



‘THE LIGHT OF TOLERANCE’— BETWEEN RABBI ABRAHAM KOOK AND HOJA EFENDI FETHULLAH GÜLEN

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Abstract

This paper deals with similarities between the ideas of two religious leaders, Hoja Efendi Fethullah Gülen and Rabbi Abraham HaKohen Kook, with emphasis on their ideas of the state and tolerance. Abraham Isaac Kook was born in Griva, Latvia in 1865. In 1904, Kook moved to Ottoman Palestine to assume the rabbinical post in Jaffa. In 1919 he was appointed Rabbi of Jerusalem, and soon after, as first Chief Rabbi in 1921. His books and personality continue to influence many even after his death in Jerusalem in 1935. Attempting to synthesize traditional Judaism with a modern and largely secular ideology Kook should be properly understood as a pragmatic consensus-builder and present-day Jewish National-religious stream draws on his ideology. Fethullah Gülen always addressed by his followers as Hoja Efendi (respected teacher) was born in Erzurum in eastern Turkey in 1941. In 1953 he began his career as a government preacher and has travelled the length and breadth of Turkey since. His movement seeks integration with the modern world by reconciling modern and traditional values and hopes to re-establish the link between religion and society. Both leaders express a unique synthesis of state/nationalism and religion, military service and religious life. They both seek the integration of religious people into the modern life and prefer to do it by using tolerance as a way of living. Interesting to note, that both leaders make the same use of the term ‘light’, for instance; Rabbi Kook titled his most famous book : ‘Orot HaTorah’ (lights of Torah, Tevrat ışıkları). Both leaders represent the same ideology within their respective societies: Jewish-Israeli and Muslim-Turkish, as tolerant religious orthodoxies.

"I love all.

I am unable not to love all creatures,

All the nations.

From the depth of my heart i long for the glory of all,

for the uplifting of all."

(Rabbi Kook, Arfiley Tohar [The Mists of Purity])

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"Sevgi yaşatan bir İksirdir; İnsan sevgiyle yaşar...Sevgiyle mutlu olur ve sevgiyle çevresini mutlu eder..." [Love is the elixir of life. Human beings live by virtue of love...thanks to love you are joyful, and be means of ove you bring joy to your neighbours...]

(Fethullah Gülen, İnsanın Üzündeki Sevgi [the love inside the people])

1. Introduction

Both Rabbi Avraham Hacoen Kook and Fethullah Gülen Hoca, each an influential and enlightened leader in his own community, expressed tolerant attitudes unusual for their age. By examining their lives and writings, we may better understand how inter-religious dialogue may be achieved.

2. A brief summary of their lives

2.1. Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook (1865-1935)

Early life

Rabbi Kook, sometimes called: "The seer of Light", was a rabbi, religious arbiter, Kabbalist and philosopher. Having immigrated to the Holy Land during "Second Aliyah" (the wave of immigration before 1914), he developed a philosophical, Kabbalistic position favorable to Zionism and the new settlement movement. This system of thought, expressed in works compiled from his writings in the realm of religious law, philosophy, exegesis, ethics, Kabbalah and homiletics ("Aggadah") forms a significant component in the world outlook of the various elements of the National-Religious Movement of today.

Born in the village of Griva, Latvia, his first teacher was his learned father. At the end of 13 ("Bar Mitzva"), he was sent off to study in nearby towns. Married in 1884 to the daughter of Rabbi Elyahu Te'omim, he spent a year studying at the prestigious Volozhin Yeshiva,¹⁶⁵ where he acquired most of his religious education. Appointed in 1888 as rabbi of the Lithuanian town of Zeimel, he began to devote himself to Kabbalah. After the early death of his first wife, he married her cousin, and in 1895 was elected rabbi of Boysak, where he began to publish his precepts in the journal "HaPelles".¹⁶⁶

The Jaffa Period

When the Jewish community of Jaffa, prompted by Rabbi Joel Moshe Solomon, requested him to serve as their rabbi, he hastened to fulfill his dream of immigrated to the Land of Israel. Landing at Jaffa harbor in 1904, he quickly took up his post as rabbi of Jaffa and the new settlements. The period at Jaffa, the most fruitful for his writings, produced the material for many of his most influential

¹⁶⁵ Yeshiva or Yeshivah (plural: yeshivot) is an institution for Torah study and the study of the Talmud by males primarily within Orthodox Judaism. Could also be translated as Divinity School.

¹⁶⁶ Sources for descriptions of the Rabbi's life: Kook, A.Y. HaCohen. (1961) Letters of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook (Jerusalem, HaRav Kook Institute). (Heb.)



works : *Orot HaTorah* [Lights of Torah],¹⁶⁷ *Orot HaTfilah* [The Lights of Prayers]¹⁶⁸, *Orot HaTshuva* [The Lights of Repentance],¹⁶⁹ and more. At that time he also promoted the establishment of the Takhkemoni School which combined religious and secular studies: "to educate man to be honest and good" "and to prepare him "for the struggle of life". This expression of his view that it is imperative to progress with the spirit of the age, aroused strong opposition among extreme sectors of the Jerusalem Rabbinate. Further dissent was created by his relations with the secular leaders of the Labor Movement, by his support of the growing agricultural settlements, and by his willingness to find religious, canonical sanction for their continued existence. He also founded a small yeshivah in Jaffa, where the students spent half a day poring over the holy Writings, but worked at everyday jobs during the second half.¹⁷⁰

The World War 1 Period

In 1914, Rabbi Kook participated in the founding meeting of the World Congress of "Agudat Israel" in Europe, due to his hope of bringing the leaders of that movement closer to Zionism.¹⁷¹ Stranded there after only a month by the outbreak of W.W.1, he was forced to remain in Switzerland till 1916 when he was called to serve as a rabbi in London. There he became deeply involved in public activity in an effort to aid the settlement of The Land of Israel. Following the publication of Rabbi Kook's manifesto in the British synagogues, many memoranda were sent from the Jewish congregations to English parliamentary groups, affirming that the Faith of Israel is linked to Israel's Nationalism and to the Land of Israel. These were highly influential in the issuing of the Balfour Declaration of 1917. After the end of the war, and having spent almost three years in London, Rabbi Kook returned to the Land of Israel in 1919, when he was appointed Rabbi of Jerusalem. In an attempt to provide solutions to religious problems arising from the transition from Diaspora life to the conditions of life in the Holy Land, he helped to establish the institution of Chief Rabbinate.¹⁷² In 1921, after his appointment as Chief Ashkenazic Rabbi of the Land of Israel, he continued his public activities and his writing till the end of his life. He died of cancer at age 70 in 1935, and was buried with great honor in the Holy City.¹⁷³ His son and spiritual heir, Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook, continued his work, while Rabbi Yehudah Maimon founded an academy for Jewish studies and a publication society in Jerusalem that bear Kook's name.

Though Rabbi Kook is considered a conservative from the standpoint of "Halacha" (legal tradition), his philosophical outlook is seen as profoundly original as well as being bold and dialectical. It draws upon his response not only to Jewish writings of all periods, but also to universal thought, in a unique blend of Bible, Talmud, Hebrew philosophy, and Kabbalah, with more modern concepts absorbed from the scientific and philosophical world of his day. All these he succeeded in molding into a unified

¹⁶⁷ Kook, A.Y. HaCohen. (1900) Lights of Torah (Jerusalem, Jerusalem Publishing).(Heb.)

¹⁶⁸ Kook, A.Y. HaCohen. (1979) Lights of Prayer, M.T. Neria (ed.) (Jerusalem, Lavi Publishing). (Heb.)

¹⁶⁹ Kook, A.Y. HaCohen. (1935) Light of Repentance (Jerusalem, Jerusalem Publishing). (Heb.)

¹⁷⁰ Yaron, Z. (1979) The Philosophy of Rabbi Kook (Jerusalem, The World Zionist Organization). 14. (Heb.)

¹⁷¹ A political Social Ultra Orthodox movement, which was founded in 1912 as a universal religious organization. Back then staunchly opposed to the new settlements.

¹⁷² Gerber, R. (2005) The Enlightenment Revolution- the Spiritual Way of Rabbi Avraham Isaac Haohen Kook (Jerusalem, Biyalik Institute) 192. (Heb.)

¹⁷³ Neria M. T. (1986) In the field of Rabbi Kook (Kfar HaRoeh Publishing) 43-44. (Heb.)



system and mode of teaching, thus becoming revered as one of the most outstanding figures among Jewish thinkers of recent generations. Apart from members of the extreme Orthodox Community who bitterly opposed his modernistic, nationalist views, all those who came into contact with Rabbi Kook admired him deeply. While the zealously sectarian rabbis respected him for his profound Torah knowledge, they declared an irreconcilable religious war against him, claiming his progressive Zionist beliefs to be totally false, so that he suffered deeply from the schism till his last days. As he walked through the streets of the orthodox quarter of Me'a Shearim [100 Gates] in Jerusalem, he heard the epithet "Heretic!" hurled at him from behind closed shutters. Of the many books he wrote, he succeeded in publishing a few himself, but most of them appeared, often in edited versions, only after his death.

2.2. Fethullah Gülen (b.1938)

Childhood

Fethullah Gülen Hoca was born in 1938,¹⁷⁴ in the small village of Koruçuk (with fewer than 80 homes), in the Hasankale sector of the Province of Erzurum, eastern Turkey. His father, a religious teacher in the local mosque and his mother, a housewife, had six children, of whom Fethullah Hoca was the second son.¹⁷⁵ The early death of one of his brothers during his childhood affected his life deeply.¹⁷⁶

His father's influence was extremely significant. Fethullah Hoca relates that his father's eyes were always filled with tears, but that he never wasted his time. He wrote that although he grew up in a small village in material poverty, to the point of actual privation, he was apparently blessed with 'regal breeding'.¹⁷⁷ And it was indeed his father who exposed him to the world of Islam's classical philosophers.¹⁷⁸ During childhood, Fethullah Hoca ran the family errands, helped his mother with household chores, and even cared for the herds of goats. In his leisure time, he loved to read books or to memorize verses from the Koran (Hafızlık).¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ According to the records of the Turkish Population Office, Fethullah Gülen was born April 27, 1941. See Ünal, A. (2004) M. Fethullah Gülen Bir Portre Denemesi (İstanbul: Nil Yayınları), 508.(Tur.)

Nonetheless, most books about Gülen as well as his speeches, note the year of his birth as 1938. see for example: Gülen, F.M. (2000) Prophet Muhammad : Aspects of his life (Virginia :The Fountain), i.(Tur.)

The reason for the discrepancy may be that his father reported his birth to the authorities only 3 years later.

¹⁷⁵ Gülen, F.M. (1996) Fasıldan Fasıla 3 (İzmir: Nil A.Ş Yayınları). Cover. (Tur.)

¹⁷⁶ One version claims that it was a sister who died: www.pearls.org/authors/biography.html, while another version attests to the death of his brother: <http://en.fgülen.com/a.page/life/biography/c160.html>

The first version notes that for years Gülen visited his sister's gravesite and wept.

¹⁷⁷ Nursi, Ş. (1996) Küçük Dünyam (Hatırlar)- 3. Zaman, 27 Kasım. (Tur.)

¹⁷⁸ Sartoprak Z. and Sidney G. (2005) Fethullah Gülen and the 'People of the Book': A Voice from Turkey for Interfaith Dialogue. The Muslim World, 95, 3. 331.

¹⁷⁹ Nursi, Ş. (1996) Küçük Dünyam (Hatırları)- 5. Zaman, 26 Kasım. (Tur.)



His Education

Beginning to pray at the age of four, Fethullah Hoca affirms that since then he never missed a prayer-service. Since teaching of the Koran was forbidden at that time, his mother, his first Koranic teacher, used to rise in the middle of the night to teach him and later all the women and girls of the village.¹⁸⁰ his first instructor in Arabic was his father, but later he studied in Erzurum under the grandson of Lutfi, Sadi Efendi.¹⁸¹ In 1949, Fethullah Hoca's family moved to the town of Alvar after a brief stay in Artuzu,¹⁸² at which time the boy was forced to leave primary school after only two and a half years of study. Though his teacher had recommended entering him into the fourth grade, the move curtailed his education and Fethullah Hoca completed his studies later, by his own efforts. By his own admission, he finds it hard to grasp how he succeeded in learning everything by himself, noting that he was even able to read Ottoman Turkish fluently.

In 1953, Fethullah Hoca began his career as "Government Preacher", the only legal preaching post available in Turkey at that time. His great rhetorical skills made him a highly gifted orator, raising him to the first rank of Islamic preachers of Eastern Anatolia in the 1970's.¹⁸³ In 1959 he moved to Edirne, the gateway of Turkey to the West.¹⁸⁴ On the way, he spent several days in Ankara, during which time he took the Preaching (Vaızlık) Examination of the Administration of Religions, and was later informed by his relative Hüseyin that he had passed successfully.¹⁸⁵ In Edirne, Fethullah Hoca spent large sums of money in purchasing books which he considered to be of value, and would give books and journals as presents to his friends. His generosity is often alluded to by his friends, for it was known that he was frequently in financial straits. He ate and slept very little, by his own admission, so that his abstemious life-style once forced him to be hospitalized for a fortnight.¹⁸⁶ at Edirne, Fethullah Hoca first received the position of Second Imam in the Mosque of the "Üç Şerefeli Camii" [Three Illustrious Ones]. Now, for the first time in his life, he received a regular salary of 170 pounds.¹⁸⁷

His Military Service

On November 10, 1961, Fethullah Hoca began his military service at Mamak.¹⁸⁸ At the same time, he continued to lecture on religious subjects.¹⁸⁹ Having been sent to serve at Iskenderun, he fell ill due to

¹⁸⁰ Erdoğan, L.(1995) Fethullah Gülen Hocaefendi- Küçük Dünyam (İstanbul: AD Yayıncılık), 25. (Tur.)

¹⁸¹ <http://en.fGülen.com/a.page/life/biography/c160.html>

¹⁸² His move to Artuzu took place after the move to Alvar and before the move to Erzurum.

Ünal A. and Williams, A. (2000) Fethullah Gülen- Advocate of Dialogue (Virginia: The Fountain),14, www.thefountainmagazine.com

¹⁸³ www.islamonline.com/cgi-bin/news_service/spot_full_story.asp?service_id=750.

¹⁸⁴ Ünal, M. Fethullah Gülen Bir Portre Denemesi. 508.

¹⁸⁵ Erdoğan, Fethullah Gülen Hocaefendi- Küçük Dünyam. 47-48.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 51

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 149

¹⁸⁸ according to another opinion, he started his service on the 11th of November: Ünal A. and Williams, A. Fethullah Gülen- Advocate of Dialogue, 18. www.thefountainmagazine.com

¹⁸⁹ <http://en.fGülen.com/a.page/life/life.chronology/p1055.html>



the change of climate, and was granted three months' leave back at Erzurum, which he had left four years earlier.¹⁹⁰ At Iskenderun he had undergone disciplinary punishment which included ten days' imprisonment in an army jail, due to a sermon which he had preached there.¹⁹¹ Three months later, Fethullah Hoca returned to his unit, at last completed his army service, and was released in 1963. Returning to Erzurum, he stayed with his family for a year, and then went back to Edirne.¹⁹² During his military service, one of Fethullah Hoca's superior officers who had a thorough knowledge of Sufism, urged Fethullah Hoca to read Western classics. As a result, he became familiar not only with classics of the West, but also with Eastern Islamic writings, both religious and non-religious.¹⁹³ Consequently, Fethullah Hoca read widely in Rousseau, Balzac, Dostoyevski, Pushkin, Tolstoy and many others,¹⁹⁴ as well as in the great works of the East.

His Civilian Life and the Founding of the Movement

At Erzurum, Gülen continued to give lectures, and for the first time began to visit the "Halk Evi" [People's Hall], where he presented lectures and seminars to the local people. In the framework of Gülen's work as a young teacher, we may find elements which testify to his pro-nationalist approach.

In August of 1964, he returned preach at Edirne, where he gave his services voluntarily as teacher of the Koran and as Imam of the Dar'ül Hadis Mosque. Moving to Izmir in March of 1965, he assumed his position as official preacher of the Administration of Religions, and also served as teacher in the Islamic study hall Kestanepazarı Kur'an Derneği. In addition, he presented volunteer lectures and seminars.¹⁹⁵ In Izmir, he became very well-known due to his enthralling sermons. Preaching in two or three additional places beside his regular Friday sermon at the Kestahanepazarı Mosque, he was extremely active, often working on Saturdays as well.¹⁹⁶ During the 1970's, Gülen gave lectures all over Western Anatolia where they earned him many followers due to his original idea of blending service to the nation with service to humanity, of combining spirituality with intellectual training, and most crucial, his belief that true happiness is reached by helping others.¹⁹⁷ Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, Gülen continued his activities in Turkey, while the 90's witnessed his emergence into the public sphere, where the movement which he founded gained increasing recognition. His entrance into the public sphere was closely connected to the issue of dialogue which he constantly emphasized, and with activities linked to advancing this topic.

¹⁹⁰ the heat in Iskenederun as opposed to the cold in Erzurum. Fethullah Hoca mentioned he had arrived to Iskenderun with a coat:

Nursi, Ş. (1996) Küçük Dünyam (Hatırları)- 12. Zaman, 6 Aralık.

¹⁹¹ www.kimkimdir.gen.tr/yazdir.php?id=2659.

¹⁹² Ünal, A. M. Fethullah Gülen Bir Portre Denemesi, 508.

¹⁹³ Ünal A. and Williams, A. Fethullah Gülen- Advocate of Dialogue, 19.

¹⁹⁴ <http://en.fGülen.com/a.page/life/biography/p760.html>

¹⁹⁵ Erdoğan, L. Fethullah Gülen Hocaefendi- Küçük Dünyam, 98.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 102.

¹⁹⁷ Ünal, A. M. Fethullah Gülen Bir Portre, 509.



3. Analogies between Rabbi Kook and Fethullah Hoca

3.1. Their Personalities

Beyond the many similarities in the biographies of these two outstanding figures, they both became charismatic leaders who serve as role- models for thousands of admirers, despite their extreme modesty. It was related of Rabbi Kook: "his humility, self-effacement and unwillingness to be showered with honors were well known." When a celebration was held in Haifa in the summer of 1914 to honor him, he requested that the speakers not heap praises upon him, for in Hebrew, the word "honor" connotes "heaviness", and the greater the honor, the greater the heaviness that accompanies it. His luminous personality and nobility of character are repeatedly testified to by various people who came into contact with him. One of his pupils describes their first meeting as follows:

In 1904, not long before the Feast of Pentecost [Shavuoth], I journeyed to Jaffa on my doctor's orders, to bathe in the sea. On Shavuoth, which fell on a Friday, I prayed at the "Gates of Torah" [Sha'arey Torah] synagogue. Only 21 years old at that time, I was privileged to hear how the Rabbi was reciting the Preliminary [Akdamos] prayers, before the congregation with trembling and weeping, so that I was moved to the depth of my soul. From that moment, I felt deeply bound to the rabbi with ardent love, and became his pupil and devoted adherent forever.¹⁹⁸

Kook was a profound thinker who delved deeply into spiritual questions in the privacy of his study, but was also a public figure and active leader of superior rhetorical skill, who labored untiringly for the betterment of society. His gentleness of spirit, forgiving nature, generosity, and desire to compromise so as to further peace among people were manifest in all he did, as was his constant emphasis on mankind's spark of Godliness.

Gülen, too, in his personal life, faithfully expresses the values which he teaches. Thus, for example, he lives a truly ascetic life. Living in the United States, he owns no personal property or possessions, either there or in Turkey. His dress too is extremely modest and simple, so that he refuses even to wear a tie.¹⁹⁹ Blankets, sheets and books are his only possessions.²⁰⁰ He relates that he never takes trips to the nearby regions, and that ordinary pleasures, amusements and entertainment are unnatural to him. He was determined to devote his life to spirituality and religious pursuits only, spending his days in humble living and even austerity, while never expecting to create a spiritual or social movement at all. Gülen's outstanding charisma marks him as probably the most charismatic figure in the annals of modern Turkey. He is surely the most wise and learned among Turkey's religious leaders, especially because of his comprehensive acquaintance with a uniquely broad range of erudite sources.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ [http:// he.wikipedia.org](http://he.wikipedia.org).

¹⁹⁹ Bonner, A. (2004) An Islamic Reformation in Turkey. *Middle East Policy*, 11, 1. 85

²⁰⁰ Akman, N. (1995) Sabah, 23-30 Ocak. <http://en.fGülen.com/a.page/life/biography/p760.html>.

²⁰¹ Bilici, M. (2006) The Fethullah Gülen Movement and Its Politics of Representation in Turkey. *The Muslim World*, 96, 10.



3.2. Nationalism

The nationalistic leanings of these two prominent thinkers were very similar. Gülen himself served in the army, and called upon everyone else to undertake this duty as well. Rabbi Kook was a passionate Zionist and fought valiantly for immigration to the Land of Israel. The Rabbi's spiritual path was a blend of religion and nation, so that his followers, including his son, argued in favor of army service within a religious framework, for their vision of nationalism was as a fundamental religious component of the redemption of the Jewish people.²⁰² And indeed in Israel today, there are institutions for the study of Torah (The Law, Tevrat) that inculcate the combination of religious teaching with military service, not willing to dispense with either of them. According to Rabbi Kook, the concept of the State is not the embodiment of the Divine Ideal as claimed by Hegel, but the Justification for the State is achieved only when its inhabitants live according to the Divine Ideal, with the will to exercise the Divine Ideal creating the foundation of the Nation's existence. The laws of the state must lead the national entity into becoming a national-humanistic base for emitting Divine Light.²⁰³ In a similar manner, Gülen too helps to make Islam more "nationalistic". In his view, the state or "devlet" and the nation, or "millet", do not contradict each other. There is no conflict between Turkish nationalism and religious identity.²⁰⁴ Gülen's movement strives to build a new social contract in which Ottoman-Turkish tradition will play a formative role. He brought together diverse groups to discuss Turkey's problems and to offer solutions to the conflicts between religion and science. These activities were carried out, for example, under the auspices of the Turkish Journalists and Writers Foundation [Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı].²⁰⁵ Nonetheless, there are significant differences between the two thinkers, Gülen and Kook, in their ability to express their ideas: while Rabbi Kook's activity took place just before the founding of the State of Israel, a state characterized as being "Jewish", permitting and even encouraging the establishment of "National-Religious" schools, Gülen's activity in Turkey, a state with a markedly secular Constitution, faces the fact that a synthesis between nation and religion cannot find full expression in the schools or in any educational system as may exist today. Thus, Rabbi Kook's ideas, despite struggles with the anti-nationalistic ultra orthodox community's views, fell on attentive ears, since there is a large, highly respected national-religious sector of the population, in Israel today. Yet the synthesis promoted by the Gülenic Movement is perceived by Turkish secularists as a threat to the regime, although it in no way presents religion as being contradictory to the civil authority.

3.3. Education and Educational Synthesis

Both Gülen and Kook were active in education and in establishing schools (or Yeshivot) for enhancing their religious beliefs and their respective faiths. But this was not their only purpose. As Kook averred, the ultimate foundation is education. Rabbi Kook's method in advancing the sanctification of all realms of being and all professions and wisdom is the basis of his concept of the educational value of secular and scientific studies. In the early 20th century, attempts were made by various groups in

²⁰² On Jewish Nationalism see Katz, J. (1979) *Jewish Nationalism :Essays and Studies* (Jerusalem: The World Zionist Organization) 320. (Heb.)

²⁰³ Yaron, *The Philosophy of Rabbi Kook*, 320.

²⁰⁴ Gündem, M.(2005) *Milliyet*, 27 Ocak.

²⁰⁵ Yavuz, M.H. (1999) *Search for a New Contract in Turkey: Fethullah Gülen, the Virtue Party and the Kurds*. *Sais Review*, 19, 1,125.



Eastern Europe to introduce changes into the religious-Jewish educational curriculum by adding secular to religious studies. In the contrast to other leading rabbis, Rabbi Kook did not completely oppose this trend, for he believed in the value of educational synthesis, combining the religious with the secular, while yet always ensuring that religious subjects are of primary importance, and that the more worldly studies are secondary.²⁰⁶ Kook hoped to create a society in which history, philosophy, criticism and poetry would not be the exclusive province of those who wish to undermine or destroy religion. In the yeshivot that he established, he envisioned the spiritual academy of the Israeli people, while actively founding new Torah institutes in every possible place. In 1924, he headed a delegation of rabbis to the United States for the purpose of raising funds for Torah seminaries. Received in America with great esteem, he was even awarded honorary citizenship of New York City. On his return to the Land of Israel, he also witnessed his founding of the Yeshiva in Jerusalem called "The Central World Yeshiva" or more briefly "Merkaz HaRav" [the Rabbi's Center]. Its main innovations were the use of Hebrew as the language of instruction, and the addition of the studies of philosophical thought and meditation. Its goal was to draw "the best young men from all over the world, those who excel in talent and mental brilliance...to restore the ancient glory of Israel, to enable them to improve their knowledge of the Torah of Israel, and to participate in the rebirth of the Land of Israel."²⁰⁷ The rabbi encouraged the Center's graduates to take an active part in public life and to become rabbis, teachers and leaders in the public sector in all fields, and indeed his pupils did disperse themselves all over the country to fulfill these goals.²⁰⁸ Among them were also rabbis who emigrated to the United States to serve as spiritual leaders of congregations there. The central purpose of education according to Rabbi Kook is to make man honest and good so as to prepare him for Spiritual Amendment and Perfection. Ever since Abraham the Patriarch began to fill the world with God's presence, it is believed that the more Man calls upon the Name of God, the greater will be his goodness and integrity.²⁰⁹

Education is also a crucial element characterizing Gülen and his followers. As an integral part of the educational system founded by Gülen, student dormitories, secondary schools, seven universities, cultural and instructional centers as well as summer camps were set up in many places. This comprehensive educational system comprises over one hundred school in Turkey itself, and above two hundred beyond Turkey's border.²¹⁰ Schools inspired by Gülen initiative already began to be built in the 1970's but the great majority were built starting in 1983.²¹¹ the Gülenic educational system emphasizes such traditional values as respect for elders, politeness, and good behavior, as well as stressing older pedagogical methods such as memorizing by rote rather than analytical thinking. These schools support a philosophy based on Turkish nationalism rather than on Islam.²¹² the prevailing belief in Gülen's movement is that "the world is undergoing a process which causes man's deterioration, one in which humanity is forfeiting itself to technology, so that only education can counteract this rapid decline". According to the basic credo of the movement, one school can prevent

²⁰⁶ Yaron, *The Philosophy of Rabbi Kook*, 189.

²⁰⁷ [http:// he.wikipedia.org](http://he.wikipedia.org).

²⁰⁸ Yaron, *The Philosophy of Rabbi Kook*, 16.

²⁰⁹ Filber, Y. (1993) *The Star of Light: Studies in the Teachings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook* (Jerusalem, The Institute for the Study of Rabbi Kook's Teachings) 177. (Heb.)

²¹⁰ According to Yavuz, the number of schools is above 500. see: Yavuz, M.H. (1999) *Search for a New Contract in Turkey*, 124.

²¹¹ Özdalga, E. (2000) *Worldly Asceticism in Islamic Casting: Fethullah Gülen's Inspired Piety and Activism*. *Critique*, 17, 84-85.

²¹² Kristianasen W.(1997) *New Faces of Islam*. *Le Monde Diplomatique* (English Edition), (July), 11-12.



hundreds of pupils from descending into a life of crime, and since those who usually end up in prison are young people, it is doubly important to help them. Education is the prime means for softening their hearts and for awakening the love of these youthful personalities for nation and country, to enable them to preserve their individuality and independence.²¹³

In the case of both these great thinkers, the education they promulgate is not an independent system cutting itself off from state education, but on the contrary, these are systems which both of them believe blend harmoniously with the governmental course of study. Thus, in Israel's "national-religious" schools, a religious program of studies is taught in addition to the general one, while in Gülen's schools, religion is not taught at all. The course of study in those schools is the one dictated by the state, and the schools themselves are under close supervision by the government. At the same time, despite their differences, both leaders consider education to be a beneficial force, ameliorating the individual human being and his personal qualities according to Rabi Kook, and improving man as part of society according to Gülen.

3.4. Concern for Their Students

Both these outstanding men expressed their love for the younger generation (which is called "Golden Generation" [Altın Nesil] at the Gülenic Ideology) in practical ways. Rabbi Kook cared for his pupils as if they were his children, since the yeshiva in Jerusalem became a sort of extended family for them. he conducted life in the school in a fatherly manner, without formality or distance, often helping the boys materially, with his wife's aid, so that even the holes in their socks were darned. Fethullah Hoca relates that while he was in Izmir, working with his pupils at Kestanepazarı, he always checked the boys' bedrooms, bathrooms and toilets in the evenings, both to see to the condition of his pupils and to remedy matters that required correction, always trying to protect the pupils. As a result he slept very little during that period, just two or three hours a night, until he began to suffer seriously from exhaustion and weakness.²¹⁴

²¹³ Gülen M. F. (2002) *Yitirilmiş Cennete Doğru (Çağ ve Nesil 3)* (Izmir: Nil Yayınları), 37-39.(Tur.)

²¹⁴ Erdoğan, (1995) *Fethullah Gülen Hocaefendi- Küçük Dünyam*, 99-100



3.5. Religion and Science - Religion and Philosophy

Both Gülen and Rabbi Kook studied philosophy, were well versed in the works of the major writers, and forcefully confronted the religious issues they encountered in their studies. In Rabbi Kook's thinking, the influence of modern philosophy is evident, including many concepts found in the works of Spinoza. Hegelian influence is especially noticeable.²¹⁵ In addition, one finds traces of the thought of Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, Schelling, Buddhism and also to scientific discoveries bearing on philosophical issues (Evolution, the age of the universe etc.).²¹⁶ In some instances, these concepts seem influential, in others they are treated critically. Thus, for example, Rabbi Kook found no problem in accepting the theory of Evolution, in marked contrast to many others, even asserting that it conforms with ancient ideas that appear in the Kabbalah. Rabbi Kook viewed the amalgamation between the sacred and the profane as what is termed: "the Method of all-Inclusive Unity", that is, a blend of the two in all spheres and in every important value: in man, in society and in the world as a whole. From this approach, too, springs his positive attitude towards the secular segment of the population.²¹⁷

Gülen was also well acquainted with modern positivistic knowledge, such as literature, history and philosophy. As an auto-didact, he had even succeeded in attaining an understanding of the natural sciences- biology, physics and astronomy, as well as being able to read the works of Sartre, Camus and Marcuse in the original.²¹⁸ Gülen was also deeply influenced by Kant.²¹⁹ Gülen saw science and philosophy as a step promoting man's religious awareness, for in his opinion science is essential for man's personal development, and without it, he remains hollow, with nothing to transmit to others. If one is not acquainted at least with philosophy and with the principles of certain sciences such as physics, chemistry, astronomy, medicine and botany, and if the individual is not involved in theological studies to the same degree, he will find it impossible to explain anything to others, or to persuade them of the truth of his beliefs. Thus, every believer bears the real responsibility of reading widely and learning the ways of God in ordering the world.²²⁰ Thus secular studies are essential for each individual who calls himself a "believer".

²¹⁵ This fact is especially evident in his article, contained in his work *Lights [Orot]*, "concerning the Course of Ideas in Israel", which uses the concept of "ideas" in the Hegelian sense to explain Jewish History : Kook, A.Y. (1963) *Lights* (Jerusalem: HaRav Kook Insitute). (Heb.)

²¹⁶ Goldman, E. (1985) Rabbi Kook's relation to European thought, in: B. Ish-Shalom and S. Rosenberg (Eds) *A Jubilee of Lights* (Jerusalem: Alinar Library and the Department of Religious Culture and Education in the Diaspors). 118-119.(Heb.) see also: Gelman, Y. *The Aesthetics in the Philosophy of Rabbi Kook*, in: B. Ish-Shalom and S. Rosenberg (Eds) *A Jubilee of Lights* (Jerusalem: Alinar Library and the Department of Religious Culture and Education in the Diaspors). 159-168.

²¹⁷ Lifshitz, H. (1966) *The Sacred and the Profane in the Teaching of Rabbi Avrahan Yitzchak HaCohen Kook* (Jerusalem, The Zionist Organization). 7.(Heb.)

²¹⁸ www.pearls.org/authors/biography.html

²¹⁹ See his book: Gülen, M.F.(1998) *Varlıgın Metafizik Boyutu* (İstanbul: Feza Yayinevi). (Tur.) also here: Can, E. (1998) *Fethullah Gülen Hocaefendi İle Ufuk Turu* (İstanbul: AD Yayıncılık A.Ş). 109-111.(Tur.)

²²⁰ Gülen, M. F. (1996) *İnancın Gölgesinde* (İzmir: Nil Yayınları). 203-204.(Tur.)



3.6. Tolerance and the Attitude towards Atheists

Religious tolerance in the modern age sprang from the weakening of religion. When the idea of tolerance spread in Europe during the second half of the 17th century, traditional religious faith had been enfeebled and undermined. Tolerance was motivated by a desire to be liberated from the social and organizational restrictions of religion. This was a non-religious form of tolerance, which gained its chief support from opposition to religious piety, or from indifference to it.²²¹ We are thus forced to ask the following question: can a person who believes that "there is no salvation outside the church" as St. Augustine asserted, remain indifferent to heretics? This question was intensified within Jewish society since the establishment of the state of Israel as a "Jewish State" aggravated the tension between secular and religious elements of the citizenry.

Neither Rabbi Kook nor Gülen derides or scorns the irreligious, but both rather wish to integrate them and to bring them closer. Though Rabbi Kook felt great anxiety on seeing the increasing secularization of youth, and their abandonment of religion, he yet loved them and supported them in many ways, even willingly accepting the opprobrium of "vain love" towards them. even a sinner, in the rabbi's view, is still a son of God.²²² All-embracing love is essential for true worship of the Lord, and whoever harms another even in love, not only spreads dissent among the people, but also injures religious life. Thus the truly religious man is unable not to love. As one of Rabbi Kook great ethical works teaches:

Love for all creatures must dwell in the heart and soul, especially love for each individual; and love of all the people is the desire of the most honorable, and the source of their material and spiritual uplifting...it is this characteristic which harmonizes the exalted Messianic Spirit with the more earthly elements of Israel...We must know that the life-point of light and sanctity never departs from the Godly image instilled into all mankind, and with which every nation and tongue is graced, each according to its intrinsic worth.²²³

In similar vein, Gülen maintains that tolerance towards others draws all its *origins* from religion. What is expected of us today is the realization that tolerance is a force that grows primarily within ourselves and later in our surroundings. In order to bring about the rebirth of our nation, we must cut off the roots of hateful thoughts, and afterwards instill the concept of tolerance. In Turkey, this viewpoint has already begun to be perceived, but the rate of its growth must be accelerated, so that the trend may continue and even spread throughout the world. The world of the future must be founded on tolerance, love and mutual acceptance, instead of hatred grievances, violence and war.²²⁴ Furthermore, we will seek in vain to find tolerance, with all its depth and many dimensions, in other places, for indeed it is to be sought in Islam. Tolerance is also a particularly "Turkish trait", as already noted by Yunus Emre and Mevlana.²²⁵ Gülen believes that the world has already crossed the threshold

²²¹ Toynbee, A. J. (1965). *A Study of History* (New York: Oxford University Press). 348.

²²² Yaron, *The Philosophy of Rabbi Kook*, 333.

²²³ Kook, A.Y (1971) *Thy Father's Instruction* (Jerusalem, HaRav Kook Institute). 76.(Heb.)

²²⁴ Gülen, M.F. *Fasıldan Fasıla* 3, 102-104.

²²⁵ Celaleddin Rumi (1207-1273) philosopher and mystic of Islam, poet of Persian origin, who is known in his didactic epics and poets : *Mansnavi-ye Ma'nav*. Rumi had affected tremendously the mystic Islamic thought as well as the ideology of Gülen. He is the father of Mevlevi sect which is known for its Whirling Dervishes. On Rumi see, for example: Schimmel, A. (1993)*The Triumphal Sun: a Study of the Works of Jalaladdin Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press).



of understanding the truth that there is no way to avoid the dialogue.²²⁶ For Gülen, liberalism and tolerance towards others and inter-religious debate are not merely pleasant ideas to be put into practice in some future Paradise, but are at the heart of the significance of being a Muslim here and now. He is convinced that the world is a symphony composed of different faiths, and just as an orchestra cannot perform if all its members play the same instrument, so too the world is a harmonious blend of all the varied beliefs. The most potent pillar of tolerance is rooted in love, which is the strongest force in the life of each human being; it follows compassion whereby the world may be thought of as a "symphony" of compassion and mercy", leading at last to tolerance. This is the final pillar for constructing a new mode of existence, one in which we must shut our eyes to the blame of others but forgive them, so that all together we heal the great majority of our wounds.²²⁷ The fact that Gülen's precepts are not just an abstract model, but have been open to real life experiments and implementation, encourages the supporters of the movement to discover the many points of similarity between themselves and others, instead of stressing their differences and peculiarities. This pertains not only to the divisions between religions, but equally to those within the various secular groups. Gülen attempts to find common ground even with Marxists, saying that those who consider religion to be "opium of the masses" should not have their opinions dismissed lightly.²²⁸ Gülen also has a group of supporters who hold atheistic views, who endorse some of his tenets at a distance, but do not play an active part in the movement's regular business.²²⁹

3.7. The Element of "Light" as Expressed in Poetry

We may note with more than passing interest that both these great thinkers frequently discussed and used the concept of "light". Rabbi Kook's works nearly always include the element of light. The titles of his books affirm this fact repeatedly. In the thought of Gülen light is also a central element, to prove which we need only mention the "Houses of Light" [Işık Evleri]. In both cases, light is conceived of as the Supreme Lofty Light which descends from above to the lower realms of worldliness, enabling man to carry out the Divine Will,²³⁰ each according to his own faith or religion.

Both men were also engaged in writing poetry, especially poems dealing with the relations between man and God.²³¹ Both of them conceive of Light as representing Sublime Truth, infusing every aspect of daily being, serving as an alternate way to describe the life of perfected righteous behavior. This is exemplified in Rabbi Kook's poem:

Bring us light,
Bring us Holiness,

Yunus Emre- a poet and mystic of the 13th century.

²²⁶ Ünal, A. M. Fethullah Gülen Bir Portre Denemesi, 362.

²²⁷ Kurtz, L. R. (2005) Gülen's Paradox : Combining Commitment and Tolerance. *The Muslim World*, 95, 3 , 378

²²⁸ Gülen, *Fasıldan Fasıla* 3, 201.

²²⁹ Aras B. and Caha Ö. (2003) Fethullah Gülen and his Liberal 'Turkish Islam', in: Barry Rubin (ed), *Revolutionaries and Reformers* (Albany: State University of New York Press). 150

²³⁰ Kook, *Lights of Torah*, 6-7.

²³¹ On Rabbi Kook's poetry, see Lifshitz, H. (1975) *The Seer of Light* (Jerusalem, The Rabbi Kook Institute). The rabbi's family name, kook, is thought by some to derive from the Yiddish "kookken" meaning "to peer deeply", thus reflecting his unique ability to see beyond surface so as to discern the inner essence of people and events.



Bering us honor,
Bring us justice
Grant us life
Worthy of its name.

In Gülen's poem, we read:

O Army of light, the light of radiant faces
Diffusing deep and warm joy,
Bearing armfuls of tranquility to every place
With endless tears beclouding their eyes"

The Turkish original verse rhymes musically:

Işık ordusu, aydın nâsiyelerinde nûr
Sinelerinde derin ve sımsıcak *mutluluk*.
Götürürler her tarafa kucak kucak huzûr;
Gözlerinin içinde buğulanır *sonsuzluk*..

4. Conclusion

Just as Rabbi Kook inspired a large group of National-Religious followers who adhere to his teachings, so Gülen too drew many loyal acolytes. The unique quality linking the two leaders is that both regarded nationalism as a complementary force enhancing the religious element, viewing the nationalist component as an integral part of religious duty, indeed as an actual obligation of the Faith. Both of them regard tolerance as a religious commandment, believing religion to be the very source of tolerance rather than the motivation for its absence. Both refuse to leave the material world and its culture in the hands of the non-religious or, to be dealt with by atheists. Thus they strive, each with the means available to him and in his own surroundings, to create a synthesis that will enable religious people to become the very best from all aspects, both spiritual and material, including science and all realms of culture. Furthermore, both serve as models proving that it is possible to be a truly devout religious leader, uncompromising in matters of the faith, while at the same time being highly educated, tolerant, and concerned for the welfare of all those who do not conform to this model themselves. While others may find this combination paradoxical, Fethullah Gülen Hoca and Rabbi Avraham Kook prove in their own lives that these seemingly divergent attitudes can be blended in perfect harmony.

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