

***Tikkun Olam* as Messianism: Macrocosmic Restoration through
Microcosmic Piety in Rav Kook**

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Throughout the ages, Jewish thinkers have claimed that the Jewish messianic impulse can redeem the world—but what is at stake in such a claim? If we take to heart the insights of Martin S. Cohen’s essay in this volume—namely, that *tikkun olam* is about the challenge that confronts *halakhah*, when it at times needs to find a way to ignore its own strictures for the sake of remaining faithful to its own principles—then how far of a stretch is it for mystical Jewish thinking to transform this messianic impulse into a redemptive reality? The present essay will investigate territory only a few centuries removed from that of sixteenth-century Safed, the home of Rabbi Isaac Luria’s radically baroque Kabbalah. Nonetheless, the shift into the thinking of Rav Kook,¹ the first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Palestine in twentieth-century Jaffa and Jerusalem, is not as far removed from its Lurianic forerunners as it might at first seem to be. In this essay, I will present a close reading of several of Rav Kook’s texts—mostly from his hidden diaries written between 1904 and 1921, known as the *Sh’monah K’vatzim* or *Eight Files*, which were censored and only recently republished.² My argument is that by the early twentieth century in Jerusalem, the concept of *tikkun olam* had become even more highly charged with, and inseparable from, its messianic impulse than it had been in earlier generations. Indeed, the concept of *tikkun olam*, as Rav Kook understood it, was a product of the discernible undercurrents of Lurianic messianic impulse which became exacerbated within the context of twentieth-

century proto-Zionism, and which came to mark the birth pangs of the State of Israel.

My intention here is to write about *tikkun olam* as the concept finds expression in both the published and the (until-now) unpublished works of Rav Kook. In these texts, it carries a kind of redemptive messianism—a highly utopian and radically new vision of reality in the here and now—that the term almost never has when used by moderns today. I also believe that restoring some of what Rav Kook brought to the idea of *tikkun olam* will enhance the concept for moderns, by infusing it with greater philosophical depth and spiritual grandeur that is often lacking, when the phrase is used merely as a handy Jewish sound-bite about working for social justice outside the larger framework of a philosophy of history. What I find fascinating is how Rav Kook offers a countervailing and unifying approach in his thinking about *tikkun olam*, from a perspective of philosophical mysticism, and how unique this approach is, in its concern with transforming the outer world (or macrocosm) through one's inner world (or microcosm) as a messianic process.

Transforming such a messianic impulse into a reality that strives to work forward toward redemption remains deeply controversial for Judaism, yet Rav Kook's legacy makes it simply impossible to address *tikkun olam* without considering this intricate web of the messianic impulse and its realization, which are always in the offing. While Jewish mysticism may promulgate an esoteric understanding of the importance of the messianic impulse, the exoteric Jewish religion of the masses is, through its "neutralization"—whereby messianic terms were transformed and neutralized, ultimately leading to their allegorization—by and large fearful of (and thus protected from) any overt messianic impulse.³ Scholem was suggesting that this esoteric messianic impulse courses through the veins of every epoch of Jewish history, and so the stabilizing and conservative elements of exoteric Jewish religion made sure to defang its bite. Even a cursory look at Jewish thinking through history—from the Qumran sect in Second

Temple times to the messianic prophecies of Sabbetai Tzvi,⁵ and including both the messianic self-understanding of Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav⁶ as well as even that of the most recent Lubavitcher *rebbe*, Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson⁷—confirms this tension, in the degree to which such a messianic impulse is allowed to seep into any redemptive reality whatsoever. Consider David Berger’s characterization of the late Lubavitcher *rebbe*’s messianic posturing as something suggestive of a separate religion⁸—which is to say exactly what led the head of the Lithuanian Jewish community, the late Rabbi Eliezer Shach, to call Chabad a “cult” and sarcastically define it as the religion closest to Judaism.⁹ Or consider Yehudah Amitai’s contention that *Gush Emunim* (the settler group whose name means “Block of the Faithful”), its antithesis *Shalom Achshav* (the anti-settler group whose name means “Peace Now”), as well as the militarism of Ariel Sharon all constitute “false messianisms marked by a single-minded evasion of moral and political complexity.”¹⁰

Throughout the course of this essay, I will explore the contours of this fascinating messianic impulse as it relates to the intricate web of ideas known as *tikkun olam* in the writings of Rav Kook—which, until now, have been highly censored. Central to my argument will be a reconsideration of Yehudah Mirsky’s remarkable intellectual biography of Rav Kook, in which he claims that while “Rav Kook had no doubt that he was living in messianic times, looking inward, he did not see himself as the Messiah, but did understand his own expansive and healing consciousness as profoundly redemptive.”¹¹ What Mirsky brings to the fore with such a claim is the complex web of messianic impulses that Rav Kook intertwined with the principle of *tikkun olam*. I intend to unpack a complex spectrum within philosophical mysticism that is concerned with the messianic process of transforming the outer macrocosm through the transformation of one’s inner microcosm. We shall see how Rav Kook’s daring adaptation of *tikkun olam* constitutes both a challenge to embrace spiritual activism and a call to balance a life of outreach

in the macrocosm with contemplative spirituality in one's personal microcosm. We shall discover the radical implications of this kind of piety, which results in a rewriting of Judaism's self-understanding on the cusp of its next paradigm.

A brief biographical sketch of Rav Kook is in order. First serving as the rabbi of Zeimel and then of Bausk (in Lithuania and Latvia, respectively), eventually Rav Kook realized his love for Zion by immigrating to the Land of Israel in 1904, where he served as rabbi of Jaffa until 1914 and then accepted the position of Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem in late October of 1919. Then, not three years later, he was voted in as Chief Rabbi of Palestine for the Ashkenazim in February of 1921.¹² In those days, the chief rabbinate remained an office shared between Ashkenazic and Sephardic chief rabbis—an arrangement that was in part a hold-over from Ottoman times, when chief Jewish religious authority had been vested in the *hakham bashi* or “head sage.”¹³ Given that the colonial practice of the British was to rule as indirectly as possible, they were happy to continue the Ottoman system of granting these religious figures authority over personal status.¹⁴

In the first set of the secret diaries known as *Sh'monah K'vatzim*, composed between 1904 and 1921 and, after being intentionally suppressed by his inner circle of disciples, only eventually published by the family of the late Rabbi Eliyahu Shelomo Raanan, much is revealed about Rav Kook's messianic calling. (Note that his deeper messianic impulses in the other still-hidden files, composed between 1921 and 1935, remain the source of much speculation.¹⁵) In his love for Zion, Rav Kook was torn between what he saw as the redemptive possibilities of a “New Settlement” and the primarily ultra-Orthodox ways of the so-called “Old Settlement,” which community embodied the most regressive elements of his own Eastern European Jewish religious upbringing. Israel provided the context, according to Rav Kook, for cultivating a new spiritual persona whose heart would incline toward transcending boundaries, whose spirit “is beyond all

fixed logic...or any practical established *halakhab*, and [whose] heart aspires to ascend on high.”¹⁶ By reading journal entries from *Eight Files* like these, and speculating, with Rosenak, about what may be in the yet-to-be-revealed journals, it seems reasonable to posit that Rav Kook’s spiritual pendulum swung along a range that encompassed “the normative along with the antinomian, responsibility towards the collective together with a yearning for individuality.”¹⁷

Rav Kook was no ordinary rabbi. Even today, decades after his death, he remains a towering figure in “Israeli politics and Jewish spirituality.”¹⁸ As a mystic, halakhic decisor, poet, and activist, Rav Kook transcends boundaries and defies categorization; yet it is his messianic impulse that has likely left its strongest trace, and has led to the greatest reductive misreading of his teachings by his disciples.¹⁹ Redemption, for Rav Kook, was not an externalized person or event from *without*; rather, it was a deeply dialectical process from *within*: “It was about processes originating in God’s attempts, through human action, to reconcile His eternity with the world He created.”²⁰ Notwithstanding the deeply personal, inward-turning nature of this process of redemption, Mirsky notes that “central to [Rav Kook’s] thought-world was messianism, an apocalyptic energy field that held in place the conflicting elements of his time. He saw in secular Zionists and socialists the unwitting heralds of the Messiah.”²¹ That messianic impulse was made manifest in more than merely Rav Kook’s writings—it also informed his activist piety that embodied *tikkun olam*, as “he spent much of his time visiting the sick, counseling the distressed...and tending to the poor. He regularly gave away his household possessions, and signed as guarantor for pauper’s loans until his family convinced the local loan society to stop honoring his signature.”²² For Rav Kook, redeeming reality from its brokenness was the equivalent of redeeming hidden sparks nascent within all realms, including (most controversially) the secular and mundane ones.

To fully appreciate the unique insights in Rav Kook's re-reading of *tikkun olam*, we need to understand why he found the foundations of *tikkun olam* to be so deeply embedded in the mystical notion of "ultimate cosmic and meta cosmic repair and restoration." Developing his own version of Lurianic Kabbalah, Rav Kook accepts the cosmological vision of a cataclysmic divine withdrawal that sets in motion all of cosmic history, right up to the birth-pangs of Zionism. This process of a cosmic *tikkun* that heals the very fissures within the Godhead leads Rav Kook to a radical point of reflection: if the "holy is all that is near the great apotheosis of the *tikkun*" while the profane is "that which has not yet woven itself into the fabric of the final *tikkun*," then "could the seemingly profane be sacred, and the seemingly sacred, profane?" From this, it seems evident that for Rav Kook, only a "slim membrane stands between that radicalism and the coming of the Messiah."²² The devotional work of the final *tikkun* becomes a perpetual contemplative practice for Rav Kook, as he continuously attempts to unify contradictions in thinking and to heal brokenness in reality that inescapably takes place within messianic time. What takes places in time cannot be extracted from Rav Kook's notion of being, as it necessarily encompasses his very own constitution of self.²⁶

To appreciate the volatility and urgency of Rav Kook's messianic impulse, it is important to understand the abiding influence of the rabbinic notion to the effect that "in the time of the footsteps of the Messiah, impudence (*hutzpah*) will swell."²⁷ This rabbinic notion imagined a chaotic pre-messianic eschaton preceding the messianic era, a time in which everything, including morality, becomes topsy-turvy. Such messianic *chutzpah* is crucial in breaking through all the inevitable accretions of exilic existence. In the hasidic thought of Chabad so crucial to Rav Kook's spiritual formation, this is "referred to as *dillug*, skipping, vaulting over seemingly unbridgeable gaps—non-being and being, nothingness and existence, man and God—a skipping that lands on its feet because in the end it is all the same

ground.” In his inimitably dialectical way of thinking, Rav Kook fuses the rabbinic with the hasidic as a response to “the confusions of modernity.”²⁹ A good part of that confusion, which Rav Kook witnessed first-hand while stranded in exile by the horrors of World War I in St. Gallen, Switzerland, lies with nationalism.³⁰

The power of the burgeoning Jewish nationalism that marks Zionism is closely linked to the temptation of heresy for Rav Kook, insofar as most forms of base nationalism tend to be guided by universal ethics, which were in opposition to the specificity of Jewish ethics—and this struck him as morally problematic.³¹ And indeed, each of Rav Kook’s main disciples managed, tragically, to exacerbate this moral problematic intrinsic to nationalism. Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlap “saw around him a time of cosmic rebirth under the sign of Messiah ben Joseph, an era of purest darkness in which the ontologically vapid gentiles, facing spiritual evaporation, had to try to destroy Israel,”³² with the result that the entire being of the people of Israel is essentialized to the height of holiness. Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook’s messianic impudence found expression in May 1967, in his rejection of the 1947 United Nations vote to partition Palestine, as he cried out to throngs of his *Merkaz Harav* students: “Where is our Hebron—are we forgetting it?! And our Jericho... our East Bank?! Where is each and every clod of earth? Every last bit, every four cubits of the Land of Israel? Can we forego even one millimeter of them? God forbid! Shaken in all my body, all wounded and in pieces, I couldn’t, then, rejoice”³³—with the result that the Land of Israel is essentialized to the height of holiness. By raising peoplehood and land to the level of untouchable holy of holies, Rav Kook’s legacy was betrayed—losing, in the process, Rav Kook’s vision of *tikkun olam* as a macrocosmic, universal vision of his microcosmic, personal piety.

Clearly, a very different tension characterized Rav Kook’s own thinking about messianism than the version of that same tension that his students felt. But it was that very tension that led him to

distinguish between the pre-Sinaitic Abrahamic/Noahide laws and the Torah of Moses revealed at Sinai. Whereas the former promulgated, in Rav Kook's mind, a kind of natural morality with an ethical goal of creaturely peace and kindness that were intuited and thus predated full revelation at Mount Sinai, the Torah of Moses presents "sacral *mizvot*...[as an] educational means towards the higher morality of the future, [while] they are of as much ethical import as are the simple kindnesses of the present."³⁴

Notice how globalized Rav Kook's vision of redemption becomes in the following passage from *Eight Files*, in which Rav Kook interprets a rabbinic dictum regarding redemption; it seems that he imagines Israel–Diaspora relations to hold the very key to *tikkun olam*:

The sanctity of nature emanates from the sanctity of the Land of Israel, so that [the notion that] the Shekhinah that descended into the Diaspora to accompany the Jews in exile [becomes] the connective tissue that ensures sanctity in opposition to nature. But any holiness that is opposed to nature always remains incomplete. Holiness needs to be swallowed up in its supernal crystallization in holiness—which is the very holiness of nature itself. This is the foundation of *tikkun olam* altogether and [will be] its resolution at the end of time. The holiness in the Diaspora will be connected to the holiness in the Land of Israel, so that in the future all synagogues and academies of Babylonia will become permanently ensconced in the Land of Israel.³⁵

Clearly there is a dialectic being set up here within Rav Kook's cosmology between the macrocosm of Israel and the microcosm of the Diaspora. Each institution located therein, whether a place of Torah (such as an academy) or a place of prayer (such as a synagogue) constitutes an entire *olam*, an entire world—and at times, these may be in opposition with one another. Indeed, it is the opposition

between these polarities of holiness that Rav Kook seeks to unify through his vision of *tikkun olam*, which is a process of unifying these oppositional energy fields. So it is in this sense that I want to press deeper into Mirsky's claim that "central to [Rav Kook's] thought-world was messianism, an apocalyptic energy field that held in place the conflicting elements of his time," while "he did not see himself as the Messiah, but did understand his own expansive and healing consciousness as profoundly redemptive."³⁷

Following Rav Kook's own thought-world of messianism as a process animating and sustaining the collective world soul, rather than merely as potential embodied in a particular person, it becomes somewhat questionable to dismiss his messianic impulse in favor of a seemingly more neutralized redemptive consciousness. After all, redemptive consciousness is part and parcel of the messianic impulse that courses through all beings—from the being of the soul of Rav Kook and other righteous individuals (*tzaddikim*), to the being of the larger world-soul in which his particular soul was nestled. A revision of Mirsky's earlier claims regarding messianic neutralization will be necessary, if we are to take into account the following three facets of messianism in Rav Kook's thought:

1. Rav Kook's scathing, albeit idiosyncratic, critique of the Church for having stripped away the personal messianism of Jesus, thus causing "a crippling absence of spiritual *élan vital*" as well as leading to the Church's "refusal to believe that the material world could be redeemed on its own terms"³⁸;
2. The reading of Rav Kook's oeuvre by the self-described "Rav Kook Circle" in the early 1940s, as well as by his later disciples-cum-apostles, according to which it was possible to understand those "teachings as esoteric and entirely sacred, a corpus whose very study was itself part of the redemptive process",³⁹ and
3. Rav Kook's fear of being punished with afflictions for having revealed too much esoteric knowledge.⁴⁰

With these considerations in mind, there is no escaping the conclusion that it was the primacy of the messianic impulse within Rav Kook's thought-world that influenced his expansive vision of *tikkun olam* as a force that could reach out to the external cosmos only insofar as it delved deeply into the internal piety of the mystic. Put simply, Rav Kook is stretching the term *tikkun olam* to encompass both the macrocosm “out there” and the microcosm within himself. Given the desire for the unification of both realms, the distinction between Messiah and world collapses—leaving only the flow of messianic consciousness free to bring redemption to the world.

For such a messianic impulse to be coursing through all of being necessitates quite a different view of the world and the cosmos, starting with the world-soul itself. While the notion of the world-soul really begins with Plotinus, in this regard Rav Kook followed more precisely in the spirit of the modern-style idealism that characterized German Romanticism at its most spiritual, envisioning “the natural course of the world flowing toward its ultimate rectification of *tikkun*...as being interwoven into the fabric of its deepest truth at all times.”⁴¹ German Romanticism, especially as expressed in the thinking of Hegel, had posited a developmental model of the *Weltgeist* (“the world spirit”) that animates history, in which Judaism represented an early stage that needed to be superseded through the advent of Christianity. Already by 1912, Rav Kook had sought to focus Hegel's biased philosophy of history through the lens of the Jewish thinker Nahman Krochmal (1785–1840). In so doing, he created a fourfold counter-argument to Hegel, namely:

1. that the “Absolute Spirit” arises precisely in the nation;
2. that the “Absolute Spirit” is realized through the vehicle of commanded morality or *mizvot*;
3. that the “Absolute Spirit” is already embodied within the Jewish people, and
4. that the “Absolute Spirit” is the fusion of body and soul as manifest in the nation, rather than in the state.⁴³

The rectification of the world—“from both a particular and universal sense—is the completion of its messianic impulse illuminating it,”⁴⁴ from the moment of its being embedded at the incipience of creation. The Hegelian “Absolute Spirit” comes across in Rav Kook as *ru'ah*, *n'shamah*, or *havayah*, and that messianic impulse is not something that “just appears from thin air...but courses through all pathways of the opening heart.”⁴⁵ And it is in this spirit that Rav Kook explicitly correlates the light of that messianic impulse to *tikkun olam*.⁴⁶

In this next passage, notice how collective human evolution as a revelation of the “Absolute Spirit” in history—a theme that derives directly from Hegel’s philosophy of history⁴⁷—is correlated to the specificity of a Jewish approach to the “spirit” (*n'shamah*), through a directing of the heart known as “intentionality” (*kavvanah*):

Humanity desperately needs to evolve to the point where it recognizes the great value of an Intentionality and its Desire, of the hidden idealism within the depths of the soul. [These spiritual aspects] are always adorned in the bounty of new colors, which radiate some of the soul’s power and her great splendor. All of the great ethical deeds in the world, both universal and particular, are merely a manifestation of constricted consciousness, miniature sparks from the great flame of an integral Intentionality. Intentionality is everything. The renaissance of Intentionality is the renaissance of the world...Intentionality stands out within the letters, and the names, for every letter and vowel within them are an abyss of both seas and tributaries, great Niles and the expansive hands of life, desire, aspiration and enlightenment, strength and power, unity and splendor. Intentionality is manifest in its grasp of the holy bodies, pure idealistic people, where the upright and good deeds and ethics are the feeling of their vitalization. What illumination becomes manifest in the world, through a vital and invigorated Intentionality!

The supernal secrecy comes and connects the soul, directed in its intentionality, with the eidetic source of life, with the ultimate root; and the limitless light, the light of the living God, progresses and expresses ambitions as manifest in every thought and action. Intentionality is what gives birth to action. *Tikkun olam* is encompassed and integrated within the supernal intentionality invested with divine vitality. *Tikkun olam* is integrated within every thought of peace and encompassed within the battle for what is just and right. *Tikkun olam* is integrated within the endurance of wisdom and the structure of what is good and pleasing, all of which is encompassed within it.

Serving as a communal rabbi of Jaffa early on during his residency in the Land of Israel, Rav Kook was exposed to the ebb and flow of such collective diversity. Regardless of the conflict—whether between the loosely traditional secular Zionist Jews of the “new” *yishuv* and the staunchly traditionalist Jews of the “old” *yishuv*, or between Jews and Arabs—Rav Kook was always extending himself and taking advantage of his position as Chief Rabbi to promote the pathways of peace and friendship. Given his messianic impulse, it is clear that this kind of communal activism was very much integral to his realization of *tikkun olam*.⁴⁹ The mystical vision undergirding Rav Kook’s vigilance to extend himself beyond the expected halakhic legalism of the old *yishuv* (including matters regarding the status quo of religious devotion) clearly stems from a commitment to do his part as a spiritual agent charged with the task of *tikkun olam*: to restore that primordial harmony to a world now mired in chaos. Such devotion embodies “a kind of *tikkun olam*” just as much as does “a deeply spiritual recitation of the Shema and all the letters of its blessings,”⁵⁰ as it is embodied in a spiritual activism that extends the sanctuary walls into a prayer-life of conciliatory outreach within one’s own community.⁵¹ The radical implications of this kind of piety result

in a rewriting of Judaism's self-understanding, whereby "the seeming sinners, were, in their commitment to the Jewish people, the land, and social justice, closer in themselves to the messianic restoration than were pious Jews."⁵² Rav Kook's dedication was to seeing each of these opposing groups, as Mirsky astutely notes, eventually reach and heal each other, as part of the process of incremental messianic development embodied in *tikkun olam*.⁵³ This perspective then shines an entirely new light on the role of the messianic impulse within the collective setting of the community, as Rav Kook writes:

When asked about the direction of communal life, the answer cannot be found from within existence itself, unless we merit entering the aspiration of the great and exulted universe, which shimmers slightly through into the world of knowledge, and in all the expansiveness of the world of the spirit. It is here that we already come to the conclusion that it is impossible for all of human aspiration to be immersed only in such communal life alone. Moreover, if communal life stopped being weaned from its supernal nourishment above it, then its purpose would become deficient...And for this to be so, *tikkun ha-olam* [must] demand that we envision a deep redemption from the founts of supernal redemption. So the eternal hope of Israel—for the illumination of the messianic impulse, for the divine light in the world—is the basis of the world and all its conditions. Even the communal formations with all their fragmentations lead to the necessity that what people are envisioning will be found. All their fountains will be immersed in the same supernal directives, and their visions will ascend and shower upon the communal visions that are holding up such substantial space in our vast universe at present.⁵⁴

While nationalism is the spark that lights the fire of inspiration here for Rav Kook, it is clearly a call to envision the messianic impulse driving Zionism. One must give heed to the messianic impulse, as it is redeemed from exile and opens new pathways to liberation for the “the spiritual renaissance of the integral human being.”⁵⁵ But one must *also* continually seek a more expansive consciousness that can accommodate the messianic impulse. Rav Kook describes this process in the following ornate passage:

At this auspicious hour of national revival, each day there comes forth [development] from potentia to actua in different gradations while the entire world is rattling the cries of war, whose direction is concealed, except unto God who knows all outcomes—this is surely the setting up of *tikkun olam* under the sovereignty of Shaddai, through Israel’s return to its stronghold, to be a proper and dignified nation whose ways shall be revealed throughout all paths of life, all living things; and all orders of nature from all national police forces to the spiritual seekers are signs of the spiritual renaissance that constitute the integrated human macrocosm (*ba-adam ha-k’lali*). Indeed, even the celestial throngs are moving in this direction of rectifying (*u-m’taknim*, from the same root as *tikkun*) the darkened site of the destroyed Temples, as well as liberating those [dark] forces that are imprisoning the Shekhinah in the depths of her exile—they are all moving forward and evolving. The heavy chains fettering the Messiah’s legs are being shattered, falling away like chaff in the fire, like thin threads of flax passing between burning flames. Even though the national renaissance, and the signs of the spiritual renaissance of the integral human being all appear to be occurring from the external and embodied perspective, it is from these very crises that the spiritual [nature] and the light of the supernal soul in all its configurations is being

built. The supernal light of redemption is moving forward and revealing itself in the multiple golden waves. The time has come to embrace all creative thinkers, philosophers, interpreters, and anyone who is inspired by the divine spirit and longs for the presence of the Holy Spirit, to come and [self-]cleanse through the depth of thinking in the secrets of Torah, with free spirit, with discernment and blessing, [with] the great logic and the purifying service so exalted and uplifting. The exultation of this holiness is revealed through singular mystics. So all who envision some kind of a sign from within their spirit, even if it is faint, are actually perceiving a tiding of this holiness, a tiding that will add strength by listening to the secret supernal sounds, uplifting the limited and finite human consciousness to become more expansive within the supernal grove of holiness, where the spiritual light of hidden holiness and the wondrous aroma of the Messiah, herald of the redemptive moment that originates deep within the God of Jacob.⁵⁶

By surveying even briefly the voluminous censored writings of a major twentieth-century mystic, we have the opportunity to appreciate the nuances of Rav Kook's innovative philosophical reading and mystical practice of *tikkun olam*. I have attempted to show just how the idea of *tikkun olam* was invested with a kind of redemptive messianism by Rav Kook, who brought a unique philosophical depth and spiritual grandeur to the concept—which it often lacks, when used merely as a handy Jewish sound-bite to working for social justice, outside the larger framework of a philosophy of history. Rav Kook offers a countervailing and unifying approach in his thinking about *tikkun olam*, within a perspective of philosophical mysticism, that is uniquely and simultaneously concerned with the messianic process

of transforming the outer macrocosm through the transformation of one's inner microcosm. His unique adaptation of the concept of *tikkun olam* thus becomes a call to spiritual activism—one that extends at once beyond the walls of the synagogue and the house of study, into a contemplative life of conciliatory outreach with the world while also delving deeper into one's own spiritual life. The radical implications of this kind of piety result in a rewriting of Judaism's self-understanding. This kind of *tikkun olam* takes the shape of a form of redemption that is not an externalized person or event from without; rather it is a deeply dialectical process from within, albeit one with deep macrocosmic reverberations.

The spiritual healing that Rav Kook dedicated his life to bring to light could only have been possible as part of a deep, personally pious, and utterly inner *tikkun olam* that has the capacity to precede the restorative *tikkun* of the historical *olam*. The messianic impulse pulsating through this proto-Zionism that gave birth to the State of Israel allowed Rav Kook to paint his thoroughly modern canvas of redemption with a most vibrant and diverse palette of colors. Giving heed to this macrocosmic messianic impulse opens new pathways to liberation for the spiritual renaissance of the microcosmic, integral human being—and that is the ultimate purpose of *tikkun olam*.

NOTES

¹ Rabbi Abraham Isaac ben Shelomo Zalman Hakohen Kook was born in Griva (modern-day Latvia) in 1865 and he died in Jerusalem in 1935. Rav Kook is often referred to as the Rayah (the acronym of his name).

² Avraham Isaac Kook, *Sh'monah K'vatzim*, File 1 (Edition for Students of the Academy: Jerusalem, 5764 [2003–2004]). There is much speculation surrounding the censorship that was carried out regularly by Rav Kook's inner circle of disciples and editors, both David Cohen (known as the Nazir) as well as Rabbi Moshe Charlap. The primary reason for editorial censoring of the strong messianic impulse in Rav Kook's writings was his disciples' sense that the world was not yet ripe for such a message. For more on the specifics of editorial censorship, see Avinoam Rosenak, "Hidden Diaries and New Discoveries: The Life and Thought of Rabbi A. I. Kook," in *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 25:3 (Spring 2007), pp. 111–147.

³ The thrust of this "neutralization" revolves around how the esoteric impulse is sublimated for the sake of keeping exoteric religion together, in light of previous messianic movements that revealed too much esoteric truth. Cf. Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken, 1971), pp. 176–202, esp. 201. For a revisionist approach to neutralization of messianism in Jewish mysticism, see Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

⁴ See Israel Knohl, *The Messiah Before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

⁵ See Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).

⁶ See Zvi Mark and Naftali Moses, *The Scroll of Secrets: The Hidden Messianic Vision of R. Nachman of Breslav* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2010).

⁷ See Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menahem Mendel Schneerson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

⁸ See David Berger's *The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001).

⁹ Yeshayahu Ginsburg, "On Chabad," in *The Beacon: An Open Platform for the Orthodox Community* (April 22, 2013), available online at <http://thebeaconmag.com/2013/04/opinions/on-chabad>.

¹⁰ Yehudah Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 229.

¹¹ Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution*, p. 237.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁵ Still-hidden files remain suppressed by the inner circle of disciples connected with Mossad Harav Kook and they will eventually be published, presumably,

once the world is ready for the advent of the messianic age.

¹⁶ Rav Kook, *Sh'monah K'vatzim*, File 1, §151, p. 59, quoted and translated in Rosenak, "Hidden Diaries and New Discoveries," p. 115, n. 24.

¹⁷ Rosenak, "Hidden Diaries and New Discoveries," p. 120.

¹⁸ For a wonderful intellectual biography of this fascinating figure, see most recently Yehudah Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution*, p. 1.

¹⁹ Mirsky rightly points out the degree to which the ideological highlighting and editing of Rav Kook's writings by his son, Tzvi Yehudah, continued a process of "blunting the more radical theological leaps and harsher critiques of conventional religiosity, and subtly but unmistakably heightening the nationalist dimensions"; see Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution*, p. 224.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 3 and 50.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 40 and 49.

²⁶ The French Jewish thinker Emmanuel Levinas will come, by 1948, to a full-fledged critique of this link between being and time in his teacher Martin Heidegger's magnum opus of the same title (*Sein und Zeit*, 1927). However, that same proclivity for considering *extasis* as a core tenet in mystical thinking, evident in Heidegger's ontology, is already sensed in Rav Kook. Further consideration of the *Zeitgeist* surrounding Kook and Heidegger is beyond the scope of this essay.

²⁷ M. Sotah 9:15. The original reads: *be'ik'vata di-m'shikba hutzpah yasgei*.

²⁸ Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution*, p. 98. This critical point made by Mirsky deserves much deeper reflection—namely, the correlation between Rav Kook's re-reading of the Chabad concept of *dillug* relative to his idiosyncratic notion of *tikkun olam* within messianic time, and Heidegger's notion of "skipping over." Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein Und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), I: III: 62, p. 66.

²⁹ Yehudah Mirsky, *An Intellectual and Spiritual Biography of Rabbi Avraham Yitzbaq Ha-Cohen Kook from 1865–1904* (Ph.D. dissertation; Harvard University, March 2007), pp. 379–386; compare with Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution*, pp. 59–61.

³⁰ Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution*, pp. 121–156.

³¹ Mirsky, *An Intellectual and Spiritual Biography*, pp. 379–380.

³² Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution*, p. 223. Rabbi Charlap (1882–1951) was the head of the *Merkaz Harav* yeshiva in Jerusalem, founded by Rav Kook in 1924.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

³⁴ *Idem.*, *An Intellectual and Spiritual Biography*, p. 380.

³⁵ Rav Kook, *Sh'monah K'vatzim*, File 2, §326, p. 342. (All translations in this

essay are my own work unless otherwise indicated.) The word “crystallization” here translates the Aramaic *tamtzita*. In the rabbinic mind, in the messianic era diaspora buildings themselves will be magically be relocated to the Land of Israel; see B. Megillah 29a: “It has been taught: Rabbi Eleazar Hakappar says: “The synagogues and houses of learning in Babylon will in time to come be planted in the Land of Israel, as it says, *For as Tabor among the mountains and as Carmel by the sea came*. Now can we not draw an inference here *a fortiori*: seeing that Carmel and Tabor, which came only on a single occasion to learn the Torah, are implanted in the Land of Israel—how much more must this be the case with the synagogues and houses of learning, where the Torah is read and expounded!” In the rabbinic mind, these two mountains (or their angelic guardians) came to Sinai at the time of the giving of the Law. For Rav Kook, however, the teachings and prayers that nourish these institutions will find inspiration in the Land of Israel and will therefore relocate in order to be closer to its source; this is akin to Aḥad Ha-am’s model of the land of Israel as the central wheel, emanating and drawing inspiration from its spokes to the circumference back to its center.

³⁶ Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution*, p. 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 128–129.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁴¹ Rav Kook, *Sh'monah K'vatzim*, File 5, §106, pp. 100–101. Plotinus (204–270 C.E.), the famous Neoplatonist philosopher, expounds on this idea in his work, *The Enneads*.

⁴² Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), pp. 53, 244, and 335.

⁴³ Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution*, pp. 79–80.

⁴⁴ Rav Kook, *Sh'monah K'vatzim*, File 5, §235, p. 163.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, File #5, §235, p. 164.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, File # 5, §235, p. 165.

⁴⁷ Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pp. 53, 244, and 335.

⁴⁸ Rav Kook, *Sh'monah K'vatzim*, File #4, §61, p. 21.

⁴⁹ Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution*, pp. 83–86.

⁵⁰ For more on this call to the particular ritual expression of devotional piety, see Rav Kook, *Sh'monah K'vatzim*, File #6, §275, p. 278.

⁵¹ For more on this universal call to pious living, cf. Rav Kook, *Sh'monah K'vatzim*, File #7, §43, pp. 312–313; and also File #7, §47, pp. 316–317.

⁵² Rav Kook, *Sh'monah K'vatzim*, File #2, §21, as quoted and translated by Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution*, p. 98.

⁵³ Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution*, p. 98.

⁵⁴ Rav Kook, *Sh'monah K'vatzim*, File #7, §67, p. 327.

⁵⁵ Rav Kook, *Sh'monah K'vatzim*, File #8, §181, p. 454.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*