

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Never Too Far Gone - Part I

Elimelech was a weaver by profession. His job was tedious and slow, requiring endless patience and concentration, with the output barely worth the tremendous efforts. Despite the endless hours he spent in front of his loom, Elimelech was barely earning any money. To supplement his income, he took a job as a watchman during the night hours, when the lack of daylight made it impossible for him to weave. Still, no matter how hard he worked, he was not making ends meet.

Elimelech was naturally upbeat, always cracking jokes and finding the bright side of difficult situations. However, while positivity is a positive trait, there are ways to take it too far. Elimelech was a letz, using humor not just to diffuse tense situations, but also to make light of difficulties, including his own.

When business is failing, and one cannot earn profits to make his work worthwhile, the obvious

next step is to move on to a new profession. Elimelech, however, remained before his loom, joking at his own pitiful situation as he weaved.

Not one to take life seriously, he would laugh uproariously as he handed his wife a few pennies each week, not nearly enough to pay their grocery bill. The responsibility of a man to provide for his household was beyond him; life was one big joke. His friends tried explaining to him that he was shirking his responsibilities, but Elimelech did not take their words to heart. "What's the big deal?" he would perpetually ask. "So we don't have money, nu."

"Go find yourself a real job, Elimelech," one of his acquaintances told him bluntly. "Your kids are starving. Your wife is starving. You can't leave them to die of hunger!"

"You are much too serious for your own good," Elimelech scoffed. "Dying of hunger, my foot! Weaving is a good business; good for the nerves, good for the stress. Never hurts to do a little exercise, does it? We're becoming real pros at stretches and crunches and twisting ourselves into pretzels to buy the most goods with the least money, ha, ha!"

The non-Jewish owners of the shops beside Elimelech's weaving workshops loved being entertained by the constant stream of jokes that flowed from his mouth. It didn't take much to have them all doubled over on the floor, choking with laughter at his latest witticisms.

One day, Elimelech was sitting in front of his loom, trying to ignore his hunger pangs, when a gentile entered his tiny workshop. "We're having a party now, and we need a good entertainer," he told the weaver. "Come and crack some jokes for us."

"Nah, I don't think it's for me," Elimelech replied.

“Come on, it won’t be for long, and you’ll make more money than you make from a month of weaving,” the man cajoled.

Though Elimelech felt uncomfortable by the idea, he really did need the money. And what could be so terrible about saying a few jokes at a party? Allowing himself to be persuaded, he followed the gentile out of the shop.

His performance was an instant success. Standing on a table, he recounted joke after joke as his guests laughed appreciatively. Sometime in the middle of his performance, someone handed him a shot of whiskey, which he imbibed in a single gulp. Somewhat lightheaded from the alcohol, his wisecracks were even more hilarious than they had previously been.

One short hour later, he had more money in his pocket than he made in two months. The feeling gave him an adrenaline high he had never experienced before. Walking home, he made the decision not to share the day’s experience with his wife. Better that she did not know where he had been, or even how much he had earned. There was something shameful about what he had done. It felt like he had sold his soul.

Elimelech’s wife was content with the handful of coins he presented her with. It was relatively more than he usually brought home, and would hopefully be enough to purchase nourishing food for her starving children. Gratefully, she thanked him and headed for the marketplace.

The next day, another gentile came to summon Elimelech to the bar for a morning of entertainment. Once again, his performance was a tremendous success, leaving him both tipsy and richer.

From there, everything spiraled downward. Elimelech no longer found fulfillment in his boring weaving job, which could not even pay the

bills. Instead, he found himself in the bar, entertaining crowds of drunken gentiles with every joke he could think of. The occasional shots of whiskey led to heavier alcohol consumption, and soon, he was no longer refusing the wine they kept offering him. The non-kosher wine he drunk further dulled his darkening soul.

His descent into spiritual abyss was swift. Elimelech developed a taste for fine wine and was soon spending all his earnings in the non-kosher bar. This led him further and further into sin.

Though he never told his wife about his new occupation and subsequent addiction, it was not difficult for her to figure it out on her own. Her husband rarely came home at night, and when he did, it was in a complete stupor. The trickle of coins that was never enough to support the family halted completely, and she was forced to rely on charity just to survive.

After just a few short weeks, Elimelech was barely keeping the mitzvos. He never davened, ate non-kosher food and wine, and worked on Shabbos as a private comedian for a wealthy man in the neighborhood. Not brave enough to face the betrayed look in his wife’s eyes, he began to stay away from home. Most of his nights were spent at the bar, his weekends at the wealthy man’s estate, and his days at his weaving workshop, nursing hangover after hangover.

With time, Elimelech became completely estranged from his family. Though he tried to ignore the voice of his conscience, he was ashamed of his actions and the person he had become, though he had no idea how to get out to the rut he had fallen into. Most of the time, however, he would drown out the guilty feelings with alcohol, quickly returning to his humorous and witty self.

One Friday afternoon, Elimelech stood outside his workshop, entertaining a crowd when he

noticed a buggy pull up across the street alongside the town's largest hotel. Two serious and distinguished looking men disembarked from the carriage and entered the hotel. A few moments later, they returned with the hotel's owner, Asher, who looked both excited and breathless.

Elimelech watched as the three returned to the carriage and opened the door once more. A tall, stately man with a long, white beard, slowly descended from the carriage. He was handed his cane, and accompanied by the three men, began walking to the hotel.

Instinctively, Elimelech stopped joking and the crowd grew silent, awed by the majesty surrounding the elderly man. The distinguished man disappeared inside the hotel, followed by what appeared to be the entire Jewish community, all dressed in their Shabbos best.

Abandoning his non-Jewish cronies, Elimelech hastily crossed to street to inquire about what was going on.

"Don't you know?" came the response. "The great rebbe, Rav Chatzkel, is in town for Shabbos! He is known to possess ruach hakodesh, and is an electrifying speaker. There is no one who has listened to his lectures and has not been affected by his words."

Elimelech was confused. "When is he speaking? Now, a few hours before Shabbos?"

"Not now. He's having a tisch after the seudah tonight. But it'll be tight on space, so they are selling seats now. If you want to come to the tisch tonight, you'd better hurry up and buy yourself a seat before they book up."

Elimelech watched the man hurry into the hotel. "Maybe this is my chance," he said softly to himself. "Maybe this is my chance."

Impulsively, he walked into the hotel and stood on line to purchase a seat. Having spent the entire week's earnings on booze, he had no money to purchase the seat, but he hoped the hotel owner would allow him to reserve it anyway and pay him the next week.

"You sheigetz!" Asher, the hotel owner, yelled at him. "I see you all day, drinking and joking with the other shkotzim in the village! You have no place here!"

"Please," Elimelech begged. "Please, reserve me a seat. I really would like to participate. I don't have money now, but I'll pay you back next—"

"Absolutely not," Asher said coldly. "A sheigetz like you does not belong at such a holy gathering. If you could afford a seat, maybe. But giving you a seat on credit? Definitely not!"

Ashamed and dejected, Elimelech left the hotel, but his determination didn't waver. Mounting his horse, he galloped to the estate of the wealthy landowner, whom he usually spent his weekends entertaining. Hesitantly, he asked the wealthy gentile to lend him money.

"Lend you money?" the gentile asked, shaking his head. "Come inside. We're having a two-day affair, as usual. There's no need for you to borrow the money; you'll earn it yourself after you entertain us."

Elimelech shook his head, somewhat desperately. He sensed that his spiritual salvation was so close, and he was not about to give it up without a fight.

"I can't perform for you this week," he said firmly. "There's a great rabbi visiting, and I want to go see him. The thing is that I don't have the money to reserve a seat. Can you perhaps lend it to me?"

The man laughed. “What’s this nonsense about seeing a great rabbi? You’re not that type at all! Don’t go anywhere, and stay with us this weekend. The party won’t be the same without you.”

Realizing he needed to speak the gentile’s language, Elimelech changed tactics. “I want to go to the rabbi because I would like to observe the way he speaks and acts, so that I can impersonate him for all of you when I come back. You’ll get a first-class rendition of the grand rabbi performed by yours truly!”

The gentile burst into peals of laughter. “Let’s see you do that!” he guffawed. “Alright, we’ll have to do without you this week. How much money do you need?”

Elimelech left the wealthy man’s estate with a few bills, just enough to pay for a seat at Rav Chatzkel’s tisch. Nervously, he re-entered the hotel and walked up to the front desk.

“You again!” Asher, frenzied with hosting such a distinguished visitor as well as the gathering, was not in the greatest mood.

Silently, Elimelech placed the bills down on the counter. “Can I purchase a seat?” he asked determinedly.

“I guess so, since you’ve paid in advance,” Asher said, not sounding happy about it. “Do me a favor. Don’t make any jokes in the rebbe’s presence, or we will throw you out.”

“Don’t worry,” Elimelech said tightly, though he understood where the other man was coming from. “I won’t say a word.”

It was already very close to Shabbos, and crowds began streaming toward the hotel for Minchah and Kabbalas Shabbos. With a sinking feeling, Elimelech realized that he did not have anything

suitable to wear to shul. His regular Shabbos clothing were at home, with his wife, and there was no way he could return home to get them. His wife would never believe he was sincere.

With no other choice, he changed into the most suitable clothing he could find and joined the throngs headed toward the hotel. It seemed as though the entire city was spending Shabbos in the hotel with the rebbe. Entire families were walking together, slowly filing through the entrance. Watching the smiling faces around him, Elimelech felt a keen sense of longing for his own family.

Inside the hotel, the woman disappeared into the women’s section and the young children, holding tightly onto their fathers’ hands, continued onward with the men toward the shul. Elimelech could almost feel the touch of his little Shua’s hand clutching his own, realizing sadly that he was the only one there who was completely alone.

Standing at the very back of the room, feeling alien and removed from the happenings around him, Elimelech watched as the crowd began Minchah, followed by Kabbalas Shabbos. They sang and danced through the kabbalistic verses of Lecha Dodi, completely swept away by the beauty and majesty of the moment.

Elimelech watched. He saw the dancing, heard the singing, practically felt the aura enveloping the other congregants, but although he longed desperately to participate, there was an invisible wall preventing him from doing so. The agony of seeing such a moving experience while being unable to join was excruciating.

“What will be with me?!” he cried silently. “I have no money, no family, and no Yiddishkeit either! How can I ever get out of this rut I fell into?!” Noiselessly, he began sobbing and sobbing. How had he forfeited his olam habah for emptiness?

They had reached the final stanza of Lecha Dodi. The entire congregation turned around, as is the custom, and everyone witnessed Elimelech's silent weeping. Embarrassed at the hundreds of pairs of eyes suddenly upon him, Elimelech looked away, but he could not escape the wise and thoughtful gaze of the visiting rebbe, Rav Chatzkel.

After Maariv, the crowd dispersed to make kiddush at home and eat a quick seudah. They were all invited back to the hotel to join the rebbe during his own seudah, which would begin one hour later. Only Elimelech, who had no seudah to go to, remained in the empty room, his head lowered, his eyes downcast.

Less than an hour later, the people began streaming back into the hotel. Asher, the proprietor, had set up many tables connected to each other in the largest room in the hotel, forming one huge table capable of seating close to one hundred people. The people lined up at the door, and Asher directed each man to a seat.

When Elimelech's turn came, Asher placed him in the next available seat, which was at the foot of the very long table, directly across from where Rav Chatzkel would sit. Elimelech realized immediately that this seat would put him directly into rebbe's scope of vision, but there was nothing he could do about it. Weak from weeping and from not eating, he sat in his assigned chair and waited for the seudah to begin.

The rebbe entered the room, which immediately grew silent, save for the shuffling of a few chairs as the people stood respectfully. Lifting the silver goblet set before him, Rav Chatzkel began chanting the words of the Friday night kiddush in a soul-stirring tune. Instinctively, everyone shut their eyes and began to sway. The rebbe's chanting brought life to the words they recited every week. This was testimony to the fact that

Hashem created the world and continues to create it every moment of the day!

After an uplifting kiddush and hamotzi, the hotel attendants began distributing portions of fish. Elimelech accepted his plate with tears in his eyes. He hadn't eaten anything since midday, but for weeks already, he hadn't been careful with the kashrus of his food. Now, eating together with the other Jews, he could not believe how far he had gone. What have I done? Where have I gone? How could I have done this to my family?

His thoughts were interrupted by a sudden bang on the table. "Zemiros!" the gabbai announced.

The rebbe began zemiros with a slow, inspiring tune. The entire crowd joined along in a stunning harmony. When the song was over, he began a new tune, this one quicker, with an upbeat tempo. The mood changed from soulful to joyous and then to soulful again as the rebbe alternated between the two types of melodies.

Elimelech knew all the songs, but he could not bring himself to join in. There was something, some barrier in his heart, that prevented him from fully participating in the uplifting experience.

After the singing died down, the gabbai rapped on the table again. "The rebbe will now say a vort on this week's parshah," he announced.

Rav Chatzkel stood up, but did not speak about the current parshah. Instead, he spoke about sin. He described what an aveirah is, and how a person who falls prey to sin is destroying himself. By succumbing to sin, a person causes his own suffering. "The Aibeshter is crying!" the rebbe cried in a broken voice, looking directly into Elimelech eyes as he spoke. "Oy, gevald! What happens to a Yid when he does an aveirah?" He began crying and the crowd could not help but be swept into tears along with him.

From behind their tears, people exchanged glances. What was going on? This wasn't a pre-Yom Kippur lecture; why was the rebbe speaking about sin?

But for the rebbe, nothing and no one existed besides for Elimelech the weaver, and so he continued saying whatever he felt Elimelech needed to hear. "How much pain a person brings into the world when he sins!" Rav Chatzkel continued to lament. "How much evil he brings into this world! Do you fully comprehend what it means for someone to eat non-kosher food? Do you understand what desecrating the Shabbos does to a person? Oy, gevald!"

The rebbe's pained sobs echoed throughout the large room as the crowd cried along with him. Elimelech too, sobbed hysterically, as the rebbe's words struck their mark. What had he done? What had he done?!!

Suddenly, Rav Chatzkel banged on the table and began singing an upbeat melody. Confused for a moment, the crowd shrugged but then joined in. The entire hotel was alive as the people soared together in song.

The rebbe lifted his hand and the singing died down. "Do you understand what a true baal teshuvah is?" he asked, launching into a new theme. "Can you recognize the greatness of a man who returns his heart to Hashem? 'Tatte,' he's saying. 'Take me home! Give me another chance!' And with his tremendous love for us, Hashem agrees." For the next few minutes, he continued speaking about the power and greatness of authentic repentance, his eyes never leaving Elimelech's face.

With that, the rebbe began another song, and then another and another. Oblivious, Elimelech continued crying and crying and crying. It was a long seudah and many zemiros later that the

exhausted crowd finally went home and rebbe retired to his room.

Elimelech, however, did not budge. He remained where he was, his cheeks resting in his hands as a puddle formed on the table below, regretting his terrible deeds. With a pained heart, he finally fell asleep right there at the table.

The next morning, the crowd returned for Shacharis and mussaf. Elimelech tried desperately to participate, but still found that he couldn't. Instead, he watched the others connect to Hashem as they davened with thought and feeling, wondering if he would reach a similar level of connection one day.

After davening, everyone went back home to eat with their families and returned an hour later for a seudah with the rebbe. Once again, Rav Chatzkel spoke about the gravity of sin, bringing the crowd to tears. Once again, he roused them with a joyous tune before continuing to speak about the power of teshuvah. All this time, Elimelech sat in his seat directly opposite the rav and absorbed the words spoken directly to him.

When shalosh seudos came, and the same thing repeated itself again, Elimelech found that he no longer had the strength to endure it. He closed his eyes weakly to avoid the rebbe's piercing gaze, crying and crying and crying, letting the mussar and the love and the music wash through his soul.

When Shabbos was over, and havdalah was made, everyone stood up and filed past the rebbe, who blessed each of the warmly. At the very end of the line, leaning on the table for physical support, was Elimelech.

"Please, rebbe," he whispered weakly. "Can I speak to the rebbe for just a minute?"

Rav Chatzkel regarded his pained face with compassion. "Come sit with me in my room," he invited.

Sitting across from each other at the small table in the rebbe's room, the rebbe said kindly, "What is bothering you, my son? I see that you were crying the entire Shabbos. Something is bothering you."

"The rebbe surely knows what's bothering me," Elimelech said hoarsely. "The speeches the rebbe gave at the Shabbos seudos were intended specifically for me, to prompt me to do teshuvah. I'm sure the rebbe realized immediately that I am a sinner."

"Let me hear," the rebbe said quietly. "What aveiros did you do? Which sins did you commit?" Elimelech's face turned red, but he knew that getting help would have to be painful. He began to speak. And speak. And speak.

"Oy, oy," the rebbe replied, hearing one sin after the next. "Oy, oy, oy."

"Rebbe, tell me how to repent," Elimelech continued. "What should I do to merit atonement?"

Rav Chatzkel regarded him thoughtfully. "You must fast for three days and three nights," he said finally. "That will be your repentance."

Elimelech gaped at him. "The rebbe is making fun of me," he croaked. "I just finished recounted the thousands of sins I have committed. That's all I need to do to repent? Just three days and three nights of fasting?"

"I hear," the rebbe said slowly. "You are truly ready to go through a difficult process to achieve complete and authentic teshuvah?"

"Yes!" Elimelech cried.

"Okay, then, this is what you have to do," the rebbe began. "From now on, you are not to eat anything during the week. For six days each week, you will eat no food, and drink small amounts of water only at night. Only on Shabbos will you be permitted to eat a little."

"For how long, rebbe?" Elimelech asked, accepting his fate.

"For the remainder of your life," Rav Chatzkel informed him. "You are to fast the entire week for the remainder of your life, unless you receive a sign from Hashem that your teshuvah was accepted."

To be continued...

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!
This story is taken from tape # A348

TORAS REB KALMAN HOTLINE

Vaadin & 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: Vaadin given in BMG
Option 2: Shmussen given in Adelpia
Option 3: Captivating stories taken from shiurim

To receive Vaadin by email or for questions and suggestions
call/text 609.807.1783 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

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Never Too Far Gone - Part II

Recap: Elimelech strayed from the Torah path, and at whim, attended the tischen of a visiting rebbe. Inspired, he discussed a path to teshuvah with the rebbe.

“This is what you should do,” Rav Chatzkel instructed. “From now on, you are not to eat anything during the week. For six days each week, you will eat no food, and drink small amounts of water only at night. Only on Shabbos will you be permitted to eat a little.”

“For how long, *rebbe?*” Elimelech asked, accepting his fate.

“For the remainder of your life,” Rav Chatzkel informed him. “You are to fast the entire week for the remainder of your life, unless you receive a sign from Hashem that your teshuvah was accepted.”

With that, Rav Chatzkel blessed him with strength and success, and reminded him of the lofty place that true *baalei teshuvah* merit to reach.

With a lighter heart, Elimelech left the room, his head whirling. He realized that he would need to find a place to stay while he did teshuvah. He was no longer welcome at home, and his weaving workshop had become the hangout for drunken gentiles. With nowhere to turn, he decided to go to *shul*.

At shul, he found the shul’s shamash, R’ Dov, preparing to lock the building. He had just finished cleaning up from Shabbos and was ready to go home.

“R’ Dov!” Elimelech called. “Please, wait a moment. Can we go inside the *shul*? I need to speak to you.”

The shamash looked at him questioningly, but did not object. Pocketing his large key ring, he opened the door of the shul and walked inside. Elimelech followed behind him.

The shamash led Elimelech into the *bais medrash* and sat down. Warily, he looked at his unexpected guest. “Yes?”

“You know who I am, R’ Dov, don’t you?” Elimelech asked.

R’ Dov nodded slowly. “You’re Elimelech. The weaver. The... comedian.”

Elimelech grimaced. “I’m sure you’ve heard the rumors about where I’ve been and what I’ve done over the past few months.”

R’ Dov, looking uncomfortable, nodded.

“Unfortunately, most of the rumors are probably true,” Elimelech continued with a sigh. “I’ve fallen, badly, and now the Rebbe, Rav Chatzel,

has given me a path to teshuvah. The thing is, that I don't really have where to be right now. I'm not welcome at home, and I can't go back to my workshop, which would drag me right back into sin."

"I hear," R' Dov said cautiously. "And you think I can help you?"

"Would it be possible for me to stay in the shul for the next little while?" Elimelech asked hopefully. "Is there a room somewhere where I can be alone while I do teshuvah?"

R' Dov hesitated for a moment, unsure whether he could trust Elimelech's sincerity.

"Please," Elimelech pleaded. "I have nowhere else to go. Now is my opportunity to do teshuvah. Please, can you help me?"

"Alright," the shamash finally said, standing up. "You can stay here. The shul is locked from after *Maariv* until about an hour before *Shacharis*, and it is also locked between *Shacharis* and *Minchah*. Besides the three *tefillos*, this place is locked and empty all day."

"Thank you," Elimelech said gratefully. "But what about during davening? I don't want anyone to see me. Is there a private room somewhere where I can stay during davening?"

R' Dov hesitated just a fraction of a second before deciding that if he was helping this lost Jew do *teshuvah*, he would help him all the way. "I'm about to let you in on a tremendous secret," he cautioned. "This goes no further, is that clear?"

"Certainly," Elimelech agreed.

"When the shul was built, a secret bunker was created beneath the building," R' Dov disclosed, lowering his voice despite the fact that no one besides for Elimelech could possibly overhear.

"One never knows when such a room will be needed to shield us from the gentiles," he explained.

Elimelech nodded. "Where is it? Will you allow me to stay there?"

"The entrance to the bunker is beneath the bimah," the *shamash* said. "When you push away the bimah, there is a door that leads to the secret room twenty feet beneath the shul. There is a rickety ladder that you can use to get to the room. If you'd like to use it, I can help you down there every morning before *Shacharis* and then again before *Minchah*, and I would help you back up again once I lock up the shul."

"Yes, please, that sounds really good," Elimelech replied.

"I have to warn you, though, that it's dark and cold down there," R' Dov cautioned. "Stay upstairs in the warm shul tonight, and I will help you get down early tomorrow morning before *Shacharis*."

"Thank you; thank you so much," Elimelech said over and over as the shamash made his way to the door. "I really appreciate this. May it be a merit for you and your family!"

"Amen," R' Dov answered. "Good night. I'll see you in the morning." A gust of freezing air tore through the building when he pushed open the heavy oak door. A moment later, the key turned in the lock, and it was silent. Elimelech was alone in the building.

Taking a *tehillim* off the bookshelf, he began beseeching Hashem to forgive him for his sins. Alone in the dark and silent shul, and overcome by the effects of the inspiring Shabbos, he prayed like he never prayed before.

Early the next morning, R' Dov returned. With Elimelech standing nervously behind him, he heaved the bimah forward and picked up the rug that had been laying beneath it to reveal a small trapdoor.

The shamash bent down and pried the door open. Breathing hard, he stood up. "This is it," he said, brushing off his pants. Lighting a candle, he held it over the entrance.

Peering in, Elimelech could see a room deep below. A table and a single chair were the sole furnishings in the dark, windowless chamber.

"There are footholds against the wall on this side, leading all the way down," R' Dov pointed. "Put your feet down, and you'll feel them. I'll hold the candle so that you'll have light."

Gingerly, Elimelech placed his foot in the small niche in the wall. With R' Dov holding the small flame from above, he slowly descended into the bunker. As R' Dov had warned, it was cold and dark.

The shamash lowered down a packet of matches and a decent supply of candles. "I'll come back after davening to help you up," he promised before closing the trap door and covering it with the rug.

Elimelech could hear the thud of the bimah as it was dragged back into place. The room was eerily dark. Lighting a candle, he shivered in the cold air and wondered if there were any rodents sharing his new quarters with him.

Soon, sounds of voices and movement filtered down into the cold bunker. Elimelech listened as the chazzan began *Shacharis*, once again, experiencing the feeling of not belonging. Despite his efforts to do teshuva, he felt entirely removed from the congregation of Jews praying above his head.

Two hours later, when the shul finally quieted down, the trapdoor was lifted. Light and fresh air rushed into the room, and Elimelech breathed deeply.

"You can come up now," R' Dov called, his face visible at the top of the opening. "I'll be here to help you climb over the top."

"Thanks," Elimelech called back, gripping the footholds as he carefully climbed up. It was still early in the day, but already he was missing his breakfast. Biting his lip, he concentrated on the grooves in the wall, slowly making his way into the warmth, light, and air of the *bais medrash*.

When his head and hands were aboveground, R' Dov grasped his hand and hoisted him over. "Were you okay down there?"

"More or less," Elimelech replied, collapsing into a chair.

"Let me go prepare you something to eat," the kindly shamash offered.

"No, no," Elimelech protested. "I'm not allowed to eat. I'm fasting, as part of my teshuvah."

"Ah," the shamash nodded in understanding. "Alright then, I'm leaving now and locking the building. I'll come back before *Minchah* to help you back down."

"Thank you so much," Elimelech murmured as he watched the shamash go.

For the next few hours, Elimelech recited Tehillim and spoke to Hashem in his own words. He begged to be allowed to renew his relationship with Hashem and *klal* Yisroel, to once more feel that connection that he no longer felt.

Shortly, before *Minchah*, R' Dov returned and helped him back into the bunker. For the next four

hours, various minyanim gathered for *Minchah* and then Maariv above Elimelech's head as he followed along below. Now, with his strength ebbing from his lack of food intake, he felt somewhat more connected to the congregation davening above him.

When R' Dov returned much later and shined a candle into the bunker entrance, he found Elimelech sleeping fitfully below. Blowing out the candle, the agile shamash threw his legs over the entrance and clambered down the makeshift ladder.

"R' Yid, R' Yid!" he cried, rousing Elimelech. "The shul is empty; you can come up now."

Elimelech opened his eyes and squinted in the bright light. The acute emptiness in his stomach and the pounding of his head made it difficult for him to concentrate on the face before him. "Do you have water?" he asked weakly.

"Sure, let me get you some," R' Dov said, heading back toward the ladder. "Do you want me to help you up first?"

"Okay," Elimelech agreed.

The way up was far more difficult this time than it had been the first time Elimelech had climbed the makeshift ladder earlier that morning. With R' Dov coming up behind him, he stepped over the edge of the opening into the warm *bais medrash*. R' Dov hurried to bring him a drink of water, which he gulped thirstily. After ensuring that Elimelech was okay, the devoted shamash locked up and left.

Exhausted, Elimelech lined up a few chairs and laid down. Within minutes, he was asleep.

Thus ended the first day of Elimelech's teshuvah. The days that came afterward followed a similar pattern. Down again, up again, down again, up

again, as the rumbling in his stomach got louder and the pounding in his head got stronger. Monday passed, then Tuesday, then Wednesday, then Thursday. Elimelech grew weaker and weaker, hanging on by the life-giving water he drank in the evenings. He spent the time saying Tehillim and *davening* for forgiveness.

Friday night came. Elimelech was sitting huddled in the bunker, waiting for davening to be over so that he could finally eat something. He heard the scratching of chairs and the thud of footsteps as the shul emptied out, waiting for the shamash to move the bimah, open the trapdoor, and free him from his cell.

He waited and waited and waited.

When davening was over, R' Dov walked out together with a few of his neighbors, chatting amiably. Completely forgetting about the man languishing in the shul's bunker, he sang Shalom Aleichem and made kiddush. The shamash and his family washed and enjoyed fragrant challah, tasty fish, and delicious chicken. After *bentching*, the exhausted shamash went to bed and promptly fell asleep.

In the bunker, Elimelech realized that he had been forgotten about. Terribly weak and dizzy, he was sure death was very near. He fought to stay awake, certain that if he fell asleep, he would never wake up again.

After a while, he realized that he did not have sufficient energy to remain awake. "Hashem," he whispered with his last embers of strength. "I see that my teshuvah is not being accepted and I am going to leave this world. Please, at least let my death atone for my terrible sins! Please be forgive me!"

Whispering "Shema Yisroel", his head slumped on the table before him, and sleep overtook him.

Soon, Elimelech began dreaming. In his dream, a man with a white beard came over to him. “My son, my son,” the man said warmly. “Your teshuvah has been accepted by Hashem. Go home! Go home to your wife and children and return to a life of Torah and *mitzvos*. Sell your belongings and purchase a home near a mikvah, which you should use daily. You will merit tremendous growth in Torah.”

Elimelech suddenly woke up. He opened his eyes and glanced around weakly, trying to orient himself to his surroundings. It took a moment for him to remember. It was Shabbos, and he was in the shul’s secret bunker, not having eaten a single bite for the entire week.

Before he had a chance to think much longer, he heard the heavy movement of the bimah being pushed from its place above his head. Moments later, light shone into the cold bunker and the shamash’s worried face appeared at the top.

“Reb Elimelech! Reb Elimelech!” R’ Dov cries were apologetic as he made his way down the makeshift ladder. He reached the bottom and turned to Elimelech, who was sitting weakly with his head on the table. “Forgive me, I fell asleep and somehow forgot all about you! I did not mean to leave you alone in this freezing room. Are you okay? Let me help you upstairs.”

“Thank you,” Elimelech replied. “I don’t think I have the strength to climb up, though.”

The shamash regarded him with concern. “I don’t like how you look,” he declared. “You must eat properly. Where will you eat the seudah? Will you come to my house?”

Elimelech shook his head. “I want to go home,” he whispered.

“Alright, first things first,” R’ Dov said. “We need to get you upstairs, and then we’ll take it

from there.” He studied the man before him for a few seconds. “You’re all skin and bones, R’ Elimelech. It shouldn’t be a big deal for me to carry you up.”

Elimelech didn’t protest, so R’ Dov lifted him with one arm and, using his other arm, felt his way up the ladder. It wasn’t easy, and by the time they reached the top, both men were sweating profusely. Elimelech staggered into the nearest chair and lay his head on the table.

“Well!” R’ Dov said in satisfaction, breathing hard. “You wanted to go home, you said? Home, as in, to wherever you were living before you started using the shul’s bunker?”

“Home,” Elimelech said feebly. “Home to my wife, to my children.”

R’ Dov’s ample eyebrows did a complicated dance, and he seemed at a loss for words. “Are you sure?” he finally asked.

“Yes.” Elimelech’s voice, though barely louder than a faint whisper, was firm. “I don’t know... if... I’ll manage the entire walk home,” he said hesitantly.

R’ Dov made an affronted face. “What did you think, that I would abandon you now, after a week of taking care of you so devotedly? As soon as you feel ready, I’ll help you walk home.”

With one arm supportively around Elimelech’s shoulder and the other clutching his hand compassionately, the kindly shamash and the weaver slowly made their way out of the shul and down the road in the direction of Elimelech’s home.

Elimelech, leaning heavily on R’ Dov as he took one painful step after the next, wondered how his wife would react when she saw him, praying silently that she would give him a chance. He had

betrayed her, and she owed him nothing, but Elimelech hoped she would find it within her heart to allow him to prove himself worthy of her forgiveness.

As the two men walked up the path leading to the front door, Elimelech mustered the strength to stand on his own. “Thank you,” he whispered emotionally to the devoted shamash. “Thank you for everything you’ve done for me over the past week. I think I’ll be okay now.”

“Are you sure?” R’ Dov asked, unconvinced.

Elimelech hesitated, wavering between his desire for privacy and his fear of dying on the front stoop, locked out by his wife, with no one else to help him. He didn’t respond.

“I’ll be waiting at the edge of your property, in case you need me,” the shamash said, instinctively understanding. He backed away as Elimelech knocked on the front door.

“Who is it?” Elimelech heard his wife call.

“It’s me,” he said, his stomach fluttering nervously. “It’s me, your husband, Elimelech.”

Her eye appeared in the peephole. “You!” she cried through the door. “What kind of husband are you?!”

“Please, open the door,” Elimelech begged.

“For you?!” Her laugh was bitter. “Go back to your gentile friends, have some more whiskey, and go lose yourself in sin. We’ve suffered enough from your betrayal!”

“Please, give me a chance,” Elimelech pleaded, his voice cracking. “I’ve done teshuvah, and I want to come home. Please don’t turn me away!” From behind the door, his wife hesitated for a long moment. Could it be he was speaking the

truth? Had Elimelech truly repented? She would have to take a gamble, and she knew she wouldn’t be able to live with herself if she might have turned down someone who had done genuine teshuvah.

Making a swift decision, she unlocked the door and opened it a crack before running off to the recesses of her room. Elimelech’s state would remain to be seen. She would remain in the background, waiting and observing.

Elimelech pushed the door open and stepped slowly inside. The children, it seemed, were all asleep, and his wife was nowhere in sight. Heading to the kitchen, he found the wine and silver kiddush cup and sat down at the table to make kiddush.

Washing his hands, he made hamotzi and ate a small piece of challah. Unaccustomed to eating, his body could handle no more. He was exhausted but didn’t dare go sleep in his bedroom. Instead, he laid down beside the table and promptly fell asleep.

Peeking out from the doorway of her room, his wife watched him carefully, trying to divine his sincerity. She remained awake the entire night, keeping guard lest he awaken, unsure what her next step should be.

In the morning, Elimelech was still in the exact same position, sleeping soundly on the floor. Gently, she roused him. “Elimelech, please wake up,” she called gently.

He sat up heavily. Every bone in his body ached, and it took him a moment to place where he was. Could it be? Was he finally home?

With stiff fingers, he dressed and called out to his wife that he was going to shul. The next thing he knew, little Shua’s hand had slipped into his own, joining him for the short walk to the shul that had

served as his home during the most intense week of his life. Elimelech felt as though he was in a daze. How had this happened so quickly?

With his son at his side, Elimelech sat down at the back of the shul, trying to ignore the many whispers around him. His presence, it seemed, had caused a big sensation, and people noted how much weight he had lost and how serious he looked while wondering what he was doing in shul. He could sense that his own little Shua, too, was still suspicious of him, and he hoped to one day renew his trust with the people he loved most. Returning home from shul with his young son, Elimelech was warmed by the excited welcome he received from his other children. Almost naturally, he took his seat at the head of the table and slipped into a fatherly role of leading the seudah. His wife continued to watch him silently. By the time the meal was over, she was convinced of his sincerity. "Tell me what happened," she requested softly.

"Not now," Elimelech responded. "Today is Shabbos, and this is not something to speak about on Shabbos. But don't worry, I'll tell you everything once Shabbos is over."

That night, once Shabbos was over, he sat down with his wife. The entire story came out, beginning with his shameful career that had led him astray, continuing with the inspiring Shabbos with Rav Chatzel, and ending with the subsequent week of teshuvah.

"Alone and dying from starvation in the shul bunker just last night, I had a dream," he concluded. "I was informed in my dream that my repentance was complete and that I should return home. I was given instructions to ensure that I will not slip again. Are you willing to go along with them?"

"I'll go along happily with whatever needs to be done in order to ensure that you remain on the

proper path," his wife pledged loyally. "What were the instructions?"

"We need to move to a home right next door to a mikvah," Elimelech said. "I need to immerse myself daily."

"Is that all?" she asked when he was quiet for a moment. "That's not a big deal at all. Of course, we'll move. I'll start looking for something suitable tomorrow morning."

A few short weeks later, Elimelech sold his home and moved with his family to a nearby town, settling in a small but comfortable cottage neighboring a mikvah. He found a respectable *parnasah* and dedicated himself to Torah, eventually becoming a tremendous *talmid chacham*.

A Jew is never too far gone to do a complete *teshuvah*.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A348

TORAS REB KALMAN HOTLINE

Vaadin & 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: Vaadin given in BMG

Option 2: Shmussen given in Adelpia

Option 3: Captivating stories taken from shiurim

To receive Vaadin by email or for questions and suggestions call/text 609.807.1783 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