

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Poisonous Words

The great Chozeh of Lublin had a close *talmid* known as the Yid Hakadosh. Since he had the same first name as his *rebbe*, the Chozeh, his friends referred to him simply as ‘the Yid’. Later, when he became a great and holy *rebbe* in his own right, the moniker was changed to ‘Yid.’

The Yid Hakadosh was an incredible *tzaddik* who was completely cut off from *gashmiyus*. His entire being was occupied with Torah and *kedushah*. After his first wife passed away, childless, he remarried. His second wife did not bear any children either. When she passed way, the Yid Hakadosh married a third time. The months turned to years and more years, and they were still not blessed with children.

One day, his wife came to him in tears. “All I want is a child,” she wept. “All the other childless

women come to you for a *brachah*, you bless them, and then they bear a child. Why can’t you bless me as well?”

“It’s not me,” the Yid Hakadosh told her. “Of course I would love for Hashem to grant you children! I wish we would have children of our own! It must be the *hakpadah* of my *rebbe*, the Chozeh, that is hindering our ability to have children. Why don’t you go to him for a blessing? If he blesses you, surely we will merit a child.”

While the Yid Hakadosh was a disciple of the Chozeh, at some point, he adopted a *derech* slightly different from that of his illustrious mentor. At that point, he began attracting his own *chassidim*, and the Chozeh called him in to speak to him.

“I’m not angry at you,” the Chozeh assured the Yid. “I understand that this is where you feel the proper path for your *avodas* Hashem lies. However, I must ask you to leave the *chassidus*.”

At the Chozeh’s behest, the Yid Hakadosh opened his own *bais medrash* and his own *chassidus*. He still had only the greatest awe and respect for his venerated mentor, yet he knew that this was the best way for him to serve Hashem.

His *chassidim*, however, were a different story. A fierce rivalry sprouted between the followers of the two *gedolim*. They politicized the differences between the two factions, taunting and teasing and mocking the other as they touted their own greatness. The competition was terrible, the fighting even worse.

The Yid Hakadosh’s wife heard her husband’s advice and lowered her eyes, embarrassed. As *rebbe*tzin, she was fiercely loyal to her *chassidus* and enjoyed listening to the *chassidim* as they denigrated the Chozeh’s congregation. She loved

action and had much pleasure listening to a fiery debate between two opposing *chassidim*, silently rooting for her side.

However, even more fiercely than she desired her husband's *chassidus* to be superior, the Yid Hakadosh's wife desired a child. She swallowed her pride and went to see the Chozeh of Lublin.

The Chozeh was known to possess *ruach hakodesh*. He was known as the Chozeh – seer – because of his ability to view the unseen. For seven years, he wore a covering around his eyes since he couldn't bear to look at people and see the *aveiros* stamped on their faces. He was known to see from one end of the world to the other.

When the Yid Hakadosh's wife knocked on the door, the Chozeh immediately detected who she was. "What do you want from *me*?" he asked before she could even pose her request. "You talk *lashon harah*. The sin of *lashon harah* is from the gravest of sins! And for a *talmid* to speak *lashon harah* about his own *rebbe*? That's far worse!"

Her face turned red in mortification. "*Chas v'shalom!* My husband doesn't – ."

"Your husband may not speak out against me," the Chozeh countered, "but what goes on in your *shteibel*? How many people talk *lashon harah*? And you stir the conversation, fishing for more gossip! How can you allow yourself to do this?!"

He banged on the table. "I want you to promise me that you will never again speak *lashon harah* about me. If your *chassidim* come and say *lashon harah* about me or my followers, you must tell them that you can have no part in it."

"I promise," the woman whispered, frightened.

The Chozeh nodded. "In that case, I promise you will have a child."

"Thank you!" she cried.

The next few days were very difficult for the Yid Hakadosh's wife. Without children to care for, she had a vast social circle whom she chatted with every day. The Chozeh and his followers were of their main topics of conversation, and that was now off limits to her. When *chassidim* stopped by to tell her a nasty joke about the Chozeh, a joke she would have greatly enjoyed in the past, she was forced to stop them mid-tracks. She wanted a child, and she would do as the Chozeh asked.

As the weeks wore on, and she became less accustomed to the nonstop gossip about the Chozeh's following, fulfilling her promise to the Chozeh became slightly easier. Within the year, she gave birth to a sweet little boy.

Finally a mother of a child of her own, the *rebbe* stopped being so vigilant about guarding her tongue. Over the year, she had acquired better habits and no longer spoke freely about the other *chassidus*, yet she stopped being so apprehensive about it and let herself be more relaxed during conversations.

One afternoon, when her precious little boy was three-and-a-half years old, a *chassid* popped by for something. "Did you hear what happened?" he asked the *rebbe*. "You'll never believe what the Chozeh's *talmidim* did this time! The rascals!" He recounted the terrible exploits as she clucked her tongue.

"Did they really do that?" she asked, her hand over her mouth in exaggerated horror. "Such *reshaim!* I always knew they were evil!" It was the first time since her fateful audience with the

Chozeh that she had surrendered to the temptation of *lashon harah*.

Suddenly, there were terrible shouts from the courtyard. Panicking, she ran outside and discovered her only son lying motionless on the floor.

“He fell down!” someone screamed. “One minute he was playing; the next minute he fell down!” The *rebbitzen* felt faint. She rushed to her husband. “Our son! He’s unconscious! What should I do?!”

“Oy!” The Yid Hakadosh grew pale. “There’s nothing I can do. Run to the Chozeh, quickly. He’s the only one who can help.”

“Okay, I’ll go right now,” the *rebbitzen* said hastily, dashing out the door. She hurried to the Chozeh’s home and knocked on the door.

“*Rebbitzen*, we made a deal,” the Chozeh told her as soon as she entered. “You said you wouldn’t speak *lashon harah* against me or my followers. You broke your part of the deal, and so my part is off as well.”

“No, *rebbe*, please!” she cried, breaking down in tears. “It was a mistake! I won’t do it again! I promise to be more careful! Please forgive me!”

The Chozeh wavered for a moment. “Alright. This time, I’ll forgive you. But if you break the deal again, don’t bother coming back to me for help. Your child’s health, your child’s life, is in your own hands.”

“Thank you, *rebbe*,” she responded, enormously relieved. “I promise not to speak *lashon harah* about you again.”

“May your child be well again as soon as you see him next,” the Chozeh blessed her.

When she arrived home, the *rebbitzen* was greeted by her child, happily running about.

“It was a total miracle,” she was told. “From one second to the next, he just stood up and started acting himself again. Just like that.”

The *rebbitzen* hugged her son tightly, understanding that it had been her *lashon harah* that had caused his sudden collapse. *You’d better be exceedingly careful with your speech from now on*, she chided herself. Her son’s life was not something worth playing around with.

For the next few days, the *rebbitzen* would check herself each time before she spoke, worried lest *lashon harah* slip through her lips. She censored and re-censored her thoughts before putting them into words and focused on tuning out the gossip of others. Her son’s life was at stake.

The weeks went by and the inspiration faded. She let down her guard slowly. First, she stopped avoiding her gossipy friends. Then she stopped bothering others to refrain from forbidden speech. Soon, she rarely censored her thoughts and just watched what came out of her mouth.

A year and half passed from the original incident, and the *rebbitzen* completely forgot about her resolution. One afternoon, as she sat outside with her friends watching her son romp and play with the others, a heated conversation regarding the Chozeh’s *chassidim* began. She listened as her friends exchanged stories and comments, exclaiming excitedly.

The conversation took a juicy turn and the *rebbitzen* couldn’t contain herself. “They’re a

bunch of good-for-nothings,” she tossed in, picking leaf off her skirt.

“Oy vey!” one of her friends cried, pointing at a child sprawled on his back. “Whose son is that?”

What happened to him?”

They all craned their necks to see.

The *rebbitzen* jumped up, her heart pounding. It was her child! She rushed forward and knelt beside him. Why had he collapsed? Was everything okay?

“Our son collapsed!” she called into the house as she tore inside in search of her husband. “What will be?”

“There’s nothing I can do,” the Yid Hakadosh said, shaking his head sadly. “Go to my *rebbe*, the holy Chozeh. Perhaps he’ll be able to help.”

A *chassid* who was present offered to drive her to the Chozeh, and the *rebbitzen* gratefully accepted. She climbed onto the carriage, her lips never ceasing to move and she recited *perek* after *perek* of *tehillim*. She barely noticed the passing scenery or the bumps in the road. *Hashem*, she beseeched silently. *Please, save my child!*

When they reached the Chozeh’s home, the *rebbitzen* disembarked from the carriage and knocked on the front door. A *talmid* let her in and she headed straight for the Chozeh’s study. To her dismay, the *rebbe* refused to look up from his *sefer*, ignoring her completely.

“*Rebbe!*” she cried. “*Rebbe*, save my child!”

“I’m sorry,” he replied, still averting his face.

“It’s too late. There’s nothing I can do. The sin of *lashon harah* has claimed the life of your child.”

The *rebbitzen* burst into tears. “Please, *daven* for him! A *brachah*! Something! I won’t speak *lashon harah* again!”

The Chozeh just turned a page in his *sefer*, studiously ignoring her.

The *rebbitzen* waited and waited until she realized she was waiting in vain. Her shoulders heaving, her eyes red, she returned to the carriage. She resumed reciting *tehillim* fervently the entire way home, hoping against hope for a miracle. When the carriage pulled up outside her home, she took a deep breath and glanced out the window.

When she glimpsed members of the *chevrah kadishah*, she knew it was all over. They were preparing for her son’s *levayah*.

For her son’s *levayah*! An anguished cry rose from deep inside her. How could she have foolishly allowed herself to speak her mind when she had known this would be the outcome? How could she have so cruelly thrust a dagger into her only child’s heart with her poisonous words?

And now, it was too late.

She had been foolish, and her only, long awaited child was taken from her.

The Yid Hakadosh recited the *brachah* of *dayan haemes*, his heart breaking in anguish. While he knew that *Hashem* had taken the child at the perfect, destined moment, he was mourning the lost opportunity to educate his only son, to marry him off, to guide him and assist him and influence him positively. He had buried two wives without meriting children before finally being granted a beloved son with his third wife. Now, he was

burying this precious child, knowing he would likely never have another.

On the opposite side of town, in the Chozeh's home, his young son Usher'l suddenly took ill. He had previously been completely healthy, and his illness came as a shock to his parents. Doctors were summoned, yet they raised their hands in despair. They could not diagnose Usher'l with any illness and were mystified by his symptoms.

It must be the Yid Hakadosh's pain, the Chozeh realized. He just lost his only son and he must be mourning the loss terribly. Since I was involved in the story of his son's death, I have indirectly caused this holy tzaddik anguish. My own son probably became ill as retribution for the Yid's suffering.

The Chozeh watched his son's condition deteriorate and was desperate to accumulate merits on his behalf. Suddenly, something flashed in his mind. *Tzedakah tatzil mimaves* – charity saves from death! Together with his assistant, he gathered all of Usher'l's belongings and sold them on the market. He then immediately distributed the money to the town's poor.

When he returned home, the Chozeh was hopeful that the situation would take a turn for the better. To his dismay, the doctor informed him that Usher'l's condition had worsened. *It wasn't enough*, he thought to himself. Rushing back to the market, he found a buyer willing to purchase all the contents of his entire home for an astronomical sum. Once again, as soon as he concluded the deal, the Chozeh allocated the money to the poor.

When he returned home, the house was bare. He had emptied the entire home for *tzedakah*. He turned expectantly to the doctor. "How's Usher'l? Is there any news?"

"No good news, I'm afraid," the doctor responded, frowning. "He's been steadily declining throughout the day."

The Chozeh picked up his feverish child, tears streaming down his cheeks. "It's the Yid Hakadosh's pain," he murmured, putting Usher'l gently down in the carriage. "Please, take us to the Kozhnitzer Maggid for a blessing."

When the Kozhnitzer Maggid saw the deathly ill child, he immediately understood the situation. "There's a *hakpadah* from a great *tzaddik* on this child," he told the Chozeh.

"Yes, *rebbe*, please save him!" the Chozeh pleaded, recounting the full story with the Yid's wife.

The Kozhnitzer Maggid heard him out and then turned pensive. "There's not much I can do," he admitted. "If a *tzaddik* like the Yid Hakadosh is in pain, then Hashem is also in pain. Although the child's death came from the terrible sin of *lashon harah*, at the end of the day, the holy Yid Hakadosh is pained. There's nothing really to do."

"Please, *rebbe*!" the Chozeh cried, refusing to give up so fast.

The Kozhnitzer Maggid thought for a few moments. "Leave the child with me," he finally said. "Little Usher'l will sleep in my bed together with me each night. If he remains with me in my bed, I promise you that no harm will come by him."

The Chozeh nodded. "For how long must he live with you?"

"Until his bar mitzvah," the Kozhnitzer Maggid responded. "Once he is the halachically

considered a man, he'll be responsible for his own actions and I'll be able to send him home.”

The Chozeh embraced his motionless child and handed him over to the Kozhnitzer Maggid. Each night, the Maggid would sleep with Usher'l, who gradually grew stronger and stronger. He remained with the great *tzaddik* for the next few years until he reached bar mitzvah, when he was finally reunited with his illustrious father.

This story illustrates the gravity of *lashon harah*, and the compounded severity of *lashon harah* spoken about a *talmid chacham*. Life and death hinge upon our words; how can we risk operating the dangerous tool called ‘tongue’ without safeguards? In addition, we learn from this story that while we may never pain another Jew, we must be exceedingly careful not to cause a *tzaddik* anguish; the repercussions are frightening.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # TB82 - 2004

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