WOMEN LEADING FROM PERSONAL TO NATIONAL IDENTITY
JUDY KLITSNER I judyk@pardes.org.il

From the Daughters of Egypt to the Daughters of Tzelaphechad: Women Leading from Personal to National Identity

1. Exodus – Chapter 13

וַיְהִי בְּשַׁלַּח פַּרְעֹה אֶת־הָעָם וְלֹא־נָחָם אֱלֹהִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא כִּי| אָמַר אֱלֹהִים פֶּן־יִנָּחֵם הָעָם בִּרְאֹתָם מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרָיְמָה׃ וַיַּסֵּב אֱלֹהִים| אֶת־הָעָם דֶּרֶךְ הַמִּדְבָּר יַם־סוּף...

When Pharaoh released the nation… God said, "The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt." So God led the people roundabout…

Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*

The frightened individual.. cannot bear to be his own individual self any longer, and he tries frantically to get rid of it and to feel security again by the elimination of this burden: the self. Modern man… is anxious and tempted to surrender his freedom to dictators of all kinds.

2. Numbers – Chapter 13

וַיְדַבֵּר יְקֹוָק אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר׃ שְׁלַח־לְךָ אֲנָשִׁים וְיָתֻרוּ אֶת־אֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן אֲשֶׁר־אֲנִי נֹתֵן לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ אֶחָד אִישׁ אֶחָד לְמַטֵּה אֲבֹתָיו תִּשְׁלָחוּ כֹּל נָשִׂיא בָהֶם׃ וַיִּשְׁלַח אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה... כֻּלָּם אֲנָשִׁים רָאשֵׁי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵמָּה׃ וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹתָם לְמַטֵּה רְאוּבֵן שַׁמּוּעַ בֶּן־זַכּוּר׃.. אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח מֹשֶׁה לָתוּר אֶת־הָאָרֶץ... וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־נַחַל אֶשְׁכֹּל וַיִּכְרְתוּ מִשָּׁם זְמוֹרָה וְאֶשְׁכֹּול עֲנָבִים אֶחָד וַיִּשָּׂאֻהוּ בַמּוֹט בִּשְׁנָיִם... וַיַּרְאוּם אֶת־פְּרִי הָאָרֶץ׃ וַיְסַפְּרוּ־לוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ בָּאנוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחְתָּנוּ וְגַם זָבַת חָלָב וּדְבַשׁ הִוא וְזֶה־פִּרְיָהּ׃ אֶפֶס כִּי־עַז הָעָם הַיֹּשֵׁב בָּאָרֶץ וְהֶעָרִים בְּצֻרוֹת גְּדֹלֹת מְאֹד וְגַם־יְלִדֵי הָעֲנָק רָאִינוּ שָׁם׃ עֲמָלֵק יוֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב... וַיַּהַס כָּלֵב אֶת־הָעָם אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר עָלֹה נַעֲלֶה וְיָרַשְׁנוּ אֹתָהּ כִּי־יָכוֹל נוּכַל לָהּ׃ וְהָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־עָלוּ עִמּוֹ אָמְרוּ לֹא נוּכַל לַעֲלוֹת אֶל־הָעָם כִּי־חָזָק הוּא מִמֶּנּוּ׃ וַיֹּצִיאוּ דִבַּת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תָּרוּ אֹתָהּ אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר עָבַרְנוּ בָהּ לָתוּר אֹתָהּ אֶרֶץ אֹכֶלֶת יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ הִוא וְכָל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־רָאִינוּ בְתוֹכָהּ אַנְשֵׁי מִדּוֹת׃ וְשָׁם רָאִינוּ אֶת־הַנְּפִילִים בְּנֵי עֲנָק מִן־הַנְּפִלִים וַנְּהִי בְעֵינֵינוּ כַּחֲגָבִים וְכֵן הָיִינוּ בְּעֵינֵיהֶם׃

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Send men to scout the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelite people; send one man from each (lit. one man, one man) from their ancestral tribes, each one a chieftain among them. Moses sent them… all were men, heads of the Israelites…These are their names: to the tribe of Reuben… These are the names of the men whom Moses sent to scout the land… And they came to wadi Eshkol and they cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes, which had to be borne on a carrying frame by two of them… And they showed them the fruit of the land and said, "We came to the land… and it is indeed a land flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who inhabit the land are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large; and we saw the Anakites there. Amalakites dwell in the Negeb… Caleb hushed the people before Moses and said, "Let us surely go up, and we shall gain possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it." But the men who went up with him said, "We cannot attack the nation, for it is stronger than we are." They spread calumnies among the Israelites about the land they had scouted, saying, "the country

we…scouted is one that devours its inhabitants. All the people we saw in it are men of great size…. And we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves and so we looked to them."

Numbers – Chapter 14

וַתִּשָּׂא כָּל־הָעֵדָה וַיִּתְּנוּ אֶת־קוֹלָם וַיִּבְכּוּ הָעָם בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא׃...וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם כָּל־הָעֵדָה לוּ־מַתְנוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם... וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו נִתְּנָה רֹאשׁ וְנָשׁוּבָה מִצְרָיְמָה׃

All the community lifted their voice and the nation cried that night…all the community said…"If only we had died in Egypt…. let us put up (*n-t-n*) a head and return to Egypt."

3. Numbers - Chapter 26

אֵלֶּה מִשְׁפְּחֹת מְנַשֶּׁה ... לְחֶבֶר מִשְׁפַּחַת הַחֶבְרִי ...וּצְלָפְחָד בֶּן־חֵפֶר לֹא־הָיוּ לוֹ בָּנִים כִּי אִם־בָּנוֹת **וְשֵׁם בְּנוֹת** צְלָפְחָד מַחְלָה וְנֹעָה חָגְלָה מִלְכָּה וְתִרְצָה **:...וְשֵׁם בַּת־אָשֵׁר** שָׂרַח **:שֵׁם| אֵשֶׁת עַמְרָם יוֹכֶבֶד בַּת־לֵוִי** ... וַתֵּלֶד לְעַמְרָם אֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־מֹשֶׁה וְאֵת **מִרְיָם אֲחֹתָם** ׃ ... **וְלֹא־נוֹתַר מֵהֶם אִישׁ** כִּי אִם־כָּלֵב בֶּן־יְפֻנֶּה וִיהוֹשֻׁעַ בִּן־ נוּן ׃

These are the families of Menashe…Hepher, the clan of the Hepherites… Now Zelophehad son of Hepher had no sons, only daughters. **The names** of Zelophehad's **daughters** were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah… **The name** of Asher's **daughter** was Serah… **The name** of Amram's wife was **Jokhebed, daughter** of Levi…she bore…Aaron and Moses and **Miriam their sister…** Not one man remained, except Calev… and Joshua

4. Bamidbar Rabba, Pinchas 21,10

… ולא נותר מהם איש כי אם כלב בן יפונה **איש ולא אשה** על מה שלא רצו ליכנס לארץ **אבל הנשים קרבו לבקש נחלה בארץ לכך נכתבה פרשה זו סמוך למיתת דור המדבר...**

… "not one man remained, except for Calev"… **a man, but not a woman,** in that they did not want to enter the land. But the women drew near to request an inheritance in the land; that is why this passage follows that of the death of the desert generation…

5. Sifrei Zuta 27,1

ואלה שמות בנותיו, ולמעלן הוא אומ׳ ושם בנות צלפחד שם היה להן בזכות ושם היה להן במעשה שם האחת שפרה ושם השנית פועה (שמות א טו) שם היה להן בזכות ושם היה להן במעשה הטוב...

"These are the names of his daughters," and above it says, "the names of the daughters of Zelophehad"! They had a name in merit and a name in action… and so is the case in [Shemot 1]: "the name of the one was Shifrah and the name of the second Puah": they had a name in merit and a name in good deed…

6. Numbers - Chapter 27

(א) וַתִּקְרַבְנָה בְּנוֹת צְלָפְחָד ... וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֹתָיו מַחְלָה נֹעָה וְחָגְלָה וּמִלְכָּה וְתִרְצָה ׃(ב) וַתַּעֲמֹדְנָה לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה וְלִפְנֵי אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְלִפְנֵי הַנְּשִׂיאִם וְכָל־הָעֵדָה פֶּתַח אֹהֶל־מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר ׃ (ג) אָבִינוּ מֵת בַּמִּדְבָּר וְהוּא לֹא־הָיָה בְּתוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַנּוֹעָדִים עַל־יְקֹוָק בַּעֲדַת־קֹרַח כִּי־בְחֶטְאוֹ מֵת וּבָנִים לֹא־הָיוּ לוֹ ׃ (ד) לָמָּה יִגָּרַע שֵׁם־ אָבִינוּ מִתּוֹךְ מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ כִּי אֵין לוֹ בֵּן תְּנָה־לָּנוּ אֲחֻזָּה בְּתוֹךְ אֲחֵי אָבִינוּ ׃ (ה) וַיַּקְרֵב מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מִשְׁפָּטָן לִפְנֵי ה׳ ׃ (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר יְקֹוָק אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר ׃ (ז) כֵּן בְּנוֹת צְלָפְחָד דֹּבְרֹת נָתֹן תִּתֵּן לָהֶם אֲחֻזַּת נַחֲלָה בְּתוֹךְ אֲחֵי

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אֲבִיהֶם וְהַעֲבַרְתֶּן אֶת־נַחֲלַת אֲבִיהֶן לָהֶן׃ (ח) וְאֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל תְּדַבֵּר לֵאמֹר אִישׁ כִּי־יָמוּת וּבֵן אֵין לוֹ וְהַעֲבַרְתֶּם אֶת־נַחֲלָתוֹ לְבִתּוֹ׃ . . . וְהָיְתָה לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְחֻקַּת מִשְׁפָּט כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְקֹוָק אֶת־מֹשֶׁה׃

The daughters of Zelophehad drew near… and these are the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. They stood before Moses, Eliezer the priest, the chieftans and the whole community at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, saying: Our father died in the wilderness and he was not among the band that banded against the Lord in the band of Korah; rather he did by his own sin and had no sons. Why should our father's name be lost to his clan because he had no son? Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen." Moses brought their case before the Lord. The Lord said to Moses, "Rightly do the daughters of Zelophehad speak.

7. Rashi - Numbers 27:7

כן בנות צלפחד דברת ... מגיד שראתה עינן מה שלא ראתה עינו של משה׃

… the daughters of Zelaphehad saw that which Moses did not.

8. Sifrei Bemidbar Pinchas 133

...אמרו לא כרחמי בשר ודם רחמי המקום׃ בשר ודם רחמיו על הזכרים יותר מן הנקבות אבל מי שאמר והיה העולם אינו כן אלא רחמיו על הזכרים ועל הנקבות רחמיו על הכל שנאמר [נותן לחם לכל בשר וגו׳ (תהלים קלו כה)

When the daughters of Zelophehad heard that the land was divided into tribes to males and not females… they said: God's mercy is not like the mercy of human beings. Human beings have mercy on the males more than on the females; but for the Creator of the world it is not so; His mercy is on both males and females, as it says (Ps. 135): God gives bread to all flesh…"

9. Exodus - Chapter 19

וַיֵּרֶד מֹשֶׁה מִן־הָהָר אֶל־הָעָם וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת־הָעָם וַיְכַבְּסוּ שִׂמְלֹתָם׃ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־הָעָם הֱיוּ נְכֹנִים לִשְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים אַל־תִּגְּשׁוּ אֶל־אִשָּׁה׃

Moses descended the mountain to the people. He warned them to stay pure and they washed their clothes. He said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."

10. Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai*

THERE IS PERHAPS no verse in the Torah more disturbing to the feminist than Moses' warning to his people in Exodus 19:15, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman." For here, at the very moment that the Jewish people stand at Mount Sinai ready to enter into the covenant—not now the covenant with the individual patriarchs but presumably with the people as a whole—Moses addresses the community only as men… Moses does not say, "Men and women do not go near each other." At the central moment of Jewish history, women are invisible… This verse sets forth a pattern recapitulated again and again in Jewish sources. Women's invisibility at the moment of entry into the covenant is reflected in the content of the covenant which, in both grammar and substance, addresses the community as male heads of household. It is

perpetuated by the later tradition which in its comments and codifications takes women as objects of concern or legislation but rarely sees them as shapers of tradition and actors in their own lives… If Moses' words shock and anger, it is because women have always known or assumed our presence at Sinai; the passage is painful because it seems to deny what we have always taken for granted. On the one hand, of course we were there; on the other, how is it then that the text could imply we were not there?

11. Exodus – Chapter 19

וַיֹּאמֶר יְקֹוָק אֶל־מֹשֶׁה֙ לֵ֣ךְ אֶל־הָעָ֔ם וְקִדַּשְׁתָּ֖ם הַיּ֣וֹם וּמָחָ֑ר וְכִבְּס֥וּ שִׂמְלֹתָֽם׃ וְהָי֥וּ נְכֹנִ֖ים לַיּ֣וֹם הַשְּׁלִשִׁ֑י כִּ֣י
בַּיּ֣וֹם הַשְּׁלִשִׁ֗י יֵרֵ֤ד יְקֹוָק֙ לְעֵינֵ֣י כָל־הָעָ֔ם עַל־הַ֖ר סִינָֽי׃

The Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and warn them to stay pure today and tomorrow. Let them wash their clothes. And they should be ready for the third day, for on the third day the Lord will descend before the eyes of all the people on Mt. Sinai.

12. Rashi - Numbers 27:5

…ראויה היתה פרשה זו להכתב על ידי משה, אלא שזכו בנות צלפחד ונכתבה על ידן׃

This parasha should have been written by Moses, but the daughters of Zelaphechad merited to have it written by them.