

CHAPTER 6

Harmonism, Novelty, and the Sacred in the Teachings of Rav Kook

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I do not often indulge my mystical penchant for finding significance in names, but I shall do so here because of the felicitous coincidence of the names of Rav Kook and the appropriateness of their meaning to his personality. The name "Kook" in Yiddish means a look, a glance. The Hebrew acrostic of his name, "HA-R-A-Y-H," standing for *Ha-Rav*, Avraham Yitzhak *Ha-Kohen*, means the look, the sight, the glance. Both names, therefore, imply vision.

This essay will treat three aspects of the grand vision of Rav Kook: his harmonistic approach; his conception of the new; and his view of the relations between the sacred and profane.

I

One of the major themes evident in all the writings of Rav Kook is that of harmonism. We all experience a degree of dissonance in our lives—our hearts and our minds are in almost constant and tragic confrontation; science and religion pull us into divergent paths; wherever we turn, intellectually or existentially, we are beset by dualisms, distinctions, and opposing concepts. Our lives don't seem to hang together, they lack coherence; our cognitive experience is pock-marked by antinomies and incompatible categories of all kinds; existence itself seems so very fragile, frangible, and fractured.

Harmonism is the desire to transcend all differences between

opposing ideas as to the way to truth, viewing them as but transient obstacles to be overcome, and harmonizing them in a grand, cosmic, mystico-philosophical effort to achieve the *Alma de-Yihuda*, the World of Unity of which the Zohar speaks, and which is the worthiest goal of man's aspirations. Rav Kook sees this as the proper antidote to the *Alma di-Peruda*, the World of Disunity, characterized by man's atomizing tendencies and the fragmentary nature of his perilous existence. In the state of *Alma de-Yihuda*, man's integrated life reflects the uncompromised unity of God; in the *Alma di-Peruda*, man's experience of dissonance is both cause and effect of the broken and disrupted unity of God.

One must add here that for Rav Kook, unlike the Lurianic kabbalists, what separates the worlds of Unity and Disunity is not time—with the World of Unity relegated to the eschatological era—but perception. In an objective sense, unity and harmony exist and are, indeed, the foundation of all existence: "All is naught but the revelation of oneness that appears in a variety of 'sparks.'"¹ It is only subjectively that fragmentation and conflict seem to prevail. Indeed, Rav Kook is primarily subjectivistic, his interest almost exclusively centered on man's inner life.

Thus, while Franz Rosenzweig viewed the world as dissonant and fragmented, Rav Kook saw it as whole, and he attributed the experience of fragmentation to our flawed perception of reality. Hence, objectively, "The world is not torn and shattered. It stands as a powerful structure. The highest heavens and the bowels of the earth form one unit, one world, one existence."²

I do not recall who first used the term "harmonism" to describe the thought of Rav Kook, but it is a most felicitous one. Rav Kook himself alludes to harmony, although not to describe his own thought, and it expresses well the particular quality and flavor of his quest for unity. Thus: "Every mitzvah and every halakhah has its own particular musical quality, which Knesset Israel listens to and enjoys."³ Musical tones ought to differ from each other by their very nature; yet they should not result in a cacophony but, approached properly, can be harmonized to produce a new, marvelous whole. Creation may now be little more than chaos, but man has the ability to make of it a divine symphony. Moreover, the proper and profound insight both into the world and into one's

self will reveal that unity is already ubiquitous and underlies the apparent mass of dissonance and atomization that seems to prevail.

Rav Kook's harmonism has a multiplicity of significant consequences and implications. Because I have written about it elsewhere,⁴ I shall not elaborate upon this aspect of the theme here, but just briefly adumbrate some of the areas that are comprehended in this grand conception of harmony. They include the spheres of metaphysics, education, epistemology, psychology, talmudic studies, Bible, war and peace, science and religion—to mention but a few. In other words, Rav Kook's striving for unity is totally comprehensive, indeed nothing less than a cosmic effort. And he does not lose sight of man's mundane interests in the drama of harmonization.

I alluded to the fact that Rav Kook's monism has its origin in the Zoharian concept of overcoming the '*Alma di-Peruda*' by establishing the '*Alma de-Yihuda*'. A more complete study of the history of this idea, in its various forms, would have to include the "SHeLaH"⁵ and the subsequent development of the theme in the hands of the Hasidic masters, the immediate influences on Rav Kook. Space does not permit the presentation of the other side of the coin: the implicit rejection by Rav Kook of the pluralistic views of the Mitnaggedic world, as exemplified by R. Hayyim Volozhiner in his *Nefesh ha-Hayyim*.

It is hard to avoid one last comment on Kookian harmonism, and that is that his theories dovetailed beautifully with his personal proclivities. Not only was the mode of his thought dialectical in a harmonistic manner, but his personality was irenic. He was a peaceful, peace-loving leader (a difficult combination!) who preferred to resolve differences rather than allow them to fester and lead to ugly and destructive confrontation. He did not eschew differences of opinion; on the contrary, he encouraged and cherished them. He was himself a man of principle who suffered terrible vilification from circles which to this very day studiously refrain from mentioning his name except, perhaps, to smear him. The more he was attacked by critics, often mindlessly extremist, the more resolutely he maintained his position and the more stubbornly he asserted his independence. But he wished to transcend, not dissolve, differences and so have each play its own role in the divine economy or symphony.

It is for this reason that, over fifty years after his death, it is painful to behold how he has been ill-served by some of his own followers, those who presume to be the official and authoritative interpreters of Rav Kook. Of course, he was a great nationalist whose love of Eretz Israel was legendary. But he was not a jingoist! One wonders what he would have said had he known that those who speak in his name and the name of his thinking sow divisiveness in Israel, speak the rhetoric of power and coercion, and throw bombs at adversaries, Jewish and non-Jewish. "Even in times of war," the Midrash teaches, "one must seek peace."⁶ Rav Kook was not a one-issue person. Eretz Israel was a cardinal part of his whole outlook, but it was not all of it. To highlight and absolutize the holiness of the Land and, at the same, time, to ignore or derogate the holiness of human life, all in the name of Rav Kook, is to betray him and his teachings. Rav Kook taught the principle of harmony, whether in the universe of ideas and precepts or in the realm of human relations or in the inner life of each individual. And in the symphony of creation, when one focuses on one note or one tone or one instrument to the neglect of others, one has not harmony but disruption and discord and divisiveness.

It is worth mentioning, in this respect, a beautiful *vort*, a homiletical insight, that has been repeated in his name. *Shalom*, Peace, according to the Sages, is one of the sacred Names of God; *Emet*, Truth, is His "seal." What is the difference between a "name" and a "seal," such that one characterizes Peace and the other Truth? It is this: A name or signature proceeds letter by letter, until the whole name is signed. A seal, however, imprints all in one act. So too, Truth is a seal—it is "all or nothing." Half a truth is a lie. But Peace is a name, a signature, and therefore can be attained only step-wise, bit by bit. Consequently, we must aspire for it piece by piece, and must not despair if we cannot win the prize of total peace all at once. Would that all of us, "Kookians" no less than others, bore this in mind in our politics as well as our theorizing!

II

Rav Kook's view of the New is exemplified in a posthumously published lecture—actually two introductory lectures to Yehudah Ha-

levi's *Kuzari*, delivered in Rav Kook's yeshivah and recorded by his disciple, Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neriah.⁷ Rav Kook singles out three philosophical works as the most significant of the medieval period: Bahya's *Duties of the Heart*, Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, and Halevi's *Kuzari*. Each made a singular contribution. Bahya's work is preeminent as an ethical treatise, Maimonides' as the great rationalistic achievement of the Middle Ages, and Halevi's *Kuzari* as the most spiritual—or, to use the direct translation of his term, *havayati-elohi*, "theo-experiential." None of the three is reducible to either or both of the other two. Rav Kook's harmonism is here applied to literary criticism and philosophical analysis. Each of these works is different from the others; but while it is important to delineate their differences from and oppositions to each other, ultimately one must see them in the perspective of the totality of Jewish theology as each makes its distinctive contribution to that totality and thus complements the others.

Rav Kook then focuses on the uniqueness (and perhaps superiority) of Halevi as Rav Kook understands him. Rationalism both preceded and followed Maimonides, even though his version had clear advantages over others. Ethical works were written before and especially after Bahya, although his interpretation of ethics, as representing that of the Torah and the Jewish tradition, is clearly superior. Neither Bahya nor Maimonides can be said to have attained uniqueness. This achievement is reserved for Yehudah Halevi.

Halevi's theo-experiential vision is not that of the will or the intellect, but is singular: that of renewal, creation anew. Through the Torah we are recreated, born anew. We become genuinely new beings. We "create" ourselves by means of Torah. Rav Kook then quotes the talmudic comment on the verse *va-asitem otam*, "you shall do [or make] them" (Deut. 29:8). The Rabbis read *otam* as *attem*, hence: "you shall make yourselves; I [i.e., God] consider it as if you had made yourselves."⁸ For Halevi, Rav Kook maintains, important as ethics and reason are, the theo-experiential view is the most significant of all because it teaches us to transcend ourselves, to renew ourselves in the fullness of our very existence, to become new beings by means of the divinity that flows into us from the Torah. The divine miracles at the Exodus as well as the

commandments and laws of the Torah were genuinely new, unprecedented. The Torah itself came to us as something wholly new, and it therefore elicits from us the striving for the New. Indeed, the very last paragraph of his classical work, *Orot ha-Kodesh*, concludes on this theme of the New, speaking of the creation of "new souls."⁹

Now, Rav Kook's characterization of the three medieval works is not terribly novel or significant, although some attention should be paid to his interpretation of Halevi. What is remarkable—and we shall presently see why—is his treatment of the New, his esteem for the novel.

In truth, Rav Kook's enchantment with the idea of the New was not unprecedented in the history of Jewish thought. A theme that appears often in the Zohar is that of the sense of newness that must accompany one's divine service. Thus, "garments worn in the morning are not to be worn in the evening," that is, each of the daily prayers is specific to its own time—and they are not interchangeable.¹⁰ While echoes of this idea already appear in rabbinic literature ("every day they should appear as new in their eyes"),¹¹ the kabbalistic treatment is deeper and more substantive than what appears to pass as a mere recommendation in the Midrash. The subject is further elaborated in Lurianic Kabbalah, and it is then more fully developed in Hasidism, which finds it compatible with its own emphasis on spontaneity and *devekut*. The following statement by R. Yisrael Meir of Gur, the renowned author of *Hiddushei ha-Rim*, may serve as an illustration of the Hasidic appreciation of the radical newness of time: " 'And if not now, when' [Avot 1:14] When will the 'now' come about—the *now* 'now'—this very minute that we are speaking? Since the creation there was none like it, and there never again will be. Before this, there was another 'now,' and after this, there will be another 'now.' And every 'now' is another [way] of serving God."¹²

Rav Kook's Hasidic background, which had such a seminal influence upon him, thus served as well to prepare him for the even greater valuation of the New that he was to develop.

In addition, I believe that it is clear that Rav Kook's emphasis on and delight with the New was influenced as well by the heady times in which he lived. For him, the pioneering spirit of Zionism, the adventurousness of the *halutzim*, the social experimentation in the

kibbutzim, the renaissance of Eretz Israel redeemed by its own children—all constituted harbingers of the Messianic redemption of the people of Israel and thereafter of all mankind. Of course, these stirring and momentous developments did not create the idea of the New for Rav Kook, but they did inspire him; they provided the right climate for Rav Kook's profoundly religious formulation of the New. There is no better proof for this thesis than Rav Kook's own words:

The life of the Jewish people, which is constantly being renewed in Eretz Israel, causes us to renew and exalt our thought processes and our logic. The specific form of this novelty must be felt in all disciplines—in Halakhah and in Aggadah, in all areas of science and ethics, in our conception of life and in our *Weltanschauung*. The general content of this newness must be the establishment of all spirituality on the basis of the collective life of the nation and the establishment of all of national life on its highest spiritual basis, and the complete coordination of secular life with sacred life and physical life with spiritual life in general.¹³

This passage is important not only for the light it sheds on the influence on Rav Kook of the Zionist experiment and the novelty of the Jewish situation it was creating, but also for the insight it provides into the content of Rav Kook's conception of the New. New ways of thinking must be insinuated into the study of Halakhah, of Aggadah, of ethics and morality. The New must characterize our *Weltanschauung*, our very conception of life itself. The foundation of spirituality must no longer be that of the individual in his relation to his Maker, but that of the people, the nation—the sign of Israel's reentry onto the stage of history as a nation reborn—and that national foundation, in turn, must be based on the coordination or integration (or "synthesis") of the sacred and the profane, of the mundane and the spiritual.

What is remarkable about Rav Kook's conception of the New and his respect for novelty is the indomitable courage he displayed in formulating and advocating such ideas. He was, after all, no outsider to the religious establishment of his time. As Chief Rabbi, one would not normally expect revolutionary ideas of him; indeed, one would expect him to preach reverence for the Old, not striving for the New. Of course, his respect for the sacred tradition was bound-

less. Yet his courage led him to advocate the tenets of political Zionism, imperfect though it was, and the espousal of the New as the culmination of his—and Yehudah Halevi's—"theo-experiential" approach. This boldness earned him no peace and serenity.

Indeed, it is this that makes his views on the New so compellingly relevant to our contemporary situation. Two opposite attitudes characterize Jewish life in our stormy, riven, polarized times. On one side, our technological society is based upon the need for change and the desire for the New. The technological imperative is, at bottom, a quest for the novel. The atmosphere is thus created for the worship of the New—indeed, the newest. The quest for the New, whatever its nature and regardless of its quality, permeates every facet of life, from fashion to gadgetry, from education to scholarship to religion. Jacques Maritain has referred to this phenomenon as "chronolatry," the worship of the most recent, the most modern. It is an idolatry in which the icon is temporal rather than material; the latest page of the calendar and the latest position of the hour hand of the clock are the fetishes of this cult of the New. This is not only nonsensical but also dangerous. One wit once remarked that "he who marries the spirit of the times will soon find himself a widower." In the realm of religion, such mindless pursuit of novelty is noxious; not only does it ignore, at its own peril, the value of tradition and history in the life of the sacred, but it despairs of the search for enduring truth.

In a classical sociological illustration of Newtonian mechanics, this chronolatry—or what we might call "neophilia"—has evoked an equal and opposite reaction, what we may term "neophobia," the fear of the New. With Haskalah and Reform championing the New, traditional or Orthodox Jews have chosen to advocate the traditional, the tried and tested, and to abjure all that is new or modern. The most pithy expression of this view is the one offered by the renowned R. Moses Sofer, the venerable author of *Hatam Sofer*, who used an original halakhic ruling, out of context, as a metaphor for the problem of the New: *hadash asur min ha-Torah*, "what is new is forbidden by the Torah." Such neophobia has become as ingrained in Orthodox circles as neophilia has become the dogma of those modernist and anti-traditionalist circles who so proudly congratulate themselves on their rejection of all dogma.

Confronted with two such equally unattractive alternatives in the orientation to the New, it is refreshing and encouraging to turn to Rav Kook and discover that one need be neither a neophilic nor a neophobic, that it is possible to approach the new not as a neurotic but as an open-minded and passionately spiritual person who, without obsessions or phobias, can esteem the New in a discriminating manner for its high spiritual value and its redeeming potential for man and society. The very reason he is ignored by the religious left—his refusal to go along with the cultic adoration of the newest and most modern—and the very reason that he is still reviled by the religious Right—his rejection of atavism and spiritual recidivism—are what make Rav Kook's *Gestalt* so appealing, now, a half century after his death.

The two themes, Harmonism and the New, are not unrelated. The successful perception of the underlying unity of existence and the harmonious concatenation of all its diverse and multifarious parts themselves lead to holy novelty. Thus, Rav Kook writes: "The reason for combining Torah with Wisdom [i.e., secular knowledge] is not to make up for some deficiency [in either of them], but in order to create new combinations and phenomena."¹⁴

III

The principle of harmonism is not limited to the realm of the ontological, that is, the different aspects of reality, but applies equally to the realm of the axiological—the sphere of values. Hence, the sacred and the profane too, the most significant of values, must be embraced in the harmony that prevails in all the rest of existence.

Indeed, for Rav Kook, the very definition of the sacred is the awareness of the wholeness of existence, of the harmonious interrelatedness of the vast complexity of the universe. It is the perfection and unity of all, the perception that all issues from the Creator of all.

Since the holy is the vision of cosmic harmony, whereas the profane is that of fragmentation, and, moreover, since in truth, objectively, it is harmony that prevails, it follows that the profane is never absolute. It is one of the functions of the mystical insights

of Torah that in the world one must view the profane from the perspective of the sacred, and hence realize that "there is indeed no absolute profaneness in the world." Thus, "all values are drawn together, and the unity of the world is revealed."¹⁵ It is not difficult to hear the echoes of this teaching of Rav Kook in Buber's famous statement that there is no holy and profane, only the holy and the not-yet holy.

This vision of the holy is quite startling. The classical understanding of the sacred in the Jewish tradition is that which is separate, set apart, different. Thus, the Scriptural commandment "Ye shall be holy" (Lev. 19:2) is interpreted by the Sages as "Ye shall be separate."¹⁶ In Rabbinic parlance too, the standard marriage formula, "You are hereby sanctified unto me," is a legal statement that means, "You are hereby separated from all other people." Rudolf Otto's description of the Holy as the "numinous" certainly seems closer to the traditional view of the holy than the creative and all-embracing definition that is propounded by Rav Kook.

It is important, therefore, to trace the antecedents of this rather novel view of Rav Kook and evaluate his contribution in the light of this background.

In classical Judaism, as mentioned, holiness implies separateness, and especially separateness from the profane and the mundane. The Torah is replete with lines of demarcation, and the Halakhah reinforces these distinctions and elaborates upon them—distinctions between Jew and Gentile, Sabbath and weekdays, kosher and nonkosher, the Holy Land and elsewhere, and so on. *Havdalah* is an integral part of *Kedushah*.

It is in Hasidism that, as a result of a certain line of development to which we shall return later, the blurring of such distinctions between the sacred and the profane began to reveal itself. The sacred, in Hasidism, gained greater power, a need to reach out and conquer new horizons, to encroach upon the secular and transform it into the sacred. This aggressiveness of the holy rejects sharp boundaries and clear limits. Thus, for instance, the Halakhah sets very clear limits to the prescribed times for each of the formal daily prayers, as well as to the recitation of the *Shema*. But Hasidic emphasis on holy intention and thought accentuated the pneumatic as opposed to the normative, the spiritual over the legal,

and thus abided praying even after hours, in clear violation of the Halakhah, provided that the proper holy intentions were present. The sacred became irrepressible—at the expense of the profane.

Similarly, Hasidism saw opportunities for holiness even in areas that were *reshut*—adiaphora or neutral—from the point of view of Halakhah. It developed the theme of *avodah be-gashmiyyut*, serving God through corporeal means, and not only through formal mitzvot such as prayer, study, or tefillin. Again, the boundaries between the sacred and profane are blurred as the sacred expands outward.

I am convinced that, from a systematic point of view, this development was inevitable, given the high emphasis placed by Hasidism on divine immanentism, the presence of God within the universe and His closeness to man. If, indeed, “the world is filled with His glory” (Isaiah 6:3), the *locus classicus* of Hasidic theology, or—as the *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* puts it—“there is no place that is empty of Him,”¹⁷—then holiness too is ubiquitous and cannot be easily contained in neat halakhic categories such as those of time and place. The closer one perceives the presence of God, the more all-embracing becomes the sense of the holy and the greater its domain.

As a footnote, I believe that the immediate precursor to this Hasidic development is R. Isaiah Halevi Horowitz, the “SHeLaH” whom we mentioned earlier. In two separate but significant comments, he points out that, for Jews, the sacred/profane dualism is meant to be provisional and ephemeral, because ultimately all the profane will be sanctified; and second, that it is only the immanent presence of the divine that sustains existence, and thus even idolatry exists because it participates, in some way, in the divine. I see these two views as related—as they are, I believe, later in Hasidism and, later yet, in Rav Kook. It is immanentism that gives rise to the revolt of the sacred against the limitations imposed on it in its campaign to sanctify the profane. I might add that the bold view of the “SHeLaH” on the divine within the idolatrous has implications both for theodicy and for the liberal approach of Rav Kook to religious skepticism and denial.

The traditional rabbinic world did not take kindly to this innovation by Hasidism. The most intellectually objective, and least *ad hominem* polemicist of the Mitnaggedim, R. Hayyim Volozhiner,

spells out the antinomian implications of this exaggerated immanence and the consequent blurring of the sacred/profane distinction by the new movement that was sweeping Jewish Europe. In retrospect, from the vantage point of the late twentieth century, the issues that agitated the greatest thinkers of the early years of the last century seem so very quaint and ingenuous. Yet they were very real, if not so much in and of themselves, then as powerful symbols and harbingers of unwanted and unexpected consequences. R. Hayyim faulted the Hasidim for neglecting the halakhic times set for prayer, and also for their violation of one particular halakhah: the prohibition to meditate on words of Torah in a latrine or in other such unclean places. Hasidim, R. Hayyim tells us, inflamed with the consciousness of divine immanence, would declare that God is present anywhere and everywhere and, if so, He is present even in the latrine and dirty alley ways; to refrain from meditating on "words of Torah" in such places is in effect a denial of God's presence and hence a sin. R. Hayyim considered this aggressive monism a sign of the incipient antinomianism of Hasidism and, therefore, worthy of his strong opposition.¹⁸ He pointed out that the Halakhah is built on the foundation of value pluralism, and that there are real differences within the realm of the holy itself, such as distinctions in the levels of divine emanations and, more important, halakhic distinctions in the sphere of holiness—thus the Mishnaic teaching of the "ten levels of sanctity,"¹⁹ that there are ten degrees of holiness, as well as the various levels of sanctity in the three "camps" surrounding the Tabernacle.

Rav Kook was obviously well aware of this controversy. His own family background included both Volozhin and Habad. He was not only a great mystic and religious thinker, but a renowned halakhic scholar who was profoundly committed to Halakhah. The issues were no longer possessed of the same high emotional quotient, but the lessons had become part of history. Thus, Rav Kook protects his flank and states, "The distinctions between the sacred and the profane are facts, and the attempt to blur their [separate] images is destructive. The profound understanding and intuiting of this matter of their differences are the source for great spiritual fruitfulness."²⁰

It is true that all such distinctions are ephemeral, but in the

reality in which we live such differences are highly significant and must not be ignored. True, the contradictions between sacred and profane will ultimately be eradicated as the world is swept up to the heights of holiness, but for us in the here-and-now, in this mundane sphere, an abyss separates them, and the gap cannot be bridged by any heroic leaps, but only gradually and surely. And it is precisely this gradual reconciliation and harmonization that constitutes our major challenge.²¹

This caveat notwithstanding, the harmonization of sacred and profane is not relegated to some distant eschatological era, but can be—nay, must be—achieved in this world, inasmuch as the scene of the unity that must be accomplished is internal and subjective. And the insights to be gleaned from this harmonistic softening of the sacred/profane dualism are available for us—here and now.

Thus, the approach of Rav Kook to the holy was dialectical: holiness is supernal, but it is also close to us. Our lives in the very realm of the profane are filled with holiness. Rav Kook's dialectic of holiness had Hasidic precedent. The Kotzker Rebbe explained the verse "Ye shall be holy men unto Me" (Exod. 22:30) to mean that one can be a "man" and "holy" at the same time. The profound Hasidic sage R. Zvi Elimelekh Shapiro, in a comment on the verse "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2), queried: If God wanted us to be holy, why did He create us with such gross natural appetites? He replied that it is precisely in the realm of nature that we are expected to attain holiness. This answer, he continued, explains how the end of the verse, "for I the Lord your God am holy," can serve as a rationale for the beginning of the verse, "Ye shall be holy." That is, just as My holiness is expressed in the coexistence of both My transcendence and immanence, so I expect of you to be holy by means of both involvement in and separation from the world.²²

The relation of sacred to profane was expressed by Rav Kook in terms of the Aristotelian distinction, taken over by medieval Jewish philosophers, mystics, and exegetes, between matter and form: "The sacred must be built on the foundation of the profane. The profane is the matter of the sacred, and the sacred is its form. The more powerful the matter, the more significant the form."²³ Similarly, Rav Kook stressed again and again, spirituality is not

only *not* contravened by physical health, but it requires it. For just as there is an ongoing dynamic in the cosmos as a whole from lower to higher and higher to lower, so in the microcosm of the human organism there is a constant reciprocal relationship between body and spirit.²⁴ Therefore, "the body must of necessity be healthy and whole in order for the spirit to flourish."²⁵ Rav Kook took this idea with the utmost seriousness, and emerged with a rather revolutionary thesis: that the very first level of *teshuvah* or repentance is that of physical health—not just that health is necessary for the life of the soul and proper repentance, but that physical health is *in itself* a spiritual value in the ladder of repentance.²⁶ Rav Kook is not here merely giving sophisticated expression to the folk wisdom of *abi gezunt*. Rather he is incorporating into his religious philosophy of *teshuvah* his own assessment of the relationship between sacred and profane and, ultimately, the Hasidic doctrine of *avodah begashmiyyut*, serving the Creator through corporeality.

Thus, Rav Kook adopts the Hasidic doctrine of the innate significance of even halakhically neutral acts when graced with holy intentions and applies it to a person's daily work. First, he counsels that whatever one does, one should do wholeheartedly and without distraction—advice already given by the Ba'al Shem Tov himself, and recorded in the *Tzavaat ha-Ribash*. Thus, a person should concentrate on prayer while praying, on understanding the material being studied during Torah study, and on trying one's best to help a friend when engaged in *gemilut hasadim*. This is so, he continues,

in all that one does—for in truth there is nothing in the world that is not for His glory. Hence, whatever one does should be [for the purpose of carrying out] His command and His will, seeking thereby [to know] His Name, as one endeavors with all his reason and powers to do what he does in as perfect and whole a way as possible. Thus he will come to know the blessed Name in all ways. . . . When a man performs something in perfection, whether in thought or in deed, he ought to be happy with his lot, and not pursue anything else, for the entire world is then concentrated before him in that matter.²⁷

This emphasis on the importance of the act in itself, and not merely as something propaedeutic to a formal mitzvah, is straight Hasidic doctrine and fits in nicely with Rav Kook's views on the relation of the sacred to the profane. His conciliatory stance on the

Hasidic-Mitnagdic polemic comes through clearly. On the one hand, he follows R. Hayyim Volozhiner's view that the study of Torah *lishmah* (for its own sake) means for the sake of intellectual comprehension and not, as the Hasidim would have it, for the sake of ecstatic contemplation or *devekut*. On the other hand, his view that work be performed with total concentration on the work itself, as a means of carrying out the divine will even where no formal mitzvah or halakhah exists, is in line with Hasidic teaching and not in keeping with the view of R. Hayyim, who counseled a form of "double consciousness," whereby one could be physically engaged in the daily pursuits of earning a living and yet, at the very same time, could inwardly be cogitating in Torah in a purely intellectual fashion.²⁸

Thus, forewarned by the often bitter yet illuminating history of the Hasidic-Mitnagdic controversy, and sensitive to the Mitnagdic criticism of Hasidic excesses, Rav Kook acknowledged man's rootedness in his existential context in which fragmentation and dissonance appear to hold sway, and yet felt free to press his teaching of harmonism even in the realm of the sacred and the profane.

Let us now temporarily put aside the question of the extent to which Rav Kook is indebted to and follows Hasidic teaching, and turn to an internal problem in his conception of the sacred and profane—a problem that may seem trivial, but which may give us an indication of how radical his teaching really is.

We mentioned that, for Rav Kook, holiness is the perfection of the whole, the ultimate in harmonism, while the profane represents its antithesis, that is, the quality of fragmentation and dissonance. Rav Kook acknowledges gladly that whole areas of life require the ability to look at phenomena in isolation. This requirement of *analysis* is particularly pertinent in the natural sciences. Yet, it is the function of holiness to overcome this separateness and embrace all in its *synthesizing* cosmic vision. Indeed, if holiness is universalized, it must perforce be found to include the profane. Now Rav Kook does not see in this embrace by holiness the destruction of the profane, but its inclusion in the larger scheme of harmonization by the sacred. But if by profane we mean the resistance to such all-embracing comprehensiveness, how can it be included in it? What we have here is a logical contradiction that cannot be overcome

by dialectical reasoning. How can A include B, if by definition B represents noninclusion?

Of course, one might argue that Rav Kook is not a systematic philosopher, and that his mystical sweep and poetic style make for a certain degree of fuzziness so that such questions are irrelevant. But I do not think that this is the case, certainly not with regard to the present issue.

I propose to solve that problem in the old Jewish manner of answering one question by asking another. Rav Kook writes: "The foundation of the Holy of Holies bears within itself the element of the holy and the element of the profane."²⁹ This statement is somewhat puzzling. The "Holy of Holies" or the holiest is obviously more pure, more supernal, more holy than the merely "holy." One might have expected that Rav Kook should state that the "holy" includes the "Holy of Holies" and the "profane," thus allowing the "Holy of Holies" to retain its pristine purity while leaving it to the merely "holy" to include within itself, along with the "Holy of Holies," the profane as well. Surprisingly, Rav Kook reverses the order and places both the sacred and the profane within the wider context of the Holy of Holies.

Here again, one might dismiss this as quibbling, and insist that a lyrical and mystical writer like Rav Kook should not be read as, for instance, Professor Leo Strauss reads the *Guide* of Maimonides or a halakhist reads Maimonides' *Yad*. But I demur and believe that Rav Kook is telling us something of real importance: there are two levels of sanctity, the "holy" and the "Holy of Holies," and the latter represents the ultimate in holiness. While the holy confronts the profane in this contest of the whole versus the parts, synthesis versus analysis, comprehensiveness versus separateness, the impulse to include all—even the profane and all that it stands for—comes from the very highest level of holiness, the "Holy of Holies." Rav Kook means exactly what he says: because of his very definition of holiness as harmony in its widest and most comprehensive sense, it is the "Holy of Holies" that must include both the holy and the profane.

Thus, writing of the conflict between the sacred and the profane, he avers that the clash is only subjective, "but they are reconciled in the heights of the world on the foundation of the Holy of Holies."³⁰

If that is indeed the case, our first question is answered: there is no logical trap here. The profane, in its aspect of separateness and fragmentation, is opposed to holiness which, in turn, is not assigned by Rav Kook with the task of embracing the profane itself. That duty is reserved for the "Holy of Holies," the highest level of sanctity, which thus makes it possible for the profane to retain its integrity when it is included in the ultimate harmony. The sacred and the profane continue their dialectical confrontation, as both are absorbed in the "Holy of Holies."

We now return to the problem of Rav Kook and his relation to his theological antecedents in Hasidic thought. It should be obvious that, on a theoretical plane, Rav Kook goes further than did Hasidism. For Hasidism, the raw power of the sacred seeks to break out of its halakhic and spiritual confines and annihilate the profane by sanctifying it, thus transforming even *reshut*, halakhically neutral acts, into holy deeds of a certain order. When this act of sanctification takes place, the profane acts are no longer profane; they are holy. For Rav Kook, however, the profane is not annihilated, but is included in the very highest realms of sanctity, the "Holy of Holies."

Thus, Rav Kook built on Hasidic thought but transcended it. His approach to the secular world was one that gave it religious credibility and enduring significance, and in this sense his contribution was original, bold, and radical. Whether or not he followed through on this premise and spelled out the consequences, such as in the curriculum he devised for his yeshivah, and whether or not his followers succeeded in implementing his insights—that is the subject for another essay.

Notes

1. *Orot ha-Kodesh* (Jerusalem, 1963), I, 16 (paragraph 12).
2. *Ibid.* I, 144 (paragraph 126).
3. *Eder ha-Yakar* (Jerusalem, 1967), 48.
4. Lamm, "Monism for Moderns," in *Faith and Doubt* (New York, 1971), 42–68.
5. Acronym of *Shenei Luhot ha-Berit*, by R. Isaiah Halevi Horowitz. See *ibid.*, 63, for an illustration of the Shelah's treatment of the *hav-dalah* as exemplifying the uniqueness of Judaism's monistic or harmo-

nistic approach. For further comment on the Shelah, see section 3, below.

6. *Sifre* on Deut. 20:10; cf. *Bemidbar Rabbah* 11:7.
7. *Mishnat ha-Rav* (Tel Aviv, 1980), 94–98.
8. *Sanhedrin* 99b.
9. *Orot ha-Kodesh*, III, 368.
10. *Tikkunei Zohar*, 22. Cf. *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* 2:13.
11. *Midrash Tanhuma* on Deut. 26:16.
12. Quoted in *Likkutei Yehudah* V, 213–15.
13. "Ne'edar ba-Kodesh," in *Ma'amarei ha-Re'ayah* (Jerusalem, 1984), 413.
14. *Orot ha-Kodesh* I, 63 (paragraph 46). In an address published in the *New York Times Book Review* (February 7, 1993), Alexander Solzhenitsyn, protesting the mindless and destructive pursuit of the new and the newest in art, especially in literature, advocates an appreciation of the new tempered by a reverence for the old and the traditional that echoes the views and sentiments articulated by Rav Kook more than a half-century earlier with regard to more comprehensive and consequential issues. Solzhenitsyn writes:

The divine plan is such that there is no limit to the appearance of ever new and dazzling creative talents, none of whom, however, negate in any way the works of their outstanding predecessors, even though they may be 500 or 2,000 years removed. The unending quest for what is new and fresh is never closed to us, but this does not deprive our grateful memory of all that came before.

No new work of art comes into existence (whether consciously or unconsciously) without an organic link to what was created earlier. But it is equally true that a healthy conservatism must be flexible both in terms of creation and perception, remaining equally sensitive to the old and to the new, to venerable and worthy traditions, and to the freedom to explore, without which no future can ever be born.
15. *Orot ha-Kodesh* I, 143 (paragraph 125).
16. *Sifre ad. loc.*
17. *Tikkunei Zohar*, 57.
18. *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* 3:2–4. See my *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah's Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and His Contemporaries* (New York, 1989), 14–18, 98–99.
19. *Kelim* 1:6–9.
20. *Orot ha-Kodesh*, II, 312 (paragraph 19).
21. Zvi Yaron, *Mishnato shel ha-Rav Kook* (Jerusalem, 1974), 111–12.
22. *Iggera de-Kallah* (Jerusalem: 1980), 2:80.
23. *Orot ha-Kodesh* I, 145 (paragraph 127).
24. See *Ibid.* I, 70 (paragraph 54); and II, 416 (paragraph 14).
25. *Ibid.* I, 65 (paragraph 49).
26. *Orot ha-Teshuvah*, 5th ed. (Jerusalem, 1970), 21. Cf. Yaron, *op. cit.*, 128.
27. *Musar Avikha u-Middot ha-Re'ayah* (Jerusalem, 1971), 39–40. For more

- on this theme, especially as it relates to the relations between Torah and "secular" studies, see my *Torah Umadda: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition* (Northvale, N.J.: 1990), chaps. 6, 10, 11.
28. See *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* 1:8; and my *Torah Lishmah*, 130 n. 8. Cf. Yaron, *op. cit.*, 114–15, espec. n. 11.
29. *Orot ha-Kodesh* I, 64 (paragraph 48).
30. *Ibid.* II, 311 (paragraph 17).