

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

R' Nochum

R' Nochum was a pious and devoted Jew, always looking for *mitzvos* and engaged in *chesed*. He was a simple man of average intelligence and was unable to learn much Torah. His foremost desire to devote his entire life to Hashem. However, he needed to sustain his family, and for that he needed a livelihood. He certainly was not cut out to be a *rov*, or a *rosh yeshiva*, or even a *rebbe*. However, he was not interested in any mundane occupation. He wanted to devote his days to Hashem.

Unsure what to do, he went to speak to his *rov*. "Rebbi," He pleaded. "I'm trying to serve Hashem with my entire being. Please advise me which kind of *parnasah* I should pursue that will allow me to serve Hashem every moment."

"R' Nochum," His *rov* said kindly, "You are a very special person. I want you to understand that no matter the occupation you choose, you will be doing the greatest *chesed* possible. This is because you will be working to feed your wife and children. According to halachah, a man only

needs to feed his children until the age of six years old. Beyond that age, he can insist that they contribute to the household finances by taking a job of their own. Therefore, by working to feed your family, you are doing them a tremendous kindness."

"That is not what I meant," R' Nochum tried to explain respectfully. "Of course, I would like to do *chesed* by supporting my family. But I would love for that occupation not to be mundane. I want to serve Hashem as much as possible."

His *rov* thought for a while and then came up with an idea. "Why don't you open a hotel?" He suggested. "The regular, paying clients will provide you with *parnasah*. However, whenever a pauper comes for lodging, give him a room for free. Look out for the downtrodden, and assist them however you can. If someone comes in looking hungry, but does not buy a meal since he cannot afford it, you should serve him anyway without cost. By being an innkeeper, not only will you be performing *hachnosas orchim* round the clock, but you'll also encounter constant opportunities for *chesed* and *tzedakah*."

R' Nochum was very pleased with the suggestion, and thanked his *rov* warmly before heading home to discuss it with his wife. In excited tones, he began depicting the hotel they would invest their savings into as a business venture. It would have twenty spacious bedrooms on the upper level to accommodate many guests, and they would hire a maid to clean the rooms and change the linens. They would build an expansive kitchen where R' Nochum's wife would have ample space to churn out delicious meals for their family and guests. If Hashem granted their venture success, they would be able to live comfortably off the rent from the paying guests and at the same time be able to host the homeless and unfortunate at no cost.

Hearing her husband's animated descriptions, his wife agreed that it was a worthwhile venture. Soon, their cozy home was transformed into a

construction zone as it was expanded to become a hotel. A second floor was added, and the downstairs was renovated to include a spacious dining room, a *bais medrash*, and a kitchen.

When the hotel opened for business, it was blessed with success. R' Nochum would run up and down the stairs, welcoming guests and settling them into their rooms. With his signature warmth and good cheer, he would serve the guests hot drinks and fresh cake and inquire after their welfare. Although the hotel charged a fee for its services, R' Nochum never demanded payment. The guests were aware of the fee, and he knew that they would pay if they could. If someone did not pay, it meant he couldn't afford to, and in that case, R' Nochum was happy to host him at no cost. Amazingly, the guests were impressed by his integrity and did not take advantage of his lax payment policies. As R' Nochum's reputation grew, so did his clientele, and vacancies were rare. Business was booming.

There were daily *minyanim* hosted in the hotel *bais medrash* for the convenience of the guests. However, the *bais medrash* was not utilized solely by those who patronized the hotel. The locals also appreciated *davening* at the hotel, and people from around the neighborhood would flock the hotel *bais medrash* for *minyanim* and learning. The hotel provided free coffee and tea, which made the *bais medrash* an inviting option, especially on cold winter days and nights.

R' Nochum acknowledged that many of the people frequenting his *bais medrash* were doing so more for the hot drinks than for the learning. Still, he decided to take advantage of the situation to encourage these men to learn more Torah. With his personal money, he hired a local scholar to sit in his *bais medrash* between *Mincha* and *Maariv*, to learn with the coffee drinkers and teach them a little.

One cold, snowy night deep in the winter, R' Nochum suddenly sat up in bed. Since entering

the hotel business, where guests could show up at any hour, his ears had become accustomed to picking up the slightest sounds even in the midst of sleep. Now, it was very early morning, and he was roused by the soft sounds of footsteps echoing under his window. Quickly, he threw on a robe over his pajamas and took the steps two at a time down to the main floor. Pulling open the front door, he saw a man, shivering and soaked, at his doorstep.

Taking the freezing man by the arm, he helped him inside and settled him into a chair by the warm fireplace in the *bais medrash*. It was obvious that the man had been traveling in the snow for a while. R' Nochum's wife joined them downstairs, and she quickly prepared a hot drink and light meal for him to eat. He accepted the food gratefully and relaxed by the fire, the tension in his shoulders slowly ebbing.

"In around two hours, there will be a *minyan* here in this room," R' Nochum told his newly arrived guest. "Would you like to come upstairs, and I'll give you a bed to rest in?"

"No, thank you," The man declined. "I'm still very cold. I prefer to stay here, near the fire."

With a jolt, R' Nochum realized that the poor man was still clothed in his wet traveling garments. "I'm so sorry!" He exclaimed. "Here, let me lend you something to wear. I'll wash your clothing and hang it by the fire to dry. You can get sick wearing wet clothing like this!"

"Thank you so much," The guest replied gratefully. "I would greatly appreciate that." He went into a private room to don R' Nochum's clothes, and when he finished, he handed over his own soaking wet clothing and shoes and settled back by the fire.

When R' Nochum washed the clothing, he saw that they were ragged and worn. The man's shoes, too, were riddled with holes. R' Nochum

understood that he was dealing with a pauper, and he was happy to assist him and ease his burden as much as possible. After washing and wringing the clothing, he spread them out to dry near the fire. Soon enough, the *bais medrash* began to fill up as people came by for free morning coffee and *Shacharis*. R' Nochum left the pauper alone at the fire and began fulfilling his duties as host, handing out coffee and wishing the *mispallelim* a good morning.

Shortly before davening, he went to check on his newest guest, who was still soaking in the warmth of the fire. "I just wanted to let you know," He said hesitantly, "That I have an extra pair of tefillin in case you need..."

"Thank you, but I have my own tefillin," The man replied.

"I'm impressed," R' Nochum told him sincerely.

"Even though you seem to have had a difficult life, you did not abandon Yiddishkeit! That is very impressive!"

His guest flashed him a smile and got up to join the minyan.

After davening, the pauper approached R' Nochum and politely requested his clothing, which he had given to his host to wash. "I'm ready to continue my journey," He explained.

R' Nochum was strongly opposed to this idea.

"You can't leave yet," He argued. "You just got here, after a harrowing journey. I want you to sit down and relax for a day or two so that you regain your strength. You won't have to pay a penny for your stay."

"Please, I really need my clothing back," The man insisted.

R' Nochum eyed him doubtfully. "I'll gladly give you back your clothing, but won't you stay for a few days? It isn't wise to venture out again in this terrible weather."

"No, I really need my clothing. I must continue my journey," The man repeated.

R' Nochum did not want to interfere in another person's business, so despite his disapproval, he went to get the man's clothing, which had dried in the interim. The man dressed quickly and thanked his host warmly for providing him with warm shelter and some food. As he prepared to leave, R' Nochum approached him and shoved a wad of bills into his pocket.

The man pulled the money out and handed it right back. "Thank you for your hospitality, but I really don't need money," He said almost apologetically.

"What do you mean?" R' Nochum asked in surprise. "Everyone needs money. It will come to good use on your journey."

"You don't understand," The man said softly. "I am a multi-millionaire. I really do not need your money. Thank you for everything, but I must be on my way now." He turned and began walking down the path away from the hotel.

R' Nochum jumped in front of him, blocking his path. "You can't just leave now, without explaining!" He demanded, curiosity overwhelming him. "What do you mean, you are a millionaire? How did you end up at my doorstep early this morning?"

The man hesitated for a few moments. Then he shrugged and followed R' Nochum back inside. He could not deny that he owed something to R' Nochum, who had graciously hosted and revitalized him.

The two men sat facing each other in R' Nochum's study. Over cups of tea, the man began relating his story.

"My name is Yitzchok," He began. "I come from the city of Budapest, a metropolis rich in Torah and *yiras shamayim*, as well as a teeming business center. I am a wealthy man, far wealthier than you can imagine. I own many businesses in multiple industries and earn far too much money, even for a large family size like I have. I really have no need for most of the money I earn.

"Therefore, I devote the profits of entire businesses toward different kinds of charity. The profits from my lumber business, for example, go entirely to support *talmidei chachomim*. I own a chain of fruit and vegetable stores, and the profits from these stores are earmarked for widows and orphans. I am also heavily involved in the cattle industry, and with the proceeds from my cattle ventures, I support a few *yeshivos*."

R' Nochum practically jumped out of his seat. "I don't believe you," He exclaimed skeptically "You must be living in a fantasy world. Do you really make all that money and just give it away?" "I really do," The man assured him. "I make a lot more than that. I am also in the hotel industry, by the way. I own a huge hotel in the center of the city, a few times the size of your institution over here. The profits from the hotel are utilized to support *rabbonim*."

"But... how can you give away money like that?" R' Nochum sputtered.

"There's plenty left for myself and my family, don't worry," R' Yitzchok said quietly. "We reside in a luxurious mansion and live a lavish, comfortable lifestyle. So you must be wondering how I, a wealthy tycoon, ended up at your doorstep in middle of the night. I'll explain.

"One of my largest business ventures is the bank I operate in one of the offices in my home," The

man continued. "I borrow and lend money, and facilitate many large financial transactions. Because I am scrupulous with halachah, I am extremely involved with the day to day operations of the bank. I also heavily oversee my other businesses to make sure they are running completely according to the Torah. I am an extremely busy person with a packed schedule.

"A few years ago, my bank gave someone a loan of few hundred thousand rubles to invest in a venture. It was interest-free, as I do not and will never take interest. The borrower invested the money and was very successful. A few years later, when the loan came due, he walked into the bank with a large bundle containing the entire sum in cash. I was busy with multiple other transactions at the moment, so I showed him where to put the money and planned on dealing with it later. However, I got caught up in a few other things, and by the time I remembered about the money, it was no longer there. It was missing."

R' Yitzchok paused for breath and then continued. "In my home, I employ a few women and girls in various capacities. Most of them come from unfortunate backgrounds, and I hired them to give them *parnasah* and help them have a better life. On that fateful day when the money went missing, there was only one orphan who had been working in the vicinity of the room that housed the bank, and she had even been in the room. It was obvious to me that she was the culprit.

"It was difficult for me to accuse her, so I tried to give her an opportunity to confess. 'Would you happen to know where the money is?' I asked her. 'My master, please don't suspect me of taking the money!' She responded, almost pleadingly. 'I am a Jewish girl, I would never steal!' It was hard for me to believe her, since there had really been no one else around. Besides, she was an orphan of marriageable age. It was logical to me that she had stolen the money and put it away so that she could marry herself off with a comfortable dowry. I

began to get angry, and I asked her again to tell me where the money is, this time in a much sterner tone. The interesting thing is that I really did not need the money. What bothered me was that she was denying something she had obviously done.

“She kept insisting that she did not steal the money, and I began berating her sharply for stealing and lying. She began crying and called me cruel and heartless, and so I played her game and called her a derogatory name as well. Soon, we were shouting at each other at the loudest decibel levels, me out of anger and she out of pain and fear.

“Seeing that I was getting nowhere, I summoned the police to get her to return the money. They forced a confession out of her and took her, kicking and screaming, to the police station. At the station, she was subjected to unbearable beatings and torture, yet she kept insisting that she did not have the money. She was thrown into a squalid cell and was fed food unfit even for animals along with black, dirty water. After seven days of interrogations and beatings, after seven days of subhuman living conditions, she still continued to deny stealing the money, and the police let her go.

“Weak and beaten, she returned to my home, but I refused to let her in. She took her meager belongings and left my home, crying, as fast as her weakened state would allow. She went to a friend’s home and begged for shelter. When she was invited inside, she collapsed onto a bed and lay there weakly, her strength gone. She became deathly ill and passed away less than two weeks later.

“When I heard the news of her untimely demise, a feeling of guilt wormed its way into my conscience. However, I dismissed it quickly, since I was still certain she had stolen the money and that her suffering had come about because of her own stubbornness against admitting the truth.

A few days later, I decided to organize the bank a little. Amidst my work, I came across a bundle containing the missing money! I felt weak in the knees and sank into my chair, clouds of regret and despair washing over me. I knew that the blood of this unfortunate orphan was on my hands. I could not contain the storm of emotions that overwhelmed me at the moment. I knew that there was no way to atone for my terrible actions. I had lived my life feeling smug about how much money I gave to tzedakah, about what a great *baal chesed* I was. It was because of my *gaavah*, my bad *middos*, that I had wrongly accused a poor orphan of taking money that I didn’t even need.

“I knew I needed to speak to someone to figure out how to move on from there. I needed to begin working on atoning for my *aveirah* as soon as possible, and I needed guidance. I knew that the only person who could help me was Rabbi Meir of Premishlan, a tremendous *baal ruach hakodesh*, fondly known as Rav Meir’l. Just by gazing at someone, Rav Meir’l could see everything about his past present and future. I hoped he would be able help me find clarity on what my next steps were.

“I walked into Rav Meir’l’s small study, and as soon as he saw me, he turned his face away. ‘It’s forbidden to gaze at the face of a *rasha*,’ he intoned.

“ ‘But Rebbe, I came to you for help in correcting my deeds! You must help me!’ I cried out.

“ ‘It is forbidden to gaze at the face of a *rasha*,’ he repeated. ‘You are a hooligan, a gangster! You have the blood of a Jewish girl on your hands!’

“Hearing his words, my heart sunk in despair, but I bravely forged on. ‘Rebbe, you have *ruach hakodesh*. You know everything that happened even without me saying a word. Please, help me! What do I do now?’

“ ‘Help you?’ Rav Meir’l exclaimed. ‘How can I help such a *rasha*? There is no *tikun* for what you did!’

“I am stubborn, and I didn’t give up. I cried and cried. ‘It can’t be that there is no way for me to do *teshuvah*!’ I insisted. ‘Please help me! Tell me what to do!’

“Rav Meir’l was not moved by my tears. ‘You are a murderer,’ He said in no uncertain tones. ‘You don’t belong in a Jewish home. Please, leave my house!’

“ ‘No, Rebbe, you can’t push away a Jew. Have pity on me!’ I threw myself at his feet and pleaded with him to help me. Finally, he agreed to speak to me and asked me to stand up. I stood up slowly and braced myself for his words.

“ ‘The *aveirah* you committed is terribly severe,’ Rav Meir’l began quietly. ‘The way I see it, there are only three possible avenues of *teshuvah* that you can pursue. The first option would be to accept upon yourself to die immediately. If you choose this option, by the end of the day, you will suddenly pass away from a strange death. Your second choice is to become terribly ill for three years. You won’t be able to move from your bed and will have to depend on others for your basic needs. There is also a third option. You will need to leave your home and go into *galus*. You may not spend more than one night in the same place, and you must leave and continue walking first thing in the morning. You may never ask anyone for food or money, and you may only eat cold food. You will have to remain in this difficult *galus* for three years.’

“None of these options were particularly inviting, yet I knew I needed to atone for my sin. I asked if I could think about the options before making my decision, and Rav Meir’l told me to return in two days’ time to let him know what I decided. For the next two days, I agonized over this decision. One thing I knew for certain. I wanted to live. I would

not choose the first option, death. However, I could not decide between the other two options. What was better, a painful illness or three years of poverty and wandering? Since I could not consult with my wife or anyone else, I was forced to make this difficult decision on my own.

“Ultimately, I decided that being sick in my own bed, surrounded by my family, was the better of the two choices. I knew my family would hire the best doctors and provide me with round the clock care and support, and I felt that it would be an easier option.

“As soon as I decided this, even before I had a chance to go tell Rav Meir’l my decision, I developed a high fever. I was brought to my bed, where my fever continued to climb and I became delirious. I couldn’t differentiate between fantasy and reality. I thought I saw ghosts, I thought I saw the Angel of Death. I was sure I would die at any moment. Finally, during a brief respite from my delirium, I recalled Rav Meir’l and my decision. I sent my eldest son to go to Rav Meir’l and beg that he daven that I be cured of my sickness so that I could go see him personally.

“My son obeyed my instructions and went to Rav Meir’l with a tremendous sum for *pidyon gelt*. He explained my request, that I wanted to recover so that I could come to speak with him. Rav Meir’l returned the money, saying he did not want it. However, he agreed to bless me that I should recover. He told my son that I should go see him three days later.

“Three days later, my strength had returned considerably. I still could not walk properly and was forced to lean on a cane as I limped toward the tzaddik’s home. When I arrived, I explained that I could not handle the illness and begged to be allowed to change my course of atonement to *galus* instead. Rav Meir’l agreed and handed me beggar’s attire. He told me to change into the rags, which were to be my clothing for the next three years. I was to wear them on Shabbos and *yom tov*

and weekdays and was only allowed to remove them to wash them. The only belongings I was allowed to take with me were my tefillin and cane. Rav Meir'l also reminded me that I was never allowed to eat warm food or sleep for two nights in the same place. And then, as soon as I was dressed in the rags, he ushered me out of his home, instructing me to return exactly three years later."

R' Yitzchok concluded his story. "I did exactly as he told me. Day after day, I wandered from place to place. I suffered terrible embarrassment and degradation and was forced to come upon the mercy of so many Jews. The seasons changed, and it got more difficult, but I persevered, never staying in the same place for more than one day, never asking for food, never eating warm food." "How long has it been?" His host, R' Nochum, asked breathlessly. "What are you up to?"

"Today is exactly two years since the day I left Rav Meir'l's home to begin my stint in *galus*," R' Yitzchok replied. "It has been two painful, difficult years. But nothing is worse than the news I just discovered, that Rav Meir'l, the great tzaddik, passed away. I am a man with a broken heart. When will my bitter *galus* finally end?"

R' Nochum scratched his head in thought. "Why don't you go to the *gadol hador*, Rav Chaim Sanzer?" He suggested after a moment. "It is known that he helps people achieve atonement. Why don't you travel to him for a *kaparah*?"

R' Yitzchok's weary eyes lit up. "That is a great idea!" He exclaimed eagerly, jumping up from his chair and getting ready to go.

"I'll come with you," R' Nochum said quickly. "I want to hear what Rav Chaim has to say." He ran to inform his wife that he would be back in a few days. Getting into his coach, he turned to the 'pauper' and invited him to hitch along with him. Although R' Yitzchok was not allowed to hire a coach for himself, he was allowed to hitch along

with someone else, and he gratefully joined R' Nochum inside the wagon.

The two men reached the city of Sanz and came to the home of Rav Chaim Sanzer. As they stood outside his door, R' Nochum felt his heart break for the man beside him. He could not imagine how R' Yitzchok would endure another torturous year of *galus* and hoped that Rav Chaim Sanzer would be able to assist him.

The shamash opened the door and invited them into Rav Chaim's study. They entered the room timidly. The last thing they were expecting was the warm welcome they received from the tzaddik. Even before they uttered a sound, he exclaimed, "Look who is here! The *baal teshuvah* is here! I feel that Hashem has received and accepted your *teshuvah*!"

Before they could process his words, Rav Chaim continued. "I know that the tzaddik Rav Meir'l *ztzk*'l said that you would need three years of *galus*. However, I'm giving you permission to go back to Rav Meir'l, to his *kever*. Lay down at his graveside and cry! Tell Rav Meir'l that the Sanzer Rav ruled that your two years of *galus* are considered like three years, that it was enough of an atonement for you and it is time for you to go home. When you finish emptying your heart at his *kever*, you'll feel much better, and you'll know that you are able to return home."

R' Yitzchok threw himself at the tzaddik's feet and thanked him from the depths of his being. R' Nochum, observing from the side, could not contain his tears of emotion. Rav Chaim blessed R' Yitzchok that he should succeed in guarding his anger in the future, and the two men left his home.

They traveled to the *kever* of Rav Meir'l, and R' Yitzchok did as Rav Chaim Sanzer had instructed. Throwing himself down at the graveside, he began pleading with Hashem to accept his *teshuvah* and forgive his terrible sin. Then he

spoke to Rav Meir'l, telling him Rav Chaim's *psak* that his *galus* was complete.

As soon as he finished, R' Yitzchok felt a huge wave of relief wash over him. All the months of suffering were erased and he stood up with renewed vigor. With tears of emotion, he kissed R' Nochum and expressed his gratitude for the wonderful suggestion of going to see Rav Chaim Sanzer. Then he finally returned home to his startled and relieved family.

R' Yitzchok spent the rest of his days working on his character and engaging in as much *chesed* as possible.

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