

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Tzedakah- The Wisest Investment

Dovid was a young man with a good head, and he was very successful in his learning. The custom in his hometown was that young men would learn in yeshiva until the age of seventeen, after which they would go into business or learn a trade. When Dovid turned seventeen, he did not feel it was necessary to leave yeshiva and go to work. He came from a wealthy family so money was not a concern, and he was doing very well in learning.

When he shared his thoughts with his friends, they discouraged him from staying in yeshiva.

“If anything, having money should be a greater incentive for you to go into business,” They told him. “With money and connections like yours, you’ll be starting off way ahead of us. Besides, all of us are going out to work. You won’t have any friends in yeshiva with you.”

“But I love Torah, and I feel that my place is before my Gemara,” Dovid protested. “I have more than enough materialism; there’s no need for me to make more money.”

His friends did not accept his arguments and kept on pushing him to go into business. After hearing their talk for long enough, Dovid finally allowed himself to be convinced. A few days passed, and with his decision solidified, he even began to look forward to becoming a businessman. Life inside the bais medrash was no longer as appealing and exciting as it had once been for him.

When he returned home at the end of the zman, he mentioned his decision to his father, who was completely against the idea. “Why do you need to go to work?” His father asked. “Your friends need to earn a living so they can help their families and eventually get married. You are in a different situation. I’m happy to provide you with all your needs. You have the opportunity to become a tremendous talmid chacham! There’s no reason you need to give it up!”

Dovid jiggled impatiently. “All the other bochorim my age are going into business,” He explained. “I don’t want to be different than everyone else. Besides, I’ve already done my time in yeshiva. I’m getting a little burned out.”

Seeing that his son would not be persuaded otherwise, his father relented. He agreed to give Dovid an ample sum of money to purchase inventory with which to start a business, and advised him to travel to the city of Kushta, the capital of business in the region. Reluctant to send his son so far away and with so much money alone, he arranged for Menachem, his trustworthy business associate, to safeguard the money and accompany Dovid to Kushta.

Throughout their weeks of traveling, Menachem and Dovid hid the money in their wagon. When they would reach Kushta, they intended to rent

lodgings at a local inn and stow the cash in the inn's safe.

When they finally arrived in the city, they checked into an inn, planning on resting up from their exhausting travels. However, there were trumpets tooting, and they could not help but notice the long faces of practically every person they encountered. "What is going on?" Dovid inquired of someone.

"Didn't you hear? The great tzaddik was niftar!" The man responded. "There's a levayah beginning right now, just a few blocks away."

Excited to have arrived in the city in time to participate in the levayah of this erstwhile tzaddik, Dovid expressed a desire to attend. Menachem was of the opinion that they were too fatigued from their journey to go anywhere, but Dovid disagreed and went to the levayah.

In a display of honor for the righteous niftar, the entire Jewish community turned out for his levayah. As Dovid stood in the crowd, he noticed that while most of the Jews were crying mournfully over their loss, there were a few who were roundly cursing the departed man. Their language was so obscene, and their anger was so intense, that Dovid had a hard time understanding the contradictory opinions of those in attendance. Was the niftar righteous or evil?

When he asked the man standing next to him, he was told that the tzaddik had borrowed a tremendous amount of money a few years earlier. Shortly thereafter, a massive fire had consumed his home and everything in it, including the money he had borrowed. Having lost everything, the tzaddik was unable to pay back what he had borrowed and left this world with outstanding debts to the people who were cursing him so intensely.

Hearing the story, Dovid was horrified at the chilul Hashem the creditors were causing with

their shameful speech regarding the departed tzaddik. He understood that they were upset about the loss of their money, yet he felt bad for the righteous man who was being defamed at his own funeral due to debts caused by no fault of his own. Burning with indignation, he elbowed his way to the front of the crowd, banged loudly on the casket, and called, "Stop the levayah!"

His cry was met with stunned silence, as people tried to comprehend what was occurring. Who was this young man, and what was he doing interrupting the proceedings?

"I hear that there are people who are carrying grudges against this tzaddik for not repaying his debts," Dovid continued, taking advantage of the silence to get his message across. "Anyone who can bring two witnesses to testify that they lent him money and were not repaid should come forward. I will personally repay them."

There was another moment of silence before everyone began speaking at once. Menachem was hastily dispatched to retrieve the money from the inn's safe, and as creditors came forth with witnesses, Dovid paid each person what he was owed. Slowly, the commotion died down and the levayah resumed. The tzaddik was buried with equal honor and respect from all the Jews, especially the creditors, who were now freed of their grudges toward him.

On the way back from the cemetery, people came over to welcome Dovid to the city. They were impressed by his middos and generosity, and wanted to know more about him. By contrast, Dovid had no interest in acquainting himself with the people of a city that produces such scorn for a great tzaddik. Despite Menachem's entreaties that they return to the inn to finally get some rest, Dovid insisted on turning around and heading directly back home. His exposure to the world outside of yeshiva left him disenchanted, and he had only deep regret that he had abandoned his Gemara.

Several weeks later, Dovid's wagon rolled back into his hometown. His father was shocked to see him back so soon. "What happened?" He asked in surprise.

Dovid began recounting the story of the men who had humiliated the tzaddik at his funeral. "I went there to do business, but it is a wicked city," He explained. "I couldn't stay there for another moment. The only thing I want right now is to go right back to my Gemara and pick up from where I left off."

His father strongly supported his decision to use the money to pay up the tzaddik's debts, and he was proud of his son for returning to yeshiva. Dovid spent another few months learning with tremendous diligence before his Gemara.

After some time, his friends came to persuade him to enter the workforce again. "Just because a few men were angry about a debt, it doesn't mean that the entire city is wicked, let alone the entire business world," They told him. "You need to give business a fair chance. You learned enough. Now is your time to be successful at earning money."

Once again, their ceaseless persuasion had its desired effect, and Dovid slowly became used to, and then excited about, the idea of traveling back to Kushta to start a business. His father disagreed with his choice, but once more supplied him with ample funds for his venture and arranged for Menachem to accompany him.

His second experience was no more pleasant than his first.

As he entered the city with Menachem, they saw a young girl, her hands shackled, standing with a subdued expression on her face. Behind her stood a man who obviously wielded power over her. Going over to investigate, Menachem discovered

that she was being sold as a slave for five-hundred gold coins.

"I knew this was a terrible city!" Dovid declared in distress when Menachem explained to him what he had learned. "They are actually selling real people to slavery! Maybe she is a Jewish girl! Please, take the necessary sum and go redeem her."

Menachem did as Dovid instructed, and the girl was released into his care. Once more consumed with distaste for the city of Kushta, the two men decided to return home, taking the girl with them.

"You're back early again?!" Dovid's father exclaimed. He noticed the girl and threw up his hands in exasperation. "Every time you go out on business there is another story!"

"You're right," Dovid replied. "The world is really crazy, and I want no part in it. I'm going back to yeshiva for good." True to his word, after packing up his things, he returned to yeshiva.

The young girl became part of the household, but she refused to answer any personal questions. After living with the family for some time, she finally opened up and told them that she was not a Jewish girl. She was actually the daughter of the king of a faraway land, and had been taken captive after a failed war. She had been sold from one country to the next, until she was finally redeemed by Dovid and brought to their home.

Like Dovid, his parents had assumed that the refined young girl was Jewish, and they were completely taken aback to discover that she was not. They were not too keen on having a non-Jewish girl living in their home, but they couldn't throw her out into the streets. She continued living with them and made herself useful by assisting them with keeping house and in any other way she could. Despite the fact that she was not Jewish, she impressed the family with her modesty and sensitivity.

Eventually, she expressed the desire to become a Jew. In accordance with halachah, the family tried to persuade her against it, explaining that she could serve Hashem as a gentile by observing the sheva mitzvos bnei noach. Still, she persisted. Through her time in their home, she had learned all about authentic yiddishkeit, and that was what she wanted. After a long, grueling, discouraging process, she emerged from the waters of the mikvah a Jew.

Time marched on, and soon Dovid turned twenty years old. He was still learning in yeshiva and developing into a genuine talmid chacham. It was now time to think about marriage.

“I want to let you in on a little secret,” His father told him. “The girl who you redeemed was not Jewish. She is actually a princess from a foreign land, and she became a giyores after living in our home. She is sincere in her yiddishkeit, a real special girl, and I think she will be a wonderful match for you.”

Dovid was shocked to hear that the girl hadn't been Jewish, but he quickly recovered. “If you think it's a match, then I agree,” He said to his father. “However, if she is truly the daughter of the king, how can we marry without permission from her parents?”

His father agreed to send messengers to make the dangerous trip overseas to request permission from the king. The messengers returned with a positive response, but Dovid was not satisfied.

“Something tells me that they aren't trustworthy,” He explained to his father. “How do I know that they actually spoke to the king and received his blessing? I want to make the trip myself, and to hear it from the king with my own two ears. Additionally, she has not seen her parents since she was taken captive many years ago. The right thing would be for her to come along to see her parents again after all this time.”

“Don't you remember those failed trips to Kushta?” His father asked, raising his brow in skepticism. “Each time you travel, something else happens. I'm not sure that this is a good idea.”

“It's the only way to do it,” Dovid pleaded.

His son was a dependable boy, and the incidents in Kushta had happened some years earlier. His father resignedly agreed. He hired a large escort to accompany Dovid and the girl on the dangerous overseas journey, to provide protection.

The journey by ship was four months long, and as most seafaring journeys were in those days, it was riddled with danger and challenges. Only a few days before they were due to pull in at the port of the girl's homeland, an unexpected storm capsized the ship. The floundering passengers slowly joined the ship at the bottom of the sea. By miracle, both Dovid and the girl were rescued by a fisherman, who caught them in his net and drew them to safety. They were the only survivors of the tragic sinking.

Sitting in the fisherman's hut, he asked them who they were, and the girl explained that she was the daughter of the king who had been taken captive. She was now returning to request permission to marry Dovid.

“If you are indeed the king's daughter, as you say you are, there is an inn just a few miles away from here. You will be able to send a message to the king from there, and he will surely come down to greet you,” The fisherman suggested.

“How can we ever repay you for saving our lives?” They asked the fisherman, tears of gratitude flowing down their cheeks.

“If you would like to repay me, then this is what I am requesting,” The man replied. “I'm sure her father will permit you to get married, and he will throw a lavish wedding. On the night of your

wedding, I want you to come discreetly back to me. Bring along a shovel, some wood, and a big mat. By fulfilling this request, you will have repaid me for saving your lives.”

His bizarre request made them a little uneasy, yet they felt they had no choice but to comply. Dovid shook the fisherman’s hand and agreed to return on the night of their wedding with the requested items.

Leaving the man’s home, they followed his directions to the inn and sent a message to the king. Seeing his daughter’s handwriting moved the king to tears. Excited and emotional, the king and queen made their way to the small town where their daughter was waiting for them, and a tearful reunion followed. Hearing that Dovid had redeemed her from captivity and that she had converted to Judaism, the king granted them permission to marry and set a wedding date for the following week.

One week later, amidst great pomp and ceremony, Dovid and his wife became husband and wife. After a night of celebration, the guests and family left and the brand new couple was left alone.

“I’ve always been someone who keeps my word,” Dovid told his kallah. “We promised the fisherman that we would go back to him after the wedding, and I want to fulfill our promise.”

“Aren’t you afraid?” She asked nervously. “His request sounded spooky. We should come alone, without anyone knowing, with shovels in the middle of the night?”

“If he wanted to harm us, he could have done so when he found us floundering in the ocean,” Dovid pointed out. “He saved our lives! We owe it to him to at least go back and see what he wants.”

Dragging the heavy wood, the cumbersome mat, and the shovels, the young couple made their

painstaking way back to the fisherman’s lodgings. When they finally arrived, it was near morning. The fisherman was already at the waterfront, and he smiled broadly when he saw them.

“Mazel Tov!” He cried. “Welcome back! I’m so happy you came here!”

“We want to repay you for saving our lives,” Dovid said. “What would you like us to do?”

“I want you to dig a very deep hole in the ground over here,” He replied, showing the rough measurements with his hands.

The couple exchanged a fearful glance but complied without a word. As they swung shovelfuls of dirt to the side to form a large hole, they couldn’t help but wonder if they were digging their own grave. Would their bodies soon be tossed inside the pit they were creating?

When the ditch was large enough to satisfy the fisherman, he instructed them to cover it up with the wooden planks they had brought and to put the mat in front of it. After they complied, the fisherman pushed away one of the boards and lowered himself into the pit.

The couple exchanged another glance, wondering what he was up to. His behavior was getting stranger and stranger.

“Do you know who I am?” The fisherman called up to them from inside the pit. “I am not a person from this world. I am the man, the tzaddik whom you saved from slander at his levayah a few years ago in Kushta. You paid up my debts and spared me hours of additional disgrace. Do you remember me?”

“I remember you,” Dovid responded, his voice shaky from his encounter with a man from the Next World.

“There was a decree in shomayim that everyone on the ship you were traveling on was destined to drown,” The ‘fisherman’ continued. “You, too, were supposed to meet your end at the bottom of the sea. However, due to your chesed and tzedakah with me, I was sent down in the body of a fisherman to save you from death, which I did. You buried me once, with dignity and honor. Now that I repaid the favor, I am asking you to do the same for me again.”

“What should I do?” Dovid asked breathlessly.

“Please cover up this whole with dirt,” The ‘fisherman’ instructed. “Please bury me once more so that I can go back up to shomayim.”

Dovid did as he asked, covering the ditch back up with mounds of earth and burying the fisherman inside. When he finished, the fisherman’s soul went back up to its rightful place in Gan Eden.

This story is brought down by the Ben Ish Chai, a great Sephardic mekubal, to expound upon the extraordinary protection granted by tzedakah and chesed. Its far-reaching effects are such that Hashem will even send down a neshamah from Gan Eden to protect those who perform these powerful actions.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A191 - 1987.

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