

“Let’s Get Together”: Post-Exilic Reconstructions of Sacred Community in Judaism and Tibetan Buddhism

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Pre-exilic conceptions of community in both the Israelite and Tibetan cases were aligned not only along theological sectarian lines, but along regional and political lines as well. As exile forces a shift in perspective both regionally and politically, the lines of community are redrawn as well. Within new minority populations, what used to constitute discourses of estrangement between localized groups are replaced by discourses of affinity as a unified nation in exile over and against the new majority populations these exiles come into contact with. Added to that is the disappearance of the centralizing sacred space, further enabling democratization.

What remains to be determined, however, is the mode through which this shift takes place within the social dimension of each religion. Differences of opinion have emerged in the Jewish case as to whether the separate sects combine to create a new unified whole or whether one sect survived largely intact while the others became obsolete. As we turn to the Tibetan case, we see the same two possibilities. This chapter will argue that while both cases can be seen in either light, the truth lies in the compromise of these two views. In both cases, the evidence suggests that one sect predominates, while the others adapt to exile by adopting elements of the sect best suited for exile. In the Jewish case, this led to an eventual lack of distinction

between the groups, while in the Tibetan case it is as yet too soon to tell what will occur. However, current trends indicate that the same phenomenon will occur in Tibetan Buddhism.

The examination of Tibetan Buddhism with regard to this issue forces us to re-examine Judaism in another way as well. Besides reopening the debate about exclusion, unification, or absorption, we must not only look at the way exile effects unification of sectarian differences, but also at the ways in which exile effects new discourses of estrangement within the community. As Tibetan Buddhism continues in its exilic form, certain disruptions of unity cannot be ignored. Different forms of Tibetan Buddhism are emerging regionally, and theological disagreements such as the one concerning Dorje Shugden have created certain schisms within the religion. A return to the Jewish case in this light suggests that similar occurrences happened in rabbinic times. While many authors focus on the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes as the only sects whose transformation in exile is worth noting, other groups did exist. The most notable of these, and the one that most parallels the Shugden sect is that of the Jewish-Christians. In both cases, despite trends in general toward a unification of sectarian groups, these sects can no longer function as part of the whole. The factors engendering this split, however, are not only theological, but also regional, political, and economic.

Theological and Ritual Unification and Sectarianism

In Judaica scholarship, the general scholarly perspective on what happens to the various sects after the destruction of the temple is laid out by a number of scholars including George Foot Moore and Jacob Neusner, and is summed up in the following passage by Shaye Cohen:

According to the usual view, sectarianism ceased when the Pharisees, gathered at Yavneh, ejected all those who were not members of their

own party. Christians were excommunicated, the biblical canon was purged of works written in Greek and apocalyptic in style, and the gates were closed on the outside world, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Functioning in a “crisis” atmosphere, the rabbis of Yavneh were motivated by an exclusivistic ethic; their goal was to define orthodoxy and to rid Judaism of all those who would not conform to it. In this interpretation the “synod” of Yavneh becomes a prefiguration of the church council of Nicea (325 C.E.): one party triumphs and ousts its competitors. In addition, we are told, the Sadducees, Essenes, and presumably, all other sects, conveniently rolled over and died, thereby facilitating Pharisaic victory. The Sadducees, bereft of the temple, were bereft of their livelihood and power base. The Essenes perished in the great war against the sons of darkness.¹

Despite this dominant scholarly view, Cohen proceeds to argue that this is not what really happened. He claims that the rabbis did not recognize themselves as Pharisees, and that their whole project of producing a Mishnah that glorified debate was the inclusion of a multiplicity of views rather than the exclusion of sectarian views. He writes:

In addition to removing the focal point of Jewish sectarianism, the destruction of the temple also facilitated the emergence of individuals as

¹ Shaye Cohen, “The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism,” *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 1985, 55:27-53 reprinted in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Origins of Judaism Volume II Part 1: The Pharisees and Other Sects* (New York: Garland Publications, 1990, pp.101-128), 102.

authority figures to replace the institutional authority previously exercised by the temple and the sects. The net effect of these developments was the end of sectarianism and the creation of a society marked by legal disputes between individual teachers who nevertheless respected each other’s right to disagree.²

Cohen supports this statement with evidence that shows that the pre-70 sects never assign *halakhot* to individual teachers: it is always an authoritative body. He ascribes this to the idea that only a prophet could confront the temple and priesthood individually. After 70, however, “The individual, although not a prophet, could now emerge, since he did not have to measure himself against the unapproachable precincts of the temple.”³

The distinction here is subtle but important. The conclusion this leads to is that the typical view that states the rabbis are descendants of the Pharisees is oversimplified. Rather, the rabbis represent a new Judaism that draws heavily on the Pharisees but not to the exclusion of the other sects. Minority opinions are included, and rabbinic Judaism becomes in effect a compromise of the various sects.

While the most interesting historical point in Cohen’s essay is that the rabbis, rather than being a continuation of the Pharisees who excluded other groups, were rather quite inclusive and encouraged unity plus debate, there is a more interesting theoretical point that Cohen makes. He suggests, following Max Weber to a certain degree, that having one true temple was mirrored in each sect thinking of itself as the one true Israel. With the destruction of the temple and the absence of such a monistic theology, the society changes to reflect the shift and it too becomes less monistic and more pluralistic:

² Cohen in Neusner, *Origins Volume II Part 1*, 119.

³ Cohen in Neusner, *Origins Volume II Part 1*, 121.

As remarked above, the temple represents monism. “One temple for one God.” Only one holy site, one altar, one cult, and one priesthood can find favor in God’s eyes. Sects defined themselves in reference to the temple and therefore arrogated the temple’s exclusivistic claims. Only the sect is the true Israel and only the sect correctly fulfills God’s wishes. Some of the sects admitted that the temple was still legitimate to one degree or another, but all the sects agreed that every variety of Judaism other than its own is illegitimate. This is the monism of the temple transferred to the sect. With the destruction of the temple in 70, the institutional basis of monism is removed.⁴

After the destruction of the temple, the one becomes many, the monistic becomes pluralistic. The removal of a centralized sacred space opens up the possibility of a more pluralistic and open theology: more than one set of ideas can be accepted and can be laid side by side, as is often the case in rabbinic literature.

Theological unification also occurs in the case of the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai. Although there was authority by which one was always supposed to side with the House of Hillel, around the time of the destruction of the Temple, such partisan ideas significantly diminished. The Mishnah and Tosefta give accounts of authoritative rabbis siding with the House of Shammai on occasion as well as accounts of rabbis siding with both or neither. Alexander Guttman uses these examples to argue that the Houses themselves disappeared around the time of the destruction of the Temple and gives the following rationale:

The schools of Shammai and Hillel ceased to exist but shortly after the destruction of the

⁴ Cohen in Neusner, *Origins* Volume II Part 1, 121-122.

Temple. First, Beth Shammai had been relegated to impotence. Subsequently, the designation Beth Hillel for the only remaining authoritative school became meaningless and was, therefore, dropped.⁵

On a similar note, he writes,

After the rivalry of the Schools had been terminated, their feud became past history and the Beth Qol had suffered a loss of prestige, the Sages felt free to make changes. To be sure, they did not reverse the principle of Beth Hillel’s superiority over Beth Shammai, but they relaxed it. The sages living after the destruction of the Temple were the successors of the Hillelites. Also the existing conditions were more conducive to the generally more lenient Halakhah of Beth Hillel. What actually happened was that several sages took the liberty of accepting some of the Shammaitic Halakoth.⁶

In both these statements, Guttman suggests a view similar to that of the normative view regarding the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, namely that the latter two groups became obsolete, so the former became the precursor of the rabbis. In addition, this view seems similar to Cohen’s revision in that Guttman notes that the dominant group takes a more pluralistic view once there is no more rivalry and is able to compromise and incorporate the views of other parties. What is most interesting here, however, is that this sudden disappearance of rivals and contesting parties occurs simultaneously with the destruction of the second Temple and the beginning of the exile. It is a vivid

⁵ Guttman, “The End of the Houses,” *The Abraham Weiss Jubilee Volume*, 1964, 89-105 reprinted in Jacob Neusner ed., *Origins of Judaism. Volume VI: History of the Jews in the First Century of the Common Era* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990, pp.211-228). 226.

⁶ Guttman in Neusner, *Origins* Volume VI, 223.

example of the crisis of exile and/or loss of a sacred center leading to a democratization of the sacred community.

The same possibilities emerge within post-exilic Tibetan Buddhism. The major difference is that the religious view regarding the Tibetan Buddhist orders in pre-exilic times was already a pluralistic one. While Lhasa in general and the Jo-khang in particular were certainly central, the existence of a plethora of pilgrimage centers essentially meant there was no central sacred space to argue about, nor was there a monistic center represented by a temple or deity that encouraged any one order to consider itself as having exclusive rights to “true religion.” Despite certain ideological critiques here and there, the largest sectarian problem was a political one. However, the dissipation of the power in Lhasa as a result of the exile, not only religiously but also politically, leaves open the possibility of a more democratized theology and politic.

In exile, one finds two opposite trends among the Tibetan Buddhist orders. The first, like the Jews, is a unification of sectarian differences. Overall there is less strife between the orders and a renewed effort to reach an understanding of one another. Approximately fifty percent of the younger generation of Tibetans, those raised in exile, do not know to which of the four orders of Tibetan Buddhism they belong or do not differentiate between orders, and significantly more of the younger generation than the older generation considers Bon to be a part of Buddhism.⁷ One finds leaflets in exile describing five orders of Buddhism (i.e. including Bon), and even the constitution of the Tibetan government in exile says that the Tibetan assembly shall contain “2 members elected from each religious denomination: Nyingma, Kagyud, Sakya, Geluk and

⁷ Interviews were conducted during 2000-2001 with fifty Tibetan elders (born and raised in Tibet) and fifty members of the younger generation (born and raised in exile). While no elders considered Bon to be Buddhism, approximately 25% of the younger generation said Bon is not different from Buddhism, while another 10% were unsure.

Yungdrung Bon.”⁸ Here the government itself is describing Bon as a separate denomination rather than a separate religion. While there were few theological differences between the four orders even in pre-exilic Tibet, the inclusion of Bon and the increased dialogue among all the orders show a democratization and a pluralistic theological outlook.

Moreover, numerous respondents of both generations as well as officials interviewed⁹ indicated that the relationships between all the orders have become better in exile, citing the residential arrangements. Because sectarian identity was so much an outgrowth of one’s specific monastery or one’s region in Tibet, there simply wasn’t as much dialogue between the sects in Tibet. In exile, not only is there dialogue between sects within the governmental structure, but also within settlements, since the refugee settlements are not established along sectarian lines. Furthermore, it is not uncommon in exile for monks or nuns of one order to encounter teachings from other orders or even to train for some time at a monastery of a different order. Notably, Dolma Ling Nunnery, a non-denominational nunnery, has been established by the Tibetan Nuns’ Project, just outside Dharamsala.

A separate trend is that there is a homogenizing tendency with regard to practice. Nyingma and Kagyu monasteries have become more scholastic in exile and focus more on debate, thus appearing closer to Gelugpa or Sakya forms of instruction. Also the non-denominational nunnery noted above teaches practices from various schools, though there are reasons to suggest that non-denominational here is closest to Gelugpa, such as the emphasis on debate and the issuing of a Geshe degree. All this suggests the idea that the Gelugpas, like the Pharisees, are not

⁸ Chapter V, Article 37, section b qtd. in Ganshyam Pardesi, “Some Observations on the Draft Constitution of Tibet,” *Tibet Journal* Vol. 1 No. 1 (Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, July/September 1975), 63-71.

⁹ These include heads of settlements, heads of monasteries and nunneries, heads of schools, and the secretary of religion and culture for the Tibetan government in exile.

erasing the other sects, but absorbing them as they compromise with them.

Nevertheless, there is an equally strong tendency in exile toward renewed sectarian consciousness. Whereas in Tibet only the Geluggas had a nationwide prayer festival that Geluggas from throughout the country would attend, in exile, each of the sects has such a festival. This is not to suggest that such annual prayer festivals did not exist before, but rather that in Tibet, these annual days were days of annual prayer in each of that order's respective monasteries. In exile, these annual festivals have become opportunities for all exiled members of that order to gather in one place, whether Bodh Gaya (for Kagyupas and Nyingmapas) or Lumbini (for Sakyapas). One might see this as yet another imitation of a Gelugpa custom, but on the other hand these gatherings provide a separate sectarian identification.

Also with regard to practice is the issue of the liturgical calendar, an aspect that affects both religions in exile. In pre-exilic Judaism, the Essenes had their own liturgical calendar, and the Sadducees had some disagreements with the Pharisees about certain dates for festivals, most notably Shavuot. After the destruction of the Temple, the Patriarch would intercalate the calendar each year, and by the fourth century or so, a fixed calendar emerged, functioning to centralize sacred time in the absence of a centralized sacred space.

In fact, there was a court of calendar regulation to which members could be nominated: "The number of those nominated was limited, and the position was greatly coveted by the sages."¹⁰ Once set for the year, the calendar was universal in the Jewish world, though there were occasional attempts to usurp authority by intercalating the calendar without the authorization

¹⁰ Abraham Weiss, "Third Century Seat of Calendar Regulation," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 1944, 14:267-76 reprinted in Jacob Neusner ed., *Origins of Judaism Volume VIII Part 2: History of the Jews in the Second Through Seventh Century of the Common Era* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990, pp.433-442), 441.

of the Patriarch. One such case involved Akibans¹¹ while another involved an attempt by the Exilarch to intercalate the year in Babylonia.¹² Despite these anomalies, the office of the Patriarch and its ensuing nominees held the sole right to intercalate the year: "Since exercise of this responsibility was a symbol of legitimate succession to the authority of the temple, the Patriarchs guarded their sole right to set the calendar."¹³ Indeed, here is a clear statement of the control of sacred time directly replacing that of the control of sacred space as well as its ability to unify the Jews in exilic times.

Similarly, separate regions of Tibet celebrated different sets of holidays in pre-exilic Tibet, and some locales celebrated the same holidays but at separate times due to differences in agriculture or local custom. In exile, this has shifted radically. In interviews, the very same elders who reported strikingly different sets of holidays while growing up in Tibet all recited the same set of holidays they celebrate now. A few went so far as to say that they check the liturgical calendar printed by the Tibetan government in exile and follow that specifically.

The calendar issued by the Tibetan government in exile, as well as the short but well-known volume *Festivals of Tibet*, have certainly universalized the calendar, but they too contain hints of Lhasan/Gelugpa bias, as Tsepak Rigzin notes outright at the beginning of his book.¹⁴ Again there is some democratization, with the inclusion of various types of holidays, yet there is an overall Gelugpa focus, just as we have seen with

¹¹ P. Hagigah 3:1. For a discussion of this see A.I. Baumgarten, "The Akiban Opposition," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 1980, 50:179-97 reprinted in Jacob Neusner ed., *Origins of Judaism Volume VII: History of the Jews in the Second Century of the Common Era* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 3-22.

¹² See Neusner, "Economic and Political Life of Babylonian Jewry." *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 1963, 31:165-96 reprinted in Jacob Neusner ed., *Origins Volume VII*, 338-380.

¹³ Baumgarten in Neusner, *Origins Volume VII*, 7.

¹⁴ Tsepak Ringzen, *Festivals of Tibet* (Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1974).

regard to other traditions and practices. As in the Jewish case, we see the successors of those who would have controlled sacred space taking control of sacred time. Furthermore, we see sacred time acting in a unifying way following the loss of sacred space. In both cases, there is the attempt to provide a single universal calendar to unify the exiled populace.

Theologically then, it seems that in exile, there is some amount of theological democratization and unification. Minority opinions are considered in Judaism, and the ideological critiques of one another with regard to one's order diminish in Tibetan Buddhism. Practices and traditions are shared, moreover, in an ecumenical way, although one group's practices tend to predominate. All of this can be attributed to the condition of exile. Surely, this is partly due to the loss of a centralizing sacred space to be controlled by a central party. Still, it must also be due to the minority status of a community in exile. While a faction within a majority has the luxury of vying for power against other factions within the majority group and using the discourse of an exclusivistic theology or practice that ideologically critiques other sects to do so, one no longer has that luxury in exile. The only choice is to find common ground and find a way to accept one another so as to join forces to survive.

There is, however, one major distinction between the two groups with regard to religious democratization in exile. It is often asserted that in the Jewish case, the Sadducees could not survive without the Temple because their entire theology and practice were concerned with the Temple. In other words, scholars say the rabbis descend most from the Pharisees because the Pharisees were more easily adaptable to the situation of exile since their emphases on purity and law outside the Temple could continue without the Temple. This is most definitely not the case with Tibetan Buddhism. There is nothing about the Gelugpa sect theologically or with regard to practice that makes it more adaptable to exile than the other orders. If anything, one can argue that Tibetan Buddhist theology of any order is easily adaptable to the condition of exile, and therefore one can predict

that despite some measures of Gelugpa-ization that are taking place, all the orders – and Bon as well -- will survive intact.

Although the aforementioned theological democratization is clearly documented and easy to explain, it is not the whole story. Despite the fact that exile creates a minority status and the loss of centralized sacred space, which leads to increased affinities and unification, major theological splits have occurred within each group in exile. Sometimes, when exclusivistic claims are held very strongly, there simply is no room for compromise. In post-exilic Judaism, this is the case with the Christians, while in Tibetan Buddhism this is the case with Shugden.

At first, neither the emergence of Christianity nor the destruction of the Temple created a total rift between Jews and Christians; in fact, Jews and Christians continued to worship together possibly until as late as the 4th century. However, as Christianity became more orthodox, certain tenets – namely the belief that Jesus was resurrected, was the messiah, and would return – became the only truth, thereby making it impossible for Judaism and Christianity to remain as one religion. Like the Pharisaic sect, Christianity could be easily adapted to a context devoid of the Temple or centralized sacred space. Thus the rabbis and Christianity survived, at first unified by their minority status, lack of power, and lack of outside support, but as Christianity gained the support of gentiles and grew in numbers and power, a split occurred.

The political aspect of the Christian-Jewish split can be summarized as follows:

When Christianity began, Judaism was the dominant tradition in the Holy Land and framed its ideas within a political framework until the early fifth century. Christianity there was subordinate and had to work itself out against the background of a politically definitive Judaism. (Elsewhere, of course, Christianity had

to work out of its subordinate position as well.) From the time of Constantine onward, matters reversed themselves. Now Christianity predominated, expressing its ideas in political and institutional terms. Judaism, by contrast, had lost its political foundations and faced the fact of working out its self-understanding in terms of a world defined by Christianity, now everywhere triumphant and in charge of politics.¹⁵

Despite the obvious issue of exclusivity, here Neusner makes the point that the break is also political. Other scholars have noted regional issues, crediting its rise to ascendancy to the fact that despite its Palestinian branch, “Christianity came to maturity in the Greek world and represents the blend of Hellenistic Judaism, hellenized Christianity, and Greek ideas and Greek religion and Greek spirit.”¹⁶ In other words, it was the Greek branch, with the syncretistic ideas and foreign support that led to the rift between Judaism and Christianity, probably more so than theology. While exclusivist theology is a factor, again we see that belief never accounts for all the factors.

Again we have the question here of the dominant discourse of estrangement. Was it in fact – as it is usually maintained by scholars – the irreconcilable theologies of the two religions? Or were regional or political affinities the deciding factor? Of course, all are factors here, but the important point is

¹⁵ Jacob Neusner, “From Enemy to Sibling: Rome and Israel in the First century of Western Civilization,” *The Ben Zion Bokser Memorial Lecture*, 1986, pp.1-36 reprinted in Jacob Neusner ed., *Origins of Judaism vol. VI: History of the Jews in the First Century of the Common Era* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990, pp.371-406), 372.

¹⁶ Samuel Sandmel, “Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism and Christianity: The Question of a Comfortable Theory,” *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 1980, 50:137-48 reprinted in Jacob Neusner ed., *Origins of Judaism Volume III Part 2: Judaism and Christianity in the First Century* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990, pp.223-234), 234.

that belief is not the sole, nor even necessarily the most crucial factor, though the intensity of a certain belief can create a certain amount of exclusivity.

In Tibetan Buddhism, the same pattern emerges with regard to the Shugden sect. Within the Gelugpa order, there is a protector deity known as Dorje Shugden who is responsible for maintaining the purity of the lineage. The time and circumstances of the origin of this deity are uncertain, but most likely he emerged around the time of the fifth Dalai Lama. His popularity increased around the time of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, and many Gelugpa monks have been initiated into a practice of propitiating him since that time. In fact, even the fourteenth Dalai Lama, though currently an opponent of the Shugden sect, received such an initiation and performed rituals regarding Shugden through the mid 1970s.

The condition of exile, while enabling various groups to come together in Tibetan Buddhism, has had the opposite effect on the Shugden sect. Because Dorje Shugden is primarily concerned with the purity of the Gelugpa lineage, the simple fact that exile has brought about dialogue between the orders is problematic from the perspective of a Shugden adherent. The Shugden sect is exclusivistic – it sees the Gelugpa order as pure and the other orders as corrupted. The current contact between groups along with the ability in exile to study within the confines of different orders, either in a non-denominational context or by receiving teachings from lamas of different schools, has created a Tibetan Buddhism that is less purely Gelugpa and more democratized, exactly as described above. Therefore, in exile, it was not uncommon for Gelugpa monks to take teachings from non-Gelugpa monks and to study a variety of texts and meditation practices, not all of which are Gelugpa. As a result of these activities, coupled with the exclusivism of the Shugden sect, there have been violent outbreaks against the Gelugpa monks who have become more ecumenical, and most notably, there was a murder of the director of the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics in Dharamsala. Since Shugden has always been

understood to be a wrathful deity, a group of Shugden adherents has become quite vocal about these occurrences, maintaining that they are due to the wrath of Shugden and that Shugden will continue to punish those who corrupt the pure Gelugpa lineage or those who fail to maintain their vow to propitiate him. The other possibility, naturally, is that these adherents themselves are behind the acts of violence.

The situation has come to the fore because of the Dalai Lama's own position on the issue. Once initiated into Shugden practices, there are supposedly severe ramifications for those who break their vow, and many are thus reluctant to renounce Shugden practices. Nevertheless, the Dalai Lama gave up propitiation of Shugden in the 1970s largely because the propitiation of Shugden is at odds with the Dalai Lama's role as the head of all four lineages in exile. In fact, the Dalai Lama's stance in exile has been notably ecumenical. Moreover, the Dalai Lama's condemnations of violence apply to the violence in the name of Shugden as well. The Dalai Lama has gradually become more and more vocal on the subject of Shugden, to the point where at this time, it is common practice for the Dalai Lama, in the midst of any set of teachings, to request that any Shugden adherents no longer attend the teachings of the Dalai Lama, and he also encourages people to come forward with any information they have regarding violence perpetrated in the name of Shugden.¹⁷

Of course, the Dalai Lama's stance has greatly angered the Shugden adherents. Kelsang Gyatso, leader of the Shugden sect – as it is now known – has taken offense at the Dalai Lama's statements. He has argued that the Dalai Lama is corrupting the lineage and that moreover, he is an opponent to the freedom of religion. Kelsang Gyatso maintains that by refusing Shugden

¹⁷ For example, the Dalai Lama gives annual (sometimes bi-annual or tri-annual) teachings in Bodhi Gaya at which he has made these comments. I have heard such comments myself on numerous occasions, and in casual conversation, a number of students have noted that the Dalai Lama takes a harder line on this issue with each passing year.

adherence admission to his teachings, the Dalai Lama is being intolerant of freedom of religion. Finally, and theologically most important, Kelsang Gyatso and his sect have elevated the status of Shugden. They claim he is a fully enlightened Buddha rather than a mere protector deity.

Because of the Dalai Lama's statements and Kelsang Gyatso's attempts to receive attention from the press, this conflict has reached the ears of most Tibetans in exile. Since a layperson cannot be initiated into Shugden practice, this controversy should be limited to the monastic context, but laypeople too are under the impression that Shugden is bad. I even met one layperson who changed his name from Kelsang to Tenzin when he found out he was named for Kelsang Gyatso (at the time of his birth, this controversy had not yet arisen). Shugden adherents have accused the schools and the government of discrimination, but none has been found to exist.¹⁸

Interestingly, regional, political, and economic factors have had a significant impact on this controversy. Kelsang Gyatso, resides in the UK and has received foreign support both from Europeans and from the Chinese government. The foreign support of has created a chance for the survival among the Shudgen sect despite the lack of internal support, which is reminiscent of the gentile support for Christianity. Meanwhile, the Chinese government's involvement suggests a political angle as well. Despite the Chinese government's noted stance against religion, they support Shugden; one must speculate that their reason for doing so is to divide the Tibetans amongst themselves for political purposes. Notably, both the European Shugden adherents and the Chinese government have called into question the Dalai Lama's political authority, claiming that his remarks against the Shugden sect have demonstrated that he is against freedom of religion. UK residents expressed this in the form of a

¹⁸ For a discussion of the history of Shugden practice and the current controversy, see *The Worship of Shugden: Documents Related to a Tibetan Controversy*, Department of Religion and Culture, Central Tibetan Administration, Dharamsala, India.

protest during the Dalai Lama's visits to Europe in the 1990s, and the Chinese government has used this position to continue their position of not negotiating with the Dalai Lama as any type of suitable authority. Once again, politics and region are as much factors in the support and survival of a splintered sect as theology. Moreover, the condition of exile exacerbates some of these factors.

Obviously, the situations of Shugden and Christianity are different in many ways, but the comparison of the two shows that not all sects become more unified in exile. Rather, a combination of factors including an exclusivist theology, a regional separation, and an increase of economic and/or political support for one group can create the opposite effect and estrange groups from one another in exile.

Regional Unification and Sectarianism

In pre-exilic times both Judaism and Tibetan Buddhism contained discourses effecting unity and estrangement along regional lines, Judaism to a lesser extent and Tibetan Buddhism to a greater extent. In exile, the lines are entirely shifted. On the one hand, previous divisions based on region somewhat disappear for the same reason mentioned above, the issue of minority status and the need to work together. On the other hand, new regional divisions emerge, sometimes between the diaspora and the homeland, and sometimes between various regions within the diaspora. While one can see seeds of the onset of this in the Jewish case during the early exile, it is a slow process that largely takes place beyond the scope of this article, that is, in post-rabbinic times. In Tibetan Buddhism, however, one can already see these new lines being drawn, a mere fifty years into the occupation and exile. As the older regional prejudices disappear, new subcultures are being created that engender differences between the exile and Tibet, the northern and southern settlements, and the Western diaspora with the Nepali and Indian exiles.

The primary discourse regarding the pre-exilic regional splits is one of unification in post-exilic times. In Judaism, for example, although a significant number of rabbis and Jews remain in Palestine, the older notions of Israel vs. Diaspora and urban vs. rural disintegrate as the groups unify to create a universal calendar as well as universal laws and practices.

For example, while there are some distinctions during the early exilic period between Palestine and the diaspora, they are minor, and are largely political rather than religious issues, as we will see below. In fact, the Babylonian Jewish authorities and Palestinian Jewish authorities were on very good terms, as evidenced by the travels back and forth of the rabbis. Some Babylonians went to study in Palestine and even received ordination from Judah Ha-Nasi in order to teach upon their return to Babylonia. Others went from Palestine to preach in the diaspora:

After the destruction, the most important single source of influence of Tannaim on Babylonia as on the rest of the diaspora was the occasional visitation of Tannaitic apostles of the Palestinian patriarchal court.... These apostles may have had political missions; but they most certainly had spiritual missions, giving sermons in synagogues, deciding matters of law according to the viewpoint of the Tannaim, representing the authority of the patriarchate wherever they went. They also collected funds for the Palestinian academies, presumably in place of the former gifts to the Temple, communicated edicts on the intercalation of the calendar, conducted polemics against Christianity, and occasionally, worked miracles.¹⁹

¹⁹ Jacob Neusner, "Studies on the Problem of Tannaim in Babylonia," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 1962, 30:79-127 reprinted in Neusner, *Origins* Volume VII, pp.84-85.

As mentioned, the calendar was inculcated each year in Palestine and a messenger brought the calendar to the diaspora.²⁰ Of course there was the attempt to usurp that authority once by the Exilarch, and there were still some cultural differences between groups, and some customs that existed in parts of the diaspora that were unknown or even disapproved of in other parts of the diaspora or in Palestine, but despite the loss of pilgrimage which used to bring the groups together, they seem unified.

Meanwhile, northern/southern distinctions disappeared, as all the Jews retreated to the north, and the Mishnah itself, although written by an elite literate class and intended largely for a landed upper-class becomes a text that unifies all classes of Israel. Moreover, the Mishnah begins a trend in the concept of Israel as primarily a land to primarily a people. Though both discourses do exist in the Mishnah, Jacob Neusner points out how the individual man is now Israel:

The Mishnah's principal message is that the Israelite man is at the center of creation, the head of all creatures upon earth, corresponding to God in heaven, in whose image man is made. The way in which the Mishnah makes the simple and fundamental statement is to impute power to the Israelite to inaugurate and initiate those corresponding processes, sanctification and uncleanness, which play so critical a role in the Mishnah's account of reality. The will of man, expressed through the deed of man, is the active power in the world.²¹

²⁰ This is in fact no different than it had been previously, although it had been the Temple priests, not the Patriarchy, who inculcated the year.

²¹ Jacob Neusner, "Max Weber Revisited: Religion and Society in Ancient Judaism" *The Second Century*, 1981, 1(2):61-84 reprinted in Neusner ed., *Origins* Volume VI, pp.423-447, 439.

Here we see a shift not from sacred space to sacred time, but from sacred space to sacred people, and although here Neusner and the Mishnah may in fact mean only the Israelite man – i.e. the one residing within the holy land – and may be directed at the landed class, Neusner is quick to point out that within a generation, the Mishnah was in the hands of rabbis not only in Palestine but also in Babylonia and was understood to apply to all Jews of all regions and classes.²² The identity as a people rather than a place is beginning to become the more prevalent unifying discourse in exile.

Over the centuries, with Chinese Jews, Indian Jews, Sephardic Jews, and Ashkenazic Jews each proceeding in their own directions, cultural differences emerge, but the nationalism concerning the people Israel and the respective minority status in each place of residence create a discourse of affinity among Jews everywhere.

With Tibetan Buddhism, we find a similar discourse of affinity, as the previous regional distinctions are no longer relevant. After all, in exile, as in the case of the orders, people from U-tsang, Kham, and Amdo—the three main regions of Tibet—suddenly find themselves in close proximity to one another, speaking a new diasporic dialect that does not separate them the way language, natural boundaries, and styles of dress and culture did in pre-exilic Tibet.

Even the same Khampas who had been considered the more rude, poorly bred cowboy types compared to the Lhasan intellectual elites are now revered as heroes:

Boundaries that are maintained from within are very often to keep the folk spirit of Tibetans who are alive. Delineating, reviving myths of origin is a favourite pastime of Tibetans in exile. It is fitting that in their stories, the old Tibetan renegade warriors, the K'am-pa(s) of Eastern Tibet, come alive as heroes, despite their

²² *Ibid.*, 431.

traditional mistrust of and rebellions against Lhasa officialdom. It was the K'am-pa(s) that underwent CIA-backed mountain guerilla warfare training to use against the Chinese and it is the K'am-pa(s) whose minor insurrections and dissident activities even within the Tibetan refugee community are forgiven in the face of the greater context of their tainted survival.²³

Here, not only is there a total reversal of previous regional strife becoming admiration, but there is also the note about retelling the story of Tibetan origins in exile, a myth that effects a discourse of affinity by stressing the unifying identity as Tibetans over a localized identity.

Moreover, a number of interviewees volunteered that exile has helped the relationships among the regions by bringing such people together, and the constitution for the Tibetan Government in exile mandates that governance be shared among regions. In addition to the fact that two members of the assembly must come from each of the five denominations, mentioned earlier, there is also a stipulation that the assembly will consist of "10 members elected from each of the three regions of Tibet without discrimination of sex."²⁴ The regions referred to here include U-tsang, Kham, and Amdo. On the one hand, this suggests that people are divided according to region in that one's home region dictates how one votes and whom one may elect. In some ways this is a result of concepts of sacred space: one's location within Tibet still matters in exile. On the other hand, the equal representation of the regions demonstrates a tend toward democratization in this area.

What is interesting is that each refugee settlement does not elect representatives to the assembly based on the region within exile, though this is quickly becoming a category of

regional difference. People in the southern settlements feel their religious faith and practices are somewhat different than those in the north. Both groups (northern and southern) describe the southern settlements as more traditional and more faithful. Generally speaking, this is simply due to the amount of Western contact. The southern settlements are not along the tourist paths and often require special visas. The northern settlements, known for their good climate, not to mention the presence of the Dalai Lama, draw significant attention from the west and are westernizing at a more rapid rate.

One of the main rifts beginning to occur is that of those who live in exile and those who live at home, i.e. a regional split. There is a common stereotype among recent refugees that those in exile have lost the traditions and have become westernized. These refugees note the lack of ritual, the change in the style of dress, and changes in the Tibetan language itself. They think the exiles do not have the same faith as those who still live in Tibet, a sentiment, interestingly, echoed by members of the younger generation in exile.

Meanwhile, the exiles have their own stereotypes of Tibetans who still live in Tibet. The exiles feel that the suppression of the Chinese government has made it impossible to learn the Tibetan language, Tibetan history, and especially Buddhism. They claim that Tibetans in Tibet never learn to read and write Tibetan, are given a false Chinese version of Tibetan history in schools, and are supervised so closely in the monasteries and/or allotted a limited stay there that they do not have the chance to get a complete monastic education. Interestingly, this generalization too is echoed by the group described: In a survey of monks at Sera monastery in South India, seventy percent were from Tibet proper and had come because they didn't feel they could get a traditional monastic education in Tibet.

In other words, Tibetan Buddhism as practiced within Tibet and outside of Tibet have become two separate entities. While there is no animosity between the groups and while there

²³ Dorsh Marie de Voe, "The Refugee problem and Tibetan Refugees," *Tibet Journal* Vol. VI no. 3, Autumn 1981, 33.

²⁴ Chapter V, article 37, section a qtd. in Pardesi.

are no essential theological differences between the two groups, and many refugees claim to do all the activism they do for the sake of those left behind, there are nevertheless two groups, whose practices, language, and style of religious education differ to the point that one can see a discourse of estrangement emerging. Should the exile last significantly longer, this could pose a problem for the refugees upon return.

Finally, another regional difference within exile is that between the India/Nepal area, accounting for almost all the exiles, and the area outside that region, especially in Europe and America. Here too one is already beginning to see differences in faith, practice and culture that may down the road lead to a sectarian type of split. In fact, even the main issue of nostalgia is markedly different between the two groups. While refugees in Nepal and India insist on returning to Tibet once it is free, refugees in the West, while striving for Tibetan independence, are not as sure about returning to Tibet permanently. This has led to an understanding that the two groups reflect different orientations: one exilic, and one diasporic.²⁵

Certainly, the overarching discourse in terms of regions is one of affinity. The nationalist sentiment, the struggle for independence, the democratization of previously regionalized splits, and the common myth of origin work to create a unified Tibetan identity unscathed by regional issues. Nevertheless, as in the Jewish case, cultural differences and some differences in orientation, and even religiosity, are emerging along regional lines.

Political Unification and Sectarianism

Just as the rifts concerning theology and region in pre-exilic times are significantly tempered in exilic times, the same is the case with political rivalries. As the factions become more tolerant of one another in exile and become more willing to share

more power, another level of democratization takes place. In many ways, this cannot be separated from theological issues, since we now understand that the political groupings align along theological and/or regional lines as well.

In Judaism, if one sees the Pharisees, Sadducees and perhaps even Essenes as political parties, the same trends listed above nevertheless occur. The Mishnah produces a more pluralistic system of compromise that unifies the groups rather than pitting them against one another politically. In addition, despite the strong authority of the patriarchy, political power is democratized. Interestingly, the pre-exilic Babylonian community, although it existed, had little if any formal political power. However, after 70 CE, the position of the exilarch emerges and the diasporic region begins to wield some political power. Still, the exilarch and patriarch remain on friendly terms, and there appear to be few power struggles during the early period of exile. As with the other categories, this makes perfect sense: the new minority status and loss of sacred space create a vulnerability that necessitates camaraderie.

In Tibetan Buddhism too, the same tension occurs as is there for the other categories. As mentioned above, according to the exilic constitution drafted in 1963, each order now has equal representation in the Tibetan parliament in exile, as does each region. However, one might note that the Gelugpas are still the most visible sect in politics:

Historically, it cannot be denied that there existed Gelugpa domination. Ever since Gaden Phodrang (the Government started by the line of Dalai Lamas) came into existence, the Gelugpa school commanded as the ruling party and the Central Government. The Government started its exclusive elite school called Tse lobdra for training monk officials, all hand-picked mostly from the three great Gelugpa monasteries. Thus, all monk officials belonged to [the] Gelugpa

²⁵ Ellen Posman, "Outside Looking In" Unpublished paper presented at the American Academy of Religion, Denver, November 2001.

sect. However, since 1963 when the present Dalai Lama promulgated the Tibetan Constitution, the Gelugpa domination was supposed to have ended. But I suppose the Gelugpa influence in Tibetan administration probably prevails over others even today. This is understandable because for one thing, most of the officers who have some experience in administration, are obviously from the Gelugpa order and it would be disastrous to suddenly replace them all at once.²⁶

One reason for this is that the executive branch of government in exile is still the realm of the Dalai Lama, a Gelugpa, and a number of positions, including anywhere from one to three members of the Tibetan Assembly, are appointed by him.

In an interview with Ayang Rimpoche, a Kagyu Lama who has been involved in politics with the government in exile, similar comments emerged. He observed that most of the overseas representatives of the Tibetan government in exile are Gelugpas, adding that a significant portion of overseas fundraising goes specifically to the Gelugpa order in the form of support for Gelugpa monks and monasteries, of which there are more in exile than any other order. Ayang Rimpoche also noted that most religion teachers in the Central Tibetan Schools and well as in the Tibetan Children's Village schools are Gelugpa, explaining that the understanding of Buddhism Tibetan refugee children receive is also biased in the Gelugpa direction. Politically, he also suggested a Gelugpa strength in the government, though he specifically referred to it regionally as an U-tsang stronghold.

Yet again in both cases the tendency is the same: a democratization and acceptance of all groups on the one hand, and a Pharissization or Gelugpa-ization on the other. These are

not either-or options, but a both-and scenario. While it seems that it should be the case that either all groups are unified by a decentralization of power in which each former rival group now has an equal share of power or that one group unifies the others by absorbing them into a modified monopoly, both are in fact the case. In fact, the former aids in the latter's progress. Through a discourse of democratization, one effects sentiments of affinity, and through an overall Pharissization or Gelugpa-ization, one also effects sentiments of affinity since the groups become more similar than they had been previously. Finally, as one group maintains authority in practice but cedes authority in theory, that group creates a context of trust that unifies the people without sacrificing a strong central authoritative body from which to regulate sacred time or other legal or practice issues.

Conclusion: Viewing Community Outside the Homeland

In both cases there is definitely a trend toward the unification of sectarian differences. In Judaism, the rabbis seem adamantly against sectarian controversy and develop a whole style of literature that bases itself on including different opinions. Meanwhile, the exiled Tibetan orders have developed ecumenical meetings and discussions aimed specifically at better relations between the groups as well as creating an inclusive governmental structure within the newly developed constitution.

Nevertheless, there is a distinct difference between the two cases. While in the Jewish case there is a move from exclusivist claims to more pluralistic ideals, such pluralism already existed in pre-exilic Tibet. Even in pre-exilic times, Tibetan Buddhists recognized that there can be multiple paths to one goal, that there can be differences of opinion without necessitating that one be "more right" than the others.

Then again, there is the case of Bon, which in pre-exilic Tibetan Buddhism was not given the status of a legitimate path, and at times, was even persecuted. In exile, relations with the Bonpos in particular have improved, to the point where there is

²⁶ T.G. Dhongthok, "Four Rivers Have the Same Water," *Tibetan Review*, September, 1976, 25.

significantly less hostility, more respect given for each other's systems, and at the extreme, Bon is referred to as the fifth order of Tibetan Buddhism.

Suddenly, a relationship begins to emerge between the changes made to sacred space in exile and the changes made to sacred community in exile. The singular sacred space of the temple in Jerusalem becomes multiple in exile, as God's presence—the shekhinah-- descends upon any synagogue or any group of Jews studying Torah, although the presence of God was still rationalized as “one.” Meanwhile, the sacred pilgrimage spaces in pre-exilic Tibetan Buddhism were multiple, and there was little tension in the idea that they became even more numerous in exile, incorporating new sites in India and Nepal, including any site the Dalai lama visits, because the theology is already multiple in Buddhism, to an extent.

Now we find a similar situation with regard to sacred people, sacred community, “Israel” for Jews, and “insiders”²⁷ for Buddhists. The exclusivist claims to being the people “Israel” become more open in exile, whereas the more inclusive “insiders” of Tibetan Buddhism, while becoming more inclusive of Bon and while improving relations among the sects, do not need the same rationalization, because the pre-exilic societal structure, as well as the theology, were already pluralistic. The more we look into this, the more we see that it is not so much what Tibetans can learn from the Jews as it is that the Jews had to change to accommodate exile, whereas Tibetan Buddhism was already structured to adapt well to the situation of exile.

Yes, Tibetans had regional, theological, and political groupings in pre-exilic times and have been changing the power structures in exile to reaffirm the affinity of being Tibetans over the previous estrangements. And certainly, as a result, there has been some of the kind of unification that took place in Judaism, as well as a Gelugpa-ization that may be similar to the Phariseization that took place in Judaism. But unlike in Judaism, the reduction of estrangement in Tibetan Buddhism does not

²⁷ The Tibetan term for Buddhist is nang-pa, literally “insider.”

erase the earlier affinities. There is a real effort to maintain regional and theological identities: the question of whether or not this will be ultimately successful will depend on the length of time of the exile as well as the continued effort to instill the next generation with different ideas.

The question of whether or not new affinities would be formed was the intended focus of this chapter, as well as the hypothesis, given the psychological and political needs of refugees, to present themselves as a unified force.

What then, do we make of the new estrangements? The advent of the Shugden controversy creates a problem for this hypothesis. Rather than promoting affinities, these groups are creating sentiments of estrangement. The heavy involvement of the Chinese government in Shugden demonstrates a political reason to create estrangements in exile. And the involvement of Europeans complicates things further. Perhaps one could view this sect in the following way: Shugden is not solely concerned with estrangement from, but also with affinity for other groups, whether Western or Chinese.

This brings us back to the Jewish case. Do the early Christians fit the same pattern? In the Christian case, the answer is assuredly “yes.” Considering synagogues housing both Jews and Jewish-Christians existed possibly up through the fourth century, Christianity as separate from Judaism was not built entirely on a discourse of estrangement, but also on an affinity for other non-Jewish groups.

Looking at groups this way, one might consider splinter groups that did not survive, such as the followers of Bar Kochbah. They used a discourse of estrangement as they turned to a belief in Bar Kochbah as the messiah, but the sect dissipated shortly afterward. Perhaps the problem was not that the theology could not survive Bar Kochba's demise,²⁸ but rather that the

²⁸ One can easily explain this by the fact that bar Kochbah lost his battle and turned out not to be the messiah, but the case of Christianity surely teaches that even when a golden age does not dawn immediately, that one does not automatically have to retract one's beliefs.

discourse of estrangement did not simultaneously create a discourse of affinity with some other group, such as the Christians with the Romans or the Shugden sect with the Chinese government or European supporters.

Along the same line of thought, one might consider another current controversy within Tibetan Buddhism, that of the two Karmapas. When the sixteenth Karmapa passed away, the search for the seventeenth Karmapa created two rival camps. Currently, the Karmapa born in Tibet has most of the support, although the Sharmapa, the main supporter of the Karmapa born in India, has been culling support, partially from abroad. Whether this splinter group will turn out to be a footnote in history or a serious faction will perhaps not be determined by finding a way to reconcile the theology of the matter,²⁹ but rather by finding the appropriate regional/and or political group with which to align itself. Yet again the prominence of belief over other factors comes into question.

This essay has intended to show that sentiments of estrangement are often replaced with those of affinity for a larger grouping in exile due to the need to survive when confronted with new surroundings. Both case studies exemplify these new discourses of affinity, and show that new estrangements are also possible, if attached to a discourse of affinity with an outside group. These discourses of affinity, whether external or internal, need not necessarily be with regard to belief, but can be political, regional, or even economic.

However, turning back to the more prominent idea of unification, we find a difference in the two cases. Unlike the Jewish case, in which new affinities are intended to erase sentiments of estrangement, the Tibetan case shows a new possibility: that of forging new relationships of affinity while maintaining separate identities. Clearly the time periods we are

²⁹ Compromise suggestions have been made: there is an idea that the Karmapa may have chosen to incarnate as two beings or that one may be a greater or lesser incarnation; there are cases in history of a tulku reincarnating separately his body, speech, and mind.

looking at are a factor here. In the current global situation and given the current discourses of pluralism and multiculturalism, the idea of grander affinities while maintaining subsets of distinct affinities has become a real possibility. This also reflects a difference in the degree of estrangement felt in pre-exilic times. The Tibetan groups were not sectarians claiming sole knowledge of the truth. While there were problems between regions and theological orders, an overarching acceptance of different paths leading to one goal kept the situation from being one where a new affinity would contradict an old affinity. In Judaism, to become a rabbinic Jew was to become a universal Jew and give up any previous affiliation with a particular subgroup. There are no Essenes, Sadducees, or Pharisees left in rabbinic times, nor are there northerners or southerners. There are of course Palestinians and Babylonians, but even this distinction becomes minimal in the new discourse of the Mishnah and Talmud and in the methods used to evoke sentiments of affinity between the two groups.

What does all this mean for the future of Tibetan society? That is still unsure. There is ample evidence to suggest that each order will survive with its own prayer festival, lineage histories, political representatives, teachings on emptiness, and meditative and ritual practices. However, as exile wears on, the more likely outcome is that the ecumenicism between the orders will result in an eventual single order that will unify the populace; it will be largely Gelugpa and largely descendant of Gelugpa, but by that time, aspects of the other orders will imbue the sole order as well.

As for regional issues, the process will be quicker. Already second generation refugees are confused about what region to vote with and are largely unaware of the dialect, customs, clothing, and landscape of their home province. Should such refugees return, it is doubtful that they would return to a home province. Exhibits and cultural productions will remain a major form of conveying this knowledge to future generations, but pre-exilic regional identities seem to dissipate faster than

theological ones, while new regional affinities by settlement or even country of residence are also emerging more quickly than any other type of affiliation.