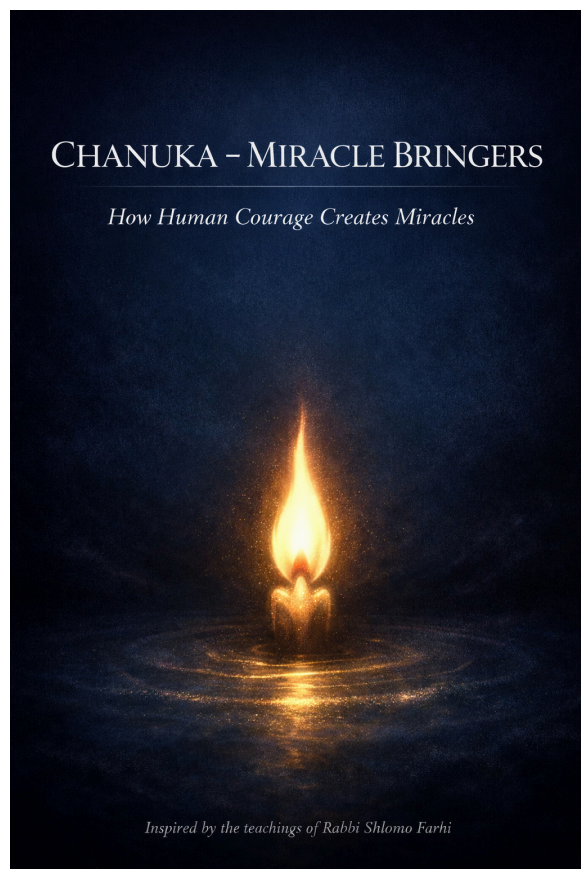


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SPREADING LIGHT AND
TORAH TO OUR AMAZING
BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN
AM YISRAEL



THE WORLD MOVES WITH US

I want to share what I think is a really interesting idea that's given over by Rav Shlomo Wolbe. There's a beautiful sefer that was put out — they translated all of the talks that he gave after he left his job in the yeshiva, when he was giving his shiurim. It's a very, very beautiful book and it's highly recommended. It's a very pure book as well.

I really enjoyed it, and the authors donated it to the shul, and I think it's a tremendous addition to our beautiful library over here.

So he starts off with an idea.

The idea goes like this:

Right in the beginning he says that when a person is connected to this world — obsessed with this world, thinking about this world, subjugated to this world — then his level of spirituality decreases.

But it doesn't happen in a vacuum.

When a person goes down, creation itself also goes down with him.

Because mankind plays not only a role in the world, but the **central** role in the world. A human being has an interconnected relationship with all physical realities around him. The world is not just "around us." The world is tied to us.

And because that's the case, we find something fascinating:

When a person is doing the right thing — when a person is on a very high level — he raises everything around him.

He gives an example: Yaakov Avinu puts his head down on rocks. All the rocks want to be under his head, so they coalesce into one rock so his head can rest on it. Even the stones want to be associated with a tzaddik.

And he makes a joke — some Jewish women put their heads on small diamonds hoping the diamonds will coalesce into one big diamond. Fine.

But the point is serious:

A person can influence the natural order of the world through their spiritual level.

And the flip side is also true.

When a person is misbehaving — using the physical world and all its desires — the world itself responds, and it descends accordingly. The world goes down a level with him.

And Rav Wolbe brings something remarkable.

In the beginning of creation, when animals like lions were running around, they did not eat other animals. Lions were not only a football team — they were vegetarians.

So what changed?

Adam sins.

And now the lions are eating other animals.

And you ask: What does Adam have to do with what's on the lion's menu?

And the answer is powerful:

When Adam ate something he shouldn't eat, animals began to eat things that they shouldn't eat.

Even the lion — who maybe doesn't speak English, who maybe doesn't talk, who never went to yeshiva — “learns” from Adam.

Not because Adam said something to him.

Not because Adam modeled it enough times that the lion learned to mimic him.

But because the spiritual level of humanity reshapes reality. The spiritual level of a man has an impact on his surroundings.

My friends, once we understand that, we understand a central pillar of Hanukkah.

THE BERACHAH THAT'S MISSING ONE WORD

Hanukkah, we know, is a time of miracles. We say it every night at the Menorah: “Hashem, You did miracles for our forefathers...”

Now, can I just point out one thing?

How many times do you guys make that berachah? Eight times a year, every year. If you're Sephardic, you make it much less. Ashkenazim make that berachah from the time they're kids — every night they light, they say it. For us, until we leave our parents' home and move into our own place, we're not making that berachah — but at least we're hearing it.

Now I want to point out something.

No one ever pointed this out to me. No one ever asked me this question. But I think it's an obvious question that needs to be asked.

Let's look at the structure of the berachah.

There are **three** concepts in the berachah.

Two of them appear as “then and now,” something and its opposite. One of them does not.

Let's review:

- **Nissim:** You did miracles, and we want You to do miracles.
- **Zman:** In those days, at this time.

- But there's one thing that appears only once:

It says: **“for our forefathers.”**

It should say: “for our forefathers... and for us.”

The subject of today is missing.

Everyone catch that?

There's “those days” and “this time.” There's miracles then and miracles now. But it only says “for our forefathers.” It doesn't say “for us.”

By the way, just as a contrast, on Pesach in the berachah we say “for us,” because we are obligated to see ourselves as if we left Egypt, so we're “us” just like they're “us.”

But here, what is the meaning of this?

On one level you could say: we're asking HaKadosh Baruch Hu to do miracles for us now **in the merit of our forefathers**.

So read the berachah like this:

“Hashem, You did miracles for the great tzaddikim of yesteryear, You did miracles for them then. Even if we don't deserve miracles now, do miracles for our forefathers now — in their merit.”

Why are we saying it like that? Why are we communicating that way? What's the point?

Rav Wolbe is explaining something magnificent.

Whenever there's a **nes**, a miracle, there's always a **Ba'al Nes** — a carrier of the miracle.

THE BA'AL NES: WHO CARRIES A MIRACLE

So Rav Wolbe says something unbelievable.

Whenever there is a **nes** — a miracle — there is always a **Ba'al Nes**.

Now, we're familiar with someone who literally carries that name: **Rebbe Meir Ba'al HaNes**.

Unbelievable, by the way. Us Syrians, some Ashkenazim — we're *meratziot*, we don't know what we're doing. You want great last names? You have to go to the Persians.

You ask a guy, “What's your name?”
 “David Cohen Gadol.”
 “What's your name?”
 “This guy? Mashiach.”

I had a guy tell me his name was **Mashiach Cohen Gadol**. I said, “You know that doesn't work. Mashiach comes from Yehuda. Cohen Gadol comes from Levi. Unless you're schizophrenic — then maybe it works.”

Anyway.

Rebbe Meir Ba'al HaNes.

I once met a guy whose last name was Ba'al Nes. You know someone from the community? Rabbi Ba'al Nes? He didn't just take the last name — he took the first name too.

I think I told you this once: I met a kid in camp. His last name was Ben David. Poor kid. You know what his first name was?

Mashiach.

Can you imagine the pressure?
“Mashiach Ben David, you didn’t do your homework — you’re going to ruin everything.”

“Where are you going for midwinter vacation?”

“Florida.”

“You’re not going to Israel, Mashiach Ben David?”

Anyway.

Let’s translate the words **Ba’al HaNes**.

What does *Ba’al* mean?

It means **owner**.

It also means **carrier**.

It also implies **responsibility**, a yoke on one’s shoulders.

That’s why a husband is called a *ba’al* — because he carries the responsibility of the marriage, the family, the provision. *Ba’al* means you’re carrying something heavy.

So Rebbe Meir was called Ba’al HaNes not because he *did* miracles — Hashem does miracles — but because miracles passed **through** him.

Every time there’s a miracle, you have to ask:

Who is the Ba’al Nes?

Who is the one carrying it?

When Moshe Rabbeinu takes the Jewish people out of Egypt, he becomes the Ba’al Nes.

Wow. Big tzaddik, Moshe Rabbeinu.

But here’s where we miss the point sometimes.

We think Moshe Rabbeinu was given a job — “Take the Jews out of Egypt.” And that job would have happened anyway, and Moshe was just the messenger.

That’s not true.

Moshe Rabbeinu **caused** the job to be done.

Because he was such a tzaddik, in his merit, miracles were able to happen.

Let’s be very clear:

The tzaddik never performs the miracle.

Hashem performs the miracle.

But the tzaddik is the one **through whom** the miracle occurs.

So when Moshe Rabbeinu comes riding into Egypt, and the Jewish people need saving, the whole world starts to bend — toward Moshe’s needs, toward his mission, toward his spiritual stature.

That’s the idea of **Moshe Rabbeinu Ba’al Nes**.

Now let’s bring this to Hanukkah.

Who is the Ba’al Nes of Hanukkah?

It’s not the oil.

It’s not the menorah.

It’s the **Kohanim**.

The **Maccabim**.

The **Chashmonaim**.

The ones who acted with such tremendous **emunah**.

The ones who did what they did despite the odds.

So the question becomes:

If you want to be a Ba'al Nes —
if you want miracles to happen through you
—
what do you need to do?

And Rav Wolbe points out something
fascinating.

The word *ba'al* — owner, carrier — also
connects to the idea of a **yoke**, something
heavy placed on one's shoulders.

Being a Ba'al Nes means carrying
responsibility.

So if the Ba'al Nes of Pesach is Moshe
Rabbeinu,
and the Ba'al Nes of Hanukkah is the
Chashmonaim,

what do *we* need to do if we want to
become — let's call it — **Shlomo Ba'al
Nes**?

And this is where Rav Wolbe brings **two
Gemarot**.

One in **Berakhot** with Abaye.
And one in **Sanhedrin** with Rava.

And both Gemarot are asking the same
painful question.

“WHY DON'T WE HAVE MIRACLES?”

Abaye has a discussion with Rav Papa.

And Rav Papa says:
“I don't understand what's going on in our
generation. How come we're not having
miracles — the miracles that we need?”

“Our generation,” Rav Papa says, “is more
learned than the generation before us.”

And he proves it.

He says:
The great rabbi of the previous generation,
Rabbi Yehuda, his expertise was in **Nezikin**
— Bava Kamma, Bava Metzia, Bava Batra.

But when Rabbi Yehuda got to Masechet
Uktzin, he admitted that he didn't know it on
the same level.

Rav Papa says:
“Look at that. Their generation's rabbi knew
some things and not others. In our
generation, we're experts in everything.”

So how come **they** had miracles and **we**
don't?

How come when Rabbi Yehuda took off one
shoe as a sign of mourning because there
was no rain — before he took off the second
shoe, it already started raining?

That was Rabbi Yehuda's trick.

My trick is not bringing an umbrella.

But seriously — Rabbi Yehuda takes off one
shoe, rain starts.

Here we are fasting, praying all day, doing
everything, and nothing changes.

What's going on?

Abaye answers Rav Papa directly.

“You know why?” he says.
“Because the previous generation lived with
mesirut nefesh.”

They knew less Torah — but they were
moser nefesh to sanctify Hashem's name.

Now, mesirut nefesh is commonly misunderstood.

People think mesirut nefesh means dying for Judaism — being burned at the stake, being shot, giving up your life.

That *is* mesirut nefesh.

But it's not the only kind.

Mesirut nefesh means **giving up what you want**.

Nefesh means desire.
What animates you.
What drives you.

And he gives an example.

You have a guy who loves a double cheeseburger. I don't know what it's called — Double Big Mac? Whatever it is. The burger with the cheese.

Then he goes kosher.

He walks past McDonald's. Smells amazing.

Then he goes next door — not to McDonald's — to **McMoishy's**.

Same burger. Terrible vegan cheese. And it costs six times more.

And there's a sign in McDonald's:
"\$1.99 — six burgers — feed a family of twelve — fries, soda, a toy."

The reward for giving up the burger you want — that's mesirut nefesh.

But Abaye says:
It's not just about reward.

Miracles come **from** mesirut nefesh.

Why?

Because naturally, people do what's comfortable.

Survey says: people do what they want. People don't do what they don't want — unless they have to.

So when a person breaks their own will — when they act in a way humans don't normally act — they act **supernaturally**.

And when a human acts supernaturally, the world responds **supernaturally**.

That's the connection between mesirut nefesh and miracles.

The Chashmonaim risked their lives to light the candles.

And what did the Greeks want to take from them?
Their spirituality.

And the Chashmonaim said:
"We're not having it. We'll give our lives to light candles."

And Hashem responded:
"You gave your lives for the Temple service? Then the Temple service will respond supernaturally."

"THE TORAH WANTS THE HEART"

But Rav Wolbe says we're not finished yet.

Because there's a **second Gemara** — and this one comes from **Rava**.

Rava asks essentially the same question Abaye was asked, but he comes from a slightly different place.

He looks at the generations and says:

“How is it possible that in earlier generations they had miracles, and in our generation we don’t?”

And remember — Rava and Abaye lived in the **same generation**. They’re responding to the *same reality*.

The generation before them knew **less Torah**.

They had **fewer resources**.

Learning was harder.

And yet — miracles happened.

So Rava answers:

“You know what the difference is?”

The Torah wants the heart.

Not the mind.

Not the information.

The heart.

Now, this is interesting.

Abaye emphasized **mesirut nefesh** — sacrifice.

Rava emphasizes **lev** — heart.

At first glance, they sound like two different answers.

One sounds like self-sacrifice.

One sounds like emotion, passion, inner feeling.

But Rav Wolbe suggests something deeper.

Maybe they are saying the **same thing**, from two angles.

Because if Torah doesn’t live in your heart, you will never give anything up for it.

You might love ideas.

You might enjoy learning.

You might be inspired.

But you won’t miss a football game.

You won’t give up your seat on the bus.

You won’t inconvenience yourself.

Ideas don’t move people.

Love does.

If something doesn’t live in your heart, it will never demand mesirut nefesh from you.

So maybe Abaye and Rava are describing the same failure in two languages:

Abaye says:

“We don’t give up enough.”

Rava says:

“We don’t feel it enough.”

And maybe both are true.

WHEN TORAH IS TOO EASY

Rava goes further.

He says:

“One generation ago, Torah was difficult.”

There weren’t yeshivot everywhere.

People had no money.

They had to travel far to find a rabbi.
Learning came with hardship.

Today?

Torah is easy.

It's accessible on every platform.
Any rabbi in the world.
Any rebbetzin.
Any topic.
Any time.

And that's a blessing.

But ease comes with a price.

When something is easy, it doesn't require
supernatural strength.

And if it doesn't require supernatural
strength, it doesn't generate miracles.

So maybe what we need to do is not make
Torah harder — but **make ourselves work
harder**.

Take the same easy Torah...
and add a dose of **mesirut nefesh**.

Add heart.
Add commitment.
Add cost.

RABBI YISRAEL SALANTER: "HASHEM SAYS"

And Rav Wolbe brings a story that made a
big impact on him — from **Rabbi Yisrael
Salanter**.

Whenever Rabbi Yisrael Salanter learned,
he never said:

"The Mishnah says..."
"The Gemara says..."
"The pasuk says..."

Instead, he would say:

"Hashem says."

"If two people are holding a tallit — Hashem
says they must split it."
"Hashem says to put on tefillin."
"Hashem says to pray."

Why?

Because the moment you say "Hashem
says," something changes.

The Torah is no longer information.
It becomes a **direct command**.

It becomes a conversation.
A relationship.

And when Torah is learned that way, it
penetrates the heart.

When you know it comes directly from
Hashem, you don't just understand —
you care.

And when you care, you're willing to give
something up.

TURNING EASE INTO MESIRUT NEFESH

So Rav Wolbe says:

You're listening to a class.
It's easy.
Thank Hashem that it's easy.

But make it hard on yourself.

Don't listen to the class and turn off your phone.

Listen — and accept something.

Ask yourself:

"What did I learn?"
"What did it inspire me to do?"
"How will I change because of it?"

The moment you do that, the easy thing becomes mesirut nefesh.

You hear a shiur.
You love an idea.

Say to yourself:

"Hashem gave me this beautiful idea.
Thank You, Hashem, for this Torah.
Now I'm going to do what You asked me to do."

That builds **deveikut**.
That builds **rachmana liba bai** — Hashem wants the heart.
That builds **mesirut nefesh**.

And then something incredible happens.

THE WORLD RESPONDS

When you act that way, the world responds in kind.

You need a miracle?

You need nature to bend?

Bend your nature first.

And then you'll see.

You too can become a **Ba'al Nes**.

BEND YOUR NATURE

So Rav Wolbe brings it all together.

The question was never really,
"Why don't we have miracles anymore?"

That's the *symptom*.

The real question is:
Why don't we live in a way that invites miracles?

Miracles don't come from information.
They don't come from inspiration alone.
They don't come from knowing more Torah than the previous generation.

Miracles come when a person **breaks their own nature**.

When a person does something that is uncomfortable.
When a person gives something up.
When a person acts not because it's easy, but because it's right.

That is mesirut nefesh.

And that is what Abaye was saying.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEN AND NOW

The earlier generations didn't have better minds than we do.

They had fewer sefarim.
Fewer shiurim.
Less access.
Less structure.

But they had something we often lack.

They lived Torah with **cost**.

Learning Torah meant inconvenience.
Keeping mitzvot meant sacrifice.
Showing up meant risk.

And when people live that way, the world responds.

Not because Hashem "owes" them anything

—

but because the world itself bends toward those who rise above it.

WHEN TORAH LIVES IN THE HEART

And this is where Rava's words hit hardest:

"The Torah wants the heart."

Not just attendance.
Not just listening.
Not just agreeing.

The heart.

If Torah doesn't live in your heart,
it will never cost you anything.

And if it never costs you anything,
it will never move reality.

That's why Rabbi Yisrael Salanter insisted on saying,
"Hashem says."

Because the moment Torah is personal,
the moment it becomes a command from Hashem Himself,
it stops being abstract.

And when it stops being abstract, it starts demanding action.

TURNING A SHIUR INTO A TURNING POINT

So Rav Wolbe says something very practical.

You listened to a shiur.

Good.

Now what?

Did it change anything?

Did it cost you anything?

Did you accept anything on yourself?

If you listened and then closed your phone and moved on,
nothing happened.

But if you listened and asked yourself:

"What does Hashem want from me *now*?"
"What am I going to do differently *today*?"

Then the easy thing just became hard.
And the hard thing just became holy.

That is modern mesirut nefesh.

WHEN YOU BEND, THE WORLD BENDS

And this is the final point.

You want miracles?

You want nature to bend?

Don't ask Hashem to bend nature for you while you refuse to bend your own.

Bend your nature first.

Give something up.
Show up when it's uncomfortable.
Choose Torah when it costs you.

And then you'll see something extraordinary.

The world responds.

Reality shifts.

You don't need to be Moshe Rabbeinu.
You don't need to be a Chashmonai.
You don't need to be Rabbi Meir Ba'al HaNes.

You just need to be willing to carry something heavy.

And then —
you, too, can become a Ba'al Nes.

TAKEAWAY

The mistake we make is thinking that miracles are something Hashem decides to give — or not give — based on how worthy we are.

That's not how it works.

Miracles don't come from knowing more Torah.

They don't come from inspiration.

They don't even come from wanting good things badly enough.

Miracles come when a person **acts beyond their nature**.

When you do what's easy, the world responds naturally.

When you do what's hard, the world responds supernaturally.

That's what mesirut nefesh really is.
Not dying — but *choosing*.

Choosing Torah when it costs you comfort.
Choosing a mitzvah when it disrupts your routine.

Choosing Hashem's will over your own.

And when Torah moves from the mind into the heart, it becomes costly — and therefore powerful.

So the question is not:
"Why don't we have miracles anymore?"

The real question is:
"What am I willing to bend in myself — so the world will bend in return?"

Because the moment you bend your nature, you become a **Ba'al Nes**.

SHABBAT TABLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Rav Wolbe teaches that the world rises or falls with us.

Where do you see your actions affecting the

“atmosphere” of your home, your family, or your community?

② Abaye says miracles come from mesirut nefesh.

What is one small comfort you could give up this week for the sake of a mitzvah or Torah growth?

③ Rava says “the Torah wants the heart.” How can Torah move from something you *understand* to something you *feel*?

④ Rabbi Yisrael Salanter said “Hashem says” instead of “the Mishnah says.” How would your learning or mitzvah observance change if you heard it as a direct command from Hashem?

⑤ Think of a time when doing the right thing felt uncomfortable or inconvenient. Did you see any unexpected blessing or “mini-miracle” follow?

⑥ What is one way you can turn an **easy** Torah habit into a **meaningful** act of mesirut nefesh?
