

# A WORLD OF KINDNESS: AN ANALYSIS OF MEGILLAT RUTH (III)

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

## I

As we begin our study of the second chapter of Megillat Ruth, we will notice that, as in the first chapter, the **Milah Manchah** (key word -which we will identify in the analysis of v. 8) appears twelve times. We will (finally) attend to this interesting phenomenon - which informs, in one fashion or another, much of the Megillah.

Along with analyzing, verse by verse, the content (and many allusions etc.) of the chapter, we will also note a curious and significant structure of this chapter which helps us to understand the central "message" of this part of the story.

As mentioned in last week's shiur, the division of Ruth into four chapters is purely Christian in origin; in this case (unlike many other chapter-divisions in the T'nakh), the division works well. The entire chapter (with the exception of the final, summative verse) takes place during one day at the beginning of the barley harvest (early spring) in Bo'az's field.

## II

### RUTH IN BO'AZ'S FIELD (2:1-7)

#### OVERVIEW

At the beginning of this section, we are introduced to Bo'az, the male protagonist in the story (and, as we pointed out at the end of last week's shiur, Ruth's "opposite number"). Ruth initiates the idea of collecting *Leket* (the gleanings), although she is clearly unaware of the attendant matrix of Halakhic norms. She "happens" to glean at Bo'az's field and, upon his arrival at the field, Bo'az takes notice - and inquires as to the identity - of this Moavite woman. In the supervisor's description of Ruth, we are given much insight into her outstanding traits which drew Bo'az's attention to her.

#### ANALYSIS

2.1. And Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his

name was Bo'az.

Note how the text first introduces an anonymous man, identifying his character and relationship with Naomi - and only at the end of the verse tells us his name - Bo'az. We already noted this pattern at the beginning of the Megillah (1:1-2) and pointed out that this style indicates that we should pay special attention to the name (which the reader awaits to hear, somewhat in suspense). In our verse, this feature is particularly noteworthy, since the following verse ignores Bo'az and we only reconnect with him after Ruth's suggestion to Naomi is approved and she sets out for "a field" to collect the gleanings. The text seems to be telling us to note the existence of this man, this relative of Naomi's dead husband, who is "Bo'az" - and keep that name filed away for later reference.

The name "Bo'az" is, just as his description, associated with strength (**Oz**). In fact, the Septuagint renders his name **Booz (Bo'oz)** - i.e. "strength is in him" (or "strength is in **Him**"). The earlier description - **Ish Gibor Hayil** has two possible meanings:

1. A man of valor - specifically on the battlefield - e.g. Yif'tach (Shof'tim 11:1) and David (I Sh'mu'el 16:18)
2. A man of material wealth - e.g. the taxed **Gibborei heHayil** in II Melakhim 15:20 and the exiled **Gibborei heHayil** in II Melakhim 24:14.

We will find that both descriptions are accurate regarding Bo'az.

2.2. And Ruth the Moavite said to Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor. And she said to her, Go, my daughter.

There is no need for the text to remind us of Ruth's roots - we know quite well that she is a Moavite. Evidently the text is stressing her "foreignness" to both explain her unfamiliarity with the laws of *Leket* (gleaning) as will be explained in the next paragraph and to underscore her willingness to venture out into the fields **as a foreigner** to try to bring sustenance into Naomi's home.

The Torah's command regarding *Leket* is found in two places:

And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. (Vayyikra 19:9)

And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not make clean riddance up to the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning of your harvest; you shall leave them to the poor, and to the stranger; I am the Lord your God. (Vayyikra 23:22)

Note that *Leket* is *Leek* is not presented as a privilege of the poor - since the wealthy landowner is not allowed to collect it, it is the **right** of the poor to pick up these gleanings. The fact that Ruth

suggests that she will "find favor in the eyes" of some landowner - as if that is the only way that she would be able to glean there - indicates her unfamiliarity with the nature of Jewish "welfare" laws. (We will yet return to this topic in the final installment).

More surprising is Naomi's brief reply - which, as implied in last week's shiur, are her first words to Ruth since the sad return to Beit-Lechem. (Remember, when Ruth stubbornly clung to Naomi, the text states that Naomi ceased speaking to her (1:18) - and, indeed, this is the first time that the two converse since then.) Why didn't Naomi instruct Ruth regarding her rights to *Leket* once Ruth had initiated the idea?

One of two answers may be suggested here. Either Naomi was still in the "helpless-mode" to the point where she could **only** muster a simple "go, my daughter" without paying attention to Ruth's words in any detail; or else Naomi was also unfamiliar with the law. This would make sense, since, when she previously lived in Beit Lechem, she was, herself, the wife of a wealthy landowner and would have had no reason to join the "gleaners". As the wife of the landowner, she would also have little or no reason to be familiar with the laws (from the owner's perspective), since her husband likely oversaw those details (as does Bo'az in our chapter).

More surprising is Naomi's brief reply - which, as implied in last week's shiur, are her first words to Ruth since the sad return to Beit-Lechem.

The fact that Naomi did not come up with this the idea of joining the ***M'laktot* idea further demonstrates her "depression" (as pointed out last week) which does not allow for problem-solving, rather for helplessness.**

2.3. And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to a part of the field belonging to Bo'az, who was a relative of Elimelech.

The verse describes three actions, one after the other: **vaTelekh, vaTavo vaT'laket**. Keep in mind that although T'nakh is a written document, even those sections which are not essentially oral have an auditory dimension. The three verbs, one after the other (staccato) create a sense of rapid action. For another example of this, see the description of Esav's reaction to his sale of the birthright:

Then Ya'akov gave Esav bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way; thus Esav despised his birthright. (B'reshet 25:34)

This rapid-fire description of Ruth's activities foreshadow that characteristic of hers which draws the attention of the significant onlookers - a bit later in our chapter.

In the first installment, we noted that the Megillah is set "in the days when the Shof'tim ruled". Our records of that period (Sefer Shof'tim) reflect the most intense level of Divine response to national behavior in our history. Whenever the nation abandoned God, the immediate result was a foreign oppressor's successful conquest and subjugation of Am Yisra'el. (Even if it wasn't immediate, that is the sense portrayed throughout Sefer Shof'tim). In similar fashion, when B'nei Yisra'el would cry out to God for help, He would immediately (again, as above), send salvation through any one of the "Shof'tim". Truth to tell, none of the oppressors (with the possible exception of the P'lish'tim) nor any of the redeemers was very significant in the broad sweep of Jewish history. Both conqueror and liberator are perceived as foils in the narrative of Shof'tim - the oppressor to implement the Divine judgment against the B'nei Yisra'el and the redeemer (e.g. Ehud, Gid'on, Shim'shon) to actualize God's desire to free the people. One almost gets the sense that whichever enemy was "available" at the time would suffice; in like fashion, whichever tribal leader was "in position" when Divine wrath turned to favor was chosen to save the people.

We noted that this introduction to our Megillah is curious because the story of Ruth, Naomi and Bo'az reflects almost the opposite interaction with God. Not only is the Megillah missing a "record" of God's actions (with the exception of the end of the famine in the first chapter and Ruth's pregnancy in the final chapter); but those events which we would naturally expect to be ascribed to God - such as the momentous meeting of Bo'az and Ruth - are relegated to "chance". Note our verse - **vaYiker Mikreha** - lit. "she just happened to [come to Bo'az's field]." Why does the verse describe her "finding" Bo'az's field in this manner?

It seems that the text is using irony to drive home one of the central points of the story. While it **seems** that Ruth just happened into this field, the reader already knows (thanks to the foreshadowing in v. 1) that the Providential Hand is at work here. Surely the kindness which Ruth has shown for Naomi will be rewarded - and surely Bo'az has been introduced to us for just that reason.

Besides the text's near-total ignorance of God's overt role in the lives of the actors, the text also pays no attention to the fate of the nation during this time. This is, truly, the only historic narrative in T'nakh which is totally removed from national concerns and awareness.

Megillat Ruth is showing us the "other side" of life during the period of the Shof'tim. Whereas, on a national level, the people's behavior was always met with an overt, obvious and immediate Heavenly response, private (and family) lives played out according to a more subtle and "natural" Divine scheme. Ruth "just happened" to go to Bo'az's field in order to glean...and the rest is (literally) history.

The repetition of Bo'az's family connection at the end of this verse (evocative of the apparently redundant style of 1:2) reminds the reader of the family connection which makes Ruth's "choice" of field meaningful - note the chiasmus involving his original identification (**miMishpachat Elimelech...Bo'az.**) and this one (**Bo'az...miMishpachat Elimelech**). **This serves to highlight this**

**relationship which, as we will learn from Naomi's words later in the chapter, will become the key to the rest of the story.**

2.4. And, behold, Bo'az came from Beit-Lechem, and said to the reapers, Hashem be with you. And they answered him, Hashem bless you.

2.5. Then said Bo'az to his servant who was set over the reapers, Whose maiden is this?

2.6. And the servant who was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moavite maiden who came back with Naomi from the country of Moav;

2.7. And she said, I beg you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves; so she came, and she has continued from morning until now, scarcely spending any time in the hut.

The opening **v'Hinei** serves to indicate a surprise (see, inter alia, B'resheet 29:25, 37:29- note again the constant "B'resheet" phrases). The surprise here may indicate that until now, Ruth was unaware of the identity of the landowner - or it may foreshadow Bo'az's surprising interest in Ruth. In either case, we the readers are aware of the fortunate meeting which is about to happen

Bo'az was clearly not present at the field from dawn (when the **Kotz'rim** - reapers - would begin work) - he comes at some later point of the morning from town. This makes sense, since Bo'az owns the land and does not work it - although, as we will see, he does maintain a presence in the field once Ruth enters the story. It isn't clear whether this was his custom, or it was Ruth's presence there that motivated him to stay there.

The greeting passed between Bo'az and his workers (which so many of us know from growing up in B'nei Akiva), shows us how freely and comfortably God's Name is on the lips of all of the people in Yehudah - even the workers who are (as we shall soon see) not necessarily the exemplars of religious behavior. This serves to highlight one of the subtle messages of the Megillah - God "arranges" for kindness on behalf of those who bless His Name. Throughout the story, from Naomi's first attempts at persuasion (1:8) through the naming of Ruth's son (4:11-12), everyone in the story blesses their fellow(s) - with God's Name. Indeed, this verse is the first source cited in the Mishnah (Berakhot 9:5) to support the ordinance created during the Second Commonwealth that "each person should greet his fellow with God's Name".

2.5. Then said Bo'az to his servant who was set over the reapers, Whose maiden is this?

Why does Bo'az notice Ruth, among all of the "gleaners"? The Rabbis (BT Shabbat 113b) are surprised at his interest and comment:

Was it then Boaz's practice to enquire about damsels? ... It was taught: He perceived modest

behavior in her, the standing ears [she gleaned] standing; the fallen [she gleaned] sitting.

Besides this insight, the text itself reveals an outstanding feature of Ruth's behavior which drew Bo'az's attention. In v. 7, the supervisor reports to Bo'az that Ruth has been working "from morning until now"; when we analyze that verse, we will suggest why that level of diligence is remarkable among the "gleaners".

The actual wording of Bo'az's question - **L'Mi haNa'arah haZot** (*Whose maiden is this?*) is odd - we would have expected **Mi** instead of **L'Mi** - why does Bo'az assume that Ruth "belongs" to someone else?

Some posit that Bo'az meant "whose wife is this?" - but, if that were his intent, we would not expect **Na'arah** - rather **L'Mi ha'Ishah haZot. Na'arah** implies a single woman (compare D'varim 22:22 and 22:23). More likely, Bo'az assumed that Ruth was someone's servant - seeing as she was both unfamiliar and foreign-looking.

2.6. And the servant who was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moavite maiden who came back with Naomi from the country of Moav;

The servant's report reminds us - in his initial remark - of the butler's mention of Yoseph to Pharaoh: "And there was there with us a **Na'ar Ivri**, servant to the captain of the guard;" (B'resheet 41:12); yet the rest of his report turns us in the very opposite direction. Ruth's "return" from Mo'av, in the company of Naomi, was evidently well-known in the vicinity of Beit-Lechem - and very much to Ruth's credit.

2.7. And she said, I beg you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves; so she came, and she has continued from morning until now, scarcely spending any time in the hut.

The servant reports Ruth's words faithfully (we see her inaccurate understanding of her rights in the field in v.2); her modesty is also evident (besides the insights of Hazal, quoted above) from her request to glean "after the reapers" (who are young men) as opposed to "among the reapers".

The report that Ruth has been gleaning "from morning until now" is truly remarkable when we consider the likely customs of **M'lak'tim** (gleaners). Those who came to the field to collect the various **Mat'not Ani'im** (gifts to the poor - **Pe'ah, Leket & Shik'hah** and their parallels in the vineyard) would likely collect as much as necessary for their family for that day or, perhaps for an extra day or two. This was certainly the case at the beginning of the harvest season. Why would this young woman who, according to the supervisor's report, only had to feed herself and Naomi, work with such diligence? Evidently, although her circumstances placed her below the Halakhic poverty line (see M. Pe'ah 8:8), Ruth carried herself with the dignity - and work ethic - of someone of greater

stature. Indeed, Bo'az noticed her because everything about her didn't fit the picture of a **M'laketet** - her modesty, her diligence and her self-effacing meekness.

## SUMMARY

In the first two verses of this chapter, both hero and heroine are "set up" to meet - Ruth initiates the idea of "gleaning"; but first we are told about a relative of Elimelech who is a man of power - we do not yet know what type of power. Although he fits the model of later Biblical usage - a man of material wealth - the book is placed in a much earlier period - leus to believe that his strength goes beyond his ownership of land. We will yet learn of h"personal power". In the meantime, we see that Bo'az's attention is drawn to Ruth, on account of her diligence and, as the rabbis tell us, her modesty (this is also alluded to in the text). We anticipate that the fated meeting between Bo'az and Ruth is imminent - and, indeed, such is the case.

## III

### DIALOGUE A: BO'AZ AND RUTH (2:8-14)

## OVERVIEW

As can be seen by the header of this section, there is more than one dialogue in this chapter. There are two - and there are strong parallels between them which suggest some type of intended symmetry aimed at drawing our attention to their common denominators. We will identify them during the analysis of the second dialogue, between Naomi and Ruth.

In this dialogue, Bo'az waxes loquacious while Ruth says little. His words are both framed as directives (where she should glean) and in blessing. The dialogue is made up of five components - Bo'az and Ruth alternate speeches, with Bo'az both opening and closing the interaction. Both of Ruth's responses are driven by the theme expressed by her in her words to Naomi: "I will find favor in his eyes..." - again reminding us of how she views her role in the "*Leket*-relationship".

## ANALYSIS

2.8. Then said Bo'az to Ruth, Do you not hear, my daughter? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go away from here, but stay here close to my maidens;

The use of **Bitti** (my daughter) parallels Naomi's response to Ruth is v.2. We already sense that a symmetry exists between Bo'az and Naomi in their relationships with Ruth.

The **Milah Manhah** in this chapter is **Leket** (in several forms). It is not only that the **Leket** solves the hunger problem in Naomi's house, it also serves as the **Shadkhan** (matchmaker) between Ruth and Bo'az. Note how the relationship between the two of them takes an interesting turn - around the

**Leket.** At first, Ruth is convinced that she is dependent on the kindness of a landowner to be able to glean in his field. As soon as Bo'az approaches her, however, the opposite "power structure" becomes apparent - it is Bo'az who is beseeching Ruth to do him the **Hessed** and stay, as a "gleaner", in his field. Ruth is unaware that **Leket** is forbidden to the owner and that he needs **M'lak'tot** in his field to collect the "lost" grain.

As pointed out several times, this keyword appears 12 times in our chapter - much as the keyword **Shuv** appeared in the first chapter. Although one could chalk this up to coincidence, when the reader begins to notice the proliferation of the number six (and its multiples) in the Megillah, the conclusion must be reached that there is some significance to this pattern.

In the third chapter, before returning home from the night on the threshing floor,

[Bo'az] measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her; and she went into the city. And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said...He gave me these six measures of barley; for he said to me, Do not go empty to your mother-in-law. (3:14,16)

These six measures were understood by the Rabbis (Ruth Rabbah 7:2) as an allusion to six righteous people (the first of whom was David) who descended from Ruth - each of which was blessed with six virtues. Hazal clearly saw a significance in the spelling out of the exact amount of barley taken home that morning.

The name Bo'az appears 18 times in the Megillah, and Ruth's 12 times. (Both of these counts ignore the genealogy at the end of the Megillah which is not, properly, part of the story).

For an (as yet) unknown reason, the number six has some association with the house of David. Therefore, Megillat Ruth, which is really the "prologue" of the Davidic narratives, has several structural (as well as over textual) "sixes". This is likely the reason that when Jews in the Middle Ages adopted a (somewhat universal) figure with six points, they named it **Magen David** (there is no immediate connection between this mystical symbol and David that appears in either Biblical or Rabbinic texts).

2.9. Let your eyes be on the field that they reap, and go after them; have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch you? and when you are thirsty, go to the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.

From Bo'az admonition to the "boys" that they not touch Ruth, we see that the harvesters were not the most punctilious about their "religiosity"; yet God's Name and blessing were regularly on their lips.

Bo'az's offer to allow Ruth to partake of the water is not remarkable - although his later kindness will be. There is one other interesting note in this verse - the mention of **me'Asher yiSh'avun haN'arim**



(which the young men have drawn) is clearly evocative of Rivkah's drawing of water for Avraham's slave - one of the stories after which much of Ruth is patterned.

2.10. Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said to him, Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, seeing that I am a stranger?

Take note of the wordplay here: **L'Hakireini v'Anokhi Nokh'riyah** - Ruth totally ignores whatever rights she may have or her cleaving to Naomi and God.

2.11. And Bo'az answered and said to her, It has been fully told to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband; and how you have left your father and your mother, and the land of your birth, and have come to a people which you did not know before.

There is perhaps nowhere in Megillat Ruth that the B'resheet association (and attendant connection with a particular protagonist from that Sefer) comes clear. Compare:

You left your father...the land of your birth...to a people which you did not know before With

Leave your land, your birthplace and your father's house, to a land that I will show you. (B'resheet 12:1).

Bo'az's words clearly and comfortably serve to cast Ruth as the female version of Avraham (see **V'shinantam 2/3**).

2.12. Hashem will recompense your work, and a full reward shall be given to you by Hashem, God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Besides the kindness shown from Ruth towards Naomi (mentioned explicitly in the previous verse), Bo'az notes the conversion of Ruth here - the phrase "to take refuge under the wings [of the Shekhinah]" is a synonym for a convert - see e.g. MT Bikkurim 4:3.

2.13. Then she said, Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not one of your maidservants.

Compare "comforted me and spoken kindly" with B'resheet 50:21 - and, critically, Yeshayah 40:1-2. There is much to say here; the interested reader will find the connection between the cited verses and ours enlightening.

2.14. And at the mealtime Bo'az said to her Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers; and he passed to her parched grain, and she ate, and was satisfied, and left.

Bo'az moves beyond the (understood) generosity of allowing a **M'laketet** to partake of the water and includes her among his hired hands, sharing the mid-morning meal with them. Her station is, at this point, something of a mid-point between a "favored" **M'laketet** and a member of the "harvesting staff". Her status will become a bit clearer as Bo'az's instructions unfold.

## SUMMARY

We see the relationship between Bo'az and Ruth become stronger with each component of this dialogue. At first, Bo'az expresses concern for Ruth's welfare - that she will have enough to glean and will have water to drink. In his second (central) speech, Bo'az reveals his great admiration for Ruth's actions on behalf of Naomi. (Ruth's second response is, in kind, longer and more personal than her first one). By the final component of the dialogue, Bo'az has elevated Ruth beyond the usual station of a **M'laketet** - in spite of her being a foreigner.

We will yet return to this dialogue - when we analyze the second (matching) dialogue in the chapter between Ruth and Naomi.

## IV

### STRUCTURE OF CHAPTER TWO

As we pointed out last week, the entire Megillah is set up in a neat symmetry, with the first and last chapters containing many mirror images, while the middle chapters are almost two sides of one coin.

The second chapter itself (which we will complete next week) is constructed as a chiasmus, with the apex of Bo'az's speech to Ruth as the fulcrum. Here is a charting of the layout:

#### A: **Bookends of the chapter:**

Both take place in Naomi's house - the chapter begins with Naomi and ends with "her mother-in-law" - the first begins at the onset of the barley harvest and the last ends with the conclusion of the wheat harvest:

*A: And Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Bo'az.(v. 1)*

*A': So she kept close to the maidens of Bo'az to **glean** to the end of the barley harvest and of the wheat harvest; and lived with her mother-in-law. (v. 23)*

B: Conversation between Ruth and Naomi:

Note how Naomi's words are brief in the first instance and expressive in the last one. We will address this next week in our analysis of vv. 18-22.

*B: And Ruth the Moavite said to Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and **glean** ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor. And she said to her, Go, my daughter. (v. 2)*

*B': 18. And she took it up, and went into the city; and her mother-in-law saw what she had **gleaned**; and she brought out and gave to her what she had left over after being satisfied.*

*19. And her mother-in-law said to her, Where have you **gleaned** today? and where have you worked? blessed is he who took notice of you. And she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, The man's name with whom I worked today is Bo'az.*

*20. And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, Blessed be he by Hashem, who has not abandoned his loving kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said to her, The man is a relative of ours, one of our close relatives.*

*21. And Ruth the Moavite said, He also said to me, You shall keep close to my young men, until they have ended all my harvest.*

*22. And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maidens, that you should not be molested in any other field. (vv. 18-22)*

C: Description of Ruth's activities in the field:

*C: And she went, and came, and **gleaned** in the field after the reapers; and she happened to a part of the field belonging to Bo'az, who was a relative of Elimelech. (v. 3)*

*C': So she **gleaned** in the field until the evening, and she beat out what she had **gleaned**; and it was about an ephah of barley. (v. 17)*

D: Conversation between Bo'az and the harvesters regarding Ruth:

*D: And, behold, Bo'az came from Beit-Lechem, and said to the reapers, Hashem be with you. And they answered him, Hashem bless you.*

Then said Bo'az to his servant who was set over the reapers, Whose maiden is this?

And the servant who was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moavite maiden who came back with Naomi from the country of Moav;

And she said, I beg you, let me **glean** and gather after the reapers among the sheaves; so she came, and she has continued from morning until now, scarcely spending any time in the hut. (vv. 4-7)

D': *And when she rose to **glean**, Bo'az commanded his young men, saying, Let her **glean** even among the sheaves, and reproach her not;*

And let fall also some of the handfuls on purpose for her, and leave them, that she may **glean** them, and rebuke her not. (vv. 15-16)

E: Bo'az/Ruth dialogue: Bo'az's offers of kindness:

E: *Then said Bo'az to Ruth, Do you not hear, my daughter? Do not go to **glean** in another field, nor go away from here, but stay here close to my maidens;*

Let your eyes be on the field that they reap, and go after them; have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch you? and when you are thirsty, go to the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.

Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said t