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## *From the Pages of Tradition*

### RABBI SOLOVEITCHIK MEETS RAV KOOK

In the summer of 1935, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik visited *Eretz Yisrael* for the first and only time, as a candidate for the position of Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Yaffo.<sup>1</sup> During that trip, the Rav met with “Ha-Rav”—Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Rav Avraham Yitshak ha-Kohen Kook, who was in the final stages of his last illness (he died on September 1 of that year). Rav Kook was reported to have said that “the experience of speaking with the young Rabbi Soloveitchik reminded him of his earliest years when he was a student” attending *shiurim* of Reb Hayyim Brisker (Rabbi Soloveitchik’s grandfather) at the Volozhin yeshiva, and he maintained “that the power of genius of the grandfather now resides with the grandson.”<sup>2</sup>

Years later, in 1977, R. Moshe Tsevi Neriyah reminisced with Rabbi Soloveitchik about his meeting with Rav Kook, and published highlights of their conversation in his weekly column in *Hazofe*, the newspaper of Israel’s religious-Zionist community. The columns, “*Sibot ha-Re’iyah*” (“Rav Kook Talks”), vignettes about Rav Kook’s life and teachings, were later reprinted by R. Neriyah in his many books about Rav Kook.<sup>3</sup> In the following section, the first person voice is that of R. Neriyah. The extended quotes are his citing Rabbi Soloveitchik’s comments in their conversation. (For clarity, “Ha-Rav” here refers to Rav Kook, whereas “The Rav” refers to Rabbi Soloveitchik.)

While important not to overstate either the significance of the casual conversation between the Rav and R. Neriyah, or any implied impact that Rav Kook’s thought might have had on the Rav, we present the following for its interest as a recollection of the only meeting of the two most prominent *ba’alei mahshava* of the twentieth century.

In light of the growing scholarly interest in the two, I have included a bibliography of comparative studies which have been published on Rabbi Soloveitchik and Rav Kook (the overwhelming bulk of which has been published in the last ten years).



I remember Rabbi Soloveitchik's visit to the Holy Land in 5695 [1935], and his superb *shiur* on *Massekhet Nedarim* at our yeshiva, Merkaz Ha-Rav—a *shiur* which captured the hearts of old and young alike.<sup>4</sup>

It was the last summer of *Maran* Ha-Rav's life, and when Rabbi Soloveitchik visited him it was already for *bikkur holim*. Despite his illness, Ha-Rav exerted himself in order to greet his guest—the young *Gaon* of the house of Volozhin—with special warmth, and to speak with him at length. When Rabbi Soloveitchik left Ha-Rav's room, moved with emotion, he composed a few lines in the visitor's book. I brought these lines—a copy of which I've been saving for forty-two years—with me on my visit to America, and showed them to Rabbi Soloveitchik:

I, too, add my prayers to those of the Jewish people, asking mercy for the wellbeing of *Rabbenu ha-Gadol*, the prince of Israel and its glory, *Maran* Avraham Yitshak ha-Kohen Kook *shelita*.

Israel lifts her eyes to heaven, that He who dwells on high should send a complete healing to the *Gaon* of *Yeshurun* and its splendor, and return him to his original strength, well and whole, that he may “come and go” before *Am Yisrael*.

Tuesday, *Parashat Pinhas* 5695 [July 16, 1935]

Yosef Dov ha-Levi Soloveitchik, Boston, USA

“Yes,” said Rabbi Soloveitchik, after reading these words, “Ha-Rav left a great impression on me. I have seen *gedolim*. I grew up in the presence of *gedolim*, but his was a unique personality, a completely different type [of *gadol*].”

“I read his books and writings, and his words often generate amazement.<sup>5</sup> To have written these things seventy years ago required great strength and spiritual force. In those days, these were completely novel ideas, and his style was completely original. Even though Ha-Rav's language is very rich, he strives to [clearly] convey his thought and its expression, and this is why there are various repetitions and emphases.”<sup>6</sup>

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Interestingly, Rabbi Soloveitchik—who has so creatively occupied himself with [Maimonides'] *Hilkhot Teshuva*—stated:

[Rav Kook's] most philosophically developed work is *Orot ha-Teshuva*—and his most significant innovation is that *teshuva* is not connected to sin, per se, but [is comprised of] man's returning to himself, returning to his source.<sup>7</sup>

In one of his *teshuva* sermons, Rabbi Soloveitchik mentions Ha-Rav *zt"l* on this point. When dealing with the *baraita* of Rabbi Matya ben Harash (*Yoma* 86a)—“If a man commits an offense against a negative precept and repents, his repentance suspends the sentence and the Day of Atonement affords acquittal”—Rabbi Soloveitchik states:

In his penetrating reflections on repentance, Rabbi Kook<sup>8</sup> labored over the interpretation of this difficult passage. What troubled Rabbi Kook was why the penitent should have to remain under “suspended sentence” until the Day of Atonement, and sometimes longer, until he underwent suffering and so on, before acquittal was granted. Rabbi Kook, who as I pictured him, loved all of Israel deeply, could not understand why a penitent, after his repenting, should have to wait further for the acquittal. Why should his sins not be atoned for immediately, following the act of repentance?<sup>9</sup>

“I also read *Orot ha-Kodesh*,” continued Rabbi Soloveitchik, “and draw ideas from it, although I cast them into a different form.”<sup>10</sup>

Rabbi Soloveitchik's words remind me of something the great poet Uri Tsevi Greenberg had told me years earlier: “There is more *mahshava* in a single chapter of *Orot ha-Kodesh* than in whole volumes of the greatest secular philosophers.”

Indeed, since *Orot ha-Kodesh* was published [in 1963-64], the gates have opened to researchers of Jewish thought of past generations, and they can examine Ha-Rav's thought, in depth and breadth, as a unique phenomenon. It was therefore natural that Rabbi Soloveitchik concluded his remarks by stating: “It is impossible to write on modern Jewish thought and to bypass Ha-Rav.”

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THE RAV AND HA-RAV:  
A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF COMPARATIVE SCHOLARSHIP

Yona Ben-Sasson, "The Philosophies of Rav Kook and Rabbi Soloveitchik: Methodological Bases—A Comparative Study" [in Hebrew], in *Be-Oro: Iyyunim be-Mishnato shel Ha-Rav Avraham Yitshak ha-Kohen Kook zt"l ve-Darkhei Hora'atah*, ed. Haim Hamiel (Jerusalem: WZO, 1986), pp. 353-510.

Shalom Carmy, "Tell Them I've Had a Good Enough Life," in *Jewish Perspectives on the Experience of Suffering*, ed. S. Carmy (Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1999), pp. 97-153.

Shalom Carmy, "Without Intelligence, Whence Prayer," *Tradition* 37:1 (2003), pp. 1-26.

Shalom Carmy, "Yet My Soul Drew Back: Fear of God as Experience and Commandment in an Age of Anxiety" (forthcoming in Orthodox Forum volume on *yirat shamayim*).

Yuval Cherlow, *Torat Erets Yisrael le-Or Mishmat ha-Re'iyah* (Hispin: Sifrei ha-Golan, 5758).

Yuval Cherlow, *Ve-Hayu le-Ahadim be-Yadekha: Mi-Di'alektika le-Harmonya be-Mishnato shel Ha-Rav Soloveitchik* (Alon Shvut: Tevunot, 5760). (Argues that the Rav's thought has more "harmonizing" impulses, à la Rav Kook, than usually assumed.)

Benjamin Fain, "Comprehensibility of the World," *B.D.D.* 9 (Summer 1999), pp. 5-21 (argues that scientific cognition is due to connection to "Higher Intellect" as demonstrated in thought of Maimonides, the Rav, and Rav Kook).

Yaakov Filber, "The Land of Israel and the People of Israel in the Thought of Rav Kook, Rabbi Soloveitchik, and the *Hazon Ish*" [in Hebrew], in *Le-Zevulun: Assufat Ma'amarim le-Zekher Zevulun Hammer*, ed. Y. Hakelman (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, 1999), pp. 199-213.

Eliezer Goldman, "Orthodox Thought Confronts Modernity" [in Hebrew], in his *Mehkarim ve-Iyyunim: Hagut Yehudit be-Avar u-vaHoveh* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996), pp. 141-58; as well as other essays throughout section II of the volume.

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Binyamin Ish-Shalom, "On Science and the Completeness of the Spirit" [in Hebrew], in *Emuna be-Zemanim Mishtanim*, ed. Avi Sagi (Jerusalem: WZO, 1996), pp. 347-382 (on modernism, postmodernism, and neo-Orthodoxy in thought of the Rav, Rav Kook, and Rav S.R. Hirsch).

Lawrence Kaplan, *Pathways to Redemption: Studies in the Thought of Rabbis A.I. Kook and J.B. Soloveitchik* (forthcoming).

Lawrence Kaplan, "Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and Dr. Isaac Breuer on Jewish Identity and the Jewish National Revival," in *Jewish Identity in the Post-Modern Age*, ed. C. Selengut (St. Paul: Paragon, 1999), pp. 47-66.

Chana Kehat, "Partnership and Equality: Between Rav Kook and Rabbi Soloveitchik" [in Hebrew], *Massekhet* 4 (5766), pp. 35-48.

Hayyim Navon, "Rabbi Soloveitchik's Religious-Zionist Worldview" [in Hebrew], *Tsohar* 22 (5765), pp. 159-70.

Pinchas Peli, *Perakim be-Mahshevet Medinat Yisrael* (Beit-El: Sifriyat Beit-El, 1990), pp. 38-62 (analysis of *teshuva* in thought of the Rav, Rav Kook, and R. Yehuda Alkalai).

Avinoam Rosenak, "Sensitivity to the Educative Moment and Halakhic Thinking" [in Hebrew], forthcoming in *Ha-Rav*, ed. Yedidya Stern and Yehoshua Friedman. (Deals with educational philosophies of the Rav, Rav Kook, and R. Hayyim David ha-Levi.)

Jonathan Sacks, *Tradition in an Untraditional Age* (London: Valentine-Mitchell, 1990), essays in first section of volume on responses to modernity.

Avi Sagi, *Etgar ha-Shiva el ha-Masoret* (Jerusalem: Hartman Institute, 2003), chap. 7 (on religious-Zionism).

Eliezer Sarel, "Teshuva in the Thought of Rav Kook and Rabbi Soloveitchik: A Comparative Study" [in Hebrew], *Alon Shvut* 155 (Nissan 5760), pp. 77-103.

Dov Schwartz, *Emuna al Parashat Derakhim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996), on theology of religious-Zionism. In English as *Faith at the Crossroads* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002).

Dov Schwartz, *Erets ha-Mamashut ve-haDimyon: Ma'amadah shel Erets Yisrael be-Hagut ha-Tsiyyonut ha-Datit* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997), esp. chap. 10.

Dov Schwartz, *Etgar u-Mashber be-Hug Ha-Rav Kook* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2001), see chap. 14 and appendix A.

Moshe Z. Sokol, ed., *Engaging Modernity: Rabbinic Leaders and the Challenge of the Twentieth Century* (Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1997). (While not much *comparative* scholarship, provides a number of important individual analyses of the Rav and Rav Kook.

## NOTES

1. For more on Rabbi Soloveitchik's only visit to *Erets Yisrael*, and his defeat in the Tel Aviv election, see Shaul Farber, *Community, Schooling, and Leadership: Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's Maimonides School and the Development of Boston's Orthodox Community* (PhD diss., Hebrew University, March 2000), pp. 81-85. See also: R. Tsevi (Hershel) Schachter, *Nefesh ha-Rav* (Jerusalem: Reishit, 1994), p. 84; Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 36-8; and Shlomo Pick, "The Rav: A Pressing Need for a Comprehensive Biography," *B.D.D.* 10 (Winter 2000), pp. 48-9, and p. 52, esp. at note 30.
2. As reported by former Chief Rabbi of Israel, R. Avraham Shapira, who was present when Rav Kook said this. See: Norman Lamm, *Seventy Faces: Articles of Faith* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2002), vol. 1, p. 4. (Similar remarks about Rabbi Soloveitchik have been ascribed to others as well.)
3. Rav Neriyah (1913-1995), a leading disciple of Rav Kook and prominent spiritual force within the National Religious camp in Israel for much of the twentieth century, was the founder of Yeshivat Bnei Akiva in Kfar ha-Ro'eh, forerunner of the network of Bnei Akiva *yeshivot* and *ulpanot*. This conversation with Rabbi Soloveitchik appeared as installment #96, *Hazofe* (Friday, July 8, 1977), p. 5; reprinted in: *Likkutei ha-Re'iyah* (Kfar ha-Ro'eh: Hotsa'at Hai Roi, 1990), vol. 1, pp. 247-51. Many thanks to R. Neriyah's son, R. Nahum Neriyah, for permission to translate and publish this selection.
4. For an account of that *shiur*, see Rakeffet, vol. 1, pp. 37-8.
5. R. Schachter records that the Rav had stated that he had never read Rav Kook's halakhic writings, except for *Olat ha-Re'iyah* (his two-volume, anthologized commentary on the *siddur*), which he enjoyed. As to the more philosophical writings, the Rav is reported to have said that he had read very little, because of the "difficult literary style." See *Nefesh ha-Rav*, p. 66, note 12. According to R. Aaron Rakeffet, this remark was made at an informal discussion between the Rav and his *semikha* students on March 29, 1960. It is possible that the Rav had read more of Rav Kook's writings in the intervening years before the 1977 conversation with R. Neriyah. (This is certainly the case with *Orot ha-Kodesh*, which was only published in 1963-64.) R. Rakeffet informs me that the remark was a follow-up to a

question on how rabbis might positively impact secular Jews, to which the Rav responded that the model for this ought to be that of Rav Kook, who succeeded in light of the powerful force of his spiritual personality.

6. At this point in the essay, R. Neriya brings citations in which Rav Kook explains his unique literary style: “*Zaronim*” in *Orot* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook), p. 136; and *Iggerot ha-Re’iyah*, I:216, pp. 266-68.
7. At this point in the essay, R. Neriya cites two treatments of Rav Kook’s philosophy of *teshuva*: R. Shimon Starlitz, “*Teshuva in the Light of Rav Kook’s Analysis*” [in Hebrew], in *Orot ha-Teshuva: Mahadurat Yeshivat Or Etzion* (Merkaz Shapira: Or Etzion, 5730), pp. 161-72; and R. Yaakov Filber, ed., *Orot ha-Teshuva*, by R. Avraham Yitshak ha-Kohen Kook (Jerusalem: Gal-Or Press, 5737), p. 24.

The Rav and Rav Kook trod innovative yet parallel tracks in their analyses of *teshuva*, shifting focus from the *correction of sin* to the *correction of man*, whose distance from God is the source of sin itself.

8. The only other references to Rav Kook in Rabbi Soloveitchik’s writings appear in: *Out of the Whirlwind* (Newark: Ktav, 2003), p. 149 (paragraph beginning “On Yom Kippur, we pray . . .”). This is a reference to *Olat ha-Re’iyah*, vol. 2, pp. 356-57. In the subsequent Hebrew version of the book, it was made explicit that the comment is from Rav’s Kook’s commentary; see *Min ha-Sa’ara* (Jerusalem: MeOtzar Ha-Rav, 5764), pp. 127-28 (the Rav also refers to this same point in *Yemei Zikaron*, p. 11). See also *Divrei Hagut ve-Ha’arakha*, p. 152, note 17 (= *Be-Sod ha-Yahid ve-haYahad*, p. 280, note 17) which is a reference to *Olat ha-Re’iyah*, vol. 1, pp. 277-78, on *birkat ha-minim*.
9. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *On Repentance* (Jerusalem: Orot, 1980), p. 177; corresponds to the Hebrew *Al ha-Teshuva*, pp. 229-30.

The Rav doesn’t quote directly from Rav Kook, but paraphrases his question. It is fairly certain that the source in Rav Kook’s writings for this passage was *Olat ha-Re’iyah*, vol. 2, p. 357 (“*Aval lo al-yedei yisurim . . .*”). Rav Kook did touch on this theme in a number of places (see, e.g., *Orot ha-Teshuva*, 14:3-4, 15:8, 16:3, 17:3; and, within a more technical-halakhic analysis, *Mishpat Kohen* #102). If, however, Rabbi Soloveitchik’s source was *Olat ha-Re’iyah*, we can conclude that amongst all of Rav Kook’s writings, that work is the only one which the Rav references in his own published writings (see other sources in note 8, above).

On the particular point of comparison in *Al ha-Teshuva* (the essential difference between repentance motivated by love versus that motivated by fear), see: Hayyim Sabato, *Be-Or Panekha* (Jerusalem: Mesorah, 2005), pp. 129-32, who analyzes the parallel between the Rav and Rav Kook, and uncovers precedents for their thoughts in the writings of *rishonim*, et al.

10. Determining which ideas the Rav “drew” from *Orot ha-Kodesh* and “cast in different forms” would be a worthy pursuit.