

Rav Yitzhak Arieli and his Disappearance from the Circles of Rav Kook and Mercaz HaRav¹

This is continuation of “Historical Revisionism by the Families of Rav Kook’s Disciples: Three Case Studies,” *Hakirah* 24. From the estate of the author, HY”D.

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Introduction: Rav Arieli’s Place in the Rav Kook Chronicles

At the end of 2006, the Religious Zionist press erupted in protest over censorship by descendants of Rav Yitzhak Arieli, one of Rav A.Y. Kook’s greatest disciples and the *mashgiach* in Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav for many years. These descendants published an updated version of their grandfa-

* Translated from the Hebrew by Michael Appel.

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¹ Note from the author’s parents: This article is a slightly abridged continuation of the article “Historical Revisionism by the Families of Rav Kook’s Disciples” that was published in *Asif*, Vol. 3, 2016, pp. 1138–1156. (Translator’s note: available in English at <http://hakirah.org/Vol24Henkin.pdf>). The author, HY”D, worked on the present article in several stages, but we were not privileged to see his finished work. We decided to publicize the material as is, because it is of much interest. From the author’s words, it appears that he intended to delve further into the details of the split in the Orthodox community in Israel into two separate camps (as he indicated in the *Asif* article), and to draw conclusions about the aspects of Rav Kook’s legacy that the proponents of the various positions sought to foster in his Yeshiva. The author’s computer contained a file on the first topic, the split in the Orthodox community. We have appended this material to the end of the current article as an addendum. We did not find material related to the second topic, that of the varying aspects of Rav Kook’s legacy that the proponents of the various positions sought to foster in the yeshiva. This work will have to be left to the reader. In the section entitled “Leadership

Rav Eitam Henkin ר"י, by the time of his death at age 31, had authored over 50 articles and three books. He was renowned both for his halachic writings and his mastery of the byways of the rabbinic world of the 19th and 20th centuries. He wrote *לכם יהיה לאכלה* on laws of insect infestation, *אש תמיד*—*biddushim* and *be’urim* on *dinie Shabbat* of the *Mishnah Berura*, as well as a soon-to-be-published historical work on *Arukh Ha-Shulhan*. His murder, together with his wife Naama ר"י, on *Hol Ha-Moed, Sukkot* 5776 was a great loss to both the Torah and academic communities.

ther's work *Einayim La-Mishpat* on Tractate *Berakbot*, and chose to eliminate the final section of the Introduction in which Rav Arieli described his reverence for Rav Kook and his own involvement in the founding and administration of Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav over many years. Moreover, the descendants added their own biographical introduction of their grandfather that completely ignored any ties between him and Rav Kook or Mercaz HaRav. **"But this was the focus of his life!"** protested Rav Eliezer Melamed in his weekly column in *Be-Sheva*.² Similar indignation was expressed by Rav Neriah Guttel, who called upon readers of *Ha-Tzofeh* to flood the publisher with complaints and even to boycott the book.³

The protests were, of course, justified. Censorship of facts and revisionist history are completely unjustified actions, especially when they impugn the image of Rav Kook for ideological purposes. However, on the other hand, we must clarify: Did Rav Arieli receive his due recognition in the historical consciousness of the Mercaz HaRav circles and those who continued the path of Rav Kook?

of Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav in the Generation after Rav Kook" (the second to last section), the author collected several passages that it seems he was preparing to analyze. In this section, as well, we have not completed the work but have added words or connecting sentences. All of our additions in this chapter and in the addendum appear in square brackets (except for very minor stylistic edits), in order to distinguish between these small additions and the author's work. In the rest of the article, the enclosures in square brackets are by the author himself, with one addition of our own, in Note 3.

² *Revivim, B-Sheva*, Volume 207, 7 Elul, 5766 (2006)

³ "A Protest for the Rav's Honor" (Hebrew) in *Ha-Tzofeh: Musaf Sofrim U-Sefarim*, 1 Elul 5766 (2006). An even greater omission by several orders of magnitude was made in the edition of *Einayim La-Mishpat* published in Jerusalem in 1989 (and again in 1994). In it, the publisher erased almost half (!) of the Introduction to Kiddushin in order to omit any reference to Rav Kook and Mercaz HaRav (Even though a letter from Rav Charlap appears at the end of the book, in which the connection between Rav Arieli and Rav Kook and his yeshiva was not omitted. Also, the volume on *Berakbot* left this part intact.) It is surprising that the uproar was raised only in connection with this small omission from the *Berakbot* volume, almost two decades later! [Addition from the author's parents: In his article in *Asif* 3, page 1142, the author showed that the omission was done by Rav Arieli himself, and even suggested a reason for it: "A more plausible explanation is that Rav Arieli wanted this volume to be accepted in the growing community of *yeshivot* and institutions that did not look kindly upon volumes that emphasized the persona of Rav Kook." Later on, we learned that, indeed, marketing considerations were behind this omission.]

Let's take, for example, a comprehensive article on the history of Mercaz HaRav by Rav Yitzhak Shilat, who learned in the yeshiva during the 1960s.⁴ In the article, Rav Shilat goes through all the important personalities who took part in the yeshiva's founding, starting with the founder himself, Rav Kook and the brief era of Rav Avraham Aaron Burstein (the Gaon of T'avrig), through the tenure of Rav Charlap as Rosh Yeshiva after Rav Kook, ending with his own days in the yeshiva under the stewardship of Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook and, at his side, Rav Shalom Natan Raanan the *menabel*, and Rav David Cohen (the Nazir) as the senior *Ra"m*. Also studying there at the time were young rabbis including Rav Mordechai Frum, Rav Shaul Yisraeli, and Rav Avraham Shapira. Rav Shilat even mentions the well-known story in which Rav Kook invited Rav Shimon Shkop, head of the yeshiva in Grodno, to serve as head of Mercaz HaRav,⁵ and also mentions additional young students from the time of Rav Kook. Only one person is conspicuously absent from this version of the yeshiva's history: Rav Yitzhak Arieli.

Professor Rav Neriah Guttel did the same thing. One of the most well-known researchers in our generation of Rav Kook's writings and teachings writes the following in his introduction to his book *Mekhutavei Ra'aya*:

Four men continued 'the Path [of Rav Kook].' They were constantly in his close orbit and were appointed in his lifetime to positions in the yeshiva he founded. It seems that **nobody would argue** that these four are: His son, Rav Zvi Yehuda; Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlap; his son-in-law, Rav Shalom Natan Raanan; and Rav David Cohen (the Nazir). With all due respect to others who were close to Rav Kook, the personal appointments of these four, his entrustment

⁴ "Ha-Mahapekha Ha-'Mercaz'-it," *Nekuda*, Vol. 181, Heshvan 5755 (1995), pp. 20–24. It is clear that Rav Shilat's descriptions of personalities in the yeshiva before his own time were greatly influenced by Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook and from things he said (or did not say) about them. As an additional example of the historical awareness of the yeshiva's students during the latter half of Rav Zvi Yehuda's tenure, we can point to the chapter dedicated to Mercaz HaRav in the volume "*Rabbeinu—Harav Zvi Yehuda Ha-Cohen Kook ZT"l*," edited by Rav Ze'ev Neuman, published by Rav Shlomo Aviner, Jerusalem 2004 (pp. 69–84). It contains specific entries for Rav Charlap, the Nazir, Rav Raanan, and even Rav Frum—but nobody else.

⁵ In his article "*Ad Asher Emtza Makom b-Mishkenot l-Avir Ya'akov*," *Ha-Maayan*, Tishrei 5770 (2010), pp. 79–96, my good friend Shemaryah Gershuni proved that although Rav Shkop was actually interested in the position, his request was denied by the yeshiva's leadership!

to them of his writings and his yeshiva, and even their ‘self-abnegation’ to his persona, speaks for itself.⁶”

And Rav Yitzhak Arieli? What happened to him?

The question is astounding: Why wasn’t Rav Arieli worthy in Rav Guttel’s eyes to be included alongside the others on the list of those who ‘continued the path,’ those who were constantly in Rav Kook’s closest inner circle? After all, he insists on the specific criteria he mentions. And even if one could argue with some of them,⁷ there is no doubt that Rav Arieli fulfills them just as much as the others, as will be proven shortly. And even if Rav Guttel wants to limit his list to four men, there is sufficient evidence to justify Rav Arieli’s inclusion over that of Rav Raanan.⁸

We’re not talking about an isolated incident. Erasures of the close connection between Rav Arieli and Rav Kook and/or the history of Mercaz HaRav can be found in books, articles, and other publications about

⁶ *Me-khutavei Raaya*, Jerusalem 2000, pp. 30-31; emphasis is mine (as well in the rest of the article). On the same page, Rav Guttel protests the absence of Rav Charlap and Rav Raanan as students of Rav Kook in scholarly research—without realizing that he himself is falling into the same trap. It should be noted that Rav Guttel’s words are similar to Hagai Segel’s in his article “*Orot B-Ofel*.” “Four men were considered inheritors of Rav Kook’s spiritual legacy [...] Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlap was appointed head of Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav and its spiritual leadership, Rav Zvi Yehuda was appointed with responsibility for the publishing of the estate’s halachic and aggadic writings, the Nazir, with responsibility for the philosophical writings, and Rav Shalom Natan Raanan-Kook, the son-in-law, was appointed *menahel* of the yeshiva.” (*Nekuda*, vol. 113, 3 Elul 5747 (1987), p. 17)

⁷ For example, appointment with responsibility for his writings: As far as we know, Rav Charlap was never involved by himself in editing or publishing any of Rav Kook’s writings (although he was among the greatest supporters of the Nazir in editing *Orot Ha-Kodesh*; see *Mishnat Ha-Nazir*, Jerusalem 5765 (2005), pp.90-91, and also p. 95). This did not detract at all from his rightful status as Rav Kook’s absolute prime disciple.

⁸ Whose only “advantage” in this respect is that he was Rav Kook’s son-in-law. Let us compare their functions in Mercaz HaRav in Rav Kook’s lifetime: Rav Raanan came to the yeshiva as a student in 1924. Four years later, he married Rav Kook’s daughter, and additional time elapsed until he took on a significant role in the yeshiva. In contrast, Rav Arieli was appointed to the senior staff of the yeshiva from the moment of its founding, and throughout all of those years (see details further on in this article). In his book *Me-Khutavei Raaya*, pp. 30-31, Rav Guttel cites numerous letters that Rav Raanan received from his father-in-law, Rav Kook. However, I have already pointed out (together with Shemaryah Gershuni in our article “*Me-khutavei Raaya U-Michtevei Ha-Raaya*,” *Alonei Mamre* vol. 122, Kiryat Arba, 5769 (2009), footnote on p. 151) that most of these letters dealt solely with family matters.

Rav Kook and his yeshiva.⁹ Sometimes it is even found in official publications, such as the annual calendar of Mercaz Harav, under the auspices of Rav Yaakov Kahane-Shapira—today the Rosh Yeshiva. In the most recent calendars (2007–2010, and even some before and after this period), the *yahrzeits* of the rabbis of the yeshiva are marked and emphasized, including Rav Kook, Rav Zvi Yehuda, Rav Charlap, the Nazir, and Rav Raanan. Rav Shaul Yisraeli merited inclusion, as did Rav Mordechai Frum, and of course Rav Avraham Shapira אש"ל (since 2009)—and after all this, they did not bother to mark the *yahrzeit* of Rav Arieli.¹⁰

⁹ Additional examples: In the monumental entry on Rav Kook in the Encyclopedia of Religious Zionism (Hebrew), Volume 5, Jerusalem 5743 (1983), column 269, it states that after the yeshiva's founding, "Appointed at Rav Kook's side were his son, Rav Zvi Yehuda, Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlap, and the Nazir, Rav David Cohen"—and Rav Arieli is missing without a trace! However, it is almost certain that the authors of this entry were following the book of Rav Menahem Mendel Porush, "Within the Walls—a Jubilee" (Hebrew) Jerusalem 1948, p. 290, which mentions the three men without reference to Rav Arieli. We will also mention Rav Yohai Rudik's citation in "A Life of Creativity" (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1998, p. 73: "We cannot sum up the organizational system that established Mercaz HaRav without mentioning the roles of two central figures who contributed mightily to the yeshiva's founding: Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlap [...] and Rav David Cohen (the Nazir)"—and nobody else. However, in the chapter on the yeshiva's staff, he dedicates space to Rav Arieli (next to Rav Raanan), albeit a third or less the amount reserved for Rav Charlap, Rav Zvi Yehuda, and the Nazir. Alongside these and others, let us cite Rav Kook's leading biographer, Rav Moshe Zvi Neriah, who was a student of Rav Arieli in Mercaz HaRav (For this reason, he is always careful to call him—and only him—"my master and teacher." This anecdote will embody their relationship. When Rav Neriah received approbation from Rav Kook on his father's book, he did not know how to characterize him at the beginning of the approbation. Therefore, he approached "the *mashgiab ruhani* of the yeshiva"—Rav Arieli, who formulated it for him [*B-Sdei Ha-Raaya*, p. 285]. Rav Arieli, in turn, included Rav Neriah in the text of his Introduction to *Einayim La-Mishpat on Kiddushin* ["*Shabar Oro*," Jerusalem 2002, p. 95, and see the diary entry on p. 286: "Rav Yitzchak Arieli invited me to see the fruits of his labors and to assist in its preparation"]), and therefore dedicated an extensive chapter to him in its rightful place, between Rav Charlap and the Nazir (*B-Sdei Ha-Raaya*, pp. 351–378). Also, in the popular book of Simcha Raz, *Malakhim Kivnei Adam*, Jerusalem 1994, Rav Arieli receives appropriate recognition alongside them both (see p. 69 and onwards).

¹⁰ This sentence was written in 1998 and updated in 2000. In the 5769 calendar (1999), Rav Arieli is mentioned on the back of the calendar alongside other rabbis of the yeshiva. However, the anniversary of his death is not marked on the calendar itself (even though, for example, the anniversary of Rav Yaakov Kilav's death is there). As another example of the prevalent historical consciousness in

Summary

Rav Yitzhak Arieli, author of the monumental Einayim La-Mishpat on the Talmud, was one of Rav Kook's closest disciples. He was among the central personalities in founding Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav and negotiating its path during Rav Kook's lifetime and following, during Rav Charlap's tenure. Rav Kook appointed him the yeshiva's Mashgiach Ruhani. The closeness of the two is reflected in a daily one-on-one havruta that the two maintained for 15 years until Rav Kook's death—the rare time of day when Rav Kook closed his door and insisted they not be disturbed. Rav Arieli's seat-of-honor in the bet midrash was preserved through the 1950s, even as his role in guiding the yeshiva diminished; and as late as 1968, he was seated on the dais at Yom Yerushalayim festivities. Until his last days, he remained a sought-after personality by the yeshiva's students, including some of the most prominent, who continued to turn to him for semikhab. I must emphasize that what took place was not a thunderous parting of the ways, a turning of his back, or an ideological about-face. Rather, as we shall see, it resulted from a painful conflict within Mercaz HaRav, principally regarding the main lines of Rav Kook's legacy and the future direction of the yeshiva.¹¹

The Social Composition of the Yeshiva and its Leadership

In our humble opinion, in order to fully understand these events, it is not enough to investigate what happened within the walls of Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav during the 1950s and 1960s. Rather, we must examine the socio-ideological character of the pre-Holocaust yeshiva world, and what replaced it afterwards—through an understanding of Mercaz HaRav's roots, and Rav Arieli's background. Using the following broad survey,¹² we hope to illuminate the causes for Rav Arieli's dissociation from Mercaz HaRav, and consequentially, his elimination from the yeshiva's historical memory.

Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav was founded in the summer of 1923. By mid-1925 it already had 50 students, and by 1927 and on, the number remained close to 80.¹³ If we analyze the makeup of the student population, we find three broad groups, separated by social and ideological characteristics,

the yeshiva today, there is an impressive drawing on the wall of the dining room, in which one half portrays the heads of the yeshiva, while the other portrays its past rabbis. All the aforementioned rabbis appear here, except the memory of Rav Arieli.

¹¹ This summary, written by the author's family, is based on a lengthy exposition in the original, Hebrew article. The original article can be seen at eitamhenkin.wordpress.com.

¹² [Which, to our distress, we have not been able to locate.]

¹³ For sources of this data, see the article referenced earlier in note 5.

most notably by their relative open- or close-mindedness to the current zeitgeist:

The first group, encompassing the majority of the students, was Eastern European in origin, from Russia and Poland, the world center of Jewish life at that time. This group was characterized, among other things, by the broad spectrum of its members, a certain limited openness, and the modern norms of the *mussar yeshivot*.

The second group, comprising a small minority of students, was from the Old Yishuv, specifically Jerusalem and the other “holy cities.” This group was characterized by a strong Orthodox awareness concerning preserving past traditions. It was heavily influenced by the “Hungarian” ideology that had a strong presence in Jerusalem at that time.

The third group, by far the smallest in size and influence, was from the New Yishuv in Israel. They lived in it in practice, identified with it, and saw themselves as part of it (the Mizrachi). This group was characterized by strong nationalism and identification with the Zionist movement.¹⁴

During those years, the relative sizes of these groups established the yeshiva's character and public image. Therefore, because the overwhelming majority of students came from Eastern Europe—as this was the source of most yeshiva students at the time—the yeshiva took on an external character similar to the *yeshivot* of Slobodka-Hebron and Lomzesh-Petah Tikva, whose students also were drawn from the same pool.¹⁵ This

¹⁴ There is another important population, geographically separate, that is the Jews of the United States, who also came to learn in Mercaz HaRav. However, we have chosen not to list them as a distinct sociological group, because they had still not coalesced into a distinctively characteristic immigrant population. (We are referring only to those Americans who came to learn in Mercaz HaRav. Practically speaking, it is possible to spread them among the three other groups: Some were similar in style and character to the Eastern Europeans; some took up the call of the Zionist New Yishuv; some—very few—closely resembled the Jews of the Old Yishuv and Hungary.

¹⁵ Even the number of students in those *yeshivot* were strikingly similar. As opposed to the *yeshivot* in Eastern Europe, the *yeshivot* in Israel during that time were unable to accommodate large numbers of students, mostly for economic reasons. Another factor that contributed to the similarity between Mercaz HaRav and other *yeshivot* was the famous Eastern European rabbi who led Mercaz for a short time: Rav Avraham Aharon Burstein from Tavrig, who served as *Rosh Ha-Yeshiva* from the winter of 1924 until his death from illness in Kislev 1925. For details regarding his tenure in the yeshiva, see the article referenced in no. 5 above.

division, to a certain measure,¹⁶ and its implications, also applies to the four personalities who comprised the faculty of Mercaz HaRav:

1) Rav Charlap: He was, without a doubt, a product of the Old Yishuv. His father was a rabbinic court judge (*daiyan*) in the court of Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin, and his teacher (Rav Zvi Michel Shapira) was also a student of Rav Diskin. Later on, as a young kollel fellow, he met Rav Kook, grew close to him and became his prime student. However, his decision to walk in Rav Kook's path did not change his basic nature, which was formed in his childhood home.

2) The Rav Ha-Nazir: Though he grew up in a Lithuanian yeshiva environment, attended *yeshivot* in Radun and Slobodka, and followed the general path of the aforementioned Eastern European group, he later turned toward academe and forged an iconoclastic path for himself. It is impossible to fit him into any categorical box. Nevertheless, on the open- vs closed-minded spectrum, he was similar to the New Yishuv group.

3) Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook: Defining him is a complicated task. He grew up in Latvia, where in addition to the traditional studies, he also learned European languages. He then made Aliyah to Israel with his father and learned for a time in Yeshivat Torat Hayyim in Jerusalem, well known as an Old Yishuv institution. However, he spent his most formative years in Jaffa, a center of the 'New Yishuv.' In some sense, we can place him on the continuum between the Eastern Europeans and the New Yishuv.

4) Rav Arieli: Like Rav Charlap, he is most readily identified with the Old Yishuv in Jerusalem. The major turnabout in his life took place when Rav Kook arrived in Jerusalem at the end of 1919.

As for Rav Kook himself, his greatness lay in his ability not only to blend and absorb all these different social groups, but also to serve as a magnet for students so varied from each other, as evidenced by the many circles of his followers.

[Unfinished]

¹⁶ With full awareness that such a sociological categorization is simplistic and limited by nature. Nevertheless, there is truth in it and it can serve a great purpose here.

[Addendum¹⁷]

Rav Kook's personality and activities as a Torah giant and public figure reflected, on the one hand, the preservation of the glorious tradition of classic spiritual leadership of generations past, including an emphasis on the Torah-Yeshiva primacy. On the other hand, he lent a certain legitimacy and showed favor to the *halutzim* and the youth movements that had sprung up in Eastern Europe and in Eretz Yisrael. All of this was based on his unique worldview of the new generation and the implications of the events that were unfolding throughout the Jewish world.

The idea of 'universal unity' developed by Rav Kook found expression in his activities: He supported and cooperated with, at one and the same time, opposing parties, Agudath Israel and Mizrachi, while refraining from declared identification with one specific group. He hoped to unite the entire Orthodox camp under a single umbrella party, "Degel Yerushalayim." Similarly, Mercaz HaRav, at its inception, served as a common address for a wide variety of students spanning the ideological spectrum, more than any other yeshiva of that time. In the study hall, learning side-by-side, were students from the Old Yishuv and New Yishuv; from America and Eastern Europe; Zionist pioneering youth alongside scions of venerable Jerusalemite families; sons of Hasidic courts with those of *mitnadvim*. With all this diversity, the yeshiva managed to maintain a social balance, even though the lion's share of students hailed from Russia and Poland. Their profile, no matter how you slice it, is identical to their peers in the *yeshivot* of Hebron and Lomzhe, who arrived in Israel from Lithuania during the same years.¹⁸

¹⁷ [This addition, dealing with the split of the Orthodox community in Israel into two separate communities, was found on the computer of the author *Hy"d*. It seems to have been intended for an additional article that would explain the historical revisionism in the families of Rav Kook's disciples as a key to understanding the *haredi*/national-religious dichotomy in Israel. It contains a broad analysis that will clarify the causes of Rav Arieli's diminished relationship with Mercaz HaRav, and with it, his disappearance from the yeshiva's historical memory. Therefore, we have chosen to append it to the current article.]

¹⁸ There has yet to be a comprehensive sociological study conducted on the students of Mercaz HaRav during the Rav Kook era. However, my friend Shemaryah Gershuni has already shown, in his article "*Rav Shimon Shkop zt"l U-Kebnat Rosh Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav—Mesorot V-Uvdol*" (*Hama'ayan*, Tishrei 2010, Vol. 50, Issue 1, pp. 79–96; see especially Note 44), that there was a regular flow of students between Mercaz HaRav and the other Lithuanian *yeshivot* of the time. It should be noted that there were sporadic examples of students in other *yeshivot*

A similar cultural and ideological diversity existed among the staff of Mercaz HaRav. The head *Ra"m*, Rav Charlap, was a product of the Old Yishuv in Jerusalem, with a kabbalistic side to his personality. Rav Yitzhak Arieli, the *mashgiach*, was also a member of the Old Yishuv and displayed its classic analytical learning style. Rav Kook's son, Rav Zvi Yehuda, was multifaceted, soaking up a variety of influences during his years in Latvia, Jerusalem, and mainly the New Yishuv city of Jaffa. The other lecturer, Rav David Cohen, the Nazir, had a unique personality all his own. He was educated in Lithuania, but then pursued an academic and philosophical path, forging his own esoteric way. Rav Avraham Aaron Burstein, who served for a time as senior lecturer,¹⁹ was a perfect example of classic Lithuanian yeshiva world. To all this was added of course the personality of Rav Kook himself.

We can say that Mercaz HaRav, its teachers and students, similar to the institutions, such as the Harry Fischel Institute (est. 1933), and other groups close to Rav Kook's circle, succeeded in reflecting his multi-faceted personality. This holds true even more for the wider circle of Rav Kook's supporters who hailed from different social and religious groups in Europe, Israel, and Jerusalem itself, among them *halutzim*, academics, and people with a modern orientation on the one hand; and on the other hand many from the Old Yishuv. The latter group's identification with Rav Kook came not from internalizing his innovative thinking or a Zionist activist outlook, but from his spiritual charisma, greatness in Torah, and his activities in support of Judaism in Israel. Rav Kook, in his lifetime, succeeded in embracing within his circle many and diverse—and even opposing—components of Orthodox life.

The Formation of Party Identification in Rav Kook's image

However, not long following Rav Kook's passing, the situation changed. A significant trend began to materialize: Within a few years, the legacy and scholarship of Rav Kook began to be identified more and more with the Mizrahi movement and its branches in Israel.²⁰ While Rav Kook had a

who came from outside the normal groups. But in Mercaz HaRav this was a widespread and notable phenomenon. See: *Hayyim Shel Yetzira*, pp. 259–261.

¹⁹ See my article “*Od B-Inyan Ha-Rav Mi-Tavrig U-Mercaz HaRav*,” *HaMaayan*, Nisan 2011, Vol. 51, Issue 3, pp. 85–89.

²⁰ I use the term “Mizrahi” more broadly than just the political organization. I use it because there is no better choice in the absence of a term to refer to the larger group affiliated with Religious Zionism. One must be careful, generally speaking, not to map Jewish society of that generation along stereotypical party

close and positive relationship with Mizrachi and its leaders in his lifetime, it was a complicated one. Alongside mutual respect, there existed various ideological and practical differences of opinion.²¹ Mizrachi leaders found Rav Kook to be an exemplary Torah and national leader, but most of them did not see themselves bound to his opinions or approach.²² By contrast, in the generation after his death, the Mizrachi movement and its offshoots—Ha-Poel Ha-Mizrachi, Bnei Akiva, and others—took hold of Rav Kook's image and legacy (as they proceeded to fashion it), and crowned him as their venerated spiritual leader while downplaying their former ambivalence towards him.²³ This was not a directed, planned process, but an inherently intuitive one at its core. But as a result, the gaps

divisions. A significant percentage have a social profile consistent, in the eyes of contemporary historiography, with a certain party, but still held ideological positions that are not necessarily identified with said party. It should be kept in mind that the thesis of this article is that, prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, the boundaries between camps within Orthodoxy were more fluid.

²¹ See, among others: Yossi Avneri, "HaRav Avraham Yitzhak Ha-Kohen Kook V-Zikato Ha-Ma'asit L-Tzionut Ha-Datit," in *100 Years of Religious Zionism* (Hebrew), Vol. 1 – "Ishim V-Shitot," Ramat Gan, 2003, pp. 41–77; Dov Schwartz, *Ha-Tzionut Ha-Datit: Toldot U-Pirkei Ideologia*, Jerusalem, 2003, pp. 56–66; Shulamit Elish, *Ha-Rabbanut Ha-Rashit V-Ha-Mizrachi Bitkufat Hamandat, Katedra*, Vol. 37, 1986, pp. 123–148; Menachem Friedman, *Hevra V-Dat*, Jerusalem, 1978, pp. 161–167. Also see: Hayyim Zohar, Rav EM Lifschitz, *Kabernit Ha-Hinukh Ha-Dati-Leumi B-Reishito: Mabat al Reka Iruei Zmano V-al Yahasav Im Ha-Raaya Kook, Mayim Mi-Dohyo*, Vol. 19-20, 2008-09, pp. 263–306.

²² One well-known example is the confrontation between Rav Kook and the Mizrachi over women's suffrage in the 1920 elections. Regarding this debate, Friedman (ibid. Note 81, p. 166) and Avneri (ibid. Note 81, p. 56) quote sharp words from Rav Yehuda Leib Maimon, which they direct at Rav Kook: "With regards to [ritual] permissibility, we'll ask the rabbis, but for day-to-day activities, we'll ask ourselves." However, examination of the source (*Doar Ha-Yom*, 1 Iyar 1920, Vol. 2, Issue 160, p. 2) reveals that his words were specifically directed at the "ḥaredi zealots." Compare this with the conciliatory words that Rav Maimon said regarding the establishment of the Chief Rabbinate in 1921 (Geulah Bat Yehuda, "Yesod Ha-Rabbanut Ha-Rashit—V-Ha-Mizrachi," in *Sefer Tzionut Ha-Datit*, Vol. 1, p. 410). Nevertheless, it seems that this reflects some indication of the gap between Rav Kook and Rav Maimon. Compare the letter of Rav Kook to the latter from Hanukkah, 1926. Either way, pungent criticism of Rav Kook was heard on several issues from a segment of the Religious Zionists of the day, such as Yehoshua Radler-Feldman [Rav Binyamin] in the aforementioned debate of 1920 (see Friedman, op. cit.), or Shmuel Hayyim Landau (Shaḥal) on the dispute over the *Hukat Ha-Kebilot* (Avneri, op. cit., p. 65).

²³ Rav Yehuda Leib Maimon captured this well in the words he penned shortly thereafter: "What a mysterious connection he had with the Mizrachi. He was

and differences of opinion between Rav Kook's path and the Mizrahi that existed during his lifetime were quickly forgotten with his passing. This is how, in less than a decade, a narrow political identification emerged, something that Rav Kook strove to avoid his entire life.²⁴

The circumstances by which Rav Kook's image became so quickly identified with Mizrahi are wrapped up, among other circumstances, with the failure of Rav Kook's vision for a "Degel Yerushalayim" movement that he formulated during his London years. This body, during the few years it existed, did not succeed in becoming the umbrella organization for Orthodoxy as its founder had dreamed.²⁵ As a result, Rav Kook had no organized group to express his unique approach and establish a permanent presence in the public sphere for the next generation. The institutions that formed around him during his Jerusalem years, such as the Chief Rabbinate and Mercaz HaRav, expressed his personality and philosophy so long as he remained at the helm. But that was not enough to realize a leadership potential for the wider, many-faceted public.²⁶

In addition, of all the different groups that had been under the influence of Rav Kook, the Mizrahi and its branches were, without a doubt,

our teacher, and we were his students. We drank up his words thirstily [...] And we, as children loyal to Avraham and Yitzhak, who walked together to the *Akedah*, bore the wood on our backs with love and deference." (*Ha-Raaya—Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Ha-Kohen Kook*, Jerusalem, 1965, p. 115). In practice, although the Religious Zionists of that generation warmly embraced Rav Kook's general philosophies, many of them did not feel obligated to follow his practical teachings and leadership unless they comfortably fit with their own outlook. See also: Yossi Avneri, *Ha-Raaya Kook—Tadmit B-Tabalikei Hügabsbut*, Bar Ilan, 28-29, 2001, pp. 161–187.

²⁴ Typical of this is the following passage from Rav Meir Bar-Ilan in summer of 1940: "Degel Yerushalayim, the organization that Rav Kook ז"ל conceived of but was never realized, and its entire program as described in 'Matarat Degel Yerushalayim'—is now practically expressed today within the Mizrahi organization"! (*Hazon Ha-Geula*, Jerusalem, 1941, p. 10). A similar example of this trend from a more recent era is the lengthy entry dedicated to Rav Kook in the *Encyclopedia of Religious Zionism* (Hebrew), Vol. 5, Jerusalem, 1983: Across the entire entry great efforts are repeated to emphasize the prominent role of the Mizrahi movement in Rav Kook's history and activities.

²⁵ See, among others: Yossi Avneri, "Degel Yerushalayim," in *Bishvilei Ha-Tehiya*, Vol. 3, pp. 39–58.

²⁶ This is besides the many conflicts that broke out over personal and ideological issues: the splitting of duties of the Chief Rabbi of Israel and the Rav of Jerusalem, the strife within Mercaz HaRav in 1937; and others. These conflicts had clear origins in the ongoing fragmentation within Rav Kook's circle, as described in the current section.

the most organized and active. An overwhelming majority of the people who worked to preserve Rav Kook's legacy, through publishing books and articles, setting up foundations, educational institutions and the like, came from the ranks of Mizrahi or its political supporters. As examples, we can cite the founding of "Mossad HaRav Kook" by R. Yehuda Leib Maimon (1936), who also edited the five-volume "Project Ezkera" (1937-38); the founding of "Hug Ha-Ra'ayah" (1940), whose participants were mostly religious Zionists²⁷; the educational activities of Rav Moshe Zvi Neriah, Rav Kook's famous 'ambassador' to the Bnei Akiva movement, who also named K'far Ha-Roeh after him (1940); and many others. Against all this, there was a vacuum among other groupings of Rav Kook's supporters when it came to furthering his legacy, especially among those from the Old Yishuv in Jerusalem. They remained within their traditional frameworks, with little appetite for joining younger movements and organizations that were furthering more modern projects.

This is how Rav Kook came to be identified with the Religious Zionist institutions. This left no room for those members of Rav Kook's staunch followers from the Old Yishuv group, unless they were willing to actively identify themselves with Religious Zionism. As long as they remained passive in the face of the burning questions of the day, as a recognizable group of Jerusalemites did, they lost their ability to be counted among the ranks of Rav Kook's followers.

Absorption of some Rav Kook followers into the Haredi Camp

In parallel, in other sections of the Orthodox community, an opposite course was underway. In Rav Kook's time, the European Agudath Israel (as opposed to the Jerusalem faction) under the spiritual leadership of Rav Avraham Mordechai Alter, the Gerrer Rebbe, took a careful, conciliatory approach to the ideological struggles between opposing camps in Israel. However, later on, as the weight of Jewish survival tilted toward Israel, the Eastern European haredi community that identified with Agudath Israel came under the influence of leaders from the circle of Rav Yosef Hayyim Sonnenfeld, considered the main rival of Rav Kook in Israel.²⁸

²⁷ Hayyim Lifschitz (ed.), *B-Maagalei Hug Ha-Ra'aya*, Jerusalem 1946, p. 47. See also: Rav Neriah Guttel, "Protocol Ha-Agudah L-Hotza'at Kitvei Ha-Rav Kook—Document," *Sinai* 126-127, Jerusalem, 2001, pp. 340–353.

²⁸ The discussion of this part of the process departs from the framework of this article. See, among others: Friedman (op. cit., Note 81), Chapter 5, especially p. 145; it deals with the weakening of the moderate faction in Israel, whose existence was "an anachronism, continuing on mostly in the merit of Rav Kook," in

Another expression of this phenomenon is the growing influence of anti-Zionist thought of Rav Elhanan Bunim Wasserman, specifically in the generation after his death (by martyrdom), while in his lifetime, he often represented a minority view.²⁹

By the 1940s, the ideological differences between the camps became more externally visible. It became increasingly untenable for someone to identify socially and culturally with one camp while, at the same time, identifying with the philosophy of someone seen as the founder of the other camp. When faced with a stark choice between a pro-Zionist ideology, or at least a measured approach to the nationalist stirrings within the Jewish people on the one hand and, on the other hand, the conservation of the Old-World traditional way of life that was being preserved only in the haredi community, many of Rav Kook's fervent supporters chose the latter approach. Only a select few chose to cling to the Zionist ideology while still functioning within the 'Lithuanian' haredi community, or the reverse: to operate within the Religious Zionist community while maintaining a haredi approach to daily life. This complex choice generally did not succeed in holding its ground through two or three generations.³⁰ In

the face of the political strengthening of the Yerushalmi Agudah faction. A clear description of this phenomenon is expressed by Rav Menachem Porush, a scion of a Jerusalemite family that split into pro- and anti-Rav Kook factions: "Only after Rav Kook's passing did things slowly change. With the founding of the State of Israel and due to the problems it awakened, a single outlook developed, and soon, any remnant of those who followed Rav Kook was forgotten." (*Sharsberet Ha-Dorot B-Tkufat Ha-Soarot*, Jerusalem, 2001, Vol. 1 p. 209. See also Vol. 3, p. 430.)

²⁹ We should briefly mention the stinging rebuke at the hands of his brother-in-law Rav Hayyim Ozer Grodzinski regarding his meddling from afar in affairs in Israel, his dispute with the Hazon Ish and Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer regarding participation of rabbis in the National Council (Va'ad Leumi), and his minority position in the third 'Great Assembly' of Agudath Israel on the question of the establishment of a Jewish State (mitzvah observant). This is not the place to elaborate.

³⁰ It will suffice to mention several Jerusalemite families that counted themselves among Rav Kook's supporters during his life, but by the 1940s and 50s were no longer considered part of this circle: Auerbach, Elyashiv, Waldenberg, and more. Members of those families who knew Rav Kook personally did not abandon this appreciation of him and his work, or even occasionally, his particular philosophy. But the public expression of this waned over the years—in equal measure with their legitimacy amongst the haredi public—so that they virtually disappeared from their descendants. A similar development occurred in the second or third generations in most of the Sachs, Frank, Tukochinsky, Levine, and other families.

this milieu, many who were close to Rav Kook in his lifetime (including Rav Mordechai Ilan and Rav Yitzhak Arieli who were profiled [in my previous article]) sent most of their sons to learn in Yeshivat Ponovezh in Bnei Brak or in Yeshivat Hevron in Jerusalem, and not in Mercaz HaRav or other Religious Zionist *yeshivot*, such as Kerem B-Yavne est. 1953. Nor did they even consider intermediate options, such as Yeshivat Kletzk/Ha-Darom in Pardes Hana/Rehovot (est. 1947).³¹

This is the key to understanding the phenomenon that we have presented, of men whose current identification with the *haredi* camp prevents them from accepting that their fathers and grandfathers, in their day, were counted among the supporters and associates of Rav Kook. This is also the key to understanding a long string of historical events that occurred on the seam between the *haredi* and Religious Zionist camps. It explains the decline of Mercaz HaRav during the era of Rav Charlap's leadership.³² It explains the creation of new middle-of-the-road political options, such as Poalei Agudath Israel, and their subsequent collapse. And it can also explain the test-case of Germany's Orthodox Jews. Upon the Aliyah of many of them during the 1930s they split almost evenly into the religious and *haredi* camps, sometimes even within families. To use stereotypical terms, when these Jews, who grew up with the ideology of "Torah and Derekh Eretz," landed in Israel in the 30s and 40s, they were forced to choose between a camp that claimed sole ownership of "Torah" and a camp that claimed sole possession of "Derekh Eretz." A decade earlier, in the days of Rav Kook, this dichotomy did not yet exist, certainly not in Rav Kook himself. Yet later on, he would become identified with only one political, social, and cultural camp. ❧

[unfinished]

³¹ Of course, one can give other reasons, such as the size of the *yeshivot*, the breadth of staff, the length of their existence, and the stature of their *rashei yeshiva*. However, the fact remains that the ideological-nationalist factor was clearly de-emphasized, in a manner one would not have expected from Rav Kook's closest students.

³² This topic has not yet been covered with the broad academic research it deserves. (For an initial work, see: Rav Yoḥai Rudik (op. cit. Note 9), pp. 138–169. In general, it can be described as follows: On the one hand, its main stock of student recruits—Eastern European Jews—were eliminated in the Holocaust; on the other hand, the *yeshiva*'s identification with the legacy of Rav Kook as fashioned by Mizrachi discouraged potential students from the growing *Haredi* camp; and on a third side, a gap opened up between the conservative personae of the Rosh Yeshiva together with some of the staff and the character of the *yeshiva*'s diminished religious Zionist student population.