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Siyum seeks to promote Jewish unity, learning

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To celebrate Jewish learning, the Phoenix Community Kollel once again is taking part in the Jewish Unity Live siyum and inviting the community to participate.

A siyum, which translates as "completion," traditionally has been a celebration of the completion of a course of Torah learning.

The 2006 Jewish Unity Live siyum has broadened the definition to include the study of any Jewish text. Sign-ups for the siyum, which in the Valley will end with a celebration March 28 at Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts, are under way.

"We want to bring together everyone that we can to celebrate and share that experience," said Rabbi Dovid Goldman of the Kollel, which is organizing the program locally. He said the invitation goes out to all Jews, regardless of practice.

On March 1, 2005, the first Jewish Unity Live event brought together more than 100,000 Jews in cities across North America, including hundreds in Scottsdale, to celebrate the Daf Yomi (page of the day) siyum that marked the completion of the study by thousands of Jews worldwide of the entire Babylonian Talmud, one page a day for 2,711 consecutive days.

The March 28 event will focus not on a similar momentous event but on the completion of many individuals' own separate courses of Jewish learning.

"I believe in it," said Irv Shuman, a Phoenix resident who signed up for the current siyum. "My Jewish education has been continuing for a long, long time," said Shuman, who has lived in the Valley more than 40 years.

Shuman, who works in property management of commercial buildings, is in an "executive learning" group studying Ramban Introduction to Torah.

He said the group discusses "practical applications of the Torah, what Jews do in specific situations," particularly rabbinical thought on how to handle specific situations and business ethics.

"It's just a wonderful experience," he said.

The idea behind the siyum is to foster Jewish learning by requesting that individuals study and complete by March one Jewish text of any type, from parenting to ethics to religion and beyond, Goldman said. So far, about 375 Valley residents of all ages have signed up, he said.

Jewish Unity Live offers a list of 86 books for participants to choose from, or they may consult with a rabbi about choosing another text. Participants can study on their own or

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with study partners or study groups.

A sampling of texts being studied ranges from the traditional - the 10 Commandments and "Ethics of Our Fathers," for instance - to the contemporary - "Genesis and the Big Bang" and "Missiles, Masks and Miracles."

Those who wish to participate can visit www.jewishunitylive.com to sign up. Or they may call the Kollel at 602-433-0300 or e-mail kollel@aztorah.com for information.

Those who enroll in the siyum will have their name, study and city of residence listed in "Visionaries of Greatness," the event's commemorative book. It's expected to be a 500-page volume that will also include Rabbi Abraham Twerski writing on Torah wisdom through the lens of modern psychology to provide insight into applying Torah principles in modern life.

The culminating Jewish Unity Live celebration will take place March 28 at Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts, 7380 E. Second St., Scottsdale, and on other dates throughout March in Atlanta, New York City, Dallas, Seattle, New Brunswick, N.J., and Bel Air, Calif.

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