

JERUSALEM LETTER / VIEWPOINTS

Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

VP:113 15 Adar 5751 / 1 March 1991

A MEETING OF ANCIENT PEOPLES: WESTERN JEWS AND THE DALAI LAMA OF TIBET

Nathan Katz

Searching Out the Jewish Secret for Surviving Exile / Hopes and Apprehensions of the Jewish Delegation / Jews in Tibetan Eyes / Explaining Judaism to Tibetan Buddhists / Meeting the Dalai Lama / Encounters with Teachers, Monks, Abbots, Nuns / "We are Both Chosen People" / Confronting the Issue of Jews Who Become Buddhists

[Editor's Note: As the world grows more interdependent, the Jewish people and Judaism have begun to confront Asian, African and American religions beyond Christianity and Islam, the monotheistic faiths that grew out of the Jewish experience. This encounter with the spiritual ideas of a world beyond Jewish influences and the communities of that world raises new issues of intergroup relations for Jews and new problems of relating to other-than-monotheistic religious ideas, posing new questions for Jewish theology and foreign policy. One such encounter has been with Tibetan Buddhism and its spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. In the spirit of the Jerusalem Center's concern for the public policy issues facing the Jewish people, we are pleased to bring a first-hand account of the major encounter, to date, between

the two, written by one of the Jewish participants, Nathan Katz, whose academic speciality has put him in a unique position in the effort.]

Searching Out the Jewish Secret for Surviving Exile

Just prior to being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama of Tibet briefly met with Jewish leaders at a Buddhist monastery near New York City. As the spiritual and temporal leader of a people who had been defeated by Communist China thirty years ago, the world's preeminent Buddhist monk wanted to learn the "Jewish secret" for surviving exile. After all, he reasoned, the Jews had the expertise: 1,900 years of living in the diaspora, all the while preserving their distinct religion. Surely the Tibetan people could benefit

Daniel J. Elazar, Editor and Publisher; Zvi R. Marom, Associate Editor; Mark Ami-El, Managing Editor
21 Arlozorov St. Jerusalem, 92181, Israel; Tel. 02-639281. © Copyright. All rights reserved. ISSN:0334-4096

The opinions expressed by the authors of Viewpoints do not necessarily reflect those of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

from Jewish experience.

As a scholar of South Asian religions including Tibetan Buddhism, and as a committed Jew, I was invited to join a delegation of eight rabbis and scholars to meet with the Dalai Lama and Tibetan leaders in Dharamsala, a hill station in the Himalayan foothills of northern India, seat of the Tibetan government-in-exile. What follows are excerpts from a diary of that historic meeting between the Jewish and the Tibetan peoples.

October 18, 1990 - New York: Rabbi Zalman Schachter, the charismatic Kabbalist from Philadelphia, has written a Hebrew benediction especially for the occasion and he asks me to translate it into Tibetan. He explains that there are benedictions for meeting scholars and for meeting kings, but none for meeting one who combined the two roles. So he composed: "Blessed art Thou, L-rd Our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has imparted of Thy compassionate awareness unto those who honor and respect Thy Names."

October 21 - between Delhi and Chandigarh: In a four-car convoy from Delhi to Dharamsala, I am riding with Zalman and Rabbi Jonathan Omer-Man, founder of the School for Jewish Meditation in Los Angeles. As the conversation turns to theologies of exile, I relate an eighth century Tibetan prophecy about the destruction of Buddhism in Tibet and its reestablishment in "the land of the red-faced people," taken to refer to the Americas. According to the law of karma, all actions in this world bear moral results, and many Tibetans understand the loss of their homeland as a consequence of their centuries of self-imposed isolation. When Tibet needed diplomatic friends, she had none. Exile was made meaningful by the fact that the loss of Tibet led directly to the spread of Buddhism to Western countries. Do Tibetans also consider themselves "a light unto the nations"?

Jonathan is intrigued by the Tibetan Buddhist meditational practice known as "deity-yoga," wherein the practitioner visualizes an aspect of divinity, and then proceeds to identify with the mind-created deity. According to the Dalai Lama's

sect, this technique is the highest and most effective route to enlightenment. Jonathan and Zalman speculate about the anthropomorphism inherent in the exile idea of the exile of G-d's presence, and they compare it with deity yoga.

We ponder the Dalai Lama's question about the "Jewish secret." Was our survival due to our democratized emphasis upon education as a goal for all Jews? Or the development of vernacular languages such as Yiddish or Judesmo? Or the genius of the rabbis in developing halakhah? Or was it enforced from the outside by anti-Semitism and ghettoization? Most promising was the notion suggested by author Rebbetzin Blu Greenberg of New York, that the primacy of the home replaced the destroyed Temple in Jewish observance, and thus made the religion more portable and especially equipped the religion for survival in exile.

One idea was being overlooked, I offered, the belief that G-d's providence ensured Jewish survival. Whether it was G-d or the belief in G-d which sustained Judaism I could not say. Zalman said there are two ways to ask why in Hebrew: ma-dua and lamah, the former looking for etiology, for origins, and the latter for purpose, for teliology. Are we being asked how did we survive, or why did we survive? Understanding Jewish survival required a bifocal response, and interplay of causes and orientations.

October 22 - Dharamsala: Last night, as we neared the Punjabi capital of Chandigarh, we were stopped at a military roadblock. Local rioting had led to a strict curfew. In the morning the road to Dharamsala is blocked by a student demonstration, but we hire one of the student leaders to guide us along back roads, bypassing the disturbances. We reach our destination but wonder how we will get back to Delhi next week.

October 23 - Dharamsala: Our schedule, prepared by the Dalai Lama's Council for Religious and Cultural Affairs, has us meeting not only with the Dalai Lama and his senior advisors, but also with abbots of the major monasteries, with government officials, with youth leaders, and with

Western students of Buddhism, many of whom come from Jewish backgrounds.

Hopes and Apprehensions of the Jewish Delegation

Marc F. Lieberman, a San Francisco ophthalmologist who organized and raised funds for our delegation, asks each of us to share our hopes and apprehensions about the upcoming dialogue. Blu hopes to increase friendship for Israel; her apprehensions revolve around Jewish law. In our unusual setting, a Tibetan refugee community in India, is there danger of contravening halakhah? Prior to our arrival, the kitchen at the Dalai Lama's guest house had been scoured, burners lit, and cooking surfaces washed with boiling water. New pots, pans, plates, utensils and cutlery were purchased especially for us, and the food was to be strictly vegetarian. She and Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, an Orthodox scholar from New York, inspect the kitchen with me and are satisfied with its kashrut. They are touched by the Tibetans' efforts.

Zalman hopes for further cooperation between the Tibetan and Jewish peoples, and is especially encouraged that we will be in direct contact with several echelons of Tibetan leadership.

Jonathan worries over the difficulty of discussing spirituality. He confesses that in many ways he finds it easier to discuss spirituality with Christians or Sufis than with fellow Jews. Happily, by the end of the week he revises that view.

I voice my sense of the deep responsibility we carry as emissaries of the Jewish people to the Tibetan people and that we must find ways to institutionalize Tibetan-Jewish contacts. Any number of Jews have studied Tibetan Buddhism, but there are no Tibetans who have studied Judaism. As a start, we should try to raise funds to enable two Tibetans to pursue Jewish studies at the graduate level -- one at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and one at my University of South Florida.

Professor Paul Mendes-Flohr of Hebrew University readily concurs about the need for academic exchanges. As a self-proclaimed secular Jew, he does not represent

Jewish tradition but Jewish modernity. Surely, no Jewish delegation could be complete without this perspective.

Rabbi Joy Levitt, who leads a Reconstructionist synagogue on Long Island, told her Sunday school children about this dialogue and asked them to prepare messages for the Dalai Lama. She showed us a notebook of touching letters and drawings with their heartfelt advice. One nine-year-old concisely wrote: "We Jews have always stuck together. No matter what. And if you Tibetans stick together, you will get your country back too."

Dr. Moshe Waldoks, a Massachusetts writer and scholar who participated in the 1989 dialogue, wonders whether this second meeting can recapture the remarkable enthusiasm of the first.

Yitz, a regular participant in interreligious dialogues, wants to help the Tibetans by raising Jewish awareness about their persecution, motivating American Jews to champion their cause in the U.S. Congress and at the United Nations. To date, no American President has received the Dalai Lama, nor has he been invited to address Congress. The United Nations has been as silent about Tibet as it has been noisy about Israel.

The discussion turns to how to address the Dalai Lama. Most Westerners call him "Your Holiness," but would that title imply that he is divinity, an idea which would compromise an observant Jew?

Jews in Tibetan Eyes

October 24: We are invited to attend the inaugural session of the Himalayan Conference on the Five Traditional Sciences, held at the Dalai Lama's monastery, Thekchen Choling. In his remarks before hundreds of Buddhist monks and scholars, the Dalai Lama lavishly praises Jews for "their courage and great determination" in preserving their religion and culture in the face of tremendous obstacles and sufferings. He says that Tibetans greatly admire Jews because "no matter how they are scattered through all corners of the earth, they maintained their sense of unity of the people," and he tells the audience how lucky they are to have our delegation

among them. His tremendous compliment brings tears to Jewish eyes. One theme of the week begins to emerge. By seeing ourselves reflected in the other, we form an image of who we are. In Christian and Muslim cultures, we Jews have seen in our reflections condescension if not outright hostility. But in Tibetan eyes we see reflected affection, respect and even a bit of awe. How differently one knows oneself through such reflections.

Listening to the Dalai Lama talk about us, one gets the impression that we Jews survived by an act of will. I wonder. Was it determination and courage, was it persecution, was it G-d, or was it belief in G-d which preserved Judaism? Is there a way to translate into a Tibetan conceptual framework the idea of a transcendent justification for empirical reality?

Explaining Judaism to Tibetan Buddhists

We have been invited to make a one-hour presentation about Judaism to the Himalayan Conference, a unique opportunity to speak before a distinguished group of Asian religious leaders. We delegate the responsibility to Yitz, and he and I work together on the format for his talk. I suggest the traditional Tibetan way of analyzing a religion in terms of its view, its path and its goal. Yitz likes the idea, and summarizes the Jewish "view" as belief in a Creator Who endows creation with an inherent sanctity. The Jewish "path" involves the study of Torah, the performance of worship or ritual connections to the transcendent, and acts of lovingkindness, our connections with one another. The Jewish "goal" is wholeness, the world to come, and the divine-human partnership in the repair of this world.

Tibetan Buddhism maintains transformation as a central metaphor, in particular the transformation of the ordinary mind into the enlightened mind, of defilement into wisdom. Judaism, too, emphasizes transformation -- the human-divine partnership in transforming this world into what it ought to be. Yitz's talk is extremely well-received.

October 25th: Yitz and Zalman discuss what blessing to recite upon the occasion

of meeting with the Dalai Lama. Zalman wants to use the new one he has composed for the occasion, but Yitz hesitates. We should not go about composing new liturgy, he cautions. Joy agrees with Yitz; the occasion itself is sufficiently radical, there is no need to compose a new blessing. But which blessing should be used? That upon meeting a king, or that upon seeing a holy man, a tsaddiq? Never before has there been an occasion for a Jew to recite a blessing upon meeting a wise man of another tradition, Zalman says, and therefore a new blessing is required. Eventually a compromise is reached: Zalman will recite the traditional blessing in Hebrew, followed by my Tibetan translation of his newly-composed blessing.

Meeting the Dalai Lama

We finally meet with the Dalai Lama in his fairly modest palace. I first met him when I was beginning graduate work in 1973. As a professor of religious studies, part of my job is to meet religious leaders around the world, and I have been blessed to meet many -- some saintly, most notably not. None, however, rises to the Dalai Lama's stature. His humor and warmth are striking, but it is his mind which impresses me the most. It goes beyond the usual sort of brilliance which one often encounters around universities. His mind penetrates with lightning rapidity; he gets to the heart of the matter more directly than anyone I have ever met. Perhaps it is the Buddhist teaching of non-egotism which creates such a flexible type of intelligence.

After Zalman's blessing, I am the first to speak. In my halting Tibetan, I greet our hosts on behalf of the Jewish people. It is a moment of fulfillment one rarely attains; for a moment my years of study of Tibetan language and culture as well as my deep commitment to Judaism coalesce. I note that this Tibetan-Jewish dialogue is not really something new, that there are Sanskrit loan words in the Hebrew Bible, that there have been contacts between India and Israel ever since the reign of King Solomon, that King Solomon and the Buddha share legends, that the esoteric

Tibetan system of Kalachakra Tantra ("cycles of time" teachings) and Jewish messianism may have a common source, that for millennia Jews have been intermediaries between India and the West.

Zalman then describes Kabbalah and Jewish esotericism, the inner dimension of spirituality. His is a crucial role in this dialogue. Tibetan Buddhism is a tradition especially rich in esotericism, and Tibetans suspect that a religion which is not likewise esoteric might be superficial. Much of the overlap between our traditions lies in esotericism, and the Dalai Lama said he found Judaism to be much more "sophisticated" than he had thought -- in no small part a response to Zalman's animated descriptions of angels, mysteries, divine emanations, and levels of being.

Next Yitz discusses how the rabbis expanded the scope of Jewish religious life and conceptions of holiness in response to exile and the loss of the Temple. He is an excellent balance to Zalman's esotericism. He never fails to remind the Dalai Lama, and the rest of us, that while mysticism is indeed a revered part of Jewish tradition, it most definitely is "a minority opinion."

As Yitz describes the Jewish observance of Shabbat, the Dalai Lama offers a most insightful comment. Yitz says that Shabbat harkens back to creation at the same time as it anticipates the messianic completion of the world. Jews live Shabbat as though the world were redeemed. The Dalai Lama draws upon his own meditative tradition of deity yoga visualization to comment, "You mean that Shabbat is your people's visualization exercise?" That is precisely what we do: through living "as though," we participate in the cosmic drama of redemption.

Paul's secularism complements Yitz's Orthodoxy. The Dalai Lama is intrigued that Jews are able to embrace both secular and religious members within our family. Paul eloquently articulates the dilemma of modernity: personal fulfillment is the watchword of the modern world, whereas communal responsibility is the hallmark of tradition. Jews are perceived as the first people to find a balance be-

tween the two -- individualism and community -- providing a model for any traditional people confronting the modern world.

Encounters with Teachers, Monks, Abbots, Nuns

October 26: Fifteen years ago while conducting my dissertation research at the Tibetan Library in Dharamsala, I came to know Alexander Berzin, a Harvard Ph.D. in Oriental Studies who often serves as the Dalai Lama's interpreter. Of Jewish background, Alex is now an esteemed teacher of Buddhism. Observing him during the dialogue, I cannot help but wonder at his thoughts, what sparks within his Jewish soul are being ignited. After yesterday's sessions, Alex says to me with a sense of urgency: "You have got to tell them more about the home. They do not understand about how the home can be a vehicle for religious transmission. Unless you teach them about how to observe religion in the home, the Tibetans will not be able to preserve their traditions."

Perhaps more than any other people, Tibetans know about the transformation of the mind, but they do not know so well the transformation of this reality, which we Jews call the sanctification of the everyday. While we can and should learn from them about the former, they need to learn from us about the latter.

Over lunch with Zalman and a Buddhist monk named George Chernoff, who despite his name is not Jewish, we hear a story about the late revered Tibetan teacher, Lama Thubten Yeshe. Lama Yeshe had many Jewish students and he often said, "If what they learn from me helps to make them better Jews, then I am most happy, then I will have served my purpose as a religious teacher." I am reminded of how Trungpa Rinpoche, the controversial Tibetan master, several times admonished me to observe Shabbat. Tibetans do not seek converts; religion for them is not a banner or allegiance, but a way of improving people, of calming the mind and cultivating altruism. I cannot help but think that if our rabbis shared this openness to spirituality, then many fewer young

Jews would seek spiritual edification elsewhere.

During the afternoon we have a rather formal dialogue with the abbots of leading monasteries. After the formal session, we invite them back to our guest house for Kabbalat Shabbat and dinner. It is remarkable to be greeted by one wearing the maroon monk's robe and a broad smile with a softly-spoken "Shabbat Shalom."

October 27th: Each morning we have been davening morning prayers outside our guest house overlooking the beautiful Kangra Valley, snow-capped Himalayas to our left, eagles soaring overhead. After prayers we hold an open house for Western students of Buddhism, many of them monks or nuns, many Jewish. One nun of Jewish origin, Thubten Chodron, wants to understand Judaism by examining me in the rapid-fire, dialectical style of Buddhist monastic training. She wants to know how Judaism is not just a set of beliefs and doctrines, but actually a path, a way to practice. Finally she turns to the G-d idea, asking how I can justify belief in an omniscient, omnipotent G-d given the pervasiveness of suffering in a world created by that G-d. Of course I cannot answer, but I assure her that my inability does not diminish either my ability to participate in Jewish religious life nor my access to the inner, experiential dimensions of our tradition.

In the afternoon we met with a group of "young, educated Tibetans." These were secularists, some advocating armed opposition to the Chinese occupation of their country in contradiction to the Dalai Lama's insistence upon nonviolence. One Jewish institution which especially interests them are our Jewish youth camps such as Ramah. Paul had spoken about his formative experiences at Camp Ramah, how it instilled a sense of solidarity with his people at an impressionable age. We decide to invite a Tibetan to observe our summer youth camps to determine how they could be adapted to the circumstances of exiled Tibetans.

October 28th: Rodger Kamenetz, a Louisiana writer reporting on our dialogue, tells me about an overheard discussion

among the lamas. Some are arguing that this sort of dialogue is not fruitful, that Buddhists ought to be more concerned about preserving their traditions than about opening themselves to others' views. Others argue that such dialogue enriches both sides, and that Tibetan Buddhists need to learn from Jews and others. We both reflect how an identical debate could be overheard in any yeshiva.

In the evening we visit the Tibetan Children's Village. More than half of the population of the village come from Tibet proper. Still, mothers make the dangerous and arduous journey across the Himalayas to deposit a child at the village so it may be raised within its cultural and religious traditions, a type of education forbidden by the Chinese rulers of Tibet. The mother is well aware of the likelihood that she may never see her child again, but even that sacrifice is not too much if her child may be raised to be proud of Tibetan heritage.

A very typical encounter: An Indian delegate to the Himalayan Conference, a government official, asks me if I am from Israel. "I want to learn something about your people," he says. "All we read in the newspapers is very slanted. Can you recommend an authentic book I could read?" His attitude is typical of many Buddhists and Hindus throughout Asia. Their minds are open; we need only present our case intelligently and it will be received. We need to circumvent governments and make contact with intellectuals and religious leaders directly.

"We are Both Chosen People"

October 29th: The day starts with a visit to Nechung Monastery, home of the State Oracle of Tibet. The medium for the Oracle, an unassuming Buddhist monk, describes his experiences of mediumship. Zalman compares notes, telling him about the prophets of ancient Israel, of the visions in the Book of Daniel, and of the mystical breastplates of the High Priest of the Temple. The descriptions are remarkably similar.

In the afternoon is our second and concluding session with the Dalai Lama.

Shoshana Edelberg of WUSF radio in Tampa asks him why he invited Jews for such intensive dialogue. Without missing a beat, the Dalai Lama replies: "I think we are both chosen people! We do not have exactly the same idea, but we Tibetans believe we are chosen by Avalokiteshvara [the embodiment of Buddhist compassion and the protector deity of Tibet]. You believe you are chosen by the Creator G-d. So it is almost the same idea. Another reason: when we became refugees, we knew that our struggle would not be easy. It will take a long time, generations. Very often we would refer to the Jewish people, how they kept their identity and faith despite such hardship and so much suffering. And when external conditions were ripe, they were ready to rebuild their nation. So you see, there are many things to learn from our Jewish brothers and sisters."

Jonathan describes Jewish systems of meditation, many of which have close parallels in Tibetan tradition. He tells about the strained relations between the exoteric and esoteric wings of Judaism, about how most leaders want to bar all but the most observant from Judaism's mysteries, and about how some want to "open all the doors" to the esoteric. He prefers a bit more caution. Next Shabbat, when I speak about our dialogue in the New Delhi synagogue, the Jews there are amazed to hear that there is such a thing as Jewish meditation! It is very sad that most Jews know so little about Jewish meditation and spirituality. Clearly, we need to open our doors more widely if we are to retain our spiritual seekers within our fold.

Moshe presents the Dalai Lama with a replica Torah scroll which Paul had brought from Israel. He describes four levels of textual interpretation: the literal meaning, the "hinted at" meaning, the "searched for" meaning, and finally the esoteric meaning. The relation of commentary to text and the mediation of the text by the tradition are areas of close overlap between Tibetan and Jewish traditions.

Blu then tells the Dalai Lama about the Jewish home, the unique forms of observance and transmission reserved for the family. Perhaps this is the most fruitful

of all exchanges, especially from a Tibetan point of view. The Dalai Lama's fascination with our home-centered observances makes me appreciate the singularity of Jewish traditions.

Finally, Joy speaks about Jewish community institutions -- the synagogue foremost among them, but also federations, Zionist alliances, religious schools, and burial societies. Clearly the Tibetans are intrigued by implications for organizing their own community, especially since theirs is even more attenuated than our own. She also presents him with the notebook of letters and drawings from the children of her synagogue, and the Dalai Lama reads several of them. It is a touching moment, an especially deep level of human contact.

Confronting the Issue of Jews Who Become Buddhists

After the presentations, on behalf of us all I raise a painful issue with the Dalai Lama, that of Jews who join other religions including Tibetan Buddhism. "Your Holiness," I say, "I must speak with candor. There remains one issue which pains us. You have seen our deep sense of family. It is very painful to us, therefore, when one of our family chooses to leave us. On one hand, it is clear that Jewish people who adopt the Tibetan path benefit greatly as individuals. On the other hand, we suffer from a brain drain on a community level. Many of our finest, most intelligent, most spiritually-inclined people are leaving us. I am not asking you a question, nor am I requesting you to make a statement. But on behalf of my coreligionists, I must tell you frankly how we feel."

The Dalai Lama is taken aback somewhat by my comments. The Buddhist attitude is not to seek converts, but at the same time it makes no distinction among peoples. Anyone who wants the teachings of the Buddha is entitled to them; religion knows no national boundary. He explains further the Buddhist belief that the Buddha offered differing teachings to students of differing personalities; therefore, no one religious doctrine could satisfy everyone. His advice, however, is both understanding

and sage: If you want to keep your people in your religion, then you must open your doors to spirituality. If you have an esoteric tradition to offer them, then they will not want to leave."

"As a result of our meeting," he continues, "to speak quite frankly, I developed much more respect for Judaism because I found there a high level of sophistication. I think it is very important that you make these teachings available for everyone, especially intellectual people. Sometimes there is a danger in too much secrecy. Often qualified people are excluded from the practice, so I think the best thing is to be flexible. I have seen many similarities between your tradition and ours. If you make these teachings available, why would your people want Buddhist tantra? You have your own tantra! Many of your people have keen intelligence and very creative minds, and if they are not personally satisfied with what you offer them, then nobody could stop them from leaving and taking a new religion. Provide them with all the materials, all spiritual teachings. If you have these spiritual values, then there is no reason to fear; if you have no such values, then there is no reason to hold on. If you cannot provide spiritual satisfaction to others and at the same time insist on holding on to them, then that is foolishness. This is reality." He is entirely right, of course.

Joy beautifully chants the Jewish prayer for scholars, and the lamas respond by "dedicating the merit" of the prayer to the welfare of all sentient beings -- a Tibetan "amen." We tearfully take leave of the Dalai Lama and his entourage, ennobled by the encounter and stirred by his challenge that we open our doors widely.

Yitz sums things up in his own way: "As a result of exile, the Dalai Lama went from being a god to being a man. And he has grown enormously in the process." Alex thanks us for "making me proud to be a Jew." The nun Thubten Chodron sees us off, too, presenting small gifts. The State Oracle had assured us that we would be safe on the fifteen hour overnight drive back to New Delhi.

October 31st - New Delhi: On the group's last day in India we run into Ram

Dass, the Jewish-born Richard Alpert, the Harvard professor who was fired for LSD research and is now a Hindu guru. A longtime associate of Zalman, he joins us in our visit to New Delhi's synagogue and makes the tenth for our minyan. He also joins us later for dinner and discusses meditation with Jonathan, commenting that he would like to refer straying Jews back into the fold via Jonathan's meditation school. I am struck by the irony: probably few people in the world have led more Jews away from Judaism than Ram Dass, yet now he wants to find avenues to lead some back. I am also struck by how pitiable is his knowledge of Judaism. After eating, we chant grace, the birkat hamazon. Ram Dass asks: "That was a very pretty tune you sang after the meal. What was that?" With such a paltry background, no wonder he left!

November 1st - New Delhi: I stay on for a few days to meet with leaders of the city's Tibetan and Jewish communities to report on our dialogue, which gives me some time to think about the past two weeks.

Coming out of this dialogue, we have all learned something about the Tibetan people, their remarkable culture, and their heroic efforts to maintain that culture in exile. More important, however, is that all of us now know ourselves differently than we had before. Of course, we learned a great deal from the other Jewish delegates; it was a notably learned and articulate group. But deeper than that, we now have seen ourselves reflected by a new other -- a Tibetan other -- an other which knows us in respect and affection.

* * *

Nathan Katz is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida. He is the author, with his wife, Ellen S. Goldberg, of "The Last Jews in India and Burma" (JL101; 1988), based on their year spent with the Jews of Cochin in South India and travelling in South Asia. His participation in the delegation was supported by grants from the Nathan A. Cummings Foundation, New York, and from the University of South Florida.