

Dvar Torah Outline — Ramchal on Reward, “Bookkeeping,” and the Personal Axis of Avodah

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman continues studying the Ramchal's framework of divine justice, distinguishing between deeds that become eternal assets in עולם הבא and deeds that are “cashed out” in this world. He explains a troubling middle category: people who do have a share in eternity, yet many of their מצוות are nevertheless paid out in worldly “trinkets,” leaving them with a diminished eternal stature due to Rabbi Shulman then transitions from the “general axis” (universal bookkeeping) to the קלקול המעשים. “personal axis,” where Hashem’s wisdom creates diverse human circumstances—wealth, poverty, and more—to generate the full range of moral and spiritual tests.

I. Reviewing the “general axis”: where deeds are paid out

A. The core distinction Rabbi Shulman reviews

- The “defining” behaviors of a person primarily determine their eternal status.
- The “non-defining” minority can be paid out in this world.

B. The danger of “using up” mitzvot in this world

- Rabbi Shulman emphasizes the tragedy of receiving reward here rather than in עולם הבא.
 - He cites the familiar principle: שכר מצוה בהאי עלמא ליכא (this world cannot truly compensate for a mitzvah).
 - Illustration (Rabbi Shulman’s language): a person may receive “peanuts”—wealth, comfort, status—while losing the true eternal gain.
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II. A new major distinction: “good deeds” that still don’t elevate eternally (2:01)

A. Ramchal’s added הבחנה גדולה

- Some actions that *should* have elevated a person in עולם הבא do not do so.
- Two questions are introduced:
 1. **Will** the deed “make it” into עולם הבא?
 2. **How much** elevation would it have produced?

B. The surprising reality

- Rabbi Shulman explains: even for someone who *will* have a חלק לעולם הבא, some מצוות may still be paid out in this world.
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III. The “middle group”: not destroyed, but diminished (5:01)

A. The unfortunate outcome

- A person can remain:
 - “among the lowest ranks of the eternal “gathering — בקטני הקיבוץ ההוא”
- Rabbi Shulman frames it as עולם הבא “bottom rung” existence—still עולם הבא, but meager.

B. Similarity to רשעים גמורים, but with a crucial difference

- Similarity:
 - In both cases, reward is paid in this world.
 - Difference:
 - **רשעים גמורים**: their good deeds are fully exhausted here, and they do not reach eternity at all.
 - **This middle group**: their deeds do bring them to eternity, but only after significant purification and with a small portion remaining.
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IV. Why does it happen? קלקול המעשים “pollutes” mitzvot (9:00)

A. The cause: spiritual distortion and accumulated עבירות

- Rabbi Shulman highlights the Ramchal's key explanation:
 - because of קלקול מעשיהם, their mitzvot do not achieve their intended eternal elevation.

B. Rabbi Shulman's metaphor

- A mitzvah is like a “rocket” meant to break the atmosphere into eternity.
- For such a person, the rocket becomes a “dud”—it rises but does not “leave the atmosphere,” remaining in worldly payout.

C. A practical framing of “pollution”

- Rabbi Shulman gives examples of how עבירות can undermine mitzvot's spiritual power:
 - If someone is speaking הרע לשון and then learns תורה or makes a ברכה, that “dirty mouth” limits what the act can accomplish.
 - If someone is מחלל שבת yet performs a partial ritual act, it counts, but its potential is compromised.
 - Not necessarily time-bound:
 - If there was no תשובה, the negative “pathways” can linger and affect later acts.
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V. Personal takeaways: don't assume your mitzvot always “go straight up” (15:05)

A. Rabbi Shulman's caution

- Even if a person “believes” and is not a רשע גמור:
 - mitzvot can become “duds” if performed without זריזות, כוונה, and spiritual integrity.
- The uncertainty itself is meant to produce vigilance and humility:
 - we generally cannot evaluate our true spiritual “trajectory” accurately.

B. Not black-and-white categories

- Rabbi Shulman clarifies:
 - Many people could be “רשעים” in some sense, yet still not “רשעים גמורים” who lose their entire share.

- can cleanse even serious spiritual damage—though we should (and other purifications) גיהנום not rely on that.
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VI. Clarifying purification vs. “built-up” spiritual achievements (19:00)

A. Two components Rabbi Shulman separates

1. **Removing evil** (purification): כף הקלע, חיבוט הקבר, גיהנום, and even ייסורים in this world remove negative elements.
2. **Accumulating good** (construction): how much positive רוחניות and closeness one has built.

B. Example: “never sinned” vs. “highest level”

- Rabbi Shulman references the Gemara’s idea of **four people who never sinned**, yet notes:
 - “Never sinned” does not automatically equal the highest מדרגה.
- Illustration:
 - could be on a higher level than someone “cleaner” in a narrow sense, because he משה רבינו built vastly more.

C. Interaction between the two

- The “negative” can pull down and can even undermine mitzvot.
 - The “positive” builds up the person’s ultimate stature.
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VII. Transition: closing the general “bookkeeping” axis; previewing a new system (22:30)

A. What has been explained so far

- Rabbi Shulman summarizes the Ramchal’s “bookkeeping” model:
 - יסורי צדיקים בעולם הזה
 - שלוות רשעים בעולם הזה
 - עונש נפשי after death as preparation for the true גמול

B. The missing piece: good things for צדיקים in this world

- Rabbi Shulman anticipates the anxiety:
 - “If good happens to me, is that bad?”
- Ramchal’s reassurance (as Rabbi Shulman presents it):
 - Good for צדיקים in this world works through **a different pathway**, not the bookkeeping axis.
 - It will be explained later.

C. Defining the “general” vs. the “personal” axis

- “קוטב הכללי”:
 - applies to everyone as a universal preparation for עולם הבא.
 - “קוטב האישי”:
 - a distinct framework, to be explained next.
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VIII. Introducing the “personal axis”: why Hashem created diverse טוב and רע (27:00)

A. Human עבודה depends on טוב vs. רע

- Rabbi Shulman explains:
 - Man is placed between good and evil to exercise בחירה and choose good.

B. The many “particulars” of good and evil

- Good is diverse because it is an extension of Hashem’s unlimited goodness.
- Evil likewise has many forms: **זה לעומת זה עשה אלוקים**.

C. Examples of character traits Rabbi Shulman uses

- **גאוה** as an עניין of רע.
- **רחמנות** as an עניין of טוב; **אכזריות** as its opposite.
- **הסתפקות והשמחה בחלקו** as an עניין of טוב.

D. Hashem sets the scope

- Divine wisdom determined:
 - how many facets of good/evil are appropriate for human life and human possibility.
- Rabbi Shulman cites the idea:
 - **רצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לזכות את ישראל לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצוות**

- More mitzvot create more “interface points” with Hashem (and more opportunities for failure too).
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IX. Why varied life circumstances are necessary: tests require situations (34:31)

A. Diversity of “states” enables full בחירה

- Rabbi Shulman explains the Ramchal's point:
 - to actualize all these moral/spiritual dimensions, humanity needs many different life conditions.
- These include:
 - external circumstances (status, resources)
 - internal states (emotional and psychological phase of life)

B. Example: wealth and poverty as a testbed

- If there were no rich and poor, many tests (mercy/cruelty) would not exist.
- The rich person's tests:
 - will he be cruel or merciful to those who need him?
 - will his heart become haughty?
 - will he be drawn after העולם הבלי and abandon עבודת בוראו?
- The poor person's tests:
 - will he accept מעט שבידו and thank Hashem?
 - or become bitter and complain?

C. Rabbi Shulman's contemporary illustration

- He describes affluent environments as spiritually challenging (distractions, leisure, comforts).
 - He contrasts with a humorous anecdote about someone who made עליה for “activities,” underscoring how environment shapes temptation and avodah.
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X. In Summary

- Rabbi Shulman clarifies a troubling middle category: a person can have a share in עולם הבא yet “use up” many מצוות in this world due to קלקול המעשים, leaving them with a diminished eternal portion.
- Purification (removing evil) is distinct from spiritual construction (accumulating good), and a person's final level reflects both.

- The “general axis” explains cosmic bookkeeping (reward/punishment allocation), but it does not yet explain why צדיקים may receive good in this world.
- The “personal axis” begins with the idea that Hashem created many facets of טוב and רע and therefore many human life-situations, enabling the full range of בחירה and avodah.