

Chazak! Be Courageous!

“Chazak! Be courageous! ...¹⁰Then 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, ¹¹when 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. ¹²Gather 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. ¹³So 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...Chazak! Be courageous! For you will bring Bnei-Yisrael into the land I swore to them and I will be with you” (Deut. 31:6, 10-13, 23)

A Drash on Shabbat T'Shuvah:

Yom Teruah (The Feast of Trumpets), the first day of the Hebrew Seventh Month, begins a ten-day period until the 10th of the Seventh Month, i.e., until *Yom Kippur* (the Feast of Atonement). These ten days are known as *Yamim Nora'im*, that is, the ten days of awe. The *Shabbat* that falls within this ten-day period is called *Shabbat Shuva* (*T'Shuvah*), the sabbath of return or repentance or answering.

According to Jewish thought, without the possibility of repentance, the world could not exist, because – as our common experience makes all too clear – man stumbles more than he strides. If there were no possibility of wiping the slate clean, man could have no hope of rising above his frequent sins. They would always remain to condemn him, never allowing him to escape inevitability of judgment and punishment. For this reason, *T'Shuvah* had to be created before the universe, for *Elohim* would not create a world that was doomed from its inception (*“⁸All who dwell on the earth shall worship him—everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the Book of Life of the Lamb who was slain” Revelation 13:8*). In Jewish understanding the possibility of repentance always exists – in fact, it must exist – and it is uniquely acceptable during the ten days of awe. During this period, *Elohim* waits – anxiously and expectantly, as it were – for the His people and Believers to return to His embrace. He is more responsive at this time, He assists those groping for His closeness, and He regards our failure to respond to this opportunity as transgression of an uncommon magnitude. Like Wisdom, Repentance was with Him in the beginning.

Have you ever wondered which is the last of the 613 *mitzvot* in the *Torah*? It is: *“⁹Now, 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” (Deuteronomy 31:19)*. It is a positive *mitzvah* (the 15th listed in *Sefer HaMitzvot*). This is absolutely important based on the law of first and last mention, e.g., 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. According to many rabbis the purchase of books expounding on the *Torah* (e.g., a Bible or *Chumash* or *Tanach*) constitutes a fulfillment of this *mitzvah*. Therefore, the climax of the entire series of *instructions* is to record and know *Adonai's* commands, so that they can be fulfilled and passed to succeeding generations.

The Lord commands His children to: *“Chazak! Be courageous!”* Then we see that *Adonai* told Moses and Joshua (*Jehoshúa*) 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. He repeats again: *“Chazak! Be courageous!”* to Joshua – the young and the old generations together!

Adonai has commanded His people (and we are included) to consider their ways and repent. This was serious as the entire nation stood in front of the River Jordan with the Promised Land was on the other side just before they were about to cross it and take possession. As a congregation, we are also standing today in front of our future Promised Land. I believe it is time that we do what our ancestors practiced and 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 and *Chazak! Be courageous! Shabbat Shalom!*