

The Jewish Encounter with Hinduism

Interreligious Studies in Theory and Practice

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Same God, Other god: Judaism, Hinduism, and the Problem of Idolatry

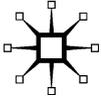
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THE JEWISH ENCOUNTER WITH HINDUISM

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*To teachers in the line of the Divine Light
Who have been gateways and sources of inspiration
Swami Sivananda
Swami Chidananda
Sri Yogeshwar*

Cover image: Prince Dara Shikoh visits a sage (possibly the Jewish Sarmad, see Chapter 4), in a prefiguration of the present Jewish-Hindu encounter. By Hunhar II, mid-18th century.

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Preface

In many ways, the present project is a summary of a lifelong journey, both spiritual and academic. The number of individuals who have contributed to it is therefore as extensive as the number of individuals who have helped form me in these dimensions, a list too long to enumerate, though never too long to recall in my heart with gratitude.

The inspiration of some salient individuals is already expressed in the book's dedication. Others are appreciated in the dedication to the complement volume, *Same God, Other god*.

In terms of the more narrowly focused academic project, gratitude is due to friends who have been pointers along the way. Both books are the serendipitous outcome of another project, much more humble in its origins. Without Eugene Korn's insistence that *Jewish Theology and World Religions*, which we jointly edited, be published, the present project would have never come under consideration. I benefited from the wisdom and ongoing work of several colleagues who read my work and shared their own with me. These include Alan Brill, Daniel Sperber, Richard Marks, and Paul Fenton. My work is all the richer for their contributions. I shared the manuscript with several Hindu friends. I am grateful in particular for the detailed responses of Swami Agamananda (Martha Doherty), who engaged my argument in a considered and detailed way.

I am very proud of this work launching a new series of publications in inter-religious studies at Palgrave Macmillan. Starting with *Or Rose*, the series editors showed faith and enthusiasm for the project from the start and their appreciation has sustained me through multiple revisions. I believe this work, with its particular balance of perspectives—descriptive, analytical, sympathetic, and engaged—is the kind of work for which they have launched this series and I am grateful to them for that. I am particularly grateful to Madhuri Yadlapati. Her keen mind, broad understanding, and deft editorial skills have made working with her a true pleasure.

Two editors at Palgrave Macmillan have made the otherwise gruesome task of turning a manuscript into a book so much more pleasant. Jenn McCall made sure the book found a secure home and Phil Getz ensured it was a comfortable home, bringing to it his wonderful and gentle human skills, along with his professional dedication.

On a more personal note, because this book reflects so much personal engagement, its creation is also something of a family affair. My sons, Elisha and Neriya,

have journeyed to India and engaged the subject matter of the book both first-hand and in continuing dialogue with me. Neriya's continuing interest in the subject matter and the unfolding of the book have helped sharpen the argument at many points.

There, my wife, has been my partner on the journey, engaging me along the way in all matters of substance and supporting me in all matters of procedure. The journey to India was undertaken with her. She is very present in the white spaces between the black letters.