CHAPTER 10

The Biopolitics of Complementary Spiritual Healing in South Korea and Israel

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In April 2021, I interview Jenn, a Korean shaman (*manshin*) in her thirties, via Zoom.[1] She tells me how she suffered from multiple aches throughout her twenties:

> My back, knee, and other joints felt constantly painful, and several surgeries failed to bring relief. I was frustrated, depressed, and almost disabled. This began to change when I learned from an experienced manshin that it was all because I was destined to become a manshin myself, and so I began to meet

[1] I use the term South Korea or Korea to refer to the Republic of South Korea. I transliterate Korean words using the McCune-Reischauer system. However, I use *shi* to guide proper pronunciation. Manshin are Korean traditional healers who practice possession trance to communicate with spirits and gods. The overarching term for Korean shamanism (*musok*) embraces other practitioners, called *sesŭp-mu*, who perform similar rituals without possession and who are not believed to embody supernatural entities.

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> her [the older manshin] often. Having been raised Catholic, and living in New York, this seemed a very far-fetched prospect for me. My family [from Korea] was heavily against me being initiated.

In another interview I asked her, "Can you imagine a doctor telling a hospitalized patient that he recommends treatment by a manshin?" She chuckles bitterly and says, "It is difficult to even think of it as an option, but I wish it were a possibility".

The Korean name for Jenn's health problem is *shinbyŏng*, spirit-inflicted illness, and the symptoms include both the physical—ranging from unexplained bodily pains to cancer—and the psychological—including psychiatrically diagnosed schizophrenia and depression. From the perspective of *musok* (Korean shamanism), shinbyŏng patients are possessed by spirits. They can be healed only when they are initiated into the role of spiritual healer, after learning to communicate with the supernatural in controlled possession-trance rituals.

Most contemporary urban manshin say that they were diagnosed and treated by various conventional doctors for years to no avail and stress that the spiritual healing they underwent was a lifesaving experience. "I was paralyzed for six months, and the doctors did not know what it was", says Sŏ, recalling her suffering as a teenager. "I could not move my right arm, and any touch on my skin felt like a burn", says Kim of her days before she was diagnosed with shinbyŏng by a manshin. Similarly, Mrs Yang, the mother of a male manshin, tells me, "I was sure that my son was going to die, with years of headaches that made him want to commit suicide. I am Christian, but could not avoid feeling relieved when his situation improved everytime he met the manshin [the practitioner with whom he began to apprentice]." These patients' health problems did not go unnoticed by the medical doctors they met, but even after exhaustive tests and lab work, there was no clear diagnosis, and no treatment that could eliminate the symptoms.

There are 300,000 practitioners of musok listed in their professional organizations, which means that millions of clients trust them and view their healing as beneficial. Nevertheless, no such healing is offered by scientifically trained medical specialists in Korea or elsewhere, and health care systems that allow patients to choose their medical providers do not include manshin. This is not because musok is illegal in contemporary Korea (though it used to be in some premodern periods), or because it is viewed as harmful to patients' health. Rather, it is simply not perceived as

a legitimate medical treatment by the public health system. It is a parallel path to healing, one that most Koreans use at some point in their lives and that is widely practiced even in hypermodern cities, but that has not been incorporated into modern medicine.

Should the individual's right to healthcare be extended to include spiritual folk healers? Most doctors would probably view such a suggestion as mere provocation, but anthropologists, who value the emic views of our interlocutors and avoid judging their phenomenological understanding, we should at least give this idea more serious consideration.

Research has already firmly established that religion is not dying out in hypermodern social conditions. Around the world, an updated Christianity remains highly influential, Islam has gained new strength, pagan spirituality is widespread—and religious healing is still tightly bound up with the manner in which many view their health. Acceptance of liminal, religious healers has been observed worldwide, including within Catholicism, as attested by Pardo (1996, 118–124). Paradoxically, as in other cases of ritual and the sacred, "that which is excluded from the community is, in reality, that on which the entire life of the community is founded, and it is assumed by society as the immemorial, yet memorable, past" (McLoughlin, 2010, 7). Thus, many premodern, vernacular health practices have persisted.

Indeed, in most contemporary urban societies, health problems are treated not just by industrially produced chemicals and medical interventions performed in modern hospitals, but also by traditional religious healers. Nevertheless, these two sets of methods do not rest on the same cultural footing and are not perceived as commensurate in the hierarchy of accepted healing methods. This is not because all modern medical treatments succeed and all traditional healing practices fail. Rather, it is related to the politics of knowledge production and control of the means to maintain what Giorgio Agamben calls the "bare life" of people within a society (1998; 2000). The politics of meaning carries no less weight in medical discourse than the need to keep people alive. As Agamben explains, in most hypermodern societies, the governing elites decide what is included or excluded from public systems, including the system of health services.

We can easily guess where traditional spiritual healing falls within this structure. Most Koreans, including spiritual healers and their clients, accept that, because of its religious origins, spiritual healing is a private matter, outside the legitimate medical discourse. Although it is legal, such healing is not accepted as a legitimate practice that can be included in the

modern system. The inverse is true as well: what is legitimate is not necessarily legal, as in cases where doctors prescribe expensive medications because they receive benefits from the pharmaceutical industry (Pardo, 2004). The medical profession's structure maintains power in the hands of the government, in what Foucault calls biopolitics, an essential control of citizens' bodies (1979). Thus, folk healing is excluded altogether from the framework of scientifically endorsed medicine.

Ethnographers in many places have documented how spiritual healing is marginalized despite its efforts to be incorporated as a supplement to—not a replacement of—Western medicine. Two examples are China (Yang, 2015, 72) and Siberia (Van Deusen, 2004). There, spiritual healers were condemned for "superstition" when the real concern was that they were operating outside the system and thus bypassing state supervision. This kind of governmental response has been harsher in nondemocratic societies, such as the USSR and the South Korean military dictatorship of the 1970–1980s, because such regimes do not consider broad public legitimacy as a relevant factor.

Just as scientific medicine excludes traditional healing, it is also the case that most healers are disinterested in testing their methods through the scientific process, and so they remain liminal. Such liminality bears stigma and social marginalization, but it is also, as Pardo (1996, 119) asserts of Christians in Naples, significant "in the construction of roles which allow so much that is out-of-the-ordinary to be explained". While the government's sovereignty over public health entails the exclusion of non-modern forms of healing, healers practice complementary or alternative medicine, terms that inherently denote marginality but also represent practical capacity.

In religious and spiritual healing, certain individuals are believed to be able to communicate with supernatural entities in order to enhance the health of believers and clients. This chapter compares two such belief systems and practices—tsaddik veneration in Israel and manshin possession-trance rituals in South Korea. The medical institutions in both countries view these folk healing practices with suspicion. To them, the healers are charlatans who take advantage of ill people at their most vulnerable. Most medical doctors do not see any healing potential in supernatural intervention, because it stands in contradiction to scientific thinking and usually does not focus on the body at all. However, many contemporary urban people still seek miracles of scientifically unexplained healing.

I have followed groups of tsaddik venerators in Israel, led by Rabbi Yaacov Ifargan, since the late 1990s, and Korean manshin since the mid-2000s. Although the Israeli case represents vernacular monotheism, while the Korean case exemplifies polytheism, they are similar in their perception and practice of spiritual healing. Moreover, institutionalized medicine in both countries has been far from supportive; although in both cases patients do not exclude conventional medical treatment from their healing process.

Religious healing is an attempt to regain control of an otherwise chaotic biological situation, and especially of chronic or terminal illnesses. The flexibility of vernacular religious healing makes it accessible and plausible even to urbanites who rarely engage in religious practices in their daily routines. Secular patients might search for professional spiritual healers because they do not feel knowledgeable enough to determine which chant, offering, or ritual can help. When institutional medical doctors say that they have no cure, then even atheistic, sceptical people might search for less scientific healing methods. This is when the help of manshin in Korea and tsaddik-venerating rabbis in Israel are most often sought out.

In the chapter, I discuss three aspects of spiritual healing. First, I analyse and compare cosmological perspectives on the supernatural, the body, and illness. Second, I discuss the roles of healers and patients in the treatment. Third, I examine how spiritual healers view modern medicine and how doctors react to spiritual practices of healing.

Healing Through Lived Religion: The Cosmological Perspective

In Korea and Israel, many people believe that illness is often the result of spiritual weaknesses, be they angry spirits of the natural elements in Korea or punishment for sins in the Jewish tradition. It is believed that health may be enhanced through rituals that address supernatural entities whose powers are thus harnessed for personal well-being. In analysing the Korean and Jewish belief systems in relation to health, we see that, although they stem from contrasting religious worldviews, their understandings of how illness and health are related to supernatural interventions are similar. Nevertheless, not all Koreans or Israelis use the services of spiritual healers. Most Christians in Korea refrain from consulting manshin (although some do so in secret), and many atheist Israelis and Ultra-Orthodox Jews

refrain from venerating tsaddikim who are important to Hasidic groups (as will be explained below). The controversial nature of such spiritual healing practices, which are based on direct communication with supernatural entities, is similar to that of vernacular practices of Catholics in Naples (Pardo, 1996) and elsewhere. The legitimacy of these lived religions is a social construct and needs to be explored within its context (Pardo & Prato, 2019).

The Healing Potential of Deceased Tsaddikim in Israel

In Jewish tradition, health and illness are under God's control. People pray for health, even in the most conventional Saturday and holiday texts. While Judaism is monotheistic, it admits a category of supernatural entities who can mediate between people and God. They are saints, or *tsaddikim* (sing. *tsaddik*), who are "seated close to the seat of honour" of God because of their outstanding virtue while alive. Tsaddikim accrued merit thanks to extraordinary acts, such as studying the Bible incessantly or helping the poor. Traditional Judaism envisions tsaddikim's merit transferring to living people as an act initiated by God, but the belief that gravesite visits and praying to the tsaddik directly can heal transfers the agency to the spirit of the dead rather than the almighty God. This is one of the reasons that some of the Orthodox groups resent these beliefs. Nevertheless, enduring beliefs in the power of the tsaddikim's graves are observable in those that have become pilgrimage sites.

The most famous health-related gravesites outside Israel are those of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994), known as the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who is buried in New York City (for his life, teaching, veneration, and role in healing, see Heilman & Friedman, 2010; Dein, 2011), and of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772–1810) in Uman, Ukraine (for his life and teaching, see Mark, 2009). Both gravesites attract thousands of pilgrims daily, and several hundred thousand around each rabbi's *hillula* (anniversary of the tsaddik's death). These auspicious dates are widely celebrated, as will be elaborated below, which emphasizes the agency of the tsaddik's spirit and the belief that it is an entity with its own healing power.

The two most famous hillulas of tsaddikim in Israel are those of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (second century CE) in the spring, and of the Baba Sali (1889–1984 CE) in the winter. On each of these dates, more than a hundred thousand venerators come to pray and feast near the grave. In

addition to individual members of the general public visiting sacred gravesites, there are specialized rabbis who perform rituals for the deceased tsaddik. Such rabbis are also called tsaddikim because the believers perceive them as people with powers beyond the normal. It is believed that they can heal thanks to their own special connection with God and with the spirits of deceased tsaddikim; some of them are relatives or spirits that appear in dreams and visions of the living rabbis.

One such case is Rabbi Yaacov Ifargan of Netivot town in Israel, whose nickname is *ha-Roentgen* (the X-ray), for his perceived ability to diagnose people solely through his own merit. Since the 1960s, the southern town of Netivot in Israel has become an important pilgrimage site, as several virtuous rabbis who immigrated to Israel from Morocco are buried there, including the Baba Sali and the Roentgen's father, Shalom Ifargan. Yaacov Ifargan was a preeminent healer in the 1990s and early 2000s. In 1999 and 2000, I participated in hillula events that he celebrated to honour his deceased father, Rabbi Shalom Ifargan. In one speech, he told the thousands of participants that his father had not been so famous while he lived because he carried out his charitable works far from the spotlight, as a *tsaddik nistar* (hidden saint). In saying this, Ifargan hinted that the famous Baba Sali, who is buried in the same cemetery, was not necessarily saintlier than Ifargan's own father; rather, Baba Sali and his followers were more interested in publicity. When corruption scandals surrounding Ifargan erupted in the media in the late 1990s, he claimed that they were all false accusations invented by Baba Sali's followers, who were jealous of his success. The public was suspicious, however, and Ifargan's popularity diminished. I continued to follow news of him and participated in virtual ceremonies and lectures that he conducted in 2020 and 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The diminishing numbers of his adherents following the scandals attest that in the quest for healing, the faith that people have in the living tsaddik is no less important than their belief in the merits of the dead one.

The enduring strong belief in his powers to heal can be seen in the pleas of his current adherents. For example, on the day Sahlom Ifargan's hillula in 2021, Rabbi Yaacov Ifargan posted on his Facebook page a video invitation to send requests before the live broadcast. These requests, which were posted as comments, included the specifics of an illness or injury to be healed. A very touching request was sent by Michel Msika, saying, "Respected rabbi, please bless my granddaughter Shira-Haya daughter of Keren-Marcel. She was injured very badly on Mt. Hermon 15 months

ago, and is still not communicating with us. We hope that she will be up on her feet and communicating with us. Thank you, respected rabbi." A request by Nati and Gili Branes reads, "Please, I beg you, pray for my daughter Shira, who exactly a year ago today was in a terrible car accident and has been in a coma since then. Please pray for salvation and heaven's pity, so with the help of God a miracle will happen and she will awake healthy in body and soul, amen." Such requests suggest the strong belief of some venerators that Ifargan can mediate between them and the supernatural to perform health-related miracles.

Many ancient tsaddik gravesites are scattered in Israel, mainly in the Galilee region. One such ancient stone dome located in a forest near the town of Safed is the assumed burial site of Yonatan ben Uziel (first century CE), a tsaddik who is believed to bring about good matrimonial matches. Certain rabbis perform *tikkun hatsot* (midnight rectification) ritual there regularly. In the late 1990s, I followed Rabbi Yaacov Ifargan during his weekly rituals at the gravesite of Yonatan ben Uziel (Sarfati, 2018). During these rituals, which hundreds or thousands of venerators attended every week, people with illnesses often stepped up to the rabbi and asked for help. He was believed to channel Yonatan ben Uziel's supernatural abilities while performing near the gravesite.

Hasidic tsaddik venerators, such as the rabbis discussed above, are scorned by some parts of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community. In the Hasidic tradition, sects are led by hereditary rabbis who are seen as having seemingly superhuman powers. More traditional rabbis view this near-deification as a sort of pantheism. They especially criticize veneration of the dead as improper for Jews. This strife began when charismatic rabbis began a spiritual revival in Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century (Segal and Blondheim 2018). Moreover, many well-established rabbis criticize charismatic rabbis such as Ifargan for not having led a religious lifestyle in their youth and view their conversion into the ultra-Orthodox way of life as insincere and driven by economic gain.

The Healing Potential of Spirits and Gods in Korea

In the shamanic perspective of Korean vernacular religions, human and supernatural entities can interact with each other directly. Humans can pray and talk to the spirits of deceased people or to the powers of nature, and these entities can respond through various acts, including causing sickness or healing. When supernatural entities are venerated properly,

they are happy and bless the venerators with good health. If they feel neglected or disrespected, they might inflict illness. Manshin Jenn, whose words opened this chapter, experienced shinbyŏng as a result of ignoring the spirits' request that she become an ardent venerator whom they can possess, and who dedicates her life to making them happy. The initial requests came in the form of dreams and visions but, when she did not respond as the spirits wanted, they made her ill. She said, "Only when I finally found a shaman to consult, after several years of anxiety and pain, did I get actual healing options. When I participated in the rituals, my pains gradually decreased." She thinks that, had she not accepted the role of manshin, she probably still would be very ill. The spirits are not viewed as very compassionate in such a case.

Most manshin are female, while most spirits are male. The venerated ancestors and historic figures were mostly preeminent men, whereas the most commonly venerated female ancestor is a deceased manshin called *shin halmŏni* (spirit grandmother). Nature spirits, such as *sanshin* (the mountain god) and *ch'ilsŏng* (the spirit of the constellation Ursa Major) are mostly male, although in some cases they have wives, who can also help in healing. Not all the gods are perceived as merciful. Some are venerated because it is believed that they can cause illness. Angry ancestors are the most feared ones. For example, people who died in tragic circumstances are viewed as seeking revenge and might cause illness. In such a case, a more benevolent entity, such as sanshin, can be called to help convince the angry spirit to stop aggravating the patient's body and allow their proper healing.

The spirits of smallpox and other diseases are called, if male, *hogu pyŏlsŏng* (spirit of illness) and, if female, *hogu aegisshi* (girl spirit of illness). They often belong to young people who died of disease (Kim, 1993). Having died before marrying, they do not receive ancestor worship, which in Korea is performed by the person's offspring. Such spirits feel neglected and therefore need constant appeasing to prevent them from causing harm. Manshin entertain them with special songs called *muga* and festive rice cakes. They often call these spirits *sonnim* (guests) and welcome them with food, but they convince them to leave soon after, as one would with a visitor. The ritual of sending these spirits off includes offering steamed sorghum or millet in a straw basket placed on a tree outside the village (Kim, n.d.).

The cosmology of musok does not have a fixed hierarchy. There is no supreme God among the multiple entities that manshin venerate. The

term *manshin* itself reflects this characteristic, because *man* means 10,000 and *shin* is spirit or God. Thus, practitioners are called 10,000 spirits to signal that they venerate a wide variety of entities. Each manshin has a unique pantheon, in which ancestors play an important role as personal guardians, and natural elements can offer support. Mythical creatures are expected to behave in accordance with their persona in the myths, and thus, if they are described as healers, the manshin can ask them to heal their patients. Such a famously compassionate spirit is Princess Pari, an abandoned daughter who, after many hardships and supernatural encounters, returns home and heals her dying father (Pettid, 2000).

When someone needs healing, a manshin asks the spirits to check for a supernatural grudge or disharmony that might be causing the disease. This can be an angry spirit dwelling in the house or its surroundings who is not being venerated at all, or an ancestor who has not been tended with the proper vernacular ancestor rites. In such cases, the spirits that surround the manshin can negotiate how the patient may appease the angry entity. In this perspective, if a person ignores the signals that supernatural entities send, such as illness, the condition might get worse and may even result in death. Initiated manshin are not exempt from such a danger and, as a precaution, they maintain a routine of veneration dedicated to the spirits that they know best and perform preventative rituals every few years.

In the two cosmologies discussed above, well-being depends on the will and actions of supernatural entities. Spiritual healers can determine the reasons for a particular disease and suggest ways to appease the supernatural and bring health. The cosmologies envision different kinds of entities with different origins and relationships. In the tsaddik cosmology, God is one and unique, and the tsadikkim are spirits of righteous men. In some cases, they are living rabbis who are perceived as healers because of their mediation between the living and God or dead tsaddikim. In Korea there are many gods, and the spirits of the dead are venerated as ancestors. The venerated entities did not necessarily accrue merit in their lives, but are often strong politicians, loving family members, or various kinds of demons. The main difference seems to be the eclectic nature of the polytheistic cosmology of musok, as compared with the stricter criteria that tsaddikim must meet to be venerated.

Healing Through Interaction with Healers: The Performative Aspect

Both rabbis and manshin perform healing rituals on several different scales, from short, individual consultations to rituals that can last many hours and include many participants. Yet these rituals differ markedly in the behaviours and imagery they entail. In tsaddik veneration, there is no visual rendering of God, and the saints who mediate the venerators' requests are shown through paintings and photographs. In Korea, by contrast, the supernatural entities are vividly depicted in cartoon-like paintings and statues. The healers' roles are very different as well. A rabbi typically suggests that the patient may heal by giving alms and reciting biblical verses. He does not claim that he can channel the tsaddik's spirit, nor does he deliver the tsaddik's words directly. In contrast, during kut rituals, the manshin asserts that the spirits have descended into her body (*shin naerim*) and are available for questioning and petitioning directly though her mediation.

The Healing Potential of Tsaddik Veneration in Israel

Yoram Bilu (1997) describes rabbis who engage in healing rituals as "tsaddik impresarios" who dream of the tsaddik asking them to deliver divinations and blessings. Most tsaddik venerators either visit the tsaddik's gravesite or meet rabbi healers. Pilgrimage tours to gravesites in Israel and abroad are common and include praying, asking for blessings, and leaving tokens of veneration near the graves. This tradition typically began when the rabbi was alive and offered his blessings directly to his disciples and followers. Some of my interviewees visited gravesites abroad and told of mystical experiences there. Brahot told me in 1999 how she used a tsaddik's healing power to help a friend whose fertility treatments had failed many times. While on a tour in Morocco, she picked a fruit growing in the graveyard where a certain tsaddik was buried. After the friend in Israel ate this fruit, her next fertility treatment was successful (Sarfati, 2018: 188–9). Brahot does not identify or live as a religious person, but she was attracted to tsaddik veneration and incorporated it into her otherwise leisure-oriented tourism activities in Morocco.

The pilgrimage sites are featured on amulets, photographs, and other sacred paraphernalia sold in stalls near graves and in religious goods stores. The immense importance that such pilgrimages have for individuals and

groups of venerators could be witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic in September 2020, at the time of Rabbi Nachman's hillula in Uman. The Ukrainian authorities had closed airports to prevent the spread of the virus, yet thousands of Jewish pilgrims flew to the countries bordering Ukraine in hopes that overland borders would be less supervised. When Ukrainian police prevented the pilgrims from crossing, they camped out for weeks, until they were deported, demonstrating their strong belief in the tsaddik's powers and the hardships that many are willing to undertake in order to be in his presence. In a television interview, Israel Shnor, one of the pilgrims who were stuck near the Belarus border for three weeks, explained his view of pilgrimage at a time of global health anxiety: "All the people that you see here, and there are many more that you do not see, never thought not to arrive. With all due respect, we have a tradition of more than two hundred years" (Nachshoni et al., 2020).

A similar stance was held by the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who attended the tragic hillula of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in May 2021. During the hillula, 100,000 pilgrims visited the forested mountain site where he is allegedly buried. They included ultra-Orthodox Jews as well as others, less observant but still hoping for supernatural intervention. They crowded the gravesite, camping in large groups in the nearby forest for days, without proper anti-Covid hygiene facilities. For them, the blessings obtained from the tsaddik on the anniversary of his death outweighed the risk of contracting the disease. When they were interviewed by the media, many stated that no illness could be contracted there, because the tsaddik's spirit would protect them from any harm. Unfortunately, in one yard where a certain ultra-Orthodox group prayed, as the pilgrims crowded on improvised platforms in order to watch their rabbi sing, some of the structures collapsed. People rushed to the exits crowding in the narrow alleyways, and forty-five pilgrims died. In the aftermath of the disaster, most of the pilgrims interviewed said they would attend the rite again the following year, so as to allow the souls of those who died to continue their hillula participation.

In June 2021, I visited the cemetery in the southern town of Netivot—where the Baba Sali, the Roentgen's father, and other Moroccan-Israeli rabbis are buried—to see whether pilgrims were back now that COVID-19 restrictions on travel and gatherings had been lifted. There were only a few visitors to the grave of the Baba Sali and the adjacent amulet shop, and none at the grave of Yaacov Ifargan, although it was the day of his hillula, though more visitors arrived in the evening, in time to participate in the

advertised tikkun ceremony that began at 9 PM. Still, I observed Jews of different levels of religiosity. Jewish people define themselves on a continuum from ultra-Orthodox, through observant or traditional, to secular or atheist (Sarfati, 2018). Most people visiting the hillula in 2021 were observant Jews, easily recognized by the *kippa* on the men's heads and the scarves and hats covering the hair of married women. There were only a few ultra-Orthodox Jews, distinguished by their black suits and hats. There were far fewer secular participants, although these had been the majority of the pilgrims I saw in 1999.

This shift in the participants' religious affiliation demonstrates that Ifargan, who is suspected of corruption, has been delegitimized, especially in secular circles. His father's fame as a tsaddik worth a pilgrimage has decreased accordingly. Suspicion of greediness is not exclusive to spiritual healing. As Pardo (2004) explained in relation to Italy's health system, fear of corruption can deter patients from seeking out certain health practitioners, and when patients discover after the fact that their healer was, in fact, corrupt, they feel demoralized. Although tsaddik veneration is a vernacular form of healing rather than an organized system, patients take it very seriously. They donate money in exchange for blessings and prayers on their behalf, and if that money is misused, they can get very upset.

Still, at the hillula in June 2021, at least three people seated in wheelchairs came in hopes of a miracle, and several others sought blessings for hospitalized relatives. The live-streamed event—a medium that has become much more widely used since the COVID-19 outbreak—hosted around 4000 viewers, and the video was shared more than a thousand times. Of the 4468 comments that were posted during the live stream, over half included the words *health* (*briut*), *healthy* (*bari*), or *healing* (*ripui/refua*).

Like many other tsaddik-venerating rabbis, Ifargan mediates the tsaddik's power during tikkun or hillula rituals by praying, singing, and burning hundreds of wax candles in bunches in a large, specially designed metal fireplace. At the height of the event, he throws hundreds of unopened boxes of candles into the fire, while calling out the names of different gates of heavens, such as the gate of good omens and the gate of salvation, as each box reaches the fire. He calls out the most important gates, among them the gate of health, many times, throwing candles each time and rhythmically repeating the gate's name. The audience responds with "Amen" each time, and the auditory quality of the repeated phrases creates what many pilgrims describe as "a sense of unity", "the ability to

connect with so many strangers", and "a power that even God cannot dismiss or ignore". In the 1990s, many of my interviewees were frequent visitors who participated in the nightly rituals every week or month, although this required travelling several hours each way. In 2021, there were fewer participants, and the effect of multitudes repeating the same rhythmic calls was not as powerful as in the larger gatherings I observed twenty years before.

The Healing Potential of Spirit Possession Practices in Korea

Manshin communicate with the supernatural by channelling spirits and gods through their bodies, thereby learning what disharmonies exist and how to solve them. The practice involves a possession trance, achieved through drumming and dancing, which also appeases the angry supernatural entities. These entities are also fed with delicacies and sacrificial animals. Jenn and other manshin do not use drumming or singing in their short, daily consultation meetings. Such noisy techniques are difficult to use in contemporary urban living conditions. Instead, they chant quietly and use divination tools such as flags in five colours, coins, and uncooked rice. Still, they get possessed by their closest spirit guardians—the ones they venerate daily—or hear divinations and orders from spirits without getting possessed by them. Jenn told me how she experiences the spirits during such meetings with ill clients: "For example, I can see a child's figure standing behind the patient and ask her if she had a young sister or cousin who died recently". As explained above, the spirits of young people who died under tragic circumstances are often the cause of maladies. "To appease such spirits, I place candy on my ritual altars, and when possessed by them, I might ask the clients to play with me and speak in a childish manner", she says.

Communication with the supernatural in the course of a possession trance is called "opening the gate of words" (Bruno, 2002). Each spirit or God is known for demanding certain kinds of veneration. Nature spirits like vegetarian foods, because they are perceived as merciful Buddhist entities. In contrast, spirits of historical generals, kings, and high officials expect to be fed with meat, expensive liquor, and imported cigarettes. Generals in particular like to possess manshin when they are performing bravery acts such as stabbing their chests with knives and standing atop sharp blades (Sarfati, 2021; Chapter 1). Performing such extraordinary feats accomplishes two goals: it demonstrates to the audience that the

manshin is entranced and protected by supernatural powers; and it pleases the spirits of warriors, who miss the thrill they had while alive. Pleased spirits heal and protect the people who paid for and performed the ritual. For example, a spirit can say that it is hungry and ask that a small altar with offerings of rice and water be placed on the windowsill. An ancestor can ask for a commemoration rite on the anniversary of her death. A mountain spirit can ask that a pilgrimage be performed. Once the manshin understands the cause of disharmony in the supernatural realm, she explains it to the patient and prescribes the precise act needed to reverse the problem. The symptoms of the disease may require intervention by modern medicine, but the root cause of the affliction can be solved only in a spiritual manner.

I asked several of my manshin interlocutors if they performed such rituals for COVID-19 patients, and they answered that they did not. They said that COVID-19 patients were completely isolated, and their families (many of which were also in quarantine) seemed to be concerned with the medical aspects more than with spiritual healing. Moreover, funerals were processed hastily and privately, and therefore pre-funeral musok rites were not possible.

The death toll of COVID-19 in Korea was very small compared with other countries. Nevertheless, manshin did conduct preventative rituals in cases where clients asked them to cleanse bad spiritual influences or deliver health-related blessings from ancestors and the gods of natural elements. In March 2020, I participated in a live, online ritual that was performed without an audience in a restored palace in Seoul to bless the nation for health and prosperity. It was a theatrically staged event, with no interaction with the audience or clients. Even in private rituals the patients have gotten used to watch on screen, while the manshin followed the COVID-19 regulations and performed without the presence of audience.

My findings about folk perceptions of COVID-19 in Korea are preliminary, but it seems that the pandemic was regarded as stemming from general dissatisfaction in the supernatural realm, rather than triggered by each patient's unique pantheon. Jenn told me that she thinks the pandemic happened because most countries in the world have been disrupting nature, the elements, and cosmological harmony.

Healing with and Without Doctors: The Interaction with Modern Medicine

Tsaddik venerators and rabbis, like manshin and their clients, do not advocate spiritual healing as a substitute for modern medical treatment. Rather, they suggest that supernatural interventions might help the healing process, ensure that the ill find the most appropriate medical care providers, and enhance or speed their recovery. In the urban spheres where most spiritual healers operate in Korea and Israel, I have not encountered any healer who tells clients to disregard modern medicine. On the contrary, many manshin and rabbis appeared on mass media as they received the COVID-19 vaccine, in order to convince the public that the vaccine is legitimate and safe. Another point of similarity between the two cases is that both countries have well-established, extensive, government-sponsored health care systems, which makes the use of complementary spiritual healing a choice, unlike the case explored in Mantanali as discussed in this volume (Koenig & Tiéman, 2023), where informants' use of alternative medicine is often, but not always, the result of a lack of access to medical health services.

At the same time, spiritual practitioners respect the boundaries between medical and spiritual healing, and there has not been a push in either country to incorporate spiritual healing into the medical establishment. Spiritual healers accept the authority of modern medicine, although they criticize its shortcoming and perceive it as too narrow. The personal agency of spiritual healers seems to be similar to that of the medical practitioners discussed by Pardo and Prato (2019). Both kinds of healers rationalize their action by stating that their occupation is a matter of personal morality. Medical doctors can choose how much effort to dedicate to each patient; and the spiritual healers view themselves a self-employed and accept that the government has no responsibility to provide their services to the public through an institutionalized system.

Yet the common perception of most medical staff is that folk healers are unnecessary and might even jeopardize proper treatment. This perspective is prevalent despite the absence of any scientific large-scale medical research in these countries proving that spiritual healing is medically harmful. The objections rest merely on personal and professional beliefs and anecdotal evidence. Nevertheless, there is no legal effort to ban spiritual healing.

Complementing Modern Medicine with Tsaddik Veneration in Israel

Tsaddik venerators in Israel are often considered by the intellectual elites as irrational, uneducated people of low socio-economic status, who are harmful to the project of national modernization. This view was boldly expressed by a famous, award-winning author, Yair Garbuz, who in 2015 stated onstage that the people who "kiss amulets, and who prostrate and bow in front of tsaddik graves" are harmful to democracy. In July 2021, he publicly insisted that he did not regret this statement (Walla, 2021). Such is the delegitimizing perspective that has prevented almost any serious scientific inquiry into the possible health benefits of tsaddik veneration.

Even as anthropologists dwell on the venerators' perspective, demonstrating how important the healing powers of tsaddik veneration are to them, modern medicine has not performed factual research to confirm or debunk these religious claims. Research on the placebo effect and on the psychological aspects of successful healing might have used data about ill and recovering tsaddik venerators, but it has not done so. This is treacherous ground to walk, because in Israel religion is entwined with governance, and debunking the powers of spiritual healing might be viewed as dangerous blasphemy. At the same time, if such research were to find some merit in tsaddik veneration, it might undermine the scientific worldview on which Israel's system of modern medicine is founded.

During the COVID-19 emergency, some of the fears that conventional medicine espoused towards the power of rabbis and spiritual healers in Israel materialized when new kinds of resistance to health authorities emerged. Some rabbis were professed anti-vaxxers, spreading rumours about fertility issues after vaccination and urging their followers to continue leading normal lives and to disobey lockdowns. Others endorsed the health authority's recommendations. These differing attitudes caused strife within the ultra-Orthodox Israeli community and were politicized by the critics of Orthodox Judaism who wish to separate religion from the state. However, these debates were not related directly to the veneration of tsaddikim, but to general concerns of health and authority.

Complementing Modern Medicine with Shamanic Interventions in Korea

The current stigma against manshin derives from the early encounters of Koreans with Western medicine in the early twentieth century, when politicians and newspapers claimed manshin did not understand science. "Indigenous female health practices were de-legitimized through a modernizing discourse to advocate newly institutionalized practices and products" (Merose, 2012, 49–50). Moreover, throughout premodern Korea, Buddhist and Confucian establishments refused to regard manshin as important in healing or in other socio-cultural processes. The main form of acknowledgement that manshin have managed to receive from society and the intellectual elite is their importance to artistic heritage transmission, because their rituals include many forms of song and dance that they alone have maintained for generations. Nevertheless, vernacular healing has survived, and it has become entwined with the healing practices of hospitals and doctors.

Jenn told me that she conducts divinations to ask the spirits about modern medical options that her ill clients have been offered. As she says, "The spirits help direct the patients to the best medical treatment, because they know the real reason for the problem. Doctors often just offer several treatment options, and the patients do not know which one to choose." One example is the story of Andrea Kalff, a German woman who happened to be in the audience of a 2006 conference where the famous manshin Kim Kŭm-hwa (1931–2019) performed. After the show, one of Kim's apprentices approached Andrea and told her that his teacher wished to meet her. The manshin explained, through an interpreter, that Andrea was very ill and had to be initiated as a manshin in order to survive. Andrea says, "This seemed nonsense to me. I had no knowledge or interest in Korea and its traditions." A few weeks later, a doctor diagnosed her with advanced-stage cancer. From that point on, Andrea's path combined modern medical surgery with an initiation ritual. She adhered to the advice of Kim to conduct a minor surgery, although the doctors thought that this might lead to future complications. Nevertheless, she was healed and believes that the combination she chose was the best. Andrea's trust in manshin Kim increased, and she became one of the few Westerners to practice musok. She apprenticed with Kim over the course of many visits to Korea and has developed her own practice. As she explains, "My healing is based less on traditional Korean texts, and more on personal healing

capacities, such as seeing the illness within a person, as Kim used to do, and healing with energies from my hands and mind". As a healer who came from a Catholic European background, Andrea wants to demonstrate to Western medicine how powerful shamanic healing can be. She is planning a joint research project on the topic with an Austrian psychiatrist. Andrea's story demonstrates how Korean shamanic healing can be harnessed to complement medical interventions in contemporary, hypermodern social conditions.

Conclusion

In both case studies, spiritual healing is believed to be obtained through communication with supernatural entities. Comparing spiritual folk medicine in a strictly monotheistic society and a multi-religious, polytheistic society reveals that religious concerns do not account for the tensions between modern medicine and spiritual healing. Rather, in both cultures, these tensions arise primarily from institutional concerns and the regulation of bodies and health. The legitimacy or illegitimacy of spiritual healing practices rests on personal beliefs, not on legal issues or scientific facts. In both Israeli tsaddik veneration and Korean musok, human mediators seek to enable ordinary people to appeal to the supernatural and be blessed by it. Both cases involve complex, often expensive rituals, and in both cases, many venerators report successful healing. Nevertheless, the contemporary ministries of health in both countries do not regard these folk healing practices as medical treatments, nor have they investigated their potential healing benefits.

Spiritual healing diverges from modern medicine even more than do herbal medicine and traditional physical treatments such as acupuncture, because it does not see the body as the problem. It might not even include inspection of, or contact with, the suffering patient. Rather, healing comes from supernatural entities that do not fit within modern scientific conceptions of the cosmos. None of the spiritual healers I interviewed in the course of this research object to modern medical treatment of the symptom of illness, but simply assert that the supernatural roots of the affliction also require treatment. This is an assertion beyond the methodology or terminology of science, and therefore it has been neither challenged nor confirmed by the authorized health-providing systems. In both cultures, spiritual healers accept their exclusion from the organized health system. Their unique position in the healing field and the vernacular nature of

their traditions free them from any kind of supervision beyond that of their peers and clients. Moreover, the biopolitics that dictates the delegitimization and marginalization of spiritual healing within the medical systems of these hypermodern societies has not prevented millions from using it in the urban centres of South Korea and Israel. The contradiction between scientific and vernacular medicine does not exist in the worldview of these contemporary spiritual healers. They are legitimized at the grassroots level and enjoy the cultural and financial support of their many patients.

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