

שְׁמַע קוֹלֵנוּ



SHEMA KOLEINU: DIVREI TORAH FROM THE REBBEIM, TALMIDIM, AND FACULTY OF MTA

Parshas Vayechi

פרשת ויחי

The Remarkable Nature of Chazak

Moshe Lieberman ('24)

We are all familiar with the cheer of the phrase "*chazak chazak v'nischazek*"—"Let us be strong, let us be strong and let us strengthen others as well," following the completion of each of the five *seforim* in the Torah. While we might say it with a lot of external passion, internally, do we really know the meaning behind these words? Moreover, we must ask ourselves the following questions: What is the source for this phrase? Is there any other instance in which we have a similar practice? And how can we apply this to our daily lives?

Following the death of Moshe Rabbeinu, Hashem tells Yehoshua that in order to faithfully observe the Torah that He gave to Moshe, Yehoshua must be "*chazak v'ematz*"—"very strong and resolute."

(Yehoshua 1:6-7). While this encouragement may serve as a general message to follow in the ways of the Torah, the words "*chazak v'ematz*" appear to have a specific connection to the reading of the Torah. This can be seen from the Midrash, which explains that when Hashem first spoke to Yehoshua, He found him reading from the Torah; it was then that Hashem said, "*chazak v'ematz*," as well as, "*lo yamush sefer haTorah hazeh mipicha*"—"Do not let this Torah cease from your mouth." (Ibid. 1:8).

Interestingly, it is based on the above *pesukim* that the Rema says that we should say "*chazak*"—"be strong," to an *oleh* after his *aliyah*. (O.C 139:11). However, Ashkenazim have adopted the practice to say "*yishar kochacha*"—"more power to you," as a congratulatory expression. Ironically, Sephardim, similar to the Rema, the Ashkenazi Posek, say "*chazak ubaruch*"—"be strong and blessed," to one who has received a *kibbud*. Another variation of the phrase is to say "*chazak*" three times, as it equals the gematria of Moshe. Additionally, there is also an intriguing theory that the custom to shout "*chazak, chazak, v'nischazek*" upon the completion of a *sefer* is actually the result of a printer's error. It may just be that an acronym in the form of the letters *ches-zayin-kuf*, for the words "*chazzan v'kahal*," which used to be printed in *chumashim* to remind the reader and congregation to say "*chazak v'nischazek*," was misunderstood and came to be printed as "*chazak, chazak, v'nischazek*."

In This Edition:

The Remarkable Nature of *Chazak*
Moshe Lieberman ('24) 1

Slow Descent
Ben Goldfeder ('26) 2

A Short Vort
Elisha Cohen ('24) 2

For Whom is the *Yeshuas Hashem*?
Matan Marmer ('25) 3

Yahrzeits & Insights: This
Week in Jewish History 3

The Gemara tells us that one of the things that is in constant need of bolstering and improvement is Torah study. Thus, we say “*chazak*” to strengthen ourselves in Torah, as it’s crucial to review the Torah that we have learned so as not to forget it. This is why, after finishing a *masechta* of Gemara, we say “*hadran alach*”—“I will return to you.” Similarly, when we finish a *sefer* of the Torah, we say “*chazak*.” In cheering “*chazak chazak v’nischazek*,” we are in essence saying “we should have the strength to review what we learned.” Likewise, when a person does a *mitzvah*, we say “*yasher koach*,” meaning that “just as you did this *mitzvah*, may it be Hashem’s will that you do many more *mitzvos*!”

We may struggle throughout our daily lives for motivation in performance of *mitzvos*, but we must remember the lesson of *chazak*, that, just like Yehoshua, we must stay strong and faithfully follow in the ways of the Torah. It is with this constant reinforcement that we will *im yirtzeh Hashem* be able to bring the *geulah b’mehairah b’yameinu*.

Slow Descent

Binyamin Goldfeder ('26)

Usually, in between each *parshah* in a *sefer Torah*, there is a line space called a *stumah*. The one exception to this is between last week’s *parshah*, Vayigash, and this week’s *parshah*, Vayechi. Rashi is bothered by this missing feature, and he explains that the *shibud* (slavery) began after Yaakov’s death (which is in this week’s *parshah*), and the fate of Klal Yisrael was sealed (*stumah*). However, Rabbi Yisrael Reisman asked in the name of Rav Schwab, Rashi seems to contradict himself. In *parshas Va’eira*, the

Torah records Levi’s death but doesn’t do so for other *shevatim* (besides Yosef), and Rashi explains that since Levi was the last of the *shevatim* to die, it is teaching us that as long as one of the *shevatim* was still alive, the *shibud* didn’t start. So did the *shibud* start after Yaakov’s death or Levi’s death? Rav Schwab says that the actual slavery and work didn’t start until after all the *shevatim* had died, but the *tza’ar* started after Yaakov died.

The Torah tells us that when Yaakov died, Yosef had to ask permission to go to bury him in Eretz Yisrael. Instead of going to Pharaoh directly, he went to the *Beis Pharaoh* and asked them to ask Pharaoh. The Midrash says that he spoke to the hairdresser of the queen, who spoke to the queen, who in turn spoke to Pharaoh. But, asks Rav Schwab, why did he do this if he himself was the viceroy of Egypt? In fact, Pharaoh told him that only Pharaoh’s throne would be more powerful, so why didn’t he just go directly? In this instance, the effect of Yaakov’s death manifested itself in a loss of political power for Yosef, who no longer had the authority to go straight to Pharaoh. When we are in *galus* and put in *shibud*, it doesn’t start with the full-blown torture. It starts slowly and gradually moves up, with small hints at the beginning. After Yaakov’s death Yosef’s power began to diminish, and descended from there.

Rav Schwab explains further: The Gemara explains that the *stumahs* in the Torah are times to reflect about what has just happened. The reason the pause is not here, says Rav Schwab, is because there was no reflection about what was going on—the Yidden didn’t stop to think about their descent, a theme that repeats itself throughout Jewish history.

A Short Vort

Flisha Cohen ('24)

“וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶל־בָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הֲאִסְפוּ וְאֵגִידָה לָכֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרָא אֲתֶכֶם בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים” (בראשית מט:א)

“And Yaakov called to his sons and said: Gather together and I will reveal to you what will happen to you in the end of days” (Bereishis 49:1)

In Parshas Vayechi, we read of the *brachos* that Yaakov gave to his sons before his passing. The Ramban comments on this part of the *parsha* by emphasizing the great impact of a parent’s blessings and the weight they carry. The Ramban says that these blessings are not just words that do nothing, but rather, they have the power to shape the destinies of the *shevatim* and the future of the Jewish people. This idea underscores the lesson that our words and *brachos* hold great power. Just as Yaakov’s blessings influenced the path of each tribe, our words and actions can impact those around us, both for good and bad. As such, it is extremely important to remember to always use our words wisely, always aiming to uplift and guide others towards their true potential, and make sure not to push them down and lead them to a worse path.

For Whom is the Yeshuas Hashem?

Matan Marmar ('25)

In Parshas Vayechi, before Yaakov Avinu passes away, he blesses all of his sons. In the middle of the blessings there is a *passuk* that is seemingly out of place. When blessing Dan, Yaakov ends his *bracha* by saying, "*Lishuasicha kivisi Hashem*", "For your salvation I long, O Hashem." What was Yaakov doing when he said this? Was it part of Dan's *bracha* or is it just a prayer that Yaakov added in the middle of the *brachos*?

Rashi says that this statement was a prophecy of Yaakov that Shimshon, who is a descendant of Dan, will have to *daven* for Hashem's salvation. When the Plishtim gouged Shimshon's eyes out, Shimshon *davened* for Hashem's salvation by asking Hashem to remember him and give him strength for one last time. The Ramban explains that Yaakov saw that none of the *Shoftim* would ever fall to the hands of their enemies but the last *shofeit*, Shimshon, who is from *Shevet Dan*, will. Yaakov saw that after Shimshon, Bnei Yisrael wouldn't have the same success defeating their enemies as they did in the time of the *Shoftim*. Therefore, Yaakov davened to Hashem. The Da'as Zekeinim offers yet a different explanation. The Da'as Zekeinim's explanation is that Yaakov saw the might and success of Shimshon and said "*Lishuasicha kivisi Hashem*," so that the success of Shimshon will be attributed to Hashem and not to Shimshon himself.

During this *eis tzara* and *milchama*, us *Bnei Chutz La'aretz* have to realize that the most important thing we can do to contribute to the war effort is *daven*. We have many brave warriors in *Eretz Yisrael*, but we need to daven as much as we can. Hopefully, Hashem will answer our *tefillos* and bring a *yeshua* for *am yisrael b'karov*.

Yahrzeits & Insights: This Week in Jewish History

Rav Mordechai Gifter zt"l (1915 - 2001) - 23 Teves



This coming Thursday, 23 Teves, will mark the 22nd Yahrzeit of Rav Mordechai Gifter zt"l (1915 - 2001).

Rav Gifter was the revered and beloved Rav of the fledgling Waterbury community from 1941 until 1944. Rather than my own feeble attempt at portraying Rav Gifter's thoughts as to his years as Rav of the Waterbury Kehilla, I will heretofore transcribe Rav Gifter's own words; Rav Gifter was renowned for his impeccable eloquence and unique oratory skills. The following is excerpted from remarks which Rav Gifter delivered as the Opening Lecturer of the Community Lecture Series in Cleveland Ohio in 1991, on the topic of "Diversity in Orthodoxy":

"Good evening my friends. When I was asked to speak tonight [about] the influence of the Telshe Yeshiva upon the Jewish community, I wasn't aware of the fact that it was part of a discussion on Diversity in Orthodox Judaism. You see, my friends, I'm not an Orthodox Jew. I'm a Torah Jew! Orthodoxy is strange to me. For years and years, I've been saying this over and over again, that this Greek term "or-tho-dox" doesn't quite well describe what we Torah Jews believe in. And therefore, I will not be engaged in "orthodoxy" tonight, but rather in speaking a bit about Torah Jews" (Rav Gifter then provides his own personal feelings regarding his efforts in planting the seeds in the "beginnings of the Waterbury Kehilla") "I was in the rabbinat (in Waterbury, Connecticut). It was a lucrative rabbinat, and [while] I was able to live as a Torah Jew in the rabbinat (in Waterbury), ... my congregants were far from that. But they listened to everything I said, as far as the community was concerned. As individuals, they were far from Torah Jews...even very far from what you would call Orthodox Jews! But it was a wonderful *kehilla* in Waterbury, Connecticut! But when my uncles, the Roshei HaYeshiva, asked me to leave the rabbinat (in Waterbury), and come to (Cleveland) to help build the yeshiva, I said 'I'm going to do it'. It meant giving up a great deal as far as means of a livelihood, and many other benefits, but it meant building Torah! And I didn't feel that in Waterbury I would be able to begin building Torah. Even though we had launched the beginnings of a day school, a kindergarten; work which was continued by a wonderful colleague of mine, Rav (Abba Zalka) Gewirtz, *zol ehr langeh lebben*, who followed me there, who built a complete day school in Waterbury..." "I left Waterbury, and came here to Cleveland."

Rav Gifter then shares a shocking revelation; perhaps the first to express as such publicly on American shores. His remarks are eerily reminiscent of our Sages' Midrashic comment on the words "*ish mitzri hitzilanu*" (Shemos 2:19):

"The great *yeshivos* of Lithuania were doing marvelous work in preparing for the future leadership of *klal yisroel*. But it was Hitler (*ym"s*) who brought about the job that had to be done here in the United States. I doubt if he had any idea of what his destruction of European Jewry would ultimately lead to. I keep telling the story of Rav Chaim Volozhiner (1749 - 1821), leader of the first and greatest Yeshiva of Lithuanian/Polish Jewry, who once burst out crying, and declared: 'THE LAST STATION FOR TORAH BEFORE THE FINAL REDEMPTION WILL BE THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA!' One of his great disciples asked him 'So why does the Rebbe cry? What is there to cry to about?' His answer was: 'I see how bitter it will be to create this last station.' "No one understood what he was talking about. But when Hitler came along, we began to understand what Rav Chaim Volozhiner was referring to."

Rav Gifter then declared what he viewed to be his life's mission, and what he felt should be the mission of every Ben Torah in America: "My friends! The United States is a station for Torah, brought about by the destruction of European Jewry!"

Rabboisai, I don't feel that I need to add much. Other than to say, that it's clear that Rav Gifter viewed the development of the community of Waterbury CT, as well as the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, with the responsibility of nurturing the world of "*Der Lesteh Stanzia*" - The Last Station. It behooves us then, to continue the Rav of Waterbury's legacy, by appreciating this responsibility, and living up to the task of being devoted servants of Hashem and loyal adherents to his Torah, so that we might hasten the final redemption, may it be speedily in our days!

יהי זכרו ברוך!

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Parsha Puzzlers!

1. How many different instances of sibling rivalry are found in *Sefer Bereishis*?
2. What did Yaakov plant while in Mitzrayim?
3. Name a father and son in *Sefer Bereishis* who experienced a similar physical ailment.

Answers:

1. There are five such instances: Kayin vs. Hevel, Shem and Yefes vs. Cham, Yitzchak vs. Yishmael, Yaakov vs. Esav, and Yosef vs. his brothers.
2. Rashi (*Shemos* 25:5) quotes a *Medrash Tanchuma* which says that Yaakov saw through *ruach hakodesh* that Bnei Yisrael would one day build the Mishkan, and would need cedar wood. He therefore brought cedar trees with him to Mitzrayim and planted them. He left instructions that upon exiting Mitzrayim, they were to take the cedar with them, so that they would be able to build the Mishkan in the desert.
3. Both Yitzchak and Yaakov had weakened eyesight in their old age (*Bereishis* 27:1, 48:10).

These questions and answers were adapted from "Torah IQ: The Great Torah Riddle Book" with the permission of the author.

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