

Rabbi Shlomo Farhi.com

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



There is a very famous question that I want to begin with today.

When we say *Al HaNissim*, we list a series of miracles:

You gave the mighty into the hands of the weak.

You gave the many into the hands of the few.

That's unbelievable. That's a miracle.

But then we say something else:

**Resha'im b'yad tzaddikim** — the wicked fell into the hands of the righteous.

And the question is obvious.

Why is *that* a miracle?

Is there any reason why the righteous *shouldn't* defeat the wicked?

If you had a thousand wicked people against five righteous people, okay — that's a miracle. But if the numbers are equal, or even close, why is it surprising that people who follow Hashem's Torah would prevail?

This question is so strong that one of the greatest tzaddikim, **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev**, addresses it directly.

And Reb Levi Yitzchak is one of my favorite tzaddikim of all time.

Do you know why?

Because every tzaddik has a unique light. Not only does each tzaddik bring light into the world — but each one brings light in a **specific and unique way**, especially when they emphasize something others don't.

In fact, that's one of the reasons the Chachamim say that when a person writes a sefer, there should be an allusion to the author's name in the book. The book expresses the author's inner essence.

Each tzaddik gives the world *what he himself embodies*.

Our secular world loves the idea of "be yourself."

"Do you."

"Live your truth."

But sometimes I look at a person and think:  
*Your most authentic self is not something  
the world needs.*

You being you didn't help anyone. It just  
forced everyone else to dance around you.

That's not authenticity. That's selfishness.

Hashem gives a person a diamond.  
Your job is not to preserve the rough stone.  
Your job is to cut pieces away.

When you cut a diamond, you lose stone —  
but you gain brilliance.

That's what **s'ur me'ra** is. Removing bad  
middot doesn't make you less you. It makes  
you a **better** you.

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So what was special about **Reb Levi  
Yitzchak of Berdichev**?

His gift was seeing **every Jew positively**.

Every Jew.

Even the worst Jew — he would find  
something beautiful.

My favorite story captures him perfectly.

A man is smoking outside the shul on Yom  
Kippur. Not discreetly — right in front of the  
shul. He's doing it *lehach'is* — to provoke.

Reb Levi Yitzchak walks over and says:

"My dear Jew, I'm sure you didn't know that  
you're not allowed to smoke on Yom  
Kippur."

The man says, "No, no — I know."

He takes another puff.

Reb Levi Yitzchak says, "Ah — then you  
probably didn't know that today is Yom  
Kippur."

The man says, "No, no — I know."

At that point, what can you say?

Reb Levi Yitzchak looks up to Hashem and  
says:

"Ribono Shel Olam — look at Your children.  
I gave him two opportunities to lie and get  
out of trouble, and he refused both. Look at  
his commitment to truth."

That was Reb Levi Yitzchak's greatness.

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So Reb Levi Yitzchak answers the question  
in his own way.

He says: You're reading *Al HaNissim* wrong.

The first two are contradictions of nature —  
weak over strong, few over many.

But **resha'im b'yad tzaddikim** is not a  
contradiction.

It's a *result*.

They merited victory **because** they were  
tzaddikim.

That's his answer.

But I want to offer a different angle.

And I think this answer speaks to all of us,  
especially on Hanukkah.

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## WHY TORAH PUTS YOU AT A DISADVANTAGE

So let me suggest a different answer.

And I want to be very clear from the outset — this is not *the* answer. It's *an* answer. A more humble answer. But I think it's a very powerful one, especially for Hanukkah.

Yes, it *should* be normal that righteous people win wars.

Yes, it *should* make sense that people who follow Hashem's Torah prevail.

But here's the problem:

**The Torah actually puts you at a disadvantage in war.**

Let me explain.

Anyone else in the world wants to launch a surprise attack? Great. That's how wars are won.

But what does the Torah say?

Before you go to war, you must first approach the enemy and offer peace.

You literally give up the element of surprise.

You say, "Maybe we can work this out. Maybe there's another way."

So right away, someone who follows Torah is fighting with one hand tied behind his back.

And it gets worse.

A Jewish army, by definition, is going to be **smaller**.

Why?

Because the Torah says the kohen stands up before battle and announces:

"Who built a house and didn't dedicate it? Go home."

"Who planted a vineyard and didn't redeem it? Go home."

"Who got married and didn't complete the year? Go home."

So let's see who's left.

I'll be the first one to go home.

But it doesn't stop there.

The Gemara says even more.

Even if you never sinned in your life — but you're afraid.

Not paralyzed with fear. Just afraid.

You look at tanks, planes, weapons, soldiers, and your heart shakes a little.

Go home.

Even if you're only *slightly* afraid, you go home.

If you're walking down the street and you see five big guys walking toward you, you're going to feel something. That alone disqualifies you.

So how big is a Jewish army that actually follows Torah?

Very small.

So now the first two miracles make sense.

The many in the hands of the few.  
The strong in the hands of the weak.

That's not surprising. That's built into the system.

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## TORAH WEAKENS PHYSICAL POWER

But it goes even deeper.

We have a concept:

**Torah mateshet kocho shel adam** —  
Torah weakens a person's strength.

There's a famous story about one of the great sages.

They once found him sprawled on the floor next to his bed, arms and legs spread out. They thought he had died.

They ran over to him.

He woke up and said, "Why are you sleeping on the floor?"

He said, "Every day I calculate how much strength I have. Then I give all of my strength to Torah. I leave just enough strength to get into bed. Today, I miscalculated."

Like in the movies — slow motion. He reaches for the bed... doesn't make it.

Today, I miscalculated.

And that's not a joke. That's a worldview.

You're supposed to give **all** your strength to important pursuits.

Anyone who learned in yeshiva knows what that feels like.

You wake up early for Shacharit.  
Grab something small to eat.  
Run upstairs to learn.  
Run downstairs for a little nourishment.  
Run back upstairs for second seder.

Lunch — if you can fight six guys for a slice of pizza or expired cereal.

And then Mincha.

Then night seder.

Then learning until 11, 12, 1 in the morning.

Do you know what it means to learn like that?

Seventeen, eighteen hours a day with tiny breaks.

You sleep like the righteous.

I learned in yeshiva not only how to learn — I learned how to sleep.

My daughter once timed me. I lay down in a recliner. She wanted to see how long it would take me to fall asleep.

Seventeen seconds.

That's long.

I also learned about power naps. Twelve minutes. Wake me up in twelve minutes.

Torah takes everything out of you.

And that's how it's supposed to be.

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## THE TRAGEDY OF A LIFE SPENT DREAMING

There's a magnificent idea brought on a pasuk about Pharaoh's dream:

"At the end of two years of days..."

At the end of a person's life — 119 years, 364 days, 23 hours, and 57 minutes — what does a person realize?

"I spent my whole life dreaming."

Dreaming of becoming a Torah scholar.  
Dreaming of knowing how to pray properly.  
Dreaming of understanding the words of the Amidah.  
Dreaming of being patient with my children.  
Dreaming of being generous.

And suddenly, life is over.

And you never even dipped your toe into the water.

The Torah describes Pharaoh standing by the river — *al haye'or*.

The root of that word appears elsewhere.

People who have near-death experiences all report the same thing:  
"I was moving toward a great light."

A person looks back and thinks:  
"Is that all I did? I dreamed... but did I become?"

We are wasting time.

We have to move.  
We have to become.

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## TORAH DOES MORE THAN DRAIN ENERGY

So yes — Torah mateshet kocho shel adam because it uses your strength.

But listen carefully.

That's not all it means.

Torah also weakens your strength **because it restrains you**.

Let's look at Yaakov Avinu.

Esav is coming to kill him.

The pasuk says:

"Vayira Yaakov me'od, vayetzer lo."

Yaakov was very afraid — and it bothered him.

Rashi explains:

He was afraid that Esav would kill him.  
And he was bothered — maybe he would kill others.

Anyone who goes into war understands:  
If someone is trying to kill you, you're allowed to kill him first.

"Haba lehorgecha — hashkem lehorgo."

But the nature of a tzaddik is different.

He says:  
"I don't want to kill anyone."

Even someone trying to kill me.

I wish he would just stay home and eat roast beef, and I would stay home too.

We have no desire to cause pain or end life.

People call us bloodthirsty.

I promise you — leave Jews alone long enough and you'll forget we exist.

When did Jews ever decide to conquer Jordan?

Do you think Israel couldn't take Jordan?

Every war we've ever fought was defensive.  
Every single one.

That's why Yaakov was bothered.

Maybe he would have to kill someone.

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## FIGHTING WITH MORAL HANDCUFFS

Other people fight differently.

"I'll punch you."  
"I'll destroy you."  
"I'll steal your assets."  
"I'll blackmail you."  
"I'll lie."

We don't do those things.

So other people have power because  
they're willing to do things we're not willing  
to do.

If they could have wiped us off the map  
already, they would have.

We could do things they do.

We don't want to.

That's why it's a chiddush that tzaddikim win  
wars.

The Torah ties your hands behind your back  
and says:  
"Go fight."

We're not fighters.

Even when it's just.

That's the argument between Yaakov and  
Shimon and Levi.

Dinah is taken.

Shimon and Levi destroy the city.

Yaakov says:  
"How could you do this?"

They answer:  
"Hachzonah ya'aseh et achoteinu?"

Yaakov isn't saying they shouldn't have  
saved her.

He's asking:  
"At this cost? Could we have killed fewer?  
Could we have minimized harm?"

If you can stop someone by shooting him in  
the leg instead of killing him, that's what you  
must do.

A person who doesn't hesitate has an  
advantage.

Torah takes that advantage away.

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## THE MENORAH ON THE LEFT: WAR MUST NEVER ENTER THE INNER CIRCLE

So this is what Torah does.

Torah restrains a human being.

And it restrains you in the exact places  
where the world tells you, "This is how you  
win."

It restrains you in war.  
It restrains you in business.  
It restrains you in argument.  
It restrains you in conflict.

And that's why it's such a chidush when the tzaddik wins — even when the numbers are equal.

Because there are things the tzaddik simply will not do.

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## **TORAH MATESHET KOCHO — EVEN IN BUSINESS**

You know, Torah doesn't only weaken your strength on the battlefield.

It weakens your strength in business too.

Because the other guy — he's able to do things without a moral compass that you will never do.

People ask me:

"Rabbi, how am I supposed to succeed if I'm not allowed to do this, not allowed to do that?"

"In my industry, it's impossible to do what needs to be done if you follow halacha."

"If I have to always tell the truth, how am I going to convince the client?"

"How do I survive in this world with these rules?"

And my answer is simple:

**Switch industries.**

If the only way to do your job is to be a criminal, then you're not doing a job — you're doing a sin.

"Rabbi, in this business I have to work on Shabbat."

Okay — then do another business.

Or figure out how to do it without Shabbat.

The koach the world has is the unrestrained nature.

Torah says to a person:

"I know you have options.  
But just because you can do something doesn't mean you should."

Might never makes right.

And that is a painful pill for people to swallow.

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## **A HIGHER STANDARD — AND WHY WE ACCEPT IT**

People always say:

"The UN holds Israel to a higher standard than everybody else."

You know what my answer is?

**As they should.**

Not because they're doing it for the right reasons — they're anti-Semites, that's why they do it.

But we are held to a higher standard.

Not by them.

By Hashem.

By our own pursuit of refinement.

Because someone did something to you — does that mean you should do the same thing back?

In other words, they stole your money, so you'll let them steal your soul too?

Buy one, get three free?

We have a way we act.

And nothing should ever change the way we act.

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## WHY THE MENORAH IS ON THE LEFT

And now we can understand something very deep.

We light the Menorah on the left side of the doorway.

Why?

The Gemara says:

So that you should be surrounded by mitzvot.

Mezuzah on the right.  
Menorah on the left.

Surrounded by mitzvot.

Nice.

But if you think the Gemara just means, "You should have a mitzvah here and a

mitzvah there," like a spiritual force field — that's not what's happening.

Because where else do we find this?

Where do we ever say:

"Put tzitzit on the right because tefillin are on the left so you're surrounded by mitzvot"?

Or:

"Put Kiddush on one side of the table and Hamotzi on the other so you're surrounded"?

Or:

"Hold the lulav and strap the etrog to your back so you're surrounded by arba minim"?

You don't find this anywhere else.

So why here?

Because here the Torah is teaching something else.

Listen carefully.

We usually do mitzvot with the right hand.

Why?

Because the right represents strength.

The right represents **Hakol kol Yaakov** — our true power is voice, tefillah, Torah.

So what do we put on the right side of the doorway?

A mini Torah scroll.

"Shema Yisrael..."

That's our inner circle.



That's who we are.

So what do we put on the left?

War.

Because war, even when we must do it,  
belongs on the left.

It is not our identity.

It is not our inner circle.

The Gemara is not just saying "surrounded  
by mitzvot."

The Gemara is saying:

**We never allow war to enter our inner  
world.**

We keep ourselves surrounded by mitzvot.

War is outside.

War is left.

War is something we do only when forced  
— and even then, we do it as Jews.

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## THE SWORD AND THE BOW — AND WHAT REALLY POWERS THEM

Yaakov says about Shimon and Levi:

"You stole your weapons of war."

He calls their weapons "tools of violence."

And the Targum says something  
unbelievable.

Yaakov says:

"I conquered Shechem with my sword and  
my bow."

But the Targum translates it:

"With my prayers and my requests."

So which is it?

Sword and bow — or prayers and requests?

And the answer is:

In the revealed world, yes — you need a  
sword.

In the physical world, yes — arrows fly.

But what powers the sword?

What makes the arrow fly true?

Tefillot.

Mitzvot.

Torah.

That is pshat in the pshat.

That's why Yaakov was upset at Shimon  
and Levi.

He was saying:

"You went before Shacharit. You went with  
swords. You stole the vessel of Esav."

That is not who we are.

That is not our inner circle.

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# SO WHY ARE WE SHOCKED HANUKKAH HAPPENED?

So somehow we act surprised that Hanukkah happened.

We say:

“Wow, the few beat the many.”

“Wow, the weak beat the strong.”

But really?

Every war Israel fought has been like this.

Surrounded by countries.

Outweighed.

Outnumbered.

In '48.

In '67.

In '73.

And since then too.

They come on all fronts.

And somehow they fall.

Why?

Because when we surround ourselves with mitzvot —  
then the soldiers are able to do incredible things with that zechut.

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## THE NISAYON: WHEN WINNING IS EASY BUT WRONG

And now I want to bless all of us.

Because most of us aren't in the battlefield.

But we are in life.

And the real test often looks like this:

You're in a deal.

You told someone something verbally.

It's not written in the contract.

You know that in court, he can't win.

You know that if you pull a move — you'll win.

It's easy.

It's money.

It's power.

So how do you stop yourself from doing what is so easy?

Start your sentence like this:

**“If I wasn't a Jew...**

**If I didn't have a conscience...**

**I have a great way to win this case.”**

“But I do.

And it's not me.”

Could you feel that?

That's what Torah does.

It weakens you in the places where the world calls it strength.

And that's why it's a chidush that tzaddikim win.

Because there are things they simply won't do.

## DON'T ENTER THE MUD (AND THE DANGER OF STAYING TOO LONG)

I'll never forget the advice my rabbi gave me.

He said:

**"If someone is throwing mud at you, never get in the mud with them — because there are things they're willing to do that you will never do."**

At the time, I thought that was the whole lesson.

And it's a powerful one.

But after more than twenty years in the rabbinate — in real life, with real people, real conflicts, real pressure — I've learned that there's **a second reason** not to get into the mud.

And it may be even more frightening than the first.

Here's the second reason:

**When you stay in the mud long enough, you start doing the things you once said you would never do.**

At first, you tell yourself you're only responding.

Then you tell yourself you're just protecting yourself.

Then you say, "I had no choice."

And suddenly, the line you swore you would never cross is behind you.

That's the real danger.

Not that they'll do things you won't — but that **being around it long enough changes what you're willing to do.**

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## THE TORAH'S GENIUS: KEEP WAR OUTSIDE

This is why the Torah is so insistent.

War must remain **outside**.

Conflict must remain **external**.

Even when it's necessary — it must never become who you are.

That's the deeper meaning of the Menorah on the left.

It's not decoration.

It's not symbolism.

It's identity protection.

The Torah is saying:

"You may have to fight.  
But never let fighting define  
you."

Your inner circle must always be mitzvot.

Your inner circle must always be Torah.

Your inner circle must always be prayer, restraint, refinement, conscience.

Once war enters the inner circle —  
once conflict becomes identity —  
you've already lost, even if you win.

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## CHANUKAH: THE MIRACLE OF RESTRAINT

And now we can finally understand why  
Chanukah is such a miracle.

It's not only that the few defeated the many.

It's that they won **without becoming them**.

They didn't adopt Greek values to beat  
Greece.

They didn't fight fire with fire.

They didn't say, "We'll become like you in  
order to defeat you."

They said:

**"We will remain who we are — and let  
Hashem do the rest."**

That is not natural.

That is supernatural.

That is why Chanukah is a holiday of  
miracles.

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## THE PERSONAL APPLICATION — EVERY DAY

Most of us are not fighting wars.

But every one of us is tested daily.

In business.

In family.

In arguments.

In moments where winning is easy — and  
wrong.

The test is not whether you *can* do  
something.

The test is whether you are willing to say:

"There is a way to win —  
but it's not *my* way."

That sentence alone is Chanukah.

That sentence alone lights the Menorah.

That sentence alone brings miracles into the  
world.

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## TAKEAWAY

**Chanukah is not the story of  
overpowering darkness.**

**It is the story of refusing to become it.**

The Torah weakens us in all the places the  
world calls strength —  
so that we never lose ourselves while trying  
to win.

The miracle is not that we survived.

The miracle is that we remained us.

And that miracle is still happening —  
every time a Jew chooses restraint over  
revenge,  
truth over advantage,  
identity over victory.

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## SHABBAT TABLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you think of a moment when “winning” would have required you to compromise who you are? What did you choose — and why?
  2. Why do you think the Torah insists on minimizing harm even in justified conflict?
  3. What does it mean practically to keep “war on the left” and mitzvot in the inner circle of life?
  4. How does moral restraint actually become a source of strength rather than weakness?
  5. Where in your life are you currently being tested with something that is easy — but wrong?
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