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**Parshat Pinchas:
Save the World - Together
*b'not tzlofchad, wonder woman, teamwork,
and a vision of good in the world*
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Class of 2018**

Mahlah, Noa, Hagla, Milcha, Tirzah, and Diana of Themyscira, daughter of Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons. Perhaps, better known as “*B’not Tzlofchad*” and Wonder Woman.

They are more than feminist icons, more than Jewish women’s heroines. They teach a model of teamwork and collective vision that go much deeper than that.

Watching the summer blockbuster *Wonder Woman* with fellow Yeshivat Maharat students, I was noticeably struck by Wonder Woman’s deep sense of connection to her community, to justice, and to a vision of a better world. From how she states her name - proudly identifying her place in her community, to her conviction that “it’s about what you believe. And I believe in love. Only love will truly save the world. I will fight for those who cannot fight for themselves.” She is not idealistic, she acknowledges it will be a fight, but she chooses to engage in it. Not only for herself, but for others as well. As I reflected on these themes, I recalled when my Hebrew School principal chose *Pinchas* for my Bat Mitzvah parsha because she saw similar characteristics budding in me, which she felt related to *B’not Tzlofchad*.

In Bamidbar 27:1-11, we are introduced to *B’not Tzlofchad* after a recounting of the planned inheritance of land as the Israelites neared the end of their journey through the wilderness and approached *Eretz Yisrael*. The land was to be divided amongst all the men, and their sons. The daughters realized that their father’s legacy would be lost if they did not stand together. So all five of them went together to advocate for themselves. They didn’t send one person to be their mouthpiece, they stood united at the opening of the tent of meeting before Moshe, Eleazer HaCohen, the leaders, and the whole congregation.

They spoke clearly. They were to the point. They did not apologize for their presence. They said simply (Bamidbar 27: 3-4):

Our father died in the wilderness. He was not one of the faction, Korah’s faction, which banded together against the LORD, but died for his own sin; and he has left no sons. Let not our father’s name be lost to his clan just because he had no son! Give us a holding among our father’s kinsmen!

אָבִינוּ מֵת בַּמִּדְבָּר וְהוּא לֹא־הָיָה בְּתוֹךְ
הַעֵדֻת הַנּוֹעֲדִים עַל־יְהוָה בַּעֲדַת־קֹרַח
כִּי־בִחְטָאֵו מֵת וּבָנִים לֹא־הָיוּ לוֹ: לָמָּה
יִגְרַע שֵׁם־אָבִינוּ מִתּוֹךְ מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ כִּי אֵין לוֹ
בֵּן תְּנֶה־לָנוּ אַחֲזָה בְּתוֹךְ אַחֵי אָבִינוּ:

And they viewed themselves as equals, as Rashi (27:1) quotes from Sifrei Bamidbar:

Mahla, Noa, etc: But further on (Numbers 36:11) states, “And Mahlah, Tirzah were”: this is to tell you that they all were of equal worth one with another, and on this account it is that it changed their order (i.e. the order of their names) (Sifrei Bamidbar 133:2).

מַחֲלָה נָעָה וְגו'. וְלֵהֲלֹן (בַּמִּדְבָּר לוֹ
אֵ) הוּא אוֹמֵר "וַתְּהִינָה מִחֲלָה
תִּרְצָה", מִגִּיד שֶׁכָּלן שְׁקוּלוֹת — זז
כְּזוֹ, לְפִיכֶן שָׁנָה אֶת סִדְרָן:

They weren't acting out of greed, but rather a desire to ensure they had a place amongst their people, and perhaps even a hope that things could be more just for future generations--that in the future those who were more vulnerable would not be forgotten about, rather they would be taken into as much consideration as everyone else. They saw an opportunity to do just that, and acted on it respectfully. As such, the Gemara in Bava Batra 119b upholds them as an example of acting with wisdom and righteousness.

The Daughters of Tzlofchad were wise, teachers of Torah, and righteous. "Wise"- because of the time they said their words, as R' Shmuel the son of R' Yitzchak said: we learn that Moshe was sitting and teaching about Yebum, as it says: (Devarim 25:5) "If brothers reside together"- they said to him: If we are seen as sons, then give us a portion of the land like a son, and if not then make our mother do *yebum*. Immediately Moshe brought the question to HaShem. "Teachers of Torah"- because they said: If our father had a son we would not speak. As it teaches: Daughter! R' Yermiah said: delete from here "daughter." Abayei said: they said even if one of the daughters had a son we wouldn't have spoken. "Righteous"- they didn't marry until they found someone right for them. Rebi Eliezer ben Ya'akov taught: even the youngest of them didn't marry younger than forty.

תנא: בנות צלפחד חכמניות הן, דרשניות הן, צדקניות הן. חכמניות הן - שלפי שעה דברו, דא"ר שמואל בר רב יצחק: מלמד שהיה משה רבינו יושב ודורש בפרשת יבמין, שנאמר: +דברים כ"ה+ כי ישבו אחים יחדו, אמרו לו: אם כן אנו חשובין - תנה לנו נחלה כבן, אם לאו - תתיבם אמנו! מיד: ויקרב משה את משפטן לפני ה'. דרשניות הן - שהיו אומרות: אילו היה [לו] בן לא דברנו. והתניא: בת! אמר ר' ירמיה: סמי מכאן בת. אביי אמר: אפילו היה בת לבן לא דברנו. צדקניות הן - שלא נישאו אלא להגון להן. תני רבי אליעזר בן יעקב: אפילו קטנה שבהן לא נשאת פחותה מארבעים שנה.

Perhaps when Wonder Woman declares "It is our sacred duty to defend the world and it is what I am going to do," she is thinking of women like *B'not Tzlofchad* who have come before her, and all the future generations which will fight to make the world a better place. Or perhaps she just knows that to be the truth because it is a deep seated reality within her community. Either way, these six women model a way of changing the world, which relies on a deep sense of community. What would it look like if we each set out to impart change with that same conviction that we were acting on behalf of, or in tandem with, others who believed the same things?

As we learn in Pirkei Avot (2:21) "It is not your responsibility to finish the work of perfecting the world, but you are not free to desist from it either."



Rabba Melissa Scholten-Gutierrez combines her personal, professional, and educational experiences to establish meaningful Jewish experiences and connections wherever she goes. She currently serves as the Community Camp Ambassador for the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta, working to increase the number of children attending Jewish overnight summer camp by stewarding a scholarship and incentives program, coordinating community marketing, and serving as a central camp resource. Rabba Melissa holds undergraduate degrees in Psychology & Social Behavior and Sociology from the University of California, Irvine and received a Masters in Social Work with a health care concentration from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.