

## Article

# The Theological Sources of the Torah and Labor (Torah U'melakha) Yeshivas

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**Abstract:** In this article, I seek to reveal the theological sources of the Israeli high school yeshivas designated “Torah U’melakha” (Torah and labor). High school yeshivas are schools for 9th–12th grade boys that offer religious studies in the first half of the day and secular studies, i.e., science and languages, in the second half. These schools serve mainly religious Zionist and modern orthodox society. Torah U’melakha yeshivas are high school yeshivas that are unique for combining vocational studies in the curriculum, such that graduates acquire a trade and can serve in the army and join the labor force in their field of expertise. Over the years, some of the Torah U’melakha yeshivas were subsequently closed and others changed their nature from vocational to technological. However, the educational trend toward “Torah and labor” has not disappeared. Vocational education, which became technological as well, has been assimilated in nearly all high school yeshivas, which, to a great degree, made the Torah U’melakha yeshivas redundant. The ideological and theological value of engaging in “Torah and work” became embedded in the pedagogic consciousness of religious Zionism and is continuing to infuse the many high school yeshivas in Israel and elsewhere.

**Keywords:** religious Zionism; Torah and labor; yeshiva high school; Torah U’melakha yeshivas; ideology; theology; pedagogy



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In this article, I seek to reveal the theological foundations of the high school yeshivas designated “Torah U’melakha” (Torah and labor) in Israel. High school yeshivas are schools for 9th–12th grade boys that offer religious studies in the first half of the day and secular studies, i.e., science and languages, in the second half (Avital 1978; Bar-Lev 1980). These schools serve mainly religious Zionist and modern orthodox society.

*Torah U’melakha* yeshivas are high school yeshivas that are unique for combining vocational studies in the curriculum, such that graduates acquire a trade and can serve in the army and join the labor force in their field of expertise. This school reality is unique in the entire educational system. The goal is not only for the graduate to receive professional training and become integrated in the economy as an experienced professional, as declared by the founders of Israeli vocational schools. The “Torah U’melakha” schools are unique for being both high school yeshivas, with a school day divided between religious studies and vocational studies, while also being nurtured by the concept of the Zionist religious theology, which espouses the combination of spirit and matter. Hence, realization of this theology should begin at the school stage. This is the double uniqueness of the “Torah U’melakha” schools.

## 1. Preface

Education occupied a central place in Jewish-national ideology, beginning from the Katowice Conference in 1884. A major focus was shaping the figure of the desirable student in the land of Israel. Four prototypes of the desirable student were proposed: Jewish farmers; Jewish laborers; members of the working settlement; and Jewish intellectuals. This was the opposite of exilic Jews with their stereotype of not engaging in productive

work rather only in spirituality or *Luftgeschäft* (a derogatory designation for unproductive businesses such as brokers, merchants, and moneylenders), with no connection to the land and to nature, subservient and weak. In contrast, in the land of Israel students were expected to engage in productive work, be physically capable, and know how to defend themselves (Reichel 2008).

This outlook was strengthened by the socialist waves of immigration (the Second and Third Aliya), which saw training for work as preparation for the redemption of the people and land. Beginning from the 1920s, this educational outlook was accepted by all streams of Jewish education: the laborers, the general secular, and the Mizrahi (religious Zionism), which all took steps to establish vocational schools.

Vocational education began in the 19th century with the technological breakthroughs that led to the industrial revolution and the agricultural mechanization revolution. Until then, vocational education normally consisted of apprentices who studied under tradesmen. With the industrial revolution, vocational schools developed, training workers for heavy industry to meet the needs of the labor market in agriculture, service industries, and manufacturing (Vurgan and Natan 2008, pp. 40–64). Vocational education was guided by two parameters: first, the needs of the country and of the labor market; and second, the need of individuals to find a job and to make a decent living. Another parameter added in Israel involved teaching values of work and productivity (Ibid., pp. 1–40). As stated, this was based on the Zionist-socialist ideology with its emphasis on values of productivity and “Jewish labor” (Riger 1945, pp. 136–41; Schwartz 1996a, 1997, 2001, 2003).

When the national system of education was in the process of establishment there were several vocational schools. “Bezalel” was founded in Jerusalem in 1906, a music school in Jaffa in 1910. Before the First World War, the “Hovevei Zion” committee established an agricultural school in Petah Tikva. In the early 1920s, there were several schools of crafts and sewing for girls in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Tiberias, and Hebron. In the early 1930s, there were two vocational schools and two schools of trades that belonged to the general secular stream; one school of trades that belonged to the Mizrahi; while the laborers stream had no postelementary educational institutions.

A unique school in that period was Basmat, a “vocational-secondary school for certified engineers and technicians”, established by the Technion in Haifa in 1928, which was the first scientific-technological school in the land of Israel. By the late 1930s, there were five schools of trade supervised by the National Committee’s Department of Education: three in the general secular stream, one belonging to Mizrahi, and one in the laborers stream (Reshef and Yuval 1999, pp. 90–97). At that time, there were several agricultural schools: Mikve Israel, which existed from 1870 east of Jaffa, the Agricultural School for Young Women in Nahalal, the Agricultural Training Farm in Jerusalem, and WIZO’s Ayanot school, as well as the Ben Shemen and Meir Shfeya youth villages, the agricultural high school in Pardes Chana, and the Kaduri school (Yonai 1992).

In the second half of the 20th century, vocational education was put under scrutiny due to two main critiques: one was that the vocational education system imparts reasonable vocational training but a poor comprehensive education. Therefore, vocational studies are a barrier to academic studies. The second was that because vocational education is provided to students from specific socioeconomic levels and geographic areas, it preserves social disparities—forming a process of tracking (Haslala; Tzameret 2005).

In the 1950s, the organization and shaping of vocational education in Israel were further developed. Zalman Aran, the Minister of Education, ascribed great significance to vocational education. In the late 1960s, however, Minister of Education Yigal Alon decided to transform the Department for Vocational Education into the Technological Educational System. While vocational education was aimed at imparting technical skills and training students for a working life, technological education was defined as education that trains students to operate in technology- and information-intensive environments (Melamed 1992). Technological education became adapted to the third millennium, to the era of computers and media, and became part of the education offered to students in Israel.

## 2. The Issue of Work in Jewish Sources

In general culture, work was perceived as belonging to the slave class or the lower classes. Free men and the aristocracy did not work and viewed work disdainfully and negatively. For instance, in Ancient Greece, the set of mind was fundamentally aristocratic, and since it evaluated physical work according to the status of the slaves who performed it, they developed an attitude of disrespect. As Plato said: “Why do labor and manual work not dignify their practitioners? Because they are wont to detract from people’s excellence” (Plato, *Republic*, book 2; [Sambursky 1954](#), p. 211).

The Torah has an ambivalent attitude to work ([Neuwirth 2015](#), pp. 4–28). On one hand, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15). Namely, man’s job was also to work. Then again, once man sinned, he was punished. “Cursed is the ground because of you . . . by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food.” (Genesis 3:17–19) Work is a curse that followed from the sin.

In rabbinical literature as well, the attitude to work is ambivalent. On one hand, “Great is labor, as just as Israel were commanded to keep the Sabbath, thus they were commanded to perform labor” (Avot de Rabbi Nathan, Version B, Para. 21). Then again, work is an existential need rather than a religious value, for example the father’s obligation to teach his son a profession so that he will not “be a bandit” (Bavli, Kiddushin 29b).

Over the years, the view of work as a need achieved dominance and Jewish law determines that a person should work because “poverty will remove from him knowledge of his Creator” (Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 156:1) and not because it is a religious value.

The ideologues of Hovevei Zion and those who came to the land of Israel in the First Aliyah were preceded by ideologues from the Haskalah movement, who encouraged the Jews to return to agricultural and productive work and took action to realize their ideas, such as Isaac Baer Levinsohn (1788–1860). Their slogan was: “Those who work their land will have abundant food” (Proverbs 12:11). In the 19th century, attempts were made to settle Jews in parts of Russia and Poland so that they would become productive farmers. The attempt failed due to natural disasters, the attitude of the authorities, and bureaucracy but became embedded in the hearts of Hovevei Zion, who strove to realize it in the land of Israel ([Levine 1975](#)). I will elaborate.

Studying the notion of work as it unfolds in early religious Zionism and in R. Reines’ thought, it is essential to appreciate the context in which the various ideas were propounded. Building upon what we have indicated thus far, two conceptual approaches need to be kept in mind in connection with Eastern European Jewry. One of these approaches was predominant in the Jewish mindset; the other was prominent in the European. The Jews were swayed by the views of Isaac Baer Levinsohn, who also took up the attempt to entrench Jewish Enlightenment and work values among the Jews, basing his efforts on a notion of work that he infused with ideational significance ([Baer Levinsohn 1977](#); [Penslar 2001](#)). Though a Maskil and a harbinger of secularizing change, and thus seen in a negative light by the observant public and the rabbinic leadership, Levinsohn was nevertheless successful in making his ideas resonate among the Jews. R. Reines was faced with the challenge of countering his impact. He never mentions Levinsohn explicitly in his writings; even so, it is apparent that his arguments are addressed to Levinsohn’s followers, whom R. Reines aims to provide with a theological reply, taking on both the issue of general education and the question of productive labor.

It was the religious Zionist movements, “Mizrachi” (a religious Zionist organization founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaacov Reines ([Salmon 2019](#)), where the word “Mizrachi” is a type of acronym for “*merkaz ruhani*”, i.e., a spiritual center) and “Hapoel Hamizrachi” (a socialist-religious-Zionist movement, formed in 1922 under the Zionist slogan “*Torah va’Avodah*” (Torah and Labor), which supported the founding of religious kibbutzim and moshavim), that presented a new concept of work as a religious value. I shall expand on this below.

### *Torah U'melakha Yeshivas*

The religious Zionist movement operated not only based on ideology but rather primarily on theology, i.e., a different Jewish religious outlook, for instance the perception of engaging in corporeality and work as part of Torah study and realization, as well as the call to human activism regarding the redemption of Israel and improving the world. Based on these theological outlooks, the “Bnei Akiva” youth movement espoused the slogan of “Torah and Work”. Now, once the guiding theological orientation had been determined, efforts were made to realize it in the educational pedagogic domain as well. In this way, theology left its imprint and had an influence on pedagogy as well.

Beginning from the late 1930s religious Zionism, which held aloft the banner of “Torah and work”, established beside the high school yeshivas and the religious high schools also several yeshivas called *Torah U'melakha* (i.e., Torah and labor), where students learned a profession as well.

There were four such vocational yeshivas: in Tel Aviv, Kfar Avraham in Petach Tikva (Hatzofe 1956), Kfar Sitrin, and the agricultural yeshiva in Kfar Haroeh (Gerdi 1959), which in time became the Ben Yakir youth village (Ben Zvi 1958, p. 40). This, in addition to several religious agricultural high schools: the Religious Youth Village at Mikve Israel, the Mosad Aliya agricultural school in Petach Tikva, and the Kfar Batya agricultural school (Reshef and Yuval 1999, p. 90).

The *Torah U'melakha* yeshivas began as agricultural yeshivas and constituted a symbol for the Zionist movement at large. The purpose of the school was to allow students to study religious subjects as well as agriculture and to join moshavim and kibbutzim as “scholars and farmers”, and maybe even as the rabbi of the town (Furman 2017). The idea of establishing an agricultural yeshiva began to emerge after the founding of Hapoel Hamizrachi in 1922 but was realized in practice only with the founding of Kfar Haroeh, a religious cooperative workers’ moshav named for R. Avraham Hachohen Kook, on whom I shall expand below.

The yeshiva was established in 1939 by R. Moshe Zvi Neria. Indeed, it continued as a high school rather than a vocational–agricultural yeshiva, but its outlook persevered when R. Shlomo Zuckerman established the *Torah U'melakha* yeshiva, which as stated later became the Ben Yakir youth village. R. Neria wrote about the founding of the yeshiva:

The Bnei Akiva movement (the youth movement associated with Mizrahi, founded in 1929) as a religious youth movement did not see its designation as merely continuing religious life with the addition of Zionist-pioneering content, rather as striving for religious youthfulness, for fresh religious thought, religious feeling, and religious action . . . and this was the orientation . . . of the yeshiva. (Ibid., p. 54)

Establishing the agricultural yeshiva expressed the idea of “Torah and work” in practice. Members of the movement embraced the slogan “Sanctify your life with Torah and purify it with work”, principles that guided high school yeshivas in general and *Torah U'melakha* yeshivas in particular. This was how these yeshivas were initiated. Goelman describes the development of the yeshivas and the ideology at their foundation (Goelman 1948): “About ten years ago, the *Torah U'melakha* yeshiva in Nahalat Yitzhak [Tel Aviv] was founded. The founders of the yeshiva envisioned the value of this idea for religious youth and worked hard to realize it”. He describes for whom these yeshivas are intended:

The *Torah U'melakha* institutions gradually being established in the land of Israel are intended at present for those finishing their studies in the Talmud Torah and elementary schools (age 14), who have limited knowledge of Jewish studies and are therefore on the level of beginners. In order to determine the curriculum, we must become familiar with the students, their social status, and their Jewish and general knowledge. The choice of a vocational school is usually based on social justifications, particularly among religious parents who choose to have their sons study a vocation so that they will be able to help support them. (Ibid.)

Therefore, he calls for establishing two levels of *Torah U'melakha* institutions:

In light of this state, we must set two levels within *Torah U'melakha* institutions: a. A *Torah U'melakha* yeshiva for boys who have reached independent understanding of Gemara and the *poskim* and are continuing their studies with half a day of religious studies and half a day of learning a trade. Learning a trade must take no more than two years in an intensive practical program. Special attention must be given to practical training. B. An educational institution of *Torah U'melakha*: youth schools with the aim of teaching Torah and a general education in an atmosphere of Torah and piety and learning a trade following the customary format in vocational schools. (ibid.)

He ends the review and advice with a prayer:

These are great days for the people and for the Jewish settlement, days of preparations for establishing a Jewish regime in the homeland. We pray that the existing *Torah U'melakha* schools will serve as foundation stones upon which will be built an extensive network of vocational Torah education that teaches boys to fear God, love the homeland, and build the land. (ibid.)

The *Torah U'melakha* yeshivas will be pillars of the Jewish settlement and the state of Israel, in both spirit and matter. Bernstein noted the curriculum and the orientation proposed by the *Torah U'melakha* yeshiva at Kfar Avraham, later Petah Tikva (Bernstein 1953, pp. 624–26):

The aim of the school: (a) In religious studies—to impart to the students sufficient knowledge of Jewish studies to reach a fundamental grasp of independently studies in gemara, Rashi, and Tosafot, and all the religious literature will be open to them. Regarding education, to teach them to be pious in truth and courtesy, to be true sons of God, their people, their Torah, and their country.

(b) In vocational studies—to specialize in a vocation wholly, according to the program customary in local vocational schools. The student will acquire the trade in a way that will enable him to support himself respectfully

(c) In general and vocational studies—to impart to the students the general and vocational education necessary for technical workers at present, to be an intellectual worker as needed by the national economy.

(d) For this purpose to study gemara, halakha, Bible, Jewish thought, Hebrew and Hebrew grammar, and history

(e) General studies: languages, English, mathematics, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and trigonometry. Special: technology, the theory of instruments and machines, technical and engineering drafting, pumps, engines, electrotechnical, calculation, professional hygiene, machine learning.

(f) Practical training: mechanical welding, mechanics, soldering, metalwork

Having understood the ideological and theological spirit underlying the establishment of the *Torah U'melakha* yeshivas, we shall now turn to several religious Zionist ideologues and even before this movement was founded, who laid the theological foundation for the concept of “Torah and work” and its realization in the educational field in the form of the *Torah U'melakha* yeshivas.

### 3. The Proto-Zionists

The idea of combining Torah and work and its integration in the educational system began with the proto-Zionists (Mashiach 2021b). R. Zvi Hirsch Kalisher (1795–1874; Myers 2003; Asaf 2015a) was among the first to call for combining Torah and work as part of an active effort to hasten the redemption. “It is necessary to understand . . . that the beginning of the redemption is through human nature, and then God, may He be blessed, will appear among us and among all creatures of the world” (Kalisher 2002, p. 68). This will be done via the land of Israel and its settlement. “To come to the Holy Land in droves like a swarm



of sheep and to transform it into a settled land, because that is the preface to the beginning of the redemption, to build that which was in ruins and to plant that which was desolate" (Ibid., p. 76).

Another proto-Zionist was R. Judah Alkalai (1798–1878), the rabbi of Semlin, Serbia (Katz 1979, pp. 308–56), who called to hasten the redemption through human efforts, manifested in a combination of Torah and work in the land of Israel: "Settling the land is the redemption . . . agricultural work is the redemption" (Rafael 2004, p. 763). Therefore, he issued a call: "The delay in the coming of the Messiah . . . is because there are things that need to be corrected . . . and these are things that involve the physical aspects of the land . . . the Messiah son of David will only come when the land will be populated" (Ibid., p. 753). It was the inception of an idea.

#### 4. Rabbis of the First Aliya

The ideological generation after the proto-Zionists founded the Hovevei Zion societies that translated the ideology into practice in the form of immigration to the land of Israel, purchasing lands, and tilling the land. The First Aliya occurred from 1882–1903 (Mashiach 2021a).

We shall focus on two rabbis who outlined the ideological and pedagogic course: R. Ze'ev Yavetz (Asaf 2015b) and R. Shmuel Mohilever. R. Ze'ev Yavetz (1847–1924) was an author, educator, and historian. Learning from Jewish history, he understood that work is one of the Jewish people's designations:

Because not only in wisdom and morals did our forefathers obtain their reputation . . . In time they acquired all the practical skills of Egypt in those days. And by the end of Joseph's life the sons of Judah encompassed metal workers and artisans . . . and the Israelites did not neglect the artisanship on their travels in the desert when leaving Egypt, because after settling the land they implanted it within them. (Yavetz 1905, 1:chp.11)

Therefore, he called for a return to the original Jewish nature and he himself served as a role model, working as the principal of the school in Zichron Yaakov, where he combined Jewish culture based on "knowledge of God", and general culture, "external culture", which in his view helps implement the commandments. For instance, studying agronomy and the natural sciences helps implement the commandments that are contingent on the land. His pedagogic approach was in time embraced in the high school yeshivas and the *Torah U'melakha* yeshivas (Haramati 2000, pp. 72–82).

The most meaningful figure in Hovevei Zion and in the First Aliya was R. Shmuel Mohilever (1824–1898), one of the greatest rabbis of his generation, who was the rabbi of Bialystok (Yarden 1982, pp. 161–70; Salmon 1991). R. Mohilever was critical of the traditional Jewish educational system. As he saw it, it is necessary to combine Torah and work, education and productivization. This combination would allow Jews to make a living, which is a religious obligation. "One is obliged to work to supply the needs of his household, even if in this way he will necessarily refrain from the study of Torah" (Mohilever 1872).

He defines the combined path as "good education". From the biblical story of Jacob's ladder, "resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven", he understood that the order in this story consists of the material—"resting on the earth" and then the spiritual—"reaching to heaven". He who focuses only on the spiritual will not succeed:

"And he had a dream in which he saw a ladder resting on the earth and its top reaching to heaven . . . " (Genesis 28). Here Jacob envisioned the ladder of happiness resting on the earth, its beginning is here on the ground, to make a trustworthy foundation for his temporary happiness, and then he shall build on it a tall and lofty house, "with its top reaching to heaven", which is the house of his eternal happiness. One who takes this course, and follows this order, will succeed and be elevated. Indeed, one whose deeds are foreign, and who ascends

to the heights to build himself a home of eternal happiness . . . will decline and will achieve neither.

He asks rhetorically: “. . . and why have our people rejected all manual work? Our forefathers were farmers and shepherds . . . and this did not detract from their shining virtues . . . and only we are embarrassed to teach our sons a craft” (Mohilever 1874). In time, this call was answered in the form of the high school yeshivas and the *Torah U’melakha* yeshivas.

### 5. The Rabbis of the Religious Zionist Movement

R. Yitzchak Yaacov Reines (1839–1915), among the great Torah scholars of Lithuania, founded the Mizrahi movement (Bat Yehuda 1985; Shapira 2002). R. Reines, who believed in a combination of Torah and work, founded a unique yeshiva where secular studies and crafts were taught side by side with religious studies. The reason for this was because many young Jews are interested in general studies in order to expand their economic options. Such studies were not available in yeshivas; rather they were only available at gymnasiums and universities (Salmon 1971).

In 1881, he published a book called “Hotam Tochnit”, in which he criticized the yeshiva forms of study. He suggested founding a yeshiva with a new study program, in response to the Enlightenment. For this purpose, he met with prominent rabbis, to enlist them in support of his initiative to include in the yeshiva general studies side by side with religious studies for purpose of subsistence (Hatzfira 29 (1882), p. 229; Salmon 2006, pp. 285–86). The rabbis refused.

Despite the resistance, R. Reines founded the yeshiva in Święciany. Not long later, the yeshiva was closed. In 1905, he established another yeshiva in the same format in the town of Lida in Belarus, called *Torah Va’daat* (Torah and Knowledge), a name that symbolizes its innovativeness versus traditional yeshivas. In his “Lecture on the new yeshiva”, R. Reines explained its designation:

A new yeshiva must be established! A yeshiva that will chart a way in life for young people . . . that will train them to be good citizens . . . that will support them honorably and profitably, and that will make them into whole people. (April 9, 1905; Fishman-Maimon 1946, p. 154)

The yeshiva will train its students to a life of work and will make them “whole people”. Therefore, both Torah and crafts should be taught. When presenting the goals of the yeshiva, he wrote:

The yeshiva has taken as its goal to focus on the students’ bread as well, “because where there is no bread there is no Torah” (Mishna, Avot 3:17). And for this reason, it was decided to arrange the curriculum in such a way that anyone who completed his course of studies at the yeshiva would have the proper means to support his position in life, whether in a rabbi’s post . . . or as a teacher . . . The yeshiva also paves the way of those who will become merchants, storeowners, contractors, through general studies . . . Each and every matter in life requires some secular knowledge . . . and this knowledge is acquired to a known extent by the students at this yeshiva. (Reines 1913, pp. 24–25)

The concept of wholeness is present in the teachings of R. Reines. However, unlike the view of ultraorthodox rabbis who contended that only Torah leads to wholeness, in his opinion, engaging in work is also essential. He divided wholeness into four categories that included both spiritual wholeness—that of the intellect and ethics, and material wholeness—that of the body and economics:

Man should be divided with regard to his wholeness . . . in four: a. Wholeness of the body. Such as bravery, beauty, and so on. b. Wholeness of the intellect . . . in secular matters as well. c. Ethical wholeness . . . d. Wholeness of ownership. To be whole also with regard to worldly possessions. (Reines 1902, p. 182)

The fact that he enumerated the conditions for wholeness alternately, regarding engaging in spirit and matter, i.e., body, intellect, ethics, and ownership, shows that they are intertwined. Torah and work. Hence, it is no surprise that it was R. Reines who founded the first high school yeshiva, in the format of *Torah U'melakha*, Torah and labor (Mashiach 2018).

## 6. R. Avraham Yitzchak Kook

R. Avraham Yitzchak Hacohen Kook (1865–1935, Latvia-Israel) was the first Chief Rabbi of the Ashkenazi communities in the land of Israel, an adjudicator, kabbalist, commentator, poet, and philosopher. He is considered to have had the greatest impact on religious Zionism (Ben Shlomo 1989; Ish Shalom 1990; Mirsky 2014). R. Kook's point of departure was pantheism—everything is Godly (Schwartz 1996b, pp. 83–87), which led him to an original outlook called pan-Toraism—everything is Torah (Mashiach 2020). Allow me to explain. Rationalist philosophy, as well as kabbalist philosophy, identified God with His wisdom-knowledge-Torah (The Rambam wrote: “He [God] and his knowledge are one” (Foundations of the Torah, 2:10), and the Kabbalists perceived that “The Holy One Blessed be He and the Torah—are one” (*The Zohar*, Vayikra, Aharei Mot, 56a; R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *The Tanya*, chp. 5)). Therefore, there is a congruence between the world and the Torah and God, and therefore, if everything is Godly—pan-theism—hence everything is Torah—pan-Toraism. “Our Torah of life is a Divine revelation that is revealed . . . in all existence” (Kook 2006–2008, 2:72). Instead of defining Torah as academic study, the concept was that life with all its activities, both spiritual and corporeal, is Torah.

He also berated those who do not understand this. He conceived this as resulting from insufficient faith:

When having insufficient faith, it seems that anything that people hasten . . . to acquire, whether science, bravery, beauty, order, intelligence, that these are all things that are external to the Divine contents of the world . . . but all this is a big mistake and a lack of faith. The pure perspective sees the Divine appearance in all improvement of life, whether individual or collective, spiritual or corporeal. (Kook 2004, 3:190)

From the prism of pan-Toraism, it was clear to R. Kook that it is necessary to combine secular and religious studies. In 1908, R. Kook wrote a letter to the members of the Mizrahi board in western countries, saying that it is necessary to establish a new yeshiva that offers both secular and religious studies. In the process, he strongly criticized the ultraorthodox who offer no secular studies, and the secular, who offer no religious studies:

To establish in the center of the new town, a big yeshiva . . . which shall also include the entire . . . spiritual and scientific part of the Torah with all its aspects . . . And general sciences should occupy a formal place in Hebrew . . . by good teachers and books, until eventually . . . such a yeshiva can produce advanced people who will truly be a glory to the people of Israel and to the land of Israel . . . warriors who fight God's war against those with a lowly imagination who perceive themselves as God-fearing [=the ultraorthodox] and against those with a poor mind and a foolish heart who perceive themselves as free men [=the secular]. (Kook 1985, 1:98)

In another place, he stressed that this “new magnificent yeshiva” will be “infused in its innermost levels with the light of the flame of a sacred fire”, and beside it, “houses for learning crafts and agriculture” would also be established (Ibid., letter 144:181–193). In other words, yeshivas for “Torah and labor” (*Torah U'melakha*).

R. Kook saw engaging in labor as a religious value and, therefore, “the sacred light is truly present in all labor” (Kook 2004, vol. 1, para.887). He saw the combination of spirit and matter as the whole ideal religious occupation. “Not only will they not contradict each other, rather they will on the contrary add strength to each other” (Kook 1988, p. 407).



R. Kook describes his era as the era of redemption; therefore, human intervention must be applied in order to hasten it. This concept exists in kabbalistic thought. The “*It’aruta diletata*”, arousal from below, will be answered by an “*It’aruta dile’eyla*”, arousal from above. The concept is also present in rabbinical literature: “Open for Me one opening . . . like the eye of the needle, and I will open for you openings that wagons and carriages enter through them” (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 5:2). However, we must be the initiators. Hence, it was clear to R. Kook that in order to hasten the redemption, it is necessary to be active in both spirit and matter and that one who focuses on only one of the two is in the wrong:

And every person of Israel should know that so long as he relates only to the secular aspects of the national revival, he is only engaging in his people’s work from one aspect, and his work is not complete work . . . and so also every person of Israel who builds the nation’s holy values should know that so long as he does not help and support the secular construction of the nation he is detracting from the nature of the mandated national work. And the more this complete recognition shall spread, the quality of our national revival will grow closer to attaining its full nature. (Kook 1988, p. 43)

R. Kook’s approach should be understood in the context of the ideological conflict with socialist Zionism, espoused by members of the Second and Third Aliya, people of the “religion of labor” who saw work as the redemption of the people and of the land. The main ideologue of this movement was Aaron David Gordon (Strassberg-Cohen 1995). Work was the main axis of Gordon’s philosophy, and it can be summarized as represented by three foundations (Ibid., pp. 148–53): First, work is a purpose in and of itself and not only a means of subsistence (Bergman and Shohat 1952, vol. 1, p. 308). Second, work-faith relations. As he sees it, when one works “it is religious worship even more than one who observes . . . all the commandments of the conveyed and customary faith” (Ibid., vol. 2, p. 123). It is not for nothing that his doctrine is designated “the religion of labor”. Third, work–nation relations. Work has a national and universal value; it allows realization of the organic association linking individuals and the collective. He believed that only work could create the Jewish people anew, disconnected as they had become from life in nature while living unproductively in exile (Ibid., p. 194). And from within that manual labor, he believed, will appear the revival and the redemption: “The revival of the people, its renewal as a working and productive people, can only come about through work . . . primarily through manual work . . . Even the redemption of the land can only come about through work” (Schweid 1983, p. 265).

In the recognition that the Torah contains everything, and in the context of the struggle with Zionist socialism, R. Kook often spoke about the combination of Torah and work and called for the establishment of yeshivas that in time were designated “*Torah U’melakha*”.

## 7. Shmuel Chaim Landau—Shachal

With regard to the *Torah U’melakha* yeshivas affected by the “Torah and work” concept put forth by the Hapoel Hamizrachi movement (Fishman 1979), one of the movement’s founding fathers, Shmuel Chaim Landau (1892–1929), is noteworthy (Rafael 1965, vol. 3, pp. 226–40).

In his opening speech at the second national convention of Hapoel Hamizrachi, he introduced his “special aspiration” to create a Jewish type that combines Torah and work, while criticizing the secular Zionists who abandoned the Torah and the ultraorthodox who abandoned work:

It is a special battle we must wage for our special aspiration: to create a type of young national-religious Jew, devoted in his heart and mind to his people and Torah and who takes an active part in building the land and in the revival of the nation. This work of ours encounters in its course objectors from right and left. While young people on the left [secular], who are indeed devoted to the work of building the land, decry anything holy . . . the young on the right, the ultra-orthodox . . . devote the spirit of their youth to interfering with the revival

of the Jewish nation in its land . . . The aspiration of national religious Judaism: building the land of Israel in the spirit of Judaism and its Torah. (Frumer 2008, p. 61)

In time, he instituted the slogan “Torah and work” (*Torah va’avoda*), borne to this day on the banner of the “Bnei Akiva” youth movement:

The return to productive life is one of the foundations of the nation’s revival and of its departure from a life of exile to the life of a nation on its land . . . To realize in life the old-new true Hebrew slogan “Torah and work” . . . and as early as two thousand years ago, the sages revealed to us this wonderful secret and said: Six days shall you labor, this is a positive commandment. (Ibid., pp. 233–34)

Studying Torah and engaging in work are part of the revival:

In this way “Torah” and “work” become not two separate things . . . that perhaps stand on the same territory and on a single level . . . two revelations of one object: revival . . . Hence, the Torah cannot be revived without work, and work, work that creates and revives a nation, cannot exist without Torah, the Torah of revival. (Ibid.)

Shachal was one of the formulators of the “holy revolt” principles (Wolkenfeld 2010), expressed in a “call of the founders”: against the Jewish-exilic identity; calling for a return to a whole, original, biblical, multidimensional Judaism that engages in Torah and work rather than only in religious spirituality; a call to connect to nature and to the earth. This also contains criticism of ultraorthodox Judaism that engages only in spirituality, as well as of secular Zionism that engages only in corporeality and nationalism:

We desire a life of work and production based on the traditional Judaism. We can’t engage only in spirituality . . . but we also can’t make do only with external nationalism of language and country, and leave our Torah . . . we desire a Judaism of Torah and work, through which Judaism will be in contact with nature, life, and the nation . . . we strive to return to the initial Hebrew life, to the original biblical Judaism.

In this way, after establishing a youth movement with the slogan “Torah and work”, the next step taken was to start establishing *Torah U’melakha* yeshivas in order to realize this Torah-oriented ideal.

## 8. R. Moshe Avigdor Amiel

R. Moshe Avigdor Amiel (1882–1945) was a rabbi and ideologue in the Mizrahi movement, the Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv (Bat Yehuda 2001; Hellinger 2003). R. Amiel strived for a complete Judaism, which in his view combines Torah and work.

And if someone were to come to me . . . and say: “Teach me the entire Torah on one foot” (According to Bavli, Shabbat 31a), I would say to him “A matter—and not half a matter”. That is the entire Torah . . . Why are they called parties, because each of them has chosen only part of the matter of Judaism . . . and not the whole thing . . . they cause a partitioning . . . of our whole Torah. (Amiel 2006, vol. 1, p. 369)

His criticism is aimed at the ultraorthodox, who embraced the spiritual part—the Torah, and at the secular, who embraced the material part—work. Both have only “half a matter”, while the Mizrahi has the “complete Torah” that includes the entire “matter”. Torah and work should complete each other. “Torah will be flavored by work and work will become a complete Torah” (Ibid.). This is “because our Torah is a Torah of life. A Torah that is not against life, but rather that transforms all needs of life into Torah” (Amiel 1943, p. 173).

In order to realize his aspiration to return to a whole Judaism, in 1938, R. Amiel founded the first high school yeshiva, *Hayishuv Hehadash*, in Tel Aviv (Bar-Lev 1987):

I see before me an enormous danger for our generation . . . New ways of life are gradually invading our life . . . There is a current obligation and an obligation of the generations to spread the study of Torah—that is my desire—to crown the Torah anew. (Gellman 1963)

His desire was to “crown the Torah anew”, namely, to return to a state where the Torah encompassed everything, both Torah studies and an occupation with general disciplines. Following this yeshiva, high school yeshivas and *Torah U’melakha* yeshivas were opened in Israel and in other countries.

### 9. R. Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel

R. Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel (1880–1953) was the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel (Zohar et al. 2020). To understand R. Uziel’s attitude to teaching one to live a life of Torah and work, it is necessary to understand how he perceives Torah (Hadani 2009; Hellinger 2003). In 1932, R. Uziel wrote a letter in which he described his wide view of Torah as encompassing the sciences and languages:

We would do well, I say, to establish the elementary school program in our country on foundations of Torah and science . . . and when I say Torah I do not mean this in its limited meaning, as do others in their ignorance and boorishness; rather I mean Torah in its wide meaning, which includes the language of the Torah, redemption of the land, and the doctrine of love and ethics in family and national life and in the life of all people created in [God’s] image. These issues and their details are the very essence of Torah. (Ibid., pp. 69–70)

Torah includes secular studies and vocational training. In a lecture given in 1919, entitled “Torah and work” (Uziel 1995–2009, vol. 1, pp. 455–60), R. Uziel stated adamantly that learning a craft is a religious commandment, as the Talmud says that a father must “teach his son a trade”, and if he does not do so, it is as if he “teaches him banditry” (Bavli, Kiddushin 30b). “From this you learn that labor and crafts are an obligatory commandment and an honor for all Jews and for the entire Jewish people, from which neither the individual nor the collective may refrain”. He further says: “Labor is unworthy of its name when it is performed only for the purpose of the present life . . . labor that is worthy of its name is that performed with affection, a wide heart, and a good eye”. He also determined that work is held in one’s favor not only in the present world rather also “it shall be used to reach eternal life” (Uziel 1995–2009, vol. 1, p. 311).

Therefore, the sacred should not be separated from the secular, nor the Torah from work. In this matter, he criticized both secular state education and ultraorthodox education:

We would commit a grave transgression if we were to make our schools completely secular, if we were to bar our children from Torah-oriented studies . . . and we would be making a mistake if we were to think that we are fulfilling our obligation by merely placing our children in the hands of religious schools. Rather, our educational duty to our children and to the entire nation is: a practical and dogmatic education and trustworthy instruction. (Ibid., p. 314)

As he saw it, engaging in work is not only for the purpose of subsistence, rather it is a religious value aimed at bettering the world, and whoever does not do so is a mere robber, whereas he has no work, so he has no Torah:

Work and crafts are not voluntary; according to the Torah of Israel this is an obligatory commandment, as the Torah says: Six days shall you labor . . . One is forbidden from partaking of the table of others, living off the work of others, without giving in return his own productive work . . .

Even one who engages in Torah and teaches it to others does not fulfill his duty, and neither he nor his Torah will persist unless he adds to this creative work by providing his own needs and doing his part in maintaining the world and contributing to the progress of humanity (Ibid., p. 456). Hence, as he sees it, the people of Israel will regain their lost

national honor “by showing all nations . . . that their hands are also well occupied with agricultural work and industry, crafts and commerce” (Ibid., pp. 468–69).

It is not surprising that R. Uziel endeavored to promote the schools of the Mizrachi, which combine religious and secular studies, Torah and work.

## 10. Summary

Vocational studies in Israel declined over time. Vocational schools, which had focused on teaching manual labor, carpentry, metalwork, and others, were closed, and there is currently a conspicuous lack of such workers in Israel. The government compensated for this deficiency by importing foreign workers.

Technological studies, which have mostly replaced vocational studies, are gradually expanding, and this is particularly evident in the rate of those studying in the high-tech track, which has replaced theoretical studies. This track has led to a drop in students of the humanities and social sciences. In high school, the increasing emphasis on the high-tech track is particularly strong in the Arab sector (Fuchs et al. 2018, pp. 1–28).

In 2006, an extensive report on vocational and technological education in Israel was published, written by Dr. Eli Eisenberg, deputy director of the ORT network, for the European Training Foundation (ETF) (Eisenberg 2006). The report emphasizes that the cuts in the budget for technological education led to the elimination of technological tracks, particularly in peripheral areas, as well as a considerable drop in the number of hours taught and a rise in the age of teachers. The report offered several suggestions for promoting technological education in Israel, including:

1. Improving the image of technological education in the media;
2. Developing and expanding the TOV (acronym for “technical studies and matriculation”) program;
3. Realistic budgeting of technological subjects, equipping laboratories, and compensating faculty;
4. Expanding secondary training, particularly of technicians and technical engineers, in fields for which there is a demand in industry and in the army.
5. Collaboration between industrial plants and schools and between universities and technological high schools (Eisenberg and Selivansky-Eden 2019).

With regard to the *Torah U’melakha* yeshivas—from the beginning, there were only four. Some were subsequently closed, and others changed their nature from vocational to technological. However, the educational trend toward “Torah and labor” has not disappeared. Vocational education, which became technological as well, was assimilated in nearly all high school yeshivas, which, to a great degree, made the *Torah U’melakha* yeshivas redundant. Many high school yeshivas have vocational or technological tracks such as electricity studies, computers, electronics, engineering, media, agriculture, theatre, and more.

The ideological and theological value of “Torah and work”, as perceived by rabbis and ideologues in the religious Zionist movement, became engraved in the pedagogic consciousness of this sector and is continuing to infuse the many high school yeshivas in Israel and elsewhere.

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