

# 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 Maharsha's Levaya*

As the world crawled out of the Middle Ages, life for European Jewry was difficult and fraught with ever-present dangers. From the stereotypical Jew-hating poritz to the common anti-Semitic peasant, there was a strong animosity toward the Jewish population of various European countries, causing the Yidden to live with a strong undercurrent of fear as they tensely anticipated the next libel, the next pogrom, the next massacre that would cause Jewish blood to flow freely in the streets.

The Polish city where the Maharsha lived was no exception.

In fact, it was likely much worse, since in the presence of the tremendous amount of kedushah given off by this great tzaddik, the forces of tumah

were able to fester and thrive. The Maharsha had a large yeshiva, where he cultivated many Torah giants and talmidei chachamim. Yet in the very same city, there was also a proportionate number of priests, who stirred up tremendous trouble for the Jews. At first, they started small, with muggings and lootings, but when the non-Jews saw that they could get away with crimes against the Jewish population, they dared bigger, more advanced pogroms and outright massacres.

A favorite tactic of these barbarians was to attack the Yidden during times of despair. When a person is in anguish, he is an easy target, and the gentiles exploited this fact. Whenever a levayah was held for a Jew, the procession escorting the coffin would be forced to pass the city's largest church as it made its way from the main shul to the Jewish cemetery on the outskirts of the city. As they passed the church, pained and mourning, the non-Jews would ring the church bells, signaling to the city's thugs to amass and attack the funeral procession. In their emotional and turmoiled state, the Jews were in no position to ward off their attackers, and often retreated in fear. More often than not, these disrupted levayos left behind many injured people and a heavily desecrated corpse.

When the Maharsha lay in bed during his final illness, his talmidim, although uncomfortable, felt compelled to broach the subject of their Rebbi's future levayah. As difficult as it was for them to discuss, they knew that an attack from the non-Jews during his levayah was a near-certain

possibility, and they wanted guidance on how to protect his holy body from being defiled.

They hesitantly posed their question, and the Maharsha weakly asked for some time to think about it. “Come back tomorrow,” He told them hoarsely, leaning back limply on his pillow.

When they returned the next day, his talmidim discovered that their Rebbi’s condition had deteriorated further. With tremendous difficulty, the Maharsha mustered his last dredges of strength to instruct them on how to proceed. “When you pass the makom tumah on the way to the cemetery,” He instructed in a thin, frail voice. “If the gentiles begin assembling, ready for attack, don’t go down without a fight. You must not allow my body to be desecrated.”

“But, Rebbi,” They protested respectfully. “The non-Jews arm themselves with spiked clubs and spears, ready to injure and kill. How will so few of us be able to ward off so many of them?”

The Maharsha heard them out silently. “You should arm yourselves as well,” He instructed. “However, if you see that you will be overpowered, the most important thing is that my guf should remain whole and unblemished.” With a shaking finger, he pointed to a pile of papers on top of one of his bookshelves. “Take those manuscripts and bring them along on the wagon that carries my coffin. If your battle against the goyim is unsuccessful, put my manuscripts on my chest. That should be enough to save us.”

The entire Jewish population spent the next few days davening fervently for the recovery of their leader, hoping he would regain his health so that he could stand at their helm once more. The non-Jews, too, were anxious, as they were eager for a grand pogrom when the rabbi would finally be gone.

Shortly after the talmidim took leave of their mentor, the Maharsha’s pure neshamah was returned to its Maker.

The grief of the Yidden was indescribable. Hundreds of talmidim tore kria for their Rebbi. Their anguished cries pierced through the night as they sat on the floor in the manner of mourners and wept over their incredible loss. Yet along with their deep angst, the students also suffered a terrible fear, knowing they would probably be forced to come face to face with their vicious gentile neighbors in battle.

After many long, sob-stricken eulogies, the entire Jewish community began escorting their honored Rebbi on his final journey. As the procession moved slowly across the city, more and more non-Jews assembled alongside them. When they reached the big church, they saw it was filled with hundreds of hate-crazed thugs, armed with spiked clubs and spears, ready to attack.

Seeing their nightmare about to unfold, the talmidim organized quickly. Fifty of the strongest students, armed with their own clubs, surrounded the coffin, prepared to give their lives to protect their Rebbi’s corpse. The rest of them made up

the outer circles around the mittah. There was an intense feeling of fear as the procession continued their slow march to the cemetery.

Suddenly, the church bells began ringing. Thousands of non-Jews began converging upon the hapless talmidim, injuring some and frightening away others. They tore their way efficiently through the tight rings of Jews around the Maharsha, until they were practically upon the coffin.

“Peter, let’s turn over this coffin and dump the rabbi out,” One drunken boor slurred to his friend. “Drag him through the streets! Drag him through the streets!” The crowd thundered, and more jeers filled the air.

It was now or never.

Seeing that they had lost the battle, one quick-thinking talmid brushed passed the drunken gentiles, dodging blows, and pulled the manuscript out from the bottom of the wagon. Breathing hard, he placed the pages gently upon the chest of the Maharsha.

Suddenly, the Maharsha’s lifeless arm began moving. His fingers clutched the pages and began to turn them slowly. And then, without warning, as the corpse turned the pages of the manuscript, the church came crumbling down. Its tall spires and high walls came crashing down, burying hundreds and injuring hundreds more. Stunned, the terrified survivors began fleeing the area, leaving the coffin and the Yidden alone.

After this tremendous miracle, the Jews were able to bury their revered Rebbi, with all the more awe at his greatness. the more awe at his greatness.

*Have a Wonderful Shabbos!*

This story is taken from tape #A390 1997

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