

Rav Kook's Purim

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Twice during the year the Rav [Kook] revealed himself in all of his greatness ... on Purim and on the night of Shavu'os. It is not easy to describe, in writing, Purim in the court of the Rav. He was so rich in spirituality...²

I would enter to visit the Rav [Kook] every day. When the days of Purim arrived the number of visitors increased and I did not want to be pressed among them. Afterwards, the Rav commented on that I did not come [on Purim], and he added, "on Purim I say unique things that I am not accustomed to say throughout the year."³

Though Rav Kook's spiritual aura was apparent throughout the year, he "revealed a *tefach* while covering two," hiding his true spiritual stature. Purim was one of the few annual occasions that he removed this mask and exposed more of his authentic self. To understand Rav Kook's behavior we need to investigate the nature of Purim in his thought in an attempt to grasp the unique spiritual character of the day.

The Gemara (*Chulin* 139b) lists the Pentateuchal allusions to the future protagonists and antagonists of the Purim story. The hint to Haman is located in the story of Adam's expulsion from Gan Eden:

"Where in the Torah is [there an allusion to the episode of] Haman? [Rav Masnah replied: From the verse,] 'have you of (ha-min) the tree [eaten, from which I commanded you not to eat?]"⁴

המין מן התורה	המין מן התורה
מנין? המין	מנין? המין
העץ	העץ

It is reasonable to assume that in addition to noting the appearance of the letters ה-מ-ן in the story of Adam's sin, the Gemara is creating a thematic link between Purim and the story of the *Eitz ha-Da'as*. What is the nature of Adam's sin and in what way does Purim provide the means of rectification?

Rav Kook describes the root of Adam's sin in the following passage:

"I am in the midst of the exile" (Yechezkel 1:1). The inner, essential "I"—whether individual or communal—does not appear by itself. Rather, it appears in relation to our holiness and

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של היחיד ושל הציבור, אינו מתגלה	של היחיד ושל הציבור, אינו מתגלה
בתוכיותו רק לפי ערך הקדושה	בתוכיותו רק לפי ערך הקדושה

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² Recollection of Rav Shimon Glitzenstein, Rav Kook's personal secretary, cited in *Mo'adei ha-Re'iyah*, 251.

³ Recollection of Rav Dovid Cohen (*ha-Rav ha-Nazir*), a close student of Rav Kook, cited in *Mo'adei ha-Re'iyah*, 258.

⁴ Translation is from The Schottenstein Edition.

purity. It appears in relation to the amount of supernal power that, with the pure light of an elevated illumination, burns within us. "Both we and our forefathers sinned" (Tehillim 106:6). This refers to the sin of Adam, who was alienated from his essential being. He turned to the consciousness of the serpent, and thus he lost himself. He could not clearly answer the question, "Where are you?," because he did not know himself, because he had lost his true "I." He had bowed to a strange god.

Shemonah Kevatzim 3:24⁵

והטהרה שלו, לפי ערך הגבורה העליונה, הספוגה מהאורה הטהורה של זיו מעלה, שהיא מתלהבת בקרבו, חטאנו עם אבותינו, חטא האדם הראשון, שנתנכר לעצמיותו, שפנה לדעתו של נחש, ואבד את עצמו, לא ידע להשיב תשובה ברורה על שאלת איך, מפני שלא ידע נפשו, מפני שהאניות האמיתית נאבדה ממנו, בחטא ההשתחואה לאל זר.
שמונה קבצים ג:כד

Rav Kook describes the "inner essential I," or the true, basic identity of a person or community which is supposed to be identified and expressed. Unfortunately, this is a challenging task. Adam strayed from his true self and listened to the external voice of the serpent. By doing so he lost the inner "I" and descended into sin.

According to Rav Kook, this spiritual identity crisis is ultimately responsible for much, if not all, of sin throughout history. Instead of striving to reveal their inner souls, people are swayed by outside influences. This problem is persistent as it is pervasive, and has even seeped into the standard educational model. Rav Kook continues:

Thus does the world continue, sinking into the destruction of every "I"—of the individual and of the whole. Learned educators come and focus on the superficial. They too remove their consciousness from the "I." They add straw to the fire, give vinegar to the thirsty, and fatten minds and hearts with everything that is external to them. And the "I" gets progressively forgotten.

וכה הולך העולם וצולל באבדן האני של כל אחד, של הפרט ושל הכלל. באים מחנכים מלומדים, מסתכלים בחיצוניות, מסיחים דעה גם הם מן האני, ומוסיפים תבן על המדורה, משקים את הצמאים בחומץ, מפטמים את המוחות ואת הלבבות בכל מה שהוא חוץ מהם, והאני הולך ומשתכח.

The Messianic era can only be reached through a process of focusing on the inner "I." We will only be redeemed when we realize that "Elokai neshama she-nasata bee tehorah hee;" that our basic core identity is connected with "Ani Hashem:"

The Messiah is called "the breath of our nostrils, the anointed one of God" (Eicha 4:20). This is his might, the beauty of his greatness: that he is not outside of us. He is the breath of our nostrils. Let us seek Hashem our God and David our king. Let us tremble before God and His goodness. Let us seek our "I." Let us seek ourselves—and find. Remove all foreign gods, remove every stranger and illegitimate one. Then "you will know that I am Hashem your God, Who takes you out of the land of Egypt to be your God. I am Hashem."⁶

רוח אפינו משיח ד', זהו גבורתו הדר גדלו, איננו מבחין לנו, רוח אפינו הוא, את ד' אלהינו ודוד מלכנו נבקש, אל ה' ואל טובו נפחד, את האני שלנו נבקש, את עצמנו נבקש ונמצא, הסר כל אלהי נכר, הסר כל זר וממזר, וידעתם כי אני ה' אלהיכם, המוציא אתכם מארץ מצרים להיות לכם לאלהים, אני ה'.

⁵ Translation is by Yaacov David Shulam, <http://www.ravkook.net/souls.html>.

⁶ For an elaboration on the theme of repentance as a return to one's "inner I" see *Orot ha-Teshuvah* 10:15.

Rav Kook felt that part of his divinely ordained life's mission was to accelerate the process of redemption through "illuminating the world" with the Torah teachings that are uniquely suited for the Messianic era.⁷ It is therefore no surprise that this emphasis on realizing the purity and individuality of each soul, which Rav Kook identified as a prerequisite for redemption, is a theme in his thought.

Within a range, he encouraged Jews to find their own paths in *Avodas Hashem* in various realms, such as the methodology and areas of Torah study,⁸ the proper balance between different character traits⁹ and the navigation of competing values.¹⁰ While there is a danger of misstep and therefore Torah and *mussar* are needed to "see the place where mistakes can come,"¹¹ one's basic attitude should be self-confidence and trust in the straightness of the soul. The abandonment of these individualized paths in favor of full conformance to an established structure runs the risk of "weariness of spirit"¹² and a complete rejection of Torah.¹³

According to Rav Kook, this theme of revealing the "inner I" reaches full expression on Purim.¹⁴ It was on Purim that the Jews accepted the Torah of their own volition, realizing that its content is identical with their inner essence. Through intoxication we are supposed to reach the level of "*nichnas yayin yatza sod*, when wine enters, secrets emerge (*Sanhedrin* 38a)," and begin to recognize the parts of ourselves that heretofore remained hidden. The symbolism of reaching a state of "*ad delo yada* (becoming intoxicated to a state of lack of knowledge)" is that a person shed the externally accrued knowledge that can bury the soul even deeper and obscure its nature. The sin of Adam was engendered by a forgetting of the self, and it is on Purim that we rectify the sin by finding that which Adam lost.

And what is true regarding the individual is also accurate for reality as a whole.¹⁵ Before Adam's sin, the divinity that underlies all of creation was fully manifest. By simply walking through the garden, Adam was in constant overt contact with Hashem.¹⁶ However, as a result of his sin, the world plummeted spiritually and the divine essence was hidden from the natural world. The world that consisted solely of "*chayim*" (life) and "*tov*" (good) was replaced with a world of "*tov ve-ra*" (good and evil) in which there is an apparent disconnect between the *ra* and Hashem. The true nature of reality as being entirely an expression of divinity became obscured.

⁷ *Shemonah Kevatzim* 3:259.

⁸ *Orot ha-Torah* 9:1; "*ha-Oneg ve-haSimcha*" in *Eder ha-Yakar ve-Ikvei ha-Tzon*, pg. 117-118.

⁹ *Mussar Avicha* 3:1; *Shemonah Kevatzim* 6:22.

¹⁰ "*le-Achduso shel ha-Rambam*," *Ma'amarei ha-Re'iyah*, pg. 105.

¹¹ *Orot ha-Torah* 11:2.

¹² *Shemonah Kevatzim* 2:123.

¹³ *Orot ha-Torah* 9:6. It is important to counter-balance this pole in Rav Kook's writings with the emphasis he places on seeing oneself as part of both *Am Yisrael* and all of reality (see, for example, *Shemonah Kevatzim* 7:112). For a discussion of the paradoxical interconnectedness between these two concepts see *Shemonah Kevatzim* 3:6, *Orot ha-Kodesh Volume 4*, pg. 486, and Binyamin Ish-Shalom, *Rav Avraham Itzhak Hacoheh Kook: Between Rationalism and Mysticism* (SUNY Press, 1993), pg. 116-122.

¹⁴ "*Iggeres ha-Purim*" in *Ma'amarei ha-Re'iyah*, pg. 153-154.

¹⁵ *Mo'adei ha-Re'iyah*, pg. 258.

¹⁶ *Shemonah Kevatzim* 3:66

On Purim, just as we are challenged to tap into our hidden selves, so too we must pierce the veil of reality.¹⁷ While during the year we live in the fallen world that consists of *ra*, on Purim we are to remind ourselves that in truth, *melo kol ha-aretz kevodo*, His glory fills the world, and God stands behind both the *tov* and the seeming *ra*. This, taught Rav Kook, is the deeper symbolism of the state of “*ad delo yada bein arur Haman le-baruch Mordechai*, [intoxication] to the point where one cannot distinguish between the cursing of Haman and the blessing of Mordechai.” The category of *arur Haman* is of supreme significance for us who live in a post-Gan Eden reality, as we must recognize the evils that exist in the world and fight to overcome them. But, once annually we smell the fragrance of Gan Eden and “forget” that evil exists. On Purim, we identify Hashem’s presence in all items and events, thereby affirming their place in the ultimate divine plan. Through this, we are able to walk away from Purim with a renewed prayer for history to come full circle and for the world of Gan Eden to once again be fully revealed.

¹⁷*Mo’adei ha-Re’iyah*, pg. 258.