

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

Captivating stories full of Yiras Shamayim taken from Shmuessin that Reb Kalman Krohn z'tl gave in Adelpia Yeshiva

The Megaleh Amukos and Tikkun Chatzos

Crakcow, 1605

As the morning sun filtered through the lace curtain and filled the room with its yellow light, Malka turned over in bed. She opened one eye, then the other, and then sat up with a start. Her husband's bed was empty. Not only empty, but pristinely made, as if he had never slept in it the night before. Her heart pounding, Malka hastily washed her hands and threw on a robe. "Yitzchok!" She called out worriedly. But there was no answer.

He probably went to shul already, she thought to herself. Calm down, Malka.

Yet she could not calm herself. Dressing quickly, she rushed down the block to the home of her sister Leah. "Leah?" She called breathlessly, knocking urgently on the door. "Open up, Leah!" The door opened slowly, and her sister stood there, red-eyed. She looked at Malka. "Yitzchok, too?" She asked hoarsely.

"No!" Malka cried. "Don't tell me Binyomin didn't come home last night either!"

Leah nodded and blew her nose. "It seems that way," She whispered, looking down at the floor. "So where are they?!" Malka practically yelled in frustration.

"I don't know," Leah said, and both sisters tried to stifle their rising panic. "Let me get my kids dressed, and then we'll go to Tatte and Mama. I can't think straight." She opened her door wider, and Malka stepped inside.

Yet before she had a chance to close the door, they heard horrific screams coming from a few blocks down.

"Go check what is going on," Leah urged fearfully.

Malka needed no further invitation. She went back outside and raced up the street toward the sounds of the terrible yelling. She didn't get too far. Her father, R' Moshe Eberless, came running up to her, his face white. "Malkala," He said, his tone anguished.

"What, Tatte?" She pleaded. "Tell me what happened!"

"The shammas..." R' Moshe began and then choked up. He began guiding his daughter back down the road, where they saw Leah and her children standing anxiously at their front door.

"What happened, Tatte?" Malka asked again.

"The shammas was cleaning the shul and... in a small room under the bed..."

"Yes?" Both of his daughters looked at him, eyes wide with fright.

"Under the bed, he discovered..." R' Moshe began weeping, and he could not continue.

“Did he find Binyomin and Yitzchok, Tatte?” Leah asked urgently.

“Yes. No.” R’ Moshe managed to say through his tears. He swallowed and then blurted out the horrible truth. “He found their bodies.”

“Noooooooo!” The anguished cries of the two brand-new almanos pierced the heavens.

It was a terrible tragedy. A terrible, double tragedy. Two young men, talmidei chachomim, had perished at such a young age, their bodies left under a bed in the shul. The double levaya was held later that morning, and then the two sisters were led to their parents’ home to sit shiva.

“What... How...?” Malka choked out. “How did they die?”

Her younger sister, Roiza, stroked her shoulder comfortingly. Yet Roiza’s young husband stepped forward, white-faced, to answer Malka’s question, and his words shocked them to the core. “It was me,” He said shakily. “It was me. I didn’t mean to, by I was the one who killed them.”

In the city of Crackow lived an affluent man with a keen business sense, R’ Moshe Eberless. In addition to being a savvy businessman, R’ Moshe was a learned man and a yarei shamayim. More than anything, he desired to marry his daughters off not just to bnei Torah whom he would support generously, yet to genuine talmidei chachomim of the highest caliber. His business dealings consumed much of his time, and he couldn’t personally devote his days to learning. He understood that only by acquiring sons-in-law who would spend their days and nights toiling before their gemaros would Torah remain within his generations.

When he married off his elder daughters, Leah and Malka, his merited sons-in-law who fulfilled

his qualifications. They were both outstanding bnei Torah who knew little outside of the world of learning. Filled with gratitude to Hashem for granting him such sons-in-law, R’ Moshe supplied them with every luxury possible, allowing them to lead a worry-free existence and focus solely on their learning. He made but one condition: the two young couples were to join the Eberless family for every lunch and supper. Nothing gave R’ Moshe more pleasure than watching his two respected sons-in-law at the table, engrossed in Talmudic discussion. Indeed, the sons-in-law complied unhesitatingly to this stipulation, grateful for the monetary support so generously bestowed upon them.

And then came the time for Roiza, the third and youngest Eberless daughter, to marry. Roiza was different than her sisters. While Leah and Malka respected limud hatorah and took pride in their husbands’ diligence, essentially, they were still the daughters of an upper-class home, with a wealthy wardrobe and wealthy needs to match.

Roiza was different. The luxury and splendor that she grew up amidst had absolutely no value in her eyes. She was a refined and modest girl, wise beyond her years, who took pleasure only from spirituality, from deeds that would retain their value for eternity. She held her two brothers-in-law in high esteem, yet for herself, she wanted more. She wanted a husband who was not just an outstanding Torah scholar, but someone who was completely detached from materialism, someone who was entirely pure, someone who was wholly entrenched in his learning.

Her sisters would tease her about her extreme piety, and poked good naturedly at her lofty ideals, yet Roiza held firm. All of olam hazeh, including her sisters’ gentle taunting, meant nothing to her. All she wanted was someone who dedicated his life entirely for Hashem. Shidduchim were suggested, one after the other. Dedicated bnei Torah, erudite scholars with yiras

Shamayim. Truly wonderful young men, yet not enough for Roiza.

After some months of fruitless searching for a shidduch for Roiza Eberless, the townspeople discovered a bochur learning diligently in a small shul in town. His threadbare clothing attested to his astute poverty, and he was hardly more than skin and bones, yet no one could deny that he was something special. There was an otherworldly glow to his thin, pure face as he sat from morning to night, and then from night to morning, immersed in the sweet sounds of Torah and avodah. He rarely left the shul, other than to tovel in the river. Once a day, he would eat some crumbs, maybe a chicken wing, to give him strength to continue. Other than that, he would sway before his Gemara practically nonstop.

Observing this holy young man, day in, day out, inspired one of the villagers to think of a shidduch for him. “He’s a perfect match for Roiza Eberless!” The villager declared before hurrying to R’ Moshe’s home to discuss his brainstorm. R’ Moshe came to the shul to observe the young man personally, and was impressed by what he saw. The rail-thin young man was definitely what his daughter was looking for. He gave his consent, and the bochur was approached. He looked up from his Gemara just long enough to hear the matchmaker’s proposal and then agreed to the match. He scarcely wished his brand-new father-in-law mazel tov before returning his concentration to the text before him.

Roiza, the fresh kallah, shone with joy as she listened to her father speak about her new chosson’s unmatched hasmadah and pure holiness. And indeed, the chosson, Nosson Nota Shapiro, was the fulfillment of her lofty dreams.

Right from the very beginning of their marriage, she sensed that his greatness ran deeper than her father and the townspeople had observed. Each night, including the night of their wedding, Nosson Nota would slip out of the house

immediately following chatzos, and his young wife would watch him surreptitiously from behind half-closed eyelids as he returned shortly before daybreak. In the morning, he would pretend he had been in his bed all night, innocently sleeping. She would watch him rush out to the first morning minyan after immersing himself in the frigid waters of the river and then head straight for the bais medrash, where he would sit and concentrate for hours until nightfall. And Roiza knew she had merited to marry a true tzaddik.

Being such an elevated person came with a price, however. Unlike the two older sons-in-law, Binyomin and Yitzchok, Nosson Nota found it impossible to comply with his father-in-law’s stipulation that he eat his main meals in the Eberless home. On the first afternoon of their marriage, R’ Moshe sat at the head of the dining room table, eagerly awaiting the brand-new couple. Recognizing his new son-in-law’s greatness, he had toiled over a sugya the night before, searching for a dazzling kasha to present to Nosson Nota. Leah and Malka soon arrived along with their husbands, and then newlywed Roiza took her place at the table. But Nosson Nota was nowhere to be found.

“Where’s Nosson Nota?” R’ Moshe asked his daughter in surprise.

“If he’s such a tzaddik, let him be a mentch and honor his shver,” Leah muttered under her breath. Roiza blushed, but did not reply.

“Where’s Nosson Nota?” R’ Moshe asked a few moments later, disappointment written all over his round face. The family had already washed and begun their meal, yet the newest son-in-law still had yet to appear.

“Nosson Nota is in shamayim,” Yitzchok said, and Roiza’s cheeks reddened even more. It was true. While he learned, Nosson Nota’s concentration was so total that he did not see,

hear, or notice anything in his surroundings. It was as if his lofty soul was truly in heaven, learning amongst the angels.

As time went on, the family's expectations of Nosson Nota changed, yet their attitude did not soften much. Roiza's older sisters, who felt slightly put down that their own husbands couldn't measure up to their young brother-in-law's elevated heights, thought that Nosson Nota was stepping on too many people in his quest to become a tzaddik.

Disgruntled at their brother-in-law's startling lack of manners, and more than a bit jealous, the two elder sisters went to complain to their father. "My husband is just as big a talmid chacham as Roiza's, and yet he is also a mentch who doesn't snub his father-in-law," Malka said earnestly, as Leah nodded along. "Who does Nosson Nota Shapiro think he is, exactly?"

Presented with the facts so starkly, R' Moshe had to agree that there was substance to their grievance. Why couldn't Nosson Nota sit at the Shabbos table for more than a few minutes? Did he really need to skip every family gathering? Wasn't bein adam lachaveiro also important? And this was besides the fact that Nosson Nota was being supported by his father-in-law. Where was his decency? Annoyed, R' Moshe confronted in his daughter and said, "As his wife, it is your responsibility to make sure your husband understands the importance of the entire family living in harmony."

Roiza listened to her father respectfully, and then began to beg him for leniency. She knew she married a true tzaddik, and that Nosson Nota was simply too disconnected from this world to waste so much time on mundane matters such as eating a leisurely meal. "Please, Tatte," She begged. "Please let him be. My husband is truly special, and this is how it has to be. Please try to understand."

R' Moshe could not understand, but he knew it would be useless to try to press his point further. Nosson Nota was Nosson Nota, and he wouldn't be coming to the family meals. He sighed and resolved to get used to the fact.

Despite the hesitant truce between R' Moshe and Nosson Nota, the two older brothers-in-law, Binyomin and Yitzchok were not ready to just let Nosson Nota be. Goaded on by their wives, they decided to trail their young brother-in-law at night to see where he went.

One night, they hid stealthily behind a tall oak tree and watched as Nosson Nota slipped out of his home, stopped to check his surroundings for potential observers, and then moving hurriedly down the street when he was assured there was no one else around. Keeping a considerable distance between them, the two older men tiptoed after him as he led them further and further away from the village center toward the icy river.

When he reached the river, Nosson Nota immersed himself in its frigid waters one time, then another and another. At last, he emerged from the river, shivering and unsuccessfully choking back tears. The two men exchanged a quick glance, but there was no time to ponder further, because Nosson Nota was already hurrying away from the river. They continued to shadow him back into town, where he entered a small shul and locked himself inside.

Seeing that they would be unable to gain entry into the shul, Binyomin and Yitzchok hung around outside, straining their ears to try to ascertain what Nosson Nota was doing inside. They heard sobbing, deep, anguished sobbing, and then they could make out the words of tikkun chatzos. Again, they exchanged a glance. So this was what Nosson Nota was doing! He was saying tikkun chatzos, and the two men, who were tzaddikim in their own right, had to admit that his anguished wailing was sincere. Impressed and intrigued, they decided to hide in the shul a few

nights later so that they would be able to observe their brother-in-law as he recited tikkun chatzos. For his part, Nosson Nota Shapiro was no fool. He realized that his father-in-law and brothers-in-law were carefully observing his every move. They were scrutinizing the way he davened, the way he learned. And he had caught sight of the two men trailing him when he went on his midnight outing.

“Roiza,” He told his wife later that day. “Please tell your sisters that it is sakanas nefashos for anyone to be in the room when I say tikkun chatzos. They should tell their husbands to be careful and not to come into the room. It’s dangerous.”

His wife looked at him hesitantly. “I’m embarrassed to tell that to my sisters,” She said uncomfortably. “Knowing them, they’ll just laugh at me.”

“You have to tell them,” Nosson Nota said urgently. “It’s truly a matter of life and death. They are playing with their lives. They must not come into the room.”

With no other choice, Roiza set out to do her husband’s bidding. As expected, her sisters treated her words as one big laughing matter, but they agreed to pass the message on to their husbands. Binyomin and Yitzchok, too, did not take the message seriously. “Sakanas nefashos? Don’t be silly. He just wants to scare us off.”

A few days later, shortly before chatzos, the brothers-in-law crept into the shul that Nosson Nota frequented at night. Their young brother-in-law, it seemed, had made arrangements with the shammass to rent a small room in the shul. The men tiptoed cautiously into the small room and looked around. The room was bare, save for a rickety bed in the corner, and a small table against a wall. The table was empty besides for a few candles and a sackcloth.

The brothers-in-law heard light footsteps, and they realized Nosson Nota had arrived. Hastily, they dove under the bed and huddled there silently, hardly daring to breathe. Peeking out from beneath the bed, they saw him enter the room and lock the door behind him. Crying softly, he pulled off his shirt and donned the sackcloth, rubbing ashes onto his forehead. Then he collapsed on the floor and began weeping bitterly as he began reciting tikkun chatzos.

His righteousness, his greatness was such that a tremendous force of pure holiness filled the room as he lay on the floor, sobbing. The two men, in their hideout under the bed, simply could not bear the overwhelming kedushah, and after a short while, both men returned their souls to their Maker.

Nosson Nota, still in midst of weeping with tremendous concentration, did not notice a thing. When he concluded tikkun chatzos, he sat down by the table, depleted of all strength. When he finally got back to himself, he got up, removed the sack, and went back to his home to catch a half-hour of sleep before he was to rise to begin his early-morning seder.

When morning dawned and the two sisters noticed their husbands were missing, they panicked. Yet nothing could compare to the intense fright of the shul’s shammass. He mopped the floor vigorously as he prepared the main bais medrash for shacharis and then moved on to the small room in the back of the shul. Humming, he pushed his mop across the floor and then lifted the bedspread to clean under the bed.

“Aaaaahhh!” He yelled, jumping back and clutching his chest. There were eyes peering out at him from beneath the bed. Bravely, he took a step closer to investigate and then sprung backwards a second time. “Aaaaahhh!” He cried hysterically. “Bodies!!! Heeeeeeelp!”

Worried townspeople living nearby came hurrying in, and they soon added their screams to the chorus. “Meisim! Dead bodies in the shul! Heeeelp!”

“Who are they?” A tall man asked worriedly, trying to peer over the crowd.

“Does anyone recognize them?” Someone else called out, not daring to look himself.

“It’s Binyomin! And isn’t that Yitzchok?!” A portly villager cried out despondently. “R’ Moshe Eberless’s two older sons-in-law!”

In the ensuing mayhem, people rushed about, informing the relatives, organizing the levayah, trying to ascertain under whose bed the bodies were found and who had caused their deaths.

After a tear-ridden levayah, the two grief-stricken sisters went to their parents’ home to sit shiva over their young husbands. Their family, grieving and bereft, surrounded them, and Nosson Nota tearfully admitted his guilt. He had warned his brothers-in-law not to follow him, and he hadn’t even noticed that they had disobeyed his warning and were in the room with him, yet he blamed himself for their deaths.

The next morning, Nosson Nota informed his young wife that he was going into exile to try to atone for causing the deaths of these two young talmidei chachamim. He planned to wander from place to place and suffer through instability, homelessness, and poverty for an entire year.

“Nosson Nota, don’t,” His wife pleaded. “You are so thin and frail. Who will take care of you? Isn’t it enough that my sisters had to lose their husbands? I am afraid I will lose you, too.”

But saddled with the guilt of his brothers-in-law’s tragic demise, her husband could not be swayed. “I give you my word that I will return after a

year,” He promised earnestly. “Please don’t tell anyone that I went.”

And as Leah and Malka sat shiva in the Eberless home, Nosson Nota and his wife parted, tearfully. Word trickled out amongst the townspeople that Nosson Nota had been present in the room when the tragedy had occurred. Tongues wagged and lips chattered, and the story mutated over and over as it passed from mouth to mouth. The versions were plentiful, and it was hard to differentiate truth from fact. Was he there? Did he do something? Everyone had a different opinion, and they intended to ask their suspect himself. They would push Nosson Nota against the wall and force the truth out of him.

However, when they arrived at the shiva home for shacharis the next morning, the third Eberless son-in-law was nowhere to be found.

Roiza, sitting in the women’s section near her sisters, suddenly found herself accosted by throngs of villagers. “Where is your husband?” They demanded.

“I don’t know,” She replied softly, truthfully. Her husband had gone into galus, and she had no idea of his whereabouts.

Yet they would not relent. “Where is Nosson Nota?” They demanded again.

“I don’t know!” She reiterated, near tears. “I really don’t know where he is!” The enormity of the situation fell on her like a load of bricks, and she began sobbing. Her two beloved sisters were now young almanos. Her own husband had disappeared. Her life was in shambles.

The tongues of the gossipmongers continued to wag. Not only did Nosson Nota murder his two brothers-in-law, but he also ran away from the crime scene and escaped justice. “Your third son-in-law, who killed the other two, has escaped,”

The villagers informed a distraught R' Moshe Eberless.

R' Moshe, grieving over the loss of his two older sons-in-law, found it difficult to swallow this piece of news. "Where is he? Find him! We need to get to the bottom of this! Where did he go?"

With a heavy heart, R' Moshe sat down to compose a letter. In it, he described the painful tragedy that had befallen his family. And then my third son-in-law ran away, he wrote in his large scrawl. He is missing, and we currently have no knowledge of his whereabouts. I am afraid my daughter will be an *gunah*. His name is Nossan Nota Shapiro. He is a man of medium build, terribly thin, and his beard is sparse. He's twenty years old, but he looks more like a *bar mitzvah* boy. He's a tremendous *masmid* who spends all his time learning. If you find him, please use your authority to command him to return home.

R' Moshe mailed copies of the letter to *rabbanim* throughout Poland, hoping that they would come across his missing son-in-law and send him back to Crackow. He also hired messengers to travel from town to town, searching for Nossan Nota. The story spread like wildfire throughout Europe.

Wandering from village to village on the Polish countryside, R' Nossan Nota Shapiro tried to atone for the tragedy that he had been responsible for. He was ridden with guilt that his *tikkun chatzos* had caused the deaths of two close relatives. He would fast for days at a time, as his wife had feared, immersing himself in Torah and *avodah* almost around the clock. Only when his strength waned almost to the point of total collapse would he agree to accept a bit of bread from a kind villager.

Realizing that his father-in-law was searching for him, R' Nossan Nota would remain away from crowds. He would daven in small, out-of-the-way

shtieblach, where he was less concerned about people recognizing him. To fulfill his self-sentence of *galus*, he would never sleep in the same *shtiebel* twice and was therefore constantly on the go. However, due to his constant fasting, he was extremely weak. His wife back home would have thought it impossible, yet he grew considerably thinner than he had already been, until he presented but a skeletal figure. And still, he plowed onwards, moving from village to village while feasting on the holy words of Torah, all the while barely feeding his body.

After a few weeks of this, Elul arrived. R' Nossan Nota had reached a point where his physical body was ready to give way and let its Master reclaim its soul. He was completely depleted, and he knew that if he would continue on in this vein, he would surely die. He sat in a small *shtiebel*, swaying weakly before his *Gemara* as he reached enormous levels of *kedushah*, with barely any strength to lift his finger to turn the page when he reached the end of the *amud*.

Suddenly, a thought entered his mind. "Lulav and *esrog*!" He cried out. What was he going to do about *lulav* and *esrog* here in *galus*, when he had absolutely nothing, not even the strength to lift his finger? The thought caught him off guard. *Galus*, *chumros*, those were very nice, but *lulav* and *esrog* was a *mitzvah* that he was required to do! R' Nossan Nota was well-versed in the *halachos* of *arbah minim*, and he cherished the *mitzvah* dearly.

At once, he made up his mind to remain in the village where he was, at least until after *Sukkos*. In his weakened state, traveling again would almost certainly mean death. Mustering up forgotten dregs of energy, he walked into town and approached the village *gabbai* to request a place to stay.

The *gabbai* took one look at him, all skin and bones, with glowing eyes, and he understood that

this was no ordinary person. “Please, can I first give you something to eat and drink?” He offered. “Thank you, I would appreciate that,” R’ Nosson Nota replied gratefully.

The gabbai led him inside the house and showed him to the table, where he was served a meal. R’ Nosson Nota, however, drank just a bit of tea and ate a small piece of fish. Then he put down his fork, sated.

“You must eat more,” The gabbai urged. “You look malnourished. It’s dangerous.”

“I’m sorry, but I simply do not have the energy to eat anything more,” R’ Nosson Nota replied weakly. “Please, do you think there is a place in town where I can sleep?”

Recognizing his guest’s greatness, the gabbai wrote him a nice letter of recommendation and sent him to the home of R’ Efraim, the wealthiest individual in town.

R’ Nosson Nota walked slowly on his spindly legs until he reached the large, palatial home of R’ Efraim. Knocking softly on the door, he asked to speak to the master of the house and was shown to R’ Efraim’s study. He gave over the note he had received from the gabbai and then respectfully requested a place to stay.

R’ Efraim was not just a wealthy man; he was also a talmid chacham. Reading the note from the gabbai, he understood that R’ Nosson Nota was someone special, and he was eager to host him. “What is your name?” He requested.

R’ Nosson Nota’s cheeks reddened and he stuttered and stammered, trying to figure out how to reply without compromising on his anonymity. “It’s alright,” R’ Efraim said kindly. “If you don’t feel comfortable, you don’t have to tell me. Here, let me show you to your room.”

Appreciative that his host did not press him further, R’ Nosson Nota followed R’ Efraim to a beautifully decorated guest room. He lay his weary frame on the bed, and within seconds, he was soundly asleep.

Yet not for long.

A mere half-hour later, he awoke, washed, and immediately resumed learning from where he had left off earlier that day. His sweet Gemara niggun filled the air throughout the entire night.

In the morning, his host interrupted his learning. “Would you like to join me for shacharis?”

R’ Nosson Nota stood up hastily. “Of course! But I daven at the smallest shtiebel, the one on the outskirts of town.”

“Why?” R’ Efraim asked in surprise. “Isn’t it much more preferable to daven with a crowd in a large shul? As it is stated, ‘Brov am hadras melech’.”

His guest looked extremely discomfited. “You’re right,” He said quietly. “But is it okay with you if I go to the small shtiebel?”

Again, R’ Efraim assumed his guest must be a troubled individual, and decided not push him. “I will be davening in the main bais medrash, but you are welcome to daven wherever you like. Please come back here afterward, because I will be waiting to give you breakfast.”

R’ Efraim found his guest intriguing, and he was looking forward to get to know him better. When R’ Nosson Nota returned after shacharis, he found a beautifully set table laden with food. Despite his resolution to cease fasting, food meant little to him, and he ate a few crumbs, just enough to give him life for another day.

Sitting across from him, his host tried to draw information out of him, but when he saw his

reticent guest would not, or perhaps could not, reply, he gave up. Instead, R' Efraim told over one of his original Torah thoughts. R' Nosson Nota appreciated it, and then added on to it, impressing his host. R' Efraim deduced that he must be a hidden tzaddik and began treating him with real respect.

R' Nosson Nota spent the entire day in his room, learning and learning. He declined lunch, and turned down the invitation for supper, opting to busy himself with only matters of kedushah. He requested, and received, permission to come and go as he pleased.

The next day, he approached his host to inquire about a lulav and esrog. "What are you planning on doing about arbah minim?"

R' Efraim smiled broadly. "Boruch Hashem, I already have a lulav and esrog," He explained. His guest's eyes lit up excitedly. "Would I be able to see them?" He asked eagerly.

R' Efraim led his guest to the breakfront and removed a beautiful silver box. From the box, he took out a wrapped bundle and carefully began to peel away the layers before proudly displaying the esrog.

"Wow," Nosson Nota breathed, squinting at the esrog from all sides. It was truly a beautiful fruit. He then examined the lulav that his host held out and was equally impressed. "They are both magnificent," He exclaimed.

R' Efraim beamed, glad his guest understood how beautiful his lulav and esrog truly were. "Would you like to use my arbah minim on Sukkos?" He offered generously, and R' Nosson Nota gratefully accepted.

"I see you are a talmid chacham?" R' Efraim prodded, trying to get him to open up.

"I wish I was a talmid chacham," R' Nosson Nota responded, shrugging. "But I do know that your lulav and esrog are one of a kind. Are you also building a sukkah?"

"Most definitely," R' Efraim confirmed. "In fact, although it is only the beginning of Elul, we are already in the process of building the sukkah. Would you like to come see it?"

"Sure," R' Nosson Nota replied.

The two men walked out together toward the expansive yard. A few sukkah boards were already standing, with many more lying nearby. Nosson Nota ran his fingers over the rich wood. "R' Efraim, when putting up this wall, perhaps you should do it like this?" He proceeded to demonstrate.

He didn't have to say that his instructions were according to a specific shitah; his host recognized he was a talmid chacham and understood this on his own. "Sure, no problem," R' Efraim responded agreeably.

R' Nosson Nota then offered another comment, and then a few more, incorporating various shittos to ensure the sukkah would be built with every possible chumrah. His host amiably agreed to all his suggestions.

Later, after R' Nosson Nota retired to his room to learn, R' Efraim mused about his interesting guest. It was clear he was a tremendous talmid chacham who was well-versed in lulav and esrog, in sukkah. He was also an incredible masmid. It was likely that he was someone very special. However, he refused to divulge his name and also tried to minimize showing his vast knowledge. But R' Efraim was okay with it. He was happy to share his home and his possessions with this special, if anonymous, guest.

As the weeks went by, however, his feelings began to change. His guest had been by him for

almost a month and half. Granted, he barely consumed any food, yet he lived in the house and utilized his possessions. He had various idiosyncrasies that were catered to without question, such as davening in the small shtiebel, and leaving the house in the middle of the night. R' Efraim cherished the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim, yet he had to admit that he was getting annoyed by his guest's behavior. Despite living off of R' Efraim's largesse for so many weeks, he refused to answer any personal questions. He didn't show a single sign of leaving. Was he planning on moving in permanently? R' Efraim didn't want to chase him out, but he began to hope that he would leave soon.

Erev Sukkos arrived. In towns all over Poland, men were putting the final touches on their sukkahs while their children finished decorating the interior of their temporary abodes. Women stood on their feet in the kitchen, mixing and grating, cooking and baking, churning out dish after dish for yom tov.

Shortly before yom tov, R' Efraim met R' Nosson Nota in the hallway and noticed that his face had an unusual glow. "You look very happy," He commented. "Is there a reason why?"

"Tonight is Sukkos," His guest replied joyfully, as if stating the obvious. Of course he was happy. Sukkos was here! He turned to his host with a question of his own. "R' Efraim, would you mind if I slept in your sukkah tonight?"

R' Efraim hesitated for a moment. "I would love for you to sleep in my sukkah," He began slowly. "There's one small problem. I am a wealthy man, and I own an array of gold and silver objects. I beautify my sukkah and show my respect for it by displaying these objects inside. Therefore, my sukkah is always locked when I am not inside it." He was quiet for another moment, thinking. "You can sleep in the sukkah. But please, when you leave the sukkah, it is imperative that you remember to lock the door to protect my gold and

silver from thieves. I will give you the key, but you must not forget."

R' Nosson Nota grasped his hands in gratitude. "Thank you," He whispered emotionally. "You cannot imagine how much this means to me."

When R' Nosson Nota entered the sukkah on the first night of yom tov, his face shone like he was on fire. He was a man who genuinely understood the greatness of being in a sukkah. He truly felt as if he was in the shadow of Hashem, and he appreciated every moment. When he made kiddush, it was apparent to R' Efraim and the entire family that their guest was no ordinary person.

After the festive yom tov meal, R' Efraim provided his nameless guest with a key to the sukkah and repeated his firm instructions that the sukkah be locked whenever it was empty, even if it was just for a few moments. "Should I bring you a bed?" He asked in concern on his way out.

"No, don't worry about me," R' Nosson Nota replied. "I don't plan on sleeping much." He took the key his host provided and placed it next to him on the table.

As soon as R' Efraim left the sukkah and closed the door behind him, R' Nosson Nota began to work on opening his heart to truly connect with the Shechinah. He swayed back and forth, as he went through various kabbalistic rituals. He concentrated intently on actually feeling Hashem's embrace through the four walls of the sukkah. His eyes closed, his concentration total, R' Nosson Nota was truly in a different, purer, better world.

It was an open secret that R' Efraim, the town's gvir, decorated his sukkah with his many gold and silver vessels. A band of thieves decided to utilize this information to try to lay their hands on some of the riches. They assumed that a flimsy sukkah couldn't be all that secure.

In the dead of the night, they crept up to the wooden sukkah and carefully turned the door handle. To their excitement, it gave way. One of the thieves pushed the door open soundlessly and peered inside. Was the owner of the sukkah present? Or was it safe to attempt the heist?

“Look!” The thief whispered to his friends. There was a lone man sitting in the sukkah. However, his eyes were closed and he appeared to be in a world of his own.

“Quick! Before he wakes up!” The robber chief commanded, stuffing an empty sack into the hands of a tall, lanky accomplice. “Fill up the sack, boys.”

The thieves tiptoed past R’ Nosson Nota and began looting the sukkah, taking everything of value. Then, they left as stealthily as they had appeared, closing the door gently behind them. R’ Nosson Nota, still in shamayim, didn’t notice a thing.

In the morning, R’ Efraim’s springing footsteps sounded outside the sukkah as he approached it with his lulav and esrog, ready to make the brachah. He entered the wooden structure, looked around, and gasped in shock. All his gold, all his silver, everything of value had completely vanished. And sitting in middle of the painfully bare sukkah was his nameless guest, swaying back and forth with his eyes squeezed shut.

R’ Efraim walked up to his guest and brought his face mere inches away from the other man. “Thief!” He cried accusingly.

R’ Nosson Nota’s eyes fluttered open abruptly, and he jumped in his seat, looking dazed. “Wh..wh..what?”

“Thief!” R’ Efraim repeated, his voice loud and harsh. He lifted his hand and delivered a ringing slap to his guest’s cheek. “After all I did for you!” He continued, his voice trembling. “I took you in, I gave you a home, for weeks! And you, not only do you refuse to tell me your name, you pay me back with irresponsibility! Thief!” His hand reached out a second time and delivered another smack to R’ Nosson Nota’s flaming cheeks.

R’ Nosson Nota looked around and realized that his host was correct. The gold and silver objects that had graced the sukkah were all gone. When had it happened? He had been in the sukkah the entire time and he had not noticed anyone! He bore the degrading blows stoically.

However, he suddenly realized that his host’s anger might endanger his ability to preform the mitzvah of arbah minim. Blows he could handle, but losing out on arbah minim? That was too much. Tears filled his eyes, and he pleaded with his host, “I’m terribly sorry for causing you such a tremendous loss. I understand that you are angry with me. But please, please, don’t deny me the zechus of using your lulav and esrog!”

R’ Efraim didn’t honor him with a response. He simply turned on his heel and left the sukkah, carrying his arbah minim.

R’ Nosson Nota jumped up and followed him, his eyes never leaving the precious objects in host’s hands as they made their way toward the main shul, where R’ Efraim would be davening. Although R’ Nosson Nota had been careful to avoid big shuls, he now had no choice. If he

wanted the lulav and esrog, he would have to daven wherever R' Efraim decided.

R' Efraim, who was still seething with anger, did not exchange a single word with his guest for the first two days of yom tov. However, on both days, when the minyan reached Hallel, R' Efraim swallowed his deep resentment and allowed his guest to use the lulav and esrog. His eyes shining, emotion stamped across his features, R' Nosson Nota recited the brachos and shook the arbah minim.

Their cold war lasted only as long as yom tov lasted. On the first day of Chol Hamoed, R' Efraim informed his guest that he was taking him to the rav to sort out what had occurred and to determine if his guest was responsible for the tremendous damage. R' Nosson Nota immediately complied.

The two men entered the rav's study and were invited to sit down. However, before R' Efraim could even begin speaking, the rav excused himself and left the room. Something about the guest R' Efraim had brought reminded him of the letter he had received regarding a missing person. He reached into his drawer and reread the letter. It was about a young man on an extremely elevated level who had disappeared after his brothers-in-law had perished from something in which he had been involved. The description of the young man sounded very similar to the man currently sitting in his study. Thoughtfully, the rav put back the letter and rejoined the two men.

"How can I help you?" The rav asked, smiling warmly at the two men.

R' Efraim lost no time listing his grievances. "I took him in, I gave him food, I gave him a place to stay. For a month and half, he lives off of me. He won't even tell me his name. I asked him only one thing: to be careful while spending time in my sukkah that thieves don't get to my valuables. One thing I asked of him! And that one thing he couldn't do! All my valuables are gone. It's not

the money that bothers me so much, it's the lack of decency. Where is his *menchlichkeit*?"

The rav listened carefully and then nodded. "If you'll excuse us, R' Efraim, I would like to speak to your guest privately in the next room." He stood up and motioned to R' Nosson Nota to follow him.

In the next room, the rav handed R' Nosson Nota the letter, and it took the young man only a moment to recognize the handwriting. It was written by his father-in-law. He read the letter quickly, his face not betraying anything that was happening in his mind.

"R' Yid," The Rav said gently after R' Nosson Nota returned the letter. "Are you by any chance the missing person in the letter?"

R' Nosson Nota didn't want to deny it, yet he certainly could not admit it either. He chose the only other option available, and remained silent.

"As Rav, I am using my authority to command you to reply," The rav said, his tone stern but his smile warm and friendly. "Are you the young man in the letter?"

R' Nosson Nota looked the rav in the eye. "I am," He admitted quietly.

"Tell me what happened," The rav said. Seeing that R' Nosson Nota was attempting to evade the question, he reiterated his authority as rav and commanded him to respond. "You must tell me. What happened to your brothers-in-law? Why did you disappear?"

"I had two older brothers-in-law," R' Nosson Nota began reluctantly. "There was some... animosity, perhaps jealousy, between us. They followed me and hid in the room when I said tikkun chatzos. I had no idea they were there. Maybe I was wrong. Perhaps I shouldn't have

said tikkun chatzos since I knew they were curious. It's too dangerous."

"Dangerous?" The rav asked skeptically. "I also say tikkun chatzos. It's not dangerous."

Tears began to stream out of R' Nosson Nota's eyes. "Does the rav understand what tikkun chatzos is?" He asked through his tears. "Tikkun chatzos! The shechina is in exile!" At this point, the young man was swaying forward and backward. "What is tikkun chatzos? As you cry with your entire being for the shechina, your neshama disconnects from its body until it flies up to shamayim. There, you can hear the malachim, the chayos hakodesh, crying bitterly for the shechina. When you say tikkun chatzos, the malachim are with you and you cry together with them. You no longer have a body, you no longer are a body. You are crying with the malachim."

R' Nosson Nota looked at the rav. "Most people simply can't bear such an overload of kedushah. It's sakanas nefashos for them to be present when this happens. I warned my brothers-in-law not to come, and they didn't heed my warning. They came, and they died. I warned them! I didn't know they were there! I did not intend for this to happen. It isn't my fault."

The rav gazed at R' Nosson Nota with fresh eyes. "And R' Efraim?" He asked softly. "What happened in R' Efraim's sukkah?"

"Honored rav, I'll be honest," R' Nosson Nota replied. "I'm not really sure what happened. I was sitting in the sukkah the entire time, just soaking in the tremendous kedushah. I was lost in my thoughts, and I simply didn't notice anything. Not the passage of time, not the howling winds. I certainly did not notice thieves coming in and making off with the gold and silver."

"Can you tell me what kind of kavanos you were having in the sukkah?" The rav asked curiously.

"Does the rav understand what a sukkah is? A sukkah!" R' Nosson Nota exclaimed. "In the sukkah, we are in the shadow of the shechina itself! If you look properly, you can actually see Hashem's Name in the four walls of the sukkah. In the sukkah, the only kavanos a person can have is regarding the sheimos of Hashem. What was I thinking about? How can a person think of anything else besides Hashem?"

The rav was stunned by his reply. Sitting before him was no ordinary man, but a malach Hashem! "R' Nosson Nota," He said respectfully. "Please remain with me until after yom tov. After yom tov, we will go together to Crackow, back to your wife and family, and then I want you to return here to become the rav of this city."

The rav stood up and went back to his study, where R' Efraim was looking into a sefer as he waited. "R' Efraim," The rav announced. "I want you to realize that the person you were zoche to host is a true angel. What a zchus you had!"

"What is the rav saying?" R' Efraim asked in confusion.

"Don't you understand who your guest is?" The rav asked. "He's a walking sefer Torah. He's one of the greatest mekubalim of our generation. And he's so young!" The rav then proceeded to recount his conversation with R' Nosson Nota to his astonished congregant.

R' Efraim bit his lip in dismay. "I smacked him twice," He whispered, his face white. "Such an extraordinary individual, and I hit him twice!" Taking leave of the rav, he ran after his guest to beg him for forgiveness. "Please, R' Yid," He begged. "Forgive me! I didn't realize... I should have never hit you."

His young guest regarded him, a distressed look in his eyes. "You should know, R' Efraim," He said softly. "After you hit me the first time, there was a terrible decree against you in shamayim.

When you smacked me a second time, it was decreed that you would have to die. When the honor of a talmid chacham is in jeopardy, Hashem Himself comes out to ensure that it is restored. Although I don't consider myself a talmid chacham, in Heaven, they consider me to be one, and therefore it was decreed that you will die."

Hearing his death sentence spelled out so starkly, R' Efraim began to sob. "Please," He begged. "I did hachnasas orchim and welcomed you into my home. I gave you a lulav and esrog. Please, forgive me! Spare me!"

R' Nosson Nota nodded. R' Efraim was right. He did provide him with a lulav and esrog. He squeezed his eyes shut and concentrated intently. A few moments later, he said softly, "Alright, you will not die. Instead, you will become a pauper. Since a pauper is compared to a dead man, you'll fulfill your sentence that way."

R' Efraim continued to weep. "R' Yid! I gave you a lulav and esrog, and I also provided you with a sukkah!" He reminded him in desperation.

"You're right," R' Nosson Nota agreed. He concentrated again for a few moments. "In that zchus, you won't be a pauper. You'll have just enough parnassah to live, but you will never be wealthy again."

"Please, just forgive me completely," R' Efraim pleaded.

"I'm so sorry," R' Nosson Nota responded sincerely. "I truly wish I could forgive you, but there are halachos regarding one who shames a talmid chacham. It's not up to me to be mochel on the honor of the Torah."

Immediately following yom tov, a fire broke out. R' Efraim's palatial home, along with everything inside, went up in smoke. He lost every single thing he owned. Just a short while later, he was visited by the police, who had caught the thieves

who had stolen his valuables from his sukkah and came to return them to him. With the money from the sales of his gold and silver, R' Efraim was able to support himself simply for the rest of his life. Everything R' Nosson Nota had foretold had come to fruition.

As for R' Nosson Nota? Shortly after yom tov, the rav of the city came to visit him, and against his wishes, absolved him of his commitment of a year of galus. "You've suffered enough," The rav said firmly, "And so has your family. It is time to go home." R' Nosson Nota tried protesting, but the rav was adamant. "We'll go together to Crackow, back to your family," He said, and then reiterated his desire to have the young man take over the rabbinic leadership in the town.

"I will obey the rav and go with him to Crackow," R' Nosson Nota replied humbly. "However, I don't think I am able to take over your position in this town."

Not protesting, the rav hired a carriage to take them to Crackow. The entire city of Crackow was up in arms when R' Nosson Nota Shapiro suddenly showed up, accompanied by the respected rav of a faraway town. Together, the two men made their way to the Eberless home.

When R' Moshe Eberless laid his eyes on his missing son-in-law, he almost fainted. Collapsing into a chair, he called weakly for his daughter, and Roiza came running into the room. She, too, turned pale at the sight of her husband, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Can you try to forgive me?" R' Nosson Nota pleaded, falling before his father-in-law. "Tikkun chatzos is tikkun chatzos, but it was never my intention to harm anyone. Please, can you try to forgive me?"

To overcome to speak, R' Moshe nodded, and soon everyone in the room was weeping alongside Roiza.

Since R' Nosson Nota had refused the rabbinic position in the town where he had spent two months of his galus, the rav came up with a different suggestion. He discussed his idea with the respected individuals in the city, and just a short while later, young R' Nosson Nota was appointed rav of the city of Crackow. For the next twenty-six years, until his untimely passing in 1633 at the young age of forty-seven years old, R' Nosson Nota Shapiro stood at the helm of Crackow's yiddishkeit, guiding its Jews with his wisdom and incredible piety. He became well-known as the Megaleh Amukos and wrote a commentary on the Rif that is studied by talmidei chachamim until today.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # TB80b 2004

TORAS REB KALMAN HOTLINE

Vaadin & Shmussen given by **Reb Kalman Krohn zt"l** are now available by phone.

USA **732.913.5616** or **718.557.7711**
E.Y. **02.313.6038**

Option 1: Vaadin given in BMG
Option 2: Shmussen given in Adelpia
Option 3: Captivating stories taken from shiurim

To receive Vaadin by email or for questions and suggestions call/text 609.807.1783 or email torasrebkalman@gmail.com

Toras Reb Kalman
Lakewood New Jersey
609.807.1783
torasrebkalman@gmail.com

Sponsored by:
Eli & Malky Friedman
Chatz & Leahle Schwab