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RAV KOOK'S CONTESTED LEGACY

I

A fierce struggle is currently being waged for control of the religious and intellectual legacy of that giant of Orthodoxy, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, universally known as "Rav Kook." On one side is a small, liberal Orthodox element made up almost exclusively of academics, which holds up Rav Kook as a paradigmatic modern Orthodox Jew—open, tolerant, and deeply engaged with currents of secular thought. For these Orthodox liberals, Rav Kook's messianism is completely secondary. On the other side is a much larger Orthodox contingent, centered around the West Bank settler movement Gush Emunim (now spearheading opposition to the Israel-PLO accord), which sets aside Rav Kook's cultural concerns and instead hails him as the messianic Zionist supreme—dreamer of a reborn Jewish state, believer in the imminence of the final redemption, and upholder of the Jewish people's right to the whole of the Biblical land of Israel. Standing outside of this debate—and no doubt wishing a plague on both groups—are Israel's ultra-Orthodox Jews, the *haredim*, who regard both modernity and Zionism as heresies to be resisted, and who therefore reject both versions of Rav Kook's teachings.

That Rav Kook is a thinker worth fighting over is clear. A strikingly original figure, he produced reams of religious writings of all types—theological essays, halakhic responsa, spiritual diaries, poetry, and personal letters. Rav Kook was the type of thinker who could not help but put his personal impress on everything he touched. While he was exposed to the various currents shaping Jewish life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he filtered all of them through his own unique sensibility; starting from the same place as others, he invariably ended up very much elsewhere. Moreover, Rav Kook had a penchant for dialectical thinking, being fully at ease with paradox and polarity. Small wonder, then, that Rav Kook's writings exhibit a remarkable plasticity, making it possible for both the modern Orthodox and the messianic Zionists to stake a claim to his mantle.

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Rav Kook was born in Grieve, a *shtetl* in northwestern Russia, in 1865. Showing great promise as a young talmudist, he attended the famed Volozhin yeshiva, then the "Harvard" of East European talmudic academies. In the course of preparing for a career in the rabbinate, Rav Kook came into contact with such outstanding personalities as the proto-Zionist Rabbi Naphtali Zvi Berlin, the pietist Rabbi Israel Meyer Kagan, and the kabbalist Rabbi Solomon Eliashev. At the same time, Rav Kook became conversant with modern trends through a reading of *Haskala* (Jewish Enlightenment) literature in Hebrew and works on philosophy in German.

Rav Kook first gained prominence as a writer of essays on issues of the day in *HaPeles*, a rabbinic journal which he edited. Especially noteworthy in this regard was Rav Kook's spirited defense of modern Jewish nationalism in terms drawn from the Jewish mystical tradition. Acting on his Zionist convictions, Rav Kook became rabbi of Jaffa in 1904. In 1914, he traveled to Germany, where he was stranded by the outbreak of war. Rav Kook spent two years in Switzerland and then moved to London, arriving in time to participate in efforts to further the issuance of the Balfour Declaration. In 1919, Rav Kook returned to Palestine as chief rabbi of Jerusalem; two years later, under the British Mandatory government, he became the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Palestine. Rav Kook served with distinction as chief rabbi until his death in 1935, laboring tirelessly on behalf of the Jewish state in the making.

While the facts of Rav Kook's career are easily detailed, the trajectory of his theological enterprise is much more difficult to determine. Part of the problem, most certainly, has to do with the form in which Rav Kook's writings are available to us. To begin with, a hefty portion remains unpublished in manuscript. Then again, a good part of what is in print is not directly from Rav Kook's hand, but is rather the work of compilers—specifically, Rav Kook's son and chief disciple, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook (who became, in the aftermath of the Six-Day War, the direct spiritual mentor of Gush Emunim), and Rav Kook's other leading disciple, Rabbi David Cohen—laboring after Rav Kook's death. It was left to the compilers to impose order on Rav Kook's often disorderly materials and to decide which writings to include and which to exclude. Especially important is the fact that Rabbis Zvi Yehuda and Cohen often stitched together materials which, while linked thematically, dated from different chronological periods.

Even if all of Rav Kook's writings were readily at hand and in excellent shape, however, serious barriers to their proper interpretation

would still remain. Certainly with regard to the theological materials—*Clouds of Splendor*, *Lights*, *Lights of Repentance*, and the three-volume *Lights of Holiness*—there can be no question of simply picking them up and starting to read. These are books which demand close study by individuals with expert knowledge of the conceptual underpinnings and terminology of Jewish mysticism, Rav Kook's chosen vehicle of expression. Absent this knowledge, Rav Kook's theological writings must remain a sealed mystery. Here, for example, is a passage from *Lights*:

> The highest domain of divinity toward which we aspire—to be absorbed in it, to be included in its radiance—but which eludes all our longing, descends for us into the world, and we encounter it and delight in its love, and find peace in its tranquility. At times, however, we are privileged with a flash emanating from the higher radiance, from that higher light which transcends all thought. The heavens open for us and we see a vision of God. But we know that this is only a temporary state; the flash will pass and will descend once again not inside the palace, but only in the courts of the Lord.

Unpacking passages of this sort, determining their underlying tendencies, and linking them into a meaningful whole, is clearly not an activity for those requiring a hermeneutical quick fix.

One scholar who is eminently qualified to clear a thicket through Rav Kook's kabbalistically-coded texts is Benyamin Ish-Shalom, who authored a major Hebrew-language study of Rav Kook's thought in 1990.[1] No sooner had the book been published, however, than it became subject to a fierce polemic, for reasons that are easy to identify. While Ish-Shalom studied for years in the educational framework that has nurtured messianic Zionism, his own orientation was strongly modern Orthodox. Inevitably, this led some in the messianic Zionist camp to view him as a traitor from the inside. In addition, Ish-Shalom, with a doctorate in Jewish thought from the Hebrew University, brought the perspective of the academic researcher to Rav Kook's work. This again was unacceptable to some in the ranks of messianic Zionism. Most importantly, though, Ish-Shalom's study provoked fierce opposition because it went far beyond the standard approach in making the case for Rav Kook's modernity.

Most previous writers on the subject had been content to establish Rav Kook's modernist bona fides by serving up a potpourri of impressionistic evidence. Standard in this approach was the citing of aphorisms by Rav Kook preaching broad tolerance (*e.g.*, "As the second Temple

was destroyed through causeless hatred, so will the third Temple be built through causeless love"). This was usually followed by anecdotal tidbits illustrating Rav Kook's openness to secular Jews (*e.g.*, his praise for the pioneers of the second *aliya*) and currents of secular thought (*e.g.*, his speech at the groundbreaking ceremony of the Hebrew University). Finally, attention was drawn to scattered passages in Rav Kook's writings endorsing modern social trends (*e.g.*, the socialism of the *kibbuts*) and modern ideas (*e.g.*, the theory of evolution).

Ish-Shalom was unwilling to settle for this, since he wished to address Rav Kook's work as a total system. And it was precisely in this connection that Ish-Shalom put forward a radical thesis. Basing himself on a patient reading of all of Rav Kook's writings, including everything in manuscript, he argued for nothing less than the "essential significance" of secular currents in shaping Rav Kook's world view. While readily acknowledging that Rav Kook "drew nourishment from various cultural and spiritual worlds," and while fully appreciating Rav Kook's "profound absorption" in the Jewish religious tradition, Ish-Shalom nonetheless maintained that the *agenda* of Rav Kook's thinking was set by the "states of mind and trends, the *zeitgeist* prevalent in the Europe of his period." Ish-Shalom did allow that Rav Kook made use of theological structures and linguistic formulations derived from the "classic sources of Jewish tradition . . . Bible, Midrash, philosophy, and Kabbalah." Still, he insisted that Rav Kook's "fundamental spiritual and intellectual interests" developed in response to the "non-Jewish cultural climate to which Rav Kook was so attentive." Summing up his view of the matter, Ish-Shalom wrote: "His central views and his understanding of the nature of reality and human essence and destiny were undeniably chiseled and developed in the quarry of the ideological and social revolutions of his own era."

The reaction of the messianic Zionists to Ish-Shalom's volume was fast and furious, and we shall turn to it shortly. Here, however, attention may be given to an important new collection of essays edited by Lawrence J. Kaplan and David Shatz,[2] which takes up and develops in a variety of directions Ish-Shalom's line of inquiry with regard to Rav Kook. Kaplan and Shatz, together with virtually all the individual scholars mobilized in their book, are modern Orthodox academics, and it is from this perspective that they approach Rav Kook's enterprise. It is not clear if the editors consciously sought to exclude proponents of the messianic Zionist viewpoint from their volume; in any case, however, none are represented in the work. It is thus a fitting act of modesty that

Kaplan and Shatz eschew any claim to "privileged access or exclusivity" in dealing with Rav Kook, and candidly acknowledge that "an anthology produced under other auspices would reflect not only a different set of substantive claims, but a different style of discourse and even a different agenda of problems."

In their introduction, Kaplan and Shatz underscore the point that Rav Kook's thinking, for all its range and diversity, is animated by a single fundamental assumption, namely that all reality has its source in the divine. This is the famous "principle of unity" or "monistic principle," and Kaplan and Shatz rightly see it as "the root of all else in Rav Kook's thought." Rav Kook's radicalism is evidenced in his willingness to push this principle to the outer limit, maintaining that, as Kaplan and Shatz put it, "since all things derive from one divine source, all opposition, discord, and conflict are illusory; in the profoundest vision of things, all reality is one and unified." It is on this basis that Rav Kook rejects any hard and fast distinction between the religious realm and the secular domain; it is on this basis as well that he insists on locating the spiritual dimension of life within the material world. All this feeds into Rav Kook's passionate religious Zionism, which aims to restore health to the body of the Jewish people so that its spiritual life can flower to the fullest. Finally, as a direct consequence of his monistic outlook, Rav Kook evinces a broad tolerance, arguing that every idea and every form of cultural expression speaks to truth in some sense. In Rav Kook's view, as Kaplan and Shatz explain, "truth is too great, too rich, and too multifaceted to be grasped or exhausted by any one particular theory."

All of the contributors to Kaplan and Shatz's volume take it as a given that Rav Kook displayed significant openness to currents of secular thought, and indeed, to the secular realm as a whole. Regrettably, however, there is no one essay in the book that treats this subject in full, teasing out its multiple implications. This is especially unfortunate, since editor David Shatz prepared a splendid article focusing on just this theme (it carries the title "The Integration of Religion and Culture: Its Scope and Limits in the Thought of Rav Kook"), but decided in the end to exclude it from the volume because of space considerations. Given the importance of Shatz's analysis and the fact that it receives glancing mention in the introduction to *Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and Jewish Spirituality*, it is appropriate to dwell on the essay at some length here.

Shatz's key contribution is to clarify, as never before, the precise nature of Rav Kook's understanding of the proper fit between secular

knowledge and religious belief. For Rav Kook, Shatz argues, the issue is not one of "synthesizing or harmonizing truth claims made by Judaism with truth claims propounded in secular works." This, of course, was the agenda of medieval Jewish philosophy, and it remains an urgent desideratum for many Jewish religious thinkers today. In Rav Kook's view, however, the religious challenge lay elsewhere, namely in developing what Shatz calls a "controlling vision" in which "all things [are seen] as holy, as fitting into a teleological scheme or design." Shatz explains further:

> All events, all movements, all theories, all social trends, are interpreted in light of this apprehension, this vision, even—especially!—when those phenomena, viewed in isolation, carry no overt and evident religious significance. Unification of the holy and profane in this sense amounts to the development of a certain reading of history and contemporary events, a reading that fits phenomena and events into a larger picture of human progress. Once attained, this vision stimulates the individual or group to act in a way that will, if only gradually, promote a yet fuller realization of this vision.

Shatz, then, highlights Rav Kook's stress on the need to, as Rav Kook himself puts it, "view the profane through the looking glass of the holy." At the same time, however, Shatz makes it clear that Rav Kook was cognizant of the role that an exposure to culture can play in "stimulat[ing], develop[ing], and improv[ing]" those faculties which nurture a controlling vision. It is on this basis, Shatz indicates, that Rav Kook arrived at a "comprehensive positive evaluation of cultural products":

> By stressing that the value of cultural activities lies in the role they play in refining and stimulating human faculties, Rav Kook escapes the narrow view that these activities are religiously important only when they deliver truths. This feature of his approach makes significant room for activities that the medieval conception does not justify—on the one hand, aesthetic pursuits, and, on the other hand, technological advances and political developments, whose fruits are not so much cognitive as pragmatic.

What about the "limits" indicated in the title of Shatz's article? They turn out to be two kinds, relating to Rav Kook's system of ideas and his personal biography. With regard to the former, Shatz makes it clear that various strands in Rav Kook's thinking—*e.g.*, his view of the

innate character of religious knowledge, his mystical epistemology, his sense of the evolutionary nature of truth, etc.—functioned as a brake on his program of integrating the secular and religious domains. At the individual level, Shatz seeks to account for Rav Kook's own limited involvement with general culture, noting that he "gleaned his secular knowledge in a relatively casual and unsystematic way: from reading periodicals, studying selected digests, and conversing with individuals who were more at home in secular thought than he was." The details of Shatz's treatment of this matter need not concern us here, but it is important to indicate that Shatz comes away from his discussion all the more impressed with Rav Kook: "[H]e did have an extraordinary sense of the *geist*, and with it a firm overall grasp of the contours and thrust of major schools of thought. In that way, he became equipped to shed light on the religious predicament that was his real concern."

II

So much for the modern Orthodox Rav Kook. But what about Rav Kook as messianic Zionist?

An important point that needs to be made at the outset is that modernist and messianist are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories. In theory, then—and, indeed, a strong case can be made for this position—Rav Kook's worldview might well have allowed for a significant expression of both elements. But we are dealing here with competing images of the man put forward by strongly opposed religious and political camps, and in that context, no process of accommodation is possible. An apt illustration of this is the polemic surrounding Ish-Shalom's volume. When, for example, Rabbi Yaakov Filber, a leading messianic Zionist figure, went after Ish-Shalom, he was not content to argue that the latter had played down or even ignored the central place of messianism in Rav Kook's thinking. Instead, he launched an assault on the very foundations of the book, asserting that Ish-Shalom's claim for Rav Kook's modernity was nothing other than a cruel hoax.[3] As if to return the compliment, Ish-Shalom, in the introduction to his volume, expressed disdain for those who associate Rav Kook with "fanatic adherence to a single idea." This position is strongly echoed in *Abraham Isaac Kook and Jewish Spirituality*, with one contributor assuring us that Rav Kook "was not a jingoist" and another decrying "nationalistic excesses and religious fervor that too often sin against morality, sometimes in [Rav Kook's] name."

An excellent point of entry into the thought world of messianic Zionism is the English-language volume, *Torat Eretz Yisrael [Torah of the Land of Israel]: The Teachings of HaRav Tzvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook.*[4] This book, published by circles associated with the Mercaz Harav Yeshiva in Jerusalem, where nearly all of the leaders of Gush Emunim trained, is at the furthest possible remove from a university press volume, such as the one edited by Kaplan and Shatz. Everything about *Torat Eretz Yisrael* exudes passionate religiosity, and proudly so. Thus, the volume begins with letters of approbation from former Israeli Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira and yeshiva head Rabbi Shlomo Aviner. This is followed by an editor's introduction in which the stumbling blocks to an English-language volume are listed, among them that "the Christian-Protestant foundations of English-speaking cultures often stand in antithesis to Torah concepts and ideals." Then again, there is the table of contents, which groups material under such rubrics as "Faith," "Loving Fellow Jews," "The Precept of Living in Israel," "Two Thousand Years of Messiah," and "Sovereignty in Our Land." Finally, the copyright page offers up the following unusual statement: "This publication may be . . . reproduced . . . in any form or by any means . . . in order to magnify and glorify Torah, without prior written permission from the copyright holders."

In terms of substance, *Torat Eretz Yisrael* consists of digests of discourses given by Rav Kook's son, Rav Zvi Yehuda (1891-1982), who for more than a half century headed Mercaz Harav Yeshiva. In the person of Rav Zvi Yehuda we come to the very heart of the controversy over Rav Kook's legacy, since he was, on the one side, his father's closest confidant and chief disciple, and, on the other side, the direct spiritual mentor of Gush Emunim. As Eliezer Don-Yehiya observes: "Zvi Yehuda's status as the editor, authoritative interpreter, and faithful heir to Rav Kook was an important factor in his own position as preeminent leader. . . . His essays . . . reflect practical conclusions derived from his father's doctrines. But his position was further strengthened by the ideas' radical content and his readiness to act on them."[5] Given the tight nexus that exists between Rav Kook, Rav Zvi Yehuda, and Gush Emunim, there is an obvious awkwardness to the assertion that Gush Emunim is somehow twisting Rav Kook's teachings so as to turn him into a messianic Zionist.[6] Conversely, this same nexus complicates the effort to establish Rav Kook's modernist credentials in any straightforward manner. In short, for the messianic Zionists, Rav Zvi Yehuda serves as a beacon; for the modern Orthodox, he stands as a stumbling block.

Rav Zvi Yehuda's version of Rav Kook's teaching centers almost exclusively around a vision of the State of Israel as a messianic reality. Notably absent in this framework, as modern Orthodox critics of Gush Emunim are quick to point out, is any attention to Rav Kook's general cultural concerns. Even within the messianic framework, the critics stress, the focus is largely on sovereignty and territory, with "spiritual" matters playing a decidedly secondary role. This last assertion, however, would have appeared as meaningless to Rav Zvi Yehuda, since for him there was nothing more spiritual, indeed holy, than the reborn Jewish state. He could not be more explicit about this: "The statehood of Israel," Rav Zvi Yehuda tells us, "is totally holy, without any blemish at all"; moreover, Israel's "government and army are holy." How could it be otherwise, he reasons, when what is transpiring in the holy land constitutes the fulfillment of biblical prophecy in the unfolding of the messianic redemption:

> We must realize that our restoration in Israel is not happenstance. This is not a coincidental shaping of history. Rather, we must see God's guiding hand, and His divine ordering of events, for what they are—the fulfillment of, "When the Lord brings back the captivity of Zion". . . . How fortunate we are to be a part of this national rebirth, to be a part of the restoration of our life to its original essence.... The more we are conscious of the divine in the events of our time, the more we will merit to meet the Almighty, who returns his divine presence to Zion.

A striking feature of Rav Zvi Yehuda's messianic outlook is its stress on gradualism and stages. This stands in stark contrast to the approach of, for example, the contemporary Lubavitch hasidic movement, which proclaims, "We want moshiach [the messiah] now" and yearns for a single, transforming messianic event. Rav Zvi Yehuda's position on this matter builds directly on that of his father, who employed the notion of gradualism to explain how the divine promise of the return of the land could be effectuated through a secular Zionist movement. (The same idea finds expression in the official prayer for the State of Israel, which characterizes Israel reborn as "the *first flowering* of our redemption.") Writing from a post-1948 and post-1967 vantage point, Rav Zvi Yehuda sees the messianic process having advanced several crucial notches:

> All of the wars we have experienced have been a part of the process of redemption, whether they occurred before or after the establishment of

> the State; whether they were before or after the conquest of Jerusalem. . . . We are in the middle of the journey. . . . God causes salvation to appear, and brings redemption to completion, step by step. We must accustom ourselves to gaze on these matters with perfect faith, and to trust in the redemption of Israel, and in its inexorable unfolding."

In line with his gradualist approach, he eschews any reliance on miracles in bringing about the messianic fulfillment. This has two especially important consequences. First, it creates a powerful activist dynamic, since responsibility for advancing the messianic process falls squarely on the Jewish people, most particularly those living in the land of Israel. Second, it gives his messianism a strong socio-political cast, since it is measured in terms of land occupied, settlements built, acres planted, etc. This is the antithesis of pie-in-the-sky religiosity, as when Rav Zvi Yehuda directly links a call for "spiritual greatness" and "mighty holiness" with a demand for "political and material strength." At every turn, he pleads for increased religious observance and Torah study, yet he tells his students that "leaving the yeshiva to settle the land of Israel is not a waste of Torah study time, but Torah itself." All this is captured in the following formula: "Torah, war, and settlement are three sides of a triangle. And how incredibly privileged we are to be assertive in all."

Given his messianic reading of Israel's growth and development, it is not surprising that Rav Zvi Yehuda rejects out of hand the possibility of relinquishing "liberated" territory. The mere contemplation of this, he observes, is a "disgrace, a sorrowful shame, and a violation of the Torah," adding that "in our time, weakheartedness is as forbidden as pork." Should a particular Israeli government agree to territorial withdrawal, he warns, the action would be "null and void," since "government decisions [can]not uproot each Jew's connection to every inch of the land of Israel." He defiantly declares:

> We are inseparably attached to Judea and Samaria... through the eternal bond between the holy people and the holy land. We must stand in defense of this to the utmost limits of dedication and sacrifice, without any surrender at all. There is absolutely no room to entertain thoughts of relinquishing even a single square meter of God's inheritance to us. There is not to be any blemish in our borders, God forbid.

How do those who view Rav Kook in a modern Orthodox light and reject the position of Gush Emunim come to grips with Rav Zvi Yehuda's assertions? Two of the contributors to *Rabbi Abraham Isaac*

Kook and Jewish Spirituality confront the matter directly by arguing that the messianic Zionist stress on sovereignty and territory is simply misplaced. Yehuda Gellman does acknowledge that Rav Kook "believed his times to be the beginning of the messianic era," but maintains that for precisely this reason Rav Kook insisted on a "higher morality for the new Zion," one that allowed no room for "moral concessions to statecraft." In similar fashion, Warren Harvey dwells on the significance of Rav Kook's statement that the restoration of Jewish statehood is to be seen as a "return to Mount Sinai." Implied in this, Harvey argues, is that the Jewish people is to "act in accordance with stricter standards of morality and piety than are prevalent among the nations"; the Jews are to "enter the land in peace, build it up in peace, and govern it in peace."

Goldman's and Harvey's arguments are placed in a broader framework by Aviezer Ravitzky, long the leading modern Orthodox critic of Gush Emunim.[7] Ravitzky maintains that Rav Zvi Yehuda distorted his father's teachings by deflecting the latter's messianism from the realm of "hope, yearning, and deep faith" into a "certain, revealed, and known future." Rav Zvi Yehuda, Ravitzky argues, projects a "deterministic" scheme, in which the possibility of reversal or failure simply do not exist. As a result, the messianic vision "no longer serves as a critical and normative standard for empirical historical reality, demanding the betterment of its ways; rather, it provides a protective and sheltering model to justify and defend historical reality as it is."

The arguments of Goldman and Harvey, as well as Ravitzky, carry considerable force, but they include the acknowledgement that Rav Kook did indeed view the modern return of Jews to Zion as a messianic happening. Which leaves us with the question: just how large a part, in fact, does messianism play in the totality of Rav Kook's thinking? Judging on the basis of the arguments put forward in two additional essays appearing in *Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and Jewish Spirituality*, one would have to conclude that it is a very large part indeed. Thus, Michael Nehorai, in a boldly revisionist piece, takes up the matter of Rav Kook's role as a halakhic decisor. This is an area where Rav Kook has always been seen as strongly liberal, in line with his desire to advance the Zionist cause. Nehorai, however, labels this a myth, citing several key instances in which Rav Kook, in dealing with matters directly related to the emergent Jewish settlement in Palestine, ruled in a highly restrictive manner. (Among the issues involved were milking cows on the Sabbath, women's suffrage, and autopsies.) This "halakhic strictness," Nehorai maintains—in an argument that ironically echoes Ravitzky's—stems directly from Rav Kook's "far-reaching and farsight-

ed vision of the yearned-for era of redemption." Since, for Rav Kook, the messianic dawn was beginning to unfold, he had no interest in having the halakha "'adjust' itself to the existing reality." Rather, he hoped to have the halakha "bring reality toward it by setting the parameters for the crystallization of the ideal state." Rav Kook's "halakhic rulings on national issues," Nehorai concludes, "were decided on the basis of his future-oriented messianic vision and not on the basis of the present empirical situation."

Further evidence of the fact that Rav Kook's messianism operated at full throttle is provided in an article by Ella Belfer. Belfer notes that the traditional Jewish conception of messianism includes both a "realistic-historical" dimension, which is "national and particularist," and a "metaphysical-spiritual" dimension, which is "universal." Most Jewish thinkers have stressed one of these elements over the other, but not so Rav Kook. In his case, Belfer maintains, we have a "maximalist messianic approach," in which the "completely material and the completely spiritual" work together:

> With respect to the material pole, the return to territoriality, for Rav Kook, requires the emergence of a real, concrete, national-political entity and not some type of amorphous, quasi-national, or quasi-political entity. With respect to the spiritual pole, in Rav Kook's view, cosmic salvation—the ultimate goal of history—involves not only the salvation of the individual soul, but also a real change in history and an essential change in the nature of humanity, and moreover, includes within itself the redemption of both Israel and the entire cosmos.

Here, indeed, is messianism on a messianic scale.

III

A favorite pastime of both the modern Orthodox and the messianic Zionists is to pose the question: what would Rav Kook say today? Nearly always, of course, this is a self-serving exercise, with each side "discovering" that Rav Kook affirms its stance on this or that particular issue. Still, the question itself is intriguing, and an honest search for answers uncovers some striking ironies which, from the standpoint of the present, attach themselves to Rav Kook's enterprise.

One such irony, most certainly, is the fact that Rav Kook's own teachings have yielded two diametrically opposed interpretations. Rav

Kook, after all, was the great champion of the principle of unity, who insisted that all reality constitutes a single, harmonious whole. It is just this, however, that has proven to be the great stumbling block for his would-be followers in both camps, since they have lacked Rav Kook's capacity for total inclusivity. This is true with regard to Rav Kook's own substantive teachings as well as the spiritual monism that he projected. Stated plainly, Rav Kook demanded too much of his disciples; their ability to tolerate tension, polarity, and outright contradiction has shown itself to be no match for his own. By formulating his monistic principle in absolute terms, Rav Kook virtually guaranteed that those who came after him would fall short of the mark. Total inclusivity has proved impossible for Rav Kook's followers, even with reference to his own basic teachings.

Irony also surrounds Rav Kook's warm embrace of secular culture, as championed by the modern Orthodox. In its original context, this stance related to the secular Zionist culture of the Jewish pioneers in Palestine, which was notable for its ethical idealism. As Tamar Ross points out in her essay in *Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and Jewish Spirituality*, the awakening of Jewish nationalism triggered a variety of schemes for a "unique social order predicated upon the ideals of justice, equality, [and] economic independence," all of which could be seen as directly tied to the "traditional vision of messianic times." This factor, no doubt, made it that much easier for Rav Kook to convince himself that the world of secular culture—philosophy, political thought, literature, art, etc.—was founded on a religious impulse that would become increasingly manifest over time. (Of course, Rav Kook's monism also played a crucial role in this regard.) Developments, however, have taken a very different turn than that anticipated by Rav Kook. Not only has cultural expression in the secular sphere failed to move in a more explicitly religious direction, it has shown itself, with disquieting frequency, to be strongly anti-humanistic. Certainly, much of what passes for high culture today is nothing more than a poisonous mix of relativism, subjectivism, and outright nihilism. In his day, Rav Kook was able to engage the ideas of such diverse figures as Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Darwin, all of whom are referred to in his writings. But would one wish to subject Rav Kook to a similar dialogue with the likes of Foucault, Derrida, and Mapplethorpe? From the standpoint of the present, Rav Kook's assumption that an exposure to secular culture can contribute to religious growth appears highly dubious.

Without doubt, however, the greatest irony involves Rav Kook's messianism, as championed by the messianic Zionists. In his lifetime,

Rav Kook staked his all on the belief that the Jewish return to the holy land marked the dawn of the messianic redemption. No amount of criticism from Orthodox anti-Zionists—and it was ferocious—could move Rav Kook from the conviction that what the Zionists had started in Palestine contained the seeds of the full messianic flowering. In Rav Kook's view, the exilic era had come to a definitive end and the Jewish people was on the high road to messianic fulfillment. What, then, would he have made of the fact that nearly a half-century after the creation of the Jewish state, a majority of world Jewry still has no wish to take up residence there? Or of the fact that secular and religious Jews in Israel are moving further and further apart with the passage of time? Or of the fact that Israel's current secular Zionist elite deems it a good thing that the country is entering a "post-Zionist" era, in which Jewish distinctiveness will give way to American-style affluence? Or of the fact that in 1996, the duly constituted government of the Jewish state would be prepared to relinquish the biblical heartland of Judea and Samaria? Or—an impossibility become a tragic reality—of the fact that an Orthodox Israeli, and a religious Zionist to boot, would brutally murder the Prime Minister of Israel? Rav Kook could only cry.

In the aftermath of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitshak Rabin, the struggle for control of Rav Kook's religious and intellectual legacy is sure to intensify. Rav Kook's teachings will remain hostage to the clash of contending forces in Orthodox life today.

NOTES

1. The book is now available in an English translation, though, strangely enough, it still carries the Hebrew form of Rav Kook's name: *Rav Avraham Itzhak HaCohen Kook: Between Rationalism and Mysticism* (State University of New York Press, 1993).
2. *Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and Jewish Spirituality* (New York University Press, 1995).
3. Yaakov Filber, "On Truth in Research on Rav Kook's Teachings" *HaTsofe*, June 15, 1990, pp. 6-8.
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