Dvar Torah Outline

# Maharal, Chapter 67: Divine Greatness Revealed Through Humility


Abstract

*Rabbi Shulman explains the Maharal's teaching that God's greatest exaltation is revealed not through distance from earthly life, but through His concern for its humblest inhabitants. Unlike human greatness, which depends on distinguishing oneself from others, divine greatness has no boundaries and therefore encompasses the great and small alike. This explains both God's care for the vulnerable and His choice to place His presence in the lower world, with sin—not humanity's earthly condition—creating the separation.*


## I

Humanity's fundamental closeness to God—and the separation caused by sin

A. *Humanity, rather than the angels, is creation's ultimate purpose*

- Rabbi Shulman reviews the preceding chapters' argument:
  - Human beings are fundamentally greater than angels because humanity is the purpose of creation.
  - The Creator therefore has a particularly direct relationship with human beings.
  - Angels serve as intermediaries rather than the ultimate destination of creation.
- Were humanity spiritually complete, God's presence would dwell in the lower world.

B. *Why, then, does God appear closer to the angels?*

- Angels' lofty position is not itself the deepest basis for closeness to God.
- Rather, human sin creates a barrier between God and the earthly world.
- Angels do not have this same obstruction; their apparent advantage reflects humanity's failings, not an inherent inferiority in earthly existence.

C. *Korach's offering: worship cannot bypass wrongdoing*

- **Numbers 16:15:** > וַיִּחַר לְמֹשֶׁה מְאֹד וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל ה׳ אַל תֵּפֶן אֶל מִנְחָתָם לֹא חֲמוֹר אֶחָד מֵהֶם נָשָׂאתִי וְלֹא הֲרֵעֹתִי אֶת אַחַד מֵהֶם: < (Moses became very angry and said to the Lord: "Do not turn toward their offering. I have not taken a single donkey from them, nor have I harmed any one of them.")
- Korach and his assembly challenge Moses' appointment of Aaron as High Priest.
- Although an offering should ordinarily express and generate closeness, their wrongdoing undermines their worship.

- Moses' prayer illustrates that the act of offering a sacrifice does not automatically secure divine acceptance.

D. *Isaiah's rejection of empty offerings*

- **Isaiah 1:13:** > לֹא תוֹסִיפוּ הָבִיא מִנְחַת שָׁוְא קְטֹרֶת תּוֹעֵבָה הִיא לִי חֹדֶשׁ וְשַׁבָּת קְרֹא מִקְרָא לֹא אוּכַל אָוֶן וַעֲצָרָה: > (Do not continue bringing a worthless offering; incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Shabbat, the calling of an assembly—I cannot endure wrongdoing together with a sacred gathering.)
- Rabbi Shulman emphasizes the same principle: sacrifices are good, but sin can make the worship accompanying them unacceptable.

# II

## God's humility is the culmination of His greatness

5:02

A. *Rabbi Yochanan's teaching*

- The Maharal cites the formulation: > כל מקום שאתה מוצא גדולתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, שם אתה מוצא ענוותו. > Wherever you find the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, there you find His humility.
- Rabbi Shulman notes that this wording follows the textual version associated with the Ran, rather than the wording in the standard printed Talmud.
- The Maharal also develops this formulation in his discussion of humility.

B. *Not two unrelated attributes*

- A superficial reading would mean:
  - God is great.
  - Despite His greatness, He is also humble.
- But if that were the entire point, Scripture would not need to repeat the pairing so consistently.
- The repeated juxtaposition teaches that **humility is a further expression of greatness itself**.

C. *The greater revelation*

- God's exaltation above the angels is indeed magnificent.
- Yet His presence among lowly earthly beings reveals something still greater.
- Divine humility does not qualify or reduce divine greatness; it brings that greatness to its fullest expression.

# III

## True greatness encompasses everything, rather than merely standing above it

8:30

A. *Being the greatest member of a hierarchy still implies limitation*

- Rabbi Shulman uses the Maharal's mountain analogy:
  - A mountain may dwarf everything around it.
  - Nevertheless, it occupies a defined space and has measurable boundaries.
- Similarly, imagining God merely as the highest being leaves Him, conceptually, as one member of a larger arrangement.

B. *God is not merely above everything—He encompasses everything*

- Divine greatness means that all existence falls within God's concern and sustaining power.
- Nothing is too small, ordinary, or insignificant to matter to Him.
- Before divine infinity, the difference between a vastly impressive creature and a tiny one does not establish a meaningful measure of proximity to God.

C. *Scripture pairs supreme sovereignty with care for the vulnerable*

- **Deuteronomy 10:17:** > כִּי ה׳ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וַאֲדֹנֵי הָאֲדֹנִים הָאֵל הַגָּדֹל הַגִּבֹּר וְהַנּוֹרָא אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשָּׂא פָנִים וְלֹא יִקַּח שֹׁחַד: > (For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty, and awesome God, who shows no favoritism and accepts no bribe.)
- **Deuteronomy 10:18:** > עֹשֶׂה מִשְׁפַּט יָתוֹם וְאַלְמָנָה וְאֹהֵב גֵּר לָתֶת לוֹ לֶחֶם וְשִׂמְלָה: > (He upholds justice for the orphan and widow, and loves the stranger, providing him with bread and clothing.)

D. *The second verse completes the first*

- Supreme authority alone might suggest a ruler concerned only with the highest levels beneath Him.
- Care for the orphan, widow, and convert shows that God's greatness excludes no one.
- His humility expresses His unrestricted involvement with all existence.

# IV

## Human titles add stature; divine humility reveals limitless perfection

15:00

A. *Human greatness depends on added distinctions*

- An earthly king is, fundamentally, a mortal human being.
- Titles, royal clothing, a crown, and public honor elevate how others perceive him.
- Even a genuinely impressive ruler remains vulnerable to illness, decline, and the loss of power.
- Human descriptions of greatness therefore add stature to someone whose underlying condition is limited.

B. *No description can add to God's perfection*

- God's greatness belongs to Him inherently; praise cannot increase it.
- **Psalms 106:2:** > מִי יְמַלֵּל גְּבוּרוֹת ה' יַשְׁמִיעַ כָּל תְּהִלָּתוֹ: > (Who can recount the mighty deeds of the Lord, or proclaim all His praise?)
- Rabbi Shulman connects this to Maimonides' teaching about describing God through negation:
  - Human language can deny deficiencies in God.
  - It cannot adequately define His infinite perfection through positive descriptions drawn from our limited experience.

C. *Divine simplicity means freedom from limiting boundaries*

- The Maharal describes God as utterly simple—not composed of parts or confined by defining limitations.
- God does not have a limited supply of attention, concern, or involvement.
- Addressing an ordinary person's needs cannot distract Him from greater matters or diminish His dignity.

D. *Concern for the lowly is itself the highest praise*

- **Psalms 68:6:** > אֲבִי יְתוֹמִים וְדַיַּן אַלְמָנוֹת אֱלֹהִים בִּמְעוֹן קָדְשׁוֹ: > (A father of orphans and a judge for widows is God in His holy dwelling.)
- God's involvement with the vulnerable reveals His lack of restriction more fully than descriptions of royal grandeur alone.

E. *The undistinguished have a special affinity with divine simplicity*

- Rabbi Shulman explains that the lowly lack the impressive distinctions through which great people stand apart.
- In this particular respect, their simplicity offers an especially fitting expression of God's unrestricted concern.
- He contrasts this with the philosophical picture of a deity concerned only with its own perfection:
  - Such exclusive concern would itself imply limitation.
  - Truly unlimited greatness can extend toward everything.

## V

### Why care for the lowly demonstrates absolute transcendence

24:30

A. *Hierarchical descriptions can still imply a common scale*

- Calling God the master of powerful beings might be misunderstood as placing Him one level above them.
- Likewise, describing Him as above the heavens could suggest that the heavens define His position.

- Such descriptions, taken alone, do not fully convey that God is beyond every created measure.

B. *The scriptural descriptions under discussion*

- **Psalms 68:5:** > שִׁירוּ לֵאלֹהִים זַמְּרוּ שְׁמוֹ סלוּ לָרֹכֵב בָּעֲרָבוֹת בְּיָהּ שְׁמוֹ וְעִלְזוּ לְפָנָיו: > (Sing to God, sing praises to His name; exalt Him who rides upon the heavens, whose name is Yah, and rejoice before Him.)
- **Isaiah 57:15:** > כִּי כֹה אָמַר רָם וְנִשָּׂא שֹׁכֵן עַד וְקָדוֹשׁ שְׁמוֹ מָרוֹם וְקָדוֹשׁ אֶשְׁכּוֹן וְאֶת דַּכָּא וּשְׁפַל רוּחַ לְהַחֲיוֹת רוּחַ שְׁפָלִים וּלְהַחֲיוֹת לֵב נִדְכָּאִים: > (For thus says the high and exalted One, who dwells forever and whose name is holy: "I dwell in a high and holy place, and also with the crushed and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the crushed.")

C. *God's concern is not restricted to beings nearest the top*

- If God belonged within the created hierarchy, the highest beings would have a uniquely fitting relationship with Him.
- His direct concern for the lowest beings demonstrates that He is not confined to that hierarchy at all.
- There is no common scale on which an angel is proportionally "closer" to divine infinity than an orphan.

D. *The contrast with angels*

- Angels have defined places and functions within an ordered chain.
- Their influence operates through the levels to which they relate.
- God, by contrast, transcends the entire order and can therefore turn directly toward its smallest and lowest members.

# VI

## The ultimate Giver is revealed most clearly through the dependent recipient

30:30

A. *The relationship between source and recipient*

- Rabbi Shulman returns to the preceding chapter's distinction between:
  - **The ultimate source or cause — עילה**
  - **The dependent recipient or effect — עלול**
- The recipient makes the giver's activity visible.
- The more clearly someone receives, the more clearly that person reveals the source providing for him.

B. *Why the needy can reveal this relationship especially directly*

- A powerful or accomplished person receives everything from God, but also gives to others:
  - Material support
  - Education

  - Encouragement
- Someone dependent on help in many areas displays the role of recipient more openly.
- That dependence can therefore reveal a particularly direct relationship with God as the ultimate Giver.

C. *Giving expresses, rather than diminishes, divine greatness*

- God's attention to dependent beings manifests His role as the source of all existence.
- Rabbi Shulman connects this to the Ramchal's principle that goodness expresses itself by benefiting others.
- The lowliness of the recipient does not detract from the Giver's greatness; it helps disclose it.

## VII

### The highest and lowest levels—and God's dwelling below

33:14

A. *Rabbi Shulman suggests a deeper allusion*

- The Maharal concludes that further profound ideas underlie this relationship.
- Rabbi Shulman suggests that he may be alluding to the special connection between:
  - **כתר — Crown**, the highest spiritual attribute
  - **מלכות — Kingship**, the lowest

B. *Opposite ends can have the most direct relationship*

- Kingship expresses the authority represented by the crown.
- Thus, the highest and lowest levels are not merely far apart; they can also be directly connected.
- Rabbi Shulman relates this to the ultimate source and the ultimate recipient:
  - The highest provides.
  - The lowest receives and expresses that provision.

C. *Why God chooses to dwell in the lower world*

- God's presence below is no longer surprising once greatness is understood correctly.
- His greatness is not a need to remain distant from ordinary existence.
- Rather, His presence in the lower world reveals:
  - His freedom from every limitation.
  - His concern for all existence.
  - His role as the ultimate source of life and goodness.
- The obstacle is sin, not the supposed indignity of earthly life.

# VIII

## In Summary

- **Humanity's earthly condition does not inherently distance it from God:** sin creates the separation that would otherwise not exist.
- **Divine humility is the culmination of divine greatness:** concern for the lowly reveals more than exalted status alone.
- **God is not merely the highest being in a hierarchy:** His unlimited greatness encompasses every level of existence.
- **Care for the vulnerable demonstrates transcendence:** God is not restricted to association with powerful or lofty beings.
- **The dependent recipient reveals the ultimate Giver:** the lowliest can have a particularly direct relationship with the highest.
- **God's dwelling below expresses His greatness:** His presence in the lower world is the fulfillment, not the compromise, of His exaltation.