

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Slippery Slope

Rav Yonasan Eibshitz was one of the *gedolei hador* of his time. He authored many popular *seforim*, such as *Karti U'Palti*, *Yaaros Dvash*, *Urim Vetumim*, *Ahavas Yonasan*, and more. His two older sons, Rav Mordche and Rav Nosson, were tremendous *talmidei chachomim* who soon moved away from their hometown of Prague to accept rabbinical positions in other towns.

Yosef, his third son, was much younger than his brothers. He was thirteen years old when his brothers married and moved away. While both Rav Mordche and Rav Nosson were great *talmidei chachomim*, Yosef was blessed with an incredible memory and extraordinary brilliance. His father greatly enjoyed learning privately with his youngest son in between giving *shiurim*, writing *seforim*, and speaking with his students.

When Yosef was seventeen years old, he decided that he wanted to go learn in the yeshiva in Berlin. His parents, however, were against the idea. They felt that a boy his age belonged at home, especially when his father was a *rosh* yeshiva and

one of the greatest *yeshivos* of the time was right nearby in his hometown of Prague.

While it was true that there was a thriving yeshiva in Berlin, there also existed a flourishing culture that was the antithesis of Torah. Rav Yonasan Eibshitz was all too aware of the dangerous pitfalls in Berlin, and he was afraid to send his son there. Yosef was a genius, a diamond, and he needed to be watched over carefully.

If a fallen log receives a scratch, it's value does not diminish; after all, it is only firewood. However, if a board of lumber is scratched, it will lose a few dollars of its value. If a piece of furniture made of beautiful polished wood receives a scratch, that would decrease the value of the piece by a few hundred dollars. Contrast this to a precious diamond. One single defect could diminish its value by thousands of dollars! Yosef, with his brilliant mind, was a precious gem, and even one flaw would cause him to fall, to freefall, to plummet into the depths. His father wanted to keep him close, where he could be guarded against scratches while being polished and shined with Torah.

"I've learned in Prague all my life," Yosef argued, when his parents declined to send him to Berlin. "I want to go away to a yeshiva, away from the distractions of home! I want to expand my horizons, to learn from the great *maggidei shiur* of the Berlin yeshiva."

His parents turned him down. They could not risk sending him to such perilous spiritual territory. Still, Yosef begged, pleaded, prodded, wheedled, cajoled, and coaxed. Over and over, he made his arguments, each more convincing than the next. Eventually, Rav Yonasan agreed to allow him to study at the yeshiva in Berlin.

Rav Yonasan Eibshitz would write *kameyos*, amulets. Before Yosef departed for Berlin, he wrote a special *kameya* for his son. On a small piece of parchment, he wrote תלך בדרך הישר תהיה

יהודי כשר ואל תעזוב תורת אבותיך כל ימי חיך – *My son, you should go on the straight path, you should remain a kosher Jew, and you should not leave the Torah of your ancestors all the days of your life.* He double wrapped the parchment and threaded it on to a chain.

“You are going to Berlin,” he said to his son just before Yosef boarded the wagon. He reached over and tied the amulet around his son’s neck. “You are going to a city that poses a terrible danger to your *ruchniyus*. Wear this *kameya* at all times, besides Shabbos and Yom Kippur, and Hashem should watch over you.”

Rav Yonsanan then handed his son a letter to give to the *rosh* yeshiva in Berlin. Father and son embraced for a long moment, and then it was time for Yosef to depart.

The journey from Prague to Berlin was long and difficult. After a few weeks of exhausted traveling, Yosef finally arrived in Berlin. He headed straight for the yeshiva, bursting with enthusiasm, excited to fill his fresh, brilliant mind with a new level of Torah.

When he arrived at the yeshiva, he avoided divulging to the other *bochurim* that he was the son of one of the *gedolei hador*, Rav Yonasan Eibshitz. Modest and unassuming, he wanted to be treated no differently than the other yeshiva students.

His anonymity did not last for too long, however. When he went to meet the *rosh* yeshiva and give over the letter from his father, the *rosh* yeshiva discovered just who he was. “Your father is Rav Yonasan Eibshitz?!” He exclaimed in wonderment. He scanned the letter quickly. In it, Rav Yonasan asked that the *rosh* yeshiva and *rabbeim* take care of his youngest son. He asked that they ensure he learned well and was only keeping good company. Rav Yonasan wrote that his older sons were *rabbonim*, and he hoped for the same thing for his Yosef. He ended his letter

blessing all those who would assist and enable his son to succeed.

The *rosh* yeshiva finished reading and put down the letter. He was touched that Rav Yonasan Eibshitz had sent him such a moving letter, and all the more, had entrusted his precious son into his care. “I want you to reside in my home,” he said to Yosef.

“If the *rosh* yeshiva is okay with it...” Yosef said respectfully. “I would prefer to be like the other *bochurim* and have similar sleeping arrangements to them. I don’t want to be given preferential treatment.”

But the *rosh* yeshiva insisted that he wanted to host the boy from such a distinguished home. He helped Yosef gather his suitcases and carry them over to his home. The *rebbitzin*, when she heard who their new boarder would be, was equally thrilled to host him and eagerly plied him with food and drink.

Soon, the *rosh* yeshiva introduced him to the faculty members at the yeshiva, who welcomed him warmly, excited that a scion of such an illustrious home had joined their yeshiva. In order to assess Yosef’s level of learning, one of the *rabbeim* threw out a difficult question.

Yosef, quoting his father, responded with an answer, but his response was shot down by a different *rebbe* in the room. “That would contradict *Tosafos!*”

Yosef held his own, adding more explanation to resolve the contradiction, but soon another *magid* shiur jumped in to question his answer. The *rabbeim* and Yosef battled back and forth for a long time. Throughout, Yosef stuck to the reasoning he had learned from his father, capably defending his position. The *rosh* yeshiva, observing the proceedings and occasionally contributing, was very impressed with his new student’s abilities.

Yosef was worn out from the rigors of his journey, and the heated Talmudic discussion soon died down. The *maggidei shiur* promised to set him up with proper *chavrusos* the following day, and Yosef went to sleep.

After he left the room, the conversation took a different turn. “I can’t understand why Rav Yonasan sent his son here,” the *rosh* yeshiva commented, shaking his head.

“We have a very fine yeshiva running here,” one of the *maggidei shiur* said.

“There are excellent *yeshivos* all over,” the *rosh* yeshiva responded. “Berlin is a big city, riddled with spiritual dangers. Why would he send his son to such a perilous place? I just can’t understand it.”

“Can I see the letter?” a *rebbe* asked, coming over. “I wonder if he’s really the son of Rav Yonasan Eibshitz. It really does sound strange.”

The letter was produced and examined, and they determined that it was most definitely authentic. The *maggidei shiur* shrugged. It was indeed difficult to comprehend, but there was no disputing the fact: the *gadol hador* had sent his son to their city, to them, and they resolved to do their utmost to help him reach his greatest potential.

The following morning, when Yosef entered the *bais medrash* for *Shacharis*, he was shown to a prominent seat near the front. There was *krias hatorah* that day, and he was honored with an *aliyah*. Very quickly, word about who he was spread amongst the other students. After *davening*, they crowded around him to introduce themselves and get to know him.

Within a short time, Yosef was flourishing in the yeshiva. He was paired with another exceptionally bright student, and the two would learn together for hours. Though he did not want

to flaunt his brilliance, his *rabbeim* loved to challenge his mind with difficult questions on the material they were learning. He was pleasant tempered and well mannered, and he soon acquired many friends.

A few weeks passed, and Yosef suddenly became aware that he was the smartest in the yeshiva. *The magidei shiur are much smarter and know a whole lot more*, he acknowledged, *but I’m way ahead of the older students*. Thoughts like these began to pass through his mind often, and he became slightly conceited.

The changes were subtle and they happened very slowly. First, he began wearing a stylish jacket on top of his regular clothes. Then, he got a new hat. There was nothing inherently problematic with his dress, but his newfound attention for his attire was noticed by one sharp-eyed *rebbe*, who grew troubled.

Slowly, Yosef’s *davening* underwent a transition. He lost the warmth, the *geshmak* of *tefillah*, altering his behavior to suit that of a gentleman as opposed to a ben Torah. In the place of fervent *shuckeling*, he prayed with his back ramrod straight. Instead of answering *kaddish* with fiery enthusiasm, he would say *yehei shmei rabbah* in what he felt was a more dignified manner, almost politely.

One Friday afternoon, after *seider*, he decided to take a walk through Berlin. He asked one of his friends, a native of Berlin, to act as his guide and show him the city.

His friend eyed him strangely. “But... you’re the son of Rav Yonasan Eibshitz! Why would you want to see what’s going on out in the streets?” “Don’t be foolish,” Yosef responded. “If I’m to be a *rov* one day, I need to know what’s going on outside of the yeshiva walls.”

“Alright,” his friend relented. He hailed a passing carriage and the two boys climbed inside. They

traveled through Berlin, Yosef's eyes wide, as his friend pointed out the various landmarks of the city, museums and government buildings, parks and historical sites.

"What is that big structure?" Yosef asked, pointing to a large building on their right.

"That's the University of Berlin," his friend said. "It's a place where people study all kinds of subjects. They train doctors and lawyers, engineers and astrologists. All the wisdom in the world is taught at this university."

"Really!" Yosef exclaimed, impressed.

His friend waved his hand. "Listen, Yosef, this is not for you. You are the son of the *gadol hador*. You don't need this college junk."

"On the contrary," Yosef responded, shrugging. "Wisdom is wisdom. It may not be Torah, but it definitely counts as something."

"Yosef, I can't believe that you are speaking this way," his friend chided.

"I'm serious," Yosef protested. "I would love to tour the university; to see what it is like."

His friend stood up abruptly, holding on to the bench to remain steady as the horse continued trotting down the street. "Yosef. Listen to me. The university is not for you, even just to take a tour. Did you know that it isn't permitted to wear a head covering inside the building? How will you walk inside?"

Yosef looked shocked. "You're right," he admitted. "I wasn't aware of that, but there is no way I can take off my yarmulke."

They returned to the yeshiva and began to prepare for Shabbos.

The next week, Yosef threw himself into his learning with renewed vigor. Sunday, Monday,

Tuesday passed and before long, it was Friday afternoon again. Yosef went to invite his friend to join him again in touring Berlin.

"Let's go somewhere different," the other boy suggested. "How about the marketplace?"

"Sounds good," Yosef said. "You know I want to see all around the city."

When they arrived at the market, it was bustling with people and activity. Stands and stalls dotted the open square and crowds of shoppers snaked between them. Strolling beside his friend in the crisp air, Yosef drank in the sights around him.

"See that man?" his friend whispered, gesturing discreetly at a distinguished looking man with balding white hair and round glasses. "That's the famed professor and dean of the university!"

Yosef's eyes widened. "Can you please introduce me?" he asked.

"Are you sure?" his friend asked, raising his eyebrows. "He's not Jewish."

"I'm sure," Yosef said. "He's a celebrity, similar to my father in our circles. I just want to say hello."

"Fine, if that's what you think," his friend said, leading him over to the professor. He cleared his throat. "Herr Professor, I'm sure you've heard of the very great Jewish rabbi, Rabbi Yonasan Eibeshitz."

The professor looked down at him. "And you are...?"

"I'd like to introduce you to the son of Rabbi Eibshitz," the boy continued, pushing Yosef gently forward.

"The son of the famous rabbi!" The professor exclaimed warmly, drawing Yosef's hand in for a handshake.

It was the first time Yosef had ever touched a non-Jewish person, and he tried to hide his disgust. He nodded.

“Your father is a brilliant man,” the professor continued. “It’s truly an honor to meet you! I would love to begin a correspondence with your learned father. Would you be able to arrange such a thing for me?”

“I’ll try,” Yosef stammered.

“My son, please come by to take a tour of our college. It would be an honor for me to be able to personally escort you around the campus,” the professor said warmly, oblivious to Yosef’s discomfort. “And you are welcome to stop by my home whenever you wish.”

“Uh, thank you, sir,” Yosef said uncomfortably.

“You know, we have plenty of Jewish students at our university,” the professor continued. “They become great physicians, scientists, chemists. If you are your father’s son, I’m sure you have a brilliant mind. Why don’t you join us? I’ll arrange a full scholarship for you—it wouldn’t cost you a penny.”

“I’m honored by your suggestion, sir,” Yosef said, feeling very ill at ease. “To be honest, however, I came to Berlin to study at the big yeshiva, and I can’t do anything else but study Torah. I’m the son of a great rabbi; I don’t think it is for me.”

The professor brushed him off. “Nonsense! There are plenty of rabbis whose children study at our university. They know the Torah, they’ve learned it for years, and now they are ready to learn more. I don’t know if your father went to college, but you, his son, certainly can. We’ll provide you with everything free of charge.”

Yosef’s eyes darted around, looking for a way to end the conversation. He murmured something noncommittal.

Noticing his disinterest, the professor concluded the conversation. “Well, then, I don’t want to keep you from your studies. It’s been a pleasure meeting you! And if you ever change your mind, you can come see me at the University of Berlin. My offer stands.”

“Thank you very much, professor,” Yosef said. The two shook hands again. For Yosef, it was the second time he touched a non-Jew. The feeling was not pleasant, but he didn’t feel nearly as disgusted as before.

Back in yeshiva, *kabbalas Shabbos* was not the same. Yosef stood in the *bais medrash*, his lips uttering the prayers to usher in Shabbos, but his mind was miles away. He looked around at his friends, the *rabbeim*, the *rosh yeshiva*. *I’m really much brighter than everyone here*, he thought to himself. *It’s true that the rabbeim and rosh yeshiva know more than me at this point, but that is only because they have an advantage in years. In just a few short years, I’ll be way ahead of them in learning.*

He tried to concentrate on *Lecha Dodi*, but his whirling thoughts refuse to cooperate. *What do I have to gain here?* he wondered. *There’s nothing that I’ll get from this place that I cannot achieve on my own. In college, on the other hand, there is so much wisdom for the taking!*

His mind did not rest the entire *Maariv*. *It’s not for no purpose, these chachmos are necessary for being a Torah Jew! Knowledge of mathematics is vital to learning key parts of Gemara. Science teaches an understanding of the niflaos haboreh. And if I went to college, I could learn to speak ten different languages, like my father. What a great kiddush Hashem, a rabbi who speaks various languages!*

I wonder what’s happening inside the university now, he thought as he sat with his *chavrusah* on Sunday morning. *The professor said there are other rabbonim whose sons are in the college. I*

wonder who they are... the professor really seems like a nice guy. Suddenly, his thoughts took a turn. Wait! Why am I even considering this? I can't take off my yarmulke, definitely not for this. No, I won't take off my yarmulke for a little college.

His learning after that was not the same. First seder, second seder, night seder came and went in a never ending cycle. His body was present in the *bais medrash*, but his mind was elsewhere. College, college, college...

One morning, as he got dressed, he fingered the *kameya* around his neck. It was cumbersome and uncomfortable, and besides, he hadn't noticed a single person in Berlin wearing something like it. He knew his father wrote it, and that it was holy and precious, but he didn't want to be different than his friends. With a quick tug, he removed the *kameya* and stored it with the rest of his belongings.

The days continued passing. Yosef's learning was getting weaker by the hour, and his motivation became negligible. Instead of taking walks around the city during his free time on Friday afternoon, he began skipping a second seder every so often, then first seder. Throughout, his head was occupied by one topic. College, college, college...

It became apparent to the yeshiva's faculty that Yosef was slipping. The *rosh* yeshiva gathered the *rabbeim* together to discuss the situation and figure out a way to help their rebelling student. "He's very busy with his hair, his clothing," one *rebbe* remarked quietly.

"He keeps missing seder," another put in, the caring evident in his voice. "And when he does come, he spaces out almost the entire time."

"He's been slipping for a while," someone said, pensively. "He's been out of things for quite some time, but recently, it seems that it is getting worse faster than before."

The unanimous consensus was that Yosef was not the same *bochur* who had come to them a year before, and that remaining in the yeshiva was detrimental to his spiritual wellbeing.

The *rosh* yeshiva decided to write to Rav Yonasan Eibshitz, explaining the situation and asking that he take his son home. As much as it hurt to inform the *gadol hador* of painful news regarding his youngest son, the *rosh* yeshiva knew that it was the best course he could take. Yosef needed to get away from Berlin, from the bad influences, and start over again in Prague. He needed his father's strong, but reassuring hand.

With a heavy heart, the *rosh* yeshiva sat down to pen the letter and mailed it off. He knew it would take a few weeks for his letter to reach Rav Yonasan, and then another few weeks for a reply. He resolved to keep a close eye on his *talmid* while waiting for the reply.

But instead of a reply from Yosef's father, the news that arrived a few weeks later was tragic. Rav Yonasan Eibshitz had passed away. Yosef was now an orphan.

By the time the news of his father's passing reached Yosef, too much time had elapsed for him to sit a full week of shivah. Instead, he sat on a low chair for one day, and his *rabbeim* and friends came to comfort him. It was painful to see that Yosef barely resembled his father's son any longer.

When he got up from shivah, Yosef davened for the amud and said kaddish. Then he wandered outside, brokenhearted, away from the other *bachurim*. He needed to be alone in his pain, to remember his illustrious father and grieve for his brand new status as a *yasom*. Grief was an unfamiliar emotion, but he wallowed in it, alternating between sadness and anger.

It was in this state of anguish that his *yetzer hara* gained stronger footing. After a few hours of grieving, Yosef hailed down a carriage and

asked to be taken to the University of Berlin. He stepped out in front of the imposing college building, paid the driver, and then stood motionless, observing the throngs of students walking in and out.

He remained there for a few moments, his future hanging shakily before him. Would he go in? Could he take off his yarmulke and enter the place that could teach him the wisdom he longed for? Would he remain true to his father and turn his back on the building that had occupied his dreams for a solid few months?

Suddenly, a shadow fell over him. He looked up to see the dean of the university standing before him.

“Yosef, son of the great Jewish rabbi!” the professor said warmly, offering his hand for a shake. “How are you? I haven’t seen you in a long while!”

Yosef shook his hand. It was the third time he touched a non-Jew, and he found that it no longer made him squeamish. “I wanted to see the university,” he told the professor.

“Sure, come on inside,” the professor invited. “I’ll take you on a guided tour.”

“I can’t,” Yosef replied in a small voice. “I’m a religious Jew; I can’t remove my head-covering.”

The professor leaned in, as if to clue him in to a grave secret. “If you’re walking with me, no one will bother you,” he said, winking. “You can keep your hat on and nothing will happen.”

“Thank you, sir,” Yosef said excitedly, joining the professor on the path toward the large entranceway of the university building.

“Tell me, son, how is your father?” the professor inquired as they walked.

Yosef’s eyes dimmed and his voice was low. “My father passed away recently.”

“Oh!” It was obvious from the professor’s tone of voice that he had been unaware of that fact. “I’m so sorry to hear that! Your father was an extraordinary scholar.” He paused for a moment and then turned sideways to look at Yosef. “I want you to know that I will be there for you, like a father, from now on. If you ever need anything, and I mean anything, you should know you can count on me.”

Yosef recoiled, but kept silent. He didn’t want to offend the professor, who was treating him so kindly.

They entered the building and Yosef kept his yarmulke on. People passing them in the halls shot him odd looks, and he got his fair share of angry glances as well. Most of the Jewish students in the university were not observant, but even those who were didn’t dare cover their heads indoors. Seeing Yosef, with his yarmulke, walking with the dean, they understood that he was an important personage.

“And this here is our library,” the professor said with a flourish, after showing Yosef the lecture halls and lounges. The expansive room was lined with tomes from top to bottom. Some students were sitting at tables, working on research, while others were browsing through the extensive collection. “We have all kinds of books here. Science, medicine, language, even Jewish books. Any subject you might be interested in has ample representation within this library.”

Yosef could not tear his gaze away. He had never seen anything like it in his life. He looked around slowly, trying to drink it all, itching to break open the volumes and get his hands on the knowledge inside.

“There’s a board meeting scheduled in a few minutes,” the professor said, glancing at his gold

pocket watch. "I want to introduce you to the executives at the meeting."

"But... I'm only eighteen years old!" Yosef stammered, a blush creeping to his cheeks.

The professor ignored his protest. "It's a big honor for the university to host your father's son. Come, the meeting is in the conference room. This way, please."

Yosef followed him shyly. The professor introduced the rabbi's son to his colleagues, and within a few minutes, he was shaking hands with the greatest minds and deepest pockets of Berlin. As he conversed with them and they expressed a desire to have him join them, Yosef's remaining resolve weakened. By the time he left the university after dark, his mind was made up.

He returned to yeshiva and began packing his things, explaining to his friends that he would be enrolling in the University of Berlin the following morning. The news spread like wildfire, and Yosef found himself being summoned to the rosh yeshiva.

"Yosef, Yosef," the rosh yeshiva cried, caressing his hand, his voice a mixture of warmth and mourning. "Yosef, what are you planning to do? Come back to yeshiva, where you rightfully belong."

Yosef felt torn. "I'll stay in yeshiva for the second half of the day," he said, making a quick compromise. "I'll learn in college in the mornings, and I'll come back every day for second seder."

The rosh yeshiva shook his head. "No, my son," he said gravely. "You must choose. Either you remain in yeshiva, or you leave. There is no way to straddle two worlds at the same time." Yosef was unimpressed by his words. "In that case, I'll leave the yeshiva," he responded shortly.

The rosh yeshiva began to weep. "Yosef, Yosef! What are you doing to your holy father in shomayim? Every mitzvah that you do adds a beautiful jewel to your father's crown. Each sin that you commit further destroys your father's nitzchiyus. Yosef! Think of your illustrious father! How can you do this to him?!"

A lump rose in Yosef's throat, but he refused to back down. "I've already learned so much Torah," he said earnestly. "All I want is to study other subjects a little more."

The rosh yeshiva continued pleading with his talmid to make the proper choice, and some magidei shiur joined him, until Yosef couldn't bear the pressure.

"I can't," he said "I need to do this. Please excuse me." With that, Yosef backed respectfully out of the room. Then he turned his heel and left the yeshiva.

Outside, holding the small suitcase with his belongings, he pondered his options and decided to turn to the professor. Shyly, he explained that he wanted to enroll in the university. He asked the professor to lend him money to rent a small room and buy food.

"With pleasure," the professor agreed, overjoyed that the young genius would be joining his school. "I'll gift you the money! And there's no need to worry about tuition either. I'm granting you a full scholarship."

Yosef gratefully accepted the professor's money and was soon studying diligently at the university. The professor arranged an exemption for him to be allowed to sit in class with his head covered. As he immersed himself in science and history, he couldn't help but feel very self-conscience about his yarmulke. The small black cap felt heavier and heavier with each passing day.

After a few weeks, Yosef began rationalizing. None of the other Jewish students wore yarmulkes in the building. It was embarrassing, and he wondered if it was strictly required by Halacha. The roof of the building is like one large yarmulke, he thought to himself. His fingers crept to his head, and before he was fully conscience of his decision, the yarmulke was in his pocket. He continued to wear it whenever he left the building, but no longer while he was inside.

With his brilliant mind, Yosef was on top of his class with each course he took. He grasped the material within minutes and retained all he learned. He was admired by his professors and peers alike. Through his studies, he discovered that he was particularly adept at economics.

As a college student, Yosef couldn't daven at the yeshiva, so he found a minyan near the university which he joined three times a day. Slowly, his yiddishkeit deteriorated. His presence at the minyan dwindled to once a day, and then to Shabbos, and then to sporadic appearances when he was in the mood. He ate kosher, but was fine to eat whatever was available if there was no kosher food at hand. He stopped wearing his yarmulke indoors, even at home, and then stopped wearing it at all.

At the age of twenty-one, he graduated from the University of Berlin with impressive credentials. His benefactor, the professor, lent him money and Yosef began a business. Within a short time, he became very successful. He paid back the professor and continued building a vast fortune. Soon, he was closing expensive deals on a regular basis and became extremely prosperous. Eventually, he accepted a part-time position at the university as a lecturer.

At this point, there were barely any traces of yiddishkeit left in Yosef. He dressed and behaved just as his gentile associates. He stopped going through the half-hearted motions

of mitzvos and led a completely secular lifestyle. His saintly father, his Gemara, his fond memories of yeshiva were buried and forgotten.

Through his business dealings, Yosef became acquainted with the daughter of another Berlin tycoon. After a few months, they decided to marry. She was not Jewish, but Yosef was too far gone to care. They set a wedding date and began preparing.

Yosef's business associate, his future father-in-law, was excited about the match. Yosef was brilliant, successful, and fabulously affluent. However, as a Catholic, he wanted Yosef to convert before marrying his daughter. "It's not a big deal," he said. "They'll sprinkle a little water on you and that's all."

The thought was very disturbing to Yosef, but he was too caught up in his engagement to break it off. "I don't think I have the guts to do it right now," he confided. "I need some time to get used to the idea. Let's do it on the night of the wedding. The priest will come down, baptize me, and then marry us right afterward. By then, I'll be fine with the whole thing."

His father-in-law agreed and the conversation was over.

Three days before his wedding, Yosef went to sleep at night and had an eerie dream. His father appeared before him, his face radiating holiness and purity.

"Yosef, Yosef, what are you doing?" his father asked in anguished tone. "You left the Torah way, and now you're planning on intermarrying?!" He began to cry, a heart-wrenching sound.

Yosef watched as the brilliant glow on his father's face slowly dimmed until it was completely dark. Tears poured down his blackened cheeks like sparks of fire. "Yosef,

have pity on me! You cannot imagine how much pain you are causing me! You're killing me in this world!" Yosef saw the image of his father begin shrinking, smaller and smaller, until he disappeared.

Yosef sat up abruptly in bed, his hair pasted to his sweaty forehead. What an awful nightmare! He looked around his bedroom, trying to still his racing heart. How can I do this? What am I becoming? He could not fall back asleep.

In the morning, Yosef pushed the dream out of his mind. He had a few lectures to deliver and an important business meeting to attend. In the evening, his friends threw a rowdy bachelors' party to celebrate his final days as an unmarried man. They tossed back shot after shot of whiskey, laughing and joking together, until late at night.

It was very late when Yosef finally staggered into his palatial home, drunk and completely depleted. He collapsed into his bed and was immediately asleep.

Once more, his holy father appeared to him in his dream. Yosef shrunk back in terror as his father delivered scathing mussar, warning him to repent before it was too late. It was painful to see, painful to hear, but Rav Yonasan continued relentlessly, trying to impress upon his son the sheer dreadfulness of his ways.

When Yosef finally forced himself awake, still cringing from the unrestrained rebuke, he made a decision. He would break the engagement and cancel the wedding. With that resolved, he felt somewhat at peace and promptly fell back asleep.

Then morning dawned. The sun shined, the birds chirped, and the world seemed a lot friendlier than it had the night before. Yosef began his day, all the while pondering the decision he had made. Suddenly, there was a knock on his door. Pulling open the door, he saw his fiancé standing there, smiling at him.

Standing before her, all thoughts of canceling the wedding flew out of Yosef's head. There was no way he could do that to her, to himself! They spent the day together, shopping for last minute wedding touches and enjoying each other's company.

When he went to sleep that night, Yosef knew he didn't have the guts to cancel the wedding at such a late stage. Still, he couldn't help feeling unnerved from his dreams the previous few nights. He drank some liquor to calm his nerves and was soon asleep.

This time, his dreams took a different turn. It was as if he was watching a film of his life, an out-of-body experience. He saw himself, strong, robust, and successful at anything he tried. Then, he saw himself be diagnosed with a serious illness. He watched as his strength deteriorated as he endured difficult treatments. He saw himself grow weaker and weaker, and finally, pass away.

In his dream, a large crowd of Gentiles came to his funeral. He saw his wife, his father-in-law, his non-Jewish children. He watched the priest eulogize him and then saw himself be buried. Then his relatives and friends filed out of the cemetery, wearing solemn expressions.

As soon as the cemetery was empty, Yosef saw angels descend from shomayim. They grabbed hold of his body and dragged it out of the grave. "Yosef ben Yonasan," they said menacingly. "You will now pay for every sin you committed in your lifetime."

"Read the list!" came the order from one of the malachim.

Obligingly, another angel began to read from a ledger. "He took off his yarmulke for the first time," he thundered.

Yosef watched as the angels grabbed onto his hands and legs, holding him aloft. They began to beat him with fiery rods. The pain was terrible, and he felt that he simply couldn't endure it. "Stop!" Yosef heard himself plead. "Stop, stop! I'll do teshuvah!" "Too late," one of the angels snapped at him, bringing his flaming pole down again, hard. "You're dead already. It's too late to do teshuvah."

The pain was excruciating. Unbearable. Watching the scene in his dream, Yosef was sure his body would pass out from the pain. But this was post-death, when fainting to escape pain wasn't an option. His body was forced to withstand the torture.

"Now let us deal with the first day that you skipped bentching, a de'oraisa," the angels said, just when Yosef was sure his punishment was coming to an end. They beat him profusely, cracking his ribs and breaking his bones.

Yosef watched himself scream in agony, but the angels just continued applying more and more pain. "You see this book?" they asked him, showing him the thick ledger. "This is a list of every single sin you committed. You will suffer for each one, right here and now. Only afterward will we allow you to go to Gehinnom."

In his dream, Yosef continued watching as his body went through bitter, bloody suffering, bloodcurdling screams accompanying each blow. From his out-of-body position, he wondered how his body would handle punishment for the full accounting of his aveiros. They were still up to the first page, and that was torturous enough!

Suddenly, his father appeared, in all his holiness and glory. As Rav Yonasan got closer and closer, the words he was saying got louder and louder. "Yosef, Yosef..." he was murmuring in a pained voice. "Yosef, Yosef..."

"Tatte, Tatte!" Yosef heard himself cry out. "Tatte, save me! Help me!"

"How can I help you?" Rav Yonasan responded. "Now it is too late. You have already passed away. The gates of repentance are closed." He began crying softly along with his son's anguished screams.

"Tatte!" Yosef heard his body ask desperately. "Let the power of your Torah protect me!"

Rav Yonasan was silent for a moment. Suddenly, he called out, "Stop! Leave my son alone!"

Out of respect for the great sage, the angels paused beating Yosef.

Rav Yonasan turned to his son. "Yosef. Do you promise me that, from now on, you will live like a proper Jew? Will you abandon your current lifestyle and return to being a true shomer Torah umitzvos?"

"Yes, Tatte, I promise!" Yosef heard himself say. "I commit to return to yiddishkeit right now!"

As soon as he uttered this commitment, Yosef woke up. He opened his eyes, fearfully, and tried to orient himself. What was going on? Was that... a dream? He tried to sit up, but every movement was painful. Looking down, he saw that his bed was full of blood. His limbs, it seemed, were all either broken or badly bruised. He could not understand what happened. Hadn't it just been a dream?

Setting his teeth firmly, he pulled himself into a sitting position, ignoring the dizzying waves of pain. I'm supposed to get married tonight! he remembered suddenly. Well, not anymore.

Sitting there, bruised and broken, in a bloody bed, he reaffirmed the commitment he had made in his dream. He would give up marrying the non-Jewish girl and return to yiddishkeit. However, he had no idea how to proceed from there. "I need guidance, I need direction!" he said out loud.

From the corner of his eye a small package on a high shelf caught his attention. My kamaye! he suddenly remembered. He pictured his saintly father sitting and writing the amulet, wishing to protect his son from the dangers he would encounter. He began reminiscing of earlier, sweeter days, when he had been a young boy in his father's home, and the two would learn together for hours. "Tatte," he cried. "I can't do this on my own!"

With superhuman strength, he pulled himself out of bed and took one painful step at a time toward the kamaye. With shaking fingers, he tied it around his neck. For the first time in years, he really spoke to Hashem, pleading with Him to grant him the physical and emotional stamina to do teshuvah.

He began to feel his strength returning and movement became more bearable. Reaching for some paper, he wrote a brief letter to his ex-future father-in-law. In it, he apologized for causing him and his daughter pain and explained that he couldn't turn his back on his religion. He included a tremendous sum of money to try to repair some of the hurt he was surely causing them and then sealed the letter.

Next, he wrote a letter to the professor that had taken him under his wing. He thanked the professor for the honor he had shown his father and for the care he had displayed to the lonely orphan. He informed the professor that he would be returning to yiddishkeit and that this would be their final correspondence.

Scrawling the names of both addressees onto the envelopes, Yosef left the letters on the table for his servant to deliver. He knew he needed to leave as soon as possible, before the world awakened and people would question his actions. There was no time to sell his mansion or liquidize his substantial assets. Instead, he emptied his safe of its cash and gold into a sack, grabbed a change of clothing, and went to hire a horse and wagon.

By the time the business day began, Yosef was far away. His business, his investments, his home, his fiancé all remained behind, abandoned in Berlin.

The driver dropped him off at an upscale hotel in a city many kilometers away. Yosef paid the hotel manager to care for him and his wounds. Expert physicians were summoned to stay at his side and help him heal. It took him a month to fully recover from the severe bruises he had suffered through his dream.

When he finally felt better, he left the hotel and went to purchase a set of Jewish clothing. His beard and payos had grown in, and he no longer looked like the wealthy magnate he had been just a few weeks before. Properly attired as a frum Jew, he made his way back to his hometown of Prague.

Soaking himself in the holiness of Prague's shuls and Jewish community, Yosef spent hours in intense teshuvah. Too late, he understood the danger of trading a wonderful environment for a poisonous one, and he pleaded with Hashem to help him forget the teachings he had learned in university. He wanted to fill his mind with Torah, and only with Torah.

With the small fortune he had brought with him from Berlin, Yosef established one of the first kollelim. He built a beautiful bais medrash and supported a group of elite talmidei chachamim who learned there with tremendous hasmadah.

With time, he married a fine bas Yisroel and established a Torah-true home. He never spoke of his years in Berlin and his family knew nothing about that time period in his life. It was only shortly before he passed away that he told his family about his terrible years in Berlin. He asked them to publicize his story to warn others of the dangers of mixing with non-Jews and inhabiting a bad atmosphere.

The places, the people, the culture that we choose to surround ourselves with affects us tremendously. For even if someone is the son of Rav Yonasan Eibshitz himself, even if he comes from the purest of homes and is reared with the finest Torah education, a negative environment has the power to pull him toward the most terrible of sins.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A435

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