

Great Controversies



**The Modern
State of Israel**

**Rav Avraham
Yitzchak (HaKohen)
Kook and Rav Yosef
Chaim Sonnenfeld:
Defining the
Religious Nature
of the Land**

**Rabbi Yechezkel
Freundlich**

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Rav Avraham Yitzchak (HaKohen) Kook and Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld

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- A. Introduction: a controversy which defines much of the religious struggle in Israel today
 - a. Rav Kook and R' Sonnenfeld were pre-holocaust and pre-State
 - b. Last week discussed different Orthodox responses to a secular, national movement, aimed at re-establishing a Jewish homeland, but for completely secular purposes
 - i. Looking at the window from different floors – should you jump?
 - ii. Imagine the creator of the MRI, examining a patient, prescribing treatment against all-known medical wisdom
 - c. Rav Kook saw the world through a Kabbalistic Redemptive lens
 - i. The process has started and everything has its role in it

Now if at a certain time there should be found an arousal within the Jewish people whereby people will speak only of the spirit of the nation and will attempt to negate the spirit of G-d from all their assertions and from their revealed source which is their national spirit and disregard the Torah, what should the righteous of such a generation do? To rebel against the spirit of the nation, even verbally, to reject that which it asserts? That is something impossible. The spirit of the L-rd and the spirit of the Jewish people are one. Rather, therefore, the righteous must work hard to reveal the light and holiness which lies in this national spirit, the light of G-d which lies within the light of Israel.

Orot

- ii. Very difficult to explain and even more difficult to understand or sell to the masses
 - 1. Gerrer Rebbe: he is a brilliant scholar and above reproach, but is similar to Rabbi Meir in the Talmud, whose colleagues could not understand him
 - iii. R' Sonnenfeld represents addressing "real life, in front of you now" threats to living a Torah lifestyle (needs far less explaining than philosophy of Rav Kook)
- B. Rav Avraham Yitzchak haCohen Kook (1865-1935)
 - a. Background
 - i. Most remarkable: brilliant scholar, Kabbalist, poet, sensitive soul prone to tears
 - ii. Mixed background: mother's family were Chabad Chasidim, fathers side strong misnagdim – he seamlessly combined them
 - 1. Dressed traditional, mikvah every day, but addressed modern world in a way far different from his contemporaries
 - iii. Parents spoke Hebrew to him as a young child, became linguist, and was very influenced by Netziv and the Chofetz Chaim and saw redemption on the horizon, in a Kabbalistic framework
 - b. Philosophy
 - i. Everything is based on a historical process. All of existence in a state of Divine becoming, the enemy of "good" is constriction, smallness, exile – of the Jews from Israel

and humanity from G-d. Celebrated progress, development as the deepest expression of divinity. In sum: "Everything is rising"

1. In order to achieve redemption, the "forms" of the exile had to be broken.
2. Kabbalistic idea that there is a hidden world behind the world we see, holy sparks within individuals and the throughout the world enclosed in husks that need to be broken to be released.
3. Applied it to Jewish history. How is it, that after thousands of years of religion, vessel of religion has been broken in modern world? Secularism, Modernity broke the husk that held spark of religion, and through this the fire of religion will be released; will get far worse before they get better. But everything negative is positive

"As long as nation has had no need to correct its practical approach to life [while in Exile] the impurities in understanding of divinity - in awe and faith and everything connected - will do no visible damage. However when the time arises in which the national renaissance is necessary and the horn of salvation must be revealed, then those impurities which existed within us impede any outbursts of holiness. It is impossible for the nation to bond together and achieve in its life its strength and implantation of its order with other than clear thinking and deeds that proceed from the purity of pure knowledge of G-d with the utmost clarity. This is the reason that great negative power is aroused in the time of the footsteps of the messiah, this is the reason that atheists exists with great impudence, even though it is terrible to see such awful things, so much truth, good qualities, laws and customs that were treasured by Jews swept away and uprooted by flood of negativity. Despite this, eventually all will grow in purity and strength in supernatural holiness from the firm pure exalted kernel which no negativity can effect. Then when all is broken, the light will shine as a new light upon Zion and with a wondrous greatness that is above every conception that the poor powers of souls exhausted materially and spiritually by the long and debilitating exile could ever conceive"

- ii. Zionism was far more than a political movement or safe haven from persecution: Jews were catalyst of human evolution and by ending their exile their spiritual genius would be freed bringing redemption to the world

C. Controversies

a. Zionism

- i. Convinced the Jewish return was part of the Messianic process of Redemption, and saw everything in this context. "Renew the old, sanctify the new" - But no one else did:
 1. Ben Yehudah, (who championed Ugandah and turned back on all of Jewish History): A Jew without a past has no Jewish future!
 2. Religious Zionists preached solution to a problem, not redemption or Moshiach
 3. Agudah/Traditional religious/Eidah Hachareidis...not only thought human hands weren't supposed to be involved, but certainly not through heretics who openly turned their back on Torah
- ii. Religious community already in Israel vehemently opposed the Zionists and their anti-religious lifestyle and philosophy

One cannot altogether dismiss the success of the Zionists. Though this is pervaded by many deficiencies, there must also be here a spirit of the divine, to build souls for the Holy Land. Through all does the Holy One, praised be He, accomplish His mission. Who can discern the mysterious working of G-d, to fathom why there should be among those who serve this cause people who are so thoroughly tainted with heresy?

Igrot, letter #473

- b. Approach towards the "heretics"
 - i. Building the Holy of Holies in the Temple

Certainly one can find in every Jew, even in the lowest one, many precious jewels of good deeds and of good qualities of character, beyond enumeration. Eretz Yisrael will surely help to bring them out and to hallow them. If these attributes cannot be seen in them, they will become revealed in their children and their children's children. (ibid)

(In response to the Shmitta Controversy): I would like you to know that in the past as in the present, I loathe the evil in the wicked, but the good that is in them I have always esteemed highly, and loved, for this is an aspect of the divine. When I see even among our lowest ones some good quality, any feeling for equity and truth, even if only a courteous conversation or an act of good manners, I draw him closer, always hoping that as a result he will turn toward the good, in some measure, and if my encouragement should stimulate in his heart the tiniest degree of penitence, whether inspired by fear or love, all the effort in the world will have been justified"

There is no limit to the pain they have caused me. It has made me sick, this mockery of our holy Torah at the hands of these heretics. But I thought that by protesting I would not redress the condition. I would only add fuel to the fire. The protest would surely have provoked them to add to their rebelliousness, and I, therefore, felt constrained to keep silent, for the honor of the Torah.

Your honor is fortunate that he is privileged to be free of the burden of public service and he can withdraw and pursue the truth in its full perfection, but I am deprived, being burdened all day with the responsibilities of serving those people of G-d. My only delight is that I remind myself that my feet are stationed on the holy soil, on the land G-d has called His portion and His inheritance and characterized with various expressions of endearment.

Response to Rav Yosef Dovid, Ridvaz

- c. Focus in Torah Study alone and role of secular studies
 - i. There was a ban from 1800s on secular studies in Jerusalem. For Rav Kook, you can discover a light of holiness in all studies of the world.
 - 1. Was already an issue in 1914 while in Jaffe, and his appointment as Rav in Jerusalem depended on it and for him, in the new world was impossible

As long as Orthodoxy maintains stubbornly: No, we will only study Gemara and the Codes, but not Aggadah, not morals, not Kabbalah, not research, not worldly knowledge, not Chassidus, it impoverishes itself, and all the strategies it adopts in self-defense, without embracing the true life-giving therapy, the inner light of the Torah, will prove of no efficacy. In the face of all this, I will continue my battle against all who have risen against me from all sides.

Igrot, letter 602

- d. Sports
 - i. The religious world from Europe forbade it, as a matter of philosophy. Zionists celebrated it as a new Jew, specifically on Shabbos
 - 1. Rav Kook spoke about holiness of physical exercise, granting a new spirit in strengthening the body to provide for spiritual ascent, like David and Sampson...etc
- e. Founding of Hebrew University
 - i. Weitzman's idea
- f. Korbanos (sacrifices)

g. Chief Rabbinate

- i. Invited in 1919 by the WZO to serve as the chief Rabbi of Israel. Strongly opposed by the existing community: "they" had no authority to appoint him, he wasn't qualified, and philosophically there is no such thing as a government appointed "chief rabbi"

This rebel is excommunicated on the basis of the teachings of the Sages. It is forbidden to stand before him, to study Torah from him, and it is a mitzvah to show disdain for him, and whoever supports him is as one who plants a tree for idol worship close to the alter of G-d.

Printed pamphlets

- ii. For 2 years he lived in Jerusalem before he accepted, and when he did, the Eidah HaChareidis split off and formed their own beis din, to oversee religious functions, appointed Rav Sonnenfeld as its head, and this exists until today.
- h. Personal relationship with Rav Sonnenfeld needs to be noted