

RAV KOOK

First Lecture: "Life and Letters"

I. INTRODUCTION:

A. In manifold problems that confront and confound J. life today, often hear expression: "if only R. Kook were alive today!" Comes from all quarters, religious and secularist, Israeli and Diaspora.

B. What ~~warmer~~^{manner} of man was this who, 30 years after his death, is still so sorely missed? What were distinctive qualities this personality who seemed so out of place our age -- as if G-d created his soul out of purity and grandeur of days of old, together with vision and courage of days yet unborn? What were the main outlines of the thought and philosophy of this unusual man who was, at one and the same time, a disciplined, rationalist legal scholar, and a soul that soared to mystic heights and overflowed in passionate poetry of exquisite charm -- a man of whom Prof. Gershom Scholem said that he was the last authentic Jewish mystic of the ages?

C. Our 3 lectures will be devoted to discovering what we can about him - his life and his thought. It should be emphasized that these 2 elements -- life and thought -- are deeply intertwined in his case; that his biography is his philosophy, and his thinking is his life-story. *If tonight we concentrate on his biography -- do not take it as merely a story. It is a chapter in Jewish sapience.*

D. I trust that these discoveries will be interesting -- if they are not, it is the fault of the lecturer, not his subject. But let me confide in you: it was difficult to prepare these lectures. For one thing, there is the paradoxical nature of the man himself: rationalist and mystic, man of affairs and solitary thinker, communal leader and poetic soul, creative Halkhist and imaginative Kabbalist. For another he was extremely prolific. He is the author of over 30 works, most of which are as yet unpublished. The literature about him is even more extensive: about 1000 pieces, ranging from essays to whole books. Another difficulty: the problems he dealt with and the answers he offered, for which he was both passionately defended and viciously attacked, are still very much with us and, in some circles, still debated. For we are speaking now not of an ancient sage who flourished centuries ago, but of a modern, a contemporary, and a man who drew vitriolic assaults upon himself even as he proved to be one of the most popular spiritual leaders in all Jewish history.

Gauge of popularity: his "Rosh Millin" (semi-mystical commentary on Siddur) so widely beloved, simple folk who adored him used it as superstitious charm against evil. K. never encouraged such attitudes. Always stressed what son of his dear friend, the "Hafetz Hayyim," used to say: unlike certain Hassidic "Rebbs" who boasted that God did what they said, he (the "Hafetz Hayyim") did what God said!

II. Ancestry and Birth

A. born early Fall 1865, Latvian town Grieve to family: piety and love learning.

B. These 2 complementary qualities go far to explaining K's character.

C. From father's side -- Mitnagdim, Lithuanian scholarship. Paternal grandfather admired by R. Hayyim of Volozhin: equal to "Rashba," "Ran." From him -- "hatmadah", halakhic prowess.

R. Israel Salanter: Hasidim + Mitnagdim both mistaken...

D. From mother's side -- HaBaD Hasidim. Deep piety, happy and optimistic disposition. Brith Milah -- 2 gifts: button and "kipah" from 3rd HaBaD leader, R. Menachem Mendel ("Tzemaḥ Tzeddek"). As boy, revered it, slept in it.

fragments, external stimulant as E... P. Naftali Kopshitz on why Hasidim drink...

III. Early Education

A. From beginning, 2 qualities: love Torah (plus unusual intellectual talent) and limitless love Holy Land. Story: 3-4 years old, heard mother reading "Tzema Urenah" on Patriarchs travelling to Holy Land - he grabbed cane, marched. Mother: "where to?" He: "to land flowing with milk and honey."

B. At age 9 - "Griever Iluy" (also: "Kasoker Iluy") - on own in local Beth Midrash.

C. Age 15 - to Lutzin ("hevey golah") -

*READ AUX. TEXT P. 2-B

D. Age 19 - Volozhin: 400 students, Netziv, tolerance, Bilov. Netziv: "happy here?" - K: "Yes -- as if in Eretz Israel". First literary work here: defense N's "Haamek Davar" vs. critic. K an anomaly: deeply pious and spoke only Hebrew -- Zionists and anti-Zionists confused by him. Courteous, affable but: enigma.

E. Marries daughter "Aderet" (Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-R. Tumim) and goes to Ponovezh.

IV. Early Rabbinate

A. Beginning, refused Rabbinate. In father-in-law's home met Hafetz Hayyim. Both Kohanim - studied Temple Service. H.H. urged K. take Rabbinate. Same time, had entered business venture -- thank God: failed. At H.H.'s suggestion -- accepted position town of Zolmel (6 years). During this time - H.H. urged K. write book on Temple Service. K: only if permit me to leave Rabbinate. H.H.: "No; never came across any one more fit than you to occupy Rabbinic post." These are years of study and growth -- especially Kabbalah.

great friends, even later when political paths diverge. Spoke at Agudah 11/30 insults K. H.H. walks out

actually, first invited MAAGID-VILNA. story K. in Rintel kitchen P.Y

B. 1895 - to larger community of Boisk. Achieves reputation as scholar and Zaddik -- and also as leading, ideological exponent Orthodox Judaism. Ideas - distinctive and original. Hebrew style - flawless, graceful, and poetic. "Ish Negged ha-Zerem."/

V. The Jaffa Period

A. 1904 - dream of settling in Holy Land comes true.
Invited: Jaffa.

B. Anecdote: first set foot holy soil - "Look: Jewish cow!"

C. First sermon: Halakhah and HaBad - type Hasidism in perfect modern Ivrit -- charmed all sections community: Talmudists, Hasidim, and Maskilim. Above all, was adored by young ^{workers} widows of New Yishuv.

D. Wrote prolifically - from Halakhah to Kabbalah, letters and essays. His greatest mystical experiences. Love of Israel and land grew even greater -- signed not as "Rabbi and Chief of Beth Din of Jaffa," but: "Abr. Isaac ha-Kohen Kook, servant to Holy People in Holy Land, residing in Holy City of Jaffa."

E. Jaffa fell in love with Rav Kook. Appearance: Old world Rabbi - all day in Tallit and Tefillin; holy thoughts. Yet - part of his people, Father to a generation, boundless love. *(PICTURE on cover of book: Mele - Su Brit Govt 1927. birthday Kook given. K had to wear at official functions, but command put cross. returned in protest, 1928)*

F. His special concern for non-observant youth (Halutzim) -- obvious in his letters (2 volumes).

* READ - AUX. TEXT, P.10, #F-4

G. But more than letters and sympathy. Highly active for both their material and spiritual welfare. Material: Diaspora to buy Palestinian Etrogim and wine; Shemitah controversy.

H. Spiritual: the "Massa Teshuvah" (Oct-Dec-1913) together with leading Rabbis (esp. R. Yosef Hayyim Sonnenfeld).

Attitude: when praised all Palestine Jews, even non-observant, S: mustn't we hate those who rebel against God? K: quoted R. Zusya -- "wish I could love greatest Zaddik as intensely as God loves worst Rasha."

A fascinating trip (described by Avidor). One incident: In Gallilee - new Moshavah, Periah (Polish, Galician Jews - many from St. Louis); population: 40.

* READ AUX. TEXT, P.9 # E-4

When Rabbis eat, heard workers singing next door. K. entered, spoke warmly, paternally. "We want ^{to} be close to you -- but you too come back to us; we'll learn courage from you -- you learn Torah and Mitzvot from us." Response: "Hedad, Amen!" Rabbis and workers form circle, dance and sing. K: suddenly leaves; returns dressed like police-guard: head-dress and rifle. Gets into circle, dance increases in tempo. He encourages them: "R. Aaron of Karlin said -- virtue of dancing: can't help but raise yourself." At end, K: "refuse to take off uniform, let go rifle till all you promise: Shabbat and Kashrut." Promised: Entered in diary: "Happy is he who beheld these dances of Teshuvah."

I. Even as he knew how to win hearts of others, as a man among men, so was his poetic sensitivity sharpened. During this "Massa Teshuvah," late on night under full moon ~~moon~~ in vineyards of Zikhron Yaakov, wrote following words -- of beauty, purity, holiness -- in his notebook:

* READ AUX. TEXT P. 11, #G-1

Handwritten: שבת שלום לכולם... (in Hebrew)

J. Mysticism: The ineffable (not rationalist, but subjective experience); Still: clear doctrines of vast significance nature of God, Man, Existence. Judaism: Kabbalah, Sode, Hen, Mistorin: Kabbalah: "underground Stream Judaism". Zohar-Luria - Gaon and Besht. K: "man by nature a mystic." Experience of "Light" (flow of grace, vitality). Principle of "Zi'azua" or Alternation. Feeling of Unity, Oneness.

(* if time: READ AUX. TEXT P. 12 -- ineffable, light, etc.)

VI. The European Period

A. 1914 - Invited attend Rabbinic conference Europe: undecided: wanted meet them, plead for understanding New Yishuv and Aliyah; but reluctant leave Holy Land. But: wife ill, physicians advise health-resort Switzerland.

B. In Europe - stranded by outbreak World War I. For a while lives as private citizen in St. Galen.

C. 1916 - accepts call Synagogue in London. Only temporary; longs for Eretz.

. First sermon: parable well-diggers: (no water - can understand despair and abandonment; but those with faith and courage -- want to quit when muddy waters issue - inexcusable! Come back, dig deeper...)

. London: scene feverish Zionist activity right before Balfour Declaration.

. K: source encouragement Weizman and colleagues: not beg; demand.

. Anti-Zionist activity by titled Anglo-Jewish leaders -- their propaganda in Parliament -- almost destroy Zionist work -- religion not nation. K's answer:

* READ AUX. TEXT, P. 6, #D-3

. Effects of K's letter -- overwhelming. Anti-Zionist retreat in disgrace. K quoted in Parliament. Opponents ask for reconciliation. Weizman, Sokolow, Nordau thrilled. K thus significantly responsible for Balfour Declaration.

. Balfour Declaration - K to England: not thank you, but congratulate you... (aguo 8.93)

- K had a powerful confidence in ultimate triumph justice.

Read from

Handwritten: וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַח ה' בְּעַמּוֹ

Handwritten: וְיִשְׂמַח בְּעַמּוֹ

Handwritten: when Lord Montagu scores Balfour Dec. as anti-J. religion, M.P. "who accepts as greater authority in Jan: M or K?"

(if no time - skip to IX, include rest in next lecture)

VI. Jerusalem

A. 1919 - With end war, inevitable happened -
K. called to most eminent rabbinic position in world:
Chief Rabbi Jerusalem.

B. Perplexed: Jaffa (home) or Jerusalem (influence)?

C. Two hostile delegations at Railroad Station:
Jaffa Rabbis and lay leaders, Jerusalem counterparts.
(Story: reverse of classical embarrassing position where
each community wants its Rabbi to go elsewhere... ~~story~~ stay
two boys fleeing fathers: "ich vel shlagen dein tatte,
du shlag meinem").

D. Decision: Jerusalem

E. Difficulty: Kanaim -- to plague his life and
peace increasingly. Yet K. above all a warm, gentlemanly
human being. (אנשים רבים באו אליו וביקשו שיתפטר: אבל הוא לא עשה כן)

F. First Sermon: Hebrew-Yiddish; audience in rapt
attention when suddenly K all upset, nervous. Audience
looking for cause: K's old father looking for seat.
Finished - audience sings: "Barukh Elokeinu". At Melaveh
Malka father asks for reason upset: "stage fright (emata
De'tzibura) and excitement of Kibbud Av at one time --
too much for me."

VIII. Chief Rabbinate Holy Land

A. K long thought of unified Chief Rabbinate and
High Court. Presents to British High Commissioner Sir
Herbert Samuel (K calls him: "Sir Eliezer ben Menahem").
Samuel - London accept under certain conditions.

B. English idea: two Chief Rabbis (British scheme
prevent too much unity, centralization).

C. Kannaim bitterly opposed (to call K "Rabbi of
Jaffa". Declared fast day when K elected.) Secularists:
impossible demands. Convocation threatened breakdown.
K's phenomenal skill kept it going. Elected R. Yaakov Meir
Sephardi Chief. K unanimously acclaimed Ashkenezzi Chief
Rabbi.

D. Under his stewardship (1921-1935) saw Yishuv grow
from 90 to 400 thousand Jews. Unequalled love and reputation.

E. K. above politics. While spiritually oriented
Mizrachi, certainly a leading ideologist, still: never narrowly
partisan. (Degel Yerushalayim -- to circumvent Mizrachi -
Agudah polemics. A failure).

F. Arlazarov Affair. His passion for justice - greater than his desire to be loved.

. Dr. Chaim Arlazarov (brilliant, young diplomat, executive Jewish Agency) murdered. Workers' party blames Revisionists political assassination. Stavsky arrested. Feverish pitch overwhelming vs. Stavsky; he is found guilty.

. K alienates all those chalutzim etc. whose friendship he had cultivated. Convinced Stavsky's innocence, leads campaign for appeal.

* READ: AUX TEXT P. 5, #D-2 (esp. last 2 parag.)

. Stavsky decision reversed on appeal, let free.

IX. Conclusion

A. A living, saintly legend.

B. Witness reported: halo when studying Zohar.

C. K to guest: walk, must "cool off" - Ahavat ha-Shem.

D. Shavuot Night -- teach Maimonides' sefer Mitzvot till dawn -- gems.

E. Simhat Torah.

F. Story told in N.Y.: child, slipped down ~~key~~ icy mountain. Teacher: "if tied up above, won't slip here below."

הקדמה - תפילה
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