# A Tentative Source of Rav Kook’s Orot Hateshuva Chapter 1

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. The result of all bad behavior is illness and pain . . . but after one recognizes clearly that he himself and his own harmful behavior is responsible for the weakness he feels, he turns his attention to rectifying the problem.

I understand that Rav Kook is firstly describing someone who doesn’t care about his personal hygiene or physical health. Such a person is sinning against nature. Similarly, Rav Kook describes one who sins against natural ethics and one who sins against natural aspects of the Torah. Concerning ethics, Rav Kook might be thinking of the חסיד שוטה, who takes his devoutness to foolish (and sometimes fatal) extremes (Sotah 20a). An example of a sin against Torah is maybe one who fasts although he is unable to handle it (Taanit 11b דלא מצי לצעורי נפשיה). Rav Kook in the following paragraph speaks about a natural spiritual, repentance ––pangs of remorse that motivate the sinner (an upright individual) to perform teshuva.

R. Shneur Zalman of Liady, in his collection of sermons known as *Likkutei Torah* [2], also recognizes three stages of repentance. Homiletically, the three types are based in Ps. 34,15.

סור מרע, ועשה טוב, בקש שלום ורדפהו

and they correspond to the three names of G-d that appear in the text of the *berachos* that we say:

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) 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

(The spelling of) Elokim is numerically equivalent to the spelling of the word for nature.

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

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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* *Havayah,* 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.

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Rav Kook’s third level:

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.

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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 forms are themselves different steps of an ongoing 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 thoughts in a new direction.

On the other hand, it’s possible that R. Kook was not influenced by the *Likutei* *Torah* at all. Rather he arrived at a similar understanding independently. (Possibly both R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi and R. Kook relied on the same earlier source that I’m unaware of.)

It is however known that R. Kook did study *Likkutei Torah*. This is documented in a book called *Mazkir* *HaRav* by R. Shimon Glicenstein (published in 1973). 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, obvious Divine Inspiration springs out of each and every line of these Hassidic essays and sermons”.

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There is however one more thing to mention. 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 and the second describes the gradual teshuva. They are straightforward, but the third paragraph is much more difficult to understand. You get the feeling that R. Kook was too overcome with emotion to finish his idea on paper.