

# 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 Bird's Testimony*

Meir was a moneychanger. He operated with both local and foreign currency, exchanging coins for larger bills and foreign money for its fair amount in local tender. He dealt extensively with shopkeepers, who would often come to exchange their money for bills of larger denominations and was the go-to address for travelers seeking entry in the local market. This profession earned him a respectable income. With his honesty, generosity, and fear of Heaven, Meir was well-liked and looked up to in his community.

Most of the time, his job was relatively easy. There was little competition and virtually no haggling or physical labor. A few times a year, however, when he accumulated enough foreign currency, he would need to travel to the countries where the money originated to exchange it for the currency of his own country. Traveling with such

large sums, much of it coins, presented a great risk, both to his money and to his life.

To protect himself during these journeys, Meir developed a method of concealing the coins within his valises so that they did not jingle. He would wrap stacks of coins tightly in a thick material which he would store among bags of potatoes and carrots. He would guard his luggage carefully throughout the journey in both directions.

On one such trip, Meir joined a caravan and set out on a week-long journey across the desert. His camel was loaded up with his packages, giving the appearance of a vegetable merchant. As the caravan made its slow trek across the desert's sandy dunes, he kept four eyes on his precious sacks of vegetables, concerned for the vast sums hidden within them.

Soon, Meir's circumspect behavior caught the attention of Ibrahim, a tall, powerfully-built soldier in the king's army. Like Meir, Ibrahim needed to reach the opposite side of the desert, and he had joined the caravan for the safety its numbers provided in the wilderness. Noticing the Jew traveling a few paces in front of him constantly looking over his shoulder and counting his sacks, Ibrahim grew suspicious.

On the second day of their journey, when the caravan stopped to rest for the night, Meir tied his camel to a pike and ventured off for a few moments. Ibrahim seized the opportunity. With the handle of his sword, he prodded the sacks of potatoes. He smiled gleefully as he heard the faint clanging of the stacks of coins. This man was no potato merchant, but rather a dealer of golden apples! He walked casually back to his camel, his brain churning furiously as he hatched a scheme in his mind.

When the caravan resumed traveling, Ibrahim

paced his camel to ride beside Meir's and struck up a conversation. The two conversed amicably as they rode up and down the sandy dunes. Soon, they were deeply engrossed in conversation. Ibrahim proved to be a captivating storyteller, and he kept Meir's attention riveted as they rode with the caravan further and further into the desert.

Ibrahim slowed his pace slightly, and caught up in his story, Meir did the same, not even noticing that they were lagging behind the caravan. "Hey," Ibrahim said suddenly, interrupting himself in the midst of a fascinating account. "Look, we fell behind!"

With focused looks on their faces, both men stared straight ahead and pulled on their camels' reins. The camels increased their speed, galloping gracelessly until they fell in line at the rear of the caravan. Ibrahim picked up the threads of his story, patting himself mentally on the back. His plan was working; it was working well. The Jew was listening, spellbound, and he was allowing Ibrahim to set his camel's pace without even realizing it.

As the day dragged on and the sand stretched endless before them, Ibrahim continued engaging Meir in long, exciting tales. Three more times, he tested his companion by falling slightly behind the caravan. All three times, Meir instinctively slowed his pace to match Ibrahim's, too caught up in the story to notice that the caravan was moving on without them.

Ibrahim smiled gleefully as he continued chatting with Meir, keeping an eye out for a particularly high sandbank. The caravan wove up and down the sandy dunes until Ibrahim noticed the perfect place to carry out his plot. Up ahead, the sand formed a deep valley and then a steep hill. He ramped up the excitement in the captivating tale he was telling and slowed his camel to a trot.

Beside him, Meir's camel slowed too. His eyes were riveted to Ibrahim's wide eyes and hands that did not stop gesticulating. The distance between them and the caravan began to grow.

The caravan entered the valley. Ibrahim continued his masterful storytelling.

The caravan began climbing the sandy incline. Ibrahim's voice grew even more dramatic.

The caravan reached the summit and soon disappeared on the other side. Ibrahim and Meir slowly rode into the valley.

Suddenly, Ibrahim jumped off his camel and came menacingly close, brandishing his sword. Meir came down to reality with a thud. Looking around, he realized that they were alone in the sandy valley. The caravan was nowhere to be seen.

Desperately, he reached for his own sword, but Ibrahim was quicker. With one sharp kick, he threw Meir onto the ground and tore his weapon away.

"Please," Meir pleaded. "Have mercy on me!"

Ibrahim ignored his entreaty. "I'm going to kill you," he explained with one knee pinning the Jew to the ground. He held a rope between his teeth and began bounding Meir's hands and feet tightly. "You have money, and I intend to take it. Your life is not worth anything right now."

"Have mercy!" Meir cried.

"Sorry," Ibrahim said with an indifferent chuckle. He finished shackling Meir and went to get his sword.

Meir lifted his face and indicated at a bird flying overhead. "That bird will be my witness," he

declared. “There’s no one around, but that bird will avenge me!”

Ibrahim laughed. “Really now,” he scoffed. “A bird will be your witness?” With a final chuckle, he swiped with his sword and Meir crumpled to the floor. He was dead.

Working quickly, Ibrahim dug a hole in the sand and buried the slain Jew inside. He transferred Meir’s luggage onto his own camel and set the other camel free. Settling himself comfortably on the saddle, he urged his camel to move at maximum speed, catching up with the caravan within the hour.

Back home, Meir’s family counted the days until a letter would arrive from their father, informing them that he had reached his destination shortly. When no letters arrived, they waited a little longer. And then longer. The weeks and months passed, and they realized that something had happened to him. He had vanished without trace in the unforgiving desert, a veritable death sentence.

For his part, Ibrahim remained indifferent and oblivious to the pain of Meir’s family. He exchanged the coins for the currency of his home country and set back with another caravan for the return journey, wealthier than ever.

The years passed. Ibrahim was promoted in the army to higher and higher positions and became a favorite of the king. Eventually, he was chosen as viceroy, an honor only second to that of the kingship itself. Needless to say, his arrogance grew exponentially together with his power. One of the roles of this position involved criminal sentencing. This gave Ibrahim the tremendous power over the lives and deaths of his subjects. He, and he alone, decided who was worthy of the death sentence and which criminals would be granted another lease at life.

Another exclusive honor that he enjoyed was eating the main meal of the day together with the king. While other high-ranking dignitaries were permitted to stand and watch as the king consumed his meal, only Ibrahim was allowed to dine with the king.

One evening, the king and his viceroy sat at the table, ready to dine. A row of dignitaries stood behind them in a semi-circle while court jesters performed tricks in the middle of the room. A waiter entered, bowed low, and placed a steaming silver tray in front of the king. “We have managed to procure a very rare bird for His Majesty’s meal today,” he announced, bowing again. “It is known for its soft, fatty meat and delicate flavor. Despite its rarity, it flew here specifically to honor the king’s table, and it is a privilege to be able to serve it to His Majesty.”

Hearing the name of the bird, Ibrahim laughed out loud. Then he remembered that he was seated beside the king, and quickly grew silent.

The king turned to him in suspicion. Despite his firm belief in his viceroy’s loyalty, he always maintained a slight sense of mistrust in the man who was slated to replace him on the throne after he passed on from this world. Ibrahim was a good man, but what if his ambitions for greater power led him to plot against the king’s life?

“Why did you laugh?” he demanded, wondering if the new and rare meat he was being served was poisoned at his viceroy’s request.

Ibrahim colored. “Uh, Your Majesty,” he stammered. “Uh. It’s not... I didn’t mean...”

The king’s well-honed senses immediately shot up to high alert. “Well, Ibrahim?” he prodded, a bit more menacingly.

Ibrahim thought quickly. Should he tell the king the truth? The king was waiting impatiently for an

answer. His mind raced back and forth as he considered how to respond. On the one hand, the king was a compassionate overlord to his Jewish subjects, allowing them to live in his territory in peace. At the same time, they were only Jews! Surely the king hated the Jews!

“You are hiding something from me,” the king stated harshly. “I demand that you tell me why you laughed. Now.”

Realizing that lying would do more harm than good, Ibrahim hesitantly began describing the long-ago caravan journey on which he had killed a Jew. “A moment before he died, a bird flew overhead, and in his desperation, the Jew pointed to the bird and declared that it would be his witness and his avenger,” he explained. “When the waiter brought in this specific bird for dinner, it reminded me of the foolish Jew and made me laugh.”

The king struggled to contain his anger and kept his voice a cold, deliberate calm. “And what was the name of this man?”

“Meir,” Ibrahim said quickly. “Meir the moneychanger. He was well-known in the capital city.”

The king stood up abruptly. “I need air,” he said, sweeping out of the room with his retinue of guards and servants. Ibrahim was left at the table with the cooling bird, worried and confused.

Sitting in his workroom with his chief of staff waiting patiently for orders, the king began to speak. “Send soldiers to guard the viceroy’s house, and do it stealthily. I don’t want anyone going in or out, and I don’t want to give the family time to escape.”

The chief of staff scribbled on his clipboard. “At once, Your Majesty.”

“Once the home is secured, please set up an area for a small tribunal on the lawn outside his house. I’d like the widow and children of the Jewish moneychanger who disappeared so many years ago, Meir, to be brought there. When this is arranged, I will come.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“And one more thing,” the king added as an afterthought. “Ibrahim, the viceroy. Send guards to surround him and guard him carefully. I don’t want him to escape.”

“Certainly, Your Majesty.” If the chief of staff was surprised by the king’s sudden change of heart regarding his second in command, he hid it well.

Soon, a large crowd of onlookers gathered outside Ibrahim’s home, which was surrounded by a group of heavily armed soldiers. The fearful and bewildered family of Meir the moneychanger was led to the front of the crowd.

A hush settled over the crowd as the king appeared, taking his seat facing his audience. They bowed deeply in deference.

Then Ibrahim was prodded forward, his hands and feet shackled.

The king stood up and addressed the crowd in a thunderous voice. “Today, we will see justice take place. It may be two decades later, but justice will persevere. You, Ibrahim, the man destined to wear my crown, are a lowly murderer who led a man to his death just so that you could pad your own coffers a little more. It makes no difference that the man was a Jew; the crime remains the same.”

“Seize him!” the king ordered the soldiers. “Hang him from the doorpost of his own home. Banish his family from this city and from all of my

territories. They may take only the clothing on their backs with them. Let it be known throughout this country that murder does not go unpunished!” The crowd stirred in disbelief as a noose was placed around the viceroy’s neck, and he was hanged from the doorway of his home. His grief-stricken wife and children were given no time to mourn. They filed past Ibrahim’s lifeless body dangling over the doorpost into a life of exile and hardship.

A few days later, the king presented Ibrahim’s wealth to Meir’s widow. “I can’t bring your husband back to life,” he said apologetically. “But at the very least, I can try to right the wrong by easing your financial plight.”

She bowed and thanked him in a low voice.

“I want you to know that I am no lover of the Jews,” the king continued. “However, I know that there is a Master controlling the world. If a Jew, right before death, declared that a bird would serve as his witness and avenge his death, and then the very bird and the information was served to me on a silver platter, there was just no way I could ignore it.”

If only we understood the true potency of the words that we, as Yidden, utter, how much more careful we would be with everything that emerges from our mouths!

*Have a Wonderful Shabbos!*  
This story is taken from tape # A08

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