Dvar Torah Outline

Derech Hashem: Mutual Responsibility, the Suffering of the Righteous, and the World's Rectification

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman explains how the Jewish people's spiritual interconnectedness allows individuals to benefit from the merits of others—and enables exceptionally righteous people to suffer for the benefit of their generation. Building on Ramchal's discussion of mutual responsibility, he distinguishes between suffering that atones for a contemporary community and a higher form that repairs longstanding deficiencies in the world. Central to both is the righteous person's identification with others and imitation of God's goodness through selfless giving.

I

Review: Entering the World to Come through connection to a righteous person

A. *Location and context*

- The class continues **Derech Hashem, Part II, Chapter 3**, midway through section 8.
- Rabbi Shulman reviews another way God enables people to attain the World to Come:
  - Someone lacking sufficient personal merit may nevertheless enter through a meaningful connection to a righteous person.
  - This connection involves actively supporting that person's spiritual work, not merely admiring him.

B. *Three examples from the Talmud in Ketubot*

1. **Marrying one's daughter to a Torah scholar.**
2. **Conducting business on behalf of a Torah scholar.**
   - For example, the scholar contributes capital as a silent partner.
   - The other partner manages the business and shares the profits, enabling the scholar to study with peace of mind.
3. **Benefiting Torah scholars through one's property.**
   - Providing financial or material support.

C. *These are models, not an exclusive list*

- Rabbi Shulman explains that the three examples represent broad categories of assistance:
  - **Bodily and familial support.**
  - **Emotional and practical effort**, such as bearing the pressures of running a business.
  - **Financial support**, which he notes has a conceptual connection to the intellect.

- Other forms of genuine assistance can also establish this spiritual bond.
- The essential element is helping the righteous person fulfill his mission.

D. *Connection to the Hasidic emphasis on the righteous leader*

- Rabbi Shulman identifies this teaching as a foundation for the Hasidic emphasis on attachment to a righteous leader.
- However, Ramchal distinguishes between:
  - Those who enter the World to Come through another person, who occupy its lower levels.
  - Those who help others enter, who attain especially elevated positions.
- Entering through another's merit is therefore a rescue, not the ideal substitute for developing one's own spiritual standing.

II

Mutual responsibility: Why one person's merit can benefit another

5:01

A. *The conceptual question*

- How can one person's righteousness enable someone else to attain the World to Come?
- Rabbi Shulman returns to the Maharal's explanation:
  - Israel can be understood as **one integrated person**.
  - The Torah scholar supplies the mind or soul.
  - Others contribute practical effort, bodily assistance, or material resources.
  - Together, they form a functioning whole.

B. *God created people as interconnected beings*

- Ramchal explains that God originally bound individuals to one another.
- This is the principle of:
  - **"כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה"** (All Israel are responsible for one another).
- Rabbi Shulman emphasizes the literal image of a **guarantor**:
  - A guarantor becomes responsible when the original borrower fails to pay.
  - Similarly, spiritual responsibility extends beyond the isolated individual.

C. *A practical legal expression: Reciting a blessing for someone else*

- A person who has already fulfilled the obligation of Friday-night Kiddush may recite it for someone who still needs to fulfill it.
- Although the first person has discharged his own obligation, mutual responsibility gives him a continuing responsibility toward the other person.
- The blessing is therefore not considered unnecessary.

D. *Accountability depends on one's ability to influence*

- Mutual responsibility also means that another person's wrongdoing can affect us.
- However, Rabbi Shulman clarifies that this does not mean indiscriminate accountability for conduct one cannot possibly influence.
- Examples include:
  - Members of one's household.
  - People in one's community.
  - Others whose behavior one could meaningfully challenge or improve.
- Failing to intervene when one has the ability to do so can create responsibility.

E. *Connections differ in strength*

- Rabbi Shulman compares Israel to a body:
  - The hand and forearm have a more immediate connection than the forearm and toes.
  - All belong to one organism, but not every relationship is equally direct.
- Supporting a Torah scholar strengthens the spiritual connection between the supporter and the scholar.

F. *The positive side is greater*

- God's measure of goodness exceeds His measure of punishment.
- If interconnectedness can make people accountable for one another's sins, it can certainly allow them to benefit from one another's merits.

III

The righteous person's suffering as atonement for his generation

11:30

A. *Returning to the broader subject of suffering*

- Rabbi Shulman places the discussion within the forms of suffering already studied:
  - Suffering in this world that cleanses a person's sins.
  - Purification after death.
  - Previously discussed cases involving suffering connected to parents or grandparents.
- Ramchal now introduces another category:
  - **A righteous person's suffering can atone for others.**

B. *Mutual responsibility makes this possible*

- Because people are spiritually connected, suffering need not address only the sufferer's individual shortcomings.
- A righteous person who is deeply connected to his generation may bear suffering that benefits that generation.

C. *An analogy: An older brother offers to bear another's punishment*

- Rabbi Shulman illustrates the idea with an older brother who offers to accept punishment in place of his younger brother.
- Such selflessness awakens the father's compassion.
- The analogy highlights two simultaneous principles:
  - **Mercy greatly mitigates the punishment.**
  - **Justice is not simply abolished.**

D. *Why justice must remain*

- The purpose of creation requires people to earn their ultimate good.
- Erasing all consequences would undermine that structure.
- Nevertheless, through the righteous person's intervention:
  - The suffering can be greatly reduced.
  - Its atoning effect can be much greater.
  - The outcome can be better for everyone involved.

E. *The scope of communal atonement*

- Rabbi Shulman cautions against assuming that one righteous person automatically atones for every aspect of an entire generation.
- The underlying principle is that a spiritually great person's love and concern create a broad connection through which others can benefit.

IV

Accepting suffering with love: Identifying with the larger whole

16:00

A. *What acceptance with love does—and does not—mean*

- Ramchal requires the righteous person to accept suffering for his generation **with love**.
- Rabbi Shulman explains:
  - This does not mean enjoying pain or pretending that suffering is pleasant.
  - It means recognizing the good accomplished through a painful experience.

B. *The comparison to personal purification*

- A person destined for the World to Come may still need to have sins removed.
- Suffering can serve that cleansing function.
- Rabbi Shulman compares this to a painful but necessary medical treatment:
  - The pain remains real.
  - Understanding its benefit allows a person to welcome its healing purpose.

C. *Accepting another's purification as one's own*

- The righteous person should accept suffering for his generation as he would accept suffering needed for his own purification.
- This expresses a deeper understanding of identity:
  - He does not regard the community as entirely separate from himself.
  - Its spiritual deficiencies belong to the larger whole of which he is a part.
- Rabbi Shulman describes this as the **"bigger me"**—the self understood as including the generation.

D. *Why this identification matters*

- To the extent that the righteous person genuinely identifies with the generation, God allows his suffering to remove evil from that larger collective.
- Acceptance with love thus expresses the very unity that makes communal atonement possible.

E. *A brief comparative aside*

- In response to a question about Christianity, Rabbi Shulman characterizes its idea of vicarious atonement as an adaptation of Jewish mystical concepts.
- His central discussion remains Ramchal's account of how mutual responsibility operates within God's justice and mercy.

V

Who can undertake this role, and why it elevates the righteous person

22:00

A. *Spiritual responsibility begins with oneself*

- Asked whether someone who is not righteous can bear suffering for the generation, Rabbi Shulman answers that he does not think so.
- He emphasizes the order:
  - Address one's own spiritual deficiencies.
  - Then become capable of repairing deficiencies in others.
- He compares this to the principle that charity begins at home.

B. *The righteous person benefits the generation—and rises himself*

- Ramchal states that the righteous person:
  - Atones for his generation.
  - Attains a tremendous personal elevation.
- Rabbi Shulman explains that this elevation is not merely a matter of accumulating additional spiritual credit.

C. *Imitating God through extraordinary goodness*

- God's foundational purpose in creation is to bestow goodness upon others.

- By accepting suffering for an entire generation, the righteous person becomes an extraordinary benefactor.
- His greatness lies in resembling God through selfless giving.

D. *Becoming a "head" within the future collective*

- Ramchal describes such a person as attaining a leading position among those who enter the World to Come.
- Rabbi Shulman returns to the image of one collective person:
  - The head directs and benefits the body.
  - Someone who benefits the whole community fittingly occupies a corresponding spiritual position.

E. *The ten martyrs introduce a further question*

- A participant asks about the ten martyrs, whose deaths are associated in rabbinic tradition with the sale of Joseph.
- Rabbi Shulman notes that this involves something greater than atonement for one's contemporaries:
  - Their suffering addressed a wrong from a much earlier generation.

VI

A higher category: Repairing longstanding deficiencies in the world

26:30

A. *The first category: Rescuing one's own generation*

- A generation may deserve severe punishment and face destruction.
- A righteous person's suffering can:
  - Avert catastrophe in this world.
  - Benefit the generation's standing in the World to Come.

B. *The higher category: Advancing the world toward perfection*

- Ramchal then describes suffering assigned to exceptionally pious people who have already attained personal spiritual completeness.
- Rabbi Shulman notes the shift in terminology:
  - From **צדיק** (a righteous person).
  - To **חסיד** (a person of exceptional piety).
- He connects this distinction to the ascending stages described in *Mesillat Yesharim*.

C. *Not every spiritual problem belongs to the present generation*

- A generation may be doing reasonably well while the world still carries unresolved damage from the past.
- The higher form of suffering addresses these deeper, longstanding deficiencies.

- Its purpose is to advance the overall course of divine governance toward ultimate perfection.

D. *The business analogy: Current profits and old debts*

- Rabbi Shulman compares the situation to a successful company burdened by longstanding debt:
  - A profitable quarter does not eliminate earlier liabilities.
  - Current resources may need to pay down old debts rather than fund new spending.
- Likewise, exceptional spiritual achievement can be used to repair ancient damage.

E. *The ten martyrs as an example*

- Rabbi Shulman presents the ten martyrs as an example of this higher category.
- In the midrashic account reflected in the liturgical poems:
  - Their deaths address the unresolved wrong of Joseph's sale.
  - Rabbi Ishmael's heavenly inquiry reveals this connection.
- Their exceptional spiritual stature made them capable of contributing to a repair reaching far beyond their own generation.

VII

Why the world needs repair: Original concealment and accumulated sin

33:00

A. *Even the original creation required human work*

- Rabbi Shulman explains that the world was not initially created in its final perfected state.
- Adam had a task because deficiencies and challenges remained.
- **Genesis 2:15:**
  - **"וַיִּקַּח ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם וַיַּנִּחֵהוּ בְגַן עֵדֶן לְעָבְדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ."**
  - (The Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to guard it.)

B. *Challenge enables partnership in creation*

- Adam's work involved obedience, restraint, and overcoming challenges.
- By completing what remained unfinished, humanity could become a partner in bringing creation to perfection.
- Some hardship therefore belonged to the original human task, even before sin.

C. *The foundational deficiency: God's concealment*

- Ramchal identifies the concealment of divine light as the source of this initial incompleteness.
- Human beings were meant to overcome that concealment and bring themselves and the world toward perfection.

D. *Later sins intensified the concealment*

- Human wrongdoing added further layers of damage.

- Rabbi Shulman traces examples through:
  - Adam's sin.
  - The idolatry of the generation of Enosh.
  - The violence and corruption preceding the Flood.
  - The rebellion of the generation of Babel.
  - Sodom's perversion of justice.
  - Egypt's sexual immorality.
- These accumulated failures increasingly concealed goodness and lowered the world's spiritual condition.

E. *Abraham begins reversing the decline*

- Rabbi Shulman identifies Abraham as the figure who began reversing this process.
- Nevertheless, the world's accumulated deficiencies still require a long course of repair through God's governance.

VIII

Suffering, justice, and the world's ultimate restoration

37:30

A. *Divine governance brings creation back toward perfection*

- God guides history through many interconnected developments.
- These processes ultimately bring the world's damaged condition toward rectification.

B. *Punishment addresses the demands of justice*

- One component of this process is that people undergo consequences corresponding to wrongdoing.
- Ramchal describes this as satisfying the demands of divine justice.
- Suffering is therefore discussed here as part of the removal of evil, not as an end in itself.

C. *Exceptional people can repair on behalf of others*

- God allows spiritually complete and distinguished individuals to undertake repair beyond themselves.
- Divine judgment can fall upon them rather than upon the broader world.
- This extends the earlier principle of mutual responsibility to a much larger scale.

D. *Two levels of communal suffering*

1. **Atonement for the present generation**
   - Addresses punishment deserved by one's contemporaries.
2. **Repair of longstanding damage**
   - Addresses deficiencies inherited from earlier history.
   - Moves the world itself closer to its final perfection.

E. *The closing question*

- A participant asks whether one person could accomplish the final remaining repair, or whether its completion must be collective.
- Rabbi Shulman affirms that the process will ultimately be completed.
- The transcript ends without resolving who will accomplish that final step.

IX

In Summary

- **Supporting a Torah scholar creates a meaningful spiritual bond:** it can enable someone to attain the World to Come, although this is not a substitute for the ideal of personal spiritual achievement.
- **Mutual responsibility explains shared spiritual consequences:** Israel is an interconnected whole whose members can affect one another through both wrongdoing and merit.
- **A righteous person's suffering can benefit his generation:** justice remains operative, while mercy allows suffering to have a broader and more powerful atoning effect.
- **Acceptance with love expresses collective identity:** the righteous person treats the generation's purification as the purification of the larger whole to which he belongs.
- **Such selflessness produces extraordinary elevation:** by becoming a benefactor to others, the righteous person imitates God's goodness.
- **The highest category reaches beyond the present generation:** exceptionally pious individuals can help repair ancient deficiencies and advance the entire world toward perfection.