

# TORAS REB KALMAN



## סיפורי צדיקים

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

### *Ezra's Sefer Torah*

Yechezkel was a Jew who lived in the era of the *Geonim* and resided in the city where Rav Shrira Gaon lived. Yechezkel's prized possession was an heirloom *sefer* Torah written by Ezra Hasofer, which had been passed down in his family for generations. The *sefer* Torah was complete with a precise record showing its *yichus* up to the generations back to the quill of Ezra Hasofer himself.

Unlike today, where shuls and *shteiblach* dot every street and neighborhood, the cities in the times of the *Geonim* had but one large *bais haknesses* that serviced all the Jews living there. The city where Yechezkel lived was no different. It's magnificent *bais haknesses* was utilized by all the Jews in the city, including the venerated Rav Shrira Gaon.

At the front center of the shul stood a large *aron kodesh* with numerous shelves, holding twenty-five *sifrei* Torah on a regular basis. These scrolls were privately owned, belonging to Jews who resided in the city. Since the only *minyanim* in the city took place in this main *bais haknesses*, any Jew who owned a *sefer* Torah and wanted the merit of having it used would keep his scroll in the large *aron kodesh*. Yechezkel's precious Torah, too, was housed in this *aron kodesh*.

To keep things fair, there was a rotation, with a different Torah being used each week. Ezra Hasofer's Torah was cherished by everyone, and whenever its turn came to be *lined* from, it would be carried out of the *aron kodesh* with great pomp and ceremony.

Yechezkel commissioned a gorgeous mantle for his precious scroll as well as a golden crown. It was the king of the *sifrei* Torah in the *aron kodesh*. Each time it was used, Yechezkel would add another jewel to the crown. It was priceless in and of itself, and when adorned with tremendously valuable gold and jewels, it's worth was incomprehensible. Eventually, the Jews became concerned that its exceptional value would attract unwanted attention from the gentiles, and they pleaded with Yechezkel to stop adding more jewels.

Like all the other *sifrei* Torah, the scroll from Ezra Hasofer was used two weeks a year. Due to its distinguished lineage, it was always used on *Simchas* Torah and on *Shavuos*. When the *sefer* Torah was removed from the *aron kodesh*, the women in the *eZRAs nashim* would crowd around the small windows, vying for a glimpse, as the men craned their necks from all corners of the shul, aiming for the same thing.

Each and every Jew longed for an *aliyah* during those days, since they wanted the merit of looking into the precious *sefer* Torah, of glimpsing the

handwriting of Ezra Hasofer himself. It was always the wealthy, who could afford to bid the highest, who would merit the coveted *aliyos*. Enormous sums were raised from the sale of *aliyos*, and even lesser privileges such as *hagbah* sold for fantastic prices. The money was used to purchase more *seforim* for the *bais haknesses's* library.

When the precious Torah was removed from the *aron kodesh*, only Yechezkel or the *rov*, Rav Shrira Gaon, were permitted to hold it. Since Halacha dictates that one *sefer* Torah may not be shown more honor than others, this scroll from Ezra Hasofer was returned to the *aron kodesh* immediately; it was the other *sifrei* Torah that were used for dancing.

The years passed. Yechezkel turned seventy, then eighty-years-old. He realized that his years were numbered, and so he summoned his two sons. "I'm getting older," he said gravely. "I feel it in my bones. I'm leaving you a tremendous *yerushah*, gold and jewels and property. Of course, there's nothing as valuable as the precious *sefer* Torah from Ezra Hasofer passed down in our family."

The two sons, Eliezer and Nesanel, listened to their father speak, and the same thought occurred to them simultaneously. Which of them would be lucky enough to receive the invaluable *sefer* Torah? None of them dared to voice this question out loud, and they tried to banish the thought from their minds.

Yechezkel sat down to write a *tzavaah*. He wrote many interesting things in the will, yet neglected to mention anything about the precious *sefer* Torah.

Shortly thereafter, he passed away.

No sooner than at the *levayah* itself, as the two sons walked behind the coffin, heads lowered,

Eliezer turned to his brother. "I'm willing to let you take all the gold and property, millions of dollars' worth, that Abba left for us. You can have everything. All I want is the *sefer* Torah."

Nesanel looked sideways sharply. "Are you crazy?" he asked, trying to keep his voice down. "What's money anyway? You have it one day and lose it the next. I'm not interested in the money. You can have it all, just please leave me the *sefer* Torah."

Eliezer's voice took on a pleading note. "I'm the *bechor*," he reminded his brother. "Accordingly, I deserve a double portion of the inheritance. I'm giving it all to you, both portions of it. I really, really want the *sefer* Torah."

"You do get *pi shnayim*," Nesanel agreed. "But that it is only regarding money. This is a *ruchniyus* thing. Besides, I'm a bigger *talmid chacham* than you. I've dedicated my entire life to Torah, and now I want the Torah. Besides, I was the one who was there for Abba, assisting him with his daily needs. I believe that I deserve the *sefer* Torah."

The brothers were both grandfathers themselves, many times over. Walking behind their father's *mitah*, they were each followed by a large family of sons and grandsons. These offsprings quickly joined the argument, causing it to evolve considerably. Yechezkel wasn't even buried yet, and already there was *machlokes* over the inheritance.

A kindly neighbor walked over to the feuding family. "*Rabbosai!*" he called over the tumult. "*Rabbosai!* Can I have your attention, please?" When they turned to look at him, he continued. "You are at the funeral of your beloved father. This fighting has got to stop. It's a disgrace to your father."

“We’re not fighting,” one of the brothers quickly said. “It’s just that I think I should get the *sefer* Torah.”

“That’s what *you* think,” his brother countered.

“And *I* disagree.”

Eventually, Yechezkel was buried, and an uneasy truce settled over the family as the brothers sat *shivah*. It did not take long for the mourners to break the fragile ceasefire. At every opportunity, between visitors coming to console them, Eliezer and Nesanel debated the topic of who should inherit the coveted *sefer* Torah. Whenever *rabbanim* came to be *menachem avel*, the brothers each tried to win them over to his point of view.

“You’re sitting *shivah*; you shouldn’t be thinking about this right now,” the *rabbanim* would respond, wisely neglecting to choose sides.

Yet the brothers continued arguing fiercely, refusing to give up their claims to Ezra Hasofer’s *sefer* Torah.

When word of the feud spread throughout the city, there were many Jews who could not understand why Yechezkel’s children were even arguing. To them, the choice was clear; had they been the beneficiaries of this inheritance, they would have happily accepted the money, become millionaires overnight, and enjoy a life of luxury. It baffled them that the two brothers were willing to live with little so long as they owned the *sefer* Torah.

When the week of mourning was over, the arguments heated up considerably. The rift between the brothers widened as they exchanged angry retorts. Eventually, they realized that neither side would end up budging an inch. They would need outside intervention.

When they approached the *beis din*, however, none of the *dayanim* felt qualified to judge the case. It was decided that due to the complexity of the question, it would need to be ruled upon by the senior Torah authority in the city, Rav Shrira Gaon.

When the time came for their *din* Torah to be heard, the room was packed with sons and grandsons, sympathetic friends and curious neighbors. As the elder of the two, Eliezer presented his argument first. When he finished, Nesanel stood up and offered a rebuttal, passionately explaining why he felt he was deserving of the *sefer* Torah. Soon, Eliezer’s son jumped in to defend him, followed closely by Nesanel’s eldest grandson.

Very soon, the situation escalated into a war of words between the two branches of the family. The noise level grew louder and louder, with cousins howling at each other with unconcealed animosity. Some of the grandchildren shut their eyes and tried to block out the awful fighting, mourning the fact that with the loss of their illustrious grandfather, they had lost some of their dearest family as well.

Rav Shrira Gaon banged loudly on the table to gather everyone’s attention and to put an end to the unruly situation. “I’ll give my *psak* tomorrow,” he said when the room fell silent. “Everyone is asked to leave the *bais din* and return tomorrow morning to hear my ruling.”

The room erupted as all those assembled got to their feet and began to leave, animatedly rehashing the same topic of the inheritance. It would be a long night, they knew, but in the morning, the decision would be rendered, one way or the other.

When Rav Shrira Gaon entered the *bais din* the next day, he found an even greater crowd assembled, all waiting anxiously for his ruling.

Some rash young men on both sides of the conflict tried speaking to him, to make further convincing arguments, but he ignored them, taking his place at the front of the room.

A hush settled over the crowd and heads leaned forward, ears perked, waiting nervously to hear the venerated sage's ruling.

“*Goral!*” Rav Shrira Gaon thundered.

The slight murmuring in the audience died down completely. Eliezer and Nesanel felt their heartbeats quicken. A *goral* meant no negotiating, no concessions, no compromise. One of them would get the precious scroll written by Ezra Hasofer, and the other would not.

Rav Shrira Gaon took two equal size pieces of parchment and placed them on the table before him. On one, he wrote, ‘*sefer Torah*’; on the other, ‘*kol hakesef*- all the money’. Carefully, he folded both pieces and put them into a box. “I want each of you to put your hand into the box,” he instructed the two brothers. “Feel around for a piece of parchment, and do not pull your hand out until you are confident that you’ve chosen the parchment you truly desire. When you pull a piece out of the box, I want you to be completely comfortable that *you* are choosing the outcome of this *goral*.”

Eliezer licked his dry lips anxiously. “Okay,” he said hoarsely. “I’m prepared to let a *goral* decide the outcome of this dispute. However, this means that whatever happens is from *shomayim*, and if so, I want to fast first.”

“Are you sure?” Rav Shrira Gaon asked.

Eliezer nodded. “Yes, I would like to fast, to prepare myself spiritually for this ruling from Heaven. However, since I’ve already eaten today,

I’ll need to fast tomorrow. Can we conduct the *goral* in two days’ time?”

“Two days is too soon for me,” Nesanel countered. “I, too, want to fast, and I also want to sit and learn for two days and two nights straight. In three days, I’ll be ready for the *goral*.”

Eliezer pursed his lips. “On second thought, just fasting is not enough for me. I would like to fast, learn, and give *tzedakah*. I’ll need at least another day. Can we do the *goral* in the beginning of next week?”

“Eliezer is truly a *tzaddik*,” Nesanel said to Rav Shrira Gaon. “He plans on fasting and learning and giving *tzedakah*. But I really want to merit this *sefer Torah*! I want to accumulate even more *mitzvos*, such as providing food for *talmidei chachomim* and paying for the printing of *seforim*. I think it would be best if we waited a month to do the *goral*.”

A small smile tugged at the corners of Rav Shrira Gaon’s mouth. He could see where this was headed. If he left the two of them at it for even a little longer, the *goral* would be pushed off until the days of their great-grandchildren. He cleared his throat.

“Ahem. It’s noble of you that you both desire to upgrade your *avodas Hashem*,” he said, his voice both gentle and firm. “However, the *goral* will be taking place now. Hashem sees your good intentions, and there will be plenty of time to fulfill them afterward.”

Both brothers’ faces fell, and they began hastily murmuring *tefillos*. Some moments of tears and *tehillim* passed as their hands groped blindly inside the box, closing around a piece of parchment, then discarding it. They grasped a piece, then left go, over and over. It was

impossible to decide. Which parchment represented the cherished *sefer* Torah?

Slowly, they pulled their hands out of the box and unfolded the papers. Their audience waited, not daring to breath.

Nesanel, the younger brother, held up his parchment triumphantly. He had won the *sefer* Torah.

Eliezer forced himself to squelch his overwhelming disappointment. He had, after all, chosen his inheritance with his own hands.

“Still friends?” Nesanel asked quietly, putting his arm around his brother. Despite his own ecstasy at his win, it was hard for him to watch his brother hurting. Now that the dispute was behind them, he hoped to resume the close brotherly relationship they had always shared.

“Friends,” Eliezer confirmed, shaking Nesanel’s hand, willing himself to be happy for his brother. But there was no denying that deep inside, he was brokenhearted.

He walked out of the *beis din*, his head bowed, trailed by his mournful sons and grandsons.

“Eliezer! Don’t look so down,” a well-known businessman, who had been avidly following the story, chided him as he passed. “You just became a multi-millionaire! I think you must be the only person in the world who could possibly be so devastated to learn about the tremendous riches that just landed on your head.”

“You could never understand,” Eliezer responded earnestly. “You’re a businessman. How can you possibly fathom what Torah means, what the holiness of Torah truly is? How can you understand who Ezra Hasofer was, what this *sefer* Torah represents! I grew up in a home where

Torah was cherished above all else! Money is meaningless! Authentic value can be found only in Torah!”

The businessman, who indeed could not understand, watched Eliezer continue down the street, a befuddled expression on his face.

Later that day, a contract was drawn up, clearly detailing that the entire monetary inheritance, including jewels and property, belonged to Eliezer while the holy *sefer* Torah, Ezra’s Torah, belonged to Nesanel. The brothers signed the contract and shook hands, reiterating their pledge to remain on good terms. Still, there was no denying the slight hill that remained wedged within their relationship.

The story spread well past the city where they lived. It traveled to cities and towns all over the continent as people expressed their amazement at the brothers’ great love for Torah. The extraordinary tale was told and retold, spreading like wildfire, until it reached an obscure village on the other side of the country.

Daniel, a Jew who lived in this small village, was an angry, embittered young man. Heartless, evil, and crazed with jealousy, Daniel found his blood pressure rising when he heard of the veritable fortune Nesanel had forfeited to claim possession of the *sefer* Torah. *I’ll teach that Nesanel a lesson*, he thought to himself grimly as he stomped through his small home, fuming bitterly. It did not take long for the disillusioned young man to hatch his cruel plot. Chuckling wickedly, he tucked a small knife into his pocket, threw some clothing and food into a satchel, and set off on his horse toward the city where the brothers lived.

Throughout the long journey, he continuously envisioned himself carrying out his plan, smiling in satisfaction. Having a wicked goal filled him

with meaning and purpose, giving him energy to weather the perils of the road.

When he finally arrived in the city of the great Rav Shrira Gaon many days later, it was evening. He joined the men of the city in the *bais haknesses* for *Maariv*, counting down the minutes until he would finally be able to carry out his plot.

*Maariv* concluded. The congregants filed out of the shul in groups and pairs, chatting and bidding each other good night. Daniel concealed himself behind a pillar and waited silently. Soon, the room was empty, save for the *gabbai*, who had remained to push in chairs and put away stray siddurim. Daniel dared not to breathe as the *gabbai* passed right by him. Luckily, he was not discovered.

The *gabbai* pattered around for another few minutes, putting Daniel under terrible strain. He straightened tablecloths and blew out lanterns. Finally, finally, the *gabbai* pulled a large key ring out of his pocket. With a final glance around the shul, he left the building and locked the door behind him.

Daniel waited just a few more minutes before starting to act. He had rehearsed each step until he knew it in his sleep, and so he knew exactly what he wanted to do.

First, he removed a small candle from his pocket and lit it. The candle provided just enough light for him to see without attracting attention from passersby on the street. His heart thumping excitedly, he approached the *aron kodesh* and pushed aside the *paroches*. It was not difficult to locate Ezra Hasofer's *sefer Torah* sitting proudly amongst the other scrolls.

Daniel steadied his candle on a nearby table. He needed both hands free to lift the *sefer Torah* out of its place and bring it to the *bimah*. With deft

fingers, he removed the heavy golden crown, not bothering to admire the beautiful design and impressive jewels. He slipped the mantle off of the scroll and undid the *gartel*. With practiced motions, he rolled the *atzai chaim*, flipping past *parshah* after *parshah* until he reached the *posuk* he needed. It was now or never.

The *sefer Torah* was open to the *posuk* וַעֲבַדְתֶּם אֶת ה' - אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּבֵרַךְ אֶת לֶחֶמְךָ *and you will serve Hashem, and He will bless your food*, referring to the success Hashem will shower upon those who serve him faithfully. Daniel fished through his pocket and found the small knife. Painstakingly, he scratched off the letter *ayin* of 'v'avadedetem' and replaced it with an *alef*. This tiny correction entirely changed the meaning of the *posuk*, since v'avadetem with an aleph means *and you will destroy*.

Daniel put down his quill and leaned forward to examine his handiwork. Gorgeous! He pocketed the quill, the vial of ink, and his trusty knife and hurried to return the *sefer Torah* to its place. A few minutes later, the wicked Jew was already in his wagon, headed homeward. Other than the single altered letter in the *sefer Torah*, not a trace remained of his presence.

Once every few years, the *gabbai* of the *bais haknesses* arranged for an expert *sofer* to perform a thorough examination of the twenty-five *sifrei Torah* in the *aron kodesh*, to check that they were still fully kosher. At this point, they were due for a screening, and so only two weeks after Daniel's nocturnal visit to the city, a scribe was called in. He went through the *sifrei Torah* one by one, a process that took many days. Eventually, he reached the cherished *sefer Torah* written by Ezra Hasofer. He began with *Bereishis*, going through line by line, *parshah* by *parshah*. Soon, he reached *posuk* that Daniel had doctored. His eyes widened in horror as he saw the *alef* of

*v'avadetem*. How could this be? How could Ezra Hasofer have made such a fundamental error?

The scribe brought his eye up to the parchment and noticed that it appeared tampered with. This aleph had not always been there; it must have been added in at a later date. Weak with apprehension, he went to inform the *gabbai* of this development. The *gabbai* came by, saw it with his own eyes, and panicked as well.

Gathering up his courage, the *gabbai* went to inform Nesanel, the *sefer* Torah's owner, of this terrible development. He knocked quietly on Nesanel's door, uncomfortable to share the devastating news.

"Come inside!" Nesanel invited, leading him to his study. "To what do I owe the privilege of your visit? How can I help you?"

The *gabbai* waited for his host to take a seat and swallowed hard. "I have something shocking to tell you," he blurted. In a low tone, he described the *sofer's* finding,

Nesanel's face turned a ghostly white. He had given up his entire inheritance, a life of comfort and luxury, for this *sefer* Torah. In one instant, his entire world was shattered. How could such a thing have occurred? How could someone be so heartless as to destroy such a valuable *sefer* Torah?

Nesanel could not sleep the entire night. His mind was consumed by the news the *gabbai* had brought him, and he could find no peace. He decided to perform a *shaalas chalom*, to try to gain an understanding from *shomayim* regarding the tampered *sefer* Torah.

That night, he purified a room and covered the bed in white. Slowly and fervently, he recited the necessary *pesukim* and concentrated on specific

*sheimos*. Then he lay down on the bed, falling asleep with the troubling thoughts on his mind. He hoped that he would receive an answer in his dream.

As he lay there, his breathing slow and even, Nesanel suddenly saw his beloved father.

"Abba!" he cried excitedly.

"My dear son," Yechezkel said softly. "I know what happened. I saw as it happened. Do not fear, Nesanel. Tomorrow, you'll take another look at the holy *sefer* Torah from Ezra Hasofer, and you'll see that the damage has corrected itself."

"How, Abba?" Nesanel asked. "Who will fix it?" Yechezkel smiled at him. "I came before the *beis din shel maalah*, and I said, '*Ribono shel Olam!* See the *kavod haTorah* of my children! They gave so much for this *sefer* Torah! You can't let a solitary *rashah* ruin it with the stroke of his quill!' The *beis din shel maalah* agreed, and decreed that Ezra himself would descend to correct it.

"My son, when you check the *sefer* Torah tomorrow, not only will the *posuk* read *v'avadetem* with an *ayin*, it will also be impossible to discern that the letter had once been scratched off. The parchment will be in perfect, like-new condition."

"But, Abba..." Nesanel began hesitantly. "How will I know that it was indeed Ezra Hasofer who fixed the *sefer* Torah?"

"Don't worry," Yechezkel said reassuringly. "On the floor, beside the *aron kodesh*, you will find a human eye. *Ayin tachas ayin*- an eye for an eye. Since that heartless man tampered with the *ayin* of *v'avadetem*, he will pay for it with his own *ayin*, and his eye will pop out of its socket, for you to discover in the morning. However, since it is a

human body part, be sure that this eye receives a kosher burial.“

When Nesanel awoke the next morning, he hurried to the home of the *gabbai* and the two of them went to the shul together. Indeed, as Yechezkel had promised, the *sefer* Torah had corrected itself overnight. Joyously, they put back the *sefer* Torah and began looking around on the floor. Sure enough, they discovered a human eye. As his father had instructed, Nesanel buried the eye.

When the story got around, it did not take long for the culprit to be discovered. Daniel, now minus one eye, was shunned from society. *Ayin tachas ayin*, he had received his just deserts.

*Have a Wonderful Shabbos!*

This story is taken from tape # A359

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