

## PARSHAT PINCHAS

## PART 1

*What is inheritance? What does it mean to inherit something? (Seek a definition)*

## Bemidbar 27

Then the daughters of Zelophehad<sup>2</sup> came forward. The names of the daughters were: Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah.

They stood before Moses and before Elazar, the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, at the door of the Tent of Meeting.

*How could this all have been stated more concisely?*

*What is extraneous and why might the text include it? (names, who was there)*

They said: "Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not among the group that gathered against God in the company of Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he had no son? Give us a possession among the brothers of our father."

*What is the legal assumption here?*

*What exactly is their argument for receiving it?*

*Whose interest do they say they are fighting for?*

*Whose interest do you think they are fighting for?*

Moses brought their cause before God. God spoke to Moses, saying: "The daughters of Zelophehad speak correctly. You must give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brothers. You must cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them.

"You should further speak to the Israelites and say: 'If a man dies and has no son, then you must cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. And if he does not have a daughter, then you must give his inheritance to his brothers. And if he has no brothers, then you must give his inheritance to his father's brothers. And if his father has no brothers, then you must give his inheritance to his next-of-kin of some other sort, and he shall possess it. And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as God commanded Moses.'"

*Clarify the order of priority for who receives the inheritance.*

*(Son, Daughter, Father's brothers, Father's uncles, Other next of kin)*

*What do you think about the entire legal process in this story? Is the process fair?*

*What major values come away from this story? Which is more important: equality for women or that property stays in the family?*

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<sup>2</sup> (the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph)

## PART 2

*Does anyone know what an estate tax is?*

The following text is from the website, Debate.org:

The inheritance tax, or estate tax, is a tax which the United States places on the total taxable value of the estate of a person that has died.

*Any questions about that rough definition? The precise tax varies, we're trying to get at the basic idea of it.*

### **Opponents of Estate Tax**

Opponents of inheritance tax typically refer to it pejoratively as "death tax." They argue first that concern over burdening their children with this tax may lead elderly to make unwise investment decisions late in life, and that it may also discourage entrepreneurship earlier in life. Opponents also claim that morally it should be only the choice of the person who earned the money what should be done with it, not the government. They see taxing wealth at death as a kind of forced income redistribution that goes against free-market capitalism. Also, studies suggest that the expense to the government of collecting the estate tax is almost as high as the funds received from it, thus making it a highly inefficient way to get revenue.

*What resonates with you in this argument? What bothers you?*

### **Proponents of Estate Tax**

Proponents of the inheritance tax say that it helps prevent consolidation of wealth in the hands of a few powerful families and is a basic building block of the nation's system of progressive taxation. They also feel that inheriting large sums without tax undermines people's motives to work hard in the future and, thus, undercuts the principles of capitalism, encouraging people to become idle and unproductive, which hurts the country overall. Those in favor of the inheritance tax also point out that, contrary to claims, it taxes the same earnings twice; within the structure of US estate tax, much inherited money is in the form not of prior salary for work, but of unrealized capital gains, money on which no tax has ever been paid before. Finally, proponents also make the point that transfers of wealth from generation to generation have often been limited, and the amounts that are currently being transferred are so high as to have very little historical precedent, thus making taxing them less onerous. The controversy that has raged over inheritance tax in the United States shows little sign of abating.

*What resonates with you in this argument? What bothers you?*

*Is it fair that some people receive more because of things their parents did?*

*Is the story of the Daughters of Tzelophchad possibly dealing with this question in some way or arguing just about the details? What is the major value at stake with that story?*

*What is at stake in our discussion?*