

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Lost and Found

Shlomo was a businessman, prosperous and successful. Much of his wealth could be attributed to the large establishment he ran adjacent to the central transit station. All public transportation operated out of this station, strategically positioned in the hub of a large, well-located city. Horses and coaches bearing passengers from around the country arrived at and departed from this station. It hustled with life, luggage, and livestock around the clock.

Shlomo owned the exclusive rights to operate a store and cafeteria in the area. Thus, his massive enterprise enjoyed the patronage of the thousands of individuals who passed through the station each week. He sold cold drinks and hot drinks, ready-to-eat meals, warm pastries, and liquor. His monopoly over this small market ensured that he had full control over prices and no competition to seal his potential customers. The profits were quick and steady.

The business mushroomed under his watchful management and was soon too large for him to oversee alone. Shlomo promoted a few of his loyal and talented employees to serve as supervisors of different departments in the large store.

A keen businessman, he knew his own presence was vital to the smooth operation and continuity of the establishment, and so he spent his days there. He stood in the store from sunrise, when the first coaches began rolling away from the station, serving coffee to the early birds with a warm smile. He was the last one to leave, late at night, after closing up the bar and sending the few remaining employees to bed.

It was impossible for one man to work so many hours every day. It was simply beyond human capacity. Therefore, Shlomo established a lunch break for himself for one hour in the middle of the day. From one to two o'clock in the afternoon, he would leave the store and head home to rest. During his breaks, he would send his daughter, Leah, to run one of the departments, mainly just to be a presence in his stead so that his employees would know that the boss still had his fingers in the pie even when he turned around. This arrangement worked well and the business continued turning an incredible profit.

One wintery afternoon, at two o'clock, Shlomo entered the bustling store, looking around with pride and satisfaction as his employees served a steady stream of customers. He walked briskly to the opposite end of the massive store to replace his daughter behind the counter as he did every day. To his surprise, Leah was not in her usual place, assisting customers and serving drinks. The door behind her counter, which led to outside, was wide open, which was also unusual.

His confusion quickly grew to concern as he roamed the store in search of the fifteen-year-old girl. "Have you seen my daughter?" he asked his employees.

“Your daughter?” they asked, blinking. They hadn’t been aware that their boss’s daughter had been present in the store that afternoon.

“She was manning the drinks counter,” Shlomo explained. “I found the door open, and she’s nowhere to be found.”

“She must have gone out, to buy a fruit or something,” one of the workers suggested, shrugging.

“She didn’t. I looked outside; there’s no one there,” Shlomo replied, his voice laced with urgency. He went from department to department, seeking his daughter and questioning his workers.

No one, it seemed, had seen Leah.

She must have gone home, he tried to calm himself. *She must have left just as I was coming in*. He left the store and quickly headed home, just to be sure.

“Leah? Leah!” he called as he entered the house.

“Leah, are you here?!”

“Leah didn’t come home yet,” his wife said, coming out to greet him. “Isn’t she still at the store?”

“No, she’s not there!” Shlomo cried, pacing nervously. “You’re sure she’s not home? She should have been home more than an hour ago.”

“She disappeared!” His wife’s shriek carried throughout the house. “Shlomo, go to the police! Maybe something bad happened to her!” She collapsed into a chair, arms trembling, face pale.

Shlomo didn’t need a second invitation. With brisk steps, he walked to the police station, where he was cordially received, in deference to his wealth and power. “My daughter is missing,” he said without preamble. “She disappeared from my

store near the transit station. Please, can you help me find her?”

A search committee was quickly set up and they hit the streets. For the next few hours, they questioned passersby and looked for witnesses, searching the ground and surrounding area for clues. The sun began to set and the search team was no closer to its goal.

The Jews of the city gathered in shul for *Mincha* and then *Maariv*, and word spread that Shlomo’s daughter was missing. Perhaps she was kidnapped? Injured? Lost? Shlomo was of the wealthiest men in the city, and people clucked their tongues sympathetically at his unfortunate plight.

Living in the same city was the great Maharsha. As the foremost leader of *klal* Yisroel in his generation, the Maharsha’s schedule was crammed, and his every moment was valuable. He therefore designated a certain amount of time each evening for people to consult him on various issues and concerns. With his incredible wisdom and grasp, the Maharsha was able to fire off a concise answer or suggestion to every petitioner, solving their difficult queries in seconds. The line would move quickly. Question, answer. Question, answer.

“You must go to the Maharsha,” Shlomo’s friends advised him. “Get a *brachah* from the *gadol hador*. He has hours for receiving people after *davening*, and for this sort of emergency, you won’t have to wait on line.”

Shlomo rolled his eyes. Arrogant and conceited, he did not have a high opinion of the venerated sage and was known to openly deride him. “How, exactly, will the Maharsha help me?” he demanded, scorn dripping from his words. “Okay, so maybe he knows how to learn Gemara. Let him learn Gemara! I’m looking to find my missing daughter, not to learn a *Tosafos*. I’ll take care of my own issue and let him deal with his learning.”

“Don’t be like that,” people tried to convince him.

“You have a serious problem on your hands! Go to the Maharsha! Why don’t you at least give it a shot?”

Shlomo just rolled his eyes again and walked home, frustrated.

At home, things were no better. His family was hysterical, agonizing over Leah’s disappearance. By this time, she had been missing for many hours. Amidst the wailing and shrieking, close friends were trying to productively solve the mystery and find the girl.

“Shlomo,” his closest friend said firmly, taking him by the arm. “I’ll come with you. But you must go to the Maharsha!”

“Leave me alone!” Shlomo moaned in response.

“Enough about the Maharsha already! Tell me something else! Can we write letters to surrounding locales, detailing Leah’s description and appearance?”

By morning, the letters had been sent and word got out that Shlomo was offering a handsome reward to whoever would find his daughter and bring her home safely.

A privately-paid search team was organized to find the missing girl. They went from village to village in search of her, yet Leah remained as elusive as ever. Being that she was last seen in the store, right near the busy transit station, she could have traveled in any direction, making it all the more difficult to narrow down a search area.

Two days passed, then three. Shlomo nearly went insane with worry. He berated himself for allowing his teenage daughter to work alone in his business, for not taking more precautions when placing her in such a perilous environment.

“That’s it, I’m going myself to search for her,” he announced to his red-eyed wife after a full week had passed.

She lifted her puffy face, wiping her tearstained cheeks. “How?” Her voice was raspy from prolonged weeping. “How will you search for her? Where will you go?”

“I’ll go everywhere,” he said, setting his lips into a determined line. “I’ll go from city to city, village to village. I won’t give up until I find her. I won’t come home until I can bring her back with me.”

Against his wife’s protests, he padded his clothes with large wads of cash and dumped a change of clothing into a small carry-on. True to his word, he traveled from town to town in a desperate attempt to find his daughter. It was like searching for a needle in a haystack. How could he find one teenage girl, lost somewhere, anywhere in the country?

At each locale he visited, he would describe his daughter to as many people as possible and would offer monetary compensation to anyone who agreed to join in the search for her. Sympathetic individuals tried to assist him, but the results were always disappointing. Leah was nowhere to be found.

Shlomo found himself wandering from place to place, sleeping in motels and always on the go. The difficult conditions took a toll on his body. With the passage of months, his jet-black beard went completely white and he lost much of his weight. He could barely work up an appetite and found himself growing weaker and weaker, to the point where he needed to buy himself a walking stick to help keep his balance.

One day, some two years after he began his search, he stopped off in a shul, weak and exhausted, to catch his breath. An old man approached him, looking at him kindly.

“Reb Yid, welcome to our city,” the elderly man said warmly. “Forgive me, but you don’t look well. Do you need a place to stay? Meals?”

“I don’t need a place to stay,” Shlomo responded tiredly. “I have plenty of money. I need my daughter! She’s missing!”

The man was a good listener, and he listened quietly as Shlomo relayed his tale of woe, beginning with his daughter’s disappearance and ending with his own sorry state after so many months of searching for her.

“I don’t understand something,” he said when Shlomo fell silent. “You come from the same city as the Maharsha! What does he have to say? I’m sure you got a *brachah*—.”

“Enough!” Shlomo practically exploded. “I’ve heard enough about the Maharsha! Stop pestering me! My daughter is missing! For a missing child, you call the police. You call down a search team. Let’s leave the Maharsha out of this!”

“Reb Yid, you have it all wrong,” the elderly man said softly. “We know that when a Jew has a problem, he consults with a *tzaddik*. Why deal with it alone? Let the Maharsha help you!”

Shlomo stood up angrily and responded with a shocking disparagement of the *gadol hador*, leaving his audience of one gaping after him.

Another year passed. Shlomo’s health continued to deteriorate until he was no longer capable of searching any further. Despondently, he spurred his horse in the direction of his hometown and began the painstaking journey back to where he had begun. Despite his vow, he would be returning home without Leah.

After weeks of traveling, he finally entered the city and rode wearily up to his palatial home. When he knocked on the door, however, he was greeted blankly. He had aged so considerably that

his own children no longer recognized him. “Can we help you?” they asked politely.

“Don’t you recognize me?” Shlomo responded plaintively. “It’s Totty!”

“Totty!” they echoed in astonishment. “Totty! Totty’s back!”

His wife came running to the door, nearly fainting when she recognized her husband, a shadow of his former self. The tears were plentiful as the family reunited the gaping hole left by Leah’s disappearance felt more keenly than ever.

The news of Shlomo’s return traveled quickly, and soon his friends were upon him, embracing him warmly. Inevitably, the subject of the Maharsha came up. “We’ve tried everything humanely possible,” his friends told him. “Look at you! You practically killed yourself trying to find her and she’s still missing! Let’s go to the Maharsha once and for all!”

“Leave me alone,” Shlomo moaned. “I told you I don’t believe in these things! All he knows how to do is learn Gemara. I’m not wasting my time.”

But his friends refused to take no for an answer. They continued pestering him to bring his troubles to the holy sage.

“Alright!” Shlomo conceded grudgingly, raising his hands in defeat. “So go! Just go already! Go tell the Maharsha that my daughter is missing for three years now. Go tell him, and leave me alone!”

“That’s ridiculous,” one of his friends snapped at him. “The first thing the Maharsha will want to know is where the father of the girl is. Let yourself be helped, Shlomo! You must come with us tonight to see the Maharsha.”

Shlomo crossed his arms. “I’m not going.”

“Yes, you are going,” his friends countered. “You are going tonight, between *Mincha* and *Maariv*, when the Maharsha has hours to receive people.”

“I’m not going.”

“Yes, Totty, please go,” his children pleaded.

“It’s our last hope for finding Leah!”

“I’m not going.”

“Shlomo, you must,” his wife insisted. “You must go tonight.”

“I’m not going.”

Before he knew it, his friends literally lifted him up and his family pushed him out the door. They physically brought him, kicking and screaming, to the Maharsha’s home. One of his friends ran ahead to inform the *gabbai* of Shlomo’s impending arrival.

“Of course I remember that terrible story,” the *gabbai* whispered back. “But that happened years ago! Where was he until now?”

“Don’t ask questions,” the friend said quietly.

“It’s a miracle he’s coming at all. Can you push us ahead of the line?”

The *gabbai* pursed his lips. “No, I’m sorry, but I really can’t. All these people need to see the Maharsha urgently. There’s no way I can give one person preferential treatment over the others.”

“Please,” Shlomo’s friend pleaded. “He’s been through so much! Can’t you—.”

“No, I can’t,” the *gabbai* said tersely. “I’m sorry, but your friend will wait his turn like everyone else.”

Shoulders slumped, the friend turned to Shlomo and his entourage, who had entered in the midst of his conversation with the *gabbai*. “It’ll be our turn in just a few minutes,” he said encouragingly. The door to the Maharsha’s study opened, and a man emerged, looking thoughtful. The *gabbai* didn’t even glance at Shlomo as he ushered a different waiting individual into the study.

“That’s it,” Shlomo cried in exasperation, jumping up from his seat. “I’m going. I’m not waiting for the next six hours for a chance to speak to someone who can’t even help me.”

“No,” his friends said, just as stubborn. Taking his shoulders, one of them gently guided him back into his seat.

The door opened again, and the next man went in. Each appointment, it seemed, was only a few minutes long, and the line moved steadily. Question, answer, next person. Within a short time, the *gabbai* called Shlomo’s name.

Shlomo got up, his legs wobbly, suddenly afraid of what he would find in the *tzaddik*’s study. He walked hesitantly into the room.

With his powerful bearing and piercing eyes, the Maharsha was the kind of *gadol* whom Jews trembled before him as they sought his guidance and were relieved when they emerged from his study unscathed. When he gazed at someone, his stare tore right through him.

Despite his scorn for the *tzaddik*, Shlomo’s heart pounded fiercely as he stood before him. His knees suddenly did not seem strong enough to support his weight and he teetered precariously, on the verge of a bad fall. The *gabbai*, on his way out of the room, slid a chair behind him and helped him onto it. Shlomo sank down gratefully.

Behind his desk, the Maharsha turned a page in the *sefer* before him and took a long puff of his pipe.* Shlomo shifted nervously in his seat, but

the Maharsha didn't even lift his eyes to favor him a glance. He continued perusing the *sefer*, smoking his pipe and turning the pages, utterly neglecting to acknowledge the man sitting before him.

Shlomo's nervousness evaporated and a seething anger took its place. The nerve! There he was, one of the wealthiest men in the country, sitting there contrary to his own wishes, because everyone was convinced that the Maharsha had the ability to help him. Instead, he was being completely ignored. He clenched his teeth and continued to wait as his blood boiled within him.

For a full half hour, the Maharsha continued learning, completely disregarding Shlomo's presence. Shlomo thought he would go insane from the torturous wait, yet he didn't dare make a move or utter a sound.

In the waiting room, his friends waited along with the *gabbai* and other petitioners, trying to fathom what was taking so long. The Maharsha was known for his sharp grasp and brief responses, which meant that the typical audience lasted no longer than one minute. More complex questions were sometimes granted an additional minute, but a visit lasting this long was unheard of. They glanced continuously at the door yet did not dare interrupt.

At long last, the Maharsha lay down his pipe and closed the volume before him. He stood up, and instinctively, Shlomo did the same. The Maharsha's piercing eyes roved over Shlomo's body slowly. He stared into his eyes, then at his nose, then at his chin. He continued downward until he was gazing intently at his shoes.

Shlomo's body trembled and he held onto the desk for support. The Maharsha's penetrating gaze began making its ascent up his legs and chest and face and rested once more on his eyes. Shlomo was sure he would pass out from the

sheer terror. His lips felt frozen, and he could not utter a sound.

The Maharsha continued staring intently at him, his eyes traveling downward and then slowly coming back up. By the third time he repeated this process, the room began swimming before Shlomo and he leaned forward, trying to steady himself and regain clarity and focus.

"Okay," the Maharsha finally said, removing his terrifying gaze from Shlomo. He took out a piece of paper. With a few deft movements, he scrawled something onto the page. Then he lit a match. He glanced briefly at the words he had written and then up at Shlomo before setting the match to the paper.

The fire voraciously consumed the page, which the Maharsha had hastily dropped onto the stone table to avoid burning his fingers. Within a few short moments, all that remained was a small pile of ashes and some curling wisps of smoke.

The Maharsha turned to a shaken Shlomo. "You can go home now," he said. "Your daughter will be home between two and three o'clock tonight." Shlomo walked shakily out of the room, leaving the door open for the *gabbai*, who hurried in to help the Maharsha out to *Maariv*.

"What happened?" Shlomo's waiting friends asked breathlessly.

"Why did you force me to go?" Shlomo responded bitterly. "He was terribly cruel to me. I sat there for thirty minutes while he didn't even acknowledge my presence. And then he stared at me, these terrible, penetrating stares. I felt that I was being stabbed all over my body, just from the power of his gaze!"

"But what did he say?" his friends pleaded. "Was he able to help?"

Shlomo shrugged. "What is this, magic? He wrote something on a paper, burned it, and then said that she'll be home today. Abra cadabra!"

His friends began exclaiming excitedly. "That's wonderful!"

"It's a good thing you went!"

"It's amazing! Your daughter is coming home!"

"Oh, please, don't try to sell me that," Shlomo said tiredly. "Please, I just came home today after years of searching. I'm exhausted. I just need to go home."

When Shlomo arrived home, he found his house crammed with people. They were all talking excitedly about the Maharsha's words. The *gadol hador* said that the girl would come home, and everyone wanted to be present when it happened. Shlomo, thoroughly exhausted, begged the crowd to leave, yet his plea was ignored. The hour got later and later, yet those in the house showed no signs of settling down. The fireplace roared, the lanterns burned bright, the people chatted and waited.

Two o'clock in the morning. Outside was dark and eerie, while inside, the house pulsed with life. Two-fifteen. Two-thirty. A quarter to three. The clock struck the three o'clock mark.

Suddenly, they heard a voice. "Abba! Abba! Open up! Abba!"

Someone pulled open the door. Standing on the stoop was Leah.

The exclamations grew deafening. Her mother ran toward her, crying, embracing her tightly. Shlomo followed, his eyes bulging in shock. Leah fell on his shoulder, and he began weeping hysterically. His daughter was back!

Even at the unearthly hour, the news traveled speedily around the city. Everyone rejoiced with Shlomo and his family at the safe return of their daughter, now eighteen years old.

Leah was brought into the house and shown to a comfortable chair. She was immediately surrounded by the curious crowd. Crying, she explained that she didn't feel comfortable sharing her story with the general public. "It's private," she said through her tears. "Can everyone please leave? I would like to speak to my parents privately?"

Her request was ignored. No one budged. They stood there, waiting to hear where she had been, what had happened to her. Realizing that the full story would get around anyway, Leah relented and began to relay her experiences

"For a few years, I was in charge of the store for one hour every day," she began. "I got to know the ins and outs of the business, I got to know the steady customers. On that fateful day, I was in middle of serving customers when a heavily decorated officer came in. He was an army general, and he must have been in the midst of a long trip. He didn't want to order a drink, but rather a full barrel of wine.

"He ordered me to deliver the barrel to his wagon. Although lugging a full barrel was difficult for a young girl like me and would have been very easy for him, I knew that customer service was an important part of the business, and so I agreed. The barrel was every bit as heavy as I had imagined, and I lugged it slowly up the steps of his wagon.

"I reached the third, uppermost step and set the heavy barrel down. Turning to exit the carriage, I was shocked to realize that the door had been closed and locked behind me. I was trapped inside the general's wagon."

Her parents gasped. The crowd leaned in to hear better.

Leah continued. “I began screaming, ‘Let me out! Let me out!’, but to no avail. In the hubbub of the busy transit station, no one heard the muffled cries emanating from the general’s wagon. The general, sitting calmly on the bench in the carriage, explained to me that he wanted me to be his wife.

“‘Absolutely not!’ I yelled angrily at my kidnapper. ‘It is forbidden for me to marry a non-Jew. Let me out! Take me home!’ But he coldly refused. We traveled and traveled and traveled. Eventually, I lost my sense of direction. When the wagon pulled up before an elaborate mansion sitting on a gated estate, I could not figure out where it was located.

“The general forced me to marry him. In the three years that I was there, we had three children. I was never permitted to leave the estate, since the general was afraid I would escape. There were rolling fields and beautiful orchards on the estate itself, and I spent much time there with my three little children. As much as I longed to be free of the general and the life he had forced upon me, I was stuck, and I was determined to make a good life for my innocent children.

“This afternoon, something strange occurred. When the general came home after an exhausting day’s work, he handed me some money and instructed me to go to town to buy sweets for the children. I was stunned that he was allowing me to leave the beautiful prison of his estate, and I left as quickly as I could. One of the servants gave me a lift to the market.

“I exited the carriage at the market and looked around. It was my first time in public since my abduction three years earlier. Suddenly, an old man came over to me. ‘My daughter, it’s time for you to go home,’ he said gently, kindness written all over his wizened face. ‘Why are you living

with the general? You are a Jewish girl! Go back home to your parents.’

“He was the first Jew I had seen in three years. I looked at him, startled. ‘Of course I want to go home!’ I exclaimed in surprise. The man nodded.

“‘If that’s the case, I’ll take you home,’ he said. He showed me to his wagon and invited me to get in.

“There was no time to think. My desire to go home was so strong that I completely forgot about the general, about my children waiting for me at the estate. I got onto the wagon and sat down. The old man, taking the reins, assured me that the trip wouldn’t be long and that I would soon be home.

“A moment later, we drove passed the general’s estate. To my horror, I noticed that the entire mansion was in flames. I suddenly remembered—my children! I had abandoned them to their gentile father, to perish in this terrible fire! I began screaming hysterically for my children, trapped in the inferno.

“The old man glanced back at me. ‘Your children won’t make it,’ he said softly. ‘They need to leave this world. But you, you are a holy Jewish daughter, and you must return home. There’s a reason all this has happened to you, but in just a short while, it will be over. You’ll be back home.’

“Following his directive, I closed my eyes and slept for the remainder of the journey. Finally, the wagon bumped to a stop and the old man pulled open the door. ‘You can get off the wagon,’ he said. ‘You are home now.’

“When I stepped into the cool night air, I found myself in front of this house,” Leah concluded tearfully. “Here I am.”

Listening to his daughter’s story, Shlomo realized how wrong his attitude toward the Maharsha had been. The Maharsha only knew Torah, that was true, but it was through his Torah that he

possessed incredible abilities, including rescuing a lost girl from captivity and burning down her kidnapper's home to achieve this. His happiness at Leah's return was marred by his bitter regret for the degradation he had caused the *gadol hador*.

Morning dawned quickly, and the people of the city danced him all the way to *Shacharis*, joining him in the tremendous joy of his daughter's homecoming. Shlomo approached the Maharasha, who was already seated and preparing for *davening*. Before the entire shul, he crouched and kissed the *tzaddik's* feet.

"Rebbi!" he cried tearfully. "*Ani ma'amin b'emunah sheliemah*, I believe with my entire heart in the power of Torah, of *gedolei* Torah. Until now, I thought that someone who learned Torah was doing a nice deed, a small mitzvah. Now, I humbly understand that Torah transforms one who learns it into a superhuman. Please forgive me for the many ways I've derided you!"

The Maharsha granted him a complete *mechilah*.

For the rest of his life, Shlomo donated generously to the Maharsha's yeshiva and undertook to support *gedolei* Torah and *talmidei chachomim*.

**At this point in the story, Rav Kalman Krohn, who was speaking to teenage bachurim, paused his storytelling for a moment. "Is [the fact that the Maharsha smoked] a heter for everybody to smoke?" he asked the bachurim. "First become as big as the Maharsha. Then you can smoke."*

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A390

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