Dvar Torah Outline

Parashat Lech Lecha: "Lech Lecha," Using Your Past as Fuel, and the Two "Altars" of Torah and Tefillah

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman explores the opening command to Avraham—"לך לך מארצך"*—and explains, via Rabbi Tzadok, that the Torah is teaching not only self-transformation ("go to your true self") but also where the* כוח *to change comes from: specifically, from one's background and past rather than in spite of it. He then reframes* "אל הארץ אשר אראך" *as a hint that the destination is a place of deeper revelation of Hashem. Finally, Rabbi Shulman highlights Avraham's two* מזבחות *as a blueprint for personal growth: Torah provides the clear revealed path, and* תפילה *protects and guides us through the unpredictable challenges that derail even good intentions.*

I

"לך לך מארצך" — an unusual formulation, and what it signals

A. *The grammatical problem*

- Rabbi Shulman notes the phrase sounds internally inconsistent:
  - "לך לך" implies going **to** somewhere.
  - "מארצך" implies leaving **from** somewhere.
- The Midrash is "bothered" by why the pasuk doesn't simply say "צא מארצך" (leave your land).

B. *Midrashic reading: "לך לך" as self-repair*

- Rabbi Shulman cites the famous Midrash:
  - "לך לך" = **לאתקנא גרמך** — go to your true self; fix, elevate, and perfect yourself.

II

Rabbi Tzadok: "מארצך" means your past is the כוח for growth

2:01

A. *The psychological objection people feel*

- Rabbi Shulman, quoting Rabbi Tzadok: a person may think,
  - "I come from this family / environment / background—how can I succeed in changing?"

B. דווקא *from there: the energy of the* בעל תשובה

- Rabbi Shulman brings the Gemara's principle:
  - **"במקום שבעלי תשובה עומדים אין צדיקים גמורים יכולים לעמוד"**
- Explanation given:
  - The בעל תשובה has urgency and fire because he knows the alternative and recognizes the preciousness of the opportunity.

C. *Re-reading the pasuk as "don't run from your past—use it"*

- "מארצך… ממולדתך… מבית אביך" becomes:
  - not something to deny,
  - but the **fuel** ("מ means מכח") that drives the "לך לך" journey.
- The unknown destination symbolizes personal wholeness (שלמות), even before one sees where it leads.

III

"אל הארץ אשר אראך" — where is the moment Hashem "shows" the land?

3:31

A. *The textual question*

- Rabbi Shulman asks: Hashem says "to the land I will show you," yet the Torah doesn't seem to state explicitly, "Here is the land."

B. *Ramban's answer: the "showing" is the promise*

- Rabbi Shulman cites the Ramban: the fulfillment is when Hashem says,
  - **"וַיֵּרָא ה' אֶל־אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר לְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת"** *("Hashem appeared to Avram and said: To your offspring I will give this land.")*
- That statement constitutes "Hashem showing" him the land.

C. *Rabbi Tzadok's hinted re-read: the land where Hashem is "shown" to you*

- Rabbi Shulman proposes Rabbi Tzadok's דרש:
  - Don't read "אַרְאֶךָּ" only as "I will show you," but as a hint toward **"אֶרְאֶה לְּךָ"** — the land where **Hashem will be revealed to you**.
- The destination is framed as a place of more direct revelation and relationship with Hashem.

IV

Avraham's two מזבחות: a model for personal growth

5:30

A. *Two adjacent episodes, two altars, two different emphases*

- Rabbi Shulman points to two pesukim describing two מזבחות:
  - **"וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַה' הַנִּרְאֶה אֵלָיו"** *("He built there an altar to Hashem who appeared to him.")*
    - No mention here of calling out in prayer.
  - **"וַיִּבֶן־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַה' וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה'"** *("He built there an altar to Hashem, and he called in the name of Hashem.")*
    - Targum: he davened.

B. *First altar: the "revealed" path—Torah as clear guidance*

- Rabbi Shulman explains:
  - In the journey of self-perfection, the first "altar" is what's clear and revealed.
  - How does a person know where to go?
    - By looking into **Torah**, where the רצון ה' is revealed and directs one's life.

C. *Second altar: navigating the unknown—tefillah as protection from derailment*

- Rabbi Shulman describes the problem:
  - Life contains many unforeseen turns; even with good intentions, a person can get derailed (including by the יצר הרע).
  - He gives an example: success and money can become spiritually dangerous distractions.
- Remedy:
  - Beyond Torah guidance, one needs **תפילה**:
    - "וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה'" represents crying out to Hashem for help in the unpredictable parts of life.

V

Practical takeaway after Tishrei: bringing both "altars" into the year

9:31

A. *Using the momentum of Tishrei*

- Rabbi Shulman encourages looking back at Tishrei as a כוח to launch forward.

B. *Turning past mistakes into propulsion (not denial)*

- After doing תשובה, we shouldn't try to forget failures.
- Instead, we harness "מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך"—our past—as fuel for forward movement.

C. *The two pillars for success*

- Rabbi Shulman closes with the roadmap:
  - **Torah** — "ה' הנראה אליו": clarity, instruction, revealed רצון ה'.
  - **Tefillah** — "ויקרא בשם ה'": protection and guidance when life is uncertain.
- Concluding blessing: with these, "נעשה ונצליח בעזרת השם."

VI

In Summary

- Rabbi Shulman explains "לך לך מארצך" as a charge to pursue self-perfection **powered by** one's past, not blocked by it (Rabbi Tzadok).
- "אל הארץ אשר אראך" is read as a journey toward a place of deeper **revelation of Hashem**.
- Avraham's two מזבחות become a growth blueprint: **Torah** shows the revealed path, and **תפילה** sustains a person through what cannot be anticipated.