

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Torah Through Tears

Avrohom Abish was a sweet and delightful child, but he could not read. This was in the days before dyslexia and reading problems were diagnosed issues, and Avrohom Abish's inability to read stumped his parents and those around him. His brothers and all the other children in the city mastered the aleph-bais and *nekudos* easily, progressing quickly from reading short words to full *pesukim* of *chumash*. Only Avrohom Abish remained behind, unable to piece together the letters swimming on the page before him.

His father, a *rov*, worried constantly about his young son. While his oldest son, Rav Mordeche, was already an *av bais din* and his other sons were budding *talmidei chachomim*, Avrohom Abish's future in the Torah world seemed bleak. He had a bright mind, but how would he ever advance in learning if he couldn't even read?

It was not as though Avrohom Abish didn't put in effort into learning how to read. Oh, how he tried, straining his eyes over the stubborn letters and trying to understand what his *rebbe* was trying to explain to him, but his mind refused to cooperate. The letters danced across the page in a dizzying display of somersaults and cartwheels, a confusing mix that, no matter how hard he tried, he simply could not read.

Eventually, his parents realized that their young Avrohom Abish had a different calling in life. He would never become a *rov* or a *rosh yeshiva* or a *dayan*. His future would not involve the printed word that caused him endless frustration.

Instead, they apprenticed him to a carpenter, to learn the trade of wood and nails. In the dim carpentry shop, Avrohom Abish no longer needed to struggle over rows and rows of incomprehensible letters. Instead, he learned to wield a hammer and a chisel, to sand and shine and buff.

It bothered Avrohom Abish that he was destined to remain a simple carpenter throughout his lifetime. He longed to progress in Torah, to be able to read a *siddur*, to conquer a piece of *Gemarah*. He would sit silently by the Shabbos table and observe his older brother, Rav Mordche, arguing with his father in learning as their other brothers added their own two bits to the discussion. His heart was full of pain.

His parents wanted to marry him off at sixteen years old, as was customary in their community, but they met many obstacles. While his father and brothers were renowned for their genius, Avrohom Abba was known as a failure, the only blemish on his family's crown. People were hesitant to give their daughters to a man who could not read.

After much waiting, anguish, and disappointment, a *shadchan* brought up the idea

of the daughter of Reb Eliyahu Cohen from Mezritch. The Cohens were a fine family, but they didn't have a penny to their name. Their daughter, Baila, was a sweet but simple girl.

Baila had known her entire life that she would need to compromise when it came to *shidduchim*, since her parents could not provide a dowry. When the *shidduch* was suggested with Avrohom Abish, she could barely believe that she would merit marrying into such a distinguished family. The fact that her chassan himself was a simpleton didn't bother her.

As per the customs of that age, Avrohom Abish and Baila did not meet prior to their engagement; their first meeting was to take place just prior to their chuppah. Instead, their parents met and concluded the *shidduch* by breaking a plate. They were now *chassan* and *kallah* with a wedding date set for two months later.

Avrohom Abish's family was immediately thrown into a flurry of preparations. The entire family needed to be outfitted and his mother wanted to send Avrohom Abish into his marriage with a full new wardrobe. There were fittings and appointments and lots of happy, hectic activity.

Avrohom Abish himself was a joyous *chassan*, excited at being able to start a family of his own. There was only one thing that weighed on his mind, dampening his happiness. It was his family's custom that a *chassan* lead the *bentching* after the wedding meal, but Avrohom Abba could not read, and he could not *bentch*. He was mortified of messing up during his own wedding, but was also ashamed to advertise his illiteracy by abandoning this precious custom.

His father and brothers tried teaching him *Birchas Hamazon*, but this proved to be time-consuming and frustrating.

"You start off by saying, '*Rabbosai, mir vellen bentchen*,'" Rav Mordche began the first lesson enthusiastically.

"*Rabbosai, mir vellen bentchen*," Avrohom Abish repeated obediently.

"Great!" his brother complimented him. "Then you wait for everyone to respond '*Yehi shem*', and when they are done, you say, '*Yehi shem Hashem mevorach meatach v'ad olam*.' Get it?"

"I think so," Avrohom Abish said, a tad uncertainly.

"Let's try," his brother suggested. "You start, I'll respond, and then you'll continue, okay? Nu, start. *Rabbosai*..." he trailed off encouragingly.

"*Rabbosai*," Avrohom Abish repeated. "Um. I don't remember what goes next."

Rav Mordche gave a small sigh. "*Rabbosai, mir vellen bentchen*."

"*Rabbosai, mir vellen bentchen*," Avrohom Abish echoed.

"*Yehi shem Hashem mevorach me'atah v'ad olam*," Rav Mordche responded. He waited a beat, then another. "Nu? Why aren't you saying anything?"

"What should I say?" Avrohom Abish asked in bewilderment.

His brother stood up and dropped the *bentcher* onto the table in frustration. "I give up," he declared. "For now, Avrohom Abish, just practice that first line. Okay?"

A look of confusion passed over Avrohom Abish's eyes. "I'll try," he promised. "Remind me one more time. *Rabbosai*, right? And what were the rest of the words after *Rabbosai*?"

It didn't get much easier after that.

The remaining eight weeks until the wedding were sheer torture for Avrohom Abish. He practiced and practiced and practiced and practiced thousands of times, going through the entire *bentching* line by line until he finally mastered it. His every waking moment was spent drilling and drilling the words in. His head ached from the effort, and his entire body was drained of energy, but he persevered until it finally sunk in.

A few days before the wedding, the family set out for Mezritch, the *kallah's* hometown, where the wedding was to take place. They arrived in a small village neighboring Mezritch the night before the wedding and rented rooms in a hotel for the night. The entire family gathered together for supper, an excited Avrohom Abish sitting like a king in the center of them all.

As they wrapped up the meal, someone suggested that Avrohom Abish lead the *bentching*. "Tomorrow night, you'll have to *bentch* before the entire city," they coaxed. "You've been practicing for weeks. Let this be a last rehearsal before the real thing."

They washed *mayim acharonim* and Avrohom Abish took a deep breath, trying to still the butterflies in his stomach. He lifted the cup of wine and began. "*Rabbosai, mir vellen bentchen.*" Around him, the family enthusiastically responded, "*Yehi shem Hashem mevorach me'atah v'ad olam!*"

Avrohom Abish took another deep breath, trying to remember what came next. He relaxed as the words came to him. "*Yehi shem Hashem mevorach me'atah v'ad olam. Birshus avi mori...*"

His brother Rav Mordche, who had spent hours drilling the words into him, nodded

encouragingly and Avrohom Abish found the words to continue until he reached the first *brachah*. Then he began to mix up the words and sentences, stumbling through the words and making far too many mistakes.

It was downhill from there. He could barely remember any of the words of the second *brachah*, and nothing after that. He sat silently, eyes downcast, as the rest of the family finished *bentching*.

Rav Mordche closed his *bentcher* and whirled on his little brother angrily. "We practiced for *hours!*" he hissed, smacking him on the cheek. "I gave you days, even weeks, of my time! How great of an idiot can you be, Avrohom Abish?! What is the matter with you?! And you expect to get married tomorrow and *bentch* out loud in front of the entire city? This isn't a difficult Gemarah; it's just *Birchas Hamazon!* You are an embarrassment to our family!"

"Stop persecuting the poor boy," their father interjected, but he was too late.

His face drained of all color, Avrohom Abish silently left the room. He ran out of the hotel and down the dark streets, his heart searing in pain. He ran until he could run no longer and stumbled down under a tree in a deserted area at the edge of the forest.

And then the tears came.

Avrohom Abish cried like he never cried before, his intense pain running down his cheeks in twin rivers of agony. "*Ribbono shel olam,*" he sobbed brokenly. "You are the Father of mercy. If I was destined to be an ignoramus, I should have been born into a family of ignoramuses. You, however, placed me in this family, a family of brilliant geniuses. I am suffering so much. You placed me into this family, and all I want is for You to give

me Torah, too. How much do I have to suffer? All I want is to understand and retain Torah!”

Once the tears began, they would not stop. For long minutes, Avrohom Abish wept. “I can’t even *bentch*! I can’t remember a few paragraphs of *tefillah*! Why? All I am asking for is Torah!” He cried and cried until he fell into a deep sleep.

Suddenly, he found himself standing together with a few other people. One of them, an elderly man, approached him. “Avrohom Abish, I want to let you know that your prayers were accepted,” he said softly. “Hashem has heard your *tefillah*, and He will grant you wisdom.”

Avrohom Abish gaped at him wordlessly. Could it be?

“You’ll see,” the man continued. “You’ll open a *chumash* and you’ll find that you’ll be able to read it. You’ll look into the *Rashi*, and the words will jump out at you, their meaning crystal clear. The Gemarah will be open before you to plumb into its depths. Because of your prayers, your life will be transformed. The Torah is being granted to you, a true gift.”

Avrohom Abish’s mouth hung open, his eyes round. Were his troubles finally over?

The elderly fellow was not finished. “You will be so smart that your entire family will cleave to your wisdom. People will point you out as a wise and intelligent person. However, you must make sure to retain your humility and your simple fear of Heaven even after your mind is awakened.”

Then Avrohom Abish woke up. He stretched and glanced around. The sun was rising, there was a pleasant breeze, and he could hear the sweet sound of birds chirping in the background. What a beautiful dream! He stood up and straightened out his rumpled clothing. He felt the same as he always felt, and realized with disappointment

that, like most dreams, his was probably nonsense.

The sun rose higher in the sky, and Avrohom Abish knew he needed to go *daven Shacharis*. Reluctant to face his family, whom he was sure was still angry and disappointed in him, he opted to walk to Mezrich, which was located twenty minutes away.

In the shul in Mezrich, the congregants were making a small celebratory fuss over one man, insisting that he sit in the front of the shul. From the conversation he overheard, Avrohom Abish gleaned that the man was his *shver*, Reb Eliyahu Cohen, whom he had never met before. Though poor, Reb Eliyahu was a respected *talmid chacham*, and his friends wanted him to sit up front in honor of his daughter’s wedding scheduled for that very evening.

Avrohom Abish took a siddur down from the shelf and opened it with trembling fingers. The letters stared back at him defiantly, daring him to understand what they stood for, but, like always, he could not read them. Biting his lip, he took out a *chumash*, but met with similar failure. He had not become a genius overnight.

Taking his place at the back of the shul, Avrohom Abish began to *daven* as best as he knew how, his heart heavy with disappointment. As the rest of the congregation recited *Pesukei D’zimrah*, he prayed in his own words, begging Hashem to open his mind. Then the *tzibbur* began *davening* Shemona Esreh. Avrohom Abish stood, like the rest of them, but he did not know the words. Instead, he swayed back and forth and *davened* for the day when he would be able to join them fully.

Suddenly, an elderly man approached him and whispered a blessing into his ear. Avrohom Abish looked sideways at him and nearly fainted. It was the man from his dream.

As the man walked away and was swallowed up by the crowd, Avrohom Abish felt a renewed hope enter his heart. He went back to the bookshelf and took down a *chumash*. His hands shook so badly that he almost couldn't open the cover, but when he managed to turn to the first page, he found... that he could read the *pesukim*. The words jumped out at him, and the skill that so many people had labored to teach him for so many years crystalized in his mind. He read the *pesukim* with shining eyes, looking into *Rashi* to help him clarify their meaning. It was incredible. He could read, he could understand!

Davening was over, but Avrohom Abish didn't notice. He took down a *Mishnayos* and perused it with the glee of a child in a toy store, devouring line after line. Suddenly, he felt a tap on his shoulder. He glanced up and saw an unfamiliar face smiling at him.

"Aren't you the *chassan*?" the man asked him. "Mazel tov! Your *shver* is up front. Let me go call him."

Before Avrohom Abish could respond, the man had walked off, and soon he was being ushered to meet his father-in-law, Reb Eliyahu Cohen. They shook hands and conversed politely as the crowd around them swelled. Someone began singing *Siman Tov* and soon a circle formed.

"Isn't your father a great *talmid chacham*, and your brother an *av beis din*?" someone suddenly asked. "Tell us a *vort*!"

Avrohom Abish took a deep breath. Obviously, the questioner was unaware that he was an ignoramus. Opening the *mishnayos* before him to the first page, he read the first Mishnah. It was a *Mishnayos Parah*. He glanced at the *Rav* and the *Tosfos Yom Tov* on the Mishnah, and with lightning speed, the commentaries clicked in his mind.

This was the very first Mishnah he was learning, but when he opened his mouth to speak, brilliant *pilpulim* emerged. The people listened, dumbstruck. When someone tried to argue, he held his ground and masterfully defended his position. An intense joy flooded his being as he realized that the Torah had finally, finally, revealed herself to him. Looking up, he noticed the elderly man from his dream standing amongst the crowd, observing him with a small smile.

Back in the small village on the outskirts of Mezritch, his family began to worry. Avrohom Abish had not returned since he had fled the hotel in shame the night before. Concerned, they began searching for him, fanning out over the city, but they could not find him.

"Perhaps he went into town," one of the brothers suggested. "You continue searching here, and I'll go to Mezritch to try to find him."

He set out briskly, arriving at the neighboring shtetl less than twenty minutes later. Entering the shul, he stopped short. There was a small crowd gathered around... was that Avrohom Abish in the center, giving a discourse? He inched closer, not believing his ears.

Before his little brother could see him, he turned on his heel and raced back to Berditchev. "You'll never believe it!" he gasped breathlessly to his brothers. "He's in Mezritch, in the shul, giving a *shiur* to the entire shul!"

"What, a *shiur*? Avrohom Abish?" the others scoffed in disbelief.

"Come see for yourself," he insisted.

His father and brothers joined him, walking quickly until they reached Mezritch. The brother who had first found Avrohom Abish motioned them to be silent and led them into the shul. Sure enough, Avrohom Abish was standing,

surrounded by a crowd of people, delivering a complex *shiur*.

They looked at each other in bewilderment. What was going on? Was this the same Avrohom Abish who was not able to get past the first *brachah* of *Birchas Hamazon* just the night before?

When Avrohom Abish finished speaking, his father broke through the crowd and embraced him tightly. His brothers clustered eagerly around him.

“What happened to you?” Reb Mordche asked quietly after the crowd dispersed and the family was alone.

“I’ll tell you the truth,” Avrohom Abish responded. “After Reb Mordche hit me, I was so humiliated and heartbroken. I went out to the forest and cried my heart out to Hashem and Hashem answered my prayers. Today, I found that I merited to understand the Torah.”

His father regarded him thoughtfully. “Perhaps, then, Baila Cohen is not your *basherte*,” he suggested. “After all, both sides agreed to this *shidduch* with the knowledge that you were illiterate. Now that Hashem has opened your mind, this *shidduch* no longer has any basis. We will find you a wife worthy of your Torah.”

“With all due respect, how can I humiliate my *kallah* that way?” Avrohom Abish asked softly. “If I was destined to remain an ignoramus until after our engagement, then it was in order to merit the correct match. She is obviously the one destined for me.”

His father and brothers pleaded with him to change his mind, but the sixteen-year-old held firm in his decision. That evening, he stood under the *chuppah* with the daughter of Reb Eliyahu Cohen.

Although she had never dreamed she would merit to marry such a *sefer* Torah, Baila proved to be worthy of her role. She supported her husband and stood at his side as he rose higher and higher in Torah, surpassing even his father and brother Rav Mordche. He took a leading stance in the famous saga of the Kliever Get and became renowned throughout *klal Yisroel* for his brilliance.

Young Avrohom Abish wasn’t born Harav Hagaon Avrohom Abish, but he became that because of the genuine *tefillah* that emerged from his broken heart. A pure, heartfelt prayer has the power to uproot mountains and overturn worlds.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A267

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