



The Daughters of Tzelafchad Redeem the Land

The Deeds of the Mothers are Signs for the Daughters

In our time and age and in particularly in our place there is an intensified awareness especially among women of the inherent holiness of our Land. It is only in the *zechut* (merit) of the righteous women that *Kever Rachel* – the eternal dwelling place of Rachel, our Mother is in Jewish hands today. I clearly remember about 20 years ago or so, the Israeli government wanted to close Kever Rachel to Jews, as it was too much effort to protect it properly within the Arab/Christian neighborhood of Beit Lechem. The women in Gush Etzion got together and organized themselves to fill up busses daily to visit Rachel's gravesite. Every day a busload from a different community, Sunday Efrat, Monday Alon Shevut, Tuesday Bat Ayin etc. arrived at Kever Rachel to show the government how important Rachel's tomb is for us. I was amazed to experience how our effort bore fruit and how our actions influenced the government to preserve this holy site as a place of prayer for Jews. Our attachment to the Land of Israel is constantly being strengthened as we with *mesirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice) expand our *yishuvim* and build new communities. Even if we live in relative secure areas such as Gush Etzion, just living on the land and doing what we can to heal it is also vital to the redemption process. This is why my husband agreed to pay for an extensive reconstruction of our vegetable garden by an ecological company with exiting ideas of creating the right soil balance. They will be using lots of organic compost, essential oils and hay for mulching to ensure the growth of healthy microbes providing plants with natural protection from pests and diseases and converting nitrogen and other nutrients into usable forms for plants to grow. From which source do we draw our inherent attachment to this land? From where do we get the strength to stand up for the Land? We are only an extension of the souls that preceded us. The spiritual rectifications enacted by our ancestors have become part and parcel of our spiritual genetics, paving the way for our continual efforts in walking on their path. I would like to extend the saying, "The deeds of the fathers are a sign for the sons: (Ramban, *Bereishit* 12:6; *Midrash Tanchuma Lech* 9), to claim that also "the deeds of the mothers are a sign for the daughters."

Biblical Role-models – The Daughters of Tzelafchad Who Loved the Land

Among the role-models who have affected our inherent attachment to the Land of Israel are the daughters of Tzelafchad. In a time when the general sentiment was remiss regarding the love of the Land of Israel, these five sisters stood up in their dedicated quest for a portion in the Land. They yearned to be part of revealing the Shechina through redeeming the Land of Israel:

וַתִּקְרַבְנָה בָּנוֹת צִלְפַּחַד בִּן חֶפְרָה בִּן גִּלְעָד בִּן מַכִּיר בִּן מְנַשֶּׁה לְמִשְׁפַּחַת מְנַשֶּׁה בֶן יוֹסֵף וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֹתָיו מִחֲלָה נֹחַ וְחִגְלָה וּמִלְכָּה וְתִרְצָה: וַתַּעֲמִדְנָה לְפָנַי מִשָּׁה וּלְפָנַי אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וּלְפָנַי הַנְּשִׂאִים וְכָל הָעֵדָה פָּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר: (במדבר פרק כז פסוק א-ב)

"The daughters of Tzelafchad, the son of Chefer, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Menashe, of the families of Menashe, the son of Yosef came forward. His daughters' names were Machlah, Noah, and Hogla, Milkah, and Tirtzah. They stood before Moshe, and before Elazar the kohen, and before the chieftains and the entire congregation at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting... saying..." (*Bamidbar* 27:1-2).

Our sages note that the section about Tzelafchad's daughters directly follows the passage describing the punishment of the men in the desert: "Among these there was no man..." (*Bamidbar* 26:64-65). The incident of the spies who despised the land is contrasted with the daughters of Tzelafchad who held the Promised Land dear (Rashi, *Bamidbar* 26:64). Rashi already explained in *Parashat Shelach Lecha* that

Hashem was not commanding Moshe to send spies. The expression, *Shelach Lecha* – “Send for yourself” indicates, “on your own responsibility, I’m not commanding you, but if you decide, go ahead” (Rashi, *Bamidbar* 13:2). Based on this Rashi I found a commentary that sounds as if it originated from a current feminist, reform rabbi, but surprisingly, it was by Rabbi Efraim Solomon ben Aharon of Luntshits 1550-1619: “The men despised the land and said, “*Let us appoint a chief and return to Egypt*” (*Bamidbar* 14:4), while the women loved the land and said, “*Give us possession in the Land*” (Ibid. 27:4). Therefore, Hashem said, in My opinion according to what I see in the future, it would have been preferable to send women who love the land for they would not speak evil about it. However, if you, according to your own opinion decide to send אנשים/*anashim* – ‘men,’ behold that is on your own responsibility. Therefore, it states, שלח לך/ *shelach lecha* – “Send men for you” – according to your own opinion. However, in My opinion, it would have been better to send women” (*Kli Yakar, Bamidbar* 13:12). It seems that the women of Israel had an intuitive, spiritual understanding that the physical world can become sanctified. Just as women are aware that their wombs can become a dwelling place for the sacred seed of life, so too are they aware that the earth can become a dwelling place for the Shechina. Women, therefore, are more likely to feel a special love for *Eretz Yisrael* – the Land most suited for the fulfillment of the mitzvot of the Torah. And it was they, unlike the men, who realized that *Eretz Yisrael* is the place where the Shechina will begin Her return to the earth (Yosef Ben Shlomo Hakohen).

Inheriting Yosef, the Tzaddik

“Then approached the daughters of Tzelafchad...” They approached – brought themselves close to each other, to the inner most point of the land and to their own souls. You can only connect with the Land of Israel when you come close to its Divine sparks reflected in your own soul. Connecting with one another is a springboard to go beyond the outer shell of our own ego and get in touch with the inner point of the land and ourselves. “...of the families of Menashe, the son of Yosef.” Why is the name of Yosef mentioned among the ancestors of Tzelafchad’s daughters? If they are from the tribe of Menashe isn’t it obvious that they also descend from Yosef? Yosef was known for his love of the Land of Israel unlike half the tribe of Menashe that received its inheritance on the other side of the Jordan River. The daughters of Tzelafchad were connected to the other half of Menashe associated with Yosef – who made his brothers swear to bring his bones up to the Land of Israel (Malbim). The gematria of יוסף/Yosef (156) is identical with the gematria of ציון/*tzion* – ‘the inner point.’ Tzion is the innermost inner. It is like the Russian dolls: Outside Israel, tzion is Israel; inside Israel, tzion is Yerushalayim; inside Yerushalayim, tzion is the Kotel... until we reach the innermost point between the wings of the Cherubs on top of the tablets of the Holy Ark within the holies of holy of the Temple. Whenever there is great holiness, the opposite – the shell – is also prevalent. It was because the spies tapped into its shell, that they were so appalled by the Land of Israel. The job of Mashiach ben Yosef is to crack the shell open and go beyond the exterior by revealing the inner light of the Land. In this way, he is able to ingather the exiles and build up the Land of Israel. If we are looking for exterior, physical comforts, Israel is the wrong address. Yet, there is no Torah learning and closeness to G-d as in the Land of Israel. Being tuned into this inner value makes us love the land. The daughters of Tzelafchad were likewise able to penetrate the shell of the Land of Israel, and tune into its inner light. Therefore, they had the zechut to reveal a new law in the Torah. This is what enabled “their eye to see that which the eye of Moshe did not see” (Rashi, *Bamidbar* 27:7).

Revealing a New Law in the Torah

“This chapter ought to have been written by Moshe, but for the fact that the daughters of Tzelafchad had so much merit, it was written through them” (*Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra* 119a). What was the great merit of Tzelafchad’s daughters to teach laws of Torah, which even the greatest prophet of all times, Moshe, was unable to teach? The daughters arose in the wilderness and merited to receive the

reward for the entire generation. They approached Moshe when the Israelites complained because they had to retreat. Moshe asked, "Behold the Israelites want to return to Egypt, and you request an inheritance in the land?" They answered: "We know that ultimately the Jewish people will possess the land... This is what Hillel used to say, 'In a place where nobody jumps at the merchandise buy it, in a place where there are no men, become a man etc.'" (Eliyahu Kitov). The request of the daughters of Tzelafchad showed that they firmly believed that the Children of Israel would return safely to their own borders. Even at a time when everyone else had lost hope, they were filled with tremendous אמונה/*emunah* – 'faith.' This is the special zechut through which the daughters merited that a portion of the Torah be written through them:

וַיֹּאמֶר הַשֵּׁם אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: כֵּן בְּנוֹת צִלְפַּחַד דְּבַרְתָּ נָתַן יְתֵתֶן לָהֶם אַחֲזֵית נַחֲלָה בְּתוֹךְ אֶחָיו אֲבֵיהֶם וְהֵעֲבַרְתָּ אֶת נַחֲלַת אֲבֵיהֶן לָהֶן: (במדבר פרק כז פסוק א-ז)

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 'the daughters of Tzelafchad speak properly. You shall certainly give them a portion of inheritance along with their father's brothers, and you shall transfer their father's inheritance to them'" (*Bamidbar 27:1-7*).

רש"י על במדבר פרק כז פסוק ז

כן בנות צלפחד דברת - כתרגומו יאות כך כתובה פרשה זו לפני במרום מגיד שראתה עיני מה שלא ראתה עיני של משה:

THE DAUGHTERS OF TZELAFCHAD SPEAK RIGHT- Understand the word כֵּן/*ken* as the Targum: 'Rightly,' 'properly.' G-d said: Exactly so is this chapter written before me on High. This tells us that their eye saw what Moshe's eye didn't see (Rashi, *Bamidbar 27:7*).

I find it mindboggling that the daughters of Tzelafchad were able to have a vision in the Torah that even superseded that of Moshe about whom it states:

ספר דברים פרק לד פסוק י' ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה אשר ידעו השם פנים אל פנים:

"There was no other prophet who arose in Israel like Moshe, whom Hashem knew face-to-face" (*Devarim 34:10*).

So much credit was given to the selfless אמונה/*emunah* which the daughters expressed, that they were given an even finer perception on certain parts of the Torah than Moshe himself. What could be a clearer proof of how much the Torah respects women?