

# The Role of Individuation in Courageous Followership as Modeled by the Daughters of Zelophehad

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#### **Abstract**

In the annals of Hebrew history is an often-overlooked story of five women who stepped out of their cultural paradigm to request a correction to the Israelite law that not only benefitted them but their nation for generations. The story of the daughters of the Zelophehad in the book of Numbers, Chapter 27, depicts an example of the role followers play in increasing opportunities for humanity to flourish. Such followers, according to Chaleff (2009), may be considered courageous in that they move outside of the norm to challenge leaders to bring about change. In this paper, I use the du Tout et al. (2011) model of individuation in a psycho-hermeneutic exploration of how the psychological phenomenon empowers followers to be agents of change and contribute to human flourishing, which I define as environmental well-being for this paper.

*Keywords*: followers, followership, daughters of Zelophehad, individuation, psychohermeneutics, courageous followers

#### Introduction

In leadership studies, much is discussed about the traits, roles, responsibilities, and achievements of leaders. Central to their success and only gaining scholarly interest in the last few decades are those who follow them. Followers are defined as people who receive, accept, and implement actions according to the guidance of those to whom they report (Chaleff, 2009; Kellerman, 2008; Kelley, 2008; Treister & Schultz, 1997; Yukl, 2006). They are responsible for achieving the manager's objectives, the leader's vision, and the organization's mission. From this perspective, a follower may be responsible for leading others while being accountable to someone else. They may be referred to as staff, teams, associates, administrators, etc.. Whatever the label, the destiny of the organization is often shaped by the abilities and attitudes of those perceived as followers.

The current global environment of constant and swift changes requires a workforce that can take decisive action (Yukl, 2006). Organizational authorities must be supported by prepared and engaged workers who can function effectively. They must be comfortable with themselves and confident in their abilities. Such people, according to the theory of individuation, are those who have gone through a process of self-discovery during which they have become aware of their strengths and developed ways of handling their weaknesses. They have reached a place of empowerment based purely on their locus of control. Followership theorists classify such staff as courageous, stars, or diehards (Chaleff, 2009; Kellerman, 2008; Kelley, 2008).

Through a hermeneutical study of the daughters of Zelophehad, whose story is found in the biblical book of Numbers, Chapter 27, I seek to shed light on the formation of such character through the research question, What are the factors that contribute to the formation of exemplary followership. The story details how five women found themselves without a male protector in prenational patriarchal Israel. With no one to speak for them and no property rights of any type, the daughters of Zelophehad realized that they were the sole determiners of their destiny. The decision to address their plight publicly required breaking the societal norms of their culture, risking rejection and isolation. The confrontation of authority, however, proved to elevate the status of women and, thereby, the daughters of Zelophehad contributed to the flourishing of their nation. Studying their decision process through the lens of Jung's theory of individuation (du Toit et al., 2011; Kincel, 1975; Tyagi, 2008) explains character development that empowers followers to be agents of change in the modality of human flourishing.

# **Definition of Human Flourishing**

Human flourishing is another term for human well-being and provides a framework for understanding what makes people happy (Anand, 2016; Case et al., 2023). The concept looks beyond economics as a tool for assessing components that contribute to happiness or well-being. Human flourishing, then, involves the ability to participate in activities and exercises that add value to life. Many of these are related to the mundane routines of living such as caring for oneself and loved ones, playing or watching games, shopping for groceries or clothing, and so forth. This provides a framework for understanding what establishes a state of well-being.

Well-being, however, may be tied to individual happiness, whereas flourishing may best describe a community, a society, or even an ecosystem. In this framework, researchers consider whether and how the environment meets the needs of its constituents. Some use the six areas of Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a benchmark (Case et al., 2023, pp. 2–3; Dhiman, 2011). The six areas—physiological, safety, love, esteem, self-actualization, and transcendence—are met according to importance, not in

any particular order. Weinberg (2011) explained, "Maslow tells us that as a need is satisfied, it largely disappears, and the individual begins new motivation new focus, to fulfill the next higher need" (p. 17). Thus, researchers seek to understand how the drivers and domains are interrelated. In some societies, human flourishing is intrinsic rather than extrinsic. Virtue and social relationships are valued more than consumables. Case et al. (2023) noted that a myriad of factors work together to create or define human flourishing, concluding that the environment is central to the phenomenon.

In this paper, human flourishing is defined as the common good for society as we consider the results of five women's confrontation of patriarchal leadership of prenational Israel. According to Solum (2023), communities flourish when they create atmospheres that promote health, peace, and prosperity and when their systems nurture families through promoting human virtues and provide opportunities for "meaningful work and recreation" that facilitates social interactions (p. 1149). Through such a framework, all members of society may benefit. This study shows that the individuation of the daughters of Zelphehad helped them to contribute to the flourishing of their nation by enabling women to have a stronger role in the community.

## The Theory of Individuation

The theory of individuation was developed by Carl Gustav Jung, the psychiatrist and founder of analytic psychology, to explain the human process of becoming self-aware (Kincel, 1975; Tyagi, 2008). Jung considered the psyche the centrality of human experience and knowledge—conscious and unconscious. According to the theory, the psyche and the physical being grow and develop together. The unconscious is a conglomerate of the known and unknown human experience; it includes elements gathered and forgotten, considered, and cast off, and knowledge that lies dormant until aroused by and for a purpose. The conscious and unconscious are psychological opposites, opined Jung. The conscious operates as the ego, the aware unit, but the unconscious expresses itself in the shadows of dreams, visions, and actions. The conscious is the principal agent in the formation of the persona, which fosters socialization and helps individuals to acclimate to accepted norms. Though expected to be unique individuals, people are expected to meet the unspoken mandate to connect with their societies (Ellens & Rollins, 2004).

The unconscious or shadow develops early in life as the alternative persona to the acquiescing role of the ego (Kincel, 1975). It is the shadow of oneself, which is banished in the process of acclimation, instituted through social learning and discipline. Forsaken undesirable thoughts and behavior reside in the unconscious until the individual acknowledges them. Jung considered the shadow the dark side—active in dreams, imaginations, or negative projections. Kincel (1975) explained that through "confrontation with the unconscious contents and their integration into consciousness,

an individual gradually becomes a more complete expression of his own inner nature and becomes a unique human being" (p. 10). When the conscious is forced to confront itself, the individual's personality begins to develop and maturity ensues, producing a higher level of self-awareness (Stein, 2021).

Both the persona and shadow exist in the collective, as well as the personal. The persona is what is particular to the individual, but the collective is what is common to humanity (Kincel, 1975). Jung's psychology also postured that mature males embrace their feminine attributes (Anima), which empower higher levels of sensitivity. On the other hand, females gain power and strength from their masculine side (Animus). Each also may be empowered by their archetypes: the Old Wise Man for men and the Great Mother for women. Men who identify with their archetype exude a high degree of charisma and see themselves (questionably) as gifted leaders. Women influenced by the Great Mother archetype see themselves (speculatively) as nurturers and protectors of humanity, which needs them to survive.

## Individuation as a Psycho-Hermeneutic

Religion and psychology are closely connected by their relation to the human psyche. Religious texts are the product of the human psyche and, therefore, bear evidence of human psychological disposition in the depiction of behavior and verbiage (Kille, 2004). Kille (2004) opined that "every step of the way from sacred experiences to the sacred story, every group that gathered, evaluated, and canonized the Bible, and every act of interpretation have involved and been shaped by the human psyche" (p. 31). In hermeneutical study, psychological criticism considers conscious and unconscious factors underlying the communal and/or personal interpretation of a text. It focuses on the content of the expression, understanding that the unconscious is always at work in every text. Not only does the text bear the history of its antecedent but also the collective history evidenced in standard symbols and images, dreams, stories, myths, narratives, and epics. Psycho-hermeneutical inquiry may also consider personalities, religious phenomena, biblical ethics, and the influence of the reader and interpreter (Ellens & Rollins, 2004). A psycho-hermeneutic researcher will consider pathogenic and therapeutic elements in the text represented by language and the systematic presentation of divinity (i.e., Is the presence or will of God revealed or darkened regarding the individual response?).

du Toit et al. (2011) developed and empirically validated a model designed to predict human behavior by associating 10 attributes with three stages of individuation: (a) the containment/nurturing stage, (b) the adapting/adjusting stage, and (c) the centering/integrating stage. In Stage 1, properly nourished individuals develop a strong sense of security and develop enough confidence and self-esteem to challenge boundaries. In Stage 2, they form their ego identities and learn self-sufficiency and

independence. They also learn to balance relationships and to disengage when necessary. Many may also become aware of personal and social imperfections and make determinations about development and tolerance options. This is also the stage where they may become aware of their unconscious or dark side, which leads to a deeper sense of power and purpose. In Stage 3, individuals are more centered and more comfortable with their internal and external environments. Balancing dynamics such as personal and social conflicts comes naturally. They are more reflective and consider their inner thoughts from both sides of their psyche. In this mode, their fulfillment comes in serving others and a purpose outside of their sphere. This creates a healthy internal psychological environment where they accept themselves as they are, aware of what they need to control and/or improve and the decisions that they make regarding either.

## The Impact of the Individuation of the Zelophehad's Daughters

The theory of individuation helps researchers to consider an aspect of human growth that is applicable to humanity throughout time. "Whenever a human being is involved with the Bible, in every aspect from its origins to some distant future when it is interpreted for the last time, psychological dynamics of perception, thought, learning, and socialization are at work" (Ellens & Rollins, 2004, p. 5). The models of introspection that examine these positions are based on psychological theories. The du Toit et al. (2011) model of individuation, with its stages and attributes of the process, presents a great tool for exploring the story of the daughters of Zelophehad presented in Numbers 27:1-7.

# The Story

Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah, daughters of the deceased Zelophehad (a descendant of Jacob through the line of his 11th son, Joseph), came before the Hebrew court led by Moses and the priest Eleazar to file a complaint. Their father had died without a male heir in the wilderness during Israel's 40-year trek from Egypt to the land promised to the descendants of Abraham in Genesis 17:8. The women explained that their father had not been part of the rebellion led by Korah (Num. 16), whom God had condemned to death. They explained that their father died a natural death and that his son, if he had had one, would be eligible for a share of property in the Promised Land. Zelophehad did, however, have five girls who felt that they should inherit their father's land. "Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father," the women petitioned (*King James Version* [KJV, 2024, Num. 27:4).

The request surprised Moses because Israeli law had no stipulation for women owning property, inherited or otherwise. Therefore, Moses consulted God, who said, "The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an

inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them" (*KJV*, 2024, Num. 27:7). The edict became law for all of Israel, with the caveat that women inheriting from their fathers were required to marry within their tribes so that the inherited property would remain with the original family.

## **Analysis**

Looking at the text through a sociorhetorical hermeneutic lens helps to establish the historical, social, and cultural dimensions of the story. The historical location provides for an understanding of the sociocultural positions of the story (Henson et al., 2020). The account of the daughters of Zelophehad firmly occurs in prenational Israel. The women are identified as members of the Hebrew tribe of Manasseh, which historically flourished when Moses led the Israelite people out of Egypt to the land promised their ancestors. The daughters of Zelophehad encounter took place just as the fledgling nation was preparing to leave its wilderness home of 40 years and cross the Jordan into Canaan—the land of promise. During this time, Israel was a patriarchal society, and the role of women was primarily domestic. Women's value was tied to the role of their husbands in society and their ability to give them children, specifically males (Ruth 1:9-14; 1 Sam. 1:6: Prov. 31:23). Property passed from male to male, including widows whose husbands had died before producing an heir. In this case, the widow, under the Levirate law (Deut. 25:5), became the wife of the nearest single male relative (Vos, 1999, p. 104).

Before Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah approached Moses, "women did not constitute autonomous entities before the law in biblical Israel ... As a result, women possessed, for lack of a better term, few if any 'rights'" (Kawashima, 2011, p. 2). The act of Zelophehad's daughters in approaching Moses and his council was unprecedented. It was the first time in Old Testament scripture that a female publicly challenged the governing law (Barker, 1995, p. 228). Their courageous demonstration compelled a just leader to seek a righteous God for the proper recourse, resulting in a change that affected generations. How did these women come to decide to break social norms? What empowered them to confront an assembly of men about a perceived injustice during a time when the concept of women as citizens had not been formed?

# Method: du Toit et al.'s (2011) Model of Individuation

Individuation may have been the base of such change as people who become self-aware are willing to break with societal norms to develop socioeconomic independence (Fraser-Thill, 2023). Throughout history, human coexistence has been based on tightly formed interrelated nuclei that provided security and sustenance for its members. Group stability depended on the maintenance of the collective, and breaching norms was discouraged. Yet, as some members became self-aware, confronting their realities and actualities through the process of individuation, they were more willing to confront

and, if necessary, break the boundaries. The individuation model may provide some enlightenment on the experience of Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah Zelophehad.

Table 1 maps the women's behavior to the du Toit et al.'s (2011) model of individuation to chart their demonstration of the phenomena. According to the model, evidence of Stage 1, the containment and nurturing phase, is a high level of confidence and high self-esteem. This is demonstrated by the five women who approached the council of men in front of the entire Israeli assembly. The approach was no feat for mild-mannered or insecure people, for they were sure to have drawn attention first because of their gender and second because of their challenge. Courage requires confidence.

The evidence of the second stage, the adapting/adjusting phase, is the acceptance of the past in an objective and realistic manner. At this stage, individuals demonstrate the ability to break with typical patterns and to face reality. It is the stage in which they accept the flaws of others and the need to create their own happiness. The second stage is also the place where one becomes aware of a greater purpose. Zelophehad's daughters demonstrated this level when they laid out the facts of their father's life and death, his loss, and their rights. They accepted their father's flaws and expected Moses to do the same. Their very voice broke with the societal norm for women and their sense of purpose was demonstrated in their request for justice. They realized that their future depended on their actions.

In Stage 3, centering/integrating, individuated people can handle tension caused by conflicting ideas. Zelophehad's daughters demonstrated the ability to handle tension as the atmosphere their encounter created was undoubtedly very tense since it was not common for women to come to court. They approached an all-male council in a patriarchal society. By doing so, they broke a societal norm, risking rejection by men as well as women. Their actions make them an example of followers who spoke truth to power despite apparent dangers. The actions of these individuated women are a model of courageous followership that their contemporary professionals may emulate and draw strength from.

Table 1: Individuation of Zelophehad's Daughters

| Stage                     | Evidence   | Demonstration  |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Containment/Nurturing     | High level of confidence and<br>high self-esteem   | • Approach male assembly Broke cultural norm   |
| 2. Adapting/Adjusting     | <ul> <li>Acceptance of the past in an objective and realistic manner</li> <li>Accept the flaws of others and the need to create their own happiness</li> <li>Becomes aware of a greater purpose</li> </ul> | <ul> <li>Approached the council, laid out the facts of their father's life and death, his loss, and their rights</li> <li>Accepted their father's flaws and expected Moses to do the same</li> <li>Voice broke with the societal norm for women</li> <li>Sense of purpose was demonstrated in their request for justice</li> </ul> |
| 3. Centering /Integrating | Handle tension caused by conflicting ideas   | <ul> <li>Approached all-male council in patriarchal society</li> <li>Broke societal norm</li> <li>Risked societal rejection</li> </ul>   |

# The Need for Courageous Followers

Followers, often referred to as subordinates, reports, and/or associates, help leaders to execute their responsibilities wisely and/or effectively. Yet, people have been conditioned to take a subordinate role to leaders. From childhood, people are taught to submit to authority or to suffer consequences for disobedience. This ideology is reinforced through various societal institutions from schools to religious organizations. Indeed, a verse from a well-known poem advises "We can't all be captains; we've got to

be the crew ... Be the best at whatever you are" (Rainy Day Poems, 2024). As a result, many enter the workforce understanding themselves to be supporting characters whose best contributions are to the lead player. Such social programming tends to feed timidity that may impair the ability to respond appropriately in difficult situations (Chaleff, 2009).

Yukl (2006) noted that followership behavior may be classified in a variety of ways. Individuals who are overwhelmed by workplace challenges may become resigned and unconcerned about progressing. They become apathetic, unable to move beyond the present circumstances, and pay little attention to accomplishing the tasks at hand, which is where they differ from regimented followers. Regimented followers perform their tasks blindly without too much thought and are completely obedient, functioning by rote and requiring much supervision. Leaders may benefit, however, from the passive support of such followers, whose threat potential can be managed, but it will cost them time and energy to ensure positive productivity (Marshall, 2008; Schermerhorn, 1997).

In transactional environments where decisions are made by managers, such attitudes may have been welcome, but as the workplace transitioned to team environments where decision making was conducted by groups, passivity contributed to problems in the quality of decisions. This lack of efficacy was attributed to groupthink, where group members tend to follow a proposed course in the interest of appearing cooperative (Cline, 1990). Cline (1990) explained, "Together the studies suggest that groupthink groups 'attempt to maintain harmony at the expense of critical decision-making" (p. 122). Followers engaged in these groups focus on reaching consensus rather than solving problems.

Then there are the dysfunctional followers who are not concerned about the accomplishments of their peers, leaders, or organizations (Kellerman, 2008; Kelley, 2008). They are there for compensation, unmotivated, and content with the status quo. Their major advantage is that they are dependable as survival is their major objective. Such behavior is symptomatic of leadership failure or a self-focused organizational mission (Treister & Schultz, 1997). However, Treister and Schultz (1997) opined, "followership s not a term of weakness, but the condition that permits leadership to exist and gives it strength" (p. 9). Mature followers are self-confident, share the leadership vision, and promote the organizational mission (Kellerman, 2008; Kelley, 2008). These individuals engage in high leader–member exchange, where they "are able to fill the gaps in the leader's knowledge, experience, intelligence, and planning" (Treister & Schultz, 1997, p. 10). They become an extension of their leaders. Depending on their personalities and motives, they may also be a threat to their superiors. Kellerman (2008) classified such followers as activists and/or diehards, while Kelley (2008) considered them stars (Marshall, 2008).

Chaleff (2009) postulated that followers must enter five dimensions of courage to ensure leadership effectiveness. According to Chaleff's courageous followership model, they must assume responsibility, be willing to serve, challenge as necessary, participate in transformation, and take moral action (pp. 6–8). Followers who assume responsibility are those who acknowledge and embrace their organizational citizenship. They understand their position, assess their opportunities, and take appropriate actions. At the same time, they understand the importance of serving and are eager to take on additional responsibilities, even if someone else receives the credit. They can make tough decisions, support their leader's actions, and be assertive even in uncomfortable situations. "Courageous followers give voice to the discomfort they feel when the behaviors or policies of the leader or group conflict with their sense of what is right" (Chaleff, 2009, p. 7). They value organizational goals above group harmony. Most importantly, they are true to their moral compasses and unafraid to confront injustice. These behaviors typify the model of individuation exemplified by the Zelophehad women.

#### Discussion

In summary, the psycho-hermeneutic model of individuation presents one answer to the research question, What are the factors that contribute to the formation of exemplary followership? The daughters of Zelophehad, as described in Numbers 27:1-7, demonstrated the stages of individuation in taking an unusual and courageous step for their time. Individuation allows the reader to identify with the biblical characters' experiences as the story unfolds. By doing so, it lifts the characters from the pages as mere images and brings them into view as humans faced with choices like contemporary dilemmas. Looking at the story through this lens reveals that the women faced rejection by the male council, ostracism by their society, and, potentially, detachment from their community. However, because they were aware of their position, had faced their father's failures, and were willing to be separated from their community, they broke cultural norms to approach the public council and demand justice.

Their action required a higher level of psychological awareness and stability to forego societal norms and request their due inheritance. As such, they demonstrated the courageous follower model (see Figure 1) as they took the responsibility of standing for their father's inheritance, challenged leadership, and acted morally resulting in a change that served their community. Because of the daughters of Zelophehad, single Israelite women from that point on were eligible to receive an inheritance if their fathers had no sons. The standing of women was improved in the fledgling nation, which contributed to the nation's ability to flourish. Their action allowed the community to experience peace and prosperity as women gained a new level of security. In addition,

the common good was enhanced as leadership showed that it was open to change, enhancing the virtue of the collective society.

Figure 1

Chaleff's (2009) Courageous Followership as Demonstrated by the Daughters of Zelophehad



Though the action of the daughters of Zelophehads stands as a model for addressing injustice with calm and courage, I would err if I did not laud Moses for receiving the women and taking their request seriously. Had he been a man of a different character, this story may not have made it into the sacred text (except that a gracious God had designed it to be so). In his role, Moses is an example for leaders who care about those whom they lead. Such will demonstrate their concern by their behavior, including listening and acting (Chaleff, 2009; Upshur-Myles, 2007; Yukl, 2006). These are the individuals who empower their followers by expressing appreciation for their efforts, respecting their ideas, and keeping promises made to them. They follow up with employees on issues that are important to the individuals, which shows that they are able communicators. They are open and approachable, always willing to share knowledge with those whom they lead. When leaders behave in such ways, followers are not only empowered but they feel valued. The result is a more highly functional organization as those who follow become more engaged (Bass, 1990; Chaleff, 2009; Yukl, 2006).

# Limitations of the Study and Future Directions

Kille (2004) advised that psychoanalytic researchers must be careful not to read into the scriptures what is not there. Osborne (2006) explained that "as readers, we want to place ourselves in front of the text (and allow it to address us) rather than behind us (and force it to go where we want)" (p. 29). To do otherwise is to impose personal assumptions upon the text to fulfill expected meaning. To avoid such bias, the scholar advises that biblical interpreters present the story as relayed by the sacred text. Researchers then consider the period of the story, the culture, and the practices of the time. Then, the researcher may consider the story from the perspective of the reading. Fully recognizing the presence of personal imagination and assumptions, the researcher may use hermeneutical tools to clarify the perception of the inherent events and behaviors.

The behavior of the Zelophehad women easily aligned with the identified attributes (evidence) of individuation as postured by the du Toit et al. (2011) model. What the

story did not reveal was the catalyst of the individuation process. Individuation is considered a natural process that starts with a child's first demonstration of preference (Amsel, 2019). That process, however, is interrupted by parental discipline and direction. What is the catalyst that motivates the introspection that promotes self-discovery leading to self-awareness through the process of individuation? This matter provides an opportunity for further study in psychology.

The story also did not identify the sister who first experienced the separating level of awareness. Since the Bible presents Zelophehad's daughters as a unit, they have been studied as such. There is no way to determine who was the leader or if a less-individuated sister accompanied the group because of her familial attachment. Additionally, because the women could only be observed through this one episode, there was not enough information to identify other individuation behaviors. However, the identified attributes illustrate the application of individuation in the development of strong and courageous followers. Future studies may consider extending this study to build an extensive model of courageous followership that would further build on the du Toit et al. (2011) model.

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