

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

The Epidemic Part I

It began with the child of the baker, who fell ill with a seemingly routine childhood ailment. His symptoms grew worse by the hour, and two days later, the child breathed his last. A funeral was held, the child was buried, and the community mourned along with the baker's family.

Just one day later, the fishmonger's little girl suddenly passed away. Her death was quickly followed by the passing of one of the local peddlers and then the shoemaker's apprentice.

After four deaths in just three days, it became clear what was going on. An epidemic had broken out in the Jewish community.

The fourth day of the epidemic claimed the lives of five more victims. No one felt safe. They had no idea who would be next. An epidemic had the

power to wipe out the entire community, and no one could be sure that he would survive it.

Completely helpless and at loss, the people came running to Rav Shapira, the rav of the community. As their spiritual leader, they hoped he could direct them toward the proper forms of repentance so that the wrath of Hashem would be calmed.

“Today, before Minchah, we will all accept upon ourselves a fast day for tomorrow,” Rav Shapira told them. “No one will go to work tomorrow. We will all gather in the main shul for Shachris, after which we will recite tehillim. Then, I will address the people. Every single Jew in the community must be present at my talk.”

Signs were drawn up and nailed up in conspicuous places all along the avenue. Word of the rav's instructions passed from one person to the next. With the ominous cloud of death hanging over their heads, no one dared ignore the rav's commands.

The next morning, the main shul was crowded with all the men in the community. They davened selichos and said Avinu Malkeinu. This was no laughing matter; the people prayed with tears streaming down their faces. They moved onto vidui, repenting with tremendous concentration and fervor.

When Shacharis was over and they finished reciting the entire tehillim, Rav Shapira ascended to the bimah. Still wearing his tallis and tefillin, his face a fiery red, he addressed the congregation in a thundering voice.

“Rabbosai, we must remember that there is a Judge and there is judgment. Nothing can happen to a community unless there are aveiros taking place in the community! We are now in a time of terrible danger, and we must take immediate action to correct whichever wrongs are taking place in our midst.”

He looked around the room, his gaze taking in each member of the kehillah. "I will be in my home today, and I will be waiting for any information you may have about what aveiros may be responsible for the epidemic we are seeing now. I hereby decree that if anyone has any knowledge of someone who has done something that may require a tikkun, he inform me immediately. This is not lashon hara; it is for the constructive purpose of saving our kehillah from obliteration."

A thunderous silence filled the room after the rav finished speaking. He left the shul and the rest of the community followed suit. They were fasting, and they went home to daven to Hashem for their salvation. It goes without saying that each man repented privately for any sins he may have committed.

The rav sat at home, saying tehillim as he waited, but no one came to him. No one could think of anything that might have been done by a community member to cause such a terrible epidemic.

The next day, another child passed away. Two days later, three more people succumbed to the epidemic. The community redoubled their efforts at teshuvah and tefillah, but they were no closer to uncovering the source of Hashem's anger.

It was three days after the day of fasting that Dov Ber, a young father in the community, finally hit upon something. He was walking home from Shacharis with his neighbor, Meir, a contemplative silence between them, when he suddenly thought of something.

"Did you see Reb Moishele by davening?" Dov Ber asked his friend.

"Reb Moishele, that quiet, simple man from the back of the shul?" Meir squinted his eyes in thought. "No, I don't think I noticed him, why?"

"I just realized that he never comes to shul to daven," Dov Ber said. "I see him on Shabbos, but during the week, he does not daven in shul."

"Are you sure?" Meir asked doubtfully. "He's a quiet guy; he keeps to himself and stands on the side. Maybe you just didn't notice him."

Dov Ber shook his head. "No, I'm sure of it. It's been months already that he hasn't come to shul during the week. Maybe even a year or two. He only comes on Shabbos."

Meir gave his neighbor a skeptical look. "Are you trying to imply that this whole epidemic is because of Reb Moishele? Oh, please, that's ridiculous."

"It sounds farfetched," Dov Ber agreed. "But the rav said that in case we know anything, we are required to tell him. I don't want to take responsibility for this epidemic, do you?"

"I guess not," Meir said, halfheartedly.

"So come with me to the rav," Dov Ber said. "Let's go right now."

"The rav will laugh at us," Meir said. "He'll think of us as fools. An epidemic doesn't start because someone doesn't come to davening."

"Let's just go," Dov Ber said, turning in the direction of the rav's house. His friend sighed and reluctantly joined him.

They found the rav sitting at the table, deep lines of worry and sorrow crisscrossing his face. Just that very morning, a father and son had passed away. There was so much pain and so much fear, and despite their renewed efforts at prayer and repentance, there was no end in sight.

Rav Shapira lifted his head when the two young men walked in. "Yes?"

Dov Ber suddenly felt foolish. "Um... uh... the honored rav has ordered us to report any incidents

or strange activity in the community? So that we can repent and the epidemic will stop?"

"Do you have any information that you think might help us understand why this epidemic began?" the rav asked gently.

Color rushed to Dov Ber's cheeks. "Yes. I mean, no. I mean, I noticed something, but surely it was not the cause of the epidemic."

"Go ahead."

"There's a quiet man, a simpleton, Reb Moishele," Dov Ber said uneasily. "I just realized that he hasn't been coming to shul for Shacharis during the week. He comes for Minchah and Maariv, and I see him in shul on Shabbos. But he's not there during the weekday Shacharis. Could it be that he was making a mockery of tefillah, and that is what caused the epidemic?"

Rav Shapira looked at him in silence for a moment before speaking. "I don't think that one lone Jew not being careful to daven with a minyan would cause an epidemic."

From behind him, Dov Ber felt a small nudge from Meir. He waited.

"However, if Reb Moishele, as you say, is not going to shul, that means he is doing something. Since the two of you have brought me this information, I am now tasking you with shadowing him for an entire day. Hopefully, we will discover what he's up to."

Dov Ber exhaled sharply. He had not been expecting this.

"Remember," the rav continued. "If he is a thief, or engaged in other covert operations, he will take extra precautions to cover his tracks. You need to outsmart him, and at the same time, be careful that you are not discovered."

"Alright," Dov Ber said. "I will do it. Meir?" Meir nodded. "I'll join you."

With the rav's brachah ringing in their ears, the two young men left Rav Shapira's home and began to plan their next steps.

"Let's go to his house first," Dov Ber suggested. "We'll wait outside and follow him when he leaves."

"What if he already left for the day?" Meir countered.

"There's only one way to find out," Dov Ber said, an adventurous note creeping into his voice. "If he's not there, we'll have to come back tonight." Jackets pulled tightly to shield them from the frigid wind, they walked briskly across town to the small cottage where Reb Moishele lived with his family.

"You can't just knock on the door and ask for him!" Meir said urgently, pulling his friend's sleeve. "What will you say? 'Hi, Moishele, we're just checking if your home so that we can follow you whenever you decide to leave?'"

"Don't be a silly," Dov Ber scoffed. "Watch me." They pulled open the creaky wooden gate and Dov Ber knocked on the door.

They could hear children playing inside and the muffled sounds of footsteps approaching. Soon, the door swung open. A woman stood there with a questioning expression on her face. She was, presumably, Reb Moishele's wife.

"Hi," Dov Ber said. "Is Yeruchem there?"

"Sorry, you got the wrong house," the woman said.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Dov Ber said innocently. "I must have gotten confused. Whose house is this?"

"My husband is Reb Moishele," the woman said, making no move to call her husband.

"Is he home?" Dov Ber said, pushing his luck.

“No,” she said briefly.

“Okay, I apologize for disturbing you,” Dov Ber said politely. The door swung shut behind him.

“He’s not home,” Dov Ber reported to Meir. “Time for Plan B. Let’s meet here tonight, at around nine o’clock.”

“Why so early?”

“If he’s a thief, he probably goes out at night to steal,” Dov Ber explained. “I don’t want to miss him again.”

“That makes sense,” Meir agreed. “Don’t forget to bring a warm coat. It’s bound to be a cold night.”

It was a dark, moonless night. The two friends met up outside their homes and walked together to Reb Moishele’s house. “We could get sick from this weather,” Dov Ber whispered as his breath came out in big puffs of smoke.

Meir shivered. “I hope not. Let’s stand closely together to retain as much body heat as possible. Also, we shouldn’t just sit outside his house; our body temperatures will go down faster if we’re still. We’ll walk briskly around the block as we wait for action and review the gemara together.”

“I hope he comes out soon,” Dov Ber said, pulling his scarf over his face. “As much as I don’t want to catch him doing something wrong, I surely hope we aren’t wasting our night.”

The soft yellow glow of candlelight flickered in Reb Moishele’s home when they got there.

“He’s still up,” Meir observed.

The pair began pacing the street in front of Reb Moishele’s home, talking in learning and trying to stay warm. About an hour later, the yellow glow was gone.

“He went to sleep,” Dov Ber said excitedly.

“Now we wait,” Meir said, much less excited. “I still don’t understand how your teretz explains the difficulty in the Tosafos...”

They continued speaking in learning, their hands pressed deeply into their pockets for warmth. Every so often, they would glance up at the silent house, wondering if and when it would come to life.

And then, shortly before midnight, a light suddenly went on in Reb Moishele’s house.

“He’s waking up!” they whispered to each other, moving closer toward the house and pushing themselves deeper into the shadows. “This is it!”

Not daring to breathe, they watched as the door opened and Reb Moishele walked out. He hurried to the barn and reemerged moments later, leading his horse.

“He’s leaving with a horse and wagon,” Meir whispered into Dov Ber’s ear so quietly that he wasn’t sure his voice was heard. “There’s no way we can follow him by foot.”

They watched in silence as Reb Moishele hitched the horse to the wagon and jumped up onto the driver’s bench. With a flourish of the whip, he was off.

“We have to try,” Dov Ber urged, taking a huge gulp of the freezing air. “We must try to follow him. Let’s go!”

The two friends raced after the wagon in a futile effort to keep up, but they were no match for the horse’s speed.

“He’s surely a thief,” Meir panted as they watched the wagon up ahead turn toward the forest. “Who else goes into the forest in the middle of the night?”

“By the time we get there, he’ll be lost somewhere in the forest,” Dov Ber said, sounding just as out

of breath as his friend. “Still, we are obligated to try.”

They saw the wagon enter the forest and ran faster, ignoring their racing hearts and aching legs. “This way!” Dov Ber called, pointing toward an opening in the trees. “He went this way!”

They stopped, breathless at the entrance to the forest and peered inside uncertainly. “Should we go in?” Dov Ber asked.

“We’ll get lost trying to find him,” Meir said worriedly. A growl sounded in the distance. “And there are dangerous animals living in these woods!”

“Let’s just walk a little bit,” Dov Ber coaxed. “We won’t go far, and if we don’t see him right away, we’ll turn around.”

Another growl pierced the air, and this one was much closer.

“No,” Meir said. “You can go in if you want, but I am heading back. This is much too dangerous.”

“I can’t go in myself,” Dov Ber cried. “Alright, if you’re going back, I’ll go with you.” He reluctantly followed his friend back into town, and a half hour later, both were tightly sleeping.

The next morning, they went to see Rav Shapira and described their adventures of the previous evening. “We tried following him, but his horse was much too quick,” they explained. “We know he entered the forest, but it was too dangerous to try to find him inside.”

“Do you know what he was doing there?” the rav asked.

“No, we lost him once he entered the forest,” Dov Ber said. “We were afraid to venture inside, in the pitch dark.”

The rav pursed his lips. “This sounds fishy,” he said slowly. “I think you should try to follow him again tonight, but this time, I want you to take me along. Come to my house tonight, and we will all go together.”

“Is the rav sure?” Meir asked. “It’s very cold, and it could be dangerous...”

“This is my community and my responsibility,” the rav said firmly. “I want to go along with you tonight. With Hashem’s help, we will discover what is going on and hopefully get this epidemic to end.”

To be continued....

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A150

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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

The Epidemic Part II

RECAP: An epidemic broke out in the Jewish community and claimed many lives, prompting the rav to investigate the spiritual state of the community in the hopes that proper teshuva would lead to their salvation. When word reached him that Reb Moishеле, a simpleton in the community, never davened with a minyan for Shacharis and disappeared into the forest every night, he decided to investigate further to determine whether this was the wrongdoing that had brought the epidemic upon them.

It was a dark, frigid night, and Dov Ber and Meir stood huddled beside Rav Shapira, trying to protect him from the cold. They stood in the shadows and spoke quietly in learning as they watched Reb Moishеле's dim and silent house.

Like the previous night, the first hours ticked by without any action. Everyone inside was sleeping. And then, just twenty minutes before midnight, a candle flickered to life somewhere inside the house.

“Just like yesterday,” Dov Ber murmured in a barely audible voice, leaning forward to get a better view.

“Step back,” Meir warned. “You don't want him to see you!”

Holding his lantern, Reb Moishеле came out of the house and deftly hitched his horse to the wagon.

“We'll have to run to keep up with him on the wagon,” Dov Ber whispered to the rav apologetically.

“I'll be fine,” Rav Shapira assured him.

Reb Moishеле hoisted himself up onto the wagon and whipped the horse. Within moments, the horse was galloping swiftly down the street.

“That way!” Dov Ber cried as the three stalkers ran after the cloud of dust. “He's heading toward the opening of the forest!”

They ran and ran for twenty minutes straight, their breaths ragged and uneven, but they didn't dare stop for rest. When they finally reached the entrance to the forest, panting and breathless, they found Reb Moishеле's horse tied to a tree and his wagon waiting patiently beside it. Of Reb Moishеле himself there was no sign.

“Now what?” Meir asked. “This is exactly what happened last night. We chased him to the forest, and that was that. It's dark and dangerous; how will we ever find him inside?”

“Let's hold hands and walk together,” Rav Shapira suggested. “Hashem will watch over us.”

Besides, it's dark and dangerous for Reb Moishele, too. Whatever he's doing in the forest, it's unlikely that he ventured in too deeply."

Dov Ber took the rav's right hand, and Meir took his left. With a prayer on their lips, they walked past Reb Moishele's bound horse into the trees. Leaves and twigs crunched underfoot, the sounds echoing loudly in the stillness of the night. With the canopy of trees blocking out the little moonlight, it was almost impossible to see where they were going.

They forged on, one tentative step after the other. The wind shrieked, the branches swayed, and the three men shivered, but they were determined to get to the bottom of the mystery. Another step. Then another. Where was Reb Moishele?

And then they heard it. The sound of crying.

"Someone's crying," the rav whispered. "Shh..."

They moved forward soundlessly. The wailing was more audible now. It was a masculine voice, weeping as it mumbled something they couldn't clearly hear.

"Is that Reb Moishele crying?" Meir whispered.

"There are two people crying," Dov Ber whispered back. "Listen."

They strained their ears. Indeed, there were two voices murmuring something together and crying. The threesome stood between the trees and listened to the heart-wrenching wailing and before Rav Shapira knew what was happening, he began to cry along with the two voices. Although he could not make out their words, his emotions were powerfully aroused and he cried and cried along with them.

The sight of their revered rav weeping in the forest stirred the two young men to tears. Soon, there were five voices crying in the stillness of the forest.

When the rav composed himself, he beckoned to his two assistants to follow him out of the forest. They walked carefully through the trees until they reached the entrance, where Reb Moishele's horse was still patiently waiting.

"It's obvious to me that Reb Moishele is no thief," the rav said quietly. "While we had always assumed he was a simpleton, this is clearly a man who is operating on an elevated spiritual sphere. We will wait for him here so that I can question him when he emerges from the forest."

They stood beside the horse for a full hour until they finally heard the crunching of leaves heralding Reb Moishele's appearance at the entrance of the forest. With bated breath, they watched as Reb Moishele walked calmly toward his horse.

Their eyes met his and Reb Moishele froze.

"Shalom aleichem," Rav Shapira said, his voice gentle. "Do you recognize me?"

"Yes," Reb Moishele whispered. His eyes darted around, searching for an escape from the trap. "You are the rav."

"That's right," the rav confirmed. "And I would like to know what you are doing here."

Reb Moishele clamped his mouth shut, looking very uncomfortable, and didn't say a word.

"It is important that you tell me what you were doing here in the forest," the rav said, more firmly this time.

Still, Reb Moishele was silent.

"As rav of this community, I order you with the power of the Torah to tell me what you are doing here," the rav commanded.

Reb Moishele's eyes grew wide, and he was clearly struggling with himself. "I came to say

tikkun chatzos,” he finally said in a small voice, realizing that he could not defy a direct command from the rav.

“But I heard two voices,” Rav Shapira pointed out. “Who else was there with you?”

Reb Moishele looked at the ground and did not respond.

The rav stared him down. “Reb Moishele. I command you to tell me!”

But Reb Moishele just gave a small shake of his head. “I cannot.”

“You must,” the rav insisted. “You must tell me. Reb Moishele, this is not a request but a psak. Tell me who was reciting tikkun chatzos together with you!”

“Honored rav,” Reb Moishele beseeched. “If you are forcing me to respond, I will, but I must ask you not to publicize what I am about to share with you. The same goes for the two young men with you,” he added, nodding at Dov Ber and Meir.

“We’ll keep your secret,” the rav pledged.

“All my life, I have recited tikkun chatzos each night at midnight,” Reb Moishele began. “I exchange my regular clothing for sackcloth and rub dust from the ground onto my head. And then I cry for the destruction of the bais hamikdash. This is not something I began recently, but something I have been doing all my life.

“At one point, I asked Hashem to show me a sign that He was listening to my nightly tefillos,” Reb Moishele continued. “Sometime thereafter, I began to hear a voice repeating the words after me each time I recite tikkun chatzos. I performed a shaalas chalom to discover whose voice this was, and I was told by the bais din shel maalah that the neshamah of Yirmiyahu HaNavi himself is sent down each night to cry together with me over the bais hamikdash. Once I learned that Yirmiyahu

Hanavi joins me in my mourning for the bais hamikdash, you can be sure that the intensity of my mourning increased, along with the strength of my commitment to tikkun chatzos.”

The rav, along with Dov Ber and Meir, peered at Reb Moishele in astonishment. Standing before them was the same simpleton they had always known, only now they understood that beneath his ignorant persona was a hidden tzaddik.

“Tell me,” Rav Shapira asked shakily. “I see now that you are a tremendous tzaddik. Why is there an epidemic in town? What sins do we need to rectify?”

Reb Moishele chose not to respond.

“If you don’t know why this terrible epidemic fell upon us,” the rav pressed further. “Then perhaps you can ask Yirmiyahu Hanavi. Please, the entire community is in terrible danger. People are dying left and right. What is the cause of this punishment?”

Reb Moishele’s forehead creased in thought. “Tomorrow after davening,” he finally promised. “Tomorrow after davening I will tell the rav why the epidemic was brought upon us.”

With that, the questioning was adjourned. Reb Moishele offered the rav a ride back on the wagon, and the two young men hitched along, too. The short drive back into town was silent. Still awed by what they had learned, neither the rav nor his assistants dared speak.

Dov Ber and Meir went home for whatever was left of the night, but they didn’t sleep a wink. Their minds were having difficulty digesting the fact that the simple Reb Moishele was really a pious and lofty tzaddik who merited to recite tikkun chatzos with the soul of the prophet Yirmiyahu. Not only that, but he knew what was causing the epidemic and would reveal it the next morning!

In the morning, they found that they simply could not keep the story to themselves. They each told a few select friends, warning them to keep it a secret, of course, and within minutes, the unbelievable story spread like wildfire throughout the whole town. Shacharis that morning was packed; no one wanted to miss Reb Moishele's explanation.

A few minutes before Shacharis, Rav Shapira emerged from his home, wearing his tallis and tefillin. As he entered the shul, the sea of people split for him, allowing him to pass toward the front of the shul. When he reached his seat, he turned around and peered into the crowd, but did not see Reb Moishele.

"Is Reb Moishele here?" he asked someone standing nearby.

"No," came the reply.

They waited another few minutes, but Reb Moishele still did not appear. Realizing that waiting for Reb Moishele might mean waiting forever, the rav sent the chazzan up to the amud, and Shacharis began.

Deep in middle of davening, the door of the shul suddenly opened. Crowned in the doorway was Reb Moishele, wearing his tallis and tefillin. He stepped inside and walked up the aisle to the front of the shul where the rav was sitting.

But as he walked, something frightening happened. Left and right, people were fainting. The butcher, the baker, the cobbler, the blacksmith...practically anyone who looked at Reb Moishele collapsed in a faint on the floor.

Ignoring the drama around him, Reb Moishele calmly opened a tehillim and began murmuring its holy words as he waited for the conclusion of davening so that he could speak to the rav.

When davening was finally over, Rav Shapira turned to him, a newfound look of respect and

awe in his eyes. "Reb Moishele, please explain to me what is going on. Why are all these people fainting when they see you? And what is the cause of the epidemic in our community?"

"I will answer both of your questions with one answer," Reb Moishele began. "On my head I am wearing tefillin shel rosh, and the holiness of these tefillin has the power to overcome all the bad in this world. However, when a person does not treat his tefillin with the proper respect and speaks devorim beteilim when wearing them, he loses the protection of the holy tefillin.

"I am now wearing my tefillin shel rosh, tefillin that are completely holy since I never desecrated them with mundane chatter. The holiness of these tefillin is so powerful that those who have done aveiros cannot bear it. That is why so many people fainted from looking at my tefillin."

The entire room was silent. The people listened carefully, soaking in each word and waiting for more.

"Rabbosai!" Reb Moishele thundered, banging on the bimah. "The reason there is an epidemic in the community is because people are speaking about mundane matters while wearing their tefillin! The tefillin shel rosh is comparable to the tzitz worn by the Kohen Gadol, who was not allowed to become distracted by idle thoughts while wearing it. The tzitz, however, contains but one shem Hashem, while the tefillin contain eight sheimos. How much more so must we be careful to keep our minds, and certainly our words, focused solely on our creator!"

Hearing Reb Moishele's stirring mussar, Rav Shapira burst into tears. While he had always treated his tefillin with respect, he had not been aware of the enormity of the tefillin's holiness, which serves as a protection for klal Yisroel. The gift of protection from Hashem was right there in the room with them, on each of their heads, yet they had not understood its significance and value.

Now that Reb Moishela, the hidden tzaddik, had revealed to them the folly of their ways, the entire community immediately repented. Then and there, they accepted upon themselves to be extremely careful not to speak a single mundane word while wearing their tefillin.

With their firm resolution came the conclusion of the epidemic. Not another man, woman, or child died from the strange illness after that morning. Indeed, the kedushah of the tefillin, when properly respected, served as the best measure of defense against any threats to their safety and wellbeing.

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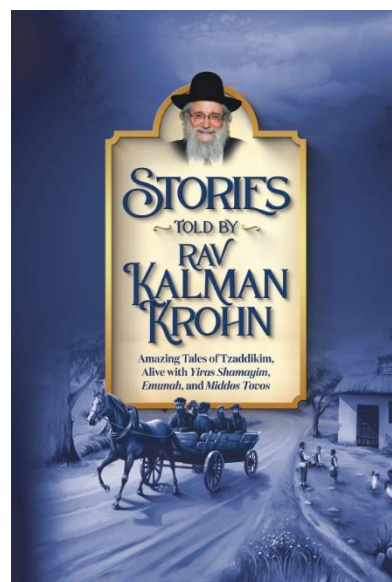
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