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## Contents

From the Editors

## Articles

Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Buber: Two Approaches to Non-violence  
by *Braj M. Sinha*

Varieties of Mystical Nothingness: Jewish, Christian and Buddhist  
By *Daniel C. Matt*

Torah-Hindu Parallels in the Narratives of Five Persons  
by *Bharat Jhunjhunwala*

Israel and Pakistan: Between the State and Non-State Players  
by *Joseph Hodes*

## Book reviews

C. B. Divakaruni, *The Palace of Illusions*  
reviewed by *David R. Blumenthal*

Shalom Salomon Wald and Arielle Kandel *India, Israel, and the Jewish People*  
reviewed by *Navras Jaat Aafreedi*

Ithamar Theodor and Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, eds. *Dharma and Halacha – Comparative Studies in Hindu-Jewish Philosophy and Religion*  
reviewed by *Nathan Katz*

## Obituaries

Zaithunchchi  
by *Nathan Katz*

Rabbi Ezekiel N. Musleah  
by *Steven Heine*

Sarah Cohen

*by Ellen S. Goldberg*

## **Communications**

Emergence of Kolkata as a Center for Jewish Studies in India`

*by Navras Jaat Aafreedi*

Three tin ingots of Haifa shipwreck with Indus (Sarasvati) hieroglyphs reinforces the Meluhha rebus reading *ranku dhatu mûh*, ‘tin mineral-ore ingot’

*by S. Kalyanaraman*

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## Obituary: Zaithanchhungi



We just learned from her daughter, Annette, that Zaithanchhungi passed away a few months ago at her home in Aizawl, Mizoram. She is the author of *Israel-Mizo Identity: Mizos (Chhinlung Tribes) Children of Menashe are the descendants of Israel* (2000) and several books on the same topic in her Mizo language, the first work on an intriguing community.

A Christian herself, she takes great pride in the emergence of the Bene Menashe from among her own people. The good Christian folks of Mizoram are all staunch Zionists and Israel lovers. Around Aizawl, one notices streets and shops bearing names like Zion, Solomon, Israel, and the like. Zai, as she was known to all, gladly helped visiting Jews connect with the Bene Menashe. My wife and I are among the fortunate ones to have been befriended by her. With great enthusiasm, she took us to Aizawl's two synagogues, the miqveh, and facilitated our 2015 visit there. We learned a lot!

I first came to know her during the 1980s when I was in the early stages of my research about Indian Jews. She gifted me then with an earlier edition of her book, which complemented my meager knowledge of Bene Menashe in Burma. She was the pioneer, she was the inspiration, she was the one who introduced me, visitors such as Rabbi Eliahu Avihail, author Hillel Halkin, and activist Michael Freund, and thereby played a large role into the affirmation of a Bene Menashe Israelite identity. The rest, as they say, is history.

Those of us who new her will long remember her pioneering work, her passionate embrace of her Jewish neighbors, her tireless energy in promoting

their cause, and her remarkable kindness in hosting us. For all of this, I am eternally grateful and honor her memory.

*Nathan Katz*