

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Matot-Masei
July 15, 2023 *** 26 Tamuz, 5783

Matot-Masei in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2244/jewish/Matot-Masei-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, “Matot,” means “Tribes,” and it is found in Numbers 30:2. The name of the Parshah, “Masei,” means “Journeys,” and it is found in Numbers 33:1.

Moses conveys the laws governing the annulment of vows to the heads of the tribes of Israel. War is waged against Midian for their role in plotting the moral destruction of Israel, and the Torah gives a detailed account of the war spoils and how they were allocated amongst the people, the warriors, the Levites and the high priest.

The tribes of Reuben and Gad (later joined by half of the tribe of Manasseh) ask for the lands east of the Jordan as their portion in the Promised Land, these being prime pastureland for their cattle. Moses is initially angered by the request, but subsequently agrees on the condition that they first join, and lead, in Israel’s conquest of the lands west of the Jordan.

The forty-two journeys and encampments of Israel are listed, from the Exodus to their encampment on the plains of Moab across the river from the land of Canaan. The boundaries of the Promised Land are given, and cities of refuge are designated as havens and places of exile for inadvertent murderers. The daughters of Tzelafchad marry within their own tribe of Manasseh, so that the estate which they inherit from their father should not pass to the province of another tribe.

Haftarah in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/895320/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week’s haftarah is the second of a series of three “haftarot of affliction.” These three haftarot are read during the Three Weeks of mourning for Jerusalem, between the fasts of 17 Tammuz and 9 Av.

The prophet Jeremiah transmits G-d’s message to the Jewish people, in strong tones chastising all the sectors of the people, including the leadership, for their abandonment of G-d. “What wrong did your forefathers find in Me, that they

distanced themselves from Me, and they went after futility and themselves became futile?” He reminds them of the kindness G-d did for them, taking them out of Egypt and leading them through the desert and settling them in the Promised Land, yet they repaid kindness with disloyalty. “For My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the spring of living waters, [and furthermore, this was in order] to dig for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that do not hold water.”

G-d asks them to view the actions of their neighboring nations, the Kittites and Kedarites, “and see whether there was any such thing, whether a nation exchanged a god, although they are not gods. Yet My nation exchanged their glory for what does not avail.”

Jeremiah then goes on to foretell the suffering the Jewish people will suffer at the hands of their enemies, and also their erstwhile allies: “Your evil will chastise you, and you will be rebuked for your backslidings; and you shall know and see that you’re forsaking the L-rd your G-d is evil and bitter.”

The haftorah ends on an encouraging note, assuring the people that if they return to G-d with sincerity, they will be restored to their full glory.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Complexity of Human Rights by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z”l

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/matot/complexity-human-rights/>

The book of Bamidbar comes to a close that is very strange indeed. Earlier in the parsha of Pinchas we read of how the five daughters of Tzelophehad came to Moses with a claim based on justice and human rights.[1] Their father had died without sons. Inheritance – in this case, of a share in the land – passes through the male line, but here there was no male line. Surely their father was entitled to his share, and they were his only heirs. By rights that share should come to them:

“Why should our father’s name be disadvantaged in his family merely because he did not have a son? Give us a portion of land along with our father’s brothers.”

Num. 27:4

Moses had received no instruction about such an eventuality, so he asked God directly. God found in favour of the women.

“The daughters of Tzelophehad are right. You shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father’s brothers and transfer the inheritance of their

father to them.”

He gave Moses further instructions about the disposition of inheritance, and the narrative then passes on to other matters.

Only now, right at the end of the book, does the Torah report on an event that arose directly from that case. Leaders of Tzelophehad’s tribe, Menasheh, son of Joseph, came and made the following complaint. If the land were to pass to Tzelophehad’s daughters and they married men from another tribe, the land would eventually pass to their husbands, and thus to their husband’s tribes. Thus land that had initially been granted to the tribe of Menasheh might be lost to it in perpetuity.

Again, Moses took the case to God, who offered a simple solution. The daughters of Tzelophehad were entitled to the land, but so too was the tribe. Therefore, if they wish to take possession of the land, they must marry men from within their own tribe. That way both claims could be honoured. The daughters did not lose their right to the land but they did lose some freedom in choosing a marriage partner.

The two passages are intimately related. They use the same terminology. Both Tzelophehad’s daughters and the leaders of the clan “draw near”. They use the same verb to describe their potential loss: yigara, “disadvantaged, diminished”. God replies in both cases with the same locution, “kein ... dovrot/dovrim,” rightly do they speak.[2] Why then are the two episodes separated in the text? Why does the book of Numbers end on this seemingly anticlimactic note? And does it have any relevance today?

Bamidbar is a book about individuals. It begins with a census, whose purpose is less to tell us the actual number of Israelites than to “lift” their “heads”, the unusual locution the Torah uses to convey the idea that when God orders a census it is to tell the people that they each count. The book also focuses on the psychology of individuals. We read of Moses’ despair, of Aaron and Miriam’s criticism of him, of the spies who lacked the courage to come back with a positive report, and of the malcontents, led by Korach, who challenged Moses’ leadership. We read of Joshua and Caleb, Eldad and Medad, Dathan and Aviram, Zimri and Pinchas, Balak and Bilam and others. This emphasis on individuals reaches a climax in Moses’ prayer to “God of the spirits of all flesh” to appoint a successor (Bamidbar 27:16) – understood by the Sages and Rashi to mean, appoint a leader who will deal with each individual as an individual, who will relate to people in their uniqueness and singularity.

That is the context of the claim of Tzelophehad's daughters. They were claiming their rights as individuals. Justly so. As many of the commentators pointed out, the behaviour of the women throughout the wilderness years was exemplary while that of the men was the opposite. The men, not the women, gave gold for the Golden Calf. The spies were men: a famous comment by the Kli Yakar (R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, 1550 –1619) suggests that had Moses sent women instead, they would have come back with a positive report.[3] Recognising the justice of their cause, God affirmed their rights as individuals.

But society is not built on individuals alone. As the book of Judges points out, individualism is another name for chaos: "In those days there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in their own eyes." Hence the insistence, throughout Bamidbar, on the central role of the tribes as the organising principle of Jewish life. The Israelites were numbered tribe by tribe. The Torah sets out their precise encampment around the Mishkan and the order in which they were to journey. In Naso, at inordinate length, the Torah repeats the gifts of each tribe at the inauguration of the Mishkan, despite the fact that they each gave exactly the same. The tribes were not accidental to the structure of Israel as a society. Like the United States of America, whose basic political structure is that of a federation of (originally thirteen, now fifty) states, so Israel was (until the appointment of a king) a federation of tribes.

The existence of something like tribes is fundamental to a free society.[4] The modern state of Israel is built on a vast panoply of ethnicities – Ashkenazi, Sefardi, Jews from Eastern, Central and Western Europe, Spain and Portugal, Arab lands, Russia and Ethiopia, America, South Africa, Australia and other places, some Hassidic, some Yeshiva-ish, others "Modern", others "Traditional", yet others secular and cultural.

We each have a series of identities, based partly on family background, partly on occupation, partly on locality and community. These "mediating structures", larger than the individual but smaller than the state, are where we develop our complex, vivid, face-to-face interactions and identities. They are the domain of family, friends, neighbours and colleagues, and they make up what is collectively known as civil society. A strong civil society is essential to freedom.[5]

That is why, alongside individual rights, a society must make space for group identities. The classic instance of the opposite came in the wake of the French revolution. In the course of the debate in the French Revolutionary Assembly in 1789, the Count of Clermont-Tonnerre made his famous declaration, "[To the Jews](#)

as individuals, everything. To the Jews as a nation, nothing.” If they insisted on defining themselves as a nation, that is, as a distinct subgroup within the republic, said the Count, “we shall be compelled to expel them.”

Initially, this sounded reasonable. Jews were being offered civil rights in the new secular nation state. However, it was anything but. It meant that Jews would have to give up their identity as Jews in the public domain. Nothing – not religious or ethnic identity – should stand between the individual and the state. It was no accident that a century later, France became one of the epicentres of European antisemitism, beginning with Édouard Drumont’s vicious *La France Juive*, 1886, and culminating in the Dreyfus trial. Hearing the Parisian crowd shout “Mort aux Juifs”, Theodor Herzl realised that Jews had still not been accepted as citizens of Europe, despite all the protestations to the contrary. Jews found themselves regarded as a tribe in a Europe that claimed to have abolished tribes. European emancipation recognised individual rights but not collective ones.

The primatologist Frans de Waal, whose work among the chimpanzees we mentioned in this year’s *Covenant & Conversation* on Korach, makes the point powerfully. Almost the whole of modern Western culture, he says, was built on the idea of autonomous, choosing individuals. But that is not who we are. We are people with strong attachments to family, friends, neighbours, allies, co-religionists and people of the same ethnicity. He continues:

A morality exclusively concerned with individual rights tends to ignore the ties, needs and interdependencies that have marked our existence from the very beginning. It is a cold morality that puts space between people, assigning each person to his or her own little corner of the universe. How this caricature of a society arose in the minds of eminent thinkers is a mystery.[6]

That is precisely the point the Torah is making when it divides the story of the daughters of Tzelophehad into two. The first part, in parshat Pinchas, is about individual rights, the rights of Tzelophehad’s daughters to a share in the land. The second, at the end of the book, is about group rights, in this case the right of the tribe of Menasheh to its territory. The Torah affirms both, because both are necessary to a free society.

Many of the most seemingly intractable issues in contemporary Jewish life have appeared because Jews, especially in the West, are used to a culture in which individual rights are held to override all others. We should be free to live as we choose, worship as we choose, and identify as we choose. But a culture based

solely on individual rights will undermine families, communities, traditions, loyalties, and shared codes of reverence and restraint.

Despite its enormous emphasis on the value of the individual, Judaism also insists on the value of those institutions that preserve and protect our identities as members of groups that make them up. We have rights as individuals but identities only as members of tribes. Honouring both is delicate, difficult and necessary. Bamidbar ends by showing us how.[1] The word “rights” is, of course, an anachronism here. The concept was not born until the seventeenth century. Nonetheless it is not absurd to suggest that this is what is implied in the daughters’ claim, “Why should our father’s name be disadvantaged?” [2] These two passages may well be the source of the story of the rabbi who hears both sides of a marital dispute, and says to both husband and wife, “You are right.” The rabbi’s disciple asks, “How can they both be right?” to which the rabbi replies, “You too are right.” [3] Kli Yakar to Num. 13:2. [4] See most recently Sebastian Junger: Tribe: On homecoming and belonging, Fourth Estate, 2016. [5] This is the argument made most powerfully by Edmond Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville. [6] Frans de Waal, Good Natured, Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 167.

Matot-Masei: Seeing the Good Through the Lens of Our Own Identities

by Rabbi Lev Meiowitz Nelson

<https://truah.org/resources/lev-meowitz-nelson-matot-masei-moraltorah2023/>

Sometimes who we are affects what we can see.

In this week’s parshah, we meet Zelophechad’s five daughters for the second time. Last week, in Parshat Pinchas, they appealed to Moses for a change in the inheritance laws. Their father died leaving no son, and they wanted to inherit his portion of the land so their family’s name would not be obliterated. God agreed. This week, they are back in court, so to speak, not as plaintiffs but as defendants. Their tribe, Menashe, is concerned about what would happen to their land-holding if the daughters marry outside the tribe; it could be lost to Menashe forever. God is sympathetic to the tribe of Menashe’s argument in Numbers 36:5. But in the next verse, God seems to give conflicting instructions: They should marry within their tribe, and,

לְטוֹב בְּעֵינֵיהֶם תִּהְיֶינָה לְנָשִׁים.

La-tov b’eiheim tihiyena le-nashim.

Translating hyper-literally, which will become significant in a moment, God says, “To the good in their eyes they shall be women.” In context, this means they can marry whomever they want, and the classical commentators spill their ink resolving the apparent contradiction between the two halves of this verse.

Find more commentaries on Parshat Matot-Masei.

Of the nine classical commentators appearing on Sefaria who write in Hebrew and comment on this verse, not one of them picks up on a small grammatical detail identified by Hila Unna, a contemporary Israeli woman from a famous family of the religious kibbutz movement. Writing in *Dirshuni: Israeli Women Writing Midrash*, Volume II, Unna notices the grammatical gender of the second word quoted above. “Eineihem” is masculine; the feminine plural form, which the verse should have used regarding the daughters, is *eineihen*.

Almost certainly, this is a scribal error and an easy one to make at that. But that’s not how we read Torah; we believe that every word, every letter, has meaning. Based on the grammar on the page, and reaching for the most obvious plural masculine noun present, Unna re-reads the sentence literally, in midrashic style: [To the good in the eyes \[of the people\] will be these women, for generations.](#)

Or, switching around word order to be more in line with English syntax, “These women will be good in their [the people’s] eyes.” She shifts “to the good” from being an indirect object, modifying the implied noun “husbands,” to become a direct object, and she interprets *nashim* not as wives but simply as women. In other words, God is saying that these women should be remembered as good. In a single neat line, Unna clears up the confusion about God’s instructions and grants the daughters a new, formal status in the public eye as “pursuers of good.”

Reading this midrash, I was reminded of a teaching I learned from Dr. Avivah Zornberg about Moses, when I had the honor of studying with her in Jerusalem. She says that Moses’ whole life is framed by the idea of “good,” beginning with his birth, when the very first thing we learn about him — after his sex — is that his mother saw that he was good. (Exodus 2:2) Commenting on several episodes in the book of Numbers, including Numbers 10:29-32, Zornberg points out how often Moses uses the word “*tov*/good.” In her interpretation, this indicates a fundamental orientation in Moses: He is so focused on things that are good that he has trouble seeing anything as bad or understanding when others see things that way.

I would like to suggest that this trait cuts both ways. Yes, it prevents Moses from understanding certain things, but it also attunes him to seeing goodness even when it might not be obvious — a trait that for sure saves the Israelites multiple times in the desert when God is fed up and wants to blot them out.

Now we are at the end of the desert wandering. Moses’ death has been ordained. Joshua has been anointed his successor. (Numbers 27:12-23) Joshua is a worthy

leader, but the same air of “tov” does not surround him. Who, then, carries forward this special legacy of Moses? I believe Hila Unna is saying that Zelophechad’s daughters do.

In the New York Times on July 2, historian Jill Lepore wrote about the harm we suffer as a country because we have lost the habit of amending our Constitution. She writes:

Originalists, who now dominate the Supreme Court, insist that rights and other ideas not discoverable in the debates over the Constitution at its framing do not exist. Perversely, they rely on a wildly impoverished historical record, one that fails even to comprehend the nature of amendment.

She goes on to write about how the Amendments Project, which she leads, has just released a public archive of more than 20,000 historical proposals to amend the Constitution, made by people of all genders, races, and statuses over the years — not just the wealthy, white, Christian men who were present at the Constitutional Convention.

As we grapple with the most recent spate of Supreme Court rulings that undermine human rights — on affirmative action, on LGBTQ rights, on student loan debt forgiveness, and more — let us remember how Hila Unna, a woman with no advanced degree, noticed one letter’s change that opened a new world of meaning to her. And let us strive to learn from Zelophechad’s daughters, seeking good wherever we can find it.

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[Taking Vengeance Too Far: Moshe Oversteps God’s Mandate...Matot-Masei by Eitan Cooper](https://schechter.edu/taking-vengeance-too-far-moshe-oversteps-gods-mandate-parashat-mattot-massei/)

<https://schechter.edu/taking-vengeance-too-far-moshe-oversteps-gods-mandate-parashat-mattot-massei/>

Vengeance is one of the driving forces of the populism characterizing the democratic politics in our time.

A very large number of people in democratic societies vote for those leaders who can infuriate and frustrate the elites that they loathe, even if they derive no real benefit from it. A populist leader aggravates an injury – real or perceived – felt by many people, then vilifies those elites (also real or perceived) for being the cause of their pain. The frustration of the vilified elite feeds the popularity of the populist

leader. It is a joy, a narcotic ecstasy that soothes the pain.

In turn, many of the elites are ecstatic when they see a corrupt populist leader being brought to justice. Here also, the “justice done” has little value for fixing the injuries that enabled the rise of the populist in the first place. There is no real “Tikkun” in it.

In Vaykira, Leviticus Ch. 19 the Torah commands not to hold grudges and not to avenge, but in Tehillim, Psalm 58, revenge is celebrated: “The Righteous will rejoice when they see vengeance bathing the feet in the blood of the wicked.” The Psalm indicates that the benefit of vengeance is ecstatic joy at seeing the downfall of those you perceive as wicked.

So the populist knows this truth: although there is no “Tikkun” in vengeance, there is a narcotic ecstasy in seeing the destruction of others who you hate.

That brings us to this week’s Torah Portion, Matot, in Numbers, Bamidbar Ch. 31, in which Moshe is commanded by God to take “Israel’s vengeance on the Midianites” as his last action before his death. The Torah is picking up the story that stops abruptly at the beginning of Ch. 26, of the sexual seduction of the Israelite men by the daughters of Moav and Midian leading to their worshipping a local deity – “ba’al peor” and to the desecration of the Mishkan by an Israelite and the daughter of a Midianite.

The story ends with the spearing of the couple by Pinchas, the son of Elazar the High Priest, assuaging God’s anger and ending a plague that had broken out in the Israelite Camp. Now, one thought the story ended there...but now it’s back – with a vengeance.

Recall that Miriam and Aaron have already died in the Desert, and Moshe has already been told that his fate too is to die without setting foot in the Holy Land. Yet to make his life’s mission complete, he is told he is to avenge the hurt caused by the Midianites.

He does that – and much more. He sends an army led by Pinchas – the youthful avenger – who kills the Midianite kings, including Bil’am, who had actually blessed Israel in Numbers, Bamidbar, Ch. 24. Why would Bil’am be singled out? While the Midrash vilifies Bil’am – it makes him the catalyst for the seduction and desecration described above, there is no indication of this in the plain text. Bil’am follows God, praises Israel and foretells its greatness.

Moreover, when Pinchas’ army returns after killing all the Midianite kings and their men and taking the women and children captive, Moshe is angry for leaving the grown women and male offspring alive. So, they kill them, then divide up the loot

including the young girls. Now Moshe's mission is finally complete – He can die in peace!

This shocking story disturbs the soul more than anything else I can think in Torah, but looking carefully at the text, I also notice there are other possibilities. God begins this sequence of events by telling Moshe that he is to take "Israel's revenge". Some commentators notice that it is not literally "on" the Midianites, but a correction of the harm "caused by" them.

Moshe on the other hand, tells the people that they are to take "God's revenge". It is Moshe who sends Pinchas to lead the army and kill Bil'am. It is his command to kill the women and male children. You see, Moshe oversteps his mandate, So forget about hitting the rock is the reason, he is no longer an effective leader for God's people.

Often leaders invoke God's will when inciting to horrific acts of revenge. The Torah here tells us otherwise. Not in God's name!

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Upgrading the Torah – and the World: Matot – Masei by Benjamin D. Sommer

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/upgrading-the-torah-and-the-world-2/>

Is God's law perfect? Most of us would assume that anything created by an omniscient and omnipotent being must have no flaws. But a story in today's parashah suggests otherwise—in a manner that shows a surprising similarity to a key concept of Jewish mysticism.

At the end of the reading for this Shabbat (Num. 36:1–9) and in four other passages in the Torah (Lev. 24:10–23, Num. 9:1–14, Num. 15:32–36, and Num. 27:1–11), the Israelites and Moses confront a situation in which the law is unclear, or in which some Israelites seem dissatisfied with the existing law. Moses asks God to clarify the law relating to the situation, and God responds to Moses's request. For example, a story in last week's Torah reading (Num. 27:3–4) tells of the daughters of a recently deceased man named Zelophehad, who had no sons. Because women could not inherit under the existing law, his landholding was set to pass to his closest male relative. As a result, his land and his name were going to disappear forever. The daughters approached Moses to ask why their father's

name should be lost, and they requested the right to inherit his land so that the family's plot, and hence Zelophehad's name, would endure.

The daughters' query was not open-ended. They respectfully presented an objection to the existing law of inheritance, and they made the solution they were looking for explicit. God's response when Moses brought the question to God's attention is fascinating. God did not declare, "I am perfect, and My law is perfect, and who are these women to tell Me how to run My universe?" Instead, God agreed to their plan: בְּנֵי זְלוֹפְהָד דִּבְרֹת ("The daughters of Zelophehad speak rightly," Num. 27:7). God agreed to modify the existing law of inheritance to allow a sonless man's property to be divided among his daughters. That way, the property would stay together, forever associated with the deceased man's name. This story from last week's parashah presents the law as malleable and open to improvement.

As if to underscore this point, the revision God issued to the law of inheritance is itself revised in this week's Torah reading. In Num. 36:2–4, the leaders of the tribe of Manasseh (to which Zelophehad's family belongs) approach Moses to point out a wrinkle in the solution that God set forth back in Num. 27. What would happen, under the revised inheritance law, if one of the daughters marries a man from some other Israelite tribe? In that case, the children of that marriage will inherit Zelophehad's land, and a piece of Manasseh's territory will pass into the permanent possession of the other tribe. The tribal leaders object to the apparently unforeseen consequence of the legal revision reported in last week's parashah.

Again, God does not respond angrily, insisting that there can be no consequences unforeseen by God's all-seeing eyes. Rather, God responds precisely as God had done earlier: בְּנֵי מִטֵּה בְּנֵי-יוֹסֵף דִּבְרֹת ("The tribe of Joseph's sons speak rightly," Num. 36:5). The originally imperfect law had been improved in light of the daughters' plea, but the tribal leaders' subsequent plea reveals that God had not improved it enough. So the amendment is amended: the daughters may inherit, but not if they marry a man from outside their tribe. If they are to exercise their right to inherit, they must marry members of the tribe of Manasseh. In that case, Zelophehad's land will stay with his descendants through the female line, while also remaining with his tribe. This amendment does not undo the earlier revision; before that revision, the land would have gone to Zelophehad's closest male relative. Under the new law, the daughters may marry a much more distant member of their tribe,

and the children of that more distant relative will end up owning the land. But the amendment to the amendment solves the problem that concerns the tribal elders. In presenting these stories of legal revision, the Torah acknowledges without embarrassment or discomfort that what God has wrought is not always set in stone. The law, we might say, is 1.0, and it can be upgraded—as can the upgrade. The narrative makes clear that God does not find this insulting. God seems perfectly satisfied with a situation in which the Israelites participate along with God in allowing the law to develop over time.

Much the same thing can be said about the world itself in the Torah. As has been widely noted, the opening chapter of Genesis is in many respects a classic example of an ancient Near Eastern creation account, sharing with its Mesopotamian counterparts several features of plot and style. But Gen. 1 differs in some crucial respects. Many ancient Near Eastern creation myths conclude with the construction of the highest god's temple by the lower-ranking gods. To a reader who has noticed the many elements of the ancient Near Eastern creation myths in Gen. 1, the world created there appears lacking, because it never arrives at its expected culmination, the erection of God's palace or temple. That absence is remedied several thousand years later with the completion of the Tabernacle in the last two chapters of the Book of Exodus. The opening narrative of Genesis and the closing narrative of Exodus are linked by extensive verbal parallels, which indicate that Gen. 1:1–2:4 and Exod. 39–40 are the bookends of one long story that reaches its culmination in Exod. 40.

The world that God created in Gen. 1, then, was deliberately imperfect. It was “good”—and parts of it were “very good” (as Genesis 1 states several times)—just not perfect. God seems to have regarded Godself as free to desist from bringing creation to its ultimate goal, and it was the task of the Israelites to complete the work. Significantly, the deficiency is made right not by the gods who build the divine palace in other ancient Near Eastern myths, but by human beings.

In light of the story of Zelophehad's daughters, it becomes clear that what is true of the world that God created is also true of the law God gave Moses: God's handiwork wants improvement, and the expectation of the Torah is that the Israelites will provide it. This idea is not only present in the Bible. It is also central to Kabbalah. Especially in the teachings of one of the greatest Kabbalists, Isaac Luria (1534–1572), Jews are responsible to help God improve the world, and they do so by observing the mitzvot or commandments. Luria calls improvements generated by observing commandments *tikkun*.

We can restate the message of the story from today's parashah in Lurianic terms: The original law needs tikkun, as does the original cosmos. Enacting that tikkun is the role of the people Israel—today, no less than in Moses's own time. This classically Kabbalistic, and also classically Conservative, idea was well phrased by Abraham Joshua Heschel in his book *God in Search of Man*:

“There is a partnership of God and Israel in regard to both the world and the Torah: He created the earth and we till the soil; He gave us the text and we refine and complete it. ‘The Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah unto Israel like wheat from which to derive fine flour, or like flax from which to make a garment’ [quoting Midrash Tanna devei Eliyyahu Zuta 2:1]” (274).

This week, as we read about Zelophehad's daughters, is an ideal time to commit ourselves anew to this partnership, and to the responsibilities it entails.

(This commentary was originally published in 2017. Benjamin D. Sommer is Professor of Bible and Ancient Semitic Languages at JTS)

Yahrtzeits

Bobbi Ostrowsky remembers her mother Sylvia Edelman on Saturday July 15th

Steve Sklar remembers his brother Joseph Sklar on Monday July 17th

