

## There is a Balm In Gilead

♪ *There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole; there is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin sick soul. (1) Some times I feel discouraged, and think my work's in vain. But then the Holy Spirit, revives my soul again. (2) If you can't preach like Peter, if you can't pray like Paul. Just tell the love of Jesus, and say He died for all.* ♪ (based on "Go up to Gilead and take balm." Jeremiah 46:11)

**B**alm is used for a number of natural aromatic substances that are utilized for healing and soothing. It is also contracted from the word Bal'sam, a general name for many oily or resinous substances which flow or trickle from certain trees or plants when an incision is made through the bark.

In the Hebrew Bible, this word occurs in Gen. 37:25; 43:11; Jer. 8:22; 46:11; 51:8; and Ezek. 27:17 as the rendering of the Hebrew word *tsori* or *tseri*, (צֹרִי, צָרִי, *Tseri*, *Tsori*, and *Tserim* (m.), which is rendered balm in English) which denotes the gum of a tree growing in Gilead, which is very precious. It was celebrated for its medicinal qualities (known for the great healing powers of its balm), and was circulated as an article of merchandise by Arab and Phoenician merchants. The shrub so named was highly valued, and was almost peculiar to the Land of Israel. The writings of Pliny the Elder indicate that the tree was brought to Rome in the first century A.D. The historian Josephus recorded that the Queen of Sheba made a gift of balm of Gilead to King Solomon. In the time of Josephus it was cultivated in the neighborhood of Jericho and the Dead Sea.

There is another Hebrew word, *basam* or *bosem* (בַּשָּׂם, בִּשְׂמִים, *bosem*, *besamim* (m.), meaning spices, and perfume) from which our word "balsam," as well as the corresponding Greek *balsamon*, is derived. It is rendered "spice" (Song of Songs 5:1, 13; 6:2; Ex. 35:28; 1 Kings 10:10), and denotes fragrance in general. *Basam* also denotes the true balsam plant, a native of South Arabia (Song of Songs). The English word balm is derived from balsam, which originated from the Greek word (pronounced) *balsamon*, which was adopted to represent the Hebrew words *baal shemen*, meaning "lord of oils."

Gilead was a well-known exporter of balm from the earliest of times. Joseph was sold by his brothers to a caravan of Ishmaelite traders who were transporting a cargo that included balm:

<sup>23</sup>So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him; <sup>24</sup>and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it. <sup>25</sup>Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and **balm** and myrrh, on their way to bring them down to Egypt. <sup>26</sup>Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood?" <sup>27</sup>"Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. <sup>28</sup>Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled him up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt. (Genesis 37:23-28 CJB)

## Parashat Mas'ei

*Parashat Mas'ei* concludes the Book of *Bemidbar*, bringing together elements of the desert period, and drawing various parts to their logical conclusions. It traces the travels and encampments of the Israelites throughout the whole period of wandering. It then looks forward, setting boundaries and borders for Israel once they enter the land, and appointing leaders to oversee that land division. There is then a focus on the cities of refuge, which is a major element in structuring society based on justice and fairness. This is all very fitting as all that stands between the Israelites and their entry into the land is *Moshe's* concluding speech in *Devarim*.

All of this would work beautifully, but, this is not how *Parashat Mas'ei* ends. But the last section of the *Parashah* brings back the case of the daughters of *Zelophehad* (זֶלְפֶּחַד, *Zelophehad* or *Tzelofechad*). Earlier in the Book of Numbers, the daughters of *Zelophehad* (Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah) came before *Moshe*, complaining that their father died, leaving no sons. They claimed that they should be able to inherit their father's land so that it would not pass out of their family due merely to the lack of male heirs. *Moshe* consulted with *יהוה*, who confirmed that the women were justified in their case. The *Torah* was then revised, establishing that if a man dies with no sons, his daughters are entitled to inherit his land. (see Nu. 27:1-11)

### **Insights in the Hebrew Names of the Cast of Characters**

זֶלְפֶּחַד, *Zelophehad*, *Tzelofechad*, from the root *tzel* meaning shade or shadow and *fehad* meaning fear.

מַחֲלָה, *Mahlah* or *Machlah* meaning illness, sickness, disease, malady, complaint, ailment, affliction.

תִּרְצָה, *Tirzah* or *Tirtzah* meaning to want, to appease, to placate

חֻגְלָה, *Hoglah* or *Chaglah* could be derived from the Hebrew root *Chag* (חָג) meaning festival.

מִלְכָּה, *Milcah* or *Milkah*, essentially the Hebrew name *Malka* means female monarch, queen, sovereign.

נֹחַ, *Noah* means in motion (this is not the same name as the Ark builder whose Hebrew name is *Noach*)

Taken together, five female characters in the *Parashat* mean illness to placate a festival of a sovereign in motion. These are the daughters of the shadow of fear.

This ruling is revisited here, with the leaders of the tribe approaching *Moshe*, complaining that given the revised law in the *Torah*, if the women were to marry outside the tribe, that land will be lost to the tribe. Again, after consulting with *יהוה*, *Moshe* confirms that the tribal leaders are correct, and decrees that women who inherit their fathers' land need to marry within the tribe in order to protect the integrity of the tribal land. This will finally be settled when *Yehoshua* divides the land in Joshua 17:1-6.

<sup>1</sup>This was the territory chosen by lot for the tribe of *M'nasheh*, for he was the firstborn of *Yosef*. As for *Makhir* the firstborn of *M'nasheh*, the father of *Gil'ad*, because he was a warrior he got *Gil'ad* and *Bashan*. <sup>2</sup>So the lot was drawn for the other descendants of *M'nasheh* according to their families - for the descendants of *Avi'ezer*, *Helek*, *Asri'el*, *Sh'khem*, *Hefer* and *Sh'mida*; these were the male descendants of *M'nasheh* according to their families. <sup>3</sup>But *Tz'lof'chad* the son of *Hefer*, the son of *Gil'ad*, the son of *Makhir*, the son of *M'nasheh*, had no sons, only daughters; these are the names of his daughters: *Malchah*, *No'ah*, *Hoglah*, *Milkah* and *Tirtzah*. <sup>4</sup>They approached *El'azar* the cohen, *Y'hoshua* the son of *Nun* and the leaders and said, "*יהוה* ordered *Moshe* to give us an inheritance together with our kinsmen." Therefore, in keeping with *יהוה's* order, he gave them an inheritance together with the kinsmen of their father. <sup>5</sup>Thus ten parts fell to *M'nasheh*, in addition to the land of *Gil'ad* and *Bashan* beyond the *Yarden*, <sup>6</sup>because the daughters of *M'nasheh* had an inheritance along with his descendants; but the land of *Gil'ad* belonged to the rest of the descendants of *M'nasheh*. (Joshua 17:1-6)

### **The Conclusion of the Desert Experience**

Many have wondered why this case appears here, in this ultimate position in *Bemidbar*, and various theories have been proposed. For example, Tamara Cohn Ashkenazi and Elizabeth Goldstein explain that *Shemot* begins with five women who save *Moshe*, (the two midwives, *Moshe's* mother, *Moshe's* sister, and Pharaoh's daughter), and that *Bemidbar* ends with the five daughters of *Zelophehad*. These

two groups of women bracket the Israelite experience in Egypt and in the desert. Masha Turner has claimed that this is a fitting ending as it shows the need for the interaction between humans and *יהוה* in determining legal decisions.

While each of these theories adds a dimension to the understanding of the text, perhaps there is another possibility. The entire desert experience can be seen from an educational viewpoint. From the time of *יהוה's* revelation to *Moshe* in the beginning of *Shemot*, *יהוה* has been teaching the Israelites how to grow into a Chosen and Covenanted People. *יהוה* has led them to experience formal frontal learning, as when commandments, laws, and cultic practices are directly stated and "taught" to the Israelites. In these situations they are meant to listen, absorb the material, and act accordingly. In addition to these formal moments, *יהוה* uses informal educational models as well to help the Israelites to grow and develop. Their experiences, including the use of manna, the availability and scarcity of water and how to deal with those situations, all led to the Israelites learning how to understand their relationship with *יהוה*, and how to be a people. They needed to learn how to negotiate their rights and responsibilities as individuals, their communal identity as tribes and as a people, and their covenantal relationship with *יהוה*.

It is in this context that the daughters of *Zelophehad* narrative comes through as a critical text. This small scenario deals with a very deep issue in a beautiful and effective manner. The conflicting needs of the individuals - *Zelophehad's* daughters, the community - the tribe, with *יהוה* overseeing, are settled peacefully, and to everyone's satisfaction. It is as if this is the test to see if the Israelites learned how to negotiate these competing demands during their desert period. They have learned that if you only look at the needs of the community, you end up with troubles like *Moshe* had when he spent all of his time adjudicating the people's needs. This was so difficult that he required his father-in-law *Yitro* to tell him that he must set up organizational systems because he could not deal with the needs of the people alone. They learned that if you only look at the needs of the individual, you end up with disasters like the rebellion of *Korach*. It is only through the careful, sensitive, interaction between individuals, with an appreciation for community, and with deference to *יהוה* that a people can grow in understanding, in strength, and in commitment to something bigger than themselves.

This, then, is a most fitting ending to the desert experience. It points to the growth of a people, and, points the way for us to grow as respectful, thoughtful, and growing communities and individuals. The daughters of *Zelophehad* narrative is a model of the success to which the Book of *Bemidbar* invites its readers to aspire.

### ***From Tsuris to Tsori***

In the NE part of the country the newly imported English word *tsuris* is used to represent "troubles." According to Google in <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/tsuris> comes from the *Yiddish* צרות, *tsoros*. In Hebrew, we have: צרה, צרות, נ. צרה, *Tsarah* or *Tsarot* (f.) meaning trouble. Look at the similarity between the Hebrew צורי (*tsuri* by reading the unvoiced vav as a "u") which is masculine and *tsuris* which is feminine. But the daughters of the shadow of *tsuris* go before *Moshe* and *יהוה* and obtain from them a righteous inheritance (through obedience) which is none other than the land of the *tsori hagil'ad* צרי הגלעד, the Balm of Gilead. Under the wisdom and leadership *יהוה* through His servant *Moshe* troubles are transformed into healing and the inheritance of the source of the healing. Therefore, *There is a balm in Kol Simcha, to make the wounded whole; there is a balm in Kol Simcha, to heal the sin sick soul. His name is Yeshua. He is the Balm of Gilead that heals sick sin soul and makes the wounded in spirit whole. Amen!*