

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Reb Shmuel HaSatan Part I

The year 1395 was a relatively quiet one for the Jewish community in the historic city of Prague. For two torturous years, they had suffered through devastating pogroms. Entire families were wiped out, murdered for their faith, leaving the survivors broken and bleeding. Now, in the calm that followed those terrible years, they were finally free to pick up the shattered remnants of their lives and start to live again.

The king who ruled over Prague and its environs was of the frivolous and fun-loving sort, interested in nothing other than his personal pleasures. He was so busy indulging in his earthly desires that despite the rampant anti-Semitism present in the kingdom, he largely left the Jewish populace alone. Bishops and cardinals would plead with him to rid the country of its Jews, but the king preferred to focus his energy on his hunting and fine wines.

Yet the hate-crazed priests would not give up. Time and again, they met with the king and offered different ideas to make the lives of the Jews more difficult. Owning land was already outlawed, but now they tried to convince the king to forbid Jews from engaging in many forms of commerce, including import and export, owning a store, and peddling. Though the king was uninterested at first, eventually they succeeded in obtaining his seal of approval, and their evil plan became law.

Since so many professions were closed to Jews, many turned to moneylending as a source of income to support their families. By lending money to their non-Jewish neighbors, they were slowly able to build capital as they collected interest on the loans.

One day, however, even moneylending ceased to exist as a way of livelihood for a Jewish household. The priests succeeded in passing a law that universally forgave all debt owed to Jews by non-Jews. As the Jews gasped in panic and distress, the town criers informed all non-Jewish citizens that any money owed to the Jews was no longer collectible, as per the new decree. In doing so, they essentially stole thousands of gulden from the Jewish community.

The troubles of the Jews were far from over. Now that the priests had succeeded in gaining the king's ear, they continued to work diligently to ensure a miserable existence for the Jewish community. The treasury minister began to pressure the king to increase the tax burden on the Jews.

“Our coffers are running low,” he told the king, over and over. “The Jews have money, and we need money. There’s no reason not to raise the sum we need through taxing them more.”

“Why should we go after the Jews again?” the king asked dismissively. “I’d rather not bother with this.”

“The Jews have enough money,” the treasury minister, influenced by the priests, tried on a different occasion. He presented his trump card. “I’m afraid that the treasury will run too low to finance the grand hunting party His Majesty has planned. The best way to solve this issue would be to tax the Jews.”

“I hear,” the king said, more amenable to the idea.

“And why would they be willing to accept another tax? We are already collecting a princely sum from them every year.”

“The Jews are not citizens, Your Majesty,” the treasury minister pointed out. “We allow them to live on our lands and afford them protection from their enemies through our mighty armed forces. They ought to pay a protection tax for these services, isn’t that so?”

The king smiled. “Hmm, that does make sense. How much do you think we can collect for this protection tax?”

“Twenty thousand gulden, not a penny less,” the minister said confidently. “That should fill the royal coffers for a while.”

After the king signed off on the new decree, a messenger was sent to the Jewish community of Prague to inform them of the new protection tax. When he arrived in the city, the messenger explained that he needed to meet with the leaders of the Jewish community and was directed to the home of Reb Shmuel, Prague’s premier askan.

Reb Shmuel was sitting at home, learning, when he heard a commotion outside. Soon, there was a knock on his door, and he hurried to answer. A messenger of the king, wearing the royal coat-of-arms on his lapel, stood at his doorstep. Wordlessly, the messenger handed him a sealed letter and returned to his carriage before Reb Shmuel could utter a sound.

Reb Shmuel watched as the messenger’s carriage disappeared around the bend and then went back inside. He broke the seal on the letter and lit a candle so that he could read it properly. “Twenty thousand gulden!” he murmured to himself, his face paling. “In just eight days! Gevald!”

Swiftly, he folded the letter and slid it into his pocket. Blowing out the candle, he hurried down the street to the home of Rav Avigdor, the rav of Prague.

“Reb Shmuel! You look terrible!” the rav greeted him. “Come inside and sit down. What’s going on?”

“A new decree,” Reb Shmuel managed to say, handing the rav the letter.

“Another decree?!” The rav’s sigh was long and heavy. The Jews of Prague had already endured their fair share of suffering. He opened the letter and read it carefully.

“I don’t understand,” Reb Shmuel spoke up when the rav finished reading. “How do they expect us to raise such an enormous sum of money in eight days?”

“I don’t know,” the rav replied, his face just as pale. “Just recently, many Jews lost tremendous amounts of money that they had loaned to non-Jews. Most professions are forbidden for Jews to practice, and most of us can barely earn enough to put bread on the table. There’s just no way to raise that kind of money, and certainly not in so little time!”

“I’ll call together the seven members of the kehillah’s board,” Reb Shmuel suggested, his sense of practicality shining through despite the panic and despair. “Can we meet here in a half-hour?”

The rav nodded. “Certainly. Let us hope that Hashem guides us out of this newest decree.”

Precisely thirty minutes later, nine men sat around the rav's table: Rav Avigdor, Reb Shmuel the askan, and the seven board members. Rav Avigdor spoke first, informing the others about the newest decree and impressing the urgency of the situation upon them. "It's a protection tax," he explained. "If we don't come up with the sum they are demanding, they will withdraw their protection, which means a terrible pogrom."

Reb Shmuel spoke next. "They're demanding twenty-thousand gulden in just eight days," he summarized. "It sounds impossible to raise, but we must do our utmost hishtadlus in trying to put together the money. I suggest that we start by compiling a list of every person in the community and whether or not they have money. We must account for every last household in the community."

The board members remained awake the entire night, compiling the lists and adding up the projected sums they hoped to be able to raise. They continued working diligently the following morning, finally concluding their work in the early afternoon hours, but the final tally didn't even come close to the sum they needed.

"We must call an asifah of the entire community," Rav Avigdor decided. "I want every single Jewish man in Prague in the main bais medrash today after Maariv, with absolutely no exceptions. We are talking about a matter of life and death for an entire community."

Reb Shmuel and the board members went from house to house, informing the community of the mandatory gathering called by the rav. Slowly, the shul began to fill up with people. After maariv, when every man in the community was present in shul, the doors were locked to prevent anyone from leaving, and the rav stood up to address the crowd.

"As you may have heard, threatening clouds of danger are hanging over the Jewish community in

Prague," the rav began, outlining the contents of the letter that had arrived from the royal treasury. "Therefore, we must ask every man in this room to give everything he has toward this effort. We are sure that there are many Jews with hidden jewels or sums of money, and we are forced to ask you to swear that you will fully disclose everything you own so that we can raise the money needed to save all of our lives."

The askanim went from person to person, inquiring about each household's financial situation. The Jews had suffered through pogroms before and were eager to avoid the terrible riots. One by one, they pledged whatever they had toward the fundraiser. Still, despite the pledges of gold and silver, jewels and coins, there simply wasn't twenty thousand gulden within the Jewish community of Prague.

It was daybreak by the time the board members had finished questioning the entire kehillah, with disheartening results. Rav Avigdor unlocked the doors of the bais medrash and allowed everyone to go home. There were only six days left until they were required to pay the tax, and they still had no idea how they would raise the money.

Over the next few days, the city was plunged into despair. Tehillim gatherings were held, the community fasted, and people tried to brainstorm for new ideas, but there was simply not enough money and no time to try to raise it from Jews in foreign countries. They were running out of time. Three days before the deadline, the askanim admitted defeat. There was absolutely no way they would come up with the demanded sum of twenty thousand gulden. They would have to take a different course.

It was decided that the community would send a representative to the king to explain the situation and ask for a reduction. While the entire community would spend the time praying for his success, the representative would hopefully

secure a reduced price or at least an extension of the deadline.

As the rav and leader of the community, it seemed that Rav Avigdor would be able to best plead their case before the king, but one of the board members objected. “Rav Avigdor is the gadol hador, and he is certainly worthiest of overturning the heavenly decree, but in a time of suffering such as this, he is needed by the community. There is a tremendous risk that the king will grow angry and subject our representative to a brutal death. We cannot risk the rav’s life like that, and especially not at a time like this.”

“I would like to go anyway,” Rav Avigdor declared. “I am willing to risk my life for the community.”

To his surprise, the other board members united to oppose his decision. “Reb Yechiel is right,” they said, agreeing with the first board member’s position. “The community needs the rav too much at this difficult hour. We can’t take the risk of losing our leader.”

Seeing their determination, Rav Avigdor backed down.

“I’ll go,” Reb Shmuel said suddenly.

“You?” a tall board member asked. In truth, Reb Shmuel was an ideal candidate. Blessed with a sharp mind, natural charisma, and an endearing personality, he was an accomplished and experienced askan who had proven his dedication to the community time and again.

“You realize that your life is at risk here?” someone else pointed out.

“I do, and I’m prepared to go anyway,” Reb Shmuel confirmed. “As the grandson of one of my ancestors, I feel that I am the right person for the job, and hopefully Hashem will be with me.”

“Who was your ancestor?” Rav Avigdor asked.

“It’s a long story,” Reb Shmuel said. “But once you hear it, you’ll certainly agree that this will stand as a merit at my side.

“Many years ago, during the era of the early Rishonim, the king of Persia prepared to wage war against a neighboring enemy. In the need of reinforcements for his army, he requested that the Jews of Eretz Yisroel join him in the battle against his enemy. In return, he promised to drive the Muslims out of Eretz Yisroel and grant it to the Jews.

“Upon the guidance of the rabbonim, a Jewish brigade was formed to answer to the Persian king’s request. With great sacrifice, the members of the brigade left their families behind and went to fight for Persia. With Hashem’s assistance, they saw much success in each battle, as they slowly conquered more and more territory.

“The last strategic battle was over the city of Antuchya. If the Persians would succeed in capturing Antuchya, they would win the war. The Jews, already tasting their liberation from galus, etched onto their shields, ‘The fall of Antuchya means the renewal of Yerushalayim.’ With this longed-for goal in mind, the Jews gave the battle their all and emerged victorious.

“When the Jews came to collect on the Persian king’s promise of Eretz Yisroel, they were met with bitter disappointment. Not only did the king refuse to fulfill his pledge to the Jewish warriors who had fought for his country, he decided to punish them for their audacity at even asking for such a thing. He ordered his men to capture and kill every living scion of malchus bais Dovid until not a single descendant remained. This would ensure that the Jews would never receive Eretz Yisroel in the future, since there would be no way for Mashiach ben Dovid to be born.

“The Jews were powerless to stop his decision. Anyone who descended from the Davidic dynasty was hunted and killed. The blood of men, women, and children flowed freely in the streets as entire families were wiped out. No one could escape the swords of the bloodthirsty soldiers, who showed mercy to no one as they murdered infants and the elderly and everyone in between. Within a few weeks, not a single descendant of Dovid remained.

“There was one young woman who had recently married a descendant of the House of Dovid. Her new husband and his entire family were murdered, but she succeeded in escaping. Despite the fact that she herself descended from a different tribe, the Persian king put a death bounty on her head. He was afraid that she was, perhaps, carrying a child, and letting that child live and be born could lead to the rebirth of the dynasty he had erased from the earth.

“She hid out, without food and water, for two days, then three, wondering when death would come. The entire Persian army was out to find her, and she was sure her hours were numbered. Indeed, she had recently discovered that she was expecting a child, and she knew that the Persian king would not call off his search until she was hunted down.

“One night, the king went to sleep and had a dream. He awoke with an excruciating headache, but could not recall what the dream had been about. For the remainder of the night, his servants nursed his headache as he struggled to recall his dream, but to no avail.

“The following night, the same thing repeated itself. The king woke up in middle of the night, his head pounding painfully. He knew he had just dreamed something important, but he could not remember what it was.

“When the strange occurrence repeated itself a third time, the king became obsessed with solving

the mystery. He couldn't sleep, he couldn't eat, and he couldn't concentrate on the important tasks involved in running a kingdom. All he could think about was the elusive dream, the dream that repeated itself three times in a row but disappeared from his memory the moment he awoke.

“Desperate to get to the bottom of it, the king summoned his ministers and advisors. None, however, could tell him what his dream had been. He called priests and sorcerers, but they, too, were stumped. Frustrated, the king began threatening them with prison, torture, and death if they did not succeed in figuring out the mystery.

“Word got out about the king's mysterious dreams, and soon, it reached the ears of Jews scattered throughout the kingdom. One elderly Jew, Reb Nosson, living in a country far from the capital but under the control of the Persian empire, heard about the dreams and felt that he could offer an explanation. His friends and family begged him not to go to the king, afraid for his life, but Reb Nosson was adamant that he held the answer to the mystery.

“He arrived at the capital a few days later, having traveled non-stop through many countries and territories, and presented himself to the king's guards. Hiding their doubt that an elderly Jew with a steep accent and a stooped back could reveal that which respected advisors and priests hadn't been able to reveal, they ushered him into the king's private chamber.

“Reb Nosson found the king lying in bed, listless, frustrated, and still suffering from unbearable headaches. He perked up eagerly when he saw Reb Nosson. ‘Speak,’ he commanded.

“Reb Nosson began to speak. ‘The king dreamed that he was in a beautiful garden,’ he began. ‘It was a tremendous garden, spanning acres of land, full of the most gorgeous flower beds. Rows and rows of trees cultivating every kind of fruit in the

world were lined up in neat columns, creating shady walkways under their leafy branches.

“His Majesty was walking amongst the beautiful trees when he suddenly took an axe and began chopping down the trees. Soon, the entire garden was a mess of wilted flowers and tangled branches, the once proud trees lying limply on the floor, lifeless. Looking around at his work, the king noticed one thin sapling still standing at the edge of the garden. Briskly, he made his way through the slain trees and prepared to bring his axe down on the single remaining sapling.

“Suddenly, a man with a long white beard, dressed royally, appeared, accusing the king of destroying his entire garden. He called him out for the ruins that his garden had become and stopped him from knocking down the last remaining sapling. Taking the axe from his hands, the man prepared to bring it down on the king’s head, to kill him for his actions. The king pleaded for his life, beseeching for mercy.

“The regal elderly man, hearing the king’s pleas, finally agreed to spare his life, but on one condition. He instructed the king to care for the sapling, to water it and nourish it and ensure that it grew into a tall and strong tree.

“His Majesty hesitated to give such a pledge,’ Reb Nosson continued, ‘And the man began to hit him on the head with painful, though not deathly, blows. Absorbing the message, the king swore that he would always care for the sapling and would protect it against all potential enemies, understanding that if the sapling were to die, so would he.’

“Reb Nosson finished speaking,” Reb Shmuel told the board members and Rav Avigdor, who were hanging on to every word. “And the king sat up excitedly in bed. ‘Yes, yes,’ he cried. ‘That was exactly my dream! But tell me, please, what does it mean?’

“Reb Nosson took a deep breath. This was the critical moment, and he prayed silently that the king would accept his words calmly. ‘The king recently ordered the slaughter of the entire Davidic dynasty,’ he said quietly. ‘Thousands of fruits could have come out of the trees, but the king had them all slain anyway. Dovid Hamelech will not stand quietly while he witnesses the death of his garden. He came to warn His Majesty that if he destroys the remaining sapling, the unborn child of the woman who escaped, King Dovid will have to avenge the death of his family.

“In his dream, His Majesty swore to always protect the remaining sapling, since he understood that his life hangs in the balance. In real life, Your Majesty must find the woman, bring her to your palace, and care for her until she gives birth. As the single remaining scion of the House of Dovid, Your Majesty’s life is dependent upon the survival of this child.’

“The king got out of bed and kissed Reb Nosson’s hand, moved by the interpretation of his dream. Immediately, he called off the death warrant written on the woman’s name and spread the word that she not be harmed when found. A few short days later, the terrified woman was discovered by the king’s soldiers and brought before the king.

“To her surprise, instead of being subject to a brutal death like her husband and in-laws, the king welcomed her warmly. Briefly, he described his dream and reiterated his pledge to keep her and her child safe. He gave her a private wing in the palace where she could continue living as a Jewish woman, constantly asking after her health and wellbeing.

“A few months later, she gave birth to a baby boy, whom the king named Bustenai. With the birth of Bustenai came the rebirth of the House of Dovid and everything that it represents to the future of the Jewish people.

“I am a descendant of Bustenai,” Reb Shmuel said in conclusion. “Dovid Hamelech himself intervened from on High to ensure Bustenai’s protection from an evil king, and I hope that as his grandson, I will merit similar protection. Please, allow me to represent the Jewish community of Prague before our king!”

The room was silent after Reb Shmuel finished speaking.

The rav spoke first. “I didn’t know you come from such distinguished lineage,” he told Reb Shmuel.

“But certainly, as the descendant of a man who grew up, unharmed, in the home of a vicious Jew-hater, you will merit *siyata dishmaya* to return, unharmed, from the king. Go in peace, and return in peace.”

“I have two requests before I go,” Reb Shmuel said. “Firstly, in the event that, *chas v’shalom*, I do not return, I ask that the community care for my family. I have a wife and young children, and they need to eat and be kept warm. I hope to return safely, but in the event that something happens to me, are you willing to accept responsibility for their care?”

“Of course,” the board members agreed.

“In addition, I am requesting that the entire community gather tomorrow morning at *netz* at the main *bais medrash*; men, women, and children. I need the *tefillos* of every single member of the community. I may be a descendant of Bustenai, but who am I, myself? I have no merits, nothing to help me succeed, other than the prayers of the community.”

Rav Avigdor nodded. “We’ll send out the message right now. You’ll be leaving first thing tomorrow morning?”

“First thing,” Reb Shmuel confirmed.

“May Hashem be with you,” the board members murmured.

To be continued...

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A426

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סיפורי צדיקים

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

Reb Shmuel HaSatan Part II

Recap: *The king levied an impossible tax on the Jewish community of Prague which they could not pay. The askan, Reb Shmuel, a descendant of Bustenai, the sole survivor of malchus bais dovid during the era of the Rishonim, volunteered to go to the king to try to negotiate better terms.*

When Reb Shmuel came home from the board meeting, it was already late at night. As his wife served him supper, he informed her that he had agreed to represent the community before the king and would be leaving the following morning.

“Why you, Shmuel?” she asked, tears coming to her eyes. “Why does it always have to be you? I’m afraid you’ll never come back! Who knows what the king will do to you?!”

“Rav Avigdor can’t go; the people need him too badly at a difficult time like this,” Reb Shmuel explained. “You don’t have to worry. When

someone is moser nefesh for klal Yisroel, Hashem grants him heavenly assistance. Daven, certainly, but there’s no reason to worry.”

“Of course I’m worried,” she protested, coming to sit at the table beside him. “But I guess if the rav can’t go, you really are the best person to represent the community. Should I prepare food for the journey?”

“Please,” Reb Shmuel said. “And, if you are able to, please prepare my tachrichim and Shabbos clothing. I’ll be wearing my tachrichim, in case something does happen to me, with my Shabbos clothing on top.”

“Oy, Shmuel, what will be?” she whispered tearfully as she went to do his bidding.

“Also, please pack a bag for Rochel,” Reb Shmuel requested. “I will be taking her along.”

“Rochel? Our daughter?!” his wife’s eyes were wide and fearful. “Why do you need to take Rochel along as well?”

“I think she will be a big help,” Reb Shmuel responded in his calmest voice.

“Isn’t sacrificing one member of this family enough?” she cried hysterically. “Do you want me to lose the two of you on the same day? How can you take our poor daughter into the lion’s den?!”

“If that’s what Tatte wants, I’m willing to go,” Rochel spoke up quietly from the corner of the kitchen, where she had overheard the entire exchange.

“Go prepare your Shabbos clothing, Rochel,” her mother said repeatedly, trying not to burst into tears. “May Hashem protect the two of you...”

Reb Shmuel remained awake the entire night, reciting tehillim for the success of his mission. At the crack of dawn, as he had requested, the entire

Jewish community of Prague gathered in the bais medrash to pray for his success.

Dressed in her Shabbos best and clutching her tehillim, Rochel followed her father onto the wagon. Reb Shmuel forced himself to remain stoic before his wife, who was sobbing, unashamed, outside their home as she waved and waved. The wagon wheels began rolling and Rochel opened her tehillim. They were on their way.

After two hours of traveling, Reb Shmuel instructed the driver to detour through a city that they would be passing shortly.

“Are you sure?” the driver asked, reluctant to deviate from his intended route. “We’re talking about a matter of life and death. I don’t think we should be going anywhere until you finish speaking to the king.”

“To the contrary, this will hopefully help my mission,” Reb Shmuel explained. “Living in that city is an influential member of the king’s inner cabinet. He owes me a favor, and now is an excellent time to collect on that favor.”

Many years earlier, Reb Shmuel was traveling through a forest, when he noticed a small suitcase abandoned under a tree. He stopped the wagon and went to check what was inside. Perhaps a Jewish traveler had lost his luggage and was still searching for it!

The suitcase was made of durable leather, and from its condition, it was clear that it had not been lying in the forest, exposed to the elements, for too many days. Untying the leather straps, Reb Shmuel discovered that the case was filled with banknotes. A quick count of the money revealed that it totaled to twenty thousand gulden, a veritable fortune. In addition to the money, there were also sealed letters from the king of a foreign country.

Sewn onto the lining of the suitcase, Reb Shmuel found a card identifying its owner as a powerful government minister. He returned to his wagon together with the suitcase and changed directions, not wanting to delay the return of the money for even a moment.

When he arrived at the minister’s palatial residence and explained why he had come, he was immediately invited inside. Just three days earlier, the minister had returned from a diplomatic mission in a foreign country. Among his other obligations there, he had collected a loan for the king totaling twenty thousand gulden. He had also received a few important documents from the foreign monarch to bring back to his king.

However, when the valet had brought in the luggage, the minister realized that the case containing the money and the documents were missing. While a tremendous loss, the missing money was the lesser of his troubles, as he could easily make up the sum from his personal coffers. The documents from the foreign king, however, were a much greater issue. It seemed that he would have no choice but to admit to the king that he had irresponsibly lost the suitcase.

For three days and nights, the minister could not eat or sleep. He paced his home like a caged lion, picturing the king’s wrath and brainstorming for the easiest way to break the news to the king. The anguish was eating him up alive.

He was in middle of pacing his study when his butler appeared. “Sir, there’s a Jew here to see you—.”

“I don’t have time for a Jew now!” the minister cut him off with a snarl.

“—about the missing suitcase, sir,” the man continued in a small voice.

“About the... where is he?” the minister demanded. “Send him in!”

Reb Shmuel was brought to the minister's study, still holding the leather satchel. The minister reached out and grabbed the case from him. "This is mine!" he practically roared.

"Yes, it's yours," Reb Shmuel agreed. "I found it in the forest. Please, take it back."

The minister untied the leather straps and spread out the bills on the table. "Twenty thousand," he said wonderingly when he finished counting the money. "It's all here. And the four documents that I brought back with me. It's all here."

"I would never take something that didn't belong to me," Reb Shmuel said quietly.

"I thought you Jews have a law that permits you to keep an object that you find if it belonged to a non-Jew," the minister said, somewhat accusingly. "That's what the priest told me. Why did you return the money to me then?"

"We do have such a law," Reb Shmuel confirmed. "The reason it was enacted was because Jews were getting harmed by returning lost objects to their non-Jewish owners. Often, the non-Jewish owner would accuse the Jew of pilfering some of the money or damaging the object before returning it."

"And weren't you afraid I would do the same?" the minister challenged. "I could easily say that there were thirty thousand gulden originally and then accuse you of stealing ten of them."

"True, but Your Excellency is known for being just and honest. I know and you know that this is all that was inside the case, and I trusted that as a man of integrity, you would not accuse me of a baseless crime. In any case, I was prepared to take the risk since I knew how difficult this loss must be for you."

"I like you, Jew," the minister said, standing up.

He walked over to his safe and began unlocking it. "Of course, I will repay you for returning this valuable suitcase."

"There's no need," Reb Shmuel said. "I did it for the sake of the mitzvah, and I will be rewarded in Heaven. I refuse to accept any sort of payment from you."

The minister was taken aback. "Surely you are jesting," he said, removing a thick envelope from the safe.

"No, I mean what I say," Reb Shmuel insisted. "I will not take payment for this small act of returning your suitcase."

"Well, then, if you insist," the minister said slowly. "But should you ever find yourself in need of a favor, come see me, and I will try my best to assist you."

Now, many years later, on his way to plead the case of Prague's Jewish community before the king, Reb Shmuel knew that the minister could offer invaluable assistance. He directed the driver to the minister's sprawling mansion and disembarked from the wagon together with his daughter.

"My name is Shmuel, from Prague," he told the gatekeeper. "Your master is well-acquainted with me and will be very pleased with my visit."

"We shall see about that, Rabbi," the gatekeeper said disbelievingly, knowing his master's unfavorable disposition toward Jews. But a whispered conversation with the butler confirmed that Reb Shmuel was speaking the truth.

"Come on in, sir," the butler said magnanimously, leading him inside.

"Shmuel! It's so nice to see you again," the minister greeted him warmly, his face lighting up.

“What a pleasure to be in the company of a man as honest as you.”

“Thank you, Your Excellency,” Reb Shmuel responded.

“What can I do for you?” the minister requested, indicating that he should sit down. “Perhaps you would like me to fulfill my pledge to you, to assist you in any way I can?”

Reb Shmuel inclined his head in agreement. “Yes, that is the case. The favor I am requesting might be difficult, but it is something I really need. You see, a harsh decree is facing our community, and I must speak to the king about it. However, the law does not allow a Jew in the capital city, and certainly not into the palace. I am asking you to help me obtain an audience with the king.”

The minister was taken aback by the request. “Surely you realize that I, too, am bound by this law,” he pointed out. “When the king sees that a Jew has received entry on my request, I will be killed immediately.”

“Surely there must be a way,” Reb Shmuel pleaded. “This is a matter of utmost importance.” The minister gave a long drawn out sigh, taking a deep puff on his cigar. Lifting his eyes to meet Reb Shmuel’s, he noticed the girl standing silently at her father’s side. “Is this your daughter?” he asked.

“Yes, this is my eldest daughter, Rochel,” Reb Shmuel replied.

The minister pursed his lips thoughtfully. “Perhaps I can get your daughter an audience with the king,” he said slowly. “While he won’t like it, the king will understand that I couldn’t refuse the request of a young girl. Now, that’s an idea. I’ll obtain an audience for your daughter, and the rest will be up to the two of you.”

Reb Shmuel gave a sigh of relief. “Excellent. When will Your Excellency be prepared to travel?”

“Now is just a good a time as ever,” the minister said, rising from his chair. “I’ll go have the butler prepare my things. We’ll travel together in my carriage, which is comfortable and, more importantly, covered. No one in the capital city may see you, Shmuel, since you are so obviously a Jew.”

As the minister readied himself for the journey, Reb Shmuel went to inform the wagon driver of the newest developments. “You’ll wait here, and we’ll travel to the capital with the minister. We will return for you after we speak with the king.”

He then turned to his young daughter. “Rochel,” he said emotionally, looking into her large brown eyes. “You are an intelligent and clever girl, and the king will likely enjoy conversing with you. It may take a while before he asks you for your request.”

“I will try my best to make you proud, Tatte,” she said bravely. “But when he asks me for my request, what should I say?”

“Say that you would like for your father to obtain an audience with the king,” Reb Shmuel instructed. “Tell the king that your father would like to say four words to him.”

“Four words?”

“Four words,” Reb Shmuel confirmed with a smile. “I hope that this will make him curious enough to grant your request.”

The minister appeared, and they halted their conversation to follow him into his luxurious carriage. The driver climbed up front, whipped the horses, and they were off. The minister made small talk with Reb Shmuel throughout the two-

hour drive while Rochel silently murmured Tehillim.

As they approached the capital city, the minister reached over to close the blinds on the carriage windows. "They'll recognize the crest on my carriage and wave it through without checking who is inside," he told Reb Shmuel confidently, "but I don't want to risk anyone seeing you through the windows."

The carriage stopped outside the palace gates and the minister stood up. "Come now, young lady," he said to Rochel. To her father, he added, "Wait in the carriage and be sure that no one sees you. If your daughter succeeds in securing an audience for you with the king, you will be summoned from here."

"Thank you," Reb Shmuel said, somewhat hoarsely. He pulled his daughter close and placed his hands on her head. With intense emotion, he blessed her. "Remember- four words," he whispered as she disembarked from the carriage. "And may Hashem be with you."

The driver slammed the door shut and Reb Shmuel was left alone. There was no longer any need to squelch the tears that had been threatening to come. His cheeks wet, he began reciting tehillim with intense concentration, pleading for his daughter's safe return and success in his mission to aid the Jews of Prague.

Rochel, trying to stay calm, walked beside the minister as they headed toward the palace gates. Recognizing the minister, the guards laid down their swords and saluted respectfully before allowing him to pass, Rochel following closely behind.

The king was sitting in the throne room, deep in conversation with some close friends, when his chief of staff announced the arrival of the minister. "Send him in," the king said, smiling.

The minister, too, was a dear friend and advisor, one he was happy to see. "He's more than welcome to join us."

"Ah, how are you, my friend?" the king asked as the minister bowed low. "You came just in time!" He suddenly noticed the girl standing quietly at the minister's side, her eyes glimmering with intelligence. "And who is this young lady?"

"Thank you, Your Majesty," the minister responded. "I met this girl outside my home, your Majesty. She looked like a clever young lady, and she approached me with a request. She wanted me to help her secure an audience with the king. To be honest, Your Majesty, she is a Jewish girl, but still, how could I turn down the request of a young lady?"

"I see," said the king. "And what is your name, young lady?"

"Rochel, Your Majesty," she replied.

"Well, Rochel, have a seat," the king said. "Who is your father? What does he do?"

"My father is Reb Shmuel, and he works as an advocate for the Jewish community of Prague."

The king smirked, realizing where the conversation was headed. "Tell me, Rochel. They say that the Jews are a smart people. Are you smart?"

"I don't know, Your Majesty," Rochel replied humbly. "But if there is anything you would like to ask me, I will answer as best as I can."

"Alright, then," the king said, hiding a smile. He proceeded to ask her a few questions, which she answered brilliantly and eloquently. Amazed, he asked her, "Who taught you all this?"

"My parents," she replied immediately.

Enjoying her wisdom and wit, the king continued to converse with her for a long while. Finally, he asked her the question she had been waiting for.

“Would you like to ask me for anything?”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“What is your request?”

“I would like for the king to agree to an audience with my father,” Rochel said carefully. “My father will not speak long. All he wishes is to say four words to the king.”

The king frowned. “What does that mean, four words?”

“I don’t know,” Rochel said honestly. “But that is my request.”

“Granted,” the king said, leaning back in his chair. He was intrigued. What did the Jew plan to tell him in four words? He ordered the minister to go find Reb Shmuel and bring him in.

A few minutes later, Reb Shmuel walked into the room and bowed low. Rochel, displaying tremendous respect for the king, kept her face turned toward him even as she observed her father from the corner of her eye.

“Jew!” the king called out. “You know I don’t meet with Jews, but for the sake of your clever daughter here, I agreed to hear just four words from you. Be careful, Jew! If you exceed your allowance of four words, I will throw you to the dogs!”

Reb Shmuel’s heart took a dive as he silently prayed to find favor in the monarch’s eyes. What would be if he would be thrown to the dogs? What would become of Rochel, of Prague’s Jews? Willing himself to keep his face and his voice calm, he opened his mouth and began to speak.

“Vayomer Hashem el haSatan,” he called out clearly.

The king blinked and then turned to a nearby advisor for translation. “And Hashem spoke to the Satan,” the advisor whispered.

The king’s forehead creased. What did that cryptic sentence mean? Vayomer Hashem el haSatan? Maybe it’s numerical value hinted at something? Perhaps if they wrote the sentence backward, it would clarify itself?

His advisors tried to help him make sense of the four words, but they got nowhere. The king turned to Rochel, but the girl had no idea what her father meant. Reb Shmuel just stood there silently, not daring to explain lest he become fodder for the dogs.

After a frustrated twenty minutes of trying to understand the man’s words, the king gave up. “You win,” he told Reb Shmuel. “I won’t throw you to the dogs, and you can speak as much as you need to explain yourself. What does ‘Vayomer Hashem el haSatan’ imply?”

“Your Majesty, these words are a posuk in Iyov,” Reb Shmuel began. “Hashem, the Creator of the world, spoke to the Satan, the lowest of creations. Hashem spoke to the Satan, and He asked him what his request was.

“Your Majesty, I am but a humble and lowly man, but surely not as low as the Satan,” Reb Shmuel continued. “If the Creator of the entire universe could speak to the Satan and ask for his request, perhaps the great king of our land can do the same with a lowly man such as myself?”

Recognizing Reb Shmuel’s wisdom, the king smiled. “Tell me, what is your request?”

Reb Shmuel fell at his feet, silently praying for Hashem to help him in the merit of his ancestor, Bustenai. “Your Majesty, the Jews are a harmless

people. We live quietly and don't bother anyone. Recently, Your Majesty enacted a decree that is impossible for us to fulfill. We simply do not have the resources to pay the requested tax in such a short amount of time. We can give you whatever we have now, but the remainder will take a few months to amass. Please, extend the deadline so that we can have a chance to pay what you are asking for."

The king looked away from Reb Shmuel's pained face and caught sight of Rochel, her face stained with tears. For reasons he could not understand, he was greatly moved by her silent sobs. Ordering everyone out of the room, he beckoned for Reb Shmuel and his daughter to draw near.

"I apologize for the decree I signed," the king said when they were alone. "I never realized what a special people the Jews are. Right here and now, I will sign a declaration abolishing the decree."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," Reb Shmuel said gratefully, bowing low again.

"There is just one thing I must ask you," the king continued. "Where did you get your courage from, to send your daughter here and to appear before me with your request?"

Reb Shmuel began to relay the story of Bustenai while the king listened attentively. "He was my ancestor," Reb Shmuel explained when he finished. "And I drew my strength from him."

The king nodded appreciatively. "Amazing, truly amazing. You know, Shmuel, that really you are deserving of death. After all, you bested me in front of my advisors. However, in appreciation for your bravery, I will give you a token punishment in place of the death penalty."

"I will accept whatever Your Majesty sees fit," Reb Shmuel responded.

"As a punishment, you will take on the surname Satan (Sutton)," the king declared. "You said that the Satan is the lowest thing in the word, and you compared yourself to it. Now, it will become your name."

Before allowing Reb Shmuel to depart, the king took his hand and pledged his friendship to him and to the Jews forever.

Perhaps in the merit of his mesiras nefesh for klal yisroel, Reb Shmuel Hasatan was blessed with many great descendants, among them the holy Chasam Sofer.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!
This story is taken from tape # A426

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