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The Study of 'Hinduism' and the Study of 'Judaism': A Personal Journey

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Abstract
Two religious traditions have informed my personal and academic life – Judaism and Hinduism. This is a reflection on their intersection over a period of more than 40 years. This article chronicles an academic journey from a reified religious universalism towards identifying a deep structural affinity between Judaism and Hinduism defined in contrast to other major differentially constructed religious traditions, then to a position of radical alterity that is potentially just as productive of a very different discussion among those interested in cross-traditional and interreligious deliberations. The wider context is that of the relationships, conceptual and analytical, between discernible religious traditions, or dimensions thereof.

Keywords Judaism · Hinduism · Comparative reflections · Autobiography · Hindu–Jewish studies · Intercultural understanding

Introduction to the New Framework for the Study of 'Religions'

This article chronicles an academic journey from a reified religious universalism towards identifying a deep structural affinity between Judaism and Hinduism defined in contrast to other major differentially constructed religious traditions, then to a position of radical alterity that is potentially just as productive, albeit of a very different discussion among those interested in cross-traditional and interreligious deliberations. The wider context is that of the relationships, conceptual and analytical, between discernible religious traditions, or dimensions thereof. But before coming to Judaism and Hinduism, it is important to register three delineating caveats. First, there are Judaisms and Hinduisms, that is, there are plural religious traditions and trajectories within these larger heuristic tradition-yānas or vehicles.

Secondly, scholars of religion in the last 15 or so years have begun to systematically rethink these conceptual vessels of religious traditions. The older insight

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that "religion" was primarily a Protestant categorization that framed inter-religious discourse in specific, and often pejorative, ways has given way to a broader and more problematic critique that both provides a fuller chronological and theological backdrop to the Christian genealogies of "religion" and the difficulties of locating parallels in other languages and conceptual schemas, and that also focusses on the impact of the adoption of "religion" and its oppositions, as indigenous categories by other religious traditions.[1] The work of scholars including Brent Nongbri and Tomoko Masuzawa has provoked a critical re-examination of earlier cross-religions comparative work (Nongbri 2015; Masuzawa 2005). This has a profound impact on the use of the term "Judaism" in religious studies scholarship and differentially on the use of "Hinduism" too.[2] We now need to reconstruct "religion" beyond its oppositional antitheses – secularity, politics, rationality and spirituality – both within and between these reconfigured religious traditions. These new agendas also raise anew the politics of forging such parallels as we embark on the third decade of the twenty-first century amid growing doubts about the post-Cold War "return of religion".[3]

Thirdly, my purview is limited to the reflective and scholarly rather than that of existential inter-religious encounters, or interfaith relations, Buberian or other. My experience of the latter has been limited to participation in broader multilateral, multi-religious activities and the rather disconcerting bilateral Hindu–Jewish sessions at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne in 2009, where discussions of Islam played a prominent part and the asymmetry of concerns generated diverse and seemingly incommensurate agendas.[4] While clearly essential, most interfaith dialogue rarely rises above "the hermeneutics of the warm tummy", that is, a sort of mild, "collective effervescence" of limited duration as the conflicts and tensions of shared mutual incomprehension are consciously avoided, and with the result that these "relationships" are repeatedly proven to be less than robust when actually encountering "other" people who define themselves in terms of substantial ethical, theological or communal differences.[5]

[1] For example, the prioritization of belief over practice, or of religious experience over discipline and authoritative practice.

[2] In relation to Judaism, something of the scale of the necessary revisions can be appreciated by comparing (Boyarin 2006) with his more recent studies, (Boyarin and Barton 2016, and Boyarin 2018); also see (Batnitzky 2013). On Hinduism, see (Sweetman 2003, Lipner 2006, Pennington 2007, Lorenzen 2006, Michaels 2004) and the definitive collection of articles in (Llewellyn 2005).

[3] See *The Economist* journalists, Wooldridge and Micklethwait (2009; also, Berger 1999, PEW 2015 and Sloterdijk 2014) for a sustained argument for reading "the return to religion" as nothing of the kind but in reality, a Nietzschean anti-liberal, anti-religious trajectory.

[4] I served as the Jewish Co-Chair of the New Zealand Council of Christians and Jews and am currently on the boards of the Wellington Abrahamic Council, and the Religious Diversity Centre of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Nationally, my work in the inter-religious space includes writing (Morris 2007; Morris 2009a, b; Morris 2009a; Morris 2019; and Morris 2011). Additionally, I have been involved in the government-sponsored Regional Interfaith Dialogues in the Asia Pacific (Yogyakarta, 2004; Cebu, 2006; Waitangi, 2007; Phnom Penh, 2008; Perth, 2009; and Semarang, 2012) as a member of the New Zealand delegation (http://regionalinterfaith.org.au/).

[5] Jacob Neusner is persuasive that a genuine Jewish–Christian dialogue has yet to commence, that is, between two discrete religious traditions; see (Neusner 1991: ix).

A Jewish Student Encounters Hinduism

My undergraduate studies were shaped by logical positivism and analytical thinking in the so-called Anglo-American fashion. The focus was on the modest, meaningful and intelligible, as I learned of ethics, well metaethics and, metaphysics, or rather the ways in which metaphysical words were used in everyday language. This provoked a reaction that fostered an attraction to the immodest, meaningless and unintelligible as I discovered so-called Indian philosophy through modernist, nationalist idealists such as Radhakrishnan and Dasgupta.[6] These bodies of thought were in fact not really philosophical at all in terms of being primarily focussed on compelling logical arguments and supporting evidence, but were rather articulations that converged on mokṣa (spiritual emancipation, release or liberation), that is, Hindu "theologies", addressing the discernibly religious and salvific end of spiritual life. Increasingly drawn to the "Orthodox Hindu theology" of the Six Schools (ṣaḍdarśana)[7] and to Advaita Vedānta (the non-dual "end" or climax of the scriptural tradition of the Vedas) as somehow representing the pinnacle of these traditions, only later did I come to understand how much these presentations were dependent upon imperial British idealism, itself a series of secondary and culturally inflected readings of Hegel and Kant, and how these same sources in part provoked the very emphasis on language and intelligibility that I was so keen to escape from. I read the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad-Gītā and Śaṃkara's commentaries.

My Jewish tradition, as I appreciated it then, was grounded in critical study, and while there was limited reference to the "world to come", or eschatology, there was no discussion at all of enlightenment, or individual soteriology. I was engaged by these ideas of a beyond-my-self and the stark contrast between what I took to be this spiritual possibility and everyday life. Linking my burgeoning Hindu textual interests to lived Hindu practices and communities was, however, more challenging. During my first visits to diasporic Hindu mandirs (temples), I enjoyed the melodic ragas (improvised melodies), kīrtans (liturgies), bhajans (devotional sons) and ārtī pujas (fire ceremonies) honoring the deities with light (dīpa), but 'to see' and 'be

[6] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), South Indian idealist philosopher and academic, prolific interpreter of Advaita, and President of India (1962–1967); and Surendranath Dasgupta (1887–1952) Bengali philosopher, interpreter of Yoga, and author of five-volume *A History of Indian Philosophy* (1922–1955).

[7] There are traditionally held to be six schools (darśanas) of Indian religious thought or "theology" or "philosophy" that are taken to be āstika ['orthodox', that is, recognising themselves as being based on the scriptural Vedas (originary Hindu texts)]. These Vedas are understood to be śruti ("revealed" or "heard"). These schools were over time arranged in three sets of dyads: (1) Sāṃkhya (dualistic theism)/Yoga (an "application" of Sāṃkhya), (2) Nyāya (logic and epistemology)/Vaiśeṣika (Atomistic theism) and (3) (Pūrva) Mīmāṃsā (Vedic hermeneutics and orthopraxic)/Vedānta (Uttara Mīmāṃsā or higher hermeneutics) or ultimate Vedic knowledge.

Vedānta came to be the dominant elite theology in India and understood itself in a supersessionist way in relation to the other āstika schools. There are a number of different Vedāntic traditions that offer authoritative commentaries on a corpus of authoritative texts (the Upaniṣads, the Brahma Sūtras and the Bhagavad Gītā). They are classified by reference to their understanding of ultimate reality and include Advaita Vedānta (Non-dual reality), Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-dual reality) and Dvaita (dualistic reality). The āstika darśanas are contrasted with the nāstika or heterodox systems of thought, which include determinist materialism (Ājīvika) and non-determinist materialism (Cārvāka), Buddhism and Jainism.

seen' by the deities (mūrtis, images) fostered an incipient iconoclasm as I spontaneously evoked Rabbi Ḥiyya's narrative of Abram smashing his father's "idols",[8] and my initial and immediate response to Gaṇeśa was to recall the children's book, *Babar the Elephant*. Further concerns about kashrut (dietary norms) arose in relation to prasāda ("sharing" food with the gods/goddesses). My enjoyments and perplexities continued through the cycle of festivities from the "carnival:" of Holī, via the Navarātrī celebrations (Mahāśivarātri), to Divālī (Dīpāvalī).[9]

It was impossible not to forge parallels and consider similarities between my exposure to Hindu ritual and communal life, and those of my Jewish religious experience. As we strive to encounter and render meaningful experiences that arise in alien traditions, we start, as we must, with the familiar which we discern as paralleled in the "other" tradition. Chaim Potok refers to this as "selective affinity".[10] I began to consider such selective affinities between Holī and Simḥat Torah; pūjā and some Jewish ritual practices; and the invocation of the "presence" in the Kabbalat Shabbat (Sabbath welcome) with the awaking or "calling" (āvāhana) of the deity, then their presence as guest, until their departure (Vīsarjana or Udvasana). It was also evident to me that the notion of the Jewish injunction to devotional service in the Shema with all of one's "heart, soul and strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5, 11: 13) resonated with some forms of Hindu bhakti (devotion). These preliminary selective affinities provided a basis for further comparative reflections as I read the Hindu epics (Mahābhāratam and Rāmāyaṇam), the purāṇas (a corpus of religious texts) and legal and ritual texts alongside Jewish texts.

The non-sectarian neo-Vedāntin, or revivalist Vedāntin position, is that Advaita Vedānta and its ideal of the jīvanmukta (living enlightened one) represented the very sāra (essence) of the Hindu religious traditions as the apex of the recognized margas (paths) to spiritual union with the absolute.[11] The centrality of Śaṃkara's Vedānta is acknowledged in the title of Śaṃkarācārya for the Hindu spiritual leaders of the peethas (religious orders) at the four cardinal compass maṭhas (monastic centres) that geographically define holy Bhārat (India).[12]

[8] See *Bereshit Rabbah* 38:13.

[9] While I would later come to appreciate the diversity of migrant Hindu festivities and their regional inflections (New Zealand, Fiji, Britain, and in North America), it was only in India that I came to realize the bewildering array of rituals and practices of different Hinduisms.

[10] See Walden 2001: 32. This is Potok's alternative to Max Weber's (via Goethe) "elective affinities" (Die Wahlverwandtschaften) used to describe the (non-causal) relationship between Protestantism and capitalism (Weber 2001).

[11] Neo-Vedānta – also known as neo-Hinduism, modernist Hinduism, Universal Hinduism and Global Hinduism – are designations of the versions of reformist, nationalist and elitist Hinduism developed in the nineteenth century that consciously incorporated responses to the European imperial critiques of Hinduism and offered themselves spiritually as antidotes to "Western materialism". See Halbfass (1988, 1995), and his edited volume Halbfass 1995; Nicholson 2010; Malhotra 2014. Gavin Flood astutely links "modern Hindu self-understanding" with "the West's view of Hinduism" (Flood 1996: 257). Ninian Smart noted that neo-Hindu traditions are essentially smārta (non-sectarian, Hindu traditions drawing on Mīmāṃsā, Advaita, Yoga, and theism dating from early centuries CE) revivals (Shepherd 2009: 186).

[12] The pivotal centrality of Advaita Vedānta within the rich panoply of Hindu religious traditions may well be seen as misplaced and as selective, although this 19th and 20th revivalist construction does reflect something of the significance of its historical and theological role. Dvārakā (Gujarat) in the West, Jagannatha Puri (Odishain) in the East, Śṛngēri (Karnataka) in the South and Badrikashrama (Uttara-

My formal undergraduate curriculum was supplemented by reading about mysticism from which I adopted three claims. First, mysticism was the universal core of religions, including my own. Secondly, the core entailed that ritual and community, while important, were the "outer garments" for those who sought the "inner mystical truth". And, thirdly, Advaita Vedānta was an exemplary model of Hindu mysticism, and of mysticism per se, and as such presented the superior path for the intellectual and spiritual elite.[13] For some reason, while I found immense value in the theological reflections on the Hindu epics, the epics themselves, like their Homerian parallels, were of less interest. I suspect that this was in part due to the influence of texts such as *The Ethics of the Fathers* where there are different ages recommended for the commencement of the study of different types of texts (5 years for scripture, 10 for Mishnah, and 15 years for Talmud); that is, there is a graded evaluation of legal and theological texts over narratives.[14]

My analytical discipline did, however, lead me to consider the role of language and its relationship to other foundational phenomena in these Indian "theological-metaphysical" traditions. I was captivated by the potent queen of the Vedic goddesses, "Speech" (Vāc), the feminine personification of sound, particularly liturgical formulas, and the muse of visionaries, musicians and poets (Kinsley 1988: 11–13). "Speech" was integral to "creation" or emanation itself, and the ordered multiplicity of sounds, that is, language, co-generated the multiplicity of physical forms, that is, the world. These traditions developed into the idea of the "absolute as sound" (Śabda-Brahman, the sound generator of the manifold universe), differentially understood in different schools,[15] and to the sacred potentialities of liturgical language in the "great Upaniṣadic sentences" (Mahāvākyas), and in the ritual guides, and to the sphoṭa model of language as simultaneously communication and ontology in Bhartṛhari's Vākyapadīya (Iyer 1965; 1966; 1969; Coward 1980; Coward and Raja 1990). These contentions about language, things and meanings were very different from Ayer and linguistic models derived from the early Wittgenstein. For example, Bhartṛhari, beginning with how meaning is constructed and communicated, develops a "word" monist, or non-dualist, position that insists that emanation, cognition and language are in fact different views of the same process (the co-processes of ontology, epistemology and soteriology) and, as such, ultimately reveal the non-dual Brahman (Reality).

While my lecturers forced me to focus on the clarification of, and the attempted transparency of, language as the means of clearing away its messiness to leave the

Footnote 12 (continued)
khand) in the North; on links between historic Advaita and current Hinduism, see Joël André-Michel Dubois (2014).

[13] The books I read at the time included Otto (1932), a comparison of exemplary mystics of the West (Meister Eckhart) and East (Śaṃkara); also, (Scharfstein 1973; Staal 1975; and the classic, Underhill 1912; and, of course, Scholem 1941).

[14] *Pirke Avot* 5:21, although the anachronistic reference to Talmud clearly refers to advanced textual study. A later comment on this text attributed to Rabbenu Tam contends that the study of Talmud incorporates scripture and Mishnah too.

[15] Śabda-Brahman, the sound generator of the manifold universe.

clarity, meaning and truth, in Śaṃkara's Advaita, words falsely attribute the characteristics of one thing to another and so obscure truth, specifically, the false identification of the absolute self with other distinctive qualities that mask our inclusive, and distinction-less identity as Brahman.[16] While both explored the limits of language, they do so in radically different ways, although I came to characterize these differences in terms of the Advaita distinction between the everyday and higher levels of knowledge/truth.

Diffusion or Shared Universals?

I was struck by the seemingly obvious parallels between Hindu theories of language and Jewish reflections, so for example, the idea that reality itself is in some deep dense linguistic, made up of speech/language, and that contemplation of these language/speech forms generates insights into the nature of reality, brings Bhartṛhari's Śabda-Brahman and Sefer Yeṣirah's 32 paths into the same conceptual frame (Hayman 2004). While there are clearly significant differences, there are also striking parallels. How might we explain these? Parallels and similarities discerned in different traditions, however interesting and suggestive, demand something more: an explanation. The two dominant explanatory modes are cultural diffusionism and human universalism. The former, diffusionism, cross-temporal and cross cultural, has been a main research enterprise in the Humanities. Between two similar notions, usually located in two different texts, we identify and prioritize the order, following precise rules for determining this, so that we can trace the diffusion from one time to another in a single location, or from one place to another, and from one time to another. The physically creative conceptions of language in Sefer Yeṣirah are chronologically later than the classical Hindu grammatical theories, and there are recorded geographical and temporal instances of contact between Indian ideas and those of the Near East, and so a diffusionist argument can be mooted as a prelude to further research in the attempt to establish connective pathways of place and time (Liebes 2000; Shulman 2002: 191).

The alternative explanation, when there are no evident grounds for diffusion, is that of the positing of human universals; these are most often biological and psychological, and increasingly so from evolutionary perspectives, so that we might trace these 'similar' linguistic theories to the physiological mechanics of sound/language production and human communication and the ways these are reflected in universal evolutionarily developed cognitive processes. The parallels are thus accounted for by the history, or prehistory, of our shared humanity. Similar contentions are made concerning mysticism; functional accounts of religion; the rationale for forms of

[16] There is an analytical parallel in Advaita, in that certain "revealed" language has mystical potentialities and qualities that can effect spiritual transformation, and other language can be refined to aid spiritual development.

ritual; religious experiences; and, of course, 'religion' itself.[17] And, there are scholars who combine both explanations accounting for particular diffusion in terms of underlying universal factors.

Comparative work in the study of religion most commonly arises from 'selective affinity' (as above), the selection, or intuition, of a point of similarity or contact, that is subsequently supported with selective evidence (Walden 2001: 32). Selective affinity diffusionism has led to much of the most interesting comparative work in the history of religions. On the other side, the transitions from universal biological to universal cultural claims often appear premature, and are more likely on closer examination to turn out to be the universalization of tradition-specific claims. Much of the most reductive comparative work in the history of religions can be viewed as having arisen in this way.

But You Are Not a Hindu!

As a student, I was drawn to the notion of the fragility and insubstantiality of all existence and, in particular, to the idea of the illusory nature of everyday experience and to the possibility of awakening to a deeper reality. I spent a number of years researching a wonderful Hindu religious text, Śaṃkara's Adhyāsabhāṣya (the introductory section of his commentary to the Brahmasūtra; the Brahmasūtrabhāṣya or Śārīrakabhāṣya). Śaṃkara contends that all experience (all modifications of 'mind stuff'/ 'internal doer'/ processor) has the same starting point, or pre-condition, a primordial error or delusion that gives rise to both the illusions of the experiencer and to the multiplicities of her experiences. The name given to the dynamic process that sustains this foundational mistake is adhyāsa, or the necessary but inappropriate, superimposition, or transference, of the qualities of one thing on to another. This is developed to account for a number of experiential levels – from mistaking the coiled rope to be a snake, via the everyday experiences of multiplicity, to the necessary but ultimately false presupposition of experience itself. So, via the erroneous attribution (adhyāsa) of names and forms (nāmarūpa, the primordial linguistic/physical 'word/world stuff'), to non-dual reality (Brahman) beyond all distinctions, so that non-dual reality is mistakenly experienced as the manifold linguistic/physical world of appearances. This curiously persuasive thesis is defended against opponents, obvious and less so, and fosters a progressive distancing of the engagement of the modernist, Sartrean self from the underlying Vedāntic "self as witness" (sākṣī).[18] Awaking from a dream is likened to awakening from the empirically true but ultimately false everyday life (vyavahāra) to the highest (paramārtha) non-dual reality.

[17] More recently, this distinction has been somewhat obscured in the debates over whether the rise of modernity is better explained as diffusionist, contact based on trade, migration, urban population concentrations, industrialization, and the application of instrumental reason; or, whether these are understood as a universal emergent human history (globalization).

[18] See (Fackenheim 1961): 37 for an analysis of the existential self and existence.

Meeting my father, an Orthodox Jew, after having been away for a number of years, I spent more than 2 hours giving him a truncated and hopelessly inadequate version of Hindu religious history from the Aryan conquests to Advaita Vedānta (Uttara Mīmāṃsā) and beyond, via dharma, pratyakṣa (perception) and the distinction between reality as conditioned and featured or non-dual and unconditioned (Saguṇa or Nirguṇa Brahman). He listened patiently and asked for several clarifications before announcing, 'But you are not a Hindu!' It was many years before I fully realized the implications of this, and the inadequacies of my then response in terms of my premature rejection of (his) 'parochialism' in the name of my equally premature (Vedāntic mystical) universalism.

Later I worked on the Hindu thinker, Krishna Chandra Bhattachayya (1875–1949) and his constructive and creative re-readings of Vedānta, Sāṃkhya and Yoga in the light of Kant and Hegel (Bhattacharyya 1983: 1–362), albeit often as mediated via their English translators and interpreters; his Hindu inflected readings of Western thinkers (Bhattacharyya 1983: 663–722); and, his innovative Hindu/Husserlian phenomenology (*The Subject as Freedom* 1935, (Bhattacharyya 1983: 363–454). His subtle understandings of Hindu theologies "read together with" European thought offer a model for comparative religious research. Bhattacharyya forged links within Hindu thinking, particularly across the traditional schools, highlighting the culturally derived shared problematics that are specific to these Hindu traditions and their significant sharing not so much of identifiable metaphysical positions, but rather of underlying debates and contestations, within, between and beyond the Hindu darśanas (theological/philosophical schools). This Bengali thinker also wrote of the political impact of colonialization and imperialism for the religious thinking and lives of the colonized and offered a most trenchant critique of the idealist modernists (the Neo-Vedāntins, above) that had originally engendered my interest in Hinduism. The embedded nature of his thought in Indian religion, mythology, politics and debate challenged my own dis-embedding, deculturalization and detraditionalization of Śaṃkara and Advaita from these broader cultural and historical contexts. These contexts, so often assumed, provide both the prismatic foundations and contested conclusions of Hindu religious thought. Bhattacharyya made me realize that my father was right, and I was not a Hindu!

Descent and Assent

When teaching at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1991–1992, I had conversations with two of the faculty there about the relationship between religions, and in particular, the Jewish and Hindu traditions. The first was Richard Hecht who had a growing interest in the ethno-religio-politics of the Bharatiya Janata Party and that of Religious Zionists in Israel and was developing new ways to think about these affinities (Friedland and Hecht 1998).[19] The second was with Barbara Holdrege,

[19] This interest was also in the associated 'Hindu" political organizations, the Viśva Hindū Pariṣada (VHP) and Rāṣṭrīya Svayamsēvaka Saṅgha (RSS). Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's (1883–1966) *Outlines of Hindutva* (1923), reprinted in 1928 as *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, outlines both his distinction between Hindutva/Hinduness and "Hinduism" and the relationship of the former to modern Indian

who asked me to read her comprehensive manuscript, *Veda and Torah* (Holdrege 1996). My first systematic reflections on this comparative topic were at the American Academy of Religions (AAR) in San Francisco in 1992. My paper "The Discourse of Traditions: Judaisms and Hinduisms" was complemented by Wendy Doniger's acute response. Starting from the "politics of comparison", I argued for the disaggregation of the category of religious tradition in favour of differential models of religious tradition. This session and discussions with Barbara Holdrege led us to co-found an experimental program unit in the AAR in 1995, the Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms Consultation, formalized as the Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms Group in 1998 as a regular program unit of the AAR. This group over the following years brought leading scholars in Hindu and Jewish Studies together to consider shared themes and topics, historical contacts and the broader academic implications for the study of religions. These included a small number of scholars who worked in both areas, and ranged from interreligious dialogue, via mystical traditions, and religious law, to religio-politics. The program unit attempted to deepen our knowledge of Judaisms and Hinduisms, and to create both a framework and agenda for comparative studies that incorporated insights based on Hindu and Jewish case studies.[20]

My attempt to think about Judaisms and Hinduisms beyond diffusionism, and the assimilation of different cross-religions phenomena within universal categories, led to a focus on the historical, social and cultural processes underlying religious categories. In 1994–5, I developed a model of two contrasting forms of religious community as a basis for comparative religious studies (Morris 1996: 223–249). The first are "communities of descent". These communities are characterized by a particular historical priority of their social form and understanding of continuity ideally as simultaneously biological and cultural. That is, as traditions they primarily replicate themselves over time biologically. They view themselves essentially as extended families and prioritize these familial relationships. This emphasis on physicality is reflected in physical purity codes and rituals with a focus on food and body taboos and behaviors. Communities of descent are non-missionary, although "conversion" is always a possibility via fictive descent with the retrospective recognition

Footnote 19 (continued)

(Hindu) nationalism/ Hindu Rashtra/Hindu Nation (Sarvarkar 1938). Sarvarkar in 1947 supported an independent, sovereign Jewish state in the "Jewish fatherland" and opposed the Indian United Nations vote against this proposal. See also, Friedland and Hecht (1998).

[20] We also were invited and joined the initial editorial board of the *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* (1998–2010), which has become a major vehicle for these comparative explorations, although the focus is on "two cultures or peoples rather than" religious interactions and comparisons (Katz 2018:195). The field has significantly developed since innovative work on interfaith relationships by Nathan Katz (Katz 2007: 77–126); the implications for comparative studies in religion of Hindu/Jewish research by Holdrege (Holdrege 2007, Holdrege 2018); and a whole new pioneering field in the constructive Jewish theology of Hinduism by Goshen-Gottstein (Goshen-Gottstein 2015; Goshen-Gottstein 2016); see also, Brill (2019) and Theodor and Kornberg Greenberg (2018), and the earlier, Chatterjee (1997), Goodman (1994), and Kasimow (1999).

of being part of the historical, familial community. They tend towards non-hierarchical authority structures. Descent communities are highly territorialized. As identity is vouchsafed by being born into the community via descent, such communities tend towards ideological and theological diversity as this is not a primary threat to communal identity.

Contrasting communities of descent are "communities of assent". These are secondary communities in that their self-definition entails a necessary narrative of their separation and independence from particular descent communities. They form new communities, in fact, a new model of community that is radically open to others beyond recognition of descent, and numbers are largely replenished by including others that are persuaded to assent to the crucial salvific significance of a person, truth or idea. Identity is here determined by assent rather than descent and generates an assent package that must be policed by doctrinal experts, defining doctrinal conformity and creating heretics. They tend towards authoritative hierarchies using familial titles to mark rank and seniority. Communities of assent are inherently cross-cultural, and imperial, and develop considerable expertise in crossing cultural thresholds or borders as they present assent packages in very different cultural guises, thus demarking "religion" from culture. Assent packages take on creedal formulas amenable to cross-cultural transmission, and the new community now distanced from biological proximity appropriates the older familiar language with metaphorical brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, and just as relationships are "spiritualized" so ritual and purity behaviors are spiritualized and internalized. They develop deterritorialized spiritualized space in spiritualized heavenly temples, and "Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land".

These two models are, of course, just that, models. Judaism and Hinduism can be identified as communities of descent, as can other "indigenous" religions, and Christianity, Buddhism and Islam as communities of assent. Jewish and Hindu identities are linked to familial claims (Jewish mothers or Hindu jāti, occupational extended familial group), although both allow for fictive narratives of conversion,[21] and have generally restricted missionary activities. Both traditions subscribe to extensive and comprehensive physical purity codes focused on regulating the body and its functions, including eating, contact and sex, and are theologically and ideologically pluralistic. Textually, commentary is more frequent than independent theological

[21] Three recent studies of conversion to Judaism provide an introduction to historical and contemporary concerns in Israel and beyond, Kravel-Tovi (2017), Sassoon (2018), and Parfitt and Fisher (2016). Regarding conversion to Hinduism, see Sikand and Katju 1994, Sharma 2011, Viswanathan 1998 and Barua 2015. The issue of the recognition of conversion to Hinduism is still an ongoing issue within Hindu communities. At the 2017 Religious Leaders of Aotearoa/New Zealand Forum in Auckland, a Hindu leader insisted that the non-missionary history of Hinduism and its rejection of conversion distinguished it from Islam and Christianity and provided the foundations for its "inclusive harmony". An International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON) spokesperson understood himself as a "convert" to Hinduism having taken a Hindu name and adopted religious practices, beliefs and lifestyle, even if this was not acknowledged by the person standing next to him. Other modern Hindu groups that do allow for conversion include Ārya Samāja, and Svāmīnārāyaṇa Sampradāya. Reconversion to Hinduism from Islam, and Christianity, is not technically conversion at all but a public reaffirmation of their jāti and, thus, Hindu identity.

treatise, and familial relationships tend to be actual rather than metaphorical. The lack of clear demarcation between religion and culture makes these descent traditions especially difficult for beginning students of the study of religions.

Assent communities preserve foundational orienting narratives of separation from their communities of descent; so, for example, Paul's ecclesia, literally, "being called out from", being called out from communities of descent to form a new community: "In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all" (Colossians 3:11 NRSV); or, "There is no longer Jew nor Greek …. for all of you are one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28 NRSV). This is the transition from descent communities to a new societal form, more club than family. Paul also emphasizes the spiritualization of then contemporary "Jewish" purity practices so that internal intention replaces external dietary and circumcision laws, and familial relationships are adopted for the new non-familial community itself. In a similar way the saṅgha,[22] the new assent community traditionally held to have been established by the Buddha, requires the rejection of descent "caste" identities, and many ritual Hindu practices are internalized and spiritualized. Christianity and Buddhism are missionary, generate assent authorizing hierarchies, and foster imperialism. They both develop policeable assent packages formulaically designed for cross-communal and cross-cultural diffusion – Christian creeds and doctrines; the Buddhist Four Noble Truths, Eight-Fold Path and the Twelve Link Chain of Dependent Origination. In Islam, the Five Pillars are an example of an assent package. Students of religion follow these proven and well-trodden paths as they develop religious literacy in the religions of assent. It is important to note that, over time, assent communities can, and do, develop patterns of descent.

The importance of the assent/descent models are potentially threefold. First, the patterning and implications of historical priority in religions have been neglected by scholars. Religions do not encounter each other outside of time but in ways already largely determined by their histories. While descent communities are prior to the assent communities that emerge from them, assent communities develop oppositional identities and supersessionist theologies as integral to their self-identities and understanding. These frame inter-religious contact and relationships over time that continue to provide the foundations for the power asymmetries of contemporary encounters. Continuing descent communities also developed patterned strategies in defensive response that also have continuing impacts, in particular, the failure to acknowledge the equal validity of subsequent assent identities and the often-pejorative revisions of their descent sacred traditions. In fact, I suspect that assent challenges continue to shape descent developments, and vice versa, as significant dynamics of religious and inter-religious histories. These relationships are

[22] Although the term saṅgha (Pali; Sanskrit, saṃgha) clearly refers to the new community of assent in Buddhist traditions generally, its resonances range from the new community of monks and nuns (Theravāda) to all Buddhists (Mahāyāna). It is interesting to note in contrast to the threats of loss of Hindu caste identity by leaving India and the opprobrium associated with *yeridah* for Jews leaving the land, Christians, and Buddhists spiritually deterritorialized earlier traditions as evident in Origen; see Wettstein 2003; and Levy and Weingrod 2004).

complexified, over time forming relational strata, so, for example, Islamic supersessionism impacts Judaism and Christianity, albeit differentially, just as Hindu appreciations of Buddhism and Sikhism tend to inclusivism, while these and the assent critiques in turn determine ongoing mutual (mis)understandings. These historical priorities and patterns require further research to ground comparative studies in religion.

Secondly, the dominance of assent models in the academic study of religion have led to energies spent asking the wrong questions and the generation and perpetuation of mis-representations. Asking assent questions of descent traditions, and vice versa, is unlikely to yield meaningful findings. So, for example, prioritizing questions of belief, an essential assent enquiry, often delivers disappointing results when addressed to descent communities where belief is less central to defining identity, or determining ritual and practice; or, focusing on religious experience as certification of assent is likely to be less productive when addressed to descent communities. The failure to acknowledge different models of religious tradition has limited the value of many comparative studies. The universalization of the model of assent religions and their claimed supersession of descent religions needs to be acknowledged and corrected.

Thirdly, the model of descent communities requires further research to develop different accounts of parallels and similarities that can deepen understanding of descent religions and redefine their differences from religions of assent. This can potentially create new differential models for the comparative study of religions. The dynamics of the transition from descent to assent communities also requires further work explicating the transitions of intercultural developments and responses to new political formations. The promise is of novel accounts of heuristic categories utilized to explicate religions such as revelation; the authority of prophets/seers; the limits and extent of textual authority and exegetical freedoms; the nature and location of ritual space, including the household; and the significance of the familial for religio-cultural continuity. In the contemporary context of the ubiquitous dominance of the nation-state, majority descent traditions in pluralist contexts promote distinct forms of descent-nationalism that clearly differ from majority assent-nationalisms. The model also has predictive value in the correlation of particular beliefs and practices with communal structures and other characteristic features. The model requires further exploration and refinement against the details of historical developments.[23] I had found a way where not being a Hindu coincided significantly with being a Jew.

[23] To give a brief and illustrative example of the wrong questions, I was a consultant for Crown Law concerning the proposed end to the ministerial exemption which permits (limited) košer slaughter (šeḥitah) in New Zealand. They wanted to identify the underlying belief in order to understand how to evaluate the practice, and when this rationale did not seem to work, there was difficulty grasping the persistence of these ritual practices. What counts is inner dispositions and beliefs rather than external practices. Similar logics seem to operate in the continuing number of countries banning of košer religious slaughter in Europe.

Towards Radical Jewish Hindu Alterity

From K. C. Bhattacharyya, I came to better appreciate the ways in which theologies are intimately embedded in culturally specific mythologies and the internal logics of religious traditions that generate assumptions and debates that are replicated across time.[24] My focus on the descent "body" coincided with the post-structural "return to our bodies" and the focus on our entanglements with stuff or matter, that is, our material lives, our embodiment.[25] I had thought that Jewish and Hindu understandings of embodiment, central to both descent traditions, would reveal overlapping insights. To briefly focus on this strand in Hindu religious thinking, the formulations of a fundamental dualism between the experiencer, human (and/or divine), and pluralistic (experienced) reality can be traced back to the later Vedic texts and the great epics that provide the basis for later theological articulations. In these earlier versions, the mysterious dualism discovered as the strange admixture of (deity) self and 'other', and the difficulties of locating a workable fulcrum for the separation of this intimately fused dyad, are contemplated, and investigated mythologically, metaphorically, and by reference to established narratives, in terms of fish, or lotuses, in water; of birds in forest trees; or, of the heat of pots and that of fire.[26]

This foundational dualism plays a pivotal role in South Asian religious traditions, and is demonstrably older than its systematic elaboration in the Sāṁkhya Kārikā (Verses on Sāṁkhya).[27] Sāṁkhya here means rational method or enumeration and refers to the elaborated listing of the different categories of the contents (of experience) in the world, it is also the mode of salvific knowledge, of the liberating separation of "us" from matter. The existence of this primordial dualism of Puruṣa (contentless consciousness) and Prakṛti (manifold matter) is never argued for in the Sāṁkhya Kārikā but just assumed; and, in a somewhat circular fashion this too is the conclusion of the text's analysis of experience and reality. What is analyzed, however, is why the discrete two do not appear as separate and their seeming mutual interdependence. The contention is that Puruṣa (as draṣṭṛ, witness) misidentifies the contents of experience (dṛśya, that witnessed) with itself when, in fact, our minds, bodies, and the external world are all equally part of Prakṛti (matter) and absolutely independent of Puruṣa. The dualistic line here is explicitly drawn in the most radical fashion – the mind, body, all contents of consciousness of the internal and external worlds, all that we routinely identity with self and person (personality and memory) are in fact part of Prakṛti (dynamic matter) and the object rather than subject of Puruṣa as witness (sākṣin).[28] What we usually identify as subject and object are here equally matter, and Sāṃkhya is the means of realizing the ultimate difference

[24] This is explored in Doniger O'Flaherty et al. (1998).

[25] See (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2005; and Jaschik 2005).

[26] See Mahābhārata (400 BCE); these traditions form the narrative and imaginative ground for what is sometimes referred to as proto-Sāṁkhya, the traditions that developed into textual Sāṁkhya school.

[27] Attributed to Īśvarakṛṣṇa (c. 350 CE).

[28] Prakṛti (matter) is composed of three types – sattva, rajas and tamas – generating unceasing transformations. See (Burley 2007).

between Prakṛti and Puruṣa, freeing us from suffering (duḥkha) and promoting the attainment of kaivalya (genuine detachment) or mokṣa (spiritual freedom).[29]

This cosmogenic Puruṣa/Prakṛti dualism developed in the Sāṃkhya Kārikā (and also in the Sāṁkhyasūtras) not only creates, via Gauḍapāda's commentary, the framework for Śaṃkara's Advaita but has a much broader religio-cultural resonance that encapsulates earlier traditions and forms a common conceptual currency for debates within the orthodox Hindu āstika ṣaḍdarśanas, as theological elaborations on the earlier Upaniṣads and Brāhmaṇas, and beyond to the nāstika schools, including Jaina and Buddhist.[30] The important dimension, here, is not the fixed concluding metaphysical positions but the shared core problematics and the various responses that challenge, modify, transform or reconstruct these common underlying frameworks.

Sāṁkhya dualism provides a theological framework and salvific problematic that is addressed by Śaṃkara as he defines and defends his Advaita Vedānta against the Mīmāṃsā, Sāṁkhya, Buddhists and others. Prakṛti here becomes cosmogenic nāmarūpa (name and form) unfolding to give rise to manifold reality, with adhyāsa offering an account of the perceptual, psychological and spiritual processes at play in generating this everyday world of an illusory self perceiving manifold external reality. While the distinction between Ātman (Puruṣa?) and Prakṛti (nāmarūpa) is similarly conceived, the Sāṁkhya, dualism is radically revised in Advaita to be only provisionally so, and from a higher perspective to be non-dual Ātman/Brahman. So, the same religious problematic, while shared, is given a very different ontological and metaphysical meaning and solution. Śaṃkara, too, draws on the same mythological and metaphorical images such as the Upaniṣadic dual birds, enjoyer and witness.

Beginning with the affinity of the selective shared problematic of dualist embodiment, we can explore the Jewish "versions" of Hindu embodiment, and vice versa. Jewish traditions have drawn on Near Eastern, Hellenic, and Hellenistic legacies, in addressing dualistic embodiment, although systematic psychological–ontological theologies only appear late in Jewish history. Almost immediately, the differences are striking in spite of the diffusionist technologies that meant that the Greek thinkers and Upaniṣadic ṛṣis drew on the same image of the charioteer and chariot to explore embodiment and its remedies. Hindu embodiment is radically more inclusive than its Jewish variants. The Hindu demarcation line is drawn dramatically more inclusively of the material than its alternative, so, that the contents of thought, "emotion"[31] and consciousness and even the "mind" (manas) and sense of our self, are manifestations of stuff. The Jewish self, too, has its accretions, often mistaken

[29] In Sāṃkhya, material reality is categorized as 25 tattvas (things) consisting of five thick elements (mahābhūtas); five subtle elements (tanmātras); five motion possibilities (karmendriyas); five senses (jñānendriyas); mind (manas); ego (ahaṃkāra); intellect (buddhi); underlying, unchanging Prakṛti; and, Puruṣa.

[30] Buddhist religious thinking can be seen as an extended rejectionist commentary and reconfiguration of Sāṃkhya dualism, and the comparatively early translation of the Sāṃkhya Kārikā into Chinese ensured that it played a role in the development of Chinese Buddhism too.

[31] Emotions are a problematic and anachronistic term for Hinduism and Judaism; see Schimmel 1980, Schimmel 1997, and Soloveitchik 2003.

for self, that generate tensions and need to be jettisoned on the religious path. But the Jewish traditions focus on the realities of the moral and discrete individual, albeit alongside the moral and discrete descent community (Jacobs 1992). The radical dualist Hindu–Buddhist model of content-less and condition-less (non-)self runs counter to Jewish training and experience and a religious tradition that seeks to positively modify the self and insists on personality and personal moral and practice choices as an integral part of this refinement within the context of a community.[32]

The "mind" defines the Jewish subject and falls on the other side of the demarcation line of extraneous non-self, or matter. My mind includes my individual characteristics alongside those of my descent tradition. The "living soul" of Genesis and its authoritative rabbinic elaborations grant intellect and personality, the specific individual identifying qualities as the very heart of each human person.[33] Feelings are determinative constituents of this notion of person, and thus of personality and our identity as subjects, and these are not to be discarded but turned towards, embraced and refined (e.g., Harvey 1996). This ancient cult of person and personality was, and continues to be, central to almost all Jewish traditions. In fact, some Jewish "mystics", influenced by Neo-Platonism, those who come closest to detachment from the personal everyday self in favor of divine identification, still needed to return fortified to the world of discrete persons, families, commandments, and community (Eilberg-Schwartz 1988; Reif and Egger-Wenzel 2015).

Although Jews are familiar with a wide array of dualistic theologies, including those that conclude as materialist, or idealist, none appear as radical or comprehensive as the Hindu model. But just as in the Hindu traditions, the arguments are never simply theological but culturally embedded in mythological and metaphorical images, narratives and practices; the same is so for Judaism. Hindus can ritually separate themselves from descent identities in the later stages of life by discarding their caste identities in preparation for liberation, while Jews are descent-identified at death and "gathered to their people". As hard as it is to conceive of ourselves as disembodied, it is even more so to consider ourselves as disembodied without minds, emotions, or affections. This takes us beyond our Jewish theologies, philosophies, narratives, mythologies, and the metaphorical repertoire that underlie and are so often assumed in our distinctive debates and positions. This very different, and impossible for me as a Jew, model-of-embodiment came to encapsulate my not being a Hindu and, thus, the radical alterity of Hinduism.

[32] The focus here on the radical differences in understanding of the demarcation line between self and non-self (matter) is designed to illustrate the ways in which complex traditions, over time, in this case Judaisms and Hinduisms, embed metaphysics in myth, liturgy, image, symbol, metaphor and narrative, that is, in religious cultures. We can, of course, dis-embed positions, pedagogies and practices from these larger religio-cultural traditions and explore parallels, such as the evident affinities between Hindu traditions, the moral and spiritual refinement of conduct in living according to the Dharma, or the development of the Jewish person following the Jewish teachings of Musar.

[33] Genesis is understood to teach that we are made up of two discrete elements body and soul, and this unique admixture, a temporal unity of the upper and lower worlds, comes to be understood as allowing humankind to do Torah.

Differential Embodiment and Religious Experience

My training as phenomenologist of religion fosters the reading of metaphysics as religious experience, so that metaphysical and theological reifications were bracketed out to leave the cosmogonies of Sāṃkhya, Śaṃkara's Advaita and Bhartṛhari, as ramified and sophisticated accounts of actual and idealized aspirational religious experiences, experiences culturally constructed, vouchsafed, recognized, acknowledged as contextualized in Hindu traditions. The phenomenological contention is that universal human empathy allows the "informed" human interpreter to come to a personal intuitive appreciation of the religious experience of the "other".[34] As fellow humans reading the religious texts and rituals of other humans, we innately are held to have this capacity. This universal empathy, the precondition of phenomenology of religion, is, of course, prematurely claimed as universal, that is, differences are plotted on a universal scale, here, of human experience. So often, reading texts and attending or participating in the rituals of religious "others", it is not so much that we "empathize", as in "feel with", but more often we follow the reasoning, or "think with", emlogy, rather than empathy, or both, so that emlogic and empathetic deliberation lie behind many cross-traditional and inter-cultural intuitions. "We" inhabit different culturally constructed bodies that arise out of different reasoned and culturally embedded dualisms, but we can think and feel along with these "other" experiences and their ramifications. It is not that traditions are hermetically sealed; we can, and do, cross-traditionally engage, emlogically and emphatically, but we do so not from a dis-embedded and disembodied universal standpoint but rather from a tradition-specific embodied position. The Hu-Ju and Bu-Ju phenomena are clearly one testament to this. And, to return to our dualist example, anyone who has undertaken a Vipassanā (Vipaśyanā) meditation retreat knows that experiences formed in the very different Buddhist religious tradition can generate particular experiences that challenge received wisdoms about the self and its provenance. The Buddhist subtext allows for the articulation of the experiences in terms of tried and tested experiential models. Religious traditions construct and evoke religious experiences. But these potential religious experiences begin as raw unramified bodily occurrences that require specific cultural contextualization for them to become religious experiences per se. My own evening of Sufi/Dervish dancing entailed not only movement, perceptual changes and particular bodily concentration but also the Sheik's explanation of the spiritual meaning of these changes.

Many spiritual teachers working across traditions deliberately frame their "traditional" teachings for cultural others (assent spiritualities). Rajneesh insisted on a "dynamic yoga" designed expressly for westerners to challenge their different embedded cultural frames of reference. More recently Leonard Cohen, a well-known Jewish ordained practitioner of traditional Japanese Zen for four decades finally left, only to find "peace" following an Advaita Vedānta teacher who taught of the illusory

[34] See Smart in Shepherd (2007: 7–8), and Weibe (2014), especially chapters 1, 17,18, 19 and 20. Smart wrote of 'informed empathy', that is, an empathy based upon a non-evaluative and competent 'reading' of pertinent texts and materials.

nature of the self and who had developed ways to address the specific spiritual needs of his western followers. It might, of course, be argued that the personalities involved and Cohen's relationships with his teachers (Kyozan Joshu Sasaki and Ramesh Balsekar) played a significant part in his spiritual pursuits. Cohen himself understood Vedānta to be responsible for the alleviation of his half century of depression, raising the issue of the cross-cultural understanding of religious experience, its nature and purpose. One BuJu who has seriously entertained Judaism alongside the non-dual answer to embodied dualism is Michaelson (2009).[35] His was an inspired act of selective affinity where Kabbalistic teachings on the self and the meditative techniques of salvific transformation were through a process of adhyāsa assimilated to the Buddhist (Sāṃkhya) understanding of the (non)self. This act of Buddhist supersessionism was his novel and informed capitulation to create his non-dual Judaism. This creative act of the rendering of a specific Indic framework as a human universal and the assimilation of Kabbalah to this "universal" lasted approximately seven mystical years until Michaelson came to realize that whatever Kabbalah was, and he is no longer sure, it is not meditation to overcome Indic dualism en route to liberation. He frames this as "Why I Fell Out of Love with Kabbalah" (Michaelson 2016) and contends that, after a century or more of considering Kabbalah as mysticism or mystical praxis, this is false, and it is "hard to discern what Kabbalah is actually for on its own terms". He writes, "Theosophical Kabbalah … is premised on the notion that it is possible to know the inner structure of the divinity, which mirrors that of the world, which mirrors that of the soul. The study of it engenders a unique spiritual experience – not like meditation, not like prayer … in the view of some Kabbalists, (it) affords the power to maintain the world, heal sickness, or at least get rich … Other schools have different purposes in mind: union with God, the ability to do magic, effecting changes in the godhead Itself, uncovering the secrets of existence". But Michelson starkly contrasts this with his own spiritual agenda and concern "…in suffering and the end of suffering. If a spiritual teaching doesn't liberate one from the all-too-human tendencies toward greed, hatred and delusion, I'm just not that interested in it". The bottom line for Michaelson is that the two (Buddhist non-dualism and Kabbalah) are simply "different". He concludes that "I don't think Kabbalah liberates in this fashion. It does other things, but not that. And … after 20 years of doing this stuff, I find … liberation … is the only thing worth doing, spiritually speaking". Here Michaelson acknowledges his premature Buddhist universalism and his recognition that the Indic (Buddhism) and the Jewish (Kabbalah) are simply different.[36] While I reject his conclusion and his still premature universalism, I concur with his claim that they are just "different" differently embedded in different cultural narratives and mythologies, so that the question of what they are is necessarily religio-culturally specific.

[35] See also his accessible work, Michaelson 2006.

[36] See also Prothero 2011 on religious difference.

Concluding Reflection

I have overly dwelt on the Hindu details, assuming a greater familiarity on the part of the reader of the Jewish discussions. I still consider the descent/assent model to be productive but more so when our thinking is liberated from premature universal categories, such as mysticism, or religion, and their oppositions, in favor of holistic, dynamic and complex culturally embedded religious traditions that are equally dependent upon metaphor and myth as on theology, law or rationality. My discovery of the centrality and irreducibility of mythical and metaphorical images underlying the Hindu Advaita mode of embodiment – my rejection of a dis-embedded Hindu "mysticism" – in favor of a lived tradition led me to rediscover a re-embedded Judaism not as a universal example of religion but as a more complex, interesting, and intersectional vessel for defined contestations and debates that necessitated a new openness to scriptural and Midrashic narratives, not simply as teaching texts of homiletic value, or as justifications and legitimations, but as foundational narratives that ground traditions, ritual and praxis.[37] Why we undertake particular rituals and hold particular beliefs is not reducible to a set of universal motivations, albeit religiously specifically inflected with intercultural permeations, but rather is grounded in a plethora of specific symbols and stories, and pivotal images that underpin rather than need to be overcome in the quest for spiritual life. I have a love for Hinduism, as I understand it, but I am a Jew and no longer universally justify this – Judaism does not provide answers to universal human questions per se, although it proffers many teachings and deep insights of cross-traditional value – but it has its own conceptual matrix of problematics that it offers solutions for. I am an embodied Jew not only with a body but one embedded within a community governed by specific historical and conceptual traditions, what Foucault understands as a biopolitical system designed "to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order" both by creating (Jewish) subjects and a collective form of life. It is from this position with informed empathy and emlogy that I now study and understand Hinduisms (Foucault 1998: 138). My study of Hinduisms has greatly enhanced my Jewish life and understanding of Judaism, and my study of Judaism has given me what I consider to be a more nuanced and deeper appreciation of Hinduisms.

In summary, we now live in an age of the premature universality of global diffusion and its attendant supersessionism of the progressive hypermodern. Alterity and difference are obscured by the closure of the veil of endlessly discredited universal claims. We still need to learn to live with each other without the denial of difference. Religious truths and experiences are embedded in complex cultural forms that are not readily reducible to universal categories. Their dis-embedding for comparative purposes requires caution and care. We need to appreciate the tentative nature of our

[37] The difficulty here is the designation of those who frame their lives in terms of these traditions. Gershom Scholem suggested replacing "Judaism" with "Those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel" (2 Samuel 20:19) and what they undertake accordingly by those who understood "themselves as obligated by the heritage (yerushah) of the generations and as obligated to the tradition (masoret) of historical Judaism" (103), in Scholem (1989: 98–104), or as members of a "holy community" (kehillah kedoshah); see Woolf 2015.

selective affinities and develop new cautions about positing human universals, that can at best be pragmatic and heuristic.

Interreligious and intercultural understanding is ever more crucial in our increasingly fragmented and fragile world if we are to establish even the most basic level of *le vivre ensemble* – the alternatives remain truly dire! Understanding others and forging new and comprehensive cross-traditional solidarities, even heuristic ones, has assumed a critical urgency in the face of the challenges we collectively face, and interreligious understanding plays an essential role in developing our capacity to effectively and collaboratively respond. This is intended as a contribution to interreligious understanding and its complexities and the dangers of premature supersessionist universalism.[38]

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[38] When the secular/religious opposition is challenged, it becomes plausible to include the religiously non-affiliated and those who declare "no religion" in censuses as integral to the religious diversity of a nation or region. It is, of course, as significant for the non-religious to find ways to live alongside the religious as the obverse.

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