The Religious Genius in Rabbi Kook's Thought: National "Saint"?

Reference Library of Jewish Intellectual History

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BOSTON / 2014

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:
A bibliographic record for this title is available
from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-1-618114-05-1 (cloth)
ISBN 978-1-618114-06-8 (electronic)
ISBN 978-1-618114-11-2 (paper)

Book design by Ivan Grave
On the cover:
Portrait by Rivka Pick-Landesman (reproduced by the author's permission).

Published by Academic Studies Press in 2014
28 Montfern Avenue
Brighton, MA 02135, USA
press@academicstudiespress.com
www.academicstudiespress.com

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Preface

Numerous studies have been written on the thought of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook. Rabbi Kook combined halakhic, philosophical, and Kabbalistic intuitions, based on many diverse sources, with an exceptional national stance; he also possessed an extraordinary personality. He unquestionably exemplified religious genius.

Most of the works about Rabbi Kook are anchored in historical and philosophical disciplines. The central question the current book addresses is the degree to which Rabbi Kook's writings can prove to be beneficial to the postmodern discourse. I examine this multifaceted issue and highlight the contribution of his writings to this discourse. The book is concerned with religious genius, as such genius emerges from the thought of Rabbi Kook, and discusses at length the traits of the perfect individual according to him. I assume that Rabbi Kook's thought describes religious genius as well as proving his own genius.

The book had its beginnings in an Elijah Interfaith Institute study project on religious genius headed by Dr. Alon Goshen-Gottstein. In addition to Dr. Goshen-Gottstein, the book was also read by Dr. Uriel Barak and Dr. Meir Munitz, who offered valuable comments. My thanks to Professors Menachem Kellner and Daniel Statman for their assistance. Finally, I wish to thank Edward Levin for his important comments.

Chapters Eleven ("Rabbi Kook and the Revolutionary Consciousness of Religious Zionism") and Twelve ("Maimonides in Rabbi Kook's and Religious Zionist Philosophy: Unity vs. Duality") were originally translated by David Louvish and Batya Stein, respectively, and were adapted for this volume.

I would like to thank the Vice President for Research of Bar-Ilan University Professor Benjamin Ehrenberg and the Zerah Warhaftig Institute for the Research of Religious Zionism for their support of this research.

Dov Schwartz

Introduction

The spirited interest in saints and religious genius associated with the postmodernist experience and its active study can be traced to three main causes, each of which relates in some manner to the instability and fluidity characteristic of this experience:

(1) A moral anchor: the postmodernist questioning of universalism and absolute truth undermines traditional moral conceptions. "Saintliness," in the characteristic sense of the activity of the "saint," is expressed in behavior, and not in abstract moral principles.[1] It therefore makes ethical education possible, despite the lack of accepted moral principles.

(2) Metaphysical dialectics: the modern world focuses on man and his existence, while metaphysics is shunted aside. Since postmodernism emerged from the conflict with modernism, the concept of "man," which was at the center of modernity, is no longer universal and stable. Postmodernism champions the legitimate voice of the different, the Other, and the individual, which at times was allowed no expression by the modern world. Postmodernism explores the boundaries of metaphysics, employing irony and nostalgia.[2] To a certain degree, this nostalgia ensues from the need for certainty, identity, and meaning in a world in which the stability of time has been undermined (the present facing the future, and so forth). "Saintliness" expresses nostalgia for the metaphysical.

(3) The quest for asceticism: additionally, the postmodernist discourse on sexuality, as expressed especially by Foucault, demands an anchor with which one can withstand temptation.[3] The saint presents a way of life that contends with temptations and overcomes them.

1 See, e.g., E. Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago, 1990). See D. Gurevitz, *Postmodernism* (Tel Aviv, 1997), 269 [Hebrew].

2 See K. Tester, *The Life and Times of Post-modernity* (London, 1993), 54-78.

3 See G. G. Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago, 1993), 220-35.

The Western religious world felt no need to provide a historical and realistic definition of saints, as the scientific research of positivist questions does. The saints, at the rise of Western religion, were primarily martyrs, individuals who gave their lives for their faith. The cult of saints gave the flocks of the faithful of the new religions the resolve to endure. The saint was perceived as a figure standing in the background who is present for the believer.[4] Over the course of time, this perception came to include the individual who lived a life of faith, and thereby was devoted to his fellow (healing, miracles, and the like). For example, the first four khalifs, until Ali, were perceived as saints in Islamic literature. Their ways of life were seen as worthy of study and emulation. The uninterrupted tradition of the Western religions contains the unchanging adoration of saints. From time to time the Catholic Church announces the addition of saints to the existing list. According to Catholic doctrine, only God can proclaim saintliness, but the Pope manifests the divine will. Inge defines the saint as follows (the division here is mine):

> (A) They [saints] tell us that they have arrived gradually at an unshakable conviction, not based on inference but on immediate experience,
>
> (1) that God is a Spirit, with whom the human spirit can hold intercourse;
> (2) that in Him meet all that they can imagine of goodness, truth, and beauty;
> (3) that they can see His footprints everywhere in nature;
> (4) and they can feel His presence within them as the very life of their life, so that in proportion as they come to themselves they come to Him.

4 See P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981). On the medieval period, see A. Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. J. Birrell (Cambridge, 1997); C. Ernst, *Manifestations of Sainthood in Islam* (Istanbul, 1993); idem, *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism* (Richmond, Surrey, 1996); V. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin, TX, 1998); J. Shatzmiller, "Jews, Pilgrimage, and the Christian Cult of Saints: Benjamin of Tudela and His Contemporaries," in *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History*, ed. A. Collander Murray (Toronto, 1998), 337-47; J. Galinsky, "Different Approaches towards the Miracles of Christian Saints in Medieval Rabbinic Literature," in *Ta Shma: Studies in Judaica in Memory of Israel M. Ta-Shma*, ed. A. Reiner et al. (Alon Shevut, 2011), 195-219 [Hebrew].

> (B) They [saints] tell us what separates us from Him and from happiness is
>
> (1) first, self-seeking in all its forms;
>
> (2) and, secondly, sensuality in all its forms.
>
> That these are the ways of darkness and death, which hide from us the face of God; while the path of the just is like shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.[5]

According to Inge, a saint is a complex of experience, theological approaches, and practice. In the postmodernist discourse, the saint appears where general moral principles have lost their validity, and the emotive is the only channel for ethical education. The saint lives a life of sensibility, that enables imitation and internalization. The questions that arise in the study of the modern relationship to sainthood are both scholarly-objective and reflective. Some examples of such questions are:

> (1) How is saintliness to be defined in the reality of the postmodern world?
>
> (2) Can the attributes of the saint serve as a common basis for multiple religions?
>
> (3) How are the character traits of the saint to be charted in a world in which abstract research is no longer an absolute criterion for truth and consensus?

These questions are the subject of intensive discussion by philosophers and scholars. In this work I will seek to reexamine them indirectly, by the personification of the general arguments on the nature of sainthood in an analysis of the figure of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook as saint. I will define below the meanings I find in the idea of the "saint," but I will state here that we are engaged in a study of religious genius, namely perfection and the exceptional dimension in his religious inspiration. Saint and religious genius are not identical, since the former is a realistic figure, while the genius tends toward the ideal. In the following discussion, however, we will not distinguish between the two.

Since there is no authoritative proclamation of sainthood in the Jewish world, the basis for the image of the saint is, primarily, acceptance

5 W. R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (London, 1899), 325-26.

by broad circles of the community. The saint is perceived first and foremost as one who gave his life for his faith and community. The paradigm of saints is those who die for *Kiddush Hashem* (literally, the "sanctification of the name of God"), that is, dying a martyr's death when given the choice of conversion or the sword, or when forced to transgress the laws of Judaism (Rabbi Akiva and the other sages killed by the Romans, the German pietists who committed suicide in the Crusades rather than convert, etc.). Another paradigm focuses on a life of *Kiddush Hashem*, that is, those individuals who are seen as selfless, and whose very being and activity are directed in their entirety to the public good. The term "*kedushat ha-hayyim*" (the sanctification of life), coined during the Holocaust, refers to survival in face of the Nazi machinery of destruction.

In the religious Zionist public in Israel, Rabbi Kook is seen as an unquestioned spiritual and altruistic authority. There are differing opinions within this public on the degree to which his praxis is to be followed, and the extent to which his life was a pure model for a religious Zionist life. However, he is unquestionably revered by the entire religious Zionist camp as one who devoted his life to the people as a whole, and to the national rebirth. In the secular camp, he shares a place of honor as one of the founding fathers of Zionism, whose actions changed the standing of the Jewish people in the world. Among the nonreligious, he is profoundly admired for his support of Zionism, in contrast with the majority of Orthodox rabbis. Furthermore, many of his opponents among the non-Zionist Orthodox public unreservedly state that his motives were "holy." I do not intend to discuss the historical parameters that present Rabbi Kook as a saint; rather, I will examine his character traits as a saint through an analysis of the texts that he authored, and the incorporation of those texts in his rich spiritual and cultural world.

Chapter One

Methodology

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook lived in a modern world. To a certain extent, he began to experience the undermining of humanism in the First World War.[1] He died in Mandatory Palestine in 1935, and did not live to see the total collapse of normative systems that occurred in the Second World War. Because he did not know the postmodern world, he meets the nostalgic criteria of the saint. As I mentioned above, the figure of the saint in the Christian world begins with official recognition by the Church. That is to say, the element of public recognition is a component of the image of the saint. While originally an official body declared sainthood, beginning in the twentieth century one could also speak of saintliness in the context of consensus—that is, public acceptance. Rabbi Kook is indeed broadly viewed as an exceptional figure. Generations of religious Zionist pupils are educated to follow in his path, and the members of his close circle saw him as a supreme charismatic authority. In the secular public he is perceived as the premier spiritual representative of religious support for the Zionist enterprise.

Another consideration in this context is that the saint, in the Catholic sense, is proclaimed as such only after his passing. Orthodox Jewry in the Diaspora did not acknowledge Rabbi Kook as their spiritual guide during the years of his activity. The evidence shows that even in the 1940s his writings were not commonly known in Europe, although European Jews had heard

1 For Rabbi Kook's life, see A. Rozenak, *Rabbi A. I. Kook* (Jerusalem, 2007) [Hebrew]. Biographies of a hagiographical bent have been written as well, such as Rabbi Judah Leib Maimon (Fishman), *Rabbi Abraham Isaac ha-Kohen Kook* (Jerusalem, 1965) [Hebrew]. It is noteworthy that Rabbi Kook apparently understood the war in a positive manner, since its apocalyptic elements fit into his messianic vision. This is indicated, e.g., in his essay "War," published in his book *Orot*; this topic is worthy of a lengthy discussion.

of him. Rabbi Kook became a saintly figure only after intensive educational work spanning decades, the greater part of which was encouraged by the leaders of state religious education in Israel.[2]

Sources

The saint, with his traits, image, and activity, is a central topic in Rabbi Kook's thought. For our purposes, I define "saint" as a religious personage with characteristics that border on perfect, who possesses an exceptional religious consciousness, and who acts in an altruistic manner for the elevation and redemption of the world. Rabbi Kook added the national dimension to these characteristics, as we will see in Chapter Six. His discussions of the saint clearly tended toward the obsessive, in terms of both his analysis of the characteristics of such a figure and his revealing confessions. In this respect, Rabbi Kook is exceptional in the landscapes of religious Zionist thought and modern Orthodoxy.

The image of Rabbi Kook as religious genius is composed of at least two strata:

(1) Historical activity, constructed from testimonies and evaluations. His activity was based mainly on his connection with the New and Old *Yishuv* (roughly speaking, the New *Yishuv* refers to the Zionist-inspired Jewish community in the Land of Israel, and the Old *Yishuv* refers to the pre-Zionist Jewish community there) on the one hand, and with the Zionist movement and its personages, on the other. Scholarly research has explored the question of the altruistic motives of Rabbi Kook's activity.[3]

(2) Texts: Rabbi Kook barely engaged in methodical writing. His style was generally aphoristic, and was composed of a lengthy series of random paragraphs on various issues. His writings include letters, commentaries, and collections of passages.

The following discussion will be based mainly on textual analysis. I ascribe great importance to the few compositions that are methodical, and

2 See D. Schwartz, "On Religious Zionist Extremism: Education and Ideology," *Dor le Dor: Studies in the History of Jewish Education in Israel and the Diaspora* (forthcoming) [Hebrew].

3 See D. Schwartz, "From First Blossoming to Realization: The History of the Religious Zionist Movement and Its Ideas," in *The Religious Zionism: An Era of Changes. Studies in Memory of Zvulun Hammer*, ed. A. Cohen and Y. Harel (Jerusalem, 2004), 40-51 [Hebrew].

that compelled Rabbi Kook to engage in consecutive writing. I especially focus on two works: "*Eder ha-Yakar*" ("The Noble Sum"—from Zechariah 11:13) and "*Ikvei ha-Tzon*" (The Tracks of the Sheep"—from Song of Songs 1:8), both of which were published in 1906, and which were reprinted in a single volume. These essays are infused with the consciousness of the saint and the exemplary individual.

The other sources in Rabbi Kook's writings that are relevant for the religious genius, although not in methodical fashion, fall into two categories:

(1) Revealing personal passages, in which the author attests to his propensities, desires, and visions. The image of the singular individual emerges from within these passages.

(2) Random philosophical passages, which enable us to compose the portrait of the exemplary individual.

Rabbi Kook ascribed great importance to the perception of the *tzaddik* (the spiritual leader of the community) in Hasidism. To a great degree, the figure of the Hasidic *tzaddik* is the starting point for the variegated and rich perception of the saint. The Hasidic influence penetrated as far as the notion of the worth of the *tzaddik*'s eating, which appears from time to time in Rabbi Kook's collections. He found nothing wrong in giving a monetary donation to the *tzaddik*, "in the manner of a gift expressing sublime honor."[4] Rabbi Kook developed a sort of restorative historiographic theory that "Torah scholars" and the "righteous" (*tzaddikim*) were the leadership in ancient times. A series of historical events, first among them the Exile, eroded the standing of those individuals. Hasidism restored the standing of the *tzaddik*: "The recent Hasidism came and strove to rectify this, to restore the living worth of the righteous individual and his unique activity. This notion [of such activity] is both mystic and social, and much attention must be devoted to its positive and negative aspects."[5] The end of this passage teaches of a certain reservation, and Rabbi Kook's conception of the saint is not just another version of the Hasidic *tzaddik*, but a rich and variegated development of the Hasidic figure.

4 *Kevatzim*, vol. 1, 174.

5 *Shemonah Kevatzim* 2:156 (vol. 1, 339).

Phenomenological Methodology

Our discussion will be influenced by methodologies from the phenomenological school of the philosophy of religion that arose at the beginning of the twentieth century in Germany and Austria. Rudolf Otto, Max Scheller, Friedrich Heiler, and Gerardus van der Leeuw each argued in his own way that the religious consciousness must be understood and described from within itself. Psychology, sociology, and politics can aid in understanding the religious mind, but the religious act is understood first and foremost from within religion. They explained holiness and the image of the saint in a similar manner. In the Jewish world, this approach especially influenced Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik[6] and Abraham Joshua Heschel,[7] whose philosophical orientation vastly differs from that of Rabbi Kook. Nonetheless, Rabbi Kook adopted the conception of the existence of a universal religious consciousness, which he called the "holy sentiment [*regesh*]" or the "general sentiment of religion," connecting to his idea of universal morality.

I use phenomenological methodology as a tool for understanding the image of Rabbi Kook as a "saint" based on his profound religious experience and religious consciousness. I intend to set aside the specific time and place in which he was active, to disregard his leadership of a circle of followers and the thinkers and series of interests that guided him in his activity, and to examine the features of his personality itself in terms of religious genius. I am aware that a study of Rabbi Kook's ideological circles would contribute greatly to an understanding of his conduct as a saint, but in the current book we will focus exclusively on his writings.

From an interpretive aspect, our methodology will be twofold. Rabbi Kook's creative spiritual activity was obviously conducted within a defined conceptual framework. He drew upon Kabbalistic and Hasidic sources, and was influenced by European philosophical approaches such as those of

6 See D. Schwartz, *The Philosophy of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, vol. 1: *Religion or Halakha*, trans. B. Stein (Leiden, 2007); vol. 2: *From Phenomenology to Existentialism*, trans. B. Stein (Leiden, 2012).

7 See, e.g., N. Rotenstreich, "On Prophetic Consciousness," *Journal of Religion* 54 (1974): 185-98; D. Schwartz, *Aggadah in the Prism of Phenomenology: A Reexamination of "Heavenly Torah"* (forthcoming).

Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Bergson. Evaluating Rabbi Kook's thought on the background of its sources will be the platform for our discussion of its meaning. Evaluation is the first interpretive phase; in this book, we will seek to explore the additional significance of Rabbi Kook's thought, namely, as an expression of the "saint." The image of the religious genius is built on a methodical platform and constitutes an additional interpretive stratum.

Systemization

In his examination of the hermeneutic traditions of Western culture, Kepnes distinguished between the "destructive tradition," whose postmodernist representatives are Derrida and Foucault, and the "constructive tradition," represented by Richard Gadamer. The former tradition is concerned with the formational conditions and processes of cultural meanings, while the latter discusses the new possibilities of meaning in cultural products.[8] We cannot examine the deconstructive dimension of Rabbi Kook's teachings by itself. Although it is extremely important to understand the archaeology of the text aided by Freudian, Marxist, and other theories, Rabbi Kook's text involves distinctly constructive dimensions, and the meanings it contains open the way for countless new possibilities.

I have argued on various occasions that Rabbi Kook's writings do not strive for systemization.[9] This is a tremendous collection of passages that may be defined as religious poetry, expressing his religious mood. Rabbi Kook did not refrain from expressing differing, even contradictory, intuitions. His character supports the argument that religious greatness of spirit is not restricted to the confines of method or school. The thought of such an individual is conducted on open and parallel tracks. Specifically for this reason, Rabbi Kook's writings anticipate the postmodernist spirit. We cannot impose only a single interpretive tradition on his writings. Furthermore, the argument that Rabbi Kook did not attempt to formulate

8 See S. Kepnes, "Introduction," in *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age*, ed. S. Kepnes (New York, 1996), 5.

9 See, e.g., D. Schwartz, *Religious Zionism between Logic and Messianism* (Tel Aviv, 1999), 198-233 [Hebrew]; see also J. Garb, "Rabbi Kook—National Thinker or a Mystic Poet," *Daat* 54 (2004): 69-96 [Hebrew].

a defined philosophical method means that we should not search for an underlying textual motif that will explain the text as a whole. Since his writing is usually aphoristic, in that each text is self-sufficient, we must seek its meaning in every subtle motif, citation of biblical verse, and literary ornament that appear in these texts. From the outset, Rabbi Kook did not want to restrict the reading of his writings, and therefore related to them as poetry. He wrote explicitly: "I cannot restrict myself to one topic, to one matter, to a single level, or to a single style. Rather, I must draw upon all styles, all matters, all the levels, everything. If I see a single path that I like and am drawn only to it, afterwards I see how the other ways demand their role of me."[10] In consequence, almost every conceptual passage in his writings takes on a wealth of meanings in different strata. This is how I analyze Rabbi Kook's writings.

Moreover, understanding the traits of the saint require a deconstructive reading of Rabbi Kook's writings. I argue that he planned, from the outset, to enjoy total freedom in his writing—that is, he refused to be subjugated to any one method or approach. The study of the meanings in his writings includes the stratum of personality; such an assumption would seem obvious. We should also note Rabbi Kook's own intuition: he was aware that his personality is a necessary component in the construction of conceptual intuition. He wrote in his letters that

> when a person begins to conduct some study and research, he must always prepare himself, according to his ability, to be close to what is examined; if he can, he should draw so close to the subject that he can sense it from within himself, from his soul, and from the depth of his feelings. Then, if he will not do the most he can, an essential condition will be lacking of the necessary conditions for discovering the truth.[11]

It has already been noted that Rabbi Kook's creative capacity was much greater in the Land of Israel than in the Diaspora.[12] The element of

10 *Shemonah Kevatzim* 6:1 (vol. 3, 3). See also ibid., 6:140 (vol. 3, 50).

11 *Igrot ha-Re'ayah*, vol. 1, 94.

12 On the distinction between the Torah of the Diaspora and that of the Land of Israel, see *Igrot*

personality, with its feelings and emotions, fashion ideas. One of the reasons why Rabbi Kook did not succeed in his activity on behalf of Degel Yerushalayim (literally, "Flag of Jerusalem"), the alternative federation led by Torah scholars and those close to them that he wanted to establish in place of the religious Zionist Mizrachi movement, was his unwillingness to remain abroad on behalf of the new movement. That is, not only is the personality involved in meaning, the venue of the writing is of importance, as well.

To return to our deconstructive reading of Rabbi Kook's writings: one of the traditions that Rabbi Kook absorbed was the medieval esoteric tradition of Maimonidean rationalism (see the extensive discussion below, Chapter Twelve). Many fourteenth-century interpreters of Maimonides, by way of example, preferred to explain the nature of his *Guide of the Perplexed* not from its methodical chapters that discuss defined topics (the Creation, Divine Providence, and the like), but rather from his casual references to these topics in chapters that are concerned with entirely different issues.[13] Rabbi Kook was quite familiar with the tradition of the interactive reading of a text, in which "the sky is the limit," and this quite possibly paved the way for the style in which he himself chose to write. He did not, however, absorb this tradition as it was. An example of how Rabbi Kook significantly differed from the medieval rationalist tradition is his deep esteem for aesthetic creativity, while the medieval tradition thought lightly of art and music as an aesthetic experience; this, too, will be discussed below in Chapter Seven.

Basic Characteristics

An initial list of the personality and conceptional motifs that are to be found in Rabbi Kook's character would include the following:

(1) Rationalism: Rabbi Kook was the author of intriguing philosophical and religious ideas;

ha-Re'ayah, vol. 1, 112. See, e.g., Y. Cherlow, *The Torah of the Land of Israel in Light of the Teachings of R. Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook* (Hispin, 1998) [Hebrew].

13 I discussed these questions extensively in my book *Contradiction and Concealment in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Ramat Gan, 2002) [Hebrew].

(2) Mysticism: he possessed the religious consciousness that seeks *unio mystica* with God;

(3) Prophecy: he was charismatic, with the consciousness of a prophet;

(4) Nationalism and altruism: he supported the national idea, against the stance prevalent in the rabbinic circles to which he belonged;

(5) Leadership: he served as the first Chief Rabbi in Mandatory Palestine, and gathered a circle of disciples around him;

(6) Openness and resistance to change: he exhibited openness regarding his cultural sources, but was conservative in many of his halakhic ways;

(7) Dialectics and unification of opposites: he experienced, and formulated, swings between extremes. He was sure that the extremes came from one source.

In each of these categories, however, Rabbi Kook was not unique in his time. Other Orthodox Jewish thinkers, both in the Land of Israel and abroad, also offered conceptional, mystical, and prophetic insights. Additionally, the behavior of some could be understood as exceptionally altruistic. Nevertheless, the combination of all these traits was not commonplace, and explains our view of Rabbi Kook as a "saint."

In his thought, Rabbi Kook anchored the saint in the cosmic reality. That is, all of existence is dependent on the saint for its proper working, on the one hand, and on the other, for its rectification and elevation. The saint is perceived as the one by whose merit material existence endures. Without him, the world would once again be absorbed in the divine light. In Rabbi Kook's terminology, the saint is responsible for the "quantitative" aspect of existence.[14] He creates the merging of the qualitative (the light) with the quantitative. Accordingly, the saint is envisioned as a partner in the act of Creation, whose decisions are accepted by the Master of the Universe. Rabbi Kook enhanced the biblical and midrashic traditions of exceptional individuals, and fully exploited the theurgic element at the basis of Kabbalah. We cannot overestimate the importance of the saint in

14 *Shemonah Kevatzim* 7:134 (vol. 3, 200). Although this conception is a fact for Rabbi Kook, it need not serve as a practical program for the saint. In other words, he does not have to trouble himself with the question: "How can the world survive if the spiritual longing is so prevalent?" (*Kevatzim*, vol. 2, 87).

Rabbi Kook's thought, and in this book we will examine the details and meanings of the saint's cosmic responsibility.

Interpretation

An additional note is in order at this juncture. This work is based on the fundamental assumption that the deep infrastructure of Rabbi Kook's thought is Kabbalistic.[15] I argue, however, that many passages in Rabbi Kook's writings were composed, from the outset, with multiple meanings, at times parallel, while in other instances one is built on another. It was axiomatic for Rabbi Kook that the Kabbalah itself requires clarification and a prosaic formulation in modern language (that is, modern Hebrew), for the following reasons:

(1) Esoteric tradition: throughout its history, the Kabbalah was perceived as a teaching transmitted orally from one individual to another, and therefore was not formulated in writing;

(2) Depth: the messages of the Kabbalah are seen to be complicated or hidden, and must be unveiled;

15 This approach was already raised in the important articles by J. Avivi: "History as a Divine Prescription," in *Rabbi Mordechai Breuer Festschrift: Collected Papers in Jewish Studies*, ed. M. Bar-Asher et al. (Jerusalem, 1992), 709-71 [Hebrew]; idem, "The Source of Light: Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook's *Shemonah Kevatzim*," *Tzohar* 1 (2000): 93-111 [Hebrew]. I applied this approach in my analysis of motifs in the thought of Rabbi Kook: see D. Schwartz, *Challenge and Crisis in Rabbi Kook's Circle* (Tel Aviv, 2001), 141-206 [Hebrew]. I will make three minor comments regarding Avivi's first, and fundamental, article, which I used a few times in the writing of the current work:

(1) The comparison of Rabbi Kook with Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzatto is illuminating, but in regard to various questions Rabbi Kook cannot be understood without the massive influence of Habad Hasidism, whose terminology he constantly employs. An example of this is the distinction between *Ein-Sof* and His light, which is discussed in depth by J. Ben-Shlomo, "Perfection and Perfectibility in Rabbi Kook's Thought," *Iyyun* 33 (1984): 289-309 [Hebrew]. In his second article, Avivi related to this Hasidic influence.

(2) Avivi's plan for classifying and identifying Rabbi Kook's terminology as a dictionary was daring and important, but it seems that the terms that he classified under Lurianic Kabbalah could also be explained in accordance with the early Kabbalah, such as the Zoharic. Here, as well, Avivi's second article provided balance for his first.

(3) The image of the righteous individual, or saint, is an essential element, one that cannot be disregarded, in Rabbi Kook's formulation of his Kabbalistic approach. The conception of the righteous individual fashions Rabbi Kook's metaphysical approach.

(3) Difficulty: the Kabbalistic teachings are deemed abstract, while formulated in complex symbols.

Rabbi Kook also thought that the need to clarify the Kabbalistic teachings arose in the generation of Redemption, as opposed to previous generations. His mission lay, so he believed, in disseminating the secrets of the Kabbalah to his generation. For him, the revelation of secrets was one of the markers and needs of the process in which the redemption would be realized. He wrote to Rabbi Isaiah Orenstein (1854-1909): "His eminence should know that my entire intent in my notebooks, and in all that I write, is solely to arouse the minds of Torah scholars, old and young, to engage in the study of the inner meaning of the Torah."[16] Rabbi Kook argued in the article "Worship," which he wrote in 1906, that the great and perfect individual is entrusted with the study of the "divine wisdom." He wrote:

> Consequently, the obligation that is imposed on the greatest Torah scholars at present is inestimable, and whoever has the faculty and inclination for sublime spiritual matters should set his study and inquiry mainly in the heights of the divine wisdom, which comprises the aggadah in its entirety, as the outstanding individuals in all the generations cried out continually in this respect, by the scholars in the various and ramified aspects of Kabbalah, Hasidism, philosophy, science, ethical teachings, in all the generations.[17]

Rabbi Kook noted the tradition of the gradual revealing over time of the Kabbalistic secrets to the broad public, to the generation of the "footsteps of the Messiah."[18] Rabbi Kook's antinomian conception (to be discussed in Chapter Eight) is also based on the appeal of engaging in Kabbalah, at the expense of particular halakhic study. An important interpretive element of Rabbi Kook's writings is Kabbalistic.

16 *Igrot ha-Re'ayah*, vol. 1, 41. See N. Gottel, *Mekhutavei Re'ayah: The Circles of R. Avraham Itzhak HaCohen Kook's Correspondents* (Jerusalem: 2000), 97 [Hebrew]. On this issue, see J. Garb, *The Chosen Will Become Herds: Studies in Twentieth-Century Kabbalah*, trans. Y. Berkovits-Murciano (New Haven, 2009), 23-29.

17 *Eder ha-Yakar*, 143.

18 *Igrot ha-Re'ayah*, vol. 2, 69.

I therefore maintain that, in large part, Rabbi Kook's writings consist of at least three interpretive layers:

(1) The first layer is Kabbalistic, and usually depicts the process of the Sefirotic emanation, which occurs in the world and in the soul;

(2) The second layer contains the philosophical ideas with which Rabbi Kook occupied himself, from the medieval rationalist orientation to modern Kantian and post-Kantian thought;

(3) The third layer comprises the series of prosaic and literary ideas that he formulated in poetical language, and the ideas that were raised in the historical and nationalist-messianic environment in which Rabbi Kook was active and in which he expressed his thought.

I assume that the characteristics of the saint in Rabbi Kook's thought are woven of a combination of these three layers, and it is in this light that I will relate to his writing and to the wealth of nuances, incorporation of biblical verses, symbols, and motifs that compose it. If we take this assumption to its reasonable conclusion, we find that Rabbi Kook's literary corpus is built for the continuous meeting of writer and reader. The text's meanings are not based solely on the layer of the author's intent; they also incorporate the layer of meaning of the reader, who wants to analyze and internalize the text's contents and messages. The reader himself moves between the different interpretive possibilities, and the results can be formulated as language games. Rabbi Kook's writings assume a great deal of author-reader interaction, and he was also aware of this type of writing from the classical medieval literature (the writings of Judah Halevi, Abraham Ibn Ezra, and Maimonides). Thus, the methodology of phenomenology, which constitutes the object in accordance with the subject and the subjective consciousness, is suitable for a reading of Rabbi Kook's writings.

Chapter Two

The State of the Research

The character of the saint is present in different ways in Rabbi Kook's ideas. He frequently refers in his writings to "those possessing spirituality," the "great noble ones," the "great souls," the "universal souls," the "noble souls," the "great masters of spirituality," "exemplary individuals," and the "great ones of the world" who are active in the messianic era. These are only a few of Rabbi Kook's appellations for the saint. A comparison of these passages with Rabbi Kook's life reveals an inescapable parallelism. Rabbi Kook referred directly to himself and wrote an outline for his spiritual biography, thereby reflecting the religious genius in his personality.

A number of scholars have sensed Rabbi Kook's exceptional personality and used various tools to explore the reasons for this feeling. Most related to the ideas of this great thinker, but wrestled with the question of the nature and genre of his thought (philosopher-Kabbalist; systematical thinker-poet). Any examination of his personality usually occurred by chance. Examples of scholars who adopted this approach are Zvi Yaron, who reviewed some insights of the conception of the righteous individual in Rabbi Kook's thought;[1] Benjamin Ish-Shalom, who noted the balance in the image of the righteous one;[2] and Avinoam Rozenak, whose biography of Rabbi Kook was written within a climate appreciative of Rabbi Kook's personality.[3] We will now survey two approaches that related directly to his image as a religious genius.

1 Z. Yaron, *The Philosophy of Rabbi Kook*, trans. A. Tomaschoff (Jerusalem, 1991), 122-31.

2 B. Ish-Shalom, *Rav Avraham Itzhak HaCohen Kook: Between Rationalism and Mysticism*, trans. O. Wiskind-Elper (Albany, 1993), 162-66.

3 See above, Chapter One, n. 1.