

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

The Arizal's Greatness

During the times of the holy Arizal and Rav Shlomo Alkabetz, the Baal Lechah Dodi, there was a woman who suddenly developed a strange and unexplained illness. She took to her bed in terrible pain and seemed to be suffering from hallucinations. A thorough medical examination did nothing to explain her symptoms, and the subsequent opinions solicited from expert doctors brought no results. After sometime, her family began to suspect that a dibuk was living inside of her.

A dibuk is the soul of a person who is no longer alive. Due to its actions during its lifetime, the dibuk is not permitted rest and is sent back down to the world, where it is pursued by destructive angels. For years and years on end, it roams from one side of the world to the other as it desperately attempts to dodge menacing angels wielding fiery clubs.

The only time the dibuk finds peace from its pursuers is when it enters the body of a living being. It can find entry in a person who performs an aveirah, and once inside, wreaks havoc on its host's body. Residing in the body finally affords the dibuk a measure of peace, and it is reluctant to leave. It takes a tzaddik knowledgeable in kabbalah to communicate with the dibuk and coax it out of the body in the least risky manner.

There are various ways that a dibuk can leave a person's body, and many of them are dangerous. If the dibuk leaves through the mouth, for instance, it takes the person's soul along, effectively ending its host's life. If it leaves through the elbow, the person will permanently lose the function of that arm and hand. The best place for the dibuk to leave is through the pinky toe, as that causes very little damage other than some bleeding.

The woman's family came to the Arizal to request his assistance in getting rid of the dibuk. Being that time was of essence and the Arizal would not have the time to personally assist them that day, he instructed his closest disciple, Rav Chaim Vital, to remove the dibuk in his stead.

"Do it before sundown," the Arizal instructed his student. "And I want you to be aware that the dibuk is a liar. In order to get it out of the woman's body, you will need to know the name of the dibuk, as well as the name of its mother and father. It will try to lie to you, once, twice, and three times, but if you ask it its name a fourth time, it will no longer have the strength to lie."

Rav Chaim nodded and hurried to perform his rebbi's bidding. It was already late in the afternoon, and there was not much time to waste. As he followed the woman's relatives to her home, a curious crowd gathered behind him, eager to glimpse this unusual event.

"Please, give her some privacy," he pleaded with the crowd. "I don't want anyone following me in."

The people reluctantly hung back as Rav Chaim knocked on the door. "It's Chaim Vital," he called. "Can I come in?"

Inside the house, the woman was sitting in a chair, her face constricted in pain. The room was crammed with people who had hurried ahead of Rav Chaim, hoping to witness the removal of the dibuk. When Rav Chaim's voice sounded through the door, a deep voice suddenly emerged from the woman. Everyone leaned forward.

"Ha ha," the voice of the dibuk called out mockingly from within the woman. "Rav Chaim Vital is coming, and he thinks he can make me leave this woman's body. I'll never leave! Ha ha ha!" His evil laugh caused shivers to travel through the crowd.

Someone opened the door and let Rav Chaim in. He was led to the room where the woman was sitting, and found her to be dressed very modestly, her kerchief covering most of her face.

Suddenly, the same deep voice called out from inside of her. "The holiness on the face of Rav Chaim Vital is too much for me to look at."

Rav Chaim heard the fear in the dibuk's voice and nodded. This was a positive development. "What is your name?" he asked the dibuk.

"Yosef," the dibuk responded.

"What is your name?" Rav Chaim asked again.

"Moshe," came the subsequent answer.

"What is your name?" Rav Chaim questioned a third time.

"Yehuda," the dibuk responded.

"I demand that you tell me your name," Rav Chaim said sternly.

"Yonasan," the dibuk finally admitted truthfully, supplying the names of his parents as well.

"I understand that you are in need of atonement," Rav Chaim said to the dibuk. "However, you have no right to punish this woman simply because you require a tikkun. You must leave her body now!" "Absolutely not," the dibuk responded. "I am staying right here."

Outside, the sun was setting, and the room grew dark. Lanterns were lit, casting dark shadows over Rav Chaim and the woman. "You must leave," he insisted.

"I'm not going anywhere," the dibuk continued to maintain.

"If you don't leave this woman, I will put your soul through greater torture than you have ever known," Rav Chaim informed the dibuk grimly.

"You think that the angels are causing you pain? That's nothing compared to what you'll be feeling if you stay inside this woman. I know your name and can now excommunicate your soul. The consequences of this will be indescribably harsh."

"You can't tell me what to do," the dibuk said brazenly. "I'm not leaving, and that's that."

Rav Chaim tried in various ways, but the dibuk refused to cooperate. Soon, the dibuk stopped responding, ignoring him completely. "I'm going to daven maariv and then I'll consult with the Arizal," he informed the woman's family.

After maariv, Rav Chaim approached his rebbi and described the situation.

The Arizal nodded thoughtfully. "I knew it would be difficult, and that is why I specifically instructed that the dibuk be removed before shkiah. Once nighttime falls, the level of impure forces increases tremendously, making it a lot more difficult, impossible even, to get the dibuk's cooperation. You'll have to try again in the morning."

Rav Chaim looked glum, picturing the woman's pained face. "But she's suffering so badly. How can she wait until morning?"

"There's no other choice, unfortunately," the Arizal responded. "The dibuk will not leave her body at night. Go back tomorrow, first thing in the morning, and you should be able to get the dibuk out."

His heart heavy, Rav Chaim went to inform the family of the Arizal's instructions. He spent the night weighed down with deep remorse for not having been able to coax the dibuk out of the woman before nightfall, feeling a heavy responsibility for her extra hours of suffering.

When morning finally approached, he davened vasikin and gathered a minyan of men. Together, they hurried back to the woman's home.

"I know your name," Rav Chaim reminded the dibuk. "You must obey me and leave this woman's body."

"I won't, I can't," the dibuk moaned in response. "I'll help you achieve atonement if you leave her body," Rav Chaim offered.

"No," the dibuk said stubbornly.

"I'm asking you one more time to leave on your own," Rav Chaim continued. "After that, I will invoke kabbalah and force you to leave."

"No," the dibuk continued to insist.

Rav Chaim began to say specific pesukim and sheimos. "I command you to leave through the pinkie of this woman," he ordered.

Suddenly, the woman began crying out in pain. "Something's... moving!" she gasped. "Through...my...hand. Ow!"

Suddenly, a long plume of fire began shooting out of the woman's pinkie, like a lit match. The

dibuk's deep voice began screaming from within the pinkie, "Help me! Please, Rav Chaim, you are the only one who can help me! I am leaving her, but you must help me!"

"Tell me, what was your sin?" Rav Chaim asked the flaming pinkie. "What did you do that caused you this eternal suffering?"

"I was a malshin, an informer," the dibuk admitted.

"Who did you inform on?" Rav Chaim queried.

The dibuk began to cry. "I was an informer my entire life, informing on my fellow Jews to the government for money. People used to yell at me, avoid me, slander me, but I was profiting too much to care. So many Jews lost their parnasah and their freedom because of me."

"That is a terrible sin," Rav Chaim agreed. "I understand that you need a tremendous tikun. However, why did you go into this specific woman? What did she do wrong?"

"Ha, you think she's so innocent?" the dibuk scoffed. "She does terrible aveiros."

Rav Chaim looked at the woman, so modestly dressed. It was difficult to imagine that she had committed grave sins. "What does she do?"

"This woman has a maid, a non-Jewish maid, who likes to sing," the dibuk explained. "The songs that she sings are vulgar and coarse, and they impact this woman when she hears them. While she would never sing such impure songs herself, just listening to them has contaminated her soul, allowing me to enter her body."

"I promise you that she will never listen to those impure songs again," Rav Chaim pledged. "She'll fire the maid immediately and be careful with the kind of music she listens to. Now, please leave her body."

“I won’t leave until you promise me a tikun,” the dibuk countered.

“I will give you a tikun,” Rav Chaim agreed. “Leave this woman completely.”

The woman began moaning in pain as the pencil of fire shot out from her pinkie. A moment later, the window shattered. Then the woman opened her eyes and smiled. For the first time in months, she felt no pain.

“You must fire that maid immediately,” Rav Chaim instructed her. “And you must make sure never to listen to non-Jewish music again. If, chas v’shalom, you succumb and listen to such music, you will be vulnerable to another dibuk entering your body.”

“Yes, I’ll fire her at once, and I won’t ever listen to such music again,” the woman sobbed emotionally. “Thank you! Thank you for saving my life!”

Rav Chaim left her home and returned to his mentor, the Arizal, who instructed him on which tikunim to do for the soul of the informer.

News of the story spread, and people discussed the holiness of Rav Chaim Vital and his rebbi, the Arizal, with tremendous awe. As the story was shared from one household to the next, another story emerged, this time featuring the Arizal himself.

One day, the Arizal was sitting at a table in his front yard, learning from a sefer before him. Suddenly, a goat wandered into the yard, walked up to him, and put its paws down onto the table.

The people who were present watched in amazement as the Arizal began to speak to the goat in a low voice. The goat began to cry pitifully as the Arizal continued speaking. Then, the Arizal made a motion with his finger and the goat obediently took its paws off the table and made its

way to the shochet, settling down politely in front of him, inviting the man to slaughter it.

When questioned about this bizarre occurrence, the Arizal explained that the goat was a gilgul of a man who had done terrible aveiros in the past. It was a human soul cloaked in an animal’s body, and this caused it immense pain. When it felt it could no longer handle the agony of living in the body of an animal, the goat made its way to the Arizal for assistance in achieving atonement.

The Arizal told the goat that it would merit atonement if it were to be slaughtered and its meat given to a talmid chacham. After the talmid chacham would recite a brachah over its meat, it would achieve atonement. Desperate to atone for its sins as soon as possible, the goat hurried immediately to be slaughtered.

An abundance of stories such as these began spreading about the Arizal and his disciple, Rav Chaim Vital, and the stories made their way overseas. Eventually, they reached the ears of a wealthy man, Yehoshua, who resided in the city of Kushta.

Yehoshua was meeting a friend in a quiet tavern when the conversation turned to the amazing stories depicting the Arizal’s greatness and his kabbalistic abilities, and he remained skeptical. “How can a human today be able to read minds?” he chuckled.

“No, he really can,” his friends insisted. “The Arizal’s greatness is unsurpassed. He understands the language of the trees and can read the past and future in the stars. He can take one look at someone and know everything about him, all his actions and deeds.”

Yehoshua began laughing harder. “Oh, please, don’t tell me you believe this nonsense. These are just unfounded rumors. I bet you he can’t do anything like this.”

“Be careful how you speak,” his friend cautioned.

“Don’t speak like that against someone as great as the Arizal.”

Yehoshua just continued laughing. Flaggering down a waiter, he ordered a full glass of strong wine. When it arrived, he lifted it. “A toast to the success of the Arizal!” he cried mockingly, draining the cup.

His friend rose in protest. “How can you do such a thing?!” he demanded, scandalized by the wealthy man’s behavior. “It’s bad enough that you’re drinking this non-kosher wine. How can you use this yayin nesech to degrade the holy Arizal?!”

“Don’t tell me what to do,” Yehoshua roared, the effects of the alcohol already evident in his tone.

Far away, in Tzefas, the Arizal was sitting and learning, surrounded by his talmidim, when he suddenly began laughing.

“Why is rebbi laughing?” someone asked.

“There is someone in Kushta who just toasted my success on a cup of yayin nesech,” the Arizal explained. “In ten days, he will be here in this room. You will all be present, and you’ll see the way he will try to test me. And then you will see how I will give him the tikun he requires.”

One day passed, then two. Word got out that on a specific day, someone would be coming to a pick a fight with the Arizal. The people waited eagerly to see how the story would play out.

Five days passed, then six and seven. Sure enough, on the tenth day, Yehoshua showed up.

He had traveled all the way from Kushta to disprove the greatness of the Arizal. A small crowd had gathered to await his arrival, and they shivered when he knocked on the door, right on schedule. The showdown had begun.

“How may I help you?” the Arizal asked his guest.

“I was told that you know everything about everyone,” Yehoshua said brazenly. “So, tell me, what did I do yesterday?”

The Arizal gave a small chuckle. “Yesterday?”

He began listing, in accurate detail, everything Yehoshua had done from the morning until the night. Yehoshua listened, stunned, having been completely unprepared that the Arizal would succeed in besting him.

“Not only what you did yesterday,” the Arizal continued when he finished recounting the previous day’s events. “I can tell you what happened before yesterday. You robbed your partner Mordechai of his rightful share of the business. You drank yayin nesech. You caused an almanah suffering. You performed the three gravest sins in the Torah: avodah zara, giluy arayos, and shefichas damim as well!”

“What are you talking about?” Yehoshua tried to deny the accusations, his face flaming in embarrassment.

“You surely remember the terrible aveirah that you did with your maid,” the Arizal reminded him. “And then afterward, you informed on her and had her killed.”

“Absolutely not!” Yehoshua cried in denial. “I’ll admit that I am guilty of the other sins you mentioned, but this last story is slander. If you say I did it, prove it.” He smiled smugly, sure that he had bested the Arizal. After all, the maid was no longer alive and therefore unavailable to testify.

“You want to test me?” the Arizal asked in a low, dangerous tone. “I can bring the maid here right now.”

Yehoshua rolled his eyes. “Impossible. She’s dead. There’s no way you can prove any of this... of this malicious slander.”

“Don’t test me,” the Arizal warned.

“What are you, a magician?” Yehoshua scoffed.

“If you can bring her back to life, go ahead! Show me how!”

The Arizal closed his eyes and began concentrating on kabbalistic phrases. Suddenly, the body of the maid descended into the room, right before their eyes. Yehoshua shrank back in fear, but then relaxed when he saw that the maid’s body was lifeless.

The Arizal walked over to Yehoshua and stretched out his hand. In one fluid motion, he pulled the maid’s soul out from within Yehoshua and thrust it into her dead body. And just like that, the maid was living and breathing again.

“He sinned with me,” the maid testified. “And then he informed on me to the local government and had me killed.”

As soon as she finished her testimony, the Arizal withdrew the soul from inside her and replaced it within Yehoshua. Immediately, her body fell lifelessly to the floor. The Arizal pronounced a specific name of Hashem, and the body disappeared.

“How... what...” Yehoshua sputtered.

“I’ll explain,” the Arizal said gently. “When a person does the terrible sin of giluy arayos, the soul of the woman is bound to his like a dog, and he can never shake it off. When his neshamah ascends to shomayim after his lifetime, he will be unable to deny the sin, as the woman’s soul is bound to him forever. Although you don’t feel her soul within you, it is tied to you and will remain that way forever.”

When Yehoshua heard this, he threw himself to the floor. “Rebbi, please, give me a tikun,” he pleaded. “I need atonement. How can I get it?”

The Arizal looked sternly at the man at his feet. “What do you think this is, a game? You do terrible aveiros, you mock me with forbidden wine, you brazenly try to test me. And now that I proved that I am right, you suddenly come crying for a tikun? It’s not that easy!”

Yehoshua began weeping profusely. Crouched on the floor in a puddle of tears, he begged and pleaded for atonement.

“I don’t see how I can give you a tikun,” the Arizal told him. “You don’t appear to have real regret for your sins.”

In response, Yehoshua reached into his pocket and removed a heavy bag of coins. Putting the money on the table, he said, “Rebbi, I want your talmidim to use this money to purchase wood, and then to burn me to death. That will be my kaparah.”

The Arizal looked silently at the money for a moment. “That’s not the way we do it in bais din,” he finally said. “The way sereifah is done is that we will dig a pit deep enough that when you stand in it, the ground will reach your waist. Then we’ll pour hot lead down your throat, from which you will die. That will be your tikun.”

“I never realized how grave my sins were,” Yehoshua said in a trembling voice, “But if that is what I need to achieve atonement, then I am ready.”

The Arizal gave one of his students some money to purchase a piece of lead and instructed a few others to dig a hole in the middle of the floor. When the student returned with the lead, it was cooked up in a small pot and melted into a boiling, sticky mass.

Yehoshua went to stand inside the pit, tears of regret streaming down his cheeks. The Arizal grasped him by both shoulders and gave him a shake. "You must say shema," he instructed. "And now vidui. And I will give you certain sheimos to think about as we pour the boiling lead down your throat. It won't be an easy death, but in this manner, you should merit atonement."

Between gut-wrenching sobs, Yehoshua whispered a heartfelt vidui, repenting on the terrible sins he had committed in his lifetime. The Arizal watched him thoughtfully, not uttering a word.

When Yehoshua finished reciting vidui, he looked up from his tears, waiting for the torturous death, but the Arizal was still just gazing at him. He waited tensely for a minute, then two, and then he could no longer handle the wait. "Rebbi, please give me the kaparah," he begged. "Please give it quickly. The wait is so difficult."

The Arizal nodded. "Close your eyes and recite the brachah of shehakol. We will pouring warm lead down your throat, and although it will burn you and eventually choke you to death, you must recite a brachah on the moment of pleasure when the warm liquid begins sliding down your throat." Yehoshua obediently closed his eyes, his entire body trembling. "Baruch atah Hashem Elokeinu melech haolam," he recited fervently. "Shehakol nihiyeh bidvaro."

"And now, with your eyes closed, open your mouth," the Arizal continued. Yehoshua opened his mouth, but instead of pouring the molten lead inside, the Arizal reached for a small jar of honey, which he began spooning into the condemned man's mouth.

It took a minute for Yehoshua to understand what was happening. At first, he thought he was hallucinating when the cool, sweet, and thick liquid entered his mouth. When he grasped that it was truly honey, not lead, he opened his eyes in confusion.

The Arizal grasped his arm and helped him out of the pit. Instructing his students to leave the room, he led the ashen-faced man to a chair. "Hashem loves the yidden," he explained. "He does not want to hurt us. However, there are times when a person's sins require him to go through terrible suffering in order to achieve atonement.

"You, too, were destined for a torturous death. However, you repented, and Hashem has accepted your teshuvah. Those moments where death was staring you in the eye were so real to you that you experienced the actual fear of death, and that has served as your complete kaparah."

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!
This story is taken from tape # A429

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