

Re-Enchanted Judaism:

The New Jewish Search for Personal Experience and Religious Expression

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This is the cover of the *Santa Cruz Haggadah* (see Appendix A). On its front is an illustration of an older, Jewish man with a white beard and yarmulke. He sits in the lotus position and has a *third eye* on his forehead. With one hand, he holds the Ten Commandments; with the other, he makes the peace sign. Passover is a celebration of Jewish freedom from bondage in Egypt. However, the editor of this Haggadah explains that Passover is an opportunity to channel our energy to “heal the earth...and free ourselves from what holds us back” (Roekard 1999). My wife’s Jewish family used this Haggadah for their Seder in 2014. Jacqui’s sister-in-law co-led the Seder. She holds a PhD in psychology and writes for a professional journal known as *Energy Psychology*. She trains health professionals to heal patients using energy channeling techniques and the disciplines of *Reiki*. According to Lori, healing energy is an integral part of her profession and her Jewish faith. When Jacqui described her family’s beliefs, she exclaimed, “This is not my grandmother’s Judaism!”

For those who came to faith in Jesus in the 1970’s, at the height of the counter-cultural revolution, we may be somewhat familiar with the syncretism between Judaism, Eastern religion, and the New Age. At that time, re-enchanted Judaism was a fringe movement, and not representative of mainstream Judaism. At that time, contemporary Judaism stressed moral value, ritual practice, Jewish survival, and the preservation of tradition. Mainstream Judaism tended to disregard supernatural experience and miraculous phenomena. Today, however, there is a resurgence of interest in supernatural and personal experience, and an exploration into non-mainstream religious expression. Judaism is experiencing a *re-enchantment*ⁱ. In this paper, I will give a brief background to Re-Enchanted Judaism, introduce some of the beliefs and practices, and explore three streams contributing to the movement. I will explore common characteristics, and discuss how missionaries to the Jews can engage Jewish people in the context of this phenomenon.

Historical Overview

There has always been Jewish interest in mysticism, and supernatural, personal experience. Many contemporary Jewish beliefs originate out of medieval mysticism. Some were borrowed from non-Jewish sources and adapted as a kind of syncretistic religious expression.

Pre-Enlightenment Judaism

Before the Enlightenment, most people did not separate experience into spiritual and natural phenomena. They assumed that an invisible spirit world pervaded our natural world. Their world consisted of healing and curses, spirits and demons, visible and invisible forces. There were common explanations for the mundane, and spiritual reasons for the inexplicable. Miraculous stories are found throughout rabbinic texts, Jewish folklore, and Yiddish stories. The term *supernatural* began to be used by the sixteenth century (Harper 2016).

Enlightened Judaism

By the nineteenth century, the *Haskallah* (Jewish Enlightenment) had penetrated the Jewish ghettos, and propagated across Europe. Enlightened Jews rejected supernatural explanations for the inexplicable. They rejected a literal reading of Scripture, the belief that God audibly spoke to mortals, and that he miraculously intervened in history. Reform Judaism emerged out of the enlightenment as a religious system that stressed the moral value of religion and explained that the purpose of Jewish ritual was to teach worshippers moral truth and preserve tradition. The Biblical moral truth was clothed in primitive myth and miraculous narrative. The Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, Reform Judaism's joint statement says,

We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domain of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age...clothing its conception of divine Providence and Justice...in miraculous narratives. (Pittsburgh Platform 1885, para 2; cited in Levine 2016)

In the 20th century, the founders of Conservative Judaism, and American Orthodoxy shared the same ideals of the Enlightenment, but retained traditional worship and religious practice.

Enlightened Judaism reached its apex in Reconstructionism. Its founder, Mordecai Kaplan, came to America escaping persecution in Eastern Europe. His Judaism was survivalist, nationalist, and rationalist. Kaplan predicted the end of European Jewry, and its superstitious ultra-orthodox religion. He believed that Reform and Conservative Judaism led to Jewish assimilation. Ultra-Orthodoxy had failed to save European Jewry. Therefore, he sought to reconstruct a rational movement that would preserve Jewish civilization. Dana Kaplan (2013) explains, "Reconstructionists rejected supernaturalism...a belief in an omnipotent God who could preform miracles" and that Israel was providentially given a mission to civilization" (p. 33). Miracles are incompatible with science, reason, and history. Kaplan believed the Holocaust vindicated his thesis. Kaplan "pointed to the Holocaust as having completely demolished and voided faith in a supernatural providence" (Schweid 1992, p. 46). If God exists, He was not going to reach down from heaven and save the Jews. Kaplan exchanged "supernaturalism" for "super-nationalism"

Post-Enlightenment Judaism

Some theorize that the Enlightenment ended on August 6, 1945, when the US demonstrated that Western civilization had invented the means of its own destruction. Progress gave way to Post-Modernism. Many began to distrust technology and science, doubted that reason is an infallible tool for inquiry, and questioned absolute truth. It seemed that rationalism, the god of the Enlightenment was dying. Concerns reached a critical mass in the 1960's when a counter-cultural explosion engulfed North America. Boomers abandoned rational religion in search of alternative expressions of spirituality in the occult, ancient mysticism, and Eastern religion. Out of this milieu of beliefs emerged the *Jewish Renewal Movement*.

The Jewish Renewal Movement

Zalman Schachter-Shalomi immigrated to the United States in 1941 and was ordained as a Chabad rabbi, a Hassidic proselytizing sect. In the 1960's, he was sent to reach unaffiliated Jewish students on American college campuses. Schachter-Shalomi immersed himself in the counter-culture. He dropped LSD, educated himself in Buddhism, New Age and the occult; and entirely broke with Hassidism. He gathered students around himself and formed *havurot*, small home groups that met outside of the synagogue. Schachter-Shalomi rejected institutional Judaism, and promoted personal experience with God, and a popular version of Kabbalah. He used contemporary language, rock music, and explored the social concerns of the decade including feminism, gay rights, and the peace movement. His efforts became known as the *Jewish Renewal Movement* (Harris 2014).

Today, the organizational arm of the movement is called *Aleph* (the Alliance for Jewish Renewal). The movement publishes a journal, *Tikkun* and claims to have thirty-five congregations in North America (aleph.org 2016). The movement has since impacted all the branches of Judaism from Hasidic to Reform through its language, music, interest in personal spirituality, and the Havurah movement. It's two greatest contributions have been the popularization of Kabbalah, and its socio-political concept of *Tikkun Olam* (healing the world). Rabbi Lori Schneide-Shapiro, leader of the Open Temple in Venice, explained in an interview that during Schachter-Shalomi's time in Philadelphia, students at the Reconstructionist seminary became intrigued with his mystical teachings. Shapiro said that today, the Open Temple is interested in healing through psycho-spiritual technique, helping members experience personal healing through spiritual exercise, and that members of her congregation are often pursue personal miraculous experience. (Phone interview with Shapiro, July 14, 2014).

Characteristics of the Jewish Renewal Movement

1. Healing. *The Jewish Renewal Movement* stresses *Tikkun Olam*, healing the world and healing the whole person. The term *Tikkun Olam*, a Medieval Kabbalistic term, originally described a metaphysical process of re-uniting God's essence through the performance of *mitzvot* (traditional practices). In the Renewal Movement, the term took on a socio-political meaning. It came to describe acts of social justice that lead to healing the world through meditation, prayer, and action and is ecumenical in nature. Michael Lerner, founder of *Tikkun*, writes "The world we inherit is deeply flawed...Judaism is one part of the answer...it provides the metaphysical foundation for *Tikkun Olam*, healing and repair of the world that we so badly need" (Lerner, p.23). Karen Roekard (1999) in her book *the Santa Cruz Haggadah* explains how celebrating the Passover begins this effort. Celebrating the Passover helps heal the planet by liberating our souls from bondage "It is up to us to heal the planet [Tikkun Olam] and free ourselves from whatever holds us back from being the best people we can be" (Roekard 1999).

2. Ecstatic Experience. Ecstatic experience, practiced in Hasidism, is a second aspect of the movement. Rabbi Sheff Gold, a student of Schachter-Shalomi, teaches meditation, healing, and ecstatic experience. An ecstatic experience happens when one is possessed and controlled by a Divine Spirit. She describes her own experience, "this is what happens when I chant: I heighten my attention as I use the music, breath, power, and beauty of the chant to relax...thus

get out of the way so the Spirit can descend. After a while it feels as if God is chanting through me” (Gold 2013, p.110).

Three Streams of Re-Enchanted Judaism

The Jewish Renewal Movement is one of several streams contributing to Re-Enchanted Judaism. I will explore three streams that contribute to the phenomenon: (a) the resurgence of interest in Kabbalah, (b) the popular interest in Eastern religion, and (c) the emergence of neo-pagan Judaism and earth religions.

Kabbalistic Judaism

Kabbalistic Judaism was practiced by Hassidic sects for hundreds of years. Kabbalah offered a mystical explanation of traditional rituals. In the 1970’s it was popularized by Chabad, the Jewish Renewal Movement, and celebrities such as Abraham Joshua Heschel (Huss 2007, p. 109). Contemporary Kabbalah differs from Medieval Kabbalah in that “It emerged as a postmodern spirituality, and [is] dependent on...social changes in the late twentieth century” (p. 107). It shares more with New Age belief than a mystical exploration of rabbinic practice. Its emphasis on social justice and personal spirituality gathers non-Jewish attraction and non-affiliated Jewish interest as well as those within mainstream Judaism (Huss 2007, p. 109).

The Kabbalah Center, founded in Los Angeles, in 1965 by Philip Berg, built a consumer market around this Medieval study. Some of the topics they explore include the nature of religious faith, the Bible, experiencing the presence of God, meditative disciplines, astrology, and sex. Some of their followers included Madonna, Lindsay Lohan, Demi Moore, Lucy Liu, and Paris Hilton (Kabbalah Centre 2016, FAQ). Berg died in 2013 and today the center is managed by his family.

Jewish Buddhism and Eastern Religion

Jewish interest in Buddhism began as early as the 19th Century. Charles Strauss at the World Council of Religions publicly declared himself to be a Buddhist Jew and compared Buddha’s principles with those of Judaism (Kamenetz 2007/1994, p. 8). After World War II, an interest in Eastern religion budded in the US. Popularity exploded on the scene in the 1960’s. The idea of the *Jubu* (a Jewish Buddhist) was popularized by Kamentz’ 1994 book, *The Jew in the Lotus* (see Appendix B). He described a conversation between the Dali Lama and Jewish leaders following the Chinese conquest of Tibet and his exile. The Dali Lama compared his exile with that of the Jewish people. Out of this conversation, Kamentz (1994) describes the similarities of both religions.

What follows, then, is the story of a historic dialogue between Jews and Buddhists. It is also the story of some Jews toward Buddhism...and what this has to tell us about the problems in Jewish religious life today. But most of all it is the story of the possibilities for Jewish renewal (p. 4).

Some seek to describe Kabbalah’s connection to Buddhism. Others embrace Buddhist beliefs in their own context and seek to express Buddhism in Jewish ways. Both practices stress

meditation, learning as a journey toward enlightenment, and the belief in reincarnation. Both stress the omnipresence of a Divine being who pervades all living and non-living matter. Both stress the importance of human harmony with nature.

Neo-Pagan Judaism

In the nineteenth century, historians and archaeologists began to understand the extent of the syncretistic practice in ancient Israel. Excavations in Judaea exposed Asherah poles, altars to Canaanite Deities, and inscriptions indicating Jewish pagan worship. Hellenistic practice proliferated into the Second Temple Period as shown in this mosaic from the floor of the Beit Alpha synagogue excavated in 1928. The mosaic shows Helios surrounded by pagan Zodiacs. In 1889, Sir William Robert Smith published *The Religion of the Semites* in which he argued that Judaism originally emerged as a Canaanite religion and evolved into rabbinic Judaism (Smith 1889). In 1918, Sir James Frazier published *Folklore in the Old Testament* which alleged that the narratives and practices in the Bible are rooted in Canaanite religious practice (Frazier 1918).

This remained largely an academic discussion until the subject matter trickled down into the undergraduate classrooms of the universities. In the 1970's, with the emergence of historical revisionism, socio-political concern over the earth, and an interest in alternative religions, some Jewish people began exploring the alleged pagan origins of Judaism. They asked if the earth religions might offer us ways to save our planet and re-establish harmony between humans and nature. In 1979, the Jewish Wiccan, Starhawk, authored *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*. She popularized the nineteenth century theories about the alleged pagan roots of Judaism and interconnected these theories with Wicca. Jennifer Hunter, author of *Magickal Judaism*, writes,

The pagan history of the Hebrews introduces us to Semitic Gods and Goddesses. Seasonal elements of Jewish holidays bring us closer to the earth. We can take the magickal focus and intent we've learned from our Wiccan path and apply it to Jewish rituals. We can bring the sense of ecstatic celebration we've found in Neo Paganism and wake up those Jewish rituals! It's...*bashert* [divine marriage] as they say. (Hunter 2006, p. 3)

Neo-Pagan Judaism stresses our interconnection with earth and each other, the importance of ecstatic experience, and holistic healing. Unlike Kabbalah and Buddhism, neo-pagan Judaism is polytheistic, and looks backward to Judaism's pre-rabbinic origins. It sees Canaanite religion as the original Judaism that was censored by the authorities who established Judaism and Christianity (Hunter 2006). Several factors account for the popularity of neo-pagan Judaism. It is a short step to go from practical Kabbalah to magic. It is fueled by the Western socio-political concern for the planet. It is allegedly validated by historic revisionism and academic theories describing the origins of Judaism. Most importantly it is popularized by Hollywood's fascination with the supernatural and the occult. Jews who ascribe to Wicca are called *Jewitches*.

Jewitches...admit that they are part of an eclectic group. Be they "witchy Jews" or "Jewish witches," Jewitches have a strong sense of Jewish identity but also practice magic, cast spells and tend to identify with "goddess-directed" worship. (Jacobs 2003)

Adherents draw connections throughout Judaism. They describe pagan origins of traditions such as welcoming the new moon, lighting candles, and affixing on the doorposts the *Mezuzah* which they believe is a *Talisman* that channels good energy into the house.

Hunter (2006) compares Jewish traditions with magical rituals such as amulets and Wiccan new moon ceremonies. She claims that these activities alter our physical and spiritual world (Hunter 2006, p. 152). Today, neo-paganism has become politically connected with the political LGBT movement. The stress on the feminine aspect of the divine and goddess worship interconnects lesbianism. In 2009 young millennials, David Hein and Irene Sankoff decided to tell the story of their mother's coming out experience as a lesbian Jewish-wiccan. Their production, *My Mother's Lesbian Jewish Wiccan Wedding*, became an immediate hit at the 2009 Toronto Theatre Festival.

Evaluation

Throughout history, Jewish people have adapted their religious and cultural expression to the host culture they've resided within. Re-enchanted Judaism is a recent iteration of that adaptation. Re-enchanted Judaism is also a repeat of the Jewish-Canaanite syncretism prevalent in the first Temple period. Jewish people are thirsting for a connection with God and not finding it in traditional synagogue practice. As in the days of the latter prophets, they are turning to false religions and popular movements. Jewish people, along with the rest of Western culture, have become disillusioned with the empty promises of the Enlightenment and the impotence of rationalism that mainstream Judaism embraced one-hundred years ago.

How Does This Phenomenon Differ from Its 1970s Antecedent?

What is different today, from its 1970s antecedent is that the phenomenon no longer on the fringe of mainstream Judaism. Its language, practices, and many of its beliefs are entirely familiar to most Jews. New Age spirituality has been popularized through film and entertainment; Re-Enchanted Judaism has influenced synagogue worship, it has pervaded modern Jewish education, and informed Jewish theology. Another second difference is that voices of older Jewish thinkers who influenced Judaism prior to the 1970's, sometime called the Quiet Generation, are gone. Beginning in the 1980's, Boomers have filled their leadership ranks and today it is their children, the Millennials, who are emerging into those leadership roles. The Boomers and their children have brought a fringe movement into Judaism's mainstream. Perhaps the largest difference is what many call the phenomenon of the shrinking world. Millennials, who are technological natives are well connected to the international resource of spiritual information by way of the internet. Millennials have discovered a global market of spiritual beliefs and practices to import into Judaism that the Boomers, in the 1970's never dreamed of enjoying.

Characteristics of Re-Enchanted Judaism

Most streams in the movement share these themes: (1) Each stream stresses a tangible intersection of the invisible spiritual world with our natural one in time and space. Jews are looking for a tangible experience with a transcendent being. They are looking for personal healing. Buddhism promises an Eight-Fold path to heal and relieve suffering. Kabbalah explains

that a Jew may heal their life and through Tikkun Olam. (2) Each stream teaches that there is an invisible world inhabited by spirits, angels, or former mortals, whom we can communicate with. Buddhism and Kabbalah describe the process of reincarnation. Neo-Pagan religion describes a polytheistic world of gods and spirits that inhabit our organic and inorganic world.

(3) We are interconnected with each other and to the earth. We have a responsibility to care for it. Neo-paganism teaches that the earth is our mother from which our life came. Kabbalah teaches that all Jews possess a Divine Spark that interconnects us. And Buddhism stresses the importance of living in harmony with nature. (4) Each stream teaches that there is a Divine being(s) that inhabits all living things and from whom we may seek help and guidance. (5) Prayer is a miraculous act that engages our mind and our spirits and has tangible results. It is meditative and is a personal tool to connect with the Divine and change our environment.

Engaging Re-Enchanted Judaism

Affirm What We Can

We should train missionaries to welcome the emergence of re-enchanted Judaism and the decline of the rationalism. Rationalism and secular humanism held modern Judaism captive for over 100 years. Contemporary Judaism minimized personal experience with a Divine Being. It elevated science and reason above faith. And it relegated spirituality to the sphere of philosophy and superstition. It believed reason and human capability could solve our socio-political and ecological problems. It understood prayer to be a human ritual whose purpose was to preserve tradition and transmit heritage. We should train missionaries to embrace this new interest in prayer, personal experience, and quest for divine solutions to human problems. We can affirm concern for the environment, and our responsibility to maintain it. According to the Genesis 2:15, God placed Adam and Eve in the land to guard and care for it. We can affirm the task of *Tikkun Olam* (healing the world), explaining that it is only through Yeshua can the world truly be healed. Until the prince of peace reigns in the hearts of men and women there will not be peace on earth. We can explain that the God of Israel hears, but that our transgressions have short-circuited our communication with Him. We can explain that He provided the remedy through His Messiah.

Listen to the conversation

We should train missionaries to learn the language, vocabulary, themes and values re-enchanted Judaism teaches. Contemporary Jewish values have shifted from Jewish survival, and the preservation of Jewish heritage, to personal spirituality and holistic healing. Where we are able describe the gospel using the language of re-enchanted Judaism we should try. Where the meaning of the language is clearly non-Biblical, we should clarify Biblical truth.

Re-think Personal Engagement

Sixty years ago, a missionary to the Jews sat down with an inquirer and opened the Jewish Bible to Isaiah 53 where they would build a case for the Messiahship of Yeshua. For many Jews today, Messianic prophecy is not an effective starting point. In 2005, I had the opportunity to meet Galia, the Israeli mother of Jewish believer. Galia, in her mid-forties was steeped in Kabbalah. She repeatedly disputed Messianic prophecy, parroting what her

Kabbalistic rabbi had taught her to say. However, when we looked at the story of Yeshua casting a demon out of the man from the Gadarenes, her eyes became huge. She read about the spiritual power of Yeshua and His ability to heal. She wanted to discover how Yeshua's power could heal her life. She continued talking to her son, Guy, in the weeks to come about the story and contemplated how Yeshua was able to heal.

Deconstruct Antiquated Paradigms of Jewish Religious Expression

Sometimes I have felt that we, in the Messianic Movement, and in Jewish missions, have held on to antiquated paradigms of Jewish culture and religious expression as one holds on to a forty-year-old black and white photograph of their family sitting on their dresser. The Jewish community has evolved since the 1970's. Many Jews are looking for a different experience than their parents. Jewish culture, beliefs, and religious expression have changed. Missionaries to the Jews need to re-immense ourselves in today's Jewish communities and re-acquaint ourselves to its new cultures, values, religious expression, and quest for personal experience.

Discover and Explore the New Jewish Cultural Artifacts

In *Culture Making*, Andy Crouch (2008), argues that we engage culture through its cultural artifacts. We change culture by creating new artifacts. I believe we can understand Re-Enchanted Judaism by learning what the new Jewish artifacts are, and exploring how we can appropriate to communicate the gospel. Artifacts include the language of *Tikkun Olam* understood through a Biblical lens, contemporary forms of Jewish worship and music, a Biblical view of meditation, and Biblical understanding of healing and prayer.

Be Willing to Disagree and Explain Why

Jews respect *chutzpah* (holy guts). Jews respect those who are unashamed of what they believe, and are willing to engage in respectful conversation over those differences. We need to train missionaries who will not shrink back from discussing the Biblical view of prayer, healing, the spiritual world, and the human condition. For centuries, Jews who embraced Jesus were ostracized by the Jewish community and vilified. However, Re-enchanted Judaism has generated a tolerance and pluralistic climate among Jewish. It has promoted ecumenical discussion and even an interest in alternative religious expression. Re-enchanted Judaism provides a new opportunity to share the gospel.

Pray Because We Are Engaged in a Spiritual Battle

False belief and idolatry did not originate in the minds of profound thinkers or charismatic leaders. The Bible tells us that we are engaged in a spiritual battle with Satan for the minds and hearts of people. Re-enchanted Judaism and its miraculous phenomena originates from the author of evil, who is committed to turning Jews away from the God of Israel. He will use miraculous phenomena to validate its beliefs. Our weapon in this battle is prayer. We should pray for the hearts and minds of the Jewish people. We should pray that for those immersed in supernatural experience that God will draw back the curtain so that they may see who is truly generating false spiritual experiences and turn to the source of Living Water who truly can satisfy.

Conclusion

In this study I described the decline of rationalistic Judaism and emergence of a post-modern phenomenon called *Re-Enchanted Judaism*. I explored three streams that contribute to the phenomenon. They are Kabbalah, Eastern religion, and Neo-paganism. Re-Enchanted Judaism emerged in the 1970's as a fringe movement, but today has influenced mainstream Judaism as well as unaffiliated Jews. Today Jews are familiar with some of the language, belief, and practices of re-enchanted Judaism. Younger Jews emerging into leadership roles have brought beliefs and practices into the mainstream. Missionaries to the Jews need to learn how to engage today's Jewish community. We need to affirm the search for personal spirituality, experience with God, and point them toward true healing and connection through Yeshua. We need to listen to the discussion and learn the vocabulary, values, and beliefs. We need to use the contemporary language when we can, and discuss differences as we communicate the gospel. Jewish syncretism is not new. Our role is no different than Isaiah's in his day when Israel sought spiritual experience in Canaanite religion. He declared

Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat...Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy...Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David (Isaiah 55:1-3, ESV)

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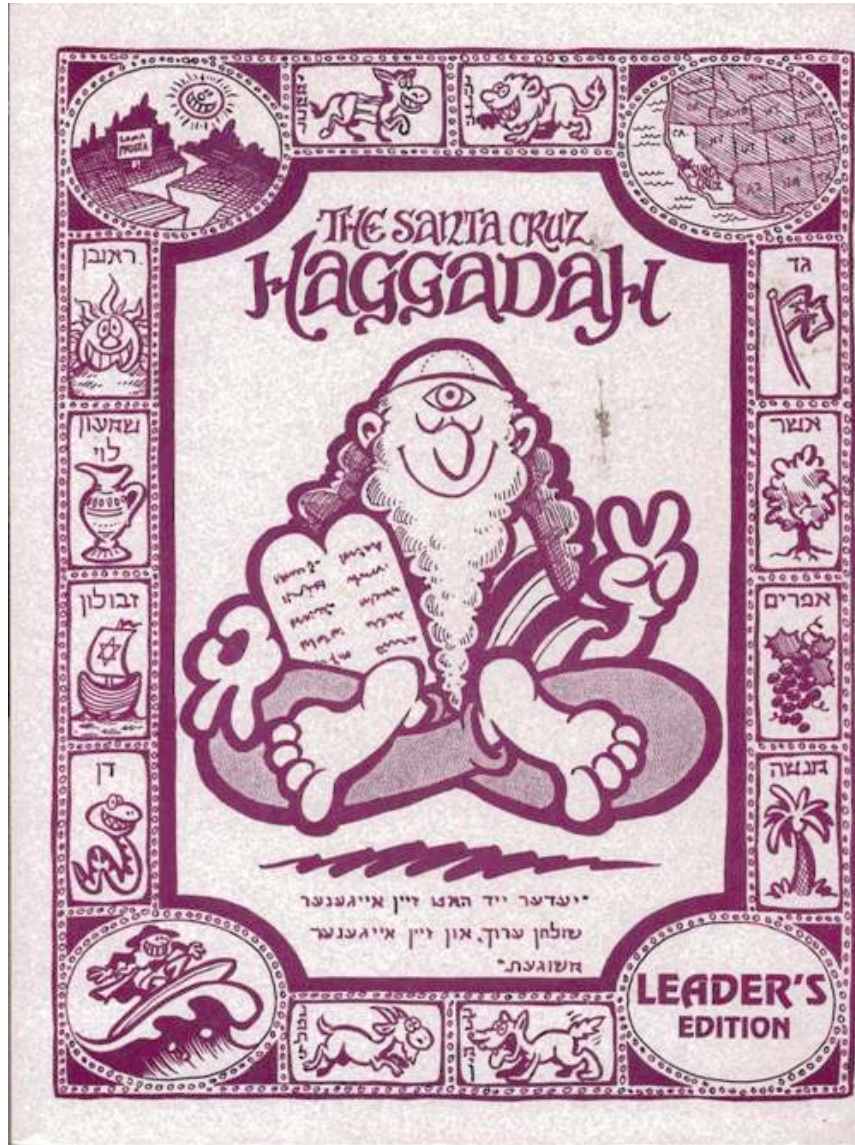
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Appendixes

Appendix A

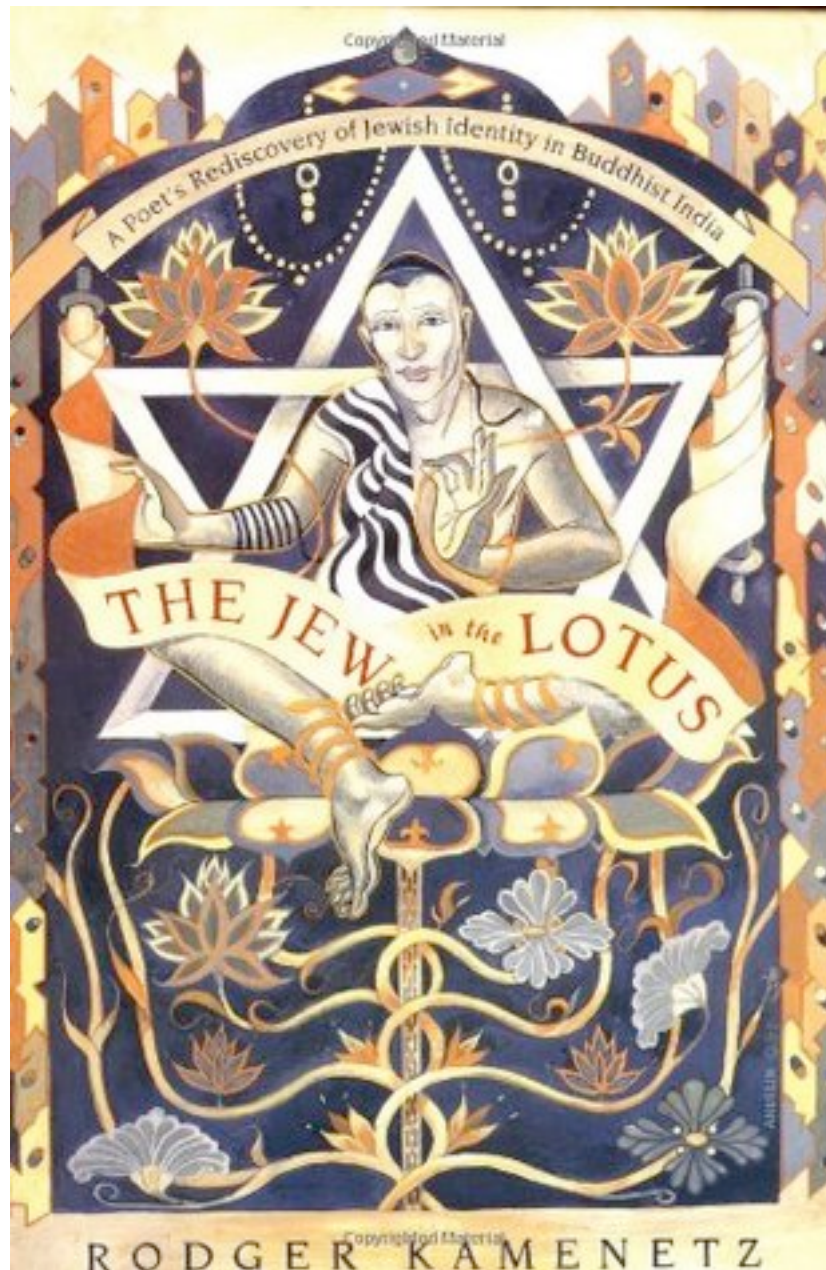
Roekard, *Santa Cruz Haggadah*



From <http://www.amazon.com/The-Santa-Cruz-Haggadah-Leaders/dp/1489533524>

Appendix B

Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus*



From <http://www.amazon.com/Jew-Lotus-Re-Discovery-Identity-Buddhist/dp/B008TFTHUC/>

ⁱ The expression *dis-enchantment* was popularized by Max Weber in describing the Enlightenment and its anti-supernatural rationalism. In recent years, sociologists have described the renewed social interest in supernatural phenomena as *re-enchantment*. The expression is used by sociologists to describe what Christians call the New Age. Jewish people within the movement have used the term for self-description. The Open Temple, in Venice, California in their promotional video describe themselves as Re-Enchanted Judaism.