

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Achilah

It was *erev* Pesach, and the Vilna Gaon was in the town of Pinsk, where he would be spending *yom tov*. The visit of such an esteemed personage made a stir in Pinsk, and everyone wanted to get a glimpse of the famed *gadol*. After the *zman* for burning the *chometz* passed, the Gaon needed some time away from the tumult. He told his hosts that he was going to the *bais medrash*, and asked that he not be disturbed.

When he entered the *bais medrash*, he was surprised to discover that it was not empty. In the far corner of the room, a lone figure sat, wrapped in his *tallis*, learning aloud with tremendous concentration. It was midday on one of the most hectic days of the year. There is so much to do on *erev* Pesach; from ensuring that all the *chometz* is burned, to locking up all *chometz* utensils, to learning the *halachos* of Pesach, to grinding the *marror* and preparing for the *seder*... And yet, the Jew was sitting and peacefully learning, as if he had all the time in the world.

The Gaon approached the man, who quickly stood up in deference to his distinguished visitor. "May

I ask how it came to be that you are here now?" the Gaon asked. "Today is *erev* Pesach; there is so much to do today to prepare for Pesach!"

The man hesitated before responding. "I would not answer this question had anyone else asked it," he said slowly. "However, since the Vilna Gaon himself is asking me, I will answer him by telling him my story."

He cleared his throat and began. "I am not a native of Pinsk. My hometown is a different city, a few kilometers away. The reason I am here is because in my hometown, I acted as a *malshin*, an informer. I was a *shomer* Torah *umitzvos* for the most part, but at the same time, I would sell my fellow Jews to the government for money. I informed on anyone who cheated, evaded taxes, or committed any sort of legal infraction. I'm ashamed to admit that my actions put many Jews behind bars and even led to some executions.

"Many years ago, on the day before *erev* Pesach, I was walking in the street and I met an old, hunched man who looked very troubled. Although I generally did not like my fellow Jews and spent my time plotting against them, something inside me caused me to ask him what was disturbing him. He explained that although Pesach was just two days away, he had no food for *yom tov*. Uncharacteristically, I removed a five-ruble note from my pocket and handed it to him. That was the first act of *chesed* I had done in my entire adult life.

"The old man passed away shortly thereafter, and I completely forgot about the story. Years passed, and one day, shortly before Pesach, the non-Jews in my hometown created a libel against the Jewish community. In order for the government to give them free reign to begin a pogrom based on the libel, they needed one Jew to confirm that their accusations were true. They came to me on the day before *erev* Pesach to ask me to add my signature to the document, attesting to the truth of their charges. They left the document in my home

and asked that I give it in the next day, signed, to the government.

“I was heady with power. The fate of the entire Jewish community now rested upon my signature. *I’ll show them who’s boss*, I thought to myself. I took out a pen and signed my name on the bottom of the page with a flourish. Then I put down the document and took out a candle and feather, ready to perform *bedikas chometz*. I planned to deliver the document to the government officials the following morning.”

The man took a deep breath and continued. “I began to search my house for *chometz*, the thin candlelight casting eerie shadows on the walls as I searched. Suddenly, I yelled out in fear. Standing before me was the old man whom I had given five rubles to many years earlier. I knew he had passed away some time ago, and I took a shaky step away from him.

“The old man began to speak. ‘Don’t give in the document,’ he told me. ‘I want you to know that if you hand that document to the government, you will never be able to atone for that sin. You will remain in Gehinnom for eternity. For your own sake, tear up the document!’

“‘Why did you come here?’ I asked him. ‘Who sent you?’

“‘I’m here because I begged in *shomayim* to be allowed to come down to warn you,’ the man replied. ‘Because you gave me money to buy food for *yom tov*, I was permitted to come down to warn you that if you give in that document, it will be your undoing. Don’t do it!’

“‘I won’t,’ I responded, shaken by the presence of a dead man in my home. Assured by my words, the man disappeared.

“As soon as he left, I regretted my hasty reaction. I couldn’t let myself get frightened away by ghosts. I would be a man, and submit the

document like I really wanted to. There was no way I would forgo the golden opportunity to exercise my power over the Jewish community.

“As soon as I came to this decision, the old man reappeared, startling me terribly. With nary a word, he reached for the document and tore it to shreds. At that moment, I realized that I would be a fool to disregard his direction. Hashem had permitted the old man to caution me as a reward for the *tzedakah* I had once given, which meant that the man was trying to help me, not harm me.

“The old man had one last thing to say before he departed. ‘You’ve done terrible *aveiros*,’ he said in no uncertain terms. ‘You were ready to give up an entire town of Jews just to feel a little powerful. If I were you, I’d be terrified. You’d better atone for your sins before you are called up to Heaven and judgment is reckoned.’

“‘What should I do?’ I asked him, feeling alone and frightened, the powerful high I had been feeling earlier in the day now a very distant memory. He gave me the name of a certain *rov* and advised me to approach him to learn how to atone for my sins. It was *erev* Pesach, but I wasted no time following his instructions.

“The *rov* heard me out, and I could tell he was appalled by my actions. Since *Chazal* say that the *tikun* for *lashon hara* is learning Torah, he advised me to go straight to a *bais medrash* in a different town to learn. ‘Stay there for seven years,’ He said. ‘Do not leave the *bais medrash* for seven entire years. Spend seven years steeped in Torah, and that will be your *tikun*.’

“I did as he advised,” The man in the *tallis* told the Vilna Gaon. “This is the *bais medrash* I came to on an *erev* Pesach fourteen years ago. For the next seven years, I did not leave these hallowed walls. There were days when I was very hungry, days when my back ached terribly from sleeping on the hard benches. I lived off of the generosity of the townspeople of Pinsk, relying on them for

my every meal. Yet despite the hardships I suffered, I never left the *bais medrash*. I spent my time learning, first basic *mishnayos*, and then working my way up to the more difficult *Gemaros* with *meforshim*. I also constantly beseeched Hashem to grant me complete forgiveness. Over the course of those seven years, I completely transformed into another being entirely.

“On *erev* Pesach, seven years later, in the waning moments before the years would be complete, the same old man suddenly appeared. His face was beautiful and glowing, his beard pure white. I knew that despite all the inner work I had done over the previous seven years, I was not worthy of such caliber *neshamos* coming down to this world especially for me, but I was grateful that he was allowed to come down to tell me that my *teshuvah* had been accepted on High.

“The old man assured me that my regret and suffering had been accepted in *shomayim* and my repentance was complete. He took out a fragrant piece of fresh bread, the kind I had not eaten in seven years. “Eat, my child,” he said softly.

“I pulled back my hand, as if bitten by a snake. ‘But...Pesach!’ I stammered. ‘It’s *erev* Pesach, after the *zman* of *achilas chometz*! How can I eat *chometz* on *erev* Pesach?’

“The old man shook his head. ‘You’re making a mistake,’ he told me. ‘It’s not yet after the *zman*. You may eat now. Go ahead, it’s permitted.’

“He put the bread in my hand and my fingers closed around the fresh, soft slice. I hadn’t eaten for a full day, and the tantalizing aroma was making me dizzy. Could I eat it? Was I allowed to? I was pretty sure it was well after the *zman*, but this *neshamah*, this *neshamah* from heaven, was insisting it was not. Hungry and confused, I told him, ‘But I don’t have any water for *netilas yadayim*.’

“‘I’ll get you water,’ the old man replied. He stepped out of the *bais medrash* to fulfill his words. Glancing after him, I noticed people running to and fro, trying to complete their preparations in time for *yom tov*. Suddenly, my confusion vanished. I was certain it was long after the *zman* for burning the *chometz*, and I was not allowed to be in the possession of any *chometz*. Instinctively, I threw the bread out of the *bais medrash* door, and as it fell to the floor, it rotted before my eyes. Then the old man disappeared.

“At that moment, I realized with sudden clarity that it had been a *nisayon*. At the last minute, just before my seven-year period of atonement was over, the Satan, clothed as the old man, had been sent to try to make me stumble in the *nisayon* of *achilah*. I was brokenhearted by this, and I went to see the *rov* who had originally advised me what to do. The *rov* told me that this was a sign that my *teshuvah* was not yet complete. ‘Go back to the *bais medrash* for an additional seven years,’ he said.” The man looked up at the Vilna Gaon. “That is my story. For fourteen years, I stayed in this *bais medrash* and toiled in Torah, with one very difficult test of *achilah* in the middle. Today is the final day of my fourteenth year.”

The Vilna Gaon was very moved by the man’s story and assured him that this time he had truly reached complete atonement.

Food is a very powerful tool in *ruchniyus*. ואנשי קודש תהיו לי - Hashem tells us to become *kadosh*-by eating the way we are supposed to. We have to carefully watch ourselves in food-related areas. What do we eat? How do we eat it? This seemingly mundane act, which we all perform multiple times every day, is wired with the power to make us holy if we make sure to utilize it properly. By working on our *achilah*, we will *iy”H* be *zoche* to fulfill ואנשי קודש תהיו לי.

The above story is about a *malshin*, an informer. I would like to relay a personal anecdote regarding *malshinim*.

Years ago, I flew to England to experience the Elul *zman* in the company of my *rebbe*, Harav Yehuda Zev Segal zt"l, *rosh* yeshiva of Manchester. When Yom Kippur arrived, I resolved to keep the *rosh* yeshiva in my sight the entire day. On Yom Kippur night, he was up late *benching* his students. When he finally retired to his office, it was well past midnight. Perched on a mattress beside his desk, I watched as he sat down, noble and dignified, his head crowned with the Kapitzshetzer Rebbe's yarmulke, which he only wore on Yom Kippur.

I watched as he lifted the *sefer Chofetz Chaim* from his desk and kissed it reverently. "Ah, my holy teacher!" He exclaimed in *yiddish*. "My holy teacher! He saved me! He saved me!"

Being that I had come to Manchester specifically to observe him and learn from him, I could not let this cryptic comment go by without inquiring about it to gain clarity. From my spot on the mattress, I asked, "Why did the *rosh* yeshiva say that the Chofetz Chaim saved him? How did the Chofetz Chaim save the *rosh* yeshiva?"

He took out the *sefer Shem Olam*, authored by the Chofetz Chaim, and showed me the following story from Rav Chaim Volozhiner.

The Vilna Gaon was once in back of a wagon, traveling somewhere. He learned from some *seforim* as the wagon driver steered the horses onward. In middle of the journey, the driver needed to take a little break and stretch his legs. He pulled over to the side of the road and asked if the Vilna Gaon would mind holding onto the reins for a few moments until he returned. His illustrious passenger agreed, moving toward the front of the wagon to take possession of the reins. The wagon driver walked between the trees and was soon out of sight.

Unbeknownst to the wagon driver or the Vilna Gaon, they had strayed onto private property. The wagon was parked at the edge of a field belonging to a non-Jewish landowner. Unfortunately for them, the non-Jew was around, and he noticed the trespassers. "Get off my property or else!" he yelled menacingly, wielding a stick for emphasis and rounding out his threat with loud curses in a variety of languages. "How dare you drive your wagon onto my property?" he accused the hapless Gaon, delivering ringing blows to his back with the stick.

The Vilna Gaon's instinctive reaction was to shift the blame off his shoulders and onto those of the true culprit, the wagon driver. "It wasn't me," he was about to say. "My driver drove the wagon here." At the last moment, however, the Gaon managed to bite back these words. He remained silent as the non-Jew began to beat him with the stick.

When the wagon driver returned to the scene, he was horrified to see the Vilna Gaon being beaten. He quickly appeased the landowner and drove the wagon off the man's property, apologizing profusely to his passenger all the while.

When recounting the story to his disciple, Rav Chaim Volozhiner, the Gaon said, "If I would have said to the goy that the wagon driver was at fault, I would have engaged in the act of informing on another Jew. From just one phrase I would have become a *malshin*. All my Torah and all my *mitzvos* wouldn't be able to save me from the terrible retribution of a *malshin*. I would have had to come back to this world in the *gilgul* of a dog. Just for one phrase!"

When Rav Chaim Volozhiner heard this, he was shaken. The Gaon, who did not exaggerate, taught with this story that for just a small slip of the tongue, a person may be judged as a *malshin*. What was most frightening was that it is so simple for this to happen!

“Nu,” Rav Segal said to me as he finished relating the story. “The Chofetz Chaim didn’t save us? We owe our lives to the Chofetz Chaim! Without his *sefer* explaining the myriad intricacies of permitted and forbidden speech, we would all act as *malshinim* numerous times throughout our lives!”

Indeed, we owe a great deal of *hakaras hatov* to the Chofetz Chaim for saving us from some of the gravest sins in the Torah.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A13

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