Dvar Torah Outline

Shabbat and the Ascent from Action to Prayer to Torah

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman explores Rav Tzadok HaKohen's understanding of three forms of spiritual toil: serving God through action, through prayer, and through Torah study. These correspond to the three pillars sustaining the world and to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, respectively. The central distinction is between action and prayer, which cultivate physical and inward life in this world, and Torah, which connects a person to eternal divine wisdom—a framework preparing for a fuller understanding of Shabbat.

I

Why must Shabbat follow work?

A. *Shabbat as an ascent, not merely a cessation*

- Rabbi Shulman begins by reviewing the premise of the preceding discussion:
  - Six days of work come first.
  - Shabbat follows as a **higher stage**, built upon what precedes it.
- **Exodus 20:9–10:**
  - **שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל מְלַאכְתֶּךָ:** (Six days you shall labor and do all your work.)
  - **וְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָל מְלָאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתֶּךָ עַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתֶךָ וּבְהֶמְתֶּךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ:** (But the seventh day is Shabbat for the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son, your daughter, your male servant, your female servant, your animal, or the stranger within your gates.)
- The question is therefore not only why work is prohibited on Shabbat, but **what kind of work prepares a person for Shabbat**.

B. *Building the world and serving God*

- For the nations, Rabbi Shulman summarizes the previously discussed role of developing civilization:
  - Producing food and clothing.
  - Building roads and functioning communities.
  - Establishing the conditions that enable Israel's divine service.
- For Israel, Rav Tzadok seeks a more directly spiritual meaning of "work."

C. *Three possible meanings of human toil*

- **Job 5:7:**
  - **כִּי אָדָם לְעָמָל יוּלָּד וּבְנֵי רֶשֶׁף יַגְבִּיהוּ עוּף:** (For a person is born to toil, just as sparks fly upward.)
- The Talmud in Sanhedrin considers three forms of toil:
  - **Work or action.**
  - **Speech**, understood here as prayer.
  - **Torah study**, the ultimate conclusion.
- Rav Tzadok explains that the first possibility cannot simply mean working to sustain oneself; that would make the account of life's purpose circular.
- Instead, "work" means **using the body to perform God's commandments**.

D. *The three pillars*

- The three forms of toil correspond to the three pillars upon which the world stands:
  - **Action → acts of kindness.**
  - **Prayer → divine service.**
  - **Torah study → Torah.**
- Rabbi Shulman develops these through the distinctive service of the three patriarchs.

II

Abraham: serving God through the body and through action

2:30

A. *Abraham's life of practical service*

- Abraham exemplifies active, bodily service:
  - Welcoming guests.
  - Establishing hospitality for travelers.
  - Preparing food.
  - Fighting the four kings.
- His activity is not merely worldly enterprise:
  - His actions are directed toward Heaven.
  - Through them, he seeks to perfect the world.

B. *Even Abraham's prayer emphasizes its physical framework*

- Abraham's prayer is described through **standing**.
- Rabbi Shulman explains that the prayer practices associated with Abraham emphasize:
  - Physical posture.
  - Standing rather than sitting.
  - Having a designated place for prayer.

- These laws apply universally, but Abraham is the patriarch through whom this **bodily dimension of prayer** is highlighted.

C. *Circumcision as refinement of the body*

- Abraham receives the covenant of circumcision.
- This fits his broader role: **sanctifying and refining the physical body**.
- His corresponding pillar is acts of kindness—serving God through what one physically does.

D. *Morning and afternoon prayer: different kinds of effort*

- In discussing the Maharal's framework of body, emotional life, and intellect, Rabbi Shulman contrasts:
  - **Morning prayer:** overcoming bodily inertia, rising promptly, and beginning the day with energy.
  - **Afternoon prayer:** interrupting business, activity, and emotional involvement to stand before God.
- Afternoon prayer requires a different kind of strength:
  - Stopping in the middle of a productive flow.
  - Setting aside immediate concerns.
  - Restraining distraction and praying attentively.
- Rabbi Shulman considers the connection between this restraint and Isaac's attribute of strength and self-control.

III

Isaac: prayer as inward service and awareness of God

7:30

A. *From bodily posture to speech*

- Unlike the emphasis on Abraham's standing, Isaac's prayer is described through speech.
- **Genesis 24:63:**
  - **וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לָשׂוּחַ בַּשָּׂדֶה לִפְנוֹת עָרֶב וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה גְמַלִּים בָּאִים:** (Isaac went out to converse in the field toward evening; he raised his eyes and saw that camels were coming.)
- The Sages understand Isaac's conversation in the field as prayer.
- Isaac therefore represents **the toil of prayer**, corresponding to the pillar of divine service.

B. *Prayer is service of the heart*

- Rabbi Shulman explains that calling prayer "service of the heart" does not exclude spoken words.
- Rather, it distinguishes prayer's essential inward activity from bodily action.
- Physical preparation matters, but it establishes the conditions for the central task:
  - Directing the heart toward Heaven.
  - Submitting oneself to God.

- Recognizing before whom one stands.

C. *Awareness of God defines the act of prayer*

- Rabbi Shulman cites the well-known explanation of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik concerning the Rambam:
  - Awareness that one is standing before God is not merely an added enhancement.
  - It belongs to the **definition of prayer itself**.
- The defining experience is standing before the King with awe and submission.

D. *The Rema's opening instruction*

- The Rema opens his comments to the Shulchan Aruch by drawing upon the Rambam's *Guide for the Perplexed*.
- **Psalms 16:8:**
  - **שִׁוִּיתִי ה׳ לְנֶגְדִּי תָמִיד כִּי מִימִינִי בַּל אֶמּוֹט:** (I have placed the Lord before me always; because He is at my right hand, I shall not falter.)
- Constant awareness of God changes how a person behaves:
  - One conducts oneself differently in the presence of a great king.
  - Recognizing God's presence produces awe, humility, and restraint.

E. *Isaac's characteristic spiritual awareness*

- **Proverbs 17:16:**
  - **לָמָּה זֶּה מְחִיר בְּיַד כְּסִיל לִקְנוֹת חָכְמָה וְלֵב אָיִן:** (Why does a fool have money in hand to acquire wisdom when he has no heart?)
- Rabbi Shulman explains the cited rabbinic reading of lacking a "heart" as lacking awareness of God.
- Isaac embodies the opposite:
  - He lives with an enduring consciousness of God's presence.
  - Figuratively, he remains upon the altar.
  - His awareness gives rise to awe.
- This makes Isaac the fitting representative of prayer: **the heart's response to standing before God**.

IV

Why is prayer called "conversation" rather than the highest form of speech?

13:30

A. *The difficulty in the Torah's description*

- The Hebrew term **שיחה** often denotes ordinary conversation rather than weighty speech.
- Rabbi Shulman illustrates this usage through:
  - The Mishnah's warning against excessive conversation.
  - The Talmud's discussion of the ordinary conversation of Torah scholars.

- The question is therefore striking:
  - Why describe Isaac's deeply serious prayer with a term associated with casual conversation?

B. *Rav Tzadok's answer: the comparison is to Torah*

- Prayer is not trivial in itself.
- Even an intensely heartfelt prayer, however, occupies a lower level of speech **relative to Torah**.
- The distinction is between:
  - **Prayer:** life connected to the present world.
  - **Torah:** eternal life.

C. *Torah is God's creative speech*

- **Psalms 33:6:**
  - **בִּדְבַר ה' שָׁמַיִם נַעֲשׂוּ וּבְרוּחַ פִּיו כָּל צְבָאָם:** (By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.)
- Rav Tzadok connects Torah to the divine speech through which creation comes into being.
- Drawing on Bereishit Rabbah:
  - Torah is God's instrument of craftsmanship.
  - God looks into Torah and creates the world.
- Torah therefore expresses a level of speech that **creates and sustains existence**.

D. *Prayer as Israel's conversation with God*

- Rav Tzadok contrasts:
  - **Torah:** God's speech.
  - **Prayer:** the speech of the congregation of Israel addressing God.
- He employs the symbolic relationship of husband and wife:
  - Torah represents divine, creative speech.
  - Prayer represents Israel's responsive conversation with God.
- Rabbi Shulman explains the associated masculine and feminine symbolism as a contrast between:
  - The more abstract, spiritual dimension.
  - The dimension engaged with concrete conditions and needs.
- Both forms of service are necessary; the distinction establishes their relative spiritual levels.

E. *The ordinary conversation of Torah scholars*

- Rabbi Shulman recalls the discussion in Sukkah concerning sleeping beneath a bed in a sukkah and the example of Tavi, Rabban Gamliel's servant.
- The Sages derive instruction even from a scholar's ordinary conversation.
- Nevertheless, such conversation remains a lesser category relative to direct Torah teaching.

- Similarly, prayer can be profoundly significant while still being called "conversation" **in comparison with Torah**.

V

Why even the holiest prayer concerns temporal life

22:00

A. *The distinction is not between shallow and elevated requests*

- Rav Tzadok rejects the explanation that prayer is "temporal life" merely because people ask for material benefits.
- Prayer can seek the highest spiritual goods:
  - Wisdom.
  - Repentance.
  - Forgiveness.
  - A teacher and opportunities to study.
  - Better character and closeness to God.
- These requests are still prayers about a person's condition and service **within this world**.

B. *Shabbat and festival prayers sharpen the question*

- On Shabbat and festivals, prayer does not center on ordinary requests for personal needs.
- Nevertheless, it remains within the category of temporal life.
- The distinction must therefore concern **the kind of spiritual vitality prayer provides**, not simply its subject matter.

C. *Prayer sustains inward life in this world*

- Prayer nourishes the heart in a world characterized by:
  - Free choice.
  - Emotional struggle.
  - Changing circumstances.
- Rabbi Shulman notes how a powerful prayer can transform someone's feelings for an entire day.
- This is genuine spiritual vitality, but it belongs to the conditions of present worldly life.

D. *Torah supplies enduring life*

- In the future state, Rav Tzadok explains, life will no longer be drawn primarily from the heart's work of prayer.
- Rabbi Shulman connects this to the image of God's revealed presence:

- **Isaiah 30:20:**
  - **וְנָתַן לָכֶם אֲדֹנָי לֶחֶם צָר וּמַיִם לָחַץ וְלֹא יִכָּנֵף עוֹד מוֹרֶיךָ וְהָיוּ עֵינֶיךָ רֹאוֹת אֶת מוֹרֶיךָ:** (The Lord will give you bread of adversity and water of affliction, but your Teacher will no longer be concealed, and your eyes will see your Teacher.)
- Torah, by contrast, supplies life that endures eternally.
- Thus, the Talmud's conclusion that human beings are born for **the toil of Torah** identifies the highest of the three pillars.

VI

Jacob: Torah and the completeness of the third pillar

26:30

A. *The patriarchs form an ascending sequence*

- Rav Tzadok presents the three patriarchs as successive stages:
  - **Abraham:** bodily action and kindness.
  - **Isaac:** prayer and inward service.
  - **Jacob:** Torah and eternal life.
- Jacob represents the culmination toward which the earlier stages lead.

B. *Jacob's complete household*

- Abraham has Ishmael, and Isaac has Esau.
- Jacob's household, by contrast, remains wholly within Israel.
- Rabbi Shulman explains this as a symbolic expression of the difference between the pillars:
  - Kindness and prayer have forms that extend beyond Israel.
  - Torah, in Rav Tzadok's account of its inner spiritual essence, belongs uniquely to Israel.
- Jacob's complete household represents the integrity of this final level.

C. *The nations' relationship to action and commandments*

- The nations can participate in:
  - The seven Noahide commandments.
  - Charity.
  - Acts of kindness.
- Thus, the first pillar has an expression outside Israel.
- Rabbi Shulman notes Rav Tzadok's qualifications concerning the spiritual level and reward of these actions, while emphasizing the basic point: **there is a real category of commanded action available to the nations**.

D. *Torah's distinctive covenantal place*

- **Psalms 147:20:**
  - **לֹא עָשָׂה כֵן לְכָל גּוֹי וּמִשְׁפָּטִים בַּל יְדָעוּם הַלְלוּיָהּ:** (He has not done so for any other nation; His laws they have not known. Praise the Lord.)
- Rav Tzadok invokes the rabbinic teaching that one should not accept a claim that Torah is found in Edom.
- Rabbi Shulman later clarifies that the distinction concerns **Torah's inner divine light**, not merely the ability to read or analyze its outward subject matter.

VII

Prayer's outward appearance and the hidden truth of the heart

30:30

A. *Solomon's prayer for the foreigner*

- The nations also have a relationship to the second pillar, prayer.
- **I Kings 8:41:**
  - **וְגַם אֶל הַנָּכְרִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא מֵעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא וּבָא מֵאֶרֶץ רְחוֹקָה לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ:** (Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, who comes from a distant land for the sake of Your name.)
- **I Kings 8:43:**
  - **אַתָּה תִּשְׁמַע הַשָּׁמַיִם מְכוֹן שִׁבְתֶּךָ וְעָשִׂיתָ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא אֵלֶיךָ הַנָּכְרִי לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּן כָּל עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ אֶת שִׁמְךָ לְיִרְאָה אֹתְךָ כְּעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלָדַעַת כִּי שִׁמְךָ נִקְרָא עַל הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בָּנִיתִי:** (May You hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls upon You for, so that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You as do Your people Israel, and know that Your name is called upon this house that I have built.)
- Rabbi Shulman explains that Solomon asks God to answer these prayers so that unanswered requests will not lead outsiders to deny God or profane His name.

B. *The Temple as a place of prayer for all peoples*

- The related prophetic description appears in **Isaiah 56:7**:
  - **וַהֲבִיאוֹתִים אֶל הַר קָדְשִׁי וְשִׂמַּחְתִּים בְּבֵית תְּפִלָּתִי עוֹלֹתֵיהֶם וְזִבְחֵיהֶם לְרָצוֹן עַל מִזְבְּחִי כִּי בֵיתִי בֵּית תְּפִלָּה יִקָּרֵא לְכָל הָעַמִּים:** (I will bring them to My holy mountain and make them rejoice in My house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted upon My altar, for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.)
- This establishes a relationship between the nations and prayer, even as Rav Tzadok distinguishes their participation from Israel's particular covenantal service.

C. *Prayer's fullest expression: faithful attachment to God*

- **Psalms 109:4:**
  - **תַּחַת אַהֲבָתִי יִשְׂטְנוּנִי וַאֲנִי תְּפִלָּה:** (In return for my love they accuse me, but I am prayer.)
- David's identification with prayer expresses its fullest spiritual embodiment.
- **Proverbs 31:30:**
  - **שֶׁקֶר הַחֵן וְהֶבֶל הַיֹּפִי אִשָּׁה יִרְאַת ה' הִיא תִתְהַלָּל:** (Grace is deceptive and beauty is fleeting; a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.)
- Rav Tzadok reads the faithful, God-fearing woman as an image of Israel's relationship with God.
- In the symbolic contrast Rabbi Shulman presents, the decisive issue is not outward emotion but **inward fidelity, awe, and commitment**.

D. *External resemblance does not establish inner equivalence*

- Rabbi Shulman explains Rav Tzadok's images of imitation:
  - An ape resembles a human being without being equivalent.
  - A pig displays its split hooves while lacking the other sign required for kosher status.
  - Esau projects righteousness convincingly enough to mislead Isaac.
- The point of these images is the gap between **external appearance and inward reality**.
- An observer cannot determine the truth of someone's prayer merely from tears, trembling, or visible intensity.

E. *Even Samuel could not see another person's heart*

- **I Samuel 16:7:**
  - **וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל שְׁמוּאֵל אַל תַּבֵּט אֶל מַרְאֵהוּ וְאֶל גְּבֹהַ קוֹמָתוֹ כִּי מְאַסְתִּיהוּ כִּי לֹא אֲשֶׁר יִרְאֶה הָאָדָם כִּי הָאָדָם יִרְאֶה לַעֵינַיִם וַה' יִרְאֶה לַלֵּבָב:** (The Lord said to Samuel: Do not look at his appearance or his tall stature, for I have rejected him; it is not as a person sees, for a person sees what is before the eyes, but the Lord sees the heart.)
- Rabbi Shulman stresses that Samuel's mistake was not simply preferring physical attractiveness:
  - He judged apparent righteousness.
  - God alone knew the hidden truth.
- This explains why, within Rav Tzadok's framework, a distinction known to God may remain invisible to human observers.

VIII

Torah's inner light and the threshold of Shabbat

37:30

A. *The final distinction among the three pillars*

- Rabbi Shulman summarizes:
  - **Commandments and kindness:** the outward, practical service of this world.
  - **Prayer:** the inward vitality of this world.
  - **Torah:** connection to eternal life beyond this world's limits.
- This accounts for the ascending order of action, prayer, and Torah.

B. *Torah originates above the created order*

- Rav Tzadok describes Torah as a descent from supernal divine wisdom.
- Rabbi Shulman explains the image of fruit falling from a lofty tree:
  - The Torah accessible below derives from wisdom far above.
  - Its source precedes and underlies the unfolding of creation.

C. *Physical subject matter is Torah's garment*

- Torah discusses concrete matters:
  - One person's animal damaging another's property.
  - The dimensions and walls of an alleyway.
  - Other practical legal situations.
- These subjects are not the limit of what Torah is.
- They are the **physical clothing of divine wisdom**.

D. *The hidden light within Torah*

- Rav Tzadok identifies Torah's inner dimension with the primordial light hidden within it.
- Rabbi Shulman clarifies the claim about Israel's distinctive relationship to Torah:
  - Someone may understand the outward discussion of an ox causing damage.
  - Rav Tzadok's claim concerns access to the **inner light of eternal divine life** clothed within that discussion.
- The distinction is therefore spiritual and covenantal, not merely informational.

E. *Preparing to return to Shabbat*

- Rabbi Shulman closes by noting that the discussion has not yet fully returned to Shabbat.
- It has established the necessary framework:
  - What spiritual "work" consists of.
  - How its forms ascend.
  - Why Torah stands at their culmination.

- The next stage is to explain Shabbat in light of this progression.

IX

In Summary

- **Shabbat follows meaningful spiritual work:** the six-day framework is preparation for an ascent, not merely exhaustion followed by rest.
- **Abraham represents bodily service:** kindness, commandments, and practical action refine the physical dimension of life.
- **Isaac represents prayer:** its defining feature is the heart's awareness of standing before God.
- **Prayer is "temporal life" even at its holiest:** it sustains a person's inward relationship with God within the conditions of this world.
- **Jacob represents Torah's eternal life:** Torah is divine wisdom clothed in practical teachings, containing an inner light beyond its outward subject matter.
- **Appearance cannot reveal spiritual authenticity:** Rabbi Shulman emphasizes that God alone knows the heart, a principle central to Rav Tzadok's discussion of prayer and its different expressions.