

“Mazel Tov On Your Simcha!”

This week, the community-wide **Amud-a-Week** program merited to finish the another *perek* of Tractate *Brachos*. This brings us to the final stretch, only a third of the tractate to go. Some of you may think, “Oh! This is irrelevant to me”, but the reality is that this celebration is one for the entire community—active participants and not-yet-active-participants. The *Gemara* (Shabbos 118b) relates that the great Amoraic sage, *Abayei*, would “boast” that when he would see a Yeshiva student that finished a tractate, he would make a celebratory feast for all of the Rabbis. Even though he himself had not finished the tractate, nor had the other Rabbis, *Abayei* saw fit to make a celebration for everyone. Similarly, although only those associated with the **Amud-a-Week** program may have finished this portion of Talmud, we are all part of the celebration, and moreover, a participant may be our friend, neighbor or someone we sit next to in shul.

The *Chasam Sofer* (Rabbi Moshe Sofer 1762-1839) shares a surprising insight into the custom of making a celebration on the occasion of finishing a portion of Torah. He suggests, that the festivities are not simply for the completion of a section of Torah, rather for the preparation of undertaking to learn *another* part of Torah. He goes as far as to postulate that making such a celebration actually helps a person be successful in his next learning endeavor. He proves this from an episode recounted in the Torah.

The verse recounts what happened when *Yisro*, Moshe’s father-in-law, came to join the Jewish people in the desert with the intention of converting. Aharon, the High Priest, and the Torah scholars of the generation joined in a festive meal “*lifnei Hashem*”, in front of Hashem (Exodus 18:12). Rabbi Sofer writes that the specific usage of the term “*in front of Hashem*” refers to what the Talmud (Tractate *Brachos* 64a) teaches, “*anyone who benefits from a meal with a Torah scholar, is likened to have benefited from the Divine Presence*”. In the aforementioned verse, the main protagonist is *Yisro*, and it is because of him that the meal was considered “*in front of G-d*”. Rabbi Sofer further notes that, at this point, *Yisro* had not yet started studying the Torah and nevertheless, the Torah saw it fit to consider him a *talmid chacham* to the extent that his meal is considered “*lifnei Hashem*”. He was worthy of this honor because of his commitment to begin the study of Torah.

This Friday night, we are also celebrating. Not merely celebrating for the past, but celebrating for the future as well. Commemorating the beginning of a new *perek* in Talmud as a community, as one. It is not only a celebration for those who finished the previous *perek*, but also for those who will begin the new *perek* with us. And just as *Abayei* made a celebration for the “nameless” Torah scholar who finished a tractate of Talmud, we are all part of this celebration for our friends and neighbors accomplishing, and accepting to accomplish, parts of Talmud.

So as you decide Friday night if you are in the mood to leave your warm home for the chilly outdoors, think in these terms. It is not “someone else’s celebration”, it is YOUR celebration. With this in mind, we are looking forward to celebrating together at the home of Jonathan & Chani Spetner, 8360 Balson, beginning at 9 pm. Mazel Tov to *everyone*!