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Parshat Mase'i Nurturing Proactive Women Rabbanit Bracha Jaffe *Class of 2017*

This past Shabbat we read Parshat Mase'i at the conclusion of Sefer Bamidbar. What message does the Torah wish to impart to us at the end of the journey in the desert, on the cusp of becoming an independent nation in their own land? The very last verses of Bamidbar talk about the five daughters of Tzlof'chad and the choices that they made regarding their father's inheritance in the land of Israel.

Previously, these five sisters had approached Moshe and requested that their father's land be passed down to them as they had no brothers to inherit the land. Moshe asked G-d if their request should be upheld and G-d taught him that the sisters' love of the land was indeed justified and they would receive their father's inheritance. The sisters were free to marry whoever they wanted although the preference was to keep the land within the tribe. This was the law for other daughters who inherited their father's land. We see, however, that their decision was to marry their own cousins, thereby keeping their father's land from being divided among other tribes. The last verse then concludes that these are the commandments and judgments that G-d commanded to Bnei Yisrael through Moshe.

I would suggest that these verses were deliberately chosen to reflect the following:

- love of the land of Israel
- love of family

And perhaps most important:

- to stand up for your values
- be proactive about your choices
- Raise your voice when you have a question

All five daughters of Tzlofchad and his wife were equally questioning, courageous and proactive¹. I believe that this doesn't happen by chance, rather they must have learned these values from their home life. Even though some say that their father was a sinner², still people are not **all** good or **all** bad. Even if their father was a public sinner, they still learned to stand up for what they believed in. They just made better choices!

I heard a beautiful drash from Rav Yuki of the Lechu Neranena shul in Raanana. Within the names of the girls there is a clear connection to their proactiveness.

Machla: from "Machol = dance" or "Lecholel = to make happen"

Tirtza: from "Larutz = to run"

Chogla: from "Lachug = to draw a circle"

Milka: from "Lalecht = to walk"

No'a: from "Lanu'a = to move"

B'not Tzlofchod were proactive all the way!

¹ See Rashi, Bamidbar 27,1

² See Rashi, Bamidbar 27,3 who quotes R. Akiva saying that Tzlofchad violated the Shabbat and others.



This past Shabbat, July 19th, 2014 was also my father's 19th Yahrtzeit: Yechiel Simcha Ben Moshe Tzvi V'Esther Chana Naiman. My father was a YU graduate, a close Talmid of the Rav zt"l and embodied what it means to be an *ish Torah*³. He was also a graduate of MIT and a true scientist as well as a teacher at heart. He taught us Halacha every Shabbat and expected the same level of knowledge and participation from his sons as well as his daughters. He encouraged us to ask questions and quoted Pirkei Avot (2,5) to us many times: *lo habayshan lomed* - "the shy person cannot learn". I would add the continuation: *ve'lo hakapdan melamed*: "and the brusque person cannot teach". We merited this nurturing: learning from a gentle yet exacting teacher who was never happier than when we asked a **good** question.

I am proud to be continuing my father's heritage having moved myself from the hi-tech world to Yeshivat Maharat. I am saddened that he cannot accompany me on this path of Torah and that I cannot share my learnings and teachings with him. Thank you Abba for teaching me to question out loud and never to take a back seat just because I'm a woman. May his memory be a blessing and may he be a *melitz yosher*⁴ for peace and comfort for Jews in Israel and around the world.



Rabbanit Bracha Jaffe served, for many years, as Community Educator and Director of Mercaz Center for Adult Education in Beth Tfiloh synagogue in Baltimore, MD. Her love of tefilla and ritual led her to be an experienced gaba'it and organizer of women's tefilla groups. She has taught many women and girls to leyn and is the voice of the JOFA Megillat Esther App. Rabbanit Bracha interned at United Orthodox Synagogue in Houston, Texas and at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale in New York. She participated in chaplaincy programs at New York Presbyterian Hospital and at a maximum security women's prison. Rabbanit Bracha is a 2017 graduate of Yeshivat Maharat, following a long career in hi-tech in Israel. She feels blessed to be following this path which nourishes and fills her soul.

³ Man of Torah

⁴ Advocate on High