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

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

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

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

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

Idolatry?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Trajectories

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

[2] The term "JuBu" was coined by Rodger Kamenetz in *The Jew in the Lotus* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994) to indicate a Jew who practices Buddhism. We shall consider this term in this essay.
[3] See Nathan Katz, "India and Israel in the Ancient World," *Shofar* 17, no. 3 (1999): 7-22.
[4] Chaim Rabin, "Loanword Evidence in Biblical Hebrew for Trade between Tamilnad and Palestine in the First Millennium B.C.," in *Proceedings of the Second International Seminar of Tamil Studies* (Madras: International Association of Tamil Research, 1971), pp. 432-440.
[5] Ranabir Chakravarti, "Reaching Out to Distant Shores: Indo-Judaic Trade Contacts (Up to CE 1300)," in Nathan Katz et al., eds., *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 19-43.
[6] Katz, "India and Israel in the Ancient World," pp. 20-22.
[7] Jataka tales are a very popular Buddhist literature. "Jataka" means "birth story," and Jataka tales are homiletic moral teachings of the Buddha set in one of the Enlightened One's previous births. They are scattered throughout the early texts known as suttas or discourses, and were eventually codified in the Jatakamala by Aryasura. (J. B. Speyer, trans., *The Gatakamala or Garland of Birth Stories by Aryasura*, repr. Kessinger Publishing, 2006 [1900]).
[8] Thomas William Rhys Davids, ed. and trans., *Buddhist Birth Stories; or, Jataka Tales* (London: Trübner, 1880), pp. xxii-xxvi.
[9] I Kings 3:16-28.
[10] There is another significant *Jataka* connection that links Jews and Buddhists, this one very much later and quite accessible to historical inquiry. The entire *Jataka* literature was made known to the Western world by Jewish merchants of the early Middle Ages. T. W. Rhys Davids described: "[The Jews] were naturally attracted by a kind of literature such as this—Oriental in morality, amusing in style, and perfectly free from Christian legend and from Christian dogma. It was also a kind of literature which travellers would most easily become acquainted with, and we need not therefore be surprised to hear that a Jew, named Symeon Seth, about 1080 A.D., made the first translation into a European language, viz. into modern Greek. Another Jew, about 1250, made a translation. . . into Hebrew; and a third, John of Capua, turned this Hebrew version into Latin between 1263 and 1278. . . .The title of the second Latin version. . . is very striking—it is 'Aesop the Old." (Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Birth Stories*, pp. xxx-xxxi.)
[11] As an undergraduate student, I had been taught that the term "Hindu" was first used by Muslim invaders under Mahmud of Ghazni in the tenth century. Since then I have come across the Aramaic version of this term, "Hindu'a," in the Talmud, written about five hundred years before the Afghan invasions of India. In both Muslim and Jewish use, however, the term is geographic, not cultural, and certainly not religious.
[12] Medieval links are surveyed in Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The Last Jews of Cochin: Jewish Identity in Hindu India* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 35-61.
[13] Solomon D. Goitein and Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza—"India Book"* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008).
[14] See Edward C. Sachau, trans., *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030* (Delhi: S. Chand, 1964), vol. I, p. 206. See also A. Asher, trans. and ed., *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela* (New York: Hakesheth, n.d.), p. 188. And see yet again Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo* (New York: Orion Press, n.d.), p. 301.
[15] Brian Weinstein, "Traders and Ideas: Indians and Jews," in Katz et al., eds., *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 44-56; and Richard G. Marks, "Hindus and

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

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

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

[18] Ibid., p. 188.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[30] Ibid., p. 4.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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