

## Chazak!

<sup>6</sup>*Chazak! Be courageous! (Deut. 31:6, TLV)*

This week's *Torah* Portion is *VaYelech* (Deut. 31:1-30), which means, “*He went.*” Moses continues to deliver his last message to our people, and they are all still standing in front of the Jordan as they listen:

### **Chazak! Be Courageous!**

<sup>1</sup>*Then Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. <sup>2</sup>He said to them, “I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in. Adonai has said to me, ‘You are not to cross over this Jordan.’ <sup>3</sup>Adonai your God—He will cross over before you. He will destroy these nations from before you, and you will dispossess them. Joshua will cross over before you, just as Adonai has promised. <sup>4</sup>“Adonai will do to them just as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when He destroyed them. <sup>5</sup>Adonai will give them over to you, and you are to do to them according to all the mitzvot that I commanded you. <sup>6</sup>**Chazak! Be courageous!** Do not be afraid or tremble before them. For Adonai your God—He is the One who goes with you. He will not fail you or abandon you.” <sup>7</sup>Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “Be strong! Be courageous! For you are to go with this people into the land Adonai has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you are to enable them to inherit it. <sup>8</sup>Adonai—He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you. He will not fail you or abandon you. Do not fear or be discouraged.”*

### **Public Torah Readings**

<sup>9</sup>*Moses wrote down this Torah and gave it to the kohanim, the sons of Levi who carry the Ark of the Covenant of Adonai, and to all the elders of Israel. <sup>10</sup>Then Moses commanded them saying, “At the end of every seven years, in the set time of the year of cancelling debts, during the feast of Sukkot, <sup>11</sup>when all Israel comes to appear before Adonai your God in the place He chooses, you are to read this Torah before them in their hearing. <sup>12</sup>Gather the people—the men and women and little ones, and the outsider within your town gates—so they may hear and so they may learn, and they will fear Adonai your God and take care to do all the words of this Torah. <sup>13</sup>So their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear Adonai your God—all the days you live on the land you are about to cross over the Jordan to possess.” <sup>14</sup>Then Adonai said to Moses, “Behold, your time to die is near. Call Joshua, and present yourselves at the Tent of Meeting, and I will commission him.” Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves at the Tent of Meeting. <sup>15</sup>Adonai appeared in the Tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood over the opening of the Tent. <sup>16</sup>Adonai said to Moses, “Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise up and prostitute themselves with the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will abandon Me and break My covenant that I cut with them. <sup>17</sup>Then My anger will flare against them on that day, and I will abandon them and hide My face from them. So they will be devoured, and many evils and troubles will come on them. They will say on that day, ‘Isn’t it because our God is not among us that these evils have come on us?’ <sup>18</sup>I will surely hide My face on that day because of all the evil they have done, for they have turned to other gods. (Deut. 31:1-18)*

Have you ever wondered which is the last of the 613 commandments (*mitzvot*) in the *Torah*? It is: <sup>19</sup>*Now, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to Bnei-Yisrael—put it in their mouth, so that this song may be a witness for Me against Bnei-Yisrael” (Deut. 31:19). This is the 15<sup>th</sup> positive mitzvah listed in Sefer HaMitzvot. This is absolutely important based on the law of first and last mention. (In review: the first and last mention of a principle in Scripture carries with it additional meaning or significance, and we should therefore pay close attention to it). The sages derive from this verse that every Jew is commanded to write a *Torah* scroll, a commandment that can be fulfilled according to the Rabbis, “by writing a single letter of a complete scroll, because the lack of even one letter renders a scroll invalid. The writing or correcting of a single letter is tantamount to completing the entire scroll” (Rambam, *Sefer Torah* 7:1). According to some Rabbis the purchase of books expounding on the *Torah* (e.g., a *Chumash* or *Tanakh*) constitutes a fulfillment of this mitzvah: “According to the 18th-century commentator Rabbi Abraham Danzig, a Jew’s obligation was to own, and not necessarily write, sacred books for studying. As printed books became more readily*

available, the gap between the cost of writing a Torah scroll and printed Jewish sacred texts would only grow, and thus this mitzvah came to be understood as encouragement for studying Torah, as opposed to the narrow understanding of writing one.” (<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-mitzvah-to-write-a-torah-scroll/>) The climax of the entire series of mitzvot (613 of them) is to record and know Adonai’s commands, so that they can be fulfilled and passed on to succeeding generations. Please note that the Scriptural text tells us to write *this song*, i.e., the Song of Moses and teach it to our children

Adonai commanded Moses and Joshua to write the Torah and to teach it to the people, and to place the scroll inside the Ark. Times would come when the masses would forsake the Torah and be drawn after the cultures of the surrounding societies, but that written Torah would remain as a constant reminder of Israel’s roots and the unchanging focus of its devotion.

<sup>19</sup>“Now, write *this song* (Hebrew, hashirah) for yourselves, and teach it to Bnei-Yisrael—put it in their mouth, so that *this song* may be a witness for Me against Bnei-Yisrael.” <sup>20</sup>“For when I bring them to the land flowing with milk and honey that I swore to their fathers, and they eat and are satisfied and grow fat—then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and they will spurn Me and break My covenant. <sup>21</sup>Now when many evils and troubles have come on them, *this song* will confront them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten from the mouth of their descendants. For I know the intention they are devising this day, even before I bring them into the land that I swore.” <sup>22</sup>That day Moses wrote *this song* and taught it to Bnei-Yisrael. <sup>23</sup>Then he commissioned Joshua son of Nun and said, “Chazak! Be courageous! For you will bring Bnei-Yisrael into the land I swore to them—and I will be with you.” <sup>24</sup>Now when Moses had finished writing the words of this Torah on a scroll, right to the end... <sup>25</sup>Moses commanded the Levites, carriers of the Ark of the Covenant of Adonai saying, <sup>26</sup>“Take this scroll of the Torah, and place it beside the Ark of the Covenant of Adonai your God. It will remain there as a witness against you, <sup>27</sup>for I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. Indeed, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against Adonai—how much more then after my death? <sup>28</sup>Gather to me all the elders of your tribes and your officials, so that I may speak *these words* in their ears and call heaven and earth to witness against them. <sup>29</sup>For I know that after my death you will certainly act corruptly and turn aside from the way I have commanded you. So evil will fall upon you in the latter days, because you will do what is evil in the sight of Adonai, provoking Him to anger by the work of your hands.” <sup>30</sup>Moses spoke in the hearing of the whole community of Israel the words of *this song*, right to the end.” (Deut. 31:16-30)

*This Song?* Deuteronomy 32 (Parashat Haazinu) is *this song* and it is always sung with its own melody. It is written in the form of a poetic verse. Some Rabbis teach that it had to be a song because a *song* implies the concept of harmony. In *this song* people recognize that all elements of the universe blend together in carrying out Adonai’s will, just as all the notes in the score of a complex song, all the instruments of an orchestra and all the voices in a choir join in harmonious cooperation to create a song, as opposed to the disjointed noise that results from the failure of the notes, instruments, and voices to harmonize properly. Adonai also commanded us to consider our ways and repent. This is serious and it involved the entire nation as they stood in front of the River Jordan. The Promised Land was on the other side and they were about to enter into it. As a congregation, we are also standing today in front of the Promised Land. It is time that we face the reality of our shortcomings and our sins. I challenge us as a congregation to get our affairs right with one another individually and as a congregation since *Yom Kipur* beckons next Tuesday. Shabbat Shalom!