

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 Saadya Gaon

Rav Saadya Gaon was a the *gadol hador* of his generation. At one point in his lifetime, similar to many other tremendous Torah leaders throughout the generations, he undertook to go into exile. Generally, Rav Saadya was careful to dress in respectable attire, as befitting for a *rov* who represents the Torah. However, when he went into *galus*, he donned beggars' attire. Wearing the rags, it was difficult to recognize the great sage.

During his wanderings, he would travel day in day out, sleeping on shul benches or in a hostel for paupers. Like a typical beggar, he would collect coins and crusts of bread as he made his way from town to town along the countryside.

Rumors spread throughout Babylon that Rav Saadya Gaon went into exile. As the news traveled, people began to look out for their venerated leader, hoping to spot him in their city or village.

On one particularly rainy day, the frigid temperature and stormy weather made it

impossible for Rav Saadya to continue his wanderings. Shivering and damp, he knew that his life was in danger from the vicious winds and heavy downpour. He stopped a passerby and inquired if there were any inns in the area where he would be able to spend the day.

“The inns are closed during the rainy season,” The man replied. He turned and pointed down the road to a large house near the corner. “However, there is a very generous man who lives in that house over there. His name is R’ Yechiel, and he is the go-to person for tzedakah and donations. Why don’t you try him? Maybe he’ll take you in.” The Rav Saadya who knocked on the wealthy man’s door did not look anything like the respected leader he was known to be. His clothing were drenched, through and through, dripping into a puddle that was quickly forming around his feet. His worn pants were splattered with mud and grime, souvenirs of the dirt roads he had trudged on in the rainy weather.

The woman of the house, when she answered the door, took one look at him and turned up her nose in distaste. She and her husband were happy to give tzedakah, yet they weren’t too keen on having squalid paupers dirtying up their beautiful home. She looked at Rav Saadya questioningly.

“May I please come in?” Rav Saadya asked through chattering teeth. “I’m freezing, and I have no where else to go in this weather...”

The woman tried to mask her annoyance, yet she could not refuse a fellow Jew’s refuge from the brutal weather outdoors. Wordlessly, she led him inside and showed him to a corner of the main room, where he could sit down and warm himself by the fire.

Putting down the small pack that contained his meager belongings, Rav Saadya tried to warm his bones by the roaring fireplace. As he rubbed his frozen fingers together and allowed the warmth of the fire to seep through his drenched clothing, he

was enveloped by the delicious aroma of a hot meal being prepared nearby. He was filled with gratitude to Hashem for providing him with shelter, and, it seemed, a warm meal that would further revive and revitalize him.

From his small corner, he watched as the family sat down to their meal. R' Yechiel, it seemed, was not yet home. Rav Saadya stood up and walked toward the middle of the room, lingering hesitantly a few feet away from the table, waiting to be invited to join the meal or at least to be served in the kitchen.

Noticing his presence, the woman grew even more irritated. "I apologize, but my husband isn't home yet," She said, mustering up some dregs of patience to speak to her guest in a pleasant tone. "You are welcome back when he gets in later."

Rav Saadya nodded and wordlessly retreated to his corner. Watching the shivering, drenched, and obviously hungry Jew turn away, the woman felt a slight pang of remorse. She headed to the kitchen and came out with a hard lump of bread, which she handed to the beggar.

Rav Saadya accepted the crusty bread and thanked her. He washed and chewed slowly on each dry piece, trying to ignore the sounds of clinking dishes and happy chatter of the family enjoying their hot meal just a few feet away. He was grateful that he had received something to eat, but he couldn't help but feel somewhat disturbed that the wealthy household could not spare one hungry beggar a warm bowl of soup.

Later that evening, after the family finished their meal, R' Yechiel finally walked in. Immediately, his wife began listing her grievances against the beggar who sought shelter in their home that afternoon. "He begged me to take him in," She said indignantly. "Even though he was muddy and wet, I let him in. I even gave him some bread so that he shouldn't be hungry. But you should have seen the face he made when I gave him the bread!

What we serve here is obviously not good enough for that beggar! His behavior really insulted me!" Her husband raised his eyebrows and then brought them down, staring hard at the beggar through narrowed eyes. Seeing R' Yechiel's stern expression, Rav Saadya looked away. Turning on his heel, the wealthy man stalked out of the room. Needless to say, Rav Saadya was not treated to a hot meal that night. The dry crust of bread would have to serve as his supper.

In then morning, R' Yechiel's annoyance regarding his unwanted houseguest only grew stronger. Curtly, he informed the beggar that he was going to shul for *shacharis* and demanded that he accompany him. He hoped that once in shul, he would be able to shake the beggar off of his tail and return home without him.

"Thank you for the invitation, but I'm planning on davening right here," Rav Saadya replied, gesturing to the chair in the corner where he had spent the night. His clothing were still damp from the previous day's rain, and he hadn't had much to eat in many hours. He was afraid to leave the house in his weakened condition, especially considering the fact that the stormy weather had not abated.

R' Yechiel left the room and slammed the door behind him. After his conversation with the beggar, he worried that his guest planned on parking himself in their home for an extended stay. Pursing his lips, he instructed his children not to give the beggar anything to eat. By denying the pauper food, R' Yechiel hoped he would pick himself up and find himself more hospitable shelter.

The entire day went by. The family completely ignored the beggar in the corner. Rav Saadya did not receive a morsel of food all day, and he felt himself growing weaker and weaker. However, contrary to R' Yechiel's plan, the longer he went without food, the more determined he became not to leave. He knew that trying to brave the brutal

weather in his starved state was a near-certain death sentence since he had nowhere else to go. Despite his intense hunger, in R' Yechiel's home at least he had a roof over his head, protecting him from the elements, and even a fire to keep him warm. He observed the family's meals and activities in silence.

As the day waned, two *talmidei chachomim* came by to collect money for tzedakah. The woman of the house opened the door and explained that her husband was still at his store, working. "He should be back shortly," She said apologetically. "Would you like to come in and wait until he gets here?"

The two men followed her into the dining room, where they sat down to wait for R' Yechiel's arrival. They noticed a pauper dressed in rags warming himself by the fire, and they nodded in greeting, not recognizing him. As they waited, they began to discuss the *sugya* they were learning. Rav Saadya, despite his bedraggled appearance, could not resist the allure of a deep Torah discussion, and he jumped in to join. As he steered the discussion to one brilliant angle and then to another, the two men looked at each other, impressed. They posed a difficulty they had been pondering, and Rav Saadya instantly provided a dazzling answer. Then Rav Saadya told them an original thought on the *sugya*. The two were overwhelmed by his sheer brilliance.

When R' Yechiel strode into the room, the two men explained that they were collecting money for tzedakah. Warmly, the wealthy man gave them a nice sum of money, and they thanked him profusely. They left the large house, still marveling at the wisdom of the pauper whom they had encountered. "We must tell the *rov* about our discovery," One of them exclaimed excitedly. "Such a *talmid chachom*, such brilliance!"

The pair detoured passed the home of the town's *rov*, and began recounting their experience with the pauper who had been in R' Yechiel's home.

They retold the *chiddush* that they had heard from the beggar, and the *rov*'s face lit up with pleasure. Amazed, he assured the men that he would go meet the pauper himself when he had some free time.

While the two men were still in the room, two other *rabbonim* came to see the *rov*. They had been sent by the *Reish Galusa* on a mission which brought them to see this specific *rov*. They mentioned that since their mission for the *Reish Galusa* required a significant amount of travel, as they went along their route, they were additionally looking for Rav Saadya Gaon, who had gone into *galus* and disappeared. "Have you possibly seen Rav Saadya in this town?" They inquired.

"No, I haven't," The *rov* responded honestly. "We haven't heard anything about Rav Saadya here." The two men who had just been in R' Yechiel's house exchanged a long glance. "I don't know if the man who we saw was Rav Saadya," One of them said hesitantly. "I mean, he was a muddy, weary-looking pauper. But he told us the most outstanding *vort*..." His voice tingling with excitement, he retold the *chiddush* for a third time.

Unlike the small-town *talmidei chachomim*, who had never seen Rav Saadya, the two *rabbbonim* on a mission for the *Reish Galusa* were familiar with the Torah sage. "Can you take us to see this pauper?" They asked, wondering if they had discovered Rav Saadya at last.

"Sure," The younger men agreed, and they brought the two *rabbonim* to R' Yechiel's home. Entering the expansive main room, the two *rabbbonim* saw a poor man dressed in rags sitting by the fire. They stopped short in fright, recognizing the mud-splattered man as the venerated leader of *klal* Yisroel, Rav Saadya Gaon. In unison, they sprawled before him and began kissing his mud-stained shoes.

Rav Saadya realized he had been discovered, and he begged the two *rabbonim* not to make a commotion. Respectfully, they stood up. However, they were too late. The lady of the house had seen them kissing the feet of her unwelcome squatter.

As the two *rabbonim* hurried back to inform the *rov* of the town that Rav Saadya was indeed in town, she hurried after them, demanding to know what they had been doing. "Don't you realize who you are hosting?" They challenged her. "Rav Saadya Gaon himself is sitting in your dining room!" Leaving her standing there, dumbstruck and devoid of color, they rushed on toward the *rov's* home.

The woman turned around and ran to tell her husband the astonishing news she had just learned. The couple was intensely remorseful of their mistreatment of their guest. They realized that they had done a terrible misdeed against such a great man and against the Torah which he represented.

When the *rov* of the town heard that the pauper staying in R' Yechiel's home was Rav Saadya Gaon, he gathered the finest *talmidei chachomim* of the village to join him in greeting the great sage. As the procession made its way to R' Yechiel's home, more scholars joined until a huge assemblage of learned men burst into the wealthy man's home to show respect for Rav Saadya.

Rav Saadya, unaware of the commotion in town, was still perched on the same chair, in the same muddy clothing, warming himself by the same fire, and still intensely hungry. Suddenly, the door opened, and a huge crowd filed in, filling the room from wall to wall as each man tried to glimpse the holy visage of Rav Saadya Gaon. R' Yechiel, his face still unusually pale, squeezed his way through the assemblage. When he reached Rav Saadya, he began crying, begging for forgiveness. "If only we would have known!" He cried. "Why didn't the *rov* reveal himself to us?"

Rav Saadya did not reply.

R' Yechiel's wife, who had made her way through the crowd as well, joined her husband's tears. "Please forgive me!" She pleaded. "I can't believe how badly I mistreated the *rov*! Please forgive me!" Rav Saadya still did not reply, and the couple retreated to a corner, the enormity of their misdeed seeping into their repentant hearts.

The Torah scholars who were gathered around began asking questions to Rav Saadya, who answered them all with tremendous wisdom and foresight. The room was abuzz with Torah discussion and Rav Saadya's countenance shone with a fiery light.

After the shock and commotion calmed down, the room began to empty out, and R' Yechiel approached his acclaimed guest once more to try to obtain his forgiveness.

"I did not bear a grudge against you for even a moment," Rav Saadya assured him. "I went into exile for a reason, since I needed atonement for my *aveiros*. If you were here to help me achieve the *kapparah*, than it was from *shomayim*." Rav Saadya paused and then continued. "However, I do want you to realize that it doesn't make a difference who someone is. Any Jew, if he is a pauper or Rav Saadya Gaon, deserves respect and proper treatment. Any time you encounter someone, no matter how he appears, assume he is Rav Saadya Gaon in disguise and treat him as such. This is something you need to work on."

R' Yechiel and his family took Rav Saadya's rebuke to heart and opened their home to all kinds of people in need. For the rest of their lives, they were known as a family who personified *hachnasas orchim*, where people were hosted with dignity and hospitality.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A109 - 1989

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