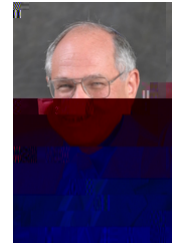


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**Shabbat Parashat Pekudei
March 9, 2019 - 2 Adar II 5779**



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The Blessings of Completion
Torah Reading: Exodus 38:21 – 40:38
Haftarah Reading: 1 Kings 7:51 – 8:21

“And when Moses saw that they had performed all the tasks – as the Lord had commanded, so they had done – Moses blessed them.” (Exodus 39:43)

What is completing a task a source of blessing? One reason is that one feels a sense of accomplishment – one set out to do something and successfully completed the task. That is especially the case when, as in this case, a group has never been called on to do something like this, and so there is no record of accomplishment to demonstrate that one can, and so finishing the task relieves the builders of anxiety that they may well have in trying to do something that they never did before. Another reason that finishing a task is a source of blessing is the pride that one can legitimately have upon completing a task on which one has embarked: one can point proudly to what one has done. Yet another is sense that one can contribute to the world in meaningful ways, that we human beings have the ability to see a need and to meet it. In this case, there is also the satisfaction of doing what God has asked of us, so that the completion is not only a blessing for us but for us. The same feeling may apply when one has done something that is not directly

such as healing someone in body or spirit, ameliorating poverty, educating someone or making that possible, contributing compassion or beauty to the world, or building, renovating, or maintaining a synagogue, school, or social service agency that will enable people to worship, learn, and live more fully. All of these elements may be included in the response of Moses to the completion of the Tabernacle and the vestments of the people who would serve in it.

There is another indication in this week's Torah reading of the blessings of completion. Parashat Pikudei ends the Book of Exodus. Traditionally, as we end each of the five books of the Torah in our reading them in the synagogue, we say *hazak, hazak, v'nithazek*, "Be strong, be strong, and let us strengthen each other." In a rabbinic ruling by Rabbi Nechama Goldberg, approved by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards in 2000, she traces the origins of this custom:

The earliest reference to the custom of saying *hazak* to one who reads from the Torah is found in HaManhig, written by Abraham ben Nathan ha-Yarhi, who wrote at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries regarding the customs of Jews of France, Germany and Spain. He writes:

As for the custom in France and Provence that all who read from the Torah, as they concluded, the hazzan would say to them in a loud voice, *hazak*, I have found support for this in *Bereshit Rabbah*, "Let not this Book of Teaching cease from your lips." The word *hazak* is used only to the one who holds the object in his hand, from which we learn that the Sefer Torah was in Joshua's lap. And God said to him, "Be strong and resolute [*hazak v'amatz*] (Deuteronomy 31:7, 23; Joshua 1:7)" From here, to the one who concludes the Torah reading we say to him, *hazak*.

According to the custom, *hazak* was recited to each person who read from the Torah. At that time, Torah reading customs were in flux. It was customary for each person who was called to the Torah to read for himself. As fewer people were able to read the Torah, especially with the appropriate trope, a designated reader replaced the congregant. The blessing of *hazak* was addressed to the reader. (Ha-Manhig refers only to the reader and does not distinguish a separate individual receiving an aliyah.) The citation from *Bereshit Rabbah* is used as proof-text that the person reading from the Torah (or reciting the blessings) should be holding on to the Torah. By inference, since God said *hazak* to Joshua while he was holding the Torah, we should also say *hazak* to one who holds the Torah:

R. Shimon b. Yohai said: The Book of Deuteronomy was an ensign for Joshua. When the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself to him, He found him sitting with the Book of Deuteronomy in his hand. Said He to him, "Be strong, Joshua, be of good courage, Joshua; this book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth." (Josh. 1:8). Thereupon he took it and showed it to the orb of the sun which he apostrophised thus: "Even as I have not stood still from (studying) this, so do thou stand still before me!" Straightaway, "And the sun stood still," etc.

The next source to report on this custom is Orhot Ha'ayim by Aaron ben Jacob HaKohen of southern France writing in the beginning of the fourteenth century:

In *Bereshit Rabbah*, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth," teaches that the Sefer Torah was in Joshua's hand since one only uses *hazeh* ["this"] when one is holding the object in his

hand. And when he concludes, we say to him, *hazak ve'amatz*. From here, the custom derives to say to the one who concludes his reading in the Torah, *hazak*, and thus is the custom in France and Provence. However, in Spain, we only say this at the conclusion of the Torah exclusively, and each

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