

Israelites, declaring that it was important to help them return to the Jewish religion. Accordingly Rabbi Amar proposed to send qualified rabbis to the region to formally convert to Judaism those who were living as Jews and wished to be recognized as Jews.¹⁵¹ Once they had undergone conversion, they would have an automatic right under Israel's Law of Return to settle in Israel and to take up Israeli citizenship.¹⁵²

Rabbi Amar's decision has vindicated the efforts of those in Manipur and Mizoram who have for many years asserted an identity as descendants of Manasseh and sought to live as Jews. They have in effect been given entry into the Jewish nation, with recognition that they have a unique past and a distinct history—yet a past that is bound up with that of the Jews, apparently as fraternal descendants of the ancient Israelites. Whether the Benei Menashe who take up the opportunity to settle in Israel will retain a distinct identity or assimilate into the broader Jewish world is yet to be seen. The racial difference from other Jews is not apparently as significant in this context to the Benei Menashe as the differences that the Mizos perceive between themselves and the *vai* of India.

Mawii came to understand her dream as indicating that she would become a guide for the Israel group in her village. Indeed, as events have transpired, she has become a pioneer in Mizoram along the road to Judaism and identification with the Jewish people, having trod the path before many of her compatriots.

Postscript

In the year 2000, I visited Mawii at her home at Bungkawn on the outskirts of Aizawl. In the years since I'd first met her, much had changed in the practice of Judaism in Mizoram. In 1992, only around 20 Benei Menashe had managed to settle, as Jews, in Israel. By 2000, the figure was now close to 500 individuals and slowly continuing to grow. The increased contact and familiarity with Israel that had developed has had its impact upon the Jewish knowledge available to the community in Mizoram, who have gradually brought their practices more and more into line with the Orthodox Judaism to which they aspire.

Although she seemed a little subdued on this occasion, Mawii was still a member of the Benei Menashe and was following Judaism along with her children. One must admire the strength of commitment to Judaism manifest among the Benei Menashe, who remain a decidedly small proportion of the population. Although one finds throughout Mizoram a deep admiration for the State of Israel and the Jewish people, and Mizos are generally proud of their putative descent from ancient Israelites, many nonetheless find it inconceivable for a Mizo to reject Christianity, so intimately bound up has that religion become with their identity as Mizos.¹⁵³ Such people place pressure on wayward souls who would follow Judaism, not to forsake the Saviour.¹⁵⁴

In the light of the greater familiarity with Jewish practices, I found it telling that Mawii was now calling herself "Elisheva" rather than Elizabeth. I did not ask her what she thought about the name, having regard to the almost mystical way the name Elizabeth had originally come to her.

Acknowledgments

It has been my privilege to explore the manner in which many members of the Benei Menashe in Manipur and Mizoram have come to embrace the Jewish religion and to follow the adventure of its impact on their lives, in India and in Israel. I am deeply grateful to the generosity of spirit of the members of this community, who have opened their thoughts, and their homes, to accommodate me and my enquiries. Although there are many individuals who deserve my personal thanks, I shall restrict myself on this occasion to expressing my appreciation particularly to two individuals: Mawii (not her real name) whose fascinating life-story is the subject of this article and who told her story to me with enthusiasm; and Gideon Rei, whose readiness to interpret for me made it possible for me to learn of the richness of Mawii's experience.

I also extend my thanks to my friends Charles Solomon and Nigel Sinnott who read through an earlier version of this essay and offered me valuable comments that have helped to improve the final draft.

I am also fortunate that my wife, Miriam, is a member of one of the first families of the Benei Menashe group who chose to live as Jews. As Miriam is fluent in Mizo and the various dialects used in Manipur, with her by my side, I have had the good fortune to be able to consult with an expert on matters of historical detail, and to clarify linguistic concerns as and when they have arisen. I offer to you, Miriam, my heartfelt gratitude for your constant support.

Notes

¹ B. B. Goswami, "By-product of Christianity on the Hill Tribesmen of North-east India," *Review of Ethnology* 7(1-9) (1980):42-46; M. Samra, "Judaism in Manipur and Mizoram: By-Product of Christian Mission," *The Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* 6(1) (1992):7-22.

² I shall use the abbreviation "CHIKIM" in this article as a convenient way to indicate the constellation of tribal groups generally known by the terms Chin, Kuki, and Mizo. This term was invented by Haokholal Thangjom, a former Manipur state minister, by combining letters from the words Chin, Kuki, and Mizo, and was intended to be used as a generic name. H. Thangjom, "Towards Constructive Destruction," in L. Haokip (ed.), *Kut Festival Souvenir* (Imphal, Manipur: State Level Kut Committee, 1990):19-21. "Chikim" in fact means "all the clans" or "all the tribes" in a number of the CHIKIM dialects. While it was used in publications from Manipur for a short while, Thangjom's term has not caught on more widely. In this article, I shall use CHIKIM as a shorthand term to refer to the Chin-Kuki-Mizo peoples, without thereby intending to suggest that it has any greater significance as an ethnic or tribal name.

³ J. Valsiner, "Epilogue: Ontogeny of Co-construction of Culture within Socially Organized Environmental Settings," in J. Valsiner (ed.), *Child Development within Culturally Structured Environments, Vol. 2: Social Construction and Environmental Guidance in Development* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1988):292-294.

⁴ I. Edgar, "Dream Imagery Becomes Social Experience," in S. Heald and A. Deluz (eds.), *Anthropology and Psychoanalysis: An Encounter through Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁵ A fuller account of how this belief has arisen will appear later in this article. Shalva Weil, in her articles "Lost Israelites from the Indo-Burmese Borderlands: Re-Traditionalisation and Conversion among the Shinlung or Bene Menassehm," *The Anthropologist* 6(3) (2004):219-233 at 228, and "Dual Conversion among the Shinlung of North-East India," *Studies of Tribes and Tribals* 1(1) (2003):43-57 at 52, records that Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail suggested the appellation "Children of Menasseh" to the group, who had already been identifying themselves as the descendants of the biblical tribe.

⁶ Zaithanchhungi, *Israel-Mizo Identity* (Aizawl: St Joseph's Press, 1990):70 suggests another name for the mountain is "Mal Selaimon" and speculates whether this might not be "the namesake of King Solomon or Suleiman, The King of Turks."

⁷ S. Chatterjee, *Mizoram Encyclopaedia*, 3 vols. (Bombay: Jaico Publishing House 1990):608.

⁸ F. K. Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society: A Tribal People of Burma Adapted to a Non-western Civilization*, 2nd ed. (Aizawl, Mizoram: Tribal Research Institute, 1980):14.

⁹ Vumson, *Zo History, With an introduction to Zo Culture, Economy, Religion and Their Status as an Ethnic Minority in India, Burma, and Bangladesh* (Aizawl, Mizoram, published by the author, n.d.):19-21. Lists comparing words in various CHIKIM dialects are to be found in H. Kamkhenthang, S. Prim-Vaiphei, Romeo Serto, and Hawlingam Haokip (eds.), *In Search of Identity* (Imphal, Manipur: Kuki-Chin Baptist Union, 1986), Khup Za Go, *A Critical Historical Study of Bible Translations Among the Zo People in North East India* (Churachandpur, Manipur: Chin Baptist Literature Board, 1996), C. A. Soppitt, *A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the North-East Frontier with An Outline Grammar of the Ranggkhol-Lushai Language and a Comparison of Lushai with other Dialects* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Firma-KLM Private Ltd/Tribal Research Institute 1893/1976):79-84; J. Shakespear, *The Lushai Kuki Clans*, 2nd ed. (Aizawl, Mizoram: Tribal Research Institute, 1988 [1912]):225-238.

¹⁰ R. G. Woodthorpe, *The Lushai Expedition 1871-1872* (Calcutta: Firma KLM 1873/1978):9.

¹¹ B. B. Goswami and D. P. Mukherjee, "The Mizo Political Movement," in K. S. Singh (ed.), *Tribal Movements in India*, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1982):134.

¹² R. Gopalakrishnan, *Insurgent North-Eastern Region of India* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1995):105; B. B. Goswami, "The Mizos in the Context of State Formation," in S. C. Sinha (ed.), *Tribal Politics and State Systems in Pre-Colonial Eastern India* (New Delhi: KP Bagchi 1987):315-319; Woodthorpe, *The Lushai Expedition*.

¹³ B. Thangchina, "Christian Unity in Mizoram," in K. Thanzauva (ed.), *Towards a Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective* (Mizoram: Mizo Theological Conference, 1989):109.

¹⁴ N. Chatterji, *The Mizo Chief and His Administration* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Tribal Research Institute, 1975):9-10.

¹⁵ H. N. C. Stevenson, *The Economics of the Central Chin*, 2nd ed. (Aizawl, Mizoram: Tribal Research Institute, 1986):22; Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society*, 47-52; Chatterjee, *Mizoram Encyclopaedia*, 50.

¹⁶ Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society*, 25.

¹⁷ Goswami, "The Mizos in the Context of State Formation," 314, 320.

¹⁸ Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society*, 27-28.

¹⁹ Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society*, 30.

²⁰ Quoted in Lehman, *The Structure*, 32. Ironically, however, Lehman records the view of Professor G. H. Luce that the term "Chin" is in fact "an old Burmese word meaning 'ally or comrade,'" 3. Another suggested explanation for the term is that it derives from a Burmese word meaning "basket," a reference to the large baskets which the CHIKIM used to carry on their backs, held by rattan thongs strapped to the forehead.

²¹ B. B. Goswami, "Outgroup from the Point of View of Ingroup," *Man in India* 55(4) (1975):326-330. By contrast, Lehman, *The Structure*, 28-30, shows that the term *vai* in Burma generally had a positive connotation, representing admired aspects of Burman civilization. Goswami further observes that the term *vai* is no longer applied to the Europeans, despite their racial similarities to Indians. Europeans are referred to by the respectful term *Sâp* (sahib).

²² Myer Samra, "Buallawn Israel: The Emergence of a Judaizing Movement in Mizoram, Northeast India," in Lynette Olson (ed.), *Religious Change, Conversion and Culture* (Sydney, Australia: Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture, 1996):128.

²³ Lal Dena, *Christian Mission and Colonialism: A Study of Missionary Movement in Northeast India, with Particular Reference to Manipur and Lushai Hills 1894-1947* (Shillong, India: Vendrame Institute, 1988):88.

²⁴ F. Downs, "Christian Conversion Movements among the Hill Tribes of North-east India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in G. A. Oddie (ed.), *Religion in South Asia*, 2nd ed. (Columbia, MO: South Asia Publications, 1991):159.

²⁵ Thangchina, "Christian Unity," 110.

²⁶ Zothantluanga Ralte, "The Pace of Socio-Economic and Political Developments: Responses to British Colonialism and the Emergence of the Mizo Minority Nationality in Indian Politics," in J. V. Hluna, Sangkima, and Romesh Buragohain (eds.), *Seminar Papers: Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India—the Mizos* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):59-62 at 60.

²⁷ This process has not taken place in other territories. In Manipur, for example, the various Kuki tribes have assiduously sought to retain their separate dialects.

²⁸ Downs, "Christian Conversion Movements," 173.

²⁹ Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society*, 39.

³⁰ K. Thanzauva, "Introduction," in K. Thanzauva (ed.), *Towards a Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective* (Mizoram: Mizo Theological Conference, 1989):5.

³¹ Lal Dena, *Christian Mission*, chapter 2.

³² Lal Dena, *Christian Mission*, 65-70.

³³ Thangchina, "Christian Unity," 110. Khup Za Go, *A Critical Historical Study of Bible Translations*, 52 records a membership of 57,628 for the UPC in North East India. L. Jeyaseelan, *Impact of the Missionary Movement in Manipur* (New Delhi: Scholar Publishing House, 1996) reports that the 1981 census showed a total population of 134,766 individuals in the Churachandpur District of Manipur, of whom 118,887 were recorded as Christians (83). Only 3,500 of these were members of the United Pentecostal Church (106).

³⁴ Thangchina, "Christian Unity," 113.

- ³⁵ Lal Dena, *Christian Mission*, 102.
- ³⁶ A. G. McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 2nd ed. (Aizawl, Mizoram: Tribal Research Institute, 1977 [1949]):223.
- ³⁷ McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 223.
- ³⁸ Lalsawma, *Four Decades of Revivals, the Mizo Way* (Aizawl, Mizoram: published by the author, 1994):213-214. Also see Goswami, "By-product."
- ³⁹ Lal Dena, *Christian Mission*, 110-111; Chatterji, *Mizo Chief*, 9, 13.
- ⁴⁰ Goswami and Mukherjee, "The Mizo Political Movement," 136.
- ⁴¹ Foreign Department Report on Chin Lushai Hills, September 1892 (Aizawl, Mizoram: Tribal Research Institute, 1980); Petition from the Zo Re-unification Organization, Central Zone, Aizawl, to the Prime Minister of Great Britain for "Re-Unification of Chin-Lushai Land into One Administrative Unit," dated 29 January 1992.
- ⁴² Downs, "Christian Conversion Movements," 168-169.
- ⁴³ S. Prim-Vaiphei, "Who We Are/ Who Are We," in H. Kamkhenthang et al. (eds.), *In Search of Identity* (Imphal, Manipur: Kuki-Chin Baptist Union, 1986).
- ⁴⁴ S. Chatterjee, "Minority Nationalities of N.E. India—the Mizos," in J. V. Hluna et al. (eds.), *Seminar Papers: Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India—the Mizos* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):42.
- ⁴⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 1991).
- ⁴⁶ Nonetheless, Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest*, 78-83 identifies ethnic rivalries among the various communities in Mizoram and the persistence of tribal loyalties in elections.
- ⁴⁷ D. K. Chaudhuri, "Changes in Tribal Societies in Tripura—the Lushai Reform Movement (1946-1950)," in J. V. Hluna et al. (eds.), *Seminar Papers: Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India—the Mizos* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):68; V. Venkata Rao, T. S. Gangte, and K. B. Devi, *A Century of Government and Politics in North-East India, Vol. IV: Manipur* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Co. Ltd., 1991):40; Lal Dena, "Some Anomalies of Colonial Rule, 1891-1919," in Lal Dena (ed.), *History of Modern Manipur 1826-1949* (New Delhi: Orbit Publishers, 1990):81-82.
- ⁴⁸ Rev. Dr. Hawngam Haokip, "Introduction," in H. Kamkhenthang et al. (eds.), *In Search of Identity* (Imphal, Manipur: Kuki-Chin Baptist Union, 1986):i-ii.
- ⁴⁹ James Herbert Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1940):159.
- ⁵⁰ P. S. Haokip, *Zale'n-Gam: The Kuki Nation* ("Zale'n-Gam": Kuki National Organisation, 1998):42.
- ⁵¹ Haokip, *Zale'n-Gam*, 40.
- ⁵² Population assessed as 30,670 in 1984: Lucy Zehol, *Ethnicity in Manipur: Experiences, Issues and Perspectives* (New Delhi: Regency Publications, 1998):36.
- ⁵³ Population recorded at 78,883 in 1984: Zehol, *Ethnicity in Manipur*, 36.
- ⁵⁴ Zehol, *Ethnicity in Manipur*, 90; Khup Za Go, *A Critical Historical Study of Bible Translations*, 81, 93-94.
- ⁵⁵ Weil, "Dual Conversion" refers to this conflict at 46. At this time, as they were in conflict with the Thadou, the group who had arrogated the term "Kuki" to themselves, the Paite temporarily sought identification and political alliance with the Nagas.

⁵⁶ I have observed the same situation among the Benei Menashe in Israel, with those who identify primarily as Mizo being critical of their neighbors from Manipur who persist in perpetuating their "petty" clan and tribal distinctions.

⁵⁷ Sawngtinlam, *The Tukbemsom Tribe* (Kangpokpi, Manipur: H. Seilal Press, n.d.):77; Prim-Vaiphei, "Who We Are," 23.

⁵⁸ J. N. Phukan, "The Late Home of Migration of the Mizos," in J. V. Hluna et al. (eds.), *Seminar Papers: Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India—the Mizos* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):8.

⁵⁹ Literally, "older sibling/younger sibling."

⁶⁰ Haokip, "Introduction," iv.

⁶¹ I used the term "CHIKIM" in a presentation at an academic seminar in Mizoram in 1992 and was surprised to receive a submission from the floor requesting the word be altered to "CHIKIMI," to allow for a consonant and vowel from each of the words Chin, Kuki, and Mizo. When next I visited Manipur, I reported my experience to Mr. H. Thangjom who had initiated the use of the term CHIKIM. Mr. Thangjom responded that "CHIKIMI," would have no meaning, whereas "chikim" is understood to mean "all the clans" or "tribes" in various dialects.

⁶² Prim-Vaiphei, "Who We Are," 22.

⁶³ H. Kamkhenthang, "Groping for Identity," 1-16 in H. Kamkhenthang et al. (eds.), *In Search of Identity* (Imphal, Manipur: Kuki-Chin Baptist Union, 1986):61. See also H. Kamkhenthang, *The Paite: A Transborder Tribe of India and Burma* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1988):1-2 and Shakespear, *The Lushai Kuki Clans*, 148.

⁶⁴ Eliyahu Avichail, *The Tribes of Israel: The Lost and the Dispersed* (Jerusalem: Amishav, 1990):137-142.

⁶⁵ Weil, "Lost Israelites," 220.

⁶⁶ Tudor Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel: The History of a Myth* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002); and Tudor Parfitt and Emanuela Trevisan Semi, *Judaizing Movements: Studies in the Margins of Judaism* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002).

⁶⁷ R. Pudaite, *The Education of the Hmar People* (Sielmat, Manipur: Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission, 1963):21.

⁶⁸ Shakespear, *The Lushai Kuki Clans*, 93, 148.

⁶⁹ Lorrain, *Dictionary*, 80.

⁷⁰ Haokip, "Introduction," iv.

⁷¹ E. R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1954).

⁷² Weil, "Dual Conversion"; Weil, "Lost Israelites," 229. Notwithstanding Lian Tual's assertion, informants have indicated to me that this name is immediately recognizable as Paite or Tiddim Chin, regardless as to whether such a name might also occur in Jingphaw.

⁷³ Shalva Weil, *Beyond the Sambatyon: The Myth of the Ten Lost Tribes* (Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefutsoth, Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, 1991):85; Hillel Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River: In Search of a Lost Tribe* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002):30-31; Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes*, 111-116.

⁷⁴ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940).

⁷⁵ With a population recorded at 78,883 in 1984, in fact the Thadou were the largest of the twenty-three tribes recognized in Manipur and just slightly larger than the

largest Naga tribe, the Tangkhul, who numbered 76, 115: Zehol, *Ethnicity in Manipur*, 36.

⁷⁶ R. K. Das, *Manipur Tribal Scene: Studies in Society and Change* (New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1985):46.

⁷⁷ Chatterjee, "Minority Nationalities," 42.

⁷⁸ B. B. Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest—A Study in Politicisation of Culture* (Jaipur: Aalekh Publishers, 1979):105.

⁷⁹ B. Lalthangliana, "Mizo," in J. V. Hluna et al. (eds.), *Seminar Papers: Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India—the Mizos* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):7.

⁸⁰ Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest*, 75; A. Dutta, "Ethnicity and Statehood in Mizoram," in J. V. Hluna et al. (eds.), *Seminar Papers: Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India—the Mizos* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):46; S. Thangkhengin, "Why Should We Be Called Zoumi," in H. Kamkhenthang et al. (eds.), *In Search of Identity* (Imphal, Manipur: Kuki-Chin Baptist Union, 1986):61.

⁸¹ Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society*, 30. Lehman suggests that the term zo "expresses their view of being backward and uncultivated" (see also 54-55). Thangkhengin, "Why Should We Be Called Zoumi," 64, however, asserts that Zou was the name of the ancestor of the tribes who regard themselves as zo.

⁸² Thangkhengin, "Why Should We Be Called Zoumi," 55.

⁸³ Vumson, *Zo History*, 3.

⁸⁴ L. S. Gangte, "Who Are We?" in H. Kamkhenthang et al. (eds.), *In Search of Identity* (Imphal, Manipur: Kuki-Chin Baptist Union, 1986):47.

⁸⁵ Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest*, 22; Shakespear, *The Lushai Kuki Clans*, Introduction and 109. In that vein, it is significant that Lorrain's *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, published in 1940, before the formal adoption of the term, includes an entry at 320: "Mi-zo, *n.* a Lushai; the Lushais. (*Lit.* Highlanders). Some use this name to include other neighbouring hill tribes." It is also instructive to see the way that Thangjom, who generally uses the term "CHIKIM" for all the CHIKIM group, finally comes out in favor of Mizo as the collective term, declaring, "Hallowed be thy name, Mizo, the blessed name": Thangjom, "Towards Constructive Destruction," p. 21. Thangjom avoids referring to "Mizoram," preferring to call it the "Lushai Hills District," a term that we have seen has not been in use officially since 1952, as he wishes to avoid associating the name Mizo with any one "administrative unit," in the CHIKIM habitat, since he wishes it to apply to all sections of the group, wherever they might reside.

⁸⁶ Dutta, "Ethnicity and Statehood in Mizoram," 45; Lalrimawia, "Inner Line (Mizoram): A Study in Historical Perspective," in J. V. Hluna et al. (eds.), *Seminar Papers: Studies on the Minority Nationalities of Northeast India—the Mizos* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):124-126.

⁸⁷ F. A. Quaraishi, *Christianity in the North Eastern Hills of South Asia—Social Impact and Political Implications* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: The University Press Ltd., 1987):41; Samra, "Buallawn Israel," 108.

⁸⁸ Chatterjee, "Mizoram Encyclopaedia," 203-205.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Chatterjee, "Mizoram Encyclopaedia," 203.

⁹⁰ Chatterjee, "Mizoram Encyclopaedia," 204.

⁹¹ Dutta, "Ethnicity and Statehood," 45.

⁹² Chatterjee, "Minority Nationalities," 43.

⁹³ Quaraishi, *Christianity in the North Eastern Hills*, 55. Robbins Burling, "Tribesmen and Lowlanders of Assam," in Peter Kunstadter (ed.), *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations*, Vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967):215-229, notes that when the Nagas fought to attain independence from India, "foreign missionaries were accused of encouraging the rebellion," since the leaders of the revolt were all Christians (221). Similarly, the Judaizing movement in Manipur and Mizoram has been regarded by some Indian nationalists and politicians, particularly members of the Communist Party, as part of a Jewish plot to subvert India, as in S. Berindranath, "Mythology of Zionist Propaganda: Mizos Are the 14th Lost Tribe of Israel!" *Blitz*, March 29, 1980, with the accusation that "some of those actively connected with the Underground Mizo National Front movement have been identified as having been trained in America and Israel." This attitude has resurfaced in 2005. Following the decision of the Sephardi Chief Rabbi to accept the Israelite claims of the Benei Menashe, Israeli rabbis were sent to India to formally convert members of the group to Judaism. These efforts were abruptly terminated as a consequence of protests from the Indian government that "Israel is trying to aggressively convert Indian citizens," Matthew Wagner and Herb Keinon, *Jerusalem Post Online Edition*, November 9, 2005.

⁹⁴ Quaraishi, *Christianity*, 57.

⁹⁵ Quaraishi, *Christianity*, 10.

⁹⁶ John Vanlal Hluna, *Church and Political Upheaval in Mizoram* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Mizo History Association, 1985):90-91.

⁹⁷ Despite the resentment of Christian encroachment in the tribal districts of North East India as "a legacy of the colonial West, a foreign doctrine implanted in their midst," Burling, "Tribesmen and Lowlanders of Assam," 220 notes that in 1963, the Indian government found it politically advantageous to take in tribal refugees from East Pakistan, many of them Christians, to highlight that India does not discriminate against any religion, whereas Pakistan discriminated against non-Muslims.

⁹⁸ R. C. Verma, *Indian Tribes Through the Ages* (New Delhi: Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1990). The CHIKIM tribes in general have the status of "scheduled tribes"—provided individuals register themselves as belonging to one of the named tribes recognized in a particular state. Their religious affiliation does not affect this status. Unfortunately for members of formerly untouchable castes who convert to Christianity, they are excluded from the advantages of scheduled caste status by a decree excluding anyone who professes a religion other than Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism: Jose Kananaikil, *Scheduled Caste Converts and Social Disabilities: A Survey of Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1990). See R. K. Das, *Manipur Tribal Scene*, chapter 4 for an intriguing analysis of the situation of the Loi, who have worked hard to establish an identity for themselves as a scheduled caste of Manipur.

⁹⁹ Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest*, 144.

¹⁰⁰ B. K. Roy-Burman, "Emergence of Mizo Nationality," in Dr. Romesh Buragohain, Dr. J. V. Hluna, and Dr. Sangkima (eds.), *Souvenir: International Seminar Aizawl Mizoram* (South Aizawl: Seminar Committee, International Committee Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Government of Mizoram, 1992):15-22, at 17.

¹⁰¹ Chatterjee, "Mizoram Encyclopaedia," 449-450, 747.

¹⁰² Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest*, 144.

¹⁰³ Chatterjee, *Mizoram Encyclopaedia*, 542.

- ¹⁰⁴ Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest*, 157-162.
- ¹⁰⁵ Hluna, *Church and Political Upheaval*, 98-99.
- ¹⁰⁶ Hluna, *Church and Political Upheaval*, 101-103.
- ¹⁰⁷ Hluna, *Church and Political Upheaval*, 103.
- ¹⁰⁸ I am thankful to Mr. J. K. Gangte, a prominent member of the Benei Menashe and a native of Chongmun, who discussed the matter with me. Mr. Gangte has written a mournful lament concerning this incident.
- ¹⁰⁹ Roy-Burman, "Emergence of Mizo Nationality," 21-22.
- ¹¹⁰ A small sector of the Churachandpur District, centring on Vangai Village, was incorporated into Mizoram: see B. K. Dasgupta, "The Paite National Council," in K. S. Singh (ed.), *Tribal Movements in India*, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1982):125.
- ¹¹¹ Chatterjee, *Mizoram Encyclopaedia*, 542; Tribal Research Institute, *The Tribes of Mizoram, a Dissertation* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Tribal Research Institute, 1994):12-14.
- ¹¹² Chatterjee, *Mizoram Encyclopaedia*, 450.
- ¹¹³ B. K. Dasgupta, "The Paite National Council," 126-127, reports that in 1960 the Paite National Council in the Churachandpur District of Manipur submitted a manifesto to the Indian government calling for the creation of "Chinland" for "the reunification of the Chin people of India and Burma under one country." This Chinland was to take in all of Manipur, Mizoram, parts of the North Cachar Hills and Tripura, the Chittagong Hills of East Pakistan, the Arakan Hills, and adjacent areas in Burma. More recently, the Paite have lent their support to the creation of a "Zo-Gam" (Zomi Land) incorporating the same terrain. A similar vision of the same imagined nation, with yet a different name is seen in Haokip, *Zale'n-Gam: The Kuki Nation*.
- ¹¹⁴ McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 223.
- ¹¹⁵ Samra, "Buallawn Israel," 105-131; Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River*, 188-191.
- ¹¹⁶ Lemuel Henkhogin Haokip, "The Origins and Development of Judaism in North East India Upto the Present Day," in L. H. Haokip (ed.), *Judaism 25th Anniversary Souvenir* (Manipur: The Benei Menashe Council, 2001):20-28.
- ¹¹⁷ Gideon Rei's companions in this journey were Simeongin Vaiphei and Rebecca Benjamin.
- ¹¹⁸ Haokip, *Judaism 25th Anniversary Souvenir*, 24.
- ¹¹⁹ This confusion is particularly evident among many of the people featured in Phillipe Stroun's 1997 film, *The Return of the Lost Tribe* filmed in Manipur and Mizoram. It is also evident in the book by Kailam Gideon Menashe, *The Lost Tribes in the World* (Churachandpur: published by the author, 1997). Ostensibly a follower of Judaism, Menashe's work is peppered with references to both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus, we learn, at 175, "was sent by Hashem to seek the lost ten tribes of Israel."
- ¹²⁰ Yosef Goell, "Forget the Lost Tribes, Aid Lost Souls," *The Jerusalem Post*, August 26, 1994.
- ¹²¹ Jeyaseeian, *Impact of the Missionary Movement in Manipur*, 120.
- ¹²² Haokip, *Judaism 25th Anniversary Souvenir*, 71.
- ¹²³ Yair Sheleg, "Amar: Bnei Menashe Are Descendants of Ancient Israelites," *Haaretz*, April 1, 2005.
- ¹²⁴ In the following pages, in the midst of quotations from Mawii, statements appearing in brackets are my comments on Mawii's words.
- ¹²⁵ Vumson, *Zo History*, 54.

¹²⁶ The Thadou, the largest of the Kuki tribes in Manipur, have only moved there during the mid-nineteenth century, having been forced out of what is now Mizoram by the invading Lusei tribes. Das, *Manipur Tribal Scene*, 45.

¹²⁷ Pudaite, *The Education of the Hmar*.

¹²⁸ Hol Kho Lun Lungdim, *Kuki Culture and Origin* (M. Phil. Dissertation Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1983):159-161; Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River*, 222-224; Zaithanchungi, *Israel-Mizo Identity*, 68-69.

¹²⁹ Thangchina, "Christian Unity," 110.

¹³⁰ Ratu was already in existence and featured in Mizoram's history of Revivalism. A Ratu villager, Puma, introduced a song-form that became popular during the first wave of Revivalism (1906-1908). See Lalsawma, *Four Decades of Revivals*, 45-46.

¹³¹ Samra, "Buallawn Israel."

¹³² Although Mawii here talks of Jews in Ratu, these in fact were Chala's Israelites, who continued to follow Jesus.

¹³³ In Mizoram, Judaism and "Messianic Judaism" are associated with poverty and low status, whereas a significant number of better-off and influential people in Manipur have adopted Judaism, hence Mawii's initial inclination to look down on the "Israelites."

¹³⁴ The fact that Vairengte is a border town may explain why Ngurliamthang apparently still spoke Hmar rather than the dominant dialect of Mizoram.

¹³⁵ This appears to be a practice carried on from Pu Chala's time. Weil, *Lost Israelites*, 228 quotes from the Rev. Dr. C. L. Hminga that, "There were several people going round the villages collecting names of those who would like to join the migration party. There was time when 'migration into Israel' was in the lips of almost everybody in Lushai."

¹³⁶ According to Reverend G. J. Hnamte, most of Pu Chala's original followers in Ratu are now members of his Church of God (Seventh Day), a denomination, which in practice is very similar to the pattern set up by Pu Chala, except that it does not hold to the idea that the Mizos are descendants of Israelites. See Samra, "Buallawn Israel," 113-115.

¹³⁷ This is Gideon Rei, in whose house we met. As noted earlier, Gideon visited Israel in 1981 to study Judaism. While the Judaizing congregations in Manipur and Mizoram raised the cost of his fares, Rabbi Avichail and his *Amishav* organization arranged for his needs and those of the two colleagues who went with him, while in Israel.

¹³⁸ Myer Samra, "The Tribe of Manasseh: 'Judaism' in the Hills of Manipur and Mizoram," *Man in India* 71(1) (1991):183-202; Zaithanchungi, *Israel-Mizo Identity*, 29-30, gives further examples of the use of the name, as do Parfitt, *Lost Tribes*, 138, and Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River*, 59, 80, 164, and 175. Many of the Christian Israelite groups in Mizoram now assert that they hail from the tribe of Ephraim. When attempts are made to bring all the Sabbatarians/Judaizers together, reference is made to "the sons of Joseph."

¹³⁹ In the same way, Mizos use "Davida" for David, "Paula" for Paul. Feminine names end with an "-i." Hence, one has names such as "Miriami," while English "Roberta" would become "Robertai."

¹⁴⁰ Samra, "Buallawn Israel," 120. However, Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River*, 189 records that, "As far back as 1945, a Hmar named Zakaithanga had been told from heaven that Manmasi (the putative first ancestor of the Hmar) was Manasseh."

¹⁴¹ Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River*, 156, 192.

¹⁴² M. Kirti Singh, *Religious Developments in Manipur in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Imphal: Manipur State Kala Akademi, 1980):300-301; Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East: Studies in the Formal Religions of Northern-India* (New Delhi: Manoharlal Publishers, 1984):50-61.

¹⁴³ In Manipur, some groups who have lived in the Imphal Valley for many generations have come to be absorbed into the dominant Meithei community, taking on the Meithei language and Hindu practices, while possibly maintaining some vestiges of their former tribal identities. Some families of the Manlun clan, originally members of the Zou tribe, belong to this category. Members of this group visited the remote Behiang Village on the Tiddim Road, close to the border with Burma, to meet with its chief, Pu Tongzapao Manlun seeking to learn about the Jewish faith that he followed. Notwithstanding their common roots, however, the two sides found themselves unable to communicate with each other. In Tripura, the Hlam/Halam tribe, who had lived there for centuries, had become partially Hinduized, while retaining their own language and Mizo-Kuki identity, and at least some of them participated in the Mizo uprising, see Chatterjee, *Mizoram Encyclopaedia*, 448-449.

¹⁴⁴ Pudaite, *Education of the Hmar*, 63.

¹⁴⁵ Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River*, 320.

¹⁴⁶ Prim-Vaiphei, "Who We Are? Who Are We?" 31.

¹⁴⁷ See Lal Dena, *Hmar Folk Tales* (New Delhi: Scholar Publishing House, 1995): ix; Hol Kho Lun Lhungdim, "Israel/Jewish Theory of Our Origin—A Synopsis," in Lunminthang Haokip (ed.), *Kut Festival Souvenir 1991* (Imphal: State Level Kut Committee, 1991).

¹⁴⁸ Herbert C. Dobrinsky, *A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House and New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1988):145. Syrian Jewish communities in Latin America follow similar rules.

¹⁴⁹ In private, the Nepalese man indicated to me that he would have preferred the appellation "Benei Naftali," romantically musing over whether the Nepalese might not in fact be descendants of the tribe of Naftali.

¹⁵⁰ Roy-Burman, "Emergence of Mizo Nationality," 21.

¹⁵¹ See the article "Rabbinic Recognizes Bnei Menashe as 'Descendants of Israel,'" on Arutz 7 Israel National News, March 31, 2005; Yair Sheleg, "Amar: Bnei Menashe are descendants of ancient Israelites"; on www.haaretz.com, April 1, 2005; Myer Samra, "Recognition for the Benei Menashe," address to the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, May 17, 2005.

¹⁵² Mordecai Roshwald, "Who Is a Jew in Israel?" *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 12(2) (1970):233-266 provides a fascinating analysis of categories of inclusion and exclusion created by the interface between the Law of Return and *Halakhah* (rabbinical law), determining which people can or cannot claim citizenship in Israel, their civil, national, and religious status, and their ability to marry in the country.

¹⁵³ When members of an Israeli Beth Din visited Mizoram in September 2005 to formally induct members of the Benei Menashe into Judaism through conversion, hostility erupted among sections of the Mizo community. One prominent politician asked rhetorically: "How would Israelis respond if Christian missionaries went to Israel to convert their children." Although the rabbis had by this stage successfully converted around 218 Benei Menashe in Mizoram, their activities had created a diplomatic incident between India and Israel. The rabbis' permits to enter Manipur were withdrawn so that they could not carry out conversions for Benei Menashe in that state who wished to be fully recognized as Jews. For an account of this

controversy, see the *Wikipedia* entry on Bnei Menashe and Matthew Wagner and Herb Keinon's article in the *Jerusalem Post Online Edition*, November 9, 2005.

¹⁵⁴ In the year 2000, I had been interviewing an elderly woman, in the home of a prominent local family affiliated with the Presbyterian Church. My informant had been a member of Chalianthanga's Buallawn Israel and had since embraced Judaism. The mistress of the house was present in the room as we spoke. My informant and I were treated cordially, until I asked her how difficult it had been for her to put aside belief in Jesus as the Messiah. When my informant responded "Not at all," the mistress of the house flew into a rage, shrieking that it was unthinkable for a Mizo to forsake the Christ. Needless to say, the interview came to an abrupt and embarrassing halt at this point.

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