

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Blinded by Money

The Noam Elimelech was one of the five main disciples of the Magid of Mezritch. He was a tremendous giant in Torah and was *zoche* to a high level of *ruach hakodesh*.

Every Rosh Chodesh, the Noam Elimelech would preside over a *seudah*, where the *chassidim* would sing and he would say *divrei* Torah. One month, during an especially packed Rosh Chodesh *seudah*, the *chassidim* were in the midst of listening, spellbound, as their Rebbe gave over pearls of wisdom from the Torah. Suddenly, the door opened, and two men walked in.

The Noam Elimelech stopped speaking. "I cannot believe it," He said quietly. "These people have the audacity to show up at a Rosh Chodesh *seudah* without wearing any clothing on their bodies! Since the times of Adam *Harishon*, this has never been done!"

Everyone looked toward the door, at the two men standing there. As far as they could tell, both men were fully dressed. What was the Rebbe talking about?

"I have never in my life seen a Jew as bare of *ruchniyus* as these two men!" The Rebbe explained. "They are not clothed in any *mitzvos* whatsoever!"

When the two Jews at the door hear the Rebbe's words, they feel faint. What did the Rebbe mean, they had no *ruchniyus*? They were *shomer* Shabbos, people who tried to observe the *mitzvos*. Sitting down at the table with shaky legs, they listened as the Noam Elimelech continued.

"Do you know why you are bare of *mitzvos*?" The Rebbe asked. "It is because you shamed Rav Yechiel Michel, Rebbe of Zlotchov! He almost passed away from the terrible destruction you wrought! And because of this terrible sin, you lost all of your *mitzvos*! Only your *aveiros* still remain with you."

The two men replied, "The Rebbe is right. We realize that we are guilty of a terrible transgression, and we came here to ask you to help us correct our wrongdoing."

"Please come up to the front," The Noam Elimelech instructed. "Please announce to everyone what you did! The embarrassment of letting everyone know what you did wrong will serve as your atonement." The two men stood up, and after much hesitation, they began recounting the following story.

"My friend and I were both very wealthy, and we lived in large mansions on sprawling, gated properties side by side," One of the men began. "We were business partners and close friends, and our wealth was one joint account shared between us. We would each withdraw funds from our joint accounts for our private use. Hashem blessed our ventures with success. We were buying out tracts of land, and our wealth kept growing.

"One of our employees owned a home on the outskirts of the city, in a location that we thought

would become very valuable. We offered to buy off his property, yet he refused. He didn't want to uproot his family and search for a new home elsewhere. We pushed him a little more, yet he held his ground. He was comfortable where he was, and he had no interest in selling."

At this point in their story, the two men began looking uncomfortable, yet they forged on. "We had already bought out all of the lots surrounding his property. At this point, he was the only one holding out, and his refusal to sell was hindering our plans for developing the area. With visions of an ever-greater fortune, we were not ready to give up on buying his land. He was our employee, after all, and so we had some leverage over him. Unable to control ourselves, we offered him an ultimatum: Either he sold us his home, which we would pay him handsomely for, or we would fire him from his position. Without a job, he would be unable to feed his family.

"Our employee could not believe that we, two frum Jews, two wealthy men who had more than enough money already, would actually cause a family to go hungry just to grow their assets some more. He began yelling at us, telling us how cruel we were, for kicking a family out of its lodgings or firing its only breadwinner. He refused to believe that we would actually stoop to firing him for refusing to sell. However, I am ashamed to admit that this is exactly what we did. We stripped him of his position and left him and his family hungry.

"Left without a livelihood, the man tried to invest his meager savings. Then he tried to earn some money off his property. Yet all of his efforts failed. He was forced to go from door to door, begging for food to feed his family. Although we were generally happy to support the members of our community, we refused to give to him, since we understood that when he hit desperation, he would finally agree to sell us the property.

"When his situation became truly unbearable, we went to him with our offer. We explained that although he had snubbed our original, generous bid on the house, we were still willing to buy it off of him. At this point, however, we would only do so for a third of the property's value. Instead of offering him the full six hundred rubles that his home was worth, we would purchase it for two hundred. Our former employee's financial situation had hit rock bottom, and although he loathed to sell his home, and certainly not for such a low price, he accepted our offer since he had no other choice. He had no other way how to feed his children.

"At our insistence, he wrote up a contract, stipulating that he would sell us the property for the bargain price of two hundred ruble, and all three of us signed the agreement. However, without us realizing, he had added two little words into the contract: *shelo birtzoni*, I am agreeing to these terms against my will. After we signed the contract, we paid him his two hundred rubles and ordered him out of the house within the week. He, his wife, and his young children were forced to pack up and find a small hut on the other side of town to live in. We then generously offered to rehire him, yet also for one third of his previous salary.

"The stress of being kicked out of his home, earning just a pittance for its sale, and losing two-thirds of his livelihood was too much for our newly rehired employee. Within a short time, he got sick from heartache, and he passed away shortly thereafter. While his friends and relatives were reeling from the sudden passing of a young man, they didn't make the connection between his money troubles and his tragic death. His wife, however, was very aware of the correlation, yet she was afraid to start up with us, the two most powerful Jews in the city. The family had suffered enough at our hands, she decided. There was no reason to provoke us further.

“It was common knowledge in his family that despite his poverty, our former employee had owned his home. His relatives reasoned that after paying the widow the value of her *kesubah* and setting aside funds for the young children, they might stand to inherit something from the *yerushah*. They traveled in from a nearby village to come see if there was anything of value from the inheritance that they could claim.

“They were astonished to hear that the house had been sold shortly before their relative’s death. They came to us, demanding to see the contract proving that we had bought the property. We produced the contract, and they immediately noticed that the wording of the agreement clearly stated that the former owner had felt forced to sell. They informed us that they would be taking us to *din Torah*.

“We were summoned to a *din Torah* before Rav Yechiel Michel of Zlotchov. The plaintiffs were the widow and her relatives, and they argued that the contract was not valid since it had been done by compulsion, as was written on the agreement. Rav Yechiel Michel asked to see the contract, and after glancing at it, he declared that it was null. His holiness was such that as soon as he pronounced that the agreement was void, the physical letters with which it was written disappeared from the page. The page became blank. Rav Yechiel Michel showed us that there was no contract at all, and tore the empty page in half. He then addressed us in the harshest terms, calling us cruel murderers, and demanded that we return the property to its rightful owner, the widow and her family.

“It was very difficult for us to be shamed in public like that, and we vowed to take revenge. When an opportunity came our way shortly thereafter, we quickly took advantage of it. Through our business dealings, we had developed a positive working relationship with the government minister in charge of the commerce in our area. Shortly after the *din Torah*, we were in the

commerce minister’s office, when he began to question a business trend in the town of Zlotchov. While the prices in all other towns would fluctuate depending on supply and demand, prices in Zlotchov always remained constant. The Jews of the town would all charge a set price, no matter the circumstances. Since we were Jews, he asked if we had any idea of the reasoning behind this. Seizing the opportunity, we told the minister that Rav Yechiel Michel, the *rov* of the town, rules with an iron fist. He controls the economy by setting prices, and people are afraid to defy him.

“As we expected, the commerce minister grew furious when he heard our accusation against Rav Yechiel Michel. He felt threatened that someone, and a Jew no less, was usurping his position as controller of the market and economy. We helped fuel his fury as much as we could, and within a short time, he decided to prosecute Rav Yechiel Michel.

“With his *ruach hakodesh*, Rav Yechiel Michel was aware of the entire story, and he was not surprised to be summoned to the commerce minister. He was brought before the minister, who was flanked by guards with whips, ready to mete out justice onto the hapless Rebbe. Rav Yechiel Michel immediately declared that the charges against him were true. He did indeed set the prices and control the town’s economy, he admitted, since he wanted to ensure that every Jew would have sufficient *parnassah*, as well as the ability to afford necessities. After this confession, one of the guards stepped forward and raised his whip, ready to bring it down hard. Rav Yechiel Michel’s holy eyes bore into the man, and the guard suddenly found that his arm had become paralyzed, frozen midair. The next guard took over, yet he, too, became paralyzed. Frightened, the minister realized that he was not dealing with an ordinary person, and he began to plead with Rav Yechiel Michel for forgiveness for trying to harm him. Rav Yechiel Michel agreed to forgive him on condition that he leave the affairs of the

town alone, and immediately, the guards regained movement.

The two Jews finished recounting their story, and they stood there silently, eyes downcast. It had been painfully shameful for them to publicly expose their horrific deeds, yet they were grateful that they had been able to atone for their sin with the embarrassment they endured.

When someone has money in his pocket, it is easy for him to feel entitled, to step on others who have less. Whether it's a yeshiva bachur with an extra-large allowance or an adult who was blessed with wealth, having money gives a person an illusion of being in control, of being able acquire whatever he desires, no matter the price, no matter the circumstances. It is important to be extra sensitive to ensure that we are sharing our blessings instead of using and abusing those with lesser means.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A159

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