

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 Light of the Menorah

The following story, sourced from the firsthand account of the Jewish soldier's diary, was recorded in the encyclopedia and later included in the *sefer* Pardes Chanukah.

The Revolutionary War, which led to the formation of the United States of America, was fought under impossible conditions. The destitute Continental Army could barely afford to feed its soldiers, let alone replace their worn uniforms and boots or heat their freezing tents.

There weren't too many Jews amongst the colonists, and even fewer in the Continental Army. Recognizing that they would be prime

fodder for the frustrated and freezing soldiers looking for a scapegoat after suffering loss after loss against the mighty British Army, the Jewish soldiers took care to hide their faith.

Writing in his diary, a Jewish soldier described the low morale of the colonists in Valley Forge during the brutal winter as they battled a mighty army for their independence. They were hungry, cold, and fatigued, and many of them felt that they were fighting for General Washington's unrealistic dream. They were certain that all their work and suffering would end in defeat, and they would soon be hanged in a row from trees by triumphant British soldiers. The war was pointless, they believed. They were fighting for a hopeless cause.

Standing around a small fire with his comrades, trying to get warm, the Jewish soldier began reminiscing of bygone days. He was born in a small European town, where the warmth and camaraderie of his loving family was constantly overshadowed by the hatred of their non-Jewish neighbors.

Staring into the flames, he could see his father dressed bearskins, being forced to dance before the *poritz* and a crowd of jeering gentiles. He could hear the threatening barking of the dogs and the snapping of their vicious jaws as they leaped about the arena, trying to trap his father. He could still feel the squeeze of his mother's hand on his shoulder as she was compelled to observe the derogatory spectacle. He shivered, remembering his parents' tears as they walked home in shame.

That incident had been the catalyst for his decision to emigrate to the New World, a place he had hoped would prove more friendly to his people. *My poor father and mother*, he thought sadly, picturing their tiny, drafty home and the adjacent mill that never brought in enough money

to pay for their expenses and the *poritz's* exorbitant taxes.

Pulling his threadbare jacket tighter around his thin frame, the soldier shifted to more pleasant memories. He envisioned the delicious smell of his mother's bread baking in the stone hearth, and pictured his family gathered before the fire, singing in unison.

"Just a second," he said suddenly. "Today is Chanukah!" How could he forget those long-ago days, when he used to light a small menorah beside his father's larger one? How could he forget the spirited dancing together with his brothers around the leaping flames? Chanukah was an oasis of light in the darkness of the fierce European winters, a reprieve from the hostilities of their hostile neighbors.

Chanukah! The mere utterance of the word gave the soldier strength, reminding him that just as Hashem had performed a miracle and saved the Jewish nation, He would do so again with the coming of Mashiach.

Despite his desire to keep his faith hidden from the other soldiers, he knew that he needed to light the menorah. He needed the strength and the spirit, to be bolstered by the courage of the Chanukah story.

When most of the camp was asleep, he removed a small brass menorah from his pack and walked off to the outskirts of the base. Kissing the menorah reverently, he thought of his father who had pressed it into his hands during their final farewell.

"My son," his beloved father had said, his voice choked with emotion. "Take this menorah with you. It will keep *yiddishkeit* alive for you."

"*Tatte!*" the soldier cried now, breaking down completely. He wept and wept. "*Tatte*, where are you now?!"

Looking around, he found the camp completely still. It seemed that everyone was sleeping. Even if anyone was to notice his flame, he reasoned, it wouldn't look strange. There were multiple small fires burning throughout the camp, providing pockets of warmth on that freezing night.

Placing the menorah on the floor, he rolled a small wick and filled the first cup with oil. With tears in his eyes, he recited the *brachos* and lit the first *licht*. As he sang whatever he could recall of *Maoz Tzur*, he was transported back to his home in Europe, dancing around the menorah with his brothers. He could taste his mother's delicious *latkes*, feel the smooth finish of the carved wooden *dreidel*, and hear his *melamed's* enthusiastic telling of the Chanukah story.

What did I leave? Why did I leave? He asked himself, a deep feeling of remorse flooding his being. *There was poverty, cold, and hunger, true, but there was also warmth, light, Chanukah! What do I have here? Absolutely nothing!*

Lost in his melancholy thoughts, he watched the tiny flame flicker. Suddenly, he was startled to feel a heavy hand on his shoulder. One hand flew instinctively to the hilt of his weapon and he whirled around to confront his intruder.

It was none other than his commander, George Washington, himself.

His arm lifted itself automatically, and he offered the general a full salute.

"Soldier!" General Washington demanded. "What is the meaning of this?"

The Jewish soldier's felt himself quiver even as he forced himself to remain calm. Realizing that

he had no choice but admit the truth, he said, "I am a Jew, general, sir, and these are the Chanukah flames of my menorah."

"And what is Hanukah?" the general inquired.

In halting tones, the soldier began to relay the story of Chanukah, beginning with the tyrannous rule of the Greeks. He described how a family of Jews, the *Maccabim*, stood up against the attacks on their religious rights, forming a tiny army with the goal of overthrowing Greek rule and restoring the rightful governance of the Jews to the Jewish people.

General Washington listened raptly, identifying with the plight of the Jews in that age. He saw himself as a Maccabee, using courage and idealism to liberate the colonists from the British imperialists.

"The Greeks had a mighty and well-trained army," the Jewish soldier explained. "The power of their might, combined with their superior weapons and war elephants, and coupled by their sheer numbers, made them an unbeatable force. The Maccabee army, by contrast, was comprised of a tiny group of idealistic scholars with no fighting experience. Their chances were virtually none."

Washington's eyes lit up as the soldier described the wondrous miracle that Hashem performed for the Jews. Against all odds, the tiny Maccabee army vanquished the mighty Greek battalions, liberating their country. They had been fighting for the truth, and the truth prevailed. They emerged victorious.

"General, sir," the soldier concluded earnestly, seeing a slight mist forming at the corners of Washington's eyes. "The Chanukah miracle is a lesson for us all. There is a G-d in Heaven who is

watching us and taking care of us, and if we are worthy of it, will provide us with miracles, too.

"The Jewish people are like this tiny flame here, a miniscule force against the heavy darkness of night. Nation after nation has risen and tried to slaughter us, but we remain, flickering and quivering, but very much aflame. As the nations fade, one by one, into history, the Jews continue to prevail.

"General, we too, have a small army, and we are up against the mighty British. I pray for your success every day, General Washington. We mustn't forget that although our situation appears hopeless, G-d has the ability to change things around. He can perform a miracle."

General Washington tore his gaze away from the riveting flame and shook the soldier's hand. It was clear that their conversation had made a deep impression on him. "Thank you for your inspirational words," he said. "I know that Jews possess prophets, who speak the wisdom of G-d. I am sure that you are such a prophet, and your words have given me the confidence that we will win this war. Thank you for your words and thank you for your prayers."

With those words, General Washington walked away, leaving the Jewish soldier alone with his menorah.

A few days later, the Continental Army was victorious in the battle of Valley Forge, lifting the morale of the soldiers and completely turning the tide of the war. Many battles and bloody deaths later, the colonists declared victory over the British, and General Washington was elected to serve as the first president of the newly minted United States of America.

With the war over, the Jewish soldier returned to a civilian life, settling into an apartment on

Broom Street in New York's Lower East Side. Slowly, he created a life for himself, finding a job and making new friends. Unmarried, and without any family in America, he led a lonely existence, but he was grateful to be warm, safe, and sated.

When Chanukah rolled around, he placed his brass menorah on the window ledge and lit the first flame. Singing softly to himself, he tried to picture his parents' home and the memorable times he had shared with his family.

A sudden knock on the door interrupted his thoughts. Hurrying to open it, he was shocked to see President Washington on his doorstep. He tried to speak but found he couldn't. Not a single sound emerged from his dumbstruck throat.

"Can I come in?" the president asked.

Wordless, the Jew stepped aside to let the president in. His small studio apartment looked just like one would expect the quarters of a bachelor to appear, with no one to take care of it. There were objects and garbage strewn about messily, with no rhyme or reason. Wishing the mess would disappear, the former soldier led the president inside.

George Washington headed straight for the window and settled himself in front of the lit menorah. "I came to tell you thank you," he told the dumbfounded Jew. "I will never forget the words of courage and inspiration that you told me that night. I know that we only won the war thanks to people like you, who stick up for what is right and true. I know that your prayers accomplished much on High, and I am certain that they were instrumental in our victory."

The Jew still hadn't found his tongue, so the president continued. "In another few months, there will be a ceremony, where we will be distributing medals to the various war heroes.

There will be a celebration, and speeches, and we will award medals to those with the most monumental contributions to our success.

"I have singled you out, however, to personally visit and present you with this token of gratitude from the American people. I want you to receive this, not through an official ceremony, but as a personal gift from my heart to yours."

The president stood up abruptly, and the Jew followed suit. With a flourish, Washington presented him with a golden medal on a chain. It read, 'A token of thanks for the light of your candles' and was signed 'George Washington'. A small picture of a menorah accompanied the words.

Still speechless, the Jew acknowledged his gratitude with another firm handshake, and then the president was gone.

For a long time, the former soldier continued to gaze at the single dancing flame on the small brass menorah given to him by his father. No matter how far away from home he was, the light of Chanukah would never be extinguished.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # A430

TORAS REB KALMAN HOTLINE

Vaadim & Shmussen given by **Reb Kalman Krohn zt"l** are now available by phone.

USA **732.913.5616** or **718.557.7711**
E.Y. **02.313.6038**

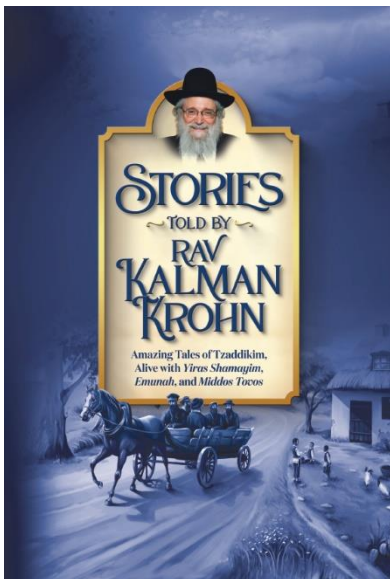
Option 1: Vaadim given in BMG
Option 2: Shmussen given in Adelpia
Option 3: Captivating stories taken from shiurim

To receive Vaadim by email or for questions and suggestions call/text 609.807.1783 or email torasrebkalman@gmail.com

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

Sponsored by:
Eli & Malky Friedman
Chatz & Leahle Schwab

Volume One of the
"Stories Told By Rav Kalman Krohn"
Book Series is now available at your local
Judaica Store.



Coming Soon!

Volume Two

of the
"Stories Told By Rav Kalman Krohn" Book Series
is at the proofreader and scheduled to be released for
Pesach 2024!
Dedication opportunities are now available!

Coming Soon!

"ספר תורת רב קלמן"

וועדים ש'נאמרו בישיבת אדלפיה

בענין פסח

Is scheduled to be released for Pesach 2024!
Dedication opportunities are now available

Contact:
torasrebkalman@gmail.com
732-730-9337