

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

The Thief's Belief *Part I*

The following story is printed in the sefer Ahavas Chaim.

Our generation is blessed with an abundance of *talmidei chachamim* and Torah resources, and a significant percentage of the community are learned scholars. In previous centuries, however, it was not this way. Only the few *gedolei hador* and the local *rabbanim* possessed Torah knowledge; majority of the common folk were ignorant in Torah.

Growing up in this era in one of the Middle Eastern countries, Yedidya was of the simple Jews. He knew how to daven and kept the *mitzvos* the way his mother taught him, but on the whole, he was an ignoramus. Until his bar mitzvah, he spent his time helping out at home and fooling around with his friends, but once he passed the halachic threshold from boy to man, it was time for him to begin earning a livelihood.

Yedidya found earning a livelihood to be a lot more difficult than it sounds. Despite the tremendous effort and energy each venture took from him, he found that he was simply not making money. It was his finances' sorry state of affairs that led him to a creative idea one day.

He would become a thief.

Let Sadya and Moshe and Yonatan and Rachamim sweat for the money. His occupation would be to pilfer the money from their pockets. After all, Yedidya rationalized, he needed money, and robbery was just as worthwhile an occupation as any other.

After a while, he had his operation perfectly running. First, he would steal small wads of cash, either by pickpocketing someone's wallet, or through midnight break-ins of homes and businesses. Then, he would invest the money into shady business deals, swindle other people, all to turn a modest profit.

Yedidya's 'position' was not a unique one. Throughout Europe and the Middle East, the small, poverty-stricken Jewish communities were plagued with the problem of local thieves. Being that so many were desperately poor, the *nisayon* of robbery was tremendous.

For five years, Yedidya swindled and cheated and robbed his way through business. When he turned eighteen, it was time for him to marry. The wily matchmakers, though they knew somewhat of his occupation, managed to sell his name to Chaya, an unsuspecting girl from a nearby town, and soon they got married.

After their marriage, Chaya naturally questioned her husband about his source of income, and Yedidya tried to answer vaguely. "I invest a little, do some odd jobs," he responded. She accepted this and the conversation moved on.

A few months into their marriage, however, Yedidya found himself admitting to his wife that

he was actually a thief. “The good kind,” he quickly explained as her expression turned to horror, then disgust, then deep disappointment. “I only take what I need, and I don’t take a lot. I leave most of it for the owner.”

Chaya’s expression closed. Never in her life had she felt so betrayed, but there was little she could do. She realized that Yedidya would never agree to give her a *get*, and even if he did, she would never get remarried. As difficult as the reality was for her, she eventually learned to make peace with it.

Yedidya was good at his game. He knew the best victims and when to time his robberies. He generally timed his break-ins for late *motzai* Shabbos, since he found that people were most relaxed at that time and often left their valuables less secure than usual. He would make rounds to the nearby towns, collecting candlesticks and goblets and other silver objects, along with money and jewels.

Eventually, the people realized who was responsible for their losses, and they began to keep away from Yedidya. They regarded him with pity, understanding what an empty life he lived, but difficult life circumstances couldn’t condone his actions.

The day came when Yedidya walked into shul for *Shacharis* like he usually did and met the cold stares of the rest of the community. “Throw him out!” someone yelled, and a few more men joined in the chant. “Throw him out! Throw him out!” Yedidya took a step back, bewildered, but the men didn’t have pity on him.

“How can you sit here and daven beside the very men you stole from yesterday and last week and last month?!” someone asked him testily. “The nerve! Please get out and don’t come back!”

Yedidya stumbled out of the *bais medrash*, embittered and embarrassed. That day, he *davened* alone at home, afraid to venture out to

shul. That marked the downward spiral of his *tefillah*. He stopped going to shul and continued praying at home, but these prayers were rushed and lacking in meaning.

At this point, Yedidya and Chaya were married for more than ten years, and they had still not been blessed with children.

One day, a kindly neighbor, one who still deemed it proper to nod and smile at Yedidya when he met him, offered his advice. “Do *teshuvah*,” he urged. “Stop this lowly thievery, repent, and Hashem will bless you with children!”

“Ha!” Yedidya replied, his tone bitter. “You think Hashem is not giving me children because I am a thief? There are far worse people than me who are raising big families!”

Another five years passed, and Chaya’s arms remained empty. Both of their hearts were broken by their pain, but they were unwilling to change their habits. The saddest part was Chaya’s attitude toward her husband’s ‘job’. While she had originally been a repulsed and reluctant partner, she had become enthusiastic about her husband’s ‘work’ over the course of their marriage. She was now on the same page as he, seeing nothing wrong with being a thief.

One Shabbos, Yedidya was sitting outside when he noticed a large crowd passing by. “Hey,” he called out. “What’s going on? Where’s everyone going?”

“Don’t you know?” came the response. “The great Chacham Dovid is here for Shabbos, and he is going to be speaking at the main shul before *krias haTorah*. Why don’t you come hear it?”

“Na, not interested,” Yedidya said, waiving them on.

Moments later, another crowd of people walked past, followed by more and more people streaming down the street. “Why don’t you come

along?” his kindly neighbor asked, stopping outside of Yedidya’s house. “This is an opportunity not to be missed.”

“No thanks, it’s not for me,” Yedidya replied.

He continued to watch as the crowds came. He saw the regulars of the small shul down the block pass his house; obviously, they were giving up their regular *minyana* to be in the main shul and hear the *chacham*. He saw the members of the shul on the outskirts of town walking down the street; they, too, didn’t want to miss the *rav*’s lecture. Suddenly eager not to miss out, he grabbed his hat and followed the crowd.

The main shul was jam packed, but utterly silent, as everyone waited for the *rav* to begin. “We must strengthen our *emunah*,” Chacham Dovid began, his fiery voice resonating throughout the large *bais medrash*. “Each individual must recognize that his income, the amount of food and money he will have each year, is decided on Rosh Hashanah. No matter how much *hishtadlus* a person does or does not do, he will achieve the same result: exactly the amount Hashem decreed for him on Rosh Hashanah.”

The *rav* paused for a moment and then raised his voice to a booming decibel. “Then why resort to *genaivah*?” he cried. “Why resort to pilfering and stealing and usurious interest? Whatever *parnasah* you are supposed to have has already been decided! There is no reason to go to unscrupulous means to receive it!”

Yedidya listened, his face turning colors. He wanted to flee, but he was sandwiched in the mass of humanity packing the *bais medrash* and had no choice but listen.

“Why would a person stoop to thievery if it’s only giving him whatever he would get from a permissible livelihood anyway?” Chacham Dovid continued. “What happens to a thief? He loses all his friends, of course! He becomes shunned and

ostracized from the community. And for what? For money he would have gotten anyway!

“A thief is a fool! Not only is he not getting any more money and not only does he have a miserable existence here in this world, shunned by the community, he doesn’t receive a portion in the World to Come either. He is going to go straight to Gehinnom.”

With that, the *rav* began to cry. “Oy, Gehinnom,” he wailed. “Ooh, is it hot. You would think that once a person is in the ground, he is sleeping and it is all over, but no! No, no, no! The *ganav* is in Gehinnom, roasting to a crisp! Oy, vey! Who hasn’t succumbed to thievery? Who hasn’t stolen even a tiny little bit in their lives? We must do *teshuvah* before it is too late!”

Yedidya wasn’t used to inspirational speeches, but this one grabbed at his heart with iron grasp. *Woe is to me*, he thought to himself. *He’s right! What have I done to myself? Why am I thief? I must repent!*

The Yedidya who came home from davening that Shabbos morning was a changed person. His mind was made up: his days as a thief were over. “Where were you?” Chaya asked curiously as they sat down to eat. She knew her husband hadn’t been to shul in years.

“I went to hear a lecture from Chacham Dovid, the great *rav*,” he replied, somewhat hesitantly. “He’s in town for Shabbos.”

Chaya burst out laughing. “What, you? A lecture? You’re pulling my leg.”

“No, I’m serious,” Yedidya said firmly. “It was a fiery speech.”

She got up to clear their plates. “What did he speak about?”

Yedidya met her eye. “About being a thief,” he said simply. “Rather, about not being a thief.”

“Well, this is our livelihood, isn’t it?” she huffed. “Not according to Chacham Dovid. All the money we are supposed to have is decided on Rosh Hashanah, and Hashem doesn’t need us to resort to ways that are against *halachah* to receive the money he apportioned for us.”

“Oh, really?” she asked testily. “So what are you supposed to do, exactly? Tonight is *motzai* Shabbos. Do you really plan on sitting at home? What are we supposed to eat this week?”

“All I know is that I am a good listener,” Yedidya said, shrugging his shoulders. “The *chacham* said that a thief loses both this world, and the next, and he’s a fool, since he’s not even getting anything for it. I’m giving up stealing, and Hashem will provide for us.”

Chaya looked at her husband strangely. “But what will you do all day?”

Yedidya shrugged again. “I can help you clean up,” he offered. “Maybe we can take a walk? I’ll say *tehillim*. There’s nothing to worry about; Hashem will provide for us.”

Motzai Shabbos passed extraordinarily slowly. Yedidya tried to ignore his itching fingers and Chaya’s probing looks. He was determined to do this. He was no longer a thief. Sunday passed the same slowly.

When Monday came, Chaya could no longer maintain her worried silence. “Are you going to do a break-in today?” she asked cautiously.

“Nope,” came his determined response.

“And where are we supposed to get food from?” she asked pointedly.

“We still have food in the house, don’t we?” Yedidya reminded her. “When we need more food, Hashem will send it. Maybe someone will bring food to our door... or maybe... Whatever. I don’t need to give Hashem ideas.”

True to his initial promise to Chaya after they married, Yedidya never stole more than he needed to live. There were no large wads of cash hanging around the house waiting for them on a rainy day. As the week passed, their supply of food and coins grew sparser and sparser, and by Shabbos, there was only money for a bit of fish and some flour for challahs.

On Shabbos morning, Yedidya decided to go to shul. The *chacham* had promised that *parnasah* comes from Hashem himself, and yet, nothing had come his way. Since the *chacham* was still in town and would be leaving a few days after Shabbos, he hoped for the opportunity to speak to the *rav* and clarify what he had meant.

Once again, in his speech before *krias* Hatorah, Chacham Dovid spoke about *parnasah*. Again, he discussed how a person’s livelihood is predetermined at the beginning of the year and there was nothing someone could do to receive more than he was decreed to. He spoke about the foolish thief, who loses everything in this world and the next, while gaining absolutely nothing.

And in the audience, Yedidya listened. He was so inspired, that he didn’t even feel the need to discuss the concept privately with the *chacham*. He was determined to continue his clean record of the week before, and felt a certainty that food would come to him directly from Hashem.

When he came home, however, Chaya’s doubts began to eat away at his certainty. “Yedidya, we have nothing left in the house,” she told him. “If you skip your regular *motzai* Shabbos activities, we are both going to starve to death.”

“Nonsense,” Yedidya replied. “Hashem is the one who provides food, not my illegal activities.”

“Are you sure you’re right?” she asked. “Look what happened last week. Did Hashem provide for us last week? No! Nothing! I’m not willing to starve to death!”

Yedidya slumped in his chair. A wave of weakness washed over him. “Listen, maybe you’re right. I gave the *chacham*’s idea a chance, but it obviously didn’t work.”

“Exactly,” Chaya declared triumphantly. “That is what I have been trying to tell you!”

“So tonight I go back to break-ins?” Yedidya asked, his heart a war of conflicting emotions.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A443

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

The Thief's Belief Part II

RECAP: Yedidya, a thief, is inspired by the Chacham's lecture and decides to rely on Hashem to send him his food instead of stealing it. After a week passed without any food miraculously coming his way, his wife convinced him to resume his robberies.

"So tonight I go back to break-ins?" Yedidya asked, his heart a war of conflicting emotions.

Chaya gave a relieved smile. "You should, though I'm not sure how you plan on doing that. Don't you usually spend the week scouting out leads? Last week, you did none of that."

"I actually have one lead that I never followed up on," Yedidya said slowly. "I got this one a while ago, but I could never bring myself to do it, pitying the woman too much."

"Who is it?"

"There's a young widow who lives not far from here," Yedidya explained. "The husband was very wealthy, but they were not married long when he passed away. I don't think she has any children. She lives alone in a big, unprotected house."

"I'm not sure what's stopping you," Chaya said. "It's not like you are planning to harm her in any way. You'll just take food for the week. She'll never know the difference."

Late that night, hours after Shabbos was over, Yedidya pushed all thoughts of Chacham Dovid out of his mind and walked to the widow's home. Agile as a monkey, he scaled the chimney and entered through the second-floor window.

In her room, the widow awoke from the creaking sounds of a window opening down the hallway. Terrified, she tiptoed to the door and locked herself into her bedroom. Afraid that the thief would hear her and come to kill her, she wept and davened soundlessly, hoping for the best.

Yedidya lit a lantern and went downstairs to the kitchen. It was though he had stumbled upon a gold mine. There was cooked fish and chicken, bread and meat. He loaded up a basket and prepared to leave the house with his booty.

Standing by the window, he suddenly began having second thoughts. If I am a thief, I will burn in Gehinnom, he reminded himself suddenly. Is this food worth it? For sure not!

Another voice spoke up in his head. "Yedidya, if you don't take this food, how will you ever have food to eat?"

He shook his head forcefully at the voice. No, stealing is wrong. I can't do this.

The voice persisted. "This widow is loaded," it reminded him. "She won't even notice if you take the food."

Yedidya hesitated. Then he made his final decision. He was not a thief. He dropped the basket near the window and clambered out, pulling the window closed behind him.

Chaya was still up when he came home and her eyebrows shot up when she saw his empty hands. “What’s going on? Where is the loot?”

“I decided that I’m not a thief,” Yedidya said firmly.

“Crazy man!” Chaya wailed. “What will we eat tomorrow?!”

Yedidya lifted his hands apologetically. “You know what? I’ll go to speak to Chacham Dovid tomorrow. Are you coming to sleep?”

When Yedidya arrived at the chacham’s doorstep the following morning, he found a long line already waiting for a chance to speak to the rav. Sighing, he took his place at the back of the line and settled down for a long wait.

Eventually, he reached the front of the line and was ushered in to the tzaddik.

Yedidya took a seat across from Chacham Dovid. “Tell me honestly,” he began, somewhat brazenly. “Do you say the truth, or are you a liar?”

“I only say the truth,” the chacham replied evenly.

“And what about in your lectures,” Yedidya challenged. “Do you only say the truth in those, too, or do you also perhaps lie?”

“Chas v’shalom, I never lie,” the rav responded. “My sources are directly in the Torah and Chazal, and are completely true.”

“Well,” Yedidya continued. “You said in your lecture that parnasah comes to a person from Hashem, and therefore there is no need to be a thief. Truthfully, all my life I was a thief, but I have a miserable life. My wife and I have been

married for close to twenty years, and we have no children. I have no friends. And when I heard in your lecture that I will also lose my World to Come, I decided that I would give up stealing.

“For eight days, I did not steal even a crumb, yet no parnasah came to my feet. I am starving. My wife is angry at me. I believe that Hashem will give me parnasah, yet it’s just not happening!”

The rav listened silently as Yedidya continued. “Last night, I finally decided to do another break-in. I broke into the house of a young widow and filled a basket with food. At the last minute, I was victorious over my yetzer harah and left the food in her house, not taking a morsal. And still-nothing! No food, no income, nothing has come my way!”

He lowered his voice and asked, full of pain, “So tell me, did you say the truth in your lecture or not?”

Chacham Dovid gazed at Yedidya with compassion. “Tell me, do you have emunah in Hashem?”

“Of course I believe in Hashem,” Yedidya replied.

“I didn’t ask if the thief believes in Hashem,” Chacham Dovid said quietly. “I asked if you believe in Hashem. It’s not enough to believe that Hashem will provide for you, with plans in the back of your head that if it doesn’t work out, you’ll return to stealing. That’s not real emunah! You must first commit to stop being a thief, no matter what, when, or why. After that, you may work on your emunah.”

“I hear,” Yedidya said.

“That’s all?” the Chacham asked in surprise. “You hear? I want you to commit never to steal again, no matter what, and believe that Hashem will provide you with a livelihood.”

Yedidya swallowed hard. This would not come easy to him, but he was determined to follow through. "I promise never to rob again," he said in a choked, yet resolute voice. "And I believe that it is Hashem who will give me my parnasah." "Very good," the rav said in satisfaction.

"What do I do now?" Yedidya asked.

"Stay here with me for now," the chacham directed. "Have a seat at that table over there, and I'll ask someone to bring you breakfast."

"But other people are waiting to come speak to you," Yedidya protested.

"That's okay. I'll meet with them while you are in the room," the chacham assured him.

Yedidya took a seat at the table and was served a scrumptious breakfast. Nothing was more delicious than the feeling that Hashem was providing for him. He had arrived at the Chacham's house unsure where he would get his next meal, and Hashem had sent it to him right then and there.

When he finished eating, he watched the various people coming for brachos or advice from the Chacham. Suddenly, a young woman walked in and his face blanched. This was the widow whom he had almost robbed the night before!

"My name is Sarah," she began. "I am a widow. My late husband, may he rest in peace, was a wealthy man, so I am not lacking materialistically. However, I live in perpetual fear of being robbed or attacked. I am a lone woman in a large and beautiful home, and I often have trouble sleeping, afraid that someone will break in and harm me.

"Last night, my nightmares came true. I heard a thief enter through a window, and I cannot even describe the terror I felt at that moment. Baruch Hashem, he didn't harm me, and I'm not even

sure if he took anything, since I found a basket of food under the window he used as his exit."

Sarah took a deep breath. "What should I do?" she wailed to the Chacham. "I am so afraid! I don't know how I'll be able to sleep at home anymore! Please, can you find me a shidduch? I need a man in the house, someone to protect me."

"You are Sephardic," the Chacham stated.

"Yes," Sarah replied.

"And, you, Yedidya," Chacham Dovid continued, turning to the former thief, who was sitting at the side table, his face pale. "You are Sephardic, too, isn't that so?"

"Yes, I am Sephardic," Yedidya confirmed.

"Wonderful!" the Chacham turned back to the distressed widow. "I believe I have a shidduch for you."

She waited.

"This man here, Yedidya," the rav explained simply.

With her simple emunas chachamim, Sarah just nodded. She didn't know Yedidya at all, but trusted the Chacham that the shidduch was appropriate.

"Just a second," Yedidya blurted, panic in his eyes. "I am married already!"

"That's not a problem," the Chacham said smoothly. "Many Sephardic men have more than one wife. Do you have children yet?"

Yedidya's eyes clouded over momentarily. "Not yet. We have been married for fifteen years, but without children."

"And do you want to have children?"

“Of course I want children!”

“Well, then, listen to my idea,” the Chacham said with a smile. “You, Yedidya, are a very kind and compassionate person, and without the burdens of parnasah, I believe you can even become a big talmid chacham. Take this widow as a second wife, and learn Torah the whole day. She will support you.”

“But...but...” Yedidya’s mind spun in a million different directions.

“Under no circumstances should you divorce your first wife,” Chacham Dovid continued. “You will build her a beautiful home and divide your time between your two wives’ homes. And I give you a blessing that both of your wives will bear you children.”

“But...but...” there was a desperate urgency in Yedidya’s voice. Things were moving much too fast for him to process. “But I’m at least fifteen years older than her!”

The Chacham smiled and waved a hand. He got up and left the room, returning moments later with an earthenware plate. Boom! Smash. “Mazel Tov!” the Chacham cried.

“I think I need to go tell my wife,” Yedidya said weakly, glancing from the rav’s grinning face to Sarah’s exuberant one.

“Wait, not yet, there’s a time and place for everything,” Chacham Dovid objected. He called for his assistant and instructed him to go to Sarah’s home and bring back the basket of food that the thief had attempted to steal the night before.

When his assistant returned, they all partook of the bread, meat, and fish. “This is your eirusin,” the rav explained. “Now you are engaged.”

“How will I ever break the news to my wife?”

Yedidya asked helplessly after they had arranged the date for the small wedding and Sarah had left.

“The key lies in how you present it to her,” the Chacham said. “Obviously, it isn’t smart for you to come home and announce that you found a second wife. Rather, tell her that you found a clean source of income and are in fact a millionaire. Only after she gets excited about that should you tell her the other details.”

“Okay,” Yedidya said slowly, hoping it would work.

“Tell her that I promise her that if she allows you to proceed, she will have children from you, and that you will become a great tzaddik,” the Chacham added.

“This is going to be a toughie,” Yedidya muttered to himself. “I need a blessing for this one.”

The Chacham blessed him warmly and Yedidya returned home.

“Chaya, you’ll never believe it,” he said as he walked into the house. “Remember what the Chacham said? Well, it’s true. Our monetary troubles are over.”

“Did you just inherit somebody’s fortune?” she called cynically from the kitchen.

“Actually, I did,” Yedidya replied merrily. “I am a millionaire, and you, Chaya, are a millionairess.”

“Aw, enough with the games,” Chaya said, coming out to greet him. “Did you bring home any food? We haven’t eaten since yesterday.”

“Of course! Only the best for the millionairess,” he winked, laying out a delicious spread on the table.

“What? Yedidya, where did you get this from?”

Chaya's hungry stomach rumbled loudly as she went to wash her hands. "Please be serious for a moment and tell me what happened."

"I'm serious," Yedidya insisted. "I really did just inherit a great fortune. I'll build you a beautiful mansion, and you'll be the queen of the neighborhood. And, on top of all that, the Chacham promised me that we will have children."

It took some more convincing for Chaya to believe her husband, but soon, she came to recognize that he was saying the truth. "Hashem has answered our prayers," she whispered. "But what strings come along with this?"

"There is something," Yedidya admitted, and told her about his engagement to Sarah, the wealthy widow he had attempted to rob the night before. "But don't worry, I like you very much, and we will continue to have a wonderful marriage."

Ever the eishes chayil, Chaya accepted this news stoically, realizing the Divine providence that had led them to this moment.

A few weeks later, Yedidya and Sarah married. A year later, both women were blessed with children. Yedidya became a learned scholar, and his relationship with both wives thrived.

Many years later, a respected and elderly Yedidya would retell this story to his grandchildren, pointing out the incredible message.

"Look around at the beautiful life I have," he would say. "I am so fortunate. I have everything a man could need or want. I have children, grandchildren, happy marriages, and no financial pressure. Once upon a time, I was at the bottom of the totem pole, a lowly thief.

"What happened? More importantly, why did it happen? How did I merit to change my life around so drastically?"

Yedidya would then pause for a moment until everyone's attention was fully captured and then continue, "Because I was a shomea, a listener! I didn't just hear the lecture of the Chacham; I listened to his directive! I listened to him when he told me to take a second wife, something that was not at all in my plans! It was because I listened that my life turned around."

The key to success in life is to be a shomea, a listener. Don't just hear what the gedolim have to say, listen to them! Don't just hear what your rabbeim and mentors try to give over, listen and obey. When we learn to listen and accept what our elders impart, our lives, too, will take a turn for the better.

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