



From the Dean's Desk

Sy Syms Celebrates the Centennial of Daf Yomi, A Historic Innovation in Judaism

The Innovation

This week marks the **100th anniversary** of one of the most important innovations in the Jewish world over the last millennium: **The founding of Daf Yomi** by Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin, Poland. Worried about increasing fragmentation among the Jewish people, he conceived of Daf Yomi (literally, "Daily Page") as a way to bring people together. Each day, everyone would learn the same page in the 2,711-page Talmud, completing the Talmud in about 7½ years.

The Motivation: Unity

Although we tend to focus on the "content" side of Daf Yomi learning, Rabbi Shapiro actually was motivated by the **unity** it might bring. He wrote of his innovation: "When two Jews from different towns, or even different countries, meet, the knowledge they share on the Talmud being studied will help them form a deep bond of friendship."

In fact, many of my most delightful meetings with new contacts at YU have started with half an hour of our chatting about the Daf before getting to the topic of our lunch or chat.

The first day of Daf Yomi was Rosh Hashanah 1923 (5684 on the Jewish calendar). That means that **Rosh Hashanah 2023** (5784) is the centennial of Rabbi Shapiro's world-changing innovation.

To help mark this historical milestone, I have been learning "**Double Daf**" – two pages per day – for the past 3¾ years. (Much of that learning came when I was in the Glueck Beis Medrash for Night Seder with our students.) Doing so enabled me to finish the Talmud a week before Rosh Hashanah.

The Shabbos before the holiday, each of YU's campuses had a delightful off-site Shabbaton (the men at Camp Romimu, the women at Camp Dora Golding). Saturday night at Camp Romimu, I had the merit of doing my **Siyum HaShas** ("completion of the Talmud") with the 275 men and a dozen rabbis (and their families) who had attended that Shabbaton (photo below).



In the Siyum (**the audio recording can be [found here](#)**), I focused on **“The Re-Founding of Judaism.”**

In short, nearly two thousand years ago, the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash (the Great Temple) was threatening to wipe out Judaism. The central focus of Judaism had been physically destroyed and the religion’s very survival was at stake.

The nation’s leader at the time was **Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai**, who had spent his first forty years as an entrepreneur (Rosh Hashanah 31b). **Tapping his entrepreneurial mindset** when the nation most needed it, Rabban Yochanan **pivoted Judaism** to a very different model or “blueprint,” recreating a portable Judaism that could survive – and even thrive – in exile, rather than being dependent on being in the Land of Israel and on the existence of the Beis Hamikdash. In four fateful words (Gittin 56-58) and with lots of work afterward (e.g., Rosh Hashanah 4:1-4), he **re-founded Judaism** and Judaic practices for a new era.

By tapping his entrepreneurial muscles to re-found Judaism during its most pressing time, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai embodied the powerful **“Torah U’Business”** combination that we are celebrating this month as part of the **36th (“Double Chai”) anniversary** of the Sy Syms School of Business.

[The recording](#) has many more details about his innovations that live with us until this day. Notably, those innovations also struck a balance between being **Deeply Rooted** (remembering the destruction) while being **Forward Focused** (building the future) – a core focus of Yeshiva University today.

To further mark this milestone, I co-authored a piece with [Dr. Tevi Troy](#), the new senior scholar in YU’s Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought, about Rabbi Shapiro and his innovation. Entitled **“The Talmud for Today’s World,”** it was published the day before Rosh Hashanah in First Things magazine and is [accessible here](#).

May we be able to thrive amidst the **next 100 years** of Jewish learning, and have our students play a central role in the innovations that will enable us to experience Torat Tzion together!



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Mission

Develop Torah-grounded
professionals who excel
in the workplace and in
the community.