

## Naomi's Rejection

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### Introduction

#### 1. Outline of Chapter 1

- 1:1-2 The family moves to Moav
- 1:3-5 Losing three men, Gaining two women
- 1:6-13 Naomi tries to convince Ruth and Orpah to remain in Moav
- 1:14-18 Orpah leaves, but Ruth stays with Naomi
- 1:19-22 Naomi and Ruth return to Beit Lechem

#### 2. Prof. Phyllis Trible, *Two Women in a Man's World: A Reading of the Book of Ruth*, Soundings 59:3 (1976)

A man's world tells a woman's story. With consummate artistry, the book of Ruth presents the aged Naomi and the youthful Ruth as they struggle for survival in a patriarchal environment. These women bear their own burdens. They know hardship, danger, insecurity, and death. No G-d promises them blessing; no man rushes to their rescue. They themselves risk bold decisions and shocking acts to work out their own salvation in the midst of the alien, the hostile and the unknown... One female has chosen another female in a world whose life depends on men. There is no more radical decision in all the memories of Israel.

#### 3. Danger in the fields 2:9, 2:15, 2:16, 2:22

#### 4. Malbim to Ruth 2:2

ואמרה "ואלקטה בשבלים" ר"ל שלא תקח רק לקט שאין העניים מקפידים ע"ז, שיש שדות הרבה וכ"א מלקט בשדה מיוחד, משא"כ פאה שכל אחד חוטף מחברו, שהדין הוא אם צ"ט אומרים לחלק וא' אומר לבזו, שומעים למי שאומר לבזו (משנה פאה ד:א), וא"כ יבזו העניים בזרוע כחם ואם תרצה לבזו יפגעו בה מרי נפש. וגם בהלקט אמרה "אחר אשר אמצא חן בעיניו", שאם אראה בעל השדה מביט עלי בעין רעה לא אלקט שם, עד שאראה שמצאתי חן ושלא יגיע לי בזיון מהקוצרים או יתר העניים:

And she said "I will collect (leket) among the stalks" – meaning, she would only take leket, for which the needy are not as demanding, for there are many fields and each one collects in a separate field. As opposed to peah, where each grabs from the other, for the law is that if 99 [paupers] say to [have the owner] distribute it and one says to have the paupers take, we listen to the one who says to take (Mishnah Peah 4:1). If so, the paupers would take by force, and if she wanted to take then those of bitter spirit would harm her. Also regarding leket, she said, "after the one in whose eyes I find favour," that if I see that the owner of the field looks at me with a stingy eye, I will not collect there, until I see that I have found favour and I will not suffer shame from the harvesters or the other paupers.

#### 5. Mishnah Peah 4:3

פיאה אין קוצרין אותה במגלות ואין עוקרין אותה בקרדומות, כדי שלא יכו איש את רעהו.

Peah may not be collected with scythes and uprooted with sickles, lest people strike each other.

#### 6. Dr. Yael Ziegler, *מדוע נכתבה מגילה זו*, pg. 2

...מטרת מגילת רות היא להצדיק את טהרת היוחסין של דוד, והיא עושה זאת באמצעות שרטוט האופן שבו רות, האישה המואבייה בסיפור, הינה מופת לחסד, ועוסקת בנתינה עקבית וחסרת אנוכיות לאחרים... נכון שהביטול העצמי של רות אינו דבר שהיהדות דורשת מכל יהודי, אך הוא הכרח מוחלט כשמדובר במנהיגינו. לא זו בלבד שאנו מצפים לכך ממנהיגינו, זהו גם תנאי מקדים לכינון מלוכה. בלי רות ליד ההגה, בלי מישהו שמסוגל לתת באופן מוחלט ובלתי אנוכי לאחר, המלוכה אינה הבטחה או חזון של שפע, אלא איום מסוכן, עתיד מעורר חרדה, מתכון לפריצות, שהיתות ועריצות.

...The goal of Megillat Rut is to justify the purity of David's lineage, accomplishing this by detailing the way that Ruth, the Moabite woman of this story, exemplified chesed, and involved herself in consistent and selfless giving to others... It is correct that Ruth's self-nullification is not something Judaism demands of every Jew, but it is a clear requirement when speaking of our leader. Not only do we expect this from our leader, but it is a prerequisite for establishment of the monarchy. Without Ruth at the helm, without someone who is equipped to give in a clear and selfless way to others, the monarchy is not a promise or vision of plenty, but a dangerous threat, a terrifying future, a recipe for lawlessness, corruption and tyranny.

## The Basic Story

7. Ruth 1:6-18 (tr. JPS 1985 c/o sefaria.org)

She started out with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab; for in the country of Moab she had heard that the Lord had taken note of His people and given them food. Accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living; and they set out on the road back to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Turn back, each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me! May the Lord grant that each of you find security in the house of a husband!" And she kissed them farewell. They broke into weeping

and said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." But Naomi replied, "Turn back, my daughters! Why should you go with me? Have I any more sons in my body who might be husbands for you? Turn back, my daughters, for I am too old to be married. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I were married tonight and I also bore sons, should you wait for them to grow up? Should you on their account debar yourselves from marriage? Oh no, my daughters! My lot is far more bitter than yours, for the hand of the Lord has struck out against me."

They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung to her. So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Go follow your sister-in-law." But Ruth replied, "Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your Gd my Gd. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the Lord do to me if anything but death parts me from you."

When [Naomi] saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her

## Approach 1: Blame

8. Zohar Chadash, Ruth pg. 37a

"כי צר לי מאד מכם." "עליכם' מבעי ליה, כמד"א [ש"ב א] "צר לי עליך!" מאי 'מכם'? א"ר קרוניא אמר רב בזנא: "עאקו בלבאי מכם, דאתון גרמתון לבניי דימותו," כמאן דמתרעם מאחרא:

"For it is very painful [*sic*] for me, from you" – It should say "upon you," like Shemuel II 1, "It is painful for me, upon you"! What is the meaning of "from you"? Rabbi Kerunya cited Rav Bizna: "There is pain in my heart from you, for you caused my sons to die," as one who complains about another.

9. Midrash, Ruth Zuta 1:8

מפני מה היתה מחזרת אותן? כדי שלא תתבייש בהן...

Why did she send them back? So that she would not be embarrassed by them...

10. Dr. Yael Ziegler, על חמות וכלות

האפשרות כי נעמי באמת ובתמים לא רצתה שכלותיה ישובו עמה נתמכת על ידי תגובתה של נעמי להצהרת הנאמנות של רות, ממנה עולה כי היא תישאר עם חמותה בכל מחיר. נעמי לא מחבבת את רות, והיא לא מציעה מילים של חסד או של תמיכה. למעשה, היא נותרת דוממת לאור הצהרת הנאמנות הדרמטית של רות. הפסוק מציין "ותחדל לדבר אליה", השורש חד"ל מצביע על פעולה מכוונת מצדה של נעמי, הפסקה של התקשורת.

The possibility that Naomi really and truly did not want her daughters-in-law to return with her is supported by Naomi's reply to Ruth's declaration of loyalty, which demonstrated that she would remain with her mother-in-law at any price. Naomi did not hug Ruth, and she did not put forth words of chesed or support. She was actually silent in the face of Ruth's dramatic declaration of loyalty. The text points out, "And she ceased [*vatechda*] speaking to her," and the root *chet-daled-lamed* refers to an intentional action from Naomi, cutting off communication.

## Approach 2: Concern for their physical welfare

11. Devarim 23:4-5

Amonite and Moabite shall not enter the congregation of Gd; even the tenth generation of theirs shall not enter the congregation of G-d, ever, for they did not greet you with bread and water when you were leaving Egypt, and for they hired Bilam son of Be'or against you...

## 12. Malbim to Ruth 1:10-11

אי - גלו דעתן שאין הולכין אתה ללוותה עד ארץ יהודה ולשוב משם לארץ מואב, "כי אתך נשוב לעמך" כי דעתנו להשאר בין בני עמך, ועדיין לא אמרה "לאלקיך" דהיינו להתגייר רק "לעמך" ר"ל לגור בין בני עמך.  
אי-א - ע"ז אמרה נעמי להן עצתה "שובנה בנותי למה תלכנה עמי." ר"ל הלא בני עמי לא יתחתנו עמכם, ואם תקוו שאני אתחתן עמכם אחר שכבר הייתן כלותי, "העוד לי בנים במעי"...

1:10 – They revealed that their intent was not to go with her to escort her to Judea and then return to Moav, “for we shall return with you to your nation,” we intend to remain among your nation. She [*sic* – should be “They”] did not say “to your Gd” yet, meaning to convert, but only “to your nation”, meaning to live among your nation.

1:11 – To this Naomi replied with advice, “Go back, my daughters, why would you go with me.” Meaning: My nation will not marry you, and if you hope that I will marry [sons] to you since you have already been my daughters-in-law, “Do I still have sons in my innards”...

## 13. Midrash, Ruth Rabbah 2:17

"מר לי מאד מכם" – בשבילכם, כי יצאה בי ובבני ובבעלי יד ד'.

"It is very bitter to me, from you" – for you, for the hand of Gd came out against me, my sons, and my husband.

### Approach 3: Concern for their spiritual welfare

## 14. Talmud, Yevamot 47b

"ואין מרבים עליו ואין מדקדקים עליו" - אמר רבי אלעזר: מאי קראה? דכתיב "ותרא כי מתאמצת היא ללכת אתה, ותחדל לדבר אליה."  
"And we do not heap upon him and we are not precise with him" – Rabbi Elazar said: What is the textual basis for this? It says, “And she saw that [Ruth] was persisting in going with her, and she stopped speaking to her.”

## 15. Midrash, Ruth Rabbah 2:16

ר' שמואל בר נחמני בש"ר יודן בר' חנינא בשלש מקומות כתיב כאן שבנה שבנה כנגד ג' פעמים שדוחין את הגר ואם הטריה יותר מכאן מקבלין אותו

Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachmeni cited Rabbi Yudin b"Rabbi Chanina: It says “Go back” three times here, parallel to the three times we push away a convert. If they push further than this, we accept them.

## 16. Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Minchat Shlomo 1:35:3

נלענ"ד שכל המסייעים לגירות כזו, אף אם הם טועים לחשוב שהם גרים גמורים, אפי"ה גם לשטתם המגיירים אותם עוברים בלאו של לפני עור וגו'

It appears, in my humble opinion, that all who help such a conversion, even if they mistakenly believe that these are full converts, still, even according to those who convert them, the judges violate *lifnei iver*...

## 17. Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook, Daat Kohen 154

ולא עוד אלא שהמקבלים אותם הרי הם עוברים על לפני עור ממנ"פ. דאם נאמר שאין גירותם גירות גם בדיעבד, הרי הם מכשילים את הרבים במה שמחזיקים נכרים בחזקת ישראל... ואם באמת הם גרים, ובדיעבד מתחייבים בכה"ת כולה, הרי הם מכשילים אותם בזה שמחייבין אותם בעונשין של איסורי תורה שעוברים עליהם...

Further, those who accept them violate *lifnei iver* no matter what. If we would say that their conversion is invalid even *ex post facto*, then they cause the masses to stumble by considering non-Jews to be Jews... And if they truly are converts, they are obligated in the entire Torah, and [the judges] are making them stumble in this, making them liable for violation of biblical prohibitions...

### A Lesson in Jewish-Non-Jewish Relations

## 18. Malbim to Ruth 2:21

באמת הוא אמר לה "וכה תדבקין עם נערוטי", רק באשר היא היתה מואביה ושם אין מתרחקים מן הנערים לא הבינה לדייק בדבריו וחשבה שכונתו שתדבק עם אנשיו, שהנערים היו עיקר אצלה שחשבה שאחד מהם ישא אותה. וע"ז קראה "המואביה" כי בת ישראל היתה מבינה...  
In truth, he said to her, “Here shall you adhere with my *ne’arot*,” but since she was a Moabite, and there the women did not distance themselves from the *ne’arim*, she did not understand the precision of his words, and she thought he meant to adhere to his men. The *ne’arim* were the main element for her, thinking that one of them might marry her. Therefore it called her “the Moabite” [in 2:21], for an Israelite girl would have understood...

19. Talmud, Sotah 42b

דרש רבא: בשכר ארבע דמעוּת שהורידה ערפה על חמותה, זכתה ויצאו ממנה ארבעה גבורים, שנאמר "ותשאנה קולן ותבכינה עוד."  
Rava taught: As a reward for the four tears Orpah cried for her mother-in-law, she merited and four warriors came from her, as it says, "And they raised their voices and they cried further."