

RUTH - THE MOTHER OF LOYALTY, THE MOTHER OF SPIN

by Rabbi Aryeh Winter

"More than what the charity giver does for the poor, the poor does for the charity giver." This lesson, the *Medrash Rabbah* tells us, we learn from Ruth.

Ruth, from the royal family of Moab, permanently left her homeland to dwell with her mother-in-law Na'omi after the husbands of both Ruth and Na'omi died. When Ruth and Na'omi returned to Na'omi's former town, they were both poor, with no means to provide for themselves. Ruth told Na'omi that she would go out to the fields to collect that part of the crops and harvest that were allotted to the poor. That way they would have to eat. Na'omi agreed, and Ruth went to the field of Bo'az, a relative of Na'omi's husband. Boaz inquired as to Ruth's identity, and upon finding out who she was, he made sure that she was provided for. Ruth came home with a sizable amount of produce, which led Na'omi to inquire where Ruth went to collect. Ruth responded *"The name of the man for which I did for him today is Bo'az."*

The *Medrash Rabbah* takes note of the unusual wording of Ruth's response. Shouldn't she have replied *"The name of the man who did for me today is Boaz?"* Why did she make herself the subject of the action performed? The answer, the *Medrash* says, is that we learn the lesson about who really benefits when one gives charity.

While we may learn this lesson about charity from Ruth, our original question still remains: Why did Ruth herself respond in such an unusual manner? Ruth was responding to her mother-in-law's question about who was so generous. Did it matter to Na'omi that Ruth's acceptance of the charity from Boaz was a bigger "favor" than Boaz giving the charity to Ruth? In fact, this response borders on being ungrateful, with Ruth pointing out that her act of kindness to Boaz was "better" than Boaz's, immediately after Boaz did perform a very gracious act!

The answer is better understood when one looks at where Ruth came from. Ruth was a former princess who was raised in the lap of luxury. Scrounging around in a field for food as a beggar was not something that she would have ever envisioned herself doing. Yet here she was, a Moabite princess, literally begging for her sustenance. Having fallen to such depths obviously took a toll on Ruth. It was not a good experience for her. In order to restore her self-esteem and put a positive "spin" on what she had just done, she said that she had performed the bigger act of kindness on that day. She focused on the positive so that she could still hold her chin up high and not become depressed with her situation. Even if the way she boosted her morale might have seemed to have

slighted Boaz, it was still something that Ruth felt was necessary for her to preserve her dignity.

This episode of Ruth teaches us two important lessons. First, when we give charity or deal with those less fortunate than us, we have to be fully cognizant that someone is hurting because they are in need. We have to try and minimize this pain to whatever extent we can, so that those who are poor can maintain their dignity and pride. Second, Ruth is a shining example of one who accentuates the positive. Even at the lowest moment in her life, a time when she may have rightfully become sad and depressed and possibly lost faith in G-d, she managed to turn a degrading incident into one which reflected positively on her. Ruth knew that it was important to preserve her dignity, and by viewing her situation in a positive light, she proved herself worthy of the title our Sages bestowed upon her, *The Mother of Royalty*."

Shavu'os marks the anniversary of G-d giving the nation of Israel the Torah. When the nation of Israel was camped at Mount Sinai, they were a nation unified, as our Sages said *"Like one man with one heart."* On this Shavu'os, we should recall this unity, and strive for it again. We should actively remember and help those less fortunate than us. We should try to heal rifts in our nation, by using disagreements as a starting point for discussions on unity. We have to accentuate the positive in our people and build on it. Come next Shavu'os, we will hopefully be able to accept the Torah again as a unified nation.

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Rus Elisheva a"h bas R' Chaim Ozer shlit"a, whose first yahrtzeit is on 10 Sivan. Russie, as she was known, exemplified the actions of her Biblical namesake by always finding that silver lining, no matter how ominous looking the cloud. May her memory be blessed.

By the Zwick, Prero, Newman, Chait, Schwartz, Wolfset, Mendelson, Edelstein, and Krupnik families.

Dear Readers, Thank you for the shower of blessings and good wishes on the occasion of the birth of my daughter Elisheva Bracha. I know that in years to come, she will appreciate having her birth been the catalyst for worldwide blessings!

May you and yours have many joyous occasions, and a good YomTov.

R' Yehudah Prero and family

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