

# Rav Kook Torah

by Rabbi

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## Two Levels of T'shuva

The Torah portion of Nitzavim is always read before Rosh HaShana (with or without Vayeilech), a fitting time to speak about reflection and repentance. Often we have a strong desire to make changes in our lives. We may want to be better parents, better spouses, and better people. We aspire to greater spirituality in our lives, to devote more time to Torah study, to be more thoughtful in our interpersonal relationships. And yet, circumstances may make such resolutions very difficult to keep. Our goals may seem unattainable, and our personality faults beyond correction.

### National T'shuva

The Torah describes the national t'shuva (repentance) of the Jewish people as they return to their homeland and their faith:

“Among the nations where the Lord your God has banished you, you will reflect on the situation. Then you will return up to the Lord your God... He will gather you from among the nations... and bring you to the land that your ancestors possessed.

God will remove the barriers from your hearts... and you will repent and obey God, keeping all of His com-

mandments... For you will return to the Lord your God with all your heart and soul” (D'varim 30:1-10).

Twice, the verse states that “You will return to God.” Is there a purpose to this repetition? A careful reading reveals a slight discrepancy between the two phrases.

After reflection in the exile, the Jewish people will return to the land of their fathers. Here the text says, V'SHAVTA AD HASHEM ELOKECHA – “you will return UP TO God”, using the Hebrew word AD.

After returning to the Land of Israel and God removes the barriers of their hearts, they will learn to fully love God and keep His commandments. This time the Torah says, KI TASHUV EL HASHEM – “you will return to God”, using the preposition EL.

### Two Stages of T'shuva

How are these two types of national return different? What is the difference between AD and EL?

The first t'shuva is the physical return to their homeland, to their language, and to their national essence. This is returning “up to God” – approaching, but not fully attaining. Thus the Torah uses the preposition AD, indicating a state of “up to, but not included in the category” (a Talmudic expression, AD V'LO AD BICHLAL). This is a genuine yet incomplete repentance, obscured by many veils.

After this initial return, the Jewish people will merit Divine assistance that “will remove the barriers from your hearts”. This will enable the people to achieve the second stage of return, a full, complete t'shuva, all the way “to God”. This is an all-embracing return to God “with all your heart and soul”.

### **Thoughts of T'shuva**

It is important to recognize and appreciate these different levels of t'shuva. This lesson is also true on a personal level. We should value even partial efforts to change and improve. The Sages praised even HIRHUREI T'SHUVA, the mere desire to improve (Pesikta Rabbati 44). Perhaps we are unable to fulfill our spiritual ambitions to the extent we like. Nonetheless, we should view our desire to change and improve as tools that purify and sanctify, leading us on our way to attaining complete spiritual elevation.

*Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 339-341. Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I p. 335; Orot HaT'shuva 17:2*