

## Chazak! on Shabbat T'Shuvah

*"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>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...Chazak! Be courageous!" (Deut. 31:6, 10-13, 23a)*

### *What is Shabbat T'Shuvah?*

*Yom Teruah (the Feast of Trumpets)*, the first day of the Seventh Hebrew Month, begins a ten-day period until the 10<sup>th</sup> 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, repentance or answering.

In 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, a human 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. Thus, 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, *Yah Adonai Our 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*.

Our *Torah Portion* is *VaYeLech (Deut. 31:1-30)*, *And He went*. Here, Moses continues to deliver his last message to our people while they are all still standing (*Nitzavim*) in front of the Jordan as they listen (*sh'ma*).

As we approach the conclusion of the *Torah*, we remember the *Law of First and last Mention* (mainly 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). Jewish Sages derive from *Deut. 31:19* "<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.", which is the *last* command (*mitzvah*) in the *Torah*, that *every Jew* is commanded to write a *Torah* scroll, a commandment that can be fulfilled according to *Maimonides (Rambam)*: "*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*). It seems like a *great leap of faith* to jump from writing *this song* to writing *this Torah*. But according to some Rabbis the purchase of books expounding on the *Torah* (e.g., a *Chumash* or *Tanach*, i.e., a *Bible*) constitutes a fulfillment of this *mitzvah*. If we regard the rabbis teaching benignly, then the *climax* of the entire *series of mitzvot* (613 of them) is to record and know *Yah Adonai's Torah*, so the principles can be obeyed and passed on to succeeding generations (our children). 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 a constant reminder of Israel's roots and the unchanging focus of its devotion: "<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" (*Deut. 31:21*).

Today *Yah Adonai* commands His children: “*Chazak! Be courageous!*” This is followed by *commanding* Moses and Joshua (*Jehoshúa*) *to write* the *Torah* and *teach it* to the people, and afterwards to place the scroll inside the Ark. He repeats again: “*Chazak! Be courageous!*” to Joshua – that is, to the young and the old generations alike!

*Adonai* has commanded His people (and we are included) to consider their ways and repent. As a congregation, we are also standing today in front of our future (our Promised Land). I believe it is time that we do what our ancestors practiced and face the reality of our shortcomings and sins. I challenge us as a congregation to get our affairs right with one another individually and as a congregation. *Chazak! Be courageous and Repent! Shabbat Shalom!*