

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 Meharam MiRottenberg

Rav Meir of Rottenberg, known as the Maharam MiRottenberg, was a *rishon* who lived in Worms, Germany. A libel was brought against him by a former *talmid* who had gone astray, and Rav Meir was imprisoned. The Jewish community wanted to ransom him, yet the king was demanding the astronomical sum of twenty-thousand gold coins for his release. No amount of lobbying, pleading, or attempts at reaching a compromise bore results. The king refused to negotiate. It was either twenty-thousand gold coins, or Rav Meir would remain imprisoned forever.

Although raising this fantastic sum would reduce the Jewish community to terrible poverty, they were determined not to allow their revered leader to languish in prison for the rest of his life. They were prepared to live the simplest of lifestyles to secure his release. A *pidyon shivuyim* committee was established to raise the funds and word was sent to Rav Meir regarding the efforts being made on his behalf.

When Rav Meir learned of these efforts, he expressed his unequivocal opposition. If the Jews were to succumb to the king's extortion and ransom him for such an exorbitant sum, he argued, the king would continue to victimize innocent Jews to fund his expensive habits. He would not allow himself to be ransomed and thereby set off a cycle of libels, imprisonments, and extortion. It was a decree from Heaven, and Rav Meir accepted the decree with love.

The king refused him any visitors, but agreed, after intense lobbying, to allow the Jews to send him packages through the prison warden. Rav Meir requested his tallis and tefillin, which were soon brought to him. He was given kosher food, parchment, quills and ink. Soon, his jail cell overlooking the river was transformed into a vibrant *bais medrash*. He knew all of Shas by memory, and spent his time reviewing *sugya* after *sugya*. Many pages of *chiddushei* Torah were composed within the cold stone walls of his cell as Rav Meir sat hunched over with his quill, day after day.

What bothered him most was that he did not have a *sefer* Torah. Without a *sefer* Torah, he was unable to fulfill certain *mitzvos*, such as Parshas Zachor and Parshas Parah. He was forced to miss *kriyas haTorah* three times a week, and additionally on *yom tov* and *rosh chodesh*. With his amazing memory and unlimited supply of writing implements, he would have been content to remain in prison for the remainder of his life if only he had a *sefer* Torah in his cell with him.

One Thursday night, he dreamed that *malach* Gavriel came to him, holding out a *sefer* Torah. "Meir ben Boruch," Gavriel said to him in his dream. "You should know that you are very beloved by Hashem. Hashem sees and knows of your anguish, and since He loves you so, He is willing to give you one of the thirteen *sifrei* Torah transcribed by Moshe *Rabbeinu*. It was brought up to the *beis din shel maalah* and is used by *tzaddikim* every Monday and Thursday.

However, the tzaddikim are willing to give up their *sefer* Torah so that you can have it. Before you read from this *sefer* Torah, be sure to prepare yourself properly, because the souls of the tzaddikim will join you in your cell when you *lein* from their *sefer*.”

“Why are you giving me this *sefer* Torah? Why do I deserve it?” Rav Meir asked the angel.

“It’s because you gave *klal* Yisroel an abundance of Torah,” Gavriel responded. “You established many, many students of Torah and the Torah owes you this favor.”

When Rav Meir awoke, he was trembling. Awestruck, he noticed that on the desk in his cell was a real *sefer* Torah, a *sefer* Torah that had been granted to him from Heaven. He didn’t dare go near the scroll just yet. He spent the entire Friday in intense spiritual preparation to ready himself for reading from the Torah after *Shacharis* on Shabbos morning. As Shabbos approached, he donned his Shabbos garments and davened with great fervency.

When it was time for *kriyas haTorah* on Shabbos morning, he gently removed the *mentele* from the *sefer* Torah and opened the scroll. As he began *leining*, the room suddenly lit up with a brilliant glow. Rav Meir understood that the light was emanating from the *neshamos* of the tzaddikim who had joined him in his cell. When he finished *kriyas haTorah*, he rolled the Torah back up and light in the room dimmed considerably. When *Minchah* rolled around, he read from the *sefer* Torah again, and once more, the room lit up brightly. The *sefer* Torah brought Rav Meir tremendous joy.

Thus passed days, weeks, and months with Rav Meir in prison. His days and nights were filled with Torah, and he merited to read from the heavenly *sefer* Torah on Mondays, Thursdays, Shabbos, *yom tov*, and *rosh chodesh*. Each time

anew, he saw his room become alight with the souls of tzaddikim.

At some point, Rav Meir decided to copy the *sefer* Torah. There were some contrasting opinions regarding certain letters in certain words in the Torah. Rav Meir realized that he would do a great service for the people of Worms by duplicating the *sefer* Torah from *shomayim*, which was surely as accurate as possible. He put in a request for *klaf* and ink, and the jailer obtained them for him from a *sofer* in Worms.

The process took a long time. He painstakingly wrote letter after letter, parshah after parshah. Eventually, he finished the very last letter of *V’zos Habrochah*. He lay the newly minted scroll on his desk alongside its original and put down his quill, content with his accomplishment. In his dream that night, he saw *malach* Gavriel once more. The angel smiled at him and then plucked the *sefer* Torah from Rav Meir’s desk, taking it back with him. Indeed, when Rav Meir woke up, there was only the Torah he had written on the table.

Rav Meir was troubled by the dream. He was unsure whether it was a sign that he shouldn’t have duplicated the *sefer* Torah. He performed a *shaalas chalom*, and he asked the *beis din shel maalah* this question. He was told that he had indeed done a wonderful thing by copying the Torah, and it was a great service for *klal* Yisroel. However, since he now had a *sefer* Torah of his own, there was no need for him to have the one from *shomayim*, and so they reclaimed it.

With the *sefer* Torah written by his own hand, Rav Meir would learn. Through the *pesukim*, he was able to extract the Torah *shba’al peh* as well, and he was able to learn the entirety of the Torah. Rav Meir grew older and frailer, and he began to feel that his time on this earth was running out. He wanted to gift his *sefer* Torah to the people of his hometown, Worms. Using boards of wood in his cell, he nailed together a box just large enough

to encase the *sefer* Torah. Then he wrapped the box in a coat, hoping that the double covering would protect the scroll from cold and winds and water.

Then, he lifted the box up to the tiny window in a high corner of his cell. Closing his eyes tightly, he prayed that the scroll reach its intended recipients in Worms. With tremendous emotion, he pushed the wrapped box out the window and listened until he heard the loud splash indicating that it had hit the water. There was nothing more he could do from prison, but if Hashem willed it, he knew that his precious *sefer* Torah would reach the right hands.

Shortly thereafter, the Maharam Mirottenberg was *niftar*. News of his passing took time to reach the Jewish community, but when they finally discovered that he was no longer among the living, they began to work on ransoming his body. Eventually, after a costly ransom, Rav Meir was brought to *kever yisroel*.

The little wooden box containing his *sefer* Torah continued bobbing along the riverside, slowly floating with the current. The weeks marched by as the small box made its unhurried way downstream. After many months, it finally reached the outskirts of Worms.

One morning, a group of fishermen were out on the water when they noticed a rectangular object floating nearby. They threw out a net to catch it, but it sunk beneath the net and resurfaced on the other side of their boat. They tossed the net overboard in a second attempt at seizing the object, but when they brought the net back up, it was empty. As if to mock them, the wooden rectangle bobbed to the surface a few meters further out.

“Let me have a try!” One of the men called, getting up from his perch on the small fishing boat and taking hold of the net. “You must be having a hard day, eh? It’s just a wooden box, an easy catch!” To his utter shock and dismay, however,

the box was more slippery than a fish. No matter how hard he tried, he could not capture it.

Other fishing boats pulled up alongside the first, and the capturing of the elusive box morphed into a competition between the fisherman. Still, the box continued to evade their grasp. They used big nets and small nets and tried every fishing hack they knew. They surrounded it from all sides, yet it soon disappeared beneath the water only to resurface far outside of the circle of trawlers.

Onshore in Worms, news of the strange phenomenon spread. Everyone heard about the strange wooden box floating in the water that seemed to be controlled by an otherworldly force. Trained, experienced fishermen could not pin it down. Something eerie and strange was at play.

One Jewish fisherman joined the swarm of fishing boats, watching the unusual spectacle. As if being steered, the box floated toward him and bobbed in the water beside his boat. He reached out with his bare hand and plucked the wooden box right out of the water.

From their own trawlers, the non-Jewish fishermen watched in greed and dismay as their prize was captured by a Jew. Determined to usurp the treasure, they chased the Jew’s boat to shore. On the beach, holding the box in his hands, the Jewish fisherman found himself surrounded by a greedy mob. Realizing he was outnumbered, he dropped the box onto the sand and ran for his life. The fisherman jumped in to pick it up, but found that they could not lift it. It was simply too heavy. A group of burly men with bulging muscles took up positions on all sides of the small wooden box. “One, two, three. Lift!” They heaved, but the box refused to budge.

By now, everyone realized that something unnatural was taking place, and they became afraid to tamper with it. Soon, they abandoned the small wooden crate and left the seashore.

The Jews returned to the sight when the coast was clear and attempted to lift the box. With no great difficulty, one man picked it up and smuggled it though the city and into the shul. After it was stored in a secure location in the shul, they went to inform their *rov* of the interesting occurrence. It was obvious to them that Hashem was interfering with nature to ensure the box be brought to the Jewish community, and they wanted the *rov* to open it up. What would it contain?

The wooden cover was pried open and they discovered a *sefer* Torah inside. On top of the scroll was a note that read:

מתנה שלוחה ספר זה תורה ציוה לנו משה כתובה בכתב ידו של מאיר הספר הזה קדוש וטהור וכל הקרוב אליו יקדש לקהילה הקדושה ורמיזה ולא יקראו בו אלא פעמים בשנה בשבועות זמן מתן תורתנו ובשמחת תורה זמן סיום התורה

This scroll is the Torah that was given to us by Moshe, written in the handwriting of Meir. It is a gift to the holy community of Worms. This scroll is holy and pure, and anyone who approaches it must first prepare himself in holiness. It may be read twice per year- on Shavuos and on Simchas Torah.

The people of Worms were awed and grateful at the precious gift they had been granted by their late leader, the Maharam MiRottenberg. As he instructed, only those who had first toiled in holiness and purity handled the invaluable *sefer* Torah, and it was beautifully adorned with velvet and silver. With great joy, the *sefer* Torah was danced to its rightful home in the *aron kodesh*, where it remained under careful guard. Twice a year, on *Shavuos* and *Simchas Torah*, the *sefer* Torah was removed and used for *krias haTorah*.

The precious *sefer* Torah was carefully protected throughout many painful chapters of Jewish history. Sadly, today this *sefer* Torah is hidden from us although its location was known until relatively recently.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A78

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