

a CALL to ACTION

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Shabbos Chazak

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Shabbos Chazak

INTRODUCTION

*It is the Jewish custom that upon completing any of the five books of the Torah in our cycle of weekly readings, the entire congregation calls out: 'Chazak, Chazak, v'Nischazek – Be strong! Be strong! And may we be strengthened!'*¹

EVERYONE'S CALL

- 'Chazak, Chazak, v'Nischazek'² is called out by everyone present in the synagogue, including men, women, and children.

LOUD AND JOYFUL

- We call out with a loud, joyous, voice, which reflects on the strength and steadfastness of the Jewish people in all Torah matters.

THRICE STRENGTHENED

- This strength is itself further bolstered by our tripled expression of strength, '*Be strong! Be strong! And may we be strengthened!*'³

IMPLEMENTING THE CALL

- During Shabbos Chazak, each and every Jewish person should strengthen themselves, their family, and all around them (the word '*nischazek* – may we be strengthened' is plural), in all matters pertaining to Judaism, Torah, and Mitzvos.⁴

¹. The sources given for this custom in Likutei Sichos, Vol.25 p.474, are: "Avudraham, Seder Hatza'os Sefer Torah; Responsa of Maharam Mintz, Chapter 85; Aruch Hashulchan, Orech Chayim, 39:15; Keser Shem Tov (Gagin) Vol.1, 38."

². "We call out – everyone present in Shul, both those in the men's section and those in the women's section and even including young children - 'Chazak, Chazak, v'Nischazek', using the word *chazak* three times." (Parshas Vayechi 5752 – Sichos Kodesh p.505)

[In Jewish Law, something done three times constitutes a *chazakah* (lit. a strength) i.e. a legally valid continuity and power. In this case, the word *chazak* i.e. the strengthening, is itself given a *chazakah* (legal strength) by being repeated three times over – Ed.]

³. Parshas Matos-Masei 5751 – Hisvadyos p.68.

See there, footnote 4: "Note that the source for this custom is from the fact that "When Hashem told Yehoshuah upon the completion of the Torah, 'Chazak v'Ematz – Be strong and fortified!' [See footnote 1 above for sources]. The innovation in this custom is that although 'strength' is mentioned only twice in the verse, 'Be strong and fortified', Jewish custom has nevertheless added a third 'strength'.

Now, in addition to an established Jewish custom being 'a part of Torah itself', it even bears an advantage of a kind, over the Written and Oral Torah (See Likutei Torah, Derushei Sukos, 80c and in many other location, for an explanation of this advantage). Moreover, this custom carries the advantage and complete state of 'something done three times assumes a legal strength, a *chazakah*' [See previous footnote]."

⁴. [The name of every Parshah, in addition to its content, serves as a lesson and instructed that we should implement. This is included in the

GREAT KIDDUSH / FARBRENGEN

- We should connect this custom with the holding of a special *farbrengen* in addition to the weekly *farbrengen* (that are held in fulfillment of the custom ‘to gather congregations each Shabbos’). Indeed, many congregations have the custom to hold a *Kidushah Rabbah* – a ‘Great Kiddush’ on Shabbos Chazak.⁵

RE-INSTALL THE CUSTOM

- We should re-establish and bolster this custom everywhere, so that all may add in reciting words of Torah - along with – and they may add in their rejoicing upon the completion of an entire book of Torah.⁶
- This should include the acceptance of good resolutions to increase in Torah study and the embellished performance of Mitzvos.⁶

directive from the Alter Rebbe to ‘live with the Parshah of the week’ by implementing its lessons. Moreover, since our Parshah is also the conclusion of the entire book of Breishis - and ‘everything follows its conclusion’ (Brachos12a) - this Parshah’s name (Vayechi) must certainly contain a powerful lesson.

However, since we are already alive (and can therefore ‘live with the Parshah’) – the life of Jewry being *true* life since it stems from the Torah of Life (Avos d’Rabbi Nasan 34) – then what instruction can we take from the name Vayechi, which means ‘life’?! How do we ‘live’ with ‘living’?

The explanation, in brief, is that a person generally does not feel his life-force and certainly not its source i.e. the essence of his soul. He merely feels the individual powers that stem from this life-force e.g. sight, hearing, etc. Our general and essential life-force remains undetected by our senses. The instruction of Vayechi, then, is to take the expression of our soul’s essential life-force i.e. our essential faith in Hashem, and ‘live with it’ by expressing it within the particulars of our divine service and details of our daily affairs.

Insofar as Torah is concerned, instead of merely living with (and sensing the vivifying force we receive from) the individual Parshah of each week, ‘Vayechi’ instructs us to live with and sense the general vivifying force of Torah itself, ‘for it is our lives and the length of our days’. This awareness should then be likewise brought to bear in the particular of our daily ‘living’.

And since the life of the entire creation comes from the Torah, Vayechi teaches us to view the world in context of its true general life-force, so that we fully interact with the world based on the awareness that there is nothing besides Hashem. (Editor’s synopsis of Sichas Vayechi 5750 – Hisv. p137)]

“It is now Shabbos Parshas Vayechi, Shabbos Chazak, when we conclude the first book of Torah [i.e. Breishis, also known as] ‘Sefer Hayashar’ [i.e. the Book of the Upright – our forefathers Avraham, Yitchak and Yaakov. The name Breishis comes from the word *rosh* – a head or beginning, which indicates that this book is loftier than the other four books. See there, footnote 1]. Each and every Jewish person should therefore strengthen... [See main text above for continuation] ... in a manner whereby it becomes clearly discernable that he lives in the true sense of the word ‘living’ i.e. with the individual as well as general life-force of the Jewish people and the Torah, as it permeates every last detail of our day-to-day lives. (Parshas Vayechi 5750 – Hisvaduyos p.137)

5. Ibid. See also there, p.142: “We should therefore hold an extra farbrengen in honor of this Shabbos Chazak [upon completing the book of Breishis], as well on the Shabbos Chazak’s for completing the remaining four books of the Torah. Certainly, then, we should hold an extra farbrengen on the Shabbos Chazak for completing the entire Chumash – although there is no need to encourage a celebration for that completion, since we already celebrate the completion of the entire Torah with the festival of Simchas Torah.

This practice should be further required in this Shul and study hall, since those present have not fulfilled their ‘obligation’ with the current farbrengen. For that reason I found it necessary to promote and encourage this practice now. After all, I don’t want people to attribute the fact that that the Gabbaim haven’t arranged an additional farbrengen, to the fact that this farbrengen is being held! [Rather, they should go ahead and make another farbrengen –Ed]

There is plenty of time to hold a second farbrengen following this one, and even after all that we have discussed in this farbrengen, there still remains plenty that could – and should – be discussed. Particularly, as there are Torah scholars present amongst the audience, and especially as there are students of Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim who are expected to fulfill everything in the most perfect manner [‘temimim’ means ‘perfect ones’ –Ed].

The most important thing is not merely the discussion, rather that the message should even transcend speech altogether, so that it will be openly and clearly discernable that this is our very life-force – [as alluded to in the name of the Parsha,] ‘Vayechi’ [lit. ‘he lived’]!”

See also Parshas Bamidbar 5750, footnote 137 – Hisvaduyos p.153: “It is for this reason that Kiddush on the day of Shabbos is called *kidushah rabbah*, the ‘Great Kiddush’, since it is held amongst a multitude of Jewish people [i.e. in Shul]” See there in the subnote: “This explanation is in addition to its basic euphemistic meaning, seeing that it is shorter than the Kiddush for Friday night (*Magid Mishnah*) to the Rambam, Shabbos 29:10.”

6. “In a similar manner to the rejoicing over the completion of the entire Torah that is celebrated on Simchas Torah. The gathering of a large number of Jewish people for the sake of rejoicing over completing the Torah further emphasizes the indivisible unity of the general life-force of the Jewish people and the Torah. The final purpose, however, is for this life-force to be drawn down until it permeates our actual service, including its very finest details.” (Parshas Vayechi 5750 – Hisvaduyos p.137) [See previous two footnotes for further clarification]