

Dvar Torah Outline — Rabbi Shulman on the Power of Torah Study: Reading, Understanding, and the World's Elevation

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman explains that while love and fear of Hashem are powerful internal “vehicles” for spiritual growth, Hashem gave an even higher external תורה תלמוד כלי. He outlines two (and then a heightened third) levels within Torah study—simple reading, analytical understanding, and finally grasping hidden depths—showing how each level produces a corresponding increase in personal and proper שלמות. Rabbi Shulman emphasizes that Torah study must be done with טהרה, and he concludes that Torah elevates not only the individual but the entire creation, כוונה.

I. Torah as the highest “intermediary” to closeness with Hashem

A. Context: contrasting internal vs. external means

- Rabbi Shulman situates this in פרק ט, end of אות ט.
- In a prior section (אות ח), two powerful internal means were discussed:
 - אהבה and יראה of Hashem.
- Now: Hashem provided an **external** means, higher than all others:
 - “ואמנם אמצעי אחד נתן לנו האל יתברך... שמדרגתו למעלה מכל שאר האמצעים... והוא תלמוד תורה.”
 - Torah learning is presented as the strongest vehicle to come close to Hashem.

B. Why Torah wasn't listed first

- Even though it is the greatest, it is **given** from outside the person.
- Rabbi Shulman explains the framework begins with what is **always internally accessible**, then introduces Torah as the supreme added כלי.

C. Proof from the Gemara: Torah is “greater” than mitzvot

- Rabbi Shulman cites the famous debate: מצוות vs. תלמוד תורה.
- Conclusion attributed to רבי עקיבא: תורה is greater because “תלמוד תורה מביא לידי מעשה”—it brings one to action/mitzvot.

D. Maharal: Torah is the “root,” mitzvot are “branches”

- Rabbi Shulman explains Maharal's framing:
 - Not merely: “you need to know halacha to do mitzvot.”
 - Rather: Torah is the **root-system**; mitzvot are expressions/branches.
 - Doing a mitzvah is bringing an aspect of Torah into the world; learning Torah engages the root itself.
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II. Two categories within תלמוד תורה (3:32)

A. First category: reading/learning at the level of words

- “והוא בשתי בחינות... האחד בבחינת ההגיון והלימוד”
- Rabbi Shulman characterizes it as:
 - Reading/pronouncing and basic comprehension (even “rote” familiarity).

B. Second category: understanding/analysis

- “והשני בבחינת ההשכלה”
 - This is deeper: understanding how, why, what is being demanded, and conceptual clarity.
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III. Why Hashem gave תורה (and how it works): with conditions סגולת התורה (4:30)

A. Torah and Nevi'im as a divinely-prepared “compilation of words”

- Rabbi Shulman reads: Hashem, in kindness, composed and transmitted sacred text:
 - “כי הנה רצה בחסדו יתברך וחיבר לנו חיבור דברים... ומסרם לנו והיינו כלל ספר התורה”
- Extends beyond the Five Books:
 - “ואחריו... ספרי נביאים”

B. The כוונה, תנאים, קדושה, טהרה

- The spiritual effect depends on reading:
 - “בקדושה ובטהרה”
 - “על הכוונה הנכונה... עשיית רצון השם יתברך”
- Rabbi Shulman defines the terms:
 - **קדושה**: recognizing Torah as set-apart/transcendent (more “soul-side”).

- טהרה: removing “icky” bodily/physical impediments (more “body-side”).
- כוונה: learning as fulfillment of Hashem’s command, not like studying a neutral subject.

C. Result of this first level: major personal elevation

- Outcome of this kind of Torah reading:
 - “יתעצם בו על ידם מעלה עליונה ושלמות גדול עד מאוד”
 - Rabbi Shulman explains why it’s phrased so strongly:
 - All mitzvot elevate, but Torah does so in a uniquely high, distinguishing way.
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IV. The second level: effortful understanding yields “perfection upon perfection” (11:03)

A. “השתדלות” appears specifically here

- Rabbi Shulman highlights the shift in language:
 - For reading: you can reliably “complete” it.
 - For deep understanding: there’s **effort** and no guarantee of success.
- “וכן מי שהשתדל בהבנתם... ובידיעת... יקנה כפי השתדלותו שלמות על שלמות”
 - One acquires an added level of perfection proportional to effort.

B. Differentiating the reward-logic of reading vs. understanding

- In the first level, the main qualifiers were:
 - קדושה, טהרה, כוונה.
- In the second level, a new variable enters:
 - עמלוגייעה (toil), producing gradations of spiritual gain.

C. Rabbi Shulman’s framing: “the uncomplicated Jew” still achieves much

- He affirms the power of basic Torah reading with sincerity.
 - But emphasizes a higher tier exists through deeper, effortful understanding.
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V. The “how much more so”: reaching hidden depths—and a warning about (14:30) קבלה

A. Highest tier within understanding: סתרים ורזים

- Rabbi Shulman reads:
 - “כל שכן אם יגיע אל השכלה... סתריהם ורזיהם”
- This is the loftiest form of Torah understanding and yields the truest perfection.

B. Why one should not rush into קבלה

- Rabbi Shulman cautions: קבלה belongs to the “secrets” tier.
- If one lacks genuine understanding, merely reading terms yields little (and risks misunderstanding).

C. Supporting illustration: the Vilna Gaon on Arizal’s language

- Rabbi Shulman quotes the idea that Arizal’s words are often analogical:
 - Not meant at face value.
 - Therefore, without comprehension, one isn’t actually accessing the intended wisdom.
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VI. Torah’s impact is cosmic: elevating the entire creation (18:30)

A. Not only personal perfection

- Rabbi Shulman emphasizes the expansion from individual to universe:
 - “לא די מה שקנה אדם בעצמו מעלת השלמות”
- Torah learning elevates:
 - “מציאות הבריאה כולה בכללה ובפרטה”
 - The whole creation, generally and in each detail, becomes elevated and perfected.

B. Shavuot timing as meaningful providence

- Rabbi Shulman notes it’s striking they reached this topic right before Shavuot.
 - He comments that such “alignment” can be read as a sign of divine רצון in their learning.
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VII. A conceptual map: דעת, חכמה, בינה in Torah understanding (20:32)

A. Parsing “ובהנתם” vs. “ובידיעת מה שמסרו לנו”

- Rabbi Shulman explains two components:
 1. **What was transmitted.**received tradition — (“מסרו לנו”)
 2. **Understanding it.**internal comprehension — (“בהנתם”)

B. Chochmah and Binah

- **חכמה**: what one receives from teachers/mesorah (data received).
- **בינה**: processing and understanding that received content.

C. דעת as clarity and differentiation (illustrated by Havdalah)

- Rabbi Shulman connects דעת to discernment:
 - He references the Gemara's logic for placing הַבְּדֵלָה in the blessing of לאדם חוֹנֵן לְאָדָם דַּעַת (“אתה חונן לאדם דעת”):
 - Without דעת, you cannot distinguish (להבדיל) between things.
- Maharal's definition (as Rabbi Shulman presents it):
 - Knowing what something **is** and what it **is not**—its essential boundaries.

VIII. Ramchal's standard warning: knowing terms without meaning is “not knowledge” (25:30)

A. Quotation/paraphrase from Ramchal's מאמר הויכוח

- Rabbi Shulman brings Ramchal's point:
 - If one only knows names/labels (e.g., names of ספירות) without grasping their nature and purpose:
 - “אין זו ידיעה כלל”
- True חכמה is:
 - grasping the “סוד עצתו יתברך” in creation and הנהגה,
 - until one truly understands the words of Chazal.

B. Balanced message: very high bar, but the greatest יעד

- Rabbi Shulman stresses two truths simultaneously:
 1. The bar for קבלה is genuinely high.
 2. It represents the highest שלמות to which a person should ultimately aspire—without self-deception.

C. Practical guidance: build upward with real understanding

- Rabbi Shulman recommends a developmental path:
 - start with accessible learning (e.g., גמרא, משנה),
 - climb gradually,
 - ensuring clarity at each step before moving higher.

IX. Closing note: Ramchal's youthful brilliance and early passing (29:00)

- Rabbi Shulman remarks on Ramchal's young age and that he died around age 40 in a plague, underscoring both the tragedy and the magnitude of his Torah output.

X. In Summary

- Rabbi Shulman teaches that תלמוד תורה is the greatest means Hashem gave for closeness, surpassing even mitzvot because Torah is the **root** that generates all action.
- Torah study has ascending levels: sincere reading with קדושה/טהרה/כוונה; effortful understanding producing “שלמות על שלמות”; and the rare mastery of secrets (“סתרים ורזים”).
- One should not rush into קבלה: without true comprehension, knowing terminology is “אין זו ידיעה” כלל.
- Torah elevates not only the learner but the entire creation, and the processes of חכמה–בינה–דעת describe how transmitted tradition becomes internalized clarity.