

HALOCHOSCOPE

The question for the next two weeks:

When one finishes a section of Talmud, it is customary to hold a celebration, called a *Siyum*. At this celebration he makes a festive meal, which qualifies as a *Seudas Mitzvah*. At this meal things that might otherwise be restricted are relaxed due to the *mitzvah* component. For this, and other reasons, it is customary to delay the *siyum* to an opportune time. If one who has finished a particular section attends a *siyum* conducted by another person on the same section, may he still make his own *siyum*, at his own opportune time? How long may he delay it? The person holding the *siyum* has a mentor who is an *Aveil*, in the middle of a mourning period. If he delays it until *Erev Pesach*, to save *bechorim*, first-born, from fasting, may the *aveil* attend the *siyum* and be excused from fasting?

The issues:

In this issue:

- A) What is a *Siyum*?
- B) *Seudas Mitzvah*
- C) What kind of completed study is deserving of a *Siyum*?

In next Issue:

- D) What is the status of participants in another's *Siyum*?
- E) Delaying a *Siyum*
- F) The *Taanis Bechorim*, fast of the first born, on *Erev Pesach*
- G) An *Aveil* attending a *Siyum*

A) What is a *Siyum*?

There are three main sources for the practice of making a *siyum* on completion of a section of Talmud. Studying Torah is a *mitzvah* like any other. One could celebrate any *mitzvah* observance. However, most *mitzvos* do not take a long protracted time. Therefore, the actual *mitzvah* does not call for a special celebration. Torah study as a *mitzvah* applies all the time. If one celebrated all the time he would have no time to study! Since the Talmud is divided into sections that are studied separately for a time period, completion of a section amounts to completion of a group of *mitzvos* of Torah study. Therefore, it offers an opportunity to give thanks for the merit of completing the *mitzvah*. The source for this is a passage dealing with a holiday that was celebrated annually when the process of preparing the wood for the offerings was completed. [See Baba Basra 121b, Rashbam, Nimukei Yosef. Mishna Taanis 4:8, commentaries. Biur Hagra YD 246:76.]

The second source is a midrashic reference to the feast that Shlomo Hamelech made for his servants when he was informed by Hashem that he would be granted wisdom. From here we learn that one makes a feast for the completion of the Torah. The gift of wisdom that Shlomo was granted completed his Torah. [See Shir Hashirim Rabah 1:9.]

The third source is a direct Talmudic dictum that Abaye would call for a Yomtov for the Rabbis when a young Rabbi would complete a tractate of Talmud study. The celebra-

tion appears to be due to the joy of others who see the student complete it. This implies that the student should certainly celebrate; even outsiders feel joy. [See Shabbos 119a.]

A fourth source discusses the obligation of a student to attend the *siyum*. The penalty for absence seems to be rather serious. [In its context, this could be due to the disrespect for the teacher.] This might be so that the student does not miss the conclusion, including vital details. Perhaps attendance shows dedication to see the project through to the end. This source does not make reference to the celebration. However, others point out that the third source implies that the colleagues of the *mesayem* have an obligation to attend. [See Baba Basra 22a. Yam Shel Shlomo end B.K. Perek 7.]

The first source touches on the issue of reciting *shehecheyanu* on the completion. This *brocha* is recited on a combination of the privilege of a *mitzvah* with the appreciation of the auspicious time. Thus, it is recited on *mitzvos* that occur from time to time and on good tidings. The poskim discuss whether it may be recited upon completion of the writing of a *sefer*. While it is not customary to recite it at a *siyum*, the concepts of the joy at reaching this milestone and feelings of thanksgiving do apply. The poskim discuss adding *shehasimcha bim'ono*, 'true joy exists only in Hashem's abode', for the *zimun* at a *siyum*. This is added for a wedding. For various reasons, it is not recited at a *siyum*. [See Rokaiaich 371. OC 223, Shaarei Teshuva 10. Aruch Hashulchan YD 246:45.]

The second source is cited as the basis for *Simchas Torah*, when the cycle of reading the weekly Parshiyos is completed. [See Hagahos Ashri, end Sukah, Tur, BY, Sh. Ar. OC 669, Rema, commentaries.] It is also cited as a source for the shouts of joy at the completion of a section of Torah, the '*chazak*' at the end of a *chumash*. The most obvious source for this traces it to the words that Hashem said to Yehoshua, basically, at the conclusion of the *Sefer Torah*, and the beginning of his *sefer*.

The words 'chazak ...' express the need to strengthen oneself. One should not rest on his laurels, having reached what he feels is the completion of the study 'course'. Rather, he should use this opportunity to move on with more strength. The Torah has no end or completion, but is unlimited and infinite. Though the written and oral forms have beginnings and ends, there is always a qualitative infinity. It is also endless in its cyclical or circular sense. The real idea of the *siyum* comes from the completion of the review of the knowledge. In fact, the first words uttered upon completion refer to this review, '*Hadran*' is translated as either 'we *will* return to ...' or 'we *have* [now] returned to ...'. This is also one reason given for the term '*masechess*' for tractate. This word does not mean volume or part. It has a weaving loom connotation. It hints at the continuous movement back and forth on a loom, weaving the cloth without necessarily coming to an end. [Some add, this is why Jewish printers traditionally number the page on which the text of a tractate begins as 'page two'. One should never think he has completed it.] This is the reason we do not wait to restart the Torah, but begin immediately after ending. The same is done at a *siyum masechess*, where people usually start the next section right after ending this section. [See Taamei Haminhagim 337-8 729, Likutim 92.] In a sense, even when completing it for the first time one really is finishing his first review. In the womb, each unborn child studies the entire Torah for the first time. An angel causes him to forget it upon birth, and for his entire life he tries to remember it by reviewing it. [See Nidah 30b.]

The third source refers directly to the completion of a *masechess*. It is the main

source for a *siyum*. Most of the customary prayers seem as old as the *siddur*. As oral traditions, they presumably date to the times of the Prophets, in some form. The *siyum* is there to thank Hashem publicly for the fortune of completing, while acknowledging that it came with toil and hard work. [Yam Shel Shlomo ibid. See Halochoscope X:2.]

B) Seudas Mitzvah

Having determined that a *siyum* is in order, the feast to celebrate it is considered a *seudas mitzvah*. This means that the participants fulfill a *mitzvah* eating there. Certain restrictions are relaxed to permit eating there under otherwise restrictive regulations. For example, a *bris milah*, circumcision, is celebrated with a festive meal. This is considered *seudas mitzvah*. People who might otherwise be disallowed from eating the food at this meal, might be allowed to do so due to the *mitzvah*.

The basis for this consideration is a Talmudic passage describing a partial *Yomtov* that coincides with a partial fast day. The day that a family had the privilege to donate wood for use in offering the *korbanos* was celebrated as a *Yomtov* by the members of that family. It is similar to the day a private person donates a *korban*. He is forbidden to fast or to eulogize on that day. He is also forbidden to work. Some say this has the standing of *minhag*, while others say it is a Rabbinical prohibition. One such family had a tradition to donate the wood every year on the Tenth of Av. If *Tisha B'av* falls on *Shabbos* it is pushed off to Sunday. The fact that it is pushed off mitigates its severity. The members of this family did not observe the fast day. This raises the issue of a *bris milah*. The *bris milah* must be done on the eighth day, if at all possible. If the eighth day falls on Sunday, the Tenth of Av, the *bris milah* takes place. The immediate *baalei simcha* may break their fast. Everyone else may only attend the *seudah* by night, after the fast is over. For the *baalei simcha*, the entire day is a *Yomtov*. For the others, the day is not a *Yomtov*. The *seuda* is a *mitzvah*. It may not push aside the prior fast day.

This arises when one wishes to celebrate a *siyum* that will conflict with the *Taanis Bechorim* to be discussed later. It also arises when offering meat and wine for a *siyum* during the 'nine days'. Another consideration is the participation of an *aveil*, also to be discussed later. Most poskim consider a *siyum* sufficient cause to override the restrictions that would be overridden by any standard *seudas mitzvah*. Some poskim draw a distinction between the *mesayem* and the guests, as will be discussed in the next sections. [See Psachim 50a, Tos. Taanis 12a, 26a, Rambam, Klei Hamikdash 6:9-10. Yam Shel Shlomo B.K. 7:36. Chavos Yair 70. Tur, Sh. Ar. OC 551:10, 559:9, commentaries.]

C) What is deserving of a Siyum

Accordingly, it is important to determine what qualifies as such a *seuda*. What is considered a complete 'course' of study that requires or deserves a *siyum*?

It has always been the practice to sub-divide parts of study. Hashem made breaks between *parshiyos* to give Moshe a chance to absorb them. We derive from here that when studying it is important to break the subject matter into its sections. [See Vayikra 1:1, Rashi, Sifra.] Hashem also divided the Torah into five *Chumashim*. Each *Navi* is distinct from each other *Sefer*, including the twelve *Sefarim* of the short prophecies. Each *Sefer* of the *Kesuvim* is separate, and *Tehilim* is subdivided into five *Sefarim* of its own.

Some *masechtos* of *Mishna* and Talmud were always separate *Sefarim*. Avraham studied *Avoda Zara*. The *Tana'im* studied *Uktzin* or the like. Debates and disagreements

recorded were later included. There were differences of opinion on interpretation or on traditions. Many *masechtos* had not been organized, or many *Mishnayos* were not put into a *masechess*. The generations were becoming less learned and scholarly, and the Romans were making study by heart more difficult. Therefore, the *Mishna* was organized and later written down, making it easier to study quickly and continuously, and to memorize. The body of the text went back to Sinai, with additions by each generation of scholars as they saw fit. The *sefer* was not necessarily to arrange an order in which they would be studied. Rather, each teacher used his judgment to choose a subject that he felt they would appeal to the students at the time. [See Baba Metzia 33a-b, Rashi. Tana Dbei Eliyahu Zuta, 2. Tanchuma and Yalkut, end Ki Sisa. Rambam, Introduction Mishna.] Some tractates were subdivided again, such as 'Nezikin' [Bava Kama, Bava Metzia and Bava Basra]. The *perakim* of each tractate were also authorized and separated.

The basic measure of a protracted study is when it takes time, it is studied in full with no omissions, and it is studied with a commentary of some sort, so that one knows the true meaning. The sub-sections of the Torah read each week are like a complete lesson in a series. In the end, we make a *siyum* on the entire Torah. A complete Seder of *Mishna* qualifies for a *siyum*. Some *poskim* consider studying a *masechess* of *Mishna* or *sefer* of *Chumash Navi*, with one main commentary, sufficient. Others maintain that a single *masechess mishnayos* is insufficient, or that to qualify it must be studied with more than the basic commentary. Some even qualify a *Sefer* of *Midrash* and some, a section of *Shulchan Aruch*. [The standard text of the *hadran* implies that completing other *sefarim* is cause for celebrating a *siyum*.] There is a general consensus that a *masechess* of Talmud qualifies, no matter how short. By definition, it takes time to understand the issues. It is complete and self-contained. It gives the student the joy of accomplishment. The majority do not accept completion of the writing of a *Sefer Torah*, or any *Sefer* as a cause for a standard *sudas mitzvah*. [See Sh. Ar. OC 470, commentaries. Yabia Omer I:26:9. Igros Moshe I:157, II:12. Tiferess Shmuel 55.]

On the Parsha ... And Moshe completed the work. The cloud covered the Ohel Moed and the glory of Hashem filled the Mishkan. And Moshe was unable to enter the Ohel Moed, for the cloud rested on it, and the glory of Hashem filled the Mishkan. [Pekudei, 40:33-35] And [Hashem] called to Moshe ... [Vayikra 1:1]. Moshe could not enter the Ohel Moed until he was called on by Hashem. The call gave him the power to enter (see Or Hachayim). Why does the Torah place the verse about Moshe's inability to enter the Mishkan right before the end of *Sefer Shemos*, rather than at the beginning of *Vayikra*? Having completed the construction of the *Mishkan*, one could think that humanity had indeed reached its highest level possible. Israel had managed to bring the *Shechina* down to a structure, the work of their hands. They had a right to feel a sense of accomplishment, that with Hashem's help and instructions they had fulfilled their purpose in this world. Among other things, Hashem wished to show us that whatever we accomplish, we have never finished our jobs. Each great accomplishment is but a step on the way, bringing us closer and closer to perfection, and to Hashem.

♫ In memory of R. Akiva Moshe ben Menachem Manale Silver, whose *yahrzeit* is Adar 28. ♫

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