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The Jewish Theosophist

The OFFICIAL MAGAZINE of
THE ASSOCIATION OF
HEBREW THEOSOPHISTS
THE INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATION



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Edited by HENRY C. SAMUELS
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The JEWISH THEOSOPHIST

*Devoted to the study of Judaism in the light of
Theosophy and Theosophy in the light of Judaism*

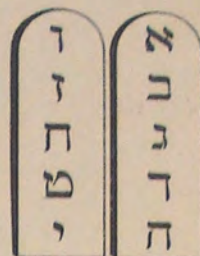


THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE
Association of Hebrew Theosophists

Published by Its American Section
Edited by HENRY C. SAMUELS
323 Fifteenth Ave. North, Seattle, Washington

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Volume 1

Seattle, Wash., July, 1927

Number 4



"Step forward, then, brothers, and take
your rightful place among the Nations.
Israel has a future and a work to accom-
plish therein."

Annie Besant, D. L., P. T. S.



The Jewish Theosophist is the official magazine of the Association of Hebrew Theosophists, an international organization. It is published quarterly by the American Section in the interests of the Ideals and Objects of the entire Association. All communications pertaining to this publication should be addressed to the editor, Henry C. Samuels, 323 Fifteenth Ave. North, Seattle, Washington. Contributors to this magazine are alone responsible for their respective opinions. The magazine is supplemented with occasional bulletins or news letters. Annual subscription \$1.00 in advance. Single copies 25c.

ADVERTISING RATES ON APPLICATION

Table of Contents

"An Invocation," by Isidore G. Ascher, ("The Standard Book of Jewish Verse"	Page
.....	Inside Page of Front Cover
"Theosophy and Cabala," by H. Blumenfeld	3
"Laying the Foundation Stone for the Adyar Synagogue	3
"Adyar Synagogue Committee"	4
"The Founders of the Association of Hebrew Theosophists and the Adyar Synagogue"	4
"Plans of Proposed Synagogue at Adyar, Madras, India"	5-14-19-26
"The Idle Word," From an Address by C. W. Leadbeater	6
"Heaven an Evolutionary Conception," by L. E. Blochman	7
"Report of Funds"	10
"The Association of Hebrew Theosophists—In Spirit, Ideals and Objects"	10
"Bibliographical Notes on Judaism and Theosophy" (Compiled by Mr. J. J. Portman of Holland)	15
"Realizations"—(Editorial Comment and News Items)	16
"Jewish Calendar"	18
"An Appreciation"	19
"The Theosophical Society"	20
"Spiritual Greatness"	21
"The Chassidim" (A Jewish Mystical Sect), by Mrs. Muller Pia, of Italy	22
"Judaism and Theosophy," by A. Horne	23
"The Order of the Star in the East" (General Information)	25
"A Message to Jews in India." Association of Hebrew Theosophists (Indian Section)	27
"Rabbi Edward L. Israel on Theosophy and the World Teacher"	28
"Book Reviews"—"Mysticism" by Dr. Annie Besant	30
"The Kingdom of Happiness," by Jeddu Krishnamurti, with introduction by Dr. Besant	31
"Beautiful Thoughts of the Ancient Hebrews," by Elias Gewurz	32
"Looking Toward the Light"	Inside of Back Cover

Theosophy and Cabala

By H. BLUMENFELD

Being a Jew, I am intensely interested in the teachings of Theosophy in the light of Cabala, for according to my own absolute knowledge Theosophy is a correct prototype of the Cabala of old; born in old Palestine and nursed at the breast of Zoroastrian philosophy, and in former Talmudic days looked upon as a divine revelation.

Modern Jewish critics are inclined to view the Cabala strangely, owing to the fantastic dress in which certain Western scholars clothe the doctrine, which gives it an un-Jewish appearance. But Cabala and Theosophy are thoroughly Jewish, as it may be readily seen from their more modern presentation which renders the philosophy as a whole obvious and applicable. Were it not so its hold upon thousands of Jewish minds would be a psychological enigma defying all process of reasoning. We recognize the Cabala and all pertaining to Theosophy as twin sisters. We see all the ethics and wisdom of Theosophy interlaced with the highest aim of Cabala, both being the effort to make metaphysics subservient to the Brotherhood of men.

The Cabalist regards ethical questions as

part of the religious ones, and Theosophy, through its aim for Truth in the highest, fully embraces every phase of religion, and it teaches that truth is to be found in all religions. Thus may we look for Truth in our Synagogues, the Moslem in his Mosque, the Christian in his Church, and the Buddhist in his Temple; helped greatly by tolerance which is a cardinal principle in Theosophy.

But the study of Theosophy is also mystical, which may extend to realms beyond conception, such as the Talmud relates concerning the four sages who have entered "Paradise."

1. Ben Azzai devoted himself to theosophic speculations of the doctrine, beholding the mystic of the "garden" and dying.
2. Ben Zoma just entered the "garden," looked and went mad.
3. Elisha Ben Abuyah destroyed the plants of the heavenly garden.
4. Akiba was the only one that entered the "garden" and returned unscathed.

It is wonderfully sweet to enter the Paradise of Theosophy, and as we enjoy the fruits of the great garden of wisdom let us also follow the example of dear old Rabbi Akiba; let us return unscathed by aiming for greater usefulness.



Dr. Annie Besant, president of the Theosophical Society, laying the foundation stone for the Adyar Synagogue.

The Chassidim

(A Jewish Mystical Sect.)

By MRS. MULLER PIA, of Italy

For centuries the Jews lived under a tremendous thought form of contempt, and disdain, and nobody, who is not a Jew and has not lived in countries where Jews are persecuted can imagine what that means, never to be sure in opening a book or entering a society not to find there a word which offends—What could grow out of that repression and continuous persecution?

Terrible is the Karma of the Jews, living in Europe, but it would be sorry if the hard lesson of suffering, would not at the same time be the wisest master, Dr. Annie Besant rightly says: "Suffering is the way to greatness." Never do we find so many great characters than in times of difficulty; but we must not look after them in the rays of the heroes. Heroes are soon known, but the thinkers and the wise work in silence; in solitude they grow deeper and deeper; showing to those who understand a beauty and wisdom inexpressible and indescribable. Not outside is to be found the greatness of the Jewish character but deep in his interior there lies his value.

Very few know of the vicissitudes of the Jewish soul; know how many movements rose and decayed, showing the longing of a purer life, lived nearer to God. Among the poorest Jewish population of Poland and Russia they rose, prospered for a time and then decayed for lack of understanding and because of persecutions and repressions. The most characteristic of these mystical movements is that known under the name of Chassidism and which I find in the person of Martin Buber, a reviver and renewer.

I thought it best to translate some parts of the introduction of Martin Buber's book "Die Geschichte des Rabbi Nachman" (Rabbi Nachman's Story), where a short description of Chassidism and its doctrine is given. Unfortunately my little knowledge of the English language will greatly hinder the record and will not at all give back the splendid style in which the original is written, but I hope the reader will forgive me as it is not so much the style which I want to convey but the contents and the substance.

Martin Buber writes:

The Diaspora generated mystical movements of tremendous force, especially after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. The old dream of redemption arose strongly in the depressed souls, and in the middle of the sixteenth century a new era began for Hebrew mysticism which announced that for every individual it is given to co-operate for the redemption of the whole.

The kabbalah recognizes two kinds of incarnations of the soul: the Gilgool and the Gbbur; the former concerns the souls who incarnate at birth, it

is the pilgrimage of the soul; the second may happen when a great spirit who left this world descends sometimes in his full splendor and power, sometimes only partially to take possession of an individual helping him in his evolution. This is the case of prophets.

Through these kinds of processes the purification and evolution of all souls is accomplished, and this theory is identical to that held by Theosophists.

The idea of Lurya (who taught a hundred years before Locke) was that by a special training and pure living, with an absolute love toward all beings the world redemption could be quickened and the kingdom of Heaven established. This idea called forth a hundred years later, that unfortunate movement known under the name of Sabbatai Zebi, its founder. This man was inspired by a high ideal, and to make himself worthy of the Tbbur, by living a pure and ascetic life. But he preached abnegation from all worldly things, which were only hinderances for the man who determined to help for the redemption of the world. These teachings caught the Jewish peoples' souled with tremendous strength, and at about 1700 a pilgrimage of 1500 men went to Jerusalem, the goal of their dreams, but it ended in a lamentable manner. Besides that assembly there were many individuals who, driven by their immense longing for the world's and their own redemption, took up the pilgrim's staff and wandered into a deliberately chosen exile, without taking food and rest until they fell ill and died.

These martyrs were the forerunners of the last movement in the evolution of Jewish mysticism that of the Chassidism (18th Century). Chassidism is the Kabbalah transformed into ethics, but the mode of life it preaches is not that of ascetics, but that of joy, conceived in the union with God. Chassid means pious, but Chassidism is free from all sentimentality and feeling ostentation. It takes the "beyond" into the "here" and leaves it develop and to shape as the soul shapes and forms the body. The teaching is realistic, full of mystical God-feeling, as to how the true ecstasy comes, the union with God which is the unique goal worthy of a man, the summit of all existence. This ecstasy means the enfoldment of the soul, is the perfected soul who flows into the infinite. In the ascetic life the spiritual being shrinks together, only in the joy it is possible to grow, until, cleaned from every spot, he (the being) matures to Divinity!

It was in Poland, where the Jews lived in fear and despair after the pogroms, that the Chassidic movement began. The founder of the Chassidism was Israel ben Eliezer, called "Baal-shem" the Master of the wondrous name (of God). Around him and his disciples arose intimate legends rich in color. He was a simple, truthful man endowed with great powers. His doctrines are very imper-

fectly preserved since they were never put down and never taught fully to anybody, because there was no one to be found worthy enough to receive the whole teachings from the Master's lips and to be initiated in the mysteries. Nevertheless, the essence of his doctrine can easily be acknowledged.

God, he taught, is the essence of everything. He who is able to look at things not blinded by illusion, sees God. God does not speak out of the things, but he thinks in them, therefore He can only be reached with the inmost power of the soul. As soon as that inmost power is liberated, the man is able to unite with God everywhere at all times, every action is sanctified, however low it may seem to men, in all things even in the seeming dead there are sparks of life. What we call bad and coarse is only an imperfection, a want, it is "God's exile," the lowest step towards God's throne, it is as the Kabbalah states—the sheath which envelops the essence of the things. There is nothing in the world which could be unworthy of love. Men's instincts too are not bad; but the saint and pure makes out of the instincts a "Chariot for God."

Man's destiny is the expression of his soul; he whose thoughts are circulating round impure things, experiences impurity; he who emerges into holiness experiences bliss. Man's thinking is his being; who thinks about the spiritual world lives in it, and every outer law is only an ascend to the inner one, the last scope (goal) for every individual is the becoming himself the law. Truly the world above is not a thing exterior but interior.

On every path men find God, and all paths are full of unity; but the most perfect one is the way of prayer. He who prays with ardent zeal, out of him speaks God himself, the inner word; this is the experience, the outer word is only the garment. But the prayer should not happen in pain and penance, but in joy. Joy only is truly God's service.

Baal-Shem's doctrine found easy entrance to the simple people's heart, who could not grasp the idea intellectually, but whose soul vibrated in harmony with the mystical God-feelings inherent in the teachings. The announcement of the joy to be

found in God acted like a liberation upon the people after the domination of a rigid and severe law. That people found itself in opposition to a crowd of erudite Talmudists, but the new teaching came as a revelation and the issue was not doubtful; the religious rigidity could not withstand a religious renewal. A strong rival arose to Chassidism in the Haskalah movement which in the name of science fought against what was called superstition, but that body also was too weak.

Unfortunately in the Chassidic movement itself germs of degeneration began to arise. Chassidism brought liberation to the soul, but for a price the majority of people could not achieve, which is purity, discrimination and concentration of the spiritual life. Therefore an institution of mediators was established; the mediators were called "Zaddikim" the righteous. The theory was that the mediator who lived in both worlds, is a kind of "Trait d'union" between them, through whom the prayer is carried up and the benediction brought down. This theory developed very quickly and unfortunately overgrew every other teaching. The "Zaddick" made the Chassid richer in assurance of God's being, but infinitely poorer of the only worthy thing; the individuals own search after God.

Then there was another misuse which crept in, at the beginning, the degree of a Zaddik was conferred only to worthy men, mostly to disciples or disciples of disciples of Baal-Shem himself. But many a one unworthy of that great mission insinuated himself into the charge, with all kinds of miracle doings which blinded the simple men. In that way the Chassidism degenerated and though many thousands of its members are still spread over the world, we have only a grimace of what once was great and noble.

We see by the comparative study of religions that associations founded upon truth never disappeared totally, and that there is always a time during which they flourish up and show their beauty to the world. This age of general religious rebirth brings therefore also regeneration to Chassidism.

Judaism and Theosophy

By A. HORNE

(The author has kindly sent us a copy of his reply to criticism in Israel's Messenger, in Sanghi, and from which the following is an abbreviation.)

The April and May issues of Israel's Messenger were kind enough to take notice of my humble efforts at arousing American Jewry to the need of discussing spiritual truths. In both the above criticisms, several statements were made which are totally erroneous, not only as a matter of personal opinion, but as a matter of positive and indisputable fact. The writers

are very evidently misinformed on these few particulars, and the editor of Israel's Messenger will no doubt accord me the courtesy of an opportunity to correct these bits of misinformation.

First, as to your April article, written no doubt by the editor himself, as it is unsigned:

A Message to Jews in India

*Association of Hebrew Theosophists
(Indian Section.)*

DEAR BROTHERS:

Now it is high time to begin to work for a cause so dear to our heart. Many, many years have gone by since the Theosophical Society was sent by the Masters of Wisdom to bless the world by its teachings, but our Jewish people in India held themselves in the background, where they remained unknown for about half a century.

Now all barriers have fallen down, all limitations have dropped before the tremendous uplifting influence of the Jubilee Convention of the T.S. Before its sweeping, purging power all has changed, all took another phase. An urge for service, an urge for help, sprang in many a heart. Self-restraint turned then to self-surrender, and the birth of the Association of Hebrew Theosophists was the outcome.

It was born to serve our Society, to serve our race—to serve our Society by enriching it with the Jewish thoughts which have been evolving for many centuries from the ancient scriptures of our prophets, and sages of old; to help our race by bringing them to the light of Theosophy, by turning their narrow orthodoxy to a rational broad-mindedness, adorned with intelligent spirituality—a spirituality tinged by the high philosophical conceptions of races and cultures other than their own.

It is, therefore, the bounden duty of each and every one of us to carry that banner of truth wherever he goes, and do what he can towards the realisation of our objects as given below. *Three Sections of our Association have been already formed outside India, those of America, England and Holland, and the privilege is but ours to lend them support. Our American brothers have gone so far ahead that they have already published books and pamphlets on Jewish mysticism, and founded a quarterly magazine—*The Jewish Theoso-*

phist, appearing in Seattle, Washington, edited by the president of that section.

We would, therefore, appeal to one and all to join us, and to try and kindle in others the fire of love and service, and so to lighten our burden. We would also request those who are not members of the Theosophical Society to show their sympathy by becoming associate members.

*Will be found in this issue under the heading "The A. H. T. Its Spirit, Ideals and Objects."

(The annual dues for both full and associate members is Rs. 3/—. Subscription to the Jewish Theosophist \$1.00 or about Rs. 2-14, will be received with thanks by the Secretaries.)

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"Those who know God only by the Creation know Him by His shadow; but the pure and perfect Spirit, * * * * * is not reduced to knowing the Cause of the works, as one gets glimpses of the truth by the shadow; he raises himself above that which is created, and receives the Revelation of the Eternal in such manner that he recognizes Him in Himself, as well as in His shadow, the Logos and the Universe." —*The New Age Magazine*.

For the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil doers, for the sake of firmly establishing righteousness I am born from age to age." —*Bhagavad-Gita*, IV, 7.

BOOK REVIEWS

Mysticism

By DR. ANNIE BESANT
(Reviewed by A. Horne)

(The Theosophical Press, \$1.30, through the librarian of the A. H. T., Mr. Louis B. Ball, 1031 Bennett Ave., Long Beach, Calif.)

Under the title of *Mysticism* we find five lectures delivered by the President of the Theosophical Society several years ago at a convention of the British Section. To those who are familiar with her lectures and writings, an introduction is hardly necessary; to those who are not, no description of ours can give an adequate representation of her strength of diction, her breadth of vision, and, above all, her clarity of exposition. Those of us who have watched her strenuous activity in the outer world, with its attendant exactions in time and energy, never cease wondering how this remarkable little woman could ever find the time to enter so faithfully and so minutely into the spirit of every faith, every religious movement, every philosophy and science, and to so accurately carry away an understanding, not only of their many details, but of their synthetic essence.

The first lecture is on "The Meaning and Method of Mysticism,"—a necessary introduction, because of the confusion, in the minds of the many, between mysticism and mystification. She begins by quoting the Dean of St. Paul's, who defines Mysticism as "the most scientific form of religion," and then goes on to show, in her own painstakingly clear way, how correct that definition is, and how baseless is the unreasonable assumption of so many: "We had thought," said the *Times*, "that Mysticism was an exploded superstition." It is scientific, however, because it is essentially the response of consciousness to a peculiar form of experience, in itself as analyzable and recordable as any more prosaically scientific experience can be. The lecturer takes Mysticism in its universal aspect, and shows it to be essentially the same kind of a thing in whatever religion it happens to manifest itself. It is the "higher knowledge," the "knowledge of Him by whom all else is known." Mysticism, furthermore, "does more than declare that that direct knowledge is possible; it proclaims the method whereby that knowledge may be obtained." Some details of that method are given, which bring the lecture to an interesting close.

In the second talk we are brought face to face once more with the fact that the same spiritual conceptions are, upon examination, found to underlie all religions, and, in tracing this similarity to its

source, the lecturer points out the strange fact that even in the case of savage beliefs, "in the background of every savage faith, kept as a sacred thing, to be spoken of only with reverence and with awe, behind all those superficial beliefs in gods and devils, behind all those thoughts of sacrifices, to propitiate hostile powers, there was one Being ever believed in, whose only symbol was the over-arching sky, who had no image, who had no likeness, to whom no prayers were ever made, a mighty all-embracing Life . . . ; indications of an idea so foreign from the savage of modern thought that man began to ask . . . how could a conception so great and all-embracing come from these undeveloped brains, these crude unevolved barbarians?" The solution of this problem we find solves at the same time the question of identity in religious beliefs; for those beliefs "did not grow out of savage ignorance, but . . . came from an identity of origin, from Teachers, highly developed spiritual men, who came forth into the world from time to time to give out the ever-same ideas in a form suited to the needs of the time . . . These ideas came from the mouths of men who spoke with authority of that which they knew, and were not the dreams of savages, awe-stricken before a nature too mighty to oppose, in which destructive agencies were rife."

The development of the God idea in the various religions of the world is then taken up; in the Hebrew religion, for instance, the lecturer points out the original local and national character of the Deity, a conception that had a philosophical basis for its existence, for it was intended as a cohesive force while the Hebrew nation was in the making. When, however, the Jews return from the Babylonian captivity, you find that "the God idea has assumed a wider, greater, and far more splendid form. They bring back with them the idea of immortality; they bring back with them the idea of one God, the universal, the all-pervading . . . Instead of the God who walked in the garden in the cool of the day, you have 'the high and lofty one who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy'."

In lecture three we meet with "the Christ idea" as it is found to pervade the various faiths—under different names and forms, of course. In two religions alone the idea of the God man is not found: the Mohammedan and the popular Hebrew. "I am obliged to put in the word 'popular,'" the

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lecturer explains, "because, in the more mystical writings of the Hebrews, there are naturally traces of this same spiritual fact; but owing very largely I think, to the sense among the Hebrew teachers that the people were in danger of falling away from their national God into various forms of idolatry, it seems that all image or likeness, even the human itself, was excluded from their larger conception of Deity. In their mystical writings, as I say, you find traces of that, traces which are drawn partly from the verse in *Genesis* when it is said that 'in the image of God made He man' . . . It would seem that surrounding necessities veiled what in other faiths was one of the central religious conceptions."

This lecture is followed by one on "the Man idea," in which Dr. Besant points out that even science is going away from the conception of an evolving body rather than that of an unfolding spirit, while philosophy as well is showing a tendency away from the materialistic and towards the idealistic and religious. The simple evolutionary hypothesis, which, the lecturer admits, is not without its grandeur, does not seem to be supported by fact; "history, as far as it exists, does not show us these traces of the savage unfolding into civilization . . . We find them dying out where civilization approaches them. . . Civilizations, as we know them in the past, have the same strange mark and characteristic that, as Bunsen said of Egypt, they seem to spring 'full upon the stage of history' . . . Dig down as you will through ancient civilization, you do not dig down into a savage state. You find cave-men; you find men of the Stone Age; but you never find traces of evolving from the Stone Age into civilization."

Coming down from civilization, as a whole, to individual man, the same difficulty confronts us, for the social qualities "are a disadvantage in the struggle for existence, and practically eliminate their possessors in the frantic struggle for life." Were life nothing but a survival of the fittest, the development of culture, of true civilization, could not go on, for brute force would prevail over the finer elements.

What, then, can man be? If not an offspring of the beast of the field and of the jungle, he must be, as religion teaches, an offspring of God: a divine spark, unfolding his divinity in the world of material forms. "Let me remind you," says the lecturer, "that in the books called the Apocrypha of the Hebrew scriptures you find suggestions and hints of deeper and sublimer views than you find in the canonical scriptures. There the inner teaching of the Hebrew faith was beginning to show itself, whereas in the canonical scriptures, especially the earlier ones, you have rather the popular view, the view preached to the people . . . You remember how it is said in *Genesis*: 'God created man in His own image' . . . You may remember also that it is written in the Apocrypha: 'God made man in the image of His own eternity.' How different the atmosphere! How changed the thought! In one case the image of God is the outer form; in the other it is a likeness of nature, an identity of existence."

This divine spark it is that incarnates; passing from lower to higher forms, through the mineral, vegetable, animal, and finally human kingdoms; unfolding at each stage more and more of its latent divinity. Not an evolution, in the sense of acquisition; but an unfoldment, a release of potentialities, till conscious divinity—perfection—is reached. Such is the theosophical view of the origin and destiny of man.

The fifth and last lecture is entitled "Interpretations," and here Dr. Besant takes a few of the prevailing theological ideas and, in her illuminating way, shows their foundation in truth and in error. Hell, satan, salvation, atonement—one by one these and other ideas are expanded and interpreted, psychologically and spiritually, till the realization dawns upon one that the theosophical conception of life is a remarkable key that unlocks many a riddle and leads one onwards to greater understanding. For one who wishes to acquaint himself with theosophical thought in its religious aspect, this little book makes an excellent and pleasantly readable introduction.

The Kingdom of Happiness

By JEDDU KRISHNAMURTI

With an Introduction by Dr. Besant.

(Boni and Leberight, \$1.50, through the Secretary of the A. H. T., Mr. Louis B. Ball, 1031 Bennett Ave., Long Beach, Calif.)

Mr. Krishnamurti begins his book, "I want, if I can, to put before you certain ideas which you should cultivate and which would give you a definite and intelligent conception of true spiritual life. I think all of you realize that to create, as you must create if you would live, there must be struggle and discontent; and in guiding these to their fruition, you must cultivate your own point of view, your own tendencies, your won abilities; and for this I

desire to arouse in each that Voice, that Tyrant, the only true guide that will help you to create. Most of you prefer—it is a much easier way—to copy. Most of you like to follow. Most of you find it much easier not to cultivate your own tendencies, your own qualities, your own natures, but rather to follow blindly. And I think you will agree with me that it is fatal for the development of the Voice. The noblest guide each of us has in this Voice, this Tyrant, this Intuition; and it is in cultivating, in ennobling, and in perfecting this, that we arrive at the goal—our own goal."