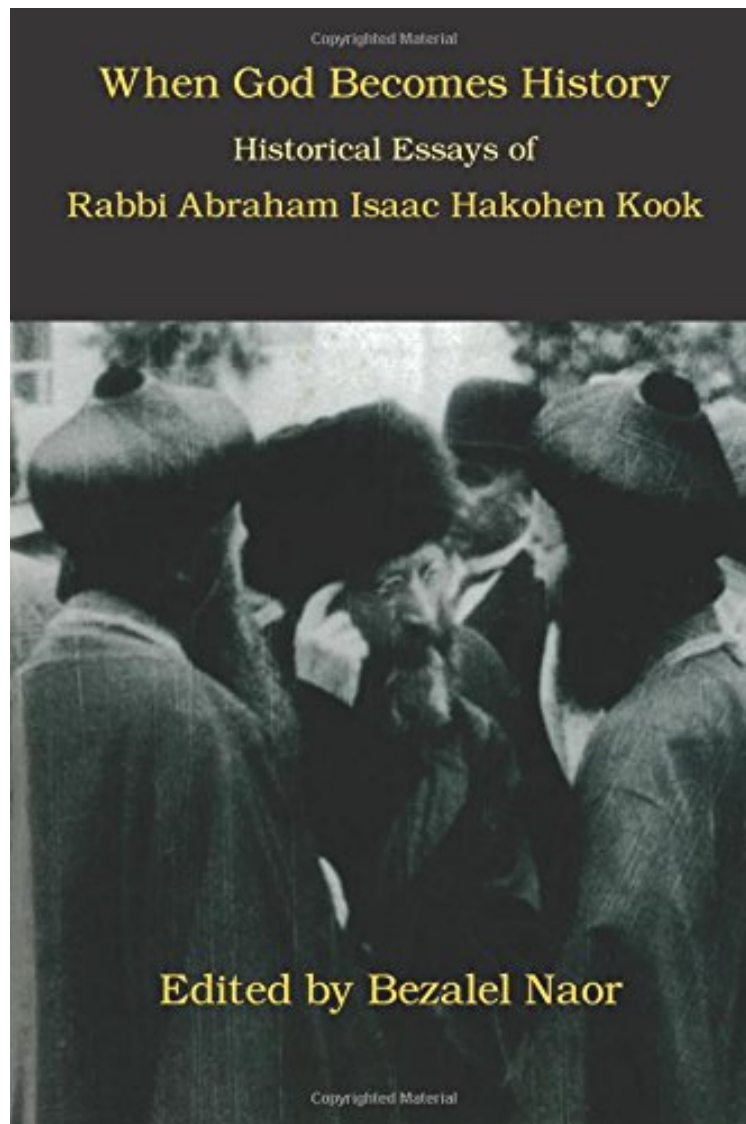


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When God Becomes History: Historical Essays of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook

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learning, to step up and go thru the ...By CustomerImportant learning , to step up and go thru the passage .9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. A unique set of essays letters providing penetrating insightsBy Ben RothkeThe MyersBriggs type indicator is extremely popular, in part that it effortlessly categorizes human personality into 16 categories. Yet as an effective tool for psychological analysis, its utterly worthless. Given that the human personality is far too complex to be pigeonholed into its 16 categories.Those with complex and multifaceted personalities are often a challenge to understand. More often than not, they are misunderstood. Perhaps no other rabbinic personality of the last 100 years has been more misunderstood (and often misinterpreted) than the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935).While not a biography per se, *When God Becomes History: Historical Essays of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook*, by Bezalel Naor, a scholar of R Kook, achieves what a good biography should: its leaves you with a deeper understanding of the subject.Far too many have portrayed Kook, using the narrow-like lens of Myers-Briggs. Yet Kook deserves to be known as a man of penetratingly deep new ideas about religion, state, and human existence. The letters Naor has collected show a man struggling to be both a faithful religious leader to a flock that didnt always appreciate or agree with what he said and felt. This is the often intractable challenge that every Chief Rabbi has faced.Naor has gathered 20 of Kooks essays and letters in this most remarkable and fascinating book. Two of the essays (eulogy for Theodor Herzl and a speech at the groundbreaking of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem) are some Kooks finest homilies.In the Herzl eulogy, Kook used his encyclopedic knowledge of Bible, Talmud, philosophy and kabbalah to give one of the most inspired and profound eulogies ever given. In the Hebrew University speech, Kook used it to emphasize the supremacy of the Torah. Sadly, in both cases, his words were misunderstood and used against himIn the essays, one sees how being misrepresented was extremely difficult for a sensitive soul such as Kook. It troubled him that no matter how selective he chose his words, they would still evoke criticism from, as he called them the small of intellect.Throughout the book, Naor captures a recurring theme: Kooks speaks of matters of significance, only to find that his deep words were misunderstood by a shallow body of people. In fact, there lays the problem when it comes to Kook; he often wrote in matters of deep philosophy and universality, which doesnt always lend itself to the common man. Add to the fact that he lived and preached in a highly charged time, its somewhat of a miracle that his words were not misinterpreted.A challenge in reading (and understanding) Kook is his propensity for a focus on universality. It took a man like that of near boundless intellectual capabilities to see how events occurring in his lifetime, were in fact cosmic events in history. Its ironic that for a man who focused on this cosmic universality, that he was, and still is, simply classified as a simply being nothing more than a Zionist rabbinic leader.Kook was also a scholar entrenched in kabbalah. In a few of the essays, Naor highlights Kooks mystical side. For me, I found those rather difficult to understand.As my friend Pesach Sommer noted in his articulate review of the book, R Kook, despite being somewhat well known, is the victim of all sorts of assumptions. This is particularly true in the English speaking world.Naor selectively choose from the finest of essays that show Kook as one of the most profound religious leaders of recent times. Kook was misunderstood when he lived, and misunderstood to this very day. But in this superb book, Naor shines some much needed light on Kook, and brings the reader the thoughts of a man who must be understood.

Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook (1865-1935) served as the Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Erets Israel during the period of the British mandate. Rav Kook was a polymath, equally talented as a Talmudic legalist and rationalist philosopher, on the one hand, and as a mystic and poet, on the other. Today, we would say that he was both left and right hemisphere. The present collection brings together in English translation Rav Kooks contributions to the field of Jewish history, though perhaps *historiosophy* would be the better word. Rav Kook joins the ranks of those great Jewish thinkers who preceded him in interpretation of history: Maharal of Prague, Moses Hayyim Luzzatto and Zadok Hakohen of Lublin. If Rav Kooks philosophy were to be summed up in a single word, it would be: *Kelaliyut* or universality. Whereas most of us are held captive by individual events, Rav Kook has a great gift for the overview of history. He brings this gift to bear in his ability to provide perspective on the modern rebirth of Israel against the backdrop of mankind's ongoing spiritual evolution. In the latter regard, his vision has sometimes been compared to that of Teilhard de Chardin and Sri Aurobindo, or more recently Ken Wilber. Contained in this collection are Rav Kooks eulogy for Herzl and Rav Kooks remarks at the opening of Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The essays are placed in historic context and provided with copious scholarly endnotes.

About the AuthorBezalel Naor is a lifelong student of the teachings of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook. He translated Rav Kooks seminal work *Orot* (2015), as well as several other books by Rav Kook. Naor is the author of original studies of Jewish Thought in both English and Hebrew. Most recently, he published *Mahol la-Tsaddikim* (Dance Circle for the Righteous), a comparative analysis of the cosmologies of Italian kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto and Habad Hasidic interpreter Rabbi Eizik of Homel (*Orot*, 2015). Naor is presently at work on an historical novel as well as a collection of mystical poems.