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Like the *Fearless Girl* statue placed in the heart of Wall Street this March, the daughters spoke up and took action against the status quo. What gave them the confidence and skill to step forward? We hear little about or from the women themselves again, although commentators have speculated about their rationale. Was it their faith? Did their strength arise from their collaboration? Was their act planned or spontaneous? These are questions I try to address with my students in what I see as their overlapping roles as social change agents and Jewish educators—both in class and also as part of JTS's Social Justice Task Force. And they are questions we must all ask ourselves and each other if we hope to see a new generation of Zelophehad's daughters.

To see the image in color and and high-definition, visit:

www.jtsa.edu/fearless-women

Pinehas 5777

פינחס תשע"ז



I Will Get Back Up Again

**Rabbi Stephanie Ruskay, Associate Dean,
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“What does your dad do at Google?”

One of our JustCity Leadership Institute pre-college program students explained that her mother works at Google in a significant leadership position. Yet each time she wears a Google T-shirt, people ask her what her father does there.

In 2017, nearly a century after the ratification of the 19th Amendment, people still jump to the conclusion that a high level leader of one of the country's largest technology firms is a man. The tired feeling of having to address latent sexism that my student feels each time someone asks her this question is what I felt, to my surprise, rereading the story of the daughters of Tzelophehad.

In this week's parashah, Tzelophehad, a member of the tribe of Manasseh, dies, and his five daughters protest the fact that they are being denied his inheritance. He has no sons, and inheritance passes only to sons. The daughters beseech Moses. They reason that their father should not be deprived of having his legacy passed on, with all his resources thus passing out of his family, simply because he only had daughters. Surely his daughters should be able to inherit from him. Moses confers with God and returns with the answer that the daughters can indeed inherit from their father—but really only to preserve his legacy.

This 21st-century female rabbi felt disappointed as I read the story this time. I wished the daughters of Tzelophehad hadn't requested an inheritance only to honor their father. I wished that they'd done so because it was just and they believed in egalitarianism. I wished God and Moses hadn't gone out of their way to say they were granting the right solely to honor Tzelophehad. I wished gender inequity wasn't baked into even our most egalitarian stories.

In her book *Rereading the Rabbis*, Rabbi Dr. Judith Hauptman, E. Billi Ivry Professor Emerita of Talmud and Rabbinic Culture, explores this story and concludes that the Rabbis of the Mishnah and Talmud were also conflicted about it. Several of them were really committed to the idea of women and daughters being able to inherit from a father and a mother. Others were not. So they read and reread the passage and commented and re-commented, with some rabbis concluding that yes, women could inherit from a parent and others concluding that no, a woman couldn't inherit from a parent. Artfully they created a category of "gifts in contemplation of death," which were essentially inheritances by another name. They also created a way for marriage dowries to be equivalent to the portion a daughter would have inherited from a parent. According to Hauptman, although the Rabbis recognized that the Torah text does not grant women equal ability to inherit from their parents, they were not satisfied with this. As a consequence, they went back and forth for centuries and found creative solutions to deliver the *equivalent* of an inheritance.

In my role as associate dean of JTS's rabbinical school, I have the privilege of directing our Slifka project, which brings egalitarian rabbinical students to college campuses for several weekends throughout the year. They work on campuses where there is both a critical mass of egalitarian-raised students and a vibrant Orthodox community life, but insufficient staff support for the egalitarian students to create robust communities. There they model an egalitarian Jewish life that is sophisticated and joyful. They offer students raised with a Jewishly egalitarian perspective the opportunity to deepen their full connection to Jewish life, rather than feel that they have to choose between secularism or an engaged Jewish life that requires them to check their commitment to egalitarianism at the door. And they offer the possibility to students who grew up in non-egalitarian settings to explore their religious lives in ways that resemble the egalitarian spirit they have in the rest of their lives.

Rereading the account of the daughters of Tzelophehad reminded me that the work to address gender inequity is something we visit and revisit. The Rabbis weren't comfortable that it existed or that they'd resolved it, which is why they kept returning to it.

And we, too, should not be satisfied. Yes, in the Conservative Movement we have women rabbis and Talmud scholars, and women wear tallit and tefillin. But have we each committed enough to eradicating sexism when

we see it or experience it? When we are in egalitarian Jewish spaces, do we see tallit and tefilin for girls and women as a burden, or as something we are glad we *can* do but at the same time are relieved that we don't feel social pressure to do? I'd suggest that really being engaged as egalitarian Jews requires each of us to perform and internalize these mitzvot and to contribute to affirming a culture in which it is expected and celebrated.

When I was a child, my father would ask me each night at bedtime, "what did you do today to make the world safe for democracy?"

There are many parts of democratic civil society that I feel called to act on today. Yet women's leadership and egalitarian values are core to that work. Even 32 years after the Conservative Movement ordained Rabbi Amy Eilberg, our first female rabbi, we benefit from reading about the daughters of Tzelophehad. And perhaps we should recommit to remembering their names: Mahlah, Noa, Hoglah, Milkah, and Tirzah.

32 years into Conservative women's ordination, nine years after my own ordination, and 20 years since my father passed away and last asked me what I did today to make the world safe for democracy, I ask you: What have you done today to make the world safe for democracy—and in particular, to make sure that nobody assumes that only dads lead at Google?

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דבר אחר | A Different Perspective



Fearless Women

Dr. Meredith Katz, Clinical Assistant Professor of Jewish Education in the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education, JTS

Many narratives coalesce in Parashat Pinehas, and it is challenging to review without connection to the current political and social climate. The daughters of Zelophehad make a proposal to inherit their father's portion, as part of a land division framework aiming toward equality: "to the more thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to the fewer thou shalt give the less inheritance." The daughters raise their claim with Moses et al. as women, demanding their right to inherit in the absence of any sons, a significant step for women in ancient times that is then added to the canon.