

Shavuos Night

By Leah Herskowitz
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Illustrated by Mordechai Zeffren

It was a sunny late afternoon. Although the sun was moving lower in the sky, getting ready to say good night, its warm rays beckoned the children to eat supper quickly and come outside to play a while longer.

Shulamis and Shaindy were busy playing on the stoop. Benjy, just arriving from yeshiva, walked up the steps swinging his briefcase.

"Hurry Benjy – Mommy's making blintzes for Shavuos, and we have a milchig supper, so we can sample them. I put away three for you!"

"Great! Thanks, Shulamis!"

But Benjy continued slowly up the steps, deep in thought. "This year Shavuos means a lot more to me than blintzes, or even Mom's cherry cheesecake!"

After a "Hello everyone," Benjy washed up and then began his regular ritual of lifting up baby Zundel; up, up, and swinging him gently while he laughed and squealed in fright and delight.

"Enough Benjy! Come sit down for your supper."

At the table Roizy announced, "Mrs. Stein is helping us make gorgeous flowers for Shavuos. Do you know why we have lots of flowers and leaves on Shavuos?"

Chezky screamed, "Because there were lots of flowers around Har Sinai when the Jews got the Torah, and, and. . ." he paused for a minute, "but weren't the Jews very scared of all the lightning and thunder?"

"Yes, Chezky, they surely were scared, but also so happy. Do you know why? They had been counting the days, waiting to receive the Torah."

Benjy sat thoughtfully, thinking about that first Shavuos; the fiery mountain, the voice of Hashem. And he was thinking about Shavuos last year in his yeshiva. That was when the heavens opened for him—when his mind opened.

The big, bright bais medrash had been crowded with boys and men. The lights sparkled. The music of the Torah was like a symphony, with partners and groups learning. Even now, a year later, Benjy could still feel his spirits lifting from that special Shavuos night. It was as if he was standing at Har Sinai to receive the Torah.

Benjy just couldn't wait for next Tuesday night to receive the Torah again, in the big crowded yeshiva bais medrash.

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At last – Tuesday. Benjy ran home from yeshiva at noon. A quick lunch, some last minute errands for Mommy, polishing shoes – and Benjy was ready to get dressed for Yom Tov, but Mommy said he and Moshe should take naps if they wanted to stay up all night. Well, no arguing with Mommy just before receiving the Torah, right? So they both went for naps.

Benjy was awakened by the sound of an ambulance, or was it just a dream? No, the ambulance seemed to be stopping in front of their house. Heavy footsteps went down to the basement apartment of Mr. Brown.

Benjy washed quickly and ran down. Mr. Brown was already being carried out on a stretcher to the ambulance. Mommy was putting on her coat. Daddy wasn't home, so, of course, she wasn't going to let Mr. Brown go alone to the hospital!

"Oh. Benjy, I'm glad you're up. Mr. Brown fell and he's so shaken up, he has to be checked out. Let's hope he's not seriously hurt. Keep an eye on the kids, my cooking is all done, baruch Hashem. I'll call as soon as I know what's what." And she was out the door into the waiting ambulance.

"Ok, kids," said Benjy, "let's all say Tehillim and daven for Mr. Brown."

Chezky pleaded, "Please Hashem, make Mr. Brown better quick so he can come back and tell me more stories."

"And let him come back quick all healthy, so I can go to yeshiva tonight for Kaballas HaTorah," davened Benjy quietly.

Abba came home, and he joined the family saying Tehillim around the big table.

The doorbell rang. Great – they were back! Mr. Brown's leg was bandaged; he could walk, but very slowly. The ambulance men carried him down to his apartment and left. Benjy went to dress for Yom Tov, so he could go early to the yeshiva.

Abba called Benjy into the kitchen, where he had been talking with Mommy. "We're so happy that Mr. Brown is not seriously hurt, baruch Hashem, but he has a sprained ankle and has to rest it. It was a bad fall and he's so frightened. I made him comfortable in the recliner, but we can't leave him alone today."

Abba paused. He and Mommy looked at each other, then Abba put his arm around Benjy and said quietly, "Benjy boy, we know how much you want to go to the yeshiva tonight, but, but. . ."

"Okay, Abba. I know what you want. I'll stay with Mr. Brown tonight."

"Is that me saying this?" thought Benjy. He couldn't believe that he had said it. A little voice inside him was crying out, "No, no, don't stay home! You know how wonderful it was last year in yeshiva." The voice kept repeating it, but lower and lower, and finally it subsided.

Then Benjy said again, this time very loud, "Yes, I'll stay with Mr. Brown."

"We're proud of you Benjy," said Mommy.

"No Kaballas HaTorah in shul for me this year," thought Benjy. "Not gonna feel the same in Mr. Brown's apartment."

Even the Yom Tov seudah was different. Abba davened downstairs with Mr. Brown and ate with him. Benjy and Moshe went to shul, and Benjy made Kiddush for the family. Mommy helped him lead the zemiros and listen to the children's divrei Torah.

At 11 o'clock, Mommy and the children were in bed, and Moshe and Abba went to the yeshiva. Benjy went down to Mr. Brown's apartment. The place was dingy, stuffy, and had a musty odor. The light was dim. "I guess it's to save electricity," thought Benjy. Mr. Brown had fallen asleep in the recliner and was snoring quietly. He looked so pale and frail.

Benjy arranged his sefarim on the small table and started reading quietly. He tried to figure out what his chavrusa, Simcha, would be leaning now in the big bais medrash in the yeshiva. He kept reading, a little bit louder now, and slowly the words of the Torah relaxed him and he was able to concentrate on the meaning. He struggled happily over difficult passages, and felt a thrill as he turned the pages.

Oh! — he had awakened Mr. Brown! His eyes were open and there was a faint smile on his pale face.

"I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to wake you."

"Don't worry, Benjy," Mr. Brown replied weakly. "This is music to me. It makes me feel a little better." His voice trailed off and he was asleep again, snoring softly.

Benjy kept learning, shaking back and forth in concentration, oblivious to Mr. Brown as he studied to a soft tune. His body and soul were both involved in Torah, stopping only when he needed to think through some difficult concepts. There was no one here to answer his questions, but it seemed as if there was some spark at the dimly lit table that showed him the way.

Benjy took his Chumash now, and was again learning with a soft tune, asking questions and hearing Rashi speak to him.

Mr. Brown was awake again. "Benjy, please bring me water to wash my hands. There's a basin under the sink."

After washing his hands, Mr. Brown started talking, first very slowly and weakly, and then with increasing strength.

"I have memories of learning Chumash in the old country. I can see my rebbe teaching us the Rashi. He taught us with love and..." here Mr. Brown had a twinkle in his eye —"with a sharp eye!

"After my bar mitzvah, some friends and I learned together in the town bais medrash. My father was too poor to send me to the yeshiva in the city, and when I was fourteen, I started to work. At your age, Benjy, I was working in a bakery from four o'clock in the morning, till six o'clock at night. Oh, I was tired! But at night I went to the bais medrash and learned with my friends. There was a wonderful man in our village, Reb Duvid. He knew how tired we were, and he took care of us and taught us Chumash and Rashi with such sweetness and love that it nourished our souls. It revived us. It gave us strength in our bodies and in our souls to continue.

"Then the Russian beasts rounded up all the boys our age and put us to work in the bitter cold, in unbearable conditions. But Reb Duvid's Torah protected us and kept us alive."

Now Mr. Brown was tired again. He closed his eyes and dozed off. Benjy continue learning, refreshed and invigorated. Even though he was not in the yeshiva with his friends, he felt supreme joy.

He stopped and looked around. Had the room been dim? No, it seemed to be bright with Torah! Yes, here too, he felt as if he was receiving the Torah!

There was a tap at the door. He looked at the old Tea Pot Clock on the wall. It showed 5:30 already! The night had flown by!

His father walked in. "Benjy, you go to the yeshiva and daven Shacharis there. I'll stay here now and daven with the later minyan in shul. How did it go, my boy?"

Benjy closed his sefarim, walked to the door, stood there a minute thinking, then turned back to his father.

"You know Dad, I learned something new tonight, something very important. A person can feel the acceptance of the Torah even alone, if necessary. Even in a dark room, the Torah gives us light! If you reach for it, it comes to you."

