

The Association of Jewish Theosophists in the Netherlands: The Efforts of Louis Vet and Others to Revive Judaism*

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Abstract

This article presents and analyses the activities of the Association for Dutch Jewish Theosophists (VJT), which was formed during the Order of the Star of the East congress in 1926. The VJT, which has never been studied before, helped in altering the perception of Judaism in the Netherlands. Dutch Theosophists began to see Judaism and its mystical Kabbalah as a religion with a long history comparable to Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. Prior to the VJT, several Dutch Jewish Theosophists developed other initiatives to educate their brethren and others about Judaism. Although none of these activities were long lasting, they illustrate that Theosophy was an incentive for Dutch Jewish Theosophists to have a fresh look at their own religion. This may even have led them to develop an affinity with progressive Judaism. These developments came to a halt when Jews began to be transported to Camp Westerbork.

Keywords: Jewish Theosophists in the Netherlands; the Order of the Star of the East; Judaism; progressive Judaism; Kabbalah; Shoah

Introduction

The discovery of the existence of the “Vereeniging voor Joodsche Theosofen” (VJT), the Association for Jewish Theosophists in the Netherlands, has opened a new window on Theosophical appropriations and on Dutch Jewish history. The VJT became lost over time until Boaz Huss, initiator of the “Kabbalah and Theosophical Society” project, stumbled upon the Association of Hebrew

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Theosophists (AHT), and in its wake became aware of its Dutch branch, the VJT.¹ Huss tracked down several short articles by the VJT, but since they were in Dutch, he left them aside. By coincidence, I offered to translate these texts and do a quick search on its main author. This turned out to be the first step in unearthing the VJT. The next steps involved identifying the people who participated in the VJT, unravelling their activities, and making an inventory of Dutch Jews who joined the Theosophical Society between 1875 and 1942.² From the material collected it became clear that the VJT was a minor movement during the Interbellum, and lasted at most for seven years. Nevertheless, it had an influence on the perception of the Jewish religion among Dutch Theosophists. What's more, it turned out that several Dutch Jewish Theosophists – even before the formation of the VJT, and most likely inspired by Theosophy – had also undertaken activities to present Judaism in a more favourable light. These activities have to be seen against the background of the following.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Jews in the Netherlands had been drawn to the major cities, where towards the end of the century many had come to live in great poverty. Their dire living conditions were fertile soil for socialist ideals, boldly brought to the fore in the play *Ghetto* (1898), which was written by the liberal Jew and socialist writer Herman Heijermans (1864–1924). Yet *Ghetto* also had strikingly contrasted anti-Semitism with the petty-minded religiosity of Jews themselves. The play, highly criticized by orthodox Jews, had led to heated discussions among the public.³ The socialist movement, and Heijermans' work, had an impact on the self-awareness of Jews. During the first decades of the twentieth century, some had turned to Zionism, and many had assimilated into the Dutch society. The majority considered themselves first and foremost Dutch, then Jewish. Attendance at synagogues became less frequent, typical Jewish (religious) traditions were increasingly ignored and neglected. Nonetheless, most

1. Huss, "In Search of Jewish Theosophists," 17; *Id.*, "Qabbalah, the Theos-Sophia of the Jews," 137.

2. See Nagel, "Supplement."

3. Michman, Beem and Michman, *Pinkas*, 114; Lakmaker, "Herman Heijermans," 46–47.

Dutch Jews stayed in the same neighborhood, they didn't easily enter into mixed marriages, and they held onto a variety of Jewish customs.⁴

To counter this secularization process and the negative views of Judaism, it is most likely that the VJT informed their fellow Theosophists, through the lens of Theosophy, about Judaism's esoteric richness. This was done by the activities of the association's president, Louis Vet (1876–1963), who focussed on the Kabbalah. A decade earlier, a handful of Dutch Jewish Theosophists had been involved in the Association of Liberal Jews in the Netherlands ("Vereeniging van Vrijzinnige Joden in Nederland," VVJN). This association is considered a forerunner of the Dutch Progressive Jewish Congregation ("Liberaal Joodsche Gemeente," LJG) which came into existence in the early 1930s, and grew exponentially with the flood of German Jews after the Nazis had come to power.

This paper will show that the VJT offered the Dutch Theosophists, Dutch Jews and the Dutch in general, a different and more uplifting perspective on Judaism. Moreover, it not only unfolds a new case of "Theosophical appropriation," it sheds light on the religious dynamics of Judaism in the Netherlands during the first decades of the twentieth century.

The Association for Dutch Jewish Theosophists (VJT)

The "Vereeniging voor Joodsche Theosofen" (VJT) was the Dutch branch of the Association of Hebrew Theosophists (AHT). The AHT was launched by twelve Jewish Theosophists taking part in the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the Theosophical Society (TS), at the headquarters of the TS in Adyar, India.⁵ Founded in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) and others, the TS had developed into an esoteric religious movement largely based on Blavatsky's writings. Madame Blavatsky integrated ideas

4. Michman, Beem and Michman, *Pinkas*, 120, 152, 160–61; Michman, *Het Liberale Jodendom*, 24–26.

5. N.N., "Association of Hebrew Theosophists," 246; Huss, "Qabbalah, the Theos-Sophia of the Jews," 141–44.

from Occultism, Neoplatonism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Highly successful lodges sprouted worldwide.

The movement encouraged the comparative study of religion, philosophy and science. A core concept in Blavatsky's teachings concerned the revival of knowledge of an ancient global religion. Supposedly, such wisdom would come again and eclipse the current world religions. Imbued with such ideas, the Jewish Theosophists present at the fiftieth anniversary in December 1925 saw opportunities for both Jews and Theosophists to enrich one another. For that purpose they set up the AHT. The president of the TS at the time, Annie Besant (1847–1933), acknowledged the initiative of the group. She symbolically formalised the AHT by laying the foundation stone for a synagogue at the compound of the TS in Adyar on December 30, 1925, during “an entirely Jewish ceremonial in Hebrew.”⁶

Gaston Polak (1874–1970), an engineer from Brussels and dedicated Theosophist, was assigned as the AHT's president. He immediately announced the establishment of the association in the periodical *The Theosophist*.⁷ Soon after, national branches of Jewish Theosophists were set up in the United States, England, and India. In September 1926, the American group initiated the bulletin *The Jewish Theosophist*. News about this new branch on the tree of the TS also found its way into the Netherlands.⁸

The Dutch branch of the Theosophical Society, the “Theosofische Vereeniging Nederland” (TVN), was officially founded in 1892, seventeen years after the birth of the TS in New York.⁹ A periodical was launched straightaway to keep mem-

6. Perez, “A Short History of the Foundation of the A.H.T.,” 7.

7. Polak, “Appeal to Members of the T.S.,” 103–4.

8. At the end of January 1926, the Dutch public was informed that (at the compound of the TS in Adyar) a Hindu temple, a Buddhist temple, an Islamic mosque, a temple for the Parsees (Zoroastrians), and a chapel for the Liberal Catholic Church were in construction (Annelèn, “Mevrouw W.A.L. Ros-Vrijman over de Theosofie,” *Algemeen Handelsblad* on January 30, 1926). There was no mention yet of the construction of a synagogue. Presumably, this news followed later.

9. For an introduction to the development of the TVN see Bax, *Het web der schepping*, 94–167; Jansen, “... een kern van broederschap ...,” 11–44.

bers informed about the developments of the TVN and the TS abroad.¹⁰ The organisation and its periodical *Theosophia*—since 1948 spelled *Theosofia*—still exist, but the major growth of the movement took place during the first three decades of the twentieth century, when lodges were set up throughout the country. The most active members organized study meetings for lodge members, and lectures for the public in general. On the agenda were subjects like ancient wisdom, reincarnation and karma, the evolution of the soul, the power of thoughts, hypnotism and mesmerism, and the view of Theosophy on religion(s).

A milestone for the movement was the settlement in 1924 of the European headquarters of the Order of the Star of the East (OSE) at the estate of Philip Baron van Pallandt (1889–1979) in Ommen, the Netherlands. The leadership of the TS had installed the OSE thirteen years before, in 1911 in Benares, to prepare the world for the coming of a new religious world leader, the “Maitreya.” Annie Besant and other leading figures of the TS believed that Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986) would become this new Messiah. And just as a Dutch branch of the TS had been set up, a Dutch branch of the OSE was set up: the “Orde van de Ster van het Oosten” (OSO).¹¹

As soon as the decision was made to settle the European headquarters of the OSE in Ommen, an international OSE congress was scheduled for the summer of 1924, in Arnhem. Those interested could afterwards attend the camp organised at the Baron’s estate. About half of the participants in Arnhem went to this event.¹² A major success, the OSE congress was organised as the “Star Camp”

10. *Theosophia* appeared first in May 1892. In 1905 a related yet different bulletin was published: *De Theosofische Beweging* (The Theosophical Movement). It appeared every month until 1940, and was incorporated in the 1931 and 1932 volumes of *Theosophia*.

11. Bax, *Het web der schepping*, 162. The initial meeting of the OSO took place in Utrecht on Sunday January 7, 1912. Towards the end of the year Cornelia Wilhelmina (Corrie) Dijkgraaf (1865–1955), the OSO’s president, informed her audience that the coming of the Messiah was reviving among adherents of all religions, including a Jewish sect in Arabia (“Gisteravond had in de bovenzaal van het Leesmuseum” in the *Apeldoornsche Courant* on December 12, 1912).

12. See “De Orde van de Ster in het Oosten” in the *Arnhemse Courant* on August 13, 1924, and in *Het Vaderland* on August 14, 1924. The first article estimates that 500 people went to Ommen, the second mentions 580.

for the next five years.¹³ Its celebrities were always Annie Besant and Krishnamurti. Even after Krishnamurti resigned as the (anticipated) religious world leader and disbanded the OSE during the 1929 Star Camp, the gatherings continued until 1938.

The third Star Camp, organised in July 1926, was attended by approximately two thousand people from various parts of Europe. The president of the newly formed Association for Hebrew Theosophists, Gaston Polak, was also present. He encouraged the Jewish attendants in Ommen to found regional branches of the internationally oriented AHT, and several Dutch-Jewish Theosophists present in Ommen responded by establishing the VJT.

The Dutch monthly *De Theosofische Beweging* (The Theosophical Movement) announced the formation of this group in a short article. Dated August 1926, it bears no author's name, but must have been written by Louis Vet, the man who had become the VJT's president. The notification addressed two issues. The first concerns the organisation's ideology. At the TS' fiftieth jubilee convention in Adyar, the Jewish attendants had realised, Vet explains, "that Judaism, illuminated by Theosophy, holds many treasures of wisdom that can contribute to the uplifting of humanity in general, but especially for the Jews, who nowadays lack this knowledge."¹⁴ To illustrate his point, Vet mentions the subject of the wisdom surrounding "death and thereafter." For many generations, fear of the unknown and the inability to understand serious loss, had affected people. This had not only led to physical repercussions, it had affected people's souls as well. Vet claims that everywhere in society, traces of special inner knowledge had always been present, including among Jews.

Only Jewish Theosophists could join the VJT: men and women known as Jews, and registered by the TS/TVN as members. However, non-Jews interested in the movement could participate in some way as well, presumably as associate mem-

13. See N.N., "Dr Annie Besant in 't theosofen-Ster-kamp" [photo shoot of the camp], 975-76; N.N., "Een onderhoud met Krishnamurti," 884-85; Cohen, "Association of Hebrew Theosophists," 259; "Het Sterkamp te Ommen" in *Het Vaderland* on August 7, 1938; Schreuder, "De Sterkampen in Ommen," 10-11, 25-33.

14. [Vet], "Vereeniging voor Joodsche Theosofen," 183, translated AN.

bers.¹⁵ The intention of the organisation was to illuminate Judaism through Theosophy, and Theosophy through Judaism. With that, Vet copied faithfully from the document compiled in Adyar by Gaston Polak and Sulman Samuel Cohen (1895–1980), a Jew from Basra, now Iraq, who was active at the TS in Adyar.¹⁶ The tools to reach this goal were, according to Vet, literature and unspecified other means.

Those drawn to the initiative could register themselves—and this leads to the second issue that Vet’s writing addresses. Soon a meeting would be organised to offer further information. Thereupon a list of names and, partly incomplete, addresses was to follow.

The VJT: Louis Vet and eight others

During the late 1920s roughly one hundred thousand Jews resided in the Netherlands. This was less than 2 % of the Dutch population.¹⁷ By 1927, the Dutch Theosophists totalled over 2,700 members.¹⁸ A slightly higher percentage of this group, namely 2,5 %, was Jewish. Their names have been filtered out of the TS General Register kept in Adyar.¹⁹ In total at least one hundred Dutch Jews, mostly either noted in the civil registration system as NI (“Nederlands Israëlich,” i.e. Ashkenazi) or PI (“Portugees Israëlich,” i.e. Sephardi), joined the TS between 1893 and 1938. By 1926 several had resigned, while others had passed away. Consequently, the potential number of registered Jewish Theosophists that may have been sympathetic to the cause of the VJT was limited to about seventy.

15. Louis Vet is unclear in his phrasing, but probably had the outline in mind as published in N.N., “Information to Prospective Members,” 7.

16. Here, Vet clearly cited from Polak, “Appeal to Members of the T.S.,” 4.

17. Michman, Beem and Michman, *Pinkas*, 128–31; Michman, *Het Liberale Jodendom*, 22–23.

18. Hofstra, “De nieuwere religieuze bewegingen in ons land,” 530.

19. It ought to be noted that my compilation of Dutch Jewish Theosophists most likely is incomplete. More Jews could have participated in the TVN, but for one reason or another may have never been registered in Adyar. Also, I may have overlooked certain names when screening the books. The people scrutinized have been scrutinized because I recognized their names as Jewish; when screening the books, I didn’t recognize for instance the name “Denekamp” (see note 27) as (possibly) Jewish.

It is a rather anonymous group, these seventy odd Jewish Theosophists. Only a handful of these men and women did at some point reach the news,²⁰ and another handful link to “more or less famous others.”²¹ The exception is José Vigeveno (1891–1943), who nowadays is still known by some as an influential entrepreneur, art collector, vice-consul of Nicaragua, and secretary of the Theosophical lodge in Amsterdam.²² Of the seven women and one man that Louis Vet listed in his announcement of the VJT, the following is known.

First listed by Vet was Cato Nijburg-Lorjé (1879–1959), a mother of three.²³ She had joined the TS in July 1919, lived in Amersfoort, and owned a stationary shop. She acquired the business knowledge from her favourite brother, Willem Lorjé (1870–1942), to whose wife, Rosa Lorjé-Wolf (1873–1942), she was akin in spirit.

Second on the list was the just mentioned Rosa Lorjé-Wolf. The Lorjés also had three children, and by 1926 owned two stationery shops in Amsterdam. Both shops had sold the entrance tickets for a public lecture in Amsterdam about the Dutch Order of the Star in the East, scheduled on February 9, 1921.²⁴ Besides being a Theosophist, Rosa Lorjé-Wolf was a feminist and politically active.²⁵ Furthermore, the Lorjés had been involved with the periodical *Het Oude Volk – voorheen en thans: maandblad voor vrijzinnige Joden* (The Old People – Then and Now: Monthly Magazine for Freethinking Jews).²⁶ Their bookshop had a

20. For instance, Esther Bekkers-Lopes Cardozo (1880–1943) reached the news as a European championships winner of floret-fencing (“Mevrouw Bekkers-Lopes Cardozo,” *De Telegraaf* on August 2, 1921; “Schermen,” *Algemeen Handelsblad* on February 27, 1912; TS no. 722770 in Nagel, “Supplement”).

21. See Karel A. van Gelder (1875–1972), registered as TS no. 10174; Joseph Toeman (1887–1956), TS no. 37330; Marie Calisch (1877–1964), TS no. 18131; Meijer Goldsmid (1886–1932), TS no. 46993; Leen Hamburger (1895–1964), TS no. 61856, and Jeannette de Vries, TS no. 79850 in Nagel, “Supplement.”

22. N.N., “Vigeveno, José,” 1535; TS no. 60281 in Nagel, “Supplement.”

23. See TS no. 77318 in Nagel, “Supplement.”

24. Advertisement in *De Telegraaf* on February 7, 1921.

25. See TS no. 64501 in Nagel, “Supplement.”

26. Michman, *Het Liberale Jodendom*, 29, 152–55. The purpose of this bi-monthly journal was to elevate the proletarian Jew, and to aid in bringing the “religious inner-life of the modern, liberal Dutch Jew” to fruition (Michman, *Het Liberale Jodendom*, 29, translated AN; see also the articles “Het Oude Volk,” in *De Maasbode* on June 14, 1917, and *Algemeen Handelsblad* on June 20, 1917). The VVJN existed for no more than two years. It intended to guide its members by assigning spiritual teachers

full-page advertisement on the back cover of every single issue of this magazine, which ran three volumes between 1917 and 1920.²⁷ This initiative had led to the establishment in May 1919 of the Jewish reform movement “Vereeniging van Vrijzinnige Joden in Nederland” (VVJN; Association of Liberal Jews in the Netherlands). Rosa Lorjé-Wolf had taken a seat on its board.

The third person mentioned by Vet was the secretary-treasurer of the VJT, Ré Levie (1865–1943). She lived in Bloemendaal, Haarlem’s border village, and made a living as a pianist and music teacher. A Theosophist since 1902, Levie had been quite active for the organisation during the earlier years of her membership.²⁸ For instance, she translated R.W. Emerson’s essay *The Over-Soul* (1841) into Dutch as *De overziel* (1904) for the Theosofische Uitgeversmaatschappij (the Dutch Theosophical Publishing Company). In December 1905 she had put out a call for a Kabbalah study group in Amsterdam, while the TS’ “encouragement for the comparative study of religion, philosophy and science” had ignited her desire to study “the Jewish religion, the Hebrew language, Hebrew scriptures, and most of all the Kabbalah.”²⁹ Since members and non-members of the TS, both Jews and non-Jews, occasionally had expressed the same interest, Levie had launched her idea. She hoped that such a group would elevate the opinion of Jews about their own religion, “especially the more generally developed youth, who now turn away from their religion with defamation and contempt, because they think it is inferior.”³⁰ It is unknown whether her call resulted in the formation of a group, but her private interest led to the presentation of a lecture on the systematic study of Kabbalah for Theosophists in June 1906, at the European TS Congress in Paris.³¹

capable of “deepening the spiritual life” and who would “bring the beauty to the fore that can be drawn from the ancient Jewish teachings” (Michman, *Het Liberale Jodendom*, 153, translated AN).

27. One of the three editors of *Het Oude Volk* was the Theosophist, and stationary bookshop owner, David I. Cardozo (1880–1944) (see TS no. 64500 in Nagel, “Supplement”). Another, Salmine Hermine (Minnie) Denekamp (1878–1944), had a sister-in-law who was a member of the TS lodge Apeldoorn.

28. See TS no. 22495 in Nagel, “Supplement.”

29. Levie, “Studie in Kabbalah c.a.,” 192, translated AN.

30. *Ibid.*

31. “Derde Congres van de Federatie der Theosophische Secties in Europa,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*

Ré Levie had a much younger half-sister, listed by Vet as his fourth: Phine Levie (1890–1943). She was the headmistress of a Montessori nursery school in Amsterdam. Just like her eldest half-sister, Phine Levie was single. Between 1926 and 1929, she was secretary of the Wahana lodge.³²

The fifth on Vet's list also lived in Amsterdam, and was also single. Gerarda Cohen (1875–1930) had worked as an office assistant, and had been the leader of an Order of the Star of the East group in The Hague.³³ Besides, her brother Isaac Th. Cohen van Straaten (1868–1931) — he had officially changed his surname by adding his mother's surname — had been an editor of *Het Oude Volk*, and presided over the VVJN.

Next came Bertha Cohen (1859–1943) from Arnhem, who was also single. She had joined the TS in The Hague, in 1902, and had organised a Theosophical study group at least twice.³⁴ Her sister-in-law was number seven on Vet's list. Until her marriage in 1921, Gertrude Themans-Godschalk (1875–1957) had been a brush manufacturer. Her husband, a nephew, and a sister-in-law were also Theosophists.³⁵

The only man in the group, whom Vet listed as number eight, was Bram Klein (1868–1943). Klein ran a hat shop in Amersfoort. His oldest son had joined the TS, and his sister had married a Theosophist.³⁶

Last but not least comes Louis Vet (1876–1963), single, who ran the bookshop “Firma M. Vet” (M. Vet Company) in Utrecht together with his sister Clara Vet (1873–1935), who was also single. Clara Vet's TS registration had taken place in May 1902; Louis' had followed a year-and-a-half later.³⁷ Prior to taking over their father's business in December 1906, the Vet siblings had worked as teachers. (Louis had been educated as a teacher of the Jewish religion.) Their mutual

on June 9, 1906; N.N. “From Divers Lands,” 275.

32. See TS no. 53827 in Nagel, “Supplement.”

33. See TS no. 58823 in Nagel, “Supplement.”

34. See TS no. 21030 in Nagel, “Supplement.”

35. See TS nos. 107304, 125481, and 62906 in Nagel, “Supplement.”

36. See TS nos. 92012, and 73732 in Nagel, “Supplement.”

37. See TS nos. 21698, and 24857 in Nagel, “Supplement.”

interest in Theosophy showed in their work, and traces back to 1911, when a notification in the local newspaper alerted readers to the fact that tickets for a TS lecture series at the Utrecht lodge could be obtained at Vet's bookshop.³⁸ In 1915, 1916 and 1918 similar advertisements informed the public that the Vet Company sold such tickets. Another indication of the Vets' involvement with the TS concerns the publication of a booklet written by an ardent speaker and writer of Theosophical subjects, Wilhelmina A.L. Ros-Vrijman (1875–1948).³⁹

Within the Dutch world of booksellers, Louis Vet was an engaged and appreciated colleague. His colleagues were aware of his Theosophical studies and knew they had his sincere devotion.⁴⁰ After the foundation of the VJT, this showed publicly through Vet's contributions in *De Theosofische Beweging*,⁴¹ his lectures presented to several lodges of the TS, and a radio broadcast.⁴² The subject of Vet's talks always concerned the Jewish religion seen through the lens of Theosophy.

38. Advertisement "Theosofische Vereeniging," *Utrechtsch Nieuwsblad* on October 18, 1911.

39. Advertisement and announcement in *Nieuwsblad voor den Boekhandel* 93, nos. 32 and 33 (1926): 390, 398. After her marriage in 1901, Mrs Ros-Vrijman began to lecture and write about Theosophy. She did so until 1940. Her husband, Johannes D. Ros (1875–1952), was president of the TS lodge The Hague. The booklet published by the Vet Company, *Nieuwe banen in de Vrijmetselarij* (April 1926; 20 pp.), was based upon a lecture Ros-Vrijman held for the Co-Masonry lodge in The Hague, of which she and her husband were also members.

40. J.B., "L. Vet," 497.

41. [Vet], "Vereeniging voor Joodsche Theosofen," 183–84; Vet, "De Theosofie een Secte?," 239–40; *Id.*, "Samenwerken van Joodsche Theosofen," 36–37; *Id.*, "Boodschap van Dr. Annie Besant," 73 (i.e. Vet's translation of Besant, "To Hebrew Theosophists," 4); *Id.*, "Samenwerking van Joodsche Theosofen," 98–99; *Id.*, "Vervolging van Joodsche Theosofen," 369–71.

42. So far, the references to Louis Vet's lectures that have been found are (date: subject, location): January 28, 1929: "A New(?) Reading of the Old Testament," TS lodge Het Oosten at the 2e van Swindenstraat 9, Amsterdam; March 30, 1930: "The Jewish Religion," TS temple at the Tolstraat 160, Amsterdam; January 14 and 28, February 25, and April 8, 1931: the course "What value does the Old Testament have in our modern time?," TS lodge Utrecht; April 16, 1931: "The unknown value of the Old Testament," TS lodge Bussum; November 15, 1932: "The World Bond between Jewish Theosophists and the Jewish people," HIRO radio broadcast; February 7, 1933: "Judaism in relation to our new society," TS centre Toewijding in Rijswijk; February 17, 1933: "The Caballa," TS lodge at the Witte de Withstraat 9, Amsterdam; March 28, 1933: "The Caballa," TS lodge The Hague; April 25, 1933: "The Cabbala," TS temple at the Tolstraat 160, Amsterdam.

Except for Louis Vet, and a single reference to Ré Levie, none of the names above have surfaced in documents or newspaper articles related to the VJT. The movement, therefore, must have been rather private and rather small. What is interesting to note, however, are the connections between various members of the VJT. They come across as a socially interconnected web of shopkeepers and independent, mainly unmarried, women. It is an image in accordance with Marty Bax's description of networks among Dutch TS members formed by family ties and friendships.⁴³ Such connections often lasted for many years and were passed on to the next generation. It is also an image in accordance with the observation that women "have played significant roles in founding and leading" the TS.⁴⁴

Reaction to the VJT

Louis Vet's announcement in the autumn of 1926 of the establishment of the VJT immediately sparked a response from the Jewish Theosophist Herman van Praag (1882–1942). "Again a new sect?" van Praag queried, all the while considering the creation of the VJT a sad development.⁴⁵ He elucidated his opinion by two more questions: "Haven't we Jews suffered enough from sectarianism?" and "Shouldn't we be happy that there is an organisation like the TS, which wants to form a nucleus of brotherhood without the distinction of race, religion, et cetera?"⁴⁶ The Jewish people have always sought unity, van Praag explained, while each religious Jew daily voices the prayer "Hear Israel the Eternal our God is One."⁴⁷ Van Praag considered the Jewish Theosophists to be better off demonstrating acts of unity towards their Christian Theosophical brothers and sisters than founding a new sect.

Vet replied to the critique by stating that the Theosophist had outgrown sects. According to the TS' beliefs, all religions would in the future become part

43. Bax, *Netwerken in de westerse esoterie*.

44. Wessinger, deChant and Ashcraft, "Theosophy, New Thought, and New Age Movements," 753–56.

45. van Praag, "Weer een nieuwe secte?," 214; TS no. 58413 in Nagel, "Supplement."

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*

of what many Theosophists believed to be the World Religion. If this was the case, and it was the case from Vet's perspective, how could the VJT be viewed as a sect? Vet also explained that Theosophical wisdom would be a delight for Jews, and vice versa, Jews could contribute Jewish wisdom to Theosophists. To give an example, Vet referred to the prayer cited by van Praag. It was not properly translated, he argued. It ought to be "Hear Israel, J H W H our Elohim is One," which Vet considered distinctly different for it contained a singular (J H W H / Jehovah) and a plural (our Elohim) for the Godhead.⁴⁸

In addition to Vet one other Theosophist responded to van Praag's critical remark in *De Theosophische Beweging*. Johannes H. Kengen (1884–1976) from Utrecht. Kengen had a Christian background, and had been a regular speaker for the TS since 1916. Over the years Kengen developed a great interest in religion, so much so that in 1927 he became ordained a priest for the Liberal Catholic Church.⁴⁹ In his response to van Praag, Kengen, careful in his wording, first acknowledged van Praag's pure intention, then described how he noticed a parallel with Roman Catholics who had exchanged their original church for the Liberal Catholic Church. Some of these converts had really struggled to leave the "old" Roman Catholic tradition behind. The remnants of this struggle had caused a sincere resistance toward a new religion, church and rituals, which some, however, had been able to set aside through their "higher insights." Presumably these former Roman Catholics, now Liberal Catholic Church members, had gleaned such insights from Theosophy. Be that as it may, to evolve to the World Religion – here Kengen referred to Annie Besant's

48. Vet, "De Theosofie een Secte?", 240. Vet's plea for precise translations and a proper understanding of Judaism can be linked to Justus Tal (1881–1954). Appointed Chief Rabbi in 1918 in Utrecht and a prolific writer, Tal wanted to bring Jews closer to their people and their religion, but strongly opposed Zionism and Reform Judaism (Hagedoorn, "Tal, Justus").

49. Kengen, "Geachte Redactie!," 238. Kengen, employed by the State Railway Company, engaged in activities ranging from local (social) politics to astrology, and from the TS, beginning in 1911, to the "Religieus Socialistisch Verbond" (Religious Socialists Alliance). He knew the Vets since 1912 or even earlier. In 1912 Kengen and Clara Vet were on the board of the Utrecht department of the "Rein Leven Beweging" (Pure Life Movement).

Evolution and Man's Destiny (1924) — it was necessary to first purify, deepen, and spiritualize the existing religions and their rituals. From this point of view Kengen observed a beautiful terrain to be cultivated by Jewish Theosophists:

There is a great awakening [taking place] among the Old Folk [the Jews] that can be illustrated by the reconstruction of their civilization in Palestine.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, for the time being this is still just a national awakening. It is waiting for the fruitful blessing of religion that cannot come from the circles of Orthodox Jews. For there the same phenomenon is happening as in official Christianity: on the one hand orthodoxy, too tied to the old and believing too much, on the other hand modernism, quite apart from the old, with little or no belief; and both lack the light of Occultism.⁵¹

When the Jewish Theosophists would prepare their people for a new, pure, occult religion, so Kengen opined, the Jews would perhaps be sent a “Great Occultist,” similar to the Christians and Hindus, who had been “given” Charles W. Leadbeater (1854–1934) and J. Krishnamurti respectively. With that Kengen gave a different twist to the idea of the coming of *one* religious world leader: he suggested that each religion could “receive” its own new leader.

Judaism as a major world religion

After this brief, yet serious discussion, *De Theosofische Beweging* published three short updates about the AHT in 1927. A fourth, longer piece followed in 1931. These updates were mainly translations of news Vet had read in *The Jewish Theosophist*. In the first, he was sloppy and unclear in his writing. For instance, Vet agreed that the movement of the Hebrew Theosophists was effective in England, Adyar, the United States and Egypt, and then cryptically added: “In our country presumably the least, because the Jews in all other countries have

50. So far no obvious connections have been noticed in the Netherlands between Dutch (Jewish) Theosophists and Zionists. This contrasts the situation in the Dutch East Indies where Zionists’ activities took place at addresses housing TS lodges (“De opbouw van Palestina,” *De Sumatra Post* on February 14, 1921; “Bandoeng: Poerimfeest,” *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* on March 13, 1930; “De Toekomst van Palestina,” *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* on June 8, 1938).

51. Kengen, “Geachte redactie,” 238–39, translated AN.

received more resistance in their development.”⁵² Considering that the VJT was less effective compared to the AHT branches established elsewhere, Vet probably tried to explain this “fact” through a mechanism of resistance. Jews in the Netherlands supposedly had encountered hardly any opposition; therefore, Dutch Jews lacked incentives to study Judaism or Theosophy. With that, Vet indirectly criticized the secularisation process taking place among Jews.

Vet himself remained passionate about the Jewish Theosophical cause. He quoted in agreement “a brother from Adyar” – most likely S.S. Cohen – who had said that the movement had “the extraordinary opportunity to create a strong chain around all Jewish Theosophists” and that it was important to arouse “a strong passion” among them so it could affect their non-Jewish TS members as well as their “non-Theosophical religious brothers around the world.”⁵³ Vet’s global commitment becomes even more apparent in his last update, a letter to the editor. This writing contains the translation of a circular signed by three rabbis in Bagdad that was published in English in *The Theosophist* of June 1931. The Jewish Iraqi clergy had judged the TS “to hold a new belief which in some respects differs from the Jewish faith.”⁵⁴ Consequently, they had advised the Grand Rabbi of the Basra congregation to have the lodge of the TS “removed away from the vicinity of the Grand Synagogue and to notify all who bear the name of Israel to keep away from this religion which is against the belief of Israel since its foundation up to now.”⁵⁵ Deeply concerned about the discrimination and persecution of his fellow brethren in Basra, Vet had passed on this news also to the chief rabbis in the Netherlands; his letter to them was copied in his letter to the editor.

The news about the AHT and the VJT must have awoken, or stirred further, the interest of Dutch Theosophists for the Jewish religion, and led to

52. Vet, “Samenwerken van Joodsche Theosofen,” 36, translated AN.

53. Ibid. Concerning S.S. Cohen, see Huss, “A Jew Living in an Ashram,” 21–29.

54. N.N., “The Persecution of Hebrew Theosophists,” 363–64.

55. Ibid. Vet, “Vervolging van Joodsche Theosofen,” 369–70. See also Huss, “Qabbalah, the Theos-Sophia of the Jews,” 144.

their belief that Judaism was one of the religions that could be viewed from the Theosophical perspective. After all, the Theosophist Johannes J. Poortman (1896–1970), Dutch but not Jewish, compiled a file entitled “Bibliographical Notes on Judaism and Theosophy.”⁵⁶ And the TS lodge in Amsterdam organized a course — more likely a lecture — on a Sunday in February 1927 about the Jewish religion. Presumably Louis Vet was not the organizer of the course; it must have happened too quickly for him to prepare, given the limited spare time he had. But by January 1929, Vet was ready to present a talk entitled “Een nieuwe(?) vertolking van het Oude Testament” (A New(?) Interpretation of the Old Testament). The question mark between brackets indicates that Vet would not offer a *new* reading of the Old Testament, but return to older, more authentic readings. When the Dutch TS (TVN) organised a series of teachings during the first months of 1930 about the “Great Religions and their Synthesis in the New World,” Vet was scheduled to cover the Jewish religion (fig. 1). Evidently, Judaism was now incorporated within the TVN’s narrative of the great religions; it had cemented its place next to Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.

There is another example to illustrate that Judaism gained its place in the Dutch Theosophical narrative. On Tuesday November 15, 1932, the Humanitarian Idealistic Radio Broadcast devoted the Theosophists’ airing time of twenty minutes to Vet, who then talked about the “world bond” between Jewish Theosophists and the Jewish people.⁵⁷ The broadcast was announced in *Het Vaderland* as: “4.10 pm. Lecture by Louis Vet about ‘The World Bond of Jewish Theosophists and the Jewish People.[.]’”⁵⁸ The announcement appeared in

56. Poortman, “Bibliographical Notes on Judaism and Theosophy,” 15. The file is announced in *The Jewish Theosophist* 1, no. 2 (1926): 17. Involved with the TS since 1915, Poortman became a member of the Dutch Association for the Theosophical World University (TWU), and took part of the TWU-meeting in London in June 1927. Just like Kengen, Poortman was a member of the Liberal Catholic Church, which he joined in 1924 (Vandekerkhove, “Johannes Jacobus Poortman,” 105–10).

57. Members of the TVN launched the “Humanitaire, Idealistische Radio-Omroep” in 1929 (N.N., “De H.I.R.O.,” 121–22; Jansen, “. . . een kern van broederschap . . .,” 139–40).

58. “Radionieuws: H.I.R.O.,” *Het Vaderland* on November 12, 1931, translated AN.

many other newspapers as well, indicating that the broadcast may have reached a substantial audience.



Figure 1. Announcement for a TVN lecture series on world religions in *Algemeen Handelsblad* on January 17, 1930.

Two months later the bookseller from Utrecht began to lecture about Kabbalah — a recurrent subject within Blavatsky’s writings⁵⁹ — presented by Vet as a mystical method to read the Bible. A journalist summed up the presentation delivered at the TS lodge The Hague:

After stating that the Western and Oriental worldviews are so different that it is impossible for Westerners to understand Oriental wisdom if they do not completely detach from their usual point of view, the speaker pointed out that the Jews originally came from India and from there had taken with them the ancient wisdom. On their wanderings they arrived in Egypt, where wisdom was also to be found. The Egyptians had laid out the great

59. Chajes, “Construction Through Appropriation,” 32-68; Pasi, “Oriental Kabbalah,” 157-63.

laws in sizes and numbers in their mighty edifice, the great pyramid. Moses, who was privy to this knowledge, passed it on to his people and put it down in writings that we find in the Bible. These writings, the Mosaic books, contain stories, but the remarkable thing is that behind the words a deeper, hidden meaning is laid down, because the letters are at the same time numbers, and so the words can form numbers. If we want to read the Bible in a cabbalistic manner, we must have the key that reveals the hidden meaning behind the outward story through those numbers. And then we will see that the world events are explained, that certain relationships and laws are revealed. Aided by lighted images, that showed several cabbalistic facts and letters next to each other, these ratios were explained further and it was argued how also here the ancient wisdom gets confirmed.⁶⁰

Even though the “ancient” wisdom passed on by Vet about Judaism may be historically incorrect and altered to fit his Theosophical perspective, it resembles contemporary ideas of non-Jewish, and Jewish Theosophists alike.⁶¹

Interest in the mysterious Kabbalah had been low-key in the Netherlands.⁶² It was mainly known as a secret science (with letters and numbers) to discover the essence of things (and to forecast events). But when the magazine *De Tempel* (The Temple) was founded as a platform in 1923 for diverse, liberal (free) religious movements, “Kabbalah” became included in its subtitle.⁶³ What is more, the series of articles published about that subject were separately published in the bundle *De Qabbalah* (1925).⁶⁴ The interest of Jews in Kabbalah certainly increased. So

60. “Theosophische Vereeniging,” *Het Vaderland* on March 29, 1933, translated AN.

61. See Huss, “Qabbalah, the Theos-Sophia of the Jews,” 144 ff.

62. Between 1900 and 1930 only three books with Kabbala in the title were published. Two involved the Dutch translations of Erich Bischoff’s *Die Kabbalah: Einführung in die jüdische Mystik und Geheimwissenschaft* (1903; *The Kabbalah: Introduction to the Jewish Mysticism and Secret Science*), and Sepharial’s *The Kabala of Numbers* (1914). For the third, see note 64.

63. The full title of the magazine is on volume 1, no. 1 (April 15, 1923) (the subtitle varies in later issues): *De Tempel: tijdschrift gewijd aan vrij religieuze stroomingen: vrijzinnige godsdienst, oostersche- en westersche religie, occultisme, spiritisme, theosofie, astrologie, kabbalah, vrijmetselarij, anthroposofie, rozekeuzers-cosmologie, mystiek, psychical research, wetenschap, architectuur, kunst, religie en wijsbegeerte* (*The Temple: Magazine Devoted to Free Religious Movements: Liberal Religion, Eastern and Western Religion, Occultism, Spiritism, Theosophy, Astrology, Kabbalah, Freemasonry, Anthroposophy, Rosicrucian Cosmology, Mysticism, Psychical Research, Science, Architecture, Art, Religion and Philosophy*).

64. These articles appeared under the heading “De Qabbalah,” or “De praktische Qabbalah,” in

when the Society for Jewish Scholarship invited in February 1929 Dr Hermann Morath from Leipzig to speak about “The Science of Kabbalah” for the Dutch Israeli Seminary in Amsterdam, the hall was packed.⁶⁵

A year later *Theosophia* enlightened its readers on the Kabbalah from a Theosophical point of view. This was followed in 1933 by an article in *De Theosofische Beweging*.⁶⁶ It goes beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on the content of these articles, and to explore how Kabbalah was interpreted by the Dutch Theosophists. All that can be said here is that Kabbalah, as the mystical tradition of the Jewish religion, had become incorporated into the Dutch Theosophical discourse by the early 1930s.

In the 1933 summer issue of *Theosophia*, an article was devoted to the recent persecution of Jews. The author, Curuppumullage Jinarajadasa (1875-1953), tried to find an answer to the question of why Central Europe (Germany) carried “the terrible hate bacillus in its organism” and how to tackle the hatred towards their Jewish brothers.⁶⁷ By 1939 this problem had intensified. The flood of Jewish refugees and immigrants, and the anti-Semitic German politics concerned members of the TVN. A committee was installed to aid in finding the Theosophical point(s) of view on this complicated, troubling matter.⁶⁸

De Tempel 2 (1924): 125-27, 160-61, 176-78, 194-95, 210-11, 253-54, 270-71, 355-59. *De Qabbalah (Joodsche geheimleer)* (1925; The Kabbalah (Jewish Secret Science)) was published in the “Tempel-series” by De Vrij Religieuze Tempel, Amsterdam, and was advertised in *De Tempel* volume 3.

65. Notwithstanding the interest of the public, the host of the evening and president of the Society for Jewish Scholarship, Professor Jehuda L. Palache (1886-1944), was so disappointed with Morath’s lecture that he didn’t leave time for discussion. Morath had talked about the “Bar Tanjoh,” also named “Bal-Schem Tow” and “Rabbi Löw and the legendary Golem in Prague,” but had not reached the academic standards Palache anticipated (“Joodsche Wetenschap” in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, and “De wetenschap der Kabbalah” in *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, both on February 26, 1929; see also “Genootschap voor de Joodsche Wetenschap in Nederland: Jaarverslag” in the *Nieuw Israelietisch Weekblad* on June 7, 1929).

66. Dijk, “De Kabbalah,” 372-79, 413-21; Gomperts-van Embden, “Kabbalah en Sefiroth,” 62-67.

67. Jinarajadasa, “Jodenvervolgung,” 246-67, translated AN. The original text appeared in *The Theosophist* (June 1933): 257-58.

68. N.N., “Jodenvervolgung,” 26; *Id.*, “Martin Buber over de levenstaak van de Joden in deze tijd,” 58; *Id.*, “De Joden in Polen,” 58-60; Schimmel, “Het Joodse vraagstuk,” 139-47.

Earlier activities of Jewish Theosophists

The founding of the VJT comes across as an immediate response to the plea of Gaston Polak to fellow Jewish Theosophists during the Star Camp in 1926. There may have been, however, more at play. According to Dan Michman, in his thorough study of the founding years of progressive Judaism in the Netherlands, the publication of *Het Oude Volk* (1917–1920) and the formation of the VVJN in 1919 was an early liberal Jewish reform movement that disappeared without a whimper.⁶⁹ Overlooked by Michman is the fact that this movement was initiated by Theosophists, namely David I. Cardozo and Willem and Rosa Lorjé, and two others who were closely related to Jewish Theosophists — Isaac Cohen van Straaten and Minnie Denekamp, who was the main editor of *Het Oude Volk* until May 1919.⁷⁰ Michman also overlooked, or neglected, the fact that the VVJN participated in the conference organized by the preliminary committee of the “Federatie van Vrije Religieuze Groepen en Organisaties” (FVRGO; Federation of Free Religious Groups and Organisations).⁷¹ Participants in this event, organised in Amsterdam on May 29, 1919, ranged from Theosophists to members of Christian movements, Freemasonry lodges, and the Spiritist’s Brotherhood Harmonia. At the end of the conference the preliminary committee under the leader of the Dutch Order of the Star in the East was set up to make further preparations for the official instalment of the FVRGO. By January 1921, the Theosophist José Vigeveno had become the federation’s secretary.⁷²

69. Michman, *Het Liberale Jodendom*, 30.

70. See note 27. After her editorship, Minnie Denekamp became a “spiritual teacher” and the coordinator of courses in liberal education about the Jewish religion to children aged ten to sixteen (see the advertisement for the VVJN in the *Israelietisch Weekblad* on December 20, 1918; see also “Vereeniging van vrijzinnige Joden in Nederland” in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* on December 12, 1918).

71. “Congres Religieuze Federatie,” *Algemeen Handelsblad* on May 30, 1919; N.N., “Federatie van Vrij-Religieuze Groepen en Organisaties,” 82–85.

72. “Federatie van Vrij-Religieuze groepen en organisaties,” *Algemeen Handelsblad* on January 17, 1921. The article states also that the VVJN had manoeuvred itself into a state of decay and had withdrawn from the federation.



Figure 2. The cover of *De Tempel* 3, no. 9 (1925).

The FVRGO established the periodical *De Tempel*, i.e. the magazine carrying “Kabbalah” in its subtitle. Together with forty others, Vigevano had a seat on the editorial board of this extraordinary, religiously multifaceted, bi-monthly magazine. On a regular basis *De Tempel* carried a variety of Jewish subjects which informed its audience about the richness of Judaism (fig. 2).⁷³ After three volumes, the publication had come to a halt at the end of March 1926 – only a few months before the VJT was founded. Perhaps *De Tempel* and its “death”

73. These articles were mostly written by Jewish journalist Nico Salmon Godfried (1890-1932).

had prepared the ground for Louis Vet, and the eight other Jewish Theosophists to get involved with the VJT? Perhaps the VJT was in some way a restart of the VVJN, an organisation that operated solely from a Theosophical perspective?

These are open questions. And there is yet another open question. As said, Dan Michman identified the VVJN as an early progressive Jewish movement, but didn't notice it was ideologically driven by Theosophy. Might there have been more connections between Jewish Theosophists and members of the “*Liberale Joodse Gemeente*” (LJG, Progressive Jewish Congregation) in the Netherlands?

The World Union of Progressive Judaism (WUPJ), founded in London in 1926, had targeted countries where large groups of unorthodox Jews had not yet parted from their orthodox religious institutions. The WUPJ considered the Netherlands a perfect target, because both the Portuguese-Israeli and the Dutch-Israeli congregations had remained orthodox in nature, whereas many members of their declined numbers had privately become quite liberal. Consequently, the president of the WUPJ, Lilian Helen (Lily) Montagu (1873–1963), initiated contact with a few Jewish families in the Netherlands in the beginning of 1929.⁷⁴ This was just a few months before the Federation of Free Religious Groups and Organisations was abolished in May 1929,⁷⁵ and Krishnamurti renounced the role that he had been expected to play as the new religious world leader on August 3, 1929.

The first LJG was installed in The Hague (October 1931), followed by a second in Amsterdam (January 1932). Both congregations grew in number, especially in Amsterdam, where German Jews settled after Hitler had been sworn in as Chancellor on January 30, 1933. In the meantime many Theosophists had left the TVN. Accordingly, the very modern building known as “The Free Religious Temple” – built by the TVN at Tolstraat 160 in Amsterdam and officially opened by Annie Besant on July 9, 1927 – became too expensive to maintain (fig. 3a & b). To cut costs, the TVN decided to refurbish the interior of the building into an audito-

74. Michman, *Het Liberale Jodendom*, 36–37.

75. “De federatie herdacht: 1919 - 29 Mei - 1929,” *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* on May 29, 1929.

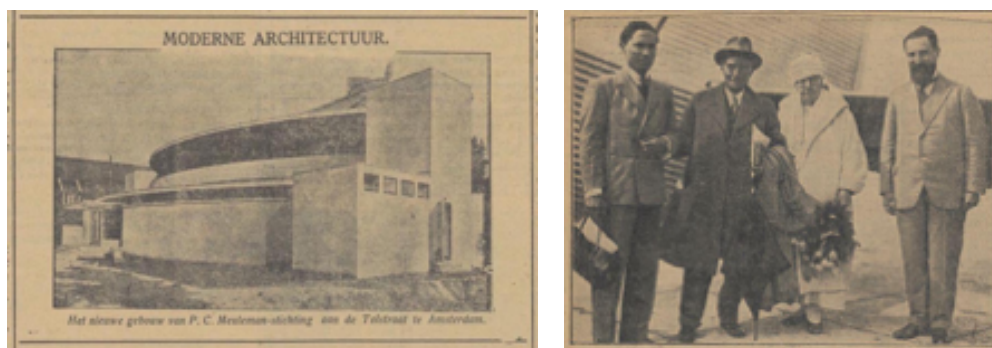


Figure 3a & b. Left, the Free Religious Temple (*Nieuwe Venlosche Courant* on July 12, 1927). Right, from left to right, Y. Prasad, C. Jinarajadas, Annie Besant, and José Vigeveno (*Algemeen Handelsblad* on July 11, 1927).

rium in 1933, and to rent it out to others.⁷⁶ The LJG began to make use of this facility. Most likely José Vigeveno was involved in the negotiations with members of the LJG about the agreement. In 1937 the TVN allowed the LJG to convert the building at Tolstraat 160 into a synagogue.⁷⁷ It is unknown whether Jewish Theosophists may have been attracted to the LJG. Yet with most Jewish Theosophists living in Amsterdam, and their former temple having become a synagogue, it is very likely that connections between members of both groups were not uncommon.

Aftermath of the Dutch Jewish Theosophists

The LJG in Amsterdam thrived until the early 1940s with an estimated, but probably exaggerated number of nine hundred families.⁷⁸ The synagogue at

76. N.N., “De vrij-religieuze tempel te Amsterdam,” 598; Heijdra et al., *Kroniek Cinétol*, 38; Jansen, “... een kern van broederschap . . .,” 68–71.

77. Michman, *Het Liberale Jodendom*, 122–23; Heijdra, *Kroniek Cinétol*, 39; Schreuder and Van Kessel, *Community Cinétol*, 44–47. In 1934 “Mrs Vigeveno” stepped down as a board member of the LJG in Amsterdam (Michman, *Het Liberale Jodendom*, 115). Perhaps she was the wife of José Vigeveno, Ilse Vigeveno-Benario (1899–1950).

78. Based on the figures of 1938 (ca. 180 families in Amsterdam, and ca. 230 in total in the Netherlands), Michman estimated the number of 900 too high (Michman, *Het Liberale Jodendom*, 142).



Figure 4. Louis Vet during a meeting of bookshop owners on July 4, 1939.

Tolstraat was in use until 1941. That same year the German invaders forced the TVN to dissolve and confiscated their properties. The synagogue became transformed into a cinema to feature many Nazi propaganda films.

The last reference found concerning Louis Vet's Theosophical activities is dated April 1933. The abrupt halt to his lectures for lodges of the TVN may be related to his sister. After a long illness, Clara Vet died on September 1, 1935. Vet may have needed to put in more hours running the shop (fig. 4).⁷⁹ An equally plausible explanation for his disappearance from the public eye as Theosophist may be connected to Hitler's politics. Many people with alternative views on life were sensitive and careful not to stir up controversy. In any case, Vet remained an active, critical, passionate bookseller until August 1941, when due to the government's instalment of anti-Jewish regulations in March 1941, the company was assigned an administrator.⁸⁰

79. J.B., "Mejuffrouw Clara Vet †," 594.

80. N.N., "Vereeniging ter Bevordering van de Belangen des Boekhandels," 464, 467; "Nieuwe

In June 1942, the grounds of the Star Camp in Ommen were rebuilt into a prison camp. The following month, Jews began to be transported from Camp Westerbork to Poland. By the end of April 1943 Louis Vet went underground. He survived. Two other members of the VJT survived also, as did twenty of the one hundred people listed as Jewish Theosophists, in contrast to the thirty-five on the list that were murdered.

Three months after the war Vet resumed his business at Oudegracht 261 in Utrecht. “ARISEN!” he happily announced in newspapers.⁸¹ In 1958, Vet, aged 82, stepped back from his life’s work. A young man took over and changed the name of the shop. The last five years of his life, the old bookseller, small and slender, spectacled and a bit eccentric, lived in the home for elderly Jews in Amsterdam, where he participated in religious festivities.⁸²

Conclusion

The Dutch Association for Jewish Theosophists (VJT), existing between 1926 and 1933, and perhaps mainly embodied by its president, Louis Vet, was in sync with the outlines developed by the Association of Hebrew Theosophists. Theosophy enabled Jews like Ré Levie, Rosa Lorjé-Wolf, and Louis Vet to look anew and with pride at their own religion. Vet presented Judaism to his (Theosophical) audience as a major, rich, world religion having its own ancient, mystical tradition (Kabbalah).

Before the VJT, the periodicals *Het Oude Volk* (1917–1920) and *De Tempel* (1923–1927) had informed their readers about Judaism. Both periodicals and the organisations behind them, the Association of Liberal Jews in the Netherlands (VVJN) and the Federation of Free Religious Groups and Organisations (FVRGO), were intimately linked to Jewish Theosophists, but had less of a Theosophical lens on Judaism. Nevertheless, due to the influence of Theosophy, Dutch Jews and non-Jews alike gained a different, more positive view on Judaism.

beheerders en bewindvoerders,” *De Tijd* on October 1, 1941.

81. Advertisement in *Het Parool* on July 11, 1945, and in *Irene* on July 27, 1945.

82. “De Joodse Invalide,” *Nieuw Israelietisch Weekblad* on September 20, 1958.

Taking into account the small number of Jews who joined the TS after 1926, the conclusion is that the VJT may have raised the interest among Dutch Jews about the teachings of the Theosophical Society, but certainly didn't lead to an increase in the number of Jewish Theosophists. On the other hand, the activities of Jewish Theosophists surely paved the way between the Theosophical Society in the Netherlands (TVN) and the Progressive Jewish Congregation (LJG) in Amsterdam: when in 1933 the latter needed a building for worship, they were given permission to use their Free Religious Temple and to convert it, in 1937, into a synagogue.

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