

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Whispers of Faith Part I

The expulsion of the Jews of Spain was a terrible mass tragedy in the history of Klal Yisrael. Thousands of Jews were forced to leave their homes and the country of their birth, to wander about the world, homeless and displaced. Thousands more were given an ultimatum: conversion or death, and they chose death – painful, torturous death at the stake – to reneging on their loyalty to Hashem.

Unfortunately, there were some who were not strong enough to give up their homes and their wealth, let alone their lives, for Hashem, and those Jews publically converted to Christianity.

Many of these Jews, however, continued leading Jewish lives in secret.

Our story takes place about thirty years after the Jews were expelled from Spain.

Mr. Bargulu is a clever man, a wise man, a man with a keen understanding of how the way of the world – and the people within it – works. A proper Spanish gentleman, he is tall and silver-haired, with a respectable real estate portfolio that is constantly being enhanced by new purchases and deals.

With his acute business sense, he easily picks out profitable properties that, with some small improvements, bring him significant returns. He is a man who doesn't just know his field, but knows it intimately, inside and out, and his success speaks for itself. His home is lavish, his coffers overflowing, his wife sparkling in jewels.

Mr. Bargulu's wisdom isn't limited to real estate. He is an expert at understanding how people think and what makes them tick. He can size up an individual's personality, character, and temperament just a few moments after meeting him. Indeed, the sprawling estate in a suburb adjacent to the Spanish capital, where he lives with his wife and children, is constantly humming with people who have come to consult with him about a wide variety of topics.

Mr. Bargulu has a reputation of giving wise, on-target advice that always benefits those who follow it, and in recent years, this reputation has reached the ears of some of the king's most influential advisors. Being an advisor to the king is not a simple task, since one misfired piece of advice can spell the end of one's life. At the same time, it is a job with tremendous potential, for if one offers wise advice that ultimately proves beneficial, the result will be a hefty promotion.

And so, more and more of the king's advisors have begun to turn to Mr. Bargulu for insight and direction before advising the king on a decision. With his clear mind, quick grasp, and level-headed thinking, Mr. Bargulu's advice proves successful time and again.

It doesn't take long for the king to discover that his advisors are using their own advisor, a real estate magnate named Mr. Bargulu. Intrigued, he sends his guards to bring Mr. Bargulu to the palace so that he can meet him personally. *Why should I ask for advice from my advisors, only to have them give me the advice of Mr. Bargulu?* he thinks as he waits for the guards to return. *It makes more sense for me to hire him myself, so that I can ask for his advice directly.*

When the guards knock on Mr. Bargulu's door, his face registers surprise. Despite his brilliance, or perhaps because of it, he is not a man who desires honor. He is content to sit at home and conduct his business quietly, and he is happy to assist those who come to him for advice, but a summon from the king is not something he was looking for. However, the king is the king, and there is no way that he, a private citizen, can defy the king's order. And so, he waves goodbye to his wife and children and accompanies the guards back to the palace.

The palace, from the inside, is just as splendid as he'd imagined. Through every hallway and room he is led through, he finds himself surrounded by gilded pillars and gleaming marble, the tiny rainbows of what must be thousands of crystals winking down at him from the massive chandeliers. His own luxurious home is like a pauper's hut compared to the king's extravagant living quarters.

The guard leads him to the king's antechamber, where he tentatively seats himself and waits to be

called in. He can hear his heart beating against his chest. Other than glimpses from afar at public ceremonies and parades, he has never met the king before, certainly not exchanged words with him, and he commands himself to take calming breaths as he waits for what seems like an eternity.

Finally, after an endlessly long moment that could not have been more than a minute or two in reality, a uniformed servant ushers him into the king's chamber, where the king is seated on the throne, his back erect, his lips curved in a half-smile.

At his left sits a man with dark robes, a shaven head, and a long, flowing beard. A bejeweled symbol peeks out from beneath his dark beard, cementing his identity as a priest, and not just any priest, but Father Miguel, one of the highest-ranking religious figures in Spain. Though Mr. Bargulu has never met the priest personally, he has dealt with some of the Father Miguel's underlings when they'd come to him, on the priest's behalf, for advice on one matter or the other.

Mr. Bargulu bows before the king, overcome with awe at the majesty, the royalty, the aura surrounding the monarch.

"Rise, and come closer," the king says in a friendly voice. He takes Mr. Bargulu's hand in his own. "Sit beside me."

With slightly tremulous knees, Mr. Bargulu obeys, his hand still warm from the king's touch. From the king's other side, the priest throws him a smile and then he smiles back. He does not dare speak and sits silently, waiting for the king to continue.

"I have heard many wonderful things about you," the king says, meeting his eyes. "My advisors say

that you are a brilliant man with exceptional wisdom.” He falls silent, gazing at his guest expectantly.

Mr. Bargulu inclines his head. “I thank Your Majesty for the compliment,” he says humbly. “I don’t consider myself a brilliant person; I am a simple man who just tries to do the right thing.”

“That’s precisely the problem,” the king replies, clasping his fingers on his lap. “Many of us have difficulty understanding just what the right thing is. My men seem to think that you have an exceptional grasp of how things work.”

“I try to think through things thoroughly,” Mr. Bargulu murmurs. “My mind works quickly, and I try to think as broadly and as far as I can. I suppose I have good focus as well, which allows me not to get distracted and reach a quick, clear decision.”

The king looks at Father Miguel, who nods, before turning his gaze back to Mr. Bargulu. “Very well,” he says. “Perhaps we can discuss a specific issue that I’ve been having in the government. I’d like to hear your opinion on the matter.” In a few succinct sentences, he describes the question, with the priest throwing in a comment or two.

Mr. Bargulu purses his lips. “What are the various solutions Your Majesty is considering?” he wants to know.

The king proceeds to list the different avenues he could take as Mr. Bargulu’s mind begins to churn. By the time the king is finished speaking, Mr. Bargulu already knows the answer. He explains his thought process to the king, who is astonished at his clarity and the swiftness of his mind. There is no doubt that Mr. Bargulu’s response is the only perfect solution.

“Tell me,” the king says. “What field of business are you in?”

“I’m in real estate,” Mr. Bargulu responds. “I buy and sell properties.”

“And consulting,” Father Miguel adds. “He’s a sought-after consultant, for all different issues, Your Majesty.”

“I can certainly see why,” the king says, offering a smile. “I would be glad to have you come back tomorrow if that is alright with you.”

“Certainly, Your Majesty,” Mr. Bargulu replies. Truthfully, he does not have a choice. He can’t refuse the king. He bows. “It would be my honor to do so.”

The following morning, Mr. Bargulu awakens just as the beginning rays of sunlight begin to penetrate his window. He freshens up and dresses before heading down to the dining room. The aroma of freshly baked bread wafts down the hallway from the kitchen, greeting him tantalizingly.

But before he can even be served his breakfast, his loyal butler enters the dining room. “Sir,” he says respectfully. “There are members of the royal guard at the door, sir. They are here to bring you to the palace.”

Mr. Bargulu drops his napkin onto the table. “So early!” he exclaims incredulously, but rises from his seat and follows the butler to the front door. He can’t say he’s pleased to have been singled out by the king, but there is nothing he can do about it. He instructs the butler to inform his wife about his whereabouts, and joins the guards outside. His stomach is rumbling slightly, but he ignores it. Now is not the time to think about breakfast.

This time, he is not brought to the king's antechamber but directly into the large room that a servant calls a "small dining hall." The king is already seated at the table, his personal servant standing behind his chair. There is only one other place setting at the table. Mr. Bargulu gulps.

"Take a seat, my dear Mr. Bargulu," the king calls. "I am sorry that I called you here so early, but there is much to discuss and the day is short. Am I correct in surmising that you have not yet eaten?"

"You are correct, Your Majesty."

"Excellent." The king looks pleased. "We will dine together."

This is an unprecedented honor. Rarely does anyone dine with the king, and Mr. Bargulu is not even a member of the nobility or a royal advisor. "I thank Your Majesty for the kindness he is showing his humble servant," he says.

Over breakfast, the king engages his guest in complex discussion and is once again astounded by the depths of the man's brilliance. When they finished eating, the king and Mr. Bargulu walk together to the king's workroom, where they continue their conversation. Never has the king reached decisions so quickly, and with such clarity and confidence. He continues to speak with his guest for hours, many hours, about all the problems that are troubling him, and Mr. Bargulu never fails to provide him with a clever solution.

Night falls, and the king finally wraps up their conversation. "I have never met anyone quite like you," he confides. "I have just one request of you. I want you to join my team of advisors."

Mr. Bargulu takes a moment to respond. When he speaks, his voice is low and clear. "Your Majesty, while I am wholly prepared to give everything

that I can for the sake of the kingdom, I am just a simple man with common blood. I am undeserving of such an exalted role."

"You are deserving by nature of your mind," the king tells him. "I have never seen such clarity of thought in a human being. Spain needs you! Of course, as my advisor, you will receive a large salary. Do you agree to join my staff?"

There is nothing Mr. Bargulu could say other than, "I thank Your Majesty for the honor. I would be honored to become a royal advisor." He quashes his true feelings and says his lines as he is supposed to. "Would the king agree for me to sleep at home with my family and come to the palace during the day?"

The king nods. "Very well. You may return home now, and I will send for you in the morning."

The king's choice turns out to be a wise one. Under Mr. Bargulu's capable guidance, the country flourishes like it has never before. The economy is prospering, the negotiations with allies and enemies are favorable, and the citizens are grateful. The king cannot stop blessing his newest but most trusted advisor for the success he has brought to Spain.

While the king could not be happier, the same cannot be said of Mr. Bargulu. Working as an advisor to the king affords him tremendous honor, as well as money, but it a grueling job that demands his full attention. His workday begins early in the morning and ends late at night, and his mind must be fully alert the entire time to service the king.

Additionally, the taxing schedule is tearing him away from his family. He is home for just a few hours at night, but after a full day of working, he is unable to do anything else but collapse into bed in exhaustion. He barely gets to see his wife and

never sees his children. The position of honor is beginning to feel like a prison sentence; the palace a golden cage.

But although Mr. Bargulu wishes he could reclaim his previous life, the choice is not his to make. He belongs to the king now, and his opinions and desires are enslaved together with him.

The years pass in a haze of mental effort and exhaustion combined with honor, success, and a deep sense of achievement. Mr. Bargulu's talents are being fully maximized in his service of the king and Spain, and by the time the tenth anniversary of his royal service rolls around, he can scarcely recall his days as an ordinary civilian. The camaraderie and family dinners, the seaside vacations with his wife and fishing trips with his sons are warm but distant memories. From time to time, he heaves a sigh of yearning, but most of his thoughts are completely occupied with governmental matters.

One morning, Mr. Bargulu opens his eyes to feel the soft patting of his personal servant's hand. "Sir," the servant murmurs, his measured voice soothing to his master's ear. "Sir, the king is expecting Your Excellency this morning, as usual. Does Your Excellency feel ready to get up?"

It feels as though a millstone is resting upon his head. Mr. Bargulu sits up slowly as a coughing spasm rocks his body. "I don't feel too great," he admits. Catching sight of the sunshine warming the window, he gasps, "What time is it? I'm usually up at dawn!"

"Your Excellency is tired," the servant says, handing him a basin of water. "And, if I may, rundown as well. Your Excellency works much too hard. It isn't good for your health!"

"If my boss was anyone other than His Majesty, I'd stay in bed now," Mr. Bargulu sighs. "But the kingdom needs me, and I must do my duty."

His wife enters the room. "Perhaps you can speak to the king and explain that you need a lighter schedule," she suggests, a hopeful expression on her face. "You must rest and recover from this nasty cold of yours. It will not help the kingdom if you end up working yourself to death."

"A vacation would do so much for Your Excellency," the servant adds, as he walks to the door carrying the basin. "Someplace pleasant and sunny and relaxing, even for just a few days."

"I'll speak to the king about it," Mr. Bargulu promises. "But now, I really must hurry. I'm late enough already."

"Are you sure you should be going to the palace today?" his wife queries, studying his face. "You're looking a little gray."

"Yes, I really must get going," he replies, resolving not to tell her about the pounding of his head. He stifles a cough until she leaves the room. When he's sure she's gone, he lets it out, a deep hacking cough that doesn't sound good even to his own ears.

Later, after a long strategy session with some of Spain's greatest generals, he turns to the king and gives voice to his concerns. "I don't have the strength I used to," he says quietly. "It seems that the long and difficult schedule is becoming too much for my body to handle. Would His Majesty grant his humble servant just a few days reprieve, or perhaps a few hours each week? I will gladly serve His Majesty with my last breaths, but I don't feel capable of working for so many hours seven days a week without even the slightest break."

“My dear Bargulu,” the king says fondly, reaching out and lifting his advisor’s chin so that they are eye level. “How I long to grant my wisest advisor the time and space to relax! However, I can’t afford to spare you for even a few hours! The kingdom needs you; there is simply no one who can step into your shoes. And so, despite my longing to grant your wish and make you happy, I’m afraid I must turn you down.”

Mr. Bargulu swallows. “I understand, and it is my honor to fulfill Your Majesty’s wishes.” A hacking cough interrupts his next thought, and the king waits patiently until he can speak again. “I am not feeling so well, however.”

“I may not be allowing you to take a holiday, but I will take care of you,” the king assures him. “In fact, I will send for the royal physician to examine you immediately. We will get you the proper medicines to chase away that horrific cough of yours, and in no time, you’ll be good as new.”

Mr. Bargulu is not about to contradict the king, so he thanks him and keeps his thoughts to himself, and when the royal physician hands him a potion that he insists will be a miracle cure, he drinks it dutifully. Yet as the days pass, he does not find himself getting stronger; instead, he feels his strength ebbing more and more.

Just a few short weeks after this conversation with the king, Mr. Bargulu is in middle of working with the tax minister on a financial calculation when suddenly, without warning, he crumples down in his chair. The tax minister’s eyes widen in alarm. He kicks back his chair and flings open the door. “Help! HELP!” he shouts down the wide corridor.

To be continued...

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!
This story is taken from tape # 294

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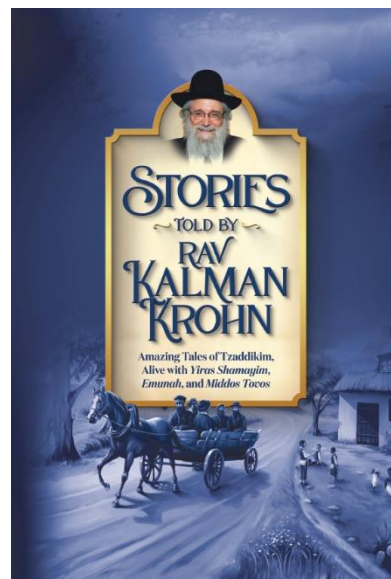
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סיפורי צדיקים

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

Whispers of Faith Part II

Recap: About thirty years after the expulsion of all Jews from Spain, a brilliant man named Mr. Bargulu is appointed as a royal advisor to the king. He works almost round the clock for ten years, and although he begs the king for some reprieve, he is too important to Spain for the king to give him time off. One day, he collapses during a meeting at the palace.

The tax minister's eyes widen in alarm. He kicks back his chair and flings open the door. "Help! HELP!" he shouts down the wide corridor.

His words bounce off the marble walls, echoing over and over. He doesn't wait to see if someone has heard him; there's no time to waste. He gently eases Mr. Bargulu onto the floor and grabs his wrist, checking for a pulse. There is a faint, though very faint, ticking.

"What happened?" Three guards burst into the room, swords drawn. The tax minister quickly appraises them of the situation and one by one, each slips his sword back into his sheath. The guard closest to the door turns on his heel and leaves the room at a rapid clip, presumably to call a doctor. The other two drop to the floor beside Mr. Bargulu and work on trying to revive him.

Less than an hour later, Mr. Bargulu is laying on a comfortable bed in the palace, sleeping but conscious. The doctor throws him a glance, notes with satisfaction that his chest is rising and falling rhythmically, and turns back to the king. "Chronic overwork, Your Majesty," he explains. "His body cannot handle so much exhaustion and stress, and it rebelled."

The king's face is creased with concern. "How much longer will it take until he gets better?"

"That depends on what Your Majesty means by 'better'," the doctor says softly. "I estimate he'll be back on his feet in a few days, at most. But if by 'better', Your Majesty means, 'ready and able to resume all of his duties', I'm afraid that might never happen. His body is not as strong as it once was, Your Majesty. He will need a lighter schedule if we don't want this to happen again."

The king nods, and in truth, he fully intends to comply with the doctor's recommendation. He recognizes the truth of the doctor's words, and understood that by not allowing Mr. Bargulu to take things a little easier, he is risking losing his most trusted advisor completely. There is no

choice but to offer him some leeway, some hours of reprieve, and the king just has to get used to it.

But when Mr. Bargulu returns to his duties four days later, however, all the king's good intentions fly out the window. It's not that he has a change of heart; he really does want to give his advisor some free time. But when push comes to shove, when decisions need to be made and solutions need to be found, there is no one in the cabinet quite as capable as Mr. Bargulu, and so he finds himself pushing off his advisor's free time just another few hours, then days, then weeks.

In the meantime, Mr. Bargulu finds himself working just as long and as hard as before, and it doesn't take more than three months for his body to protest again. Loudly.

Once again, the king is standing opposite the doctor, an expression of concern written on his face. Once again, the form of a sleeping Mr. Bargulu is laying in a bed nearby. Once again, the doctor looks grim. "I'm afraid the prognosis is not good, Your Majesty."

The king blanches. "Will he make it?"

A sigh emerges from the doctor's throat. He seems to be considering how to answer. "I hope so," he finally replies. "But there appears to be a significant chance that he may not."

"But he must!" The cry is pained, pleading. "Spare no expense, doctor. He must get well."

"I will do everything that is humanely possible," the doctor pledges. "But perhaps it would be wise for Your Majesty to prepare for every eventuality."

"I'll be back tomorrow morning," the king says in a broken voice. "Please send for me immediately if he wakes before then."

"Certainly, Sire."

When Mr. Bargulu awakens, however, it becomes clear that his condition has deteriorated to the point where he no longer recognizes the doctor, nor the king when he comes again to visit. He is so weak that he can barely lift his head off his pillow, and he needs to be spoon-fed.

As the days march by, he grows progressively weaker. Soon, he can barely swallow and spends most of the day sleeping. Even when he is awake, he remains in the same prone position, looking more dead than alive. Then he falls into an unconscious state and is completely unresponsive. His chest still rises and falls, but the doctor knows that it is a matter of hours before his heart ceases to beat.

His wife and children are summoned to the palace to bid him goodbye. They stand around his bedside, gazing at the shadow of the man they'd known. His face is gaunt, his hands almost translucent. They don't know if he can hear them, if he can sense their presence, and they whisper their goodbyes through clogged throats.

The doctor checks his pulse and feels his temperature. Death seems imminent. As the family files solemnly out of the room, he sends for Father Miguel to perform his rituals on the dying man. It is the same priest who had been present at Mr. Bargulu's first meeting with the king, with the same black robes and the same serious expression. Only his beard is no longer the same; it has since taken on a noble shade of grey. He enters the room, his back erect as ever, a small pail of water in his hands.

"It's almost over," the doctor says in a low voice. "What a special man."

"A wise man," the priest agrees, and a sigh escapes from inside of him. As the kingdom's

foremost religious leader, he had worked closely with Mr. Bargulu on a variety of matters. “It’s hard to see him like this. Knowing him in his zenith, who would have imagined it would come to this?”

“No one escapes death in the end,” the doctor remarks, somewhat darkly, from the doorway. “I’ll be in the next room if you need me.” He pulls the door gently shut behind him.

Other than the unconscious Mr. Bargulu and Father Miguel, the room is empty. The priest pulls a chair closer to the dying man’s bedside and sits down, placing the pail of water on a nearby surface. He gazes sadly at the narrow, pale figure on the bed, recalling the ten years they’d worked together. Then, collecting himself, he moves on to the reason he’s come.

He leans forward, bringing his face mere inches away from Mr. Bargulu’s motionless one. “Mr. Bargulu,” he says softly, in a calming, almost hypnotic voice. “You have lived for sixty years, a long and fulfilling lifetime during which I am sure you committed countless sins.”

The figure on the bed, as expected, does not respond, so Father Miguel continues. “If you confess now, you will be forgiven for your sins. I will sprinkle the holy water on you, and your soul, when it departs, will soar straight up to Heaven.”

Still, no reaction. Mr. Bargulu, though he hears every word, is in a semi-dead state, and he is in no position to fulfill the priest’s directive. Luckily, the clergyman recognizes the problem. “I understand that you can’t speak, Mr. Bargulu, but I don’t want a good man such as yourself to die without repenting. I will confess for you.”

He stands up and, bending over the bed, begins to confess in the dying man’s name. Then he lifts the

pail and sprinkles some of the water on Mr. Bargulu.

Father Miguel takes a step back. It looks like this is the end. He looks left, then right, then back at Mr. Bargulu. “*Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad!*” He waits a beat. “*Baruch shem k’vod malchuso l’olam va’ed.*”

If the walls would have eyebrows, they would have been rising in shock. If the bed would have a mouth, it would be crying out in surprise. If the pail of water would have a mind, it would have been churning in confusion. A priest? *Shema Yisrael?*

But none of these have any human characteristic, and there is no one else present that can question the strange occurrence. In the silence that fills the room, Father Miguel picks up his pail and walks out.

He pokes his head into the room where the doctor is waiting and nods at the medical man. “I’m done,” he announces. “He’s not going to live much longer, but at least he’ll go to Heaven in one piece.” That said, he gives a little wave and heads briskly down the corridor. This task is complete, but there is more work to be done.

The doctor rises from his chair and slips back to the dying man’s room to be with him as his soul leaves his body. There is something so conclusive, so final about a person’s last moments on earth, that it never fails to give the doctor tremors. He perches tentatively on the chair the priest has recently vacated and observes Mr. Bargulu’s shallow breathing, waiting for the moment when his lungs will give out and his heart will rest.

As he sat there, he suddenly noticed that the patient on the bed was sweating profusely. Although Mr. Bargulu hadn’t drunk much in days,

beads of sweat began forming on his forehead, his cheeks, his neck, down to his feet. The doctor stared in amazement. Was the crisis averted? Had the dying man truly triumphed over death?

He pinches himself, unsure if he is imagining things. But no, it is not an illusion. Mr. Bargulu is still sweating like a freshly peeled zucchini, and his bedsheets are more than just a little damp. Two medical aides join the doctor in the room, and they, too, gape openmouthed at the phenomenon.

“Don’t undercover him,” the doctor cautions. “He looks like he might be getting over the crisis, but we are not on safe shores yet. He’s sweating so badly now that if any cold air comes in, that alone could be enough to cause his death.”

The next few hours are critical, but to the doctor’s amazement, Mr. Bargulu pulls through. In the morning, the man who was already given up as dead opens his eyes. His lips part weakly and he mouths soundlessly, “P-p-please... water.”

The doctor stifles an urge to cry out. He forces himself to speak softly, so as not to startle his patient. “Of course,” he says as calmly as he can manage. One of the aides fills a cup with water and hands it to the doctor along with a spoon for feeding.

Ever so slowly, Mr. Bargulu swallows a spoonful of water, then another. The effort is enormous, and after just two spoons he closes his eyes, thoroughly spent.

“Send a message to the king,” the doctor instructs the guard posted nearby in the corridor outside the sickroom. “The crisis was averted. Mr. Bargulu has awoken.”

“At once, sir,” the guard salutes.

“And then a message to the kitchen,” the doctor calls after the guard’s retreating back. “We need soup. Hot, nourishing soup.”

“Yes, sir!”

“What about a message to his family, sir?” one of the aides suggests.

“Yes, I forgot about that,” the doctor agrees, trying to read Mr. Bargulu’s temperature with his hand. “Please take care of arranging that.”

The following morning, Mr. Bargulu feels strong enough to sit up slightly, propped by pillows. The doctor is seated beside him, feeding him a thick broth, when the king suddenly appears in the doorway. He is flanked by his ever-present security detail, his features weary and haggard. The weight of the kingdom, it seems, borne without Mr. Bargulu’s support, is difficult for him.

“My dear Mr. Bargulu!” the king exclaims, his face lighting up as he catches sight of the man on the bed.

The doctor, startled by his sudden appearance, hastily puts down the bowl of soup and bows. Mr. Bargulu, stuck in bed, suffices with bowing his head. The king ignores the doctor’s gesture; his eyes are focused only on his devoted advisor.

“Your Majesty,” Mr. Bargulu says, his voice low and weak.

A relieved smile stretches across the king’s face. It’s been so long since his advisor has recognized him! What a miracle! “I was so happy to hear that you are recovering,” he says warmly, sitting down beside the bed. “I couldn’t bear the thought of losing someone as precious as you.”

“I thank Your Majesty for the kind words,” Mr. Bargulu whispers hoarsely. “I’m grateful to be alive.”

“You’re a real trooper,” the king comments. “It’s truly a miracle that you’re alive.”

“I am forever indebted to Your Majesty for the excellent medical care I received,” Mr. Bargulu says, each word straining him more than the last. “I am sure that I would not have recovered without the doctors Your Majesty provided for me.”

“Don’t talk if it’s hard for you,” the king tells him. “I want you to rest, so that you can recover properly. I’ll try and come visit you again tomorrow.”

“Thank you,” Mr. Bargulu whispers again.

Over the next few weeks, Mr. Bargulu continues to recover rapidly. He progresses from sitting on his own to eating independently to learning how to walk again. Each small but successful milestone is applauded by his dedicated doctors and, from further away, the king.

It takes time for Mr. Bargulu to fully regain all his previous capabilities, but when he does, there is no one more grateful than the king of Spain. When the doctor finally pronounces Mr. Bargulu fully healthy, albeit while taking strong precautionary measures, such as not taxing himself, the king sends for his advisor to appear before him.

“Your Majesty,” Mr. Bargulu says once the formalities are over and he is seated in his former chair beside the king’s. “I must thank you once again, from the bottom of my heart, for the medical care and medicines Your Majesty has arranged for me during my illness. It is unlikely that I would be sitting here now if not for the

tremendous kindness Your Majesty has shown me.”

“You’ve done more for this kingdom than any other member of the cabinet,” the king says warmly. “If anyone deserved it, it was you.”

“Still, I am forever grateful,” Mr. Bargulu reiterates. He opens his mouth as if to continue speaking, but then seems to think the better of it. He remains silent.

“Speak,” the king orders. “It seems to me that there is something on your mind.”

“I want nothing more than to continue serving Your Majesty for many, many more years,” Mr. Bargulu says quietly. “However, desire alone is not enough to keep my worn body running. I beg Your Majesty to relieve me of my taxing schedule.”

“My dear advisor, no one knows more than I how much I need you,” the king responds softly. He takes Mr. Bargulu’s hand. “I am the one who pushed you too far, and I realize now what a mistake that was. What kind of schedule do you propose?”

“With Your Majesty’s permission, I would like to cut back to working only once a week,” Mr. Bargulu says carefully. “Perhaps some of the other members of the cabinet can work out the various angles to every issue prior to our discussing them. With all the options sorted out beforehand, it will take much quicker for me to make decisions, and in that way, I’ll have time to fit everything in to one day per week.”

The king purses his lips, picturing the days when Mr. Bargulu had his finger on the pulse of every single issue pertaining to the government. What successful times those were! Then he remembers the weeks of his wise advisor’s illness, and the

months of his subsequent recovery. In his absence, economic growth was sluggish and all the government wheels took longer to turn.

“Granted,” the king says after a long, pensive moment. “We’ll do as you say. The other advisors will prepare as much background information as possible about every matter that needs your wisdom and input, and you will work only once a week.”

Mr. Bargulu sighs with relief. “I can’t thank Your Majesty enough,” he exclaims. Truthfully, he’d been worried that his request would be turned down.

“But don’t forget to rest and relax,” the king reminds him. “Take care of yourself, for the kingdom’s sake.”

They spend the rest of the day engrossed in discussion about various matters that had occurred during the previous months. The mental effort is straining. But when Mr. Bargulu returns home that evening, he knows that he does not need to be back in the palace for a full week, and that thought alone rejuvenates him.

Another two week pass in this manner. Mr. Bargulu spends one full day in the palace, and then enjoys a restful week at home, uninterrupted by a summons from the king.

One day, Mr. Bargulu asks a servant to send for Father Miguel. The servant nods; back before Mr. Bargulu became ill, visiting priests were a common sight around the estate. He hurries to perform his master’s bidding and sets up a meeting with the priest to take place in two days’ time.

“I would like to thank you for being with me in my near-final moments,” Mr. Bargulu tells the priest when they are seated, face to face. Other

than the two of them, the room is empty. “I seem to recall that although I was unable to confess, you did so for me so that my soul would merit to ascend to Heaven. I thank you, Father.”

Father Miguel feels his stomach drop. He had never expected Mr. Bargulu to recover, let alone remember that he had been with him. “This is my job,” he says, trying to sound magnanimous instead of terrified. “It is my pleasure.”

Then his worst nightmare comes true.

To be continued...

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape # 294

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Whispers of Faith Part III

Recap: At the deathbed of Mr. Bargulu, the king of Spain's foremost adviser, the attending priest, who does not expect the unconscious Mr. Bargulu to recover, murmurs Shema Yisrael. Mr. Bargulu does recover, however, and he summons the priest to his home.

"I seem to remember that after you confessed on my behalf, you murmured some words," Mr. Bargulu continues. His tone is flat, not betraying his thoughts, and Father Miguel feels his stomach drop to his toes.

"Oh?" the priest asks, trying to sound indifferent. His mind grasps desperately at thin wisps of hope. Perhaps Mr. Bargulu doesn't understand what he'd heard in his unconscious state. Perhaps he wants clarification, in which case the priest is glad to invent some sort of explanation.

To his dismay, however, Mr. Bargulu seems to have understood what he had heard. Perfectly. "*You said Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad,*" the king's foremost advisor says, in the same even tone. "And then after that you said *Baruch shem k'vod malchuso l'olam va'ed*. Am I correct? Were those the words you said?"

The color drains from Father Miguel's face. There is no use denying it; Mr. Bargulu is too smart, too sharp to be fooled. He licks his dry lips, but they remain just as dry as before. When he opens his mouth, he finds himself incapable of speech.

Mr. Bargulu notes his reaction through narrowed eyes. "Why are you so pale?" he demands.

The priest swallows hard, his tongue sticking in his mouth, trying to formulate a response. What can he say? How can he possibly explain himself?

"I look at you, and I feel that you are a secret Jew," Mr. Bargulu says suddenly. "How else would you know that phrase, and why did you decide to say it? Isn't it a phrase that Jews recite before they die?"

"I-I-I," Father Miguel stammers, his teeth chattering in rhythm with his shaking knees.

Mr. Bargulu rises. According to his doctor, he is not allowed to get excited, but he cannot stop himself. He regards the priest with unmasked anger and a touch of disbelief. "You!" he cries. "You... you! How *could* you? You are a traitor, a traitor to Christianity and a traitor to Spain! I trusted you. The king trusted you. The kingdom

trusted you! You are the highest clergyman in the land, a secret Jew! Even death is not enough of a punishment for you!”

The priest continues to face him silently, not uttering a word. To Mr. Bargulu, his silence is incriminating enough. He shakes his head disbelievingly and collapses back into his chair, suddenly spent. He feels old, too old. This conversation is not good for his recovering health.

“You really do deserve to be killed, in a nice public spectacle,” Mr. Bargulu says in a calmer voice, feeling his heartrate slow to normal levels. “But I am a nice man, and I believe in second chances. I am willing to keep this between us, willing to leave the Inquisition out of this, on one condition.”

The priest, still completely silent, waits for him to continue.

“I want you to come with me, now, to the king, and confess what I just discovered,” Mr. Bargulu declares. “I want you to denounce your Judaism in front of the king and embrace Christianity completely, wholeheartedly this time. You’ll kiss the cross and pledge to be a loyal Christian, and then you will be forgiven. If you are unwilling to do this, however, there is no way I can overlook this discovery of mine. Your fate will be death, a painful and torturous death.”

From deep within, Father Miguel finds the courage to respond. When he speaks, his voice is clear and proud, almost defiant. “There’s nothing to discuss,” he intones firmly. “You are correct; I am a Jew. If you’d like, you can kill me like you killed the rest of my brethren, but I refuse to denounce my heritage.”

His words seem to have infuriated Mr. Bargulu, who leaps to his feet in one swift motion. “Foolish

man! Do you realize what sort of fate awaits you? Torture! Unspeakable torture followed by death!”

But Father Miguel returns his stare with a clear, unapologetic gaze. “If that’s what it takes for me to die as a Jew, it’s worth it.”

“Stand up,” Mr. Bargulu demands gruffly.

The priest rises slowly. He does not regret his decision, but neither is he in a hurry to meet his death. Chin up, back erect, he faces the king’s advisor.

Mr. Bargulu reaches out to grab him, and to Father Miguel’s utter astonishment, pulls him into a hug. “I, too, am a Jew,” he whispers into the priest’s ear, so quietly that Father Miguel is unsure if he is imaging it. He pulls back and searches Mr. Bargulu’s face, his expression incredulous.

But Mr. Bargulu just nods. There are tears glistening in the corners of his eyes. “Yes,” he whispers. “You heard me right. I, too, am a Jew.”

And suddenly, they are both crying unabashedly as they fall back over each other in a tight embrace, an embrace between brothers. The tears, proud and unhindered, fall and fall until their inner wellsprings have run dry and neither of them have any tears left to cry.

“I don’t understand,” Father Miguel says at last, wiping his tears with an embroidered handkerchief. “If you are, as you say, truly a Jew, how did you end up in this position? You are the closest to the king, the closest in the entire Spain!”

“I can ask the same of you,” Mr. Bargulu replies, moving his chair closer to his guest’s so that they could continue their conversation in hushed tones. As far as he is aware, there is no one in the

vicinity, but as a Marrano, he knows that there is no such thing as being too careful.

“Yes, I know.” The priest heaves a weary sigh. “I would never have imagined that this is what would become of me. A priest? A member of the hated clergy that made the lives of my family miserable?”

“And not just any priest,” Mr. Bargulu reminds him. “You hold the highest office in the Church! If I’m the king’s right hand, then you are his left! I may have moved my practice of Judaism to the bowels of my cellar, but I certainly haven’t professed to lead a religion that isn’t mine!”

“I’ll tell you how it came about,” Father Miguel says, a melancholy shadow darkening his eyes. “It’s difficult for me to describe the chilling scenes I’ve witnessed. I was a young man at the time of the expulsion, and my eyes beheld more suffering than most people witness in a lifetime. I saw hundreds of my brethren burned at the stake. Hundreds!”

He takes a sip of water, and his host can see the way his hands tremble as they clutch his water glass. “I saw my parents tortured to death. I saw little, innocent children burned to a cinder. I saw my grandparents, my siblings, my neighbors murdered in the most gruesome ways imaginable. All these heroic Jews were offered an ultimatum: conversion to Christianity, or death. And with clear eyes brimming with *yiras shamayim*, they rightfully chose death.

“As my friends and family stood on the platform, beaten and bruised, awaiting their torturous death, they continued to affirm their loyalty to the One who had created them, to the One who continues to create, to orchestrate each and every moment of our lives. ‘*Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu*

Hashem echad!’ they cried as the flames licked their bodies and consumed them whole.”

Father Miguel stops abruptly, his breathing short and shallow. The memories are hard for him, and it takes him a few moments to collect himself before he can continue. “I heard those words, those timeless words of *Shema*, and I, too, was ready to give my life for Hashem. But then a sudden thought struck me.

“What about the thousands of Jews who were not strong enough to withstand the test of our generation? What about the thousands of Jews who took their *Yiddishkeit* underground? How would they die, with the mutterings of a priest? Would they have to forfeit the opportunity to declare their loyalty to Hashem prior to their deaths?”

The question hangs between them for a long moment before the priest speaks again. “I had no one to ask, no rabbinical figure to guide me, and so I was forced to make this decision alone. I don’t know if it was the correct thing, but I chose to follow the path of the other Marranos, keeping *Yiddishkeit* in secret, solely for the purpose of being able to say *Shema Yisrael* with Jews at their deathbeds.

“I stayed alive, living a double life, just for this purpose,” the priest continues, his fingers toying with the folds of his handkerchief. “In truth, I am ready to give up my life for Hashem, and so I am not afraid of being caught. I am here just to help my fellow brethren repent before their deaths, and whenever my time is up, I will proudly give up my life for Him, just as my parents and siblings did so many years ago.”

“But how do you know?” Mr. Bargulu asks. There are tens of questions dancing around his mind, and he struggles to ask the more important ones.

“How do you even know who is really Jewish and who is not?”

“I don’t know,” the priest admits. “That’s exactly why I became a priest. In my position, I am summoned to deathbeds all the time, and I utilize the opportunity, seconds before the patients pass away, to recite *Shema Yisrael* for them. Just in case they are a Jew, either a hidden Jew or a born Jew who denounced his heritage, I am able to assist their souls in returning, repenting, at the moment of death.”

“But... but...” His story is so unbelievable that it is taking time for Mr. Bargulu to digest it. “But you are so high-ranking! And look at you, you look like the real thing!”

Father Miguel glances down at his clerical robes in disgust. “I have no choice,” he says simply. “In order to accomplish my mission, I have no choice but to dress like this. Believe me, I did not want to rise in the ranks of the Church. I was quite content to operate at the lowest level of the clergy, fulfilling my mission with one death at a time. I was promoted, again and again, against my will, and I had no choice but to go along with it.”

“I know about that,” Mr. Bargulu says quietly. “About promotions and positions that one has no choice but to accept.”

“Yes,” the priest agrees. He has known Mr. Bargulu from before the very first interview he’d had with the king. He had been present when the king met Mr. Bargulu for the first time and witnessed, from a front row seat, how Mr. Bargulu was forced to leave his civilian life behind to completely devote himself to the king.

Mr. Bargulu inhales deeply. “I am from the second group you mentioned, the group of Jews who were unable to withstand the test and went underground with their Judaism instead of giving

up their lives. I was just a young boy at the time of the expulsion. My parents didn’t want to leave their wealth and property behind, to start over in a strange country as a refugee. And then, when it was too late to leave, they were afraid to die at the stake. Like you, we saw so many people being killed, but unlike you, this drove our fear instead of inspiring us.”

He pauses, and the priest nods encouragingly. Mr. Bargulu sighs. “I may be wise, but I am not strong,” he says, in a voice laced with shame. “My father made his choices, and I followed close behind, letting my fear of death dictate my lifestyle choices. Of course, I didn’t give up *Yiddishkeit*. I just relocated it to the cellar, where I donned *tefillin* each morning, koshered my meat and chicken, and observed Shabbos and *yom tov*.”

“You were able to keep up a double life even while working for the king?” the priest queries. He knows, more than anyone, about Mr. Bargulu’s intense work schedule in the palace before his illness.

His host looks down at the floor. “No,” he says quietly, his cheeks reddening. “I was able to keep the Torah in secret up until the king drafted me as an advisor. At that point, I lost all control over my life and my time. There wasn’t a minute for *davening*, for Shabbos, for *kashrus*. Whatever vestiges of my Judaism I managed to retain in the beginning all but disappeared.”

“And then you got sick,” the priest prompts.

“And then I got sick,” Mr. Bargulu continues. “I was but a hairsbreadth away from death. I laid in bed, unconscious, but I was able to hear every word that took place in the room. You came in at some point, and you began to recite Christian prayers with me. Each word was like a knife twisting in my heart. I knew that I was about to

die, and despite my intense regret for my choices, my actions were coming back to haunt me.

“I knew that a Jew is supposed to say other things at his deathbed, but I could not remember what they were. After so many years of being disconnected from *Yiddishkeit*, I could not recall the timeless words of *Shema*, which my mother had recited with me each night decades ago. How I longed for someone to say the words with me, to assist me in amending my folly. How I so wanted to declare my loyalty to the Only One Who was, is, and will always be.

“But instead, I had a priest at my bedside, you, and you were sprinkling me with impure water. Each drop was like an arrow to my soul. How I wished I could make you leave, but I was powerless to move or speak. My entire body was revolted by the water, by the words, and I hoped to die quickly just to be able to escape it.

“And then, before you left, you bent over me and whispered the words of *Shema Yisrael*. When I heard those words, my body relaxed. For the first time in many years, I felt at peace. I waited for death to come, but it didn't. Instead, I fell into a very deep sleep.

“I began to dream a disturbing dream, one in which I saw my grandfather. His face was radiant and holy, his beard long and white. He was holding a large flask of water in his hands. ‘My grandson,’ he said to me, his voice disapproving. ‘How could you have done this, grandson of mine? What have you done with your life? In a moment or two, you will be summoned before the heavenly court for a final accounting of your deeds. You did not withstand your most important *nisayon*! So many people gave their lives for Hashem, but you chose not to.’

“His voice was filled with such disappointment in me that I felt myself cringe with shame. ‘Rather than give up your life for Hashem, you decided to take your *Yiddishkeit* underground,’ Grandfather continued. ‘You had no right to do that! You were obligated to give up your life rather than to transgress one of the three cardinal sins. Now you are about to die, and what will be with you?’

“I listened to his words without responding. How could I respond? How could I refute his words, his words of truth? My grandfather's face was sad as he continued. ‘Your father, too, gave up his *Yiddishkeit*. What is left of him? A grave in a Christian cemetery! Oy, what will be left of my generations?’

“I had no answer for him. If only I could rectify my ways, but alas it was too late! I turned back to my grandfather to hear the rest of his words. ‘I went to the *beis din shel maalah* and begged them to give you another chance,’ Grandfather said. ‘I was granted permission to appear before you in a dream and warn you that this will be your final chance to do *teshuvah*. I want you to swear to me that you will repent fully, that you will return fully to Torah and that you will also bring your father's bones to *kever Yisrael*.’

“Overcome with emotion, I swore to do my grandfather's bidding. Grandfather smiled and reached into his flask of water. ‘I will now sprinkle you with this water, to wash off all the impurities that contaminate you,’ he said. And as soon as the water was sprinkled on me, I began to sweat and sweat. All the impurity inside me began to come out and when my body was finally rid of the contaminants, I woke up.”

Mr. Bargulu finishes speaking and the room is silent for a long moment, heavy with his revelation. Father Miguel, too overcome for

words, just gazes at his host and waits for him to continue.

“I promised my grandfather that I would repent,” Mr. Bargulu says at last. “Immediately after I woke up, I was too weak from my illness to follow through with my pledge, but over the past month, I have regained my strength. It is time for me to make good on my promise, and that is why I called you here. After you recited *Shema* with me, I knew you were a Jew, but I didn’t know if I could trust you fully. I called you here to test your conviction, and you passed the test.”

Father Miguel feels a surge of energy pulse through him. “Let’s escape together, me and you. We’ll figure out a way to outsmart the king and leave the country, and by the time he realizes what happened, we’ll be far away from the Inquisition’s grasp.

“I’m willing to do it,” Mr. Bargulu says immediately. “But we have to think of a plan that involves my family. I can’t abandon them here to a non-Jewish future.”

“Of course,” Father Miguel agrees. He is not a family man and can flee unencumbered, but he understands the importance of the entire Bargulu family joining them. “Mr. Bargulu, you are the wisest man in Spain. I’m sure you can think of some kind of plan...”

His host’s forehead is a mass of creases, a sure sign that he is deep in thought. When he looks up, there is a smile in his eyes. “I’ll tell the king that I made a vow to visit the Holy Land once I recover,” he says slowly. “I’ll explain the importance of having my family accompany me, due to my frail health. And surely I cannot leave Spain on a months-long trip on my own, without being accompanied by a priest, such as yourself.”

The priest nods. “I hope he will allow both of us to go,” he says with a small frown. “We both play significant roles in the running of the government.”

“With me, not so much anymore,” Mr. Bargulu reminds him. “I’m semi-retired, and he’s learning to manage without me. Besides, if he’s worried about losing me, he’ll feel more secure if you come along to make sure that I don’t just run off.”

Father Miguel still has a skeptical expression on his face, but he nods. “I’ll leave it up to you to discuss it with the king, then,” he says. “Send for me once you speak to the king.”

Just three days later, when Mr. Bargulu is in the palace for his weekly strategy session with the king’s other advisors, he catches an opportunity to speak to the king. They were alone in the strategy room after the others had left, wrapping up some final decisions, when the king veers the discussion toward a different topic.

“My dear Mr. Bargulu,” he says fondly. “You seem to be making a fine recovery. How are you feeling these days?”

“Much stronger,” Mr. Bargulu admits. “I feel better and better every day.”

“Excellent,” the king declares.

“I actually wanted to ask something of Your Majesty,” Mr. Bargulu says, seizing the opening to bring up his request. “During my illness, I made a vow to visit the Holy Land if I were to recover. With the king’s permission, I would like to fulfill my vow. Would Your Majesty be willing to spare me for a few months?”

The king gives a small frown, then a smile. “You know I can’t refuse you,” he says with a rueful chuckle. “The kingdom will suffer without you,

but it's a sacrifice we'll make willingly. Consider it a gift to repay your years of devoted service to Spain."

Mr. Bargulu feels a flutter of excitement within. He'd expected it to take longer before the king would give in, but the king has surprised him. "I thank Your Majesty for your generosity," he says. "I hope to secure passage on a ship leaving next week, for myself and my family. I was thinking that it would be fitting for me to sponsor the trip of a clergyman as well. I owe the Church a lot, after all, and in this small way, I can pay it back with a visit to the Holy Land."

"A clergyman's dream," the king agrees. "I'm sure any priest you offer would jump at the opportunity."

"With Your Majesty's permission, I would like to offer it to Father Miguel first," Mr. Bargulu says innocently. "I'm not sure he'll agree, but I think there is no clergyman in the kingdom worthier than him."

"More worthy, definitely not, but where will that leave me, without both of you?" the king asks in response, and for a heart-stopping moment, Mr. Bargulu is certain his request will be denied. Then the king adds, "However, I certainly do not want to take this opportunity from him. He, too, works very hard and could use a vacation."

"He was with me in my almost-final moments," Mr. Bargulu muses. "It would be a fitting way for me to express my gratitude."

"If he is interested in going with you, he may," the king finally assents. He is not at all certain that Father Miguel will agree, though if he does agree, his company will ensure that Mr. Bargulu returns to Spain in a timely manner. The king trusts his foremost advisor implicitly, but it never hurts to add an additional measure of security.

The king rises, and Mr. Bargulu follows suit, bowing. They part warmly, Mr. Bargulu stifling a loud sigh of relief. Once the king is out of sight, Mr. Bargulu sends for Father Miguel. They have plans to finalize, passage to purchase, and a very important task that cannot be forgotten.

"I can't get to the cemetery without raising suspicions," Mr. Bargulu explains to the priest, his tone low and urgent. "As a priest, however, you will be able to invent a better cover story. I'll describe to you exactly where my father is buried, and I need you to go to the cemetery and dig up his bones. I promised my grandfather."

"Won't be easy, even for me," Father Miguel says with a wink. "What do you want me to do with your father's bones once I dig them up?"

"Conceal them in your baggage, and we will bring them along with us to Eretz Yisrael," Mr. Bargulu replies.

The next few days found the Bargulu household in a hub of activity. Mrs. Bargulu supervises her staff in packing as much of their possessions as they will be able to take along without raising anyone's suspicions. Mr. Bargulu quietly empties the contents of his safe into an inconspicuous burlap sack. It isn't worth the risk to liquidate his properties and investments before the trip; they will have to leave the vast majority of their wealth behind. But even so, the treasures in his safe will be enough to support his family comfortably in their new lives.

It is with trembling knees that the Bargulus and Father Miguel board the ocean liner that is to take them away, far away, from the only land they have ever known. Even on the ship, they are careful to play the parts of the wealthy real estate magnate and priest, concerned about the prying eyes of the other passengers. It is only in the

privacy of their cabins that they are free to live as Jews.

When they finally reached the safety of Eretz Yisrael, they feel light and free. Father Miguel sheds his repulsive clerical attire and dons regular civilian clothing, reverting back to his true identity of Michoel the Jew. For the first time in thirty years, the Bargulu family is able to openly display their *Yiddishkeit*.

Their first destination is Tzefas, home to great *mekubalim*. More than anything, they want to know how to repent, how to atone for the terrible sin of observing a foreign religion, even if they mocked it in their hearts. Mr. Bargulu and Michoel decide to go to the *beis din* in Tzfas to seek direction.

Standing before the *dayanim*, they find that they can't get their story out. Their throats are clogged, their cheeks are damp, and their tears just flow and flow. Finally, with tremendous difficulty, they manage to recount the events of the previous decades. When they finish, they wait with downcast eyes for the *rabbanim* to speak.

There are tears in the eyes of the *dayanim* as well, and although they condemn the Spaniards' actions, the *rabbanim* explain that their *teshuvah* is very beloved to Hashem. They advise the two men to settle in Tzefas, where they will be able to live authentically as Jews. Living out the rest of their lives in a Jewish environment, keeping the *mitzvos* in public, will help atone for the years that they kept their *Yiddishkeit* underground.

Mr. Bargulu and Michoel succeed in integrating into the Jewish community of Tzefas, where they merit to support many *talmidei chachamim*. They return to Torah, completely and openly, living in Tzfas until a ripe old age. The whispers of faith,

the *Shema Yisrael* of a priest to the king's dying advisor has brought them both home.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

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