

Understanding Teshuva



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Written by Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of British Mandate Palestine, and popularly known as 'Rav Kook', *Orot HaTeshuva (Lights of Repentance)* revamps our view on *Teshuva*. Concluded in 1924, *Orot HaTeshuva* views repentance as a positive and motivating experience, rather than a depressing one.

Rav Kook writes that the subject of repentance encompasses a major part of the Torah and life. It is a commandment by God that, on one hand, is the simplest to perform, for the slightest thought of repentance is in itself repentance. Yet in another sense, repentance is the most difficult of all commandments to fulfil; as Rav Kook writes, it has not been fully actualised in the world and in human life.

Repentance, according to Rav Kook,

is to return to our true spiritual self. Rav Kook writes that "through repentance all things return to God." The word *Teshuva* literally means "return." It is not an escape from the world. On the contrary, it is "precisely through genuine, pure *Teshuva* that we return to the world and to life." *Teshuva* redeems the sinner from darkness, rejuvenates them and restores a state of life and joy. As a father of Religious Zionism before the creation of the State of Israel, Rav Kook writes about national and spiritual *Teshuva*. The rebuilding of the nation and the State of Israel could not take place through only a secular sphere, it had to have a parallel religious revival. But what would make the generation prior to the rebirth of the State of Israel return to God?

Rav Kook writes that the normal approach was doomed to failure. One cannot reach out to youth, brimming with life, vigour and creativity, with a negative message of *Teshuva*. Rather, the younger generation prior to the creation of the State of

Israel had to return with a positive awakening of spirit and courage. "*Teshuva* comes not to embitter life," Rav Kook taught, "but to make it pleasant." "*Teshuva* is essentially a return to our origins, to the source of supernal life and existence in its wholeness."

Rather than being hindered in the path of perfection and trembling with a sense of fear in our souls at the time of repentance before us, Rav Kook teaches that we must thrust aside our negative thoughts about *Teshuva* and transform our sorrow into positivity. *Teshuva* is when we return to our truest, purest self and this can only be done in a positive way.

Understanding Rav Kook's ideas on *Teshuva* can teach us a valuable lesson in life. Seeing the positive in all situations is imperative. Finding the good and seeing mistakes as an opportunity to return our soul to a better condition will fill us with a positive spirit and courage.

