

## Double Chai, Double Standards, and Daughters Who Don't Settle

by Meg Goldenberg Marion

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When Jonah and I gave our D'var Torah back in June, we noted that it had been 15 years since our b'nai mitzvah. I wouldn't have known that but for the framed invitation propped on a book case precisely 18 feet away from where I'm madly writing. Today is the 18<sup>th</sup> day of July and, as most of you know, 18 is a most significant number in Judaism. The word 'chai' means life and the numerical value of chai is 18 – the chet is 8 and the yud is 10. For this reason, we Jews have viewed 18 as a lucky number and will often give monetary gifts in multiples of 18 as a nod toward celebrating life. And while most people tend not to call themselves superstitious, we all have our preferred numbers. Mine are all even, my sister's are odd...you get the picture. So chai is the life affirming opposite of the dreaded 666 (the number of the beast) from the book of Revelation in the Christian bible which, very ironically, adds up to 18. And while I wouldn't call myself very superstitious, Stevie Wonder, I haven't relished being 66 and will gladly trade 67 for it in a few weeks. On a much more positive note, September 10 will be my incredibly fantastic husband Michael's and my 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary so we're hitting double chai. Yay. He is truly my good luck charm.

That said, 36 and a half years ago, I had to search far and wide for a rabbi to marry us. The ones I knew at Temple Emanuel in Beverly Hills would not perform an interfaith marriage in 1989. Thankfully, much has changed since that time and a reform rabbi would be hardpressed not to perform one in 2025. And with that, we're going to take a quick dive into the first of two interesting parts of this week's Torah portion, Pinchas.

At the end of the last parasha, Pinchas, Aaron's grandson, followed up on God's displeasure with the Israelite men who were consorting with Midianite women and worshipping their god. So, Pinchas ran two of them through with a sword while they were comparing navels. We've already seen Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu die when they offered alien fire to God, but that was their idea as opposed to God's and now Pinchas becomes a hero for taking two lives which pleased God and ended a plague.

While it is hard to wrap one's head around that one, I read through the rest of the parasha and was delighted to find the daughters of Zelophehad. While not nearly as made for prime time as the murder, there is much to unpack. Zelophehad, you see, died without a male heir but there were no provisions made for such a situation. Interesting in

a book filled with inheritance issues that never seem to follow the established rule.

In 2025, it seems altogether strange to imagine women unable to inherit land. Still, when I began watching *The Handmaid's Tale* a few years ago, as disturbing as it was, it didn't feel real. Until recently, that is. It struck me that it might resonate to look at Zelophehad's daughters through the lens of *The Handmaid's Tale*, so with a big assist from ChatGPT, here we go.

Title: *The Handmaids of the Tent*  
(A satirical Torah-meets-Gilead crossover)

Scene: *The Tent of Meeting*  
(Austere. Red robes swishing. Moses sits in a dramatic high-backed chair. Eleazar the Priest is holding a clipboard. The five daughters of Zelophehad enter—defiantly—not in red but in fabulous fringe tunics. Background chant: "Blessed be the inheritance.")

Machlah whispers to her sisters: Okay, remember: calm, composed, and absolutely *done* with patriarchy.

Noah says: So... not like last time?

Hoglah adds: Last time I *merely suggested* women be allowed to own goats. And suddenly I was 'emotional.'

Milcah pipes in: Let's focus, handmaids—uh, I mean, sisters.

Tirzah marches forward and proclaims:  
Blessed be the peacemakers. But also—blessed be the landowners. We want Dad's property.

Moses is startled: Excuse me? This is highly irregular. Property goes to sons. That's...tradition!

Eleazar peeks over his clipboard: They have a point. Zelophehad didn't have sons. I mean, technically the land is just sitting there like a sad, unused Airbnb.

Mahlah (arms crossed) says: Our father wasn't part of Korach's rebellion. He died doing basic wilderness stuff. No drama. So why should his name disappear just because he had the audacity to only produce fabulous daughters?

Hoglah adds (sarcastically): Next you'll say we can't inherit because we are unclean yet can multitask.

Moses responds nervously: Let me... uh... consult *You-Know-Who*.

He turns aside dramatically. Cue flashing light and a low hum as he downloads divine Wi-Fi.

Moses turns back to the daughters: So, uh, yeah. God says... you're like totally right.

All five daughters (in unison): Wait—what?

Eleazar double-checks the clipboard: Yup. "The plea of Zelophehad's daughters is just." Land rights, inheritance, all of it. You're officially landladies.

The daughters say three things:

1. We're gonna need *so* many donkeys for all this paperwork.
2. And a vineyard. Obviously.
3. So... does this mean we also get voting rights? Temple leadership? Equal goat pay?

Moses panics: Let's just take this one historic feminist moment at a time.

Narrator states in an ominous Gilead tone:

And so it was decreed: If a man dies with no sons, his daughters inherit. Thus sayeth the Eternal, smashing the patriarchy one tribe at a time.\*

Closing Chorus (chanting, Beyoncé-style):

🎵 Who runs the Promised Land? All the single ladies 🎵

So, we looked at two excerpts from Pinchas, tied together by Eleazar, Aaron's son, Pinchas' father, and Moses' cohort in the story of Zelophehad's daughters. Very different tales but, at the end of the day, both stories revolve around doing what's right or what might be right in the eyes of God. It's not enough to complain about what's wrong in the world. We must act and work together.

Shabbat Shalom.