# A Source for Rav Kook’s Orot Hateshuva Chapter 1 and 2

Chaim Katz

Rav Kook begins the first chapter of his *Orot Hateshuva* [1] as follows:

We find three categories of repentance: 1) natural repentance 2) faithful repentance 3) intellectual repentance.

את התשובה אנו מוצאים בשלש מערכות: א) תשובה טבעית, ב) תשובה אמונית, ג) תשובה שכלית

He defines natural repentance:

(תשובה טבעית) הגופנית סובבת את כל העבירות נגד חוקי הטבע, המוסר והתורה, המקושרים עם חוקי הטבע. שסוף כל הנהגה רעה הוא להביא מחלות ומכאובים . . . ואחרי הבירור שמתברר אצלו הדבר, שהוא בעצמו בהנהגתו הרעה אשם הוא בכל אותו דלדול החיים שבא לו, הרי הוא שם לב לתקן את המצב

The natural physical repentance revolves around all sins against the laws of nature ethics and Torah that are connected to the laws of nature. All misdeeds lead to illness and pain . . . but after the clarification, when he clearly recognizes that he alone through his own harmful behavior is responsible for the sickness he feels, he turns his attention toward rectifying the problem.

I understand that Rav Kook is primarily describing someone who doesn’t care about his personal hygiene or health. Rav Kook also includes one who sins against natural ethics and natural aspects of the Torah. Though I’m not sure, the sins in ethics might be similar to the חסיד שוטה, who takes his devoutness to foolish (and even dangerous) extremes (Sotah 20a). The sins in Torah might include one who fasts although he is unable to handle fasting (Taanit 11b דלא מצי לצעורי נפשיה) [2].

R. Shneur Zalman of Liady, in his collection of sermons known as *Likkutei Torah* [3], also recognizes three stages of repentance. Homiletically, the three types are based in Ps. 34,15.

סור מרע, ועשה טוב, בקש שלום ורדפהו.

The three types of repentance correspond to the three names of G-d that appear in the text of the *berachos* that we say:

ברוך אתה ד' אלוקינו

According to R. Shenur Zalmen of Liady, the first level of repentance relates to the Divine name *Elokim* (In Hassidic thought, repentance (teshuva return) is taken literally as ‘returning to G-d’, not only as repentance from sin.)

The mystics of the 16th century connected the name *Elokim* to nature.

אלוקים בגימטריא הטבע

*Elokim* is numerically equivalent to the word for nature (*hateva*). [4]

*Elokim* is related to ממלא כל עלמין, the immanence of G-d . . .

🙤🙥🙤

R. Kook describes the second level of repentance as follows:

אחרי התשובה הטבעית באה האמונית, היא החיה בעולם ממקור המסורת והדת

After the natural repentance comes a repentance based on faith. It subsists in the world from a source of tradition and religion.

R. Shneur Zalmen of Liady describes the second type of repentance as a return to *shem* *Hashem,* the Tetragrammaton. This name signifies the transcendence of G-d, the name associated with the highest degree of revelation, the name of G-d that was revealed at Sinai and that revealed the Torah.

🙤🙥🙤

Rav Kook’s third level of repentance:

התשובההשכלית היא . . . הכרה ברורה, הבאה מהשקפת העולם והחיים השלמה . . . היא מלאה כבר אור אין קץ

The intellectual repentance . . . is a clear recognition that comes from an encompassing world and life view. . . . It is a level filled with infinite light.

R. Shneur Zalman of Liady describes the third level of as a return through Torah study to the level of the *Or En Sof*, the infinite self-revelation of G-d. It is a return to אתה to Thou.

🙤🙥🙤

In summary, R. Shneur Zalmen discusses three types of teshuva, (although the sources only speak about two types: תשובה מיראה תשובה מאהבה, Yoma 86b). These three teshuva categories form a progression. The most obvious teshuva is to “turn away from evil”, to return to the Divine name *Elokim* (related to the laws of of nature). A subsequent higher degree of teshuva is a return to the Divine name *Hashem* (related to the revelation at Sinai). The most intense teshuva is to return to the *Or En Sof*, through the study of Torah in an exalted selfless way. Rav Kook also speaks of a threefold progression: a return based on nature, a return based on faith, and a return based on intellect.

I think one could argue that the first chapter of Rav Kook’s *Orot Hateshuva* was inspired or was influenced by R. Shneur Zalman’s analysis. It’s almost as if R. Kook was consciously building upon or interpreting the thoughts of R. Shneur Zalman and developing those ideas in new directions. [5]

R. Kook did study *Likkutei Torah*. This is documented in a book called *Mazkir* *HaRav* by R. Shimon Glicenstein (published in 1973) [6]. R. Glicenstein was Rav Kook’s personal secretary during the years of the first world, when Rav Kook served as a Rabbi in London.

On page yod, R. Glicenstein writes:

One time on the eve of the holiday of Shavuot, I entered the Rav’s room and I found him running back and forth like a young man. He was holding the Likutei Torah (the section on the Song of Songs) of the Alter Rebbe (the Rav of Liady) in his hand. With sublime ecstasy and great emotion, he repeated a number of times: “Look, open Divine Inspiration springs out of each and every line of these Hassidic essays and exegeses”.

מכל שורה ושורה שבמאמרי ודרושי חסידות אלה מבצבץ רוח הקדש גלוי'

🙤🙥🙤

The second chapter of *Orot Hatshuva* is titled Sudden Repentance and Gradual Repentance. The chapter consists of three short paragraphs: the first describes the sudden teshuva as a sort of spiritual flare that spontaneously shines its light on the soul. The gradual teshuva is a person who plods forward to correct and improve his character and his life without the benefit of spiritual inspiration.

These ideas also find a parallel in the *Likkutei Torah* [7]. R. Shneur Zalman of Liady discusses two levels of Divine service (not to two levels of repentance). In one a spontaneous arousal comes from above (itaruta de le-eyla) initiated by G-d as a Divine kindness, without any preparation on man’s part. In the other (itaruta de le-tata) a man’s service involves great exertion and effort to tame and refine his own animal nature.

Rav Kook’s third paragraph (of chapter two) is difficult to understand. Rav Kook begins by describing again the sudden repentance:

התשובה העליונה  באה מהברקה של הטוב הכללי של הטוב האלהי השורה בעולמות כולם

The sublime teshuva is a result of a flash of the general good of the G-dly good, which permeates all worlds.

The paragraph then continues on a seemingly different track.

והיושר והטוב שבנו הלא הוא בא מהתאמתנו אל הכל, ואיך אפשר להיות קרוע מן הכל, פרור משונה, מופרד כאבק דק שכלא חשב. ומתוך הכרה זו, שהיא הכרה אלהית באמת, באה תשובה מאהבה בחיי הפרט ובחיי הכלל

The rightness and goodness within us, does it not come from our symmetry with the whole. How can we be torn from the whole, like an odd crumb, like insignificant specs of dust?

From this recognition, which is truthfully a G-dly recognition, comes a repentance from love both in the life of the individual and the life of the society.

I have a feeling that this paragraph is also related to something in *Likkutei Torah* but for some reason, R. Kook was maybe too overcome with emotion to finish the idea on paper.

R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi writes there, that people complain to him because they only feel a spirit of holiness that arouses them to emotional prayer for a short duration of time (sometimes for a few weeks). Afterwards the inspiration ceases completely and it’s as if it never existed. He responds to them, that they should use those periods of inspiration when they occur, (not just to enjoy the pleasure of prayer but) to improve their character, to change their behavior for the better. The state of inspiration will then return.

I think Rav Kook is dealing with the same issue. How can we take the exalted periods of awareness and inspiration and join that type of teshuva together with the gradual teshuva to effect a permanent change in the life of the individual and the community? I don’t think he answers completely, (or I can’t say I understand the answer completely), but he does say that it depends on the realization that we are part of the “whole” and not separate. With this realization (which he calls a G-dly recognition), we can always partake of the inspirational teshuva and reach even the most exalted levels. [8]

[1] <https://he.wikisource.org/wiki/אורות_התשובה_א>

<http://www.hebrewbooks.org/31307>

[2] I saw these two examples in Rav Kook’s Ein AY”H,

<https://he.wikisource.org/wiki/עין_איה_על_ברכות_ט_רי>

In the following paragraph, Rav Kook speaks about a natural spiritual, repentance ––pangs of remorse (if the sinner is an otherwise upright individual) that motivate the sinner to perform teshuva.

[3] <http://chabadlibrary.org/books/default.aspx?furl=/adhaz/lkutey/21/73a> Likutei Torah Parshat Balak 73a. The sermon begins with the words מה טובו. There are (shorter) versions of the sermon published in other collections.

[4] Quoted also in the second part of Tanya, (*Shaar Hayichud Vhaemunah*) beginning of chapter 6. The statement is usually attributed to R. Moshe Cordovero, (*Pardes* *Rimonim*)

[5] Possibly both R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi and R. Kook relied on an earlier source that I’m unaware of.

Maybe R. Kook and R. Shenur Zalman arrived at a similar understanding independently.

[6] <https://www.otzar.org/wotzar/book.aspx?150570> R. Tzvi Yehudah Kook wrote the introduction to the book. From the introduction, it looks like R. Tzvi Yehudah published the work based on essays and notes that R. Glicenstein had given him.

[7] Parshat Vayikra page 2b, on the words אדם כי יקריב מכם. <http://chabadlibrary.org/books/default.aspx?furl=/adhaz/lkutey/4/2b>

[8] Caveat. 1) I hope I didn’t mess up any translations of Rav Kook’s words. 2) These are delicate topics that aren’t suited to short essays like this one. Excuse me if this isn’t very clear; I hope I haven’t made anything worse.