

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Waters of Protection

Rav Pinchos Koritzer would relay the following story on Purim, since Purim is a time of miracles.

Back during the middle ages, when the influence of the religious leaders on the non-Jewish population was tremendous, priests posed a terrible threat to klal Yisroel. Through their fiery sermons, they would ignite in their followers a fierce hatred of the Jews, which often led to deathly pogroms.

At the time of our story, there was a priest in Warsaw who wielded a power that was more vicious than most. He was proficient in the art of sorcery. Sorcery is a force of impurity that can be harnessed to perform the supernatural. This priest, Paul, was an expert in using this evil power over those who crossed him, especially the Jews.

There were Jews who, after mistakenly coming into contact with Paul, suddenly lost their livelihoods. They could not explain what went

wrong in their formerly profitable business model, but suddenly, business dried up. Unbeknownst to them, the priest, Paul, was behind their sudden financial downfall.

Others suddenly became ill. From one day to the next, they went from being healthy and active to frail and weak, lying faintly in bed. Controlling their symptoms from afar was Paul, cackling evilly as he took down one healthy Jew after the next.

One of Paul's favorite haunts was a Jewish-owned inn in town. He frequented the inn on a daily basis for an afternoon drink. When he entered the inn, all the other customers would flee in terror, afraid to cross paths with him. In the privacy of the then-empty inn, Paul would spend two hours imbibing drink after drink while cursing roundly at everything and anything.

Each afternoon, Yossel, the Jewish innkeeper, would observe surreptitiously from his perch behind the counter as the priest, who was supposed to represent an example of piety and morality for his people, descended into lowly animalistic behavior. Afraid of Paul's reputation for avenging against people who wronged him with supernatural means, he remained on guard the entire time the priest was in his inn, taking extreme care to remain on Paul's good side.

While the priest was a steady client, Yossel would have much preferred to do without his business. He stood on tiptoes, holding his breath, the entire time that Paul was in his inn. Each afternoon, when the priest finally staggered drunkenly out of the bar, he would breath a deep sigh of relief. And when nightfall came and Yossel headed to bed, he thanked Hashem that another day had passed without Paul using his sorcery on him.

One afternoon, Paul strode into the bar, nodding appreciatively as the three men nursing drinks in the inn stood up and walked out. He sat down at

the nearest chair and banged on the table to summon the innkeeper.

Yossel came over swiftly. "What can I get you today?"

"Ah!" Paul grunted, slamming down some money on the table. "Give me the good stuff. The good, heavy stuff."

Yossel nodded, scooping up the coins and returning to the counter to fill the order. A few minutes later, he returned to Peter's table with a glass and a full bottle. He filled the glass to the brim and then moved to the side, waiting to refill it. As he filled the glass after it was drained the first time, Yossel's mind began to churn.

He watched Paul down the second glass and reached for the bottle. If I can get him to teach me the art of sorcery, he mused, eventually, I can use the power against him, to destroy him permanently.

Just the other day, his neighbor's wife had suddenly become paralyzed. It happened about an hour after she detoured past the priest's home on her way to the market. She had previously been completely healthy, and the doctors were mystified, but the paralysis has Paul's fingerprints all over it.

Any day, I am going to be his next victim, Yossel thought as he returned to his place behind the counter. I can't let this man wield his power alone. He fiddled with his ledgers and organized his desk absently, waiting for the priest to become fully drunk.

A half-hour later, Paul was cursing drunkenly in his seat, his short legs propped up on the table, his shoes just barely missing his half-full glass. Without stopping to consider if he was doing the right thing, Yossel approached the table gingerly and sat down opposite the priest. "Paul, I want you to teach me sorcery."

Paul's legs came crashing off the table with a thud. "Are you crazy?" he slurred. "I should teach you the great art of sorcery? How much will you pay me for it?"

Yossel thought quickly. "I'll give you three years of free whiskey," he offered. "But after three years, you must repay me by teaching me everything you know."

"I'll think about it," Paul promised, speaking in a grand tone as if he was emceeding a massive event.

"I'll let you know tomorrow!" He got up clumsily. Swaying unsteadily, he wobbled out of the inn.

The following day, the priest returned. "It's a deal," he said tersely, stretching out his hand for a handshake.

"Free whiskey," Yossel agreed, shaking his hand.

"Three years. And then you teach me everything you know about sorcery."

The next three years, Paul showed up every afternoon at Yossel's inn. He imbibed tremendous quantities of expensive alcohol, all on the house. Yossel did not say a word as the whiskey flowed, biding his time until the three years were up. Paul, on the other hand, forgot all about their deal. He quickly became accustomed to his free alcohol supply and never thought more about it.

One afternoon, when Paul entered the bar, instead of being served his favorite whiskey, Yossel approached his table with a calendar. "It's been three years," he said, indicating to the date on the calendar when they had struck the deal. "Three years to the day. I've kept my end of the deal. The time has come for you to teach me everything you know about sorcery."

Paul was taken aback. He had completely forgotten about their arrangement and had not been expecting this request. "I need one more day," he stalled. "I'll come back tomorrow and we'll start then."

"A deal is a deal," Yossel reminded him, disappointed.

"Of course," Paul said smoothly. "I plan on keeping the deal. We'll start tomorrow. For now, can you bring me the regular?"

Unlike his usual custom, however, Paul seemed satisfied after just two shots of whiskey. Still very much alert, he waved to Yossel and left the inn. Hurrying home, he changed out of his clerical robes and donned peasant attire. He spent the rest of the day following the Jewish innkeeper and observing his habits.

Peeking through the inn's window, he saw Yossel wash his hands and dry them carefully before eating a sandwich. He watched as the innkeeper served a few customers. Later in the evening, Yossel donned his hat and jacket. Peter watched as he tied his shoes, washed his hands, and left the inn. From a safe distance, he followed the innkeeper to shul.

After following Yossel around until the evening and then again from daybreak the following morning, Paul realized that he could not get rid of the troublesome Jewish innkeeper through the forces of impurity. Yossel was constantly surrounded by holiness. He wore tzitzes and tefillin, prayed from the depths of his soul, and spent a long time learning from his Gemara. He was constantly washing his hands: before he ate, after he used the facilities, after tying his shoes; getting rid of any impurities before they managed to affect him.

The priest understood that in order to bring about Yossel's downfall, he would need to entrap him some other way. In a sudden flash of inspiration,

he realized how he would do it. He would agree to teach the Jew sorcery, and ensnare him during their lesson together.

When the afternoon rolled around, Paul strode into the inn and sat down. The room cleared instantly, and within a moment, they were alone. "Alright," Paul announced. "I'm ready to teach you."

Yossel's features lit up eagerly, and he came around from behind the counter to join Paul at the table.

"Not here," Paul said, standing up from his seat. "This is not something that I can teach you in public. We need to go the outskirts of town, where we will have some privacy."

Yossel fell in step beside the Paul and they began making their way to the forest outside the town. As they walked, Jew and priest together, they created a major sensation. The Jews who witnessed them walking looked at each other in bewilderment and apprehension. It was no secret that the priest was a vicious anti-Semite. What was he doing walking with a Jew?

"Yossel," they hissed in fright, motioning furiously with their hands. "Get away from him!" "It's fine," Yossel signed back, smiling at them to alleviate their fear. "It's all okay."

They continuing gesturing frantically at him as he tried to calm them with his facial features.

"What do they want?" Paul snapped in annoyance.

"They're letting me know that sundown is soon," Yossel explained. "They want to make sure I'll have time to daven minchah."

Paul rolled his eyes. "You'll have time," he promised.

When they finally left the prying eyes behind, Paul spoke. "You should know that sorcery is not an easy art to learn. It's not something I can teach you in one day."

"That's fine," Yossel agreed. "As long as you keep your commitment and teach me on a regular basis until I finally learn everything there is to know."

They walked together through the woods, deeper and deeper. Yossel tried not to let himself grow frightened as the distance between himself and the populated city grew further and further. Soon, they reached a grassy field.

"Alright," the priest announced. "I am ready to teach you, but you must be willing to do everything that I tell you."

Yossel nodded eagerly, squashing any seeds of doubt growing inside him. "I'm ready."

"Alright, then. Grab hold of my belt with both of your hands, like this," Paul said, demonstrating. "You'll need to close your eyes and keep them closed for fifteen minutes."

Yossel hesitated. He was no fool. They were alone for miles around. Why would he trust Paul not to kill him as he stood, for a quarter of an hour, with his eyes closed and his hands clenched on the priest's belt?

"Come on," Paul urged, somewhat impatient.

Yossel hesitated again. Paul didn't appear to have any sinister motives, and besides, half the Jewish community had seen them leave the town together. If he was killed, there were more than enough witnesses to point the blame at the priest. However, he had never touched a non-Jew before and was nauseated to hold onto clothing.

Paul gave him a sharp look. "Let's go, hold onto my belt and close your eyes."

Yossel swallowed the bile rising up inside of him and dug his fingers into Paul's belt. "What are you going to do?" he asked suspiciously.

"This is how I teach sorcery," Paul replied. "Now, close your eyes."

Yossel closed his eyes.

Paul began to work his magic, without Yossel even feeling anything.

A few minutes later, Yossel opened his eyes. He squinted, shook his head as if to clear it, and looked around again. He was not on the grassy meadow where he had been when he had begun his lesson with Paul a few minutes earlier. He was somewhere else, someplace that he did not recognize. Where was he? How did he get there? His heart began to race.

Suddenly, he remembered that he was in the midst of learning about the forces of sorcery from the priest. "Paul, Paul!" he called desperately, looking around for the priest.

Silence met his cries.

Yossel glanced around helplessly. There was no one around. He was alone. He began to walk around, trying to figure out where he was, but everything was completely unfamiliar.

Suddenly, he stopped short. Stretched out before him, its peak touching the sky, was the biggest mountain he had ever seen. As he pondered the awesomeness and majesty of the breathtakingly tall mountain, he realized that it had not been there a moment before, when he had opened his eyes and found himself in this unfamiliar territory. The mountain had magically appeared before him.

What he saw next caused him to stop breathing and he groped wildly for something to grasp onto to steady his balance. An enormous snake, longer

and larger than life, was wrapped around the mountain, its massive head a few times the size of Yossel himself. He stood paralyzed in fright, already picturing himself being swallowed whole by the monstrous snake.

The snake opened its enormous mouth and began to speak.

Yossel couldn't believe his eyes. Was this a dream? Was this real? What was happening to him?

In a flash of shock, he realized that the snake was none other than the Nachash from the days of Adam and Chava, the very embodiment of evil and impurity. With a dawning horror, Yossel understood that as he had grasped the belt of the priest, Paul had unleashed the forces of impurity to bring him here, to the headquarters of the serpent, of tumah, itself.

What a fool I am, he berated himself. How did I allow this to happen?

"Hello," the massive snake said to him. "Why have you come here?"

Yossel tried to keep his voice steady. "I came to learn about sorcery," he heard himself say.

"Welcome," the snake replied. "You've come to the correct place. However, in order for you to learn sorcery, there are certain thoughts and beliefs in your brain that must be eradicated first. Holiness and impurity cannot coexist, and so we will now get rid of the holiness in your mind to allow the forcers of impurity to rein."

At a loss, Yossel did not respond. How he wished to turn back the clock. He hadn't meant to learn the art of sorcery at the expense of his yiddishkeit!

Standing in front of the monstrous snake, however, he felt trapped.

"What is your name?" the snake demanded.

"Yossel," he squeaked in fright.

"Forget your name!" came the command.

The snake lifted its head, its massive fangs gutting from its mouth as it spoke. "Forget your name!" it commanded.

And just like that, Yossel forgot his name.

"What is your father's name?" the snake continued.

Yossel forced his mouth to move. "Chaim."

"Forget your father's name!"

To his dismay, once the snake uttered those words, Yossel could no longer recall his father's name.

"What is your mother's name?"

"Mindel."

"I command you to forget your mother's name!"

Yossel took a step back and ran his tongue over his parched lips. How could he escape from here? He was slowly losing his identity!

"Which town do you come from?"

"I come from Warsaw."

"Forget the city you come from! Forget the name!"

And once more, Yossel completely forgot the name.

The snake continued the interrogation. "What do you like most in the world?"

"Mitzvos!" Yossel cried.

The snake opened its mouth. “Forget the mitzvos!” it commanded.

And despite his entire being rebelling against the idea, Yossel forgot about the mitzvos.

“Tell me,” the snake continued. “What religion do you practice?”

Yossel no longer knew who he was or where he came from, but this caused him to lift his head proudly. “I am a Jew,” he declared. “I live a life of yiddishkeit.”

“What is a Jew?” the snake asked.

“A Jew is one who believes that Hashem created the world and fills the world with His splendor.”

There was a moment of silence. Then the snake uttered a terrible sentence. “Forget yiddishkeit! Forget all about Hashem!”

Yossel realized that his entire life was disappearing by the snake’s command. With enormous effort, he yelled, “Shema yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad! No, I will not give that up!”

The snake reared its head. “Do you realize who you are fighting with?” it hissed. “You are on my property. You are in my hands!”

Yossel ignored it and continued screaming the posuk of Shema Yisroel.

The eyes of the snake began shooting out sparks of actual fire, and Yossel stumbled backward to avoid getting burned. The snake picked up its massive body and began rumbling toward him.

“Shema Yisroel!” Yossel continued to cry.

The snake turned toward the mountain. “Come down!” he commanded. “Come down and GET HIM!”

From over the mountain’s crest, hundreds of wild beasts appeared, and they began charging down the incline in Yossel’s direction. Ferocious lions and deadly leopards, tigers, bears, cheetahs—every kind of dangerous beast multiplied by the dozen were speeding down the mountain, their mouths hanging open in anticipation of their meal.

“Get him, get him,” the snake chanted, encouraging them.

Pillars of fire began shooting out of the animals’ eyes as they neared Yossel.

“Get him, get him!” the snake continued.

“Hashem elokeinu Hashem echad!” Yossel cried.

The beasts drew closer, mere inches away from him, and then they disappeared. Yossel continued screaming Shema as more and more wild animals charged at him, but when they got close enough to touch him, they simply disintegrated into the thin air.

“Hashem hu haelokim!” Yossel screamed as a fresh round of dangerous animals galloped up to him. He continued yelling the phrase over and over, his words felling the ferocious beasts.

While his verbal ammunition appeared to be working, there were still thousands of animals streaming down the mountain. Yossel knew he needed to do more. “Ribbono she olam!” he sobbed. “I’m ready to give up my life for you! Let these beasts come and kill me for the sake Your Name. I will never renounce You! Hashem hu haelokim!”

He opened his eyes, ready for the next round of animals, and found himself laying in a grassy field. There was no mountain, no snake, and no

animals out for his blood. He sat up slowly and looked around. Where was he?

Yossel realized that the entire scene with the snake had been nothing but an illusion. The forces of impurity appear to be real, but in actuality, they are nothing but air. By crying out “Hashem hu haelokim,” Yossel had grasped onto holiness, kicking away the tumah and sorcery.

Shaking, he stood up, desiring to return home.

But then he realized he had no idea where home was. He had no idea who he was. The snake had caused him to forget everything.

He began walking aimlessly until he reached the nearest village. He stayed there for a few days, but no one seemed to recognize him there, and he definitely did not recognize anyone either. I guess this must not be the place where I live, he told himself as he left for the next village.

The next village provided didn't either provide encouraging results, and neither did the neighboring city. For three lonely years, Yossel wandered from place to place, hoping to recall his identity and recover his family. For three dark and difficult years, he searched his mind and country but got nowhere.

Three miserable years concluded. One morning, Yossel awoke and to his shock and relief, remembered his name. “I'm Yossel!” he announced to no one in particular, doing a little jig. “I'm from Warsaw!” The names of his parents came back to him, and he recalled that he had owned an inn. His face darkened as he remembered Paul, the priest, and his intentions to learn sorcery.

Being not far from his hometown, he set out for Warsaw immediately. He arrived the following morning, squinting in recognition as he walked along the familiar streets. Even before returning home, he went to see Paul.

“Tell me what happened in the past three years,” he demanded of the priest.

Paul, surprised to see him, invited him to sit down. “I'll tell you the truth,” he confessed. “I was ready to teach you sorcery, but then I noticed that you constantly wash your hands.”

The Gemara in Brachos teaches that there are 10,000 mazikin, harmful spirits, on either side of each individual, ready to harm us. If we would be able to see them, we would literally die of fright.

In fact, the Gemara says that Rav Bibi bar Abaya asked to be taught how to see it, and he was given instructions on how to make a complex recipe involving the organs of three generations of cats. He was told to drip the concoction into his eye, drip by drip, and he would be able to see the mazikin.

Rav Bibi bar Abaya was warned not to do it, as it could be dangerous, but he was curious and decided to go ahead despite the dangers. He followed the precise directions and created the liquid that he dripped into his eye. What he saw was terrifying. There were thousands of spirits surrounding him on all sides, ready to harm him. In fact, when they realized that he could see them, the mazikin grew so angry that they actually began to harm him. It was only due to the tefillos of the other gedolim that Rav Bibi bar Abaya recovered.

The priest, Paul, explained to Yossel that he normally utilized these damaging spirits when operating within the realm of tumah. Coupled with sorcery, he could control the spirits to inflict damage and destruction.

“With you, however, this was impossible,” Paul admitted. “You immediately washed your hands each time you came in contact with tumah. There are hundreds of times a day when an individual encounters impurity. With your scrupulousness,

however, you made sure to wash off the tumah immediately, before I could harness its power. You immersed in a mikvah, you washed your hands regularly with a two-handed cup; it was impossible to find any traces of impurity remaining on your being.”

“Netilas yadayim,” Yossel murmured.

“Yes,” the priest continued. “I have harmed many Jews in this manner, and I thought it would be easy to get you as well. You aren’t a rabbi or a holy man, just a simple innkeeper. But no, your scrupulous hand-washing made it impossible. I realized that the only way to gain power over you with the forces of impurity was to bring you to the headquarters of tumah itself. Only there, with its highly concentrated levels of impurity, would it be possible to bring you under my thumb.”

“But how?” Yossel asked. “How did you manage to bring me there if you couldn’t use sorcery on me?”

Paul gave a throaty chuckle. “When you dug your hands into my belt and grasped it tight, the tumah from my being streamed into your body. After that, you were like a puppet in my hands. Even though your entire being rebelled against the influence of the snake, you were powerless to stop it from altering your mind. It was only when you began screaming ‘Hashem hu haelokim’ with your entire being that you succeeded in freeing yourself from the net of impurity that had entrapped you.”

It was a shaken Yossel who returned home to his family, who had been mourning his disappearance for three years.

The following day, Yossel went to see his rebbe, Rav Pinchos Koritzer. In a trembling voice, he relayed the entire story, beginning with his deal with the priest and ending with the return of his memory just two days previously.

Rav Pinchas wept when he heard about Yossel’s experiences and was moved to the core. “The forces of evil and impurity are everywhere,” he explained. “I knew that very great tzaddikim, kabbalists, can gain power of these forces, but I never imagined that even a simple Jew possesses the power to do the same. How awesome is the simple act of washing one’s hands!”

“But Rebbe!” Yossel’s voice was pained. “Why are these powers of impurity even allowed to rein? My neighbor... and the man who sat at my table in shul...there were so many Jews who suffered terribly as a result of Paul’s sorcery. Why does it have such a power?”

“You’ve heard the answer from the priest himself,” Rav Pinchas pointed out. “Perhaps those people neglected to wash negel vasser in the morning. Perhaps they scratched their heads and didn’t wash their hands thereafter. Perhaps they became impure and did not immerse in the mikvah. There are countless times a day when an individual can meet up with impurity, and unless he washes it off, it wields a dangerous power over him.”

The rebbe raise his voice. “Paul did something to someone?! He did it to himself!”

Yossel fell silent, recognizing the truth in his rebbe’s words and awed by the power that each individual possessed over their own health and wellbeing.

No one wants to be harmed, and therefore, many people run around looking for segulos to protect them from danger. The segulah for protection, however, lies not in a faraway land or through mystical objects, but in the very hands of each man.

If one is careful to fill up his washing cup and pour water over his hands, properly, three times on each side, each time he becomes impure, he will be protected from all danger and harm.

In fact, I have heard from the Skevere Rebbe that if someone suffers from anxiety and is constantly afraid of lurking dangers, he should take upon himself to pour the water over his hands an extra time each time he washes. If he customarily washes each hand twice for netilas yadayim, he should do so three times, and if he regularly washes negel vasser three times on each hand, he should now increase to four times.

Halacha itself provides the greatest protective segulah, and one who scrupulously follows the halachah with handwashing will merit protection from the forces of tumah.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A373

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