



# Partnering with G-d

**W**hat is the essential principle of Religious Zionism? What distinguishes it from other movements within Orthodox Judaism?

For Rav Kook, one key factor emerges from an age-old but highly relevant question of how to understand the books of our prophets. Many *nevi'im* captivately prophesied about the messianic era. The Jewish people will return to the Land of Israel and the *Beit HaMikdash* will be rebuilt. Peace and fraternity will become the norm. The hungry will be fed. G-d's palpable presence will permeate the world. All will recognize the truth of the One G-d and His Torah.

What is the relevance of these prophecies for Jews living in an imperfect world? What should be our takeaway when we read these soul stirring descriptions during the tragic times of exile?

One approach is that these prophecies are intended for consolation and encouragement. The promise of a bright future provides us with succor and hope even as we live through the depravity of the present. But on a practical level these prophecies should have little impact on our behaviors. Our job is to punctiliously observe the commandments and fervently pray for redemption. G-d will then see that we are worthy of redemption and He alone will send Mashiach to redeem us.

Rav Kook, however, taught a different approach. In his view, redemption is not solely something to be awarded but a goal to be actively pursued. The prophecies regarding the ingathering of the exiles and the establishment of a Jewish state normatively obligate us to

see them to fruition. We must partner with G-d to perfect the world.

In this context, Rav Kook quotes the following Midrash: *In the future, a heavenly voice will burst forth from the tops of mountains and declare: "Whoever acted together with G-d, let him come and take his reward... the Holy Spirit says "Who has acted before me such that I can reward him" (Vayikra Rabbah 27:2).*

G-d wants us to "act together with Him" to create redemption. For this reason, Rav Kook's conception of Religious Zionism is still urgently relevant today. While, arguably, the secular Zionist project was mostly accomplished by the establishment and strengthening of the State of Israel, for Rav Kook, this is just the beginning. Partnering with G-d to bring redemption after 1948 means trying to actualize the whole gamut of messianic prophecies within our individual and national lives. It means deeply studying the Torah's descriptions of the end of days and actively using this "light of Mashiach" to help navigate our path in the present (*Orot, Yisrael UTechiyato*, 20).

In line with this broader conception of Religious Zionism, Rav Kook cited the above Midrash in at least two different contexts. In 1906, Rav Kook wrote a public letter in which he urged Jews living in the diaspora to immigrate to the Land of Israel. After describing the virtues of living in the Land and the historical changes that made it an opportune time to make the move, Rav Kook wrote: *Who is so blind that he cannot see the hand of G-d that is guiding us, and who does not feel a personal obligation to "act together with G-d" (Ma'amarei HaRe'iyah, p. 324).*

Here, Rav Kook refers to Aliyah and settling the Land as partnering with G-d.

In an essay written 25 years later, Rav Kook once again invoked this Midrash. Here, however, his theme is not the material building of the Land, but the imperative to realize why we have returned. According to Rav Kook, our mission is to create a society in the Land of Israel that reflects G-d's most ideal values.

Therefore, in conjunction with the building of towns and businesses, a true Jewish revival must include "invest[ing] to increase the light of Torah in the Land of our lives... and then the holy and loyal spirit of the Jewish people will be revealed through the entire enterprise." By doing so, Rav Kook writes, we will fulfil the words of the Midrash of "act[ing] together with G-d" to bring redemption (*Ma'amarei HaRe'iyah*, pg. 73).

Partnering with G-d to create a redeemed reality is a multifaceted project. Even as we thank G-d for what we have, we still must actively work towards making life in Israel pulsate with the spirituality and morality of the Torah. We must be a part of creating the utopian society that we want to live within.

May we merit to partner with G-d towards the material and spiritual redemption of the Jewish people, and ultimately, the whole world.

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