

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Wonderous Waters

Concealed within nature, Hashem created certain kinds vegetation and stones that carry hidden powers. Rabbeinu Bachaya's commentary on Parshas Titzaveh lists a variety of stones and grasses that each contain certain segulos. For example, there is specific kind of stone that brings wealth to one who owns it. Another kind of stone brings endearment to its owner, ensuring that he is liked by all.

There are all kinds of these extraordinary powers hidden in creation, powers that we do not understand. There is a kind of grass that, when worn by a person, protects its wearer from ayin hara. There is another kind of grass that burns smoke like a straight pillar, heading directly upward, but will curve when it reaches a ceiling. There is a kind of water that is able to swallow

other water. If a cupful of ordinary water would be poured into this phenomenal water, it would be swallowed up and the water level would not increase.

While everyone would love to get their hands on a rock that guarantees wealth, these things are concealed from majority of people since they are too powerful for an ordinary individual to play around with. The midrash tells the story of a Jew who came upon a species of grass that was known to revive life in a dead being. To test it out, he placed the grass next to a dead lion he encountered in the desert. The lion subsequently roared to life and devoured the Jew.

There's a Teshuvos HaRashba where the Rashba responded to a letter from people who questioned him about how these phenomena work. The Rashba's response was that we simply cannot understand how these things work.

There was once a king, King Albert, who was enraptured by the idea of these marvels concealed within nature. He spent a lot of time researching the various wonders of vegetation and stones, and he discovered that there was a certain kind of water that would provide eternal life to whoever drank from it. If someone tried to shoot him or stab him, he would suffer out the pain of these wounds, but he would never die.

As soon as King Albert learned about this water, he became obsessed with laying his hands on it. He asked the wisest, most knowledgeable men in his kingdom if they knew where to find such water, and while they all agreed that the water existed, they did not know where or how to find it.

"The water is hidden, Your Majesty," his advisors explained to him. "It exists, but it's well hidden. It's not the kind of thing that just anyone would know about, because then they, too, would want to drink from the water."

“What about the astronomers?” the king wondered. “The stargazers are excellent at deciphering the secrets of the galaxies. Perhaps the secret to this water is hiding in the formation of stars. Do we have anyone in the kingdom who is intimately acquainted with the wisdom of the stars?”

“There is someone,” his advisors reported back to him the next day. “There’s an elderly astronomer, Max, who lives not far from the capital. He is said to understand the language of the stars better than any other.”

“Bring him here,” the king ordered. “Perhaps he will be able to help me.”

The elderly astronomer was duly summoned, and he arrived at the king’s palace three days later. He was brought before King Albert, bowing low.

“Rise,” the king called. “Come here, grandfather, we have much to discuss.”

“Whatever pleases the king,” Max said humbly, wondering what the king could possibly want.

“You are familiar with the language of the stars,” the king stated. “You are well acquainted with the wisdom of the galaxies.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“Have you ever studied other sciences?” the king asked. “Nature, perhaps?”

“I have, Your Majesty.”

“I suppose you are familiar with the strange powers of certain species of grass and stones,” the king continued.

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

The king smiled, pleased by this answer. “Very well. Have you ever heard of the kind of water that causes its drinker to live forever?”

Max inclined his head. “Yes, Your Majesty.”

“Do you know if this kind of water truly exists, or is it merely fantasy?”

“I believe it does exist, Your Majesty,” the astronomer said slowly. “There are reliable reference books that seem to indicate that the existence of such water is not a fantasy, but a fact. However, the water is well hidden, and I don’t know of any cases in which it was actually discovered and drunken from.”

The king pursed his lips. “That is exactly what I am trying to do,” he said. “I want to find the water, and I need you to help me. Can you see if the stars will reveal the location of this water? I will pay you well for your efforts.”

“I will be glad to do whatever I can to be of assistance to Your Majesty,” the elderly man said carefully. “However, this is not something that will take a day or two. I will need at least a few weeks to study the stars and the riddles inherent within them. Even then, I can’t guarantee that I will discover the secret Your Majesty desires.”

“Try,” the king urged. “Try your best. I will provide you with lodgings here in my palace, along with food, drink, and anything else you might need. You can stay here as long as you need, for weeks, months, or even years, until you discover the location of the water.”

For the next eight weeks, the elderly Max spent his evenings in the garden, gazing up at the star studded sky. His days were occupied with diagrams and calculations as he recreated constellations on paper and worked on deciphering their meaning. For weeks he drew, scribbled, crossed out, and calculated until one day he hit results.

He was immediately ushered into the king's workroom.

"My dear Max," the king said warmly. "I heard that you have finally found success."

"It appears that way, Your Majesty," the elderly astronomer confirmed. "I have found the location of the water, but I must warn Your Majesty that it is in a most secluded location and is extremely difficult to reach."

The king waved his hand dismissively. "No matter. I'm willing to go to any lengths to get this water."

"We are talking about an extremely strenuous trip," Max tried explaining. "Weeks and months of traveling over land and sea, and over steep mountains and through dangerous waters. This is a trip that would be impossibly difficult for even the most seasoned of hikers."

"I want to do it," King Albert said firmly. "I don't care how difficult it is; I need that water."

Max withdrew a map from his pocket and unfolded it, smoothing out the creases. "I will give detailed instructions to the navigators," he said, laying the map out on the table. "But this is the general route."

He pointed to a small circle near a large blue blob on the map. "This is the port city," he explained. "You will need to travel this way through the ocean, past this country and this and this..." His finger slid gracefully over the map, slowing as it neared its destination. "This is the island you will dock out."

"That's where the water is?" the king asked excitedly.

"The water is there," Max confirmed. "But it is not easy to access. This island is surrounded on all sides with towering mountains. Your ship

should circle the island until it reaches a break in the mountains, which should be around here." He pointed to a tiny spot on the map.

"And then?" the king asked breathlessly.

"You'll need to climb the mountain to the right of the split," the astronomer continued. He turned the map over and began drawing a diagram on its reverse. "It's a very tall, dangerous mountain and won't be easy to climb."+

"Go on."

Max drew a circle with triangles surrounding it. "When you reach the top, you'll have a good view of the entire island. You'll notice that the island is surrounded by a ring of mountains, with an area of lowlands in the middle. From your position at the top of the mountain, you should be able to see a tiny blue squiggle somewhere around here in the valley. That is the river you are looking for."

"I see," the king said, studying the diagram. "So we climb the mountain at the right of the split, and once we reach the top, we look out for the river in the valley. And then, I assume, we go down the mountain to the river?"

"That's right," Max drew a wavy line at the base of one of the triangles. "You'll need to follow the river to its source, to the place where it comes out of the ground. When you find the end of the river, dip in a cup at that spot and drink from it. This is the water that will give you eternal life."

"Are you sure?" the king asked, his eyes shining.

"I'm sure, Your Majesty," the astronomer said quietly. "But you must remember not to dip the cup too deep into the ground, or to take water that is further away from the end of the river, because only the water that is directly near the ground will have the quality you are seeking."

“Thank you,” King Albert said emotionally, reaching out and embracing the elderly man. “Thank you! This is wonderful news!”

“If I may,” Max began hesitantly.

“Go ahead,” the king consented generously.

“As Your Majesty’s humble servant, I must advise the king against this trip. Even if Your Majesty is able enough to brave the wild, there is an additional, far greater peril, that of tampering with the way of the world. While I constantly pray for Your Majesty’s longevity, the Creator of the world has instituted the phenomenon of death for a reason. I strongly advise Your Majesty against interfering with the course of nature.”

“I thank you for your warning, Max,” the king said curtly, “I recognize your care and concern for my welfare. Your concerns notwithstanding, I still would like to make the trip and drink that water. Can you write up the precise directions and instructions for my navigators?”

Max swallowed hard, clearly disturbed by the king’s plans, but he nodded. This was his king, after all, and it was his duty to obey. “Certainly, Your Majesty.”

Two weeks later, the king started out on his journey together with three ships and two hundred of the best commandos in the army and navy, who would be there to guide him and protect him on the arduous journey.

True to the astronomer’s word, the trip was exceedingly difficult. King Albert was accustomed to a comfortable lifestyle, and though his cabin on the ship was luxurious, it was not nearly what he was used to. He was immediately weakened by an extreme bout of seasickness, which lasted for more than a month.

The journey by ship lasted close to three months, three months of nausea, discomfort, and storms.

When the lookout finally sighted the island, the king was good and ready to set his feet on solid land again. The ship traveled slowly around the island until it reached the break in the mountains, and then it docked at last.

But the difficult trip was not yet over.

From the moment they docked, it was clear to the soldiers and seamen that this was an island not inhabited by people. They could see jaguars and bears and mountain lions prowling in the distance while crocodiles snapped their jaws in the shallow waters on the beach. The soldiers, despite their experience at combat, shivered at the sight of these ferocious animal enemies.

They spent the night on the dock, sleeping soundly in the security of the ship. There were long days ahead of them, and they needed all the strength they could get.

The next morning, refreshed and invigorated, the king and his two-hundred commandos left the ship to begin their trek up the mountain. Armed with weapons and enough supplies for a three-week journey, they began the steep climb.

There was no clear trail to follow, and plenty of places to plummet to one’s death. The soldiers set their teeth and walked carefully, one foot in front of the other as they wended their way up the mountain. The king followed after the first half of soldiers, the second half bringing up the rear.

They walked and walked and walked until they could not take another step. The sky was darkening, and they needed to rest. The weary soldiers set up a camp on a small plateau in the mountain and, with the exhausted king at their center, they tried to fall asleep.

But with the setting of the sun came the animals. The soldiers leaped up in alarm as growling sounds drew nearer and nearer. No one wanted to serve as dinner for the mountain animals. They

hurried to gather branches and created a large fire, hoping the blaze would keep the beasts away. Their plan worked, but none of the soldiers, nor the king, slept that night.

When the sun rose, they were all just as exhausted as they'd been before they settled down to rest, but there was no choice but to climb further. The peak was still so far away. Wearily, the soldiers gathered up their weapons and supplies and continued the difficult trek, supporting their king as they climbed higher and higher.

When night came, they had still yet to reach the peak. Again, they lit a large fire and tried to ignore the ferocious growling of the dangerous animals as the group settled down to sleep. Before they knew it, the sun rose and they forced themselves to rise with it for another day of climbing.

At the end of the third day, they finally reached the summit. The soldiers gazed around them in awe. The view was breathtaking. Mountains stretched all around them, surrounded by the grey-blue of the ocean. The mountains all sloped toward the large valley in the center of the island. And, like Max had said, they could see a skinny blue snake in the center of the valley. The river!

Someone set out a cushion on the ground, and King Albert collapsed onto it, fatigue washing over him. He forced his eyes open and surveyed the awesome view. "Almost worth the trip just for this," he murmured, and the soldiers couldn't help but smile, remembering the intense difficult trek they had just endured.

"Tomorrow, we are heading down that mountain," the king said, determination in his voice. "The way down, while more difficult and certainly more dangerous, should not take as long as the way up. I hope to reach the lowlands by nightfall tomorrow. At this rate, we will be back on the ship by next week!"

There were cheers all around. The soldiers spread out their blankets and were fast asleep before the king could say another word.

The following day, they began the dangerous trek down the mountain. Two soldiers plummeted to their deaths along with an avalanche, but the rest of the group made it down successfully. By nightfall, they were all in the valley, where they set up camp at the riverside. Just another day or so, and they would reach their destination.

The next morning drew bright and sunny. The king and his soldiers were in high spirits, relaxed and excited as they walked along the river trying to find its source. No one dared touch the water of the river. This was a holy river, they knew, and they were afraid to touch it.

At last, they finally reached the end of the river. They could see exactly from where the water was flowing out, between two rocks. After months and months of hardship, they had finally reached the end of their torturous journey. The excitement was palpable.

The king turned around to face his men. "I thank you all for joining me here," he said. "I must remind you that not a single one of you is permitted to take from this water. As king, I am the only one who will drink from it."

The soldiers nodded.

The king looked at the water flowing out from between the boulders, the source of the beautiful river between the mountains. He needed a few moments to calm down, to think, to perform this momentous action with the utmost concentration.

He turned away from the water. "Let's eat first," he suggested to the soldiers. "Let's eat, settle down, and then I'll drink from the water."

Obligingly, the soldiers set up the meal, and they all ate together. Once everyone was sated, they

each had a small shot of whiskey, toasted each other and the welfare of their king.

The king stood up, mentally preparing himself for the greatest moment of his life. He shed the hiking outfit he had been wearing on the mountain and donned his royal robes. Lifting his eyes heavenward, he sent up a prayer of thanks that he had merited to reach this moment, to access the elusive water that would give him life forever.

The soldiers gathered around him and the king dipped his cup into the water at the precise spot that the astronomer had describe. He lifted the cup to his mouth and prepared to take a sip.

“Stop!” a voice suddenly cried out.

The king’s head whipped around. Other than his silent soldiers, he didn’t see anyone. Shrugging, he turned back to his cup of water, lifting it back to his lips.

“Stop!” the voice cried again, more desperately this time.

And suddenly the king saw him.

Standing before him was an old, old man, his face wizened with age, covered in mud and grass. “King!” the old man cried. “Wait! *Wait!* Don’t drink the water!”

“Who are you?” King Albert demanded. “What do you want from me?”

“Just wait,” the man begged. “Don’t drink the water until after you hear my story!”

The king looked from the man to his cup, back and forth, before setting the cup down on the ground. “Yes?”

“I am also a king,” the old man began. “I was a king just like you, in the prime of my rule. Like you, I learned about the water that grants eternal

life, and like you, I searched and studied until I managed to discover the secret of its location. I came here, and I drank the water. And it made me live forever.”

King Albert gaped at him. “When was this?”

“Years ago,” the man said. “Years and years and years ago. At the time, I was on top of the world. I would go out to battle, unafraid of death. I ruled for thirty years with an iron fist, outliving all my generals and ministers.”

“That sounds amazing,” the king said.

“It was terrible,” the man corrected him. “I outlived everyone in my generation, and the people in my country grew tired of my rule. Who needed an old, outdated king? They wanted someone younger, someone with the times.

“I was still clinging to my kingly garments, but they didn’t consider them kingly anymore. They considered them old fashioned. I wanted to rule the way I always had, but they felt that these ways were out of touch. Despite the fact that my mind was clear, I was considered old and senile. As far as the country was concerned, I had outlived my life by too many years.

“I was called the ‘crazy king’, and the children would make fun of me in the streets. My own great-great-great grandchildren, now ruling the country, would ridicule me publicly. The burning shame was too much too bear.

“Things got so bad that people would throw rotten vegetables at me on the streets. This soon turned into rocks, small ones and then large ones. Yet no matter how hurt I got, I didn’t die. I was in pain, but I recovered. Once, someone shot me with an arrow. The arrow pierced a vital artery, and everyone was sure I would die. But I didn’t die. I recovered from that, too.

“I was desperate to die. I wanted to join my friends and family, the generations that knew and loved me. What good was it to remain behind with people a few hundred years younger than me who mocked me and scorned me? I searched for a solution, something that would allow me to die at last.

“One day, I met a stargazer who was able to find an answer for me in the stars. He advised me to return to this place, the place of the water. If and when another king would come to drink the water, I would need to warn him not to do so. The king would then have the opportunity to throw the water, the very water that gives eternal life, into my face, thus degrading it. By preventing the king from drinking it, and by degrading the water through throwing it, the water will lose its wonderous properties, and I will instantly die.”

The mud-covered man looked up beseechingly at King Albert. “Your Majesty!” he cried. “Do us both a favor and don’t drink that water! The Creator has instituted the phenomenon of death for a wonderful purpose. There comes a time when every man is destined to die, and that is for his ultimate benefit. You think that by drinking this water you will live forever? Drinking this water will be something you will forever regret!”

The king looked from the man to the wonderous spring, and then turned his head to glimpse the large group of soldiers who had accompanied him. He thought of the months of difficulty that he’d gone through, just to reach this spot and drink from its water. Could he give it all up, after everything he’d done to get to this moment?

“Your Majesty!” the old man’s voice was hoarse. “Your Majesty, take that cup and throw it at me. I will finally merit death, and you will go back to your country for many more years of rule, even without interfering with nature.”

King Albert was no fool. Looking into the elderly man’s eyes, he could see the misery pooling

within them. Despite the arduous journey, the precipitous climb, and the constant danger they had skirted to make it to this river, the man was right. He did not want to live an eternal life of misery and regret.

With shaking hands, he picked up the cup and threw the water at the old man. Instantly, the man collapsed, dead.

The king motioned to his soldiers that it was time to turn around and begin the journey home. Then he pocketed the empty cup, which would serve as a reminder for the rest of his days that the ways of the world that Hashem created are the wisest ways of all.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A154

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