

# THE CONNECTION

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Levin

*Then she fell on her face, and bowed down to the ground, and said unto him: 'Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should recognize me, and I am a foreigner?'*

And Boaz answered and said unto her: 'It has fully been told me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband; and how you left your father and your mother, and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you knew not heretofore.

May HaShem recompense your actions, and be your reward complete from HaShem, the G-d of Israel, under whose wings you came to take refuge (2:10- 12)

Boaz responds to Ruth's sense of surprise with the only possible answer that can bring her closer. In her words one message rings - I am a stranger and not worthy and you are a great leader of a blessed nation; what can we possibly have in common and why do you say all these things unto me? Boaz must explain. He does so with wisdom and tact. At the same time that he gives due recognition to her status as a convert, he bases his remarks on that which will bring them closer.

Boaz first notes that Ruth has done a mighty deed of valor. Like Abraham she has left all that she has known for the sake of an idea. In a way she performed a greater feat than Abraham for he walked after God, who after all is never capricious, who is always faithful and who protects and rewards his servants. Ruth, on the other hand, came to join a people that she did not know. Perhaps, they are narrow minded, perhaps they are petty, vindictive, hypocritical, or plain unsuitable for to be her people. Why did she do it? Because kindness is deeply imbedded within her.

The allusion to Abraham is unmistakable. Compare the following phrases.

*...how you left your father and your mother, and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you knew not heretofore (Ruth ibid).*

God said to Abram, 'Go away from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you (Gen. 12:1, for another parallel see Psalms 45:11).

Boaz understood that dwelling on Ruth, the convert may not please her and he quickly moves beyond that fact. Now Ruth is a Jew and whatever her merits in converting may have been, it is belonging that she may now crave most of all. He must explain to her that he marvels at something that unites him and her, not something that will set them apart. What is that thing? It is loving-kindness.

*"That you came to take refuge under His wings"*

R. Avin said:

The earth has wings - "from the wings of the earth we heard songs (Isa 24)".

The morning has wings - "If I take the wings of the morning (Ps. 139:9)".

The sun has wings - "The sun of righteousness with healing at its wings (Malachi 3:30)".

The cherubs has wings - "And the sound of the wings of the cherubs (Ezek. 10:5)".

The Chayos angels have wings - "And the noise of the wings of the Chayos (Ezek 3:13)".

The Seraphim angels have wings - "Each one had six wings (Isaia 6:12)".

Said R. Avin: Great is the power of those who act benevolently, for they shelter not in the shadow of the wings of the earth, nor in the shadow of the wings of the morning, not in the shadow of the wings of the sun, nor in the shadow of the wings of the Cherubim, nor in the shadow of the wings of the Chayos, but in the shadow of Him at whose word the world was created, as it says (Psalms 36:8): "How precious is Your loving-kindness, O God, and the children of the world take refuge in Your wings (Ruth Rabbah 5:4).

This Rabbinic comment skillfully shifts our attention from Ruth, the convert who comes to seek refuge under Hashem's wings to the shelter that he gives to all the children of the world. God is equal opportunity protector of all His children who emulate His quality of Love and Kindness and deal with each other accordingly.

The realization that this elderly Sage views himself as equal if not inferior to Ruth, that he marvels at her spiritual accomplishments and looks up to her, leaves Ruth temporarily speechless, with nothing right now to say. A precious moment of deep communion has taken place, and no one but the protagonists know it. One thing is clear - Boaz and Ruth share deeply of values and perceptions. Perhaps, may they hope, they are united at the very root of their souls. The metaphor of the wings and loving-kindness returns when Ruth speaks to Boaz at the threshing floor.

*And he said: 'Who are you?' And she answered: 'I am Ruth your servant; spread therefore your wings over your handmaid; for you are a redeemer.' And he said: 'Blessed be you of HaShem, my daughter; your have shown more kindness in the end than at the beginning (Ruth 3:9-10)*

The mixing of sacred and personal in the most inner sanctum of love and life is the highest scaleable pinnacle of spiritual life. Can man and women ever deal with one another on a level beyond desire? The book of Ruth says yes. But, caution! Only the wholly righteous should ever attempt it (Ritvo, end of Kiddushin). All others must guide themselves by the parameters of the religious law that governs interaction between the sexes. Any impurity, any admixture of petty desire or self-interest irretrievably spoils overambitious relationships and lead them astray and into deepest reaches of the

inferno.

R. Akiva expounded: Man and woman, if they merit it, the Divine Presence is in between them. If they do not, fire consumes them (Sotah 17a).

Boaz and Ruth build their relationship, their recognition and understanding of one another, upon a lifetime of spiritual growth. They seek purity and unselfish commitment to God and it unites them. The name of Hashem is constantly upon their lips. They can risk a meeting upon the threshing floor, in the depth of the night, with no witnesses because they share the palpable awareness of God's presence. When a man and a woman can reach for loving-kindness as the basis upon which to build their interconnectedness, an incomparable resource has been mined and Redemption becomes possible, as Ruth puts before Boaz, "...for you are a redeemer".

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