
Rabbi Kook and the Modernization of Judaism

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Abraham-Yitzhak ha-Cohen Kook is, without doubt, one of the most celebrated rabbis of the twentieth century. He is known to most people, however, only as the creator of the philosophy of religious Zionism, and we frequently overlook the fact that the foundations of his teachings reflect a deep modernization of Jewish faith itself and of its approach to an array of contemporary problems.

Rabbi Kook was a poet by nature, not a university professor. Thus, he believed that mysteries are explained only by other mysteries. This approach makes a systematic study of Rabbi Kook's philosophy difficult. In the following article, I will attempt to outline Kook's philosophy in more concrete terms.

[H1] A Step in the Development of Judaism

According to Rabbi Kook, one vital step in the evolution of Judaism is the revival of those sparks of Divine light that have hitherto been lost, or that were insufficiently realized in the process of historical development. It must be noted that the outline presented below represents a simplification of Rabbi Kook's views. It is described in more detail in Rabbi Kook's article, "The War of Ideas and Faiths" (*Orot*, p. 129; see also *Shemona Kevatzim* 1:16).

The central problem Rabbi Kook faced was the wave of Jewish souls leaving Judaism for various ideological movements alien to it. This wave was particularly strong in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when many deserted yeshivas closed their doors and Jewish youth turned en masse to secular Zionism, socialism, or other "ism." According to the mainstream Orthodox view, these departing youth were "lost and mistaken;" the problem was thought to lie in them—they were not taught correctly, they did not fully understand their traditions, and so forth. Thus, the task of religious leadership was to influence these souls through explanation and teaching so that they would return to Judaism.

It was at this moment that Rabbi Kook proposed an entirely different approach to the problem. According to him, the reason Jews were rejecting the Torah lay not only in the error of their ways, but also in the flaws of the modern religious world—in Judaism as it existed at the time. In order to bring about the return to Judaism of those who had fled, it was necessary not to drag them back to the Judaism that they had rejected, but to correct the defects within Judaism itself. Then those Jewish souls would gradually return of their own accord to the renewed Judaism of tomorrow. In other words, Rabbi Kook regarded the exodus of Jews from Judaism as an indicator of the presence of flaws in Judaism; furthermore, he saw it as a sign that the time was ripe for correcting these defects and believed that social/historical circumstances required that we do so without delay.

Basing his approach on Kabbala, Rabbi Kook maintained that if a large number of Jews rushed to a particular ideology under the banner of morality and virtue, this meant that despite its apparent distance from Judaism, or even hostility to it, that ideology must contain a spark of Divine light. The anti-religious appearance of this alien ideology would merely be its shell, which fed off the energy of the spark inside. It is that spark, not the shell, that attracts the souls of those who turn away from Judaism, as Jewish souls, on the whole, are drawn to good and reach for it innately. Furthermore, the “breach”—the spontaneous, morally grounded mass movement of the Jewish people—is itself an indicator of the ripeness of the spark, a sign that it is time for its activation.

[H2] *The Teaching of Rabbi Kook as Torat haKelal, Teaching for the Entire Nation*

Of course, Rabbi Kook did not believe that every Jew is an entirely upright person who strives for good in every deed. We know perfectly well that among Jews there are plenty of fools and criminals. However, when a large group of Jews leave their tradition for another ideology, we see not the rejection of the Torah by an individual Jew, but a socially significant movement. Such a movement is always accompanied by a sense of moral righteousness declared and subjectively felt by its participants. Without this sense, a social movement cannot develop.

Rabbi Kook believed that a human sense of morality, which is the manifestation of God in the individual, is the world’s driving force. Therefore, he viewed a spontaneous, morally grounded social movement by the Jewish people as a definitive manifestation of the role of the Jews as the chosen people—even though the form that this manifestation takes might directly contradict the directives of the Torah—and held that we must, in the end, view the situation as “*hitgalut Elokim*,” the revelation of the Divine.

Thus, Rabbi Kook’s teaching is a *Torat haKelal*, a teaching of national unity, viewing the Jewish people as an integral whole, capable only as a single entity of bringing the Torah to the world, and seeing disparate groups within the Jewish people as essential parts of the whole.

[H1] *Flaws in Judaism and the Process of their Correction*

Continuing our analysis of the outline for Judaism’s development, it is important to note that the ideas presented so far—that inside every shell are concealed sparks of holiness and Divine light, that the shell feeds off the energy of this spark, and that Jewish souls carry within themselves the role of the chosen and the attraction to good—do not constitute the unique and truly revolutionary teaching of Rabbi Kook, as all of these ideas have been stated and discussed many times in Kabbala and in Hassidism.

The true revolution in thinking put forth by Rabbi Kook lies in the proposition that this situation arises due not only to the attraction of the sparks, but, above all, to a defect in Judaism as it exists, evidenced in the lack or insufficient activity of a given spark within it.

The process of activating the spark involves several stages. The first step is to extract the

sparks from the shell (see *Shemona Kevatzim* 1:71, also *Orot*, p. 63, passage 9). Guided by our Divine moral intuition, we must explore and determine the precise nature of the Divine spark that is drawing masses of Jewish souls to a particular ideology. To do this, it is necessary not only to approach the views of those who have joined the new ideology or movement with extreme respect and deep attention, but also to demonstrate genuine sympathy for the “ism” itself.

In the language of Kabbala, we must feel the Divine spark locked within the foreign ideology. Clearly, in order to extract the spark from any specific “ism,” it is necessary, while staying within the framework of Judaism, to show sympathy toward the “ism,” as sympathy and empathy are the first steps toward understanding. But any individual religious person may not sympathize with every ideology. Some may simply be too deeply repulsive to him or her. This merely shows that this person is not equipped to extract the spark of Divine light from those particular “isms.” Rather, that person must work with those ideologies in which he or she sees value, as only in them will he or she be able to find the spark of Divine light. It is impossible for any one person to sense the sparks in all “isms,” and it is wrong to attempt to spread oneself so thin. Every person must focus on what is genuinely close to his or her Divine soul.

At this stage, those who, in the course of their lives, have spent time near to or even within the foreign ideology being examined may play an especially important role. In particular, when Western values are integrated into Judaism—or, to put it more precisely and formally, when those sparks of Divine light that nourish the values of contemporary Western culture are revived within Judaism—an important role must be played both by Jews from Western countries and by Jews from Russia, who have been educated in the crucible of totalitarianism and communism.

The process of identifying the Divine sparks in secular ideologies is only the beginning of our work since, as stated above, we cannot integrate that spark into Judaism directly. Such a heavy-handed transplant would lead to a rejection of the tissue, which could even result in the death of the entire organism. Therefore, unlike Reform Judaism, which swallows the spark whole from the other teachings and so takes in with it elements of shell that radically contradict the Jewish approach and tradition, the Modern Orthodoxy of Rabbi Kook strives before all else to find this spark’s native, authentic manifestation in Judaism. Orthodoxy must seek out the spark and its true Jewish form in the fundamental tenets of Judaism—that is, in the complete and ideal Judaism, encompassing all the ideas contained in all of its texts and oral traditions. To do this work, one must not only be an expert in Torah, halakha, and aggada, but one must also have the particular wisdom to sense behind the traditionally expressed formulations the deep contemporary content that accurately reflects their Divine light while resonating in today’s world.

Next, the given spark must be cultivated within a renewed Judaism. The process of the cultivation of sparks is carried out in our model through modern Judaism, as it does not alter the existing, historically formed Judaism, but supplements and corrects it. The concept

presented here is not Reformism, which is associated with the abolition of ritual commandments, but Modern Orthodoxy, in which a process of development is continually taking place alongside the preservation of tradition. Judaism loses nothing, but only increases.

As a result of the activation of the spark, the defect in Judaism is corrected, and Judaism takes a new developmental step. In place of the existing Judaism of today comes the Judaism of tomorrow. Furthermore, because the spark whose light had been attracting the souls who left is now restored and active within Judaism, these souls begin to return to Judaism (see *Shemona Kevatzim* 8:51).

Of course, we do not in any way mean to say that those who will return to Judaism are the very same people who left it earlier. The step in development described here occurs over the course of several decades, and those who have left have left. At the individual level, a return to Judaism is possible at any moment; but the return of a whole generation is impossible without the restoration of that spark that gives life to the new ideology and that triggered the exodus from Judaism in the first place—a process that must ripen over many decades. Finally, people with “kindred souls” to those who left earlier now return, as they are the souls attracted to this particular spark—but this takes place two to four generations. In other words, it is their spiritual grandchildren and great grandchildren who return to Judaism.

[H1] Example #1: The Integration of Sparks from Zionism

We will now use examples to illustrate how this model functions in practice.

For the first example, we will examine a fairly simple “ism,” with regard to which the above model has been fully carried out from beginning to end: secular Zionism.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, “Judaism” and “Zionism” were not only contradictory, but in many ways hostile to one another. At that time, the slogan of secular Zionism was, “We will become a nation like all others.” This entailed, in particular, the abandonment of religious principles as a basis for Jewish self-identification in favor of a civil-national identity. Because of this, many rabbis condemned secular Zionism as an attempt to destroy the Torah and traditional Judaism.

Under these circumstances, Rabbi Kook took an entirely different position. He maintained that we should not berate secular Zionism for being outwardly wrong, that is, for straying from the Jewish heritage, the Torah, and God. Instead of focusing on the outward defects of Zionism, he argues, we should seek out its inner truth, find its Divine spark, and correct existing Judaism accordingly by integrating into it the spark that had attracted Jewish souls to secular Zionism.

As Rabbi Kook writes,

The *nefesh* [that is, the lower part of the soul in kabbalistic tradition] of sinners of Israel in

the “footsteps of Messiah”—those who join lovingly the causes of the Jewish People, Land of Israel and the national revival—is more corrected than the *nefesh* of the perfect believers of Israel who lack the advantage of the essential feeling for the good of the people and the building of the nation and land. But the *ruah* [that is, the higher part of the soul] is much more corrected in the God-fearing and Torah observant... The *tikkun* [correction] will come about through the “Light of Messiah”... Israel should bond together, and the *nefesh* of the observant will be corrected by the perfection of *nefesh* of the better transgressors, in regard to communal affairs, and material and spiritual ideals attained to human understanding and perception. Whereas the *ruah* of these transgressors will be corrected by the influence of the God-fearing, observant and great of faith. And thereby both groups will receive Great Light... The higher *tsaddikim*, masters of *neshama* [the third and highest part of soul], will be the uniting conduits, through which the light of the *nefesh* will flow from left to right, and the light of the *ruah* from right to left... This will be accomplished through the light of Messiah, who is David himself, who erected the yoke of *teshuvah*. For the sake of David, Your servant, do not rebuff Your Messiah.” (*Arfilei Tohar*, § 21, published also in *Orot*)

The situation was somewhat simplified by the fact that this spark consisted of the desire to resurrect a full and true Jewish national life in the land of Israel. Not only does this ideology *not* contradict Judaism, as many mistakenly believed at the beginning of the twentieth century, but also, on the contrary, is an essential condition for Judaism’s further existence and development. Therefore, Rabbi Kook focused on the study of those sources in Judaism that address the religious significance of claiming the Land of Israel. In his articles and books, he conducted a thorough and deep analysis of these sources, and he made this analysis the central component of his educational program at the Zionist “world-wide Yeshiva” (*Merkaz haRav*) that he founded. After his death, Rabbi Kook’s students, and especially his son, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, brought up a new generation of rabbis and religious activists at that yeshiva, for whom Zionism—the claiming of the Land of Israel and active participation in its government—was an integral part of the living Judaism that they studied, taught, and abided by. Graduates of the yeshiva *Merkaz haRav* transmitted the same active contemporary Zionist spirit to their students and to the religious circles they influenced.

Since this teaching was in keeping with the times, it began to spread far and wide. All of this took place as an undercurrent over the course of nearly half a century, from the 1920s to the 1970s. And when, after the Six Day War (1967) and especially after the Yom Kippur War (1973), the question of creating Jewish settlements in the territories of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza came up, the tens of thousands of students of Rabbi Kook’s school, united in the movement Gush Emunim, were the driving force behind the new wave of Zionism.

In other words, in the 1970s and 1980s, the religious Zionists—that is, the adherents of Modern Orthodoxy, Rabbi Kook’s school—became the leading Zionist group in the country. The perceptions of society were transformed: People’s ideas of “Zionism” and “Judaism” ceased to contradict one another and drew closer. The struggle for the settlement of the

Land of Israel by Jews took on a religious character far different from the anti-religious character it had had at the beginning of the twentieth century. As a result, those who had a Zionist soul, who cared about Jewish settlement in Israel, began to draw closer to Judaism, rather than to distance themselves from it. One could say that in the late twentieth century, Zionism “returned” to Judaism the souls that it had “borrowed” at the beginning of the century.

As a result of all of these processes, the right wing of Israeli society (that is, people who seek to settle and claim all of the territory of the Land of Israel) is today significantly closer to religious values than the left wing. This distinction is so strong that the expression “religious right” has become a stock phrase in the Israeli political lexicon. In the 1920s, it was the opposite—those concerned with the settlement of Israel were significantly farther from religion than those who were indifferent to the issue. In this way Judaism has completed a step in its development, having extracted a spark from secular Zionism. A side-effect of drawing “Zionist souls” to religion was, in particular, that hardly any such souls remained on the atheist side; this has led to the fact that today secularism is most often associated with a rejection of Zionism, or “post-Zionism.”

[H1] Example #2: The Integration of Sparks from Atheism

We will now examine a different example, one that may appear shocking at first, but that nevertheless fits within Rabbi Kook’s overall model for approaching secular ideologies. Specifically, we will apply the system described above to atheism. We will attempt to carry out the process of extracting a spark of Divine light and furthering the development of Judaism by means of atheism.

Rabbi Kook writes,

Atheism displays the power of life. Therefore, the real spiritual heroes extract sparks of great kindness from their atheism and turn its bitterness into sweetness. (*Arfilei Tohar*, § 120)

The destructive wind of disbelief will purify all the filth that gathered in the lower realm of the spirit of faith... all will grow in purity and strength, in supernal holiness, from the firm, pure exalted kernel, which no negativity can affect. Its light will shine as a new light upon Zion with a wondrous greatness. (*Shemona Kevatzim* 1:476, *Orot haTehiyah*, ch. 51, p. 199)

Atheism, according to our model, fully qualifies as an outside “ism.” It stands in opposition to Judaism, displaying the banner of rejection of religion—yet Jews join its ranks in significant numbers, proclaiming its morality and worth.

Because in Rabbi Kook’s time atheism was actively growing and attracting supporters, he devoted a significant amount of attention to its analysis in his works. As always in his approach to a foreign ideology, Rabbi Kook did not focus on a critique of atheism’s mistakes, its rejection of God and tradition, and so forth. This would have been trivial, and it was

attended to at the time by much of the religious establishment. Rather, he attempted to understand where the deep attraction of atheism lay, what was in it that drew Jewish souls, and how Judaism needed to evolve so that, instead of leaving, souls of this type would find their rightful place in it.

What is the “spiritual core” of atheism, its Divine spark? In order to find this, we can ask the following question: From where do members of this group derive pride? For pride reveals the correlation between our achievements and our Divine spirit. We take pride in those achievements that gladden our Divine spirit, seeing them as truly worthy. In other words, the point of pride of any ideology signals what must be culled from it, as it is the root of the attraction of the Divine soul. This, therefore, is where we must seek out the concealed spark.

In what, then, do atheists take pride, specifically as atheists? Of course, I am not speaking here of those atheists who have never given either religion or atheism a serious thought, and who were simply taught to be atheists. Any movement has fools in plenty; we must not focus on these, but on those who think for themselves. We speak here of real atheists—intelligent, thinking, and active. In what do they take pride *as atheists*? Based on my own acquaintance with atheists and their books, I believe that the atheist prides himself on being a doubting, critically thinking person. The atheist says: “You, the religious, merely believe. But I doubt. I cannot unquestioningly accept all of this. I am a skeptic.” It is not for nothing that a conversion to atheism in Israel is called *hazarah beShe’ela*, literally, a “return to the question” (as opposed to coming to religion, which is traditionally known as *hazarah beTeshuva*, or “return to the return,” which can also be read as “return to the answer.” With this formulation, atheists establish themselves in opposition: “You, the religious, have the answer (*teshuva*)—but we have the question (*she’ela*). This is their source of pride, that they “have the question.” We are not discussing simple questions, of course, such as what is or is not kosher, but the fundamental and eternal questions of existence. The atheist stresses: “You are attracted to answers, we to questions.”

Thus, the true atheist has skepticism as his or her core conviction and declares him or herself to be a critical thinker who has unanswered questions to which no one can have ready answers. Is this core of atheism attractive? Picture two teachers, one who says, “Come to me. I have answers for everything,” and one who says, “Come to me. I have questions and doubts for every problem.” Which of them seems more spiritually advanced? Whose lectures would you wish to attend? The skeptic’s, of course. We know that there are no ready answers to the truly complicated questions. We also know that answers are very often superficial and questions much deeper. Therefore, if one says that he has answers, and the other that he has questions, we will, of course, go to the one who has questions.

By means of this analysis, with the help of our own religious intuition, we have found the spark of Divine light in atheism. Our intuition clearly confirms that questions and doubts are a great thing, and that in them there lies the source of atheism’s spiritual attraction.

Does this component—unanswerable questions—exist within Judaism? Clearly, in Judaism as it existed 100 to 200 years ago, the emphasis was primarily on the “answers.” Today,

unfortunately, within the popular, rather primitive Judaism with which certain demagogues try to “capture” the masses, the stress is also frequently placed on the answers. But if we are deeply convinced of the religious importance of unanswerable questions, then let us look to ideal Judaism and try to find out where within it the central questions and doubts lie.

The first thing that comes to mind is the book of Job. Job is a righteous and good man, yet he is showered with misfortunes: the destruction of his possessions, the death of his loved ones. And so, three of his friends come to him, and after the period of silent mourning, they begin to ask: Where is justice in the world? Why does the righteous man suffer? Job’s friends offer highly reasonable explanations, but Job rejects them all, telling his friends that they are wrong, that they understand nothing. The discussion continues for the length of the book, about 40 chapters. At the end of the book a voice rings out from the heavens, saying to the three men, “Ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job hath.”

In other words, the Book of Job concludes by telling us that there is in principle no answer to these essential questions. The question of justice remains open. It is necessary to seek an answer, but one must never assume one has found it.

Thus, we have an example from a book from Tanakh that clearly states that there can be no answer to this and, apparently, to many other fundamental questions. Another such book is Kohelet, Ecclesiastes. And although this book ends with the words “fear God... for this is the whole man,” which can be seen as an “answer,” the entire book in essence tells us that answers to real existential questions do not exist. This is one more typical instance in Judaism of the “unanswerable question.” One must admit that if, instead of questions, the books of Job and Ecclesiastes consisted of a collection of answers about the meaning of life, Tanakh would be greatly impoverished.

However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this aspect of doubt was not a developed area within existing Judaism. Its spiritual leaders considered doubt to be a flaw and discouraged their followers from discussing questions that sowed it. They were to stay inside and never venture out. The leaders feared that one from their flocks might leave—yet many did flee Judaism because those spiritual leaders were unable to reveal its inner potential to address adequately the problems of the times. The leaders discouraged the reading of certain books, but people read them and turned away from Judaism and its lack of tolerance for doubt.

We have found the Divine spark in atheism, and we determined that that spark was not realized in existing Judaism, which feared doubt to the point that the thirst for it became a force for the spread of atheism. Our next steps are to develop within Judaism the spark of doubt that we have discovered in its roots, so strongly that it will shine more brightly there than it does in atheism.

The following conception formulated by Rabbi Kook provides us with a roadmap for revealing the spark of doubt in Judaism. He tells us that any faith that lacks doubt is not an ideal faith. On the contrary, belief without doubt is primitive: Doubts are an integral part of true faith. As the Divine is by its very essence eternal, and all things human are, by their

essence, temporal and finite, including all of our thoughts, ideas, and reasoning about God, our understanding of God cannot, in principle, be correct.

But what are we to do, if we are finite and temporal? How can we at least draw closer to the eternal Divine, come to understand it even partially? At the very least, we must doubt everything we think about the Divine, for when the finite being feels his limitations and doubts himself, he becomes “less finite,” some potential of the infinite appears within him. If we are sure of ourselves and do not doubt, then our finite and temporal conceptions of the Divine become “even more finite,” moving further from the eternal Divine. If what is finite wishes to become less finite and to move closer to the infinite, it must be dynamic. That is, we cannot become actually infinite, but we must at least be potentially infinite, if only through doubting the certainty of our understanding and wishing to move forward. Therefore, doubts are an integral, necessary part of true faith, aiding, not impeding, its progress.

When students in a yeshiva or school are taught this concept of faith, an entirely new generation of religious people rises up, a generation whose views can be characterized as “religious post-atheism.” These people use the religious achievements of atheism in the development of Judaism. Unless it activates within it the aspect of doubt, religion will be primitive. Doubt is necessary for its existence. Because the aspect of doubt was not adequately developed in religion over the last centuries, atheism came along, smashed everything, and advanced among people the concept of the value of doubt—and for this, religion owes it a debt of gratitude.

Atheism comes, says Rabbi Kook, to ridicule the primitive form of religion and destroy it, clearing the ground for the construction of a more exalted religious system. From the point of view of the development of religion, atheism was a historical necessity, as we ourselves—even the religious community and leaders who recognize the importance modernization—would never have decided to destroy that primitive aspect of religion. We simply would not have had the strength and nerve. Therefore, atheism enters and does all of that work for us.

The observant religious person who has grasped the ideas of post-atheism holds a different sort of religious consciousness. He combines Orthodox religiosity with a willingness to doubt his own religious tenets. Such a person emanates this new type of faith, changing the ideas of those around him, opening the way to religion for doubting people. These doubting souls begin to approach Judaism, seeing that post-atheist Judaism contains the spark of doubt, and that the spiritual necessity of doubt is even more developed here than it was in atheism.

The difference between the post-atheist religious consciousness and the classical one is easy to see. The Israeli essayist and philosopher Dr. Daniel Shalit says that one needs to converse with a religious person for no more than ten minutes to determine whether he or she is post-atheist or pre-atheist. Approached this way, atheism is not an enemy of religion. It is an enemy of primitive religion, but an ally in the creation of a more advanced one. If we can make the ideas of atheism the general property of the religious world, we will move religion

forward and make it possible for those whose souls instinctively and absolutely correctly thirst for skepticism and doubt to approach this religion.

[H2] What Is to Be Doubted?

Thus, according to Modern Orthodoxy and post-atheism, doubt is critical for the growth of faith; without it a person cannot believe truly. If people, limited by nature, do not doubt their own limited religious ideas, they will remain much further from God in their understanding than those who, though limited, at least doubt.

When we frame the problem this way, we frequently encounter the following question: “Should one doubt everything? There must be something, from the religious perspective, that is absolutely beyond question. God’s existence is certain —how can that be doubted?!” The answer, from the point of view of religious post-atheism, is that everything can and must be doubted. To doubt is not to deny, but to subject to criticism and analysis. This applies even to the tenet that God exists. What is to be doubted is not the words themselves, but our interpretation and understanding of them. Since doubt is not denial but analysis and clarification, it is necessary for our religious understanding. It would be incorrect to see doubt in the existence of God as a choice between the statements “God exists” and “God does not exist.” This is a different kind of doubt entirely. What we must doubt is the meaning that we give to the word “existence” as it relates to God.

Rabbi Kook proposes a completely radical approach to this problem. He explains that there is a faith that is not faith. And there is a lack of faith, or atheism, that is, in its essence, faith. What does he mean by faith that is not faith? He refers to the person who believes in God, but whose belief is so primitive that his image of God is closer to a caricature than to what God is. And what is lack of faith that is faith? This is the situation when a person says that he does not believe in God, but he says this because religious groups have pictured God in such a primitive form that he is unable to believe in such a God. This unbelief reflects not a lack of faith, but a high level of religious feeling.

The words “I believe in God” or “I do not believe in God” do not reflect true faith or lack of faith. We must hone the meaning of these words during our whole lives—not just our individual lives, but over the course of all human life. We can and must doubt these meanings in every way, for doubt is not denial; doubt is dissatisfaction with simple answers and a thirst for more precise understanding.

[H1] Example 3: The Integration of Sparks from Reform Judaism

We will now turn to another example and analyze, according to our model, the Modern Orthodox perception of Reform Judaism.

It is clear that Reform Judaism contradicts traditional Orthodox Judaism, yet many Jews follow this ideology, which sees itself as worthy and moral. Appearing at the beginning of

the nineteenth century, this movement rode the gathering wave of rationalism. The reformers were convinced that all that was needed for an understanding of the whole world, including religion, was sound reasoning. They believed that by means of rational analysis they could easily distinguish what was important in religion from what was secondary, and then do away with the secondary to create a new, true religion, based on the main ideas of Judaism. They considered the main ideas to be the philosophical tenets, such as monotheism and ethical values; they discarded what they saw as unimportant: observance of the Sabbath, kashruth, and other laws that they viewed as rituals. The Reform Movement steadily gained ground throughout the nineteenth century.

However, with the crisis in rationalism that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century, Reform Judaism, too, found itself at a crossroads. It began to change in a new direction, in many ways drawing closer to tradition. Reform Judaism today is entirely different from what it was at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but its external appearance remains essentially the same.

The “shell” in Reform Judaism is evident: It is based on the idea that we can make changes in religion at will, according to our needs of the moment. Clearly, this contradicts the fundamental ideas of traditional Orthodox Judaism. When Reform Judaism first appeared, the Orthodox, observing its external form, naturally judged it to be in opposition to Judaism. However, working with Rabbi Kook’s ideas, we must not get caught up in a conflict with the superficial challenges of Reform Judaism. Rather, we must find the core, the positive idea that attracts Jewish souls to its teachings. If Jews are turning to it, it must contain a Divine spark.

What is this spark? As discussed earlier, one method of seeking it out is to ask what adherents of this movement take pride in. Reform Jews’ main point of pride is that they are modern; they are in step with the times; they change and grow rather than remain stagnant. (This is why the term “progressive” is often preferred to “reform.”)

Therefore, we must ask, from the perspective of our own Divine souls, is this principle—to grow and advance rather than to stay in one place— good or bad? It is good, of course, and each of us feels it so. Thus, we have extracted the Divine spark of Reform Judaism. We must now turn to Rabbi Kook’s vision of Judaism and see how this spark— the value of change— manifests itself.

How are we to find the idea of change within Ideal Judaism? In its most apparent form, it is presented as the continuing Revelation, but that concept is not a simple one, and we will discuss it in more detail later. In order not to become mired in its complexities, we will take a clearer example. We will explore the difference between Rabbi Kook and Maimonides on the questions of change in the Divine and of the religious importance of progress.

Rabbi Kook tells us that, given its perfect nature, the Divine cannot lack the aspect of constant change, and therefore religion, to be worthy of God, must progress and develop. In other words, the need for progress and modernization, even in the area of religion, is not merely a human trait; it is a manifestation of our Divine nature. Religion, therefore, must

develop—not in order to make it easier and more convenient for us humans, but because without development religion will not adequately reflect God. Rabbi Kook’s analysis of this concept completes the process: we have found the corresponding spark in Judaism and developed it to a higher level than it reaches in the “ism”—Reform Judaism—we began with.

We are now faced with the process of cultivation of this spark in practical Judaism. According to our model, if our “ism” is Reform Judaism, the Judaism of tomorrow will be the Modern Orthodoxy of Rabbi Kook—that form of Orthodox Judaism that sees development as important and provides a roadmap for it. Furthermore, in some sense, Modern Orthodoxy is even more modern than Reform Judaism, as it not only strives to develop and evolve in areas that seem “out of date,” but it also has a program for the further development of Judaism. This orientation to the future is entirely unique. In our experience with many religious ideas, we have never come across anyone who proposed a program of religious development for the coming decades or centuries!

[H2] The Essential Difference between Reform Judaism and Modern Orthodoxy

Although there are parallels between certain aspects of Reform Judaism and Modern Orthodoxy, we must emphasize again the cardinal and essential difference between them. Both recognize that the historically formed, traditional Orthodox Judaism in many ways fails to address the needs of contemporary society, and that this prompts many Jews to leave it. However, the two approaches to this problem are critically different. The Reform Jews proclaim that it is difficult for people today to observe all of the commandments and restrictions of Judaism, and therefore we should ourselves lighten the demands to make life simpler for its followers. But the Modern Orthodox maintain the opposite: after all, from a technological standpoint, today it is much easier to observe all of the commandments than it was in past centuries, so the real question people are asking today is simply, “What do I need all of this for?” However, when we develop those sparks that have dropped out of sight within Judaism, we create a reason for many more people to move toward it. In other words, the Reform solve the problem by making Judaism smaller, while the Modern Orthodox solve it by making Judaism bigger, through the development of its ideals and the restoration of its sparks of Divine light.

Both movements see the presence, seriousness, and depth of the problem, and they do not avoid it, as do many of the Hareidim, but the solutions they propose are polar opposites.

[H1] Religious Anti-fundamentalism and the Concept of Continuing Revelation

The religious concept of the continuing Revelation of God asserts that the Divine Revelation did not stop at Mount Sinai, but continued throughout time and continues still, manifested not in miracles, but in the course of human history, above all of Jewish history. Therefore, this Revelation can and must be listened to, and to do this we must see history as a dialogue with God.

There is no doubt that the very idea of monotheism as a religion of dialogue implies a continuing interaction between humans and God throughout all of human history. What is more, Jewish monotheism, as Rabbi Kook's concept emphasizes, is characterized by the idea that not only does every individual carry on a dialogue with God, but the nation as a whole, and all of humankind do the same. It would be natural to suppose that through this dialogue, God continues to speak. Of course, God does not say anything to contradict God's earlier words; God's word cannot be revoked. The earlier Revelation is never rescinded, but it must be continually developed and added to. Thus, the idea of a national dialogue with God leads to the principle of continuing Revelation, and that, in its turn, to Modern Orthodoxy.

The view of history as a dialogue between humans and God means that God is continually speaking to us, and all innovations that bring forth progress in culture, society, and religion are not simply human invention, but also Divine Revelation. Therefore, they must be integrated into our religious ideas and not discarded.

It stands to reason that not everything that has occurred in the course of history is Divine. Many developments can and should be criticized, changed, repaired. However, it would be categorically wrong to cast away historical development as a whole, as we would be discarding with it essential elements of the Revelation. According to this conception, we do not have the right to reject historical change—not because we must protect human creative activity from primordial religious dogma, but on the contrary, because we adhere to a religious viewpoint. Thus, the concept of the Continuing Revelation, and Modern Orthodoxy, which is based on it, are both aspects of Rabbi Kook's religious anti-fundamentalism.

[H1]The Embedded Implication that Judaism Must Lag Behind Culture in Its Development

Looking at this model for the development of Judaism by means of sparks from "isms," we are obliged to make note of one critical feature, which from a religious point of view might well be seen as an embedded "flaw." Namely, the model presupposes that Judaism lags behind culture in its development. The "ism" appears first, arising in relation to progress in the larger society. As a result of this, people become dissatisfied with flaws in Judaism that earlier generations accepted (see *Arfilei Tohar*, 2 and 68); they leave and build a new ideology; and only two or three generations later does a segment of the religion adapt, develop, and realize the essence of these new ideas to create.

But if it is always thus, how will religion ever be able to lead? How will it accomplish what it is called upon to do?

The answer to this problem comes in two complementary parts.

The first is the fact that, indeed, within the structure of assimilating sparks from various ideologies and movements, Judaism will never be in a position to overtake those "isms." However, Rabbi Kook explains that Judaism has "in reserve" another most important

concept, namely, that of God's dialogue not only with the individual, but also with the nation as a whole. Christianity or Western society never adopted this idea, inherent to Judaism from the start; humankind has only today begun to explore it. Therefore, Judaism will be able to lead civilization by means of this idea, rather than through its assimilation of sparks, which, as important as it is, merely serves to correct accumulated flaws that occur in the process of transition from Judaism of Diaspora to a Judaism of the Nation of Israel. Until we have adequately corrected these flaws, we will continue to fall behind and so will be unable to make ourselves heard by the world. We must continue to correct them, while at the same time developing that concept of national dialogue with God that is uniquely ours. We would later bequeath this concept to humankind, thereby making an essential contribution to the development of civilization.

This is the first part of the answer. However, the problem has another aspect. The second part of the explanation as to why Judaism lags behind culture in its development is that, as Kabbala explains, our entire world is "*tikkun olam*"—"a world of correction." God's light cannot appear in our world immediately in its true form. At the beginning of Creation and again in every new stage of development, there is *shevirat kelim*, the breaking of the vessels, and the sparks of Divine light become enveloped by shells. Judaism's "lag" is grounded in the very foundations of existence. Every idea first appears in a wrong form, in the context of the "ism." And only afterward, as a result of our efforts to improve the world, it appears in a purer and more correct form.

This arrangement of things is, of course, not accidental. It is related to God's desire to allow us to become God's "companions," God's co-creators in the universe.

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