

Dvar Torah Outline — Ramchal on the Structure of Creation: Physical, Spiritual, Souls, Angels, and the “Intermediate” Realm of Sheidim (Demons)

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman explains Ramchal's taxonomy of creation as divided into two overarching realms—*גשמי* (physical) and *רוחני* (spiritual)—and then carefully traces the subdivisions within each. He clarifies what “perceivable by the senses” means (including perception aided by tools), and why the spiritual realm contains both *נשמות* (souls destined to enter bodies) and *נבדלים* (transcendent beings not destined for bodies), including *כוחות* and *מלאכים*. Rabbi Shulman then highlights a surprising “middle category” between physical and spiritual—*שדים*—using Chazal's broader principle that Hashem creates intermediary gradations, and he offers modern analogies (microscopic life, quantum phenomena) to help conceptualize what “in-between” might mean.

I. Ramchal's headline claim: all creation splits into two realms

A. “Parts of the entirety of the world are two”

- Rabbi Shulman opens “chapter five,” noting it concludes the first section (*חלק א*).
- The two realms:
 - *גשמי* — the physical
 - *רוחני* — the spiritual

B. Defining “physical” as “perceivable by the senses”

- Ramchal's definition (as Rabbi Shulman explains it): physical things are *המורגשים בחושינו*—what our senses can register.
- Clarification: “Perceivable” includes perception **with assistance of tools**
 - Example: something too small to see unaided but visible with an electron microscope is still in the physical category.
 - Analogy: poor eyesight corrected by glasses doesn't redefine reality; it changes the observer's access.

C. Examples of “physical but not directly sensed”

- Rabbi Shulman notes that many physical phenomena require instruments:
 - Light waves, radio waves, bluetooth waves
 - Sound waves can sometimes be felt as vibrations
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II. Subdividing the physical world: upper and lower (2:30)

A. The “upper” physical: heavenly bodies

- **כלל הגרמים השמימיים: העליונים**
 - **הגלגלים וכוכביהם** — celestial bodies and their “spheres/orbits” (as Rabbi Shulman frames it) and the physical forces affecting trajectories.

B. The “lower” physical: earth and its domain

- **התחתונים**: what is within the space of the “lowest sphere”
 - **הארץ והמים והאוויר** — earth, water, and air (i.e., our terrestrial environment and atmosphere).

C. Modern physics analogy: “compartments” of physical law

- Rabbi Shulman sketches three “registers” (as physicists describe):
 - Newtonian (everyday scale)
 - Quantum mechanics (extremely small scale)
 - Relativity (cosmic scale)
 - Point: even within “physical,” different realms operate with different governing principles.
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III. Defining the spiritual world: non-physical and not sensed (8:00)

A. What “spiritual” means in Ramchal’s terms

- **הרוחניים**: created beings **משוללי מגשם** (devoid of physicality)
- **בלתי מורגשים מחושינו** (not sensed by our senses)

B. The spiritual subdivides into two categories

- **נשמות** — souls

- **נבדלים** — “transcendent” beings (Rabbi Shulman emphasizes: transcendent = not engaged with physicality)
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IV. Souls as spiritual beings designed to enter bodies (10:30)

A. What makes a **נשמה** unique

- Rabbi Shulman reads Ramchal: souls are spiritual beings whose “destiny” is **לבוא בתוך גוף**—to enter a body.

B. Two forms of unity between soul and body

- **לגבל בתוכו** — “mixed into it”
- **ולהקשר בו בקשר אמיץ** — “bound/tied to it with a strong bond”
- Rabbi Shulman explains these are not redundant:
 - “Mixture” can mean interpenetration without attachment (like marbles mixed)
 - “Binding” implies a deeper linkage (like chemical bonding), making separation harder in a different way

C. Ongoing interaction over time

- **ולפעול בו פעולות שונות בזמנים שונים**
 - The soul acts within the body in different ways at different times.
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V. The “transcendent” (**נבדלים**): spiritual beings not destined for bodies (16:00)

A. Core definition

- **הנבדלים** are spiritual creations **כלל מיוסדים לגופים כלל**
 - They never enter a physical body; they are not made for embodied interaction.

B. The **נבדלים** split into two more categories

- **כוחות** — disembodied forces (**הנבדלים**)
- **מלאכים** — angels

C. Many levels and “laws” govern these beings

- Rabbi Shulman stresses Ramchal's point: even spiritual beings have **חוקים טבעיים** (natural laws) appropriate to their **מדרגה**.
- Analogy:
 - Just as engineers know material properties in the physical world, **גדולי תורה** can “know” metaphysical regularities (e.g., effects of **י"ג מידות הרחמים**, mitzvot).

D. Maharal as a model for describing metaphysical reality

- Rabbi Shulman suggests the Maharal's writings aim to show that Chazal consistently speak about an operating metaphysical structure behind mitzvot and events.

E. “Levels” vs. “steps”: **מעלותיהם** and **מדרגותיהם**

- Rabbi Shulman revisits an earlier analogy:
 - **מעלה**: a floor/level (e.g., 3rd floor, 4th floor)
 - **מדרגה**: a step between floors
- Takeaway: there are both “tiers” and “incremental progressions” within tiers.

F. Diversity within **מלאכים**: “species within one type”

- Rabbi Shulman notes Ramchal's language: variation is so great that one could call them different “species” within the overarching category of angels (e.g., **אופנים**, **שרפים**, **מלאכים** are not mere poetry but precise distinctions).

VI. The missing category: an intermediate between spiritual and physical—(27:00) **שדים**

A. Ramchal's surprise addition

- Despite the neat physical/spiritual split, Ramchal says there exists:
 - **מין אחד ... כמו אמצעי בין רוחני וגשמי** — a kind of intermediate creature between spiritual and physical.

B. Chazal's broader principle: intermediaries between major categories

- Rabbi Shulman cites the idea that Hashem structured reality **בהדרגה** (stepwise), providing “in-between” entities so transitions are not jarring.
- Examples Rabbi Shulman lists:
 - Between **מדבר** (human) and **חי** (animal): the monkey

- Between **צומח** and **דומם**: coral (described as rock-like yet growing)
- A more unusual Chazal-reference example: **אדני השדה** (a creature described in Mishnayot with a connection to the ground)

C. Why intermediaries matter

- Rabbi Shulman: intermediaries make categories relatable and intelligible—bridges that reduce the “gulf.”
- He contrasts this with mistaken conclusions some drew from observed gradation (e.g., evolution misread as “origin” rather than “design”).

D. Applying the principle to spiritual vs. physical

- Just as humans relate downward via intermediaries, so too:
 - It may be “easier” to interact with **שדים** than with **מלאכים** (though both are difficult).

E. Identifying the intermediate: **שדים** and their link to occult interaction

- Rabbi Shulman notes:
 - This realm is where some practices (e.g., witchcraft) might “tap into” power.
 - He references traditions that Shlomo HaMelech “controlled” demons (with the caution: one must understand what the Gemara intends).

VII. What makes **שדים** “in-between”? Not fully sensed, not fully bound by physical law (34:00)

A. A subtle textual contrast in Ramchal

- Rabbi Shulman points out Ramchal's wording shift:
 - For **רוחניים**: “not sensed”
 - For **שדים**: “**in truth**” they are not sensed—hinting at partial overlap or borderline status.

B. Not constrained by the full boundaries of physicality

- Ramchal's criteria (as taught by Rabbi Shulman):
 - They are not perceived by our senses
 - They are not constrained by all the limits/laws of tangible physicality

C. Rav Dessler's proposal / analogy: microbes as a conceptual bridge

- Rabbi Shulman shares an idea attributed to Rav Dessler (as a proposal):
 - שדים might correlate (literally or analogically) to viruses/bacteria—or to some “power” associated with them beyond the purely physical.
- Supporting association:
 - Chazal describe vast numbers of unseen entities around us; Rabbi Shulman connects this image to the modern experience of seeing microbial life under a microscope.

D. Another modern analogy: quantum phenomena as “between”

- Rabbi Shulman suggests the extremely small (approaching quantum behavior) can help us imagine an “intermediate” domain:
 - Not comfortably categorized as ordinary physical
 - Not identical to the spiritual realm either

E. Classification: “called spiritual” but not angelic

- Ramchal (as summarized by Rabbi Shulman):
 - They are sometimes called “spiritual” לא בדקדוק (not with precise accuracy)
 - They are distinct from the class of angels, though similar in some respect
 - They have their own limited, specific “laws”
 - This species is called שדי
 - And it too subdivides into many subtypes

VIII. In Summary

- Rabbi Shulman presents Ramchal's creation-map: physical vs. spiritual, each with structured subdivisions.
- “Physical” means accessible to human sensing, including through instruments; “spiritual” is categorically beyond sensory perception.
- Souls are spiritual beings uniquely designed to enter, mix with, and bind to bodies; transcendent beings do not enter bodies and include both כוחות and מלאכים, each governed by “laws” appropriate to their level.
- Ramchal adds an intermediate category—שדים—reflecting a broader Torah principle of gradual, bridged categories in creation; Rabbi Shulman uses modern scientific analogies (microbes/ quantum) to make the “in-between” intelligible while stressing it is not simply identical with angels or ordinary matter.