

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 Taz's Unquenchable Thirst

When the holy Bach was already an elderly man, he was once traveling in the vicinity of the Town where his great son-in-law, the Taz, resided. He decided to detour through the Taz's city to visit his son-in-law.

As soon as the Taz got word of his illustrious father-in-law's plans, he hurried out to the city gates to welcome him in a display of kavod Hatorah. The Taz's awe and respect for his father-in-law was unbelievable to witness. In fact, whenever he was with the Bach, he wouldn't speak before his father-in-law granted permission.

The Bach was overjoyed to see his beloved son-in-law, and together, the two gedolim walked toward the Taz's home. A large crowd had joined the Taz in welcoming the Bach to their city, and they escorted the illustrious scholars.

The two gedolim reached the Taz's house, and the Taz moved aside respectfully to allow his father-in-law to enter first. The Bach nodded and crossed the threshold into the small house before stopping short. He'd never known the depths of his son-in-law's poverty.

The house was tiny, just one small room that served as the kitchen, dining room, and study, with a small corner, partitioned off with a faded curtain, for sleeping. There was barely any furniture in the room save for a rickety bench and a worn table that was missing one leg. The peeling walls and dirt floor, though clean, were further testimony to the Taz's poverty.

There were no delicious smells coming from the cold oven, and when the Bach walked into the room and sat down on the lone bench, he caught a glimpse into the open cupboard. It was completely bare. There simply was no food in the house.

Every day, over the course of the Bach's stay, the neighbors would come by with steaming pots of food. They knew that the penniless Taz would not be able to feed the Bach respectably, and though they didn't have much either, they gave what they could for the kavod hatorah.

The Bach was terribly distressed over his son-in-law's poverty, which stared him in the eye during the entirety of his visit. When he left, he wrote his son-in-law a letter in which he described his pain at seeing such a great talmid chacham in such difficult financial straits. He continued by blessing the Taz that one day, he would merit to

learn Torah with peace of mind and without any financial worries.

But although his poverty bothered the Bach, the Taz himself did not particularly mind that he didn't have money to purchase a new table or enough firewood to keep him warm without having to bundle up. Materialism meant little to him, and he was content to live on dry bread and water.

The only thing that bothered him about his lack of means was that it was holding him back from publishing his commentary on the Shulchan Aruch. He had already written the outlines of the sefer, but there was no way he could continue without familiarizing himself with all the opinions of the Rishonim and Acharonim before him.

The Taz owned a decent collection of seforim, but not nearly enough to finish writing his commentary. Often, he would study a topic in a sefer he owned only to find that these seforim would bring mention of other seforim. Without access to those seforim, he could not complete his commentary.

While he received a small salary from the town for serving as the rav, it was a token amount that didn't cover much of his family's necessities. Without money for adequate firewood and food, purchasing new seforim was a fantasy. If only he would have had some money, he would have purchased the volumes he needed, but, to his great distress, his financial situation did not allow this.

One day, the Taz was on his way to shul for davening when he noticed a large wagon stopping just in front of the shul. The peddler jumped off the horse and quickly set up a stall, where he began unloading his wares. The Taz's heart jumped when he saw the seller's precious merchandise. Seforim! The man was selling seforim!

The short, portly merchant hummed to himself as he stacked the volumes on his makeshift stall. Outside the shul, he learned, was the perfect place to hawk seforim for sale. People going to daven or learn would automatically look over his table, their eyes roving from volume to precious volume. More often than not, they ended up buying one or two.

The seforim merchant took a step back and bounced on his heels, eyeing his stall in satisfaction. Perfect. The seforim were neatly aligned, their brand-new covers and the crisp scent of fresh ink both beckoning and impressive. He would only be in town for a week before he moved on to the next town, and he hoped to earn a nice profit.

The Taz was always excited when a seforim peddler came to town. Perhaps he would find a sefer he needed! Perhaps it would even be on sale! And if Hashem wanted, he might somehow find the money to pay for it! He walked up to the stall and shook the seller's hand. "Shalom aleichem," he greeted him. "Welcome to our city."

"Aleichem shalom," the seller replied, pumping the Taz's hand.

"You've just traveled a long way," the Taz said. "Are you perhaps thirsty? Or hungry?"

The seller gave a slight shake of his head. "Thank you, but I'm fine. I brought along food and drink."

Another customer, browsing the seforim, overheard the exchange and looked up. "Reb Yid," he said to the merchant. "I realize you are unaware who you are talking to. This is the famous rav, son-in-law of the Bach!"

The seforim merchant's face lit up. He had heard so much about the Bach's illustrious son-in-law, but he'd never met him personally. His hand, the

one which had just merited to shake the Taz's, suddenly felt light and warm.

"How long will you be staying here?" the Taz inquired.

"About a week," the merchant replied.

The Taz smiled. He hadn't davened yet and wasn't comfortable browsing through the seforim before he prayed. With the knowledge that the merchant was safely in their town for the next few days, he went inside and davened slowly and carefully like he usually did. Then he patiently wrapped up his tefillin and folded his tallis, putting them both away. Only then did he permit himself to go back out to look at the seforim.

He noticed immediately that while he had been davening, the merchant had laid out many more seforim. There were hundreds of volumes covering the stalls. The Taz, being brilliant, didn't need much time to look through all the seforim. A quick flip through the pages was enough to tell him which one he needed. Within a short time, he concluded that he didn't need any of the seforim that the man was selling.

"You have a beautiful collection," he complimented the seller. "Thank you so much for bringing them to us. I am sure the entire city will benefit from this and you will sell many seforim. Hashem should shower you with success and financial security."

"Amen," the seller said sincerely, grateful for the blessing. "I just wanted to let the rav know that in addition to the seforim I have laid out, I have a few top-of-the-line volumes which I did not display, since the average layman would not appreciate them. I only show them to big talmidei chachamim. Also, they are rare and very expensive. I can't put them out where they can get lost or stolen. Would the rav be interested in looking at those seforim?"

"I would love to see them," the Taz said.

The seller jumped onto this wagon and emerged moments later with a small pile. He lovingly and proudly showed them to the Taz, one by one. The Taz looked them over, but none of them were what he needed.

Then, the seller showed him another sefer from the bottom of the pile, and the Taz knew he struck gold. "The Agudah!" he cried. He had seen this rishon mentioned in so many seforim, but he had never seen the volume that the Agudah had authored.

"Yes, this a true find," the seller confirmed, glad that someone understood and appreciated the value of the sefer. "It's quite rare, and I only have one copy."

"Can I flip through it?" the Taz asked eagerly.

"Certainly," the merchant agreed. He stood nearby, watching as the Taz flipped through the pages with unbelievable joy.

The Taz's entire being glowed with excitement. "This is exactly what I need," he said, looking up from a page where he'd found the exact halachic argument he had been trying to find as a basis for something in his commentary. "How much do you want for this?"

The seller named a price, an astronomical price.

The sefer was rare, prized, and worth a lot of money. But as soon as the Taz heard the figure, his heart sunk. His salary for an entire year was less than the asking price of the sefer.

"I understand you need to make a profit," the Taz told the seller, the disappointment evident in his voice. "Still, the price you are asking for is truly a princely sum! How can anyone afford such an expensive sefer?"

The seller nodded understandingly. “To be honest, I’d barely be making a profit if I sold the sefer at the price I named,” he admitted. “It’s an extremely rare piece, and I bought it for a price just under the amount that I was willing to sell it to the rav for. I was hoping to sell it to a rich man someday, but I am willing to make less money so that the rav can have it.”

“I wish I could afford it, but I can’t,” the Taz said longingly, kissing the sefer and handing it back. “I thank you for your generous offer, but I’m not in the position to purchase such an expensive volume.” He began to walk away, thoroughly distressed.

The merchant couldn’t bear to see the holy Taz’s distress. He ran after him, holding the precious sefer. “I’m willing to give it to the rav for cost price,” he said hurriedly when he reached the Taz.

“How much is cost price?” the Taz asked.

The seller named the amount he’d paid to purchase the volume a few years earlier. He wouldn’t make any money, but he’d be giving the gadol hador something he wanted so badly.

The Taz gave a sad smile. “That’s three-quarters of my annual salary,” he said quietly. “You are a kind and goodhearted man, but this sefer is not meant for me.”

The Taz went home, but his heart was not at peace. He was happy to live a life of poverty if it meant not having enough food to be sated, but not being able to buy the sefer that would help him complete his life’s work was terribly difficult. So difficult, in fact, that he found that he couldn’t eat or sleep properly.

The next morning, he went back to the seforim stall, which was still standing in front of the shul.

“Reb Yid,” he addressed the seforim merchant. “As I told you yesterday, I don’t have the money to purchase the Agudah, but I’d like to ask you a favor. Would you be willing to lend me the volume, just for a day or two?”

The seller looked at him. It was a rare and valuable sefer, but this was the gadol hador who wanted to borrow it. He hardly needed to tell him to be careful not to bend the pages or keep the volume away from chometz. “Okay,” he agreed. “The rav can have the sefer for a day.”

The Taz thanked him profusely, the joy shining from his eyes. He took the sefer reverently, kissed it, and held it to his chest as he walked back home. Although as rav, he generally made himself available to the public if they would need him, now, he locked himself into his home. He had limited time with the precious sefer, and he wasn’t ready to waste a single second.

He began with the first page, reviewing it carefully over and over until he was satisfied that he fully understood the Agudah’s positions on the halachos of netilas yadayim. Then he moved on to the next set of halachos and the next. When he finally finished the entire sefer, he started it again from the beginning.

Until the next morning, he did not leave the house except to daven Minchah and Maariv. The rest of the time, he was learning the Agudah over and over and over. He took notes and committed much of the sefer to memory. By the time Shacharis came around the next morning, he had already reviewed the sefer countless times and had memorized the entire thing.

He brought the sefer back to the seller with a glowing face. “Thank you!” he exclaimed over and over, even bending forward and kissing the seller’s cheek. “I can’t thank you enough for lending me the sefer for one day.”

“If this is what the sefer means to the rav, then I’d like to give the sefer to you as a gift,” the seforim merchant said. He would swallow the loss. He’d made enough money from other sales. But this, the opportunity to make the gadol hador so happy, this was a priceless opportunity he would not forgo.

Hearing the word ‘gift’, the Taz shook his head vehemently. “Soneh matanos yichye,” he quoted. “One who despises gifts will live long. But it’s okay, I already memorized the entire sefer, and I took notes. I no longer need the actual sefer. But I’d like to give you a gift, something as a token of my appreciation for lending me the sefer. What can I give you?”

“Soneh matanos yichye,” the seller quoted right back. “I, too, don’t want to take any gifts. But if the rav would give me a blessing, I would appreciate that very much.”

The Taz gave him a warm blessing for success, and indeed, the man continued to see success in all his endeavors.

Other than that single day, the Taz never again merited to learn from the sefer Aguda. However, one who learns Shulchan Aruch with the Taz’s commentary will notice that he quotes the Aguda multiple times. All this originated from his tremendous diligence in learning and memorizing the sefer during the few hours that he borrowed it. How tremendous was the Taz’s unquenchable thirst for Torah, even as he happily forwent the most basic materialism! How great was the enormity of his connection to Torah!

If only we could emulate just a fraction of the connection, the awe, the love that our gedolim had for Torah!

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A101

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