

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

The Chofetz Chaim's Self Conversation

Rav Hillel Zaks, a grandchild of the Chofetz Chaim, lived in his illustrious grandfather's home until he was nine years old. Although he was very young, he retained certain memories regarding his experiences with the Chofetz Chaim. He related the following story to Rav Sholom Schwadron.

The Chofetz Chaim would often go into his room and begin speaking to himself. Strangers who would witness this phenomenon would often raise their eyebrows in wonder as they heard the great sage laugh or cry to himself or tell over an astounding story to an audience consisting of his own ears alone. Those close to the Chofetz Chaim understood that he was learning *mussar*.

When Rav Yerucham Levovitz, the famed *mashgiach* of the Mir Yeshiva, was *mashgiach* at the Chofetz Chaim's yeshiva in Radin, he was very interested in eavesdropping on one of the

Chofetz Chaim's 'conversations' with himself in a closed room. Someone in the Chofetz Chaim's household informed Rav Yerucham that he had gone into his room and begun speaking to himself. Rav Yeruchem hurried over and put his ear to the door. He overheard the following conversation that the Chofetz Chaim had with himself.

"Ah, good morning, Yisroel Meir!" The Chofetz Chaim greeted himself. "How are you feeling today?"

"*Baruch Hashem!*" The Chofetz Chaim replied to his own query. "I'm fine, *baruch Hashem*. I'm healthy as an ox, even at my age. It is so kind of you to ask me how I feel! Thank you!"

The room was quiet for a moment, and then the Chofetz Chaim, playacting the role of the first man who inquired after his wellbeing, said, "Oh, hello, Yisroel Meir! I haven't seen you in a few days! How are you?"

"Thank you for asking! That is so considerate of you," The Chofetz Chaim, now acting as himself, responded. "You should know, I was always strong and solid, but now I see that my bones are starting to act up once in a while. But the truth is, that *baruch Hashem*, I am feeling healthy and well."

Another moment of silence.

"Yisroel Meir! How have you been? We haven't seen each other in a while! How's it going? Are you feeling alright?"

"Good morning, R' Yankel! So good to see you! What should I tell you R' Yankel? It's just not the way it used to be. My bones are creaking already, and I recently started walking with a cane. I remember how I used to be strong, so robust and sturdy. *Baruch Hashem*, I still feel fine, but I can't depend on myself the same way I used to."

Rav Yerucham's ear was still pressed against the door, and he waited for the Chofetz Chaim to continue his monologue.

"Good to see you, Yisroel Meir! How are you doing today? You look so healthy and well!"

"*Baruch Hashem*, the *Eibeshter* truly loves me, and I have to keep thanking Him for all the kindness He does for me constantly. Truthfully, though, I think I will need to go see a doctor soon. I used to be the picture of good health, but I haven't been feeling so well lately. You should know that I take it as a personal compliment that you are always asking about me. Thank you so much!"

Again, a few moments of silence.

"Oy, Yisroel Meir, what happened?! I see that you are walking bent over, like you are in pain. Is everything okay?"

"*Baruch Hashem*, it could be worse. I'm really beginning to feel my age. I'm planning on going to the doctor tomorrow; maybe he'll be able to help me."

Another quiet minute.

"Yisroel Meir, I see you are still walking the streets! Did you go to the doctor? How are you feeling?"

"Yes, I can still walk around, *Baruch Hashem*. I was at the doctor a few weeks ago, and he diagnosed me with a disease that's not too serious. I'm not feeling very well, but I'm hoping to pull through."

Pause.

"Oy! Yisroel Meir! I don't know how to say this... but you really look terrible! Is everything okay?"

"I don't know, R' Yankel. My symptoms aren't getting better. My family is taking me to see a specialist today for a more thorough examination. Thanks for asking about me, I really appreciate that you care."

Pause.

"Nu, Yisroel Meir? What is going on? Did you go to the specialist yesterday?"

"I did, and I was diagnosed with a fatal illness. I would have never believed that such a thing would have happened to me, a man who was once young and strong. I just hope I don't have to suffer too much, and that Hashem grant me a complete *refuah* despite the doctor's dire predictions."

Pause.

"Ah, R' Yankel! Thank you for coming to visit me! I never would have believed I would be homebound like this, lying in bed unable to get out. I used to be so energetic, always coming and going. Now, I can barely eat and I am on a liquids-only diet. My family is very worried about me, but I trust that Hashem will heal me. It means so much that you came by to visit a bed-ridden man like me!"

Pause.

"Good morning, Yisroel Meir, how are you feeling after so many weeks cooped up in bed?"

"Ah, thank you for coming!" This time, the Chofetz Chaim's voice sounded raspy, as if he was really lying in bed, deathly ill, speaking with his last vestiges of strength. "My condition really isn't too good. I'm in tremendous pain, and I don't have the energy to perform the most basic tasks. I fear that the end is not too far off..."

A long pause. Then the Chofetz Chaim began speaking in the roles of people other than himself and R' Yankel.

“He’s taking a turn for the worse!”

“Call the *Chevrah Kadisha!*”

“Everyone stand back!”

“Light the candle, light the candle!”

The Chofetz Chaim continued, this time speaking as himself, “I’m leaving this world! Who would have thought? Who would have imagined that I would leave the world?” He began crying. “I thought I would live forever. I had such a good life, children, grandchildren. And now I have to leave this world! Oy!”

“Yisroel Meir, you have to say *vidui*.”

“*Oshamnu, Bogadnu!*” The Chofetz Chaim cried out, his voice shaky with tears. He sobbed heavily as he went through the entire *vidui*. “*Shema Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad!*”

And then, “There’s no pulse! Yisroel Meir was *niftar!*”

“Did you hear the news? Yisroel Meir passed away a few hours ago!”

“Okay, it is time to do the *taharah*.” The Chofetz Chaim suddenly announced, impersonating the head of the *Chevrah Kadisha*. He began describing the entire *taharah* process that the members of the *Chevrah Kadisha* were doing to his body.

He moved on to his burial. “Nu, the Chofetz Chaim is no longer with us. Here, help me shovel more dirt on top of the *aron*.”

Suddenly, the Chofetz Chaim’s voice grew grave. “Yisroel Meir!” He thundered. “*Kum tzu din*—Come to judgement!”

Rav Yerucham, still eavesdropping outside the door, heard these words and fell to the floor with a thud. For close to two hours, he had listened as the Chofetz Chaim slowly envisioned his declining health and then death, and when he heard the Chofetz Chaim acting as the *bais din shel maalah*, calling himself to judgment, he grew terribly frightened and fainted.

Those present in the Chofetz Chaim’s home heard the loud thud of Rav Yerucham falling, and they came running to see what happened. They quickly revived Rav Yerucham, and realizing that he had overheard something interesting, they, too, began following the Chofetz Chaim’s conversation with himself, picking up in the middle of the story.

“Yisroel Meir, come to judgement!” The Chofetz Chaim was calling from inside the room.

He resumed his normal voice. “Ooh, oy! I forgot there was going to be a judgement! What will be with me?! I’m terrified!”

The Chofetz Chaim then resumed playacting the *bais din shel maalah*. “Anyone who has anything good to say about Yisroel Meir should please come up to speak!”

“Oh, wow,” The Chofetz Chaim said in his own voice. “Look how many good *malachim* are coming forward! There are the *malachim* that were created from my *harbotzas hatorah!* Oh, there are the *malachim* from the merits of my *sefer* Chofetz Chaim! And those *malachim* were created when I wrote the Mishnah Brurah!”

“Yisroel Meir, you did a wonderful job in your time on earth, as all these angels have testified. And now, I call forward anyone who has anything to say against Yisroel Meir!”

“Oy, vey! Look how many *malachim* are marching in! That one is here to testify that I didn’t have the proper intentions when I did a mitzvah. The next one is saying that I did the mitzvah by rote. The third one proclaims that my *mitzvos* were not complete. Oy, I thought I was such a big *tzaddik*. I thought I had accomplished so much! But no! Look how many prosecutors are testifying against me!” At these words, the Chofetz Chaim began sobbing bitterly. “What will be with me?”

“We will now put all the *mitzvos* on one side of the scale and the *aveiros* on the other. Yisroel Meir, the verdict is that your *mitzvos* and *aveiros* are split fifty-fifty, they equal each other exactly! Since the *halachah* is that if someone’s *mitzvos* and *aveiros* are even, we are *mateh klapei chesed*, we will tip the scales in your favor. Yisroel Meir may go to Gan Eden!”

“What a relief! What a *simchah*! I am actually going to Gan Eden! Ah, here are the *malachim* that are singing excitedly as they walk me to Gan Eden! Hashem is so good, that even though I have an equal amount of *mitzvos* and *aveiros*, I am being allowed into Gan Eden. Look, here is the entrance to Gan Eden! I’m about to go in!”

The Chofetz Chaim then assumed the role of the angel guarding the entrance to Gan Eden. “Stop! Don’t go in! The *halachah* only dictates that the scales be tipped in favor of the defendant when the *neshamah* is *niftar*. But you, Yisroel Meir, are still alive! You can’t go in to Gan Eden if fifty-percent of your deeds are negative. You need to do *teshuvah*! Yisroel Meir, you must do *teshuvah*!”

At these words, the Chofetz Chaim began crying. For twenty minutes, he sobbed for the many *aveiros* that he had committed and did not yet do proper *teshuvah*. When he finished crying, he wiped his tears. As if nothing had occurred, he exited the room and went to eat supper.

Such was the way the Chofetz Chaim learned *mussar*. Such was the way he brought himself to a level of real, tangible *emunah* in *schar v’onesh*. He was aware of his attributes and demanded a tremendous amount of himself, utilizing simple imagery and visualization tools to constantly perfect his *neshamah*.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!
This story is taken from tape # A25B

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