

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Rav Avraham Ben Musa

From the day Avreme'le was born, he was immersed in an atmosphere of purity and holiness. His mother took great care that the sights and sounds her newborn son imbibed be untainted by the immorality of the world around him. Lovingly, she shielded him from viewing immodest sights and even impure animals, investing much effort to ensure that his eyes remained clear and pure. She would wheel his cradle to the bais medrash and let the sweet sounds of Torah learning lull her son to sleep. From his very first moments in this world, every breath he inhaled was of unadulterated kedushah.

His mother's efforts paid off.

Blessed with a sharp mind and having been reared, for all practical purposes, in a bais medrash, at just two years old, little Avreme'le had already acquired mastery over aleph-bais and kria. Soon, he was davening along with the tzibbur. At three years old, he was learning Chumash; at four years, Gemara. By the time he reached six years of age, he was spending his entire day engrossed in learning. After a long day

in yeshiva, where he participated in a difficult Gemara shiur along with bachurim many years his senior, he would continue learning in a small shul in his neighborhood, delving into the secrets of the Torah at the feet of an old talmid chacham. Recognizing Avreme'le's greatness, the mekubal agreed to teach the little boy on condition that his mentorship remain concealed.

The insular Sephardic community in which he grew up was located in the heart of a Muslim country. The Jews and Muslims lived in their own respective communities side by side, with minor business dealings at the local marketplace the sum total of interaction with each other. The acute danger of a Jew venturing into the Muslim neighborhood for any reason was a town legend, and even small children knew better than to be caught inside.

Until one day, their greatest fear was actualized. An older Jew was walking at the outskirts of the Jewish neighborhood, his mind completely engrossed in his learning, and inadvertently wandered into the Muslim quarter. When he finally realized his error, it was too late. Riled on by their elders, some young Arab thugs quite literally tore him to shreds and then dumped his lifeless body onto a wagon they sent back into the Jewish district.

The late man's horrified friends caught a glimpse of his ravaged body as it rolled into town tossed over a wagon, and the entire Jewish community was plunged into mourning. The man had not committed any crime other than wander onto the wrong street, and his tragic punishment came as a terrible blow to his fellow townsmen.

The Ben Musa household was particularly shaken by the tragedy, as the slain Jew had been their next-door neighbor. When an oblivious Avreme'le walked into his home after yeshiva, he found his mother weeping bitterly. He was completely unaccustomed to seeing his strong, resilient mother in tears.

“What happened?” The little boy asked his mother, worriedly.

In a few short sentences, his mother related the terrible tragedy that had befallen the head of the family next door. Avreme’le, too, was stunned by the sheer cruelty of the Muslims. His young, innocent heart burned with indignation. He found it difficult to comprehend why someone would behave so brutally without purpose, and he found it even more confounding that the Jewish community, while shattered and mourning, had no plans to retaliate. Resolutely, he decided take matters into his own hands.

When his mother tucked him into bed that evening, Avreme’le closed his eyes and feigned sleep. Determinedly, despite the passing hours and his growing fatigue, he did not allow slumber to overtake him. He waited patiently, hour after hour, until the last of his family members had gone to sleep and the home was cloaked in a peaceful silence.

When all was finally calm, Avreme’le sat up. Soundlessly, he tore off his blanket and slipped on his shoes. Tiptoeing past his sleeping family, he slid open the shuttered window, slipping noiselessly outside. His soft footsteps echoing in the still night, he hurried down the bare streets and passed through silent alleyways until he reached the small shul where he learned after yeshiva.

As he expected, the old mekubal was still there, his back swaying gently as he squinted over his sefer in the dim candlelight, humming softly.

“Rebbi,” Avreme’le whispered, trying to catch his attention without startling him.

His mentor lifted his eyes from the sefer before him and rested a questioning gaze on the young boy.

“Rebbi, can I borrow a sefer from you?”

Avreme’le asked, hurriedly naming the tome he wanted.

The elderly kabbalist sighed. “At this hour of the night?” He asked, frowning. He was accustomed to such requests from his young student, yet he was worried about such a young boy staying up so late at night. “It’s not healthy for a growing boy to be missing so much sleep,” He admonished.

“Go back home and go to sleep, Avreme’le.”

“Please, Rebbi,” The boy pleaded. “I’ll only use it for a few minutes,” He promised hopefully. “I’ll use it right here and give it right back to you afterward.”

But the old man shook his head. “You know, you really are too young for this,” He remarked. “And it’s very late. You should be sleeping now.”

But Avreme’le wouldn’t give up, and the elderly mekubal finally relented.

The six-year-old sat by the dim light of his lantern, opened up the volume to a specific spot, and began concentrating intently on the small letters. Finally, he stood up, closed the sefer with a satisfied sigh, and returned it to his mentor. Then, as soundlessly as he had left, he snuck back into his house and went to sleep.

When morning came and her little boy did not make a swift appearance like he usually did, his mother went to wake him. “Good morning,” She called, opening the shutters and allowing the sunshine to fill the room with its yellow light.

“Time to wake up, Avreme’le.”

To her surprise, he did not even stir. His chest rose and fell rhythmically as he slept on. After a few more fruitless attempts to wake him, his mother gave up. Shrugging at his unusual behavior, she returned to her housework.

When he finally awoke, it was late morning. Deflecting his mother's probing questions as to the reason for his uncharacteristic behavior, he went to the mikvah to immerse himself before Shacharis. When he finished davening, instead of going to yeshiva as he usually did, he snuck discreetly back into the mikvah and submerged himself in its pure waters again, and then again, and then again. After repeatedly immersing numerous times, he went off to the side. Quietly, cautiously, he etched something out on a piece of parchment. He placed the parchment into one sack, then into an additional sack, and slipped it into his pocket. Then he immersed himself one more time.

Emerging from the mikvah, he dressed hastily and headed for the marketplace. He surveyed the busy market, his mind working furiously, until a plan dawned.

"Excuse me?" He called to a kind-looking Jew nearby.

The man looked down and saw a child gazing up at him expectantly. "How can I help you?"

"Can I borrow some money?" Avreme'le asked, smiling his most charming smile. "Don't worry, I promise to return the loan in full."

"And may I ask why a young boy needs money?" The man asked, wonderingly.

"I want to buy fish," The little boy replied.

Ah. "Alright," He said, nodding in understanding. The child had probably seen the tantalizing fish displayed in the market and was seeking a way to finance his temptation. Smiling indulgently, he gave the boy some bills.

"Thank you!" Avreme'le exclaimed in gratitude, before scampering off to make his purchase. Examining the fishmonger's display with pursed lips, he carefully selected an especially large,

juicy-looking fish and paid for his purchase. He checked over his shoulder to ensure that the Jew who had lent him the money was no longer watching him and ran off in the direction of the Muslim quarter.

Noiselessly, he moved quickly through the unfamiliar streets, searching, searching until he finally came upon a large, rambling house beset by manicured flower beds and surrounded by a wrought iron gate. The owner of the house, an Arab sheik, was especially outspoken in his hatred of the Jewish community, and he would be the perfect target for little Avreme'le's revenge.

Despite the danger of being caught in the Muslim neighborhood, the little boy stopped in front of the house, his yarmulke proudly displayed on his head, peyos flapping, tzitzes flying in the wind. Cupping one palm around his mouth, he called loudly, "Fish for sale! Fresh fish for sale! Fresh from the sea, delicious, juicy—"

The door to the sheik's mansion opened and a maid came rushing out. Walking quickly up to the gate, she hissed, "Jewish boy! Get away from here quickly! Do you know what could happen to you if anyone notices you here?"

"Do you want to buy some fish?" Avreme'le asked sweetly, smiling toothily at her and holding up his prize.

"No, not now," The maid hastily responded, sweeping her arms frantically in a shooing motion. "Just get away and fast! Do you know what they did yesterday, to man from your community?!"

"But I want to sell my fish," The little boy said, assuming an air of wounded innocence.

"It's dangerous," The maid responded flatly. "I'm telling you, for your own sake, to disappear from this area as fast as you can!"

Avreme'le regarded silently her for a moment, not budging an inch. Suddenly, he said, "You know what? I see that you are a very kind person, so worried about my safety. I want to give you the fish as a gift. It's the least I could do to thank you for being so thoughtful and sensitive."

The gratified maid, unaccustomed to praise, gladly accepted his offering. "Thank you!" She said, a mixture of surprise and delight crossing her face.

"My pleasure," Avreme'le said graciously. "You definitely deserve it." He paused. "Can I ask you one small favor?" Removing a small cloth sack from his pocket, he held it out toward her. "Can you just... well, you know... can you just deposit this into the well for me?"

All at once, the maid stiffened and stared at him suspiciously through lowered lenses. "Put that into the well? Into my master's freshwater well?!" She repeated in disbelief, shaking her head. "Not a chance! No!"

"Why not?" The little boy asked, flashing her another disarming smile. "It's just a silly game, not difficult at all, and it would make me so happy."

"What is it?" She asked curiously, her eyes still narrowed sharply at him.

"I gave you a lot of fish," Avreme'le made sure to remind her, completely ignoring her question.

Hesitating, she reached for the sack. Then, abruptly, she tossed it into the well. "Now, off with you," She said to the little boy, who obliged.

Racing as fast as his legs would carry him, he hurried back to the Jewish quarter, and made a very tardy appearance at yeshiva.

Back at the sheik's home, the maid just shook her head ruefully at his retreating back and went back into the house to continue her preparations for the party her master was hosting that evening.

From there, everything proceeded just as Avreme'le planned.

A member of the sheik's household staff drew water from the well for the chef's use. The water was added to the meat, mixed into the bread dough, turned into a soup. It was heated with tea leaves, frozen into ice cubes, and poured into pitchers.

By the time the party wound to a close later that evening, the sheik, all the members of his family, all the members of his staff, and all of his guests—seventy people all together—had partaken of the well-water in some form or another.

And by the end of the evening, each one of the seventy were dead, the maid included.

When the attendees of the fateful party failed to return to their families, their worried relatives sought to find them. The grim scene of seventy bodies met them at the sheik's home. Who could have committed such a heinous crime?

An investigation was launched, but no evidence was found. There was no sign of poisoning, no sign of struggle, no bloodshed. Just corpse after corpse, silently concealing the secret of their murders. It was probably the Jews, the Muslims mused angrily before reluctantly abandoning the thought. After all, how could the Jews murder seventy people without attracting any attention and leaving behind no tracks? Besides, the Jews wouldn't be so stupid as to arouse the fatal ire of their Muslim neighbors.

Confounded by the mystery, they turned to their sorcerers, who, in turn, were stumped. "We don't know," The sorcerers said simply, throwing up

their arms in defeat. But the relatives of the deceased weren't satisfied. They were determined to solve the case of the gruesome murder.

"Why don't we ask the Jewish elders?" Someone suggested after they exhausted all of their other options. "The Jews are smart; they should have the answer!"

Nodding in agreement, a delegation entered the town's main shul and approached its rav. Recounting their story, they demanded of him to solve the mystery. "We'll be back soon, so be sure to have an answer for us," They said, warningly, before leaving.

Once again, the Jewish community was in uproar. Their feelings were divided. On one hand, they felt mollified, grateful to Hashem for meting out justice upon the very men who had so cruelly murdered a Jew the day before. At the same time, they were fearful, as the Muslims were expecting a solution to their impossible mystery, and it would not bode well for the Jews if none were found...

When little Avreme'le entered the shul that evening, he found the rav deep in prayer, his face creased anxiously.

"May I ask what is worrying the honored rav?" The little boy asked respectfully.

The rav explained the impossible challenge placed before him by the Muslims. "If I don't discover the secret of their murder, I am afraid the Jewish community will suffer terribly," He added.

Avreme'le gazed up at him with round, innocent eyes. "Oh, I know what happened with that murder," He said confidently.

"You do?!" The rav asked in surprise. "What happened? And how do you know?"

"Because I did it," Avreme'le responded matter-of-factly. Seeing the question marks in the rav's skeptical stare, he continued, "I was very upset by what the Muslims did yesterday to my neighbor, so I looked up a way to kill them in a certain kabbalah sefer. You just have to be mechaven to a certain sheim Hashem, and then you write it on a piece of parchment, and then you put it into the water... and then it poisons the water," He concluded.

"You did what?! You aren't allowed to do that!" The rav sputtered in shock.

"But I was very angry," The young boy protested. "It doesn't matter," The rav responded. "It's forbidden to do something like that! You're not allowed to learn kabbalah, you're too young for that! Who is teaching you kabbalah anyway?"

Who is your rebbi?"

Avreme'le averted his gaze. "I'm sorry, but I promised him that I wouldn't reveal his identity," He mumbled apologetically.

The rav looked at him sharply and then issued his punishment. "Because you are someone who was moreh halacha lifnei rabbo, you will need to go into exile for two years. But," He added, unwillingly to lose the precious young talmid chacham, the six-year-old who was able to delve into the secrets of the Torah and possessed the ability to be mechaven sheimos. "Don't go too far. Tell your parents I said that you need to go away, perhaps to a relative in a nearby town, for two years. They'll trust me."

The little boy accepted his punishment stoically, but he had some parting advice for the rav. "You can tell the Muslims that the casualties of that tragedy choked on a poisonous gas emitted from the cooking fire in the kitchen," He suggested wisely before leaving the shul.

When Avreme'le arrived home and informed his parents that the rav insisted that he leave home for two years, they immediately grasped what had occurred. Their little boy's difficulty waking that morning, his disappearance in middle of the day, now banishment for two years on the rav's order... they understood that their son's strange behavior had something to do with the deaths that occurred in the Muslim quarter. Unquestioningly, they obeyed the rav and sent their young son off to fulfill his sentence of exile at his uncle's home in a different city.

When the Muslim delegation returned to see if the rav had a solution to the mystery they challenged him with, the rav followed the six-year-old's advice to the letter. "Based on the evidence you brought me regarding the way the corpses were found," He told the delegation. "It's clear that the people in the house suffocated from a fatal gas that is emitted from certain kinds of cooking fires."

To his relief, the Muslims found his explanation plausible and left in peace. From then on, perhaps afraid of the consequences of starting up with their neighbors, the Muslims ceased bothering the Jewish community. And little Avreme'le grew into Rav Avraham Ben Musa, a great Sephardic mekubal who authored many great Kabbalistic works.

Why was a boy of just six years of age able to achieve spiritual heights that some never achieve even after a long and full lifetime? It was due to the inborn purity and innocence that was never destroyed by magazines full of nonsense and videos full of drivel. It was cultivated through tender nurturing of an inner spark of kedusha, unadulterated by storybooks full of gibberish, celebrations of utter foolishness, and other coarse music so influenced by a foreign culture. It was because of the untainted environment his mother toiled to provide for him from his first moments on earth.

Every Jewish child is born with a neshama, unsullied and pure.

And every Jewish child can achieve tremendous heights, if only his mother realizes her power to preserve his natural purity so that he can grow into true greatness.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A427

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