

# TORAS REB KALMAN



## סיפורי צדיקים

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

### *Tochachah*

*The following is based on a parable from the  
Chofetz Chaim.*

As it has happened many times throughout our history, difficult decrees were enacted against the Jews in the country where Gidalya resided. To save his son's life, both physically and spiritually, Gidalya made the difficult decision that the best thing he could do for his son, eight-year-old Mendel, was to send him to a foreign country. As difficult as it was for him to part from his young son, he knew that this separation was necessary for his son's benefit.

Gidalya's wife packed up a small valise with all of Mendel's possessions, tucking some homemade cookies into a side pocket as moisture formed in her eyes. Mendel was so young, so innocent and pure. Who knew when she would see him again?

Mendel hugged his mother and waved to his younger siblings and then boarded the wagon after his father, who would be accompanying him for the first leg of his journey. Tears pricked the corners of his eyes, and he lifted his shoulders bravely.

Father and son traveled together over hills and through forests until they reached the port city. Gidalya purchased tickets, and the two boarded an ocean liner that would take Mendel away from the sinister clutches of the government.

They sailed for a few days until they sighted land in the far distance. Mendel's new country loomed larger and larger before them as the steamship drew closer. The port, however, was not built to accommodate such a massive ship. Instead, the sailors let out small rowboats which they would use to ferry the passengers to land.

This was the point at which father and son were forced to part. Mendel was to go on the rowboat to his new home, and Gidalya would remain on the steamship for its return journey.

Gidalya bent low until he was eye level with his young son. "Mendel," he said, his voice laced thickly with emotion. "I cannot accompany you any longer. This man will take you across the river, and you will be in a different country, where you will be safe. Who knows when we'll meet again? You won't be able to return home for decades. Mendel, remember the rich heritage that you come from. Remember your father and mother, who love you more than anything. Don't forget who you are!"

Mendel fell into his father's arms and began to cry. "Tatte! Don't leave me! I'll miss you too much!"

"I'll miss you too, Mendel," his father replied, caressing the boy's heaving shoulders. "I'm doing this for your benefit, Mendel. We must part here

now, and who knows when we'll see each other again? One day, in many years, we will be reunited. I want to see that you have continued in the ways I have taught you."

"But Tatte," Mendel cried, clinging to his father's pants. "I am only eight years old! How will I survive myself?"

Gidalya willed his voice to remain steady for his son's sake. "Hashem will take care of you," he said. "Hashem will take care of you."

Father and son embraced for a long, emotional moment and then it was time for Mendel to go. He hitched his backpack higher on his shoulders and walked resolutely down the ramp to the waiting rowboat.

Up on deck, Gidalya leaned over the railing, waving and waving until Mendel was but a tiny speck in the distance, disembarking from the rowboat onto the port. A kindly sailor, noticing his angst, offered him the use of his telescope and Gidalya peered through it at the shore.

He could see his little Mendel standing amongst the strangers on the port, standing out like a sore thumb. Mendel was wearing short pants, but everyone around him was wearing long pants. Mendel's cap was a completely different style than the ones the other boys were wearing, and no one else had a backpack. Gidalya's heart dipped as he watched some kids laugh at his precious Mendel, who was dressed so strangely according to the culture of his new country.

He bit his lip and peered through the telescopic lens again. Mendel was speaking to the boys, but it appeared that they did not understand him. His mouth was moving desperately as he gestured with his hands to make himself understood. Gidalya interpreted his son's hand motions easily. It seemed that Mendel was thirsty from the long trip, and wanted to know where to find a drink. The boys, however, did not understand what he

wanted, and imitated his gestures while laughing uproariously.

Gidalya watched helplessly. There was nothing he could do to assist his son, to ease his transition into the strange climate he had suddenly found himself in. "If only there was someone who cared enough to help a lost child," he said out loud.

There was a rumble, and the steamship began moving, beginning its return journey home. Gidalya took one more look through the telescope, hoping to glimpse his precious son one more time. To his relief, he saw a middle-age man approach his lost-looking son and hand him a glass of water. Moments later, the man took off his own jacket and draped it over Mendel's shoulders.

Gidalya could see the relief registering on Mendel's face; saw the way his panicked frown stretched into an enormous smile. A tremendous wave of gratitude flooded the worried father. I owe this man, Gidalya thought to himself. Boy, do I owe him. I have never felt more gratitude to anyone in my life. I am eternally grateful to him for taking care of my child. One day, when I meet up with him, I will repay him.

The nimshal to this parable, says the Chofetz Chaim, is a neshamah which is forced to part from the holiness on high and enter this world, all on his own.

Chazal say that the reason newborns cry immediately after birth is because they are protesting their fate. They don't want to be born, to be separated from the malachim, from their Father on High. The angel prods him into life despite his protest. "You must be born. This separation is for your benefit. You must be born."

Then Hashem looks down from His telescope. Who will take care of His precious child? Who will teach him to be a pious and righteous Jew? And when the child's parents, and his rabbeim,

teach him Torah, Hashem sees them helping His child and is filled with joy, pledging to repay them.

The Chofetz Chaim explains that this is the reason why the mitzvah of tochachah, rebuke, is so important. When rebuke is given over in a kind and sensitive manner, it is one of the greatest kinds of chesed one can do for his friend. When one performs this mitzvah properly, and cares enough about his friend to steer him back onto the correct path, Hashem witnesses this through His telescope. This is how we show Hashem how much we care about his children!

The rebbe Rav Hershel was the av bais din of Krakow. Pure, pious, and intimately familiar with the entire Shas, he ruled on all four sections of the Shulchan Aruch with absolute clarity and was renowned for his piety and wisdom.

Krakow was a large city in Poland, but there were many smaller villages surrounding it. These villages fell under the dominion of the rebbe Rav Hershel's rabbinical leadership, and it was therefore his responsibility to ensure that the spiritual state of these communities was up to par.

One year, shortly after Sukkos, as the winter set in, the rebbe Rav Hershel began making his rounds to the nearby villages. He would check that the mikvah was halachically sound, ensure that the marketplace was closed on Shabbos, test the scales in the local shops to determine they were not faulty, inspect the knives of the shoctim to ensure they met all halachic requirements, and make sure that the local rav was fit for his position.

At each village he visited, the rebbe Rav Hershel was treated with a royal welcome. The entire town would come out to greet him, to show honor for the Torah. Usually, he would arrive at night, and the leaders of the community would escort him to the home of his host, where a seudah would be prepared. The learned Jews in the

village would join the feast, which would mostly revolve around divrei Torah.

At one village that he visited, the rebbe Rav Hershel was invited to the home of a wealthy landowner, where he received sumptuous accommodations. There, a feast was set up, and all the talmidei chachamim of the village gathered around the table with Rav Hershel for a Torah discourse.

The home where the rebbe Rav Hershel was staying was a large one. In addition to the many rooms which the family used for themselves and for guests, the landowner rented out some of the rooms to tenants. One of these tenants was the local melamed, a learned man named Reb Mordechai Rotner.

Reb Mordechai had come to town for parnasah, and his wife and children still resided in the nearby village where he hailed from. The small room he rented from the landlord was adequate for his needs during the weeks he spent locally, teaching.

Reb Mordechai Rotner was known as the 'sharfe', the sharp one, for his blunt manner of speaking. He was extremely serious and also very private. No one really knew too much about him, other than that he was a talmid chacham and an excellent teacher. Those who could afford his services gladly paid his fees, grateful that their sons would learn under a talmid chacham of his caliber.

On this night, when the famous Rav Hershel was visiting, Reb Mordechai Rotner went to sleep early as usual. As a rebbe, he never allowed himself the luxury of staying up late, since he owed it to his students to be fully alert and present when he taught them. Therefore, while the other talmidei chachamim in the village exchanged divrei Torah with the rebbe Rav Hershel down the hallway from his small apartment, Reb Mordechai was in bed, sleeping.

Reb Mordechai slept until chatzos and then got up to recite tikkun chatzos. This special man would customarily arise at chatzos to bemoan the destruction of the bais hamikdash for a full hour, wearing sackcloth and sitting on the floor.

Now, when the rebbe Rav Hershel was present, Reb Mordechai slipped out of his home and walked down the hallway, on his way to the concealed place where he recited tikkun chatzos. His heart and mind were already on the churban, heavy with pain over the loss.

Passing the large room where Rav Hershel and sixty other talmidei chachamim were gathered, he peaked inside. There was a meal taking place, he saw, graced with ongoing Torah discussion. The people were animated, the people were alive, and the sounds of Torah reverberated endlessly.

Reb Mordechai pursed his lips and entered the room, heading straight for the head of the table. He walked up to the rebbe Rav Hershel and asked quietly, “How could the rav be sitting at a meal when in heaven, they are crying? It’s chatzos laylah! Yidden all over are crying for the pain of the Shechinah. How can the rav sit here at a meal?”

The rebbe Rav Hershel jumped in surprise. He had never met Reb Mordechai Rotner before, but his criticism stung. “Such tochachah!” he cried out appreciatively. Reaching for the mayim acharonim, he washed his hands and bentching began.

The other sixty men understood that something had happened, that Reb Mordechai had given the rav mussar, but none of them had been able to hear his words. Obliging, they allowed Rav Hershel to lead them in bentching.

The meal over, Rav Hershel disappeared into his room. The rest of the guests reluctantly went home.

The following morning, the rebbe Rav Hershel emerged from his room for Shacharis. A tremendous crowd was there, and they all davened with him. After Shacharis, Rav Hershel turned to his assistant. “The person who came over to me last night,” he began. “Last night, before we bentched. Who was he?”

“His name is Reb Mordechai Rotner. He’s a big talmid chacham.”

Rav Hershel nodded. “Can you please let him know that I want to speak to him?”

“Reb Mordechai is the melamed,” the man clarified. “He teaches the children. Should I disturb his teaching?”

“No, of course not,” Rav Hershel replied. “He can come when he has a break.”

Reb Mordechai was notified that the visiting gadol wanted to see him, and when he dismissed his young charges for recess, he went to see Rav Hershel. His body language bespoke tremendous awe and respect for the Torah, but he was not one bit apologetic for his behavior the previous night.

“Shalom aleichem,” the rebbe Rav Hershel greeted him. “Thank you so much for the tochachah you gave me last night. No one has ever given me criticism like you have. Tell me, where are you from, and what is your parnasah?”

“I come from a nearby town,” Reb Mordechai said. “And I work here as a melamed, a teacher for the young children.”

“Why don’t you teach the children in your own town?” Rav Hershel wanted to know.

“This is where I was able to find a job,” Reb Mordechai explained.

“What are the costs of living around here? How much parnasah do you need per year?” Rav Hershel continued.

Reb Mordechai named a sum, and Rav Hershel shook his head. “Are your earnings from your job as a melamed sufficient to cover the needs of you and your family?”

“Not exactly,” Reb Mordechai admitted.

Rav Hershel’s next words stunned Reb Mordechai. “I want to hire you,” he said. “I’ll pay you double what you are currently earning. Leave your position for someone else, and become my personal teacher. You’ll come along with me wherever I go and give me real, honest criticism.”

“That is what the rav wants?” Reb Mordechai asked. “My family could definitely use the money, but I’ll give the rav a disclaimer beforehand that I’m not the kind of person who plays nice. If I see something wrong, I say it like it is.”

“Excellent,” Rav Hershel agreed in satisfaction. “That’s exactly what I want, blunt honesty. I’ll be in town for a few more days. You can use the time to find a replacement, and then you’ll join me when I return home.”

Reb Mordechai agreed. He wrote a letter to his wife, explaining that he would be moving to the nearby metropolis of Krakow and arranged for a competent talmid chacham to assume his teaching responsibilities.

When it was time for the rebbe Rav Hershel to return home, Reb Mordechai Rotner went along with him. He was given a seat in shul adjacent to the rav, and he faithfully pointed out whichever shortcomings he saw.

“Excuse me, when the rav davens such a long shemonah esreh, he is holding up the entire tzibbur,” he pointed out one day.

“Excuse me, when the rav davens too quickly, it is an embarrassment to the congregation,” he pointed out three days later. “They need to see their rav davening with his whole heart.”

The rebbe Rav Hershel was grateful for these comments, happily paying Reb Mordechai his generous salary. Each time another shortcoming or area of improvement was pointed out, Rav Hershel had the opportunity to perfect himself, and that, too him, was of ultimate importance.

One night, Rav Hershel was engrossed in a complicated sugya, trying to unravel the depths of a Tosafos. He became so involved in his learning that he did not notice the passage of time. When he finally figured out the meaning several hours later, overflowing with joy, he noticed that the sun was up. Not just rising, but already high in the sky.

In a flash, he realized that he had been up the entire night and had missed shacharis. He quickly recited krias shemah and then headed for the shul. As he walked, he braced himself for Reb Mordechai Rotner’s criticism. He knew he would get criticism like he never experienced before, and in front of the entire shul no less.

Indeed, he saw Reb Mordechai Rotner standing by the door. He wore an expression that Rav Hershel could not decipher. The rav began trembling. He wanted tochachah, he paid for the tochachah, but he was genuinely afraid of the criticism he would now be subjected to.

He raised his hands in surrender. “Reb Mordechai, Reb Mordechai, please give me just three minutes to organize my thoughts before you start,” he pleaded.

Reb Mordechai looked at him, the same inscrutable expression on his face. “I am not giving any more criticism,” he finally said. “I quit my job.”

Rav Hershel was shocked. "I knew it!" he cried. "I did the greatest sin, causing a chilul Hashem before the entire city when I didn't appear for shacharis! But you still have to stay to give me mussar! How will I ever grow without you helping me?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm quitting," Reb Mordechai repeated.

"You don't understand," Rav Hershel tried explaining. "I didn't miss Shacharis because I was sleeping. I was busy –."

"I'm not giving mussar anymore," Reb Mordechai repeated again, his tone firm and unyielding."

"But why?!" Rav Hershel cried brokenly.

"How can I give tochachah to a man who walks together with the Ri Orleans?" Reb Mordechai asked.

Rav Hershel was amazed. The Ri Orleans was a Baal Tosafos, and it had been exactly his Tosafos that Rav Hershel had been working on all night.

"What do you mean?" he asked Reb Mordechai. "What do you mean, he's walking together with me?"

Reb Mordechai didn't respond. His words had been clear.

Realizing that Reb Mordechai was serious, the rebbe Rav Hershel paid him the money he owed him for his services and Reb Mordechai vanished. It is known that when a great tzaddik is involved in a Gemara, the amoraim come down to learn with him. When one is stuck on a Tosafos and learns it for hours, the Baal Tosafos will come down to learn with him. The same goes for other commentaries as well.

When the great Rav Hershel spent so much time trying to understand the Tosafos authored by the Ri Orleans, the Ri Orleans himself came down to learn with him, without him realizing it.

Reb Mordechai Rotner was so great, that when he saw Reb Hershel walking, he glimpsed the great Baal Tosafos walking along with him. The criticism at the tip of his tongue died immediately. He could not bring himself to give mussar to someone who merited to walk alongside the Ri Orleans, and he quit his job.

*Have a Wonderful Shabbos!*  
This story is taken from tape # A75

### **TORAS REB KALMAN HOTLINE**

Vaadim & Shmussen given by **Reb Kalman Krohn zt"l** are now available by phone.

USA **732.913.5616** or **718.557.7711**  
E.Y. **02.313.6038**

**Option 1:** Vaadim given in BMG  
**Option 2:** Shmussen given in Adelpia  
**Option 3:** Captivating stories taken from shiurim

To receive Vaadim by email or for questions and suggestions call/text 6098071783 or email torasrebkalman@gmail.com

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

Sponsored by:  
Eli & Malky Friedman  
Chatz & Leahle Schwab