

Be Strong and Of Good Courage

This week's Torah portion is a double portion: *B'har* and *Bechukotai*. These are the concluding *parashiot* of the Book of Leviticus and as we read the final words we'll rise (albeit virtually) and we will say together: *chazak chazak v'nitchazeik*, Be strong, be strong, and be courageous.

And in these days of turmoil, chaos and uncertainty, we sure need all the strength and courage we can muster.

The tradition of saying “חַזַּק חַזַּק וְנִתְחַזֵּק” *Chazak chazak v'nitchazeik*”

at the conclusion of a Book of Torah is related to the emotional and spiritual encouragement that Moses gave to Joshua and the Children of Israel just as they were about to cross over the Jordan river, enter the Promised Land, and begin an uncharted and somewhat intimidating new chapter in history:

⁶ Be strong and resolute, be not in fear or in dread; for Adonai your God marches with you: God will not fail you or forsake you.

⁷ Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: "Be strong and resolute, for it is you who shall go with this people into the land that Adonai swore to their ancestors to give them, and it is you who shall apportion it to them. ⁸ And Adonai will go before you. God will be with you; God will not fail you or forsake you. Fear not and be not dismayed!" (Deuteronomy 31:5-8)

It is natural that whenever we leave one reality and begin another we are in need of encouragement. The whole point of graduation ceremonies and *B'nei Mitzvah* celebrations is to mark the major milestones of our life; noting where we have been, recognizing what it took to bring us to where we are, and expressing confidence that whatever comes next, we'll be able to muster the wisdom, strength, courage and faith to succeed.

Similarly, as we continue to struggle with the ravages of COVID-19 and the uncertainties of a world transformed by pandemic, the blessings that form the heart of this Shabbat's Torah reading are essential to emphasize:

³ If you follow My laws and faithfully observe My commandments,

⁴ I will grant your rains in their season, so that the earth shall yield its produce and the trees of the field their fruit. ⁵ Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and your vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your fill of bread and dwell securely in your land. ⁶ I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down untroubled by anyone; I will give the land respite from vicious beasts, and no sword shall cross your land. ⁷ You shall give chase to your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword.

⁸ Five of you shall give chase to a hundred, and a hundred of you shall give chase to ten thousand; your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. ⁹ I will look with favor upon you, and make you fertile and multiply you; and I will maintain My covenant with you.

¹⁰ You shall eat old grain long stored, and you shall have to clear out the old to make room for the new.

¹¹ I will establish My abode in your midst, and I will not spurn you.

¹² I will be ever present in your midst: I will be your God, and you shall be My people.

¹³ I, Adonai, am your God who brought you out from the land of the Egyptians to be their slaves no more, who broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect. (Leviticus 26:3-13)

Our world has changed. Our expectations and plans have been turned over, altered, or dismissed. What tomorrow brings, we can only guess. And yet, we have learned to appreciate our blessings like never before. We have discovered skills and patience and resilience and determination. We have learned to recognize the sublime and the exalted and the subtle and sweet as if tasting something for the very first time. And we know that we are strong and we have courage and we will not only persevere, but we will continue in the tradition of our ancestors who met every challenge, overcame every obstacle, endured every setback and still, in every generation, left their mark on life.

And so, my friends, this is our time and our day:

Chazak, chazak v'nitchazeik: Be strong, be strong and be courageous!

B'vrakhah, בברכה

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