

## CONTENTS



*List of Illustrations* ix

*A Note on the Spelling of JewBu* xi

*Acknowledgments* xiii

Introduction: Sheldon on the Mountain	1
<b>PART I. FOUR PERIODS OF JEWISH-BUDDHIST ENGAGEMENT</b>	15
Chapter 1 Breaking down the Barriers	17
Chapter 2 Buddhist Paths to Self-Discovery in the Early Twentieth Century	38
Chapter 3 Jews and the Liberalization of American Buddhism	56
Chapter 4 Buddhism and the Creation of a Contemplative Judaism	81
<b>PART II. LIVED EXPERIENCE OF JEWISH BUDDHISTS IN THE UNITED STATES</b>	97
Chapter 5 Making Meditation Jewish	99
Chapter 6 Mapping Jewish Buddhist Spirituality	123
Chapter 7 Constructing a Jewish Buddhist Identity	148
Conclusion: After <i>The Jew in the Lotus</i>	178

viii CONTENTS

<i>Appendix A: Research Methods</i>	193
<i>Appendix B: Teacher Interview Guide</i>	203
<i>Appendix C: Lay Practitioner Interview Guide</i>	209
<i>Notes</i>	217
<i>References</i>	237
<i>Index</i>	251

# Introduction

## SHELDON ON THE MOUNTAIN



AMERICAN BUDDHISTS like to tell a popular joke. A Jewish woman travels to the Himalayas in search of a famous guru. She heads east, traveling by plane, train, bus, and oxcart until she reaches a far-off Buddhist monastery in Nepal. An old lama in maroon and saffron robes tells her that the guru she is seeking is meditating in a cave at the top of the mountain and cannot be disturbed. She has traveled far and insists that she absolutely must see this guru. The lama eventually relents but requests that she not stay long, bow when addressing the guru, and say no more than eight words to him. With the help of a few lamas, monks, and Sherpa porters, she trudges up the mountain. Exhausted, she reaches the top and the cave where the guru is meditating. Keeping within the eight-word limit, she bows and says what she came to say: “Sheldon, it’s your mother. Enough already, come home!” (Frankel 2013; Das 1998, 4).

This amusing story pokes fun at the widespread perception that American Jews have a particular affection for Buddhism. Past empirical research seems to support this view. In his sociological survey of seven Buddhist centers in North America, sociologist James Coleman (2001, 119) found that 16.5 percent of the Buddhist practitioners in his randomly generated sample were of Jewish backgrounds. Similarly, sociologist Wendy Cadge (2005) discovered that nearly a third of those she interviewed at the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center as part of her comparative ethnographic study of Theravada Buddhist organizations in the United States were of Jewish background. Through his research for his best-selling book *The Jew in the Lotus*, Rodger Kamenetz (1994) estimated that Jews represented about 30 percent of Western Buddhist groups in the United States.<sup>1</sup> While scholars do not have precise statistics about

the number of Jews involved in Buddhist communities in the United States, it seems safe to assert that the proportion of Jews in Buddhist circles is disproportionate to the percentage of Jews in this country (Jews constitute about 2 to 3 percent of the population).

These numbers, and their insinuation that Judaism and Buddhism have a distinctive relationship in the United States, motivated this study. I wanted to know why Buddhism appeals to Sheldon and others like him and was curious how Sheldon arrived at the cave at the top of that mountain at all. I also wanted to know if the encounter between Judaism and Buddhism emerged out of the countercultural ethos of the 1960s, as popularly assumed, or if there were earlier antecedent encounters that required unearthing. This book wrestles with these questions by telling the story of how Judaism and Buddhism met and combined in the United States since the late nineteenth century, and how people incorporate these traditions in their daily lives today.

The distinctive relationship between Judaism and Buddhism has been part of public consciousness in the United States since Kamenetz published *The Jew in the Lotus* in 1994. His book chronicled the meeting between eight Jewish delegates—a group of progressive rabbis and scholars from across various wings of American Jewish life—and the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India. The book is now on its thirty-seventh reprint and even inspired a PBS documentary of the same name featured in film festivals around the world. It also popularized the term “JUBU”—a moniker for a Jewish Buddhist—for a wide audience (Van Gelder 1999; Chiten 1999; Kamenetz 1994, 1999).

Since the publishing of *The Jew in the Lotus*, countless popular articles, memoirs, books, and blog posts have cast attention on the special relationship between Judaism and Buddhism. Television stations, including PBS and ABC, have produced special programs about the Jewish-Buddhist relationship. Dozens of celebrities, including Goldie Hawn, Leonard Cohen, Steven Seagal, and Mandy Patinkin, have publicly extolled their Jewish Buddhist identities in print and on television. US newspapers—from broad publications like the *LA Times* to niche outlets like the *Jewish Daily Forward* or *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*—have published articles about such topics as “JuBus—Embracing Judaism and

Buddhism,” “Zen and the Art of the BuJu,” and “At One with Dual Devotion.”<sup>2</sup> Recently, *Tablet Magazine* even ran an article about the Jewish roots of mindfulness meditation in the United States, explaining how a group of four American Jews—Sharon Salzberg, Joseph Goldstein, Jack Kornfield, and Jacqueline Mandell-Schwartz—popularized mindfulness meditation in the United States, and how, in the words of journalist Michelle Goldberg (2015), they “turned a Buddhist spiritual practice into a distinctly American phenomenon—and a multi-billion-dollar industry.”

Scholars, too, have expressed a curiosity about the Jewish-Buddhist relationship. In *The Transformation of American Religion*, religious studies scholar Amanda Porterfield (2001, 158) noted that Jews “took the lead” in the development of American forms of Buddhism, observing that “one of the most interesting aspects of Buddhism’s merger with American religious and intellectual life is its disproportionate appeal to people with Jewish backgrounds.” Similarly, in his book *Buddhism in America*, Richard Seager (2012, 225) pointed out the “important role played by Jewish Buddhists in the introduction and adaptation of the Buddha’s teachings in America.” And in the new volume *Buddhism beyond Borders: New Perspectives on Buddhism in the United States*, scholar Mira Niculescu (2015) writes about the rise of Jewish mindfulness as an offspring of Western Buddhism in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this popular and scholarly notice, we know comparatively little about the relationship between Judaism and Buddhism in the United States. We do not know how Jewish Buddhists experience and narrate their multireligious identities; based on these identities, how they have built institutions, new practices, and staked claims in their communities; and what broad social and historical factors explain how these two traditions came together over centuries to produce these identities in the first place. These are the questions at the heart of this book.

Threaded through the book is an argument that the distinctive social position of American Jews, or what I call the “Jewish social location,” led American Jews to their engagement with Buddhism and fundamentally shaped the character of it. The Jewish social location is

the set of orientations produced by the position of Jewish Americans as a distinctively left-liberal, urban, secular, and upper-middle-class religious minority in the United States. Jews occupy a distinctive place in contemporary US society in terms of residential patterns, class, education, occupation, and religious beliefs. More than any other religious or ethnic group in the United States, Jews live in and near the largest American cities, exceed all other groups in socioeconomic status, and surpass all other groups in educational attainment. In addition, Jews consistently fall at the bottom of measures of traditional religious beliefs. Compared to all other ethnic and religious groups (except “religious nones”), they are the least likely to be sure that God exists, to believe that there is an afterlife, and to say that the Bible is the exact word of God. A deep-seated appreciation of this particular sense of Jewish social distinctiveness rests at the heart of the stories in this book.<sup>4</sup> The American Jews in this book also relate deeply to the experience of being a religious minority living in a largely Christian society. The Jewish social location—itsself a particular combination of a distinctive demographic, religious, and minority position—propelled Jews into their encounter with Buddhism and shaped the historical mark they left on it. Moreover, it defined the pathways through which Buddhism entered into American Judaism, and to this day, continues to structure how people interpret and knit together ideas from both traditions in framing their identities, creating religious practices, and building organizations.

### Why Was Sheldon on the Mountain? An Overview of Past Arguments

Puzzled by the distinctive relationship between Judaism and Buddhism, scholars have offered explanations for the affinity between the two traditions and specifically for why Buddhism appeals to American Jews. Many of these arguments are based on some element of interview data combined with anecdotal evidence.<sup>5</sup> Broadly speaking, past explanations for the Jewish attraction to Buddhism fall into four categories: historical, religious/theological, demographic, and “pull” explanations.

The historical explanations include a number of different arguments, the most common of which is the claim that Judaism and Buddhism have a shared focus on suffering. Jewish people, the reasoning goes, dwell especially on the idea of suffering because the Holocaust forced them to grapple with the massive suffering endured by so many. Buddhism provides Jewish people with answers (and ways of coping) with that suffering (see Porterfield 2001; Linzer 1996; Rosenberg 2003; Sautter 2002; Brodey 1997). In another explanation, Coleman (2001) claims that since Jews traditionally played the part of outsiders in a US culture dominated by Christianity, they have been more willing to embrace ideas that mainstream society sees as deviant or foreign. He also suggests that Jews are more interested in new religious movements because Judaism has been more greatly eroded than Christianity by the processes of secularization. Other scholars contend that Jewish seekers were drawn to Buddhism because Buddhists had no history of prejudice toward Jews (see Linzer 1996; Rosenberg 2003).

The religious/theological explanations for the affinity between Buddhism and Judaism are many. Porterfield (2001) suggests that the intellectual training and study of religious texts serves as a bridge to connect Judaism and elite forms of Buddhism. Another argument claims that the Jewish conception of God proves an ideal fit with the nontheistic aspects of Buddhist philosophy (see Porterfield 2001; Linzer 1996; Weinberg 1994; Sautter 2002; Brodey 1997). Finally, other scholars contend that Buddhism does not make theological demands on its members, thereby making it accessible; Jews are frustrated with the emphasis on Jewish particularism or chosenness (see Porterfield 2001; Kamenetz 1994; Seidman 1998; Brodey 1997; Libin 2010), and the stress that many Buddhist teachers place on universal truth resonates with disaffected Jews; and the similarities between the mystical and meditative traditions of Buddhism and Judaism attract Jews to Buddhism (see Kamenetz 1994; Libin 2010; Linzer 1996).

Third, the demographic argument claims that Jews are overrepresented in the segments of society to which Buddhism appeals most strongly: the highly educated upper middle class, intellectuals, artists, and bohemians (see Coleman 2001; Rosenberg 2003). And finally, scholars base the

fourth argument for why Jews are drawn to Buddhism on “pull factors,” or the characteristics of Buddhism that pull in American Jews. Scholars reason that Jews are attracted to Buddhism because it is a body-based practice that lends itself to direct experience (see Porterfield 2001; Linzer 1996; Weinberg 1994; Sautter 2002; Brodey 1997; Kamenetz 1994; Libin 2010). Sheila Weinberg (1994), a reconstructionist rabbi, argues that Buddhist spiritual practices have been consciously and systematically tailored for the Western mind and vocabulary, making them appealing to American Jews (a discussion dealt with in more depth in later chapters in this book). Other scholars suggest that Jews are attracted to meditation because it allows them a means to “slow down and live” in a time of electronic media as well as a sense of collective breathlessness (see Green 2003), and they are attracted to the Buddhist approach to the elimination of war, poverty, racism, prejudice, environmental pollution, intemperance, and drug abuse (see Brodey 1997).

The many assertions presented above demonstrate the range of ways that scholars have thought about the appeal of Buddhism to Jews.<sup>6</sup> While all these assertions may touch on certain truths, they provide only partial explanations. For example, many Jews undoubtedly feel uncomfortable with the idea of God, but so do many other Americans, so why do Jews seem to look to Buddhism as a haven for their skepticism? Similarly, some American Buddhist traditions may well provide body-based experiential practice, but so do other traditions, so why do Jews seem to gravitate to Buddhism over other traditions? None of these past studies offers the sufficient empirical data that would allow scholars to evaluate their claims. In this book, I draw on over three years of ethnographic research—archival research, interviews, and participant observation—in order to discern how people understand their relationships to both Judaism and Buddhism, and why Buddhism appeals to many American Jews. I examine the various explanations for the affinity between the two traditions at various points throughout the chapters to come and tie them together in the conclusion. I repudiate any claim of an intrinsic affinity between these traditions; to understand how these two traditions came together, I argue that we need to understand instead the historical and social webs that connect them.



## Toward a Sociological Perspective on Religious Syncretism

At its most general, this is a book about religious syncretism in the United States, the history that produced it, and the way that individuals experience it in daily life.<sup>7</sup> Historically, the term “syncretism” has served as the conceptual bedrock across academic disciplines for the study of inter-religious mixing. Syncretism has a complex history and etymology, with its meaning dependent on the historical and political context in which it has been used.<sup>8</sup> Syncretism developed a pejorative connotation from its use within seventeenth-century theological debates about the degree to which illegitimate forms of religious mixture supposedly contaminated church doctrine. It implied an infiltration of foreign religious elements seen as belonging to other, incompatible traditions into a “pure” religious tradition (Stewart and Shaw 1994; Leopold and Jensen 2004). Thereafter the term continued to be polemically used within the comparative study of religions. This history has led many contemporary scholars of religion to feel that the term has been too tarnished to remain usable.<sup>9</sup>

Scholars have reclaimed the term syncretism over the past thirty or so years as it relates to themes central to postcolonial analysis, including creolization, hybridity, and interstitiality (Leopold and Jensen 2004; McIntosh 2009; Robbins 2011).<sup>10</sup> Anthropologists, in particular, invoke the term syncretism not to focus on the contrast between pure culture(s) and mixed ones, or the disorder caused by cultural mixing. Rather, they use the term to analyze the conditions, especially in the context of post-colonialism, in which cultures emerge, as Homi Bhabha (1994, 38) describes, “at the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space.” Scholars draw on the term to underscore the fluidity and heterogeneity in cultural and religious life, and deconstruct the broader cultural processes, discourses, and power relations surrounding religious mixing (McIntosh 2009).

Drawing on the concept of syncretism does not, however, overlook its charged history. Rather, as anthropologists Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (1994, 2) note, “embracing a term which has acquired—in some quarters—pejorative meanings can lead to a more challenging

critique of the assumptions on which those meanings are based than can its mere avoidance.” In agreement with Stewart and Shaw, I specifically embrace the framework of syncretism to analyze the meeting and mixing of Judaism and Buddhism in the United States. Syncretism remains the concept central to the interdisciplinary study of religious mixing and raises broader questions about issues of boundaries and power, befitting an examination of the transformative encounter between these traditions. In this study, I broadly define syncretism as the mixing of various elements (including practices, beliefs, identities, communities, etc.) associated with different religious traditions.<sup>11</sup>

The use of syncretism as an analytic framework helps also to move sociologists of religion beyond the various metaphors—salad bar religion, religion à la carte, or bricolage—often used to explain religious mixing in the United States. These metaphors connote the idea that individuals pick and choose among religious options in highly individualistic and idiosyncratic ways and that the processes of religious mixing are steeped in arbitrary choice and random ordering.<sup>12</sup> This has led scholars to dismiss religious mixing as trifling and/or ephemeral, even as recent survey data have demonstrated the prevalence of religious mixing in the United States.<sup>13</sup> The framework of syncretism, as currently used in the literature, invites an analysis of the cultural and structural processes that shape religious mixing.

I also draw on the framework of syncretism to call attention to not only the presence but also the significance of religious mixing in the United States. The majority of the current work on syncretism emerges out of postcolonial contexts in the developing world, where religious blending holds harsh political or economic consequences. This has led syncretism to appear as a problem endemic to “traditional societies” in developing countries (see van der Veer 1994); it has created the impression among social scientists that religious mixing is not an important facet of religion in the West, even though historians of American religion have long underscored the significance of religious contact and exchange in the United States.<sup>14</sup> Examining religious syncretism in the United States throws into relief the salience of fluidity and heterogeneity in American religion, particularly in the current era of “new religious pluralism.”<sup>15</sup> In doing so, it

challenges the dominant paradigm within sociology that suggests that religions adapt and change in this country by assimilating into the majority and taking on the characteristics and organizational forms of liberal Protestantism.<sup>16</sup> The central contribution of this book is to demonstrate that minority religious traditions in the United States *also* reconfigure themselves by borrowing and integrating elements from each other through a process shaped by their specific social locations in society. They do not just adapt to the majority, I show, but also to each other.

### Boundaries, Power, and Authority

Studying the Jewish-Buddhist encounter in the United States raises the issue of boundaries, and where to draw the line around who is (and is not) a Jew and who is (and is not) a Buddhist. Scholars of both Jewish and Buddhist studies have perennially wrestled with these definitions, without any agreed-on answers. Jewish studies scholars have long recognized that being Jewish is not only a matter of religion—the traditional, matrilineal definition of Jewish identity founded on halacha (Jewish religious law)—but also a matter of ancestry, ethnicity and cultural background. In this study, I consider anyone a “Jew” who identifies as such, even if they are also an ordained Buddhist priest who maintains little to no Jewish observance. In doing so, I depart from the convention in Jewish studies not to include as Jews those who have adopted another religious tradition. I examine the spectrum of Jewish and Buddhist engagements and identities, highlighting the involvement of both observant and “cultural” Jews in American Buddhist life, from the position of prominent Buddhist communal leaders (e.g., ordained monks, lamas, and roshis) to the position of casual meditators with little to no involvement in the Buddhist community.

By deliberately drawing attention to a broad range of Jewish engagements and identities, I seek to enlarge the historical analysis of American Jewry by adopting a “dispersionist” approach to American Jewish history (Hollinger 2009).<sup>17</sup> This dispersionist approach includes within its scope the lives of all American Jews regardless of their involvement with Jewish communal life and irrespective of their declared Jewishness.

American Jewish history has focused overwhelmingly on the stories and work of communal Jewry, organizations and institutions that the public identify as Jewish, and activities of individuals who proclaim themselves Jewish and/or are so identified by non-Jews. In the chapters to follow, I include the stories of those Jews who identify proudly and publicly as Jewish and those who see their Jewishness as seemingly irrelevant in their lives. In doing so, this book broadens the analytic scope of American Jewish history to include stories of those who have little to no involvement in communal life. It stakes a claim that upbringing and inheritance are impossible to entirely cast off, and the social locations of our past give shape to the religious possibilities of our future.

Buddhist studies scholars have similarly debated who counts as a Buddhist in the United States and how to categorize the various different Buddhist groups in this country.<sup>18</sup> Over the past several decades, scholars have offered various typologies using different criteria to categorize groups. Typically, they divide American Buddhists into two or three categories that distinguish between convert Buddhists, or those whose ancestry is not Asian and whose religious heritage is not Buddhist (most “converts” have European American ancestry), and “heritage” or “ethnic” Buddhists, or those who are typically immigrants and refugees from Asian Buddhist cultures, and their descendants. Although these categories help somewhat to clarify the differences among the various Buddhist groups in this country, they often reify artificial boundaries and fail to capture the diversity of Buddhism in the United States. They also rarely map onto people’s self-identifications and frequently reflect and reproduce unconscious white privilege and power.<sup>19</sup>

The respondents in the chapters to follow largely think about themselves as “American Buddhists”—and in turn, I consider them as such—even while recognizing that “American Buddhism” is not a singular entity. These respondents do not view Buddhism as their inherited historic or ethnoreligious tradition, and few feel any connection to Buddhism as it is practiced and institutionalized in Asia. Rather, these Jewish Buddhists identify with a Buddhism that was constituted in and adapted to the United States—a process I describe in the chapters to follow. When I characterize Jewish Buddhists as a collective, I refer to

them as convert Buddhists—a label I recognize as imperfect for all the reasons mentioned above but also necessary for the descriptive purpose of labeling those born in the United States who were not raised Buddhist, yet later came to identify or affiliate with Buddhism in some way.<sup>20</sup>

Related to the issue of boundaries is the issue of power, and who has the authority to exercise it over what counts as true, authentic religion (be it Judaism or Buddhism) and the decision-making power to decide what counts as allowable religious mixing. The issue of power is particularly important to the history of Buddhism in the United States, where the middle and upper-middle classes (including American Jews) have appropriated and recontextualized the tradition—and arguably exploited as well as fragmented it too—in order to commodify it and place it at the service of their needs. At different times and in different contexts, the exchange and mixing of Jewish and Buddhist forms will be shrouded in conflict, inherently unequal relations of power, and even the subjugation of ideologies and beliefs of Asian culture. When these issues of power and dominance surface, I call them out, and explain their context and ramifications. Broadly speaking, however, the encounter between Judaism and Buddhism largely occurred in a context defined by the inevitable transformations that arise when religions collide and remake themselves in response to each other and, unlike the early relationship between Buddhism and Christianity, was not mired in violence, missionization, or colonial oppression.<sup>21</sup>

Lastly, in narrowing in on these inevitable transformations, one of the final contributions of this book is to both excavate and illuminate the role that American Jews played in the project of Buddhist modernism. As Buddhist studies scholar David McMahan (2008, 6) has demonstrated, this project—a complex set of historical processes—sought to bring Buddhism into engagement with the dominant cultural and intellectual forces of modernity. In Europe and the United States, Buddhist modernizers have inserted the tradition into preexisting discourses and debates, interpreted it in terms of modern Western categories, and transformed it to accommodate to and/or resist European colonialism. These Buddhist modernists refashioned Buddhism in order to enhance its prestige and viability in an emerging global context (McMahan 2008, 70).

Throughout the chapters in this book, I discuss how American Jews, from Charles T. Strauss (1852–1937) in the nineteenth century to Joseph Goldstein (1944–) a century later, sought to reinterpret Buddhism to make it compatible with the norms and expectations of US society.

## The Study

My arguments unfold across seven chapters, divided into two sections. They emerge from over three years of ethnographic fieldwork and historical research that I conducted about the relationship between Judaism and Buddhism in the United States. This research included over eighty interviews with Jewish practitioners of Buddhism, both teachers and lay practitioners, as well as archival work and extensive participant observation that I conducted in various Jewish and Buddhist meditation centers in New England, New York, and California.<sup>22</sup>

The first section of the book (chapters 1–4, organized chronologically) provides the history of the Jewish-Buddhist encounter in the United States, describing the broad social and political forces that brought Jews into contact with Buddhism, and then later Buddhism into contact with Judaism in the United States. Each chapter in this first section focuses on a specific time period from 1875 to today, demonstrating the various encounters between Buddhism and Judaism, and how American Jews have participated in the project of Buddhist modernism. This first section is an examination of the broad historical processes that sowed the seeds for contemporary forms of religious syncretism to occur. The second section of the book (chapters 5–7, organized thematically) moves from history to ethnography, and looks at how the encounter between Judaism and Buddhism led to the creation of new syncretic practices, spiritual discourses, and identities, respectively.

The first chapter opens at the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893 in Chicago, where Strauss—a wealthy haberdasher of Jewish descent—became the first person to convert to Buddhism on US soil. I tell Strauss's story—and his work to modernize and transform Buddhism—while also laying out the spectrum of ways in which American Jews encountered and engaged with Buddhism in the late nineteenth century

from about 1875 to 1924. Chapter 2 describes the second period of Jewish-Buddhist involvement in the United States that began in the 1920s. In this period, the intellectual engagement between Judaism and Buddhism persisted, but it became augmented by a growing appearance of solo American Jews—largely from wealthy and prominent families—who received training by Asian teachers and pursued Buddhist practices in Asian-founded Buddhist groups. The chapter illustrates these developments through the stories of three prominent Jewish Buddhist modernizers: Julius Goldwater, Samuel Lewis, and William Segal.

The third chapter describes the period of intensive Jewish-Buddhist engagement that occurred within the American Left, from about 1966 to 1990. This chapter traces the trajectories that led many Jews in the second half of the twentieth century to Zen, insight meditation, and Tibetan traditions—three communities in which Jews have emerged as prominent teachers and leaders.<sup>23</sup> I argue that through their prominent positions as Buddhist teachers, Jewish Americans participated in the modernization of Buddhism in the second half of the twentieth century by elevating the practice of meditation, instilling within it an activist ethic, and increasing its psychotherapeutic orientation.

The fourth chapter describes the final period of Jewish-Buddhist activity in the United States, from about 1991 to the present. This chapter focuses on the involvement of American Jews, like Jon Kabat Zinn, in the promotion and popularization of a secular, psychotherapeutic Buddhism beginning in the early 1990s. It then discusses the important role that the Nathan Cummings Foundation played in creating new Jewish-Buddhist dialogues and systematically incorporating Buddhist ideas and practices into American Judaism.

In part II of the book (chapters 5–7), I move from the history of the Jewish-Buddhist encounter to an analysis of the syncretism of Jewish Buddhist practices, discourses, and identities. The fifth chapter explores the development and contours of the syncretism of religious practice, asking how the practice of meditation spread from Buddhism into Judaism and how it was reconfigured along the way. I show how meditation moved from Buddhism into Judaism through a process by which a prominent group of Jewish teachers and leaders de-emphasized its explicitly

Buddhist roots and repackaged it within a Jewish framework, thereby rendering it familiar and compelling, yet different and exotic to the American Jewish mainstream.

The sixth chapter probes the syncretism of spiritual discourse, asking how one group of Jewish Buddhists—those that I call the “spiritually enriched”—assign spiritual meaning to their Buddhist practices, and how that spiritual meaning in turn is charged with particular religious and political investments. This group of Jewish Buddhists maintains an active and practicing relationship to Judaism. They imagine Buddhism as an important means to enhance their sense of spirituality *and* complement their Judaism. I highlight four central frames of spirituality that emerged from my conversations with these respondents. Finally, the last chapter explores the syncretism of religious identities, investigating how Jewish Buddhists understand and narrate their relationships to both traditions. It draws on an analysis of thirty-two interviews with Jewish-born “Buddhist converts,” or those who have turned their hearts and minds toward the teachings and practices of the Buddha and maintain a cultural identification with Judaism. I explain how respondents emphasize that they view their Jewish identities as ascribed and cultural and their Buddhist identities as achieved and enacted. I then describe four approaches that these Jewish Buddhists take to integrating their two identities into one syncretic Jewish Buddhist identity.

Finally, I conclude this book by discussing the broad threads that have carried through the history of the encounter in the United States between Judaism and Buddhism. I offer various speculations about *why* so many American Jews are attracted to Buddhism and provide a typology of three types of Jewish Buddhists in the United States. I also revisit the question of boundaries, power, and authority. The preeminent theologian Harvey Cox (1973, 121) once wrote that “few faiths ever escape modification when they collide or interact with others. Most profit from such encounters.” My goal in these chapters is not to make an argument about who does and does not benefit from the encounter between Judaism and Buddhism but rather to describe how both traditions—and their people, organizations, discourses, and practices—were transformed as a result of their meeting.



## INDEX



- Adler, Felix, 27–28  
Adler, Samuel, 27  
Agatz, Katie, 18  
Ajahn Cha, 68, 226n23  
Albanese, Catherine, 220n12  
American Jewish World Service, 87  
American Left and Buddhism, 13, 57, 58–59, 82  
Ammerman, Nancy, 125, 130, 231n4  
Ananda Maitreya, 226n27  
anti-Asian sentiment, 32, 38, 44, 46, 48, 221nn28–29  
appropriation, 11, 24, 26, 37, 47, 116, 122, 131, 147, 190  
Arnold, Edwin, 29, 220n11  
ascribed vs. achieved identities, 152, 167–75, 233n8  
Asian immigration to US, 45, 56  
  
Bancou, Marielle, 53  
Baraz, James, 184, 226n26  
Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, 89–90, 91, 110, 226n25  
Baumann, Martin, 222n34  
Beat movement, 56, 59, 225n8  
Bell, Catherine, 231n5  
Bender, Courtney, 135  
Bercholz, Sam, 66  
Berkeley Zen Center, 60–61, 74, 91  
“Bewish” term, 63  
Bhabha, Homi, 7, 47  
Blum, Mark, 224n3  
Bodhi, Bhikkhu (Jeffrey Block), 75, 226n27  
Boorstein, Sylvia, 89–91, 92, 93–94, 103, 106, 110, 123–24, 186–87, 226n26  
Boulder Shambhala Center, 66  
Breyer, Stephen, 88  
Bronstein, Marcello, 89  
Buddha (Siddhārtha Gautama), 29, 165–66, 174, 186; Adler on, 28; birthday of, 46; imagery in meditation exercises of, 109–13, 166, 230n10; Strauss on, 17, 22, 23, 24, 26  
Buddhism: activist ethic in, 13, 22, 71, 73–76, 161; cosmological/mythological aspects of, 24, 25, 29, 66, 73, 110, 131, 151, 162, 173; four noble truths of, 166; Jewish condemnations of, 30–32, 80; Five Precepts of Morality in, 17, 21; liberalization in US of, 68–80; popularization in US of, 56–57, 82–83, 224n4; rational, scientific appeal of, 21–23, 25, 28, 30, 34, 36, 180, 220n12, 221n18, 221n22; rebirth in, 24, 29, 69, 110, 161; term misconceptions, 219n18; three main schools of, 45; Western adaptations (“strategic occidentalism,” “whitening”) of, 6, 10, 11–12, 14, 37, 46–47, 64, 69–70, 140, 190, 222n2  
Buddhist Brotherhood of America, 45–46  
Buddhist-Christian relationship, 11, 219n21  
Buddhist Global Relief, 75  
Buddhist identity, 10, 149, 169–71  
Buddhist-Jewish conversion possibilities, 190–91  
Buddhist Mission of North America, 42, 43, 44, 46  
Buddhist modernism, 11–12, 13, 57–58, 68–69, 79, 184, 188–90, 222n3; beginnings of, 25–26, 35, 39, 45, 50, 188  
Buddhist Peace Fellowship, 74–75  
Buddhist Sangha Council, 45  
Burns, Ken, 53

- Cadge, Wendy, 1, 227n39, 230n7  
Cambridge Zen Center, 83  
Campbell, David, 218n13  
Carus, Paul, 32  
Chayat, Shery, 225n16  
Chochmat HaLev, 94, 239n26  
Chodron, Pema (Deirdre Blomfield-Brown), 66–67  
Chogye International Zen Center, 62  
Christian Science, 33, 221n26, 22n33  
Cohen, Leonard, 2  
Coleman, James, 1, 5, 162  
conversion, attitudes toward, 26, 149, 150–51  
Cooper, David, 93, 94, 115, 119, 231n16  
Cooper, Shoshanna, 94, 115–16, 231n16  
counterculture and Buddhism, 56–57, 59–60, 62, 66, 78, 154–55, 181  
Cowan, Rachel, 89  
Cox, Harvey, 14  
“cultural religion,” 151
- Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso), 2, 52, 67, 86, 87–89, 178  
Dances of Universal Peace, 50  
Davidman, Lynn, 233n10  
Davidson, Richard, 229n8  
Davis, Avram, 94–95, 229n26  
Demerath, N. J., III, 151  
dharma, 41, 42; transmission of the, 49, 60–61, 72  
Dharmapala, Anagarika, 17, 21, 25, 33, 34, 219n3, 220n11, 220n13, 221n30  
diffusion studies, 104–5  
Dipa Ma, 226n23  
dispersionist approach to American Jewish history, 9–10, 189, 219n17  
Douglass, Anna, 226n26  
Dzogchen Center, 67
- Eisenberg, Ellen, 221n29  
Elat Chayyim Center for Jewish Spirituality, 94, 115, 128, 229n24  
Empty Gate Zen Center, 62  
engaged Buddhism, 73–75  
Epstein, Mark, 85  
Epstein, Ron, 224n3  
Ethical Culture Society, 20, 27–28, 36  
Everyday Zen Foundation, 72  
Ewing, Skip, 62
- Federman, Asaf, 218n6  
Fischer, Norman, 72–73, 91–93, 106, 178, 189  
Flam, Nancy, 89  
forgiveness, 70, 119
- Gampo Abbey, 66–67  
Genesee Valley Zen Center (later Springwater Center), 71–72  
Ginsberg, Allen, 59, 66, 225nn8–10  
Glassman, Bernard, 75–76, 94, 189, 227n45  
God: existence of, 4, 22, 23, 27, 153; forms of reference to, 114, 129  
Goenka, S. N., 63, 68, 225n19, 226n23  
Gold, Shefa, 90, 93  
Goldberg, Michelle, 3  
Goldberg, Natalie, 225n16  
Goldstein, Joseph, 3, 12, 63–65, 66, 69, 77, 184, 189; *A Heart Full of Peace*, 70; later career of, 83, 85, 87, 89, 90, 226nn23–26  
Goldwater, Barry, 40  
Goldwater, Julius, 13, 39–47, 49, 50, 54, 79, 181, 188, 223n11  
Goleman, Daniel, 63, 85–86  
Green, Paula, 74–75  
Green, Tova, 74, 225n16  
Greenbaum, Jesse Linnell, 29  
Greenberg, Irving and Blu, 87  
Greyston Mandela, 75, 228n47  
Gurdjieff, George, 51–52, 53
- Hahn, Aaron, 33  
Hall, Manly P., 40  
Halpern, Charles, 86–87  
Hartman, Blanche, 61–62  
Hasidism, 81, 94–95, 113  
Hawaii, Buddhism in, 40–41, 222n6

- Hawn, Goldie, 2  
Hecker, Hellmuth, 222n34  
Heinze, Andrew, 77, 86  
Hervieu-Léger, Danièle, 156  
Hitler, Adolf, 233n11  
Hollinger, David, 219n17  
Holocaust, 5, 76, 157–58, 234n16, 234n17  
Horowitz, Bethamie, 235n5  
Hunt, Ernest, 41–42  
hybridity, 47
- Imamura, Yemyo, 42, 222n6  
Inayat Khan, 48, 49  
India, American Jews in, 62–64, 81, 82, 85  
Insight Meditation Society (IMS), 65,  
74–75, 83, 111, 128, 149, 226n26  
Institute for Jewish Spirituality (IJS), 106–8,  
112, 118, 121  
Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center,  
94, 115
- Jacobs, Janet, 157  
James, William, 130  
Japanese American concentration camps,  
44, 45–46, 47, 226n27  
JewBu term, xi, 2, 187–88  
Jewish blessing flags, 99–100, 110  
Jewish Buddhist identity, 14, 148–77,  
187–88; three main types of Jewish  
Buddhists, 185–86  
Jewish-Buddhist relationship: beginnings  
of, 2, 12–13, 17–37; conferences and  
dialogues on, 87–92; development of, 13,  
38–55, 56–80; explanations for, 4–6,  
34–36, 88, 182–84, 218n6, 220n10;  
liberalism and, 19, 21, 35–36, 39, 78, 108,  
114, 125, 127, 134, 163–64; media attention  
on, 2–3  
Jewish-Buddhist spirituality, 14, 88, 123–47,  
178, 227n39, 231n2  
Jewish-Christian relationship, 11, 158–60, 183  
Jewish identity, 9–10, 14, 134, 150, 169, 176,  
233n10; cultural (ethnic) vs. religious,  
152–60; voluntary nature of, 20, 152, 160.  
*See also* Jewish Buddhist identity  
Jewish immigration to US, 34  
Jewish meditation, 80, 81, 88, 92–95, 99–122,  
127, 142, 161–63, 178, 190; elements of,  
108–17; justifications for, 117–21;  
syncretism in, 104, 108, 122, 152  
Jewish Meditation Center of Brooklyn  
(JMC), 99–104, 109, 112–13, 114, 119,  
120–21  
Jewish Renewal movement, 81–82, 119,  
228n1  
“Jewish social location,” 3–4, 180, 182–83,  
217n4  
Jodo Shinshu (Shin Buddhism), 40–43, 46  
Jones, J. L., 31  
Joseph, Israel, 33
- Kabat-Zinn, Jon, 13, 82–86, 106, 228nn5–6  
Kabatznick, Ronna, 229n8  
Kabbalah, 81, 106, 114, 120  
Kamenetz, Rodger, xi, 1, 2, 87–89, 178  
Kapleau, Philip, 71  
karma, 29, 170  
Karuna Center for Peace Building, 74–75  
Katz, Joanna, 90, 93–94  
Katz, Nathan, 66, 88  
Kaufman, Debra, 234n15  
Kerouac, Jack, 59  
Ketelaar, James E., 26  
Khema, Ayya (Ilse Kussel), 226n27  
Kim, Helen, 235n7  
Kitzes, Jeff (Bon Soeng), 62  
Kobori Nanrei, 53  
Kornfield, Jack, 3, 64–65, 66, 68, 69, 70, 77,  
83, 85, 90, 189, 226n23, 226n26  
Kornman, Robin, 66  
Krassen, Miles, 90  
Krishna Dass (Jeffrey Kegel), 63–64
- Laicher, Alison, 101–4, 110, 113, 118, 120–21  
Laping, Barry, 63  
Leavitt, Noah, 235n7

- Levine, Stephen, 63  
Levitt, Joy, 87, 89  
Lew, Alan, 91–93, 103, 113–14, 117, 119–20, 127, 178, 229n20  
Lewis, Samuel, 13, 39, 48–50, 53–54, 181, 188, 223nn13–16  
Liebling, Mordechai, 89  
loving-kindness (*metta*; *Hesed*), 70, 103, 110, 142, 144  
Luther, Martin, 46
- Maezumi, Taizan, 59–60, 75  
Maha Bodhi Society, 21–22, 26  
Mahasi Sayadaw, 68, 226n23  
Mahayana Buddhism, 45, 46. *See also*  
  Nichirin Buddhism  
Makor Or: A Center of Jewish Meditation, 93, 114  
Mandell-Schwartz, Jacqueline, 3, 63, 65, 225n19, 226n25  
Martin, Rabia, 48  
Masuyama, Kenju, 43, 223n9  
McMahan, David, 11, 25, 58, 219n18, 222n3  
McRoberts, Omar, 135  
meditation, 6, 13–14, 25, 57–58, 68, 137–38; cross-legged (*zazen*), 52, 60; insight (*vipassana*), 57, 63–65, 68–72, 78, 90, 93, 106, 109, 148–49, 162–63, 219n23, 224n5, 225n21, 227n36; mainstreaming of, 82–95, 105–6. *See also* Jewish meditation  
Mendes-Flohr, Paul, 88  
Mentorgarten Meditation Hall, 49  
Metivta: A Center for Contemplative Judaism, 94  
Meyer, Wali Ali, 223n14  
Michaelson, Jay, 93  
mindfulness, 3, 68, 69–73, 109, 112, 140–41, 144, 186; Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), 83–85, 228n5, 228n7  
monasticism, rejection by Jewish Buddhists of, 58, 71, 72, 73  
Morgan, Bill, 225n10  
Munindra, Anagarika, 68, 226n23  
Nachman of Bratslav, 121  
Naropa Institute, 64, 66, 78, 225n10  
Nashville Mindfulness Center, 62  
Nathan Cummings Foundation, 13, 86–92, 94–95, 106–7, 121, 181  
Native American spirituality, 50, 81  
Nhat Hanh, Thich, 62, 83, 168  
Nichirin Buddhism, 57  
Niculescu, Mira, 3, 230n9  
nirvana, 28, 162  
Nishi Hongwanji Los Angeles Buddhist Temple, 42, 44  
Nisker, Wes, 63  
Nyanaponika Thera (Siegmond Feniger), 223n20  
Olcott, Henry Steel, 220n11, 221n20, 222n2  
Omer-Man, Jonathan, 87, 94–95  
Ouspensky, P. D., 51–52
- Packer, Toni, 71–72, 73, 225n16  
Pandita, U, 68, 226n23  
*Pansil* rite, 17, 41  
Patinkin, Mandy, 2  
pluralism, 8, 36, 127, 135, 145–46  
Porterfield, Amanda, 3, 5  
power issues, 11, 122, 189–90  
pregnancy and fieldwork, 201–2  
Prothero, Stephen, 222n2, 222n5  
psychotherapeutic Buddhism, 13, 68, 76–78, 79, 162–63, 167, 189  
Putnam, Robert, 218n13
- Queen, Christopher, 75
- Ram Dass (Richard Alpert), 63, 66, 85, 94, 226n24  
Reform Judaism, 20–21, 27, 35, 88–89, 116, 174  
reincarnation. *See* Buddhism: rebirth in religious liberalism, 22, 28, 35–36, 38, 117, 133, 145, 221n17, 227n33  
Rhys-Davids, T. W., 32–33, 220n14

- Rochester Zen Center, 71  
Roosevelt, Franklin Delano, 44  
Rosenberg, Larry, 227n39  
Rosenthal, Lee, 224n3  
Roth, Jeff, 90, 93–94, 112, 113, 229n24
- Salzberg, Sharon, 3, 63, 65, 69, 70, 77, 83, 85,  
87, 90, 189, 226nn25–26  
San Francisco Zen Center, 61, 72  
Sautter, Cia, 229n26  
Schachter-Shalomi, Zalman, 81–82, 87, 93, 94  
Schiff, Hannah, 33  
Schmidt, Leigh Eric, 133, 221n17, 227n33  
Schneerson, Menachem Mendel  
(the Lubavitcher Rebbe), 80  
Scholem, Gershom, 80, 228n49  
Schwartz, Gary, 229n8  
Seagal, Steven, 2  
Seager, Richard, 3, 25–26  
Segal, William, 13, 39, 48, 51–54, 181, 188  
Seidman, Naomi, 231n8  
Senauke, Alan, 74, 76, 225n15, 227n41  
Senzaki, Nyogen, 47, 49, 50  
Seung Sahn, 62, 83  
Shainberg, Laurence, 225n16  
Shaku, Soen, 34  
Shaw, Rosalind, 7–8  
Shinran, 46  
Shrobe, Richard (Wu Kwang), 62  
Shy, Yael, 101, 118  
Slater, Jonathan, 93, 113, 118  
Smith, Tom, 234n14  
Snyder, Gary, 59  
social justice, 20, 22, 28, 35, 68, 74–76, 86–87,  
134  
Sokei-an Shigetsu Sasaki, 47, 49, 50  
Soto Zen Mission (Sokoji), 60, 225n14  
Soule, Sarah, 105, 231n21  
Spirit Rock Meditation Center, 65, 90, 143,  
226n26  
Sravasti Abbey, 67  
Sri Lanka, Buddhism in, 21, 25, 65  
St. Denis, Ruth, 50  
Stein, Arlene, 234n16  
Stewart, Charles, 7–8  
Strang, David, 105, 231n21  
Strassfeld, Michael, 89  
Strauss, Charles T., 12, 17–26, 28, 34, 36, 46,  
47, 79, 180, 188; criticism of, 30–31  
Strozer, Teah, 225nn15–16  
suffering, 5, 28, 31, 76, 165–67  
Sufi Ruhaniat International, 50  
Sufism, 48–50, 81  
Surya Das (Jeffrey Miller), 63, 67, 187  
Suzuki, D. T., 47, 52, 54, 58  
Suzuki, Hoitsu, 60–61  
Suzuki, Shunryu, 59–60, 73, 224n6  
syncretism, 7–9, 13–14, 58, 70, 82, 124, 126, 145,  
150–52, 167, 175, 179, 190, 218n13, 232n4; in  
Jewish meditation, 104, 108, 122, 152
- Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, 72  
Tenenbaum, Shelly, 233n10  
Theosophy, 23, 36, 37, 48  
Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhism, 21, 22, 45,  
46, 57, 63, 64–66, 68–69, 73, 77, 160, 162,  
224n5; four Jewish-Buddhist teachings  
of, 70  
Thubten Chodron (Cheryl Greene), 67  
Tibetan Buddhism, 13, 57, 65–67, 78, 88, 160,  
161, 162, 170, 234n21; four main schools  
of, 226n28. *See also* Vajrayana Buddhism  
Trungpa Rinpoche, Chogyam, 59, 66, 78,  
225n10, 226n29, 227n31  
Tweed, Thomas, 219n20, 220n10
- Umansky, Ellen, 33, 222n33
- Vajrayana Buddhism, 45, 170  
Verman, Mike, 228n49  
*vipassana*. *See under* meditation
- Waldoks, Moshe, 87–88  
Waskow, Arthur, 89, 228n1  
Weinberg, Sheila, 6, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 110–12,  
118

- Weintraub, Steven, 225n15  
Weitsman, Mel, 60–61, 72, 74  
Western Buddhist Teachers Network, 67  
Wicker, Pearl, 42  
Wilson, Jeff, 69, 122, 223n20, 228n5, 229n22  
World's Parliament of Religions, 12, 17–19,  
30, 34, 47  
Yauch, Adam, 89  
Zen, 13, 47, 49–50, 52–53, 58–62, 75, 78, 137,  
160, 162; meditation in, 71–73; women's  
role in, 61; “Zen boom” in US, 56–57  
Zen Hospice Project, 72  
Zen Peacemakers International, 76