

# TORAS REB KALMAN



## סיפורי צדיקים

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

### *Free to Fly*

Behind the Iron Curtain lived an elderly *rav*, whom we'll call Rav Baruchov, who had a shul in his basement. There wasn't much about the room that made it a shul, save for the small *aron kodesh* in the front and the *bimah* at its center. But this was the Soviet Union, and a shul, any shul, was a novelty.

Two or three elderly men would usually join Rav Baruchov for *davening*, and a *minyan* was a rarity. It was much too dangerous to *daven* in the Soviet Union, and *davening* with a *minyan* multiplied the danger by a thousand percent.

On the evening of Yom Kippur, however, the shul was packed. The little basement room, which normally held just a handful of old men and was only built to accommodate one hundred

congregants, was now bursting at the seams with three-hundred participants crammed inside.

It was Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur! Despite the danger, despite their terror, no one wanted to miss *Kol Nidrei*. They came dressed in their worn work clothing. Who owned a *kittel* in those days? But despite their colorful attire, the whiteness, the purity of Yom Kippur had descended upon the underground shul.

Rav Baruchov's heart swelled. It was a tremendous *chizuk* to see so many Jews together on the holiest night of the year. Many of the participants in the *minyan* knew very little about *Yiddishkeit*, yet the opportunity to repent, to purify themselves, was not something they were ready to give up.

The next morning at Shacharis, however, Rav Baruchov was dismayed to realize that there weren't enough men to fulfill the quorum for a *minyan*. Of the three hundred congregants of the previous evening, only six elderly men had come back.

This was in the middle of the week, and the people had to go to work. Whether they would manage to avoid work that would desecrate the holiest day of the year or not, they could not risk taking the day off and going to shul. As much as it pained them to have to work on Yom Kippur, they knew it was necessary so that they would remain alive.

Shacharis was long and meaningful. Despite the paltry participation, the few elderly men tried to recreate the Yom Kippurs of their youth, when they had been able to properly observe the day without fear of being caught. The *chazzan*, his *tallis* over his head, led the *tefillos* as if there were five hundred people responding to each stanza instead of five. The room may have been empty of people, but it was saturated with depth and emotion and meaning.

Rav Baruchov served as the *chazzan* for *Mussaf*. Ah, *Mussaf* on Yom Kippur! It's the high point of each individual's service of Hashem! The tears of the handful of men in that basement shul was enough to overflow a river.

They reached the prayer of *Aleinu*, one of the most poignant parts of the Yom Kippur *davening*. As they fell on their faces, each of the six men present felt that they were fulfilling the words of the prayer. "Hashem!" they each cried. "I am willing to give up my life for You! I am willing to be killed for You!" The closeness they felt with their Creator at that moment was indescribable.

When *Mussaf* was finally over, there was a break for a few short minutes so that the elderly men could catch their breaths, and then *Minchah* began. It was already later in the day, and a few more people had joined them. Rav Baruchov smiled as he counted the men. There was already more than a *minyan*.

As the minutes ticked by and the afternoon turned to evening, more and more people joined the *davening*. By the time *Neilah* came, the place was just as packed as had been the night before.

"Please, say a few words before we begin *Neilah*," someone asked Rav Baruchov, but he was afraid.

He was sure there were some KGB agents amongst the crowd. It was impossible to have an assemblage of three hundred Jews without a single KGB agent finding out about it. Rav Baruchov knew that if he said one wrong word, one phrase that might be interpreted the wrong way, he was finished.

"Please," the people begged. "We need *chizuk*. We need to be inspired. Please, just a few words."

"Okay," the *rav* agreed. The people needed it, and he would deliver, even if he was punished for it later. He thought for a moment and then walked

up to the front of the shul to address the crowd. The room fell silent.

"There was once two neighbors who lived side by side," Rav Baruchov began. "They shared a good, friendly relationship until the day they got into a fight about a rooster. For some reason, it was unclear who the rooster belonged to, and both neighbors claimed that it was theirs."

He stopped and looked around. "A whole rooster! A veritable fortune! With the rooster and a hen, they could have eggs all summer! They could cook in a pot and have delicious meals for two weeks! And they both thought the rooster was theirs, neither of them willing to give it up to his neighbor.

"It got to a point where the animosity between themselves became too much to bear. 'It is mine!' one would snarl at the other, grabbing the rooster by its wings. 'Thief!' And the other one would growl, 'You're the thief! This rooster is mine!,' yanking it back by the legs. They decided to take the rooster to a *rav* and have him rule on their dispute.

"The *rav* could barely hear the argument over the shouts and insults the neighbors were hurling at each other. He pointed at one of the neighbors. 'What is your claim?' he asked. 'He stole my rooster!' the man yelled. 'He's a thief!'

The *rav* then turned to the other man. 'He's a *rasha*!' the second man shouted at the first. 'Just because he has a big family, that doesn't give him the right to walk into my yard and take away one of my roosters!'

"The *rav* looked at both of them, who had already gone back to yelling at each other. 'Hmm,' he said. 'You each claim that the other man stole your rooster. Well, the only way to know the truth is to ask the rooster himself to tell us who he belongs to.'

“Both neighbors looked at the *rav* in shock. ‘What do you mean, ask the rooster?’ they wanted to know. ‘The rooster can’t talk.’

“The *rav* just smiled. ‘Please leave the room, both of you, and I will speak to the rooster privately.’ Although the men thought the *rav* had lost his mind, they walked out of the room, leaving the *rav* alone with the rooster.

“The *rav* lifted the rooster and untied the string binding its legs together, securing his fingers around the legs instead. ‘You can come back in,’ he called to the neighbors. When they came inside, he turned to address the rooster. ‘Okay, Rooster, please go back to your true owner.’

“The *rav* released the bird into the air, and the rooster flew directly to one of the neighbors. It had recognized its owner, and once it had been able to fly again, it had returned to its rightful place. ‘This man is the owner of the rooster,’ the *rav* declared, and the other neighbor was forced to admit defeat.”

The people in the small basement shul smiled, appreciating the *rav*’s wisdom. Rav Baruchov looked heavenward and continued. “*Ribbono Shel Olam!* Look what a Jew is! The gentiles take us and bind our legs, disabling us from flying. But what happens when the enemy lets loose, even for one second? We fly straight back to Hashem.

“Look around the room at Your children. All day today, their feet were bound; they had no choice but go to work. Yet the second they were released, even if it is only temporarily, they came running right back to You! How they long to be with You!”

Rav Baruchov began to cry, and the rest of the congregation cried with him. “אנא בכח גדולת ימנך” he called out. “Hashem, open up the bondages of those who are tied and look where they run! We run right back to You!”

We are fortunate that today, we can serve Hashem freely. There is nothing binding our hands, nothing holding us back from becoming close to Hashem. Let us utilize the *yomim noraim* to run toward our Master and to merit the ultimate connection with Him.

*Have a Wonderful Shabbos!*  
This story is taken from tape # A267a

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