

Operation K.T.

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Shavuos in Clinton, Oklahoma!

David Hershberg felt disappointed every time he thought about it. Clinton, Oklahoma was his home town and he liked the idea of going back to spend some time with his family, after being away for almost a year as a sophomore in the High School of Yeshiva Pri Tzedek in Brooklyn, N.Y.

But Shavuos is the holiday when we received the Torah, David thought, and Clinton is far away from Har Sinai...



"Dad, how many *bar mitzvah* boys are there in the highest class of the Hebrew School?" asked David when he settled down after the long bus ride home.

"About nine or ten," answered Mr. Hershberg. "Why do you want to know?"

"I'm looking for some company on *Shavuos* night. Maybe I can get the fellows to stay up with me to learn Torah all night long."

Mr. Hershberg smiled. "You have a tough case. Our Clinton boys are not in the habit of staying up late to study Torah. You'll have a hard time convincing them it's worth the sacrifice."

"Nothing wrong with trying. Just imagine Hashem coming to Har Sinai to give us the Torah and finding nobody there!" David laughed when he said it, but he was very serious.

He was something of a celebrity in Clinton's Jewish community. He was the only boy in town who had ever gone to yeshiva in the "big city." His old Hebrew School friends were anxious to hear what yeshiva life in New York was like, so when he invited them to visit his home for a *Melave Malkah*, all of them came. Everyone had a grand time listening to David tell about far-off Yeshiva Pri Tzedek.

"Would you like to know how it feels?" David asked.

"Sure!"

"How?"

"Tell us!"

"Well," David continued, "the best part is *Shavuos* night." He told them his unforgettable feelings of the year before. Three hundred strong, David and his schoolmates had crowded the

yeshiva *Bais Medrash* studying Torah until they felt almost as if they were at Har Sinai themselves.

Afterwards, he invited them to join him in the Clinton synagogue for a real all-night *Shavuos*, just like the one in Pri Tzedek. He wasn't too successful, though.

"I can see learning a little, but why do we have to do it all night?"

"Don't you get tired? I mean, I once stayed up that late for a wedding, but learning . . .?"

"I'd stay up for a good video, but you'll have to manage without me, Davie, old boy."

David was discouraged, but he didn't give up. The *Melave Malkah* was just the first step in Operation *Kabollas HaTorah*, or, as the Hershberg family called it for short, Operation K.T. He followed up the first defeat with phone calls and visits to his friends, trying them one by one.

"Are you going to Har Sinai with a group or alone?" joked Mrs. Hershberg.

"I have six fellows who are willing to stay for a little while. They aren't really sold on the idea but they are willing to try it out."

In the little time he had left until the big night, he kept calling, visiting, and convincing. There was a lot of talk about it in shul as the evening services ended on *Shavuos* night. Mr. Green grumbled that Clinton wasn't the place for such ideas. Mr. Bressler said it was great, but that the boys should take pillows along. So the conversations went while David looked brave and confident.

That night, Mr. and Mrs. Hershberg went to the shul to prepare a surprise for David and company—soda, cookies, and cake. David picked up Herbie Green and Alfred Bressler on the way to the synagogue and, together, they went to call for a few of their more faint-hearted friends.

In about an hour there were ten boys there. David was thrilled! No one would have believed it could happen in Clinton, Oklahoma. If only he could keep them interested enough to stay awake all night! The session began with the fellows studying in groups of two and three. David's enthusiasm was contagious and soon the "voice of Torah" began to sound like a corner of Pri Tzedek. Then David led a discussion group on Megillas Rus which is read on *Shavuos*. His class in Pri Tzedek had studied it with the important meforshim. Questions, answers, and ideas flew back and forth until Mark Gross piped up, "You know, David, this *Shavous* night bit is as good as you said it would be."

"I have another surprise for you. Wait a few minutes until I get back."

David returned carrying a tray of refreshments. "Join in, fellows—Pri Tzedek style!"

With a cry of appreciation, they began to help themselves and, when they were finished, Freddie Goldstein, star of the Hebrew School choir, led them in *Shavuous* songs. As he began a song with a fast beat, a few of the boys jumped up and suddenly they were holding hands, singing and dancing with the joy of Torah students the night before the Torah is given. By the time they sat down again, it was well past one o'clock and David was afraid he would soon hear, "*Gut Yom Tov*, David, time to crawl into bed."

Then Chaim Polikoff called out, "Come on, you lazy guys, it's *Shavuos!* Let's start learning again."

Jakie Hymowitz declared, "What do you mean 'lazy guys' —I'm saying up all night!"

"Me too!" "Me too!"

David beamed. They might have a *minyán* for *Shacharis* after all. The learning continued until 3 A.M. when David went out for more refreshments. When he returned, the tired but happy boys got up to yawn and stretch before eating and drinking. Suddenly Herbie Greenstein froze and said, "Shh — listen!" They all stood straining their ears. The street door had opened and quietly shut. Footsteps were heard slowly climbing the steps. The boys stared wide-eyed in fright.

Then Al Bressler chuckled, "I'll bet you it's a couple of our fathers coming to check up on us. Let's have some fun. Let's hide under the benches and surprise them." Silently they sprang down behind the benches and waited for their worried parents to come into the shul.

The door opened and a voice was heard.

"Hey, no one's here but the lights are on."

"Yeah, they even left some books open. Must have been in a hurry to get home."

Now David and the others were really frightened. It had all seemed like a prank—their fathers checking up and the boys hiding. The ugly hate-filled voices told a different story. Some hoodlums had invaded the shul. What were they up to? How many were there? Fear gripped the Jewish boys crouching behind the benches. Wide-eyed they looked to David for leadership. He forced himself to smile reassuringly as he held his finger to his lips for silence. First he motioned them down into hiding then he held up a clenched fist to show his friends that they would come out fighting in defense of Torah and the shul. That did it; they smiled back and motioned with their fists as if to say, "We'll get em."

"Okay, Hank, let's get going. I'll throw the paint all over the altar. You knock over the bookcases"

"I gotcha, Nicky. I think I'll use some prayer books for target practice on the light bulbs."

"I'll turn over the benches, Gene. Wait till the Jew boys roll out a bed in the morning and see this place. Ha!"

As the three vandals made their way down the aisle, David jumped up yelling Yehoshua's battle cry, מי לה' אלי (Whoever is on Hashem's side, come with me)! The yeshiva students caught the three intruders by surprise and quickly overpowered them. David sent Herbie and Chaim next door to wake the janitor and get the police while he and his friends held on to their captives. In less than ten minutes, four police officers took them into custody.

After that David and company really needed some soda and cookies. By the time their hearts stopped racing, it was time to *daven Shacharis*. Never had they prayed with such joy as they thanked Hashem for allowing them to save the beautiful old synagogue—and all because they had given Clinton its first all-night *Shavuos* Torah session.

The big excitement came later that morning when, with David and his friends fast asleep at home, the Jews of Clinton arrived for *Shavuos* morning services. Prayers started late that day because every man and woman in shul was talking about Clinton's brave Torah students who saved their beloved synagogue from being vandalized. Man after man came to Mr. Hershberg to shake his hand.

"We thought your Davie was out of his mind for trying to bring an all-night *Shavuos* here. Thank G-d our town produced a boy like him."

"Don't give Davie all the credit," Mr. Hershberg answered. "Without the other boys there wouldn't have been anyone left here in the shul."

The services finally got started. When the rabbi rose for his sermon, a hush fell over the crowded synagogue. He spoke of the first *Shavuos* when the Torah was given.

"We owe our existence as a nation to the Torah. And today we owe the safety of our synagogue to the brave Torah students who stayed up last night to show us, their elders, what *Shavuos* is all about. We are proud of them; they taught us what *Kabollas HaTorah* really means. In their honor, we have decided that this year's *Shavuos* drive will be devoted to two causes—half for Yeshiva Pri Tzedek and the other half to create a scholarship fund for Clinton youngsters who want to go to out-of-town yeshiva high schools.

The next September, three of the famous *Shavuos* group boarded a plane to join David Hershberg in Pri Tzedek. And the next *Shavuos* they were all back in Clinton—but this time over one hundred men and boys joined them for an all-night Torah session. That's how Operation K.T. brought *Shavuos* to Clinton, Oklahoma.

