

# TORAS REB KALMAN



## סיפורי צדיקים

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

### ***The Levush and Amein***

Rav Mordechai Yaffe, known as the Levush, was from the greatest halachic rulers during the era of the Acharonim, and wrote a commentary on the Shulchan Aruch and the Poskim. His name was Yaffe because he was truly beautiful. In fact, he davened that none of his children would have beauty, since he saw firsthand how much easier it was for a person with beauty to sin.

One day, a group of representatives from the city of Puzna came to the Levush to ask him to become their rov. Puzna was home to thousands of Jews, and its rabbinical post was a distinguished one. The Jews of Puzna hoped that the esteemed Levush would agree to serve as their spiritual leader.

The Levush already had a rabbinical position, but it was in a small town. After thinking over the offer

for a while, he realized that he would have much greater opportunities for kavod shamayim in a city as large as Puzna. That decided it for him. He informed the delegation that he was ready to accept the position.

“The rav of Puzna also serves as the av beis din,” the representatives informed him. “And he serves as the rosh yeshiva of the Puzna Yeshiva as well. All these positions come along with the rabbinical seat.”

“Hmm,” the Levush replied. “If that’s the case, I’ll need your permission to first travel to Italy. I’m ready to accept all three positions; however, I am completely ignorant of astronomy and I would have a difficult time ruling on matters concerning the sanctification of the new moon. In Italy, there is a Sephardic rav who is well versed in these matters. I would like to learn by him first, after which I will take over the helm of your city, with Hashem’s help.”

The Puzna delegation smiled in satisfaction, agreeing to this. They returned back home to wait for his arrival. The small town where the Levush had previously served as rav made him a tremendous farewell gathering when he left for Italy. He would be sorely missed, but they were grateful to find a new rav to try to fill his larger-than-life shoes.

The Levush spent a long time in Italy, learning everything he needed to know about astronomy from the Sephardic rav. Being extremely thorough by nature, the Levush did not leave until he had complete clarity on every intricate detail so that he would be able to rule properly if an issue arose.

For three months, he learned every day with the Sephardic rav, writing each halachah down and eventually publishing it as a commentary on the Shulchan Aruch on the topics of sanctifying the new moon and new month. After three months, he felt he had achieved total clarity on the entire subject so the

Levush packed his bags and went to bid the Sephardic rav goodbye.

The two rabbanim sat down together at the table and were talking in learning. Then the Levush asked the Sephardic rav for permission to return back to Puzna. Before he had a chance to ask for a blessing for success, a little boy entered the room and helped himself to an apple from the bowl on the table.

The child wiped off the fruit and recited a ha'eitz in a sweet, clear voice. The Sephardic rav, as well as some family members standing nearby, immediately responded with a resounding amen to the boy's blessing. The Levush, concentrating on his impending farewell, neglected to say amen.

When the Sephardic rav saw that the Levush did not say amen, he became very angry. "Get out," he told the Levush curtly. "I don't want to see your face anymore."

The Levush paled, realizing that he had committed a terrible error which had resulted in him to be excommunicated by his rebbi. He immediately removed his shoes and walked out of the house.

He pushed off his travel plans and remained in Italy. For thirty days, he was not permitted to come before his teacher. He spent those thirty days, white-faced and brokenhearted, awaiting the moment when he would be able to seek forgiveness from the Sephardic rav.

When the thirty days were over, the Levush came back to his rebbi, his head lowered, his back stooped. But the Sephardic rav would not let him inside.

"I do not forgive you," his rebbi informed him, blocking the doorway.

"But, rebbi, why?" the Levush asked. "What did I do?"

"You did not respond amen!" the other rav's tone was grave. "A little boy recited a brachah. Can't you fathom what that means? And you didn't respond amen?!"

The Levush was stunned. "I didn't really pay attention to the boy," he explained. "I barely heard him reciting a brachah. And he was a katan, a child under the age of bar mitzvah. It is not a certainty that his brachos count."

The Sephardic rav moved aside. "I will forgive you," he finally said, letting the Levush inside. "After all, you are a dear talmid, as well as a great talmid chacham and a tzaddik. However, I forgive you only on condition that you take upon yourself to relate this story to whomever you meet. Let this story be heard, and let its message be known. A wasted opportunity to respond amen is no joking matter!"

The Levush bowed his head in acceptance.

"Come inside, have a seat," the Sephardic rav invited. "I see that you don't really understand the greatness of amen. I will tell you a story, so that you can understand the importance of amen and why I became so upset.

"In a certain province in Italy, the gentiles always used to attempt to turn the governor against the Jews. However, there was one pious man in town, Yosef, whom the governor liked a lot. Whenever there was a libel against the Jews, he would be the one to speak to the governor and prove to him that it was all false.

"One day, there was a tremendous riot against the Jews, with the gentiles demanding that they be permanently banished from the province. They yelled and protested and rioted against the large Jewish presence in their cities until the governor caved to the pressure and decreed that all Jews were required to leave the area within thirty days.

“The anguish of the Jewish community was indescribable. Besides losing their homes and property, land which had been in their family for generations, there was no other city which would be willing to take them in. They flocked to Yosef’s home to beg him to intercede before the governor.

“Yosef readily agreed to try, but he needed to do something first. ‘I still didn’t daven minchah,’ he told the crowd at his door. ‘After I daven, I’ll head straight for the governor’s palace.’

“The people began to buzz. ‘Minchah?!’ they cried. ‘This is a matter of life and death! Every minute counts! Please go to the king immediately!’

“While Yosef didn’t really understand why they felt the thirty minute time difference would matter so much, they continued to pressure him until he agreed. When he came to the governor’s palace, the valet informed him that the governor was in the gardens, leading him there for his audience. Yosef entered the garden with tremendous trepidation. The fate of his community rested on his shoulders. Silently, he prayed for *siyata dishmaya*.

“When the governor saw Yosef, he hugged him warmly, giving him a kiss on his forehead. ‘Yosef, my beloved friend!’ he cried joyfully. ‘How happy I am to see you! What can I do for you?’

“Yosef felt himself relax. The governor was in an excellent mood, overflowing with kind and generous feelings. It wouldn’t be too difficult to persuade him. ‘How is His Excellency?’ Yosef inquired politely. ‘It looks like today is a busy day at the palace.’

“‘I’m doing well,’ the governor replied. ‘A high-ranking priest will be here shortly, and we will be having dinner here in the garden with all the local government officials. He should be here any minute, in fact.’

“‘Ah,’ Yosef said understandingly. ‘Well, then,

may the dinner be successful! Will His Excellency be available for a short meeting after dinner?’

“‘Certainly, my dear Yosef,’ the governor said warmly. ‘Please, be my guest here tonight.’

“Yosef moved to the side as the priest entered the garden accompanied by a large entourage. He bowed low before the governor and the garden grew absolutely silent. The priest rose and began to speak, praising the governor in Latin.

“Standing beside a tree at the rear of the garden, Yosef, who was not versed in Latin, did not understand a word of the priest’s speech. I may as well daven Minchah, he thought to himself. Sunset was rapidly approaching, and time was running out.

“As the priest droned on and on, Yosef recited Ashrei and began Shemona Esreh. He was deep in middle of davening when he heard the priest finish his Latin blessing with a flourish. ‘And now,’ the priest declared, switching back the language of the land. ‘Let us all declare our agreement with this beautiful praise bestowed upon our governor!’

“‘Amen!’ the crowd thundered.

“Though Yosef heard the priest’s call, he could not respond amen. He was in the midst of Shemonah Esreh, when it is forbidden to speak. Closing his eyes, he concentrated on his prayers.

“‘That Jew didn’t respond amen!’ one sharp-eyed anti-Semite declared. ‘That Jew, that despicable, disloyal—.’

“‘What?!’ the governor drew to his feet, enraged. ‘Seize him!’ he ordered his servants.

“Yosef was grabbed from his place beside the tree. With encouragement from the priest and permission from the angry governor, he was subjected to unimaginable torture. Even after Yosef’s holy soul finally left his ravaged body, his torturers continued

to pry his limbs apart. When they were finally done, they tied all the severed parts of his body to his clothing and sent it to the Jewish community.

“Two weeks later, the Jewish community was kicked out of their homes and banished from the governor’s domains.

“There was a tzaddik in the community who had been a close friend of Yosef’s. He was extremely bothered by the horrifying death his friend had been subjected to. He had always thought of Yosef as righteous and pious, and he wondered if Yosef’s terrible death was an indication of a severe sin he had committed. This troubled him tremendously.

“He fasted and fasted until he merited to have Yosef appear to him in a dream. “My dear friend,” Yosef said, his ethereal face glowing. ‘I am pure, my soul is pure. The only claim against me was that I once didn’t answer amen to the blessing of my young son. For that single amen, I was punished with not being able to answer amen to the praise for the governor, resulting in my vicious death.’”

The Sephardic rav finished his story and was quiet for a moment, letting the message sink in. “I heard this story directly from the tzaddik who saw Yosef in his dream,” he told the Levush. “Now do you understand why I was so upset when you neglected to respond amen to my child’s blessing?”

“The point is not whether or not the little boy is obligated to make brachos,” the rav continued. “The child made a blessing, declaring Hashem to be the Master of the world. Everyone in attendance responded, ‘Amen’, testifying their agreement that his blessing is true, that Hashem is indeed the Master of the world. You, however, remained silent, which is a complete affront to kavod Shamayim, and that is why I got angry.”

Accepting his mentor’s criticism wholeheartedly, the Levush went on to publicize the story and published it in one of his seforim, spreading the

message that even the blessing of a young child is an opportunity for kavod Shamayim, an opportunity that no one can afford to forgo.

*Have a Wonderful Shabbos!*

This story is taken from tape # A243

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Toras Reb Kalman  
Lakewood New Jersey  
609.807.1783  
torasrebkalman@gmail.com

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