

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

A Shabbos Transformation

Hershel the horse dealer was a clown; there was simply no other way to describe him. The man didn't have a serious bone in his body. His stall at the market was always crowded with people; not just by those interested in purchasing a horse, but with throngs of shoppers who came to be entertained by his wisecracks.

Though Hershel didn't mean it as a marketing ploy, the crowds he drew with his humor ensured that he always had plenty of business. He earned a reputation as a trustworthy dealer with good business sense who could always be counted upon to uplift his customers along with their transaction.

Hershel was an expert on horses. A few times a year, he would travel to the main animal fair to restock his inventory. After so many years in the business, he could sniff out potential problems in the horses available for purchase and knew which ones would earn him the highest resale return.

With the biannual fair just days away, Hershel set out on the journey there. He drove a wagon connected to a large, empty trailer and carried with him a tremendous amount of money. If all went well at the fair, he would make the return trip home with a trailer full of livestock and a far slimmer wallet.

The fair was loud and colorful. Hershel made his way around the square, stopping at stalls and examining the horses. Spotting an acquaintance heading in his direction, he called out a humorous greeting. The man, and a few others within earshot, laughed out loud.

Enjoying his audience, Hershel continued cracking jokes. Just like at the market back home, his humorous quips and anecdotes drew crowds. Soon, a swarm of people were surrounding him, laughing and joking together.

When a carriage pulled up in the middle of the square, the group clowning around with Hershel didn't pay any attention to it. Then, the door of the carriage opened, and a man with a long white beard emerged, his face glowing with holiness. It was the Toldos Yaakov Yosef, grandson of the Baal Shem Tov.

His very presence silenced the crowd. No one dared crack jokes with the rebbe standing before them. They stood in awe, waiting for him to speak.

Hershel the perpetual clown, who couldn't stand or understand a serious moment, dared to break the silence. "So, Rebbe," he drawled dramatically. "What can I do for you? Would you, perhaps, like to purchase a horse?"

"No, Hershel," the rebbe replied evenly. "I need something else from you. There's a Jew who owes the poritz a few years' worth of taxes, a princely sum. Since he is unable to pay, the poritz imprisoned him and his family. Now, they are threatening to take him and feed him to the dogs

if the Jewish community does not come up with the money he owes the poritz.

“You know that the poritz is not making empty threats,” the rebbe continued. “He owns a collection of the most vicious dog breeds, and there have already been Jews who have tragically met their deaths in the jaws of his dogs. Raising the money to pay the poritz is a matter of life and death.”

“Okay, rebbe, how much money do you need?” Hershel asked.

“He owes 1500 rubles,” the Toldos Yaakov Yosef said quietly.

Someone whistled. Most people did not make nearly that much in an entire year.

Hershel whipped out his wallet and counted out a stack of bills. “Here you go,” he announced. “1500 rubles.”

The rebbe was taken aback. “You’re giving the entire sum?” he verified in surprise. He had hoped that the horse dealer would respond generously to his appeal, but he hadn’t dreamed he would take on the entire debt. “Would you like anything in return?”

Hershel puckered his face in exaggerated thought.

“Hmm. Maybe a brachah? How about you give me a brachah to put into my wallet instead of the money?” he winked.

“What do you want me to bless you with?” the rebbe asked.

“Any brachah is fine,” Hershel returned.

The rebbe thought for a moment. “I give you a brachah that you should feel Shabbos,” he finally said.

“Oh, boy, did you hear that?” Hershel asked, chuckling. “Everybody, I am going to feel Shabbos! Rebbe, the only thing I feel about Shabbos is the texture of my wife’s potato kugel!” He laughed at his own joke as the rebbe disappeared back into his carriage, shaking his head ruefully.

Hershel continued joking around for another little while before deciding to head home. He didn’t have any money left to spend at the fair, and there was little reason to hang around. He made his return trip with both an empty wallet and an empty trailer.

“Welcome back,” his wife, Chana, greeted him upon his return. “Were you successful?”

“I guess that depends,” Hershel said with a shrug. “I didn’t buy a single horse, but I did succeed in purchasing a blessing.”

Chana burst out laughing. “You did what? Come on, Hershel, not a single horse?” She was used to her husband, who couldn’t utter a straight sentence. Surely, he didn’t mean what he was saying!

“No, really,” Hershel insisted. “I met the Toldos Yaakov Yosef and he was raising money for pidyon shevuyim. I gave him whatever I had, but then I didn’t have any money for horses.”

Her eyes widened. “You gave him all the money you brought along? All of it?”

“Don’t worry,” Hershel reassured her. “I told you, I got a brachah in return. He told me I would feel Shabbos.”

“Hershel!” she cried in exasperation. “That couldn’t have been the blessing.”

“It was,” he insisted again. “The rebbe blessed me that I should feel Shabbos.”

His wife just shook her head. The rebbe's request for tzedakah notwithstanding, she couldn't understand what had possessed her husband to give away all his business capital. How would he continue to do business? They only had a little bit of money left, not nearly enough to purchase more inventory for their dealership. What would they live off of?

The following morning was Thursday. Having no more inventory and no money to purchase more horses, Hershel remained at home instead of manning his horse stall at the marketplace. Never having had the opportunity to learn how to learn Torah, he had little to occupy his time. Bored, he wandered outside.

The clock struck noon, and soon it was chatzos on this ordinary Thursday. Hershel glanced at the sun, noting the passage of time. "Shabbos is coming!" he exclaimed out loud. "It's almost erev Shabbos!"

Squatting down beside a chicken pecking around his garden, he informed the bird, "Tomorrow is erev Shabbos!"

To a flying sparrow, he exclaimed, "Shabbos is coming! We must prepare!" A passing squirrel received this same message.

From the kitchen window, Chana observed her husband communing with the animals outside. Wiping her hands on a dishtowel, she hurried outside to make sure he was still sane. "Hershel!" she called from the doorway.

"Chana!" he cried back breathlessly, coming toward the house. "Do you realize what tomorrow is?"

She took a step back. "What? What's going on? What's happening tomorrow?"

"It's erev Shabbos!" Hershel exclaimed joyfully.

"Do you know what Shabbos is? Do you understand the magnitude of holiness on this day?"

"Wait a minute, Hershel, take a deep breath and calm down." She spoke slowly and evenly, like one would speak to a young child. "Take it easy. Shabbos is coming, true. That's all. Nothing to get worked up about."

Hershel gave her a pitying look. Not something to get worked up about? Grabbing a broom, he began sweeping the floor with energetic strokes, practically dancing around the room. "Shabbos is coming! Shabbos is coming!"

When his children came home from cheder, they found their father dancing on the tables and their mother with her head between her hands. It seemed obvious that Hershel had gone insane.

The vast majority of people do not merit to fully appreciate the holiness of Shabbos, and the tzaddikim who do also possess the ability to contain their feelings within. Hershel was a simple Jew, an ignoramus and a clown to boot, and when he suddenly began experiencing intense holiness, he could not contain his feelings.

At Minchah and Maariv, he danced into shul, his face beaming. "Shabbos is coming!" he greeted the first person he saw, grabbing the man's hands in spontaneous dance. He pulled some more bewildered congregants into the circle and began singing yismichu b'malchuscha, dancing as if it was Simchas Torah.

"He's drunk," Itzik the cobbler murmured to his neighbor.

"Drunk? I'd say mad is more like it," a third man put in.

"He's just Hershel being Hershel," the neighbor said dismissively. "Today he dances about Shabbos; tomorrow, he'll come to shul dressed

like the poritz. The guy's a regular prankster, let's not forget."

After maariv, Hershel jumped onto the bimah. "Rabbosai!" he bellowed. "Whoever sleeps tonight is crazy! Tomorrow is erev Shabbos, and Shabbos is the holiest day of the week. It's when Hashem speaks directly to every Jewish soul. Rabbosai! If you sleep tonight and don't prepare for Shabbos, you'll get nothing out of it! Shabbos is coming! Shabbos!"

"You're right," the neighbor admitted quietly to his friend. "He went insane!"

When it became obvious that Hershel would remain atop the bimah indefinitely, two of the strongest men in the community came to physically carry him off. They led him by force, still screaming about the holiness of Shabbos, back to his home.

He spent the entire night dancing on his dining room table. Despite his wife's repeated entreaties to quiet down so that the children would be able to sleep, he continued to sing and dance with unlimited energy.

Matters became even more intense on Friday. Hershel ran through the streets, weaving in and out of alleyways, calling out to every person he passed. "Shabbos is coming! Shabbos is almost here!"

Hershel himself did not understand what had come over him. He was an am haaretz and understood little about the true meaning of Shabbos. All he knew was that he had suddenly become overwhelmed by excitement and anticipation for the holy day.

By the time Friday wound down, the entire town had witnessed Hershel's supposed insanity. He had danced in the streets, at the market, at the mikvah. His thunderous voice carried from one

side of town to the next as he sang in anticipation of Shabbos.

And then Shabbos finally arrived.

Hershel stood in shul, at his usual place in the corner of the room between his fellow leitzim. But something was different about him. There was a holiness that glowed from his face, a glimpse of the Shechina that peeked out from his shining eyes. As he recited Mizmor Shir L'yom HaShabbos, his face turned a deep scarlet. It was obvious that he was connected, authentically connected, to Hashem.

Tears falling from his eyes, he whispered, "Hashem, I never knew that You're here. Shabbos is beini uvein bnei Yisroel, but I've never felt Your presence before."

He began singing the words of kabbalas Shabbos and Maariv, and the entire congregation sang along with him. From his place at the back of the shul, he led the mispallelim through an intense davening entrenched in holiness and concentration.

When davening was over, he danced and danced and the entire shul danced with him. Then he began singing, slow and heartfelt melodies, and the entire shul sang with him. It was clear that the Shechinah was with him. Somehow, Hershel the clown had transformed into Hershel the Rebbe, and although no one could explain how or why, they knew his actions were authentic.

At home, his Friday night seudah lasted until the morning. People came and went, basking in the special Shabbos aura that surrounded him as he sang the zemiros with tremendous fervor.

In the shul the next morning, no one was laughing at him anymore. Instead, Hershel was given a distinguished aliya. After Mussaf, he gave an impromptu drashah, imploring his neighbors and friends to sense the presence of the Shechinah.

“We are incredibly lucky to be Jews,” he said passionately. “One day a week, we merit to be connected to Hashem. Shabbos! How lucky we are to have Shabbos!”

A large crowd escorted Hershel to his home after davening, much as they would do for a distinguished tzaddik. He spoke about Shabbos as they walked, and the people drank in his words, eager to share in the excitement and joy that enveloped him.

At Shalosh Seudos, the high point of Shabbos, a huge crowd crammed into his home. Hershel sang Askinu Seudasa, his face afire. No one present had ever before glimpsed such intense concentration, emotion, and holiness emanating from a human. It was as though they were witnessing his neshamah yeseirah itself.

And then it was time for Maariv.

When Hershel concluded Shemona Esreh, he suddenly found that he was back to himself. The people were shocked at how instantly he shed his extraordinary Shabbos aura and reverted back to the familiar jester they had been accustomed to.

“Hey, Getzel,” he called to the shamash, who was returning the siddurim to the shelves. “What does an elephant use to take the skins off of potatoes? A peel-er!”

As he cracked up at his own joke, the others exchanged puzzled glances. Hershel was back to himself, clowning around as always. They couldn’t even picture him dancing at kabbalas Shabbos anymore. It was as if they had imagined the entire thing.

The week passed slowly. At first, Hershel’s family watched him suspiciously, waiting for him to start dancing in the streets, but when they realized he was really back to himself, they relaxed their vigil.

Then Thursday dawned.

“The blessing of the Toldos Yaakov Yosef is being fulfilled,” Chana, Hershel’s wife, realized in wonder when chatzos arrived and he began dancing energetically around the house.

“Let’s get the house ready for Shabbos!” Hershel cried, grabbing the broom. Singing merrily, he began a thorough cleaning. He cleaned with his hands, he cleaned with his feet, he cleaned with his heart and soul, dancing through the house. Shabbos was coming!

After Minchah in shul, Hershel danced atop the tables. “Rabbosai, can you fathom what Shabbos means? Os hi leolam! Shabbos is an eternal sign of the bond between klal Yisroel and our Creator! Shabbos is coming!”

Friday morning saw Hershel going from shop to shop, beseeching their owners to close up as fast as possible to prepare spiritually for the holy day. Friday afternoon found him in the mikvah and then reciting tehillim in a joyful singsong in his front yard.

The people were waiting for Hershel on Friday night in shul. They longed for him to lead the davening, to sweep them away on his spiritual cloud, to carry them along with him in his incredible feelings for Shabbos.

Indeed, Hershel davened at the amud in the most beautiful voice, and the people prayed like they had never prayed before.

When Hershel began reciting Mizmor Shir L’yom HaShabbos, he broke down in tears. “Hashem,” he cried. “I never knew where You were. All my life, I never merited to feel Your presence. Now, I am finally lucky enough to really feel Your Shechinah, but it’s only on Shabbos! Hashem, please stay with me forever!”

The entire congregation cried along with Hershel, the man who didn't know how to take things seriously but merited to sense kedushah on a level that they could not attain.

Tens of people thronged to his home the entire Shabbos. They came for his zemiros, for his drashos. They came to be uplifted and inspired. Mostly, they longed to share in the authentic Shabbos aura that Hershel was experiencing.

But when Shabbos was over and Havdalah recited, Hershel reverted back to his old mundane self. Once again, he was a simple horse dealer, the clown of the town.

For the remainder of Hershel's life, this cycle repeated itself. He lived to a ripe old age, and, unbelievably, he would transition between incredible spirituality to complete simplicity and then back again each week anew.

His reputation grew, and many great rabbonim traveled from far and wide just to be with him over Shabbos, to be uplifted by the aura that surrounded him on the holiest day of the week. At the end of his life, Hershel resided in the city of Sighet, which was frequented by many gedolim of the era who came to personally witness Hershel on Shabbos.

Though Hershel had been blessed with Shabbos, during the week he was still the am ha'aretz that he had always been. Toward the end of his life, some individuals felt that the tremendous holiness of Shabbos was more worthy to be felt by a talmid chacham, not an ignoramus. They therefore took it upon themselves to learn Torah with Hershel, to enable him to become a man truly worthy of the intense spirituality that overtook him each Shabbos. Indeed, in his old age, Hershel became a talmid chacham.

Hershel had done one mitzvah, a spur-of-the-moment decision that affected the remainder of his life. That one difficult deed brought him incalculable reward, both in this world and in the next. He had been given a window of opportunity, and he grasped it, changing his life forever and ever.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A414

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