

# TORAS REB KALMAN



## סיפורי צדיקים

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

### ***The Berditchiver Rebbe and the Shochet Part I***

The Berditchiver Rebbe was amongst the generals who led klal Yisroel in his generation. A famed rebbe, he was a giant in Torah, in Halacha, in agaddah, and renowned far and wide for his tremendous ahavas Yisroel. He was also a master of the hidden Torah, and his tefillos carried great weight in shomayim.

The Berditchiver Rebbe would rarely break his concentration in learning. As a leader of his people, he bore responsibility for them on his shoulders and often needed to spend great periods of time on their behalf. Still, even while he spoke to downtrodden Jews and concerned himself with their needs, his heart and mind were always tied to holiness.

In fact, after one conversation with an elderly woman to which the rebbe devoted a tremendous amount of time, close disciples questioned how he

was able to spend so much time speaking to her. The rebbe asked them to repeat the words he had spoken to the woman and then showed them that the roshei teivos, first letters, of each sentence he had spoken spelled out the name of a different angel in heaven. Even in the midst of comforting the woman, the Berditchiver Rebbe had been able to simultaneously keep his mind on the lofty happenings above.

One afternoon, the rebbe was in the midst of learning, his mind engrossed in the sugya before him, when a thought entered his mind. He stood up and motioned to his gabbai, who hurried over. "Please prepare the horse and wagon," the rebbe said. "We need to travel immediately."

The gabbai, though surprised by the sudden plans, was unquestioning in his faith of his rebbe's decisions. "At once," he responded, hurrying out to pack a small bag for the rebbe's journey.

A few short minutes later, the two of them were seated on the wagon. The driver whipped the horses, which broke out into a trot, then a gallop. The journey was smooth and uneventful, and after a few hours on the road, they arrived at their destination.

At the rebbe's behest, the driver stopped the wagon outside the city's hotel and the gabbai stepped down. "Please rent a room for us," the rebbe instructed him. "Afterward, please let the people of the city know that I am here."

"Www..what does the rebbe mean?" the gabbai stammered in astonishment. The Berditchiver Rebbe was a humble, unassuming man who liked to hide his greatness. Whenever they traveled, he usually kept his identity a secret so as not to attract unnecessary honor.

"Go to the rov of the city, and let him know that the Berditchiver Rebbe is here," the rebbe said calmly. "Spread the word that the Berditchiver Rebbe is in town."

Still bewildered, the gabbai went to fulfill the rebbe's bidding. He entered the hotel and approached the front desk. "I would like to rent a room," he said, pulling out some bills. "The Berditchiver Rebbe is here, and he wants to stay at this hotel. Do you have a room befitting the rebbe?"

From behind the desk, the manager's head jerked up, his long payos swinging back and forth. "The Berditchiver Rebbe is here, in this city?! Wow, what an honor! Here, let me show you the best room I have."

"Did you say the Berditchiver Rebbe is here?" A man with a straggly brown beard called excitedly from across the lobby, where he was dragging a leather suitcase toward the entrance of the hotel.

"Yes, he's right outside," the gabbai confirmed, following the man outside to the waiting wagon. When he returned a few minutes later with the rebbe, ushering him into his newly rented accommodations, a large crowd of admirers had already formed, eager to glimpse the holy face of the rebbe and get his blessing.

The gabbai left the rebbe in the hotel room, learning from a sefer at a small table, and went to make more noise about the rebbe's presence in the city. He raced through the streets, informing rabbanim and ordinary Jews, spreading the word to every person he met. A thick swarm of petitioners descended upon the hotel as people jostled for the opportunity to speak to the famed tzaddik.

When the gabbai returned from his mission, the hotel manager was waiting for him, clearly regretting his earlier enthusiasm to host the rebbe. "This cannot continue," he said firmly, gesturing at the crowds of people crammed into the hallways. "This is a hotel, not an auditorium. It wasn't built to accommodate such crowding. This place is liable to be destroyed in just a few minutes. Just a little pushing, and my walls will come crumbling down!"

The gabbai pursed his lips, surveying the crowd thoughtfully. "I'll send everyone out," he suggested. "We'll have them make a line outside the hotel building, and one person at a time will be allowed in for a short audience with the rebbe."

"Fine!" the hotel manager agreed.

Together, they managed to coax the crowd back out through the entrance and into an orderly line that snaked for miles down the road. The chassid with the brown straggly beard who had had the good fortune of bumping into the gabbai in the hotel lobby was standing, still holding his luggage, in the coveted place directly in front of the hotel's wooden doors. He would be the first man to receive an audience with the rebbe. Those further down the line looked ahead despairingly, wondering how many days they would have to wait before being given an opportunity to meet with the rebbe.

When the crowd was finally organized, the gabbai rubbed the back of his hand over his sweaty forehead and rushed back to the room where he had left the rebbe.

The Berditchiver Rebbe looked up from his sefer. "Tell me, are the people here?"

"The entire city is here, or so it seems!" the gabbai exclaimed. "There must be close to a thousand men outside, all waiting to talk to the rebbe. Should I call in the first one?"

"I'm a rov, aren't I?" the rebbe asked instead of responding.

"Y..yes," the gabbai said hesitantly, unsure what the rebbe was getting at.

"Well, doesn't the halachah say that when a rov comes to a city, the shochet of the city should bring him all his slaughtering knives for inspection?" the rebbe asked rhetorically. "I want you to go outside and find the shochet."

The gabbai left the room and walked outside toward the expectant crowd. The man with the straggly beard looked at him eagerly, one foot resting protectively on his suitcase. "Can I go in?" "Not yet," the gabbai told him sympathetically. He stood up on a carton and motioned for quiet.

"Is the shochet of the city here?" he bellowed.

The people looked in front and behind them as the question rippled down the line. No, it did not appear that the shochet was present. There were rabbonim, there were askonim, there were carpenters and cobblers, bakers and blacksmiths, but no shochet.

"He's not waiting on line," the gabbai reported back to the rebbe.

"In that case, please go summon him from his house," the rebbe directed.

The gabbai appeared again at the entrance of the hotel, but the man with the straggly beard's shoulders slumped in disappointment as the rebbe's devoted assistant walked right passed him, inquiring after the shochet's address and hurrying off.

The shochet, Nosson, was a tall, powerfully built man. His muscular arms were capable of restraining aggressive animal as he tied their legs and readied them for slaughter. He was accustomed to dealing with large, heavy beasts and was stronger and tougher than they were. His huge frame filling the doorway, he looked down at the gabbai standing before him expectantly.

"The Berditchiver Rebbe is here," the gabbai said, trying not to cower in fear. "He wants you to bring him your slaughtering knives so that he can make sure they are kosher."

Nosson's forehead creased. "I've been the ritual slaughterer here for many years. The local rabbonim constantly inspect my knives, and they are always okay. You can tell the rov that

everything is in order with my slaughtering knives. There's no need for further inspections."

The gabbai forced himself to meet the slaughter's tough gaze. "Yes, but halachah dictates that if a rov comes to a city, as a show of derech erez, the shochet is required to bring him his knives for inspection."

"Don't you tell me what Halacha says or does not say," Nosson growled, looming menacingly over the gabbai. "And you can go back to your rov and tell him the same thing. No rov is going to come in here and tell me what to do!"

When the gabbai returned to the hotel, he couldn't bring himself to repeat the shochet's brazen words. "He didn't want to come," he said quietly, without elaborating more.

The Berditchiver Rebbe didn't need to hear anymore. He was not surprised by the shochet's refusal to bring his slaughtering knives; in fact, he had been anticipating it.

Watching the rebbe's face, his seasoned gabbai suddenly grasped what was occurring. The rebbe had come to this city specifically to deal with the shechitah in town, which he knew to be problematic. Anticipating resistance from the shochet, he had forgone his usual practice of keeping his identity hidden and notified the entire city of his presence so that he could make them all aware of the problematic shechitah.

The rebbe rose from his seat and gestured to his gabbai to accompany him outside. A hush fell over the long, long line as the saintly rebbe made his appearance in front of the hotel. While he had a reputation of being warm and kindhearted, the people watched fearfully as the rebbe's face took on a stern appearance.

Turning to the gabbai, he announced in a thundering voice, "Go to the shochet, Nosson, and let him know that I insist he bring me his

chalafim. I am the Berditchiver Rebbe. He must bring me his slaughtering knives!”

Those standing close enough to hear the announcement began whispering to each other as the gabbai walked off in the direction of the shochet’s home. Word of the rebbe’s instruction snaked down the line. A small crowd of curious Jews left their places in line to follow the gabbai and witness his exchange with Nosson.

The gabbai found the slaughterer standing at the door, muscles bulging, arms crossed defiantly over his chest. “What now?” he demanded.

The gabbai ignored the unfriendly tone, taking strength in his rebbe’s directive. “The Berditchiver Rebbe insists that you go to him, immediately, with your –.”

“My shechitah is fine,” Nosson cut him off. “The local rabbonim okayed it, and that is good enough for me and good enough for the city. We don’t need a rov coming from outside and interfering! I won’t allow the Berditchiver Rebbe to tell me what to do.”

The cluster of people behind the gabbai exchanged incredulous glances, astonished at the shochet’s mockery of such a respected tzaddik. An uncomfortable pit settled in their stomachs as they contemplated the fact that the kashrus of their meat and poultry was largely in the hands of a man who had so brazenly degraded a great Torah giant.

When the gabbai returned to the hotel without the shochet, the rebbe asked him to call the owner of the hotel. The man came hurrying over, his hands shaking nervously.

“Are you the owner of this hotel?” the rebbe boomed, his voice echoing over the hushed crowd.

“I am,” the owner confirmed in a chattering voice.

“And the meat that you serve in your hotel; is it under the shechitah of Nosson, the local shochet?” the rebbe continued, not lowering his voice.

The owner nodded. “Yes, I use meat from Nosson. His shechitah is under the supervision of the local rabbonim, who have deemed it kosher.”

“I refuse to eat from this shechitah,” the rov announced. “I won’t be eating meat during my stay in this town.” He re-entered the building and returned to his room.

“The rebbe won’t be able to see anyone tonight,” the gabbai informed the disappointed crowd. The man with the straggly beard heaved a great sigh before loading his luggage onto a nearby wagon and driving off. The crowd dispersed slowly.

Soon, a new crowd formed, this time outside of Nosson’s home.

“I reserved a full cow that is scheduled to be slaughtered tomorrow, for my daughter’s wedding?” A hefty man in the front half-told, half-asked the shochet. “I wanted to cancel the order. I won’t be needing it anymore.”

“What do you mean?” Nosson asked in surprise.

“Did the wedding get called off?”

“No, no, nothing like that, baruch hashem,” the man said, chuckling uncomfortably. “It’s just that the holy Berditchiver Rebbe doesn’t want to eat your shechitah, and I don’t want to serve it at the wedding.”

“That rebbe said my shechitah is treif?!” the shochet demanded.

“No, no!” the man cried, taking a step back. “He just said he won’t eat from it, and as such, I don’t want to eat from it either.”

Nosson raised his hands in surrender. “Fine, your order is canceled. Serve bread to your guests and see if I care!”

“Please cancel my order, too,” the man behind him called out.

“And mine!” someone else added.

“And mine! The chicken and the beef!”

The cancellations were coming thick and fast as rumors began flying throughout the city.

When Nosson came to shul for Mincha, his mood was sour. “What is going on over here?” he yelled at his neighbors. “One little rebbe, and everyone’s running the other way?!”

The other congregants just averted their eyes uncomfortably.

In the morning, the rabbonim of the city met up to go speak to the Berditchiver Rebbe together. The rebbe greeted them warmly and invited them inside. They discussed a variety of topics before someone, finally, broached the subject that was on the forefront of everyone’s mind.

“We want to know what to do about Nosson’s shechitah,” a senior rov began. “Does the rebbe feel that we should no longer certify that his meat is kosher?”

The rebbe shrugged. “I’m not the rov here, and so I don’t want to pasken. Personally, however, I don’t plan on eating from his shechitah.”

When they left the Berditchiver Rebbe, the rabbonim were undecided. They had understood from the rebbe’s words that it would be best if they stopped certifying the shechitah, yet how could they tear away a man’s livelihood? Most puzzling was the fact that it was coming from the Berditchiver Rebbe, famed for his deep love of mankind.

As they walked, a man came over to them, gesticulating excitedly with his arms. “We discovered that the shochet isn’t the straight man we had always assumed him to be,” he blurted, quickly recounting what he had seen to the rabbonim.

Others came rushing over to report similar stories portraying Nosson as a man with a tainted soul. “We need a different shochet,” they insisted. “We refuse to eat this man’s shechitah, and until the rabbonim remove their certification and pass it on to someone else, we won’t have anything to eat.”

The stories spread, some true, some less so, and the pressure from the people grew. Eventually, the rabbonim of the city agreed to remove their kashrus certification from Nosson’s slaughterhouse, effectively shuttering his establishment. By that time, the Berditchiver Rebbe had already returned home.

Shut down by the rabbonim and shunned by his neighbors, Nosson became a loner. He was too ashamed to appear in public and began davening in a tiny shteibel at the outskirts of the city. Despite the fact that he was a strong, powerfully built man, he had no children, no built-in supporters to assist him in reaping revenge from the townspeople who had humiliated him so.

His wife, whose standing in the community had plummeted along with her husband’s, fell into a deep depression. Her condition deteriorated further and further, until one evening, about a month after the rabbonim had decertified her husband’s shechitah, she returned her tortured soul to her maker.

Nosson’s loneliness intensified tremendously after his wife’s passing. He had no job, no family, no standing in the community, and definitely no friends. Still, he had been a shochet for many years and had a tidy fortune to live off of.

To add to his misfortune, he was soon swarmed by people demanding refunds on orders he had

never filled, either because they had been canceled in the wake of the Berditchiver Rebbe's refusal to eat his shechitah, or because his business had been shuttered before he could fill them. These refunds, plus the cost of his daily living, was eating away at his savings.

With his reputation in shambles, Nosson knew he would never be able to find another job. His only option was to invest his savings so that it would continue generating income for as long as he needed it. He researched some investments, put most of his money into a promising deal, and then promptly lost his entire fortune when the investment soured. His home was sold to pay off the rest of his debts.

A year earlier, he had been a respected man with a prominent position within the community. Now, Nosson was homeless, jobless, and all alone in the world. He had not a penny to his name. Swallowing his pride, he went around the city seeking loans, but he was consistently being refused. People were wary of lending money to a man whom the great Berditchiver Rebbe had not trusted.

"I understand that you don't trust that I'll return the money," Nosson said hoarsely after another bitter disappointment. He struggled to keep the desperation out of his voice. "If you don't want to lend me money, perhaps you can give me some tzedakah? I have no money for food."

The man he was speaking to remained unmoved. "I would gladly give tzedakah to a nice, simple Jew, but why would I waste my money on an evil man like yourself? In your days of power, did you ever think about the unfortunate who could not afford the inflated prices you charged? Did you have pity on the poor who married off their children in disgrace since you could not spare them some cheaper cuts of meat at prices they could pay?! Now it's your turn to feel how they felt. I'll save my tzedakah for good people like them."

Left with no alternative, Nosson was forced to leave his hometown to collect money at locales where he wasn't infamously known and passionately hated. While his anonymity protected him and allowed him to collect small amounts of money, it also hindered his efforts, since not too many people were willing to throw larger sums at a complete stranger.

And so, Nosson settled into the painful and arduous life of a pauper, living from coin to coin.

To be continued....

*Have a Wonderful Shabbos!*

This story is taken from tape # TG64

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### ***The Berditchiver Rebbe and the Shochet Part II***

*RECAP: The Berditchiver Rebbe traveled to a nearby town and summoned the local shochet, Nosson, to inspect his slaughtering knives. When the shochet refused, the rebbe publically announced that he would not eat from the Nosson's shechitah. This led to the entire town boycotting the shechitah. Nosson was reduced to poverty and forced to travel to beg for charity. His wife fell into a depression and passed away.*

Nosson became a wanderer, traveling from village to village, begging for his daily bread. His garments, once made of a fine material, were reduced to rags. He hungered constantly and lost a significant amount of weight. Within a short time, he bore little resemblance to the powerful influential individual he had once been.

He could never stay in the same town for more than a few days, since it annoyed the townspeople to see the same beggar collecting for too long. "Weren't you here already?" they'd ask in irritation if he dared approach the same person twice. He would make his rounds around the town, and two days later, move on to the next locale.

After one particularly grueling round of begging, during which he had been subject to much humiliation and a drenching rain shower, Nosson entered a bar and requested a bit of whiskey. "Please, I need to warm myself," he explained to the bartender.

"Can you pay?" the bartender asked suspiciously, eyeing his customer's bedraggled appearance.

"This is a business, not a charity. We don't dispense drinks for free."

Nosson withdrew a small bundle from his pocket. It contained all the coins he had painstakingly collected during his stay in town, not an insignificant sum. Opening the sack, he withdrew a single coin. "I'm not looking for a real drink, just a small toast," he told the man behind the counter. "I assume this is sufficient?"

The bartender eyed the bundle of coins greedily. "Yes, it's more than enough," he said distractedly.

"You're paying for a small shot glass, but it's a cold and rainy day. For this price, I'll let you have a full glass of something that will really warm your insides."

"Thank you," Nosson said gratefully, sinking wearily into a chair. He sipped from the glass before him and stopped to sense the whiskey flowing through his blood. Nodding appreciatively, he slowly downed the rest of the glass. As his limbs thawed in the toasty warmth

of the bar and the whiskey worked its magic on his brain, he lowered his head onto the table and was soon fast asleep.

The bartender tiptoed up to him and listened to his slow, even breathing. “He’s sleeping,” he reported to his colleague. “You get that bundle out of his pocket, and we’ll split the profit.”

“Deal,” his friend agreed.

Two minutes later, they were in the back room, counting the coins and dividing the money. They tossed the empty sack into the fireplace to destroy all evidence of their crime and returned to their positions behind the counter. Oblivious, Nosson slept on.

A few hours later, Nosson awoke, feeling more relaxed and refreshed than he had felt in a long time. Despite the treacherous conditions, he had succeeded in raising a larger sum than he had in any other town and was more financially secure than he had been in a while. He had enjoyed a good drink and a better rest, and felt invigorated, ready to continue his travels.

Instinctively, his hand patted his pocket where his money was, and he gasped in shock. The pocket was empty.

Jumping to his feet, he rushed to the counter. He swallowed a few times, struggling to contain his tears. “My money! My money was stolen!”

The bartender widened his eyes in shock. “Stolen? Here?!”

“It must have been that sleazy looking customer who came by for a drink before,” his colleague said knowingly.

The bartender raised his hands in despair. “If it was him, then I don’t believe you’ll be getting your money back soon.”

Nosson left the bar, waves of despair washing over him. He had not even managed to purchase a piece of bread with the money he had toiled for, and already it was gone. He had already lost his home, his wife, his livelihood, and his standing in the community. Why did he have to lose the few coins he had accumulated after hours on his feet in the cold and rain? “What more do you want from me, Hashem?” he cried out bitterly.

As he dragged his feet down the dirt path that would lead him out of the village, Nosson replayed the day’s events in his mind, growing more and more despondent. Alone with the shrubs surrounding him and his dismal thoughts, he fell deeper and deeper into despair as he reflected on what his life had become.

His feet led him in the direction of the next village, where he would spend his time, once again, begging for coins as the village children demeaned him with hurled stones and spoiled fruit. His stomach growled hungrily and he walked with waning strength, wondering how far off the village was and if he would encounter someone kind enough to give him a meal.

Lifting his eyes, he spotted another pauper on the road, apparently heading in the same direction. Eager for company, Nosson quickened his stride and closed the distance between the two of them. “Shalom aleichem, I’m Nosson,” he introduced himself, holding out his hand. “It looks like we’re both headed to the same village; would you mind if we walked together?”

The beggar’s grip was weak, and his handshake was clumsy. “Pinchas,” he said briefly.



They trotted alongside each other in silence for a few moments, each immersed in his own thoughts. Looking up, Nosson noticed that Pinchas wore a backpack on his shoulders. His eyes lit up eagerly as he wondered if his new acquaintance had any food to share.

“Hey, Pinchas?” he asked carefully. “I haven’t really eaten today. Do you by any chance have a piece of bread for me?”

Pinchas raised his eyes heavenward and hitched his backpack higher on his shoulders. “I wish! I’m also starving. I haven’t eaten since yesterday!”

Nosson nodded, still eying the knapsack hopefully. “Maybe you have... money? Something to buy food with?”

“Money?” Pinchas scoffed. “Do I look like a rich man to you? I don’t have a dime to my name.”

“I’m really hungry,” Nosson complained. “What do you have in that bag, anyway?”

“It’s nothing,” Pinchas said. “Trust me, it’s nothing.”

Nosson’s immense hunger, blooming in front of his mind, clouded out his judgement. “You’re just stingy, huh? I say there’s food in there, and you just don’t want to share with a starving man. You’re... you’re a cruel, heartless animal!”

“There’s no food in here!” Pinchas protested. “I’m telling you, I don’t have a crumb on me. I’m just as hungry as you!”

“If there’s nothing in there, why are you being so secretive?” Nosson demanded. “Let me see for myself what’s in there!”

Pinchas took a giant step away from him. “Absolutely not! This is mine, and it’s private!”

Who are you, a highway bandit? What right do you have to demand to see my private belongings?!”

“You’ll tell me what’s in there if you know what’s good for you,” Nosson threatened menacingly.

“I’m not sure what’s going on here,” the other man objected. “You wanted to walk together, that’s all. You don’t want to walk with me anymore? That’s fine with me.”

“What. Is. In. Your. Bag.” Nosson demanded, his voice dripping ice and steel.

Pinchas dropped his hands to his sides and heaved a terrific sigh. “It’s just papers, okay? I write, privately. It’s not something I want anyone else to see.”

“Just papers, huh?” Nosson retorted, not quite believing him. “If it’s just papers, why won’t you let me see?”

“Because they’re private!” Pinchas cried, stamping his foot in exasperation. He stalked off, not bothering to wait for Nosson.

Starving, with a bleeding heart, Nosson chased after him. From his pocket, he whipped out a slaughtering knife, the only possession remaining from his previous life, and removed the protective casing. “You are hiding something,” he growled at a startled Pinchas. “Give me your bag, or I will kill you.”

“It’s mine,” Pinchas cried, cradling the knapsack with both arms.

“Let me see!”

“It’s private! Don’t kill me! Don’t kill me!”

“You... you...” Nosson sputtered angrily. He lunged forward and thrust his knife at Pinchas. A moment later, Pinchas was sprawled on the floor, blood gushing from his wound. Nosson glanced at him briefly and grabbed the knapsack, tossing it open.

As Pinchas had promised, it was full of papers. No food. No money. Just a thick sheaf of useless papers.

Nosson tossed the bag on the floor in disgust and turned back to the man on the floor. Pinchas’s face had a sickly greyish tinge, and his eyes were glassy with pain. He lay limply in a growing pool of his own blood. “I’ll... never... forgive you,” he rasped weakly with dying strength. “Hashem is witness to your actions. You’ll never be forgiven... for them.” He closed his eyes and uttered a soundless Shema.

Nosson watched in a stupefied horror as Pinchas breathed his last.

He had killed a man, a Jew.

He had reached a new low. He now had human blood on his hands.

Despairingly, Nosson dragged the body to the side of the road. Using his slaughtering knife and his bare hands, he dug a ditch just deep enough to serve as a grave and laid Pinchas’s corpse inside. He tossed in the knapsack and the papers and covered the grave with dirt and branches.

The next days passed in a haze of guilt and depression. Nosson wandered around, hitching rides with no destination in mind, lost in his gloomy thoughts. He didn’t care where he was or when he had eaten last. He wallowed in his misery for hours on end until he could no longer withstand the pain.

One of his hitches took him all the way to London. It was there that he decided that the only exit out of his depression was to drink away his troubles. While in a stupor, he would be free of the thoughts that haunted his sleep.

There was a small sign outside a nearby bar advertising that it was looking to hire. Nosson entered the bar and presented himself to the owner. “I know I look a little disheveled,” he admitted. “As soon as I earn a bit of money, I’ll be able to clean myself up and dress properly. But I’m a good worker and I think I can do what you need.”

“Let’s give it a try,” the owner agreed.

Nosson found that he greatly enjoyed the position. During the day and in the evenings, he served customers and cleaned tables. At night, when his hours were complete, he would drink himself into a dreamless sleep. He was always too busy or too drunk to recall his troubles. Soon, Shabbos and yom tov faded from his life along with kashrus, tefillin, and tefillah. He looked and acted no different from the non-Jews he served, a far cry from the prominent shochet he had once been.

One afternoon, a tall man with shrewd eyes entered the bar. He stood in a corner, not drinking, not conversing, just observing the people as they emptied glasses and bantered drunkenly. He was looking for someone vulnerable, someone weak and defenseless, someone whom he could prey on for his vicious schemes.

From his obscure position in the background, he noticed Nosson serving the customers, a vacant look in his eyes. The tall man nodded knowingly. He was familiar with this empty look, with the feeling of worthlessness and a desperate desire to forget one’s past. This was exactly what he was looking for.

He moved from his place at the back of the bar and strode up to the counter. “Excuse me,” he began politely. “You look like a newcomer to town. I don’t believe we’ve met before. What is your name?”

“Nathan,” Nosson said.

“Henry,” the tall man returned, offering his hand for a shake. “Nice to meet you. I’m actually looking to hire. I’ve been observing you for a while, and it seems that you might be a qualified candidate. What is your skillset?”

“I’ve worked here as a bartender for a few weeks, but prior to that I was a slaughterer and a butcher,” Nosson replied. “I lost my job and was reduced to poverty a few years ago, and I have been very weak since, but if I were to eat well and regain my strength, I believe I could do an excellent job restraining animals and slaughtering them. I’ve worked with large animals, such as bulls and cows, as well as sheep, goats, and chickens.”

“A slaughterer,” Henry said thoughtfully. “All right, sir, I might have a position for you in that field. If it’s still open, I’ll be in touch.”

Nosson left the counter to clear off some tables that had emptied and Henry took advantage of his absence to speak to his boss. “I want you to start giving your employee good food,” he told the owner of the bar. “I want you to give him a good place to sleep. I’ll pay for it,” he added quickly, seeing the look on the employer’s face. “I would like to observe him; to see how he reacts to a better life.”

“Why not, if you pay for it?” the owner agreed.

Suddenly, Nosson’s meager lunches and dinners at the bar became five-star meals. He was served filling soups and thick slabs of meat, creamy potatoes and crisped vegetables. From the

background, Henry observed as he ate heartily, not minding that the food was treif. He began putting on weight, and his sagging muscles began to fill up again.

“I want your bartender,” Henry told the bar’s owner after two weeks. “I want to hire him to work with me.”

The owner stood up from his chair. “What do you mean? He’s my worker. You can’t just—!”

He was silenced at the sight of a thick wad of bills dangling from his guest’s fingers. “You’ll find another worker,” Henry suggested, shifting the money back and forth between his hands. “And this is a little gift for your sacrifice.”

“Fine, you can have him,” the owner of the bar conceded. “Does he even want to work for you?” Henry winked slyly. “Only one way to find out, huh?”

Nosson was thrilled at the opportunity to practice the profession he had been engaged in for so many years, years from a better and happier life. He bid the bar farewell and joined his new employer on his carriage. “Where are we going?”

“You’ll see,” Henry said mysteriously. “It’s a journey that will take a few days. But the carriage is comfortable, and there’s plenty of good food.”

Traveling in luxury with the finest meat and wine at his fingertips, Nosson finally felt like a person again. The hunger that had been his constant companion since he had become a beggar was finally a memory. He was dressed respectably and on his way to reclaiming his position as a slaughterer. He sat back in his comfortable seat, contented.

After nearly a week on the road, the carriage pulled up outside an enormous brick building

surrounded by a tall iron gate. An armed guard nodded in recognition at Henry and opened the gate to allow them to pass.

“What is this building?” Nosson asked in awe, craning his neck to see how high it went.

Henry just smiled. “This is your new workplace.”

“But... what is it? What do you do here?” Nosson prodded.

“Come inside,” Henry suggested instead of answering. “Let’s sit in my office and have a proper discussion.”

As they walked silently down the corridors, they passed a large room. Nosson glimpsed at around sixty boys sitting in rows. There was an adult in the front of the room, facing the boys, gesturing with his hands as he explained something. Was this a school? A few doors later, he saw another group of boys in a similar setting.

“We are a missionary center,” Henry explained proudly as they sat across from each other in the starkly decorated office. “We find young Jews who are down on their luck; lonely, hungry, and abandoned. We bring them here, give them food and friends and love, and of course, teach them about the true faith. In fact, we are so successful, that a significant percentage of the students here go on to become missionaries, recruiting even more students to our institution.”

Nosson nodded, too far gone to be horrified. “I see. And you need a butcher?”

“Actually, we need another counselor,” Henry said smoothly. “Unruly boys instead of unruly animals, but otherwise, it’s pretty much the same thing. Restrain them, tame them, keep them in line. We have enough staff dealing with the religious angle.”

“But you said you needed a slaughterer,” Nosson reminded him, disappointed.

“We do, but only part-time,” Henry said reassuringly. “We’ll bring you animals to slaughter for the kitchen, but it’s not a fulltime job. The rest of the day, we’ll need you to keep the boys in shape. You’ll be very well compensated.”

Adjusting to life in the monastery took time, but soon Nosson was spending his time slaughtering animals and counseling Jewish boys who had been indoctrinated with a foreign faith. Trapped in this impure atmosphere, he slowly began to absorb the missionary teachings.

One morning, a little goat was brought in for slaughter. He seized the squirming animal and lifted his knife. Realizing it was in danger, the goat began bleating, a crying sound that stirred the very depths of Nosson’s soul. The crying of the little goat sounded so similar to the tearful screams of Pinchas, the man he had killed.

The goat could not speak, but in its pitiful cries, Nosson heard Pinchas cry out, “Don’t kill me! Don’t kill me!”

He looked at the goat. It was just a goat. It was not Pinchas, reincarnated, coming to take revenge. But then why did he hear the voice of the man he killed coming from the goat’s mouth? “Stop crying!” he ordered the goat, slicing its throat before the sound could further unnerve him.

In the stillness that followed, Nosson felt an uncanny sense of *déjà vu*. It felt as though he had just repeated the vile act he had committed when he had killed Pinchas. The crushing memories came tumbling back, destroying the peace of mind he had only recently regained.

The boys in his division sensed his distraction and ran wild while he sat at the front of the room, staring down at the floor.

“And what is going on here?” Henry demanded, appearing at the door with his arms folded across his chest. “Aren’t you supposed to be supervising them?”

“W...w...what?” Nosson jumped, shaking his head to clear it. “I... they need fresh air,” he stammered, grabbing the first excuse that came to his mind.

“By all means,” Henry said magnanimously, waving his hands expansively at the large window. “We have a beautiful courtyard for the boys to—.”

A collective groan rose up from all sixty boys at once.

Nosson’s head began to pound. “The courtyard is... stifling,” he said determinedly. “Nothing will happen if I take the boys out to a nearby field. They’ll feel so much better afterward.”

“Absolutely not.” Henry’s tone was firm. “This place is secured. We don’t compromise on safety.”

“I want to teach them some athletics,” Nosson countered.

“Only in the courtyard.”

Nosson stood up. “It’s not possible in the courtyard! It’s too narrow. I’ll take responsibility for the boys and bring them back afterward.”

Henry threw up his hands. “Alright. But don’t go far.” The boys followed him outside and watched in excitement as he motioned to the guard to

unlock the iron fence. “We’re expecting you back in an hour. Enjoy, boys!”

The boys whooped loudly as they followed Nosson around the corner, gulping in the free air. They huddled around their counselor expectantly. “Now, boys, we’ll practice running,” Nosson announced. “That way!”

The group broke into a sprint, laughing gleefully at the unexpected adventure. Glancing at the sixty boys running alongside him, Nosson suddenly felt a powerful urge to repent. “Boys!” he called urgently. “Boys!”

The boys slowed their pace, looking at him with question marks in their eyes.

“You are Jewish boys,” Nosson whispered fiercely. “The monastery is not for you! Run! Run while you still can! They tried to trap you, but now is your chance! Run, and find yiddishkeit! Run for your very lives!”

The boys hesitated for a beat.

Then they ran and ran and ran, dispersed in tens of different directions.

By the time Henry and his cohorts at the monastery realized they had fled, it was too late. Sixty Jewish boys escaped the missionary clutches and returned to a life of Torah.

Nosson, too, fled, running back toward the life he had left behind. He hitched a ride out of London and began slowly making his way toward the town of Berditchiv. He thought back to the days when he had been a shochet and felt a terrible remorse that he had strayed so far. He knew that only the Berditchiver Rebbe, who had set off the chain of events, would be able to assist him in putting his life back together.

When he arrived in Berditchiv, he stopped a passerby. “Where does the Berditchiver Rebbe live?”

The man looked up at him. “Go to the end of the road, and make a right. It’s a small cottage in the middle of the street. You’ll recognize it by the crowd of people waiting to speak to him.”

Nosson followed the man’s directions. Sure enough, in front of one of the houses on the block was a small line of people. Trembling in awe, he took his place at the end of the line and settled down for a wait.

A hush settled over the small crowd as the rebbe appeared in the doorway of his home. Bypassing the entire line of people, he approached Nosson and laid his hand on his shoulder. When he spoke, his voice was warm. “Come inside.”

Nosson followed the rebbe on wobbly legs, realizing that the rebbe possessed ruach hakodesh. The holy tzaddik sat down, and Nosson threw himself onto the floor before him. “Rebbe, rebbe, please help me! Look how far I fell!” He let out a hysterical cry, unable to control the deep anguish welling inside him.

“My child,” the rebbe said kindly. “Chazal say עבירה גוררת עבירה. When you were the shochet in your hometown, you occasionally gave your customers non-kosher meat. We both know this is true. The only kaparah for such a sin is exile, but look what happened to you in exile! You killed another Jew! And then, you shed yiddishkeit entirely! That led you to feed non-kosher meat to tens of Jewish boys and to aid missionaries in ensnaring their neshamos. Your aveiros are terrible. You must do teshuvah!”

“Yes, yes! I want to repent!” Nosson cried, wiping his face with his shirtsleeve. “Tell me what to do! How can I atone for my misdeeds?”

The Berditchiver Rebbe gave him a warm smile. “Just like each of your aveiros led to another sin, the same will happen in the opposite direction. You did the first step, a mitzvah. You saved sixty Jewish children from those missionaries.”

“How does the rebbe know?” Nosson asked in surprise.

“Because of your mesiras nefesh, sixty Jewish boys will return to a life of Torah,” the rebbe continued, sidestepping the question. “You saved their lives. This mitzvah will lead to more and more until you merit complete teshuvah.

“When that little goat came to you for slaughter, it wasn’t just a goat. It was the neshamah of Pinchas, the Jew you murdered. He refuses to forgive you, and there is no way to atone for killing him. Still, you must find his widow and the orphans he left behind. You must find out where they are and support them for the remainder of your life.

“In addition, you must undertake to fast every Monday and Thursday,” the rebbe continued. “Just like you were pulled to sin, run to find mitzvos. Cleave yourself to Torah, learn Gemara, search for opportunities to do mitzvos. You must cry real tears, a cupful of tears each night. Drink the cupful of tears and plead with Hashem to forgive you. Perhaps, perhaps... maybe in the merit of your efforts, Hashem will accept your teshuvah.”

“Rebbe, I’m afraid I’ll mess up,” Nosson whispered. “Please, give me a blessing!”

“May you be successful,” the rebbe wished him. “May you be successful. And remember that habah litaher misayin oso- if someone tries to become pure, all he has to do is try, and Hashem will help him achieve his desire.”

Nosson accepted the Berditchiver Rebbe's directive fully. He searched extensively until he discovered the whereabouts of Pinchas's widow and children. He moved to their city and took on backbreaking labor to earn money to support them. The widow never learned of the identity of her benefactor, as the money was always delivered through a messenger.

Nosson fasted and cried as per the rebbe's instructions. He searched for opportunities to do mitzvos and garner merits. As the weeks and months progressed, he felt the process change him. He was becoming a new person.

A year after his first meeting with the Berditchiver Rebbe, Nosson went to see him again. The rebbe greeted him with a heartfelt shalom aleichem. "Now that you have done teshuvah," he announced jovially, "I give you a blessing that you should soon find your destined mate."

"A wife?" Nosson sputtered. "Rebbe, I am already an older man."

The rebbe shook his head. "You're not too old. Marry, and begin a new life. Your teshuvah is complete. Of course, you must continue supporting the widow, but now is the time for you to live a happy and successful life."

Nosson married shortly thereafter and became a father for the first time less than a year later. The teshuvah he had done lodged itself in his genes, and his children all grew up to be pious and pure, bringing him tremendous nachas.

*Have a Wonderful Shabbos!*  
This story is taken from tape # TG65

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