Dvar Torah Outline

Rabbi Shulman on Rabbi Tzadok: Torah, the Patriarchs, and the Boundaries of Prayer

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman explores Rabbi Tzadok's teaching that the three patriarchs embody Torah, divine service, and kindness, corresponding to the mind, heart, and bodily drives. Jacob's distinctive achievement is spiritual wholeness: through Torah, he transforms the relationship with God from an exposed "field" into a protected, intimate "house." This framework explains why prayer requires humility and restraint—not insistence that God fulfill our preferred plans, but recognition that only He knows what will truly benefit us.

I

Three Pillars, Three Patriarchs, and the Complete Person

A. *Continuing Rabbi Tzadok's The Sanctity of Shabbat*

- Rabbi Shulman reviews the three pillars upon which the world stands:
  - **Torah**
  - **Divine service**, including sacrifices and prayer
  - **Acts of kindness**, understood here as an umbrella for the practical commandments.
- Rabbi Tzadok distinguishes between these pillars:
  - Other nations also perform good deeds and pray.
  - Torah, in its distinctive covenantal character and inexhaustible depth, belongs uniquely to Israel.

B. *The patriarchs embody these three forms of service*

- **Abraham → kindness and practical action.**
- **Isaac → divine service and prayer.**
- **Jacob → Torah.**
- Abraham and Isaac each had a son who departed from their spiritual path:
  - Ishmael represents a distorted appropriation of Abraham's attribute.
  - Esau represents a distorted appropriation of Isaac's attribute.
- Jacob's children, by contrast, all remained within the covenant:
  - Rabbi Tzadok connects this completeness to Torah's unique resistance to such spiritual distortion.

C. *"King" as an image of integrated spiritual mastery*

- Israel inherits all three patriarchal strengths.

- Rabbi Tzadok reads **מלך**—"king"—as an acronym:
  - **מוח — mind**
  - **לב — heart**
  - **כליות — kidneys**, representing the deeper bodily and instinctive dimensions.
- A complete person brings all three dimensions into the service of God.
- This illuminates the rabbinic description of Torah scholars as kings: genuine mastery begins with governing oneself.

II

Jacob: Torah, Wholeness, and Freedom from Deficiency

4:00

A. *Jacob corresponds to the mind and the pure soul*

- The mind is the seat of Torah wisdom and corresponds to the soul's essential purity.
- Jacob therefore represents completeness without spiritual admixture or defect.

Genesis 25:27:

> ויגדלו הנערים ויהי עשו איש ידע ציד איש שדה ויעקב איש תם ישב אהלים: > (The boys grew up; Esau became a man skilled in hunting, a man of the field, while Jacob was a wholesome man, dwelling in tents.)

- Rabbi Shulman explains that Jacob's wholesomeness means more than innocence:
  - It signifies integrity and completeness, without an internal spiritual breach.

B. *Sin as "missing" or lacking*

- Following the Maharal, Rabbi Shulman explains that **חטא** can mean a deficiency or failure to reach the mark—not only the violation of a commandment.
- The biblical description of expert slingers illustrates this meaning:

Judges 20:16:

> מכל העם הזה שבע מאות איש בחור אטר יד ימינו כל זה קלע באבן אל השערה ולא יחטא: > (Among all these people were seven hundred chosen men, left-handed; each could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.)

- "Not missing" expresses the underlying meaning of the term.
- Rabbi Shulman compares spiritual deficiency to a crack in an eggshell:
  - An intact structure withstands pressure.
  - A small breach makes it vulnerable.

C. *"Jacob did not die"*

- Within Rabbi Tzadok's interpretation, death gains entry through deficiency.
- Jacob's spiritual completeness therefore explains the rabbinic teaching that he did not die.

- His connection to Torah expresses an enduring life that is not subject to the ordinary consequences of spiritual fragmentation.

III

Isaac: The Heart, Spirit, and the Power of Speech

9:00

A. *Isaac corresponds to the heart*

- The heart is associated with **רוח**, the spirit and inner vitality of the person.
- Isaac's divine service develops this dimension of human life.

B. *Speech brings inner thought into the world*

Genesis 2:7:

> וייצר ה' אלהים את האדם עפר מן האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים ויהי האדם לנפש חיה: > (The Lord God formed the human being from the dust of the ground, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human being became a living soul.)

- Onkelos interprets the concluding description as a **speaking spirit**.
- Rabbi Shulman explains:
  - Thought begins inwardly.
  - Breath and speech give it expression in the physical world.
  - Speech thus connects the mind's content with the vitality associated with the heart.

C. *Isaac's prayer expresses this spiritual power*

Genesis 24:63:

> ויצא יצחק לשוח בשדה לפנות ערב וישא עיניו וירא והנה גמלים באים: > (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 as prayer.
- His service of God is therefore expressed through speech: the heart's inner life directed toward God.

IV

From Mountain to Field to House: A Developing Relationship with God

11:00

A. *Tosafot's question about praying outdoors*

- The Talmud describes someone who prays in an open valley as brazen.
- Tosafot asks: **How, then, could Isaac pray in a field?**
- Rabbi Shulman presents Rabbi Tzadok's resolution:
  - The spiritual framework available in Isaac's lifetime differed from the one established afterward by Jacob.

B. *The patriarchs' descriptions mark successive achievements*

- The Sages associate the future Temple site with three descriptions:
  - **Abraham: a mountain**
  - **Isaac: a field**
  - **Jacob: a house**
- Rabbi Tzadok understands these not merely as different names for an unchanged reality.
- Each patriarch advanced the relationship between God and His people.

C. *Jacob establishes the intimacy of a house*

Genesis 28:17:

> ויירא ויאמר מה נורא המקום הזה אין זה כי אם בית אלהים וזה שער השמים: > (He became afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.")

- A house represents:
  - Privacy
  - Enclosure
  - Intimacy
  - An established place of encounter.
- Jacob made this relationship available to his descendants permanently.

D. *Why returning to the field becomes inappropriate*

- Isaac prayed within the spiritual conditions of his time.
- After Jacob established the "house," deliberately returning to an exposed setting represents a retreat from that achievement.
- Rabbi Shulman contrasts:
  - Calling out into an open sky
  - Entering a private, intimate audience with God.
- The concern is not merely architectural; the physical setting expresses the nature of the relationship.

V

Closing the Breach: Torah as a Protected Spiritual Home

15:00

A. *Isaac's struggle with the open northern side*

- Rabbi Tzadok describes the world as a structure with an exposed side.
- The northern opening symbolizes the point through which the evil inclination gains entry.
- The evil inclination is also associated with hiddenness: it approaches from concealment.

- Isaac's attribute of strength and discipline is directed toward confronting this vulnerability.

B. *Jacob completes the enclosure*

- Isaac battles the danger within the "field."
- Jacob establishes a protected "house" by closing the remaining breach.
- His Torah-centered wholeness supplies his descendants with a spiritual refuge.

C. *The study hall as protection*

- Rabbi Shulman connects this to the rabbinic instruction:

> אם פגע בך מנוול זה משכהו לבית המדרש > (If this contemptible one—the evil inclination—encounters you, drag him to the study hall.)

- Attachment to Torah places a person within Jacob's protected domain.
- A person can still break through those protections, but Jacob has established a place to which one can return.

D. *No descendant is irretrievably lost*

- Jacob's complete family expresses the enduring character of this inheritance.
- Even someone who has strayed retains the possibility of repentance.
- Rabbi Tzadok applies the biblical principle that God provides a path back for the banished:

II Samuel 14:14:

> כי מות נמות וכמים הנגרים ארצה אשר לא יאספו ולא ישא אלהים נפש וחשב מחשבות לבלתי ידח ממנו נדח: > (For we must surely die, and are like water poured onto the ground that cannot be gathered again; yet God does not take away life, but devises means so that the banished one will not remain banished from Him.)

- Jacob's "house" is thus an enduring spiritual inheritance, not merely his personal accomplishment.

VI

The Inner Boundaries of Prayer: Humility Rather Than Unrestrained Desire

19:31

A. *The physical setting reflects an inner posture*

- Rabbi Shulman explains that an open setting can encourage a feeling of wildness or limitlessness.
- A house conveys restraint, modesty, and the awareness that one stands before the King.
- The central requirement is to approach God with humility rather than unbounded demands.

B. *Not everything we want is good for us*

- A person should be cautious about requesting something that might ultimately cause harm:
  - To oneself

  - To one's spiritual life
  - Or even to the wider Jewish people.
- Ambition alone does not establish that a request is appropriate.

C. *We do not know where our spiritual success lies*

- Rabbi Shulman distinguishes between knowing our proper goals and knowing the precise circumstances that will achieve them.
- Appropriate goals include:
  - Closeness to God
  - Opportunities to study Torah
  - An adequate livelihood
  - The ability to support one's family and fulfill commandments.
- But we generally do not know which particular job, employer, or life arrangement will best serve those goals.

D. *Even apparently spiritual plans can mislead*

- Someone may believe that retirement will necessarily produce more Torah study and greater righteousness.
- In practice, it might instead produce inactivity and spiritual decline.
- Prayer therefore requires acknowledging the limits of our understanding, even when our proposed plan sounds religiously admirable.

VII

Solomon's Prayer: Why an Unanswered Request Can Be a Kindness

23:30

A. *God knows the petitioner's heart*

I Kings 8:39:

> ואתה תשמע השמים מכון שבתך וסלחת ועשית ונתת לאיש ככל דרכיו אשר תדע את לבבו כי אתה ידעת לבדך את לבב כל בני האדם: < (May You hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, forgive, act, and give to each person according to all his ways, whose heart You know—for You alone know the hearts of all human beings.)

- Rabbi Shulman explains Rabbi Tzadok's reading of Solomon's prayer:
  - Israel's requests should be answered according to God's knowledge of what will truly benefit the petitioner.
  - Withholding a request may therefore express care rather than rejection.

B. *Solomon's different request concerning the foreigner*

I Kings 8:43:

> אתה תשמע השמים מכון שבתך ועשית ככל אשר יקרא אליך הנכרי למען ידעון כל עמי הארץ את שמך ליראה אתך כעמך ישראל ולדעת כי שמך נקרא על הבית הזה אשר בניתי: > (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, revere You as Your people Israel do, and know that Your name is proclaimed over this house that I have built.)

- In Rabbi Tzadok's explanation, an unanswered prayer could lead the foreign petitioner to conclude that the God of Israel rejects outsiders.
- Solomon therefore requests an answer that will prevent a desecration of God's name.
- Rabbi Shulman stresses the distinction between:
  - Prayer as service of God
  - Prayer as an attempt to secure one's own desires.
- Emotional intensity does not, by itself, establish that a request is spiritually sound.

C. *A person without restraint resembles an unwalled city*

Proverbs 25:28:

> עיר פרוצה אין חומה איש אשר אין מעצר לרוחו: > (Like a breached city without a wall is a person who has no restraint over his spirit.)

- The image returns to the contrast between the exposed field and the protected house.
- Jewish prayer should be thoughtful and directed toward circumstances that facilitate service of God.

VIII

Balaam: The Danger of Getting Exactly What One Demands

26:31

A. *Persistence can express defiance rather than devotion*

- Balaam repeatedly sought permission to accompany Balak's representatives.
- Rabbi Shulman presents his insistence as driven by ambition, honor, and material reward.
- He wanted the opportunity so strongly that he continued pressing despite God's opposition to his purpose.

B. *Permission is not necessarily endorsement*

Numbers 22:20:

> ויבא אלהים אל בלעם לילה ויאמר לו אם לקרא לך באו האנשים קום לך אתם ואך את הדבר אשר אדבר אליך אתו תעשה: > (God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men have come to summon you, arise and go with them; but only the thing that I speak to you shall you do.")

- Rabbi Shulman connects this to the rabbinic principle:

> בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך בה מוליכין אותו > (A person is led along the path he wishes to take.)

- A person may receive permission to pursue a course that will ultimately destroy him.

C. *Balaam's apparent success becomes catastrophe*

- Balaam obtained the permission he demanded.
- Yet the outcome brought humiliation and destruction rather than the reward he sought.
- His example demonstrates why an answered request is not necessarily evidence that the request was wise.

D. *The opposite of humble prayer*

- Brazen prayer insists: **This is what I want, regardless.**
- Proper prayer recognizes: **I may not know what is good for me.**
- The "house" of prayer supplies the spiritual boundaries that help cultivate this humility.

IX

Isaac's Work Bears Fruit in Jacob, While Esau Remains in the Field

29:33

A. *Isaac's outdoor prayer was itself disciplined*

- Rabbi Tzadok is not criticizing Isaac.
- Isaac prayed with restraint and self-mastery even though the spiritual "house" had not yet been established.
- His task was to bring the exposed field into divine service.

B. *Jacob completes rather than replaces Isaac's work*

- Through Isaac's labor, he merited Jacob, who established the next stage.
- Jacob's dwelling in tents expresses the enclosed, stable spiritual life achieved through Torah.
- His accomplishment grows out of Isaac's struggle.

C. *Esau represents the unresolved field*

Genesis 25:29:

> ויזד יעקב נזיד ויבא עשו מן השדה והוא עיף: > (Jacob was cooking a stew, and Esau came from the field, exhausted.)

- Rabbi Shulman cites the Midrash's reading of Esau's exhaustion as the consequence of grave sins.
- Esau remains the "man of the field" described earlier:
  - Exposed
  - Unrestrained
  - Pursuing desires without the boundaries of divine service.

D. *Isaac's task is to redirect the heart*

Ecclesiastes 10:2:

> לב חכם לימינו ולב כסיל לשמאלו: > (A wise person's heart inclines to his right, while a fool's heart inclines to his left.)

- Rabbi Tzadok associates the heart's left side with the evil inclination.
- Isaac's work is to strengthen the good inclination and bring even the heart's resistant dimensions under its influence.
- His goal is to transform the field:
  - From a place of uncontrolled desire and wrongdoing
  - Into a place of prayer and divine service.

E. *Where the teaching pauses*

- Jacob supplies Israel's inheritance of the **mind and Torah**.
- Isaac supplies Israel's inheritance of the **heart and disciplined divine service**.
- Rabbi Shulman concludes before beginning the corresponding discussion of Abraham.

X

In Summary

- **The three patriarchs develop complementary forms of divine service:** Abraham embodies kindness, Isaac prayer, and Jacob Torah.
- **Jacob's Torah represents spiritual wholeness:** it explains both his complete family and the teaching that he did not die.
- **Mountain, field, and house describe successive achievements:** Jacob establishes an intimate, protected relationship with God for his descendants.
- **Prayer requires inner boundaries:** humility includes admitting that we do not know which circumstances will truly benefit us.
- **An unanswered prayer may be protective:** God knows the petitioner's heart and future better than the petitioner does.
- **Balaam illustrates the danger of insistence:** obtaining what one demands can become the instrument of one's downfall.
- **Isaac's struggle makes Jacob's achievement possible:** disciplined service transforms the exposed field and prepares the enduring spiritual house.