

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Tit for Tat

The friendship between Zev and Elchonon went back years. They grew up together in the same shtetl, made trouble together at cheder, and shared the same youthful dreams of making it rich someday.

Their rebbi, to say the least, didn't appreciate their get-rich planning as much as them. He constantly threatened to kick them out of yeshiva for coming late or disturbing the class with their whispers. Eventually, his warnings came true and the two boys found themselves permanently suspended from yeshiva.

Afraid to tell their parents that they were not allowed to return to yeshiva, the two young troublemakers would leave their homes each morning as usual. Their unsuspecting parents didn't dream they were spending their day anywhere other than in the one-room schoolhouse that served as the shtetl's cheder.

To occupy themselves, Zev and Elchonon took to rummaging through garbage dumps to find broken furniture which they would then fix and sell for a profit. Soon, they were operating a vibrant little business, slowly building up some capital. For the first time in their lives, these two misfits tasted success.

As they grew from children into teenagers, they expanded their business, investing their money into new ventures. Over the course of their dealings, they became friendly with Abish, who owned a wine factory. Soon, they were purchasing wine from him at wholesale prices and reselling the bottles in nearby shtetls for double the price.

They started small, but Abish quickly came to recognize that he was dealing with trustworthy and talented salesmen. Soon, Zev and Elchonon became Abish's sole distributors in a business relationship that enabled them all to prosper.

Abish wasn't young, and only a few short years after the youths had begun working with him, he took to his deathbed. Realizing that the burden of running his thriving business would be too heavy for his wife, he instructed her to sell the wine factory after his death.

Shortly thereafter, Abish passed away. As instructed, his wife put the factory up for auction, intending to sell it the highest bidder.

This left Zev and Elchonon in a quandary. Invested as they were in the wine business, they longed to purchase the factory. They had the necessary talent and experience to ensure the continued success of the company. However, the wine factory was worth a tremendous amount of money, and there was no way they could come up with so much cash. They had carefully saved their earnings over the previous years, but it wasn't nearly enough to purchase the factory.

On the morning of the auction, they entered the

home of R' Abish's widow along with throngs of other investors. They knew they had no real chance of winning the bid, but it couldn't hurt to try.

"Should we bid higher?" Zev nudged Elchonon during the bidding process, when the price of the factory had already climbed significantly.

"How?" Elchonon asked. They both knew how much they could afford, and the price was just too high.

"How not?" Zev retorted in a whisper. "We need this factory!"

"Your right," Elchonon agreed. "Let's continue bidding and we'll figure out the payment afterward."

The two continued to counterbid every offer made by the other investors until the room finally fell silent. No one was willing to offer a higher amount than the one Zev had just agreed to.

"Going once!" the moderator cried. "Going twice! Going three times... aaaaand...sold!"

The room erupted all at once. People stood up and began heading toward the exit. The two young partners were surrounded and congratulated, and they spent the next few minutes shaking hands and exchanging smiles.

When the room emptied out, they approached R' Abish's wife, who was grateful that the factory would be going to men her husband had worked with and trusted.

"You see," Zev began hesitantly. "We really wanted this factory because, after working with your husband these past few years, we are well acquainted with this trade, and feel that we have the experience to ensure the continued success of the business your husband built from scratch."

The widow nodded.

"To be honest," Zev continued, mustering the courage. "Neither of us has the kind of money we bid for the purchase of the factory. But we have a different idea," he continued quickly, seeing the look on her face.

"We wanted to ask you a favor," Elchonon took over from his floundering friend. "We will pay you half the price up front, and we'll make steady payments from the profits of the factory until we finish paying you back. Would you be willing to do this for us?"

The widow hesitated for a moment, considering their request. Her husband had trusted these employees, and they really were the best ones to ensure the factory's future success. "Alright," she agreed with a small smile. "Let's write up a contract stipulating all the conditions of the sale. I'd like it to include that in the event that you stop making the monthly payments, the factory will revert back to my ownership."

"Of course, of course," the two partners agreed with palpable relief. The papers were signed, the deposit was paid, and the two walked away with the keys to the factory.

From the start, their venture was blessed with success. Under their capable hands, the factory began earning double and then triple its previous profits, and the partners were able to pay up R' Abish's widow within a few short months.

The passing years were kind to Zev and Elchonon. The two former yeshiva misfits succeeded in putting this reputation behind them, establishing themselves as trustworthy businessmen and generous philanthropists. In time, they each married and began to raise a family.

Despite the changes in their personal lives, the kinship between Zev and Elchonon remained rock-solid. Theirs was a partnership all other businesses aspired to attain, pointing to the mutual respect and trust between the two men as a model for all to follow.

Over time, the division of labor had settled between the two partners. Elchonon, the more logical and brainier of the two, was in charge of the books and the purse strings, while Zev, with his entrepreneur mind that was constantly dreaming up new ideas, was in charge of the business strategy. In addition, there were tens of employees working for the company in various capacities.

With a business as lucrative as theirs, their families lived well. A far cry from the impoverished homes both Zev and Elchonon had grown up in, their children were raised in wealth and luxury. However, they shared their wealth with the poor as well, opening up their homes to those in need.

One day, Elchonon was balancing the books when he noted with pleasure that the business was doing far better than he'd always thought. His eyes widened as he realized just how much money was in the business account. A thought niggled its way into his mind. Would Zev ever know if I take this money?

He pushed the thought out of his mind and continued working, but it continued pestering him. Zev will never know. I can take 20,000 groschen from the account, and he'll be none the wiser.

His greed overpowered the rest of his feelings, and without another thought, Elchonon walked over to the safe and withdrew 20,000 groschen. He pocketed the money and left the factory for the day.

For the next few days, the money burned a whole in his pocket, but Elchonon tried not to think about it too much. He rationalized that what Zev didn't know wouldn't hurt him, and continued about the business as usual.

Elchonon had always nursed a secret dream to travel to Eretz Yisroel and daven at the historic sites and graves. With trains a distant future and airplanes not yet invented even in the most

fantastical science fiction, such a trip would mean a months-long absence from home, rendering it a distant dream with little hope of ever becoming reality.

Now, with the 20,000 groschen in his pocket, he began to entertain thoughts of traveling to Eretz Yisroel. He brought up the idea to Zev, who was predictably unenthusiastic. "I don't understand why you suddenly feel the need to travel," he said, frowning.

"It's not sudden," Elchonon admitted. "This is something I've wanted to do for a long time. Don't panic, and think about it for a second. I'll be gone for three, four months, not longer. During that time, you'll look after my wife and children. The business is practically running itself and should not be too difficult for you to manage alone. And when I return, it'll be your turn to go on vacation."

"Wow, you really need the break," Zev said softly, studying his friend's face. "The truth is, it's understandable. We've been working at this same job since our early teens, and it makes sense that you would be burned out. Let me think about this for a little bit. I'll get back to you."

Two days later, Elchonon broached the subject again. "I would like to leave as soon as possible, so that I can return in time for yom tov," he explained. "Have you been thinking about it? What do you say?"

Zev nodded. "Yes, I've thought about it, and I'm okay with it. We've been friends for years, after all. It's my pleasure to help you out when I can."

"You'll care for my family in my absence?" Elchonon asked. "And don't forget that I'll do the same for you when you decide you need a break."

"Sure, with pleasure," Zev said, in response to his partner's earlier question. "When do you plan on leaving?"

"There's actually a ship setting sail next week,"

Elchonon said. "Is that too soon for you? The next ship won't leave for another month."

"No, next week should be fine. Have safe trip and enjoy yourself," Zev wished him, genuinely meaning each word. "You'll wrap up whatever you were in middle of before you leave?"

"Of course," Elchonon agreed. "I'll leave my assistant, Yerucham, to oversee my side of the business."

"Great," Zev replied, and then the conversation returned to business matters.

The next week, Elchonon bid goodbye to his family and boarded the ocean liner with his luggage. He brought along with him a significant amount of money for the trip, including the stolen 20,000 groschen, which he was thinking about investing in real estate in Eretz Yisroel.

The passengers settled down in their cabins and toured the massive ship while the sailors prepared the liner for travel. An hour later, the steamship began to move away from the port, slowly slicing its way through the water. Its progress was excruciatingly slow.

The ship continued sailing for a half-hour before someone noticed a small sailboat paddling frantically after them. With superior agility thanks to its small size, the sailboat closed the gap between them and soon pulled up alongside the massive liner.

The man on the sailboat was waving his arms wildly, trying to capture the attention of the steamship's crew. Soon, all the passengers on the massive ocean liner were peering over the railing, trying to understand the man's shouting.

From his place on the deck, Elchonon peered down at the shouting man and was astonished to see that it was Zev. "Zev!" he cried as loud as he could. "ZEV!"

Zev turned toward his partner, his face registering relief. "Elchonon!" he shouted back. "Forget it! I have second thoughts about this whole business! I'm not interested in taking care of your family while you go party! Listen, either you come back home with me, or we divide the partnership. I'll buy you out, or you can buy me out. If you plan on continuing this trip, the partnership is over."

"Is that what you want?" Elchonon snapped back, shocked at the change in his partner's attitude. "I'm not turning around now, but if you'll sell me your share in the partnership, I'll buy you out."

"Deal!" Zev's voice was beginning to grow hoarse from shouting over the roar of the steam engine. "Listen, is your ship making another stop soon?"

"I think so!" Elchonon yelled back.

"So jump overboard onto my sailboat," Zev suggested. "We'll write up a contract, you'll pay me for my share in the partnership, and you'll rejoin your ship at the next port."

"Fine," Elchonon said coldly. He grabbed his money bag and jumped overboard, landing inside the small sailboat. His ankle began throbbing from the force of the fall.

"Are you alright?" Zev asked worriedly, ignoring the horrified shouting of the passengers craning their necks on the steamship.

"I'm fine," Elchonon said, still stung by his friend's betrayal. "Honestly, I'm not even sure what is going on here. I asked you for permission to take a vacation, and you agreed. Not even an hour into my trip, here you are, changing your mind. What do you think this is, a game? We've been partners for years! Things were going so well!"

"Look, I know this was last minute, and I'm sorry," Zev said. "I thought I would be able to do it, but I just can't. I'm not willing to take care of your family and run the business. This is not

something that partners do. What if you never come back?"

"I thought you trusted me," Elchonon said gruffly, hurt in his voice. "I guess I was mistaken. You want to divide the partnership? Go right ahead. How much do you want for your share? 15,000 groschen?"

"Twenty-five," Zev shot back.

Elchonon had to bite back his laughter. It dawned on him that Zev really had no inkling how much their business was worth. He had thrown out the ridiculously low number of 15,000 groschen just to demonstrate how hurt he was. The business was worth closer to 150,000 groschen, but if Zev wanted only twenty-five, he was willing to drive a good bargain.

"I'll buy you out for twenty, and that's final," Elchonon said. "But just so that you can't claim I cheated you later, I want you to know that I'm getting a great deal here. Under normal circumstances, I would pay you more for your share. But I don't really want to divide the partnership, and if that is what you want to do, I'm only willing to do it for 20,000 groschen."

"Deal," Zev said, nodding at Elchonon's disclaimer. "I'll write up the contract, and when we stop at the port city for you to rejoin your ship, we'll go to a beis din to have the contract certified. Elchonon hid his smile as he removed 20,000 groschen from his money bag. Not only did he buy off Zev's portion in their lucrative business for a ridiculously low price, he was using Zev's money to pay for it!

The following morning, they pulled up at the port city and hurried to the home of the rav. Briefly, they explained the story and showed him the contract. With two witnesses present, including the rav, the contract was signed, the money was handed over, and the deal was concluded.

"Listen," Elchonon said to his partner as they walked back to the port. "I want you to give the keys to the factory to my wife as soon as you get

home. You don't have any rights to the business any longer."

"Of course," Zev agreed. "Have a safe trip!"

Elchonon reboarded the steamship and continued along to Eretz Yisroel. He soaked in the sights and scenes and connected with the holy sites. After an enthralling trip, he returned home. He had been gone for almost five months.

His wife and children greeted him excitedly, and he entertained them with stories of his travels. When the children were finally in bed, he broached the subject that had never been too far from his mind throughout the trip.

"How is the business doing?" he asked eagerly. "How were you managing it?"

"What do you mean?" his wife asked in surprise. "Why would I be involved? You made up with Zev that he would run the business and make sure we had what we needed, and that is exactly what he did."

Elchonon jumped to his feet. "But I bought him out!" he sputtered, searching his pockets for the contract they'd signed. "Here it is! I have the contract right here. I'll be back. I'm going to speak to him." Moments later, he was standing at Zev's front door.

Zev's eyes widened when he saw his visitor and he rushed forward to grab him in a warm embrace. "Elchonon, my dear friend!" he cried. "Welcome back! We've missed you! I hope you enjoyed yourself, and now I'm more than ready to transfer the responsibility of your family and your share of the business back to your capable hands."

Elchonon shrank back and regarded the other man coolly. "What are you talking about?" he asked coldly. "You were the one who resolved the partnership since you didn't want the responsibility. I bought you out, remember?"

Zev's mouth flew open. "What do you mean, Elchonon? What are you talking about?"

Elchonon waved the contract. “As if you don’t know, huh? To jog your memory, here is the contract we signed. You stopped me on the ship, remember? I bought your share of the business for 20,000 groschen.”

“This contract is forged!” Zev cried. “I never came to your ship, and I certainly never sold you my share of the business for such a measly sum! Ask anyone; there are plenty of witnesses who can testify that I didn’t travel anywhere. I was right here, minding the business and caring for your family, just as you requested.”

“Impossible,” Elchonon snapped. “You want me to believe this nonsense? I saw you, and we went to the rav together. This is a valid contract, and I’ll prove it in bais din!”

He stalked down the steps, shaking his head at Zev’s audacity. Behind him, Zev, too, shook his head in shocked frustration, wondering what kind of games his partner was up to.

The next day, both partners appeared in bais din to present their sides of the argument. Zev had witnesses testifying that he had not gone anywhere during the entire time Elchonon was traveling, while Elchonon produced the document showing Zev’s signature. A letter was dispatched to the rav who had presided over the sale, and within a few weeks, his response came back corroborating Elchonon’s story.

Zev, however, did not accept the rav’s response.

“Something strange is going on here,” he insisted. “I have never seen this rav, nor did I sail out to meet with Elchonon. These are fabricated lies!”

Rav Avrohom Moshe, the rav chairing the case, was at a complete loss. Both sides had adequately proven that they were speaking the truth, but the two truths contradicted each other. He simply did not know how to rule. He davened to Hashem to grant him clarity in making the proper decision.

That night, Rav Avrohom Moshe had a dream in which Eliyahu Hanavi appeared and explained to him the entire story. Since Elchonon had always been completely honest, the 20,000 he had stolen was the first time he had fallen victim to this sin. Hashem, who is maavir rishon rishon, wanted to help him rectify this sin and therefore sent Eliyahu Hanavi in the guise of Zev to take back the stolen money.

Rav Avrohom Moshe was amazed that Elchonon had merited to have Eliyahu Hanavi save him from the destruction of his sin. He called Elchonon in and told him the story.

Elchonon immediately broke down and admitted that he had fallen prey to his greed. On the spot, he repented for the sin and resolved never to repeat it in the future. Zev was called in next, and Elchonon told him the story. The two made peace and pledged to remain worthy of each other’s trust forever onward.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A63

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Toras Reb Kalman
Lakewood New Jersey
609.807.1783
torasrebkalman@gmail.com

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