



RAV KOOK'S TEACHINGS

With Rejoicing, Teshuvah Is Complete

In these paragraphs, from Orot HaTeshuva 9:10, Rav Kook discusses the spiritual and emotional experience of a Jew during the month of Tishrei. Despite its brevity, this passage contains several of Rav Kook's foundational ideas regarding Teshuvah and the human soul. (Translation by Yaacov David Shulman.)

הַתְּשׁוּבָה וְכָל הַהֲלִיכוֹת הַמַּעֲשִׂיּוֹת שֶׁלָּהּ, עִם הַרוּחַ הַכְּלָלִית הַשׁוֹלֵטת בְּעֵקֶרָהּ בְּיָמֵים הַמְּסֻדָּדִים לַתְּשׁוּבָה עִם גִּדְלַת הַתּוֹעֵלֶת שֶׁלָּהּ לְזַכֵּךְ אֶת הַנְּפְשׁוֹת, לְעֵדוּ אֶת הַרוּחַ וּלְטַהֵר אֶת הַמַּעֲשִׂים מִכְּעוּרָם, הִיא תִּכְרַחֵת לְהִיּוֹת סוּפְגַת עֲפָה אִיִּזוֹ תְּלַשָּׁה, שֶׁלֹּא נִמְלֵט מִסָּגָה אֶפְלוּ הַגְּבוּר שֶׁבְּגְבוּרָתָם.

כְּשֶׁמְקַמְצִים אֶת הַרְצוֹן, כְּשֶׁכּוֹפְפִים אֶת עַז הַחַיִּים ע"י הַסְּלִיכָה הַפְּנִימִית, וְהַנְּטִיָּה לְשׁוֹב מְכַל חֲטָא, מְתַקְנֵם ג"כ הַרְצוֹן שֶׁל הַטוֹב, וְעַז הַחַיִּים הַטְּהוּרִים מִתְחַלְשׁ גַּם הוּא. נִמְצָא הָאָדָם סוֹבֵל מִטְּהוּרָתוֹ הַמוֹסְרִית תְּלִישָׁה כְּזֹאת שֶׁסוֹבֵל חוֹלָה שֶׁהִתְרַפָּא ע"י הַזְּרָמָה אֶלְקָטְרִית תְּזַקֵּה, שֶׁאֲמַנְם גְּרָשָׁה אֶת הָאָדָם שֶׁבְּמִסְתָּלְתוֹ, אֲבָל הַתְּלִישָׁה אֶת הַכֹּחַ הַחַי וְהַבְּרִיא שֶׁבוּ. שְׂבִים, ע"כ, יָמִים שֶׁל שְׂמֵחַת קִדְשׁ, שֶׁל יְדוּת הַנְּפֶשׁ, לְקוּמָם אֶת הַרְצוֹן הַטוֹב וְעַז הַחַיִּים הַטְּהוּר. אֵז תִּהְיֶה הַתְּשׁוּבָה שְׁלֵמָה.

Teshuvah, together with all of its practical applications, with the general spirit that prevails essentially on the days particularly suited for teshuvah with its great utility for purifying people, refining the spirit and purifying deeds of their ugliness, must necessarily conceal some weakness within itself. That is something that not even the mightiest of the mighty can escape.

When we constrict our will, when we subjugate the vigor of life by an inner repulsion and an inclination to turn away from every sin, the intention for good is also constricted. And the might of a pure life is also weakened. And so a person's moral purification causes him to suffer weakness analogous to that suffered by a sick person who has been healed by a robust electrical shock; which, although it has ejected the poison of his illness, has weakened his vital and healthy power. Therefore, there return days of holy joy, of the rejoicing of the spirit, to raise the goodwill and the pure might of life. Then teshuvah will be complete.

Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook



Living Passionately and Idealistically

Rabbi Dr. Yosef Bronstein

The importance of Ratzon

As a kabbalist, Rav Kook often underscored the importance of a human being's *ratzon* ("will" or "desire"). When stripped down to its core, a person's essential *ratzon* is "a small spark of the great flame of... G-d's will." Just as G-d desires the betterment of the world and all its inhabitants, so, too, deep down, every person has an identical burning drive. Our most elemental desire is that each individual and the world collectively live the ideal life of perfection and connection to G-d (Orot HaKodesh 3, p. 39).

Due to our complex makeup, this primal passion is often concealed. Instead, we focus on more limited goals and desires. We crave fulfilling relationships, a good job, or success in specific projects. As Jews, however, our mission is to constantly analyse our drives and passions and work to connect each specific passion back to our core desire for spiritual perfection. Through a process of "moral toil," we are called to elevate ourselves above the "vicious and narrow cycle of limited desires" and consciously realize how each of our passions is part of this "great tapestry" of the general pining for perfection (Orot HaKodesh 3, p. 40).

Ratzon and Teshuvah

Rav Kook highlighted several aspects of religious life that are ideal opportunities for cultivating and revealing this elemental *ratzon* (see, for example, Orot HaKodesh 3, 77). One such example is the process of *teshuvah*. When a person thinks seriously about his current spiritual state or the state of his family, community, or the world as a whole, he will immediately realize the significant gap that exists between the present reality and the Torah's vision of perfection. Contemplating this chasm will nourish one's primal

desire for perfection and closeness to G-d. *Teshuvah* then can help the inner *ratzon* grow from a small spark to a raging fire, from a subconscious drive to a conscious and omnipresent organizing principle in one's life (Orot HaTeshuva 9:1-2).

A Unified Personality

Teshuvah, though, can also have a detrimental impact on a person's *ratzon*. True High Holiday *teshuvah* requires one to amputate specific external drives that have become appended to the pure soul (Orot HaTeshuva 8:1). This severing of the less idealistic parts of our identity can negatively affect the one doing *teshuvah*.



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Rav Kook explains that a person – body and soul, mind and heart, *yetzer hatov* and *yetzer hara* – is a holistic entity. If, before engaging in *teshuvah*, a person was passionate for physical pleasure, the redirecting of these drives can potentially weaken a person's general vitality and zest for life.

A diminishment of even negative desires can leave a person more blasé and less passionate than before, or in Rav Kook's language, with a debilitated *ratzon*.

Rav Kook writes that the beginning of one's growth in *Yirat Shamayim* is often accompanied by a wave of "passivity" as a person incorrectly associates religious life with "losing one's essential *ratzon*" (Orot HaKodesh 3, pg. 28 [introduction]).

The Simcha of Sukkot

This is why the holiday season of Tishrei concludes with Sukkot. True *teshuvah*, as painful as it is, must conclude with a sense of joy and vitality. The painful contemplation of the gap between the real and the ideal does not end in despondency but in the joyful realization that we are blessed to live in G-d's presence and have the wherewithal to constantly strengthen that connection (Orot HaTeshuva 16:3). *Teshuvah* broadens our field of vision, allowing us to see new spiritual opportunities on the horizon. This joyful excitement should be the dominant emotion that we gain through the months of Ellul and Tishrei. And so the apprehensive opening days of Tishrei cannot be complete without the joy of Sukkot. Through serving G-d with joy, we will reinvigorate our *ratzon* and passionately pursue an optimistic life of serving G-d.

"A *tzaddik* must believe in himself that he is fit to experience joy in the performance of *mitzvot*, such a joy that the entire world is not worthy of it... And particularly in the times of joy... we banish from our hearts gloomy calculations that can cloud a person's spiritual life. Rather, we are happy with G-d, in the sanctity of His light that is revealed in our souls... and we spiritually connect with [G-d's light], with the vitality of His sanctity that gives life to all" (Shemoneh Kevatzim 2:222).

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