

Preface

In October 1990, eight rabbis and Jewish communal leaders traveled to the Indian city of Dharamasala in order to discuss with the XIV Dalai Lama intersections and points of contact between Buddhism and Judaism. It was their intention to create and promote an inter-religious dialogue. In his bestseller, “The Jew in the Lotus” (1994), Rodger Kamenetz recorded this historical event and popularized the notion of “Je(w)Bu” (or “BuJews,” or “BuJus”), which at that point had already existed for several decades: Je(w)Bus have a Jewish background, yet, practise, for the most diverse reasons thinkable, aspects derived from Buddhist spiritualism.¹ The various names that are in use for this phenomenon reflect the variety of identities constructed out of the encounter, entanglement, hybridity, or syncretism of Judaism/Jewishness and Buddhism (and other Asian cultures and religions): Some put the Jewish aspect first, while others stress the Buddhist. One identity can serve as the background to the foregrounded other(s); many “JewBus” do not see contradictions between the two.²

Not coincidentally, such encounters between Judaism/Jewishness and Asian cultures and religions has a broad appeal particularly in the United States, where a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society have facilitated them with the lowering of social barriers between different groups. The validation of difference particularly since the 1960s, the declining retention rates of large, established religious institutions, the fascination with exotic “others” as alternatives to mainstream religious ideas and practices, and the increase in religious subjectivity have all contributed to a contemporary openness to hybrid

¹ Rodger Kamenetz: *The Jew in the Lotus: A Poet’s Rediscovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India*. San Francisco 1994.

² Buddhist teacher Sylvia Boorstein’s book illustrates this point in its title: *That’s Funny, You Don’t Look Buddhist. On Being a Faithful Jew and a Passionate Buddhist*. San Francisco 1996. The vast literature on this topic includes Alan Levin: *Crossing the Boundary. Stories of Jewish Leaders of Other Spiritual Paths*. Berkeley 2015; Alan Lewin/ Sherril Jaffe: *One God Clapping. The Spiritual Path of a Zen Rabbi*. Nashville 2001; Judith Linzer: *Torah and Dharma. Jewish Seekers in Eastern Religions*. Northvale 1996; Melinda Ribner: *New Age Judaism. Ancient Wisdom for the Modern World*. Deerfield Beach, FL 2000.

identities, à la carte practices, and loose forms of religious affiliation.³ This new constellation is based on greater openness and inclusiveness, curiosity, and acknowledgement of spiritual needs compared to only a few decades ago.⁴

Regardless of whether and how these developments will also re-shape the religious landscape of Europe, they raise questions of great importance to those interested in modern religion in general, and Judaism in particular: Universalism and particularism mark a pair of perspectives whose interplay is characteristic of Jewish modernization. For Europe more than for other social and religious contexts, the question of secularism and public religion is relevant; it is part and parcel of some of the phenomena questioning concepts of “religion” as something “private” that have dominated the Western discourse since the Enlightenment. The context of Israel as a “Jewish state,” whose Jewish citizens tend to conceptualize their Jewish identity very differently from such European notions, the encounter with Asian forms of spirituality brings yet other questions regarding the place of Judaism (as a religion, spiritual source) into play.⁵

Put in the most oversimplified terms, the overarching question behind these encounters has to do with the nature of Judaism: Can it be seen more as a “religion” in the sense defined by Western (Protestant) ideas, or a broader concept altogether? If a “religion,” for lack of a better, or rather more intelligible word in the public discourse, is Judaism a “Western” religion, universalized in its diaspora history, or an “oriental” religion with potentially closer relations to “(Far) Eastern” religions that have been shaped by other historical, social, and ideational forces than “Western” ones?

The current relevance of these issues must not mask the fact that encounters between Judaism and Asian cultures predate by centuries the emergence

³ Cf., among many other studies: Robert N. Bellah: *Habits of the Heart. Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley 1985; Paul Heelas/Linda Woodhead: *The Spiritual Revolution. Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*. Malden 2004; Wade Clark Roof/William McKinney: *American Mainline Religion. Its Changing Shape and Future*. New Brunswick 1987; Wade Clark Roof: *A Generation of Seekers. The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*. San Francisco 1993; Robert Wuthnow: *After Heaven. Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*. Oakland 1998.

⁴ For recent developments within American Judaism that are related to the larger changes in the religious landscape, cf. Steven M. Cohen/Arnold M. Eisen: *The Jew Within. Self, Family, and Community in America*. Bloomington 2000, pp. 7–12, 191–207.

⁵ Cf. Joseph Loss: *Buddha-Dhamma in Israel. Explicit Non-Religious and Implicit Non-Secular Localization of Religion*, in: *Noval Religio. The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religion* 13 (2010) 4, pp. 84–105.

of “New Age” forms of posttraditional expressions of Judaism. Every American synagogue whose program for 2017 includes meditation (or even “Torah Yoga”), every European facing a bookstore shelf full of books on “esoteric” topics, and every young Israeli embarking on the almost normative post-army trip to a Far East, continues a long line of encounters, transfers, exchanges, and entanglements of individuals, ideas, and texts that link Asian religion and spirituality to Judaism and other religions.⁶

Historic and current points of contact between Jewish and Asian cultures are naturally quite diverse and emerged long before the 1990s. This is why it is assumed that, for example, the Bene Israel have been living in India since antiquity, yet not later than the Middle Ages. Scholarship has established that these groups share several similarities with Rabbinic Judaism, but have also adopted numerous customs and notions from their Hindu environments.⁷ The origin of former Jewish communities in China can be traced back to the ninth and twelfth centuries respectively. Yet, their cultural and religious identity too was significantly influenced by their surrounding cultures.⁸

The post-Middle Age encounters between European-Jewish and Asian cultures started with the Early Modern Age and reached well into the beginning of the twentieth century as a result of colonialization, as merchants, missionaries,⁹ and explorers shared their accounts of these Asian countries, religions, and populations. Motivated by these texts, Jewish intellectuals too began to take interest in these Asian cultures, or even traveled to these regions.

In the nineteenth century, encounters of a different kind took place in the context of colonial trade and cultural connections in Asia. This influence was more specifically established at the end of the nineteenth century as part of a cultural search for new sources of art, philosophy, ethical thought and lifestyles; such as the Japanism in post-Impressionist painting or the interest in pedagogical elements of Buddhist monastic initiation in the texts of German

⁶ Diane Bloomfield: *Torah Yoga: Experiencing Jewish Wisdom through Classical Postures*. San Francisco 2004.

⁷ Cf. among others Shalva Weil (ed.): *Indian Jewish Heritage. Ritual, Art and Life-Cycle*. Mumbai 2002; Monique Zetlaoui: *Shalom India. Histoire des communautés juives en Inde*. Paris 2000.

⁸ Cf. among others Sidney Shapiro: *Jews in old China. Studies by Chinese scholars*. New York 1984; Tiberiu Weisz: *The Kaifeng Stine Inscriptions. The Legacy of the Jewish Community in Ancient China*. New York 2006.

⁹ Cf. among others William Charles White: *Chinese Jews. A Compilation of Matters related to the Jews of Kai-Feng Fu*. New York 1966.

thinkers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the second half of the twentieth century, the dominance of this process shifted to the United States and became evident mainly in the cultural mergers of the Beat Generation and the Hippies who followed it. It continued in various adaptations, though with changing emphasis, into the twenty-first century. The contemporary stage of Jewish-Asian cultural contact coincides with the New Spirituality movements, in which ethnic, religious, and medical Asian traditions are fused with an individual's in order to create a new unity.¹⁰

The objective set by the publishers of the current *PaRDeS* issue was to focus on Jewish relationships with Asian cultures in order to close existing gaps in research. The contributions, which were commissioned by an international call-for-papers and subsequently reviewed, reflect the current interests of researchers working in this broad field. The articles are divided chronologically into two large groups: Four articles concentrate on the nineteenth century and deal with various views on Hindu and Buddhist cultures as held by Jewish intellectuals. In contrast, the five articles of the second group focus on the *fin de siècle*, the early twentieth century and contemporary phenomena in which hybrid forms of Jewish and Asian cultures are addressed.

The first article of the current *PaRDeS* issue by Richard G. Marks distills a common Jewish view of Hinduism from the ways in which rabbis traveling to India interacted with it. Marks discusses the works of rabbis David d'Beth Hillel and Jacob Sapir Halevi; both studied the scholarly tradition of Vilna Gaon, immigrated to Palestine and afterwards set forth on a journey to India in order to learn about Hinduism. Both Hillel as well as Sapir were fascinated by Hindu temples, statutes, and rituals, which they considered as curiosities. Although both ascribed to the understanding and notion of sacrality to the Hindus, they also described their beliefs and practices as an "abomination"; an expression derived from biblical terminology characterizing the forbidden and horrific.

Sebastian Musch's article introduces little-known author Friedrich Korn (1803–1850), who claimed that the Jewish people descended from India. Musch situates Korn in intellectual debates of the first half of the nineteenth century and discusses his attempt to establish a genealogical connection between

¹⁰ Cf. for example Helen Kiyong Kim; Noah Samuel Leavitt: *JewAsian. Race, Religion, and Identity for America's Newest Jews*. Lincoln 2016.

Indians and Jews. Korn, a convert, invited his former co-religionists to follow his example, arguing that Judaism had fulfilled its historical role and that its sister religion would thus continue the tradition of monotheism. Ultimately, he argues in favour of an astrotheology, which is of greater universality, since each human being, regardless of his/her religious affiliation, is assumed to be equal before celestial bodies.

Hans-Michael Haußig outlines the attempts of two representatives of Reform Judaism – Salomon Formstecher (1808–1889) and Samuel Hirsch (1815–1889) – to incorporate Judaism within the framework of a general history of humanity. Both authors believed that Judaism was the only religion next to which only paganism could exist. In the context of their theses, which Formstecher and Hirsch presented in 1841 and 1842 respectively, they responded differently to the Indian religions, allocating them specific places in the overall trajectory of religious development.

Arthur Schopenhauer’s conception of a “pessimistic” Buddhism and “optimistic” Judaism as the two most distant religious ideas was proudly appropriated by many Jewish thinkers. Aleš Weiss shows that these Jews portrayed Buddhism as an anti-worldly and anti-social religion of egoistic individuals seeking their own salvation, the most extreme form of pessimism and asceticism which negates all beings, social structures and transcendence. Analyzing texts by Ludwig Philippson, Ludwig Stein, Leo Baeck, and others, Weiss shows how the image of Buddhism as an antithesis to Judaism helped German Jewish reform thinkers to define the “essence of Judaism” and to prove to both Jewish and Christian audiences its enduring meaningfulness and superiority for their modern society.

Emily Sigalow’s article about Julius Goldwater (1908–2001), scion of a prominent American Jewish family, introduces the group of contributions exploring more recent and contemporary encounters between Jewish and Asian cultures. After encountering Buddhism in Hawaii and being ordained as a Buddhist minister in Kyoto, Goldwater moved to Los Angeles in the 1930s to become one of the first European-American Jodo Shinshu ministers in America. He thus belongs among the first US-American Jews, who built Buddhist communities and took on the role of spiritual leadership.

Yaakov Ariel’s analysis of the spiritual path of Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997) revolves around one of the most colorful personalities of the Beat Generation. While identifying as a Jew, Ginsberg wished to transcend beyond his parents’

orbit and actively sought to create an inclusive, tolerant, and permissive society in which persons such as himself could live and create at ease. Toward this ideal, he selected elements from the Christian, Jewish, Native-American, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions, weaving them together into an ever-growing cultural and spiritual quilt. He saw no contradiction between his enchantment with Buddhism and his Jewish identity.

Rachel Albeck Gidron's article is a historiographical study of the contacts between Asian thought and Modern Hebrew literature in Europe and Israel from the late nineteenth century to the present day. It defines three stages of such contacts. The first stage is marked by the influence of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Buber on Hebrew literature in Europe and later in Palestine. In the second stage, the Beat Generation and the Hippie movement influenced Hebrew writing in Israel. The third stage sees the participation of Hebrew writing in the global process of the New Age. The article explores the theoretical possibilities for cultural linguistic symbiosis in literature as a basis for discussing the symbiosis between East Asian thought and Western thought within Hebrew literature, illustrating its findings through the work of contemporary Hebrew writer Joel Hoffman (born 1937).

The article by David Landau and Nina Rageth explores Indian Sufi influences in the music of Shye Ben Tzur, a Jewish Israeli musician who combines Sufi poetry in Hebrew with traditional North Indian Sufi music. The idea of India as a spiritual land subsumes references to Islam and renders it part of the "mystical East" allowing Ben Tzur's audience to engage with Muslim themes outside of Middle Eastern politics.

Mira Nicolescu's contribution argues that "JewBus" do not constitute the continuous phenomenon that many scholars have addressed them. With the help of ethnographic field research, conducted since 2009, she demonstrates that individuals as well as entire communities are subject to dynamic change. She divides the latest developments into three "eras": the age of challenging, the age of claiming, and the age of re-claiming. Nicolescu points out that today Buddhist and Hindu-based practices are no longer seen as counter-cultural, but have rather become legitimate elements of Western cultures.

The study by Hiroshi Ichikawa is a unique historical document. The author is a member of a team of Japanese scholars entrusted with translating the Talmud into Japanese. The author unfolds the historical circumstances in which the project came about, as well as a number of issues that arose during

the translation which demanded cross-cultural thinking in order to achieve optimal translations of expressions and concepts from Hebrew and Aramaic into the cultural space of the Japanese language. The extreme cultural and linguistic difference between the two languages required a pioneering mediation system as demonstrated by the review of examples presented in this article.

The current issue of *PaRDeS*, whose cover is graced by artist Siona Benjamin's image "Tikkun ha-Olam," concludes with conference reports, book reviews, and a list of selected new publications in the fields of Jewish studies.

The publishers would like to thank the peer reviewers as well as the translators and editors Melanie Waha, Dr. Sigrid Senkbeil, Jeffrey Green, and Daphny Cassel. We would also like to cordially thank Marco Winkler of the Universitätsverlag Potsdam and Frank Schlöffel for the thoughtful layout without which the current issue would not have taken from.

Nathanael Riemer, Rachel Albeck-Gidron, Markus Kraß