

THE RAV, HA-RAV, & THE REBBE: THREE APPROACHES TO TESHUVA

PART II, HA-RAV

I. Rav Kook's Monism

1. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot ha-Kodesh*, Vol. II (1985), 395–396

True reality is the divine, and all existence that descends from God's ultimate transcendence is no more than the descent of will in its imperfect choice, which causes yet more deficiency until, at last, all impurity will perish, and the will in its freedom shall rise to the absolute good, and the Lord will be one and His Name one. The return of all to the Divine is the highest perfection of existence, and one cannot conceive its worth.

2. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot ha-Teshuva*, Chapter 4, §2 (Bokser,* 49)

Through penitence all things are reunited with God; through the fact that penitence is operative in all worlds, all things are returned and reattached to the realm of divine perfection. Through the thoughts of penitence, its conceptual implications and the feelings it engenders, the basic character of all our thinking our imagination and our knowledge, our will and our feeling, is transformed and placed again within the context of the holy order of the divine.

**Abraham Isaac Kook: The Lights of Penitence, Lights of Holiness, The Moral Principles, Essays, Letters and Poems (1978), Ben Zion Bokser, ed.*

3. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot ha-Teshuva*, Chapter 5, §7 (Bokser, 55)

Penitence was planned before the creation of the world, and it is for this reason the foundation of the world. The quest for the perfection of life is a phase of its manifestation according to its nature. Since nature, by its own workings, is without probing and discrimination, sin thus becomes inevitable. "There is no man so righteous that he will [always] do good and not sin" (Kohelet 7:20). To nullify the basic nature of life that man shall become a non-sinner—this itself would be the greatest sin. "And one must make atonement for the sin committed against the self" (Num. 6:11). Penitence redresses the defect and restores the world and life to their original character precisely by focusing on the basis of their highest attribute, the dimension of freedom. It is for this reason that God is called the God of life.

II. Three Levels of *Teshuvah*

4. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot ha-Teshuva*, Chapter 1 (Bokser, 43)

We encounter the phenomenon of penitence on three levels: penitence according to nature, penitence according to faith and penitence according to reason. Penitence according to nature may be divided into two parts: the physical and the spiritual. ... The science of medicine concerns itself a good deal with this. ...

5. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot ha-Teshuva*, Chapter 8, §13 (Bokser, 67)

Every sin produces a special anxiety of the spirit, which does not recede except through penitence. ... One can recognize the anxiety that comes through in marks on the face, in gestures, in the voice, in behavior, in the handwriting, in the manner of communication, in speech, and especially in the style of writing, in the way one develops thoughts and arranges them. Whenever sin has obstructed the light, there is the defect noticeable.

6. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot ha-Teshuva*, Chapter 1 (Bokser, 44)

After the natural phase of penitence comes penitence inspired by religious faith. This phase of penitence is operative as a result of religious tradition, which frequently concerns itself with penitence. The Torah promises the penitent forgiveness. The sins of individuals and of the community are purged away through penitence. The prophets abound with exalted utterances on the subject of penitence. In a general way all the admonitions of the Torah deal with penitence from the perspective of religious faith.

7. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot ha-Teshuva*, Chapter 1 (Bokser, 44–45)

Penitence according to reason comes after penitence according to nature and religious faith have already taken place. It represents the peak of penitential expression. This level of penitence is inspired not only by a natural malaise, physical or spiritual, or by the influence of religious tradition, whether it has induced in the person a fear of retribution or conditioned him to the acceptance of some law or precept. It is also inspired by a comprehensive outlook on life that came to crystallization after the natural and religious phases of penitence had registered their influence. This phase of penitence, in which the previous are included, abounds in endless delight. It transforms all the past sins into spiritual assets. From every error it derives noble lessons, and from every lowly fall it derives the inspiration for the climb to splendid heights. This is the type of penitence toward which all aspire, which must come and which is bound to come.