

JEWISH STUDIES | 2020

Chapter Showcase



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FROM THE EDITOR

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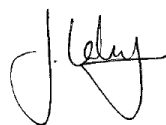
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To submit a proposal for a book project, please review our [submission guidelines](#) and email a full prospectus to me at jlakamper@rowman.com. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Judith Lakamper
Associate Acquisitions Editor



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Arrival at Auschwitz

For eight days we traveled, day and night, toward an unknown goal. The police who accompanied us to the frontier spoke of a big, common Ghetto where we would be put to work. But when we saw, through the small opening of our sealed car, that the S.S. (Storm Troopers) took over our train at the frontier, we knew there was no hope for us. From then on we received no food, no water. The small children cried with hunger and cold, the old people moaned for help, some went insane, others gave life to their babies there on the dirty floor, some died and their bodies traveled on with us . . . Once in a while our jailers would enter the car in a renewed search for valuables, or only to beat us and silence plaintive voices with brutal threats.

Then we arrived. We strained our tired, weakened eyes to read the name of the station: AUSCHWITZ. When the S.S. guards unsealed the door of our car and ordered us to get out, I ran to my parents, embraced them and begged them to forgive me if I had ever caused them any heartaches. "You were always the best child any parents could have," they comforted me. My sisters and brothers embraced me silently. My husband drew me close. "Take care of yourself . . ." he whispered, "take care of your warm, generous heart . . ." My son just looked at me, with his big, blue eyes. "Mother . . ." they said. "Mother . . ."

No one who came out alive of a German extermination camp can ever forget the picture that greeted us at Auschwitz. Like big, black clouds, the smoke of the crematory hung over the camp. Sharp red tongues of flame licked the sky, and the air was full of the nauseating smell of burning flesh. A detachment of S.S. men with guns, whips, and clubs in their hands attacked us, separating the men from their wives, parents from their children, the old from the young. Those who resisted or were too weak to move fast were beaten, kicked, and dragged away. In a few minutes we were standing in separate groups, almost unconscious with pain, fear, exhaustion, and the unbearable shock of losing our beloved ones.

Now, with a handful of S.S. officers, the camp physician took over the direction of this infernal game. With a flick of his hand he sent some of us to the left, some to the right. It took some time before I understood what this meant. Of every trainload of prisoners, ten to twelve thousand at a time, he selected about three thousand inmates for his camp. The others, those who went "left," were taken to the crematory to die a horrible

death in the constantly burning fire. They were loaded into Red Cross trucks, in a weird mockery of all human decency, and carted away; and all we ever saw of them again were their clothes in the storeroom of the camp.

Later I learned all about this bestial procedure. They were taken into small wooden houses, undressed, given a towel and a piece of soap and told to stand under the shower. They were trembling with expectation, yearning for the drops of water which would cleanse their soiled, exhausted bodies after the long days of traveling, and which would quench the thirst of their dry, hot throats. But instead of water a heavy, choking gas came out of the jets. Within seven or eight minutes some of them were asphyxiated, others only became unconscious and were tossed into the flames alive. The screams, the gurgling, choking sounds coming out of those wooden houses will forever ring in my ears.

The children, little blond or dark-haired children coming from every part of Europe, did not go with their mothers into the gas-chambers. They were taken away, crying and screaming, with wild terror in their eyes, to be undressed, thrown into the waiting graves, drenched with some inflammable material and burned alive. Hundreds of thousands of little children, the beautiful and the plain ones, the rich and the poor, the well-mannered and the naughty, the healthy and the sick, blue-eyed blond Polish children, dark-haired little Hungarians, round-faced Dutch babies, solemn little French boys and girls, all died to satisfy the sadistic instincts of these perverts.

We, who by mere chance were sent to the "right," formed a column and set out toward the camp. The roadside was lined up with rotting corpses showing the fate of those who fell out of line. We arrived before a large wooden building and were told to enter.

But suddenly the column disintegrated, the unbearable tension exploded and the terror, the pain, the sorrow, and the loneliness turned women into screaming, panicky, and hysterical creatures. They refused to enter the building which had the sign *Disinfection* painted on it in big letters. Bullets-flew, whips cracked and clubs fell with a dull sound, leaving broken bones and open skulls in their wake—but the pandemonium would not subside.

"Where is a doctor?" yelled one of the S.S. men. I stepped forward. He stood me on a table and I was given the first order of my camp-life.

"Tell these animals to keep quiet or I'll have them all shot!"

"Listen to me . . ." I called to them. "Do not be afraid! This is only a disinfection center, nothing will happen to you here. Afterward we'll be put to work, we'll all remain together, friends, sisters in our common fate. I am your doctor . . . I'll stay with you, always, to take care of you, to protect you . . . Please, calm down . . ."

My words had their effect. The women believed me, they fell silent and entered the building, one after another. Under the supervision of S.S.

men and women other prisoners carried out the program of disinfection. We were undressed there before the laughing S.S. guards who showed their appreciation for some of the beautiful bodies by slashing them with whips. Everything that could have reminded us of our past life was taken away from us.

When we came out of the building we did not know each other any more. Instead of the exhausted, tortured, but still self-respecting women who entered through its door, we were a heart-rending lot of crying clowns, a ghastly carnival procession marching toward the last festival: death . . .

I was beyond caring. After my encouraging speech to the hysterical women I had swallowed the forty centigrams of morphine which I had hidden in a small bottle. I felt an ironical superiority as I held out my head to the scissors and smiled under the ice-cold shower . . . My feet were winged by the effect of morphine as I entered the doors of Auschwitz, certain that I was going toward the supreme happiness of oblivion.

Chapter Two

Holocaust Memory in Society

It is difficult to weigh what an individual knows about the Holocaust without considering what he or she has taken in from popular culture. Popular culture in relation to the Holocaust considers television shows, movies, plays, and books, including survivor memoirs and, more recently, memoirs written by members of the second and third generation. The proliferation of this Holocaust culture over the years has made it hard to discern what members of the second and third generations know from their own family stories and the larger collective consciousness. This swelling of Holocaust culture in America started slowly, however, and has continued to build over time.

It is fair to say that Americans had opportunities to learn about some of what was happening in Europe during the Holocaust, though this flies in contrast to so much of what Americans learned about American involvement in the war. The members of the third generation often spoke about “what would have happened if Americans had known . . .” seemingly unaware that much of what was happening in Europe played out on the pages of American newspapers (newspapers.ushmm.org).

When survivors came to America, however, they found a country that was unwilling to listen to their stories, that had no frame of reference to hear and understand what they were sharing.¹ The term “Holocaust” to describe what happened to the Jews of Europe simply did not exist yet, and did not “stick” as a naming device until the 1960s. Survivors, then, found themselves keeping their stories to themselves, talking only to other survivors and to their own children.

Americans had two prevailing ideas about survivors when they first arrived. First, that in order to survive the victim needed to become a perpetrator. There was an understanding that to survive the camps, Jews needed to move outside of the bounds of ethics and values that govern society. They

“must have” committed unspeakable acts to do this. Second, and in direct contrast to this, that Jews allowed themselves to be victims, “like lambs to the slaughter.” There was a belief that Jews had allowed the atrocities of the Holocaust to take place, and had gone passively along. Survivors, then, were ashamed to fit into one of these two categories and opted, instead, to keep their stories to themselves.²

The silence around the Holocaust began to break with the debut of five bestselling novels that were published in 1948. While none of these books focused on the Holocaust, per se, they each had a Jewish soldier as the main character, all were set in Europe, and all had a central theme of the murder of the Jews of Europe. It was in 1952, however, that the conversation was opened in a broad-reaching way. This is when *The Diary of Anne Frank* became a bestseller in America, with a Broadway play and a feature film that followed. *Anne* depicts the story of a teenage girl who lives in hiding with her family, until they are found and taken to Bergen-Belsen. It is, especially on stage and screen, portrayed as a story of hope and the ability of people to survive in untenable circumstances and remain hopeful. Perhaps because of the choices made, the way *Anne* became a universal story of hope, an American audience was able to connect with it.

Pushing the American understanding and discussion of the Holocaust forward at the start of the 1960s was the Eichmann trial. The trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel afforded one hundred survivors the opportunity to testify, each sharing a small portion of what they experienced during the war. The trial was recorded for television, and segments were shown in America each night during primetime.³ During the trial, it was the survivors who took center stage, eclipsing Eichmann in many ways. Rather than victims, the survivors who spoke were the bearers of history, laying out the story of the Jewish experience during the Holocaust.

The Eichmann trial also opened the door for one of the biggest scholarly conversations about the Holocaust as Hannah Arendt published a series of articles in *The New Yorker*. These articles ultimately became her pathbreaking and controversial book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. While Arendt’s work had a large effect on the scholarly community, it is the appearance of her earlier articles in *The New Yorker* that helped shape the public discourse and understanding of the Holocaust, and of how survivors might be viewed.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the cultural mores of America were shifting. Americans were becoming activists, protesting against Vietnam, and joining movements for civil rights, women’s rights and gay rights. At this point, children of survivors, members of the second generation, were raising their voices for issues of equity, and were proud to claim their own space as American Jews. By the 1970s, survivors were entrenched in their new lives in America, and willing to speak more publicly about their wartime experi-

ences. This aligned with a shift in the ways Americans viewed “survivors” more generally, and Holocaust survivors were accorded more respect and credence than they had in the immediate postwar years.

Perhaps the biggest sea change came, however, with the *Holocaust* miniseries that aired on NBC in 1978. Millions of viewers tuned in for this, with supplemental materials prepared for schools across the country. *Holocaust*, while fictional, was being used as a “way in” for people (including students) to learn about the Holocaust. It worked—the American Jewish Committee conducted a poll and found that over 60 percent of American viewers felt that the show made the Final Solution accessible.

From the late 1970s until the present, the proliferation of the Holocaust in public discourse has increased exponentially. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), opened in the early 1990s, is one of the most popular attractions in Washington, DC. Survivors took center stage in the ways in which the Holocaust is remembered in the United States, giving public talks, visiting schools, and writing memoirs for the public to consume. Just a few months after the USHMM opened, *Schindler’s List* was released. Often credited as one of the most impactful Holocaust movies, it has been viewed by hundreds of millions of people. By the mid-nineties, it was safe to say that the Holocaust was a part of American culture.

Schools, too, took up the mantle of teaching and learning about the Holocaust. In 1994, New Jersey was the first state to mandate Holocaust education “from the earliest possible moment,” with seven other states following suit as of 2019. With children’s and young adult books about the Holocaust bursting forth on a regular basis, schools developing curricula, and textbooks including passages about the Holocaust, a generation of young people began to grow up with an awareness of the Holocaust. While scholarly debate and study continues to surge, schoolchildren have received much the same Holocaust education across time and space. They are, at the least, very much aware of the Holocaust and taught, most often, about the dangers of unchecked prejudice.

It is worth a word of caution about the ways in which the Holocaust is used in popular culture.⁴ Holocaust, as a term, has been co-opted by various political groups and organizations. PETA brought us the concept of “Holocaust on a plate” to promote vegetarianism. Pro-life groups have called abortion “a Holocaust.” The warning and reminder of “never again” has been used with urgency after an onslaught of school shootings.

The Holocaust does sit within a long history of genocide; it is both singular and one of many. As a society, though, we should use great care when drawing neat analogies to the Holocaust. Not because the Holocaust was sacred, nor because other atrocities have not occurred before or since, but because this gives Holocaust deniers and antisemites room to debate the

historical truth. If everything is “a Holocaust,” nothing is. It diminishes Holocaust history and memory.

TRANSMISSION OF MEMORY

As the Holocaust was remembered and represented in American culture, the children and grandchildren of survivors were using public representation to augment what they learned at home. These members of the second and third generations placed their family memories within the broad scope of Holocaust representation.

Concepts of common and deep memory frame the ways in which we can understand how the second and third generations consider the Holocaust in their everyday lives.⁵ The constructs of common and deep memory are generally used in connection to survivors, but the idea of “postmemory” can be used to draw a connection to the second and third generations.⁶ Postmemory, a concept distinguished from memory by generational distance, is particularly powerful for members of the second and third generations. This idea helps us understand that members of the second generation often “remember” events that they did not experience, and that these memories sometime usurp the memories of their own lived experiences.

Hirsch writes with members of the second generation in mind, but Alan Berger broadened her definition to include the third generation.⁷ Berger argues that members of the third generation typically have no direct experience of survivors’ trauma, but inherit their postmemories through stories and photos.⁸ From my own lived experiences as the granddaughter of survivors and from my research I know that this is not always true. Many members of the third generation grow up at the knees of survivors, and while they might not witness all that the second generation has, they have their own gauntlet to run: survivors and “survivors of survivors.”⁹

Family memory influences the ways in which children and grandchildren of survivors interpret public commemorations, films, and television shows about the Holocaust. Interestingly, participants in this study often spoke about public markers of Holocaust culture as they considered their conceptions of the Shoah. Members of the second generation spoke about feeling a combination of “embarrassed . . . and proud . . . after I watched *Holocaust* on television. I wondered if everyone would know it was about me, my family, my parents. I knew I was too old to feel that way, but I couldn’t help it.” Grandchildren, on the other hand, remembered going to movie theatres to see *Schindler’s List*, leaving in tears, unsure of what to make of it or if “my grandparents were being portrayed . . . it was always a secret and I didn’t understand how to know what I was seeing,” in the words of Karen.

Esther, a member of the second generation, spoke at length about her childhood fantasy of seeing people who looked like her and imagining them to be relatives who survived, after all. She imagined that she would be able to bring a sense of peace to her home if she found those who were missing. She explained that the proliferation of movies in the late 1940s and then, of course, *Anne Frank*, fueled her imagination. “I had images, just Hollywood images, but images to go along with the words and memories I grew up hearing. My mind so often ran away from me.”

This sentiment was confirmed time and again by participants: they imagined their families in every movie they saw because they finally had images to match the settings that they grew up hearing about. This was especially true for the third generation. Children of survivors were so very close to their parents, and grew up “having their nightmares instead of my own,” and didn’t need or want images to replace what they had heard.

Grandchildren, on the other hand, had some generational distance. They wanted to know “truth” and have a more immediate sense of what their grandparents had lived through. This was most profoundly experienced in seeing *Schindler’s List*. Cali explained that,

I knew my grandparents weren’t being shown in the movie, but I imagined them anyway. I had a sense that it *could have been* them. And . . . I hadn’t seen images before. It was the first movie I saw about the Holocaust, and it felt like . . . maybe I wanted it to be about my grandparents. I placed them where they didn’t belong so that I could have a better understanding.

Saul shared a similar idea, knowing that he had grandparents who had been in Auschwitz and other camps. “I was so close with my grandparents, but I could only picture them as they were now. *Schindler’s List* showed me, for the first time, how to make sense of their stories, their nightmares. I wanted the movie to explain to me what happened to my grandparents.”

How, then, do we tease out what these members of the second and third generation know and understand about their family stories, and where those memories have been colored by Hollywood images? This brings us back to the idea of just how slippery memory really is, and how it can be shifted and changed with outside sources. Memory, and testimony or bearing witness to memory, is fluid and changes the person gathering the memory, in this case, members of the second and third generations.

SECOND- AND THIRD-GENERATION MEMOIRS

With these landmarks in place, it is hard to discern exactly what any one person took in from his or her own family stories, or what he or she learned from popular culture. Members of the second and third generations “never

saw what my grandparents went through. I imagined them in every picture and movie that I saw,” as Elizabeth explained. Despite these gaps, we see second- and third-generation memoirs proliferating.

The Holocaust was the defining event in the lives of its survivors. As has become apparent, however, the outcomes of the Holocaust, and its effects, have not been restricted only to those who experienced it first-hand. As time has passed, a sophisticated literature has developed that traces the deep and wide-ranging influence the Holocaust has had on descendants of survivors, especially the second and third generations.¹⁰ It has become increasingly evident that members of the second and third generation have encountered the Holocaust in myriad ways, often mediated through their survivor family member, and that their relationship to this horrific episode through kinship networks has shaped how they interact with the world, view family, choose careers, and form their own perceptions of self. What they remember is filtered through story, personal research, and intuition—what they *want* to believe. They remember their parents or grandparents through rose-colored glasses, as flawless individuals. Memory becomes more important than history, as family storytelling and mythmaking brings the Holocaust legacy into focus.

In order to better understand what members of the second and third generation have internalized from both their family stories and broader Holocaust culture, I read fifteen memoirs written by children or grandchildren of survivors. I chose four to focus on here, and have selected these because they are particularly emblematic of the memoirs as a whole and allow for careful analysis that is representative of the genre as a whole.

The proliferation of recently published descendant memoirs suggests that there are more to come. The voices of members of the second and third generations are particularly noteworthy at the moment, and will be followed by subsequent generations. As survivors are no longer with us, members of the second and third generations increasingly play a major role to shape the narrative of the Holocaust, articulate what one of the seminal events of the twentieth century means, and become the driving forces at commemorations like International Holocaust Remembrance Days and Yom HaShoah. Increasingly, their memoirs will be read in advance of those talks, offering a perspective about the ongoing, transgenerational impact the Holocaust has on descendants. It therefore seems critical that our field continue to grapple with how to make sense of the slippery line between history and memory.

Second- and third-generation memoirs are a new avenue for research, allowing academics to ask fresh questions about this memory/history divide, which has implications for interpreting the Holocaust and how that traumatic period under the Nazi regime is marked and remembered into the future. Key questions arising from second- and third-generation memoirs are the same that guide this study. They are: (1) how does the Holocaust affect descending

generations? (2) How do children and grandchildren remember the Holocaust? (3) What legacies and lessons do children and grandchildren inherit, and which do they wish to pass on? and (4) What role might children and grandchildren play in Holocaust commemoration? These questions provide a matrix by which scholars can analyze these valuable new primary sources in order to contribute to our understanding of Holocaust memory. Each memoir offers its own perspective on these queries; taken together, they help to map continued responses to the Holocaust.

To examine just how members of the second and third generation understand and write about the Holocaust, I offer a close analysis of four recently published second- and third-generation memoirs. These memoirs are generally representative of this growing field. Each of the offerings represent memoirists who grew up and live in America, and therefore share common experiences that can be generalized across American descendants of survivors. Two of the books are by members of the second generation and two are third-generation memoirs, which provides some insight into changing perceptions across generations and how members of the second and third generations share certain attitudes and approaches while diverging in others. Ultimately several themes emerge clearly from each of the books, yet in different and subtle ways. First, that descendants grapple with the difference between “always knowing” about their survivor parent or grandparent while also looking for answers about the “truth” of what happened. Second, each memoirist articulates both the burden and privilege of memory. And thirdly, the books address in varying ways the sort of inheritance that descendants of survivors have taken away from their lives, especially related to the transmission of either trauma or empowerment. In these ways all four books, and the wider group of transgenerational memoirs that continue to appear, grapple with critical questions about the long-lasting effects of genocide generally, and the Holocaust in particular, has on individuals, families, communities, and societies writ large.

One of the salient features of second- and third-generation memoirs is that they often have multiple thrusts in terms of their audience and the stories they tell. Many, for example, attempt to target three audiences simultaneously: academia, the “educated public,” and other children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. In turn, as subsequent generations step into a void left by their parents and grandparents, they aim to tell two, sometimes three, stories: their own, that of their parents, and the story of their survivor relative. Many of these memoirs loosely follow a similar pattern. First, there is a brief version of the survivor story, or “what was always known.” Next comes the way in which the descendant is working to find “the truth,” or answer questions that he or she was left with. Finally, there is some sort of closure, life lesson, or take-away for the reader. As with all memoirs, these are in-

tensely personal works, and they show only the portrait the author wants; they are, in sum, highly subjective.

A rare second-generation memoir that broke through to popular conversation is Elizabeth Rosner's *Survivor Café: The Legacy of Trauma and the Labyrinth of Memory*.¹¹ With a review in *The New York Times*, Rosner's work garnered significant attention. Her goal, it seems, was to write a book that was a hybrid of sorts—a literary academic memoir. As the daughter of Holocaust survivors, Rosner shares their stories very briefly at the outset, but their survival narratives are not the focus. Instead, she explores her own experiences as a member of the second generation, as well as the experiences her father has shared with her and other family members. Rosner also looks to connect her second-generation ideas to other cultural traumas throughout her book, most especially Cambodia and Hiroshima, attempting to draw link from her specific accounts to the universality of experiences related to mass atrocity.

While Rosner seems to bring conscious awareness to other genocides and consider other experiences, Esther V. Levy's memoir, *Legacies, Lies, and Lullabies: The World of a Second Generation Holocaust Survivor*, emphatically focuses on *her* world.¹² The very first line of the preface reads "I've been harboring within me an epic family story, lying dormant beneath the surface and threatening to eat me alive." Her mother and maternal grandparents were interned in and survived Terezin, making Levy *both* a second- and third-generation survivor. She explains very early in the book that she feels destined to tell this story, and states clearly that the members of the second generation are the only ones to speak for those no longer here or able to speak for themselves.

Third-generation memoirs exhibit a discernable shift in perspective from second-generation ones; there is less intimacy in the ways in which the grandchildren know their survivor relatives, and more open questions about their grandparents' Holocaust experiences for which they are seeking answers. Noah Lederman has written a cohesive and, in many ways, compelling third-generation memoir with *A World Erased: A Grandson's Search for His Family's Holocaust Secrets*.¹³ He tells his grandparents' stories with respect, and is honest when he is unsure of what happened or why. He talks about his father and his aunt, and what he knows of their trauma. Certainly, he articulates his own real and relentless obsession with the Holocaust. His memoir is engaging, and Lederman is self-aware and articulate.

While Lederman represents many elements of empowerment, Allison Nazarian more closely represents inherited trauma. Her third-generation memoir, *Aftermath: A Granddaughter's Story of Legacy, Healing, and Hope*,¹⁴ needs careful and considered reading. She asserts, repeatedly, that she has learned lessons of healing and hope, but her narrative, when read at even a surface level, tells a different story. Her memoir follows the maternal line of

trauma: her grandmother, her mother, and then her. Her grandfather was also a survivor, but she does not focus on his story or the legacy she might have inherited from him.

Regardless of the generation or experiences of the memoirist, their texts reveal several themes, all connected through the larger idea of memory. All the memoirists explore when and how they learned about their survivor relative's Holocaust experience, and how they have worked to learn information to fill in the gaps in the story that know. They also see themselves as carrying the torch of memory; as their parent or grandparent once held the family history, now the history belongs to them. This history is expressed as both a privilege and a burden, and memoirists feel some degree of pressure both to get the memory right, and to share it with others. Finally, second- and third-generation memoirs show evidence of transmission of either trauma or empowerment from their survivor relative. The children and grandchildren of survivors vary in how explicit they are in their reckoning with this aspect of their lives, but they all engage with the ways in which they attempt to cope with their family's Holocaust history.

Rosner and Levy, the daughters of survivors, both express a sense of "always knowing" about their parents' Holocaust experiences; there was never a time, in their retelling, that they did not know what their parents went through during the Holocaust. The ways in which they grew up knowing about the Holocaust, what happened to their parents, and how it affected them is never an open question. This is emblematic of second-generation memoirists broadly, and members of the second generation as a whole. Members of the second generation always, in many ways, know some version of the truth—what happened, the facts—about their parents' Holocaust experiences; their task was to make sense of these events and how they affected their parents and themselves. The third generation, on the other hand, find themselves looking to learn more about their grandparents' experiences.

This searching for facts is evident in Lederman's third-generation memoir. The goal of much third-generation memoir writing might best be defined as a desire to remember, or memorialize, their survivor grandparent. Lederman certainly does this, but his work moves beyond memorialization to catalogue his own relentless pursuit of the truth. As he looked to discover the veracity of his grandparents' wartime experiences, Lederman reveals more about himself: his travels, his love of surfing, his work as a teacher in a high school, all of this framed as "searching." His teaching, in particular, helps him on his journey to learn more both about the Holocaust generally, and his grandparents specifically. Lederman taught in an urban high school, and, while there, he developed a course on the Holocaust. This part of his story is less fleshed out, but Lederman created his own curriculum, seemingly "going rogue" in this age of standardization. This glimpse into his teaching helps the

reader to see just how fully Lederman immersed himself in the Holocaust in all aspects in his life. His curiosity was broad and ranged beyond his intense interest in his family history. He sought to make sense of the Holocaust overall and contextualize what he learned about his grandparents.

Nazarian, in contrast, was deeply curious about only her family. She vacillates between knowing the facts of her family story and wondering about what might have been true. We see this by the way in which she often assigns motives to those she comes in contact with. She does this most commonly with her Bubby (grandmother). Readers learn that Bubby had a first husband who was killed early in the war. Nazarian states that she is certain her grandmother dreams of him at night, and waits to meet him when she dies. This is after she explains that her grandmother never once spoke of her first husband, leaving one to wonder how she can assign such emotions to her grandmother, regardless of how close they were. In another instance, she says that her grandmother does not like mass transit because it reminds her of the cattle cars that took her to Auschwitz. Again, Nazarian just knew this. It is an interesting “knowing” of truth. Readers see that what Nazarian asserts is not possible. She believes, however, in what she says. This “knowing” is not uncommon in second- and third-generation memoirs, and brings the ideas of “knowing” and “truth” into question.

Once descendants of survivors “know” their legacy, they often struggle with what to do with their knowledge. This struggle reads like a burden in memoirs. Levy, for example, refers to herself as a “replacement child,” taking on a burden, and a label, that many descendants might contest. Members of the second generation born to parents whose first children were murdered during the Holocaust are most commonly thought of as “replacement children.” These children “own” this burden, if it is such, of replacing their murdered relatives, and live with this reminder throughout their lives. Levy, however, considers the generation of Jewish children born after the Holocaust as a replacement generation, of sorts, regardless of whether they were born into a Holocaust survivor family or not. She willingly admits to feeling special, elevated in a way, because of her second-generation status, and sees survivor parents and survivor children as “super parents” and “super children.” By this, Levy means that survivors became parents who were heavily involved in their children’s lives, and the children of survivors became children who were highly attuned to their parents’ feelings. She explains that she was a super child who aspired to become a super parent. Levy has taken her legacy as the child of survivors and made it rare air; her way of carrying the legacy is to understand herself as special.

A sense of specialness is prevalent throughout the memoirs. Lederman, too, sees himself as special: he bears the burden of his grandparents’ legacy by believing his search for knowledge is unique. He misses any sort of connection to other members of the third generation, or any knowledge that

the third generation exists as a conglomerate. He is intensely certain that he is the only grandchild doing this work. He states in an off-handed way that he has not spoken with other grandchildren of survivors, and this seems odd for a curious young man.

As Lederman writes about his work in Holocaust education, this struggle of being solitary plays itself out. Writing about his teaching also allows Lederman to talk about both denial and antisemitism. He suggests that members of the third generation armed with facts will be able to counter these forces, but does not give further ideas for how this might happen. He does not make this case strongly enough. The burden that Lederman takes on must feel like the weight of the world. By not joining a community of third-generation survivors who are memorializing their grandparents, he is holding the privilege and burden of memory on his own. He is fighting against Holocaust denial and antisemitism single-handedly.

Nazarian, again in contrast to Lederman, is aware that there are other members of the third generation. She does, in fact, tell readers that she interviewed one-hundred-fifty other third-generation survivors. She makes mention of this data set at multiple places in the text, but never follows up on her surveys. She alludes to these findings in vague ways, if only to point out the ways in which she, herself, is unique. These references leave readers wanting to know more about what is a large sample of interviewees, and the questions this raises about her methods, questions, and findings are left open and unanswered. Ultimately, it is not clear if these were structured interviews, intentional conversations, or casual talks with third-generation friends. More on this point would have created a richer, more complex book, and allowed Nazarian to place herself within the broader picture of the third generation.

It becomes clear that members of the second and third generations know and seek truth, and carry the knowledge they find in different ways. These writers explore, to varying degrees, how their legacies were passed on to them. Rosner makes the case for epigenetics, or the biological transmission of trauma. She opens this section of her book by stating “slowly but surely, science is bringing us empirical proof of a legacy we have already known in our bones, our dreams, and our terrors.”¹⁵ The data she uses to support this claim come from two sources. The first is an academic, but not peer reviewed, journal called *Nature Neuroscience*. This data looked at mice, and how they reacted to receiving electric shocks when they smelled cherry blossoms. Another study, published in the popular magazine *The New Republic*, argues that children of parents with PTSD are more likely to have PTSD themselves, and produce less cortisone than their peers. From these two data points, she asserts, “long before we knew that even without the narrative repetition, the past would be transmitted through our cells, our DNA.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, Rosner might be looked at as a person who has inherited trau-

ma *and* empowerment. She seems to acknowledge that she has inherited trauma, but her writing is hopeful and looks far outside of herself and her experiences. While the epigenetics she writes so eloquently about in her book might still exist largely in the realm of new, and sometimes contested, science, another possible avenue of investigation might be the social transmissions of trauma discussed elsewhere by Janet Jacobs.

Other of the memoirists write about how they inherited legacies. Levy eloquently explains how she learned about her family history. She explains that she felt responsible for her mother's happiness, and also that members of the second generation "pick up on things" not verbalized by their parents. She shifts often between these two dimensions: what she experiences as an individual and what she perceives as being common to other children of survivors. She goes on to argue that children and grandchildren learned the unspoken rule not to ask questions of their survivor relatives, and wonders why her mother and grandparents never shared certain details of their time in Terezin that aligned with some of the "history" that she learned about. With comments and musing like this, Levy aligns herself with both the second and third generations, seeing herself as both the daughter *and* granddaughter of survivors rather than just the latter. She complicates her own perspective for the reader, though seemingly does not notice the complexity of her ideas.

Building on what we see in Rosner, then Levy, Nazarian provides an intimate look into the legacy she inherited. Scholars and lay readers alike get what might be the most honest account of what goes on for members of the third generation. We see the very real angst that is passed from one generation to the next, whether through epigenetics or not. We see just how hard it is for granddaughters to overcome the maternal line of trauma that can be passed down. If examined as a piece a data, if read as a window into how a granddaughter of a survivor might think, feel, and process her experiences, Nazarian's explanation becomes a useful artifact. This memoir, in particular, needs to be interpreted with care. Nazarian's words and tone contradict one another, and while she says that she has healed and broken the cycle of trauma that was transmitted to her, the very existence of this book suggests otherwise.

Much like Rosner, Noah Lederman has owned his trauma and is moving into finding strength and hope in his family history. Lederman wrote of ideas, experiences, and fears that are common for members of the third generation, but his story does not read like one of inherited trauma. Instead Lederman highlights a tale of empowerment: he acts like a detective to understand as best he can how his grandparents survived the war. He looks for the hero in his family, and is constantly in awe of the strength and grace that his grandparents displayed over the course of their lives. Certainly, it might be argued that Lederman spends huge amounts of time and energy invested in the past. He does not, however, seem to be traumatized by it. He

appears to have learned lessons of openness, a willingness to engage with the world, and a curiosity about others. He is empowered by his grandparents and the legacy they have left to him.

It perhaps bears repeating that these memoirs are highly emblematic of books written by members of the second and third generations. While this was a close examination of just four such texts, they stand here for a far larger collection in which the same themes, promises, and problems exist. Where, then, does that leave second- and third-generation memoirists? What should their role be, and, perhaps more importantly, how might scholars use and interpret these memoirs? The children and grandchildren of survivors are contributing a different type of primary source to the history of the Holocaust, as their survivor relatives were with their own memoirs. Survivor memoirs, of course, retain a place in the canon of Holocaust history and memory, as they help scholars and others obtain a first-hand perspective about the events themselves. Second- and third-generation memoirs, however, add something different. They are informing us, in a primary way, about the lasting effects of genocide.

By their very nature, these memoirs are filtered through the lenses of generational storytelling and memory. The writers admit, to differing degrees, of the legacy that they inherited, and grapple with that in their writing. Each writer, however, presents his or her own experience as “the way it was,” and very few readily acknowledge other members of their generation doing the same work (with Rosner being one notable exception). Multiple memoirs give varied perspectives and allow us to understand better the breadth of ways in which generational survivors have internalized their experiences. In fact, they become more interesting, important, even urgent, when read together. As a group, they paint a picture of generations affected by genocide. The memoirs discussed here, when read together, are one example of this. The second-generation memoirs show children who grew up powerfully affected by the lives of their parents. As Levy said, both parents and children seem to have felt destined to tell their stories. They carry Holocaust legacies with them, and want to share them.

Here, though, the two second-generation writers diverge. Rosner wrote about her father and her own experiences. She spent a great deal of time articulating a complex set of feelings, how they came about, and drawing lines between experiences and events. She sees intersections between her father’s Holocaust life and her own life after the Holocaust. Levy, however, spent far more time writing about her family than herself. She does not entirely remove herself from the narrative. It is clear that something about this story has shaped Levy. Perhaps it was having a “super mom,” one who was, in her mind, close to perfect, and something that she needed to aspire to. What is different, most notably, in these memoirs is the level of self-awareness the writers convey. When looking at the two in connection with one

another, however, they begin to paint a somewhat complex picture of trauma caused to members of the second generation.

It is easy to see in the third-generation memoirs how the grandchildren of survivors feel the continued effects of the Holocaust. Both Lederman and Nazarian have spent much of their adult lives grappling with their grandparents' legacies. They have devoted travel, research, self-reflection, and career choices to the Holocaust. They have struggled to find their place within the broader context of Holocaust memory. They have both placed themselves at the center of Holocaust remembrance. Here, though, the similarities end. The differences in perspectives might be most instructive, as we are better able to understand how generational survivors of genocide internalize and cope with the effects of their family histories.

While there are many members of the third generation who hold tight to their grandparents' stories, who become obsessed with finding truth or sharing the stories they have grown up with, Lederman and Nazarian are prime examples of how members of the third generation interpret their grandparents' experiences in different ways. Noah Lederman has, at least through a reading of this work, triumphed over the Holocaust. His memoir shows grit, flexibility, and a willingness to learn and grow. He travels, and he seems unafraid to engage with the world. He does not turn from "his" Holocaust story, nor does he take his grandparents' trauma and make it his own. Allison Nazarian, on the other hand, relentlessly talks about healing. One might expect her to need to heal from her mother's suicide, but she, at times, frames that as a relief, explaining that life became more peaceful after her mother's death. She is cognizant of the way this sounds, and doesn't shy away from this. Nazarian, instead, heals time and again from the Holocaust, from her mother's Holocaust reckoning, from her own caretaking of her grandmother. She explains that she uses a twelve-step approach to tackling the trauma and addiction she feels to the Holocaust. These are highly divergent approaches to confronting and overcoming a family Holocaust legacy.

Additionally, when looking at this set of memoirs, it is useful to consider them through a gendered lens, not only because of the memoirs selected for this analysis, but because it is indicative of further lessons of empowerment and trauma. The women—Rosner, Levy, and Nazarian—have similar writing styles. By my reading, they are all examples of inherited trauma to varying degrees, though none might see themselves that way. Rosner seems to own some of her trauma, though she perhaps explains it through epigenetics: she was bound to be traumatized, as it was in her DNA. Nazarian and Levy take less ownership, refuting it relentlessly, but it is there nonetheless.

Both Rosner and Nazarian draw connections between events that are not obviously connected, and are quick to intuit what others might be feeling in any given situation. They not only "just know" their family stories, and have grown up surrounded by them, but "just know" many other things. The

motivations of those in positions of power, for example, are things that each claim to understand. Both women grapple with the ways in which reparations are paid, and both assign motives to the German government as they correspond with officials. Rosner also gives meaning to the ways in which commemorative trips to Buchenwald were planned without ever speaking with conference organizers. While it is easy to understand why one might try to understand these interactions, these assertions seem virtually impossible to prove. Ultimately, by relying on intuition and drawing conclusions that are difficult to understand, their narratives are weakened.

Lederman took a more measured approach to his writing. He does not assign motives to people when he is uncertain of them, nor does he rely on his intuition. His book certainly raises questions at times, but he is able to look beyond coincidences and recognize that not every event in his life is connected to the Holocaust. In these readings, however, the sole memoir authored by a man took on a very different tone. This difference is echoed in my own findings that show clear gender differences. We see here, too, variance in the ways in which men and women respond to inheriting their family history. In this reading, the women, whether in the second or third generation, were more affected by inherited *trauma* than men.

These comparisons are, again, about a very small number of generational memoirs that are representative of a larger sample. What stands out as interesting here is the ways in which the gender divide in the memoirs echoes that tone and content of the conversations that comprise this study. Rosner, Levy, and Nazarian are highly in touch with their feelings, disclosing personal details, musing on paper, and drawing complex connections between their lives and the lives of their survivor relatives. Lederman, on the other hand, is more linear, less discursive, and less emotional. The differences between the women and men who participated in this study showed many of the same characteristics, as discussed throughout this book.

That a group of memoirs can provoke such a range of questions is testament to their strength. These, however, are not the only questions that second- and third-generation memoirs raise. This mini-case study of these four memoirs gives a subset of answers to the questions driving this book. After a careful analysis of these four memoirs, some initial answers emerge.

A close reading of these memoirs makes abundantly clear that the Holocaust has, in fact, shaped the children and grandchildren of survivors. Of the four writers, two inherited trauma from their family history. Two others took away messages of both trauma and empowerment, but, nonetheless, have devoted much of their lives to unraveling their families' past and making connections to other instances of mass trauma. All four of the memoirs show children and grandchildren who see their survivor relatives as heroes, essentially flawless individuals. They show themselves not as Holocaust specialists, and they do not claim to be at any point, but simply as individuals

recounting family stories, trying to learn more. They acknowledge that the Holocaust has affected them and how they think about their interactions with the world, some with more self-awareness than others, but all take up the call to continue talking about the event that has become the defining moment of their family's past.

The descending generations see themselves as the future of Holocaust remembrance, willing and able to pass on their relatives' story. This is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, as we enter a post-survivor era, children and grandchildren can speak to the experiences of those closest to them. They can share details of their parents' and grandparents' lives that others cannot. On the other hand, we see that family stories change over time, and history gets conflated with memory. Details get changed, personal research adds a different dimension, and intuition colors the narrative.

Ultimately, while second- and third-generation memoirs each contain flaws and challenges that need to be addressed, particularly the ways in which they navigate the line of memory and history, they are useful primary documents. Second- and third-generation memoirs will continue to inform Holocaust historiography, allowing scholars to probe the ways in which the Holocaust affects descending generations. As time goes on, we will see how this legacy touches the fourth generation, and what that does to the ways we remember and commemorate the Holocaust as a field. Certainly, without survivors, we lose a primary connection to the Holocaust. But it is largely through subsequent generations and their memoirs that scholars will be able to ask questions about how the memory of the Holocaust is constructed, and how knowledge of this catastrophic event will be shaped and conveyed to the general public.

These questions are all on display throughout this larger study, and while I do not come to concrete or complete answers, the interviews conducted and examined here continue the conversation. Ultimately, focused conversations with children and grandchildren of survivors show much the same patterns as we see in this smaller case study of memoirs. Importantly, these memoirs influence other children and grandchildren of survivors as they are read and discussed. As members of the second and third generations learn about the experiences of others, they see themselves and their lives reflected back to them.

It remains difficult to unwind the ways in which individual memory is influenced by collective, societal memory and popular culture. An awareness of this broad Holocaust culture is a first step towards contextualizing individual memory. These touchpoints, memoirs, films, television shows, and museums provide a backdrop for individual memory.

NOTES

1. Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Holocaust: An American understanding*, vol. 7. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016).
2. Lipstadt, *Holocaust*; Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust testimonies: The ruins of memory*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).
3. Lipstadt, *Holocaust*.
4. Anne Rothe, *Popular trauma culture: Selling the pain of others in the mass media* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011).
5. Langer, *Holocaust testimonies*.
6. Marianne Hirsch, *Family frames: Photography, narrative, and postmemory*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1997).
7. Alan L. Berger, and Naomi Berger, eds. *Second generation voices: Reflections by children of Holocaust survivors and perpetrators*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001).
8. Berger and Berger, eds. *Second generation voices*.
9. Alan L. Berger, *Children of Job: American second-generation witnesses to the Holocaust*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012).
10. Berger, *Children of Job*; Berger and Berger, eds. *Second generation voices*; Martin S. Bergman and Milton E. Jucovy, eds. *Generations of the Holocaust*. (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Melvin Jules Bukiet, ed. *Nothing makes you free: Writings by descendants of Jewish Holocaust survivors*. (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2002); Helen Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with sons and daughters of survivors*. (New York: Putnam, 1979); Paula S. Fass, *Inheriting the Holocaust: A second-generation memoir*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Liora Gubkin, *You shall tell your children: Holocaust memory in American Passover ritual*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007); Aaron Hass, *In the shadow of the Holocaust: The second generation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Marianne Hirsch, *Family frames: Photography, narrative, and postmemory*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1997); Eva Hoffman, *After such knowledge: Memory, history, and the legacy of the Holocaust*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2005); Janet Jacobs, *The Holocaust across generations: Trauma and its inheritance among descendants of survivors*. (New York: NYU Press, 2016); Menachem Rosensaft, *God, faith, and identity from the ashes: Reflections of children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors*. (Nashville: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2015); Arlene Stein, *Reluctant witnesses: Survivors, their children, and the rise of Holocaust consciousness*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Dina Wardi, *Memorial candles: Children of the Holocaust*. (New York: Routledge, 1992).
11. Elizabeth Rosner, *Survivor café: The Legacy of trauma and the labyrinth of memory*. (New York: Counterpoint, 2017).
12. Esther V. Levy, *Legacies, lies and lullabies: The world of a second generation Holocaust survivor*. (Sarasota, FL: First Edition Design Publishing, 2013).
13. Noah Lederman. *A world erased: A grandson's search for his family's Holocaust secrets*. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).
14. Allison Nazarian, *Aftermath: A granddaughter's story of legacy, healing and hope*. (Allie Girl Publishing, 2016).
15. Rosner, *Survivor Café*, 6.
16. *Ibid.*, 9.

Chapter Eleven

In his stories Kafka usually, though not always, bypasses explicit indications of nationality or religion. Furthermore, with the exception of one fragment of a story (“In Our Synagogue”), Kafka never indicated the Jewishness of any character, narrator, or setting. However, the reader of his diaries would not for one moment doubt the intensity with which Kafka is conscious of his Jewish-being (as Buber has coined it in existentialist terms). While this consciousness did not become an active identity before his maturity, that is before the years 1905–1906 when the twenty-three-year-old Kafka joined the Jewish (and in part Zionist) circle of Prague intellectuals (Max Brod, Felix Weltsch, Hugo Bergman), nonetheless, once this identity was consolidated it became a spiritual plane to which a uniquely sensitive cognitive and emotive apparatus was increasingly applied. This plane gradually expanded into every aspect of the young writer’s thoughts and actions. It influenced political and social positions, his love relationships and failed engagements, his reading (including anti-Semitic literature, which he apparently consumed quite eagerly), his opinions in matters of literature and art, and above all his self-perception. Kafka’s auto-activation as a person and writer at the heart of the “Jewish condition” did not cease for the entire period of his literary activity, those years that have been called his “decisive years.”¹ In this period, which began with the writing of *The Judgement* (September 1912), Kafka discovered his calling and path as a writer and, at the same time, discovered the depth and problematic of his “Jewish condition.” These two discoveries were codependent and were in fact two facets of a single discovery: knowledge of the “self” and finding the proper mode for its aesthetic expression. This duality did not fade for the remaining twelve years of the author’s life, until his untimely death in 1924. It stood out particularly in the early twenties, when the birth pangs of the Czech Republic were accompanied by violent outbursts of anti-Semitic mobs. Frequently, this duality became the main topic of his letters (especially in his correspondence with Milena, his non-Jewish lover). Here, Kafka expressed his desire to trade places with a Jewish refugee child, napping in his parents’ bosom in a temporary shelter for Jewish refugees that had been set up in the Jewish community center (while they awaited their visas to America), which had just a few years prior hosted the evening performance of Yiddish actor Yitzchak Lowy, and during which Kafka had delivered his notable lecture on the “Jargon.”²

From the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Kafka's interest in Zionism and its chances piqued, though it was an interest that never lead to an unambiguous position. Kafka remarked on this in one of his *Blue Octavo Notebooks*, when he described himself as a man blockaded within himself, and who lacks the ability to connect to any faith that contains within it a messianic hope: "I have not been guided into life by the hand of Christianity—admittedly now slack and failing—as Kierkegaard was, and have not caught the hem of the Jewish prayer shawl—now flying away from us—as the Zionists have. I am an end or a beginning."³ Essentially, his interest in Zionism was bound to his understanding of its character as if it were of pastoral-utopian ambitions. His interest did not connect with Zionist aspirations for a particularly Jewish state or culture, but with its desire to liberate the modern Jew (that is, as far as Kafka is concerned, the modern western Jew, who has adapted to his surrounding culture) from the hustle and bustle of the metropole, to draw him closer to "nature" by agricultural labor, and to extract him from the modern urban labyrinth of ongoing existential anxiety, alienation, social automation, loneliness, and often crass self-serving materialism. Of all the ideological fathers of Zionism, Kafka was not close to Herzl, nor to Ahad Ha-am or Buber, but rather to A. D. Gordon, the initiator of "Cosmic" Zionism. At any rate, interest in the fate of Zionism and its many sects became a permanent fixture of his life. Kafka regularly read the issues of *Selbstwahr*, the Prague Zionist weekly published by his friend Felix Weltsch, in which some of his own stories were published, including the seminal "Before the Law" (December 1914). In Kafka's final years of life, after escaping the "claws" of Prague, that old bird of prey that refuses to release its victims, he took pains to update Weltsch on his many and changing addresses, including those of the many sanatoriums he frequented to convalesce from his illness, so that those issues of *Selbstwahr* would continue to arrive without delay. He even tried, as mentioned previously, to learn Hebrew, although it was strangely beyond his ability. Kafka's failure in acquiring the Hebrew language is also a testimony to his ambivalent attitude toward the new Zionist culture (as will be discussed shortly), which in the main would have demanded shifting his writing from German to Hebrew. A similar ambivalence is attested to by his recurring talk of emigration to Palestine, or at least a lengthy trip there. This possibility, which was discussed in his first conversation with his soon-to-be fiancé Felice Bauer, was similar to the affair of their engagement itself: toying with the possibility of a "redemption" that must not take place. (As cited above, Kafka wrote of this possibility to Milena: "If I am never going to leave my bed again, why shouldn't I travel as far as Palestine?")⁴ Typically for Kafka, emigration to Palestine became a consensual desire only with his final partner Dora Diamant, the Yiddish-speaking daughter of a Polish Hasid who was herself a Zionist and read Hebrew. Kafka began to speak confidently of his desire to emigrate to

Palestine only in his final year of life, when his illness entirely precluded such a possibility.

All this raises with increasing pertinence the question of whether we may regard Kafka as more than a deeply self-aware Jewish person who was, in addition, also a great European writer—whether we may regard Kafka primarily as a “Jewish writer,” one who stands among other Jewish writers of his day who wrote in several other languages—Bialik, Sholem Aleichem, I. L. Peretz, Bruno Schultz, Ze’ev Jabotinsky, Isaac Babel, Albert Cohen, Sh. Y. Agnon, Albert Memi, Edmond Jabès, Saul Bellow—at the center of what I have elsewhere called the “modern Jewish literary complex.”⁵ Can we say that Kafka’s work—his stories and three novels, as well as his parables and aphorisms—is significantly imprinted with the mark of his “Jewishness?” Can we say that at least some parts of his work, such as the novel *The Missing Person* (1912–1914), the stories “A Report to an Academy” and “Jackals and Arabs” (1916), “The Hunger Artist” (1922), and especially “Josephine, the Singer or the Mouse Folk” (1924), were written with clear Jewish and even Zionist implications? This had already been argued by several critics when the stories were first published and continued to be maintained by more contemporary critics over the past thirty years, as the Jewish element of Kafka’s writing began to receive a more central place in his readers’ attention.⁶

It is not my intention in the present work to join those who have attempted a clear and definite answer to this difficult question, which the more one delves into the more the quandaries multiply. The reason is that the two parallel systems, which the author developed in his major active years, the one expressed in his diaries and correspondence and the one expressed in his fictional writings, certainly shed light on each other but do not merge with each other, and certainly do not “interpret” each other in any exhaustive or even binding sense. As detailed above, Kafka avoided any explicit projection of his self-conscious “Jewishness” onto the narrative surface of his fictional works, and any attempt to plumb the depths of his stories for hidden significations of Jewishness involves interpretive or deciphering efforts that are no more legitimate and no less convincing than any other, even contradictory, effort. Answering the question of Jewish signification in Kafka’s fictional works would involve a kind of interpretive “death-defying leap” that I have no desire to perform. Certainly, the negation in toto of allegorical interpretation for Kafka’s stories, since such interpretation is unable to produce unambiguous meanings, is equally a methodological mistake. The stories are so constructed that the demand for allegorical interpretation of their symbols is inherently mandated, both as a result of the unique dynamic of Kafka’s prose-style as well as by the poetic and aesthetic occasion of the literary symbol itself. Adorno has remarked in this regard: “If the notion of the symbol has any meaning whatsoever in aesthetics—and this is far from certain—then it can only be that the individual moments of the work of

art point beyond themselves by virtue of their interrelations, that the totality coalesces into meaning. Nothing can be less true of Kafka."⁷ This is a complex issue that allows us perhaps to see Kafka's stories as broken allegories (or parables that have been detached from their morals), as narratives that have been interrupted at the moment of transition from their allegorical signifier to their allegorical signified. This problematic will not be at the center of our present discussion.

My intention is rather to discuss an attitude that can more or less be discerned, and which may shed some light on the vague and broad question of Jewish signification in Kafka's fictional works. I refer to Kafka's attitude toward a more fundamental question regarding the very possibility of a modern Jewish literature. That is, whether it is possible to conceive of a literature that would be fully Jewish in content and tonality, as well as in any other significant aspect of its narrative or poetic expression and, at the same time and with equal authenticity, would be fully "modern" in the sense this word has acquired in Western culture since the turn of the eighteenth century: A perception of reality that combines Kantian subjectivity with renaissance humanism, that places man and his stature at the center of the moral universe, that sees the Enlightenment's rationalism as the primary guide to comprehending the world and to the actions necessary for the betterment of the human condition. This same question can be formulated in historical terms as well: Ashkenazi Jews (the only ones Kafka was familiar with), primarily those who lived in central and western Europe, once granted civic and, to and extent, also social emancipation by their home countries, began to venture beyond the former bounds of their religious-communal life (though not always detaching from it entirely), and in a gradual process had partly or fully integrated into their surrounding European cultures and civil societies. In the process of acculturation some became writers, and some quite prominent writers, who wrote in the languages of their new-found cultures (such as Heinrich Heine, Ludwig Börne, Georg Brandes, Karl Kraus) or in the Jewish national languages of Hebrew and Yiddish (Kafka did not know other Jewish national languages) such as Bialik, Sholem Aleichem, and I. L. Peretz. Were these writers able to unite the modernity of their surroundings with their own Jewish consciousness to produce a complete and coherent literary composition? Is such a union even possible without a certain measure of playing "off-key," whether on the part of their modernity or (especially) on the part of their Judaism?

This question regarding the possibility of a modern Jewish literature, however it may be formulated, had a clear personal significance for Kafka. After all, he was a Jewish man, child of assimilated Jewish parents of the Bohemian bourgeoisie, but who were in fact only one or two generations removed from Jewish village life (father) and the mercantile town life (mother), and he himself tried his hand at writing German literature and regarded himself as maintaining "blood-relations" with German and

Austrian authors such as Heinrich von Kleist and Franz Grillparzer (as well as Dostoyevsky and Flaubert).⁸ Does his position as a Jew at the heart of Christian literatures, especially German and Austrian, not entail a certain “off-key” note, or at the very least an effort to ignore an unpleasant truth? And if it is indeed “off-key,” does this not compromise his work’s sincerity, if not its value? These questions occupied Kafka beyond a personal level as well, as historical and literary-aesthetic questions, regarding the place of Jews in the social and cultural setting of German-speaking lands since their mid-nineteenth-century emancipation and regarding the literary, aesthetic, and moral value of German works by Jewish writers such as Karl Kraus (whose witty and biting satires, published in his personal journal *Die Fackel*, Kafka read keenly, even if with a pinch of disgust);⁹ or Else Lasker-Schüller (whose expressionist lyrics, purportedly marking a complete symbiosis of Germanness and Jewishness, he wholeheartedly despised);¹⁰ or the popular Viennese-Jewish author and playwright, Arthur Schnitzler, whose plays were regularly staged at the Prague city theater, and which Kafka never missed while yet judging them scornfully;¹¹ or his local Prague circle of Jewish writers, including Franz Werfel, Oskar Baum, and Max Brod, for whom he harbored sincere personal affection, though that did not always translate into literary approbation.

In fact, these questions (whether personal or literary) were for Kafka a particular (and particularly perverse) “case” of a much broader moral and philosophical problematic that he could not take his mind off of. Even while Kafka felt that his own life depended on his persistent literary productivity, and that without realizing his literary mission it would not be worth living, he never did stop contemplating the value of literature as such—not only that written by Jews attempting to integrate into modern culture, but also that written by “geniuses” the likes of Goethe, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky. Isn’t literature in and of itself, even at its best, only slight of hand or half-truths, he asked himself? Doesn’t language in and of itself, let alone in its aesthetic manipulation, distance one from the truth, and aren’t its charms merely deceitful tentacles mercilessly grasping at the writer, and aren’t the words in which he invests his energy truly his most dangerous enemies? At any moment they might turn those unsheathed swords, with which they overcome the challenge of self-expression, and direct them at the writer himself, stabbing his heart and turning the blade to ensure a painful death, as do the court emissaries at K.’s execution in the final chapter of *The Trial*.¹² These questions were, for Kafka, burning personal questions quite literally, upon which rested the fate of his writings (to be published or to be burned), and yet these were also philosophical problems of the highest order. We ought not lose sight of this fact, even as we narrow our discussion to Kafka’s remarks about the Jewish literatures that were produced (mostly) by his contemporaries.

NOTES

1. See: Reiner Stach, *Kafka: The Decisive Years*, trans. Shelley Laura Frisch (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2005).
2. Franz Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, ed. Willy Haas, trans. Tania and James Stern (New York: Schocken Books, 1953), 196.
3. Franz Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkinson (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 1991), 52.
4. Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, 236.
5. See: Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).
6. The scholarly study of Kafka's works from the Jewish and Zionist vantage points has been the focus of many books and articles lately. See the surveys of these in articles included in: Bettina von Jagow and Oliver Jahraus, eds., *Kafka-Handbuch: Leben, Werk, Wirkung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008). In particular, see: Andreas B. Kichler, "Kafka und das Judentum," in: *Ibid.*, 194–211. And: Mark H. Gelber, "Kafka und zionistische Deutungen," in: *Ibid.*, 293–303. Many new books and articles have been added to this particular branch of "Kafkology" after the publication of the aforementioned handbook.
7. Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 245.
8. See: Franz Kafka, *Letters to Felice*, ed. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born, trans. James Stern and Elisabeth Duckworth (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 315–16.
9. See Kafka's references to Kraus in his letters to Max Brod and Robert Klopstock. *Letters to Friends, Family and Editors*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 30, 81, 87–88, 94, 315.
10. In a letter to Felice, Kafka writes: "I cannot bear her poems. Their emptiness makes me feel nothing but boredom, and their contrived verbosity nothing but antipathy. Her prose I find just as tiresome and for the same reasons." See: *Letters to Felice*, 190–91, 93.
11. See: *Ibid.*, 193. As well as: Franz Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka, 1910–1913*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Joseph Kresh (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), 153–54.
12. See the last entry in the diaries: "More and more fearful as I write. It is understandable. Every word, twisted in the hands of the spirits—the twist of the hand is their characteristic gesture—becomes a spear turned against the speaker." *The Diaries of Franz Kafka, 1914–1923*, trans. Martin Greenberg (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 232. See also: *Letters to Milena*, 177.

Chapter One

A Jewish Encounter with Hinduism

ENCOUNTERING HINDUISM

My classroom building on the immense Banaras Hindu University campus reminded me of British Mandate era buildings in Jerusalem. It obviously had been built in the 1940s, or at least refurbished then. All the desks had inkwells.

Among the students earnestly taking notes were Buddhist monks from Thailand and Cambodia wearing orange robes; two Tibetans, one of whom looked like a Sherpa in his yak-wool vest; an Australian Christian dressed like a hippie trying to dress like an Indian, and several Indians dressed in modern clothing. Up front, wearing a *sherwani*, a traditional Indian long golden coat, was the professor of Hindu religion and philosophy who normally taught this course on Western religion. He was particularly diligent in his note taking.

Then came a question that highlighted both the vast gulf between Indian and Jew, and the commonalities between Indian and Jewish religion: “Do Jews still sacrifice animals?” Probably few Christians in America do not know that Jews stopped sacrificing animals nearly two thousand years ago. However, in India, the question made perfect sense. After all, in India, animal sacrifices only ended in the early twentieth century and they still occur in Nepal.

The question was emblematic of my stay in India—a place where Judaism does not register on the religious awareness of even the most educated, but where people’s intensely religious lives—full of household ritual, frequent prayers, hand washings, and elaborate food regulations—makes it in some ways much closer to Judaism than Christianity.

I spent a sabbatical year in India teaching in the graduate school of religion and philosophy at Banaras Hindu University in the city of Varanasi, where I had a Fulbright-Nehru fellowship, courtesy of the U.S. State Depart-

ment. I titled my project “A Needed Dialogue and Encounter of Hinduism and Judaism,” an encounter between two ancient religious traditions that have had relatively little interaction.

I was encouraged to go to India because of the positive response of my single chapter on Hinduism in my 2012 book, “Judaism and World Religions.” Yet, I was able to catalog those encounters—many consisting simply of medieval rabbis responding to reports of Indian religion in Arabic writings—in just one chapter in my book.¹

In Banaras, I taught an introduction to Judaism course as part of the Introduction to Western Religions course required of graduate students in the religion school. Even the course’s usual instructor had never heard of Talmud or Midrash. And he too was surprised to learn that Jews stopped bringing animal sacrifices long ago, in the first century. He assumed that the practice had not ended until Judaism’s nineteenth-century Reform movement as it had been by India’s nineteenth-century religious reformers.

Just as they knew little about Judaism, the most important thing I learned was that Jews should not trust any of the generalizations, stereotypes, or almost anything written in American popular literature on Hinduism, even the most basic things that come on a Google search are often incorrect. I recommend reading this book in conjunction with one of the many fine introductions to Hinduism, so that the reader has an anchor in firm understanding of Hinduism.²

Hinduism

India is a big place with 1.3 billion people. As of the 2001 census, 80 percent of Indians are Hindu; 13 percent Muslim (making India the country with the world’s third largest Muslim population), and the rest mostly divided between Christianity—a Western import—and the homegrown religions of Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism. However, the religion called Hinduism is really a collection of related religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions with common roots and practices but great differences that are recognized by individual practitioners.

Compare this phenomenon to someone who sees Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as essentially one religion. After all, the three monotheistic religions share the same theology of one God who created the world and rewards and punishes sinners; and they share many religious figures, such as Abraham and Moses.

In reality, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are at least three religions—and the closer you look at any one of them, the less monolithic it appears to be. All the more so in India—with its 122 major languages and more than fifteen hundred minor languages, representing myriad distinct ethnic groups. Almost any obscure Hindu sect has more members than there are Jews.

Hinduism is generally regarded as the world's oldest organized religion. It consists of “thousands of different religious groups that have evolved in India since 1500 BCE.”³

Hinduism is really a variety of religions held together in the twentieth century by politics and agreed upon commonalities. Common definitions of Hinduism claim that it is a “complex, organic, multileveled and sometimes internally inconsistent nature.”⁴ Alternately, Hinduism does not have a unified system of belief encoded in a declaration of faith, but it is an umbrella term comprising the plurality of religious phenomena of India. Hinduism differs from Judaism and other Western religions in that it does not have: a single founder, a specific theological system, a single concept of deity, a single holy text, or a single central religious authority.

The term “Hindu” itself originally referred to those from India. As a term for people of a specific religion, it probably does not go back before the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when it was used by people to differentiate themselves from followers of other traditions, especially the Muslims (Yavannas), in Kashmir and Bengal. The “ism” was added to “Hindu” only in the nineteenth century in the context of British colonialism and missionary activity. Hinduism has been variously defined as a religion, a religious tradition, a set of religious beliefs, and as a way of life. Hindu traditionalists prefer to call it *Sanatana Dharma* (the eternal or ancient *dharma*).

According to the Supreme Court of India: “Unlike other religions in the world, the Hindu religion does not claim any one Prophet, it does not worship any one God, it does not believe in any one philosophic concept, it does not follow any one act of religious rites or performances; in fact, it does not satisfy the traditional features of a religion or creed. It is a way of life and nothing more.”⁵ Hindu family law includes jurisdiction over panentheists, polytheists, monotheists and monists; those that use images and those that reject them.

Hinduism is too varied and vast to be defined in terms of a core belief shared by everyone. Rather it is like a banyan tree with a multiple root system creating a cluster of trees linked together under a single canopy unlike the monocentric/single trunk beech or oak. It is a web of numerous systems of belief and practice united by a common attitude of mind structuring the world in terms of a transcendent source that manifests itself in multiple forms. No other religion admits such polycentrism.

Banaras Hindu University

I lived in Varanasi, an ancient town with a continuous residence of the same people since the sixth century BCE and possibly continuous since the thirteenth century BCE. The town is also known as Kashi (its ancient name) and Banaras (its Hindu name). Banaras Hindu University, founded in 1916 by

Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, during the colonial period, with the financial aid of theosophist Annie Besant, is the oldest and largest residential university in Asia. The campus is twice the size of Central Park in New York and arranged as ornate buildings set back among hibiscus and jasmine flowers. Most of the campus is used for the fields of technology, agriculture, and medicine, so the size of the arts and sciences section that I had to transverse was limited.

Banaras Hindu University is, as its name implies, a religious college—as are, in their way, Seton Hall and my alma mater, Yeshiva University. Banaras, now called Varanasi, is in one of India’s holiest cities, on the banks of the sacred Ganges river, the city of a million residents that draws three million pilgrims each year—many with the belief that dying in the holy city, or being cremated on the shores of the Ganges, will prove auspicious. This is the city that you see in the pictures where thousands come out to bathe in the Ganges and everyone waits in line on the *ghats* (the staircases down to the river) in order to place votive lights in the dark river water.

To use an Israeli metaphor, it is like Bar Ilan University, a modern Orthodox institution located near Bnai Brak, an ultra-Orthodox center. There were plenty of ways in which Banaras reminded me of Yeshiva U. There were the pious students who kissed their sacred Sanskrit texts, like yeshiva students kissing their Bibles or Talmuds. Some went further and kissed their Sanskrit dictionaries, an extension of the realm of holiness seen in Jewish circles. The pious students also paused at the doorway to touch the floor—reminiscent of the YU students who would kiss the mezuzah on the door jamb.

With that in mind, I was particularly keen to find out how my classes on Judaism would resonate with the Indian students. I was thrilled to see them catch on to subtle points. When the students read Genesis, “they all said, ‘Look! Adam was originally a vegetarian.’” This led me to explain the similar reading of the text by the fifteenth century Jewish thinker Joseph Albo.

And the philosophy of Maimonides in his *Guide to the Perplexed* earned the high praise of being yogic. For them, yogic is not just exercise; rather it is attaining a level of consciousness through understanding the true nature of the self. One moves from false consciousness to regaining the truth through correcting your mind and your habits. Yoga for them is a process by which you elevate the human condition through philosophy, correct ethics, meditation, and also physical discipline.

The Indian students found that some of the most esoteric ideas of Judaism were the easiest for them to grasp. Theoretical kabbalistic discussions of whether God is separate from the world, whether the world is all God, and how God infuses the world are similar to the topics discussed in their standard fare courses in the scholastic Hindu metaphysics of *Vedanta*, Yoga, and Shaivism. The students generally spent much of their time studying how Hindu emanation schemes work.

There was a court case in India recently where the judge ruled that Hinduism is a way of life, not a religion—the same way as many Jews see themselves. Hinduism gives Jews a template for us, as Jewish, for self-understanding as opposed to using the Christian concept of religion. Some of the things that seem least Christian about Judaism make the most sense to Hindus.

My ethnographic discovery of Hinduism started already in New York when there was a meeting of Fulbright scholars in a restaurant. Those from the Midwest got there first and ordered food. When the Hindus and Jews arrived, we discussed whether fish is considered meat; for Jews it is not but for most Hindus it is. However, there were Bengali Hindus present for whom fish is not considered meat.

We also discussed the mushrooms on the pizza because many Brahmins do not eat mushrooms since they are a fungus, not a vegetable. This is similar to the Rabbinic tradition where mushrooms warrant a different blessing than vegetables since they are a fungus. In one religion, they are not eaten and in the other, they receive a different blessing, but both religions share a commonality of thinking in taxonomy and structural differences. The actual practice is different, but there is a certain common way of thinking, of always doing categorization and creating a rule for it.

While Banaras is a coeducational institution, unlike Yeshiva College, still men and women cannot touch. When there was a school performance, it was very much like a yeshiva day school play. One could profitably compare how to do dramatics in both faiths with the similar Orthodox Jewish and Hindu ban on unrelated males and females touching each other.

The lead male role in the play was given to a girl, so that she could touch and hug the heroine. A minor male role was performed by an actual male student, but the rest of the individual roles were women. The men served as a background dance troupe, acting out selected events in the narrative. And like at a day school, there was the awkward ending when the female students only received flowers and a shawl from the female dean and the male students from the male dean.

If the school was traditional, old-time Brahmin, there would have been no mixing allowed. If it was fully modern then it would not have been a question—that is likely the case at India's secular universities. Instead, they try to walk the same tightrope as their modern Orthodox counterparts.

I was comfortable with the way people felt compelled to tell me their religious affiliation and religious practice as part of their self-presentation. As soon as I arrived, a woman in the Fulbright office introduced herself as an orthodox Hindu, proceeding to compare her perception of the common Jewish and Hindu orthodox practices.

Many other people I encountered said they were observant Hindus or ritually observant Hindus, but not like those too-strict orthodox. Still others said they were traditional. I also encountered those who told me they were

sometimes observant. Many said they were more observant during festivals than non-festivals or more observant at home than away. I also met many who said they were unobservant, minimally observant, or focused on the modern philosophic meaning rather than ritual.

Yet, even coming from Orthodox Judaism, I was impressed with those Hindu professors who arose at five o'clock in the morning, bathed in the Ganges river, went to Temple, worshipped at home, studied sacred writings, and fed the poor all before my day started.

The biggest impact of my teaching in India was possibly cultural. They had never really thought of Judaism, of where it fits in. They only knew it through Christian or anti-Semitic eyes, through Shylock or *Mein Kampf*. "So, what do you think about Hitler?" turns out to be a common conversation opener without meaning any personal offense. They have no knowledge of the Jewish historical experience or the Eastern European aspects of World War II. Their World War II experience ran from Burma to Indochina.

For these future religious teachers and religious leaders studying at Banaras, the whole course of Jewish history and our self-conception as a people, the Holocaust, Israel—did not register. They tend to think of religion in the abstract as ritual and philosophy. The Jewish organizations have a great deal to gain in creating a teaching guide about Judaism and about Israel for the Indians. The biggest impact that my teaching could have on Judaism would be to encourage Jews to encounter Hinduism as explained in the next chapter.

WRITING ABOUT HINDUISM

This book asks the important question: How do I be true to my own faith and still speak about another religion in a way that rings true for both sides.

I write as a Jewish thinker who has begun to glimpse something of the richness and importance of the world beyond Jewish frameworks. In every age there are border crossers who bring back the fruits of their encounters to those who have not made the journey. I write as a way for presenting Hinduism to Jews, but hope that it will also be useful to Hindus and to all those interested in interreligious encounter.

This book will be an understanding of Hinduism from a Jewish point of view, and specifically my view based on Orthodox Jewish training and erudition. I looked at aspects of the Hindu religion with a Jewish understanding that is both academic and rabbinical. I cannot overcome my own observer status and that my comments are from my own perspective.

My journey introduced me to the wisdom of Hinduism and, in turn, I came back a better Jew able to use its wisdom to see my tradition in a new light. In some ways, to use a Hindu term, I was on my own *sadhana*, a spiritual discipline for a goal, in this case, understanding and insight.

Judaism assumes that there is wisdom among the gentiles, in that we have no trouble using the wisdom of Christian thinkers such as Aquinas, Kierkegaard, Barth, or Tillich to understand Judaism. The same should apply to the writings of Ramanuja, Shankara, and Vivekananda. Jews can use the wisdom of the scholasticism of *Nyaya*, or the legal theory of *Mimamsa* the same way we use Western logic and jurisprudence. Most importantly, and as a primary thrust, the goal is to recognize that there is wisdom among the nations and Indian philosophy is deep and enriching for Judaism, no less than Western philosophy. Hindu theological reasoning is just as important as Christian theology.

Comparison

This book is influenced by the current approach of comparative theology, even if not following its rigorous rules. One starts with the teachings of one's own tradition and with a desire for having one's own faith confront others with different commitments. The field of comparative theology does not think about the general meaning of religious diversity. Instead they engage specific texts, motifs and claims. It draws on resources of more than one tradition and is willing to be changed from what it learns from other traditions.⁶

If comparisons and contrasts with another faith tradition are to be done properly then they have to be done in conversation with the practice and expertise of the other faith including their own self-understanding. What one says about another religion needs to be understood by the believers in the other traditions. An exercise in comparative theology must be accountable to members of the faith for the accuracy and theological relevance of what they write. The comparisons are only as good as their theological value. Many of them are a homology, a similarity based on a similar function in a system.

The study of other religions helps our intellectual coming to God. This is an activity of faith seeking understanding and confronting the world in which we live. This encounter of two religions pushes me to new possibilities of thinking about Judaism. Beyond that, observing the diversity of human religious life, similar and different from one's own, teaches one about the broader issues of religious life. Perhaps, in the culmination, God transforms the self; in seeking wisdom, we see ourselves anew.

When appropriate, I invite the reader, in this book, to reconsider the differences between the faiths by discussion of an overlooked part of the Jewish religion, to consider a neglected commonality. Knowing the best in other religions creates a desire to emulate and learn from the higher aspirations. The wisdom can push me to think about the possible, even if usually ignored.

This book will make the most sense to a reader who thinks about Judaism in textual and philosophic terms. If one's Judaism consists of the textual

richness of the Talmud and Midrash, *Zohar* and Cordovero, Saadiah and Maimonides, and Heschel and Solovetichik then one will be most comfortable with the conceptual framework of the book, especially if one can follow the debates on immanence and transcendence or rationalism and mysticism in Judaism.

Think of Judaism as a full pantry of spices and ingredients. We can produce a Judaism that resonates with Hindu ideas and doctrines by selecting certain ingredients of Judaism and combining them in atypical proportions to produce a similar taste to Hinduism, and *visa versa* from Hinduism to Judaism. In this case, I choose to use aspects of the philosophic and mystical elements of Judaism to illuminate similarities between Judaism and Hinduism.

Understanding emerges only by means of particular texts, doctrines, liturgical practices, and moral precepts. This process demands a sense of humility that Judaism endorses in principle as an openness to the wisdom of others. The investigation needs to note both differences and similarities between Judaism and other religions. Only in this way, can there be a mutual understanding, full of challenge, correction, and enrichment, for both religions.

The broadening of perspective here, in this book, is that God can work in other traditions, languages, and religions. We are not compelled to affirm other traditions, but neither does faith require us to think that what we already have is all that we can know. The encounter for intelligent faith and diversity may be providential.

We cannot learn about another tradition from within our own texts and community. We actually have to go out of our own texts and comfort zone. We cannot learn about another tradition from within our own—we actually have to study the other faith. Yet, we need to come to the table with the breadth and depth of our conviction and grounding in a given religious tradition.

When we look at another religion, we have to understand that we are not all the same and that we have to respect differences. The quest for common features does not mean that all religions are the same; rather, differences will persist and may emerge in a sharper and more interesting way. Yet, at the same time, we are not entirely different from each other and share many commonalities. In addition, even when we look at the commonalities, we have to understand that nothing is completely identical, so we keep differences, large and small, in mind. But nothing is entirely dissimilar so there is implicit comparison on many small and major details. One must bear in mind that one should not compare their myth to your law, or their mysticism to your rationalism. Comparison needs to be comparing the same in both religions, myth to myth, law to law, and mysticism to mysticism.

We engage in interreligious encounter to clear up misconceptions on both sides, but also to show our sincere and committed endeavor to work as a religious person with others. To sanctify God's name we present ourselves to a wider world in a dignified and respectful manner. Interfaith encounter

simultaneously cultivates better religious self-understanding and aids in the bettering of relationships with other faiths.

Hospitality, a term stressed by the Jewish thinker Emmanuel Levinas, is openness to new perspectives through leaving one's safe precinct. An important element in approaching other faiths is the need to go out of one's comfort zone. One actually needs to meet someone of another faith, placing oneself in a situation where one may be confronting new perspectives. One needs to see, meet, talk, and enter the realm of the other. In an age of globalization, people now have increasing contact with other faiths through business and immigration.

What is the starting point for approaching other religions? When looking at another religion we should not start with an assumption that we are opposites or unable to communicate, in a zero-sum duality like Elijah's choice on Mount Carmel. We should not assume irreducible differences, rather potential commonality. The preferred method is to let us first know each other and see the commonalities and then, and only then, deal with irreconcilable differences. Even then, differences can be used to create binary opposition or drive a wedge, or they can be seen as two alternative paths to the same goal.

Many forms of looking at another religion seek to fit religions into universal patterns. My approach does not assume commonality and even presumptively assumes that they have little in common. I generally assume that Judaism, as are most religions, is a system, in which each works by its own rules. So even when I see a commonality between two religions, I understand the common practice as belonging to two different structures. I can recognize similar practices to my own Judaism and other practices that are quite different.

When I attempt to explain Hinduism in Jewish terms, I look at it with Jewish eyes and ask what they mean to a Jewish observer. I assume that my readers are not experts in Indian thought or Hinduism, nor am I an expert on Hinduism. I do not have the philological skills to handle the several required languages of Hinduism. Besides, Hinduism is too diverse and complex to contain in any one presentation. Everything was done in translation and therefore does not follow the rules of a rigorous comparative theology. Do not consider this book as the last word on anything; continue the encounter.

I ask my readers to consider opening themselves up to a new way of looking at religion, new possibilities of thought.

Method

I lived in Banares, an Orthodox city of Temples, educated Brahmins in the university, and ritual practitioners. I also spent time in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in the south of India and in the northern Indian holy cities of Haridwar and Rishikesh in Uttarakhand, as well as observing Nepalese Hin-

duism in Katmandu. In addition, I visited many other cities and regions for shorter periods of time including Delhi, Mumbai, Kerala, and Jaipur.

English was the official language of instruction and academic writing in India and Nepal. I was studying in a major Indian university religion department that taught what they considered Orthodox Hindu thought to a classroom of Hindus. I had the chance to speak to many students in and out of the classroom. They naturally offered their own religious opinions contrasting their Hindu beliefs to the Judaism that I was teaching.

This book focuses on the 96 percent of Hindu practitioners who are members of some version of Shaivism or Vaishnavism, who follow the Agamic and Puranic practices. Knowledge of Hinduism was everywhere. Books and picture guides of how to observe Hindu *dharma* properly were available in almost every bookstore, as well as explanations of *dharma* in newspapers columns, dramatic performances and posters on the walls of the temple. I also came to know law and lore through visiting people to see their family practice. Just as a traditional Jew knew the ritual order from family practice, possessing rudimentary prayer book knowledge without Talmudic mastery, so too Hindus know their own practices even if they cannot read the Sanskrit texts.

In addition, I spoke to temple priests, ritual priests for burning the dead, storekeepers, rickshaw drivers, local Sanskrit scholars, and wandering holy men (*sadhus*). I let taxi drivers take me to where they personally worshipped, I spoke to pilgrims outside temples and let fellow faculty tell me about their own observances. Concerning rituals, I spoke to both middle-class practitioners as well as pujari (priests performing the ritual) and corroborated their views with popular Hindu books.

There is no reason to be suspicious of their answers, especially since I subsequently found the same answers in up-to-date academic anthropological studies of contemporary Hindu practices.

This book avoids the popular orientalist projection that Indian religion has two separate religions, a narrow philosophic religion and a popular religion of the masses. Not only do I have theoretical objections to such an approach, but my many encounters show that many ordinary people know and reflect upon the ordinary tenets of their faith while the intellectual elite frequently take part in popular practice. I especially integrate the mid-brow worship of local festivals, syncretic gurus, such as Sai Baba, and worship of the *pipal* tree as vital elements of Hinduism.

As a corollary, this book does not focus on the philosophic religion of the sophisticated *advaitan* thinkers of some select ashrams to the exclusion of the Hinduism of the Temple, suburban family, market, and university.

In my interpretations, I use my own experience and approach to Judaism as the basis for my observations. For example, I had to choose the exemplar religious person who is engaged in the study of sacred Hindu writings. Most

photographs of India take pictures of the colorful *sadhus*, sitting outside, chanting from a colorful paper chapbook, rather than the trained *pandit* with his computer, shelves of books, piles of notes, and power-point lecture plans, who is training the next generation.

Looking at the situation with my specific Jewish eyes I prefer to typify Jewish learning by the Yeshiva student and congregation, rather than the colorful person sitting by the Western Wall with a book open before him. I am skeptical of the educational level and motivation for the person sitting and begging by the Western Wall. So too, I prefer as a reliable source of Hinduism the trained scholar and his students, not the semi-literate *sadhu*. (I did however speak with many *sadhus* and ascertained that many of those posing for tourists did not possess a depth of knowledge, but rather were living their ascetic lives due to piety or lack of financial resources.)

In many of my other decisions, I trusted my Jewish eyes favoring the educated and middle-class family over the colorful. I am a theologian not an ethnographer. I think about religion textually and theologically not ethnographically. This encounter was mediated by books. Yet, pizza, pilgrims, and school plays let me make many ethnographic observations as I read my books.

The Hinduism that I predominantly encountered in the area in which I lived was *Mimamsa* Hinduism, the Hinduism of ritual observance. My neighbors went to Temple, prayed daily, and kept the festivals, dietary laws, and purity laws. There, observant Hindus are not vestiges of ancient religion, rather the contemporary formulations of an ancient faith, similar to my own observance of Judaism. I am not attempting to be a critical historian of Vedic texts or discuss ancient Vedic religion. I am looking at classic Hindu texts as understood in contemporary teaching.

In contrast to this ritual emphasis, most Western theological reflection on Hinduism, from the eighteenth century through the early twentieth century, was done by Christian missionaries who oscillated between negative assessments of Hinduism as superstition or as lacking Christian salvation. In addition, they looked in Hinduism to seek the Indian version of the Christian concepts of incarnation, grace, trinity, and salvation, not ritual.

Many Western books still confuse *Advaita* with all of Hinduism, and thereby label Hinduism as mysticism, monism, or as only a transcendental philosophy. I focus on the overwhelming majority of Hindus who are Shai-vite and Vaishnava theists serving a theistic God in love and duty. I am looking at religious law, ritual, intention, study, dietary rules, and the integration of observance and philosophy, traditional Jewish topics.

The goal is to not make Hinduism look strange and primitive. Instead the goal is to help defend against those making it seem strange, so too Judaism should not make itself strange to Hinduism and should defend against those making Judaism strange to the dharmic religions.

BETWEEN HINDUISM AND JUDAISM

A few words about Hinduism and monotheism. Judaism takes great pride in not worshipping idols. It is right there at the beginning of the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness, of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Exod. 20:3–5). And the psalms are full of mockery. “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not.” (Psalms 115:4–8).

It is not a surprise, then, that Jews are discomfited by Hindu religion, with its devotional statues and images dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, and myriads of other less prominent deities.

If you ask a Hindu about the image of a deity, whether in their home or in a temple, they might say the image is just the way to direct your heart or they may say that the divine needs to be manifest for human’s to worship. In contemporary India, everyone understands these are representations. Yet at the same time, they are embodiments given a presence of the living God, even the natural realm is divine.

Western views of Indian religion are not helped by the choices made by the graphic designers, who tend to put images of ancient dancing gods on the covers of books about Hinduism. Those are generally decorations on the outside of buildings, or masks used in drama performances rather than the actual ones used in worship. Imagine if we took pictures of lions on the outsides of the Torah ark, pictures of cherubs, or zodiacs from old synagogues, and put them on the cover of a book about Judaism as a representation of the Jewish deity.

However, Hindus see these questions about monotheism and idolatry as incredibly judgmental and provincial, because they start the conversation by judging Indian religion by Western conceptions. Hindus want Westerners to recognize how they focus on a personal God; or how they pray, seek grace or repent before God. They resent how Western textbooks do not present them as concerned with charity, good deeds, helping one another, and family life, and how much they’re doing all that to help gain a theistic God’s merit or love.

This book does not seek to address how Hinduism relates to the Rabbinic category of *avodah zarah* (foreign worship). The goal is to understand the wisdom and diversity of Hinduism through Jewish eyes.⁷ This book will emphasize this diversity of Hinduism and the separate denominations.

Biblical Comparison

How would you explain the diversity in Western biblical terms? Here is a little thought experiment. This is not intended to make fun of the Bible or Hinduism. Nor is its goal to subject Hinduism to the Bible. This is an attempt to explain diversity in a Western context, moving beyond Western exclusivity and divisions between believer/pagan. These are hypothetical and are not my beliefs or historically true.

How would Hinduism react to biblical stories? When Jeroboam set up his golden calves in Beth El and Dan, the Bible condemned it as unfaithfulness to the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12). However, what if this was the Indian subcontinent?

The response to Jeroboam would have been “It’s a great idea! Maybe we should have a separate temple every day’s journey through the country.” More temples are a blessing and private altars make worship even more convenient. The twentieth-century Indian author, Radhakrishnan, wrote that India is not a tiny country like the biblical land so it needs shrines everywhere so that the people can get to them.

Alternatively, consider the prohibitions in Deuteronomy and Kings about pillars, trees, minor deities, astral deities, and spirits. Imagine if the response had been to not worry about them too much. The Indian reaction throughout history would either be acceptance of worshiping using physical forms or at least tolerance, in that, they consider that the common people will eventually learn to move beyond them slowly, very slowly. Golden calves, pillars, and trees are fine forms of worship for most people. Even the worship of spirits and serpents should be either accepted or tolerated. (Maimonides takes a similar approach in his *Guide of the Perplexed* toward tolerating sacrifices in the Bible.)

King Hezekiah demolished the bronze serpent that Moses had created, because people had been burning incense to it right up until that time. In India, these practices would have endured and would likely still be done today.

Elijah

Elijah and the priests of Baal staged a showdown between two competing religions of whose sacrifice will be consumed. Imagine if Elijah and the priests of Baal had said, “There’s only one God over everything. Why are we fighting?” So let us put away differences and merge all the cults of the high god Baal into the biblical cult. We will also combine our scripture and even produce various versions of the scriptures with different narratives based on different denominations. We will all affirm the biblical universalism of Malachi 1:11 “My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be

brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord Almighty.” It is all the same God despite different cults, nations, and names.

In this alternate scenario, all of the various Aramaean nations, together with Moab, Ammon, and the Philistines, become one religion by joining with the biblical religion. The new combined religion will give some deference to Jerusalem but each member will keep its own cultic practices. We would have also included in this new unity the Hittites, whose language is close to Hebrew. Yes, they have many gods and a completely different form of worship than the Aramaean religions; in fact, the Hittites have a thousand gods. Yet, over time, they will become one with the biblical perspective.

Ezra and Alexander the Great

In this hypothetical counter-history, Ezra never asked anyone to put away foreign wives and never sought to limit foreign worship practices. Imagine, if he saw strength through including many different people and diverse practices in the Jerusalem cult. When Ezra read the Torah in public, he sought to bring it to every nation that he could. He only asked each group to accept it as best as their culture could, allowing them to create alternate versions. He acknowledged that only the Jerusalem priests truly kept everything properly, but he relaxed the rules for everyone else.

In addition, Second Temple Judaism had priests, royalty, apocalyptic visionaries, Qumran, Sadducees, Nazirite ascetics and proto-rabbinic scribes. Historically only the writings of the scribes become the cultural resource for future Jews. However, what if all these competing groups had survived? Further, consider if the Mishnah, written from a Jerusalem point of view, was seen as authoritative. However, many parts in this harmonious empire belonging to other Second Temple groups felt no need to study or follow it in practice.

To consider later centuries, imagine that even when Judaism and Christianity divided, it still did not matter. Then imagine that Christianity never became the religion of the Roman Empire and just another offshoot of this complex Jerusalem religion.

Now imagine that between the seventh and seventeenth centuries all these Near East and Mediterranean groups started converging even more and developing a common identity. Yet, the Jerusalem group with its scribes and priests keep up a purity of doctrines.

Finally, imagine that this region from Greece to Iraq gains liberation as a single country in the middle of the twentieth century, with a government that is going out of its way to downplay differences and claim everyone is biblical. For many reasons, they may have started creating ideologies of a single

identity already in the thirteenth century and solidified in the seventeenth century, but now this unity was written into textbooks and law.

Hinduism came to be in a similar fashion to my hypothetical biblical story. But Judaism did not go that way. From Jeroboam to Mishnah and beyond, Judaism always chose the particularistic and exclusivist direction. Judaism was always in theory aniconic, iconoclastic, and opposed to popular cults.

In reality, the ancient Judiasms of Elephantine in Egypt, Qumran in the desert, or Sadducees in Jerusalem did not continue as separate denominations in the contemporary era of Judaism. Finally, Judaism also maintained a tight sense of unity of its teachings compared to Hinduism. In Judaism, the various traditions of Jewish philosophy, Kabbalah, and law did not become completely diverse paths.

Abraham

Let me tell one more story, the famous story of Abraham shattering the idols of his father Terach (Gen. 11:26). All three Abrahamic faiths tell this story based on Second Temple period sources. Here is a truncated Jewish version.

Abraham, as a lad, came to the realization that there is one eternal God in the heaven and the earth greater than any earthly force. Abraham's father Terach was an idol maker. Once, Terach had to leave his shop and left Abraham to mind the shop in his place. A person would come and wish to buy an idol. Abraham asked him: How old are you? He would reply: I am sixty years old. Abraham would say: Woe to that man who is sixty years old and wishes to bow to something that is one day old! The person would be embarrassed and go away.

One time a certain woman came along carrying a dish of fine flour. She said to him: Come and offer this to them. He went and took a rod and broke all the statues, and placed the rod in the hand of the largest one of them. When his father returned, he said to him: Who did this to them? Abraham said, I cannot lie to you. A certain woman came carrying a dish of fine flour, and said to me: Go offer this to them. I offered it to them: this one said "I will eat first"; and that one said, "I will eat first." The largest among them got up, took the rod, and broke the others. His father answered him: Why are you making a fool out of me! Do these idols know anything! Abraham replied: Let your ears hear what your mouth says!

My addenda to understand Hinduism:

Terach: Abraham! Are you a moron? The Hindu statues are used to bring the infinite Divine to mind. We need a representation in our minds. We can only show true devotion to a human image.

Abraham: But there is only one immaterial God.

Terach: But we live in a sensory material world. We need physical representation to worship. That is why God will give in the Torah a command to construct a Tabernacle. God will also give physical commandments in order to serve with physicality. So here, we also have physical statues.

Abraham: But you think they are actually alive!

Terach: Give me a break. They are wood and clay. Only when they are brought to the Temple and consecrated in a special ceremony do they become divine. Now they are still in the workshop. They are not robots with moving parts. Really, Abraham, have you ever seen an idol or a golden calf move? Your straw man arguments do not work. Do the Cherubim move in the Tabernacle?

Abraham: Yes, they do. Cherubim in the Tabernacle turn toward each other and away from each other (BT *Bava Batra* 99a).

Terach: Boy you are really anthropomorphic. In order not to take religion anthropomorphically you better read Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed* or maybe Shankara's commentary on the *Brahma Sutra* or even the *Lakshmi Tantra*.

Abraham: But what about the thousands of plaster and clay little idols that Hindus make for home shrines and for stores? Aren't people worshiping those?

Terach: They serve as a reminder of the god and help focus on a specific aspect. They are changed regularly. The ones they use for festivals are even dissolved in the river when they are finished using them to show that the image has no intrinsic value. The little ones they leave out in the rain under trees to show that they have no holiness after they are used. You treat many religious objects like *tefillin* in a more intrinsic manner.

Abraham: But she brought them food to eat. Can they eat?

Terach: She said offer it to them. Tabernacle sacrifices are also offerings but God does not come down and eat it. You were the one who says she thought they actually ate. She just said bring them an offering. You seem to treat your ritual as pure and assume that others are naïve. If you visit a foreign culture, try to understand them in a charitable way and assume that the people are on the same level of sophistication as you.

Abraham: But I discovered the God of heaven and earth and everyone else is primitive. I get to correct them. I get to show my elders the right way.

Terach: You are not alone in discovering an immaterial God. The Greek philosophers since Xenophanes (6th century BCE) already had this conception of God. In India, the Upanishads already had a singular immaterial divine *Brahman* behind everything. But you don't see them going around breaking things. I cannot wait until you are out of adolescence. Remember Abraham, if God ever says to you to offer your son on a mountain, please think about what the word offering may mean.

Maimonides and Hinduism

Let us now try this in the other direction. What parts of Judaism are most Hindu? Let us look at Maimonides classic work *Mishnah Torah*, which opens with the following:

“The Foundation of Foundations and the Pillar of all Wisdom is to know that there is a First Cause (Primordial Being) and that He brought about all that is. And all that exists, of heaven and earth and what is between, exist only on the account of the Truth of His Being” (Yesodei HaTorah 1:1). Later Maimonides writes “What is the way to love and fear God? Whenever one contemplates the great wonders of God's works and creations, and one sees that they are a product of a wisdom that has no bounds or limits, one will immediately love, laud and glorify [God] with an immense passion to know the Great Name.” (Yesodei HaTorah 2:2).

Maimonides true path of worship advocates that the individual self should attain a contemplative knowledge of the divine, working to overcome materiality through knowledge. Maimonides, the philosophic theist, advocates philosophic contemplation, love of God, and knowledge of His name. How would this be read in Hinduism? For the Hindu, this is the core of religion. Many Hindu works teach the truth that God alone exists. Nothing is real as God is real. God alone is Being. The Hindu reader of Maimonides would say this is equivalent to the study of the many Hindu classics of how there is one divine reality, how divine immanence works, how to engage in *bhakti*, and the impermanence of the world around us.

For Judaism to be closer to Hinduism, it would need to have study halls where God, and His absolute Being and his truth is the full time course of study. To approximate the Hindu approaches to religion, the Jewish study hall would consist of studying the statements about God and human perfection as found in the texts of Midrash, Saadya, Bahye, Maimonides, and Gersonides combined with the study of *Zohar*, Cordovero, Musar, and Hasidut.

However, most modern Jews do not focus on the indwelling of divinity, nor do most see wonder or awaken love of God in their lives. In actual contemporary Judaism, synagogue life, *halakhah*, tikkun olam, and community building has replaced any medieval contemplative approach. Furthermore, Judaism does not have serious traditions of breath training, physical fitness, or mastery of the body as part of this contemplation. Nor does Judaism, at this contemporary point, take kindly to traditions of celibacy, seclusion, or leaving society to be a holy man.

To be fair to Judaism and not privilege Hinduism, before I proceed with the rest of the book, I must state the clear and immense differences between Hinduism and Judaism.

In the Jewish narrative, there is a covenant between God, who actively seeks out to a specific people, the Jews. God calls to Abraham who answers the call. In turn, Moses accepts God's call to lead the people and then the entire Jewish people pledge allegiance to God's will at a revelation at Sinai. A specific act of God took the Jewish people out from Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, showing chosen peoplehood, miracles, divine providence, and a special intimacy between God and His people. He brought them to the holy land and had them build a Temple for Him . . . Jewish liturgy affirms this theology of God, Torah, and Israel daily, on the Sabbath, and annually at the Passover Seder. Judaism affirms human responsibility for building society and sees human action as crucial. Judaism has a strong contractual character even though it transcends strict legal contract, in that, God dignifies human life and offers a personal relationship with God.

These aspects characterize Judaism in contrast to Hinduism. I could write an entire volume about these differences, but then it would be a very different book.

PRIOR ENCOUNTERS

Israelite trade with India dates back to biblical times, most notably King Solomon's imports from Tamil Nadu of ivory (1 Kings 10:22), while Song of Songs delights in invoking Indian fragrances of nard and saffron (4:14).

The Middle Ages and Early Modern Period

During the Middle Ages Jews knew about various aspects of Indian religions through the Arabic and Persian mediators. The Muslim scholar Al-Biruni (c. 973–1048) translated a number of Sanskrit works into Arabic—including selections from Patanjali's *Yogasutras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*—as part of his encyclopedic treatise on India.

The crucial point of these translations is the fact that Al-Biruni renders the Sanskrit gods (*deva*) with the Arabic terms for angels (*mala'ikah*) or

spiritual beings (*ruhaniyyat*), a theological shift aiding in their acceptance. Christian works of the colonial and modern periods translated the word *deva* as gods, so as to imply a polytheism, the Judeo-Arabic world knew the varieties of Indian belief as the one God of the Upanishads with the myriad *devas* as mere intermediaries. In addition, most medieval Muslim theologians expanded People of the Book to include Hinduism, allowing for a comparison in scripture.

The following is a brief summary of prior encounters from the Middle Ages until the twentieth century. In my prior book *Judaism and World Religions*, I give a full annotated discussion of these prior texts, here I will briefly mention a few highlights.

Saadia Gaon (d. 942), leader of Babylonian Jewry, correctly presents several Hindu theological positions in his work. Notably, he seems to have an understanding of actual practices of the Indian subcontinent. He mentions the Brahmins and Hindu ritual practices. He mentions that their doctrine of theism as presented in the *Nyaya* school (see below on *Nyaya*) and he criticizes them for lacking prophecy. Saadia's works reflect the theologically complex world of cosmopolitan humanistic Baghdad where interfaith meetings brought together Asian religions with Middle Eastern faiths.⁸

The most popular medieval work of this genre of translations was Kalilah wa-Dimnah, which was based on Indian fables contained in the *Panchatantra* (circa 300 CE). These are stories of the young prince turning to the ascetic for guidance. According to Abraham ibn Ezra, a Jew had translated it directly from Sanskrit into Arabic.

Yehudah Halevi, author of the eleventh century defense of Judaism book known as the *Kuzari*, chooses Indian culture as an example of something that we only know by reliable witnesses due to India's remoteness, but also because of the great mysterious wisdom that was traditionally attributed to the Indian sages. Casually he mentions that Indian culture is "hundreds of thousands of years old" and that they have "idols, talismans, and witchcraft." Elsewhere Halevi views the Indians as idolatrous pagans and a "dissolute, unreliable people," lacking any credibility.⁹

Treating India as the land of ancient wisdom, Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera, in his work, *Ethical Epistle*, written in the thirteenth century, brings a story about an old man who suddenly appears out of nowhere. When asked about his origins, he answers: "I am from the land of India, from the seed of ancient sages. All my ancestors had ancient beliefs, but only I am left, a prophet of wisdom, an old man of cunning."¹⁰

There is an entire range of early fourteenth-century Spanish thinkers that followed the thought of Abraham ibn Ezra, who explains the religions of India as a form of magic. None of these authors are famous and influential; however, the approach has echoed in many citations and paraphrases in later literature. For example, Rabbi Yosef Tov Elam (fourteenth-century Spain)

comments that: “the way of the wise men of India is to make mental forms at specific times to bring down the power of the stars” but he recoils by writing: “I know a little to teach and not to do, because it is truly idolatry.”¹¹ A similar statement is found in the writings of his contemporary, Menachem Tamar, who claims “I met a Jew from India who told me that these things exist there. They make images at specific times and the form speaks.”¹²

Skipping ahead to the age of exploration, Amsterdam rabbi and widely read scholar Menashe ben Israel (1604–1657) was a universalist concerning religions, finding a common core behind diverse practices. He read the accounts by Pedro Teixeira, a Portuguese Christian, who visited India and wrote a book in 1610 expressing only disdain for the religious practices he observed, calling them “absurdities,” “follies and superstitions,” and “diabolical ceremonies.” In contrast, Menashe saw commonalities with Judaism. Menashe reads Teixeira and records the same practices with approval because, for him, they attest to an underlying universal doctrine.

Menashe created the widespread kabbalistic myth that Asian religions were gifts given by Abraham to his concubines. The book of Jubilees and the *Zohar* record that Abraham gave magical practices to his children who headed East, in the original to Arabia or Persia. In his version, cited by many twentieth century popular works such as Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (d. 1983) the journey was to India and the gifts was meditative practices and other aspects of Asian religions. Menashe finds common doctrines with Eastern religions showing how Jews and Hindus share belief in transmigration; he also finds Hindu views compassionate at their core.

David d’Beth Hillel (mid-nineteenth century), a member of the group of Lithuanian expatriates who came to live in the land of Israel under the inspiration of the Gaon of Vilna, undertook a journey eastward through Afghanistan to India. Once in India, he stayed long enough to learn about the local religions, He concludes that the Hindus had one God at the time of Adam based on the Hindu literature and from there digressed into having lower deities under a supreme God.

Another wandering Lithuanian Jew whose family also moved to Israel, Yaakov Saphir (1822–1885), was given a Middle Eastern education including fluency in Arabic and had undertaken a journey eastward. Saphir shared many views of the Christian missionaries about Indian religion as “idolatry in every house . . . carved from stone, or wood, or metal standing on the wall or on the table and a lamp burning continuously before them. Every morning before any activity or eating they place a food offering.”¹³

Positive Encounter in the Modern Era

Moses Mendelssohn argued over two centuries ago that Hindus were not polytheists but monotheists who worship God through a misunderstood sys-

tem of symbols to express divine providence. Mendelssohn argued that images of the divine in Hinduism are symbolic the same way the rabbinic stories of the cherubim embracing are symbolic. Symbolism is part of a healthy human understanding of God. An outsider would misconstrue the story of the cherubs as literal, so too Westerners misconstrue the symbolic nature of Hinduism.

Mendelssohn thought the Bible only forbids imagery to Jews following Nahmanides and he extended the tosafist idea of *shituf* to Hinduism. Modern Jews were actually much better readers of Hindu symbolism than their Protestant contemporaries were. The latter used Hinduism to attack Catholicism, ritual, and representation. Jews, such as Mendelssohn, who were in favor of ritual had little to gain by attacking Hindu ritual.¹⁴

Maurice Fluegel (c. 1831–1911) was an Orthodox rabbi in Baltimore who gave up the rabbinate in order to pursue scholarly interests in comparing *Vedanta* and Kabbalah. He treated both as a form of perennialism, where all religions trace their origins to common, ancient roots. His work, *The Philosophy of Qabbala and Vedanta*, remains a late nineteenth-century curiosity. He compares the Vedic *Brahman* to the *Zohar*'s Infinite, Unknowable *Eyn Sof*. Fluegel still acknowledges the traditional Jewish view that the myriad *devas* are angels.

In the twentieth century, Ezriel Guenzig (c. 1868–1931), head of the Mizrahi Tahkemoni School in Antwerp and editor of the journal *Ha-Eshkol*, was a conduit of Western and academic knowledge to his Hebrew-reading rabbinic audience. In 1900, he wrote an appreciation of the recently published works belonging to the series *Sacred Books of the East* edited under the direction of Max Muller. He compares the Hindu positively to Judaism, noting the similarities of the two religious worldviews Kabbalah and Hinduism, especially emanation, nirvana, *eynsof*, *sefirot*, and theories of the soul. Gruenzig's approach consists of focusing on the philosophic works and the ancient scripture to formulate a Hindu monotheism as part of a larger perennialist vision.

Many modern Jewish thinkers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as Rabbis Kaufman Koehler, Leo Baeck and Abba Hillel Silver castigated Asian religions as passive, otherworldly, nihilistic, and not having a sufficient ethical system.

Azriel Carlebach (d. 1955) was the editor of *Ma'ariv*, one of Israel's leading daily newspapers, and wrote "India: Account of a Voyage." Carlebach's description of India was, for decades, the only Israeli account and shaped their image of India. Carlebach had been ordained as a rabbi in his youth by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, hence his contribution is that he applied his rabbinical knowledge and used biblical and rabbinic terms to refer to parallel institutions and rituals in the Hindu religious tradition. He translat-

ed Hindu temples and priests using the biblical words temples (mikdashim) and its priests.

Nathan Katz, a professor of Indian religions who returned to Jewish observance offers a cultural bridge between Judaism and Indian faiths, and has made himself the hub of Indo-Judaic studies. Katz's approach is mainly ethnographic, yet he does offer the following reflections:

When the swami speaks of G-d as the Light, beyond all form and distinctions, the initial understanding is put into question. And the more one delves into the philosophies underlying Hindu practice, the more the initial level is reduced to a comic book version of a profound and serious theology. . . . I knew beyond any doubt that Hinduism teaches a way of being in the world that is consonant with the Biblical principle that we humans are all created b'tselem Elokim, in the image of G-d. Whatever we may think of her more mundane religious practices, it cannot be denied that Hinduism creates a cultured human whose actions honor both humans and our Creator.¹⁵

Katz calls us to begin the discussion in earnest and to realize that our first perceptions are not necessary accurate.

Meditation

Jewish returnees from Indian ashrams, who brought with them the influence of Eastern forms of yoga and meditation, generated a new series of halakhic questions. A permissive answer came from Rabbi Hayyim David Halevi (b. 1924), former Sefardi Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, who wrote that: "The initiation ceremony of Transcendental Meditation, and similarly the mantra given to the meditator, has absolute colorings of idolatry, forbidden when used for a forbidden purpose. The technique of Transcendental Meditation, however, by itself is not forbidden."¹⁶ Halevi distinguishes the techniques of meditation from the religious aspects, the realm of ritual or allegiance to a guru.

It is interesting to note that Rabbi Halevi's practical response produced a theoretical statement on the difference between the two faiths as being the difference between Hinduism that "encourages a person to empty his mind from continuous daily thoughts . . . focus on a specific mantra . . . to attain emptiness. But Judaism attains that by filling him with holy feelings of the Divine existence." For Halevi, "The technique of Transcendental Meditation, however, by itself is not forbidden, if a person does it without the initiation ceremony, and without the guidance of those teachers [gurus]."¹⁷

Hindu-Jewish Summit

A major leap was made on February 5–6, 2007, at the first Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit that took place in Delhi consisting of a delegation of the chief rabbinate of Israel with major religious leaders of the Hindu *dharma*.

Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger said although interreligious dialogue has increased recently, the Hindu-Jewish declaration is a significant move, which highlights the necessity of expanding interfaith community to eastern traditions. This meeting led to a “Declaration of Mutual Understanding and Cooperation from the First Jewish–Hindu Leadership Summit.”¹⁸

The document was remarkable as an Orthodox Jewish acknowledgment that Hinduism accepts one Supreme Being, and that there exists commonality between Jewish and Hindu revelation and ethics. In fact, during the first Hindu-Jewish summit meeting, the Israeli chief rabbi with a full rabbinical delegation visited the Delhi Akshardham Temple complex.

A second Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit took place in Jerusalem on February 17–20, 2008. In this meeting, the leaders went further in their declarations and considered Hinduism as a shared “Creator and Guide of the Cosmos.”

The participants reaffirmed their commitment to deepening this bilateral relationship predicated on the recognition of one Supreme Being, Creator and Guide of the Cosmos; shared values; and similar historical experiences. “It is recognized that the One Supreme Being, both in its formless and manifest aspects, has been worshipped by Hindus over the millennia. This does not mean that Hindus worship ‘gods’ and ‘idols.’ The Hindu relates to only the One Supreme Being when he/she prays to a particular manifestation.”¹⁹

There was a third Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit in New York on June 17, 2009, which I attended. At that meeting, the Hindu representatives shared the perception that Christians engage in aggressive proselytizing and have a hidden conversionary agenda in interfaith activity. Even now, in the United States, Hindus complain that they face aggressive missionary campaigns. They felt that Jews understand their concerns about proselytizing. Nathan Katz notes that, “when Jews and Hindus converse, there are no ulterior motives [. . .] The Hindu-Jewish dialogue is also about our experiences of oppression and intolerance” from other faiths.

The Hindu representatives emphasized that they can learn from Jews about building community as a diaspora minority in America. More importantly, they wanted to fight anti-Hinduism and change the derogatory descriptions of Hinduism in textbooks. The new substantive interfaith theme was to convey to the Jewish participants that the swastika is an ancient Hindu symbol of auspicious times, which originally had nothing to do with Nazis.

What should we make of these meetings? Did either side understand the other side? Was it all diplomatic? For some observers, the rabbis at the summit never affirmed that both sides worship the same God rather only a recognition of the same one Supreme Being. The swamis sought to impart that Hindus do not worship idols but the one supreme God, in formless and manifest forms, but that is not the way Jews speak of the divine. Critics of the

events from both sides each claim that their side was not educated enough about the other side to engage in the discussion.

My take at the time was that the summits show a broad openness for approaching Hinduism by the Jewish participants but the statement is likely to become substantially more qualified or restricted when there is greater familiarity by the rabbis with the huge variety of Hindu thought. The swamis who engaged in the Hindu-Jewish dialogue all gave Smarta answers about their worship, some of the rabbis assumed this was the only Hindu theological position.

Secondly, the Jewish community did not know what to expect. For example, in the New York meeting there were some swamis who would not be in the same room as women, while others gladly shared the podium with female Hindu leaders. All the swamis considered the kosher tuna wraps as meat, forbidden to a vegetarian; others would eat only the fresh fruit, since they would not eat even vegetarian food cooked with utensils that might have been used to serve their forbidden foods.

Finally, these early summits were not greatly published on the Jewish side nor even translated into Hebrew for the Israeli public. This book treats the encounters as an initial ice-breaking meeting but does not place too much emphasis on the content of the encounters.

NOTES

1. Alan Brill, *Judaism and Other Religions: Models of Understanding* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010); Alan Brill, *Judaism and World Religions: Christianity, Islam, and Eastern Religions* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012).

2. This book on Jewish-Hindu encounter is best read with an introduction to Hinduism at one's side. The following are books for further reading and serve as the base of information that this book is based upon.

The following seven works are the basic scholarly introductions, which I have found most helpful. Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany: SUNY, 1994) is the introductory textbook for an advanced undergraduate class or graduate classroom. This book is the most thorough and complete of any other book. Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996) is an introduction to Hindu religious books, legal literature, and ideas. C. J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1992) is the best introduction to popular religion and best for dispelling the myths about popular Hindu religion. Axel Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004) offers an anthropological introduction and focuses on Nepal instead of on India. Julius Lipner, *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge, 1994) is a thematic introduction; Sushil Mittal, *The Hindu World*, ed. Gene Thursby (London: Routledge, 2004); Krishna Sivaraman, *Hindu Spirituality: Vedas through Vedanta* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) and *Hindu Spirituality: Postclassical and Modern* (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

The following three books present Hinduism from an insider's perspective similar to an introduction to Judaism written by a pulpit rabbi. Bansai Pandit, *The Hindu Mind* (New Delhi: Dharma Publications, 2005) is an essential introduction explaining all basic facets of Hinduism. The work is highly readable and the best place to start. Swami Sivananda, *All about Hinduism* (Rishikesh: Divine Life, 1997) is a rapid overview of all the topics in the books including texts, philosophies, practice, and ethics; a modern Hindu summary. Chandrasekharendra Saraswati,

Hindu Dharma: The Universal Way of Life (Mumbai: Bhavan Book University, 1995) is a classic defense of an Orthodox Hindu life based on following Shankara's teachings and living an austere life. These are almost 800 pages of oral lectures first published in 1940 and revised.

3. David Levinson, *Religion: A Cross-Cultural Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 58.

4. *The Life of Hinduism*, Edited by John Stratton Hawley and Narayanan Vasudha (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006) 9.

5. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 1.

6. On the current field of comparative theology, see Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); idem, *Hindu God, Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

For a work attempting a broad Hindu-Catholic encounter, in many ways similar to this book, I recommend Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Classical Hinduism* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1982).

A classical comparative author that worked with Christian categories imposed on Hinduism are the writings of Rudolph Otto, see *India's Religion of Grace and Christianity Compared and Contrasted*, trans. F. H. Foster (New York; London, 1930); idem, *Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism*, trans. B. L. Bracey and R. C. Payne (New York, 1932).

For recent Hindu-Jewish comparisons, see Theodor Ithamar and Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, eds., *Dharma and Halacha: Comparative Studies in Hindu and Jewish Philosophy and Religion* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018). Moreover, see the older studies in Hananya Goodman, ed., *Between Jerusalem and Benares: Comparative Studies in Judaism and Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

7. An upcoming valuable book on the topic is Rabbi Daniel Sperber, *The Halachic Status of Hinduism* (forthcoming).

8. Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 16, 172.

9. Yehudah Halevi, *Kuzari* I:60–62.

10. Shem Tov ibn Falaquera, *Ethical Epistle (Iggeret ha-Musar)* ed. A. M. Habermann, *Kovetz Al Yad* 1(n.s.) (Jerusalem, 1936), 76–78, cited in Abraham Melamed, "The Image of India in Medieval Jewish Culture," *Jewish History*, 20:3–4, (December 2006), 299–314.

11. Dov Schwartz, *Astrologyah u-magyah* (Ramat-Gan: Universitat Bar-Ilan, 1999) 170.

12. Dov Schwartz, *Astrologyah*, 214.

13. Jacob Saphir, *Even Sapir: masotav ha-muflaim shel Yaakov Sapir ha-Levi be-Teman* (Jerusalem: Yehoshua Kohen, 1989) 51–54; 116.

14. Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, or, On Religious Power and Judaism*, Alexander Altmann, intro.; Allan Arkush, trans. (Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1983) 112–115 and *Biur Exodus 20:3*. Mendelssohn explicitly relies on Nahmanides to forbid images only to Jews and he relies on the Tosfot concept of *shituf* to permit images to Hindus, extending the discussion of Christianity to Hinduism.

15. Nathan Katz "Jerusalem in Benares" in *Tikkun* (May–June 2007), 23–25, 68–70.

16. Hayyim David Halevi, *Meqor Hayim: piske halakhot ha-nehutsot be-yoter* (Tel Aviv: 1983), 179–180.

17. Hayyim David Halevi, *Meqor Hayim*, 179–180.

18. Seventy-three-page report on the 2007 summit online at http://www.millenniumpeacesummit.org/1st-Hindu-Jewish_Summit_Report-Final.pdf. The second 2008 conference of 76 pages is here at http://www.hindujewish.com/pdfs/2nd-Hindu-Jewish_Summit_Report-Final-print.pdf and the third 2009 conference is briefly reported here at <http://www.swaminarayangurukul.org/news/3rd-hindu-jewish-leadership-summit-us>.

19. http://www.hindujewish.com/pdfs/2nd-Hindu-Jewish_Summit_Report-Final-print.pdf.

Chapter Five

Israel in the Mirror of Iran

An Iranian Approach to Jewish and Israeli Messianism

Amir Rezaeipناه

Judaism and the Jewish community are some of the most problematic topical categories in the contemporary history of Iran. On one side, as Judaism is the oldest of the Abrahamic religions, a kind of status and respect is felt among Muslims, especially the Shi'ites, toward Judaism. From this perspective, this religion is among the permanent and eternal religions of *al-Islam*.¹ In the Muslims' view, Judaism has a legitimate and true nature, and foundation, which gradually and due to distortion (*tahrif*) and innovation has deviated away from the right path. In countries like Iran, which since long in the past has had a significant and influential population of Jews having their prominent places (like their pilgrimage sites such as the Tomb of Esther and Mordechai in Hamadan or the Tomb of Daniel in Shush, the Tomb of Habakkuk in Tuyserkan and the Peighambariyeh mausoleum in Qazvin) and certain Jewish rituals, the social relations and acceptance of the followers of this religion have been normal and ordinary. However, on the other side, because of some differences and challenges between the Muslims and the Jews in nascent Islam, which has produced some anti-Jewish Qur'anic sayings, there is a kind of pessimism and doubt toward Jews in the Muslims collective unconscious.

The issue of fear and hope in relation to Jews in different eras, especially after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, has underlain many challenges and discussions in Iran. From the revolution onward, the manner of interaction with Judaism and the Jews has altered from the historico-religious and socio-cultural frames of the past, taking on a political and theological shape. Although there had been challenges and protests over the Arab-Israeli Conflict and Palestine, from this date (1979) onward, the issue of confronting Israel

and a distorted group of the people of Israel was outlined as one of the identity-giving bases of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). Since this era, the duality of the Oppressed-Oppressor (*Mustazaf-Mustakber*) was highlighted as the basis of constructing the identity of the Islamic system.

The basic category of the process of the connection between the political and the religious, in both the IRI and Israel, is messianism. Messianism is a kind of problematic in the political logic, and especially the foreign policy, of Iran and Israel.² However, Israel, on one side, has been, besides the United States, the most prominent enemy and “other” of the Islamic Republic of Iran throughout its existence. In the words of ayatollah Khomeini, like a “cancerous tumor” (*Qode-ye Saratani*) never to be tolerated. On the other side, in the view of the heads of Israel, Iran as an Islamic-Shiite country, having an activist approach based on political activism, can be a source of many challenges and crises for the only Jewish nation-state of the world. In macro-scale, although Iran and Israel as non-Arab majority states could have many convergence and alliance lines within the Islamic-Arabic region of the Middle East, North Africa, and especially the Persian Gulf countries, however, their activist and antagonistic ideologies destroy most bases of communication. In fact, political Islam in Iran and Zionism in Israel feed from some sources, especially in ideology and political theology which, prior to making real convergence, pave the way for their divergence. The issue of supporting the Muslim lands and defending Palestine and Quds is one of the central subjects in Iran’s Islamic revolution, and the slogan that “the Quds route, passes from Karbala” is a central motivation for Iran’s warriors during the Iran-Iraq war. This subject has continued in the postwar era. For example, in the appearance of ISIS (Islamic neofundamentalism) and the intensification of the Syria crisis, the media elites and the heads of the IRI have talked about the emerging crisis as a “Western, Hebrew, Arabic” axis. They used the term “the martyred defenders of holy shrines” (*Shohada-ye Modafee Haram*) for those killed in this battle and what the IRI views as a holy war. These kinds of concepts present a Shiite apocalyptic view based on the existence of a global front of evil, which is now in front of the IRI and the West, centered on the United States, Jewishness represented by Israel, and Arabic ignorance, centered on Saudi Arabia, and some of the Arabic countries are the main axes of what the IRI sees as a satanic and outrageous alliance. However, the issue of Jewish citizens residing in Iran is raised in various parts of the country’s constitution, as well as many of its main texts and laws—especially in the civil law entitled “the religious minorities” (articles like article 13, 14, 64, and 67 of the constitution). Although legislation differentiates between the citizens due to their religion, it has also tried, as far as possible, to guarantee Jews—and followers of other religions considered divine within Islam—civil rights, legal mechanisms, as well as social and political positions.

It seems that a set of politico-strategic, sociocultural, and, finally, religious-ideological factors underlie some positive and negative approaches in the field of “Jewish and Israel studies” during the era of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Accordingly, two different dimensions, one conservative and one radical, simultaneously observe this field of study in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The conservative field observes Jewish Studies, and the radical one involves Israel studies. This subject has been more indicative in messianism, as one of the most central debates in political theology. This study concentrates on the thought foundations and results of one of the main incompetencies and challenges observed within the theological study in the Middle East: looking at science through a window of politics. In other words, in Iran, and maybe to an extent in Israel, the investigation of certain dimensions of political theology, especially messianism, holds a taboo aspect; or, in more precise terms—this field is considered a proprietary one, and entering it has been generally viewed as a “bureaucratic” dimension; in other words, political theology, in a security-based bureaucratic and pragmatic order, is imagined as strengthening politics and the political order. In this sense, the religious in a general meaning and *Shariah* in a specific conception are interpreted as tools for the fixation of the existing bureaucratic structure and strengthening the power of the hegemon power. The bureaucratic conception of religion from the Safavids era in Iran and prior to it was theorized in the Sunnah world in the shade of the overcoming thought that says “might makes right” (*al-haqu leman qalaba/ taghalob*) and, as a result of an articulated hidden discourse, the authoritatives had the right to interpret some of the religious and legal limitations in line with their power extendance.

The main focus of this chapter is the methodological incompetency and challenges to political theology rooted in the epistemological, ontological, and sociological fields. Perhaps one of the reasons that the Iranian researchers and politicians, and probably mutually those in Israel, cannot deal with, absent any presuppositions or logically, the subjects of Jewish Studies, Israel Studies, Iranian Studies, Shi’ite Studies, and Islamic Studies, arises from a historic heritage and the accumulation of some of the misunderstandings in their collective mentality. Unless three circles—non-Jewish Iranian researchers, Iranian Jews, and Iranian politicians/elites—overcome this problematic challenge to find a reasonable solution, there is no possibility for the existence of properly rational iterations of Jewish Studies and Israel Studies as academic fields in Iran.

JEWISH IDENTITY IN THE SHADE OF ISLAMIC TRADITION

Muslims generally believe that the divergence and detachment circles toward Israel are more than the convergence bases. This subject has been repeatedly

emphasized in the holy Quran, wherein is stated that the enmity of Jews toward Muslims equals that of the polytheists: “You shall certainly find the Jews and those who associate partners with Allah are the most vehement of the people in enmity against those who believe” (Al-Meada/ 82). It is also stated that, as a result of the conflicts between Muslims and Jews:

You shall, certainly, be tried in your substance and lives and you shall certainly hear from those who were given the Scripture before you and from those who set up equals (to God) a good deal of hurtful abuse. But if you are patiently persevering and guard against evil, then this (attitude) is worth being followed with constancy and firm determination. (Al-Imran/ 186)

“Those who were given the Scripture” is a Quranic term referring to the Abrahamic religions, and here specifically refers to the Jews. The holy Quran says that after God blessed and favored the people of Israel, because of their intolerance and ingratitude, they went down to Egypt and they were smote with abasement and destitution. The holy Quran also accuses them with disbelief in the divine verses, and the prophets’ murders, and so considers Jews as caught up in God’s wrath and anger:

“And when you said, ‘Moses! (we are weary of one kind of food so) we will not at all remain content with one and the same food, pray, therefore, to your Lord for us that He may bring forth for us some of that which the earth produces, of its vegetables, of its cucumbers, its corn, its lentils and its onions.’ He (- God) said, ‘Would you take in exchange that which is inferior (—delicious food) for that which is superior (—the realization of the noble object of your life)? (If this is so) then go to some town and you will certainly have (there) all that you have demanded.’ And lo! it so happened, they were smitten with abasement and destitution and they incurred the displeasure of Allah. That was because they denied the Messages of Allah and sought to kill His Prophets unjustly and that was because they disobeyed and had been transgressing. (Al-baqara/ 61).

In the holy Quran’s words, the Israelites didn’t even entirely abide Moses, where he complains:

(Recall the time) when Moses said to his people, ‘My people! why do you malign me when you know that I am certainly a Messenger from Allah to you.’ But when they deviated from the right course, Allah let their hearts deviate (as they were), for Allah guides no transgressing people to success. (As-Saff/ 5)

In this verse, Israelites are referred to as the “transgressing people” which means those who emphasize on doing sin and disobedience. In this understanding, the Israelites break their covenant with God, and, as a result, they were cursed, and they are those who pervert the words of the Divine Book:

So on account of their breaking their covenant We deprived them of Our blessings, and We let their hearts become hardened. Now they pervert the words from their proper context (of the Divine Book) and (in doing so) they have abandoned a good portion of what they were (reminded of and) exhorted with. And you will never cease to discover one dishonesty (or the other) on their part, with the exception of a few of them; so pardon them and pass (them) over. Verily, Allah loves the doers of good to others. (Al-ma'ida/ 13)

Jews are people who have believed in “*al-jibt*” (idols) and “*al-taqt*” (devil), two high levels of disbelief, and have tried to exchange the right with wrong: Did you not see those who received a portion of the Book, that they believe in idols (*al-jibt*) and the devil (*al-taqt*), and say regarding the disbelievers that they are more rightly guided than the Muslims. (An-Nisa/ 51)

In the view of the holy Quran, it promises two instances of rebellion and corruption of the Jews, one of them is through the murder of Isaiah and the opposition of Jeremiah and the other is through the murder of Zechariah and Yahya:

And We decreed for the Descendants of Israel in the Book that, “You will indeed create great turmoil in the earth twice, and you will surely become very proud.” So when the first of those promises came, We sent upon you Our extremely militant bondmen—they therefore entered the cities pursuing you; and this was a promise that had to be fulfilled. (Al-Isra/ 4–5)

Muslims believe that many of the Jews’ thoughts and rituals are distorted and invalid. For example, “And the Jews said, ‘Allah’s hand is tied’; may their hands be tied—and they are accursed for saying so! In fact, both His hands are free, He bestows upon whomever He wills.” (Al-ma’ida/ 64)

There is a saying in Farsi, “*Irād-e Bani-Israēli*” (“The excuses of the children of Israel”), which is related to the Israelis “behavior”; this issue refers to some verses in the holy Quran. In these verses, the Quran—besides saying that God has blessed and favored the Jews and has excelled them over others “O Descendants of Israel! Remember the favor of Mine, which I bestowed upon you and gave you superiority over others of your time (by sending the Noble Messengers to your nation)” (Al-baqara/ 47)—presents a brief of their history and refers to their criticisms in relation to Moses’s request to sacrifice a lamb. In some other parts of the Quran, there is knowledge and warnings about the negative features of the Jews, while the Christians are considered to be better friends to Muslims in comparison. In other surahs of the Quran, *al-aaraf* and *taha*, the story of “*ijil al-dhahab*” (or Golden calf) is referred to as one of the Jews’ distortions in the absence of Moses.

Accordingly, an escape route should be found from these people and their religion’s seditions and enmity. Although in many ways Islamic ontology,

through its common roots with Judaism, is aligned with it, these two religions have many lines of differentiation and separation. Judaism and Islam are two religions having a strong law; the issue at hand is their detachment dimensions and points of difference and separation. In comparison with its relationship to Christianity, the Islamic tradition expresses a more serious and intense otherness toward Judaism.

Based on the Islamic texts, foretelling of the rise of prophet Mohammad is mentioned in the original texts of Judaism, especially the Hebrew bible. There is a quotation from Metatron (an archangel in Judaism and known in Judaism as the Recording Angel or the Chancellor of Heaven) which says God has chosen you [the Jews] to be prophets of the Ismaelites to save you from Edom.³ In the Islamic view, some rabbis and movements like Sabbatai Sevi have distorted this and, in the shade of Zionism, turned it conversely. In the Islamic tradition there is a negative expression, *Israeliat*, which has been used by some like Ka'ab al-Ahbar, Abdullah ibn Salam, Wahb ibn Munabbih, and Ubaid ben Shadhia Jorhomi as a sign of efforts by Jews and other non-Muslims to distort the Islamic sources and texts.

However, as will be said, according to some scholars like Gershom Scholem, this other-making of Islam and Judaism is mainly rooted in the advent of Zionism. So, the issue of the advent of Zionism's activist and pragmatist ideas toward the Jewish religion paved the way for the withdrawal of the image of Jews from isolation and representing historical oppression, shifting the historical image of the homeless and oppressed Jews to Jews having land and state. This also strengthened anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish sentiment and activities and also led to the denial of the the Holocaust.⁴

REVOLUTIONARY ELITE AND ISRAEL; ANTI-ZIONIST

Within the Islamic Republic of Iran is the concept that Iran contains the most important and prominent population of Muslims and Shi'ites in the world. The formal name for this concept is "*Umm Al-Qura-ye Jahan-e Islam*" (Iran as the Center of the Muslim World) and its leader is named "*vali-ye amr-e moslem-e jahan*" (the commander of the world's Muslims). The IRI is the manifestation of the most serious and central interpretation of the political Islam and the jurisprudential Islamic ideology in the Shiite world (and in a general meaning in the Muslim world). On the other hand Israel, as the only political unit of Jews, in the shade of the hegemony of Zionist thought and through passing the "Jewish state" law, considers itself as the main trustee of planning the affairs of the Jewish people (as the best and chosen people of God) throughout the world.

Although during the revolutionary struggles to overthrow the Pahlavi regime, the issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict was a major subject, after the

Islamic revolution the issue of othering Israel and supporting Palestine became a basic and central factor in articulating the discourse of the Islamic revolution. The revolutionary elites of Iran defined one of their main responsibilities and duties as liberating and emancipating Palestine and Quds (Jerusalem) from Israel. In their viewpoint, the Palestinians are an oppressed people who have been captured by global imperialism, and the Islamic revolution of Iran has the duty of supporting, emancipating, and liberating them.

Through a three-fold division in Iran's foreign policy and post-revolutionary relations' structure, a better understanding of the IRI's other-making toward Israel can be articulated. Such a thing can, to some extent, be said about Israel, and thus talking about Iran doesn't mean a unidirectional subject matter.

The Ideological Level

Ideology observes the identity-based foundations. The Islamic system, in this part, recognizes its identity and others according to the Islamic and revolutionary patterns. Political Islam, based on the idea of *Velayat-e faqih* (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist), and the pillars of *Jomhuriat* (Republic), and *Islamiat* (Islamism), articulates the center of this discourse. This level aims to recognize the "self" and "other" among other nation-states. The national identity pillars and categories are defined as a result of the interactions which observe this domain. On this level the concepts of *mellat* (nation) and *Ummah* (religious community) are blended together.

Two basic fields can be differentiated on this level. First is the abstract domain of ideology in which Israel is an "other," and in relation to the United States as a fundamental and *big* "other." Second is the pragmatic and practical ideology, which lacks the determinism of the abstract one. In this pragmatic reading, those countries are placed in the domain other-making strategies whose existence is not in the agonistic domain but in the antagonistic one:

According to the IRI's constitution, Iranian foreign policy is crafted according to four fundamental principles: first, rejection of all forms of external domination; second, preservation of Iran's independence and territorial integrity; third, defence of the rights of all Muslims without allying with hegemonic powers; and, fourth, the maintenance of peaceful relations with all non-belligerent states.⁵

As a result, Iran's support of Palestine, Lebanon and Syria, and its opposition to Israel can be understood. In the international arena and in foreign policy, Iran has three important aims: the formation of a Shiite government; defending Muslims; and fighting what they view as the arrogance through which Israel and the United States (as the "global arrogance axes") threaten Iran's

other aims.⁶ In such a framework, the tensions between a tendency to export the revolution and moving toward greater convergence with the broader world is one of the most challenging aspects for the decision-makers of postrevolutionary Iran.⁷

The important point within the ideological aspect is that ideology has a flexible and fluid state in Iran (and in Israel, for that matter). Ideology is no longer a simplifying logic to deal with real-world complexities, shoring up presuppositions taken for granted, or presenting value-based judgments without external facts. Rather, Iran's (and again Israel's) ideological logic contains consistent pragmatic and security-based dimensions.⁸ On this level, the Islamic republic seeks to build connections with nations instead of states.⁹

The Strategic Level

On the strategic level, the main axes of national power are national security and the national economy. Accordingly, if on the ideological level power software is talked about, on the strategic level the subject matter is the hardware that strengthens foreign policy and foreign relations. It can be said that Iran's best allies in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf can be countries with two features of being non-Muslim and non-Arab; however, in the historical moment, Iran's revolutionary elites decided to consider Israel and the United States in their antagonistic domain as Iran's main enemies and rivals. As a result, Israel is viewed as the enemy of Iran's national security, one that is destroying the economy and national development of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Israel's image in this area is as a potential and even actual enemy. On the strategic level, struggle with and other-making toward Israel in different layers like defending the oppressed and the resistant groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, the progress of the nuclear program, and so on, are considered as the base of strengthening the presence and strategic depth of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Accordingly, although the IRI doesn't recognize Israel as a nation-state, studies concentrated on such a nation-state inevitably pass through a set of negative presuppositions and images which negate a realistic outlook or an analysis based on rationality.

In this regard, the security-based approach in most of the research on Israel is related to foreign policy, national and international security, the Palestine issue, the sociology of violence in Israel, and so forth.¹⁰ There is generally an attempt to demonstrate Iran's pre-1979 revolution relations with Israel as relations full of deception, and as having a military and unstable nature; consistent elements of this scholarship also include elements of apartheid, nationalism, and nostalgia that have been attended to about Israel.¹¹ Notably, there are detractors from these foci, contending that Israel and Judaism are not questions for Iran's scholars and that there should not be such strict other-making.¹²

The Diplomatic Level

Iran's nodal point and concept on the diplomatic level is national interest. Diplomacy's many types—formal diplomacy, general diplomacy, media diplomacy, religious diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, tourism diplomacy, and personal diplomacy—are tools for advancing national interests. It seems that Iran's diplomacy, at least on the obvious level, seeks to minimize Israel's power and influence in the region and within the international system. A main part of Iran's alliances and ties, especially on three levels—the Muslim world, the nonalignment movement, and the global front of anti-imperialism—consider this objective.

THE RELIGIOUS, THE POLITICAL, AND THE SOCIAL

One of the main parameters and components in comprehending the process of Iran's (and Israel's) politics and policy-making (as a base for analyzing the Iranian approach to Jewish and Israel studies) is understanding and explaining how the political is related to the religious. On a more macro level, how they are related with the social and the discursive. The notional and meditative structure dominating these two players is affected by the historical heritage and the accumulation of the myths and their semantic systems throughout history. Political Islam in the IRI, and Zionism as ideology in Israel, are the symbols of theoretical and practical ties between the religious, the discursive, the political, and the social, from which prominent theoretical and objective consequences have issued especially in the field of mutual studies in political theology and messianism.

The basic point and category in the process of how the political and the religious are related in these two lands is messianism. Messianism is a kind of problematic and complex issue in the political logic, and especially the foreign policy, of Iran and Israel. This problematic essentially enters the notion of seeking a lost era or reaching a bright future, belief in the duality of good and evil and their historical and permanent confrontation, the negation of oppression and cruelty, deontology, activism, as well as internationalist beliefs and so forth. in the political culture of a territory. Shiite and Jewish messianism have been realized in a widespread base from idealism and normativism to realism and pragmatism, and have articulated the circles of the political creation, especially in foreign policy, in the shade of an idealized realism.

The result of the relation between the different mentioned fields has been the highlighting of certain approaches based on political mysticism, fatalism, mission-orientation, acceptance of holy suffering, martyrdom and sacrifice, an ideological-pragmatic conception of events and processes, and a mixture of national and transnational beliefs, and so on. Studies concerning the fields

of Jews and Israel also have a positive or a negative approach toward their self and other discourses.

AN ALTERNATIVE AS MAHDAVIAT

Besides the negative and divergent bases of the Islamic tradition and the other-making relations and discourse of the Islamic revolution's discourses, the native experience of Shiite-Islamic messianism articulates a third factor of misunderstanding in the case of Iranian scholarship on Jewish and Israeli political theology, concentrating on messianism. The manner that elites, politicians, and researchers, especially Iranian Jews (who have secondhand knowledge about Jewish languages, culture, and law), comprehend Jewish and Israeli political theology, especially its messianism, is affected by Shiite-Islamic messianism or the native thought of *Mahdaviat*. In fact, there is a kind of simulation and tautology in Iranian thought about this issue.

Probably, in some dimensions and fields, the same meaning, identity, nature, and function are imagined for the Jewish apocalyptic messiah (Mashiach) that are imagined for *Mahdi*. In this way, Mashiach is understood through the context of *Mahdi*. The common dimension of this simulation can be recognized by three categories: "justice," "emancipation or salvation," and "a messianic global empire."¹³

In genealogy and historical analysis, from the ancient times, Iranians were familiar with subjects like messianism, salvation, emancipation, redemption, justice, and so on in the frame of waiting for the advent of *Saoshyant* (*Saoshyans*). Messianism in the pre-Islamic thought of Iran, especially in the Zoroastrian era, was represented in the fundamental confrontation of *Ahura* (good) and *Ahriman* (evil), and in accepting periods of hardship and suffering before the advent of *Saoshyant*.¹⁴ Messiah is a superman possessing *farrah-e Izadi* (divine grace) and charisma, like the apostles has innate ascetic, richness, and independence has ultranatural and ultramaterial power; is well-known as virtuous and honest; and fights the dominant and devilish beliefs and religions.¹⁵ The objective and practical result of the politics and tradition of *iranshahri* (Iranianship) thought is the emergence of *Saoshyant* and the idealistic sovereign, and the subsequent *farshookart* and renewal and revival of the world. In this era, *asha* (*aša/arta*) (truth) is objectively represented and *druj* (deceit, falsehood) withdraws. *Saoshyant* is the enemy of ignorance and darkness and is the executor of justice, liberation, and emancipation principles. Fire is the symbol of the Zoroastrian religion, and *Mazdayasna* is the symbol of purity and light of the messiah's advent era.¹⁶

Messianism became more highlighted in the Islamic era, and after presenting an Iranian-Shiite reading in the framework of *Mahdaviat* thinking and discourse. Shiite messianism, which is presented in Mahdi, the apocalyp-

tic savior, is a dynamic element in the Shiites' social and individual lives. *Intizar* (awaiting) is based on counting down and patience full of holy suffering along with the *zohor* (advent) of a holy and innocent ultrahuman from the family of the last divine prophet, Muhammad, during the apocalypse. The promised Mahdi comes to make the world full of *idalat* (justice) after it was filled with *zolm* (oppression): "Through him, Allah will fill the earth with fairness and justice as if it had been filled with oppression and cruelty."¹⁷

In Islamic messianic thought, the Shiites', Muslims', and finally humanity's emancipation, salvation, and redemption are based on the acceptance and realization of the historical mission and duty of the followers and establishing an ideal Islamic political-religious community, a nation based on the element of belief.¹⁸ Mahdi is a perfect human who is both guided and guiding; a level even higher than the transcendental level of Islamic mysticism.¹⁹ Mahdi (in the Sunni Islam "renewer or *mujaddid* of the era"²⁰) is at the center of the dynamism of the theoreticians and scientists, especially the Islamic millennialists, and different interpretations by Shiites and Sunnis of the "last hour" viewpoint, and the nearness of the end of the world, resurrection, and apocalypse (documented by some verses of the Quran like "the [promised] Hour may be near at hand" [Ash-Shura/17], "the Hour is about to come" [Ghafir/59], and so on).²¹ Shiite Islam developed a kind of belief in divine justice based on holy suffering which was to some extent lost in the historically more dominant Sunni Islam. The theory of emancipation is fed by the element of martyrdom in Shi'ism, an element that is based on Imam Hussein's unique martyrdom.²²

Mahdaviat is considered as the continuity of *Imamat* and *Velayat* principles in Shi'ism. Throughout the history of Shi'ism there was generally a kind of passive and nonactivist waiting. In this kind of waiting, the main element is *Taqiya* (a precautionary dissimulation or denial of religious belief and practice in the face of persecution). According to this principle, Shiites should not and cannot utter their beliefs especially in relation to the apocalypse era or Armageddon or act toward it. Any activist effort is rejected or even *haram* (forbidden). In this regard *Isalate Tahrim* (authenticity of the forbidden) was slightly moderated with the advent of the Safavid dynasty and the leadership of Shah Ismail, one of the grandchildren of Safi-ad-din Ardabili, son-in-law and successor of Zahed Gilani. The Safavid movement rose in the power vacuum, political instability, social turmoil, and anomy which followed the Mongol attack led by Hulagu Khan into the heart of the Middle East and the Muslim world, including Baghdad, the Abbasid capital.²³ The Safavids and *ahle Khanghah* upon the sufi and semimessianic currents like Naqshbandi, Noorbakshia, Shadhili, Qadiriyya, Mevleviya, Teyforiyya, Rafaeiyya, Bektashi, ahle Fotowat and Okhowat, the followers of Shah Nimatullah Wali, and so on have represented themselves as people of idea, power, and action.²⁴

From the Safavid era and with the manifestation and consolidation of the Shiite-Iranian government of the Shiite, *Dhi Shokat and Dhi Eghtedar Sultan* (the king who is both Shiite and powerful) messianism and *Mahdaviat* thought was reformulated with two positive (observing Shiite-Iranian identity) and negative (applying agonism “controversy” and antagonism against discursive others, generally the Sunnis) dimensions; its Iranian-Shiite identity was affected and the position of the *Dhi Shokat and Dhi Eghtedar Sultan* was upgraded to the rank of the deputy of the absent imam.²⁵ The Safavids, from the beginning, had apocalyptic claims and approaches.²⁶ Sufism, Shi'ism, *Iranshahri* and interpreting Islamic caliphate and kingship tradition articulated the components of the Safavids semimessianic government.²⁷

Iranian-Shiite messianism continued its gradual process in different shapes until the Islamic revolution and the formation of the Islamic republic system (such as the notion of *tamadon-e bozorg* “Great civilization” of Mohammad Reza Shah); with the advent of Political Islam and a jurisprudential Islam with *Velayat-e faqih* as the nodal point, messianism developed a different color. The principles of *Velayat* and *Idalat* acted as the strengthening base of this issue. After the Islamic revolution, *esalate ibahe* (authenticity of permission and authorization) and an active awaiting replaced the previous passive one. Based on the formal reading and the main stream, *Velayat-e faqih* is the logical continuum of the *imamat* and *Velayat* principles. In imam Khomeini's thought, the *Veliy-e faqih* has the authority of the infallible Imam, albeit on a lower level. In fact, *Velayat-e faqih* is the Shiites *imamat* and *Velayat*, minus the *Ismat* (infallibility) element. *Imamat* and virtue are manifested in the existence of the twelve imams who are the descendants of imam Ali and the prophet's daughter, Hazrate Fatemeh. The twelfth imam, named Mahdi, is absent and the apocalyptic savior of the Shiites. In his absence, according to the *Velayat-e faqih* notion, the *faqih* takes his place.²⁸ According to the fifth article of the constitution “During the occultation of the Wali al-'Asr (may God hasten his reappearance), the leadership of the *Ummah* devolves upon the just and pious person, who is fully aware of the circumstances of his age, courageous, resourceful, and possessed of administrative ability, will assume the responsibilities of this office in accordance with Article 107.” The revolutionary elites called ayatollah Khomeini “Imam,” and many of them considered him as the only activist and fighter who, during *asre Qeybate Kobra* (the Major Occultation era), can pave the way for imam Mahdi's just and global government.²⁹ This issue led to some people calling themselves the awaited Imam.³⁰ The theoretical bases of messianism, in the light of the principle of *Velayat-e faqih*, formulated the meaning, identity, and legitimating bases of postrevolutionary Iran. These were based on Islamic religious categories and the practical consequences of these categories.³¹ This led to the isolation of any unideological conception of Jewish Studies, and especially of Israel Studies.

IRANIAN JEWISHNESS (KALIMIS)

The Iranian Jews, who have been present for about three thousand years, are generally called *Kalimi*. *Kalimi* is a name given to Prophet Moses as indicated in the Quran, a man who spoke to God. Iranian Jews, numbering about fifteen thousand people, have always been among the most effective sociopolitical and economic groups of people in Iran.³² This issue, especially after the constitutional era, has been significant, and two of the Jewish and Christian minorities have had an effective presence in the modernist processes based on new technologies; they even brought about some of these new tools, technologies, and concepts.

This Jewish and Christian pioneership in some cases underlies some of the negative trends of the Ulama and the traditional groups, and sometimes led to their *tahrim* and *takfir*. In the mentality and collective memory of some Iranians, especially the religious groups, the Jews are imagined as abnormal and sometimes destructive citizens of the sociocultural system and structure. In comparison to *Kalimi* and *Mousavi*, which have a positive denotation, *Johud* is a negative expression which sometimes is used to address Jews. Also, in some cases and categories, a kind of self-alienation can be recognized among Iranian Jews. Although some, like Michael Meyer, believe that the experience of enlightenment, antisemitism, and Zionism are the three forces which have formulated Jewish identity more than anything else—Asian and African Jews, especially those in Iran, have experienced different forces, among which colonialism and Islam are most important.³³

Of course, this lack of complete sociability, particularly in the era of Islamist governance, doesn't mean the rejection or absolute negativity of the Iranian Jews or the *Kalimian*. Most of the Iranian Jewish personalities have high face and prestige, and have important roles in the political, social, and economic realms. Despite some of the existing inadequacies and discrimination, the Jews in Iran live their social lives freely and in special fields are pre-eminent. In Iran's system of religious democracy, although being Muslim is of the parameters and standards of having high ranks, in the social eras and the existing public structures, the Jews generally have an appropriate rank and position. Synagogues and religious places like the Tomb of Daniel in Shush, the Jews' religious, educational, clinical, welfare, cultural, and social centers are highly respected, and there are strong social relationships between this religion and other Iranian citizens. However, it seems that there are few research-based activities and field studies on the life of the Jews' communities. *Anjoman-e kalimian-e Tehran* (Tehran Jewish Committee) is the most important religious association of the Iranian Jews.³⁴ While during the presidency of Mahmood Ahmadinejad, there were pressures resulting from his messianic populist approaches and his rejection of the Holocaust, this has changed during the presidency of Hassan Rouhani. He and his

foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, have congratulated the advent of the Jewish New Year to Jews globally, and particularly to Iranian Jews, wishing them a very happy New Year.

TWO PARADIGMS: CONSERVATISM AND RADICALISM

According to the Islamic negative and divergent heritage, the existing political other-makings and the mentality of the *Mahdaviat* notion, two different and even opposite paradigms in relation to messianism have formed in Iran toward Jewish Studies and Israel Studies. The conservative paradigm generally contains Jewish Studies, and the radical one is defined in relation to Israel Studies. In this context, Jewish theology and particularly messianism have been conservative and ultimately positive, while Israel Studies has been radical and consequently negative. Iranians accept anything they reach in Jewish Studies and consider the status quo equivalent to their conception. Even though in studying Israeli theology, especially messianism, the first option is rejection. Accordingly, it is believed that Israeli messianism should be rejected. In fact, balance in the Jewish and Israeli political theology has generally been a missing and defective factor. The approach in the field of Jewish Studies, especially Jewish theology and political mysticism, and the Kabbalah movement, is conservative. On the other side, in Israel Studies the approach is critical and radical. Negation and rejection is the central principle. Israel Studies in Iran has generally been focused on self-positive foregrounding in relation to Zionism. In other words, these works represent a kind of verbal violence and negative associations. In most instances, scholars do not see because it exists, they see because they want to see.

CATEGORIES AND PROBLEMS

One of the prominent features of Jewish political theology, like Shiite Islam, is the activeness of messianism and waiting for the emergence of a savior during the apocalypse. In this sense, Messiah is a historical and religious phenomenon that has been referred to in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish interpretations, but messianism is a social-discursive construct which is articulated in the bidirectional relations between political structures and social contextures and in the interaction with time and history (like Mahdi and *Mahdaviat* in Shi'ism). Messianism is the process of producing and reproducing semantic and meaning systems and coding and decoding from collective memory and minds of Jews on Mashiach in the shade of extant hidden and evident power throughout Jewish history. A significant portion of the texts and literatures produced in the Jews' sociopolitical thought and action proves this subject. Mashiach, or the Jews promised man, is who will fulfill the

desires and wishes of the people of Israel. Through the emergence of Zionist thought, the manner of awaiting for the emergence of this messiah has been significantly and revolutionarily transformed.

So great is this transformation that Jewish messianism can be divided into pre- and post-Zionism eras (as it was mentioned, two conservative and radical approaches were formed in relation to Israel Studies and Jewish Studies, especially political theology and messianism). The serious difference in relation to these conceptions is mainly related to certain issues: first, the function of Messiah and his movement's ideology and discourse; second, the duties and missions of the believers and the Jews' in relation to the messianic movement in the Armageddon and its activeness or passiveness; third, the nature and functions of the state or essentially the necessity of constructing a Jewish nation-state or rejecting such an existence; fourth, the issue of the holy land and the obligation or lack of justifiability for the Jews returning to the land; fifth, the amount of attention to the issues of emancipation (besides redemption and salvation) and resistance; sixth, sacred or holy suffering and the acceptance of hardship and suffering toward the realization of messianic aims and desires. This chapter tries to critically analyze the existing texts in each of these areas and describe the micro- or macrodifferences and changes in the thought of Jewish theoreticians and policymakers toward messianism, before and after the emergence of the Israeli state. This is effective in analyzing identity and otherness, and the borders of justifying actionism and even violent acts (verbally and physically).

THE FUNCTIONS OF MESSIAH AND HIS MOVEMENT

In stimulating the Iranian perspective with messianism, the nodal point in relation to Jewish messianism is the concept of justice. In this approach, the main function of the apocalyptic Messiah is the realization of justice. The savior comes to fill the world with justice and welfare, after it was filled with injustices and oppressions. Mashiach comes to revive the lost status of his followers, the Jews, the logical system of the world and humanity; he comes to rearticulate the chain of equivalence of the religious apocalyptic ideology in relation to others. According to Younes Hamami Lalehzar:

Among the necessary signs to recognize the identity of Mashiach, rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem is enough. Mashiach gathers all the diaspora; he guides the world in a way which all will worship God seamlessly. This will be the era of peace and conciliation; in the era of Geula there will be no sin.³⁵

The issue of the chosen people in Judaism was mainly spoken about in the pre-Christian and pre-Islamic eras when Judaism was against paganism; so Mashiach comes to realize the supremacy of belief and faith. The radical

view is that Mashiach is a Jew and comes to the Jews, and his main aim is the people of Israel and Jerusalem; as a result, those who see this fact will accept the Jewish faith. However, what is mostly accepted is that in such a day all will worship God, and according to the holy Bible, they will even use the same name for God.³⁶

Most of Iranian academic and nonacademic elites and researchers in studying Israeli messianism find that this kind of messianism is like a tool for confronting *Mahdi-e Moeud* (the awaited Mahdi). In the Iranian view, Zionist ideology thus sanctions any kind of confrontation for preventing the advent of *Mahdi*. The base of the middle east and the Persian Gulf oppositions can be understood as a reference to the perception of Zionists and the Israeli state's apocalyptic planning. By such a logic, Israeli messianism equals conspiracy against any true understanding of messianism, namely, Islamic and Shiite messianism. The Israeli messiah and his functions are not based on a true conception of the Hebrew bible and history, in this framework, but are a consequence of the interests of the leading governments.

Iranians conceive of Jewish messianism as a passive one, like the traditional Shiite's approach. After the emergence of Zionist ideology and the codification of Israeli political theology and messianism, Mashiach's function and his movement change to an active one. Zionists are activists, and some of them violent and radical people who give a radical and antagonistic reading of the awaited Mashiach. Zionism has merged traditional messianism with modern politics and has prompted the diaspora with a strengthened feeling of nationalism and the revival of the glory of ancient Israel. Zionism has interpreted messianism in a political context in an attempt to establish a political system based on the idea of emancipation and relate it to modern nationalism.³⁷ Iranian researchers consider justice to be a concept of Judaism that was lost through its distortion in Zionism. In the context of the dominant figures of Israel, the function of Mashiach is not the establishment of justice but guaranteeing Israel's security-based equations.

In Iranian scholarly assessments, during the emergence of Zionism, messianism was distorted from its principal form and turned into an instrumental concept by means of which the leaders of the "Zionist Regime" (a name the Islamic Republic of Iran gives to Israel) legitimate their functions.³⁸ The announcement of Jerusalem as Israel's capital is aligned to apocalyptic war and moving the borders of opposition and enmity into the holy places: Jerusalem or *Quds* or *Beit-ol-Moqaddas*, the Muslim's favorite city, and *Al-Aqsa* Mosque, the Muslim's first *qiblah*.

THE DUTIES AND MISSIONS OF THE BELIEVERS AND THE JEWS

It is a challenging issue to say what the duties of a Jew and the Jewish community are toward Mashiach and the apocalyptic movement. John Ashton classifies the messianic idea on a grid with four coordinates: “1. Time: when will the redemption take place? 2. Scene: where does redemptive action take place? 3. Agency: who performs redemptive acts? And 4. Scope: what will be redeemed?”³⁹ When the belief in messianic determinism is strong, and emancipation in a special way imminent, when emancipation is behind the door, logic dictates passive waiting in addition to trust in God and the realization of the will of the holy ruler. On the other side, when “there is affinity between messianism and violence,” people lose control and actively function.⁴⁰ This is the pragmatic dimension of theology and the political act arising from messianism. A process, which has passed from mere reading and finding texts, has assessed messianism and the awaited savior in the social frame and activism.

According to the Iranian approach, the main difference between the Jewish and Israeli conceptions of Maschiach’s followers’ duties is the centrality of the traditional Jewish texts, and the activism of social actions and practices and the collective actions in Israeli messianism. In this approach the passive and historical wait is replaced by an active and socialized one. Based on Jewish teachings, a Jewish person should pass all the borders in front of him until all get unified and remain as a solid ethnicity.⁴¹ Israeli messianism is an activist and violent process, which asks for an act toward the Zionist messianic ideology especially in relation to the resistant front (including the Islamic Republic of Iran and all the countries and movements which are opposing the United States, Israel, and the “arrogant system”). As Hamami Lalehzar says:

Moses ben Maimon speaks very nice about this issue, our enthusiasm for Mashiach’s era is not aimed to dominate on the world or the nations; it’s for the emancipation from the oppressors’ power of hegemony which prevents us from doing our divinely duties. Our passion for such a day is because in that time all the honest and righteous people gather and logic and truth dominate the world.⁴²

THE NATURE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE

Certain issues are discussed a great deal, such as the state’s nature, nation, Israeli nationalism and Jewish internationalism, Hebrew as the Jewish national language, and establishing a Jewish state. Here, the difference and opposition between the native (national) and universal and also the macro-

dimensions in Iran and Israel have been generally talked about. So, this is an important issue to understand the borders between the internal and external dimensions and the national and transnational interests and duties. As a result, determining the limits of citizenship and commitment to the Jewish believers is of importance. These may be discussed in relation to traditional and (post)modern messianism. Negar Partow describes this thus: “In Israel after the foundation of the state, Revolutionary Messianism remained concentrated on an institutionally based narrative.”⁴³ Revolutionary messianism is against the traditional and classical approach, understands Jewish messianism in the base of a Jewish nation-state, and puts the state in the position of the messianic era agent. In fact, Israeli messianism is a kind of semiotics rise and conceptual redefinition and revisionism in methods, ways, and values.

The enactment of the Jewish land law and the formal change of the secularist nature of the Israeli state can also be interpreted in this regard, and in relation to the duality of nationalism and internationalism:

Following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, some idealists of the left of the Zionist movement believed that Israeli leaders might seriously consider the prophetic image of the state that was “a light unto the nation,” basing its policies on the principle of justice and right.⁴⁴

Many scholars, like Yosef Salmon, Michael Brenner, and Jakob Klatzkin, have studied the relation between religion, nationalism, and the nature of Judaism.⁴⁵ In most of these studies, the exile period and the Israelis’ hardships are the main factors of the rise and continuance of the state of Israel. Although “the notion of centrality, or the direct impact of Israel on a peripheral Jewish population, has three distinct frames of reference: the state of Israel, the Jewish people and the Hebrew religion,” Iranian scholarship views Zionist ideology as a deviant one which has seized the people of Israel and the Hebrew religion for the interests of Israeli leaders and *Istekbar-e Jahani* (the global arrogance); moreover, “the contemporary state of Israel is not a religious one and in most cases it is anti-religion.”⁴⁶ Following the foundation of Israel, the diaspora turned into a national community and messianism was no longer an abstract and internationalist idea but a subcategory of nationalism. The Jews made a way through history and had different responsibilities: the responsibility of other-making.⁴⁷

In this reading, messianism (theoretically and practically) is focused on all humanity, and the Jews as the “chosen people” have the responsibility of enacting it. This can be investigated in relation to the governing ideology of Israel (the Zionist idea), and this is one of the serious issues in Israel’s foreign policy and international relations. Zionist ideology in many cases, like immigration to Israel and emigration from Israel, uses the terminology of Jewish messianic literature (*Aliya/Yerida*).

Probably, the most important simulation and distortion in this field of the Iranian studies of political theology and Israeli messianism is related to the Shiite-Islamic theory of *Umm Al-Qura*. According to this theory, the IRI is the main land of righteousness and goodness fighting many others and enemies, and the conservation of this land is the most important function of all the believers and people. Political researchers and agents have generally expressed such simulation and tautology toward Israel as a state built by a group considering themselves the best group and the destined victors of the apocalyptic war.

THE HOLY LAND

“In January 1990 Prime Minister Shamir had made his ‘big Israel’ speech, taken to mean that he intended to fill the OTs [Occupied Territories] with Soviet Jews, saying ‘Big immigration requires Israel to be big as well’ [. . .].”⁴⁸ Shamir stated that “big immigration requires Israel to be big as well. . . we must have the Land of Israel and we have to fight for it, struggle for it.” He added that “just when many among us were saying that time is working against us, time has brought us this aliyah and has solved everything.”⁴⁹

Some post-Zionist scholars and Zionist critics, like Israel Shahak, who are highly attended to by the Iranian elites, state that:

In a famous talmudic passage in *Tractate Ketubot*, page 111, which is echoed in other parts of the Talmud, God is said to have imposed three oaths on the Jews. Two of these oaths that clearly contradict Zionist tenets are: 1) Jews should not rebel against non-Jews, and 2) as a group should not massively emigrate to Palestine before the coming of the Messiah. (The third oath, not discussed here, enjoins the Jews not to pray too strongly for the coming of the Messiah, so as not to bring him before his appointed time.) During the course of post-Talmudic Jewish history, rabbis extensively discussed the three oaths.⁵⁰

In the Iranian approach, one of the manifestations of Jewishness is the wish for returning to the promised and holy land. This is Jewish messianism full of activism and violence. According to some Israeli Jews, hardline Christian Zionists walked a wrong road because the establishment of “Greater Israel” and the displacement of the Palestinians through any means, especially violence, is incompatible with Christ’s message of love and affection. The foundation and expansion of Israel and moving toward the promised land is something in line with the superpowers’ interests, especially the United States.⁵¹

As David Ben-Gurion said in a meeting of Israeli ambassadors July 17, 1950:

So long as there exists a Jewish Diaspora . . . Israel cannot behave as other states do and take into account only its own geographic and geopolitical situation or limit its concerns to its own citizens and nationals only. Despite the fact that the Jews living abroad are in no legal way part and parcel of Israel, the whole Jewish people, wherever it resides, is the business of the State of Israel, its first and determining business. To this Israel cannot be neutral: such a neutrality would mean renouncing our links with the Jewish people.⁵²

Accordingly, in studying Israel's political theology, most Iranians consider the Jews as violent people who are willing to seize the Promised Land at any cost. The Islamic republic views Israel as a dictatorship and even an apartheidist "ethnic democracy" based on Israeli nationalism, and as a result its messianism is also based on its ethnic supremacy. Walter Eytan, an Israeli diplomat, says: "The messianism latent in the Jewish soul, stimulated by the miracle of Israel's return, was ready to embrace the entire world. With the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, a new era of peace and good will could be dawning for all men."⁵³

EMANCIPATION, REDEMPTION, AND SALVATION

Galut (exile), Israelis' holy suffering, and a need to compensate for the Jews' difficult eras are some bases in the analysis of emancipation, redemption, and salvation in Judaism. Jewish messianism can be described as such: "Judaism, in all its forms and manifestations has always manifested a concept of redemption as an event which takes place publicly, on the stage of history and within the community."⁵⁴ Emancipation and salvation are categories related to faith and mysticism.⁵⁵ One of the most promising elements is passing from the era of advent, horrors, turmoil, wars, hopes and fears, and expectations, reaching the era of the establishment of the "awaited" which the Jews call Geula, and have many questions on what will happen in this era: how will human life change?; whether God's orders change or not?; and so on.⁵⁶

Expressions like "rebirth," "the dawn of redemption," "the lost generation of slavery and first of redemption" reoccurred in the writings and speeches of the [Zionist] pioneers, and many believed that they were "building the Third Temple" in the political sense. As the negation of diasporic history, Zionist redemption was viewed as a renewal of the Jewish or Israelite history of Antiquity.⁵⁷

In the words of Joskowicz and Katz: "Modern political Zionism, the second type of messianism without Messiah, refers to a quasi-messianic return of the

Jewish people to their ancient lands without waiting for, and without need of, a messianic figure.”⁵⁸ Iranian scholars believe that the unreligious Zionism, at its inception, used Jewish messianism as a tool for the realization of the promised redemption and salvation. From this perspective, like the Western scholars, even religious Zionism moved toward a pragmatic approach and broke from the history of the notion of redemption, emancipation, and salvation. This was a result of the necessity of articulating a secure life in the land of Palestine.

Messianism is a prompting structure which has unified the diaspora (the chain of equivalence) and manifested them as people out of global history (logic of difference). This unique messianism outlines the Jews as the chosen ethnicity and challenges contemporary global history. In mainstream Judaism, this subject underlies the foregrounding of some elements like martyrdom, and in Zionism is a consequence of seeking supremacy and invasion. So, seeking emancipation in Judaism and Zionism has resulted in two opposing results: resistance and the activism of a holy belief, and invasion and destructive actionism. In the Iranian view, Zionists are unbelievers who are claiming belief in the historical apocalypse, so, the opponents and the rival discourses of the Zionist and especially post-Zionism and new Zionist political theology, emancipation, and salvation are highly attended to.

According to Israel’s mainstream, Zionism has its name from the prophetic and messianic expression of “Zion,” which denotes the redemption of the people and the land. It should be noted that even for Ben-Gurion and other Jewish secular nationalists, the Hebrew bible is the spiritual, historical, and cultural touchstone of Jewish identity and the Jews’ ties with the land of Israel.⁵⁹

In Scholem’s words:

There is revolution where there is an attempt to create a messianic kingdom without Torah. In the last analysis, there can be no revolution for the Jews. The Jewish Revolution is exclusively the reattachment to Torah.⁶⁰

In the Iranian view, while Zionism and Israeli ideology have actually changed to anti-Bible and anti-Zion, Judaism has its originality despite the distortions; but Zionist political theology lacks any originality and legitimacy.

SACRED OR HOLY SUFFERING AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF HARDSHIP

Judaism is the religion of secrets. In this Abrahamic religion, concepts are expressed through secretive and complex signs and symbols. This is beyond the essence of religion as a transmaterial and multilayered issue. Probably

one of the main reasons of this subject, in relation to martyrdom and the holy suffering attributed to messianism, is the unique evolution of the Jews and the people of Israel and the unconventional relation it has with other religions, groups, ideologies, thoughts, and even historical people and political unites. Furthermore, Zoroastrianism can be one of the main sources of belief in the apocalyptic savior, the redemptive Messiah, millennialism, and the re-advent of chiliasm.⁶¹

There is a belief in fate and mission in Judaism. Messiah ben Joseph and Messiah ben David will come at a determined time, and the fate of humanity will change through the centrality of the Jews as the chosen people. However, some rabbis have equated the messianic era to the rising of the sun; this happens step by step and gradually. The darkest period of Judaism, the Shoah, brought about many messianic movements which have a redemptive nature in their foundation, and each emphasizes that emancipation should now take place and cannot wait passively.⁶² “Pre-nationalist historians used this ‘holy scripture . . . not really accessible to the mind’ to narrate a secular history of the ‘Jewish nation,’” as seasoned Israeli cultural critic Moshe Machover concisely explains in his review of Shlomo Sand’s book *The Invention of the Jewish People*:

Jews already “knew” that they were all direct descendants of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who was renamed “Israel” by God. Thus they were all “literally” Bnei Yisrael (Sons of Israel). Their God-promised and God-given homeland was Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel). . . . Eventually—to cut a long story short—the Jews were punished “for their sins” and were exiled from their homeland by the Romans. But at the End of Days God will send his Mashiach ben-David (anointed scion of David), who will ingather the exiled Jews and return them to their homeland, the Land of Zion. All that remained for Zionist ideology to do was to secularize this sacred narrative. The eschatological bit, the “return” to Zion, was converted into a political colonizing project—hence its very name: “Zionism”—with the impressively bearded Theodor Herzl as secular messiah or his herald.⁶³

That some like Hertzberg use the term “secular messianism” to define the spiritual essence of the Zionist enterprise may sound like an oxymoron, or at least a paradox (which, on some level, it is).⁶⁴

CONCLUSION

The process of finding and understanding scientific subjects must generally exist under the shade of unscientific categories. In other words, you understand something which for its conception you have experienced specialized and nonspecialized training directly and indirectly; and, the more the deficiency in that field, the more lack of accuracy you face.

In relation to Jewish Studies and Israel Studies in Iran, with a concentration on political theology and especially messianism, attending to the extant and unique context and perspective is of importance. There is a local approach which is not necessarily based on scientific rules and parameters. About the Jewish people and the political theology in messianism, we should accept a number of narratives which pass some categorizations like Ashkenazi and Sephardi; local approaches which have been affected by the historical heritage and existing abstract realities.

In the structure of Islamic identity, Judaism has always been considered a moderate “other.” This process of other-making has been tenser and more serious in Islamic lands, especially in postrevolutionary Iran, with the rise of Israel and Zionist ideology. Thus, this process has moved from agonism to antagonism and even verbal and physical violence. By attending to the duality of good and evil, the oppressed and the oppressor, this subject has had its impact on scholarship in the fields of Jewish Studies and Israel Studies and formulated a special duality. The centrality of survival and the pragmatic trend, besides the technical defects and lack of familiarity with Jewish culture and the Hebrew language, underlies the raw and immature studies of Judaism and Israel within Iran. Messianic action contains a pragmatic metaphysics and dimensions of messianic populism; and, from messianic image to action, Judaism and Israel are articulated as imagined, not necessarily as they are. The apocalyptic events and processes, like the Holocaust, are in a static field based on their relationship with the self and the other identity, and the processes of inclusion and exclusion, are accepted or rejected.

NOTES

1. “Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam” (Ali-‘Imran/ 19)
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