

## **Rav Kook**

Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook (5625/1865-5695/1935), served as the first Ashkenazic chief rabbi of Erets Israel. He was born in Grieva, a suburb of Dvinsk, Latvia, to Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Hakohen Kook and Perel Zlata Felman. The elder Kook's intellectual roots were in the famed Volozhin Yeshiva, founded by the eminent disciple of the Vilna Gaon, Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin. Abraham Isaac's maternal grandfather Raphael, on the other hand, was a hasid of Rabbi Menahem Mendel Schneerson of Lubavitch, author of Responsa Tsemah Tsedek. At an early age, Abraham Isaac imbibed both of these influences, which would later germinate in his thought, producing a unique fusion of the mitnagdic and hasidic traditions. Abraham Isaac studied in his youth with the rabbi of neighboring Dvinsk, Rabbi Reuven Halevi, author of Responsa Degel haRe'uvani. Later, he studied in Lutchin and Smorgon. The young genius was engaged to the daughter of one of the great rabbis of the generation, Rabbi Elijah David Rabinowitz-Te'omim of Ponevezh.

During the year preceding his marriage, Abraham Isaac studied in Volozhin, where he developed an intimate relationship with the rosh yeshivah or dean, Rabbi Naphtali Zevi Judah Berlin.

After serving as rabbi in the small town of Zoimel and later in the city of Boisk (Bauska), Latvia, in 1904 Rabbi Kook accepted the invitation of the port city of Jaffa, Erets Israel, to serve as its rabbi. In Erets Israel, Rabbi Kook, who was himself an interesting mixture of the old and the new, exerted a profound influence on both the Old and New Yishuv, as they were referred to in those days. His brilliance in all aspects of Torah attracted the finest minds among Jerusalem's young pietists: Zevi Pesah Frank, Jacob Moses Harlap, Israel Porath, and others, who would become the leaders of the next generation. By the same token, Rav Kook had a unique gift for reaching out to the modern elements in Erets-Israeli society who were alienated from Jewish tradition. Thus, Rav Kook cemented relations with the halutsim, the pioneers in the outlying settlements.

Especially in the new settlement of Rehovot was Rav Kook able to count many friends. His deep philosophical thoughts, as well as the poetic expression he gave to them, could not fail to impress the avant-garde writers of the day. Samuel

Joseph Agnon, Joseph Brenner, et al supped at Rav Kook's shalosh se'udot (third meal of the Sabbath). Rav Kook served as rabbi of Jaffa for a decade.

In 1914 Rav Kook traveled to Europe to attend the conference of Agudat Israel, a newly formed Orthodox movement, in order to impress upon the delegates the importance of Orthodox participation in the settlement of Erets Israel. Due to the outbreak of World War One the conference was cancelled, and Rav Kook found himself stranded on the European continent, unable to sail home. He spent the war years, first as a private citizen in St. Gallen, Switzerland in the home of an admirer Mr. Abraham Kimhi, and later in London as rabbi of the prestigious East End synagogue Mahzikei Hadat, founded by East European immigrants.

At war's end Rav Kook returned to Erets Israel, becoming the Ashkenazic Rabbi of Jerusalem, and eventually Chief Rabbi of Erets Israel. It was during this final phase of his career that Rav Kook emerged as a world leader of Jewry. In 1924 he spent the better part of a year in the United States as part of a three-man rabbinic delegation sent to raise funds for the destitute yeshivot of Eastern Europe. About that time, Rav Kook established a yeshivah of his own in Jerusalem, known ever since as Merkaz Harav. The institutions Rav Kook established, namely the chief rabbinate and Yeshivat Merkaz Harav, continue to this day. Rav Kook's teaching was preserved both orally by his disciples, and in the abundant writings he penned, some of which have yet to see the light of print. Rav Kook returned his soul to his Maker on 3 Ellul, 5695/1935, the exact day on which he had entered Jerusalem sixteen years earlier.

Taken from [www.orot.com](http://www.orot.com)



## The Arrival in Eretz Yisrael

The weekly newspaper Ha-Hashkafah described the momentous occasion:

“On Friday, the 28th of Iyyar, our new rabbi made his appearance in our town.... He was received with great honor by residents of the community from all sections of the population. Messengers came from Jerusalem, to welcome him in the name of Rabbi Shmuel Salant and the Aderet. Delegates also came from the villages of Rishon Letzion, Petach Tikvah, and so on, to receive their new rabbi.

Important representatives from the Sephardic community also arrived, and he spoke with them in pure Hebrew. It is rare to find an [Ashkenazic] rabbi who can speak such a pure, flowing Hebrew. On the Sabbath morning, the rabbi spoke well with a clear, unadulterated Hebrew, and the Sephardic Jews also understood his words and enjoyed the sermon.

Even the Chabad Chasidim expressed their opinion that they consider the new rabbi to be the best possible choice. They concluded that such a rabbi was on par with the rabbis of the greatest cities of the world, due to his great wisdom and erudition.... They also consoled themselves, that even though the new rabbi was educated in non-Chasidic yeshivot, on his mother’s side he is descended from Chabad Chasidim, and is endowed with several Chasidic qualities.”



'Orange Picking in Neve Zedek' by Nachum Gutman

“Rav Kook’s house was a few hundred steps from our home. His house was enclosed with a whitewashed fence. The courtyard had a gate, and contained a small garden and a well of water. Just the sight of the house conveyed an atmosphere of serenity and joy. Through the open windows of the house we could hear the sounds of Jews studying Torah. And when the figure of Rav Kook would appear in the opening of the gate, as he readied himself to walk to synagogue — this image would always take my breath away.”

“As a child I adored him, because of his beauty, his noble serenity, and his unwavering poise. His persona fascinated me so much that I would literally follow after him, placing my feet in the footprints that he left in the sand.... I never met another man like that, a rabbi who knew how to attract people from all sectors and factions. What a figure he was!”

(Stories from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Encyclopaedia of Religious Zionism, vol. V, pp. 110-111)

- **The Court Summons**
- **The Arrival**
- **Greatness in Torah**
- **Teshuva**

זה כמה אני נלחם מלחמה פנימית, ורוח חזקה דוחפת אותי לדבר על דבר התשובה, וכל רעיונותי רק בה הם מרוכזים התשובה היא תופסת את החלק היותר גדול בתורה ובחיים, עליה בנויות כל התקוות האישיות והציבוריות, היא מצות ה' שהיא מצד אחד קלה שבקלות, שהרי הרהור תשובה הוא כבר תשובה, ומצד אחר הרי היא קשה שבקשות, שלא יצאה עדיין אל הפועל במילואה בעולם ובחיים

“For some time I have been struggling with an inner conflict, and a mighty force impels me to speak about teshuvah [penitence]. All my thoughts are focused on this topic. Teshuvah holds a primary place in Torah and in life. All the hopes of the individual and of society depend on it.”

- **Secular Community**
- **In London**
- **Art**
- **Poetry – Universalism – Particularism**

### **The Fourfold Song**

There is a person who sings the song of his soul. He finds everything, his complete spiritual satisfaction, within his soul.

There is a person who sings the song of the nation. He steps forward from his private soul, which he finds narrow and uncivilized. He yearns for the heights. He clings with a sensitive love to the entirety of the Jewish nation and sings its song. He shares in its pains, is joyful in its hopes, speaks with exalted and pure thoughts regarding its past and its future, investigates its inner spiritual nature with love and a wise heart.

There is a person whose soul is so broad that it expands beyond the border of Israel. It sings the song of humanity. This soul constantly grows broader with the exalted totality of humanity and its glorious image. He yearns for humanity's general enlightenment. He looks forward to its supernal perfection. From this source of life, he draws all of his thoughts and insights, his ideals and visions.

And there is a person who rises even higher until he unites with all existence, with all creatures, and with all worlds. And with all of them, he sings. This is the person who, engaged in the Chapter of Song every day, is assured that he is a child of the World-to-Come.

And there is a person who rises with all these songs together in one ensemble so that they all give forth their voices, they all sing their songs sweetly, each supplies its fellow with fullness and life: the voice of happiness and joy, the voice of rejoicing and tunefulness, the voice of merriment and the voice of holiness.

The song of the soul, the song of the nation, the song of humanity, the song of the world—they all mix together with this person at every moment and at all times.

And this simplicity in its fullness rises to become a song of holiness, the song of God, the song that is simple, doubled, tripled, quadrupled, the song of songs of Solomon—of the king who is characterized by completeness and peace. Orot Hakodesh II, p. 444

If you desire, human being, look at the light of God's Presence in everything.

Look at the Eden of spiritual life, at how it blazes into each corner and crevice of life, spiritual and of this world, right before your eyes of flesh and your eyes of soul....

Gaze at the wonders of creation, at their divine life—not like some dim phenomenon that is placed before your eyes from afar.

But know the reality in which you live.

Know yourself and your world.

Know the thoughts of your heart, and of all who speak and think.

Find the source of life inside you, higher than you, around you. [Find] the beautiful ones alive in this generation in whose midst you are immersed.

The love within you: lift it up to its mighty root, to its beauty of Eden.

Send it spreading out to the entire flood of the soul of the Life of worlds, Whose light is reduced only by incapable human expression.

Gaze at the lights, at what they contain.

Do not let the Names, phrases and letters swallow up your soul.

They have been given over to you.

You have not been given over to them.

Rise up. Rise up, for you have the power.

You have wings of the spirit, wings of powerful eagles.

Do not deny them, or they will deny you.

Seek them, and you will find them instantly. Orot Hakodesh I, pp. 83-84