

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Shehakol Niheye Bidvaro

Henoch's life was not an easy one. He suffered through a difficult childhood, and as he got older, his difficulties just seemed to get worse. He had a strained marriage, lived in poverty, and found it difficult to get along with others. Although Henoch tried to have emunah that this was the life that was best for him, tailor-made by Hashem, it was hard to remain strong when the going was so rough.

He decided to go to an adam gadol for a berachah, since it is well known that the blessing of a tzaddik can help alter one's circumstances for the better. He arranged a time with the rav's assistant and counted down the hours until he would be able to unburden his heart.

When Henoch entered the rav's study, the rav immediately noticed the heaviness of his footsteps. Henoch looked like a man weighed down by a crushing burden, and the rav's heart went out to him. "Come inside, sit down, make

yourself comfortable," he welcomed the broken man warmly. "Let me serve you a cup of tea."

Henoch felt very uncomfortable being served tea by one of the greatest gedolim of his time, but he didn't have the audacity to demur. His eyes roved awkwardly from the steaming cup of tea toward the table and then to the door, unsure how to react.

"Make a berachah," the rav invited in a gentle tone.

Obligingly, Henoch recited a shehakol and allowed the warmth of the tea to penetrate deep inside. He finished the tea, stood up, and thanked the rav for his time.

The rav, surprised that his guest was leaving so soon, looked deeply into his eyes. "What is on your mind, my son?" he asked kindly. "Why have you come here?"

"The rav already answered my question," Henoch replied.

"I don't recall you asking me a question," the rav countered. "How could I have answered a question you didn't ask?"

"I came with a question, but the rav answered it even before I had a chance to ask it," Henoch said. The rav shook his head. "But we didn't even start speaking! All I did so far was serve you some tea!"

Henoch sat back down. "I came here with a very heavy heart," he admitted. "Sometimes it seems that anything that can go wrong in my life goes wrong. I watch everyone else living such beautiful, fulfilling lives, but somehow for me, everything is difficult. I came here for a blessing, and perhaps for advice as well. I needed a way out of my challenging life."

"So what changed since you walked in here?" the rav asked.

“The rav served me tea and instructed me to make a berachah,” Henoah explained. “I never really make berachos. I mean, of course I say berachos on my food, but when was the last time I consciously thought about the words I was saying?”

“This time, however, when I made the blessing on the tea before the rav, I concentrated on my words. And I realized, elokainu melech haolam! Hashem is the king of the entire world! Shehakol niheye bidvaro! Nothing happens by chance. Everything that happens is by Hashem’s word.

“As I sipped the tea, I thought to myself, Hey, what did I just say? Hashem created the entire world, and everything that happens is only by His command. How can I complain about the life He has given me? No one can do anything to me without His permission! Hashem knows what He’s doing, and if these are the circumstances He has chosen for me, that this is what is best for me. “I came in with a question: why is my life so difficult? Why am I being punished like this? And with the blessing on the tea, I got my answer. I am in wonderful Hands. Hashem is in charge, and He is the one creating my life, the best possible life for me.”

The rav gazed at Henoah in silent admiration. “Wow,” he said after a moment. “I say shehakol many times a week, and I always thought I was concentrating on what I was saying. But to be honest, I have never thought of these words this way, never felt them the way you have. Your words are a gift, a deeper understanding into the blessing of shehakol, and one that I will treasure forever.”

There was another moment of contemplative silence before the rav spoke again. “You have given me a gift, the gift of a true shehakol. I would like to pay you back with a little story.”

This was the story he relayed.

Yonasan and Levi were close friends who had gone on a trip together and were traveling back home. They each had cloth sacks that contained their lunch. Yonasan had packed himself three challah rolls, while Levi had brought along two. When midday rolled around, they stopped off at a stream to wash their hands and returned to the wagon to eat their lunch.

“Hey, Yonasan, do you see that guy down there? He’s waving at us. Do you think he needs a hitch?”

Yonasan squinted in the direction his friend was pointing toward. “He looks Jewish, doesn’t he? Let’s drive down there and see what he needs.” They drove the wagon further down the road to where the Jew was trying to flag down a passing wagon. “R’ Yid,” Yonasan called out. “Do you need a ride?”

“Are you traveling east?” the man asked them. “I need to get to the next city eastward.”

“Yes, we’re passing that way,” Levi told him. “Hop in.”

The man boarded the wagon and took a seat on the bench beside the other two.

Yonasan leaned over and whispered to his friend, “Do you think he’s hungry? It doesn’t look like he has any food with him.”

“Let’s share with him,” Levi agreed. “R’ Yid, are you perhaps hungry? My friend and I have some rolls for lunch and are happy to share.”

“To be honest, I’m famished,” the man admitted gratefully. “If the two of you would be so kind to share your meal, I haven’t eaten all day.”

“Of course,” the others answered. “We’ll share whatever we have.” They sliced up the rolls and divided the pieces between them. They ate as they watched the passing scenery.

Around a half hour later, they reached the city where their passenger needed to be dropped off. He thanked them profusely for the ride and for sharing their food. “Here are five silver coins,” he said, putting the money on the seat he had just vacated. “Payment for the meal you so kindly provided.”

“We don’t need payment,” Yonasan and Levi protested in unison. “We were happy to do a chesed for a fellow Jew.”

“You did do a chesed,” the man pointed out. “You gave me a ride and you gave me food. I had money, but nothing to eat, and you sated my hunger. I want you to have this money. Enjoy it!”

The two friends continued on with their journey when Yonasan took his eyes off the road for a moment and turned to Levi. “I’m sure you realize, Levi, that I get three coins and you get two. After all, I provided three rolls and you provided just two.”

Shimon gave a half-hearted chuckle. “Just a minute here. You have your math all wrong, Yonasan. That Jew’s stomach was empty, and we each filled it up half way. So we each get two and a half.”

Yonasan glanced at him briefly before turning back to the dirt path he was driving on. “Ridiculous!” he declared. “Why did you fill him up halfway if you gave him less than I did?”

Their voices began to grow heated before Shimon braked sharply on their argument. “Wait, wait, wait. Let’s stop and take this rationally. We are friends for years now. It’s silly to break a friendship over a single coin. I give in. You’ll get three and I’ll get two. Even though I’m right, our friendship is worth more than half a silver coin.”

Yonasan disagreed. “It’s the principle of the matter,” he said. “If I’m going to take three, it’s

because that’s the right thing, not because you are being generous for the sake of our friendship.”

“Fine,” Shimon said. “Why don’t we stop at the next city we pass and find a judge to make this decision? If he says three for you and two for me, I’ll be perfectly fine with it. And if he says to split it evenly, you’ll have to be okay with it.”

“Deal,” Yonasan agreed. “Let’s remember that we were never planning on making money off this guy in any case. These coins are an unexpected bonus. So whether it’s two or three or two and a half, either way we’ll both be gaining more than expected.”

On this optimistic note, the two friends turned into the next city and headed directly for the courthouse. They waited on line until it was their turn and then presented their case. “We each had rolls... and he ate some of the rolls... and he gave us coins...”

“Wait a minute, wait a minute,” the judge cried. “There’s a protocol here. You, there, will present your story and then I’ll give your friend a chance to say his side.”

“Well, my friend and I were traveling together and we picked up a passenger on the way,” Yonasan began. “We shared our lunch with him, and then he left us five coins. Now, I provided three rolls and my friend provided two. Therefore, I believe that I should get three coins and he should get two.”

“And what do you have to say?” the judge asked Levi.

“I had two rolls, and Yonasan had three,” Levi confirmed. “Though I don’t see why it matters exactly how many rolls each of us brought. The guest was hungry, and Yonasan and I both helped fill him up by sharing our rolls with him. It only makes sense that we should divide the coins equally.”

“To summarize,” the judge said. “Yonasan brought three rolls, Levi brought two, and your guest brought none. Correct?”

“Correct,” both men verified.

“Well, then, this is my verdict,” the judge said as the two leaned forward. “Yonasan, who provided three rolls, receives four coins, and Levi, who provided two rolls, receives one coin.”

Both men were stunned by this ruling. “But, judge, I don’t understand—”

“I’m sorry, I must get on to my next case. I don’t have time to explain,” the judge said, dismissing them from the room.

Levi shook his head in frustration as they returned to their wagon. “This is ridiculous, and you know it,” he said to his friend. “You know that I get at least two. The question was whether I get two or two and a half. What type of insane decision is that, to give you four and me, one?”

“I don’t know,” Yonasan replied. “But we made up that we would abide by whatever he rules. True, we did not expect this outcome, but a deal is a deal. Come on, just take your coin and let’s move on. Our friendship is worth more than a few silver coins.”

“If our friendship is worth more than this, then why don’t we split it fifty-fifty?” Levi countered, a touch of bitterness in his voice.

“Oh, please, let’s not get there again,” Yonasan said, more sharply than he intended. “We made up that we would do whatever the judge decided, and that is what we will do. Case closed.”

“Easy for you to say,” Levi muttered under his breath, but he didn’t argue. Their friendship really was worth more than a few silver coins. Still, he inwardly seethed at the unfairness of the verdict.

The next day, after they returned home, Levi decided to go the Ibn Ezra to clarify what had taken place. “Rebbe, I have a question,” he said, and related the entire story.

The Ibn Ezra listened carefully, but was puzzled. “I hear, and that’s an interesting story, but I’m not sure I understand why you’re here.”

Levi realized he would have to ask his question directly, but felt foolish to complain about something so trivial as money. “I don’t understand the ways of Hashem,” he said finally. “Just because I did a chesed, I should have this anguish?”

The Ibn Ezra threw him a funny look. “If you can’t even understand the ways of a human, how can you attempt to understand the ways of Hashem?”

“What does the rav mean?” Levi asked.

“Sit down, and let’s review the story from the beginning,” the Ibn Ezra said. “Let’s put all the rolls and the table and figure this out. How many rolls did Yonasan put on the table?”

“Three,” Levi replied.

“And you?”

“Two.”

“So how many rolls do we have on the table?”

“Five,” Levi said, trying to understand where the Ibn Ezra was headed.

“Very good,” the Ibn Ezra said. “Now, let’s get a little more mathematical. We’ll slice up the rolls into three parts each. How many slices do we now have on the table?”

“Fifteen,” Levi said.

“Fifteen slices for three men,” the Ibn Ezra summarized. “So that means that each of you consumed five slices, correct?”

Levi still did not comprehend where the tzaddik was trying to lead. “Yes.”

“Now, listen carefully,” the Ibn Ezra instructed.

“On the table were fifteen slices. Six of them belonged to you, from your two rolls. Nine of them belonged to Yonasan, from his three rolls. If you ate five out of your six slices, then you only gave your guest one slice. Yonasan, on the other hand, ate five out of his nine slices, and gave the guest four slices. Therefore, he gets four coins and you get only one.”

As Levi’s mind grasped this equation, the accuracy of the judge’s ruling suddenly became crystal clear. He even began to wonder how he had ever thought differently.

“You weren’t able to understand the ruling of a human judge,” the Ibn Ezra chided gently. “How could you even question the intricate ways of Hashem?”

The rav concluded the story and turned to Henoah. “Shehakol niheye bidvaro. Everything is created by the word of Hashem, and often, His ways are unfathomable to us. Shehakol niheye bidvaro- though we may not understand His ways, we know that it comes from Him, and therefore, it is good and just.”

Shehakol seems like a simple blessing that we recite mindlessly countless times a day. But if we put thought to it and understand the gravity of the words, we’ll understand just how powerful this berachah is.

The Shulchan Aruch states that when someone is about to leave this world, he should take a drink

of water and make the blessing of shehakol. These words sum up our entire emunah: that everything in this world is created by the word of Hashem. How wonderful it is to live a life knowing that we are in Hashem’s loving hands.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A111

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Toras Reb Kalman
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