

Pinchas

Shabbat Shalom. Since today is not the first time I have given the D'var Torah, you all know that I speak about one part of the Parsha which is a teaching moment for me.

I must admit that sometimes it is a bit more challenging since I am reading the Parsha with 21st century eyes and sensibilities and the Torah was written many centuries ago, but let's try anyway.

One thing to know about Torah is that only a relative small number of women are even mentioned. And even fewer are actually named. Of all the names of the tribes and their descendants, perhaps one woman is mentioned. Of course we know that the Torah was written by men so there's no surprise there.

Today I'd like to talk about the daughters of Zelophehad who are given quite a bit of space in today's Parsha.

But first I'd like to recall some other women in the Torah.

Let's start with Sarah. . When she told Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael it was barely 2 verses. Incidentally, that is the last time Sarah spoke to Abraham as noted in the Torah. At the time I first read that I felt sorry for Ishmael and thought with my modern feelings that how could she do that? However, she is the first person who truly saved the true heir to the covenant. In addition, G-d did not rebuke her.

Next, we have Rebecca who tricked Isaac into giving Jacob the blessing. This is told in a few verses. Once again Rebecca knew that Jacob would carry on G-d's wishes rather than Esau.

Then we read about Yael and Deborah and a few other women, but they are recalled without much notice,.

Now we come to the daughters of Zelophehad.

As the story goes, Zelophehad had 5 daughters, no sons. Since Judaism is a patriarchal society, sons were very important to carry on the name and keep the property within the tribes. When Zelophehad died, the daughters went to Moses to plead their case for their inheritance. Moses thought and agreed that they did have a worthy case, but he felt that he alone could not make any judgment and took the matter to G-d. G-d agreed with the daughters and they were allowed to inherit the property just like the sons. This was a gutsy thing for the daughters to do, This was truly unprecedented for the time.

They approached the problem thoughtfully by going through the right steps to get to their goal. They were respectful and accepted the compromise that they marry within their tribe, but it was a true beginning of taking women seriously.

Today in Conservative and Reform congregations women are full participants. Although it did take many years to get there, I do believe that the daughters of Zelophehad led the way.

In addition, there have been some families with only girls who have not only kept their maiden name after marriage, but in some cases, the groom has taken the bride's name.

So what is the message for me today? Perhaps it's patience. You mean I should stop praying to G-d to give me patience NOW? Perhaps it's taking the time to be prepared with facts about whatever it is that I would like to change or to correct. Perhaps it's being willing to compromise and listen to the other side of a situation. And most important perhaps it's presenting my situation calmly and respectfully and not whining about whatever is troubling me. I do hope that if the occasion arises, I can remember the daughters of Zelophead and act accordingly.

Once again I find something in the Parsha of the week that can help me to be a more informed person if I am willing to try. That is the genius of our Torah.

Shabbat Shalom