell back upon its traditional policy of support for Arab nationalism, Arab unity, and the Palestinian cause. Reiterating its opposition to Israel's acquisition of Palestinian territory by force, it explicitly linked the normalization of relations with Israel's compliance with UN resolutions 242 and 338. It permitted the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to open a Delhi office, which later was upgraded to full diplomatic status. On the other hand, Israel's mission in Bombay was restricted to the consular level. India also labeled Israel a 'black sheep' like South Africa by cosponsoring the General Assembly resolution 3379 in November, 1975, "equating Zionism with racism."

False Hopes: The Janata Party Government

Israel showed an exceptionally high degree of forbearance in dealing with India, always trying to win India's friendship, despite Delhi's cold and sometimes unfriendly attitude. Jerusalem believed that India had exaggerated concerns over the issue of normal diplomatic relations with Israel and, therefore, never abandoned the hope that two countries' interests would converge in the long-term. Israeli diplomats were even instructed to avoid confrontations with the Indian delegations at the United Nations.⁷² Israel waited for the right time to turn the potential of close relations into a reality. The long-awaited opportunity arrived in 1977, when for the first time the Janata party displaced the pro-Arab Congress party from power in Delhi.

Israel's hopes seemed likely to be realized when Morarji Desai and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who had generally favored full diplomatic relations with Israel, became the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of India, respectively. But to Israel's frustration, the new government in Delhi declared it would continue the traditional West Asia policy. Paradoxically, it went even further than the Congress party when it not only made normal relations with Israel conditional upon peace with the Palestinians, but also stated that a separate 'Palestinian homeland' would be essential for peace in the region.⁷³ Moshe Dayan's "incognito visit" to Delhi in 1977, therefore, could yield nothing concrete as regarded the normalization of relations.

Notwithstanding these unfavorable policy pronouncements, the Janata Government made its official stand towards Israel somewhat milder. India's initial reaction to the Camp David accords was closer to the Israeli side: "Boundaries between states should be settled through negotiations and not by force and all the states in the region, including Israel, should have the right to exist in peace with secure boundaries."⁷⁴ But when the other Arab states rejected the accords and Egypt was excommunicated from the Arab world, the Janata Government backtracked from its support of the agreement. In any case, before the Janata Government could have taken any significant step towards the normalization of relations, it collapsed. The Congress party, led by Indira Gandhi, returned to power with a massive majority in Parliament, immediately accusing its predecessor of tarnishing India's image in the Arab world. India-Israel relations were in the freezer again.

The 1980s: A Decade of Mixed Trends

Indira Gandhi hardened her attitude towards Israel. In her speeches and interviews, she openly called Israel an 'expansionist state.' Israel's destruction of Iraq's nuclear plant at Ossirac 1981 and the war in Lebanon (1982) strengthened her perception. The Indian government imposed many restrictions on the activities of the Israeli Consulate in Bombay. When the Israeli Consul criticized India's West Asia policy, the government reacted in an unprecedented manner and for the first time in Indian diplomatic history, declared a foreign

diplomat *persona non grata*.⁷⁵ Israeli sportsmen were not allowed to participate in the 1982 Ninth Asian Games held in New Delhi. During the seventh NAM summit (1983) in Delhi, India took every opportunity to condemn Israel and repeated the demand of self-determination for the Palestinians. Private visits and other non-official contacts with Israel were made even more difficult.

Rajiv Gandhi: Half-Hearted Steps

Things began to change slowly when Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister of India. Unlike his mother, he was free from any ideological mindset. He gradually shifted from the socialist path and showed interest in the Western world. He was more open towards Israel than his predecessors. The Jewish lobby in the USA became active and raised the issue of normalizing the relations with Israel at every possible juncture. Dehli very much appreciated successful lobbying by the America-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in the US Congress to stop the delivery of Airborne Early Warning Systems (AWACS) aircraft to Pakistan. India reciprocated in the political sphere by allowing a Vice-Consul to work again in Bombay and then upgrading the mission to Consul level in 1989. The Israeli tennis team was also permitted to play the Davis Cup tie in India. Visa regulations were made less stringent.

During Rajiv Gandhi's period, Israel approached India on the issue of destroying the Pakistani nuclear plant at Kahuta. It was reported that Israel also offered to sign secret agreements covering the sale of Israeli arms and electronic warfare equipment, as well as cooperation in military intelligence and anti-terrorist operations.⁷⁶ India discussed all these issues but finally decided to reject Israel's ideas and offers. During these contacts, experts from both countries discovered many common strategic interests, but could not see eye to eye on how to advance them.

The few positive steps towards normalization of relations taken by Rajiv's government were outweighed by many counter developments. The beginning of the *Intifada*⁷⁷ in 1987 shifted the focus to Israeli occupied territories. Opinion in the Western world began to favor the Palestinians. In this situation, an Indian rapprochement with Israel seemed very difficult. Dehli was irritated by the Israeli Ambassador's statement to the United Nations that the Israeli government dealt better with the *Intifada* than the Indian government dealt with the Sikhs when it crushed the Separatist movement. Nor did India approve of Israel's involvement in the Sri Lankan ethnic crisis. Similarly, India resented Israel's immediate recognition of Rabuka's regime in Fiji, since Rabuka had overthrown a democratically elected government and made discriminatory laws against the Indian majority on the island.⁷⁸

During the late 1980s, the popularity of Rajiv's government plunged, after it was found involved to be in the multi-billion dollar Bofor guns bribery scandal. In these circumstances, any positive step towards Israel were seen as carrying a needless risk of annoying the traditional Moslem voting bloc in

Congress. Just before the parliamentary elections of 1989, the Rajiv government conferred the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding on Yasser Arafat. India even reversed its sports policy and refused to play its 1988 Davis Cup tie against Israel in Ramat Gan. When the PLO declared the 'State of Palestine' on November 5, 1988 in Algiers, India was one of the first countries to recognize it.

The Policy Changes

With the change in the international balance of power after the Gulf War of 1991 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India and Israel finally found an opportunity to normalize their relations. By allowing Allied aircraft access to refueling facilities during the Gulf War, India had signaled a readiness to re-examine its West Asia policy. This was motivated by Delhi's perception of new priorities in India's national interests dictated by rapidly changing international realities.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union, India's long standing ally and biggest supplier of arms, was a major blow to Delhi. All of sudden, in a very unstable world, its superpower umbrella had disappeared. The Gulf War had previously demonstrated the superiority of Western arms over Soviet arms. There were flutters in the Indian defense establishment, because India's weapons and warfare tactics were based on the Soviet pattern, while Pakistan's were based on the Western pattern. India felt the urgent need to upgrade its armed forces along Western lines.

In 1991, India also introduced structural changes in its economy and desperately looked for Western investment to make these changes succeed. Simultaneously, the Indian government was facing much criticism from the West for violating human and patent rights, and for continuing its missile and nuclear development programs. Economic aid and loans to India were often conditional on concessions on these issues.

As a result, Delhi began to identify Indian interests with the West and especially with the USA. The role of the US Jewish lobby in stopping AWACS sales to Pakistan and garnering support for India on Kashmir during the early 1990s was not only appreciated in Delhi, but it also apprised Indian leaders of Jewish clout in the USA.

The end of the cold war also largely eroded the political and ideological relevance of NAM. The depressed oil prices in the early 1990s reduced India's oil dependence on the Arab states. The passage of a pro-Pakistan resolution on Kashmir by the Islamic Conference (OIC) also encouraged India to re-evaluate its West Asia policy. After the Madrid Peace Conference of October, 1991, the argument that India should avoid the Arab states considered friendly and the Moslems at home became irrelevant since the Arabs, including the PLO, were themselves negotiating peace with Israel. On the other hand, Israel, finding itself dictating the terms for the first time, any Indian participation in the

Middle East Peace Process made upon the normalization of relations between the two countries.

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism worsened the domestic and regional security environment of India, which saw a common cause with Israel in this regard. The killing of one Israeli tourist and the abduction of others in Kashmir presented a rare and useful opportunity for Indian and Israeli officials to work together. The interaction between them helped build confidence and created a perception of mutual importance in the changed international scene.

After the Gulf War, public opinion in India once again demanded a fair attitude towards Israel. After much deliberation, the first concrete step in this direction came when India voted to rescind the 1975 UN resolution "equating Zionism with racism." This policy reversal raised little controversy in India and there were no strong protests from Arabs. Most of the actual and perceived constraints behind India's policy of "no full diplomatic relations with Israel" had virtually lost their rationale. Even Moscow and Beijing housed Israeli embassies. India, finally, became the last major non-Moslem country to follow suit on January 29, 1992.

The Reactions

The Government of Narsimbha Rao took this historic decision with a paper-thin parliamentary majority, justifying it with the argument that it would give India a role in the ongoing Madrid peace talks. The Prime Minister said in Parliament,

On external affairs, one point that has been raised is about the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel. We were in touch with all concerned interests, our friends, and we came to the conclusion that it is better for India not to get isolated in the peace process of the Middle East... The dividends of this decision are not merely to India but to the entire Middle East Peace Process where we have always been playing the role of a champion of rights... It is our duty to enter this arena at a time when a conciliatory role by India is of essence. And that is why we have taken this decision.⁷⁹

The pro-Israel *Bhartiya Janata Party* (a successor of *Jana Sangha*) welcomed the decision, but found itself in an awkward position since the Congress party had hijacked its agenda. The *Janata Dal*, a centrist party depending on low caste and Moslem support, expressed some mild criticism. The communist parties reacted in a confused manner. Some of the Moslem leaders flayed the move as ill timed and hasty, arguing that it should have been preceded by the PLO's recognition of Israel.⁸⁰ The Indian press, with a few exceptions, welcomed it. The Arab reaction was muted, calling it "neither unexpected nor dramatic."⁸¹ The decision to upgrade ties was hailed in Israeli and American circles.

RELATIONS AFTER THE NORMALIZATION

Once the ice was broken with the establishment of normal diplomatic ties on January 29, 1992, India and Israel rapidly developed close and friendly relations. Israeli diplomats were surprised to find a lot of curiosity and warmth for their country among Indians. The existence of such a favorable foundation made their job easier as they worked to accelerate the process of building stronger ties between the two countries.

Keeping a low profile for about a year, both countries worked hard to strengthen the institutional mechanisms of a closer relationship. It is significant that in five years the two countries covered the vast institutional gamut of bilateral relations, a process that normally takes a decade or more. Since then, India and Israel have cooperated closely in a large number of areas of mutual interests.

Cultural Interaction and Economic Cooperation

Realizing the limitations of immediate politico-strategic or security cooperation, India and Israel first emphasized economic and cultural relations. Besides being mutually beneficial, these helped in building confidence and bridging gaps on the political and strategic issues. Since the opening of the embassies in 1992, there seems to be a flood of cultural interaction between the two countries. Many exchanges of high level visits took place, including the high profile visits of Foreign Minister Shimon Peres (1993) and President Ezer Weizman (1997). From the Indian side, many ministers of the government of India and also many provincial-chief ministers visited Israel. With great fanfare, Israel celebrated "Shalom India" to mark the completion of five years of diplomatic relations and to commemorate India's fiftieth year of independence. India reciprocated by organizing many cultural events all over Israel to celebrate fifty years of Israeli independence.

Israelis are enthusiastic travelers and have been particularly fascinated by Indian culture and civilization. Since the signing of the agreement for cooperation in tourism during Shimon Peres' visit (1993), around 20,000 Israelis have visited India annually.⁸² The growing cooperation in cultural and educational exchange programs has provided a greater opportunity for the people of the two countries to know each other better.

In the arena of economic cooperation, India's main interests are in the field of agriculture, the transfer of technology, and the use of Israel as a possible platform for expanding its business with the European Union and the USA, since Israel has free trade agreements with them. Israel's main considerations are: the huge Indian market with more than 200 million middle class consumers, a link to the Far East, and arms sales. Today, a large number of Israeli-based multinational companies are collaborating with Indian companies in the fields of engineering, ground water management, desalination, agro-industries and prevention of desertification,

telecommunications, etc. Both countries have accorded "most favored nations" status to each other. The transportation links and financial infrastructure required for the expansion of bilateral trade have also been developed rapidly.

These efforts led to an uplift in thriving trade between the two countries. Within six years, it jumped to \$680 million (US) in 1998 from \$202 million (US) in 1992 amid continuous diversification.⁸³

Defense and Security: A Growing Partnership

A fundamental understanding of the long-run convergence of their defense and security interests led the two countries to maintain some secret military contacts, even when normal diplomatic relations were missing. Israel's impressive military successes against the Arabs were closely watched and quietly admired by the Indian military establishment. Israel's help in terms of arms and military hardware during India's military conflicts with China (1962) and Pakistan (1965 and 1971) had signaled the potential for military cooperation. Therefore, unsurprisingly, in the unstable post-cold war world, defense and security partnership is emerging as an important area in India-Israel relations.

Israel's highly developed, research-oriented industrial-military complex, which is currently undergoing a recession, can provide an answer to some of India's need to upgrade and modernize its existing weaponry and armed forces. More importantly, both countries are facing financial and technological problems with regard to vital defense projects⁸⁴ necessary to achieving the much-desired qualitative technological independence. These realities nurture the emergence of India-Israel defense and security partnerships through joint research and development efforts.⁸⁵ Realizing this imperative, today leading Israeli and Indian defense companies and research organizations are working jointly on many projects and constantly exploring new ones of mutual concerns.

Both, India and Israel are nuclear states—the former recently declared and the latter a clandestine one. The hostile security environments around both countries made a nuclear program strategically imperative for them, in terms of their national defense and security. Neither country signed the Non-Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and each has advanced arguments in defense of its position. With the demonstration of Pakistan's nuclear capability, Iran's ongoing nuclear program, India and Israel see imminent threats, so close collaboration in this area may emerge.⁸⁶ But because of international pressures, in all probabilities any such collaboration would be carried out in secret.

Unlike many other western countries, Israel did not condemn India's nuclear tests in May, 1998, and yielded only marginally to strong US pressures to curtail its defense ties with Delhi. Following a brief period of

cool defense ties, India and Israel have reinforced their military relations and expanded the channels of their strategic ties. At the height of Kargil crisis in Kashmir (May-June, 1999), Israel acceded to India's request to speed up the delivery of military equipment.⁸⁷ Defense sources in Tel Aviv estimate that the Indian defense market has the potential of additional deals worth \$2 billion (US).

As the official level, this defense and security partnership, is still kept at a low profile compared to the other areas. Because of some domestic pressures and international constraints, both countries are moving with a lot of caution and even secrecy, with a strong realization that their partnership would go a long way in serving their mutual security and commercial interests.

Politico-Strategic: Emerging Alliance

The growing military cooperation between Israel and India, especially under the nationalist *Bhartiya Janata* Party government, is causing increasing concern in the Arab-Islamic world. Pakistan is leaving no stone unturned to carry on its propaganda on the so-called India-Israel nexus against the Arab-Islamic world.⁸⁸ Recently, the Arab League underlined the need for an Arab confrontation of India-Israel cooperation, especially in the nuclear field, noting that it constituted a grave threat to Arab security.⁸⁹

The resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism and militancy concerns both India and Israel. The Jewish state considers its spread in North Africa, the Middle East and even Central Asia, a direct threat to its security. Delhi has also begun feeling the brunt of increased Islamic militancy as its internal and external security environment has deteriorated sharply in the last decade. The role of Pakistan and mercenaries funded by Moslem states in abetting terrorism in Kashmir, Punjab, and the northeast provinces has added to Delhi's apprehensions. The geo-political location of India and Israel also encourages strategic cooperation between them to fight against the increasing threat from the Islamic militancy.

Although officially India and Israel deny any cooperation in Kashmir, it is difficult to deny the speculations that both countries are sharing intelligence information related to militancy there. These exchanges of information are important given the fact that some terrorism originates from or is supported by the Arabs in the Middle East. Israel has been a constant supporter of India in its dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir. Israel's interest in watching the developments in Pakistan's vital nuclear installation at Kahuta provides another common string to India-Israel affinity. India has also shown interest in counter-terrorism and security techniques developed by Israel.

Israel, on the other hand, still considers good relations with India useful to further legitimizing its presence in Asia. It also expects India to play a larger role in the ongoing peace process, with a fresh direction in its West Asia policy. Israel hopes that increasing mutual understanding of the convergence of long-

term interests will one day wean India away from being a close ally of the Arabs. One can notice this change as India has moderated her position in the United Nations vis-à-vis Israel. Today, Delhi is becoming increasingly convinced that it is in its interest to have good relations with Israel.

Conclusions and Prospects

India's negative attitude towards the Zionist movement and Israel persisted for seven decades mainly because Indian leaders perceived a clash of national interests with Israel. During the first half of the twentieth century, Congress's opposition to religion-based partition and its anti-colonialist ideology created this perception.

In late the 1940s and early 1950s, Nehru was in a dilemma to create a balance between 'realpolitik' and 'idealism' in India's Israel policy. He remained indecisive and preferred an *ad hoc* incremental approach, weighing national interests with the recognition and establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel. Decisions with regard to Israel were also delayed because of the lack of vital security issues and the relative insignificance of Israel at that time.

India's interests are so deep and complex in this region that any conflict in the region puts India in a vulnerable position, and ultimately it has felt compelled to take sides with the Arabs on the basis of cost-benefit analysis. This nature of Indian Israel policy supports the Hobbesian proposition that national interests define international morality.

India-Israel relations, until 1992, can also be termed the victim of non-bilateral factors. Indian leaders followed an overtly cautious approach and allowed minority leaders and Arab states to influence their Israel policy for a long time. The perception that this served India's national interests was so strong that even the failure of the Arabs to support India during its wars with China and Pakistan and the pro-Israel Janata Government failed to cut much ice in Delhi. Whenever the chance of an India-Israel rapprochement appeared, other counter developments marred any such possibility. In short, it can be said that the post-World War II world order proved detrimental to India-Israel understanding.

The emergence of the new world order in the 1990s instilled new life in India-Israel relations. Israel showed remarkable patience in dealing with India's unfriendly attitude and its belief that Indian and Israeli long-term strategic interests converge finally paid off. This revitalized relationship is no longer seriously threatened by the issues that prevented friendship between India and Israel in the past, though these still haunt both Delhi and Jerusalem. The emerging India-Iranian friendship and Sino-Israeli cooperation could emerge as new hurdles.

The future of India and Israel as close strategic allies is tied up with regional security and the international environment. The rejuvenated peace process has eroded the importance of Arab pressures and the domestic Moslem

factor in India. On the issue of Kashmir, India is increasingly realizing that Arab support cannot be relied upon; instead, Israel's cooperation is more valuable to counter the rising waves of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. Non-alignment is no longer a serious agenda. However, the two countries still have to develop a common threat perception.

The friendship between India and Israel has gone beyond the institutional network and it is becoming stronger as their interaction multiplies. Today, relations between the two countries are prospering within this a favorable environment. Indo-Israel economic cooperation is proving mutually beneficial, a partnership in the defense and security spheres is developing, and politico-strategically both states are moving closer.

The progress in bilateral relations in the past eight years justifies the conviction on the both sides that their mutual strategic and commercial interests are growing. It is in this framework, that relations between India and Israel can be termed as having moved from conflict to convergence of interests.

NOTES

- 1 This was especially the case during the ideologically-divided era of the cold war. However, such a proposition started loosing its influence after the cold war was over, and the cultural and ethnic issues gained predominance. Samuel P. Huntington has elaborated this phenomenon very well in his book, *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996).
- 2 For details see Graham Allison, *The Essence of Decision* (Boston, 1971).
- 3 It is generally defined in terms of national interests as perceived by the rational actor. However, no attempt has been made to quantify the concept.
- 4 Not all Moslems were opposed to the Indian National Congress. Many prominent leaders of the Indian freedom movement were Moslems.
- 5 Khalid B. Sayeed, *Pakistan, the Formative Phase 1857-1947*, 2nd ed. (London, 1960), p. 13.
- 6 Leonard A. Gordon, "Indian Nationalist Ideas about Palestine and Israel," *Jewish Social Studies* Vol. XXXVI (Fall, 1975), pp. 221-34.
- 7 In India, the term West Asia is used for the Middle East.
- 8 "The Report of the Palestine Royal Commission, 1937," in *The Israel-Arab Reader*, edited by Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin (New York, 1995), p. 48.
- 9 Anand Bazaar Patrika, Calcutta, 7 April 1937, *India-West Asia Relations: The Nehruvian Era*, by Najma Heptulla (New Delhi, 1991), p. 150.
- 10 Heptulla, *India-West Asia Relations*, p. 39.
- 11 Under the League of Nation's mandate, fostering the development of the 'Jewish National Home' in Palestine was the legal responsibility of Britain, then the world's leading colonial power. In Palestine, the Jewish

- Agency depended on the goodwill of the mandatory (British) government on many crucial matters, such as immigration and the security of the *Yishuv*—the Jewish community living in Palestine. Furthermore, the Zionist leaders' activities to generate financial support and immigration were mainly concentrated in Western Europe and North America.
- ¹² "Harijan" 26 November, 1938, in *Gandhi, Satyagraha and the Jews: A Formative Factor in India's Policy Towards Israel*, by Gideon Shimoni (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 37-46.
- ¹³ Shimoni, *Ghandi, Satyagraha*.
- ¹⁴ The services of Sidney Silverman, the British Labor Member of Parliament and a strong advocate of Indian independence, Emmauel Celler, the Congressman who had campaigned for the Indian Citizenship Bill, Martin Buber, the great philosopher and writer, and even of Albert Einstein were utilized for this purpose.
- ¹⁵ Shimoni, pp. 37-46.
- ¹⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Glimpses of World History* (Delhi, 1982), pp. 262-3.
- ¹⁷ Heptulla, *India, West Asia*, n.10, p. 150.
- ¹⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru, "Statement to the Press," 26 September 1936 and "Speech at Allahbad," 27 September 1936; in *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography (1889-1947)* Vol. 1, by Sarvapalli Gopal (Harvard, 1976), pp. 232-3.
- ¹⁹ *Constituent Assembly Debates*, Vol. II, 12 April 1947 (1947), in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 2nd series, Vol. 4 (Delhi, 1986), pp. 594-603, 1259-65.
- ²⁰ Officially called the Hebrew University delegation.
- ²¹ S. H. Bergmann and Yaaqov Shimoni, "Report on the Inter-Asian Conference," in *Relations Between Israel and Asian and African States: A Guide to Selected Documentation*, no. 6, by Shimon Avimor (India, Jerusalem, 1991), pp. 64-77.
- ²² Other members were Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, Iran, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay and Yugoslavia.
- ²³ Indian leaders were consistent in this view throughout the freedom struggle. The bloody and painful partition strengthened this position of theirs. However, it is ironic that the Indian representative at the UNSCOP, Abdur Rehman himself, emigrated to Pakistan, a state created on the basis of religion.
- ²⁴ Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and India voted against the partition. The Nationalist China abstained and Thailand was absent.
- ²⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Independence and After*, Delhi, 1949, p. 202.
- ²⁶ For details see Yohanan Ramati and Dinesh Kumar, "The West's Dilemma: Democracy or a Pro-Moslem Policy: The Positive Implications of the Nuclear Tests in Indian and Pakistan," in *Bulletin of Jerusalem Institute for the Western Defence*, Vol. 11, no. 2, (Jerusalem, June, 1998), pp. 1-11.

- 27 "Constituent Assembly Debates," n.19.
- 28 "Eliahu Elath to Sharett," 14 October 1949, *Israel Documents*, Vol. 4 (London), pp. 547-8.
- 29 Avimor, *Relations*, from "The New York Times," 24 March 1950, pp. 64-77.
- 30 Murray Gordon, "Indian-Israeli Relations: Perspective and Promise," in *Midstream*, (November, 1974), pp. 13-36.
- 31 Gordon, "Indian-Israeli Relations."
- 32 Sudha Rao, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: The Indian View* (Delhi, 1972), p. 36.
- 33 . Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, p. 169
- 34 *Jawaharlal Nehru: Letters to Chief Ministers*, Vol. I, 1947-49, edited by G. Parthasarathi (Oxford, 1989), p. 275.
- 35 P. R. Kumaraswamy, "India's Recognition of Israel, September 1950," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 31, no. 1 (January, 1995), pp. 124-38.
- 36 Kumaraswamy, "India's Recognition of Israel."
- 37 Name of the building where the headquarters of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs is located.
- 38 Walter Eytan, *The First Ten Years: A Diplomatic History of Israel* (New York, 1958), pp. 181-6.
- 39 Maulana Azad's maternal family roots were in Saudi Arabia.
- 40 Michael Brecher, *The New States of Asia* (London, 1963), p. 130.
- 41 "Israel Documents," Sharett to Elath, 19 March 1950, Vol. 192, in *Moshe Sharett: Biography of a Political Moderate*, by Gabriel Sheffer (Oxford, 1996), p. 525.
- 42 Sheffer, *Moshe Sharett*, p. 555-6.
- 43 Brecher, *New States*, p. 130. Some senior Indian diplomats also confirmed that India had agreed to allow Israel to open its mission in Delhi, without India's doing so. But they failed to provide any supporting detail or document.
- 44 Gordon, *Indian-Israeli Relations*, p. 27.
- 45 Uri Bialer, *Between East and West: Israel's Foreign Policy Orientation 1948-1956* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 206-34.
- 46 Michael Brecher, *India and World Politics: Krishna Menon's View of the World* (New York, 1968), pp. 52, 79.
- 47 G. H. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment* (London, 1966), pp. 174-5.
- 48 M. J. Akbar, *Making of India* (London, 1988), p. 499.
- 49 Arthur G. Rubinoff, "Normalization of India-Israel Relations: Stillborn for Forty Years," *Asia Survey* Vol. XXXV, no. 5, pp. 487-505.
- 50 Gideon Rafael, *Destination Peace: Three Decades of Israeli Foreign Policy—A Personal Memoir* (London, 1981), p. 89.
- 51 Brecher, *India and World Politics*, p. 79.
- 52 Patil later became a minister in Nehru's cabinet. Sharett visited India in his individual capacity.

- ⁵³ The *Histadrut* sponsored many programs related to cooperative movements in India, especially the *Bhoodan* (land donation) movement.
- ⁵⁴ Sudha Rao, *Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 45.
- ⁵⁵ Seventy percent of Indian trade, at that time, was routed through the Suez Canal. The Arabian energy source (oil) was considered crucial to the success of the Second Five Year Plan.
- ⁵⁶ For details see Brecher, *India and World Politics*, pp. 62-76; and Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, pp. 280-5.
- ⁵⁷ Press Information Bureau, "Prime Minister on Suez Canal Issue," 16 November 1956, p. 310.
- ⁵⁸ Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, p. 283.
- ⁵⁹ Brecher, *India and World Politics*, pp. 62-76.
- ⁶⁰ Meron Medzini, "Reflections on Israel's Asian Policy," in *Israel in the Third World*, edited by Michael Curtis and Susan A. Gitelson (New Jersey, 1976), pp. 200-11.
- ⁶¹ Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (Bombay, 1970), p. 385.
- ⁶² Avimor, *Relations*, from "Asian Recorder," 18-23 December 1970, p. 9, 369.
- ⁶³ Personal interview with Reuven Dafni, the Israeli Consul in Bombay at that time.
- ⁶⁴ Arthur Rubinoff, *Normalization*, p. 496.
- ⁶⁵ Inderjit Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder: Withdrawal of the UNEF Leading to the Six Day War* (London, 1968), p. 151.
- ⁶⁶ Rubinoff, *Normalizations*, from *Lok Sabha Debates*, fifth series, Vol. 14, 25 April 1972, pp. 487-505.
- ⁶⁷ K. R. Singh, "India and WANA," in *India's Foreign Policy: Studies in Continuity and Change*, edited by Bimal Prasad (New Delhi, 1979), pp. 247-59.
- ⁶⁸ Rubinoff, *Normalization*, p. 496.
- ⁶⁹ Shri Ram Sharma, ed., *India's Foreign Policy Survey: 1973* (New Delhi, 1977), pp. 311-38.
- ⁷⁰ Singh, *India and WANA*, pp. 250-1.
- ⁷¹ This help was marginal compared to the help given to Pakistan by these countries.
- ⁷² Personal interview with the first Israeli Ambassador to India, Ephraim Doweik, (Jerusalem), 11 March 1998.
- ⁷³ ADL International Report, *India's Campaign Against Israel* (New York, 1977).
- ⁷⁴ "Ministry of Foreign Affairs Report," in unpublished dissertation of Kumaraswamy's, *India's Policy Towards Israel* (New Delhi, 1988), p. 166.
- ⁷⁵ *The Indian Express*, 30 June 1982.
- ⁷⁶ "Israel's Offer to India," *Foreign Report*, no. 156 (February, 1987), pp. 3-4.

- 77 The Palestinian uprising against Israeli rule in the West Bank and Gaza.
- 78 P. R. Kumaraswamy, "India and Israel: Prelude to Normalization," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. XXIV, no. 2 (Winter 1995), pp. 53-73.
- 79 "Excerpts from Reply to the Debate on the President's Address in Rajya Sabha," 10 March 1992; *P. V. Narsimha Rao: Selected Speeches*, Vol. I, June 1991-June, 1992 (New Delhi, January, 1993), pp. 122-3.
- 80 *The Statesman*, New Delhi, *The Indian Express* (New Delhi), 31 January 1992.
- 81 Personal interview with the PLO Ambassador Dr. Khalid El-Sheikh (New Delhi), 18 September 1998.
- 82 *India-Israel Functional Cooperation*, Study Paper (Embassy of India: Tel Aviv, 26 March 1998).
- 83 *The Statistical Abstract of Israel 1998* (Central Bureau of Statistics: Jerusalem).
- 84 For example Light Combat Aircraft, Main Battle Tank, Pilot-less Target Vehicle, and missile development programs.
- 85 Kumaraswamy, "India and Israel: Evolving Strategic Partnership," in *Security and Policy Studies* no. 40 (BESA, Bal-Ilan University, Tel Aviv: 1998).
- 86 *The Jerusalem Post* (Jerusalem), 24 May 1998.
- 87 *Ha'aretz* (English) (Tel Aviv), 2 September 1999.
- 88 Dr. Maqsudul Hasán Nuri, "The Indo-Israeli Nexus," *Regional Studies*, Vol. XII, no. 3 (Islamabad: Summer 1994), pp. 3-54.
- 89 *Al-Wafd* (Arabic) (Cairo), 25 August 1999, in FBIS-NES-1999-0835, 29 September 1999.

INDIA AND THE HOLOCAUST: PERCEPTIONS OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

P. R. Kumaraswamy

India was one of the few non-Arab and non-Muslim powers that was reluctant to normalize relations with Israel. After initial hesitations, it recognized the Jewish State in September, 1950, but it waited for more than four decades to establish diplomatic relations.¹ This approach was largely the continuation of the pre-1947 position of the Indian Nationalists. Their inability and even unwillingness to understand the Jewish problem and their unsympathetic attitudes towards the demand for a Jewish national home in Palestine come out distinctly in their attitude towards the Holocaust.

Ever since its formation in 1885, the Indian National Congress has been more than a political party; rather it was a nationalist movement fighting for India's freedom. As a result, the Congress Party influenced and molded the policies of free India when the Indian sub-continent was partitioned in 1947. Similarly their persecution and destruction at the hands of Nazi Germany marked the most crucial period of Jewish suffering and survival and played a vital role in the emergence of the Jewish State. How did the Congress Party react to such a colossal event which influenced international opinion in favor of a homeland for the Jews?

Asia in general was indifferent to the Jewish problem and the Jewish longing for Jerusalem. According to one school of thought, Asian apathy was due to the absence of the Judeo-Christian heritage.² The history of the Jewish people and their claims to the Holy Land were alien to the Asian masses as well as to their Western-educated leaders. Others, however, have attributed the Asian reluctance to endorse the Zionist enterprise in erstwhile Palestine to Asia's suspicion and disapproval of the goals and objectives of the Zionists.³

Neither of these arguments can be dismissed easily. The Judeo-Christian heritage significantly facilitated the formation of the Jewish state. The reasons for the support differed. For some Christians, it was the fulfillment of the Prophecy and for others it was an atonement for centuries of persecution of the 'chosen people.' This was also seen as an honorable solution to the age-old Jewish problem in non-European and non-Christian Palestine.

Likewise, Islamic countries and countries with large or sizable Muslim populations perceived Jewish claims to Palestine through an Islamic prism. While persecution of Jews was alien to Islamic civilization, the latter was also unfamiliar with the concept of equality. In the words of Bernard Lewis, "How could one accord the same treatment to those who follow the true faith and

those who willfully reject it?"⁴ As a result, countries with sizable Muslim populations opposed the 1947 UN Resolution calling for the partition of Palestine, and India was no exception.

India was largely indifferent towards the Jewish problem and was primarily concerned with the plight of the Arabs in mandated Palestine. Nationalist leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru had shown considerable understanding and sympathy towards the European treatment of the Jews. The former called them 'untouchables of the Christianity' and the latter described them as 'people without a home or nation.' However, due to a variety of reasons, developments and compulsions, the Indian nationalists did not support the demand for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Even though towards the end of his life, Mahatma Gandhi type spoke favorably of a Jewish homeland, this did not affect Indian thinking.⁵

On the specific question of the Holocaust, the Congress Party maintained an unusually subdued silence. It adopted no formal resolution either on the Jewish problem or on the Holocaust. Making a passing reference, the foreign policy resolution adopted in its 1939 annual session declared:

International morality has sunk so low in Central and South Western Europe that the World has witnessed with horror, the organized terrorism of the Nazi government against the people of the Jewish race... The Congress disassociates itself entirely from British policy which has consistently aided the Fascist powers and helped in the destruction of the democratic countries. The Congress is opposed to imperialism and fascism alike and is convinced that world peace and progress required the ending of both of these...⁶

Earlier the Congress Party mentioned 'the plight of Jews in Europe' for the first time in December, 1938. The Congress Working Committee (CWC) resolution on *Palestine*, declared *inter alia*: "While sympathizing with the plight of Jews in Europe and elsewhere, the Committee deplors that in Palestine the Jews have relied on British armed forces to advance their special claims and thus aligned themselves on the side of British Imperialism."⁷ The primary focus, thus, was on Jewish 'collaboration' with Imperialism and their 'persecution' in Europe. However it is essential to remember that both these resolutions were adopted well before the Nazi decision to annihilate Jews through mass murders and gas chambers.

The Jewish Refugees

Besides these two instances, Nehru, the chief architect of the foreign policy of the Congress Party, unsuccessfully attempted to declare the party's support for Jewish refugees. Keeping in view 'the terrible pogrom in Germany against the Jews,' Nehru sponsored a resolution in the CWC. Even though the exact date is not clear, this probably happened in December, 1938, at the

Wardha session in that took place shortly after Nehru returned from Europe. The draft resolution read:

The Committee sees no objection to the employment in India of such Jewish refugees as are experts and specialists and who can fit in with the new order in India and accept Indian standards.⁸

This move however was not accepted by the Congress Working Committee and especially by Congress President Subhas Chandra Bose and hence was rejected.

Nehru had just returned from an European tour. Besides this first hand experience in Europe, what motivated Nehru to seek such a resolution? In his letter to Congress President Bose, in April, 1939, Nehru remarked:

...I felt that we must express our opinion in regard to it (that is, pogrom). You (that is, Bose) say that you were 'astounded when I produced a resolution seeking to make India an asylum for the Jews.' I am surprised to learn that you felt so strongly about this as, so far as I remember, you did not express yourself definitely at the time. But is it fair to characterize my resolution as one seeking to establish an asylum for the Jews in India?... *It was not from the point of view of helping Jews that I considered this question, though such help was desirable where possible without detriment to our country, but from the point of view of helping ourselves by getting first-rate men of science, industry, etc., on very moderate payment.* Quite a number of countries sent special commissions to Vienna, after the Nazi occupation, to pick out good men. Turkey has profited greatly from such specialists. It seemed to me an ideal chance to get the right type of technicians and specialists. Their coming here on low salaries would have helped us also to bring down other salaries. They would have come for a period and not to settle down for ever. And only a limited number would have come, and only such as were of definite use to us and accepted our standards and political outlook.⁹

Nehru was candid.

Nehru was primarily motivated by the benefits that would accrue to India by the entry of Jewish refugees from Europe and humanitarian considerations were of secondary importance. It is however essential to remember that Nehru's views were not different from the prevailing international situation; nor was he alone.¹⁰ Nehru was not holding any public office when he advocated the absorption of the Jewish refugees. Even while fighting against foreign rule, he was merely seeking to promote India's interests through selective absorption.

Furthermore, during the war a number of refugees did come to India and Nehru pleaded for their accommodation in various provincial governments.

Some Indian leaders and future diplomats such as Shiva Rao and R. K. Nehru, were married to Jewish refugees from Europe.¹¹ More over, after the war, India served as a transit point for a number of Iraqi and Afghan Jews prior to their emigration to Israel. As Prime Minister, Nehru was more than accommodating and repeatedly extended their stay in India.¹²

Rationale

Given the magnitude of the human tragedy, the response of the Congress Party was mild and muted. A more general and common explanation could be that during World War II, normal functioning of the party was seriously hampered. Severe restrictions were imposed by the British and the war crippled its normal functions as most of the Congress leaders including Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru were incarcerated. For the first time since 1885, the Congress Party was prevented from conducting its annual election for party president and was unable to hold its annual session. As the entire leadership was in British prisons, party forums such as the Working Committee were unable to function.

This position continued through entire course of the World War and once the war ended the leaders were gradually released. But the Indian nationalists focused their attention towards the immediate domestic agenda. Pre-occupation with the impending partition of the sub-continent along communal lines prevented them from paying any attention to the outside world and the question of the Holocaust took a back seat.

The Holocaust undoubtedly accelerated the realization of Zionist political aspirations in Palestine and in certain ways it was instrumental in generating a favorable view towards the idea of a Jewish homeland. At the same time, however, there were skepticisms concerning this linkage and many, including the Indian nationalists, deliberately adopted a policy of delinking the Jewish annihilation in Europe and the fate of Palestine. For example, when the Special Session of the UN General Assembly met in April, 1947, to deliberate the future of Palestine, India vehemently opposed the proposed United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) visit to the Displaced Persons camps in Europe. Even the UNSCOP, of which India was a member, rejected such a linkage and the majority of the members recommended that "any solution for Palestine cannot be considered as a solution of the Jewish problem in general."¹³ While the majority of the members of the UNSCOP recommended the partition of Palestine into independent Arab and Jewish states, India, Iran and Yugoslavia proposed the creation of a federal Palestine with adequate autonomy for the Jews.¹⁴

However, these factors alone do not explain the position of the Congress Party. It is possible to offer a few reasons why the Congress Party, which had championed the cause of oppressed and subjugated people, was indifferent towards the Nazi gas chambers. This omission becomes more revealing if one

looks at the Congress position on the rights of the Arabs in Palestine; since early 1920 it had adopted as many as six resolutions on Palestine and expressed its sympathy and support.

First and foremost, there was no Jewish constituency in India that could lobby the Congress Party to adopt a more vocal stand vis-à-vis the Holocaust. On the contrary, the Muslims and Congress Party's arch rival, the Muslim League, actively lobbied for their co-religionists in Palestine. Unlike the Congress, the League was vociferous in its opposition to the Balfour Declaration and British policies towards Palestine. In its view Palestine was an Islamic land and hence could not be placed under non-Muslim control. The Jewish population in India has been microscopic and, due to historical and religious reasons, they faced no animosity in India. Unlike Christianity or Islam, Judaism is not a proselytizing religion and this facilitated Hinduism adopting a more favorable attitude towards the Jews. At the same time, however, centuries of tolerant atmosphere also eliminated the possibility of Zionism taking serious roots in India. Thus there was no political compulsion for the Congress Party to show any special attention towards the Jews.

In this context it is essential to remember that the mainstream leaders of the Zionist movement were not keen to cultivate India. Literature on contacts with India often refer to efforts made by the pre-state Israeli leaders in seeking India's support and understanding; attempts by Immanuel Olsvanger and Martin Buber figure prominently. Olsvanger went to India in 1936 as the first official emissary of the Jewish Agency and met a number of Indian leaders including Gandhi and Nehru.¹⁵ Likewise, in 1939 Martin Buber, together with Judah Magnes, wrote to Gandhi outlining the philosophical underpinnings of the Zionist movement and their explanations were later published as *Two Letters to Gandhi*. These letters are commonly understood and described as *Buber-Gandhi correspondence*. However there is no evidence to suggest that Gandhi had read Buber's letters, let alone replied to them,¹⁶ and hence the term *correspondence* appears inaccurate and misleading.

Important as they were, neither Olsvanger nor Buber can be treated as the principal figures in the Zionist movement. Nor were they towering personalities who can be compared to the influence and leadership that Gandhi or Nehru wielded in India. Their contacts with the Indian leaders were important primarily because of the absence of any other contacts. For its part the Zionist leadership was aware of its priorities. For example, speaking to the Zionist Executive on April 6, 1948, just weeks before the establishment of the State of Israel, David Ben-Gurion remarked: "When we say the whole world, it is an exaggeration; we never think of India or China or similar countries, but rather about the countries in which Jews have lived or are living."¹⁷ Until 1948 there were no personal contacts between the principal figures on either side and the contacts with Gandhi were minimal and occasional. Until 1956 when Moshe Sharett visited India, no leading

Zionist personalities had come to India and even Sharett was no longer in office when he met Prime Minister Nehru.

This indifference of the pre-state Israeli leaders contrasts with the position of the Arabs of Palestine. Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the Mufti of Jerusalem, began courting India's support for enlarging the Palestinian problem into an Islamic agenda in the early 1920s. British India had the largest Muslim population in the world and Palestine was a serious religious issue for the community. When the Congress Party was trying to forge Hindu-Muslim unity against the separatist slogans of the Muslim League, it could ill-afford to adopt a more pronounced stand on the Holocaust.

Two, Nehru, the architect of the Congress Party's foreign policy, looked at the prevailing international situation through his anti-colonial prism. Writing to Zionist Orientalist Immanuel Olsvanger in September, 1936, he remarked: "I cannot tolerate this imperialism in India or Palestine and the question I ask everyone is whether he stands for this imperialism or against it."¹⁸ Predisposed towards the Arabs, neither he nor the Congress Party considered Zionism a genuine national liberation struggle but saw it as a collaborator with British imperial designs in the Middle East and elsewhere. Even while seeking Gandhi's support, the Zionist leadership was unable or unwilling to reciprocate and endorse India's struggle against the British. As the Jewish nationalist movement, Zionism was unable to support and endorse India's struggle for freedom.¹⁹ Their association with and dependency on the British inhibited the Zionist leaders from identifying with the political objectives of the Congress Party, for such a move would have alienated them from the British. As a result while the Arabs and the Mufti were supporting India's freedom struggle, even the limited Zionist contacts with Gandhi were not accompanied by a reciprocal support for his struggle for freedom.

A third explanation could be found in the pro-Nazi influences of Subhas Chandra Bose, especially while he was Congress President during 1937-39. Commenting on his influences, Nehru remarked:

He (that is, Congress President Bose) did not approve of any step being taken by the Congress which was anti-Japanese or anti-German or anti-Italian. And yet such was the feeling in Congress and the country that he did not oppose this or many other manifestations of Congress sympathy for China and the victims of Fascist and Nazi aggression...²⁰

As discussed earlier, Nehru's resolution on the Jewish refugees was rejected by the CWC primarily due to the opposition from Bose. Quoting German sources in November, 1942, the *Jewish Advocate* (Bombay) charged that Bose had argued that "anti-Semitism must become a part of the Indian freedom movement since the Jews—he alleged—had helped the British to exploit and suppress the Indians."²¹ By that time Bose had broken off from the Congress but even after his departure, it appeared that he had a sizable

influence in the party. Rebellious against the pacifist policy advocated by the Congress Party reeling under the influence of Gandhi and Nehru, Bose sought to militarily overthrow British rule with the support of Germany and Japan. Since anti-Semitism was alien to Indian culture and history, irrespective of his motivation, Bose's alliance with Nazi Germany was a retrograde move and complicated things for the Congress Party.

And lastly, during the critical years of 1940 and 1946, the Congress Party was headed by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. He had strong Arab connections with his mother being the niece of Sheikh Muhammed Zahir Vatri of Saudi Arabia and himself being born in Mecca.²² After India's independence he was regarded as Nehru's adviser on Arab and Islamic affairs.²³ According to Michael Brecher, Azad had vetoed Nehru's proposal for the normalization of ties between India and Israel that was promised to Walter Eytan when the Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry visited New Delhi in early 1952.²⁴ Given his sympathy for the Arabs, it is extremely likely that under Azad's influence the Congress Party adopted a milder and indifferent posture vis-à-vis the Holocaust.

Conclusion

Even half a century later, the Holocaust plays a central part in Israel and haunts Jewish life both in Israel and in the Diaspora. The role and attitude of various countries, powers, groups and individuals towards this human suffering have repeatedly come under closer scrutiny and criticism. The passage of time has only intensified the interest. As India was a colony, the British represented and handled its international functions. This however did not prevent but rather facilitated the nationalist leadership's decision to adopt and articulate a position that registered India's opposition to Nazism and Fascism. At the same time, the Congress Party and its leaders, who for most of the war period were incarcerated by the British, adopted a somewhat indifferent and muted position towards the Holocaust.

Unlike the newly found champions of Jewish rights and Jewish defense against persecution, India has nothing to atone for. The Congress Party's position did not imply its endorsement or tacit compliance. It adopted a muted position partly due to the imprisonment of key leaders and partly due to its erstwhile position on the Arab-Jewish dispute over Palestine. The prolonged neglected and indifference of the Zionists further complicated the picture. After the war, when the magnitude of Jewish suffering began to unfold, the Congress Party was pre-occupied with the future of India and the impending partition of the sub-continent. It appeared content that India was neither a tacit accomplice to nor a beneficiary of the Jewish sufferings in Europe.

NOTES

- ¹ Among others see, P. R. Kumaraswamy, "India's recognition of Israel, September, 1950," *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 31, no. 1 (January, 1995), pp. 124-138; and "India and Israel: Prelude to Normalization," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 19, no. 2 (Winter 1996), pp. 53-73.
- ² Michael Brecher, *The New State of Asia: A Political Analysis* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968 reprint), pp. 125-127.
- ³ M. S. Agwani, "The Palestine Conflict in Asian Perspective," in *The Transformation of Palestine: Essays on the Origin and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, by Ibrahim Abu-Lughod (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971), p. 443.
- ⁴ Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987, paperback), p. 4.
- ⁵ P. R. Kumaraswamy, "Mahatma Gandhi and the Jewish National Home: An Assessment," *Asian and African Studies* (Haifa), Vol. 26, no. 1 (March, 1992), pp. 1-13. See also, Gideon Shimoni, *Gandhi, Satyagraha and the Jews: A Formative Factor in India's Policy Towards Israel* (Jerusalem: Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations, 1977); Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi and His Jewish Friends* (London: 1992); and Leonard A. Gordon, "Indian nationalist ideas about Palestine and Israel," *Jewish Social Studies* (New York), Vol. 37, nos. 3-4 (summer-fall 1975), pp. 221-234.
- ⁶ A. G. Zaidi and S. G. Zaidi, *The Encyclopedia of the Indian National Congress* (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1977ff), Vol. 12, p. 160.
- ⁷ Zaidi and Zaidi, *Encyclopedia*, Vol. 11, p. 497.
- ⁸ Quoted in Jawaharlal Nehru's letter to Subhas Chandra Bose, 3 April 1939, in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, First Series*, edited by S. Gopal (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1972ff), Vol. 9, p. 537.
- ⁹ Gopal, Emphasis added.
- ¹⁰ For instance, after the war US President Harry S. Truman urged the British to allow 100,000 Jewish refugees into Palestine and implement one of the recommendations of the Anglo-American commission. At the same time he was not willing to relax the immigration policies of the US.
- ¹¹ S. H. Bergmann and Ya'acov Shimoni, "Report on the Inter-Asian Conference," 17 April 1947, *Central Zionist Archives* (Jerusalem), S25/7485.
- ¹² It was in this context that Nehru allowed a Jewish Agency immigration office in Bombay shortly after India recognized Israel in September, 1950.
- ¹³ *United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, Report to the General Assembly* (New York: United Nations, 1947), Vol. 1, p. 46. Only Guatemala and Uruguay refused to endorse this recommendation.

- ¹⁴ During the UN General Assembly vote on the partition of Palestine on November 29, 1947, India joined the Arab and Islamic countries in opposition to the move.
- ¹⁵ For a detailed discussion see, Shimoni, *Gandhi, Satyagraha and the Jews*, pp. 28-31.
- ¹⁶ Shimoni, p. 47.
- ¹⁷ Quoted in Michael Brecher, *Israel, the Korean War and China: Images, Decisions and Consequences* (Jerusalem: Institute of Asian and African Studies, 1974), p. 39.
- ¹⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru to Immanuel Olsvanger, 25 September 1936, *Central Zionist Archives*, S25/3583.
- ¹⁹ While seeking the support of the Indian nationalists Olsvanger drew parallels with the Zionist and Indian struggles. Such comparisons were made only in India or conversations with the Indian leaders. Even in private individuals such as Olsvanger were unable to identify with India's struggle against the British.
- ²⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1985), p. 422. However one cannot underestimate or ignore the political rivalry between the two and the threat Bose posed to Nehru's future in a free India.
- ²¹ Report in the *Jewish Chronicle* (London) reproduced in *Jewish Advocate* (Bombay), Vol. 12, no. 3 (November, 1942), p. 22.
- ²² Rajmohan Gandhi, *Understanding the Muslim Mind* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1987), p. 219.
- ²³ M. S. Agwani, "Ingredients of India's Arab Policy," *Indian and Foreign Review*, (New Delhi), Vol. 10, no. 12 (April 1, 1973), p. 12.
- ²⁴ Michael Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography* (London: 1959), pp. 571-72.

BIBLIOGRAPHY ABOUT INDIAN JEWRY

PART II:

PUBLICATIONS FROM 1998

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About This Bibliographical Column

This bibliographical column constitutes part two of what we hope will be an ongoing effort to keep readers of this journal informed of some of the writings—both academic and popular works—that have appeared in recent years about the Jews and Jewish communities of India. It supplements the “Bibliography about Indian Jews, Part I: Publications from 1993 to 1997,” compiled and edited by Nathan Katz and Frank Joseph Shulman, that appeared in volume 2 (April, 1998) of the *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*, and the article by Nathan Katz entitled “An Annotated Bibliography About Indian Jewry (Revised)” that was published in early 1994 by Congregation Bina of New York City on behalf of an audience of both scholars and general readers.

The entries within the column are organized by community. First are general works on Indian Jewry, followed by sections on the Cochin Jews, the Bene Israel, the little-known Mughal Jews, the Baghdadi communities of Indian port cities, the Ashkenazim (many of whom—but not all—were refugees to India from Nazi-dominated Europe), and finally the mysterious tribal Jews. Excluded from this bibliography are items pertaining to Indo-Israeli diplomacy, except insofar as they bear on the religious and cultural life of Indian Jews.

While copies of some of the items in this bibliography are difficult to obtain, and newspaper articles may at times be even harder to locate, scholarly studies are generally accessible. As this column should always be regarded as a work in progress, readers are invited to communicate additional items, as well as corrections, to the compiler-editors.

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VII. TRIBAL JEWS

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FEATURE REVIEW ESSAY

BUDDHIST MEDITATION AND THE JEWISH QUEST FOR TRUTH

Alan Lew, with Sherril Jaffe, *One God Clapping: The Spiritual Path of a Zen Rabbi* (New York, Tokyo, London: Kodansha International, 1999), 315 pages.

Alan Lew's *One Hand Clapping* is the best book that I have read on the encounter between Judaism and Buddhism. Written with his wife, Sherril Jaffe, the book details his own very moving spiritual journey from his secular Jewish family in Brooklyn to his long commitment to Buddhism and finally to his becoming the rabbi of the largest Conservative congregation in San Francisco.

Written with honesty and clarity, this book deserves a great deal of attention by Jews who are open to the possibility that knowledge of Asian religious traditions may help them see their own tradition in a more profound way. What makes this a truly remarkable book is Lew's knowledge of both Buddhist and Jewish traditions. After ten years as a Buddhist who followed a rigorous discipline of daily meditation and twenty years of intense study of the Jewish tradition, including six years in the Rabbinical School at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Lew is one of the few Jewish writers on the Jewish-Buddhist encounter who has a good grasp of these two very different traditions and who understands the centrality of *halacha* for Judaism.

As we begin to read Lew's extraordinary story, we learn that even after he became a committed Buddhist he did not give up his belief in God: "I had no unfriendly feelings toward Judaism; I simply didn't see Judaism as a serious spiritual path, so I set out" (p. 303). Like other Jewish spiritual seekers in the 1960s and 1970s, Lew ended up practicing Zen Buddhism at the San Francisco Zen center and at the Berkeley zendo. The Buddhism that Lew practiced was Soto Zen Buddhism as taught by the disciples of Shunryu Suzuki-roshi, one of the most influential Buddhist teachers of his time. He founded the San Francisco Zen Center and the Zen Mountain Center at Tassajara soon after coming to America in 1958. Suzuki's book *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, remains one of the most widely read books on Buddhist meditation. Shunryu Suzuki-roshi places great stress on ritual forms rather than on beliefs or doctrines. For him, the path to peace and joy is through sitting meditation. He was interested in one's posture and breathing, not in one's religious tradition. In *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* he states:

I think some of you who practice *zazen* here may believe in some other religion, but I do not mind. Our practice has nothing to do with some particular religious belief. And for you, there is no need to hesitate to practice our way, because it has nothing to do

with Christianity or Shintoism or Hinduism. Our practice is for everyone.¹

Thus Lew did not experience real conflict between his practice of Buddhism with its stress on sitting and his belief in God, to whom Lew continued to pray throughout the years that he was a member of the Buddhist community. He explains:

My practice, Buddhism, was not a theistic religion. It was not God-centered, but it was not concerned with denying God's existence, either. For me, in fact, it always seemed to bring the sense of the sacred to the foreground. So even though I was a Buddhist, it was a natural thing for me to pray... (p. 98)

However, in his mid-thirties, when he was about to be ordained as a Zen priest, he realized that he would have to begin a new path because he could no longer say, "I take refuge in the Buddha."

Taking refuge in the Buddha is one of the three most precious things in Buddhism. The other two are the *Dharma* (the teaching of the Buddha) and the *Sangha* (the spiritual community). All Buddhists honor these three jewels of Buddhism. A person is very privileged to encounter these rare and precious gems. As a Buddhist, Lew had repeated this formula on numerous occasions. But ironically it was his strong Buddhist meditation practice itself which moved him to follow a new path. Lew explains:

Saying these words ["I take refuge in the Buddha"] as part of preparation for ordination as a Buddhist was suddenly very serious. I couldn't say that I took refuge in the Buddha anymore—I couldn't say it because I was a Jew.

The problem wasn't that I felt I was betraying God. In fact, when I was sitting in *zazen*, I often felt more in contact with God than I ever had before. But I felt I was betraying my soul. Mine was a Jewish soul. I was betraying myself.

Zen meditation, which focused on the present moment, had given me a wide, vibrant view of the world. It laid reality bare. It allowed me to overhear the constant arguments going on in my head. Now I heard something else, underneath, after all the veils were drawn back. I confronted my essence, and my essence was Jewish. (p. 120)

Coming out of the Soto Zen tradition, with its strong, rigorous discipline, Lew was very drawn to Orthodox Judaism. But ultimately he turned to Conservative Judaism because he could not accept the Orthodox understanding of Revelation. He writes that Orthodoxy,

...has frozen the classical evolutionary thrust of Judaism and left it completely unable to deal with new historical circumstances, such as the changing status of women and homosexuals. I don't believe we can go back without giving up more than we ought to

be willing to give up. Judaism owes Orthodoxy a substantial and largely unacknowledged debt, and given the current acrimony among the various Jewish denominations, it is not likely to be acknowledged any time soon. The simple truth, however, is that Orthodoxy sustained serious Jewish spirituality, albeit a particular version of it, when no one else on this planet showed the slightest interest in doing so. I feel enormous gratitude to the Orthodox movement for this and I wish them well. But their version cannot be my own. (p. 304)

As we can see, Lew shows great appreciation for Orthodox Judaism and, like many Orthodox Jews, takes *halacha* very seriously. Nevertheless, he disagrees profoundly with those Orthodox Jews, such as Rabbi Chaim Zvi Hollander, who argue that it is not permitted for Jews "to seek out and explore the spiritual modes of the *Goyim*, even if it is for the purpose of enhancing our own spiritual experiences in the service of our G-d."² Lew's own experience is that Buddhist mediation can deepen the Jews' understanding and appreciation of their own tradition. It was, after all, Buddhist meditation which led to his return to Judaism. He is convinced that Buddhist-style meditation will lead Jews to appreciate and practice their own tradition in a more disciplined way. With the help of meditation, Jews will be enabled to see more clearly the importance of *kashrut*, prayer and other Jewish rituals. In fact, they will begin to perceive more significance in all their daily actions.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, a major influence on many Conservative rabbis, claimed that "Judaism is the *theology of the common deed*."³ This, according to Lew, is precisely the idea which Jews must come to realize. He argues that it is not the mystical aspect of Judaism, but ordinary Judaism presented in a disciplined way, that will help Jews to see in the Jewish path of *halacha* the beauty and preciousness of everyday Judaism.

NOTES

- ¹ Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (New York: Weatherhill, 1970), p. 76.
- ² Chaim Zvi Hollander, "Beyond the Torah's Limits," in *Zen and Hasidism*, ed. Harold Heifetz (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1978), p. 139.
- ³ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1966), p. 102. Italics in the original.

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COMMUNICATIONS

THE DALAI LAMA IN HEBREW

by Bezalel Naor, OROT

Your readers may be interested to learn that the earliest reference to the Dalai Lama in Hebrew literature occurs in a fanciful biography of the pseudo-Messiah Shabbetai Zevi, *Sippur Halomot, Kez ha-Pela'ot* (Story of Dreams, Wondrous End), alternatively titled *Me'ora'ot ha-Zevi* (Events of Zevi), Lemberg, 1804. [Though according to Scholem, the title page gives a false date and the actual printing was about 1830. Ch. B. Friedberg, *Bet Éked Sefarim*, gives 1824 as the year of the Lemberg (Lvov) edition. Scholem informs us the true editioprinceps was brought out by Israel Jaffe, the famous hasidic printer, in Kopyst 1814. G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* (Princeton, 1973), pp. 757, n.190; 124, n.52.]

You may ask what the Dalai Lama has to do with the "Messiah of Izmir?" In a gloss to page 15 (the first, real page 15—due to mispagination there are two pages 15), the anonymous author advises his reader not to be amazed that a wondrous light emanated from Zevi's face, for such could be seen over the head of the "Lama," where it was produced by the adjuration of evil spirits!

The lengthy reference to the "Lama," "high priest over all the priests," "in the land of Tibet near East India, in its great city whose name is Barantola," is full of misinformation. It seems much of this misinformation was drawn from Bernard Picart's *The Ceremonies and Religious Customs of the Various Nations of the Known World* (London, 1741). See Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago, 1998), pp. 21-2. According to Lopez, Picart's source, in turn, was the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1667). Lopez, pp. 27, 222.

In the imagination of this writer of "creative history," the Dalai Lama became a *golem*, the Tibetan priests created from clay, "just like the *golem* our 'masters of names' (*ba'alei shemot*) produce from clay." Somehow, the author of *Me'ora'ot ha-Zevi* mixed-up two Tibetan concepts, *tulpa* and *tulku*. A *tulpa* is a phantom being voluntarily produced by powerful concentration of thought and the repetition of prescribed rites.

A *tulpa*, unlike a *tulku*, which is the successive incarnation of a particular personality (such as the Dalai Lama), is a temporary phenomenon that is willfully created. It may take any form whatever but is most often in human shape. These *tulpas* coexist with their creator and can be seen

simultaneously with him. The *tulku*, on the contrary, does not coexist with his ancestor. Usually, the *tulpa* is sent to perform a definite mission. However, once the thought form is given sufficient life to pass as a real being, it may free itself from its originator's control. Folklore in Tibet and elsewhere tells tales of the created being turning on its magician-father and killing him, and we are reminded of the fictional Dr. Frankenstein and his monster (Barbara Foster and Michael Foster, *The Secret Lives of Alexandra David-Neel: A Biography of the Explorer of Tibet and Its Forbidden Practices* [Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1998], p. 154).

Sound familiar? By the way, in 1936, Alexandra David-Neel, spurred on by the legend of the *golem*, paid a pilgrimage to the synagogue of the sixteenth century mystic Rabbi Loew in Prague (Foster and Foster, p. 306).

Our teacher Rav Kook, of blessed memory, devoted much thought to the phenomenon of Buddhism, developing some original ideas in this regard. But that is another subject altogether, best left for a future communication.

Holocaust Refugees and the Maharaja of Jamnagar

by Shatrushalyasinji, H. H. the Jamsaheb of Nawanagar

Editor's Introduction

The story of Jewish refugees to India during the Holocaust is only beginning to be told. Whether from the recent edited academic work (Anil Bhatti and Johannes H. Voigt, eds., Jewish Exile in India 1933-1945, 1999), or from the fiction on Anita Desai (Baumgartner's Bombay, 1989), interest has been piqued about India's ambivalent response to Jewish suffering in Germany.

One little known refuge was provided by His Highness the Maharaja of Jamnagar, a port city in Gujarat in western India. Mr. J. M. Benjamin, a leading member of New Delhi's tiny Jewish community, wrote to the current Maharaja of Jamnagar, son of the savior of more than 1,000 Jewish children, seeking information and clarification. Mr. Benjamin passed the Maharaja's response on to Mr. Samuel Daniel of Congregation BINA in New York City, who in turn submitted it to our journal. This, then, is the first time that any information about this righteous act of heroism has appeared in print.

Mr. Benjamin wrote to Mr. Samuel M. Daniel of New York on April 21, 1999: "I am enclosing a copy of a letter received from the Maharaja of Jamnagar in reply to my request."

"Some one thousand two hundred children and women were saved by his father. The[ir] ship was not given permission to land at any British port nor at Bombay. This great humanitarian service of the late Maharaja has somehow remained shrouded in mystery: rather strange that it has not found a place in any archives of India nor Israel. You may remember one ship carrying men, women and children going to the Holy Land was sunk by British forces off the coast of Haifa!"

"You may request your friend [presumably the editor of this journal] who is doing research on this subject to give as much publicity as possible in the American media."

The Palace,
Jamnagar,
Gujarat,
India.

April 5, 1999.

To:

Mr. J. M. Benjamin,
A-7, Nirman Vihar,
NEW DELHI -110 092

Dear Mr. Benjamin,

The information you seek should be available at the Polish Embassy in New Delhi in view of the fact that the Vice President of Poland personally came to Jamnagar to express the Polish people's gratitude for the safe sanctuary afforded to some Polish women and children during World War II. However a brief history of that episode is as follows:

Some one thousand and two hundred children and approximately forty women had managed to escape from the advancing Nazi Armed Forces aboard a small ship, unfortunately they were unable to get permission to enter any British Port due to the very difficult situation prevailing there at that time. Their predicament became quite serious as a result of failure to find any refuge at all inspite of having sailed all the way around the African continent and they

were then finally anchored at Bombay Harbor where they were also confronted with refusal of landing permission, and now with the Captain of the ship refusing to sail on as there did not seem to be anywhere left to go.

It was at this juncture that during an Imperial War Council meeting in London during which my father, who was attending as one of its two Indian members, was approached by the then Prime Minister 'in exile' of Poland who was attending as a Special Invitee, with a request to persuade the Governor of Bombay to grant refuge to these hapless twelve hundred Polish children and forty women. This my father tried to do upon his return to India which journey he undertook flying through West and Central Africa.

It was when my father found himself confronted by an unmoveable Authority, in the Governor of Bombay, who pleaded his inability to concede to the Polish request unless he got clearance from The Home Office, London, that the invitation to the Polish children and women was extended to come to Jamnagar.

Jamnagar was the very first time that these unfortunate Polish children and women set foot on *Terra Firma* since they set sail from their homeland in the middle of a Nightmarish night. At Jamnagar, after badly needed medical treatment, they were first accommodated in a temporary camp 'under canvas,' and later relocated at Balachadi which is seventeem miles East of Jamnagar on the coast of the Gulf of India where a 'Polish Camp' had been quickly constructed as a sanctuary for these Polish visitors. This 'Polish Camp' which consisted of a Barrack-type accommodation and incorporated a School, dispensary and playgrounds is where my beloved Polish brothers and sisters spent the remaining period of World War II until they returned home in 1946.

An important aspect of this episode was that the expenses of maintaining these Polish children and women had essentially to be borne by my father personally and not by the Nawanagar State Exchequer. This was because, in our status in relation to the British Crown, if these Polish children and women became guests of the State of Nawanagar then giving them sanctuary on Indian Soil would have necessitated first obtaining clearance from the Home Office, London. Whereas if they were my father's personal guests then the Home Office at London or the Viceregal Administration at New Delhi had no jurisdiction or control over their arrival and presence in Jamnagar. In conclusion these lovely Polish children and their escorting women were never war-time refugees; they were ROYAL GUESTS OF THE THEN JAMSAHEB OF NAWANAGAR and were treated as such and not as refugees.

Yours truly,
SHATRUSHALYASINJI
Jamsaheb of Nawanagar

OBITUARIES

Bibhuti S. Yadav-In Memoriam (July 10, 1943-October 10, 1999)

The contribution that Bibhuti Singh Yadav made to Indo-Judaic studies was largely intangible. It lay in the remarkable attitude he had toward Judaism and in the intellectual ferment that attitude inspired in his Jewish students and friends. As an Indian philosopher inclined toward Buddhism, Yadav conveyed both a critical and an empathetic stance toward Judaism. I shall discuss this stance, as befits the subject matter, in a personal way.

My awareness of Bibhuti Yadav's openness toward Judaism stems from my earliest acquaintance with him, a Proseminar in Indian Thought at Temple University in 1976. In the course of that academic experience, Prof. Yadav and I had occasion to talk about Jewish topics, including the Jewish mystical tradition, kabbalah. I loaned him one of Gershom Scholem's classics, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, for he was, at the time, interested in the idea of the Torah as the incarnate name of God. I was moved by his interest in Jewish thought and gladly loaned him the book. (This was, I might add, the first of many Jewish books that I loaned to him over these intervening twenty-three years.) Some time later, I got the book back and quickly saw to my surprise and perplexity that he had completely filled it with Sanskrit marginalia. Key kabbalistic terms and concepts, as well as Scholem's scholarly analyses, had found their parallels in classical Sanskrit thought. My guess is that my well-worn pages of Scholem were literally the only site in the world in 1976 where a profound Indian-Jewish philosophical dialogue was in progress.

Those marginal notes captured what I took over the years to be Yadav's ambivalence toward Judaism. On the one hand, Bibhuti Yadav was genuinely interested in Jewish thought. He wanted to inform himself of trends in Jewish intellectual history and could often become quite excited by an idea that seemed to him original and powerful. On the other hand, he often conveyed the sense that all Jewish ideas had been thought before—by Hindus and Buddhists. He seemed to deny Judaism any uniqueness, any right to the integrity of its own expression. It was an oddly disconcerting experience for me to learn that a medieval Jewish theology of ritual that I was studying, to take an example, had, so to speak, been developed centuries before by Mimamsa thinkers. This attitude of "I've seen this all before" put a Jewish thinker in his place, for it is precisely the attitude of superiority and implicit condescension that Jews often display toward Christianity or Islam. It was

a sobering corrective and a tonic for intellectual humility. It also made me aware, as I'm sure it did for others committed to the cross-civilizational conversation aware, of how vast Indian thought is and of how pathetic and inadequate our semi-educated stereotypes of it are. I bristle with anger and shame when I hear Jewish theologians dismiss Hinduism as either a flagrant paganism or a cold metaphysical monism. I think that many of us who have "the marginal notes" have learned a crucial lesson and feel a strong obligation to teach it to our students and peers.

Bibhuti Yadav's knowledge of Judaism was never vast, but he did probe the essentials. I recall that once I was commiserating with him about a close relative who had abandoned her Judaism and had become involved in a cult-like, new religious movement. He started to speak about the Exodus as the basic trope of Jewish historical experience. The Jew must leave his or her place and wander into history, eventually to return to a place both new and old. This seemed to me a basic truth and a sterling insight about Judaism, if not about the human situation as such. And, at the end of the day, he was right. My relative "returned" to a richer Judaism than she had originally known. Her wandering in the wilderness of historical experience followed the archetypal pattern that he discerned for Judaism as a whole.

Bibhuti Yadav was inclined to view complex historical matters in a patterned way. In a manner somewhat reminiscent of the German idealists, whom he came to loathe, and their Jewish imitators, Bibhuti Yadav treated Judaism as a symbol, as an essential idea on the stage of history. He submerged its particularities into a pattern. The pattern that he found characteristic and of world historical significance was in Judaism's opposition to Christianity, that is, in Judaism's vigorous insistence on its own identity in the face of what he took to be a totalizing metaphysical ideology committed to the silencing of difference. He used to say that between Morocco on the Atlantic and Malaysia in the Pacific, only Israel and India expressed real difference. The threatening Other here is Islam, not Christianity, but the point is the same. He found a kinship between Hinduism and Judaism based on their historical stance of defiance. He also saw a deeper root to this kinship: both Judaism and Hinduism were exilic religions. (The Hindus were exiles in their own repeatedly colonized land, in his view.) Both of these exilic religions held their people together by a divine law. The divine law imparted not only a social-political identity, but a cosmological one as well. Yadav's appreciation of the parallels between Torah and its rabbinic jurisprudence, politics, and theology, and Dharmashastra ought to command further scholarly attention.

Bibhuti Yadav was stimulated by the presence of his Jewish students and friends. He treated them, so to speak, as allies, as fellow Asians who were doubly exiled in the Christian West. He constantly berated me when he thought that I was being too imitative of Christian theology or of trends in

philosophy that he thought owed too much to Christianity. He was prone to impose his near categorical opposition to Christianity onto me or onto Judaism in general. He did not recognize that Judaism's opposition to Christianity, while deep and pervasive, cannot be global and categorical due to the filiation of the latter from the former, as well as their long historical juxtaposition. These have created a complex bond between them.

Bibhuti Yadav's contribution to Indian-Jewish philosophical dialogue was not entirely intangible. He did leave behind one published article, "Buddhism on Rosenzweig" (*Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*, Vol. 1:1). This article developed from a scholarly dialogue he had with his esteemed colleague, Prof. Norbert M. Samuelson, in Philadelphia in 1995. This article represents his most subtle attempt to examine his own ambivalence, to balance both his empathy and his critique. Yadav's thought became ever more concerned with issues of identity and difference as he filtered his textual mastery of Sanskrit sources through an expanding reading of postmodernist philosophers. Accordingly, he tried his best, and largely succeeded in my view, to let Judaism be Judaism, Rosenzweig be Rosenzweig. He came to an exquisitely crafted examination of Rosenzweig's thought on Hinduism and Buddhism in *The Star of Redemption*. While he characterizes this thought as mistaken, it is mistaken in a profound sense. Rosenzweig is an "admirable" and "world-class" thinker. Yadav was particularly taken by Rosenzweig's advocacy of a "new thinking," a concrete, situational personalism liberated from the coercions of metaphysical systematizing. He praises Rosenzweig for the power and vision of his full-fledged critique of Hegel, but faults him for falling back on Hegelian tropes. Rosenzweig misses the particularity of Asia. "The biblical closure keeps him from discerning the textual bodiliness, the thickness of claims and counter-claims, and concrete particularities of Asian civilizations." Rosenzweig's critique of Hinduism is indeed profound as a critique of Sankara's Vedanta. But it mistakes a part for the whole. Many Indian critics of elitist Vedanta would have been thrilled by Rosenzweig's criticism of it. But Rosenzweig, against his better methodological instincts, silences their difference. Yadav goes on to essay how an Indian Buddhist text, the *Tevijja Sutta*, exemplifies precisely the critical "speech thinking" Rosenzweig himself advocates. Yadav wants to persuade Rosenzweig of how particular, how heterogeneous India is. The article culminates with an imagined dialogue between Sakayamuni and Franz Rosenzweig, as they walk together "out of the gate to a life on the road to freedom." The theist Rosenzweig and the atheist Buddhist differ on who unlocked the gate that leads to their liberative road. They find substantial agreement, however, on the task that lies ahead. "They would have smiled at each other in enlightened difference, happy to discover the way that leads towards life beyond in the middle of life as the theme of actual conversation. Addressing each other as 'Thou,' they both would have looked at the shifting

horizons in awe and optimism, knowing that to keep walking together is the way of being in the middle of the world.”

This article represents not only an extraordinarily valuable addition to Rosenzweig scholarship, but a turn of mind that is comfortingly Judaic as well. As my work turned increasingly away from philosophy of religion toward ethics and then political theory, I often sensed a mocking or disparaging attitude on Bibhuti Yadav’s part. His implication seemed to be that ethics and political theory, as intellectual projects, lack the full dignity of epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophy of language properly conceived. He seemed impatient at times with the fundamentally moral cast of Jewish thought. He wanted a discourse closer to the theoretical projects of Indian thought. Yet in the above essay, Bibhuti Yadav puts the ethical response of the human person to the concrete particularity of the other in the center of the human task. He sees Buddhism as a practiced deconstruction of metaphysics and a constructive way of humane living in the middle of the world. This may be termed, at the risk of imposing my own categorization, a “Judaic turn.”

With another vignette, taken from the midst of life, I close. As his remains were borne from his village to the Ganges for cremation, the route was lined with thousands of people, among them hundreds of wailing young women. I asked Prof. William Allen, who accompanied his remains to India, why this was. He informed me of his recent discovery. Bibhuti Yadav had spent part of his salary, much of it returned to India every month, on the dowering of indigent brides. Without his assistance, many poor women would have been unable to marry. The wailing women along the route, who had expected money from him, were mourning not only his quiet beneficence, but their own uncertain futures. The Jewish reader has undoubtedly already recognized that the dowering of indigent brides is an important and central mitzvah. Although Bibhuti Yadav often spoke as a philosophical amoralist, his actions belied his words. Perhaps continued dialogue with Judaism, as exemplified in his Rosenzweig article, might have furthered his development of a discourse to link the moral with the metaphysical. It would have been wonderful to watch where the “Judaic turn” might have taken him.

Our pain at his passing is matched only by our gratitude for his life. I hope that it is no insult to his Buddhist proclivities to pray that he “be bound up forever in the bonds of life.”

Alan Mittleman
Muhlenberg College

Jacob E. Cohen-In Memoriam (1913 - 1999)

Jacobai E. Cohen, a prominent Income Tax Officer in Kerala and a *hacham* within the Paradesi Jewish community, died on October 28, 1999, at his home in Jewtown, Cochin.

Born in April, 1913, to Elias Jacob Cohen and Esther Hallegua Cohen, he was raised in the home of his uncle Yakob Hai Cohen, a scholar and treasurer of the Paradesi Synagogue, who taught him Torah and Talmud. His affinity for Jewish learning can also be traced back to his paternal grandfather, Yakob Daniel Cohen, a learned nineteenth century immigrant from Baghdad, who ran a Hebrew and Malayalam printing press in Cochin from 1877-1882.

Jacob Cohen, known to his friends as "Dicky," graduated from Maharaja's College in Ernakulam and the Law College in Madras. Enjoying a long and successful career in the Income Tax Department of the State of Kerala, he achieved the position of Inspector. After his retirement, he continued for many years as an "unofficial PRO" for the department and as a tax consultant in private practice.

Within the Jewish community, he was valued as an expert *hazzan*, who knew the unique liturgical tradition of Cochin in its entirety. Describing a Shabbat Torah reading in the Paradesi synagogue, Nathan Katz and Ellen Goldberg recount: "When a reader made an error, he would be corrected promptly and with shouts. It was striking to notice Jacob Cohen, the community's most proficient reader, calling out corrections...entirely from memory."¹ Samuel H. (Sammy) Hallegua, Warden of the Paradesi Synagogue, writes: "I went to him frequently to discuss some points about the Torah, of which he had a very wide knowledge."² Always willing to share this knowledge, Cohen served as teacher to young Jewish students in Ernakulam as well as Cochin

Passionately devoted to preserving Jewish life in Kerala, he and his wife Sarah remained in Jewtown rather than joining the mass emigration to Israel. As part of this commitment, he was eager to pass on stories and theories about Cochin Jewish life and history to visitors from around the world. Counting myself fortunate to be among the scholars of Kerala Jewish life who learned from the Cohens and enjoyed their friendship, I treasure this quote from a 1985 Passover letter as a touchstone of their commitment: "[Here in Jewtown] the matzah-making gang are becoming fewer and fewer. But heart within and God overhead, we carry on the torch tradition."

Cohen's university level expertise in the Malayalam language and his acquaintance with the traditional women's Malayalam Jewish songs was unique among men in the modern Paradesi community. Along with Sarah, he

was a renowned singer of these songs; he gave generously of his time and knowledge in an effort to preserve and interpret them. Their mutual interest in Cochin Jewish history and in the Malayalam songs led to a friendship of more than twenty years with the Kerala Christian scholar and journalist Prof. P. M. Jussay (editor of *The Kerala Times*), who has written this tribute: "Dicky was a jolly good fellow. He was one of the few who knew his community through and through—not only its long history but also its faults and foibles, and he could laugh at them. He was the best of all my friends in the community. I can still see him smiling at me, sitting in the bosom of Abraham."

Jacob Cohen was the *karanon* of the Paradesi community—the oldest man, with the ritual responsibility and honor of starting communal prayers. He took that position seriously, regretting his physical inability to get to the synagogue during the last year of his life. During his final months, he was visited at his home on Synagogue Lane by a steady stream of Jews, Hindus, Christians and Muslims of varied ages, occupations and social backgrounds—continuing the years long hospitality which he and Sarah had always extended to their wide and cosmopolitan circle of colleagues and friends. We can never forget his gravely voice, his outspoken opinions, jokes and teasing, as well as his loyalty and concern for others. In the words of his friend Sammy Hallegua: "Dicky died very peacefully and his funeral was attended by hundreds of his friends. We have to accept that generations succeed generations but to all of us his death is a grievous loss... We will miss him."

Jacobai E. Cohen was predeceased by his cousins Sonny and Jackie Cohen and is survived by his beloved wife Sarah and by his brother-in-law Shalom A. Cohen, the last of the Paradesi.

Barbara C. Johnson
Ithaca College

- ¹ Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The Last Jews of Cochin* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), p. 224.
- ² Thanks to S. H. Hallegua for much of the information about J. E. Cohen's life.

Daniel Judah Elazar-In Memoriam (1934-1999)

Daniel J. Elazar, a member of the editorial board of this journal, passed away on December 2, 1999, in his home in Jerusalem. He had been battling lymphoma.

Elazar is regarded as one of the world's leading political scientists. He was Founder and President of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, the major independent Israeli policy studies center concerned with analyzing and solving key problems facing Israel and world Jewry. He was Director of the Center for the Study of Federalism at Temple University, the world's leading federalism research institute. He was Professor Emeritus of Political Studies at Bar-Ilan University and Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Temple University. Former President Reagan appointed him a citizen member of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, which he was twice reappointed, and served as a consultant to the governments of Israel, Canada, Cyprus, Italy, South Africa and Spain. Most recently, he was the Edna Gene and Jordan Davidson Visiting Eminent Scholar in the Humanities a position he held in the Department of Religious Studies at Florida International University.

He was the author or editor of more than seventy books ranging from the study of local government in the American midwest, to comparative federalism, to the Arab-Israeli peace process, to the definitive work on the American Jewish community (*Community and Polity*), and to his recent four-volume work on the Covenant tradition in politics. He was editor of three academic journals: *Publius, the Journal of Federalism*; *Jewish Political Studies Review*; and *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints*.

Elazar was twice a Guggenheim Fellow, a Fulbright Senior Lecturer, and a grantee of the American Council of Learned Societies, the Earhart and Ford Foundations, the Huntington Library, the Pew Charitable Trust and the National Science Foundation.

Elazar had the broadest range of interests imaginable, one of which was Sephardic Jewry. His 1989 book, *The Other Jews: The Sephardim Today* was a definitive study of Sephardic history, outlook and communities, and he was the past president of the American Sephardic Federation. He traced his family lineage to eleventh century Spain, and he was a fourth generation Jerusalemite. It was through his passion for Sephardic Jewry that Elazar's interest in Indo-Judaic Studies emerged. He visited India and Sri Lanka several times and maintained close professional and personal relationships on the subcontinent. He made two academic contributions to the study of Jews in India: "A Political Leader in the Postwar Indian-Jewish Community,"

in *Population Review* 39, 1 and 2 (1995): 95-97; and "Foreward" to Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The Last Jews of Cochin: Jewish Identity in Hindu India* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), pp. xi-xv.

His remarkable intellect enabled him, a leading political scientist, to contribute greatly to a religious studies department. As the holder of the Davidson Chair, Elazar delivered the annual Davidson Lecture, and in deference to his temporary academic home, he spoke on a topic of biblical theology, "The Biblical Account of God's Struggle Against Human Hierarchy." He was also a man of deep sensitivity and insight. None of us at FIU who attended the university's convocation in honor of His Holiness the Dalai Lama will ever forget Elazar's striking invocation in which he prayed for the liberation of the Tibetan people to the God who once liberated the Jewish people.

Elazar is survived by his wife and partner, Harriet, three children and three grandchildren

Nathan Katz
Florida International University

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

LYONE SAMI FEIN is a graduate student in the School of Religion at the University of Iowa. Her dissertation focuses on the female characters encountered in the Mahabharata and the Hebrew Bible, who are presented by the texts as exemplars of human spiritual development. In addition to her academic pursuits, she is an artist and musician. Currently she teaches introductory religion classes at Kirkwood Community College, Iowa City, Iowa.

BARBARA C. JOHNSON is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Ithaca College. She has been engaged in research on the Cochin Jews of India and Israel for almost thirty years. She has written many articles on the community and is co-author with *Ruby Daniel of Ruby of Cochin: An Indian Jewish Woman Remembers* (Jewish Publication Society, 1995). She has spent most of 1999 on a Fulbright grant in Israel and India, working on a project to coordinate the translation, analysis and publication of Malayalam Jewish women's songs.

HAROLD KASIMOW is the George Drake Professor of Religious Studies at Grinnell College. He has written a number of articles on interfaith dialogue and on Abraham Joshua Heschel that have been published in the US, England, India and Japan. He is co-editor of *No Religion is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue* (Orbis Press, 1991).

NATHAN KATZ, the co-editor of this journal, is Professor and Chair of Religious Studies at Florida International University, Miami, Florida. Among his dozen books are: *Buddhist Images of Human Perfection* (2nd ed., Delhi, India, 1989), *The Last Jews of Cochin: Jewish Identity in Hindu India* (with Ellen S. Goldberg, Columbia, SC, 1993), and *Who are the Jews of India?* (Berkeley, CA, 2000).

DINESH KUMAR is currently a post-doctoral fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel. The author acknowledges the research grant from the Council for Higher Education, Israel.

P. R. KUMARASWAMY is Associate Professor at the Centre for West Asian and African Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. Until recently he was a Research Fellow at the Harry S Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel. He is author of *India and Israel: Evolving Strategic Partnership* (Ramat Aviv, 1998) and editor of

China and the Middle East: The Quest for Influence (Sage 1999) and *Revisiting the Yom Kippur War* (London, forthcoming).

ARTHUR M. LESLEY teaches Hebrew language and literature at Baltimore Hebrew University. His research focuses on Hebrew writing in Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Recent publications include editing *Reference to the Ancients in Jewish Culture during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Italian) in *Storia d'Italia: Gli Ebrei in Italia* Vol. 1 (1996) and writing "Corrado Vivanti, and Jews at the Time of the Renaissance," a review essay, in *Renaissance Quarterly* (52, 3) Fall 1999.

RICHARD G. MARKS is Professor of Religion at Washington and Lee University, VA, and has taught Thai students in the Program of Comparative Religion at Mahidol University, Bangkok, for five years. He has written *The Image of Bar Kohba in Traditional Jewish Literature: False Messiah and National Hero* (1994). He plans to write on the history of Jewish perceptions of Indian religions from the ninth century through the *Haskalah*.

ALAN MITTLEMAN is Associate Professor of Religion and Chair of the Religion Department at Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA. He is the author of *Between Kant and Kabbalah* (SUNY Press, 1990) and *The Politics of Torah: German Jewish Orthodoxy and the Founding of Agudat Israel* (SUNY Press, 1996). He is a rabbi and a member of the Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative). He was a fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation of Germany for 1994, where he served as Guest Professor at the University of Cologne.

JOAN G. ROLAND is Professor of History at Pace University, New York. Her book, *Jews in British India: Identity in a Colonial Era* (University Press of New England, Hanover, New Hampshire, 1989), has been reprinted, in an up-dated edition as *The Jewish Communities of India: Identity in a Colonial Era* (Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NJ, 1998). She has contributed numerous articles and chapters to journals and books and is currently researching Indian Jews in Israel.

FRANK JOSEPH SHULMAN, a bibliographer, editor and consultant for Western-language reference works on Asia since 1969, is the author of numerous bibliographies and scholarly guides, the compiler and editor of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) bibliographical journal *Doctoral Dissertations on Asia from 1975 through 1996*, and a contributor and bibliographical consultant to the Association's Bibliography of Asian Studies. Among his many publications are *Doctoral Dissertations on South Asia, 1966-1970: An Annotated Bibliography covering North America, Europe,*

and Australia (1971); a Directory of Individuals Interested in the Jews and the Jewish Communities of the East, Southeast and South Asia (1993); and The Chinese Jews and the Jewish Diasporas in China from the Tang Period (618-960 A.D.) through the mid-1990's: A Selected Bibliography (1998).