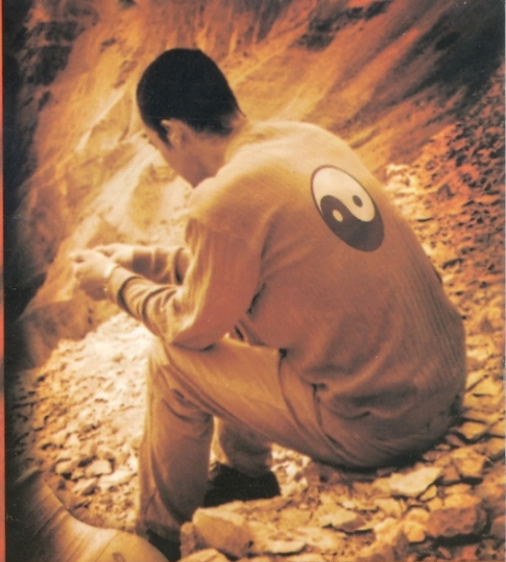


*"Jews  
in the  
East"*



# MISHKAN

A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Issue 38 / 2003

JERUSALEM



*New Age  
Influence  
on  
Post Modern  
Judaism*

# MISHKAN

**A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People**

ISSUE 38 / 2003

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**Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies · Jerusalem**

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# The Not So New Age

## Editorial

A casual walk down Jerusalem's Ben Yehuda street, the city's main pedestrian shopping area, dispels any impression that the New Age movement is a peripheral phenomenon in Israel. The New Age centers, the posters announcing mystic festivals, and frequent discussion of holistic healing /education/ relationships/*your abstract noun here*, evince a widespread and popular movement. Still, a paradox exists between this blatant phenomenon on the one hand, and camouflaged chameleon on the other. New Age religion eagerly embraces any faith, assumes its inclusive doctrines and thinks itself indistinguishable from the original. It blends in by adopting vocabulary and adapting creeds in hopes of being all things to all men so it might deceive a few.

Whether this subterfuge is intentional or not, the movement's growth demands the attention of believers in Jesus. According to Noam Hendren, a pastor in north Tel Aviv, "It may well be that New Age alternatives are already our primary 'competition' in evangelistic terms, even in Israel." Consequently, Hendren believes it essential that believers in Israel "learn to address New Age issues and arguments as part of our overall preparation for sharing the Good News of Yeshua." He warns "such preparation should not be limited to those who are participating in New Age festivals as part of their personal outreach."

Consequently, *Mishkan* editors thought it wise to devote this issue to the New Age movement in Israel, researching its methodology and examining its adherents. New Age is "a complex of spiritual and consciousness-raising movements ... covering a range of themes from a belief in spiritualism and reincarnation to advocacy of holistic approaches to health and ecology," according to the American Heritage dictionary. That's a reasonable, but academic definition. The manager of "The New Age Center," just meters off Zion Square at the intersection of Ben Yehuda and Jaffa streets, offers a pragmatic explanation for the movement: "People have found so much power in themselves," she says. It's about power and it's about the self. Finn Barr develops this idea in his article in this *Mishkan* which details the connection between today's movement, its eastern mystic roots and finally its occultic and Satanic background. He reports that Israel has 50-60 Satanic groups whose acceptance has been facilitated by the New Age movement.

Despite its growth in Israel, many Israelis have become acquainted with New Age in India. Upon finishing their military service, it has become a tradition for middle and upper-class Israeli youth to trek to India to explore its spiritual allure. The Israeli media have published many articles and case histories of these youth who disappear, are robbed or experiment with drugs

while on this trek. Marijuana use, often in conjunction with a religious ritual, frequently leads to use of more addictive drugs which are widely available in India. Many of these youth return to Israel having suffered mental and emotional damage. Janice Ross, who works in India sharing the gospel with Israeli youth journeying there, testifies of her first hand knowledge of Israeli youth suffering a variety of tragedies in India, as well as the spiritual background which give rise to those events. Ross traces the movement's rise in popularity back in Israel and reports on Israel's New Age festivals.

How are believers to react to New Age religion? Obviously they must be informed. Articles by Caspari Director Lisa Loden and Heinrich Pedersen, general secretary of the Danish Israel Mission, explain the movement's rise in Israel and the people drawn to its differing forms. These articles clarify who is involved and what they are doing. They give a good overview of the Jewish New Age scene with a particular eye toward Israel where New Agers generally express openness to the Good News. I personally have enjoyed a warm reception when sharing the gospel with New Age friends; I found the "who and what" of the movement to be necessary information in order to strategically share the gospel.

One evangelist in Kfar Saba, experienced in sharing with New Agers, encourages believers to be informed and active in sharing the gospel with them because they are such an "open audience." He stresses their readiness to listen, but warns against compromising Jesus' unique role in salvation – even if they agree that Jesus is *one* of the ways to salvation. "Shake them up in their convictions. Let them firmly face "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except by me.""

The early believers in Jesus had to celebrate their newfound faith in a pagan world. Questions of customs and vocabulary abounded. Professor Karl Olav Sandnes of Oslo writes in this *Mishkan* that Paul found criteria to determine the most effective way to express Christian faith in that environment. They understood the challenge and tailored their worship and witness to meet it. Having entered the mainstream, New Age devotees present 21st century Christians with a similar challenge.

Many questions remain unanswered. How many people are involved in the movement in Israel? Presently the movement is too fluid to be tracked by a demographic survey. What do they believe? Again, the ambiguity of the movement thwarts doctrinal definition. Answers to those objective questions would be helpful in defining the movement, but a baffling subjective question *demand*s a response – Why Buddha and not Yeshua? Why a Hindu guru, but not the Jewish Messiah? Why a drug-induced Shiva, but not "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"? Many answers have been offered, but none of them is adequate. This issue of *Mishkan* answers some questions, prompts others and ultimately suggests much more study, reflection and effort be

invested in that large segment of Israeli and Jewish population that is attracted to this mystic movement.

New Age prompts new questions, but in many ways it's just that old time religion—paganism—repackaged, masquerading as monotheism and demanding a response. Christians have responded in the past, the church fathers confronting Gnosticism—New Age's spiritual progenitor. Our challenge is to respond to this more recent development, tailoring our witness to lovingly meet this challenge.

Hendren concludes: "In many ways, the New Age is the Now Age—and the sooner we accept the fact and orient our witness accordingly, the more effective we will be in fulfilling our calling as followers of the Messiah."

*David Smith*

# **Between Idolatry and Virtue: Paul and Hellenistic Religious Environment**

**Karl Olav Sandnes\***

Since the time of Emperor Constantine (fourth century AD) Christianity has been the dominant religion in large parts of Europe. This has gradually changed since World War II. Now Christianity faces a situation that, in many ways, resembles the situation of the first Christian generations who lived in a world of many faiths. The answers and solutions provided by the Church and Christian believers are no longer self-evident; rather, they are challenged and even questioned by adherents of other belief systems. Believers find themselves being pushed back into a pre-Constantinian era. It is, therefore, the aim of this article to seek some guidance by turning to the New Testament, and to Paul in particular. Some of Paul's first interpreters will help us glean information from his letters with regards to this problem.

## **Paul in a World of Many Deities**

In what is possibly the oldest Christian source, Paul addresses his readers in Thessalonica as people who have "turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (1 Thess 1:9 NRSV). This statement reveals that Paul's preaching included a view on idols, the deities of his time. Furthermore, the idols are implicitly presented as being unable to provide any help. Paul contrasts them with the living and true God, thus basing his statement on the Old Testament belief that God alone is active and real. Embracing the Christian faith implied, according to Paul, a transition from the idols to the One Living God, thus leaving behind the former loyalty and allegiance to the idols (1 Cor 12:2; Gal 4:8 cf. 1 Thes 4:5).

Although idols and obedience to them belong to the past of the believers, Christians are still challenged by them and their assisting forces. Ephesians 6:11-17 describes the spiritual warfare in which believers are involved. They participate in a continuous struggle against fourfold hostile powers (rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, spiritual forces of evil) which are described as surpassing human nature. By his resurrection Jesus defeated all these powers

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(Eph 1:21; cf. 2:2; 3:10), and the believers must now stand against them. In Ephesians it is explicitly stated that these powers are not of “blood and flesh”; that is, they are not human beings. It is, of course, another matter that human beings can be their agents in the world, as is probably the case in 1 Corinthians 2:6-8. Behind these somewhat puzzling descriptions of the powers are what scholars usually identify as astrological and magical traditions, their emphasis on the planets and astrological influence in human affairs. These are possibly associated with the role of the goddess Artemis in the city of Ephesus, or are used as a comprehensive designation for various evil forces and spirits.

The above-mentioned texts speak of idols and the powers in highly theological terms. But what lies behind these theological statements? Historical and archaeological research into the Hellenistic cities where Paul worked provides us with some information on this issue. To take Corinth as an example, archaeologists have uncovered a number of temples and shrines in this city of approximately 100,000 inhabitants. Pausanias, a traveller to Corinth and other cities in Greece around 170 AD., provides, in his *Description of Greece*, a full description of Corinth’s many deities. For New Testament readers it is natural to fill in the picture given by Paul’s theological statements by looking into the Book of Acts. This literature gives a vivid picture of the religious environment that caused Paul’s theological statements concerning idols and powers in his epistles.

A survey of the Pauline mission according to Acts substantiates the fact that Paul met with the long-standing traditional cults of the Hellenistic-Roman period. Paul is twice exposed to magi. According to Acts 13:6-12, Paul confronts a sorcerer with divinatory powers. Similarly, Acts 19:18-19 mentions magical practices and magical books in Ephesus. In this city a confrontation with the cult of Artemis, whom the Romans called Diana, also took place. The story is given a significant place in the narrative of Acts (19:23-41). A huge temple was raised in Ephesus for this Olympian goddess connected with fertility and childbirth. According to Acts 14:8-18, Paul and Barnabas were mistaken for being Hermes and Zeus due to the miracle they had performed on a crippled man in Lystra: “When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have come down to us in human form!’” (v.11). In this text we see a typical element in Hellenistic religion; there is no sharp distinction between men and the Divine. People who demonstrated extraordinary power or abilities were seen as heroes, something in between men and the gods. This is, of course, the logic that produced cults of various heroes, such as the emperor’s.

Finally, in Philippi Paul met with Pythian divination according to the pattern found in Delphi. Modern Bible-translations speak here of a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination, but the Greek text is more precise, speaking of a Pythian spirit (Acts 16:16). Pythia is the name of the prophetess who gave



oracles in Delphi, the famous sanctuary of Apollo. In short, Paul met with a plethora of deities and religious practices. What was, then, the position taken by Paul towards his environment which was so full deities?

### **Flee from Idolatry**

In language taken from Old Testament texts regarding the abandonment of idols, Paul urges his readers to flee from idolatry (1 Cor 10:14). His Corinthian readers are tempted to partake of food offered to idols, as served in the many temples of the city. Paul then instructs them by reminding them of how the Israelites fell, while in the desert, because they were tempted by the feasting associated with the Golden Calf (Exod 32). They did not consider God a sufficient provider and this mistrust was the beginning of their apostasy. The temptation to participate in temple meals in Corinth works very much in the same way, according to Paul (1 Cor 10:1-13). This is the lesson that Paul wants his converts to draw from Israel's past.<sup>1</sup> The implication of this text is that Paul's attitude regarding many gods, the idols and their worship, is rooted in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament foundation for Paul's thinking on the issue allows him to draw on a set of arguments. The idols are to be avoided since they are unable to speak or bring any help (1 Cor 12:2). This corresponds to Acts 14:15 where Paul speaks of the empty, or worthless, gods. In the Septuagint the Greek word applied here (the adjective *mataios* and cognates) is a favorite term denoting the gods as unable to do anything (Jer 2:5; 8:19; 3 *Macc* 6:11). This argument is in accordance with the critique launched against the many gods as especially seen in the so-called Deutero Isaiah (e.g. 44:12-20; 44:6-7 cf. *Wisd.* 13:10-14:21). Idolatry is mocked here and becomes an object of ridicule.

Paul also draws upon the nexus between idolatry and immorality found in Old Testament texts: Worshipping idols paves the way for immorality (1 Thes 4:5; Rom 1:21-30). This connection is made in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 as well, when Paul associates craving with idolatry.

In Galatians 4:8 Paul denies the existence of idols; they are not gods. This implies by no means that Paul ignores idolatry. What we have seen so far contradicts such a conclusion, but the idols of the gentiles were for him not really gods at all.

At the end of the day, however, Paul's opposition to idol-worship is due to his conviction that it is inspired by the Devil and his demons and conveys

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<sup>1</sup> Paul here applied a typological view on the Old Testament. He assumes an analogy between Israel and his converts which allows him to find patterns in God's dealings with Israel of relevance for his churches. For this way of reading the Old Testament, see Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: the Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

fellowship with them. The warfare against the spirits associated with the Artemis, and other cults in Ephesus, is, in fact, a battle with the Devil (Eph. 6:11). Nowhere is this more explicit than in 1 Corinthians 10:15-22. Christians who partook in sacrificial meals in temples associated themselves with demons. Fellowship with Christ and fellowship with demons are mutually exclusive. Although the many gods were unable to speak or bring any help, they nonetheless had supernatural powers. Thus the idols represented demonic spirits, and were therefore to be avoided. This is an idea which Paul takes from the Old Testament: "all the gods of the nations are demons" (Ps 95:5 LXX).<sup>2</sup> The worship of demons is involved in the plethora of gods Paul met in the narrative of Acts. In brief, Paul considered the many gods of the Greco-Roman world to be incompatible with belief in the One God. The danger of idolatry lurked everywhere in the culture surrounding the Christians. But did Paul's instruction to flee from idolatry necessarily mean withdrawal from the surrounding society?

### **The Need to Discern**

In his instruction to flee from idolatry, Paul stands firmly in Old Testament traditions. In the Graeco-Roman world, social life and idolatry were intimately connected. According to the Old Testament, Jews were expected to live separated from pagans. Although the question of the relationship between Jews and gentiles runs throughout the Old Testament writings, and thus reveals that to draw a simple line of demarcation between the two was difficult, it was still much more difficult to distance oneself in the Diaspora where idolatry surpassed that of the Old Testament. To what extent was it possible to flee from idolatry when it was entirely interwoven into the fabric of social life? And even more so, was Paul himself unaware of this need to sort out good and acceptable from within the bad?

Paul recognized that, as part of their daily life in a pagan city like Corinth, his converts had to associate with idolaters (1 Cor 5:9-10). A previous letter from Paul had caused his converts to disassociate with neighbors who practiced immorality and idolatry, and Paul now corrects that misunderstanding. He expects them to disassociate from Christians who continued to participate in idolatrous worship, not to keep away from all idolaters: "... since you would then need to go out of the world" (v. 10b cf. John 17:14-16). This is a very realistic statement of the apostle. He knows that it was neither possible nor an ideal to entirely avoid dealings with idolaters. His correction implies that he expects his readers to be able to draw some distinctions. In practice, things looked more difficult than his instruction to flee from idolatry might at first sight indicate. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul urges a distinction between idolatry and

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<sup>2</sup> See also Ps 106:37; Isa 65:3.11 LXX; Baruk 4:7.

the idolater, the neighbour who practiced idolatry. This distinction is supported pragmatically; otherwise, they would have to leave the world.

In 1 Corinthians 10:26, however, Paul provides a theological rationale for the task of distinguishing between good and evil, virtue and error in the pagan environment: "... the earth and its fullness are the Lord's". In the midst of his discussion on eating food offered to idols, Paul quotes from Psalms 24:1. His belief in God the Creator created an opportunity for thankfulness, as well as legitimizing some practical use of even meat offered to idols. Since God is the ultimate source of all food, believers can eat all food presented to them, notwithstanding that the food sold in the market came from the temples. Due to God's creation of the whole earth, good and useful things were to be found everywhere, even in a context influenced by idolatry. But the fact that God's good gifts were embedded in a pagan society forced the Christians to make some distinctions.

Some of the criteria for this critical reflection appear in I Corinthians. We have already seen that Paul forbids his converts participation in meals in the temple or its precincts. His instruction to flee idolatry applies to this situation. Paul touches upon the need to distinguish between what is permitted and what is idolatry in two similarly sounding dicta: "Everything is permissible to me" (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23). Both texts render what is, in fact, a Corinthian slogan of permissiveness allowing Christians to practice sex freely, to eat excessively and to participate in temple-meals.<sup>3</sup> Paul qualifies this slogan so sharply that he comes close to negating it: "- but not everything is beneficial." Nonetheless his reference to this slogan implies that believers have to find their way through many dangers. The result of the process wherein distinctions are made between what is permitted and what is to be fled from, cannot master or overpower the Christian. There is a danger of being taken captive or jeopardizing one's faith in this process. Furthermore, the result of this process should not jeopardize the faith of other Christians nor that of the Christian fellowship. Most commentaries on these Corinthian passages emphasize Paul's rejection of the slogan. No doubt, there is much to recommend such a conclusion. But taken together with 1 Corinthians 10:26 on God's gifts which are found even in the meat market, Paul's reference to them implies the need to distinguish good from evil in the permissiveness of the Corinthians. It is only when applied together with Paul's criteria that there is some truth in the freedom claimed by this slogan.

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<sup>3</sup> See Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth, The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001), 76-109.

## A Key-text: Phil 4:8

Paul trusted that there were elements of truth in the cultural and religious environment of his converts as well. These elements are to be distinguished from deceptive elements, and then to be retained in the Christian life. This trusting and thinking involves a dialectical and critical work. I think this is what Paul addresses in Philippians 4:8: “whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” This sentence – except from the introducing “finally, beloved” – appears to be more at home in Greco-Roman philosophers than in Paul. The adjectives and the nouns “that make up the sentence are as uncommon in Paul as most of them are common stock to the world of Greco-Roman morality.”<sup>4</sup> Paul is not ignorant of the fact that virtues – if they were to be found – were deeply embedded not only in a pagan culture, but also in traditions and in literature promoting Greek mythology on the many gods and their immoral life, such as in Homer’s writings, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Nonetheless, the apostle here urges his readers not only to think highly of these virtues of their pagan past, but rather to take them into account. The two statements introduced by “if” imply that it is necessary to filter that which belongs to their pagan past from that which is morally excellent and praiseworthy. Paul urges them to embark upon a critical reflection in order to lead them to embrace the best of their pagan past. What criteria does Paul envisage here in this process of distinguishing between good and evil?

The following v. 9 brings out the basis on which one can discern the difference: “Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.” Paul refers here to the gospel he has taught them and transmitted to them. This must imply that he urges his converts to perform their critical evaluation of the traditions found in their environment in light of that which is conformable to Christ. He wants the believers to “read” the Greco-Roman religious culture in the light of what they have learned through his preaching and example. The crucial criterion thus becomes what is conformable to Christ.

Furthermore, it is important here to note that Paul asks them to take him as their example: “what you have seen in me.” This echoes Philippians 3:17 where he instructs his readers to imitate him. This instruction closes Paul’s own story told in 3:4-16. What, then, does his story bring to the question of critical evaluation of their environment? Paul’s story highlights precisely the criterion which he urges his readers to practice in evaluating their environment. Paul

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<sup>4</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 415. See also John Ferguson, *Moral Values in the Ancient World* (London: Methuen & Co., 1958).

was also forced to re-think and to re-define his life. What was formerly a gain to him, he came to regard as a loss because of Christ. After Christ had appeared to him outside Damascus, he viewed his life in a new light. Just as his life was being conformed to Christ, and his death and resurrection (v.10), so should his addressees likewise evaluate religion and culture in Philippi in light of what was conformable to Christ. It is only when they are conformed to Christ – as also Paul himself also seeks – that they will be able to distinguish between virtue and vice in their environment. It is thus possible to find virtuous traditions and convictions in the Greco-Roman religious culture. But this naturally implies that if something is not conformable to Christ, and what Paul has taught them, it is, accordingly, not praiseworthy.

### **“The Right Use” according to Early Interpreters of Paul**

We have seen that Paul urges his converts to make distinctions in their dealings with their environment. We noted that he made a difference between idolatry and the idolater, that he urged his converts to seek that which edifies the fellowship of believers, and to avoid being empowered by the threat inherent in pagan cultures. The theological rationale for this project was, of course, his belief in God the Creator. Philippians 4:8 is probably the text where he provides a somewhat foundational treatment of the need to make a difference in dealings with the environment. But Paul’s letters were occasional writings, and we therefore seek in vain for a full and coherent treatment of this burning issue. There are, however, sufficient pieces and fragments which, when collected, provide a broader picture. I think that some early Christian writers, writing a while after Paul, might help us put the pieces together.

Paul and his Christian contemporaries struggled to find their way to live as God’s holy, elect and dearly-loved people in the midst of a pagan culture. As we have noticed, this challenge is addressed in Paul’s letters, as well as in the New Testament in general. For a number of centuries Christians had to grapple with this same situation, finding their way between idolatry and the good, between abandonment and participation, in the pagan culture in which they lived. In this context, some Christian writers developed arguments and scriptural interpretations which shed some light on the more occasional and fragmentary letters of Paul. In particular, they addressed the question of Greek education and the pagan literature which made up the content of education in antiquity.

Origen (185-251 AD) wrote a letter to his student Gregor, who was called *Thaumaturgos* (Wonderworker).<sup>5</sup> The theme of this letter concerns how his

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<sup>5</sup> The Greek text with a German translation is found in Peter Guyot and Richard Klein, *Das frühe Christentum bis zum Ende der Verfolgungen*, Band 2, Texte zur Forschung 72 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994), 87-93.

student is to deal with the pagan literature which formed the basis for all instruction and education in antiquity.<sup>6</sup> Origen's advice takes, as its point of departure, an allegorical reading of Exodus 11:2 ("Tell the people that every man is to ask his neighbour and every woman is to ask her neighbour for objects of silver and gold") and of Exodus 12:35-36 ("The Israelites had done as Moses told them; they have asked the Egyptians for jewelry of silver and gold, and for clothing, and the Lord had given the people favour in sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And so they plundered the Egyptians"). By making reference to the silver, gold and clothing of Egypt, Origen is using a common interpretation which was in development at an early stage among the Christians. The silver and gold of the Egyptians symbolizes the wisdom and literature of paganism. This logic probably originated already in the first or second century since it draws upon Acts 7:22 where it is told that Moses received training in the wisdom of the Egyptians.

The exodus-event is, to Origen, an analogy of how also Christians must leave paganism. But they should not leave behind the gold of the Egyptians. This silver and gold could be disastrous, something which was demonstrated in the incident of the Golden Calf (Exod 32). It could, however, also be "useful" when applied in the service of God. According to the Old Testament, some of the gold was used to adorn and equip the Temple. How can Christians then identify the silver and gold in paganism? The criterion applied by Origen is "usefulness," meaning pagan wisdom which is conformable to the Christian faith. The criterion of "usefulness" (Greek: *chrêsimon*/Latin: *utilitas*) emerges in many Christian texts as the main criterion with which to deal critically and selectively with paganism. As demonstrated by *Christian Gnilka* this criterion is taken from the contemporary debate on how to separate good from evil in Homer's writings.<sup>7</sup> Origen and many with him now make use of it in a Christian setting; usefulness refers to what is conformable to Christian faith and tradition.

Gregor of Nyssa (ca. 331-395 AD) in his *Life of Moses*<sup>8</sup> also refers to Exodus 12:35-36. His interpretation concurs with that of Origen, but he emphasizes that the silver and gold from Egypt adorned the Holy place (*Life of Moses* 2:116). Similarly, the true wisdom of the Church will be adorned by pagan wisdom. Also worth noticing is Augustin's (354-430 AD) comment in his *Confessions* 7:9:

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<sup>6</sup> See Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*, Cambridge Classical Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> See Christian Gnilka, *CHRËSIS, Die Methode der Kirchenväter im Umgang mit der Antiken Kultur. Der Begriff des "rechten Gebrauchs"* (Basel, Stuttgart: Schwabe & Co AG, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> For a text-edition with English translation, see Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses* (Paulist Press, New York, Ramsey, Toronto, 1978).

*And I myself had come unto thee from among the Gentiles; and I set my mind earnestly upon that gold which thou willedst thy people to take from the Egyptians ... wheresoever it were. And to the Athenians thou saidst by the Apostle, That in thee we live, and move, and have our being, as certain of their own poets had said. And surely it was from Athens these books came. But I set not my mind towards the idols of Egypt, which they made of the gold.*<sup>9</sup>

Of special interest to us is the last passage implying that “where there is gold, it also rightly belongs to the Lord.” This clearly echoes Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 10:26 where Psalms 24:1 is quoted: “the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s” (cf. Sir 1:1: “All wisdom is from the Lord”). Belief in God the Creator demanded that paganism not only be fled, but be critically judged by “what is useful and helpful” in interpreting the Christian scriptures (*De Doctrina Christiana* 1:7-10), in other words, judged by the Christian faith.

This allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament offered help in a dilemma many Christians faced. This dilemma led to this creative reading of Old Testament texts. Nonetheless, they substantiated this reading with scriptural arguments which – at least some of them – are not far off from Paul’s logic in 1 Corinthians 10:26 and Philippians 4:8. Finally, we turn to two early Christian writers to support this claim.

Clement of Alexandria’s (150-215 AD) writings witness intense debate among the Christians on how to deal with the pagan culture surrounding them. He was himself an advocate of involvement, participation, and to some extent acceptance. He fights fellow Christians who wanted to have “faith alone and naked,” as he puts it (*Strom.* 1:9/43:1). In *Strom.* 6:11/89:1-3 he gives a description of how he views the debate on pagan literature and education. His description starts from the well-known story of the Sirenes in Homer’s *Odyssey* (*Od.* 12:37-73). From their island, the Sirenes enticed seafarers by singing so beautifully that they could not resist the temptation to visit the island. The meadow on which the Sirenes sat while singing was, however, full of dead bones from those who had been tempted. Homer says that Odysseus and his companions also faced this temptation. It is told that his men stopped their ears to avoid being enticed. Odysseus himself chose another strategy, aiming at enjoying the beautiful song while resisting the temptation to visit the island: he had himself tied to the mast of the ship. Thus, he could safely listen to the song and not miss it, as his own men did. Clement offers an allegorical interpretation of this classical story. The Christians who are afraid of being enticed by the pagan literature resemble Odysseus’ companions. They missed the beautiful song of the Sirenes, which is an analogy for pagan education and wisdom. But Odysseus himself was able to enjoy the song while being safely tied to his ship (cf. *Od.* 12:155-164).

Clement’s ideal is the attitude manifested by Odysseus. Clement is fully aware of the danger inherent in the pagan literature and culture, but he urges

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted from the Loeb Classical Library edition.

the Christians to adopt Odysseus' strategy rather than that of his companions. Christians who act like them do so, according to Clement, because they are unable to distinguish between what is "useful" and "helpful" in the pagan culture. He mentions an example. When the catechumens are Greek, knowledge of the pagan culture and literature will certainly be useful and contribute to a better teaching in the Christian faith. What is needed is the ability to discern the useful from the useless – both in relation to the Christian faith. Clement also adds scriptural proof to his opinion by quoting Paul's citation of Psalms 24:1 in 1 Corinthians 10:26.

In his commentary on Paul's letter to Titus<sup>10</sup>, Hieronymus (ca.345-420 AD) works out some hermeneutical principles for dealing with classical pagan literature. His presentation starts from the appearance of dicta taken from pagan writers in Paul (Acts 17:28; 1 Cor 15:33; Tit 1:12). Of special interest here is Titus 1:12: "Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons." This is taken from a hymn praising Zeus.<sup>11</sup> In its original setting the proverb about the Cretans being liars is used because Cretans claimed to know the grave of Zeus, who was immortal. Since Zeus is alive, the Cretans must be liars when they speak about his tomb! Hieronymus addresses this citation of Paul since some Christians accuse the apostle here of maintaining that the Cretans lied about Zeus. Hence Paul, here, becomes a witness to the immortality of Zeus. Hieronymus defends Paul, and is thus led to present a hermeneutic of how to deal with paganism. The key word in his commentary is the Latin *usus* which refers to the "right use" or "usefulness". Paul is selective; he chooses that which he can make use of. Hieronymus, therefore, argues that the apostle, by selecting some passages from a pagan writing, in no way accepts the context from which they are taken. Hieronymus contrasts "the whole comedy," "the whole book," "the whole writing," "the whole song," with "one verse," "a part of the book," "something good," "some truth," thus emphasizing the selective use Paul makes of pagan writers. The nouns "good" and "truth" bring to mind Philippians 4:8 where Paul uses the corresponding Greek terms.

Hieronymus adds an illustration: What Paul does is comparable to what bees do when producing honey. From a number of flowers they pick only the best, and thereof they produce something new – sweet honey. This illustration became commonplace in early Christian texts on dealings with pagan culture and literature.<sup>12</sup> The Christians found this illustration in pagan philosophers who referred to the practice of the bees in order to emphasize the need of discerning between useful and vice in Homer's writings. Thus, the Christian discourse on how to deal with the pagan culture is indebted to a critical tradition in this culture itself. The logic of this illustration is the process of

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<sup>10</sup> PL 25.589-636.

<sup>11</sup> Christian Gnilka pp.124-127.

<sup>12</sup> Christian Gnilka pp.102-133.



adapting pagan traditions into a new setting – that of the Christian faith. From this it follows that the Christian faith defines what is useful or helpful in paganism.

Our sources are considerably later than Paul's letters. There is, however, no doubt that the challenge they address remains more or less unchanged since Paul's days. It is likely that they have developed strategies and arguments which were not there in Paul's epistles – at least not in full. But we have good reason to assume that Paul would not fundamentally object to this development. After all, we have observed logic in his own writings which points in the direction followed by some of his interpreters.

### **Summary**

Present-day Christians who find themselves in a market full of religious alternatives, options and claims have a spokesman in Paul the apostle. His letters as well as the narrative about his ministry in the Book of Acts show him at work among many deities. His letters disclose an ambivalent attitude towards the Greco-Roman culture which was so marked by this plethora of divinities. The title of this article, "Between idolatry and virtues," is an attempt to formulate the two sides of this ambiguity. In line with Old Testament traditions Paul urges his converts to flee from idolatry. The Devil and the demons are lurking in paganism, but the culture is still more than paganism. Recognizing this, Paul is led to speak of the need to make distinctions. It is necessary to separate good from evil, truth from error, honorable from dishonourable etc. A key text for this critical dialogue with the pagan culture is Philippians 4:8. Finally, I have argued that this text forms an embryonic expression of what some of Paul's early interpreters addressed as "making right use of" pagan literature. The pagan culture is not rightly seen only as an arena for the Devil and demons. Believing in God the Creator demands that pagan cultures be critically judged by finding what is useful and conformable to Christ and Christian faith.

# The New Age and Similar Movements in Israel

Finn Barr\*

When volunteers were needed in 1994 to work with pilgrims in the Holy Land, I jumped at the opportunity. The "peace process" was leading to a big increase in the numbers visiting Christian shrines in the Holy Land and help was needed to cater to all these pilgrims.

I had never had a chance to visit the Holy Land before so this was my opportunity. Besides, having been involved in investigating the detrimental effects of the New Age Movement (NAM) in the churches since 1978, I was tired of this weird metaphysical system and was delighted to have an opportunity to get back to the roots of our Biblical spirituality. It would be good to be able to put all this material away and just concentrate on reading and studying the Bible in the Holy Land where it was largely inspired. I was in for a big surprise.

## New Age in Nazareth

My first assignment was to the Nazareth area. I met a lot of local Arab youth who liked to practice their English with me. One youth told me of his fascination with Buddhism and psychic powers. He was introduced to this by one of his Jewish school friends. I was amazed that anyone living in the Holy Land, where some of the greatest religious geniuses in the world were born, would pursue another religion like Buddhism. However, I dismissed this as just an isolated case.

But as time went by and I became more accustomed to Israeli society, I saw that Buddhism, Hinduism and the New Age Movement were no strangers there. This New Age Movement (NAM) is a syncretistic amalgam of pantheism, the esoteric and the occult, of magic and myths about the secrets of life mixed in with ideas from astrology, astro-physics and pop psychology. It borrows from all religions but is under obedience to none. Some papers like the *Jerusalem Post* had articles about, and lots of advertisements for, NAM materials. Hardly a day went by without some new NAM book being advertised.

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## Enneagram

I was amazed to see the notorious enneagram, which is creating havoc in religious communities in America, being advertised again and again. It was listed as a popular Miriam Adahan addition to the *Jerusalem Post* "Judaism Library!" This vicious little piece of occultism was first brought to light by Gurdjieff, a "charlatan and a swindler who was into Gnosticism" according to Professor M. Pacwa. Gurdjieff supposedly got it from the Sufis who used it for fortune telling! Pacwa says it is "theological nonsense, suffused with Gnostic ideas. For instance, the nine points of the enneagram are called the 'nine faces of God,' which become nine demons turned upside down." Secondly, Pacwa says, it is a psychological system that hasn't been tested by professional psychologists so it is irresponsible to pass it off as true.<sup>13</sup> The enneagram was revised by Oscar Ichazo, another occultist, and finally cosmetically disguised for the Jewish market. The advertisement stated that it would help people "to accomplish *tikkun* (restoration)" and grow "spiritually closer to Hashem"!<sup>14</sup>

## Alternative Medicine

Occasionally newspapers included supplements on alternative medicine, but alternative religion would probably have been a better term. These included adverts for yoga, zen, healing through past-life therapy, channeling and NAM crystals ("try the influence of black tourmaline against the evil eye")! Most of these were available from the Reidman Centre for Complementary Medicine in Tel Aviv, which even had its own rabbi. Some alternative healers claimed they used 'psychic energy' to ease back pain and cure ear infections.<sup>15</sup>

I was not surprised to read that the Israeli Medical Association and the Health Ministry moved to bar ads by alternative healers.<sup>16</sup> But Tirzah Agassi maintained that "spiritual healing, complementary medicine and all sorts of alternatives and occult practices are becoming increasingly fashionable in Israel" and this is due to the "daunting reality" that people have to face.<sup>17</sup>

I noticed that Tel Aviv featured again and again in NAM adverts. The Post stated that there was an "explosion of interest in (the) esoteric" since the dawning of the "Age of Aquarius" – especially among youth.<sup>18</sup> Astrologers were interviewed about their divining powers. One said that they do not rely totally on the zodiac but can also read coffee cups, palms, crystals or Tarot cards. Astrologer Herbal Lifschitz's forecasts for 1995 were given. In hindsight,

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<sup>13</sup> *Southern Cross*, 30-8-92, 10.

<sup>14</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, 21/9/94.

<sup>15</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, 31/1/95.

<sup>16</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, 3/1/95.

<sup>17</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, City Lights, 3/3/95.

<sup>18</sup> *Jerusalem Post Magazine*, 30/12/94.

some of these predictions badly missed the mark: e.g. President Hafez Assad “will not survive the year,” and for Prime Minister Rabin “the rest of the year his position will be more secure.” Sadly, Mr. Rabin was dead before the year's end. There was of course not a single reference to the many Biblical injunctions against the occult (Deut 18:10-12; Lev 19: 26,31; 20: 6,27; II Kgs 17:17; 21:6; 1 Chron 10:13; I Sam 28:3; Isa 47:12-13). The incident of Moses and the magicians in Exodus 7 illustrates the difference between apparently identical acts. Moses and Aaron perform miracles at the command of God, who changes the laws of nature in order to bring about the miracle. The Bible thus accepts miracles but “not such as are performed with the aid of occult science.”<sup>19</sup>

In the Bible witchcraft and divination are identified with rebellion (I Sam. 15:23). Divination is enumerated among the sins for which Yahweh destroyed the kingdom of Israel (II Kgs 17:17), among the sins of Manasseh (II Kgs 21:6), and among the practices rooted out by the reform of Josiah (II Kgs 23:24).

### **Yogis and Witches**

In February 1995 the media reported that yogis from all around the world came to Israel for a week-long “Yoga for Peace” conference organized by the Israeli Yoga Teachers’ Association. Disappointment was expressed at the poor Arab turnout, as apparently “Islam is not really open to yoga.” Nobody bothered to mention that the Hebrew Bible is not really open to yoga either! The purpose of sitting in the lotus position is to facilitate the serpent power of *kundalini* at the base of the spine, that it may climb upwards and illuminate the brain so as to develop occult or psychic powers—which are vigorously condemned in the Torah (see above). Still, “Yoga for Peace” carried on. Hindu chants mixed with Hebrew prayer as rabbis, priests, ministers and sheiks held hands and chanted “om” for peace.

Later in the year a convention of witches took place in Tel Aviv. Though witches are generally associated with the cultural past, witchcraft (or wicca) is a growing trend today. Today’s witches come together in covens to cast the circle, raise the cone of power, and invoke the Goddess within. Books on witchcraft are very popular in NAM bookshops because the two movements have a lot in common. Part of the Tel Aviv convention’s function was seemingly to address witch-phobia!

It was reported that “all seven witch stories published last year in Hebrew feature children overcoming their fear of witches and learning that these women are just regular, if quirky, folks.”<sup>20</sup> Are the witches preparing to come out of the closet?

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<sup>19</sup> cf. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, v. 11, 704.

<sup>20</sup> Sue Fishkoff, “Modern-day witches: Fat, friendly & feminist.” *Jerusalem Post*, 14/4/95.

Not long after this convention, Starhawk, America's best known witch and an associate of ex-priest Matthew Fox, flew in from California, the cultural bellwether for the rest of the world. One can understand President Ezer Weizmann's concern about American culture destroying that of Israel, when Starhawk was invited to give workshops on how to "potentialise magic and get in contact with Asherah, the Hebrew Goddess." Dancing, drumming, chanting and trances were also thrown in for good measure!

June 1995 saw articles in the papers on the growth of Satanic cults. The Lev Le'Chai animal welfare group estimated that there were some 50 to 60 suspected Satanic groups in the country, with about 10 members in each, "usually from well-off families."<sup>21</sup> Though not all Satanic cults are interested in the NAM, the latter has certainly helped to make Satanism better known. One of the main sources of NAM teachings is Helena Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*. She quotes Kabbalists as saying that "the true name of Satan is that of Jehovah upside down." He is the "light of truth," "the Devil is ... Creative Force, for Good as for Evil."<sup>22</sup>

### NAM Challenged

Not all these activities or the infatuation with esoteric religion went unchallenged. Dr. Michael Kaufman responded to a Tirzah Agassi piece entitled "This Passage to India Reveals Heaven on Earth." This article was in praise of Hinduism, which was extolled for its "universal tolerance"; she argued it had received a "bad rap" from Christians. Ayodha – where intolerant Hindus razed a Muslim shrine to the ground – was not mentioned!

Kaufman's critique seems to have been substantiated to some extent when the Israeli media revealed to the horrified public the monstrous exploits of the Japanese Aum Shinri Kyo sect. This cult describes itself as Buddhist, but incorporates a variety of beliefs from Hinduism including great devotion to Shiva, the Hindu god of creation and destruction.

Alternative medicine and other fringe activities were also challenged in the *Jerusalem Post* in July 1995, in an article entitled "The Danger of Voodoo Science." Biofield therapeutics came in for a bit of a bashing for its claims of manipulating the patient's "aura" by scooping off any negative energy. The article mentioned that in one hospital in the U.S.A., a patient complained after a careless biofield practitioner, working on someone in the next bed, scooped some negative energy onto him!<sup>23</sup>

Another challenge to the astrologers and diviners came from Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, who quoted Torah and Talmud to show that these things are idolatrous

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<sup>21</sup> *Jerusalem Post* 26/6/95.

<sup>22</sup> *Irish Theological Commission*, "A New Age ...," Dublin, Veritas, 1994, 35.

<sup>23</sup> *Jerusalem Post* 9/7/95.

and magical practices. Riskin stressed that the nation of Israel is not ruled by the stars but only by God. He cited Deuteronomy 18:14, "For these nations which you shall dispossess listen to astrologers and diviners. But as for you the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so."<sup>24</sup>

### **Oriental Fascination**

Jeff Green, in his column "Reading from Right to Left," looks at Israeli infatuation with the Far East and especially with Buddhism, concluding that "Buddhism seems to be made to order for an age of shifting definitions." Perhaps he should have said an age of relativism, for the NAM zeitgeist is monistic and claims to be beyond good and evil. Green said that in the past Israelis, though living on the Western rim of Asia, regarded Middle Eastern and Oriental culture as "Levantine," but now increasingly look to the East and its religions and cultures. Though Green did not mention it, it seems to have become the custom for young Israelis, when they finish national service, to disappear for a year or two into the mystic East.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Situation in Tel Aviv**

When I was sent to work in Tel Aviv/Jaffa, I had a good opportunity to visit the many NAM shops for myself. My Israeli taxi driver gave me a good taste of what was to come as he spoke eloquently about the prophecies of Nostradamus! The latter is very popular in NAM circles because of his fascination with astrology and magic, and was a channel for a spirit entity that dictated to him the prophecies that made him famous.<sup>26</sup>

I expected the bookstores in Tel Aviv to be stocked with Californian material since it is the home of the NAM and a paradise of prosperity. But no, it was nearly all locally printed and published in Hebrew. It was a bit strange to see this material – at such variance with the Hebrew Bible – printed in what many regard as the almost sacred Hebrew alphabet.

*In the areas around Dizengoff Street and Allenby Road there are lots of NAM shops, with some specializing only in crystals. Nearly every Steimatsky bookshop had a considerable NAM section.*

The famous White Gallery opposite the Mann Auditorium is one of the best known NAM stores in the country – it even gets a mention in the Lonely Planet Guide Book to Israel. Nearby was a Dianetics Scientology Center. In the White Gallery there were at least eight NAM magazines published in Tel Aviv alone – five in English and three in Hebrew. The Israeli Theosophical Society even had

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<sup>24</sup> *Jerusalem Post* 9/7/95.

<sup>25</sup> *Jerusalem Post Magazine*, 7/4/95.

<sup>26</sup> Eileen Campbell & J.H. Brennan, *The Aquarian Dictionary of the New Age* (Harper/Collins, 1990), 209.

its own magazine, with a logo of the Star of David and the Crux Ansata with the motto "There is no religion higher than Truth!"

This magazine contained the "Great Invocation" of Alice Bailey, who founded the Lucifer Publishing Company (now Lucis Trust) after claiming to receive messages from a "spirit guide" called Djwhal Khul or "the Tibetan." Lucis Trust sponsors World Goodwill, a political lobby group headquartered on the United Nations Plaza in New York. Bailey's books give specific instructions for implementing "the Plan" – a one world government and religion.<sup>27</sup>

The "Plan" for a one world religion is basically the teaching of Theosophy, founded by Helena Blavatsky in 1875. It is a blend of occultism and the eastern mysticism of Hinduism and Buddhism. At the core of this planned New World Religion is the initiation (act of consecration), openly termed as "Luciferic" by Blavatsky and Alice Bailey. According to the latter, Lucifer is the "Ruler of Humanity."<sup>28</sup> Bailey suggests that the "tyrant" God of the Old Testament has not been fair to Lucifer, who will be rehabilitated!<sup>29</sup>

The spirit of Tibet seems to exercise a great fascination for Israelis and even for Jewish people in other parts of the world, as Tibetan Buddhism is now the rage. Jewish writer Rodger Kamenetz has written a whole book about it entitled "The Jew in the Lotus" published in 1995. The *Jerusalem Post* called it "one of the most urgent and compelling critiques of the condition of North American Jewry that we have."<sup>30</sup>

## Dharamsala

Kamenetz, an English professor in Louisiana, writes about a delegation representing the main currents of North American Jewry: Orthodox, Reform, Reconstructionist and Secular, who were invited to meet the now exiled Dalai Lama at Dharamsala in Tibet. The Dalai Lama was intrigued about how the Jews had kept their culture while living in exile for over 2000 years, and probably why so many had lost their religion and espoused Buddhism. Fortunately the secular Kamenetz rediscovers his Jewish roots amongst Buddhists, but was alarmed to discover how many Jews did not, instead becoming "Jubus" or Jewish Buddhists. On returning to America he is determined to investigate and this book is the result of his research.

Kamenetz writes:

*In the past 20 years Jubus have played a significant and disproportionate role in the development of ... American Buddhism. Various surveys show Jewish participation in such groups ranging from 6 to 30 percent. This is up to twelve times the Jewish proportion of the*

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<sup>27</sup> J.S. Benkovic, *The New Age Counterfeit*, LHLA (Clearwater, Florida, 1993), 27.

<sup>28</sup> M.B. Schlink, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Blavatsky's *Anthropogenesis*, v.2, 506-18.

<sup>30</sup> *Jerusalem Post Magazine*, 20/2/95.

*American population 2½%. In these same twenty years, American Jews have founded Buddhist meditation centers and acted as administrators, publishers, translators and interpreters. They have been particularly prominent teachers and publicizers.*<sup>31</sup>

## **Liberals and Orthodox**

Most of Kamenetz's American companions in Tibet are enthusiasts, and syncretism seems to be no problem for them. For example, when they meet the Dalai Lama's *kuten* (oracle) they suggested investigating how they could train a Jewish oracle like the *kuten*. When the latter is possessed by the god Dorje Drakden his eyes bulge, cheeks swell out and his lips hiss violently; they attribute this to the "volcanic energy of the deity." In this possessed state he makes oracular statements. Some of the Jews with Kamenetz are delighted and enthused as to how they can get one too!

But there is one notable exception - Orthodox Rabbi Irving Greenberg, who talks of "superstitious practices."<sup>32</sup> All through the book his comments are wise and consistent with the Biblical worldview. No wonder Kamenetz says that most American Jews, who are not Orthodox, tend to feel that the Orthodox are the real Jews.<sup>33</sup> Personally I have found that the Orthodox with their large families tend to be very strong on family values, personal holiness and morality, but have no time for strangers at all and would not give one the time of day! In contrast, secular Jews like those in Tel Aviv are very approachable, friendly, and helpful, and usually have a passion for justice, but are weak on family values, morality and holiness. Of course the Bible stresses the need for both justice *and* personal holiness.

Rabbi Greenberg is deeply involved in interfaith dialogue, for he believes strongly that if one cannot propagate his religion without using stereotypes and negative images of others then "all religions will go down the tubes - and good riddance - because we're a source of hatred and demolition of other people."<sup>34</sup> Greenberg quoted Rabbi Kook, the great chief rabbi of Israel, who said "that every hateful or negative image of other traditions that's in our own should now be seen as a mountain we have to climb over as we try to reach God."<sup>35</sup>

Of course it could be said that something of Rabbi Greenberg's quotation might apply to this article! Yes, we must respect other religions, but the NAM is not really in this category as it borrows from all religions, distorts them all and is faithful to none!

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<sup>31</sup> Rodger Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus: A Poet's Rediscovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India* (Harper/Collins, 1994), 7f.

<sup>32</sup> Kamenetz, 181.

<sup>33</sup> Kamenetz, 283.

<sup>34</sup> Kamenetz, 110.

<sup>35</sup> Kamenetz, 111.



## Secular and Orthodox

What I found so surprising in Kamenetz's book is what the Ultra Orthodox and secular Jews have in common when they seem poles apart: a fascination with the Kabbalah, that body of esoteric doctrines which contains the heart of the Jewish mystical traditions and shows definite Gnostic influence. The Orthodox are fascinated because it is part of their mystical tradition, and the secular, having given up on religion, find a great spiritual vacuum in their lives which they try to fill with New Age religion—which of course includes the Kabbalah since it has "become a pivotal point of the entire Western esoteric tradition."<sup>36</sup> Madam Blavatsky's books which are important texts in the NAM often quote the "cabbalists." What was once very closely guarded esoteric doctrine has now become common currency, with NAM shops well stocked with Kabbalistic materials. In the past a man had to be married, and Maimonides taught that he had to be 30 years of age, before entering the perilous world of Kabbalah mysticism.<sup>37</sup>

It is no accident that New Age shops like the White Gallery in Tel Aviv have prominent pictures of the Ultra Orthodox rabbi Menachem Schneerson. A review of *The Wisdom of Rabbi Schneerson* asks if "the wisdom so lucidly expressed here could not have come from the pen of any other inspired, selfless spiritual leader – Sufi, Christian, Tibetan, Buddhist?" The reviewer, speaking subjectively of course, says that the language of the rabbi is "New Age, even hip."<sup>38</sup>

## Kabbalah

In the Kamenetz book enthusiasts try to show that Judaism and Tibetan Buddhism have a great deal in common, e.g. the concept of reincarnation. They obviously were referring to Kabbalah, as nowhere in Biblical Judaism is this concept to be found. Rabbi Greenberg quietly interjects that "kabbalah is no more than a minority report."<sup>39</sup>

So it would be more accurate to say that Tibetan Buddhism and Kabbalah, not Judaism itself, have a great deal in common. Certainly the Kabbalah is prominent in New Age circles because they both seem to go back to a common source: Gnosticism, a pantheistic movement predating the Christian era, which claimed to know the mysteries of the universe. Gnosticism borrowed the formulas of various religions, including the language and images of the Bible, but the essence of the Bible was totally ignored. It was an antinomian libertinism.

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<sup>36</sup> Campbell & Brennan, 230.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. E. Wiesel, *Night* (Fontana, 1972), 13.

<sup>38</sup> *Jerusalem Post Magazine*, 22/9/95.

<sup>39</sup> Kamenetz, 105, 155.

Kamenetz admits in his book that “Jewish Gnosticism is one acknowledged source for the later developments of Kabbalah.”<sup>40</sup> What Gedaliahu Stroumsa says of Gnosticism I think can also be said of the New Age Movement. Stroumsa says that “there can be no Gnosticism without a revolt against the Jewish God.”<sup>41</sup> In some cases, Stroumsa says, “a violent rejection of the Jewish God, or of Judaism, seems to stand at the basis of these [newly published Gnostic] texts.” In fact there is a diabolizing of the Jewish God in Jewish Gnosticism. Incidentally Pope John Paul II, in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, referred to “the return of ancient Gnostic ideas under the guise of the so-called New Age.”<sup>42</sup>

Is Israel set to adopt a new metaphysical and non-Biblical worldview? Is ethical monotheism to be replaced by non-ethical polytheism? Because according to Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, what “is uniquely characteristic of the land of Israel is that it does not tolerate unethical and immoral people on its soil. Whoever sins is sent into exile.” The rabbi says that “our ability to remain on Israeli soil – and not to be exiled – depends upon our fealty to traditional Jewish teaching, the continuity of our ethical, moral and ritual conduct which links us to our glorious past.”<sup>43</sup> This “traditional Jewish teaching” includes of course the Biblical injunctions against occultism.

## Conclusion

I have traveled a number of times by ship to Haifa in Israel. I have noticed that as the ship comes closer to the Holy Land, Mount Carmel, the place where Elijah strove so valiantly to preserve the purity of the religion of Israel, gradually appears on the horizon. Drawing nearer to land one sees that the most prominent feature now on Mount Carmel is the golden dome of the Baha’i Temple and its adjacent gardens. Baha’i is of course a syncretistic religion, though many of its followers are nice people. Is this site symbolic of the direction Israel is going? Exchanging the God of the Bible for syncretism?

The London *Tablet* once reported that an ancient Russian icon of the prophet Elijah holding the Torah has been shedding tears for some time in a London art gallery. Perhaps he is weeping for Israel.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Kamenetz, 274.

<sup>41</sup> G.C. Stroumsa, “Gnosis,” in Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Contemporary Jewish Thought*, 289.

<sup>42</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (Cape, London, 1994), 90.

<sup>43</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, 7/10/94.

<sup>44</sup> *The Tablet*, 23-3-96, 401.

# The New Age in Israel at the Beginning of the 21st Century

Lisa Loden\*

Israel in 2003 greatly resembles a spiritual supermarket where every kind of spirituality is marketed and sold. The plethora of spiritual options that characterizes the post-Christian, post-modern west is accessible in Israel today. Few differences exist between the spiritual climate in Israel and the neo-pagan, new age ideological atmosphere that suffuses the western world.

The New Age religious movement is not easily definable. It can best be described as an umbrella-like structure covering a vast array of beliefs and practices, all of which have in common an anti-rational bias, and are ultimately intensely personal and subjective. In addition, there is generally a strong mystical and apocalyptic dimension to New Age thought.

*The New Age is not based on a system of proofs, and it is not seen as a system that needs any proofs. The most forceful pseudo-scientific claims are presented as personal expressions, the fruit of visionary experiences that no criticism can override ... The New Age is the supreme expression of the eternal and total defeat of the scientific-rational narrative that has ruled the world of thought since the 18<sup>th</sup> century ... 'Unity,' 'wholeness' and 'the expansion of consciousness' are among the terms commonly used by spokesmen of the New Age. The entire cosmos is aspiring to internal harmony, to a unified harmony to a unified blending of all its elements and it calls upon human consciousness to blend with this universality. Within this embracing harmony, everything is identical to everything else, even if it looks as though they are saying different things. Every individual's inner truth is necessarily identical to the inner truth of every other individual. Thus, all religions and all worldviews are ultimately aimed at the very same message ... there is no room for discussion and debate, clarification and proof. Language as a means of expression has been replaced by a language that impresses by force of the terminology it uses. This use of a mixture of terms from the realms of science and Hinduism and Buddhism, Hermetics and mysticism is aimed more at creating an atmosphere and an impression than at transmitting a semantic message. This is an appeal to image and impression rather than to logic and the rational.<sup>45</sup>*

The proliferation of new religious movements worldwide has assumed vast proportions and the religious scene in Israel is no exception. "New Age" religious influence has permeated Israeli society at every level. From the

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<sup>45</sup> Dan Yosef, "The 'New Age' is Nothing New," Ha'aretz, 31/03/99.

kindergarten to the old age home, in radically secular and ultra-orthodox circles, a proclivity for the new age is in evidence everywhere. What was once considered arcane and inaccessible has become mainstream in 21st century Israel.

## Religious Judaism and the New Age

### Voices Pro

Traditional Judaism in Israel is currently undergoing an unobtrusive process of infiltration and syncretism. New Age and mystical concepts are being seamlessly woven into the fabric of Judaism. A particularly blatant example of this trend is a comment made by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Israel's former chief Sephardi rabbi. He is quoted as having said that the six million Jewish holocaust victims were reincarnated sinners who were annihilated by the Nazis to pay for the sins of their past lives.<sup>46</sup> This is not the first time he has made such statements to the Israeli media. Another prominent rabbi, Rabbi Kadouri, "performs divination by reading palms after they rest for a moment on the Torah."<sup>47</sup> These two examples are not isolated instances but are mentioned because both of these rabbis exert great influence in Orthodox Jewish circles.

New Age doctrine and practice are clearly in evidence in Orthodox Judaism as it is practiced in many frameworks today. Historic Jewish mysticism has been revived and in many cases reworked to make it more accessible to today's seeker. Traditionally, in Jewish circles the study of the Zohar (the primary kabbalah text) has been restricted to men over the age of forty. Today this text is widely available to the general public and kabbalah teachers abound.

*...the freedom surrounding Kabbalah today has created an unguarded passageway between New Age and Judaism, allowing the introduction of "new" guides who do not need Jewish community approval. Kabbalistic teachers can now include outright New Age disciples, identifiable by their lack of concern for a Jewish frame of reference.<sup>48</sup>*

Numerous voices in the Israeli religious establishment enthusiastically embrace New Age concepts and practices. The numbers of religious Jews who are mixing traditional Judaism with New Age, mystical ideas and practices is steadily on the rise.

*Just 20 years ago the most popular yeshivas were those that integrated religious studies with scientific analysis in the Western spirit, whereas nowadays the mantle of popularity has passed to yeshivas that devote themselves to the study of Hasidism and kabbala and that are engaged in processes of spiritual and mental transcendence. Three notable examples are the*

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<sup>46</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, 11/08/00.

<sup>47</sup> Hannah Newman, *The Rainbow Swastika, New Age Missionizing Among Jews*, 4, taken from the internet, [http://philologos.org/\\_eb-trs/naI.htm](http://philologos.org/_eb-trs/naI.htm). 26/02/03.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 13

*Ramat Gan Yeshiva, Otziel Yeshiva and Siah Yeshiva in Efrat. The religious educational establishment is seriously considering the possibility of establishing centers in which the central sacred studies will not necessarily be Gemara, but philosophical contemplation.*<sup>49</sup>

As of October 1999, there were two “Yeshivashrams” operating in Israel. These “Yeshivashrams” combine traditional (and nontraditional) yeshiva studies with the ashram lifestyle of the Far East.<sup>50</sup> There are growing numbers of centers for the study of Kabbalah in all of the cities of Israel. One of them, the Kabbalah Learning Center, founded by Rabbi Shraga Berg, has seven branches in Israel. This center runs a Kabbalistic kindergarten in Tel Aviv and reports that the main branch in Tel Aviv has 2000 visitors a month. This group is preoccupied with some of the more mystical and magical aspects of Kabbala, selling a wide range of paraphernalia that is intended to impart blessing and ward off curses. The centers offer a variety of courses and charge between 500 and 700 shekels per course.<sup>51</sup> Another Kabbalistic group, the Bnei Baruch, focuses on publications and courses. Their emphasis is abstract and philosophical and involves intellectual and mental activity. In contrast to the Kabbalah Learning Center, their courses are free of charge and they offer them in over 60 locations in Israel.<sup>52</sup>

Although a mystical tradition in Judaism has existed for centuries, it has been largely been the province of the few and as such has not been accessible to the masses.<sup>53</sup> However, the influence of the Jewish mystical tradition, and the kabbalah in particular, has from the twelfth century broadly influenced the Jewish people. Things have changed dramatically and the arcane has become mainstream in today’s Israel.

The Orthodox religious establishment in Israel is today facing a challenge to be relevant in the lives of this generation. Youth, and this includes religious youth, are looking for authenticity when it comes to religious experience. Strict adherence to Jewish law has been the major characteristic of Orthodox Judaism and today’s religious youth are looking for something that goes beyond preoccupation with the details of halacha.

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<sup>49</sup> Yair Sheleg, “And Isaac Went Out to Meditate,” *Ha’aretz*, 15/09/02.

<sup>50</sup> David Weinberg, “Searching for Spirituality,” *Jerusalem Post*, 10/10/99.

<sup>51</sup> Neri Livneh, “Spirit of the Age,” *Ha’aretz*. 20/12/01.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>53</sup> “The first tangible historical evidence of the existence of Jewish mysticism is not found until the second century of the common era. The precise dating of this beginning is a matter of debate; estimates range from the second to the sixth century. These first mystical pronouncements are called ‘chariot mysticism’ or ‘mysticism of the divine throne.’ This form of mysticism functioned in closed rabbinic circles which anxiously took care that the contents of their knowledge and their mystical experience did not become known by the public as a whole.” J.H. Laenen, *Jewish Mysticism: an Introduction*, (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky, 2001), 18. Scholars disagree as to the dates, but the Dead Sea texts show origins of hekalot mysticism back to 2nd century BC, and it is certainly flowering in the 3rd century AD.

*It is a tragic mistake to hold the entire community hostage to yeshiva standards of piety and asceticism, argued Rabbi Beni Lau, a rising young star and kibbutz rabbi (and Chief Rabbi Lau's nephew). "A great deal of authentic religiosity is out there in the community, outside yeshiva walls, seeking channels of expression in artistic, cultural, community and professional life" <sup>54</sup>*

## Voices Con

Judaism, however, does not unilaterally accept the interweaving of New Age, Eastern mystical ideas and practices. There are voices within Judaism that object to this "foreign" influence. Jonathan Rosenblum expresses it in this way:

*While acknowledging that a positive impulse animates the spiritual search of many Israelis, I suspect that the current expressions of that impulse are far more likely to lead away from Judaism than towards it. In Judaism, the focus is on God. Finite man's life derives its meaning and eternity through the connection to God, the eternal source of all Being. The mitzvoth are the means to that connection.<sup>55</sup>*

Other Jewish leaders also express concern about the hybrid of Judaism and New Age thought that is so prevalent in Orthodox Jewish circles.

*But the New Age phenomenon presents more of a problem than just the occasional halakhic conundrum. Various Jewish leaders, among them Rabbi Yuval Sherlo, head of the hesder yeshiva in Petach Tikva, have spent years warning of the danger inherent in New Age thinking. Being "turned on" to faith, they say will become the be-all-and-end-all of the religious and halakhic worlds, and as time passes, this will no longer do the trick and people will start looking for the next big thrill.<sup>56</sup>*

Some sources have highlighted the overtly pagan origins of many of the New Age practices that are now being incorporated into Judaism. An area of concern is the idolatrous character of some Eastern rituals and techniques, and their heathen roots.

*"Although I had a powerful desire to enter a Buddhist temple, I couldn't bring myself to do it. Something stopped me," says Haggai Sofer, a senior teacher of Tai Chi. ... Yohai Rosenberg, a student at Ma'aleh, a religious film school, who spent ten months in India, notes, "To the degree that I was present at these ceremonies, I was there as an observer and not as a participant. In the final analysis, this idolatrous culture is so foreign to us that it does not represent a temptation for us."<sup>57</sup>*

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<sup>54</sup> Weinberg, *Jerusalem Post*, 10/10/99.

<sup>55</sup> Jonathan Rosenblum, *Jerusalem Post*, 21/06/01.

<sup>56</sup> Yair Sheleg, "From Yiddishkeit to Yeshivashram," *Ha'aretz*, 29/09/00.

<sup>57</sup> Yair Sheleg, "And Isaac Went Out to Meditate", *Ha'aretz*, 15/09/02.

It is ironic that Sofer can teach the Chinese martial art of Tai Chi that comes out of a Taoist religious system but stops short of actually entering a Buddhist temple. He has already fallen prey to the lure of Eastern, mystical religion.<sup>58</sup>

### **New Age Trends in Judaism**

In 1998, the *Jerusalem Report Magazine* carried a feature article that highlighted a mystical aspect of ultra-Orthodox thought. This rather bizarre report focused on a home for the mentally disabled, where all the residents suffer from downs syndrome and/or autism, that is run along the lines of an ultra-Orthodox yeshiva. The understanding of those who manage the institution is that those who suffer from autism and developmental disorders have actually returned to this life from a previous incarnation because they have sinned in an earlier life and must do penance. These mentally handicapped people are thought to possess supernatural powers. These powers are intended to be used to repair the evils of their past lives by offering counsel and help to others. This understanding comes from a passage in the Talmud that states that God selected “fools and children” to be prophets after the destruction of the temple. By means of an alphabet board (Ouiji board) and flash cards the mentally handicapped create words and answer questions. This is called “facilitated communication” and the theory is that thoughts of the mentally handicapped (fool in talmudic terms) are thereby communicated. Another Talmudic belief operating here holds that the fetus, which is considered to be all soul and no brain, has an amazing ability to see from one end of the world to the other while in the womb. This ability disappears at birth in the normal child but continues in the mentally handicapped.<sup>59</sup>

Another area where the New Age has entered Orthodox Judaism is in the area of alternative medicine. The Shalem Institute is an institute of alternative medicine under the supervision of an ultra-Orthodox rabbi. A variety of alternative treatments and techniques, including reflexology, Bach flowers and herbal medicine are offered at this institute. Yair Sheleg points out that alternative medicine is the only alternative field that has penetrated both the national religious sector and the ultra-Orthodox community.<sup>60</sup>

As in the secular world, music plays a large role in the diffusion of New Age atmosphere to Jewish circles. The most prominent musical figure in the Orthodox Jewish world is the late Shlomo Carlebach. Carlebach is noted for his lively musical compositions of traditional and Biblical texts. He was a charismatic figure in the tradition of the 1960's who had a large following of

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<sup>58</sup> All of the oriental martial arts, Judo, Karate, Kwan Do and Tai Chi have their philosophical base in the religions of the countries from which they originate. As such, they are deeply embedded in “idolatrour foreign culture.”

<sup>59</sup> Netty C. Gross, “Touched by Angels?,” *The Jerusalem Report*, 9/14/98, p. 18, 19.

<sup>60</sup> Yair Sheleg, *Ha'aretz*, 29/09/00.

hippie-type Jews. His synagogue was called the House of Love and drew numbers of disaffected and searching young people. Nine years after his death, his music continues to draw young counter-culture religious Jews and has also entered mainstream Orthodox circles.

Carlebach's form of Judaism is distinctly Hassidic and as such has strong mystical tendencies.<sup>61</sup> In his music there is a celebration of the individual and his personal encounter with God.

While Carlebach himself cannot be considered a classical New Age Jew, his emphasis on universality and subjective experience in worship has been an open door for many of his followers to move beyond his teachings into admixtures of Judaism and the New Age. An Internet search yields many links between Carlebach, mysticism, and kabbalah. His followers hold weekly campfires in the cemetery, tying blue strings to the grave to "absorb his aura" and then be worn as bracelets.<sup>62</sup>

It should be noted that along with crowds of secular Israeli young people, large numbers of religious youth have also traveled to India, Thailand, Nepal and other Far-Eastern countries. They encounter the religious world of the East, are affected by the exotic spiritual atmosphere, and upon their return to Israel exert an ever-growing influence on both the beliefs and practices of Judaism.

## **New Age Influence in Secular Israel**

### **Education**

It is not only in the occasional ultra-Orthodox institution or school that mystical, New Age practices abound. In many secular schools, subjects that have been traditionally linked to Eastern religious philosophy are being given place in the normal curriculum. In one secular school in an outlying suburb of Jerusalem, a third grade class has yoga lessons as a mandatory part of the weekly schedule.<sup>63</sup> In special education schools, yoga, mantras, and centering meditation are a regular part of the curriculum.<sup>64</sup>

The anthroposophist educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner is in evidence in a number of locations in Israel. Anthroposophy developed out of theosophy in the late 19th and early 20th century. It is a strange mix of non-orthodox Christian thought, eastern philosophy, nature mysticism, communal living, and organic farming. In effect, adherents of this system embrace a total worldview

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<sup>61</sup> See Shlomo Carlebach's teachings on <http://www.rebshlomo.org/torah>, particularly the teaching on healing.

<sup>62</sup> Newman, 26/02/03, 4, (quoting from *Jerusalem Post*, "Life in the Cemetery," 19/09/97).

<sup>63</sup> Conversation with parents, February 2003.

<sup>64</sup> Conversation with parents, April 2002.



that affects every aspect of their lives. Anthroposophist thought contains a racial classification system that has been accused of laying the groundwork for the rise of German fascism. Rudolf Hess was an anthroposophist. Although the group has experienced difficulties, today there are “Waldorf” schools in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Kibbutz Harduf. The kibbutz school has over 300 students and its curriculum meets the requirements of the Israeli ministry of education. In addition to the normal studies, “The focus is on ... ‘soul experiences’ in arts, crafts, music and beyond – activities such as organic agriculture, ceramics and leather workshops, javelin and discus throwing.”<sup>65</sup> Although there are no lessons in anthroposophy, according to an 11th grade student, “They don’t directly teach us their philosophy, but we have the spirit for it, the potential.”<sup>66</sup>

### **Merchandise**

Secular Israel has increasingly become a materialistic, consumer based society. Shopping is one of the nation’s favorite pastimes. A typical secular family outing on Shabbat is to the shopping mall. This holds true even in the current depressed economic situation. A visit to any one of the dozens of shopping malls will expose the family not only to New Age shops, but also to New Age type merchandise in a variety of other stores. From the department store to the pharmacy to the bookstore, the stores abound with imports from the Far East that feature Hindu, Shinto, Taoist, and Buddhist symbols. What once was the province of a disaffected minority and available in a few select stores and areas has now become accessible to virtually every Israeli at his local shopping center.

### **Health Care**

The health care system in Israel is a hotbed of New Age influence. Alternative medicine and therapies abound. All of the health funds now have departments that offer certain alternative therapies. This development has occurred during the past ten years. Prior to that time, these therapies were only available in the private sector.

In addition to the presence of alternative therapies in the public health sector, there are colleges that grant diplomas for the study of alternative medicine in many locations throughout the country. Brochures advertising institutions that offer courses for holistic, natural, and alternative therapies frequently appear unsolicited in mailboxes.<sup>67</sup> I recently received such a brochure that offered courses in reflexology (diagnosis by examination of the

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<sup>65</sup> Stacey Feldman, *Jerusalem Report*, 9/11/00, p. 22.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> If the Messianic community were to do this on a large scale there would be a public outcry but the “New Age missionaries” are met with no resistance.

foot), manual holistic therapy, emotional holistic therapy, Shiatsu, yoga, Bach flower therapy, belly dancing (!!), naturopathy (licensed by the Israeli association of naturopathy), Feng Shui, color therapy, palm reading (to the level of licensed therapist), guided imagery, etc. These courses are advertised as being recognized by the ministry of education for teachers on sabbatical studies.<sup>68</sup> It would not be so noteworthy if this brochure had come from one of the larger cities in Israel. The school, however, is in a very small village, Karkur, near Hadera – hardly the center of Israel.

On a weekly basis, private practitioners of various New Age therapies advertise their treatments and courses in the numerous local papers. These papers are distributed free of charge in mailboxes, supermarkets, local grocery stores and often come together with the weekend editions of the papers. In the past five years, special listings of “alternative medicine” have begun appearing regularly in these publications. In one week, in one small local paper I counted eight such listings for such diverse offerings as reflexology, diagnosis through cosmic energy, a fertility clinic using energy treatments, holistic treatments: channeled energy and Reikki, body and soul balancing, etc.<sup>69</sup> Having followed this development in Israel for the past 20 years, it is clear that this is an actively growing trend throughout the country.

## **Divination**

Israel today abounds with people who purport to be able to predict the future and uncover hidden secrets through classical divination practices. There are tealeaf readers, coffee ground readers, aura readers, channelers and Tarot card readers in every population center in Israel. These individuals advertise openly with promises of answers to questions, success in business and love, healing and knowledge of the future. In the same local papers that advertise alternative medicine, there are now column headings for “mystics.” For years these people have been advertising, but the new development is that there are columns devoted to listing them. The availability and accessibility of these forms of divination and fortune telling is truly astounding. These practices have entered the mainstream of popular culture.

For the past four years there has been an annual “mystic fair” that lasts for one week in a large shopping mall in the city of Netanya. During this fair, you can visit the channeler, card reader, aura reader, etc. of your choice. In fall 2002, the municipality of Jerusalem featured a street fair for a week on the major walking street in the center of the city. Each day had a different theme but each day there were stalls that featured various ethnic and New Age products and

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<sup>68</sup> Brochure from the Institute of Holistic, Natural Medicine in Karkur, Israel, October 2002.

<sup>69</sup> Kol HaSharon, advertising section, 8/5/02, p.68.

advertised mediums and holistic healers. I have been told that other cities also regularly feature such events.

Yet another phenomenon where Israelis in large numbers are seeking guidance, wisdom, and healing are the streams of people who regularly visit the graves of famous rabbis to ask for their aid.<sup>70</sup> In Sephardic circles, thousands of people visit the grave of the Baba Sali in the southern city of Netivot. The Baba Sali, or holy grandfather was a Moroccan Kabbalistic rabbi who died in 1984. He was considered to be a miracle worker who healed the sick and opened wombs. His intervention is still sought today. People purchase amulets, posters and various other items with his picture. Prayers are made at his grave and the thousands who visit his grave do so because they believe in his power to meet their needs today.<sup>71</sup> The same phenomenon is in evidence in Ashkenazi circles but the crowds who visit the graves in Tiberias and Meron are mostly religious whereas the Sephardic visitors are primarily non-observant Jews.

It is surprising to realize that both the police and the Israeli army use psychics. It is standard practice to have the help of mystics when the army or the police are looking for missing persons. In a recent celebrated case of a missing child, the police received more than 100 calls from alleged mystics offering information about the child's whereabouts. The police actually tailored some of their searches to the reports of the mystics. It was later reported that the child had been murdered before the search even began. None of the one hundred mystics had that information. The police, nonetheless, followed up all of these reports concerning this child.<sup>72</sup>

It might appear to be an anomaly, but the largest cellular telephone company in Israel offers their customers the option of dialing a service number to receive either a daily astrology reading or a daily tarot card or a daily fortune cookie. This surely attests to the level of interest of the average individual in knowing the future.

## Media

Television and cinema are major channels for the dissemination of the New Age message. Israel receives all of the major films that are distributed in the United States, usually within one to two weeks of their release in the U.S. market. Films such as *The Matrix*<sup>73</sup>, *Sixth Sense*, *The X-Files*, and *The Blair*

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<sup>70</sup> This is a long standing tradition within Moroccan Jewery but in today's Israel the old mystical traditions intermingle with New Age practices and it becomes increasingly difficult to separate them.

<sup>71</sup> Yossi Klein Halevi, "When Israelis Think About God," *Jerusalem Report*, 13/9/99, p. 22.

<sup>72</sup> Sara Leibovitch Dor, *HaAretz*, 03/01/03.

<sup>73</sup> Although, some have seen *The Matrix* as a Christian film, it mixes Eastern concepts of physical reality as projections of the mind with Greek mythology and Christian concepts

Witch Project have a major cult following in Israel, particularly among young people. These films present a post-modern New Age view of reality and are very influential. Film as a medium is able to convey a subliminal yet powerful message. As the New Age is more about atmosphere and impression than reason and logic it seems that film media is particularly suited to convey New Age ambiance.

With the advent of cable and satellite television, the New Age is in almost everyone's living room. Increasingly, the content of television from the United States and England is reflecting a New Age, relativistic worldview. This can be seen particularly in the programming for children. In cartoons and in action series there is a frequent emphasis on the mystic and supernatural. Two very popular television series during the past four years were Hercules and Zena. These two series featured the gods of Greek mythology who had supernatural powers and were depicted as powerful heroes.

During Passover 2002, the Israeli children's channel featured a filler that was repeatedly shown between programs in which a group of children dressed in flowing garments sat in a circle in a beautiful natural setting, held hands, meditated, and levitated off the ground.

### **Essence of Life (eol.org.il)**

After this article was written in April 2003, an advertisement began to appear on prime-time Israeli television. The highly professional advert highlighted individuals in normal Israeli settings speaking about peace beginning within, and the responsibility of everyone to take control of their own lives. Immediately the warning bells sounded for me. The only text was: if you want to know more, contact eol.org.il.

Essence of Life is the name of a sophisticated, comprehensive program intended to impact Israeli society at every level. The program is the vision of Shari Aaronson who, among other things, is the primary shareholder in Bank Hapoalim, a large Israeli bank. She is a wealthy, successful business woman with extensive contacts in the Israeli business, commerce, media and financial world. Her vision is "to plant seeds of a viewpoint, according to which, every individual has the choice and the ability to bring about change in his life towards the goal of inner peace with himself and his environment."<sup>74</sup> According to the website, she has invested millions of dollars in an effort to improve Israeli society according to the philosophical/spiritual vision of "eol."

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in a syncretism that is typical of the New Age (Brian Godawa, *SCP Newsletter*, Spring 1999, Volume 23:3, "Postmodern Movies: The Good the Bad and the Relative, Part I").

<sup>74</sup> eol.org.il (my translation)

One of the activities of “eol” is a comprehensive educational program that was initiated in 2001 in the city of Ariel. The general purpose of this program is to impact every resident of Ariel with eol’s vision – “The development of an individual and public environment in which people will be concerned about their own emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical development and that of others.” The first stage targeted school teachers, parents, municipal workers and public figures. An extensive curriculum was prepared for use in schools called “Peace Begins Inside Me”. The goals are, “to know your inner potential and ability, to develop your own ability to take responsibility for yourself and your environment, to understand your own uniqueness, to accept yourself as you are, and to develop channels of communication with the environment, your family and the community.”<sup>75</sup>

Another aspect of “eol” is a well-developed philanthropic organization called “Matan.”<sup>76</sup> This aim of this organization is to facilitate the charitable contributions made by the public sector. It is supported by numerous high profile Israeli businesses, organizations, and individuals.

A further activity of “eol” is a charming, user-friendly website for children. The site is interactive and introduces children to the “eol” philosophy through stories, songs and video clips.<sup>77</sup>

Although apart from its general language and tone the website gives no indication of direct new age influence, the “recommended links” tell another story. Of the eight links listed, three of them are to the spirituality of the new age, the Dalai Lama, Deepak Chopra (a populist New Age guru), and Brian Weiss (a Columbia and Yale graduate psychiatrist who writes books and gives seminars employing the “teaching of the Masters” and endorses and uses “past life therapy”).<sup>78</sup>

“Essence of Life” is an excellent example of the New Age desire to affect the whole of life. As Israel is a small country, the influence of this organization is immense, especially considering the vast sums that are being invested in this venture. One can be certain that as this organization has now chosen to go public through the Israeli media that its influence will only continue to grow. Although many of its goals are praiseworthy, its underlying motivation is to change the consciousness of Israeli society through “good deeds and good thoughts” based on new age spirituality.

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<sup>75</sup> see [www.ariel.muni.il/new/ariel.htm](http://www.ariel.muni.il/new/ariel.htm)

<sup>76</sup> [www.matan.co.il](http://www.matan.co.il)

<sup>77</sup> [www.bow.co.il](http://www.bow.co.il)

<sup>78</sup> [www.brianweiss.com](http://www.brianweiss.com)

## Israelis in India and the Far-East

Tens of thousands of Israelis have been flocking to India since the late 1980s. Their destinations of choice are the province of Goa on the southwest coast and Dharamsala in the north. By far, the largest majority of the Israelis in India are young people who have finished their military service and are looking to escape the narrow confines of Israel. India is exotic, beautiful, relaxed and inexpensive to anyone living on an Israeli income.

In the year 2000, some 60,000 Israelis received visas to India. Many of them had powerful encounters with Buddhism or Hinduism.

*Dror Eshed and Melila Hellner live in an attic apartment in Jerusalem. In the living room are mattresses covered with Indian cloth, a drawing of Krishna and volumes of Jewish mysticism. Like thousands of other young Israelis, their lives have been transformed by Indian spirituality....On Melila's first day in India she entered a cave in which were engraved statues of the three Hindu aspects of God: creator, preserver and destroyer. Despite her instinctive Jewish aversion to idols, she found herself bowing down, in surrender. "I felt a simultaneous awareness of God's multiplicity and all-pervading unity, without any contradiction. It was the most liberating experience I ever had."*<sup>79</sup>

Yoga classes are attended by hundreds of Israelis as they travel through India and Tibetan Buddhism is particularly attractive. Typically these young people return to Israel encumbered with a new perspective on religion and they are often deeply influenced by Indian spirituality.<sup>80</sup>

The Internet has become a choice tool for the dissemination of the New Age and there are a number of well-designed websites in Hebrew that promote Eastern religion and assorted New Age offerings.<sup>81</sup>

## New Age Festivals

Since 1997 a new trend has been sweeping Israel. This is the result of the hundreds of thousands of Israelis who have traveled in India and the Far East since the late 1980s. The Indian experience has profoundly affected a large number of these young people who, upon their return, desired to recreate the ambiance of India in Israel. It was this desire that birthed the New Age Festival movement in Israel.

The first New Age Festival was held in 1997 and was attended by 4000 people. This was the Beresheet (In the Beginning) festival and in the years since 1997 the numbers have grown amazingly from 6,000 in 1998 to 25,000 in 2001.

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<sup>79</sup> Klein Halevy, 1999, 23.

<sup>80</sup> see the cover article, "Magical Mystery Tour," in *The Jerusalem Report*, 03/12/01, pp. 24-27, 30-31 for an in depth look at Israelis trekking in India in search of spirituality.

<sup>81</sup> See [www.tantra.co.il](http://www.tantra.co.il) [www.laila.co.il](http://www.laila.co.il) [www.mysticage.co.il](http://www.mysticage.co.il), [www.action.naturaj.co.il](http://www.action.naturaj.co.il), etc.

The festival is held during the days of the Rosh Hashanna (the Jewish New Year).<sup>82</sup>

The success of this festival has spawned other New Age festivals that are held on other Jewish holidays. The second largest festival is the Boombamela festival that happens during the interim days of Passover. This festival has grown from 4500 in 1999 to 30,000 in 2001. Numbers were down to 18,000 in 2002 and the conference organizers are doing a media push to bring the numbers up again for 2003.<sup>83</sup> Boombamela is essentially a nonsense word that is a corruption of Kumbhmela, the name of a large Hindu religious festival held in India. Last year's Boombamela festival, 2002, was sponsored by, among others, Tower Records, Nestle, Master Card and the National Geographic Channel.<sup>84</sup>

There are now five major New Age festivals held annually on Passover, Lag B'Omer, Pentecost, Rosh HaShana and the Feast of Tabernacles. Due to the success of these festivals, the organizers are offering another festival this year, Shantipi Purim. The Shantipi festival traditionally takes place over Pentecost. Shantipi is a construct word consisting of Shan, the Hindi word for peace and tipi (tepee), an American Indian tent. This word symbolizes the spirit of the festival.<sup>85</sup>

The Sagol festival is advertised as a festival of "meditation and love." This is one of the oldest festivals and it began in 1997. The information on their website says,

*Sagol is a festival of meditation and love and is totally dedicated to spiritual work and to a journey of getting to know ourselves in a family atmosphere with the best teachers and guide ... The Sagol festival takes place twice yearly, on Succot and Lag B'omer in order to have continuity in the tradition of love and growth ... The purpose of the festival is to unite as many people as possible at the right moment to create a critical mass that we would have the possibility of influencing and causing change.*<sup>86</sup>

Music and dance are both vital elements in all of the festivals and there are multiple music stages that feature music round the clock. World music, trance music and all night dancing are part of every festival. Trance music has birthed a subculture in Israel that is immersed in New Age spirituality. Several highly professional, very attractive websites are devoted to the promotion of trance music and the spirituality behind it. Israel is known as one of the leaders world wide in this genre of music.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> [www.beresheet.co.il](http://www.beresheet.co.il)

<sup>83</sup> [http://www.boombamela.co.il/files/bg/mayda\\_bg.htm#](http://www.boombamela.co.il/files/bg/mayda_bg.htm#)

<sup>84</sup> Taken from information appearing on posters advertising the festival.

<sup>85</sup> <http://images.maariv.co.il/images/stuff/shantipy/rashi.html>

<sup>86</sup> [www.sagol.org](http://www.sagol.org)

<sup>87</sup> [www.chaishop.com/il](http://www.chaishop.com/il), [www.trance.co.il](http://www.trance.co.il), [www.infected.co.il](http://www.infected.co.il),  
<http://darkshoh.isratrance.com>, [www.tranceculture.com](http://www.tranceculture.com), etc.

The New Age festivals in Israel have emerged as one of the most influential purveyors of the New Age religious movement in Israel. The sheer fact of the numbers attending these festivals is indicative of the impact they are making on Israeli society. These festivals offer a smorgasbord of mystical spirituality. One of the festivals advertises “over one hundred meditation workshops.” The Jewish holidays have become prime time for a New Age spirituality and the New Age festival scene in Israel has become a sizable and significant subculture.

### **Response of the Messianic Community**

The response of Israel’s Messianic community to this phenomenon has been slow in coming and to this date remains relatively insignificant. To my knowledge, only one article that deals critically with this subject has been published in Hebrew. A number of seminars that dealt with the New Age world view have been given during the past number of years but they have been sparsely attended and there are no books in Hebrew that treat this subject from an apologetic point of view. The Israeli College of the Bible offers one course on Cults and the New Age Movement and another on comparative religion. A critical analysis of this movement has not impacted the many local Messianic congregations. Although a significant number of leaders of Messianic congregations have come out of the counterculture of the 1960’s, there is little, if any, teaching in the congregations concerning the New Age movement.

Since there is little teaching and even less understanding of this movement, it should be no surprise that there is correspondingly little outreach to the New Age Israeli. Teams have been sent to the festivals to evangelize but this is a proverbial drop in the bucket compared to the constant bombardment of society by the New Age message.

### **Conclusion**

It can be seen by the variety of areas that have been covered in this article that the New Age in Israel has become mainstream and is today touching the lives of virtually every family in the country. The purpose of this article has not been to give a critique of this movement but simply to report on recent developments. The conclusions that can be drawn are self-evident. To all intents and purposes there is no voice being raised in Israel that clearly states the dangers of the New Age. Since this movement has become practically all pervasive in the country, there is great need to expose the spiritual deception that has made serious inroads into every level of Israeli society.

Israel today has abandoned her godly heritage to follow after false gods. Considering the New Age festivals on Jewish holidays brings to mind the picture of the children of Israel cavorting around the golden calf in the desert



when they were meant to be waiting for the revelation of God. As has been shown, it is not only counterculture types who are being drawn to this movement. People from every class and level of society are involved in this movement and many are committed to bringing others into the New Age experience and mentality.

Israel lives in an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty. Old ways no longer satisfy. There is a longing for peace, love and a sense of security. The young generation in particular is hungering for spiritual reality. Instead of truth, they are fed poison. For the gospel, the challenge is immense—as is the opportunity.

# Hinjews, JUBUs and New Age Judaism

Heinrich Pedersen\*

There are significant differences to be found in the large group of Jews who, in the past 25 years, have affiliated with the ancient Eastern religions of Hinduism, Buddhism and the mixed religions. This article will attempt to illustrate the differences, and will conclude with a brief look at some of the similarities as well. This mixture of Eastern religions can basically be divided into three main groups.

First you have the Jews who mix Judaism with Hinduism - Hinjews. Some of the Hindu movements that are prevalent in the west are naturally also familiar in Jewish circles. This is of course most obvious in Israel where the Hare Krishna, Osho<sup>88</sup>, and Sai Babba movements are active. The other main group is the Jewish Buddhists who are so well known in the USA that they have been given the acronym JUBUs. The last and also the most pervasive of these movements is the network called New Age Judaism. This incorporates many different groups, which nevertheless have enough in common to designate them as a separate Jewish movement.

## Hinjews

The numerous examples of Jews that have joined various different Hindu movements date back to the hippie days of the 1960's. Sara Levinsky Rigler is an example of one such Hinjew. In an article titled "India to Israel"<sup>89</sup> she voices an opinion held by many Jews (and Christians) at the time: "I was seeking God, so of course I did not look in Judaism. Instead I went to India. It was the heyday of the Sixties, during my junior year at Brandeis (University). I found a guru and started meditating." Even though the guru encouraged her, as a Jew, to examine Jewish mysticism, she started with Hindu meditations: "Months of meditating in India had convinced me that there was a spiritual dimension to reality, that life held treasures greater than the physical world could offer, and that by following the proper methods I could elevate myself to the ultimate

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<sup>88</sup> According to some sources OSHO means "The blessed one." Also note 4.

<sup>89</sup> [www.aisj.com/spirituality/odysseys/India\\_to\\_Israel.asp](http://www.aisj.com/spirituality/odysseys/India_to_Israel.asp)

state: God-consciousness.” While in Israel she tried to see if Jewish mysticism could bring her to the same state, but she only came into contact with scholars who were studying Kabbala; she returned to the US disappointed. “The day after graduation, I joined an ashram, an Indian-style spiritual community, situated on twenty-one acres of woods in eastern Massachusetts. I stayed there for the next 15 years.”

The ashram Sara Rigler joined was founded by Swami Paramananda (1884-1940) before WWII. The ashram belongs to the Hindu Ramakrishna order. This movement is one of the largest reform movements within Hinduism. It was spread early in the west due to the mission work of the leader, Swami Vivekananda (1862-1902). Vivekananda represented Hinduism at the so-called world parliament of religion, which was held in Chicago in 1893. The Ramakrishna mission built up a series of Vedanta centers in the US and Europe after the conference. The religious foundation of these centers is the Hindu Vedanta philosophy, which represents a monotheistic form of Hinduism known as Brahman, which claims that everything is connected to the oneness of the world. Brahman is the true reality behind everything, according to Vedanta philosophy. Sara Rigler is therefore an example of a Jew who submerses herself deeply into an established Hindu movement, seeking to discover the true reality through meditation. (After many years in the Ramakrishna movement Ms. Rigler rediscovered her Jewish roots and now lives in Jerusalem.)

It is difficult to say how many Jews are actively involved in the different Hindu centers in the US and Europe, but the most widely spread movements in the west are all active in Israel, where it is easier to obtain a general view of their size. In Israel the three significant guru movements are: Osho Hare Krishna and Sai Babba. In addition there are a number of different yoga schools that are more or less aware of their connection to Hinduism.

The Osho movement was started by the Indian guru Rajneesh Chandra Mohan (1931-1990). After having taught philosophy at different Indian universities, he started an ashram in Poona, India, in 1974. As a guru he was called Bhagwan Sri Rajneesh, and he quickly gained many disciples—the so-called Sannyasins. With the help of his psychological knowledge he combined many different traditions in the meditations he developed: yoga, Buddhist breathing exercises, western philosophy, Hindu tantra, etc. Because of the tantra element, and the associated perverted relationship to sex, he was dubbed the sex-guru by the western media. He moved to the US in 1981, and bought a large farm in Oregon where he, at one time, kept 74 Rolls Royces. Bhagwan Sri Rajneesh returned to India in 1984 due to immigration law violations and started calling himself Osho. After his death in 1990 the movement continued to exist with many centers worldwide. Many followers, including Israelis, still

journey to Poona to participate in teaching and meditation.<sup>90</sup> According to an Osho follower at an Israeli New Age festival in 2002, there are about 200 Sannyasins in Israel, but many more Israelis participate in the numerous meditations held regularly.<sup>91</sup> The follower felt it was hard to say exactly how many Osho followers there were in Israel but he would estimate it at about 3000. There are plans to build an actual Osho ashram<sup>92</sup> where the Sannyasins can live permanently, but so far most of the followers have regular jobs. On the weekends and at the meditations, they don their red suits to join in the powerful meditation together.

The number of Hara Krishna followers (so-called devotees) in Israel is estimated to be equal to the number of Osho followers—i.e., a core of roughly 100-200 dedicated followers and a group of less devoted followers numbering about 3000. A comparison with Denmark, whose population is roughly the same as the Jewish population of Israel, can help to evaluate these numbers. There are 50-100 Hara Krishna devotees and 300-400 less devoted followers in Denmark.

The many different yoga movements that are represented in Israel also indicate that there are many Hinjews in Israeli society. There are a number of different Israeli yoga centers represented on the Internet; among them is the “Ashatanga yoga” which is presented as a Hebrew version of Hatha Yoga. Sahaja yoga, started by a woman, has five centers in Israel, while only one contact address can be found in Denmark.<sup>93</sup>

Judging by these tentative figures it would seem that the percentage of Hinjews in Israeli society, compared to the rest of the western world, is substantially larger. At the same time it appears that very few go all the way, leaving Judaism to become complete Hindus. Therefore it is legitimate to use the term Hinjews to designate Jews that incorporate different Hindu ways of thought and meditation techniques.

## JUBUs

In 1995 the author Rodger Kamenetz wrote in the *The Jew in the Lotus*, “Today in American universities there is an impressive roster of Buddhist scholars with Jewish backgrounds, perhaps up to 30 percent of the total faculty in Buddhist Studies.”<sup>94</sup> Other sources have exhibited similar figures when indicating the number of Jews among western Buddhists. In any case, there are so many Jewish Buddhists that the acronym JUBU has been invented. Jews can be found

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<sup>90</sup> Heinrich Pedersen, *Hinduism*, (Copenhagen: 1997), 65-67.

<sup>91</sup> [www.OSHO.nataraj.co.il](http://www.OSHO.nataraj.co.il) and [www.tantra.co.il](http://www.tantra.co.il)

<sup>92</sup> [www.sannyas.net/news.shtml](http://www.sannyas.net/news.shtml)

<sup>93</sup> [www.sahajayogo.org](http://www.sahajayogo.org)

<sup>94</sup> Rodger Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus*, (San Francisco: 1995), 9.

in all the main Buddhist movements, and most Buddhist schools have centers and followers in Israel.

But why are so many Jews interested in Buddhism? In her book, *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist*,<sup>95</sup> Sylvia Boorstein gives her opinion, saying that Buddhism offers a complete, mature, sophisticated, spiritual path.<sup>95</sup> She elaborates on this remark saying: "The Buddhism that had come to the West offered a clear explanation for suffering and tools for the direct, personal realization of a peaceful mind. It required practice, not affiliation. It was a great spiritual *path*. It promised transformation."<sup>96</sup> Many of the Jews that join Buddhist movements say [or 'feel'] that Judaism has not offered them a satisfactory, spiritual way of life. They have experienced Judaism as a club membership or an initiated family that would offer support in times of trouble. Rabbi Michael Lerner, who is involved in the Jewish Renewal Movement, thinks that the Jewish attraction to Buddhism is due to "the impotency of much of American Jewish life, its inability to sustain the spiritual or psychological energies of its youth, and its total failure to be witness to God's presence on earth."<sup>97</sup>

The other attraction of Buddhism is its explanation of the problem of suffering. At the core of Buddhist teaching are the four noble truths about the end of suffering. "The first time I heard my Buddhist teachers explain the Four Noble Truths ... I thought, 'They're telling the truth. These people are talking about exactly what I'm worried about. They know what the *real* problem is. And they promise a solution.' My friend Howie Cohn, another Jew teaching Buddhism, told me, 'The first time I heard the Four Noble Truths, I cried.'" <sup>98</sup> The fact that the problem of suffering is not equally important in all forms of Buddhism indicates that Jews turn to Buddhism for a number of reasons.

Through the centuries after Sakyamuni Buddha (sixth century BC), Buddhism has evolved in many different directions, but it is possible to point out three main movements. Hinayana Buddhism, meaning the little craft, which is called theravada Buddhism by its followers, (those who follow the ancient teaching), is the southern Buddhism, i.e., the form of Buddhism found in Sri Lanka, Thailand and other south Eastern Asian countries. Mahayana, meaning the big craft, is the form of Buddhism found in China and Japan. Zen Buddhism is a part of Mahayana Buddhism in Japan. A special branch of Mahayana Buddhism is Tibetan Buddhism, which was developed under heavy influence

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<sup>95</sup> Sylvia Boorstein, *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist* (San Francisco 1997), 20.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 12

<sup>97</sup> Allen Appel, *High Holiday Sutra*, 1997. Rabbi Michael Lerner on the back cover of the book.

<sup>98</sup> Sylvia Boorstein, *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist* (San Francisco: 1997), 20.

from occult tantra and shaman elements which dominated Tibet before the arrival of Buddhism in the seventh century AD.

In all these traditional schools there are Jews who have converted and live as monks in Thailand or in Tibetan monasteries in India or Nepal, or who meditate under close supervision by Zen masters in Japan. To designate them as JUBUs would be misleading, as in most cases they are fully adopted into the traditional schools.

Each of these traditional schools has its own westernized movement where the traditional Buddhism is more or less mixed up with western religious thinking, attitude and cultural behaviors. In the majority of these western versions of traditional Buddhist movements you find Jews and many of these movements also have centers in Israel. One of the Tibetan movements has five centers in Israel and there are also several Zen centers there<sup>99</sup>. Jews who become involved with these western versions of the traditional Buddhist schools will naturally combine them with elements of their Jewish background. If the order of the acronym JUBU indicates the percentage of Judaism and Buddhism, this group should perhaps be called BUJUs instead; it would seem that the religious and spiritual aspects come mainly from Buddhism, while the culturally determined elements, such as world view and view of human nature, are derived from the Jewish background.<sup>100</sup>

A certain western form of Buddhism has developed through the years, which attempts to combine the different traditional forms of Buddhism and adapt them to a western way of life. This group takes the most fruitful elements of the different schools and incorporates this combination with western thought and individual lifestyle. An example of this is the Western Buddhist Order<sup>101</sup> which has quite a few members, especially in the USA. My experience with Jews from this group is also that they are more BUJUs than JUBUs; for example they would rather speak about the divine than about God.

In this division, JUBU designates the specific Jewish version of Buddhism. A significant difference from the other combinations is that it is possible to speak about God, and even God as the creator. In her book, Sylvia Boorstein explains how she struggles with the concept of God, but also how she experiences the proximity of God through her meditation. "This is the closest I can come to describe my experience of God as the Source of all creation. This is not the God I 'believe in'. This is the God I know and trust with all my heart."<sup>102</sup> Amongst

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<sup>99</sup> [www.zen.org.il](http://www.zen.org.il)

<sup>100</sup> Thubten Chodron is an example of a Jew who has been a Tibetan nun for over 25 years. Her home page [www.thubtenchodron.org](http://www.thubtenchodron.org) does not indicate that she practices her Judaism at all, but she still designates herself as a JUBU. [www.thubtenchodron.org/InterreligiousDialogue/the\\_origin\\_of\\_the\\_jew\\_in\\_the\\_lotus.html](http://www.thubtenchodron.org/InterreligiousDialogue/the_origin_of_the_jew_in_the_lotus.html)

<sup>101</sup> [www.fwbo.org](http://www.fwbo.org)

<sup>102</sup> Sylvia Boorstein, *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist* (San Francisco 1997), 55.

JUBUs the traditional concept of God is combined with the Buddhist meditation practices.

The Kabbalistic concept of God facilitates this. In the Kabbalistic system it is a fundamental idea that God is totally hidden, inaccessible and infinite. The *Ein Sof* (Infinite) is utterly unknowable. In some Kabbalistic interpretations *Ein Sof* is translated as “nothing.” *En Sof* has been compared with the Eastern (Buddhist) idea of *Shunyata*, which can also be translated *nothing*. In a dialog between Dalai Lama and some Jewish rabbis the two concepts were compared. In his personal account, Rodger Kamenetz says, “As the Dalai Lama had carefully phrased it, there is ‘a point of similarity’ between the Kabbalistic *ain sof* and the Buddhist *shunyata*. It would be exaggerating to say they are identical. The Kabbalistic approach emphasizes that God is No Thing. But it still affirms an absolute existence—even if ineffable. In the Buddhist approach, all existence is empty because none of it has inherent reality, or absolute reality in itself.”<sup>103</sup>

Kamenetz felt a tremendous excitement in this dialog between Kabbalistic Judaism and Tibetan Buddhism. “The most obvious and fundamental difference between the two religions is zero and one, Buddhist nontheism and Jewish monotheism. But now that the angels were talking, *shunyata* had met *ain sof*.”<sup>104</sup> In a similar meeting Rosie Rosenzweig makes the same comparison between *shunyata* and *Ein Sof*. “All feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness come from emptiness. This certainly sounded like the Ayn Sof, the G-d of no end.”<sup>105</sup> The combination of the Jewish concept of God and the “Godless” Buddhism is thereby facilitated by the Kabbalistic perception of God.

This is also the case with the concept of reincarnation. Reincarnation is a part of Kabbalah and Hasidism. To the writer of *Zohar*, the concept of *Gilgul* (rotation, reincarnation) is a punishment that is put upon human beings who commit certain sins or fail to keep some of the laws. In the Hasidic movement *Gilgul* was given a more central position. The early Hasidim seized on the concept of *Tikkun* (repairing, healing) and made it even more the responsibility of the individual by shifting the focus from the cosmos to the individual soul.<sup>106</sup> Every soul has its purpose to develop *Tikkun*. Until the soul has fulfilled its purpose and achieved perfection, it is condemned to *Gilgul*. Because the concept of reincarnation is a recognized part of Judaism, it is possible to combine Buddhism and Judaism.

Even though there are many differences between traditional Eastern religions and Judaism, it is obvious that the Kabbalistic ideas of *Gilgul* and *Ein*

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<sup>103</sup> Rodger Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus* (San Francisco: 1995), 86.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>105</sup> Rosie Rosenzweig, *A Jewish Mother in Shangri-la* (Boston: 1998), 53.

<sup>106</sup> Nicholas de Lange, *An Introduction to Judaism* (Cambridge:2000), 206-7.

Sof are stepping stones into Judaism for Eastern religions and New Age thinking.

### **New Age Judaism**

New Age Judaism has not formed schools and umbrella organizations and does not have head Rabbis like Reform and Conservative Judaism. Like in New Age in general, New Age Judaism is a network where the different parts do not necessarily look upon themselves as part of a movement. New Age Judaism is a “do it yourself” or “homespun” religion. Every individual can make and practice his own religion. The individual is not dependent on a group that does the same. You can choose a practice, a meditation, a healing technique or something else from the religious supermarket. In this supermarket there is everything from A to Z (Astrology and Aura to Zen and Zohar). When you choose you don’t necessarily look for truth, but you try to find out if it works. You use whatever you have chosen until it doesn’t fit you anymore. Then you throw it away, and choose another practice that is offered in the New Age market. Choose, use and toss. The consumer culture that influences our materialistic western world has transformed the religious world, and a “spiritual materialism” has been developed.

In New Age Judaism it is not the Hindu or Buddhist traditions, but the Kabbalistic mystical tradition that is seen as the backbone of the network. “Many of us have looked for spiritual truth and mystical experience in India, Japan and elsewhere, never even knowing that a treasure chest of riches was available in our own spiritual backyards.”<sup>107</sup> Many of the Hindu and Buddhist ways of thought have a Kabbalistic explanation. The following New Age Jewish explanation of a soul’s connection to the universal soul is very similar to the Hindu explanation of Atman (the soul) and Brahman (the universe). “How do we become more giving and less selfish? First, we recognize that we are all interconnected. We are taught through the Kabbalah that each person is part of a larger original soul that we call *Adam*.”<sup>108</sup> As we have seen, the idea of reincarnation is incorporated into New Age Judaism through the Kabbalah.

But according to Melinda Ribner, the Jewish idea of reincarnation is more advanced than the Hindu or Buddhist idea:

*The Jewish view of reincarnation is somewhat more elaborate and complex than Hindu or Buddhist perspectives. While the Buddhist and Hindu views state that the soul reincarnates as the same person in a new body, the Jewish perspective claims that this sometimes happens but mostly it does not. According to Judaism, the soul consists of five levels: nefes, ruach,*

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<sup>107</sup> Melinda Ribner, *New Age Judaism* (Deerfield Beach: 2000), XVI.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*, 125



*neshama, chaya and yehida. When the soul reincarnates, it will most likely not be the soul entirely as it was before. Only the levels of the soul that need fixing have to reincarnate.*<sup>109</sup>

Even though this interpretation of the Buddhist view of reincarnation is not entirely correct, because Buddhism also operates with five levels of the soul, it is clear that in this case the origin of the idea of reincarnation in New Age Judaism is the Kabbalah's mysticism.

Even though many scholars find this form of New Age Judaism far from the Kabbalah and even from Judaism,<sup>110</sup> it is this New Age mixture of Eastern religions, Kabbalah and Judaism that has become the most widespread of the three cocktails that we have dealt with in this article. New Age Judaism has profited from the position of the Kabbalah in Judaism and become an independent Jewish movement.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, it is possible to distinguish between three main movements that combine Eastern religions with Judaism. Hinjews combine Hinduism and Judaism; JUBUs combine Buddhism and Judaism, and finally New Age Judaism, through Jewish mysticism, incorporates many Hindu and Buddhist methods and ideas into networks that have come to form a separate, independent Jewish movement.

Even though these three combinations are examples of the same phenomenon, there are significant differences between them. One difference is how each of the three, Hinduism, Buddhism or New Age, is combined with Judaism. Then there is the degree of synthesis between the two given religions. There appear to be elite monks and nuns and others who become very dedicated, and a much larger peripheral group that occasionally participates in different courses and retreats. In spite of these differences we are definitely dealing with a collective phenomenon—a combination of Eastern religions and Judaism, which is the fastest growing and evolving Jewish movement today.

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<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, 156

<sup>110</sup> N de Lange, 2000, p 63. Many Jewish scholars have criticized New Age Judaism for being Pop-Kabbalism. "In recent times there has been a rediscovery of the spiritual riches of the kabbalistic traditions. Unfortunately, genuine interest in recovering an authentic Jewish heritage has become confused with a modern quest for esoteric exotica and a spiritual 'quick fix.' Study of the Jewish mystical tradition requires linguistic skills and painstaking work, as well as a sympathy with the aims of the earlier kabbalists. A large number of the publications about the *Zohar* and kabbalah available are now compiled by people lacking these resources, some of them little more than charlatans. These books have little or nothing to do with Judaism."

# **Toward a Theology of God - In the Context of the Influence of Eastern Religions on Jewish People Today**

**Boaz Johnson\***

In recent years I have made a few trips to India to explore a new phenomenon – the Israeli attraction to Hinduism. I was introduced to this phenomenon by students while delivering a series of lectures in Jerusalem. These students said, “Do you know, you cannot book a flight to India, unless you plan long in advance? There is a huge interest in postmodern forms of Hinduism among young Jewish people.” Sure enough when I landed in New Delhi, and then went on to places like Goa and Manali, I found many Israelis and Jewish young people from other parts of the world. Some of the streets in Goa have street names in Hebrew. Many restaurants have menus in Hebrew. This is striking in a country which has had a history of strife over which language should gain supremacy!!

During these trips, I began conversing with young Israelis. I asked them basic questions like, “Why are you visiting India? How long have you explored Hinduism?” A large majority of the people gave me answers such as: “I am searching for the meaning of life and God in this ancient land,” and “The Hindu gurus have provided many of my answers in this quest.” I have found Hinduism to be a religion which enabled them to escape the harsh realities of life and dive into a world removed from the reality. It gave them a sense of peace to explore a religion which enabled people to escape deep emotional stress. My conversations with them led me to realize that the theological and philosophical frame of reference was no longer Jewish. It was Hindu. It was Buddhist. It was Jewish-Hinduism. It was Jewish-Buddhism. It is postmodern religion, where the boundaries of the theological and philosophical framework are no longer well defined.

Of course, this was not a new phenomenon to me. I have seen this trend in different parts of the world. My lectures on university campuses in places as different as Budapest, Moscow, New York, Rio de Janeiro, and Toronto have led

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me to the same conclusion. During extensive Q & A times, students would very quickly want me to move away from questions regarding the particular Jewish philosopher, the main topic of my lecture. They sought to engage in the convergence between Eastern and Western thought. Now granted, my Indian looks and my training in Hinduism is a quick draw toward those kinds of questions. Nevertheless, I am always fascinated to see the kind of attraction postmodern forms of Hinduism and Buddhism have among Jewish young people across the world.

In the light of the above, it would be crucial for Messianic Jews and those interested in Jewish evangelism to explore the possibility of presenting the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah to a generation whose thought is informed more by Eastern religions, rather than Judaism or Christianity. In previous papers, presented in the framework of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism, I have explored some aspects of new perspectives on evangelism among postmodern Jews.

In this paper, I would like to briefly present the thoughts of Brahmobandhav Upadhyay, a courageous Indian philosopher who sought to use ancient Indian philosophy as the basis to the presentation of the Gospel to a Indian frame of reference. Following this, I would like to draw conclusions for evangelism among postmodern Jews who are influenced by Eastern thought.

Brahmobandhav Upadhyay (1861-1907) was born Bhavani Charan Banerji. He was the classmate of Swami Vivekananda, the guru who single-handedly made Hinduism a household term in the Western world after his speech at the World Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893. He was also a close friend of another important Indian philosopher, Keshub Chandra Sen. In 1887, he joined the *Brahmo Samaj*, a Hindu reform movement started by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. During this time he began reading the Gospels and became convinced of the uniqueness of Jesus the Messiah. On February 26, 1891, he received Christian Baptism in the Anglican Church. Thereafter, he changed his name to Brahmobandhav Upadhyay. After his conversion to Christianity, he wrote many articles in journals like *Sophia*, and *Sandhya*. His writings were devoted to the task of presenting the gospel to a mindset formed by a Hindu frame of reference. He was convinced that this was the only way to make sense of the Gospel to a Hindu mentality. He wrote,

*We are of the opinion that attempts should be made to win over Hindu philosophy to the service of Christianity just like Greek Philosophy was won over in the middle ages ... The task is beset with dangers. But we have a conviction and it is growing day by day, that the Church will find it hard to conquer India unless she makes Hindu philosophy hew wood and draw water for her.<sup>111</sup>*

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<sup>111</sup> *Sophia Monthly* 4, no. 7 (July 1897), 8-9.

From the beginning of his conversion to Christianity, Brahmobandhav developed the conviction that Indian thought would do much service to the presentation of the gospel to a Hindu mindset, in much the same way that Thomas Aquinas made use of Aristotelian thought. In his writings, he makes it abundantly clear that he did not go into this venture naively. He was well aware of the pitfalls of using a thought pattern which was alien to the biblical worldview.

In the process of his search for a core evangelism concept for the Hindu mindset, he latched on to the concept of God as *Brahman*. In order to understand the concept of God as *Brahman*, it is worthwhile describing in brief the history of God in Indian Philosophy. The concept of Brahman is defined quite differently in two different periods in the history of Indian thought:

1. The Pre-Vedic period (Pre-1500 BCE); and
2. The Advaita Vedantic period (eighth century CE).

During the pre-Vedic period (pre-1500 BCE), *Brahman* was defined as *Saguna Brahman*, or the God who is full of personality and attributes. Scholars of Indian philosophy regard this to be the period of monotheism, in which Brahman was regarded as the only God. This God however had several names. He was called *Dyaus Pitr*, the Heavenly Father. He was called *Prajapati*, the Lord of creation. He was called *Purusha*, the quintessential Man. This God, Brahman, was defined as *Sat-Cit-Ananda*. The word *sat*, in Sanskrit, means Absolute being; the word *cit*, is translated to mean absolute knowledge or consciousness; and the word *ananda*, is translated as absolute peace. Therefore, in pre-Vedic India, God was defined as "Absolute Being, Absolute Knowledge and Absolute Peace." This seems to have been a very vibrant phase in India. Brahman was regarded as the creator. He was omnipresent. He was omniscient. He was holy. He demanded holiness from people. He detested sin. When the evil died they went to "the house of clay." When the righteous died, they went to "the world of the *Pitr*, father. Some of the indications of who is this monotheistic God are found in some of the earliest texts of Hinduism called the Rig Veda. The Rig Veda comes from the period 1500-1000 BCE. It largely contains references to nature oriented gods. However, there are crucial traces of traditions from the Pre-Vedic period, i.e. Pre-1500 BCE. A good example is the following description of *Brahman* as *Prajapati*.

*Prajapati, the Firstborn, came forth from the Holy Spirit (paramatman) before creation. He was the one and only God of the universe, which comprises the skies, stars, earth, and the seas. He rules the endless firmament and the earth. We worship this God, Prajapati, with offerings in sacrifices.*<sup>112</sup>

Another text portrays *Brahman* as the eternal *Purusha*.

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<sup>112</sup> *Rigveda* X:121:1 (All translations of the Vedas are my own).

*The eternal Purusha exists now. He existed in the past. And, he is expected to come. Not only that, it is the same eternal Purusha who is in control of eternity. It is for the salvation of mankind, he surpasses his immortal sphere and descends to the mortal sphere. He will come to give everyone recompense for their deeds.*<sup>113</sup>

It is very clear from just these two selections from very early and incipient Indian philosophy that this was a monotheistic stage. Furthermore the worldview presented seems to carry a very close resemblance to the text of the Bible. *Brahman, the Prajapati*, has no equal. He is the creator. He is the sustainer. *Brahman*, in these and other incipient texts of Indian philosophy, takes on a Trinitarian form. He is called the *Dyaus-Pitr*, the heavenly Father. He is called the *Prajapati*, the firstborn Lord. He is called the *Paramatman*, the Prime-Spirit. He is also called the *Purusha*, the eternal Man. This *Purusha*, becomes incarnate for the salvation of humanity.

Keeping these texts in mind, Brahmobandhav Upadhyay seeks to relate the God of the Bible to Hindus as *Sat-Cit-Ananda*: Absolute Being, Absolute knowledge, and Absolute Peace. However, before he does this, he has to overcome some more hurdles. He has to distinguish between this concept of God and the later conceptions of divinity in Hinduism.

In the post-1500 BCE period, however, India became very polytheistic. Various nature-related gods emerged during the Vedic period: *Agni*, the god of fire; *yama*, the god of the dead; *tvashtri*, the god of volcano; *vayu*, the wind god; *usas*, the goddess of dawn, and so on. It is quite clear that the earliest conception of the monotheistic God had no relationship to the later conceptions of nature gods. Upadhyay had to overlook this phase.

The fifth century BCE is regarded as a period of great crisis in the Indian subcontinent, as is true of the rest of the known world. This is the era which gave rise to the Confucianism and Taoism in China. The period – eighth to fifth century BCE – is the era of the great prophets in Judaism. In India this is regarded as the period of a very large revolt against polytheistic Hinduism. This is the era which gave rise to the Buddhism and Jainism. It is also the period which gave rise to Upanishadic Hinduism. Buddhism, as it was taught by Sidhartha Gautama (ca. 563-483 BCE), gave an atheistic response to polytheism. The Upanishad's also gave an atheistic response. When the Upanishadic sages were asked who is God, they said, "He is neither the God of the incipient form of Indian thought, nor is it the polytheism of the nature gods of the Vedas." "So who is it then?" They responded:

*Brahman is not this, not that (neti, neti). It is incomprehensible, for it cannot be comprehended. It is indestructible, for it is never destroyed. It is unattached, for it does not attach itself. It is unfettered. It does not suffer. It is not injured.*<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> *Rigveda* X:90:2.

<sup>114</sup> *Brihadaranyaka* 3:9:26.

The vibrant Brahman of the early stages of Indian history gets transformed into an impersonal principle. This Brahman is called Nirguna Brahman. It is no longer a person with attributes. It is a principle without any personality. It is no longer a "He." It is an "It." The religious leaders of this period defined Brahman with the same words: Sat-Cit-Ananda. However, now this impersonal principle is non-existent. It becomes Absolute Non-being, Absolute non-consciousness, and Absolute non-bliss. This impersonal principle forms every particle of the universe. There is nothing else, but this impersonal principle.

There is a story which comes from the Upanishadic period which describes a *Shishya* (disciple) asking a *Guru* (teacher), "Who is God?" The Guru responds, "What do you see there?" The student replies, "I see a tree." The Guru asks, "What else do you see?" He replies, "I see branches, leaves, apple, etc." The Guru asks him to bring one of those apples, and eat it. After the disciple was finished eating the apple, he asks, "What else do you see?" He responds, "I see seed." Thereupon the Guru urges him to break open the seed. "What else do you see? He says, "Nothing." To this the Guru says, "This is your *Brahman*. It is *neti, neti*, nothing, nothing. It is just a principle."

Shankara, the eighth century CE Hindu philosopher and reformer adopted this Upanishadic definition of Brahman. Shankara's philosophy is called the *Advaita Vedanta*, the non-dual philosophy, or the philosophy of monism. It is a philosophy which considers *Brahman* to be nothing but an impersonal principle which encompasses everything which exists. In the ultimate analysis everything merges into this impersonal principle. The only reality is this *Nirguna Brahman*. Modern renaissance Hinduism has largely adopted Shankara's Hinduism. Vivekananda, and more recently, Radhakrishnan, made this form of Hinduism very popular among the Hindu elite and in the West.

Brahmobandhav Upadhyay had to make a crucial decision. Should he formulate the conception of God, and Biblical incarnation, for Indian evangelism based on this philosophical framework? Or should he find his framework elsewhere?

A postmodern proponent of this thesis is Deepak Chopra. He has made a significant impact on postmodern society, including the Israeli youth I encountered in India. Thousands of people attend his Mind/Body Center for Well Being. In one of his many books he writes regarding this impersonal principle,

*On the material level, both you and a tree are made up of the same recycled elements: mostly carbon, and other elements in minute amounts ... Your body is not separate from the body of the universe, because at the quantum mechanics level there are no well defined edges. You are like a wiggle, a wave, a fluctuation, a*

*convolution, a whirlpool, a localized disturbance in the larger quantum field - the universe - is your extended body.*<sup>115</sup>

Chopra makes it quite clear that the goal of his program is to enable people to realize that the Ultimate Reality is the impersonal principle called *Brahman*. The goal of the program is the realization that every human being is a part of this universal impersonal principle. His thought is nothing but the postmodern rendition of the Upanishadic thought and Shankara's *Advaita Vedanta*.

The question which we face in this postmodern era is similar to the question that Brahmobandhav Upadhyay faced, "How can this thought be used to present the biblical doctrine of God and the Gospel to the Hindu frame of reference?"

It seems to me that we can learn several lessons from him. The first thing that Brahmobandhav Upadhyay does is to go to the roots of the concept of *Brahman*. In doing so he undercuts Shankara's Advaitic and Vivekananda's modern understanding of *Brahman*. *Brahman*, Upadhyay declares, is not *Nirguna Brahman* (Attributeless Principle), but rather *Saguna Brahman*. He is a God who is full of personality. He is full of attributes. He is "He." He is not "It." He is love. He is glory. He is light. He is omniscient. He is omnipresent.

This was a very courageous move on the part of Brahmobandhav Upadhyay. In his day no one could stand up to the thesis of Shankara. All the most influential scholars of Indian Philosophy were devout followers of Shankara's thought. For Brahmobandhav Upadhyay, he sought to be authentic to the Biblical doctrine of God and the Messiah. In the process he discovered a pure philosophy of *Brahman* without tinkering with its roots.

Starting from this point, Upadhyay explained that the core of *Brahman*, the *Sat-Cit-Ananda* is found in the concept of *Cit*. This is the concept of Absolute Knowledge or Absolute Word. The Godhead has a relationship of internal and intrinsic Word-knowledge. He writes:

*His eternal self-knowledge or Logos is to be conceived as identical with the divine nature and yet distinct from the Supreme Being in as far as he by comprehending himself generates his logos. God, knowing himself by producing or generating his own image and word, is called Father; and God as known by himself by his inward generation of the word is called the Word or the Son.*<sup>116</sup>

According to Brahmobandhav Upadhyay, this internal relationship within the Godhead is an intrinsic and necessary relationship. Any relationship outside of the Godhead is not necessary but contingent relationship.

Upadhyay's thought here is radically different from the thought of his friend and mentor Keshub Chandra Sen. Sen was the first one to introduce Brahmobandhav Upadhyay to the Messiah, but he himself never became a

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<sup>115</sup> Deepak Chopra, *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, 68-69.

<sup>116</sup> Sophia Monthly 2, no. 4 (April, 1895), 11.

Christian. In his philosophical musings, Sen also tried to use Vedantic thought to explain the Biblical revelation of God. However, he adopted a neo-modalistic version of *Brahman* as *Sat-Cit-Ananda*.

He explains the concept on *Brahman* in the form of a triangle.

*The Apex of the triangle is the Supreme Brahman of the Vedas or the Jehovah of the Bible, in his own glory. From him comes down the Son in a direct line, an emanation from divinity, into Jesus. This God touches one end of the humanity, then running all along the base permeates the world, and then by the power of the Holy Spirit drags up the degenerated humanity to himself.*<sup>117</sup>

In Sen's thought the *Brahman* alone is God. The Son and the Holy Spirit are not divine. He suggested that Jesus was a man who completely emptied himself so that he became the transparent medium in which God indwells, and through which human beings can see God and know God. He suggests that in the Messiah "... man remains man and God is only superadded to his nature. Humanity continues to be humanity, but divinity is grafted upon humanity."<sup>118</sup>

He saw the Messiah's pre-existence only as a fertile idea in the mind of God. He writes, "As the sleeping Logos, did Christ live potentially in God's bosom, long, long, before he came into this world of ours."<sup>119</sup>

The *Cit* or logos represented God's ideas and intentions for the universe. God is shown to have been expressing both his thoughts and the power in creation, and thereby putting something of himself in creation. He sees Messiah as the end of the process of evolution in creation. He writes, "The problem of creation was not how to produce Christ, but how to make everyman Christ. Christ was only a means, not the end."<sup>120</sup>

It becomes very clear that Sen does not regard Messiah or the Holy Spirit to be a part of the Godhead. For Sen, even *Brahman* is *Nirguna Brahman*. He is a universal principal. From this universal principle flow the *cit* and the *ananda*, the Christ and the Holy Spirit. In reality therefore, Sen's *Brahman* is no different than the Vedantic *Brahman* of Shankara, the universal principle. Sen completely transformed the Biblical image of God into a Vedantic image of nothingness.

In contrast to this, Brahmobandhav Upadhyay comes up with a Biblically authentic theology of God. First, he distanced himself from Sen. According to him, Sen fell into the same trap that Descartes fell into. The famous dictum, *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) is fraught with the same kind of dangers which are contained in Vedantic thought. It makes "human thought the measure of existence." Instead, Brahmobandhav Upadhyay argues for *ens est*

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<sup>117</sup> K.C. Sen, *Lectures in India* (London: Cassell and Company, 1904), 16.

<sup>118</sup> K.C. Sen, *Lectures in India*, 37.

<sup>119</sup> K.C. Sen, *Lectures in India*, 31f.

<sup>120</sup> K.C. Sen, *Lectures in India*, 16.



*ergo cogito*, “Being is, therefore I think.”<sup>121</sup> Being is of primary importance, according to Upadhyay. If Being is not posited first then one will fall into the trap set by Vedantic philosophy of the Upanishads and Shankara. This trap leads one to nothingness and emptiness. This was the trap which his friend, Sen, fell into. He was convinced of the thesis that “Being is the ultimate foundation of all certitude, the foundation of thinking.” This became the basis of his doctrine of God, *Brahman* as *Sat-Cit-Ananda*.

When Brahmobandhav Upadhyay proposed this idea of the Beingness of God, he was reaching out toward the pre-Vedic concept of *Saguna Brahman*. This is a personal God. This is a Being God. The *Sat-Cit-Ananda* describes the triunity of the Godhead. *Sat* is the Father. *Cit* is the Logos, the Messiah. And, *Ananda* is the Holy Spirit. In contrast to the Shankara’s Vedanta, he explains that *Brahman* is distinct from creation. The relationship of the Godhead, *Sat-Cit-Ananda* is a “necessary relationship” of the “necessary Being.” Creation, on the other hand, is not self-existent. Creation has contingent existence. Therefore, a human being is distinct from the Godhead. Sen, we have noticed, fell into this Vedantic trap. *Cit*, the Messiah, is divine. He is a part of the Triunity – *Sat-Cit-Ananda*. He is a part of *Brahman* living in the eternal dialogue of the *Sat-Cit-Ananda*.

From the perspective of the Vedas, Brahmobandhav Upadhyay also dealt with the issue regarding what sort of personality did Jesus have, i.e. the two natures of Messiah. He writes:

*According to the Vedas, human nature is composed of five sheaths or divisions, (kosas) ... These five sheaths are presided over by personality (ahmpratyaayi) which knows itself. This self-knowing individual is but a reflected spark of the supreme reason (kutastha-chaitanya) who abides in everyman as the prime source of life. Similarly, the time incarnate Divinity (the Logos, Messiah) is also composed of five sheaths. But, he is presided over by the person of the Logos, Cit himself and not by any created personality (aham). In the God-man, Cit, the five sheaths are presided directly by the Logos-God ...*<sup>122</sup>

It seems very clear from the above that Brahmobandhav Upadhyay was very successful in using the thought of the Vedas to explain the doctrine of God and Christology for the Hindu mindset. He was quite aware of the dangers which lay in this venture. Yet, he was able to distance himself from its pitfalls. This is quite clear in the contrast between him and Sen. I am quite convinced that Brahmobandhav Upadhyay is a very good model to form a doctrine of God and Messiah-ology which will make sense to postmodern Jews.

The question before us is, “Are there modern or postmodern Jewish philosophers who could be used to form the framework for a doctrine of God and Messiah which will make sense to a postmodern Jewish community?”

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<sup>121</sup> Brahmobandhav Upadhyay, *Sophia: A Weekly Review of Politics, Sociology, Literature, and Comparative Theology*, n.s., 1, no. 2 (23 June, 1900), 8.

<sup>122</sup> Brahmobandhav Upadhyay, *The Twentieth Century*, 1901, 7.

There are many Jewish philosophers who come very close to the thought of the Vedas, in their description of God. Some of these are the Rabbis from Late-antiquity. Others are philosophers from the Middle Ages. Still others are modern and postmodern philosophers. Let me illustrate this point from a glimpse into the thoughts of Franz Rosenzweig and Emmanuel Levinas. Each of these philosophers deserves separate treatment. However, it would be worthwhile to mention the relevance of these philosophers to postmodern evangelism. The philosophies of these scholars can be used very profitably in postmodern evangelism, pretty much in the same way that Brahmobandhav Upadhyay used the ancient Vedas.

Franz Rosenzweig is perhaps one of the most important Jewish philosophers of the 20th century. Many modern and postmodern Jewish Philosophers have depended on Rosenzweig's thought. Emmanuel Levinas, the most important postmodern Jewish scholar is a case in point. Rosenzweig has also made quite an impact on the world-view of the average postmodern Jew. He was born in 1886 and died in 1929. Much of his thought was therefore developed around the same time as Brahmobandhav Upadhyay. His major contribution to religious thought *Der Stern der Erlösung* was published after World War I.<sup>123</sup>

In this major thesis, Franz Rosenzweig proposes a triangle. This triangle consists of three givens of existence or three realities: God, nature and the human being. God is at the apex of this triangle, while the world or nature and the human being form the base of the triangle. God is also the source of the world and human beings. Rosenzweig suggests that each of these encounter each other in the course of history. The world is not independent of God, but receives its existence from God. This existence results in "creation." Secondly, God is also the creator of humanity. During the course of history, when God interacts with humanity, this results in "revelation." Further, the encounter between God the Creator, the world and human beings also results in "redemption," which is the ultimate destiny of this encounter between God, the world and human beings. Rosenzweig portrays this complex of encounters between God, world and human beings, which results in creation, revelation and redemption as a "star" - the star of redemption. The heart of this complex of encounter, according to Rosenzweig, is the *Panim* or the face of God.

The triangle which Rosenzweig proposes seems very similar to the *Sat-Cit-Ananda* of Brahmobandhav Upadhyay. God reveals himself through creation and God reveals himself through a human being. Traditional theology would consider the first to be "general revelation," and the second to be "specific revelation." The complex of both reveals the *panim* or face of God.

It seems to me that postmodern Jewish evangelism would do well to bring together the eastern thought of Bramobandhav Upadhyay's kind and Western

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<sup>123</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*. Trans. William W. Holt, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).

Jewish thought of Rosenzweig, Martin Buber and Emanuel Levinas' kind. In my experience, I have found that this gives a good framework to convey the gospel to postmodern Jews. The New Testament apostles and the early church fathers were very good examples of this kind of theologizing and evangelism. The best example may be seen in the epistles of Paul. Let me give one example. Writing to the Corinthians he uses a profound Trinitarian formula to convey the essence of the gospel. "For it is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."<sup>124</sup>

This is such a profound precursor to the *Star* of Rosenzweig and the *Sat-Cit-Ananda* of Brahmobandhav Upadhyay. God reveals himself in the eternal triangle of *Light-Knowledge-Glory*. Yet, the core of God's revelation is in the center of the triangle. It is the *Panim*, the face of the Messiah.

In the use of any philosophy – whether it is ancient or postmodern philosophy – our goal must always be to reveal the *Panim*, the face of Jesus the Messiah. Rosenzweig gives us a lead toward this. Brahmobandhav Upadhyay has done this quite well. Might this not be an invitation to several courageous theologians to follow in his footsteps?

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<sup>124</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:6

# **A Fatal Attraction – Israeli Youth and India**

**Janice Ross\***

While in India I heard the story of a fabulously wealthy king of long ago. This king loved jewels and it was rumored he would pay huge sums for rare and precious stones. Merchants came to his fortified castle from far and wide, each bringing their unique and beautiful jewels which they hoped to sell for a fortune.

The king would hold a grand banquet for these guests. They were seated outside in a lovely walled-garden. On a high stage in the middle of the garden musicians played and beautiful women danced. The king sat on his throne upon the walls and watched his guests below enjoy themselves. As the night wore on he gave a signal and attendants released poisonous snakes into the garden. Screams echoed through the night as his guests were bitten and died. At dawn the snakes returned to their cages, the king's servants collected the jewels and disposed of the bodies.

The king's collection grew as did his fortune and fame. When the merchants didn't arrive home no one was too surprised. After all, travel was dangerous, accidents happen and robbers abounded. They never suspected the truth.

## **Remake for a New Millennium**

This tale reminds me of the Israeli youth I've met in India over the past four years. Since March 1999 I've traveled to this frustrating yet compelling country seven times. My visits have lasted from six weeks to six months and I've met hundreds of Israelis. Most are in their early 20's and just out of the army.

In the year 2000 approximately 60,000 Israelis got visas for India, almost quadruple the number in 1997. According to the Israeli Government Department of Statistics, in 2000 there were only 330,000 Israeli Sabras between the ages of 20-24. That means around 18 percent of young Israelis visit India in one year alone. I've only met a handful of Russian Israelis in India.

Many Israelis travel for months at a time. They go to the beaches of Goa, and temples of Hampi during the winter then travel north through Rajasthan to the mountains and monasteries of Himachal Pradesh in summer.

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They've come to this "paradise" to enjoy their parties and get away from the stress of Israel. Many cast off all restraint, congratulating themselves on how lucky they are to be in such a beautiful, exotic and cheap place. They're confident they'll go home the richer for it, if not financially then spiritually. Then the serpents bite, they fall and their precious jewels, sanity and reason, decency and health are lost.

Of course the analogy fails. They don't all die, but I think often those who return have been "poisoned" and Israel is reaping and will reap a bitter harvest from the fatal attraction of the east.

### **The "Serpents" of India**

A Nepali jeep driver told me of the time he saw a young Israeli sitting on the side of a steep mountain road far from the nearest town. He was cradling his friend in his lap, crying and begging for someone to stop. They'd been in an accident and the jeep driver and his friend were killed. Passing motorists were too superstitious to take a corpse in their car but somehow this man was moved with pity. They managed to get the body into the car and drive for hours to the nearest town. Over and over the young man kept saying "I promised his mother I'd bring him back safely, what will I say to her now." The driver who died was inexperienced and didn't know the roads. Of course the Israelis wouldn't have known that until it was too late.

A poignant sign I saw once in the guesthouses in Leh said "Missing on the way from Manali to Leh, Shai Ofir, 23, please call." A Tel Aviv phone number was included. Did Mr. And Mrs. Ofir ever find out what happened to Shai? Was he in an accident or did he disappear because of something more sinister.

### **Greed And Violence**

Guidebooks for India warn about the disappearance and murder of travelers. The summer of 2000 in the Kullu valley area around Manali was especially bad. Two Germans hikers were shot while sleeping in their tent on the trail to Hampta Pass. One managed to get away but his friend was murdered. Later that same summer, locals attacked an Englishman, his Spanish friend and her young son while they were hiking. The man survived but the lady and her son were killed.

Usually the motive for these attacks is money, most tourists have more money in their money belt than many Indians will earn in a lifetime.

Most of the time locals who get greedy just jack up the prices. It's so bad we're thrilled if a day goes by when someone doesn't try to cheat us. What tips the scale from a bit of envy, price inflating to outright attacks and even murder? I think an underlying cause is drugs. Drugs mean big money, greed, crime, corruption and violence.

Young travelers and hippies have been using drugs and partying in India since the 1960's. The latest exodus of Israelis has rejuvenated and spread the scene to more and more parts of India. In popular traveler areas, few cafes will not let people smoke dope. I have seen people smoking dope in public hundreds of times. Drugs are illegal but corrupt police and municipalities turn a blind eye for a price. Not only is marijuana common (after all it grows in north India), but harder drugs like L.S.D., ecstasy, ketamine and cocaine abound.

It's having a devastating effect on local communities. Some Indians no longer farm or learn a trade; they can make much more money for less effort selling drugs. Indian youths can't handle the easy money and often start using drugs themselves. The influence of seeing so many western youth using drugs impacts even young children. One of my Indian believer friends in Manali told me that grade school children have started to get high sniffing glue and eating sandwiches made with heat rub used for stiff muscles.

I heard a sad story from an Indian missionary. When the missionaries wanted to show the Jesus film in Ladakh the local people weren't interested because Jesus was an "Israeli" and they don't respect Israelis. For many Indians the only Jews they see are stoned on drugs.

## **Drugs**

Some Israelis get caught smuggling drugs. Though the police can often be bribed sometimes they'll make an example of someone to keep up appearances. The "examples" serve long prison sentences in squalid Indian jails.

I read a ghastly story in a Mumbai (Bombay) newspaper in January, 2003. A 22-year-old British girl had been in a holding cell awaiting trial for over a year. The cell was meant for 23 women but held 134. Some of the other prisoners carried HIV and no clean sanitary supplies were available. She contracted a sexually transmitted disease as well as malaria. Her crime was traveling with an Israeli friend who tried to board a plane with 10 kg of cannabis in his suitcase.

According to the Drug Enforcement Administration in America, Israeli crime syndicates are dominating Ecstasy smuggling and supply. They've even used young Orthodox Jews as Ecstasy couriers. Ecstasy pills can be bought wholesale for a couple of dollars in Amsterdam and sold for \$20-40 each in the States. See the web article Ecstasy Rolling Across Europe ([www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/intel/01008/index.html](http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/intel/01008/index.html)).

The number of travelers robbed, killed or thrown in jail is small but drugs in India have affected the minds and health of countless young Israelis.

I helped care for one young Israeli woman who'd taken LSD, cocaine and ecstasy all at the same time. She had to be hospitalized and sedated for a week until her father arrived from Israel to take her home. A year later she still hadn't come back to normal. The Israeli embassy in India has a lot of experience with

young Israelis who've "gone mad." Special psychiatric clinics have been opened in Israel to try and deal with the phenomenon.

Most Israelis who use drugs in India think they know how to avoid overdose. Maybe they do, although one wonders how "safe" it is to take pills from strangers. There are other negative health effects. You should hear the smoker's cough and wheezing from these young people just recently out of the army. They sound like old men. The more I've studied about drugs the more I'm convinced that although many Israelis seem okay when they return from India, they are going to pay a terrible price in years to come – everything from lung cancer to brain damage. Website [www.erowid.org](http://www.erowid.org) has a lot of information. It's pro freedom of choice but the facts speak for themselves.

## **Shiva**

Shiva is the Hindu god of destruction and regeneration. He's also the lord of the dance and of drugs. His devotees smoke dope as an act of worship. Shiva represents another danger of dabbling in drugs. It opens up a user's mind to evil spiritual forces. I have seen some Israelis hold their dope pipe up to the middle of their forehead (the so-called third eye) and chant a blessing to Shiva before they take a puff.

The "art" at trance parties and druggie cafes is almost always about Hindu and Buddhist gods, magic mushrooms, pixies, aliens etc. These glowing wall hangings are one of the most popular souvenirs young Israelis bring home.

I remember speaking to a young Israeli on the bus to Delhi. He'd been in India for almost six months. He'd had numerous LSD trips, read Hindu scriptures, studied Osho's teachings and taken intensive Tibetan Buddhist meditation courses. His guru had recommended a massive overdose of LSD as a short cut to spirituality but thankfully he didn't do it. I think young Adam wasn't far from a nervous breakdown. He was only the second Israeli I ever met in India who had some believing family. "They're just waiting to die and go to heaven but I've seen heaven in this life," he said.

## **Trance**

One of the more popular types of trance music is Goa trance named after the Indian state of Goa, a popular party destination. Trance music is a type of techno music that can put people into a trance. This can happen with or without the use of drugs as trance music is deliberately designed to connect with the dancer's bodies on the deepest levels, their brainwaves and heartbeats. Of course the effects are magnified when dancers take Ecstasy or other party drugs as many do.

One should also note the spiritual dimension. As mentioned, Shiva is also the lord of the dance. I've seen Shiva idols "blessing" the trance disc jockey's podium. It becomes a type of altar.

All disc jockeys exert a certain amount of control over the dancers. They chose the music and lower or raise the volume; they are a major factor in a party's success or failure. Many trance disc jockeys regard themselves as techno-shamans leading their "tribe" into contact with the spirit world. Israeli trance disc jockeys are famous around the world.

## **Gurus**

One famous Indian guru was Osho. He's dead now but sadly his influence goes on. I remember trying to reason with Banshee, an Osho devotee in his late 20's. He'd come to believe that there was no right or wrong; if he went so far as to kill someone (me for example) it would only be fulfilling my karma. For more information about Indian gurus I recommend Tal Brooke's fascinating and horrifying book "Riders of The Cosmic Circuit."

## **Tibetan Buddhism**

According to [www.buddhanet.net](http://www.buddhanet.net) only 6 percent of Buddhists in the world believe in Tibetan Buddhism. However, due to the charm of the Dalai Lama, sympathy for the Tibetan refugees and their presence in India I'd say it's the kind of Buddhism that has the biggest effect on Israelis. Tibetan Buddhism is totally steeped in the occult. There's not room to go into details but young Israelis who engage in tantra practices, Vipassana meditation, the Kalachakra Mandala initiation etc. are laying out the welcome mat for demons.

I've grown to know and love many Tibetan friends over the years. Most aren't very religious though they maintain great love and respect for the Dalai Lama. These precious people need freedom in Messiah. Instead in their ignorance they "give the buyers what they want" and sell countless idols, and occult ritual objects to eager young Jews.

## **Jewish Mysticism**

I've seen more posters of Rabbi Schneerson in India than I have in Israel. Chabad certainly gets around. In many ways I admire these dedicated families who risk a lot to try and help the young Israelis. Still, no matter how kind they are, they teach Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism. I've attended a number of Kabbalat Shabbat meals and the messages never pointed to the Tenach, just to their false messiah.

## **The Effect In Israel**

Huge new age festivals take place during the high holidays. Attendance at *Berasheet* (Rosh Hashanah), *Boombamela* (Pesach) etc. can reach as high as 40,000. There's something for everyone, men, women and children.



I remember *Berasheet 2000*. On the evening of Rosh Hashanah a Chasidic looking group performed on the main stage. One song said, "The way I was going didn't matter to me then I found out God is one." Then in the chorus they sang of Elohim, Buddha and Shiva; all are one. That was the first time I heard that but certainly not the last.

Again and again over the weekend singing groups and speakers gave glory to the Hindu gods, to Gaia the earth goddess, to Native American spirits, even to Zeus. On the last afternoon I passed in front of a group of at least 500 people, the announcer was telling them to raise their hands and pray for the spirit of the east to fill them. He told them to pray to the sun. I shouted out in Hebrew, "What's this about the spirit of the east? That's not our spirit; our spirit is the Holy Spirit of God. What are you doing?" I started crying. At the back I saw an ultra-orthodox rabbi and his students. Some were raising their hands too. I challenged the rabbi. God hates idols, Israel was to be a light and we should be going to India and teaching the Hindus about the real God not praying to their gods! The Rabbi said he wasn't going to bow to these spirits but if others did it was ok. He said he had asked some big Rabbi about it and the Rabbi said, "Better some god than no god."

Rosh Hashanah 2000 was a landmark weekend for Israel. Not because of *Berasheet* but because that's when the new Intifada started. Or could there be a connection?

### **It's not Hopeless, just Hard**

I imagine that all of this is pretty shocking for most people. Somehow, even though I've seen so much of it I can still hardly believe it myself. People ask if Israelis are open; in a way they are. The problem is that they are open to everything. What I long and pray for is that they'll get hungry and thirsty for righteousness.

Please pray for the youth of Israel. I think the new age is a greater threat than terrorism. Thankfully more and more believers in Israel are getting involved in outreach at the new age festivals. Literature goes out, there are many deep conversations, and God graciously saves some people. Pray the body of Messiah in Israel will minister effectively to young people caught in the new age trap.

As far as India goes, please pray for more workers. None of the 11 partners I've had over the past 4 years came back long term. Either it was too hard on their health, or they went back to a different job, or they didn't really like that kind of Israeli. I don't know how much longer the door will stay open in India. There were a lot of problems in 2002. India and Pakistan almost went to war, there were threats of terrorist attacks and Indian believers are suffering increased persecution. I only know we need to keep pressing ahead as long as India remains a popular destination for young Israelis.

I'm grateful the Caspari Centre has started a program "Jews In The East." If you feel called to take part in a four-month outreach to young Israelis in Asia please contact them at [caspari@caspari.com](mailto:caspari@caspari.com).

Can we have any impact? Our numbers are so small. According to Bridges for Peace 62 percent of Israelis are not personally acquainted with even one Christian.

I'll never forget the story Zachy told a group of us one night around a dinner table in northern India. We were a mixed bunch - two Israelis, a Muslim Kashmiri, a few British and Americans. I was sharing my faith, and it reminded Zachy of something his tour guide friend once told him. One day Zachy's friend showed Neil Armstrong, the astronaut, around the tunnels under old Jerusalem. Armstrong, a strong Christian, asked the guide if Jesus might actually have walked on the stones they were standing on. "Why not?" the guide said "These were the streets when he was here." Armstrong replied, "Then it's even more thrilling for me to stand here than when I stood on the moon."

When Zachy said that everyone was dumbstruck for a minute. He got kind of embarrassed and said of course he didn't really believe in God and conversation went on to different things, but I was praising God in my heart. Somehow this story touched Zachy's guide friend so much that he told others and it touched Zachy so much that he remembered it and told us.

When we're proud of our Lord Jesus and not ashamed of the gospel, Israelis will notice.

# The “Israeli” House in Cochebamba

Joshua Pex\*

In 1983 Bob and Joyce Williamson began their work of evangelizing young Israelis traveling through Bolivia. They initially worked as missionaries with one of the tribes in the region of Cochabamba with an organization called New Tribes Missions.

They ended up hosting an Israeli traveler by chance and many other Israelis soon followed. As the couple grew older they moved into the city, but continued to receive Israelis into their home consistently. Since then another couple, Roy and Linda Milton, has moved into their house to help continue this important work among young Israeli travelers.

I knew of the outreach work among Israeli travelers done by the Williamsons and later by the Miltons through newsletters my parents received from them and I had often thought how great it would be to visit them and help them. My chance came as I was planning where to go as part of the discipleship training program I was doing with the group in Israel called Lech Lecha.<sup>125</sup> After one of the teaching session I was approached by Menachem Kalisher, pastor of one the Messianic congregations in Jerusalem and our teacher for the course that day. He told me that some congregations had been praying that someone from Israel would go to Bolivia to find out more about the work among Israeli backpackers there. If the right candidate could be found, their congregation, Beit Geulah, would be willing to support the project. Both of us saw this conversation as an answer to our prayers and it was decided I should go.

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<sup>125</sup> Lech Lecha is an authentic Israeli discipleship program designed for Messianic Israelis who have completed their army service. The program emphasizes the personal study of the Scriptures (an overview of the whole of the Bible is given by various local teachers, and every day six chapters of Scripture are read), living a lifestyle of evangelism, spiritual disciplines, discipleship, servanthood, fun, and getting acquainted with the various ministries from around the country. At the end of the course the participants are encouraged to serve in other parts of the world as “a light to the nations.”

I spent three weeks with the Miltons in Cochebamba. However, my time there was not during what they call the wave, which is right after the carnival in Brazil, when backpackers continue their journey through Bolivia and Peru. It nevertheless provided me with a great opportunity to see the hospitality of the Miltons and Williamsons towards Israelis as they come their way.

Visitors that reach this “Israeli” house are privileged to receive a warm welcome which includes a dinner followed by a Bible lesson that lasts for two-three hours.

The missionaries (yes, that is the terminology that they use for themselves and the visiting Israelis even get excited over it) introduce themselves and tell about the experiences that they are encountering as missionaries to a tribal group that has never been exposed to civilization. Very interesting information and experiences are shared. Afterwards there is a dinner that more or less consists of Israeli foods. Roy then asks the visitors “Would you like to know what we teach the tribal people after we learn their language and customs?”

Israelis almost always respond positively. The missionaries then take out their Bibles and begin from the book of Genesis to share about the eternal love of God and His plan of salvation for everyone, stressing that this was done through Abraham and the Jewish nation.

The amazing thing is that the visitors listen to this teaching in silence and are usually very attentive. They ask questions every now and then, but generally, they really try to understand the concept. They leave the lesson with a very clear picture of their need to accept Yeshua the Messiah and that he is the Messiah of God. After the lesson, dialogue sometimes occurs and the visitors are offered the New Testament or a wide variety of other books to take with them as they continue their journey. They all have their picture taken together and the pictures then go into an album kept at the house. Every time new visitors arrive they look through the albums for their family members or friends who came this way before. Approximately 11,000 people have passed through the house already.

It is difficult to draw a picture of a typical Israeli backpacker in South America, but in general they are different from those traveling to India. They are looking for adventures, river rafting and mountain climbing. Most of them are just out of the army and planning to go back to Israel to study. At the same time they are very open-minded and will gladly accept both the teaching given by the Miltons and a copy of the New Testament for the road.

The impact of this ministry would be greatly enhanced if some Israeli Messianic believers could be there to meet and interact with the travelers as well. It is also important to find ways to establish connections between the people that have passed through the house and heard the gospel and local believers in Israel. There is no doubt that a house as open to Israelis as the house in Cochabamba is an excellent tool for evangelism. It raises a desire

within them to study for themselves and to learn what the Bible has to say. The visitors tell their friends about the house and by word of mouth others get to know of the place and follow in their footsteps. The sincere love of the missionaries for the Jewish nation speaks volumes to those who enter the house. The house is decorated with gifts, Israeli flags and various army decorations given as gifts to the missionaries by past visitors.

Each visitor leaves his or her e-mail address and mailing address. This makes it possible for a further connection to be established. I sent e-mails to about 500 people asking them if they were interested in knowing more about Jews who believe in Jesus. No one has responded... yet. The greatest joy for the missionaries would be to see some of the visitors come to know the Messiah through their visit with them.

It is my prayer as well.

## Annotated list of Books on New Age\*

Ankerberg, John (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (In Defense of the Faith Series). Harvest House, 1996.

This is a comprehensive and user-friendly guide to the New Age movement. The book is laid out in dual columns and has the format of an encyclopedia. The articles are informative and cover a wide range of New Age beliefs, practices and therapies. The index is good and there is a chart that contrasts New Age beliefs with biblical faith. A second edition is scheduled to come out this year, 2003

Appel, Allan. *High Holyday Sutra*. Minneapolis, 1997.

A novel about Rabbi Johan Grief's development from young student at a Jewish Seminary to a JuBu Rabbi, first in a small village synagogue and at the very end in "the Hebrew Meditation Circle in Los Angeles." The novel is formed as one (long) Yom Kippur sermon, and it is at the same time a tragicomic Jewish-Buddhist love story.

Boorstein, Sylvia. *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist. On being a Faithful Jew and a Passionate Buddhist*. Harper, San Francisco, 1997.

This book is a collection of essays about how Sylvia Boorstein combines Buddhist and Jewish spiritual practice. This 60 year old lady says: "I am recognized as a Buddhist. I am also - and have become much more open about this part in the last few years - an observant Jew." She doesn't see any problem in the combination of being both practicing Buddhist and observant Jew. She has for many years guided Buddhist retreats and given lectures to Jews and others about Buddhist meditations and way of life.

Brooke, Tal. *Riders of The Cosmic Circuit*. Lion Publishing, 1986.

This is an exposé by former New-Ager Tal Brooke on influential Indian gurus such as Sai Baba, Osho etc. The teachings of these gurus affect many young Israelis; it is worthwhile reading an experienced believer's insight into just how shocking and evil those teachings are.

Gelberman, Joseph H. *Zen Judaism*. California, 2001.

This book consists of 59 small anecdotes in the Hasidic story telling tradition. Some of them are funny but hardly any of them have the Zen character of a riddle (Koan). The title is therefore misleading.

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This list is compiled by Heinrich Pedersen.

Kamenetz, Rodger. *The Jew in the Lotus. A Poet's Rediscovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India*. New York, 1995.

This is the best-selling account about a group of Jewish rabbis and scholars going to Dharamsala in 1990. They meet Tibetan Buddhist lamas and also Dalai Lama, and in the dialog between the representatives of Judaism and Buddhism, they find similarities and differences. The part where the Jewish group meets the JUBUs in Dharamsala is very interesting. "The Jew in the Lotus" has been produced as a documentary film.

Kamenetz, Rodger. *Stalking Elijah. Adventures with Today's Jewish Mystical Masters*. New York, 1998.

In this book Rodger Kamenetz continues the spiritual journey he began in *The Jew in the Lotus*. He seeks the counsel of different spiritual teachers across US and in the process paints the picture of the new landscape of Jewish New Age practice.

Maharaj, Rabindranath. *Death Of A Guru*. Hodder & Stoughton Religious Paperback, 1986.

The fascinating testimony of a guru who realized the powerful occult experiences he was having had a darker side. He eventually found real "light" in Jesus. This book has been translated into Hebrew and is given to young Israeli seekers.

Mangalwadi, Vishal. *When the New Age Gets Old: Looking for a Greater Spirituality*. InterVarsity, 1992.

A wonderful apologetic book by a readable Indian intellectual believer on subjects that fascinate and deceive many young Israelis (such as reincarnation, tantra etc.).

Reisser, Paul C. Ed. *New Age Medicine, A Christian Perspective on Holistic Health*. IVP, 1988.

This book takes an in-depth look at the religious and philosophical underpinnings of the alternative health scene. It is good in that, in addition to a critique of the therapies, a framework for understanding the theory behind the various therapies and treatments is also given. The book also takes a look at conventional medicine with regard to how its weaknesses have opened the way for alternative, New Age medicine to become so popular. Although it was published some time ago, it remains one of the best in its field.

Ribner, Melinda. *New Age Judaism*. Deerfield Beach, 2000.

Melinda Ribner is director and founder of the Jewish Meditation Circle. In this book she tries to show that the modern New Age in many ways is in line

with Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah. The book contains many guided meditations including “Meditation on the *Shema*” and “Meditation to Love Yourself.”

Rosenzweig, Rosie. *A Jewish Mother in Shangri-la*. Boston, 1998.

The story about a Jewish mother travelling with her Buddhist son to different Buddhist centres in the world. It is also the story of the Jewish mother on a spiritual journey into the Buddhist world. She seeks to build a bridge between Judaism and Buddhism, while remaining true to her Jewish identity.

Scholem, Gershom. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York, 1975.

This classical book on Jewish Mysticism was first published in Israel in 1941. The book consists of an expansion of nine lectures given in New York in 1938. The fact that it has been reprinted many times since, and as late as 1995, shows its importance. Of course this book doesn't deal with the New Age development of Jewish Mysticism, but ends with the Hasidic movement.



# Jewish Versions of the Gospel of Matthew: Observations on Three Recent Publications

Craig A. Evans\*

When people think of Jewish Gospels outside the New Testament the *Gospels of the Hebrews, Nazarenes, and Ebionites* immediately come to mind. All that remains of these Gospels are quotations, excerpts, or summaries, usually quite brief, found in the writings of the Fathers of the Christian Church.<sup>126</sup> The best attested of the three (*Nazarenes*) is clearly related to the Gospel of Matthew and is perhaps a recension of it. The other two Jewish Gospels also appear to be related, in varying degrees, to Matthew, the New Testament Gospel that influenced the Church more than any other Gospel.<sup>127</sup> That these Jewish Gospels are closely related to Matthew, and in one or two instances are probably versions of it, should occasion no surprise, for Matthew itself is a product of Jewish messianism. Recent studies have rightly recognized this important dimension.<sup>128</sup>

Scholarly discussion of the origins, beliefs, and experience of the Jewish

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<sup>126</sup> For convenient collections and translations of these Gospels, see W. Schneemelcher (ed.), *New Testament Apocrypha. Volume One: Gospels and Related Writings* (rev. ed., Cambridge: James Clarke; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 134-78; J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation based on M.R. James* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 3-16.

<sup>127</sup> For substantial documentation of this observation, see É. Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus* (3 vols., New Gospel Studies 5.1-3; ed. A. J. Bellinzoni; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1990, 1992, 1993).

<sup>128</sup> J. A. Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); A.J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994); D.C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998). The Gospel of Matthew has been traditionally viewed as the most Jewish of the four New Testament Gospels. Whereas the Jewish authorship of Mark and John is disputed, almost everyone agrees that the Matthean Gospel was composed by a Jew.

community that believed in Jesus has relied heavily on the remains of the three Jewish Gospels and what the Christian Fathers say about them.<sup>129</sup> The importance of these must not be underestimated. However, what has gone largely unnoticed in the last decade or two is the publication of two versions of the Gospel of Matthew – one in Hebrew and another in Coptic – versions that appear to have circulated among Jewish Messianic congregations well after the more familiar version of Greek Matthew had become the standard Gospel of a Church that had become predominantly non-Jewish. Yet a third publication, in which a scholar from Harvard has recently revisited a Gospel fragment published almost 100 years ago, has raised once again the possibility that an old papyrus – possibly also related to Matthew or *Nazarenes* – circulated among Jews who believed in Jesus as Israel’s Messiah.

It will be worthwhile to review these lesser known texts, for their importance in appreciating afresh the Jewish context of the Jesus movement. While we may not be able to show that these texts reach back to the first century (perhaps antedating the New Testament Gospels themselves, and perhaps attesting authentic Jesus tradition), nevertheless, the light they potentially shed on Jewish messianism in the second, third, and fourth centuries fully justifies their careful study.

## Hebrew Matthew

The complete text of Matthew in Hebrew is preserved in a lengthy, polemical treatise composed in the 14th century by Shem Tob ben Isaac (sometimes called Ibn Shaprut). Shem Tob’s purpose was to refute the Christian Gospel story, point by point. Although disputed, Shem Tob may actually preserve an independent textual tradition of Matthew, possibly related to a “Gospel in Hebrew letters,” mentioned by the second-century Church Father Papias. If so, what does it tell us about the Jewish believers who preserved it? Many readings cohere with early Greek witnesses, many are independent, and it has been shown that Shem Tob’s Hebrew Matthew is based upon neither the Vulgate nor Byzantine Greek, which, if it had been translated in the 14th century, it would have been. It is an important witness to a much earlier tradition, possibly one

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<sup>129</sup> For a representative sampling, see F.J.A. Hort, *Judaistic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1894; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980); J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish-Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964); H.J. Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969); F. Manns, *Essais sur le Judéo-Christianisme* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1977); R.A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period Until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (SPB 37; Leiden: Brill, 1988); A.F.J. Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition* (VCSup 17; Leiden: Brill, 1992); J.N.B. Carleton Paget, “Jewish Christianity,” in W. Horbury et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*. Volume Three: *The Early Roman Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 731-75.

that is in some way related to a Hebrew version of Matthew that early Church Fathers discuss.

What has just been said summarizes some of the principal arguments offered by George Howard, who in 1987 published the text of Hebrew Matthew, along with an English translation, introduction, and critical discussion. A revised edition appeared in 1995.<sup>130</sup> Although not all reviewers were persuaded by Howard, leading authorities in the study of early Judaism and Christianity, such as William Horbury and Daniel Harrington,<sup>131</sup> agree with some of Howard's conclusions, thinking that Shem Tob's Hebrew Matthew is more than merely a medieval Hebrew translation of either Greek Matthew or Latin Matthew.<sup>132</sup>

At important points Hebrew Matthew appears to reflect Jewish interests. We see this in what seems to be a higher regard for Torah, the Law of Moses. According to Greek Matthew, "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress . . ." (5:31-32). When it comes to applying the divorce legislation of Deut 24:1-4, the halakah of Greek Jesus stands in tension with rabbinic halakah. Major rabbinic figures allowed a man to divorce his wife, if for no more cause than a spoiled dinner (cf. *m. Gittin* 9:10; *Sipre Deut.* §269 [on Deut 24:1]).<sup>133</sup> Not only does Jesus' stricter views on divorce stand in tension with the more lenient views of the rabbis, his halakah in Greek Matthew seems even to stand in tension with written Torah itself. Not so in Hebrew Matthew, however; for it reads differently in a very important way: ". . . But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife *is to give her a certificate of divorce*. But concerning adultery, he is the one who commits adultery . . ." (emphasis added). Hebrew Matthew makes it clear that the law of Moses is to be followed. Moreover, the absence of the exception clause (cf. Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor 7:10),

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<sup>130</sup> G. Howard, *The Gospel of Matthew according to a Primitive Hebrew Text* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987); rev. ed., *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1995).

<sup>131</sup> D.J. Harrington, Review of G. Howard, *The Gospel of Matthew according to a Primitive Hebrew Text*, in *CBQ* 50 (1988) 717-18; W. Horbury, Review of Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, in *JJS* 47 (1996) 382-84; idem, "The Hebrew Text of Matthew in Shem Tob Ibn Shaprut's *Eben Bohan*," in D.C. Allison Jr. and W.D. Davies, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*. Volume III: *Commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 729-38.

<sup>132</sup> For recent studies lending further support to Howard's thesis, see R. F. Shedding, "A Further Consideration of the Textual Nature of Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew," *CBQ* 61 (1999) 686-94; idem, *The Textual Relationship between P45 and Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew*, *NTS* 43 (1997), 58-71.

<sup>133</sup> That this halakah is indeed ancient, reaching back to the time of Jesus and earlier, is seen in Josephus (cf. *Ant.* 4.253; *Life* 426) and the sage Jesus ben Sira (cf. *Sir* 25:26).

which scholars suspect may have been a later gloss, may support the antiquity of Hebrew Matthew.

We find another example here in the Sermon on the Mount. According to Greek Matthew, "Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, Do not swear at all . . ." (5:33-34). But according to Hebrew Matthew, "Again you have heard that it was said to those of long ago, 'You shall not swear *by my name* falsely, but you shall perform to the Lord your oath. But I say to you, Do not swear *in vain by anything* . . ." (emphasis added). Hebrew Matthew's different reading is quite significant. Swearing is permissible (as it certainly is in the Law of Moses), but it is not to be done falsely, "by my name" (cf. Lev 19:12), or "in vain" (cf. Exod 20:7). In Hebrew Matthew there is no hint that laws pertaining to taking oaths have been abrogated. Once again, the halakah of Jesus in Hebrew Matthew is closer to the halakah of the rabbis.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing variants in Hebrew Matthew is found in an important saying held in common with Luke. According to Greek Matthew, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (12:28 = Luke 11:20, except the latter reads "by the finger of God"). According to Hebrew Matthew, Jesus says, "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, truly the end of (his) kingdom has come." Not only does this form of the saying fit its context more naturally, and not only is the ambiguous phrase "upon you" missing, the clause "the end of (Satan's) kingdom has come" coheres dictionally and thematically with Jewish eschatology. This aspect is expressed clearly in the *Testament of Moses*, a book composed in Israel sometime in the first third of the first century C.E., that is, during Jesus' lifetime and probably during his ministry. According to the eschatological vision of this work, "then his (God's) kingdom will appear in his whole creation, and then the Devil will have an end" (*T. Mos.* 10:1). Hebrew Matthew seems to be saying the same thing: if Jesus is able by the Spirit of God to cast out demons, then indeed the kingdom of Satan is coming to an end (cf. Mark 3:26, lit. "If Satan . . . is divided . . . he has an end"). We need not argue that Hebrew Matthew preserves a form of the saying that is older, or more authentic, than that found in Greek Matthew/Luke. But its form is consistent with Jewish eschatology of late antiquity and does not appear to represent a confused, medieval reading that may have emerged in the time of Shem Tob.

## Coptic Matthew

In 2001 Hans-Martin Schenke published the Coptic text of the Gospel of Matthew, as found in the Schøyen Collection (catalogue number MS 2650).<sup>134</sup> This papyrus codex dates to the first half of the fourth century, preserving most of Matthew 5:38 – 28:20. It is written in the northern style of the Middle Egyptian dialect of Coptic.<sup>135</sup> Schenke has provided a description of the codex, including its paleography, orthography, language, and text form.<sup>136</sup> He offers a transcription of the Coptic text and a German translation.<sup>137</sup>

Because we have here a Coptic translation of a Greek version of Matthew we have to exercise great caution in our interpretation of the significance of different readings. After all, a different reading in Coptic Matthew may be due simply to translation, not to a difference in the Greek text that the Coptic translator had before him. Accordingly, we are advised to focus on differences that are not readily explained by the vicissitudes of translation.

There are in fact variant readings that may point to a Semitic/Jewish context in which the version of Matthew that underlies the Coptic text was preserved and studied. These Semitic readings are seen in theme and diction, including Aramaizing style. Frequently we encounter the familiar Aramaic locution to “speak before” someone (cf. 15:23; 16:20; 17:20; 23:27, 28; 26:74).<sup>138</sup> At 9:34 Coptic Matthew reads “by Belseboul.” The addition of the name of the prince of demons coheres with Shem Tob’s Hebrew Matthew that reads “by the name of the prince of demons.” Greek Matthew simply reads “by the prince of the demons.” The expression “one by one” at 10:10 is Semitic (cf. Mark 14:19). At 11:1 we have “synagogues” instead of “cities,” perhaps reflecting a Jewish setting. At 14:25 Coptic Matthew reads “upon the waters of the sea,” instead of “upon the sea.”<sup>139</sup> At 15:2 Coptic Matthew omits “transgress the tradition of the elders,” possibly reflecting a higher regard for rabbinic halakah (as seen in Hebrew Matthew above). Similarly, at 15:9 Coptic Matthew omits “in vain they honor me,” once again possibly reflecting Jewish concerns. At 19:29 Coptic

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<sup>134</sup> H.-M. Schenke, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium im mittelägyptischen Dialekt des Koptischen (Codex Schøyen)* (Schøyen Collection 2: Coptic Papyrus 1; Oslo: Hermes, 2001).

<sup>135</sup> Schenke, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium*, 17.

<sup>136</sup> Schenke, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium*, 17-34.

<sup>137</sup> Schenke, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium*, 35-191. Schenke provides an appendix (pp. 279-311), in which he retroverts the Coptic into the Greek that he thinks underlies the Coptic translation. This is followed by beautiful color plates (pp. 315-92), which are remarkably legible.

<sup>138</sup> This locution is quite common in Targums, that is, the Aramaic paraphrases of Tanak.

<sup>139</sup> The phrase “upon the waters of the sea” is Semitic, occurring some half dozen times in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Exod 15:19 “the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the people of Israel walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea”; Ps 33:7 “He gathered the waters of the sea”).

Matthew's addition of "wife" agrees with Shem Tob's Hebrew Matthew. At 21:9 and 21:15 Coptic Matthew reads "in the house of David," instead of "to the son of David."<sup>140</sup> At 25:27b Coptic Matthew omits "with interest," which again possibly reflects Jewish sensitivity – in that collecting interest is contrary to the Law (cf. Exod 22:25; Lev 25:36-37; Deut 23:19-20).

### A Fragment of Greek Parchment

Document 840 from Oxyrhynchus was published in 1908 and touched off a firestorm of debate. It comprises a single page of parchment (not papyrus), with 22 lines of text on one side and 23 lines on the other. Its small size could suggest that it was an amulet. The fact that we have two stories, the conclusion of one in lines 1-7, and most of a second in lines 7-45, encourages us to view this parchment as a leaf from a codex, albeit a small one, whether or not it was used as an amulet.<sup>141</sup>

Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt, the first to edit and publish the text, dated the leaf to the fourth century and argued that it was part of an extracanonical Gospel (probably composed in Egypt) and that the story itself probably originated before the end of the second century.<sup>142</sup> They further concluded that although this fragment seems to be Jewish, it probably is not part of one of the other Jewish Gospels (such as the *Gospel of the Nazarenes* or the *Gospel of the Ebionites*) nor is it a fragment of a Gnostic Gospel. Quite recently, Harvard professor François Bovon agrees, concluding that POxy 840 is not Jewish.<sup>143</sup> As will be shown, this conclusion should be reconsidered.

Beginning at line 7 of the *verso* and continuing to the end of the story, which breaks off with the poorly preserved final lines of the *recto*, we read:

*And he took them and brought them into the very place of purification, and was walking in the Temple.*

*And approaching, a certain Pharisee, a ruling priest, whose name was Lev[i], met them and s[aid] to the Savior, "Who permitted you to wa[lk] in this place of purification and to see [the]se holy vessels, when you have not wash[ed] nor yet have your disciples [ba]thed their [feet]? But defil[ed] you have walked in this Temple, which is a pure pl[ace], in which no*

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<sup>140</sup> Coptic Matthew's reading "in the house of David" may reflect the influence of Ps 122:5 and/or Tg. Ps 132:17.

<sup>141</sup> Soon after the publication of POxy 840 E. Preuschen ("Das neue Evangelienfragment von Oxyrhynchus," *ZNW* 9 [1908], 1-11, here 1-2), citing a passage from Chrysostom, wondered if the fragment was part of a tiny book worn around the neck in place of an amulet.

<sup>142</sup> B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt, "Fragment of an Uncanonical Gospel," in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 5 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1908), 1-10 + pl. I.

<sup>143</sup> F. Bovon, "Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840, Fragment of a Lost Gospel, Witness of an Early Christian Controversy over Purity," *JBL* 119 (2000), 705-28.

*o[ther person] walks [unless] he has washed himself and cha[n]ged his cloth[es], neither does he [dare view these] holy vessels."*

*And [the Savior immediately stoo]d (still) w[ith hi]s disciples and answered him, "Are you then, being here in the Temple, clean?"*

*He says to him, "I am clean, for I washed in the pool of D[avi]d, and having descended by one set of steps I ascended by another. And I put on white and clean clothes, and then I came and looked upon these holy vessels."*

*An[s]wer[ing], the Savior said to him, "Woe to you blind who do not see. You have washed in these running waters in which dogs and swine have [been] cast night and day, and have cleaned and wiped the outside skin which also the harlots and flute-girls anoi[nt] and wash and wipe [and b]eautify for the lus[t o]f men; but with[in they are f]ull of scorpions and [all wic]kedness. But I and [my disciples], who you say have not ba[th]ed, have been dip[pe]d in the waters [of eternal] li[fe whi]ch come from . . . [ . . . B]ut woe to the . . .*

Bovon regards the priest's description of ablution inauthentic of Jewish practice, but reflective instead of Christian baptism and controversy.<sup>144</sup> Nevertheless, recent investigation of POxy 840 and advances in archaeology in the land of Israel may be tipping the balance in favor of viewing the story as true to first-century Jewish practices, though not necessarily as deriving from an actual event in the life of Jesus. The alleged inaccuracies can in most instances be satisfactorily explained.

First, the excavation of several miqva'oth in the vicinity of the Temple precincts provides more than sufficient documentation of the general verisimilitude of the story itself.

Secondly, the issue surrounding the viewing of holy vessels has been clarified in a recent study by Daniel Schwartz,<sup>145</sup> who cites incidents related in Josephus (cf. *J.W.* 1.152, where Pompey views the holy place; *Ant.* 14.71-72, where Pompey sees the golden table, sacred lampstand, libation vessels; *J.W.* 1.354 = *Ant.* 14.482-483, where Herod expresses fear that foreigners would gaze upon sacred objects), rabbinic traditions (cf. *t. Hag.* 3.35; *y. Hag.* 3.8, where Israelites are invited to see the Temple's menorah), and Scripture itself (cf. 1 Sam 6:19, where people die for looking into the ark of the covenant; Num 4:20, which warns that looking upon holy utensils will result in death). Schwartz concludes that POxy 840 may contain a genuine Jewish polemic directed against priestly arrogance and elitism.

Thirdly, ritual immersion was required for entry into the Court of the Israelites (cf. *m. Yoma* 3:3: "None may enter the Temple Court for service, even though he is clean, until he has immersed himself. On this day [i.e., the Day of Atonement] the High Priest five times immerses himself . . ."; see also *b. Yoma*

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<sup>144</sup> Bovon, "Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840," 716-21.

<sup>145</sup> D.R. Schwartz, "'Viewing the Holy Utensils' (P. Ox. V, 840)," *NTS* 32 (1986), 153-59.

30b, which presupposes that priests immersed themselves before entering the Sanctuary; according to *b. Yoma* 30a, moving from a common place to a holy place “requires immersion”; and see Josephus, *J.W.* 5.227: “Men not thoroughly clean were debarred from admission into the inner court”; cf. *m. Kelim* 1:8). When immersed, Israelite men would have been permitted to enter the inner court, where sacred vessels, sometimes on display, could be viewed. It must be admitted that there is no evidence apart from POxy 840 that the laity were expected to change clothes as well as immerse themselves. But caution is required here, for “changed clothes” in lines 19 and 20 has to be restored. Moreover, we do not know that it was not required of the laity to immerse themselves and change their clothes on special occasions when sacred vessels were put on display.

Fourthly, the priest<sup>146</sup> claims that he has descended by one set of steps and ascended by another. Grenfell and Hunt think “the two stairways leading down” to the pool “seem to be details invented for the sake of rhetorical effect.”<sup>147</sup> Rhetoric or not, divided steps that go *down into* and *back up from* the water are now attested in Jewish miqva'oth, including some of the miqva'oth in the vicinity of the Temple Mount itself.<sup>148</sup> Qumran offers a clear and interesting example, where the center divider is quite wide, perhaps reflecting Qumran's great concern over matters of purity. That Qumran, a priestly sect, used miqva'oth with divided steps could be especially pertinent. The excavated mansion in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem, which may have belonged to a High Priest, also has a miqveh with divided steps. Grenfell and Hunt, who wrote before the aforementioned sites had been discovered and excavated, may be forgiven for thinking miqva'oth with divided steps are unattested in Judaism, but Bovon should know better. He says he is unable to find evidence of divided steps. He cites the *Epistle of Aristean* 106<sup>149</sup> and *m. Sheq.* 8:2,<sup>150</sup> but is not satisfied,

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<sup>146</sup> Some have objected that there was no High Priest named Levi. This may be true, but the text probably means “a certain ruling priest,” not “a certain High Priest.” The use of *tis* implies one of the several ruling priests. We know of a captain of the priests who may have been a Pharisee (cf. *'Abot* 3:2; *m. 'Ed.* 2:1-2). In any case, “Pharisee” in POxy 840 may well be a gloss. The original text probably read “a certain ruling priest named Levi.”

<sup>147</sup> Grenfell and Hunt, “Fragment of an Uncanonical Gospel,” 3.

<sup>148</sup> For discussion and photographs, see W. S. LaSor, “Discovering What Jewish Miqva'ot Can Tell Us,” *BARev* 13/1 (1987) 52-59; R. Reich, “The Great Mikveh Debate,” *BARev* 19/2 (1993) 52-53; idem, *EDDS* 1.562. H. Eshel (“The Pools of Sepphoris: Ritual Baths or Bathtubs?” *BARev* 26/4 [2000] 44) remarks: “Another telltale sign of a mikveh often appears in excavations: a low partition that divides the stairs into two staircases, one for going into the bath, one for coming out.”

<sup>149</sup> “For the ground ascends, since the city is built upon a mountain. There are steps too which lead up to the cross roads, and some people are always going up, and others down and they keep as far apart from each other as possible on the road because of those



because divided steps are not explicitly mentioned. But the discovery of miqvaoth, with divided steps, in the vicinity of the Temple Mount itself, surely clarifies the meaning of these texts.<sup>151</sup> To claim, as Bovon does, that POxy 840's miqveh and divided steps relate in some way to Christian baptismal ceremonies seems farfetched and unnecessary.<sup>152</sup>

Fifthly, the rhetoric, "dogs and swine ... harlots and flute-girls," is metaphorical and hyperbolic,<sup>153</sup> not careless misunderstanding of the pragmata of the Temple Mount.<sup>154</sup> Jesus' point is that all sorts of people have washed in the waters fed by the various channels of running water. They may technically meet the requirements for entry into the area where ritually pure Israelites may view the sacred vessels, but inwardly they are as corrupt as ever. Moreover, the

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who are bound by the rules of purity, lest they should touch anything which is unlawful."

<sup>150</sup> "All utensils found in Jerusalem, on the path down to an immersion pool, are assumed to be unclean. [If they are found] on the path up from the immersion pool, they are assumed to be clean, For the way down is different from the way up," the words of R. Meir" (mid-second cent.).

<sup>151</sup> According to *m. Sheq.* 8:2 (cited in preceding note), unclean vessels are to descend on one side of the steps, while clean vessels are to ascend on the other; see R. Reich, "Mishnah, Sheqalim 8:2, and the Archaeological Evidence," in A. Oppenheimer, U. Rappaport, and M. Stern (eds.), *Jerusalem in the Second Temple* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Svi, 1980) 225-56 (Hebrew, with English summary on p. xiv). The recently excavated miqvaoth with divided steps strongly encourage seeing POxy 840 as describing authentic Jewish practice, whereby people also descended on one side and ascended on the other. Furthermore, *m. Tamid* 1:1 tells of the priests' use of the Chamber of Immersion and how the priests did not sleep in their priestly vestments, but slept in their own clothes, with the priestly garments beneath their heads. This is entirely consistent with POxy 840's portrait of a priest who bathes, descending on one side and ascending on the other, and then changes his clothes. One should also note *T. Levi* 9:11, where the patriarch Levi, father of the Israel's priestly tribe, enjoins his sons: "Before you enter the sanctuary, bathe; while you are sacrificing, wash; and again when the sacrifice is concluded, wash."

<sup>152</sup> Bovon, "Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840," 717, 719, 721. Bovon views the story recounted in POxy 840 as essentially an allegory.

<sup>153</sup> As seen in 2 Pet 2:22, where the "dog turns back to his own vomit [alluding to Prov 26:11], and the sow is washed only to wallow in the mire"; Matt 7:6, where Jesus warns his followers: "Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine"; or Matt 23:25-28, where we read of polished cups "full of extortion and rapacity," or white washed tombs "full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." The hyperbolic nature of POxy 840 is rightly recognized by Bovon, "Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840," 717.

<sup>154</sup> This point is missed by Grenfell and Hunt, "Fragment of an Uncanonical Gospel," 3, who comment that Jesus' language is "incredible," indicating that the author of the fragment "was not really well acquainted with the Temple."

idea that impurity flows upstream may be presupposed here.<sup>155</sup> Accordingly, Jesus is suggesting that the water itself is contaminated and cannot convey purity, which is consistent with his teaching elsewhere (cf. Mark 7:14-23). Jesus' criticism of the ruling priest, which almost has a Qumranian ring to it, may allude to 1 Kings 22:38, where the dogs licked up the blood of Ahab and the harlots washed themselves in the bloodied water.<sup>156</sup>

There are therefore no grounds for saying that the author of this story does not understand either Judaism or the topography and custom of the Temple.<sup>157</sup> Without deciding the question of authenticity, I think it is fair to conclude that POxy 840 in fact does relate a story from a reasonably well-informed Jewish perspective. If the conclusion that has been reached is justified, then POxy 840 offers important documentation of ongoing controversy between Jewish believers in Jesus and Jews who viewed with misgivings Jesus' teaching concerning purity in general and perhaps ritual bathing in particular. In a Jewish context, this story would provide clarification and rationale for embracing a faith that no longer regarded the pragmata of the Temple cultus as sacred or normative (in sharp contrast with emerging rabbinic Judaism).<sup>158</sup>

## Conclusion

These newly discovered (or re-discovered) Jewish recensions of Matthew attest an active intramural struggle in the early centuries of the Jesus movement, as the Church began its bifurcation into a gentile faith and a Jewish community of Messianists struggling to maintain faith and identity, caught between gentile Christianity, on the one hand, and emerging rabbinic Judaism and an increasingly hostile synagogue, on the other. Simply put, gentile Christianity devalued Torah and Jewish traditions, while rabbinic Judaism devalued the life and death of Jesus Messiah. Jewish Messianism struggled to maintain both.

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<sup>155</sup> If so, this offers an important point of agreement with rabbinic halakah.

<sup>156</sup> First observed by M.R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924; corrected ed., 1953), 29.

<sup>157</sup> Admittedly, the "Pool of David" remains unattested, but other pools and miqva'oth in which ritual immersion took place in the vicinity of the Temple Mount have been uncovered. Excavation on the Temple Mount itself, which is not possible in today's political climate, may someday uncover such a pool.

<sup>158</sup> On aspects of this tension, see R.A. Pritz, "The Jewish Christian Sect of the Nazarenes and the Mishnah," in D. Assaf (ed.), *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies*. Division A: *The Period of the Bible* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 125-30.

# Why Were the Early Christians Called Nazarenes?

Richard Bauckham

In Acts 24:5, Tertullus, the lawyer acting for the high priest Ananias, refers to “the party<sup>159</sup> of the Nazarenes.” This is the only place in the New Testament where the term “Nazarenes” (Greek *nazōraioi*) occurs as a term for Christians. Because of the form of the Greek word we can be sure that the term originated in Aramaic. It must have been the term used by Aramaic-speaking Jews to designate the early Christians. It probably did not originate as a term Christians used for themselves. They preferred terms that pointed to their role in the fulfilment of prophecy, as the nucleus of the renewed Israel of the messianic age. They called themselves “the holy ones”<sup>160</sup> (or “the saints” alluding to Dan 7:18, 22, 25, 27) or “the assembly of God”<sup>161</sup> (or “the church of God” alluding to “the assembly of YHWH” as used of Israel in the wilderness). They called their movement “the Way”<sup>162</sup> (alluding to Isa. 40:3; cf. 30:11, 21; 35:8 etc.). But outsiders could not use these theologically loaded terms for them. The issue is similar to that of how people referred to Jesus, whose common name required that something be added to distinguish this Jesus from others. Christians called him Jesus the Messiah, but this usage was not available to Jews who did not regard him as the Messiah. Among them he was generally known as Jesus the Nazarene, referring to his home village, Nazareth. (A familiar parallel case for this sort of designation is Mary Magdalene, so called after her home village, Magdala.) Much the most plausible reason why followers of Jesus were called Nazarenes is that the term was transferred from Jesus to his followers. They did not come from Nazareth, but they were so called because their master did. This

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<sup>159</sup> The Greek word *haeresis* here is usually translated “sect,” but in contemporary English that term has sociological significance that is not implied by the Greek *haeresis*. When the various parties in Judaism were called *haereseis*, the implicit analogy was with the Greek philosophical schools.

<sup>160</sup> E.g. Acts 9:13, 32, 41; Jude 3; Rom 15:25, 26, 31; 1 Cor 16:1.

<sup>161</sup> 1 Cor 15:9; 1 Thess 2:14.

<sup>162</sup> Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; cf. 18:25, 26.

explanation has sometimes been disputed<sup>163</sup> because the precise form of the Greek word in Acts 24:5 (Greek *nazōraioi*) does not seem too close to the word Nazareth. But it is now generally accepted that *nazōraios* is adequately explained as a Greek form of an Aramaic word meaning “of Nazareth.”<sup>164</sup> When Jesus himself in the New Testament is called “the Nazarene,” the Greek is sometimes *nazōraios*, sometimes the more properly Greek form *nazarēnos*.

We do not know of any other term that Aramaic-speaking Jews used to label the first Christians and so it is likely that the term “Nazarenes” was used from a very early stage, as soon as the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem were a distinctive and significant enough group for others to need a word for them. It remained the ordinary and standard term for Christians in Semitic languages (including Hebrew, Syriac and Arabic). In the Hebrew of the rabbis Christians are *notsrīm*. In Greek and Latin, on the other hand, another word, “Christians,” became standard. This word (Greek *Christianoī*, Latin *Christiani*) is a Latin formation of the type most often used to describe political groups named after their leader. A New Testament parallel case is the “Herodians” (*Hērōdianoī*), the supporters of Herod Antipas (Mark 3:6 etc.). Like “Nazarenes,” “Christians” originated as term outsiders used. It was first used in Antioch (Acts 11:26), probably because the Roman authorities there classified the Christians as a political group, followers of “Christ,” and sufficiently different from Jews in general for a new term to be needed. The difference between “Nazarenes” and “Christians” is a strictly linguistic one: Aramaic-speakers used “Nazarenes,” Greek- and Latin-speakers used “Christians.” It is not the case that “Nazarenes” referred only to Jewish Christians, whereas “Christians” included gentile Christians. Both terms meant simply “Christians.” The term “Nazarenes” originated, of course, with reference to Jewish Christians, because there were only Jewish Christians at that time, but, once there were Gentile Christians, it would have been used for them too. Aramaic and Hebrew had no other words that could be used for gentile Christians. Conversely, the term “Christians” originated later, with reference to a Christian community that included gentiles as well as Jews, but this was not, at least primarily, why it was coined. It was coined because “Nazarenes” made no sense to the Roman authorities in Antioch and they needed a Latin and Greek term appropriate to the Christian group as they perceived them.

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<sup>163</sup> For a brief history of research, see S.C. Mimouni, ‘Les Nazoréens: Recherche étymologique et historique,’ *RB* 105 (1998), 212-215.

<sup>164</sup> M.O. Wise, ‘Nazarene,’ in J. B. Green and S. McKnight ed., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Illinois/Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1992) 571-574, explains the Greek *ō* as a form of pronunciation evidenced by the orthography of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>. K. Berger, ‘Jesus als Nasoräer/Nasiräer,’ *NovT* 38 (1996) 323-325, differs from the recent consensus in arguing that *nazōraios* corresponds to Hebrew *nazir*, ‘Nazirite’ (LXX *naziraios*).

Tertullian, writing in the early third century, knew that “Nazarenes” was the term Jews used to refer to “us,” i.e. Christians as such, not Jewish Christians in particular (*adv. Marc.* 4.8). But in the fourth and fifth centuries, Epiphanius, Jerome and others, writing in Greek or Latin, use “Nazarenes” with reference to specific groups of Jewish Christians. This was doubtless because these groups called themselves, in Aramaic, Nazarenes, and were so called by their Aramaic-speaking neighbors. The probability is that these “Nazarenes” were the Jewish Christian groups in most continuity with the early Jerusalem church,<sup>165</sup> and had continued to call themselves by the ordinary Aramaic and Hebrew words for Christian, whereas other Jewish Christian groups – Ebionites, Elkasaïtes and others – acquired other designations to distinguish them from those still called “Nazarenes.” If so, the implication is probably that “Nazarenes,” while it originated as a term used by outsiders, was taken over by followers of Jesus themselves. We should in any case think this was likely to happen at an early stage, since the Christians themselves would inevitably find themselves using the outsiders’ term at least when talking to outsiders. The same happened in Greek and Latin with the word “Christian.”

It is possible that this is all that should be said about the term “Nazarenes.” But it is also possible that, when early Christians themselves took over the term into their own usage, they saw more significance in it than the merely geographical reference (“of Nazareth”). This possibility arises because there is strong evidence that they did this in the case of the term applied to Jesus himself. Matthew 2:23 refers to Jesus’ residence in Nazareth as fulfilling the words of the prophets, “He shall be called a Nazarene (*nazōraios*).” Since these words do not actually occur anywhere in the Hebrew Bible, this text has been much discussed and many explanations offered.<sup>166</sup> One suggestion is that there is a play on the word “Nazirite” (Hebrew *nazir*; Greek *naziraios*), meaning someone consecrated to God in a particular way. In the story of Samson’s birth, it is predicted that Samson “shall be a Nazirite” (Judg 13:5, 7). But that Matthew refers to this text seems unlikely, because Jesus was not a Nazirite. One of the three features of the Nazirite vow was abstention from wine, but Jesus was well-known, even notorious for not practising this kind of asceticism (Matt

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<sup>165</sup> This is argued by, e.g., R.A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity* (Hebrew University, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992); M.C. de Boer, ‘The Nazoreans: living at the boundary of Judaism and Christianity,’ in G.N. Stanton and G.G. Strouma ed., *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 239-262; S. C. Mimouni, *Le judéo-christianisme ancien: essais historiques* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1998), chapter 2.

<sup>166</sup> There is a bibliography of recent discussion of *nazōraios* in Matt 2:23 in J.A. Sanders, ‘Nazwraï’o’ in Matthew 2.23,’ in C.A. Evans and W.R. Stegner ed., *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel* (JSNTSup 104; Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 117 n. 1.

11:19; 26:27-20).<sup>167</sup> But might this possible play on words - Nazarene/Nazirite - have been associated with the early Christians when they called themselves Nazerenes?<sup>168</sup> This too is unlikely. There were Nazirites among the members of the Jerusalem church, but, like most Nazirites, they merely lived under the Nazirite vow for a limited period (Acts 21:23-24). This would be no basis for thinking of the church as a whole as "Nazirites." Second-century tradition about James the brother of Jesus, leader of the Jerusalem church, depicts him as a life-long ascetic who, among other things, practised the conditions of the Nazirite vow.<sup>169</sup> This is probably pure legend,<sup>170</sup> but even if James was a lifelong Nazirite, this would provide no basis for associating the Jerusalem church as a whole with "Nazirites."

A more probable explanation of Matthew 2:23 is that it alludes to Isaiah 11:1, a well-known prophecy of the royal Messiah of David: "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch (Hebrew *netser*) shall grow out of his roots." It must have been a problem for early Christians, for whom it was immensely important to correlate the facts about Jesus with messianic prophecy, that Nazareth is not even mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. But Jewish exegetical method quite commonly found additional meaning in the biblical texts by detecting puns: a word in the Hebrew text might suggest also another, similar-sounding word. So a reference to Jesus' home village Nazareth could be found in the word *netser* (Isa. 11:1) whose three written letters (*n-ts-r*) are also the first three of Nazareth's four (*n-ts-r-t*).<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> M. Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000) 41-42, sees Jesus' vow in Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25 as having 'unmistakable Nazirite connotations.' So also M. Wojciechowski, 'Le naziréat et la Passion (Mc 14, 25a; 15:23),' *Bib* 65 (1984) 96-96. But Jesus is not vowing to abstain from wine; he is vowing to drink wine only in connection with the kingdom of God. The point is not the temporary abstinence, but the nearness of the kingdom.

<sup>168</sup> B. Chilton, 'An Exorcism of History: Mark 1:21-28,' in B. Chilton and C.A. Evans ed., *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (NT Tools and Studies 28/2; Leiden: Brill, 1999), who thinks that 'Nazarene' in Mark 1:24 means 'Nazirite,' writes that "James was a Nazirite, and saw his brother's movement as focused on producing more Nazirites" (243).

<sup>169</sup> Hegesippus in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.22.4-5.

<sup>170</sup> See R. Bauckham, 'For What Offence Was James Put to Death?,' in B. Chilton and C.A. Evans ed., *James the Just and Christian Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 213-215. B. Chilton, 'Conclusions and Questions,' in Chilton and Evans, *James the Just*, 257-258, takes Hegesippus' account to be historical.

<sup>171</sup> B. Pixner, *With Jesus through Galilee according to the Fifth Gospel* (Rosh Pina: Corazin, 1992) 14-19, suggests that Nazareth was actually named with reference to Isaiah 11:1. He thinks that members of a Davidic clan (from which Jesus came), who called themselves "Nazarenes" because of the term *netser* in Isa 11:1, settled in Nazareth c. 100 BCE, and gave the village its name. This is possible, but rather speculative.

This pun could easily be applied not only to Jesus, but also to his followers, the Nazarenes.<sup>172</sup> The word *netser*, used of the Messiah in Isaiah 11:1, is also used of the Messiah's people in Isaiah 60:21: "They are the shoot (*netser*) that I have planted." Moreover, these later chapters of Isaiah, which were the most important prophecies for the early Christians, contain another text that could be read as a punning reference to the Nazarenes.<sup>173</sup> In Isaiah 49:6 God addresses his Servant:

*It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
and to restore the survivors (n<sup>e</sup>tsire or n<sup>e</sup>tsure) of Israel;  
I will give you as a light to the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.*

Here the root *n-ts-r*, meaning "to watch, to preserve,"<sup>174</sup> is used to refer to the "survivors" or "preserved" of Israel, the messianic remnant restored by the Messiah. Isaiah 49:6 was a significant text for the early Christians (cf. Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47), and the early Jerusalem church would surely have seen itself as the *n<sup>e</sup>tsire* of Israel (the *n<sup>e</sup>tsire* restored by the *netser*) and could easily have connected this word with "Nazarenes." This need not be regarded as an alternative to a link with Isaiah 60:21. Jewish exegesis reveled in verbal links between various scriptural passages. An early Christian exegete who spotted the links between Nazareth, Isaiah 11:1, Isaiah 60:21 and Isaiah 49:6 could readily have found them significant.

One more possible link<sup>175</sup> is with Jeremiah 31:6:

*There will be a day when sentinels (n<sup>o</sup>ts<sup>e</sup>rim: watchmen) will call in the hill country of Ephraim: "Come, let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God."*

Here the Nazarenes would be the sentinels who announce God's salvation of his people. That early Christians could have seen themselves in this text is made quite possible by its proximity to Jeremiah's famous prophecy of the new covenant (31:31-34).<sup>176</sup> But another possibility, that Christians were called or called themselves *n<sup>o</sup>ts<sup>e</sup>rim* in the sense of 'observers' of Torah, is an unlikely

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<sup>172</sup> For a full discussion, which also draws on the evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls, see H. Ulfgard, 'The Branch in the Last Days: Observations on the New Covenant before and after the Messiah,' in T.H. Lim ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls in their Historical Context* (Edinburgh; T. & T. Clark, 2000), 233-247.

<sup>173</sup> This is suggested, among others, by Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law*, 44 n. 74.

<sup>174</sup> This root is used in Isa 42:6, a closely related passage, to describe the Servant himself: "I have taken you by the hand and preserved you."

<sup>175</sup> This is suggested by Ulfgard, 'The Branch,' 237.

<sup>176</sup> Note also the quotation of Jer 31:15 in Matt 2:18.

connotation. Other Jews would scarcely have seen this as distinctive of Jewish Christians, nor is it what Jewish Christians themselves are likely to have adopted as a self-designation.

Why were the early Christians called Nazarenes? Their own answer might have been: "Because this is what the scriptural prophecies call us."