

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 Malshin

There was a man, whom we'll call Yosef, who earned his livelihood through serving as a malshin, an informant. Indeed, this was a very profitable occupation. As an insider living within the Jewish community, it wasn't difficult for him to chance upon other Jews breaking the law or committing minor infractions, and he did not hesitate to report his findings to the anti-Semitic government. The government, who was more that delighted to receive opportunity to penalize the Jews, rewarded him handsomely for each scoop he brought them.

Yosef was somewhat of a contradiction. Despite his abominable occupation, he was a believing Jew. He kept kosher, was a shomer Shabbos, and davened three times a day. He considered himself part and parcel of the frum community.

Needless to say, Yosef led a lonely existence. His fellow Jews were wary of him at best and downright vengeful at worst. Plenty of them had close friends or relatives who were jailed or evicted from town as a direct result of Yosef's reports, and no one was interested in serving next

as his fodder. When he walked in the street, people would cast him hateful looks and cross to the other side to avoid being with him.

In order to protect himself from the vengeance of the townspeople, Yosef was always accompanied by two tall, broad-shouldered, non-Jewish thugs who served as his bodyguards. Additionally, his bodyguards were his accomplices. When he noticed someone committing a wrongdoing, he would report to his two protectors, who would assist him in bringing the information to the government. The three would then split the payment they received between themselves.

They were always rewarded according to the size of the prize they caught. No matter if the charge was smuggling, tax evasion, or something far worse, the government would arrest and torture each of Yosef's hapless victims before throwing him into prison, usually for life. His money and property would be confiscated to line the coffers of the government officials and, of course, the pockets of Yosef and his thugs. If a rich man was caught, all those involved netted a far greater profit. This incentivized Yosef to focus on the wealthier Jews in the hopes that he would be able to convict them.

One day, he chanced upon an especially juicy scoop involving a prominent member of the community. Gloating at his good fortune, he informed his bodyguards that they were to prepare for travel. "I know it's already the afternoon," He told them. "However, I don't want to wait until tomorrow. The discovery I have made will make some of our friends in the government very happy, and it should earn us a very tidy profit."

"Not a problem, boss," His bodyguards replied.

"Just give us a couple of minutes to pull ourselves together. We should be ready to go within the next half hour."

A short while later, the three of them boarded the carriage that would take them to the next town, where the local authorities were based. One of the thugs took the reins and whipped the horses, and his companions settled in the back as the horses began moving.

Suddenly, Yosef took notice of the sun, which was slowly descending in the eastern sky. "Stop!" He called to the bodyguard who was manning the horses. "I just remembered that I did not daven minchah yet. Please stop outside of that shteibel at the end of the road so that I can pray."

The two thugs were accustomed to Yosef's religious duties, and they agreed to wait outside in the carriage while he stopped off at the small shul. Yosef slipped into the bais medrash and stood at the back of the room. Mincha began.

He was in the midst of Shemona Esreh when something strange happened. As he recited "Selach lanu avinu ki chatanu," he suddenly felt moved by the words he recited, unthinkingly, three times a day for so many years. How do I dare ask Hashem for forgiveness each morning, noon, and evening, and then head straight back to doing terrible sins, he wondered in distress. It felt hypocritical to continue the brachah, yet at the same time, he could not bring himself to skip it.

Right then and there, Yosef made up his mind. As difficult as it might be, he would change. Starting from that moment, he committed to never tattle on another Jew to the authorities again. "Forgive me, for I have sinned!" He wept silently, beating his chest fiercely, tears of regret streaming down his cheeks. Full of remorse, that one brachah of Selach Lanu alone took him almost thirty minutes to complete.

Waiting outside, his bodyguards first grew impatient and then somewhat concerned. Their boss davened minchah every day, and they knew it never took him more than a couple of minutes.

They got out of the carriage and moved toward the window of the shul, peering inside to make sure that Yosef was okay, that he wasn't being held up or mistreated by his fellow Jews.

What they saw astonished them.

Their hardened, unemotional, no-nonsense boss was crouched over his prayer book, sobbing his eyes out. The two bodyguards exchanged puzzled glances. "What's gotten into him?" They muttered as they returned to the wagon to wait for Yosef to finally finish up.

Another half-hour passed before Yosef emerged from the shul.

"Hurry up, let's go," His bodyguards urged. "It's getting really late."

Yosef bit his lip. "I'm not... feeling so well," He said after a moment. "I'm not up to traveling right now. Let's turn around and go home."

"What do you mean, you aren't feeling well?" They demanded, not buying into his excuse. They had seen his tears earlier, and they understood that their boss was having second thoughts regarding the whole snitching enterprise. They weren't ready to let the big scoop he had discovered earlier slip through their fingers. "You were feeling just fine earlier. Let's go, get into the wagon."

Yosef did not budge. "No, I'm sorry, but I really can't come," He said feebly.

The larger of the two thugs approached, and brought his face a menacing few inches away from Yosef's. "We know what you are up to," He said threateningly. "You've decided to repent, huh? You want out, is that right? Well, guess what? We are not letting you go so quickly. You said you have an especially juicy piece of gossip for our government friends, didn't you? You will do as I say and come into the wagon right now, so

that we can head to the next town to report it. The Jew will get what he deserves, and we will all get our big, fat reward.”

“I can’t,” Yosef cried. “I can’t come with you! I’ll pay you whatever you ask. How much money do you think you’ll get from this? I’ll give it to you right now and save us all a trip!”

“Absolutely not!” The other thug yelled from his perch on top of the wagon.

“Do you think you can buy us off, and we’ll just let that Jew go around breaking the law?” His friend growled. His large arms reached out, grabbed Yosef around the waist and tossed him carelessly into the carriage. “There we go!” He called, jumping into the wagon. “We’re off!”

As the wagon wheels rolled along the dirt roads, Yosef strengthened his resolve. He had done enough damage until then, and he was determined that not a word of slander would pass through his lips.

It was well into the evening when the carriage arrived in the next town. The shops were shuttered and the government offices were closed. Instead, the thugs steered the horses in the direction of the governor’s residence, where they were sure to find him. The bodyguards grabbed Yosef and hauled him up the steps. Locking him in between the two of them, they knocked on the front door.

The governor, as expected, was nursing a glass of whiskey. He greeted his visitors warmly. Whenever they came outside of office hours, it usually meant they had especially profitable information. Waving the three men into his dining room, he turned to Yosef with a smile. “I see that you have some news for me?”

Yosef balled his fists and took a deep breath. “I’m sorry, sir, but I have nothing to report,” He said carefully. He was rewarded by a fierce kick under the table by the bodyguard seated right next to

him, and he had to bite his lip to keep himself from crying out.

The governor looked at him in astonishment. “Then why did you come here?” He asked, annoyed.

“I don’t know,” Yosef stammered. “I thought... because... maybe... I really don’t...”

“Nonsense!” The thug across from him suddenly yelled, banging his fist on the tabletop for emphasis. “This Jew came here to fry a fat fish. He told us a few hours ago that he had a big scoop. But then, when he was praying, he suddenly let his emotions get the better of him, and now he denies any knowledge of wrongdoing in the Jewish community. He’s protecting his Jew friend who broke the law!”

The governor pursed his lips thoughtfully. “I command you to tell me what you originally wanted to report,” He said, his voice low and dangerous.

Yosef met his gaze but said nothing. The governor felt the heat rising in his cheeks. “If you don’t tell me right now,” He warned. “I will break every bone in your body.”

“Go ahead,” Yosef said defiantly. “Go ahead and break them. I have no information on my fellow Jews.”

The governor rose and signaled to the two thugs to accompany him. Mercilessly, the three of them beat Yosef over and over, until he was but a broken, bruised shadow of his former robust self. Callously, they tossed him down the governor’s front steps.

Yosef’s head was bleeding, his limbs were hanging, and each breath hurt. However, despite the haze of terrible pain, he was cognitive of the fact that he was alone. The governor and thugs could be out again in any moment, and he knew

this was his only chance to escape. With superhuman strength, he inched his way to the horses, untied them, and hoisted himself clumsily onto the carriage. Ignoring the pain in his hands, he grasped the reins and nudged the horses to begin moving.

As the horses carried him in the direction of his hometown, the terrible pain increased. Yosef knew he was in awful shape, that an ultimate recovery was far from certain. However, he did not feel even the slightest regret for his decision to keep silent. He knew his suffering was heavenly retribution for his evil past, and he bore it stoically.

As he traveled through the forest, he suddenly heard moans of help coming from within the foliage. Slowing the horses, he discovered a Jew whose money had been stolen mid-journey and had been abandoned in the forest to die.

Despite his own sorry condition, Yosef helped the Jew onto his wagon, saving his life. The two rode back to their town together. After dropping his passenger off, Yosef drove himself home. Battered and bruised, he limped painfully into his house and collapsed into his bed.

He never woke up again. That night, he died of his injuries in his sleep.

When the townspeople discovered that he had died, their reaction was one of tremendous joy. At last, their tormentor had met his end. They rejoiced over his plight, dancing in the streets.

“What kind of a funeral should we make for him?” The townspeople asked each other. “Should we eulogize him by elaborating on how much suffering he caused the community? Should we move the assemblage to tears with stories of the terrible damage he caused by informing on us to the authorities?”

“Better, let’s not honor him with a funeral at all,” Someone suggested. “Let’s leave his body here to rot for a few days. It’s a mitzvah to disgrace him in this manner. Let everyone see what befalls a person who informs on his brethren!” “Yes!” The others agreed enthusiastically.

The rov of the town, however, disagreed. “It is forbidden to disgrace another Jew,” He told them. “He was a malshin!” The townspeople protested. “As an informant, he removed himself from amongst us. There is nothing wrong with letting his body wait a while before burying it in a forgotten and forsaken corner somewhere!”

The rov realized that opposing them would come to know use, and so he hesitantly okayed their plan. After all, Yosef had most definitely been a malshin, and it was permissible to do so. Still, something was bothering him about the whole story. Yosef’s body had been badly bruised at the time of his death. It appeared that he died a gruesome death at the hands of a vicious assaulter. They were missing a piece of the story, but what was it? Could it be that Yosef had repented prior to his death? Were they wrong in their assessment of his character?

Troubled, the rov decided to perform a shaalas chalom, to ask his question to the heavenly courts in a dream. Was Yosef a rasha, or was he really righteous? Did he do teshuvah? Did he deserve disgrace?

In his dream, it was revealed to him that Yosef had indeed been an informant, a vile slanderer worthy of the harshest Gehinnom. However, the rov was told, shortly before his death, Yosef had done a complete teshuvah. After accepting upon himself never again to inform on his brethren, his willpower was severely tested, yet he withstood agonizing pain and refused to divulge anything that would harm another Jew. With the last vestiges of his strength, he saved the life of a stranded yid.

This teshuvah was wholly accepted by Hashem, and Yosef's din was reversed. Instead of harsh punishment, he was judged as a tzaddik and granted a portion of Olam Habah.

The Machenster rosh yeshiva, Rav Yehuda Zev Segal zt"l, was once observed on Yom Kippur night, kissing a photo of the Chofetz Chaim and declaring that the Chofetz Chaim had saved him. Rav Segal explained that through his teachings of shemiras halashon, the Chofetz Chaim saved him from unwittingly being a malshin. In the Sefer Chofetz Chaim, there is story about the Vilna Gaon, who was once accused by a non-Jew of trespassing on private territory. It was at the tip of the Gaon's tongue to explain that it hadn't been him, but rather the friend he was traveling with, who trespassed. The Gaon managed to curb his response in time, saving himself from the punishment of a malshin: gilgul as a dog, which even his mitzvos and Torah wouldn't be able to protect him.

This story regarding the Vilna Gaon demonstrates just how simple it is for the yetzer harah to ensnare someone into becoming a malshin. Rav Segal, who understood the severity of the sin of being a malshin, was immensely grateful to the Chofetz Chaim for clarifying the halachos of lashon harah. Thus, a person who is careful to follow the halachos will be saved from this abominable sin.

The Vilna Gaon, the Chofetz Chaim and Rav Segal genuinely understood the gravity of sin, and, specific to our story, the aveirah of being a malshin. From these anecdotes, we learn that this is a sin that causes such tremendous spiritual damage that it overrides all the mitzvos the person may have performed.

Still, despite the severity of this aveirah, Hashem willingly accepted the teshuvah of Yosef and allowed him a portion of Olam Habah. The damage may be tremendous, but the power of true, heartfelt teshuvah is even greater.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A69 -1991.

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