Cultivation and Conflict: Buddhist-Derived Meditation and Ethical Complexity among Israeli Jews

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Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted   for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

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Cultivation and Conflict: Buddhist-Derived Meditation and Ethical Complexity among Israeli Jews / Ori Mautner

Abstract: In Israel, the demand for Buddhist-derived meditation practices appears to be among the highest in the world, and such practices are currently being employed by a striking variety of Israelis. This dissertation relies on over 14 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Israel and the occupied West Bank. It examines the ways in which orthodox Jews on the one hand, and non-observant Jewish activists for solidarity with Palestinians on the other hand, use meditation techniques drawn from Buddhism for pursuing objectives that are central for them, respectively, as contemporary Israelis.

In the dissertation's first part, I discuss orthodox Jewish meditators. I analyse the theological justifications they provide for practising Buddhist-derived meditation, and describe retreats and classes through which they learn such techniques, including the disputes and dilemmas this generates. Specifically, the first four chapters concern the themes of arriving at proximity to God through meditation, the tension between discipline and spontaneity, strategies for managing value conflicts, and senses of failure. Taken together, these chapters illustrate the complex ways in which the values of *orthodoxy*, *spirituality* and *non-renunciation* intersect with orthodox Jewish meditators' self-fashioning projects.

In the second part, I address Engaged Dharma Israel (EDI) activists, who attempt to show solidarity with Palestinians living under Israeli military control by providing them with practical assistance. I illustrate how among EDI members, the same practices used by orthodox Jewish meditators are employed for quite different ends: cultivating cosmopolitan sensibilities and negotiating Israeli national belonging. Specifically, I focus on the relationship between EDI members' self-cultivation project and two sets of opposing values they hold. The first set is *friendliness* (approaching others with a caring attitude) on the one hand, and *resistance to injustice* on the other. The second set is *intimacy* (experiencing self and other as interdependent) and *autonomy* (being self-directed and deciding to what extent to partake in difficult situations).

My dissertation contributes to the burgeoning field of the anthropology of ethics (which analyses people's attempts to lead good lives comparatively), including to debates concerning encounters between disparate ethical traditions and the relationship between ethics and politics. It also contributes to the anthropology of religion, including to discussions of religious mediation. Primarily, however, I attempt to contribute to the anthropology of ethics by linking debates on self-cultivation with ones on values. Through addressing different types of Israeli meditators, I demonstrate that fundamental to self-fashioning projects is the complex ways in which they relate to people's value considerations. Subsequently, I argue that the dominant model anthropologists utilize for comparing ethical projects—Michel Foucault's discussion of 'forms of subjectivation'— ought to be complemented by considering the tensions people experience between their different values. Finally, in the conclusion I propose that values, instead of being analysed atomistically, can only be properly understood in relation to other values that are held simultaneously to them in a specific ethical project.

Contents

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INTRODUCTION

Self-Fashioning and the Value Considerations of Jewish-Israeli Meditators

Buddhist-derived *vipassanā* and mindfulness meditation practices are currently being employed by a striking variety of Israelis. These include 'secular' Jewish members of the Engaged Dharma Israel (hereafter: EDI) activist group.[1] Influenced by the 'Engaged Buddhism' movement that operates in many parts of the world (e.g. Queen 2000; Queen, Prebish and Keown 2003), EDI members seek to express solidarity with, and to provide practical assistance to, Palestinians living under Israeli military control. Other meditators, however, are positioned very differently in the Israeli social, religious and political landscape.

One morning, I met Shalom, an orthodox Jew who was then around 30 years old, in a relatively remote Israeli settlement in the Hebron hills of the southern West Bank. After he had hugged me and invited me to have tea, we approached an observatory overlooking the area's impressive desert landscape and named after a young Jewish woman who was 'martyred for the sanctification of God's name' (*nirtsecha al kiddush Ha'Shem*) nearby. On my way to the meeting, I noticed several signs stating 'we support sovereignty', calling on the Israeli government to annex West Bank settlements. These are held in a status of military rule since Israel occupied the area—which orthodox Jews consider a vital part of the 'greater', biblically-defined 'land of Israel'—from Jordan in 1967.

I associated Shalom's appearance—his curly sidelocks (*pe'ot*) reaching below his shoulders, beard, large colourful crocheted skullcap (*kippa*) and Australian-made brown leather boots—with religious-nationalist political activism. Yet Shalom, soft spoken and friendly, said nothing that suggested a preoccupation with nationalism or political engagement. 'I love the land of Israel', he told me, 'but that's not the main thing that drives me'. Rather, he was concerned mostly with 'interiority' (*pnimiyut*) and 'soulness' (*nishmatiyut*), with 'the essence of things'.

When reading Hasidic texts and ones on 'spirituality', he came across a book on mindfulness and eventually attended a 'Jewish *vipassanā*' meditation retreat. And in the future, Shalom would like to teach Nonviolent Communication—a method which, he claimed, is resonant with *vipassanā,* and which he had learned from a therapist residing in an ecological Israeli settlement in the West Bank's Jordan valley. I was confused. On several occasions, I heard EDI activists refer approvingly to this method. Additionally, they would state that residents of this and other nearby settlements, and of ones found in the area where

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[1] While I use the group's real name, according to the preference of some of its key members, in this dissertation I refer to all other groups and persons using pseudonyms.

Shalom was residing, were aggressively preventing Palestinian shepherds from grazing their herds, prompting activists to escort them to pasture grounds.

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On a winter night, along with a few dozen Haredi (ultra-orthodox) and religious Zionist Jewish Israeli men, I was crammed inside a small tomb compound in the centre of the West Bank Palestinian village of Kifl Hares. I went there with Yehuda, whom I had met on a 'Jewish *vipassanā*' retreat. The visit constituted the yearly Jewish pilgrimage to the tomb, traditionally considered to be the burial site of the biblical figure of Joshua, known for having been the Israelite tribes' leader who conquered the land of Canaan after 40 years of wandering in the desert. In order for thousands of Israelis to access this and two other tombs, they were escorted and protected by members of the Israeli army, who imposed a night-time curfew on the Palestinian inhabitants. Among the pilgrims, the atmosphere was festive. The village's residents, in contrast, were forced to remain in their homes.

Within the narrow tomb compound, it was stifling and sweaty. Men were praying with heartfelt voices, many of them reciting the *tikkun klali* (Hebrew: 'universal rectification') stipulated by the Hasidic master Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, with shouts of 'amen!' constantly being heard. Yehuda uttered this text too, and being unmarried, he also recited a prayer he had received from his rabbi for finding a match (*zivug*). Then, he took out his simple cellular phone, from which he read the medieval Tibetan Buddhist text *Eight Verses of Training the Mind*. Yehuda related in particular to one passage: 'Even when someone I have helped,/ Or in whom I have placed great hopes/ mistreats me very unjustly, I will view that person as a true spiritual teacher', a selfless attitude he was trying to cultivate when practising meditation.

A few months later, I joined EDI activists in accompanying members of a Palestinian family from the same village who were trying to reach agricultural lands found nearby, next to an Israeli settlement. In the course of this attempt, a young Palestinian man was hospitalized after being shocked with a Taser gun.

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One *vipassanā* or 'insight' meditation retreat took place, like many other similar activities in Israel, in a now largely privatized *kibbutz*. This is the name for a utopian, communal type of agricultural village that emerged in the beginning of the twentieth century in pre-state Israel (Spiro 1956, 1958). Following the retreat, I was seated in a large hall whose old metal roof typified the original, austere aesthetics of such communities (Helman 2008). Next to me, a few orthodox and 'secular' (*chiloni*, i.e. non-observant) Jewish participants were chatting, with the latter including some who used to attend EDI activities. A secular woman, who had several black tattoos and hair that was cut short on one side (in a style her friend described as 'hipster'), observed that she did not associate 'religious people' with the 'openness' needed for attending Dharma activities.

A few weeks later, I met one of these orthodox men—who used to attend many meditation retreats—at Jerusalem's Western Wall (*Kotel*). Underneath his shirt, tucked inside his blue jeans, was a pistol. He wished not to 'let terrorists win' by intimidating Jews and thereby deterring them from accessing parts of the land of Israel, he said. Therefore, he arrived at the Western Wall by walking, intentionally, through the Muslim quarter of Jerusalem's old city (where he also stopped briefly on his way and 'played with sweet Arab children'). And although he was praying at the Wall as one of a group of Jewish men, his focus was on speaking to God directly, sincerely and emotionally.

<center>***</center>

These narratives all involve orthodox Jews who display a concern with and care for the self, and who conduct introspection that is informed at least partly by meditative practices drawn from Buddhism. They show that at times, orthodox Jewish meditators and EDI participants attend the same meditation activities, which often take place in rented areas in *kibbutzim* (plural for *kibbutz*); and that their paths can cross in West Bank locations adjacent to Israeli settlements. Both sites—*kibbutzim* and West Bank settlements—have been historically and symbolically significant frontiers in the Zionist national project and its conflict with Palestinians. But whereas *kibbutzim* are associated primarily with Israel's secular-Jewish, socialist-Zionist 'pioneers'—who were, to a large extent, political precursors to EDI—West Bank settlements are identified principally with religious Zionism, the movement to which most orthodox meditators belong. Finally, in recent decades, both of these nationally significant types of communities have been undergoing considerable individualisation, with care of the self becoming more prevalent and valid in both.

This dissertation relies on over 14 months of fieldwork conducted in 2017-2018. It examines the diverse ways in which orthodox Jews in Israel and the occupied West Bank, and liberal-progressive Israeli activists for solidarity with Palestinians, employ Buddhist-derived meditative practices for pursuing objectives that are central for them, respectively, as contemporary Israeli Jews. The chapters link these people's projects of meditative self-cultivation to broader ethical complexities in which these projects are embedded. As we shall see, orthodox Jewish meditators and EDI participants utilize similar 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1988) drawn from Buddhism—ones focusing on mindfulness of thoughts, feelings and physical sensations. They do so, however, within dissimilar cosmological frameworks and in relation to divergent values and objectives.

Orthodox Jewish meditators and participants in EDI activities normally do not come in much direct contact. Moreover, Israeli meditators of either category relate to Palestinians in ways that can raise strong objections among the other. Yet as we have seen, at times they attend the same meditation activities and cross paths in West Bank locations. Thus, rather than being two distinct and bounded fieldsites, orthodox meditators and EDI participants may

be thought of, following Cook, Laidlaw and Mair, as two points on a single network of Israeli meditation practitioners (2009: 58). And by designing the boundaries of this study to incorporate both types of people, I wish to analyse comparisons between them 'that are germane to the theoretical questions that drive the research' (ibid.). These, as we shall see, consist primarily of the different ways in which people's ethical projects of self-fashioning intersect with their broader value considerations.

In the next sections, I shall introduce orthodox meditators and EDI participants, with a focus on locating their interest in meditation in the context of Israelis' increasing emphasis on individual wellbeing and autonomy in recent decades. Then, I discuss the diverse ways in which, among my different interlocutors, self-cultivation via meditation intersects with the ethical complexity entailed in submitting to multiple values. I argue that central to projects of self-fashioning are the different ways in which these relate to subjects' value concerns, and that Michel Foucault's highly influential model for describing and comparing ethical projects does not account sufficiently for the roles of plural values in ethical life.

Insight and mindfulness meditation among Israelis

Commonly translated as 'insight', the Pali word *vipassanā* refers to several related Buddhist meditation techniques. Traditionally, *vipassanā* practices have been employed almost exclusively by Theravāda Buddhist monastics, as part of 'a much larger package of mutually supporting practices and beliefs' centred on world renunciation (Wilson 2014: 19). The classic purpose of such techniques has been the development of the mental faculty of mindfulness (*sati*) (Pranke 2002: 889), and in turn the cultivation of insight into the true 'nature of things': that they are 'impermanent and unstable' (*anicca*), 'unsatisfactory' (*dukkha*) and 'not self' (*anattā*) (Gethin 1998: 187). When fully nurtured, the liberating wisdom (*paññā*) attained through *vipassanā* is said to lead to the ultimate goal of *nibbāna*: 'the cessation of suffering and freedom from rebirth' (Pranke 2002: 889). Yet even when less developed, it can still lead to 'rebirth in the highest heavenly realms' (Wilson 2014: 46).

Since the early twentieth century—following 'the direct and indirect pressures of colonialism' (McMahan and Braun 2017: 6)—insight meditation practices have become available, on a mass scale, not only for monastics but also for lay people in Burma and later in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Nepal (Cook 2010a: 1). This popularization of *vipassanā* has been described as 'the most significant development in Burmese Buddhism in the twentieth century' (Pranke 2002: 890) and as the chief transformation in Theravāda Buddhism more generally since the Second World War (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 237; Cook 2010a: 1). It has been inspired by 'reformist', 'protestant' or 'modernist' strands of Buddhism that have gained influence in Asia since the second part of the nineteenth century, emphasizing 'rational, scientific, and scriptural elements' of Buddhism, and 'meditational practice', at the expense of

'so-called popular or traditionalist' aspects (Baumann 2002: 55; see also Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988; Sharf 1995; Cook 2010a).

Since the 1970s, Buddhist and Buddhist-derived insight and mindfulness practices have begun to flourish dramatically in the West (Wilson 2014: 27; McMahan and Braun 2017: 9-10). Predominantly, they have taken 'streamlined forms' that focus on 'a single technique like mindfulness of the breath or sensations' (McMahan 2017a: 35), and have been depicted—in line with 'modernist' interpretations—as 'psychological, spiritual, or scientific rather than as *religious*' (McMahan 2008: 184-185; emphasis in original). This has culminated in the contemporary 'mindfulness movement', as part of which practices drawn from Buddhist *vipassanā* have become 'part of a billions-of-dollars-a-year self-help industry' and 'ubiquitous in the field of mental health' (Stuart 2017: 159-161; see also Cook 2016, 2017). Currently, mindfulness is instructed in schools, hospitals, prisons, major businesses, even armies, and most recently, through mobile apps, with much of this penetration into largely 'secular spheres of activity' relying on 'scientific studies' of meditative practice, which have 'skyrocketed' (McMahan and Braun 2017: 1).

For most of the Israeli meditators I discuss, the terms '*vipassanā*' and 'mindfulness' refer to the same type of practices: ones facilitating awareness of bodily sensations, feelings and thoughts (usually, through continuously attending to one's breath or mentally 'scanning' the body for sensations). Moreover, for many of these meditators, such techniques are largely removed from the aims of attaining insight into the 'three characteristics' of life as described by the Buddha—impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self—and from the ultimate goal of *nibbāna*. When using the term 'meditation', therefore, I refer to Buddhist-derived *vipassanā* and mindfulness practices in a broad sense. And I employ the more specific terms 'insight meditation' or '*vipassanā*' when the people concerned conceptualize this way the techniques they utilize (which normally is indeed coupled among them with some attempt to develop insight into the 'three characteristics').

As we shall see throughout this dissertation, mindfulness practices afford being employed within diverse contexts and for various ends (cf. Keane 2016: 30, 202). While in Buddhist settings such techniques are normally intertwined with Buddhist religious tenets (Cook 2010a; Shulman 2010), outside such frameworks they permit various interpretations. The vacuum created when promoting detachment from ideas and viewpoints, it seems, cannot help but be filled by particular cosmological and teleological positions—in this case, Jewish, romantic, and liberal-progressive—according to which these practices are then deployed (see also McMahan 2017a). So, while these contemplative techniques are originally part of a Buddhist attempt to 'tame' the minds of those who utilize them, the different Israelis I discuss also domesticate, and thereby discipline, these very practices.

The demand for *vipassanā* retreats in Israel—available there since the late 1980s (Loss 2007: 21)—appears to be among the highest in the world when compared to the size of the country (Pagis 2008: 10; see also Fulder 2017). Why is this so? *American* Jews are said to have a 'particular affection for Buddhism', and indeed their proportion in Buddhist circles, and the key roles they have played in popularizing mindfulness, are disproportionate to their percentage in the United States population (Sigalow 2019: 1-3). One explanation for this is Jews' overrepresentation 'in the segments of [American] society to which Buddhism appeals most strongly: the highly educated upper middle class, intellectuals, artists, and bohemians' (5). Another is the 'focus on suffering' shared by Judaism and Buddhism (ibid.).

This helps to elucidate why a relatively high number of Israeli Jews, too, appear to be interested in Buddhist-derived meditation. First, such practices have gained 'wide appeal among (mostly) educated and relatively affluent people around the world' (McMahan 2017a: 35), and Israel, after being 'a society of austerity in the 1950s', has become since the 1990s 'part of the global economy and culture' and has turned 'affluent' (Ben-Porat 2008: 104-105). This suggests that such practices can now resonate with many Israelis.

Indeed, the current concern with *vipassanā* and mindfulness among Israelis appears to be part of a larger trend of religious innovation in the country that researchers typically credit to the widespread liberalization of its economy and society since the mid-1980s (e.g. Fischer 2011; Klin-Oron 2014; Persico 2015; Stern 2015a; Kaplan and Werczberger 2017). Following this transformation, the values of 'individualism and individual autonomy' have 'become increasingly entrenched' among Israelis (Weiss 2015a: 425). Moreover, practices focusing on the individual's internal life, which researchers often describe as 'New Age-related' (Kaplan and Werczberger 2017: 579), now flourish among Israelis of various backgrounds to an unprecedented extent (Persico 2014a: 300; Werczberger and Huss 2014).

Second, as part of their mandatory military service, many young Israelis encounter 'fear and anxiety, and not infrequently […] injury and death' (Maoz 2006: 133). Everyday life in Israel can also generate similar experiences, since in many periods—even if less so in recent years—the country is 'exposed to terrorism and death on an almost daily basis' (ibid.). Indeed, according to some (e.g. Fulder 2017), much of the interest in 'the Dharma' among Israelis is due to the 'unease', and the subsequent 'desire to be free', that the conflict with the Arab world generates. And the combination of these factors—of a liberalized economy, high affluence in global standards *and* a continuous participation in armed conflict—appears fairly unique to Israelis. Finally, interest in Buddhism and in meditation has also grown following exposure to such contents through the practice, popular among Jewish Israelis, of travelling to South and East Asia for an extended period following military service. Israeli backpackers in India, for example—where *vipassanā* retreats are widely available—often describe their army period, at

least partly, as 'frustrating and despair-causing', and consider travelling a 'site for reversed experiences and self-transformation' (Maoz 2006: 127-128).

Orthodox Jewish meditators

Orthodox Israeli Jews who wish to learn insight and mindfulness meditation, or to improve their proficiency in such practices, do so in several different locales. The first main category is 'Jewish meditation' (*meditatsia Yehudit*): classes, silent retreats and workshops that have emerged in recent years and that emphasize the 'Jewishness' of the meditative exercises taught. 'Jewish meditation' teachers normally present meditative techniques that are derived from Buddhist traditions (and at times also from additional ones, e.g. Hindu) as resources to be harnessed by Jewish students for religious Jewish ends.

Accordingly, instructors teach these practices in ways that are disconnected—either largely or entirely—from South and East Asian social contexts, concepts, cosmologies, soteriological goals, additional ritual forms and material objects (images, statues, alters, etc.). Instead, 'Jewish meditation' instructors teach such practices within observant (albeit in some cases not orthodox) Jewish social and institutional contexts; and depict them as appropriate and advantageous from a religious Jewish standpoint. They claim that such practices help Jews to attain goals that are desirable from a Jewish theological perspective; that there is evidence in Jewish texts of past Jewish sages utilizing similar techniques; and/or that there are reasons to believe that these practices really originated in the *Jewish* tradition and only arrived in 'the East' later (see also Mautner 2016).

The second main category of events in which orthodox students participate is what may be referred to as 'Dharma' activities. These consist of silent retreats, courses and workshops attended primarily by non-observant Israeli Jews (including EDI participants, whom I discuss in more detail below). In these events, students are instructed in practices derived from Buddhist traditions, and meditation training is often accompanied by discussions of elements of (primarily) Buddhist thought and 'psychology'. However, instructors normally eschew the label 'religion', preferring instead to describe what they teach not as 'Buddhism' but rather as 'Dharma'[2] (the teaching of the Buddha concerning the 'underlying way of things'—Gethin 1998: 24). Influenced by 'modernist' understandings of the Buddhist tradition, they argue that what the Buddha taught—and subsequently, what they practise—is a universally applicable philosophical and psychological 'mind training', rather than a sectarian 'religion' (see Loss 2010: 95).

Some orthodox Israeli Jews attempt to practise additional, more 'traditional' types of Jewish meditative practices, such as imagining and concentrating on divine names, especially

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[2] 'Dhamma', the Pali equivalent to the Sanskrit 'Dharma', is also frequently used.

the Hebrew four-letter name of God (or tetragrammaton). But as in Jewish meditation more broadly—in which, since the twentieth century, the focus has shifted to 'reflective investigation of consciousness' (Persico 2019a)—these techniques are often combined with Buddhist-derived introspection, and it is on the latter that I focus in this thesis.[3]

Orthodox Jewish meditators are diverse in terms of age, class, ethnicity and religious affiliation. Rather than being rooted in one particular locale or belonging to a single religious community, they amount to a network or category of people who meditate in the same settings despite arriving from diverse orthodox backgrounds. In this dissertation, I focus primarily on the more 'committed' among them: those who, after encountering Buddhist-derived meditation, continue practising and attend repeatedly retreats or classes. Committed orthodox meditators (with the partial exception of established teachers) tend to be young (in their twenties and thirties) and often unmarried, thus normally not having small children or childcare responsibilities. Moreover, they are usually affiliated with religious Zionism, but the influences of Haredi (ultra-orthodox) Judaism on their Jewish observance and thought are discernible (I discuss these categories presently). Committed orthodox meditators are also largely Ashkenazim (Jews of European origin). And common occupations among them are students in religious seminaries (*yeshivot*), alternative therapists, educators and musicians.

Finally, while I frequently encountered orthodox women in retreats and classes, with some of whom I also conducted interviews, during my fieldwork I got to know thoroughly mostly men. This was so for reasons of 'modesty'. Various meditation activities attended by orthodox students are for men only, or involve significant separation of the sexes, following the organizers' interpretation of Jewish law (*halacha*) as requiring men and women to remain apart in religious and other events (see also Engelberg 2011). Consequently, normally it was not viewed as appropriate for me to meet orthodox women (unmarried and especially married ones). It is largely men I depict, therefore, when discussing orthodox meditators.

The people I term 'orthodox Jewish meditators' can be described broadly as belonging either to 'religious Zionism' or to 'Haredi' (ultra-orthodox) Judaism. They reside in 'Israel proper' or, just as commonly, in Israeli settlements in the West Bank (which they designate, using biblical and official Israeli terminology, as 'Judea and Samaria'). The majority are affiliated with 'religious Zionism', whose members are also known as 'national religious' (*dati'im leumi'im*) and are recognized by knitted skullcaps (*kippot srugot*) worn by males. Around 22% of Israeli Jews reportedly belong to religious Zionism (Herman et al. 2014), making them constitute roughly 15% of all Israelis. A 'widely diverse' movement (Stern 2012: 78), religious Zionism is unique within Israeli society for its ideological integration of religion and nationalism (Engelberg 2011: 433). This means that it differs both from originally-

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[3] Additionally, while I have encountered orthodox Jews who learned mindfulness in medical and therapeutic contexts and later attended 'Jewish meditation' activities, I do not address the former types of settings.

hegemonic secular Zionism, and from traditional Haredi denunciations of Zionist nationalism as a sacrilegious attempt to usher in the messianic era instead of passively waiting for God to do so (ibid.; Stadler and Taragin-Zeller 2017: 136).

A significant minority of orthodox meditators can be described as Haredim (lit. 'those who tremble' before God), who reportedly form around 12% of all Israeli citizens (Malach and Cahaner 2018). The Haredi group—whose male members are recognized by their dark suits, black hats and white shirts—is 'located at the outermost religious pole' of the Jewish continuum, being noted typically for its 'uncompromising adherence to the strictest version' of *halacha* or Jewish law (Bilu and Goodman 1997: 379-380). Moreover, many Haredim strive 'at all costs to insulate themselves from the polluting effects of modernization' (ibid.). Religious Zionists, while maintaining a separate school system, serve enthusiastically in the Israeli military, 'participate fully in the workforce', normally 'obtain an academic degree', and consume (at times even produce) secular art and entertainment (Engelberg 2011: 434). Haredim, in contrast, classically 'live in segregated "enclave" communities' (ibid.), and from 'a material standpoint', usually lead 'exceedingly modest lives, have sizeable families, reside in dense quarters, and rely on government support' (Stadler and Taragin-Zeller 2017: 136).

Some Haredim participate in 'Jewish meditation' activities in orthodox settings and then continue practising on their own. Few, however, attend meditation events regularly, and even fewer join activities in non-orthodox (e.g. 'Dharmic') locales. Therefore, among the 'committed' meditators with whom I interacted regularly, only a handful were Haredim, and amidst them, most were newly religious Jews (a category I shall discuss below).

However, the line between religious Zionists and Haredim is often blurry (Garb 2009: 104; Caplan 2017: 231; Taragin-Zeller 2019: 6), and many meditators are difficult to categorize. Among religious Zionists who are committed to meditation, several are influenced by Hardali (acronym for 'Haredi nationalist', known also as *Torani*) teachings, characterized by 'hyper-nationalism' or 'hard' right-wing politics combined with a stringent observance of Jewish law (Mozes 2009; Mozes 2010a: 36). In some cases, this involves, unlike for Haredim, considering the state of Israel sacred (Harel 2017: 140).

Moreover, in recent years religious Zionists of all kinds have been displaying an increasing interest in Hasidism (Mozes 2009), attempting 'to draw inspiration, tools, and cultural capital from early Hasidic texts and practices' and thereby rejuvenate traditional Judaism (Persico 2014a: 287). This neo-Hasidic trend partakes in a 'New Age' search for subjectivity-centred spirituality: emphasizing emotions and intent in divine worship, such teachings transfer Judaism's centre of gravity from Torah study and religious commandments to the individual's inner world (Persico 2019b: 109). Religious Zionists' turn to Hasidism has had, therefore, a far-reaching impact, adding a strong 'measure of individuality' to their classically collectivist theology (Stern 2014: 232, 238). Among orthodox meditators, an

engagement with Hasidism is nearly universal, and particularly salient is the attempt to combine neo-Hasidic thought and practice (especially, as we shall see, those influenced by the Breslav and Chabad traditions) with a religious Zionist orientation (see also Garb 2009: 104; Mozes 2010a: 213). Similarly, most Haredi meditators are affiliated with Hasidic, primarily Breslav and Chabad, communities.

Several orthodox meditators, both religious Zionists and Haredim, are *ba'alei teshuva* (lit. 'masters of return', hereafter: BTs), namely Jews who are 'returning' from the secular lifestyle to a religiously observant one (Persico 2014b: 32). BTs 'bring with them the dispositions and preferences of (post)modern western culture', thus stimulating the formation of new forms of religious practice (33). Yet frequently they also attempt to maintain a more stringent, and presumably sincere, form of observance even than other orthodox Jews (Bilu and Mark 2012: 56-57; Taragin-Zeller 2019).

One 'primary' site for welcoming BTs 'back into the fold' is Breslav Hasidism: a dispersed tradition centred around the teachings of Rabbi Nachman of Breslav (1772-1810) and his followers, which emphasize 'unconditional faith, imagination, and emotional arousal' (Bilu and Mark 2012: 51). Consisting predominantly of BTs, the Breslav community has experienced unprecedented burgeoning growth in Israel since the 1990s (Persico 2014b: 32-33), and like the BT movement more generally, it operates as 'a fruitful wellspring of contemporary cultural creation' (Persico 2014c: 99). Accordingly, most orthodox meditators are influenced, to varying degrees, by Breslav teachings. Moreover, they often find inspiration also in the Chabad movement—'the Hasidic epitome of scholarship and cultivated introspection' as a means of 'the mystical negation of the self'—which likewise consists of many BTs (Bilu and Mark 2012: 47, 56).

Finally, in this thesis I do not address meditators who belong to non-orthodox, or 'liberal', Jewish denominations such as Reform and Conservative Judaism (cf. Niculescu 2015). These denominations are relatively small in Israel (Pagis, Cadge and Tal 2018: 602-603), and orthodox meditators normally do not consider their members properly observant. Consequently, when referring to 'religious meditators' or 'observant meditators', I mean specifically orthodox ones.

Settling the land, settling the mind

A central religious Zionist ethos—associated with the Gush Emunim ('Bloc of the Faithful') settlement movement and its interpretation of the teachings of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hacohen Kook (1865-1935)—has held a 'dialectical' perspective concerning the secular Zionist enterprise (Inbari 2007: 700). Imbuing it 'with covert messianic significance' (ibid.), this approach considers Israel's founding following the Holocaust, and its capturing of further parts of the biblical land of Israel in 1967, as 'part of a linear process towards the redemption

of the Jewish People and the world as a whole' (Stern 2012: 78). In this statist, messianic theology, redemption is bound up with the maintenance of 'a physical union' between Jews and the land of Israel, a union that moves history to its 'redemptive end' (Harel 2017: 128).

Following the 1967 Six Day war, religious Zionists, by leading the settlement movement in the occupied West Bank and Gaza strip, have moved from the 'rearguard' to a controversial 'vanguard' position in Israeli society (Engelberg 2011: 433). Undoubtedly, the settlement movement has played a significant role in shaping the identity of religious-Zionist society, setting its political agenda and 'determining its disposition in terms of education and values' (Leon 2010: 65). But while most religious Zionists identify to varying degrees with the political right, the majority do not live on settlements and are not diehard political activists (Engelberg 2011: 433). Indeed, there has been an increasing division within religious Zionism between a pragmatic camp based on the new middle class—consisting, for example, of engineers, software developers, managers and lawyers—and 'a radical nationalist camp' (Leon 2010: 61, 73). Accordingly, most religious Zionists are much less 'messianic' than they are often presented as being (Mozes 2010b), with 'collective redemption' not being the ultimate motivating factor among a growing number of them (Stern 2014: 11). Even among 'settlers in Judea and Samaria', arguments for preserving the integrity of the entire land are based primarily on security considerations rather than on 'redemption' (Brown 2008: 176).

Similarly, for most orthodox meditators, collectivist commitments to the flourishing of the Jewish people and to its unique role in history amount to an important dimension of their identity, and provide a sense of purpose, pride and belonging. Yet the vast majority do not spend a significant amount of time carrying out political activism, with self-realization being a more pressing concern than national and universal redemption. As the state of Israel is now in place, individualism is entrenched and many currently feel disenchanted regarding the statist redemption project (as I shall explain shortly), spiritual goals seem to meditators just as valuable and valid—if not more so—than national ones (see also Fischer 2011; Stern 2014; Harel 2017).

Nevertheless, the classical religious Zionist ethos of collectivism does play an important role in the lives of some, including in the ways in which they view the significance of meditation. Such orthodox meditators present their emphasis on individual and 'inner' matters as contributing to the world's redemption, maintaining that one can work for the collective through caring for oneself (cf. Klin-Oron 2014; Tamari 2014). These religious meditators link the 'return' of meditative practices to the 'sacred domain of Judaism', and their employment by Jews in the land of Israel, to the effort to revive the biblical prophets' 'meditative traditions', which they consider crucial for the progression of redemption (see Chapter 4).

When explaining their move towards more individualistic tendencies, orthodox meditators mention political factors. In 2005, Israel vacated and demolished unilaterally all its settlements in the Gaza Strip and four settlements in the northern West Bank (Inbari 2007: 697-699). Known as 'the Disengagement'—but normally referred to by orthodox meditators as 'the Expulsion' (*ha'gerush*)—this event has 'constituted a profound crisis' for many. Like previous territorial withdrawals, the Disengagement raised powerfully the puzzle of 'how can a state that uproots settlements and hands over parts of the biblical Land of Israel to Arab rule be considered "absolutely sacred?"' (699), thereby accentuating 'tensions between earthly realities and transcendental ideals' (Harel 2017: 129). Consequently, a growing number of religiously motivated settlers and other orthodox Israeli Jews have become 'ever more disillusioned with the Israeli state' (ibid.), creating a desire for 'alternative visions of redemption that give room to individual expression and fulfillment' (139; see also Stern 2014).

Additionally, at times orthodox meditators explain their shift towards greater interest in 'spirituality' as resulting from economic factors, namely Israel's increasing incorporation into the capitalist global economy in recent decades and the ensuing affluence among many. As one meditator put it, 'the times of survival—in which people used to work for many hours just to get bread—are over. This allows for an inner and spiritual search to take place'. Moreover, religious meditators often mention the 'tension' found throughout the world, including among Israelis, and which has presumably motivated many to become interested in meditation. This tension, they tend to argue, is due to economic and technological factors such as the high pace of people's lives and their lack of awareness and 'connection' to themselves following the predominance of smartphones (cf. Cook 2018).

Relatedly, several committed orthodox meditators grew up in upper-middle class suburbs (often moving to settlements in the West Bank to attend *yeshiva* or following their marriage). These meditators, to be sure, often reject what they consider the staid materialism and bourgeois lifestyles of most religious Zionists (see Leon 2010; Harel 2017). But the settings where many reside and where meditation activities take place—despite the 'counter-culture and New Age ambience' (Fischer 2011: 302) and seemingly 'ramshackle', 'self-built homes' (Steinhardt 2010: 37)—frequently provide middle-class ease, too.

Similarly, in recent years a shift has taken place among Haredim 'from an ascetic and insular fundamentalism to a piety that demands more involvement with mainstream society' (Stadler and Taragin-Zeller 2017: 133). This has involved Haredim adopting 'elements of Israel's mainstream identity'—e.g. 'the Zionist ethos and the country's models of citizenship and voluntarism'—with some even beginning to enrol in universities and build professional careers (138, 150; see also Zicherman and Cahaner 2012; Finkelman 2014). Such transformations have resulted, at least partly, from cuts to the financial support the community receives from the government (Stadler and Taragin-Zeller 2017: 139). Haredim's

greater engagement with broader Israeli society—in which 'New Age-related' practices such as meditation are now commonly found (Kaplan and Werczberger 2017: 579)—helps to explain why they too are becoming interested in adopting these techniques.

Orthodox meditators today, then, are far from living in the close-knit and presumably highly-regulative Jewish communities of the past. Accordingly, the influence of rabbis is limited, with meditators normally facing little constraint when choosing whether to heed their guidelines (e.g. pertaining to whether meditation and particular settings for learning it are 'kosher'), if they ask for them at all (see also Ettinger 2017). Thus, personal autonomy plays a central part in the ethical and religious lives of observant meditators (which is true also for EDI participants, as I explain below). This demonstrates the historical significance of the unprecedented contemporary popularity of meditation among Jews (Persico 2019a). Following the employment of such practices, the kernel of Jewish life moves from communal belonging, participation in public rituals and conforming to traditionally sanctioned obligations towards individual spiritual flourishing.

The Engaged Dharma Israel group

Most orthodox meditators do not consider the Palestinians around them as playing any significant role within their own political-theological projects (see also Stern 2015b: 158). These are premised, normally, on the Jewish people's 'return' to what religious meditators regard as their ancient homeland, with the more Zionist among them also emphasizing, as we have seen, the reestablishment of Jewish national sovereignty there. And while orthodox meditators often consider unfortunate the prices Palestinian individuals and communities have paid as part of this process, even the Haredim among them normally regard it as clearly warranted and justified, and the suffering as resulting primarily from Arab decisions. Consequently, when we consider 'ethical complexity' among orthodox meditators, we should note that their relationship towards Palestinians—which many other people regard as crucial in this context—is not of particular significance to them (see, however, Mautner 2016).

This brings me again to EDI. Over the past decades, many around the world have invoked an interpretation of the Buddhist tradition as politically engaged, applying Buddhist teachings to matters such as 'human rights, economic justice, ethnic tolerance, racial healing, and environmental protection' (Queen 2002: 324). So, while traditional Buddhist discourse and action seek to reduce suffering or dissatisfaction (Pali: *dukkha*) primarily in the life of the practitioner, Engaged Buddhists strive to address it also at the social, institutional, and collective levels (325). Consequently, there have been debates as to whether Engaged Buddhism has a long history, or is instead an 'inherently new' development brought about by Buddhism's encounter with Western sociopolitical thought in the nineteenth century (Henry 2006: 4-7). For instance, some maintain that in working toward the creation of 'a good society',

Engaged Buddhism forgets the tradition's ultimate goal: the liberation of every individual from society and the world (Dietrick 2003: 263; cf. Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 244-245; Cook 2010a: 43).

EDI was founded following the 2008-2009 Israeli war in the Gaza Strip, and during a period in which—subsequent to Israel's Oslo Accords with the Palestinian Liberation Organization in the 1990s—the traditional Israeli left's collective action has weakened significantly (Weiss 2015a: 419-420). One way in which participants describe the group's objective is to deal with the *dukkha* generated by the violence between the two peoples. Specifically, participants try to contest this violence and decrease injuries through working regularly with members of a few (at the time of my fieldwork, three) Palestinian communities living under Israeli military control in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. EDI's support and solidarity concerns matters such as the building of a 'separation barrier' that limits Palestinians' access to agricultural lands; takeover of additional lands by turning them into Israeli 'national parks' or 'natural reserves'; house demolitions; and harassments by Israeli citizens and soldiers.[4]

Many if not most Israeli meditators, including orthodox ones, regard their practice of meditation as unrelated to politics (cf. Candea 2011)—perhaps other than by having, as believed by meditators in other settings, some 'beneficial ripple effects on society' (Queen 2002: 325; Wilson 2014: 160). For committed EDI members, in contrast, the Dharma cannot simply be 'apolitical', especially not in Israel. As they see it, a troubling aspect of the Dharma's otherwise heartening success in having reached diverse parts of Israeli society is that it is now being practised on lands deprived from Palestinians and by soldiers involved in oppressing civilians. And this contradicts the morality (Pali: *sīla*) that is integral to the Dharma and to its aim of improving all beings' welfare.

Thus, in line with what they consider the group's Dharmic approach, EDI members attempt to respond beneficially to the *dukkha* Israeli participants experience as part of living in political conflict. This involves enabling Israelis to come in direct contact with the realities of military control over Palestinians. Indeed, the group—while holding the current state of affairs as violent and unfair, and believing that Israelis play a major role in this—strives to be neutral with respect to contending views concerning the conflict's roots and its desirable solutions. EDI members often criticize Israelis for not acknowledging and addressing the suffering and injustice Palestinians experience. But like many Engaged Buddhists (King 2009: 29), and unlike some other Israeli activists, they seek to contest deeds they regard as aggressive or discriminatory without displaying hostility towards the people committing them.

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[4] In this thesis, I am in no way able to address the various dimensions of this intricate political situation. Accordingly, my goal is not to ventriloquize EDI members' critiques (Heywood 2018: 17) or 'denounce' injustices with which they are concerned (Jean-Klein and Riles 2005), but rather, more modestly, to analyse central dimensions of different Israeli meditators' ethical projects.

Furthermore, participants in EDI activities consider self-cultivation via insight meditation and solidarity activism to be mutually reinforcing: contemplative self-fashioning improves the quality of political action, which contributes, in turn, to self-cultivation. Specifically, meditation turns one into a more skilful and sustainable activist. And activism exposes one to suffering and dissatisfaction caused not only by individual-psychological factors but also by social and political structures and institutions, making one's understanding of the Dharma more expansive and well rounded.

EDI participants' social characteristics are similar to those of most other non-orthodox Jewish-Israeli meditators (Obadia 2002; Pagis 2008: 20; Loss 2010: 93) and 'progressive', left-wing activists (Weiss 2014: 13; Wright 2018: 22). They are mostly secular Ashkenazim (Jews of European origin), highly educated (with several of them holding or studying for advanced academic degrees) and quite a few have spent lengthy periods abroad. Yet despite their economic privilege, bureaucratic competence, and cultural status, the political power of such people has been declining in recent decades. Finally, most EDI participants, including committed ones, are women.

At the time of my fieldwork, the more committed EDI participants consisted of 10-15 Israelis in ages ranging from late twenties to early sixties, and normally they either did not have children or had ones old enough to live on their own. They worked largely as therapists, professionals or in art-related occupations, and a minority of more experienced activists among them were employed by civil society organizations. Participants would drive to EDI activities in their spare time, particularly on weekends (when orthodox Jewish residents of nearby Israeli settlements would rest in observance of the Sabbath). The majority would participate primarily in activities taking place in one of three Palestinian locations, meaning that they would meet EDI members who regularly visit other Palestinian communities only a few times a year.

EDI participants arrive with varied levels of experience in Dharma practice and political activism. Consequently, the group's activities are offered at different levels of difficulty and challenge. For instance, EDI defines one of its roles as helping members of the Israeli Dharma community to step outside their 'comfort zones' and turn their gaze gradually towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Members attempt therefore to make this step more convenient and less threatening, among other things by designing relatively 'soft' activities such as enjoyable and children-friendly olive harvesting events in relatively tranquil areas, carried out in collaboration with Palestinian families.

Indeed, some core EDI members first attended such events and later began participating in activities involving tense encounters with other Israelis. Such participants are willing to act in ways that are considered radical by Israeli standards (e.g. staying overnight at a Palestinian village while the Israeli army is forcing a closure)—though without necessarily

adopting a self-image as 'leftist activists'. Frequently, changes of this sort take place following participants developing genial ties with Palestinians, which they experience as highly meaningful (see Chapter 6).

Moreover, some core members—who previously were (and at times simultaneously are) involved in other types of solidarity, anti-occupation and human rights activism with Palestinians—do not consider themselves 'Dharma practitioners'. Oftentimes, such EDI members find the attitudes prevalent in other activist groups too 'macho' (see also Weiss 2014: 105), for example when it comes to dealing with difficult emotions that activism invokes; or too harsh concerning ideological matters. So while normally these participants do not conduct Dharma practice outside EDI activities, they appreciate the reflective and accommodating approach utilized as part of these events. That is, they find this 'Dharmic' approach supportive of, at times even indispensable for, their involvement in activism.

Indeed, EDI activities may be described as 'reflective activism', in which participants attempt to bring Dharmic contemplation and wisdom to challenging occasions, including heated and nerve-racking encounters with Israeli soldiers and West Bank settlers (see Chapter 5). Likewise, at least some try bringing awareness of the conflict, and direct experiences of the 'interdependence' of Israelis and Palestinians, into their personal meditation. Nevertheless, a few members argue that EDI activities demonstrate that the distinction between Dharma practice and political activism is itself overly 'dualistic' and thus simplistic (they would add, perhaps, that it is based on illusory labels with which people falsely identify). In practice, they explain, meditating and displaying solidarity with Palestinians are two expressions of the same tendency to act in beneficent and caring ways towards oneself and others.

Fieldwork: Significant features

Throughout my fieldwork, I resided in a ground-level flat in an alley in the Nachlaot neighbourhood of West Jerusalem, known for being the home of many neo-Hasidic orthodox Jews as well as spiritually-inclined non-observant Israelis. Centrally located within Jerusalem, this area was convenient for reaching several of the sites I visited.

On weekdays, when not attending meditation retreats, I attempted to meet interlocutors and participate with them in different events. In the case of orthodox meditators, these included classes and lessons on meditation or on Jewish spirituality (primarily in Jerusalem). And in the case of EDI participants, they consisted of meditation groups and meetings for planning activist events (in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv) or visits to Palestinian counterparts (in the West Bank and East Jerusalem). Alternatively, I would spend time with meditators, mostly orthodox, in restaurants or coffee shops (especially in or around Jerusalem's Machane Yehuda market). I sought to engage regularly with different types of interlocutors, and would join primarily activities that most members of the relevant group

seemed to consider central. And when attending these events, I tried appraising how they related to such people's projects of meditative self-fashioning.

On weekends, I aimed at spending the Sabbath with orthodox meditators, as it offers a close view of observant Jews' communal and family life (see also Stern 2014: 17). Fridays and Saturdays, however, are normally when EDI activities take place, as they are the days in which most participants do not work. Consequently, on some weekends I attended EDI activities, and on others I spend time with orthodox meditators in synagogues as well as in or around their homes.

My fieldwork benefitted from both categories of meditators being very accommodating to me. Orthodox meditators normally treated me in a friendly and intimate manner. My interest in their lives and in Jewish tradition, despite my 'secular' background, was something most of them appreciated; and my willingness to partake in religious Jewish practice, even if merely out of intellectual curiosity, was usually viewed as 'a step in the right direction' (Fader 2009: 18). Moreover, on several occasions I assisted orthodox teachers in setting up and running retreats—e.g. preparing food or ringing bells to signal the beginning of sessions—which enabled me to get to know better both teachers and students. In the case of EDI, while prior to my fieldwork I did not have much experience in activism, participants belong, broadly speaking, to the same social group as I do. And as their initiative is one in which I was interested not only academically but also personally (as an Israeli and a meditator), from an early stage in my fieldwork EDI participants considered me a group member.

Like the vast majority of orthodox meditators and EDI activists, I am a native speaker of Hebrew, the language in which we communicated. Moreover, akin to most EDI participants, I understand only basic Arabic. Nevertheless, I was still able to comprehend and participate in the majority of conversations between EDI activists and the group's Palestinian counterparts—which took place either in Hebrew, in English, or at a level of Arabic that I was largely able to handle.

One limitation of my fieldwork choices concerns Jewish textual study. For most orthodox Jews, the reading and analysis of sacred texts, particularly rabbinic ones such as Gemara (a component of the Talmud), are central and formative. This, however, is not something I emphasize in this dissertation: while on many occasions I studied with orthodox meditators Gemara and other Jewish works (especially Hasidic ones or those of Rabbi Kook), I did not do so systematically. And while I frequently visited *yeshivot*, the types of institutions where many orthodox meditators received education, I did not enrol in such a seminary as a student and do not possess the skills acquired there. Finally, for reasons of space, I discuss only occasionally and briefly additional contemporary 'spiritual' practices with which orthodox meditators engage.

Self-fashioning and multiple values

So far, I have introduced the different Israeli meditators addressed in this thesis, emphasizing how individual self-fashioning through meditation has become an increasingly valid, feasible and central endeavour for them. I now discuss the theme of the main theoretical contribution of this dissertation: the relationship between these people's different projects of self-cultivation and the ethical complexities in which these projects are embedded.

In his programmatic volume, *An Anthropology of Ethics*, James Faubion relies extensively on Michel Foucault's 'diagnostics' of ethics (2011: 13). Yet Foucault's formulation, according to Faubion, is 'weak' in its address of 'ethical complexity': identifying relations with others excessively with *parrhesia* or truth-speaking, it is unable to account for situations in which one ethical subject discovers being 'yet a second ethical subject' (ibid.). Similarly, I find Foucault's analysis of ethics highly useful, but limited when it comes to addressing ethical complexity—though for a different reason than for Faubion.

Following Foucault, in order to describe and analyse Israeli meditators' ethical projects, I discuss their 'forms of subjectivation', or ways in which they constitute themselves as ethical subjects via Buddhist-derived meditative practices. For Foucault (1990: 26-32, 37; 1997: 263-266), such projects of self-fashioning consist of: (I) *ontology*, the 'ethical substance' or part of the self that the project attempts to transform (II); *deontology*, the 'mode of subjectivation' or category in relation to which people recognize the project as applying to them; (III) *ascetics*, the self-forming techniques or practices people perform; (IV) *teleology*, the kind of being one aspires to become.

This formulation has been employed extensively by anthropologists for describing and comparing different ethical projects (Laidlaw 2018a: 178, 181). Within it, the components of 'ontology' and 'deontology' can be said to cover much, though perhaps not all, of the ethical subjects' cosmologies. By this I mean, following Soumhya Venkatesan, people's understandings of how 'core ontological entities' interact and are ordered, an aspect that, as Venkatesan demonstrates, is necessary for accounting fully for projects of self-fashioning (2014: 77-78).

What Foucault's framework lacks, I maintain, is attention to values, and particularly to the prevalence of value pluralism in social life (see Robbins 2013): to multiple values, including ones found in competition or tension with one another, often being central to the same ethical project. A similar understanding concerning this limitation in Foucault's model can be found, implicitly, in the classic ethnographies by James Laidlaw and Joel Robbins. Both rely on Foucault's discussion of 'forms of subjectivation' to portray their interlocutors' projects of self-fashioning (Laidlaw 1995: 19-20, 389-394; Robbins 2004: 217-219). Moreover, both highlight value conflicts in their analyses, and appear to take ethical complexity as consisting largely of such conflicts (e.g. Laidlaw 1995: 7, 394; Robbins 2004: 4, 332; see also Robbins

2013; Laidlaw 2014a: 167-173). But when addressing values, both do so largely independently of Foucault's formulation of ethics, which suggests they do not find it pertinent for probing this matter.

Perhaps the component of 'teleology' in Foucault's model can be thought to cover roughly one value, or something that is 'ultimately good and desirable' (Robbins and Sommerschuh 2016: 8) to the people involved in a given ethical project. Alternatively, Faubion suggests expanding Foucault's parameter of 'deontology' or 'mode of subjectivation' to include not only people's obligations for fashioning themselves in a particular way, but also, among other things, the values encouraging them to do so (2011: 50-52). Neither option, however, is sufficient by itself. As I shall demonstrate through discussing Israeli meditators, several values can relate to the same attempt at self-fashioning, and they may do so in diverse ways that include not only informing the goal of a given ethical project (teleology) or the reason actors find it compelling (deontology). Projects of self-fashioning may promote or be stimulated by people's main values, but they may also (among other things) come into conflict with some of these values or may be less effective in realizing them than other means. Moreover, different ethical projects can compete over the right way to fulfil specific values. So, distinct and often contesting values interact in various ways with social actors' projects of self-fashioning, and a concrete manner of accounting for this appears missing from Foucault's highly influential formulation.

Cultivation and complexity

In Part I of this dissertation (chapters 1-4), I discuss orthodox Jewish meditators and the role of Buddhist-derived meditative practices in their ethical lives. I argue that three main values, which frame my arguments in these chapters, are central for these people. First, orthodox meditators value upholding what they consider correct Jewish conduct, views and attitudes, which I refer to as *orthodoxy*. As I explained above, oftentimes committed orthodox meditators are influenced by groups that strictly adhere to all the rules of Jewish law and even intensify them (Fischer 2014: 160). Significantly, this takes place in the context of various orthodox Jews, particularly religious Zionists, currently becoming more lenient (Ettinger 2017), with many even leaving the orthodox fold (Heymann 2013). Unlike such people, committed orthodox meditators frequently appreciate aspects of Haredi Judaism, particularly what they consider its sincere approach towards authentic Jewish tradition.

Second, orthodox meditators are concerned with what they term *spirituality*: experiencing or arriving at greater inner purity, psychological wellbeing or improved character traits—and consequently also at increased proximity to God. Normally, they address this using language that emphasizes ethical development, or through contemporary therapeutic and psychological discourse or via Jewish mystical terminology. For religious meditators, then,

spirituality revolves around knowing, mastering and healing the self (see also Pagis 2020), which may result in greater intimacy with the Creator.

Accordingly, for orthodox meditators—unlike what they regard as the case for most religious Jews—Jewish observance is coupled with awareness of inner states. Consequently, they strive to experience Jewish law not merely as a set of 'external', Godly- and communally-sanctioned dictates and prescribed practices, but also to discover its ethical significance for 'spiritual' transformation. They are familiar, to be sure, with detailed instructions, found within the vast rabbinic textual corpus, on how to conduct themselves in numerous everyday instances such as tying one's shoes and what to say and do after using the toilet. Bodily practices as such are therefore not what religious meditators consider missing from standard orthodox observance. For most, the problem is rather that they do not regard such practices as sufficiently 'spiritual': not bringing about inner transformation that results in harmony, purity or happiness, *halachic* rituals do not operate for them as sufficiently effective inwardly-directed 'technologies of the self' (see Foucault 1988: 18). Indeed, part of what religious meditators wish to achieve through meditation is to learn to experience traditional Jewish practice in ways that involve more intention and rely on greater inner peace, thereby making it more meaningful or 'spiritual' (see also Persico 2014a: 288-289).

Third, orthodox meditators value *non-renunciation*: they strive to sanctify worldly life, including its mundane and material aspects, rather than escape it. Evidently, this contrasts with *nekkhama*, Pali for the Buddhist virtue or 'perfection' of renunciation that is normally emphasized among monastic *vipassanā* meditators (Cook 2010a) but also, though more ambivalently, among lay ones (Pagis 2019). For example, religious meditators regard heterosexual marriage and family life as highly significant, with those who are single striving eventually to establish families and have (ideally several) children, and dating being understood as necessarily directed towards these goals (see also Engelberg 2011: 433). Accordingly, they use Buddhist-derived practices for improving their life in this world—similarly to traditional Jewish meditative techniques, which normally take 'practical', 'world-affirming' directions (Persico 2019a), in line with the 'worldliness' that informs most Jewish traditions (Biale 2010: 4). Buddhists, orthodox meditators often claim, meditate in remote places like forests or caves. Jews, in contrast, should do so as part of families—which they are responsible to support through working—understanding that life, created by a benevolent God, is ultimately good. 'We [Jews] live in the world, not in a monastery', one meditator told me. 'You seclude yourself [*mitboded*] to speak to God for an hour and then go buy diapers'. Moreover, unlike the Buddhist emphasis on renouncing attachment to the self, religious meditators wish to cleave to the Creator through their God-given souls.

Orthodox meditators, then, are either householders or aspire to become ones. But while in other contexts, such as Hindu India, householders are characterized by 'disciplined

domesticity'—living 'in the shadow' of renouncers and being 'guided' by them (Madan 2011: 9B-10B)—among religious meditators no social position of a monastic or full-time renunciate exists. Indeed, even the closest (though increasingly less common—Stadler and Taragin-Zeller 2017: 139) social role, that of the full-time Torah scholar, involves marriage and children. Furthermore, rather than 'disciplined domesticity', orthodox meditators' non-renunciation often entails emotionally expressive spontaneity, which they take to indicate authenticity—at the expense of ascetic self-control and in a manner resonating with romanticism (see also Fischer 2014: 156).

The first four chapters of this dissertation concern diverse themes: arriving at proximity to God through meditation (Chapter 1), the tension between discipline and spontaneity (Chapter 2), strategies for managing value conflicts (Chapter 3) and ethical failure (Chapter 4). Yet taken together, they all illustrate the complex ways in which the values of *orthodoxy*, *spirituality* and *non-renunciation* intersect with orthodox meditators' projects of self-fashioning.

Then, in Part II, I address the self-cultivation project of EDI participants, focusing primarily on its relationships with two sets of opposing values they hold. In Chapter 5, these are *friendliness* (approaching others with a caring, non-antagonistic attitude) and *resistance* (struggling against injustice and violence). And in Chapter 6, competing values consist of *intimacy* (experiencing self and other as mutually interdependent and vulnerable) and *autonomy* (being self-directed and deciding to what extent to partake in difficult situations).

As we shall see, projects of self-fashioning may relate in various ways to people's key values. They may promote these values (Chapters 1-2), generate conflict between them (Chapters 3-4), entrench the friction between them but also assist in managing it (Chapter 5) or be ultimately insubstantial for realizing them (Chapter 6). Moreover, at times people have to choose between different ethical projects that disagree in practice on the right way of realizing the same value (Chapter 2). This demonstrates the diversity of the possible relationships between projects of self-fashioning and the ethical complexities in which they are found. Therefore, along with Foucault's 'four questions', another necessary dimension in accounting for people's ethical projects is an examination of the different ways in which these intersect with their value concerns.

In the dissertation's conclusion, I address an additional aspect of Israeli meditators' self-fashioning projects. I demonstrate that both orthodox meditators and EDI participants employ several practices they wish to carry out sincerely, in ways that are informed by actors' inner states. In the 'sinceritual' of orthodox meditators' traditional Jewish prayer, this involves attempting to insert meditative reflection into ritualized, communally-prescribed speech. In silent meditation, by contrast, the socially stipulated act consists of placing one's awareness on one's present, unprompted inner experience; and orthodox meditators' practice of

hitbodedut (impromptu speech to God) as well as EDI participants' 'contemplation circles' involve, additionally, verbalizing this experience. As it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to perform such practices in a non-sincere, merely ritualized manner, they can most appropriately be described as 'institutionalized sincerity'. Finally, I end the dissertation with a few brief and provisional thoughts concerning values' ontological status.

PART I

Orthodox Jewish Meditators

CHAPTER 1

'Finding Vessels for Our Lights': Insight Meditation as an Ethical Means for Jewish Encounters with the Divine

Late one weekday night, I drove Yehuda, an orthodox Jew in his thirties, to his home in Jerusalem's old city. We were 'ascending' (as he used to call it) towards Judaism's most sacred area from a weekly class on Buddhist Dharma. The class took place in Israel's coastal plain, where Jewish residents tend to be significantly less observant than in Jerusalem. Throughout my fieldwork, I found myself in similar circumstances, driving my car with Yehuda besides me, many more times. We used to travel to silent, 'Jewish meditation' retreats in various parts of the country, including ones that took place in Jewish settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. However, Yehuda and I also participated in *Dharma* classes and retreats.

Returning from such a class that night, as my car was entering the walls of the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem's old city, Yehuda explained to me that the Buddhist view of the world was, as he saw it, 'very partial, very lacking'. 'At the place where I am now located', he explained, 'the Dharma happens to be helpful. However, if I managed to master all of the Jewish esoteric teachings (*Torat ha'Sod)*, then the Dharma wouldn't be of any help to me anymore. If anything, it could only take me down, it could harm me'.

What was it about the Buddhist Dharma, I wondered, that could have potentially damaging effects on Yehuda? Moreover, if Buddhism was ultimately harmful, as he claimed, why did he, a dedicated orthodox Jew, bother going to weekly Dharma classes and to participate in several mentally and physically exhausting meditation retreats—instead of devoting his time and energy to studying Torah and practising Jewish mysticism? Yehuda had an impressive ability to explain things using parables. 'Imagine', he said,

> a palace in which there is an inner room and a more external room. Only esoteric Judaism [*Torat ha'Sod*, by which Yehuda referred predominantly to Hasidic teachings] holds the key to the inner room. However, most contemporary Jews will never be able to enter it, as they do not hold the key to the more external room. They therefore remain totally outside the palace. Buddhists, on the other hand, while they don't have the key to the inner room, *do* have the key to the outer room.

> Who is closer to the inner room, to ultimate truth, then? The Buddha opened the external room's door and arrived very close to the inner room. He stood at its threshold—closer than most Hasidim, who are standing outside the palace and cannot make any use of their key to ultimate truth. But the Buddha stopped there, in the external room. Had he only been born a Jew when the First Temple was still standing—instead of in India 2,500 years ago! If he had, who knows what could have happened?

For Yehuda, then, Judaism has exclusive access to ultimate truth, which Buddhism will never be able to reach. However, in practice, whereas Buddhists utilize their (merely

incomplete) version of truth, most Jews remain at a distance from both ultimate and partial truth. This includes Hasidic Jews, some of whom he regarded as practising the most spiritually elevated form of Judaism.

In this chapter, I will explain in more detail what these 'external' and 'inner' rooms signify for Yehuda. By doing so, I will try to elucidate the roles that Buddhism, and particularly Buddhist-derived meditation, play in the religious lives of people such as him. For these orthodox Jewish meditators, what does it mean that Judaism has exclusive, albeit often unrealized, access to ultimate truth? Moreover, in what way is Buddhism's merely partial grasp of reality able to contribute to the lives of observant Jews?

As I shall demonstrate, orthodox Jewish meditators use Buddhist-derived practices for repairing themselves ethically and psychologically. Rectifying themselves in these ways, they believe, is a prerequisite for utilizing the full potential that lies in one's more advanced inner capabilities, predominantly the soul (*neshamah*), as well as in Judaism's resources for arriving at greater proximity to God. For many orthodox Jewish meditators, then, self-cultivation via ascetic techniques that emanate from Buddhism (primarily *vipassanā* and mindfulness meditation) serves as a means for enhancing one's capability to experience divine presence. And this, we should note, is a very different objective from those normally ascribed to meditation in Theravāda Buddhism. In the latter, relating meditation to the soul and to a creator God would be regarded as resulting from an attachment to a 'delusion' (*moha, avijja*), to something that is 'unstable' and that consequently brings about suffering (*dukkha*) (Gethin 1998: 74, 144, 189). In this respect, observant Jewish meditators' repurposing of *vipassanā* (or 'insight') meditation as orthodox Jewish is antithetical to the Buddhist path to liberation (74).

Finally, feeling one's bodily sensations is central in the meditative practices that orthodox Jewish meditators domesticate. Ethnographic research that emphasizes the significance of the body in mediating divine presence likewise suggest that bodily techniques often act as devices for arriving at proximity to the divine. Subsequently, below I shall argue that the role of *vipassanā* in orthodox Jewish meditators' religious lives illustrates, counter to Webb Keane (2006), how ethical self-cultivation via the body often serves as a means for rendering the transcendent more manifest in people's lives.

Self-cultivation, transcendence and the body

Keane maintains that a 'conflict' exists in Western modernity 'between the desire for transcendence and abstraction' on the one hand, and 'the persistence of material embodiment' on the other (2006: 309-310). 'Transcendence', he argues, 'haunts modernity' as it involves 'unrealizable desires' such as having 'a self freed of its body' (309). Moreover, Keane refers to

'language and material objects'⁵—but not to the human body—in his discussion of entities that 'help make it possible for living people to be aware of and interact with beings and powers that are otherwise not perceptible to the human senses' (310).

For many orthodox Jewish meditators, however, it is precisely *through* embodiment and the senses of the human body (and not just via language and material objects) that they can come in contact with what they take to exceed the world. Moreover, as I will show immediately, this seems to be the case also for people in many other contemporary settings. Therefore, unlike what Keane maintains, in this chapter I wish to argue that material embodiment is often *not* (or at least not only) a problem as far as transcendence is concerned. Rather, ethical self-transformation that relies on the body often acts as a means for making the transcendent more present in people's lives.

Indeed, in various settings, analysing the ways in which bodily techniques of ethical self-fashioning bring about the feeling of proximity to the divine is necessary for coming to terms with an important ethnographic dimension. Much of the anthropological writing on ethical self-cultivation 'directs our attention to the ways in which inner states are inculcated and cultivated through embodied practice' (Mittermaier 2012: 251). Or as Michel Foucault, the main philosophical influence on this literature, writes, 'technologies of the self' enable individuals 'to transform themselves' through, among other things, 'operations on their own bodies' (1988: 18). In some ethnographic cases, arriving at intimacy with the divine is simply not a major goal of people's projects of ethical self-fashioning. In various other settings, however, bodily practices of self-cultivation *do* seem to serve as means for directly coming in contact with the transcendent in this very life.

This appears to be the case especially in contemporary charismatic Protestantism. 'Pentecostal/charismatic churches emphasize the importance of sensing the presence and power of the Holy Spirit directly and immediately' (Meyer 2010: 742). Subsequently, 'techniques of the body' are 'always key to the genesis of presence' among charismatic believers (Meyer 2012: 27), as they make the divine 'tangible in the immanent' (Meyer 2010: 743). For example, Josh Brahinsky describes how among American Pentecostals and other Christians 'indebted to Pentecostalism', 'a process of careful cultivation' takes place in which 'the body is central to making spiritual experience [...] authoritative' (2012: 217). For such people, Brahinsky explains, 'sensory experiences' (222) that rely on particular 'aptitudes' (220) 'function as a crucial medium for verification of the supernatural' (228). Similarly, Tanya Luhrmann describes how a particular evangelical 'technology of prayer'—in which 'God is immediately present and in which he speaks back'—involves learning how to pay attention to

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⁵ These include 'icons', 'relics' and 'offerings' (Keane: 2006: 311).

'internal experience', including 'awareness of [one's] body' (2012: 158-159; see also Kasmani and Mattes 2020).

Furthermore, in the Catholic covenant Rebecca Lester studied in Mexico, practices involving the body were intended not only 'to draw out' and 'nurture' the 'feeling of being in love with God', but also to enable newcomers to hear 'the voice of God' (2005: 16, 20). Finally, the Buddhist ascetics Joanna Cook researched regarded a 'condition of enlightenment, or momentary transcendence of the self and consequent insight', to be 'potentially actualized' by 'continuous physical and mental discipline' (2010a: 73). Namely, through 'bodily and mental practices' (7) such as 'intensive meditation', monastics attempted 'to go beyond the intellectual cognition of reality and gain an experiential understanding of ultimate truth' (94).

Thus, in various contemporary settings people seem to carry out projects of ethical self-cultivation through techniques that involve the body, and for ends that include making the transcendent more present in their lives. This seems to be particularly true in Pentecostalism, a form of Christianity that while distinct from the Calvinism that Keane seems to have in mind when arguing for a presumed antagonism between embodiment and transcendence, is likewise Protestant. In this chapter, too, I hope to illustrate that ethical practices of self-cultivation via the body (in this case, meditation drawn from Buddhism) are intended to assist people to come in contact with transcendence (here: the creator God of orthodox Judaism). Joel Robbins wishes to remind readers of 'the contribution of religion, or of the transcendent, to ethics' (2016: 769). Following Robbins, I would like to underscore one important way in which ethics often contributes to religion (see also Lambek 2000: 310): mediating the transcendent and making it more tangible and accessible.

Unfulfilled desires

A significant number of orthodox Jewish meditators spend much time and energy searching for ways of experiencing God's presence more vividly. This is in line with *devekut*—or 'ecstatic union with God' (Biale et al. 2017: 5)—being a 'foremost' ideal of Hasidism (Idel 1990: 49), a movement whose thought and practice are very influential among them. For example, during the same car drive mentioned above, Yehuda stated passionately that he sought to have 'a direct experience of *Ha'Shem* [God]'. 'I strive to witness a great miracle', he said, 'one in which the sky opens up and I connect to *Ha'Shem*, see *Elokim* [God] as clearly as I see you'. While Yehuda is especially prone to making statements of this sort—emphasizing his longing for visceral experiences of the divine—it is not uncommon for other orthodox meditators to report a similar interest. In a typical conversation, another religious meditator spoke with glittering eyes of how much he would like to see 'each and every Jew come to know *Ha'Shem*, to taste *Ha'Shem*'. Hearing this, the two listeners present in the room smiled and nodded.

Moreover, observant meditators often attribute everyday occurrences to providence (*hashgacha*) rather than chance (cf. Webster 2013). And they interpret events and elements of their everyday reality using ideas and concepts pertaining to *pnimiyut ha'Torah*—the 'inner' and 'mystical' teachings of the Torah as found in Jewish traditions such as Kabbalah and Hasidism. For instance, they frequently discuss the 'inner' significance of various Jewish commandments, and some of them accredit supernatural powers—e.g. the ability to influence mentally the physical world—to well-known rabbis.

Accordingly, most orthodox meditators assume that Judaism—being the only 'religion of truth'—contains all the teachings Jews require for fulfilling God's will and for arriving at proximity to Him. Surely, they think, many observant Jews do not display enough interest in actually getting closer to God. Yet their tradition nonetheless contains the most reliable means for doing so.

If having much faith in the Jewish tradition and its spiritual potential is indeed so common among religious meditators, in what way do orthodox Jews such as Yehuda find the *Buddhist* tradition—and the practices derived from it—to be 'very helpful' for them? What is the 'partial' and 'lacking' Dharma able to achieve that Judaism is not? 'Nowadays', Yehuda explained to me, there are many 'concealments' (*hastarot*) of God in our world. For example, some people in *Mea She'arim*—a Haredi (ultra-orthodox) neighbourhood in Jerusalem known for its religious stringency—study the most elevated religious teachings available to humanity, he said. And yet they 'will never get anywhere' spiritually.

Yehuda himself used to reside in that area for a few years after he 'returned to the Jewish fold' (*chazar bitshuva*), i.e. started leading a lifestyle of adherence to Jewish religious law (*halacha*). However, eventually he experienced 'a crisis' and decided to leave the neighbourhood. 'It did not feel right', he said. In fact, Yehuda had experienced such a degree of alienation that he abruptly decided to shave the long beard and sidelocks (*pe'ot*) he had grown—despite believing, following Jewish mystical teachings, that these granted him 'much spiritual strength'. By performing these physical acts, Yehuda turned his appearance into one that while still 'religious', was undeniably distinct from the appearances of other residents of that area, where dress and hairstyle mark clear social boundaries.[6]

As reasons for his departure, Yehuda cited the neighbourhood's dirty streets and cramped homes, residents' 'unhealthy' eating and smoking habits, as well as their vehement rejection of the Israeli state. Many people in *Mea She'arim*, he told me as we were visiting it, constantly focus on others' shortcomings, and they especially 'oppose anything that is secular'. All this negativity, Yehuda continued, is 'neurotic' and indicates that such people do not have

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[6] When I met him, Yehuda's beard was short and he had grown no sidelocks. Instead of standard Haredi garb, he wore 'modest', long-sleeved shirts or sweaters, long dark pants, and a black knitted skullcap. While he looked observant, his appearance did not allow for a simple way of labelling him as belonging to any Jewish subgroup.

much faith in God. He had once even heard a well-known Hasidic rabbi state wryly that when the Messiah comes, he will have a much easier time dealing with the 'secular' (i.e. non-observant) Jews than with some of the Haredim, who will give him considerable trouble.

We should pause briefly to note that when discussing the difficulties he had found with a certain segment of Haredi society, Yehuda tied together seemingly unrelated matters—problems concerning sanitation, personal cleanness and health, lack of faith, as well as psychological issues. I shall explain below why many orthodox meditators consider such matters to be linked, and how they regard meditation as a means for tackling all of them.

Not all religious meditators, however, operate in the context of Haredi communities. Rather, the majority are affiliated with the second large category of orthodox Israeli Jews, broadly defined as 'religious Zionism' (see Introduction). Moshe, an instructor of 'Jewish *vipassanā*' meditation retreats, engages closely with people who may be regarded as belonging to either group (i.e. both religious Zionists and Haredim). According to Moshe, orthodox Israeli Jews of all types often discuss 'spiritual universes' (or Jewish understandings with regard to cosmology and the structure of the Godhead) in their conversations and as part of their studies. However, their experiences are usually disconnected from any otherworldliness. A 'gap' exists, therefore, between Jewish religious practice and metaphysical discourse on the one hand, and what most religious Jews actually feel on the other.

> Religious education discusses "the world to come" [*ha'olam ha'ba*] and "the garden of Eden". "If you fulfil the commandments, you will get there", we are promised. But we know that in this world, things don't work this way. Many times, this talk creates a large distance between what people expect and their realities, as they don't experience anything resembling heaven in the present. Even when people labour to fulfil the commandments and hold the right values, they can still experience much difficulty and suffering. This often inspires a serious inner search among such people.

According to Moshe, then, while religious Israeli Judaism is often concerned with lofty ideals, it does not provide observant Jews with adequate means for actualizing these ideals in practice, in this world. Indeed, for Moshe, performing the Jewish commandments and reading Jewish 'spiritual' texts ultimately proves insufficient for this purpose. And this disparity, in turn, engenders disappointment and confusion among some religious Jews who seek experiences of transcendence. (Here and in many other instances, Moshe seemed to be influenced by *vipassanā* teacher S.N. Goenka, who argues that we 'need not wait until after death to experience heaven and hell; we can experience them within this life, within ourselves'—Hart 1987: 55.)

Indeed, religious Jewish meditators frequently talk about the centrality of arriving at 'proximity to God' (*kirvat Ha'Shem*). However, many of them say that this typically remains a call for Jews to get close to God merely metaphorically, for example by satisfying His will through fulfilling His commandments, studying Torah and 'being a good person'. Such

orthodox meditators, in contrast, desire experiencing proximity to God more literally and directly, 'as the great Hasidic masters describe it'.

Shlomo, a religious Zionist in his early twenties and unmarried, illustrates another challenge many observant Jewish meditators face concerning their own tradition. One day, we met for lunch in West Jerusalem's main market. During our conversation, Shlomo described how earlier, as he was walking towards the market, he noticed a young girl who 'was not dressed according to the modesty standards of religious Zionism'. One of the things he found most difficult among his social group, Shlomo explained, was its relationship to sexuality. According to a prevalent interpretation of Jewish law (*halacha*), extramarital sex and male masturbation amount to the 'extremely grave sin' of spilling seed in vain (Mark 2011: 108), and Jewish mysticism considers them at times as dire as killing one's own children (109). Yet Shlomo 'never received' from his tradition 'the tools needed for "working" with sexuality' (see also Nir 2011; Yifrach 2018). In contrast, he credited meditation to his improved ability to deal with sexual desire appropriately.[7] (Indeed, Moshe, the instructor of 'Jewish *vipassanā*' retreats mentioned above, compiled and printed booklets explaining how the latter might assist observant Jews who struggle with 'upholding the covenant [with God]', or *shmirat ha'brit*—a euphamism for masturbation.)

Similarly, following the 'Jewish *vipassanā*' retreat he had attended, Shlomo resolved (in what was an uncommon choice) to spend some time at a Buddhist monastery outside Israel. When he returned, he told me that in contrast to his experiences at the monastery, most rabbis and students in *yeshivot* (religious Jewish seminaries) place an overemphasis on intellectual Torah study. For instance, he remembered seeing another *yeshiva* student continuing to read a religious text even as he was going up the stairs. This made Shlomo angry. 'How could this student be doing something spiritual, aimed at worshiping God', he asked, 'while being so disconnected from his own body?'[8]

The body and the *nefesh*

What connects and explains these accounts by Yehuda, Moshe and Shlomo? In describing what he found problematic about some segments of Haredi Judaism in Israel, Yehuda discussed cleanliness and health habits, individual lack of genuine faith in God and psychological issues. Moshe argued that while observant Jews often experience difficulties and suffering, the lofty ideals of religious Jewish discourse, as well as Jewish commandments and religious practice, do not provide adequate ways of addressing these problems. And Shlomo

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[7] Similarly, the *Vinaya* or Buddhist monastic code prohibits intentional semen emission (Derrett 2006), and although male Tantric yogis are at times described as engaging in sexual activity, normally they 'must refrain from ejaculation' (Langenberg 2018: 572).

[8] Shlomo's attitude reflects one side of a broader debate over Torah study's centrality. The more common orthodox approach, unlike that of Shlomo, would consider studying Torah even while going up the stairs as spiritual, even heroic.

explained that although he was being expected to remain fully sexually abstinent until marriage, orthodox Judaism did not offer him apt tools for dealing with his desires. Moreover, by excessively emphasizing intellectual study, he argued, it drives its adherents to become disconnected from their own bodies, thus hindering their religious progress.

All these issues are related to what many orthodox meditators deem as insufficient consideration in Jewish Israeli religious settings to what they refer to as the *nefesh*. Following Jewish mystical accounts, religious meditators typically regard the *nefesh* as 'the lowest grade of the mental apparatus' (Bilu and Goodman 1997: 401), where the person's inner world 'interacts with the physical' and 'where the person gains awareness of the body as a receptacle for the spiritual' (Kaplan 1985: 137). Moreover, they view the *nefesh* as distinct from other, more 'elevated' levels of the person's interiority such as *ruach* (spirit) and *neshamah* (soul).[9] According to these observant meditators, then, many religious Jews find themselves struggling with the 'lower' and more mundane aspects of their personhood, which correspond to the *nefesh*. These have to do with one's body, desires and 'unrectified' aspects of one's character—including one's lack of true faith in God.

For example, when discussing members of his old neighbourhood, Yehuda portrayed faith as a virtue that is concerned, to a significant extent, with the *nefesh*. As he explained, a truly faithful person learns to accept everything that takes place as being the result of God's will, and therefore embraces it as happening 'for the better' (*letova*). In contrast, one whose *nefesh* is turbulent—i.e. who has little self-control and is often agitated and angry—cannot be said to have true faith in God. In turn, such lack of faith often results in psychological (and at times even psychiatric) problems, which may lead eventually to physical illness—all elements related to the *nefesh*.

Indeed, for orthodox meditators the *nefesh* is where one repairs oneself both ethically and psychologically (see also Seeman and Karlin 2019): they are inclined to tie together ethics and psychotherapy and to regard both as taking place on the level of the *nefesh*. And tending to these 'lower' facets of the person, many religious meditators argue, is in turn essential for making full use of the 'higher' aspects—which involve one's ability to understand deeper meanings of the Torah and to arrive at greater proximity to God. Put differently, these meditators believe that establishing a stable basis at the 'mundane' level of the *nefesh* is a necessary condition for the spiritual success of the individual. Conversely, if one's *nefesh* remains insufficiently rectified—as is the case among many contemporary religious Jews—this limits significantly one's religious development. This is so even as, being Jewish, such people

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[9] Meditators offer divergent understandings as to the distinction between *ruach* and *neshamah*. Moreover, they frequently state that two even more elevated levels exist, *chaya* and *yechidah*, but that these are esoteric and difficult to grasp.

possess a wonderful heritage of elevated religious teachings and considerable innate spiritual potential.

Central to the way orthodox Jewish meditators view the relationship between Buddhist-derived meditation and Judaism, then, is a hierarchical logic in which refining the inferior inner level of *nefesh* is a prerequisite for making full use of the more superior levels of one's interiority. But how do such people link meditation to the body and the *nefesh*? *Vipassanā* practices often emphasize awareness of one's body and bodily sensations, which are some of the objects of mindfulness (*sati*) suggested by the Buddha (Pagis 2009: 268-269).[10] Among the various meditation styles orthodox Jewish meditators learn, one method in particular underscores the significance of the body. In this popular style of practice, disseminated by prominent Burmese-Indian *vipassanā* teacher S.N. Goenka (1924-2013), meditators learn to develop 'extreme heightened awareness' of 'the nuances of bodily sensations' (Pagis 2009: 272). When doing so, their aim is to observe these sensations—whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral—'with equanimity' (ibid.), i.e. 'without reacting to them, accepting their changing, impersonal nature' (Hart 1987: 18).

Specifically, this type of insight meditation practice 'involves moving one's attention slowly from head to toe, patch by patch, feeling whatever is happening in the body' (Pagis 2009: 272). 'Whenever the meditator comes across a sensation, be it pain or itchiness, a pleasant or unpleasant feeling, she is asked to respond always in the same way, with full attention but without moving, speaking, or reacting emotionally' (ibid.). Put differently, in this style of *vipassanā*, meditators 'attempt to affect'—or manipulate—their 'embodied feedback loops consciously and deliberately', through non-reactively paying attention to their bodily feelings, thus turning 'the somatic map of the self into an aggregate of essenceless, impersonal sensations' (270). This, in turn, is supposed to 'eradicate' meditators' 'mental impurities' and instead to cultivate 'good qualities' in them, 'for one's own good and for the good of others' (Goenka 1987: 51). Finally, practising *vipassanā* in this way is said to lead meditators on the road that ultimately ends in *nibbāna*, the 'liberation from all suffering' (iv) and the escape from the wheel of rebirth.

The 'network of meditation centres and assistant teachers' that Goenka launched 'spans the globe today' (Stuart 2017: 161). It encompasses more than '188 permanent centres, where ten-day silent retreats are taught twice a month year round, as well as 138 non-centre sites, where retreats are taught at makeshift camps' (ibid.). Organizers require all participants to discontinue 'all forms of prayer, worship, or religious ceremony' for the full duration of each of these ten-day retreats, and to refrain from bringing with them any 'reading or writing materials' to retreat sites. Orthodox Jews are thus disallowed to carry out practices that they

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[10] The other objects are the mind (*citta*) and mental contents (*dhamma*).

consider mandatory according to Jewish religious law (*halacha*) during these retreats (e.g. to conduct three daily prayers and to study Torah).

Moreover, in the Goenka retreats Buddhist concepts, ideas and goals are discussed, and students are requested to 'take refuge' formally in the 'Triple Gem' (i.e. in Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha). Goenka emphasized that the latter act should not be viewed as one of conversion 'from one organized religion to another', and that the refuge taken is in 'the quality of enlightenment' rather than in any 'personality, dogma, or sect' (1987: 54). Nevertheless, several orthodox Israeli Jews associate such features of the Goenka retreats with idolatry ('*avodah zarah*), thus being deterred from participating in them. Indeed, for such reasons, only a minority of the orthodox Israelis who are interested in meditation attend retreats conducted by Goenka's organization.

Instead, many religious meditators attend 'Jewish *vipassanā*' (hereafter: 'JV') retreats, established by Moshe for the purpose of making this particular style of practice available to orthodox Jews. During such retreats, Moshe attempts to instruct the style of insight meditation taught in Goenka retreats—albeit within a framework that accommodates the religious needs of orthodox participants. Thus, three daily Jewish group prayers and periods in which students are allowed to study Torah, all required by *halacha*, are included in the JV retreats' program. Moreover, Moshe's evening discourses relate insight meditation to Jewish terminology, cosmology and religious ends in a variety of ways (see Mautner 2016; Mautner and Mizrachi 2020).

For example, like in other settings for learning insight meditation, in JV retreats participants' awareness of physical sensations is aimed at 'a progressive and embodied realization' of impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and not-self (*anattā*)—'the three characteristics' of 'all phenomena' according to Buddhist philosophy (Cook 2010a: 8, 11). Moshe, however, does not use Pali words when elucidating such concepts. And unlike in insight meditation's original teleology, participants in JV retreats do *not* relate their mindfulness of physical sensations to Buddhist soteriological principles like attaining *nibbāna* and thereby transcending the cycle of rebirth. Rather, they learn 'to reinterpret subjective experiences and responses'—including their insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self—in ways that are 'consonant with [the] religious principles' (Cook 2010a: 7) and cosmological understandings (see Venkatesan 2014) of *Judaism*, not Buddhism.[11]

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[11] Moshe reinterprets the impermanence of physical sensations as an opportunity to develop humility given transience in the face of *Ha'Shem*, who 'resuscitates us and continues to create every cell of our bodies at every moment'; and to feel gratitude for His 'immense grace'. Similarly, unsatisfactoriness, including life's troubles and anguish, are taken to be, ultimately, for the meditator's own good, a result of God's benevolent providence. Furthermore, not-self is portrayed as meaning that only God really exists. Finally, in JV retreats participants acquaint themselves not simply with 'the truth about the world' (i.e. the Dhamma—Gethin 1998: 35), but more specifically with the laws of *God's creation* as they operate within.

Significantly, orthodox meditators link their eradication of 'mental impurities' via bodily awareness to 'character rectification' (*tikkun ha'middot*), an ethical process that takes place, as they explain, at the level of the *nefesh*. For example, during JV retreats Moshe conveys to students that a main goal of insight meditation is helping them 'to learn how to experience connections between the body and the *nefesh*'. By doing so, he says, they will be able 'to free themselves from desires [*ta'avot*] that have characterized them for years', leading to 'tangible progress in rectifying their characters'. Similarly, Moshe states that according to the Jewish sages, 'physical sensations are inseparable from the operation of the *middot*' (character traits or virtues), and therefore 'working with sensations is an important tool for rectifying one's character'.

It might be helpful to note here that the word *nefesh* in contemporary Israeli Hebrew does not merely entail an esoteric Jewish meaning (i.e. referring to the lower part of one's inner world, connected to one's physical body). Rather, it holds an additional, more common meaning of 'mind' or 'psyche'. Psychology, for example, is normally described in modern Hebrew simply as 'the science of the *nefesh*' (*torat ha'nefesh*). Similarly, when Israelis discuss New Age 'mind-body' spirituality and therapy, they often designate them as 'body-*nefesh*' (*guf-nefesh*) practices. Consequently, when orthodox meditators invoke the word *nefesh*, it resonates not only with a theological Jewish cosmology that involves a creator God and souls, but also with a more naturalistic ontology in which *nefesh* simply denotes 'psyche' or 'mind'.

Similar to Moshe, other religious meditators relate *vipassanā* to character rectification, too. Discussing insight meditation's significance from a Jewish standpoint, several of them describe character rectification as 'the foundation of Judaism' and explain that according to Rabbi Hayyim Vital—an influential early modern kabbalist—it is even more fundamental than performing the Jewish commandments (cf. Garb 2011: 123-124). For many orthodox meditators, then, insight meditation serves as a way of mending one's character traits, or purifying one's *nefesh,* through the cultivation of 'embodied self-reflexivity' (Pagis 2009). And this, as I shall now show, is intended, in turn, to establish a stable 'mundane' basis for religious progress to take place on one's more elevated interior planes.

A divine soul inside a body

How do orthodox meditators relate meditative practice to the 'higher' levels of one's interiority? Ya'akov, a relatively experienced meditation student, came prepared to a retreat in which we participated together. This was a 'secular' Dharma retreat, i.e. one attended mostly by non-observant Jews, and in which insight meditation and Buddhist philosophy were depicted as universal, non-religious psychological 'wisdom'. Additionally, the teachers made no attempt to relate the Dharma to Jewish thought or religious practice. Yet as the retreat was taking place during the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, Ya'akov brought with him to the retreat

a Hanukkah menorah (*Hanukkiah*), candles, matches and a Jewish prayer book compiled for this holiday.

Each evening, Ya'akov lit candles in the menorah, which he placed in the hallway of the men's dormitory so that other male participants would be able to join him if they wished. As this retreat was defined as 'silent', students were expected not to speak to one another. Ya'akov, however, nonetheless gave *divrey torah* (sayings of Torah) to the few other meditators who decided to join him in lighting the menorah. One evening, standing in front of the candles, he explained that each candle symbolizes the body, the wick symbolizes the *nefesh*, and the flame symbolizes the soul (*neshamah*). 'This means that when one's *nefesh* stands upright inside one's body, one's soul can shine', he concluded. Another participant, who was somewhat religiously observant, was standing nearby. Listening to Ya'akov's sermon, he uttered a cry of excitement, signaling that he was impressed by the depth of his wisdom.

Ya'akov's short address concerning the relationship between the body, the *nefesh* and the soul is instructive for understanding the significance of meditation for many orthodox Jewish meditators. In our conversations, he often related meditation to his attempt to form a Jewish version of 'spirituality', one that would not overlook the centrality of the body and the *nefesh* in religious life. Similarly, at the end of a 'Jewish meditation' retreat, another meditator wished all the other participants that their souls would 'feel at home' inside their bodies, and that their bodies and souls would 'unite'. With the help of meditation, she concluded, such a union was possible—to which the listeners responded with a resounding 'Amen'.

Likewise, Shalom, in his late twenties, explained in a conversation that took place following a JV retreat that 'we are a soul inside a body'. Subsequently, by 'repairing the *nefesh* at its innermost point through observing bodily sensations', insight meditation can 'narrow the gap between the body and the soul'. Many 'good, commandment-fulfilling Jews', Shalom continued,

> suffer as a result of this gap. *Vipassanā* is, in this sense, "proper ethical behaviour that precedes the Torah" [*derech erets ha'kodemet la'Torah*]. It helps us to work on our *nefesh*, to purify our psychic vessel [*kli nafshi*], which is crucial [in enabling us] to arrive at a real connection to our soul.

According to all these orthodox meditators, then, the *nefesh* is located between the body and the soul, and by practising insight meditation, they are able to rectify their *nefashot* (plural for *nefesh*), thus linking their souls and their bodies.[12] Put differently, for many religious meditators insight and mindfulness meditation serve as ways of bridging the gap between the lower parts of themselves and their more elevated facets. And by repairing the

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[12] In 'proper ethical behaviour that precedes the Torah', 'proper ethical behaviour' is a translation of the Hebrew *derech erets*. This literally means 'the way of the land', and thus in addition to 'ethical behaviour' can denote 'mundaneness' (*artsiut*). Indeed, for Shalom *vipassanā* is related to both: feeling bodily sensations allows the meditator to rectify the mundane *nefesh* and thus improve one's ethical character.

'vessel' (*kli*) of one's *nefesh* via meditative practice, they attempt to enable this 'vessel' to hold the divine light that 'shines' from one's soul.

But what exactly do orthodox meditators mean by enabling one's soul to 'shine'? Many religious meditators contend that the soul is a 'lot from God above' (*chelek eloka mi'ma'al*—Job 31:2), or a 'divine part' within the person. One 'Jewish meditation' teacher expressed this idea succinctly, stating that it is essential to remember that 'behind all the madness that characterizes our lives and the world, there exists a divine soul [*neshamah elokit*] within each of us'. Consequently, religious meditators often argue that when one's soul reveals itself against the backdrop of a repaired and stable *nefesh*—and thus is able to 'shine'—one thereupon connects to God from within oneself. 'In order to foster a relationship with the divine', one orthodox meditator explained, 'I first of all need to connect to myself, to my *neshamah*. And by connecting to my *neshamah*, I connect to *Ha'Shem*'. Indeed, religious meditators frequently contend that coming in contact with one's divine soul is the most common way for ordinary Jews in our age to encounter God.

Moreover, during JV retreats Moshe explains that through practising insight meditation—and remaining equanimous (*b'izzun nafshi*) in the face of physical sensations—one can actualize the biblical verse 'from my flesh I shall see God' (Job 19:26). Namely, observing physical sensations without reacting to them reveals one's soul, the 'divine part' or 'eternal source' within the person. In this way, Moshe and other observant Jewish meditators argue, insight meditation is supposed to lead Jewish practitioners, ultimately, to 'the awakening and revealing' of their souls, the Godly part within them. Specifically, by systematically feeling bodily sensations with a balanced and non-reactive *nefesh*, one is to undergo deep 'mental purification' (*tihur nafshi*) and eventually to experience the sublime 'peace' associated with the soul and with the infinite and eternal God.

Accordingly, at the end of one JV retreat, a rabbi who attended it related emotionally to the rest of the participants that he was 'shocked'. He had been instructing others in Hasidic teachings, including in meditative practices, for over twenty years. Yet only during the retreat did this rabbi realize that it was actually possible 'to feel the Holy One, blessed be He, through the body'. In fact, he continued, this is what 'redemption' means: when God 'dwells in the lower worlds [*dira ba'tachtonim*]'.

Hasidic thought presumes that reality 'lies within the divinity, and the divinity permeates all reality' (Elior 1993: 59). Likewise, orthodox meditators normally adhere to the panentheistic view that 'the world lives within God' (Mirsky 2014: 221). This helps to explain why such religious Jews—believing as they do that God not only transcends the world but also saturates all of it—try to see 'the presence of the divine in material reality' (Persico 2019a), including in one's 'embodied subjectivity' (Seeman 2008: 467).

Moreover, during JV retreats Moshe also explains that *vipassanā* promotes 'self-nullification' (*bittul*), in which one gradually abolishes one's illusory sense of distinct and independent selfhood, realizing instead that one is inseparable from *Ha'Shem*. Through experiencing first-hand how one's physical sensations and thoughts ceaselessly change, and how they are not under one's control, the meditator progressively realizes that all people and things are merely manifestations of the divine unity. Namely, that God amounts to and directs everything that exists, and that fundamentally, 'there is nothing but Him' in the world (*ein od milvado*).

Clearly, Moshe's depiction of insight meditation as leading to the nullification of one's false sense of independent selfhood into the omnipresence of God is a Jewish rendition of not-self (*anattā*): a core Buddhist teaching and one of 'the three characteristics' of all phenomena according to Buddhist thought (Cook 2010a: 8). *Vipassanā* practice—including in the Goenka retreats, where Moshe first learned this style of meditation—classically attempts to provide meditators with the means for realizing experientially 'that one does not have an enduring self' (Cassaniti 2017: 134). Indeed, the entire Buddhist 'road to liberation' rests on this insight, namely that the 'I' is 'essenceless and impermanent' (Pagis 2009: 270). Similarly, Moshe utilizes the insight meditation practice of maintaining equanimity in the face of sensations for helping meditators to arrive at the nullification of their egos.

Yet in contradiction to the Buddhist denial of an omnipotent creator God, during JV retreats Moshe attempts to aid meditators to annul their illusory experience of selfhood precisely *into* this God (see also Mautner 2016: 78-81). Significantly, Moshe's notion of self-nullification relies on Hasidic teachings. As stated above, the 'basic assumption' of Hasidic thought, which espouses the 'mystical negation of the self' (Elior 1993: 224), is 'the omnipresence of God in all things' (13). Subsequently, in JV retreats bodily sensations are understood to result not from one's past *kamma* (as is the case in Goenka retreats) but from the divine will; and the Buddhist doctrine of not-self (*anattā*) is transformed into Hasidic cleaving (*dvekut*) to God and self-annulment into Him (*bittul*).

It is noteworthy that Goenka alerted his students to what he regarded as the 'dangerous illusion' of associating a particular 'deep, tranquil, calm experience' that is encountered as part of *vipassanā* practice with 'an eternal creator living inside us' (1998: 65). Such a mistake, Goenka advised, would result in 'a bondage' in which the meditator may be 'trapped' (ibid.).

Buddhist-derived meditation and divine presence

At this stage, it might be helpful to return to some of the questions I have raised previously in this chapter. Specifically, we can now appreciate why orthodox Jewish meditators regard practices drawn from the Buddhist tradition as helpful. As we have seen, religious meditators believe that 'tools' extracted from the Buddhist Dharma can assist observant Jews in repairing

their *nefashot*. This, in turn, serves as a means for making their divine souls 'shine', thereupon enabling them to annul their sense of separate selfhood and encounter God within themselves. In contrast, such people often report not finding sufficient methods for rectifying their *nefashot* within standard orthodox Judaism.

After recognizing in what respects the Buddhist tradition is helpful for orthodox meditators, I shall now explain briefly what many of them find problematic about Buddhism. Yehuda believes that insight meditation—and the Dharma more generally—contain 'great wisdom'. However, these are 'things that a *goy* [a non-Jewish person] who is not concerned with Godliness [*elokut*]' can practise too, he said. Namely, as they do not involve a 'relationship between man and God', and only operate on the level of *nefesh*, Buddhism and insight meditation can never reach the 'final goal'. Rather than the Buddhist objective of 'awakening', he explained, one should strive for the much more ambitious end of 'uniting with the creator of the universe, reaching proximity to *Ha'Shem*, seeing God with one's own spiritual eyes'— and subsequently, 'repairing the world in the kingdom of the Almighty' (*letaken 'olam bemalchut shadai*). 'I can see the great wisdom that lies in the Dharma and still realize that much more lies beyond it', Yehuda concluded.

Similarly, at the end of a Dharma class, one orthodox participant—wearing a tee shirt with the Israeli flag printed on it—asked the teacher why he was talking about 'the mind' during the entire class, but did not say anything about the soul. The teacher, slightly embarrassed, replied that the term 'soul' is not used in Buddhism, and that Buddhist teachers recommend investigating critically the notion that an essential, non-changing entity exists inside us. The observant participant did not seem impressed.

Several contemporary orthodox Israeli rabbis regard Buddhism as amounting to idolatry ('*avodah zarah*)—a 'cardinal sin' in orthodox Judaism, i.e. one that a Jew is required, officially, to 'die rather than transgress'. Such rabbis find fault with Buddhist thought and rituals, particularly the practice of exhibiting images and statues of the Buddha (see Mautner 2016; Mautner and Mizrachi 2020). Yet as I shall discuss in greater length in Chapter 3, this does not stop some observant meditators from practising meditation and attending Dharma classes in settings where Buddha statues are present.

Instead, as the above narratives suggest, what unites many orthodox meditators is their opposition to Buddhism's atheistic cosmology, i.e. its disregard of the creator God and the divine soul—which means, in the case of Jews, also a neglect of Torah and Jewish law. Moreover, several religious meditators claim that whereas Judaism is fundamentally life-affirming, Buddhism is overly pessimistic and ultimately life-denying. As Yehuda and others explain, rather than the Buddhist renunciatory desire to escape or transcend 'the endless round of rebirth that is *samsāra*' (Gethin 1998: 64), the aim of Judaism is 'repairing the world'—including one's family life, occupation, community and nation—'in the kingdom of the

Almighty'. Accordingly, while they regard the goal of *vipassanā* in its Buddhist context to be 'silence', in Judaism, hearing like Elijah 'a sound of sheer silence' (*kol dmama daka*; 1 Kings 19:12) only serves as a foundation for one then to find God in the various forms of clamour that normally characterize one's active existence in the world. It was for these reasons that Yehuda argued that ultimately, engaging with Buddhist-derived contents might be harmful for orthodox Jews—despite their advantages in offering means for repairing the *nefesh*.

Subsequently, some orthodox meditators relate *vipassanā* to proximity to God in another way, which reinforces its domestication as 'Jewish' rather than 'eastern' and thus potentially 'idolatrous'. According to these meditators, when a person with a 'Jewish soul' comes in contact with the 'divine part' of oneself following the practice of meditation, such a person often feels a spontaneous urge to begin speaking to God. As Moshe told me, what distinguishes 'Jewish *vipassanā*' from non-Jewish versions of insight meditation is that 'when deep silence arises within Jewish meditators, they often feel like turning to God and talking to Him'. As the 'singularity' (*segulah*) of 'the people of Israel' involves 'speech and language', he said, the ability to be 'in dialogue with the eternal and sublime' arises naturally out of the 'silence' and 'being' (*havaya*) revealed through meditation.

In his particular case, Moshe further explained, meditation was what brought him to feel 'a connection to Judaism' in the first place. While meditating, he would suddenly sense 'a presence, as if I was sitting in the face of something infinite that knows me, loves me, and wants me to talk to it'. And just as his desire to speak to God emerged naturally from his practice, Moshe believed that this could happen to many other people, 'and especially to Jews' (cf. Vallely 2006).

We should note, however, that many observant meditators do not consider speaking to God to be the end of one's religious practice. Rather, experiencing proximity to God is supposed in turn to prompt Jewish meditators to understand viscerally the importance of satisfying His will, thus reinforcing or leading to an observant Jewish lifestyle centred around fulfilling the commandments of religious Jewish law. Upon encountering one's divine soul and speaking to God, in other words, one is expected to realize that being a merciful 'Father', God only granted the Jewish people the commandments for their own good, 'in order to help us'. Indeed, in a mellow and contemplative tune (*niggun*) that Moshe usually plays at the end of JV retreats, the singer requests God, using words taken from the Sabbath's liturgy, to 'purify our hearts to worship you in truth' (*v'taher libeinu l'ovdecha b'emet*). After cleansing the *nefesh* and experiencing proximity to *Ha'Shem*, then, one is supposed to feel a strong desire for worshipping Him 'in truth', i.e. to fulfil His commandments keenly, 'from within'—and not merely because it is dictated by one's social group.

Furthermore, some orthodox meditators describe the experience of wishing to speak to God, after coming in contact with one's divine soul, as potentially being an instance (albeit

a relatively lesser one) of the state of 'holy spirit' (*ruach ha'kodesh*). Such religious meditators differentiate between holy spirit and the related—although even more unusual—state of actual 'prophecy' (*nevu'a*). Whereas in the 'semiprophecy' (Mirsky 2014: 118) or 'lower rung of Prophecy' (Fischer 2013: 3-4) of holy spirit an individual Jew reaches 'up' to God and arrives at proximity to Him, in the state of prophecy God reaches back 'down' to that individual.

Ya'akov, for example, explained that in biblical times, many 'sons of the prophets' (*bney ha'nevi'im*), who attended 'prophecy schools', were operating in the 'land of Israel' and were practising meditation. These, he emphasized, were not actual prophets, as they had not received God's word and thus were not in charge of disseminating it among the people of Israel. However, some of the sons of the prophets nonetheless managed to attain the high spiritual level of holy spirit. Namely, they succeeded in arriving at proximity to God. Nowadays, Ya'akov continued, after the people of Israel had returned to the land of Israel and re-established Jewish sovereignty there as part of Zionism, all observant Jews in the land of Israel should once again strive to attain the holy spirit. And they may do this with the help of practices such as meditation, thus renewing the tradition of the sons of the prophets (see Chapter 4). Receiving actual prophecy, on the other hand, does not depend on humans, but instead is something that God alone can choose to renew.

According to James Faubion, 'mystics' such as prophets 'can—in potentia—carry their irritations too far' (2013: 304). They may suggest that the 'axiomatics' of a given 'practical ethics neither constitute nor lead to the truth'—in this case, that of the Jewish commandments. 'Put mystics at the center of things organizational and structural', Faubion writes, 'and such things run the ever more precipitous risk of falling apart' (ibid.).

Following Faubion, presenting oneself as a prophet, i.e. as one who has received the word of God, would be highly contentious for orthodox Jews: it may mean instructing others not to perform the Jewish commandments or to perform them differently than they do now (see Garb 2009: 84-93). Accordingly, none of my interlocutors allege to have received prophecy or openly aspire to become actual prophets. This, I presume, is part of an 'Orthodox reticence' pertaining to claims of having 'inner inspiration' and being able to recognize 'God's call', which would award one 'religious authority' that 'overrides' that of 'rabbinic authorities' (Fischer 2013: 3-5). Orthodox meditators, then, attempt to reach *some* degree of contact with the divine within them. But they do not aspire to become mystics or prophets in the more radical sense of actual '"deification" or "divination" or union with the divine' that Faubion discusses (2013: 289), and that might result in them becoming 'systematic irritants' of the social order (304).

Finally, some orthodox meditators regard meditation as bringing about proximity to the divine in yet another way. Yehuda often confessed as to the rift that existed between his intellectual understanding of Jewish spirituality on the one hand, and the state of his *nefesh*

on the other. 'I can seem very intelligent', he once stated boldly, 'but my deeds, my character [*middot*] go in the totally opposite direction'. Meditation, he explained, 'helps us to clean the vessel [*kli*] of our *nefesh*, and thus enables us to study Torah, pray to God, speak to him [*l'hitboded*] and immerse ourselves in the *mikveh* [ritual bath] with better concentration and a more settled mind [*yishuv ha'da'at*]'. Surely, he continued, 'usually we do not receive spiritual lights [*orot ruchaniyim*] as a result of practising meditation'. Rather, 'we get them from these other activities'. However,

> The quality of all these activities decreases if they don't rely on a strong foundation in the *nefesh*, a foundation that meditation provides. Rabbi Nachman [of Breslav (1772-1810), a Hasidic master venerated by many religious meditators] said that only one thing keeps people away from *Ha'Shem*—that their minds are not settled.

For some orthodox meditators such as Yehuda, then, it is rarely through their practice of *vipassanā* that they receive spiritual 'lights' from God. After all, insight meditation only concerns the lower, 'physical' inner level of *nefesh*. Instead, observant Jews normally receive divine 'spiritual lights' when they carry out other, more religiously 'elevated' activities (Torah study, prayer, sincere talk to God or ritual immersion in natural water springs), which take place at the levels of *ruach* and *neshamah*. And it is through conducting such activities, according to Yehuda, more so than through meditation, that Jews 'get closer to *Ha'Shem*'.

But without having a solid foundation in the relatively mundane level of *nefesh*—which insight meditation helps to bring about—Jews are only able to receive spiritual 'lights' to a much more restricted extent. As another experienced meditator put it, until he encountered insight meditation, he had not possessed the 'vessels' needed for containing effectively the wonderful 'lights' that shine from Jewish religious practice. For such orthodox meditators, then, proximity to God means experiencing divine presence as part of traditional Jewish activities that they conduct, which are to feel sharper and more intense owing to their practice of meditation. The latter, they explain, provides the mundane basis that one needs, at the level of the *nefesh*, for holding the spiritual 'lights' that are entailed in traditional Jewish ritual, and that correspond to more elevated interior levels. As one meditation teacher conveyed, insight meditation is 'a *kli* [meaning both 'tool' and 'vessel'] that provides 'an excellent foundation' for the meditator then to go 'one step further' and access 'a higher place': one of divine inspiration', available only through Jewish practice.

In considering *vipassanā* a 'mundane' and universal instrument that when employed by Jews, enables them to access their divine souls and to make greater use of their tradition's singular potential, orthodox meditators resemble the thought of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook (1865-1935). Rabbi Kook's theology emphasizes granting 'meaning to the material, secular, mundane world'—in this case, insight meditation, the body and the *nefesh*—and 'placing' it 'under religious [Jewish] regulation' (Fischer 2011: 286; see also Nir 2011). Specifically, the

'profane' for Kook is 'that which has not yet woven itself into the fabric of the final tikkun', i.e. 'the ultimate cosmic and metacosmic repair and restoration' (Mirsky 2014: 27-28). Being the 'spiritual godfather of Religious Zionism' and its 'greatest theologian' (2), Rabbi Kook influences many observant Jewish meditators, particularly the more national-religious among them.

Conclusion

Returning to the parable with which I began this chapter, we are now able to understand why according to Yehuda, Buddhism can only open the door of the palace's 'external room', whereas Judaism holds the key to the palace's innermost room but is unable to use it. As we have seen, orthodox Jewish meditators tend to distinguish between the *nefesh*—the lowest level of one's interiority, connected to the physical body—and the more elevated levels of *ruach* (spirit) and especially *neshamah* (soul). According to such people, repairing the *nefesh* is something many religious Jews are in a vital need of doing. A stable basis on the level of *nefesh*, they contend, amounts to a necessary condition for utilizing the full potential (or spiritual 'light') that lies in one's more advanced inner capabilities, and in the singular practical and intellectual resources available as part of the Jewish tradition and associated with these capabilities.

Insight meditation, orthodox meditators further argue, is helpful in establishing stability in the *nefesh*, while alternative ways of doing so are hard to find as part of contemporary Judaism. Such meditators believe, in other words, that by feeling their physical sensations and refraining from reacting to them, Jewish contemplatives may rectify their characters and purify their *nefashot*. This, in turn, can enable them to abolish gradually their illusory sense of distinct and independent selfhood, and to 'reveal' instead their divine souls and allow them to 'shine'—which in effect means encountering God within oneself. Finally, connecting to one's divine soul inspires some meditators to begin speaking to God spontaneously and sincerely, and makes it clear to them that fulfilling the Jewish commandments is actually in their best interest. Alternatively, others argue that cleansing the *nefesh* through meditation improves the quality of one's Jewish practice, enabling more divine spiritual 'light' to flow as part of it. Therefore, by practising meditation, an observant Jew such as Yehuda can open the door of the palace's external gate, and then—using the resources available as part of the Jewish tradition, and his divine soul—to open the door of the hitherto-unreachable innermost room and connect to God.

For many religious meditators, then, insight meditation serves as a means for feeling divine presence more clearly, and at times even having experiences of direct contact with Godliness within themselves. As Moshe put it, following his own *vipassanā* practice, altering their responses to bodily sensations can bring meditators to feel 'deep, mystical experiences

of stillness', ones in which the meditator 'really feels eternity and nothingness [*ayin*] within'. We may say, therefore, that for several orthodox Jewish meditators, Buddhist-derived ethical and ascetic technologies of the self act as devices for making the transcendent more present and apparent—so much so as sometimes even helping them to feel an intimate connection to God. Put differently, these religious Jews utilize body-centred contemplative practices of ethical self-cultivation for the aim of encountering 'eternity', which they associate with the Creator. So, rather than the 'conflict' Keane finds 'between the desire for transcendence' and 'the persistence of material embodiment' (2006: 309-310), for such people it is often *through* bodily sensations that they can cultivate virtue, diminish their sense of selfhood and witness God.

All of this is not to say that for religious meditators, meditative practice is concerned solely with the divine. Rather, as I shall demonstrate in later chapters and as hinted at in this chapter, it also has to do with other, diverse matters ranging from learning how to cope better with life's difficulties to Jewish religious nationalism. Moreover, like people elsewhere, orthodox meditators spend much time attending to familial responsibilities and to employment and education commitments (both 'secular' and Jewish). Not to mention that many of them enjoy eating good food, and some regularly consume popular music, fiction and films (though others find this problematic).

Additionally, it is owing to the centrality of the mundane body in their meditative practice that many observant meditators are able to partake in *vipassanā* without continuously being concerned over 'idolatry'. Specifically, orthodox meditators regularly refer to the human body when suggesting that insight and mindfulness meditation is, in essence, non-religious—depicting the body as universal and mundane (i.e. as something to which no religious doctrines are intrinsic). Merely observing one's breath and bodily sensations, as Moshe stated frequently, is 'all there is' to *vipassanā*. Indeed, he would continue, after he had explained to rabbis how simple and practical it is—that it 'has nothing to do with accepting any philosophies or religious beliefs', and that it certainly does not involve any 'eastern' rites— none of them ever expressed any objections. In other words, as such meditative practice is not tied exclusively to the potentially idolatrous Buddhist 'religion', it is not in itself threatening to Jews (see also Mautner n.d.).[13]

This argument, we should note, follows a well-established modernist discourse and practice of decoupling Buddhist meditation from the 'organized religion' of Buddhism (see also Mautner and Mizrachi 2020; Mautner n.d.), a process to which S.N. Goenka has been central. While Goenka's understanding of insight meditation was 'rooted in a traditional Burmese Buddhist worldview' (Stuart 2017: 161), he combined in his teachings many elements

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[13] In Chapter 4 I show that some orthodox meditators consider employing *vipassanā* in relation to Jewish practice and thought as the most genuine way of utilizing it.

'drawn from the lexicon of secularity' (McMahan 2017b: 118). For example, *vipassanā* for him was 'an art of living, a technique', and 'a science' that 'discovers the law of nature within' (ibid.). Partly influenced by Goenka (Stuart 2017: 173), the disentangling of meditation from Buddhism has occurred also as part of the widespread introduction of 'mindfulness' practices 'into secular health-care contexts' (Cook 2017: 120). In such settings, 'Buddhist meditative techniques' have been 'interpreted as universal, rather than religious' (ibid.)—albeit, like in Goenka's retreats, nevertheless retaining at times some 'spiritual' (Braun 2017) or 'salvific' (Schlieter 2017) dimensions.

Orthodox meditators, then, depend on the centrality of the mundane body in *vipassanā* for using it to arrive at greater proximity to God, but *also*, more fundamentally, for arguing that meditation is essentially non-religious and universal. The materiality of the human body, therefore, is what enables religious meditators *both* to reinforce the 'purification' of insight meditation from Buddhism (see Latour 1993; Cook 2017), *and* to utilize *vipassanā* as an instrument for having experiences of Jewish transcendence.

Finally, in this chapter I have described how orthodox Jewish meditators repurpose meditative practices drawn from Buddhism for bringing about greater proximity to the creator God—instead of utilizing them for attaining Buddhist goals such as a *nibbānic* escape from the wheel of rebirth, or at least accessing 'rebirth in the highest heavenly realms' (Wilson 2014: 46). As observant meditators normally do not consider the practices they utilize to involve forbidden 'eastern' religious contents, such repurposing does not entail much ethical tension on their part. In the next three chapters, however, I will focus on other dimensions that the domestication of insight meditation as orthodox Jewish involves. As these dimensions consist of value conflicts and ethical contestations, they often prompt religious meditation students to carry out considerable reflection and judgement.

For instance, perhaps it will not come as a surprise to learn that not all orthodox meditation students are greatly impressed with *vipassanā* (or specifically with its version that emphasizes physical sensations). One religious Jewish friend of mine, for example, argued that while purifying the *nefesh* is good in itself, it is in fact *not* necessary for getting closer to God. Thus, instead of spending much of his time practising insight meditation, he did so sometimes, but generally preferred devoting himself to other meditative techniques—ones that, as he saw it, influence directly one's 'higher' internal planes.

Moreover, several orthodox meditation students have trouble with the ascetic and self-renouncing dimensions often entailed in *vipassanā*. Consequently, they prefer utilizing more romantic and ecstatic forms of religious practice over insight meditation; or attempt to combine *vipassanā* or mindfulness with a spontaneous and self-expressive attitude. To put this in the terms I have used in this dissertation's introduction, both types of orthodox meditators aim at promoting the value of *spirituality* through meditative self-fashioning, and

are also committed to *orthodoxy* and *non-renunciation*. But whereas they share the attempt to improve themselves ethically while operating as observant Jewish householders, they differ over what, more precisely, a fulfilment of the third value (*non-renunciation*) entails. In the next chapter, I focus on the complexities this involves.

CHAPTER 2

Reluctant Ascetics: On the Ethical Dimensions of Spontaneous Self-Expression

As part of a 'Jewish *vipassanā*' retreat that took place at an Israeli settlement in the occupied West Bank, a few dozen orthodox Jewish men spent five days together in silent, arduous toil. They dedicated most parts of each day to rigorous self-observation from the early hours of the morning until late at night, seated in meditation posture at a girls' dance studio that was temporarily converted into a meditation hall. Three times a day, participants would pray together as a group. The longer, morning services normally took place at a short walking distance from the retreat site, at a synagogue that required students to pass through a colourfully painted kindergarten to reach. The afternoon and evening prayers, in contrast, occurred at an impromptu synagogue located at the same room as the retreat site's large dining hall.

During the service that concluded the retreat, participants were whisperingly reciting the words of the prayer. By this point, a contemplative and peaceful atmosphere had settled in. When the prayer ended, students were allowed once again to communicate with and touch one another, after not being permitted to do so for the duration of the entire retreat. For a few seconds, all remained hesitantly silent. Then, they spontaneously formed a circle of hugging men, rotating in dance as well as chanting softly and serenely together, with voices and demeanours that betrayed gratefulness, joy and especially relief. Gradually, however, the tranquillity of the circle of dancers turned more and more ecstatic, and the tempo of the chants and of the spinning dizzyingly increased. This culminated when one student—who had a visibly difficult yet also meaningful time during the retreat—jumped on top of a table and began addressing the rest of the group, affectionately and enthusiastically, at the top of his lungs.

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In chapter 1, I presented orthodox Jewish meditators' practice of *vipassanā* as largely coherent and harmonious. In this chapter, in contrast, I analyse an ethical tension many religious meditators feel between their desire for spontaneous self-expression and the disciplined or ascetic restraint such meditative practises normally necessitate. Whereas these orthodox meditators regard self-expression highly, they largely wish to *avoid* ascetic discipline—partly as some of them associate it with the harmful self-repression they used to encounter in religious educational institutions.

To be sure, some degree of systematic and disciplined effort is detectible in all settings that observant meditators attend for practising meditation, as well as in practices found within

different Jewish traditions. Nevertheless, certain meditation teachers and settings emphasize discipline whereas others understate it, accentuating unrestrained self-expression instead. Uninhibited expressiveness, I subsequently argue, operates in this context not merely as an 'amoral' register (Schielke 2009a: S31) distinct from that of ethics, nor is it just lenient 'absence of discipline' (Mayblin and Malara 2018: 1-2). Rather, the spontaneous poignancy that characterizes many orthodox meditators' conduct is ethical: as I shall attempt to show, it is a 'normative ideal' (Wilf 2011: 463) or a 'standard' of what the Jewish person 'ought to desire' (Taylor 1992: 16).

Moreover, I describe the ways in which some orthodox meditators manage to repurpose Buddhist-derived meditation for expressive ends while nevertheless accommodating some of the discipline it normally involves. I focus on two settings (Moshe's 'Jewish *vipassanā*' retreats and Yonatan's 'Jewish meditation' workshops), attended almost entirely by orthodox Jews and established especially for the purpose of making meditative practice available to them. In these locales, both disciplined self-cultivation and spontaneous self-expression are manifest, although in different ways and to divergent degrees.

My discussion of the ethical tension between self-restraint and self-expression illustrates a broader problem. As ascetic practices and lifestyles (e.g. insight meditation) arrive in new settings, they face the possibility of being employed in novel ways, according to the non-ascetic values and dispositions that are predominant in these locales. Oftentimes, the latter can be described as 'romantic'. Indeed, in many religious meditators' lives, 'romantic expressivism' (Taylor 1989) is a dominant cultural current. Specifically, Israeli religious Zionism, a major social and cultural force among orthodox meditators, can be described as a 'romantic, expressivist, and nationalist' movement (Fischer 2014: 156), one that partakes in the broader Zionist repudiation of the meekness and self-denial that presumably characterizes diasporic Jewish life. Consequently, notions such as self-expression, self-actualization, freedom and authenticity (Fischer 2011: 286) are prominent among many religious meditators.

Moreover, the teachings of early Hasidic masters such as Rabbi Nachman of Breslav (1772-1810), another highly significant source of inspiration for observant meditators, 'contain a strong romantic element' (Green 1979: 140, 302). Finally, the 'conceptual roots' of the New Age movement, which also influences several of these people, lie in the 'western romantic and esoteric traditions' (Werczberger 2011: 79; Heelas 2008). As I shall demonstrate, such romantic, self-expressive tendencies inform the ways in which many orthodox meditators approach Buddhist-derived meditation techniques—ones that have originally been employed by monastics for forsaking 'all attachments and desires' (Pagis 2008: 152-153).

A similar dynamic, in which a tension exists between ascetic self-restraint and romantic self-expression, appears to be significant also in other related settings. Romanticism,

despite presumably differing 'radically' from the Dhamma (Thanissaro 2015: 6-7), 'provides many themes that have become important to Buddhist modernism' (McMahan 2008: 11), the strand that has popularized insight meditation in recent decades beyond the purview of Buddhist monastics or even laypeople. Such themes have included 'reveling in creative spontaneity' and 'appeals to a return to the natural' (McMahan 2008: 11-12). Moreover, they have consisted of the tendency to 'recover a sense of lost meaning' and 'mystery' (220)—and something extraordinary, even sacred—'in the most mundane things and activities' (216), often through 'mindfulness' practice. Similarly, in the contemporary 'secular' mindfulness movement, meditation is not presented as a practice 'for ascetics who have renounced the worldly life' (McMahan 2008: 184), aimed at cutting 'attachment to a sense of self' and thereby attaining 'enlightenment' (Cook 2010a: 8-9). Rather, mindfulness is often 'reconfigured as a technique for self-discovery' (McMahan 2008: 184) and 'self-fulfillment' (Purser and Loy 2013; see also Gleig 2013; Cook 2018; Braun 2017; Wilson 2017).

Self-cultivation through self-restraint

In Chapter 1, I explained that orthodox meditators often consider meditative practice a means for arriving at greater proximity to God. However, in some settings that religious students frequently attend for learning meditation, and particularly in 'Jewish *vipassanā*' (hereafter: JV) retreats, this necessitates a significant amount of exertion and discipline. Indeed, more often than consisting of uplifting experiences of divine presence, practising meditation in these locations requires students to experience physical and psychological challenges, and to continue meeting these challenges with self-restraint. For instance, in meditation sittings during JV retreats, students often move a lot, sigh and seem to be toiling. Moreover, following these retreats participants often describe how difficult the process of learning insight meditation is—some saying it feels 'almost like a torture' or is harder than basic training in the Israeli army (cf. Cook 2010a: 75, 79).

Accordingly, Moshe, the instructor of the JV retreats, explicitly cautions students about expecting to experience transcendence. People often believe, he told me, that during meditation sessions they are supposed to feel serene and witness sublime visions such as 'lights and halos'. But 'sitting down with yourself and with everything that comes up inside you' is often quite 'inconvenient', even 'Sisyphean', and 'every meditator should expect moments of difficulty'. First-time meditators, he used to explain, often find that when practising in the retreat's quiet setting, they discover 'a great amount of disquiet and agitation inside—something they do not encounter directly in the turmoil of day-to-day life'. Subsequently, in JV retreats Moshe instructs students to accept the physical and emotional pain they feel during long, successive periods of sitting meditation, and to allow it to persist

until it naturally passes away, as through practising this way 'every sensation one feels becomes an instrument for inner change'.

Therefore, according to Moshe, while JV students can ultimately expect to find 'deep inner peace', this does not result from going on a pleasant break away from the responsibilities of one's family life and occupation. Rather, at least in initial stages, the 'light' meditation students experience stems from 'inner war' or 'finally dealing with all the discomforts and unpleasantness we try to distract ourselves from in everyday life'. And it is by standing up to these difficulties during meditation, and remaining equanimous (*b'izzun nafshi*), that one's *nefesh* can gradually become free from desires (*ta'avot*), one's character traits (*middot*) can be rectified, and one can arrive at greater proximity to God. Meditation, in this sense, is aimed at cultivating a virtuous Jewish self, one that may subsequently encounter the divine more fully and lucidly.

Accordingly, self-discipline plays a central role in JV retreats, as students' ability to restrain themselves is crucial for their prospects of completing these programs. This becomes apparent in the 'code of discipline', which they are required to read and to commit to prior to the beginning of each retreat.[14] These guidelines—designed to enable meditators to conduct as sustained and focused an investigation as possible of their 'inner worlds'—are not always enforced fully. But they provide a general framework for participants concerning how they should behave during retreats and what they can expect from them.

In the code, participants are asked to maintain 'noble silence', namely to refrain from any form of communication (both verbal and nonverbal) with other students for the duration of each retreat. Moreover, they are instructed to abstain from listening to music and to writing or reading (with the exception of daily Torah study, considered binding according to *halacha* or Jewish religious law). Furthermore, participants are required to commit to staying within the retreat's site and to have no contact with the 'outside world'. (This includes anything from phone calls, text messages and emails to having visitors, and students are asked to deposit their cellular phones prior to each retreat.) Likewise, they are expected to eat only the 'simple' vegetarian (and Kosher) meals provided by the management—the last full meal every day being lunch; and are not permitted to bring cigarettes, alcohol or drugs (including painkillers and sleeping pills). Finally, participants are instructed to regard meditation as a 'very serious' endeavour that involves 'strenuous work', and to appreciate they are not going on a 'vacation site' in which they can expect to enjoy themselves or receive 'intellectual entertainment'. This is explained citing the rabbinic ethical principle of *lefum tsa'ara—agra*,[15] meaning, in Aramaic: according to the pain or the effort is the reward.

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[14] This text is highly influenced by the Goenka retreats' 'code of discipline'.
[15] Pirkei Avot 5:23.

Asceticism and its discontents

These ascetic dimensions of JV retreats—the emphasis they place on disciplined 'self-regulation' and 'training' aimed at 'becoming virtuous' (Cook 2010a: 16)—resonate with similar tendencies found in the participants' religious lives. In a group conversation that concluded one retreat, an experienced meditator highlighted the importance of 'inner labour' in Judaism. 'The more one suffers and toils' during retreats, he subsequently stated, 'the more one comes out of them having gained' in terms of rectifying one's character traits (*tikkun ha'middot*).

Similarly, another participant related that each year during the 'Days of Awe' or Jewish High Holy Days (*yamim nora'im*), people engage in talking, reading and listening to sermons concerning repentance (*teshuva*). Subsequently, many make earnest attempts to 'work' on particular aspects of their characters. This student, however, stated he had grown disillusioned with the prospect of becoming 'a better person': soon after starting to lead an observant lifestyle, he realized that performing the Jewish commandments transformed him mostly 'on the outside'. Nevertheless, after coming across meditation, he became hopeful once again of improving 'on the inside'.

Moreover, Yehuda, whom I discussed in the previous chapter, liked the fact that JV retreats train students to refrain from reacting to their physical sensations. Following a retreat he had attended, when feeling itchiness—on one of his ears, for example—while being busy in his daily tasks or praying, he would 'work hard' and 'give a good fight', succeeding, at times, to resist his urge to scratch and thus relax the irritated body part. This training made Yehuda more aware of involuntary impulses to move during prayer in an agitated reaction to discomfort or pain. It also reminded him of what he once heard about a renowned Hasidic master (or 'Rebbe') in Eastern Europe, who was said to continue studying Torah with great determination—despite constantly being bitten by mosquitos and while refraining from scratching his wounds. When Yehuda first heard this anecdote, its details 'went in one ear and out the other', as he had not possessed the 'tools' needed for beginning to practise anything similar. But after learning *vipassanā*, Yehuda felt that he too could begin 'working on his character'—through abstaining from reacting to unpleasant sensations.

Such ascetic tendencies among orthodox meditators, and other dimensions in their lives that underscore restraint and discipline in striving for 'ethico-religious perfection' (Etkes 1993: 5), are resonant with Jewish teachings on *mussar* (usually translated as 'ethics'). *Mussar* works—'spiritual literature' that 'directs Jews in their daily lives', and particularly on 'one's attitude towards God' (Dan 2011)—are often quoted by Moshe in his 'evening talks'. Moreover, such texts are studied, to varying degrees of frequency, by members of all orthodox Jewish strands. Accordingly, a classic orthodox attitude considers 'relentless and ascetic devotion to Torah study' to be Judaism's 'supreme religious act' (Mirsky 2014: 8), and uncompromisingly

ascetic habits and capabilities are frequently attributed to Hasidic masters and teachers (e.g. Green 1979: 27-28; Garb 2009: 110).

Ultimately, however, many religious meditators' identification with the *mussarist* ethics of ascetic self-cultivation—with exerting effort in order to 'fight' and thus rectify one's harmful character traits—is quite restricted. As several of them convey, they had turned to meditation in the first place as they wished to enjoy a connection with 'the Maker, blessed be him' (*ha'Boreh yitbrarach*). But they dislike the 'tough' and 'strenuous' style of divine service ('*avodat Ha'Shem*) they encountered when attending religious Jewish seminaries and high schools. Instead, they look for a religious atmosphere characterized by *nachat*—satisfaction and comfort.

Indeed, observant meditators frequently associate their experiences of religious seminaries with self-repression: the curriculum almost universally included *mussar* texts, and meditators relate having been encouraged to impose discipline on themselves in order to comply with orthodox ideals. For example, they refer to intimidating rabbis or spiritual 'supervisors' (*mashgichim*) 'chasing' and compelling students to attend long morning prayers—despite the latter feeling alienated from such prayers and being willing to perform them only 'extraneously'.

In contrast, observant meditators, including most teachers, frequently convey disapproval of the promotion of a harsh atmosphere among orthodox Jews. Oftentimes, they confess that they themselves previously 'fell down' (*naflu*) in relation to central matters of Jewish observance, and that being overly harsh with oneself can cause 'paralysis' and make one stop believing in oneself. Furthermore, some religious meditators associate *mussar* and the related endeavour of character rectification (*tikkun ha'middot*) with the self-repression they oppose. *Mussar* texts and figures often advocate virtues such as awe of heaven (*yirat shamayim*), modesty (*tsniut*), shame (*busha*) and submission (*hachna'a*)—an emotional range that has been described as comprising the intuitive set of religious Jewish values (Yifrach 2019). Yet this approach is often criticized for encouraging Jews to 'shrink' and 'fight' themselves, thereby rendering them 'hesitant and paralysed' and suppressing the 'freedom and breadth' necessary for mature spiritual development (ibid.).

Such anti-ascetic rejection of *mussar* resonates with the Nietzschean-inspired Zionist (including religious Zionist) repudiation of diasporic Judaism's presumed frailty (Ohana 1995). Specifically, a central Zionist ethos has involved viewing 'Diaspora Jews' as 'the diametric opposite' of the handsome Sabra (native-born) 'pioneer of the Land of Israel' (Almog 2000: 77-78). Imagined as beautiful according to standards originating in ancient Greece and Rome, the Sabra man is 'strapping, self-confident, and strong-spirited' (ibid.). In contrast, the diaspora Jew—especially the Eastern European *yeshiva* (religious seminary) student—is thought to be 'pale, soft, servile, and cowardly' (ibid.), and is associated with 'bowing one's

head before the gentile', including during the 'horrors of the Holocaust" (38, 43). It is with the latter, diasporic type of Judaism that orthodox meditators often associate *mussar*.

'Natural', emotional and artistic expression

At the end of one JV retreat, a participant told me he did not like the program very much, and mentioned that instructing students not to say 'hello' to each other—and not even to make eye contact—felt 'repressive'. Similarly, several orthodox meditators believe that whereas other settings are less arduous, and consist of more opportunities for students to experience happiness and humour and to express themselves, the format of JV retreats is 'too strict'.

Specifically, many consider ascetic discipline 'unnatural'—both in the sense of conflicting with one's true nature and of detaching oneself from the natural world. One participant, for example, related that Moshe's 'evening talks' were 'difficult to endure', as they elaborated on several *mussar* themes (e.g. how rectifying one's character traits is essential for having true faith in God; the importance of embracing the reality of one's impending death). 'It was not good for me to listen to these talks', he relayed, as they 'oppose the process I undergo now and collide with what I believe in. They really devalue simple and free spiritual life. They try to combat our simple nature—they are about always acting unnaturally'. Similarly, a professional musician was troubled by the idea of not changing his posture or rubbing itchy sensations: whereas he wished to operate out of a sense of 'natural flow', striving to concentrate on an unpleasant feeling without reacting to it appeared to him 'unnatural'.

Moreover, in JV retreats, curtains and screens normally block daylight from entering the meditation hall through windows, thus preventing bright light from dazzling meditators. Instead, a dim lamp is used. Often, however, when a meditation session ends and a rest period begins, a few students remove the screens and open the shutters for the duration of the break. On one occasion, such students explained that staying in a room that lacks daylight for too long feels overly removed from nature. Likewise, one of them spends much of his time 'touring the country' (*metayel ba'arets*), and after the retreat had ended, he went camping in the desert—feeling that the space where that particular retreat took place was too detached from the natural world.

As these narratives illustrate, the centrality of self-restraint and discipline in JV retreats does not resonate with many orthodox students' preferences. Rather than constraining, even temporarily, what they view as their healthy and natural volitions (making eye contact with and saying hello to others, rubbing itchy sensations and being in contact with the natural world), they prefer expressing such volitions freely and spontaneously.

Most participants in these retreats, we should note, are relatively experienced in facing discomfort. Previously, they conducted military service, which at times involves demanding physical and psychological dimensions (e.g. in the case of combatants); or became habituated

to studying Torah for many hours every day when attending religious seminaries; or both. It is perhaps for this reason that such students rarely leave retreats before their end. However, when the contents and approach of these retreats are not resonant with their ethical understandings and preferences, often such participants make this known following or even during retreats. This demonstrates that the majority of orthodox meditators favour expressivity over disciplined cultivation not, or at least not only, due to a simple difficulty to endure regimens entailing much self-restraint. Namely, their preference for spontaneous self-expression over ascetic discipline reflects, fundamentally, cultural ideals rather than psychological escapism.

The emphasis many orthodox meditators place on free expression of 'natural' volitions and on nature resonates with romantic principles such as fulfilling one's 'nature' (Taylor 1989: 374) and 'the affinity between our feelings and natural scenes' (Taylor 1992: 86). Moreover, as I explain in Chapter 4, such stress on nature is related to the special attachment many religious meditators feel not just towards the natural world in general, but also towards the particular, sacred natural environment of the 'land of Israel' (*erets Yisrael*).

Many orthodox meditation students' romantic desire to express themselves unreservedly also finds other articulations, such as their extroverted expression of emotions, particularly joyous ones. One evening, I was driving with a few religious Jews to a 'Jewish meditation' class in Jerusalem. One of the men present, whom I met for the first time that evening, rested his head on my thigh soon after entering the car. During the drive he was humming *niggunim* (wordless tunes) and giving a short but animated *vort* (Yiddish: a Torah insight). At some point, he sighed fondly and said: 'it's good to be a Jew'. Similarly, male orthodox meditators often hug one another (as well as me), smilingly call each other 'my brother' (*achi*), affectionately tell others they love them and explain what they appreciate about them. One man can tell another, for instance, that he is 'sweeter than honey' and has 'a lot of light to give others'. This accords with Hasidism's 'romantic-like ethos', which designates 'extremely positive value' to 'feelings and emotions' (Persico 2019a).

Similarly, religious meditators often arouse joy in themselves through playing music. For instance, during Yonatan's meditation workshops participants often play tunes (on instruments such as a guitar, an organ and a West African drum), chant, dance and clap their hands. This corresponds to Rabbi Nachman of Breslav's 'revolution' of recommending 'joyful song and melody', rather than 'suffering and self-affliction', as a prescription for atoning for sin (Mark 2011: 110).

Moreover, I once attended a prayer service with a group of meditators that took place during the Jewish month of Adar. Associated with joy, the holiday of Purim—commemorating the saving of the Jewish people from the plot to kill all of them, as recorded in the biblical Book of Esther—falls during this month. At the end of the service, several participants started

chanting and dancing loudly and enthusiastically: 'when Adar arrives, we increase our joy![16] The tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them!'[17] Combining happiness and gratitude with an appreciation of collective revenge, this chant is poignant for many.

Indeed, in addition to joy, orthodox meditators often express more troubled emotions. While praying during retreats, frequently male meditators look as if they are yearning or anguishing, and at times they even shed tears. With their eyes closed, their torsos swinging to and fro and their hands rotating in their sides, they move their lips silently and appear to be concentrated as they address God. And at one point during the prayer, many of them point their palms towards the sky and look up in supplication. Moreover, during retreats participants at times scream when praying, attempting to do so 'from the depth of one's heart', according to the Hasidic ideal of attaining 'burning enthusiasm' (*hitlahavut*) or 'higher devotional intensity through prayer' (Seeman 2008: 472). One meditator, for instance, would often shake his body passionately and clap his hands loudly. And in the confession (*viduy*) part of the prayer, he would bend down and thump his right fist on the left side of his chest, next to his heart, as is the custom—yet he would do so with remarkable force.

Similarly, orthodox meditators often display a keen interest in creative self-expression, with many of them belonging to social milieus in which artistic endeavours, normally viewed as 'a means of self-discovery' (Fischer 2011: 291), are quite common. For example, in one religious seminary (*yeshiva*) in a West Bank settlement, a student set up a 'quietening hall/palace' (*heichal hashkatah*) inside a small portable building (*caravan*) where students could meditate. The hall was full of colourful cushions and contained a Tibetan bowl used for marking the beginning and end of meditation sessions. Aesthetically similar to this hall, the next-door portable building served as a painting studio for students.

Furthermore, one meditation student I met was studying in a religious Jewish film school in Jerusalem; another was attending a Jewish contemporary dance school for men; and several worked, at least partly, as musicians. Such engagement with art echoes, of course, a major romantic theme, and 'art was the context in which Romanticism, as a more or less unified ideology, originally emerged' (Wilf 2011: 464; see also Berlin 2001; Trilling 1972). Additionally, a preoccupation with artistic creativity is evident among orthodox Israeli Jews more broadly, particularly as part of religious Zionism, in which an 'efflorescence of creative arts has emerged' in recent years (Fischer 2014: 157). The 'underlying conception' of much of this, it seems, is that 'existential and artistic themes are very relevant to inner religious life and growth' (149; see also Jacobson 2011).

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[16] Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 29a.
[17] Esther 9:1.

Finally, in Goenka *vipassanā* retreats, 'meditation halls are painted white' and consist of 'no symbols or decorations' (Pagis 2008: 158), as part of a minimalist and uniform aesthetics (Loss 2007: 117-118). Maintaining such a 'monotonous' environment is aimed at establishing a symbolic universalism that downplays identification with any religious or cultural idiosyncrasy, thus assisting participants to attend to their inner experiences without stimulating unnecessary thoughts and imaginations (119-120). Similarly, Moshe—while not removing Jewish religious objects or images—makes substantial efforts to ensure that the meditation hall in JV retreats is relatively bare and colourless, so as to allow participants to focus on introspection. Moreover, akin to many teachers of Goenka retreats, Moshe's style of dress is simple, avoiding conspicuous shades and designs.

In significant respects, this is unlike the aesthetics of the West Bank settlements where JV retreats frequently take place, and that participants at times encounter during retreats. For example, Moshe often instructs participants, for lack of more soothing alternatives, to conduct prayers at impromptu synagogues that normally serve as educational institutions. Inside or nearby such locales, the walls are usually colourfully and chaotically painted—in a style that reveals clear countercultural and New Age influences. During one retreat, for instance, some group prayers took place at a temporary building that normally serves as the meeting point for the members of a strictly religious youth movement. Brightly hand-painted by the adolescents, the walls included a golden image of the would-be third Jewish holy temple in Jerusalem.

Unrestrained bodies

Orthodox meditators' expressive attitudes are also evident in the physical dispositions, or the habitus, of most of the men among them. Specifically, the masculinity of many observant meditators, particularly ones influenced by neo-Hasidic trends and by radical strands within religious Zionism, is characterized by moving around, taking up space and making loud sounds—comfortably, repeatedly and unapologetically. Such physical dispositions are not dissimilar to 'the masculinities peculiar to Zionism and later to Israelis', which combine 'softness', 'sensitivity', and a willingness to be vulnerable with 'hyper-virile' tendencies, i.e. acting in an 'extroverted and emphatic' fashion (Nordheimer Nur 2014: XXIV).

Amit was wearing a mulberry-coloured, collarless shirt and green trekking sandals—with the heels of which he would step on his wide cargo pants' worn-out edges when walking. His beard was long, and his large, coarsely knitted wool skullcap (*kippah*) lay above his wavy, unkempt hair. During prayer services conducted as part of JV retreats, he would often pace easily about different parts of the male section of the impromptu synagogue, for example getting up to look out of a window or to observe religious books on a shelf. Alternatively, he would go outside the synagogue for parts of the service. With his white *tallit* (prayer shawl)

covering his head, back and shoulders, Amit would stroll back and forth; and walking outdoors, he would often tread slowly, stopping to appreciate the view or to smell flowers.

Similarly, during retreats, other orthodox meditators would often walk around various parts of the retreat site; sit down or recline comfortably; and stretch and yawn conveniently. Moreover, male orthodox meditators would feel more confident than I did to go into what I regarded as other people's personal space—including that of women—at times passing them by assuredly during retreats.

The tendency to move around space comfortably and unreservedly seems particularly strong among orthodox meditators residing in settlements in the West Bank (what they refer to as *Yehuda v'Shomron* or Judea and Samaria). In this area, religious meditators often feel comfortable driving cars quickly, and while talking on the phone through a speaker—partly due to the perception of a lower degree of law enforcement there and to some roads being less crowded. Additionally, however, 'living an autonomous, self-expressive national existence in the material reality of Yehuda and Shomron and in domination over the Palestinian population' there 'is the day-to-day, taken for granted' reality for many religious settlers (Fischer 2014: 158). It has therefore become an 'embodied' part of their 'system of dispositions and habitus', and in turn also of much of 'the national religious population at large' (ibid).

This is so particularly in some settlements and unauthorized outposts (*ma'achazim*), characterized at least partly by 'anarchism, radicalism, and self-sufficiency' (Steinhardt 2010: 29) and by an atmosphere of 'nationalistic bohemianism' (Fischer 2011: 301). Such settlements include ones where some meditators reside and where meditation activities take place, and indeed some religious meditators live in houses lacking official building permits, in an in-between legal state (see also Tzfadia and Yiftachel 2014). Operating in these locales provides a 'romantic flavor' (Feige 2009: 48-49): it often brings about a feeling of 'direct connection to biblical history' and of living in a 'romantic landscape of a seemingly unspoiled land' (Jacobson 2011: 32-33).

The inclination of many orthodox meditators to feel comfortable and confident when taking up space and moving around it has, additionally, a resolute auditory counterpart. During retreats in which students were generally expected to remain silent, some religious meditators would nonetheless say blessings—out loud, slowly and intently—in front of others. This would happen after going to the toilet, or before eating or drinking in the dining hall (e.g. uttering 'Blessed are you Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who creates various kinds of sustenance'). At times, some would even hum wordless tunes (*niggunim*) or clap their hands loudly during prayer services. Additionally, several participants would produce a sound— sometimes quite a noisy one—in every step they would take, as their trekking sandals or heavy, Australian leather boots would hit the ground or as they would slowly go up a staircase. (This would even happen in the midst of prayer services, while other students were attempting to

concentrate.) Moreover, religious meditators would often let the doors of meditation halls slam powerfully again and again, or would blow their nose loudly and repeatedly, without appearing to try and decrease sound levels.

These behaviours, being quite similar to those prevalent in many Israeli religious seminaries, are normally not regarded as insensitive by other orthodox participants, who rarely complain about such matters. Thus, unlike 'inappropriate self-expression' in many monastic settings—in which one's body is expected to become 'the container of the inner world' (Lester 2005: 154; see also Cook 2010a; Laidlaw and Mair 2019)—here an unapologetically expressive bodily comportment is perceived as normal, even desirable.

Nevertheless, some orthodox meditators take space as well as make gestures and sounds in a markedly more moderate fashion. The ideal qualities of this alternative male habitus—often associated with Litvak (or Lithuanian) propensities[18] and influenced by *mussar* teachings—are 'humility and self-restraint' as well as 'discipline' of 'passions, urges and emotions' (Hakak 2012: 44, 117). One student from a fairly conservative Haredi background, for instance, used to walk in the retreat site with his face down, and with short and silent steps, clearly distinct from the expansive and audibly conspicuous ones of other participants.

Finally, female orthodox meditators[19] generally exhibit more 'softness', restraint and 'discretion' than male ones (see Fader 2009: 146, 162)—in part because religious Jewish girls in Israel are normally 'educated to be extremely wary of intimate self-revelation, especially in the public sphere' (Jacobson 2011: 34). Many women meditators, however, are still quite expressive in conduct and speech. They often report their 'spiritual' experiences passionately and with vivid gestures, and scream loudly *táte!* ('father' in Yiddish)—as many men do—when 'isolating themselves' in nature and 'speaking to their maker'.

Introspection between repression and expression

During one 'Jewish meditation' lesson, Yonatan interpreted that week's Torah portion. The Biblical Israelites' 'scream' following their enslavement in Egypt, he argued, was what began the process of their liberation. Following Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, Yonatan mentioned that the purpose of screaming during Jewish religious practice—particularly when praying or speaking to God—is releasing inner 'contractions' and helping us return to being innocent. Moreover, he argued that while *Yekkes* (Jews of German origin, stereotypically considered overly polite and rigid, and by derivation anyone else with such characteristics) 'do not like expressing anger', it is important to vent this emotion—for example by screaming.

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[18] Litvak approaches typically emphasize 'highly intellectual Talmud study' (Hakak 2012: 3), unlike Hasidism's 'privileging' of 'individual experience and expression' (Seligman et al. 2008: 136). Both, however, contain significant internal variation and in practice the line that separates them is often blurred.

[19] During my fieldwork among orthodox meditators I interacted mostly with men (see Introduction).

In response, I asked Yonatan whether screaming does not merely relieve anger temporarily, without dealing with the sources of the anger that prompt one to scream in the first place. He replied by stating he did not find anything wrong with releasing inner tension through screaming, even if this relief is only momentary. Similarly, in some of Yonatan's workshops, I would feel a desire to conduct silent introspection of the kind to which I was used from Dharmic retreats—especially while dining. Yet oftentimes, when Yonatan would sense that participants including myself were quiet (and perhaps lonely or upset), he would encourage them to sing and dance, for example by starting to chant a Hasidic *niggun* ('*deedee dai-dai dai-dai dai!*'), with a proactiveness that at the time felt forced to me. He would do so, I eventually came to learn, as he believes (likewise following Rabbi Nachman of Breslav) that through intentionally smiling, dancing, singing and laughing, one comes to possess a greater ability to contain and withstand difficult feelings such as sadness. Indeed, according to Rabbi Nachman one overcomes the 'negative influence' of sadness and suffering by 'forcing it into the dance, sweeping it off its feet as it is brought into the [dance] circle' (Green 1979: 142).

By contrast, in Dharmic forms of *vipassanā*, meditators are instructed to cultivate a mental approach that carves out a middle ground between self-repression and unrestrained self-expression. The option that is suggested instead of these two poles, when dealing with difficult feelings, is self-observation. By this meditators mean investigating diligently and peacefully the nature of mental and physical phenomena one normally takes to make up one's self. Consequently, states such as anger, loneliness and insecurity, which are considered to result from harmful mental habits, are thought to gradually weaken and ultimately be removed. Moreover, and significantly, while carrying out such systematic introspection necessitates some discipline, in Dharmic insight meditation practice this restraint is *not* associated with self-repression. This is so as no enduring self that can be repressed is thought to exist, and as during *vipassanā* practice one's challenging mental and emotional states, rather than being stifled, are supposed to be given the liberty to manifest themselves more lucidly and to be examined calmly.

In JV retreats, Moshe advocated this approach—which he learned when attending Goenka *vipassanā* activities (see e.g. Goenka 1987: 48-49). As Moshe would explain, 'giving room' to pain or 'making friends' with it at times raises from the depths of one's mind things that are 'not easy at all', including underlying 'mental agony' that is not revealed in most of daily life. While such experiences repel some students, in *vipassanā* practice 'we are told just to be with' this discomfort, and 'this is where real individual growth begins'. Indeed, in several cases orthodox meditators credit this middle ground of dispassionate observation, found between repression and expression, as what assists them in improving their psychological states, thus bringing them to feel gratitude towards teachers such as Moshe.

Nevertheless, the majority of orthodox meditation students regard meditative practice as concerned primarily not with such dispassionate observation, but with spirituality in a romantic and expressive sense. According to these religious meditators, meditation *should* consist of self-expression. Consequently, as we have seen, they may regard some meditation activities, including the JV retreats, as involving *too much* discipline—which can prompt them to associate these events with harmful self-repression.

Meditative promotion of authenticity

We have seen that many orthodox meditators reject ascetic self-cultivation and its emphasis on self-restraint and discipline. Instead, they wish to express what they view as their natural desires unrestrictedly, and to be in touch with the natural environment. Moreover, they tend to express emotions—both agreeable and difficult—freely, and to refrain from restricting their movement in space or their generation of loud sounds. What, then, is the role of meditative practice for such religious meditators, ones who emphasize self-expression *at the expense of* ascetic restraint? If meditation is not aimed at rectifying one's character traits through disciplined self-examination, what is its purpose?

Several religious meditators depict meditative practice as promoting 'authenticity' in the face of social constraints. Specifically, they often report being concerned over making choices pertaining to career, familial and educational matters prior to attending meditation activities, and 'receiving answers' (from God, through one's own *nefesh*) regarding their true desires during activities. For example, participants in Yonatan's workshops often emphasize the importance of using the 'silence' and 'contemplation' (*hitbonenut*) that these workshops entail for arriving at self-knowledge. Driving back to Jerusalem from one workshop, Sara—an orthodox woman in her thirties—explained that each Jewish person's soul (*neshamah*) has its own role to play in the universe. 'Each one of us', she said, is 'like a pipe [*tsinor*] responsible for bringing divine light down to this world' in one's own particular way, by carrying out one's unique purpose or destiny (*ye'ud*). Meditation, she subsequently explained, is helpful in investigating 'what is accurate [*meduyak*] for me': 'what do I really want, what is the role of my *neshamah* [soul] in this world and what is its *tikkun* [rectification]'. Meditation, then, assisted Sara in examining whether the way she was living was in line with her soul's unique role and purpose, its *tikkun*.

Indeed, for many orthodox meditators, meditative practice resonates powerfully with the modern ideal of authenticity, or 'coinciding with oneself and one's deepest needs or impulses' (Williams 2002: 184)—another central 'legacy of Romanticism' (Wilf 2011: 472). This ideal holds 'that each individual has his or her own nature or voice' (470-471)—the 'inner élan' (Taylor 1989: 374)—'with which he or she must be in touch and to which he or she must

remain faithful' (Wilf 2011: 470-471). The authenticity ideal emphasizes, in other words, each individual's 'radical uniqueness and capacity for self-determination' (466).

Oftentimes, orthodox meditation students refer to a process of 'connecting' to oneself, or to the work of *birur ha'ratson*: clarifying the 'roots' of one's volitions. According to many religious meditators, what drives most desires is ultimately, as Yonatan put it, the wish 'to connect to *Ha'Shem* [God] through connecting more fully to myself, and in this way to be happy and content'. Therefore, in workshops, Yonatan encourages participants to conduct divine service ('*avodat Ha'Shem*) that brings them 'closer to themselves', to discovering their 'deepest and most internal volitions'. Such 'work' consists of chanting wordless tunes (*niggunim*) and *hitbodedut* (isolating oneself and speaking to God out loud, sincerely and spontaneously).

Yet for many religious meditators, meditation too serves as a way of connecting more fully to one's unique self and its specific role in the world—which they consider, in turn, a way of connecting more fully to God. According to Charles Taylor, in the modern ideal of authenticity, 'self-discovery' must pass 'through a creation' of some sort—usually 'artistic' (1992: 61-62). One's true nature, in other words, can be found 'only through articulation and expression' (Wilf 2011: 471). Subsequently, when one is 'in the dark about what one most wants or most deeply needs' (Williams 2002: 182), she or he may 'embrace the materiality of semiotic forms'—e.g. write words on a page or play an instrument—and thereby 'reveal' to oneself one's 'interiority' (Wilf 2011: 469).

According to Eitan Wilf, in the process of self-discovery, one 'examines different potential lines of action that are externally objectified' in order to 'ascertain which possibility matches up with his or her interiority and should thus be pursued' (2011: 477). Similarly, in the silence and introspection that meditative practice entails, different options about one's life choices 'flow' into one's mind. Many meditators experience that when focusing their attention on the 'materiality' of the feeling of their breath or bodily sensations—in the silence, solitude, and bareness of retreats and workshops—realizations about 'who they really are' and about what they 'really want in life' take place. Such orthodox meditators, then, use embodied 'external stimuli' or 'material objectification'—i.e. the feeling of one's breath and physical sensations—as 'a locus of orientation' or an 'inner compass' (Wilf 2011: 478-479) that brings about insights concerning one's 'true self'.

This, in turn, enables such religious Jews to express themselves more completely. When students in Yonatan's workshops share with the group an 'insight' they have about their 'spiritual work' or their 'role' in the world (at a workshop's closing session or during a Torah lesson), oftentimes the rest of the participants utter a *pshhh* sound, indicating being impressed. One student, for example, relayed in a trembling voice that the workshop he had attended helped him realize what his 'vision' was. Characteristically (cf. Leach 2000 [1965]),

this was to teach religious Jews various psychological, spiritual and communicative 'tools' he had encountered, in a way that would be 'integrated' into a Jewish practical and theological framework.

Nevertheless, religious meditators who are willing to endure a substantial degree of ascetic self-restraint—e.g. ones who attend repeatedly JV retreats—*also*, at times, utilize meditative practice for romantic self-discovery and subsequent self-expression. As we have seen, the JV retreats place emphasis on the disciplined self-observation and self-cultivation that insight meditation traditionally involves. However, Moshe explains also that the more one develops inner peace and awareness of one's inner world through meditation, the more one's 'natural and spontaneous ability to experience and express emotions' increases. Thus, rather than turning meditators into 'machines', the fruits of meditation, and particularly the experience of inner peace, enable them to convey their emotions and thoughts in a more refined and creative manner. Yet this is based, for Moshe, not on 'a sense of a private self' or 'ego', but instead on 'a silent sense of being that lacks any personal characteristics'.

In Moshe's case, such articulation takes the form of writing verse that expresses reverence of God: over the years he has composed numerous personal and intuitive poems concerning his spiritual experiences. Moreover, his spontaneous and candid self-expression consists of speaking to God during sessions of prayer, *hitbodedut* and even during seated meditation practice. Likewise, for many participants the Buddhist-derived ascesis they practise on such retreats amounts to merely one stop on their religious and creative personal journey of self-realization—even if a stop several of them return to repeatedly. This makes the restraint required on such retreats more bearable. Living in retreat conditions, as one meditator put it, is not a permanent state—it is more akin to a recharging area where one can ask oneself questions 'about what I am busy doing [in life] and this way get the answers'.

Finally, a few 'returnees' to the Jewish fold (*ba'alei teshuva*) relate that they 'discovered' their connection to orthodox Judaism in the first place through practising *vipassanā* in Dharmic, non-Jewish settings. Some of them describe an 'inner voice'—representing the profoundest and perhaps most divine part of their selves—announcing to them that they have decided to become observant (and in the case of Moshe, to undergo formal conversion to Judaism). Normally, such meditators depict this moment as a realization that hit them suddenly—like a 'storm' in which the depths of their souls became revealed to them, although one that had been preceded by a longer period of 'inner search'. So, while listening to a 'voice' that is considered the 'authentic', 'internal ethical guide' leads some non-religious Israeli Jews to refuse military service (Weiss 2017: 56), here heeding this voice following Dharmic meditative practice prompts such people to begin leading a life of orthodox Jewish observance.

Rejection of discipline in JV retreats

And yet the incongruence between JV retreats' ascetic demands and observant students' expressive dispositions and preferences often generates tension, which at times involves students leaving retreats midway. Indeed, a few participants who had not conducted military service[20]—and in rarer cases, ones who had—quit these retreats before completing them.

Elisha, a participant in his twenties who was studying at a Hasidically-inspired religious Zionist *yeshiva*, approached Moshe after one of the first sessions of a JV retreat and said that the practice taught seemed to suppress his 'natural desires'. He was feeling like eating meat, for example, and that was not allowed in the retreat. Moshe crossed his hands, appearing to be on the defence. Quickly, however, he recuperated and said that 'this practice actually *connects* us to our desires [by helping us to realize what they are], but also enables us to have the choice of whether or not to "go for them"'.

This did not seem to appease Elisha. That day, during the evening group prayer ('*arvit*), he was shaking and apparently crying (though without making much sound). Moreover, he raised his arms up in the air, frequently curled his hair with his hand, and his facial expression indicated that he was going through a lot. Furthermore, the *shmoneh esre*, the central part of the prayer—to which individual participants can add personal requests—took Elisha far longer to whisperingly recite than everyone else, who were waiting quietly for him to finish, not for the first time during the retreat.

Likewise, before the participants went to sleep that night, Moshe reminded them that they were not supposed to be playing musical instruments, adding softly that whoever was doing so was hindering others. (In fact, students were asked not to bring such instruments to the retreat's site in the first place.) A few hours earlier, I had seen Elisha place a stringed instrument into its case, and the next morning, he decided to return home. According to Moshe, the retreat's contents and demands 'clashed with too many beliefs he held'. Nevertheless, before he departed Elisha told me, while shaking my hand, that he did not regret attending. 'I have received lots of insights about myself', he said.

Another *yeshiva* student struggled since the beginning of a JV retreat in which he participated. At the end of one evening talk, he approached Moshe and began complaining about some of the talk's contents, laughing shortly and apparently uncontrollably. Among other things, he related that he liked to practise meditation with an approach of 'open awareness'—paying attention to whatever thoughts or feelings come up in his mind, without choosing in advance a particular object on which to focus—as he learned to do elsewhere. This student thus rejected Moshe's instruction to move his attention across his body systematically,

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[20] This was either because they were in their early twenties and postponed enlistment to study in a *yeshiva*, or because they attended a non-Zionist Haredi *yeshiva* and thus were exempt from conscription.

as if 'scanning' it. Following this conversation, he walked around the meditation hall with quick steps, puffing his lips and sighing.

On another evening, this student approached me (I was assisting Moshe during that retreat) and said a lot of pressure had accumulated inside him, and that he wanted to go on a walk and dip in the *mikveh* (ritual bath) down the road from the retreat site. And during one lunch break, standing next to several other participants, he said loudly (despite the instruction to maintain silence): 'oh, I feel like screaming! God help me'. Not long after, he too decided to leave.

What was so difficult for such religious students? As we have seen, unobstructed self-expression is a central concern for many observant meditators. For several of them, therefore, it is difficult to be told what to do by others, especially if this reminds them of the ways in which they used to be instructed in religious educational institutions they found oppressive. Moreover, orthodox meditators cherish the notion of having a unique self that they ought to express. Thus, normally they are unexcited about, even antagonistic towards, manipulating this self to fit the demands of external authority. Indeed, if one believes that a true self exists, and that one knows what is right for it, then it seems sensible to reject any exercise that intends to melt or transform radically this sense of individuality.

When discussing some participants' complaints about the atmosphere in JV retreats being 'too gloomy', Moshe said the unhappiness such students feel actually 'comes from within themselves'. According to Moshe, the retreat conditions and the very nature of this meditation practice stir difficult emotions and memories—'all those unpleasant voices one carries within and usually represses'. And as some participants are unable to take it, 'their minds come up with different excuses for leaving'. Several students concurred, telling me that those who 'run away' normally do so as a result of their inability to face painful emotions, experiences and memories. Similarly, some participants in Goenka *vipassanā* retreats, too—'around ten percent of all new students' (Pagis 2008: 21)—leave prematurely.

Yet as I have attempted to show, at least in the case of JV retreats a significant *cultural* dimension complements such inner experiences of difficulty. That is, a conflict exists between the ascetic discipline these retreats necessitate and many participants' valuation of spontaneous self-expression over such restraint. To some, this provides further ethical encouragement not to identify with the meditative practice taught, namely not to consider it justified, to begin with, to make the efforts necessary for combatting the inner challenges *vipassanā* elicits.

Yonatan's workshops

A group of men was conducting a Sabbath prayer service in the male section of a modestly-built synagogue in a Jewish settlement in the southern part of the West Bank. Among them

was Yonatan, who was leading a 'Jewish meditation' workshop in the settlement that weekend. Yonatan's long *tallit* was covering his white Shabbat clothes and resting on the top of his head, above his large crocheted *kippah*. For much of the lengthy service, including parts when the men were singing and dancing, he held no eye contact with the other participants, some of whom were his meditation students. A deep crease between his closed eyes indicated his attempt to concentrate on his inner experience while silently uttering the prayer's words, his head moving in a slow, repetitive nod. And on the way back to the house where the meditation workshop was taking place, he was walking quietly and contemplatively on his own.

Soon after arriving, however, Yonatan resumed guiding the participants, both women and men, in meditation for around 15 minutes. 'Take a deep breath, smile and feel your stomach filling with air. When you exhale, you can make a loud sound. *Aahhhh*'. He then instructed the students to 'take a few minutes to observe what's going on in your *nefesh*: what you're thinking, what your physical sensations are like and what emotions you have'.

> If you feel discomfort, some contraction anywhere in your body, that's okay. You can simply be with that, without trying to change it. But also pay attention to a pleasant feeling you have somewhere—of goodness, of satisfaction. Now, you can start witnessing the different volitions that are there inside and gradually find one that is more internal. You can smile as you connect to this inner volition.

After this session had ended, Yonatan began leading the group in the reading of a Hasidic text. Once in a while during this lesson, he would start passionately chanting a wordless tune, excitedly clapping his hands, banging rhythmically on the table or even standing up, dancing, and smilingly encouraging other men to follow. When participants would share a positive experience, or an insight related to their '*avodat Ha'Shem* (divine service), he would raise his hands and forcefully cry 'Yes!' And at one point, he even imitated the sounds of goats (*baaa!*) and rode on the back of a male student. According to Rabbi Nachman, he explained, 'fooling around' can enable one to reach out to God in ways the intellect (*sechel*) cannot, and intentionally making oneself joyous is a way to defeat sadness and suffering. Throughout this session, Yonatan's children were running around the room playing.

Both restraint and self-expression are detectible in Yonatan's demeanour. He conducted disciplined and concentrated introspection in the context of prayer. But not long after, when leading students in Torah study, his behaviour was much more unreserved (as we have likewise seen earlier). Moreover, he directed students, in a manner resembling typical insight meditation instructions, to pay attention to whatever experiences they were facing, including difficult ones, without trying to modify them—which involved self-restraint. Yet he also guided them to *reject* the effort that characterizes ascetic self-cultivation by intentionally smiling and concentrating on pleasant rather than challenging feelings. And in line with self-expression, in Yonatan's instructions meditation was ultimately intended to engender a

greater awareness of one's most 'internal' volitions, and subsequently a profounder familiarity with one's true self.

Indeed, taken as a whole, Yonatan's workshops do not require much discipline: in these programs, students practise meditation as part of short and temporally dispersed sessions and alongside frequent Torah lessons. Moreover, such workshops entail more unstructured periods, time for sleep and room for interacting with others than do other programs such as the JV retreats. Likewise, Yonatan's workshops emphasize the students' romantic self-expression: singing, dancing and speaking (or screaming) to God sincerely in *hitbodedut*. Consequently, religious meditators who do not wish to follow highly demanding instructions, and who prefer instead to learn meditation as part of an approach that enables relaxing, expressing oneself freely and listening to intellectual Jewish teachings, often appreciate such programs.

Yet according to several religious meditators, such a focus on spontaneous emotional utterance and on relative ease, rather than on systematic meditation instruction, entails the risk of not enabling students to undergo meaningful and transformative enough experiences. One former participant, for instance, told me he liked being instructed in a structured technique that he could then practise at home. In Yonatan's workshops, he said, the contents taught—analyses of holidays that are taking place at the time, or of that week's Torah portion— are beautiful, and Yonatan is a lovely person. However, in each activity 'he teaches something slightly different' when it comes to meditation. Similarly, another student complained that the observance of silence in such events is 'not serious enough', namely insufficiently meticulous and protracted to allow students to meet unfamiliar parts of themselves.

In contrast, at times the emphasis on personal authenticity and the complementary devaluation of discipline that characterizes such workshops encourages participants to reject the relatively little restraint that is asked from them in the first place. This is so as under such conditions, some students find it difficult to appreciate the significance of discipline for meditative practice. In one event, which was officially conducted in silence, a few men used to speak to each other nonetheless, until late at night, in the men's dormitory. Refraining entirely from chatting would be 'extreme', two of them said, as they were close friends.

The true self and God

In Theravāda Buddhist contexts, insight meditation is said to lead to 'self-knowledge' in a 'conventional' and 'everyday' sense—i.e. concerning matters such as 'one's patterns of behavior, thought and emotions' (Pagis 2008: 88). Ultimately, however, it is intended to lead to realizing that a 'stable and permanent self' (32)—the 'thinker of thought' or 'feeler of feeling'—is an illusion (85; see also Collins 1982). In contrast, we have seen that a major component of the ethical projects of many religious meditators who emphasize self-expression

is the view that one has a unique and stable self. Accordingly, a main goal of meditation as part of this approach is connecting the orthodox Jew to one's self in the ultimate sense of 'the soul' (*neshamah*)—the Godly part within—which subsequently enables a more truthful expression of this self in the world. Contrary to generating insight (*vipassanā*) about non-self or no-soul (*anattā*), then, for such religious meditators meditative practice is used for bringing about insights regarding one's singular, 'true self' or divine soul.

But how is the self understood as part of the ethical projects of religious meditators who *are* willing to tolerate significant degrees of ascetic self-restraint? For many such meditators, too, meditative practice involves an attempt to connect to one's 'true self', and accordingly, references to this self—the soul—are not entirely missing from settings that promote ascetic restraint such as JV retreats. Significantly, such meditators often regard connecting to one's soul and hearing 'the voice of God' inside oneself as resulting from the central Hasidic concept of *bittul* or self-annulment. Contrary to the expressive emphasis on one's uniqueness and stability, *bittul* promotes the opposite view: that one should strive to realize that having a separate self is an illusion, as in truth 'there is nothing but God' (*ein od milvado*) in the world. As part of the approach that grants greater room for disciplined self-cultivation, then, connecting to one's divine soul is less about celebrating one's particularity and more about humbly realizing the vanity of thinking that one exists as a separate self (see Chapter 1).

In an important sense, then, both religious meditators who are willing to tolerate higher degrees of ascetic discipline (as instructed in the JV retreats) *and* those who wish to focus on spontaneous expression (as encouraged in Yonatan's workshops) attempt to link one's current, everyday self and one's underlying, true self. For the former, however, more effort and discipline are required for arriving at this real self. And rather than trying to find God in the *particularity* of one's present state of selfhood, aspects of one's self need to be transformed—one's character traits need to be rectified—so that the self's real divinity, which transcends one's individuality, can become apparent (cf. Fischer 2014: 164-165). Put differently, in the ethical mode that centres on self-expression one becomes closer to God through getting to know better one's *unique* self. In contrast, within the approach that appreciates discipline's contribution to self-cultivation, through becoming more virtuous— namely closer to God in one's character—one can connect to an *impersonal* aspect of the soul. According to Moshe, such self-annulment still enables meditators to give expression to their particular life circumstances, though while being less burdened by identifying with a 'personal being' or 'ego'.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that most orthodox Jewish meditators value spontaneous self-expression, and that they worry that ascetic self-restraint might bring them to repress their natural and healthy desires. Nevertheless, some agree to practise meditation in settings that necessitate accepting a substantial degree of discipline (e.g. the JV retreats). Such systematic toil is aimed at enabling these observant Jews to transcend their unique individuality and encounter Godliness within. Yet disciplined meditative practice allows them also to get to know themselves more profoundly and to express emotions and thoughts more lucidly.

In contrast, observant meditators whose physical dispositions are more ecstatic and religious approaches more expressive have less patience for restraint. Either they leave JV retreats prior to their end, or prefer to attend activities that place greater emphasis on spontaneity. For these meditators, expressing one's individuality and one's 'natural' volitions and emotions does not have to rely on much 'preparatory *askēsis*' (Faubion 2013: 288). Instead, they are primarily interested in utilizing the silence and peace that meditative practice is said to generate for connecting to and articulating one's unique, true self; and facing their innermost volitions in this way is what they mean by encountering God within. Thus, in settings other than the JV retreats (e.g. Yonatan's workshops) orthodox meditators whose approaches are largely expressive often domesticate Buddhist-derived meditation to fit their more romantic goals and needs. This illustrates the transformation that originally ascetic practices, such as *vipassanā*, may undergo as they are utilized in novel cultural contexts, ones in which the emphasis placed on disciplined self-restraint is restricted.

We may now appreciate more fully what is indeed 'ethical' about practising meditation in these different ways. Understanding what is ethical about meditative practice in which disciplined self-cultivation is central seems more straightforward: this approach involves orthodox Jews working 'to fashion themselves and cultivate ethical qualities' (Laidlaw 2017). Through observing their physical sensations—pleasant, unpleasant and neutral—and refraining from reacting to them, for example, practitioners attempt to 'rectify their character traits', thus becoming more virtuous and faithful and ultimately even annulling one's sense of separate selfhood. Such work requires 'discipline', which is often 'unpleasant' and 'cognitively, emotionally, or physically taxing' (Mayblin and Malara 2018: 9). Finally, such discipline is to a considerable extent 'future oriented', as it promises 'eventual ease' (ibid.)—feeling more peace as well as experiencing greater proximity to God subsequently to one's efforts.

Yet as we have seen, religious meditators who emphasize spontaneous self-expression often reject this restraint and the 'future oriented' thinking it entails. Such refusal of discipline, however, is not 'amoral' like 'playing football during the hours before fast-breaking' in Ramadan to 'kill time' and 'forget the feelings of hunger and thirst' (Schielke 2009a: S31, S24-S25). Nor is it a 'lenient' claim that all this effort may in itself be fine, but it is 'just not for me'

(Mayblin 2017: 504). Rather, many religious meditators' rejection of discipline is often quite 'earnest' (ibid.), normative and passionate.

So, for a participant who tells Moshe he opposes *vipassanā* as it 'represses his volitions', there is something fundamentally dubious about insight meditation's ascetic dimensions. According to such a student, 'the kind of persons we think we are or aspire to be' (Laidlaw 2014a: 1) are ones who act on their volitions, being expressions of one's singular individuality—rather than people who observe such desires dispassionately, let go of them and attempt to dissolve one's sense of separateness. For these orthodox meditators, then, spontaneous and authentic self-expression is indeed an 'ethical aspiration' (Taylor 1992: 55). It is a 'normative' (Wilf 2011: 472), 'moral ideal' of 'what a better or higher mode of life would be' (Taylor 1992: 15-16). And when meditative practice prompts one to make concessions concerning this ideal, refusal to do so amounts to more than mere 'running away' from difficulty: it entails an ethical judgement that relies on a value consideration.

Specifically, whereas both the 'disciplined' and 'expressive' approaches aim at promoting *spirituality* through meditative practice, and are committed to doing so in an orthodox Jewish manner, they differ over what is entailed in the value of *non-renunciation*. Virtually all orthodox meditators are, or aspire to become, householders who partake in family life. But for students with spontaneous, expressive propensities, *non-renunciation* entails, additionally, refraining from the self-repression they consider some forms of meditative practice (e.g. JV retreats) to involve.

Whereas the current chapter has portrayed the 'disciplined' and 'expressive' ethical projects as discordant with each other, the next two chapters demonstrate that tensions are also found *within* each project. Thus, in Chapter 3 I examine the ethically laden choices religious students—especially 'expressive ones'—often have to make when attending the settings for learning meditation that I have discussed in this chapter, as well as additional ones. These dilemmas revolve around the difficulty to pursue simultaneously *spirituality, orthodoxy* and *non-renunciation*. Then, in Chapter 4 I analyse different orthodox meditators' senses of failure following their attempts to promote these three values outside formal settings for practising meditation.

CHAPTER 3

'Falling Down' in Order to 'Uplift Divine Sparks': Value Conflicts and Strategies for Managing Them

Along with Ya'akov and Yehuda—two orthodox Jewish meditators in their thirties—I stepped out of an elevator into one of the floors of a residential building in a town in central Israel. We were curious and excited, as we were about to attend the first meeting of a weekly class for meditation instructors which, Ya'akov and Yehuda imagined, would assist them in supporting other observant Jews in becoming familiar with meditation.

Outside the flat where the class took place, we were greeted by a large Buddha statue. A few years earlier, Ya'akov told me decisively he would not agree to participate in meditation activities where such figures are found, and when he noticed the statue beside the flat, he paused for a moment, surprised. He then smiled anxiously, glanced at Yehuda and me and having noticed that we remained silent, said upon entering: 'guys, let's remember we're Jewish!' Inside, however, Ya'akov was to discover several more Buddha figures. Additionally, Tibetan Tangkhas, a picture of the Dalai Lama, canvases with Zen calligraphy and other images from Tibet, China and Japan—all were hanging on the walls.

The floor of the main room, where students were seated, was covered with mattresses and cushions. The room was crowded, and we had difficulty finding a place to sit down. Ya'akov and Yehuda were hesitating as to where to go, with the only available spot requiring us to take a seat very close to female participants, some of whom were wearing tights deemed 'immodest' by orthodox Jewish standards. A student in a Haredi (or ultra-orthodox) Jewish seminary, Yehuda later related that a long time had passed since he had been to a room with so many women. At the *yeshiva* he was attending—a Hasidic seminary where many students were *ba'alei teshuva* (newly observant Jews)—even going to Jerusalem's central bus station was deemed 'problematic' given all the 'stimuli' found there.

Having settled in, Ya'akov asked Yehuda how he had felt about 'the decoration', pointing to the statues and images. 'I'll try to uplift the [divine] sparks [these things contain]', Yehuda responded. He was referring to the mythical, Kabbalistic 'conception of the *tikkun*', or restoration, according to which 'captive divine sparks' are dispersed throughout creation and have to 'be redeemed by human deeds' (Dan 2006: 77-78). Central also to Hasidic thought, this doctrine contends that it is 'redemptive' to discover the 'holiness' found 'in everything' (Mirsky 2014: 48, 103). Apparently, for Yehuda this included presumably idolatrous figures and immodestly clothed members of the opposite sex.

During the class, the teacher asked students to define 'meditation'. Different answers were offered ('systematically observing the mind', 'being in silence with myself', 'concentrating

on a single object'). When Yehuda's turn had arrived, he said assuredly that meditation is 'the attribute of equanimity' (*middat ha'hishtavut*). Responding to the teacher's request for elucidation, Yehuda stated that meditation is '*chesed* [love, mercy] and *din* [strict divine law, justice], or right and left, meeting at the centre'—referring to divine emanations (*sefirot*) described by Kabbalistic writings (Dan 2006: 43). The non-observant Jewish teacher, whom Yehuda could assume was unversed in this terminology, replied with a slightly bewildered 'nice' before moving on to the next student.

Both orthodox Jewish participants appreciated the teacher's humorous, easy-going approach. For Ya'akov, it accorded with his own attitude, in which meditation is not a means for anything else—especially not the ultimate Buddhist goal of escaping earthly life and attaining *nibbāna* (or *nirvana*). Rather, in Ya'akov's view meditation is a way of manifesting the satisfaction and contentedness that is always available in the present moment. Similarly, Yehuda was thankful for many ideas and concepts he had encountered at the class, and reported that his religious life had become livelier following his practice of meditation. However, both also had problems with the teacher not acknowledging matters such as the creator God, who had revealed the Torah to the people of Israel, or the person's soul (instead, the teacher discussed the Buddhist concept of not-self).

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Ought an orthodox Jew be in an immodest environment, where statues and images challenge prohibitions of idolatry ('*avodah zarah*), and the philosophies taught defy one's beliefs and views? If asked, most orthodox Jewish rabbis in Israel would counsel to steer clear of such settings (see Mautner 2016: 29-30, n.d.). However, several meditators—who are committed to orthodox Jewish observance and who consider themselves faithful, 'serious' Jews—find meditative practice meaningful enough that they decide to learn it even in locales that are far from conforming to strictly-orthodox dictates. Can they 'uplift the [divine] sparks' found in such settings? Or are they leading themselves into unnecessary 'tests' (*liydey nisayon*) regarding their ability to 'guard their eyes' (*shmirat ha'eynayim*) from 'forbidden sights', eat kosher food, observe the Sabbath properly and avoid harmful teachings?

In this chapter, I analyse some of the practical quandaries orthodox Israeli Jews face when resolving to learn Buddhist-derived meditation. Religious students can learn such practices in settings that follow orthodox Jewish standards of conduct and thought, such as ones described in previous chapters. Yet for reasons that will become clear below, often they decide, additionally, to attend events in settings that do not. Determining where to learn meditation, I argue, requires them to face dilemmas that necessitate reflection; and this often results in making difficult practical judgements. Such judgements normally revolve around trying to pursue, simultaneously, three distinct values that are important to religious meditators and that often come into conflict. These things that really matter (Robbins and

<p style="text-align:center">70</p>

Sommerschuh 2016: 8) are: (I) *Spirituality*, or experiencing wholeness, harmony and self-intimacy; (II) *Orthodoxy*, maintaining correct Jewish conduct, views and attitudes; and (III) *Non-renunciation*, striving to sanctify worldly life rather than escape it, which often involves promoting spontaneity at the expense of ascetic discipline (see Chapter 2).

As I shall demonstrate, many religious meditators experience an inability to realize all three values sufficiently in *every one* of the settings for learning meditation that are available to them. In situations of value conflict, 'realizing more of one' value entails 'realizing less of' others, thus necessitating people to make tough, even 'tragic', choices (Robbins 2013: 100-101). And as conflicts of values typically involve or evoke 'distinctive' dimensions of ethical life—such as dilemma, reflection, self-evaluation, reasoning, doubt, judgement and decision (Laidlaw 2014a: 23; 2018)—they are 'specifically ethical' (Laidlaw 2014b: 499). Accordingly, below I show that learning and practising Buddhist-derived meditative techniques often requires orthodox students to make various kinds of ethically laden choices and compromises.

In recent years, several anthropologists studying ethical life have turned to analysing value conflicts, or ethical dilemmas more broadly—namely situations in which people find themselves caught between two or more incompatible demands. James Laidlaw, for instance, describes the tension among lay followers of Jainism between the 'strong example of self-denying asceticism' that characterizes their religion—and in which they partly participate—on the one hand, and their 'pursuit of wealth, prestige, personal fulfilment' and 'fecundity' on the other (2002: 319). Similarly, Joel Robbins depicts how 'Urapmin culture is deeply marked by the contest between their traditional relationalism and the individualism they confront in the Christianity to which they are also committed' (2004: 300). And Samuli Schielke portrays 'an ethical subjectivity' among young Egyptian Muslim men 'that is based on a coexistence of various motivations, aims, and identities' that often come into 'conflict' (2009a: S29)—including 'religion', 'respect and family', 'good character' and 'love' (2009b: 168).

In situations characterized by such 'tensions and contradictions between competing desires or obligations' (Venkat 2017: 169), people frequently have to make 'painful decisions' and 'moral compromises between incompatible aims of good life' in 'the absence of a middle way' (Schielke 2009b: 171; cf. Lambek 2010: 23, Daswani 2013: 475). That is, in these circumstances people need 'to address' a 'tension' that 'is never permanently transcended or reconciled' (Simon 2009: 270), thus being 'unable 'to escape from' making 'hard choices' that require them 'to take one path rather than another' (Laidlaw 2014a: 172). This happens, for example, when a particular cultural system makes opposing requirements '*at the same time* without providing coherent methods to resolve potential crises and contradictions' (Elisha 2008: 181)—thus leaving people 'in a state of moral frustration' (Robbins 2015: 23). 'Actually living a life', then, in many settings 'requires doing so with reference to values that make

conflicting demands, and managing the inherently irresolvable tensions between them' (Laidlaw 2014a: 169).

Yet to my knowledge, anthropologists have not tried to conceptualize the specific strategies people employ in order to contend imperfectly with value conflicts—strategies that can be compared to ones utilized in other locations. To be sure, *institutionalized* ways of addressing such conflicts are frequently available to people. Laidlaw, for instance, writes that in Jain communities there exist 'various established social forms' (2014a: 127)—namely 'ideas, institutions, relationships, and practices' (1995: 22)—that lay Jains use for making their contradictory values seem at least partly 'combinable' (2014a: 126-127). Nevertheless, he emphasizes that Jain 'individuals still have to make choices' when engaging with these forms (2002: 319) and that '[e]ach ethical subject must find his or her own way' (2014a: 168). Similarly, Robbins explains that while much of Urapmin Christian rituals and millenarianism attempt to 'settle' the value conflict the Urapmin experience—ultimately both fail (2004: 254, 289-290). And more broadly, according to Robbins 'the cross-cutting play of values in people's lives' is what 'gives social experience its fluid, occasionally unpredictable, and perhaps sometimes even chaotic character' (2015: 28; see also Robbins 2004: 315). Like Laidlaw, then, Robbins appears to maintain that despite socially established procedures for managing them, conflicts of value remain open for people to handle in diverse and unscripted ways.

I have no wish to challenge this portrayal of social life as having fluid qualities. Rather, I suggest that the ways people manage value conflicts *beyond* socially institutionalized routes (e.g. specific rituals, relationships and practices) are often recurrent, and that conceptualizing them is worthwhile. As with acts of spontaneity—which frequently take highly predictable forms and fall within 'a limited repertoire of conventional genres' (Laidlaw 2014a: 174-175; see also Herzfeld 1985; Leach 2000 [1965])—improvized responses to value conflicts, when analysed, may turn out to follow conventional patterns. Describing orthodox Jewish meditators' implicit strategies for managing value conflicts, I consequently propose, can contribute to a comparative examination of the often-recurring ways people contend, in practice, with the 'inherently irresolvable tensions' (Laidlaw 2014a: 169) such conflicts involve. Therefore, in much of this chapter I discuss two interrelated strategies that religious meditators employ—for the most part tacitly—which I call respectively 'value amplification' and 'value accumulation'. And in the chapter's conclusion, I suggest that thinking in terms of these strategies may help to explain what takes place also in other settings.

Unsatisfactory options

In the instance portrayed above, Ya'akov and Yehuda regarded many ideas and practices taught in the class for meditation instructors as helpful for inner wellbeing (Value I: *spirituality*). Such devices are unavailable to them, as they see it, in contemporary religious

Jewish social settings. Moreover, these orthodox meditators appreciated the teacher's casual attitude and non-ascetic approach to meditation (Value III: *non-renunciation*). In contrast, they had difficulty with his 'secular' (or atheist) views, and found it challenging to meet satisfactorily orthodox Judaism's practical demands as part of the class (Value II: *orthodoxy*). Therefore, while Ya'akov and Yehuda learned much from the teacher, they did not consider his class an ideal setting for learning and practising meditation.

Why, then, were these observant meditators willing to continue attending the numerous meetings of which the class consisted? Orthodox Israeli Jews who wish to learn Buddhist-derived meditative practices, or to improve their proficiency in such techniques, can do so in several different locales. The first central category is normally referred to as 'Jewish meditation' (*meditatsia Yehudit*), and includes, among other settings, the 'Jewish *vipassanā*' retreats and Yonatan's workshops discussed in previous chapters. Such activities facilitate, as an inherent part of the programme, the observance of religious Jewish law (though as we shall see, this is not always done in a way orthodox meditators consider proper). The second main type of events may be referred to as 'Dharma activities', attended primarily by 'secular' (*chiloni*), i.e. non-observant, Israeli Jews. In these events, meditation instruction is typically accompanied by discussions of (primarily) Buddhist thought, presented as a universally applicable philosophy and psychology rather than as a sectarian 'religion'. Both categories (i.e. 'Jewish meditation' and 'Dharma activities') consist of several organizations and teachers that arrange and lead meditation events, with every setting having its own characteristics and style of practice.

Significantly, it is common for orthodox students who have participated in one activity—and are interested in continuing to practise—to appraise different alternatives before choosing a single setting they are happy to attend more regularly. Yet it is also normal for them to *alternate* between different settings without committing to one organization or even intending to do so: many are appreciative of *certain* features of each locale but have difficulties with others. Thus, for several religious students each setting, including 'Jewish' ones, enables an adequate realization of only *some* of the three values. This includes Ya'akov and Yehuda. As they did not find any setting satisfactory for realizing sufficiently all three values, they agreed to participate in ones that accomplished satisfactorily only some, such as the class for meditation instructors.

To take another example, Zvi, a *yeshiva* student in his twenties, was contemplating which career (and relatedly, which course of higher education) to pursue. Zvi had attended several meditation activities before I met him at a 'Jewish *vipassanā*' (hereafter: JV) retreat. On one occasion, he told me about additional locales where silent retreats were taking place,

which consisted of a 'secular' Dharma setting and one for practising 'Jewish meditation'—in both of which the teachers were instructing in a similar meditation style.[21]

According to Zvi, he benefited considerably from this style of practice, which had enabled him to get to know better his thought patterns and emotions and to experience harmony. Moreover, the organizers and teachers in both settings were 'kind, sweet people'. Likewise, he appreciated these events' format, which was more 'relaxed' and less intensive than JV retreats. Specifically, retreats in the former settings included many breaks (such as ones dedicated to yoga practice or other types of physical exercise); and consisted of shorter meditation sessions. Practising in such locales, then, amounted to a significant experience for Zvi, enabling him to get to know himself better in an environment he found beneficial.

But this was not the whole story. In both the settings he appreciated, Zvi faced difficulties in upholding orthodox Jewish observance. On 'secular' Dharma retreats, he explained, it was at times 'unpleasant to be religious'—especially during Shabbat; and one really 'had to make an effort' to sustain an orthodox form of life there. For example, once Zvi had attended a crowded retreat, in which teachers used a microphone inside the meditation hall during the Sabbath so that all students would be able to hear them. This prompted Zvi and a few others to refrain from entering, as listening to someone speaking using electricity during the Sabbath means to desecrate it (*lechalel shabbat*). For such reasons, Zvi and another religious man once joined such a retreat for a few days, but then left prior to Shabbat.

More surprisingly, Zvi encountered problems related to orthodox observance also on a 'Jewish meditation' retreat. JV retreats consist solely of men, following the organizers' strict interpretation of Jewish law as requiring men and women to remain apart in public and in religious events. In contrast, the organizers of the other type of 'Jewish meditation' retreats held a non-orthodox approach, welcoming both men and women, and with no separation other than in accommodation. Once, however, at the request of orthodox students with more stringent views, the organizers decided to enable those who wished to do so to sit in a sex-separated manner. They thus placed a partition (*mechitsah*) in the back of the meditation hall, next to which such people could stay; while others could sit in the room's front, at a 'mixed-sex' area.

For Zvi, this was not satisfactory. He expected the partition to be placed in the room's front rather than back, so that those who wished to sit separately could do so without seeing members of the opposite sex when looking at teachers. (Ironically, in this regard Zvi would have preferred the Dharmic Goenka *vipassanā* retreats, in which greater separation of the sexes is kept.) Moreover, when the 'Jewish meditation' teachers conducted non-orthodox

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[21] This approach centres on paying attention to whatever salient sensations, thoughts and emotions one experiences. By contrast, in JV retreats, influenced by Goenka's teachings, students are instructed to move their attention across the body systematically. Moreover, while the former normally allocate time for walking meditation, JV retreats only involve seated meditation.

forms of Jewish prayer inside the hall, Zvi decided to step outside. He was concerned about participating in events that claim to conduct Jewish practice, but operate in a manner he considered 'not kosher'. Such events, he felt, are even more confusing than 'secular' activities, which normally do not pose religious alternatives to traditional forms of Judaism.

Zvi, then, found spiritually significant the style of practice common to retreats in two settings, Dharmic and Jewish, he had attended (*spirituality*). Moreover, he appreciated what he regarded as the more flexible and gentler—or less ascetic—approach on these retreats (*non-renunciation*), which assisted him in benefitting from his practice. However, in terms of Jewish conduct (e.g. Shabbat observance, separation between men and women), he had experienced major difficulties in either setting (*orthodoxy*). Thus, for Zvi, along with advantages, these non-orthodox retreats had significant shortcomings.

Similarly, at the JV retreat, Zvi liked the commitment to orthodox Jewish observance (*orthodoxy*), which had made it simpler for him to meditate. However, it was difficult for him to develop inner wellbeing (*spirituality*), as he found the schedule, rules and atmosphere too strict and ascetic (*non-renunciation*). He was therefore nervous about attending such a retreat again.

Moreover, Zvi used to attend another 'Jewish meditation' activity: workshops taught by Yonatan (see Chapter 2). He benefited from these events being conducted in a religious settlement—making orthodox observance integral to the program and timetable—and viewed many of the intellectual teachings as beautiful (*orthodoxy*). And while he enjoyed the laidback atmosphere (*non-renunciation*), this was related to the main problem he found with such retreats: that Yonatan was not instructing in any meditation technique systematically. Rather, according to Zvi, Yonatan was mostly patching together inspiring sermons on Hasidism with a meditation style that was too inconsistent, and during sessions that were too short, for such events to be inwardly transformative (*spirituality*). Consequently, Zvi was not enthusiastic about participating in these workshops again: experiencing plenty of *orthodoxy* and *non-renunciation* in his everyday life, such a weak dose of *spirituality* did not seem worth going to the trouble of attending a workshop.

Responding to value conflicts

When experiencing a value conflict within a given setting, orthodox Jewish meditators such as Ya'akov, Yehuda and Zvi have to decide whether to remain there. And if they decide to stay, they need to determine how to respond to the conflict, making judgements while 'very much in the midst of what is going on' (Laidlaw 2018: 15) and frequently having 'to improvise' in order somehow to 'find their way' (Laidlaw 2014b: 504; see also Mattingly 2014).

One central way in which religious meditators deal, in real time, with such inability to realize adequately all three values is what I shall call 'value amplification': actively augmenting

the fulfilment of those values that are not already being realized sufficiently in a particular setting. Most commonly, *orthodoxy* is in many settings impaired by secular people defying fundamental Jewish religious beliefs and making proper Jewish observance harder to sustain. In response, religious students proudly state correct theological positions and pronounce their commitment to their observant Jewish identity, thus bringing the atmosphere and views in that location closer to proper Jewish ones.

For instance, when considering how to contend with the Buddha statue he had noticed, Ya'akov glanced at myself, and especially at Yehuda, scrutinizing our reactions. Having felt that Yehuda would not resist staying (they had both been looking forward to the class and we had driven a long way to get there), Ya'akov resolved to enter the flat, though not before stating: 'guys, let's remember we're Jewish!' Similarly, Yehuda resorted to value amplification when attempting to 'uplift the [divine] sparks' found in the class's profane setting—during which he was sitting next to immodestly clothed women—by offering secular participants a charismatic yet unprompted account of Kabbalah.

These meditators' labour to rectify the atmosphere around them and reinforce their observant identities was carried out as part of social interactions: amongst themselves and with non-observant participants. First, Yehuda's and especially Ya'akov's attempts to manage their appearances to ensure they were perceived as sufficiently devout involved efforts to pre-empt potential accusations of laxness. (Like most orthodox meditators, however, both wished also not to come across as excessively harsh concerning observance.) Second, while working at their own ethical self-characterization as religious—and thus as closer to truth—they portrayed non-observant Jewish participants as ethically dubious.

Additionally, religious meditators need to resolve whether to attend a particular meditation activity *prior* to actually doing so—often knowing that it is unlikely to promote satisfactorily all three values. Similarly, after attending a setting that enables only an inadequate realization of one or more values, orthodox meditators frequently contemplate whether to repeat the exercise. A main way in which they attempt to address partially such dilemmas is what I shall call 'value accumulation'. They pursue the three values *serially* and *aggregately*—practising meditation in several different locales, with each one enabling a substantial realization of only one or two values, and additional settings making up for the limitations of previous ones. This way, they hope, it becomes possible to overcome temporary sacrifices—such as 'downfalls' (*nefilot*) in terms of Jewish observance—and feel that over time all three values are fulfilled significantly.

Zvi, for example, regularly participated in different meditation events, yet not feeling sufficiently content with any, he assembled, over time, the advantages of each in a way that would counteract the others' shortcomings. Thus, he would attend activities in which he felt he was developing inwardly (*spirituality*), yet which were often inconvenient for him in terms

of Jewish conduct (*orthodoxy*), thus minimizing his involvement whenever doing otherwise would entail compromises over Jewish observance. And this would add up gradually to Zvi's participation in activities in which what he regarded as adequate observance was convenient (*orthodoxy*), but in which he found the atmosphere too harsh (*non-renunciation*), and consequently, from which it was difficult for him to benefit spiritually (*spirituality*).

While these strategies can be utilized independently from one another, frequently they are linked. Amplifying a value that is not being sufficiently fulfilled by realizing it more fully as part of the same event often supports religious meditators in accruing all three values, though gradually and unevenly, in the longer run. That is, value amplification can reinforce orthodox meditators' decision to remain in a particular setting despite its value shortcomings—knowing that in the future they can offset these limitations by attending other settings. The greater mental ease religious meditators achieve through value amplification, then, commonly serves as a foundation on which they can rely when planning to realize the three values cumulatively in the longer run.

For instance, emphasizing their Jewish identity seemed to reassure Ya'akov and Yehuda about staying in the class, despite its limitations in terms of Jewish observance (*orthodoxy*). And this assisted them also in value accumulation: they knew their participation in that class was temporary, and that later they could attend additional settings. These would include ones where they could perform the Jewish commandments more smoothly (*orthodoxy*), though probably in any such setting it would be difficult likewise to promote inner wellbeing (*spirituality*) *and* for this setting to be sufficiently non-ascetic (*non-renunciation*).

Moreover, whereas religious meditators normally partake in value amplification while being present in a particular setting and interacting with other participants, value accumulation often takes place discreetly, without them having to disclose it to others. Nevertheless, below we shall see that this is not necessarily so. At times, telling other orthodox Jews that one's attendance of a Jewishly-questionable setting is brief, and will soon be followed by returning to one's familiar, observant way of life, assists the interlocutors to tolerate the meditator's participation in that activity.

I shall now present and analyse in more detail the dilemmas that a few particular orthodox meditators faced when deciding where to practise meditation, and the ways they responded to such quandaries. I will emphasize their employment of value amplification and value accumulation, and the links between them.

Shlomo: From Torah study to Zen and back?

An unmarried man in his mid-twenties, Shlomo first practised Zen meditation intermittently while studying at a religious Zionist *yeshiva* following his military service. At an advanced

stage of his religious training, Shlomo attended a *kollel*—a section of the *yeshiva* in which experienced students learn Gemara (rabbinical analysis and commentary) more comprehensively. During his time at the *kollel*, Shlomo spent an entire year preparing—under a rabbi's direct supervision—for an arduous, five-hour exam that was planned to take place over the summer. Many rabbis and students considered passing this exam a prized accomplishment, and doing so amounted to a stage that leads, eventually, to rabbinic ordination.

While Shlomo enjoyed studying Gemara, he also desperately wished to continue developing his meditation skills. Around this period, he encountered an online article on *vipassanā* written by Moshe. The article was long, but Shlomo could not stop reading. It seemed to describe a skill he had been yearning to obtain for a long time. As Shlomo explained, 'I told myself: "I don't care about anything—I'm going to do this"', referring to the JV retreat. According to Shlomo, despite the many years he had devoted to Jewish learning—all the knowledge, Torah insights and quotations he had accumulated—he still felt 'powerless'. In the end, none of these things had really helped him to lead what he regarded as a 'happier and more peaceful life', feeling helpless in the face of 'the most basic aspects of his personhood': emotions and desires, as well as involuntary thoughts that would not let him fall asleep at night.

While a JV retreat was planned for not long after this time, it coincided with Shlomo's Gemara exam. Moreover, the next time such a retreat was scheduled was around a year later. He thus faced a dilemma: along with additional obstacles (*meni'ot*), attending the retreat would mean foregoing an important event in which he had invested much time and effort. Following some deliberation, eventually Shlomo accepted he *had* to participate in the retreat. Feeling as if his 'life depended on it', he decided 'to go for it and concede the exam'—to the disappointment and incomprehension of the rabbi instructing him and several people around him. Whereas rabbis in that *yeshiva* generally welcomed engagement with non-traditional topics such as art and philosophy, for Shlomo to go as far as favouring meditation over Torah study surely amounted, according to many, to an error of judgement.

Shlomo did not regret his choice. Returning home from the retreat, he felt happy and freed from 'a lot of the baggage' he had been carrying for his entire life. For the first time, he explained, he was no longer afraid of uncontrollable urges or emotions overcoming him, or from endless thoughts taking over. At last, he had 'a tool for dealing with such mental or emotional experiences'—observing them with acceptance, knowing they are impermanent. And unlike all the 'ideas and words' by which he had been surrounded, Shlomo reported, this practice dealt with experiences he could actually feel on his flesh; leaving 'a deeper imprint' than all the books he had ever read.

Encouraged by his experience, Shlomo resolved to dedicate more time to thorough meditation training. While unable to do so on JV retreats (which at the time were taking place irregularly), he imagined a monastic environment to be ideal for this end. And still being interested in Zen practice and thought, with their emphasis on spontaneous action and simplicity, he decided to travel to a Zen monastery abroad, where he spent a few months.

Even within Shlomo's comparatively 'liberal' orthodox milieu, this choice counted as unconventional. Yet he was confident that the core of both Zen and Buddhism was meditative 'mental work' ('*avodah nafshit*') rather than 'religion', and that they complemented rather than contradicted Jewish life. Moreover, Shlomo was certain that staying at the monastery was part of a merely 'temporary journey': while essential for his gaining experience in meditation, it would eventually result in his Jewish practice getting 'stabilized' again, he thought.

Indeed, following a further period of travel, Shlomo's plan was to return home. In Israel, he would maintain a more solid form of observance (hopefully, one entailing a rejuvenated understanding of Judaism), and relying on the expertise he was to gain, he envisaged making meditative practice more accessible to the many religious Jews who 'need it'. Possibly, this would take place in a particular religious settlement in the West Bank, where residents combined orthodox observance with an atmosphere of 'personal search' and 'spiritual freedom'.

Following his return from the monastery—over lunch in Jerusalem with friends from his *yeshiva*—Shlomo felt comfortable explaining that during his time there he delved deep into Zen, and so had taken temporarily to following Jewish law more loosely than normal. Whereas his friends did not respond negatively to this, he related later that other people did (and indeed another meditator complained to me that the 'openness' that characterized Shlomo's *yeshiva* resulted in some students turning out 'confused'). However, during his stay at the monastery it was important for him to keep track of the days of the week, so as not to 'forget' the Sabbath—this, he said, could happen easily given that institution's 'monotonous' schedule. And while at times partaking in the monastery's routines involved him desecrating the Sabbath, on Fridays he would wear elegant clothes and conduct a ritual for 'receiving' it (*kabbalat Shabbat*). On that day he would also, as done traditionally, recite a longer prayer than those he would perform on weekdays.

Shlomo, then, was dedicated to developing inner peace (*spirituality*), to the extent of being willing to make temporary compromises concerning his Jewish observance (*orthodoxy*). Specifically, he believed that the religious Jewish norms into which he had grown up—which afforded a central place to Torah study—were unsatisfactory in terms of inner wellbeing. Consequently, he was willing to give up on a highly-regarded qualification in textual learning in order to attend a meditation retreat. Similarly, during his time at a Buddhist monastery, he

was ready to observe the Jewish commandments more leniently—at times violating Jewish law—in order to devote himself more fully to Zen.

Furthermore, Shlomo decided to pursue spiritual flourishing in a setting he found sufficiently non-ascetic: while monastic, it emphasized spontaneity and this-worldly wonder (*non-renunciation*). Specifically, according to Shlomo, Zen practice enabled him to move away from a 'transcendent' view of God as 'great and mighty'—'a grandfather sitting in the sky and admonishing humans'—and towards experiencing an 'immanent' God 'found in everything' (see also Gleig 2013). Finally, upon returning home, Shlomo hoped to realize all three values significantly, leading an observant life (*orthodoxy*) in which he would meditate regularly and instruct others in such practice (*spirituality*), while residing in a community characterized by personal freedom (*non-renunciation*).

In relaxing temporarily his observance while at the monastery, Shlomo practised value accumulation. He was hoping that pursuing inner wellbeing there (*spirituality*), without adhering carefully to Jewish law, could be added to him upholding a high level of observance for years before (and presumably after) his temporary absence from home (*orthodoxy*). Moreover, telling other orthodox Jews (e.g. family members) that this was his plan rendered Shlomo's intention to stay at the monastery more palatable for all and made it easier for him to decide to travel there.

While at the monastery, Shlomo appeared also to employ value amplification. Whereas during his stay he was only following the Jewish commandments loosely, he attempted to compensate for this by reinforcing the Jewish atmosphere there (*orthodoxy*). Specifically, he did this by wearing elegant clothes on the Sabbath: being a traditional component of Jewish religious life, this assisted him in maintaining Shabbat ambience even while staying at a Zen monastery abroad. And keeping this element of Jewish conduct made it more pleasant for Shlomo to remain there despite being able to uphold only a restricted level of observance, and in turn to continue accruing all three values over a more extended period.

Ya'akov: Attending 'secular' activities 'ex post facto'

A graduate of a religious Zionist *yeshiva* in his thirties, Ya'akov, discussed earlier, was working in the field of holistic medicine. While he attended many 'secular' Dharma activities, he was often at pains to ensure his presence there was taking place within a solidly-defined practical, and especially theological, Jewish framework. During a break from a Dharma class, a secular woman told Ya'akov she was happy he was there, as being a religious Jew, his presence added a distinct dimension to the group. 'I too feel a connection to Judaism', she stated, before adding matter-of-factly that 'after all, Buddhism and Judaism are really the same'. Another man soon joined in, saying: 'meditation is just meditation—it's neither Buddhist nor Jewish'.

During most of this exchange, Ya'akov remained silent. Eventually, however, he rejected both speakers' perennialism, stating softly but decisively: 'it all comes from us [i.e. from Judaism]'.

For Ya'akov, then, Judaism and the Dharma are *not* on a par regarding their correlation to truth: the source of the universal, religiously neutral 'wisdom' (*chochmah*) found in different 'eastern' traditions such as Buddhism is Judaism itself. And unlike such traditions, the teachings of Judaism alone consist also of genuine divine revelation (*Torah*). Thus, Ya'akov believed it was appropriate for Jews to learn the Dharma not only because the wisdom it contains is universal and non-religious, but also because historically, this wisdom is derived from *Judaism* (see Chapter 4).

On his way to his car following another class, Ya'akov encountered a secular participant. While this was midweek, Ya'akov wished this student 'Shabbat shalom', a blessing universally said prior to or during the Sabbath (which begins on Friday evening). When I questioned him, he explained in an innocent-sounding manner that 'we won't see her [that participant] until Shabbat'. Yehuda, who was also present, began laughing.

What motivated Ya'akov's midweek 'Shabbat shalom' blessing? By practising meditation in Dharmic settings, he was taking one step outside the relative safety and clarity of unequivocally orthodox Jewish milieus (such as religious seminaries and houses of learning). And in return, he felt a need to urge people pursuing spiritual flourishing within 'secular' Dharmic locales to move at least one step *his* way, towards 'kosher' Jewish thought and practice. Consequently, Ya'akov challenged the secular student subtly about her non-observance, reminding her—and perhaps also himself—that the truth ultimately lies in *Judaism* rather than in the Dharma. In other words, he attempted to cope with the avowedly non-observant surrounding by making the atmosphere a bit more 'Jewish'.

Similarly, before a non-observant meditator went on a 'secular' Goenka *vipassanā* retreat in northern Israel, Ya'akov wished him: 'enjoy your trip abroad', implying that the atmosphere on such retreats is insufficiently 'Jewish'. According to Ya'akov, while the practice instructed there is profound, remnants of 'monastic' (Theravāda Buddhist) philosophy—which for him is fundamentally 'un-Jewish'—are entrenched in the organizers' approach. Such 'residues', as Ya'akov explained, include a deep suspicion of the world, which in this ascetic viewpoint, as he understood it, one ultimately needs to renounce.

Specifically, the Goenka retreats are a concentrated attempt to investigate the nature of the suffering or dissatisfaction (Pali: *dukkha*) that, according to the Buddha, characterizes life, and in turn to learn how to deal with it. Ya'akov, in contrast, believed that the world, created by a benevolent God, is fundamentally good; and that following Jewish 'return' to the land of Israel as part of Zionism, we live in the 'generation of redemption' (I shall elaborate on this in Chapter 4). Consequently, for Ya'akov meditation's goal is not to eliminate suffering but to experience 'the inspiration of divine presence' (*hashra'at ha'Shechinah*).

Thus, instead of practising meditation 'intensively'—in a way that encourages students to encounter difficulties early in the process—Ya'akov advocated a softer approach of 'slowing-down, quietening the mind and relaxing'. And unlike the Goenka retreats (and the JV retreats that are influenced by them), the framework he had in mind would give room to singing and music—which according to many religious meditators 'played an important role in the meditations of the ancient prophets of the Bible' (Kaplan 1982: 13). Meanwhile, when attending JV retreats, Ya'akov would lean against a wall during meditation sessions, lie down inside the hall during breaks, and generally seek not to strive very much, thus moving the atmosphere in the 'right' direction.

Furthermore, the approach to meditation in Goenka retreats seems to be at odds with another goal that is central for Ya'akov: promoting Jewish spirituality not only *within* 'the land of Israel', but also *in relation* to it. While for him extraordinary spiritual potential is encompassed in the land's nature, Goenka retreats move students away from its natural environment. For example, each day of these retreats consists of many hours of silent practice in an artificially lit hall in which the windows are covered, consequently 'sealing' the hall, as Ya'akov put it, from nature and natural sunlight.

Besides Dharma classes and *vipassanā* courses, Ya'akov attended other 'secular' Dharma retreats. While he appreciated the 'more relaxed' atmosphere there, it was important for him to ensure his attendance would not come at the expense of Jewish observance. This required a considerable amount of planning from him—along with reflecting on practical problems that would arise and making judgements concerning potential solutions.

For example, while students on these retreats are expected to maintain silence, at times Ya'akov would speak to other observant participants about religious matters. He would remind them that the first day of the new month of the Jewish calendar (*rosh chodesh*)—which required them to pray differently—was coming up; and would coordinate the logistics of conducting Jewish rituals (e.g. ones related to Jewish holidays). Normally, observant students would perform such rituals discreetly. Ya'akov, by contrast, would oftentimes give 'Torah sayings' (*divrey Torah*) in an assured and non-apologetic voice. Moreover, he would communicate with kitchen workers about the food's *kashrut* ('fitness' according to Jewish dietary laws), refraining from consuming fresh vegetables since workers would not ensure they contained no insects as required by Jewish law (*halacha*).

Finally, Ya'akov decided not to attend such 'secular' retreats during the summer. On these events, men would share space with women who were often dressed 'immodestly'. While this in itself was 'problematic', things would go too far in summer months, when female participants tended to wear shorter, even less 'modest' clothing.

Ya'akov, then, appreciated the meditation practices he had learned in various Dharmic settings, which he found instrumental for inner wellbeing (*spirituality*). But while, on the

whole, he managed to uphold orthodox observance in such locales, often this required ingenuity, and was not problem-free, as the conditions there were not ideal (*orthodoxy*). Likewise, Ya'akov often opposed what for him was the ascetic atmosphere in which such practices were taught (*non-renunciation*), which he considered improper from a Jewish standpoint (*orthodoxy*).

Thus, Ya'akov wished to practise Buddhist-derived meditation as part of a clearly-delineated Jewish theological and practical framework, one in which he would feel comfortable and in control. He believed, however, that no option he had encountered was suitable for doing so. Indeed, using the language of the Talmud, he admitted attending 'secular' retreats 'ex post facto' (*b'di'avad*) rather than 'a priori' (*l'chatchila*), namely only for lack of a satisfactory 'Jewish' alternative. Accordingly, he was one of a few orthodox meditators who often discussed establishing a setting that would better satisfy his needs (i.e. would enable realizing adequately all three values).

In the interim, Ya'akov attempted to maintain his commitment to orthodox Jewish identity, thought and practice even when operating in settings run by non-observant people. One central way in which he dealt with the challenges this involved was through value amplification, making use, confidently and openly, of the possibilities available to him within a given locale for pursuing his main values. For example, he would speak to others on silent retreats so as to ensure correct performance of Jewish law (*orthodoxy*), or would lie down inside the meditation hall to create a non-ascetic ambience (*non-renunciation*). Additionally, operating this way seemed to make him feel better about staying in such imperfect settings, thus assisting him in value accumulation: attending different locales and pursuing all three values aggregately. Finally, he would keep away from certain meditation activities at particular times if he believed the circumstances there might overly defy proper Jewish observance.

Yehuda: Reflection and judgement during interactions
Following a 'secular' Dharma class, Yehuda approached the teacher saying he was surprised to conclude—based on what the teacher had explained—that the Dharma did not amount to idolatry ('*avodah zarah*). The teacher, and a few senior students present, hastened to confirm that it 'definitely' did not. Buddha statues, they added, are not a way of worshipping any external entity. Rather, they are meant to remind meditators of the potential for cultivating favourable mental qualities, similarly to photos of Jewish masters (*tsaddikim*) that many religious Jews hang in their homes or at work. Though Yehuda seemed persuaded, he appeared to continue contemplating this for a while.

A few days later, Yehuda and I meditated together in my flat in Jerusalem by following recorded instructions on 'Jewish *vipassanā*'. After our session, he remarked laughingly on how different the spirit of these instructions was from that of 'secular' Dharma classes: while

in the latter teachers 'never discuss faith in God', in the former the teacher 'relates every aspect of the practice' to such faith. Later that day, Yehuda asked anxiously whether following death, I would like my body to be cremated, as many Buddhists do, adding he 'really hoped' I did not. 'Nothing', he explained, is 'more terrible than that, because according to Kabbalah, when the body is burned, the soul gets burned as well'. He also wondered whether the Dharma teachers he knew ever considered this question.

Yehuda used to reflect regularly about what he learned on 'secular' Dharma events, scrutinizing the degree to which it accorded with Jewish theological views and practical dictates. At times, however, such reflection pertained to everyday problems. After one class, he reported that his Jewish practice became 'full of life' following his encounter with the Dharma. And during that meeting, he learned excitedly about the option of attending a weekend Dharma workshop. Eventually he realized, however, that it was planned to take place at the same time as a 'Jewish meditation' retreat for which he was already registered. Only observant Jews were going to attend the retreat, which was to be carried out in the context of 'proper' Jewish atmosphere and conduct. In contrast, nearly all participants at the Dharma workshop, being secular Jews, were planning to arrive on Friday morning, and again on Saturday morning—driving home on both afternoons and thus committing the serious offence of Sabbath desecration. (Observant Jewish participants could stay at the workshop overnight, thus refraining from driving on the Sabbath.)

Yehuda preferred the flexible style of instruction and easy-going personality of the Dharma teacher. However, he also wished to meditate in a 'Jewish atmosphere', and in relation to Jewish rather than Buddhist teachings. Thus, he was unsure which event he should attend. A few days later, during a conversation with Ya'akov, the latter stated clearly that attending the Dharma workshop would be 'inappropriate' (*lo shayach*). Indeed, soon after, Yehuda resolved that he 'wanted to attend a Jewish activity', and that 'the issue with the Shabbat' in the Dharma workshop was 'not right'. While religious Jews normally speak on the Sabbath, he explained, a silent retreat can potentially merge well with Shabbat's emphasis on cessation (*shvita*) from all activity. So had the retreat been conducted in silence, or had all the participants planned to stay overnight, then perhaps he would have attended. But the combination of students speaking *and* of some of them driving contradicts too bluntly the Sabbath's spirit.

Yehuda, then, appreciated the practices he had learned on 'secular' Dharma activities (*spirituality*), as he considered them, and the atmosphere there, less rigid than on 'Jewish meditation' events he had attended (*non-renunciation*). Moreover, he acknowledged that during Dharma activities, teachers were not instructing in outright idolatrous contents, and he even found many ideas inspiring and congruous with Jewish thought. However, he held

that ultimately, their philosophical framework (and some specific beliefs and practices) contradict the teachings of Judaism (*orthodoxy*).

Finally, Yehuda wished to attend a 'secular' Dharma workshop, believing he would benefit from it inwardly (*spirituality*). However, eventually he decided, instead, to attend a 'Jewish meditation' retreat, about which he was less excited. The non-Jewish character of the workshop diverged too drastically from Shabbat's crucial emphasis on ceasing from activity, thus preventing participants from observing it properly and enjoying its sanctity (*orthodoxy*).

Yehuda reached this decision following a conversation with Ya'akov, in which the latter had made it clear how he was expected to act. Whereas observant meditators are mostly unable to consult other orthodox Jews about such matters during meditation events (see also Stern and Ben-Shalom 2020), they *can* in between such events. And unlike the relative immunity from the gaze of other orthodox people during many meditation activities, during some, and especially in between them, observant meditators are liable to face blame and be held responsible for wrong decisions. At times, this counteracts temporarily the logic of value accumulation, dissuading such people from attending Dharmic events. For example, Yehuda could have ignored Ya'akov's verdict without this having far-reaching implications. However, Ya'akov's reasoning—and the confidence he displayed—appeared to tilt Yehuda towards choosing to attend the 'Jewish meditation' retreat (about which he was less excited) instead of the Dharma workshop.

Tamar: Conflict, dilemma and compromise

At times, practising meditation in 'secular' Dharma settings involves even greater friction with the standards of orthodox Judaism, especially those pertaining to the Sabbath. Tamar, a married woman in her thirties, attended a Goenka *vipassanā* retreat without knowing precisely what it would entail. She underwent Chinese acupuncture from a returnee to Judaism (*ba'alat teshuva*) who had become Haredi (ultra-orthodox). This woman—whom Tamar described as 'extremely wise'—recommended her to attend a Goenka *vipassanā* retreat, having done so herself many years earlier when she was still secular and while traveling in India. However, had this woman remembered what such retreats demand, Tamar told me during an interview in her home, she would not have suggested it, as it is 'not 100% permissible from a *halachic* [i.e. Jewish law] perspective'.

According to Tamar, while the retreat was 'extremely challenging', overall she had 'an incredible experience'. For her, *vipassanā*'s greatest innovation is that unlike contemporary Judaism, it 'manages to bring into everyday life, in a methodical way', spiritual teachings found 'only intellectually' in Jewish writings. As she explained to her husband when he joined our conversation, it is an effective 'tool' for 'being happier and for becoming a better dad or a better mom'.

Yet during the retreat Tamar endured major struggles concerning Sabbath observance. When filling out her registration form, she assumed that the retreat's obligatory, daily evening talks would consist of 'frontal lectures'—only to realize on the first day that they consist of video recordings of S.N. Goenka. As watching a video on Friday evening means transgressing the prohibition of using electricity on the Sabbath, Tamar approached the teacher in search of a solution. The latter, however, replied that there was not much she could do, and upon further consideration informed Tamar she would have to discontinue her participation if she were to miss Friday's evening talk.[22]

Following much apprehension, which included Tamar crying repeatedly, eventually a partial solution was found. Rather than watching the video, she listened to an audio version, played in a separate room, with a non-Jewish person pressing the button for the talk to begin. Yet she was unable to concentrate, and felt guilty, knowing she was implicated in an action that was 'far from perfect from a *halachic* perspective'.

Had Shabbat been *really* important to her, Tamar admitted, she would have left the retreat immediately. Either she would have found a ride home or she would have reached a certain point along the way where she would ask a family to stay with them for the Sabbath. And had she arrived by car, she probably would have decided to drive home herself. True, ultimately she resolved to continue participating despite violating Jewish law. However, Tamar was certain she would 'never agree to spend Shabbat there again'—the many positive things she thought about *vipassanā* notwithstanding.

While it was painful for Tamar to infringe Jewish law, she found it just as agonizing that during the retreat the organizers had made no mention of the days of the week. Referring only to what day number it was out of the retreat's ten days, when Shabbat arrived there was no acknowledgement of this, meaning that many participants—unable to speak to one another and being out of touch with the world outside—did not realize it was the Sabbath. Likewise, it was difficult for Tamar to accept eating merely a single piece of fruit on Shabbat evening (as she would normally do during the retreat), instead of the traditional, plentiful Shabbat dinner.[23] Nevertheless, in line with Jewish custom, on the Sabbath she wore an elegant 'Shabbat dress' and some jewellery—unlike the 'rags' she was wearing during the rest of the retreat. (This was similar to Shlomo's behaviour at the Zen monastery.) According to Tamar, she had done so partly in order to communicate to anyone who came across her that it was the Sabbath, being unable to do so through words.

Furthermore, during the retreat Tamar consumed no bread. According to Jewish law, eating bread necessitates one first to conduct ritual hand washing (*netilat yadayim*)—which

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[22] Fridays are when the fourth days of Goenka ten-day retreats take place in Israel. These are considered especially important days, and ones in which students are particularly sensitive, learning *vipassanā* for the first time following over three days of preparation via awareness of respiration.

[23] Tamar emphasized, however, that the retreat's manager was 'lovely'.

the organizers of Goenka retreats prohibit, along with any other 'prayer, worship, or religious ceremony'. Instead, she ate puffed rice cakes, saying the appropriate blessing (which was against the retreat's guidelines) in her head. Unlike the more conspicuous act of ritual hand washing, she explained, it would be difficult for others to notice her saying the blessing in this way. 'Would this [rather than uttering the blessing out loud] pass *halachically*? I don't know', she confessed. 'To me it sounded okay, but I didn't talk to a rabbi about it, or about anything else I did'. Similarly, she did not share this with the Haredi acupuncturist, so as 'not to upset her'.

Tamar, then, appreciated highly the efficacy of *vipassanā* in promoting inner wellbeing (*spirituality*), and believed it accords very well with Jewish thought. Moreover, while she found the retreat difficult, she did not consider it overly ascetic, emphasizing instead its utility for happiness in everyday life and for becoming a better parent (*non-renunciation*). However, some procedures inhibited her ability to maintain orthodox observance, and the retreat disregarded the Sabbath (*orthodoxy*), which was especially hard for Tamar, making her confident she would not return to another ten-day event.

During the retreat, Tamar dealt with practical dilemmas that resulted from the value conflict she was experiencing—trying to follow orthodox Jewish law and customs (*orthodoxy*) while avoiding being asked to leave the inwardly significant retreat (*spirituality*). This was difficult, as several main dictates of *halacha*, as understood by Tamar, disagreed with the retreat's rules. In response, she came up with creative, though far from ideal, ad hoc solutions. These included listening to an audio recording played during the Sabbath by a non-Jew—violating Jewish law less fragrantly, she told herself, than watching a video would have done, and enabling her to stay as it was consistent with the retreat's guidelines. Another solution consisted of eating rice cakes instead of bread, and subsequently saying a blessing in her head rather than as part of the more conspicuous act of ritual hand washing. This still meant potentially breaking Jewish law, and undoubtedly defying the retreat's guidelines (thus impeding, from the organizers' perspective, Tamar's ability to benefit from the teachings). But as it resulted in her not being noticed by the management, it at least enabled her to continue participating.

Perhaps the 'secular', Dharmic environment tipped Tamar towards making compromises concerning Jewish observance instead of leaving the retreat. There were no other orthodox Jews around, and so she was not liable to face blame for *halachic* violations. If anything, withdrawing partway might have caused her to feel inconvenience towards the organizers, as she committed to remain there until the retreat's end. Similarly, perhaps Tamar did not speak about this with highly observant figures (e.g. a rabbi and the Haredi acupuncturist) partly, at least, so as to avoid criticism, embarrassment and further guilt.

Significantly, Tamar resorted to value amplification. In conjunction with listening to a recording on the Sabbath, she reinforced the Jewishness of the atmosphere by wearing an elegant dress and jewellery, thus trying also to remind others what day it was (*orthodoxy*). This enabled her to complete the retreat—an event that operated, in turn, as part of a broader temporal framework of value accumulation. Specifically, to have 'an incredible experience' (*spirituality*) like the one she underwent was not something she could normally feel during daily life, involving the responsibilities of working and parenting. Outside such retreats, in contrast, she could lead a steadier observant lifestyle (*orthodoxy*), and through her *vipassanā* practice, become 'a better mom' (*non-renunciation*). And though she determined not to attend a full retreat again, Tamar was considering to return for a shorter period, which would not require her to stay there during the Sabbath. In this way, she could continue gathering, over time, a substantial realization of all three values.

Finally, both Tamar and Ya'akov were willing to distract other participants from the programmes of Dharmic events—thereby, from the organizers' perspective, likely inhibiting their progress. And in promoting Jewish identity in this way, both appeared also to feel virtuous. This resulted from their taking *orthodoxy* to be at least partly collective: while one can, if necessary, fulfil religious obligations alone, and should not compel others to be observant, it is clearly preferable for Jews to follow tradition and to do so together. Ironically, however, in order to promote collective conformity to Jewish observance during these events (which such meditators treated largely instrumentally), they displayed unyielding *individualism*.

Conclusion

We have seen that three main values inform orthodox Jewish meditators' considerations about which meditation activities to join. First, they wish to be instructed in practices they find spiritually advantageous. Second, they want meditation events to take place in settings that enable them to maintain conveniently orthodox Jewish observance and identity. Third, religious meditators want activities to be non-renunciatory: to affirm life, and in the case of many, to refrain from what they consider strict ascetic discipline.

Moreover, oftentimes orthodox meditators believe that no single setting will enable them to realize all three values satisfactorily. Consequently, when attending such locales—and before and after doing so—they are driven to reflect on, and make practical judgements as to, which of the values to concede for realizing more fully the others. In turn, having to face such choices can generate emotions such as tension, anger and guilt.

To be sure, not all religious meditators encounter major difficulties in finding one setting that, they believe, will help them realize all three values adequately. Some attend repeatedly activities taking place in a single locale (usually, one of 'Jewish meditation'), and

appear content with continuing to do so. Yet problems and dilemmas pertaining to the virtual impossibility, for many, of promoting all three values satisfactorily within a single setting, are quite common. 'Uplifting the divine sparks' found in the Buddha's Dharma, then, is a risky affair that often involves some degree of 'falling down' (*nefila*) in terms of one's commitments—requiring compromises pertaining to observance, identity and views.

How, then, do orthodox meditators respond to the necessity of making fraught ethical choices? Common ways of addressing value conflicts, none of which resolve them, include value amplification and value accumulation. As we have seen, these strategies frequently complement each other. Amplifying the realization of a value that is not being adequately fulfilled assists religious meditators in remaining in settings that for them are ethically dubious. And in turn, accumulating values over time by attending additional locales counters this deficiency: while other settings are likewise experienced as lacking, they are so in complementary and thus productive ways.

However, neither strategy is entirely satisfactory for orthodox meditators—especially not from the standpoint of Jewish law. Reinforcing one's religious identity cannot fully compensate for making concessions concerning the Jewish commandments—which one is *required* to observe. Similarly, fulfilling one's religious duties is unlike writing a post-dated cheque: it is not something one can easily refrain from doing now by promising to do later.

Nevertheless, in the next chapter we shall see that along with treating the performance of the Jewish commandments deontologically—as a duty—orthodox meditators also regard it, frequently, as a device that trains them to become more virtuous. This helps to explain why these strategies *are* helpful: regarding Jewish observance not only as a 'moral code' but also as an 'ethics', namely as a path of self-cultivation, provides a temporal horizon to the present-oriented focus of these requirements (Laidlaw 1995: 392). And as this approach places the different decisions one makes—including deficient ones—within a longer ethical course, it renders the compromises inherent to value amplification and value accumulation less unwarranted.

Additional imperfect solutions to the conflicts orthodox meditators experience include participating in some events partially, avoiding problematic versions of other activities and coming up with other original ad hoc compromises. Finally, some envisage establishing a religious Jewish framework for practising meditation that will enable an adequate realization of all three values concurrently. In this sense, the conflict such meditators experience appears less stark than in cases in which the values concerned are found in tension *by definition* (even if in practice they are partly combinable). These include this-worldly wellbeing and ascetic world-renunciation among lay Jains (Laidlaw 1995), as well as relationalism and Christian individualism among the Urapmin (Robbins 2004).

If it is possible, in theory, to accomplish adequately and simultaneously all three values, why is it that many religious meditators currently do not regard any setting for learning meditation as doing so? Perhaps this is for contingent reasons, as instruction in Buddhist-derived meditation by orthodox teachers has been taking place only for a few years, and thus no programme that 'does it right' for the majority of students happens yet to have been established.

But there might be a more fundamental explanation, related to what I have described in the previous chapter. While many religious meditators highlight spontaneous self-expression and refraining from what they regard as harmful self-repression, this approach precludes making the disciplined effort that appears necessary for success in these kinds of meditative practices. Put differently, the expressive, non-ascetic framework in which several religious meditators wish to operate (*non-renunciation*) rejects the means of arriving at the type of inner wellbeing at which they aim (*spirituality*). Furthermore, the settings who *do* offer what such meditators consider an appreciated middle ground between restraint and spontaneity are often experienced by them as problematic in terms of Jewish observance (*orthodoxy*), as we have seen in the cases of Zvi and Ya'akov.

Moreover, while more 'disciplined' religious meditators do not consider the insight meditation activities they attend overly renunciatory, they face other, practical problems. Shlomo appreciated the JV retreat, but his ability to continue pursuing *spirituality* there was limited, as the next retreat was scheduled for long after that time. He thus attended a Zen monastery, where he faced issues concerning *orthodoxy*. Similarly, while Tamar was impressed by the Goenka retreats in terms of *spirituality*, she had problems pertaining to *orthodoxy* there. (And she could not attend the JV retreats inspired by them, as these were for men only, for reasons of *orthodoxy*.) Thus, for any setting to be satisfactory—in all three respects and according to most observant meditators—is difficult.

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By discussing value amplification and value accumulation, I have tried to find patterns in the choices and improvisations made by orthodox meditators when contending with value conflicts. At some point, I hope, these strategies can figure in a comparative investigation in which additional ways of managing such dilemmas will be discussed. Yet I would like to conclude this chapter by considering also the possibility that these two strategies might themselves be pertinent (though surely only partially) for analysing what takes place in other ethnographic cases, too.

According to Laidlaw, while lay Jains 'engage in fasting, confession, meditation, and the renunciation of various aspects of everyday life', they do so 'only at intervals' (2014a: 168). For instance, all Jain families intensify their religious observance during the festival of Paryushan, and this finds expression in their 'increased attendance at formal religious

functions and further restriction of the diet at home' (1995: 276). Prior to and following such periods, however, lay Jains lead lives that emphasize mostly the opposing ideal of this-worldly wellbeing. They may be said, therefore, to engage in value accumulation, realizing mainly worldly involvement throughout most of the year, and making up for this by accomplishing ascetic renunciation primarily on particular occasions. Lay Jains can thus realize significantly their two central values—though in an accrued manner and over relatively long timespans.

Similarly, according to Robbins while 'most Urapmin find it difficult to realize any of their values very fully in daily life, there are ritual settings in which they are able to do so' (2013: 23). Specifically, 'the Spirit disco is an unusually full realization of the value of individualism, while the pig sacrifice fully realizes the value of relationalism' (ibid.). The Urapmin, then, might be said to engage in value accumulation, too—accomplishing both relationalism and individualism substantially at different points and in a cumulative manner.

In some instances, lay Jains and the Urapmin appear also to tilt situations in which one of their key values is not being realized sufficiently towards it becoming fulfilled to a greater extent—and thus practise something resembling value amplification. For example, the Hindu-led 'Ganesh-ji festival represents rather vividly all the material and sensual aspects of life from which the Jains, even if only for the duration of their own holy days, are setting themselves carefully apart' (Laidlaw 2015: 136). Still, lay Jains participate in this festival— partly as the lives they have to lead during the rest of the year involve Hindu neighbours they need 'to get on with' (ibid.). The ways Jains do so, however, are 'notably qualified and disengaged', with many making a 'brief', 'sometimes rather exhausted appearance at the festivities' (ibid.), as at that time they engage in a fast. Presumably, lay Jains thereby amplify the realization of renunciation in this festival, thus tipping it in a more Jain direction.

Similarly, the Urapmin ritual of sacrificing a pig to a nature spirit is 'a very full expression' of their 'relationalism', as it involves 'repairing relationships with the very worst social partners' the Urapmin 'know' (Robbins 2015: 25, 28). The pig sacrifice may therefore be said to involve the Urapmin actively trying to slant their relationship with the nature spirits towards relationalism, thus amplifying this value's realization. In these examples, then, Jains and Urapmin people may be said to try actively to bring situations in which they operate closer to their value preferences—by increasing the fulfilment of one of their two key values. And this, in turn, can be seen as partaking in a longer scheme in which they accumulate both, as suggested above.

CHAPTER 4

No Success like Failure: On the Ethical Potential of De-Responsibilization

Recent anthropological writing has emphasized the constitutive roles senses of failure often play in ethical life, describing them, in Christian and Islamic contexts, as 'part and parcel of religious modes of self-fashioning' (Kloos and Beekers 2017: 14). This is so, such researchers argue, as failures constitute productive grounds for religious practitioners to reflect and work on their moral selves, strengthen their faith, improve their personal piety and strive to become better believers (10, 13; see also Robbins and Williams Green 2017; Kloos 2017; Simon 2009; Liberatore 2013; Schielke 2015). Similarly, among ISKCON (or Hare Krishna) devotees, articulating one's own weaknesses has been described as 'not simply a lamentation of the inability to be a good devotee', but also 'a means of becoming' one (Fahy 2017: 347). For ISKCON practitioners, it has been argued, 'failing well represents an expedient means of inhabiting the moral system' (346).

Akin to the cases described in this literature, in this chapter I shall demonstrate that among orthodox Jewish meditators, too, senses of failure can have ethically productive consequences. Yet unlike the instances considered in such writings—in which failure operates simply as a means for *future* ethical accomplishment—I am going to address cases in which additionally, and paradoxically, one is successful precisely *because* in an important respect, one has failed.

In his song 'Love Minus Zero/No limits' (album: 'Bringing it All Back Home', 1965), Bob Dylan sings: 'Some speak of the future/ My love she speaks softly/ She knows there's no success like failure/ And that failure's no success at all'. This enigmatic verse by Dylan is resonant with the approaches of orthodox Jewish meditators such as Moshe and Yehuda. As we shall see, while they acknowledge that in one sense, 'failure's no success at all', as one should strive to improve oneself and correct one's mistakes, they *also* suggest that 'there's no success like failure'. For them, their senses of failure mean that they have reached (in Moshe's case, when he 'fails well'—see Fahy 2017) greater heights of accomplishment than others who are successful in more conventional ways.

The category of failure 'inevitably raises issues of responsibility and freedom' (Robbins and Williams Green 2017: 35), and indeed the current anthropological literature on senses of failure acknowledges the pertinence of questions of responsibility to this theme. Such writings tend to associate failure's productive ethical potential with people's willingness to assume greater responsibility for different aspects of their lives (van de Kamp 2017: 56; Kloos 2017: 101; Robbins and Williams Green 2017: 22-23). In contrast, among orthodox meditators such as Moshe and Yehuda, failing in a way that demonstrates that one is actually successful does

not involve taking full or greater responsibility for the failure. Rather, it involves relenting some responsibility and ascribing it instead to another entity such as God or a *tsaddik* (a righteous person).

According to Joanna Cook (2016: 147), the 'primary academic analysis of the popularity of secular mindfulness practice has been that it is a neoliberal tool' (e.g. Žižek 2001; Purser and Loy 2013). In this common interpretation (which Cook critiques), Buddhist-derived mindfulness practices are 'technologies of "responsibilization"' that 'encourage subjects to take responsibility for their decision making and subject formation', as part of a 'neoliberal' entrepreneurial ethos (Cook 2016: 142-143). By contrast, Moshe's and Yehuda's approaches towards failure, while being strongly influenced by their employment of such meditative practices, can be described more as ones of *de*-responsibilization. Emphasizing what in Dharmic terminology is known as 'right effort' (Pali: *sammā-vāyāma*), and in Jewish terminology as *hishtadlut*, both attempt to 'let go' of expectations concerning the *consequences* of their exertions. In this way, they 'constrain' the responsibility that can be attributed to them for failing, and conversely 'proliferate' the responsibility of God or *tsaddikim* (see Laidlaw 2014a: 203). Specifically, they do so by learning—to a significant extent, through meditative practice—to consider themselves responsible primarily for one aspect of their conduct (the efforts they exert) but less so for another (the results of such efforts, which are under others' control). This demonstrates that mindfulness and insight meditation practices may operate as technologies in which meditators learn to take *less* responsibility for their actions' consequences—though without impinging on their ability to 'inhabit the moral system' (Fahy 2017) or to experience success.

Yet in this chapter I discuss two additional orthodox meditators—Ya'akov and Zvi—whose attitudes towards failure, success and responsibility are in many ways converse to those of Moshe and Yehuda. Notably, unlike the latter, Ya'akov and Zvi were born into orthodox Jewish—and specifically religious Zionist—households. And according to these orthodox meditators, the Jewish people's 'return' to the land of Israel as part of Zionism has meant that the entire world has been undergoing a process of redemption. For them, this results in responsibilizing or ethicalizing various dimensions of everyday life, placing within the realm of people's accountability additional concerns. Namely, they turn things considered insubstantial by others into 'matters of great social consequence', to which one can be held to account and that the violation of which requires justification (Mathias 2019: 5, 12). As part of the 'deontological' nature of their 'millenarian moral outlook' (Hickman and Webster forthcoming), in other words, Ya'akov and Zvi feel that contemporary Jews ought to promote the world's salvation through 'actions meant to elicit a redemptive response from God' (Brown 2008: 177).

But rather than 'failing well', the Jewish people's key role in the redemption process results, for such orthodox meditators, in something closer to succeeding badly. Having formed high expectations that inescapably lead to disappointments, they are unable to enjoy much of the reality of redemption. So, whereas Moshe's and Yehuda's success-through-failure relies on *de*-responsibilization, Ya'akov and Zvi's succeeding badly results from much—perhaps *over*—responsibilization. Or, reversing the order of Dylan's verse, for Ya'akov and Zvi 'there's no failure like success', as the difficulty in attending adequately to Israeli Jews' different responsibilities, assigned to them precisely due to their significant part in redeeming the world, creates discontent. This demonstrates that de-responsibilization can, at times, prove at least as ethically productive as responsibilization.

Finally, while the previous chapter concerned ethical tension that orthodox meditators experience in formal settings for practising meditation, in this one I discuss tension that characterizes instances that take place *outside* such settings. As we shall see, in these occurrences, too, orthodox meditators attempt to promote *orthodoxy*, *spirituality* and *non-renunciation*, and at least some of their senses of failure result from not managing to realize these values both simultaneously and satisfactorily.

Moshe: Accepting failure faithfully

'There are many last-minute cancellations. We may end up at a [financial] loss', Moshe proclaimed to his wife, standing in their kitchen on the morning of the first day of a 'Jewish *vipassanā*' retreat for orthodox men he was about to begin instructing next door. In addition to being concerned over financial matters, Moshe also expressed worry that the sum of participants would be lower than ten—the minimum number of Jewish men required for setting up a *minyan* (quorum) for group prayer. In response, Moshe's wife suggested that the participants join a *minyan* in one of the several synagogues found nearby. 'I'm not going to take them to a synagogue', Moshe retorted, with traces of desperation and irritation in his voice. As their teacher, he clearly preferred the students to form their own *minyan*, within the atmosphere of a silent retreat, and thus avoid the loud and likely distracting experience of a public synagogue, where worshippers converse keenly with one another (see Conclusion).

Apparently recognizing his own anger, Moshe then said out loud: 'thank you, Creator of the universe, for all the obstacles [*meni'ot*]' while dialling a number on his old mobile phone. Moshe called a long-time friend and, acknowledging that his request was 'mad', asked him if he was free to attend the week-long retreat that was about to begin that same morning. Expectedly, the friend said he was unavailable, to which Moshe responded that it was all right, by this time sounding somewhat reassured. Soon after, Moshe also called one of his neighbours, asking if his teenage son could come to 'complete the *minyan*' that afternoon.

'Forgive me for haunting you relentlessly ['*ad chormah*]' Moshe said, smiling warmly, and I could hear the neighbour chuckling over the phone.

On a different occasion, Moshe and I were walking towards the house of another one of his friends, with Moshe holding a stroller in which his baby daughter was sitting. The baby was crying continuously. 'This one is giving me tests of [mental] balance all the time', Moshe told me with a smile, and we both began laughing. 'Usually, the mark I get is "barely satisfactory"' [equivalent to a 'pass'], he added humbly. 'What is it, *tsaddika* [lit. righteous one]', Moshe asked the baby softly. 'Why are you screaming? Are you tired'? An old man who walked past likewise said to the baby, 'what is it? Why are you crying?', to which Moshe replied in a friendly voice: 'it's all trials of faith, that's all. Happy Purim, brother!'

In what way did the crying of his daughter amount, For Moshe, to a trial of faith? Moshe consistently emphasizes the significance of people developing faith (*emunah*) in God—which he takes, following his *vipassanā* practice, to mean the ability to uphold mental balance (*izzun nafshi*) in the face of anything that happens to them. The greatest virtue, he says, is 'trust' (*bitachon*) in *Ha'Shem*, or 'sacred equanimity' (*shivyon nefesh kadosh*) regarding the ups and downs of life. And such trust can rely only on the firm belief, felt on one's flesh, that whatever we experience results from *Ha'Shem*, and that 'everything the Merciful One does— He does for the better' (Aramaic: *kol d'avid rachmana—l'tav 'avid*), or 'for our benefit'. Moreover, for Moshe 'once you find the Holy One, Blessed Be He inside your heart, as a force that guides you, you can increasingly see His hand in everything, and [mentally] contain all the suffering and hardship you experience'. And the 'gift' of being able to realize this, he often relates, has provided him with 'the deepest answer possible' to his 'thirst for meaning'.

Expectedly, however, Moshe's decision to 'embrace' the 'difficulty of reality' through living the life of a meditating, orthodox Jewish householder (Das 2014: 489)—one who is highly committed to *orthodoxy, non-renunciation* and *spirituality*—often renders his ethical experience turbulent. Indeed, although he strives to accept smilingly whatever happens to him, Moshe acknowledges that oftentimes he is far from perfect in this respect. On one occasion, Moshe told me that due to the accumulation of different kinds of obligations he had to face during that period—financial,[24] familial and religious, including praying (which on mornings could take up to an hour) and studying—he was unable to meditate formally. While for years he used to meditate for at least two hours every day, the closest he would get to meditating in any systematic way at that time was trying to feel his bodily sensations as he would fall asleep at night. Partly as a result, when attending to his daughters Moshe would find it difficult, at times, to maintain mental balance and not to speak angrily.

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[24] In addition to teaching 'Jewish *vipassanā*', Moshe worked as a security guard at a religious high school. Sitting inside the guard shack, he would diligently study Jewish texts, including ones that, he thought, resonate with meditation.

Being unable to meditate regularly by way of sitting with closed eyes for long periods, Moshe would try treating whatever would happen in everyday life as constituting most of his training in mental balance. As much as he was feeling 'connected' to *vipassanā* practice, Moshe explained, 'from the outset I felt I was missing something: this Father you can talk to and rely on'. Thus, the goal of meditating in a Jewish way is not 'some future *nirvana*, in which everything is zeroed and I no longer have to suffer and deal [with difficulties]—basically the ultimate escape from everything'. Rather, the objective is developing 'the ability to *endure* everything', namely the different challenges life presents. For Moshe, then, 'Jewish *vipassanā*' involves making an effort (*hishtadlut*) to accept whatever happens with equanimity and mental balance—as it is all derived from God's will. For instance, while he used to cry when his wife would raise objections to him dedicating himself more fully to conducting retreats, eventually he learned to accept more calmly that '*Ha'Shem* will make things happen in the time He sees fit'.

Nevertheless, for Moshe making an effort to accept anything that happens to him with equanimity or mental balance—'in a spirit of trusting submission to God' (Laidlaw 2014a: 203)—pertains also to instances in which he reacts out of mental *im*balance. In the world to come, he would say, paraphrasing Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, people are judged not by the spiritual degree they have reached, but according to the number of times they 'have made a new start' in their lives. And this is true also regarding meditation: what counts is trying to accept non-reactively—again and again, regardless of how successful one is—whatever is happening now, which includes admitting even one's own involuntary reactions, as soon as one becomes aware of them.

Returning to the occasion in which Moshe and I were walking outside with his baby daughter, it was late in the evening when we arrived at his friend's house, by which time Moshe was exhausted. At some point, he lay his head and arms on a table and fell asleep, though his older daughters, who arrived there as well, would shake his arm every once in a while, and in response he would hold their hands or sing songs with them. Later, Moshe related what he would do, at times, when after a long and busy day he would come home from the evening prayer ('*arvit*) service at the synagogue and need to recite the bedtime *Shema Yisrael* ('Hear, O Israel') prayer. This prayer is long, and repeats some of the text he had recited a few minutes earlier, during the evening prayer service. Sometimes, Moshe confessed, he would feel so tired that it would seem 'not right' to say the entire bedtime *Shema*, 'to force myself to complete it'. And so he would recite the prayer's main part, and some short parts before and after it, and go to sleep. 'I'm already totally worn out [*gamur*], having made *mesirut nefesh* [self-sacrifice or full devotion] to recite the evening prayer. And now to recite the *Shema* again—I feel *Ha'Shem* doesn't want [me to do] it'.

The essence of it all is understanding that... there's a phrase, and if it's engraved in you, then you're sorted out: *Rachmana liba ba'ei*. [In Aramaic:] 'The Merciful One wants the heart'. If your heart is there, with God, then even if you utter only one 'Hear, O Israel', but a true and deep one—then it's alright.

At this point, Moshe's friend, who thus far remained silent, responded: 'yes, but I have one reservation. So that it all doesn't sound too "spiritual", we need to remember we are still...' but before completing his sentence, Moshe interjected. 'Obviously', Moshe said, 'we have the *halacha* [Jewish law], blessed be *Ha'Shem*'. The friend then said immediately: 'yes, we have [to follow] the *halacha* and the commandments', with Moshe concurring: 'totally, you're right'.

I was about to ask how they thought one should act when a conflict arises between *halacha*'s dictates and what one feels in one's heart—like the conflict Moshe seemed to experience concerning the bedtime *Shema* prayer, in which he appeared to favour the heart over the letter of the law. But as Moshe's wife (who was not present during this conversation) wished to return home, we had to say goodbye to his friend. On our walk towards their house, I asked Moshe about this. '*Halacha*', he responded, 'is certainly the word of *Ha'Shem*, and an important dimension of Judaism consists of accepting with self-annulment [*bittul*] God's will—even when not fully understanding its rationale'. 'However', he added, all this time oscillating between talking to me and comforting his baby daughter,

Ha'Shem doesn't want you to act like a robot. He doesn't need countless people replicating his wishes out of inner blindness [on their part], as he doesn't have an ego that makes him angry if you don't do what He wants. Neither is the point to think: 'I'll keep the Sabbath and get rewards in the world to come', like those promises made by some rabbis. The essence of everything is that *Ha'Shem* created the universe in order to benefit the created. What *really* matters is feeling an inner connection to Him, feeling God's presence in your life.

So a fine balance exists between [on the one hand] having to act according to *Ha'Shem*'s will, realizing that doing so is the best option for you, and [on the other hand] understanding you shouldn't ignore what *you* feel at that moment.

But how would Moshe balance these two commitments? Once, we went on a trip to a natural spring he liked, where he used to stay in a tent for a long period and meditate before officially converting to Judaism and beginning to lead an orthodox lifestyle. At some point, another meditator who was there with us said with a guilty voice: 'I'm [like] a floor mop [*smartut*, i.e. weak]. I haven't laid the *tefillin* yet'. This was the afternoon, and observant Jewish men are expected to wear on their heads and one of their upper arms *tefillin* (or phylacteries)—leather boxes that contain scrolls of parchment on which verses from the Torah are inscribed—when praying on weekday mornings. Additionally, that meditator confessed that 12 times since he was 13, when a Jewish man is first commanded to begin doing so daily, he did not don the *tefillin* at all throughout the day—thus transgressing what orthodox Jews normally consider an elementary commandment.

In response, Moshe said calmly that this happened to him twice since his conversion. Following one occasion, Moshe related this to a friend, explaining that throughout that day he was so busy he could not find the time. That friend, however, became angry, yelling something like: 'how can you say that, as if it [i.e. not wearing the *tefillin*] is normal?'

Moshe was less categorical. Of course, he explained, one 'should make an *adhiṭṭhāna*' (Pali for 'strong determination') to perform such commandments correctly every day. But one should remember also that through His commandments, the Creator's only wish is benefitting the created. So, instead of internally 'hitting yourself on the head with a hammer [when you are not successful], you can be soft with yourself', realizing it was God's will for things to turn out this way. We all expect much from ourselves, Moshe said, and have an inner voice that wants us to be 'spiritual and righteous [*tsaddikim*]'. But if we accept that this is our reality now—that we still have a long way to go, spiritually—and realize that our deficiencies and even 'falls' (*nefilot*) are ways in which *Ha'Shem* tries to teach us to annul ourselves to Him, then we can learn to rejoice in them (cf. Cook 2010b: 261; Heywood 2018: 49).

Being deficient in terms of observance, then—as well as reacting emotionally to challenging occurrences (for example, by getting angry at one's children)—for Moshe surely constitutes 'failures': such behaviours contradict God's instructions on how to arrive at proximity to Him. Yet being unsuccessful in these ways is both expected and non-tragic, and if embraced internally, can in fact constitute success. Moshe fails, at times, in maintaining his mental balance, finding the vitality needed for uttering the full bedtime *Shema* prayer with minimal attentiveness, and (more rarely) donning the *tefillin* at some point during the day. Yet he also realizes that *ultimately*, what *Ha'Shem* wants is for people to strive to make Him present in their lives and to place trust in Him, and that remembering this is more beneficial for devoting oneself to God than punishing oneself for failing. Accordingly, to accept one's human shortcomings calmly, and to determine enthusiastically to try again next time constitutes *greater* success than either feeling disparaging guilt or managing to obey *Ha'Shem*'s commandments, though in a way that does not concern one's inner world. (Moshe would mention in this context the term *mitsvat anashim melumada,* lit. 'studiously acquired commandment', referring to rote religiosity.) Failing well, in other words, for Moshe amounts to a greater accomplishment than what 'success' denotes for most orthodox people.

Yehuda: Failure indexes success

Throughout my fieldwork, I regularly interacted with Yehuda, a religious meditator who was in his thirties and unmarried. Being charismatic and eloquent, he got along well with students at the Hasidic *yeshiva* (religious seminary) where he was studying, and where like him, most students were 'returnees' to orthodox Judaism (*ba'alei teshuva*). Nevertheless, Yehuda spent much time alone, feeling not particularly understood by most other students.

During the break of one Dharma class, Yehuda related to some participants that he could no longer work in a job that lacked spiritual significance. Previously, alongside attending *yeshiva*, he was employed in a shop that sold office equipment. (Despite being a gifted student, Yehuda had acquired no academic or professional training.) Doing such work, he now thought, would be wasting his time. Until he would find a fulfilling occupation (he was thinking, at times, of becoming a meditation instructor), he preferred living in a tight space with three other students, partly subsidized by his *yeshiva,* so that he could 'study' (*lilmod*) for much of the day.

For Yehuda, unusually for a student at a Haredi *yeshiva*, where Talmudic learning is normally emphasized, 'study' consisted of different kinds of Jewish texts but also (at least during that period) of notes on Dharmic thought, as well as of fiction works. And while later on he relented to work part-time in an inexpensive coffee shop chain, he did this so that he could remain independent in terms of his schedule. Indeed, Yehuda continued dedicating most of his time to reading, praying, conducting *hitbodedut* (sincere speech to God) and meditating.

Yehuda described feeling 'torn' between the Haredi and secular 'worlds'. While he would wear relatively plain and 'modest' long-sleeved clothes, these were much more 'secular' than the dark suits with white shirts donned by Haredi men around him. Similarly, he sported neither a long beard nor sidelocks—which he decided to cut, despite their spiritual potency— and regularly studied subjects other than Torah. And he had difficulty finding a match, which was due primarily to his lifestyle and appearance being atypical for his community.

Furthermore, Yehuda practised meditation, including in 'secular' and Dharmic settings, where he would interact with non-observant Jews, such as women who were not his relatives. And as we shall see, at times he committed religious offenses he considered serious. Despite all this, however, he steadily and enthusiastically aspired to arrive at greater proximity to God—primarily through *hitbodedut* and prayer, both of which were supported by Buddhist-derived meditative practices.

One afternoon, having attended a prayer service together, and pacing between limestone-bricked buildings typical to central Jerusalem, Yehuda instructed me on how to pray. 'You should stay with what you have at the moment of prayer, with who you are at that moment. You need to take in the entire experience you're going through and work exactly with that'. According to him, knowing he should approach prayer in this way was 'a big secret' he had 'received', either from God or from *tsaddikim* with whom he was in spiritual contact. 'Most people only pray externally', he explained, paying attention to the words they read and their meanings but not to their own experience—even though the latter is a main way in which God communicates with humans.

If you begin praying and experience difficulty, observe the difficulty. A person for whom it is hard to pray, and still 'fights', even if after the 'fight' he still arrives only at a sad result, this is a big rectification. It's much more significant than that of someone who from the beginning came to the prayer and everything was 'open', being able to feel a lot, cry and experience 'lights'. The person who struggles feels nothing at the time, and thinks he does not get anything out of praying, but the repair is much larger. When something opens up one day, it's thanks to all these times.

Meditation, Yehuda subsequently argued, is helpful for becoming more aware of one's present experience, including one's difficulties, thus rendering one's prayer and *hitbodedut* more efficacious. Conversely, without developing a capacity for introspection in this way, one may, like most people, be unable to address *Ha'Shem* properly, being too busy and distressed to be mentally 'available'. 'You can't play chess when you're bleeding to death', he told me following one retreat, with a characteristically striking metaphor. 'An ordinary person needs meditation to be able to speak to God with a settled mind [*yishuv ha'da'at*]'.

And yet Yehuda had trouble practising either *hitbodedut* or prayer consistently. At times, he would experience such great difficulty addressing God in prayer that he would feel an inability to pray at all (cf. Simon 2009; Fahy 2017: 339), with meditation being of no avail. This too is unusual in his community. Reciting prayer without true *kavvanah* (intention) is compared in Kabbalistic writings 'to a body without a soul', and in some rabbinic statements, *kavvanah* is considered 'essential to prayer' (Werblowsky and Widoger 1997: 353). But according to the common approach among most orthodox Jews in Israel, one is expected to continue praying even with little concentration and intentionality. Nevertheless, periodically the difficulty and spiritual 'descent' (*yerida*) Yehuda would experience would be so great that he would neither pray nor conduct *hitbodedut* for days or more. While he would strive to 'be on the rise [*b'aliya*] again', he would say that 'when you're in decline, there's nothing you can do—it's part of the way'.

Moreover, on the first day of a Jewish meditation retreat, which took place at an Israeli West Bank settlement not far from Jerusalem, Yehuda told me he felt strong 'resistance' towards the teacher and the atmosphere, thus deciding to leave. 'I can't wait to be on the bus [back to Jerusalem]. Since we've arrived, I've been feeling like someone is kicking me out of here'. And so unlike what he said in other instances, and in contrast to the approach promoted in most of the meditation activities we attended together, he did not attempt to continue 'working' with this difficulty by focusing his awareness calmly on its mental and physical expressions. Rather, on that occasion, Yehuda ascribed both the agency and the responsibility for his desire to leave to another entity—perhaps divine providence and perhaps a *tsaddik*—whom he claimed was 'kicking' him away from the retreat.

Later, Yehuda expressed remorse for leaving. Encountering the retreat's teacher and his approach for the first time that day had aroused in him difficult memories from a few years

earlier, he explained. This pushed him outside his 'comfort zone' and unfortunately, in response, he 'lost control and did everything imaginable to get out of there as soon as possible', for which he should apologize to the teacher. Only weeks later, he continued, when conducting 'analytical meditation'—a term he had encountered in a class on Tibetan Buddhism—did he realize through deep 'self-examination' (*cheshbon nefesh,* lit. accounting of the *nefesh*) the depth of how 'entrapped' he was at that time. Leaving the way he did, Yehuda concluded, was 'a sin' and 'a mistake'. It would have been better to remain at the retreat at any cost—trying to accept himself, as he was, while 'in a state of great and lasting contraction [*tsimtsum*], without trying to control the situation'. Or, as he put it in English, to 'let go and let God'.

Moreover, after leaving the retreat, Yehuda met a friend in the northern part of the country. Together, they attended a party where, as Yehuda would relate to me later, he committed *halachic* 'offences' (*'averot*), including 'serious' ones. He did not elaborate on their nature, stating that one is forbidden 'to say *lashon ha'ra*' (lit. 'the evil tongue'), namely to speak derogatively, even about oneself. He was a 'classical' 'returnee', Yehuda added, chuckling bitterly, experiencing steep 'ascents' and 'descents' within short time spans. While he had been 'high' for a few weeks—during which he would study Torah for many hours at night, and pray regularly and with intent—he then 'fell down' abruptly. 'My problem, he concluded, 'is that I'm an extreme type'.

But for Yehuda, his exceptional personality is not associated only with harm. 'It is said that "he who is greater than his friend, his inclination is bigger than him"', Yehuda used to tell me, quoting a well-known rabbinic verse (Babylonian Talmud, *Sukkah* tractate, 52a). 'Everyone receives a soul from *Ha'Shem*, and according to the type of soul we get is the type of this "good" friend, the evil inclination [*yetser ha'ra*], which we receive as well'.

> Because my spiritual coefficient [*mekadem ruchani*] is high, I have a large evil inclination. I know from my experience that I've received a very high soul, probably from previous incarnations [*gilgulim*], and [thus] have had to face very hard trials [*nisyonot*]—ones I've endured but also ones I haven't really endured. A strong spiritual struggle is taking place over me, and there are *tsaddikim* who are working hard on me. One rabbi took me as his personal project, after a few others had failed.

Indeed, Yehuda told me that travelling from Jerusalem to the much more 'secular' (*chiloni*) city of Tel Aviv would take him 'out of balance', consequently stimulating him, at times, to 'sin' (*lachto*). By contrast, leading an observant lifestyle and staying at the *yeshiva* safeguarded him from acting this way. When leaving the *yeshiva*, it was hard for him not to be tempted, and doing so would 'crush' him spiritually. Finally, he said that had certain people from his *yeshiva* known about some of the things he was doing—including, perhaps, learning meditation in Dharmic settings—they probably would not have let him continue attending. Nevertheless, although Yehuda had not told him anything directly, the head of the *yeshiva,* being a *tsaddik,* surely knew all about these matters, and his not saying anything meant he

wanted Yehuda to remain there. Moreover, this *tsaddik* occasionally visited Yehuda in dreams, thus indicating his merit, and during these dreams he would approve of Yehuda's practice of meditation.

Similar to Yehuda's flattering interpretation of his shortcomings, according to several rabbis, particularly ones who are prominent among 'returnees', the lower one 'descends' in times of 'spiritual decline', the higher one ultimately can 'ascend'—so long as one continues to try. Rabbi Igal Cohen, for example—who relates he had grown up in poverty and surrounded by violence—explains in his popular, video-recorded sermons that crises are one's sources of growth. If the Creator has generated 'unbelievable cravings' in a person, Cohen argues, this person's soul is 'unbelievably high'. One should subsequently apologize to the Master of the world, acknowledge one's sins and try again, relying on His help.

Yehuda likewise believes that while often he is found in spiritually 'low places', and faces difficulties, this is because his soul is 'great', which enables it also to reach the high spiritual degrees he experiences at other times. Indeed, for him the struggles he undergoes, as well as his 'descents', indicate that he has unique spiritual capabilities. Yehuda's failures thus demonstrate, paradoxically, that in an important respect he is superior to most others— including ones who excel consistently in Torah study, *hitbodedut* and prayer, who are married and who have sizeable incomes.

Significantly, along with taking responsibility obliquely for his wrongdoings by acknowledging that it was his obligation to apologize (see Laidlaw 2014a: 195) and to try and do better next time, Yehuda also invokes the 'defence of "involuntariness"' (193). He emphasizes having incomplete control, and thus being only partly to blame, for his failures: oftentimes, he suggests, such failures are caused by God, through Yehuda's evil inclination, meaning that the action in question is not that of Yehuda's 'real' me (194). Moreover, as this inclination is too large for him to handle himself, it necessitates the help of *tsaddikim*, with whom, along with God, Yehuda distributes his responsibility (ibid.)—as part of an 'ethics of passion' in which he is 'being acted upon' by these entities (Mittermaier 2012: 247-249).

Indeed, Yehuda frequently told me that unlike Hasidim, 'Lithuanian' Jews (*Lita'im*) tend to think they can achieve 'enlightenment in the face of *Ha'Shem*' by relying entirely on their divine service ('*avodah*), for example by studying Torah day and night. In contrast, Hasidim (or at least 'genuine ones'), while acknowledging that most weight lies on one's own efforts, realize that 'receiving assistance from a *tsaddik* is crucial': 'only with his help can you get to the highest spiritual levels'. For this reason, it seems, Yehuda is suspect of orthodox Jews, including meditation teachers, who rely on meditation too heavily—believing that their spiritual work alone, without the assistance of God and of righteous people, is all they need for making spiritual progress.

Yehuda, therefore, combines 'internal' and 'external' understandings concerning the locus of ethical failure (Robbins and Williams Green 2017: 27), situating it partially within himself and partly in entities greater than him. Consequently, he does not consider himself fully accountable for his 'crashes', and yet the latter still signal the greatness of his soul. So, while such prominence—similarly to his failures—is attributable to his actions only partially, it amounts to religious success on his part.

Ya'akov: Demanding tranquillity

One afternoon, I visited with Ya'akov, a holistic medicine practitioner in his mid-thirties, a *yeshiva* at an Israeli settlement in the southern West Bank. There, he discussed with another religious meditator the option of setting up a meditation centre for orthodox students. Following the meeting, Ya'akov and I drove towards Jerusalem. As we passed next to the Hebron mountains, he said assuredly and excitedly that in biblical times, bands of 'sons of the prophets' (*bnei ha'nevi'im)* used to seclude themselves in caves in that area and meditate. He was referring to people who attended 'prophecy schools'—or 'apprenticed themselves to recognized prophets' (Kaplan 1978: 65)—and who, according to him, practised what we know today as 'the wisdoms of the east'. For Ya'akov, therefore, that area—along with other parts of 'Judea and Samaria' (the West Bank) where the prophets used to operate—was conducive for meditative practice, and constituted an appropriate location for establishing a centre for 'kosher' meditation.

Unlike other orthodox meditators, Ya'akov did not like discussing emotions or difficulties, which he deemed unnecessary for having significant inner experiences. Instead, when driving we would often listen to mellow and contemplative Hasidic tunes. Alternatively, he would elucidate to me the significance of meditative practice by contemporary Jews within the process of the world's redemption.

During the period of the second Jewish holy temple in Jerusalem, Ya'akov would explain, most Jews were living 'in the east', not far from India—in what is known as the Babylonian exile. The *Shechinah* (divine presence) therefore moved there from the land of Israel, too, which resulted in much spiritual thriving in that part of the world. And because the people of Israel did not take the opportunity to 'ascend' (*la'alot*) to the land of Israel in large numbers—and thereby to realize redemption—the prophets' wisdoms, including the Dharma, became 'concealed' (*nignezu)* from them for many centuries. In contrast, currently, in 'the third temple period' (i.e. following the state of Israel's establishment), 'we are certainly witnessing redemption unfolding'. More and more Jews ascend to the land (although so far, most still reside abroad). Consequently, eastern wisdoms such as the Dharma are beginning to be practised globally—especially since Israel's capture of 'Judea and Samaria' in 1967—and are returning to the people and land of Israel, to their true origins.

Ya'akov, then, offered a dialectical eschatological account. He presented, in a millenarian fashion, the contemporary as recovering something ancient (Hickman and Webster forthcoming), depicting Buddhist meditative wisdoms as originally Jewish. After being practised in the 'land of Israel' in biblical times by Hebrew prophets and their students, he argued, these teachings were divinely 'concealed' from Jews during their long exile. And such contents currently return to the Jewish people, since many of them have immigrated to the greater land of Israel, thus significantly advancing the process of national and universal redemption (see also Mautner 2016, n.d.; Mautner and Mizrachi 2020).

Specifically, Ya'akov and several other orthodox meditators maintain that for full redemption to arrive, prophecy—having been impossible for many centuries because of exile—'will have to be restored' (Kaplan 1978: 152). And a necessary condition for reaching prophecy, they argue, will be attaining first the lower state of 'the holy spirit' (*ruach ha'kodesh*). Subsequently, some of them present meditative practices—with their resultant purification of one's *nefesh* and 'exploration' of one's 'inner world'—as the 'tools' employed by biblical prophets, and therefore as instrumental for arriving at 'the holy spirit'. They thus consider the renewed instruction of 'kosher' forms of meditation to Jewish masses as one important way of 'preparing' for the restoration of prophecy. Indeed, for Ya'akov, being involved in the burgeoning movement of Jewish meditators and their increased ability to attain 'the holy spirit' is a central way of joining in the Jewish people's task of repairing the world.

Yet rather than emphasizing the self-discipline that insight meditation is normally understood to require (see Chapter 2), Ya'akov highlights enjoying the convenience and pleasantness of life. He views the current age as one in which people can begin experiencing, throughout the week, dimensions of redemption—including the cessation of work and the peace that are associated with the Sabbath, as well as material abundance. Accordingly, when I would be worried about something, Ya'akov and other orthodox meditators would oftentimes respond by saying '*b'nachat*', meaning roughly 'with satisfaction and comfort'. Moreover, he would frequently urge others to 'smile', including during meditation practice. *Nachat*—satisfaction and comfort—then, is a state many religious meditators prize. And rather than viewing it as dependent on meticulous inner work, they seem to consider it as simply available in the present, as part of the world's redemption.

During the car drive mentioned above, from the Hebron mountains to Jerusalem, Ya'akov and I stopped at a newly-built shopping mall to buy food. The mall, Ya'akov said excitedly, was 'the first to be built in Judea and Samaria'. Being dedicated to maintaining a healthy diet, he bought himself a fruit shake, and reproached me subtly for my choice of deep-fried falafel. Such occasions—in which orthodox meditators and I purchased and ate food together (especially food they considered 'natural' and thus 'healthy')—recurred many times.

What underlies this emphasis on healthy eating and 'natural health'? For religious meditators such as Ya'akov, the land of Israel's natural environment is sacred. Moreover, it is associated with wholesome corporeality—at both the national and individual levels. 'In exile [*galut*]', a meditator named Zvi (whom I shall discuss below) explained once, the Jewish people are 'like a dead body with its bones scattered'. In contrast, with collective return to Zion, 'life is restored to this body', as once again the Jewish people have their own land, government, economy and military. Similarly, Ya'akov argues that Jewish religious life in exile is characterized by an overemphasis on an intellectual, disembodied engagement with the Torah. While certainly sacred, Torah study is lacking without the connection to one's body and *nefesh* (psyche) that presence in the land of Israel enables, and that practices such as meditation promote.

Specifically, according to religious meditators such as Ya'akov, for the individual Jew to contact his or her soul and thus attain, ideally, 'the holy spirit', one must not neglect the *nefesh*, the lower and physical part of the self (see Chapter 1). And maintaining a healthy body through 'natural' eating, such meditators believe, is central for rectifying the *nefesh* and in turn making spiritual progress. For such orthodox meditators, then, keeping a healthy and 'natural' diet is essential for being able to place one's soul (*neshamah*) upright inside one's rectified *nefesh* and body through means such as meditative practice.

As part of his dedication to the redemption process, Ya'akov—who, as stated, works as a holistic medicine practitioner—tends to ethicalize such dimensions in his and others' conduct, turning them into matters regarding which one can be 'held to account' (Mathias 2019: 11). Consider this exchange between him and Yehuda, which took place one night when returning from a meditation class. While both are deeply influenced by Haredi (ultra-orthodox) thought and practice, both are also ambivalent about different dimensions of Haredi social realities. 'In general', Ya'akov said, 'the Haredi lifestyle is hopeless ['*al ha'panim*]'. Yehuda (who as we have seen was living in a Haredi community) chuckled, as if thinking 'tell me about it', and said: 'yes, there's no harmony'. Ya'akov: 'holding *tishes* [Yiddish: 'tables', i.e. celebrations] in the middle of the night, eating in an unhealthy way, becoming overweight'. Yehuda: 'this is a terrible epidemic'. Ya'akov: 'it's out of sync with the spirituality of the land of Israel, which goes together with the body. [Paying attention to] the body is a must. This is 180 degrees [away] from exile, where [it is said that] the more the body is developed, the more the soul is destroyed'. So, while Ya'akov respects Haredim's religious sincerity, and finds inspiration in some Haredi rabbis' teachings, he believes that most Haredim lead lifestyles that lack harmony, as they do not fully appreciate the theological significance of the Jewish people's return to Zion.

Likewise, before one meditation class began, Yehuda took a soy milk drink out of a refrigerator that was found in the flat where the class took place. Realizing this was a relatively

inexpensive brand, Yehuda mentioned casually that he preferred the organic version. Ya'akov corrected him, however, asserting that both organic and inorganic mass-produced soy drinks are 'engineered' and therefore unhealthy. Similarly, when I once poured tap water for myself, Ya'akov informed me he had heard from 'a senior Doctor' that the healthiest option was a particular type of filtered water.

Moreover, Ya'akov emphasizes operating in an atmosphere of 'sanctity' and *nachat*. On one occasion, he protested to a meditation teacher as the latter was speaking on his mobile phone inside a room used for weekly meditation sessions—although the teacher only did so briefly, quietly and after that evening's session had ended. Meditation, Ya'akov told him, needs to be practised out of a 'presence of sanctity', which involves cessation (*shvita*) from any mundane activity. Indeed, Ya'akov would complain when teachers managed the practicalities of retreats and workshops—as they often did—because this prevented them from teaching out of such a presence. Furthermore, before I left the country at the end of my fieldwork, he interrogated me, somewhat disappointedly, as to whether going abroad and for a long period was really necessary. (Ya'akov emphasized the spiritual significance of remaining in the land of Israel, and interpreted the Jewish commandment of settling it as meaning a Jew should only leave under limited circumstances.)

Finally, during one meditation session that took place in my flat, I heard Ya'akov moving around a lot, apparently struggling to find peace. Following the session, I realized that the teacher's recorded instructions to sit upright notwithstanding, throughout long parts of the sitting Ya'akov was lying down. Moreover, before leaving, he told other participants that the teacher made him laugh when in his instructions he encouraged meditators to smile— though 'just a little', so that they would focus on observing their experiences detachedly rather than try to influence them. In this instance, Ya'akov appeared to criticize the teacher for not promoting enough *nachat* and instead advocating an overly ascetic (or 'tough') approach (see Chapter 2). Noticeably, however, on this and other occasions Ya'akov seemed to have had difficulty experiencing *nachat* himself.

Indeed, despite emphasizing satisfaction and comfort, Ya'akov, like all other meditators, was facing different sorts of challenges. Being divorced, he needed to earn enough money to support his children, who were living with his ex-wife and whom he could visit only on limited occasions. Additionally, he had unrealized expectations regarding the establishment of a meditation centre that would cater to orthodox Jewish Israelis' practical and theological needs and aspirations.

For Ya'akov, then, as the redemption process has begun, Israeli Jews are responsible for living serenely and comfortably—akin to the Sabbath's desired atmosphere—even during the six working days, thereby preparing for full salvation. Consequently, Ya'akov ethicalizes various dimensions of life he considers linked to this concern, and demands responsibility

from others in these regards. He expects meditative practice to consist of rest and pleasure rather than of hard work, and insists that teachers instruct others in an atmosphere of 'sanctity' that is devoid of worldly worries. Moreover, he urges himself and others to consume spiritually conducive, wholesome food, thus relating themself further to the land of Israel's sacred environment.

From all this anticipated peace, however, there ensues a significant amount of strain. Many around Ya'akov do not share all or even most of his commitments. They operate at a high pace during the six working days, consume food of doubtful quality and consider it appropriate to exert some effort in meditation. For Ya'akov, this results in a tense attempt to maintain tranquillity, and in recurrent though largely subtle expressions of anger and frustration at those who fail to meet the demanding and specific standards he sets. In his case, it thus seems, a high degree of responsibilization of people's everyday actions, brought about by a perceived condition of living in the triumphant era of redemption, results in frequently experiencing ethical failure—on the part of others and of himself. Indeed, oftentimes Ya'akov ends up falling short of those things about which he cares (e.g. remaining peaceful), and he expects feeling this way in the first place because he considers this a time of success for the Jewish people.

Zvi: Ethicalization brings demoralization

One afternoon I visited Zvi, in his mid-twenties, in his family's home. While this was an unplanned call, Zvi, who was on a break from the *yeshiva* in which he was studying, made me feel welcome and devoted a notable amount of time to me. Shortly following my arrival, I asked him—who was wearing a large crocheted *kippa* and loose-fitting clothes, which presumably were remnants of his time on what he called the Israeli 'hummus trail' in India—about his interest in meditation. In response, he led me to a bookshelf from which he took out a few volumes, after which we sat down to read from these books and discuss them. Zvi, I was to find out, enjoyed learning, and appreciated especially the partner-based study method (Aramaic: *chavruta*).

Sitting next to the family's large living room table, Zvi showed me a paragraph written by a contemporary Kabbalist. Paraphrasing the text, he explained that currently, as the Jewish people are back in 'the land of Israel', as part of the process of the world's redemption, 'we are finally able to combine the tendencies' of the periods of the first and second Jewish temples in Jerusalem. Jews today can have 'real divine worship in which they feel a connection to God' (like in the first temple period), accompanied by 'studying Torah and performing the commandments meticulously' (as in the second temple period). 'We can see this beginning to happen now', Zvi concluded. And no longer relying on the book we were discussing, he added that 'Jewish meditation is a main part of this development'.

Following several hours of friendly discussion and debate, Zvi invited me to join him and his brother, who was also present, for a lunch of oven-roasted vegetables. Then, he walked me out to my car (in line with the Jewish commandment of *hachnasat orchim* or hospitality). And grinning, he said: 'I will make a graffiti for you', after which he approached the car's back window and inscribed in the summer dust: '*Ha'Shem* loves you :)', apparently encouraging me gently to become more observant.

A few months later, Zvi and I made a plan to study Torah in central Jerusalem. (We were to read rabbinic discussions on the commandment of ritual hand washing, which he said pertains to 'spiritual purity'.) Before I left for the meeting, Zvi asked me to buy him some fruits from west Jerusalem's main market, located on my way to the house of learning. Later, however, he sent me a voice message, requesting me not to bring 'Pink Lady' apples. These grow abroad, he explained, and 'since we finally returned to the land of Israel after 2,000 years', he wished to 'enjoy its delicious fruits'. It was too late, however. I did not notice his message in time, and happened to buy him apples precisely of the kind he did not want. When I met Zvi, he was slightly disappointed. And being informed on 'natural health' (like Ya'akov and other orthodox meditators), he showed me that on these apples was what appeared to be wax (which he scratched with one of his nails), making them appear shinier. 'Apples can't naturally look this way', he proclaimed.

Subsequently, I asked Zvi whether like meditation, natural health was linked to the Jewish 'return to the land of Israel' as part of the redemption process. 'Of course', he replied. According to Rabbi Kook, '*teshuva* [i.e. 'repentance' or 'return'] has to take place on many planes, including [that of] physical health'. And 'just as the land of Israel is the correct and accurate location for the Jewish people, one needs to eat in a way that is correct and accurate'. Moreover, 'when Jews reside in their land, everything, including health, is more whole'.

Zvi studied 'natural nutrition' at a college for 'complementary medicine in the spirit of Judaism'. And besides learning about nutrition and joining meditation retreats, he used to attend a class on 'flowing imagination' (*dimyon nove'a*), a psycho-spiritual technique developed by a Breslav Hasid, which Zvi described as a way of attaining self-knowledge through 'exploring one's imagination'. (Whereas Zvi, Ya'akov and other orthodox meditators regard the 'return' of mindfulness and insight meditation to the 'sacred' realm of Judaism as helpful preparation for prophecy, they often relate practices involving imagination and music to reaching, ultimately, actual prophecy.)

Once, while he was on a break from a 'natural nutrition' class, Zvi and I visited an inexpensive coffee chain. He was 'fed up with thinking about health', he said, and so he bought himself an iced chocolate drink. As we were queuing, he mentioned that meditation necessitates perseverance, which proved challenging for him. At that time, he had been practising '7 minutes of awareness of breathing each morning' for several weeks (occasionally

adding, with each incoming and outgoing breath, one of the four Hebrew letters of *shem Ha'Shem*, 'the Lord's name' or the Tetragrammaton). Doing so, he thought, was something he 'owed' himself. And though previously he would stop meditating soon after returning from retreats—despite feeling elated during these retreats—he knew from experience that it was imperative for him to continue practising, even if for a short time every day. On other occasions, however, Zvi would tell me ashamedly that he had stopped as he was feeling too busy (cf. Beekers 2017).

At that time, Zvi felt he needed to make central life choices, including whether to marry the woman whom he had been dating for several months, what higher education course to join and which career to pursue. 'I want to realize what I should be doing [in terms of profession]', he said. 'At the moment, I can't find my [ideal] place'. While he was working with adolescents with special needs close to the *yeshiva* he was attending—and volunteering, during breaks, with disabled children at a different settlement—he was considering studying either engineering or computer science. 'I know it's good to help people through my profession', Zvi said, as part of the responsibility he felt to partake in repairing the world (*tikkun 'olam*). 'But what I do should also be fun for me'.

Moreover, Zvi was contemplating building a rudimentary, unauthorized house for himself and his potential future family in the settlement where he was studying. This would be cheaper than doing so almost anywhere else, as he would not need to purchase the land, only to finance the house's simple construction. And though he would probably receive from the authorities a demolition order, Zvi explained, normally such orders are not implemented. Indeed, while he was anxious about this plan, he imagined he would eventually go ahead with it.

Thus, in addition to attending a *yeshiva*—which involved studying Torah and praying, including up to one hour on some mornings—Zvi was working with children with special needs. Later, he began being employed also by a public organization that was running tours for potential Jewish immigrants to Israel. Moreover, he was taking classes on 'natural nutrition' and 'flowing imagination'. These commitments, as well as procrastination or a reluctance to encounter painful sides of himself, made it difficult for him to meditate regularly. (Likewise, following my fieldwork Zvi did get married, and had a child, which made meditating at home particularly rare for him. Similarly, having by then left the *yeshiva* and begun a full-time college course, Zvi would study Torah mostly during the Sabbath, struggling to find time during the rest of the week.)

Trying to juggle these various responsibilities, Zvi seemed to feel self-doubt and guilt concerning his inability to excel in all these different respects. Before his classes would begin, we would often browse together popular books on Jewish topics found nearby, in a stand inside the Jerusalem central bus station. On one occasion, he and I later attended a group

prayer at the station's synagogue, where orthodox men from various streams were forming quorums of ten or more and praying together. Towards the end of the service, he looked at me and pointed with his head at the synagogue's exit. Following our departure, I asked him at what point during a group prayer it was permissible to leave. 'In principle, one should stay until the end. But I'm a *chapper* [Yiddish: lit. 'snatcher', someone who is insufficiently scrupulous]', he said, adding he wanted to arrive in time to his college class. Similarly, during one meeting, when he remembered he had previously proposed to get sorted my *tefillin* (which, due to not being used for several years became improper to don), Zvi held his face and said emotionally: 'I'm so bad [*garu'a*] for not taking care of this!'

Moreover, Zvi and I once read and discussed a text by Rabbi Kook in the study hall of the *yeshiva* he was attending. We then joined the afternoon (*'arvit*) prayer service, during which he instructed me on how to conduct the main, 'standing' (*'amidah*) part of the prayer, including the customary bodily postures (e.g. when to take three steps backwards and forwards, when to bow). Following the service, against the background of the murmur of other participants, he explained to me that the purpose of praying is to face 'the King of Kings, the Holy one, Blessed be He' and express 'the soul's yearning for Him, for infinity, for perfect goodness'. Chuckling, Zvi added that 'that's at least the ideal. To what extent I manage to do this is a different matter'.

Besides longing for God, however, Zvi explained that one ought also to 'aim' (*lechaven*) mentally at the import of as many as possible of the prayer's words. Each word, not to mention passage, holds numerous (including esoteric) meanings, which one can always continue acquiring. The prayer of the boy who (as in a well-known Hasidic story) cannot read the text, and instead blows a whistle loudly out of great yearning for *Ha'Shem*, is surely very deep, Zvi added. Yet such a prayer is definitely incomplete in the case of those who *can* read. One 'needs to do much work', and continuously so, 'in order to make the prayer more whole'—both in terms of one's emotional state and one's understanding of its deeper meanings. And this is something Zvi tries to do—though according to him often far from successfully.

For Zvi, then, 'repentance', particularly during the redemption era, means that Israeli Jews need to perfect various aspects of their lives. These include nutrition, Torah study, prayer and meditative practice (which helps in getting to know oneself better, and operates as 'preparation for prophecy'). They also consist of family life and work (e.g. choosing a profession that both contributes to others and is enjoyable to oneself). Zvi's religious approach, in other words, ethicalizes different dimensions of Jewish subjects' existence, placing responsibility on them (and especially on himself) to be successful in these regards. For Zvi, one still 'inhabits the moral system' despite not fulfilling all these duties perfectly. Yet the difficulty of meeting these high expectations, being held accountable for accomplishing more than one practically can, creates guilt and disappointment regarding oneself. Like the

case of Ya'akov, then, Zvi's celebration of the Jewish people's significant role in the redemption process—an obvious sign of religious success—also results in regular experiences of inadequacy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate the unexpected, ethically productive consequences of failing among some orthodox Jewish meditators. As we have seen, Moshe and Yehuda view their very experiences of failure as meaning that in important respects, they are religiously thriving. For them, 'falling down' can mean they have reached higher spiritual degrees than others who are successful in more established respects. Moreover, unlike what is normally described in the recent anthropological literature, failing in ethically valuable ways does *not* involve, among them, taking greater responsibility for their deficiencies. Rather, succeeding-through-failing relies on attributing some responsibility to *other* entities.

Indeed, whereas Buddhist-derived meditative practices are frequently depicted as technologies of responsibilization, Moshe's and Yehuda's attitudes towards failure, despite being inspired by such practices, involve primarily *de*-responsibilization. Such orthodox meditators learn to consider themselves as accountable chiefly for the efforts they exert, but less so for the results of such attempts, which are under the control of either God or a *tsaddik* or both. This is similar to many Dharmic insight meditation practitioners, who likewise place responsibility predominantly on the effort one ought to make during practice. The quality of the experiences one undergoes when meditating, on the other hand, are described by them as resulting largely from one's past *kamma* (*or karma*) which, lying outside one's present control, warrant less self-blame (cf. Laidlaw 2014a: 210).

By contrast, for orthodox meditators such as Ya'akov and Zvi, the Jewish people's 'return' to the land of Israel as part of Zionism indicates that the world has entered a historical era in which it is gradually being redeemed. Moreover, this progression necessitates the ethicalization of different aspects of Jews' everyday lives, placing further matters within the realm of individuals' accountability. Yet such ethicalization induces, among these religious meditators, demanding hopes that lead to discontent, guilt or tense attempts to maintain peace and comfort. So, whereas Moshe's and Yehuda's ability to fail well relies on *de*-responsibilization, Ya'akov and Zvi's 'succeeding badly' appears to depend on *over* responsibilization.

Oftentimes, 'millenarian activists', placing faith in God, consider themselves 'both the authors *and* not the authors of their own actions at the same time' (Hickman and Webster forthcoming; emphasis in original). By contrast, among orthodox meditators the more messianic figures (e.g. Ya'akov and Zvi) ethicalize individuals' conduct to the point of

understating God's responsibility for everyday events. And it is those who are *less* messianic, such as Moshe and Yehuda, who ascribe greater accountability to God and *tsaddikim*.

Finally, all the religious meditators I have discussed attempt to realize *orthodoxy*, *spirituality* and *non-renunciation* simultaneously, and among some, their senses of failure result from the difficulty in doing so. Thus, Moshe has trouble finding the time to meditate formally (*spirituality*) and pray (*orthodoxy*) while making a living and caring for his family (*non-renunciation*). Moreover, Zvi finds it challenging to juggle his commitments to meditating, maintaining a wholesome diet (*spirituality*), studying Torah, praying with intent (*orthodoxy*), acquiring a profession and getting married (*non-renunciation*). And it is when these commitments collide—which makes it difficult to realize all three values sufficiently— that these orthodox meditators experience failure in one or more of these respects.

Among the other meditators, senses of failure likewise involve difficulty in realizing these different values, though not as a result of them clashing. Yehuda has a hard time finding a match and a fulfilling job (*non-renunciation*), at times commits sins, struggles to address God (*orthodoxy*) and loses self-control (*spirituality*). Rather than originating from a conflict between his different commitments, however, these challenges appear to be distinct ones (and indicate to Yehuda his spiritual success). Similarly, Ya'akov is concerned with performing the Jewish commandments meticulously (*orthodoxy*) and with supporting his children through working (*non-renunciation*), which he wishes to do within an atmosphere of sanctity, health and harmony (*spirituality*). Yet his senses of failure result less from a tension between these allegiances and more from his difficulty to meet his own high expectations concerning each domain.

Part I: Conclusion

Chapter 1 has argued that for many orthodox meditators, Buddhist-derived practices—and particularly a specific *vipassanā* technique that emphasizes awareness of bodily sensations—act as means for feeling God's presence. Embodiment, therefore, rather than impeding experiences of transcendence, for these meditators is precisely how one comes in contact with God.

Using Foucault's terminology (which I discussed in this dissertation's introduction), the ontology or 'ethical substance' in this project consists of the *nefesh,* the lower, mundane part of the self, which is closely linked to the body. And rectifying the *nefesh* is in turn considered necessary for revealing the soul (*neshamah*): an elevated, 'Godly part' within the person. As for deontology, when repairing one's *nefesh* and exposing one's divine soul, one operates as a member of the Jewish people—who are thought to have a unique capability of arriving at proximity to the Creator, and who, according to many orthodox meditators, alone have divine souls. Furthermore, ascetics here consists of insight meditation, and particularly of a specific practice that highlights paying attention, diligently and continuously, to subtle bodily sensations without reacting to them. Finally, teleology takes the form of establishing connection with God within oneself, through one's divine soul, subsequently to having mended one's *nefesh* via meditation.

This goal amounts to a substantial realization of the value of *spirituality*. But *orthodoxy* and *non-renunciation,* though less emphasized, are also fulfilled as part of this project. As for *orthodoxy*, students learn to meditate in a 'kosher' Jewish setting. Additionally, encountering their divine souls is said to encourage some to perform God's commandments more eagerly—with *spirituality* in this sense contributing to *orthodoxy*. As for *non-renunciation*, meditators are either married with children or aspire for this, and upon leaving retreats, they attempt to improve themselves ethically while operating as householders.

Chapter 2 described another, competing and ultimately more popular orthodox Jewish ethical project—one that likewise promotes *spirituality*. The ontology and deontology are similar to those of the one just discussed—the 'ethical substance' is the *nefesh* and one meditates as a member of the Jewish people—but the ascetics and teleology are rather different. Here, unlike in the first project, insight and mindfulness practices do not involve sitting still for long periods without moving, as this is thought to involve excessive striving and physical pain. Instead, paying attention to one's thoughts, feelings and physical sensations is carried out in a more 'relaxed' manner, with the aim being to access—through the peace and silence of meditation—one's *unique* divine soul and subsequently to express it, spontaneously, in the world.

While this second project likewise promotes *orthodoxy*, it underscores especially *non-renunciation,* criticizing the first project for not realizing this value satisfactorily, as it ostensibly consists of too much 'repressive' discipline and is therefore overly ascetic. So, while virtually all orthodox meditators are committed to *non-renunciation*, the two projects disagree on what its realization involves, and people participate in them, respectively, depending on the degree to which they take self-restraint to accord with this value.

Whereas chapters 1 and 2, when taken together, portray the two projects as discordant with each other, the next two chapters demonstrate that tensions are also found *within* each. First, Chapter 3 examined the ethically laden choices and compromises that are entailed, for orthodox students—especially those who adhere to the second approach—in learning meditation in both orthodox and non-orthodox (including Dharmic) settings. These dilemmas revolve around trying to pursue, simultaneously, *orthodoxy*, *spirituality* and *non-renunciation*, which observant meditators find it difficult to realize sufficiently in every one of the settings that are available to them. In response, they employ the strategies I have called 'value amplification' and value 'accumulation'.

Chapter 4 analysed the failures orthodox meditators experience when trying to promote these three values outside formal settings for practising meditation. Often, senses of failure result from the difficulty of dedicating sufficient time for meditation (*spirituality*) while fulfilling religious duties (*orthodoxy*), making a living and, in some cases, caring for one's family (*non-renunciation*). Moreover, I demonstrated that unexpectedly, some orthodox meditators view their very experiences of failure as meaning that in important respects, they thrive religiously and spiritually.

Thus, orthodox meditators' projects of self-fashioning via meditation aim primarily at *spirituality*. And while in principle they realize also *orthodoxy* and *non-renunciation,* they differ over what a fulfilment of the latter entails. Finally, as part of both endeavours, it often proves difficult actually to realize all three values substantially *and* concurrently, therefore necessitating concessions.

This suggests that multiple values can relate to projects of self-fashioning in diverse ways. Specifically, the two main ethical projects of orthodox meditators allow for the realization (at least in principle) of their three key values. Yet these projects differ over what the realization of one of these values (*non-renunciation*) involves (Chapters 1-2). Moreover, within both projects, value conflicts—or difficulties in realizing all key values simultaneously— are common (Chapters 3-4). And Foucault's framework for comparing ethical projects lacks specific ways of addressing such contexts: ones in which projects struggle to realize simultaneously all their subjects' central values, and compete over the proper way of realizing some of them.

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Most orthodox meditators do not regard the Palestinians around them as playing any significant role within their own political-theological projects. In the next part of this dissertation, I discuss Jewish-Israeli meditators whose stance is rather different: EDI activists who attempt to promote Palestinians' human rights and to enact solidarity with them.

PART II
Engaged Dharma Israel

CHAPTER 5

Sensitive Radicals: Exemplarity and the Multiple Values of Engaged Dharma Israel

A group of Israeli Dharma practitioners arrived at the top of a hill on which Almog and I were standing. This was part of a tour in the Jordan valley region of the West Bank, organized by the Engaged Dharma Israel (EDI) group. Almog, a veteran EDI member, was asked to recount for the participants—most of whom were secular, middle-class Israelis, and for the majority of whom this was the first time to the area—what had just happened. Appearing somewhat upset, Almog explained that a few Israeli settlers living in a nearby, recently-established outpost (one officially 'unauthorized' by Israeli authorities) were preventing Palestinian residents from grazing their flocks on that hill. These shepherds, Almog continued, used to visit the hill for years prior to the outpost's construction. And as they depended on their flocks for their meagre livelihood, and had no other grazing area available, herding in that zone was indispensable for them. Now, however, once the outpost had been established, harassment by the outpost's residents—who were backed by members of the army—became a regular occurrence for these Palestinian inhabitants.

Moreover, Almog related, the settlers, consisting of several young men, had just aggressively intimidated his own partner. She was accompanying the Palestinian shepherds to the grazing area—as Almog and she used to do on a weekly basis—in order to document, and thus possibly prevent, any attacks on them. Finally, a group of Israeli soldiers called to the area reinforced the settlers' position, as was normally the case, ordering the Palestinians to leave and photographing the identity cards of all the escorts.

Almog also mentioned that previously, he had tried to get in touch with some settlers from the area. However, their actions revealed that they were unwilling to deviate from what appeared like their larger, strategic goal of 'Judaizing' the Jordan valley by making the lives of Palestinians residing there unbearable and thus prompting them to leave.

Soon after Almog had finished speaking, we all heard the sound of an approaching jeep. Inside was the group of female soldiers who had ordered the Palestinian shepherds to go away. 'Hi guys', the lieutenant (i.e. the officer in charge) said in a friendly voice after stepping out of the jeep. 'Ahlan', several of the participants replied, echoing the officer's informal tone with an Arabic word for 'hello' that has become firmly established in everyday Hebrew. Nimrod, one of the founders of EDI, began filming the interaction using his phone—a common practice among activists when encountering the military, police or settlers. 'What's going on? You're here for what purpose?' asked the lieutenant. Some participants responded by explaining that we were conducting a tour, and were overlooking the area from the hill. 'So', the lieutenant stated, 'I will just make one thing clear [*yishur kav*]. Palestinian residents—they are not

allowed to be here. Don't reach a stage in which you bring them up here or something'. She then went on to explain that the area was formally considered a 'firing zone' (*shetach esh*)—like many other places in the region—and so going there without coordinating the visit beforehand was both dangerous and forbidden.

'Can I ask something?', one of the Dharma teachers who participated in the tour intervened. 'If this is a firing zone', the teacher asked, 'why are they [i.e. the Palestinian shepherds] forbidden to be here while we [the Israeli settlers living in the nearby outpost and the participants in the tour] are allowed?' Other participants raised similar questions, with the officer struggling to provide answers they found convincing. The lieutenant began raising her voice: 'all I know is that these people [i.e. the settlers] are allowed to be *here*, and that the other people [i.e. the Palestinians] are allowed to be *there*, and I don't want there to be any relationship between them. So please, don't create a situation in which you escort residents from the *khirbeh*s [lit. 'ruins' in Arabic] down there to this direction, alright? Now enjoy yourselves. It's Friday afternoon'.

One participant, a woman in her seventies, insisted: 'if this is a firing zone, is it permitted...', but before completing her question, she was stopped by another Dharma teacher, who seemed to feel that the officer was getting upset. 'She [the lieutenant] is not the right addressee [for these kinds of queries]', the teacher stated. Another teacher seemed to agree. 'We can assume she didn't create these rules'.

Nimrod, however, was unimpressed. 'No', he said calmly, addressing the officer, 'but it's important for you to...'. 'What?' she interrupted him, nearly shouting, 'to use my brain? This is not the [appropriate] place for that'. 'We all served in the army', one of the teachers stated quietly, apparently trying to empathize with the officer. 'Look', Nimrod told the lieutenant in a tone that was both gentle and detached: 'it's important for you to know that what you're saying is not true'. Another soldier intervened: 'we're just doing [our] job'. 'Of course', Nimrod replied, 'but at least it's worth that you know. Saying "they are allowed to be here and they are allowed to be there" isn't based on anything'.

'I really don't feel this is a topic for discussion', one of the soldiers exclaimed impatiently. 'No, because you told us what not to do...', Nimrod said. 'So, I'm *telling* you...', the officer tried to interject, but Nimrod went on speaking: 'we explained that what you're saying is not true. That's all'.

'Okay, no', insisted the officer. 'It's very true you're not [going to be] escorting Palestinian residents to this area'.

'One of us accompanied them this morning', Nimrod stated, with the lieutenant immediately replying 'so it's forbidden!' '...and we'll accompany them again', he continued.

'No', said the officer, 'that's what I told you, that it's *forbidden* to accompany them'.

'What is forbidden is what you and your soldiers are doing', Nimrod replied tenderly, though with a trace of sadness in his voice, 'and you need to understand that'.

'No problem, no problem... It's a shame if [in the future] it's not a tour and [instead] it's an escort—we'll have to intervene'.

'What will you do? What kind of intervention?' Nimrod asked, again softly, sounding almost as if he were genuinely curious regarding the threat the officer had in mind.

'Let's wait, okay?'

'Will you stop people from making a living?'

'They have their own places to make a living, and we have ours', the officer replied.

'*This* is their place', Nimrod responded, with Almog adding decisively: 'they have no other place'.

'We'll just stop them from breaking the law. That's it!' one of the soldiers cried.

'To be here doesn't mean breaking the law', Nimrod repeated. 'What you're saying about laws isn't true—the laws are the opposite'.

'You have your own opinion!' the same soldier said, upset.

'It's not a matter of opinions', Nimrod insisted with a cool voice.

Appearing to have had enough, the officer wished us 'good afternoon', with one of the Dharma teachers responding with 'thank you' and Nimrod replying 'to you too'. 'Have a good tour, and don't reach a stage in which you escort shepherds here, okay?', the officer tried one final time. 'We'll see you next week, when we accompany them', Nimrod stated, still calm. Frustrated, the soldiers murmured something and left.

Nimrod then told the participants in the tour—most of whom remained silent during this exchange—that had we been Palestinians rather than Israelis, a conversation of this sort would not have taken place. 'There is such a great difference between the way soldiers act when they encounter us and how they act when they encounter them'. Nevertheless, Nimrod stated that coming across soldiers—in that context and atmosphere—probably felt 'unpleasant' to most participants. Presumably, the inconvenience of being involved in an unexpected quarrel with members of the armed forces was intensified, in the case of most, by having previously served in the Israeli army themselves; and for some, by having children or grandchildren who were serving at that time. Nimrod thus suggested that before continuing the tour, participants 'stay with this experience' silently for a few minutes, and also offered them a chance to share their thoughts and feelings with the group.

<center>***</center>

This part of the dissertation concerns members of the EDI group: non-observant Israeli Jews involved in 'Engaged Dharma' activism of solidarity with Palestinians. In this chapter, I shall examine the complex and tense encounters that such activism can entail between participants and other Israelis (primarily soldiers and committed religious-nationalist settlers) who are

actively involved in military control over West Bank Palestinians. During these encounters, I argue, EDI activists attempt to realize two values that often come into conflict with one another. These may be referred to, using the activist's own terminology, as resistance to injustice and violence on the one hand, and friendliness (namely approaching others with a caring, non-antagonistic attitude) on the other.

In particular, I will focus on Nimrod, in his forties, who is exemplary within EDI in promoting both values to a significant extent. Indeed, among EDI participants, Nimrod is the person most concerned with forming and developing the group's unique approach. First, he is one of very few core members who are employed in activist-related professions—in his case, working for an NGO. Second, he is one among a very small minority of committed EDI participants who are involved in instructing others in the Dharma.

Nimrod is also distinctive in shaping another aspect that defines the group's attitude: placing an emphasis on being aware of, and reflecting upon, one's thoughts, feelings and emotions, silently and as part of group verbal interaction. As I shall illustrate, practising such mindful reflection is a central way in which EDI activists respond to the many challenges they face. These include situations of value conflict, in which ideals such as resistance and friendliness collide, and so 'realizing more of one […] results in realizing less of the other' (Robbins 2013: 101). According to Joel Robbins, 'what exemplars exemplify is single values expressed in relatively fully realized form' (2018: 175). Nimrod, by contrast, is exemplary not in his ability to promote significantly one specific value, but in his simultaneous realization of the different—and at times conflicting—values that together characterize the group's approach. Notably, Nimrod's doing so involves practising mindful reflection, which (among other things) helps him to face tense situations calmly, and while exhibiting both resistance and friendliness.

Finally, EDI's project combines ethical self-fashioning and political action in ways that make the very distinction between these domains seem forced. Specifically, cultivating favourable mental qualities through mindful reflection (ethics) and 'standing together' in solidarity with Palestinians (activism) are regarded by participants as complementary ways of acting beneficently and caringly. The case of EDI, then, is helpful for analytically relating the anthropology of ethics with that of politics, as group members themselves consider both spheres to be fundamentally intertwined.

Friendliness, resistance and loving Israeli kinship

In the instance depicted above, the Dharma teachers—who were not experienced solidarity activists—spoke considerately to the soldiers whom they had encountered. In doing so, they may be said to have exhibited (even if only partially and, according to some, as we shall see, problematically) the virtue described in Buddhist traditions as *mettā* or loving kindness. The

'underlying motivation for the practice of the Buddhist path is generally understood to be the benefit and welfare of both oneself and others' (Gethin 1998: 186). Consequently, according to Buddhist thought the 'wholesome mind always contains the seed' of *mettā:* 'the wish for all beings [...] to be well and happy' (186-187). Another central Buddhist concept, and one related to *mettā*, is 'right speech'. The latter constitutes one element of the noble eightfold path leading to the cessation of suffering as taught by the Buddha. It regards a statement as 'well-spoken' if uttered 'at the right time', 'in truth', 'affectionately', 'beneficially' (i.e. in a way that assists the listener to progress towards the goal of liberation) and 'with a mind of good-will' (AN 5.198, trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu).

In most EDI activities, while a commitment to *mettā* is clearly present, it is largely implicit: several participants are familiar with this term, but many do not refer to it directly, often using instead the Hebrew word for 'friendliness' (*yedidutiyut*). This is due to a preference (which EDI members share with orthodox meditators) for avoiding overly technical and foreign terminology, thereby making the group's endeavours more related to the concrete concerns of most participants. Similarly, 'right speech' is another concept with which many EDI participants are acquainted, and by which some are influenced.

In the occasion I described, friendliness coincided with a style of interpersonal communication frequent among Israelis—normally strangers meeting one another for the first time—referred to as *histahbekut*. Derived from the Arabic *sahbak*, this term means roughly 'to become someone's friend'. Significantly, *histahbekut* often amounts to an enactment of 'loving Jewish Israeli kinship' (Wright 2018: 49), characterized by cultural intimacy (see Herzfeld 1997) among strangers.

Histahbekut was initiated by the officer when approaching the participants in the tour ('hi guys'), with the teachers generally reciprocating, thus implicitly accepting her bona fides as 'friendly'. Specifically, they tended to speak caringly regarding her ('can I ask something?'; 'she [the lieutenant] is not the right addressee'; 'we can assume she didn't create these rules'). Indeed, the officer and the teachers were conversing in a relatively intimate and affectionate manner ('we all served in the army')—given that this was, on the whole, a strained encounter between civilians and armed military personnel.

By contrast, Nimrod's style of interaction with the soldiers appeared one to which they were unaccustomed, thus presenting a challenge for them. Indeed, Nimrod's behaviour did not seem to fit any of the categories of Israeli civilians normally visiting the area. First, Nimrod was not a *sahbak*. He was constantly filming these IDF (Israel Defence Forces) soldiers, which they in turn almost certainly interpreted as an unfriendly act. (Such recording of Israeli soldiers' and police officers' actions has become common within Israeli anti-occupation and opposition activism.) Moreover, Nimrod did not say 'ahlan' to the soldiers, nor did he ask how they were, instead speaking matter-of-factly, without smiling and often in an emotionally

removed tone of voice. Furthermore, Nimrod was generally not accepting of the soldiers' authority, disobeying their orders and challenging the factual claims they made.

However, neither was Nimrod acting in a manner typical of 'anti-occupation' activists operating in the area. Along with keeping an emotional distance from the soldiers, he was speaking to them respectfully, at times almost softly. Moreover, despite his firm stance towards them, he did not express anger, hostility or moral outrage (which too contain the emotional engagement characterizing Jewish Israeli kinship—see Wright 2018: 31-36). Nimrod did not, for example, reprimand them, with a prophetic tone, about the crimes and injustices they were presumably committing; nor did he appear to try to make them feel ashamed or guilty. Instead, he was attempting to encourage the soldiers to question the basis and morality of their actions.

Nimrod, then, along with being highly assertive (declaring that the activists *will* be back and that *the soldiers* were the ones breaking the law), was also calm and considerate. Consequently, it was difficult for the soldiers to place him neatly under the label of 'extreme leftist'.[25] Nimrod's acting neither like a typical *sahbak* nor like a standard activist, and lacking the affective engrossment that characterizes both, was something the soldiers did not seem to expect. Apparently, this was one reason why the lieutenant struggled during much of their interaction (see Keane 2016: 93), and as I shall explain below, for Nimrod to nonplus the soldiers in this way was efficacious.

Thus, for EDI activists, the preferable way of treating with friendliness Israelis they regard as actively involved in the harassment of Palestinians is to cultivate a particular *internal* disposition towards them. This consists of remembering that one is not acting *against* such people and has no interest in considering them enemies or feeling hostility towards them. And such a disposition expresses itself in an external stance that while treating them with respect, simultaneously remains largely removed from them. This is because to display warmth actively towards such people (i.e. *histahbekut*) in this context almost inevitably would come at the expense of resisting injustice and violence, hindering one's ability to stand effectively in solidarity with one's Palestinian partners.

When expressed through dialogue, such a commitment to resistance largely corresponds to *parrhesia* as described by Michel Foucault, namely 'the reflexive practice of freely and directly speaking the truth' (Faubion 2011: 14). According to Foucault, the one who uses *parrhesia* says only what she 'knows to be true' (1983: 2-3). Moreover, *parrhesia* constitutes 'criticism' of 'what the majority believes' and thus requires 'courage': there exists 'a difference of status' between the *parrhesiastes* and their audience, making it a 'dangerous'

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[25] Among Israelis, 'the left' refers 'to the Palestinian question and an antioccupation or pro-peace position' more so than to socio-economic matters (Wright 2018: 7).

endeavour that 'involves a risk' (ibid.). Finally, '[n]o one forces' the *parrhesiastes* 'to speak' (4-5). Instead, 'in *parrhesia*, telling the truth' is 'regarded as a duty' (ibid.).

In keeping with *parrhesia*, EDI members often convey their duty and commitment to 'standing in solidarity' with their Palestinian counterparts—by confronting other Israelis about what activists perceive as the systematic and perpetual violence and abuse Palestinians face. As we have seen, Nimrod was telling the soldiers what he regarded as true, which involved criticizing them. He thus voluntarily faced the danger of being arrested, demonstrating his courage. (On a different occasion, I witnessed him jump in front of a young soldier who was pointing a rifle at a Palestinian civilian, in an attempt to calm the soldier down.) Finally, Nimrod regarded such resistance as his obligation.

Both Buddhist 'right speech' and *parrhesia* involve an emphasis on speaking the truth. However, there exists a tension between the affection and tact that characterize right speech (Gombrich 2009: 7)—in which silence is preferable to divisive or harsh talk (Thanissaro 1999)—and the frank criticism of *parrhesia*, which is likely to 'hurt' the interlocutor (Foucault 1983: 4). Accordingly, for Nimrod to display friendliness openly towards the soldiers, as part of an attempt to perform 'right speech', could be experienced by them as an employment of *histahbekut*, which would come at the expense of resistance. That is, affectionate 'right speech' could be liable to result in not demonstrating unequivocally enough Nimrod's opposition to the soldiers' actions and the political structures they were reinforcing. And such an overtly courteous stance would constitute neither 'right speech' nor *mettā*, as it would yield to injustice and violence, thus abandoning the emphasis on truthfulness and goodwill that is essential to both. Consequently, Nimrod resorted not to express his friendliness through a genial demeanour, maintaining instead an *internal* disposition of *mettā* towards the soldiers— which he communicated to a very limited extent, as the mere avoidance of hostility.

Nevertheless, Nimrod's conduct was characterized by friendliness if compared to the considerably more confrontational style of many other activists (which we shall see below). Additionally, his particular way of non-antagonistically resisting the soldiers constituted, even if obliquely, an expression of care towards them. Specifically, refusing to express rage or animosity, and instead defying the soldiers calmly and laconically (e.g. stating that 'the rules are the opposite' without elaborating) operated as a pedagogical instrument aimed at interrupting their habitual thought and behaviour patterns. This, Nimrod was hoping—though without expecting too much—might enable them to think in novel, critical ways about the circumstances and their roles within them. As he often said, it was important for him to 'stimulate thinking' among soldiers and other Israelis. And while this could arguably result in these Israelis experiencing substantial discomfort and conflict, activists assumed such greater self-knowledge ultimately to be in these people's interests. Consequently, Nimrod would look for shifts in the gazes, facial expressions and bodily postures of soldiers during such

interactions. (On a different occasion, activists discussed a situation in which some of them were debating an Israeli general. According to Nimrod, at some point the activists 'crossed the line' in terms of how critical their assertions were, and as the general was unable to 'contain' this, his eyes became 'glazed'.)

During the encounter with the soldiers, then, Nimrod exhibited both resistance and friendliness to a substantial extent. This was unlike the Dharma teachers. The inclination of the latter, who were not committed activists, towards approaching the soldiers with friendliness meant accepting the emotionally proximate style of interaction initiated by the officer. This, in turn, hindered their ability to carry out resistance, i.e. to challenge the soldiers' actions and authority over the area's Palestinians.

As for Nimrod, for other committed EDI members, too, conveying friendliness and resistance simultaneously is not straightforward. Indeed, debates regarding the question of how to relate to Israelis who play a direct role in military control over Palestinians (i.e. settlers and soldiers) frequently arise. Such circumstances raise the question of whether it is desirable or even possible to be kind to one's political opponents while remaining resolute and effective in opposing injustice. Nimrod is, in this sense, an exemplar among EDI participants, managing to realize concurrently both values, i.e. resistance and friendliness, 'to the fullest extent possible in a given cultural setting' (Robbins 2018: 175)—that of EDI.

While promoting both values is appreciated by many EDI members, realizing merely one of them is problematic. Acting with friendliness but without also performing resistance means consenting to injustice and violence. According to some EDI activists, this is what many Israeli Dharma practitioners—insufficiently concerned about their state's control over Palestinian civilians—are doing, and this renders their Dharma practice incomplete. By insulating themselves from the numerous ways in which their lives are 'interdependent' upon those of Palestinians, such Israelis, it is argued, unintentionally perpetuate their sense of having an independent and separate self.

Conversely, if an activist's demonstration of resistance consists of aggression towards others, this does not only harm these others, but also damages the activist's own wellbeing, thus impeding her or his ability to remain involved in activism effectively over time. Therefore, instead of enabling 'harmful' emotions such as anger and resentment to take charge of oneself, it is considered wiser to learn to develop gradually a less hostile approach towards opponents.

The *koan* of value conflict

When Nimrod encountered the soldiers, he managed to act in a way that significantly expressed both resistance and friendliness. Yet as I was to find out, while he considered this desirable, Nimrod was aware that it was not always simple to realize both values simultaneously. During the same Dharma tour, participants were seated inside a tent in the

Jordan valley, which was the home of a Palestinian family. A few days earlier, Israeli soldiers had left a decree—signed by the Major-General in charge of the region—next to the encampment. The document granted the residents eight days to remove all their belongings from the area due to 'prohibited construction'. According to inhabitants and activists, this was an Israeli attempt to expel indefinitely the Palestinian residents without providing them alternative accommodation or compensation.

Sitting inside the encampment, tour participants were drinking tea provided by our hosts. The latter seemed worried, to the point of desperation. At some point, Almog received a phone call. 'I have to go', he informed Nimrod, who immediately suggested that I accompany Almog so that he was not alone. Very soon, I was seated next to Almog in his car, still affected by the difficult scenario we had just encountered. We were on our way to a nearby hill, where Israeli settlers were preventing other Palestinian shepherds' flocks from grazing. In addition, Almog reported, the settlers had just intimidated his own partner, who was accompanying the shepherds. Later, she related that one settler was particularly aggressive, 'shoving' his phone straight to her face as he was filming her. 'No stranger had ever come so close to me', she stated.

Driving across different dirt paths in an attempt to find Almog's partner, eventually we reached the hill in question. As Almog's car was climbing the hill, we noticed a military jeep driving behind us, soon overtaking the car. The jeep then stopped in front of us, next to a side-by-side vehicle that was parked at the path's edge. Four young men—who, I was soon to realize, arrived from the nearby outpost—were standing next to the vehicle, talking to the soldiers casually. At least one was carrying a pistol. Noticing us, a tall and well-built young man walked over to Almog's car and photographed its license plate.

Almog, who seemed fairly apprehensive, instructed me to 'take a picture of them, too'. I 'froze', however, feeling unable to do so. Based on past experience, I assumed that photographing these men's faces, while legal, would probably be experienced by them as hostile. Thus, it might exacerbate the tension between us (Almog and me) and them (the four settlers) into an outright, potentially violent confrontation. Significantly, however, along with being afraid of being physically attacked, I expected also that taking the photos would anger these men and would not be of any benefit. Perhaps frustrated by my inaction, Almog stepped out of his car and approached the soldiers and settlers, interrogating them as to the reported harassment of the shepherds and his partner by these men.

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Driving to Jerusalem following the tour, Nimrod asked me what it felt like for me to encounter the settlers. I responded by describing how I did nothing when Almog asked me to take pictures of them. Apart from being apprehensive, I said, photographing these men was something that, at that moment, I was not sure would be constructive. While I anticipated that

Nimrod would explain why I was wrong, his response surprised me. 'Part of the issue', he said, 'is to manage to make it clear to yourself that you're not doing this *against* them, you're not trying to make them fail or look bad. We have no interest in doing something that harms other people'. But 'even more importantly', he continued,

> You don't need to convince yourself too quickly that documenting these scenes is 'the right thing to do', and definitely not to begin thinking: 'if this is unpleasant for him, that's *his* problem; *I'm* doing what is right'. To consider that your opponent might be feeling unpleasant, and for this to raise questions for you, even hold you back—that's very valuable. When someone feels uncomfortable, the human and appropriate response is to think, 'wow, something bad is happening'. The fact that someone is my opponent doesn't mean I should ignore their feeling bad and agree to make them feel this way.

Nimrod called this experience 'a *koan*', referring to 'paradoxical' (Crook 1997: 229) or 'puzzling' (Minemma 2002: 28) questions employed in Zen Buddhism. Well-known examples are: 'in clapping both hands a sound is heard; what is the sound of the one hand?' (22), and 'what is your original face before your mother and father were born?' (25). While such questions 'cannot be answered', they 'can be resolved' through 'an existential paradox' (28) in which the Zen pupil lives through the riddle (25). Analogously to a *koan*, Nimrod explained,

> On the one hand, you know that he [i.e. the settler whom you encounter] isn't acting properly and is involved in something unjust. You want to stop or prevent it, and know that documenting the interaction would be part of that.[26] On the other hand, your filming may make this person feel uncomfortable, angry, anxious, and may appear rude to him. To 'embrace' [*lehachzik*] both realities without being able to determine between them is a great [mental] place. 'There is both this and that—now what am I doing?' It's very good to be in a [mental] place that deliberates and feels indecisive [*mitlabet*], not to become someone who thinks: 'because I'm right, the [negative] consequences of my actions don't matter'.

The above instance (as Nimrod himself acknowledged) involved a conflict of values. EDI members value resistance: openly asserting solidarity with Palestinians who are attacked or threatened by Israelis, in this context by photographing these Israelis. Yet they also value friendliness: having an attitude of care and kindness towards all people, including 'opponents'. Accordingly, Nimrod certainly found it justifiable for me to wish to protect the Palestinian shepherds and to try to prevent violence against those accompanying them by confronting the alleged perpetrators. But he also considered it warranted that I wanted to avoid prompting the settlers to feel badly—even if they appeared to have acted violently. Indeed, I witnessed Nimrod face similar dilemmas. For instance, when discussing Israelis' responsibilities for the

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[26] According to activists, if they refrain from filming on such occasions, they and their Palestinian counterparts face the risk of being harmed or treated illegally without this being documented. Moreover, they believe that filming increases the chances of shepherds being able to reach grazing grounds.

Additionally, EDI members make clear that when documenting such interactions, their goal is not to put pressure on those recorded by uploading the films to social media. Rather, even in the rare cases when this is done, the aim is to expose Israelis to 'the reality of occupation', prompting them to recognize the responsibility they share for it.

occupation (e.g. with members of the Dharma community), he would attempt to use words that would not be too harsh, but also to avoid overly benign language.

During our conversation, then, I was expecting Nimrod to try to help me resolve the value conflict or *koan* I was experiencing by explaining how in the future I could be more courageous and perform resistance more emphatically. Instead, he admitted that a value conflict existed and encouraged me not to rush to resolve it: 'even if it takes a month or ten more [similar] experiences until you reach a resolution—it's alright. Don't hurry to settle this'.

The costs of activism

Facing *koan*s—not knowing how to act in tense, violent or risky circumstances—constitutes one example of the challenges solidarity activism involves. Activists often describe such demanding situations as transpiring abruptly, following long periods in which an ostensibly tranquil atmosphere prevails. While EDI members attempt to invite only relatively experienced participants to activities that have such potential, they are not always successful. After all, they explain, an inseparable part of activist undertakings—although to varying extents, depending on the context—is taking participants outside their 'comfort zones'.

Indeed, according to EDI members their activities—like those of Israeli solidarity, human rights and anti-occupation initiatives more generally—often raise difficult and intense feelings among participants. These include sadness over Palestinians' pain, but also guilt over one's entanglement in violence and feeling that one does not do enough to counteract it. Other related emotions consist of anger and aggression directed at people perceived as promoting violence and discrimination (e.g. settlers relying on sizeable state resources, residents of unauthorized outposts appropriating land and intimidating others, soldiers refraining from hindering them). Likewise, involvement in activist events can prompt fear of getting harmed physically, by violent attacks, or legally, through arrests (see also Wright 2018; Weiss 2014). Finally, according to participants, activism involves pain, weariness and despair at things not turning out the way one expects or wishes; or conversely—and more subtly—becoming conceited following instances of success.

Such risks point to activism's intrinsic harmful potential. In Buddhism, social and political 'disengagement' has a long history, with many revered thinkers (including Mahāyāna philosophers such as Śāntideva) considering engagement unfruitful and even harmful to well-being and thus actively discouraging it (Lele 2019). But whereas such thinkers regard political involvement as interfering with the tranquillity required for liberation (ibid.), the wisdom and inner peace EDI participants seek are not ones of world-transcendence. Instead, they involve partaking in the world in greater depth as well as improving it, and rely on experiencing the interdependence of all life (see Chapter 6). Consequently, though EDI members acknowledge the inner disquiet activism entails, they do not consider this a sufficient reason for avoiding it.

Involvement in solidarity activism can also have substantial harmful social repercussions that relate more specifically to Israel's current political climate. In recent years, Israelis who actively oppose military control over Palestinians 'have found themselves in stark opposition not only to the state but also to most of the rest of the Jewish Israeli population' (Wright 2018: 16). For example, they have gradually become perceived as 'traitors' and 'extremists' by wider parts of society, and by politicians and mainstream media (8)—a change which has led to 'far-right political parties increasing their power' in the Israeli parliament and government (155). Furthermore, some activist NGOs 'have been subject to public campaigns against their work as well as proposed legislation that would cut their funding from abroad and criminalize some of their activities' (ibid.). And in general, such activists 'have increasingly been subject to attacks, of all kinds, from a strengthened right-wing public and government', at times paying 'high prices' for their work (156).[27]

Consequently, participating in 'leftist' political action may result in alienation from family, friends and work colleagues, which can ensue from revealing to them one's involvement in activist events or relating one's views. Alternatively, those who refrain from addressing these topics—which often form a major part of their identities—with certain people (such as employers) may experience estrangement. Likewise, activists often describe visiting the homes of Palestinians who face major hardships, and just a few minutes later arriving at the centre of Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. In the latter cities, they frequently find streets filled with rejoicing people, benefitting from material prosperity. Such sharp discordances are described by EDI members as indicating an unbearable disparity between the complacency and affluence of mainstream Israeli society, and the distress experienced in its 'back yard' (as Nimrod put it).

Finally, participation in such types of activism can involve physical risk. For example, activists affiliated with distinct yet related groups, in addition to claiming to have been falsely arrested numerous times, have received death threats on social media as well as intimidating phone calls—which apparently have resulted in no or little response from the authorities. Such threats have followed from particular members of these groups becoming targeted and publicly campaigned against by organizations who accuse them of being 'anarchists' who 'harass IDF soldiers'. In some cases, these activists suggest that this has serious negative repercussions on their health. While significantly less common among EDI—due to the group's less antagonistic approach and lower public visibility—such developments concern people whom many EDI participants know and thus alarm several of them.

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[27] While most Jewish-Israelis regard military control over West Bank Palestinians as harmful for Israel and morally problematic, they also view it as necessary under the current circumstances (Mizrachi, Weiss and Sadeh 2019).

To be sure, activists regularly emphasize that such 'prices' are low compared to those that Palestinians 'pay'. Yet EDI members do choose to relinquish comfort when becoming involved in these pursuits. In particular, regularly attending the more 'radical' types of EDI events means risking not only elements of one's identity pertaining to national pride and belonging (which participants often describe as being significantly challenged by the realities they encounter). Rather, participating in such activities also means compromising valuable familial, friendly and professional ties. This, in turn, can have adverse social and economic implications, and can jeopardize one's physical safety as well as psychological and even physical health. So, while the *parrhestic* criticism that resistance involves may allow participants to feel superior to others, thus providing some advantage in terms of their identities, it also places them at different types of risks. These are inherent to activism, but also stem more specifically from the current political situation in Israel.

Mindful reflection as care

In response to such difficulties, EDI members emphasize attending to their emotional and psychological components. Specifically, they encourage and facilitate participants' developing awareness of their activist-related inner experiences (i.e. thoughts, feelings and physical sensations), as well as investigating their characteristics. This approach is influenced by elements of Buddhist thought (especially Zen) and practice (particularly Theravadin insight meditation), and by modern psychotherapy. EDI, in this sense, is unique among Israeli anti-occupation groups: members of the latter tend to focus on more 'practical' or conversely 'ideological' concerns, and to exhibit greater suspicion towards such 'soft', emotional and psychological matters.

Mindful reflection occurs before, during and following activist events, taking the form of group silent meditation and 'contemplation circles' (*ma'agaley hitbonenut*). In the latter, participants are encouraged to 'share' impromptu accounts of their experiences—and of their reflections on these experiences—with others who, seated together, form a circle. Such reports are expected to consist of descriptions and analyses of one's own experience rather than of 'intellectualizations'. Namely, when expressing thoughts on a particular topic, one is asked to distance oneself from their contents (e.g. by reflecting on how such ideas are products of one's mental 'conditioning', or are motivated by a usually unacknowledged emotional component). As Joanna Cook writes regarding the related practice of Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), practitioners turn their attention from a 'thought to consciousness-of-that-thought', examining its 'experience' without assuming that it is a 'true or accurate reflection of reality' (2017: 129). Moreover, whereas attending to others' reflections often enables EDI participants to obtain insights into their own experiences, which they can then recount, participants are

encouraged not to debate others. Instead, they are instructed to 'support each other' in dealing with emotional and psychological challenges simply by listening quietly to one another.

Short silent meditation sessions, followed by 'contemplation circles', normally take place at the beginning of EDI activities and are regarded as 'emotional preparation' for the day. During such sessions, participants are encouraged to reflect on their motivations, expectations and fears concerning the event. Organizers then suggest to participants that they 'carry over' this approach to their activist pursuits, thus 'building an intention' to practise mindful reflection throughout the day. Indeed, such preparation is thought to transform EDI activities from more-or-less standard activism into 'on the ground' Dharma practice, with participants ideally helping each other by upholding this contemplative ambience.

Moreover, a few minutes of silent meditation, followed by a 'contemplation circle', are conducted also at the end of activities, during which participants are encouraged to reflect on what they have found fulfilling as well as challenging. Furthermore, such sessions take place during EDI meetings and retreats. Finally, some members continue practising seated, silent meditation—alone or as part of 'practice groups'—in the days following events. And as some relate, by doing so they are able, at times, to 'make peace' with what has 'accumulated inside' them as a result of these activities.

Significantly, several committed participants regard EDI's particular Dharmic approach—and especially the mindful reflection it emphasizes—as especially advantageous for dealing with the difficulties activism involves. They report that it helps them to 'take care of themselves' and to support their friends in doing so—thus preventing their involvement in activism from harming them. Put differently, the Dharmic approach of mindful reflection, members maintain, introduces a necessary and effective therapeutic dimension to a pursuit that has the potential of making participants psychologically, socially and physically unwell.

What do members believe that mindful reflection accomplishes? As Nimrod frequently explains, activists' minds, like those of others, are 'conditioned'. And while activism normally originates from noble motivations, it can invoke harmful mental qualities like 'aggressiveness' and a sense of 'separateness' (*nifradut*) of oneself from others. Thus, 'processing' the resultant emotions (pain, desperation, anger, fear, guilt, etc.)—and providing a space for them simply to 'be'—enables one to achieve some freedom in relation to them. This, EDI members argue, is significantly more desirable than common alternatives, which strengthen the pull of these emotions and entrench their being habitual. The latter include passively and 'automatically' reacting to such emotions, or otherwise 'repressing' their existence by diverting one's attention away from them. Mindful reflection, then, is regarded by participants as a way for Israelis involved in solidarity activism to increase their emotional autonomy from the force of unhealthy mental patterns and conditions that political resistance evokes.

Mindful reflection

Returning to the story with which I began this chapter, we may ask how Nimrod developed his ability to promote both resistance and friendliness when speaking to the soldiers. Within EDI, Nimrod is foremost in incorporating a Dharmic dimension into activities—one that consists primarily of mindful reflection. For example, following the encounter with the soldiers, Nimrod acknowledged that it had probably felt 'unpleasant' to most participants, so instead of continuing the tour, he suggested that they 'stay with this experience' and offered them a chance to address it. For him, while both resistance and friendliness are central values, paying attention to one's experience and contemplating it is just as fundamental. Indeed, along with exemplifying the realization of resistance and friendliness, Nimrod is known in EDI for promoting a third value of mindful reflection.

Specifically, for several participants and primarily for Nimrod, mindful reflection—along with being good in itself—may enable the greater realization of other central ideals, including both resistance and friendliness. Deepening one's confidence in the significance of these other values, it turns them from fairly abstract commitments into more intuitive, embodied predispositions. Mindful reflection, in other words, is helpful in transforming values such as resistance and friendliness into virtues.

Indeed, via mindful reflection one can reinforce one's inclination towards friendliness, realizing that one has no interest in others, including one's 'rivals', suffering or experiencing pain, and that approaching them non-antagonistically can be advantageous both for oneself and for them. Likewise, mindful reflection may allow one to gain insights into 'mental patterns' that make it difficult to challenge prevalent views and beliefs (e.g. that displaying solidarity with Palestinians is inappropriate as they are 'our enemies'). This—along with having friendly encounters with Palestinians, becoming acquainted with their everyday realities and spending more time with other activists—can assist one in acting with *parrhesia* in relevant situations. Mindful reflection, then, assists EDI members to reinforce other central dimensions of their approach (e.g. resistance and friendliness), gradually turning these from things regarded as good (values) into good qualities of the person (virtues).

Moreover, when I experienced a conflict of values between resistance and friendliness, why did Nimrod encourage me not to hurry to resolve it? For Nimrod, mindful reflection has the potential to lead to the development of yet another virtue. Namely, along with helping meditators to cultivate friendliness and resistance, mindful reflection also assists them to develop 'mental stability' (Pali: *upekkha*, often translated as 'equanimity'). Becoming aware of and reflecting on one's inner experiences can decrease one's 'reactivity' to challenging mental states that are intrinsic to activism (e.g. uncertainty, surprise, tension, fear, anger), thus weakening their 'pull'. Through mindful reflection, then, one may nurture the ability to 'contain' (*lehachil*), or maintain mental balance under, difficult circumstances.

Thus, according to Nimrod, for me to attend to and reflect on my experience of conflict between resistance and friendliness would help me to arrive eventually at greater clarity concerning the way to promote both simultaneously. Additionally, through mindful reflection I could develop mental stability, which would improve my ability to 'contain' *koans*, or respond to perplexing situations with greater calm and composure.

Activist burnout

Nimrod, then, is exemplary within EDI in his ability to embody to a high degree several qualities that are appreciated within the group. He is able (1) to convey resistance during activist events; (2) to approach others, including political 'rivals', with an attitude of friendliness (or at least while avoiding enmity); (3) to maintain comparative mental stability when facing violence, uncertainty and paradox; and (4) to accomplish all this at least partly through maintaining awareness of, and reflecting upon, his inner experience. And while all these competences are valued and aspired to by the majority of EDI members, most exemplify only some of them, and only sporadically.

Early one Saturday, Danielle and I left Tel Aviv for a 'working day' organized by EDI among Palestinian herding communities in the Jordan valley. Danielle, in her thirties, was an experienced and much-respected activist, who was originally affiliated with 'rougher' and more 'in your face' anti-occupation groups. Recently, however, despite meditating only rarely on her own, she had become involved predominantly with EDI, appreciating the group's 'sensitive' approach.

On our way, Danielle and I passed by an intersection outside the large Israeli settlement of Ariel. A few days earlier, an Israeli settler had been lethally stabbed there by a Palestinian. As we were driving, she noticed hand-written posters in Hebrew—placed there following the attack as part of a makeshift memorial—demanding 'separation between Jews and Arabs' in public transportation. Danielle asked me to stop the car, after which she stepped outside and angrily ripped the posters, stating that they promoted apartheid. Later, we saw a man herding a flock next to a nearby 'illegal' (i.e. unauthorized) Israeli outpost, with long hair and a large *kippa*. 'Why did I smile back at him? I should have realized he was a settler', she told me.

At 7:30 am, we reached the location where we had agreed to meet the rest of the participants (we were fewer than ten) in the 'working day'. Like us, they seemed tired. Standing outside our cars, we shared our names, where we were from, and very briefly—in a way that felt rather strained—'what we came with' to the activity (i.e. what we were feeling and what our motivation was for attending). We did this hastily, without first sitting in silent meditation for a few minutes as was the norm in EDI activities. Indeed, unusually for EDI events, that day the vast majority of the participants, including the organizers, were not committed Dharma

practitioners; and perhaps as a result, their statements tended to be general and brief. Thus, the atmosphere was one of impatience, even cynicism, towards this self-reflective stage, which participants seemed to regard as an uncomfortable ritual. They appeared to have waited impatiently for the 'real' part: working in solidarity with Palestinians in opposition to 'the occupation'.

We began working, trying to restore a blocked water well—which our Palestinian hosts, we were told, could be prevented from doing on their own (see also Braverman 2020: 530-531). After a few hours of work, during which we came across no moist soil, our Palestinian counterparts concluded that the well had become dry. Subsequently, some participants began telling the day's organizers that as we were of no help to our hosts, they would rather return home and spend the rest of the Saturday with their families. Nevertheless, from there we drove to another Palestinian encampment nearby. However, our host there, too—who was busy attending to a disease that harmed his flocks—had trouble making use of our presence.

We eventually returned to our cars, with the organizers admitting this had been a frustrating day. While we were talking, preparing to begin our journeys home, an Israeli military jeep—with three men on reserve duty and one younger female soldier—stopped next to us. A few activists immediately began filming the interaction (as they would do whenever encountering representatives of the Israeli authorities or settlers). One soldier said 'hello' and asked what we were doing there. Someone responded quietly and succinctly that we were on a tour. The soldier then asked 'where are you from?', at which Danielle muttered 'where are *you* from?'. It made her upset, she later told me, that he allowed himself to ask us such questions, as if we were 'his friends'. 'I see you don't want to talk', he replied. Shortly afterwards, the female soldier asked another participant—an experienced activist operating mostly as part of a different anti-occupation group—'why are you filming me?' He responded by grinning and saying: 'this is for my Facebook page'. She began filming him back using her personal phone, with the older soldiers trying to calm her down. And stepping back into the jeep, she said: 'I can't stand seeing them!', apparently meaning 'leftist' activists in general. During the exchange, that activist also referred to the area's settlers as 'terrorists' and to the soldiers as their 'puppets'.

Following this encounter, all said a quick goodbye without concluding the day with the customary silent meditation and group reflection. The atmosphere felt heavy, one of disappointment, perhaps even of wasted time. On our way back to Tel Aviv, Danielle related that while she used to try holding conversations with soldiers for many years, recently she began realizing that this was 'draining' her. She found their responses 'frustrating', and so she stopped. Danielle then added that conducting a 'contemplation circle' that day could have been helpful. Participants would have been able to see that others were feeling similarly to themselves, and be reminded that showing their presence in the region and meeting their

Palestinian partners were significant in themselves—regardless of whether they were able to help with anything 'practical'. However, Danielle continued, recently she had not been in the right mood for leading 'contemplation circles'. And as no other group member who had experience in doing so attended that event, that day no such 'circle' was carried out.

Mindful reflection and *koans*

The atmosphere during the 'working day' was not one that emphasized conducting activism while simultaneously carrying out mindful reflection. Rather, participants were primarily concerned with practical achievements (i.e. being effective in supporting Palestinians). Moreover, they 'reacted' emotionally to soldiers and settlers without explicitly attempting to remain aware of such reactions. And as that day did not yield much success, and did not consist of much contemplation, participants were left feeling frustrated—without having the option of collectively 'processing' that emotion. Therefore, while certainly conveying resistance, most did not exhibit much friendliness or mental stability. And this is attributable, at least partly, to their not operating within a framework that promoted mindful reflection.

When I discussed this with Nimrod—who had not attended that particular 'working day'—he maintained that it was important for participants to be able to 'unfold' (*liftoach*) together the emotional difficulties that they were experiencing. Otherwise, he explained, such emotions might 'accumulate' over time and create harm. Consequently, Nimrod emphasized that as he saw things, concluding activities with 'contemplation circles' should be regarded as indispensable. Moreover, he asserted that unlike other groups—whose work he certainly appreciated—EDI's style stressed providing participants with information 'matter-of-factly' (*b'inyaniut*), trying to make clear distinctions between facts and one's own interpretations. Accordingly, it was one that refrained from using 'negative adjectives' to describe 'opponents'.

Similarly, core EDI members once conducted an overnight 'retreat' at a Palestinian family's encampment. One of the event's goals, they stated, was for participants to 'take care' of themselves by addressing, within the group's supportive atmosphere, issues about which some of them felt concerned. Following dinner, one participant related he had been in touch with the civilian security coordinator (*ravshatz*) of one of the area's settlements. Subsequently, participants deliberated whether it was appropriate for that member to remain in contact with the security coordinator—knowing that Palestinian shepherds living nearby repeatedly complained about harassment and even attacks from him.

That participant suggested meeting with the security coordinator and pointing out on a map where the shepherds were 'legally' entitled to herd, thus demonstrating that the place he prevented them from entering was one that they were formally permitted to access. Then, he proposed, he would ask the security coordinator why he had blocked them. Another participant insisted that Israelis should concentrate on accompanying Palestinians to grazing

grounds where the latter face harassment—and that given that man's job title and violent history, group members should not be misled regarding his goals. It would be utterly futile, he argued, to hold well-intentioned conversations with settler officials, whose objectives clearly contradict the rights and interests of the Palestinian inhabitants.

Nimrod responded by stating that first of all, as he saw things, whatever was happening in that area concerned primarily the lives of its inhabitants: the members of the Palestinian communities. And as the group's job was to assist them rather than to speak *for* them (cf. Wright 2018: Chapter 1), everything EDI did needed to stem from their requests and to depend on their approval. Subsequently, however, Nimrod moved to addressing the 'psychological prices' paid by those involved in activism. It is more convenient to view activism in a non-emotional manner, he said, concentrating on the goals to be achieved. But actions have internal residues: if one decides that doing certain things—such as speaking to people who act violently—is 'illegitimate', then an 'inner distance' begins to emerge. And continually detaching oneself from such people, refraining from having any contact with them, may reinforce 'hostility'—even if the wish to maintain distance is in itself sensible. When people decide not to meet others, it becomes easier for them to think simplistic things about these others, and their views concerning them can remain coherent, lacking any confusion.

Yet reality, Nimrod continued, is more disorderly than the way it seems when we think about it abstractly. Indeed, to communicate with such people also has a cost. If we begin feeling close to someone, then once we recognize the violence they employ, we may try to make it seem 'prettier' than it actually is. The challenge, he concluded, is not to provide theoretical answers to such questions. Rather, it is to investigate 'what happens inside us when we choose to enter situations in which we communicate with our rivals, and what "prices" this requires us to pay'. Indeed,

> We can investigate whether these qualities, of friend and rival, can coexist. Is it possible for us to resist such a person without feeling hostility towards him? Do my speaking to him and my struggling against him exclude each other? [...] As long as we don't harm our Palestinian counterparts, friendliness towards our rivals and struggling with them don't need to be ranked—they are equivalent.

For Nimrod, then, when encountering dilemmas (or *koans*), emphasis is to be placed not on coming up with 'solutions' to such quandaries, but on paying attention to, and reflecting upon, their psychological implications. This is more straightforwardly so than for other EDI members, who—while respecting Nimrod and striving to learn from him—tend to place more stress on supposedly more real-world questions, and to prioritize one of these qualities (i.e. friendliness or resistance) over the other.

Nimrod, on the other hand, wishes to avoid the mistake of placing one of these values above the other. Instead, he suggests embracing, and investigating in practice, the logical paradox or *koan* of treating both as equally worthwhile. Put differently, Nimrod's proposed

way of responding to value conflicts is not to attempt to reconcile the tension by ranking the values hierarchically. Instead, he emphasizes practising mindful reflection, thus reminding himself that conflicting values are compossible. Moreover, he tries cultivating stability—again, at least partly through mindful reflection—in order to be able to contain mentally such contradictions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate that exemplars may not always be figures who realize a single value substantially, as suggested by Robbins (2018). Rather, exemplars may, alternatively, embody a complex of *several* discrete values and virtues that together provide a group with its distinctive character. In this sense (though as I shall explain immediately, not in others), my analysis is closer to that of Caroline Humphrey, according to whom an exemplar 'has the qualities' or virtues—in the plural—'that one admires' (1997: 36).

Specifically, the value pluralism (see Robbins 2013) that Nimrod embodies includes values that are often found in conflict (friendliness and resistance); and also consists of ones that assist him in addressing this tension—through embracing rather than resolving it (mindful reflection and stability). Likewise, EDI members regard mindful reflection both as good in itself, *and* as assisting them to turn other values they stress—friendliness, resistance and stability—into virtues (i.e. inclinations of the mind and body towards realizing these values). But while other participants exemplify one or more of the group's central ideals, none of them realize, to the same extent as Nimrod, all these values simultaneously.[28]

Indeed, unlike the exemplars Humphrey depicts—who are 'open-ended', 'unfinished' and have 'no single meaning' (1997: 34, 41)—Nimrod's esteem results primarily from his ability to realize the *specific* values that matter within EDI. To be sure, for most members Nimrod operates not as an 'intentionally chosen' teacher with whom they form a 'hierarchical' relation of discipleship (Humphrey 1997: 35-36). He does not officially act as the teacher or leader of EDI, maintaining instead more casual contacts with other participants. Moreover, others do not necessarily try to be *like* him (see also Robbins 2018: 184), his extensive experience both as a full-time activist and as a Dharma instructor not constituting a feasible prospect for most. Nevertheless, Nimrod *is*, in practice, the dominant figure within EDI, and the more regular participants appreciate him, attempt to learn from him and accept his implicit authority. Accordingly, some feel 'fondness', at times 'even admiration' for his conduct (Robbins 2018: 186; see also Humphrey 1997: 36)—though they express this in largely oblique and reserved ways so as to avoid embarrassment.

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[28] Notably, mindful reflection does not operate here as a 'paramount value' that lower-level values help to realize (cf. Robbins 2004, 2013: 111). Rather, it is promoted alongside other values as well as assists in their realization.

Several anthropologists (e.g. Mahmood 2004; Fassin 2014; Ortner 2016: 60; Mattingly and Throop 2018; see also Laidlaw 2018b) have recently called for integrating, or analytically connecting, the anthropology of ethics and that of politics. Some of them (e.g. Fassin 2014; Ortner 2016) have expressed concern over the possibility that the study of ethics would de-politicize anthropology, and so have asked how it might relate to political considerations. One common response has been to situate people's ethical projects in the context of disparate power relations (Mattingly and Throop 2018: 485). Another has been to analyse 'moral and ethical stakes that arise from the practice of politics', namely from widely debated 'social problem[s]' to which power is central (Fassin 2015: 203-206). However, likewise heeding this call, at least implicitly, other anthropologists have analysed the ethical dimensions of political activism (e.g. Heywood 2018; Wright 2018), with some demonstrating that the lifestyles of activists require ethical self-fashioning (e.g. Dave 2012; Lazar 2017).

The case of EDI suggests that another worthwhile way of integrating the study of ethics with that of politics consists of examining how interlocutors in the field *explicitly* link self-cultivation to activism. By these two dimensions I mean the work that individuals intentionally conduct on themselves in order to become certain kinds of persons, and their attempts either to transform or maintain structures and institutions of their society, community or state. In EDI, more so than in the abovementioned cases, political activists *themselves* understand what they do to involve systematic self-cultivation, which takes the form of particular ascetics or technologies of the self—specifically, introspective techniques of reflection (cf. Lazar 2017: 5). That is, rather than being primarily something the analyst interprets to be happening among activists, EDI participants attempt—overtly and deliberately—to develop particular virtues that are integral to their ethical-political project, doing so through the specific means of meditative reflection.[29]

Indeed, in EDI, political action and ethical cultivation are so 'intimately part of the same project' (Laidlaw 2014a: 115) that to make a sharp distinction between them would be misleading. Specifically, EDI members consider self-fashioning and solidarity activism to be mutually reinforcing. Developing favourable mental qualities via mindful reflection, they argue, assists one to remain involved in activism over time, despite the various challenges it entails. Additionally, meditative self-cultivation renders one's selfhood more consistent with one's pursuit of care, expressed through both resistance and friendliness. Conversely, activism exposes one to *dukkha* (suffering or unease) caused not only by individual-psychological factors, but also by social and political structures, thus expanding one's wisdom and understanding of the Dharma. As Nimrod once argued (in a decidedly world-affirming

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[29] While Cook's female renouncer interlocutors get close to relating meditative self-fashioning to activism, as their self-cultivation bears noteworthy implications on gender politics, these appear largely unintended (2010a: 141-142, 160-162), and thus cannot easily constitute 'activism'.

statement that some Buddhists would question—see Thanissaro 2015: 265; McMahan 2008: 153-155), activism constitutes the most complete enactment of what the Dharma stands for, as it enables one to experience most forcefully one's 'interdependence' upon others. For these meditator-activists, then, endeavours of self-cultivation improve the quality of one's political action, which in turn reinforces one's self-cultivation.

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We have seen that within EDI, the promotion of mindful reflection and the cultivation of friendliness occur against the backdrop of the difficulties entailed in conveying resistance to Israel's military control over Palestinians. These are especially acute given the severe crisis of 'the left' in Israel: as Israelis become more committed to demonstrating resistance through activism, they become more removed from growing segments of their own society. In the next chapter, I shall discuss one aspect of EDI's project that provides participants motivation for taking political action despite normally believing they can do little to produce widescale transformation: their visits to Palestinians.

CHAPTER 6

At Home in My Enemy's House: Ritualized Hospitality between Intimacy and Autonomy

In 2018, a post was uploaded from the EDI group's Facebook account. The post began with a description of a phone conversation that one group member held with an Israel Defence Forces (IDF) officer the night before.

> Hello, is this the Ephraim Brigade? I would like to update you that we are a group of Israelis who have come to stay with our friends at [a Palestinian village at the centre of the West Bank]. We will stay with them all night, and we want you not to raid the village like you did yesterday.

The post went on to explain that in response to stones being hurled at an Israeli settler's car outside the village, the IDF carried out 'harsh collective punishment'. This included Israeli soldiers entering the village at night, breaking into dozens of homes and frightening occupants.

According to the post, the officer who picked up the phone 'was so surprised' by the possibility of Israelis having West Bank Palestinian friends with whom they felt confident enough to stay overnight that activists had to repeat their account 'several times'. 'We understand you have to prevent stone throwing. But raids on a village of thousands of residents and arbitrary break-ins to houses in the dead of night will not accomplish this'. EDI members, the post's author further explained, wanted army officers to know that the next night, 'Israelis would be waiting for the soldiers in the village'. Along with potentially 'preventing the continuation of collective punishment', by doing so members also wished 'to show these young soldiers that the divide [*chaluka*] between Israelis and Palestinians' is 'less stark than [the soldiers] might think'.

'It was a long and intimate night, even a moving one', the post continued, during which EDI members and their Palestinian hosts 'talked about education, love and shared activities'. They also spoke of 'non-violent struggle and violent actions that previously took place in the area'. For example, activists listened to stories told by a young man who—like so many others 'who have lived under military rule for their entire lives'—has 'experienced countless events of bullying [*hit'amrut*]' by the army.

Moreover, EDI members visited that household 'many times in the past', and their Palestinian counterpart—a man—always welcomed them 'in the guest room, which is isolated from the rest of the house'. That night was different. 'Our host instructed us to sit in the living room, along with his wife and one of their children. It was our first time sitting together with the wife', who conveyed curiosity as well as 'how much she appreciated' the activists staying there. 'Thanks to the IDF', the post concluded, 'we have become slightly more like household

members [*bney bayit*]' there. Speaking of the same village during an Engaged Dharma retreat, a Dharma teacher affiliated with EDI related that that village—which she too used to visit regularly—often felt to her like 'the right place to be, the place where I feel most at home'.

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EDI practitioners seem to appreciate, and to be particularly moved by, being the guests of West Bank Palestinians. In what sense does spending time in the houses of Palestinians—whom many if not most Israeli Jews consider their enemies, and whose places of residence they find unsafe—'feel like home' to these activists?

Introduction: Hospitality between intimacy and autonomy

Anthropologists often describe hospitality as a 'ritualized' activity, one that relies on a 'depersonalized repertoire' of things that are to be done correctly by both hosts and guests (Humphrey 2012: S63-S64; Rabinowitz 1997: 117; Allerton 2012: S52). Moreover, hospitality's ritualized norms have been portrayed as crafting a 'kind of sociality and affect that otherwise would not exist', often consisting of a 'joyous atmosphere' (Humphrey 2012: S65, S73), increased intimacy (Candea and da Col 2012: S9) and 'bonds of trust'—even between people who stand for 'contrasting ethnic and ideological categories' (Marsden 2012: S127).

But similar to other ritualized actions, while hosts may render their hospitality 'sincerely and emotionally felt' by 'meaning to mean' it, they may also not (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 211-213). Moreover, ritualized hospitality can create distance and detachment: though participants 'can seem closer', and may even feel closer', 'they are always also distanced' by hospitality's pre-formed conventions (Humphrey 2012: S71-S73). These, along with branding visitors as 'neighbours and kin', define them also 'as virtual outsiders' (Herzfeld 2012: S214). Indeed, declarations 'that the guest should act "as in your own house"' are often 'belied by formal receiving areas' (ibid. S214; Shryock 2012: S24), and by guests being 'necessarily at the mercy' of hosts (Candea and da Col 2012: S5). Furthermore, oftentimes guests and hosts come to stand for rival collective entities, and in circumstances of 'political subordination', hosts can obtain a 'moral advantage' over guests through offering hospitality (Candea and da Col 2012: S14). Yet hospitality involves an 'element of threat' to hosts too (Herzfeld 2012: S213), because when receiving guests, they open their 'I' to the other (Humphrey 2012: S73).

Arguably, this is so especially in the 'Arab world', where houses have been described as 'marked by a strong desire to receive visitors and, at the same time, to safeguard their own interiority' (Shryock 2004: 36). Being 'a pillar of Arab culture, Palestinians no exception', hospitality there is said to be a 'duty so closely associated with pride and honour that the right to perform it has turned to a prerogative' (Rabinowitz 1997: 115). The well-known ideal of Arab hospitality involves guests being 'delicately received', 'met with elaborate greetings' and given

'food of high quality' (Shryock 2004: 35-36). Yet it also consists of protecting guests from harm, and it is 'in the ability to act as host' in these different ways that sovereignty is said to be 'manifest' (Shryock 2012: S25). Finally, hospitality has been described as partaking in 'a complex interaction' between 'virtue' and 'pragmatism' or 'instrumentality' (Marsden 2012: S119-S121), and this appears to be true also in some Arab contexts (Shryock 2004: 58-59).

In this chapter, I analyse why many Israeli activists emphasize the moments of communion involved in receiving hospitality from Palestinians. By acting as polite and submissive guests to Palestinians, activists regard themselves as offering a correction (even if a minor one) to the ways in which they view Israeli Jews as frequently behaving. Most EDI participants acknowledge the historical, religious and national connections Jewish Israelis feel to 'the land of Israel', and the long history of persecution of Jews outside it. Yet these, they argue, cannot justify policies such as military control over the West Bank, 'endemic' to which are dispossession and '[n]umerous violations of basic human rights', including 'restrictions of movement, collective punishment' and 'abuse' (Weiss 2016: 689).

Thus, instead of violence towards and exclusion of Palestinians—e.g. taking over lands and resources—activists, through offering Palestinians support and being their guests, attempt to trust them and display solidarity with them. This reflects what EDI members consider the appropriate way of being Jewish in Israel-Palestine: respecting Palestinians by establishing warm ties with them, and arriving at spaces they inhabit not forcefully, but with consideration to their rights, needs and wishes. EDI participants, then, enjoy Palestinians' hospitality at least partly because the genial and respectful attitude entailed in operating as their guests reflects what these activists regard as the proper stance for Jewish Israelis.

Moreover, EDI members value 'intimacy' which, relying on Mahayana Buddhist tenets and on meditative practice, involves trying to experience self and other as mutually interdependent. Relatedly—and in line with an emphasis prevalent within the Israeli 'peace camp' on humanitarian empathy (Weiss 2015b)—activists cultivate the tendency to envisage themselves in others' shoes and subsequently to respond to their suffering with care. Such empathy centres on the suffering for which activists think they bear responsibility—which, they believe, is predominantly by Palestinians.

Thus, building upon EDI participants' perception of *ontological* intimacy (or interdependence) between themselves and Palestinians, and their *normative* emphasis on intimacy with Palestinians (i.e. feeling and responding to their suffering), activists experience being warmly hosted by their presumed enemies as highly poignant. As we shall see, during these occasions members of each group consent to being vulnerable in relation to the other, and at times reveal hidden or internal aspects of themselves (see also Wilson 2012: 32; Sehlikoglu and Zengim 2015: 22). Receiving hospitality from Palestinians, then, facilitates

boundary crossing between the groups, thereby enabling participants to realize powerfully intimacy, which for them is a central value.

Yet the degree of intimacy that hospitality affords is necessarily limited, and along with wishing to experience proximity and interdependence, activists also value the autonomy of themselves and of Palestinians in relation to each other. For instance, EDI participants wish not to intervene in what they consider Palestinians' internal affairs, and therefore normally they regard commenting on hosts' social norms or politics as inappropriate for Israeli visitors. Likewise, most want to retain some independence from relationships with Palestinians that may involve demanding exchange commitments. Instead of simply promoting intimacy between themselves and Palestinians, then, activists often operate in ways that bolster the autonomy of both and their detachment from each other.

Like elsewhere, much of this hospitality—preparing and serving food, displaying affection through language, tone, expression and touch—is ritualized. Frequently, however, such ritualized actions are supplemented by moments during which Palestinian hosts intend in particular the intimacy with their Israeli visitors. Apparently, these include the abovementioned instance, in which a Palestinian man invited activists to sit in the family's living room, and to meet his wife—both for the first time. But even when hospitality remains predominantly ritualized, it is still experienced as powerfully proximate by visitors: the degree to which hosts identify with hospitality's conventions matter less for creating affection than their performance of its acts (cf. Robbins 2001: 594; Seligman et al. 2008: 24).

This is another reason why many EDI participants appreciate being Palestinians' guests. Within the group, and when members interact with Palestinians, intimacy, although valorised, is generally subordinate to the competing value of autonomy: proximity to others is encouraged so long as it occurs willingly. Moreover, throughout most of daily life, whereas autonomy is largely entrenched, an intimate atmosphere of crossing boundaries between Israelis and Palestinians is not available. Conversely, in some instances (e.g. partaking, alongside Palestinians, in tense and heated encounters with Israeli soldiers and settlers)— which only more committed EDI members enter knowingly—activists experience intimacy with Palestinians while their autonomy is being undermined. Hospitality, in contrast to all these instances, uniquely enables EDI members to experience substantial intimacy with Palestinians in a context in which their autonomy remains largely solid.

Thus, in this chapter's conclusion I argue, following Joel Robbins (2015), that receiving ritualized hospitality from Palestinians operates as an event in which intimacy is being promoted powerfully—though normally, without requiring activists to forego personal autonomy. And hospitality's capacity to combine the realization of these opposing values, I maintain, accounts for much of its significance for EDI participants.

Appreciating Palestinians' hospitality

At an overnight meeting that marked the end of a year's worth of EDI activities and events, around ten core members met at a guesthouse in northern Israel to 'rest together' and reflect on the preceding period. The opening session consisted of about fifteen minutes of meditation. Then, one participant passed around to the others, who were seated in a circle, pictures that had been taken during activities, instructing them to select a photo that 'gave them strength' and explain why this was so.

Next to an image of an activist confronting Israeli policemen during a demonstration against Palestinian house evacuations, I noticed another one that captured my attention. The photograph showed Nimrod speaking to Marwan—a Palestinian man with a greying moustache, whom Nimrod had known for years. Set in the veranda of Marwan's house— overlooking the 'separation wall' between his village and Jewish neighbourhoods of Jerusalem, as well as his olive trees—Marwan and Nimrod were smiling at each other mischievously. Along with portraying the structural conditions of occupation, one participant commented, the photo also captured playfulness and humour, reminding her of the generosity that Palestinians offer EDI members during activities and visits.

On another occasion, EDI members arrived at Marwan's house, together with a few dozen other Israelis, as part of a tour. When Marwan saw me, he held me firmly and kissed me on each cheek. After all guests sat down, Marwan mentioned his close relationship with Nimrod—the only Israeli to have been visiting that village regularly for several years— describing him as a 'son of the village'. Then, while making sure his family members had offered all visitors coffee, Marwan began providing an account, in Hebrew, of life in the village. During the explanation, one visitor commented: 'it seems like you have a very beautiful life here', referring to the view from the house and the trees around it. Marwan chuckled sadly and said 'another settler', prompting many visitors to laugh too. 'You're welcome here', he added softly, 'the house is open to everyone', before turning to explain the harsh personal and financial prices he and his family have paid as part of 'the occupation' (Hebrew: *ha'kibbush*).[30]

Back at the EDI meeting, when another participant's turn to speak arrived, she described the generosity of members of a Palestinian family, with whom she and her partner used to stay regularly, and whom the couple used to support in ordeals involving settlers and soldiers. The family resided in a remote encampment in the Jordan valley, where the climate is desert-like. During one visit, it had come to the Palestinian hosts' attention that the couple was afraid of snakes found in the area. Consequently, one of the hosts transported a tractor— with a mattress placed on its elevated back part, to be used as a bed for the Israeli couple—and

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[30] The 'separation wall' next to the house cut their access to olive groves and to family members' graves. Moreover, Marwan, the main breadwinner, was no longer allowed to work in Jerusalem, making their financial situation significantly more strained.

set it next to the encampment's main tent. The next morning, another one of the hosts—the old *sheikh*, the head of the family—brought yoghurt and honey to the Israeli guests at the tractor. This was despite the visit taking place during Ramadan, in which, being Muslim, all adult household members where fasting at day time. Smiling widely, another EDI participant commented that imagining the old *sheikh* delivering breakfast to the visiting couple 'completely melted' his heart.

Directly afterwards, Nimrod related that once, Palestinian residents held a demonstration next to the main road outside another village. The residents protested the Israeli authorities' construction of security railings along the sides of the road, which impeded the access of farmers' vehicles to agricultural lands. When the demonstration was over, Nimrod approached an IDF officer in charge of soldiers who arrived there to ensure that the protesters would not block the road. Nimrod wished to convey that he appreciated the soldiers' non-aggressive behaviour that day, unlike in previous cases. Yet to Nimrod's bewilderment, the officer notified him that he was being detained. By this time, the Palestinian campaigners had already begun walking towards the village and so were unaware of this occurrence. However, one of them returned and pulled Nimrod away, proclaiming: 'he's our guest and you can't take him'. Nimrod recalled being highly impressed by this man's resourcefulness and bravery.

Similarly, at another EDI event, a small Israeli group assisted members of one Palestinian family to harvest their olive trees. Several participants appreciated the proximity they experienced to members of the family as part of this 'direct encounter', and the affection these Palestinians displayed. That day, I sat on top of a large tree, picking olives and speaking at length with one family member who revealed to me the tensions he was experiencing with his boss.

EDI participants, then, depict their Palestinian counterparts as generous, committed and attentive to their needs. In doing so, they subscribe to the widespread idea, mentioned above, of Arabs being 'hospitable people', and convey appreciation for the elaborate, ritualized affability they often encounter in these circumstances, which is both familiar and striking for them. This is unlike the negative ways in which Israelis often present Palestinians, and unlike how some participants initially expect them to act given that they live under Israeli military control. Additionally, activists at times present their hosts' generosity and consideration as contrasting with insensitivity exhibited by some, particularly first-time, Israeli visitors (e.g. the guest who congratulated Marwan on his quality of life).

Presumably, when providing hospitality, Palestinians shield Israeli guests from others who may be unhappy about their presence, thereby making good hosts. In other Palestinian communities, and even in segments of the communities activists visit, to have Israeli groups results in being subject to much reproach for 'normalizing' relations. Hospitality therefore

involves Palestinians' willingness to risk being reprimanded (and follows years during which activists carefully develop ties with counterparts by demonstrating solidarity and offering support).

Awkwardly, however, we have seen that rather than being shielded, activists visit predominantly in order to protect Palestinian hosts from Israeli soldiers and settlers. Dan Rabinowitz argues that for Palestinians, '[e]xtending hospitality to Israelis […] emerges as a unique chance' for tackling 'the paradox of being displaced in your own homeland', transforming 'a situation ostensibly humiliating and degrading into a locus' of 'honour' (1997: 115-117). It appears that for EDI's counterparts, too, offering activists a particularly generous and heartfelt hospitality amounts to a way of regaining some degree of sovereignty and pride.

Finally, while receiving hospitality occurs frequently, it is difficult and improper for the activists to instigate it—being aware, for example, of the labour involved, particularly for women, in preparing food and hosting large groups. EDI members relent, however, when Palestinian counterparts insist. For the hosts, alongside valuing friendly encounters with Israelis, and being moved by visitors' solidarity, the support activists provide may yield economic benefits. Visitors assist some of these Palestinians with farming or herding, and at times purchase from them olive oil and 'organic vegetables' (though at other times the same farmers may insist on giving activists free bags of such produce). Moreover, EDI organizes large acquisitions of these products by other Israelis, as well as paid workshops on 'traditional farming' that Palestinians run.

Routines of hospitality

Most EDI activities take place in agricultural lands that Palestinians cultivate or in areas they use as grazing grounds. Moreover, activities normally involve visits to Palestinian counterparts' homes (in villages or in encampments). While Israelis are usually instructed to bring food and drinks to these events—so as not to rely on Palestinians' hospitality, which is not to be assumed—Palestinians often actively take on the role of hosts and provide participants with meals.

For example, one autumn day participants assisted Ibrahim, a main EDI counterpart, in reinforcing terraces in an olive tree plot that he owned next to his village in the central West Bank. Participants worked for several hours, mostly lifting stones scattered on the ground and transporting them, using plastic buckets, onto terraces. Most brought with them food—often vegan and organic. Yet Ibrahim informed us nonchalantly that at 1:00 pm we would have lunch prepared by his wife.

Indeed, following our work we drove to Ibrahim's house. His family received us cordially, offering each visitor coffee and preparing a table for us in the guest room. When Ibrahim's teenage son—who had known me from previous visits—realized that my plate was

empty, he immediately rose towards a large vessel containing *mujaddara* (cooked lentils with rice), with roasted almonds on top, and placed in my plate two large servings. (This was far more than I could eat, after having already consumed a large *mujaddara* plate and the accompanying fresh vegetable salad and yogurt that each guest received.) When I thanked the son, he chastised me subtly, saying 'no, this is your house'.

On another visit, a man in his twenties whom I did not know approached me. Following a short conversation in English (he was not fluent in Hebrew and I only spoke little Arabic)—during which I learned that like many other young men in the village, he had spent time in an Israeli prison—the man insisted that we come to his house for tea. The organizers decided to assent (as in Ibrahim's case, the casual yet confident invitation left little room for refusal). When we arrived unexpectedly, the man's mother, smiling calmly, straightaway sent her younger children to fetch snacks and cold drinks from the grocery shop, and served us tea and fenugreek flavoured semolina cakes.

Such visits frequently impress the guests greatly. On these occasions, very often Palestinian family members—who spent time in Israeli prisons and who undergo distressing experiences ensuing from Israel's military control—are present. The visitors are moved by the generous hospitality, with the hosts skilfully making them feel comfortable and welcome—despite the guests' clear association with 'the occupier', and despite normally being significantly more well-off. Similarly, visitors are impressed by how such occasions very rarely involve any displays of anger or blame, with hosts commonly expressing wishes for peaceful coexistence. Accordingly, Palestinians often employ affectionate language, calling visitors 'my dear' (Arabic: *habibi/habibti*) and insisting that the house they are visiting is their home. Moreover, in the case of male hosts and visitors, hosts often kiss their guests on each cheek or shake their hands firmly when meeting.

The intimacy of being invited guests

As part of a tour to the Jordan valley, EDI members went on an unsolicited call, along with other activists, to an unauthorized Israeli outpost whose residents have been accused of harassing Palestinians. During the tense visit, an outpost resident claimed that his Palestinian neighbours did not actually wish the Israeli activists to accompany them to grazing grounds. That was what these Palestinians told him, the outpost inhabitant claimed, when he visited their encampment. In response, one activist probed whether he would agree to go to these Palestinians' dwelling again, and to ask them if that indeed was true—yet this time without carrying a gun or being accompanied by soldiers. Addressing this incident during a 'contemplation circle' at the day's conclusion, several participants described the activist's response as 'powerful'.

Similarly, Nimrod reported that he once refused to lead a tour for an Israeli group to a Palestinian neighbourhood in East Jerusalem. While the group's regulations required being accompanied by an armed guard, Nimrod refused to enter a Palestinian area if he had to depend on guns. 'If people don't want me [there]', he said, 'I won't force it upon them with weapons'. He then added that every Israeli should experience, at least once, the rare occurrence of a Palestinian ordering them to 'give the ID' (Arabic: *jib al-hawiya*)—an expression Palestinians hear regularly from Israeli soldiers. A 'reversal' of this sort, he explained, would prompt Israelis to question the assumption that Palestinians are primarily a 'security risk' and the legitimacy of employing collective punishment against them.

Similarly, Nimrod once posted on Facebook reflections about a solidarity visit to the East Jerusalem Palestinian neighbourhood of 'Isawiyya, where residents were clashing with the Israeli police in protest at their mistreatment. A long-time West Jerusalem inhabitant, he wrote:

> When I walked down the street as a guest, as someone who is given permission, 'Isawiyya was revealed from within and another place in Jerusalem became connected for me. [...] The heart opened up. [...] From within 'Isawiyya, 'Isawiyya appeared so beautiful.

Nimrod, then, wished to visit Palestinian areas as a guest who is received voluntarily rather than as an intruder who forces Palestinians to allow him there. This approach enabled his heart to 'open up' during a visit, and made an area that Israelis often perceive as foreign and unattractive both appear 'beautiful' and feel emotionally more proximate to his own home.

Nimrod's account illustrates one reason EDI participants often 'feel at home' when receiving Palestinians' hospitality. Like him, other members challenge what they view as domineering Israeli treatment of Palestinians: rather than assuming sovereignty over Palestinians by relying on force, they take a compliant stance towards their counterparts, attempting to accept them as Israelis' hosts. (This is universally true in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where the group's activities take place. By contrast, the identities of hosts and guests are more ambiguous in 'Israel proper', where EDI participants reside but where Palestinians used to be dominant.[31])

For EDI members, then, being present in West Bank Palestinian localities as invited guests—as part of activist attempts to display solidarity with the suffering and injustice hosts experience—is a way of finding an ethically sound manner of being Israelis. Consequently, participants perceive their visits as taking place not only on the individual scale but also on the national one (cf. Candea 2012), and as representing a necessary first step towards reconciliation.

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[31] Over 700,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from the area that became Israel during the 1948 war, and to which the ancestors of most EDI members immigrated in recent decades. Thus, while participants consider it home, they usually recognize that West Bank Palestinians also feel a valid connection to it.

But when Nimrod stated that being Palestinians' invited guest enabled his heart to open up and to experience a Palestinian neighbourhood as 'beautiful', he revealed another reason why such visits often make activists say they feel at home. Namely, EDI members appreciate experiencing intimacy with others, and crossing the boundaries between themselves and them, which being guests of Palestinians promotes.

As we have seen, visiting Palestinian counterparts involves activists entering their domestic spaces—including, at times, living rooms designated exclusively for family members. These visits also involve meeting several relatives—such as, in many cases, women (who often do not join activist events)—and consuming food that members of the family prepare and serve. During visits, then, participants frequently enter intimate Palestinian spaces.

At times, alongside displays of affection, visits to Palestinian counterparts' homes involve conversations concerning each other's difficulties, hopes and fears. Additionally, agreeing to stay at a Palestinian village or encampment—and commonly ones that most Israelis are very reluctant to visit, and consider risky—means trusting Palestinians and placing oneself at their mercy, thus consenting to be vulnerable in relation to them.

One afternoon I drove with Rina, in her forties, and her young daughter, to visit Ibrahim, following an incident in which a Palestinian stabbed an Israeli settler to death nearby. Subsequently, the IDF blocked the entrance to Ibrahim's village, prompting us to go there. Upon our arrival, we found a few older men sitting on a bench across the street and talking, as they often did. Seated on the sofa in the guest's living room, and drinking coffee, we chatted with Omar, one of Ibrahim's sons. *Alhamdulillah*, Omar told us, the independent business he had formed upon his release from an Israeli prison was doing well. He also shared that ever since the attack, he was trying to put himself 'in the shoes of the [Israeli] man' and to think: 'what if it was I who were stabbed? What if it were my father?' The attack, he proclaimed, was mistaken and it was a shame it had happened. Ibrahim joined the conversation, saying that some in the village, including himself, agreed with Omar's approach, while others thought the attack was justified.

After Omar left, Rina told Ibrahim: 'I can see something is weighing on you'. 'You're right', Ibrahim responded. Rina and I expected Ibrahim to talk about the curfew. He related, however, that most of his family members were planning a trip to the *Haj* pilgrimage in Mecca, and as his older sons were living with their families, he would have to stay alone in the large house throughout the long trip—about which he was discontented. The curfew, he later added, troubled him less: 'what can you do [*ein ma la'asot*]', he said in Hebrew, such things are 'common' in the village.

In such interactions, Israeli activists experience Palestinians' vulnerability. Ibrahim revealed his unwillingness to stay alone in his house—which joined his more fundamental fragility, to which he had grown accustomed, of being subject to the IDF's commands.

However, activists also enable *themselves* to be vulnerable in relation to Palestinians—including in the physical sense of visiting, together with a young child, a village many Israelis define as 'hostile'. Similarly, Nimrod once wrote in the group's blog that 'over the years', he has

> accumulated more and more experiences of entering Palestinian spaces—exposed and without defences. Willingness to be vulnerable, and to be vulnerable before Palestinians, turns out to be far more valuable than feeling protected.

Interdependence, empathy and intimacy

Why do activists find being vulnerable in relation to Palestinians 'valuable'? EDI members' appreciation of intimacy with, and fragility before, Palestinians results to a significant extent from their subscription to the Buddhist doctrine of the 'interdependence' of all people and things. One morning, prior to an anti-occupation demonstration in the East Jerusalem Sheikh Jarrah area, about ten meditators arrived in Nimrod's house, located in a quiet West Jerusalem neighbourhood. Between sessions of seated and walking meditation, participants discussed what supported their Dharma practice and what they could expect to encounter at the rally. Following lunch—which consisted of vegetarian and largely vegan homemade food brought by participants—Nimrod described the history of Sheikh Jarrah and recent events. One Palestinian family, he explained, including a man in his eighties, had been evacuated from their home without being granted an alternative residence, and another family received an eviction warrant.

In his explanation, Nimrod contended that Israelis' and Palestinians' lives, particularly in Jerusalem, are deeply intertwined (see also Allegra 2017: 61). If Israeli Border Police officers act violently towards Palestinians in East Jerusalem, then 'our sense of security in West Jerusalem relies on this behaviour', and so 'our safety means their harm'. While he was unsure what exactly was the right thing to do under such circumstances, Nimrod knew he would rather 'give care' and 'be with' this situation rather than ignore it. After all, he added, violence results from both peoples' perceptions of 'separateness from each other'.

This account is characteristic of an emphasis within EDI on everyone and everything's 'interdependence' (Sanskrit: *pratītyasamutpāda*; Hebrew: *tlut hadadit*) upon everyone and everything else. Embedded in this idea—which is popular among the 'liberal and progressive' international movement of 'engaged Buddhism' (King 2009: 7) of which EDI is part—is the correlated doctrine of 'emptiness' (Sanskrit: *sunyatā*). The latter 'declares all things to lack inherent self-existence (*svabhāva*)', i.e. to have 'no independent, enduring nature in and of themselves', and thus regards 'all beings' as 'constituted' merely 'by their interactions with other beings' (McMahan 2008: 150). In contemporary Buddhist literature, interdependence—depicted as conveying a 'world-affirming' celebration' of 'interwoven' reality—is often presented as '*the* fundamental outlook' of Buddhist teachings (150-151). This is in tension with

early, classical formulations of the term, according to which worldly life is 'ultimately futile, disappointing, and binding' and interdependence 'a web of entanglement' in which beings are tied 'to rebirth in a world of suffering' (153-154, 171). Accordingly, some depict current teachings on interdependence as overly 'immanent' and too influenced by romanticism: encouraging people to accept the worldly 'vagaries' that cause their suffering, such teachings block their 'path to a transcendent happiness' (Thanissaro 2015: 265).

The appeal of the 'engaged' interdependence doctrine among EDI helps to explain why several members find vulnerability in relation to Palestinians 'valuable', including when receiving hospitality from them. According to these activists, Palestinians suffer under Israeli military control. And Israelis' interdependence upon Palestinians—in which the actions of each directly affect the other—means that activists share both in Palestinians' suffering and in the responsibility for it (see also King 2009: 26).

To be sure, interdependence can imply a universal, flat notion of responsibility: as the entire world is linked, one ought not to care particularly about those found nearby. Here, in contrast, interdependence is interpreted to mean an *accentuation* of responsibility towards those who are proximate. Palestinians being the next link to Israelis in the causal chain, with the Israeli authorities affecting their lives deeply and immediately, means that Israelis are accountable for Palestinians' wellbeing and only then for that of others. Carrying out solidarity activism thus amounts to 'a movement of care', in the direction of the true, interdependent nature of things. As one participant related in a 'contemplation circle': 'it's important that the lives of these people [i.e. Palestinians] won't seem far away, disconnected. That they will be a part of my life'.

EDI members, then, stress 'openness' and connection rather than 'sealed-ness' of one's heart. Additionally, they use meditative practice to reveal such interdependence. In a morning, out-door meditation session, held during a retreat in a relatively secluded Palestinian encampment in the Jordan valley, Nimrod instructed participants to 'let the outside sink in':

> Let's use our being out here. The sounds [roosters were calling], the wind. Even the view—if our eyes are open [as some participants' eyes were]. Let's let the world enter inside. Let's be part of all that is happening here. [...] We have time to observe the people and circumstances we've met [during the retreat]. There's [external] reality, and there's our inner world. How do they affect each other? What reverberations are there inside?

Activists, then, often attempt to experience intimacy with the rest of the world, and particularly with Palestinians, including as part of meditation. Yet EDI members' valuation of intimacy is also expressed in another, related, way. Like most Israeli anti-occupation activists, they find motivation for conducting political action by feeling empathy towards Palestinians' suffering (see Weiss 2015b: 286), trying to feel what they believe Palestinians feel (see Bloom

2017: 24). For example, before another rally, participants began practising silent meditation, with one organizer providing instructions:

> You can take a few breaths, inhale and exhale. Then, you can remember the intention that brought you here today, [the] suffering or distress that led you to act. The heart that decided to come here and remain open in the face of whatever you meet.

In such instructions, introspection is aimed at enabling meditators to recognize and develop their empathy towards Palestinians. Similarly, EDI members attempt to relate more to Palestinians subsequently to becoming more intimate with their own inner worlds via meditation. As a Dharma teacher associated with group members explained, by understanding better how one's mind operates, one gets to know others better—because 'everyone's minds work the same way'. Meditative self-knowledge, then, facilitates developing empathy towards others. And such empathy involves intimacy—crossing boundaries between self and other—which consists, in this context, of Israelis putting themselves in Palestinians' shoes.

Yet EDI participants argue that empathy arises foremost as part of 'unmediated' human encounters. Indeed, participants often report that they continue attending activities primarily because these involve Palestinians who have become their 'friends'. For instance, Almog once described how a settler in the Jordan valley drove an all-terrain vehicle towards a flock of sheep belonging to Almog's Palestinian companions. Along with one Palestinian, he ran immediately towards the settler, who eventually turned around and steered away. When asked how he felt when he began running, Almog responded by writing: 'I don't know… These people [i.e. his Palestinian counterparts] are so dear to me that it was obvious that this was what needed to be done'. Several EDI members praised Almog for this reply.

Similarly, EDI's Facebook posts often read along the following lines: 'after years of going to this village, we can't ignore it when our friends are in trouble. We act the way we do thanks to our hearts' connections with them'. Likewise, during 'contemplation circles' prior to activities, participants frequently state a central motivation for their attendance being 'wanting to meet the people' in the village or area.

Indeed, feeling empathy towards Palestinians following such encounters frequently results in greater commitment to activism. EDI members often express themselves empathetically, emphasizing how 'painful' their Palestinian interlocutors' predicament is, and how 'standing together with them' in solidarity is the right thing to do. For example, a central group member wrote, reflecting on a particular event, that meeting Palestinians face to face requires no effort from her 'to feel empathy and rail against the injustice. The feeling of proximity just arises from the heart'. Or as a woman in her fifties said after visiting Palestinians:

> [What we encountered] should take away sleep from our eyes. It's a heavy feeling in the heart. […] Sometimes, the most humane thing is to stand up and resist [l'hitnaged].

There are things, and times, when the heart of the Dharma is to rise up and say: 'no more, this shouldn't be happening'.

According to activists, then, empathy results in a sense of responsibility for conducting political action: 'human connections' ought to constitute a foundation for becoming involved in activism, which they argue accords with the Dharma. Yet as we have seen in this and the previous chapter, presenting the Dharma as fundamentally 'engaged', in a way that stresses interdependence, has been criticized as anachronistic. Moreover, in Buddhist traditions compassion (*karuṇā*)—or caring about others' welfare 'without necessarily feeling their pain'— appears to be much more commonly addressed and valorised than is empathically 'feeling what you think others are feeling' (Bloom 2017: 24; 2016). EDI's approach, in contrast, draws on a widespread understanding of 'peace-building' among secular Jewish Israelis, in which humanitarian empathy with the other side amounts to the 'main methodology' and 'a deeply entrenched value' (Weiss 2015b: 276). This helps to explain why EDI participants—who normally stem from non-observant Jewish backgrounds—highlight empathic 'sharing' of Palestinians' suffering even more than compassion.

Autonomous communities

EDI members, then, enjoy Palestinians' hospitality because the friendly and considerate attitude entailed in being their guests manifests what activists consider the appropriate way of being Jewish Israeli. Additionally, receiving such hospitality promotes intimacy with supposed enemies, thus indicating interdependence.

Activists' valorisation of intimacy is visible also in relations between group members. During 'contemplation circles', which follow silent meditative practice, participants externalize the contents of their minds or 'inside', thus making them available to others. Such expressions of one's mental processes involve vulnerability and require trust: judging others for what they feel or think can result in significant offence. Participants are consequently instructed to 'support' speakers by simply 'holding' what they say, thereby not interfering with their contemplative work. Thus, alongside promoting intimacy, 'reflection circles' also encourage the opposing value of personal autonomy, which is central to EDI members as it is to other Israeli meditators (Pagis 2009: 277) and secular Israeli activists (Weiss 2014: 150).

Accordingly, meditation instructions during EDI activities at times move along the following lines: 'you can connect to some inner space that is not easily undermined and is always there. Just see how you're doing now, amidst all the sounds and voices—hear them, absorb them, but also have your own place within it all'. Such instructions direct meditators to recognize an autonomous inner space, characterized by stability, to which they may turn in need. Other instructions include treating 'pain and difficulty' in 'a Dharmic way, by interrogating them', which can 'provide some autonomy' from them. Significantly, according

to EDI members, activists' ability to demonstrate solidarity with Palestinians may benefit from such autonomy—enabling them to act assertively despite encountering difficulties (see also Chapter 5).

EDI's attempts to realize simultaneously autonomy and intimacy within the group[32] find expression in participants' approach towards some emotionally challenging situations that arise during events. Prior to a large demonstration held in Jerusalem (mentioned above), Nimrod informed participants that 'some people [e.g. passers-by, counter-demonstrators] will get angry', and that 'there may be harsh, unpleasant reactions'. Nimrod then suggested that 'we can decide how much to get involved [in the demonstration]', according to 'what is right for us', including by 'staying in the back' of the large group of protestors.

Besides encouraging participants to maintain their autonomy, however, Nimrod emphasized intimacy and solidarity among activists: 'if we see someone yelling at one of us, we can come by and support her.[33] You can also talk to those who have more experience if you need something'. As another activist put it, in more Buddhist terminology and in relation to a different protest: 'you can rely on the Sangha [i.e. on other participants]. We can be each other's refuge within the demonstration. If anyone needs support, then let's lean on each other'.

For EDI members, then, both personal autonomy and intimacy are needed for promoting care for participants. Specifically, organizers try to foster group members' wellbeing by encouraging them to protect themselves *and* to assist each other—and this wellbeing is thought, in turn, to be significant for their ability to support Palestinians. Nevertheless, EDI members' promotion of intimacy ultimately takes place in the context of participants' more entrenched autonomy, in which any decision to join activities is understood to be voluntary, relying on the degree to which this 'suits' them.

EDI members also value the autonomy of *Palestinians*. During a discussion with first-time participants, an activist mentioned a Palestinian counterpart whom he used to visit regularly. Wishing to compliment that man's 'inventiveness', the activist stated that he knew well 'how to take care of himself and his family'. Yet valuing their Palestinian counterparts' autonomy often marks the limits of the intimacy that activists attempt to establish with them. Specifically, participants normally refrain from expressing opinions on how Palestinians should act concerning political and social matters: not being part of the Palestinian people, they explain, they focus on what Israelis rather than Palestinians should be doing.

During an EDI retreat in the Jordan valley, the group's host provided participants with large plates of food. While he had been aware that most of the visitors were vegetarian (Arabic:

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[32] This is reminiscent of the simultaneous emphasis on detachment and compassion in Buddhism (Laidlaw 2015: 131; see also Cook 2015).

[33] Much of Hebrew grammar is not gender-neutral. Inspired by feminist thought, EDI participants frequently use feminine verb forms and pronouns to refer to both women and men.

nabatiyin), the main dish, which seemed to involve much effort to prepare, contained chicken. (Apparently, the host did not realize that for vegetarians, a dietary choice he rarely encountered among the area's Palestinians, chicken counted as 'meat'.) For much of the meal, while several participants suspected that the dish included pieces of chicken, they did not say anything. Wishing not to embarrass the host, some tried to put on their plates chicken-free parts, while to others it did not occur that this was what they were eating (cf. Weiss 2014: 87). Eventually, one participant mentioned this fact nonchalantly, while other guests kept eating, saying the food was 'very tasty' (Arabic: *zaki kthir*). Later, one EDI member related that when around 'family and friends', she refuses eating meat. Once, she said, she attended a family meal in which the only vegetarian dish was rice. Realizing this, she left and went to eat somewhere else.

To be sure, for the activists to expect the host only to consume vegan or vegetarian food would have been eccentric.[34] Moreover, refraining from openly addressing the inconvenience may be seen as another way in which activists create intimacy with Palestinians, as such behaviour accords with something EDI members recognize to be a common ethos among the latter. Known in Arabic as *musayra*, this involves conducting oneself in an 'accommodating' way, 'going along with the other', thus conveying regard 'for [the] interlocutors' face concerns' (Katriel 2016: 750). And significantly, in this context such behaviour means also abiding by the ritualized conventions of hospitality, thereby making good guests.

Nevertheless, their polite and docile behaviour also reveals that when visiting Palestinians, EDI members are less willing to speak sincerely than they do among themselves and with other Israelis. Indeed, activists are generally likely to reveal the contents of their 'inner worlds', in line with the attitude popular among Israelis of being *dugri*: 'speaking directly and saying it "like it is"' (Katriel 2016: 750). Addressees of participants' *dugri* talk include family members and friends (as in the case of the activist mentioned above), but also Israelis found in agonistic political positions to their own, such as IDF soldiers and settlers (as discussed in Chapter 5). Finally, as we have seen, recipients of frank speech include other EDI participants, for example during 'contemplation circles' (on the condition that in this context, sincerity centres on one's own experiences rather than on others' behaviour).

Additionally, even more than meat consumption and the treatment of animals, Palestinian gender politics (e.g. the status of women and homosexuals) are topics that activists normally refrain from discussing with Palestinian counterparts. In this sense, EDI members are similar to other Israeli solidarity activists, for whom such matters amount to a 'source of discomfort' (Weiss 2014: 87). Thus, rather than addressing these topics directly with

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[34] The host partly relied on raising chicken for his family's meagre livelihood. Moreover, according to activists, it became nearly impossible for him to earn a living due to Israeli policies and to the presence of settlers and the military in the area.

Palestinians, organizers ask participants to display 'cultural sensitivity' when choosing how to dress ahead of certain events. Such behaviour, too, accords with *musayra* as it avoids 'topics of potential discord' or 'confrontational talk' (Katriel 2016: 754). On several occasions, I heard that when Israeli and Palestinian women spend time in all-female company—e.g. during some 'work days'—such topics are addressed more readily. This, however, is normally not the case during hospitality events.

Similarly, EDI members generally share with other 'progressive' Israeli activists different 'ideologies and motivations' that include—alongside 'human rights', 'humanitarianism', 'feminism' and 'queer politics'—also 'environmentalism' and 'socialism' (Wright 2018: 7, 51, 105-108, 160). In this sense, they also resemble many western Dharma practitioners (e.g. Coleman 2001: 20; Gordon-Finlayson 2012: 37-38). In contrast, while a few Palestinian counterparts of EDI share these commitments, many do not—certainly not to the same extent as the activists.

EDI members are divided on some key issues. Some believe that the faults of 'the occupation' are *inherent* to Zionism. Israel, they think, should therefore be replaced by a single, binational or confederate state in 'Israel proper', the West Bank and Gaza—a view they share with many Palestinian counterparts. Many if not most participants, however, assume or hope that Jewish nationalism can be rectified, so that a Jewish-dominated Israel would coexist alongside an independent Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza. Thus, while both activist types oppose military control of the West Bank, they diverge in their orientation as to what should replace this condition, and are found in differing degrees of concurrence about this with their Palestinian affiliates. Furthermore, several participants feel somewhat uncomfortable about nationalist Palestinian symbolism—e.g. images of leaders, 'martyrs' (Arabic: *shuhada*) or prisoners who have presumably employed violence against Israelis—found in some Palestinian localities.

EDI members largely play down such ideological matters. Usually, the group does not facilitate debates on the proper solution to the conflict and it refrains from endorsing particular political parties. Instead, sharing the conviction that 'providing care' to Palestinians suffering from military control is imperative, participants focus on offering them support and maintaining ties with them. While EDI's Palestinian partners ascribe to non-violence, members explain, Palestinians' fundamental rights should be protected regardless of their views.

This practice-oriented approach assists EDI to avoid fundamental disagreements between participants—and with Palestinians—thus being efficacious in promoting its ethical-political project. Members make an appeal to Palestinians' victimhood, and as Laura Jeffery and Matei Candea observe of the politics of victimhood in general, this involves postulating suffering as existing 'before' politics, posing it as 'the neutral or indisputable starting point' for

any subsequent action or discussion (2006: 289). Notably, EDI members regard this approach as countering Israeli state policy and dominant political discourse, in which 'the notion of perpetual Jewish suffering' conceals Palestinian suffering and Israeli responsibility (Ochs 2006: 357-358).

Presenting Palestinians primarily as suffering victims (and especially as ones whose responses to this condition are frequently inspiring), then, helps to sustain activism. Accordingly, activists normally resist any challenges to Palestinians being framed as such. For instance, EDI's Palestinian counterparts at times (though admittedly not frequently) make statements that suggest they are fortunate compared with people in other places in the region ('look at what's happening in Syria'). Being similar to right-wing Israeli arguments that deny the injustices entailed in military control, activists are uneasy about such accounts. Consequently, they normally excuse them as Palestinians' ways of psychologically coping with harsh realities by attempting to feel better about their condition.

Guests' detachment

Another matter that can result in discomfort is EDI participants' practice of Dharma and meditation. Israelis unfamiliar with the group often expect it to conduct meditation practice jointly with Palestinians. Members, however, explain that while meditation is beginning to gain popularity in Palestinian society, it is still quite rare. (Additionally, they state that EDI is more interested in 'raising awareness and inviting Israelis for action' concerning 'injustices' the authorities cause.)

One afternoon, participants in a 'work day' sat in the guest room at Ibrahim's house. Having known him well, they felt comfortable conducting a 'contemplation circle' there, which followed a short session of closed-eyed meditation (before beginning, they confirmed this being okay with Ibrahim). Nimrod instructed participants to pay attention to what was 'happening inside' them following the day: how they were feeling and what was 'occupying' them. Ibrahim's son was present, along with other family members, and unlike in almost all other cases, that day Palestinians also participated in group reflection.

When his turn to speak arrived, Ibrahim's son said he 'never understood what we were doing' when meditating. In response, Nimrod explained calmly that this was 'not something special', only a way to take a break from daily life and 'pay attention to what is really happening within us' instead of directly moving on to the next thing. Ibrahim's son seemed to understand, later telling me it was 'good to have a clear and focused head'. Yet he did not show much interest in what we were doing, and in our various future conversations did not mention it.

Similarly, when an Israeli group visited his house during a tour, another central Palestinian counterpart of EDI went away for the duration of the silent meditation session. Later, when I asked if he had known what we were doing, he said diplomatically he knew we

were 'spiritual people', without adding anything else. On other occasions, activists contemplated whether it would be appropriate to practise meditation when hosted by Palestinians. According to one participant, it would appear bizarre, 'UFO-like' (*chaizari*), for Jordan-valley Palestinians 'to watch us meditating' next to their encampments. Nevertheless, activists eventually conducted group meditation there, with the hosts responding with indifference.

One EDI overnight gathering—titled, half-jokingly, a 'non-retreat'—was aimed at unwinding, discussing the preceding year's activities and planning future events. The gathering took place at a rented guest house, rather than at the home of any of the group's counterparts: members planned devoting the entire event to reflection, and some felt uncomfortable staying in a West Bank community without 'working' in resistance to the occupation. Consequently, participants felt free acting in ways they would not permit themselves when hosted by Palestinian acquaintances. Thus, in addition to practising meditation and Tai Chi for long periods, many also drank wine (which they would not do in Muslim-majority Palestinian locales).[35]

EDI participants, then, practise meditation among Palestinians, as they consider reflecting in real time on their activities' emotional and psychological dimensions a crucial aspect of the group's approach. Conducting group meditation and contemplation circles in Palestinian spaces therefore facilitates these Israelis' visits—which, as we have seen, are often valuable for the Palestinian counterparts. But rather than involving intimacy with Palestinians, EDI's meditation practice is largely detached from, perhaps even somewhat uncomfortable for, many of them: though hosts do not mistake meditation for Jewish prayer or ritual, most seem to consider it strange.

EDI members' valuation of autonomy curtails their intimacy with Palestinians in yet another way. On one occasion, an activist couple experienced discomfort regarding their Palestinian friends in the Jordan valley, whom they used to visit regularly and to whom they were strongly committed. On many visits, the couple would bring gifts to their friends' children and to those of family members living nearby. They were unable to do so every time they went, however, which made some Palestinian relatives angry. One week, feeling embarrassed, one activist wished not to visit that community. Her partner, on the other hand, insisted on visiting regularly, as otherwise the Palestinians would 'suffer negative consequences' such as being harassed when grazing.

For some Palestinian family members, it thus seems, intimacy generated an expectation that the couple would bring gifts habitually: from their viewpoint, repeatedly

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[35] Most Buddhist schools regard drinking alcohol as violating the precept of refraining from intoxicants. In contrast, EDI members who are Dharma practitioners and who drink are influenced by schools that are more lenient in this respect (e.g. some Zen traditions).

receiving ritualized hospitality resulted in obligations on their guests to reciprocate appropriately. The couple, however, felt uncomfortable with such enhanced commitment. They regarded the gifts they brought occasionally (shoes, balls and bicycles for children) as gratuitous, thinking their contribution consisted of assisting their Palestinian counterparts (e.g. by accompanying them to grazing grounds), thus not feeling an obligation to bring gifts. (The expectation to give presents when visiting others is, among such Israelis, significantly less common than among their Jordan valley counterparts.)

Indeed, upon hearing the couple's account, another participant related that because of similar instances, other activist groups preferred not to develop personal ties with Palestinian contacts. While not forming such ties 'makes things easier', he added, these connections are 'what sets our group apart'. Nevertheless, when a Palestinian with whom I had genial ties through EDI asked for assistance with business links with Israelis, I was advised not to consent, this being 'not related directly to the occupation'. Similarly, activists did not offer to stay with Ibrahim when his family members went away. Staying overnight at a Palestinian village, other than for reasons such as the army forcing a blockade, is not something they do normally: being busy also with non-activist commitments, their friendships with Palestinians centre on offering support concerning the occupation. Thus, regarding social obligation, too, EDI members often value autonomy over developing greater intimacy with Palestinians, which keeps the latter circumscribed.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that part of the satisfaction EDI members feel when experiencing proximity to Palestinian counterparts results from the fact that for these Israelis, it is ethically desirable to have personal and collective boundaries crossed. This occurs in evocative ways when receiving hospitality from Palestinians. Overall, however, such transcendence of confines is 'safe': one retains personal autonomy and soon returns to living in Israeli society. Boundaries, therefore, despite being temporarily and partially penetrated, ultimately remain intact.

We have seen, for example, that EDI participants normally do not debate their Palestinian counterparts on social and political matters—they do not act with *parrhesia* (i.e. speak the truth directly) in relation to them—which as we saw in Chapter 5 is unlike their stance towards non-activist Israelis. This is not because activists consistently agree with their counterparts on such matters, but because they believe that debating Palestinians on these issues is both irrelevant and inappropriate—Israelis and Palestinians do not belong to the same political community. EDI members' partial self-censorship among Palestinians, then, inverts how they treat Israeli soldiers and settlers. Rather than being *parrhestic* towards

Palestinians by challenging them on political questions, activists attempt to 'become friends' (*l'histahbek)* with them, which they *avoid* doing with these Israelis.

Participants therefore appreciate the intimacy involved in being Palestinians' guests precisely because they begin from a position of alienation from them, whereas to Israelis they are already socially proximate. Accordingly, despite activists' sincere commitment and affection for their counterparts, and their desire to feel close to them, they are not expected, and do not strive, to become members of the host community. Rather, receiving hospitality is normally more like a 'temporary sojourn' (Kant 1957 [1795]: 20; quoted in Shryock 2012: S30)—even if one on which some go often—following which EDI members return to their Israeli homes. This transient intimacy takes place against the backdrop of a more fundamental detachment resulting from these Israelis' membership in the ruling community—a 'painful gap' that they acknowledge. As Fiona Wright observes of similar left-wing activists, the privileges of Israeli citizenship provide them with the luxury of choosing when and to what extent to visit (2018: 54). In these respects—and despite the procedures of hospitality on the part of Palestinians, which both sides tend to observe scrupulously—activists are the de-facto 'hosts' of Palestinians rather than the reverse.

Moreover, we have seen that another main reason why supporting Palestinians and enjoying intimacy with them feels good for activists is that this fleetingly instantiates what they consider an ideal way of being *Israeli*. Indeed, whereas activists display interest in other matters associated with suffering and injustice, the Palestinian question (and to a significant extent also the plight of East African asylum seekers in Israel) are particularly poignant for them. This is because these issues involve Israel's non-Jewish 'others', meaning that these matters have particularly high stakes on the cosmopolitan commitments of 'progressive' Israelis. As they are specifically *non*-Jewish, the presumed maltreatment of the concerned groups challenges Jewish-Israeli activist's universalistic convictions more than matters involving *only* Israelis (e.g. marginalization of Mizrahi Jews[36]) or questions that do not concern Jews in particular (gender violence, the environmental crisis or cruelty towards animals). Therefore, activists' care for Palestinians and their desire for intimacy with them actually reflect not only participants' humanitarianism but also their rootedness in Israeliness and thus their difference from Palestinians.

In conclusion, I argue that during visits to Palestinians' homes, Israeli activists receive from them the gift of ritualized hospitality, and the temporary feeling of intimacy it entails on both the personal and the communal scales. Robbins describes rituals as actions that allow people to 'experience what it is like to realize one or more values fully'—against the backdrop of an everyday life characterized by the need to make choices between them (2015: 21-22).

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[36] Jews of Middle Eastern or North African origins.

Following Robbins, Israeli activists enjoy the ritualized communion with Palestinians that being their guests involve because during such moments, there prevails an atmosphere of intimacy to an extent that is unavailable at other times. Specifically, during most of daily life it is impossible for EDI members to experience the intimacy they desire at both individual and collective levels.

Indeed, due to EDI participants' cosmopolitan and humanitarian tendencies, they experience vulnerability in relation to their presumed enemies as the most significant and fulfilling type of intimacy. Within this ritualized procedure, the Palestinian hosts are welcoming and cordial. Israeli guests, in turn, can feel like the hosts' friends, and like their presence in the land is being accepted. And experiencing this as part of hospitality is among a few things that provide EDI members the nourishment they need for persisting as activists—in light of their endeavours' little success on the wider political level.

Yet this vivid, momentary realization of intimacy also enables Israelis and Palestinians to maintain some *autonomy* from each other within hospitality, as it involves physical co-presence and emotional proximity but usually not frankness. Indeed, refraining from sharing one's views on sensitive topics, and instead acting politely and considerately (and in the case of guests, docilly), is normally a central characteristic of these ritualized events. And as it supports the smooth operation of an encounter in which both parties are interested (though for partly different reasons), maintaining autonomy (or detachment) is ethically productive for all (cf. Candea et al. 2015).

Specifically, activists are aware that invitations for hospitality are common and ritualistic, making difficult any confident judgments as to the extent to which, on specific occasions, counterparts actually wish them to be there. EDI members rely on Palestinians obliquely letting them know how inclined they are for each visit (e.g. based on how enthusiastic they sound on the phone). But while ritualized hospitality is often insincere—curtailing truthful expressions of inner states during conversation—normally it is nevertheless genuine. That is, both Israelis and Palestinians usually experience strong cordiality, which entails at least a minimal degree of the hosts 'meaning to mean' (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994) the ritual, wanting the guests to be there and appreciating their deeds. While Palestinian hosts may in some respects find their guests odd, they still appear to prize activists' support and acquire strength from it—which, hosts say, is unlike the troublesome encounters they normally have with Israelis. Sincere in interaction or otherwise, Palestinian hosts often display, like in a similar context described by Rabinowitz, a 'flattering eagerness to befriend' their Israeli visitors (1997: 21).

Thus, receiving ritualized hospitality enables EDI participants to realize substantially the value of intimacy—normally, without this impinging upon their other main value of personal autonomy. And this occurs in the context of autonomy being substantially realized

during much of everyday life, but without being accompanied by sufficient intimacy with Palestinians; and of intimacy being realized during some challenging activist situations, though devoid of adequate autonomy.

For Palestinian hosts, offering hospitality to someone does not require having frank, psychologically intimate conversations or sharing an ideology with them. Rather, being hospitable is primarily a requirement of a virtuous householder. Among the activists, in contrast, hosting someone is expected to imply having similar views and tastes or being familiar with their 'inner world'. Therefore, the form of intimacy created when EDI members visit Palestinians is unlike the one to which they are used (and accordingly is different from the proximity they develop with group members when sharing reflections on inner experiences). Intimacy that does not centre on conversation therefore turns out being quite significant for these activists, who otherwise emphasize sincere verbal expression.

Indeed, hospitality's ritualized conventions of cordiality and generosity create potent emotional ties, making it largely irrelevant whether participants display their real considerations—their actions having powerful performative consequences regardless. Ritualized hospitality, in other words, is *itself* capable of producing substantial connections between Israeli activists and Palestinian counterparts along with upholding their autonomy. It thereby combines, uniquely, a significant realization of these two competing values.

Finally, whereas Palestinians offering such hospitality could be seen as a return of a gift to the activists for assisting and 'standing together' with them, things are not generally understood this way by either party. Activists' help to Palestinians, and the latter's warm hospitality, are not seen as being in exchange for each other: in the cases when voice is given to expectations of reciprocity (as in the Palestinian family's demand for gifts, mentioned above) this is experienced as transgressive. Indeed, activists viewing Palestinians as offering hospitality *voluntarily*—as a free gift—only strengthens these events' efficacy in facilitating affectionate encounters across national boundaries. Hosts are not coerced to offer a hospitable welcome, including particularly intimate features such as revealing interior parts of the house, introducing activists to family members and discussing personal matters. When resorting to behave this way, Palestinians therefore make the intimacy appear more genuine, suggesting to EDI participants (whether reliably or not) that Palestinians *do* want them there, and on a broader scale, that coexistence *can* prevail between the two populations.

Part II: Conclusion

Following Foucault, the ontology of EDI participants' main project of self-fashioning is the 'mind' (*toda'a*), which is understood in naturalistic terms—as being the substance addressed by modern psychology. Oftentimes, however, they equate the mind with the 'heart', thereby emphasizing its embodied, emotional rather than cognitive qualities (cf. Gleig 2012; Cook 2010a: 104). Moreover, deontologically, they operate primarily as human beings whose minds have universal characteristics. (Unlike orthodox meditators, then, normally EDI participants do not posit a creator God, and they do not regard Jews as having divine souls.)

In terms of ascetics, EDI participants practise silent meditation, attempting to become aware of their 'inner worlds'—thinking-patterns, beliefs, feelings and physical sensations—through attending to one's breath, body, thoughts, and at times one's surroundings. They pay particular attention to activist-related contents: anger, fear, frustration and desperation, but also care and inspiration. Additionally, their ascetics consists of group 'contemplation circles', in which they share reflections on inner experiences.

Finally, the telos of such silent meditation and group verbal contemplation is cultivating self-awareness and beneficent mental qualities, or a heart progressively free of harmful conditioning. And this results from the wisdom involved in experiencing the interdependence of oneself upon all life, in line with Buddhist teachings—particularly modernist ones influenced by romanticism and depth psychology (cf. McMahan 2008; Gleig 2012: 137; Thanissaro 2015). Relatedly, EDI participants rely, not unlike orthodox meditators, on world-affirming rather than renouncing understandings of the Dharma. For instance, for them soteriology is this-worldly, consisting of increased subjective wellbeing, social harmony and justice (cf. Pagis 2019).

In Chapter 5, I argued that EDI participants' mindful reflection promotes two competing values: *resistance,* or struggling assertively against injustice, and *friendliness,* treating others (including political opponents) non-antagonistically. Specifically, mindful reflection deepens EDI members' confidence in *resistance* and *friendliness*, turning them into intuitive, embodied predispositions, thereby transforming them from values into virtues. Moreover, mindful reflection develops mental stability among participants, thus improving their ability to respond to perplexing situations, such as ones in which these values collide, with greater composure. Furthermore, attending to and reflecting on experiences of conflict between these ideals helps participants to arrive, eventually, at greater clarity concerning ways of simultaneously promoting both. So, while self-fashioning through mindful reflection sustains the tension between *friendliness* and *resistance*, as it assists activists to cultivate each, it also enables them to *bear* this value conflict. EDI members, then, regard mindful reflection

as good in itself; as helping participants realize the values of *friendliness* and *resistance*; and as beneficial for managing the conflict between them.

In chapter 6, I described the tension between two additional values that are central for EDI members: *intimacy* and *autonomy*. Participants normally feel satisfaction when experiencing *intimacy*—or crossing personal and collective boundaries—with their Palestinian counterparts, and this occurs forcefully when receiving hospitality from them. But such hospitality, because of its ritualized, non-sincere dimensions, also enables both to maintain some *autonomy* from each other, and following such visits activists soon return to living in Israeli society. So, while receiving hospitality from Palestinians enables EDI participants to realize *intimacy* substantially, normally this does not encroach on their additional main value of *autonomy,* thereby combining, uniquely, a considerable realization of both.

Oftentimes, EDI participants experience *intimacy*, including with Palestinians, also during silent and group meditation—for example, by opening themselves up to others' suffering. Moreover, alongside promoting *intimacy*, mindful reflection enables meditators to recognize having a stable inner space, thereby encouraging the value of *autonomy*, too. Yet while self-fashioning via mindful reflection promotes the fulfilment of both *intimacy* and *autonomy,* ultimately what enables participants to realize these two values together most substantially and harmoniously is receiving Palestinians' ritualized hospitality.

Thus, EDI participants' project of self-fashioning does not only help to realize two opposing values they hold (*friendliness* and *struggle*), but also to manage this conflict (Chapter 5). And this project supports the joint fulfilment of two additional key and diverging values (*intimacy* and *autonomy*)—though not as substantially as a ritual (hospitality) in which EDI participants play only a secondary role (Chapter 6). Moreover, in this case, like that of orthodox meditators, Foucault's framework does not specify how to analyse such intricate relationships between people's attempts at self-cultivation and their value considerations.

CONCLUSION

Meditation between 'Sincerituals' and 'Institutionalized Sincerity'

This dissertation has examined the diverse ways in which orthodox-Jewish Israeli meditators, and non-observant Jewish participants in EDI activism, employ meditative 'technologies of the self' drawn from Buddhism. I have attempted to analyse the various ethical complexities, as well as the divergent cosmologies and objectives, that characterize these people's projects of self-cultivation. I have argued that central to understanding such self-fashioning projects is the intricate ways in which they relate to ethical subjects' value considerations. And I have suggested that the dominant theoretical model anthropologists utilize for describing and comparing such projects—Michel Foucault's discussion of 'forms of subjectivation'—while highly useful, accounts only incompletely for this dimension.

In this conclusion, I address an additional aspect of Israeli meditators' ethical projects of self-fashioning, which follows my discussion of ritualization in the previous chapter. Seligman et al. portray 'ritual' and 'sincerity' as '"ideal typical" forms of framing experience, action, and understanding that exist in all societies' (2008: 7). Rituals, they maintain, are characterized by 'formalism, reiteration, and externally dictated obligations': they are performed not in order 'to spin out meanings' but simply 'because this is the tradition' (ibid). Sincerity, in contrast, is the more preponderant mode in conditions of modernity, and consists of attempting to access and express reality 'as it really is', especially what we 'really' feel or think (8). Below, I demonstrate that both orthodox meditators and EDI participants employ several practices to which meditative introspection is central; and aim to carry these out sincerely, namely in ways that are informed by actors' genuine inner states. None of these practices, however, can be regarded simply as 'ritual' or 'sincere', as they combine elements of both. Consequently, and as I explain immediately, I designate these practices either as 'sincerituals' or as ones of 'institutionalized sincerity'.

Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw depict ritualized action as having four characteristics (1994: 89, 100-101; Laidlaw and Humphrey 2006: 277-278). First, it is 'non-intentional', meaning that its identity, unlike that of unritualized action, 'does not depend on the agent's intentions-in-action'. Instead, ritualized action's identity relies on 'shared public knowledge' that precedes its performance. Second, this knowledge stipulates what actions the ritual is made up of, meaning that rules specify 'what is to count as an instance' of it. Third, ritualized actions are 'elemental or archetypal'. They appear to performers as 'pre-existing and coming from outside themselves', as having their own 'facticity and independent existence', so that actors 'inherit or receive them' and have to aim at 'replicating, or achieving, or entering into' them. Fourth, being 'available for a further reassimilation to the actors' intentions,

attitudes, and beliefs', ritualized actions are 'apprehensible': they wait 'to be apprehended and, possibly, given meaning'.

Thus, in ritualized action, the 'intentions and thoughts of the actor make no difference to the identity of the act performed. You have still done it, whatever you were dreaming of' (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 5). Or to use Joel Robbins' words, ritualized actions have 'the same performative effects regardless of the sincerity of their performance', namely actors' 'intentions and other inner states' (2001: 594, 598; see also Seligman et al. 2008: 24).

As we shall see, when conducting traditional Jewish prayer, orthodox meditators attempt to insert meditative awareness, and its resultant peace and clarity, into the ritualized act of reciting traditionally stipulated, archetypal texts that may otherwise be uttered with little intention. I therefore term this practice, when approached thus—namely, when participants are 'meaning to mean' it (1994: 211)—a 'sinceritual'. In contrast, in religious meditators' practice of *hitbodedut* (spontaneous and unscripted speech to God), in EDI participants' 'contemplation circles' and in the silent meditation that often precedes all these other, vocal actions, the stipulation is of a different sort. It does not consist of a specific act whose content is clearly delineated (e.g. the recitation of a given wording) and to which actors should insert intentionality. Instead, the specification of what exactly needs to be done is deliberately more general, and involves actors attending to their current inner states, upon which the successful performance of the practice relies.

So, for example, in the sinceritual of group prayer, what one ought to whisper is stipulated exactly. And while orthodox meditators find it undesirable to recite these words with little intent, they acknowledge that doing so still counts as praying. In contrast, in *hitbodedut* and in contemplation circles, it is postulated that actors should say *something* on a particular topic, but what precisely they ought to utter cannot be specified: they are instructed to disclose their real inner states upon reflection. Similarly, in silent meditation, one is directed to pay attention to an object such as the breath or bodily sensations. And while it is assumed that doing so (especially over a long period) brings to one's awareness different thoughts, emotions, memories or desires—which one is asked to acknowledge calmly—it cannot be stipulated what exactly one is to experience.

Unlike in ritualized action, then, in such practices the actors' particular inner states are indispensable for the identity of the act performed: one cannot carry out these practices (speak spontaneously or contemplatively, or meditate) independently of introspection. It is therefore difficult, if not impossible, to execute such practices—in which the details of the act to be performed are specified only generally, as the instructions involve relying on unprompted inner states—in a ritualized manner. Rather than 'sincerituals', then, they may more appropriately be described as practices of 'institutionalized sincerity'.

Traditional prayer as a 'sinceritual'

One silent JV retreat consisted of just over 10 participants—the quorum of men needed for conducting Jewish group prayers. A few days into the retreat, some participants had to leave. Consequently, those remaining joined the three daily services carried out at a nearby synagogue, where unlike the retreat's still atmosphere, the men present were communicating with each other liberally. Thus, before heading towards the synagogue, some participants would take with them signs stating 'pardon me, I am in [the midst of] fast of speech [*ta'anit dibbur*]' to show people around them and thus reduce their involvement in social interactions.

During the first service the JV participants joined, a cellular phone began ringing, with one long-time synagogue attendant responding to this angrily. Originally undisturbed, the phone owner, who too was a frequent attendee, eventually answered, saying he could not talk. However, he soon returned to glancing at his phone and typing. Most of the regular synagogue attendants did not seem particularly concentrated. Muttering the prescribed wording of their prayers, they looked about, stared into space, yawned, leaned their hands on the back of their chairs when standing or scratched themselves. The majority of the JV participants, in contrast, stood upright in the room's front, next to shelves filled with books, so as to avoid being distracted. They closed their eyes and, barely moving, tried concentrating while addressing God in whisper, with the facial expressions of several of them intimating yearning or gratitude.

Towards the service's end, some regular attendants began speaking and shaking hands. Moreover, the synagogue's manager, an older man, loudly rattled a cup containing coins, asking, as is customary, for charity (see also Heilman 1975), and following the service, a heated argument erupted between him and a younger attendee concerning prayer times. By contrast, most JV participants continued praying with their eyes closed, later walking back slowly to the retreat site.

Following Humphrey and Laidlaw, the prayer services JV participants encountered at the synagogue were highly ritualized: their details being stipulated by the shared public knowledge of hallowed Jewish tradition, they were non-intentional and archetypal. Moreover, most of the synagogue's regular attendants performed the prayer similar to what Humphrey and Laidlaw describe as a habitual or distracted way (1994: 213). And while 'extraneous happening' (117)—including attendees' phones ringing—were normally reprimanded, they were tolerated so long as participants went through each sequence of the service (see also Heilman 1982). Moreover, for most participants, such occurrences did not jeopardize the validity of the ritual.

Orthodox meditators, in contrast, often approach services of this sort with caution, at times even perceiving such congregations' standard of prayer as deficient in intention and commitment. For instance, following the retreat, one experienced JV participant confessed that attending that synagogue 'removed' him somewhat from the retreat's contemplative

experience. Unlike the synagogue's regular attendees (though similarly to other, especially Hasidically-inclined religious Jews), orthodox meditators wish to inject 'sincere' internal dispositions (e.g. faith, proper intention or individual expression) into ritualized prayer. To use Humphrey and Laidlaw's terminology, they attempt to 'superimpose' spirituality on the ritualized action of praying, thereby 'meaning to mean' it and rendering it 'sincerely and emotionally felt' (1994: 211, 213). This may involve standing still in concentration, or moving ecstatically with emotion—but in any event it consists of trying to pray with earnest intent. Moshe, for instance, spoke of approaching prayer with great reverence, closing one's eyes and attempting to 'stand in front of God and address Him with a pure heart' by investing all of one's mental energy into aligning one's intentions with the meanings of the prayer's words. So whereas the eminent, medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides enjoined Jews to attend to prayer *as if* standing before the Creator (Seligman et al. 2008: 24), several orthodox meditators strive to experience prayer as *actually* involving doing so.

According to the prevalent approach among orthodox Israeli Jews, one is expected to continue praying even if one can do so with only little intentionality (see Chapter 4). To be sure, Moshe, like other meditators, admitted that while he strives actually to 'connect' to the prayer, even he—following the bustle and disturbances of daily life—at times prays with modest concentration, doing so 'just to fulfil the obligation' (*latzet yedey chova*). But although one can get away with not meaning the words, being absorbed in the prayer or feeling elated (which still counts as having fulfilled one's obligations), for most religious meditators it is fundamental at least to endeavour to arrive at such states.

Orthodox meditators, then, consider themselves commanded to pray, even when not feeling a strong inclination. Yet they strive to pray sincerely[37] and, significantly, they regard meditative practice as assisting them in doing so: developing awareness of one's inner experiences, they argue, enables one to pray with greater clarity, concentration and immersion. For such people, meditative practice is, in this sense, a training for learning to have greater absorption—more vivid mental imagery and intense sensory experience—in prayer (cf. Luhrmann, Nusbaum and Thisted 2010). According to Yehuda, for example, while many religious Jews 'run' their daily prayers 'like a machine, a robot or a sprinkler', he likes praying in a way that involves saying each word intentionally. And meditation is helpful in cleansing his *nefesh*, so that in turn, he can feel 'connection' or 'cleaving' (*devekut*) to God, as well as wholeness and harmony, when praying. Similarly, several other religious meditators

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[37] Unlike traditional Jewish prayer, the ritualized hospitality Palestinians provide to EDI participants (see Chapter 6) does not normally operate as a sinceritual. Orthodox meditators acknowledge prayer's rituality: its being commanded by Jewish tradition and thus being externally stipulated and archetypal. In contrast, Palestinian hosts, though often recognizing this obliquely, usually do not portray their hospitality as an externally prescribed archetypal object, and consequently do not explicitly 'mean to mean' it.

relate that following their meditative practice, their prayers generally 'go deeper'—and this is significant given the centrality of *spirituality* for them.

Indeed, during JV retreats Moshe mentions to students (as several other 'Jewish meditation' teachers do) that according to the *Shulchan Aruch*, the most widely consulted Jewish legal code, before praying one should 'pause' or 'stay' (*yish'he*) for an hour 'in order to direct his heart toward the Omnipresent [*Ha'Makom*]'. This, Moshe adds, is something almost no one adheres to: taking 'one hour' to mean 'some time', most assume it impossible to observe this directive literally. Yet according to Moshe, on retreats participants follow this instruction by meditating prior to services, which allows many of them to experience 'powerful prayers'.

Hitbodedut as 'institutionalized sincerity'

Ritualized action, as we have seen, satisfies specific stipulation. In the case I have just discussed—of traditional Jewish prayer—this consists primarily of whisperingly reciting particular words, to which certain movements (e.g. bowing, stepping backwards and forwards) are added in particular moments. Such stipulation is specific enough so as to enable performers to execute these acts successfully without having necessarily to reflect on their own thoughts, feelings and attitudes in order to do so. So, while actors may insert into the stipulated action particular mental or inner states, such as different kinds of intentionality, for them not to do so does not disqualify their performance from counting as an instance of that act.

The practices I am going to discuss in the remainder of this conclusion (*hitbodedut*, EDI's contemplation circles and silent meditation) are of a different, not entirely ritualized kind. In *hitbodedut* and contemplation circles, while prior stipulation exists—consisting of saying something aloud on certain topics—it is deliberately very general, with the actual words one ought to say out loud not being specified. Instead, performers are asked to contribute the content of their speech themselves, through providing sincere, unscripted accounts of their inner states. Additionally, for their actions to be genuinely meaningful, they must be 'authentic' and personal: agents must add something that is uniquely theirs and is different from others'. Moreover, in the insight and mindfulness practice of my different interlocutors, whereas instructions concerning how to meditate are stipulated, their central aim is to facilitate meditators being aware of their different experiences. This leaves open, and emphasizes the significance of attending to, the wide range of what one may feel at any given moment while focusing on one's meditation object.

Like ritualized actions, all these practices are non-intentional and at least partly stipulated: their general features amount to shared public knowledge that originates prior to and outside the actors who perform them. They may also be described, accordingly, as elemental or archetypal. On the other hand, they are stipulated only to a restricted extent—

one that deliberately and necessarily leaves them open to being completed by actors' unscripted mental contents. Moreover, as inner states are essential rather than optional features of these practices' successful execution—responding to such states is part of the stipulation—they cannot be described as 'apprehensible'. Thus, though socially sanctioned, such practices correspond only partially to the features of ritualization offered by Humphrey and Laidlaw. Instead, I suggest, it would be more accurate to describe them as 'institutionalized sincerity'.

Hitbodedut (lit. self-seclusion) is a popularized Breslav Hasidic practice (see Persico 2014c), one that, while not commanded by Jewish law, is frequently regarded by orthodox meditators as central in their spiritual lives. Though it takes different forms, *hitbodedut* consists, for such people, primarily of addressing *Ha'Shem* aloud and sharing with Him openly, earnestly and in one's own words one's wishes, fears and aspirations—as doing, ideally, when conversing with a close, loving and trustworthy friend (cf. Luhrmann 2012). Praying in a *minyan* (quorum), religious meditators argue, as part of a group service like the ones I have just discussed—in which participants recite texts found in a traditionally authorized prayer book (*siddur*)—is something Jewish sages created for life in the diaspora, not for the land of Israel. And according to Maimonides, they frequently add, every Jew should go out regularly to nature and speak spontaneously to God.

Indeed, religious meditators often describe *hitbodedut* as individual prayer that lacks specific structure or wording. Some explain that one may likewise dedicate time at the end of the standing (*'amidah*) group prayer for personal and emotional speech to God, and that this period, which is similar to *hitbodedut*, is their favourite part of the service. Moreover, according to Yehuda, if one conducts *hitbodedut* daily, one begins to understand the traditional prayers' texts more profoundly. Additionally, one starts feeling God's presence— that of 'a king who loves you infinitely and simply enjoys the relationship with you'—in one's daily life. But as most observant Jews do not carry out *hitbodedut* regularly, they do not experience *Ha'Shem* in this way and their faith remains rather superficial, Yehuda believes.

Hitbodedut, some orthodox meditators argue further, is 'like going on a date with the Holy One, Blessed be He' (cf. Luhrmann 2012), but it is also 'like going on a date with myself': in order to establish a connection with *Ha'Shem*, one must first arrive at greater familiarity with oneself. Thus, through getting closer to themselves—to one's *nefesh* and subsequently also to one's divine soul—religious meditators likewise get closer to *Ha'Shem*. Meditative practice, they maintain, amounts to a useful, at times crucial, preparation for—or a 'corridor leading towards'—*hitbodedut*. It cleanses one's mental (*nafshi*) vessel, thereby enabling one to conduct *hitbodedut* (as well as to study Gemara and pray) with a more settled mind (*yishuv ha'da'at*). Otherwise, the quality of *hitbodedut* can be poor, with one indiscriminately 'shooting words towards heaven'. Meditative inner awareness, then, is said to render

hitbodedut, a practice that highlights sincerity, even more sincere (and as we shall see immediately, this is the case also for EDI's 'contemplation circles').

According to a commonly-heard quip, in the streets of Nachlaot—the area of Jerusalem where I resided, known for being the home of many spiritually- and Hasidically-inclined orthodox Jews—many of those who appear to be speaking on their phones are actually addressing God in *hitbodedut*. Religious meditators likewise conduct *hitbodedut* (at times after meditating) outdoors, including in forests, on the roofs of Jerusalem's old city, next to the Western Wall (*kotel*), or even, whisperingly, in houses of learning (alongside the clamour of study partners, *chavrutot,* debating one another).

'Institutionalized sincerity' in contemplation circles

As part of EDI's 'contemplation circles' (*ma'agaley hitbonenut*), participants are invited to meditate silently for a few minutes—normally by paying attention to the feeling of their breathing or to other bodily sensations—both before and after activist events. Then, they are asked to report the thoughts and emotions that 'have arisen in them' concerning a particular topic related to these events, ideally doing so in a detached way—treating these mental contents as objects that can be examined and analysed. This type of reflection is similar to the related work Joanna Cook describes of turning attention 'from thought to consciousness-of-that-thought', 'bracketing' it by examining its experience without assuming its veracity (2017: 129, 132). While comparable practices of group verbal sharing are utilized by Israeli educators, other activists and New Age practitioners (see Tavory and Goodman 2009: 276), among these people sharing is normally not preceded by silent meditation. For EDI participants, such meditation is aimed at enabling those present to arrive at greater clarity concerning their experiences, consequently increasing their speech's sincerity.

Participants may travel in private cars to the Jordan valley, for example, where they gather at a particular junction and conduct contemplation circles, under a tree, ahead of and following activities. Or they may meet at a parking lot in 'Israel proper', from which they drive to a Palestinian village in the West Bank. When guiding such circles, central EDI members, being the first to speak, try leading them in the direction of 'true sharing'. They might say something like: 'we'll take a few minutes, see how we're doing this morning, what's in the heart'. And after a short period of silence, he or she may instruct: 'let's go in a round [i.e. speak in turns], for those of us who want to say what she came here with today, or what arose in her during this quiet sitting. This is how we help ourselves, but also each other, to make present our intentions for this day'.

Prior to EDI events, participants address, for instance, 'the frustration I felt during previous activities, that I can't change things', or a desire for 'acquaintance, both with the people and with the place', or how 'these activities are associated for me with a lot of pain'.

And at their end, participants may share that 'it was hard, the whole experience felt very shaky, lots of emotions came up', or say: 'I really like the openness, warmth and joy of the children we met. It's very gratifying'. Alternatively, they may relay that 'after having had so much fun meeting Palestinians, I remember I am not here for a trip. There is occupation and oppression here in the background, so I have mixed feelings'.

In response, circle leaders often reinforce subtly the reports of those who appear to speak reflexively (e.g. replying with 'aha') but do not do so when this does not seem to be the case. For instance, when one man's turn to speak arrived, he began advertising a political rally: 'good morning everyone. Now, about the march in Jerusalem...', with the EDI member leading the circle immediately directing this speaker in a more personal direction: 'maybe we'll save this topic for later. Talk about yourself in relation to today'. While at times EDI members enable such utterances to 'pass' (e.g. another participant letting others know about a petition she initiated), this is due to shyness or politeness: statements unrelated to inner reflection are clearly not encouraged in this context.

As in *hitbodedut*, in contemplation circles no script concerning what one ought to say is stipulated, making it impossible to stick entirely, or even primarily, to a fixed verbal formula onto which one may potentially superimpose sincerity. Instead, the generality of the specification (participants are asked to speak on a topic such as 'what I came here with today') necessarily leaves open the exact contents one should disclose. Thus unprompted speech—one that is ideally reflective and sincere, relying on the meditative introspection that goes before it—is what participants are directed to contribute, and is therefore essential for what contemplation circles are understood to involve. Akin to *hitbodedut*, then, this practice— despite having a recurrent, socially stipulated format and gently-enforced expectations as to appropriate content—can best be depicted as 'institutionalized sincerity' (cf. Leach 2000 [1965]).[38]

To be sure, much of what participants say accords with others' sensibilities. Often, for instance, participants express being thankful to the organizers, looking forward to meeting the group's Palestinian counterparts, feeling sadness or guilt over what the latter undergo and fearing encounters with settlers and soldiers. So there prevails a finite range of emotions, thoughts and themes that are likely to be invoked, and that are experienced by most as proper for the occasion. But participants are still directed to say something subjective, one that stems from their own present experience, even if they are also implicitly expected to remain, when doing so, within this spectrum.

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[38] This practice appears similar to the 'performance-based rituals' Humphrey and Laidlaw discuss, which are 'quasi-theatrical' and are 'primarily conceived as ways of getting results' (1994: 10-11). Whereas the examples these authors discuss involve outcomes such as a successful exorcism, contemplation circles aim at 'building an intention' for activities, processing difficult emotions and, implicitly, affirming participants' commitment to solidarity with Palestinians.

Therefore, while participants' experiences and their reports of them take place as part of social interactions, and cannot be analysed independently from others' influences, a fundamental aspect of contemplation circles is their involving the expectation of sharing subjective accounts. In turn, such accounts prompt others to listen quietly, and to acknowledge and empathize with the reported experiences. Subsequently, several participants consider these circles helpful for dealing with the difficulties activism involves, and name them as central for their preference to join EDI events rather than, or in addition to, alternative ones.

So, while speaking in relation to a particular topic during contemplation circles is externally postulated, the stipulation involves doing so in an unscripted manner. This means that unlike in ritualized action, participants cannot perform the specified act independently of their inner states. Instead, the very definition of contemplation circles requires them to attend to and articulate their interiority (even if in practice most share only a limited range of states) reflexively and in an appropriate manner. Like in *hitbodedut*, then, it is the expectation of sincere expression that is ritualized or institutionalized in this context.

Meditation as 'institutionalized sincerity'

Finally, among my different interlocutors, Buddhist-derived *vipassanā* and mindfulness techniques amount to the clearest manifestation of 'institutionalized sincerity'. The fundamental actions these practices involve are not physical ones upon which particular mental states can then be superimposed. Instead, what is stipulated are particular procedures for directing one's awareness non-reactively towards inner states as they really manifest themselves on a moment-to-moment basis. Whether the main object of attention is the breath, or physical sensations that one is to 'scan', these are understood to be different ways through which to reveal, and subsequently to become aware of, one's thoughts, feelings, memories, desires, etc. So while in ritualized action what is stipulated is acts that may be accompanied by varying degrees of intentionality, in meditative institutionalized sincerity the essential action is one of calm awareness of one's present-moment experience as it actually is.

To be sure, among my different interlocutors, such systematic and non-judgemental awareness of one's experience is said to lead to greater inner peace. At times it is also used for bringing about a more profound realization of 'the three characteristics' (impermanence, dissatisfaction and selflessness) or among EDI participants, of the related notion of interdependence. Moreover, in Buddhist contexts meditation is thought classically to lead towards *nibbāna* (even if far into the future), and among orthodox meditators, to a more vivid experience of, and a sense of proximity to, the Creator.

All these goals, however, are second- or third-order ones: at the most basic level, the aim of such meditative practice is to become aware non-reactively of present inner reality. So, for example, the 'three characteristics' do not refer to experiences encountered when

meditating (e.g. pain, tranquillity, anger, tiredness) but to *features* they are said to share. Meditators, therefore, may be instructed to recognize such experiences as characterized by being impermanent and thus unsatisfactory and not self (e.g. Cook 2010a: 7-8), but they may not: without a Buddhist orientation, one can attend to them during meditation without noting or emphasizing these attributes (see also Sharf 2014: 209; Lopez 2008: 207-210; McMahan 2017a). Moreover, while successful meditators' experiences are often thought to converge eventually, the description of sought-after attainments varies according to tradition and doctrine, with each tradition having its own benchmarks. So, whereas such practices involve stipulation—including, frequently but not necessarily, instructions aimed at assisting meditators to internalize specific religious tenets—directions consist most basically of attending continuously to one's unprompted experiences.

Perhaps, however, one may pay attention to one's inner states perfunctorily and thus 'insincerely'? It is very common for meditators to report habitually placing part of their awareness on their meditation object (e.g. their breath or bodily sensations), without actually inquiring into what takes place there on a moment-to-moment basis and with their minds primarily being occupied with involuntary thoughts. Moreover, while meditators learn to modify reflexively the way they direct their attention (e.g. in terms of the speed in which they 'scan' their bodies or the size of the area they attend to) according to the levels of concentration and calm they experience, they may still find themselves 'working mechanically'. But whereas it is commonplace to experience such states of mind, meditators are encouraged to strive for more attention and absorption when they realize this has begun happening, and are taught ways of doing so. Thus, to be content with maintaining this depleted level of practice permanently, or to meditate this way intentionally, would fall outside the definition of 'meditation' as it is understood in this context: attending deliberately to one's present experience as it continuously unfolds (see also Hart 1987: 19; Goenka 1987: 63; Kabat-Zinn 1994: 4; Pagis 2008; Cook 2010a).

The fundamental aim of such meditative practices, then, is cultivating awareness. This makes it seem impossible to practise them 'insincerely', in ways that are indifferent to the actor's mental states and that are content with being permanently careless or distracted. So while daydreaming and weak concentration are routine, integral is the intention to regain focus. As the primary act in these forms of meditation is paying attention to one's genuine experiences—as opposed to action onto which particular inner states may be superimposed— they cannot easily be considered ritualized (a statement with which most such meditators would agree). Instead, these practices may be described as 'institutionalized sincerity'.

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We have seen that in 'sincerituals', actors superimpose sincerity on socially stipulated practices that may alternatively be executed successfully without such mental states. In

contrast, the contents of practices of 'institutionalized sincerity' are stipulated in an intentionally partial manner: their fundamental action revolves around the actor's present, fluctuating internal condition. Moreover, we have seen that meditation promotes sincerity in two distinct respects. First, meditative practice reveals to the actor what is taken to be his or her actual, present-moment inner experience. Second, it increases the actor's awareness of such experience ahead of conducting ritualized practices (e.g. traditional Jewish prayer) as well as less-ritualized ones (*hitbodedut* and contemplation circles), thereby allegedly making their execution more profound.

As the different types of meditators I have been discussing appreciate sincerity, meditation's ability to elucidate powerfully to practitioners their true experiences helps to explain why rather dissimilar ethical-political projects should converge in utilizing such techniques. Indeed, whereas throughout this thesis I have designated orthodox meditators' and EDI participants' values using separate terms, in an attempt to capture the distinctive character of each respective project, we may now appreciate which values these people appear to *share*. This shall lead me to conclude with a few brief and speculative thoughts, for future development, concerning values' ontological status.

First, *non-renunciation*, a value I have associated with orthodox meditators, is one EDI participants can also be said to promote: the self-fashioning projects of both categories of meditators are world-affirming. Specifically, orthodox meditators are committed to a fulsome realization of the householder's family life, and many of them, who regularly display self-expressive spontaneity, also reject ascetic discipline. At least somewhat similarly, while many EDI participants find orthodox Jewish ideas of a proper family quite problematical, they too, rather than seeking world renunciation or transcendence, *embrace* the world, aspiring to repair it socially and politically. (And, like in the case of orthodox meditators, this appears to be partly influenced by romanticism.)

The same is true for *spirituality*. Whereas it is primarily orthodox meditators whom I have portrayed as being concerned with arriving at greater wellbeing and inner peace—at knowing, mastering and healing the self—this also characterizes EDI participants' aspirations when practising meditation. However, while for the former such clarity and harmony is associated with greater proximity to the 'God of Israel', for the latter such states prompt one to care for and support Israel's alleged enemies—*without* this featuring God.

Furthermore, I have presented EDI members as promoting *autonomy*, such as when encouraging participants to decide whether and to what extent to take part in psychologically challenging activities. Yet a valuation of *autonomy* can also be said to characterize orthodox meditators, especially 'expressive' ones who assuredly reject teachers' instructions to restrain themselves when practising meditation (and the directions of authority figures with whom they disagree in general). Indeed, orthodox meditators' assertive way of pursuing their values

(e.g. Ya'akov's insistence on amplifying *orthodoxy* and/or *non-renunciation* in meditation activities) is reminiscent of EDI participants' manner of struggling against injustice (e.g. Nimrod's non-aggressive but firm resistance of soldiers' commands). Such audacity—the willingness to quarrel and challenge authority so as to demand what is due—is termed *chutzpah* in Hebrew (and Yiddish), and is often associated with Israeliness or Jewishness more generally (Bauer 2014; Chowers 2012: 7; Harari 2018: 126). And *chutzpah* appears to promote *autonomy* powerfully.

The ethical lives of both orthodox meditators and EDI participants, then, can be said to involve the valuation of *non-renunciation*, *spirituality* and *autonomy*. To this we may add *sincerity*, as discussed above. Nevertheless, we have *also* seen that the meanings of such values are, in practice, often quite different for the two types of meditators. What can this teach us? Comparing the values of different kinds of people (e.g. suggesting that both groups share a similar commitment to 'spirituality') takes place at a higher level of abstraction than when describing values within a single, distinct ethical project. But people's values, I propose, cannot be meaningfully discussed on such a de-contextualized, Platonic level: when its concreteness is lost, a given value can encompass too broad a range of behaviours and attitudes to operate as a useful analytical category. Instead, one can only consider a value effectively as part of a specific ethical project; and this means, in practice, examining it relatively to the *additional* values held within that project, which often tint each other.

So, when 'non-renunciation' is combined here with 'orthodoxy', it receives a conservative shade: such non-renunciates aspire for heterosexual marriage that leads to relatively large families. (In turn, orthodox people here are householders who work—unlike some Catholic, Buddhist and Jain religious renouncers—because they also value *'non-renunciation'*.) But when 'non-renunciation' is blended with 'resistance' rather than with 'orthodoxy', it is coloured by *it*, producing non-renunciates who participate in opposition activism and who are sympathetic to queer politics. Similarly, when 'spirituality' is tinted by 'orthodoxy', people strive for proximity to *God* in the land promised to one's nation *by Him*. (In turn, the shade of this 'orthodoxy' is strikingly God-seeking relatively to the orthodoxy of less spiritual observant Jews.) By contrast, when 'spirituality' is advanced here together with *'resistance'*, it is a norm-defying spirituality, promoting a feeling of intimacy with national 'others'.

Like people, it thus seems, values cannot be satisfactorily theorized from an atomistic ontological standpoint. Being, in practice, co-reliant on additional ones—tinting them and being tinted by them—values should be analysed *relationally,* along with others that are held simultaneously to them and that together form a distinctive value configuration.

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