



■ PINCHAS POLONSKY ■ UNIVERSAL RELIGIOUS ZIONISM ■



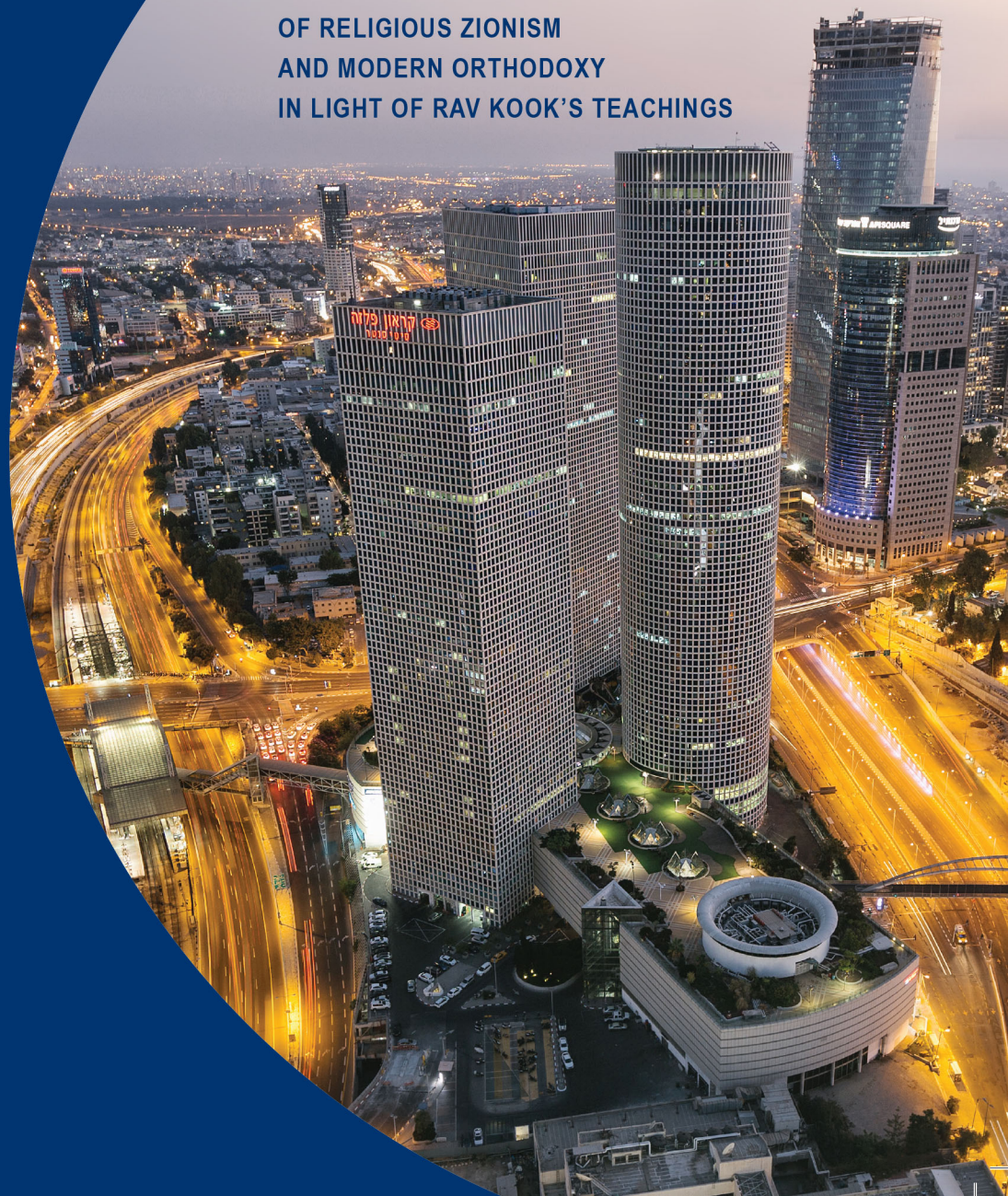
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PINCHAS POLONSKY

UNIVERSAL RELIGIOUS ZIONISM

A NEW PHASE IN THE DEVELOPMENT
OF RELIGIOUS ZIONISM
AND MODERN ORTHODOXY
IN LIGHT OF RAV KOOK'S TEACHINGS



Pinchas Polonsky

UNIVERSAL RELIGIOUS ZIONISM

The old shall be renewed, and the new sanctified.
(*Letters*, 164)

Three forces are wrestling within our camp ... the sacred, the national, and the human—these are the three fundamental demands from which all life ... is composed. The struggle is most visible in the Land of Israel, but their influence extends throughout the life of the nation... We must strive to reach that state of wholeness, where these three forces ... fully express themselves in harmony ... Only in this way can we hope for a state of life worthy of one nation in its land. (*Shmonah Kvatzim* 3:1–2)

It behooves us to take to heart and to try to unify the “tree of Joseph” and the “tree of Judah,” to rejoice in the national reawakening, and to know that this is not Israel’s end goal but only a preparation. (*The Lamentation in Jerusalem*)

—Rav A.I. Kook

THE BOOK IS ALSO AVAILABLE IN RUSSIAN
AND HEBREW EDITIONS

Pinchas Polonsky

UNIVERSAL RELIGIOUS ZIONISM

ציונות עולמית דתית (צע"ד)

A New Phase in the Development
of Religious Zionism and Modern Orthodoxy
in Light of Rav Kook's Teachings

Translated from Russian, edited, and elaborated
by Alex Shlyankevich

Second Edition, Revised and Expanded



Orot Yerushalaim



Derech Zion

2025

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To contact the author: ppolonsky@gmail.com

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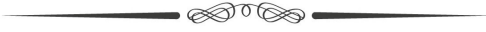
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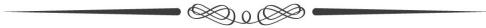


With Special Recognition

This book bears the unmistakable imprint of

Alex Shlyankevich,

whose editing, research, content development, literary refinement, and English translation were essential throughout its creation—helping bring the ideas of Universal Religious Zionism into focus and into the world.



הרב אורי שרקי
רחוב גבעת שאול 11
ירושלים 95477
ב"ה, ג' בתמוז תשפ"ה

עבודתו של ד"ר פינחס פולונסקי עולה בערכה על נסיונות מצויים של פופולריזציה של משנת הראי"ה קוק, שאין בהם חידוש רב. לשמחתנו מוגש לקורא המשכיל תוכן נעלה מבחינה אינטלקטואלית, החודר לעמקי סוגיות היסוד של המהלכים ההיסטוריים שחברתנו מתמודדת איתם, עם יכולת ניתוח המלווה בבהירות הרצאה. יש בחיבור זה תרומה חשובה לקידום פתרונות תרבותיים וערכיים של שאלות זמננו, המגלה את הרלוונטיות של מקורות היהדות לעידן התובעני, בו אנחנו חיים.

בברכה מרובה
אורי שרקי



Rabbi Oury Cherki
Givat Shaul str. 11
Jerusalem, Israel 95477
B"H, 3 Tammuz 5785
(June 29, 2025)

Dr. Pinchas Polonsky's work stands out beyond typical efforts to popularize Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook's teachings, many of which lack new insights. To our delight, this book offers the thoughtful reader intellectually rich content, delving deeply into the core issues behind the historical processes shaping our society. The analysis is both insightful and clearly articulated. This work makes a significant contribution to fostering cultural and ethical responses to pressing questions of our time, highlighting the ongoing relevance of Jewish sources in today's demanding era.

With abundant blessings,
Oury Cherki

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Warm Recommendation for Dr. Pinchas Polonsky's Important Book – A Beacon for Religious Zionism in Our Generation

To Dr. Pinchas Polonsky, a man of deep wisdom and vision,

I read your important book with great joy and heartfelt appreciation. It presents a clear, thoughtful, and profound overview of the spiritual and national trajectory of Religious Zionism in our time. At a moment when many are seeking direction, identity, and purpose within the unfolding process of Israel's redemption, this work serves as a beacon of insight and clarity. Our generation yearns for such a voice—one that speaks with responsibility, nuance, and deep faith in the hand of God in history. I was particularly moved by your original teaching on the three stages of kingship: Saul as the stage of struggle and transition, David as the stage of spiritual consolidation, and Solomon as the stage of peace and completeness. This framework offers more than historical interpretation—it provides a practical roadmap for our generation's mission: to build the land, the people, and the Torah. Your vision articulates a movement from conflict to construction, from war to Divine revelation, and from a Torah centered solely on the Jewish people to one that speaks to the entire world, in the spirit of the verse: "For the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:9). I was impressed by the clarity and depth with which you express these ideas, weaving together Torah learning, intellectual reflection, and a prophetic-historical lens. In my view, you have succeeded in continuing the legacy of Rav Kook — not only through analysis of the present, but in charting a visionary spiritual path for the future. As the prophet Ezekiel wrote: "I will appoint over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he shall tend them" (Ezekiel 34:23).

I warmly bless you: May your wellspring of thought continue to spread far and wide.

May you merit abundant divine assistance. And may you be counted among those helping usher in the era of complete redemption. With deep appreciation and faith in the unfolding redemption of Israel,



Rabbi Michael Rubinstein
Founder, "Israel Chai" Community
Rabbi, Carlebach Community of Harish
Eretz Israel

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"The eyes of Hashem your God are always upon the Land, from the beginning of the year unto the end of the year." (Deuteronomy 11:12)

USA

Israel365
161 Hamilton Road
Columbus, OH 43213
305-671-9053

ISRAEL

1 Yigal Alon Avenue
Beit Shemesh
99098 Israel
+972-2-560-6516

info@israel365.com
www.israel365.com

20 Sivan 5785
June 15, 2025

Reading Universal Religious Zionism by Dr. Pinchas Polonsky has profoundly influenced me. His presentation of the stages of Redemption—beginning with secular Zionism, progressing through religious Zionism, and culminating in universal Zionism—offers a compelling interpretation of Rav Kook's century-old vision and a forward-looking roadmap for our shared future.

It is increasingly recognized worldwide that Israel is not only central to the Jewish people but also plays a vital role in the spiritual destiny of all humanity. Pinchas Polonsky is the first in our generation to clearly articulate the Torah-based foundations of this vision. The responsibility now rests on each of us to help bring about its final stage: Universal Zionism.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Tuly Weisz

Rabbi Tuly Weisz
Israel365, Founder

TESTIMONY

Pinchas Polonsky's book is an essential contribution to continuing Rav Kook's dream—to realize a humanist and moral Zionism that is critical not only for the survival and holiness of the Jewish people, but also for all humanity. It helps safeguard authentic religious Zionism from both excessive materialism and extremism.

Rabbi Eugene Korn, PhD

*Formerly founding
editor of Meorot:
A Forum for Modern
Orthodox Discourse*

חיבור
זה כל
הסיפור

החברה
בי
התאחדות

ערב שבת קודש פרשת בהעלותך, י"ז סיון תשפ"ה

ד"ר פנחס פולונסקי הוא מחנך בעל חזון: תורת ישראל חייבת להדריך את מדינת ישראל בעולם המודרני, ולהעניק משמעות והכוונה לעולם. האורתודוקסיה המודרנית שלו היא ציונית בגלוי ואוניברסלית באותה מידה. בחזונו התורה אינה כורעת ברך בפני ערכים ורעיונות עכשוויים, ואינה מתעלמת מהם או דוחה אותם אוטומטית. תחת זאת, היא לומדת אותם ביראת כבוד כדי לאתר ולהגדיר את הקדושה שבהם. קדושה זו מחזקת ומעשירה בו זמנית את ישראל, את העולם ואת התורה עצמה.

בברכת התורה,

הרב ד"ר אבי קדיש

מרצה במכללה האקדמית לחינוך אורנים

יו"ר תנועת הביתה

Erev Shabbat Parashat Beha'alotekha, 17 Sivan 5785

Dr. Pinchas Polonsky is an educator with a vision: The Torah of Israel must guide the State of Israel in the contemporary world, and it must provide meaning and guidance to the world. His Modern Orthodoxy is both unabashedly Zionist and openly universal at the very same time. In his vision the Torah does not bow to current values and ideas, nor does it ignore or reject them automatically. Instead, it studies them respectfully in order to locate and define the sanctity within them. That sanctity simultaneously strengthens and enriches Israel, the world and the Torah itself.

With Torah blessings,

Rabbi Dr. Avi Kadish

Oranim Academic College of Education

Chairman, Habayta

Avi Kadish

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I am indebted to my close collaborator, Alex Shlyankevich, for the editing, research, content development, literary shaping, and English translation that brought the book to a wider audience. I cherish his dedication and expertise.

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And finally, thank you to all of you who have supported my work over the years. Without your generosity, this project would not have been possible.

Pinchas Polonsky

PREFACE

This book, devoted to the long-term development of Judaism and the State of Israel, was completed in the shadow of the war that followed the tragedy of October 7. Amid such a profound national crisis, theological reflection on the future may seem to some untimely—or even tone-deaf. Yet history teaches otherwise: time and again, the Jewish people have emerged from devastation with renewed strength, precisely because we have never relinquished our collective sense of purpose, rooted in our Biblical past and oriented toward a Messianic future.

Central to this legacy during the turbulent events of the past century was Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook (1865–1935). Rav Kook’s revolutionary philosophy integrated modernity and tradition, playing a formative role in the modernization of Orthodox Judaism and continuing to shape the evolution of the Jewish state in the 21st century. In this same tradition, following in Rav Kook’s footsteps and recognizing the criticality of our times, we present a vision for the ongoing development of Judaism and the State of Israel for generations to come.

Contemporary Religious Zionism, comprising the followers of Rav Kook (*Kippot Srugot*) and representing more than half of Israel’s Orthodox Jews, can justifiably take pride in its political and practical

achievements, which are rooted in the theological groundwork laid by its founders. Today, however, the movement stands at a critical juncture, lacking a compelling vision for the future. This strategic shortcoming limits Religious Zionism's ability to offer solutions to the pressing problems of our time and weakens its capacity to lead Israeli society.

Modern Orthodoxy, paralleling Religious Zionism, plays a vital role in the Jewish world, a status secured by the spiritual achievements of leaders from previous generations. However, it, too, faces an urgent need to articulate a long-term theological vision, especially regarding the State of Israel, to inspire and guide the next generation seeking to harmonize a halachic life with modernity.

In response to these challenges, we propose a new approach to advance Religious Zionism and Modern Orthodoxy, based on Rav Kook's teachings as applied to today's world. While addressing contemporary issues of Judaism, this strategy aims to pave the way for the next stage in the development of the State of Israel.

(1) We build upon Rav Kook's interpretation of Herzl's secular Zionism as the beginning of the Messianic process, identified with Mashiach ben Yosef. In our paradigm, this stage in Israel's development corresponds symbolically to King Saul. Whereas secular Zionism has largely fulfilled its mission and is now ideologically winding down, no movement within Israeli society has yet emerged to assume the mantle of Mashiach ben David, symbolically associated with King Solomon, who—according to the traditional two-stage Messianic model—is expected to succeed Mashiach ben Yosef. To address this “historical vacuum,” we propose a nuanced three-stage model by introducing an intermediate stage—David—that bridges Saul and Solomon. According to this framework, the modern State of Israel is currently transitioning from the Saul stage to the David stage. We see Religious Zionists as embodying David, the “intermediate Mashiach.” This perspective offers a theological framework for (a) the shift toward a more prominent national-religious identity of

the contemporary State of Israel and the role of Religious Zionism in this process, and (b) the new project we have termed Universal Religious Zionism (*Tzionut Olamit Datit* in Rav Kook's lexicon) and its role in the anticipated transition to Mashiach ben David, or the Solomon stage, in the future State of Israel.

(2) Central to our methodology is Rav Kook's vision of Judaism's development as a synthesis of the ideals of the three factions of the Jewish people: religious, nationalist, and universalist. The past century has seen the integration of religious and nationalist values, which is reflected in today's Religious Zionism and is largely embraced by Modern Orthodoxy. The time has come to incorporate into the religious framework the values of the third, universalist faction, commonly referred to as universal values—science, art, social development, environmentalism, well-rounded education, work ethic, tolerance, and others that constitute the spiritual content of modern civilization. This integration, which leads to Universal Religious Zionism, is an essential factor in the Messianic process.

To achieve this, Universal Religious Zionism employs Rav Kook's method of separating the Divine sparks embedded in civilizational values from the ideological shells of various "isms," reconnecting them to their authentic Biblical roots, and cultivating them organically within the framework of Orthodox Judaism. This approach offers a vital path toward resolving the tension between the religious-nationalist and universalist camps that currently divide both Israeli society and the broader Jewish world. The successful integration of national values into Judaism in the 20th century—values that had been diminished during the Exile but were powerfully revitalized by political Zionism—substantially reduced the conflict between Zionist and religious factions. This historic achievement gives us the confidence to advance to the next phase of Rav Kook's vision: the development of Judaism through the integration of universal values and the continued unfolding of the Messianic process.

Embarking on this journey, we emphasize the critical importance of the mutually enriching influence between Religious Zionism,

driven by national aspirations, and Modern Orthodoxy, which has made strides in reconciling universal values with religious tradition. Together, both movements will reach a new, universal level, becoming the spiritual leaders of the State of Israel and the Diaspora, guiding the Jewish people in their ultimate mission to be a light to the nations.

As advocates of spiritual diversity who believe that each system of thought reflects different facets of the infinite Divine, we do not seek to extend our vision to all Religious Zionists and Modern Orthodox. Nevertheless, we welcome constructive responses from those who may not share our vision.

We invite universalist Jews who may feel alienated from traditional Judaism due to its perceived or actual lack of appreciation for universal values to engage in dialogue with us. Universal Religious Zionism can restore their connection to Judaism for mutual benefit—the movement will not be truly universal without our universalist brethren. We welcome collaboration with anyone who shares the vision of Universal Religious Zionism and is prepared to join us on this journey.

This book is an invitation to that collaboration.



IN BRIEF



Diagnosing the Crisis, Proposing a Renewal

1. The Great Practical Achievements and Ideological Stalemate of Religious Zionism

It has been more than a century since Rav Kook conceived and initiated the ideological and institutional foundations of what would become Religious Zionism. Today, the movement constitutes a major force within Israeli society, encompassing more than half of the country's Orthodox Jews, with its adherents actively engaged in every sphere of national life. Nevertheless, despite its accomplishments, vitality, and significant influence, Religious Zionism finds itself at an ideological impasse. This crisis is reflected in the following ways:

A theological rift. The driving force behind Religious Zionism is the self-realization of being part of the Messianic process, in which, according to Rav Kook, the State of Israel is *Mashiach ben Yosef*, destined to be succeeded by *Mashiach ben David*. However, the unfolding history shows that such a direct transition is not feasible, suggesting that the traditional theology of Religious Zionism no longer fully aligns with the current reality.

Loss of its unifying role in Israeli society. Historically, Religious Zionism viewed itself as a bridge between the ultra-Orthodox and secular segments of Israeli society. Today, however, this

is no longer the case—the movement finds itself in even sharper conflict with secular Israel than the Haredi community.

Limited influence. Religious Zionism has significantly impacted parts of Israeli society that resonate with religious tradition (*Mazorti*), even if they do not fully adhere to it. At the same time, the movement has largely failed to affect those sectors of Israeli society that remain resistant to Judaism.

Lack of vision and roadmap. The ideological horizon of Religious Zionism has narrowed to practical, short-term tasks and no longer provides guidance for further spiritual advancement. But without a long-term vision, leadership is impossible. The young and active are drawn to inspiring dreams, not to realpolitik.

Now, more than ever, Religious Zionism is in need of its defining “I have a dream” moment. We strive to articulate that vision.

2. The Problem of a Direct Transition from Mashiach ben Yosef to Mashiach ben David

Modern Religious Zionism is rooted in Rav Kook’s profound interpretation of Herzl’s secular Zionism as Mashiach ben Yosef, a forerunner of Mashiach ben David. Following Herzl’s death, Rav Kook articulated this idea in his landmark 1904 discourse, *Misped b’Yerushalaim* (The Lamentation in Jerusalem), a eulogy to the founder of political Zionism. This premise led Rav Kook to guide Religious Zionism toward practical support for Herzl’s secular political Zionist movement, seeing it as the beginning of the Messianic process. At the same time, according to Rav Kook, Religious Zionism should begin to lay the groundwork for the next stage of the Messianic process—Mashiach ben David, who would succeed Mashiach ben Yosef and fulfill the *Geula* (Redemption).

This compelling concept empowered Religious Zionism by revealing its role in the Messianic process. Rav Kook’s vision infused the

movement with tremendous energy, enabling it to contribute meaningfully across all facets of Israeli society—most notably through the settlement of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, which significantly influenced the trajectory of the State of Israel’s development. This vision proved extraordinarily fruitful for Religious Zionism, as it provided a framework for unwavering support of secular political Zionism.

Generations have passed, and Mashiach ben Yosef in our time has nearly completed his monumentally successful mission. The goals of classical Zionism—the establishment of a viable Jewish state and the ingathering of the exiles—have been realized. Once a revolutionary movement, political Zionism now operates in a state of maintenance; its objectives no longer stir broad enthusiasm or inspire visionary commitment. Mashiach ben Yosef is “dying” and must give way to Mashiach ben David. However, no social or ideological group in Israel embodies the qualities necessary to assume this biblical role. Mashiach ben David is not yet on the horizon. Rav Kook did not elaborate on this transition, as the shift from Mashiach ben Yosef to Mashiach ben David was not a pressing issue in his time. Today, however, we are left with a fundamental question: at what stage of the Messianic process are we now?

3. The Three-Stage Model of the Messianic Process

In search of an answer, we propose refining the traditional two-stage model of the Messianic process by adopting a three-stage framework. The conventional model aligns two dynasties of the United Monarchy in biblical Israel with stages of the Messianic process: the House of Saul corresponding to Mashiach ben Yosef and the House of David to Mashiach ben David. However, the biblical monarchy comprised not two but three central figures—Saul, David, and Solomon. Accordingly, we suggest interpreting each of these kings as representing a distinct phase in the Messianic process and projecting this royal triad onto the historical evolution of the modern State of Israel.

Each king—Saul, David, and Solomon—had a unique historical mission for their reign. King Saul sought the security and normalization of his people, which the Israelites explicitly demanded: “That we may be like all the other nations: let our king rule over us and go out at our head and fight our battles” (1 Samuel 8:20). Secular political Zionism pursued similar goals—the normalization of the Jewish people and its security—which was the basis for Rav Kook’s identification of this movement with Mashiach ben Yosef, or, in our paradigm, a modern-day Saul.

Following Rav Kook’s footsteps, we analyze the other two kings, David and Solomon. King David prioritized the Jewish people’s connection to God through a national religious revival, culminating in the return of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. King Solomon’s mission was to spread the notion of One God of the Torah to mankind, culminating in the Temple of Solomon, a magnet for the nations—the mission worthy of Mashiach ben David. Indeed, Solomon could reach such a level and have such an impact on the world only because he stood on David’s shoulders.

David, a uniquely significant figure, deserves his special place in the Messianic process. Based on his tribal lineage, “Mashiach ben Yehuda” is an appropriate term for David.

If we recognize an intermediate phase—David, Mashiach ben Yehuda—connecting Saul, Mashiach ben Yosef, and Solomon, Mashiach ben David, our current position in the Messianic process becomes clear: we are transitioning from Saul to David. This transitional phase is characterized by Israeli society’s growing recognition of Religious Zionist values and contributions, fostering a gradual strengthening of the nation’s religious identity. The era of Saul, represented by secular political Zionism, is drawing to a triumphant close, and we are eternally grateful for this movement’s immense achievements. While Solomon has not yet emerged, David is evident in modern Israel, embodied by the Religious Zionists with their vanguard, the settlement movement. Their goals coincide with the goals of King David: a national religious (rather than national secular) revival.

Having supplemented Rav Kook's concept of Herzlian political Zionism as Mashiach ben Yosef or modern-day Saul with our concept of Religious Zionism as Mashiach ben Yehuda or modern-day David, and thus having determined our present place as a transition between these two phases, we can ask the next logical questions:

What will be the nature of the future social movement in Israel that can embody Solomon, Mashiach ben David? What will distinguish it from its predecessor, today's Religious Zionism? In other words, what will be the next great goal of Religious Zionism?

As we pointed out earlier, the primary difference between David and Solomon is the breadth of their missions. While the former seeks a spiritual renaissance for the Jewish people, the latter aims to catalyze a spiritual transformation of all humanity. Thus, when we project King Solomon, Mashiach ben David, into the State of Israel of the future, we envision that it must be the movement capable of making the Divine Light accessible to humanity so that "all the families of the Earth shall be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3).

How can such a transformative movement, an embodiment of Solomon, emerge? And what should we do to pave the way for Solomon's universal mission?

In search of an answer, we turn once again to Rav Kook.

4. Synthesis of the Ideals of Three Factions Within the Jewish People

In 1910, Rav Kook outlined a roadmap for Judaism's development in the coming centuries.¹ In this program, he asserted that the Jewish people are divided into three ideological factions: the

¹ *Shmonah Kvatzim*, 3:1.

religious, whose values are the study of Torah and the observance of commandments; the secular nationalist-Zionist, whose values are the settlement of the Land of Israel and the creation of a Jewish state; and the liberal universalists, for whom humanistic and universal values are central. According to Rav Kook, the future of Judaism will be a synthesis of these three ideologies.

A century later, we have reached the halfway point: Rav Kook's followers have fully integrated national ideals into the religious framework, creating modern Religious Zionism. Yet, the universalist ideals, which may seem external to Judaism but are deeply rooted in it and reveal its essence, remain unincorporated. This means that our current efforts should be directed toward the second half of Rav Kook's vision: the revival of universal values within Judaism.

In our three-stage Messianic process model, the royal triad projection onto the State of Israel unfolds as follows. In the first stage, "the reign of King Saul," secular Zionism realized national ideals by establishing the Jewish State. In the second stage, "the reign of King David," national and religious ideals intertwined. In the third stage, "the reign of King Solomon," national-religious principles will be integrated with universal values to form what we have called, in Rav Kook's terminology, Universal Religious Zionism (*Tzionut Olamit Datit*). This will complete Rav Kook's grand program of the evolution of Judaism by synthesizing all three ideologies.

Consequently, we follow Rav Kook's strategy of implementing practical policies for the present while laying the groundwork for the future. We are grateful to "Saul"—revolutionary political Zionism—for its unparalleled achievements in establishing the State of Israel. We support "David"—the contemporary Religious Zionism and settlement movement—by promoting national religious values, participating in all facets of the State of Israel, and aligning it with the ideals of Jewish tradition. We pave the way for "Solomon"—the emerging Universal Religious Zionism—by modernizing Orthodox Judaism through integrating Torah-authentic universal values into its framework.

5. Integrating Purified Universal Values into Religious Zionism

Thus, to actively participate in the ongoing Messianic process, we must realign our theology and, while maintaining its national-religious core values, initiate the transformation of Religious Zionism into its universal form. The Universal Religious Zionism project involves developing a religious, rather than merely pragmatic, understanding of civilizational values. This requires identifying the Divine sparks within these values, separating them from the ideological shells of modern “isms,” reconnecting them to their authentic Jewish source, and cultivating their growth organically within Judaism. Absent such a transformation, the Messianic process risks losing momentum and failing to achieve its full redemptive potential. Embracing this approach, Universal Religious Zionism stands poised to become a cornerstone in the spiritual foundation of the future State of Israel and the Jewish people. Equipped with this vision, we will be able to engage meaningfully with humanity and take a renewed step toward fulfilling our ultimate mission of becoming a light unto the nations.

In this book, we explore the concept of Universal Religious Zionism through three key dimensions: theology, ideology, and practice.

Theology: Development of Rav Kook’s vision of the Jewish state as the Messianic process, applied to the ongoing history of the State of Israel: a transition from the traditional two-stage Messianic model—comprising Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben David—to a three-stage paradigm symbolized by the reigns of Kings Saul (safe-haven state), David (national-mission state), and Solomon (universal-mission state) (Chapter I).

Ideology: A framework and methodology for reviving Torah-authentic universal values within Judaism, serving as preparation for the Solomonic phase of the State of Israel (Chapter II).

Practice: A catalog of universal values ready for integration into Judaism, along with approaches for extracting their Divine sparks from the ideological shells of various “isms” (Chapter III).



Chapter I. THEOLOGY



A Renewed Model of Rav Kook's Vision for Israel's Development as a Three-Stage Messianic Process *Gratitude for Saul, Support for David, Preparation for Solomon*

1. Traditional Understanding of the Two-Stage Messianic Process and Its Reinterpretation in Religious Zionism

Commonly, discussions of the Messiah and the Messianic process are framed in an eschatological context as distant future events to be revealed at the End of Days. The theology of Religious Zionism, as shaped by Rav Kook, revitalized an older but often overlooked strand of Jewish thought: the idea that the Messianic process can unfold within real historical time. For Rav Kook, the Messianic process is a living, ongoing historical reality in which all factions of the Jewish people, including the secular, actively participate. Consequently, Religious Zionists view contemporary Israeli life through the lens of the Messianic process.

Indeed, Jewish tradition has long interpreted contemporary history through messianic concepts. In ancient Israel, the term “mashiach” (literally, “Anointed One”) was used to refer both to eschatological redemption in the distant future and the unfolding of contemporary national history. The Tanakh uses this term to describe notable figures such as Kings Saul, David, and Solomon, as well as later kings of

Judah and even the Persian King Cyrus, who played a crucial, “messianic” role in returning the Jewish people from the Babylonian Exile and facilitating the rebuilding of the Temple (1 Samuel 24:6, 10; 26:9, 11; 2 Samuel 19:22; 23:1; Lamentations 4:20; Isaiah 45:1). Most notably, Rabbi Akiva proclaimed Bar Kochba to be the Messiah, indicating that during the early post-Biblical period, the concept of Mashiach could be understood in contemporary terms rather than solely in eschatological ones.² The application of messianic ideas to concrete historical processes is, therefore, not a modern innovation but a tradition firmly rooted in classical Jewish sources.

In *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars* (12:2), Maimonides emphasizes that we cannot foresee the course of the Messianic process and that our understanding of it will become clearer as it unfolds. It is, therefore, not surprising that throughout Jewish history, there has been a continuous reinterpretation and refinement of messianic concepts.

When the coming of Mashiach is viewed as a distant future revelation, it may appear as a singular event, sudden and complete. But once we recognize that the Messianic Era is already unfolding, it reveals itself as a gradual process with discernible stages.³

In the Talmud and much of classical Jewish literature, mashiach is commonly understood as Mashiach ben David. Although there is mention of a “preceding mashiach,” Mashiach ben Yosef,⁴ his role is minor. Maimonides does not mention Mashiach ben Yosef at all.

In the Kabbalah, however, there is greater emphasis on Mashiach ben Yosef. This gives rise to the notion that the Geulah (Redemption) process will unfold in two distinct phases, associated with two

² Following the catastrophic defeat of the Bar Kochba revolt, the sages, seeking to prevent further resistance against Rome that might endanger the survival of the Jewish people, reoriented messianic expectations away from human action within history and toward a redemptive intervention at the End of Days. As influential as this concept was, it never completely supplanted the idea of “historical mashiach.”

³ The two scenarios of the coming of Mashiach—“the swift and the sluggish”—are discussed in the Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin*, 98a, but from a different perspective.

⁴ Babylonian Talmud, *Sukkah*, 52a.

mashiachs: (1) Mashiach ben Yosef will lay the groundwork and create the material conditions for the Redemption. When this phase is completed, (2) Mashiach ben Yosef will “die” and then Mashiach ben David will come, whose purpose is to bring the Geulah to its final fulfillment.

Over the past 250 years, leading Jewish thinkers and the founders of Religious Zionism have re-examined traditional notions of Geulah and the two mashiachs.

In the late 18th century, Rabbi Elijah ben Shlomo Zalman, the Vilna Gaon, introduced the idea that Mashiach ben Yosef was not a singular individual but a transformative social movement. In doing so, he effectively depersonalized Mashiach ben Yosef. This idea was so radical that the Gaon chose not to publicize it. Nevertheless, it circulated among his followers and went on to influence several prominent rabbis.⁵

Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, in his 1860 book *Drishat Zion* (Seeking Zion), boldly advocated for the reevaluation of Talmudic eschatology and the reintroduction of the concept of Mashiach into contemporary history. He viewed the Messianic Era as an integral part of ongoing human history, regarding the Jewish people’s active return to Zion as a crucial component of the Messianic process.

In line with this trend, Rav Kook, in his landmark speech *Misped b’Yerushalaim* (The Lamentation in Jerusalem), following Herzl’s death in 1904, defined the non-religious Zionist movement as a Messianic process at the stage of Mashiach ben Yosef. The striking similarity between the goals proclaimed by the First Zionist Congress in Basel, such as the normalization of Jewish life and the security of

⁵ In all cases, when we mention the teachings of the Vilna Gaon on the Messianic process, we are referring to the book *Kol haTor*. This book was published in the 20th century by the descendants of the Gaon’s disciples and, according to their tradition, reflects the Gaon’s messianic vision. There are alternative opinions regarding the authenticity of this book in relation to the teachings of the Vilna Gaon, but this controversy is beyond our scope.

the Jewish people, and the goals for which King Saul was chosen, as stated in 1 Samuel 8:20—“That we will be like all the other nations: let our king rule over us and go out at our head and fight our battles”—was inescapable. Therefore, Rav Kook concluded that the religious community should support the explicitly non-religious Zionist movement because it was an integral part of the Messianic process. It was imperative to lay the foundation for the material development of the State of Israel, just as Saul built the ancient Jewish state despite his fraught relationship with the Prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 13:13-14), his inconsistent commitment to religious values, and even his deadly confrontation with the priests of Nob (1 Samuel 1:19). In the future, through our work and efforts, Mashiach ben David, a spiritual leader, would succeed and assume his role.

This religious interpretation of the non-religious social movement revolutionized Judaism. It was not immediately embraced even by religious supporters of Zionism, but gradually became the fundamental basis of Religious Zionism. This concept fueled the movement’s energy and propelled its achievements, especially the Jewish settlement of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, which drastically changed the course of Israel’s development after 1974.

However, the passage of a century has shown that the concept, when perceived in its original form, no longer corresponds to reality and, therefore, requires refinement. Today, as we witness events unfolding, we can see additional details of the Messianic process that may not have been visible to our giant predecessors on whose shoulders we stand. These new nuances and refinements of the basic concept serve as the focus of this chapter. In doing so, we continue the centuries-old tradition of reevaluation of messianic concepts.⁶

⁶ By placing the Messianic process at the center of our discourse, we recognize that “messianism” is fraught with controversies and raises concerns in some respected Modern Orthodox circles—concerns that are sometimes justified by historical and contemporary excesses. For Rav Kook, however, the Messianic process was an ongoing historical reality, and we follow in his footsteps in treating this sensitive topic with the utmost responsibility.

2. The Three-Stage Messianic Process: Understanding Our Current Position in the Development of the State of Israel

Today, the first stage of the Messianic process—Mashiach ben Yosef—is nearing completion. The core objectives of Herzl’s political Zionism—the normalization and safeguarding of the Jewish people⁷—have been largely fulfilled. While these goals remain part of the ongoing responsibilities of the state, they no longer inspire passion or function as guiding aspirations. As such, they can no longer serve as the driving force behind the country’s continued development. This suggests that the mission of Mashiach ben Yosef is drawing to a close—he is, metaphorically, dying.⁸

But who can succeed Mashiach ben Yosef?

According to the two-stage model of the Messianic process, Mashiach ben Yosef is to be succeeded by Mashiach ben David. However, in the contemporary State of Israel, no social movement can be identified with Mashiach ben David in the way that Rav Kook, in 1904, identified Herzl’s Zionism with Mashiach ben Yosef.

How, then, do we define our contemporary era when Mashiach ben Yosef is on the verge of passing, yet there is no sign of an emerg-

⁷ As tragic and costly as Israel’s wars have been and continue to be, we do not view them as an existential threat to the Jewish state.

⁸ Despite being mentioned as “killed” (*Sukkah*, 52a), the death of Mashiach ben Yosef is not necessarily foreordained; rather, it serves as a warning. Drawing on the Zohar and the interpretation of Psalm 118, the Vilna Gaon asserted that Mashiach ben Yosef would undergo trials and tribulations yet ultimately live. (This perspective comes to us through Rabbi Efraim Palvanov’s lecture series on Mashiach ben Yosef.) In our context, the death of Mashiach ben Yosef does not necessarily signify a violent physical destruction, but rather a spiritual winding down and the loss of a leadership role.

ing Mashiach ben David? In other words, where do we stand today in the Messianic process?⁹

In response to this question, we propose a revision to a core tenet of Religious Zionism: moving from the traditional two-stage Messianic process model to a three-stage framework aligned with the three kings of biblical Israel—Saul, David, and Solomon. In this model, King Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, the younger brother of Joseph, serves as the archetype of Mashiach ben Yosef, while King Solomon, the son of David, serves as the archetype of Mashiach ben David. This positions King David as the archetype of an intermediate “Mashiach ben Yehudah,” a designation we use to reflect his tribal lineage and to mark a distinct stage in the unfolding Messianic process.

To understand the characteristics of each stage, we must compare the defining governing principles of Saul, David, and Solomon and project them onto the history of the State of Israel.¹⁰

Each king—Saul, David, and Solomon—had a distinct rationale and unique interpretation of the meaning and purpose of his reign. Consequently, each had a different attitude toward the prophets and the Temple.

⁹ This question is not merely theoretical. Understanding the trajectory of the State of Israel’s development and our role in it profoundly affects the course of action we choose. The absence of an answer to this question is at the core of Religious Zionism’s ideological crisis. The impatient reader may skip to Section 7 of this chapter for the answer, but following the logical progression of the preceding sections will enhance understanding of the conclusion.

¹⁰ By designating the stages of the Messianic process as “Saul, David, and Solomon” and projecting this royal triad onto the contemporary State of Israel, we are certainly not suggesting that these kings should serve as models for imitation. Such an approach would be both practically unfeasible and ideologically fruitless, as would any attempt to return to the past. Rather, we use these Biblical figures as archetypes reflected in modern Jewish history. Analyzing these archetypes as they appear in the present offers a new perspective on the historical continuum of the State of Israel, in keeping with the enduring principle: *The deeds of the fathers are signs for the sons.*

3. The Reign of Saul—Mashiach ben Yosef: Normalization and National Security

As we pointed out earlier, when the people of Israel asked the Prophet Samuel to appoint a king, their priorities were normalization and security: “That we may be like all the other nations: let our king rule over us and go out at our head and fight our battles” (1 Samuel 8:20). Saul’s actions were entirely consistent with these demands.

At the same time, spiritual pursuits were not his priority or were, at best, inconsistent. Adherence to the general Jewish tradition was important to Saul, especially the observance of the laws of kashrut (1 Samuel 14:33). His relationship with the Prophet Samuel, however, was complex. Saul felt it was important to appear before the people in the company of the prophet, as this act legitimized his royal status (1 Samuel 13:8, 15:30). Yet he did not obey the command to destroy the Amalekites. Nor did Saul attempt to restore the Ark of the Covenant, which had been abandoned at Kiriath-Jearim after being returned to the Israelites by the Philistines (1 Samuel 7:1). Matters such as the Temple were completely outside his sphere of interest.

These characteristics of Saul’s reign are reflected in modern Israel, where the secular state respects Judaism, complies with its basic tenets, and entrusts rabbis with key civil functions—including matters as critical as marriage, divorce, and the determination of Jewish identity.¹¹ It consistently includes religious authorities in national ceremonies and encourages adherence to tradition. On the political level, however, it disregards religious goals and takes no interest in the affairs of the Temple.

¹¹ Notably, responsibility for these functions was not wrestled from the state by the religious camp, but was granted to religious authorities from the very founding of the State of Israel—reflecting a shared commitment to preserving its Jewish identity.

4. The Reign of David—Mashiach ben Yehuda: Spiritual Revival of the Nation

King David's approach to religious matters stood in stark contrast to the ambivalence displayed by King Saul. This distinction was evident even before David's encounter with Goliath. When confronted by the enemy, Saul's army viewed the Philistines' provocations as an attempt to "defy Israel," referring primarily to the nation and its people (1 Samuel 17:25). David, however, perceived these insults as an affront to God Himself. Accordingly, he asked, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he dares to defy the ranks of the living God?" (1 Samuel 17:26).

From King David's perspective, the nation of Israel was, above all, a manifestation of Divine Providence. He believed that the life of the nation was inextricably linked to, and sustained by, God. Accordingly, during his reign, the spiritual renewal of the nation took precedence over material development.

King David paid close attention to the counsel and guidance of the Prophet Nathan, who did not hesitate to rebuke him when necessary. David ultimately returned the Ark of the Covenant to its rightful place in Jerusalem. Yet above all, he was deeply troubled that his capital lacked a proper "dwelling place" for God. Although he was eager to build the Temple, he was never commanded to undertake its construction.

God conveyed His message to David through the Prophet Nathan: "When your days are done, and you lie with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own issues, and I will establish his kingship. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish his throne forever" (2 Samuel 7:12). While the reason David was not permitted to build the Temple is not explicitly stated here, a fundamental difference between him and his successor ultimately led to the postponement of its construction until the next generation.

5. The Reign of Solomon—Mashiach ben David: A Universal Appeal to Humanity

By the time Solomon ascended the throne, the nation had already attained a degree of security and stability, largely thanks to the efforts of Saul and David. Substantial strides had also been made in the religious revitalization of the people. Solomon was not compelled to wage war during his reign; his era was characterized by peace.

Unlike David, whose focus was primarily on internal national concerns, Solomon adopted a more outward-looking perspective. He viewed his mission as extending faith in the Almighty and the teachings of the Torah to all humanity. To this end, he pursued a strategy that included numerous dynastic marriages and the formation of economic and political alliances.

As a result, Solomon was uniquely positioned to build the Temple—a sanctuary that would draw dignitaries from many nations and serve as a potent instrument for disseminating the belief in the One God.

Solomon made this mandate clear at the dedication of the Temple, including in his prayer a plea that God respond to the petitions of all nations: “If a foreigner who is not of Your people Israel comes from a distant land for the sake of Your name, for they shall hear about Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm — when he comes to pray toward this House, oh, hear in Your heavenly abode and grant all that the foreigner asks You for. Thus, all the peoples of the earth will know Your name and revere You, as does Your people Israel; and they will recognize that Your name is attached to this House that I have built” (1 Kings 8:41–43). A classic example of such influence is the visit of the Queen of Sheba, who traveled to meet King Solomon, witness the Temple, and learn about his religion (1 Kings 10). This encounter left a deep impression on the Queen and helped shape the spiritual legacy of her nation, forming the foundation of Ethiopia’s religious identity. While not every visit to Jerusalem had such lasting consequences, at that stage of human history, even basic exposure to Torah values represented a meaningful contribution to civilizational development.

The purpose of the Temple was not solely to serve as the center of the national religion, but also to represent the Almighty to the nations of the world. For this reason, the task of building the Temple was assigned not to David, but to Solomon. As David himself told Solomon, God had not permitted him to build the Temple because he had “shed much blood and fought great battles” (1 Chronicles 22:8). This statement not only alludes to the moral weight of wartime bloodshed, but also suggests that a condition of war impedes the dissemination of spiritual ideas, whereas peace creates the conditions in which such ideas can be shared and embraced.

During Solomon’s reign, the Jewish people had not yet fully internalized their universal mission, nor were the nations of the world prepared to receive the word of God. It would take centuries of prophetic teaching and the gradual moral and spiritual development of humanity for the Torah—albeit in transformed and partial forms—to begin spreading through Christianity and, later, Islam. Yet by that time, the Jewish people were already exiled from the Land and no longer positioned to lead this global endeavor.

Today, however, the global landscape has undergone a profound transformation. From their sovereign state in the Land of Israel, the Jewish people are now positioned to influence the world in a manner that aligns with the prophetic vision of the Tanakh—an opportunity that was unattainable during the long centuries of the Exile. At the same time, humanity has reached a stage of development in which it is increasingly receptive to this influence. Unlike three millennia ago, the global mission of the Jewish people is no longer a distant ideal but a tangible possibility.

6. Saul, David, and Solomon:

A Comparative Analysis of the Royal Triad

As previously discussed, the ancient Jewish state progressed through three distinct stages of development. Each stage had its

own agenda and set of objectives, which it pursued while building upon the achievements of its predecessor.

In the first phase, King Saul successfully defended Israel against its enemies and laid the foundations of statehood. In the second phase, King David revitalized the nation’s spiritual life by restoring the bond between the people and God. In the final phase, King Solomon assumed the national mission of advancing the idea of monotheism among the nations of the world.

During the first phase, the emerging nation had no need for a Temple, as its primary focus was survival and state-building. In the second phase, as part of a broader spiritual revival, David conceived the idea of a Temple, although its construction remained unrealized. It was only in the third phase that the Temple was built, serving as a symbol of the Divine Presence intended not only for Israel but also for the nations of the world.

Here is a snapshot of how the progression unfolds:

The king and the corresponding messianic stage	The king’s priorities	The king’s attitude toward the Temple
Saul—Mashiach ben Yoseph	Normalization and security	Ambivalent about the Temple
David—Mashiach ben Yehuda	Spiritual revival and connection with God	Eager to build the Temple, but neither the nation nor the king are ready
Solomon—Mashiach ben David	Dissemination of Torah ideals among the nations	Builds the Temple

Each stage of this process builds upon the foundation laid by the preceding one. King David ignited a spiritual renaissance in the

nation, drawing upon the stable political and military framework established by King Saul. In turn, King Solomon fulfilled his mission of spreading the idea of the One God among the nations by leveraging the spiritual depth and internal strength fostered during David's reign. Progressing from one stage to the next required a profound shift in the kingdom's priorities and policies: from securing national survival, to cultivating spiritual vitality, to embracing a universal mission. Such sweeping transitions inevitably gave rise to tensions between the outgoing and incoming monarchs. Each king experienced a strained relationship with his successor, often showing reluctance to acknowledge or empower the next in line—and, at times, even acting in hostility. King Saul, for instance, sought to eliminate David.¹² Likewise, King David delayed naming Solomon his heir until the power struggle with Adonijah erupted, prompting decisive action only under pressure from Bathsheba and the Prophet Nathan. (We will return to the fascinating subject of royal succession and the dynamics of power transfer in section 12 of this chapter.)

7. David in Today's Israel: Bridging Saul and Solomon

Building on our exploration of the Three Kings and the vision of Rav Kook, who linked the Zionism of his time to the Messianic process by identifying Herzl's movement as Mashiach ben Yosef, we find a meaningful parallel between the chronicles of modern and ancient Jewish states. The two primary goals of Herzlian Zionism—the normalization and protection of the Jewish people—have been

¹² The conflict between Saul and David was not motivated by personal ambition, for David was loyal to Saul and the king knew it. The real issue was the future of the dynasty. That is why King Saul was angry with his son Jonathan, who was willing to give the throne to David. King Saul told his servants: "He said to them, 'Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give you all fields and vineyards? Will he make all of you captains of thousands and captains of hundreds?'" (1 Samuel 22:7). This is more than a personal conflict; it is a conflict between different groups and strata of society, possibly even tribes, representing different ideologies.

largely achieved in the modern State of Israel. Viewed through the lens of the ancient Jewish state and the Messianic timeline, this current stage signifies the completion of the first phase of redemption: the reign of King Saul, or Mashiach ben Yosef.

The next phase of the Messianic process calls for nurturing society's spiritual and religious foundations, mirroring the historical epoch in ancient Israel when King David succeeded King Saul. Today, the Religious Zionist movement in Israel is leading this transition, leaving a profound imprint on Israeli society, from military service and government to business, academia, and the arts. In particular, the settlement movement, rooted in the ideology of Religious Zionism, stands as a unique and defining contribution.

There are striking historical parallels between the tensions involving Religious and political Zionists and the ancient conflict between the rising David and the weakening King Saul. Just as Saul feared that David would replace him and sought to destroy his successor, the old Zionist elite sought to discredit and dismantle the settlement movement. Just as Saul's pursuit of David ultimately failed because of the Philistines' attacks, the old Zionist elite's attempts to suppress the settlement movement failed because of national security concerns over the Palestinian threat. Crucially, just as David honored Saul as the king of Israel, Religious Zionists honor the principles of Herzlian Zionism.

Now that we have identified the successor of Mashiach ben Yosef, we can answer the question posed in Section 2 regarding where we stand in the redemption process of the modern State of Israel: We are in the transition between its first and second phases, moving from the reign of Saul, Mashiach ben Yosef, exemplified by Theodor Herzl's non-religious political Zionism, to the reign of David, Mashiach ben Yehuda, represented by Religious Zionism. This transitional phase is characterized by Israeli society's growing recognition of Religious Zionist values and contributions, fostering a gradual strengthening of the nation's religious identity.

The third phase—the reign of Solomon or the era of Mashiach ben David—lies in the future. It is our responsibility to pave the way for its arrival.

8. The Dual Mission of Religious Zionism: Present Realpolitik and Future Ideological Foundations

What should be our course of action during the current transition from the metaphorical reign of King Saul to that of King David?

In the early 20th century, Rav Kook exemplified a dual approach—engaging in the current realpolitik while laying the groundwork for future goals—providing a model for us to follow today. He appealed to religious Jews to support secular Zionism, pursuing the contemporary version of King Saul’s mission—normalizing and securing the nation. At the same time, envisioning the evolution of the Messianic process, Rav Kook was preparing for its next phase. In 1924, he founded The Central Universal Yeshiva (*Mercaz haRav*) in Jerusalem to train the next generation of leaders who would work toward the gradual transformation of the State of Israel from a place of refuge to the center of spiritual revitalization for the Jewish people.

A century has passed. Saul has fulfilled his historic mission and now yields to David, who is now part of the national establishment. In our time, this means carrying forward David’s practical statecraft while laying the spiritual groundwork for the emergence of Solomon. To meet this challenge, Religious Zionism must broaden its guiding principles and recalibrate its long-term vision, reorienting Judaism toward its universal mission and positioning it as a conduit of Divine influence for all humankind.

Accomplishing this monumental task requires a deeper understanding of the composition of the Jewish people and the dynamic relationships among its various factions.

9. Rav Kook's Program for the Development of Judaism: Integrating the Values of the Three Factions within Jewry

In 1910, Rav Kook outlined a visionary roadmap for the long-term development of Judaism by identifying three major ideological factions within the Jewish people. The first was “the Orthodox, bearing the banner of holiness, arguing with strength, zeal, and bitterness for the Torah, the commandments, faith, and all that is holy in Israel.” The second was “the new nationalist, fighting for everything toward which the national tendency aspires.” The third was “the liberal, carrying the banner of enlightenment.”¹³

While many rabbinic leaders at the turn of the 20th century responded to the second and third ideological factions with condemnation, Rav Kook approached these “heretics” with profound empathy and insight. In his view, the nationalists and universalists had not turned away from tradition out of apathy, but out of a fervent commitment to national and universal ideals they could not find within the Judaism of their time. As Yehuda Mirsky observes, “Rav Kook came to see this heresy as not only something to be coped with but as revealing its own religious truth—a truly revolutionary proposition.”¹⁴ The very domains that drew Jews away from tradition—Zionism and universalism—became, in Rav Kook’s eyes, the key to unlocking the unrealized dimensions of Orthodox Judaism. In response, he formulated a visionary program for the renewal of Judaism and the rebirth of the Jewish nation by synthesizing the sparks of truth found in all three factions: “It is clear that in a healthy state of being, all three forces must operate together. We must always strive to reach that state of wholeness, where these three forces—holiness, nationhood, and [universal] humanism—fully express themselves in har-

¹³ *Shmonah Kvatzim*, 3:2. Rav Kook’s definitions of three factions and descriptions of their essence remain strikingly relevant today.

¹⁴ Mirsky, Yehuda. *Towards the Mystical Experience of Modernity. The Making of Rav Kook, 1865-1904*. Academic Studies Press, 2021, p. 279.

mony, each in its fullness and goodness. In such a balanced and corrected state, where nothing is lacking and nothing is in excess, they will bond together in noble, practical love. ... Only in this way can we hope for a state of life worthy of one nation in its land.”¹⁵

The transformative nature of Rav Kook’s vision can scarcely be overstated. He not only acknowledged the spiritual legitimacy of the secular movements of his time¹⁶ but called for their integration into the Orthodox tradition.¹⁷ This approach stood in sharp contrast to that of virtually all other rabbinic leaders of the period—including those who supported Zionism—for whom such a stance would have seemed nothing short of sacrilegious. Nor did the adherents of the three ideological factions themselves envision such synthesis. And yet, a century later, we stand midway toward the fulfillment of Rav Kook’s vision: his followers have succeeded in fully incorporating the national ideals of Zionism into the religious framework. The universalist ideals, however, remain largely peripheral to Orthodox Judaism. This suggests that the next stage of this sweeping endeavor must focus on integrating the Divine sparks embedded in universal values into the very fabric of Jewish life and thought.

Historically, the Tanakh has served as a wellspring of universal values for humanity. Yet, as Rav Kook taught, in order to survive

¹⁵ *Shmonah Kvatzim*, 3:2.

¹⁶ See the aforementioned *Towards the Mystical Experience of Modernity*, p. 280, regarding Rav Kook’s treatise in defense of non-religious camps, in which he argues that their ideals are not merely compatible with Jewish teachings, but, in fact, represent the fruition of Judaism.

¹⁷ Rav Kook was keenly aware of the antagonism between the camps: “Each bearer of a particular force is consumed with fiery energy directed only toward denying the value of the others, which he refuses to recognize.” (*Shmonah Kvatzim*, 3:1). Yet, Rav Kook viewed these seemingly irreconcilable contradictions as instruments for eventual symbiosis: “One will understand that for the benefit of the specific force to which one is more inclined, it must also be influenced to some degree by the opposing force that negates one’s cherished force. This negation establishes it in its proper measure, safeguarding it from the perilous flaw of excess and exaggeration.” (*Ibid.*, 3:2).

the harsh conditions of the Exile, Judaism was compelled to “contract itself,” transitioning from a state of *gadlut* (greatness) to one of *katnut* (smallness). This contraction involved setting aside both national values—such as sovereignty and statehood—and universal values, including engagement with global culture and intellectual life. For centuries, the active pursuit of national ideals would have amounted to utter destruction, as any attempt to reestablish a Jewish state in the Land of Israel would have met lethal opposition from the dominant power of the time that controlled it. Similarly, the pursuit of universal ideals risked drawing Jews—especially those with universalist aspirations—into the surrounding cultures, leading to assimilation and loss from the Jewish people. In response, a self-imposed ideological ghetto emerged, shielding Jewish life from the cultural currents of the outside world.

However, with the rebirth of the Jewish state, it becomes imperative to restore the inherent yet long-dormant universal dimension of Judaism—its return to a state of *gadlut*. Until this restoration is achieved, Jews who value universal ideals but do not find them reflected within Judaism will remain alienated from the religious tradition, thereby perpetuating the divide between the universalist and Religious Zionist camps. (A historical parallel can be drawn with the gap that existed a century ago between religious Jews and secular Zionists—a rift that Religious Zionism has since succeeded in bridging.) The integration of universal values into the theological framework of Religious Zionism—thereby forming what we call Universal Religious Zionism—can help overcome this divide and move us closer to the “reign of King Solomon,” the era of Mashiach ben David.

We interpret this historical and spiritual trajectory through the framework of the royal triad, which provides a conceptual lens for understanding both the unfolding history and the anticipated future of the State of Israel. In the first stage—“the reign of King Saul”—non-religious Zionism realized national ideals through the establishment of the Jewish state. In the second stage—“the reign

of King David”—national and religious ideals became intertwined, giving rise to modern Religious Zionism. In the third stage—“the reign of King Solomon”—national-religious principles will be integrated with universal values, culminating in what we refer to, following Rav Kook’s terminology, as Universal Religious Zionism (to be explored in depth in Chapter II). This final stage represents the fulfillment of Rav Kook’s vision for the evolution of Judaism through the synthesis of all three foundational value systems.

Based on this model, we can articulate our guiding principles:

We are grateful to “Saul”—revolutionary political Zionism—for establishing the State of Israel. While this state may have its share of shortcomings (as all states do), its very existence and material strength is an unparalleled achievement.

We support “David”—the contemporary Religious Zionism and the settlement movement—by promoting national religious values, participating in all facets of the State of Israel, and aligning it with the ideals of Jewish tradition.

We pave the way for “Solomon”—the emerging Universal Religious Zionism—by integrating Torah-inherent universal values into the framework of a modernized Religious Zionism and establishing it as a relevant voice on the global stage.

10. Building on Past Successes: Meeting the Challenge of Harmonizing Universal Values with Jewish Tradition in the Modern Era

The time has come for Religious Zionism to recognize the religious significance of “secular life” and to embrace its universal values. As noted above, this represents the central mission of Universal Religious Zionism: to complete the integration of religious, national, and universal values within a single, coherent Orthodox framework.

At the same time, universal values should not be adopted wholesale in their secular, “non-kosher” form. Instead, we must proceed with discernment, integrating only those Divine sparks that can be separated from the ideological shells of modern “isms.” Rav Kook’s methodology—harmonizing universal values with the foundations of Jewish tradition—offers a framework for doing so without compromising the core national and Orthodox commitments that define Religious Zionism.

This is no simple task. A century ago, many leading Orthodox rabbis insisted that there was neither a need nor a legitimate path for Judaism to embrace national Zionist ideals. Yet in our time, these very ideals coexist harmoniously within mainstream Religious Zionism, which has become a central force in Israel’s ideological landscape.

Today, only a fraction of Religious Zionists are actively engaged in this transformative process. A historical parallel can be drawn to a century ago, when the Orthodox world was split between relatively small pro-Zionist and anti-Zionist factions, alongside a largely ambivalent majority with no definitive stance. Contemporary Religious Zionism reflects a similar internal fragmentation, comprising Haredi Zionists (Hardal), Modernists, and Centrists. Despite these divisions, the Modernist faction today wields considerable influence and commands a significant following, much like the Zionist minority within Orthodoxy in the early 20th century. It is this Modernist group that is best positioned to serve as the primary conduit for the ideas of Universal Religious Zionism in the decades ahead. They are uniquely placed to lead this effort and help fulfill Judaism’s redemptive mission, when “Torah shall come forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3).

During the centuries of the Exile, the Jewish people existed in a survival mode, akin to the “dry bones” in Ezekiel’s vision. Judaism became exclusively intranational, insulating Jews from the outside world. As a result, the Gentile world exerted minimal influence on Judaism, and Judaism had even less impact on the Gentile world.

However, as the Jewish national body is revived in modern Israel and God “causes breath to enter the body” (Ezekiel 37:5), this breath will come “from the four winds” (Ezekiel 37:9), symbolizing the influx of positive influences from around the world.

11. Longing for the Temple: Sacred Aspirations and National Priorities

The construction of the Temple was not a national priority during the reign of King Saul. Similarly, in the 20th century, during the ascendancy of secular Zionism, the idea of the Temple held little significance in Israeli public consciousness. Even after the now-iconic declaration by Motta Gur—“*Har HaBayit be-yadenu*” (“The Temple Mount is in our hands”)—broadcast on IDF radio and reverberating around the world on June 7, 1967, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan downplayed the significance of the site, famously likening it dismissively to the Vatican. At the same time, the Chief Rabbinate issued a halachic ruling prohibiting ascent to the Temple Mount to prevent its inadvertent desecration. Thus, for entirely different reasons, both secular and religious Israel kept their distance from the holiest site in Judaism—and, in a metaphysical sense, from the Temple.

During King David’s reign, the Temple was conceived as a national vision, but it was not built because King David and the nation were not yet prepared for the task. Similarly, we have recently seen a growing interest in visiting the Temple Mount within Israeli society. Numerous religious scholars have joined the small but rapidly expanding group of rabbinic authorities who support ascending to and praying on the Temple Mount.

However, in our days of the emerging “era of David,” the building of the Temple remains beyond our reach.¹⁸ Like King David, our

¹⁸ While rebuilding the Temple is not our generation’s task, the excavation of the City of David—the original ancient Jerusalem, just a stone’s throw from the Temple Mount—along with the Pilgrimage Road leading to the Temple, is progressing at an

generation must accept that the Temple can only be built during the “reign of King Solomon” in the impending era of Mashiach ben David. Nevertheless, we must actively prepare ourselves to undertake this monumental endeavor.

This preparation includes practical activities such as Jewish pilgrimage and prayers on the Temple Mount. But these actions alone are not sufficient. The fundamental question lies in understanding the Temple’s meaning and primary purpose. Yet, most religious Jews struggle to articulate what has been missing in Judaism that the Temple would fulfill after two thousand years of absence. Simply put, why do we need the Temple today?

The Temple is not meant to be built solely to serve internal Jewish needs. To build the Temple, we must acknowledge its role as a beacon of Divine Light for all nations and as the nexus of humanity’s relationship with God. Just as in Solomon’s time, the focus should be not only on the Temple as a spectacular building that houses the rituals, but also on the universal message of Solomon’s reign to the world that the Temple symbolizes.¹⁹

In our time of the depersonalized Messianic process, the future King Solomon—Mashiach ben David—represents a state of the Jewish nation where the State of Israel will be a source of Divine Light for humanity. Once this level is reached, the seemingly insurmountable challenges of building the Temple will be reduced to technical issues and resolved accordingly. This shift will occur because the nations will become genuinely interested in the Temple,

unprecedented scale and pace. The significance of this project extends far beyond archaeology; it stands as a symbol of King David’s modern era. In the words of Elie Wiesel, “The City of David is the beginning of a new chapter of Jewish history, one in which Jewish life returns to the State of Israel.” (Spielman, Doron. *When the Stones Speak*. Center Street, 2025, p. 65)

¹⁹ Whether the service in the Third Temple will fully resemble that of the First and Second Temples—and, among other questions, whether animal sacrifices will be replaced by plant-based offerings—is a fascinating philosophical and halakhic discussion that will be explored in the course of the development of the Universal Religious Zionism project.

which will symbolize their recognition of the universal spiritual significance of the State of Israel.²⁰

12. From Saul to David vs. from David to Solomon: Bitter Succession vs. Cautious Handover

As we venture into the uncharted waters of the Messianic era, it is instructive to return to the royal triad—the biblical archetypes of the State of Israel. Particularly significant is the profound contrast between the transition of power from Saul to David and that from David to Solomon.

Saul, the founder and protector of the nation-state, and David, the champion of a national religious ideal, hailed from different tribes of Israel—both literally and figuratively. In parallel, Religious Zionism did not arise from secular Zionism; the movement is firmly rooted in Judaism. In our metaphorical framework, it originates from a different “tribe” within modern Israel. David’s marriage to Saul’s daughter marked his formal bond with the royal house. Similarly, Religious Zionism establishes its place by embracing the national ideals revitalized by secular, Herzlian Zionism—metaphorically, by marrying Zionism, the daughter of Herzl. The transition from Saul to David was fraught with internal conflict, held in check only by existential external threats to the kingdom. Likewise, while Religious Zionists fully support the state established by Herzl’s vision, they remain in deep ideological conflict with his successors—a tension manifested in disputes over the Oslo Accords, the Disengagement, settlement policy, military doctrine, and other core issues confronting the State of Israel. And just as in ancient Israel, these internal divisions are prevented from spiraling out of control by external adversaries who, time and again, “never fail to unite the Jewish people.”

²⁰ The State of Israel’s global spiritual role at its Solomonic stage will be articulated in the next phase of this project.

In stark contrast, Solomon was David's son in both body and spirit—the continuity of the House of David was secured through spiritual as well as biological lineage. Solomon's universal religiosity was firmly grounded in David's national religiosity. Yet despite this continuity, the two figures were markedly different, and the transfer of leadership was far from a mere formality. Although David recognized Solomon as his rightful heir, he hesitated to publicly formalize the succession. This ambiguity emboldened Adonijah, another of David's sons, to attempt a power grab. Only the intervention of the Prophet Nathan and Bathsheba ensured Solomon's ultimate accession to the throne. (One can hardly fault David for his hesitation—grand designs are often veiled in divine intrigue.) In other words, whereas Saul had to be restrained from launching an all-out war against David, David had to be urged to take deliberate steps to ensure a peaceful transition to Solomon.

When projected onto the modern State of Israel, this biblical “game of thrones” suggests that the evolution of Religious Zionism into its universal form will not unfold spontaneously. Religious Zionism is ripe for this next stage of development, as universal values have gained increasing acceptance within its modernist wing. However, these values are often regarded as secular—pragmatically beneficial, yet not intrinsically tied to Judaism. Just as King David delayed the preparation for Solomon's reign, the contemporary David hesitates to embrace universalization, held back by ideological constructs—the shells of modern “isms”—that, though animated by Divine sparks, distort their original meaning. The task of Universal Religious Zionism is to confront and transcend these obstacles, thereby preparing the way for the emergence of Solomon.

This will be the subject of the next two chapters.

Chapter II. IDEOLOGY



Toward Judaism's Global Mission *Reclaiming Torah-Authentic Universal Values*

1. In Search of a Unifying Name: Drawing from Rav Kook's Terminology

Today, a substantial contingent of modernist Religious Zionist rabbis and laypeople actively embrace secular knowledge and universal values, striving to integrate them meaningfully with Judaism. Yet, their efforts remain fragmented—often confined to particular areas of interest—and have not coalesced into a cohesive movement. As a result, these developments, though intellectually noteworthy, have yet to penetrate the broader public consciousness. The need for a unifying framework, one with a clearly identifiable name, is evident. We will explore the framework in the sections that follow, but let us begin with the name: *Universal Religious Zionism*. This term has appeared repeatedly throughout the book, starting with the title, and it now warrants a fuller explanation. As with all concepts presented here, it is rooted in the legacy of Rav Kook.

In 1924, Rav Kook founded a new type of rabbinical college, now known as *Mercaz haRav*, to educate and raise the first generation of

religious²¹ Zionists in the Land of Israel. In the following decades, its graduates established hundreds of affiliated yeshivas and learning centers throughout the country, playing a crucial role in the development and dissemination of Rav Kook's ideas and later in the settlement movement. Today, Mercaz haRav is synonymous with Rav Kook's teachings and Religious Zionism.

Rav Kook named this institution *haYeshiva haMerkazit haOlamit*, which he himself translated into English as The Central Universal Yeshiva. The term *olamit* (global) denoted the yeshiva's expansive worldview and its embrace of universal values. At the same time, *merkazit* (central) signified not only an *educational* center but also underscored the institution's connection to the spiritual center of *the world*: the Land of Israel.

Over time, in the daily discourse of Rav Kook's circle, the institution's name was shortened to *Merkaz haRav*. This adjustment may appear to be a linguistic convenience for ease of reference (although the abbreviation *Merkazit Olamit* would have been closer to the original—so why drop the *olamit*?). Beyond mere brevity, the name “Merkaz haRav” encapsulated the essence of the initial phase of the dissemination of Rav Kook's teachings: for such profound spiritual insights to permeate society, they first had to be focused on the *merkaz* (center)—Zion—and integrated with the core values of Zionism. Only then could the teachings be expanded to *olam* (world), embracing universal values to resonate on a broader human level.

The first phase, *merkazi*—the integration of Judaism with Zionism—has achieved tremendous success both ideologically and practically. While there is still much work to be done to realize its values in Israeli life, its theoretical framework is fully developed and implemented. Therefore, as followers of Rav Kook, we must move on to the second phase, *olami*, which awaits its realization. The cur-

²¹ The lowercase “religious” here is intentional to avoid anachronism, as Religious Zionism was not a distinct movement at the time; its forerunners were simply Zionists who were religious.

rent era demands a theological and ideological elaboration of the concept of *olami*, which will subsequently guide the practical development of Religious Zionism toward this universal vision.

The term *olami* embodies universality and, since it was introduced by Rav Kook himself, serves as a truly unifying name. As such, it aptly names our project: *Universal Religious Zionism* (*Tzionut Olamit Datit*, ציונות עולמית דתית – צע"ד). This unifying name reflects its core principle: modernization must be firmly grounded in the Orthodox principles of Religious Zionism and Modern Orthodoxy while embracing the totality of the universe and recognizing every aspect of it as a manifestation of the Divine.

2. Religious Zionism and Modern Orthodoxy: Different Historical Paths and the Opportunity for Mutual Enrichment

The mutually enriching relationship between Religious Zionism, shaped by national aspirations, and Modern Orthodoxy, oriented toward universal values, is central to the success of the Universal Religious Zionism project—a premise that runs throughout this book and is reflected in its subtitle. It is therefore essential to examine the dynamic interplay between these two movements.

Religious Zionism and Modern Orthodoxy share a deep spiritual kinship. Both remain firmly rooted in Orthodox doctrine while demonstrating openness to the broader world and a willingness to modernize in step with societal progress. The two movements frequently overlap: the *kippah sruga* is a familiar sight in American Modern Orthodox communities, and most Israeli Religious Zionists identify as modernists. Nevertheless, they remain theologically distinct. These differences arise from the unique historical contexts in which each movement emerged and evolved. Each confronted its own set of challenges and formulated responses accordingly.

Religious Zionism emerged within the space opened by political Zionism. For religious Zionists, the existence of a secular Jewish state was a concrete, everyday reality. While they recognized the monumental achievements of Herzl's ideological heirs and participated fully in the life of the state, they also viewed it as a theological challenge to Judaism. Their response was to integrate the core concept of secular Zionism—Jewish nationalism—into the religious framework, thus leading to the emergence of modern Religious Zionism. Its adherents walked the Land of Israel and breathed its air through moments of triumph and tragedy, naturally perceiving their lives as continuations of the biblical narrative—new chapters of the Tanakh—within a Messianic process as envisioned by Rav Kook. This theological vision imbued the movement with profound meaning and resilience. In this formative period, particular emphasis was placed on integrating national and Zionist ideals. Although the universal dimension of Rav Kook's Messianic theology was, in principle, as essential as the national one, its practical implementation was deferred to a later stage.

Contemporary Modern Orthodoxy developed in the markedly different context of North America, within its expansive cultural landscape. Its worldview was shaped in both synagogues and universities. Modern Orthodox Jews were deeply immersed in Western culture and contributed meaningfully to its development. Yet that same culture posed a theological challenge. The Modern Orthodox response was to seek reconciliation between universal values and Judaism. Gradually, aspects of secular culture were harmonized with their religious worldview, finding integration in certain areas—primarily through the philosophy of *Torah Umadda* (Torah and Worldly Knowledge). As for the State of Israel, it remained emotionally significant but physically distant. The Modern Orthodox community did not participate *en masse* in the Zionist enterprise, and it did not shape their daily lived experience. It is therefore unsurprising that Zionism has not deeply permeated

the religious consciousness of the Modern Orthodox mainstream. While Modern Orthodoxy has supported the State of Israel in every conceivable way—and many, following Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (who chaired the Central Committee of the Religious Zionists of America), have recognized the hand of Providence in its founding—they have rarely gone so far as to affirm its inherent religious significance or to view its history as part of the Messianic process. Those who did embrace such a perspective were often moved to make *aliyah* and identify as Religious Zionists on the ground. Whether consciously or not, for much of the Modern Orthodox world, a messianic interpretation of the State of Israel risked casting Jewish life in narrowly nationalistic terms—an orientation misaligned with their universalist religious ideals.

The concept of Universal Religious Zionism places particular emphasis on the universal dimension of the Messianic process. In doing so, it seeks to encourage the Modern Orthodox community to engage with this process in a renewed and more enthusiastic way—even while remaining physically in the Diaspora. Conversely, Religious Zionism stands to be enriched by the Modern Orthodox experience of integrating secular knowledge and universal values, elevating this integration from the personal and communal spheres to a national scale within the framework of the State of Israel.

This mutual transformation presents a formidable challenge—but so, too, does the Messianic ideal itself. Through joint advancement within the framework of Universal Religious Zionism, these two sister movements will arrive at a new synthesis—a national and universal understanding of their respective missions, unlike anything previously experienced. United, they can assume their role as intellectual and spiritual leaders of both the State of Israel and the Diaspora, guiding the Jewish people in fulfilling their ultimate calling: to be a light unto the nations.

3. Foundational Tenets of Universal Religious Zionism

3.1 Universal Values Are Integral to Judaism, Not Just an Addition

Many within the Religious Zionist communities already hold in high regard a range of universal civilizational values—such as science, technology, art, aesthetics, social development, democracy, and environmentalism. These secular endeavors are often acknowledged as important pragmatic tools: means for realizing human potential, enriching religious experience, and improving society’s perception of Judaism. However, they are generally not regarded as religious values in and of themselves. Yet there is a significant difference between embracing these values as merely “part of my life” and affirming them as “part of my Torah.” To treat an aspect of life as a religious value is to endow it with spiritual significance beyond its utility or pragmatic function. While certain theologians do recognize the religious dimension of universal values, their ideas remain confined to narrow intellectual circles and have little impact on broader society.

Consider, for example, the case of science—a value recognized in Judaism since the Talmudic era.²² Yet even within modernist Religious Zionist circles, science is typically viewed as an important but ultimately pragmatic pursuit. On the individual level, mastering science provides the foundation for a meaningful career and financial stability; it contributes to personal development and human dignity. On the societal level, it is seen as essential to the success and advancement of the Jewish state. Some may go further, regarding science as a pathway to understanding Creation and drawing closer to the Creator. Still, it is rare to encounter the view that the pursuit of science constitutes the fulfillment of a universal, divinely mandated imperative incumbent upon all humanity. In modernist Religious Zionist schools, science is taught—but its religious significance is not.

²² Science, in its modern understanding, emerged long after the classical Talmud, but we use it as a collective term for the human quest to understand nature.

When perceived merely as a pragmatic value, science must compete with other practical concerns for our limited time and resources—and predictably loses to pursuits considered “truly religious.” Moreover, longstanding anxieties persist that engaging deeply with science may lead one to question the Torah and drift away from religious observance. As a result, science occupies a low position on the priority scale within the Religious Zionist world. Only a small proportion of graduates from religious schools go on to pursue careers in science—a significantly smaller percentage than among graduates of secular schools. Consequently, science in Israel is widely perceived as a purely secular, if not implicitly anti-religious, enterprise—further damaging the public image of Judaism.

These concerns become even more pronounced in relation to the arts, humanities, and other domains where universal values are often shaped by prevailing ideological currents.

Has there ever been a successful effort to elevate a secular value to the status of a religious one? Indeed, there has.

A pivotal breakthrough in the development of Religious Zionism occurred when Rav Kook’s teachings elevated national values from being perceived as merely “part of my life” (a view already widespread among early Mizrahi adherents) to being recognized as “part of my Torah.” Once building and defending the country came to be seen as the fulfillment of Divine commandments, attitudes toward these endeavors shifted dramatically. The striking overrepresentation of Religious Zionists in the IDF’s combat units stands as the clearest expression of this transformation. A similar leap in the evolution of Judaism will take place when universal values are likewise elevated to this level of religious significance.

The paradigm shift in recognizing the role and significance of universal values within the broader religious narrative and practice yields several profound effects:

Purification of values: Through a discerning analysis of universal values, we extract the Divine sparks from the ideological shells of various “isms,” allowing these now “koshered” values to enrich and revitalize the religious world.

Elevation of significance: This transformation reshapes our attitudes toward universal values, raising them from mere pragmatic concerns to principles of religious import.

Systemic reinforcement: Integrating universal values into the framework of Judaism fosters a more cohesive religious worldview—one in which the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

Inspiration for development: Just as Zionist ideals once inspired Rav Kook’s followers to actively participate in national affairs, this shift will motivate religious individuals to dedicate their talents to universal values. One can only imagine the impact this could have on the future development of these values.

Reframing society’s perception of religion: Religion is no longer seen as a secluded sphere at odds with secular existence but as an integrated way of life in which the sacred and the secular co-exist in harmony. This holistic approach fosters a more favorable societal view of religion by affirming its relevance and transformative potential.

Of course, this transformation in society’s perception of Judaism cannot be achieved solely through declarations by religious leaders or intellectuals; what truly matters is the behavior of its adherents. Therefore, a positive religious orientation toward universal values must be lived and expressed through practice, not confined to theoretical discourse.

3.2 Integrating Universal Values into Religious Zionism as a System

The relationship between Judaism and secular knowledge has been extensively explored within the philosophy of *Torah Umadda*

(Torah and Worldly Knowledge). The roots of Torah Umadda can be traced back to Philo of Alexandria (1st century CE), and the concept was systematized by Maimonides. It later reemerged in various intellectual traditions, most notably in Samson Raphael Hirsch's *Torah Im Derekh Eretz* (Torah with the Way of the Land). In the modern era, Torah Umadda is closely associated with Yeshiva University—whose motto bears its name—and was shaped under the leadership of Rabbi Norman Lamm. In his most comprehensive treatment of Torah Umadda,²³ Lamm identifies seven distinct models reflecting Judaism's historical engagement with worldly knowledge. One of these, which he terms the *Mystical Model*, is attributed to Rav Kook. A unique feature of Kookian Torah Umadda is the integration of secular knowledge *and* values into the religious framework by elevating them to the level of holiness. We adopt this model and seek to develop it further by applying Rav Kook's concepts to the challenges and opportunities of our time.

Torah Umadda has played a significant role in shaping the character of Modern Orthodoxy. However, despite being part of the Mizrachi movement's agenda since its inception²⁴—and notwithstanding Rav Kook's monumental contribution—universal knowledge, let alone universal values, has exerted considerably less influence on Israeli Religious Zionism than on American Modern Orthodoxy. This is largely because the former has historically prioritized the integration of religious and national ideals (see Section 2).²⁵

²³ Lamm, Norman. *Torah Umadda: The Encounter of Religious Learning With Worldly Knowledge In the Jewish Tradition*. Maggid Books, 2010.

²⁴ Rav Reines conceived this project in 1896 and established a yeshiva whose curriculum included secular subjects—a radical innovation for his time. However, the turmoil that engulfed Eastern European Jewry prevented the yeshiva from reaching its potential.

²⁵ Norman Lamm succinctly observed that “Kook’s ruminations on the holy and the profane, profound as they are, have—tragically—had little effect on his followers... [Merkaz haRav’s] only distinctive trait is its extreme nationalistic character... Rav Kook’s thought thus still awaits its redemption.” Lamm provided no explanation for this deviation from the intended course but remained cautiously optimistic: “Perhaps jointly with some of its closest ideological relatives, Kookian theories... can be imple-

The goal of the proposed system is to address this gap by incorporating universal values into the fabric of Religious Zionism. This framework, which we refer to as *Universal Religious Zionism*, is composed of the following components and underlying premises:

The theological foundation of this system lies in the novel application of Rav Kook's concept of the Jewish state as part of the Messianic process to the unfolding history of the State of Israel. Within this context, the integration of universal values into the religious framework becomes essential for the continued advancement of the Messianic process. These universal values must be harmonized with the national and religious values that were integrated earlier in the development of Religious Zionism (see Chapter I).

Universal values are integrated using Rav Kook's methodology, which is grounded in the Kabbalistic concept of sparks (*nitzotzot*) and shells (*kliptot*). This approach, detailed in our earlier work, *Religious Zionism of Rav Kook*,²⁶ involves identifying, extracting, purifying, and incorporating the Divine sparks embedded within universal values into the religious framework. In this model, it is not merely secular knowledge that is integrated, but the values themselves (see Chapter II).

Universal values are classified and prioritized based on their suitability for integration. Chapter III provides specific examples illustrating the analysis of the sparks and shells inherent in various universal values.

While our primary focus is the revival of universal values within Israeli Religious Zionism, this system can also contribute to the ongoing development of Modern Orthodoxy in the Diaspora, where the challenge of harmonizing the secular and the sacred continues to evolve alongside the progress of civilization.

mented..." (Ibid., p. 116). This is precisely what Universal Religious Zionism aims for—and those "closest ideological relatives" are none other than the American Modern Orthodox community.

²⁶ Polonsky, Pinchas. *Religious Zionism of Rav Kook*. Machanaim, 2009.

The system for integrating universal values is particularly well-suited for educational implementation. Through schools, yeshivas, synagogues, and public forums, education will serve as the primary vehicle for promoting Universal Religious Zionism and embedding it in the public consciousness.

Although our system is rooted in the teachings of Rav Kook, it also draws upon the rich intellectual and spiritual legacy of numerous other leaders, including Yitzchak Yaacov Reines, Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel, Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi (Manitou), Norman Lamm, Jonathan Sacks, and others. Importantly, this pursuit of wisdom is not confined to rabbinic or even exclusively Jewish sources. Rav Kook himself instructed his disciples not to limit their learning to his own teachings, warning that reliance on a single spiritual authority could result in a distorted outlook. He encouraged a broader intellectual engagement, urging individuals to cultivate a personal synthesis informed by the teachings of a diverse array of spiritual thinkers.

3.3. Reclaiming Torah-Authentic Universal Values

Within the Orthodox community, there is a prevalent perception that universal values are foreign to the Torah, rendering their elevation to religious status seemingly sacrilegious. However, a similar challenge arose in the early 20th century during the formative phase of Religious Zionism. At that time, national values were likewise viewed as incompatible with Torah principles. Despite this resistance, Rav Kook and his school succeeded in identifying the Divine sparks within Zionism's national ideals and integrating them into the fabric of Judaism.

As we have stated previously—and will continue to emphasize throughout this book—the universal values we seek to integrate into Judaism are not foreign to it. On the contrary, they are authen-

tic Torah values that were embraced by Western civilization but not fully developed within traditional Judaism due to the historical conditions of the Exile. What we refer to as integration is, in fact, a *reintegration*—or, in the words of Rabbi Norman Lamm, a “reestablishing [of] a primordial harmony [of the value system] ... of independent people living in its own land.”²⁷ For this reason, we use the terms “integration” and “revival” interchangeably throughout this work.

3.4 Integration of Universal Values Starts with Western Civilization

At this stage, our focus turns to the values upheld by Western civilization which, despite its flaws, remains the dominant force in both material and spiritual spheres. By “the West,” we refer to the broader Judeo-Christian civilization that has developed continuously from antiquity through the Middle Ages and into the modern era. This perspective aligns with that of Rav Kook, who, in his discussion on synthesizing the values of the three ideological factions within world Jewry (Chapter I, Section 9), explicitly envisioned the integration of the liberal-universal faction—one that gravitates particularly toward Western ideals.

Certainly, Western civilization does not encompass the full spectrum of human values; Eastern civilization contributes to the richness of global culture in its own distinctive way. However, given that the Jewish people are predominantly embedded within Western society, our current efforts focus on values that are rooted in our spiritual landscape and readily accessible to us. The integration of values from Eastern civilizations may follow as a natural continuation of this process. This incremental approach enables us to engage first with the values most relevant to our present cultural and spiritual context, thereby laying the groundwork for a broader and more inclusive exploration of universal values in the future.

²⁷ Lamm, Norman. *Torah Umadda*. Maggid Books, 2010, p. 120.

3.5 Connecting with God through Civilization as a Part of Creation

In Judaism, Revelation is traditionally regarded as the primary means by which God communicates with humanity, and the entire religious framework is rooted in the traditions transmitted by the recipients of this Revelation—the Patriarchs and the Prophets. However, beginning in the classical period and gaining particular prominence in the Middle Ages, certain rabbinic thinkers—most notably Maimonides—advanced a broader view. They maintained that the connection to the Divine should be forged not only through Revelation but also through Creation, encompassing the natural world and the universe at large. This perspective rests on the conviction that both the Torah and the Universe are the works of God and are therefore deserving of reverence and study. This approach continues to inform the outlook of many within the Modern Orthodox and Religious Zionist communities today.

We venture to develop this idea further by asserting that Creation, through which God reveals Himself to humanity, is not limited to the natural world and our inner experiences but also encompasses the entirety of human civilization. Since human creativity is a gift from God, the fruits of that creativity are integral to Creation.²⁸

Unlike nature, civilization emerges from the collaborative efforts of humankind and “God in history,” unfolding as a dialogue between humanity and the Creator. By understanding ancient and modern history, people reevaluate their religious beliefs, which is part of “drawing closer to God through understanding His ways.”²⁹ Therefore, our connection to the Divine should not be limited to religion and nature. It must include aspects of holiness—Divine sparks

²⁸ The human role in building civilization does not negate the fact that civilization is a component of Creation, just as the human role in building religious tradition does not diminish the foundational place of Revelation within those traditions.

²⁹ A striking contemporary example of the evolution of theology is the radical shift in Christian attitudes toward Judaism following the Jewish people’s return to the Land of Israel.

in our terms—reflecting the entirety of civilization and human achievements. This comprehensive approach fosters a deeper, more meaningful dialogue with God.

3.6 Judaism Evolves Through Our Efforts

Divinely revealed and ordained, traditional Judaism possesses a rich history of evolution—a process that continues to this day. Crucially, we are not passive observers in this development; we are active participants and driving forces. Each individual is not merely a “cog in the machine,” but a “small engine” in his or her own right, propelling Judaism forward through personal insight and action.

The evolution of Judaism is not the exclusive domain of eminent rabbis who offer novel interpretations or establish new movements. It also unfolds through the contributions of “ordinary” adherents who engage with emerging ideas—through their understanding, support, and constructive critique. This creative engagement is a responsibility and opportunity open to all. The decisions we make—whether preserving tradition or embracing innovation—collectively shape the Judaism of tomorrow.

The religious imperative has likewise shifted. Whereas in the past, the core obligation was to study and observe the commandments, it now includes a call to study, observe, and actively participate in the advancement of Judaism.

In doing so, we not only advance our tradition—we advance ourselves.

4. The Orthodoxy of Universal Religious Zionism

Although we stated this at the outset, we wish to reiterate it to avoid misunderstandings: Universal Religious Zionism is an Orthodox

concept. We advocate only for the development of Judaism within the framework of Halacha.

Accordingly, universal values integrated into Judaism should not displace the central pillars of a person's religious system. While individuals who are especially passionate about certain values may be inclined toward this kind of shift, the resulting imbalance would be detrimental. The foundations of Universal Religious Zionism remain identical to those of traditional Religious Zionism, with the sparks of universal values serving to enrich the overall system.

We share the concern that certain universal values today may serve as Trojan horses, introducing ideologies that could undermine the essence of Orthodox Judaism. In such cases, we do not advocate for their integration. Our focus is on reviving "safe" and "purified" values—those that resonate with and have gained meaningful support within the Modern Orthodox community (for further discussion of values suitable for integration, see Chapter III).

The Tanakh tells us that King Solomon granted his 700 wives—many of them princesses—some degree of cultural autonomy. These royal marriages were not merely personal choices but strategic alliances that enhanced Israel's political influence and promoted goodwill among the nations.³⁰ However, granting his royal wives this autonomy came with spiritual risks: "...and his wives turned his heart away" (1 Kings 11:3). This form of ancient "multiculturalism" sometimes resulted in the introduction of idolatry into Solomon's palace and even influenced the king himself.

Solomon's experience serves as a cautionary tale: an engagement with foreign values can expose one to potential spiritual dangers. Yet, the king's marriages were not a mere whim but political necessities that allowed Solomon to expand his monotheistic influence. Likewise, the risks associated with engaging universal values

³⁰ One example is Solomon's alliance with Egypt through marrying the Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kings 3:1), who converted to Solomon's faith not for prestige but for the sake of Heaven (Babylonian Talmud, *Yevamot*, 76a).

should not deter us from the effort. Universalism remains vital to the Jewish mission. As with any meaningful endeavor, it requires vigilance, discernment, and safeguards to ensure its alignment with core religious commitments.

5. The Role of Universal Religious Zionism in the Long-Term Development of the State of Israel

In Chapter I, we outlined Rav Kook's revised model of Israel's development as a three-stage Messianic process, with each stage defined by distinct goals for Religious Zionism. Here, we revisit this foundational concept, which underpins the evolution of Religious Zionism into its universal phase, as elaborated in this and the following chapter.

The titles we use for these stages—"Saul," "David," and "Solomon"—represent our conceptual framework, building on Rav Kook's identification of Herzl's Zionist movement as *Mashiach ben Yosef*, the modern embodiment of King Saul. Our contribution lies in identifying not two, but three distinct phases in the development of the State of Israel, corresponding to the reigns of the three kings of the ancient United Monarchy (see Chapter I). In Rav Kook's guiding approach, at each stage of Israel's development, Religious Zionism functions on two levels: it supports the current stage while preparing for the next.

Stage 1 (1890s to 1970s)—“Saul” or a safe haven state. During this stage, religious Zionists sought to be fully engaged in the broader Zionist enterprise of creating, building, and defending the Jewish state. This stage is now considered complete. However, even as it progressed, Rav Kook's school was already laying the groundwork for the next phase: the integration of Zionist national values into the framework of Judaism.

Stage 2 (1970s to the present)—“David” or a national-religious mission state. The transition from the metaphorical Saul to

David marks a phase in which the maturing David emerges as an independent figure, no longer subservient to Saul. While Saul reluctantly tolerates David and even uses him for political gain, the reigning king increasingly views the future king as a rival and attempts to suppress him. Over time, Saul's authority diminishes, whereas David's spiritual influence and popularity among the people of Israel continue to grow.

In this stage, the task of Religious Zionism is to transform the State of Israel from a "safe haven state" into a "state for the revival of the Tanakh." This means becoming a driving force in developing Judea and Samaria, forging a deeper connection between the people and these regions of the Land of Israel, and imbuing all facets of the state with a sense of national-religious mission rather than merely ensuring survival. The settlement movement plays a central role in this ongoing effort.

The transition from Saul to David is still underway and demands time. Religious Zionists remain the leading participants in this process. Thus far, however, Religious Zionism has mainly influenced those Israelis committed to national ideals. It has not yet engaged the segment of the population oriented toward universal values. Therefore, while continuing to promote national ideals and the settlement project, the time has come to begin integrating universal values into Judaism, thus preparing for the third stage.

Stage 3—"Solomon" or a universal-religious mission state.

In preparation for this stage, the mission of Universal Religious Zionism is to attract universalist Jews to Judaism, thereby completing Rav Kook's grand program for unifying the three ideological groups of Jewry (see Chapter II, 9). This historic unification can only be realized if Judaism revives universal values within itself and evolves into Universal Religious Zionism. The full development of this stage envisions the State of Israel as a spiritual center not only for the Jewish people but for all of humanity.

6. Maintaining Balance Amidst Contradictory Values

In Halacha, contradictions pose a problem that must be resolved, for a legal system cannot function with internal conflict. When contradictions arise in Jewish law, halachic authorities render binding decisions for the community at large.

In the realm of values and ideals, however, the situation is quite different: contradictions are not only inevitable but essential, as they reflect deep existential tensions. For instance, the conflict between *chesed* (mercy) and *gevura* (justice) cannot be objectively resolved, as it touches the core of human moral experience. Each person must navigate these tensions individually and differently in each circumstance.

Indeed, such contradictions are a feature, not a flaw. They create the spiritual space necessary for independent decision-making, akin to the “personal universe” in which one’s religious maturation occurs, as taught by Rabbi Nachman of Breslav. In this sense, spiritual conflict is of religious value.

In this “conflict-based” framework, no single value should dominate or be treated as absolute. Any value that attempts to contain more Divine Light than it can bear will “explode,” echoing the *Shvirat Kelim* (shattering of the vessels)—the primordial cosmic rupture described in Kabbala. Values are meant to balance one another in a dynamic and delicate equilibrium. To ensure this balance remains rooted in the tradition, the entire value system must be anchored in Halacha, which provides the structural boundaries within which these tensions can be productively engaged.

In the vision of Universal Religious Zionism, contradictions emerge not only between the values espoused by the Orthodox, national, and universal camps, but also within each of them. We view these tensions not as threats but as opportunities to construct a deeply considered, integrated framework—one that strengthens each sector by harmonizing them all.

7. Tools for Discovering Divine Sparks in Universal Values

To identify, evaluate, and extract the Divine sparks within universal values—just as Rav Kook did with national values—we must: (1) draw upon our religious intuition; (2) engage the full spectrum of Jewish thought, including the Tanakh and its commentaries, the Aggadic tradition, Kabbalistic teachings, and Jewish philosophical literature; and (3) learn to objectively recognize the positive aspects within contentious—even negative—phenomena.

A detailed methodology for this process is presented in our previously cited work, *Religious Zionism of Rav Kook*. What follows is a selection of key concepts and methodological tools introduced by Rav Kook that lay the groundwork for further exploration—and for the development of additional tools of our own.

Tzelem Elohim—humanity’s creation in the image of God—makes respect for every human being a given, hardly requiring emphasis. What is less obvious, and central to our framework, is that it also elevates quality of life and the aesthetic dimension of everyday living—our surroundings, habits, and conditions—to the level of religious significance, beyond mere functionality. This idea is poignantly illustrated in a story about Hillel the Elder: when asked why he was going to the public baths, he replied that caring for the body is a mitzvah, for the human form itself reflects the Divine image.³¹

Imitatio Dei—the imitation of God—calls on us to draw closer to the Divine by embodying His attributes. This idea finds meaningful expression not only in emulation of God in pursuing moral virtues, but also in the realms of science and technology, which enhance human command of nature, thus reflecting God’s attribute of omnipotence. Likewise, artistic creation brings us nearer to the Divine as Creator, highlighting the spiritual dimension of both making and appreciating art.

³¹ *Vayikra Rabbah*, 34.

Nesira—“sawing”—is a Kabbalistic concept rooted in the story of Adam and Eve that signifies a transformative shift in human relationships. The First Couple begins in a “back-to-back” configuration, representing an initial, physical, and one-dimensional unity. Through the act of nesira, they transition to a “face-to-face” relationship, epitomizing a psychological and spiritual unity grounded in free will—one that fosters deeper, more meaningful relationships.

In the realm of faith, atheism can serve as a catalyst for such transformation. By disrupting the inherited “back-to-back” relationship with religion—often marked by unreflective tradition—atheism creates the potential for a new mode of engagement: a “face-to-face” relationship with God characterized by conscious, post-atheistic religiosity. This transition underscores the spiritual significance of voluntary observance, made possible by a pluralistic society in which a range of perspectives can coexist. The departure of some from traditional practice enables others to approach observance with greater intentionality and authenticity.

A parallel process can be observed in the world of art, particularly when it challenges entrenched social taboos—especially those surrounding sexuality. These taboos often enforce a “back-to-back” dynamic, sustained through external prohibitions that suppress open inquiry and personal integration. The result is frequently hypocrisy and a disjointed spiritual identity. When art breaks these taboos, it paves the way for individuals to approach such sensitive issues in a “face-to-face” manner—openly, reflectively, and with the possibility of genuine spiritual incorporation.

Chutzpah Ikveta de-Meshicha—the “chutzpah at the heels of the Messiah”—is a concept rooted in Talmudic tradition that identifies rising insolence as one of the signs heralding the Messianic Age. According to Rav Kook, this seemingly negative trait takes on a redemptive function in Messianic times, becoming an essential force in the unfolding of the Divine Plan. His reinterpretation draws on Jeremiah 31:34: “No longer will they need to teach one another

and say to one another, ‘Heed the Lord’; for all of them, from the least of them to the greatest, shall heed Me...”

A helpful parallel can be found in the spiritual development of the Jewish people. The Torah initially describes them as a flock in need of guidance (Numbers 27:17), analogous to schoolchildren under close supervision. Yet as students mature, they are expected to take on greater responsibility for their own learning and moral decisions. So too, the Messianic era is marked by a shift toward spiritual autonomy, where a form of “positive chutzpah” emerges—an assertive, self-directed religious engagement that reflects maturity rather than rebellion.

Expansion of Vessels is a Kabbalistic concept that teaches an individual’s ability to absorb Divine Light is limited by the soul’s capacity.³² This principle extends beyond the individual to encompass society as a whole. In our time—at the threshold of the Messianic process—there is a greater outpouring of Divine Light than in previous eras, necessitating the formation of broader and more refined “vessels,” both personal and collective. One practical expression of this idea is the pursuit of science and art, which serve to expand the soul’s receptivity and deepen its capacity for spiritual integration.

The Divine Origin of Global Trends, a concept first introduced by the Maharal and later expanded upon by Rav Kook, suggests that Divine influence guides the paths of human development. This viewpoint highlights the religious importance of global culture, encouraging us to identify the Divine sparks within its values. Instead of dismissing current intellectual and spiritual trends as “secular” and therefore irrelevant, this perspective affirms their importance to our religious development and preparation for the Messianic Age.

³² This idea is echoed in the Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot*, 57b, which suggests that a beautiful environment expands a person’s consciousness.

Chapter III. PRACTICE



Integration of Universal Values into Judaism *Extracting Divine Sparks from the Shells of “Isms”*

1. Selective Inclusion: Evaluating Universal Values for Orthodox Acceptance

Looking ahead, we envision the continued integration of the Divine sparks embedded in universal values into the framework of Judaism—a process which, according to Rav Kook, is vital for Judaism to realize its spiritual mission in the revival and flourishing of the Jewish state. However, not all of these sparks can be absorbed at the current stage of development. The process must be gradual, aligned with the spiritual growth of the Jewish people and the ongoing maturation of these values within their respective civilizational contexts.

Many within Religious Zionist and Modern Orthodox communities perceive certain universal values as “liberal” impositions on a traditionally conservative framework. In light of this dynamic, we set aside such contested values and do not advocate for their integration into Judaism at this stage. When a particular value encounters significant resistance or fails to resonate within modernist Orthodox circles, it indicates that the value is not yet mature enough for religious incorporation.

2. Two Groups of Universal Values Awaiting Integration into Judaism

In the meantime, we identify two categories of universal values that, to varying degrees, are ready for integration into Judaism. We refer to them as *undisputed* and *disputed* values, each requiring a distinct approach.³³

Group A: Undisputed Universal Values

These values are ready for immediate engagement, as they enjoy broad acceptance within Religious Zionist and Modern Orthodox communities. However, they are typically embraced “as part of our lives” rather than “as part of our Torah”—a distinction that recurs throughout this book and lies at the core of our thesis. The ultimate objective of Universal Religious Zionism is to facilitate the transition of such universal values from the realm of the secular to that of the sacred. Our aspiration is rooted in Rav Kook’s well-known vision of Judaism’s evolution, captured in the epigraph of this book: “The old shall be renewed, and the new sanctified.”

In our classification, the undisputed values are:

A-1. Science and Technology: Divinely Ordained
Understanding and Transformation of the World

A-2. Art and Aesthetics: Imitating the Divine Creator
Through Human Creative Expression

A-3. Critical Thinking: Doubt, Disagreement, and Conflict
for the Sake of Heaven

A-4. Ethical Intuition: Recognizing the Inner Voice, Even
When It Conflicts with Halacha

³³ People who are passionate about certain values will assert their undisputed status, while others may challenge them. Let every value find its champion.

A-5. Holistic Learning: Appreciating Creation in the Full Spectrum of Knowledge and Experience

A-6. Game and Humor: Play as Self-Expression and Laughter as Transcending Logic

A-7. Material Success: The Religious Value of Prosperity

A-8. Environmentalism: Torah-Inspired Caring for Nature

A-9. Work Ethic: Work as a Service to God

These values transcend particular religious or cultural identities; they are truly universal and constitute core pillars of any advanced modern society. Because they do not generate resistance within the modernist Orthodox camp, they should be prioritized for integration. Nonetheless, this process will require considerable intellectual and spiritual effort, as it entails recontextualizing these values within a distinctly religious framework.

Group B: Disputed Universal Values

Although the values in this category are contested and often provoke debate, they continue to resonate within modernist Orthodox communities. Disputed values are typically encased in thicker ideological shells than their undisputed counterparts, making them more objectionable to segments of the religious public. Extracting the underlying Divine sparks from these shells will require a more rigorous intellectual and practical effort.

Such values are best integrated through natural development, not by imposition. Rather than confronting those who object, individuals and communities inclined toward these values should cultivate internal dialogue, allowing for a gradual process of clarification and reframing. Over time, this reflective engagement may lead to a broader recognition of the values' religious significance.

In our classification, the disputed values are:

- B-1. Feminism: Evolving Role of Women in Orthodox Judaism
- B-2. Vegetarianism: The Garden of Eden Ideal
- B-3. Ideals Precede Commandments: Restoring the Right Order
- B-4. Independent Religious Choice: Spiritual Growth Through Responsible Decision-Making
- B-5. Tolerance of Cultural and Religious Diversity: Enriching Oneself by Recognizing Others' Values
- B-6. Progress: The Journey from Creation to the Messianic Age
- B-7. Democracy: The Responsibility of Every Citizen and the Spiritual Growth of Society
- B-8. Inalienable Rights: Reflecting the Divine Image in Every Individual
- B-9. Universalism: Appeal to Humanity from the Land of Israel

In the next two sections, we will examine a selection of universal values by tracing their origins in the Tanakh and classical Jewish sources, while also identifying the ideological shells of modern “isms” that draw energy from these values yet distort their essence.

We make no claim to exhaustiveness; our aim is to sketch a broad outline that can serve as a foundation for deeper exploration. This overview highlights key dimensions—some well-established, others more exploratory, reflecting our own original approaches. A systematic study of each value, including its potential incorporation into the religious worldview and educational curriculum, will form the next phase of the Universal Religious Zionism project.

3. Analysis of the Sparks and Shells of Undisputed Universal Values

A-1. Science and Technology: Divinely Ordained Understanding and Transformation of the World³⁴

The Divine aspects of science and technology are rooted in God's command to Adam to dominate the world (Genesis 1:26). Rav Soloveitchik explores this concept in remarkable depth in his classic *The Lonely Man of Faith* through the lens of two archetypes, Adam the First, the majestic man of domination, and Adam the Second, the man of faith. Mastering nature—and himself as a part of nature—through scientific and technological conquest is not merely a means to achieve something higher but a Divine commandment, the very existential mission of Adam the First.

Created in the image of God, we are obligated to live in conditions that reflect and honor this Divine likeness. Science and technology serve as instruments in this pursuit, underscoring their profound religious significance.

Science broadens human perception of the Divine—expanding the vessels, in Kabbalistic terms (Chapter II, 7). A worldview lacking scientific knowledge leads to a primitive understanding of religious concepts. The Vilna Gaon warned that ignorance of science significantly obstructs comprehension of the Torah. Rav Kook echoed this sentiment repeatedly, stressing that scientific progress must be embraced to deepen religious insights.³⁵ As noted earlier, the need to expand our vessels for receiving Divine Light was less urgent in times of slower historical development. In the current era—marked by rapid civilizational advancement

³⁴ While recognizing that science and technology are distinct fields, we have grouped them here for brevity. In future studies, science and technology will be addressed separately. The same applies to the pairs art and aesthetics, as well as game and humor.

³⁵ *Shmonah Kevatzim*, 1:118, among others.

and an overwhelming influx of Divine Light characteristic of the Messianic Age—this expansion has become essential.

The Shells of Science and Technology

The Divine spark within science can become obscured when it is absolutized, manifesting as scientism, the belief that science is the sole arbiter of truth. This worldview encourages the unfounded imposition of scientific principles onto all domains of life, dismissing any form of knowledge that cannot be quantified or empirically verified as illegitimate. The problem is further compounded by science's adherence to a strictly causal framework, which excludes teleological explanations—those grounded in purpose or design—that are central to Judaism.

A-2. Art and Aesthetics: Imitating the Divine Creator Through Human Creative Expression

The human drive for aesthetics and art that transcend practical function is deeply rooted in our nature and warrants serious religious reflection.

Art is the most vivid expression of the human creator imitating the Divine Creator. Since God is first revealed in the Torah as the Creator of the world (*Bore, Yotser*), the realization of our creative potential becomes a means of emulating Him, thereby deepening our dialogue with the Divine. It is through the joy of the artistic creative process that we most vividly encounter the Divine Light.

Art plays a profound role in expanding the soul's vessels to receive Divine Light. A classic example is the use of music in the training of prophets (1 Samuel 10:5). This creative capacity extends beyond artistic expression and proves vital in other domains as well. Notably, imagination—the cornerstone of artistic creation—is es-

sential for engaging with and responding to the unfolding Messianic process.

Art offers a unique path to knowing God through self-discovery, grounded in the recognition that we are created in His image. It aligns with the religious pursuit of transcendent truth by engaging intuitive and emotional dimensions that lie beyond rational understanding. By revealing aspects of the Divine inaccessible to science, art enriches our spiritual journey and serves as a vital counterbalance to the potential absolutization of scientific knowledge.

Beauty is one of the attributes of the Divine. The experience of beauty evokes a sense of ecstasy—an emotion that originates from a Divine source. Without such encounters, our connection to God remains incomplete.

The Jewish mission to serve as a light to the nations necessitates mastery of artistic expression at the highest level. While countless individual Jews have made remarkable contributions to the arts, these accomplishments have largely taken place within the cultural frameworks of their host societies. As the State of Israel enters a new phase of national maturity, an authentic Jewish artistic voice is beginning to emerge. Only through the collective cultivation of beauty can we, as a nation, effectively convey our message to the world. If the metaphorical Japheth—symbolizing aesthetic excellence—does not dwell within the tent of Shem (Genesis 9:27), then our tent is not yet in proper order.

In contemporary Israel, aesthetic living is too often neglected. The signs are visible in the dusty windows, rusting bars, tangled electrical wires, and littered streets and parks that mar the public landscape. Such disregard for visual and environmental order would be considered unacceptable in most European cities. Addressing this problem requires more than municipal reform—it demands a shift in public consciousness. Here, Judaism and its religious leadership have a vital role to play: to awaken aesthetic sensitivity by framing it as a religious value.

The Talmud teaches that a sage with a stain on his garment desecrates the name of God³⁶ highlighting the connection between outward appearance and the sanctity of Torah. This principle should extend beyond personal dress to encompass public spaces as well. To litter the Land of Israel is, in effect, to desecrate the Divine name. We are *religiously* obligated to inhabit environments that reflect our Divine essence.

Caring for the cleanliness and aesthetic beauty of the Land of Israel is not merely a civic duty; it is a spiritual act and a tangible expression of ownership. Responsible homeowners tend to their homes with pride—something not typically expected of temporary renters. And if we neglect these duties, can we really call ourselves the Land’s rightful owners?

The Shells of Aesthetics and Art

The appeal and power of beauty and the arts are undeniable. Yet their absolutization results in a hollow ideal—the belief that “beauty will save the world”—and in the mistaken notion that aesthetics naturally gives rise to ethics.³⁷ This view is no less naïve than the belief that science alone can unlock all the mysteries of existence and single-handedly redeem humanity.

A more balanced and constructive perspective recognizes science, art, and religion as distinct spheres of human activity, each governed by its own internal logic and principles. None should claim supremacy or seek to replace the others; instead, their integrity lies in their mutual respect and complementary roles in the human experience.

³⁶ Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat*, 114a.

³⁷ The meaning of the oft-quoted line “beauty will save the world,” from Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*, is frequently misunderstood. It does not refer to aesthetics, but to moral and spiritual beauty. Indeed, it is this form of beauty—rooted in human virtue—that may truly have the power to save the world.

We acknowledge that art often exists in tension with Torah values. The depiction of nudity and indecency in art presents a particularly difficult challenge, as it stands in clear contrast to the standards of modesty upheld by Jewish tradition. As a result, some devoutly observant individuals distance themselves from the world of art altogether—a tendency especially noticeable among *baalei teshuvah*³⁸ for whom art often held deep personal significance prior to their religious transformation.

Yet we maintain that engaging with art—even when it unsettles our religious sensibilities—is vital. To avoid it entirely is to risk narrowing our perception of the Divine Light, which manifests in multifaceted and often unexpected ways. Each person must navigate this tension individually, but the integration of this inner struggle into a coherent theological framework remains incomplete. Like many profound questions, we continue to dwell within this unresolved space—trusting that greater clarity may emerge in time, perhaps through the evolving lens of Universal Religious Zionism.

A-3. Critical Thinking: Doubt, Disagreement, and Conflict for the Sake of Heaven

Western thought and culture are deeply grounded in the tradition of critical thinking. Similarly, the history of Judaism is characterized by vigorous internal debate and dispute among sages, demonstrating that critical inquiry is intrinsic to the Jewish tradition. Yet in contemporary religious life, critical thinking—especially self-critical thinking—often plays a limited role, eclipsed by reverence for spiritual authority. Fostering a culture of reflective critique is essential for the continued growth and vitality of Orthodox Judaism.

³⁸ *Baal teshuva* (literally “master of repentance” or “return”) refers to a Jew who, having been raised non-observant, adopts a religiously observant lifestyle, typically within the framework of Orthodox Judaism.

The Divine spark of critical thinking lies in the recognition that what we call “truth” is dynamic and evolving, not a fixed absolute. According to Rav Kook, the capacity for growth and transformation is itself a Divine attribute.³⁹ This perspective invites the questioning of all claims and affirms that no viewpoint is immune to challenge.

Critical thinking serves as an antidote to fanaticism. It challenges dogmatism—the uncritical conviction in the absolute correctness of one’s own views—by acknowledging that one’s perspective is not the only valid one. Importantly, fanaticism is not confined to extreme positions; it can also arise within seemingly moderate or centrist viewpoints. For this reason, the need for such an antidote applies universally, not only to those at the ideological margins.

Doubt prevents the absolutization of our inherently limited perceptions of the Divine. This awareness gives rise to a more nuanced and mature post-atheistic faith, in which doubt serves to deepen rather than diminish religious life.

The clash of authoritative opinions creates a “void” in which an autonomous individual can grow spiritually.⁴⁰ From a Kabbalistic perspective, such conflict is not merely negative but can act as a catalyst for personal development and spiritual ascent—thus affirming the religious value of conflict.

The Shells of Critical Thinking

The shell that encloses the Divine spark of critical thinking emerges in the form of the absolutization of critique—an approach that ultimately distracts and destabilizes society. A prominent example is neo-Marxian Critical Theory, which often seeks to dismantle the achievements of Western civilization rather than offer a constructive critique.

³⁹ *Shmonah Kvatzim*, 4:68.

⁴⁰ From the teachings of Nachman of Breslov, *Likutei Moharan*, 64.

A-4. Ethical Intuition: Recognizing the Inner Voice Even When It Conflicts with Halacha

The basic intuitive sense of right and wrong, independent of external sources or beliefs—the Kantian “moral law within us”—is a central feature of the Western mindset. At first glance, this idea may appear at odds with Judaism, in which nearly half of the 613 divinely ordained commandments address ethical matters, seemingly leaving little room for autonomous morality. Yet in reality, the Torah’s ethical system not only makes room for the inner moral voice—it actively requires its presence.

The Sages of the Talmud differ in their views regarding the nature of the Torah’s ethical commandments. Some regard them as a new moral code revealed to the Israelites with the giving of the Torah. Others hold that these principles were innate to the Jewish people and had been practiced even before Sinai—certainly by the Patriarchs and Matriarchs.⁴¹ According to this latter view, the innovation at Sinai lay not in the content of the ethical code but in its elevation to the status of a Divine Covenant.

In Judaism, ethical understanding emerges from the interplay between Divine Law and the individual’s inner ethical sense. In our terms, this process is the dialogue between God and humanity in a historical and cultural context, leading to the evolution of ethical perceptions. What was ethically acceptable at one stage of societal development may become unacceptable at later stages. The ideal of the Messianic Age is envisioned as the integration of autonomous and Revelation-based ethics, as expressed in Jeremiah 31:34: “No longer they will need to teach one another and

⁴¹ The two worldviews are exemplified by the disagreement between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael regarding the nature of the response of the *Bnai Israel* to the Ten Commandments (*Mekhilta DeRabbi Yishmael* on Exodus 20:1). They are elaborated upon by many luminaries, including Rav Joseph Soloveichik (*Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Sefer Shemos*. OU Press, 2014, pp. 438-439) and Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson (*Chasidic Perspectives, A Festival Anthology*. Kehot Publication Society, 2002, pp. 273-285).

say to one another, ‘Heed the Lord’; for all of them, from the least of them to the greatest, shall heed Me—declares the Lord.”

Ethical intuition is deeply rooted in the Tanakh and classical Jewish sources. The motif of individuals challenging God’s explicit commands on moral grounds recurs throughout the biblical narrative—from Abraham to Moses, and from Jonah to Job—as well as in Talmudic discourse and the teachings of Hasidic masters such as Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev, renowned as the advocate of the Jewish people before the Heavenly court. In Hasidism, the theme of discerning the voice of God from within is particularly prominent. These narratives reveal a persistent tension between the external expression of the Divine will and its internal realization within human conscience.

When ethical intuition comes into conflict with religious law, Halacha should not simply suppress the inner moral voice. The Divine presence is not confined to the external forms of religious tradition and legal practice; it also resonates within the human soul through ethical intuition. Those deeply attuned to their inner moral compass—grounded in intuitive awareness—will follow it even in the face of persuasive reasoning or communal pressure. To act against such convictions is to risk inner rupture, thereby undermining the very integrity that authentic religious observance seeks to uphold.

The aim should not be a mere compromise between ethical intuition and Halacha, which may serve only as a provisional solution. Rather, the goal is synthesis—a deeper, enduring resolution that integrates both the authority of Halacha and the integrity of moral intuition, preserving the letter of the law while giving voice to the spirit that animates it.

The Shell of Ethical Intuition

The shell of the divinely inspired moral inner voice can take the form of absolutized ethical autonomy—the belief that people have

an innate ability to distinguish right from wrong without relying on rational thought or legal frameworks. This view leaves no room for the concept of good and evil as revealed by our Creator through the Law. Rather than empowering us, this detachment from the Source weakens us. In Judaism, ethics is grounded neither solely in autonomous reasoning nor solely in Revelation. Instead, it arises from an ongoing dialogue between God and human souls—individuals, nations, and all of humanity.

The limits of ethical intuition become clear when it is shaped by incomplete understanding, shallow analysis, personal bias, or hasty judgment—a reality that occurs all too often.

A-5. Holistic Learning: Appreciating Creation in the Full Spectrum of Knowledge and Experience

A well-rounded education—both in formal settings and through life experience—has long been a core universal value upheld by advanced cultures from antiquity to the present. Without a broad cultural foundation—what we refer to as “spacious vessels for receiving the Divine Light”—it is difficult to develop a coherent worldview or fully realize one’s potential for understanding and living according to the Torah. Although this perspective has not been consistently emphasized throughout Jewish religious tradition—particularly within Orthodoxy—it is by no means foreign to Judaism.

Broad knowledge was a requirement for members of the Sanhedrin, who were expected to know seventy languages—reflecting the understanding that true language mastery includes familiarity with the associated culture. Without this foundation, rendering complex halachic decisions and offering spiritual leadership to the nation would have been impossible. The value of a well-rounded education was emphasized by many medieval Sephardic sages, most notably Maimonides, and was later powerfully reaffirmed by Samson Raphael Hirsch in 19th-century Germany.

In our time, the leaders who have shaped—and continue to guide—Modern Orthodoxy have embodied this value, distinguished by their remarkable cultural and academic depth. The movement’s adherents are already committed to holistic learning, making its importance largely self-evident within the Modern Orthodox community.⁴² This model may offer valuable insight for Israeli Religious Zionists, who are still navigating how to integrate broad education with religious tradition in a cohesive way.

What remains to be more fully developed is a deeper understanding of the *religious* significance of a well-rounded education and life experience—beyond its practical advantages, personal enjoyment, or social prestige.

Travel that fosters a direct appreciation of the world’s cultural and natural diversity holds a unique place in a well-rounded education. A parable attributed to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch illustrates this insight: A righteous Jew, having lived a life devoted to the study of Torah and Talmud, stands before God upon leaving this world and proudly recounts his dedication. God responds, “All this is commendable—but have you seen My Alps? I created these majestic mountains so that people would enjoy and marvel at their beauty.”

There is no substitute for direct encounters with nature and foreign cultures. Reading, studying, or hearing about distant places cannot replicate the transformative power of personal experience.

⁴² Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik recognized the importance of a well-rounded education from an early stage of personal development. In 1937, he founded the Maimonides School in Boston, which combined rigorous Orthodox Jewish learning with a broad general education. That same year, Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein established the Ramaz School in Manhattan with a similar vision. Both institutions continue to thrive generations later, testifying to the enduring relevance of their educational philosophy. A contemporary expression of this value is the newly established Emet Classical Academy in Manhattan, a Jewish preparatory school dedicated to excellence in academic and cultural fields while promoting Jewish, Zionist, and American exceptionalism. This commitment is especially commendable at a time when all three values are increasingly under attack.

Travel offers an exceptional opportunity to broaden our worldview and deepen our appreciation of Creation. Ultimately, it expands our inner vessels for receiving Divine Light. To neglect the beauty of the natural and cultural world through direct engagement is to turn away from one of God's profound gifts.

Like a broad education, leisure travel is valued in the Modern Orthodox community. However, it, too, should be understood on a deeper spiritual level and more fully integrated into our religious framework. We might draw inspiration from Benjamin of Tudela, the medieval Jewish traveler who journeyed across much of the known world a century before Marco Polo—not for practical gain, but to satisfy his intellectual and spiritual curiosity about distant Jewish communities. His travel diaries, originally written in Hebrew and later translated into major European languages, became an important source of knowledge about the broader world.

The Shell of Holistic Learning

The Divine spark of appreciation for the wider world can become trapped in the shell of pleasure-seeking, reducing travel to a checklist of destinations and education to the mere accumulation of books. We must remember that all we take in—whether through journeying or learning—is intended not only for personal enjoyment but for spiritual growth. These experiences are meant to be brought back into the world, enriched by our unique perspectives and deepened understanding.

A-6. Game and Humor: Play as Self-Expression and Laughter as Transcending Logic

The game is a fundamental attribute of civilization, enduring throughout history and across cultures. Johan Huizinga, in *Homo Ludens* (Man the Player), explores the integral role of play in soci-

ety and posits that culture itself springs from play. He argues that without a certain level of playfulness, the very fabric of culture in its broadest sense becomes unsustainable.

The game, in its various formats—especially competitive sports that engage every facet of human ability—provides a platform for exploring emotions and actions that may elude us in our daily lives. The inherent unpredictability of games reflects the limitless possibilities of life, making it relevant and irresistibly appealing. However, the play should not be limited to entertainment or a pastime; it serves as a stage on which human self-expression and creativity are realized, much like any other domain of civilization.

Since antiquity, games have played a significant institutional role in Western culture, with the ancient and modern Olympic Games serving as prominent examples. In Jewish culture during the Exile, such institutionalization did not occur until the 20th century, so, unsurprisingly, this aspect of civilization received insufficient spiritual reflection within Judaism, let alone appreciation for its religious value. While observant Jews are drawn to sporting events in large numbers (as evidenced by the presence of kosher food stands at major American arenas), in a religious context, sport is limited to parables in sermons and allowing yeshiva students to play ball between classes to release their youthful energy.

As so often with Rav Kook, he offers a vision so original that it was scarcely imagined in his time—and remains striking even today—as he reveals the spiritual aspect of sports. In the late 1920s, the Mandate Palestine newspaper *Doar Hayom*, under the heading *HaRav Kook and Football*, reported Rav's following words: "Sport is a matter of holiness. The Maccabi movement is one of the most important foundations of our national coming to life. In sports, there is much refinement and nobility of the soul. ... It has much idealism. ... It is a distorted opinion that opposes sport; such an opinion is not suited to life and reality. ..." ⁴³

⁴³ For the full quote and the context of Rav Kook's elaboration on sports, see *Sport, the Maccabiah and Religious Approaches* by Yossi Aron at <https://www.australianjewish->

We aim to rekindle Rav's enthusiasm for the game by drawing from traditional Jewish sources (see below).

Humor is a universal value found in all societies and, like art, is unique to each culture. Humor holds an important place in the Jewish tradition as a means of coping with adversity, dealing with inner turmoil, maintaining hope in difficult times, and serving as a medium for self-expression and creativity. Jewish comedians—whose humor is deeply rooted in the Jewish psyche, itself shaped by Judaism—play a leading role in modern comedy, making Jewish humor universal.

However, despite its widespread use as a communication tool by rabbis—a tradition going back to the sages of the Talmud⁴⁴—humor's religious value has yet to be fully developed and integrated into Judaism.

The Jewish tradition includes numerous elements that can form a foundation for a religious understanding of game and humor. A natural starting point is the Purim tradition, which profoundly unites play and humor (already connected linguistically through the shared root—*sachak* (to play) and *tzachak* (to laugh)—to express philosophical insights about the hidden and revealed, illusory appearances, and the deeper truths beneath the surface of “reality.”

The play, as depicted in the Jewish tradition, hints at its Divine quality. God is “playing with Leviathan” (Psalm 104:26), where the mystical creature symbolizes the forces of nature. According to

news.com/sport-the-maccabiah-and-religious-approaches/.

⁴⁴ “Before Rabba began teaching halakha to the Sages, he would say some humorous comment, and the Sages would be cheered” (*Pesachim*, 117a). (This Talmudic reference was brought by Rabbi Mendy Uminer, himself a brilliant example of how humor can elevate teaching and dialogue.) But like any topic in Talmud, there are opposing opinions on whether humor has a place in study hall or even in life itself: Rabbi Zera (*Berachos*, 31a) and Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi (*Nedarim*, 50b) were not in favor of humor, to put it mildly.

other interpretations, playing with Leviathan is a metaphor for the World to Come, where human energy is no longer spent on material sustenance, as it is in This World, and all resources are devoted to Torah study and the pursuit of wisdom—a pure game of the mind.

In Kabbalah, God plays with the letters of the alphabet before He creates the world, signifying the foundational role of play in Creation.⁴⁵

Isaac “playing with his wife” (Genesis 26:8) underscores the complex dynamic between play, sexuality, and laughter.

The religious value of humor lies in its power to liberate us from the stifling constraints of rigid logic. We laugh when a narrative unfolds in an unexpected, illogical way—revealing deeper and more intricate connections than we initially assumed. This release from the grip of rational predictability may come through a surprising punchline, a paradox, or the sudden resolution of a seemingly intractable problem. At its core, laughter expresses the joy of glimpsing a higher order of harmony, one that transcends conventional logic.

When we succeed in breaking through the barriers formed by our overly rigid, rational understanding of the world, we experience a joy so profound that it finds expression in laughter. For all its virtues, stability rarely inspires, and the prospect of predestination is unsettling. It is freedom—not compulsion—that is a Divine attribute, and laughter becomes a momentary feeling of nearness to God. Such is the laughter of Sarah (Genesis 18:12). By naming her son Yitzhak—meaning “he will laugh”—she enshrines within his name the notion of a supralogical destiny for the Jewish people: the most “unexpected” nation in human history.

Laughter is an integral part of the “restoration of Zion” (Psalms 126:2), reflecting the unpredictable and redemptive character of messianic times and hinting at the World to Come as an eternal form of play.

⁴⁵ Zohar, Introduction, 2b.

God's laughter with the righteous in the World to Come⁴⁶—as their ultimate reward—as well as His laughter in the Psalms (2:4; 37:13; 59:9), invites us to pursue a deeper religious understanding of play and humor. Through this lens, we can enrich both our appreciation of the Divine and our efforts to emulate it.

The most sustaining form of laughter is the ability to laugh at oneself. Without this capacity, no religious system can remain dynamic or alive. Humor serves as a safeguard, ensuring that a spiritual fortress does not harden into a prison. Accordingly, Judaism not only permits self-directed laughter—it encourages it, most notably during the festival of Purim, when even *roshei yeshiva* (yeshiva heads) are fair game for satire. Without a healthy measure of self-deprecating humor, one should refrain from delving into the “mysteries of the Torah” (Kabbalah), lest the scholar imagine he can fully grasp the inner workings of the Higher Worlds—which would be truly laughable.

Laughter often requires stepping beyond boundaries. The challenge, however, lies in doing so for the sake of growth while preserving the integrity of the system—a delicate but essential balancing act.

The Shell of Game and Humor

The Torah alludes to Ishmael's improper play and laughter (Genesis 21:9), illustrating how the shell can distort the Divine sparks inherent in game and humor. This distortion arises when games meant to reflect life begin to replace it, resulting in phenomena such as gambling addiction, spectator violence, corruption, physical harm, and the dulling of consciousness—encapsulated in the ancient Roman formula of “bread and circuses.” It was precisely these vices, associated with games and public spectacles, that led the sages of the Talmud to forbid attendance at Roman theatres and

⁴⁶ Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbos*, 30b.

stadiums, viewing them as arenas of moral decay, idolatry, and the “seat of the scornful.”⁴⁷

Humor can become destructive when its Divine energy is trapped in the shell of cynicism, unrestrained mockery, or vulgarity. Rather than uplifting the spirit and illuminating deeper truths, misused humor diverts us from the Divine. The Talmud lists laughter as one of the key traits through which a person’s character is revealed,⁴⁸ as it has the power to expose both the noble and the unflattering aspects of one’s inner self.

A-7. Material Success: The Religious Value of Prosperity

In European civilization, views on the religious significance of material success have significantly changed over the past few centuries. The ideals of classical Christianity promoted altruism and cast self-interest in an unfavorable light. Protestantism, however, took a different view, advocating the religious merit of economic success. This perspective was further supported in the 18th century by Adam Smith, who argued that self-interest was a key driver of economic progress and contributed to the acceptance of material success as a universal value in the Western worldview. The earlier overemphasis on altruism may have stemmed from an underlying reluctance to engage in material pursuits perceived as distant from the Divine. This theological position fails to recognize that the material world—including its economic dimensions—is integral to God’s revelation to humanity.

In Judaism, deliberate poverty as a means of drawing closer to God has never been a norm. This stance stems from Judaism’s view that poverty tarnishes the ideals of the Torah and diminishes its capacity to impact the world. In Judaism, the importance of eco-

⁴⁷ Babylonian Talmud, *Avodah Zorah*, 18b.

⁴⁸ Babylonian Talmud, *Eruvim*, 65b.

conomic prosperity has always been recognized, exemplified by the story of *Yosef Ish Matzliach* (Joseph the Successful Man) in Genesis 39:2. The fact that all three generations of biblical patriarchs and matriarchs amassed considerable wealth dispels the notion that righteousness and material success are somehow at odds. Only an economically thriving society can afford its citizens a decent standard of living—a goal carrying intrinsic religious significance. As the 13th-century sage Rabbenu Bachya put it, “The active participation of man in the creation of his own wealth is a sign of his spiritual greatness.”⁴⁹ The incredible economic success of Jews through the millennia demonstrates that this concept is deeply embedded in Jewish consciousness.

However, in the classical and contemporary Jewish religious world (though rarely in modernist circles), it’s not uncommon to encounter the view that “wealth is only important to support Torah scholars.” While supporting houses of learning is a duty and honor, this approach is somewhat narrow. Wealth serves as a vital means for improving the world—an idea that encompasses more than just “supporting Torah scholars.”

The economic success of the State of Israel holds unique religious value. For the Jewish message to resonate globally, Israel must be a prosperous country, echoing Ecclesiastes 9:16: “The wisdom of the poor is despised, and his words are not heard.”

It follows, then, that we must deepen our understanding of the religious significance of material success.

The Shell of Material Success

The shell of material success is not merely trivial greed but an ideology that prioritizes the acquisition of material possessions and financial success above all else. Within this ideology, self-worth and social status are measured in terms of material wealth, and all other

⁴⁹ Sacks, Jonathan. *The Dignity of Difference*. Continuum, 2002, p. 95.

human achievements are deemed valuable only if they have a corresponding material equivalent.

A-8. Environmentalism: Torah-Inspired Caring for Nature

A religious approach to ecology is rooted in the dual commandments given to Adam by God in Genesis 2:15: to “work” the Garden, which signifies the transformation of the natural world for human benefit, and to “guard” it—primarily from himself—representing the responsibility of humanity to protect the very world it cultivates.

The Talmud and rabbinic literature trace the theme of man and ecology. “When God created the first human beings, God led them around all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said: ‘Look at My works! See how beautiful they are—how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it.’”⁵⁰ The remarkable fact that the rabbis discussed stewardship of nature millennia before the Industrial Age began to have a global impact suggests that they understood it not as merely a practical measure for healthy living but as a religious duty. Indeed, as Rabbi Sacks put it: “Creation has its own dignity as God’s masterpiece, and though we have the mandate to use it, we have none to destroy or dispose of it.”⁵¹

In our time, as environmental consciousness becomes a standard mode of thinking, a growing movement within Judaism is beginning to engage seriously with ecological issues. A number of Orthodox organizations and individual rabbis—among them Rabbis Haggai Resnikoff and Yonatan Neril—are promoting faith-based environmental responsibility rooted in Torah values. While this movement is still in its formative stages, it is being heard, and its presence is a promising beginning. Undoubtedly, Judaism—drawing on its au-

⁵⁰ *Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, 7:13.

⁵¹ Sacks, Jonathan. *The Dignity of Difference*. Continuum, 2002, p. 167.

thentic and deeply rooted sources—has the potential to make a profound contribution to addressing this global challenge.

As with many universal values, the lead in developing a Torah-based approach to ecology has largely come from American Modern Orthodoxy, which offers a compelling model for Israeli Religious Zionists seeking to integrate environmental thinking into a broader religious framework.

The Shell of Environmentalism

The divinely ordained purpose of protecting nature is distorted when it devolves into a form of nature worship akin to neopaganism, in which humanity is portrayed as a blight upon the planet. Such ecological extremism undermines responsible stewardship by promoting a mindless opposition to fossil fuels, often disregarding the complex realities of modern energy needs and usage. These excesses risk discrediting the noble and necessary cause of environmentalism.

A-9. Work Ethic: Work as a Service to God

Work is the most foundational of all human endeavors, shaping both individuals and civilizations. People relate to work in markedly different ways, which can be understood across three distinct levels. At the most basic level, work is regarded as an unavoidable necessity for material survival—a burden to be endured, with “real life” beginning only after the workday ends. At a higher level, work is valued as a means of self-realization and social recognition. At the highest level, work becomes a vehicle for repairing and elevating the world. While still providing livelihood and personal fulfillment, such work attains profound spiritual significance. For the religious individual, it becomes an act of Divine service.

The predominance of one attitude toward work over others within a society shapes its collective work ethic, which in turn plays

a decisive role in determining whether that society moves toward flourishing or stagnation.

The concept of work ethic, understood as an awareness of the spiritual value of labor, entered the Western world through Protestantism. Protestants were not, of course, the first to view work as more than a means of survival. Throughout history, people have taken pride in a job well done and recognized labor as a form of human self-expression and potential. However, it was the theology of the Reformation that “sacralized” work in the European consciousness, elevating it to the status of Divine service and establishing it as one of life’s fundamental purposes. “The maid who sweeps her kitchen does God’s will just as much as the monk who prays—not because she can sing psalms while she works, but because God loves clean floors.” These words, attributed to Martin Luther, capture the theological foundation of the Protestant work ethic. From this perspective, there is only one way to work: with the utmost dedication and excellence.

In his seminal work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber examined the impact of Reformation theology on the extraordinary socio-economic success of Protestant societies—a dynamic that eventually shaped the trajectory of the Western world and beyond. The work ethic emerged as a universal value, influencing not only economic development but also the broader contours of social progress.

Judaism contains numerous principles that could form the foundation of an authentic Jewish work ethic,⁵² drawing from the Tanakh, classical, and later rabbinic sources. However, a systematic articu-

⁵² The Torah-based authenticity of the universal values to be revived within Judaism—and their purity from “foreign influences”—is established from the outset of Universal Religious Zionism. However, it is worth restating here, since the Western work ethic, unlike other values, is linked to another religion—Protestantism. The paradox is that none of the Reformation theologians sought to create the “spirit of capitalism”; rather, it emerged as an unintended popular reaction to Calvin’s concept of “predetermined eternal damnation of souls”—a notion to which Judaism is inherently immune.

lation of this ethic has yet to be developed; its components remain fragmented and exert limited influence on both the Jewish religious world and Israeli society at large.

Several factors contributed to the underdevelopment of the work ethic in Judaism during the Exile:

The absolute priority of preserving the nation through Torah study. In the Diaspora, the sole guarantor of Jewish continuity was religious tradition, centered on the study of the Torah and the Talmud. Work, beyond its practical role in meeting material needs, was primarily viewed as a means of sustaining religious life and institutions, rather than as an independent spiritual value in its own right.

Not belonging to the host nation. The highest expression of a work ethic involves a commitment to improving and elevating the world. In the Diaspora, however, the surrounding world belonged to nations that were often hostile and repeatedly expelled Jews and seized the fruits of their labor. Under such conditions, it is unsurprising that Jews could not regard their work as a vehicle for uplifting the world.

Restricted access to professions. Throughout the centuries of exile, Jews were excluded from many creative and prestigious professions that allowed for the realization of human talent. And work not aligned with one's calling is rarely imbued with spiritual meaning.

Work ethic is not explicitly a Torah commandment. The Torah mandates honest business dealings as direct commandments. However, the attitude toward work itself is expressed only in terms of ideals—beneficial but not obligatory (see B-3. *Ideals Precede Commandments: Restoring the Right Order*). As a result, business ethics has been extensively developed and practiced in Judaism, while the work ethic remains a matter of worldview and personal choice (see below on the relationship between the two).

In the early 20th century, ideologists of both secular and religious Zionism sought to reshape the perception of work that had

developed in the Exile. They emphasized the spiritual value and revitalizing effect of work on the Jewish soul. For Zionist pioneers, labor—especially working the land—became a central element in creating the “new Jew” and restoring the Jewish state. In the words of A. D. Gordon, the founder of the ideology of *Kibbush HaAvoda* (The Conquest of Labor): “The Land of Israel will be acquired by labor, not by fire and not by blood.” In Gordon’s system, working the Land of Israel has an intrinsic spiritual, almost mystical value, and work becomes the essence of a laborer. This ideology dominated the Second and Third Aliyah and was often called the “religion of labor.” Gordon appealed to the small fraction of Jewish people living in Palestine at the time, rather than to the Jewish people as a whole, because the spiritual value of labor can only be realized in the Land of Israel, where Jews, as a nation, bear responsibility for transforming the world. In the religious Zionist movement, analogous concepts underpinned the ideology of the *HaPoel HaMizrachi* party, whose slogan “Torah and Labor” encapsulates its vision.

These ideological systems played an important role in the early stages of the settlement of the Land of Israel and the establishment of the state. Over time, however, their influence waned as they focused primarily on agriculture and did not extend to all forms of work in Israel.

Despite these early contributions, it is no secret that diligence in work is often lacking in Israel. This issue is not confined to the public sector; it is also prevalent in the private sector, where competition would ostensibly eliminate substandard performance. Many do not regard work as a source of personal honor or as a spiritual act aimed at improving the world—let alone as a form of service to God. As a result, a significant portion of Israel’s creative and productive potential remains untapped. Furthermore, the neglect of work’s spiritual dimension diminishes respect for others’ labor and contributes to broader social dysfunction.

Jewish sources for the development of work ethic can be traced back to the very first labor described in the Torah—Adam’s work in the Garden of Eden: “The Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and guard it.” (Genesis 2:15). On this, Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar said: “Even Adam did not taste anything until he worked.”⁵³ The Midrash teaches that Adam’s labor in the Garden was imbued with profound spiritual significance.⁵⁴

The biblical models of work ethic are exemplified by Jacob in his service to Laban and Joseph in his service to his Egyptian masters. Both combined the highest levels of professionalism with exceptional integrity in their business dealings. Their success became not just personal prosperity but a means of fulfilling the Divine Plan—Jacob laid the foundation for the future people of Israel, and Joseph ensured their survival through the years of famine and incubation in preparation for the Exodus.

Maimonides cites Jacob’s work ethic as an example: “A worker is obliged to work with all his strength, for the righteous Jacob said (Genesis 31:7): ‘I have served your father with all my strength.’ Therefore, he was rewarded even in this world, as we are told (Genesis 30:43): ‘And the man grew exceedingly prosperous.’”

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said: “Great is labor, for the Shechinah did not dwell in Israel until they began to work [on the construction of the Sanctuary]: ‘And they shall make Me a Sanctuary, and I will dwell among them.’” (Exodus 25:8). Rabbi Tarfon taught in a similar way.⁵⁵

The Talmudic literature contains numerous teachings that emphasize the value of work, presenting it not only as a necessity but as a component of a meaningful and righteous life. “Love labor, for among all the creatures that the Holy One, Blessed be He, created in His world, He entrusted labor only to man... A person

⁵³ *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, 11.

⁵⁴ *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 12.

⁵⁵ *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, 11.

[unlike animals] cannot sustain himself except through labor. Not because he is weaker than the beasts, but because labor is beloved and honorable... Love labor, for all the prophets engaged in labor... Great is labor, for all commandments and good deeds are forms of labor—except for the study of Torah and prayer.”⁵⁶

The concept of “work on weekdays as a commandment” is based on the verse: “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath.” (Exodus 20:9-10). Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai taught: “Just as Israel was crowned with the commandments of the Sabbath, so too was it crowned with the commandment to work on the weekdays.”⁵⁷ Similar statements are attributed to Shemaya⁵⁸ and Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. Thus, “six days you shall labor” is interpreted as an independent commandment to work rather than merely an introduction to the prohibition of work on Shabbat. Only through this work can one meaningfully fulfill the commandment of Shabbat. At the same time, the mitzvah of Shabbat rest prevents the idolization of work.

Rabbi Yehuda bar Ilai said: “Great is labor, as it brings honor to the laborer.”⁵⁹ Rabban Gamaliel the son of Rabbi Judah Hanasi said: “Excellent is the study of the Torah when combined with a worldly occupation, for toil in them both keeps sin out of one’s mind; But [study of the] Torah which is not combined with a worldly occupation, in the end comes to be neglected and becomes the cause of sin”.⁶⁰

In Hasidism, the Baal Shem Tov illustrates the spiritual dimension of labor through the example of a shoemaker, who, by performing his work with quality and sincere intention to serve the Almighty, can attain the highest spiritual level.

Work and business ethics are intertwined. In fact, by scrupulously adhering to business ethics—that cultivate honesty and, in

⁵⁶ *Midrash Tanaim*, 5:14.

⁵⁷ *Mekhilta DeRabbi Shimon Ben Yochai*, 20:9.

⁵⁸ *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, 11.

⁵⁹ *Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim*, 49b.

⁶⁰ *Perkei Avot*, 2:2.

turn, foster diligence—one can naturally fulfill the ideals of work ethic as well. For example, the *geneviah da'at* (“theft of the mind” regarding a received product) can be interpreted more broadly as a prohibition against substandard work since this is essentially deception, even if not explicitly stated in a contract.

Rambam ruled: “Just as an employer is warned not to withhold or delay the wages of a poor worker, a laborer is warned not to steal work that rightfully belongs to his employer. Specifically, he must be precise with his time—to such an extent that our Sages even ruled that workers should not recite the fourth [optional] blessing after a meal so as not to reduce their working hours”.⁶¹

The Shell of Work Ethic

The Divine spark of the religious essence of work can be consumed by the shell of workaholism. This does not refer to voluntary overcommitment to one’s job in pursuit of higher earnings, career advancement, recognition, or other incentives—such cases are commonplace—but rather to the idolization of work, in which everything is sacrificed to it and one’s occupation becomes the entirety of one’s identity.⁶² The danger of the work ethic devolving into an all-consuming fixation—what Max Weber termed “the iron cage”—was anticipated by the very theorist of the Spirit of Capitalism. As Dennis Prager has observed, a person who cannot stop working one day each week—implicitly, on Shabbat—is merely a glorified slave. For the workaholic, ceasing to work feels akin to ceasing to exist.

Another form of shell that draws energy from the spark of labor is the Marxist view of labor relations as the only factor shaping society, including religion. However, Weber’s aforementioned study demonstrated the opposite of Marx’s *Capital*: religious concepts can shape

⁶¹ *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Hiring and Leasing, 13:7.

⁶² The fact that the first question an American typically asks upon meeting someone is “What do you do?” reflects this cultural idolization of work as identity.

attitudes toward labor and thus influence social development and the course of history.

4. Analysis of the Sparks and Shells of Disputed Universal Values

B-1. Feminism: Evolving Role of Women in Orthodox Judaism

The discourse surrounding feminism and the evolving role of women in Judaism is one of the most hotly debated topics in Modern Orthodox circles today.⁶³

The notion that “women should be content with their unique role and not aspire to the religious obligations of men” is increasingly becoming less compelling. Elevating the role of women in Judaism is of critical importance, as it directly impacts half of the religious Jewish community. Many within the Modern Orthodox movement—including prominent leaders and scholars such as Professor Tamar Ross, a leading spiritual voice in Religious Zionism—view this issue as central to the continued evolution of Judaism. Moreover, the status of women serves as one of the primary lenses through which both Jewish and non-Jewish observers assess Orthodox Judaism.

The Shell of Feminism

Discussion of the evolving role of women in Judaism tends to focus almost exclusively on the positive contributions of feminism,

⁶³ Given the prominence of feminism as a central topic of debate, we are not reiterating well-established positions that have shaped this discourse; hence, the brevity of this section is inversely proportional to its significance. Instead, a forthcoming systematization of sources and approaches will build upon these discussions, advancing the development of the Universal Religious Zionism project.

with little attention given to its potential drawbacks. It is therefore important to recognize that, like other universal values, contemporary feminism contains both a spark and a shell. A prominent example of this shell is found in the ideologies of radical neo-Marxist feminist movements, which often emphasize gender conflict over the constructive advancement of women's status.

B-2. Vegetarianism: The Garden of Eden Ideal

The universal value of vegetarianism is explored in Rav Kook's essay *A Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace*, as well as in his personal correspondence.

Rav Kook emphasizes that God permitted the consumption of meat only after the Flood, as a concession to humanity's moral decline and physical limitations. In contrast, under the "ideal conditions" of the Garden of Eden, human beings were commanded to maintain a vegetarian—or perhaps even vegan—diet. According to Rav Kook, commandments such as the covering of the blood of a slaughtered wild animal or bird, the separation of meat and milk, and other related laws serve as continual reminders of the moral deficiency inherent in taking animal life for food.

Rav Kook envisioned a future in which humanity's spiritual advancement would lead to the restoration of the vegetarian ideal. He regarded the abandonment of this aspiration as religiously troubling: "Is it possible to picture that a moral goodness of great value, which already existed in the reality of the human heritage, should be lost forever?"⁶⁴

Rav Kook maintained, however, that the transition to vegetarianism must be gradual, aligned with the deepening moral sensibilities and spiritual refinement of humanity. He cautioned against any attempt to accelerate this process prematurely. His personal conduct reflected the tension between the Torah's ideal of vegetarianism and

⁶⁴ *A Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace*, translation by Michael Derfler.

the current impossibility of its universal implementation. Although his diet was primarily vegetarian, Rav Kook would eat a small portion of chicken on Shabbat as a symbolic gesture—a reminder that the time for complete abstention from animal consumption had not yet arrived.

The gradual acceptance of vegetarianism within the Orthodox world is exemplified by leading figures who adopted it, including Rabbi David Cohen (“the Nazir of Jerusalem”), Rabbi Shlomo Goren, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, and Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag.

Emerging technological solutions—such as the development of artificial meat replicating the taste, texture, and nutritional value of conventional meat—may further facilitate this shift, serving as yet another example of the spiritual potential embedded in technological advancement.

The Shell of Vegetarianism

The shell of vegetarianism emerges when the value of animal life is equated with that of human life—an ethically untenable position. This extreme perspective has led, in some cases, to disturbing comparisons between the slaughter of animals for food and the Holocaust. One striking example is the *Holocaust on Your Plate* campaign, which juxtaposed images from Auschwitz with those of factory-farmed animals, accompanied by captions suggesting that “leather sofas and handbags are morally equivalent to lampshades made from the skins of Holocaust victims.” While not explicitly stated, the exhibition implied that if killing animals is morally equivalent to murder, then extreme measures—including violence against farmers—could be seen as justified.

The campaign was funded by an anonymous Jewish philanthropist and developed by an artist who had lost several family members in the Holocaust. It stands as a vivid example of Jewish souls yearning for a Divine spark but, unable to locate it within Judaism, ultimately losing their moral bearings.

B-3. Ideals Precede Commandments: Restoring the Right Order⁶⁵

The dominant principle in the Western worldview holds that ideals and goals form the foundation of any system, with norms and laws serving as their outward expression. By contrast, Jewish religious consciousness has traditionally emphasized the primacy of Law, often relegating ideals to a secondary role. This outlook is encapsulated in the maxim, “Keep the commandments and their meaning will follow naturally,” commonly associated with the frequently cited verse *na’aseh ve-nishma* (Exodus 24:7), “We will do, and [then] we will hear/understand.” However, it is often overlooked that in Deuteronomy (5:24), the order is reversed: *shamanu ve-asinu*, “We will hear/understand, and [then] we will do.”

As in many other areas, this imbalance can be attributed to the centuries during which Judaism remained in a defensive posture—first against Christianity, and later against secular ideologies and other modern “isms.” Yet in the context of modernity and Jewish sovereignty, there is a growing need for a more balanced approach—one that accords appropriate weight to both halachic observance and the pursuit of the underlying ideals.

The centrality of Law in Judaism should not obscure the deeper truth that the commandments are expressions of the Torah’s eternal ideals. This is reflected in the very structure of the Five Books of Moses, where the narrative of the values embodied in the lives of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs precedes the giving of commandments to the Jewish nation. As Rabbi Norman Lamm observed, “*Halacha is minimal Judaism*, and not its totality; it does not exhaust the content of the Torah” (emphasis in the original).⁶⁶

⁶⁵ This theme is elaborated in greater detail in the article by Polonsky, Pinchas; Zolotusky, Galina; Yashgur, Gregory; BenLevi, Raphael, *The Relationship Between Ideals and Commandments in Judaism*. Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, Issue 31, 2018. <https://www.jewishideas.org/article/relationship-between-ideals-and-commandments-judaism>.

⁶⁶ Lamm, Norman. *Torah Umadda*. Maggid Books, 2010, p. 8.

Judaism's ideals deserve recognition as a distinct religious category. While the Jewish tradition boasts an exceptionally rich literature devoted to the analysis and systematization of commandments, it lacks a comparable focus on ideals. Few works are dedicated to their exploration, and no comprehensive framework has been established. Classical literature typically addresses ideals through the concepts of *hiddur mitzvah* (the enhancement or beautification of commandments) and *middot* (personal virtues), but gives limited attention to ideals that fall outside these categories. This oversight results in an imbalanced portrayal of Judaism's ethical and moral foundations. Acknowledging that many ideals extend beyond the realm of commandments or virtues is essential for a more complete understanding of Judaism's spiritual depth.

Judaism is defined by the complementary nature of its halachic and non-halachic components. It encompasses (1) Halacha and (2) a rich and diverse body of non-halachic teachings: the Torah's narrative, the Prophets and Writings, Aggadah, ethics, philosophy, mysticism, ideals, reflections, and historical narratives. Both quantitatively and substantively, the non-halachic dimension is in no way secondary to Halacha.⁶⁷ Yet the widespread misconception persists that Halacha is the central focus of Judaism, while all else is merely supplementary. Perhaps for this reason, the entire corpus of non-halachic Jewish thought lacks a universally accepted name. The absence of a clear, recognized term is significant: a phenomenon defined merely as a "non-something" struggles to gain full recognition in the public consciousness.

⁶⁷ Mark B. Shapiro observes: "While Soloveitchik wrote of 'Halakhic Man', whose ethos revolved entirely around the halakha and its study, we can contrast this figure with Rav Kook, who despite his unquestionable greatness in halakhic learning, can in many ways be seen as 'Aggadic Man', if we understand aggadah as encompassing the non-halakhic wisdom and spirituality of the Sages." (Shapiro, B. Mark. *Renewing the Old, Sanctifying the New. The Unique Vision of Rav Kook*, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2025, p. 11.)

Reestablishing the balance between Halacha and the non-halachic dimensions of tradition is essential to the vitality of the State of Israel. Historically, Halacha has served as a boundary that distinguishes the Jewish people from surrounding cultures and ensures their survival, most notably through the principle of the “four cubits of Halacha,” which remains central to Haredi Judaism. However, in the State of Israel, where Judaism impacts all aspects of societal life, Halacha sometimes conflicts with the spiritual needs of society at large. This has caused many Israelis to distance themselves not only from organized Judaism but also to harbor negative sentiments toward its core principles—a trend within the Jewish people Rav Kook had already identified more than a century ago. Correcting this imbalance is crucial to reconciling tradition with the spiritual aspirations of Israeli society.

The Shell of the Ideals Precede Commandments Concept

The shell that encloses and perverts the notion that ideals precede commandments is the ideology that rejects Halacha as a matter of principle. This was the case with Reform Judaism, which abandoned traditional halachic observance “for the sake of Torah ideals.” This serves as a reminder that both—ideals and commandments—are critical to the holistic practice of Judaism.

B-4. Individual Religious Choice: Spiritual Growth Through Responsible Decision-Making

In modern Western discourse, the individual’s inner world and capacity for independent moral choice are highly valued and find expression across disciplines—from art and sociology to medicine and politics. In contrast, Jewish religious discourse tends to emphasize laws and doctrines, often relegating personal experience and individual freedom to a secondary, subordinate role. Yet indi-

vidual conscience must have its rightful place within the framework of Judaism—not only for the spiritual well-being of the individual, but also as a vital force in the ongoing development of the tradition itself.

Jewish tradition offers profound insight into the complexity of individual moral and religious choice. The interplay between Divine commandments and personal experience is woven throughout the Torah narrative. A striking example appears in Leviticus 10:19, where Aaron, grieving the loss of his sons, refuses to fulfill God’s command—conveyed through Moses—to eat the sacrificial meat, a ritual meant to be performed in a state of joy. Upon hearing Aaron’s reasoning, Moses acknowledges the validity of his response and accepts what might otherwise appear as disobedience.

A mature and evolving religious life requires freedom from an overbearing overseer. Such independence enables individuals to make their own decisions, take responsibility for the outcomes, and grow through their mistakes. Without this autonomy, genuine religious maturity cannot be attained.

The Shell of Individual Religious Choice

The absolutization of individual autonomy in choosing a religious path can lead to the erosion of the Torah’s structural framework and risk fragmenting the unity of the Jewish people. A striking example is the refusal to follow halachic procedures for religious divorce, which can result in the complex and deeply consequential issue of *mamzerim*—a specific category of illegitimate children under Jewish law. This underscores the need to strike a careful balance between honoring individual choice and preserving the integrity of the collective religious system—a challenge that warrants its own thoughtful and nuanced discussion.

B-5. Tolerance of Cultural and Religious Diversity: Enriching Oneself by Recognizing Others' Values

Appreciation of cultural and religious diversity is a cornerstone of the modern Western worldview. While this pluralistic outlook is often associated with secularism, it stands in contrast to the common perception of religion as inherently exclusive. Yet, unlike Christianity and Islam, Judaism has never claimed that all nations must convert to the Jewish faith for their salvation. On the contrary, from its inception, Judaism has affirmed that each nation should recognize and serve the Almighty in its own distinctive, “non-Jewish” way—thus establishing a theological foundation for the value of tolerance.

In practice, however, Jewish tolerance has historically extended only to what is considered normative Judaism—despite persistent internal feuds—while the values of other religious systems were met with outright rejection. In the modern context, there is a growing need for a broader conception of tolerance. It is time to move beyond the traditional *a priori* opposition to outside worldviews and adopt a stance of understanding and mutually enriching engagement.

Rav Kook taught that tolerance should go beyond merely accepting the right of others to exist toward recognizing their intrinsic value: “Humanity is perfected by the richness of the unique character of each nation.”⁶⁸

Any understanding captures only a limited aspect of Creation; therefore, we must broaden our perspective by drawing insights—sparks—from other viewpoints. This recognition transforms the pursuit of knowing God and His Creation into a collective human endeavor, one that embraces the contributions of diverse cultures and religious traditions. In the words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “We need not only a theology of commonality—of the universals of mankind—but also a theology of difference: why it exists, why it

⁶⁸ *Shmonah Kvatzim*, 1:808.

matters, why it is constitutive of our humanity, why it represents the will of God.”⁶⁹

Recognizing the intrinsic values of different cultures is crucial in the Messianic Age. During the formative years of Judaism and the long exile, maintaining distance from foreign cultures was necessary for the maturation and survival of our tradition. Now that the resilience of Judaism is beyond question, and the State of Israel ensures the physical and spiritual survival of the Jewish people, it is time to engage with other cultures and draw from their best qualities without risking the loss of Jewish identity. The verse from Ezekiel’s prophecy of the dry bones, describing the messianic revival of Israel, reads, “Thus says the Lord God, ‘Come, O breath, from the four winds, and breathe into these slain, that they may live’” (Ezekiel 37:9). Our interpretation of this prophecy is that the revival of Israel must come from all corners—cultures—of the world. The Messianic Age demands a welcoming attitude toward other cultures, without which the Jewish people’s mission as a light to the nations cannot be fulfilled.⁷⁰

Interfaith Engagement

Despite the tensions, conflicts, and wars that have marred relations between different religious groups, the move toward interfaith engagement represents a modern development in the West.

There are two levels of interreligious interaction, different in intent and impact:

The first level of interfaith engagement is the establishment of peace. This typically takes the form of official meetings among religious leaders, where each side expresses mutual respect and refrains from asserting superiority over the other, particularly by avoiding attempts to proselytize representatives of another faith.

⁶⁹ Sacks, Jonathan. *The Dignity of Difference*. Continuum, 2002, p. 21.

⁷⁰ Let us emphasize again that using experiences from other cultures and religions is permissible only within halachic norms.

While these meetings are beneficial, their impact on the religious consciousness of the masses is limited.

At the second level, the parties aim to understand each other's essence and discern which values of another religion are worth cultivating in their own religious system. Such meetings occur among theologians who are willing to engage in deep and constructive dialogue. These interactions can have a significant impact on public awareness.

The most significant and potentially fruitful interfaith dialogue for Judaism is with Christianity. Jewish national memory rightly preserves the painful history of physical and spiritual persecution endured across the Christian world. This memory is vital and must be upheld. Yet, it is equally important to acknowledge that Christianity served as the vehicle through which the Hebrew Bible was introduced to the broader world—a fact that forms the basis for meaningful dialogue.

In recent decades, much of Christian theology has moved beyond the doctrine of Supersessionism—the belief that the Church replaced Israel in God's covenant—by acknowledging the enduring covenant between God and the Jewish people and rejecting the practice of proselytizing Jews. Moreover, a substantial number of devout Christians today actively support the Jewish people and the State of Israel and express a sincere interest in engaging with Judaism.

Since the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church with Non-Christian Religions* (1965), and continuing to the present day, the first stage of Judeo-Christian reconciliation has, in many respects, been successfully achieved. The time has come to advance to the next stage—one that requires sustained and collaborative effort on both sides. As previously noted, the Tanakh, our shared scriptural foundation, offers a robust platform for deepening this engagement. Such a dialogue not only fosters healing and a broader appreciation of Torah values on the global stage but also enriches Judaism itself by expanding the arena in which it grows and evolves.

Judaism and Islam share numerous points of theological and cultural affinity that, in principle, make interfaith dialogue between them a promising avenue for constructive and mutual enrichment. Yet the bitter conflict between Israel and much of the Islamic world—in which religion is a main driver—continues to hinder meaningful engagement grounded in goodwill.

The dialogue between Judaism and Eastern religions holds the potential to advance to a more substantive level, as it is unburdened by a history of conflict. A possible point of departure for such engagement lies in the biblical account of Abraham sending the sons of Keturah to “the land of the East” with enigmatic gifts (Genesis 25:6)—a narrative that invites reflection on early spiritual connections between traditions. A notable example of this kind of dialogue took place in 1990, when nine Jewish delegates—including at least three Orthodox rabbis and scholars—traveled to Dharamsala, India, to engage in conversation with the Dalai Lama.⁷¹

Bridging the theological divide between monotheism and the karmic frameworks of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism requires specialized knowledge and sustained patience.⁷²

The Shell of Tolerance

The Divine spark of tolerance is continually at risk of being obscured by the shell of cultural relativism. This worldview, which treats all cultures as equally valid and virtuous, fails to discern the moral failings and dangers inherent in certain ideologies. Uncritical tolerance—the indiscriminate acceptance of ideas from other cultures—becomes particularly problematic when elevated to the status of an ideological absolute. In this form, it aligns with post-

⁷¹ This engagement is described by its participant, Roger Kamenetz, in his book *The Jew in the Lotus*. The book’s subtitle, *A poet’s rediscovery of Jewish identity in Buddhist India*, speaks for itself.

⁷² As mentioned in Chapter II, 3.4, prioritizing the integration of sparks from Western cultures is more constructive.

modern philosophy, which seeks to dissolve all boundaries, norms, and definitions.

Acknowledging that other religious or cultural traditions may contain Divine elements—some of which may be underdeveloped in contemporary Judaism—should not diminish the integrity of Jewish values or compromise the Jewish people’s unique mission within humanity.

Regrettably, in our time, the ideological fervor of the Woke movement—representing the latest manifestation of shell—and the politicization of diversity have undermined the concept itself, distorting the Divine spark of tolerance it once aimed to express. Today, diversity is more often reduced to a rhetorical gesture or the object of derision, rather than embodying a sincere commitment to its foundational ideals. In recognizing this decline, we must nevertheless take care not to discard the essential value along with its corrupted expressions.

B-6. Progress: The Journey from Creation to the Messianic Age

The concept of civilizational progress, deeply ingrained in the Western psyche, is rooted in the Tanakh’s portrayal of the human journey as a trajectory from Creation to the Messianic Age. This idea of linear history, introduced by monotheism, was a profound departure from the cyclical view of history characteristic of pagan and karmic traditions. The unparalleled success of Western civilization is largely due to this “goal-oriented” sense of history, which has always been a great motivating factor for progress in all areas of human activity.

The religious significance of progress is emphasized by the Maharal and, building on his teachings, by Rav Kook, who saw global trends in human development as guided by the Creator.

Rav Kook viewed progress (*hishtalmut*) as God's attribute—"perfection that continues to grow,"⁷³—which must therefore be embraced as a religious value and realized in our lives at both individual and societal levels, encompassing the advancement of civilization—progress itself.

Yet, while the concept of global progress is rooted in the foundations of Judaism, it is not adequately recognized in our religious consciousness. Religious discourse often neglects the importance of progress while idealizing the past. But rejecting progress is not only unrealistic—it is also spiritually shortsighted, as it overlooks the vital role of historical development in the ongoing dialogue between God and humanity.

Failure to recognize the religious significance of progress fosters the belief that the Jewish people have a passive role in the Messianic process, summed up in the dictum "when God decides, He will send the Mashiach." Conversely, by fully recognizing the Divine Plan, we should promote the understanding that the coming of Mashiach results from the progress of both the entire world and the Jewish people.

The Shell of Progress

The Divine spark of human progress can become trapped in the shell of radical progressivism that rejects anything "not evolving" without consideration for tradition.

B-7. Democracy: The Responsibility of Every Citizen and the Spiritual Growth of Society

The biblical era of Jewish history is often associated with monarchy, leading to the widespread perception that the Torah endorses

⁷³ *Shmonah Kvatzim*, 4:68. The philosophical challenge of reconciling God's absolute completeness, which precludes any lack, with the capacity for progress, whose presence and absence paradoxically imply incompleteness, lies beyond the scope of this book.

this form of government. However, the Tanakh not only recounts a centuries-long period of decentralized, democratic rule under the Judges, but also implies that monarchy emerged only because the people were not yet prepared for a stable democratic system. This pre-monarchical period—referred to by 16th- and 17th-century Christian political theorists as the *Hebrew Republic*—was viewed by them as an ideal, divinely ordained form of governance for the Israelites. The concept of the Hebrew Republic had a significant influence on the evolution of democratic thought in Europe and later in America.

In the Jewish tradition, discussions concerning the structure of government are relatively rare, largely because, in the Diaspora, the absence of direct experience in state administration rendered such discussions largely theoretical. Among the few scholars who addressed the issue, Maimonides endorsed the concept of monarchy. In contrast, Isaac Abravanel—the only medieval Jewish sage with high-level political experience—argued forcefully against monarchy, advocating instead for elective government.⁷⁴

The very commandment to establish a state—“When you come into the land the Lord your God is giving you... and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me’” (Deuteronomy 17:14)—could be interpreted as an instruction to adopt a successful form of government from other nations. In our day, that form is democracy. In earlier epochs, when humanity’s spiritual development was limited, democracies tended to function poorly, leading to a preference for monarchies as the default form of government. Nowadays, with a generally higher level of spiritual development among nations, democracies significantly outperform authoritarian systems in all facets of life.

Democracy’s religious value lies in its unparalleled ability to expand each citizen’s opportunities and responsibilities in shaping the destiny of their country and the world. Specifically, responsible decision-making (both at the individual and nation-

⁷⁴ Abarbanel, *Commentary on Torah*, Deuteronomy 17:14.

al levels) is the primary tool for maturation and spiritual growth, bringing one closer to God.

Advancing democracy requires a deeper level of engagement and study than is currently undertaken within the religious world.

The Shell of Democracy

The Divine spark of democracy must be discerned from the shell of its absolutization—the conviction that democracy is the only acceptable form of government. This belief leads to fruitless attempts to impose democracy on nations unprepared for it.

Also detrimental is the absolutizing of the *current* form of democracy—a refusal to even discuss its improvement, overlooking that democracy itself has evolved in the past and will continue to change.

B-8. Inalienable Rights: Reflecting the Divine Image in Every Individual

The concept of inalienable rights—fundamental human rights that cannot be revoked or infringed upon by society—has existed since ancient times, gained broader acceptance during the Enlightenment, and now holds a central place in the Western ethos. The United States Declaration of Independence, adopted in 1776, is anchored in the idea of “unalienable rights endowed by the Creator,” proclaimed at the very beginning of this foundational document. The State of Israel’s Declaration of Independence in 1948, while not using the phrase “unalienable rights,” clearly emphasizes equality, freedom, and justice for all citizens as fundamental values of the new state.

The Torah’s proclamation that man is created in the image of God has profoundly influenced the development of human

rights in the West. Individual rights have always been important to the Jewish religious tradition. Judaism emphasizes the inviolability of the individual, private property, and protection from unjust judgment.

Freedom of speech deserves special mention. The Torah does not explicitly state freedom of speech as a commandment or entitlement; rather, the sacred text invites us to infer the inalienability of this right from its narrative.

In the Jewish tradition, the essence of the human being is defined as *medaber*, “the speaking one”, a Divine quality, as the Almighty created the world through speech. Thus, seen through the lens of Torah and tradition, denying freedom of speech is a form of oppression akin to restricting freedom of movement.

In Kabbalah and Hasidism, the Exodus from Egypt is also understood as *geulat ha-dibur* (liberation of speech)—both Divine and human. Slaves are metaphorically mute, and the Israelites gained the “freedom to speak” alongside their physical liberation. The very name *Pesach* could be interpreted as *peh-sach*, “a mouth that speaks,” highlighting the central role of retelling the story of the Exodus at the Seder. Within this framework, speech is not merely a tool for expressing opinions but the means to shape a national narrative and, ultimately, the nation itself.⁷⁵

Human rights, at their core, protect the individual from the tyranny of the state. While Judaism affirms this principle, there are no religious organizations in Israel that actively advocate for such protection while operating independently of political partisanship. As a result, human rights are not commonly associated with Judaism in the public consciousness. Establishing genuinely religious human rights organizations is essential, but doing so first requires recognizing individual freedoms as a religious value. In this context, the challenge is to overcome the statism—or quasi-theological reverence for the state—to which Religious Zionism is often

⁷⁵ Soloveitchik, Joseph. *Divrei Hagut*, p. 258.

prone, viewing the state as “the throne of the Almighty on earth.” (Rav Soloveitchik envisioned and warned against this excessive adoration at the time of the state’s establishment.) In some cases, such statism prevents Religious Zionists from employing strong yet legal methods to oppose state policies they deem harmful. Opposing government policy is not synonymous with opposing the state itself.

Reviving the theme of inalienable rights within a religious framework would enrich Judaism and deepen our understanding of this universal value.

The Shell of Inalienable Rights

The ideology of welfarism and entitlement culture creates a shell that traps the Divine spark of inalienable rights by overstretching them to include important, yet not birthright privileges, such as work, healthcare, and housing. This distorts the balance between rights and responsibilities, and ultimately undermines both.

Also, the spark of inalienable rights is exploited by the shells of a “dictatorship of minorities,” which cloaks its political aims as human rights to suppress critique.

B-9. Universalism: Appeal to Humanity from the Land of Israel

Every profound school of thought, no matter how particular, contains elements of universality that enable it to resonate beyond its boundaries. Few systems in history have been as impactful in this regard as Judaism, which introduced ethical monotheism to the world. Yet Judaism is often perceived as a strictly national religion, concerned solely with the Jewish people and disengaged from meaningful interaction with the broader world. While this perception holds some truth, it reflects the form of Judaism that has predom-

inated for nearly two thousand years—Judaism of the Exile, an inward-looking expression of faith shaped by historical necessity. But it was not always this way, and it need not remain so in the future.

The Tanakh and the Talmud offer contrasting worldviews regarding the universal role of the Jewish people. In the Tanakh, Israel is a nation living in its own land, much like other nations. But unlike other nations, the Jewish people of the Tanakh have the mission to spread the notion of One God and the ideals of the Torah throughout the world. Conversely, the Talmud sees the Jewish people as a dispersed minority among the hostile nations, prioritizing preservation through separateness over its universal mission. In Galut, the spirit of the Tanakh was overshadowed by the worldview of the Talmud. With the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, the Tanakh reclaims its role, and Judaism is called to unveil its universal light to appeal to all humankind. This moment calls for Judaism to rediscover its universalist treasures and reawaken its global mission—a vision captured in the idea of Universal Religious Zionism.

Two significant trends are contributing to a renewed orientation of Judaism toward universalism. The Noahide movement enables non-Jews, under Jewish guidance, to embrace the Hebrew Bible ideals without undergoing conversion. In teaching Torah to Noahides—who are not obligated by Halacha—and to any genuinely interested non-Jews, Jewish educators are compelled to highlight the universal dimensions and values inherent in the tradition. Similarly, the deepening of interfaith dialogue with Christianity (see section B-5) fosters a heightened awareness within Judaism of its global mission and encourages the articulation of its universal principles.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ A notable example of this effort is Israel365, an Orthodox organization whose mission is to build bridges between Jews and Christians, in part by teaching the Hebrew Bible to those who share its values.

The Shell of Universalism

The shell of universalism is embodied in a range of homogenizing ideologies—what we may refer to as radical cosmopolitanism or assimilationist universalism—which view cultural, national, and religious differences as the primary sources of conflict and assert that peace requires their minimization or elimination.

This shell reveals the paradox at the heart of meaningful universalism: it does not arise from uniformity but from the coming together of distinct and rooted identities, each offering something irreplaceable to a broader universal vision.⁷⁷ Such was the path ordained by the Creator for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God promised each Forefather that He would make his descendants into a distinct nation so that all the families and nations may be blessed through them (Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14). In other words, integration into the universal fabric—one that truly contributes to the whole—does not require abandoning national uniqueness but rather elevating it to its highest potential.

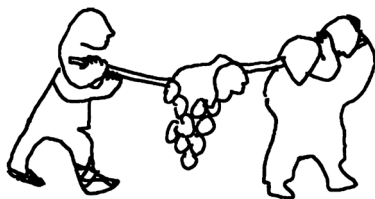
The global marketplace of cultures values what is distinctive and original. In the Biblical narrative, Saul is a “normal” king whose mission is to normalize the lives of the Jewish people in response to their demand for a king “like all other nations.” As important as Saul was to the Jewish nation, this “normal” king is not particularly interesting to humanity; his spiritual influence on the development of world civilization is limited. In contrast, David and Solomon were uniquely Jewish kings, the likes of which are hard to find among the nations. David, the author of the Psalms, is the most popular poet in human history. Solomon is recognized in Western tradition as the wisest of men, a reputation reflected in his universally revered works, *Ecclesiastes* and *Song of Songs*. It is precisely their national uniqueness that has made the spiritual legacy of David and Solomon invaluable to humanity.

⁷⁷ This analysis of the “paradox of universalism” exemplifies the core method of Universal Religious Zionism: extracting the Divine spark embedded within a civilizational value by cracking the ideological shell that encases it.

Moreover, as Natan Sharansky argues, only those rooted in a particular national or religious identity can truly defend universal values such as democracy and freedom: “Without a strength of purpose and [religious or national] identity, the free world will not long be able to repel the assault against it.”⁷⁸ Sharansky was unique among Soviet dissidents for fighting with equal commitment for both the right of Soviet Jews to make *aliyah* and for anti-totalitarian reforms in the USSR, embodying a harmony between the particular and the universal. This conviction enabled the Prisoner of Zion to endure physically and spiritually during the nine years in the Gulag.

At the same time, if cosmopolitanism is a “soft” shell of universalism, its “hard” shell, totalitarianism, creates far more dangerous ideologies. In Rabbi Jonathan Sacks’s formulation: “...universalism... [can] lead to the belief—superficially compelling but quite false—that there is only one truth about the essentials of human conditions, and it holds true for all people at all times. If I am right, you are wrong. If what I believe is the truth, then your belief, which differs from mine, must be an error from which you must be converted, cured and saved. From this flowed some of the great crimes of history, some under religious auspices, others—the French and Russian revolutions, for example—under the banner of secular philosophies...”⁷⁹

If the loss of countless millions of lives under totalitarian regimes was not enough to crack this shell, it is hard to imagine what could be.



⁷⁸ Sharansky, Natan; Wolosky Weiss, Shira. *Defending Identity: Its Indispensable Role in Protecting Democracy*. Public Affairs, 2008, p. 3.

⁷⁹ Sacks, Jonathan. *The Dignity of Difference*. Continuum, 2002, p. 50.

IN LIEU OF AN EPILOGUE



*Doesn't it seem like Judaism is just lagging
behind secular culture?*

In discussions surrounding the integration of universal values into Judaism, a common set of questions arises: “The ideals you seek to incorporate into our religious tradition have long been present in secular culture. Doesn’t this suggest that Judaism is merely trailing behind? And if culture is constantly evolving, does that mean religion is doomed to remain perpetually behind the curve? Moreover, how does this integration align with the rabbinic teaching that the Torah contains the entirety of the world?”

These are serious questions that touch the very core of Universal Religious Zionism; engaging with them is essential for a proper understanding of its vision.

First, we must reject the notion of religion as something isolated from the world or from life itself. (The division between religious and secular spheres is not originally a Jewish concept—it is, in fact, an anachronistic borrowing.) Civilization evolves as part of an ongoing dialogue between humanity and God, and every sphere of human activity contributes to this unfolding process. Some Divine messages find clearer expression within the religious sphere, while others emerge more fully in the secular realm. When our sages taught that the Torah encompasses the entirety of the world, they were re-

ferring to the ideal, complete Torah. But at any given moment in history, *human* Judaism actualizes only part of that Divine fullness. As a result, many Torah ideals are realized outside the boundaries of formal religion. This is not a deviation, but a part of the Divine plan.

Judaism has made extraordinary contributions to civilization: what we call “universal values” are rooted in the Torah. However, they are perverted, sometimes beyond recognition, by the “isms,” or in Kabbalistic terms, by the shells that encase the Divine sparks—the essence of these values—and feed off their energy. The secular world is not driven to distinguish the sparks from the shells; it consumes everything as is. Judaism, on the other hand, strives to separate the sparks from the shells to make them acceptable by religious standards. The result is a set of purified ideals that work better in our lives.

We can draw important lessons from the previous stage in the development of Religious Zionism, when national Zionist ideals were integrated into traditional Judaism. In the 1920s through the 1950s, secular Zionists—many of whom were deeply anti-religious—settled and built the Land of Israel with a fervor that can only be described as religious. What drove them was the Divine spark of love for the Land of Israel, always present in Jewish tradition but left unacted upon for millennia. However, after the Six-Day War, their spiritual heirs displayed far less commitment to settling Judea, Samaria, and Gaza. The reason is clear: the ideological spark that had once driven secular Zionism to prioritize land settlement had begun to fade. At the same time, Religious Zionism had absorbed the national ideals and breathed new life into them. That same spark, once embedded in the shell of secular ideology, was purified and revived within Judaism, where it acquired renewed force and meaning. (Poetically speaking, in the late 20th century, Zionism returned to Judaism the soul it had borrowed at the beginning of the century.) Empowered by this transformation, Religious Zionists undertook the extremely demanding task of settling the Land and became active participants

in all facets of Israeli life. Today, Religious Zionists are the vanguard of Zionism, embodying a compelling integration of religious commitment and national ideals.

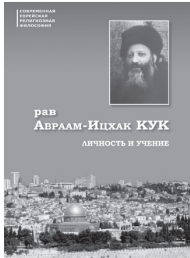
A similar transformation is now needed in the realm of universal values. Our aim is not to adopt these values as they are presented in secular ideologies. Rather, for each universal value, we must identify the Divine spark hidden within the shell of “ism,” extract it, reconnect it to its roots in traditional Judaism, and nurture it in its proper religious context. Only then, enriched by this integration, can Universal Religious Zionism emerge as a leader, not just in embodying these values, but in advancing them meaningfully on the world stage.

Once again, the dialogue between God and man is not confined to religion—it embraces the fullness of the world. In this light, the secular and the religious are no longer rivals in a race, but partners whose reintegration is not only natural but essential.

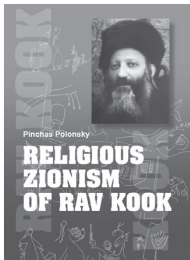


PINCHAS POLONSKY "RELIGIOUS ZIONISM OF RAV KOOK"

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You can find all texts at www.pinchaspolonsky.org/en/



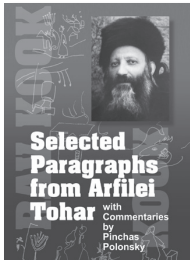
Full Russian version, 570 p.



Concise English version, 95 p.



Concise Hebrew version, 48 p.



Selected Paragraphs from Arfilei Tohar with Commentaries, 123 p.

Pinchas Polonsky's book on the philosophy of Rav Kook gave me an entirely new insight into Judaism.

Natan Sharansky

I have been involved with the Rav Kook's works for many years. I have certainly gained from reading this book and think it can speak to the hearts of many. I wish you to spread your ideas and influence the public.

*Rabbi Yitzhak Shilat,
Leading scholar of teachings of Rav Kook,
senior faculty member at Birkat Moshe Yeshiva*

Dr. Pinchas Polonsky's work "Religious Zionism of Rav Kook" is one of a kind, because not only does it brings Rav Kook's ideas closer to the general public, but also explains how Rav Kook's philosophy can help solve some of the issues in contemporary society – he does so intelligently and uses clear explanations suitable for everyone while remaining loyal to Jewish tradition.

*Rabbi Yakov haLevi Filber,
Senior faculty member at Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva*

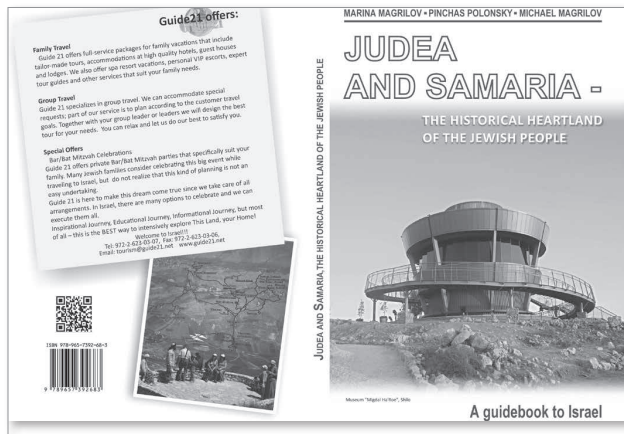
I was delighted with your superb work about the development of Judaism according to Rav Kook's philosophy. Your book spreads before the reader a dimension of novelty in Rav Kook's school of thought. You were able to emphasize the demanding sides of his teachings that do not leave any sector of the society in peace, not even the Religious Zionists. Many blessings!

*Rabbi Oury Cherki,
Senior faculty member at Machon Meir Yeshiva,
Chairman of Brit Olam Noahide World Center*

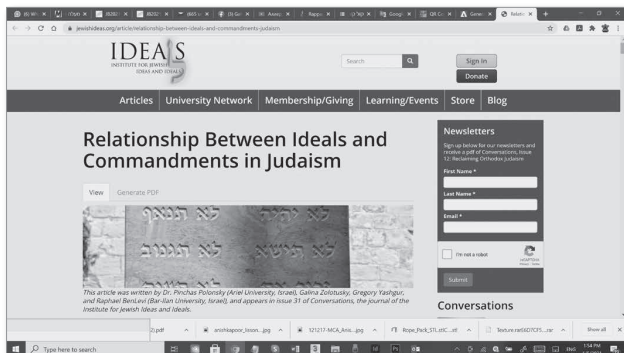
Dr. Polonsky's book, 'Religious Zionism of Rav Kook', is an important contribution to Orthodox thought and to all who seek to embrace the tradition while living it fully inside the modern world. Dr. Polonsky brings his own ideas to illuminate Rav Kook's wisdom. The book is full of fine insights into understanding of Rav Kook's thought; it deserves a wide readership and deep reflection.

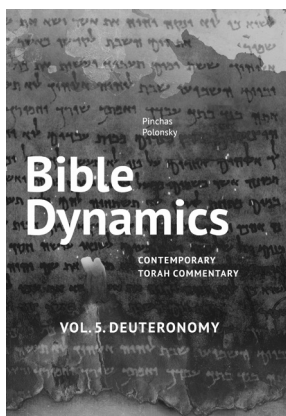
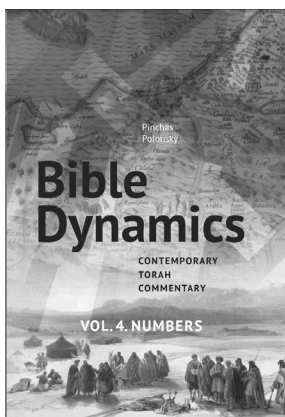
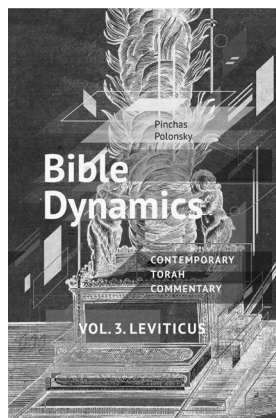
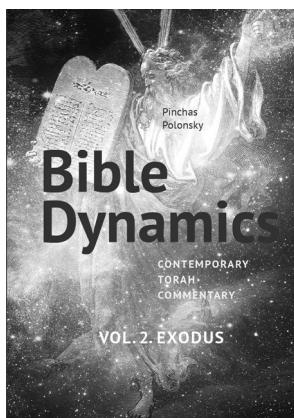
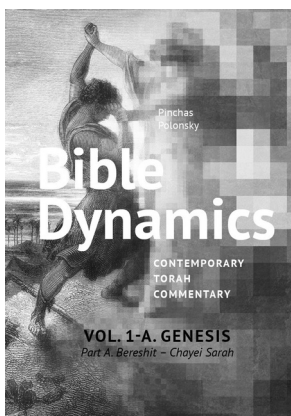
*Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, Founding President, CLAL:
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