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Natural Teshuva in the Land

The return (teshuva) to Israelite nature, which throbs in the arousal to national renaissance and its hopes - only it will bring the complete Return (teshuva) tied to the particular wisdom of the Living God, the supernal root of the Torah in all its plenitude, written and oral, of the law transcribed and transmitted and of every precious trait.” (Eretz Cheftetz 6:3) (Naor translation)

In what way does the mitzvah of teshuva have a singular nature in the Land of Israel?

RETURN TO OUR NATURAL STATE

The Hebrew word *Teva* (nature) is a word that Rav Kook uniquely employs

when characterizing the process of *teshuva* (see *Orot Hateshuva* 6:2 and 17:4). Rav Kook proposes that a Jew’s *return* is just that - an organic return to one’s true essence; a return to a way of life that aligns with our innate yearnings, ethical sensitivities and true aspirations.

Among the many appellations utilized by the Torah to describe the Land of Israel are the following two words: ‘*menucha*’ (tranquility) and ‘*nachala*’ (inheritance). Both of these terms are found in a single verse (Devarim 12:9). The Abarbanel comments on these words that only when settled in the Promised Land did the Israelites find tranquility from their long and arduous journey (*menucha*). Only in Israel did they find their inheritance (*nachala*) - namely the mitzvot.

The exilic experience of almost two thousand years has been saturated with staggering hardships and suffering. More often than not the fact that we lived outside the



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Land of Israel meant that the observance of mitzvot came with immense challenges.

Menuchat Hanefesh - a feeling of calm, stability and balance are needed for a healthy state of mind and to pursue an uplifting path of *teshuva*. From this perspective Eretz Yisrael, it can be argued, is the prime location for a spiritual setting that is ideal for achieving this lofty objective of personal improvement.

TESHUVA: ASPIRING FOR GREATNESS

An all-important aspect of *teshuva* according to Rav Kook is that *teshuva* should be understood not merely as the way we correct certain faults and transgressions. Rather *teshuva* is a means by which one designs a new course

toward achieving greatness. Thus, *Teshuva* requires harnessing all of our strengths, talents, and abilities in order to be our best selves.

Rav Kook argues that this is not only true on a personal level but on a national level as well. Bearing this in mind, many of the magnificent goals for our nation are only obtainable when we are situated in the Land. For example: building a society based on the principles of the Torah, attaining the highest degree of closeness with our Creator, and attaining national unity - all necessitate the nation's residence in the Land of Israel. From this perspective, national *teshuva* that addresses our communal aspirations is profoundly impaired when we are scattered outside the Land throughout the nations. This is why Rav Kook mightily declares: "The renaissance of the nation of Israel constitutes the foundation of the building of the greatest *teshuva*." (*Orot HaTeshuva* 17:1). ■



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