

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 View From Above

Rav Chaim Vital relayed the following story:

Maariv is over, and a steady line of people stream out of the shul. They wish each other a good Shabbos and they part outside the brightly-lit shul building, heading out under the star-studded sky for home. Dovid waves to his friend and falls into step beside his older brother, Yosef. At nineteen years old, Dovid is tall and wiry, the sparse beginnings of a beard on his chin. "Beautiful davening, no?" he asks out loud, turning to face his brother as their feet march in rhythm on the cobblestone streets.

"Geshmak," Yosef agrees, smiling back at him. Already twenty-four years old, Yosef is shorter than his brother, with kind and sensitive eyes.

They reach their home and stride single-file up the stone pathway. Yosef knocks on the front door.

"Good Shabbos!" he booms when their little sister, Shoshana, turns the lock and flings it open for them.

"Good Shabbos," she responds, somewhat less enthusiastic. She moves aside and her brothers troop in. Following them into the house, she moves to stand beside her mother, like a bodyguard ready to protect his client.

Sitting on a chair before her lit candles, their mother's face is shielded in her hands and she is weeping uncontrollably.

"Ima!" both boys cry together in alarm.

"It's Shabbos," Yosef says, his voice soft and gentle.

Dovid pulls up a second chair and takes a seat beside his mother. "Ima, its forbidden to cry on Shabbos."

"My children," Rivka manages to say through her weeping. "It's Abba's yartzeit today. How can I not cry?" She bursts into a fresh round of heartrending tears.

Shoshana slips her hand into her mother's and gives a tight squeeze.

"But Ima," the two boys say together. Their eyes meet briefly. They had not intended to speak at the same time. "It's Shabbos today," they conclude, once again in tandem.

"It's the second yartzeit today," Rivka says, accepting the handkerchief offered by Shoshana and drying her glistening cheeks. "I know it's Shabbos, but I just can't... Abba..."

"Abba is in Gan Eden," Yosef tries, his voice calm and soothing. "He's in the best possible place. He's not suffering, he's not in pain. Surely, he doesn't want you to be in pain."

“I’m trying to stay strong,” Rivka responds shakily. “You can’t understand, Yosef. You’re just a young man, never married. I’m so alone, and it’s just so difficult!” She sniffs and dabs at her tearing eyes. Shoshana, still clutching her other hand, squeezes again encouragingly.

“Should we start the seudah, Ima?” Dovid asks.

Rivka nods slowly. “That’s a good idea,” she says, leaving go of Shoshana’s hand.

“Let’s jump into the spirit of Shabbos,” Dovid suggests as Yosef fills their father’s kos with wine for Kiddush. “Let’s enjoy the seudah and leave our tzaros on the side until it’s over.”

Yosef winks. “I promise they won’t run away.” He looks around the table and lifts the brimming cup. “Everyone ready?”

By the time they’d all had a sip of wine, Rivka’s smile is back. It’s clear that she is making an effort to enjoy the meal despite her pain. She finds it comforting to hear her Yosef chant hamotzi with the same intonations as his father, his voice so reminiscent of her dear late husband. She glances at her two beloved sons and at her precious youngest daughter, and her thoughts turn briefly to her four older children, already married and presiding over seudos of their own. Despite everything, she knows she is blessed.

Nine-year-old Shoshana jumps up to serve the fish, and Dovid launches into an inspiring dvar Torah on the parshah. Rivka listens intently, her face glowing with motherly pride. When he finishes, Yosef challenges his reasoning with a sharp question, and even little Shoshana has what to contribute to the heated discussion that ensues. After the main course, the two boys lift their voices and begin a stirring rendition of one of the Friday night zemiros. From there, they move on to another song, and then another. Shoshana hums along and Rivka closes her eyes, enjoying the

melodies and the coziness of the Friday night seudah.

By the time they bentch and clean up, it is late. The spirit of Shabbos has swept away Rivka’s melancholy, and she has completely forgotten about the significance of the day. Bidding her sons a good Shabbos, she helps Shoshana into bed and then turns in for the night.

Her head rests on her pillow, and within a few minutes, Rivka is sound asleep.

Suddenly, she is in a forest. She isn’t sure why, but she’s running as fast as she can. She knows there is no one chasing her, and she has no idea what she is running to, but nevertheless, she finds herself sprinting through the woods as speedily as her legs can carry her. There are hundreds of others in the forest with her, all running in the same direction as she is. The forest is dank and dark, and is difficult to see where to go. They help each other as they continue racing through the thick brush.

As she runs, she notices a glimmer of light penetrating through the trees from the other end of the forest. Gasping for air, she summons the remainder of her strength and gallops toward the light. As she emerges from the forest, the light brightens considerably. She has never seen such brilliant light.

An old man, dressed entirely in white, approaches her. His face is framed by a flowing white beard and a snow-white tallis is draped over his head. To her surprise, he addresses her by name. “Rivka. Do you wish to see your husband?”

“Yes!” she responds eagerly. “Of course I wish to see him!”

“Come with me,” he says, beckoning with his forefinger.

Rivka follows tentatively behind him as he leads her over a grassy meadow into a blooming garden. She breathes deeply, inhaling the perfume of the flowers, her eyes drinking in the magnificent sights. In the distance, she sees a stream of pure, crystal-clear water flowing in many directions.

The elderly man halts beside a towering tree. "Take a look," he says softly.

Rivka tilts back her head and gazes up at the majestic tree. Its branches soar overhead, casting a wide circumference of shade. Hundreds of people, dressed in various different colors, sit on the ground beneath its towering branches.

Suddenly, she gasps in recognition. In the center of the crowd is her husband. He is standing before a shtender, giving over divrei Torah to the people surrounding him. They listen silently, lapping up his words.

Rivka is astonished. Her husband had been a good man and great husband, yet he had never been a talmid chacham. She had never dreamed that he was disseminating Torah in Gan Eden, with hundreds eagerly drinking up his wisdom.

Sensing her shock and confusion, the elderly man preempts her. "You can't disturb your husband!" he cries. "Wait until he finishes the shiur."

She stands at the side, willing herself to remain patient as her husband continues his lecture, gesturing animatedly at the crowd. She watches as he wraps up and then falls silent, closing the sefer on the shtender. She sees as he makes his way through the throng, walking slowly in her direction.

"Avrohom!" she bursts out, dissolving into tears.

"Avrohom!!"

"Shhh..." he says soothingly. "In this world here, there are no questions. You are coming from a world of uncertainty, yet here everything is clear."

Her sobs intensify as she hears his words. "What do you mean, there are no questions?" she demands tearfully. "Why did you leave me, Avrohom? I'm a young widow, with three single children. Yosef is so old already, and he is still unmarried. Why did you leave the world so young?" Her weeping was so strong that for a long moment, she could not speak. When she tried again, her voice was raspy. "How can you say there are no questions when I am in so much pain? Tonight is your yartzeit. What will be?"

Through her tears, she is taken aback to see her husband laughing. "It might be difficult for you to understand, Rivka, but Olam Habah operates very differently than the world you are coming from, and here there truly are no questions.

"Let me explain by revealing who I am," he continued. "When you married me, I was in my second gilgul. In my first gilgul, I was a tremendous tzaddik, holy and pure, completely invested in the mitzvos. I was a brilliant talmid chacham and was well-versed in all of Torah. I was also extremely diligent and spent every waking moment before my Gemara.

"As a young yeshiva student, my holiness was such that I decided not to marry. I did not want to benefit from anything in olam hazeh, including the pleasure of marriage. However, in carrying out this decision, I neglected to perform the first mitzvah of the Torah: piryah v'rivya, getting married and having children.

"When it was time for my neshamah to leave the world, I came before the beis din shel maalah and was shown the life that would await me forever more. In recognition of a lifetime of toiling in holiness and mitzvos, I would merit to become the

eternal teacher of hundreds of thousands of neshamos. They would dwell in my yeshiva in Gan Eden, and I would spend my days blissfully disseminating Torah.

“However, as I was being led to the tree under which I was to teach my students, a prosecuting angel suddenly appeared. ‘No,’ he declared, blocking my path forward. ‘This neshamah hasn’t performed the first mitzvah in the Torah! How can he become a teacher in Gan Eden if he hasn’t performed one of his most basic obligations?’

“The angels conferred amongst themselves and it was decided that I would be sent back down into this world. My only task was to marry and have children. Once I completed this mitzvah, I would be recalled on High, where I would take my rightful place as head of the yeshiva.”

Avrohom looks at her. “I was sent back down on to this world only to marry and have children. That was my sole tafkid, and once we had our seventh child together, there was no longer reason for me to remain in this world. That is why I was called back.”

Rivka listens, but something is still bothering her. “Why couldn’t you at least tell me that you were in actuality a talmid chacham?” she asks. “When we were married, you always claimed that learning was too difficult for you. You were a simple laborer, and that’s all. Why didn’t you ever tell me?”

The glowing man before her shakes his head. “No, Rivka,” he says, speaking to her like an adult speaks to a young child when trying to explain a concept above the child’s level and grasp. “When I was living in my second gilgul, I had no idea that I had once been such a brilliant masmid. All I knew was that my head was clogged and learning just couldn’t penetrate. It was only after I shed my body and my soul ascended to shomayim once more that I regained my previous existence and resumed my former persona.”

Rivka looks at him with fresh eyes, and for the first time since his passing two years earlier, she is finally at peace. As her husband had promised, in the world he was in, there truly were no questions anymore.

“I want you to know,” Avrohom adds, “that since you were my partner in performing the one mitzvah I was lacking, that of piryah virivyah, you will be my eternal partner in this world as well. When your time comes, you will be seated right beside me, and you will remain with me forever.”

Tears pool at Rivka’s eyes as she hears this. She squeezes her eyes shut and forces them away. “And what about Dovid?” she whispers. “Why isn’t he successful in business? All his peers are doing great, but with him, everything he touches turns to dust. He’s a poor yasom. Why can’t he be successful, too?”

“Ah, Dovid,” Avrohom says understandingly. “You remember that Dovid was involved in a dispute with someone, don’t you? They had a din Torah, and Dovid won. However, through his victory, another Jew suffered tremendously. Although Dovid was in the right, at the end of the day, a Jew is in pain, and Dovid is being punished for that. In fact, the suffering of his opponent was so great, that the angels were discussing maiming Dovid physically. I managed to convince them to mete out monetary retribution instead. I figured that would be a lot less difficult than being permanently disabled.”

Rivka nods, finally at peace with her son’s monetary troubles. She turns to the next thing that’s bothering her. “What about Yosef? He’s already twenty-four years old, and there are simply no shidduchim being suggested for him. His friends have been married for years, and he’s stuck watching from the sidelines. Yosef is such a good boy, smart and capable and kind. He has

everything going for him! Why can't he find his life's partner already?"

"Here, in this world, these are not questions," Avrohom replies. "The answers are glaringly simple. Yosef's intended is much younger than he. She needs to grow up first, and then he'll be able to marry her."

"But how will I marry him off?" Rivka wails. "I don't have a penny to my name!"

"Don't worry about it," Avrohom assures her. "Yosef's future wife is from a foreign country, and she is from a very wealthy family. She'll be more than happy to cover all their expenses, from the wedding to the home they live in."

Rivka exhales, long and slow. The worries that had kept her awake for weeks were finally assuaged. Yet there was one more question weighing on her heart. "Avrohom," she says, very quietly. "What about our beautiful little Moishele? What did he do wrong that a drunkard killed him when he was only three years old? My poor little boy! Not a day goes by that I don't cry over him!"

"Come with me," Avrohom says in response. He leads her through the flower beds deep into the garden. The fragrance grows sweeter as they walk, and the view becomes even more beautiful. Although she's only dreaming, the holiness begins to overwhelm Rivka, and she follows her husband with difficulty.

The trees are alive, animated, as they sing shirah to Hashem. Hundreds of gorgeous blossoms are singing a chorus of שמחה לב ולישרי לב שמחה. As they walk, a sweet melody of יזמרח כבוד drifts up from another group of blooms. A row of tall cedars bursts into song, belting out the words אז ירננו כל עצי יער. From below, the grasses begin a moving rendition of ה' לעולם יהי כבוד ה' לעולם while a group of shrubs sing שלום שלום ורחוק לקרוב.

When they finally reach a beautiful field deep in middle of the garden, a fire suddenly descends from above. Leaping flames in a stunning array of colors dance and twirl before them. In the background, birds are hopping from tree to tree, beautiful words of shirah flowing from their beaks. More and more flames descend, forming a striking pillar of fiery color. Rivka watches, awestruck.

Suddenly, between the flames, she sees hundreds of angels descending, holding her precious Moishele. He runs toward her, laughing happily. "Hello, Ima!" he calls.

Rivka crumples to the floor in a faint. The sight is too much for her senses. Her husband quickly kneels beside her and lifts a fistful of grass to her nose. She sniffs weakly, gradually feeling the sensation returning to her limbs.

"Moishele!" she cries. "Where did you go? Why did such a terrible decree befall on you that you were taken from the world at such a tender age?"

Her son chuckles. "Terrible decree?" he echoes. "Ima, you know that nothing is bad. There's only good here. It was the best possible thing!"

"Explain it to me," she requests. "How can it be good that a drunken gentile killed a pure three-year-old child?"

"I was only your child in my second gilgul," Moishele responds. "When I was only six months old, in my previous gilgul, a terrible tragedy befell the Jewish community where I lived. There was a vicious pogrom, and all the Jewish residents in the entire city were slaughtered. Somehow, in the commotion, I was overlooked, and I remained alive, sleeping peacefully in my cradle, the solitary survivor of a once flourishing community."

“When the pogrom was over and a bloody silence settle over the city, some non-Jews came to look for leftover booty. A gentile woman discovered me, forgotten in my cradle, and she took me home with her. Fortunately, the neighboring Jewish community discovered that a Jewish child had survived the massacre, and they tried everything to return me to my people. However, my new ‘mother’ wasn’t ready to give me up so quickly. It took years of negotiations and a very steep sum, but eventually, when I was three years old, I was rescued from the non-Jewish home and brought to the home of the rov of the neighboring city.

“I grew up at the feet of this giant of a man, who was a great tzaddik and talmid chacham. As the only survivor of my city, my new guardians invested heart and soul to ensure that I would grow into an ehrlich Jew. I grew tremendously in Torah and became a renowned talmid chacham. I lived a long, happy life.

“When I was niftar, I ascended to very high levels in Gan Eden, yet at some point, the angels refused to allow me to ascend further. My neshamah was yearning for more, but I was denied since I had nursed from a gentile woman for three years. The impure thoughts and non-kosher food that had gone into the milk she gave me were embedded into my soul, hindering my ascent into the holiness of olam habah.

“Since my neshamah was not satisfied to remain stagnant and I desperately salivated to continue rising, I agreed to return to the world, to be born again, so that I could nurse from a holy Jewish mother and erase the stains on my soul.”

Moishele flashes his mother a brilliant smile. “That’s exactly what happened. You, Ima, were chosen to be my mother for three years, until I would be weaned. Do you realize how much esteem they have for you here in Heaven, that I merited my wonderful Gan Eden due to you? You

are the one who assisted me in correcting my soul! What a merit you have!”

Tears are streaming down Rivka’s cheeks as she contemplates her son’s words. The dark misery is lifted from her mind, replaced by a joyous clarity. “Couldn’t you have been taken in a less gruesome manner?” she wonders out loud. “Did you have to be killed by that horrible boor?”

“There was a decree of death on the entire town,” Moishele explains. “You, and Abba, and our entire family... the neighbors, the storekeepers, everyone was supposed to be killed for their sins. In an effort to save the town and give the Jews a chance for teshuvah, the beis din shel maalah ruled to accept my death as atonement for the remainder of the town. It wouldn’t be enough for me to die peacefully in my sleep. I would need to die a gruesome death at the hands of that anti-Semite, and only such a death would lift the decree from over your heads.

“In fact,” Moishele continues, “For me, it’s so much better this way. Instead of dying in my sleep, I merited to be killed al kiddush Hashem, simply because I was a Jewish child. I am in such a high, holy place that there is simply too much kedushah for others to look at me there. Abba is the only one who has merited to bear the awesome holiness surrounding me, since he had brought my neshamah into the world.”

“Do you understand everything now?” Avrohom inquires quietly.

“Yes!” Rivka cries, her head spinning. How different the picture seems from above! How beautiful and perfect are Hashem’s ways! “I understand everything!”

They watch as Moishele disappears above, rising with the fiery pillars, before turning back in the direction they had come.

“Everything that happens is wonderful,” Avrohom says softly as they pass the singing trees and flowers. “But when you wake up, the hardships of life will be back, and you might not always see why it is good. Don’t forget that up here, there are answers to everything.”

Rivka nods, slightly tearful at the thought of parting from her husband once more. “I’ll try,” she promises.

“You need to be strong,” Avrohom implores. “You have a family to take care of, children to marry off. I want you to know that you will soon be offered the chance to remarry. Accept it. It is right for you. A tremendous reward awaits you here in Gan Eden for your suffering.”

They stroll quietly together until they reach the outskirts of the garden. Avrohom leaves her at the gate and returns to his place under the tree. Rivka watches him go until she can see him no longer.

Suddenly, she feels herself being dragged through the dark forest. Her skirt sweeps the dirt and leaves as she is pulled through the trees.

And then she awakens.

Rivka sits up in bed with a start. She runs her palm over her eyes and shakes her head to clear it. It had all been a dream. A wonderful, comforting dream. She smiles, grateful that she had merited to view the world from above, to see the beautiful tapestry composed of the rough knots in her life. She lays back down and allows herself to fall into a peaceful slumber, content at last.

As her husband had advised in her dream, just a few days later, someone suggests a shidduch for her. She remarries shortly thereafter, bringing up her children with the knowledge and conviction that everything that befalls a person is entirely good.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A31

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