

Parshat Ma's'e

This parsha concludes the book of Bamidbar. At the conclusion of each of the five books of the Torah, it is customary for all to declare aloud, “Chazak, Chazak, Venit'chazeik (Be Strong! Be Strong! And may we be Strengthened!)” What is the meaning and significance of this?

Rav Soloveitchik suggested that this practice has its origin in the Gemara Berachot (32b) wherein it is stated that “Arba'ah Tzrichin Chizuk” [Four activities require strengthening], that is, constant renewal of one's effort in order to succeed. The first one happens to be- Torah. HaShem said to Yehoshua “Only be very **strong** and courageous to observe, to do in accordance with the entire Torah” (Yehoshua 1:7). Why should all this be necessary for Torah? So the Rav explained that Torah requires no less than total immersion, devotion and diligence, as Chazal say, “Words of Torah are not retained except by one who is willing to give his life for it” (Berachot 63b).

The more one learns by completing a book of the Torah, a mesichta, a gemara in sha"as, the more one realizes how little he truly knows. Torah knowledge is as vast, as wide and deep as the ocean and what we do know is but a drop in the bucket. This realization can become overwhelming, depressing and it even weakens a person. Thus we inject him with a shot of chizuk, and say, “Chazak, Chazak”, be bold and strong, do not despair and do not retreat. You are not expected to be like the Rambam, or the Vilna Gaon. Just continue the way you are and do the best you can.. The response of the person is , of course I will continue and he demonstrates his resolve by immediately plowing through the path of a new mesichta, a new perek. At every siyyum of a Gemara we therefore begin immediately the next perek or Gemara. When we are mesayeim a book of the Torah-we begin the next book or parsha **that same day, usually by Mincha. The only time we cannot do that is on Simchat Torah, (in Chutz LaAretz) when we end with Zot HaBeracha, the last parsha of the Torah, because Torah reading by Mincha is only on Shabbat and Simchat Torah cannot fall on a Shabbat. So what do we do to show our resolve and chizuk, we begin Bereishit that very same morning.**