



Hebrew Universalism: The Future Vision of Rav Kook

By Elliott Dosetareh (YC '20)

In the late 19th century and early half of the 20th century, the world experienced significant ideological transformations, with the rise of both nationalist and universalist sentiments and their subsequent impact upon broader Jewish consciousness. Whereas most contemporary Orthodox rabbis at the time avoided or condemned such foreign influences on Jewish thought, Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook saw them as a Divine message and provided a theological framework to reconcile these two seemingly rival camps. Utilizing one of his most monumental texts, *Orot Ha'Tchiya* Ch. 18—which expounds upon the *Three Forces* that exists within the Jewish nation—Rav Kook introduces a remarkable understanding of how one should view these various ideological factions.

In line with his understanding of historiosophy, Rav Kook believed history's purpose to be a synthesis of ideas that initially appear to be at opposite ends of the philosophical spectrum. Since God is an active deity who is involved in history, to serve God, we must synthesize these dialectic ideas in His service to reveal the true meaning of Divine perfection. As such, according to Rav Kook, Judaism's idea of nationalism is not based on physical conquest and domination, historically characteristic of secular nationalist movements. Rather, authentic Jewish nationalism is meant to be viewed as a vessel through which the return of the Jewish nation to the Land of Israel will allow for the restoration of Hebrew civilization—which can serve as a spiritual source of blessing and inspiration for all nations to model after. In this light, Jewish nationalism is inherently universalistic, which is an idea displayed throughout Jewish liturgy, including in the daily *Amidah* and *Aleinu* prayers. Complementary, the notion of Jewish Universalism, according to Rav Kook, stands in stark contrast to secular Universalism, which endorses a blending of all distinct cultures into a homogenous and conformist society. True Hebrew Universalism understands and appreciates the unique contribution of all diverse cultures and nations, with the Jewish nation serving as the “Distilled Nation” to illuminate the Divine truth deeply embedded within them all.