

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Hatzneiah Leches ***Part I***

Shaul was blessed with a lively brood of sons, and he toiled to raise them as true servants of Hashem. A tremendous yarei shamayim and a great mechanech, he worked to instill in his sons love and respect for Torah; and a desire for mitzvos and chesed. He explained the importance of tefillah, of good middos, of positive friendships. Above all, through his own actions and lifestyle, he modeled for them the behavior of a genuine eved Hashem.

The mitzvah of chinuch is incumbent on the father; how the child actually lives his life lies in the hands of the child alone. The way a child turns out is influenced by his nurture and nature, as well as by his personal choices. With their wonderful upbringing, each of Shaul's children grew into a fine young man, and each had his own path in life.

Yaakov was the youngest of the family. Weakly and frail, he was not blessed with the same physical stamina as his powerfully-built older brothers. While they were confident and strong, capable of hauling and handling, trading and traveling, Yaakov tired easily and presented as a softie. With their natural aptitude for negotiating deals, even at a young age it was evident that his brothers would be excellent businessmen. In contrast, Yaakov preferred to remain at home with his father, quietly absorbing his wisdom and life experience.

In that day and age, no young man could marry without the means to support a family. When a boy turned sixteen years old, he entered the business world or was apprenticed to a craftsman to learn a trade. Only a privileged few, who were blessed with both minds and money, were sent to learn at the feet of a talmid chacham.

Shaul's older sons all entered the world of commerce at sixteen years old. They each built successful businesses in different markets, buying and selling and netting large profits. When Yaakov neared his sixteenth birthday, it was obvious to his brothers that business was not for him. He simply didn't have the physical strength for it.

"I'm sending you to go learn by a rebbi," Shaul announced to his beloved youngest son one day.

Yaakov was shocked. Hardly anyone he knew had been able to devote himself to learning at his age, and besides, he did not want to leave home. He had grown up at his father's side and loathed to say goodbye. "I would prefer to stay here, if that pleases Father," he said respectfully.

Shaul shook his head. "No, my son. It is important for you to learn by someone more advanced than yourself in Torah. That's the only way to

achieving greatness. I, too, wish you can remain here, yet I am sending you off so that you can become a great talmid chacham.”

Yaakov bowed his head. While he really was grateful for the unheard of opportunity to devote himself to Torah, his father was already an old man, and he worried that he would never see him again. Going off to learn meant traveling to a foreign country, a journey of many weeks, and he knew he would not return home for many years. In all probability, the next time he returned to his hometown, he would be a married man with a whole family of his own.

Still, despite his apprehensiveness, his father was adamant, so only a few days later, Yaakov found himself in the midst of a seudas preidah organized by his older brothers. His relatives and friends crammed into the house, eager to say goodbye and wish him well. Who knew when they would see each other again?

His oldest brother stood up and presented Yaakov with a beautiful gem nestled on black velvet. “Yaakov,” he said emotionally. “One day, you’ll get married far away from here. This diamond is very valuable and should be enough for you to purchase a house. You should learn well and your learning should be a zchus for all of us. Don’t forget about us...”

His next brother stood up and handed him a valuable brooch, inlaid with pearls. He cleared his throat unsuccessfully, trying to get rid of the lump that had suddenly lodged itself within, and in a hoarse voice, echoed his brother’s farewell sentiments. One by one, the rest of the brothers came forth, bestowing expensive gifts upon Yaakov along with their best wishes for a joyous and successful life.

Yaakov thanked his brothers gratefully, admiring their gifts and generosity. When the last of the brothers sat down, all eyes turned expectantly to their father. Shaul’s beloved youngest son was departing from his home, perhaps forever. What kind of valuable memento would he leave him with?

Shaul walked over to a side table and opened the top drawer. With nary a word, he removed a slim, sealed envelope and handed it to his son.

The brothers looked on curiously. “Father, what’s inside?” one of them ventured to ask.

“I’m sorry, but this is between me and Yaakov,” Shaul replied apologetically. “As you know, he has assisted me all these years, and I’d like to leave him this little gift, but it’s not something I can discuss publicly.”

He turned to Yaakov, who sat with his brothers, slightly pale, contemplating the unknown future before him. “Yaakov, my son. Take this letter and pack it in your luggage with your other belongings. Keep the envelope sealed until you get married. After your marriage, you should open and read the letter.”

“Yes, Father,” Yaakov said. “Thank you.”

“I want you to know,” Shaul continued. “That if you fulfill my directive in the letter, you will be incredibly successful. However, if you choose not to abide by my words, I cannot guarantee your success. You will be on your own.”

“Yes, Father,” Yaakov repeated, this time, his voice serious and reflective.

One of his brothers began a song, and the others joined in. For the next hour, the family sat together, immersed in music and melody,

enjoying their final moments together. Eventually, the gathering wound down, the guests went home, and Yaakov went to bed, his father's letter tucked into his valise.

It was difficult for Yaakov to fall asleep. He thought about his parents, his brothers, the only home he had ever known. Could he really be taking leave of life as he had known it? His thoughts turned to the mysterious envelope. What message did his father want to give over? If it's something from the Torah, I'd be doing it anyway, he reasoned. And if it's something against the Torah, there's no chance I'd be able to fulfill his words. What could it be? What could it be?

In the morning, his mother sewed the valuable gifts he had received from his brothers into his clothes and luggage, separating them so that he would retain the others even if one was stolen or lost. Soon, Yaakov found himself on the wagon that would take him to his destination, waving furiously to his parents, struggling to contain his tears.

The horse trotted at an even pace, out of the city, down the winding country roads. Yaakov leaned back in his seat, his mind racing. He pictured his beloved father, his wonderful mother, the sealed envelope in his suitcase. He shook his head in puzzlement. What had his father written to him? Firmly, he resolved to put the letter out of his mind. He could not open it anyway until after he married. There was little point in obsessing over its unknown contents.

After a long, tiring journey of many weeks, Yaakov finally arrived at the small yeshiva where he was to spend the next few years. He was just sixteen years old, far from home, and all alone. The homesickness was crushing. With a maturity beyond his years, Yaakov knew that only Torah

could bring him solace, could restore his joy and zest for life. He ignored his longing for home and threw himself into his learning.

Yaakov had a bright mind and loved to learn. Within a short time, he distinguished himself from the other bochurim in the yeshiva, establishing a name for himself as a brilliant talmid chacham with a sharp clarity in learning. Even his rosh yeshiva was impressed with his capabilities, taking him as a chavrusah for one seder every day.

Two wonderful years passed. Two years, replete with the sweet sounds of learning, with the gratifying satisfaction of mastering and achieving. Yaakov was now eighteen years old, a solid bochur with a shining reputation, on the cusp of shidduchim. Word of his good name got out, and soon, he found himself in the midst of a quandary.

Three shidduchim had been presented to him. Three wonderful ideas with three wonderful young women, yet the circumstances of each one were so different. How could he determine his future?

The first offer was from Reb Zecharya, one of the wealthiest men for miles around. Reb Zecharya was known for his chesed and philanthropy, for the way he supported talmidei chachamim with generosity and heart. His dream was to find a genuine talmid chacham for his noble and pious daughter. He pledged a massive dowry and promised to support the couple in style for their entire lives. If Yaakov agreed to become his son-in-law, he'd be able to sit and learn without worry.

Then there was the shidduch with the daughter of Rav Laizer, a rosh yeshiva in a neighboring town. Rav Leizer was a distinguished talmid chacham,

and his daughter had been raised in a home saturated with Torah. While he could not provide an oversized dowry, he would give his son-in-law a position in his yeshiva. If Yaakov consented to the shidduch, he would become a maggid shiur in an established yeshiva, where he would merit to transmit Torah to more generations of young scholars. It was truly a rare opportunity.

If Yaakov found it difficult to decide between those two exceptional shidduchim, he was soon approached by a third potential father-in-law. Reb Yonah was not a wealthy man, nor was he a rosh yeshiva. He was a learned man who led a simple lifestyle, raising his children in poverty. His daughter, he assured Yaakov, was the real deal. Modest and pious, she was content with little and wanted nothing more than to marry a true talmid chacham and establish a proper Jewish home. She was strong and capable, resourceful and thrifty, and a *balas middos* to boot. While there was nothing exciting or glamorous about the shidduch, Reb Yonah's sincerity and simplicity impressed Yaakov, who pledged to consider the idea.

Yaakov tasted the three ideas on his tongue and considered them for long moments at a time before concluding that he could not make such a weighty decision on his own. I'll ask the rosh yeshiva, he decided. He'll be able to guide me.

After their next study session together, Yaakov broached the topic with his rosh yeshiva. The rosh yeshiva listened silently as he outlined the three offers. Should he marry the rich man's daughter, which meant learning in peace and comfort for the remainder of his life? Perhaps he should choose the shidduch with the rosh yeshiva's daughter and become a *marbitz* Torah, cultivating talmidim of his own? And what about Reb Yonah? Should he even consider such a simple shidduch with an equally simple, yet special, girl?

"Tell me," the rosh yeshiva asked when Yaakov finished enumerating the pros and cons of each shidduch. "What do you really want? Which of these lifestyles does your heart truly desire?"

"I don't know, rebbi," Yaakov said honestly, truly at a loss. "All I know is that I want to be able to learn Torah my entire life."

"Hmm." The rosh yeshiva pursed his lips in thought. "What kind of home does your father have? How were you raised?"

Yaakov's voice was wistful as he recalled his beloved father. "My father is a special man, modest and unassuming," he said softly. "He sits and learns for much of the day, and our home was always filled with Torah and *chesed*. He isn't known throughout the world as a major talmid chacham, and he isn't known as a wealthy philanthropist either. He prefers to operate quietly, without calling attention to himself."

"Would you want to live that same kind of life?" his rosh yeshiva prodded.

Yaakov was quiet, his forehead creased in thought. "I don't know!" he cried after a few minutes of deep concentration. "I admire my father's lifestyle, but I have opportunities before me that he might not have had. Why should I choose a life of poverty and hardship if I have the chance to live a life of Torah and comfort?"

Now it was the rosh yeshiva's turn to think. He drummed his fingers on the tabletop, his eyes closed.

"The truth is, even without a dowry, I don't think I'd be so bad off," Yaakov said hesitantly. "My brothers gave me expensive and valuable gifts before we parted, and they specifically stated that I should use them to purchase a house and finance

my household for a few years after I marry. Is this something to take into account?"

The rosh yeshiva opened his eyes and peered at him. "Possibly," he said. "That's nice of your brothers, to give you such valuable presents. What about your father? Did he leave you with a parting gift?"

"He gave me a sealed envelope," Yaakov confided. "He instructed me not to open it until after my wedding. It's a letter, but I have no idea what it says."

The rosh yeshiva looked pensive. "I wonder if your father's letter will help shed light on this decision here, with your shidduchim," he said. "I know you said that you aren't allowed to open it until after your wedding, but those instructions don't apply to me. He never said someone else can't open it, only that you shouldn't. If you give me permission, I can open the letter and read it. Perhaps your father's advice will help you come to a resolution."

Yaakov's face lit up. At last, the mysterious letter would be revealed. "Yes, rebbi," he said, getting up from his seat. "I'll go bring the letter from my room."

He returned a few minutes later, carrying a creased envelope. He placed it on the table beside his rosh yeshiva's worn seforim. "This is the letter."

The rosh yeshiva picked up the envelope. "Sit down," he said to Yaakov. "I'll open the letter and read what it says inside. If I see that your father's words will help you come to a decision regarding the type of shidduch to go into, I'll tell you what he wrote. Otherwise, I'll put the letter back into the envelope and return it to you, sealed, to wait until after your wedding."

Yaakov took a seat on the other side of the room, his heart pounding as he watched the rosh yeshiva slowly open the envelope. This is it, he thought as the rosh yeshiva extracted a single sheet of paper and unfolded it. Finally, I'm about to discover the message that my father wrote for me upon my farewell. If I followed his instructions, he said, I would be very successful...

From behind his desk, the rosh yeshiva spread out the creases and brought the letter closer for a better view.

To my beloved son, Yaakov,

You are the light and joy of my life, my dear son. There is no one dearer and more precious to me than you. You have many brothers, and each is wonderful, yet you were the one who remained consistently at my side. You took care of me as I aged, you anticipated my needs and fulfilled them before I could even ask. You honored me like a servant to his king, displaying the highest levels of kibud av.

We've learned a tremendous amount of Torah together, far more than I've learned with your brothers. You soaked in everything I taught you, providing your mother and I with much nachas on a constant basis. Yaakov, I was never able to express the true depths of my love for you so as not to arouse the jealousy of your older brothers. However, in the privacy of this letter, I

can finally tell you that I love you more than any of them. You occupy a very special place in my heart.

My son, I would like to leave you with a gift. If you listen to my words, if you live by them, you'll merit a happy and successful life.

The posuk in Micha (6:8) asks: What does Hashem want from a person? *Ki im asos mishpat ve'ahavs chesed vehatzneia leches im Hashem Elokecha.* Hashem asks that we be fair and just, and that we should love to do chesed.

Read carefully, my son. Within the third thing lies the secret to success. What does Hashem ask of us? *Hatzneia leches im Hashem Elokecha.* We should keep a low profile, to stay with Him and do His mitzvos, but quietly and modestly, without calling attention to ourselves.

My dear Yaakov! Live with Hashem, keep Him before you always, yet do so in a quiet and unassuming manner. Don't make noise with your avodas Hashem. Remain in the background, fulfilling His will inconspicuously. If you heed my words, you will see much brachah in your life.

I've sent you far from home, to learn at the feet of the great rosh yeshiva shlita. He's a tremendous talmid chacham and a great tzaddik. Place yourself in his shadow, and he will care for you like a father to his son. At his side, you will grow and reach tremendous heights.

May Hashem be with you always,

Father

To be continued...

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A307

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סיפורי צדיקים

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

Hatzneiah Leches *Part II*

Recap: When Yaakov left home to go to a far-away yeshiva, his father gave him a letter, instructing him not to open it until after his wedding. After two years in yeshiva, Yaakov was offered three shidduchim, one with a wealthy man, one with a rosh yeshiva, and one with a simple family. In helping Yaakov come to a decision, his rosh yeshiva read the letter from Yaakov's father.

The rosh yeshiva finished reading the letter and found that he was touched by the beautiful and moving words that Yaakov's father had penned to his son. Carefully, he folded the page on its original creases and tucked it into a fresh envelope, which he promptly sealed. He motioned to Yaakov, who stood up and approached the desk.

"It was a very moving letter," the rosh yeshiva said, handing the envelope back to Yaakov. "You should definitely make sure to read it after your marriage."

"And... was my father's directive something that could help me make up my mind regarding the shidduchim I've been offered?" Yaakov asked, fingering the envelope nervously.

The rosh yeshiva gave a nod. "Actually, yes. According to what your father wrote in the letter, I believe that you should choose the shidduch with the daughter of Reb Yonah."

"Reb Yonah? The girl from the simple home?" Yaakov verified.

"Yes, Reb Yonah's daughter," the rosh yeshiva confirmed.

"But, rebbi," Yaakov began, hesitantly. "I don't understand. If I married the rosh yeshiva's daughter, I could live a life of harbotzas Torah! And with Reb Zecharya's daughter, I would be able to learn my entire life without worry. A shidduch with Reb Yonah's daughter is the only one where my future in Torah is uncertain."

"As far as I've heard, Reb Yonah's daughter is pious and modest, and her only desire is to establish a true Torah home," the rosh yeshiva pointed out. "She needs little and is happy with little. These traits are ideal, if not necessary, for someone who wants to dedicate his life to Torah. And according to your father's letter, Reb Yonah's daughter is the best shidduch for you."

Yaakov nodded. As much as the other two shidduchim tantalized him, the burden of the decision was overwhelming, and he felt a huge sense of relief now that the matter had been decided. "Thank you, rebbi," he said, bending

down to kiss his rosh yeshiva's hand. "I will do as you advise."

"Mazel tov!" the rosh yeshiva wished him warmly. "May you build a true bayis neeman b'yisroel!"

On his way back to the bais medrash, Yaakov detoured to his lodgings to put back the letter from his father. It was on his way from his room to the bais medrash that he was accosted by the shadchan sent by Reb Zecharya.

"Nu, Reb Yankel!" the matchmaker called, grabbing his hand for a handshake. "What's the good word? You had more than enough time to think, eh? I can't imagine why you needed so much time to decide that you want to marry the good and pious daughter of the wealthiest Jew in these parts, but I'm sure you have an answer for me by now, is that right?" He gave a large belly laugh, envisioning the handsome commission he would soon collect.

"Thank you for thinking of me," Yaakov said sincerely. "I did think about it, and I decided that this shidduch is not right for me. I'm sure she's a wonderful girl, but I don't think we are intended for each other."

"Don't think you are intended for each other?!" the shadchan sputtered. "What are you talking about? You were made for each other! How do you know who your intended is anyway?"

Yaakov lowered his eyes helplessly. "I'm sorry. I really appreciate your time, and your idea had a lot of merits, but I'm afraid I can't consent to the shidduch. Thank you for everything."

"You'll change your mind yet," the matchmaker warned, walking him back to the bais medrash.

"You can always let me know when you change your mind."

"Thank you," Yaakov kept repeating. "Thank you, I appreciate your efforts."

After an enjoyable learning seder, Yaakov hurried to the home of Rav Laizer's shadchan to inform him that he was accepting a different shidduch. Understandably, the disappointed matchmaker tried to convince him to reconsider, but Yaakov held firm. "Yes, the rosh yeshiva is a great man, and I admire him tremendously. I heard wonderful things about his daughter, too. But I discussed it with my rebbi, and at this point, I don't feel it is right for me."

"At least invite me to your wedding," the shadchan said grudgingly, realizing that Yaakov's mind was made up. "You're a good boy, and you should have much hatzlachah with whoever you marry."

The following day, Yaakov spoke to Reb Yonah's shadchan, and soon thereafter, had a short meeting with his daughter, Miriam. From their conversation, he realized she was truly everything the shadchan and her father had professed her to be. She had yiras shamayim and a deep chashivus for Torah, and the home she described that she wanted to build was exactly what he had in mind. Within twenty minutes, they were chassan and kallah.

The news spread throughout the shtetl. It wasn't every day that the best bochur in the yeshiva married a simple, regular girl. However, no one could deny that Miriam was truly deserving of the shidduch, and they rejoiced with her family at the tremendous simchah.

Their wedding, which took place a few months later, was well-attended. All the residents of the

city, along with many rabbonim, came to gladden the chassan and kallah. There was a beautiful, exhausting week of sheva brachos, and then the brand-new couple moved into a tiny home of their own.

One evening, as Yaakov and Miriam sat together, enjoying each other's company, Yaakov suddenly sat up straight. He smacked his forehead. "The letter! The letter from my father!"

Miriam looked at him quizzically. "What letter? What are you talking about?"

"My father gave me a letter on the day I left home for yeshiva," he explained, getting up and heading to their bedroom. "He instructed me to open it only after my wedding. I've saved it all this time, and now I can finally open it."

Despite her curiosity, Miriam did not follow him. She opted to remain where she was, to grant him the space to read his father's missive privately.

Sitting on his straw bed, Yaakov carefully opened the letter. As he read, tears began streaming down his cheeks. Though he and his father had always been close, Shaul was not an expressive man, and Yaakov had never realized the extent of his father's love for him. The words rekindled his own simmering love for his father, and he suddenly felt a powerful longing for home. "Father! How I love you!" he murmured, wiping his damp cheeks with the back of hand.

He continued reading the rest of his father's words, smiling in understanding as he realized why his rosh yeshiva had encouraged him to pursue the simpler shidduch. As he refolded the letter, he resolved to try and live his life according to his father's directive- modest and unassuming. Miriam was a hard worker, and she willingly labored to earn money so that her husband could

sit and learn. True to her father's word, she was more than satisfied with small, simple meals and their cozy little home. The couple was not rich, but they had what they needed and were grateful for their lot.

Within a short time, Yaakov and Miriam were blessed with one child, and then another. As their family grew, the few coins Miriam earned from her sewing became insufficient to feed their entire household.

"I can take on more mending jobs," Miriam offered doubtfully. Though she longed to ease their financial situation, she really did not know how she would manage more sewing on top of mothering, caring for the house, and the mending work she already did.

"When, exactly?" Yaakov asked, waving his hand dismissively. "At three in the morning? You need to sleep, too, Miriam. I have a better idea. My brother Boruch gave me a valuable gem as a parting gift. I think the time has come to sell it. I hope it will bring in enough money to support our family for a few months."

The following day, after a long learning seder, Yaakov brought the gem to a jeweler for an appraisal and was astonished to hear that it was worth double what he had assumed. A few days later, he found a buyer for the stone. The money he received in exchange was enough to feed his family for an entire year.

When he davened Maariv that evening, tears streamed down Yaakov's cheeks as he thanked Hashem for providing for him so that he could learn fulltime for another year. His heart swelled with gratitude to his older brother for his foresight and generosity.

The year passed quickly, full of joy and abundance. Ever the thrifty housewife, Miriam managed to stretch the money to last for eighteen months. During that time period, the family was blessed with another child.

When the money finally ran out, Yaakov sold the brooch he had received from his second brother. The money from this sale supported the family for twelve more months and through the birth of yet another child.

With his family steadily growing along with his expenses, Yaakov slowly sold off all the gifts he had received from his brothers, until one day, he had nothing left to sell. His resources were gone, and the money they had netted was spent. Yaakov was already thirty years old, an accomplished talmid chacham and the father of eight beautiful children.

Busy caring for her large family, Miriam no longer had any time to work for others, and so this source of income dried up as well. There was simply no money in the home.

“We’ll sell our produce,” Miriam said, looking out the window at the small garden adjacent to their home. To save money, they grew their own vegetables. Now, they would sell whatever produce they did not need to bring in some money. She pointed to the cow grazing outside the garden. “We can sell the extra milk from our cow, as well.”

However, the children were growing and needed to eat. After cooking for her own family every day, there wasn’t much in the garden left to sell. Miriam set up a stall in front of their home, and passersby would purchase some vegetables or a jug of milk. The income was not nearly enough, however. With little money for firewood, their

home was often so cold that Miriam was sure that the children’s tears would ice up on their faces.

Despite everything, Yaakov and Miriam managed to keep their home happy and joyous. They were living with Hashem, dedicating their lives to Torah. They were the luckiest family on earth! The children soaked in these messages, absorbing their parents’ attitude and adopting it themselves. They were thin, dressed in threadbare hand-me-downs, often hungry and cold. Yet they knew that their father’s Torah was holding up the world. What a privilege!

Late one evening after Maariv, as Yaakov sat down to a meager supper, there was a knock on the door. To his surprise, standing on his doorstep was Rav Menachem, a well-known tzaddik.

“I’m traveling through this city,” the rof explained. “Would I be able to stay at your home tonight?”

Yaakov glanced over his shoulder and took in the small dining room/living room/kitchen/children’s room behind him. It was square-shaped room, the oven standing in one corner. An old wooden table occupied much of the room, surrounded by mismatched chairs. The straw mats that the children used for sleeping were rolled up and stacked neatly against the wall. Near the oven was a small entranceway to the tiny bedroom where he and his wife slept. Where would he put his exalted company?

Nevertheless, he couldn’t say no to such a distinguished personage. “Sure, come inside,” he said warmly, stepping back so that Rav Menachem could enter. Three assistants followed the tzaddik into the house, and Yaakov invited them to sit down.

He hurried to his bedroom, where Miriam was folding laundry. “We have honored guests,” he whispered to her, explaining the situation. “It’ll be a great merit for us to host them.”

“Where?” she whispered back, gesturing helplessly.

“We’ll give them our bedroom,” he responded.

“We’ll sleep in the barn. Can you get our room ready? I’ll tell them that you are preparing the guest room for them.”

Miriam recovered from her initial surprise. “Sure,” she said, gathering up the laundry. “I’ll make the beds for them right now.”

Their oldest daughter rummaged through the cupboard and managed to put together some food to feed their guests. The rov and his assistants thanked her gratefully and ate a small meal. When they finished, one of the assistants turned to Yaakov. “We’ve been traveling a long time. Would it be okay if we take a rest here?”

“Certainly!” Yaakov said warmly. “I’ll just go check if my wife finished preparing the guest room.”

He rushed into their bedroom and stopped short. He didn’t recognize it. Miriam had emptied the shelves of all their belongings, which she had packed into a large valise. The room was completely bare of personal artifacts. Clean and inviting, it looked like a comfortable guest room. Two cots had been set up in the room in addition to their two beds, to accommodate the assistants.

A few seconds later, he ushered the Rav Menachem into the room and made sure he was comfortably settled. One of the assistants came to

close the door and Yaakov wished them a good night.

“Children, it’s time for bed,” Miriam announced.

Two of the boys ran to spread out the sleeping mats while another brought their thin blankets.

“Sleep well, children,” Yaakov said quietly when all eight of them were tucked under, Shema said.

“Mother and I will be sleeping in the barn tonight. There’s no need to worry if you don’t see us. We’ll be right outside.”

“Won’t you be cold?” his sensitive ten-year-old asked.

“We have warm blankets,” Miriam said soothingly. “We’ll be alright. Good night!”

The night was much harder than she had let on. The wind howled mercilessly, and from her corner of the barn, it seemed that even the cow was cold. Their blankets were threadbare and provided little warmth. Yaakov and Miriam dug into the hay, hoping to find more warmth under the straw, but they shivered uncontrollably the entire night.

When he finally came back inside in the morning, Yaakov was cold down to his very bones. Rav Menachem was already awake, sitting at the table and learning from a small sefer. He looked up at his host’s entry.

“Good morning, honored rov,” Yaakov greeted him. “How was the rov’s night? Did he find the room comfortable?”

“Very comfortable, thank you so much,” the tzaddik replied. He gestured at the sleeping

children. “I see that your children sleep here, in the main room. Where did you sleep?”

“My wife and I slept in a different room,” Yaakov said vaguely. “I’m glad the rov slept well. How long is the rov planning on being in town? We’d be glad to host him for as long as he needs.”

“We’ll be here a few days,” Rav Menachem replied. “You’ve done wonderful hachnasas orchim. We’d be grateful to be able to stay.”

Yaakov turned the other way so that his illustrious guest could not see the worry on his face. What would he give the rov to eat for so many days? Even more pressing, what would he serve him for breakfast? There was barely any food in the house!

To be continued...

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A307

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סיפורי צדיקים

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

Hatzneiah Leches Part III

Recap: Guided by his father's letter, Yaakov married Miriam, a pious girl from a simple family. They began a beautiful family, but finances were very difficult. When a passing tzaddik asked to stay at their tiny home, the couple moved to the barn so that he could sleep in their bedroom. However, they had no way of feeding their guests, since they didn't even have food for their own family.

He wandered outside and met Miriam in the garden, digging up some vegetables. "After Shacharis, sell the bookcase," she suggested, looking up at him. "It's the only furniture we have other than our table and chairs. The bookcase is made of solid oak. It'll bring in enough money to serve our guests generously. We'll find a different place to keep our few seforim."

"But... the bookcase is from your grandfather," Yaakov reminded her. "Are you sure we should sell it?"

"Definitely," she said, looking down at her dirt-covered hands. "I'm sure my grandfather would approve."

Immediately after Shacharis, Yaakov headed out to the market to seek a buyer for the bookcase. He was fortunate enough that the first person he approached was interested in striking a deal.

Twenty minutes later, the transaction was completed. The buyer handed over the agreed-upon sum along with a promise to pick up the bookcase within the week.

With the money from the sale, Yaakov purchased flour and oil, chicken, eggs, and fruit. Miriam spent the morning whipping up delicious dishes as the children pranced around, inhaling the tantalizing aromas that were so rarely present in their home. For the next three days, they were able to serve their honored guests with proper, tasty meals.

The food supplies purchased with the bookcase money dwindled and were soon gone. Rav Menachem and his assistants seemed very comfortable in their surroundings, and it did not appear that they would be leaving anytime soon. How would they continue to provide their guests with full, filling meals?

"I'll sell my seforim," Yaakov told Miriam as they quivered from the cold under clumps of hay in the barn that night.

"Moooo!" the cow moaned, as if in protest.

"Your seforim!" Miriam's eyes were round. She pulled her threadbare blanket tighter around herself and sighed. Each sefer, painstakingly

copied by hand, was worth a small fortune. They didn't have many seforim of their own; just two or three that they had inherited from Yaakov's father. Ever the masmid, those precious seforim were Yaakov's world. "But... you need those seforim! How will you learn without them?"

"I'll use the seforim in the bais medrash, just as I usually do," Yaakov said, shrugging. "I love my seforim, Miriam, you know that, but I can learn just as well from the public seforim available in the bais medrash. Of course, if we had something else to sell, I would prefer to keep the seforim, but we do not own a single object of value. We need to feed our guests, and there's just no other choice."

Finding a buyer for the seforim was just as easy as finding a buyer for the bookcase had been, but to Yaakov, the transaction was unbearably difficult. As he handed over his beloved volumes in exchange for a few coins, he felt as if he was severing a limb from his own body. These seforim had accompanied him for so many years, and he had learned them through the good and through the difficult.

He smiled at the buyer and pocketed the money, reminding himself that he was fulfilling Hashem's will. He was performing the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim, and he was doing the right thing. By the time Miriam served their guests another plentiful meal, he had fully accepted the loss of his seforim and the profit of an incredible mitzvah.

About a week after their arrival, Rav Menachem and his assistants packed up to leave. As they stood on the threshold of Yaakov's simple home, the tzaddik turned to his host. "We've been here for a while, and I've seen the hachnasas orchim that you've done for me. I'm leaving you with a blessing for much success from now on. Hashem should shower you with endless brachah."

"Amen," Yaakov murmured.

The tzaddik withdrew a coin from his bag and held it out to Yaakov. "This is gebentchte gelt, blessed money," he explained. "It has my brachah upon it. Hold onto this coin, and don't give it away. You'll have much blessing from it."

Yaakov thanked him and pocketed the coin. He accompanied him to the outskirts of the city, reflecting on the incredible merits he and his family had accumulated over the previous week. When he returned home, however, he found himself facing another test.

Miriam had already brought their few belongings back into their room, and he found her sitting on the bed, her arms around two whimpering children.

"Mother, I'm so hungry," a third child cried plaintively from the main room, opening and closing the empty cupboard.

"We haven't eaten yet today," their little son reminded his mother. He suddenly noticed Yaakov's return. "Father! Did you bring us food?"

Yaakov took in his children's hopeful and hungry faces. He surveyed the room, which suddenly felt cavernous now that their guests had departed and the heavy wooden bookcase had been sold. His gaze swung from the open, empty pantry to the cold and silent oven. He didn't know how to respond to his children's desperate pleas. Not only did he not have food to give them, there was simply nothing, nothing at all to sell.

Loud banging on the door interrupted his thoughts. "One moment, children," he said, turning to open the door.

"Yaakov, Yaakov!" Peter, the local wagon driver, stumbled into the house. A serious alcoholic, the

non-Jew never seemed to have enough money to fund his expensive habit and often tried begging for drinks at Jewish homes. “Yaakov, I’m so thirsty! Give me some schnapps!”

Yaakov stood at the door, trying to block his entry. “I’m sorry, Peter, but I have nothing to give you,” he said firmly. “My barrel is empty. I had guests this week, and I completely depleted my small store of schnapps. I would give you if I had, but there’s nothing left.”

“No, you must give me a drink!” Peter insisted, his red eyes wide and pleading.

Yaakov took a step back, afraid to rile up the drunkard’s anger. “Why don’t you see for yourself, Peter? Here, the barrel is empty.”

Peter glanced inside and groaned. “You were telling the truth, Jew,” he exclaimed, picking up the barrel with his huge hands and turning it upside down. A few drops of leftover schnapps began running down the sides of the wooden barrel, and he positioned it over his mouth to catch them. “Ah,” he exclaimed in satisfaction when he had finished draining the barrel of any alcoholic remnants. “See, Yaakov, even your empty barrel does well for me!”

“I’m glad you enjoyed,” Yaakov said, walking to the door and holding it open, hoping the wagon driver would take the hint.

Peter ignored the gesture. “You know, Yaakov, I’ve been fighting with my son-in-law lately. Things are really not good.”

Yaakov made a sympathetic noise, trying to conceal his apprehension. A drunk non-Jew in the house did not bode well, and while Peter did not appear violent at the moment, there was no telling when his mood would shift.

“He’s a drunk, a stupid, lazy drunk, and one of these days, he’s going to kill me. I just know it!” Peter announced dramatically. He made a show of glancing around. “I like this house. I would love to move in with you. What do you say?”

Yaakov’s mouth flew open in surprise. He had not expected the peasant to express interest in living with his family! He stammered for a few moments, trying to come up with an easy denial. “M-m-move in-n-n here?” He swallowed and tried again. “You know I like you, Peter, but we’re a Jewish family. It’s just not...possible to have you live here.”

To his astonishment, the tough wagon driver began to cry. “No, Yaakov, don’t turn me down!” he cried. “I’ll live in your barn! Please, let me live in your barn! You can renovate it to make it inhabitable for a person, and I’ll pay for the renovations. Please, Yaakov! I can’t live with my son-in-law anymore!”

Yaakov was silent for a few moments. The request was so bizarre that it was completely obvious to him that Hashem had sent him Peter for a reason. “I don’t have a penny to my name,” he informed the distraught peasant. “I’m happy for you to live in my barn, but I’ll need you to give me money up front for the renovations. I don’t have money to lay out for the project.”

“That’s not a problem,” Peter said, heaving a loud sigh of relief.

The two men walked out to the barn together. Yaakov pushed open the door and showed Peter the cow slumbering on one end. “The cow is going to stay. We can put up a divider in the middle of the barn, portioning off that side so that you can live there. Is that acceptable to you?”

“That’s wonderful!” Peter exclaimed. “Yaakov, how can I thank you? I’ll be back shortly with the money.”

When he returned with the promised sum, Yaakov went to town to hire workers. He priced out a few laborers, got estimations, and signed a contract with one of them. Within a few days, the project was complete. The barn was divided into comfortable quarters for Peter and living space for the cow. The grateful peasant moved in soon thereafter.

About three days after he moved in, Peter approached his host. “Yaakov, I’m bored,” he stated flatly, as if to emphasize just how bored he was. “My new living quarters in the barn are very comfortable. I know I paid for it, but I’m bored and have nothing to do. I want to help you out. Is there something I can do for you?”

Yaakov, still uncomfortable with the idea that a non-Jew was living in his barn, peered at him questioningly. “Why don’t you continue your taxi service? Aren’t you a wagon driver?”

“Let me tell you a little secret, Yaakov,” Peter said, whispering conspiratorially. “I’m really a very wealthy man. Even my wife, when she was alive, didn’t know this, but I inherited a tremendous amount of money. I’ve kept it hidden all my life. I worked as a wagon driver just to pass the time. It’s the winter now, and night sets in early I don’t need the money, and I’m just not in the mood of driving people around in the frigid dark.”

Yaakov stared at him, thunderstruck. Could it be that Peter was really a wealthy man?

“Isn’t there anything I can do for you?” Peter nudged.

“Well…” Yaakov’s fingers raked his beard, a habit he had while thinking. “It’s the winter now, but come spring, I would love to plant in the small field adjacent to my home. If you’re bored, you can build fences around my property and help clear the area so that we’ll have a decent farm to plow when the weather turns nice.”

“Thanks, Yaakov, that sounds just perfect for me,” Peter agreed.

The next morning, he got to work early, uprooting wild shrubs and clearing fallen branches. “Hey, Yaakov!” he called to his host. “This field is way too small. If you want to cultivate it properly, you’ll need a lot more land.”

“Isn’t there anything we can do?” Yaakov asked hopefully. “I know my wife has been planting a garden here every year. I don’t have more land.” Peter put his hand to his forehead to shield his eyes from the morning sun. “Who owns the property there, adjacent to yours?”

“Not me,” Yaakov said quickly, supplying the name of his neighbor.

“Let’s buy out his property,” Peter suggested excitedly. “With his larger plot of land joining yours, we’ll have a nice farm!”

“Peter, I already told you that I don’t have a penny to my name,” Yaakov said patiently. “I really don’t have the means to purchase the land.”

His guest shrugged him off. “You’re doing me the biggest favor, Yaakov. I’ll pay for the land, but you’ll have to make the purchase under your own name. I don’t need anyone finding out about my money, especially not my son-in-law.”

“Are you sure?” Yaakov asked doubtfully.

Peter clapped his hands. “Positive. I love farming, and I don’t have anything to do with my time. I’ll buy the land under your name, and we’ll both benefit.”

Yaakov couldn’t believe his incredible fortune. He thanked Hashem over and over as he signed the contract and purchased the adjacent property. In just a few short days, Hashem had lifted him out of his hopeless situation and showered him with blessing.

The rest of the winter passed quickly. Peter proved to be a strong, reliable worker. Despite the fact that he did not earn any money for his efforts, he spent hours and hours on the fields, clearing the land so that it be ready for farming in the spring.

Soon, the ice thawed and spring arrived. Under Peter’s diligent hands, the bare plot of land was transformed into rows and rows of neatly planted produce. Within a few short months, Yaakov was earning an incredible profit on the produce his wife and children sold. He himself was able to learn Torah the entire day while the fields produced without his input.

The months continued marching on. One morning, Peter knocked on the front door of Yaakov’s humble home. “Yaakov, I don’t want to disturb you, but I need to speak to you about something important,” he said, noticing that his host was in middle of learning.

Yaakov closed the Gemara gently and kissed it.

“How can I help you, Peter?”

“I wanted you to know that I haven’t been feeling well lately,” Peter said quietly. “I want to show you where my money is. In case something happens to me, I don’t want my son-in-law to get

a penny. I want to give it all to you, the righteous man who gave me a place to stay.”

Together, they walked through the forest. As they stepped over foliage and small branches, Peter pointed out various signs and signals that helped him determine where he had hidden his chest of riches. When they reached a specific unmarked tree, Peter stopped.

“This is it, Yaakov. Under this tree lies my money. In case something happens to me, I want it all to be yours.” He had brought along a shovel and he began hacking at the ground. A small hill of soft earth sprouted beside the hole he dug. More and more earth was shoveled out of the hole and flung onto the growing hill. “Here, stick your hand in.”

Yaakov knelt and pushed his hand into the narrow opening. He felt coarse burlap, then shiny coins. Peter was telling the truth! He really did own a secret treasure! He stood up and brushed off his pants, listening as Peter recited the signs to recognize the tree.

After the ditch was filled in again, they began the trek back home. Peter continued pointing out signs along the way, willing his host to remember his instructions. “It’s only thirty footsteps past this V-shaped tree. And you see that strange looking boulder on the left?”

Yaakov noted each sign and stored them in his memory for future access. “Yes, Peter,” he kept repeating as they made their way out of the forest. When Yaakov’s home appeared in the distance, they noticed a man standing outside, seemingly waiting for them. As they drew closer, Peter suddenly let out a loud curse. “My son-in-law!” he griped, recognizing the man. He spit at the ground in disgust. “He wanted to kill me! Loser!”

“Don’t worry, Peter,” Yaakov said soothingly. “You’re safe now. He won’t be able to hurt you here.”

They walked cautiously up the walk toward Yaakov’s house. “Can I help you?” Yaakov called out to the waiting gentile.

“I want my father-in-law to come back to live with us,” the man replied. He approached the recoiling Peter and patted his arm. “Please come back! We miss you!”

“Bah!” Peter said, shaking him off. “I like it here. I’m not going anywhere right now.”

Yaakov caught a suspicious gleam in the man’s eye as he pulled a bottle of whiskey out of his coat pocket. “Here, take a shot! Let’s be friends!”

Peter’s eyes darted from his son-in-law to his host. Despite the animosity he felt for the former, he could not resist the alcohol calling his name. Greedily, he accepted the bottle from his son-in-law and lifted it to his mouth, guzzling noisily.

The younger man grabbed the bottle back for another swig and then Peter helped himself to a second long drink. When the flask was empty, both men were stoned.

“Hey,” the son-in-law exclaimed, slurring drunkenly. “Why do you live by thes-s-s-se Jews anyway? How can you liv-v-v-v-e in such a filthy place?! Disgusting Jews!”

“Yeah, I hate the Jews,” Peter agreed wholeheartedly, spitting at Yaakov, who took a step back in surprise.

“So why don’t you come live with us-s-s-s-s?” the other man asked, poking him in the ribs. “Come live with your daughter, not these filthy strangers.”

“Live with my daughter?” Peter asked slowly, his mind trying to understand his son-in-law’s words through the drunken fog.

“Yes, come home to your daughter! Your comfortable bed is waiting for you. We miss you so much!”

“You miss me?” Peter echoed hazily.

“Of course, we miss you!” His son-in-law wrapped him in a bear hug, and Peter did not resist. “Come stay with your family! You hate these Jews!”

“Yes! I hate these Jews!” Peter slammed the empty whiskey bottle down onto the floor, shattering it into a million pieces. “That’s it, I’m coming with you!”

To be continued...

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סיפורי צדיקים

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

Hatzneiah Leches ***Part IV***

Recap: Yaakov and Miriam sold all their possessions to be able to feed their guests. Before he left, the tzaddik blessed them with wealth. Soon after, Peter, a non-Jewish drunkard, stumbled into their home and ended up moving into their barn. Extraordinarily, he purchased a farm for Yaakov, whose financial situation began improving. Peter revealed that he owned a secret fortune and showed the hiding place to Yaakov. Later that day, he suddenly declared that he hated Jews and planned to move out to live with his son-in-law.

“Yes! I hate these Jews!” Peter slammed the empty whiskey bottle down onto the floor, shattering it into a million pieces. “That’s it, I’m coming with you!”

From the sidelines, Yaakov observed the exchange between Peter and his son-in-law, horrified at the sudden change that had come over the man who had lived in his barn for more than a year. Despite his introduction to their household over whiskey, Peter hadn’t gotten drunk at all during his stay at Yaakov’s barn, and he had shown himself to be good-natured and affable toward Jews. How had things changed so quickly?

He watched as the two drunken gentiles disappeared into the barn together, emerging shortly thereafter with an assortment of bundles.

“Hey, Jew!” Peter called as he loaded his valises onto his son-in-law’s waiting wagon. “I’m moving out! Goodbye and good riddance!”

Just like that, he was gone, as quickly as he had first appeared. The horses kicked up the dust and disappeared, along with Peter, around the bend.

Yaakov mulled over Peter as he walked slowly back into his house. Everything about the story screamed of a heavenly Hand, moving the puppets about the stage. The fact that Peter had come to live in his barn was strange, and the way he had so suddenly switched tunes and galloped off with his son-in-law was even more bizarre. Would he now lose the farm that Peter had bought? Were his years of plenty over?

Hashem is orchestrating these events, he reminded himself. He will decide how this will play out.

The next morning, there was loud rapping on his front door. When Yaakov opened it, he was astonished to see Peter’s son-in-law standing there sheepishly, one arm slung over his horse.

“Can I help you?” he inquired cautiously.

The man gestured at the steed. "I came to bring you Peter's horse," he said gruffly. "The old man died last night. He choked on a bone in his dinner. As he was gasping for breath, he managed to say that he wanted his horse to go to you."

"Peter died?" Yaakov echoed in shock.

"Yeah, he choked on a bone," the son-in-law said, shifting his weight onto his other foot impatiently.

"He said you should have his horse, and so here it is. I'm not sure why he's giving it to you. He died without a penny to his name, and this is the only thing of value that he owned. Well, a dying wish is a dying wish. Take it."

Yaakov grasped the saddle tightly, patting the horse's mane to reassure it, shaking his head in disbelief. As he led the animal around to the barn, the stunning reality hit him. He was a wealthy man!

"Miriam!" he called as he returned into the house.

"Miriam, we need to talk!"

His wife looked up from her mending in alarm. "What's the matter?"

Yaakov glanced around. His older children weren't in the house, and the little ones were immersed in a frog they had caught. He lowered his voice. "I know it's sudden, but Peter died. His son-in-law just came to tell me. Yesterday, Peter took me to the forest and showed me where he kept his fortune. He wanted to bequeath it to us, he said."

"Oh," Miriam breathed. "Wow."

"I know," Yaakov said, standing up and pacing the length of the small room. "It's unbelievable.

I'm not sure exactly how much it is, but it's definitely a large amount."

"Let's give it all to tzedakah," Miriam suggested.

Her husband spun around. "What? What are you saying, Miriam? Of course, we'll give maaser from the money, and we'll be able to donate additional sums to tzedakah as well. I don't think we should give it all away!"

"I'm not sure you're right, Yaakov," she said softly. "Wealth is a test. Why would we want to accept such a difficult nisayon upon ourselves? With Hashem's help, we're doing well now. The children have what to eat, the house is always warm. What more do we need?"

"Miriam, you aren't thinking rationally," Yaakov said, continuing his pacing. "We've struggled all our lives to put food onto the table. True, it's been easier recently, baruch Hashem. But with this money, we'll be able to live without worry. I'll be able to learn with peace of mind. Maybe we can even start a yeshiva, and I'll be able to say shiurim. We'll do good things with the money, but why shouldn't we also enjoy it?"

His wife shook her head. "The money is blinding you, Yaakov. I think we should go to the rosh yeshiva to speak it over. Perhaps he'll be able to guide us."

"Sure," Yaakov agreed. "Does tonight after seder work for you?"

"Shouldn't be a problem." With the discussion on hold, Miriam returned her attention to her needle and thread.

That evening, they sat before Yaakov's rosh yeshiva. Yaakov outlined the hardships they had been through and the tremendous self-sacrifice

they had performed by hosting the passing tzaddik. He described the tzaddik's blessing and Peter's abrupt entrance into their lives, concluding with the conversation he had had with Peter's son-in-law that morning.

The rosh yeshiva listened quietly as Miriam softly explained her position about their newfound wealth. He turned his attention to Yaakov and heard his take on the matter. "I think what we have here is two spouses with two opposing opinions," he summarized. "Yaakov, you believe that you suffered enough and that the time has come for you to live in wealth. Your rebbitzen believes that you must continue living a simple lifestyle, that this sudden wealth is a test, and it'll be easier without it."

Both husband and wife began speaking at once, and the rosh yeshiva held up his hands for silence.

"I don't think we'll get anywhere by hashing this out," he continued. "You each believe very strongly in your own opinion, and neither side is likely to be convinced by the arguments of the other."

Yaakov and Miriam looked sheepishly at each other.

"Yaakov, you've left home many years ago," the rosh yeshiva said suddenly. "Your wife and children have never seen your parents. Perhaps the time has come to pay a visit home. Your father is a wise man, and you've always valued his insight. Speak to him about this dilemma. Perhaps he will be able to help you."

The couple thanked the rosh yeshiva and walked together out of his study, lost in thought.

"What do you think?" Yaakov asked eagerly as they walked home. "Would you be willing to make the trip to my hometown?"

"Of course!" Miriam said immediately. "I think it's a wonderful idea. I can start packing tomorrow morning. Can you take care of hiring a driver? When do you want to leave?"

Five days later, the family set out on the weeks-long journey. When Yaakov had originally traveled, fifteen years earlier, as a young yeshiva boy, the trip had taken four weeks. Now, accompanied by his large family, the exhausting journey lasted nearly two months. However, despite the difficulty, the family remained in great spirits, enthusiastic about meeting their paternal relatives for the very first time.

After endless time on the crowded wagon, galloping along dusty, winding roads, they finally arrived at Yaakov's hometown. Yaakov stood up in the wagon, drinking in the scenes. Much had changed since he had last been in town. It seemed that there had been considerable development in the town, and new streets and homes abounded.

"I hardly recognize this place anymore," he admitted quietly to Miriam. "To be honest, I have no idea how to get to my parent's home from here." Motioning to the driver to stop the wagon, he jumped out, feeling a little unsteady on the unmoving ground.

"Excuse me," he called to an unfamiliar Jew standing nearby. "Do you know where Reb Shaul lives?"

The man creased his nose in thought. "Reb Shaul? No, sorry. I don't know anyone like that. Here, why don't you inquire at this shop? The storekeeper knows everyone around here."

“Thanks,” Yaakov said, following the man’s pointing finger. He pushed open the wooden door and entered the dimly lit shop.

“Shalom aleichem!” the man behind the counter boomed. “And what kind of spices do you need today?”

“I’m sorry, I don’t need spices,” Yaakov said hesitantly. “Reb Chaim? Is that you?”

“Yes, of course it’s me!” The shopkeeper laughed heartily. He peered over the counter. “Forgive me. You are—?”

“Yaakov, Reb Shaul’s youngest son,” Yaakov supplied. “I’m the one who went to yeshiva about fifteen years ago.”

“Ah, Yaakov!” the shopkeeper exclaimed in recognition. “Welcome back to town! Time flies, eh? What are you doing in these parts? Moving back?”

Yaakov smiled and shook his head. “No, I’m just here for a visit. They really built things up around here. I barely recognize the place! Tell me, how do I get to my father’s house?”

The storekeeper’s face darkened. “Your father,” he said softly. “Well. I guess the news did not reach you.”

Yaakov gripped the counter for support. “What news?” he asked desperately. “Is my father—?” He couldn’t bring himself to complete the question.

“I’m sorry, son,” the man confirmed, patting his arm sympathetically. “He passed away about five years ago.”

“And my mother?” the bereaved son asked hopefully.

“I believe it was two years ago that she passed away,” the shopkeeper said quietly.

Yaakov let out an anguished cry. “I suppose I need to sit shivah,” he mumbled. “And my parents’ home...”

“Sold,” the man said helpfully. He really was familiar with everyone and everything in the community, as the Jew outside had promised.

“Your brothers are all poor, and the house was the only thing your father bequeathed to them. They needed money, so they sold it and divided the proceeds.”

“Are my brothers alive?” Yaakov asked hoarsely.

“Of course!” the shopkeeper reassured him.

“Here, let me show you how to get there. Your oldest brother lives not far... Continue down this street until the third intersection, and turn left. Your brother lives at the end of the road, in a house with a wooden fence around it.”

Yaakov shook the man’s hand. “Thank you for all your help.” He left the shop and headed back to the wagon to tell his wife the terrible news that he had just learned.

They sat in silence for a few minutes. Then Miriam spoke. “Well, we’re already here,” she said, not mentioning the hardships they had been through to get there. “Let’s at least visit your brothers. You’ll need to sit shivah for a little, and we need to stretch our legs. We’ll take it from there.”

Yaakov gave the shopkeeper's directions to the wagon driver and sat back, not noticing the passing scenery. He had come too late! His beloved father was no longer alive. He reigned in his emotions for the time being. There would be time to cry soon.

When they reached the home of his eldest brother, Boruch, Yaakov left his family waiting on the wagon and went to knock on the door. His brother took one look at him and held up empty palms in a universal signal of I don't have anything to give.

"I'm sorry," he said, mistaking Yaakov for a beggar. "I'm a poor man myself. I have no money to give."

"Don't you recognize me? It's Yaakov, your little brother!" Yaakov cried.

The two brothers embraced tightly for a long, heart-stopping moment.

"Yaakov! How are you? Come inside!" Boruch stepped aside so that he could enter. "It's been so many years! Is that your family in the wagon? Let me tell my wife to go greet them!"

Miriam and the children were introduced, and the two families hit it off instantly. Looking around at the absolute poverty his brother was living in, Yaakov couldn't help but contrast his surroundings to the beautiful gem his brother had given him prior to his departure countless years earlier. Boruch lost everything, he thought sorrowfully. All he has left of that money is the tzedakah he gave, to me and to others.

Yaakov sat shivah for two days, one for each of his parents. All his brothers came to visit him, their parents' absence lending the reunion a bittersweet taste.

The next few weeks passed quickly. The family stayed at each of Yaakov's brothers for a few days, and conscious of the astute poverty, assisted by purchasing food for their hosts during their stay. The children got to know their cousins and Miriam became better acquainted with her sisters-in-law. Yaakov, reunited with his brothers after such an extended absence, enjoyed the visit more than all of them.

"Yaakov, I think it's time we started the journey back," Miriam said one evening, as they prepared to go to sleep in a tiny room at the back on his brother's home. "We've been here for four weeks, and we have a long trip ahead of us. The yomim tovim will be here before we know it. I don't want to be stuck on the road over yom tov."

"But, Miriam, I still haven't gotten any clarity on what to do with the money we inherited from Peter," her husband protested. "We undertook this journey for that reason, and we're no closer to a decision."

"We came to discuss it with your father," Miriam reminded him. "Your father, unfortunately, is no longer here. You've already davened at his grave and spent time with your brothers. I don't see how more time will help us gain any clarity on the matter. There's no reason to stay any longer."

Once more, the brothers threw a goodbye party before Yaakov left with his family, yet this party was very different from the one fifteen years earlier. The meat and wine that had graced the table years earlier were now replaced with bread and cheap, homegrown vegetables. There were no expensive gifts, no mysterious letters. Just hearty singing, tearful speeches, and the creation of beautiful family memories.

The journey home was even more difficult than the one in. Their pace was slowed by rain and

foggy weather, muddy paths and flooded roads. While Yaakov had enjoyed the time spent with his family, the mission of the trip had ended in failure.

When they finally arrived home, drained physically and emotionally, Miriam put the children to bed and then turned to her husband. "I have an idea," she said quietly. "On the top shelf in our room is a letter that your father wrote to you before you went to yeshiva. We did not merit to speak to your father in person, but perhaps his letter will help us come to a decision."

"The letter!" Yaakov cried, jumping up. The years had been fruitful and busy and difficult, and in the interim, he had completely forgotten about the letter from his father. "Thank you, Miriam," he called as he rushed to take down the letter from the shelf.

Sitting down on his bed, he withdrew the yellowing page from its envelope. Just as he had done when he had read the letter the first time, Yaakov struggled to contain his tears as he read about his father's tremendous love for him. He wiped his tears and continued to read, his eyes drinking in his father's flowing script.

I would like to leave you with a gift. If you listen to my words, if you live by them, you'll merit a happy and successful life.

The posuk in Micha (6:8) asks: What does Hashem want from a person? Ki im asos mishpat ve'ahavs chesed vehatzneia leches im Hashem Elokecha. Hashem asks that we be fair and just, and that we should love to do chesed.

Read carefully, my son. Within the third thing lies the secret to success. What does

Hashem ask of us? Hatzneia leches im Hashem Elokecha. We should keep a low profile, to stay with Him and do His mitzvos, but quietly and modestly, without calling attention to ourselves.

My dear Yaakov! Live with Hashem, keep Him before you always, yet do so in a quiet and unassuming manner. Don't make noise with your avodas Hashem. Remain in the background, fulfilling His will inconspicuously. If you heed my words, you will see much brachah in your life.

I've sent you far from home, to learn at the feet of the great rosh yeshiva shlita. He's a tremendous talmid chacham and a great tzaddik. Place yourself in his shadow, and he will care for you like a father to his son. At his side, you will grow and reach tremendous heights.

May Hashem be with you always,

Father

Yaakov folded up the letter and lovingly slipped it back into the envelope. He suddenly lacked the desire to live a wealthy lifestyle. As per his father's directive and his wife's desire, he resolved to continue living his simple and quiet lifestyle. The money they had inherited would be used to support Torah institutions and the poor.

For the remainder of their lives, Yaakov and Miriam used their fortune to support hundreds of poor households, including Yaakov's brothers. They also merited to sustain countless yeshivos throughout the country. They operated on a

strictly anonymous basis, and none of their recipients or acquaintances were aware of their generous donations. They raised their children simply and modestly, constantly reaping the benefits of living their lives, quietly, along with Hashem.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A307

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