

# TORAS REB KALMAN



## סיפורי צדיקים

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

### *The Secret to Achieving Greatness*

Amongst the great tzaddikim throughout the generations whom klal Yisroel had merited to have in their midst was the holy Arizal. He was a student of the great Shita Mekubetzes for six years, where he rapidly advanced in his learning. His talmidim testified about him that he knew the entire mikrah, Mishna, and Talmud Bavli by heart. He could quote pipulim, midrashim, aggados; he was intensely familiar with all the various aspects of Torah.

In addition to Torah, the Arizal was an expert in sichas illanos, the language of the leaves. When one leaf or branch shakes, it appears that is being rustled by the wind. However, this is not truly so. The trees, like all creations, have the ability to communicate, and they wiggle their leaves at each other as they communicate revelations from heaven. Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai and other tremendous sages who understood the language of the leaves would often listen to their

conversations to try to overhear the goings-on of shomayim.

The Arizal was also versed in the language of the birds. It says that of hashomayim yolich es hakol—nothing happens in this world until a bird first chirps about it. The Arizal understood what each chirp meant, and he was able to listen in when a bird spoke. He knew the language of the malachim and could eavesdrop on their conversations. He even understood the wisdom of fire, and was able to learn information from the way flames leap and flicker.

He was additionally knowledgeable in understanding the readings of the forehead. Every action a person commits is written out on his forehead, and though it is not visible to most people, great kabbalists are able to see and read it. The Arizal had the ability to look at someone's forehead and immediately be aware of the person's every action.

Not only could he read a person's entire history on his forehead, he was also able to see his thoughts and desires. Just by gazing at someone, the Arizal was able to determine the person's thought process and the actions he desired to do, even if the person himself was not aware of it yet. Furthermore, he understood why things in the future would eventually happen.

Prior to the Arizal's settling in Eretz Yisroel, he resided in Egypt. The sefer Emek Hamelech relates that one day, it is unclear how, Hashem revealed to the Arizal that he must go to Eretz Yisroel. From the myriad wisdoms he had acquired, the Arizal understood that he was being sent to Eretz Yisreol so that he can become the rebbi of a massive talmid chacham, Rav Chaim Vital.

Rav Chaim Vital's dream was to write a commentary on the Zohar based on the opinion of the Ramak. It would be a clear, explanatory commentary that would help klal Yisroel

understand the Zohar, similar to Rashi on Gemara. However, when he embarked on the project, he understood that it was a very difficult undertaking, and despite investing all his energy into it, it just was not working out.

It was because of Rav Chaim Vital's efforts at creating this commentary that the Arizal was sent to Eretz Yisroel, to guide and assist him. The Arizal settled in Tzefas with his wife and five children and continued learning as he had in Egypt. The holy atmosphere of Eretz Yisroel enhanced his learning tremendously and brought it to entire new levels. As the days and then weeks passed, he waited for a visit from Rav Chaim Vital, on whose behalf he had come to Eretz Yisroel. He did not approach Rav Chaim on his own, since he would only be able to become a true rebbi to Rav Chaim if Rav Chaim approached him, with the necessary emotions and strong desire, and if he would teach him the entire Zohar. Rav Chaim Vital had heard about the great mekubal who had recently moved from Egypt, and despite his struggles with writing his commentary, he did not see a reason to approach the newcomer for assistance. Being extremely well-versed in kabbalah himself, he did not think the Arizal would have more to add.

Six months passed in this fashion. Finally, Rav Chaim decided to pay the Arizal a visit and personally test his kabbalistic knowledge to see if he was indeed on the level that the legends had him on. When he knocked on the Arizal's door, the Arizal already knew why he was coming, as he had seen it bruach hakodesh.

The two of them sat down, and Rav Chaim Vital asked the Arizal for an explanation on a specific portion of the Zohar. The Arizal began revealing things that Rav Chaim had never heard of before, and he was completely overwhelmed by the Arizal's brilliance. As they discussed more kabbalah and the Arizal continued to astound his guest with his depth, clarity, and overpowering knowledge, Rav Chaim almost could not breathe.

"Rebbi," He begged when the Arizal was done. "Please, tell me one more explanation on a difficulty I've been trying to understand!"

"I'm sorry, but that's it," The Arizal responded. "I'm not going any further."

Rav Chaim left the Arizal's home, still entirely overwhelmed. He donned sack cloth, placed ashes on his head, and stayed up the entire night, beseeching Hashem through a torrent of tears that the Arizal accept him as a student. He finally realized how much greater the Arizal was than himself, and how much he had to learn. The only thing he wanted was to sit at the feet of the Arizal and learn from his Torah.

The following morning, he immediately went to the Arizal's home. When the Arizal opened the door, Rav Chaim fell on the floor and began kissing his feet, pleading with him for forgiveness and asking him to accept him as a mentee.

The Arizal agreed, explaining that he had only refused to teach him the day earlier since their relationship needed to be built on strong desire, and was waiting for Rav Chaim to build up that strong desire. Then they sat together and the Arizal taught his new student secrets of the Torah. Rav Chaim's excitement over the teachings of the Arizal were tremendous, and he could not restrain himself from sharing some of what he learned with some other kabbalists. Eventually, the Arizal also allowed others to join in their learning sessions, and soon there were a group of ten great mekubalim learning with the Arizal.

One of the Arizal's amazing abilities was histachtus hakever: he would lay on the grave of a tzaddik, with his mouth on the gravestone, just above the head of the niftar. He would speak to the tzaddik, and the tzaddik's neshamah would respond. The Arizal did this at the kevarim of many Tannaim and Amoraim, where he would speak words of Torah and would acquire a

tremendous amount from the revelations of these neshamos when they responded.

Of all the Tannaim, the one he acquired the most Torah from was Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, author of the Zohar. The Arizal was a frequent visitor at this gravesite, and he gained a world of Torah from Rabbi Shimon.

On the yahrtzeit of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, all the mekubalim would gather in Meron, where they would discuss the Zohar in depth and detail. Afterward, they would dance with fervor and feeling, one large circle of the greatest kabbalists utilizing unfathomable levels of kedushah. Each movement of each body part was calculated according to kabbalah, and they were accomplishing vast amounts in shomayim through the act of dancing.

According to kabbalah, the center of the circle held an enormous power that whoever would dance in the middle would help elevate the forces of kedushah from everyone surrounding him up to shomayim. Therefore, all the mekubalim refrained from dancing in the center. After all, none of these tremendous giants considered themselves worthy enough of bearing the weight of their fellows' holiness. Even the Arizal, their mentor and leader, danced along the circle and did not go into the center.

One Lag Baomer, as the mekubalim danced, a tall, kingly man joined the circle and began dancing. He stood taller than the entire crowd, with a majestic white beard and a glowing face. All eyes were immediately captured by his powerful presence and regal dancing. The Arizal, too, observed him with tremendous interest, paying careful attention to his movements.

Suddenly, the man approached R' Laizer, the shamash of the Arizal's shul. Before the astonished eyes of the mekubalim, the two of them began dancing in the center of the circle. Shortly thereafter, the Arizal approached the

middle of the circle and joined them there. The mekubalim watched in wonderment as the three whirled round and round. It made sense for the Arizal to be dancing in the middle, and the majestic-looking man was obviously someone special as well. Yet where did R' Laizer, the simple shamash, come into the picture? Why did he merit to dance in the powerful center of the circle, with such exalted company?

They danced this way for another few hours. When the dancing finished, both R' Laizer and the mysterious man melted into the crowd.

"Who was that man?" A student asked the Arizal. "And who is R' Laizer, that he merited to dance with Rebbi in the middle?"

"That man was Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai himself," The Arizal revealed. "His neshamah came down in the guise of human being so that he can dance with the shamash of the shul. Our shamash is no ordinary custodian. He's a hidden mekubal, the Baal Chareidim. And if Rabbi Shimon can dance with the Baal Chareidim, shouldn't I be able to do the same?"

One of the Arizal's most important attributes was that he was a nistar- a hidden person. He kept his knowledge largely to himself. This characteristic is found in all mekubalim until today. Individuals who know kabbalah also know how to keep a secret, and indeed, this itself is the secret of their tremendous greatness.

The following story illustrates this theme.

The Megaleh Amukos was a great mekubal. Shortly before he passed away, he made it known whom he was appointing to inherit his position as rov of the city of Crackow. In his will, he designated the future rov to be a specific water-carrier, a simple man. No one dared question the Megaleh Amukos, yet privately, they all wondered at his choice.

After the Megaleh Amukos's passing, the time came to carry out his will. The water-carrier was approached and informed that he had been chosen to inherit the position of rov.

"What are you talking about?" The man sputtered, dropping his water pails and looking up at the delegation. "I can't be the rov; I can barely read!" "The Megaleh Amukos chose you," The delegation repeated. "We have no choice but to appoint you as the rov."

"Under no circumstances," The water-carrier retorted. "I am not worthy of being a rov. I won't be able to answer a single halachic question. I'm just a simple water-carrier, nothing more."

Though the members of the delegation were personally inclined to accept his words and find a more suitable rov, they were bound by the Megaleh Amukos's will and could not back down. "We have an obligation to fulfill the rov's tzavaah," They said. "It won't take too much of you. All you need to do is where a frock and look like a rov. You'll sit on the mizrach wall. That's all."

Seeing that he didn't have a choice in the matter, the water-carrier agreed. He did not give up his occupation as the city's water-carrier and continued hauling buckets of water to various homes in Crackow. However, during davening, he sat up front, and he was honored with shlishi during krias haTorah. In everyone's eyes, his whole rabbinic position was a joke.

During this time, the non-Jews made a decree against Gemara study. As has tragically occurred numerous times throughout our painful history, they decided they would burn every copy of Shas that they could get their hands on. Understandably, the Jews were in great anguish over this bitter decree, but had no way of preventing it. They knew they needed to do something, but they had no idea what.

During a heated discussion regarding the situation, a few men shrugged off the burden of finding a solution. "It's the rov's responsibility," They declared. "That's the job of a rov, to deal with crisis that befalls his community. We're going to the rov to speak to him about it."

"Are you kidding?" Others yelled at them. "You know our rov is really just a water-carrier. He's not capable of doing anything to prevent this decree!"

"We have no better options," Someone pointed out. "You are right that is unlikely he will be able to assist us, but we have nothing to lose by trying."

A delegation of the Jewish community's dignitaries were sent to the rov to discuss the tragedy set to befall on them.

As expected, the water-carrier had nothing to offer them. "What do you want from me?" He asked, raising his hands helplessly. "I'm a rov in name only. There's nothing I can do."

"You are the rov," Someone said in a determined voice. "This is your job. It is your responsibility to take care of your kehillah. Please brainstorm overnight. We'll be back tomorrow morning to hear your thoughts and ideas."

The next morning, when the delegation returned, they found the water-carrier's home empty. Apparently, the pressure had been too much for him, and he had run away the previous evening. The delegates looked at each other with raised eyebrows. Something was so strange about the situation. The Megaleh Amukos couldn't have made such a grave error in choosing the water-carrier as rov. The only logical explanation was that he was truly a great person hiding in the guise of an unassuming water-carrier.

They sent out a search team to various surrounding villages, searching for their missing

rov. At first, these missions ended in failure. No one had seen the man they described. Eventually, however, in one of the villages they reached, after describing the water-carrier and asking if anyone had sighted him, someone came forth with a clue. "Near my home, there is an empty shack," The man related. "Three days ago, I saw a Jew enter the shack and lock the door behind him. He's been inside since."

"That might be the rov!" The search team responded eagerly. "Can you show us the shack?" The man led them to a small, dilapidated hut, and the members of the search committee knocked breathlessly on the door.

After a few moments, the door opened, and indeed, the water carrier cum rov was standing at the other side. They looked at him, and he looked at them. "Mazel Tov!" The water carrier called out. "Mazel Tov! The decree has been canceled!" The members of the search team gaped at him, open-mouthed. They suddenly realized that the 'simple' water carrier was truly a hidden baal mekubal. "But... but if the rov was able to annul the decree, why did he run away?" They asked in confusion.

"The reason we were punished with this gezeirah of Shas being taken away from us was because there is hardly anyone learning Shas," The water-carrier explained. "The bais din shel maalah declared that if someone would prove his familiarity with Shas by saying over the entire Shas, word after word, from memory, the decree would be canceled. I ran away because I needed a place where I could sit undisturbed. For three days and nights, I stayed in this shack and did nothing else but recite the entire Shas. Baruch Hashem, I was successful and the decree is now annulled."

On this exalted note, the search team returned to Crackow bearing their esteemed rov. Finally, his greatness had been revealed, and he stepped fully into his position as rov.

Chazal say es hatznuim chochma- when a person doesn't not flaunt his knowledge, he merits wisdom. Learning to keep quiet regarding how much a person knows and understands is one of the biggest gifts, as it will serve as a vehicle for continued success in learning. True greatness can only come through remaining hidden as much as possible.

*Have a Wonderful Shabbos!*

This story is taken from tape # A01 - 2000.

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