

AT THE GATE OF THE CITY

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Levin

Now Boaz went up to the gate, and sat him down there; and, behold, the near kinsman of whom Boaz spoke was passing by; to whom he said: 'Ho, such a one, Peloni Almoni, turn aside, sit down here.' And he turned aside, and sat down.

And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said: 'Sit down here.' And they sat down.(4.1-2)

As they entered the city, Ruth went home and Boaz proceeded to the "gate". From many other Biblical references we know that the "gate" is the place where public activity, court sessions and prophetic exhortations take place. Excavations at a variety of sites suggest that Israelite settlements had two walls surrounding the city, with two gates facing each other. The system of double gates allowed detailed inspection of large parties before they actually entered the city. The space between the gates was paved and served as the plaza in which various activities could take place without disturbing the inhabitants of the city.

Boaz received Divine assistance. As soon as he entered this space, "and behold the near kinsman was passing by".

"Was he standing behind the door? R. Shmuel Bar Nachmeini said: Even had he been at the end of the world, the Holy One Blessed Be He would have transported him there, so that that saint not be sitting and worrying as he waits (Ruth Rabbah 7:6)

"Boaz did his part and Ruth did her part and Naomi did her part. The Holy One Blessed Be He said, I will also do my part (Ruth Rabbah 7:7).

The Scripture points out that Boaz was respected and trusted. When he spoke, people listened. The kinsmen and the elders obeyed him immediately and without questions. Perhaps this is the source for the Sages' identification of Boaz with the Judge Ivtzan.

Who was Peloni Almoni? We have previously pointed out that the Sages understood that his name was Tov. The name itself is found in the Bible in Zechariah 6:10 and Samuel II, 10:6. Here, however, he is called Peloni Almoni, an appellation that has come to signify "John Doe", a generic name for a person whose actual name we do not know. In Tanach it is also found in Kings II, 6:8 and Samuel I, 21:3, as is noted in the Masora to our verse. There it means "unspecified". The term can also refer to someone who is by nature timid and retiring (Targum). The appellation "Peloni Almoni" implies criticism. While modesty and refinement are certainly great virtues, a man must be in charge of his

natural qualities and not be subject to them. We have suggested previously that Tov lost the opportunity to have his name recorded in the Bible because he did not seize the moment and marry Ruth. He was a good man, which is what Tov means in the Holy Tongue; however, his goodness was of the inborn, natural variety, a type of timidity with which he was born, not something for which he strove and attained through a lifetime of self-discovery and inner change. There is appropriate time to utilize every quality of character in the Service of the Creator. There is time for retirement and there is time for boldness. The lesson to us is to respect the modest and the humble but to remember that the mind must lead the heart and not vice-versa.

It is interesting to realize that Boaz and Tov represent two different kinds of redemption. Tov is the redemption that almost happened, except that it did not. Boaz, on the other hand is the true and final redemption.

"It is explained in the Zohar that this alludes to the future redemption, may it come speedily and in our day. "If Tov shall redeem you", this refers to your good deeds, then let it happen that way. If God forbid not, that is if you do not return to Him, even so, "I will redeem you". It is possible to say that this is the meaning of the verse, "True, I am a redeemer, and also there is a Redeemer closer than I (Ruth 3:12). Hashem is called close", as it says, Hashem is close to all who call him"(Psalms 145:18). It also says (in the description of return to God in Deut. 30, 14), "for this matter is close to you". This redemption is closer to you than I am, "it is in your mouth and your heart " (Chasam Sofer, Sermons 302, 74).

With this we can also understand the significance of the two names of the would be redeemer, Tov, meaning Good', and Peloni Almoni, meaning 'Obscure' and 'Silent'. There were so many times in Jewish history when everything seemed set for the final redemption. The circumstances were right, the people were ready, and at times there was even a redeemer, such as King Chezekiah or Bar Kochba, worthy of the role and claiming the mantle of the Messiah. Yet, the almost had never come to fruition. The moment passed, the redeemer failed in his mission, hope dissipated and the dark curtain of distance from Hashem again descended upon His people. The reasons were never clear; sometimes it was the failure of would be redeemer, at other times, perhaps of the people themselves. Always, the true Redeemer is just around the corner, calling the elders together, arranging the union with his bride, sitting down to bring matters to completion. The belief in the ultimate redemption is one of the basic principles of Judaism. The book of Ruth demonstrates how suffering, abandonment and despair can eventuate in deliverance and joy. It shows us that the road to redemption is strewn with many disappointments and false starts. At the end, however, we believe that we will merit to welcome the descendent of Ruth and Boaz and all that we need for now is patience, persistence and hope.

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