

Judaism  
&  
Shintoism:

*Possible Correlations  
Between Two Ancient Faiths*

By Joseph A. Schiller

Copyright © 2023 by Joseph A. Schiller All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

**Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty:** This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that neither the author nor the publisher is engaged in rendering legal, investment, accounting, or other professional services. While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically deny any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional when appropriate. Neither the publisher nor the author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, personal, or other damages.

Judaism and Shintoism – Possible Correlations Between Two Ancient Faiths

By Joseph A. Schiller

ISBN 979-8-9860275-7-9

Printed in the United States of America

1st Edition – 1<sup>st</sup> Printing

Contributions

Editing: Nick Stead

Book Design and Layout: Morgan Guige

Publisher

Joseph A. Schiller

jaschiller1979@gmail.com

<http://josephschiller.weebly.com/non-fiction.html>

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100088864393074>

For my parents, Bill and Sheila Schiller, for always encouraging me to raise the expectations I have for myself.



# Table of Contents

---

Prologue.....	1
Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1.....	12
<i>Origins of a Theory</i>	
Chapter 2.....	16
<i>A Lost Tribe of Israel?</i>	
Chapter 3.....	28
<i>Genetic Connections</i>	
Chapter 4.....	34
<i>Common Mythologies and Origin Stories</i>	
Chapter 5.....	53
<i>Shared Beliefs and Legal Traditions</i>	
Chapter 6.....	66
<i>Traditions of the Priesthood</i>	
Chapter 7.....	80
<i>Parallels Between Shinto Shrines and Jewish Tabernacle/Temple</i>	
Chapter 8.....	91
<i>Similarities in Festivals, Celebrations, Customs, and Ceremonies</i>	
Chapter 9.....	138
<i>Possible Shared Linguistic Roots</i>	
Chapter 10.....	153
<i>Comparison Between the Japanese Emperor and the Jewish     “Priestly King”</i>	
Chapter 11.....	164
<i>The Ainu Question</i>	
Chapter 12.....	183
<i>Room for Further Investigation</i>	
Afterward.....	188
<i>Further Considerations</i>	
Glossary.....	I
References.....	XI



# Prologue

---

**L**ike most young people growing up in the United States, with parents that wanted me to be raised in a denomination of Christianity, I was at least marginally familiar with the doctrinal and ritualistic trappings of that faith, and to a small degree that of Judaism as well. I was, however, unfamiliar at best with other world religions beyond the minimum academic requirements of grade school. This did not preclude me, though, from having a deep interest in them. After high school, I had the opportunity to live in Japan for a little more than a year. From the very day I arrived in Japan, I strove to learn as much as I could. While my survival instincts made learning the language a priority, I sought any and all knowledge I could about the history, customs, religious traditions, etc. of my temporary home. This was how I was first exposed to Shintoism. Shintoism, for the sake of oversimplification, and only meant as such, is the animistic or early set of spiritual beliefs of those on the archipelago nation prior to the introduction of Buddhism. It was from these amateur investigations that I first

took notice of and became intensely interested in the various possible correlations between Judaism and Shintoism. I myself would never have suspected that there was potentially a whole range of reasons to investigate the connections between these spiritual heritages of two faiths with seemingly polar opposite perspectives. There were for me, however, numerous immediate and obvious observable similarities between Shintoism and Judaism which sparked a great interest in exploring further the nature of these correlations. Were these coincidental, or is there a very real link between these two faiths in the ancient past that has not yet been revealed?

This has been a project of passion for close to twenty-five years. It is precisely because there is not a greater understanding of Shintoism, and, therefore, an awareness of how this spiritual tradition is possibly connected to other faiths beyond the islands of Japan, that I chose to begin this scholarly journey. I feel that there is a tremendous amount more yet unknown about the true nature and story of ancient man. The mainstream academic community would rather ignore or not accept the evidence, or not enough evidence has been revealed and uncovered. Therefore, I do hope that this investigation and others like it will in some small way contribute positively to the overall body of historical and comparative religious studies.



# Introduction

---

One should be forgiven for thinking it countere-intuitive that there would be any significant correlations between the Jewish faith and that of Shintoism, or that of the ancient Israelites and Japanese for that matter. Isaiah Ben-Dosan stated it best: “Few peoples are as fundamentally dissimilar as the Japanese and the Jews.” Or at least appear to be. This may in a large part be due to the relatively little that most people know of Shintoism, its collective spiritual views or rituals, and, therefore, the inability to draw any immediate comparisons with Judaism as one may more easily do with Christianity or Islam, for example. Many people are traditionally raised, or at least those born with a predominantly Judea-Christian background are, with the understanding that Judaism is, based on its Semitic connections with the early proto-Judeo religious heritage of the Canaanites from which it is believed to have evolved, and due in part to the role and influence that Zoroastrianism played in the development of the practices and interpretation of doctrine thereof, directly tied to and an influence on other categorically Semitic belief systems to emerge later; again, such as Christia-

nity and Islam. Thus, many are, by default, conditioned to understand that Eastern Asian religious traditions are categorically and fundamentally different from those of Western Asia and elsewhere. It is arguable that, if a large percentage of people were polled to list the systems of faith in Eastern Asia, a strong portion could not or would not even list Shintoism.

This is perpetuated in part by the way in which scholars present information about religious traditions. One such example is in the very black and white nature often used for the categorization of this information. Most people are taught to understand religious belief systems to fall within one of two camps: monotheistic (belief in one deity) or polytheistic (worship of more than one deity). This very simplistic, and not altogether misleading, means of promoting the comparative understanding of spiritual traditions, more often than not, conditions people to instinctively assume there are little to no relationships between monotheistic or polytheistic faiths, for instance. The average consumer of information, can, therefore, be very easily drawn to a sense, unconsciously perhaps, that some spiritual perspectives have emerged independently of others. This subject area is much more nuanced than that. Take, for instance, the doctrine and principles associated with Jesus Christ. The Eastern Asian, Buddhist, and Hindu influences on the once divergent sect of Judaism now known ubiquitously as Christianity cannot be ignored. While most Christians want to believe that their faith is merely a continuation of the covenant between God and man as initiated between their god and Abraham, there is no question Christianity has a very Asian sub-context of flavor.

Another condition by which some may find themsel-

ves challenged to recognize any immediate relationship between Judaism and Shintoism is the cultural, linguistic, geographic, ethnographic, and historical differences between the Jewish and Japanese peoples, which on the surface seem to exist on opposite ends of a metaphorical spectrum from each other. Case in point, if a thousand random people from around the world were polled with the question, “What is historically the religious tradition of Japan?” the vast majority of those contributing would answer nearly unanimously with Buddhism. This is not to say that Buddhism is not a historical part of Japan’s religious tradition, but it does not represent the full picture, especially in the ancient world, and is, therefore, not the religious tradition of Japan. This hypothetical example illustrates the idea that most people have a disproportionate religio-historical understanding of these two faiths. The observation that many do not associate Japan with any other set of spiritual traditions than Buddhism, and perhaps also, to a small degree, that some do not consider Shintoism a religion to begin with, but rather animism or a proto religion, contributes to an overall lack of necessary awareness on the subject. Additionally, most Western scholars have fallen into the trap of attempting to interpret unfamiliar spiritual traditions from their native Western lenses.

Relying on preconceived notions about religion, Western commentators have often molded their narratives of Shinto into a form convenient and digestible for their Western audience. Extrapolating from the religions in their own cultures, Westerners often look in other religions for a scriptural foundation

■ and narratives about gods creating the world.

The same interpretive shortcoming also often befalls *Old Testament* scholarship as well.

Case in point, for hundreds of years it has been perpetuated that Christianity and Islam are text-based faiths, came out of the predecessor religious system, and another supposed text-based tradition, Judaism. Many scholars that oppose any Judeo-Shinto connections conversely identify Shintoism as being a faith devoid of such concrete doctrinal roots, and, therefore, fundamentally different foundationally. Arguably, Shintoism was not originally a strictly codified tradition, thus reflected in its early existential nature. The transformation to a more dogma-based faith does not take place until after the beginning of the Yayoi period and the beginning of the growing political, cultural, and social influences from the mainland.

The supposition, however, that Judaism is a text-based faith, and exclusively so, is, according to many, based on the argument that the *Torah* played, and continues to play, a central role in the faith. This conclusion, however, presupposes a couple of things. First, that those responsible for recording what are now the books of the *Torah* did so from a singular source, and the intention of having the *Torah* be the exclusive doctrinal genesis of the faith. And, secondly, that the *Torah* was, therefore, the only historical origin of doctrine for Judaism. Unfortunately, neither argument is accurate. The facts support a very different reality – that ancient Judaism, like Shintoism, was, before its own essentialist transformation during and post-Exile, originally existential in nature.

The written document containing the collective early

histories of the Jewish people, the *Torah*, was transcribed thousands and hundreds of years after the events, circumstances, and stories they describe. In fact, most scholars agree that the collected works that became the *Torah* were compiled during and from texts written during the Exile and post-Exile periods. So, how then can a book have been the basis of a faith retroactively? Well, it cannot. The truth of the matter is that most early Jews were not even aware of or taught from any unified body of doctrine, probably lived their entire lives having no more than a passing awareness of the supposed prophets or their proclamations and were likely perfectly content following their local brand of cult worship, however that local cult worship may have aligned with the growing popularity of Yahwism. To put it simply, the *Torah* has no more of a relationship to Judaism's foundations than the *Nihon Shoki* does with Shintoism, the *Amarna Tablets* with Babylonian spiritualism, or the *Book of the Dead* with Egyptian religiosity, and, therefore, cannot be the basis for arguing that Judaism, along with Zoroastrianism, were somehow the original traditions of a unique line of religious belief systems fundamentally and diametrically different from what emerged further east across Asia.

For many, it is simply too difficult to accept that a civilization in Southwest Asia and one tens of thousands of miles away in Far East Asia could have had any possible connections whatsoever, no matter how significant, in the ancient world. Scholars are redefining the historical record every day, and part of that is the recognition that the ancient world was a much more interconnected set of realms than many have yet been willing to accept. Despite this academic progress, old mindsets linger. While

the frequency and speed at which communication and transportation of goods, ideas, and people between the varying groups in the ancient world could not resemble anything like what we see in our modern world, it did happen. It happened far more often, and it had a much more lasting impact than some would like to concede. Joseph M. Kitagawa, in his preface to Donald L. Philippi's *Norito*, defines this idea of "hermeneutical distance" best when he states:

Sometimes, however, especially when we have firmly entrenched preconceived notions – for example, a certain political ideology, evolutionary dogma, or doctrinaire religious belief – our prejudgment becomes a stumbling block to understanding the text in question.

In any historical investigation the variety and strength of the evidence presented to support any conclusions, arguments, or suggestions is paramount. Nearly all of the evidence available for evaluation of the possible connections between Judaism and Shintoism is based either on text evidence, as is largely the case with Judaism, and observations, or oral traditions thereof, in the case primarily of Shintoism. Textual evidence, when based on ancient documents, only takes a researcher so far before other more substantial sources of information are needed to deepen the reliability of the study. One of the challenges inherent in this particular study, therefore, is that one cannot now make observations of ancient Shintoism's or Judaism's past, and what is observable of the modern iterations of both Judaism and Shintoism may

not be, and are likely not, very close to the ancient or original forms. Some might use this reality as a way of justifying why they believe conclusions cannot be made about the nature of Judaism's potential roots in Shintoism. But the same could be said of the text evidence in this case as well, that of the *Old Testament* and ancient Japanese texts, the *Nihon Shoki* and *Kojiki*. If researchers can have faith in the Biblical and early Japanese textual accounts and use them as one might as textbooks from the ancient world of sorts, then those very same researchers can and should extend that very same faith to the eyewitness accounts that are available and any current observable correlations. The fact of the matter is that there are plenty of currently observable and recorded accounts made by eyewitnesses around the beginning of the Meiji era in Japan that correspond with the ancient written accounts to provide a proper basis for the conclusions and correlations outlined in this study.

Over the past several hundred years, the Western world (usually understood to be Western Europe, the United States, etc.) has dominated much of the global narrative, and that global narrative is very Judeo-Christian in nature; one of the legacies of the colonial era. This includes, for instance, the disproportionate emphasis placed on Judeo-Christian connections to the historical dialogue as promoted in grade schools and collegiate textbooks adopted and emphasized by a large portion of the world. It has only been within the last few decades that those revisionists seeking a more balanced, accurate, and inclusive conversation have been able to make considerable progress. It has also only been more recently that the religious studies departments at most colleges and universities, at least in the Western world, have become

more inclusive of serious scholarship in other world religions, and willing to share the stage, so to speak, with them.

The West still produces a vast majority of historical scholarly literature available, however. And since an overwhelming portion of that work is printed or available only in English by authors and researchers that do not have command of foreign languages sufficient enough to include material in unfamiliar languages, there will inherently be a significant portion of the spectrum of scholarly research missing regarding certain spiritual realities. Again, Kitagawa states it best:

It should be noted that the Japanology in question was a variation on what was usually called in the West a discipline that examined various facets of Eastern peoples – their languages, arts, economic systems, social and political orders, religions, and cultures – and yields “data” that were then subjected to scholarly analysis and interpretation based on “Western” models, concepts, and logic.

Unfortunately, I, as the author, while being able to communicate semi-fluently in conversation in Japanese, cannot read and write beyond a first or second-year grade school level, and therefore, cannot take advantage of any literature produced in Japanese unless it is first translated into English. This, of course, forces me to acknowledge that there may be perceptions, facts, observations, or otherwise, which could or should influence the work upon which I am engaged but sadly will not.



## *Introduction*

A generally comparative study of two or more belief systems, the relationships or lack thereof between them, and the evaluation of the various characteristics by which those faiths are or are not similar, is already difficult enough. When drawing comparisons between Shintoism and Judaism, and for the reasons previously outlined, as well as perhaps others, there are a set of unique challenges. Nevertheless, and while I may not be able to mitigate all of these academic hurdles, perhaps I may be able to drive the conversation forward a little more concerning the possibly relevant relationship between Judaism and Shintoism.

# Chapter 1

## *Origins of a Theory*

---

**T**he general set of understandings about the possible relationship between the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel and the ancient Japanese people – both peoples who believe their homeland to be divinely given to them – are collectively known as the *Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry Theory*, or *Nichiyu Dousoron* as it is referred to in Japanese. These are the collection of suggestions that there are genetic, religious, and customary linkages that ultimately prove that the Japanese people, in part, are descended from the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. Some versions proposed of the theory argue for an overall connection between the Lost Tribes and the nation of Japan as a whole, while others suggest that a few groups or tribes in Japan are descendants. As early as the sixteenth century, and the beginnings of Western or European contact directly with Asia, missionaries, merchants, and explorers began to express what they believed and recognized as similarities between various Asian peoples and Judaism, or the Lost Tribes of Israel.

A more fully developed set of ideas was first proposed

by a Scotch missionary living in Japan in the 1870s, Nicholas McLeod (also believed to be Norman McLeod in some sources). It must be noted that McLeod was not a trained historian or scholar, and only had a marginal command of Japanese, and, therefore, most of his conclusions came from conversations and observations. Nearly all of his conclusions can be dismissed outright as mere fantasy, owing to the fact that they cannot be supported by any discoverable facts or evidence. For example, McLeod states that the Japanese race is the Biblical fulfillment of the curse on Noah's son Ham, and blessings on his other sons Shem and Japhet. While much of what he argues can be ignored, McLeod does, however, outline several points about the noticeable similarities between the Japanese and ancient Israelites that are worth further, and serious, exploration from a more objective perspective.

One of the many theories identified by McLeod was that some tribes of Japanese were descended from Jews that migrated eastward and eventually crossed into Japan from China or Korea. The first major Japanese academic to delve into and continue work on this theory was Saeki Yoshiro, a professor at Japan's prestigious Waseda University, in the early 1900s. According to Saeki, who was supposedly an expert on Japanese Nestorianism, several Japanese tribes, such as the Hata, Hojo, or Taira clans, were Nestorian Jews that made their way into Japan from Korea in the third century CE. Saeki's work expanded on the idea that there may be some genetic linkage between at least some Japanese with Jewish communities elsewhere. Some believe this transition in Japan took place when the Yayoi culture displaced the Joumon culture as the dominant group on the main islands (see Chapter 11 for further discussion). Japanese

scholars of the Meiji period seem to have gravitated toward the investigation of this possible connection. Dr. Jenichiro Oyabe, a graduate of Yale University, promoted a book he published in the 1920's with many of the same conclusions, even gaining audience with the royal family regarding the subject. Unfortunately, the author of this study found getting a copy of this book for reference was impossible in any form.

Both McLeod and Saeki were criticized early on and still are. McLeod, for his part, has been accused of promoting a religious connection between the Judeo-Christian world and Asia as part of some kind of spiritual support for Western imperialism in Asia, and of the overall growing Christian Zionism of that time. Some have gone as far as to say that the Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry Theory was popularized by men such as McLeod for the purpose of arguing for the inferiority of the ethnic Asian races, and the superiority of the white, Judeo-Christian world. At the same time, the common ancestry theory of the Jews and the Japanese is not the only such proposed connection. The fact is clearly made by David Goodman and Masanori Miyazawa that many marginalized peoples throughout history have used such argumentation as the ideological basis for rejecting European Christian colonialism.

Nevertheless, as it is impossible to know the true personal, racial, spiritual, or geopolitical opinions that support the theories outlined with the Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry Theory (except for where they were made explicit), the writings of McLeod, *Epitome of the Ancient History of Japan*, first published while in Japan and again after returning home, did nothing more than make an attempt to study the possible correlations between the Ja-

panese people and the Israelites. It also seems highly unlikely that a Japanese scholar such as Saeki would have dedicated themselves to studying the Japanese-Jewish connection if there was an understood inferior imperial, racial, or other ulterior theme to the subject. The overall influence Judaism and those identifying as Jews have had in Japan is non-existent at best. At any given time in recent history, there have only ever been a few hundred people that have self-identified as practicing Jews, and of those nearly all were foreign nationals residing for one reason or another in Japan. It seems highly improbable that there has ever been a powerful enough tug on the Japanese psyche to suggest bias in the motivations for Japanese scholars wanting to study this topic. It is, however, possible that McLeod was in some way a victim of the popular Zionist fervor popular in his day among the British Empire (and elsewhere) and was unaware of the influence thereof.

Irrespective of any shortcomings McLeod himself or his attempted research had, or any influences he may have been subject to, the author believes informal researchers like him, and other academics such as Saeki, were genuinely trying to make sense of characteristics between the Judeo-Christian world and the similarities found in Japan and with the practices of Shintoism and were not consciously trying to steer the conclusions based on any ulterior motives. The fact of the matter is that the collective evidence can speak for itself and does not require any assistance in doing so.

# Chapter 2

## *A Lost Tribe of Israel?*

---

**T**he Israelites, one of the names by which the Jewish people refer to the body of the faithful (the term “Jew” originally referred to those from the Southern Kingdom of Judah, but later became more universally used for all children of the covenant), was the name taken by, initially, the extended families of descendants from the land of Canaan in supposed captivity in Egypt, named after their founding patriarch Jacob, whose name was, according to the Biblical story, changed by God to Israel upon joining into a covenant with God. Also based on the traditions outlined in the *Old Testament*, the descendants of the twelve sons of Israel (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, and Benjamin) became the foundation of the Twelve Tribes of Israel that later, in their telling, returned to their promised land in Canaan. The House of Levi did not inherit land in the new Kingdom of Israel since it was the tribe of priests. However, Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were bestowed with the eleventh and twelfth portions of the inheritance of land.

About two hundred years after the death of King Solomon, which is accepted to have been in the tenth century BCE, and believed to have been the end of the greatest period of the Kingdom of Israel, the kingdom began experiencing political turmoil which resulted in the splitting of the realm into two, the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Reuben, Gad, Ephraim, Issachar, Zebulun, Naphtali, Asher, Simeon, and Manasseh) and the Southern Kingdom of Judea (Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin). Beginning in the eighth century BCE, the tribes of the Northern Kingdom were gradually conquered by Assyria and forced into exile (including some of the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin). Most of these ten tribes were, according to the story, forced to leave their homeland and resettle throughout the Assyrian Empire. According to Josephus Flavius, the first century CE Roman historian, this took place around the year 722 BCE. Unfortunately, only two verses of the *Bible* are dedicated to this. Additionally, some were exiled by way of Egypt to Kush, in what is now southern Egypt and the Sudan (Isaiah 11:11), and possibly in parts of what is now Ethiopia. The descendants of these twelve tribes began to be subsequently referred to as the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel, even after some of those descendants found their way back to Israel – when later living under Babylonian rule, they were allowed to return. A couple of centuries after the initial Exile initiated by the Assyrian invasion, the Babylonians, who displaced the Assyrians as the dominant political force in the Southwest Asian region, exiled the remaining tribes in the Northern Kingdom. They were settled further in the northern districts of that land.

The exacting details of the history of the Exiles, while important, do not need to be outlined in any tremendous

details for this study. For those that do want a more thorough scholarship on the subject, and a much more detailed investigation thereof, I recommend Prof. Avidgor Shachan's book *In the Footsteps of the Lost Ten Tribes*.

### **The Lost Tribes of Israel**

Not all of the descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel chose to migrate back to the land of Israel, or *Eretz Israel*. Many remained in the lands of Assyria/Babylon where they were resettled according to the *Bible*; specifically, the lands of Chalach (modern Iraq), the Medes (in northern Iraq and northwest Iran), modern-day Kurdistan, and Chavor (modern-day Syria). It is, however, possible, as will be mentioned later, that the land of Chalach is Khallakh in northeast Afghanistan, and Chavor is Khyber. Still, many others are believed, in part because of the stories of the *Bible*, and in part from traditions passed down by other groups of people in Asia, to have traveled and settled even further away to the Far East.

The *Old Testament* gives very little in the way of detail on this subject. The only other reliable early source is a passage by Josephus Flavius in his work, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, in which the author states that many of the descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel settled beyond the Euphrates. While Josephus is generally considered a trustworthy and credible source from the age in which he lived, it must be noted that his comments about the location of the Lost Tribes of Israel do come almost eight centuries after the scattering of those tribes supposedly took place, and, therefore, can only be considered hearsay. There are, however, traditions told of the children of Israel eventually settling in various parts of Asia, including Persia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Southeast Asia,



China, Japan, etc. Other stories suggest groups of Israelites may have ventured into parts of Africa, Polynesia, and even the Americas. Researchers and scholars of various stripes have for hundreds of years tried to uncover where these Lost Tribes of Israel may have ultimately settled.

One popular theory is that some of the Israelites, instead of staying in Assyria, pushed further eastward, perhaps first settling in parts of Persia, and gradually making it all the way along the Silk Roads into Northern India, China, Myanmar, and Japan.



*Fig. 1*

### **Lost Tribes in Afghanistan**

In what is now the modern nation-state of Afghanistan there are several tribal groups that maintain that their lineage stretches back to the Lost Tribes of Israel. More specifically, these people claim that they descend from

the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. The name Yusuf, which means Joseph, is carried by many of these tribes, such as Yusufzai (Children of Joseph), Yusufuzi, and Yusufzad. These groups further proclaim that they are *Bani-Israel*, or children of Israel, and that they were once forced to leave their homeland. The *Old Testament* mentions that some of the Lost Tribes, in one of the very rare references to them after the Exile, migrated to “Halah and Habor” to the Far East. Joseph Eidelberg, one of several prominent scholars on this subject, mentions that the Hebrew pronunciation of these names is very similar to Khallakh and Khabor. Khallakh is an ancient city southwest of Issyk-kul (modern-day Kyrgyzstan) and the Khyber Mountains. Could the location at which some of the Lost Tribes of Israel settled be this area of northeastern Afghanistan?

To this day, many of these communities choose to remain isolated from the others. While these people are technically Muslim, they have several characteristic practices that are both unique and peculiar to them, and not based on their Islamic heritage in any way. These so-called Children of Joseph have Hebrew names, passed down generation after generation. They wear the fringes only traditionally worn by Jewish priests, light candles for the Sabbath on Friday evenings, and grow the curled hair in front of both ears known as *peyot* (side curls).

### **The Pathans**

In modern Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and India there is an ethnic group known as the Pathans, which has a traditional belief that they are descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel. While they too, like many of those regions, are primarily devout Muslims, there are several

practices and customs of theirs that are distinctively non-Islamic. Rather, they closely resemble Jewish customs.

For both Muslims and Jews alike, circumcision of males is one of the most important sacraments performed. But, for the Pathans, this ceremony is performed on the eighth day after birth as is done in Judaism, not on the twelfth birthday as in Islam. The Pathans have a traditional garb known as *kafan*, a garment with four corners that are tied together with strings, very reminiscent of the *tzitzit* in Judaism – something worn by Jews to distinguish themselves as children of Israel. On the Sabbath the Pathans bake twelve loaves of *hallah* (Jewish bread) while also lighting a candle and covering it with a breadbasket. The candle must be lit by a woman past menopause, as in Judaism. The *kosher* dietary laws followed by the Pathans are also closer to those of Jews than they are of their Muslim brothers and sisters. Horse and camel meat, not forbidden for Muslims, are acceptable for the Pathans.

Some of the elders of the Pathans still wear a small box called a *tefillin* (phylactery) containing a verse from the book of Deuteronomy 6:4. Again, a custom with no precedent in Islam. Like several tribal groups elsewhere in Afghanistan, mentioned above, the Pathans retain a number of family names of the Lost Tribes of Israel, such as Asher, Gad, Reuben, Naphtali, Ephraim, Manasseh, and other names that are not traditionally found in Islamic communities, i.e., Samael, Israel, etc. Also, like the Yusufzai tribesmen and tribeswomen, the Pathans refer to themselves as part of *Bani-Israel*. Along with having a general sense of being part of the heritage of remnants of the tribes of Israel, the Pathans honor the Tavrad El

Sharif (the Torah of Moses) and show special reverence for the prophet Moses. Even the oral traditions of the Pathans reference how their tribal names are evolved forms of their corresponding tribe of Israel, such as the Rabbani tribe for Reuben, the Lewani tribe for Levi, the Ashuri tribe for Asher, and so on.

### **Lost Tribes in India**

Eastward from Afghanistan in what is now Northern India, we find Kashmir. Place names, tribal names, and names of men and women have a long tradition of being strangely similar to Hebrew names. The tribe of Asher is Asher, the tribe of Gad is Gad, the tribe of Levi is Levi, and so on. In addition to tribal groups seemingly sharing qualities of names of the Lost Tribes of Israel, there are dozens of places in the Kashmir region that closely resemble names of the ancient Kingdom of Israel, such as Samaryah (Samaria), Mamre (Mamre), Pishgah (Pisgah), Heshba (Heshbon), Gochan (Gozen), and so on.

Many historians of the Kashmir peoples and the region maintain that the Kashmir tribes were the descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel, as the priest Kitro did in his work *The General History of the Mughal Empire*, and the priest Monstrat did at the time of Vasco da Gama in the fifteenth century. There is one group in particular called the Yusmarg (think Yusuf) which calls itself B'nei Israel (Children of Israel), and it is said by many from the region that this is the ancient name of the people of Kashmir. The two most prominent historians of the Kashmir people, Mullah Nadiri (*The History of Kashmir*) and Ahmad (*Events of Kashmir*), both claim as fact in their respective works that the people of Kashmir originate from the Kingdom of Israel. There is also a folktale from the

region which tells the story of Jesus, after His resurrection, traveling to find and visit the scattered peoples of the Lost Tribes, and spending time in Kashmir.

In addition to the speculations surrounding the Kashmir tribes, there is another group of people, the Knanites, which show signs of being connected in some way with the Lost Tribes of Israel. Knanite means, in the dialect of Aramaic spoken by the people, “The People of Canaan,” and these people to this day worship from the *Aramaic Bible*.

### **Lost Tribes in Myanmar**

Along the border between the modern countries of India, China, and Myanmar lives a tribal group called the Menashe. The Menashe people actually refer to themselves as the Lusi (“Lu” means tribe and “si” means ten in the local Chinese dialect they speak).

Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail, the founder and one-time president of Amishav, an organization that seeks out the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, traveled to and investigated the claims of the connection these people have made. On his visit, he learned that the people of the Menashe, when they pray, say, “Oh, God of Menashe,” very similar to Manasseh, one of the Lost Tribes of Israel. There are numerous other tales that have survived among these people which describe a series of twists and turns from being exiled to Assyria, conquered by Babylon and later the Persians and Greeks, to being exiled to Afghanistan by the Persians, only to be conquered again by various Islamic kingdoms and forced to convert to Islam. Apparently, some of the Menashe made their way into Western China initially, and later Central China around the area of

Kaifeng. According to these oral stories, the Chinese enslaved many of the Menashe, prompting a group of them to migrate into what is today Thailand and eventually Myanmar.

There is a traditional song still sung among the Menashe people with lyrics that come very close to the tale of the Exodus in the *Old Testament*.

We must keep the Passover feast  
Because we crossed the Red Sea by dry land  
At night we crossed with a fire  
And by day with a cloud  
Enemies pursued us with chariots  
And the sea swallowed them up  
And used them as food for the fish  
And when we were thirsty  
We received water from the rock

Additionally, the name of the god of the Menashe is Y'wa, which of course is very close to that of the Hebrew god, *Yahweh*.

Among the Menashe communities, there is a tradition of having a priest that not only looks after the spiritual lives of the people but watches over them generally. These men are always called Aaron and wear a special tunic and breastplate resembling that described of the priests of the house of Levi. According to Rabbi Tokayer, an authority on this subject, the rituals he witnessed of the Menashe were straight out of the *Bible*. In fact, several thousand Menashe have made their way to Israel, migrating back to the Holy Land, as well as establishing synagogues in Myanmar as part of a general re-conversion to Judaism.

## Lost Tribes in China

Further East along the Silk Roads we arrive in China. According to the writing of Rev. Thomas Torrance, in his 1937 book *China's First Missionaries: Ancient Israelites*, it was suggested that a small minority ethnic group called the Chiang were the descendants of the Israelites, part of the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. Rev. Torrance's arguments stemmed from observations of these people he had made as a missionary.

While the evidence outlined by Torrance is not as extensive or even as strong as has been observed in other cultures, there were a couple of things that stood out to him worth noting. First, the Chiang people are monotheistic and are rare exceptions before the advent of Christianity in Asia. The god of the Chiang is called Yawei, which of course is similar to the Hebrew *Yahweh*. The priests of the Chiang wear all white and purify themselves when performing rituals, one of which is offering animals as a sacrifice to their god on an altar of uncut stones (similar to what is found in Exodus 20:25). The animals they sacrifice must undergo a similar process of purification. Unmarried men cannot become priests in their tradition (Leviticus 21:7, 13).

In addition to the Chiang people, there is a strong tradition that the city of Kaifeng has been connected to Judaism as far back as the first century CE. Joseph Eidelberg mentions that the tradition has Hebrews migrating into the Kaifeng area as early as about 205 BCE. There is nothing that stands out to suggest a connection with pre-Babylonian or post-Babylonian exile, however, some believe the long-standing relationship with the Holy Land, and the large numbers of Jews that have lived in the city for centuries may have something to do with a much

earlier migration. The prophet Isaiah may have even referred to the lost tribes in China when he said, “Behold, these are coming from afar. These from the north and the west and from the land of Sinim.” Sinim is, interestingly, the Hebrew name for China.

### **Lost Tribes in Japan**

The big question left to the researcher now is, “Is there evidence that groups of Israelites, the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, made their way further east, into Japan, perhaps?” Scholars already know that merchants from Israel were trading during the time of King Solomon across the Mediterranean basin, North and East Africa, and as far away as India. Therefore, it is not a stretch to be open-minded about the possibility that some of those tribes found their way, either along the Silk Roads across the land, or by way of the sea, as far as Japan. Could the name given to the land that some of the exiles eventually journeyed to, as possible with other parts of Asia, the Arzareth mentioned in the fourth book of Ezra, which according to some means “most far away land,” be Japan?

### **Amishav**

One of the single greatest collective efforts undertaken of serious research and investigations worldwide in search of possible remnants of the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel has been that of an organization known as Amishav. No study or exploration related in any way to the Lost Tribes of Israel can be considered without at least a cursory mention of the work conducted by Amishav. It should be mentioned that this scholarly investigatory undertaking does have a very practical purpose; that



of verifying the validity of groups of people that claim to be of Jewish ancestry and who may be trying to seek residence in Israel based on that heritage. It is largely due to the tiresome work of the directors of Amishav, led by founder Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail, that so much is now known of many disparate peoples around the world that have verifiable Jewish ancestry, including most of those mentioned in this section, as mentioned earlier. Before he passed away, Rabbi Avichail and his team opened an investigation into the Jewish connection with Japan in 2007.