

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 Rebbe's Brachah

On paper, their lives were practically perfect. Beautiful home, beautiful marriage. Wealth, respect, a close-knit community. They were generous and kind, pious and noble. Success seemed to follow their every move.

The only thing R' Shea and his wife, Hinda lacked were children.

While they were grateful for the abundant blessings Hashem had showered upon them, the couple was heartbroken over their childlessness. More than anything, they longed for a child of their own, for continuity, for a living inheritance to leave over in this world. They longed for the sleepless nights, the tantrums, the messes, and all the wonderful challenges of childrearing. They longed for their home to be filled with laughter

and light. They shed copious tears and constantly *davened* for children to call their own.

One day, Hinda heard from a friend of hers another avenue to try in the difficult quest for children. Later that evening, during supper, she broached the subject with her husband. "I heard that there's a great *tzaddik* in a town a few days' journey from here," she said, setting a steaming bowl of soup in front of Shea. "I would like to go to him, to request a *brachah* for children."

Her husband lifted his spoon. "Don't be foolish," he responded, waving it dismissively. He dipped it into his bowl. "We need to *daven*, and Hashem will help us. If we're not *zoche* to children, then we won't be *zoche*."

"No," she said, stubbornly. "Hashem grants *tzaddikim* extra *siyata dishmaya*. Perhaps in the merit of a blessing from this great sage, we will bear a child."

"What's his name?" Shea asked curiously, dipping his spoon back into his bowl.

"The Kozhnitzer Maggid," Hinda said carefully.

Shea stopped eating. "The who? I've never heard of this *tzaddik*. He's a maggid, you said? Come on, I don't think we should drop everything and travel so far for someone who's merely a maggid."

"The Kozhnitzer Maggid," she repeated. "He's not 'merely' a maggid, Shea. We're talking about a tremendous *tzaddik*, who has helped many others with his *brachos*. He's supposed to be holy, the *kedushah* literally shining on his face. Please, let's just give it a try."

Though her skeptical husband didn't seem inclined to agree, Hinda continued plead, nagging him continuously until he finally conceded. He

made arrangements for his partner to assume his responsibility of the business and informed his associates that he was taking a short leave of absence.

They began the week-long journey in their comfortable coach, stopping over in shtetls on the way each night to sleep. The trip was long and tiring, but after a few days of travelling, Shea and Hinda arrived in the hometown of the Kozhnitzer Maggid.

Arriving at the Maggid's home, the couple was informed that there were many others ahead of them in line who were awaiting their own turn to speak to the *tzaddik*. As they waited with the others, Shea began detecting an undercurrent of awe that the others were feeling, a respectful sort of anxiety as they anticipated their private audience with the Kozhnitzer Maggid. This subtle undercurrent soon infected him as well, and he trembled nervously.

Soon, the *gabbai* announced Shea's name. Hinda, who stood up along with him, was quickly informed that the Maggid didn't see women. She was invited to wait at the door of the inner study while her husband went inside. Hinda urged her husband to make the most of the audience with the holy sage, and he walked hesitantly into the room. She remained at the door, peeking in.

Shea was at a loss for words. He had never been by such a *tzaddik* before, and felt completely out of his realm. His confidence evaporating, his fingers twitched as he fumbled to extract the *kvittel* from his pocket and hand it into the rebbe. The Kozhnitzer Maggid read the *kvittel* once, twice, as Shea stood silently before him.

Hinda watched from the door, her heart racing, her head pounding. She exhaled rapidly, watching as the venerated *tzaddik* read and reread the *kvittel*. Her anguish got the better of her, and

before she could stop herself, Hinda pushed the door open and marched into the study. "Rebbe!" she cried tearfully. "Please, bless us with a child! You cannot imagine the unbearable pain we suffer daily! Please! All we ask for is a child!"

Her husband spun around, his mouth widened in shock. The *gabbai* hurried in, hot at her heels. "Excuse me, lady!" he demanded, gesticulating at the open doorway. "There are rules here! You can't just do what you want. The *rebbe* doesn't see women —."

The Kozhnitzer Maggid motioned his *gabbai* away. "It's okay," he said softly. "Leave her, let her be."

Hinda's tears continued flowing, twin rivers of anguish streaming down her cheeks. Watching her, the pain of their childlessness suddenly overwhelmed Shea as well, and he began sobbing alongside her.

The holy *tzaddik* looked at the weeping couple. "With the help of Hashem, you will have a child," he stated.

Hinda stopped crying as she processed the unbelievable words. The Kozhnitzer Maggid had promised her a child! "Thank you!" she said emotionally. "Thank you! You've made me so happy! Hashem should *bentch* you with health and a long life!"

Shea just stood there wordlessly, trying to process the events occurring at dizzying speed around him.

"Come," Hinda urged him. "The *rebbe* said that we will have a child! We can go home now."

Her husband followed her out, still unsure how to deal with the Kozhnitzer Maggid's *brachah*. Hinda spent the entire trip home chattering

excitedly. Her *emunas chachamim* and faith in Hashem's ability to fulfill the tzaddik's words was total, and she fully believed that she would soon bear a child of her own.

True to the *rebbe's* blessing, within the year, Hinda was cradling an adorable little boy in her arms. The couple made a *seudah* for their entire community, inviting rich and poor to partake in their happiness as they publically thanked Hashem for the miraculous gift of their infant son. They donated large sums of money to the poor and sent a handsome donation to the Kozhnitzer Maggid, charity to disperse as he saw fit. Their happiness was finally complete.

The baby, Ahrele, was the center of his parents' world. Their days and nights revolved around him. Hinda would coo to him endlessly, caring for him with unmatched devotion. Shea was no youngster when he claimed the title of fatherhood; he was already in his late forties. His business, which had occupied so much of his time during the long years of childlessness now fizzled on the back burner as he preoccupied himself with his precious son. It was as if all else ceased to exist.

Ahrele grew from an infant to a toddler, learning how to crawl and walk. His parents delighted in his antics and cherished his milestones. Joy and laughter fill the once-silent home. Shea and Hinda could not have felt more fulfilled.

Their peaceful happiness came to a screeching halt one winter day. Ahrele, now two-years-old, developed a raging fever and a hacking cough. Hinda did not leave his bedside for a moment, applying cool compresses and spoon-feeding him soup, watching helplessly as his fever climbed and climbed.

One, two, then three doctors were summoned. The couple would spare no expense for the health

of their beloved son, yet medicine had no hope to offer them. One after the other, the doctors shrugged and admitted defeat. It seemed there was nothing to be done.

Standing next to her delirious son, Hinda was sure her heart would burst from the unbearable worry. Her husband, pacing nervously in the next room, felt the same. It was obvious that Ahrele's condition was worsening by the day, and the doctor gently broke the news that they could count down until his end. "Two weeks, maybe three," the doctor pronounced. "It won't be longer than that."

Hinda collapsed into a chair, her face ashen. "Let's go to the Kozhnitzer Maggid!" she implored her husband. "It was in his merit that we were granted this child. Let's go to him to ask him for a *brachah!*"

"You're right," Shea quickly agreed, no longer the skeptical *misnaged* he had once been. He looked around hastily for a bag to pack his things. "I'll make the trip. I can be ready to leave in a few minutes."

"I'm coming with you," Hinda said determinedly, slipping on her coat. She ran back to Ahrele's room to speak to the nurse they had hired during his sickness. Briefly explaining the situation, she asked the nurse to care for her son for the next two weeks while they went to see the *tzaddik*. After securing the nurse's agreement, Hinda planted a kiss on her son's burning forehead and rushed out to the waiting carriage.

The couple spent the trip immersed in their *tefillos*, soaking through the *tehillim* as they beseeched Hashem for their son's complete *refuah*. When they finally reached the Kozhnitzer Maggid's home, they had gone through a week-long Yom Kippur.

The rebbe's *gabbai* recognized them as the couple who had sent a tremendous donation after the birth of their child. Seeing the panic and urgency on their faces, he pushed them ahead of the line. "I'm sorry, but the rebbe doesn't see women," he cautioned Hinda. "You remain at the door while your husband goes inside."

Hinda nodded obligingly, hanging back as her husband entered the room. Before he could even begin to speak or hand over his *kvittel*, however, her emotions overwhelmed her logic and she barged into the room. "Rebbe, please, you must help us!" she cried, weeping uncontrollably. "You gave us a *brachah*, and we were *zoche* to a child. Now it seems that this child might die, *chas v'shalom!* Please, pray for our child! Give us a *brachah* for a complete and speedy recovery!" She continued crying, unashamed, waiting for the Kozhnutzer Maggid to respond.

The rebbe was quiet for a few moments, thinking. "With Hashem's help, your son will have a complete recovery," he finally said. "Everything will be okay."

Hinda nodded gratefully. This was enough for her. Her cheeks still wet with tears, she thanked the Kozhnutzer Maggid and left the room. Shea followed her out a moment later. The return trip was very different than the journey in. Hinda was in great spirits, confident that, in the rebbe's merit, her child would recover.

When they returned home the next week, they found Ahrele even sicker than before. Even before Hinda's coat was off, she parked herself at his bedside, gripping his limp fingers with one hand and her tear-drenched *tehillim* with the other. It was there that she continued to sit as a few more days passed and Ahrele's condition further deteriorated before her eyes.

The doctor, who visited every day, had no hope to offer. Ahrele consumed barely anything and it was obvious that his body was wasting away. "It won't be long," the doctor said, gazing sorrowfully at the motionless toddler. "A day or two at most."

Shea felt that wallowing in his pain was just pulling him down. He drew comfort from bolstering his faith that the One who granted them their precious child was the same One who was now taking him back. He turned to his business affairs, trying to distract himself from the unhelpful, depressive thoughts.

Hinda, by contrast, wouldn't take her eyes off of her son. She insisted on remaining with Ahrele even throughout the night, and other than a short doze while sitting upright in her chair, she assumed a near-constant vigil at his bedside.

When it happened, it was deep in middle of the night. Hinda had already been up the entire night before, and the one before that as well. She sat beside her dying son, fighting sleep as much as she could and partially succeeding.

It was in this half-asleep, half-awake state that she saw a tall, powerfully built Russian soldier enter the room. Before she could awaken herself enough to question his presence, he removed a small flask from his pocket. It looked like a medicine vial.

Hinda watched sleepily as the soldier carefully inserted a few drops of liquid from the vial into Ahrele's mouth. He waited a moment, tapped the toddler on his shoulder, and fed him another few drops. Another pause, another few drops, and the soldier screwed the cover back onto the small bottle. "He'll be okay," he said gruffly, pocketing the vial and walking out of the room.

Hinda, shocked into silence, squeezed her eyes shut and then opened them, forcing herself to become more alert. “A soldier!” she screamed in terror. “A soldier was here!”

Shea, in the next room, was startled out of his sleep by his wife’s cries. He jumped out of bed and ran to rescue his wife. To his surprise, other than the practically lifeless Ahrele and a panicked Hinda, there was no one in the room. “There’s no soldier here, Hinda,” he said soothingly, assuming she had just woken up from a nightmare.

“He was here before!” Hinda said, trembling. “He came here before, this huge, hulking soldier! He was right here in the room!”

Shea dutifully looked out the window, but all he saw was a deserted street. “It was just a dream, Hinda. Everything is fine, everything’s okay. You can go back to sleep. There’s no soldier.”

“It wasn’t a dream!” Hinda insisted. “I wasn’t sleeping! I’m telling you, I saw a soldier! I watched him give Ahrele medicine!”

Shea looked at his wife with fresh eyes. *She’s going insane*, he suddenly realized. *The anguish, the pain of losing our only, long awaited son, is having an effect on her emotional wellbeing*. His eyes welled up and he blinked away the tears. *I’m losing my son and my wife at the same time*.

Suddenly, motion on Ahrele’s bed caught his eye. He turned toward his deathly ill son and was stunned to see that the toddler was moving his eyelids and his lips. His mouth dropped open. Ahrele had lain motionless for weeks! Could it be he was really recovering? “Hinda, look!” he breathed softly just as their son moved his right leg.

“The medicine is working,” Hinda exclaimed. She felt his forehead. While it was definitely warm to the touch, she was quite sure it was cooler than it had been earlier. “The medicine that the soldier gave Ahrele is working!”

“Hinda, I told you there was no soldier,” Shea said as gently as he could. “Soldiers don’t just barge into people’s houses in the middle of the night and dole out medicine to dying children. How did he even know Ahrele was sick?”

Hinda frowned, her eyes never leaving her son’s form. Would his body continue to respond, or was the movement they had witnessed just a twitch? “But, Shea, I saw him. I know I saw a soldier. Was my mind playing tricks on me?”

Before her husband could respond, Ahrele opened his eyes. Both his parents leaned forward as, incredibly, he began to speak. “Water,” the toddler said hoarsely. “Thirsty.”

“He’s awake!” Hinda cried, giggling in spite of herself. Shea lifted his head up and she brought a cup of water to his lips, her hands trembling.

When Ahrele fell back asleep, Hinda finally left his side to cook up a large pot of chicken soup, which she lovingly fed him the next day, spoonful after spoonful. Within two days, Ahrele was sitting up on his own, and by the end of the week, he was out of bed.

The couple’s unfathomable joy at their son’s miraculous recovery was marred by one thing. It seemed that the trauma had left a permanent mark on Hinda’s emotional health. While she was sure she had witnessed a soldier giving her son medicine, logic and everyone around her insisted it just could not be.

Since it could not have possibly been a real soldier, Hinda grew convinced that the figure she had seen was a *sheid*, an otherworldly spirit, and

the thought was positively frightening. She became anxious and edgy, constantly looking over her shoulder in fear of lurking *sheidim*. Whenever she encountered a soldier, she would flee in terror, certain it was a *sheid* out to nab her. The months passed, and Hinda's emotional state continued to deteriorate. Thoughts of *sheidim* terrorized her constantly, and she worried they would return to reclaim her son's health. She began avoiding places where she determined that *sheidim* lived and would obsessively close windows and doors in her home, trying to block entry to the *sheidim* she was sure were chasing her.

Six months had passed since Ahrele's illness. A stranger, watching the little boy play, would never have been able to decipher that this was a child who had been on the brink of death just a few short months earlier. His plump cheeks had a healthy hue, his eyes vibrant, his gleeful shouts echoing across the large house.

His father smiled at Ahrele's antics, yet it was an empty, meaningless smile. Behind it lurked pain and worry and fear. Yes, Shea had regained his son, but he was losing his wife more and more every day. He watched her shrivel into a frightened, tormented, miserable ghost of her former energetic self. It was six months of sprinting downhill, and Shea was at breaking point.

Now an avowed *chassid*, he longed to travel to the Kozhnitzer Maggid for guidance and a *brachah*. Hinda, however, was terrified of open wagons, of traveling through deserted fields and miles of unpopulated forests. She was sure these were inhabited by *shiedim*. She forcefully declined to join him on the journey to the rebbe, afraid to expose herself to the spirits stalking her.

To her dismay, her husband refused to indulge her fears, insisting that she was no less vulnerable to

shiedim than the rest of the world and that the road was just as safe as her own bed. His firm tone brooked no room for refusal, and against her will, Hinda found herself, trembling in fear, in a carriage with her husband, on the way to the Kozhnitzer Maggid.

When they arrived, Shea explained the situation to the *gabbai*, who soon granted them an audience with the *rebbe*. "Don't you dare walk in," he warned Hinda. "This rebbe's unyielding policy is that he does not see women. You can remain outside while your husband speaks to the rebbe. I repeat, do not enter the room."

Shea walked into the Kozhnitzer Maggid's study, and of course, it didn't take a fraction of a second for Hinda to burst in after him. "Rebbe!" she cried ignoring the *gabbai*, who was frantically charging after her. "*Sheidim!* *SHEIDIM!* *Sheidim* are following me!"

"Don't worry," the rebbe said kindly. "There are no *sheidim*."

"No, Rebbe, there are *sheidim*," Hinda insisted, sobbing fearfully. "I'm losing my mind! Wherever I go, I'm afraid *sheidim* are following me! Ever since that *sheid* came and gave medicine to my Ahrele, I have no peace! I'm losing my mind!"

The rebbe was quiet for a few minutes, thinking. "I wouldn't do this for everyone," he said finally. "But you are two pious Jews with a holy child, and so I will do it for you. Sit down."

Hearing these words, the *gabbai* understood that something extraordinary would soon occur. He motioned for Hinda to take a seat by the door and pulled out a chair for Shea near the rebbe's table. Then he seated himself beside Shea, waiting expectantly.

The Kozhnitzer Maggid closed his eyes and color rose to his cheeks. For a few long, heart-stopping moments, he sat there, his face a fiery red. The two men and Hinda keenly sensed the presence of the *shechinah* resting on the holy *tzaddik*. They waited breathlessly.

With his eyes still shut, the rebbe reached for his walking stick and held it out to his *gabbai*. “Take my cane,” he instructed. “Take it with you to the cemetery. There is a soldier buried there. Find his grave, and bang on it three times. Tell the soldier I want him to come to me.”

The *gabbai* hesitated, a shiver traveling up his spine. The whole idea was creepy. He was afraid to go alone to the cemetery, to speak to a dead person and summon him to the rebbe.

The rebbe continued holding out the stick, his eyes closed, yet the *gabbai* didn’t grasp it. “Nu,” he urged. “Take my stick and go summon the soldier.”

The *gabbai* swallowed hard. “Rebbe,” he said, the tremor audible in his voice. “I’m... it’s not... can someone else do this? I’m just... it’s not my thing.”

“No, I’m sorry,” the rebbe responded, “This is your job. Please take the stick.”

With no alternative, the *gabbai* reluctantly accepted the rebbe’s cane and shakily left the room. He left behind an equally trembling Shea and Hinda, who sat carefully observing the rebbe’s scarlet face.

His heart thumping, the *gabbai* jumped onto his wagon and whipped the horse, urging it in the direction of the Jewish cemetery. Walking amongst the graves, he scanned row after row of headstones until he discovered the one he was seeking. Its inscription was startlingly brief,

consisting of just one phrase, with little identifying information: *Here lies the Jewish soldier.*

The *gabbai* sucked in his breath and exhaled slowly. Lifting the rebbe’s cane, he struck the grave three times and cried out, “The Kozhnitzer Maggid is calling you to him!” He banged the stick again three more times before hastily leaving the cemetery.

Back in the rebbe’s study, as the very moment that the *gabbai* struck the third blow to the soldier’s grave in the cemetery, the Kozhnitzer Maggid suddenly spoke. “Shalom *aleichem*,” he said, smiling. “How are you?”

“If the rebbe would not have called me, I would not have come,” came the response. “It is only due to the holiness of the rebbe that I was forced to leave my place of rest.”

Hinda gave a small shriek, her face white. Her husband, with a matching colorless complexion, gripped his chair tightly. As far as they could see, there was no one in the room besides them and the Kozhnitzer Maggid, yet they clearly heard the conversation the rebbe was having with the soldier, whom only he was able to see.

“Thank you for coming,” the rebbe told the faceless voice. “I summoned you to ask you: in which merit you were chosen to bring a *refuah* to *yiddishe kinderlach*? What *zechus* do you have that you are the one sent to heal these precious *neshamos*?”

“Holy rebbe, let me tell you who I am,” the voice responded. “I was born into a poor Jewish family, yet I grew up without *yiddishkeit*. Both of my parents were largely ignorant of Halacha and Jewish tradition. The only *mitzvos* we were aware of were Shabbos and *kashrus*, and we kept them as best as we knew how.

“I was a child in the era of the *kantonistin*, when Jewish boys were abducted from the streets and forcibly conscripted into the Russian army. When I was just ten years old, I, too, was drafted into the army, never to see my parents again.

“The Russian commanders worked tirelessly to eradicate every vestige of *yiddishkeit* from the Jewish conscripts. We were young, without the warmth of home and without guidance, and eventually, even the staunchest boys from the most religious homes couldn’t hold out for too long. With my weak background, I was even more vulnerable to their tactics, and within a short time, I completely forgot about Shabbos and was eating non-kosher food.

“As a young ten-year-old in the army, I was given the role of water-carrier, but as I grew older, I was trained in armed combat and became a full-fledged soldier. Though I knew that I was a Jew, in practice, I was no different than my gentile comrades.

“One day, I was traveling with my battalion when we saw a solitary figure in the distance walking toward us, heading toward the place we had come from. As we marched forward and closed the gap between us, it became obvious that the man was a Jew. My army buddies had been raised on a diet of hatred and anti-Semitism and they fell mercilessly upon the hapless Jew, robbing him of his money and leaving him with bloody souvenirs all over his body.

“I watched the scene and decided to stay out of it. I couldn’t side with the Jew, afraid that the wrath of these wild gentiles would be pointed at me next. At the same time, I couldn’t take part in tormenting a member of my nation. While it pained me that he was suffering, I felt that my hands were tied.

“When they finished with the Jew, my friends decided to hang him. Once he was dead, they reasoned, there was no way he could possibly report them to the authorities. I watched as they took some rope and tied the Jew to a tree by his neck. They all divided up the stolen money and we began galloping away.

“It was then that I made a decision that would impact me forever,” the soldier continued. “I slowed my horse and gradually fell further and further behind my battalion. When the rest of my division was but a speck in the distance, I turned my horse around and began galloping back in the direction of the hanged Jew. As soon as I reached him, I grabbed a knife from my backpack and cut the rope that was around his neck. He fell to the ground, gasping for breath.

“I gave him some vodka to revive him, then water. When he finally came back to himself, he grew frightened all over again and pleaded with me to spare his life. I explained to him that I, too was a Jew. Handing him all the money I had on me, I encouraged him to escape as fast as he could. He didn’t need a second invitation. Thanking me emotionally, he sprinted off and was gone.

When my battalion returned to the base and a roll call was taken, it was discovered that I was missing. My ‘friends’ set out to search and discovered me, still near the tree, the ropes cut down and the Jew gone. When they realized that I had freed the hated Jew, their vengeance was swift and brutal. They beat me viciously and then hanged me on the very same tree.

“When my *neshamah* ascended on High, a tremendous commotion erupted. Here I was, a Jew who ate *chazer*, who never donned *tefillin*, who desecrated Shabbos. The verdict seemed clear: Gehinnom. But no! I also gave my own life

to save another Jew's! Saving a life is saving a world, an incredible merit.

“The two sides argued back and forth until the *beis din shel maalah* finally rendered its verdict. Since I saved a Jewish life, I would not receive Gehinnom. However, since I had done so many terrible *aveiros*, I could not receive Gan Eden either. Instead, I hover in no-man's-land. Since I saved that Jew's life in my lifetime, now in my death, I am constantly given opportunities to save lives. When I accumulate enough *zechusim* this way, I will merit Gan Eden.”

When the soldier finished his tale, the Kozhnitzer Maggid thanked him for telling them his story.

“May I return to my place of rest?” the soldier's voice asked.

“Yes, you may,” the rebbe said.

Sitting in her place at the door, listening to the exchange but not seeing anyone in the room, Hinda suddenly saw the soldier walking past her on his way out. “That's him!” she cried, recognizing him immediately as the soldier who had given Ahrele medicine. A sense of calm enveloped her and she knew with certainty that she had merited to witness not a *sheid*, but a messenger from Heaven, sent in the *zechus* of the Kozhnitzer Maggid to save her precious son.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A355

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Toras Reb Kalman
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