

Rav Kook and Religious Zionism

1] "It is impossible for a Jew to be faithful to his thoughts and visions outside of the Land in the same way that he is faithful in the Land of Israel. Manifestations of holiness, of whatever level, tend to be pure in the Land, and outside the Land, mixed with dross. However, in relation to the longing and the attachment of a person to the Land of Israel, his thoughts become purified by virtue of the 'air of Eretz Yisrael'." It is only with this perfect faith, belief and practice that true Judaism can be realised." (Orot)

2] "It is needed for Eretz Yisrael to be built and for all of [Am] Yisrael living in it, with every organization in order and running smoothly: Mikdash and Kingship, Priesthood and Prophecy, [Halachic] Judges and Police. Then the Oral [experiential] Torah lives in all its splendour and glory." (Orot haTorah 1:3)

3] "The planting of G-d develops and blooms; and the light of Salvation and Redemption spreads out slowly like the dawn which stretches over the mountains" (Orot HaTeshuva).

4] "In all paths of life it is the secular which awakens first, and then the holy is compelled to awaken, to complete the renewal of the secular, to beautify it and to redeem it." (Ma'amarei Ha-Reiya pf.403)

A discussion on Religious Zionism based on Rav Kook

Some Textual Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What do you think is meant by “the air of Eretz Yisrael”?
- In source 2 where Rav Kook talks about Geula why do you think he specifies that that is when the *oral torah* specifically will manifest in all its glory?
- What is the significance of the metaphors that Rav Kook uses in source 3? How is the Geula like “a rising sun” or “a plant growing”?
- What examples can you think of in Judaism of where “the secular awakens first and then the holy is compelled to awaken”?

Some General Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Rav Kook felt that secular Zionists thinkers and pioneers were, in fact, doing the work of Hashem. Was Rav Kook right? Were the Secular Zionists the builders of something holy?
- Is ‘or l’goyim’ best achieved when we are spread in the diaspora and able to influence them directly, or best achieved by being a ‘model’ nation in Israel?
- Is Judaism a “religion” or a “nation” or both? What makes you say that?
- How can we be sure that the third Geula is a real one?

Some Personal Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What features of the modern state of Israel make you feel like we are living in “Reishit Tzmichat Geulateinu – the beginning of the sprouting of the Geula?”
- Do you identify with Rav Kook’s vision or Rav Soloveitchik’s?
- What does being religious Zionist mean to you?

Other sources and quotes to bring into discussion:

Rav Soloveitchik on Religious Zionism:

This messianic position of Rav Kook was the only stream of Religious Zionist thought up until the Rav. The Rav was a rationalist philosopher who believed that when looking at History, we cannot prescribe meaning to events. Just like we cannot say why the Holocaust or other such events occurred, therefore philosophically we can’t claim that the establishment of the State of Israel is a Reishit Semichat Geulateinu. In years to come, once we enter the Messianic period, perhaps we can look back and say that this was the period of Reishit Semichat Geulateinu but we cannot determine that now.

Rav Kalischer (1795-1874):

Regarding the redemption of Israel, which we all await, **one should not think that Hashem will descend suddenly from the heavens** to the land to declare to His people: “Go out (from the exile)!” Nor will He send His anointed one [mashiach] in a moment to blast the ‘great shofar’ to the dispersed of Israel and ingather them to Jerusalem ... The promises of the prophets will most certainly be fulfilled at the end of days ... but not hastily in one day, rather the redemption of Israel shall come slowly, slowly ... For the initial *phases of the redemption will be by the awakening of the spirits of the heartfelt and the will of the kingdoms to ingather few of the many dispersed of Israel to the Holy Land ...*” (Shivat Tzion pg. 292)



A Related Story - Why I Made Aliyah by Hadassa Goldberg (@therealhadassa) on Instagram, June 2020

(<https://www.instagram.com/p/CBrGjrxIM85/?igshid=bx4ise49xku8>)

The truth is that I don’t feel like I made Aliyah when we did in 2004. Technically that’s when my family and I moved.

I chose to make Aliyah in 2005 when my brother was born and even though we didn’t have family here - we somehow had a full fridge and Brit Mila Hall.

I chose to make Aliyah in 2006 when I landed in Ben Gurion and felt home.

I chose to make Aliyah in 2007 when I realized I could read Chumash, Mishna and Rashi - completely understanding it.

I chose to make Aliyah in 2008 when snow covered Jerusalem in a soft white blanket and we crunched around in it.

I chose to make Aliyah in 2009 when I watched the sunset as the Shabbat Siren wailed.

I chose to make Aliyah in 2010 when I walked to the Kotel on Shavuot with thousands of people for the first time.

I chose to make Aliyah in 2011 when walking home at night didn’t scare me and at 15 - I was safe and I felt free.

I chose to make Aliyah in 2012 when my 3 day hospitalization left my side bed table covered in candies and gifts from local volunteers.

I chose to make Aliyah in 2013 when that very same hospital let me in with a guitar and candies to return the favor.

I chose to make Aliyah in 2014 when The Three Boys died.

I chose to make Aliyah in 2015 when we sang “In Eshkachech” under our Chuppah, and again in 2016 when my Husband joined the army and served.

I chose to make Aliyah in 2017 as I hiked through a river.

I chose to make Aliyah in 2018 when I spend Yom Hashoa with Holocaust survivors getting their hair done for free at a local salon.

I chose to make Aliyah in 2019 as we ran to bomb shelters and thanked the soldiers for their service

I chose to make Aliyah in 2020 as we quarantined, and realized so deeply that I was home.

I’ve chosen to make Aliyah at many points in my life, and in a country as wondrous as this, new reasons to love Aliya and **IL** always come up.

My old schoolmates wished me “Lots of luck” when we moved in 2004. And BH, after 15 years, I can say I’ve had exactly that 🍀

Some Interactive Resources:

Youtube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3HkaqO1Br8E> Israel: Do you see the miracle?

Pictures – Show chanichim pictures of the cyrus cylinder at the British museum. What is its significance?

Movie – What could Shrek teach us about how we expect a redemption to happen vs how it actually happens?

Activity – Write down your “elevator speech” about Judaism. How would it compare to Avraham’s elevator speech (which would just be Am, Eretz ve Torat Yisrael!). Why has Judaism changed so much from its founder to us?

Survey – What two people have a common demoninator with “Jew”? Jews in America responded with “Christian and Muslim.” Jews in Israel responded with “Russian and Arab”. What does this tell us about how people are thinking about Judaism?

Rav Kook and Creativity

1] “I walk around me with an overwhelming jealousy of the secular world. It is a jealousy that consumes me. For is it really possible that the power of creativity has ceased in the religious world? Has it all been given to the secular world? How could this be?” – (**Chedarav p.215**).

2] “When I lived in London, I used to visit the National Gallery. My favourite pictures were those of Rembrandt. I truly think that Rembrandt was a Tzadik... Now and then there are great men who are blessed and privileged to see the “hidden light” in their lifetime. I think that Rembrandt was one of them.” – Rav Kook, **Jewish Chronicle, 1935**.

3] “We must educate religious people to be physically healthy as well as spiritually healthy. We must help them develop a refined sensitivity and awareness of the beauty of emotions. This is possible only through the involvement in the wonderful beauty that exists within music, nature, poetry and all of the arts.” (**Orot HaEmunah p.17**).

4] “It should not be an accepted fact that every talented writer or famous poet is an atheist. We must break this stigma and show the world the poetic beauty that comes from those who are immersed in the source of the nation’s natural life.” (**Igrot HaReiya, 1, p.95**)

A discussion on Creativity based on Rav Kook

Some Textual Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Just reading the first sentence of the first source, what do you think Rav Kook would be talking about? Are you surprised the statement comes from Rav Kook?
- Would the Jewish Chronicle publish anything like source 2 today?
- Do you think Rav Kook literally means “all of the arts” in source 3?
- What does Rav Kook refer to by “source of the nation’s natural life”?

Some General Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Do you think it is still a “accepted fact” that talented artists are atheists?
- Do you over the past decades our religious world has become more creative?
- What is the difference between “art” and “propaganda”?
- Why do you think Tzfat has become the artistic centre of Israel?

Some Personal Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What surprises you about Rav Kook’s outlook? What doesn’t surprise you?
- Take a look at some Rembrandt. Do you see what Rav Kook meant?
- What parts of your Jewish life do you consider creative or not creative enough?
- How does creativity relate to Shabbat? Do you feel creatively restricted on Shabbat?
- Do you ever find yourself jealous of someone else’s creativity? Do you think it is something that is ok to be jealous of?
- Do you think creativity makes you ‘free’ – is this a kind of freedom that our religion encourages?
- What areas do you think you are particularly creative in? Why do you think you have been given these gifts? How are you going to use them to impact the world?

Some Interactive Resources:

TED Talk - Elizabeth Gilbert – “Your Elusive Creative Genius”. What does

Activity – Get everyone to draw a circle and put their “gifts” inside the circle and things they feel like they don’t ‘have’ outside the circle. Use it to discuss how we are supposed to use our gifts to serve Hashem.

Activity – Print out pictures of secular and religious artists. Ask chanichim to group/rank them based on how influential they are in general. Then ask them to rank them based on how influential they’ve been personally for each chanich.



Other sources and quotes to bring into discussion:

Pablo Picasso (artist):

“Every child is born an artist; the problem is staying an artist when you grow up.”

Maya Angelou (poet):

“You can’t use up creativity, the more you use, the more you have.”

Jordan Peterson (psychologist):

“The difference between art and propaganda is an artist has no idea what the final outcome will be.”

Einstein (physicist):

“Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world and all there will ever be to know and understand.”

Gemara Brachot 55a:

“Bezalel knew how to combine the letters of the aleph bet that make up the world.”

Robert Pinsky - poet laureate at the U.S. Library of Congress from 1997 to 2000.

“I grew up eating Jewish food, hearing Jewish jokes and arguments, attending an Orthodox synagogue and its Hebrew school. How could such things not affect my imagination, including my writing? On the other hand, my parents were quite secular in their outlook; “nominally kosher” might describe the household in certain matters. That contradiction, too, is part of me, so of my writing. In particular, I remember amid the terribly long Saturday morning services the beauty of the cantorial singing: the sounds of words in a language I couldn’t much understand, but the sound far more expressive than the stiff, boring English translation I might glance at. Like an anchor, or like a life raft? . . .the sounds of words.”



A Related Story – A Letter to the Betzalel School of Arts from Rav Kook

To the honourable heads of the academy for the education of Jewish arts, the school of Betzalel. Shalom!

There are people who say that creating a school of Jewish arts should not be a priority at this present period of time. They say that there are more urgent and important issues... Nevertheless, a desire that comes from the heart of its people, this very yearning, is a sign that there is life and hope for success.

Yet this sign of life is not just a hollow symbol. It may bring many practical benefits. The development and growth of Jewish art will bring financial profits to many Jewish families living in the land of Israel.

In addition, it will help develop emotions of beauty and purity for the children of Zion...It will lift up many depressed soul and help give them a clearer and more enlightened perspective on the beauty of life and nature and the importance of work and agriculture. **Igrot HaReiyah, 1 p.204.**

Rav Kook and Animals

1] Surely it is impossible to imagine that the Master of all beings that “has compassion on His creatures” (Tehillim 145:9) would create an eternal law in His creation that makes it impossible for humankind to survive without distorting its moral sensitivity by murdering animals. (**Chazon HaTzimchonut – C.T**)

2] Adam HaRishon was not permitted to eat meat. Only after the children of Noach survived the flood was meat permitted to them. Can we possibly imagine that we have forever lost that highly moral sensitivity that was once our inheritance? (C.T)

3] Mitzvot that involved eating meat were instructed in a specific way, in order to prepare humankind for the ethical goals of the ‘end of days’. (C.T)

4] If pious treatment of animals becomes a public norm within society *before the correct time* (when humans are still morally deficient) it will bring with it many necessary evils. For example, we may encounter many cruel people who would slaughter human beings without mercy. When their moral conscience comes to overwhelm them with guilt, they will pacify it with righteous behaviour towards animals. Therefore, Godly wisdom decided that in order to create a firm path to morality, it was necessary to temporarily disconnect humans and animals in order to keep our focus on humanitarian morality. Only through this will it be possible to bring true happiness at the end of days. (C.T)

A discussion on Animals based on Rav Kook

Some Textual Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What does the historical story told in source 2 tell us about how Judaism regards eating meat?
- In source 3, what does Rav Kook mean by the 'ethical goals of the end of days'?
- What is the overall message of source 4?

Some General Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Do you agree with Rav Kook in source 1 when he says that murdering animals is "distorting human moral sensitivity"?
- The mitzvot that Rav Kook refers to in source 3 are the covering of blood with dirt after slaughter (Kisoi Dam), shechita and animal sacrifice. Can you analyse in what ways these halachot are commanded to fine-tune our moral sensitivity? (use green box!)
- Do you think pious treatment of animals as a norm in society has come at "the right time"?
- Can you think of any 'evil people' like the ones Rav Kook refers to in source 4?

Some Personal Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Is the ideology that Rav Kook presents a good reason for being vegetarian? Can you think of any other reasons people/you might be vegetarian?
- Rav Kook himself was a vegetarian except on Shabbat. Some of his students were strict vegetarians. How do you feel about Rav Kook's approach to being vegetarian? Why do you think he wasn't vegetarian on Shabbat?

A Related Poem – Adapted from "What the Donkey Saw" – Rick Lupert

Animals sometimes see things we don't. or don't yet. They're the best earthquake predictors.

My cat alone sees things in dimensions, I still don't believe exist.

So it's no surprise to me that Balaam's donkey saw an Angel of the Holy One on the road on his way to say words put into his mouth.

He beat his donkey (which is not a metaphor) three times as she covered before what she knew was there. I can't imagine beating an animal, even one time, for any reason.

Pay attention to what the donkey does and says. It's a miracle it's talking at all. And may you always say the words that were put in your mouth by your conscience. From them, we will all grow rich.

Videos – Do we have a right to kill animal? Rabbi Dr Yitzchak Breitowitz and Sarah Esther Crispe argue... yes! But there are a few catches. Have a watch with your chanichim:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oq48lbgSE6c> – Sarah Esther Crispe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmRXRe9luEM> – Rabbi Dr Yitzchak Breitowitz

Articles – There are some practices that get a lot of bad press. If you feel like your chanichim are mature enough, you can launch into these controversial discussions. Are these practices actually Torah-ordained or are they just sociological phenomena that negatively developed over time?

<https://gothamist.com/news/kaparot-chicken-saved>

<https://www.972mag.com/temple-mount-activists-practice-sacrifice-in-east-jerusalem/>

Some Interactive Resources:

Internet – There are countless Jewish Vegetarian Societies on the world wide web that have a lot to say about Jewish sources about cruelty to animals.

Encouraging your chanichim to explore some of them during OBM or running some kind of internet treasure hunt could be fun!

Other sources and quotes to bring into discussion:

Bava Metziah 85a:

We are told that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was punished with a sickness because he told a calf being led to slaughter that had tried to hide beneath his garment: "Go! For this is what you were created for!" He was only healed after an incident in which he demonstrated compassion for a group of weasels.

Wikipedia:

Towards the end of his life, Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) followed a vegetarian diet. From 1942, he self-identified as a vegetarian. Hitler used vivid and gruesome descriptions of animal suffering and slaughter at the dinner table to try to dissuade his colleagues from eating meat.

Some Halachic laws concerning meat:

Covering the Blood: "If anyone of the Children of Israel or a convert who joins them traps an animal or bird that may be eaten and spills its blood, he must cover its blood with earth" (Vayikra 17:13).

Shechita: The act of slaughtering needs to be sanctified with a special prayer. One may not kill an animal and its offspring on the same day. One must use an extremely sharp knife.

Animal Sacrifice: As long as humankind still seeks to eat meat and slaughter animals for its own satisfaction, even though this is negative and undignified, for the time being, sacrifices help cultivate a feeling of gratitude towards God (Rav Kook). Rav Kook believed that the sacrifices of the messianic era would be 'vegetarian' sacrifices of flour and oil.

Ghandi:

Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed.

Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 10:7:

"There is nothing superfluous in the universe. Even flies, gnats, and mosquitoes are part of creation and, as such, serve a Divinely-appointed purpose"

