

Dvar Torah Outline — Rosh Hashanah: Judgment as a Beloved Gift, Coronating Hashem, and the Path to Tzedakah and Geulah

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman reframes Rosh Hashanah and the entire concept of יום הדין through a striking Midrash: Hashem “gifts” משפט to His beloved people the way a king gives a treasured orchard to his favorite son. He explains that justice is not merely frightening accountability, but the mechanism that allows our relationship with Hashem—and our reward—to be truly “ours” rather than a handout. From there, Rabbi Shulman shows how embracing דין elevates Hashem as מלך המשפט, enables Hashem’s shift from strict judgment to צדקה, and ultimately brings קדושה and גאולה.

I. Rosh Hashanah imagery vs. a Midrashic “paradigm shift”

A. Common emotional picture of יום הדין

- Rabbi Shulman opens by asking what people imagine when they hear “יום הדין.”
 - Typical association: a courtroom, a trial, fear and intensity.
- He notes this is not entirely incorrect, but it is incomplete.

B. The Midrash in Parashat Shoftim changes the frame

- The Midrash on the mitzvah of establishing courts becomes a lens for understanding Rosh Hashanah.
 - Central Torah context: “שֹׁפְטִים וְשֹׁטְרִים תִּתֵּן לָךְ בְּכָל שְׁעָרֶיךָ” (Judges and officers you shall appoint for yourself in all your gates).
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II. The parable: the king, the youngest son, and the beloved orchard (2:00)

A. The Midrash's analogy (Rabbi Levi)

- A king had many) "אמר רבי לוי, למה הדבר דומה, למלך שהיו לו בנים הרבה, ואהב את הקטן יותר מכלם" (sons, and he loved the youngest more than all of them.)
- The king also has one cherished possession:
 - He had an orchard, and he loved it more than) "והיה לו פרדס אחד, ואהבו יותר מכל מה שהיה לו" (everything he had.)
- The gift:
 - The king gives the orchard to the beloved youngest son.

B. Why the Jewish people are "the youngest son"

- Rabbi Shulman connects "youngest" to the idea that Israel is last in historical emergence but first in Divine intent:
 - "ראשון למחשבה אחרון למעשה"
- He ties this to the theme expressed in kabbalat shabbat:
 - "סוף מעשה במחשבה תחלה"

C. Why an "orchard" specifically (Maharal)

- Rabbi Shulman cites the Maharal: a פרדס is cultivated primarily for תענוג (pleasure/ delight), not basic survival.
- An orchard represents:
 - Beauty, fragrance, shade, delicacy—an environment of enjoyment.
- He notes how "פרדס" appears as a symbol of elevated closeness (e.g., the sages "entered the פרדס").

III. The Midrash's punchline: Hashem loves Israel—and loves justice (7:30)

A. Identifying the "beloved son" and the "beloved orchard"

- Hashem's beloved people:
 - "מכל האמות שבָּרַאתי אין אני אוהב אלא ישראל"
 - Prooftext: "כי נער ישראל ואהבהו" (For Israel is a youth, and I loved him.)

- Hashem's beloved “possession,” surprisingly, is משפט:
- “וּמִכָּל שִׁבְרָתִי אֵין אֲנִי אוֹהֵב אֶלָּא אֶת הַדִּין”
- Proof-text: “כִּי אֲנִי ה' אֹהֵב מִשְׁפָּט” (For I, Hashem, love justice.)

B. Clarifying “love” (Maharal): love means closeness

- Rabbi Shulman emphasizes: for Hashem, “love” cannot mean emotion; it means closeness/attachment.
- Israel is the closest “recipient” because creation’s purpose is to bestow good to a recipient.

IV. Why justice is “closest” to Hashem—and why it’s a gift to us (10:06)

A. Defining משפט as “must be” (unshakable truth)

- Rabbi Shulman explains that משפט means: “this must be this way”—a stable, objective reality.
- He parallels this with the Rambam’s concept of Hashem as מוֹכֵרֵת הַמְצִיאוֹת (necessary existence).

B. The key question: How can Hashem “give” justice to humans?

- Everything created is contingent; Hashem is necessary.
- So what does it mean that Hashem “hands over” משפט to us?

C. Derech Hashem: reward must be earned to avoid “bread of shame”

- Rabbi Shulman cites Derech Hashem: Hashem wants us to be “owners” of our spiritual gain.
- If goodness is simply handed out, it produces:
 - “(bread of shame) בֶּרֶזֶל דְּכִסּוּפָא”
- “...is the structure that makes reward truly deserved and therefore truly “ours” משפט

D. Justice makes even reward a matter of fairness

- Rabbi Shulman notes that once a person earns merit, it would be “unjust” to withhold reward—even from a רשע who did a mitzvah.
- Analogy: an employer must pay wages for work already done.

V. Rosh Hashanah: judgment is not a threat but the mechanism of ownership (16:30)

A. Rabbi Shulman's thesis about יום הדין

- The day of judgment is frightening only if seen as hostile scrutiny.
- Properly understood, דין is what makes our destiny an outcome of our own choices:
 - not “welfare,” not an arbitrary gift, but earned relationship and earned reward.

B. Judgment is the “הטבה שלמה” for תנאי

- Rabbi Shulman describes the deepest good as a good you can truly possess.
- Mercy may delay consequences, but judgment is what anchors meaning and ownership.

C. A Rosh Hashanah verse reframed via Ramban

- Rabbi Shulman references the Rosh Hashanah-linked verse from Tehillim:
 - “אֲשֶׁר־יִהְיֶה הָעָם יוֹדְעֵי תְרוּעָה ה' בְּאוֹר פְּנֵיךְ יִהְלְכוּ” (Happy is the people who know the teruah; Hashem) in the light of Your face they walk.)
- He cites the Ramban: the “happiness” is rooted in appreciating משפט.

VI. Embracing justice coronates Hashem as מלך (22:00) המשפט

A. Midrash: keeping justice “elevates” Hashem

- “בְּנֵי... בְּזָכוֹת נִשְׁאַתָּם מִשְׁמָרִים אֶת הַדִּין אֲנִי מִתְגַּדֵּה”
- Prooftext:
 - “וַיִּגְבֶּה ה' צְבָאוֹת בְּמִשְׁפָּט” (Hashem of legions is exalted through justice)

B. Rabbi Shulman: without objective truth there is no real justice

- He argues the secular/atheistic posture leads to relativized “justice” (socially constructed).
- Accepting a binding system of justice implies a מקור:
 - a Creator who is מלך המשפט.

C. Maharal: the entire universe runs on rules—so human behavior must too

- Rabbi Shulman lays out an “order” ladder:
 - math → physics → chemistry → biology → physiology
- When biological order breaks, it’s called disease—chaos.
- Therefore: it is incoherent to claim “everything has law except man.”
- /means: relationships and morality also have structured rules (e.g., husband/wife, parents משפּט children).

D. “Joy in justice” as a spiritual posture

- (.It is a joy for the righteous to do justice) "שְׂמֵחָה לְצַדִּיק עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט"
 - Sinners experience judgment as painful because it binds them to objective meaning.
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VII. The 10 Days of Teshuvah: the time Hashem is exalted in judgment (29:30)

A. Berachot 12b: when is “וַיִּגְבֶּה ה’ ... בְּמִשְׁפָּט” fulfilled?

- Rabbi Shulman cites the Gemara:
 - This exaltation occurs during “עשרת ימי תשובה” (from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur).

B. Maaseh Rav: the Vilna Gaon’s joy at shofar

- Rabbi Shulman reports that the Vilna Gaon rejoiced especially during תקיעות.
- The model: citizens rejoice at a coronation with trumpets; so too we should rejoice at shofar as coronating the King.

C. Distinction: a “king” vs. a “dictator”

- If the people cry at coronation, it signals coercion.
 - Rabbi Shulman contrasts:
 - ruler by force: מושל
 - (implying being accepted/consulted “מלך” he links this to) accepted willingly: מלך
 - Therefore, rejoicing in judgment is part of making Hashem “מלך” over us.
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VIII. From acknowledging צדקה to receiving קדושה, (34:30) and גאולה

A. Midrash: if you elevate Me in דין, I respond with צדקה

- Rabbi Shulman emphasizes sequence:
 1. Recognize and accept משפט.
 2. Only then can mercy/generosity operate without undermining justice.

B. Analogy: charity only works once ownership is clear

- If someone admits the wallet is yours, then you can give him צדקה.
- If he's still fighting to take it, you fight for every dollar.
- Parallel:
 - Only after we acknowledge Hashem's right to judge can there be "commuting" the sentence.

C. Machzor imagery: two thrones

- Rabbi Shulman references the Rosh Hashanah liturgy:
 - Hashem moves from the throne of משפט to the throne of צדקה through shofar and our acceptance of דין.

D. Kedushah revealed through tzedakah

- Proof-text:
 - "וְהָאֵל הַקְדוֹשׁ נִקְדָּשׁ בְּצִדְקָה" (The Holy God is sanctified through righteousness/tzedakah).
- Rabbi Shulman explains:
 - Only when awe of Divine justice is established can Hashem's closeness not diminish His majesty.

E. The culminating promise: doing both leads to complete redemption

- Thus says Hashem: keep) "כֹּה אָמַר ה' שְׁמְרוּ מִשְׁפָּט וַעֲשׂוּ צְדָקָה כִּי קְרוֹבָה יְשׁוּעָתִי לְבֹא וְצִדְקָתִי לְהִגָּלוֹת" (justice and do tzedakah, for My salvation is near to come and My righteousness to be revealed.)
 - Rabbi Shulman frames the arc of עשרת ימי תשובה as:
 - starting in משפט and culminating in the geulah-like closeness of Yom Kippur.
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In Summary

- Rabbi Shulman teaches that the Midrash on “שופטים ושוטרים” reframes משפט יום הדין: is not merely frightening—it is a beloved Divine gift.
- Justice enables reward and closeness to be earned (avoiding “נהמא דכיסופא”), making spiritual achievement truly ours.
- Embracing objective דין coronates Hashem as מלך המשפט; it is meant to be accompanied by joy, like a coronation.
- Only after acknowledging Divine justice can Hashem act with צדקה—leading to קדושה dwelling among us and, ultimately, to גאולה שלמה.