

**Final Conference
of the**

**Oxford Seminar in Advanced Jewish Studies:
*Towards the Study of Jewish-Buddhist Relations***



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10-11 March 2022

Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies
Clarendon Institute, Walton Street
Oxford, OX1 2HG

Convenors: Boaz Huss, Sebastian Musch & Lionel Obadia

*Entrance free. No registration for in-person attendance necessary.
Please click [here](#) to register to join via Zoom.*

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

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Thursday, 10 March 2022

9:00-9:15 – Introduction

9:15-11:30 – Panel 1

Chair: Job Jindo

Dong Xiuyuan – ‘Intuitive Knowledge in Jewish and Buddhist Scholasticism’

Gideon Elazar – ‘An Unclean Name: Abraham’s Mystical Legacy and Contemporary Rabbinical Responses to the Importation of Buddhist Practices’

Aleš Weiss – ‘Buddhism in 18th-21st-Century Jewish Religious Literature: Three Approaches’

11:30-11:45 – Coffee Break

11:45-13:15 – Panel 2

Chair: Boaz Huss

Shimon Lev – ‘Asia is One(?): Jewish Encounters with Buddhism in the Context of the Jewish National Movement in Europe and Palestine’

Samuel Glauber-Zimra – ‘*Di reyð fun Buda*: A. Almi and the Deparochialization of Jewish Spirituality’

13:15-14:30 – Lunch Break (*lunch provided for speakers only*)

14:30-16:45 – Panel 3

Chair: Lionel Obadia

Ruth Harris – ‘Buddhist Modernism and the “Semitic” Religions’

Sebastian Musch – ‘Antisemitism, Christianity, and the Quest for the Buddhist Jesus’

Boaz Huss – ‘The Spirit of the East: Orientalism, Nationalism, and the Mystification of Kabbalah, Advaita Vedanta, and Zen Buddhism’

19:30 – Dinner (*for speakers only*)

Friday, 11 March 2022

9:00-11:15 – Panel 4

Chair: Yakov Ariel

Rachel Werczberger – ‘Switching, Matching, and Mixing: Jewish Mindfulness Under Neoliberalism’

Emily Sigalow – ‘Making Meditation Jewish: The Construction of a New Religious Practice’

Ori Mautner – ‘“Finding Vessels for Our Lights”: Orthodox Israeli Jews Encountering the Divine Soul Through Secularised Buddhist Meditation’

11:15-11:30 – Coffee Break

11:30-13:00 – Panel 5

Chair: Ruth Harris

Job Jindo – ‘Between Hagami and Chouraqui: Monotheisms, Asia, and the Survival of Humanness’

Alan Brill – ‘Judaism and Buddhist Modernism: Philosophic Encounters of the Last 50 Years’

13:00-14:00 – Lunch Break (*lunch provided for speakers only*)

14:00-16:15 – Panel 6

Chair: Sebastian Musch

Yaakov Ariel – ‘Individualism, Rebellion and Searching for Meaning Outside of the Fold: Jewish Baby Boomers and Non-Jewish Forms of Spirituality’

Mira Niculescu – ‘European Jewish Buddhists, American Jubus, and Jewish Mindfulness Exploring the Phenomenon of the Jewish Buddhists in a Global Lens’

Lionel Obadia – ‘Beyond *Hinjus*, *Jubus* and Other Hyphenated Creatures: The Complex Visibility of Judaism in the Spiritual Neo-Hindu Futuristic City of Auroville, South India’

ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION
(in alphabetical order)

Yaakov Ariel, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

'Individualism, Rebellion and Searching for Meaning Outside of the Fold: Jewish Baby Boomers and Non-Jewish Forms of Spirituality'

The 1960s-1970s saw a dramatic surge in the number of young Jews searching for meaning and community outside the fold. The Baby-Boom generation militated for and obtained freedoms in a number of areas that were previously unimaginable. This included spiritual and communal pursuits. If previously, Jews considered their identity and allegiances as given, many have come to see them as open to individual exploration and choice.

Young Jews ventured out of their ancestral faith, for the most part without turning their backs on their Jewish identity. The choices were often Americanized forms of Asian religions, as well as new or hybrid forms of Christianity, Native American traditions, and UFO-oriented faiths.

Yaakov Ariel is a professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he teaches courses on New Religious Movements, Religion and the Counterculture, Religion and Race, Messianic Movements, Religion in America, Global Evangelicalism, and more.

A graduate of the Hebrew University and the University of Chicago, Ariel's research has focused on Messianic Movements, New Religious Movements, The Counterculture and religion; Christian attitudes towards Jews, the Holy Land, Zionism and Israel; history of missions to the Jews and Jewish conversions to other faiths; Jewish responses to Christianity; and Jewish conversions to other faiths. Ariel has investigated New Religious Movements and the effect of the Counterculture on religion in America and other parts of the globe.

Ariel's current list of publications includes, in addition to three books and two booklets, a hundred essays (referred articles and book chapters) and dozens of book reviews and encyclopedia entries. His book, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews*, won the Outler Prize of the American Society of Church History. His current book project is a religious and cultural biography of the poet Allen Ginsberg. More information about Ariel's publications, and other academic activities can be found at:

http://religion.unc.edu/_people/full-time-faculty/ariel/

<https://independent.academia.edu/YaakovAriel>.

Alan Brill, Seton Hall University

'Judaism and Buddhist Modernism: Philosophic Encounters of the Last 50 Years'

I propose to research the philosophic aspects of the Jewish-Buddhist encounter of the last 50 years. Masao Abe, the Japanese Buddhist philosopher, initiated an eight-volume series of important dialogues with Christians and Jews. The Christian discussions have been analyzed by Prof Leo Lefbure of Georgetown and others, but the Jewish discussions – including those of Eugene Borowitz, Arthur Green, and Sandra Lubarsky – have not been analyzed in depth. Topics covered included the nature of God, the soul, covenant, the nature of evil, and sunyata. My goal is to situate this historically in a specific moment of Buddhist modernism and when Buddhist Modernists, such as Shimada Hiromi of Soka Gakkai, needed to face Western culture. Besides the philosophic analysis, the paper will analyse how well each side understood the other religion and what were the conduits of knowledge. In general, the Jewish side showed little knowledge of Buddhist monks, priests, deities, hungry ghosts, and the general contours of karmic Buddhism.

Alan Brill is the Cooperman/Ross Endowed Chair in the Department of Religion at Seton Hall University. He specializes in interfaith theology, mysticism, comparative theology, and Kabbalah. Brill is the author of *Judaism and World Religions* (2012), *Judaism and Other Religions* (2010), and *Thinking God: The Mysticism of Rabbi Zadok of Lublin* (2002). Brill received a Fulbright Senior Scholar Award for research and teaching at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi. This research produced his volume *Rabbi on the Ganges: A Jewish Hindu Encounter* (2019). Brill is currently working on *A Jewish View of the Trinity* (Fortress Press, forthcoming 2023) and *A Jewish Theology of Religious Diversity* (Fortress Press, forthcoming 2024).

Gideon Elazar, Ariel Univestiy

'An Unclean Name: Abraham's Mystical Legacy and Contemporary Rabbinical Responses to the Importation of Buddhist Practices'

The past few years have witnessed the widespread proliferation of Buddhist practices, ideas, and terminology in Jewish religious circles in Israel, particularly among religious Zionists. Advertisements offering mediation courses and other physical and spiritual practices are widely publicized, often presented as a form of Jewish-East Asian philosophical synthesis. Thus, while the term Buddhism is most often avoided, titles such as 'Vipassana with a Jewish outlook' and 'Jewish mindfulness' are increasingly common. This lecture will examine rabbinical responses to the cultural impact of Buddhism through an analysis of a widely cited commentary on the biblical verse describing Abraham's gifts to his children: 'Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, and while he was

still living he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country' (Genesis 25:5-6). The Talmudic commentary for this single verse notes that the gifts provided to the sons of the concubines were in fact of a mystical/magical nature, described as an 'unclean name' (Sanhedrin 91A), often later identified as a form of spiritual knowledge. Early modern rabbinical scholar Menashe Ben Israel (1604-1657) was the first to identify the physical location of these long-lost decedents of Abraham, drawing parallels between Indian and Kabbalistic concepts of reincarnation. In the past several decades, mention of Abraham's gifts has served to contextualize East Asian religious traditions within the biblical narrative. As such, the commentary features in virtually every discussion regarding the correct attitude towards engaging with Buddhist practice.

In this lecture, I attempt to trace the deep ambivalence inherent in the idea of Abraham's mystical gift, focusing primarily on contemporary rabbinical texts. On the one hand, the sons sent east are in possession of knowledge from a legitimate source, rooted in the teachings of the patriarch Abraham. At the same time, the 'name' given is described as 'unclean' - marking the knowledge as either negative in nature or forbidden to Jews. The idea of knowledge both legitimate and suspect allows for a wide range of approaches regarding the meaning, nature, and limits of exposure to Buddhism. Rabbinical discussion of the issue occurs within the context of the globalization of religion in the 21st century, growing interest in spiritual change, and the acute need to adapt and maintain religious boundaries.

Gideon Elazar is a lecturer at Bar Ilan University and a researcher at the Ariel University Eastern Research and Development Authority. His PhD degree, received from the Haifa University Asian Studies Department, is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted among Protestant missionaries in Southwest China. His book *The Missionaries Return: Christianity, Ethnicity and State Control in Globalized Yunnan* is due to be published by Pennsylvania University Press in 2022. His research interests include religion, ethnicity, and identity in contemporary China and Israel as well as the cultural interaction between Israel and East Asian societies. His work in the past several years includes ethnographic research of East Asians in Israel such as the Bnei Menashe community from the India-Myanmar border and Chinese tourists and students as well as comparative readings of Buddhist, Daoist and Jewish-Hasidic texts.

Samuel Glauber-Zimra, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

'Di reydt fun Buda: A. Almi and the Deparochialization of Jewish Spirituality'

Di reydt fun Buda, the first book-length collection of Buddhist teachings in Yiddish, appeared in Vilna in 1927. Brought out by the prestigious Kletskin publishing house, the book, an abridged translation of Paul Carus's *The Gospel of Buddha*, was the work of the Yiddish essayist, poet, and spiritualist A. Almi (pen-name of Eliyahu Khaym Sheps, 1892-1963). *Di*

reyd fun Buda was produced as part of a broader effort by Almi in the late 1920s to present non-Abrahamic religious traditions to Yiddish readers. In addition to *Di reyd fun Buda*, he published a volume on Confucianism and Daoism, as well as an anthology covering Egyptian, Indian, Japanese, and Native American religious traditions. Almi framed these texts as a rebellion against the narrow constraints of the secular Yiddish cultural hegemony, which, he lamented, had no truck with metaphysical or religious questions. This paper presents *Di reyd fun Buda* against the backdrop of Almi's activities in these years, demonstrating that this first Yiddish work on Buddhism was part of a larger project to deparochialize Jewish spirituality. This project, it is argued, had close ties to the framework of comparative religious inquiry advocated for by the Theosophical Society, whose literature Almi read and incorporated into his writings from these years, thus situating the Yiddish-Buddhist encounter within the esoteric milieu of the early 20th century.

Samuel Glauber-Zimra is a PhD candidate in the Goldstein-Goren Department of Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. His dissertation, 'Occult Modernities: Hidden Realities in East European Jewish Culture, 1880-1939', examines the various expressions of modern occultism within the popular culture and religious thought of Eastern European Jewry and its diaspora in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His most recent article, 'Writings on Spiritualism from the Archive of R. Eliyahu Mordekhai Halevy Wolkowsky', appears in the journal *Kabbalah*, and he is the co-editor of Hillel Zeitlin, *In the Secret Place of the Soul: Three Essays* (Jerusalem: Blima, 2020) [Hebrew].

Ruth Harris, University of Oxford

'Buddhist Modernism and the "Semitic" Religions'

Ruth Harris will speak about the relationship of Buddhist Modernism to the Semitic Religions. The paper will focus on the widely travelled and influential Anagarika Dharmapala, who first became known in the west as Theravada Buddhism's representative at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893. As a preacher and mystic, he promoted Buddhist Universalism and agitated for the protection of Buddhist sites in India. However, these aspirations went together with a fierce Sinhalese nationalism that contained a violent critique of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. He envisaged these 'Semitic' religions as 'primitive' and 'tribal', regarded Jesus as a fanatical and ill-tempered Jew, and condemned the Muslims ('Moors') of his native homeland as the 'Jews of Ceylon'. Despite his universalist claims, he hoped to protect Lanka as an island from foreign religious invasion. In contrast to the western stereotype of Buddhism as compassionate and mindful, this talk will reveal its aggressive and martial shadow.

Ruth Harris is Senior Research Fellow at All Souls College and Professor of Modern History at Oxford. She has written widely in European and global history, as well as the history of gender, religion, and science. She is known for *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* and *The Man on Devil's Island, a history of the Dreyfus Affair*, both published by Allen Lane/Press. Her forthcoming work is *Guru to the World: Vivekananda's Life and Legacies* (October 2022). She is currently drafting a manuscript entitled, *The Global Idealist Moment: East-West Encounters*, which includes her current writings on Buddhism and the 'Semitic Religions'.

Boaz Huss, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

'The Spirit of the East: Orientalism, Nationalism, and the Mystification of Kabbalah, Advaita Vedanta, and Zen Buddhism'

In the lecture, I will offer a comparative discussion of the categorization of Kabbalah, Advaita Vedanta, and Zen Buddhism as forms of mysticism, and of their study as such. The lecture will show how Jewish, Indian, and Japanese scholars accepted the modern Western theological categories 'mysticism' and 'religious experience' and adopted the orientalist image of the mystical east. These scholars identified local Jewish, Japanese, and Indian traditions as 'mystical' and 'spiritual', and presented them as central components of their national identities. The lecture will examine the common discursive framework, and the similar historical and political factors, that enabled and stimulated the construction of Jewish, Hindu, and Japanese mysticism.

Boaz Huss is the Aron Bernstein Chair in Jewish History at the Goldstein-Goren Department of Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University. He is the Vice President of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism. His research interests include history of Kabbalah, Contemporary Kabbalah, Western Esotericism, New Age Culture and New Religious Movements in Israel. His recent publications include *Mystifying Kabbalah: Academic Scholarship, National Theology, and New Age Spirituality* (Oxford University Press, 2020) and *The Zohar: Reception and Impact* (Liverpool University Press, 2016).

Job Y. Jindo, Academy of Jewish Religion

'Between Hagami and Chouraqui: Monotheisms, Asia, and the Survival of Humanness'

This lecture explores the relationship between two prominent religious minds – Rev. Shocho Hagami (1903-89), a Japanese Tendai-Buddhist, and Dr. Nathan André Chouraqui (1917-2007), an Algerian-Jewish thinker – who shared a vision of peaceful coexistence among world religions and stressed the significance of cultivating the sense of the transcendent for the survival of humanness. In particular, they each concerned themselves with reconciliation

among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and for that, drew insight from the spiritual legacy of eastern religions. This lecture examines if and how their vision and approach may still be relevant to addressing some of the pressing existential, social, and global issues.

Job Y. Jindo teaches Semitic languages, biblical studies, and comparative religion at the Academy for Jewish Religion in the United States. His research interests span from phenomenology of biblical religion, to comparative religion (especially eastern religions), modern Jewish biblical interpretation, mindfulness in the East and the West, memory of the dead and the identity of the living, and cross-cultural and cross-religious dialogue. His publications include *Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered* (Harvard Semitic Monograph Series, 2010) and, with Benjamin Sommer and Thomas Staubli, *Yehezkel Kaufmann and the Reinvention of Jewish Biblical Scholarship* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis: Fribourg, 2017). At Oxford, he intends to explore the relationship between two prominent religious minds—Rev. Shocho Hagami (1903–89), a Japanese Tendai-Buddhist, and Nathan André Chouraqui (1917–2007), an Algerian-Jewish thinker—who shared a vision of peaceful coexistence across the world and stressed the significance of cultivating the sense of the transcendent for the survival of humanness. This is part of his book in progress, *The Life and Legacy of Shocho Hagami: Buddhism, Religious Reconciliation and the Survival of Humanness*.

Shimon Lev, Tel-Hai Academic College

‘Asia is One(?): Jewish Encounters with Buddhism in the Context of the Jewish National Movement in Europe and Palestine’

In my lecture, I will examine key trends and elements of the Jewish and Zionist worlds’ perception of and affinity with India and its culture from the end of the *Haskalah* movement till India and Israel were granted independence. The initial point of departure for this discussion relates to the textual encounter between Jewish thought and India at the outset of the *Haskalah* movement. I will focus on the encounter with Buddhist thought, starting from Getzel Selikovitch’s book *Torat HaBudhha* (NYC 1922) [Hebrew] up to David Ben Gurion’s well-known interest in Buddhism.

Shimon Lev (Low) is a curator and a researcher in Indian Studies focusing on modern Indian history and the cultural and political encounters between Indians and Jews in the context of their respective national movements. He received his PhD from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2016). In addition to his academic activities, Lev curated and exhibited in numerous solo and group art and photography exhibitions in Israel and abroad. Lev published widely in the fields of Indian Studies, culture, and art. Among his publications are *Vesheyodea Lishol* (Xhargol, 1998); *Soulmates: The Story of Mahatma Gandhi and Hermann Kallenbach* (Orient Blackswan, 2012); *From Lithuania to Santiniketan: Schlomith Flaum & Rabindranath Tagore* (Lithuanian Embassy in New Delhi, 2018); and “Clear are the Paths of India:” *The Cultural and*

Political Encounter Between Indians and Jews in the Context of their Respective National Movements (Gamma, 2018). He edited the Hebrew edition of Gandhi's *Satyagraha in South Africa* (Babel, 2014) and *Hind Swaraj* (Adam Olam, 2016). Lev's art has appeared as part of many solo and group exhibitions. In 2019, he curated the exhibition 'The Mount: Viewing Temple Mount-Haram al-Sharif, 1839-2019' at the Tower of David Museum, Jerusalem (2019-2020). He is currently teaching in Tel-Hai Academic College (East Asia Faculty) and working on a book entitled *Gandhi and the Jews – The Jews and Gandhi* as well as a curatorship project focusing on the Western Wall, planned for 2023 at the Tower of David Museum in Jerusalem.

Ori Mautner, University of Cambridge

“‘Finding Vessels for Our Lights’’: Orthodox Israeli Jews Encountering the Divine Soul through Secularised Buddhist Meditation’

For orthodox-Jewish Israeli meditators, differentiating insight (*vipassanā*) meditative techniques from Buddhism—or ‘secularising’ them—is essential for then rendering these practices orthodox-Jewish. Such people frame *vipassanā* as centred on the mundane human body, and thus as being universal, religiously neutral, and involving no forbidden ‘Eastern’ religious contents. This, however, also allows orthodox meditators, in turn, to *appropriate* insight meditation, namely, to utilize such techniques for improving their Jewish practice, argue that they are originally Jewish, and situate *vipassanā* in the context of national-religious Jewish redemption. I explain how this dynamic—in which orthodox Jews religiously ‘uplift’ profane Buddhist meditation—finds expression in their specific understanding of what comprises the self. For them, ‘repairing’ through meditation the *nefesh*—the lowest, bodily part of oneself—is necessary for then accessing the soul (*neshamah*), a higher part through which one can encounter the creator. Orthodox-Jewish meditators, then, rely on the materiality of the body for both ‘purifying’ meditative practice from Buddhism, *and* for utilising such practice for contacting the God of Israel within.

Ori Mautner is ESRC Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge. In 2022-2026, he will be Junior Research Fellow at Christ's College, Cambridge. He is also graduate of the Lautman Interdisciplinary Programme for Outstanding Students, Tel Aviv University. His PhD (Cambridge 2021) examined the diverse ways orthodox Jews on the one hand, and left-wing activists for solidarity with Palestinians on the other, employ Buddhist-derived meditative practices for pursuing objectives that are central for them, respectively, as contemporary Israelis. Mautner won the 2020 student essay prize of the American Anthropological Association's Society for the Anthropology of Religion, and his articles have been published in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* and in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*.

Sebastian Musch, Osnabrück University

'Antisemitism, Christianity, and the Quest for the Buddhist Jesus'

The lecture explores the connection between the quest for the historical Jesus in the decades following David Strauss' *Das Leben Jesu (The Life of Jesus)* from 1835 and the concomitant rise in interest in Buddhism and the Buddha during the 19th century. As heated discussions about the historicity of Jesus dominated the theological realm in German-speaking countries, the growing knowledge about the Buddha as a historical figure raised complex questions about the origins of Christianity and its potential links to Buddhism. The lecture will show how this discourse became closely tied to antisemitic attempts to eradicate the Jewish roots of Jesus and replace them with a Buddhist origin story.

Dr Sebastian Musch is a historian of modern thought and culture with interests in Jewish Studies, German Studies, Holocaust Studies and Migration Studies. He is currently the Alfred Landecker Lecturer at the Department of History at Osnabrück University in Germany. He earned his PhD in 2018 from the Center for Jewish Studies in Heidelberg and held visiting fellowships at Haifa University, University of California Berkeley, Dartmouth College, and University of Southampton among others. His first monograph, *Jewish Encounters with Buddhism in German Culture – Between Moses and Buddha (1890-1940)*, was published with Palgrave Macmillan in 2019.

Mira Niculescu, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

'European Jewish Buddhists, American Jubus, and Jewish Mindfulness Exploring the Phenomenon of the Jewish Buddhists in a Global Lens'

After a few remarkable isolated cases of conversions to Buddhism by European and American Jews at the turn of the 20th century, the sudden popularization of the Dharma among the generation of the Counterculture revealed a new cultural phenomenon: as a noticeable proportion of the emerging Western Buddhist leaders in America were of Jewish descent, observers, in the wake of the best-selling book the *Jew in the Lotus*, started talking about 'Jubus', Jewish Buddhists. Yet, less famously, on the other side of the Atlantic, European Jews have been and still are actively engaged with Buddhism.

What are the similarities and differences between European and American Jewish Buddhists, and what is the impact of the encounter between Jews and Buddhism in these various contexts? Is Jewish Mindfulness, the hybrid practice born out of the Jewish Buddhist Encounter in America, uniquely an American phenomenon?

This paper seeks to provide a better understanding of the Jewish Buddhist Encounter and its cultural consequences by looking at it through a global lens. Drawing from multi-year

ethnographic fieldwork between America and Western Europe, I offer a comparative analysis on the phenomenon of the Jewish Buddhists as a case to study global religious trends and cross-cultural fertilization today.

Mira Neshama Niculescu is a sociologist of religion focusing on Jewish spirituality and meditation and the contemporary encounter between Jews and Buddhism. A former visiting scholar at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, City University of New York and Columbia University, she earned her PhD in Sociology of Religion at Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris (EHESS) researching the phenomenon of Jewish Buddhists.

She is currently working on her first book based on her PhD dissertation and researching the global field of Jewish Meditation as a Post-Doctoral Golda Meir Fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem as well as a Visiting Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies.

Lionel Obadia, University of Lyon

'Beyond Hinjus, Jubus and Other Hyphenated Creatures: The Complex Visibility of Judaism in the Spiritual Neo-Hindu Futuristic City of Auroville, South India'

On the basis of ethnographic fieldwork in the city of Auroville, South India, this paper attempts to question other forms of being related to Asian traditions, and others for people from Jewish extraction, apart from the current models of hyphenated identities exemplified by the 'Jubu' and the 'Hinju' figures. Recent research has focused on the appeal to Buddhism and Hinduism among Jews in the context of counterculture, and that of the mutations of Judaism, hypermodern conditions of Globalization, and generational analytical models with a string emphasis upon identity claims, redefinitions of the self, and the Jewish background in a new 'spiritual' framework. The case of Auroville, a spiritual community founded by a Turkish-French Jew (Mirra Alfassa) where dozens of Israeli and diasporic Jews live and practice, brings to light a more complex, fluid, undefined, even contradictory attitude toward their Jewish heritage with reference to the Jewish-Born Guru.

Lionel Obadia, PhD in Sociology (1997), has been associate professor in Ethnology at the University of Lille (1998-2004) and is full professor in Anthropology (since 2004) at the University of Lyon, France. He teaches in other French universities (EHESS, EPHE, SciencePo). He is specialized in anthropology of religion, Asian religions and globalization. His works focus on hybridization and cultural/religious transfers. He has conducted fieldwork in France, other parts of Europe (on Buddhism in the West), Nepal (on Buddhism and Shamanism), the United States and Israel (on Jewish messianism), and South India (in Auroville). His research now explores the relationships between religions and digital technologies. He has published ten books, including *Shalom Bouddha!* (Berg, 2015), and more than 150 papers (journal articles

and book chapters), including 'Buddha in the Promised Land? Outlines of the settlement of Buddhism in Israel', in Baumann, Martin & Prebish Charles (Eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002; 'The relevance and limits of "hybridization" theory: the case of jubus, "jewish-buddhists"' in David Kim (ed.) *Religious Encounter in a Trans-Cultural Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); 'Mort, au-delà, messianisme: eschatologie individuelle et eschatologie individualisée dans le judaïsme: éclairages ethnographiques à partir de cas français', *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion*, 2016, 1.

Emily Sigalow, UJA-Federation of New York

'Making Meditation Jewish: The Construction of a New Religious Practice'

This presentation will trace the history of the movement for Jewish meditation in the contemporary United States. It will review the structural and cultural factors that brought this movement into being and will explore why and how it has grown in popularity over the past thirty years. It will also discuss how the founding teachers of Jewish meditation repackaged a Buddhist practice within a Jewish framework and made it congruent with expectations and customs within the Jewish community.

Emily Sigalow is a sociologist of contemporary Jewish life who focuses in particular on the American Jewish community. Currently, she is an Executive Director at the UJA-Federation of New York where she directs the research, evaluation, and measurement department. She recently finished a book about the historical and contemporary encounter between Judaism and Buddhism in America. This book, *American JewBu: Jews, Buddhists, and Religious Change*, (Princeton University Press, 2019) explains how Judaism and Buddhism met, combined, and changed in relation to each other in America since 1893. She has published over a dozen academic articles and book chapters while also engaging with the broader Jewish community through research presentations, popular articles, and other social media appearances. She holds a BA in Sociology/Anthropology with a minor in Mathematics from Swarthmore College, an MA in History of the Jewish People from Ben Gurion University, and a PhD in Sociology & Near Eastern and Judaic Studies from Brandeis University.

Aleš Weiss, Charles University

'Buddhism in 18th-21st-Century Jewish Religious Literature: Three Approaches'

This lecture will seek to outline three important contexts in which Buddhism has been thematized in modern Jewish religious literature: 1) as a tool of polemics and self-definition, 2) as a form of religiously neutral spirituality fully compatible with Judaism, and 3) as a rival

to Judaism, endangering its social and ideological integrity. This division tries to capture the thematization of Buddhism in Jewish religious literature in the diachronic perspective and explores the evolution in the Jewish religious relation towards Buddhism. The lecture will also try to address the issue of continuity and discontinuity in the respective roles and images of Buddhism in modern Judaism, and possible future trajectories for the image of Buddhism in Judaism.

Aleš Weiss studied Comparative Religion and Jewish Studies at Charles University in Prague, Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, and as a Visiting Research Fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He completed his PhD at Charles University with a thesis that analyzes Jewish religious views of Buddhism in a broad historical perspective, from the end of 18th century down to the present. Through an analysis of Jewish religious texts, it shows the ways Buddhism has been contextualized and tries to uncover the role which the perceptions of Buddhism have been playing in modern Judaism. He focuses on Jewish intellectual history and teaches at the Prague Centre for Jewish Studies at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University.

Rachel Werczberger, Hadassah Academic College

‘Switching, Matching, and Mixing: Jewish Mindfulness Under Neoliberalism’

Jewish mindfulness (JM) is one of the new hybrid forms of Jewish practices that have emerged in recent years within the emerging cultural realm of ‘Jewish spirituality’. Fusing traditional Jewish practice with Buddhist mindfulness meditation, JM serves as a prime example of the tendency of switching, matching, and mixing in contemporary religious life in North America in general, and among North American Jewry, in particular. Often this tendency is labeled through the analytical categories of religious individualization, self-authority, and bricolage. Yet, as some scholars have noted, these notions ignore the social and cultural frames that condition one’s possibilities to tailor his worldview as well as the power relations and hierarchies that define and delimit such processes. Following this critique, my lecture will explore JM and Jewish spirituality in terms of the prevailing neoliberal ethos and the formation of neoliberal subjectivities. I will argue that the religious mixing of Jewish mindfulness is driven by the neoliberal logic and the quest for self-transformation; a quest based on the prevailing therapeutic logic.

Rachel Werczberger is a cultural anthropologist and a lecturer at Hadassah Academic College and Ramat Gan Academic College. Her research interests include the anthropology of religion, Jewish renewal and revival, and contemporary spiritualities. Her book *Jews in the Age of Authenticity: Jewish Spirituality Renewal in Israel* was published in 2016 by Peter Lang publishing. Her edited volume (co-edited with Daniel Monterescu) *Jewish Revival(s) Inside Out: The*

Remaking of Jewishness in a Transnational Age is forthcoming from Wayne University Press. Her current research project focuses on the everyday religious and spiritual experiences of Israeli Jews.

Dong Xiuyuan, Shandong University

‘Intuitive Knowledge in Jewish and Buddhist Scholasticism’

In the lecture, I will compare the concept of necessary knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-ḍarūrī*) in Jewish Kalām with the *pratyakṣa* in Abhidharma literature. The medieval Jewish theologians and the Buddhist epistemologists both highlighted the priority of direct perception in cognition, and shared a similar taxonomy of intuitive knowledge. There is a historical link between these two scholastic traditions via early Islamic Kalām. The Jewish theologians appropriated this epistemological scheme from the Muslim Mutakallimūn and reformed it to engage in the interreligious debates over validity and abrogation of the revealed laws.

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