

# HAPPILY EVER AFTER?

*by Rabbi Dr. Meir Levin*

*And Boaz took Ruth, and she became a wife to him; and he went in unto her, and HaShem gave her conception, and she bore a son. (4:13)*

What happens when a young Moabite woman, a stranger to the complex and nuanced world of Jewish observance and sensibility, marries a man who is securely and inextricably set within it? Our verse alludes to the hard work and supreme effort that Ruth expended to become a worthy wife to Boaz. She became "a wife to him", an unusual expression which, as we will shortly realize, hints at a degree of incompatibility to be overcome.

The Torah uses this expression to describe the marriages of several Biblical personalities but pointedly withholds it when speaking of others. Among the latter is Moses, the greatest of all prophets, whose marriage to the Midianite convert Zipporah shares certain similarities with the situation of Ruth and Boaz.

Read carefully and compare the following verses from Exodus Ch. 6.

*And Aaron took for him Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab, the sister of Nahshon, to wife; and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ... And Eleazar Aaron's son took for him one of the daughters of Putiel for him to wife; and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites according to their families.*

These verses emphasize "for him"; the second cited verse in fact repeats it twice. It echoes the foundation verse of marriage: "And HaShem G-d said: 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make for him a help against him.'" (Gen. 2:18)

"..for opposition is a help. Behold, a man who is by nature angry and irascible; if his wife goads him on in expressing this, even though it is a "help" at the short run and while he is angry he enjoys this help, after he calms down, he feels hurt that his wife added wood to his fire - this is "against him". On the other hand, if she had opposed him in the beginning and calmed him and pacified him, even while appearing as opposing, she truly helps him in a way that cannot be surpassed. (He'emek Davar, ibid)"

Now let's read the description of Moses' marriage to Zipporah.

*And Moses agreed to dwell with the man; and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter (Ex. 2:21).*

No "for him" in this description.

According to the Sages, Elazar, Aaron's son, like Moses, so married Jethro's daughter, a sister of Zipporah (Sotah 43). So why does one sister merit her marriage to be described with two "for him"s and the other not even with one?

"It comes to teach us that even though the daughter of Putiel was not of any better lineage than Zipporah, Moses' wife, she merited to give birth to Pinchas. This was because she was a true help to Eleazar in his daily life - a daily partner (for good). Eleazar realized that she would assist him to become an elevated person and he did not care for her (lack) of lineage. She was a fitting wife for him and he was thereby worthy of having a son like Pinchas..... Not so Zipporah. Even though she was righteous, she did not contribute to Moses' greatness at the least ( Netsiv to Ex. 6:24).

Boaz inherited greatness; you might say that it was in his blood, his genes. A true aristocrat, he was noble in thought and deed and his elevated ancestors lived on through him. Not so Ruth - she was a self made woman of valor. In so many ways, in so many attitudes, opinions, habits and perceptions, they would have been different, not fully of the same mind, even if of the same spirit. Ruth understood that she must "become for him a wife"; not forcing or defending the world that she brought into marriage but taking an interest and setting first the world in which Boaz lived and which she has now joined.

Alas, for this reason or another, their life together did not last. Boaz disappears for the book of Ruth after this verse and the Sages say that he passed away that very night (Yalkut Ruth 608). This of course teaches us an important insight. A person might spend a lifetime pursuing a dream, a goal, a sense of purpose and destiny but it is a mirage, a delusion. Only God knows for what purpose we have been placed on this earth. Boaz spent many years leading Israel, teaching the people, accomplishing many great things. Yet, unbeknownst to him, his purpose was to wait for the Moabite stranger that would one day appear in his field. Once he married her and produced the seed of the Messiah, his purpose in the world and his life came to an end. "Boaz made 120 engagements and weddings for his children but they all died during his lifetime (Bava Basra 91a). By human reckoning, Boaz lived a failed life. Not only did he not leave a family behind, he finally married a convert and died the very same night. Yet, Hashem planned it! We don't always know where we succeed and where we fail but it is always according to His plan and in this we find consolation and succor.

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