

HALOCHOSCOPE

This week's question:

Someone is observing *availus*, mourning for the loss of a parent. Her son is celebrating a *siyum mishnayos* in memory of his grandparent, at the conclusion of *shloshim*, the thirty day mourning period, in her home. May the mother attend this *seuda*?

The issues:

- A) A *siyum*
- B) *Seudas mitzvah*, feast that is also a *mitzvah*
- C) Who participates in the *siyum* celebration?
- D) *Avail* attending a *siyum*

A) What is a *Siyum*? [Adapted from Halochoscope X:35-36]

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! The Talmud is divided into sections studied separately for a time period. Completion of a section amounts to completion of a group of *mitzvos* of Torah study. This offers an opportunity to give thanks for the merit of completing the *mitzvah*. The source for this is a holiday 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.]

A 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.]

A 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 celebration 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 inattendance seems to be rather serious. It could be due to the disrespect for the teacher, or that the student does not miss the conclusion, including vital details. Attendance shows dedication to see the project through. This source makes no reference to celebration. Some 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 Rokaich 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, having reached 'completion of the 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. The first word uttered upon completion, '*Hadran*', is translated as either 'we *will* return to ...' or 'we *have* [now] returned to ...'. This is a reason given for the term '*masechess*' for tractate. This word has a weaving loom connotation – the continuous movement back and forth, 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 why we begin the Torah immediately after ending. The same is done at a *siyum masechess*. People usually start the next section right away. [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*, and is the main source for the *siyum*. Most of the customary prayers seem to be 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.]

B) Seudas Mitzvah

The feast to celebrate *siyum* is considered a *seudas mitzvah*. 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 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. A private person donates a *korban* is forbidden to fast or to eulogize or to work on

that day. Some consider this *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, and its severity is mitigated. The members of this family did not observe the fast day. A *bris milah* must be done on the eighth day. If this 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 a *siyum* that will conflict with the fast of the firstborn on *Erev Pesach*. It also arises when offering meat and wine for a *siyum* during the 'nine days'. Another consideration is the participation of an *avail*, as in our case. Most poskim consider a *siyum* sufficient cause to override the restrictions that would be overridden by any standard *seudas mitzvah*. Some draw a distinction between the *mesayem* and the guests. [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) The Participants

From the sources for *siyum*, there is an indication that the celebrant makes the feast for his colleagues, and an indication that they make the feast for him. In both instances the others are integral to the feast. Shlomo waited to make his '*siyum*' until he arrived in *Yerushalayim*, to be able to invite others. Furthermore, the participants become part of the *simcha* by attending the *siyum*, regardless of whether they also participated in the study along the way. It is preferable to be there for the beginning as well as the end. There is a view that the *mesayem* needs the audience to properly complete his *siyum*. He needs to fulfill the *mitzvah* of Torah study by teaching as well as learning. They follow the passage being read. On the other hand, as we shall see in the case of an *avail*, in some instances the *mesayem* is clearly considered more obliged to celebrate than the participants. Even in these situations, those who help make the party are considered *baalei simcha*, in keeping with the source that the colleagues make the *siyum* for the *mesayem*.

The relevance of the *simcha* to the participants becomes an issue when they rely on the *seudas mitzvah* aspect of the *siyum*, to relax the *minhag* of refraining from meat and wine during the nine days, or as *bechorim* on *Erev Pesach*. The poskim discuss participants, based on their closeness to the *mesayem* ('would they attend the *siyum* in normal circumstances?'), the supporters of the Torah study, the helpers in preparation, or the need for ten to recite the *kaddish derabanan*. The closeness of the participant to the *mesayem* could be seen as making his joy complete. If the *mesayem* arranges the *siyum* to accommodate this friend, it means that he feels that his absence would mar his joy.

The *mesayem* is the one for whom the *siyum* is held. One observing *yahrzeit*, when he would normally fast, participates if he also studied. This shows that the other attendees are not considered being *mesayem*, despite their following the last lines. Apparently, one must intentionally host the *siyum* or at least openly join the *mesayem*. [See Shabbos 119a, Midrash Lekach Tov, Pekudei. Refs to other sections.]

D) Avail at a Siyum

An *avail* may not attend a festive gathering. Exceptions sometimes apply to a *seu-*

das mitzvah. Even on a *yahrzeit*, when he usually fasts, he may celebrate his own *siyum*. He may attend a *siyum* celebrated by another if he also studied the material. It thus becomes his own *siyum* as well. The issue is whether he may attend another person's wedding or *siyum*, if the celebrant feels his presence very important, but he did not participate in the study. The poskim allow a parent to attend a child's wedding. From the child's perspective the parents presence is crucial. The parent, too, is a *baal simcha* in his own right. What about a mentor attending his disciple's celebration? From the perspective of the disciple, it is similar to a parent. [In fact, for the death of a *rav muvhak*, mentor for one's main knowledge, certain mourning practices are observed. This is a function of both respect and 'spiritual relationship'.] Perhaps the mentor could consider a *siyum* his own joyful occasion. This is the indirect fruit of his labor. However, he does not celebrate it as his own *simcha*, but joins with the *baal simcha*. There appears to be no precedent for special consideration for a mentor. Nonetheless, many poskim permit attendance by an *avail* at a *seudas mitzvah* that does not fit the guidelines of *simcha*, festivity, including a *siyum*.

In addition, in our case, the *siyum* is held specifically to commemorate the *shloshim* of the *avail*'s parent. She did not participate in the study, because a woman does not usually study *mishnayos*. *Mishna* is the standard study material for a departed soul. When a child studies Torah or performs a *mitzvah*, it always helps the departed soul of the parent. Studying *Mishna* has an additional benefit. [For a comprehensive discussion on this aspect, please see *HalochoScope* XV:17.] She would be doing the study herself. Her son is the next closest to the *neschama* of the departed. Therefore, her son's study is really in her stead. Were it not for her, there would be no *siyum* at all. Thus, she is really celebrating the *siyum*. In addition, she is hosting the event herself. While the women's participation in a *siyum* is not active, their support role is critical in the study of their family members. If anyone should be invited to participate it should be the most critical supporters of the students. Therefore, she is, certainly in this case, the most important guest. If she wishes to avoid direct participation, she may eat off to the side. By serving, she also mitigates the issue. On the other hand, perhaps she should not sit off to the side. This might give the impression that she is not really celebrating it. [See *Moed Katan* 22b 25b, *Baba Metzia* 33a-b, poskim. *Tur Sh. Ar.* YD 242:25 246:25 341:1 374:10 391:2, commentaries.]

In conclusion, she may participate in the *siyum*.

On the parsha .. [The *yefas toar*] shall weep for her father and her mother for a month of days .. (in mourning for her parents, killed in the war, just as Jewish woman mourns, since she is converting .. [Ibn Ezra]) and after that [her captor] shall .. take her as his wife. [21:13] Why would she not mourn for a full year, especially since he delays celebrating marriage while she is in mourning [see *Ramban*]? Perhaps, for this woman there is both mourning and celebration on the marriage to her captor. In this case, her participation in her husband's celebration is integral. Furthermore, the mourning is to show respect to her parents [see *Ibn Ezra*]. What better way than to marry and have children! Thus, after the initial mourning, she celebrates marriage.

Sponsored by the Silver family in memory of Sarah bas R. Shmuel Blumenthal a”h, whose

***yahrzeit* is on the 11th of Elul. ☞**

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