

# HEROISM AND HUMILITY

*by Rabbi Dr. Meir Levin*

*Stay over this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if Tob will redeem you; but if not, then will I redeem you; lie down until the morning.'*

And she lay at his feet until the morning; and she rose up before one man could recognize another. For he said: 'Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing-floor.'

And he said: 'Bring the mantle that is on you, and hold it'; and she held it; and he measured six measures of barley, and put it on her and he came to town. (3:13-15)

The similarities between Boaz and Joseph do not begin and end in the name of God that was always on their lips. There are many others. Both descend from strong woman who pursued their men; Boaz from Tamar and Joseph from Rachel (see Genesis Ch. 38 and 30) and these facts were, we might say, written in their spiritual DNA. Both were tempted in similar circumstances and both overcame the temptation. Both earned a place in history and in the Book because they overcame; however, there was also a crucial difference between them. Joseph performed a heroic deed, a mighty act of self control, of cosmic significance and universal effect. The Sages in Genesis Rabbah 87:10 connect his escape from Potiphar's wife with the rolling back of the waters of the Red Sea before Israelites on their way out of Egypt. "The sea saw and escaped (Psalms 114:3)" - in the merit of "and he left his garment in her hand and escaped (Gen. 39:12). His self control became a symbol for all generations. "If a person says, "I was too much under the sway of my desires and that is why I did not serve God, they say to him, "Were you more into it than Joseph (Yoma 39b). In one way the seeds of Jewish survival in Egypt were sown by Joseph's refusal to be drawn into an intimate relation with an Egyptian; in another, it was a heroic act, for there are few other images as impressive and awe-inspiring as the rolling back of the roaring sea. Boaz, on the other hand, was a quiet hero and his courage was wholly internal in accordance with his name that means - Boaz, 'in him is strength'. His courage and heroism were of the everyday, one might think mundane quality, patched together from a multitude of daily deeds. He was a man who performed no theatrics and, perhaps, did not even realize that the way he lived was extraordinary, elevated, holy. Boaz was a soft spoken man, dwelling with his God and among his people, benevolent and considerate, modest and pious, despising honor, clinging to kindness. Boaz changed the world one mitzvah at the time.

Boaz was tempted even more than Joseph. "Ruth was single and with him in the bed but Joseph was tempted by a woman who was married and not with him in the bed (Rashi Sanhedrin 19b). More, at that time one could legitimately betroth a woman through an intimate relationship as the first Mishna

teaches us in Kiddushin. How easy and how tempting would it have been to rationalize. Nothing stood before Boaz, neither a religious law nor a fear of discovery. In fact, he could easily find legal argument for taking Ruth right there and then as a fulfillment of a commandment and Ruth would have accepted it, wholeheartedly and with simple faith. But, Boaz was a man of integrity and he handled this trial as he did all the daily challenges of everyday living. He did nothing out of character that night for this is how Boaz lived his life, in humility, in concealment. "Rabbi Yehoshua said: Heroism of Joseph, humility of Boaz! (Sanhedrin 19b, this line of thought comes from Nach'las Yoseph).

As the dawn flared, the ground burned under the feet of Boaz and Ruth. It would have been best for Ruth to leave immediately but Boaz behaves in his characteristic fashion. He speaks to Ruth slowly and deliberately out of concern for her dignity and feelings. He measures the barley gift as she holds the mantle and he does not spread it on the ground out of deference to Ruth. He honors this stranger because of who she is and because he honors all people. The whole business of giving her a gift is fraught with risk. Imagine if someone sees. A woman came and spent the night with Boaz and now she receives her pay. It would have been better that Ruth leaves right away, obscured and hidden behind her mantle; but no, Boaz pays no heed to fears to which a lesser man might fall prey. Boaz does the right thing. Not only that, from the text it appears that he walks with her and carries the barley for her until he enters the city.

"And, behold, HaShem passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before HaShem; but HaShem was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but HaShem was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but HaShem was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. (Kings 1:19). God is found less in heroics than in the still small voice that tinkles inside a man of conscience. Quiet heroism, humble deeds of valor, inner accomplishments bring about Redemption for "a blessing is only found in that which is hidden from the eye" (Taanis 5b).

Boaz did not know that the Holy One Blessed Be He was set to bring forth from him David, Solomon, all other kings and the King Messiah. Of Lot's daughters it says, "in her rising up"; of Ruth it says ... and she arose before one man would recognize another". On that day she was raised up and Boaz was joined to her to set the name of the dead upon their inheritance and to set up all these kings and all men of stature in Israel. In Genesis 10:31 it says, "and he (Lot) did not know of her lying down". Of Ruth it says, "and she lay at his feet until morning". Corresponding to "in her (the daughter of Lot) rising in Genesis, it says of Ruth, "and she rose before one man recognized another". This is why there is dot over the Vav of vkumah'(rising) (and an extra Vav in the word "baterem", before ( Zohar 1,110b)

The numerical value of the letter Vav is 6. We will address the 6 barleys that Boaz gave to Ruth and their significance, with God's help, in the week to come.

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