



# A Tale of Two Zalman

With a determined expression on his face, Avrem'ke started out on his journey to Lubavitch, though he had in fact just returned from there.

Logic wasn't dictating the actions of this wealthy man, rather he was being steered by the sheer desperation that pumped in his heart. He was childless and although he had asked the Tzemach Tzedek countless times for a *bracha* in this matter, he had never actually received one. This painful situation was the source of much suffering for him and his wife and on this trip he wanted it all to change.

He decided, once and for all, that if the Rebbe didn't grant his wish he would then ask for permission to divorce his wife and have the chance to raise a family with someone else.

Once inside the room, the Tzemach Tzedek read

and reread Avrem'ke's *pan* and finally turned to him with a question, "What is the name of your wife's illness?"

"In the medical world it's called '*kumintzia*,'" he replied.

"And in Gemara terminology?"

"In Gemara I believe it's called '*durktis*.'"

"If so," concluded the Tzemach Tzedek, "What do you want me to do? Change nature?! How do you expect her to bear a child?"

He was completely broken when he heard this response and begged the Rebbe to at least allow him to divorce his wife and marry someone else so he wouldn't leave this world childless.

The Tzemach Tzedek thought for a moment and then asked Avrem'ke if he recalled in which *maseches* it discusses this sickness.

"In *Maseches Kesubos*<sup>2</sup> and *Nida*,"<sup>3</sup> he replied.

"If so, why don't you go and bring a Gemara so we can look into it."

Avrem'ke left the room confused and dizzy. He entered the *beis midrash* and began searching for the correct *sefer* but his mind and heart were somewhere else. After a long while of walking around aimlessly he still hadn't found it. A short while later the Tzemach Tzedek walked in, opened up the right Gemara and began learning the relevant part out loud.

The Gemara<sup>4</sup> mentions that someone who marries a *durkti* is lucky. The Tzemach Tzedek argued this logic but Avremke pushed back and didn't want to accept it because ultimately he wanted children.

At last the unusual *yechidus* ended leaving Avrem'ke stunned, broken and utterly confused. He

saw in front of him a bleak future coupled with the horrifying reality that he had just had the nerve to have a debate with his Rebbe.

Once he had composed himself, Reb Zalman,<sup>5</sup> one of the Tzemach Tzedek's sons, approached him and offered him an idea.

"The next time you go to my father for *yechidus*, I will write your *pan*, and you should include silver coins in the value of the Hebrew word '*hirayon*' (pregnancy). They should specifically be silver because that represents *chesed*.<sup>6</sup> If you do this I hope you will then receive a *brocha* for a child."

A few weeks passed and Avrem'ke returned to Lubavitch. As planned, Reb Zalman wrote the *pan* which Avrem'ke then copied and included the money with it.

The Tzemach Tzedek read the *pan* carefully and

then exclaimed, “Why have you come a second time? Who wrote this *pan* for you? Have you come to waste my time again, after we already went through this and spent much time on this?”

I gave you my *brocha* and let you know my opinion on this. What else can I do?”

“Rebbe,” cried Avrem’ke, “A *brocha* isn’t enough for me. I want a promise.”

“A *brocha* isn’t enough?! Do you know what a *brocha* is? The meaning of a *brocha* is drawing down from the concealed into reality. This is what Yaakov [Avinu] did and this is what I have blessed you with.”

Avrem’ke began crying loud and bitter sobs, “Rebbe save me, give me a promise!”

The Tzemach Tzedek, however, remained adamant and he returned the *pan* and the money. As he was about to leave the room he said, “Only Hashem can help you.”

Once outside, he cried and cried so much that he almost fainted and nothing at all could calm him down.

A short while passed and Reb Zalman said to him, “Calm yourself, I will personally go to my father and ask on your behalf.”

After spending a long time inside the room with his father, Reb Zalman came out with a joyful expression and excitedly told Avrem’ke, “Don’t worry, you will have children.”

He invited him over for *melave malka*, which was a

welcome gesture because Avrem’ke hadn’t eaten or tasted a morsel in a long time. They sat together and discussed Chassidus and shared stories of previous generations.

During the meal Avrem’ke turned to Reb Zalman and said, “We have a tradition passed down from the Alter Rebbe that what a Rebbe can accomplish through his spirituality, a Chossid can achieve through genuine feelings of *teshuvah*.”

“Where did you hear this from?” asked Reb Zalman.

“I heard this from an elderly *melamed* who heard it directly from Reb Shmuel Munkes.”

Reb Zalman was very happy when he heard this and he confirmed that it was indeed true. “What do you want from me?” he asked.

Avrem’ke replied, “I am not suggesting you are a Rebbe, but a Chossid you certainly are.”

“So you want me to have thoughts of *teshuvah*?” Reb Zalman then put his head on the table and began singing the Alter Rebbe’s *niggun*. He sang in a soft tone for over half an hour. When he concluded the *niggun*, he picked up his head and his face was full of tears. He then turned to Avrem’ke and said, “Nu, you will have a son and when he is born bring him here and we shall see what name to give him.”

Some time went by and indeed his wife gave birth to a boy. His joy knew no bounds and he immediately dispatched a messenger to Lubavitch to find out what the name of his son should be.

Reb Zalman heard the news and replied that the boy should be called Zalman. When the messenger heard this he was startled and thought to himself, “How can the baby be named Zalman if his maternal grandfather has that name? Perhaps he has passed away...”

Catching him in mid thought, Reb Zalman said, “Wait and I will ask my father.”

The Tzemach Tzedek told his son that the boy should be called Schneur and he passed this on to the messenger.

A few weeks later Avrem’ke himself was able to make the trip to Lubavitch and he brought some *marshke* and cake that he had picked up in Vitebsk. He was abundantly grateful to Reb Zalman and wanted to bring him something as a sign of thanks and gratitude.

Reb Zalman, however, had his doubts about the *kashrus* of the cake and brought out *mezonos* and *marshke* that were produced in Lubavitch.

After greeting him warmly, he asked Avrem’ke, “Do you know why I told you to name him Schneur? Firstly because this is

the name of my [great] grandfather the Alter Rebbe, who was certainly a good Jew. Secondly because the name Schneur means two lights—you will have another son, *iy”h*.”

And so it was; he was blessed with another son.

In midst of the celebrations and after consuming his fair share of wine, Avrem’ke asked Reb Zalman to bless him with a daughter. This, however, he didn’t agree to and in fact he had a third son.

Avrem’ke’s three boys all grew up to be strong and successful but for their father it was a different story.

He had indeed merited to have children but he lost all his wealth and was left to traveling from town to town collecting money and saying over *maamarim*, with meager earnings to take home.<sup>7</sup> **T**

(Based on *Shmuos V’sippurim* vol. 2 p. 179)

1. Generally this is a woman who has difficulty bearing children, and rarely have any, let alone many.
2. 10b.
3. 64b.
4. Kesubos ibid.
5. Reb Chaim Shneur Zalman. After the Tzemach Tzedek’s *histalkus* he became Rebbe in Liadi.
6. See Tanya perek 50.
7. See *Kuntres Uma’ayan*, Maamar 19