

The Torah is brimming with those from whom we learn. Their narratives, communications, and actions provide us with a guidebook. Often, we gain invaluable insight into who they were and what they did and can internalize those lessons. Sometimes, we learn what to do from their actions; other times, we know what not to do from their stories.

In this week's Parsha, we encounter a rare occurrence in the Bible- a group of individuals who dared to question God's ruling and emerged victorious. These are the daughters of Zelophehad, Mahlah, Noa, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah, the primary trailblazers of the Torah. Their unique position as the best arguers of the Bible not only piques our interest but also empowers us with the knowledge that even against the mightiest, victory is possible.

What set the daughters of Zelophehad apart in their arguments was their profound thoughtfulness, reflection, and contemplation. Their approach to argumentation inspires us to be more reflective and considerate in our interactions.

There are times when our emotions get the best of us. When our reactions are visceral, but we know shortly after that that there was a better way.

There is a famous country song today that reflects on an argument between the songwriter and someone else. The songwriter wrote, "I can't remember everything we said, but we said it all." How many of us have said it all? That is, spoken from a place of emotions rather than intellect and without the focus necessary to reach a solution instead of contributing to the problem. We are emotional creatures, which is a beautiful aspect of our humanity. What's even more impressive is that we can give voice to those emotions.

The movie Inside Out 2 is well on its way to becoming the number-one animated movie of all time if it has yet to achieve that. My family and I watched the movie a few weeks ago, and it was an outstanding film that delves into our complex and dynamic emotions. Essentially, the Pixar movie personifies certain emotions for a young woman. These emotions embark on adventures together, aiming to provide the main character, whom they inhabit, with the best life possible. They realize that for Riley (the main character) to succeed in her relationships, excel in her activities, and be genuinely happy, they need to work together despite the difficulties that may arise.

The film has spoken to so many worldwide because we can all identify with Riley's emotions and how they can compete with each other. There are times when anger gets in the way of joy and other times when fear leads to sadness. Anxiety and embarrassment make any situation far more complicated.

What makes the daughters of Zelophdah so exceptional is that they take all of their emotions at what must have been the most intimidating moment imaginable and focus intensely on reaching their goal. Their unwavering determination to present their case despite the overwhelming odds is a testament to their strength and resilience.

According to our teacher Tikvah Frymer Kensky, z"l, in her masterful work *Reading the Women of the Bible, a New Interpretation of their Stories*:

"The five daughters of Zelophehad approached Moses toward the end of the period in the desert and asked for a change in Israelite inheritance law. Only sons could inherit the land, but there were five daughters and no son. They petitioned that since their father did not deserve to have his lineage and his name completely die, they should be allowed to inherit his property and perpetuate his name. Upon consultation with God, Moses issued the provision that whenever a man died without sons, his daughters could inherit."

The rabbinic tradition asks what it was about the daughters that helped them to do what virtually no other person could, namely, change God's ruling and, therefore, Jewish law. The rabbis are fascinated by the daughters' skills and fortitude. They consider the uniqueness of the situation and provide this teaching.

According to the Talmud (BT Bava Batra 119b), Zelophehad's daughters were wise (*chachamot*), astute interpreters (*darshanyiot*), and pious (*rachmanyiot*). Their wisdom, astuteness, and piety are not emotions. Instead, they are a combination of skills and personal qualities. They can succeed when brought together in even the most complicated and challenging times. Their wisdom enlightens us and guides us in our decision-making processes. We could consider the daughters' reactions to reflect who they were and what they held dear. The intensity of the moment they faced made it clear they had every opportunity to react harshly. After all, let's consider what was happening at this time.

Firstly, the daughters' entire inheritance was at risk, potentially putting them in the same position as all those in need within the community. So even though there is a substantial estate in existence, when they first approach this situation, there is a legitimate and significant fear that it will all disappear.

Secondly, they are not arguing with a neighbor or even a local court. Instead, they are arguing with Moses, the leader of the hundreds of thousands of Jews wandering through the wilderness. Not only is Moses the political leader of the Israelites, but he is also the spiritual leader and primary connector with the Divine. Fascinatingly, it won't be Moses' decision. It will ultimately be God's.

The daughters are not looking for a one-time exemption. They are looking to change the law and, thereby, the world for the Jewish people.

In other words, there is much pressure as they face the future.

Yet, despite that pressure, they react with hyper-focus. They communicate calmly and clearly the unfairness and intangibility of the current law. They interpret the current parameters and speak to the ways in which they do not match the reality on the ground. They are exceptional

self-advocates. Their self-advocacy empowers us to stand up for our rights and beliefs, even in the face of adversity.

Their effectiveness is attributed to their ability to react to the situation. Perhaps there is a substantial lesson we can learn from the daughters of Zelophehad. A deep breath can go a long way. Pausing before we lean into a visceral reaction can have an outstanding result. Calmness becomes the primary emotion. Wisdom, interpretation, and piety can shine through. Perhaps one simple pause can even help us improve our immediate world.