

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Reb Hershel Zidechoiver

Rav Hershel Zidechoiver was one of the great Chassidic *rebbe*s of yore and was well-versed in the entire Torah, including kabbalah. Every Shavuot, he would preside over a gathering for his followers, where he would relate the following story.

When Rav Hershel Zidechoiver was a young man, he was terribly destitute. He had no means to feed his family, often not even bread, and his home was bitterly cold. He would spend his day in his study in the loft, where he would sate himself with the words of Torah and warm his soul with the fire of learning.

Downstairs, his wife and children would huddle together, freezing, dark, and starving. His wife was a true helpmate, and she bore her plot heroically, trying to stretch each piece of bread to keep a happy atmosphere in the home.

One day, however, the hunger and cold got too much for her to bear. Ascending the rickety steps to her husband's alcove, where he sat immersed

in Torah, she began to cry. "Doesn't it say כל מזונותיו קצובין מראש השנה ועד ראש השנה? Am I not a human being? Where is my sustenance?" She asked plaintively. "For myself, I'm willing to starve, but it's so difficult to watch the children, freezing, without anything to eat. Please, *daven* for us that we should have food and warm shelter! You are a *tzaddik*; surely Hashem will listen to your *tefillos*!"

Rav Hershel listened silently, allowing her to free her emotions.

The *rebbeitzen* continued. "It says תפרנסנו ככלב - give me *parnasah* like a raven. Although a raven is cruel, he still gives a certain amount of food. I'm not asking for much. All I need is a small amount of food to feed my children!"

Rav Hershel continued to listen, but did not respond.

"Besides," His wife forged on, "Isn't it a *chilul* Hashem? Everyone knows that you are a pious man, devoted to the service of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Isn't it a disgrace to Hashem's name that the children of such an *oved* Hashem are clothed in rags and have almost nothing to eat? There are plenty of wicked people with an abundance of blessings in their lives. Shouldn't you receive at least as much?"

"I'm so sorry," He apologized. "I feel terrible about your pain. But the *Eibeshter* is not to blame for our suffering. You are correct; Hashem has enough *parnasah* for everyone. It is because of my sins that we don't have *parnasah*."

Hearing his words, his wife knew she could not argue, and so she left the room, sobbing quietly into her handkerchief.

Watching her leave the room, it ached Rav Hershel that his wife and family were suffering so. However, he accepted the pain and continued

on, ready as always to serve his Master no matter how difficult the circumstances.

Like many tzaddikim of his generation, Rav Hershel was accustomed to going to sleep shortly after *Maariv* and then waking up at *chatzos*. Despite the late hour, he would rise at *chatzos* with vigor and enthusiasm, ready to recite *tikkun chatzos* and then learn until daybreak. Due to his extreme poverty, there was no fire burning in his home. Therefore, he would grope around in darkness and learn by the feeble moonlight under freezing conditions.

On the night after his conversation with his wife, Rav Hershel awoke at *chatzos* and began his nightly ritual. Sitting on the floor, he cried bitterly, not for his own suffering, yet for the pain of the *Shechinah* and all the Jews in *galus*. He wept the way he always wept as he recited *tikkun chatzos*.

As he concluded *tikkun chatzos*, he suddenly heard a thump and then saw a spark in the darkness. Frightened that a fire would break out, he threw some water at the small glowing light, but the spark was not put out. Growing more afraid, he tried dousing it with water again, yet it continued to glow.

Cautiously, Rav Hershel drew a little closer, and in the moonlight, he saw that the spark of light was emanating from a small stone. To him, it was reminiscent of the stone that Noach had in the *teivah* to provide light. Realizing that this was no ordinary spark, he left the stone where it was and continued learning, afraid to touch it. As morning drew closer, however, he worried that his wife or children might play around with the stone. Carefully, he picked it up off the floor and hid it behind some *seforim*.

The next day was no different than any other. His children were still hungry, his home was still dark, and the temperature was still unbearably frigid.

In the late afternoon, Rav Hershel requested of his devoted assistant to please summon R' Ze'ev, a trustworthy jeweler from a nearby town. His assistant immediately went to do his bidding, and soon R' Ze'ev arrived. Rav Hershel closeted himself in his study privately with the jeweler and then explained what he wanted.

"I'm unable to go into much detail," Rav Hershel began. "The crux of the story is that I have a diamond, and since you are known as a trustworthy person, I would like your appraisal of the stone."

"Of course," R' Ze'ev replied respectfully, standing in awe of the holy man before him. He waited as Rav Hershel reached behind some *seforim*, certain that the diamond he would present for examination would be nothing more than a small stone.

To his surprise, Rav Hershel handed him a diamond the size of his fist. "What, in your opinion, is the value of this diamond?"

At the sight of the stone, R' Ze'ev was struck speechless and could not respond. He turned the stone over in his hand and peered at it through his jeweler's loupe. It was a magnificent stone, perfectly clear and unblemished, and coupled with its rare size, it was truly priceless. "No one local has enough money to purchase this stone," He told Rav Hershel honestly. "Its value is above and beyond imagination. If you'd like, I can travel to other countries to try to sell the stone. Surely, there are kings in this world with enough money who would be happy to purchase the diamond." Rav Hershel declined his offer. "Thank you, R' Ze'ev," He said sincerely. "However, I'm not ready to sell it right now. I just wanted to know its value."

"Can I ask the *rov* where he got this diamond?" R' Ze'ev asked, unable to contain his curiosity. "I prefer not to discuss it," Rav Hershel responded. He blessed R' Ze'ev and the latter left.

Alone in his study, Rav Hershel studied the stone. *Look what a righteous woman my wife is*, he mused. *Just a few tears, and look what came out of it! Hashem probably sent Eliyahu Hanavi to throw it into our home.*

Smiling, he called his wife into his study. “Now that the children are sleeping, there is something I need to show you,” He said, putting the stone on the table before her. “With your tears yesterday, you managed to accomplish a tremendous amount in *shomayim*, and Hashem sent us an amazing gift. Here is the diamond. If you want, we can sell it, and we’ll be the wealthiest in this country forever. On the other hand, can you see the spiritual glow emanating from the stone? We can tell Hakadosh Baruch Hu that instead of the wealth from the stone, we prefer the spiritual light of the stone. We can forget about selling the stone for money, and instead use the light of the stone, which would mean that we would be *zoche* to Torah for our generations!” Looking up at her, he asked, “What would you rather, the money or the light?”

His holy *rebbitzen* was freezing and hungry, and she could not imagine watching her children suffer for much longer. “On my end, I would say that I would rather starve and have the light,” She said slowly. “However, the poor children... I can’t make this decision. Whatever you decide, I’ll be with you completely.”

Rav Herschel Zidechoiver nodded. “If it is up to me, then you know what I believe. Hashem will give us bread and water, and we’ll manage. It might be difficult, but we will be receiving the spiritual light, something far more precious.”

Accepting her husband’s decision without question, she moved on to a more practical matter. “What will we do with the stone? How are we going to give it back to *shomayim*?”

“Just as Hashem put the stone here, without needing my help, He will take it back without my help,” Rav Hershel responded. “We don’t need to

mix into Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s affairs. He does not need our assistance.”

That night, when Rav Hershel Zidechoiver awoke for *tikkun chatzos*, he put the stone back exactly where he had found it. Then he sat down on the floor and began weeping for the *Shechinah*, for the *geulah*, for *klal* Yisroel. Later, after morning dawned, as he prepared to go to the *mikvah*, he noticed that the stone was indeed no longer there. Hashem had miraculously reclaimed it.

The most of us are not on the level of the holy Rav Hershel Zidechoiver, with his lifestyle and actions, he left us a legacy of *לכתך אחרך במדבר*, of serving Hashem when doing so is not easy while constantly working on our *emunah* that He will be there to guide and assist us throughout.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A106- 1989

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