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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner on...

3 Elul 5768

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3 Elul – Yahrtzeit of Maran (our revered teacher) Ha-Rav Kook – Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook: “I am building a Nation”

[From parashah sheet "Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah" – Ekev 5768

Translated by Rafael Blumberg]

When our master, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook arrived in Israel, Rabbi David Ha-Cohen, the Nazir, walked all night from Jerusalem to Hevron to greet him, and there he heard a Torah lecture from him. Following the lecture, he said to Rav Kook, “Based on your lecture, your views resemble those of Chabad.” Rav Kook smiled and responded, “I’m building a Nation.”

The Talmud teaches (Sanhedrin 38b), “Each generation and its scholars, each generation and its sages.” G-d’s conduct of each generation is different, and He sends the generation’s spiritual leadership accordingly (Even Shleima 11:9). The Torah encompasses all the generations from start to finish, all the questions and all the situations, and every generation has a unique divine emissary to uncover another part of the Torah hidden away until now, and known only to the most spiritual elite who transcend the generations, who transcend time, subsuming everything with their all-encompassing gaze.

Rabbi Hillel Zeitlin wrote an article entitled, “Rav Kook’s Fundamental Approach to the

Kabbalah” [in Hebrew], in which he compares the Kabbalah of the Ari, of the Ba’al Shem Tov, of Chabad [Lubavitch] and of Rav Kook. Our Rabbi, Rav Tzvi Yehudah, said that this article was generally accurate and that it hit the mark, but he added that the Kabbalah of the Vilna Gaon has to be included as well.

Thus, Rav Zeitlin said that the Ari spoke about the divine light in the spiritual worlds, the Ba’al Shem Tov, and in his wake, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe in his book the Tanya, brought that light down into man. Rav Tzvi Yehudah added that the Vilna Gaon uncovered the divine light within the Torah. Finally, Rav Kook uncovered the divine light within the Nation (Sifran Shel Yechidim, page 235).

Obviously, these divine lights are all connected. Certainly, all of these elite figures gazed at the whole picture, but the perspective changes. Imagine several people watching the stars from a tall tower, but with each gazing at them from a different spot in the tower, seeing them from a different perspective (*ibid.*, p. 236). Or, if you like, each of them is seeing them at a different point in time.

Thus, during the past hundred years, an amazing thing has happened: the gathering of the exiles has begun. In the Shemoneh Esreh we pray, “Sound the great shofar for our freedom. Lift up the banner to bring our exiles together,” and it is happening. Someone told me, “When my great, great grandfather was born, there were 12,000 Jews in Israel. When my great grandfather was born, there were 30,000. When my grandfather was born there were 80,000, when my father was born there were 200,000, and when I was born there were 600,000. When my son was born there were two million, and when my grandson was born there were five million!”

Yet the ingathering of the exiles does not just mean a population transfer from one geographic place to another. We are gathering together and becoming a single nation once more. From scattered individuals, from a scattered, divided people, we are once more becoming the people described in Divrei Ha-Yamim 1 17:21 as: “Who is like Your People Israel, a cohesive Nation in the Land.” Maharal at the start of his work Netzach Yisrael explains that there are three characteristics to a healthy, normal people: their unity, their possessing a common land, and their being independent. In practical terms this translates as their possessing a sovereign state, an army and a government with all its institutions. Slowly, our recognition, understanding and faith that we are a people and that we need to lead the lives of a people is returning to us. For already a hundred years we have been awakening.

Yet there are many more Jews who are still sunken in a deep sleep, in the exile as well as in Israel. There are also many religious Jews who have not yet understood what a nation is, but we are progressing. We are being carried along on the wings of an enormous movement, the Zionist movement. Rav Kook said (Orot 38): "In the end of days, a clandestine organization full of potential and yearning, fraught with internal contradictions, replete with light and darkness is calculating how to penetrate the coast for the salvation of Israel."

Therefore, many religious Jews see the darkness and reject Zionism. By contrast, many secular Jews see the light and identify with it. Rav Kook emerged, saw the light and the darkness together, and he said, "I am building a Nation," by which he meant that he was magnifying the light in order to banish the darkness. Rav Kook wrote about himself, "I know that G-d sent me to the holy land to revitalize it" (Igrot I, p. 189) – to invest spirit in the national rebirth, or, more precisely, to uncover the soul of the national rebirth. Rav Kook further writes about himself: "I am slave who has been sold to the masses, to toil and bear burdens. I have been sold to G-d's people, who are starting to strike roots in the land of their inheritance, hoping for redemption." (ibid., pp. 239, 240). This is an enormous project, a Torah project, what our master Rav Tzvi Yehudah called "the redemptive Torah" (Or Li-Netivati, p. 280), the Torah that teaches us how to construct the redemption of our people based on the word of G-d.

Also to build a single person is an enormous project, but to build a nation is infinitely harder and more complex. Towards that end Rav Kook was sent. "I am building a Nation." Let us not think that he was not also building the individual Jew. He was involved in that even more. In order for all the individual Jews to be part of the national edifice and not just a collection of isolated individuals, each Jew has to be much more full of Torah and Mishnah, Gemara and Shulchan Aruch, the fear of G-d and good character, holiness and purity, Mesilat Yesharim and Chovot HaLevavot.

No less than this, the Nation's rebirth has to be also a rebirth of individuals, such that all should be on a high level. As Rav Kook wrote: "Unless the national rebirth sheds new light on prayer, Torah, Mussar and faith, it will not yet constitute a true rebirth" (Ma'amarei HaRe'iyah, p. 414).

This is the divine mission of Rav Kook – to transform our national rebirth into a true rebirth, and thank G-d, for the past hundred years, it has been growing more and more genuine thanks to the all the light and insight contained in Rav Kook's writings. Yet we still have a

long way ahead of us. We have much more to learn of his writings, and much more to teach, in order to uncover the light stored away in our rebirth, until we will see the complete fulfillment of Rav Kook's vision [written before there was a State of Israel]. "The [future] Jewish state is the foundation of G-d's throne in the world, and its entire purpose is to render G-d one and His name one" (Orot, page 160).