

Have You Ever Wondered...

In the Zechus of a Refuah Shleima of my Rabbeim, Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky shlita, and הגאון הרב שמואל בן איסא עטיל, and Rav Moshe Heinemann Shlita, הגאון הרב משה בן פיגלא.

Q: Where does the concept of making a *siyum* come from?

A: While sitting with 7000 people at the massive and beautifully executed celebration of *Oraysa Amud Yomi* in the Cure Arena this past Sunday, I was taken back by the number of people who just completed an entire סדר גמרא and the שמחה that was palpable in the air. I have been to several large gatherings in the past, including the *Siyum Hashas* and *Adirei Hatorah*, but this one felt different. It seemed like everybody present was more than a bystander or spectator and was actually joining in making the *siyum*. As one person commented at the *Siyum Hashas*, "I feel like a party crasher. You're supposed to do WHAT for 7.5 years beforehand?!" Here, everybody was making a *siyum* on at least *Meseches Chagiga* and there are now over 40,000 people from all around the world investing in the *Oraysa* program!

Amidst the joy, דברי חיזוק, inspirational speeches, delicious food, and being in the presence of many גדולי ישראל, I couldn't help but wonder what is the source to make a *siyum*, to the extent that so many people (including close to a *minyan* from Cincinnati) spent significant money and time to travel to NJ and participate in the *siyum*?

The Rama (YD 246:26) writes:

וזה"ל כשמסיים מסכתא מצווה לשמוח ולעשות סעודה, ונקראת סעודת מצוה

There is a *mitzvah* to make a סעודה upon the completion of a *mesechta*, and this meal is considered a *seudas mitzvah*!

The Achronim bring different possibilities as to the source of making a סיום.

-The Gemara (*Shabbos* 118b) quotes אביי as saying, "I will be rewarded because whenever I heard that one of our young Torah scholars completed a *mesechta*, I would arrange a festive meal for all the other תלמידים. (Rashi explains that Abaya was the ראש ישיבה, and he himself would arrange a celebration whenever a student finished a מסכתא.)

-Some point to a much earlier מקור, a Medresh (*Koheles Rabbah* 1:1). The feast that שלמה המלך made for all his servants after being granted infinite wisdom by ה' is the source for making a celebration when מסיים Torah. Just as the increase of wisdom of one man was a cause for שמחה, so too, the increase of תורה knowledge is a reason to celebrate.

-The Gemara teaches us (*Moed Kattan*

9a) that when they completed the construction of the בית המקדש, they celebrated for 14 days, and didn't even observe יום כיפור that year (the Gemara expounds why it was permitted). Either way, it is clear that there is a value of completing a *mitzvah*!

-The Tosfos Yom Tov (*Taanis* 4:8), explains based on the Gemara *Taanis* 31a, that the reason for the י"ט of the 15th of חודש אב was because it was the annual date on which כלל ישראל completed chopping the wood necessary for the בית המקדש. Since this was the culmination of a long *mitzvah*, finishing it every year required major festivities, similar to completing the Torah.

As an aside, based on the above, the מגן אברהם (OC 551:33) rules that a סעודת מצוה can be made at the completion of any מצוה that takes serious effort and time!

Also, the מפרשים (Yam Shel Shlomo *Bava Kama* 7:37, Shach YD 246:27, Aruch Hashulchan 246:4) point out that we can derive from אביי who made a festive meal for all תלמידים (see above) that it is a מצוה רבה to be משתתף in a סיום even if you did not participate in the לימוד התורה and even if the מסיים is a lone person, מחויבים אחרים לסיים עמו!

I saw quoted in the name of Rabbi Yaakov Ruderman, *zt"l*, that when one person completed *Shas Gemara* in a town in eastern Europe, it was common place that the entire town wore their Shabbos clothes that day to demonstrate their happiness that the town now boasted another איד who had completed *Shas*!

The *Divre Yatziv* (Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam, *zt"l*, the Sanz-Klausenberger Rebbe) in a responsa shares from the famous Rabeinu Gershom (960-1040) that a primary benefit for making and celebrating a סיום is so that the person making it commits right then and there to learn another tractate! This is another reason why it is customary for the *mesayim* to actually begin learning the next new *mesechta*!

The *Rosh Hamosaad*, Rabbi Dovid Spetner, *shlit"a*, shares that the reason why he makes a big deal and is busy with סיומים is in order to inspire others to do the same. In fact, historically, every year at the completion of משנה ששה סדרי משנה new people takes upon themselves to learn משניות daily!

I will never forget when I was in Eretz Yisroel six years ago and we knocked on Rav Osher Arieli's door to get a *brocha* for my Bar Mitzvah son. Upon telling him that ששה

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was completed, his face lit up and glowed from excitement. He was truly ecstatic—overjoyed that a significant portion of Torah was completed!

Q: Why do we say the הדרן at the completion of a mesechta and what does it actually mean?

There is a beautiful מנהג to recite a series of תפילות at a סיום, starting with the words הדרן עלך. It is often done in the presence of a מניין and in conjunction with a סעודת מצוה, but there is no obligation for either.

The Hadran's origin can be traced back to the ספר האשכול (Hilchos Sefer Torah 14). It presents the *Hadran Alach*, *Yehi Ratzon*, and Rav Pappa family passages.

In regard to the question above, there are all different ideas suggested:

-According to most interpretations, the words הדרן עלך are Aramaic for “we will return to you.”

-By expressing our desire to come back, the מסיימים demonstrate that they are rejoicing because of a sense of accomplishment and not with a feeling of “good riddance, boy am I happy to be done with this” (kind of what some kids do to their science/social studies books at the end of the school year)!

-Furthermore, it emphasizes the concept that in no way have we learned this *mesechta* in its entirety and are done with it for good, since תורה is infinite and we can and hopefully will return to delve deeper and get an even better understanding of the Gemara.

-Another approach is that the root of the word הדרן is *hadar*, or glory, splendor, and majesty. We are stating that any glory we may have achieved comes from the תורה, and we are requesting from Hashem that the Torah pour down its glory upon us.

-At the 9th *Siyum Hashas* in 1992, which was dedicated to all those murdered in the Holocaust, Rav Shimon Schwab, ז”ל, in his eloquent style offered a passionate address in which he suggested an alternate פשט:

“*Hadran Aloch* – We say to the עולם האמת, our beauty here in this world should come upon you. The beauty of tens of thousands assembled all over the world to pay homage to כבוד התורה, should be נשמתכם לעילוי.

“*Hadrach Alon* – And your beauty, which means all the קידוש שם שמים, referring to the innocent who left this world בקדושה וטהרה, should come upon us.”

Q: Are the words שהשמחה inserted into ברכת המזון by a סיום מסכת?

A: The מהרש”ל (R’ Shlomo Luria, who lived in Poland 1510-1573) in *Yam Shel Shlomo* (*Baba Kama* 7:37) considers a סיום מסכתא such a tremendous celebration that he writes that this special occasion warrants the addition of the words *She’hasimcha Bi’m’ono* – “that this celebration is in His presence (*me’ono* is the name of one of the seven heavens)” at the beginning of ברכת המזון, though we only usually recite this passage at a שבע ברכות or חתונה.

He proves it from the Gemara *Kesubos* (8a) that discusses whether שהשמחה should be recited at a ברית מילה or not. In the end, the גמרא concludes that since there is צער ודינוקא, the child suffers some pain, we should not imply that there is happiness for everybody in attendance. The Maharshal argues that by a *siyum* everybody is happy (except the fellow that just started a diet!), the שמחה is even greater, and thus definitely warrants adding שהשמחה by ברכת המזון.

In fact, he was about to implement this practice at a *siyum* and כשהורה כך, נתבטלה השמחה בענין רע ומר and was ruined. He then realized that he overstepped his boundary, שאין לחלוק על הקדמונים.

The *Aruch Hashulchan* (YD 246:45) explains that by a *chasuna* it’s appropriate to add, since בעולם הזה, in this world, we don’t have שמחה שלמה, complete happiness. It’s only because we don’t live forever that we need to get married and have children (see *Brochos* 31a). Therefore, we mention that the true complete happiness is in שמים. However, תלמוד תורה which is גדולה מכל יפה שעה אחת בתשובה ומעשים טובים and we are taught that בעולם הזה מכל חיי העולם הבא, consequently, השמחה, and not במעונו!

There is a famous story which took place in the early 1900s when Rav Yitzchok Hunter, ז”ל, was a little boy. Money was scarce and the family saved up enough money to buy his mother a new dress, which was being saved for פסח.

When 11-year-old Yitzchok came home one day and told his mother that he had just completed קמא, his mother beamed with pride. The next evening when Yitzchok came home, he was shocked to see his mother wearing the new dress standing next to the table set with their finest china. He asked, “What is the occasion for all this? I thought we were saving the dress for Pesach?” His mother looked glowingly at Yitzchok and said, “You are correct, I was saving the dress for Yom Tov. What greater Yom Tov is then when my son completes a *mesechta* of a Gemara?”

This message stayed with Yitzchok and reverberated through his head as he continued through his life finishing *mesechta* after *mesechta*, growing to become the great Rosh Yeshiva of Chaim Berlin!

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