Jewish Tribune – Succos

**Starting Over … Again**

Heard the one about the fellow who won the Tour de France? He celebrated by doing a lap of honour.

Now, at over 2,000 miles and taking over 23 days, that may be an exhausting prospect. But, l’havdil alfei havdolos, that is exactly how we celebrate completing our holy Torah and indeed every masechta when we make a siyum. As soon as we finish reading the Torah on Simchas Torah, we immediately begin leining parshas Bereishis. And when we make a siyum, the minhag is to start the beginning of the next masechta at the very same celebration.

What is behind this?

The Torah begins with a ב and ends with a ל. This is strange as it spells בל which has negative associations. Think of words with these two letters in this order and it is invariably a negative connotation. A few examples: בעל, בלי, הבל, נבל, בלק, בלעם.

It gets worse. Torah she’baal peh begins with a מand ends with a ת. This of course spells מת. Death – hardly an auspicious way to start and end Torah she’baal peh!

I once heard an explanation in the name of Rabbi Joseph Pearlman. On Simchas Torah, we never simply complete Torah, we always start again. As soon as we finished the last words of V’Zos Habracha, we start Bereishis. So too at a siyum, as soon as we finish one masechta, we begin a new one.

In this light, the last letter of Torah she’bichsav and the first letter now spells לב (heart – suggesting our full emotional involvement) and Torah she’baal peh spells תם – perfection.

Even the word ש"ס (shas) has a gematria of 360 suggesting a circle of 360 degrees and the fact there is no linear start or end point, just a continuous, ongoing circle.

Interestingly, the two commencing letters of Torah she’bichsav (ב of בראשית) and of Torah she’baal peh (מ of מאימתי) spell בם. We allude to this twice a day in Shema when we sayוְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדִבַּרְתָּ **בָּם** .

We also allude to it in Sefer Tehillim when we say לְעוֹלָם לֹא אֶשְׁכַּח פִּקּוּדֶיךָ, כִּי **בָם** חִיִּיתָנִי - I will never forget Your instructions, for through them You give me life.

And perhaps this explains another peculiarity. One of the most beautiful brachos in our lexicon is שהחיינו. We give thanks to Hashem for the opportunity of living to see a momentous event.

The completion of the Torah cycle on Simchas Torah seems to fit the criteria of such a milestone event, yet it is not said. Why not? One would have thought that Simchas Torah is the perfect time to say it, to commemorate the completion of the conclusion of the Torah cycle.

Perhaps the answer is as we have said above. There is no completion. As soon as we finished the last words of V’Zos Habracha, we start Bereishis. And so too at a siyum, as soon as we finish one masechta, we begin a new one. It is not a linear journey but a tour of concentric circles. Each cycle gives rise to new insights and hopefully deeper understanding.

Therefore, in reality, there is no end, only a constant onward march to a deeper and broader understanding. Round and round, again and again. The job is never done, never finished, and as such, no שהחיינו is made because there is no והגיענו. We can never truly declare that we have arrived at our destination.

As we again begin a new cycle of Torah (and IYH Jewish Tribune articles!), may we absorb the above ideas and engage in Torah with all our לב and with an appreciation of its’ perfection and celebrate with another lap of honour!

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