mouth. The man starts breathing again, faintly but unmistakably. Something in Doree shifts, and she offers to stay with him and wait for the ambulance.

"You don't have to get to London?" the bus driver asks.

The story's last sentence is one word: *No.*

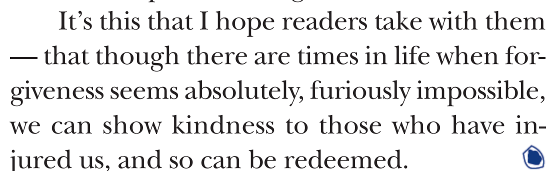
In deciding not to return to the asylum, Doree is freed from a debilitating relationship, and from her own crushing guilt. At the same time, readers understand that Munro is pushing us forward, beyond the bounds of the story, to move beyond our own torments.

I try to create a similar effect in my story, "Funnyboy," published in the *Bellingham Review* (Fall 2006). Levi Stern has a 12-year-old son, Richie, who — while riding his bike one day — was struck and killed by a car driven by local high school cheerleader Missy Jones. The police have ruled that Missy did nothing wrong. Richie shot out onto the road from behind a parked van, and he wasn't wearing a helmet. Nonetheless, Missy is heartbroken. She's apologized to Levi's wife, but for months Levi refuses to even see her; he blames her for Richie's death.

The story, told from Levi's perspective, takes place ten months after the accident, and begins: *I glanced out the window as my train pulled into the station and saw the girl who killed my son.* Over the course of the narrative, Missy persuades Levi to sit down with her at a local diner, where she tells him about a chance encounter with Richie. It becomes clear that she loved Richie, too. She gives Levi an arrow that Richie had given her, as a pick-me-up on one of the worst days of her life. Reluctantly, Levi takes it, relieving Missy of some small measure of her burden. Then, unthinking, he presses it into his palm, drawing blood. Missy asks him if he's okay. The story ends with Levi's thoughts: *I sat on a vinyl bench at Mitch's Diner across from Missy Jones, the girl who killed my son.*

The reader understands that though Levi will never be "okay" again, he has taken a first tentative step toward forgiveness.

It's this that I hope readers take with them — that though there are times in life when forgiveness seems absolutely, furiously impossible, we can show kindness to those who have injured us, and so can be redeemed.



Siyyum: Studying for Sustenance

Jane Kanarek

The Talmud teaches that whenever the sage Abaye saw a young scholar finishing a tractate, he would make a festive meal for his students (*B. Shabbat* 118b-119a). That meal was eventually designated a *seudat mitzvah*, a festive meal that marks the completion of a commandment. And the celebration marking the conclusion of studying a talmudic tractate has come to be known as a "*siyyum,*" a completion. A *siyyum* traditionally consists of a study session about the tractate, the reading of the last lines of the tractate, and the recitation of two special passages: the *hadran* and the *kaddish de-ithadita*, "the kaddish of renewal." It concludes with a *seudat mitzvah.*

While it is striking that learning is an event to be marked with study, communal prayer, food, and drink, equally striking is what kind of study we usually celebrate — Talmud. We rejoice over the mastery of the central book of our oral tradition, a book that teaches us how to understand and live our written tradition, the Bible, the Tanakh.

When Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, the 20th-century rabbinic authority for American Orthodox Jewry, was asked whether a meal marking the conclusion of studying a book of Tanakh could also be considered a *seudat mitzvah*, he responded that it could as long as the book was studied in depth along with authoritative commentary, and in a group setting over a significant amount of time.

Rabbi Feinstein's comments are instructive. They point us to the idea that while a *siyyum* is a celebration of reading, it is a celebration of reading "Jewishly." It is a celebration of reading in community and through the lens of our tradition. A *siyyum* marks not only the accomplishment of prolonged and in depth study, but also the engagement in the layers of commentary that make up our oral Torah. The *siyyum* teaches us that our own ideas are insufficient; we also need our interpretive tradition.

And yet as we engage the words of the past, we are bringing our current lives into the process, shaping the past through our study. This multivocal element of learning is ritualized in the *hadran* passage, which begins with the words, "*hadran alakh maskehet 'x' ve-hadrakh alan.*" "We return to you tractate 'x' and you

Rabbi Jane Kanarek, PhD, is assistant professor of rabbinics in the Rabbinical School of Hebrew College. After many years of study, she celebrated a siyyum *of the Mishnah.*

return to us." However, a more accurate translation is: "Our glory on you tractate 'x' and your glory on us." The passage teaches us that as much as the Talmud has the power to glorify and beautify us, we also have the power to glorify and beautify the Talmud. This is a two-way process, where we shed light on one another. This dual conversation is essential to maintaining community and a living interpretive tradition.

Because a *siyyum* celebrates such deep engagement with our ongoing interpretive tradition, should we widen our conception of which books are appropriate to celebrate through a festive meal? Should we include the study of the *Eish Kodesh*, the teachings of the Warsaw ghetto rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira? What about the study of the book of Exodus along with Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg's *The Particulars of Rapture*? What about Mordecai Kaplan's *Judaism as a Civilization*?

The ritual of *siyyum* challenges us to consider which books are so central to Jewish life that we should mark their study with a *seudat mitzvah*. It asks us to open ourselves to our tradition, to realize that these words — old and new — can enrich us now. It asks us to not take studying lightly, but to realize that reading is a Jewish communal process. By telling us to learn and eat and drink together, the *siyyum* teaches us that reading our books sustains our very lives.

Jewish Visual Culture

Jeffrey Shandler

Among the texts that art historian Vivian Mann includes in her anthology *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) is a halakhic question posed to Maimonides. He was asked for his legal opinion about a man who had a *tallis* made and, "wanting to adorn himself with the commandments, had its hems embroidered with great artistry in silk," inscribing the *tallis* with a biblical verse that included God's name. "An elder of the town chastised him, saying, 'It is forbidden to wear this prayer shawl,' but the owner did not accept his word and wore the prayer shawl regularly." Maimonides replied, "This act is sinful and totally improper," explaining that it "causes verses of the Torah to be dishonored."

Mann notes how his adjudication demonstrates Maimonides' "remarkable… discernment" of different styles and uses of Hebrew script and his "firsthand knowledge of ancient Palestinian antiquities," which he references. I am more interested, however, in the man who commissioned and wore the *tallis*. We not only don't know his name; we also don't know what prompted him to have his *tallis* embellished with embroidery. We only know that he did so motivated by some personal desire (evidently an unusual decision), and that he ignored the opprobrium that his decorated *tallis* inspired. (One wonders how he might have responded to Maimonides' ruling.)

For Mann, like most other scholars of Jewish art or religion, the center of attention is halakhah, as articulated by one of its greatest scholars, concerning visual culture. But for me, this text's value is its testimony to the idiosyncratic creativity of an anonymous "ordinary" Jew, who acted not from a position of traditional erudition but from a personal impulse to enhance his religious practice through visual adornment. And it is his desire — and his decision to realize it — that compels the rabbis to debate the issue.

It has long been commonplace to charac-

Jeffrey Shandler is professor of Jewish Studies at Rutgers University. His books include While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust *and* Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language and Culture, *among other titles.*