CHAPTER III
MINOR JEWISH SECTS AND THEIR PROBLEMS

Jewish religion was one of the oldest religions of West Asia. It had gained prominence especially in Israel and still holds a strong root in it despite the emergence of Islam or Christianity. A study into this religion will enlighten the importance it holds in the minds of the people of Israel.

Here, the attempt will be to examine several sects among the Jews. There were many sects among Jews who later got absorbed into Judaism or others cut off themselves altogether. The sects examined here will be Karaites, the Samaritans and the Falashas. Here the relationship between the mainstream Jewish community and the minor sects will be discussed. The relationship here is not static with the possible exception of the Samaritans – at least some of the people on both sides of the dividing line wanted a change in attitude and relationship or even strived to overcome the division.

The word mainstream Jews cannot be misunderstood to denote a monolithic constant and consistent entity, within the mainstream of the Jewish community in Israel it is possible to discern not only different shades of attitude concerning the marginal Jewish sects, but also outspokenly divergent and conflicting opinion.
These Jews in no way constitute a unified bloc of dissent from standard Judaism; by no means do they deviate in a similar way. Taking these three sects together and if we examine we find that each came under different circumstances and time. Each was a result of different historical conditions and each exhibited a unique religious or ethnic religious relationship to the Jews. For example, the Karaites were a sect, which was ousted from the mainstream of its parent religion – though the Karaites themselves might dispute this. The Samaritans seemed essentially a different branching off from a common Israelite religion and civilization. Surprisingly because only a handful of them remain in the world and can be regarded as small branch. On the other hand Falashas are a sect who does not insist on separateness like the other two. They are different in their rituals and way of life but their intent is accepted as full Jews by Jewish establishment in Israel and they do not hesitate to assimilate the ritual and practice of Judaism in order to be accepted as such.

All these sects and even if the core of Judaism is in every case peculiar, it is still possible to extract a common denominator in their beliefs and practices. But they all share in the sociological status of marginality. This involves being a minority, as it involves the problem of acceptance or tolerance by the dominant majority. It is these common aspects which justify an examination of such disparate groups in one study.

2 Ibid.
While discussing these three sects the proximity to Judaism need not correspond to the chronological separation from or affiliation to Judaism. Nor does doctrinal and cultural, even ethnic, proximity indicate emotional attachment. The closeness at times enhanced hostility and suspicion. The principle guiding of the sects would be to analyze the Karaites followed by the Samaritans and this would succeed only by examining the Falashas. It would also lead us to the Jewishness in Israel.

Here the question of Jewish identity which is a mixture of national and religious elements are much more pertinent. The Israel’s Jews think that they are a part of Jewry and are not numerically the bulk of it. They observe Jewish immigrants whose Jewishness is not necessarily their dominant characteristic in the sense that an Englishman is stamped with Englishness. Therefore the problem of Jewish identity is still a living question with Jews and also that of Israel’s Jews and that of students of Jewry.

To understand this religion here it becomes necessary to study each sect differently and individually. Hence it becomes necessary to know who were the Karaites. They were a distinct sect in Judaism in as much as their basic notions about the nature of religious law differ from those of the mainstream or rabbinate Jews. Whereas the latter supplement the laws of the Torah by the interpretations and modifications of the Talmud, the product of the cumulative traditions of the Judicial decisions and intricate commentaries made over by many centuries, the

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4 Ibid.
Karaite's claim can rely only on the written word of divine Joral and repudiate the man-made Talmud.

The rabbinate Judaism does not view Talmud law as human amplifications of the divine law of the Torah. The law of the Talmud conceived at the end product of an oral tradition originating the divine revelation to Moses at Mount Sinai. Moses, besides receiving the written Law which he put down in the Torah, also received the oral Law, interpretations and amplifications of the written one, which was then transmitted from generation to generation, till it was finally embodied in the text of the Mishnah and their amplified through commentaries in the Gemara (both of which form the Talmud). The Karaites do not accept this application. Only the law written down in the Torah, was given to Moses, and consequently only this law is binding to them. The interpretation of the law they say should rely on learned judgement but on the tradition which is wrongly claimed as divine origin. Possibly the name Karaim (Hebrew Plural of Karai) derived from Karo, to read, indicates that the Jews thus called are the faithful readers of the Torah.

The doctrinal rejection of the Talmud by the Karaites was a major heresy for the Jewry. The fact that the Karaites had to amplify various Biblical laws by their own interpretations sometimes in a way which was Talmudic in method, did not diminish the gravity of their dissent in the eyes of Jewish orthodoxy. Moreover, the doctrinal dispute led to practical differences in religious conduct and observance. Thus, the Karaites during the Sabbath eve sit in darkness,

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5 Roshonal, p. 292.
6 Ibid.
following their interpretation of “Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day”\(^7\). Thou shall not seethe a kind in his mother’s milk\(^8\) is not enlarged by the Karaites to the prohibition of mixing all meat and milk foods, as it is by rabbinate Jews. The Karaites calendar differs from the rabbinate one with the result that the days of observing the holidays do not coincide.

These little differences do effect matter more in social reality than those practical interpretations of the religious law which are less manifest in every day life. There is, however, one notable exception to the assumption. This is in the field of laws pertaining to marriage and divorce, where the differences create a technical – legal gap of major significance. This point, however will be dealt with further on in connections with the problem of inter-marriage between the Karaites and regular Jews. Whatever is the differences, the Karaites uphold the essentials of Jewish creed. The belief in one god, the moral code of human behaviour, the expectations of Messiah and the emotional attachment to the land of Israel, are common to Karaites and rabbinate Jews\(^*\). Occasionally Karaites have displayed an even deeper attachment to the memory of Jewish independence in ancient Israel and a more ardent expectation of a messiah delivery than rabbinate Judaism – a pietism which would not be held out against them on theological or doctrinal grounds.

It should be pointed out here that though Karaites had historical link with Judaism, they actually descended from Jewry which has been accepted by all.

\(^7\) Ibid.
\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^*\) Ibid., p. 223.
But eventually they separated from mainstream Judaism. Scholars like Julius Furst sees in the Karaites, the culmination of a tendency originating with the Sadducees (a movement whose beginning antedate the Karaites proper by about 1,000 years)\(^{10}\). But this somehow was not accepted to Karaites or the rabbinate nor to the scholars. On the other hand recent scholar by name Naphtali Wielder\(^ {11}\) offers the hypothesis that the Qumran sect (which was recently discovered from Dead Sea scrolls written in about 1\(^{st}\) Century A.D.) exerted a preponderant influence on the formation of Karaism. Some say that emergence of Karaism was in about 8\(^{th}\) and 10\(^{th}\) centuries, which Ann ben David (8\(^{th}\) century) is usually regarded as the founder of the movement. His opposition to the Talmud essentially amounted to different interpretations of Laws by using the Talmudic method and that only in the 10\(^{th}\) century did the Karaite doctrine of rejecting the oral Law and relying on the text of the Pentateach\(^ {12}\), came into full swing.

There are several views on Karaism. It would be hard to explain or accept the rabbinate explanation attributing the sectarian movement to the personal frustration of Ann on not being appointed as an exilarch\(^ {13}\). Another explanation is that social friction between the ruling class and poor Jews, the latter relying to a movement opposing the aristocratic rabbinate establishment; the individualism of Jewish communities in remote and mainstreams places in Iraq and Persia,


\(^{12}\) Ibid.

rejecting the authority of the Geonim (rabbinical leaders) and the influence of the contemporary schism in the Islam between Sunnism and Shi’ism. The latter rejected the oral traditions of Islam\textsuperscript{14}. The example of opposition to the oral Law in an earlier epoch by Sadducees would naturally be introduced as a casual factor in Karaism by anyone believing in a relationship between these movements.

The Karaite movement spread very fast out of Iraq, Persia to Jerusalem and Egypt as well as to the Balkans during the time of the Byzantines. During the 12\textsuperscript{th} and 13\textsuperscript{th} centuries Karaites lived in Crimea and Southern Russia and from there some settled in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century in Lithuania. It later spread to Volhynia and Podolia. The Nazi persecution of the Jews accomplished the physical desecrations of the Karaite communities in Eastern Europe. The establishment of the state of Israel led to a great exodus of Karaites from Egypt and other places.

These Karaites wandered everywhere. They often shared bitter relations with Jews as in Nazi Germany or being victims of the cruelty of the crusaders in Jerusalem or of Cessecks in Poland in 17\textsuperscript{th} century. In the 19\textsuperscript{th} century under Russian rule and till the revolution, they were exempted from the legal discrimination and hardships were imposed on the bulk of the Jews.

The Karaites were like Jews often affected by people who lived with them or countries in which they lived\textsuperscript{15}. This had both political and cultural impact. This was the reason that they used Arabic, Tartar, Polish and Russian

\textsuperscript{14} Ben–Sasson, pp. 63-5
\textsuperscript{15} Leon Nemoy, pp. 63-5.
languages. Still like other Jews, they retained their cultural and religious identity. Though early Karaite scholars used Arabic, later they stuck to Hebrew and was used by scholars like Benjamin Nahawandi in 9th century to Abraham Firkovitah in the 19th century. The Karaites wrote theology, polemics with rabbinate Judaism and commentaries on Bible and also Hebrew grammar and poetry. In brief, the Karaites despite their numerical insignificance for they were estimated around 15,000 at the end of the last century have shown great religious-national-cultural resilience. Their perseverance as a distinct sect for at least a millennium is another testimony to their great communal strength.

The Karaites relationship with rabbinate has been good. For eg: Don Gedaliah in Constantinople tried to bring about re-union between rabbinate and Karaite Jews in 15th century. The Karaite Isaac of Troki (Lithuania) in the 16th century wrote a book of polemics with Christianity which is not specifically Karaite in its approach. The rabbinate response to these attitudes has shown similar outbursts.

Till last century there were about 10,000 Karaites in Israel. They were in Ramla, Ashdad and Ofakim. The bulk of the Karaites settled in these places after the formation of Israel. Nearly 90% came from Egypt the remaining from Iraq and Turkey.

The Karaites also wished to have their independence and have a separate state. So they formed what is known as an association called “The Community

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16 Roshwald, p. 225.
18 Ibid., p. 663.
of the Karaite Jews in Israel\textsuperscript{19}. The main aims of this association was the integration of the Karaites within one organization and the representation of their special interests. This involves representing the community with the government and other public institutions. It also wants to promote the economic, social, spiritual and religious needs of the community. It also appointed religious functionaries such as rabbis, cantors, ritualistic slaughterers. The association also maintained local centres, synagogues religious officials and also educational institutions.

The religious practices include determination of religious laws in specific questions and performing marriages. There are two full time Karaite schools. Children who attend elementary state schools also attend Karaite classes concerned with religious education three times a week. As far as adults are concerned, they attend special courses to become cantors, ritualistic slaughterers and circumcisers.

The association published books, pamphlets and prayer-books and maintained funds to help the needy members\textsuperscript{20}. Every Karaite Jew from the age of 18 becomes a member to this association automatically unless he informs he is not interested. The budget for the functioning is covered by membership fees, voluntary contributions, marriage payment, arbitration, etc. The government through the Ministry of Religious Affairs also makes a contribution to cover Karaite religious needs.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
The association is administered by a national council of 31, consisting of the chosen representatives of various local communities\textsuperscript{21}. This council operates through a Religious Committee, whose chairman is the Chief Rabbi of the Karaites and also through an Administrative Committee\textsuperscript{22}. Each of these committees consist of 9 members. They are elected by members of the council from among themselves. The various local committees besides being represented in the national council, they administer their own affairs independently through their own local committees subject to the guidance of the central national authority. This looks like a democratic for a religious community. The source of authority is the membership, and even the Chief Rabbi indirectly depends on their choice. Local autonomy is emphasized as well.

One cannot look only at the religious aspect of Karaites. If one has to understand the Karaites, it is better to know their legal and social status as well. Their status is like any other Jews in Israel. They have been admitted on the strength of Law of Returns (1950) which assures every Jew the right to immigrate to Israel. The deviation of Karaites from rabbinate Judaism did not affect their Jewishness in respect of this fundamental law. This acceptance of the Karaite by the State of Israel as unquestionably Jewish is reciprocated by them in that they regard the state as the realization of Zionist aspiration as do most of other Israeli Jews. The Karaite seen also well absorbed into the economic life of the country and to judge by the explicit spokesmen that they have become one in their civic life, armed forces, where their equal treatment does not produce special

\textsuperscript{21} Roshwald, p. 226.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
consideration for their peculiar religious ways. This does not mean they have assimilated with others on the other hand they have their own organization, synagogues, an occasional holiday creates a wedge between them and other Jews\textsuperscript{23}.

This great gap has certainly far reaching repercussions especially with regards to religious law. There are no civil marriages in Israel. The marriage or divorce is subject to the authority of the religious court of each relevant community\textsuperscript{24}. In case of Jewish marriages and divorces authority lies with the rabbinical courts, which are guided solely by the religious law, as they understand and interpret it\textsuperscript{25}. According to the rabbinical laws, Jews are not allowed to marry Karaites. The legal reason for this prohibition is that Karaites’ divorces are from the rabbinical point of view properly formulated and are consequently invalid. Therefore, divorced Karaite women who remarries would be regarded as an adulterers. Any issue from such second marriages would be a “Mamzer”\textsuperscript{*}. Such a child would not enter into the congregation of Lord and so would be parents of the such child. Had the Karaites been considered not as Jews but gentiles, conversion to Judaism would have nullified all the previous irregularities pertaining to marriage and divorce, and the problem of Manzerian would not have risen. But they are considered as Jewish by the rabbinical authorities, this avenue is closed to them. Their separation from the larger Jewish community seems absolute.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Hahukion – Book of Laws (Tel-Aviv), p. 537.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. p. 573.
\textsuperscript{*}Mamzer is in other words called a bastard
On the other hand Karaites had also their own opinions and interpretations regarding their relationship with others. According to them, the rabbinate Judaism which allowed certain marriages like uncle marrying their niece are incestuous and consequently offsprings of such marriages are Mamzerim and are forbidden to enter the congregation of law\textsuperscript{26} (that is, into Karaite Jewry). Thus the inter-marriage of rabbinate and Karaite Jews is mutually forbidden on essentially the same religious principle. To put it in other words Rabbinites and the Karaites are separated by a common religion. Still, it must not be forgotten that the reciprocity of exclusion in this case does not equate the responsibility for this state of affairs. The rabbinical establishment is Israel is more powerful than the Karaite leadership and if any change is needed it is up to the rabbinites.

Another basic factor for this rigidity is that though rabbinical law prohibits a marriage with a Karaite, once such a marriage is performed, it is considered as binding by the same law. Thus, a Karaite who succeeds in concentrating his affiliation may pass as a regular Jew and be married to a regular rabbi to a regular Jewish partner. Such marriages are performed in Israel\textsuperscript{27}. This has its own disadvantages. A person has to lie without putting his surname during marriage. The children of such marriages do not have problem until it is discovered. Once discovered such marriages would be disqualified because of the stigma of possible mamzerut according to the teachings of both schools.

The Karaites have their own peculiar laws regarding marriage and divorce. The law of Israel following the Palestine orders in council relegates jurisdiction

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid. Also the Palestine Orders in Council of 1922-47, pp. 50-51.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
concerning marriage and divorce to the courts of the various religious communities. It reserves the legitimate right to decide which religious communities will be legally declared as such. The Karaite community has not been declared a religious community in the sense and therefore its jurisdiction in matters of marriage and divorce among its own members can be legally questioned. On the other hand, it can be argued that Karaites being Jew (and this is admitted by them and rabbinites) and subject to the marriage and divorce laws of the Jewish religious community, as specified in the Rabbinical court Jurisdiction (Marriage and Divorce) Law of 1953. Here this says that marriage and divorce of Jews will be performed in Israel according to law of the Torah with the acceptance of the Karaites, though this law is interpreted by them differently. Here the legislature had in mind the rabbinate interpretation. Thus the Karaites seem deprived of the right to perform legally valid marriages and divorces according to their interpretations of Jewish religious law. On the one hand the rabbinate law does not accept their ways and on the other the state does not accept or give status of a distinct religious community.

For the Karaites to divorce is again a problem. From the rabbinate point of view, the divorce are not valid because of a faulty formulation of the bill of divorce and from the point of view of the state that they are not valid for being neither sanctioned by rabbinical court nor performed by any other recognized religious court. Though many had protested citing that divorces were not valid.

28 The Palestine Orders in Council of 1922-47, No.51.
29 The Rabbinical Courts Jurisdiction (Marriage & Divorce Law 1953), No .573
30 Ibid.
yet it was made clear that Karaite divorce documents have no legal validity. The Ministry also maintained that “the persons representing themselves as the court of the Karaite community in Ramla.... had no authority to perform or write a divorce”\(^{31}\). As far as marriage law is concerned it is less clear for possibly a Karaite marriage is valid also according to the rabbinate law and thereby sanctioned by the state of Law.

As for as Karaites are concerned this is humiliating to their civil rights. Representation was given to the Israeli Prime Minister and Minister for Religious Affairs regarding their rights. They were also remained of Israel’s proclamation of Independence which promised “equality of social and political rights for all the citizens” as well as “freedom of religion and conscience of language, education and culture”\(^{32}\). Yet a Jewish minority remains without an appropriate legal status. The Karaites do not wish to be subject to the Rabbinical court’s jurisdiction because of the considerable differences between the religious precepts between the two communities whose marriage and divorce laws are divided by a gap of 2000 years\(^{33}\). The Rabbinical courts on the other hand are not willing to deal with marriages and divorces of Karaites with the possible exceptions of divorce agreed upon by both the partners.

In order to know more about Karaites, one look at their marriage and divorce tell us the position they face in Israeli community. The Karaites have been married to Karaites in Karaite religious ceremonies performed by Karaite

\(^{32}\) Ibid. 
\(^{33}\) Hahulean, p. 134.
functionaries and divorces have been arranged by Karaites internally\textsuperscript{34} as well as the approval of the government. Such marriages are registered by officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Divorce issued by Karaite rabbinical authority are not legally valid.

The situation is obviously intolerable to the injury of virtual prohibition of inter-marriage with other Jews and legal recognition of Karaite personal law – a recognition given to Muslims and Christian communities in Israel. However by 1965, the government appointed a special commission for the examination of the personal status of Karaites\textsuperscript{35}. This was to recommend the legal and administrative steps to be taken in order to resolve the problems dealing with matters of marriage and divorce among the Karaites for the benefit of the Karaite public in Israeli. The government and the commission were very slow in taking steps.

Some scholars have put three views suggesting the attitudes of the Kaaites to their problems especially their marriages. The orthodox religious attitude does not regard the marriage between Karaites and the regular Jews. But on the other hand it is not that rigid as it seems. For example the commission examined the chief Rabbis of Israel regarding this issue. The Sephardic Chief Rabbi by name Rabbi Nission explained that if all heads of Karaite families declared that they were ready to accept the rabbinate Judaism, “we shall work hard and find a way…. There is great difficulty involved but I hope

\textsuperscript{34} Roshwald, p. 230.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
we shall overcome it”\textsuperscript{36}. But on the other hand the Ashkenazic chief Rabbi, by name Rabbi Unterman\textsuperscript{37} was pessimistic about such a happening but he also said that such a thing cannot be ruled out either.

Scholars who have done research on this have found that the rabbinical court which the knowledge of chief Rabbis performed a marriage between the Karaite boy with a rabbinate girl. Even with regard to divorce there were certain exceptions which was given by the court that of a Karaite boy divorcing a rabbinate girl. The judgement benefited both the parties. These are only one or two exceptional cases because if a Karaites wants to return to rabbinate Judaism, the opening of the gates are not that easy.

Thus the orthodox Judaism reveals the fundamental ambivalence of the orthodoxy to the Karaites. It wants them back in the fold of regular Judaism but it resents their deviation to the point of rejecting them absolutely. As long as no collective repentance is declared by Karaites, the rejection is at large. Thus the individual Karaite, however, sincere his intention of becoming a regular Jew, will encounter the indifferent rigidity of the laws refusing this acceptance into the congregation of Lord\textsuperscript{38}.

So this insistence on a collective act and indifference to an individual decision illuminates a certain fundamental aspect of Judaism. The community of Israel, in the combined national religious sense, has a relationship to god and

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 11.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid
any division within the community is a breach which out weighs personal deviation on devotion.

As far as the practical issue of inter-marriage is concerned, the orthodox stand does not provide any answer which can satisfy either concerned parties. The rigid application of rabbinical laws for Karaites marrying rabbinical Jews or regular Jews produces directly opposed to the basic wish of the orthodox. They want rather Karaites to vanish from the place. Thus, while the rabbinical case for the collective unity of the community of Israel may have sprung from nationalistic instincts, the practical law of the rabbis work deliberately against national unity.

The other approach or attitude was the nationalistic to the Karaites’ problems which would like to see it solved by pulling down the barriers between rabbinate Judaism and Karaism and the total absorption of the Karaites in the greater Jewish community in Israel39. This is the fundamental reason why strong objections were raised by the commission to the idea of granting Karaites the status of a legally recognized separate religious community – a status the Moslem and larger Christian communities in Israel enjoy. In the words of Justice Silberg – Chairman of the Commission “Such a possibility should be rejected with two hands. It would deepen and perpetuate the tragically historical break between the two streams of our nation”40. All the members and even the President of Israel voiced the same thing ironically. In a meeting with the Karaite, the President tried to stop them from making such demands as the status of a separate religious community.

40 Ibid. 24th Feb. 1966, pp. 7-10.
Such an integration was stopped by orthodox (rabbinate) Judaism and of the orthodox Karaites, though Justice himself speaks of such inter-marriages and further says that each partner followed his or her own ways. Mr. Justice pointed out that there was one scholar who put forward legal argument for allowing marriage with Karaites, considering their marriages invalid on account of incompetent witnesses\textsuperscript{41}. He argued that Karaite women improperly divorced have not been married in the first place and thus could not have committed adultery which clears the Karaites from the stigma of sin. But nothing could change the stand of the orthodox. So Justice Silberg gave up any attempt to recommend a statutory change which would allow a marriage of Karaites with Jews. Instead he recommended for special legislation of their basic rights and would give the Karaite community official recognition as a separate religious community. He stated that the validity of law should be for four years\textsuperscript{42} in hope that often a period a new choice of overcoming the barriers between the Karaites and other Jews would occur.

The nationalistic approach tried to promote national unity by advocating legal possibility of marriages between Karaites and Jews. Of this worked then statutory legislation would establish marriage and divorce registrations procedure independently of rabbinical jurisdiction. One member of commission in fact stated that “I think that we must not block anymore of those Karaite who wish to

\textsuperscript{41} Report of Commission – Chairman Statement, p. 5, Professor Ben-Sasson, himself an orthodox man pointed out to the mixed marriages in the early centuries of Karaism and the occasional mutual tolerance of the marriage partners.

\textsuperscript{42} Report, p. 12.
merge with their rabbinate brethren”⁴³. Joining him another member of the Commission put in “that instead of a separate law establishing the authority of the Karaite rabbinical law in courts in matters of marriage and divorce, the existing Rabbinical courts jurisdiction (Marriage & Divorce) Law of 1953 be amended to include the possibility of Karaite court, though without mentioning its name”⁴⁴.

To put it altogether, the nationalistic approach to the problems of Israel, Karaites is firstly the respect for rabbinical authorities, whether genuine or due to a realistic assessment of their power. The other was the liberal’s concern for the religious freedom of the Karaites. The promoters of legislation to allow intermarriage of Karaites with other Jews seems to have less respect for the rabbinical authorities and are motivated mainly by nationalism and liberal principles. In this instance, the two reinforce each other, for establishing rights of an individual Karaite to marry a rabbinate Jew is also a step towards a gradual absorption of the Karaites into larger Jewish community.

The third approach was the anthropological attitude to the Karaites which is opposed to Nationalistic and orthodox stands. It seems Karaite distinctive way neither as an apostasy from the true way nor as a deplorable break in national unity. This distinctiveness is viewed as a long history of Jewish civilization. A

⁴³ Ibid.
⁴⁴ This member was Israel Yeshayahu, Member of Knesset & Cabinet Minister of Mapai – 1969 – Report.
spokesman stated this as “the different communities – Karaites, Sawariteans – embellish Judaism. May they continue to exist\textsuperscript{45}.

This was the detached and sympathetic attitude of the anthropologists such an attitude can also spring out of a genuine liberalism, strengthened by the realization of man’s cultural diversity significantly.

**The Samaritans**

According to the Samaritans, the basic tenets of their religious teachings were the following:

1. The Lord is the one and the only god and there is now beside him.
2. The only Prophet is Moses and no other Prophet was or will be beside him.
3. The only Holy Book is the Torah...
4. The only holy place in the world is Mount Garizim, the Blessed mountain not Jerusalem.
5. The day of Judgement of the Lord will be according to the law of the old Testament, then every man will be judged and punished for his sins.

The first Samaritan tenet, unqualified\textsuperscript{46} monotheism is identical with the fundamental belief of traditional Judaism and certainly could not be a cause of dispute. The admiration of Moses, while shared with Judaism, becomes in the holiness of the Torah is again a common belief of the Jews and Samaritans, but the Jews consider also other parts of the Bible, i.e., the prophets and the Hagiographa, as sacred books. Moreover, the Talmudic interpretation and the

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid. The Spokesman was from Israeli Society for Folklore and Ethnology.

amplification of the Laws of the Torah is alien to the Samaritans. The fourth
tenet explicitly denies the holiness of Jerusalem and insists that Mount Gerizim\textsuperscript{47} is the holy place. Indeed the choice of Mount Gerizim in the Tenth
Commandment – a clear indication of the centrality of this doctrine in their belief.
This contention is not merely a matter of doctrinal dispute with the Jews; it has
had major implications in the community’s religious cult and history. The holy
mount was the place where the Samaritans had their temple, as did the Jews in
Jerusalem. The mount\textsuperscript{48} is the place of pilgrimage on their three major holidays.
Because of its sanctity, the Samaritans have maintained a community nearby to
this day.

The religious practices of the Samaritans differ in many details from those
of the Jews. Their calendar is different and therefore their holidays do not
coincide with the Jewish dates. The pass over sacrifice is practiced yearly on
Mount Gerizim. The prayer book is different from the Jewish one. Yet, the
similarities seem more fundamental. The text of the Torah is with minor
differences, the same Hebrew text; written in character closer to the ancient
Hebrew Alphabetes. However, the Samaritan pronunciation is different. The
major holidays are identical in meaning. The Sabbath is strictly followed. The
dietary laws are similar.

Thus, a detached observer might conclude that in religious doctrine and
practice the Samaritans are essentially similar to that of the Jews, despite some
different beliefs and rituals. Their monotheism and strict following of the Torah

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
mean that they share their foundations\textsuperscript{49} with Judaism. However, relationship between religious factions is not determined by the followers of the groups who adhere to their separate identities.

**The Origin of the Samaritans**

The problem whether the Samaritans are Jewish or not requires a prior semantic clarification. The term ‘Jews’ strictly speaking refers to the descendants of the tribe of Juda and the two neighbouring tribes, Simeon and Benjamin, which it absorbed. Since the other tribes were considered to be lost, the Judah tribe claimed the continuity and the heritage of the entire Israeli tradition. So they are Jews, not in the strict etymological sense, but Jewish in the sense of historically linked with the continuing history and traditions of Israel.

On the other hand, according to the Jewish tradition the Samaritans are not descendants of any tribe of ancient Israel. The story in 2 Kings XVIII refers to the conquest of Samarit (the capital of the Kingdom of Israel) by the Assyrian King and the forced exile of the vanquished Israelites. In their place, people from various foreign cities were brought and settled. One of the foreign cities mentioned is Cuttah and the name Kutim or Cutheans, was subsequently in the post biblical literature\textsuperscript{50}, used to designate the Samaritans. The name Samaritans or \textit{Shomromina} in the original Hebrew\textsuperscript{51} appears only once in the Bible, in 2 Kings XVII.29 and has usually been interpreted as referring to the alien settlers of Samaria-Shomron in Hebrew. But a careful reading of the

\textsuperscript{50} Josephus, \textit{Jewish Antiquities IV}, 14.3
\textsuperscript{51} Hebrew Bible, 2 Kings XVII, 29.
context in 2 Kings XVII will demonstrate that the Shomronim or Samaritans, referred to in verse 29 can very well mean not the foreign settlers, but the exiled Israelites.

The Samaritan account of their origin is entirely different. In the first place, they do not refer themselves ‘Shomronim’, that is to say, the inhabitants of Shomron (Samaria) – a denotation by locality which in the historical circumstances leaves the question of the national or tribal identity open. They call themselves, Shamerim, another form of the standard Hebrew ‘Shomerim’ which literally means ‘keepers’ or ‘watchers’ and implies that they are the keepers of the law or the true keepers of law. Thus, they choose to define themselves in the religious rather than in a geographical or an ethnic term. They also explicitly deny any connection with the Cutheans or any other alien people. They claim to be the descendants of the Israelite tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, besides the priestly family which claims descent from the tribe of Levi. Thus, in essence, they claim to be the remnants of some of the lost tribes of the ancient Kingdom of Israel.

However, it is not possible to determine scientifically whether the Samaritans are the descendants of the Cutheans and other alien nations, or some of the Israelite tribes, or a mixture of the two. There is ample evidence in the Bible itself that the Israelite population persisted in the land of the former kingdom of Israel, despite the banishments by the Assyrians. Thus, for example,

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it has been pointed out that even after the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, about 135 years after the conquest of Samaria by Assyria, people from Sheohem, Shiloh and Samaria came to Jerusalem in mourning over the destruction of the temple there\(^54\). According to Moses Caster, a distinguished researcher in to Samaritan history and literature goes so far as to suggest that the Cutheans and other aliens were merely garrisons recruited by the Assyrians and stationed temporarily and often changed in the conquered kingdom of Israel – implying that their influence whether ethnic or cultural, on the indigenous Israelite population could not have been significant\(^55\). This in fact would make the Samaritans straight descendants of the lost tribes of Israel.

\(^{54}\) Jeremiah Xli. 5