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עַלֵּי דֵשֶׁה

AL EI DESHE

Weekly Torah Insights and inspiration on the Parsha from the Rosh Yeshiva Shlit"za of Gur

True Strength

This Shabbos is *Shabbos Chazak*, as we finish the first *Chumash* of the *Chamishah Chumshei Torah*. The prevalent custom is to exclaim חזק חזק "ונתחזק". Some say, instead, "חזק חזק חזק".

What is the meaning behind this alternate custom? The *Maor Vashemesh*¹ writes that חזק חזק חזק is equal in

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gematria to "Moshe." What is the connection between Moshe Rabbeinu and חזק חזק חזק?

The Gemara (Berachos 32b) lists four areas that require constant reinforcement: Torah, *maasim tovim*, *tefillah*, and *derech erez*. Rashi² understands *derech erez* as one's work

or trade. A craftsman must constantly enhance his craft; a merchant must constantly better his business acumen; a warrior must constantly improve his military abilities. The *Maor Vashemesh* points out that not all items on this list are applicable to everyone. While everyone must learn Torah, do *maasim tovim*, and daven, not everyone is required to engage in *derech erez*. Moshe Rabbeinu certainly was not involved in *derech erez*; only three items on the list applied to him. We say "Chazak" three times as an allusion to Moshe Rabbeinu who only required *chizuk* in three areas.

The combination of items in the Gemara's list is unusual. How could the Gemara combine the physical pursuit of *derech erez* together with Torah, *tefillah*, and *maasim tovim*? Rashi's explanation of the Gemara requires explanation, as well. Rashi explains צריכים חיזוק to mean that one must commit all of one's energies to the task. This is understandable for the first three items; all our energies must be invested in Torah, *maasim tovim*, and *tefillah*. But how are we to understand this regarding *derech erez*? Is a person required to devote all his energies to business?

Breach in the wall

Asarah B'Teves on *Erev Shabbos* is a rare event. The *Beis Yosef*¹⁰ quotes the *Avudraham*¹¹ as saying that if *Asarah B'Teves* would fall on Shabbos we would fast. This is not the case when it comes to other fasts; when they fall on Shabbos they are pushed off until after Shabbos. Similarly, as is the case this year, when *Asarah B'Teves* falls on *Erev Shabbos*, we fast.¹² The halachah is that one should not enter Shabbos depleted.¹³ When we fast up until Shabbos, we transgress this halachah. In this respect, *Asarah B'Teves* takes precedence over Shabbos.

Why is *Asarah B'Teves* so essential? We fast on *Asarah B'Teves* because on that day the Babylonian king reached the wall and laid siege around Yerushalayim. This was the beginning of challenging times, a pivotal moment, and we must be meticulous about observing it. For this we fast on Shabbos. There are additional benefits as well. Shabbos helps rectify the flaws which brought about our troubles; Shabbos helps mend the breach in the wall.

Many things in *Yiddishkeit* are referred to by Chazal as חומה – a wall. A Jewish home is referred to as *chomah* (Yevamos 62b). Chazal are not referring to our physical homes that keep our bodies warm and safe;

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1 End of *Parshas Vayechi*.

2 Ibid.

10 O.C. 550.

11 *Hilchos Taanis*, pg. 154.

12 Other fasts never fall on *Erev Shabbos*.

13 O.C. 249; see *mefarshim*.

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My father, the Pnei Menachem, explained: The *chizuk* that we speak about does not refer to strengthening business skills. The person has an obligation to place Hashem forefront in his mind. The Gemara tells us it is not enough to have Hashem in mind; he must constantly strengthen himself in this endeavor. Rashi explains that we must exert all our energies to the task.

If the Gemara placed all of these items in one list, it is not accidental. Building on my father's explanation, we may add that the Gemara grouped these four things together because they are all essentials. One cannot choose to live with some of them; they are all necessary. We cannot have Torah without *maasim tovim*. The Gemara tells us (Yevamos 109b), one who says I only have Torah (without *maasim tovim*) does not even have Torah. One cannot have *tefillah* without Torah. The Gemara states (Shabbos 10a), one who turns away from hearing Torah, his *tefillah* is abominable. The same is true for *derech erez*. Being *mechazek* in *derech erez*, using all of our energies to keep Hashem in focus while we go about our worldly business, requires the first three items. *Chizuk* in the areas of Torah, *maasim tovim*, and *tefillah* enables *chizuk* in *derech erez*: keeping Hashem in focus while doing business.

חֹזֵק וְנִתְחַזַּק בְּעַד עֲמִנוּ וּבְעַד עַרְי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְהָאֵשׁ יִעֲשֶׂה הַטּוֹב בְּעִינָיו – “Be strong and let us be strong for the sake of our nation and for the sake of the cities of Hashem, and Hashem will do what is good in his eyes.” (Shmuel II 10:12) The Gemara quotes this pasuk to demonstrate that we must strengthen ourselves in areas of *derech erez*. The conversation took place between Yoav and Avishai, senior officers of Dovid

Hamelech's army, as they prepared to fight against the nation of Amon. Yoav tells Avishai, “We must strengthen ourselves for the sake of Hashem's holy cities.” Yoav was saying: This war is not a selfish war. The *chizuk* that we are required to make in war is not for our glory; it is for a noble cause. The Gemara selects this pasuk to teach us that the *chizuk* we make in *derech erez* is for a noble cause: it means *chizuk* in keeping Hashem foremost in our minds.

It is for this reason, as well, that the Gemara chooses a pasuk that discusses a war. It requires constant struggle, akin to war, to keep Hashem foremost in our minds while we go about our business.

Yoav says ;וְנִתְחַזַּק; why not simply “נתחזק – let us be strong”? Why is the repetition necessary? We explained that Yoav is discussing the challenge of keeping Hashem foremost in our minds while going about our daily lives. This challenge is impossible to confront alone. Yoav is hinting that in order to surmount this challenge we must not only strengthen ourselves individually, but strengthen ourselves collectively. We must gather as a *tzibbur* to take on this challenge and ensure that we are not swept away by the tide of materialism. אִישׁ יִקְרָא אֶת רֵעֵהוּ וְיַעֲזֹרוּ וְלֹאֲחָיו יֵאמֶר חֹזֵק חֵלְפֵנוּ – *Each man shall assist his friend, and to his brother he'll say, “Be strong.”* (Yeshayah 41:6)

The last topic the Sfas Emes discusses in his *sefer*³ is public gatherings that are *l'shem Shamayim*. הָאֲסֻפוּ וְאִגְיְדָה לְכֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר – *Gather, and I will tell you that which will happen to you in the end of days* (Bereshis 49:1). Yaakov Avinu tells his children to come together, gather around. This meeting is the preparation

for all future generations. The Mishnah (Avos 4:11) states, כָּל כְּנִסְיָה שֶׁיֵּאָמַר לְשֵׁם שְׁמַיִם – *Any gathering which is l'shem Shamayim will have continued existence*. Yaakov's gathering which he made *l'shem Shamayim* lends strength to all future gatherings that are made *l'shem Shamayim*; they will all have continuity.



Why is there a custom to exclaim “Chazak” upon completion of a *sefer*? My father explained⁴ in a *shmuss* leading up to *bein hazmanim*: Whenever there is a void or any break, a special *shemirah* and *chizuk* are necessary. In between two *sefarim* there is an empty space in the *sefer Torah*. This void can be dangerous and we must say “Chazak.” So too, in *bein hazmanim*, we are given free time to refresh our minds. Such times are necessary, but they can lead to trouble. There is a special need to be *mechazek*.

Chazal's expression (see Shabbos 77b) for “worldwide” is כָּל חֲלָלֵי דְעֵלְמָא – literally, *all the empty spaces of the world*. Chazal are conveying that the whole world is full of emptiness. Yes, הָאֵשׁ יִעֲשֶׂה הַטּוֹב בְּעִינָיו – *The world is full of His glory*; yet in *galus* we do not see it. Chazal say⁵ the eyes of Bnei Yisrael became closed from the hardships of the *galus*; our vision became distorted and we were no longer able to see properly. This applies not only to the *galus* in Mitzrayim, but to our *galus* as well. We do not see Hashem's glory filling the world; to our eyes the world is completely void. *Galus* leaves a void, and there is a need to be *mechazek*.

How are we *mechazek* ourselves? How do we strengthen ourselves in the *galus*?

Every section (*parshah*) in the Torah is preceded by a break separating it from the

3 Parshas Vayechi, 5665.

4 See Otzar Drashos II, pg. 111.

5 Rashi Bereshis 47:28.

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even non-Jews build such homes. The Maharsha writes:¹⁴ this is the *chomah* of *yiras Shamayim* that protects us from the *yetzer hara*. A home in which we conduct ourselves properly is a wall against the *yetzer hara*.

Chazal consider the actions of *tzaddikim* a *chomah*. When residents of a town put their resources together to build a wall for protection, everyone must contribute. Everyone benefits from the wall, and everyone must pay their fair share. However, the Gemara (Bava Basra 7b) makes an exception to this rule. *Talmidei chachamim* do not derive any benefit from a wall, because they do not require protection. *אִסְפְּרָם מְחֹל יְרֵבוּן* – *If I were to count them, they would outnumber the sand* (Tehillim 139:18). The Gemara understands this pasuk as a reference to the deeds of *tzaddikim*: their deeds outnumber the

sand. Why is the sand used as a *mashal* here; what is the significance of sand? Sand prevents the sea from inundating the land; it provides protection. The Gemara draws a *kal v'chomer*: if a little sand can protect from the sea, then the deeds of *tzaddikim*, which are many, will certainly protect them. The *tzaddikim* are protected, and they do not have to contribute towards a wall.

Sand protects from the deluge of the sea, but what do the deeds of *tzaddikim* protect from? The Maharsha¹⁵ explains that the good deeds of *tzaddikim* protect against wickedness which threatens to flood the world. The deeds of *tzaddikim* protect the earth from the actions of the *reshaim*, just as the sand acts as a barrier against the sea.

Does the sea really threaten to destroy the world? A great storm may be said to

threaten the land, but overall, it doesn't seem that the sand saves us from the sea. What does the Gemara mean that the sand protects from the sea?

While at first glance the sea does not threaten to flood the world, this is not the reality. Without the sand as a barrier, the vast sea would overflow and quickly overwhelm the world in a great flood.

It is exactly this point that the Gemara demonstrates by comparing the actions of the wicked to the sea. The actions of the wicked are similar to the sea: although it is not apparent, they too threaten to overwhelm the *ruchniyus* of the world. We must build a *חומה* of *kedushah* and *taharah*, to hold the evil at bay.

This year, *Shabbos* will assist us in mending the walls.

(מתוך טיוטה ס"ג מקץ תשפ"א)

14 Yevamos 62b.

15 Chiddushei Aggados, Bava Basra 7b.

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previous section.⁶ Rashi at the beginning of *Parshas Vayechi*⁷ asks: "Why is there no break at all between the *parshah* of *Vayechi* (47:28-31) and the last pasuk in *Vayigash*?" This is puzzling: normally, when we find no break between *pesukim*, that is a clear indicator that this is not a new section. Since there is no space before the first pasuk of *Vayechi*, it must be a continuation of *Vayigash*. Why does Rashi assume that this pasuk begins a new section?

The *Mizrachi* writes⁸ that Ezra HaSofer had a *mesorah* that there should be a space between the last pasuk in *Vayigash* and the first of *Vayechi*; and yet, Hashem decreed not to leave the space. Why does the *Mizrachi* use this unusual phrase, "Hashem made a decree"? Why not simply write that Ezra had a *mesorah* not to leave a space?

As Rashi explains: "The Torah closes the gap, and does not leave a space, to hint at the *galus*, when our eyes become closed from hardship."

The *Mizrachi* is teaching us something valuable. The Torah does not simply foretell events. The Torah is the blueprint of the world; all that is written in the Torah is the world itself.⁹ This space between the end of *Vayigash* and the section of *Vayechi* is not merely symbolic: it is the *gezeirah* of *galus* itself.

Why is this space filled with words of Torah? This teaches us how to be *mechazek* in the times of *galus*, when we are facing a void. We must fill the void with Torah.

(ס"ג יוחי תשפ"ג מאמר ב)

6 There are two types of *parshios*, open (פתוחה) and closed (סתומה). In a *Sefer Torah*, an 'open' *parshah* starts, after a space, at the beginning of a new line, and a 'closed' *parshah* starts, after a space, in the middle of a line. In a Chumash this is signified by preceding each פתוחה with the letter פ, and each סתומה with the letter ס. The section of *Vayechi* does not have any space preceding it.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 See Pesachim 54a.

Power of the Oath

וַיִּקְרָבוּ יְמֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמוֹת וַיִּקְרָא לְבָנוֹ לְיוֹסֵף
 וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם נָא מְצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ שִׂים נָא
 יָדְךָ תַּחַת יְרֵכִי וְעָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְאָמַת אֵל נָא
 תִקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרַיִם

The time approached for Yisrael to die, and he called for his son, for Yosef, and he said to him, "Please, if I have found favor in your eyes, please, place your hand under my thigh, and you will do with me kindness and truth, please do not bury me in Mitzrayim." (Bereishis 47:29)

Yaakov Avinu asks Yosef to swear that he won't bury him in Mitzrayim. Later, Yaakov tells Yosef, (48:22) וַאֲנִי נָתַתִּי לְךָ שְׂכָם אֶחָד עַל אַחִיךָ אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְתִּי מִיַּד שֵׁעֵם, *one portion more than your brothers, that I took from the hand of the Emori with my sword and with my bow.*" Rashi explains: Yaakov told Yosef that he gave him the city of Shechem as a reward for attending to his *kevurah*. In that case, once Yosef accepts his father's reward of Shechem, he should become halachically obligated to fulfill his part of the deal. Why was it necessary for Yosef to swear?

The *Yefeh Toar* answers¹⁶ that a true *chessed* is one that is done *lishmah*—with no ulterior motives. Yaakov wanted to reward Yosef for his efforts,

but, at the same time, he wanted him to do the mitzvah properly. Yosef would swear and do the mitzvah only for the sake of the mitzvah. Only after the fact would he be rewarded for his efforts. This teaches all future generations how to do mitzvos properly. Mitzvos should be done with *ahavah* and *lishmah*, without any ulterior motives.

Let us suggest an alternative explanation. Yaakov understood that one cannot divert attention from the *yetzer hara* by providing a different attraction. When pitting attraction against attraction, there is no telling who will come out victorious. Rewarding Yosef for overseeing Yaakov's *kevurah* could only go so far; the temptations of the *yetzer hara* might be stronger. The only way to ensure that Yosef would overpower his *yetzer* is by making him swear.

This is a powerful lesson for us, serving Hashem in *galus*. There are so many temptations, the only way to ensure that we overpower them is with a *shevuah*. A *shevuah* obligates us, come what may.

Every person makes a *shevuah* before they enter this world; "Be a tzaddik, and don't be a *rasha*" (Niddah

30b). This *shevuah* gives us the strength to overpower the *yetzer hara*. If we make our own *cheshbonos*, who knows where our calculations will lead us? We are not left to our own assessments. We have made a *shevuah*, and we must follow through.

It is true, Chazal tell us (Avos 2:1) we must weigh the cost of a mitzvah against its reward. We must make our own calculations. This applies to someone whose mind is settled, who has the time and the presence of mind to make these calculations. Yet sometimes the *yetzer hara* can be overwhelming. By design, he does not leave us the luxury of careful deliberation. As Shlomo Hamelech writes, Hashem made people simple, וְהֵמָּה בְקִשּׁוֹ חֲשִׁבֹנוֹת רַבִּים – *and they sought many calculations* (Koheles 7:29). People overwhelm themselves with the *yetzer hara's* corruptions. They become so busy with those calculations that they forget to make the most important calculations—following Chazal's mandate to weigh the cost of a mitzvah against its reward.

When the *yetzer hara* overtakes us, we should remember Yaakov's counsel. You made a *shevuah*. You must never transgress it.

16 96:5.