

Ruth Chapter III: Seduction or Kindness?

וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ נָעֲמִי חַמּוּתָהּ בְּתִי הֲלֹא אֶבְקֶשׁ לָךְ מְנוּחַ אֲשֶׁר יִיטֵב לָךְ

Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, “Daughter, I must seek rest for you, where you may be happy.

How is Naomi functioning here? Who started the last chapter? This chapter? What did Naomi say in the past about rest? “Let each one find rest, each one with their husband”. So what is she talking about here? Who is this for? Is it really? What is the crisis now? Who is the hero? About who’s problem is this book? Who is the greatest hero in this book?

וְעַתָּה הֲלֹא בַעַז מְדַעַתְנוּ אֲשֶׁר הֵיית אֶת־נַעֲרוֹתַי הַנְּהִיחַ וְאֵזְרָה אֶת־גֶּרְן הַשְּׁעָרִים הַלְּיָלָה׃

Now there is our kinsman Boaz, whose girls you were close to. He will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor tonight.

Why does Naomi reiterate the point about how Ruth was with the girls? What is she getting at? If he is winnowing, what is the urgency of it?

וְרַחֲצֵת | וְסִכָּת וְשִׁמְתָּ שְׂמִלְתֵּךְ [שְׂמִלְתֵּךְ] עָלֶיךָ וִירַדְתִּי [וִירַדְתִּי] הַגֶּרְן אֶל־תְּדַעֵי לְאִישׁ עַד כִּלְתּוֹ לְאָכַל וְלִשְׂתּוֹת׃

So bathe, anoint yourself, dress up, and (I will: this is not read) go down to the threshing floor. But do not disclose yourself to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.

Is she suggesting seduction? Why not just ask him to take of them, redeem the field? Why is it written but not read that Naomi will go to the floor? Why should she wait till he is done eating and drinking? Why has Boaz not made a first move? Is Boaz a villain?

Does it remind you of this?

And the older one said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to consort with us in the way of all the world.

Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father."

That night they made their father drink wine, and the older one went in and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose.

וַיְהִי בַשָּׁכֶב וַיִּדְעַתְּ אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב־שָׁם וּבָאת וּגְלִית מִרְגְּלֹתַי
וּשְׁכַבְתִּי [וּשְׁכַבְתִּי] וְהוּא יִגִּיד לְךָ אֶת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂין:

When he lies down, know the place where he lies down, and come and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what you are to do.”

How many words in this sentence are suggestive? Who will take the lead? What does she expect him to do? Remember last week, whom did you do with?

וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-תֹּאמְרֵי [אֵלַי] אֶעֱשֶׂה:

She replied, “I will do everything you tell (me).”

How is this typical of Ruth? Why does the written text not say that it was said to her? Whom is she doing it for?

וַתֵּרֶד הַגֶּרֶן וַתַּעַשׂ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-צִוְתָהּ חֲמוּתָהּ:

She went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her.

Is she anxious to do so?

וַיֹּאכַל בֶּעֶז וַיִּשְׁתֶּ וַיֵּיטֵב לְבָבוֹ וַיֵּבֵא לְשֹׁכֵב בְּקִצָּה הָעֵרְמָה וַתֵּבֵא בִלְט וַתִּגַּל מִרְגְּלֹתָיו וַתִּשְׁכַּב:

Boaz ate and drank, and in a cheerful mood went to lie down beside the grain pile. Then she went over stealthily and uncovered his feet and lay down.

Why is he so happy? He is a very physical mood. Why so? Is he about to be more spiritual or not? How suggestive is where she lies?

וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה וַיִּחַרְדַּ הָאִישׁ וַיִּלְפַּת וַהֲנִה אִשָּׁה שֹׁכֶבֶת מִרְגְּלֹתָיו:

In the middle of the night, the man gave a start and pulled back—there was a woman lying at his feet!

Was he startled by the cold or by her? How is the language suggestive of another occasion?

וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־אַתְּ וְתֹאמְרִי אֲנִי רוֹת אֲמָתְךָ וּפְרִשְׁתְּ כְנָפֶיךָ עַל־אֲמָתְךָ כִּי גֹאֵל אֶתְּהָ:

“Who are you?” he asked. And she replied, “I am your handmaid Ruth. Spread your robe over your handmaid, for you are a redeeming kinsman.”

According to the plan, what was she supposed to do now? Instead which conversation does she bring up?

May G-d pay you back for all that you have done, G-d under whose wings you have come..

Is this a romantic gesture or a practical one? A spiritual one?

He asks who are you. Why is this significant? Would all men ask this question in this situation? How does this fit his character?

He is a redeemer. So is she demanding something?

וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ לַיהוָה בְּתִי הַיְטִבְתְּ חֲסֹדְךָ הָאַחֲרוֹן מִן־הָרִאשׁוֹן
לְבַלְתִּי־לִי כֵת אַחֲרֵי הַבְּחוּרִים אִם־דָּל וְאִם־עָשִׁיר:

He exclaimed, “Be blessed of the LORD, daughter! Your latest deed of loyalty is greater than the first, in that you have not turned to younger men, whether poor or rich.

Why is turning to him a kindness? Who are the kind ones in this book? How did kindness revive people in this book? Did Ruth want to go after the boys? Whose idea is this? How has he shifted the conversation?

וְעַתָּה בְּתִי אֶל־תִּירָאִי כֹל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמְרִי אֶעֱשֶׂה־לָּךְ כִּי יוֹדְעֵי כָל־שַׁעַר
עִמִּי כִי אִשָּׁת חַיִּל אַתְּ:

And now, daughter, have no fear. I will do in your behalf whatever you ask, for all the elders of my town know what a fine woman you are.

Humpf! If she is proposing, why is he deflecting? What sort of encounter is this? Is this what Naomi envisioned? How is she like Boaz? What is an eshet chayil and how does she qualify? Everyone knows? Have things

changed? Who brought about that change? Is this about physical love?

וְעַתָּה כִּי אֲמַנְנָם כִּי אִם גֹּאֵל אָנֹכִי וְגַם יֵשׁ גֹּאֵל קָרוֹב מִמֶּנִּי:

But while it is true I am a redeeming kinsman, there is another redeemer closer than I.

לִינִי | הֲלֵי־יְלֵה וְהִיָּה בְּבִקְרֵי אִם־יִגְאָלְךָ טוֹב יִגְאָל וְאִם־לֹא יִחְפֹּץ לְגֹאֲלְךָ
וְגֹאֲלִתִּיךָ אָנֹכִי חִי־יְהוָה שְׁכַבְי עַד־הַבֹּקֶר:

Stay for the night. Then in the morning, if he will act as a redeemer, good! let him redeem. But if he does not want to act as redeemer for you, I will do so myself, as the LORD lives! Lie down until morning.”

If it's not romantic, why should she stay the night? Who else seduced a man in Genesis? How are these stories the same, different? How are they related to Ruth?

וַתִּסֹּר בְּגָדֶיהָ אֶלְמְנוּתָהּ מֵעַל־יָהּ וַתִּכְסּ בַּצַּעֲרִיף וַתִּתְעַלֶּף וַתִּנְשָׁב בְּכַתֵּחַ
עֵינָיִם אֲשֶׁר עַל־דַּרְךְ תִּמְנַתָּהּ כִּי רָאָתָהּ כִּי־גָדַל שִׁלָּה וְהוּא לֹא־נָתַנָּהּ לוֹ
לְאִשָּׁה:

So she took off her widow's garb, covered her face with a veil, and, wrapping herself up, sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him as wife.

וַתִּשְׁכַּב מִרְגְּלָתוֹ [מִרְגְּלוֹתָיו] עַד-הַבֹּקֶר וַתִּקָּם בַּטְרוֹם [בְּטָרֶם] יְכִיר אִישׁ
אֶת-רַעְהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-יְוֹדָע כִּי-בָאָה הָאִשָּׁה הַגֵּרָוּ:
הַגֵּרָוּ:

So she lay at his feet until dawn. She rose before one person could distinguish another, for he thought, “Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.”

What does this show about Boaz’s reputation?

וַיֹּאמֶר הָבִי הַמִּטְפָּחַת אֲשֶׁר-עָלַיךְ וְאַחֲזִי-בָהּ וַתֹּאחֲזַ בָּהּ וַיִּמַּד
שֵׁשׁ-שְׁעָרִים וַיֵּשֶׁת עָלֶיהָ וַיָּבֵא הָעִיר:
הָעִיר:

And he said, “Hold out the shawl you are wearing.” She held it while he measured out six measures of barley, and he put it on her back. And she came back to the town,

What does this symbolize? (Rashi, six qualities of the Meshiach, Ibn Ezra, six great descendants)

וַתָּבוֹא אֶל-חַמּוֹתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר מִי-אַתְּ בְּתִי וַתִּגְדֹּלָהּ אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה-לָּהּ
הָאִישׁ:
הָאִישׁ:

she came to her mother-in-law, who asked, “How is it with you, daughter?” She told her all that the man had done for her;

She doesn’t know who she is? What he did to/for her.

What does this mean? Is Naomi happy with the outcome?

How is this chapter different than the previous? The same?

וַתֹּאמֶר שֵׁשׁ־הַשְּׁעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה נָתַן לִי כִי אָמַר [אֵלַי] אֶל־תָּבוֹאִי רִיקָם
אֶל־חַמוּתְךָ:

and she added, “He gave me these six measures of barley, saying (to me), ‘Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’”

Is this true? If not what does it show? Why did Ruth fib? What role is Ruth playing in the family?

וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁבִי בְּתִי עַד אֲשֶׁר יִתְדַעֵין אֵיךְ יִפְּלֵ דְבַר כִּי לֹא יִשְׁקֹט הָאִישׁ
כִּי־אִם־כֹּלֵה הַדְּבַר הַיּוֹם:

And Naomi said, “Stay here, daughter, till you learn how the matter turns out. For the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today.”

How does Naomi know this?

What kind of redemption is going to take place? Who is the redeemer? Where else is there ambiguity in this book about G-d vs. human?

Blessed is he to G-d who has not forgotten his kindness with the living and the dead.

What does this book say about human effort?

So, is it a seduction? Is it a love story? Who is the hero? In what sense? How is Boaz looking?

Next week: What is the point of this book?