

Dvar Torah Outline — Derech Hashem: Diverse Avodah, Unique Missions, and the Hidden Roots of Our Tests

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman explains that Hashem intentionally designed avodat Hashem with enormous diversity—across mitzvot, life circumstances, and even moment-to-moment emotional states—so that our relationship with Hashem can be multi-faceted rather than one-dimensional. Each person receives a unique “portion” of the overall spiritual work, and judgment is therefore individualized with exact precision. Rabbi Shulman then connects this to the Ramchal’s model of hishtalshelut: our earthly challenges originate in higher spiritual “roots,” and human bechirah can repair (or damage) those roots, affecting the world below.

I. Review: Why so many kinds of avodah and challenges?

A. The question Rabbi Shulman revisits

- Why does Hashem create **so many** areas to work on—emunah, wisdom, emotional refinement (anger, patience), etc.?
- More variety seems like:
 - more opportunities to succeed
 - but also more opportunities to fail—so what’s the gain?

B. Rabbi Shulman’s framing: mitzvot as “interface points” with Hashem

- Each mitzvah/challenge is a **point of connection** with Hashem.
- The goal is not a one-dimensional relationship, but a “brilliant diamond” with many facets:
 - multiple angles of knowing and relating to Hashem.

C. Addressing the fear of failure: repair mechanisms

- Even if a person fails in some facets, Hashem built in repair:
 - תשובה

- and if not, **יסורים** (in this world or the next)
 - Therefore the increase in interface points is still fundamentally beneficial.
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II. Every moment is different: endless permutations of avodah (5:10)

A. Not only 613 mitzvot—life circumstances multiply avodah

- Rabbi Shulman emphasizes that avodah changes with:
 - location (Chicago vs. LA vs. Eretz Yisrael)
 - age and stage (single, one baby, two babies, etc.)
 - the emotional/mental state a person is in

B. “כל רגע ורגע” — each instant is unique

- Rabbi Shulman cites the idea (from נפש החיים) that every “רגע” (roughly a few seconds) carries a new permutation of Divine manifestation.
- No moment repeats across an entire lifetime:
 - therefore each encounter with Hashem is new.

C. Marriage analogy: relationship grows through changing contexts

- Like a husband and wife: the relationship deepens because circumstances constantly shift.
 - So too, avodah becomes more multi-faceted over time.
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III. “רצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לזכות את ישראל”: multiplying merit and connection (7:00)

A. More mitzvot = more merit = more connection

- Rabbi Shulman quotes: “רצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לזכות את ישראל לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצוות.”
- Interpretation:
 - Hashem created many mitzvot to create **more points of relationship**, more “merit,” and more avenues of closeness.

B. כלל ישראל as one entity; individuals as unique components

- Rabbi Shulman explains that כלל ישראל is fundamentally one organism.

- Each person is given a **unique way** of serving Hashem.
- In עולם הבא, this reunifies (conceptually) into a restored “אדם הראשון”:
 - the sum of all unique interactions becomes a greater collective ידע ה’.

C. Why your avodah differs from another person’s

- If everyone had identical avodah, then the total knowledge of Hashem would be limited.
 - By distributing distinct עבודות among (at least) 600,000 root souls—plus subdivisions—the total revelation is vastly expanded.
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IV. Individualized missions and individualized judgment (11:00)

A. Ramchal: each person has a unique portion in nisayon and yetzer hara

- Rabbi Shulman reads and explains:
 - “ונמצא לכל איש ואיש מבני אדם, חלק מיוחד בנסיון... ובמלחמת היצר...”

B. Military and “holding position” analogy (11:30)

- Rabbi Shulman uses an army image:
 - Sometimes success is not “conquering,” but simply **holding your position**.
- Bicycle analogy:
 - Uphill: going 3 mph can be heroic.
 - Downhill: 30 mph might be underperforming.
- Lesson:
 - We cannot judge another person’s spiritual “speed,” because we can’t see their slope.

C. Judgment with absolute precision—especially relevant before Rosh Hashanah

- Rabbi Shulman connects to the season:
 - one-and-a-half weeks before the Day of Judgment.
 - Hashem judges each individual:
 - by his unique burden
 - his unique circumstances
 - and the exactness of what was truly possible for him.
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V. Mashal of the king's servants: a collective project with distinct assignments (14:30)

A. Ramchal's metaphor: servants completing the king's work

- Rabbi Shulman explains the Ramchal's image:
 - The king has a job to be completed.
 - He distributes distinct portions to different servants.
 - Only together do all parts become complete.

B. Don't abandon your post to "copy" someone else

- Rabbi Shulman stresses:
 - If a servant leaves his assignment to imitate another, the king's plan fails.
 - Nuance:
 - At first, a person should learn fundamentals (how to daven, learn Mishnah/Gemara).
 - But the "inner chambers" of a person's avodah become extraordinarily personal and unique:
 - what you can do in avodat Hashem, no one else can.
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VI. Why we don't know the rewards of mitzvot: the botanical garden and the Maharal (15:30)

A. Midrash Tanchuma: "botanical garden" mashal

- Rabbi Shulman cites the idea behind not weighing mitzvot:
 - If the king told everyone which plant is most beloved, everyone would plant only that.
- A beautiful garden needs:
 - roses and tulips
 - hedges and bridges
 - the "small" pieces that create harmony

B. Pixel/Mona Lisa analogy

- Each mitzvah can be like placing one pixel:
 - you don't know if it's "just a dot" or the "twinkle in the eye."
- Therefore:
 - no mitzvah should be dismissed as insignificant.

C. Maharal: value depends on the recipient, and Hashem is beyond our grasp

- Rabbi Shulman's core point:
 - In service to a king, the value is determined by the king's needs/preferences.
 - Applied to mitzvot:
 - mitzvot are interactions with Hashem
 - to rank them, you would have to know Hashem's "preferences," which is impossible for human intellect.
 - Flowers vs. chocolates example:
 - the same act can land differently depending on the recipient.
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VII. "The measure of this division is beyond us": only Chochmah Elyonah can assign it (21:00)

A. Reading the Ramchal: we cannot evaluate others' assignments

- Rabbi Shulman reads:
 - "אך מידת החילוק הזה ודרכיו נשגבים מאוד מהשגתנו..."
- Practical implication:
 - it is impossible to know the true weight and worth of another person's avodah.

B. "רדלא — רישא דלא יתיידע": the unknowable head (23:02)

- Rabbi Shulman brings terminology of hiddenness:
 - there is a level that **cannot** be known—not merely difficult.
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VIII. The spiritual mechanics: hishtalshelut and the "roots" of our nisyonot (24:30)

A. Worlds framework: עשייה, יצירה, בריאה

- Rabbi Shulman reviews the Ramchal's structure:
 - עשייה: the physical "world of action"
 - יצירה: associated with מלאכים
 - בריאה: the realm of created transcendent powers ("כוחות הנבדלים") that govern reality

B. Analogy to laws of nature as “transcendent powers”

- Rabbi Shulman compares higher powers to abstract laws (physics/mathematics):
 - gravity “exists” everywhere and nowhere, yet affects everything.
 - He suggests conceptual parallels:
 - attraction/connection could relate to **חסד**
 - repulsion/strictness could relate to **דין**
 - Clarification Rabbi Shulman adds:
 - these are created powers “with similar names,” not Hashem’s Essence.
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IX. Our tests begin above: human bechirah as an “inverse marionette” (28:32)

A. Every nisayon has a shresh in the higher realms

- Rabbi Shulman reads and explains:
 - “כל העניינים האלה פרטי נסיונו של אדם... מתחיל שורש בחינתם בנבדלים”
- Example:
 - exhaustion with a newborn and the struggle to get up for learning is not only a personal battle,
 - it also corresponds to something rooted above that can be repaired.

B. “Inverse marionette”: our choices pull the strings upward

- Rabbi Shulman describes:
 - The higher realms “pull strings” down into physical expression.
 - But humans, through free will, can pull upward:
 - fixing (or damaging) the upper structure
 - which then flows back down and affects reality.

C. Success and suffering as nisyonot

- Rabbi Shulman concludes this section:
 - both “הצלחת העולם הזה” and “צרותיו” are tests—
 - opportunities to refine ourselves and deepen relationship with Hashem.
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X. In Summary

- Rabbi Shulman teaches that Hashem multiplied mitzvot and life-scenarios to create countless “interface points” of relationship with Him, yielding a multi-faceted, diamond-like קשר with Hashem.
- Each person receives a unique assignment within the collective mission of כלל ישראל, and is judged with exact precision relative to his circumstances and burden—especially highlighted before Rosh Hashanah.
- We cannot rank mitzvot or other people’s avodah because value depends on the Recipient (Hashem), Whom we cannot fully grasp.
- Our earthly nisyonot have roots in higher spiritual realms; through bechirah, a person can repair those roots—like an “inverse marionette”—and thereby influence reality below.