

Notes on Aspects of Hag Ha-Shavu'ot and Megillat Ruth

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The dispute concerning the celebration of Yom Tov

The Talmud in *Massekhet Pesahim* (68b) and *Betzah* (15b) presents a debate between two *Tannaim* regarding the correct manner of celebrating Yom Tov.

R. Eliezer says: A person has no (absolute obligation) on a festival day. Rather, he may eat and drink or he may sit and study. R. Joshua says: Divide the day—half of it (should be devoted) to eating and drinking, and half of it (should be devoted) to the study hall.

רבי אליעזר אומר: אין לו לאדם ביום טוב אלא או אוכל ושותה או יושב ושונה רבי יהושע אומר חלקהו חציו לאכילה ושתיה וחציו לבית המדרש.

In both places, the *amora* R. Yohanan comments that both views were attempts to reconcile the conflicting deductions that arise from two biblical verses concerning Yom Tov.

*And R. Yohanan said: And they both expounded the same Scriptural text (in reaching their conclusions, as follows): One verse states, **there shall be an assembly to the L-rd, your God** (Deuteronomy 16:8), but one other verse states (there) **shall be an assembly for you** (Numbers 29:35). R. Eliezer holds (that the verses offer two options for observing Yom Tov—by devoting it) either exclusively to God or exclusively to yourselves. But R. Joshua holds (that the requirements in both verses must be fulfilled, as follows: Divide the day by devoting) half of it to God and half of it to yourselves.*

ואמר רבי יוחנן: ושניהם מקרא אחד דרשו, כתוב אחד אומר עצרת לה' אלקיך, וכתוב אחד אומר עצרת תהיה לכם. רבי אליעזר סבר: או כולו לה' או כולו לכם. ורבי יהושע סבר: חלקהו, חציו לה' וחציו לכם.

The Gemara in *Pesahim* (ad loc.) proceeds to cite the comment of the *amora* R. Elazar that even R. Eliezer, who held open the option of observing Yom Tov by refraining from eating and drinking, and instead spending the entire day in prayer and study, maintains that on Shavu'ot, some measure of *lakhem*, that is, eating and drinking, is mandated. At first blush this seems counterintuitive. One might have suggested that *davka* on Shavu'ot, the anniversary of the day that the Israelites received the Torah, one must spend all day in study and prayer and desist from eating and drinking! But before we address this point, we should examine the debate between R. Eliezer and R. Joshua more closely.

The contours of the debate between R. Eliezer and R. Joshua, as interpreted by R. Yohanan, are well known. However, it has generally gone unnoticed that there is something additionally striking about the two verses (one denoting that Yom Tov should be dedicated to God, the other that it should be devoted to human needs), in light of R. Elazar's restriction of the debate.¹ Both conflicting verses refer to the two specific *yamim tovim* that the Torah designates as *atzeret*; namely, the seventh day of Pesach (Deuteronomy 16:8) and the eighth day of Sukkot, that is, Shemini Atzeret (Numbers 29:35). The *amora* R. Elazar can be understood, consequently, as saying, "No matter how one resolves the tension regarding the *biblical* cases of *atzeret*, with respect to Shavu'ot, that is, regarding the day that Hazal designate as *atzeret*, all agree that one must designate time on that day for eating and drinking."

R. Elezar thus distinguishes between the laws on the biblical days called *atzeret* and the day that the Rabbis designate as *atzeret*. But although the Torah does *not* refer to Shavu'ot as *atzeret*, Hazal do. Why? This question leads us to the interpretation of Maran Ha-Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *zatzal*, on the matter.²

The Rav's interpretation of Hazal's use of the term *atzeret*

Megilat Ta'anit records the following:

*These are the days upon which one should not fast: on some of them one should (also) not deliver a eulogy. From Rosh Chodesh Nisan until the eighth of that month, during which the qorban Tamid was established firmly, one should not deliver a eulogy. From the eighth until the end of the holiday of Pesach (i.e., until the twenty-first of Nisan, during which time the holiday of Shavu'ot was settled), one should neither fast nor deliver a eulogy.*³

אילן יומיא דילא להתענאה
בהון ומקצתהון דילא למספד
בהון. מן ריש ירחא דניסן עד
תמניא ביה אתוקם תמידא
דילא למספד. מן תמניא ביה
ועד סוף מועדא אתותב חגא
דילא למספד ודילא להתענאה.

The *Tzadukim* maintained that the mitzvah of *u-sefartem lachem mi-mochorat ha-Shabbat* (Leviticus 23:15), which inaugurates the seven-week period of *sefirat ha-'omer*, and which is followed by *Hag Ha-Shavu'ot*, begins on the first *Sunday* (literally, "the morrow of the Shabbat") after the onset of Pesach. Our forefathers, the *Perushim*, on the other hand, upheld the traditional rabbinic position that, *mi-mochorat ha-Shabbat* does *not* refer to Sunday but to the day after Yom Tov, that is, the second day of Pesach, whichever day of the week it happens to fall on. In our rabbinic view, when the Torah *states* "the morrow of the Sabbath," it *means* "the morrow of Yom Tov," which is in this case the correct interpretation of the biblical term "Shabbat." Although we consider the position of the *Tzadukim* to be transparently erroneous, Hazal struggled for many years to combat their view. When they were finally victorious, they

¹ As noted by Rabbi David Shapiro, *Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on Pesach, Sefirat Ha-Omer and Shavu'ot* (Brookline, Mass. and Jerusalem, 2005), p. 195, n. 24. See note two below.

² I will be following the presentation of the Rav's approach found in Rabbi David Shapiro, "The Great Debate Between the *Tzadukim/Baitusim* and the *Perushim* concerning the Date of Shavu'ot," in Shapiro, *Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on Pesach, Sefirat Ha-Omer and Shavu'ot*, pp. 183-207. Indeed, in several places I shall be reproducing passages verbatim. Rabbi Shapiro's presentation was directly based upon a *shiur* that the Rav gave in 1972.

³ See now, Vered Naom, *Megillat Ta'anit* (Jerusalem, 2002) p. 53 and p. 57. The passage is quoted twice in the Talmud Bavli: *Ta'anit* 17b and *Menahot* 65a.

instituted an annual two-week celebration—from the eighth to the twenty-first of Nisan—to commemorate their victory, as *Megilat Ta'anit* records.

The Rav further noted that from a purely philological perspective, the *Tzadukim* had a persuasive argument. Beyond the fact that the simple sense of *shabbatot temimot* (Leviticus 23:15) suggests weeks that extend, as “normal” weeks do, from Sunday through Shabbat, the phrase *ve-asita Hag Shavu'ot* (Deuteronomy 16:10) also can lead one to the position of the *Tzadukim*. The word *shavu'a* denotes a conventional seven-day week, beginning on Sunday and ending on Shabbat. The simplest understanding of *Hag Ha-Shavu'ot* would be of a holiday that begins after seven full (Sunday-Shabbat) weeks have ended, and which is celebrated on a Sunday. Moreover, the simplest meaning of the term *mi-mochoroat ha-Shabbat* (Leviticus 23:15-16) also means the day following Shabbat, that is, Sunday.

Of course, the fundamental position of the *Perushim* was that the biblical term *mi-mochorat ha-Shabbat* means the day after Yom Tov. The Rav explained that conceptually, this means that the fundamental linkage is between Shavu'ot and Pesach. And this is why, he maintained, that Hazal in their various works changed the biblical name of *Hag Ha-Shavu'ot* to *Atzeret*. In the Torah (as mentioned above), the two times that this term is used, denote the last day of a Yom Tov, either the seventh day of Pesach or the eighth day of Sukkot. The Torah never uses it to designate the first day of a Yom Tov, since it means “an addendum to an earlier period.” Hence, by employing *Atzeret* to Shavu'ot, Hazal were polemicizing against the *Tzadukim*. They wished to emphasize that Shavu'ot is *not* free-floating, independent of Pesach. It is, rather, determined by Pesach, and it stands in relation to Pesach the same way that Shemini Atzeret stands in relation to Sukkot.⁴ Moreover, the only exceptions to this rule are the places where the Gemara (*Ta'anit* 17b, *Menahot* 65a) quotes the aforementioned passage from *Megilat Ta'anit*, which records the original debate between the sects. The Rav suggested that the term *shevuaya* (the Aramaic equivalent of Shavu'ot) is used there *davka* to emphasize that the term Shavu'ot is what misled the *Tzadukim*. Our victory over our opponents occurred when we convinced them that Deuteronomy 16:10 does *not* mean the holiday of the natural weeks, but the holiday seven weeks after Pesach.

The Rav further explained that there was a profound philosophical dimension to their debate. According to the *Tzadukim*, there was no intrinsic connection between Pesach and Shavu'ot. The former holiday celebrated our release from slavery; the latter was an agricultural festival. According to the *Perushim*, however, our release from slavery was only the first stage of our redemption. God's plan was to intervene in our political situation in order to implement his goal of presenting the Torah to us. The Exodus was only consummated with the giving of the Torah. Thus, the *Perushim* insisted that Shavu'ot was *not* a holiday separate from Pesach. Rather, it constituted what the ultimate objective of the Exodus was in the first place.⁵ One can say that physical emancipation led to the ultimate *telos* (purpose) of spiritual emancipation, through the Torah.

⁴ See Shapiro, *ibid.*, pp. 191-92.

⁵ Shapiro, *ibid.*, pp. 194-95.

Why *davka* on Shavu'ot one must celebrate Yom Tov with food and drink.

The Rav utilized the notion that the physical emancipation of Pesach is only a prelude to the spiritual *telos* of the emancipation, that is the receipt of the Torah that we celebrate on Shavu'ot, to explain the aforementioned position that even R. Eliezer insists that one celebrate on Shavu'ot through food and drink. This is because on Shavu'ot we are actually celebrating our liberation from slavery. The Rav put it as follows:

*The Ribbono shel Olam's purpose in releasing us from bondage was to give us the Torah. Shavu'ot, therefore, is the ultimate celebration of that which we celebrate on Pesach. We should rejoice over our physical release from slavery by expressing our freedom physically through food and drink. Shavu'ot is thus linked intimately with Pesach.*⁶

Rabbi David Shapiro, in a note in his presentation of the Rav's approach, points out that whereas this interpretation of the reason why we are commanded *davka* to eat and drink on Shavu'ot represents one approach, many others exist. Rashi (*Pesachim* 68b) explains as follows: We should celebrate with food and drink, as we normally celebrate any joyous occasion, to express our appreciation for the Torah. For his part, the Rav's great-grandfather (also named Rav Yosef Baer Soloveitchik), the author of the *Beit Ha-Levi*, in his commentary on the Torah (*Parashat Yitro*), points to the debate between Moses and the angels portrayed in the Talmud (*Shabbat* 88b-89a). Moshe Rabbeinu convinced them that the Torah appropriately belongs in our physical, mundane world, and not in the incorporeal world of the angels. This is because so many mitzvot are themselves of a physical nature. Therefore, we "highlight the strategic basis of Moshe's victory by celebrating physically, with food and drink," on the anniversary of the day that we received the Torah. Finally, R. Shlomo Yosef Zevin (in *La-Mo'ed*, Vol. 4 [Jerusalem, 1946], p. 7) explained as follows: the purpose of the Torah is to endow the mundane with spiritual value. We thus sanctify the acts of eating and drinking by dedicating these behaviors to the glorification of the Torah. Moreover, that is why the Torah identifies Shavu'ot with the harvest and calls it *Yom Ha-Bikkurim* (Numbers 28:26), emphasizing the implementation of the Torah's laws through mundane activities.⁷

Megillat Ruth and Shavu'ot

Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin, *zatzal*, in his book *Ha-Moad'im ba-Halakhah*, in the section regarding Shavu'ot, devotes a chapter to various aspects of Megillat Ruth, and explores the connection between Shavu'ot and Ruth. The source of the custom to read the biblical book of Ruth on Shavu'ot is first mentioned in *Massekhet Soferim*, a post-Talmudic work, which records two practices that are not followed today. One is to split the reading, reciting the first half of the book on the night after the first day of Shavu'ot and to complete it on the night after the last day. The other is to read the entire book on the Saturday night before the holiday commences.⁸ The

⁶ Shapiro, *ibid.*, p. 196.

⁷ Shapiro, *ibid.*, p. 196, n. 25.

⁸ R. Shlomo Yosef Zevin, *Ha-Moad'im Ba-Halakhah* (Jerusalem, 1980), p. 391, citing *Massekhet Soferim*, chapter 14 (ed. M. Higger [New York, 1937], p. 270).

Yalqut Shim'oni, a late Midrashic collection, cites this custom as well, writing that the reason why one reads Ruth on Shavu'ot is to emphasize that Torah can only be acquired through affliction and poverty.⁹ The custom to read Ruth on Shavu'ot is cited by the Ramoh (R. Moshe Isserles, 1525-1572) to *Shulhan Aruch Orach Chayim* 490:9, but it is unclear what exactly he means.¹⁰ Although he could be read as stating that a chazan recites the text in front of a congregation, he could also be understood as saying that it is customary that everyone reads the *megillah* individually (perhaps not even necessarily in *shul!*) In his responsum,¹¹ Ramoh writes that since the contemporary custom was only to read Eichah (on the ninth of Av) and Megillat Esther (on Purim) *be-tzibbur*, in a congregational setting, but the custom is to read Song of Songs (on Pesach), Ruth (on Shavu'ot) and Ecclesiastes (on Sukkot) by oneself, one should not recite the blessing *'al miqra Megillah* on the recitation of the latter three scrolls. The blessings, in his view, were only enacted in cases of public reading, for the honor of the congregation.¹²

Writing in the mid-20th century, Rav Zevin presented four contemporary customs. (A) Jews of *Edot Ha-Mizrach* will not recite Megillat Ruth at all in shul during Shavu'ot *davening*. (This is, he adds, is also the custom of the Hasidim of Chabad, Kotzk, Ger and others.) (B) Most Hasidim from Vohloniya and Galicia will read Megillat Ruth to themselves individually from a Chumash, in Israel on the single day of Shavu'ot, and outside the Land of Israel on the second day of Shavu'ot. (C) Ashkenazim (that is, *Mitnaggedim* or *Perushim*), will read Megillat Ruth *be-tzibbur* just as they read the Torah every Shabbat and Megillat Esther on Purim. If a congregation possesses a scroll of Ruth written on parchment that fulfills all the requisite requirements for a scroll of *kitvei ha-kodesh*, the chazan will read from it. If no kosher scroll can be found, one will read the *megillah* from a Chumash. (D) *Perushim* in *Eretz Yisrael* will read Megillat Ruth from a kosher scroll, and will recite the blessing of *'al miqrah megillah* (and the blessing of *She-hehiyanu* as well). In this custom, the last group is following the lead of the Vilna Gaon.¹³ As Rav Zevin notes, the source of the Vilna Gaon's view was not the aforementioned passage in *Massekhet Soferim* concerning Megillat Ruth, but a previous passage that was not connected to Shavu'ot at all.¹⁴ Thus, a paradoxical situation emerges. *Poskim* do *not* cite *Massekhet Soferim* as the source to read the *megillah* itself on Shavu'ot (due to the numerous discrepancies between the custom as presented in *Massekhet Soferim* and our practice), but *do* cite it for the custom of making a blessing of *'al miqrah megillah* on Ruth when we do recite it.

Writing in the 14th century, R. David Abudraham (fl. 1340) presented two further connections between Shavu'ot and Ruth which can serve as reasons why the custom to read Ruth on Shavu'ot developed in the first place. First, the events depicted in the Book of Ruth took place during the harvest season, and the holiday of Shavu'ot also takes place during that time of the

⁹ Zevin, *ibid.*, citing *Yalqut Shim'oni* Ruth, sec. 596.

¹⁰ *Shulhan Aruch Orach Chayyim*, sec 490, *hagah* to sec. 9. The *Mishnah Berurah*, sec. 17 (ad loc.), cites the *Yalqut Shim'oni* cited above, as well as the custom to read the *megillah* on the second day of Shavu'ot.

¹¹ *Teshuvot Ha-Ramoh*, # 35.

¹² In his *hagahot* on *Shulhan Aruch Orach Chaim* 490, Ramoh also mentions that one should not recite the *berachah* of *'al miqrah ketuvim* either.

¹³ Zevin, *ibid.*, p. 392.

¹⁴ Zevin, *ibid.* See Michael Higger (ed.), *Massekhet Soferim* (New York, 1937), pp. 251-52.

year. Second, Shavu'ot is when our forefathers received the Torah and entered the covenant at Sinai through the conversion process, just as Ruth converted to Judaism.

Rav Mordecai Jaffe (1530-1612), author of the work known as the *Levush*, adds another insight: In Leviticus 23, the Torah states the law to leave a part of the produce of the field for the poor person and the convert, immediately after stating the law of the two loaves that are brought in the Temple on Shavu'ot. Megillat Ruth records how Boaz magnificently fulfilled this law with respect to Ruth, who was both a convert and a poverty-stricken person, letting her glean the grain freely from his fields. To highlight this, we recite the book of Ruth on Shavu'ot. Rav Alexander Sender Schor (d. 1737), the author of the works *Tevu'ot Shor* and *Bekhor Shor*, adds yet another perspective. The Talmud Yerushalmi (*Hagigah* 2:3, and see *Tosafot* to *Hagigah* 14a) records a tradition that King David, the great-grandson of Ruth, died on Shavu'ot. As another tradition teaches that God rewards righteous people by giving them a lifespan of full years in which the day of their death is also the day of their birth, we can conclude that King David was also born on Shavu'ot. Hence, when we read Ruth on Shavu'ot, we proclaim that this is the birthday of King David, the ultimate product of the union of Boaz and Ruth.¹⁵

Ruth, King David, and the Integration of Positive Masculine and Feminine Influences

In Midrash *Ruth Rabbah* it is written:

*R. Ze'ira said: this scroll (of Ruth) tells us nothing either of cleanliness or of uncleanness, either of prohibition or permission. For what purpose then was it written? To teach how great the reward of those is who do deeds of kindness.*¹⁶

אמר ר' זעירא מגלה זו אין בה לא טומאה
ולא טהרה ולא איסור ולא היתר ולמה
נכתבה ללמדך כמה שכר טוב לגומלי
חסדים.

Perhaps one can interpret this Midrash not just regarding the “macro” level of the Book of Ruth, but on the “micro” level of individual verses as well. It is this spirit that the following ruminations and musings are offered.

The conclusion of the Book of Ruth details the genealogy of King David. Immediately before these last verses (Ruth 4:11-12), however, two striking verses are recorded:

All the people at the gate and the elders answered, “[We are] witnesses. May the L-rd make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel. Prosper in Ephrathah and perpetuate your name in Bethlehem! And may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah—through the offspring which the L-rd will give you by this young woman.”

ויאמרו כל העם אשר בשער, והזקנים--
עדים; יתן ה' את-האשה הבאה אל-ביתה,
כרחל וכלאה אשר בנו שתיהם את-בית
ישׂראל, ועשה-חיל באפרתה, וקרא-שם
בבית לחם. ויהי ביתה כבית פְּרָז, אשר-
לדה תמר ליהודה--מן-הגרע, אשר יתן ה'
לה, מן-הנצרה, הזאת.

¹⁵ The insights of Abudraham, the *Levush* and the *Tevu'ot Shor* are all cited in Zevin, *ibid.*, p. 393.

¹⁶ *Midrash Rabbah: Ruth*, translated by Rabbi Dr. L. Rabinowitz (London, 1939), Chapter II, sec. 14, p. 35. See also R. Zevin, *Ha-Moadim Ba-Halakhah*, p. 394, quoting *Yalqut Shim'oni*, sec. 601.

Why, in the first verse, is Rachel mentioned before Leah? Rashi (ad loc.) writes that although Boaz, as well as all the people gathered to witness his marriage to Ruth, stemmed from the tribe of Judah, the son of Jacob's wife Leah, with this declaration they admitted that the primary wife of Jacob was indeed Rachel.

R. Dovid Cohen, in his work *Ohel David* on Ruth,¹⁷ quotes a remarkable statement from the Italian kabbalist R. Menachem Azariah of Fano (1548-1620). He had expressed wonderment at the actions of Jonathan, the son of Saul, the first King of Israel. How could he (I Samuel, chapter 18ff.) so easily submit himself to David, and not on the contrary, act as an adversary and further the claims of his father King Saul? R. Menachem Azariah answers that Jonathan inherited this ability of self-renunciation from his maternal ancestor Rachel.¹⁸ Hazal poignantly describe how Rachel knew that Laban was going to trick Jacob and substitute her sister for her on the wedding night. But she did not want to embarrass her sister. So she passed on to her sister the secret signs that she and Jacob had previously agreed upon to ensure that Laban could not trick them.¹⁹ In other words, she magnificently submitted to her sister. Thus, in spite of the differences between Rachel and Leah, there was an overarching unity of purpose between them, and Rachel willingly submitted to her sister to help achieve this goal. Similarly, Rachel's descendant Jonathan submitted to David, ensuring the inauguration of David as the King of Israel, fulfilling the command of Jacob (Genesis 49:10), that *the scepter shall not depart from Judah*, i.e., that *de jure*, the King of Israel must come from the tribe of Judah, at *his own personal cost*. Thus, it was Rachel, with magnificent sacrificial action, who ensured the future unity of the Jewish people. Hence, she is mentioned first before Leah.

In the second verse, the crowd at Bethlehem mentions Tamar. Why is she mentioned? On this point, R. Dovid Cohen quotes Rabbenu Bahya ben Asher's comment on Exodus 19:3:

And Moses went up to God. The L-rd called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel."

ומִשֶׁה עָלָה, אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים; וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהֵי ה', מִן-
הַהָר לֵאמֹר, כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב, וְתִגִּיד
לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Traditionally, the phrase "house of Jacob" was understood as referring to the women, and "children of Israel" to the men. Both aspects, apparently, are necessary, supplementing and complementing each other.

R. Bahya writes that although halakhically, within the Jewish people, proper Jewish genealogy (with respect to designation as a Kohen, Levi, etc.) stems exclusively from one's father's side, with respect to the personal qualities of character, the *middot* that are required for appropriate exercise of kingship, the primary determinant is the mother. Hence, Tamar and Judah are

¹⁷ *Ohel David* (Brooklyn, 2003), p. 104.

¹⁸ The manner in which portrayal of the matriarch Rachel seems to change through various biblical books is described in Yael Shemesh, "The Character of Rachel: From a Beloved Wife to the Mother of the Nation," in Shmuel Vargon, et al (eds.), *Studies in Bible and Exegesis, Vol. IX* (Presented to Moshe Garsiel) (Ramat-Gan, 2009), pp. 81-110. Shemesh cites the portrayal of Rachel in the Book of Ruth on pp. 106-07.

¹⁹ *Megillah* 13b (and parallels).

mentioned, as the parents of Perez, the ancestor of Boaz, who together with Ruth will now be the great-grandparents of King David, the first and paradigmatic king of Israel.²⁰

The idea that one of the themes of the book of Ruth is to ensure the expression of full masculine and feminine characteristics in the union of Boaz and Ruth (and consequently, in their progeny) was also noticed by an author with a radically different perspective than ours.²¹ Yehezkel Kluger, in his book *A Psychological Interpretation of Ruth* (Einseideln, Switzerland, 1999), writes that originally, Elimelech's family, consisting of himself, Naomi, Mahlon and Khilyon, was too "overloaded" on the masculine side. On the other hand, the nation of Moab had a history of family relationships being too "overloaded" on the feminine side (e.g., Lot and his daughters). Ruth comes from this tradition of Moab. Both Ruth, from her side, and the family of Elimelech, on the other, had lacked the balanced masculine/feminine totality. The meeting of Ruth and Boaz was the path to achieve redemption of wholeness.

Boaz blessed Ruth with the following prayer (Ruth 2:12):

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| <i>May the L-rd reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from the L-rd, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge.</i> | יְשַׁלֵּם ה', פְּעֻלָּתְךָ; וְתַהֲרִי מִשְׁכַּרְתְּךָ שְׂלֵמָה, מֵעַם ה' אֱלֹהֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲשֶׁר-בָּאת, לְחַסוֹת תַּחַת-כַּנְּפוֹי. |
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This blessing might not just express a request for a religious reward from God, but for full personal integration and wholeness as well. And indeed, the ultimate fruitful union of Boaz and Ruth expressed the reparation of the previously unbalanced situations that both of them were heir to. Their union was blessed by God, and the wholesome psychological and religious integration of their lives led to the birth of King David.

Rav Chaim Ya'akov Goldvicht, *zatzal*, the former rosh yeshiva of Kerem Bi-Yavneh, published an article almost 30 years ago entitled "Malkhut Beit David," in which he pulled various strands within Hazal together to illuminate, among other issues, why King David "had" to come (if only through Ruth) from Moab.²² He quoted the *Shem mi-Shmuel's* quotation of his grandfather the Rebbe of Kotzk, to the effect that the *ga'avah* (haughtiness) that characterized Moab was a necessary component of a successful kingship. Whereas King Saul was *too* modest, and was therefore unable to retain kingship, David possessed those elements of pride, strength, self-confidence and fortitude, which if rightfully used, that is, for the service of God, are indeed necessary elements of the personality of a successful ruler. R. Goldvicht also quoted, among other sources, the Talmudic passage²³ that stated that the reason God did not let Moses fight the children of Moab and Ammon was because in the future, two

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²¹ His perspective was that of a follower of the theories of Carl Gustav Jung. Yehezkel Kluger's work on Ruth was written as part of the requirements of the first graduating class of the Jung Institute in Zurich, as he investigated and interpreted the biblical book in light of Jungian psychology.

Of course, as *frum* Jews we must reject the aspects of his book that are not in agreement with our *masorah* and beliefs. I only cite this book *le-sabber et ha-ozen*, as a source that can add a fortifying perspective to themes that can also be found, here and there, in various statements of our Sages through the centuries.

²² R. Chaim Ya'akov Goldvicht, "Malkhut Beit David," in Moshe Sherman and Jeffrey Woolf (eds.), *Sepher Kavod Ha-Rav* (New York, 1984), pp. 96-103.

²³ *Bava Qamma* 38a.

descendants of these nations, i.e., Ruth from Moab and Na'amah from Ammon, will join the Jewish people. Following this logic, it was *davka* Ruth's assertiveness, self-confidence and daring (the "Moab" in her) that was a necessary prerequisite of the ancestry of King David.

Now, this approach fits nicely with one of two possible interpretations of the mention of Tamar in the aforementioned verse. Does one stress Tamar's daring, assertiveness, etc., in approaching Judah (Genesis 38:14ff.)? Is Tamar to be seen, then, as a precursor of Ruth, who was similarly daring in approaching Boaz? Is that the aspect of Tamar that is relevant here? The approach that emphasizes the unusual aspects of Judah's initial encounter with Tamar is well known, but there is another aspect of the story of Tamar: her absolute refusal to embarrass Judah (Genesis 38:25ff). Tamar was willing to die rather than embarrass Judah.²⁴ In other words, adopting terminology of the Rav, *zatzal*, she engaged in sacrificial, heroic action. This, of course, is the same type of action that Rachel engaged in when she gave Jacob's secret signs over to her sister Leah, and would not participate in the humiliation of her sister. The point of quoting Tamar, then, might be to reinforce the same point that is made by quoting Rachel.

Understanding the aforementioned verses concerning Rachel and Tamar in this fashion helps us, I think, provide a more balanced approach to understanding the qualities of Ruth. It is certainly true that Hazal praise Ruth's assertiveness in coming to Boaz, and we have already mentioned Rav Goldvicht's article concerning Ruth, Moab, and the source of this necessary assertiveness (whose source he locates in Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve, who was not merely a replacement for Abel but a replacement for Cain as well, for he possessed the element of fortitude that Abel did not!). But this is not the entire picture! Even granting that (*'al pi ruah ha-qodesh*) Ruth did the right thing in assertively going to Boaz in the middle of the night, as the *megillah* details, it is simply inconceivable that the *megillah* is merely teaching us an unsophisticated praise of assertiveness *per se*. *Megillat Ruth* teaches us the elements of a properly wholesome personality from a religious perspective, and it simply cannot mean that "the most aggressive person wins!" But Ruth (and Boaz!) are also people who agree to submit to the demands of the halakhah, and the ability to withdraw, to engage in sacrificial/heroic action. These qualities are certainly part of the spiritual makeup of a Jew. After all, there are three commandments wherein one must die rather than violate. An aggressive attitude *per se* toward the demands of life is *not* the ultimate expression of what it means to live as a Jew.

I think that in light of the aforementioned lessons that can be gleaned from the citation of the matriarchs Rachel and Tamar at the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, and more specifically the acts of renunciation that both of them performed, a more properly nuanced understanding can now be absorbed.²⁵ The right measure of assertiveness and sacrificial action is what God demands of a Jew. Similarly, the right balance of masculinity and femininity is what God wants from the appropriate Jewish family. It is this wholeness, both in our individual and familial (and communal) Jewish lives, which we strive for, as we serve God through lives of Torah and mitzvot.

²⁴ See *Sotah* 10b, "Better for a man to cast himself into a fiery furnace rather than shame his fellow in public. Whence is this? From Tamar." See Tosafot (ad loc.) s.v. "Noah lo la'adam."

²⁵ Actually, Rav Goldvicht himself (ibid., pp. 98-99) quotes the aspect of submission in Ruth's behavior toward her mother-in-law Naomi.