

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Reb Aharon Karliner and the wagon driver from shamayim

Europe of the nineteenth century produced a great many gedolei yisroel and talmidei chachamim. Rav Aharon Karliner, also known as Rav Aharon Hagadol, was one of these great giants. Counted amongst the five most famous Chassidic leaders of this era, Rav Aharon HaGadol was well versed in all aspects of Torah, including kabbalah. In his lifetime, he brought a staggering 80,000 Yidden closer to Torah and yiddishkeit. It was said about him that he never ceased learning, quite literally.

When Rav Aharon would learn, his face would glow with an otherworldly joy, his enthusiasm and passion shining forth. The intensity of his love for Torah and power of his deep concentration was such, that while he learned, it was as if the entire world ceased to exist. In those moments, he knew of nothing but the sacred text on the page of Gemara before him.

It happened one day as Rav Aharon sat in his ramshackle home, swaying fervently in front of his rickety, aging shtender, concentrating on the Gemara before him. He read the words, then read them again, pursing his lips as he peered into the meforshim, trying to grasp the difficult sugya. His forehead creased in thought, he leaned back and then deeply forward, his eyes tightly shut. He hadn't encountered such a difficult Gemara in a while. He tried solving the difficulty one way, and then hit a brick wall as he encountered opposition in one of the Rishonim. He attempted an alternative solution, but that didn't tally either. Straining all his features, he leaned in to read the Gemara again.

His concentration was total, and he did not sense anyone coming in from behind him. He did not even hear the rustle the intruder made as he removed an envelope from his pocket.

But when a white, rectangular shaped object suddenly appeared on his Gemara, blocking the words from his view, he was torn out of his deep focus. At loath to turn around in the middle of learning to see who had brought the envelope, Rav Aharon simply removed the letter and perused its contents. Much to his disbelief, the letter clearly elucidated the Gemara he had been confounded by. It addressed every one of his questions, and answered them brilliantly, bringing his difficulties to a satisfying conclusion. His questions resolved, he turned around to see who had brought him the letter. A man stood behind his chair, watching him silently. Rav Aharon looked at him. He recognized him. And he suddenly felt as if he was about to faint.

For the man standing behind him, the bearer of the brilliant letter, was none other than the shtetl's baal agalah, the simple-seeming wagon driver. Rav Aharon stared at the wagon driver disbelievingly for another moment, and then his heart began pounding even faster.

Hadn't the baal agalah passed away? Hadn't he passed away five years ago?

Rav Aharon Hagadol was a tremendously elevated individual, and he suddenly understood that a neshama had come down to him while he was awake. He began to tremble. Standing up to face the dead wagon driver, he asked quietly, "What brought you to come down and bring me this letter?"

"I don't know who gave me this letter," The baal agalah responded simply. "I was given the shlichus to bring this letter down to you from shomayim." When Rav Aharon pressed him further, he continued, "Rebbe, I'll be honest with you. I didn't have many zechuyos, and therefore I'm alone. I have a room in Gan Eden where I sit alone. Whenever there's something that needs to be revealed to a tzaddik in a tangible way, I am given the job. I am dressed in a body and I come down to the world to deliver the message."

"What have you done that you were zoche to this shlichus?" Rav Aharon asked curiously.

The wagon driver hesitated. "I'm unable to reveal everything that goes on in shomayim," He said slowly. "But I'll tell you a bit. When I passed away and had my Judgement, it was decreed that due to my abundant aveiros and few mitzvos, I would need to return to this earth as a gilgul. This way, I would be given an opportunity to rectify my actions so that I would merit my share in the world to come.

"I was trembling in fear when I heard that I was being sentenced to gilgul. I was terrified to return to the world of the living, where I would face so many nisyonos, perhaps making my situation far worse than it already was. But I knew that I didn't have a choice."

The wagon driver looked up at Rav Aharon and continued his story. "As I sat there, shivering in fright, a new malach got up and declared that it wasn't proper to give me gilgul. 'I am the malach

who was created from an amazing mitzvah this wagon driver did, and I testify that he does not deserve gilgul.'

As a wagon driver, I often drove others through the dangerous forest. To protect myself and my passengers from the bandits and thieves, I would arm myself with weapons before setting out on this dangerous journey. I would travel through the trees, keeping my ears wide open for any suspicious sounds to forewarn of trouble ahead.

One day, as I drove through the woods, I noticed something dangling from a tree. It was a person. Terrified, I wanted to drive as fast and as far as I could, away from the dangling corpse. Suddenly, though, it struck me that the unfortunate person might be a Yid, and perhaps he was still alive. Cautiously, I approached the tree and saw that I was correct. It was indeed a Jew, and miraculously, he was still breathing. Working quickly, I cut the ropes and freed the dying man. Then I loaded him onto my wagon and detoured to the nearest town to try to save his life.

I brought him to the first house I saw and slowly nursed him back to health. I remained with him for an entire day, giving up the parnasah I could have earned, until I ascertained that he was on his way to a recovery. Then, I gave him whatever money I had in my possession and went on my way."

The baal agalah turned to Rav Aharon. "Rebbe, this was the single real mitzvah that I performed in my lifetime. Beis Din shel Maaleh ruled that because someone who saves a life is considered as if he saved an entire world, I merited Olam Habah and did not require gilgul. Instead, I received a room alone in Gan Eden where I wait to preform my shlichus."

With those last words, the wagon driver disappeared.

Rav Aharon Hagadol looked back at his Gemara and then at the letter. Suddenly, he began

laughing. He suddenly understood the meaning of a Gemara. The Gemara in Avoda Zara states: ש"אחת בשעה עולמו קונה. רבי בכה – Rabbi cried when learning that one can acquire his portion of Olam Habah in one moment. Why did Rabbi cry? Isn't this a good thing?

Rav Aharon understood from his story with the wagon driver that Rabbi was crying because of the word עולמו - his world. If all a person was in this world was a wagon driver, even if he merits Olam Habah, what will his reward be? He will continue being a wagon driver, delivering messages from one world to the next.

Based on this story, Rav Aharon HaGadol cautioned his Chassidim, "If you'll be a wagon driver in this world, your reward in the next world will be a wagon driver. If you don't learn any Torah in this world, how will you understand Torah in the next? Live your life properly so that you don't waste your Olam Habah as a wagon driver!"

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A264 1990

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