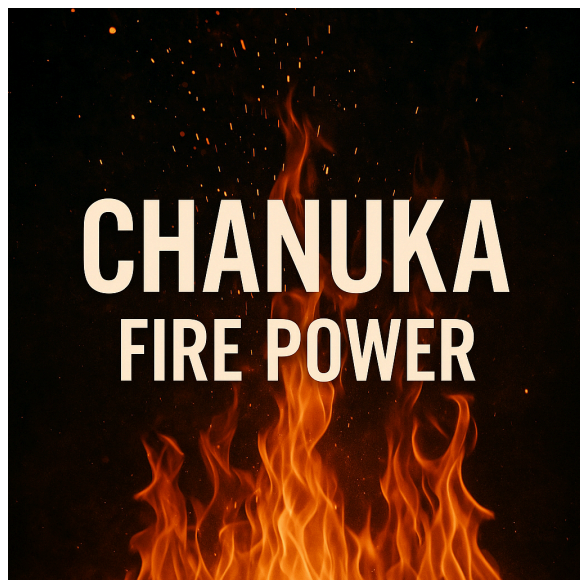


Rabbi Shlomo Farhi.com

SPREADING LIGHT AND
TORAH TO OUR AMAZING
BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN
AM YISRAEL



When a Little Light Can Change Everything

I want to begin by saying something very simple, but very important.

Hanukkah is one of those holidays that we think we understand. We've heard it our whole lives. From the time we're children, we're taught the same phrases, the same ideas. The few defeated the many. The weak defeated the strong. The oil burned for eight days.

And I don't want to take anything away from that. That is all true.

But if that's all Hanukkah was about, then it would be a nice story — not a living one.

Because the Greeks were not trying to kill Jews.

They were trying to kill Judaism.

That's a very important distinction, and it's one that we don't spend enough time thinking about.

The Greeks did not mind Jews living. They did not mind Jews working. They did not mind Jews engaging with culture, philosophy, language, art. They didn't even mind Jews identifying as Jews — as long as Judaism itself was stripped of its teeth.

As long as mitzvot became symbolic.
As long as holiness became optional.
As long as discipline became flexible.
As long as commitment bent to convenience.

That was the war.

And that is why Hanukkah is not just something that happened *then*.

It is something that happens *now*.

The War Was Never Only Outside

We assume that Hanukkah celebrates a military victory. We picture soldiers. We picture battles. We picture enemies falling.

But Chazal tell us something very different.

The Ostrovitzer Gaon writes words that are so strong, so sharp, that every time I read them I feel uncomfortable — and that's how I know they're true.

He says that when a person lights the Hanukkah candles, they should awaken themselves with tremendous desire, excitement, yearning, and passion to do the will of Hashem — without fear and without restraint — until their very nature bends the knee.

Until their character traits bend the knee.
Until their habits bend the knee.
Until their impulses bend the knee.

That is not poetic language.
That is confrontational language.

He is describing a war.

And here's the key:
He says this is something the Jewish people had
never fully achieved before.

Why?

Because until Hanukkah, the Jewish people were
mostly fighting enemies who wanted to kill them.

But the Greeks wanted something else.

They wanted Jews to live — without resistance.

The Greek Inside Us

And this is where it gets uncomfortable.

Because the Greeks did not disappear.

They moved inside.

They show up as impatience.

They show up as irritation.

They show up as, “Rabbi, I can’t anymore.”

I see it all the time.

Someone starts singing during Hallel, and people are
shifting.

Someone adds a few extra tefillot, and people are
checking the clock.

Someone opens the Aron to say a refuah, and
suddenly it's, “Torah ch'tzibur.”

Until it's *your* family member.

Then suddenly there is all the time in the world.

And I want to be very clear: I'm not criticizing. I'm
describing.

Because this resistance is human.

But it is also Greek.

The Greeks were not against God in theory.
They were against God when He slowed you down.

They were against mitzvot that took time.
They were against holiness that demanded patience.
They were against a life that could not be rushed.

And that is why Hanukkah comes exactly where it
does — at the darkest time of the year.

Convenience vs Covenant

Let me stay with this idea a little longer, because it's
not something we like to sit with — and that's exactly
why we have to.

There is a very subtle form of resistance that lives
inside religious life. It doesn't look like rebellion. It
doesn't look like heresy. It looks like *impatience*.

It looks like wanting everything to move a little
faster.

It looks like being okay with Torah — as long as it
doesn't interfere.

And I want to explain this carefully, because I'm not
talking about bad people. I'm talking about good
people. I'm talking about people who care.

But caring is not the same thing as surrender.

When Torah “Gets in the Way”

I've watched this play out countless times.

Someone opens the Aron to say a refuah sheleimah,
and immediately you feel the room change. People
shift. People sigh. People look around. People
whisper, “Torah ch'tzibur.”

Now, technically, they're not wrong. There *is* such a
concept.

But here's what I want you to notice.

When it's someone else's refuah, it's Torah ch'tzibur.

When it's *your* refuah, suddenly we find time.

Suddenly there's room.

Suddenly there's patience.

Suddenly the halachic concerns soften.

What changed?

Not the halachah.
The perspective.

And this is what the Greeks were after.

They were not against Judaism — they were against Judaism when it asked something of you.

They were against Judaism when it demanded you wait.
When it demanded you pause.
When it demanded you stay when you wanted to leave.

Why Torah Is Said During Davening

I once witnessed something that stayed with me.

A man was saying two short halachot during davening. Nothing long. Nothing dramatic. Maybe two minutes.

Someone interrupted him and said, “Don’t do this now. Do it after davening so whoever wants to leave can leave.”

And I remember thinking: *That is the exact opposite of the point.*

The entire reason we say those halachot *during* davening is because the people who need them are the ones who would otherwise leave.

The person saying them doesn’t need them.
The person who stays doesn’t need them.

It’s for the person who won’t open a book later.

And this is uncomfortable by design.

Because Torah that never makes you uncomfortable never changes you.

“Rabbi, I Can’t Anymore”

I hear this phrase a lot.

“Rabbi, I can’t anymore.”
“It’s too long.”
“It’s too much.”
“It’s taking too much time.”

And again, I’m not judging. I’m describing something very human.

But Hanukkah comes to challenge exactly this.

Because the Greeks didn’t want Jews to stop believing.
They wanted Jews to stop *resisting*.

They wanted Judaism that fit neatly into a schedule.
Judaism that didn’t interrupt.
Judaism that could be managed.

And that’s why the Ostrovitzer Gaon says that when you light the candles, your *nature* has to bend the knee.

Not your enemies.
Your nature.

The Nature That Says “Enough”

Every one of us has a nature.

A nature that wants things to move quickly.
A nature that wants results now.
A nature that wants growth without friction.

And we often assume that nature is fixed.

“That’s just how I am.”
“I’ve always been like this.”
“You can’t change a person like me.”

But here’s something we don’t say enough:

If Hashem believed you could no longer change, He would not give you another day of life.

The fact that you woke up this morning means something very simple and very profound.

It means Hashem still believes in you.

And that belief alone already puts you in a different category than you think you're in.

Change, Awakening, and the Illusion of Permanence)

There is a phrase that people say very casually, but it's actually one of the most damaging phrases we use.

"This guy can't change."
"That's just who he is."
"You're not going to change her."

We say it like it's wisdom.

Like we're being realistic.

But I want to suggest to you that it's not realism at all. It's resignation.

And resignation is something the Torah never makes room for.

The Way We Diagnose Each Other

We've become very good at diagnosing people.

We sit comfortably in our chairs and we decide who someone is.

"This one is impatient."
"That one is a narcissist."
"This one has anger issues."
"That one is impossible."

We even borrow clinical language. We throw around words we barely understand, and we say them with confidence.

And it gives us relief.

Because if someone can't change, then we don't have to expect anything — from them or from ourselves.

But here is a truth that cuts through all of that:

If Hashem believed a person could no longer change, He would not give them another day of life.

That's not poetry.
That's theology.

Life itself is proof of divine belief.

Every morning you wake up, Hashem is saying, "I'm not done with you yet."

Why Awakening Works When Pressure Fails

Let me tell you something I've seen again and again.

Pressure rarely creates lasting change.

Awakening does.

I once had a man come over to me and thank me. He said, "Rabbi, you made a small comment that changed my life."

I honestly didn't remember it.

I asked him what comment.

He reminded me.

I had asked him what he was learning. He told me about the classes he listens to — on the way to work, on the way home.

And I said to him, very gently, "That's beautiful. But listening is not the same as learning. Learning means you're holding the wheel."

That was it.

No lecture.
No mussar shmuess.
No pressure.

Just a mirror.

And that mirror changed everything.

He realized that he had been sitting in the passenger seat of his own spiritual life.

From that moment on, he started learning seriously.
Not because I told him to — but because he
discovered something about himself.

That he *could*.

The Passenger Seat Is Comfortable

The passenger seat is very comfortable.

Someone else is driving.
Someone else is choosing the direction.
Someone else is deciding the pace.

You just listen.

And listening feels like growth — until it doesn't.

Because real growth requires friction.
It requires effort.
It requires you to hold the wheel even when your
hands are tired.

And here's the key point:

Hanukkah is not about doing everything.

It's about doing *something*.

One Moment Is Not Nothing

We have a very dangerous way of measuring success.

We think if we didn't finish, it doesn't count.

If we didn't become a different person, it doesn't
count.

If we didn't sustain it, it doesn't count.

But that's not how Torah measures victory.

You controlled your anger once — even if you lost it
later.
You stayed patient for one moment — even if it
didn't last.

That moment is not nothing.

That moment is proof.

Proof that your nature is not absolute.
Proof that the "many" can fall into the hands of the
"few."

And if it happened once, it can happen again.

Hanukkah lives in that space.

One Page, One Moment, One Victory

I want to stay with this idea of one moment a little
longer, because this is where most people quietly give
up — and they don't even realize they're doing it.

Let me ask you something honestly.

How many books do you own that you never
finished?

Not books you didn't like.
Not books you abandoned because they weren't
good.

Good books.
Important books.
Books you *wanted* to read.

You read the introduction.
You read the first page.
Maybe the second.

And then... it stopped.

Life got busy.
You got distracted.
You lost momentum.

And at some point, you looked at the book and
thought,
"What's the point now?"

The Lie We Tell Ourselves

Here's the lie we tell ourselves:

"If I didn't finish, it doesn't count."

And that lie is devastating.

Because Hanukkah says something completely different.

If you read one page of a 300-page book,
that one page defeated 299 pages.

The few in the hands of the many.

You didn't lose.
You proved something.

You proved that you *can* start.
You proved that you *can* sit.
You proved that you *can* learn.

And that matters more than finishing.

Why We Sabotage Our Own Wins

This is what we do next — and this is where it gets subtle.

You control your anger once.

You walk into shul and say, "Today, I'm not going to lose my temper."

You get through the first door.
You get through the second door.

You're feeling proud of yourself.

And then something small happens.

Someone cuts in front of you.
Someone pushes the door back open.
Someone says, "I need to go now."

And suddenly — it's gone.

The patience disappears.
The frustration comes back.

And immediately, the voice says:

"See? You can't change."
"It didn't last."
"What was the point?"

And that voice is lying to you.

Because what just happened?

You *won* once.

And then you decided that the win didn't count.

One Win Is Proof, Not Failure

Let me be very clear about this.

If you were able to delay anger once,
that means anger is not invincible.

If you were able to hold back impatience once,
that means impatience is not who you are.

If you were able to sit with discomfort once,
that means discomfort doesn't own you.

Hanukkah is not asking you to win forever.

Hanukkah is asking you to win once.

Because once proves possibility.

And possibility changes everything.

Why Chazal Celebrate the Few

Think about the miracle we celebrate.

The few defeated the many.
The weak defeated the strong.

But here's what we don't usually say out loud:

The few were still few the next day.
The weak were still weak.

They didn't suddenly become many.
They didn't suddenly become strong.

They just *won*.

And that win redefined reality.

Your one page.
Your one moment.
Your one victory.

That's not failure.

That's Hanukkah.

Not Every Soul Enters Through the Same Gate

I want to take everything we've said until now and bring it a little deeper, because there's another layer to Hanukkah that explains a tremendous amount of frustration people feel in their spiritual lives.

The Arizal teaches something that, once you hear it, you can't un-hear it.

He says that there are twelve gates in Shamayim.

Not one gate.

Not one path.

Not one correct style.

Twelve.

Each gate corresponds to one of the twelve tribes. And each soul, each neshama, has its *own* natural access point to Hashem.

That means something very important.

It means that the way *you* are meant to serve Hashem may not look like the way someone else does — and that doesn't make it inferior.

Where So Much Pain Comes From

Let me tell you where I see people break.

They want to be good.

They want to connect.

They want to grow.

But it's not working.

And everyone around them — usually with very good intentions — says the same thing:

“Try harder.”

“Be more disciplined.”

“Push yourself.”

“If you really wanted it, you'd do it.”

And sometimes that's true.

But sometimes it's not.

Sometimes the problem is not desire.

Sometimes the problem is that the person is standing in front of the wrong gate.

Reuven Cannot Enter Through Yissachar's Gate

Let me explain this slowly.

Yissachar represents Torah learning in its purest form — sitting, analyzing, immersing, living inside the text.

Reuven represents something different — emotional truth, immediacy, action, intensity.

Now imagine forcing a Reuven to serve Hashem only through Yissachar's gate.

He'll feel inadequate.

He'll feel lazy.

He'll feel like a failure.

Not because he doesn't care — but because he's trying to breathe underwater.

And this happens all the time.

We build systems — schools, expectations, definitions of success — that leave no room for spiritual individuality.

And then we wonder why people struggle.

Excellence Has Many Faces

We say we value Torah.

We say we value growth.

But often, we only value one shape of growth.

And when someone doesn't fit that shape, we assume something is wrong with them.

Hanukkah comes to correct this.

Because the Greeks didn't just want Jews to stop keeping mitzvot.

They wanted all Jews to look the same.

They wanted uniformity.

And the Torah never wanted that.

The Brothers Entering Egypt

Chazal tell us something fascinating.

When the twelve brothers came down to Egypt, they didn't enter together. Each one entered through a different gate.

On a simple level, Chazal explain that it was strategic. If all the brothers entered together, it would draw attention.

But Chazal also tell us something deeper.

Ma'aseh avot siman labanim — the actions of the forefathers are signposts for the children.

Egypt was the epicenter of tumah.

And the only way to enter and leave Egypt without being damaged was for each brother to use *his own gate*.

The same gates that exist in Heaven exist in this world.

The same individuality required for holiness is required for survival.

Why This Matters So Much

So many people think they're failing spiritually.

They think they're lazy.

They think they're broken.

They think they're not built for this.

And often, none of that is true.

They're just standing at the wrong door.

Hanukkah reminds us that light doesn't come in one shape.

There are many flames.

And every flame counts.

One Flame Against a Body That Would Not Cooperate

I want to tell you a story now that, for me, puts everything we've been talking about into one image. One image that I have never been able to forget.

And every year, when Hanukkah comes around, this image comes back to me.

I had the privilege, years ago, of learning in the Mir Yeshiva in Israel. And at that time, the Rosh Yeshiva was Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zecher tzaddik livracha.

This was a man whose greatness you could feel just being in his presence.

But he was also a man who suffered terribly.

Rabbi Nosson Tzvi had a very advanced form of Parkinson's disease. And I want to describe this carefully, not to sensationalize it, but because the details matter.

This was not a mild tremor.

His arms did not shake gently.

His legs did not tremble slightly.

They moved violently.

His limbs swung in different directions, as if they had a mind of their own. When he walked, it sometimes looked like a marionette — strings pulling his arms and legs unpredictably.

People would walk on either side of him just to help him move from place to place.

The Choice He Made

At one point, Rabbi Nosson Tzvi was advised to take medication that could significantly reduce the shaking.

But another great rabbi, Rav Gifter, warned him.

He said, “I took that medication. It helped my body — but it took my Torah. My memory was affected. My clarity was affected. Don’t make my mistake.”

Rabbi Nosson Tzvi chose to live with the pain.

He chose Torah.

And I heard shiurim from him while his body was fighting him every second.

Lighting the Menorah

One year, I brought my children to see him light the Hanukkah candles outside his home.

And we stood there, watching.

This was a man who could not keep his hands still.

And yet, when it came time to light the menorah, something extraordinary happened.

He gathered himself.

He locked his fingers together.

He focused his mind.

He summoned every ounce of physical and mental strength he had.

And he held the candle still.

Rock solid.

He said the berachah.

Slowly. Carefully. With complete presence.

And then he reached forward and lit one candle.

The moment the flame caught — the moment the mitzvah was completed — it was too much.

His hand flew again.

The strength was gone.

He could not light another candle.

That one flame was all he could manage.

What That Flame Taught Me

Do you understand what we’re talking about here?

That man defeated Parkinson’s disease.

Not forever.

Not completely.

Not dramatically.

But truthfully.

For one moment.

For one mitzvah.

For one flame.

And that one flame mattered more than eight perfect candles ever could.

Because that flame was a victory.

Hanukkah is not asking us to defeat our challenges permanently.

It is asking us to defeat them once.

Because once proves that the challenge does not own you.

Why This Is So Important

We look at ourselves and we say:

“I tried. It didn’t last.”

“I started. I didn’t finish.”

“I was good — and then I wasn’t.”

And we conclude that it didn’t count.

Rabbi Nosson Tzvi teaches us the opposite.

If you held the candle steady once,
even if your hand shook again afterward —
that was real.

That was victory.

That was Hanukkah.

The Krakow Tailor and the Weight of Time

I want to end with a story that, to me, explains why
Hanukkah has the power it has — not just in theory,
but in the kind of Jews it produces.

There was a time when the city of Krakow was one
of the great Torah centers of the world. Not a large
city. Not a flashy city. But a place where Torah was
thick in the air. You could feel it in the streets.

Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski, one of the greatest
leaders of his generation, was once called to Krakow
to deal with a serious communal issue. And Rabbi
Chaim Ozer was not a man who knew how to slow
down when responsibility was placed on his
shoulders.

When there was a problem, he ran until it was solved.

Literally.

He went from meeting to meeting, from home to
home, speaking to people, negotiating, calming
tensions. And at some point, while rushing through
the city, his kapoteh caught on a fence.

It tore.

Not a small tear.
A real tear.

The jacket was ripped open.

Now, Rabbi Chaim Ozer didn't want to stop. He
didn't want to lose momentum. But he couldn't
appear like that. So his attendants ran to find a tailor.

It was already evening.

Hanukkah night.

The shops were closed. The streets were quiet.
Everyone had gone home to light candles.

Finally, someone said, "There's a tailor who might
help. But his shop is closed. We'll have to go to his
house."

They went.

The door opened.

The tailor looked up and froze.

Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski was standing in his
doorway.

He almost didn't know what to say.

"Rabbi," he finally said, "it is an honor beyond words
to fix your coat. Truly. But I need to ask one thing.
It's time to light the Hanukkah candles. May I do that
first?"

Rabbi Chaim Ozer answered immediately, "Of
course."

That *is* the halachah.

The tailor stepped away.

A few minutes passed.

Then the tailor came back into the room.

And Rabbi Chaim Ozer barely recognized him.

The man was no longer dressed like a tailor. He had
changed into Shabbat clothing. A jacket. A hat.
Clean. Dignified. Prepared.

He didn't rush.

He didn't apologize.

He stood still.

Then he lit the menorah.

Slowly.

He said each berachah carefully. Not quickly. Not by rote. Each word weighed. Each word placed.

Then he sat down.

He didn't go back to work.

He sat.

He looked at the candles.

He sang.

He thought.

Minutes passed.

Ten minutes.

Twenty minutes.

The rabbi waited.

Thirty minutes.

The candles burned quietly.

Forty minutes.

No one spoke.

An hour passed.

The tailor was still sitting.

Still looking.

Still present.

Still with the light.

Finally — after an entire hour — the tailor stood up, turned to Rabbi Chaim Ozer, and said:

“Rabbi, now I am ready to fix your coat.”

Rabbi Chaim Ozer shook his head.

He said, “Now I understand something I never understood before.”

“This,” he said, “is why Krakow produces great Torah scholars.”

“When even a simple tailor treats a mitzvah with this kind of patience, presence, and seriousness — this is the soil that grows giants.”

Why This Story Matters

That tailor didn't know he was educating anyone.

He wasn't trying to be impressive.

He was just honest.

He understood that mitzvot are not things you squeeze into life.

They *are* life.

And that's why his children — and his children's children — became who they became.

Sitting With the Light

So now I want to bring this back to us.

Because stories are beautiful, and Torah is powerful, but Hanukkah is not meant to stay in Krakow, or in the Mir Yeshiva, or in the Beit HaMikdash.

It's meant to come home with us.

I want you to notice something very simple, and very telling.

We rush the Hanukkah candles.

We light, we say the berachot, we sing maybe one song, and then we move on.

We check the clock.

We think about what's next.

We already have one foot out of the room.

But the candles were never meant to be rushed.

Chazal tell us that you're not allowed to benefit from their light. And on a simple level, that's a halachic rule. But on a deeper level, it's an instruction.

You're not lighting them *to use* them.

You're lighting them to be with them.

To sit.

To look.

To slow down.

Even staring at the flames has spiritual power.

What Would a Miracle Look Like Today?

So I like to ask myself — and I encourage you to ask yourself — one very specific question when you light the candles:

If Hashem were doing a miracle for me today, what would it look like?

Not a dramatic miracle.

Not something flashy.

Something real.

Would it look like patience where I usually lose it?

Would it look like finishing one page instead of quitting?

Would it look like sitting with discomfort instead of escaping it?

And then I ask a second question:

What light am *I* willing to add?

Because Hanukkah doesn't just commemorate miracles.

It creates them.

The Quiet Work of Light

Light doesn't make noise.

It doesn't force.

It doesn't argue.

It doesn't rush.

It just exists — and darkness moves out of the way.

That's how change happens.

Not through pressure.

Not through shame.

But through presence.

Through one moment.

Through one page.

Through one flame.

And when we honor those small lights instead of dismissing them, something shifts.

Because a little light, when it's taken seriously, always changes more than we expect.

Shabbat Table Discussion Questions

1. Where in my life do I feel the strongest urge to rush through something that actually deserves time?
2. What is one mitzvah or spiritual moment I tend to treat as an obligation instead of an encounter?
3. Can I think of a time when I succeeded once and dismissed it because it didn't last?
4. What "inner Greek" do I recognize most clearly in myself — impatience, resistance, or avoidance?
5. What would sitting with the Hanukkah candles actually look like in my home?
6. If Hashem were doing a small miracle for me this week, what would it realistically be?
7. What is one small light I can add — not perfectly, just honestly?

Final Thought

Hanukkah is not asking us to become different people.

It's asking us to take ourselves seriously.

To believe that one moment matters.
That one flame counts.
That one victory is real.

Because when a little light is honored,
it never stays little for long.