

*Rabbi Shlomo Farhi.com*

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

# HANUKKAH WHEN DARKNESS DEMANDS A RESPONSE





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## WHY SHOWING UP MATTERS

One of the most powerful things about the Jewish people — and about the nature of Hanukkah — is exactly what we are doing right now.

I spoke to a dear friend today who told me they were shaken. They didn't feel safe. They didn't want to come out.

And my response to them was simple:

“Because you are shaken, you should come out today.”

And I want you to understand something: this isn't just spiritual. This isn't mystical. This is logical.

Terror works on one equation:

**More fear equals more success.**

If people retreat, terror wins.

If people hide, terror wins.

If people change their behavior, terror wins.

Rewarding violence — whether with concessions, with states, or with moral equivalency — is success.

If something was not given before murder, rape, and pillage, it cannot be given *because* of it.

For good behavior, reward teaches.

For bad behavior, reward encourages.

And I want to say this clearly, because clarity matters:



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If today you are condemning terror, but yesterday you empowered it — shut your mouth.

If today you speak about restraint, but yesterday you protected protests that hid behind masks — shut your mouth.

If today you are shocked, but yesterday you passed legislation that normalized this — shut your mouth.

Apologize with actions.

Not with speeches.

Not with statements.

Not with carefully worded press releases meant to score points.

And no — we do not need your “Happy Hanukkah.”

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## HISTORY DOES NOT LIE

My friends, history is the greatest teacher we have.

There was once a time when a mighty nation stood toe-to-toe with the United States. Blow by blow. Tooth and nail.

That nation was Russia at the height of its power.

Socialism, and later communism, began with an idea that sounded noble:

A society cannot allow people to be rich.

A society cannot allow people to be poor.

Everything must be equal.

On paper, it looked moral.

It looked just.

It looked compassionate.



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And yet, it became one of the cruelest, most lopsided, most murderous systems in human history — led by one of the greatest murderers humanity has ever produced.

And here is what's fascinating:  
Russia did not fall because it was defeated in war.

No capitalist army beat it.  
No battlefield victory destroyed it.

It collapsed by itself.

Almost overnight.

Why?

Because false moral systems don't need to be defeated.  
They need time.

And now, as similar ideologies begin raising their heads again — even here — we need to understand something deeply, not emotionally.

Yes, there is inequality.  
Yes, there is suffering.

But the answer to evil is never a system that denies human nature.

And this brings us directly — **directly** — into Hanukkah.



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## DID GOD CREATE DARKNESS... AND IF SO, WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT IT?

So now that history has spoken, we need to go deeper.  
Because Hanukkah is not just a political response.  
And it is not just emotional resilience.

Hanukkah is a **theological confrontation**.

We say a pasuk every single day in tefillah. Everyone here knows it. We say it automatically. We don't even think about it anymore.

*Yotzer or u'vore choshech  
Oseh shalom u'vore et hakol*

God fashions light.  
God creates darkness.  
God makes peace.  
God creates *everything*.

But that is not what the pasuk in Yeshayahu actually says.

The pasuk says:

*Yotzer or u'vore choshech  
Oseh shalom u'vore ra*

God creates light.  
God creates darkness.  
God makes peace.  
**God creates evil.**

And we don't say it that way.

We change it.

We say "everything" instead of "evil."



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And the question should bother you — it should really bother you — because we say the pasuk word-for-word until the very last phrase. And then suddenly, we flinch.

Why flinch?

If we're already talking about light and darkness, peace and its opposite, why are we afraid to say the word "ra"?

Why are we uncomfortable saying that God creates evil?

And the answer is not simple — but it is essential.

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## THE RAMCHAL'S WARNING

The Ramchal, in *Derech Hashem*, says something that at first sounds almost impossible to accept.

God is absolute good.  
God is goodness itself.

And yet — God is also the source of everything that exists.

There is no second power.  
There is no competing force.  
There is no independent source of existence.

So if evil exists, where did it come from?

It cannot exist on its own.  
It cannot sustain itself.  
It cannot create itself.

Which means — uncomfortable as it sounds — **it must originate in God as well.**



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Not as an end.  
Not as a desire.  
But as a **tool**.

And here is where people make a mistake.

They think that if God created darkness, then darkness must be embraced.  
They think that if evil exists, then resistance is rebellion.

So they say:  
“This is God’s plan.”  
“This is how the world is.”  
“We should stay home.”  
“We should be quiet.”  
“We should accept.”

That is not Judaism.

Not even close.

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## CREATION IS NOT ONE PROCESS

Pay attention to the language of the pasuk.

When God creates light, the Torah uses the word **yotzer** — fashioning.  
When God creates darkness, the Torah uses the word **boreh** — bringing into existence.

Those are not the same type of creation.

Light is **formed**.  
Darkness is **allowed**.

Light is intentional structure.  
Darkness is potential.





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Darkness is not a thing.  
It is the absence of a thing.

And absence exists only so that something can fill it.

Which brings us to the very beginning of humanity.

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## THE TREE THAT SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN EATEN (YET)

Before there were Jews.  
Before there was Torah.  
Before there was history.

There was a tree.

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

And you need to notice something that most people miss.

That tree existed **before Adam and Chava sinned**.  
Before humanity failed.  
Before anything went wrong.

Which means evil existed *before* people corrupted anything.

Who created it?

Only God could have.

So when people say, "God didn't create evil," the Torah itself disagrees.

But here is the critical point.

Evil was **external**.





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The snake speaks to Chava from the outside.  
It argues.  
It persuades.  
It tempts.

But it is not her voice.

The Yetzer Hara was not inside the human being.

And that is why the test was so high.

Because if Adam had waited — if he had held back — he would have eaten from the Tree of Life afterward. And then, even the Tree of Knowledge would have been harmless.

The failure was not the existence of evil.  
The failure was **internalizing it too soon**.

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## WHEN EVIL MOVED INSIDE

The moment Adam and Chava ate from the tree, something irreversible happened.

The Gemara says something disturbing — and it's meant to disturb you.

It says the snake had relations with Chava.

That doesn't mean what people imagine physically.  
It means something far deeper.

It means intimacy.  
It means fusion.  
It means the boundary disappeared.

Evil was no longer "out there."  
It was now **inside**.



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And that changed everything.

Now the voice of good and the voice of evil sounded the same.  
Now desire was confused.  
Now intention was unclear.

“Is this who I am?”  
“Is this what I want?”  
“Is this my soul — or my Yetzer Hara?”

That confusion is the greatest punishment of all.

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## WHY DEATH ENTERED THE WORLD

Most people think Adam died because God punished him.

That’s not what the Gemara says.

The Gemara says the Yetzer Hara and the Malach HaMavet are the same angel.

Before evil was internalized, death had no power.

Once evil moved inside, death became possible.

We didn’t bring death into the world because God was angry.

We brought death into the world because we brought **darkness inside ourselves**.

And yet — and this is crucial — this was not the end of hope.

It was the beginning of a different mission.

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## EVIL SHATTERED, NOT REMOVED

Adam failed to conquer all evil at once.

So God did something extraordinary.

He shattered it.

He broke it into pieces.

Large pieces.

Medium pieces.

Small pieces.

And then He looked at each soul and said:

“This one can handle more.”

“This one can handle less.”

“This one has great light — give them a greater challenge.”

We think we are here to be comfortable.

We are not.

We are here to conquer **our portion**.

And Hanukkah is the holiday that teaches us **how**.

## WHY EVERY SOUL GETS A DIFFERENT BATTLE

Now we can finally understand something that, on the surface, makes no sense.

If God shattered evil into pieces, and if each person is given a piece according to the strength of their soul, then the purpose of life is not what most people think it is.

We think we are here to do good.

We think we are here to learn Torah, to be kind, to be moral, to be spiritual.



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But Rav Yochanan, quoted in the Midrash, says something much sharper:

**We are not here primarily to do good.  
We are here to conquer evil.**

Doing good happens automatically once evil is broken.

This is a very uncomfortable idea, because it means that difficulty is not an accident.  
It is not bad luck.  
It is not a mistake.

It is assigned.

Each person is given a portion of darkness sized precisely to the power of their neshamah.

Not to crush them.  
But because they can handle it.

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## THE GEMARA THAT EVERYONE MISUNDERSTANDS

The Gemara in Masechet Sukkah describes the end of time.

God will slaughter the Yetzer Hara.

And then something strange happens.

The tzadikim will look at the Yetzer Hara and they will cry.  
The resha'im will look at the Yetzer Hara and they will cry.

But for opposite reasons.

The tzadikim will say:  
"How did we ever conquer something so big?"



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The resha'im will say:  
"How did we fail to conquer something so small?"

And every commentator asks the same question:

**Is it big or is it small?**

It can't be both.

And Rav Wolbe answers with devastating clarity.

It was big **for the tzadik**.  
It was small **for the rasha**.

The tzadik was given a large piece of darkness — because his soul was large.  
The rasha was given a tiny piece — because that was all he needed to overcome.

The tragedy of the rasha is not weakness.

It is **not trying**.

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## THE LIE OF LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

I want to explain this with an example that illustrates this perfectly.

There was a classroom experiment.

A teacher walked in and handed out a test.

On the test were three questions.

The first question was an anagram — simple, solvable.  
Some students raised their hands quickly.  
Some struggled.



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The second question was harder.  
Again, some raised their hands.  
Some did not.

Then came the third question.

And here is what happened.

Half the class didn't even try.

Why?

Because they had already learned something dangerous:

**They had learned that they “can’t.”**

This is called learned helplessness.

Nothing changed about their intelligence.  
Nothing changed about their ability.

Only their belief.

They stopped trying before they started.

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## THIS IS THE RASHA

Now understand the Gemara properly.

The rasha is not someone who failed at something big.

The rasha is someone who was given something small and never attempted it.

Not because it was impossible.  
But because they believed it was pointless.



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And this is where Hanukkah becomes revolutionary.

Hanukkah is the holiday that says:

**Trying is already victory.**

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## WHY THE MENORAH WORKS THIS WAY

Someone once asked me a halachic question.

“What if I’m on a plane? I can’t light candles.”

I said, “Ask if you can light them at the bar.”

And if the stewardess blows it out two seconds later — did you fulfill the mitzvah?

Yes.

Because the mitzvah is not that the candle remains lit.

The mitzvah is that **you lit it**.

If it goes out afterward, that is not your responsibility.

That’s the entire philosophy of Hanukkah.

## WHY WE DON’T USE THE LIGHT

There is a halacha that we are not allowed to use the light of the Hanukkah candles.

Why?

Because if you used the first candle to do something practical, you would look at it and say:

“This does nothing.”





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And then on the second night, you would say:

“Two times nothing is still nothing.”

And you would give up before growth had a chance to happen.

So the Chachamim protected us from ourselves.

They said:

Do not test the effectiveness of your light.  
Just add to it.

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## GROWTH IS INCREMENTAL, NOT DRAMATIC

One candle teaches you that you can act.  
Two candles teach you that you can add.  
Three candles teach you that momentum exists.

Hanukkah is not a holiday of miracles that fall from the sky.

It is a holiday of **incremental courage**.

You do what you can do.

Then tomorrow, you do a little more.

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## THE WOODCHUCK TRUTH

There was an old riddle:

“How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?”

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And the answer is simple:

**As much wood as a woodchuck could chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood.**

Meaning: you do what you can do.

And once you've done that, you look at what you've done — and you realize you can do more.

That is how darkness is conquered.

Not all at once.  
Not heroically.  
But persistently.

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## WHY THIS MATTERS RIGHT NOW

If ever there was a moment when Am Yisrael needed to believe that small acts matter, it is now.

A time when people are trying to take our menorahs away.

A time when Jews are told to be quiet, to stay home, to lower their profile.

Hanukkah answers with one word:

**No.**

We light anyway.



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## WHEN EVIL IS ALLOWED TO GROW, GOOD BECOMES A DISTRACTION

Now we need to talk about something uncomfortable.

Because Hanukkah is not only about internal darkness.  
It is also about **public darkness**.

There is a mistake people make — a very dangerous mistake — where they think that doing good can substitute for stopping evil.

It cannot.

There is no mitzvah of “doing good” while allowing evil to flourish unchecked.

Doing good while ignoring evil is not righteousness.  
It is avoidance.

Before you talk to me about building more housing, talk to me about protecting the people who are already here.

Before you talk to me about compassion in the abstract, talk to me about letting Jews walk to shul without fear.

Before you talk to me about morality, talk to me about stopping people who shoot strangers in the street, who burn human beings alive, who celebrate violence openly.

Goodness does not replace justice.  
Charity does not replace protection.  
Kindness does not replace responsibility.

This is not politics.  
This is reality.



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## **FIX THE EVIL, AND GOOD WILL FOLLOW**

William Bratton taught something very simple when it came to policing:

If you fix the broken windows — the visible evil — everything else improves.

If you allow small evils to grow, they become large ones.

This is not new.

This is Torah.

Judaism has never believed that light magically appears by ignoring darkness.

Light appears when darkness is confronted.

That is why Hanukkah candles are placed in windows — facing outward.

Not hidden.

Not subtle.

Not apologetic.

They say:

“We are here.”

“We are not going anywhere.”

“And your attempts to scare us will backfire.”

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## **THE STORY THAT SAYS EVERYTHING**

Before I close, I want to share a story that was told to me today by a member of our shiur.

Many years ago, his mother worked as a housekeeper at the King David Hotel.

One day, Edmond Safra was staying there.

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She came in to clean the room, and he noticed that something was wrong.  
She looked troubled.  
She looked tired.

He asked her how she was doing.

She told him the truth.

She was a single mother.  
She was raising children alone.  
She was doing everything she could.  
But she couldn't clothe them properly.  
She couldn't give them what they needed.

Edmond Safra helped her.

But here's the part that matters.

Every time Edmond Safra returned to Israel, he looked her up.  
He made sure she was taken care of.

Quietly.  
Consistently.  
Without headlines.

And the son remembers something that shaped his entire childhood.

Every time his mother bought him a shirt, a sweater, a pair of pants, she would say:

"This is not my money.  
Don't thank me.  
This shirt came from Mr. Safra."

For years, his clothing carried a message:

**Light doesn't announce itself.  
It sustains.**



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## WHERE WE ARE STANDING RIGHT NOW

We are sitting in a building that exists because a man understood something very deep:

That fighting evil and building good are not opposites.  
They are partners.

The least we can do today is ask ourselves a hard question:

What are we going to double down on **because** of what happened?

What will we do more of — not less?

What light will we add that makes fear pointless?

Because the moment evil realizes that every act of terror results in *more* Jewish life —  
more learning,  
more presence,  
more visibility —  
that is the moment evil begins to lose interest.

Evil feeds on reaction.  
It starves when it fails.

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## THE FINAL HANUKKAH CHARGE

As we walk into Hanukkah, I am begging you:

Do not let the Yetzer Hara feel at home inside you.

Do not let fear settle in your heart and pretend it is wisdom.

Light your menorah publicly.  
Let it shine outward.



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Erase evil from the world not with speeches — but with action.

And make sure that our Hanukkiot are not only shining in our homes,  
but in the streets,  
and beyond,  
and into the entire world.

## TAKEAWAY

**Hanukkah is not a holiday of comfort.  
It is a holiday of courage.**

You are not responsible for eliminating darkness everywhere.  
You are responsible for confronting the darkness placed in front of you.

Attempt matters.  
Presence matters.  
Doubling down matters.

Light does not retreat.

## SHABBAT TABLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1] When evil or fear appears, is your instinct to retreat or to become more visible? Why?
  - 2] Where is the line between “doing good” and avoiding the responsibility to confront evil?
  - 3] What is one area where fear may be disguising itself as caution in your life?
  - 4] Why do you think Judaism insists on **public light** during Hanukkah rather than private spirituality?
  - 5] What does “doubling down on Jewish life” look like for you personally this Hanukkah?
  - 6] How can small, consistent acts make evil feel futile rather than powerful?
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