

July 10, 2009

Shabbat Shalom!

In our state, around the country, and across the world, we can think of many examples of people seeking to expand their rights in one way or another. Such an expansion requires change, and, as we know, change doesn't always come easy to a community or even to one person. The push for change and, hopefully, progress, might take the form of reasonable discussion leading to a new realization of what must be done through legislation or, even better (and more difficult), through adopting a new perspective and attitude. Sometimes, as we well know, change only comes after the creation of a movement that could involve peaceful demonstrations, violent protest, or many modes of expression in between.

In the Torah reading for this Shabbat, the daughters of a man named Zelophehad went before Moses to ask for their rights of inheritance after their father had died. In most societies in the ancient Near East, women had no rights of inheritance. If there were no sons, all property and possessions (and wealth) would pass to other relatives. In that context, this request was revolutionary in its own way: "Our father died in the wilderness...he has left no sons. Let not our father's name be lost to his clan just because he had no son! Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen!"

The daughters of Zelophehad could have encountered outright rejection or a temporary rebuff at that moment. The passage in Numbers Chapter 27 states that "Moses took their case before the Eternal" (whether that represented direct communication with a divine voice, subtle inspiration or a process of pondering morally and spiritually). The answer came to Moses: "The plea of Zelophehad's daughters is just: you should give them a hereditary holding among their father's kinsmen: transfer their father's share to them."

There are situations that arise that may not have been considered when creating the rules that govern a community or a nation. Changing those rules may not come as readily in every case as it did for the daughters of Zelophehad. It is, however, always important to raise the possibility of greater consideration among group members or citizens that might bring about a new approach to community based on a broader vision. Taking that first step down the path towards change is crucial for the growth of society and the human spirit!

-- L'shalom, Rabbi Larry K.