

# TORAS REB KALMAN



## סיפורי צדיקים

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

### ***Not Just Slang***

We'll preface this story with a few other stories to illustrate two concepts that are vital for the understanding of our story.

The first concept is *rischa d'oraisa*. This term is used to refer to passionate arguments regarding the proper understanding of a particular Gemara. When *talmidei chachamim*, each with a different opinion regarding the Gemara, engage in a heated battle of theories and proofs, each trying to bring the other to understand his point of view, that is a *rischa d'oraisa*.

To illustrate, shortly after the conclusion of the Second World War, the Mir Yeshiva was transplanted in America and based in Brownsville. Rav Nochum Partzovitz, who later became *rosh yeshiva*, gave a *chaburah* to a *bais medrash* full of tremendous *talmidei chachomim* at the end of first *sefer*.

As he was concluding, someone stood up and refuted his remarks. Rav Nochum shot back with a proof validating his position, when a second *talmid chacham* jumped into the fray. Soon, a noisy battle ensued, with tens of great scholars taking sides and arguing vociferously.

The *baal tefillah* approached the *bimah* and began to lead *Minchah*, yet no one but a bare *minyan* heard him. The deafening Torah war continued to take place in the back half of the *bais medrash* throughout *Minchah*, lunch, and *bein hasedorim*. When second *sefer* began, the battle was still ongoing. For many hours, the black-hatted, white-shirted, red-faced soldiers continued to engage in zealous combat against what they felt was an incorrect understanding of the subject matter.

That was *rischa d'oraisa*!

When the son of Rav Elchonon Wasserman, who was a student in the Mir Yeshiva, got married, many *gedolim* of the generation attended the *chasunah*, in deference to the *chassan's* esteemed father. The *chassan's* friends from the Mir Yeshiva traveled to the wedding, too, excited at the opportunity to glimpse at the great Rav Ahron Kotler, whom they had never seen before.

As was customary at the time, the *chassan* got up to deliver a *drashah* at the beginning of the wedding. This was to be followed by the *badeken* and *chuppah*. Unlike today, when the *drashos* of a *chassan* or bar mitzvah boy are interrupted by singing, the people at this *chasunah* allowed Rav Elchonon's son to deliver the *divrei Torah* he had prepared.

First, the *chassan* presented a series of questions on *Ohalos*, the difficult *masechta* he was learning. From his seat right next to Rav Elchonon, Rav Ahron swayed back and forth, his face beat red, waiting to hear how the *chassan* would answer his questions. When the *chassan* began to expound upon a solution to the questions, Rav Ahron jumped up.

“It doesn’t say that!” he exclaimed, shaking his fist. “The Gemara says something completely different!”

The *chassan* stopped short, unsure how to respond. He was no match for Rav Ahron, and could not refute him.

Rav Laizer Yudel Finkel, the *chassan*’s *rosh* yeshiva, stood up to help out his student, and he began arguing with Rav Ahron. The *chassan*’s friends, great *talmidei chachamim* such as Rav Leib Malin and Rav Shmuel Charkover, jumped in to side with their *rosh* yeshiva. Some other *gedolim* joined as well, backing up Rav Aharon.

An intense debate ensued between the scholars.

For the next hour and a half, all was forgotten. There was no *chasunah*, no *chuppah*, nothing other than a fierce Torah battle. On her side of the room, the *kallah* waited and waited to the point of tears, but deep in battle on the other side of the *mechitzah*, the men were oblivious. They continued to argue with strong passion, determined to reach the truest understanding of the Gemara.

That is *rischa d’oraisa*!

The second concept we’ll first explore is regarding the levels of greatness and holiness that the *tannaim* and *amoraim* were on. These were people who reached heights that are impossible for us to fathom. They were so holy, that most people would be burned just by the fire of their presence.

When they learned, therefore, the sages would sit in the *bais medrash* in order of their greatness. At the forefront was the great *tanna*, Reb Yehuda Hanasi, known as Rebbi. He sat facing the rest of the *bais medrash*, the leader and teacher of the other sages. The greater one was, the closer his seat was to Rebbi.

The famous Rev Yishmael ben Reb Yosi used to sit right next to Rebbi. Next sat Rav Abba, also known as Rav, and his uncle, Reb Chiya. They were followed by the rest of the sages in descending order of greatness.

Where was the great Reb Yochanan, quoted constantly in the Gemara? He would sit all the way in the back. This gives us a glimpse into the unimaginable greatness of Reb Yishmael ben Reb Yosi, Rav, and Reb Chiya.

Whenever Rebbi would rule on a *halachah*, Reb Yishmael ben Reb Yosi would immediately get up and argue against the ruling, quoting his father. Soon, Rav would join in with his angle of the debate. The fiery *rischa d’oraisa* that took place on a daily basis is unfathomable, millions of times greater than the one that took place at the wedding of Rav Elchonon’s son.

The Yerushalmi relays an anecdote that occurred when Reb Yochanan once entered the *bais medrash* in the midst of a tremendous *rischa d’oraisa* between Rebbi and the greatest *amoraim* present.

From his place at the back of the *bais medrash*, Reb Yochanan observed thunder and lightning streaming from Rebbi’s mouth as he argued. Rav, whose hands were gesticulating rapidly as he fought back, had sparks of fire shooting from his mouth.

Reb Yochanan sat in the back and suffered from terrible anguish. Why? Because though he listened to the words of Rebbi and Rav, though he heard the holy words of Torah that emerged with thunder and lightning and sparks, Reb Yochanan could not understand them at all. As great as he was, his level didn’t near the heights that Rebbi and Rav were on.

Now that we have a slightly better understanding of both *rischa d’oraisa* and the unfathomable greatness of the *amoraim*, we’ll get to our story.

Rav, as we have seen before, was an *amora* on a tremendously high madreigah. He lived until he was four hundred years old. He was so great that ordinary people would be burned to a crisp by the fire of his holiness.

Rav opened a yeshiva for extraordinary *talmidei chachamim*. Only the greatest *gedolim* of the generation were able to tolerate his holiness and thus learn in his presence. Here, too, the students sat in descending order of greatness, with the greatest among them sitting closest to Rav.

One day, after a particularly grueling *rischa d'oraisa*, two of the students sitting closest to Rav began to converse.

“Wow,” one of them said, stretching. “What a debate! What an argument! Rav’s *shuir* was truly remarkable, but now I feel like an exhausted little goat.”

“Yes, I know what you mean,” the other agreed. “I can barely move, I feel like a p-i-g!”

Rav looked up sharply at his students. Here were two tremendous *talmidei chachamim*, both exhausted from learning Torah. How did they express themselves? One said he felt like a goat. A goat is a kosher animal, permitted for a *korban*. But a p-i-g? That’s what the other student compared himself to? For the rest of his life, Rav never spoke to him again.

What did the student do so wrong? Yes, he spoke a little slang, but that was all! This wasn’t an ordinary person, but a tremendous *talmid chacham*, one who could withstand the holiness of Rav. He sat in the front of the room, further proving his greatness! He possessed the ability to engage in Torah arguments with Rav! And just because of one sentence of slang, Rav refused to speak to him again?

There are certain things that are not simple actions performed by a person, yet acts that define the essence of the individual. A man who expressed

himself that way, using coarse and vulgar language to describe a session of Torah study, was revealing his true essence as a coarse and vulgar individual. And a person like that was not someone Rav was willing to associate with.

Just a single expression of slang can defeat a lifetime of greatness.

*Have a Wonderful Shabbos!*

This story is taken from tape # A310

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