Dvar Torah Outline

Maharal, Chapter 67: Israel, the Divine Presence, and Humanity as an Organic Whole

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman examines the Maharal's explanation of why Israel is specifically chosen as the dwelling place of the Divine Presence. The central principle is that a particular part can transcend the ordinary condition of the whole while remaining connected to it—a relationship illustrated by the blue thread on a garment, the mezuzah on a house, and the brain within the body. Rabbi Shulman develops the implications for prophecy, humanity's shared spiritual purpose, Adam's relationship to the nations, and the angels' participation in creation and the division at Babel.

I

Why Is Israel Specifically Chosen?

A. *The question within the Maharal's larger argument*

- Earlier discussion established that creation's purpose involves God bestowing goodness upon His creatures and dwelling among them.
- The Maharal now asks: **Why should Israel, specifically, be the recipient of this divine relationship?**
- His initial answer is that Israel is the primary recipient of this relationship, described as God's children.

B. *The scriptural language of children*

- **Deuteronomy 14:1:** > בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לֹא תִתְגֹּדְדוּ וְלֹא תָשִׂימוּ קָרְחָה בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם לָמֵת: > (You are children of the Lord your God; you shall not cut yourselves or make a bald patch between your eyes for the dead.)
- Rabbi Shulman explains that the Maharal invokes this description as evidence of Israel's distinctive relationship with God.

C. *The difficulty posed by physical existence*

- In the Maharal's framework, the lower, physical world is inherently limited and incomplete.
- If all humanity occupied precisely the same spiritual position, humanity as a whole would remain within those limitations.
- A particular part, however, can be an **exception to the general condition** without changing what the whole fundamentally is.

D. *Israel as the particular portion connected to God*

- **Deuteronomy 32:9:** > כִּי חֵלֶק ה׳ עַמּוֹ יַעֲקֹב חֶבֶל נַחֲלָתוֹ: > (For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is His allotted inheritance.)
- The Maharal identifies Jacob and his descendants as the portion of humanity bearing this particular divine connection.
- Rabbi Shulman emphasizes the conceptual distinction:
  - The whole remains part of the physical world.
  - A particular portion can transcend that world's ordinary spiritual limitations.
  - Through that portion, the lower world can nevertheless be connected to God.

II

Korach's Challenge: Why Does the Whole Need a Distinctive Part?

6:30

A. *Korach's claim of universal holiness*

- **Numbers 16:3:** > וַיִּקָּהֲלוּ עַל מֹשֶׁה וְעַל אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב לָכֶם כִּי כָל הָעֵדָה כֻּלָּם קְדֹשִׁים וּבְתוֹכָם ה׳ וּמַדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל קְהַל ה׳: > (They assembled against Moses and Aaron and said to them: "You have gone too far! For the entire congregation is holy, and the Lord is among them. Why, then, do you raise yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?")
- Korach's argument challenges the need for distinct leadership within a holy nation.

B. *The two familiar illustrations*

1. **A garment entirely dyed blue:** Does it still require a blue thread among its ritual fringes?
2. **A house filled with sacred books:** Does it still require a mezuzah?
3. Moses answers that both requirements remain.

C. *Why an entirely blue garment still needs the thread*

- A garment's ordinary function is physical: it clothes and warms its wearer.
- Dyeing the entire garment blue does not, by itself, make the garment transcend that function.
- The designated thread at its corner serves a different role:
  - It belongs to the garment.
  - Yet it marks the garment's connection to something beyond its ordinary purpose.

D. *Why a house filled with books still needs a mezuzah*

- A residence remains a place for ordinary human life, even when filled with sacred books.
- The mezuzah at its boundary expresses its connection to a higher purpose.
- Rabbi Shulman clarifies that the example concerns a **dwelling**, not a space used exclusively for study and not inhabited; the latter raises different mezuzah requirements.

E. *Moses and Aaron as the nation's distinctive points of connection*

- Rabbi Shulman explains the correspondence:
  - The house filled with books challenges the need for **Moses**, the distinctive representative of Torah.
  - The entirely blue garment challenges the need for **Aaron**, the distinctive representative of divine service.
- The answer is not that the rest of the nation lacks holiness.
- Rather, the whole requires a particular representative who can connect it to a level beyond its ordinary collective condition.
- Rabbi Shulman compares this representative to an **antenna**: part of the larger structure, but extending beyond its general level.

III

Israel as Humanity's Point of Transcendence

11:30

A. *Applying the same structure to humanity*

- Just as Israel requires particular individuals for Torah and divine service, the Maharal presents humanity as requiring a particular nation for its divine connection.
- Rabbi Shulman explains that this does not mean the whole becomes something other than human.
- Rather, a particular part can rise beyond humanity's ordinary condition while remaining connected to the whole.

B. *The Kuzari and the reality of prophecy*

- Rabbi Shulman invokes the *Kuzari's* contrast between:
  - Philosophical acknowledgment that prophecy is possible.
  - A people whose history actually includes many prophets.
- He notes the distinction between:
  - The forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses whose prophecies were preserved for future generations.
  - The far greater number of people who experienced prophecy without leaving such a lasting public record.
- In the argument Rabbi Shulman is presenting, Israel functions as humanity's prophetic point of connection.

C. *A kingdom of priests*

- **Exodus 19:6:** > וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תְּדַבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: > (You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel.)

- Rabbi Shulman understands this designation as a role within humanity: Israel connects the human world to a higher spiritual reality.

D. *The apparent paradox at the heart of creation*

- God desires a creature that is simultaneously:
  - Genuinely physical.
  - Capable of attachment to Him.
- If the entire physical order simply became a different kind of existence, this would not preserve the same combination.
- The Maharal's model allows **physical existence and transcendence to coexist through differentiation within the whole**.

IV

The Challenge from Adam Before the Sin

15:30

A. *A future world with a different spiritual condition*

- Rabbi Shulman qualifies the discussion: the Maharal is describing the structure of the world as it presently exists.
- A transformed future world need not operate under precisely the same conditions.
- **Isaiah 11:9:** > לֹא יָרֵעוּ וְלֹא יַשְׁחִיתוּ בְּכָל הַר קָדְשִׁי כִּי מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ דֵּעָה אֶת ה' כַּמַּיִם לַיָּם מְכַסִּים: > (They shall neither harm nor destroy throughout My holy mountain, for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord as water covers the sea.)

B. *The apparent difficulty from the Ramchal*

- Rabbi Shulman cites the Ramchal's account in *Derech Hashem*:
  - Adam originally possessed a much higher spiritual standing.
  - Had he not sinned, his descendants could have continued at that level.
  - After the fall, humanity received an opportunity to recover its original standing.
  - Abraham succeeded in attaining the level from which his descendants would continue.
- This appears to challenge the claim that only a subsection of humanity can be a dwelling place for the Divine Presence.

C. *Rabbi Shulman's suggested resolution*

- Adam's original condition was not the ordinary physical condition familiar to us.
- Rabbi Shulman cites *Da'at Tevunot*: Adam's body before the sin stood at a spiritual level comparable to that of our souls today.
- Accordingly:
  - A universally elevated humanity before the sin would belong to a different order of existence.

  - The Maharal's argument here concerns humanity in its present, post-sin condition.
- Rabbi Shulman presents this reconciliation tentatively, as his proposed understanding of the Maharal.

V

The Body and Brain: Distinct Roles Within a Shared Spiritual Whole

19:00

A. *The Maharal's bodily analogy*

- A human being cannot consist entirely of the highest faculty.
- The brain requires a body that nourishes, protects, and sustains it.
- Physical organs are therefore not merely obstacles to higher activity; they make that activity possible.

B. *Why the whole cannot simply be "all brain"*

- A brain alone cannot:
  - Obtain nourishment.
  - Protect itself from danger.
  - Maintain the bodily conditions necessary for its functioning.
- Rabbi Shulman uses this to sharpen the Maharal's point:
  - An angel may belong to a different kind of existence.
  - An embodied human requires differentiated organs and functions.

C. *Supporting Torah scholars as participation in their achievement*

- Rabbi Shulman connects this model to the Talmud's discussion in *Ketubot* of how those without extensive Torah learning can merit the World to Come.
- Examples include:
  - Marrying one's daughter to a Torah scholar.
  - Providing material benefit to a Torah scholar.
  - Conducting business on a scholar's behalf.
- The underlying idea is **participation through connection**:
  - The supporter enables the scholar's work.
  - The resulting spiritual achievement belongs to an interconnected system, not to an isolated individual.

D. *The righteous among the nations*

- Rabbi Shulman applies this framework to the righteous among the nations and their share in the World to Come.
- Within the Maharal's analogy, different parts of humanity fulfill different functions within a common whole.

- Observance of the seven Noahide commandments allows non-Jews to fulfill their responsibilities within that order.
- Their participation in its spiritual purpose is real, even though the Maharal does not describe every part as having an identical role.

VI

Natural Similarity and Spiritual Preparedness

24:00

A. *The Maharal's objection: people appear fundamentally alike*

- If nations are naturally similar, what grounds the distinction being proposed?
- Rabbi Shulman stresses that this is not merely a question about outward appearance:
  - Non-Jews can be thoughtful, introspective, intelligent, and admirable.
  - Ordinary personal acquaintance does not reveal the sort of spiritual distinction the Maharal describes.

B. *Rejecting caricatures*

- Rabbi Shulman explicitly criticizes the distorted picture some children acquire when they grow up without meaningful exposure to non-Jews.
- He rejects the idea that non-Jews should be imagined as brutish or lacking a rich inner life.
- National tendencies or characteristic traits do not, by themselves, establish the deeper distinction under discussion.

C. *The distinction claimed by the Maharal*

- The Maharal answers that his subject is not ordinary human nature, but **preparedness to receive a divine influence**.
- Rabbi Shulman connects this to *Derech Hashem*, Part II, Chapter 4:
  - At the observable level, people may appear indistinguishable.
  - The claimed distinction concerns the soul and its spiritual capacities.
- In this presentation, prophecy, divine inspiration, and attachment to God—not ordinary intelligence or decency—are the relevant categories.

D. *The disagreement with philosophical accounts of immortality*

- Rabbi Shulman explains the Maharal's rejection of the philosophical view that everyone can attain the same eternal state through connection to the "active intellect."
- The Maharal maintains that the parts of an organic whole do not all become interchangeable.
- This does **not** undo the earlier point that the righteous among the nations can share in the World to Come:
  - Shared participation in spiritual fulfillment is one claim.

– Identical spiritual function or capacity is another.

VII

Adam as the Potential Totality of the Nations

29:34

A. *Returning to the original human being*

· The Maharal now addresses Adam directly:
  – Adam was one individual.
  – Yet the many nations that would emerge from him were already present within him in potential.
· His apparent singularity therefore contained an underlying diversity.

B. *One person containing many differentiated capacities*

· Rabbi Shulman explains this through the body:
  – Different organs have different functions.
  – Together they constitute one person.
· Similarly, Adam contained the potential roots of the differentiated nations that would later emerge.

C. *From potential diversity to actual nations*

· At the division of humanity into nations, these distinctions became actual and historically separate.
· Rabbi Shulman describes the nations as corresponding, within the Maharal's model, to different aspects of the original human whole.

D. *More than an analogy*

· The relationship between an individual body and humanity is not merely a convenient comparison.
· All humanity actually descends from one original person.
· The Maharal therefore understands humanity's later differentiation as the unfolding of a diversity already contained within Adam.

VIII

The Angels, Creation, and the Division at Babel

33:30

A. *"Let us make man" as meaningful participation*

· **Genesis 1:26:** > וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ וְיִרְדּוּ בִדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל הָאָרֶץ: > (God said: "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the livestock, all the earth, and every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.")
· The Midrash understands God as consulting the angels.

- Rabbi Shulman highlights the Maharal's further explanation:
  - The consultation reflects the inclusion within Adam of the spiritual powers associated with the nations.
  - The seventy angelic powers correspond to the seventy nations.
  - Adam contains these different aspects, together with the particular portion belonging directly to God.

B. *Prophetic imagery of an ordered spiritual whole*

- Rabbi Shulman invokes the prophetic image of a human likeness above the throne.
- **Ezekiel 1:26:** > וּמִמַּעַל לָרָקִיעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל רֹאשָׁם כְּמַרְאֵה אֶבֶן סַפִּיר דְּמוּת כִּסֵּא וְעַל דְּמוּת הַכִּסֵּא דְּמוּת כְּמַרְאֵה אָדָם עָלָיו מִלְמָעְלָה: > (Above the expanse over their heads was the likeness of a throne, resembling sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness resembling a human being, above it.)
- He uses the imagery of a figure, garments, and throne to illustrate an ordered relationship between:
  - The central divine source.
  - The subordinate spiritual worlds and powers.
- Within the Maharal's explanation, Adam reflects this composite order.

C. *The division of nations as the actualization of creation*

- Once the nations emerge separately:
  - Each nation comes under its corresponding angelic authority.
  - Israel retains its particular relationship with God.
- What was initially contained within one human being becomes expressed through differentiated nations.

D. *"Let us descend" at Babel*

- **Genesis 11:7:** > הָבָה נֵרְדָה וְנָבְלָה שָׁם שְׂפָתָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שִׂפַת רֵעֵהוּ: > (Come, let us descend and confuse their language there, so that one person will not understand another's language.)
- Rabbi Shulman notes the familiar lessons concerning divine humility and judges personally examining a case.
- The Maharal adds an explanation specific to the angels' involvement:
  - The nations are now to be separated from their previously intermingled condition.
  - Each angelic authority is to receive its corresponding nation.
- Thus, the plural language at Babel parallels the plural language at Adam's creation:
  - **Creation gathers the differentiated potential into one person.**
  - **Babel separates that potential into distinct nations.**

IX

In Summary

- **A particular part can transcend the condition of the whole:** This is the Maharal's central explanation for Israel's distinctive relationship with the Divine Presence.
- **The blue thread, mezuzah, Moses, and Aaron illustrate the same structure:** A designated point of connection enables the larger whole to relate to something beyond its ordinary level.
- **The body-and-brain analogy emphasizes interdependence:** Different functions can contribute to a shared spiritual achievement, including the participation of supporters of Torah and the righteous among the nations.
- **The claimed distinction is spiritual, not an observable absence of intelligence or moral depth in others:** Rabbi Shulman explicitly rejects caricatures of non-Jews.
- **Adam contained humanity's diversity in potential:** The later nations unfold aspects originally gathered within one human being.
- **Creation and Babel form a conceptual pair:** The angelic powers are included within Adam at creation and receive their differentiated national roles when humanity is divided.