

Dvar Torah Outline — Daat Tevunot: How Evil Emerges Through Hester Panim, “Blueprints,” and Directed Divine Energy (Rabbi Shulman)

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman explains the philosophical problem of how “evil” can exist if Hashem is the source of all goodness, developing the Rambam’s model that evil begins not as a created substance but as the withdrawal of divine revelation (hester panim). He then adds a second stage: once that “absence” forms a dysfunctional “blueprint,” Hashem’s ongoing life-giving power can animate it into real existing forces of harm—without implying that evil reflects Hashem’s essence. The dvar Torah concludes by mapping how varying degrees of divine concealment empower forces of tumah, how this weakens the side of good in a “zero-sum” dynamic, and how even destructive angels remain loyal servants carrying out Hashem’s decree.

I. The core problem: how can evil come from a wholly good Source?

A. Why good is easy to explain, and evil is not

- Rabbi Shulman frames טוב as an expression of Hashem’s perfection and goodness.
- רע is a philosophical problem because:
 - “ממקור טוב לא יצא רע” (from a source of good, evil shall not come).

B. Midrashic support: Hashem does not “sign His name” on evil

- Rabbi Shulman cites the idea: אין הקדוש ברוך הוא מייחד שמו על הרע (Hashem does not associate His Name with evil).
 - Analogy: a person will not sign their name on something that does not represent who they are.
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II. Rambam's analogy: evil as withholding light, not creating darkness (1:30)

A. "Turning off the lights"

- Rabbi Shulman quotes the Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim conceptually):
 - When someone turns off the lights, we say they "made it dark," but really they **withheld light**.
- So too, evil begins as **withheld revelation** rather than a "positive creation" of evil.

B. Important nuance

- Rabbi Shulman notes that in some sense "darkness" can later be discussed as having a "created aspect," but the deepest root is **absence**, not essence.
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III. Two-stage model: from absence → to an "evil blueprint" → to actual evil entities (4:00)

A. Stage 1: the concept/root of evil emerges from hester panim

- Hashem creates the system; then, where necessary within that system, He **withholds** the flow/revelation that would normally sustain proper function.
- That malfunctioning becomes the **root** from which רע can emerge.

B. The key question: absence can't create a real "thing"

- Rabbi Shulman emphasizes: you cannot get a real existent entity purely from non-existence.
- He cites the Daat Tevunot's logic:
 - "אך מהעדר השפעה, איך יבראו בריות?" (But from absence of influence—how could created beings be created?)
 - "הנה מהעדר לא יולד מציאות" (From absence, existence is not born.)

C. Stage 2: once the “blueprint” exists, it can be energized into existence

- Rabbi Shulman introduces a second stage:
 - The absence creates a **new “blueprint”** (a warped program/structure).
 - Then Hashem’s power as **Source of existence** can animate that blueprint into real forces/entities of evil (e.g., מלאכי חבלה).
- This avoids the problem of “ממקור טוב לא יצא רע” because:
 - Hashem is not the source of evil’s value/identity,
 - but He remains the source of existence-power which can energize anything structured to receive it.

D. Illustrative analogies Rabbi Shulman uses

- A printer with withheld ink: the original design is “good,” but the printed result becomes warped.
- A “monster truck” instead of the intended vehicle: same construction energy, wrong blueprint.
- A computer virus altering a root file: the machine still runs, but behaves oppositely.

E. A further implication: evil must contain a “spark” sustaining it

- Rabbi Shulman states: no evil can exist without **some aspect of good** inside it (otherwise it couldn’t persist).
- Once that sustaining spark is removed, the evil collapses.

IV. Clarifying the framework: not “post-Matan Torah,” and not dependent on the Arizal (13:00)

A. Student question: is this like צמצום and an “Arizal innovation”?

- Rabbi Shulman answers:
 - It is related conceptually, but **is not the Arizal’s invention צמצום**, and this model can stand even without that framing.

B. Scope: this is about the structure of existence (Adam and the serpent)

- Rabbi Shulman stresses this discussion is not a later “Jewish historical” development:
 - It reaches back to foundational reality (אדם הראשון and the נחש).
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V. The “root of evil” as a complex system of powers, affecting body and soul (15:30)

A. One root with many expressions

- Rabbi Shulman reads: **“וענין השורש הזה הוא כלל כוחות שונים”**
 - The root contains many distinct forces.
- From them descend all forms of deficiency and evil:
 - affecting **נפש** (e.g., depression) and **גוף** (e.g., disease),
 - across many divisions and details.

B. More to come later

- The text promises: **“ועוד נדבר מזה בחלק השני בסיעתא דשמיא”** (more in the second section).
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VI. How hester panim “feeds” evil: degrees of concealment determine degrees of dominion (16:34)

A. The system can act fully, partially, or be restrained

- Rabbi Shulman explains:
 - These powers can be active or inactive, wholly or partially.

B. The control knob: concealment of divine light

- **“כי כפי שיעור ההעלם... תינתן שליטה וממשלה אל כלל הכוחות האלה”**
 - The more concealment, the more authority/energy is granted to the system of evil (or to specific sub-parts, depending on the nature of the concealment).

C. A “zero-sum” dynamic between evil’s strength and good’s strength

- When evil powers dominate:
 - “**יוחלש כוח הטוב**” (good is weakened),
 - and the rooted structures of good are damaged proportionally.
 - When evil is subdued:
 - good strengthens,
 - roots are repaired,
 - and blessing flows more robustly into the world.
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VII. Terminology clarification: “sefirot” vs. created spiritual powers (19:31)

A. Why Rabbi Shulman pauses to clarify

- He notes he has used multiple terms that can confuse:
 - **כוחות הנבדלים** (disembodied created powers)
 - **ספירות** (a term with multiple interpretations)

B. Sefirot in Atzilut vs. parallels in Beriah

- Rabbi Shulman distinguishes:
 - **ספירות הקדושים** in **אצילות**: Hashem’s modes of conduct (not truly a “world” in the usual sense).
 - Below that: created powers in **בריאה** that parallel those patterns but are not “Hashem’s middot.”

C. “Strengthening” or “weakening” Hashem—what it really means

- Rabbi Shulman references the idea that actions can “strengthen” or “weaken” Hashem (so to speak), but clarifies:
 - It refers to the manifestation of divine conduct in creation, not any literal change in Hashem’s omnipotence.
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VIII. Tumah vs. kedushah: the downstream “names” of what flows from each side (30:30)

A. General outputs of the forces of evil

- Rabbi Shulman reads: what is “influenced” from the side of evil is called:
 - **טומאה, חושך, זוהמה, חול** (and related terms).

B. General outputs of divine illumination

- What flows from **הארת פניו יתברך** is called:
 - **ברכה, אור, טהרה, קדושה**.

C. The world’s governance revolves around distinctions and details

- The text emphasizes that Hashem’s hanhagah operates through many nuanced categories and subcategories of these dynamics.
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IX. Angels as executors: even destructive forces are Hashem’s servants (32:30)

A. Appointed “officers” over every domain

- Rabbi Shulman explains:
 - Over every domain (good or bad) there are **appointed מלאכים** to bring things from spiritual roots down into physical reality.

B. Even מלאכי חבלה are not rebels

- Even angels that carry out harm are:
 - **“משרתי יתברך עושי דברו”** (His servants who do His word).
- There is no independent competing power; all operates within the decree Hashem designed.

C. Why this structure exists (briefly)

- Rabbi Shulman ties it back to the broader purpose previously discussed:
 - evil exists to enable free will and ultimately greater revelation,

- so humans can merit the good **ממעשה ידינו** (through our own actions).
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X. In Summary

- Rabbi Shulman frames evil's origin as a problem only if evil is assumed to be a direct expression of Hashem; instead, its root is **hester panim**—withholding revelation.
- A second stage is required to explain real “evil entities”: once an “absence-formed blueprint” exists, Hashem's life-force can animate it into existence without implying Hashem “creates evil as evil.”
- The degree of divine concealment determines how empowered the forces of tumah become, and this empowerment proportionally weakens the side of good.
- Even destructive angels remain completely subordinate: all forces—good and harmful—are ultimately agents executing Hashem's ordered governance.