

Rabbi Shlomo Farhi

CHANUKA- BIO-JEW-MINESCENT



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Chanukah – Light Inside Darkness

Hanukkah: The Holiday That Begins in the Night

My friends, let us begin with something subtle but extremely powerful.

Hanukkah is a strange holiday. Not strange like “we don’t understand it,” but strange like “it doesn’t behave like every other holiday we have.”

Let’s think:

- Sukkot? 15th of Tishrei.
- Rosh Hashanah? 1st of Tishrei.
- Pesach? 14–15 Nisan.

The **day** is the holiday; the **night** is just the beginning of that day.

But **Hanukkah flips the entire script.**

Every other chag says:

“The day is the essence; the night just opens the door.”

Hanukkah says:

“The NIGHT is the essence; the day just trails behind.”

Why?

Because Hanukkah is the only holiday where:

- The mitzvah is **not** in the day.
- The mitzvah is **specifically** at night.

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- The halachic centerpiece is darkness itself.

All other chagim are daytime-driven.

Hanukkah is nighttime-driven.

Why does this matter?

Because Judaism is always teaching through structure.

Hanukkah is the only holiday that announces:

“We do not wait for the world to brighten.

We bring the light into the world *as it is.*”

The Shehecheyanu Problem in the Ghetto

Let’s step into a story.

Europe.

World War II.

A small ghetto of 500 Jews—starving, terrified, spiritually crushed, humanly crushed.

Hanukkah approaches.

The Jews of the ghetto decide:

“We are risking our lives—literally—to light a single flame.”

Oil is forbidden.

Wicks are forbidden.

Jewish practice is forbidden.

Death penalty.

And yet—they smuggle in a tiny bit.

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The question becomes:

Who will light?

The answer is obvious:

The saintly **Belzer Rebbe**.

They gather around him.

They expect courage from him—but even he trembles.

He lights.

He says the **first beracha**:

“Lehadlik ner shel Chanukah.”

They answer: **Amen**.

He says the **second beracha**:

“She’asa nissim...”

They answer: **Amen**.

He pauses.

And pauses.

And pauses.

The Jews grow anxious.

“Rebbe... say it... say the beracha... Shehecheyanu...”

But he is silent, face contorted, struggling.

And then—

He screams with every fiber of his being:

SHEHECHEYANU!

The kind of Shehecheyanu you say not with lips—but with soul, with blood, with memory, with pain, with defiance.

Afterward they ask him:

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“Rebbe... why the pause?”

And he answers words that should be carved into Jewish memory forever:

“I could make the first beracha. I could make the second beracha.
But the third... *Shehecheyanu v'kiyemanu v'higiyanu la'zman hazeh*—
how could I thank Hashem for bringing me to *this* moment?”

How can he thank Hashem for bringing him to a ghetto, under Nazi cruelty, where every breath is terror?

“I could not say it,” he said.
“My heart would not let me say it.”

So what changed?

He continues:

“But then I looked around...
I saw Jews—simple Jews, broken Jews, hungry Jews—risking their lives to light one candle of mitzvah.
Jews who had every reason to hate God, every reason to give up Torah, giving everything for one tiny flame.”

“I did not say Shehecheyanu for living to this time.
I said Shehecheyanu...
for living to see you.
To witness the greatness inside the Jewish soul.”

And then he screamed the beracha.

That is Hanukkah.

Not “thank you for good times.”
Not “thank you for comfort.”
Not “thank you for miracles.”

But—
thank You for letting me witness the infinite light inside the Jewish people, which appears precisely in the darkest darkness.

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Why Is Darkness Mentioned in Creation?

Our sages teach something wild:

The four exiles of the Jewish people are hidden—in code—inside the opening verses of Bereshit.

And when the Torah says:

“V’choshech al p’nei tehom”
(And darkness was upon the face of the deep)

That is referring to:

 **Galut Yavan — the Greek exile.**

But hold on—

We haven’t even met Abraham.
We haven’t even met a Jew.
We’re still in the first six verses of history!

Why talk about Jewish suffering before Jews exist?

Because Hashem was teaching:

Every exile produces a new spiritual creation.
Every darkness creates a new form of Jewish light.

Yavan = Darkness of the Eyes

The Greeks darkened the eyes of Israel—not by killing us, but by **forbidding our mitzvot**:

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- No Shabbat
- No brit milah
- No rosh chodesh
- No Torah
- No Jewish identity

It was a world where the Jews could not “see”—no spiritual visibility.

So what did Hanukkah introduce?

The Jewish version of **bioluminescence**.

Bioluminescence & Sonar – The Secret of Hanukkah

When creatures live at ocean depths where not a single ray of sunlight reaches them, they develop one of two adaptations:

1. Luminescence — They glow.

Fireflies, deep-sea fish, organisms that create their own light.

2. Echolocation — They don’t need light.

They “see” through sonar, through bouncing sound waves, through senses deeper than eyesight.

Both allow survival in total darkness.

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And this is exactly what Hanukkah teaches:

★ **There are two ways to survive spiritual darkness:**

- 1] **Become a source of light yourself**—glow, illuminate, bring mitzvot and Torah into a dark world.
- 2] **Develop spiritual vision that does not depend on external light**—seeing with the neshamah, sensing truth even when the world is blind.

Hanukkah isn't celebrated in the daytime
because Hanukkah isn't about light winning where light already exists.

Hanukkah is about light that is **born inside darkness**,
light that **should not exist**,
light that exists because *we choose to create it*.

This is why in halacha:
A Hanukkah candle lit in daylight is meaningless.

Daylight is not the enemy.
Darkness is.

The miracle is not “oil lasted.”
The miracle is:

A nation learned to shine when the world tried to suffocate its flame.

HANUKKAH: THE CREATION OF LIGHT *INSIDE* DARKNESS

So now we begin to understand something very deep:

Most people think the miracle of Hanukkah was:

“The oil lasted eight days.”

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But in reality?

The oil lasted eight days **because that miracle was a *metaphor* for what the Jews themselves were becoming.**

The oil was mirroring them.

Just as the oil burned in a situation where it "shouldn't have"...

The Jews stayed spiritually lit in a situation where they “shouldn’t have” been able to.

The miracle outside was merely a reflection of the miracle inside.

That's why Hanukkah is a **holiday of the night**, not the day.

- Pesach celebrates freedom.
- Shavuot celebrates Torah.
- Sukkot celebrates divine shelter.

But Hanukkah?

Hanukkah celebrates the ability to make light when the world is dark.

It is the only holiday where the mitzvah would be meaningless in daylight, because daylight is not the point.

Darkness is the point.

THE REBBE'S SHEHECHEYANU — AND THE SECRET OF THE JEWISH SOUL

The Belzer Rebbe taught us the blueprint:

Sometimes we cannot thank Hashem for the *situation*...

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...but we can thank Hashem for the **people who share that situation with us**,
for the courage of Am Yisrael,
for the holiness that erupts in our darkest times.

Hanukkah's Shehecheyanu is not:

- "Thank You for the Maccabees."
- "Thank You that the oil lasted."

It is:

- **"Thank You for letting me see what Jews are made of when everything is taken away."**

That alone is enough to scream Shehecheyanu.

THE GENESIS OF DARKNESS — CHOSHECH = POTENTIAL

Let's return to Bereshit:

- "Tohu" represents Babylon.
- "Bohu" represents Persia.
- "Choshech" represents Greece.
- "Ruach Elohim" represents Rome.

Why is Yavan called *choshech* — darkness?

Not because they hated Jews.
Not because they killed Jews.
But because:

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They attacked our spirit.

They darkened our eyes.

They shut off the mitzvot that gave us visibility and identity.

What do Jews do in darkness?

We innovate spiritually.

- In Egypt we learned faith.
- In Babylonia we learned Torah SheBe'al Peh.
- In Persia we learned unity.
- In Greece we learned how to see without light.

Each exile created a new superpower.

Hanukkah created a new Jewish muscle:

 **The ability to generate light internally when the world offers none.**

OPERATING IN DARKNESS — OUR GENERATION'S CHALLENGE

The Rebbe's story was not only about the Holocaust.

It was about now.

We live in a world where:

- People are anxious.

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- People are confused.
- People are spiritually starving.
- People are morally blind.
- People are overwhelmed with depression or fear.

This is not a world of clarity.
This is not a world of prophetic daylight.

This is a world of Hanukkah.

A world that says:

**“You’re not responsible for the darkness around you.
You’re responsible for the light you put into it.”**

And that light doesn’t have to be huge.
Hanukkah teaches:

The smallest flame defeats the largest darkness.

One candle.
One mitzvah.
One act of kindness.
One phone call.
One word of encouragement.
One shiur of Torah.

PERSONAL DARKNESS: WHERE IS YOUR NIGHT?

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The pasuk says:

“LaYehudim hayta orah v’simcha...”

“To the Jews there was light and joy...”

Light is joy. And joy is light.

That means:

Wherever you feel **joyless**,
wherever you feel **anxious**,
wherever you feel **confused**,
wherever you feel **stuck**...

That is your darkness.

That is where Hanukkah wants you to place the candle.

Some people have:

- Darkness in relationships
- Darkness in their finances
- Darkness in their parenting
- Darkness in their self-esteem
- Darkness in their spiritual life
- Darkness in their marriage
- Darkness in their identity
- Darkness in their purpose

Hanukkah asks only one question:

****Where is *your* night?**

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And what small flame can you put into it?**

LEARNING = LIGHT

“Torah is light,” we say every day.

Not poetry — reality.

A person who learns Torah regularly gains:

- clarity
- grounding
- perspective
- structure
- inner quiet
- inner strength

This is why Rabbi Farhi screams (lovingly):

**“If you listen to Breakfast & a Class every day — great.
Now what are you doing for lunch?”**

Hanukkah is the easiest time of the year to level up.

Not because it’s convenient.

Not because it’s quiet.

But because the entire energy of the holiday is:

Add light. Add learning. Add depth. Add something.

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And the smallest addition counts.

THE AUSCHWITZ CANDLE

Rabbi Farhi shares:

One year, on a Hanukkah trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau,
a group of Jewish students stood in sub-zero temperatures,
winds cutting across the camp,
their breath freezing in the air.

First night of Hanukkah.

They tried lighting a candle.
It blew out.

They dug a hole in the snow.
It blew out.

They surrounded it with their bodies.
Their jackets became mechitzot.
Their breath became protection.
Their physical presence became a wall of light.

Finally — it lit.

Standing there, they sang.
A Hanukkah flame burning in the darkest manufactured hell on earth.

Rabbi Farhi said:

“That is Shehecheyanu.”

Not because the conditions were good.
Not because the cold stopped.
Not because darkness disappeared.

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But because Jews chose to be the candle.

THE REAL MITZVAH OF HANUKKAH

It is not:

- to celebrate eight days of oil
- to eat donuts
- to spin a dreidel
- to give gifts

Those are beautiful customs.

But the essence is:

★ ****Don't ask the darkness to shrink.**

Grow the light you bring into it.**

Even a small flame —
a tiny flame —
pushes back infinite darkness.

That is the secret of Hanukkah.

TAKEAWAY

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****Hanukkah is not a holiday of escaping darkness.**

It is the holiday of becoming light inside darkness.**

Wherever you feel trapped, stuck, overwhelmed, or emptied —
that is where you place the candle.

That is where the miracle is waiting.

SHABBAT TABLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ① Where in your life do you feel the most “darkness”—emotionally, spiritually, or practically?
What would one candle of effort look like in that area?
- ② Think of a time when another Jew’s courage or kindness lit up your darkness.
What Shehecheyanu did that moment deserve?
- ③ What is one area where you’ve been waiting for the world to become brighter—
instead of bringing your own light to it?
- ④ Which kind of Hanukkah light do you need more right now:
bioluminescence (creating your own light) or sonar (finding your way even without light)?

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- 5 What learning commitment—small but consistent—can you add this Hanukkah to bring Torah-light into your routine?
- 6 If you had a “Hanukkah wishlist,” not of gifts but of spiritual upgrades—what would be on it?
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