

COVERAGE BY
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A Very Special *Siyum HaShas* in Baltimore

On Wednesday, February 20, a very special *siyum haShas* took place in Baltimore, as Rabbi David Kastor completed *Shas* after working on it for 30 years.

While completing *Shas* is quite an accomplishment for anyone, for Rabbi Kastor, a *baal teshuvah* who is hearing impaired, it is a magnificent feat, one that can inspire all.

Rabbi Kastor came to Yeshivas Ner Yisroel in 1987, shortly after becoming *shomer Torah umitzvos*. He was inspired to learn by Rabbi Chaim Tzvi Kakon, now *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivas Nefesh Dovid in Toronto, a yeshiva for young men with hearing impairments.

It took Rabbi Kastor a full year to get through his first *blatt* of *Gemara*, but he kept going, with amazing persistence. Now, after 30 years, he was ready to celebrate a *siyum haShas*, a beautiful event that was held at the home of Rabbi and Mrs. Doniel Hexter.

Recently, Rabbi Kastor has been learning daily with Rabbi Doniel Hexter, a *Rebbi* in Yeshivas Kochav Yitzchok in Baltimore.

Rabbi Kastor addressed the gathering and recalled his journey of Torah learning.

Becoming *shomer Torah umitzvos* was especially challenging for a young man with a hearing impairment. Before becoming *frum*, most things were accessible to him despite his deafness. However, in the *frum* world, Rabbi Kastor felt as if he were swimming upstream. Nevertheless, he persisted.

After coming to Ner Yisroel, Rabbi Kastor found several *chavrusos*, who were invaluable to his growth. Rabbi Binyamin Travis, now of Cincinnati, was his *chavrusa* in Ner Yisroel, and, as Rabbi Kastor put it, "He was tough on me. He made me keep on trying to figure it out on my own."

Rabbi Kastor said that although he had done well in college, learning *Gemara* presented an unprecedented challenge.

When ArtScroll published their *Gemaros*, Rabbi Kastor used the elucidated text to learn through the entire *Shas*, more recently together with Rabbi Hexter.

Habachur Binyamin Kastor, son of Rabbi David Kastor, emphasized his father's *ratzon* to learn, and testified that whenever his father is not working, he is learning. The whole family is involved in his father's desire to learn.

Rabbi Doniel Hexter read a letter sent by Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Gedalia Zlotowitz from



Moshe Chaikin - Story With Light Photography

Habachur Binyamin Kastor addressing the *siyum haShas* made by his father, Rabbi David Kastor.



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Rabbi David Kastor addressing the *siyum haShas* (L-R): Rabbi Yosef Berger, Rav of Kehillas Kol Torah; Eliyahu Meir Hexter; Mr. Doniel Hexter, host and *Rebbi* in Yeshivas Kochav Yitzchok; Rabbi Kastor; Harav Shraga Neuberger, *R"m* at Yeshivas Ner Yisroel; and Rabbi Naftali Hexter, *Menahel* of Bais Yaakov Middle School.



Moshe Chaikin - Story With Light Photography

Dancing at the *siyum haShas* made by Rabbi David Kastor (L-R): Harav Shraga Neuberger, *R"m* at Yeshivas Ner Yisroel; Rabbi David Kastor, and Rabbi Doniel Hexter.



Final Avos Ubanim *seudah* at Khal Machzikei Torah Congregation, held on Motzoei Shabbos, February 23. Fathers and sons enjoyed a *fleishig seudah*.

ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications, in which they expressed tremendous satisfaction at hearing how Rabbi Kastor was able to complete *Shas* using the ArtScroll *Gemaros*.

Harav Shraga Neuberger, *R"m* at Yeshivas Ner Yisroel, commented that in *Parashas Ki Sisa, Bnei Yisrael* are referred to as an *am k'shei oref* — a stiff-necked and stubborn People. The *middah* of stubbornness is part

and parcel of *Klal Yisrael*, and it was this *middah*, used in the right way, that enabled Rabbi Kastor to complete *Shas*.

Rabbi Yosef Berger, Rav of Kehillas Kol Torah, quoted the *Chovos Halevavos* as saying that if a person really wants to learn any *chochmah*, and applies himself studiously, he will be able to master it. If this is true with regard to general *choch-*

mos, how much more is it true about learning Torah.

If a person understands how much Hashem does for us all the time, he will have the necessary *ratzon* to learn Torah.

The final speaker was Rabbi Binyamin Travis, who traveled to Baltimore to attend the event. Rabbi Travis described the *mesirus nefesh* needed to become a *baal teshuvah*, as a person often becomes isolated from friends and family. Perhaps it was because of this *mesirus nefesh* that Rabbi Kastor was *zocheh* to finish *Shas*.

"Rabbi Kastor has taught us what it means to set a goal and strive toward it, and not be deterred even when there are setbacks," said Rabbi Hexter.

"We all left the *siyum* on a high, feeling tremendously inspired by this great accomplishment."

The 613 That Keeps On Growing!

A long-standing tradition at Yeshivas Kochav Yitzchok/Torah Institute of Baltimore has been that when Rabbi Yoel Neumann's first-grade class learns 613 *pesukim*, they take a walk to Safeway, located just a short distance from the *cheder*, and each *talmid* is entitled to purchase a two-liter bottle of soda.

For the past few years, this tradition has continued, as when Rabbi Neumann's first-graders reached fourth grade, they asked Rabbi Neumann if they could each earn a bottle of soda when the class cumulatively learned and *chazered* 613 *perakim* of *Mishnayos*.

This year, the tradition progressed to yet another level. The sixth-graders who were in Rabbi Neumann's first-grade class asked if they too could earn a bottle of soda when the class cumulatively learned and *chazered* 613 *blatt Gemara*.

A couple of weeks ago, the