



**GEULAS YISRAEL**

**RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN**

**RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**MAGGID SHIUR ALL PARSHA AND ALL DAF, OU.ORG**

# A Land in Which Tradition Breathes and Changes Flow

The instructions for dividing the Land of Israel had just been delivered to Moshe. Larger shevatim were granted broader tracts of territory. To ensure fairness and to prevent suspicions of favoritism, the process was governed by a supernatural lottery or *goral*, not human judgment. Everything seemed ready. The long-awaited Divine promise was at last unfolding; we were poised to enter the Land of Hashem. Every shevet and every family had been counted and prepared. All except for one.

Thirty-eight years earlier, a man named Tzelaftchad had died in the desert, for reasons the Torah does not disclose. He left behind no sons. As inheritance passes along the male line, his absence cast a shadow over the future—threatening to erase his legacy.

No sons meant no one to carry his name forward, no one to inherit his portion of land and no anchor to the soil of Israel.

His five daughters stepped forward, approaching Moshe in search of a solution. Moshe is confronted with a challenge he cannot resolve alone. How can he uphold halachic integrity while addressing their rightful yearning? Uncertain, he refers their case to Hashem.

## UNVEILING YERUSHA

In response, Hashem does not merely craft a tailored solution for five sisters. Instead, He delivers the entire framework of *yerusha* or inheritance law. Included in this system of halachot is the provision that, in the absence of sons, daughters may inherit the estate. Logically, these halachot should have been introduced earlier—immediately following the general mitzvot concerning the division of Eretz Yisrael. Logically, the Torah should have first outlined the national allocation of land and then, seamlessly, presented the halachot of how property passes down through family lines.

Yet the halachot of inheritance remained hidden until the daughters of Tzelaftchad emerged. The laws of family inheritance were revealed specifically in response to

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the request of the daughters of Tzelafchad. There is something deeply moving and remarkable about how these daughters faced this delicate crisis. Their dignity and resolve brought forth an entire body of halachot, shaped by their plea and courage.

### THE OUTSIDERS

The five women were consummate outsiders. As women, they assumed they stood beyond the boundaries of inheritance. Am Yisrael was preparing for its final census before entering the Land. Unlike the earlier census in Parshat Bamidbar, which simply counted the population of each shevet, the census in Pinchas counted families. These families were identified by their male patriarchs. It was a male-centered census, with the land allocated to families through the male line. The entire framework—both the structure of inheritance and the tone of the census—was male-centric.

But it wasn't only their gender that marked them as outsiders. This entire "predicament" began with the death of their father who died suddenly in the wilderness. Had their father lived, perhaps he would have had a son and the family claim to the land would have been straightforward.

The Torah omits the reason for Tzelafchad's death, because he died in disgrace. The Gemara debates whether he was the mekoshesh etzim—the man who defiantly violated Shabbat—or the megadef of Parshat Emor, who publicly blasphemed the Divine Name. Either way, the family bore a shadow. These women carried the silent stigma of being daughters of a man who had fallen in sin.

Furthermore, the daughters did not belong to a prominent or influential shevet. Later



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in Jewish history, the tribe of Menashe would rise to significance—producing kings, leaders and warriors. Yet at this point in the desert, Menashe was still a minor shevet—merely a branch of the larger tribe of Yosef, without any prominence. Had these women hailed from Yehuda, or Reuven, or even from Levi, their voices may have carried natural weight. But they came from an inconspicuous tribe, without prestige or standing. Everything about their background—gender, family shame, tribal identity—conspired to silence them. And yet they spoke.

### STANDING IN THE PRESENCE OF AUTHORITY

The Torah describes them as approaching Moshe and Aharon, Elazar the Kohen, the Beit Din, and the entire eidah. It was not a private conversation behind closed doors—it was a public appearance before the full

structure of national leadership.

וַתַּעֲמִדְנָה לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה וּלְפָנֵי אֲלֻעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וּלְפָנֵי  
הַנָּשִׂאִים וְכָל הָעֵדָה פָּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר

For these five women, standing before this august assembly must have been intimidating. Five ordinary women stepping into the center of national attention.

### SINCERITY, NOT REBELLION

This moment stands out in the desert narrative: a halachic dilemma presented not through rebellion or complaint, but with dignity and spiritual sincerity. With quiet sincerity, these women raise their concerns—neither demanding nor accusing, but respectfully seeking justice within the framework of halacha.

Respectfully. Boldly. Faithfully.

Because of the way they carried themselves, they became the conduit through which the entire halachic structure of Jewish inheritance was revealed. Of course, Hashem would have transmitted *hilchot yerusha* regardless; these laws are part of Torah and would have been revealed in due course. Yet their behavior was the catalyst that brought these halachot into the open at that moment.

### THE RIVER

And not just any halachot, but the laws of inheritance—those that preserve family memory and uphold continuity. The Hebrew word for inheritance is “נחלה” (*nachalah*), which shares the same root as “נחל” (*nachal*), meaning river. A river constantly flows, weaving its way through different regions and landscapes. It symbolizes continuity and connection. Inheritance, too, represents family continuity—not merely the passing down of assets, but the transmission of values, lifestyles, and *masorah* to future generations.

Inheritance preserves families and sustains their legacy. It is like a river, ever flowing, ensuring the past lives on within the future. *Nachalah* is like a *nachal*.

In approaching Moshe Rabbeinu and seeking change, the daughters could have challenged the *masorah* outright by claiming it was unfair. Instead, they searched for a solution *within* the existing framework rather than breaking it down. They sought change—not rebellion—and their plea ultimately brought about the formal delivery of the laws of *nachalah*, designed precisely to preserve traditions and ensure continuity. In a striking twist, their call for change became the very force that safeguarded the past.

### FLEXING WITHOUT FRACTURING

This story offers vital insight into how we navigate changing circumstances that challenge traditional values. *Avodat Hashem* is rooted in receiving and preserving the traditions of the past. Our values are eternal—anchored in Hashem’s unchanging will, revealed at Sinai, and shaped by centuries of wisdom, faith, and commitment. Torah holds within it the ability to speak to every generation and respond to every challenge.

When change challenges established orders, we face two choices: either break down the existing framework to meet new circumstances, or preserve the core values while thoughtfully adapting them to the new dynamics. Often, these adaptations become the strongest means to safeguard a system’s essence. If a system fails to evolve, it risks becoming obsolete—no longer compatible with the realities it must serve.

It is through thoughtful adjustments and subtle adaptations that we protect this living tradition—so long as the core of our

masorah remains intact. The answers to new realities come not from breaking down the system, but from uncovering the pathways halacha and our *masorah* offer within it.

These five heroines taught us the path to preserving masorah and ensuring continuity. Their request for change didn't disrupt tradition—it deepened it. They became the spark that revealed the laws of inheritance, anchoring family continuity.

### NEW AND ANCIENT

Of course, these women weren't simply seeking land inheritance. They wanted to be part of the great project of settling the Land of Israel itself. The daughters of Tzelafchad, with their respectful and sincere request, set the tone for our entry into the Land. Their story teaches us how to enter the Land: our masorah must be preserved, steadfast and whole. Yet at the same time, there may be subtle adjustments—small shifts that allow the tradition to live and breathe as we step into a new land and a new era. Settling the Land of Israel and entering a new reality naturally challenges established traditions. Traditions are deeply tied to culture and geography, and relocating to Israel inevitably tests them. We are returning to Israel after an absence of thousands of years. We are not simply entering a new land—we are stepping into a new historical era.

For some, this transition may make the masorah feel less compelling or even uncertain. That cannot happen. Our masorah has been carefully shaped over millennia, grounded in halacha and Jewish tradition.


Yet inevitably, with the ingathering of Jews from diverse lands—each carrying their own minhagim and halachic cultures—friction and change will arise. Traditions will meet,

sometimes rub up against each other, and evolve. The challenge is to find ways to make necessary adjustments without compromising the core of our masorah. This is no simple task.

It is often easier to remain enclosed within separate enclaves of masorah, clinging steadfastly to the past. But the daughters of Tzelafchad provide an important roadmap for entering Israel and this new era. Solutions must be found from within—not by opposing the masorah, or by suspending halacha, chas v'shalom. Flexing, not fracturing. ■



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
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