

Buddhism as a Tool of Polemic and Self-Definition among German Rabbis in the 19th and early 20th Century

*by Aleš Weiss**

Abstract

This paper describes an almost forgotten chapter in the relatively short history of Jewish-Buddhist interactions. The popularization of Buddhism in Germany in the second half of 19th century, effected mainly by its positive appraisal in the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, made it a common referent for both critics of Judaism and Christianity as well as their defenders. At the same time, Judaism was viewed by many as a historically antiquated religion and Jewish elements in Christianity were regarded as impediments to the progress of European religiosity and culture.

Schopenhauerian conception of “pessimistic” Buddhism and “optimistic” Judaism as the two most distant religious ideas was proudly appropriated by many Jewish thinkers. These Jews portrayed Buddhism as an anti-worldly and anti-social religion of egoistic individuals who seek their own salvation (i. e. annihilation into Nothingness), the most extreme form of pessimism and asceticism which negates every being, will, work, social structures and transcendence. Judaism, in contrast, represented direct opposites of all the aforementioned characteristics. In comparisons to Buddhism, Judaism stood out as a religion which carried the most needed social and psychological values for a healthy modern society: decisive affirmation of the world, optimism, social activity, co-operation with others, social egalitarianism, true charitability, and religious purity free from all remnants of polytheism, asceticism, and the inefficiently excessive moral demands ascribed to both Buddhism and Christianity.

Through the analysis of texts by Ludwig Philippson, Ludwig Stein, Leo Baeck, Max Eschelbacher, Juda Bergmann, Fritz-Leopold Steinthal, Elieser David and others, this paper tries to show how the image of Buddhism as an antithesis to Judaism helped the

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German Jewish reform thinkers in defining the “essence of Judaism” and in proving to both Jewish and Christian audiences its enduring meaningfulness and superiority for the modern society.

1. Introduction

The contemporary prevalence and prominence of Jewish Buddhists may suggest a natural affinity between Judaism and Buddhism. To the first European rabbis and Jewish thinkers who encountered Buddhism, however, the two religions had hardly anything in common. As early as the last quarter of the 18th century, references to Buddhism or “Lamaism” in Jewish texts began to appear in intra-Jewish polemics. Whether the target was Sabbateanism as in the anonymous text *Me’ora’ot Tzvi* (1814)¹ or Hassidism as in Menahem Mendel Lefin’s *Essai d’un plan de réforme* (cca 1791–1792),² Josef Perl’s *Uiber das Wesen der Sekte Chassidim* (1816),³ or Samson Bloch’s *Shvile ‘Olam* (1822),⁴ Jewish authors asserted the religious proximity of their target movements to Buddhism in order to delegitimize them. The derogatory parallel drawn between *lama* and *tzadik* among the East European maskilim and their heirs⁵ became an easily understandable cultural shortcut for expressing the exalted

¹ *Me’ora’ot Tzvi*, fol. 15a–b. This foliation is to the Jehudit Rozanis edition, Lemberg, 1835 alias 1804.

² Mendel Lefin: *Essai d’un plan de réforme ayant pour objet d’éclairer la Nation Juive en Pologne et de redresser par là ses moeurs*, in: Arthur Eisenbach et al.: *Materiały do dziejów Sejmu Czteroletniego*, Wrocław 1969, p. 419.

³ Josef Perl/Avraham Rubinstein (ed.): *Uiber das Wesen der Sekte Chassidim*. Jerusalem 1977, pp. 90, 124–125.

⁴ Samson Bloch ha-Levi: *Shvile ‘Olam*. Zolkiew, 1822, fol. 107a–108b; fol. 120a–120b. The anti-Hassidic pin in Bloch’s description of the cult pertaining to the Dalai Lama notices already Joseph Klausner. See Joseph Klausner: *History of Modern Hebrew Literature* [Hebrew]. Vol. 3, Jerusalem 1960, p. 359.

⁵ See i. e. Samuel H. Peltyn: *Zwichnięta kariera (z życia)*, in: *Izraelita*, 11 (1876) no. 13, p. 103. Henryk Lichtenbaum: *Z piśmiennictwa*, in: *Izraelita*, 46 (1911) no. 3, p. 9. Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liady (1745–1813), the founder of Chabad Hassidism, is called here a “Hassidic Dalai Lama [...] and once an extremely influential tzadik and fanatic”. See Alfred Lor: *Z teatru*, in: *Izraelita* 35 (1900) no. 28, p. 329. By an anonymous author from the same journal see *Odgłosy. Potęga ciemnoty*, *Izraelita* 47 (1911) no. 48, pp. 3–4. All these authors wrote for the Polish journal *Izraelita* which was a platform for Polish Jewish Reformists. Though the younger generation did not share the militant anti-Hassidic attitudes of their fathers their view of *tzadikism* was in many ways similar. See Marcel Wodziński: *Haskalah and Hassidism in the Kingdom of Poland. A History of Conflict*, Oxford 2005, pp. 249–255. I would like to thank to Marcel Wodziński who drew my attention to these authors. In a certain way, among the post-maskilic polemical uses of Buddhism, this time against Christianity, can be included also Judah David Eisenstein’s

irrationality of a cult around a morally corrupted religious leader who abuses his religious authority and intentionally deceives religiously naive masses. In using Buddhism as a “mimetic Other”, East European maskilim in the beginning of the 19th century were following the lead of 18th century critics of Catholicism. Protestant authors and other critiques of Catholicism had explained ostensible parallels between Catholicism and a derided “Lamaism” as the necessary result of the Catholic distortion of Christianity into a form of institutional and cultic idolatry.⁶ Relying on the popular view of Buddhism developed by 17th century Jesuit missionaries and their scholarly adaptations, these authors could take one thing for granted: to their readers, the absurdity of Buddhism, both in its religious ideas and cult, was self-evident.

In the 19th and early 20th century the relationship of German Jewish thinkers to Buddhism began to change, paralleling a general reappraisal of Buddhism in Germany.⁷ This period saw first serious academic studies on Buddhism, and, more importantly, widely-read treatments of the religion by G.F. Hegel⁸ and in the philosophy of A. Schopenhauer.⁹ For Schopenhauer’s followers and sympathizers, the “original” Buddhism became the most mature form of religion, in contrast to Judaism. This Buddhism was more a European fantasy.

relating to Buddhism in his introduction to the Anthology of Debates [Hebrew]. See Judah David Eisenstein: *Otsar vikuhim*, New York 1928, pp. 16–17.

⁶ For a general context of the anti-Catholic usage of “Lamaism” see Donald S. Lopez Jr.: *Prisoners of Shangri-La. Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, Chicago, London 1998, pp. 29–30. Attacks on Catholicism accompany Thomas Astley’s famous description of Buddhism in *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels (1745–1747)* literally on every page and he rarely misses an opportunity to mention the parallel between the two “degenerated” religious forms. See especially the subchapter “The Religion of Tibet, and its surprising Conformity with the Romish”. In Thomas Astley: *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*. Vol. 4, London 1747, pp. 458–460; see also pp. 461, 464, 465.

⁷ All the following phenomena have already been in detail described elsewhere. Due to the lack of space we cannot bring them here, however, the reader can find the relevant literature in the footnotes.

⁸ Hegel’s treatment of Buddhism has been dealt with by several authors. See Roger-Pol Droit/ transl. David Straight and Pamela Vohnson: *The Cult of Nothingness. The Philosophers and the Buddha*, Chapel Hill, London 2003, pp. 59–72; Heinrich Dumoulin: *Buddhism and Nineteenth-Century German Philosophy*, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 42 (1981) no. 3, pp. 460–463; Henk Oosterling: *Avoiding Nihilism by Affirming Nothing. Hegel on Buddhism*, in: Bart Labuschagne/Timo Slootweg (eds): *Hegel’s Philosophy of the Historical Religions*, Leiden 2012, pp. 51–77.

⁹ See Droit: *The Cult of Nothingness*, pp. 91–103; Viz Urs App: *Schopenhauers Begegnung mit dem Buddhismus*, in: *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch* 79 (1998), pp. 35–58; Dumoulin: *Buddhism and Nineteenth-Century German Philosophy*, pp. 463–468.

In particular, many European intellectuals saw the idea of conscious heading towards Nothingness, self-annihilation and total negation of Being, as the ultimate goal of Buddhism, and this fascinated and repulsed them. Nonetheless, Buddhism had left the realm of silly idolatry and entered the serious field of philosophy of religion where its “central religious idea” had to be scrutinized and placed next to other established religions. It is precisely this Buddhism, Buddhism as the “projected Other”, that we will meet among the authors to be dealt with.

Judaism was portrayed by German philosophers in terms that were nearly as biased and imaginary as their contemplation of Buddhism. Important German philosophers like Kant and Hegel¹⁰ deemed it to be a historically antiquated religion¹¹ which had to be given up, at least as a corporate identity, so that society could attain a higher level. Judaism and Jewish elements in Christianity were by many viewed as one of the main impediments to the progress of European religiosity and culture. Among many German theologians, church historians, and biblical scholars, there was a significant movement intended to de-Judaize Christianity¹² as well as growing interest in looking for the authentic Christianity outside of the realm of its original Jewish background. Sometimes Christianity’s original influences were located in Buddhist thought.¹³ Thus, Buddhism was not a neutral subject in the discussion of the meaningfulness of Judaism in modern German society. As we will see later in this chapter, it is precisely these treatments of Buddhism that drove Jewish religious thinkers to deal with the religion.

¹⁰ See Nathan Rotenstreich: *The recurring pattern: studies in anti-Judaism in modern thought*, London 1963, pp. 23–75; Eliezer Schweid/transl. Leonard Levin: *A history of modern Jewish religious philosophy*, Leiden 2001, pp. 117–151. Emil Fackenheim: *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, Northvale, New Jersey, London 1994, chapters „Abraham and the Kantians“ and „Moses and the Hegelians“, pp. 33–77 and 81–169.

¹¹ See also Amy Newman: *The Death of Judaism in German Protestant Thought from Luther to Hegel*, in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 61 (1993) no. 3, pp. 455–484.

¹² See Susannah Heschel: *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, Chicago 1998; Christian Wiese/transl. Barbara Harshav: *Challenging Colonial Discourse. Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany*, Leiden, Boston 2005.

¹³ There were several important authors who theorized the Buddhists origin of Christianity in Europe in the last quarter of the 19th and in the beginning of the 20th century. Among them were Eduard Grimm, Ernest de Bunsen, Rudolf Seydel and Arthur Lillie. For Seydl, who was a passionate defender of Prussian Protestantism and was especially influential in Germany, see Perry Myers: *German visions of India, 1871–1918. Commandeering the holy Ganges during the Kaiserreich*, New York 2013, pp. 35–51.

2. Ludwig Philippson

One of the important Jewish thinkers of the 19th century to respond to the views of Judaism presented by Kant and Hegel was Rabbi Dr. Samuel Hirsch (1815–1889).¹⁴ As a religious philosopher Hirsch reasserted Jewish religious particularity and tried to draw firm lines among Christianity, Judaism, and paganism. Though Hirsch devoted one sub-chapter of his book *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden* (1842) to Buddhism, he does not compare it to Judaism in a way that would explicitly single it out and turn it into a tool of defining the Jewish religious uniqueness.¹⁵ However, precisely this strategy was employed nearly thirty years later by another key figure in the German Reform movement, Rabbi Dr. Ludwig Philippson (1811–1889).

Philippson was a proponent of moderate reform, a community rabbi in Magdeburg, preacher, and for a long time an editor of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*. Into his collection of essays relating to religion and the comparison of Judaism to other religions he includes a chapter entitled *Buddhism and its relation to Judaism and Christianity* (1868).¹⁶ As he reminds the reader in his foreword, it is the first comparison of this kind.¹⁷ My initial research has not uncovered any earlier examples. If the earlier Jewish thinkers sufficed with “paganism” as the model antithetic referent to the Jewish self-definition, Philippson introduces into Jewish religious thought the Schopenhauerian idea that Buddhism is the opposite of Judaism.

“We can say that in the religious world of humankind there are two great world-outlooks that fully conflict with one another, and that their tremendous chasm can only be bridged through practical modification (*Gestaltung*): The Israelite world-outlook, which has its trunk in Judaism, [and] in Christianity and Islam its branches, and the Buddhist.”¹⁸

¹⁴ See Michael A. Meyer: *Response to modernity. A history of the Reform Movement in Judaism*, Detroit 1995, pp. 72–74; Eliezer Schweid: *A history of modern Jewish religious philosophy* [Hebrew], Vol 2., Tel Aviv 2002, pp. 50–64.

¹⁵ Samuel Hirsch: *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden*, Leipzig 1842, pp. 190–208.

¹⁶ Ludwig Philippson: *Der Buddhismus und sein Verhältniß zum Judenthume und Christenthume*, in: Ludwig Philippson: *Weltbewegende Fragen in Politik und Religion*, Leipzig 1869, pp. 119–151.

¹⁷ Philippson: *Weltbewegende Fragen in Politik und Religion*, unnumbered foreword.

¹⁸ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 120.

However, in a direct opposition to Schopenhauer, for Philippson this opposition was to Judaism's credit. What constitutes this essential difference between Judaism and Buddhism for Philippson? The answer to this question can be divided into two parts: 1) comparison of their religious ideas and 2) the implication of these religious ideas for the realm of social ethics.

"The fundamental theory of Buddhism is: nothingness (*das Nichts*), emptiness (*das Leere*), insubstantiality (*das Wesenlose*), an atheism without God, but also without Nature... The second fundamental theory is accordingly: everything derives from evil, everything is pain."¹⁹

In accord with the common understanding of Buddhism in his time,²⁰ Philippson depicts it as a religion which has only one ultimate goal: to direct the whole world and mankind towards total annihilation. He asserts that Buddhism views life as a meaningless wandering through existences,²¹ with Nothingness (Nirvana) as the only alternative to the inescapable cycle of metamorphosis of meaningless suffering. Buddhism is presented as an extreme pessimism which attributes no value to the world and the realm of inter-human relations. Its highest religious value is an absolute apathy towards the life of the individual, and more importantly, the life of society. The social reality produced by Buddhism is thus only a necessary consequence of its religious fundamentals.²²

"When the only redemption for people is to bring all of their inner voices to silence, to dissolve their entire thinking and feeling worlds such that nothing left of them remains, and to conjure some state of unconsciousness, and when the approach towards such a state already offers at least hope for the attainment of salvation, i. e.

¹⁹ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, pp. 125–126.

²⁰ Karl Friedrich Koeppen (1808–1863), whose two volumes of *Die Religion des Buddha* (1857) were an important source of information about Buddhism for many German intellectuals including Philippson, describes Nirvana as a "total annihilation of the soul, annihilation in nothingness, pure destruction" and Buddhism as "the gospel of annihilation." See Koeppen: *Die Religion des Buddha*, Vol. 1, Berlin 1857, p. 306. This understanding of the concept of Nirvana – i. e. total annihilation as a telos of religious life – was shared also by other scholars like Burnouf, Cousin or Saint Hilaire, and became a key concept determining the perspective on Buddhism at least until the third quarter of the 19th century. See Droit: *The Cult of Nothingness*. See also Robert G. Morrison: *Nietzsche and Buddhism*, New York 1997, pp. 52–59.

²¹ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 137.

²² The asocial consequences of Buddhist "quietism" were pointed at already by its Jesuits interpreters in the 17th century. See Jürgen Offermans: *Debates on Atheism, Quietism, and Sodomy. The Initial Reception of Buddhism in Europe*, in: *Journal of Global Buddhism* 6 (2005), p. 30.

of non-existence (*Nicht-Dasein*) – then all of the ties must be broken which bind people to earthly things: the family must be dissolved, possession and acquisitions must be given up, and the relationship between man and wife destroyed.”²³

For Philippson, the egoistic ideology of Buddhism which stands at the root of its asocial worldview creates only „laziness, dirt, emptiness, and spiritual ef-feminacy“.²⁴ Buddhism is described as a religion of isolated individuals where each one looks only for his own goal – i. e. self-annihilation. Other people, far and near, serve only as instruments on the way to this goal.²⁵ These values create a society that stands in sharp contrast with the one which Reform Judaism understood as truly Biblical. What makes Judaism an absolute opposite to Buddhism is its resolute insistence on the idea of a positive value of the world and the mundane dimension of human life. “Thus”, writes Philippson, “lies already herein the fundamental difference between the worldviews of Buddhism and Judaism, as well of the religions that arose from them.”²⁶ A decisive acceptance of the mundane and a perception of the world as “originally blessed” by all-loving God is for Philippson a religious fundament which underpins Judaism’s efforts of creating a value system in which the benefits of the society and of an individual are not separated.²⁷ The social superiority of Judaism vis-à-vis Buddhism is demonstrated for Philippson in the comparison of its *ethical minima*: i. e. the Biblical Decalogue and Five ethical precepts (*Pañcasīla*).²⁸ Unlike the Biblical Decalogue, the Five ethical precepts of Buddhism lack three important values: 1) Rhythmical change of work and rest, which is foreign to Buddhism because of it absolutely does not value work. 2) Honoring one’s parents and the value of a functioning family, as a fundamental building block of society. This value is absent in Buddhism because of its soteriological egoism and its general world-denying attitude. 3) Biblical religion commands suppression of *destructive* desires only, while Buddhism wants its adherents to suppress *all* desire. That creates exaggerated and

²³ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 138.

²⁴ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 138.

²⁵ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 150.

²⁶ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 126.

²⁷ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 149.

²⁸ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, pp. 141–144.

unrealistic demands on individuals and the society which lead, eventually, to the opposite results than those intended.²⁹

Philippon asserts that Judaism treats work as the highest value due to the necessity to co-operate in the hard living conditions of the Land of Israel.³⁰

“[Mosaism] wanted occupation, the faithful fulfillment of labor obligations, and called upon all of its adherents equally, ‘Six days will you work, the seventh day shall be a day of rest, so as to make it holy.’ – It thus places work before rest, whereas Buddhism wills no form of work but rather only rest.”³¹

Philippon was among the first Jewish thinkers who tried to formulate a *Soziallehre des Mosaismus*, a social teaching based on the interpretation of Biblical Judaism.³² The comparison with Buddhism allows its qualities to stand out clearly. If Judaism can be characterized by a bias toward action, the highest work ethics, social cohesion and continuous endeavors for a just society rooted in the theology of God’s blessed creation, Buddhism is a paradigm of religion of social indifference, indolence, world denial, asceticism and asocial egoism.

Until now, we intentionally avoided any reference to Christianity. Philippon, like many other early Reform Jewish thinkers regarded responding to Christian objections as an integral part of the process of the Jewish religious self-definition,³³ and he deals with Christianity on various places in his work.³⁴ As shown by George Y. Kohler, according to Philippon, these three features essentially belong to Christianity: 1) Christianity ascribes a small value to the innerworldly living and, therefore, escapes to the otherworldly. 2) Christianity has unrealistically exaggerated demands and creates an ideal

²⁹ Among these Philippon lists the prohibition of killing any animal, prohibition of eating meat, prohibition of consuming alcohol, or a demand to view every sentient being as the Biblical „neighbour“.

³⁰ Philippon, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 121.

³¹ Philippon, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 139–140.

³² See Uriel Tal: *German-Jewish Social Thought in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*. In Werner Mosse (ed.) et al.: *Revolution and Evolution*. Tübingen 1981, pp. 320–327; Christhard Hoffmann: *Analyzing the zeitgeist. Ludwig Philippon as historian of the modern era*, in: Lauren B. Strauss / Michael Brenner (eds): *Mediating modernity: Challenges and trends in the Jewish encounter with the modern world. Essays in honor of Michael A. Meyer*, Detroit 2008, pp. 114–117.

³³ See George Y. Kohler: *Ein notwendiger Fehler der Weltgeschichte. Ludwig Philippons Auseinandersetzung mit dem Christentum*, in: Görg K. Hasselhoff (ed.): *Die Entdeckung des Christentums in der Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Berlin, 2010, pp. 61–62.

³⁴ See Kohler: *Ein notwendiger Fehler der Weltgeschichte*, pp. 33–62.

according to which passivity is better than fighting for justice and humiliation better than true moral consciousness. 3) Christianity is a religion for individuals, not for the society as a whole. It has never succeeded to exert its influence on the whole of society.

This account of Christianity sheds light on Philippson's account of Buddhism. Philippson establishes Judaism and Buddhism as the two poles of religious *Weltanschauungen* expressing the ultimate religious ideal and its opposite and locates Christianity between these poles. Philippson highlights the parallels between Christianity and Buddhism in order to critique Christianity by clearly showing its deficiencies in terms of theology and, especially, social ethics, and thus demonstrating the superiority of Judaism. Among them are the teaching about original sin, which fails to formulate true individual responsibility,³⁵ the suppression of corporeality and contempt of the world,³⁶ monasticism, shared by both religions, which in effect separates elites from the rest of the society and devalues social life,³⁷ absolutist religious institutions,³⁸ and unrealistic moral demands which end up tolerating injustice, despotism and tyrannical bureaucracy.³⁹ These demands, while portrayed as moral qualities,⁴⁰ eventually effectuate passive obedience and make any endeavor for justice and social engagement impossible.⁴¹

Buddhism was for many modern opponents of Christianity a great example of a religion without God, a religion which attained the highest humanistic standards even without morality transcendentally anchored in revelation. As such, it played its role in the European discussion of nihilism and atheism in the second half of the 19th century.⁴² Philippson was well aware of atheists' sympathy for Buddhism, but he refutes this argument made by some European critiques of monotheism as thoroughly false:

³⁵ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 133.

³⁶ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 135.

³⁷ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 141.

³⁸ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 135.

³⁹ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 145.

⁴⁰ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 145.

⁴¹ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 144.

⁴² See Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness*, pp. 166–168.

“It is thus only sheer arbitrariness, when modern nihilists invoke Buddhism and treat it like a welcome favored child. With the first sharp criticism, the sword turns around in their hands and fatally wounds them.”⁴³

The historical development of Buddhism, writes Philippson, „has shown in the most persuasive way, that on atheism no religious system can be founded“.⁴⁴ In order to create an ethical society Buddhism had to give up nihilism, acknowledge the existence of matter and change its attitude towards human activity. Its ethics thus contradicts its fundamentals, atheism and nihilism.⁴⁵

Among positive features of Buddhism, according to Phillipson, are its emphasis on endeavoring to overcome one’s negative character traits, emphasis on compassion,⁴⁶ and, especially, a great religious tolerance stemming from the idea that all religions are manifestations of the same religious truth.⁴⁷ Religious tolerance and a vision of universal salvation for all moral individuals, says Philippson, is a point where Buddhism meets Judaism, in sharp contrast with Christianity and Islam.⁴⁸ It is not hard to see who the addressee of these statements is. Even a religion which has a much worse starting position than Christianity in terms of religious tolerance and general morality was able to incorporate the value which has for centuries been absent in Christian societies. In spite of all the differences, there is an essential difference between Buddhism and Christianity, i.e. the Jewish heritage of the latter. Both Christianity and Islam carry the Mosaic heritage, and therefore, despite all their deformations represent religions of social activism and creative human development.

“Nevertheless, these extravagances and the shift of focus to the beyond must not prevent us from recognizing that the worldview that has its root in Judaism and which branched out into Christianity and Islam, includes an *idealism* which recognizes God and is bonded to him, [and which] finds its substance in the development of people and of humankind. Buddhism, rather, is pure naturalism, which sees in the world only an uncountable number of creatures, of which each for itself either ascends or descends, now up and then down, and in the highest moment falls into nothingness.”⁴⁹

⁴³ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 148.

⁴⁴ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 146.

⁴⁵ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 146.

⁴⁶ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 143.

⁴⁷ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 145.

⁴⁸ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 145.

⁴⁹ Philippson, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 151.

Phillipson's thematization of Buddhism is closely connected with the polemical and apologetic agenda which aims to justify to both German Jewish and non-Jewish audiences the moral and social value of Judaism. Judged in terms of its religious "essence", Judaism represents the antipode of Buddhism. This schematic opposition becomes for Philippson a ready-made illustration of the moral and social assets of Judaism, namely its active, socially creative, egalitarian, optimistic and world-accepting nature. Philippson's analysis of Buddhism and its utilization for the Jewish case in the last third of the 19th century Germany became mostly forgotten, however, motivated by the same agenda, many of its arguments were repeated by Leo Baeck in his famous book *Das Wesen des Judentums* (1905) nearly four decades later.

3. The "Essence" of Judaism in the Buddhist Mirror

As Michael A. Meyer points out, for Jewish Reform it was important to establish a view that Judaism is "closely related to Christianity in religious and moral terms, though separate from Christian dogma".⁵⁰ The idea of Judaism as a source of an authentic Christian ethics was crucial for the defense of Judaism in modern German society. It is precisely this notion of continuity which was attacked by many German scholars including Adolf Harnack in his famous lectures about the "essence of Christianity" in 1899/1900.⁵¹ The rabbinic legacy in Judaism, and, to some, the whole of post-exilic Judaism, were viewed as steeped in suffocative legalism and thus incompatible with the demands of a modern society. Baeck's *Essence of Judaism* was an outstanding attempt to formulate a Liberal interpretation of Judaism which could provide German Jews with a well arranged and meaningful re-reading of some fundamental ideas of Jewish religion. Just as Phillipson did, Baeck uses Buddhism as a negative example to define the essence of Judaism.⁵² In both editions of

⁵⁰ Meyer: Response to modernity, p.202.

⁵¹ See Christian Wiese / transl. Barbara Harshav: Challenging Colonial Discourse. Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany, pp. 164–169.

⁵² A few authors briefly describe Leo Baeck's view on Buddhism. See Miriam Dean-Otting: Hugo Bergman, Leo Baeck and Martin Buber. Jewish Perspectives on Hinduism and Buddhism, in: The Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies, 1 (1999) no.2, pp.8–10; Alan Brill: Judaism and World Religions. Encountering Christianity, Islam, and Eastern traditions, New York 2012, p. 242; Sandra B. Lubarsky: Leo Baeck: Practical Tolerance, in: Lubarsky, Tolerance and Transformation. Jewish Approaches to Religious Pluralism, Cincinnati 1990, pp. 38–39. Among the three, Lubarsky

his *Essence of Judaism* Buddhism is brought up as often as Christianity. The following passage comes from the 1905 edition:

“As long as religion is essentially about the position of people in the world – and science today has returned to this old prophetic outlook – there are only two foundational forms of religion: The Israelite and the Buddhist. The first means to affirm the moral relationship of the will and the deed, and the second calls for its negation through will-less-ness in its inward sinking contemplation. The first, the religion of altruism, which is predicated on the perfection of people, found the all-embracing path to God and therewith the path to others. The other, the religion of the ego, which beholds perfection in people, developed the exclusionary path into the self...”⁵³

In the reworked edition from 1922,⁵⁴ Baeck slightly reformulates the text quoted above and elaborates further on the idea of the fundamental opposition between Judaism and Buddhism:

“The first means morally to affirm this relationship to the world through will and deed, it shows the field of tasks in the world; the other establishes as its goal to negate it, in will-less self-contemplation to be devoted only to the self. One is the expression of the commandment to act and create; the other of the need for rest. One leads to the wish to work for the benefit of God, to establish the Kingdom of God, in which all are to be found; the other to the demand to sink into the one, the nothingness and therein to win for the ‘I’ its rescue and its holiness. This one demands an ascent, a becoming, the long way to the future; the other proclaims return, cessation, the futureless being in silence. This one wills to reconcile the world with God; the other wants only to be delivered from the world. This one yearns for embodiment, new people, and a new world; the other for ‘extinction,’ an exodus from humankind, and exodus from the world.”⁵⁵

Judaism and Buddhism are, according to Baeck, two opposite poles of the human religious spectrum and “The entire history of the religions aside from them is that they tended towards one or the other of them.”⁵⁶ All the religions of the world can be located somewhere between Judaism and Buddhism, the

is the only one who analyses Baeck’s depiction of Buddhism in the context of his demonstration of the ethical character of Judaism.

⁵³ Baeck: *Das Wesen des Judentums* (1905), p. 40.

⁵⁴ For basic contours of this shift see Meyer: *Response to modernity*, pp. 207–208.

⁵⁵ Baeck: *Das Wesen des Judentums* (1922), pp. 55–56.

⁵⁶ Baeck: *Das Wesen des Judentums* (1922), p. 56.

two irreconcilable religious worldviews.⁵⁷ The absolutization and essentialization of this dichotomy can already be found in the writings of philosopher, sociologist, publicist, and originally an Orthodox rabbi, Prof. Ludwig Stein (1859–1930),⁵⁸ whose teachings were certainly known to Baeck.

“Here, since the existence of high culture two elementary opposites struggled for world domination: optimism, which affirms life in itself, e.g. as of intrinsic value and as an end in itself; and pessimism, which denies life in general as a value and in particular human life; the typical representative of the religion of optimism in world-history is Mosaism and its continuation, Christianity; [the typical representative] of the religion of pessimism is Buddhism.”⁵⁹

As a result of culture exchange during the times of Alexander the Great, according to Stein, these two fundamental religious worldviews do not appear in their pure forms, but every religion in the world – including Judaism and Buddhism themselves – contains an ingredient of its counterpart.⁶⁰ The goal of Christianity and Judaism – which was affected in the smallest measure – is to get rid of all the contamination by Buddhism, the presence of which he so pungently felt in European culture. His language is even stronger than Baeck’s and shows how loaded the image of Buddhism was in the Jewish culture at the turn of the century:

“Therefore, into the fire with all that in Judaism and Christianity still recalls elements of Buddhism! The pessimistic whims of Schopenhauer, the philosophical Buddhist par excellence, should no longer absorb more of our best marrow and paralyze our future-happy creativity. Asceticism and retreat from the world are

⁵⁷ When Alfred Jospe (1909–1994), in the early 1970’s, wanted to define the key framework of the fundamental value orientation of Judaism he used the example of Baeck’s antinomy of Judaism and Buddhism. See Alfred Jospe: *The Jewish Image of the Jew*, in: Eva Jospe/Raphael Jospe (eds): *To Leave Your Mark. Selections from the Writings of Alfred Jospe*, Hoboken, New Jersey 2000, p. 99. See also responsum on Buddhism by one of the key spokesmen of Australian Judaism, Rabbi Raymond Apple. *Raymond Apple: Let’s Ask the Rabbi. Replies, Responses & Reflections*, Milton Keynes, 2011, p. 34.

⁵⁸ See Jacob Haberman: *Ludwig Stein: Rabbi, Professor, Publicist, and Philosopher of Evolutionary Optimism*, in: *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 86 (1995) no. 1/2, pp. 105–111. Stein came from a long line of rabbis. Later in his life, he moved away from orthodoxy and halakhic observance, however, he never ceased to be Jewishly engaged. See Haberman: *Ludwig Stein*, pp. 91–125.

⁵⁹ Ludwig Stein: *An der Wende des Jahrhunderts. Versuch einer Kulturphilosophie*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1899, p. 333.

⁶⁰ Haberman: *Ludwig Stein*, p. 113.

pathological degenerations, hypochondriac tumors of overwrought nerves. Therefore, out from the historical religions all hostility to life and pathology!"⁶¹

Stein, like Philippson, critiques one element of Buddhism that was presented by its defenders as especially developed in comparison to its Biblical correlate, Buddhist ethics. Its extreme demands are perceived as leading, in effect, to the extinction of mankind.⁶² Similarly, Leo Baeck writes about the exaggerated moral demands of Buddhism and the dysfunctionality of social ethics based thereon. The example of Buddhism enables Baeck to demonstrate clearly the functionality of Jewish ethics, working with a realistic social psychology.

"The human kindness of Buddhism and Judaism has occasionally been compared. Buddhism had its doctrine of love; it preached intimate compassion and benevolence towards all that lives. But this, its intimacy, is rather sentimentality and melancholy. It lacks – and this is the difference from the teachings of Judaism – reverence for [one's] fellows; it lacks an emphasis on positive justice and, with it, the clear demand for, the resoluteness of moral duty. It lacks the great 'You shall,' the pressing and the demanding, the social and the messianic – these properties of Judaism. Buddhist morality has remained with feelings. That gives it the negative and passive character for which it is known; as the warmth of sentiments without specific duty is in moral hindsight nothing other than inactivity, idleness; to take part in the fate of [one's] fellow only with the mind means fundamentally being apathetic. Buddhism has been called the religion of indolence. This is a blunt judgement, but one thing is true, that it is, with all of its ideal virtues, the religion of deedless sentiment [and] of moral indolence. And for it to be redeemed is everything; [for it] the question of 'I' is life's only question."⁶³

Egoistic immersion into the depths of oneself and the social passivity stemming from it is, according to Baeck, a subversion of the Jewish values fully oriented to the construction of a just society permeated by the consciousness of God's moral calling. However noble and lofty Buddhist ethics might have seemed, their primary source was repeatedly identified in sheer egoism. As another Reform rabbi, Dr. Fritz Leopold Steinthal (1889–1969), writes in his article *Buddhismus und Judentum* (1924):

⁶¹ Ludwig Stein: *Die soziale Frage im Lichte der Philosophie*. Second ed., Stuttgart 1903, p. 512.

⁶² Ludwig Stein: *An der Wende des Jahrhunderts*, p. 335.

⁶³ Baeck: *Das Wesen des Judentums* (1922), p. 241.

“Doubtless each must recognize the level and purity of the Buddhist ethic. But the foundation of the Asiatic desires and will is not authority and the love for the Godly Lawgiver, not the categorical imperative, not the good in itself, rather egoism. The goal of all pursuits, the motivation for good is nothing other than the wish to be liberated from existence, to become released from the constraints of reincarnation.”⁶⁴

As we have already seen in Philippson, work for the sake of the whole society was presented as one of the central values of Judaism, going back to its biblical beginnings. The comparison to Buddhism is designed to allow the reader to see this idea very clearly. Thus, Elieser David (1857–1910), an Orthodox rabbi and at the time the rabbi of the Vienna Leopoldstädter Tempel, comments in his Viennese lecture on “Buddhismus und Judentum” (1906) on the Psalm 128:

“As you see, alongside family happiness, this beautiful psalm praises the blessing of work, and that too constitutes a great virtue of Judaism over Buddhism, which completely misjudged the moral meaning of work.”⁶⁵

In the same vein a Reform rabbi Max Eschelbacher (1880–1964) writes in 1923 that the decline of Buddhism may be traced back to the monks who “fell into idleness, because their life-ideal, indifference, called them to it. Judaism never knew such a phenomenon. It has honored work as highly as the Torah and Torah-study.”⁶⁶ Whether formulated in terms of Samson R. Hirsch’s *Torah im Derech Eretz* or in terms of Reform social ethics, modern German Judaism was internally perceived and externally presented as the ideal symbiosis of religious and social commitment beneficial to the whole society. The example of Buddhism could again bring its qualities to the fore.

4. The Perils of Indo-Germanic Pessimism

The philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, the key interpreter of Buddhism for Europe nearly until the middle of the 20th century, provided essential context for the negative assessment of Buddhism among Jewish religious thinkers, beginning with Philippson. The refusal of Schopenhauer’s pessimism was an

⁶⁴ Fritz Leopold Steinthal: *Buddhismus und Judentum*, in: *Religionen* (Schriftenreihe der Vereinigung für das Liberale Judentum e. V.), no. 2, Berlin 1925, p. 22.

⁶⁵ Elieser David: *Buddhismus und Judentum*, in: *Jahrbuch für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur*, 10 (1907), pp. 62–63.

⁶⁶ Max Eschelbacher: *Thora. Studium und Berufsarbeit*, in: *Der Jude*, 7 (1923) no. 3, p. 138.

important feature of modern Jewish religious idealism, be it Reform or Orthodox. At the same time and in spite of Schopenhauer's antisemitism, his philosophy was not unattractive to many German Jews. As Rabbi Dr. Fritz Leopold Steinthal mentions in 1924, many of those for whom this field of thought was altogether foreign started to be interested in Buddhism through Schopenhauer.⁶⁷ From the times of the records of Jesuit missionaries nearly until the middle of the 20th century Buddhism was known as a religion with the highest number of adherents in the world – and as such a religion with significant attractiveness. Its translation into the language of modern thought in times of spiritual and cultural crisis gave rise to fears of its attractiveness in Europe and Germany especially. These fears were famously articulated by Friedrich Nietzsche,⁶⁸ but also troubled Jewish religious thinkers. Rabbi Dr. Elieser David explained the need to clarify the relation between Judaism and Buddhism by citing the influence of Schopenhauer on Jewish freethinkers in his Viennese lecture in 1906:

“What, however, especially draws our attention to Buddhism is the fact that also modern philosophers like Schopenhauer, Feuerbach, and others draw close to certain Buddhist teachings, and that through their influence it has found entry en masse into the educated circles in Europe, that in Leipzig in the year 1903 a Buddhist mission society was formed and a Buddhist publishing house established, and [that] there from April of last year a Buddhist monthly has begun to appear. Under such circumstances, it seems by no means unbelievable that Buddhism should have not a few adherents among the Jewish freethinkers in Vienna, as I have been told. Thus even more justified is the attempt to expose the Buddhist worldview even from the standpoint of Judaism; and this is precisely the task that I have set before myself for my lecture today.”⁶⁹

Similar fears about the infiltration of Buddhist ideas into Judaism were articulated three years before David's lecture by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935).⁷⁰ These fears were not just a mere projection, at least not

⁶⁷ Fritz Leopold Steinthal: *Buddhismus und Judentum*, pp. 19–20.

⁶⁸ For the context see Morrison: *Nietzsche and Buddhism*, pp. 7–21.

⁶⁹ David: *Buddhismus und Judentum*, p. 50.

⁷⁰ Abraham Isaac Kook: *Shemonah Kevatsim*. Vol. 1, Jerusalem 2004, p. 167. For Kook, as for many of his contemporaries, Buddhism is closely connected with the thought of A. Schopenhauer whose pessimism he found directly antagonistic to Judaism. See Shalom Rozenberg: *R. Abraham*

in Germany where Elieser David spent most of his life before moving to Vienna.⁷¹ Indeed, as Martin Bauman points out, approximately one third of the early German Buddhists were born Jewish.⁷² The Jewish theological fight against Schopenhauer, intensified by his anti-Semitism, and against nihilism in general, was a significant reason for expressing a Jewish view on Buddhism. Schopenhauer's evaluation of religions based on the criteria of their optimistic or pessimistic attitude to the world was accepted by many Jewish thinkers. Many of them proudly proclaimed the optimistic nature of Judaism, which disparaged it in Schopenhauer's eyes, and used this as an argument for Judaism. Pessimism was caused by the absence of the notion of one God, the main guarantor of the creative and moral society. This relationship is clearly depicted in the previously mentioned article by Elieser David:

"In this lack of a concept of God lies also the foundation of the gloomy, pessimistic notion, which casts its shadow over the entire Buddhist worldview, of the notion that all life is suffering, and that therefore the only salvation lies in nothingness. This Buddhist pessimism has Schopenhauer famously translated into philosophy, and he has already indicated that Christianity reveals a congenial direction into it, [and] that, however, Judaism, in direct antithesis to it, represents an optimistic standpoint. And with this we must completely agree. Only we do not see with him in this optimism a weakness of Judaism, rather much more its strength and one of its substantial merits."⁷³

Buddhism appears increasingly as a negative referent serving to establish the ideological content of modern Judaism in many articles in Jewish newspapers and in lectures about Buddhism hosted in Jewish precincts.⁷⁴ Most of them reverberate with the same image: Schopenhaurian opposition of religious optimism and religious pessimism embodied in the opposition

Kook and the Blind Alligator [Hebrew], in: Hayim Hamiel (ed.): *In His Light. Studies on the Doctrine of Rav Abraham Hacoen Kook*, Jerusalem 1986, pp.317–352.

⁷¹ For David see Michael Brocke/Julius Carlebach (eds): *Die Rabbiner im Deutschen Reich 1871–1945. Vol. 2.*, Berlin 2009, pp. 147–148.

⁷² Martin Bauman: *Deutsche Buddhisten: Geschichte und Gemeinschaften*. Marburg 1993, p. 242. Baumann's account is based on the analysis of 128 profiles of early German Buddhists contained in Hellmuth Heckers: *Lebensbilder deutscher Buddhisten*. Konstanz 1990 and 1992.

⁷³ David: *Buddhismus und Judentum*, pp. 62–63. Compare also an article by Rabbi Dr. Baruch Seligkowitz: *Der Wert des Lebens in der jüdischen Weltanschauung*, in: *Ost und West*, 18 (1918) no. 9, pp. 321–324.

⁷⁴ See advertisements in *Frankfurter Israelitisches Gemeindeblatt*, 8 (1930) no. 11, p. 454.

Judaism-Buddhism, Buddhist anti-worldly orientation versus Jewish love for life and the world,⁷⁵ Buddhist solipsism, egoism and indifference to the problems of the society versus Judaism's fights for a creative moral society and the idea of a transcendent, moral God.⁷⁶ There is also frequently a reference to Buddhism in texts dealing with orientation of modern Jewish culture. Buddhism thus appears next to Christianity and Islam with a firmly defined identity.⁷⁷ Jewish religious elites were well aware of the demonstrative potential of the Jewish-Buddhist anti-thesis in the search for the definition of the "essence of Judaism". As a prominent member of the Frankfurter Orthodox community Dr. Gustav Löffler (1879–1963) said in his address to the *Vereinigung israelitischer Lehrer und Lehrerinnen zu Frankfurt a. M.* in 1931:

"The question regarding the *essence of Judaism* demands, above all else, an answer. The sustaining Jewish personalities of a forefather Abraham and the great prophet Moses, a Hillel, Maimonides, Amos, etc., can illuminate the meaning of Judaism for young doubters by means of deduction. The occupation with the writings of Buber,⁷⁸ the antitheses of Judaism – Christianity (on the basis of Dienemann's books)⁷⁹ and

⁷⁵ See Seligkowitz, *Der Wert des Lebens in der jüdischen Weltanschauung*, p. 321.

⁷⁶ A. Coralnik: *Das jüdische Kulturproblem und die Moderne*, in: *Ost und West*, 4 (1904) no. 5, p. 299; Friedrich Thieberger: *Jona, Hiob und das Problem der Gerechtigkeit*, in: *Der Morgen. Monatsschrift der Juden in Deutschland*, 2 (1926) no. 2, p. 130; Arno Nadel: *Die Bibel als metaphysisches Dokument*, in: *Neue jüdische Monatshefte* 3 (1919) no. 19/20, pp. 433–435;

⁷⁷ See Arno Nadel: *Der erste Satz der Bibel*, in: *Der Jude*, 2 (1917/1918) no. 1/2, p. 89; Julius Oppert: *Bibel und Babel*, in: *Ost und West*, 3 (1903) no. 5, p. 301; Leo Winz: *Die Judenfrage im kuenftigen Europa*, in: *Ost und West*, 19 (1919) no. 7/8, p. 172.; Max Eschelbacher: *Mose*, in: *Ost und West*, 7 (1921) no. 8, p. 170.

⁷⁸ Unfortunately, we cannot deal here with the question of Buber's rather favorable view of Buddhism. At its core lies Buber's view of Judaism as essentially belonging to the Orient. How irritating Buber's idea of spiritual kinship of Judaism with the Orient was for some German Jews is demonstrated in Elias Hurwicz: *Der Dualismus der Judenfrage*, in: *Jüdische Monatshefte*, 3 (1918) no. 3/5, p. 77. According to Hurwicz, the idea that Judaism is in the same camp as Buddhism is the peak of absurdity. See also Martin Buber: *Der Geist des Orients und das Judentum*, in: *Buber: Vom Geist des Judentums*. Leipzig 1913, pp. 9–48; Jeffrey S. Librett: *Orientalism and the Figure of the Jew*, New York 2014, pp. 209–218; Paul Mendes-Flohr: *Fin-de-siècle Orientalism and the Aesthetics of Jewish Self-Affirmation [Hebrew]*, in: *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 3 (5744/1984) no. 4, pp. 623–681. The positive inclination of some Zionist thinkers to Buddhism should be understood in the context of the positive reinterpretation of the idea of a Jew as an Oriental.

⁷⁹ The book of a Liberal rabbi Dr. Max Dienemann: *Judentum und Christentum*. Frankfurt a. M. 1914.

Judaism-Buddhism can make inductively clear the character of Judaism and demonstrate its sense and purpose.”⁸⁰

The purpose of this paper was to show this “inductive clarification of the essence of Judaism” and its “meaning and purpose” through „the anti-thesis Judaism-Buddhism“ for the modern German Judaism. Before my concluding remarks, let me close with a final paragraph of the article *Buddha und Moses* written by the Reform rabbi Dr. Juda Bergmann in 1923. The text contains nearly mytho-poetical images of the Jewish-Buddhist antithesis, with pathos, a feeling of urgency, and the almost mysterious touch of eternity present in the idea of the absolute essential opposition between the two religions.

“World history, according to Goethe, is a battle between belief and unbelief; but times of belief are the greatest in world history. For the souls of mankind two men continually struggle: Buddha and Moses. There come times of hardship and decline. Through the world sounds the lament: life is suffering. Buddha captures the souls. These times pass and must pass. Not through our tears but by the drops of our sweat will the land become fruitful. Culture will not be created by world-renouncing hermits and ascetics. Victory belongs to those that choose life.

We too are living in a time of hardship. The poet sings of the agony of being. The wise speak of the decline of culture. Buddhist wisdom is called out from India to help us solve the puzzle of life. We stand before a choice: shall we direct our efforts towards overcoming the world or improvement of the world? Is it true that life is just suffering or does life remain, with its suffering, a precious gift and joy of God? We Jews raise up the Torah and proclaim: Moses’s teachings are true. We from the tribe of Job the sufferer, we choose life.”⁸¹

It should be mentioned that the same binary opposition left its mark on the Jewish philosophy of culture, particularly through Ludwig Stein and his student David Koigen (1879–1933). For Koigen religion was an independent realm of culture, central for its creation. Therefore, he strongly criticized an apotheosis of Buddhism and European “neo-Buddhism” in German culture

⁸⁰ Julius Flörsheim: *Wie erwecken wir der Jugend Freude am Judentum?*, in: *Frankfurter israelitisches Gemeindeblatt*, 9 (1931) 7, p.214.

⁸¹ Juda Bergmann: *Buddha und Moses*, in: *Jahrbuch für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur*, 25 (1923/1924), pp.30–31.

and philosophy.⁸² He, like Stein, Baeck and many others, was aware of a recent alliance of these streams of German thought that located an authentic Christianity into the Indo-Germanic spiritual heritage in opposition to the Jewish monotheism.

5. Conclusion

For all of the instances mentioned in this article, the topic of Buddhism was on the periphery of the interests of German rabbis in the period considered. Buddhism was a curiosity many talked about, but few were interested enough to appreciate its complex philosophical and religious depth. When references to Buddhism or articles and studies comparing Buddhism and Judaism appear, it happens in a particular context and with a clear agenda of the “inductive clarification of the essence of Judaism”, to borrow the words of one of our authors. Their interest went only as far as the comparison was useful to demonstrate the assets of Judaism. It goes without saying that hardly any Buddhist would recognize himself in the Buddhism they imagined and juxtaposed to Judaism. Using Schopenhauerian coordinates of pessimistic and optimistic religions, these authors portrayed Buddhism as an anti-worldly and anti-social religion of egoistic individuals who seek their own salvation (i.e. annihilation into Nothingness), the most extreme form of pessimism and asceticism which negates every being, will, work, social structure and transcendence. Judaism, in contrast, could boast of being in direct opposition to all the aforementioned characteristics. In comparison to Buddhism, Judaism stood out as a religion which carried the most needed social and psychological values for a healthy modern society: decisive affirmation of the world, optimism, social activity, co-operation with others, social egalitarianism, true charity, and religious purity free from all remnants of polytheism, asceticism, and the inefficiently excessive moral demands ascribed to both Buddhism and Christianity. There were other reasons which made Buddhism an especially good case for this demonstration. It was connected with several themes endangering the position of Judaism in German society. Buddhism was allied with the

⁸² For the context of Koigen’s usage of Buddhism see Martina Urbach: *Theodicy of Culture and the Jewish Ethos. David Koigen’s Contribution to the Sociology of Religion*, Berlin 2012, pp. 35–51. See also David Koigen: *Ideen zur Philosophie der Kultur*. Munich and Leipzig 1910, pp. 117–121; 215–217.

Schopenhaurian philosophy with its contempt for Judaism as well as with atheism and nihilism that used an argument from Buddhism to demonstrate the achievability of a legal framework independent of a transcendent God and ethics independent of the Bible. Sometimes sympathy towards Buddhism was accompanied by the refusal to accept Judaism as the foundation of Christianity. The Jewish-Christian context is crucial. Weakening the link between Judaism and Christianity served to devalue Judaism in German society. Presenting Judaism as its ultimate religious source was therefore of central importance to both Reform and modern Orthodox rabbis. They tried to show that the more de-Judaized Christianity is the less compatible it is with the values of modern society. The external and internal identification of the Jews with the Orient, so irritating for those German Jews who felt as fully belonging to the German culture and into German nation, gave another reason for this specific thematization of Buddhism. It was not only modern European *Christian* culture which needed its "Orientals". Those thinkers of German Judaism who distanced themselves decisively from the identification with the Orient presented their own image of the religious essence of the latter. Its source was often found in Indian thought, with Buddhism representing the furthest extreme. These authors tried to show not only that Judaism as a religion does not belong to the Orient, but that it represents the sharpest antithesis to the ultimate essence of Oriental religiosity and, even more than Christianity, can self-confidently claim to be the very foundation of the modern European society.