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The Eleventh Siyum HaShas of Daf Yomi

The "Echad" Moment

The preparation for this Torah-inspired event began, in its way, over eighty years ago, when Rabbi Meir Shapiro introduced the idea of learning through the entirety of *Shas* – one page at a time – *Daf Yomi* – at the *Knessia Gedolah* of Agudath Israel in Vienna. It was advanced when the Gerrer Rebbe זצ"ל ushered in the New Year 5684 by learning the first folio of *Shas*, *Berachos daf Beis*, and tens of thousands of *Chassidim* followed his example. The more immediate preparation for this *Siyum* began on September 29, '97/27 Elul 5757, when Jews on six continents began the Eleventh Cycle of *Daf Yomi*, which has just come to a close.

The arduous task ahead was approached with trepidation... and enthusiasm, explaining one phrase at a time, exploring meanings and implications, analyzing disputes, absorbing *sugya* after *sugya*, paving one's way through a *perek*, completing an entire *Masechta*. "Hadran alach *Masechte Berachos*," and on for 2,711 pages, for seven and a half years.

Then came the taxing schedule, the logistical planning, setting up communications centers and mailings, leasing of arenas, meeting halls and auditoriums, setting up satellite networks, making and confirming seat reservations, and the countdown to the end of *Masechta Nidda*.

The long-awaited day came, and highways, skyways, trains, buses – all were crowded with *mesyemim* (*Shas* completers) and fellow celebrants. The confluence of *Yidden* outside Madison Square Garden and the Javits Center in Manhattan, Continental Airlines Arena in New Jersey, Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, Rosemont Theatre in Chicago, Ricoh Center in Toronto... the streams of joyful people converging outside of the entrances of these gathering places, pulsating with love for Torah, dedication to *limud HaTorah*, ambition for growth in Torah. All entering for a defining sort of celebration, declaring, in effect: *I am a Torah Jew, and nothing could be more fulfilling than this event, as a catapult to a yet more exciting future.*



For the hundred thousand plus people who participated in the *Siyum HaShas* of the 11th Cycle of *Daf Yomi* in America and around the world, there was an incredibly wide range of overwhelming, inspiring moments. In this writer's view, the most embracing one was the crying out of the first *passuk* of *Shema* during *Maariv*, concluding with the word "Echad!" Yes, the tens of thousands in the New York City area and at

locking unity. Yeshiva students, Chassidim, Sephardim, Jews of Polish, Hungarian, German, Russian, Moroccan, Syrian and red-white-and blue American extraction... men, women, children... Rabbis, *Roshei Yeshiva*, Chassidic leaders, *mechanchim*, teachers... manufacturers, professionals, entrepreneurs, clerks, laborers, full-time-at-home mothers – all were one in their appreciation of Torah study as the life

In the Aftermath of the Siyum

I CAN NOT PUT INTO WORDS THAT WHICH WE JUST EXPERIENCED. FROM THE MOMENT WE WALKED IN, TO OUR AMAZING SEATS, TO THE LAST KADDISH. FROM RABBI WACHSMAN'S "WE WANT MORE" TO RABBI MATISYAHU'S "WE MUST COMMIT OURSELVES," WE LEFT A FEW FEET TALLER AND FEELING LIKE WE HAVE REACHED A NEW LEVEL.

RABBI ARYEH FEIGENBAUM

Rav of Congregation Ohr HaTorah
and leader of the 100 member Dallas delegation to the Siyum.

over seventy other locations across America, and yet more in far-flung settings joined by satellite, all these people covered their eyes and intoned the declaration of *Hashem's* indivisible Unity. And in doing so *together*, demonstrated that just as "You are One and Your Name is One," one must affirm with equal certainty, "who is like Your people Israel, one nation on earth."¹

A look at the dais, a glance across the auditoriums, a scan of the list of locations, and one realizes the extent of the range of participants. Indeed, diversity made for an inter-

force of *Klal Yisroel*: its crowning glory in the ideal setting, its saving grace under pressure, its key to survival in the worst of circumstances.



The *achdus* amidst diversity was underscored by Rabbi Shmuel Bloom, Vice-President of Agudath Israel of America, in his address at the *Siyum* gathering:

When the *Gedolei Torah* convened to found Agudath Israel, Harav Meir Shapiro זצ"ל

wondered aloud in the speech in which he introduced the concept of *Daf Yomi* how it would be possible for the *kadosh*

Rav Chaim Brisker to discuss matters with a German *Rav* from Frankfurt, or how a cultured Jew from Holland would find common ground with an Eastern European Jew from Poland.

However, when he sat down to learn a *daf* Gemara, he realized that a *blatt* Gemara contains these diverse groups. The Gemara was written in *Bavel*, which today is Iraq; *Rashi* was written in France; and the *perushim* of the *Rif*, *Rashba*, *R i t v a* a n d *Rambam* were written in Spain and North Africa.

That is what *Daf Yomi* is all about, and that is the *ratzon* of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. The unity of *Klal Yisroel* should come – and could only originate from *limud haTorah*.²

“*Echad*,” in awe, in joy, in dedication and determination. Somehow, on this occasion, the place one occupied did not define one’s role. Regulars at sporting events at the Garden or Continental Arena know what to expect when they enter: The players are in the rink or on the court. The coaches are on the sidelines. And the stands are full of fans, rooting and cheering “their” team. This time, the major bulk of the players were in the stands, the coaches were seated on a dais, and everybody seemed to be

cheering everyone else, from wherever they were sitting.

Perhaps to those of us who were part of the massive New York area assemblies, the *Maariv* following the *Siyum* – after completing *Shas* – had suggestions of *Ne’ila* – the final prayer on Yom Kippur, marking the last moments before the doors close on *Hashem’s* compassion-

THE JOY OF COMPLETION
.....

Rabbi Goldberg also captured the explosion of joy at the conclusion of the actual *Siyum*:

The body rejoices. Not just the mind. Not just the soul.

The last words of the Talmud are recited and duly explicated, then the formal completion ceremony and the accompanying, unique *Kaddish* is also recited, and then – then –

No instruction.

No sooner is the last word of this *Kaddish* recited than the entire throng breaks out in spontaneous dance.

Have you ever danced together with tens of thousands of people?

It takes seven and a half years of daily intellectual and spiritual struggle to explain this dance.

People lock arms. People sing. Children and teenagers move to the front, hop the security barrier, form circles and dance in

front of the sages on the dais. The sages themselves, some very old and infirm, rise and dance in circles, too. Young. Old. Eminences. Unknowns. Dancing, all together. The body rejoices. Body. Mind. Soul. The ultimate unity.

Before G-d.
“Our G-d.”



ate forgiveness. I cannot comment for those whose connection to the event was electronic, but the memory of the hushed, silent devotion, almost palpable to us *daveners*, still inspires a chill in my bones. (See sidebar for description of *Maariv* at the *Siyum* by Rabbi Hillel Goldberg, editor of *Intermountain Jewish News*, IJN.)³



Rabbi Shmuel Bloom*



*Photo captions were printed only for those speakers quoted in this article.



Rabbi Ephraim Wachsman



The joy of celebration over the completion of *Shas* leaped over geographic distances and was joined by a multitude of smaller groups.

Back in Denver, 500 celebrants crowded the local JCC to participate in a local *Siyum*, watching the New York event by satellite connection. Rabbi Aaron Yehuda Schwab, a *Rosh Kollel* of the Denver Community Kollel, recalls:⁴

Denver was one of the 70 cities connected via satellite to more than 120,000 Jews gathered in stadiums and theaters throughout the world. People sitting around me at the JCC Theater were moved to tears of joy and sadness at numerous points throughout the hookup.

Rabbi Ephraim Wachsman brought this gathering into focus: "There are thousands of us gathered here to sanctify Hashem's Name, but the generation before us was gathered to sanctify Hashem's name in a different way. The Nazis gathered even more people.... They died as Jews, we must live as Jews!"

One of the highest points was viewing tens of thousands of people in New York and at all hookups break out into spontaneous song

from within, not an opportunity to let loose. I was thinking: G-d, look how much your children love You and Your Torah!

The sense of togetherness was genuine, as we watched a colorful display of different types of Jews of all ages in Toronto, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles – and even Lublin, Poland.

The excitement was picked up in Houston:⁵

... A satellite hook up to the East Coast celebrations, *Mara D'Asra* Rabbi Yehoshua Wender

also made a local *Siyum*, followed by a community-wide *Seudas Mitzvah*. There was a genuine feeling of being part of the national *Olam HaTorah*, and the crowd erupted into song and dance every time there was singing and dancing at the other locations.

The thrill was experienced in Calgary, Alberta, led by Rabbi Zev Friedman, who extended the celebration to Florence, Montana, courtesy of contemporary technology.

And the joy also reverberated in Moscow, in the former USSR, as reported by Betzalel Mandel:

Although the school day ends



From the intermountain Jewish News

When I watched the previous event in 1997 via satellite transmission to a video screen in Denver, I saw, and faintly heard, tens of thousands of Jews praying in unison.

I was jealous of that.

I wanted to be there.

I, too, wanted to say *Shema Yisrael* and *Yehei Shemei Rabba* with tens of thousands of Jews, together.

I made a seven-and-a-half year mental note: Be there, G-d willing, in 2005.

[Hillel Goldberg did come. The lines that follow describe *Maariv* in 2005 in the Continental Arena.]

The fourth word of the Eighteen Blessings is "our G-d," followed by "the G-d of our fathers." Who is "our G-d"? This is the G-d of the *minyan*, of the individuals, we pray with on any given *Shabbos* or weekday.

The group encourages the individual's spiritual quest.

And the group gives context to the individual yearning.

And the groups expands the spiritual consciousness.

The 20,800 voices – in unison "*Shema Yisrael*" – "*Yehei Shemei Rabba*" – put each of us on eagles' wings.

Soaring.

Enveloped.

Elevating each Jew around us, and, so much more powerful, elevated by this futuristic, vast assemblage enveloped in earnest prayer.

On the wings of eagles.

Privileged.

To be with the democracy of the Jewish people.

With "our G-d."

Jealousy consummated.

– Rabbi Hillel Goldberg
Editor

and dance. Local participants danced on the JCC stage, meshing with the ecstasy of the celebration of Torah on the screen directly behind them. The dancing was an expression of joy



at 3:30 PM, 38 boys from the oldest three grades in the Etz Chaim school remained for the event. In order to prepare them for the *Siyum*, the *Kollel Avreichim* arranged for a program for the boys running throughout the afternoon and evening until the live hookup began. At 2:00 PM, we brought the children into the auditorium where we were joined by the participants from other *mosdos*. We alternated between translating the speeches from New York and local speeches in Russian, although the video was streaming throughout. The highlight was the *Siyum* itself and the dancing following, as everyone realized that we were celebrating the event with *rivevos alpei Yisroel* (tens of thousands of Jews)!

Siyum, completing the last lines of the *Gemara Nidda* – described the elation experienced at the *Siyum* at the close of the second *Daf Yomi* cycle. It was then that Rabbi Stein began learning *Daf Yomi* – in 5698 (1938), nine cycles ago!

The Gemara tells us regarding the *asara harugei malchus* (the ten holy martyrs in the time of the Roman occupation), “*gevilin nisrafim ba’eish ve’osiyos porchos ba’avir* – the parchments were burnt, burning in the flames, but the letters were hovering in the air.” During the Holocaust, all the holy yeshivos were decimated, but their spiritual *ko’ach* remains with us until this very day. The very spirit of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin still thrives with the tremendous power of *Daf Yomi*, and although the great yeshivos have been destroyed, it is their spiritual influence that has accompanied us and has been instrumental in ensuring the rejuvenation of Torah today.



**BLOSSOMING OF TORAH,
ROOTED IN THE PAST**
.....

While most of the senior members of the gatherings could recall humbler times, Rabbi Chaim Stein, *Rosh Hayeshiva* in the Telshe Yeshiva in Wickliffe, Ohio – who made the actual

He was present among the multitudes who celebrated that day with many *Gedolei Torah* of the time, including the great *Rosh Hayeshiva*, Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman זצ"ל הי"ד.

In those days [prior to WWII], one was able to feel the imminent “*puranuyos*.” Chazal say about the suffering during *Ikvesa DeMeshicha* (in the era before the advent of *Moshiach*) that it will be so intense, they prayed that they not witness it.

of Torah study and Torah life were more than points of reference at this celebration. Since the Seventh *Siyum HaShas*, in 1975, the *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah* (Agudath Israel’s Council of Torah Sages) has called for dedicating the *Siyum* to the memory of the Six Million *Kedoshim* who perished at the hands of the Nazis ש"י in World War II. To give us a sense of how they kept the flame of Torah alive in unbearable conditions, we quote from the recollec-

tions of Reb Yosef Friedenson, editor of *Dos Yiddishe Vort*, former *talmid* of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, and survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto as well as five concentration and labor camps:

The Nazis understood that the secret of the eternal survival of the Jewish Nation was their attachment to the Talmud, and they thus sought to utterly annihilate Poland's Jews, who to them symbolized Jews totally attached to the Talmud....

I recall celebrating the third *Siyum HaShas* in 1946 in the DP camps in Germany. We were a tiny group of broken survivors, remnants of Polish Jewry that had all but been wiped out. At the time, all we had were two volumes of Gemara – symbolic of the pitiful conditions of Jewry at the time. At the previous *Siyum* in Lublin, there had been thousands of Yidden with thousands of Gemaras, and now we were only a few broken Jews with two solitary volumes of Gemara....

Today, as we celebrate the *Siyum HaShas* together with more than 100,000 Jews in North America, and many more in *Eretz Yisroel* and Europe, words to describe the

feelings welling up within me are difficult to commit to paper.

The Bostoner Rebbe, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Horowitz שליט"א added a stirring anecdote of the wartime *mesiras nefesh* for Torah, and its post-War ramifications:

There was a man in Vilna who

will not be able to finish it. Promise me that when you get out of the concentration camp, you will finish it for me...."

And then he added, "Tell your children and the remnants of *Klal Yisroel* when you will be released that they too must finish the learning that they began...."

Our perspective for appreciating what the Bostoner Rebbe aptly described as "an event unparalleled, as far as the number of people gathered together, since the time the *Yidden* received the Torah at *Har Sinai*," must also take into account the remarkable changes in the spiritual landscape in America – both in terms of intensity and sheer demographics.

Rabbi Chaskel Besser, Presidium member of Agudath Israel of America, Founding Chairman of the *Daf Yomi* Commission, remarked:

The *Siyum* is for the *zechus* of the *kedoshim* who were murdered in the Holocaust. The Nazis relished destroying every vestige of *Yiddishkeit*, burning *sefarim*, cutting beards and ripping up anything Jewish. What would be left after such destruction?... Who would have believed sixty years ago that a day such as this would ever take place? Sixty years ago, no one



took out time from his busy schedule to learn Torah. His entire family perished in Auschwitz. Even there, in the Valley of Death, he and a nephew spent time learning. One fateful night, the uncle told his nephew, "I know that tomorrow I will be taken away and killed. I am now in the middle of learning *Maseches Mo'eid Kattan*, but I know that I



Rabbi Fischel Hershkowitz



Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Horowitz



would have believed that there would be so much *Yiddishkeit* left in the world, and especially in America, where *Yiddishkeit* was non-existent at that time....

Sixty years ago, there were scarcely ten *yeshivos gedolos* in the Western hemisphere, less than two *minyanim* of *kollel yungeleit*, and an Orthodox lay community succumbing to the pressures of “making a living,” in pursuit of financial and social advancement, even at the cost of *shemiras Shabbos*. The *kedoshim*’s “letters hovering in the air” settled on the untouched parchment of the next generation. Inspiration from *shearis hapeleta* (survivors of *Churban Europe*), coupled with the dedication of America’s Torah pioneers, blessed with incredible *siyata diShemaya*, made this transforming miracle take place.

Rabbi Ephraim Wachsman, Rosh Yeshiva of Meor Yitzchok (Monsey), posed the question:

Jews went to their death with “*Shema Yisroel*” on their lips. From where do the Jewish people derive this strength? This strength comes from the Torah, the pure and unblemished Torah – it is our lifeblood, our strength. Toiling in Torah, unceasing dedication to

learning, is what has preserved the Jewish people throughout the ages.

The *Imrei Emes* of Ger miraculously made his way to *Eretz Yisroel* in the middle of the Holocaust. 100,000 of his *Chassidim* and over one hundred of his own descendants perished at the hands of the Nazis שׂר. There was one grandchild

Rebbe immediately paraphrased the Torah’s words about Noach who survived the deluge: “*Vayisha’eir ach Noach* – and only Noach remained.” Then the *Imrei Emes* turned to his grandson and said, “Noach, for so many years you have not been able to learn. Go run to a *beis midrash* and take a Gemara.”

Appreciation – from the Perspective of a Survivor

My father (a Holocaust survivor) and I attended the *Siyum* together. The next day, he recalled:

“As we walked toward Madison Square Garden, I saw all those *frum Yidden* surging towards the front entrance from all sides, and I saw the big sign on Seventh Avenue lit up with the words *Siyum HaShas*. I just stopped and remembered where I was just a little over sixty years ago – and I started to cry. I probably did not stop crying all night. That I should be seeing this, with my own eyes, when I remember a time when *Yidden* looked in wonderment when they saw a single *Yiddishe* child. And now this, in this ‘*treifeneh*’ city! Who would have believed such a thing?”

NUTTI GOLDBRENNER (FROM PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE)
Monsey, NY



Learning Torah, learning Gemara is the only thing that we have. It has remained constant and unblemished throughout the entire history of *Klal Yisroel*.

We not only capture the holy letters that escaped the destruction of *Churban Europe*, we have much to learn and to emulate from *Klal Yisroel*’s resiliency. As Rabbi Elya Ber Wachtfogel שליט״א,

Rosh Hayeshiva of Yeshiva Gedolah Zichron Moshe (South Fallsburg) emphasized:

The *Yaavetz* (Rabbi Yaakov Emden זצ״ל) said that the survival of the Jewish people in *galus* is a greater miracle than the Exodus from Egypt and the Splitting of the Sea. This survival is only due

to their cleaving to Torah. But we yearn to go on to the next stage, after *galus*.

The Gemara points out that each of the three previous *galus* experi-

who survived; his name was Rav Noach Joskowitz. When he came to *Eretz Yisroel* after the war, he ran to his grandfather’s home, and upon setting his eyes on him, the



Rabbi Chaskel Besser





Rabbi Elya Ber Wachtfogel



ences was of a precise, predestined duration: Egypt, 210 years; Babylon, 70 years; and so on. Why is this current exile, *Galus Edom*, seemingly without end?

The Vilna Gaon explains that the sins of the First *Beis Hamikdash* – idol worship, immorality and murder – were external to the human being. Its impact is finite. The Second *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed, ushering in *Galus Edom*, because of *sinas chinam* – baseless hatred, an internal corruption, not so easily cleansed from the national *neschama*.

The *Gra* says that *sinas chinam* is a *midda* that not only manifests itself between man and his fellow man, but can also cause a person to reject the Torah itself. While he may learn, it is diluted; it is not learning that stems from a true *ahavas haTorah*. It is not the learning that *Chazal* speak of which can bring the *Geula*.

The *Chofetz Chaim* explains that

the main manifestation of *sinas chinam* is through talking *lashon hara*. He cites the *Zohar* that teaches us



Outreach through Daf Yomi

Just two days after the *Siyum HaShas*, at a wedding in Lakewood, I found myself sitting next to two (not-yet-*frum*) relatives, who had traveled seven hours by car to participate in the *simcha*.

“Are you part of the Orthodox group who learns the 2,700 pages of the Talmud?” one of the brothers asked.

I told him that anyone and everyone can learn. It is not limited to a segment of Orthodoxy, whether they “do the *Daf*” or have other study sessions. He asked a little more about the *Gemara*, until I delicately offered, “If you want to learn *Gemara*, I’m available. We can do it by phone with telephone conferencing; you, your brother, and I.”

It was basically that simple.

For years, we had reached out to these relatives to try Discovery or Arachim seminars. Not even a nibble. But when 100,000 Jews got together to celebrate the millions of *blatt* learned since the last *Siyum HaShas*, the media picked it up. A little national coverage of the *Siyum HaShas* and two Jews bought their first ArtScroll *Gemaras*, cleared their Wednesday nights to learn Torah, and have committed to master at least a little of *Shas*. As Rabbi Frand said, “It’s never too little. It’s never too late.”

RABBI YOSEF WIKLER (EDITOR OF KASHRUS MAGAZINE)
Brooklyn, NY

that it is due to *lashon hara* that the *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed and it is *lashon hara* that prevents its

rebuilding. Through control of our speech, and the resultant enhanced purity of our intense Torah study, we can bring the *galus* to an end and usher in the much-longed-for *Geula*.

TAKING THE MESSAGE FURTHER

Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon א"ש"ט"ו, *Mashgiach* of Bais Medrash Gavoha (Lakewood)

focused on one of the lessons we can – and must – pick up from this remarkable gathering, and internalize.

He recalled that his *rebbe*, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz ז"ל, the *Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva*, had asked a former camp inmate, “How did you survive five years of forced labor? How did you remain a *ma’amin*? How could you come out with the same love for the *Ribbono Shel Olam*?”

The survivor responded: “The Nazis שׂוּיִּי deprived us of every opportunity to keep mitzvos. We didn’t have

Shabbos or *Yom Tov*. We couldn’t learn; we could hardly *daven*. We were taken out in the early morning,



Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon



marched to the forest, worked all day, and at night marched back.

“But one thing they couldn’t take away from us – the *levana*. The moon was always there. Some people kept track of *Rosh Chodesh*, and they would look into the sky. When the moon made its first appearance, and we were being marched back, with soldiers on each side of us, we would make *Kiddush Levana*. We used to hold hands, and as we were marching, one man in the middle would lead us in *Kiddush Levana*.

“He boomed forth: אשר במאמרו ברא שחקים.

“We would echo his words. And those words penetrated our hearts: ‘Blessed are You, *Hashem*... Who with His utterance created the heavens and... all their legions. A decree and a schedule did He give them that they not alter their assigned task.... They are joyous and glad to perform the will of their Maker. To the moon He said that it should renew itself, which will be a crown of splendor for those borne [by Him] from

the womb [i.e., the Jewish People], those who are destined to renew themselves like it, and to glorify their Molder.’

“Suddenly we were inspired with a sense of hope. Just as after the moon has disappeared from view, leaving the sky in total darkness, it reappears – first as a sliver, then a crescent, and a half moon – so, too, do we Jews seem to be on the edge of oblivion. But we too ‘are destined to renew ourselves like the moon.’”

For a month, these prisoners had

The Last of the Mohicans

RABBI YECHIEL SPERO

As I stood dancing with my children in section 109 in the Continental Airlines Arena on March 1, 2005, I could not help but feel one distinct emotion. This just might be what it will be like when *Moshiach* arrives. I watched a group of yeshiva boys in section 232 bouncing back and forth, imbued with a sense of purpose. I wondered if any of them had finished *Shas*. Probably not – they would have been too young to have started 7 1/2 years ago. But they were celebrating Torah and having the privilege to be a *ben Torah*.

I watched as two men near me, apparently from completely diverse backgrounds – one wearing a knitted yarmulka, the other a black hat, bent upwards – holding onto each other, to each other’s *neshamos*, bound by a time-

RABBI SPERO, A REBBI IN THE TALMUDIC ACADEMY OF BALTIMORE, WAS REPRESENTED IN JO BY A PURIM ARTICLE, “BATHS, BULLIES, AND BARLEY” (FEB. ’01).

less treasure, a priceless gift. I glanced over to see a large section of seats, separated by a mesh net, in which proud mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters came to celebrate their sons’, husbands’, fathers’, and brothers’ accomplishments, beaming with pride and thrilled to be part of the learning. Their very pride and joy a visible testament to who they are.

But perhaps what touched me most was the sight of my father-in-law, Rabbi Yehuda Lefkovitz, and his father, our “Pappa,” Rabbi Moshe Lefkovitz, standing on the floor directly across from us. You see, they aren’t just a father and son coming to watch as observers in this historic *kiddush Hashem*. No. They are much, much more. They are *chavrusos*.

Seven and one half years ago, my Pappa and father-in-law began learning *Daf Yomi*. For my grandfather, this wasn’t his first time. It was at least his third, although I am almost certain he

had finished *Shas* throughout his other Talmudic travels. But this time, they were not sure they would be able to finish. They couldn’t have been. Because Pappa was 85 when they started the cycle. But that was no impediment for Pappa. It never has been.

Pappa comes from a different world, a world where *Yiddishkeit* was not taken for granted. He grew up in America in the early 1900s. It was a country almost completely devoid of Torah education and Torah learning. And although Cleveland, where he grew up, had almost eighty Kosher butcher shops, none of the children went to a full-time Hebrew Day school. In fact, many of those “kosher” people themselves would head out to work immediately following *shul* on *Shabbos* morning. As the old adage went, *Es iz shver tzu zein a Yid....*

And although Moshe was one of the few fortunate ones, he wondered. He feared what might be, what might become of



Rabbi Osher Weiss



no spiritually uplifting experience, but they knew that after four weeks, there would be another “*Kiddush Levana*.”

We Jews have that power of *his'chadshus* – renewal – and as we bid farewell to *Masechte Nidda* and the entire *Shas*, in

the very same breath we say, “*Hadran alach vehadrach alan*.” We’re coming back, and we are starting all over

again, afresh.

Part of the completion exercise is for the participants to carry away with themselves the enthusiasm and the glory of the evening, mobilized with a sense of resolve. As Rabbi Yosef Harari Raful שליט"א *Rosh Hayeshiva*, Yeshiva Ateret

From Down Under... to Shas Yidden

After our own *Siyum HaShas* on Sunday evening, February 27, with close to 1,000 participants, Wednesday morning, March 2nd is again the scene of a *kiddush Hashem* that surely reigns supreme in the annals of Australian Jewish history.

At 10:00 am, right in the middle of a busy workday morning, almost five hundred people arrive to view the satellite transmission from the North American venues. A sense of pride surges through the audience when Lublin comes up on the screen, for *Dayan* Yonason Abraham *shlita*, currently on the London Beth Din and former prestigious member of the Melbourne Kollel, has been invited to recite the *hadran* in Poland. This *Siyum* is truly global!

At the conclusion of the event, when all rise to declare *kabalas ol Malchus Shamayim*, everyone instinctively rises to join with their brothers across the globe in accepting *Hashem's* Kingship. The only segment we could not participate in was davening *Ma'ariv*, because it was 2:00 pm Wednesday afternoon!

The landscape of Australia is forevermore transformed. No longer shall Australia be known as the land Down Under; henceforth it shall be known as the land of *Shas Yidden!*

– Rabbi Moshe Yudkowsky, *Melbourne, Australia*

the Torah world. He was present as a young man when the dynamic Lubliner *Rav*, Rabbi Meir Shapiro, came to Cleveland. The Lubliner *Rav* was young

at the time, perhaps in his mid thirties, but he was already a worldwide recognized figure. Spending a *Shabbos* meal with this *gadol* in his parents' home had made a distinct impression on Moshe. He remembered receiving a *sefer* from him and learning one of his many beautiful *niggunim*, the composition of “*Libi Uve'sari*.” He knew that a world of Torah existed in Europe. But what about him and his kind? What about Torah in America?

Perhaps this anxiety stemmed from when Moshe Lefkovitz was a young man. He was present when Rabbi Barnett Brickner got up to speak in front of a packed audience of Jews in Cleveland. In those days, things were different. Rabbi Brickner was the Rabbi at Fairmount

Temple, one of the largest Reform Temples in Cleveland. At a citywide gathering, Rabbi Brickner referred to the Orthodox Torah Jews of the world as a dying breed. Those stinging words burnt a hole in young Moshe's heart. The declaration regarding Torah Jewry had been spoken. Torah Jews were, in Rabbi Brickner's cutting, callous words, “The Last of the Mohicans...”

. . .

So I watched and wondered what Pappa Moshe was thinking, watching the *Gedolei Yisroel* celebrate with the largest celebration for *limud haTorah* since *Har Sinai*. I was proud.... Proud of my father who, although not there, had fin-

ished his fourth cycle. Proud of my father in-law and Pappa who had finished their first together. Proud of my older brother who also was making his first

siyum. Proud to just be a *Yid*. But what was he feeling? On the way home, I found out. He wouldn't and perhaps couldn't fall asleep. “A man lives 93 years for a night like tonight.” I couldn't tell if he was crying, although I knew that his children who were present were. So were his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. But Pappa? His tears were mixed with laughter, perhaps the laughter that *Dovid Hamelech* refers to...

Az yimalei sechok pinu...

He thought of the over 120,000 individuals who had participated in tonight's life-altering event, and he thought of Rabbi Brickner...and his seriously flawed prophecy of so long ago. Last of the Mohicans, indeed. ☞

An extraordinary number of ladies were present at the *Siyum* gatherings, as fellow-celebrants for their investment of quality time and encouragement to those learning the *Daf*. The Bostoner *Rebbe* said it quite succinctly:

We have to remember that this *Siyum* is enabled by all of those who helped us get to this minute – our families, and especially our wives, who have given up many amenities to enable us to study Torah.

This sense of appreciation was reinforced by Rabbi Pinchos Friedman שליט"א *Rosh Hakollelim* of Belz in *Eretz Yisroel*.

Rabbi Friedman quoted the well-known story of Rabbi Akiva and his tribute to his wife, Rachel, the daughter of Kalba Savua:

When Rabbi Akiva returned to his home after 24 years of intensive Torah study, hailed as the *Gadol Hador*, with 24,000 *talmidim*, he proclaimed, pointing toward his wife: "What ever I and you have learned is totally to her credit."

The same applies to the wives of the *maggidei shiur* and the *lomdei hadaf*: "*Sheli, veshelachem, shela hi*. The Torah that I have acquired, and the Torah that you have acquired, is mainly to her credit."

My Turn.....

SARAH SPERO

A lot has happened to me in the seven and a half years since the last *Siyum HaShas*. Some things good, some things better, some sad and some sadder. I anticipated the event, but by the time I had found my seat I was perfectly happy to be by myself. When the lights went down, the floodgates opened.

I was overwhelmed by the entire evening. There was a video hookup connecting us to speakers in Madison Square

MRS. SPERO LIVES IN CLEVELAND. HER ARTICLE, "REPORT FROM CLEVELAND, A VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDE," WAS FEATURED IN JO, NOV. '97.

Garden, as well as venues in New Jersey, Los Angeles, Chicago, Lublin, Poland, Moscow and others. All done in an effort to unite us as one, across the world. All I wanted was to be alone to wrap myself in the arms of generations past. I did not want to make small talk or be pleasant with my seatmates. I was overcome with emotion and I was too embarrassed to have anyone else notice. I am trying to figure out what it was that made me feel like this tonight.

Was it the numbers? I was seated in an auditorium on a snowy Cleveland night

with 1500 others, and I don't know if their reaction was similar to mine. Some of the sniffles and red eyes may have made us members of the same club, but I doubt that was it.

This eleventh *Siyum Hashas* was attended by over 100,000 men, women and children across the world. It is probably the largest gathering of Jews in modern times. One of my sons was in Continental Airlines Arena in New Jersey along with 25,000 others. He went as part of four generations: his wife's grandfather, who completed the learning along with his

Torah, a member of the *Nesius*, Agudath Israel of America, said,

The plan of *Daf Yomi* is a plan for quantity. It causes people to cover a *daf* a day, which adds up to large amounts over time. Let us hope that it will also contribute to the quality of *limud Torah*, and cause people to delve into the depth of Torah. Quantity in learning should be followed by an enhancement in quality.

This theme was also addressed by Rabbi Yaakov Perlow שליט"א, *Novominsker Rebbe*, *Rosh Agudas Yisroel*:

If all of us here tonight would just spend one hour per week learning, either in person or on the telephone, with a fellow Jew – one who has not been as fortunate as we have been, one who has not been privileged enough to have had a Torah education – this would be a great way to fulfill the Torah's command to "learn teach, keep and do." We must focus on what we, as a community, should take from the *Siyum*. Above all, we must leave here with a new sense of commitment to Torah study.

Learning *Daf Yomi* is a wonderful,

beautiful thing, but we can always improve and enrich our learning even further. The typical *Daf* schedule allows for seven hours of learning per week, one hour per day. Perhaps it is time to add an eighth hour: an extra hour devoted to gaining a more in-depth understanding of the *daf*, or to reviewing the week's study regimen, or perhaps to incorporate regular halacha study into the schedule, or time dedicated to study of *mussar*. If we come away from this *Siyum* with such a commitment, then the *Siyum* will truly have accomplished



Rabbi Yosef Haryari-Rafal



Rabbi Pinchos Friedman

son (our *mechutan*), grandson and great-grandson. What a privilege!

This must have something to do with touching eternity.

. . .

That is what the *Daf* is all about. It is a commitment to the past and a promise to the future. It is something that I have shared with my life's partner for the past four cycles. (Each cycle is about 7.5 years) That's a 'lotta' years. It is weddings and births, sickness and death, and everything in between. He likes to say that he has either slept through or turned the pages during most of the cycles. But that is not true. What is true is that I have watched with awe and respect, a commitment that has changed our lives. The *Daf*, and everything it entails, has become an integral part of who and what we are. So much so, that I do not

think of it as intrusive or obligatory. It is simply there. One's day revolves around it. It is Torah in its Oral form written down and passed to generations. You are either starting your day with the *Daf* or ending your day with it, or learning it somewhere in the middle.

Learning the *Daf* has nothing to do with school or yeshiva. It is simply a way

to commit to a study cycle of learning Torah that is empowering.

My participation in the *Siyum* tonight was as a spectator who has embraced this event with reverence. I am not only the wife of a participant, but I am also the mother of another. I am humbled by the enormity that this entails. This form of study is male dominated, but I do not think of learning Torah as anti-women. I will not apologize to those who want me to feel it is. My soul is neither male nor female. That is only my body. The Torah learned in our family belongs neither to him nor to me, but to the soul within us, as a couple, as a family, as a unit and as a nation. I am a part of it.

Tonight I stood with those past, present and future, to celebrate the eternity of our Torah and our people. And my soul soared. ☞

Hakaras Hatov

To the Editor:

The Torah Communications Network would like to express gratitude and appreciation to Agudath Israel for arranging the magnificent *Siyum HaShas*, that just took place - as it does every seven and a half years. It was truly a *Kiddush Shem Shamayim berabbim*. Hopefully, we will all celebrate the next *Siyum* together in *Yerushalayim ir hakodesh* with *Melech HaMoshiach* as the featured speaker.

We would also like to thank all our outstanding *maggidei shiur* who brought the voice of Torah over the telephone to thousands of listeners worldwide. We also wish a hearty *mazal tov* to our thousands of daily listeners, who have been on-the-line with us for the past seven and a half year *Daf Yomi* cycle, upon their completion of the entire *Shas*. It's our dedicated listeners who are with us almost 365 days a year that deserve the credit for their persistent, unwavering, and relentless daily commitment to Torah study. May *Hashem* grant them the strength and health to continue for many *siyumim* to come.

RABBI ELI TEITELBAUM

(ON BEHALF OF THE TORAH COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK)

Brooklyn, NY

We, in turn, extend our deepest admiration and hakaras hatov to Rabbi Teitelbaum for directing his extraordinary vision, remarkable skills and talents, and unwavering dedication to initiating, fine-honing, and expanding the Torah Communications Network to bring a wide range of Torah shiurim to the ears of tens of thousands of Jews, whenever and wherever they are able to tune in. The amount of Torah being spread through his pioneering efforts is beyond our calculation. N.W.

good qualities of one another and not their failings." This beautiful event, which so symbolizes unity between all segments of Jewry, should spur us to focus on the message of *achdus*.

5,000 in Chicago, noted two factors in the virtual doubling of the number of people who are finishing *Shas* as compared to the previous *Siyum*:

One, is the inspiration generated

THE SECRET OF JEWISH SURVIVAL: SAVORING THE SWEETNESS OF TORAH

.....

Rabbi Yissachar Frand שליט"א, *Rosh Yeshiva* in Ner Israel, Baltimore, addressing a *Siyum* gathering of

its purpose.

[The *Rebbe* then added,] we members of the Torah community should engage in introspection in several aspects. Tonight is 21 Adar, the *Yahrzeit* of the renowned *Noam Elimelech*, Rav Elimelech of Lizhensk. In the famed *tefilla* that Rav Elimelech composed and that many Jews say before *davening* in the morning, it states, "Put in our hearts that we only focus on the



The Novominsker Rebbe





by the *Siyum HaShas* itself. *Sefer Hachinuch* comments concerning the *Yoveil* year that a master must free his *eved* (slave) – undoubtedly a hardship for him. Yet, when he hears the *shofar* blown and remembers that everyone else is also freeing his slaves, this realization makes it easier. Similarly, seeing so many involved in *Daf Yomi*, despite the discipline it demands, creates a ripple effect and drives home the message that it is feasible. *Daf Yomi* is no longer an elitist enterprise. “If you can do it, so can I.”

The second factor is that the *nishmas Yisroel* can only achieve satisfaction through the sweet and fulfilling study of Torah. The *neshama* thirsts for something, but temporal pleasures can be compared to junk food – it cannot provide nourishment. We all must leave here tonight committed to accomplishing more. The inspiration will find expression in various extremes. While some will be moved to undertake *Daf Yomi* and finish *Shas*, others will encounter their first *daf* of Gemara.

May I share with you an actual

story of an assimilated Jew – a boxer by profession – who, seeing the enthusiasm of his newly observant son for Gemara learning, was determined to share in the experience, despite his lack of background. It took more than a year of persistence for the man, with his son’s help, to master one *daf*. The father wanted to celebrate his achievement with a formal *siyum*, but his son thought it unjustified. He brought the matter to Rav Moshe Feinstein זצ”ל, who concurred with the father. So the son organized a *seuda* to mark the long-awaited milestone – celebrating

From the Sidelines... To the Front Lines

E.T. RUBIN

A Mother’s Reflection on the Siyum HaShas

The excitement was mounting, the countdown had begun. Each morning, two shining black eyes would peer at me. “Mommy,” a voice would begin, “when is the *Siyum HaShas*? I want it to be today.”

Laughingly, I would tell him the exact countdown and gently remind him that his job is to concentrate on his learning, and when the big day would come, it would come. The day would then pass, filled as usual by the myriad obligations of a mother, working, cleaning, cooking, shopping, caring for the children and serving supper until... The door burst open, “Mommy, Mommy!” My heart plummeting, I quickly ran to the door to see what tragedy had occurred. “Mommy! Did the tickets come yet?” Breathing a sigh of relief, I explained that no, the tickets had not yet come, but they were ordered and

MRS. RUBIN LIVES IN LAKEWOOD, NJ. THIS IS HER FIRST CONTRIBUTION TO THESE PAGES.

should be arriving soon. And then came the big question.

“Mommy,” came the inquisitive voice, “are you coming to the *Siyum HaShas*?”

Clearing my throat, I responded, “No, I don’t think I will be able to go this time.”

Deep down, in the dark recesses of my mind, however, an active conversation was taking place. One voice kept repeating, “Why don’t you go? You will get such an enormous amount of *chizuk*! Imagine, joining with a crowd of thousands of *Yidden* for one purpose, to celebrate the momentous occasion of the completion of *Shas*! What could be more sublime? It is not every day that such an opportunity comes your way! Go, go, go!”

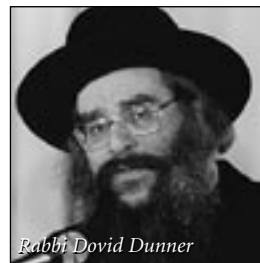
And then came the second voice. “Yes, I agree that I would derive tremendous inspiration from the *siyum*, but is that what *Hashem* really wants from me at

this particular point in my life? *Baruch Hashem*, I have been blessed with a house of children. I work part of the day away from home. I often feel like I am swimming against the tide, trying to keep house and ensure that my children are cared for physically, emotionally and spiritually. If I am out late, even one night, it can adversely affect my household for the rest of the week.... No. I shouldn’t go....”

And then, a conversation with my grandmother came to mind. We had been discussing working away from the house versus staying home with the children. My grandmother reminded me that the Gemara says that a woman earns *sachar* (reward) for Torah by sending her husband and children to learn, by being home to greet them when they return, by enabling them to learn. She added, “Any decision that you have to make in life should center around those goals; the learning of your husband



Rabbi Yissachar Frand



Rabbi Dovid Dunner

the *siyum* of one *daf* of Gemara, with Reb Moshe in attendance. Later that night, the gentleman passed away in his sleep. Reb Moshe spoke at his *levaya* (funeral) and said that just as *Chazal* tell us that there are those who acquire *Olam Habba* with one deed, so too, one can accomplish this with one *daf* of Gemara. The lesson is that it is never too late and never too little, but yet, never enough.

Among those attend-

and children should always remain top priority. If you ever have a question whether you should go somewhere, or do something, consider whether or not it will assist you to achieve this goal.”

Remembering this conversation, I realized the decision had been made. Yes, it would have given me enormous *chizuk* to personally witness, by attending the *Siyum HaShas*, how much our husbands and children can accomplish. Yes, I would personally grow from the experience. For me, however, at this particular time, it was more important to send my children for the experience of their life, while keeping things running smoothly at home. Speaking for myself, I know that by *not* going to the *Siyum HaShas*, I will be more capable of achieving my goals as a mother.

Looking back over the past few weeks, I realized that dominating my children’s conversations, their focus of excitement, was the upcoming *Siyum HaShas*.

ing the *Siyum* celebration at Madison Square Garden is a Wall Street executive who “re-discovered” his *tefillin* a year ago, and has been assuming Torah learning and additional mitzvos in the weeks since. In his words: “I’ve been hoping that my growth through assuming more mitzvos shouldn’t just be incremental. I want it to

be transforming. Being part of the *Siyum* was even more than that.”

The imprint on all of us was far from little. It was not too late. And surely, it cannot be enough. ☞

¹ From the *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Mincha* on *Shabbos*.

² Quotations based on transcripts published in *Hamodia*, Mar. 3, '05.

³ *IJN* Mar. 4, '05

⁴ From *IJN* Mar. 11, '05

⁵ Reported in *Yated Ne'eman*, Mar. 11, '05

Echoes from Seven and a Half Years Ago

Rabbi Frand mentioned two reasons why there were so many more people involved in *Daf Yomi* during the eleventh cycle than there were in the tenth. I would suggest a third reason: Rabbi Frand’s address at the Tenth *Siyum HaShas*. When I think back to that event, I remember listening to Rabbi Frand’s acknowledgement of the wives and mothers who make it possible for the men to learn, and in particular, I recall his description of the mother of Rabbi Meir Shapiro, and how she instilled in her son the recognition of the importance of learning each and every day. I was a newlywed, married less than one month, and at the time, I did not really understand what it would mean to make this kind of a commitment. But after hearing Rabbi Frand’s words, I decided, then and there, that I would support my husband in this monumental task. I don’t believe that I was alone in being motivated by his words.

GOLDIE HUTLER (IN A LETTER SENT TO RABBI AVI SHAFRAN)

Another thread that ran through our conversations was the sense of anticipation, not for the upcoming *Siyum*, but for the next one, in 7 and a half years, when, “I will be sixteen years old and I will be able to begin learning *Daf Yomi* from *Masechta Berachos* together with *Klal Yisroel!*” This zest for Torah, this thrill at being able to see and hear *Roshei Yeshiva*, *Rabbanim* and *Admorim*, as displayed by my sons, was my very own personal *Siyum*. It was seeing the fruits of my efforts “to send them off to learn.”

. . .

When my son woke me up bright and early on the day of the *Siyum HaShas*, shouting ecstatically that he cannot wait for the evening; when I ran to prepare

everybody’s lunches, and pick them up from school to ensure that they would make it to the *Siyum* on time; when I took out their white shirts and vests, and saw their eyes dancing

with excitement; when I closed the door behind them, wishing them a *chizuk*-filled evening; when I turned around to care for my daughters, and we discussed the *Siyum HaShas* over a special dessert in honor of the *Siyum*; when I was able to tuck my daughters in and put the telephone to their ears so that they went to sleep to the sound of the songs being sung at the *Siyum HaShas*; I knew that although I was only participating vicariously through the male members of my family, this was the greatest manifestation of the Gemara’s words regarding how a woman reaps reward for Torah learning. I was accomplishing my purpose. So – although I was seemingly participating only from the sidelines – in truth, I, too, was on the front lines. ☞



Photo: Pinchas Orbach

RABBI ARYEH Z. GINZBERG

The Day After

The Kiddush HaShem of the Siyum HaShas

EVERYONE'S MITZVAH

Much has already been written and much will yet be written about the recently celebrated *Siyum HaShas*. Clearly, the theme is – and will continue to be – about *Kiddush Hashem*.

Kiddush Hashem is not just a good thing; it is vital for the very future of *Klal Yisroel*. The *Rambam* writes that every person is *metzuva* (commanded) to perform *Kiddush Hashem*. In some generations, that responsibility entails giving up of one's life; in others, it's *living* in a manner that sanctifies *Hashem's* Name. Some are given the opportunity to do so with their great wealth, and others do so in the midst of their great poverty. While the situations and the times vary, the underlying theme is the same. Every man, woman and child is *metzuva* in *Kiddush Hashem*.

Even more so, *Chazal* teach us that only a great, colossal and unified act of *Kiddush Hashem* will ensure our redemption and salvation from a world where Jewish blood still flows freely (whether

RABBI GINZBERG, FOUNDING RAV OF OHR MOSHE TORAH INSTITUTE IN HILLCREST, NY, IS CURRENTLY RAV OF THE CHOFETZ CHAIM TORAH CENTER OF CEDARHURST (LONG ISLAND), NEW YORK. HE IS A FREQUENT CONTRIBUTOR TO THESE PAGES.

by homicide bombers in Tel Aviv, or by the sudden deaths of young fathers and mothers in our local communities), in order to be *mechapeir* (atone) for the colossal *Chillul Hashem* (desecration of His Name) of our forefathers in the days of the *Churban Bayis*.

And, if so much was invested by the organizers of this great event – in terms of effort, time, and money – to assure that a *Kiddush Hashem* be realized, it would behoove us to understand what truly makes a *Kiddush Hashem*.

THE CRUCIAL FACTOR

We may be able to offer a definition with a closer look at a perplexing Midrash. The Midrash in *Shir Hashirim* (1-15) describes the famous incident when the three prophets, Chanannia, Mishaeil and Azaryia, were thrown into the fire for not worshipping an idol. After three days and three nights in the fire (according to one opinion), they emerged unhurt and complete. Even their clothes, *Chazal* say, were unsinged, nor did they have a smell of fire or smoke. This took place before the eyes of all those gathered there.

What is so perplexing is that the Midrash then asks, "What was the *Kiddush Hashem*?" Could there be any greater

Kiddush Hashem in the world than to witness the overwhelming and breathtaking sight of these *Neviim* walking around in the fire and emerging unscathed? What is meant by that question?

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler זצ"ל explains that we learn a vital and important lesson from this Midrash. *Kiddush Hashem* is not generated by an event per se, no matter how powerful it may be; it is the *response* to the event that determines the level of *Kiddush Hashem*.

If the idol worshipers who witnessed this open miracle would have returned home and gone about their business as on every other day, then this miraculous event would have been many things – wonderful, inspiring, miraculous – but what it would *not* have been was a *Kiddush Hashem*. But the Midrash reports that all the idol worshipers who were present at that great miracle returned home, took their axes in hand and smashed their idols to pieces. This was the *Kiddush Hashem*.

And so when the historians, columnists or political observers of current events will need to know how to classify this *Siyum HaShas* – whether to refer to it as a massive *Kiddush Hashem*, possibly unmatched anywhere in the history of American Torah Jewry – they will have to focus their attention on "the morning after."

How did we, the participants, react on the morning after? Did we return to our homes, pick up our axes and smash away at our idols – our idols of apathy, of cynicism, of spiritual void, of lack of commitment and discipline in our *avodas*

hakodesh, and maybe most important of all, the idol of the American dream that climbing the ladder of corporate America is the ultimate goal and achievement? If we did so, then, in Rabbi Dessler's view, all the energy and resources spent on

this event were well worth it, because we achieved a significant and massive *Kiddush Hashem*.

CALLING IN THE RESPONSE
.....

Obviously, with over twenty thousand Torah-loyal Jews at Madison Square Garden, from all types of backgrounds and commitments, the reaction on "the day after" would be greatly varied, as well. Around 9:30 Wednesday morning, I received two calls on my cell phone, within minutes of each other. Despite the proximity of these two calls, they were as different from each other as they could possibly be.

The first call came from a good friend who is a prominent attorney and community leader in Silver Spring, Maryland. Years ago, Judah Lifshitz began leading a *Daf Yomi shiur* in his community, and despite a very busy practice and involvement in every aspect of the growth of the Torah community there, he dedicates his evenings to preparing and teaching the *Daf* to a small group of friends. He had traveled by railroad with other members of his *Daf Yomi shiur* to celebrate their *siyum* together with thousands of others also being *mesayeim*.

Without any hint of exhaustion, only with an infectious sense of enthusiasm and excitement, he said, "Rabbi Ginzberg, I have a problem. On Monday, I couldn't go to work because I was busy organizing my *shiur's* community-wide *siyum* held that evening. On Tuesday, my *chaverim* and I traveled to New York to attend the *Siyum*, and returned late that night by train to Silver Spring. The train was filled with people returning from the *Siyum HaShas* to Baltimore, Washington, Silver Spring, and environs. We were even privileged to have the *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Ner Yisroel, *Hagaon* Rabbi Ahron Feldman, שליט"א, traveling with us. And now it's Wednesday morning, and I'm in my car driving to my office in Washington, and to tell you the truth, I just can't go in. After such an evening of inspiration and *hisorerus* (inspiration), how do I just go back to the 'real world,' to the *chol*, when we are filled with so

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much *kodesh* from the *Siyum HaShas*?"

I shared with him *Chazal's* description of the schedule of the *Chassidim Harishonim*, who would devote three hours to each *tefilla*: the first hour to prepare for *tefilla*, one hour of *tefilla* itself, and the third hour after *tefilla*. The commentaries ask, "The need to prepare before *tefilla* is understandable, but what was the purpose of the hour after *tefilla*?" They explain that when one *davens* properly, with concentration and feeling, one's *neshama* is raised to a higher dimension, and thus needs an hour afterward for his *neshama* to return to the mundane world that we live in. So, too, I advised my friend, you should dedicate an "hour after *tefilla*" to allow the return of your *neshama* from *kodesh* to *chol*.

Two or three minutes passed, and another call followed, from an old friend who lives on the West Coast. He explained that while he doesn't learn *Daf Yomi*, he thought it was important to attend, and so he traveled with his wife and two children to New York for the great event. I asked him how long he would be staying in town, and he replied that once he was already here, he would make the most of it. He had arrived on Tuesday, went to a five-star restaurant, and then proceeded to the *Siyum HaShas*. He slept over at a hotel, would be attending a show that afternoon, and would return home later that evening.

After hanging up the phone, I was struck by the significant difference between the two early morning calls. One person was so uplifted and inspired with the event that he was finding it difficult to return to his office, and the other finds no difficulty with the transition from the ethereal treat of the *Siyum HaShas* to the bright lights of Broadway. The first caller saw the *Siyum* as a source of *chizuk* and *hisorererus*; the latter saw it as just another event, another place to go, another venue of entertainment.

According to Rabbi Dessler, *Kiddush Hashem* is measured by the event's ramifications "the morning after." How fortunate are those whose priorities and values enable them to fulfill this criterion of *Kiddush Hashem*!

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CLOSER TO HOME
.....

Another reaction came from one of my own *baalei battim*, who showed up on Wednesday morning to begin the 12th cycle of *Shas* at 5:30 a.m. in my *shul* (the Chofetz Chaim Torah Center of Cedarhurst). As he came in, he must have noticed my expression of surprise at seeing him at that early hour. We have had numerous conversations about the significance of learning in the early morning hours, and he had explained that his work finds him staying up to very late hours on the Internet, researching the latest activity in the foreign markets. His schedule requires him to attend a late *Shacharis* in the morning, and precludes the possibility of an early morning learning session.

He approached me quietly and shared the following with me: "Rabbi, my late night work schedule hasn't changed, and so I am unable to participate in your early morning *Daf Yomi shiur*. However, after coming home last night from the *Siyum HaShas* so full of inspiration, I just had to come at least once, at least the very next

morning. I wanted to share this experience with so many of my fellow Jews from around the world, even if only for one day."

He hesitated for a moment and then added, "You probably think that it's not really that much, to just come for the first day."

I responded, "Not much?" Referring to Rabbi Dessler's insight, I offered, "This is *Kiddush Hashem* in all its glory, and there's absolutely nothing in this temporal world that we live in that is more significant than that."

We may have wasted much time the morning after, with discussions at the water cooler as to who spoke how long; whether too much Yiddish was spoken, or too little Yiddish; and who did and who didn't speak. That's all insignificant. What *is* significant is how many people pulled themselves out of bed early Wednesday morning and, for the first time ever, began the first Mishna in *Shas*. Early reports indicate a four-fold increase of the average *Daf Yomi shiur*...

In Flatbush's Young Israel of Avenue J, Rabbi David Levine commented, "People

say the world is not the same since 9/11. I say our world is not the same since March 1st, the day of the *Siyum HaShas*. Look at how our attendance has so multiplied, that we're forced to move to larger quarters...."

In Monsey, Rabbi Yisroel Rokowsky's *shiur* grew from an average of 30 to over 100, necessitating an expansion of the *shiur* room. In Denver, two new *shiurim* sprouted up, and the old one went up from eight members to over 20. Similar responses are being heard from all over the USA.... Rabbi Chaim Veshnevsky, who brought a busload of "searching" congregants from the Jewish Learning Center in Manalapan, NJ, called the day after the *Siyum* with the following message: "To the *Siyum* organizers: You blew them away. You exposed my friends to Orthodoxy in a way they never would have – nor ever – imagined. The next day there were 13 members who signed up for my *Daf Yomi shiur*! In Manalapan! Many of them didn't know which way to hold the Gemara. But they were there. Thank you!"

Kiddush Hashem, indeed. ☐

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RINA BERGER



A “Praise”worthy Tradition

“MY FAVORITE PART”

.....
 “Tatty, can you guess my favorite part of the *Pesach* seder?” My brother, age six, looked up at my father with expectant eyes and awaited my father’s reply.

“Watching Tatty choke on the *marror*?”

“Uh uh!”

“Opening the door for *Eliyahu Hanavi*?”

“No!”

“All right, Tattete. Tell me, what is your favorite part?”

“Hallel and Nishmas.”

How could so young a boy appreciate Hallel and Nishmas? In our family, it’s really no question at all. At our *Pesach* seder, my parents were truly transformed from ordinary *baalebattim* into shining royalty. Tatty in his *kittel*, and Mommy in her embroidered apron, sat at the heads of the table, with the children in between. Throughout the seder, we were as players in an orchestra with Tatty as the

conductor. The beautiful *nusach*, which we all learned as small children, united us throughout the seder. The aromas coming from the kitchen let us know a delicious *shulchan aruch* was in store after the matzah and *marror*. And then came Hallel.

For as long as I can remember, my father took my brothers – as his father had taken him – to Boro Park from our Flatbush home to join Rabbi Moshe Bick זצ”ל at the end of the second seder for the first counting of *sefiras ha’omer*. My brothers commented that the *simcha* of *aliya leregel* at the time of the *Beis Hamikdash* must have felt similar. My family, generally arriving in time for Hallel was warmly welcomed. The same *nusach* that they heard at Rabbi Bick’s seder, and every *Yom Tov* in his *shul*, was used at our table.

The feelings with which every word was said by my father was reflected in his son’s voices. My sister and I, however, took our cue from our mother ר”ע. She swayed back and forth in her armchair, and whispered the words with their *nusach*. The tears streamed down her cheeks as she thanked Hashem:

“*Hatovos she’asisa im avoseinu ve’imanu* – The kindnesses that You did for our fathers and for us.” At first, it was for the usual things that Mommy cried. *Baruch Hashem*, she was seeing *Yiddishe nachas* from her children. And she had the *zechus* of having her mother and mother-in-law join us year after year at our seder.

THE CHANGING MESSAGE OF THE WORDS

.....
 Then, as the years went on, the words seemed to arouse a personal thanks to the *Ribbono Shel Olam* for the *yeshuos* the family had experienced that year. Eleven years ago, just four days after sitting at the sederim with Tatty, two of their married children and their families, and me, Mommy was rushed to the hospital with unexplained stomach pains. Over the last days of *Yom Tov*, before my eyes, she fell into a coma. For days, we feared that she would never awaken. Finally, she opened her eyes, and two days later uttered her first word – “*amein*” – to a wish from her cousin for a *refua sheleima*. She made

MRS. BERGER IS A MECHANECHES, WHO LIVES IN LAKEWOOD, NJ. THIS IS HER FIRST APPEARANCE IN THESE PAGES.

a miraculous recovery from a terrible infection, and came home three weeks after entering the hospital, but more was yet to come.

Two months later, Mommy was diagnosed with an incurable form of the dreaded disease. She committed herself to a strong fight – after all, she wanted to walk me, her youngest, to the *chupa*. For six months, she went through agonizing chemotherapy treatments, telling no one but immediate family. Every *Shabbos*, I sat next to her in *shul*, and heard her *daven Nishmas* quietly with our *nusach*. How thankful she was for every day. She told me that she really knows the meaning of the morning declaration, “*Modeh ani... shehechezarta bi nishmasi bechemla* – Thank You... for returning my soul to me with compassion.” Finally, when *Pesach* arrived again, she was in remission. We sat at the seder with company again, and when we got to *Nishmas*, there wasn't a dry eye at the table as we *davened*, “*hame'oreir yesheinim vehameitzit nirdamim*” – *Hashem*, thank You for allowing Mommy to awaken from a deep slumber, and allowing us to have another *Pesach* together as a family.

Two more years passed with their ups and downs, but the seder remained the highlight of the year. The emotions aroused by the words of *Hallel* and *Nishmas* grew as we understood more and more how much we had to be thankful for.

Baruch Hashem, three and a half years after Mommy got sick, she was *zoche* to walk me to the *chupa*. The medication had changed her outwardly, but nothing could hide the smile on her face.

heina azarunu rachamecha velo azavunu chasadecha – until now, Your pity has helped us and Your kindness has not left us” – were the last words he heard as he walked out the door. When he

THE EMOTIONS AROUSED BY THE WORDS
OF HALLEL AND NISHMAS GREW AS WE
UNDERSTOOD MORE AND MORE HOW
MUCH WE HAD TO BE THANKFUL FOR.

Hashem gave her the strength to dance at my *chasuna* and join us for *Sheva Berachos*. The next day, severe medical complications forced her to be hospitalized. Most of her remaining time was spent in the hospital.

Each week, one or another of my brothers would spend *Shabbos* with Mommy. She insisted that a white sheet be placed on her hospital tray, and that all *zemiros* be sung. My brother Yaakov spent her last *Shabbos* with her. She began *davening Shacharis* early *Shabbos* morning. When Yaakov left for *shul*, she was in the middle of *Nishmas*. “*Ad*

returned two hours later, he found her still on the same words of *Nishmas*. “*Ad heina azarunu rachamecha velo azavunu chasadecha*.” Mommy's mind was not

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entirely clear, but still, my brother was shocked that she seemed to be stuck on that line for more than two hours.

The following *Shabbos*, *Shabbos Hagadol*, *Tatty* and the children joined Mommy one last time at the hospital. Right before the *zeman* for *hadlakas haneiros*, *Tatty* helped Mommy do her *erev Shabbos* mitzva one last time. He lifted her almost lifeless hand, placed money between her fingers and helped her release the coins into her *Rabbi Meir Baal Haness pushka*. After *Kabbalas Shabbos*, the men sang *Shalom Aleichem* and *Eishes Chayil* for her one last time, and that evening she returned her pure *neschama* to her Maker.

After *Shabbos*, we sat together and recollected our last weeks with Mommy, and my brothers noticed something incredible. When she had been sick four years earlier, two of my brother

had gone to the *Skulener Rebbe שליט"א* during *davening* to ask him to *daven* for our mother. "She is only 51 years old," my brother lamented. The *Rebbe* had been standing at the *Aron Kodesh* to remove the *sifrei Torah* for *leining* when they entered. He stood at the open *Aron Kodesh* and said "*Ana Hashem hoshia NA*" – Please, *Hashem*, save the woman whose years of life equal the numerical value of *NA* – 51. On her last complete *Shabbos*, Mommy had repeated, "*Ad heina azarunu rachamecha velo azavunu chasadecha*" – You helped us *Hashem*, and Your *chessed* has not left us."

We got up from *shiva* and sat at the seder that night. My husband and I and my oldest brother and his family joined my father at his house for a difficult evening. The food had been cooked by us in Mommy's *Pesach* kitchen with her utensils, and her recipes, but

Mommy wasn't there to join us. As we approached the highlight of our seder – *Hallel* and *Nishmas* – we would just picture Mommy in her white apron telling us, "Be thankful for the time we did have together – *Hashem's chessed* has still not left you." Of course, the tears flowed, but the *nusach* and feelings were stronger than ever.

. . .

Seven years have passed since then, and now I sit each *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* with my three-year-old daughter, her *Bubbie's* namesake, next to me on the couch. I open my *Siddur* and *daven*. When I reach the words of "*Nishmas kol chai*," I say it with the *nusach* that I learned at my parents' seder. I *daven* that *Hashem* continue to treat us with *chessed* so that I can watch my children grow to *daven* and thank *Hashem* with the words of *Nishmas* as their *Bubbie* did. ✪

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