



Shavuot / שבועות

Sitting in Front



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Toras Avigdor Junior

Adapted from the teachings
of Rav Avigdor Miller zt"l

Yanky walked nervously into the courtyard of the cheider. Boys were running around happily, shouting at each other in Hebrew. His family had just moved to Eretz Yisroel and today was his first day in his new cheider.

"Hello, you must be Yanky," a smiling man with a white beard said, walking over to Yanky. "My name is Reb Binyomin."

"Hi," Yanky said, relieved to hear an American voice. "My father told me I should ask for you."

"I work here in the cheider," Reb Binyomin said. "Why don't I show you to your classroom?"

Yanky followed Reb Binyomin into the building, up the stairs, and down the hall.

"Here we are!" Reb Binyomin said, opening the classroom door. "And it looks like your rebbe is coming now. We're just in time."

A man with a red beard and long curly peyos approached.

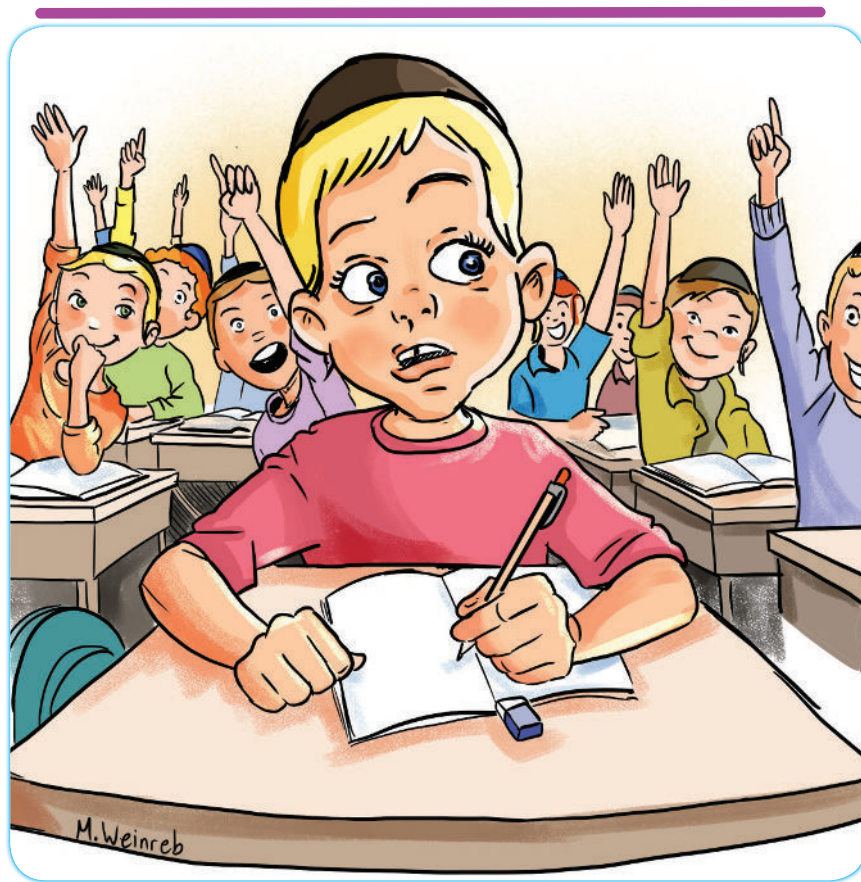
"Shalom Reb Shiya," Reb Binyomin said to the man in Hebrew. "Zeh Yanky Gutman, hayeled hachadash shehigiya m'artzot habrit."

"Ah, shalom aleichem!" Reb Shiya said warmly, holding his hand out to Yanky. "Ve are so 'eppy to 'ev you in our kitah. Come and I vill to show you to your seat."

Yanky smiled shyly and put his bag down next to the seat indicated by his rebbe at the front of the classroom.

"Hatzlocha, Yanky!" Reb Binyomin said, as he left the room.

A few minutes later, the bell rang and thirty boys rushed into the classroom and took their seats.



Reb Shiya made an announcement in Hebrew. Yanky did not understand a word he said, but it seemed clear that he was being introduced to the class. Yanky blushed furiously, not knowing what to say or do.

“Hi,” the boy sitting next to him whispered in English. “I’m Chanoch. My parents are American so I can help you if you don’t understand something the rebbe says.”

“Hi, thanks,” Yanky whispered gratefully, as Reb Shiya began teaching.

Yanky was lost. He knew some Hebrew words from learning Chumash and Mishnayos, but the rebbe was talking so fast it just sounded like gibberish.

“What is he saying?” Yanky whispered to Chanoch.

“He just explained the mishna,” Chanoch whispered back, unhelpfully.

Yanky sat miserably in his front row seat, as the class sang the Mishnayos together. They were singing the Mishnayos in a tune he did not know, and the rebbe wasn’t translating anything. And even when he did stop to explain, Yanky couldn’t understand what he was saying.

After what seemed like several centuries, the recess bell rang. Yanky followed the boys to the courtyard, where hundreds of boys began running around. He had never felt so alone in his life.

“Yanky, how’s it going?”

Yanky looked up to see Reb Binyomin standing there.

“Okay, I guess,” Yanky mumbled.

“Come,” Reb Binyomin said. “Let’s go to my office.”

In the office, Reb Binyomin offered Yanky a cookie.

“Thanks,” Yanky said, making a brocha and taking a bite.

“Your first day in a new school in a new country with a new language,” Reb Binyomin said empathetically. “It can’t be easy for you.”

“It’s impossible!” Yanky blurted out. “What’s the point of me being here? I don’t know a single thing the rebbe is saying! I’m not learning anything - I may as well stay at

home and sit on the couch. And on top of everything, the rebbe made me sit in the front row! So now thirty boys are watching me sit there looking like a fool all day!”

A tear dripped down Yanky’s cheek as he finished speaking.

“Yankel’e,” said Reb Binyomin offering Yanky a tissue. “First of all, I promise you that things will get better. By listening to the rebbe and playing with other boys you will pick up Hebrew in no time at all. In a few months you will look back and laugh at how hard this first day was.”

Yanky looked at Reb Binyomin skeptically. “How do you know?” he asked.

“Because I went through the exact same thing sixty years ago,” Reb Binyomin said with a smile. “But there’s something else I want you to know as well.

“As you know, Shavuos is coming up. And Shavuos morning, before krias hatorah, we say Akdamus. Here, read this.” Reb Binyomin opened a sidur and pointed to a line.

“קְבִיעִין בֶּן תְּהוֹוִן, בְּהִנְהוּ חֲבוּרָתָא, וְתִזְכּוּן דִּי תִיתְבוּן, בְּעֵלָא דְרָתָא” read Yanky slowly. “I don’t know what that means. I’ve never seen any of those words before.”

“It’s in Aramaic,” explained Reb Binyomin.

“What? I need to learn another language???” asked Yanky.

“No, no,” smiled Reb Binyomin. “You’ll pick up plenty of Aramaic when you start learning Gemara. But that line says ‘you should be part of the groups of tzaddikim and you should be zoche to sit in the front row’. That means that even if you don’t understand what is being said, just being part of a group of people learning Torah is already a great thing - and to sit in the front row? Ah, that’s very choshuv.

“So yes, in time you’ll learn the language and have no trouble understanding your rebbe. But in the meantime, just enjoy the fact that you get to be sitting in the front row of people learning Torah. That on its own is a huge zechus.”

Have a Wonderful Yom Tov!

let’s review:

- How does Reb Binyomin speak such a fluent English?
- Why should Yanky go to cheider if he doesn’t understand the language?



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