

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Passing the Test Part I

The following story is from the Midrash.

There was an elderly Jew who reached the end of his life. He was a prosperous man and planned on leaving his only son a vast inheritance. Shortly before he passed away, he summoned his son to his bedside to make a parting request. The son, whom we'll call Yochanan, was a married man in his thirties with two young sons.

“My son,” the dying man began. “I feel my days are numbered, and I wish to tell you the secret of my success.”

“With Hashem’s help, you’ll have a *refuah sheleimah*, Tatte.” Yochanan said earnestly, squeezing his father’s frail hand.

His father continued. “I was a businessman all my life, and I did many great things with my money.

I gave *tzedakah* and performed *chesed* and supported Torah. Still, there are many who do

good things with the money they have but are not blessed with wealth. No, I do not believe this to be the secret to my success.”

In the chair beside his father, Yochanan felt the grasp tighten around his hand. He waited patiently.

“All my life, I was *moser nefesh* never to swear,” the elderly man rasped. “I did not even swear to confirm the truth. There are times when one is obligated to swear during a *din* Torah, yet I always preferred to give up my claim in the case rather than swear. Often, refusing to swear cost me a lot of money, but Hashem greatly rewarded me for my dedication toward this mitzvah. I may have lost money in the short run, yet in the greater picture, I was rewarded with fantastic wealth.”

Yochanan’s father paused for breath. When he spoke, his voice was pleading. “My son, you will be inheriting my entire fortune. Heed my words: if you accept this mitzvah upon yourself as well, in the end, you will be successful. This is my dying wish to you: even if it is difficult, do not swear.”

Standing before his dying father, tears pooling in his eyes, Yochanan agreed. The next morning, his father’s soul returned to its Maker.

Yochanan had much time to think about his father’s final request. As an only child, he sat *shivah* alone, and between visits from comforters, his mind kept returning to his last conversation with his beloved father. Having absolutely no experience in the business world, he knew his life would change drastically now that he had inherited his father’s fortune. He was determined, at all costs, to fulfill his promise to his father.

When the week of mourning was over, Yochanan made his first attempts to try on his father’s business shoes, shoes that were a few sizes too large for him. Soon, the wet-behind-the-ears young man who was sitting on a mountain of money caught the attention of shady individuals looking to make a quick buck. It would be easy to

take advantage of the naïve and trusting newly-minted businessman.

They visited Yochanan in his father's former office, holding a sheaf of papers.

"How can I help you?" Yochanan asked pleasantly, looking up from some ledgers he had been trying to make sense of.

"We represent the Adamah Farms corporation," one of them said, flicking some invisible lint off his impeccably pressed suit. He slapped the papers down on the desk, turning them to face Yochanan. "As you can see here, your father owed us a lot of money. We've come to collect the debt."

Yochanan looked helplessly at the top page, feeling flustered. "To be honest, this is my first week on the job," he admitted, a deep blush creeping to his cheeks. "I've never really been involved in the business when my father was alive. I'll... I guess I'll have to look into it, try to see if I can find record of -."

A portly man with a goatee stepped out from behind the first. "Listen, sir," he cut in with exaggerated respect. "We thought it would be in your best interest if we made you aware that we have a solid case proving that your father owed us hundreds of thousands of dollars for these investments. We also have witnesses prepared to testify in our favor. If you can produce documents showing that the debt was repaid, we would be more than happy to review them, but otherwise, we shall be seeing you soon in court."

Yochanan stood up, willing himself not to panic. "Thank you so much! I appreciate that you're giving me time to sort this out," he said gratefully. "I'll go through my father's books and see what I come up with. I'm sure it won't be a big deal to figure this out."

"Wonderful," The first man said, somewhat dryly. He looked pointedly at Yochanan. "And when can we expect to hear back from you?"

"Uh...um...I'll take care of it right away," Yochanan stammered. "I really don't like the idea of owing anyone money."

"Yes, we understand," the heavier one responded smoothly. "However, you must understand that we cannot wait indefinitely for you to go through your records. How does next Monday sound? Either you'll furnish proof that the debt was repaid, or you'll pay it off then?"

Yochanan nodded a little too vigorously. "Yeah! Yeah, Monday sounds fine. Thank you for understanding."

As soon as the duo left his office, Yochanan began searching the office feverishly for records of the debt. To his dismay, he could not locate any documents relating to the Adamah Farms corporation. There was absolutely no evidence that the debt had ever existed, let alone that it had been repaid.

For the remainder of the week, all of Yochanan's other dealings were shelved temporarily as he turned his office inside out and combed through his father's house. Mysteriously enough, however, he could not find any contract, paid or unpaid, between his father and Adamah Farms.

The bigshots at Adamah Farms, however, were far less understanding than he'd hoped they'd be. "We said Monday," the portly representative said, stroking his pointy beard. "Today is Monday. According to our records, you owe us this money. Since you can't prove it was paid, we will be taking you to *din Torah*."

Yochanan nodded agreeably. He really had nothing to lose. He could not find record of business dealings between his father and their corporation, and he hoped that the court case would absolve him of this questionable leftover debt. Still, he knew that if Halacha required him to pay, he would do so unquestioningly.

At the *din Torah*, the *dayan* listened to both sides and heard the testimony of the witnesses brought

by Adamah Farms. After some back and forth, they decided that Yochanan did not have to pay, but he would have to swear that he had no knowledge of the debt.

At the word ‘swear’, Yochanan was already shaking his head. “I’m sorry, but that’s impossible. My father’s dying request was that I avoid swearing, as he had done in his lifetime.”

The judges exchanged glances. “Well,” one of them said kindly. “That is a very noble idea. However, in this specific case, you are obligated by Halacha to swear. Otherwise, you will need to pay the plaintiff what he claims you owe.”

“So be it,” Yochanan exclaimed. “I’ll pay if I have to, but I cannot swear.”

The *din* Torah ended positively for the sleazy owners of the Adamah Farms corporation, who gleefully collected their money from Yochanan’s office the next morning. Forging over such a vast sum of money on such doubtful charges was not easy for Yochanan, yet he did it unhesitatingly, honoring his final promise to his father.

It did not take long for word about Admah Farms’ successful venture to get around among the crooks of the business world. Free money was at hand, they realized, eager to replicate Adamah Farms’ tactics.

Only three days later, a tall man with a confident air strode into Yochanan’s office. “Shlomo Halevy,” he announced, tipping his hat. “I’m here for Yosef.”

“Oh!” Yochanan said, jumping a little at the sound of his father’s name. “I’m... my father passed away a little under three weeks ago. I’m Yochanan. Can I help you with something?”

“Yosef is gone?” the tall man’s voice sounded surprised. “I wasn’t aware of that. I’m sorry for your loss. Your father was a fine man.” Without waiting to be invited, he took a seat opposite his host. “Look, I apologize if this might be a little

unpleasant, but your father owed me money. I gave him an interest-free loan to purchase new machinery, and the loan has come due. I’m here to collect the money.”

Yochanan looked at him warily. Though he may not have been involved in his father’s business, he knew his father well. Yosef was honest, upright, and scrupulous with his business practices. If he had owed others money, Yochanan was sure he would have let his only son know. This was the second time someone was claiming a debt owed by his father, and he was starting to wonder if something was amiss.

“If I owe someone money, I’ll be happy to pay,” Yochanan told the man sitting across from him. “To be honest, however, I find it a little strange that my father never mentioned these debts to me.”

“I find it strange, too,” Shlomo heartily agreed. “I can’t imagine why he wouldn’t tell you about it. We concluded the deal in front of two of my business partners. He definitely borrowed the money.”

Yochanan drummed his fingers on the tabletop. “Wait a moment, please. Let me try to see if I can find paper record of this transaction.” He turned around and began rummaging through the ledgers behind him. “Halevy, you said? I found something!”

Returning to his desk, Yochanan began perusing the thin file. “It shows here that he borrowed three-hundred gold coins six years ago,” he murmured, moving the file toward Shlomo and pointing to the number. He turned a page and gestured triumphantly at the signatures scrawled. “Ah, but here it shows that he paid you up in full, a year later. You signed it yourself.”

Shlomo leaned back in his chair and crossed his long legs. “Yes, that was six years ago, and he did indeed repay me. I’m referring to a more recent loan, which he borrowed two years ago.”

Yochanan turned flipped the page over and frowned. There was nothing else in the file. He suddenly felt a terrible fatigue settle over him. "I guess I'll have to keep searching."

"Really. You don't trust me." Shlomo's voice was cold as ice. "Well, then, we shall meet soon in *beis din*. I'm not forgiving a loan of this magnitude simply because your father was irresponsible and neglected to record the transaction properly."

When he left, Yochanan continued searching halfheartedly. He knew where this was headed. He would find no record of the debt, he would be required to swear in *beis din*, he would refuse to swear and be forced to pay. He shrugged. It was unfair, but life wasn't always fair. There was no way he would swear.

Alleged debts came pouring in on Yochanan after that. From all directions, he was served with summonses to *dinei Torah*. At all of them, he refused to swear and instead began writing out checks for tremendous sums of money toward these false charges.

Within a few short weeks, heartless criminals cleaned him out of his entire inheritance. All Yochanan had left from his father's fortune was a single gold coin. He had sacrificed everything for the mitzvah his father had bequeathed to him. *At least there's nothing more they can rob me of*, he thought to himself after the last *din Torah*, when he returned home and realized that he had reverted back to his old self, the Yochanan without a business and without money.

To his shock, he was served with yet another *din Torah* the very next day.

The plaintiff, a wily crook who had just returned to town, was eager to milk him for every dollar he was worth and was disappointed to discover that he had already been forced to give everything up. He made a massive commotion, bringing witnesses to prove his claims that Yochanan's father had owed him a tremendous sum of money.

"Listen, you," Yochanan hissed at him furiously, willing himself not to punch the guy. "Everything was taken from me. I only have one coin left with which to start over. How can you dare do this to me? You know your allegations are false. You are taking advantage of the fact that I refuse to swear. How can you be so wicked?!"

"Business is business," the corrupt man snarled back. "You want to swear that it isn't true? Be my guest. But if you don't swear, Halacha says you owe me the money and that's that."

Despite the terrible situation it would put him in, Yochanan could not swear. The *dayanim* reiterated that the Torah allowed, even obligated, him to swear, yet Yochanan could not swear. It was announced that his home and property would be seized and sold to pay off his debts, yet Yochanan could not swear.

His last coin was taken from him. Along with his wife and his two sons, he was evicted from his home. The *bais din* possessed the home, selling it to pay his creditor. Yet Yochanan had no regrets. He knew that if he would be given the opportunity to start over, he would make the same choices all over again.

The criminals who had profited from Yochanan's naiveté were not done with him. It irked them that a man could be so principled, so devoted to his values and so firm in his choices. No, they were not satisfied that he had lost his money and his home. They wanted to break this ethical man, break him completely.

Yet another outlaw came forth to claim a debt owed to him by Yochanan's father. The man would gain absolutely nothing, since Yochanan owned nothing to give him. Still, he summoned the poor man to *din Torah* to try to compel him to swear, knowing that if Yochanan stuck to his convictions, he would be jailed in lieu of payment.

His plan worked perfectly.

The din Torah was a repeat of all the ones previously held. Yochanan continued to maintain his position, arguing that he owed the man no money yet refusing to swear. When the proceedings were finishing, Yochanan was sentenced to prison. He had entered the courtroom a free man, yet he walked out a prisoner.

As he left the courtroom flanked by his jailers, his hands manacled behind his back, Yochanan felt himself despairing. He closed his eyes, summoning the reserves of his strength, of his faith. *This has the Satan's fingerprints all over it*, he told himself. *He's trying to break me, to get me to renegade on my promise to my father, to give up the stringency I've accepted upon myself.* He straightened his shoulders resolutely. *Well, I've already paid a heavy price for my convictions. There's no way I'll give in at this late point!*

Yochanan's wife, Shulamis, found herself in a hopeless plight. A modest and gentle woman, she had been happy with her quiet life prior to her father-in-law's death and had never anticipated becoming so wealthy. Still, she had never dreamed she would become a pauper, either.

As she watched her husband being led away in chains, Shulamis realized that not only would she need to become the family breadwinner, she would also need to earn enough money to pay up the latest supposed debt that Yochanan had been charged with. The sooner the 'debt' was repaid, the sooner her husband would be released from prison.

Her husband was languishing in prison, her sons without a home. It was up to Shulamis to be the backbone of her family, a pillar of strength for her young children during this difficult time. The burden felt crushing, but she knew she would bear it stoically. She fully supported her husband's actions during his *dinei* Torah and had no regrets that he had refused to swear. They had done what was right. Everything that followed was not up to them.

Even before her father-in-law's death, before their very brief stint into prosperity, Shulamis had never worked to earn money. She had no training, no business skills, and no startup capital. At the same time, she desperately needed to start earning money as soon as possible.

And so, the dignified and refined Shulamis became a laundress.

To be continued...

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A389

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

Passing the Test Part II

Recap: Before his death, Yochanan's father implored his son to be scrupulous never to swear, even for the truth. Swindlers took advantage of this to cheat him out of his entire inheritance. Soon, his firm resistance to swearing landed him in prison on false charges. His wife, Shulamis, found herself in need of work, as she needed to feed her two children and redeem her husband from prison.

Twelve-year-old Boruch and nine-year-old Zev looked up at their mother with worried eyes. She was their only security, their only comfort. With their father imprisoned, a new, difficult era had settled upon them.

“We will become launderers, cleaning people’s clothing for a fee, until we manage to earn enough to redeem Tatte from jail,” Shulamis softly explained to her sons. She took their hands and began the brisk walk to the seashore. The breathtaking view came into sight, and for a moment, she was a regular, joyful housewife again, out with her children on an afternoon outing. Then, in pained waves, her reality came crushing down on her. Bravely, she lifted the hem of her skirt and began walking over the sandy dunes.

Looking around the endless shore, she spotted a woman approaching the water, a basket overflowing with dirty laundry under her arm. Shulamis willed herself to feel confident and approached the woman. “Excuse me?”

“Yes?”

“I would like to offer you laundry services,” Shulamis said, hoping she sounded professional enough. “I am an excellent washerwoman, and I would be happy to handle your soiled clothes while you enjoy this beautiful day.”

The woman’s grasp on her basket weakened. “How much will you charge?”

Shulamis named a price, her heart thumping wildly as she waited to see if the woman would agree.

“That should be fine,” the woman said, holding out the basket and some soap as Shulamis heaved a sigh of relief.

“Come, *kinderlach*, let’s work together,” Shulamis told the two boys. “The sooner we finish, the sooner we’ll be able to accept another job. Hopefully soon, we should have enough money to redeem Tatte.”

They bent over on the cool sand and were soon scrubbing vigorously.

“The water is so cold, Mamme,” Zev suddenly cried, thrusting his red hands forward for his mother’s viewing.

Privately, Shulamis agreed. Her hands were soft and not yet calloused, unaccustomed to this kind of labor. The temperature of the water was cutting at her skin. “Why don’t you take a break, Zev?” she offered the young boy, not allowing herself the same luxury. No matter how difficult the work was, it was the only way she could earn money, and she was determined to persevere.

When the freshly laundered clothing and the pre-agreed upon fee changed hands, Shulamis felt a mixture of hope, relief, and gratification wash over her. She pocketed the cash and looked around, hoping to find her second client just as easily as the first.

The day dragged by slowly. While they waited for more people to accept their services, Boruch and Zev frolicked on the sand. Eventually, Shulamis snagged a second paying client, and her sons joined her in scrubbing another basket of soiled clothing.

They left the seashore when the sun set, a few pennies richer, with aching hands and full hearts. Soon, soon, they would amass enough to free Yochanan. Soon, soon...

This is a challenge from Heaven, Shulamis reminded herself as she watched her children sleeping peacefully that night and willed herself to do the same. Yochanan did the right thing, and I fully accept the suffering that resulted from his dedication to this mitzvah.

The next few days were more profitable. A few kindhearted families took pity on the poor woman, and though they typically used a different washerwoman, they now brought their laundry to Shulamis. Her small sack of pennies grew along with the roughness of her now chafed hands. The thought of her husband, languishing in prison, energized her throughout the long and difficult days.

One morning, a large ship docked at the port further up the shore to refuel and stock up on supplies. Its owner, an official-looking man of medium height, strolled along the beach, watching the waves, when he spotted Shulamis, kneeling over a pile of laundry, scrubbing vigorously. There was something about her that caught his eye. With her dignified bearing and noble features, she did not have the typical appearance of a lowly washerwoman.

“Excuse me,” he called out to her. “Have you always been a laundress?”

“No, sir,” Shulamis responded, modestly keeping her eyes on the pile of clothing in front of her.

“I see. You don’t look like a washerwoman, to be honest. Why have you taken this role?”

Tears welled up in Shulamis’s eyes. “My husband was imprisoned on false charges,” she managed to choke out. “I need to earn money to redeem him.”

“Ah.” His features softened, and his voice took on a note of concern. “Well, then, perhaps I have some business to offer you. I am the royal governor of a province many miles away, and I’ve been traveling for the past few months. We have stopped off here for supplies, but the ship is set to sail again this evening. If you are interested, you

are welcome to wash the laundry of the sailors and crew on my ship.”

“Thank you, sir, I would be happy to,” Shulamis said gratefully.

“I warn you, though, that there is a lot of soiled laundry,” the governor continued. “It is big job, and it needs to be completed before we set sail tonight. However, since this is a rush job, I’m offering a high compensation for the work. It might be just enough to redeem your husband.” Beside her, she felt Boruch tense up excitedly. “I believe I’m quite capable,” Shulamis told the captain. “Can you have your men bring the laundry here, or do you prefer that I come to the ship?”

“I’m afraid it won’t be feasible to do it here,” the captain said, frowning. “There’s far too much laundry, and it will give my crew a lot of unnecessary work. Follow me, I’ll show you a nice laundry spot right beside the docked ship.”

True to his word, there was an ideal place for the massive laundry operation further up on the harbor. Shulamis and her sons worked feverishly on the coarse sailor garments, digging their way through the massive pile. As morning turned to noon and the afternoon wore on, they increased the frenetic pace of their work, hoping to finish by the time the ship was set to sail.

The members of the crew scurried about, engrossed in their tasks, as the governor wandered around, issuing orders and supervising work assignments. He stopped off at Shulamis’s makeshift workstation, observing her silently, a plan formulating in his mind.

The sun was beginning to set. The sailors boarded and took up positions around the ship. Accompanied by two burly members of the crew,

the governor approached Shulamis, nodding in satisfaction. “I see that you’ve managed to complete the task. Excellent.” He motioned to the sailors to load the wet laundry onto the ship and began rummaging around in his pants pocket.

“Ah, here we go.”

With difficulty, Shulamis managed to stifle the shout of astonishment that rose to her lips. As payment for the day’s work, he gave her a gold coin of tremendous value. It was more than enough to secure Yochanan’s release. “Thank you!” she said emotionally, taking it from him. “This will be enough for me to redeem my husband!”

“Very well,” the governor said, smiling. “Why don’t you have your son go redeem him right now? There’s no reason for him to suffer for even another moment.”

Shulamis nodded and turned to her older son. “Boruch, quick. Take this coin and hurry to the jail where Tatte is being held.”

“Okay, Mamme, I’ll go immediately,” Boruch said eagerly, dashing off.

Shulamis watched her son break into a sprint. “Thank you for your kindness, sir,” she said, turning away from the governor. She gave a happy sigh as she packed up her laundry equipment for the last time.

Suddenly, she felt herself being lifted into the air and shoved up the ramp of the docked ship. “STOP!” she shrieked, kicking her feet with every fiber of energy she possessed. “STOP! What do you think you are doing?!”

“Mamme! Mamme!” Her younger son, Zev, yelled after her from the shore, horrified.

“Lift anchor!” the governor commanded. There was a small commotion at the bow as the sailors got ready to sail, but soon they were moving away from the shore, Shulamis stuck helplessly aboard. *He kidnapped me!* Shulamis realized, panicking. *I’m all alone at sea!* “Please!” she pleaded, sobbing hysterically. “Please, return me to the shore!”

“Not so fast, my dear,” the governor said, smiling at her. “I want to make you my wife.”

“Impossible!” she cried, stamping her foot for emphasis. “I’m a Jewish woman; I’m not allowed to marry out of my faith. Besides, I’m already married. My husband is alive. Take me back home!”

“With me, you’ll have a life of comfort and ease,” the governor tried to reassure her. “You won’t need to launder other people’s dirty garments to earn a few pennies. I can provide you with anything you wish for.”

“I wish for nothing!” Shulamis spat out. “Keep your hands off me, and leave me alone! I’d sooner jump into the water!” She continued weeping profusely, covering her face with her hands.

The governor backed off in frustration. “You know what? Go ahead and cry. See if makes you happy!” He stomped off, hoping that she would come around with time.

In the meanwhile, the ship continued sailing further and further out into the sea.

Back on the shore, Zev watched the ship sail off, shouting after it as loud as he could. When he realized his mother would not be coming back, the young boy began running toward the prison to find his father and older brother. He found Boruch in the process of dealing with bureaucratic red

tape, trying to secure their father’s release. By the time he finally managed to set Yochanan free, it was very late.

“Boruch! Zev!” their father cried shakily, hugging his two sons fiercely. “I’m so grateful to Hashem to be reunited with you again.”

“But Mamme!” Zev cried. “The man from the boat took Mamme! He picked her up and put her on the ship, which sailed off with her aboard!”

Yochanan’s face turned white. “The man did what? Which man? What happened to Mamme?” “Do you mean the governor?” Boruch asked urgently. “The one who gave us that huge laundry job, which paid for Tatte’s release?”

“Yes, it was him!” Zev cried hysterically. Through his sobs, he tried to describe the traumatic scene he had witnessed. When he finished, his father began racing toward the port, his two children trailing behind him. However, there was nothing to find at the shore.

Not even a speck of the ship was visible in the distance.

Yochanan tore his clothing in mourning. Gazing out at the endless waves, he cried, “*Ribbono shel Olam!* I sacrificed so much for this mitzvah! I lost my money, my property, my reputation, and my liberty. And now, I’ve lost my wife. Yet I know this is from You, and so I accept my suffering with love.”

It was easier said than done, but Yochanan reminded himself over and over that ultimately, Hashem would reward him for his incredible sacrifices. *This, too, is part of the test*, he thought as he went knocking from door to door, collecting coins for bread to survive on. *This, too, is part of the test*, he told himself as he tried not to let the

scorn and pity of his fellow townspeople bother him.

“This, too, is part of the test,” he said wearily to his sons when he realized that no one would hire him due to his damaged reputation. “We’ll have to start afresh in a different city where no one knows me or my story.”

“How will we afford to hire a horse and wagon, Tatte?” Boruch asked quietly.

“We’ll go by foot, *kinderlach*,” Yochanan said, putting on a brave face for the sake of his children.

“There’s a river nearby which is rumored to be quite shallow. Perhaps we’ll be able to cross it by foot. That will give us a significant advantage, since we can easily settle into a community along the opposite bank.”

“I don’t know how to swim!” Zev whimpered in fright.

“Tatte, neither of us can swim, and we are shorter than you,” Baruch pointed out.

“Don’t worry, my children,” their father said soothingly. “Hopefully, the water will be shallow enough for both of you to wade through. To be safe, I’ll bind you to my body and hold you the entire way.”

The day was windy and stormy, the perfect weather to match a gloomy mood. Yochanan struggled to infuse himself with his usual spirit and vigor. Thankfully, they reached the narrowest point of the river within a few short hours. The small family stood at the riverbank, gazing across. At these crossroads in their lives, Shulamis’s absence was keenly felt. “Let’s go,” Yochanan said softly, blinking away his tears before his sons caught sight of them.

With deft fingers, he removed his outer shirt and twisted it into a long rope. Pressing his two sons close, he tied them to himself with the homemade rope. He gripped them tightly with both arms, tentatively stepping into the chilly water. Yochanan shivered but forged on.

To his great relief, the river was shallow enough to cross safely, yet the stormy weather was making things difficult. The water churned more rapidly than usual, tossing logs and branches about. With his sons’ iron grip tearing into him, Yochanan dodged the branches, knowing all too well the terrible fate that awaited him should he lose his footing. The opposing riverbank drew nearer and nearer. Soon, they would be on dry land.

Suddenly, a log came hurtling downstream, knocking Yochanan off balance. Both of his children were tossed helplessly into the water, shrieking hysterically. “Tatte! TATTE!”

“I’m coming, Zev! I’m coming, Boruch!” Yochanan screamed, trying to swim toward them. The boys, who did not know how to swim, grabbed onto a passing branch to help themselves remain afloat. As Yochanan plowed through fallen branches and swirling water in a desperate attempt to reach them, the branch carried them downstream, further and further away.

I must be dreaming, Yochanan thought as he watched his sons disappear downriver. *This can’t be real life. Surely, I’ll wake up soon and find myself snug under my blanket, my wife and children slumbering peacefully nearby, my inheritance intact. How can this be real? How can I lose my children on top of everything else?*

He pinched himself sharply and grimaced in pain.

No. It is real. I really did lose everything I had, and now my children, too! Even as his heart bled with anguish, he reminded himself that he had done the right thing. He could not fathom the reason why these happenings were occurring, but he knew without doubt that Hashem's ways are just. He straightened himself up and continued foraging forward; consoling himself that he would soon see just why this was good for him.

To be continued...

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

Passing the Test Part III

Recap: Before his death, Yochanan's father implored his son to be scrupulous never to swear, even for the truth. Swindlers took advantage of this to cheat him out of his entire inheritance, even landing him prison time on false charges. While working as a laundress to earn money to free her husband, his wife Shulamis is kidnapped. After Yochanan was released from prison, he tried crossing the river with his two sons, to start a new life on the other side, but ended up being separated from them in the midst of a harrowing storm.

Yochanan climbed up the riverbank and began trekking to the nearest city. The storm let up and the sun shined on him, warming his bones and

drying his clothes. As soon as he reached the city, he began looking for a livelihood. His name and face were unknown in those parts, and his damaged reputation did not follow him. With his literary skills and mathematical mind, he soon found work as a bookkeeper.

With his new source of income, Yochanan was able to afford a small rental, and he finally had a place to call home again. He spent his days bent over ledgers and financial statements, immersed in numbers and calculations. At night, however, his stoic façade would crumble as he lost himself in memories of the life he once had, of the family he lost. The only comfort he found was in remembering that he had merited to be moser nefesh for a mitzvah, making all his suffering worthwhile.

One morning, Yochanan was riding his horse to work when he passed a river. It was the first time he had taken that route, the first time since his own ill-fated crossing that he had come across a river. The sight of the flowing strip of water caused his head to spin. The entire trauma came back to him, crushing him with grief. This was the place where he had lost his children!

Yochanan stopped the horse and broke down in sobs. "Ribbono shel Olam!" he cried, distress all over his face. "I can't take this anymore! The pain is simply too much for me! Help me! Please, help me!"

Suddenly, an elderly man approached him. "Young man," he pronounced. "The time has come for you to be repaid for your devotion and self-sacrifice. Hashem was testing your endurance, to see if you would remain dedicated to his mitzvah, or if you would have regrets."

Yochanan stared at him, stunned. "Who... who are you?"

The man ignored him. “Go to the forest on the opposite end of the city. Enter the forest from the opening behind the white building, and walk until you see a tree without branches. Turn left, walk a few steps until you find two identical trees standing side by side. Between them, you’ll find a treasure waiting for you.”

Yochanan listened intently, mentally transcribing the precise directions.

“After claiming the treasure, go to the mayor of the city and tell him you would like to purchase the uninhabited land around this river to develop into homes and shops. The treasure should be more than sufficient to cover the costs of the purchase and development.” With that, the elderly man walked off.

Yochanan understood that the man must have been a messenger from Hashem. Instead of continuing on to work, he headed for the forest. Soon, he came upon the treasure, resting exactly where the old man had said it would be. As the man directed, his next stop was the mayor, where he offered to purchase and develop the vacant land adjacent to the river.

“No one has ever thought to do that before,” the mayor said slowly, thinking. “If you have enough money for the project and wish to develop it into a port and housing, then you may. I’ll have my assistant draw up a contract detailing the price of sale and the annual taxes.”

They signed on the deal, and Yochanan paid with a portion of the treasure. For the next few months, he threw himself into the project, hiring assistants and laborers, overseeing purchases and construction. Within two years, a flourishing trade port existed on the once barren land, surrounded by a brand-new village of shops,

offices, and homes. Yochanan’s investment grew considerably, and he became very wealthy.

The seaport and surrounding village received heavy traffic, as its location was excellent for traders. There were always new ships docked at the harbor and unfamiliar faces dotting the streets of the village. Yochanan built a large waterfront hotel beside the port, which was utilized by the many visitors.

One day, as Yochanan sat in his office overlooking the water, he noticed a newcomer exiting his ship, trailed by two young boys. Instantly, he recognized them as his missing sons. Tears of emotion welled up in his eyes. How he longed to embrace them, to hold them close! Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath. He knew he needed to react calmly and cautiously if he ever wanted his sons back.

Yochanan stood up and strode onto the dock. “Welcome,” he said to the man, holding out his hand. “Are you here on business?”

“Yes, I am,” the businessman replied, his handshake firm.

“I hope you are very successful,” Yochanan wished him. “And these fine young men are... your sons?”

The man hesitated for a split second. “You could say that.”

Yochanan nodded his head knowingly. “I see. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Well,” the man said, adjusting his lapels. “I’ve heard that there are wonderful business opportunities here, and I plan on staying for two weeks. Is there a hotel in the area where I can rent a room?”

“Certainly,” Yochanan assured him. “In fact, there’s a hotel right this way, which I own. Come, I’ll take you there and get you set up. If you’d like, I can employ your sons in a temporary capacity so that they’ll be occupied while you take care of your business affairs.”

The man lifted his eyebrows in interest as he fell into step beside Yochanan. “Interesting. That’s very interesting. What kind of job are you offering?”

Yochanan glanced back at his two sons, who were following silently behind. It was obvious that the boys recognized their father, but luckily, they were smart enough to keep silent. “I don’t have any official job opening, but I need another pair or two of hands to assist me with various tasks that arise. I would pay ten pennies a day per boy. What do you say?”

“Sounds great, eh, boys?” The man didn’t even bother to wait for their reply. “Thank you, I appreciate this. Having two young boys trail me all day would just bog me down.”

Yochanan assisted the man in booking a room and led his two children to the employee lounge.

“Boruch! Zev!” he cried emotionally when they were finally alone. “Baruch Hashem you are alive! What happened to you? Where were you?!”

“We held onto a log to keep ourselves from drowning, but the water just washed us away!” Zev burst out.

Boruch was able to control his emotions slightly better. “Eventually, we found ourselves on a beach. We saw people, and we begged them to help us find you. We hoped that these individuals would have mercy on two drenched, traumatized children. But no. Two non-Jews grabbed us and

took us for themselves, kidnapping us right off the beach.”

“They sold us,” Zev blubbered, tears rolling down his cheeks. “They sold us! They sold us as slaves on the market!”

“We were sold to a foreigner, from a different country,” Boruch continued, struggling to keep his voice calm. “That’s the man who brought us here. We were forced to serve as his slaves for all these years, but now we finally found you!”

“My children,” Yochanan said lovingly, holding them close. “Hashem has brought us together again. Hopefully, our salvation is here. Come, let me serve you a meal. I’m sure you haven’t eaten warm, kosher food in a long time.”

The next few days passed in a blissful blur for Yochanan. His sons’ master was thoroughly occupied with his own affairs and left Yochanan in full control of their welfare. He thoroughly enjoyed having his family nearby and tried not to think about what would happen when their master decided to sail away.

One afternoon, another ship pulled into the harbor and an official-looking man disembarked. As was his usual custom, Yochanan hurried out to the dock to greet him.

“I’m here on business,” the man confirmed. “I’m actually governor of a province many miles from here.”

“Welcome, governor,” Yochanan said, shaking his hand. “If there’s any way I can be of assistance; I would be glad to help you.”

The governor inclined his head. “Actually, I had a few questions. I’m not from these parts and I’m not so familiar with the way things work here...”

For the next few minutes, the two discussed a few different business options for the governor to pursue. Then Yochanan waved his hand in the direction of his hotel. "Why don't you stay in the hotel for a few days? You'll be much more comfortable there, and it'll be more conducive to making profitable deals."

"I wish," the governor said longingly, rolling his eyes at his ship. "It's just that I left my wife on the boat and I can't leave her alone."

Yochanan lifted the corner of his mouth in puzzlement. "I don't quite understand. Your wife can stay at the hotel with you."

"If she'd agree to leave the ship, then that would be a great idea," the governor said bitterly, frustration dripping all over his words. "My wife's crazy, you hear that? Simply crazy! One day she decided that she would never leave the boat. She swore that she would never leave! It's already been years, and she's never left the ship!"

"Crazy," Yochanan agreed, his mind churning. Could it be? Could he dare hope? After all, his wife had been kidnapped by a governor on a ship a few years earlier... "Listen, if she's crazy, why do you have to suffer? Let her sleep on her lumpy bed in the cabin, looking at the same suffocating walls she'd been looking at throughout these past few years. You come to the hotel without her, sleep in a fluffy, comfortable bed, and enjoy a fresh, hot meal."

The governor was sorely tempted to accept Yochanan's offer, but he hesitated. "I can't," he said finally. "My wife is not in her right mind. I'm afraid of what she might do if I'm not there to watch her."

Yochanan frowned. "I might have an idea. Let's go to your ship. I just want to see the layout, get a

feel of what we're discussing, to see if my plan is feasible."

They climbed up onto the ship together. Yochanan almost fainted when he recognized the governor's 'wife'. It was Shulamis. But how could he know if she had remained faithful to him during her years of exile?

Yochanan took a perfunctory tour around the ship and followed the governor out. "I have two capable boys at the hotel," he told the governor. "They assist me with whatever I need. For a small fee, I can send them to remain with your wife on the ship overnight while you enjoy luxurious accommodations at the hotel."

"Can I trust the boys?" the governor asked, slightly skeptical.

"Certainly. They are capable and extremely trustworthy."

"Deal!" the governor exclaimed. "Here's that fee you mentioned for the boys. And where can I find my room?"

"Come right up this way," Yochanan beckoned.

"I'll get you checked in."

Once the governor was safely in his room, Yochanan packed up a basket of hot food and handed it to Boruch. "Mamme is on the ship," he said quietly to his two sons. "I arranged with the governor for you boys to be there with her tonight. Obviously, he has no idea that you are her sons."

"Mamme," both boys exhaled, tasting the word on their tongues. They had not seen their mother in four years and had just been reunited with their father after nearly three years of separation. They

could barely believe that they would soon see their mother again.

Carrying the basket of food for their mother, Boruch and Zev cautiously boarded the ship. They walked hesitantly toward Shulamis, who was sitting stiffly in a corner.

Shulamis looked up and recognized her precious children. Both had grown taller, and hints of beard were evident on Boruch's face, yet they were most definitely her children. She stood up shakily, wondering if she was hallucinating.

Her sons rushed toward her, and soon the threesome were locked in a tight embrace. For a few minutes, the world was right again. They sat together in silence, not exchanging a word, basking in each other's company.

Suddenly, Boruch's brave façade crumbled. Facing his mother, he longed so badly to be sheltered in her arms again, to be protected against the harsh winds of life. The shield of composure he had worn the previous few years faded away. "Mamme," he sobbed. "What is going to be?"

"I don't know, my son," Shulamis said softly, stroking his heaving shoulders. "But I do know that we will soon merit salvation. I have been in captivity for four years, and never once have I sinned. I've been *moser nefesh* for *mitzvos* all these years. I have no doubt that Hashem will come to our aid."

She helped the boys find comfortable places to sleep, and they were soon slumbering peacefully. Shulamis herself remained awake for a long time, thinking and scheming until she hit upon a plan. With a small, content smile on her face, she drifted off.

At the hotel, Yochanan was awake for much of the night, pacing back and forth, peering out his window at the dark harbor. His family was so close, yet so far. Hashem had brought them back to him, and yet they were still captive. How would this end?

In the morning, he stumbled into the lobby, bleary eyed. He did not want to miss the governor's appearance, as the man held the key to his family's freedom.

"Good morning!" the governor called as he walked into the lobby, looking as refreshed as he sounded. "That was a very comfortable room. Thank you!"

"I'm glad you enjoyed your stay so far," Yochanan said with feigned warmth. "Where are you headed?"

The governor's face darkened momentarily. "I thought I would check on my wife first. Then perhaps I'll get started on those deals you mentioned."

"I'll come with you," Yochanan said quickly, joining the governor. He searched his mind frantically for an excuse. "Those boys I sent yesterday to watch over your wife didn't come back yet. I need them for some tasks."

The governor shrugged. "Sure."

Yochanan lagged slightly behind the governor as the latter boarded the ship. Peeking in from behind him, he saw Shulamis, red cheeked and breathless, pointing accusingly at their two sons.

"Why did you send me these boys?" Shulamis yelled at the governor. "Do you know what they did to me last night? DO YOU KNOW WHAT THEY DID?"

The governor's face turned a dark scarlet. "Don't tell me they violated you!" he roared, reaching out with either hand and closing his grip around the boys. He yanked them back and forth aggressively. "You... scums, you! I'll have you killed for this!"

Both boys kept their eyes on the ground and Shulamis looked away. From his position behind the governor, Yochanan instantly understood what they were trying to do. His wise wife had arranged for a trial for herself and their sons, for a chance that the judicial process would free them from their unfair bondage.

The governor's rage, once stoked, was relentless.

He shouted and cursed and threatened before running off to find a police officer.

"I'm sorry," he was politely told. "This police station is not equipped to deal with such young criminals, certainly not criminals who start up against the wife of an esteemed governor. We suggest you take the matter up with the king himself."

"I'll do just that!" the governor growled. He decided to abandon his business plans and sail for the king's court immediately together with his 'wife' and the two young 'criminals'. Yochanan, desperate not to lose his family again, managed to charm his way onto the ship and joined the voyage as well. At the time, the king's court was located just a few days away. The trip was short and uneventful.

The governor managed to secure a royal tribunal right away. Soon, Shulamis and her sons were brought before the king, a still enraged governor and a hopeful Yochanan in the audience.

The king looked the defendants up and down, piercingly. He turned to Shulamis. "Have you been defiled by these two boys?"

Shulamis fell before the king. "No, your Majesty," she cried. "I was kidnapped by this governor four years ago. These are my sons and that is my husband. Please, allow me to return to my family!"

The king's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "Who is this woman?" he demanded of Boruch and Zev.

"She's our mother," they confirmed.

The king's tone grew steely as he addressed the governor. "Tell me the truth, or you'll be beheaded. Is. This. Your. Wife."

"Nnnno, your Majesty," the governor stammered. "I indeed kidnapped her. But I swear that I have never touched her during all the years she's been with me!"

"Is that so?" the king's voice was hard. Angry. He looked to Shulamis for confirmation.

Shulamis nodded. "Indeed, I have never allowed him to lay his hands on me. It is that man, Yochanan, who is my true husband."

The king was impressed by Shulamis's strength and bravery. With a wave of his hand, he sent the shamed governor off and then beckoned to Yochanan to draw closer. He wanted to hear the entire story of this special family, who had remained true to their values and beliefs despite the incredible challenges.

After hearing about Yochanan's complete self-sacrifice to the mitzvah of never swearing, the king decided to reward him with an award from his treasure house.

For the rest of their lives, the family lived peacefully together, blessed with happiness and tremendous wealth, and all the more, blessed with the unmatched satisfaction of successfully passing the test of their lives.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A389

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