

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 Yaakov Abulefya with the Arizal

In the days of the Arizal, there lived a man named R' Yaakov Abulafia. Despite his greatness, R' Yaakov was extremely humble and considered himself a simple Jew. Being a poor man, with no means to provide for his family, he decided to travel to Egypt to solicit donations door to door. Before leaving Eretz Yisroel, he set out to the home of the Arizal to obtain a letter vouching for his authenticity to show his fellow Jews in Egypt. As R' Yaakov neared the Arizal's house, he was astonished to see the holy tzaddik coming out to greet him. He wondered about the Arizal's behavior, since he certainly did not think himself worthy of the honor. The Arizal greeted him warmly and invited him into his home.

"R' Yaakov, you are planning to go to Egypt, isn't that right?" The Arizal asked him. "You would like me to give you a letter?"

R' Yaakov Abulafia understood that the Arizal knew this because he had seen it with *ruach*

hakodesh, and he affirmed that it was indeed so; he was planning on traveling to *Mitzrayim* and would greatly appreciate a letter of validation from the *rov*.

"I will definitely give you a letter," The Arizal told him. "However, this trip to Egypt is very important. You must make sure to set out immediately."

"I just plan on collecting some money, nothing more," R' Yaakov said, suddenly feeling slightly nervous. "Why is this journey so important?"

"It's not your trip to Egypt that matters so much," The Arizal responded. "It is the journey back that is essential." He handed R' Yaakov a warm letter of recommendation and urged him once more to set out on his journey immediately.

Shortly thereafter, R' Yaakov began the long, difficult trip from Tzfas to Egypt to go collecting for his family. Armed with his warm letter from such a reputable *rov* like the Arizal, he succeeded in raising a sizable amount of funds and was soon ready to return home to Eretz Yisroel.

For the arduous return journey, he planned on renting a camel to ride through the journey. However, a friend convinced him that a horse and wagon would provide him with a far more comfortable ride. He rented a horse and wagon, and joined a caravan traveling together across the continent toward Eretz Yisroel.

After riding through the blazing heat for many hours, the caravan stopped for some respite. The weary travelers tied their animals to some trees to prevent them from escaping and set up a camp where they would spend the night. They prepared food, had a meal, and then retired until the morning.

When morning dawned, R' Yaakov, who was unused to the strenuous traveling, was still feeling extremely drowsy. Following the other members

of the caravan, he untied his horse and readied it to continue the journey. Feeling unusually tired, he slumped down for a few moments behind the tree and fell asleep. Not noticing that one of their fellow travelers were not with them, the rest of the caravan continued on without him.

R' Yaakov awoke two hours later, feeling refreshed and invigorated. Looking around, it dawned on him that the caravan had left without him, and his good mood quickly turned into dread. He was helpless and completely alone in a barren, deserted area, with no sign of direction. Panic-stricken, he began running, hoping he was heading in the right direction and that he would soon catch up with the caravan.

After running for a stretch, he saw some figures in the distance. Squinting as he ran toward them, he saw a man viciously beating two huge bulls. R' Yaakov had never seen such cruelty, and he watched in horror as the bulls were beaten with an incredible vengeance. Suddenly, something astonishing happened, and R' Yaakov rubbed his eyes to make sure he wasn't seeing a mirage. Before his very eyes, the two bulls were transformed into people, and the man who had been whipping them so cruelly turned into a bull. Watching this unbelievable occurrence, R' Yaakov understood that he had encountered a place where *neshamos* who had committed terrible sins were brought down from the Next World for punishment. Deserts, he knew, were created for this purpose: to penalize the wicked, and that is why they are so dangerous.

His breathing shallow and his heart pounding painfully in his chest, he wasn't sure if he should flee for his life or remain rooted to his place in fear. However, being that there was no where to run to, R' Yaakov decided to stay where he was and cautiously monitor the proceedings from a relatively safe distance.

R' Yaakov was forced to watch the unbearably cruel whippings that the bulls were subject to for

some time. Then, the bulls all transformed back into humans, and they started running in his direction. Falling on the floor before him, they began kissing his feet.

"We know you are from Tzfas," They exclaimed, looking up at him from their perch on the sandy earth. "Help us! Please, help us! You cannot imagine the suffering that we are going through!" The men began crying pitifully. "You live near the Ari in Tzfas," They continued desperately. "Please, ask him to help us atone for our *aveiros*. We are suffering terribly! Please speak to the Ari!"

R' Yaakov looked at them wordlessly, unsure how to respond.

"We will not leave until you promise that you won't forget our names, and that you'll go back to the Ari and ask him how we can atone for our terrible sins," The men declared.

Hearing this declaration, R' Yaakov Abulefya promised to do as they asked.

After uttering this promise, the men told him to close his eyes, and when R' Yaakov opened them a moment later, he found himself back with his caravan. Gratefully, he continued on with the caravan to Tzfas.

When he returned to Tzfas, he immediately went to see the Arizal. After greeting him warmly, the Arizal asked, "Are you coming now to discuss what you've seen in the desert, with bulls who turned into people and people who turned into bulls?" R' Yaakov nodded, amazed that the Arizal knew, with his *ruach hakodesh*, exactly what he had seen.

The Arizal began explaining that each *neshama* is connected to another so that all *neshamos* are linked in one giant web of connection. The actions of one person has much greater repercussions far beyond that individual, as it

effects all the *neshamos* connected to him. “You, R’ Yaakov,” The Arizal told him, “Are connected to these *neshamos*. Your *teshuvah* will have the power to end their suffering. Without your *teshuvah*, these *neshamos* will continue to suffer for many more years.”

“But why me?” R’ Yaakov asked wonderingly. “I’m no one special. Why should my *teshuvah* help these people?”

“Your *neshamah* and theirs are interconnected,” The Arizal repeated. “And just for that reason alone, your *teshuvah* will accomplish what they need and their suffering will cease.”

“Which *aveirah* did they do?” R’ Yaakov asked. “They disregarded the mitzvah of *payos*,” The Arizal responded. “There are various *shittos* regarding what is considered *payos* and exactly what is allowed to be cut. These men, however, ignored the mitzvah completely. They did not even comply with the minimal *shittah*. They had no *payos* whatsoever. It is because of this *aveirah* that they are suffering so.”

“And what does *payos* have to do with bulls?” R’ Yaakov inquired. “In the Torah, we learn about the mitzvah of *payos* from the *posuk* לא תקיפו פאת ראשכם,” The Arizal explained. “The first letters of the words *payos roshaychem* spells out *par*- a bull. If someone neglects the mitzvah of *payos*, his punishment will be the *gilgul* of a bull. He will be sent back into the world in the guise of a bull and will be subjected to terrible beatings.”

The Arizal then explained the steps that R’ Yaakov had to take in order to atone for the sin of these *neshamos*. R’ Yaakov Abulefya immediately undertook to do what his *rov* had told him and followed the Arizal’s instructions scrupulously.

After he completed everything the Arizal told him, he was visited by the three *neshamos* in a dream. They told him that due to his *teshuvah*,

they finally merited to go to Gehinnom. Until then, they had not been allowed into Gehinnom but were forced to suffer endlessly, day after day, with no end in sight. Now, with R’ Yaakov’s *teshuvah*, they merited Gehinnom, where they were finally cleansed of their *aveirah*. Subsequently, they received a nice portion in Gan Eden. They thanked R’ Yaakov profusely for helping them achieve peace in the next world.

R’ Yaakov Abulefya awoke, awed by the sheer responsibility he, and each Jew, has toward everyone else in *klal* Yisroel. Everything we do or do not do has tremendous repercussions and effects all *neshamos* connected to us, both in this world and the next. Will we live up to this responsibility?

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A18 - 1991

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Toras Reb Kalman
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609.807.1783
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