

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

From Ordinary to Extraordinary

When we learn Gemara with *meforshim*, and we reflect upon the greatness of the *tannaim*, *amoraim*, *rishonim*, and *acharonim*, it is amazing to try to understand the heights these giants managed to scale. Often, however, we assume that these *talmidei chachamim* were born special; they were created to be righteous and diligent. When comparing imperfect selves to these tremendous people, it is easy to become hopeless. After all, we have so many *nisyonos* that we don't always succeed in conquering!

However, it is important to realize that many of our *gedolim* were born with the very same flaws and *middos* that we have. We have no way of knowing what the Rif was like when he was young or what *techunos hanefesh* the Rambam was born with. If we invest enough effort, with enough determination, and we set our goals high enough, we, too, will become something great. The following stories illustrate this point.

When the *yidden*, led by Moshe *Rabbeinu*, left *Mitzrayim*, it was a world-famous event. From one remote corner of the earth to the other, there was no one who had not heard of the incredible miracles that had occurred in *Mitzrayim* and at the *Yam Suf*. As the wonderous stories were told and retold, people could not help but wonder about the special nation and its venerated leader, Moshe.

One Arab king commissioned a team of artists to travel to the desert and capture Moshe's face on canvas. The group of talented illustrators trekked across the dessert, where they carefully studied and drew Moshe *Rabbeinu's* likeness. The end result was a massive, realistic looking painting of Moshe. Their mission accomplished, the artists returned to their home country and presented the painting to their king.

The king was pleased with their work, yet gazing at the likeness of Moshe *Rabbeinu* didn't satisfy his curiosity regarding the leader of the Jewish nation. After all, it was just a painting of his face. Therefore, he summoned some men who were able to read faces, to understand things about people through the lines and wrinkles and idents on their faces.

The men sat down before the painting and studied it quietly, each privately recording his finding into a notebook. When they finished, the men compared notes, and discovered that they had all reached the same conclusions. From studying Moshe's features, they all concluded that he was a murderer, a thief, an impulsive man with the worst *middos* possible.

When the king heard these results, he grew angry. Moshe *Rabbeinu* was the leader of the holiest nation of the world! It was absolutely impossible that he was even just slightly evil, and certainly not as terrible as they were insisting. "Something isn't right here," The king exclaimed, his cheeks bulging in rage. "Either the artists did not draw his features correctly, or the wise men did not know how to read his features correctly!"

Fearing for their lives, both groups of men swore that they had done their jobs properly.

The king, confused, decided to travel to meet Moshe *Rabbeinu* himself. He could not trust others to do the job for him. Riding on his white stallion and accompanied by the highest ministers of the land and a large entourage of guards, he made his way across the desert to meet Moshe *Rabbeinu*.

Upon his first glimpse of Moshe, the king shrank back in fright. He immediately recognized that this was the great Jewish leader, as Moshe looked exactly like the painting he had commissioned. A fiery *kedushah* blazed over Moshe's face, and it was clear to the king that this was an *ish haElokim*. He immediately dismounted from his horse and bowed deeply before Moshe.

Speaking with tremendous respect, he introduced himself as the king of a faraway land, and explained that he had commissioned a painting of Moshe, which was frighteningly realistic. Slightly embarrassed, the king related the conclusions of the face-readers and asked for an explanation. "How could it be that they came to such terrible, obviously baseless conclusions?"

Moshe *Rabbeinu*'s response should serve as a lesson for all of us. "According to my nature, your face-readers are absolutely correct," He responded. "I was born with a murderous nature, with a thieving, impulsive nature. My natural instinct is to do evil. However, I accepted the Torah upon myself. I subjugated myself and my nature completely to the Torah. And this is how, despite my nature, I was able to become who I am."

Moshe *Rabbeinu* was not born Moshe *Rabbeinu*. He was born with many imperfections, with the desire to do everything bad. And yet by bowing to the will of the Torah, he succeeded in changing himself and his nature to become a person on the highest *madreigah* possible.

(This story can be found in the *Yachin Uboaz* on the fourth *perek* of *Kiddushin*, brought down from the *Shita Mekubetzes*.)

Another story with a similar message:

The Zohar *Hakadosh* had a grandson named Yosi, who unfortunately found himself mired in a spiritual rut. He allowed his yetzer *harah* to get the better of him, and was soon immersed in the worst kinds of *aveiros*.

Rebbi, R' Yehudah Hanasi, was once in the city where Yosi resided, and inquired after him. "*Im yesh ben loso tzaddik?* Is a son of the tzaddik R' Eliezer ben R' Shimon bar Yochai living in this city?" Rebbi asked.

When he heard that Yosi did indeed live in the city, yet was caught up in terrible *aveiros*, Rebbi decided to take him under his wing and try to steer him toward *teshuvah*. He warmly brought Yosi to the *bais medrash*, where he gave him a special purple cloak, the kind that was worn by the *gedolim* of that generation. He began calling him Reb Yosi and treating him with the respect that one would display toward a genuine *talmid chacham*. He instructed a *Tanna*, R' Yosi ben Luknia, to mentor the young man. With time, Reb Yosi ben Reb Eliezer grew into the role that Rebbi designated for him and became worthy of the purple cloak he wore. He became a true *gadol hador*.

The *meforshim* explain that the only way it was possible to turn someone like Reb Yosi around so completely was because he immersed himself in Torah. Torah has the power to completely transform a person for the better.

(This story is in *Bava Metzia*, *daf* 85)

Here's another story of a person who conquered his nature and was rewarded by becoming viceroy, second to the king of the land.

There was once a king whose favorite sport was shooting with his bow and arrow. From when he was a young boy, he would go into the forest to practice shooting. He was a skilled archer and managed to shoot his targets with incredible aim. As he grew older, he perfected his aim until, as king, he was the greatest archer in the land, easily winning every shooting competition.

At some point, however, he grew weary of being just the best shooter in his own land. He wanted to prove that in this area, he was the greatest in the entire world. He organized an international competition, where he invited representation from countries around the world. Every land sent its most talented bowmen to compete against the king. Targets were set up in the distance, and the archers prepared their bows, ready to show their skill and to try to best the king.

The bowmen first competed against each other. As each man lost, he would drop out of the competition. Eventually, a winner emerged from amongst all the archers, and he was invited to a competition with the king.

Two targets were set up in the vast distance. The targets were a few inches wide in diameter, and they were comprised of a few rings of color with a bull's eye in the center. As ruler and host, the king was honored with taking the first few shots. Squinting at his target, the king shot one arrow after the next, and they all landed squarely within the bull's eye of the target. The spectators cheered enthusiastically at their king's precision and aim.

The winner of the international competition, a man whom we'll call Peter, was invited to try next. Rounding back his shoulders, he lifted his bow and took aim. One after the other, his arrows whistled through the air and landed on the outer ring of the target. While he had definitely not missed the target, he had also failed to get them into the bull's eye like the king had.

The king was declared the victor, and the audience applauded loudly.

After the competition, the king began a friendly discussion regarding the skill of archery with Peter. The two strolled over to the targets as the king explained his strategies. Peter listened carefully, respectfully, as the king showed off his target from up close. The bull's eye was an area of a few centimeters in diameter, and the king's arrows were latched near each other within the bull's eye.

After looking over his own target with satisfaction, the king made his way to Peter's target. He was amazed to discover that every single one of Peter's arrows had entered the target at the exact same spot, one on top of the other. In astonishment, the king realized that Peter's skill was really much greater than his own. His aim was so precise that he was able to direct his arrows not within a few centimeters of each other, but on the exact same spot. The king understood that his competitor had deliberately avoided the bull's eye to allow his host, the ruler of the land, to achieve victory.

The king turned to his guest. "Tell me the truth," He prodded. "Did you do your very best in this shooting competition?"

Peter's face reddened slightly, and he began to hem and haw.

"The way I see it," The king continued, "Your aim is too precise to have accidentally missing the bull's eye. You were able to get twenty arrows into the same exact spot, and yet you couldn't get them into the bull's eye?"

Peter looked down at the ground. "Your Majesty is correct," He said quietly. "I could have gotten them all into the same spot within the center of the target. However, I felt it wouldn't have been honorable for the king for someone to best him in

the competition, and therefore I directed my arrows at the outer rings of the target.”

“Yet you participated in the contest, which was designed to see who can best me,” The king protested.

“Yes,” The other man replied, still averting his eyes. “And then, as I took my first shot at the target, I changed my mind. I decided that it was worth losing the competition and not disgracing the name of the king.”

The king was amazed that Peter was able to exercise such control over his obviously competitive nature. He was so impressed that on the spot, he appointed Peter as viceroy of the kingdom.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A102

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