

TORAS REB KALMAN



סיפורי צדיקים

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

Sin of Silence

The holy Rav Chaim ben Atar, famously known as the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh, was born in the city of Sali, Morocco in the year 5454 (1694 CE). He was a tremendous tzaddik and talmid chacham who authored commentaries on Chumash, Gemara, and Shulchan Aruch. He also possessed ruach hakodesh.

The Ohr Hachaim had an interesting custom that he followed scrupulously week after week. There were many destitute talmidei chachamim who lived in the city. With much of their time concentrated in the bais medrash, there was simply no money for them to live normally, with

solid meals and ample firewood. Instead, these special Jews and their families lived very simply, making do with the barest necessities.

With his tremendous respect for these talmidei chachamim and the Torah that they were learning, the Ohr Hachaim took it upon himself to supply them with their Shabbos needs. Every erev Shabbos, he would go to the marketplace and select large quantities of freshly slaughtered meat and fat, juicy fish straight from the sea. He would prepare packages for each family according to their needs, and the talmidei chachamim would stop by his home to pick them up, grateful to Hashem for sending them food for Shabbos.

One day, illness broke out on the farms in town, infecting all the cattle with a seemingly mild, though very contagious disease. The sickness spread from one animal to the next, but the cattle farmers were relieved to discover that their animals recovered quickly with no lasting damage evident.

But then they were sent for slaughter, and the true scope of the disease became all too apparent. The shochet slaughtered one calf after the next, but each time when the lungs were checked, there were shailos that rendered the animal not kosher. That Thursday, when housewives came to the butchery to purchase their Shabbos meat, they found empty shelves.

“I’m sorry, but the animals were all infected by a recent outbreak,” the butcher explained for the umpteenth time, this time in response to the query of the Ohr Hachaim. “There were shailos in all the lungs, and there’s simply no beef to be had.”

The Ohr Hachaim left the butcher’s shop with his brow furrowed. His concern was not for himself, but for the talmidei chachamim who relied on him

every week for their Shabbos food. How could he let down the royalty of klal Yisrael, the Jews who sat and learned and held up the world with their Torah?

After a quick stop at the fishmonger's stall to pick up his regular fish order, the Ohr Hachaim made an unusual purchase: a calf, young, small, and very much alive. When he got home, he slaughtered the calf according to halachah and carefully checked the lungs.

It was kosher, completely kosher. The holy Ohr Hachaim had merited Divine assistance that the calf he purchased did not suffer damage from the cattle epidemic.

Now he had meat, an entire calf's worth of meat, but it still needed to be salted and then packaged before the talmidei chachamim would arrive to pick up their packages. The Ohr Hachaim's family stepped in to prepare the beef for distribution, working tirelessly for many hours to have it ready on time.

Somehow, word spread around the city that the Ohr Hachaim had managed to procure kosher meat despite the terrible shortage. Soon, long lines of people were knocking on his door to request meat for Shabbos. Although he wanted to help everyone, the beef from one calf was not nearly enough to supply the entire town, and the Ohr Hachaim was forced to turn them away.

"We don't have meat for the public," he told the people who came to their door. "We have a small amount, but it is reserved for talmidei chachamim. We can't give it away."

Some of the people accepted this immediately, others tried to plead a little more before recognizing that the Ohr Hachaim would not

change his mind. One by one, the people left, justifiably disappointed, but at the same time completely understanding of the Ohr Hachaim's position.

The only one who was incapable accepting the Ohr Hachaim's negative response was R' Binyomin, one of the wealthiest men in the city. He stood inside the threshold of the Ohr Hachaim's house that Friday and refused to take no for an answer. "I'll pay you whatever you want," he entreated. "Double, triple the price!"

"I'm so sorry, but I'm not selling the meat," the Ohr Hachaim replied apologetically.

"How much do you want? A thousand? Two thousand?" R' Binyomin pressed. "I'll pay you whatever you want for a piece of meat."

"I'm not a butcher," the Ohr Hachaim reminded him. "If I was, I would be more than happy to sell to you. But since I'm not, I shechted this meat for a purpose, to feed talmidei chachmim. I don't have any extra for the public."

R' Binyomin was unaccustomed to being told no, and at first, he didn't understand that the Ohr Hachaim wouldn't change his mind. He cajoled and wheedled, offering enormous sums for a small piece of beef, and was entirely thrown off balance when the Ohr Hachaim rejected every one of his offers.

His disbelief quickly turned to anger. "What's this?" he demanded. "Are you saying that one kind of Jew is better than another? How dare you!"

"All I am saying is that this meat was prepared specifically for poor talmidei chachamim, and therefore I cannot just sell it to someone else," the

Ohr Hachaim repeated calmly. “Try to understand, R’ Binyomin, that these people are relying on this food for Shabbos.”

“I’m also relying on it!” R’ Binyomin cried, cringing at the thought of leaving the Ohr Hachaim’s house empty handed. The entire city would know that the Ohr Hachaim had stood up to him, Binyomin, the man who supported half the city! What a disgrace! “I don’t have meat for Shabbos, and I’m willing to pay anything!”

“I’m so sorry,” the Ohr Hachaim murmured, not having any new arguments to make. “I wish I could help you. I’m so sorry.”

As they stood at the door, engaged in a pointless debate that seemed to be going in circles, there was a knock, and a poor man entered the house. He was dressed in rags, his head bowed submissively, and at the sight of him, R’ Binyomin instinctively inched away in distaste.

The Ohr Hachaim, in contrast, greeted the pauper warmly. “R’ Shalom!” he cried sincerely, shaking the man’s hand. “Come, let me fetch your order... ah, here it is! Have a wonderful Shabbos! Enjoy!”

The sight of the Ohr Hachaim treating the poor man with such honor and respect was too much for R’ Binyomin. “This... this guy here, this penniless pauper dressed in smelly rags!” he seethed. “For this beggar, who happens to be a talmid chacham, you can give meat, but for me, nothing?!” He stomped out the door, his footsteps heavy with rage, and slammed the door behind him.

R’ Shalom, the poor talmid chacham, stood in shamed silence for a moment, but he didn’t try to defend his honor. With a quiet murmur of

gratitude to the Ohr Hachaim for the Shabbos package, he left the house.

The rest of erev Shabbos passed in a flurry of distributions, and soon, all the packages had left the Ohr Hachaim’s table, finding their way into the hands of their rightful recipients, poor talmidei chachamim. The Ohr Hachaim went to get ready for Shabbos, not intending to give the incident with R’ Binyomin another thought.

That night, Friday night, when the Ohr Hachaim went to sleep, he had an eerie dream. In the dream, he was censored for his behavior on Friday. “How could you have stood by when the wealthy R’ Binyomin shamed a talmid chacham? You were there, you heard how he embarrassed him! And not only did you not try to make peace between the two, you didn’t even defend the talmid chacham’s honor!

“You should know that in Shamayim, Hashem is very stringent regarding dishonor shown to those who learn His Torah,” the voice continued. “When you heard how R’ Binyomin spoke to R’ Shalom, you were required to stand up for R’ Shalom! You should have ran after the wealthy man and at least tried to show him the error of his ways! But since you stood there silently, you, too, are guilty, and you will be held accountable in Shamayim.”

“How can I atone for this?” the Ohr Hachaim asked brokenly, accepting the Divine rebuke without argument. He had nothing to say in his defense, because he hadn’t tried to stand up for R’ Shalom.

“You will need to go into exile for a year,” he was told. “Only a full year of galus will help you atone for the terrible sin of silence, of allowing a talmid chacham to be shamed.”

The Ohr Hachaim awoke and was immediately flooded with remorse. How terrible R' Shalom must have felt on Friday as he stood silently and listened to R' Binyomin's disgraceful words. How could he have allowed himself not to speak up and defend the talmid chacham?!

Galus was a bitter decree, but he accepted it with equanimity, recognizing the severity of his non-action and grateful for the opportunity to atone for it. On Motzai Shabbos, he packed a small bag and left his home, walking stick in hand.

Galus was not easy, not easy at all. The Ohr Hachaim could not spend more than one night in the same place, and was constantly on the road, wandering by foot from one place to the next. It was a difficult existence, not knowing what he would eat and where he would sleep, and suffering the humiliation of having to rely on the good hearts of Jews he did not know, but he bore it all stoically.

One Friday afternoon, some months after he'd first begun his exile, the Ohr Hachaim was on the road when he suddenly felt too drained to continue walking. He sat down on a leafy branch, enjoying the pleasant breeze, and began to learn the parshah. That week was Parshas Bechukosai, and he came up with forty-two original thoughts on the words im bechukosai telechu.

He was so engrossed in his learning that he barely noticed the passage of time until it was nearly Shabbos. With a start, he stood up from the branch, picked up his walking stick, threw the small sack with his belongings over his shoulder and ran.

His eyes trained worriedly on the sun above, he ran and ran and ran. His heart pounded and his throat burned and his legs felt numb from the

sprint, but he ignored all sensation and continued running, singularly focused on the pressing goal of arriving in the nearest shtetl in time for Shabbos.

Minutes later, he panted into the shul along with streams of Jews hurrying to davening. The Ohr Hachaim didn't have any Shabbos clothing to change into, just the same beggar rags he wore every day in his stint of exile, so there wasn't much he needed to do before Shabbos set in. He found a small corner to hide his muktzah items and joined the other paupers of the town on the beggar's bench for davening.

In that shul, like many others in that era, the gabbai would remain behind after davening on Friday night to see if there were any guests in town who needed a place to eat the seudah. There were many generous families on his roster who were gracious and willing to host these guests last minute.

When Maariv was over, the shul slowly emptied out, and soon the Ohr Hachaim and two other beggars were left alone with the gabbai. "Gut Shabbos," the gabbai greeted them. "R' Yid, you can eat by R' Menachem, who lives just down this block, make a left, the last house before the road turns. And you, R' Yid, can go to the home of R' Pinchas..."

He turned to the Ohr Hachaim, who looked every inch the typical beggar. Nothing about the way he looked or spoke betrayed his true identity as the Ohr Hachaim. "R' Yid, you can go to the home of R' Yehuda."

The Ohr Hachaim noted the address gratefully. "Thank you very much," he wished the gabbai. "Gut Shabbos."

He made his way to R' Yehuda's house, and was welcomed in warmly. R' Yehuda turned out to be a simple man, not especially learned, but his hospitality was gracious and his sincerity was real. Throughout the seudah, he made small conversation with his guest, who took great care to hide his true greatness.

The seudah drew to a close, and R' Yehuda scraped back his chair. "I am not a talmid chacham," he remarked to the Ohr Hachaim. "But you should know that the rav of this town is extremely learned, and he's also a tremendous tzaddik, with ruach hakodesh! He gives over Torah to the public three times every Shabbos: after the Friday night seudah, on Shabbos morning, and after Shalosh Seudos, and we all go to listen to his Torah. I'm going there now. Would you like to come along?"

"Of course," the Ohr Hachaim responded. How could he say no? He needed to go, to show kavod haTorah. He got up and joined his host, and together they walked to the main shul in town.

As a regular participant, R' Yehuda had an established seat in the bais medrash, at the far end of one table. "Pull over a chair, and you can sit next to me," he whispered to his guest.

As the bais medrash began filling with people, someone began singing zemiros. Soon the room was filled with heartfelt melody as hundreds of voices melded together. The Ohr Hachaim found a spare chair and dragged it over to R' Yehuda's table, squeezing it in between his host and the wall.

The rav took his seat at the front of the room, and the bais medrash quieted down. From his perch on the side of the room, the Ohr Hachaim peered at the rav. His eyes were squeezed shut, his head

swaying from side to side. He was clearly deeply involved in elevated matters, convening with malachim on High in Torah.

At last, the rav opened his eyes and stood up, his face aflame with holiness. "I'd like to give over chiddushim that I learned from Above on the posuk, im bechukosai teleichu," he began, and proceeded to elaborate on fourteen original explanations on the words. Each interpretation of the pasuk was another gem that boggled the minds of the audience.

When the rav finished all fourteen explanations, an awed silence filled the room. "Do you know who brought up these chiddushim to Shamayim?" the rav asked. "It was the soul of a tzaddik who is living in our generation, our leader and teacher, Rav Chaim ben Atar. This afternoon, he originated these thoughts and brought them to Shamayim, and I merited to learn fourteen of them, which now, you, too, have heard."

The Ohr Hachaim heard his name mentioned, and he stood up. "Chaim Ben Atar?" he called out. He wasn't about to reveal his identity, but he wanted to clarify that he'd indeed heard correctly.

The rav glanced at him sharply, not deigning to reply. From all sides of the room, people glared at him angrily, upset at the brazen behavior of the stranger in their shul who had dared interrupt the rav. Avoiding their eyes, the Ohr Hachaim sat back down and the rav continued speaking.

The next morning, after the seudah, the townspeople returned to shul to hear Torah from their rav. The Ohr Hachaim's host, R' Yehuda, had not forgotten the incident that had occurred the night before, and he hesitated for a moment before inviting his guest to join him again. He did not rebuke the Ohr Hachaim for his behavior, but

he sincerely hoped that his guest had learned from his mistake and would not speak up during the speech again.

The Ohr Hachaim pushed a chair over to R' Yehuda's table and took a seat, his eyes scanning the large room. It quickly filled up with people and ever increasing noise before dying out into utter silence when the rav entered the room.

The rav took his seat and his face began to redden in concentration as the people waited in respectful silence. After ten minutes, he opened his eyes and began to expound on another fourteen pshatim on the words im bechukosai teleichu. His voice thundered across the room, each word soaked up by the assemblage. When he finished the last explanation, he remarked, "These fourteen chiddushim, as well, belong to the holy Rabbeinu Chaim be Atar."

The entire audience was focused on the rav's face as they drank in his wisdom, all unrelated thoughts far away from their minds. Then a jarring voice cut into their concentration with a jolt. "Chaim ben Atar thought of these chiddushim?" the Ohr Hachaim called out. "Who would have thought!"

"Shh!" someone hissed angrily from behind him.

Though he was obviously upset at the beggar's audacity, the rav did not respond. Other Jews in the crowd, however, did not let the Ohr Hachaim off so easily.

"Get him out of here," a husky man with a greying beard told R' Yehuda through clenched teeth.

"You should be ashamed of yourself!" someone whispered fiercely from behind the Ohr Hachaim.

Then the rav continued speaking, and the crowd quieted down to hear him, but this time, the silence was tense. The people were angry, and so was the Ohr Hachaim's host, R' Yehuda.

When it was time for the rav's Shalosh Seudos shiur, R' Yehuda was sorely tempted to tell his guest that he wasn't invited. The last thing he needed was for the beggar to sit next to him and speak out again in the middle of the speech against the holy Ohr Hachaim. However, as he readied himself to leave the house to attend the shiur, his guest stood up to join him, and he found that he didn't have the heart to ask him to stay home.

"Listen," he said urgently as they walked together to shul. "Please be quiet when the rav speaks. He really doesn't like your interruptions. You're my guest, and it reflects badly on me. So do it for me!"

The Ohr Hachaim did not respond.

Like the flame of a candle, which shines the brightest moments before it dies out, Shalosh Seudos is the holiest time of the holiest day. In the final moments as Shabbos wanes and takes leave, there is an extra measure of kedushah that descends upon the world, an opportunity for elevated spirituality that great tzaddikim take advantage of.

The rav's face shone brighter than it had all Shabbos, and when he spoke, he seemed to be on fire. "There were another fourteen pshatim on the pasuk im bechukosai teleichu that are being learned on High," he told the audience. His voice rose, his cheeks burned, and he looked like a fiery angel as he expounded on all fourteen of them.

“Rabbosai!” he boomed. “These fourteen explanations were given to us by the holy tzaddik, Rav Chaim ben Atar, one of the gedolim of our generation! This Shabbos, we merited to learn through all forty-two pshatim on the pasuk taught by this tzaddik, Rav Chaiim ben Atar!”

From the corner of his eye, R’ Yehuda glanced at his guest. He stiffened as the Ohr Hachaim stood up.

“Chaim ben Atar?!” the Ohr Hachaim called out, somewhat mockingly, as a murmur rose among the crowd. “Chaim ben Atar! Who would have thought!”

The rav glared at him, his expression harsh. “I was quiet last night,” he said sternly. “I was quiet this morning. But I will not remain silent in the face of this audacity.” He turned to his gabbaim. “Take him away from here. Put him in the side room and make sure he can’t come out!”

The Ohr Hachaim didn’t protest as two men hooked him under either arm and led him out of the bais medrash. He preferred to spend the rest of Shabbos alone in a dark room than to reveal his true identity.

With the disturbances behind them, the rav continued speaking until Shabbos was over. Directly after the shiur, the people davened maariv and prepared to go home to make Havdalah for their families and usher in the new week.

However, before anyone could leave the shul, a terrifying roar of thunder rumbled outside, louder than any thunder they’d ever heard before. Bolts of lightning flashed across the sky, one after the other, and the ground trembled as pounding rain poured down. The Jews watched the storm from

the window, afraid to venture out of the safety of the shul before the weather calmed down a little.

But the storm showed no signs of taming. Instead, it grew stronger, fiercer, and more menacing, and the entire shul building began to vibrate violently. This was not a regular storm, not by any stretch. It looked like the very world was throwing a temper tantrum.

Terrified that the entire building would collapse, burying them inside, the people rushed over to the rav, begging him for answers. “What is going on? Is Hashem angry at us? What can we do?!”

The rav closed his eyes. “Ribbono Shel Olam,” he prayed quietly. “Please reveal to me what is happening here!”

The rav was a true tzaddik, with ruach hakodesh, and in response to his tefillah, he received a revelation from Shamayim “Do you know who your guest is? It is none other than the holy Ohr Hachaim, Rav Chaim ben Atar!”

“Rav Chaim ben Atar?!” the rav was stunned. “But then... why is he here? And why did he hide his identity?”

“The Ohr Hachaim overheard a wealthy man shame a talmid chacham, and he did not intervene to defend the talmid chacham’s honor,” he was told. “He went into exile to atone this sin, and he was supposed to remain in exile for another few months. However, now that he was locked into a dark room, that atoned completely for his actions, and he does not need to be in exile any longer.”

“And does this angry storm outside have something to do with the Ohr Hachaim?” the rav wanted to know.

“Yes, it does. It is well known that the reshaim, the evildoers, come out of Gehinnom for Shabbos, but what you may not know is that they do not go back in until the Ohr Hachaim finishes Shabbos and makes Havdalah. Since the Ohr Hachaim is still locked into the side room, he didn’t make Havdalah and the souls of the reshaim are not in gehinnom.

“However, they need atonement and therefore they need to go back into Gehinnom. That is what the storm is about. The reshaim are waiting for cleansing. Quick, let the Ohr Hachaim out and give him what he needs to make Havdalah before the storm destroys everything!”

The rav fell to the floor in a dizzy faint, completely overcome by what had been revealed to him. With effort, he stood up from the floor, and, after briefly explaining what he’d learned, made a beeline for the room where the Ohr Hachaim had been imprisoned. The rav’s hands were shaking as he unlocked the door and pushed it open.

“Please forgive me, forgive us,” he begged the holy tzaddik. “We did not know who you were! Please forgive me!”

“Mochel, mochel,” the Ohr Hachaim assured him.

He followed the rav out of the room to make Havdalah in the bais medrash, which filled with an awed and respectful hush. Word had spread quickly over the disruptive beggar’s true identity, and the people craned their necks to catch a glimpse of his holy appearance.

After Havdalah, the people fell at his feet and begged him for forgiveness, apologizing for the way they treated him. The Ohr Hachaim graciously forgave them, understanding that

they’d only done what they’d done to stand up for his honor when they’d felt it had been slighted by an unknown pauper.

As the storm subsided, the people returned home, and the Ohr Hachaim, too was able to return home, having achieved full atonement for the sin of remaining a silent bystander while a talmid chacham was being shamed.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

This story is taken from tape #A290

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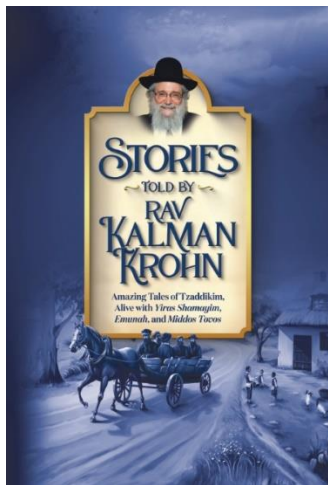
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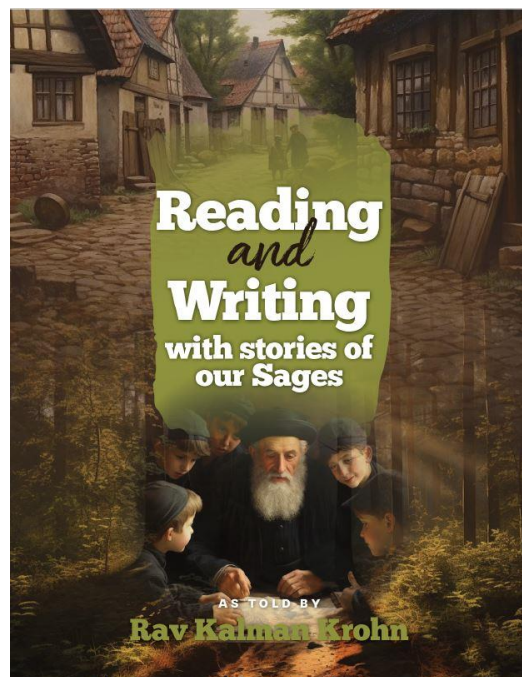
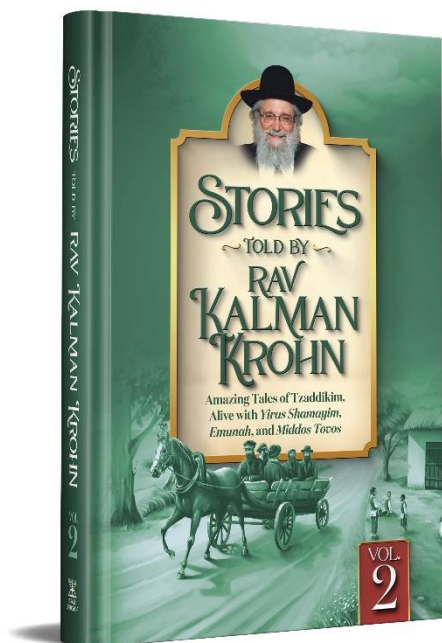


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