

Two Controversies Involving R' Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook

By: CHAIM LANDERER

It is very difficult for me to reach a compromise with my learned contemporaries, may God preserve them... I am attacked right and left... but whom shall I speak with, and who will agree with me; who is willing to forsake his honor for the honor of God and His Torah, and the sanctity of His beloved land?¹

Because of his unique philosophical world-view, as well as the role he played as first Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel, R' Kook was the subject of attacks from many sides. Members of the Ultra-Orthodox Yishuv HaYashan on the right decried his compromise with “the heretics” and his support of the secular Zionist movement. From the secular left, many resented his efforts to have the laws of the Land of Israel follow the principles of halacha.² I would like to present a number of documents which relate to R' Kook's struggles with the “inciters of strife” on both the left and right.

R' Kook and R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld

The complicated relationship between Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, the leader of a part³ of the old *yishuv* in Yerushalayim, and R'

¹ *Igrot HaRe'iyah* (2006) vol. 1 pp. 310-311. The translation appears in Ish-Shalom, Benjamin: *Rav Avraham Itzhak HaCohen Kook: Between Rationalism and Mysticism*, Albany: State University of NY Press, 1993.

² See the report in *HaPoel HaTza'ir* cited by Benjamin Ish Shalom (ibid. p. 22) “but he'd better dare not bring that wisdom and profundity into our lives, to our harm and the impediment of the Hebrew Yishuv.”

³ See the letter of R' Tzvi Pesach Frank in *Malki BaKodesh* vol. 4 pp. 43-44 trans. R' Bezalel Naor in his edition of *Orot* p. 224 note 12. “The Gaon,

Kook has been the subject of a great deal of discussion.⁴ R Kook held the official position of Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel but R Yosef Chaim was also recognized as the leader of the old *yishuv* and his opinions were sought as to how to respond to situations affecting the Land of Israel.⁵

R' Sonnenfeld was very much in opposition to R' Kook's stance on many subjects. Whereas R' Kook was very tolerant of the secu-

our Master R' A Y Hakohen Kook (may he live) was accepted here as Rav by the majority of the Holy Community here. “

⁴ In 1926, Ezriel Carlebach contributed to a series of articles in the Warsaw daily *Haynt* describing the controversy which “played an important role in the politics of Jerusalem”. See *Today: A Jewish Newspaper, 1908-1939* by Chaim Finkelstein (translation available at <<http://www.haynt.org/363.htm>> . A large portion of the comprehensive biography of R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld (S. Z. Sonnefeld, *HaIsh Al HaChomah* - 1975) is devoted to his relationship with R' Kook. See especially vol. 3 pp. 165-240, 399-422.

The above work is a very thorough biography. However, the author failed to gather material relating to two important controversies between R' Sonnenfeld and the moderate Orthodox community. The first is in regard to a heated correspondence between R' Sonnenfeld and several other members of the Hungarian Kollel, and the editor of the moderate Orthodox periodical *HaLevanon*, Y. Brill, regarding the statement published in *HaLevanon* 1880, no. 46 “that one who does not know the language of the land he inhabits is no better than an animal.” The correspondence extends over various issues of *HaLevanon*, July 30, Sept. 17, and October 1. The tone became very heated and Brill even accuses R' Sonnenfeld and his friends of forgery. It was in regard to this issue, that R Shmuel Salant sent a letter to Brill (*HaIsh Al HaChomah* vol. 1 pp. 242-243) defending R' Sonnenfeld, though adding the caveat that “even though in regards to many issues my opinion is different then his... he is a Torah scholar and he acts for the sake of heaven.” R' Sonnenfeld was also involved in a controversy with R' Chaim Hirschenson over an article in his periodical *HaMisdersonah* concerning the boundaries of Rambam's principle of faith. See *HaMisdersonah* year 1, pp. 240-243.

⁵ See Sonnenfeld *ibid.* for a description of R' Sonnenfeld's political role in the aftermath of the riots of 1929. R' Sonnenfeld would sometimes directly contravene R' Kook's proclamations. When R' Kook declared a public fast day in response to the riots. R' Sonnenfeld issued a counter-order insisting that a public fast day was not necessary as “we have faith that the government will take care of the matter.”

lar settlers, believing that they were playing an important part in rebuilding the holy land, R' Sonnenfeld viewed this as an unacceptable compromise. R' Sonnenfeld was also suspicious of R' Kook's philosophy and went so far as to ban R' Kook's philosophical magnum opus, *Orot*. The controversies between them were, at times, very heated⁶, made worse by laymen⁷ who decided to take matters into their own hands. Posters were hung in Jerusalem insulting R' Kook and he was even physically attacked.⁸ However, as is described in the letter below, both rabbis respected each other, and their disagreement was "for the sake of heaven."

Letter from R' Bentzion Goldzweig Describing the Relationship between R' Kook and R' Sonnenfeld

[The editor of *HaMaor*, Rabbi Meir Amsel, published a jubilee volume *Shu"t HaMaor* containing a section of mini-biographies of rabbis who wrote for his periodical. He sent a letter to R' Bentzion

⁶ Although R' Kook bore the repeated insults against him in silence, he was bothered enough to remark regarding R' Sonnenfeld "Even when he says something good, he says it out of wickedness, for evil, too, has good as its source." Avinoam Rosenak, *Shofar* (2007) "Hidden Diaries and New Discoveries: The Life and Thought of Rabbi A I Kook" note 25. (This quote is problematic, as the second part of the statement "evil comes from good" does not follow from the first part which speaks of good coming from "wickedness".) My thanks to Marc Shapiro for this comment and the following source.

R' Kook respected R' Sonnenfeld until the end of his life. R' Kook wanted to attend R' Sonnenfeld's funeral but R' Tzvi Pesach Frank dissuaded him, even threatening to lie down in front of his car to prevent him from attending as he feared R' Kook would be attacked by the Kan-noim. See A. Shapiro, *Imrei Shefer* (2008) p. 261.

⁷ See the letter of R' Tzvi Pesach Frank in *Malki BaKodesh* vol. 4 pp. 43-44 trans. R' Bezalel Naor in his edition of *Orot* p. 224 note 12. In the same volume of *Malki BaKodesh* p. 196, there is another letter by a Rabbi Zarechen describing the "bundles of letters and angry threats being sent to R' Diskin and R' Sonnenfeld from all sides against R' Kook." R' Avraham Shapiro writes of these zealots "even their wives suffered from them, and more than once the police had to get involved in their domestic life." *Imrei Shefer* (2008) p. 370.

⁸ See S. Raz, *Malachim Kivnei Adam* pp. 262, 483-485.

Goldzweig⁹ of Montreal, Canada seeking biographical information. On learning of Rabbi Goldzweig's ordination from R' Kook, Rabbi Amsel wrote to Rabbi Goldzweig asking permission to omit this detail as he feared it would anger R' Kook's antagonists. The relevant part of Rabbi Goldzweig's response follows:]

In regard to his¹⁰ letter of Sunday [Parshas] Chayei [Sarah] of this year, concerning his honor's reluctance to mention that I received semicha from the great official¹¹ from Eretz Yisrael because he is afraid of the followers of R' Amram¹² and R' Tzadok.¹³ I knew him, he was a great Talmud Chacham who involved himself in charity with all his might to assist distinguished men in need. He involved himself with mitzvos without any hope for benefit or gain. If he had enemies and people persecuted him—which man can say he has no enemies? To the degree in which a man is greater than his fellows, so increases the number of those who hate him and are jealous of him.

I remember during the year of 5694¹⁴ while I visited our elderly master, the leader of the entire exile, R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zt"l, I relayed to him the good wishes of the leader of the entire exile Rabbi Shlomo Eliezer Alfandri, for I had learned in his house for about two years when I was in Tzfas. Before I left for America I took a blessing of departure from him as a student takes from his teacher and I told him [i.e., R' Alfandri] I am going to Jerusalem to get a blessing of departure

⁹ Rabbi Bentzion Goldzweig (d. 25 Shevat 5726), Rabbi of Machzikei Ha-Das Congregation in Montreal.

¹⁰ Throughout his letter Rabbi Goldzweig refers to Rabbi Amsel in the third person, a formal style which is customary in rabbinic correspondence.

¹¹ Rabbi Amsel probably substituted this term in order to avoid mentioning R' Kook's name, as it is unlikely that a student of R' Kook would refer to him in this strange manner.

¹² R' Amram Blau is the founder of Neturei Karta, a group of zealots.

¹³ Another one of Jerusalem's zealots.

¹⁴ This dating cannot be correct as R' Sonnenfeld passed away on 19, Adar 2 5692 and Rabbi Alfandri had already left Tzfat in the year 5685. It would seem more logical to place this episode in the year 5684 and that Amsel mistakenly transcribed the letter "peh" as a letter "tsadi" which can look somewhat similar.

from the aforementioned rabbi [i.e., R' Kook],¹⁵ from R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap, and from the saint and gaon R' Simcha Bunim Werner¹⁶ who was part of the Beis Din of R' Sonnenfeld—I had received *semicha* from these three rabbanim—and therefore He [R' Alfandri] asked me to pass along his blessing when I visited R' Sonnenfeld. And so it happened, when I visited R' Sonnenfeld I relayed regards from R' Alfandri. R' Sonnenfeld then asked me to tell him a Torah novella from R' Alfandri since I had been his student for two years. I fulfilled his request and it was a precious thing for him. Afterwards we spoke about different subjects and he asked me if I had already visited the aforementioned rabbi [R' Kook]. I told him that I plan to visit him soon. He told me with his holy mouth “Many think I am his enemy. I never thought badly of any Jew, and on the contrary certainly not of a Torah scholar like him. If I ever speak against his actions this too is out of friendship.”

Some days later there was a *Bris Milah* to which the rabbanim were invited.¹⁷ “The aforementioned rabbi” arrived before R' Sonnenfeld

¹⁵ This demonstrates that the claim stated by Moshe Goldstein in *Masa'ot Yerushalayim* p. 229 (2004) that “he [R' Alfandri] would not allow Rabbonim who had first visited R' Kook into his house...” is false, as are many other statements in this book.

¹⁶ The fact that Rabbi Goldzweig was a student of both R' Kook and R' Werner testifies that the borders between the two “camps” was not as impermeable as is sometimes imagined. Rabbi Eitam Henkin informs me that there are over 60 *seforim* containing the approbations of both R' Kook and R' Sonnenfeld, which testifies to the non-partisan position of many of Jerusalem's residents.

¹⁷ There are several descriptions of joint participation of R' Kook and R' Sonnenfeld at *simcha* celebrations even after the dispute between them had broken out. Rabbi Yisroel Pores invited R' Kook to be Sandek and R' Sonnenfeld to be the Mohel at a *bris* and “afterward, they sat together for a long time at the *seu'dah* involved in the conversation of Torah Scholars.” Rabbi Moshe Auerbach, *HaMayaan* (1981) 21, 3, p. 33.

In *Al Chomosayich Yerushalayim* (1945) p. 91, Rabbi Moshe Blau reports “Rabbi Sonnenfeld did not hold back from meeting with R' Kook at weddings and circumcisions. Once, the zealots of Jerusalem tried to prevent R' Sonnenfeld from going to a wedding where R' Kook was *Mesader Kiddushin* and he rebuked them and went, but after R' Kook insulted him at the wedding of one of the honored men of Jerusalem, R' Sonnenfeld was afraid of *Chillul Hashem* and stopped meeting with him.” A student of R' Charlap, R' Joseph Leib Zussman in *MeAvnei Makom* no. 14 (2002)

and he waited for him. When R' Sonnenfeld arrived he [R' Kook] took his chair and with his own hands placed it before R' Sonnenfeld saying "he is elderly and a rabbi and we must honor him." It is understood that there was no hatred, jealousy or strife between them. All the hatred and strife arose solely from the "inciters of strife." About such men I have nothing to say or reckon with, but if his honor fears that he will suffer damages from this [mentioning R' Kook's name] I forgive him for not mentioning his name and [for not mentioning] that I received semicha from him.

The Hebrew text of the above letter follows:

מכתב על היחסים בין הרב קוק ורי"ח זוננפעלד¹⁸

ב"ה, כ"ג אייר תשכ"ג לפ"ק, פה מאנטריאל, קאנ.

שלום רב לכבוד ידידי היקר הרב הגאון הגדול והמפורסם, עורך הקובץ החדשי המאור, כש"ת מוהר"ר מאיר אמסעל שליט"א.
אחרי שים שלום, בשלומי ובשלום תורתו, אקוה לד' שהכל אצלו עצהיו"ט.¹⁹

also republished in *MiBechirei Tsadikaya* (2007) writes that this took place at the wedding of R' Alexander Zusskind Berlin, half a year before R' Sonnenfeld's death. This being the case, Blau's report that R' Sonnenfeld stopped meeting with R' Kook at *simchos* for this short period of time is not especially meaningful. See also Zev Rabiner, *Maran HaRav Kook* p. 140. Another report can be found in M. Neriyah *Likutei HaRe'iyah* (1991) p. 162, quoting Rabbi G. Koenig: "I also heard from my maternal grandfather, Rav Shmuel Yaakov, that when he once went to a *pidyon haben* with a friend, he was astonished to see Rav Kook and Rav Chaim Sonnenfeld [who were ideological opponents] sitting together at the head of the table. My grandfather was even more astonished when Rav Kook led the grace after meals. He held a goblet of wine. When a few drops spilled from his hands, Rav Sonnenfeld placed his hands under Rav Kook's hands to receive those drops, and he licked them repeatedly." See also a similar description in a letter of R Yaakov Moshe Charlap to his son Yechiel Mech'l in *Michtavei Marom* (1988) and another in *Shabbos HaRe'iyah* no. 75 (*Bamidbar* 2009) p. 2. In addition, there are over 10 proclamations which were jointly signed by both R' Kook and R' Sonnenfeld and many pictures in which the two appear together.

I am grateful to Rabbi Eitam Henkin for supplying me with many of the sources for this note.

¹⁸ From *Shu"t HaMaor* (1977) ed. Meir Amsel vol. 2 p. 424.

ועכשיו על זה באתי. הנה קבלתי מכ' איזה מכתבים בימי החורף הזה, בענין הדפסת ס' "שו"ת המאור וס' היובל" אבל חבל ששמתי אותם במקום אחד מכתבי החדושים שלי. ושכחתי בהם עד היום. ומטעם זה לא שלחתי לו תשובה עליהם ואתו הסליחה. והנה כהיום, שאנחנו טרודים בחיפוש מיני חמץ לפני הפסח, באתי גם על מכתביו, לכן הנני מזדרז כעת להשיבו עליהם.

על מכתבו מיום א' חיי שנה זו, בדבר הרשמי הגדול מא"י שכ"מ מסרב להזכירו בדבר שקבלתי הסמיכה ממנו שהוא מפחד מחסידי ר' עמרם או מחסידי ר' צדוק וכדומה. הן אני ידעתי, הוא ה' ת"ח גדול ואמתי, ועסק בעשיית צדקה לטובת אנשים עניים וחשובים בכל כחותיו, והי' עסקן במצות, מבלי לקוות על שום תשלום גמול או שכירות. ואם ה' לו שונאים ורודפים, מי זה האיש שיכול לומר שאין לו שונאים, מה שהאיש גדול מחבירו במדרגות שלו, יש לו יותר שונאים המתקנאים בו.

זכורני, בעת שהייתי בשנת תרצ"ד אצל מרן הזקן, רשכבה"ג, ר' חיים יוסף זאנענפעלד זצ"ל, ומסרתי לו דרישת שלום ממרן רשכבה"ג, הרב ר' שלמה אליעזר אלפנדרי, מטעם שלמדתי אצלו בביתו בזמן היותו בצפת בערך שתי שנים, ולפני נסיעתי לאמריקא, לקחתי ממנו ברכת פרידה כתלמיד מרבו. אמרתי לו שאני נוסע לירושלים לקבל ברכת פרידה מהרב הנ"ל²⁰, ומהרב ר' יעקב משה חרל"פ, ומהרב הקדוש והגאון הרב ר' שמחה בונים ווערנער, שהי' אחד מהבי"ד של הרב זאנענפעלד. מכל שלשה הרבנים וגאוני הנז' קבלתי סמיכות לרבנות. לכן ביקש אותי הרב אלפנדרי שבזמן שאבקר אצל מרן הרב זאנענפעלד, אמסור לו דרישת שלום ממנו. וכן ה', כשבקרתי אצל הרב זאנענפעלד, מסרתי לו דרישת שלום מהרב אלפנדרי. אז ביקש ממני שאגיד לו איזה חידוש מהרב אלפנדרי, מטעם שהייתי תלמידו שתי שנים, ומלאתי בקשתו, והי' אצלו לדבר יקר. אח"כ דברנו ענינים שונים ובתוך זה, שאלני אם כבר בקרתי את הרב הנ"ל. אמרתי לו שאני מוכן לילך לבקרו. אמר לי בפי קדשו, רבים חושבים שאני אויב לו, מעולם לא חשבתי רעה על איש יהודי ובפרט על ת"ח כמותו, ואדרבא. ואם אני אומר איזה פעם איזה דיבור נגד הנהגותיו, גם זהו מתוך ידידות.

אח"כ לאחר איזה ימים, הי' ברית מילה והזמינו את הרבנים, והקדים הרב הנ"ל ובא לפני הרב זאנענפעלד, והמתין עליו. וכשבא הרב זאנענפעלד, לקח הכסא שלו והעמידו בידי לפני הרב זאנענפעלד באמרו, הוא רב וזקן וצריכים לכבדו. מובן שלא הי' ביניהם שום שנאה וקנאה ומחלוקת. כל השנאה והמחלוקת צמחה ממחרחרי ריב ולא יותר. ועל אנשים כאלו אין לי מה לדבר ולהתחשב עמהם. רק אם כ' [כבודו] מפחד שלא יגיע לו מזה איזה הפסד אני מוחל לו שלא יזכיר שמו, ושאני נסמכתי ממנו.

¹⁹ על צד היותר טוב.

²⁰ I.e., R' Kook.

Controversy Regarding Distribution of Funds in the Aftermath of the 1929 Riots

In addition to pressure from the right for his Zionist views, R' Kook faced pressure from the left as well. Some feared that R' Kook would try to force his religious views on them, as is illustrated in the following little-known episode:

In August of 1929, a long-running dispute between Arabs and Jews over access to the Western Wall in Jerusalem culminated in a series of Arab riots that killed 133 Jews and wounded 339 others. The rioters also caused much damage and many Jews lost their livelihood. Jews throughout the world donated money to help support those who had been affected by the riots.²¹ Most of the money was sent to the Va'ad HaLeumi (the National Committee) which was in charge of distributing the funds.

A disagreement arose between the Vaad HaLeumi and the Zionist Office on one side, and R' Kook and several others (such as R' Meir Bar Ilan) on the other as to how to distribute the funds. The opinion of the former was that money should be distributed solely among those who had been directly affected by the riots. R' Kook pointed out that this would mean that many Yeshivos and Chesed organizations which had been indirectly affected by the riots would be left without funding. R' Kook informed the committee that although he had originally planned to pass any money sent to his office to the Vaad, he would now have to devote this money to those who had indirectly suffered from the riots who would not receive any funding otherwise.

This is how R' Kook describes the situation:²²

The crisis that has arisen because of this great calamity—the cruel destructive murders that our enemies and their supporters have brought forth—not only caused damage in those places where the slaughter and rioting occurred, but has disrupted lives throughout the entire Holy Land. Credit, which is the basis of economic existence, particularly for the Torah and Chesed organizations and those who depend on them...

²¹ R' Chaim Ozer mentions three million dollars, an enormous sum at the time. See *Igrot LeRe'iyah* p. 174.

²² M. Tsurie, ed. *Otzros HaRe'iyah* 1 p. 493.

has been stopped entirely. And all efforts from the outside are concentrated specifically to summon help to answer the pleas of the wounded, plundered and burnt. This means that the shaky situation that existed until now for the holy institutions and their dependents, and the support of many Torah scholars and rabbis that live in the holy city and the holy land that depend for their livelihood on the donations of our brothers has been drastically reduced. We need to support them right now so that they do not fall.

Many of the donors to the aid fund believe that this fund can be used to help support the needy Torah and Chesed institutions and Torah scholars. This is not possible. The agents of the aid committee here are concentrating specifically on those who have been directly damaged by the murderers and rioters. For the support of the Torah and Chesed institutions and everything related to them, we need a separate fund that will be sent directly from the donors for this purpose. This way we will be able to continue to support the holy Yeshivos and Torah scholars... that have been broken down by this widespread tragedy... until God will have mercy on Zion and the situation will have quieted..."

Just before Sukkos, R' Kook sent a letter to R' Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky,²³ spiritual leader of Agudas Yisroel, describing the results of his meeting with the committee. Some time afterward the Yiddish press exploded with reports on the contents of the letter.²⁴

²³ R' Cham Ozer was very concerned about the fate of those affected by the riots and published a special proclamation to raise funds. See *Igrot R' Chaim Ozer* vol. 2, no. 753.

²⁴ See the letter of R' Chaim Ozer in M. Neriya, *Igrot L' Re'iyah* (1986) p. 174: "He published an accurate description of the letter in *Haynt*. Then the *Tag* added spices to [i.e., distorted] my words to fit their own agenda, and from there it was published in *Moment* and then the *Yiddishe Tageblatt*, each writer adding on his own details, and this caused a great confusion before I had even read the letter."

This is how "Moment," a Yiddish Daily in Warsaw reported the matter: (I was not able to obtain the relevant editions of the other newspapers.) Title: The quarrel in Eretz Yisroel over the distribution of aid funds Vilna, November 4—(Telephone from our correspondent)—Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski has just received a letter from R Kook with the following contents:

According to some accounts, R' Kook was separating himself from the Vaad HaLeumi and calling for donations to be sent to his address. An even stranger account has R' Kook stating that he would distribute money based on the level of religiosity of the recipients.

These distortions seemed to have been designed to cause a rift between R' Kook and the Vaad HaLeumi, placing R' Kook in an embarrassing position at a crucial point in time. R' Kook sent a letter to R' Chaim Ozer requesting that he return the original letter so he could publish its true contents. R' Chaim Ozer, however, was on vacation in Montreux, Switzerland when the letter arrived, and it had been intercepted before it could reach his hands.

To R' Kook it appeared that the letter had been deliberately intercepted and distorted in order to embarrass him.²⁵ He sent a letter to R' Meir Berlin (Bar-Ilan), a board member of the Jewish National Fund, explaining the events as follows:

*Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook
Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel
Jerusalem*

*To my esteemed friend, the great Rabbi, R' Meir Berlin Shlita
Shalom Rav,*

The distribution committee of the Vaad HaLeumi for those affected by the riots in Israel categorically refuses to support the old Chaluka-Jews and the Religious elements. I have spoken about this with the distinguished American Rabbis who, for their part, intervened with Warburg [presumably Otto Warburg, third president of the World Zionist Organization].

Regarding their intervention, I received a report from Warburg that I should approach the distribution committee. However, since the officials of the committee did not want to honor my conditions, I have decided to distribute the money on my own discretion. I therefore request that the funds be sent to my address.

This letter of R' Kook made a strong impression. [My thanks to my brother Moshe for assisting me with the above translation.]

²⁵ Although R' Kook never identifies these "inciters of strife", the historical context indicates the likelihood that they were his secular, left-wing critics.

21 Cheshvan 5690,

In regard to my letter to the gaon, R' Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky, Shlita—to my sorrow, a terrible thing was done by the “inciters of strife.” I wrote to him [R Chaim Ozer], merely, that there are two opinions as to how to divide the aid money. The opinion of the Zionist office and of the National Committee, who are in charge of this, is to designate the funds exclusively for those who were directly affected by the riots and to not distribute it to those who were indirectly affected. The opinion of many others, and also my personal opinion, is to set aside a percentage of the funds for those indirectly affected. Those who are indirectly affected include the majority of the Torah and Chesed institutions. I also explained to him that a small amount of funds that were given in my name for those affected by the riots—that I had planned to give to the aid committee—I would now be forced to distribute to those who turn to me in my office who were indirectly affected by the riots. To the best of my recollection, I did not mention even a single word of complaint against the aid committee—only an explanation of the two sides of the issue and a statement of my opinion. I certainly did not state that the money should be divided based on the level of religiosity of the recipients, nor did I ask that money be sent to my address.

Just before Shabbos, I received a letter from R Chaim Ozer, shlita complaining that my letter had fallen into the hands of strangers and he never received it. It seems to have been taken with the intent to make an “exciting dish” by adding falsehoods—as is the custom of the inciters of strife, due to our many sins. I am very concerned, as my letter was written on erev Sukkos in the midst of the confusion and great heartache that surrounded me, and my secretary had already left the house; being tired and weak, I did not keep a copy of the letter. But his honor should be assured that this is what I had written. I had thought I would write to R' Chaim Ozer to produce the letter or his faithful copy, but to my sorrow he too never received it, for it was swallowed up by the inciters of strife. I hope that this entire episode will be made sufficiently clear and “the deceitful one will not roast his catch” (Mishlei 12:27).

With these exact words I am prepared to respond to all those who ask me about this episode, which, to my sorrow, shames those who are involved with it who hope to bring a spirit of confusion into the congregation of Israel.

Let us hope that the Guardian of Israel will guard us from all troubles, whether big or small, from the outside or internal, and He will spread over us His covering of peace, and there will dwell among us love, brotherhood, peace, and friendship and we will not need to worry any more,

So is the hope of his true friend who always seeks peace, with great love,

R' Avrohom Yitzchak HaKohen Kook

The Hebrew text of the letter follows:

מכתב מאת הרב א"י קוק²⁶

אברהם יצחק הכהן קוק, הרב הראשי לארץ ישראל
ירושלים

ידידי המרומם הרב הגדול מוהר"ם ברלין שליט"א, שלום רב,
כא' חשון תר"צ²⁷

בדבר מכתבי אל הגר"ע שליט"א, לצערי נעשה בזה דבר נורא מצד מחרחרי ריב. אנכי כתבתי לו רק שישנן שתי שיטות בחלוקת כספי העזרה, דעת הנהגה²⁸ והועד הלאומי, שהם הפועלים בזה, היא לחשוך את הסכומים רק בשביל הנגועים באופן ישר, ולא ליתן מזה להסובלים בדרך מסובב, ודעת רבים אחרים וביניהם גם דעתי הפרטית היא שראוי להקציב מהסכומים אחוזים כפי ההסכמה ההדדית גם להסובלים באורח מסובב. בכלל הסובלים באורח מסובב נכללים ג"כ מוסדות התורה והחסד ברובם. הוספתי לבאר לו שחלק מועט מהכספים בשביל נגועי הפרעות שבא על שמי הייתי חפץ למסור אותו לועד העזרה, אבל מפני הסבל של הנגועים בדרך בלתי ישר שפונים אלי, הנני מוכרח לחלקם במשרדי, עפ"י הכרתי. לא הזכרתי אפילו דבור אחד של קובלנא על הנהגת ועד העזרה כלל, כי אם באור השטות והבעת דעתי. וקל וחומר שלא דברתי בענין חלוקת בקבלת העזרה, בין סוגי אנשים מצד מדרגתם בעניני חרדות ולא דרשתי כספים על אדרסת.

²⁶ *HaHed*, Kislev 5690 p. 15. This letter was also published in *Yiddish in Moment and Haynt* of the same date. It was republished in M. Tzuriel, *Otzros HaRe'iyah* vol. 1, p. 495. However, this republication lacks the circumstances surrounding the episode which I have provided here.

²⁷ = November 24, 1929.

²⁸ ההנהלה הציונית.

כעת, לפני ש"ק דנא, קבלתי מכתב מהגאון ר' חיים עוזר שליט"א שהוא קובל שמכתבי נפל לידיים זרות, ולא מסרו לו כלל. והם כנראה חטפו את המכתב לעשות ממנו מטעמים בתוספת דברי שקר לפי המסורה של בעלי מחלוקת בעוה"ר. אני מצטער מאד, כי מכתבי נכתב בער"ס²⁹ בתוך המהומות, והצערים הנוראים שסבבני מעברים, המזכיר שלי לא היה כבר בבית, ואני הייתי עיף ויגע ולא הנחתי אצלי העתקה ממנו. אבל יהיה כת"ר נכון ובטוח שכה היו דברי, חשבתי לכתוב להגרה"ע שליט"א להמציא לי את מכתבי או את העתקתו הנאמנה, אבל לצערי גם הוא לא קבל אותו, כי בלעוהו בעלי פלוגתא, והנני מקוה כי כל הדבר הזה יתברר למדי, ולא יחרכו רמיה צידם.

בדברים הללו בסגנונם אני מוכן להשיב לכל השואלים ממני ע"ד המאורע הזה, שהוא לצערי מעליב את אלה שטפלו בו, כדי להכניס רוח תזזית³⁰ במחנה ישראל.

נקוה שומר ישראל ישמרנו מכל הפגעים, הגדולים עם הקטנים, החיצונים עם הפנימים ויפרש עלינו מהרה את סוכת שלומו, וישכון בתוכנו אהבה ואחוה ושלום ורעות ולא נוסיף לדאבה עוד,

כעתירת ידידו הנאמן הדוש"ת באה"ר

אברהם יצחק הכהן קוק

On the 21st of Kislev, R' Chaim Ozer³¹ wrote to R' Kook explaining what had happened. Someone visiting R' Chaim Ozer's house opened the letter to read the news from Eretz Yisrael. A journalist who happened to be there at that time read the letter, as it contained information relating to his brother-in-law. He then passed on its contents accurately to the daily *Haynt*. However, from there it traveled among the different Yiddish newspapers gaining exciting details in each retelling. The above explanation of events was published in the newspaper *Vort* and the matter died down on its own.

Conclusion

We have seen the pressures R' Kook was subjected to as a result of his unique world-view. In the words [translated], of B. Ish-Shalom (Preface pp. ix-x): "With his novel approach and fearless independence, he was a sharp contestor of the Zionist movement, despite

²⁹ בערב סוכות.

³⁰ ראה מדרש תנחומא חקת כו.

³¹ *Igrot LiRe'iyah* (1986) p. 176.

his enthusiastic support of its ideas, and as an aggressive disputant of the ultra-orthodox community (the old Yishuv) despite his deep identification with their ways, as well as an uncompromising critic of the pragmatist approach of “Mizrachi,” regardless of the encouragement and backing he gave them.” Indeed, it is this willingness on the part of R’ Kook to transcend party lines and seek the truth alone, that makes his philosophy so compelling that it continues to inspire us to this day. ❧

I would like to thank R’ Eitam Henkin, Prof. Marc Shapiro and R’ Bezalel Naor for their many insightful comments, and my wife Shaindy for her constant support and encouragement.