

Explanation of Names

BY JAMES GOLDBERG

“Teancum Singh Rosenberg” incorporates characters and ideas from outside sources as though they were a normal part of the world of the story. The following is a limited list of some of the people, places, and ideas referenced. Not everything is included; numerous scriptural passages, for example, are alluded to in the piece but not explained here. Entries are in order of appearance in the text of the story.

KABIR was a fifteenth-century Indian saint. By profession, he was a weaver, but he also wove together Hindu and Muslim traditions in his poetry to emphasize the value of loving God by whatever name. They say that at Kabir’s death, his Hindu followers and Muslim followers got into a fight over the body—Hindus believe in cremation, Muslims in burial. Before they could finish their argument, however, someone noticed that the body had turned into flowers, a fitting end to a unifying figure.

SINGULARITY OF GOD: Both the Jewish Shema and the Muslim doctrine of *tawhid* use words for the “oneness” of God that go beyond the numerical: more than one, they suggest one-of-a-kind. I have “translated” this sentiment as “Singularity” in this case.

HERSHEL OF OSTROPOL is an Eastern European (Ashkenazi) Jewish folk hero, especially in the Hasidic tradition. He’s very clever and gets the better of people by the use or misuse of his wits. I highly recommend looking up some Hershel stories.

NASREDDIN HODJA is a Middle Eastern folk hero. Stories about him often treat him as simple-minded and unintentionally wise, or else as a loveable buffoon whose stories shed great light on life. Often, they have religious double-meanings. There is, for example, a statue in Turkey in which Hodja is seated backward on his donkey. The story goes

that neighbors saw him riding this way one morning and asked why. “He wanted to go one way,” said Hodja, “and I wanted to go another. And so we are compromising.” While the story situates Hodja as a likeable fool, further reflection allows us to consider him as God’s fool: in Islam, God guides our lives absolutely. Why do we so often insist, then, on sitting backwards?

TEANCUM was a Book of Mormon hero, known for his resolute personality. He killed the evil Amalickiah and his brother, dying in the process of the second assassination.

SINGH means “lion” in Punjabi and is the name all Sikh men take, sometimes as a last name, sometimes as a middle name. “Kaur,” meaning *princess*, is the female equivalent.

ROSENBERG is a stereotypical Ashkenazi Jewish last name. The difference between a name like this and a Hebrew name is that it clearly comes from the time of exile and has connotations of living as a Jew in an often-hostile surrounding culture.

EKLAVYA was an archer in the Mahabharata, one of India’s national epic poems. Because of his low caste, Eklavya was rejected as a student at Drona’s academy. In the culture of that time, huge emphasis was placed on the student having the proper guru, or teacher, and Eklavya was set on having Drona as his, so he made an idol of Drona and meditated each morning before it for training on his own. He was soon the world’s greatest archer, better even than Drona’s student, the prince Arjuna. One morning, a barking dog distracted Eklavya and, without looking, he turned and shot the mouth of the dog shut. When Arjuna heard about this, he complained to Drona that another archer surpassed him in skill. Drona investigated the matter, found that Eklavya claimed to be one of his students, and demanded Eklavya’s thumb

as payment in order to reduce his abilities below those of Arjuna. Eklavya, devoted to the teacher he respected so much, willingly complied.

KARNA is also a character from the Mahabharata. He was the oldest son of Kunti, and thus brother to Arjuna, but was raised by a stable-keeper and did not know his birth identity. Because he was assumed to be of a low caste, he was also rejected from Drona's academy. He went to study with another sage and once allowed a worm to bore a hole through his leg in order not to wake the sage by moving or crying out.

TEGH BAHADUR, the ninth Sikh Guru, was beheaded by the Mughal Emperor for advocating religious tolerance. In an attempt to intimidate the now leaderless Sikh community, the Emperor left Tegn Bahadur's body out in a public square with orders that anyone who tried to take it would be put to death. Some faithful Sikhs came by night but succeeded in taking only the head to bring to Tegn Bahadur's widow and young son, Gobind Singh, who became the last Sikh Guru.

NEPHI is a Book of Mormon hero who attempted to trade his family's material possessions in Jerusalem in order to obtain the Brass Plates—a record of his ancestors—for his descendants' use, wherever they chose to resettle.

KORIHOR was a Book of Mormon rebel who challenged the prophet Alma to show him a miracle and was miraculously struck dumb for the remainder of his life.

ETHER was the last prophet of the Jaredite nation, as recorded in the Book of Mormon. He hid in a cavity of a rock to escape the civil war that ultimately destroyed his entire civilization.

THE MESSIAH is someone who will come, end history, and heal all wounds. Whether this coming will be a first visit or a second is a matter of significant debate.

THE ZUGOT were five successive pairs of rabbis who were the most enduring teachers of their age. Hillel and Shammai, for example, had famously opposite emphases.

THE TANNAIM were the Jewish scholar-leaders during the period following the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. To them lay the impossible task of putting the customs, teachings, and traditions of a lost land and scattered people into a meaningful written form in order to preserve a displaced Judaism through the ages. Judah the Prince, the Rabbi who completed their initial

written work, felt he had only been able to pass on "as much as a dog laps from the sea."

TWO LIONS: Judah is "a lion's whelp," according to Israel's blessing. Sikh men, since Gobind Singh, have likewise taken upon themselves the blessings of a lion.

THE HUMA is an old Iranian legend, often referred to in Sufi mystical parables and poetry.

ELIJAH was a great prophet, with power to shut up the sky, or else call down fire from it. In Mormon thought, he is better known for turning the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers: his spirit is the reason people search out their ancestors and seek a link to them.

THE WESTERN (WAILING) WALL, along with the traditions preserved by the faithful, was all that was left of the Temple after the Romans destroyed it in 70 AD.

DRONA was the most skilled military teacher on earth in Mahabharat times. He trained the Kauravas and the Pandavas, and he rejected Eklavya, Karna, and other low caste students from his academy. He was forced by circumstance to fight for the Kauravas at Kurukshetra and was killed after Yudhistira, the Pandava brother who was perfectly honest, deceived Drona into thinking his son had died. In grief, Drona stopped fighting and was killed.

PANDAVAS were the sons of Pandu, a King in Mahabharat times—and the "good guys" of the story. Pandu died shortly after their birth, and his brother reigned in his place, waiting for them to come of age. They were as follows: Yudhistira, known for honesty; Arjuna, known for intelligence and his skill as an archer; Bhima, known for physical size, strength, and ferocity; and the twins, Nakula and Sahadeva, known for their good looks.

KAURAVAS, the "bad guys" of the Mahabharat, were the evil cousins of the Pandavas. Their father ruled as king after Pandu's death, and they hoped to succeed him, constantly searching for ways to drive the Pandavas from the kingdom.

MANSUR AL-HALLAJ was a tenth-century Sufi saint who felt God so intensely he hardly cared to distinguish himself from that feeling. He once cried out "Ana Al-Haqq" ("I am the Truth") to express this feeling—and was crucified as a blasphemer for doing so, since Truth is one of the names of God in Islam. Eighteenth-century Urdu poet Mir Taqi Mir later penned a couplet in reference to this incident: "Haven't you heard what

happened to Mansur? / Here, if you say the truth, they kill you.”

BARUCH was a companion and scribe to the prophet Jeremiah. When the first copy of the Book of Lamentations was burned by the leaders to whom it had been sent as a warning, Baruch wrote the entire revelation down again.

MORONI was the last prophet of the Nephites in the Book of Mormon, and a guardian of their records, which he buried in a sacred place to preserve for the future.

BRAR is the name of a Jat clan whose members almost all became converts to Sikhism. Known for tenacity and bravery, one of the Brars’ many claims to fame is that they actually attacked and looted Tamerlane’s troops as he was invading and looting India. He burned whole forests trying to destroy the cover and find them.

RABBI ELIEZER ET AL.: These are rabbis from the era of the Tannaim, whose discussions on the meaning of Passover are included in the traditional Passover Haggadah, read by many Jews to this day. The Sunday School scene, in fact, takes the structure of a specific passage in the Haggadah.

SHIVA is a Hindu god. In one form, Shiva performs a cosmic dance that destroys and re-creates the world with each step.

GURU NANAK was the founder of Sikhism. He was an outspoken advocate of family involvement, honest work, charity, and devotion to God, and an opponent of caste distinction, discrimination against women, and religious duplicity.

JAPJI is a short hymn by Guru Nanak which devout Sikhs, including my great-grandmother, get up to sing before the sun rises each morning.

KURUKSHETRA is the name of the battlefield where the Kauravas and Pandavas waged their final war for the kingdom.

CUMORAH was the site of the final battle between Nephites and Lamanites in the Book of Mormon as well as the place where Moroni ultimately hid the abridged records of his people, engraved on plates of gold.

GHALLUGHARA is a word I learned from a primer in the Punjabi alphabet, Gurmukhi. The word means “holocaust” and is often used to refer to two specific periods in which numerous Sikhs were massacred. ■