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**Megillat Ruth 2:1-3 in PaRDeS**

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**The Story – Chapter 2:1-3**

**SECTION IV**

**INTRODUCTION**

In this series of documents I will be translating Megillat Ruth in four separate ways to produce a Pshat translation, a Remez translation, a Drash translation, and a Sod translation. I will be building these four translations by examining how Chazal translated the words in the oral and written Torah. For all four levels I will examine the Torah. For the Pshat I will draw from the text of Ruth, sefer Mordechai, the Mishna, Rashi, and Ibn Ezra. For the Remez I will draw from the Gemara, sefer Luqas, Meam Loez, and sefer Baal HaTurim. For the Drash I will draw from the Midrash, sefer Matityahu, Alshich, and the Malbim. Finally, for the Sod I will draw from the Zohar and sefer Yochanan. I will also, on occasion, use logical arguments (sevarah) to justify a particular translation.

I will be presenting the Hebrew, Greek, and english translations in order to see the traditional understanding of the text. I will then build the PaRDeS translation for the key words. Finally, I will retranslate the pasukim to bring out the PaRDeS translation. This is the goal of this work. To bring to the English speaking audience a glimpse of the richness of the text ans seen through the eyes of Chazal in the four levels of PaRDeS.

## Ruth 2:1-3

**Text:**

וּֽלְנָעֳמִי מידע לְאִישָׁהּ אִישׁ גִּבֹּור חַיִל מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ וּשְׁמֹו בֹּֽעַז׃ א

וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת הַמֹּואֲבִיָּה אֶֽל־נָעֳמִי אֵֽלְכָה־נָּא הַשָּׂדֶה וַאֲלַקֳטָה בַשִּׁבֳּלִים אַחַר אֲשֶׁר אֶמְצָא־חֵן בְּעֵינָיו וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ לְכִי בִתִּֽי׃ ב

וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתָּבֹוא וַתְּלַקֵּט בַּשָּׂדֶה אַחֲרֵי הַקֹּצְרִים וַיִּקֶר מִקְרֶהָ חֶלְקַת הַשָּׂדֶה לְבֹעַז אֲשֶׁר מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת אֱלִימֶֽלֶךְ׃ ג

**Septuagint**

***Ruth 2:1*** *And Noemin knew a man who was well known to her husband; that man was mighty in strength, of the family of Elimelech, and his name was Boöz.*

***Ruth 2:2*** *So Ruth the Moabite said to Noemin, “Let me go now to the field and I shall glean among the ears of grain after him in whose eyes I may find favor.” And she said to her, “Go, daughter.”*

***Ruth 2:3*** *And she went, and upon arriving she gleaned in the field after the reapers; and by chance she came upon the part of the field belonging to Boöz, who was of the family of Elimelech.*

**Targum:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **TANAKH** | **Translation** | **SEPTUAGINT** | **Translation** |
| וּֽלְנָעֳמִי | and to Naomi | και τη νωεμιν | and to Naomi |
| מידע | Relative (to Naomi) - kri | ανηρ γνωριμος | was a male acquaintance |
| [מודע] | Relative (to Elimelech) - ktiv |  |  |
| לְאִישָׁהּ | of her husband | τω ανδρι αυτης | to her husband |
| אִישׁ | man | ο δε ανηρ | and the man |
| גִּבּור | great of | δυνατος | was mighty |
| חַיִל | valor | ισχυι | in strength |
| מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת | from clan of | εκ της συγγενειας | of the kin |
| אֱלִימֶלֶךְ | Elimelech | αβιμελεχ | of Elimelech |
| וּשְׁמו | and his name | και ονομα | and the name |
| בּֽעַז | Boaz | αυτω βοος | to him *was* Boaz |
| וַתּאמֶר | and she said | και ειπεν | And said |
| רוּת | Ruth | ρουθ | Ruth |
| הַמּואֲבִיָּה | the Moabitess | η μωαβιτις | the Moabitess |
| אֶֽל | to | προς | to |
| נָעֳמִי | Naomi | νωεμιν | Naomi |
| אֵלְכָה | let me go | πορευθω | I should go |
| נָּא | now | δη | indeed |
| הַשָּׂדֶה | the field | εις αγρον | into *the* field |
| וַאֲלַקֳטָה | and let me pick up | και συναξω | and gather |
| בַשִּׁבֳּלִים | among the grains | εν τοις σταχυσιν | among the ears of corn |
| אַחַר | behind | κατοπισθεν | after |
| אֲשֶׁר | whom | ου | of whom |
| אֶמְצָא | I find | εαν ευρω | ever I should find |
| חֵן | favor | χαριν | favor |
| בְּעֵינָיו | in his eyes | εν οφθαλμοις | in his eyes |
| וַתּאמֶר | and she said | ειπεν δε | and she said |
| לָהּ | to her | αυτη | to her |
| לְכִי | go | πορευου | go |
| בִתִּי | my daughter | θυγατερ | O daughter |
| וַתֵּלֶךְ | and she left | και επορευθη | and she went |
| וַתָּבוא | and she went | και |  |
| וַתְּלַקֵּט | and she gleaned | συνελεξεν | She collected |
| בַּשָּׂדֶה | in the field | εν τω αγρω | in the field |
| אַחֲרֵי | behind | κατοπισθεν | after |
| הַקּצְרִים | the harvesters | των θεριζοντων | The ones harvesting |
| וַיִּקֶר | and he happened | και περιεπεσεν | and she fell |
| מִקְרֶהָ | her happening | περιπτωματι | by chance |
| חֶלְקַת | section of | τη μεριδι | In the portion |
| הַשָּׂדֶה | the field | του αγρου | of the field |
| לְבעַז | to Boaz | βοος | of Boaz |
| אֲשֶׁר | who | του εκ | the one of |
| מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת | from clan of | συγγενειας | the kin of |
| אֱלִימֶלֶךְ | Elimelech | αβιμελεχ | Elimelech |

**Peshitta**

**Ruth 2:1** And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband’s, a well-known man of wealth, of the family of Elimeleck, whose name was Boaz.

**Ruth 2:2** And Ruth the Moabitess said to her mother-in-law Naomi, Let me now go to the field and glean ears of wheat after the reapers in whose sight I may find favor. And her mother-in-law said to her, Go, my daughter.

**Ruth 2:3** So Ruth went to glean ears of wheat after the reapers; and it happened that she came upon a portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimeleck.

**Stone’s Translation**

**Ruth 2:1** ‘Naomi had a relative through her husband, a man of substance, from the family of Elimelech; his name was Boaz.

**Ruth 2:2** Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go out to the field and glean among the ears of grain behind someone in whose eyes I shall find favor.” She said to her, ‘Go, my daughter. “

**Ruth 2:3** So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the harvesters, and her fate made her happen upon a parcel of land belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

**KJV**

**Ruth 2:1** And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name [was] Boaz.

**Ruth 2:2** And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after [him] in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

**Ruth 2:3** And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field [belonging] unto Boaz, who [was] of the kindred of Elimelech.

**Symbols and their Meaning**

| **פשת P**shat  **simple** meaning | **רמז R**emez  **Hinted / allegorical** meaning | **דרש D**rush  **Metaphoric** Meaning | **סוד S**od  **Symbolic** meaning |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Naomi:** My delight | **Naomi:** Ami – (my people) | **Naomi:** Pleasant and sweet [the Torah] | **Naomi:** Chava |
| **Relative** | **Relative** | **Relative** | **Relative** |
| **Husband:** Husband | **Husband:** TheGiver | **Husband:** Dweller in the house. | **Husband:** Provider of the house. |
| **Clan:** family | **Clan:** Israel | **Clan:** house | **Clan:** heavenly hosts |
| **Elimelech:** My God is king. | **Elimelech:** Torah scholars will emanate from me” | **Elimelech:** ‘To me shall the kingdom come’ | **Elimelech:** Adam |
| **Boaz:** he comes with strength | **Boaz:** Ibzan - splendid – whiteness. "Illustrious" | **Boaz:** A wise man is strong.  Shaharaim: Free from Iniquity.  A wise man. | **Boaz:** Mashiach ben David |
| **Ruth:** Friend or companion. | **Ruth:** To saturate or replenish. | **Ruth:** Considered well. (‘she saw’) [Israel] | **Ruth:** Turtle dove (faithful spouse) |
| **Moab:** “by my father”. | **Moab:** The forty-ninth level of impurity. | **Field of Moab:** Beit din of Moav. | **Moab:** Place of Lions, of the Temple. |
| **Naomi:** My delight | **Naomi:** Ami – (my people) | **Naomi:** Pleasant and sweet [the Torah] | **Naomi:** Chava |
| **Field:** A working place for nourishment. | **Field:** A place where Torah Scholars work. | **Field:** A city (Edom) / the world. | **Field:** A woman. Zion. Jerusalem |
| **Grains:** stream current / ear of grain | **Grains:** linguistic password | **Grains:** Torah thought | **Grains:** human beings |
| **Favor** | **Favor** | **Favor** | **Favor** |
| **Eyes:** spies | **Eyes** | **Eyes:** the Sanhedrin | **Eyes:** yod / patriarchs |
| **My Daughters**: Daughters | **My Daughters**: Israel | **My Daughters**: The righteous | **My Daughters**: the 12 tribes |
| **Glean** | **Glean** | **Glean** | **Glean** |
| **Harvesters** | **Harvesters** | **Harvesters** | **Harvesters** |
| **Elimelech:** My God is king. | **Elimelech:** Torah scholars will emanate from me” | **Elimelech:** ‘To me shall the kingdom come’ | **Elimelech:** Adam |

**Peshat Level:**

**I Corinthians 15:35-44** But some *man* will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? 36 *Thou* fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: 37 And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other *grain*: 38 But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. 39 All flesh *is* not the same flesh: but *there is* one *kind of* flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, *and* another of birds. 40 *There are* also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial *is* one, and the *glory* of the terrestrial *is* another. 41 *There is* one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for *one* star differeth from *another* star in glory. 42 So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: 43 It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: 44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.

**Targum**

**2:1** Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a strong man, mighty in the Law, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

**2:2** And Ruth, the Moavitess, said to Naomi: "Let me go now into the field and gather among the ears of grain after him in whose eyes I may find favor." She said to her, "Go, my daughter."

**2:3** So she departed and went up and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and she chanced upon the part [Lit. "the possession" or "the inheritance."] of the field that belonged to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

**Rashi**

**2:1 A kinsman** A relative. He (Boaz) was the son of Elimelech’s brother. Our Rabbis, of blessed memory, said (Baba Bathra 91a), “Elimelech and Salmon, the father of Boaz (cf. Ruth 4:20-21), and the anonymous kinsman (cf. Ruth 4:1) and the father of Naomi were all the sons of Nahshon, the son of Amminadab. And (yet) it was of no avail to them the merit of their forefathers when they went from the land (of Israel) abroad.”

**2:2 Let me now go to the field** To one of the fields of the people of the city, after one of them “in whose eyes I shall find favor”, so that he will not scold me.

**That I may glean among the ears of grain after (someone) in whose eyes I shall find favor** (I.e.,) after someone in whose eyes I shall find favor

**2:3 And she went and came and gleaned in the field** We find in Midrash Ruth (the following discourse): (The Midrash asks Before she had even gone (to the field), she returned? For it states, “And she came (back to Naomi),” and afterwards (it states), “And she gleaned (in the field)”. Rather, (the explanation is) that she would mark the roads before she entered the field, and she went and came and returned to the city in order to make markings and signs so that she should not err on the paths and she should know (how) to return.

**And her lot happened** To come upon the portion of the field that belonged to Boaz.

In the words of Rashi's comment on the latter verse (Numbers 15:39): The heart and the eyes are spies for the body, and they act as the body's agents in sinning.

**and you shall not wander after your hearts**: Heb. וְלֹא תָתוּרוּ, like“from scouting (מִּתּוּר) the Land” (13:25). The heart and eyes are the spies for the body. They are its agents for sinning: the eye sees, the heart covets and the body commits the transgression. - [Mid. Tanchuma 15]

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Malbim in his introduction to Jeremiah boldly claims that the ***ktiv*** represents the simple meaning - the *pshat* - and the ***kri*** represents the exegetical meaning - the *drash*. Malbim follows through with this in his commentary and demonstrates this difference between *pshat* and *drash*. One who truly wishes to understand the Bible would do well to study it with the commentary of Malbim.

**Gemarah Level:**

**Talmud Babli**

**Baba Bathra 91a** Rabbah, son of R. Huna, said in the name of Rab: Ibzan is Boaz. What does he come to teach us [by this statement]? — The same that Rabbah son of R. Huna [taught elsewhere]. For Rabbah, son of R. Huna, said in the name of Rab: Boaz made for his sons a hundred and twenty wedding feasts, for it is said, And he [Ibzan] had thirty sons, and thirty daughters he sent abroad, and thirty daughters he brought in from abroad for his sons; and he judged Israel seven years; and in the case of everyone [of these] he made two wedding feasts, one in the house of the father and one in the house of the father in-law. To none of them did he invite Manoah, [for] he said, ‘Whereby will the barren mule repay me?’ All these died in his lifetime. It is [in relation to such a case as] this that people say: ‘Of what use to you are sixty; the sixty that you beget for your lifetime? [Marry] again and beget [one] brighter than sixty.’

**Shabbath 113b** And she went and came and gleaned in the field. R. Eleazar said: She repeatedly went and came until she found decent men whom to accompany.

**Judges 12:5-6** The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim, and whenever a survivor of Ephraim said, “Let me cross over”, the men of Gilead asked him, “Are you an Ephraimite ?” If he replied, “No”, 6 they said, “All right, say Shibboleth.” If he said, “Sibboleth” because he could not pronounce the word correctly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed at that time.

**Sanhedrin 98b** Raba b. Isaac said in Rab's name: it refers to Him to whom all geburah [strength] belongs. And what is the meaning of ‘and all faces are turned into paleness?’ — R. Johanan said: [This refers to God's] heavenly family [I.e., the angels] and his earthly family [I.e., Israel,] when God says, These [the Gentiles] are my handiwork, and so are these [the Jews]; how shall I destroy the former on account of the latter?

**Midrash Level:**

**Midrash Rabbah**

**Ruth IV:3** AND NAOMI HAD A MODA OF HER HUSBAND'S, A MIGHTY MAN OF VALOUR (II, 1). The word ’moda’ means kinsman. R. Abbahu said: If a giant marries a giantess, what do they produce? Mighty men. Boaz married Ruth. Whom did they produce? David, of whom it is said, Skilful in playing, and a mighty man of valor, and a man of war, and prudent in affairs, and a comely person and the Lord is with him (I Sam. XVI, 18). ’Skilful in playing’ refers to his knowledge of Scripture. ’A mighty man of valor,’ in the Mishnah; And a man of war,’ who knows how to give and take in the contests of the Torah; ’And prudent in affairs,’ in good deeds; ’And a comely person’ in Talmud. Another interpretation of ‘Prudent in affairs’ is that he could deduce one matter from another. ' And a comely (to'ar) person’ in that he was well enlightened (me'ir) in halachah. ‘And the Lord is with him.’ The law followed his decisions. OF THE FAMILY OF ELIMELECH, AND HIS NAME WAS BOAZ (II, I). In the case of wicked men, the name precedes the word ’his name’, e.g. Goliath was his name (I Sam. XVII, 4), Nabal was his name (ib. XXV, 3), Sheba, the son of Bichri, was his name (II Sam. XX, 1). But in the case of the righteous, the word ’his name’ precedes the name, e.g. And his name was Kish (I Sam. IX, 1). And his name was Saul (ib. 2). And his name was Jesse (ib. XVII, 12). And his name was Mordecai (Est. II, 5). And his name was Elkanah (Sam. I, 1). AND HIS NAME WAS BOAZ. [Why is this?] Because they are like their Creator, as it is said: But by My name ' The Lord’ I made Me not known to them (Exodus VI, 3). They objected: But it is written, And his name was Laban (Genesis XXIV, 29)? R. Isaac answered: This is an exception. R. Berekiah said: It means refined in wickedness. But it is also written, The name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abijah (I Sam. VIII, 2)? The Rabbis say: The meaning is, just as one was wicked, so was the other. R. Judah b. R. Simon says: They changed their evil ways and were vouchsafed the Holy Spirit [of Prophecy], as it is said, The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel (Joel I,1),

**Ruth IV:4** AND RUTH THE MOAVITESS SAID UNTO NAOMI: LET ME NOW GO TO THE FIELD, AND GLEAN AMONG THE EARS OF CORN AFTER HIM IN WHOSE SIGHT I SHALL FIND FAVOUR. AND SHE SAID UNTO HER: GO. MY DAUGHTER (II, 2). R. Jannai said: She was forty years of age and yet you call her daughter? The answer is that she looked like a girl of fourteen.

**Midrash Rabbah - Leviticus XXIII:11** R. Hanina expounded: A wise man is strong--be'oz (Prov. XXIV, 5). ’Be'oz’ applies to Boaz, as does the expression, A man of knowledge increaseth strength (ib.), for he prevailed over his passions with the help of an oath.

**Midrash Rabbah - Ruth IV:1** This is the meaning of the verse, And Shaharaim begot children in the field of Moab, after he had sent them away, to wit, Hushim and Baara his uives; he begat of Hodesh his wife (I Chron. VIII, 8 f)1 Elijah (of blessed memory) inquired of R. Nehorai: What is the meaning of the verse, ’And Shaharaim begat children in the field of Moab’? He answered him: It means that a great man begat children in the field of Moab. ' After he had sent them away’means that they came of the tribe of Benjamin, as it is written, And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying (Judg. XX, 12).4 Another interpretation is that Shaharaim is Boaz; and why is he called Shaharaim? Because he was free (m'shuhrar) from iniquity. ’Begot children in the field of Moab,’ in that he had children with Ruth the Moabitess.

**Midrash Rabbah - Ruth VI:2** R. Hunya said: It is written, A wise man is strong (be'oz);yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength (Prov. XXIV, 5): read not ’ be'oz ‘ (strong), but Boaz; ' A wise man is Boaz, and a man of knowledge increaseth strength,’ for he strengthened himself with an oath.

**Midrash Rabbah - Genesis XCVII:3** AND LET THEM INCREASE LIKE FISH IN THE MIDST OF THE EARTH. As fish are only caught by their throats,3 so will thy sons be only caught through their throats: Then said they unto him: Say now Shibboleth; and he said: Sibboleth (Judg. Xll, 6).4 Just as fish live in water, yet when a drop falls from above they catch it thirstily as though they had never tasted water in their lives; so are Israel brought up in the waters of the Torah, yet when they hear a new exposition in the Torah they receive it thirstily as though they had never heard a Torah teaching in their lives.

**Midrash Rabbah - Exodus I:17** AND IT CAME TO PASS, BECAUSE THE MIDWIVES FEARED GOD, THAT HE BUILT THEM HOUSES (I, 21). Rab and Levi discussed this. One says: It means that they established priestly and levitical families; and the other, that they were founders of a royal family.

**Midrash Rabbah - The Song of Songs I:64** THINE EYES ARE AS DOVES. THINE EYES: these refer to the Sanhedrin who are the eyes of the congregation, as it is written, If it be hid from the eyes of the congregation (Num. XV, 24). There are two hundred and forty eight limbs in the human body, and they move only by the direction of the eyes.1 So Israel can do nothing without their Sanhedrin.

**Zohar Level:**

**Soncino Zohar, Bereshith, Section 1, Page 93b** Another then discoursed on the text: And Joseph said to his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you, and they came near (Gen. XLV, 4). He said: ‘Seeing that they were already standing by him, why did he tell them to come near? The reason was that when he said to them “I am Joseph your brother”, they were dumbfounded, seeing his royal state, so he showed them the sign of the covenant and said to them: “It is through this that I have attained to this estate, through keeping this intact.” From this we learn that whoever keeps intact this sign of the covenant is destined for kingship. Another example is Boaz, who said to Ruth, “As the Lord liveth, lie down until the morning” (Ruth III, 13). By this adjuration he exorcised his passion, and because he guarded the covenant he became the progenitor of the greatest lineage of kings, and of the Messiah, whose name is linked with that of God.’

**Soncino Zohar, Shemoth, Section 2, Page 218a** This is thus what Boaz indicated in his words: “Let thine eyes be in the field”. The term “field” is a reference to Zion and Jerusalem, as it is written: “Zion shall be plowed as a field” (Micah III, 12), and also, “as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed” (Gen. XXVII, 27), in allusion to Jerusalem. Hence, “Let thine eyes be on the field”, that is, the rulers that were destined to come forth from her should have their centre only in Jerusalem.

Boaz plays the part of Mashiach: He redeems (goel) Ruth who represents Israel as the faithful spouse. He is the owner of the field and directs the reapers (Angels). He is the greatest of His generation and He is a dayan. These both are offices of the Mashiach.

**John 12:23-25** And Yeshua answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. 24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. 25 He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

**Soncino Zohar, Shemoth, Section 2, Page 2b** “by the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion” (Ps. CXXXVII, I): yea truly, all joined in the lamentation. They who had been brought up in royal luxury were now driven into exile with their necks yoked and their hands fettered; and when they reached the land of exile despair settled in their hearts, and they thought that they would never be raised up again, since God had deserted them. At that hour the Holy One called together all His heavenly hosts, His Family above, all the holy Chariots, the lower and the higher ranks, the whole celestial army, and spoke to them thus: “What do ye here?

**Soncino Zohar, Bereshith, Section 1, Page 26a** AND THE LORD GOD FORMED MAN. “Man” here refers to Israel, whom God shaped at that time both for this world and for the future world. Further, the word vayizer (and he formed) implies that God brought them under the aegis of His own name by shaping the two eyes like the letter Yod and the nose between like the letter Vau.... Forthwith at that time He planted Israel in the holy Garden of Eden, as it is said: “and the Lord God planted” (Gen. II, 8).

**Soncino Zohar, Devarim, Section 3, Page 262b** R. Judah said: ‘It is written of David, “He was ruddy and withal fair of eyes”. The “ruddiness” typifies his occupation (as a man of war), while “with fair of eyes” refers to the patriarchs.

**Other Commentaries:**

**Me’am Lo’ez**

**2:1 Now Naomi had** a **kinsman of her husband,** a **mighty man of valor of the family of Elimelech. His,name was Boaz.**

The scripture now begins to reveal how, through Naomi's efforts, Ruth married Boaz. Thus came true Ruth's words, "With [i.e., through] you we shall return to your people" (v. 1:10).

His name describes his character. *Boaz* (בועז)-in him there is strength. He was "a mighty man of valor (חיל)" who vanquished and abandoned his evil inclination, בעז being an anagram of עזב, abandoned; and he was mighty in Torah wisdom, which is acquired through the forty-eight (numerical value of חיל) virtues. To him thus applies, " A wise man is strong *(baoz*, בעוז); a man of knowledge increases strength" (Proverbs 24:5).

Furthermore, he is identified as Ibetzan, one of the chieftain-judges who protected Israel from her enemies (Judges 12:8). And his prayer saved Israel from the famine.

He was a descendant of Judah and bore within him the seeds of the royal dynasty.

The term מודע evidently means “kinsman,” for as Boaz was later to say to Ruth: "There is also a redeemer closer than I" (v. 3:12). Thus, although Naomi had this wealthy kinsman of noble lineage who would have readily helped her, she preferred to receive her sustenance through *leket,* the gleaning in the field which the Torah awards the poor. By refusing to accept gifts from a relative, she was true to the teaching that "one who hates gifts shall live" (Proverbs 15:27).

She did, however, rely on her well-known kinship to the eminent Boaz to protect her daughter-in-law from being molested while picking in the fields.

Naomi "had a kinsman of her husband"; they were, however, also related from her side of the family. For as she was to say later: "The man is related to *us"* (v. 20)-both she and Elimelech were related to Boaz.

Thus the Talmud records the tradition that the father of Boaz, Salmon (Ruth 4:21);Elimelech. Plony Almony (4:1), and Naomi’s father were all sons of Nachshon son of Aminadav, prince of the tribe of Judah. (An amended text there reads: Elimelech, Salmon, Boaz, and Naomi’s father were all the sons of Nachshon son of Aminadav.)

This dual kinship is here alluded to in the word מודע (“kinsman”) appearing between ולנעמי (“Naomi”) and לאשה (“of her husband”). So the verse can be read “Naomi had a kinsman,” or else “a kinsman of her husband.”

The scripture nonetheless calls Boaz “a kinsman of her husband” because once a woman leaves her father’s house for that of her husband, she is closer to her husband than to her father. However, Naomi’s name appears first to reflect her personal stature.

Since Boaz has been identified as a kinsman of her husband, the phrase “of the family of Elimelech” would seem to be superfluous. But this accents that even among the distinguished family of Elimelech, Boaz stood out as “a mighty man of valor.”

Elimelech is mentioned also for another reason—to contrast him with Boaz. Both were righteous men and both were descendants of Nachshon son of Aminadav, of Peretz and Judah, but neither personal worth nor ancestral merit were of any help to him when he abandoned the land of Israel.

Elirnelech - אלי-מלך, “let kingship come to me”—foresaw that the monarchy would come through Moab, and went there to seek it. But his ambition was not fulfilled. Boaz on the other hand made no effort in this direction, indeed, was even willing to give away the kingship by offering another the opportunity of wedding Ruth. So God awarded him the privilege of being the forefather of David.

The word מידע “kinsman,” is spelled with the letter yud (י, numeri­cally equivalent to 10), rather than with the expected vav (ו **,** מודע) to hint to the ten years that Naomi lived in Moab (v. 1:4).For during this time Boaz had repeatedly sent her messages urging her to return to the land of Israel and fulfill the commandment of aiding the poor, which is men­tioned ten times in the Torah.

The letter yud also alludes to the ten generations from Abraham to Boaz. David had to be the fourteenth generation, so that Solomon [whose reign climaxed Israel’s splendor as the bearer of God’s glory on earth] would be the fifteenth generation, corresponding to the full moon on the fifteenth day of the lunar month. Had Salmon’s brother Tov agreed to wed Ruth, the kingship of David would have had to wait an additional generation.

The unusual spelling of מידע also conveys that Boaz did not behave like a true kinsman. He knew that Naomi and Ruth had returned to Bethlehem in pitiful condition; for as he later said to Ruth, “It has been fully related to me all that you have done for your mother-in-law” (v. 11).Yet he offered them no immediate help, although they were so poor that Ruth was forced to go pick in the fields and, when that was not enough to sustain them, Naomi was forced to sell her field, as it is writ­ten: “The portion of field that was our brother Elimelech’s has Naomi sold” (v. 4:3).

Or else, Boaz apparently estranged himself in order to test Ruth. How she reacted to her difficult circumstances would disclose whether she was worthy of entering his house.

Another interpretation is that Boaz did not come out to greet Naomi and Ruth upon their arrival in Bethlehem because he was in mourning for his wife, who had died that very day. It is revealing in this regard that when, after the week of mourning, he went out to his fields, the field-hands did not greet him until he greeted them. This accords with the halacha that one who is in mourning greets others; others do not greet him first.

When he then saw Ruth gleaning there, he understood that Naomi did not want to accept help from her relatives. Out of respect for her wishes, he refrained from offering her gifts [and helped instead through his benevolent treatment of Ruth while she gleaned in his field.]

Moreover, he knew that they owned fields and other possessions. For as he was to say later (v. 4:9). “1 have purchased all that is Elime­lech’s and all that is Kilyon’s and Machlon’s from the hand of Naomi.” It also stands to reason that [when they left Bethlehem for Moab] Elime­lech and Naomi had not sold any part of their fields, since Torah law forbids selling a field and hoarding the purchase money.

**2:2 Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi: “I will go now to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind one in whose eyes I shall find favor.”**

**She said to her, “Go, my daughter.”**

The scripture now narrates how it came to pass that Boaz encoun­tered Ruth.

As soon as they arrived in Bethlehem, Ruth set out to provide for herself in order not to burden Naomi. Moreover, she undertook to support her mother-in-law as well—a great kindness which set her apart from the Moabite people, who had not greeted Israel with bread and water.

The daughter of the king of Moab proposed to pick in the fields with the paupers. “I will go” —gladly— ”for the ears of grain I will pick in the fields of Israel are more precious to me than the diamonds in my father’s palace.”

Ruth tactfully spared Naomi’s feelings. Claiming that she, a stranger from Moab, could glean without embarrassment, she insisted that Naomi stay home while she went to the fields alone. “I will go”—I and not you.

Lest, however, visitors arrive in the meantime to see Naomi’s daughter-in-law leave for the fields, Ruth left “now”—early in the morning, tired though she was from the long journey.

Although their destitution made picking in the fields necessary for survival, Ruth honored her mother-in-law by asking permission before she went.

Her plan was to inspect “the field,” that is, the field of Elimelech. On the way back, she would pick with the poor.

Or else, “the field” refers to the fields of Boaz, which would mean that he had welcomed them as soon as they had arrived.

Another interpretation is that since Ruth had no friend or relative in whose field she could pick, she would simply try whatever field she chanced upon. If the owner treated her kindly and generously, she would pick there; if not, she would go elsewhere, until she found a field whose owner looked upon her favorably.

(Evidently an ungenerous landowner could prevent the poor from taking what was rightfully theirs, or else the custom was not to let women pick without permission.)

She would select a field whose owner’s eyes had “favor,” that is, looked into the Torah rather than at women, and looked kindly upon the pickings of the poor. She would pick only behind a reaper who was righteous.

Some say that Ruth was ashamed to glean among the poor and pre­ferred to earn her livelihood by working. She would look for a land­owner interested in hiring her to work in his field. This is indicated by “in whose eyes I shall find favor.” Merely to partake of what by Torah law she could pick freely, she had no need to find favor. When therefore Boaz’s manservant later said (v. 7),“She came and has been on her feet ever since the morning,” he was referring to her work as a hired field-hand.

She hinted that she would not be pursuing young men who might appeal to her, but would wait to find favor in the eyes of a righteous man.

Knowledgeable in the laws that Naomi had taught her regarding giving to the poor, she now assured Naomi that she would not avail herself of peah—picking in the corner of the field set aside for the poor (Leviticus 19:9)—because there she would be competing with other paupers. Nor would she take shikechah—ears that the reapers forgot to cut (Leviticus 23:22)—because it is difficult to ascertain which ears are truly forgotten. She would only gather the leket (לקט hence ואלקטה)—ears that fell from the reaper’s hands as he cut (ibid.). And, in observance of the halacha that more than two ears that fell together at a time are not leket, she would gather only ב' שבלים, lit, two ears.

Convinced that Ruth’s behavior in the field would be in keeping with modesty, good manners, and the halacha, Naomi consented. And because Ruth felt lonely and strange, she added a word of encourage­ment: “Do not think of yourself as the Moabite, but as my daughter. I allow you to go only because necessity forces me to; for I cherish and esteem you like a daughter.”

The expression “my daughter” does not necessarily indicate that Ruth was a young girl. In fact, our sages say she was forty years of age at the time.

The extreme poverty that forced Ruth to pick in the fields like any pauper was no coincidence, but was a foreshadowing of that “poor man, riding on a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9)who would descend from her—the Messiah.

**2:3 She went; she came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers; and it was her lot to happen upon the portion of field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.**

Ruth “went” from her mother-in-law’s house and “came” to the field of Elimelech, which was now leased and later (v. 4:9) sold to Boaz because he was “of the family of Elimelech.”

Or else, she “went” looking for the field of Elimelech, but “came” upon the adjacent field of his kinsman Boaz.

According to another interpretation, Ruth set out for the field of Boaz, who had welcomed them upon their arrival, and God led her directly there.

To familiarize herself with the new place, Ruth “went” and “came” many times. And she marked the road so that she would not lose her way and have to ask directions of passers-by, who might engage her in lengthy conversations for the wrong reasons.

Rabbi Eleazar said: She came and went until she found righteous people to go with.

Eager to be self-supporting rather than dependent on charity, she came and went the entire harvest season, toiling tirelessly six days a week, as hinted by the extra letter vav (ו) in ותבוא “she came” (ו is numerically equivalent to 6).She would go to the field, pick all she could carry, take it home, and return to pick more. To avoid carrying her heavy load a long distance, she would first go to the end of the field (“she went”) and then pick on her way back (“she came”).

According to another interpretation, Ruth “went” and “came” from one field to another until she happened upon the field of Boaz, where she remained. For there, her heart told her, lay her destiny.

Even after coming to the field of Boaz, she inspected other fields to ascertain where the people were the most worthy. She found no place to compare with the field of Boaz, where everyone was righteous.

The Talmud says that itwas because Boaz’s reapers were righteous that God arranged for Ruth to come to his field; so beautiful was she, that anyone of lesser virtue came to sinful thought at the sight of her.

Boaz welcomed Ruth and instructed his reapers deliberately to “forget” many sheaves—even forget “for her from the heaps” (v. 16).So it was that after going (“she went”) through the field once, on her way back (“she came”), she found still more to pick.

God directed Ruth to the field of Boaz, where she was able to pick enough to sustain both herself and Naomi, and was treated with dignity and respect. This was only the beginning of His kindness to her, for God does not withhold good from those who walk in perfect faith. He now began to uplift Ruth and Naomi from poverty and hunger to kingship.

This is a lesson to all later generations, to place their trust in God in times of distress.

**Abraham Ibn Ezra**

**2:1** sun*’:* A relative who is known, as in and call wisdom

TO HER HUSBAND: That is, ‘through her husband’. The *lamedh* is the same as in the verse say with regard to me (לי),“He is my brother”’

BOAZ: Our teachers, of blessed memory, said that he was Ibzan who once judged Israel.

**2:2** AFTER HIM IN WHOSE EYES I FIND FAVOUR: Some say that the suffix refers to Boaz who has been mentioned, and the meaning is ‘Perhaps this will be’. But it is my opinion that the suffix refers to the owner of the field, although he is not mentioned, because it says AND HER GRANGE HAPPENED, which means ‘this is the way it happened’.

**Malbim**

*Now, Naomi had a relative through her husband.* In light of Naomi's present indigence, she could have turned to Boaz, her rich relative, for material assistance. However, she preferred to send Ruth to gather from the agricultural gifts of the poor (by doing so she felt as if her sustenance was from God in their time of need), rather than to turn to her relative who had known her when she was well off. She was embarrassed to disclose to him her present dire poverty; moreover, Naomi had already envisioned Boaz redeeming the field and her beloved Ruth and to engage him prematurely might jeopardize her plan. In order that we should not think that the reason she did not turn to Boaz was the fear that he would refuse her, the Prophet notes several reasons why Boaz would have provided for them: *Naomi had a relative through her husband* Boaz knew and cherished Naomi and her husband (which is connoted by the word ומודע which implies that he knew and cherished her, unlike a distant relative); he was *from the family of Elimelech,* as well as *a man of substance* (גבור חיל): (it has been explained [in the Malbim's commentary to *Shemos* 18:25] that the description חיל גבור, man of substance, includes all good characteristics -among them generosity and the hatred of greed), and he was a man of renown, *his name was Boaz,* and he surely would not neglect his own flesh and blood.

2. *Ruth...said to Naomi.* The Prophet relates to us the virtue and caliber of Ruth's character in that in spite of her being accustomed to fine clothes and luxury and, according to the *Midrash,* her being the daughter of a king, she agreed to glean in the fields like a pauper. She did not want her mother-in-law to accompany her because Naomi's shame and disgrace would be overwhelming, since she was formerly known in the city as a wealthy and prominent resident. She therefore agreed to go by herself, seeing that she was unknown in Bethlehem.

*Ruth the Moabitess.* That is, from a foreign country -and she would not be humiliated collecting stalks of grain to support herself and her mother-in-law.

*Let me go now to the field.* And not to an orchard where it might be dangerous to climb the trees.

*And gather [glean] among the stalks.* Ruth intended to gather only *leket[[1]](#footnote-1),* which was not in great demand by the poor since there were ample fields to accommodate all of them, but not *pe'ah[[2]](#footnote-2),* which was "up for grabs" (the *Mishnah* in *Pe'ah* 4:1 states that even if 99 poor people say to divide the *pe'ah* evenly among them and one person says, "Each one for himself," we listen to the one). If so, Ruth feared that stronger individuals would forcibly glean, and if she attempted to glean too, she might be harmed by them. Therefore, she chose to gather only *leket* and, even so, only behind *one who will regard me favorably.* Ruth meant that if she sensed that the owner of the field looked upon her disparagingly, she would refrain from gathering there. She would go only to the field of someone who looked upon her favorably and where she would avoid harassment from the harvesters and other poor gleaners.

3. *She went.* The Prophet relates that she had scarcely gone a short distance when, she *[went and] gathered in the field.* Boaz's field was close to her house and she arrived there very soon. Although it was still early morning when *pe'ah* was normally made available (see *Mishnah Pe'ah* 4:5), she did not go to collect *pe'ah* which was at the end of the field. She came and she gleaned immediately from the *leket.* Therefore, she was *behind the harvesters,* and not after other poor people who were gathering *[pe'ah]* for themselves.

*By chance.* Chance, or "fate," is something which does not come about in routine circumstances. In spite of the fact that Ruth's arrival at Boaz's field was completely by chance, the verse tells us: *it happened to her that the section of the field belonged to Boaz, who was from the family of Elimelech.* In truth it was a "happening" but, particularly for Ruth's sake. According to this, it was a providential "happening." In matters in which God wants to bring a comprehensive change for the betterment of the nation, Providence penetrates into the realm of apparent "chance." As Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, said, *HaShem, God of Abraham, arrange (hakrei) it for me today* Eliezer intended that God should not wait for the "coming into being" of all the normal circumstances and causes necessary for his mission to be accomplished. So, too, this occurrence is described as a providential "happening" in which God arranged that the first field that she would come to and choose to glean in would belong to Boaz. This was because he *was from the family of Elimelech* -who was eligible to be her redeemer[[3]](#footnote-3) and perform the act of levirate marriage from which the Davidic dynasty would descend.

**Alshich**

*(1) Na’omi had a relative from her husband, who was a mighty and influentkzl man from the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz.*

**(i) This verse seems out of context. The next verse seems to follow on from the final verse in chapter one. This verse would be better understood if it followed verse 2.**

**(ii) The opening clause,** לאשהמידעולנעמי**, is only correct if Boaz’s relationship to Na’omi is being emphasized. However, here, Scripture wishes to point out Boaz’s relationship to her husband, and thus the correct form should be** מודענעמיולאיש ***The husband of Na’omi had a relative.***

**(iii)Why is there an extra *yud* after the *menu* in the word** מידע? **There should be either a *vav* (as in the *ken)* or nothing at all, as we see later in the word** מדעתנו **(3:2).**

**(iv) What is so important about the fact that Boaz was *a man of influence?* Besides, it is obvious that he is *a man.* Why do we need the word** איש **at all?**

**(v) Lastly, once we know that Boaz is a relative of Na’omi’s husband, who is Elimelech, why does the prophet repeat the obvious fact that he was *from the family of Elamelech?***

Before Scripture goes on to discuss Ruth’s plan to go to the fields and Na’omi’s response (verse 2), Samuel, with his Divine inspiration, introduced this verse to ensure that no one would dare to slander the great and holy personalities featured in this *megillah.*

**The Field** — **Not an Ideal Place for Ruth**

First of all there is Ruth. She declared that she would like to go picking in the fields. Now as we know, a modest girl’s place is in the home (Psalms 45:14). The first thing she should have asked Na’omi was, not for permission to gather gleanings, but where her kinsmen, the leaders of the country, resided so that they could dwell together with them. Furthermore, the inhabitants of the town would surely have been shocked to hear Na’omi’s reply to Ruth. They would have most likely exclaimed: “What is she doing? How could she have allowed that girl to go into the fields? It shows no less than a lack of judgment and morals for a woman such as she to send an attractive girl, who causes all those who stare at her to be aroused (cf. Ruth Rabbah 4:4), into the fields searching for gleanings! Imagine how many rogues and scoundrels she will have to mingle with day and night in the fields just so that she can provide Na’omi with food, while that old woman stays home doing nothing? Wouldn’t it have been better the other way around? The young girl should remain in the confines of her home so that she shouldn’t come to any harm in the fields, while the older woman should go out looking for food to sustain herself.”

Boaz would have similarly been castigated: “What does a rich man like him mean by hiding his face? He should take both the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law under his wing. They are, after all, widows and need someone to care for them. In his house, they would be able to eat their fill and dress in stately clothing” (cf. Isaiah 23:18).

To prevent the ignorant from voicing such complaints, the chapter begins with the statement, *Na’omi had a relative...* before it continues relating the sequence of events in Judah.

**The Three Alternatives**

The two women had three options open to them. The first was that they go separate ways. Na’omi would stay with relatives while Ruth would gather food in the fields. Alternatively, both women could have gone to the fields together. The third option was that they remain in Boaz’s house, where they would be taken care of as their honor demanded.

Neither of them can be faulted for what transpired. The first option was out of the question, since they had come to Bethlehem together with the intention of staying together. Besides, Ruth had promised that only death would separate them.

The second option was likewise not feasible, for it is ludicrous to suggest that both Na’omi and Ruth go collecting in the fields.

Scripture relates: *Na’omi had a kinsman.* There was no need for her to go out collecting food, for she would be cared for as befits a woman of her standing. Now we can understand the extra *yud* in the word מידע*.* It signifies that Na’omi found refuge in the house of a relative where she could live honorably, just as a little *yud* nestles comfortably between the two larger letters *mem* and *daled.*

Another reason why the second option was not feasible was because even if Na’omi had wanted to go with Ruth to the fields, she wouldn’t have been permitted to do so. Boaz was an important and influential person and would not allow a relative of his to do such a thing that would undoubtedly bring disgrace to his name.

**Ruth in a Quandary**

The third option was likewise unlikely, for he was from the family of Elimelech, who had the rights to redeem his field and subsequently to marry Ruth, as it says, On *the day when you acquire...* (4:5). Thus, it would not have been possible for Ruth to have stayed with Boaz at that time lest people gossip and say that he had taken a liking to her and subsequently married her.

Thus, Ruth found herself in a predicament and wondered which course she should take. She told Na’omi that she would like to go to the fields, and her mother-in-law responded, *“Go,* my *daughter.* Don’t think I don’t care about you since you are not my daughter. On the contrary, even if you were my very own daughter, I would allow you to go to the fields, for it is not dishonorable to sustain yourself in this way. It is perfectly legitimate to accept gifts that are set aside for the poor and it is preferable to taking from people.” Now it is clear why no guilt can be attached to Boaz for not insisting that Ruth stay in his house. Not only would that give rise to gossip but even Na’omi found it permissible for Ruth to collect gleanings in the fields.

**Na’omi’s Consent**

It is also worth mentioning that Na’omi kept silent and did not send Ruth to the fields on her own initative. It was Ruth who first brought up the subject for discussion. Only then did Na’omi consent and allow her to go.

In our commentary to chapter one (verse 8), we explained that Ruth was the ‘good dove’ appointed by God to be the progenitress of the Davidic dynasty. This, says the Midrash (Genesis Rabbah 41:4), is derived from the verse, *I have found my servant David* (Psalms 89:21). Where is he to be found? In Sodom, for it is written, *And your two daughters who are to be ‘found’ with you* (Genesis 19:15. (See essay on this subject in the appendix.)

The Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 2:15) informs us that Na’omi knew of this, as she hinted in her blessing to Ruth, *May* God *grant...* (1:9). She meant to say that the gifts and blessings destined to be given to Solomon should come through you. Ruth understood the intention of this blessing but kept it a secret.

Because Na’omi knew that Ruth was destined for greatness, she did her best to play an important role in bringing the Divine plan to fruition. As we explained in the previous chapter, she survived her husband and children specifically for this purpose, and she had the merit of bringing Ruth to Bethlehem (see commentary on 1:2 1).

Now the Divine word goes on to explain why they were brought to Bethlehem. The story of Ruth begins to unfold.

**Why Boaz?**

*Na’omi had a relative. ..who was a mighty and influential man.* Through him the Kingdom of David would be realized. *He* was an איש, a man, a title awarded only to important peoplein the Scriptures.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In addition, Boaz is described as an חיל איש, *a man of valor* or *influence,* a title used in connection with monarchs (cf. II Samuel 17:10: *And he (i.e.,* David) *is even valiant* (חיל בן),indicating that he was from Judah and a suitable candidate to redeem both the field of Elimelech and Ruth through levirate marriage.

Why was Boaz chosen and not a closer relative such as Tov, the brother of Elimelech? There is an interesting answer to this.

David was destined to be the fourteenth generation from Abraham, and Solomon the fifteenth, which suggests a full moon (visible on the fifteenth day of each month).[[5]](#footnote-5) Had Tov, who was a brother of Salmon and belonged only to the tenth generation, been the one to redeem Ruth, there would have to be four more generations until David’s era. Since Boaz was the son of Salmon and belonged to the eleventh generation, only three more generations were needed until David, for Obed was the father of Jesse. That is why God chose Boaz rather than Tov.

There may be an allusion to this in the first verse. We questioned the extra *yud* in the word מידע Later (3:2), we find a similar word מדעתנו*,* and this shows that a *vav* is not required after the *mem.* The extra *yud* may stand for God’s name, as if to allude to the fact that besides a relative, there was God too, for He had chosen Boaz over Tov for the reason specified. In addition, Boaz was a man of influence, the leader of his generation and a Torah sage, qualities that Tov lacked.

*(2) Ruth the Moabitess said to Na’omi: “Let me now go into the field so that I can glean from the ears of* corn *after the one in whom I will find favor in his eyes.” She replied to her:* “Go, *my daughter.”*

**Firstly, the word tb seems redundant. What is its significance? Secondly, why is** **she still labelled with the derogatory title of ‘Moabitess’ after having converted with good intentions?**

Besides answering these questions shortly, all the difficulties in this passage will be explained to our satisfaction.

**The Significance of ‘The Field’**

When Na’omi blessed her, Ruth realized that her mother-in-law believed her to be the one chosen by God from the descendants of Lot to be the forebear of the stock of Judah. Now that Orpah was gone, she asked: *Let me go to the field.*

This simple request has more to it than meets the eye. As we know, the story of Lot and his two daughters took place in rural and not in urban surroundings, as it is written, *And Lot went up from Tzoar and settled in the mountains* (Genesis 19:30). It was there that Lot’s daughter cohabited with her father. Similarly, Judah’s union with Tamar took place in the fields (see Genesis, chapter 38).

Ruth’s question to Na’omi was: “I am destined to continue this family trait of both Moab and Judah by going to the fields. While there, I will gather food to sustain us in poverty.” She also uses the word נא*,* which is reminiscent of the נא Judah said to Tamar when he asked her to lie with him (see Genesis 38:16 אליך אבוא נא הבה).

Na’omi replied: “Go, my *daughter.* You are indeed qualified for this task. I consider you to be my daughter since the spirit of my son Machlon resides within you.”

It can be said that she was actually speaking to the spirit of her son, and the feminine gender is used, בתי לכי**,** because the Hebrew for spirit, רוח, is feminine.

As we said above, there are two obvious difficulties in this verse: the word נא and the word המאוביה*.* Besides these, there are other interesting points to be aware of.

**Why Only לקט?**

Firstly, as we know, there are three categories of produce which must be left for the poor while one is reaping in the fields. These are ופאהט שכחה, לקט**.** The first, לקט**,** is alluded to by Ruth in the verse. The law demands that any stalks that fall down during the reaping process be left for the poor (see Leviticus 19:9).

The second is שכחה*.* The law stipulates that if a sheaf is forgotten in the field during a harvest, it is forbidden to return and take it; it must likewise be left for the poor (cf. Deuteronomy 24:19).

The third is known as פאה**.** During the harvesting of a field, a corner must be deliberately left so that the poor can take from it (see Leviticus 19:9).

As we said, Ruth asked permission to take only gleanings left behind. She did not seem interested in collecting leftover ‘sheaves’ or ‘corners.’

She also made it known that she would follow *after the one in whose* eyes *she finds favor.* This is hardly the talk of a modest girl, for the implication is that she would be attracted to any man, whomever it may be. Instead of rebuking her, Na’omi, encouraged her by consenting to her request!

Let us turn our attention for a moment to the next verse:

*(3) She went and she came and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And it so happened that she found herself*

*in the section of field that belonged to Boaz from the family of Elimelech.*

**The first few words in this verse She *went and she came* seem to make little sense. The order of words should be changed to read ותבא ותלקט ותלך***,* ***She* *went and gleaned and then she came (back).***

The Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 4:6) interprets these words to mean that Ruth marked the roads leading to the fields so that she would not lose her way home. But even if this is the case, the word **ותבא***, and* she came, makes little sense here.

**It is also apparent that the field where she went to glean belonged to Boaz (see verse 7 where it is clear that she was in Boaz’s field from the morning). In verse 19 she testifies to the fact that she was working in Boaz’s field all day. If so, the clause ;ufu vren rehu *And it happened that* she *found herself...* should precede the clause *and gleaned in the field****...*

**It is also important to note the masculine gender of the word rehu***.* **Since we are dealing with Ruth, the word should be re,u**

The word vren appears to be redundant, but our Sages (Ruth Rabbah 4:4) explain that it refers to the consequences of meeting with Ruth. Since she was so beautiful, anyone seeing her would inevitably experience an emission of semen (cf: vkhk vren**,** “a nocturnal occurrence”; Deuteronomy 23:11). This is how they rendered vren rehu:“One who would meet her (rehu)would have an ‘occurrence’ (vren)**.”**

**The phrase *from the family of Elimelech* presents further difficulty. It seems totally redundant as we are well aware of this fact (see verse 1).**

**The Field — a Place Fraught with Danger**

Now we will explain these verses in detail. Ruth was afraid that anyone overhearing her speaking to Na’omi would suspect her of deceiving her mother-in-law, as they knew the fields were crowded with young men whom she would find hard to avoid. Besides, there were sure to be a number of other poor people gleaning in the field, and the majority of them would be men. It was not exactly the place for a modest Jewish girl to be.

Furthermore, though there was little chance that she would be assaulted in the fields, since there were so many people around, there was always the possibility that she would be accosted by some unscrupulous individual while traversing the valley between one field and another. In fact, it is known that evil-minded people would deliberately follow the girls and wait for an opportunity to assault them when no one else was around.

In the fields, there always existed the slight chance that she might go to pick in a corner which the workers had already left, and another pauper, noticing how vulnerable she was, would attempt to attack her. Alternatively, she might pick up some gleanings that had been forgotten but be challenged by the reapers themselves, who would claim that these bundles were not left behind and she had stolen them, thus publicly disgracing her. Or, one of the workers might have his eye on her, and, since she was so attractive, would be aroused and come to sin. Even if she were righteous and modest, she might easily be seduced, as owing to human nature, it is extremely difficult for even the most pious of women to restrain themselves.

**Preventive Measures**

So as to prevent any of the above-mentioned possibilities from occurring, Ruth took a number of precautions. First, she told Na’omi tb vfkt*I will go now,* as if to say: “I wish to go now, at the beginning of the barley harvest when hardly any men are around in the fields. In addition, the poor people usually wait until the more profitable wheat harvest is under way. Moreover, in celebration of the onset of the harvest season, the owners of the fields and their families are commonly to be found in the fields, and I would not be afraid to wander among so many people.”

It is likely that Ruth would have declined to continue going to the fields throughout the season had not Boaz instructed his maidservants to accompany her until the end of the harvest, as we shall see later.

Concerning the problem of going from one field to the next, she said, “There is no need to fear, for I will not wander from one field to the other.” She emphasized vsav*, the field,* in the singular, to indicate that she would stay in one field only.

She also told Na’omi that she was interested only in yek *gleanings,* and not in vjfa*,* forgotten bundles, or vtp, corners. As was explained earlier, hidden dangers awaited those who collected forgotten bundles or gleaned the corners.

Furthermore, she made it known that she would pick only single stalks and not search among the bundles, as the latter would be condemned as illegal by the workers. We derive this from the words ohkfac vyektu*, So that I can glean from the ears of grain* (verse 2).

Finally, she added, *after the one in whose eyes I will find favor.* She meant to say as follows: “If I seea man with whom I will find favor, I will follow him, but I will make sure that he cannot gaze at me because I will be behind him.”

It is common in large fields, that one reaper works at the head of the field and another in the center of it. The meaning of Ruth’s comment is that if she had found favor in the eyes of the midfield worker, she would not have followed behind the one at the head of the field, as this would have left her in full vew of the midfield reaper. Neither would she glean parallel to him; she would glean only behind him so that he could not come to sin by staring at her.

With these words she intended to convey the following idea: “Even if he be one with whom I will find favor, it does not follow that he will find favor in my eyes. I am not so reckless as to take the path of sinners, God forbid.”

**Na’omi’s Motherly Attention**

Naomi’s reply to Ruth’s request can be understood in two ways. Her answer could be explained to mean, “Go, my daughter. You have assured me that you will be extremely careful about where you go and how you will behave there. I am positive that you will come to no harm and no evil will come your way.

Alternatively, Na’omi’s reply meant: “Don’t think I am allowing you to go because I don’t care what you do. You are

as dear to me as a daughter, but still, I know your intentions and I allow you to go.”

Nevertheless, Ruth is still given the title of ‘Moabitess.’ This is for two reasons. A closer look at the text will reveal that there is a significant difference betweenthe way Ruth described her upcoming visit to the fields and the way she acted when she was actually there.

In verse 2, she promised Na’omi that she would follow behind the one, etc. In verse 3 we are informed that she walked *after the reapers,* seemingly in accordance with her promise. However, while the Hebrew word rjt*, behind,* appears in verse 2 the word hrjtis used in verse 3. These two words have vastly different connotations, as we shall *see.*

Ruth’s intention, as implied in verse 2, was to stay close behind the reapers. This, of course, was immodest and wrong of her. Na’omi reprimanded her by telling her, “Go, but behave modestly as if you were my *daughter,* and stay away from the workers.” As we see*,* Ruth listened to her mother-in-law and followed ohrmuev hrjt, at a distance *behind the reapers.* However, because she initially intended to stay close to them, she is branded a Moabitess. Na’omi warned her that she was now a Jewess and had to behave accordingly, as her own daughter would.

**The Field Trip**

*She went and she came.* It has been suggested that since Ruth did not want to overburden herself by carrying bundles back and forth, she did not gather any gleanings on the way in, but she picked up everything she had gathered on her way back home.

This approach would be feasible if Ruth walked through several fields. However, as we explained, she went to only a single field to pick. The word tc,u*, and she came,* implies that she arrived back in the town and only *then* did she begin gleaning!

There is, however, a deeper meaning to the verse than *meets* the *eye.* The prophet is attempting to teach us something about Ruth and her past. Ruth, as we shall *see* later *(verse 4),* was a reincarnated form of Lot’s elder daughter. Hence the verse reads as follows: *She went,* originally to her eternal world, but, *she came* back, i.e., she was reincarnated as Ruth, to glean her reward for the good deed she had done by having intercourse with her father only for the sake of Heaven.

Of course, this is only the hidden meaning embodied in the words with the Divine intuition of the prophet. The simple meaning of the text still requires explanation.

**Ruth Learns the Way**

Ruth was afraid that she might tarry in the fields until sundown, and, being in unfamiliar surroundings, would lose her way back to town. Alone, she would be a target for assault. Even during the daylight hours, a girl wandering about in the fields would be asking for trouble. What did she do to avoid this danger? She went to the first field she saw and then returned to the town so as to get herself accustomed to the way. Only then did she go back to gather gleanings. It was the third time she was making the journey and she felt sure of the way back.

It is possible that this is what the Sages of the Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 4:4) intended when they said that she marked out the way. The Scriptures do not state explicitly that she returned to the field, for it is obvious that after she arrived back in town she would have to return to the field to gather. The main emphasis is on the fact thatshe only gleaned from the field *after* she had gone to and from the town to learn the way. It is possible that she mistakenly told Na’omi that she was going *now* to the field, which could imply that she would go straight to the field to gather ‘before’ she knew the way back. She also told her that she would follow *behind the ‘one’ with whom she would find favor* when it is preferable to be in the company of a group of people. Who knows what might have happened to her had she been left alone with a single man? Of course, she realized, in fact, that she had spoken without thinking and found a way to remedy the situation. She first learned the way back, and only then did she aflow herself to pick in the field. She did not follow behind a single reaper, but she kept her distance and made sure that there was a group of reapers rather than a lone man (see verse 3 ohrmuev hrjt*behind the reapers,* in the plural).

Ruth also informed Na’omi that she was going *now,* at the beginning of the barley harvest, and as soon as her mother-in-law gave her permission to go, *she went* **—**immediately. She promised to visit only one field, and indeed that is what she did. Furthermore, she kept her promise to take only gleanings and not forgotten bundles or corners. The Scripture testifies to her honesty: So *she gleaned in the field behind the reapers.* Two facts stand out. *She gleaned*

— she did not take from the corners or from what was forgotten behind, and she only gathered from that which had fallen from *the reapers.*

**Ruth Meets Boaz — No Mere Coincidence**

*It happened that she found herself...* This is an allusion to the fact that Ruth was destined to meet Boaz and marry him, even though she was not his predestined mate in life, for indeed, in every levirate marriage the union between a widow and her brother-in-law comes as a result of Biblical law. Furthermore, Ruth was not from the people of Israel; she had been a Moabitess who had chosen to convert to Judaism. Hence, a union between these two could be classified as a rare ‘occurrence.’ That future event which was destined to happen retroactively caused her to ‘chance’ to glean in the field of Boaz so that she could meet him and eventually marry him. This, then, is the meaning of the double expression ufu vren rehu**.** *A ‘happening’ caused her to ‘chance’ upon the field of Boaz.* It was no accident, but part of the Divine plan which brought her to a special destiny.

*From the family of Elimelech.* It was from the family of Elimelech that she would find her mate for a levirate marriage. Though the Hebrew rehuis in the masculine, there is no irregularity, as the reference is to the ‘event’ and not to Ruth herself.

We seeproof of God’s arranging for Ruth to find herself in Boaz’s field so that she could meet and become acquainted with him, in the following verse: *Behold! Boaz came.* The Hebrew vbvuis an expression used to denote something that came about through design and not mere accident. Thus, it was the future levirate marriage between the two that brought about this meeting in the field of Boaz. It was not pure chance that brought Ruth there; rather, Boaz’s arrival on the scene was ordained to coincide with Ruth’s presence.

Now we can understand the juxtaposition of clauses in verse 3. Earlier we questioned their order: the second half of the verse should precede the first half. In fact, the prophet deliberately arranged that the phrase, *And it so happened that she found herself,* would be followed immediately by the announcement: *Behold! Boaz came,* to indicate that these two events were closely related.

Another possible meaning of these words is as follows. As we said, the spirit of Machlon rested within Ruth until it could be redeemed by way of marriage to a ‘redeemer’ **—** and that was Boaz. Thus, that which had happened to her, i.e., that Machlon’s spirit had rested within her, was by special design, since in normal circumstances, a Jewish spirit cannot enter a gentile’s body. That unusual developement caused it ‘to happen’ that she should find herself in the field of Boaz —from the family of Elimelech **—** who had the responsibility of redeeming her so that the name of the deceased could be perpetuated over his inheritance.

Interestingly, this explanation is alluded to in the numerical value of the words. vren equals 345. Add to this the number of letters in the words (4) and we have a total of 349. The numerical value of iukjn jur (the spirit of Machlon) (348) together with the phrase itself (1) is likewise 349.

**Lot’s Daughter Became Ruth!**

This is yet a further way of understanding this phrase. As we have said earlier (and we shall speak more of later), Ruth was the one who was destined to be the progenitress of the Davidic dynasty as a reward for the courageous act of Lot’s elder daughter, who lay with her father only for the sake of Heaven. Ruth herself was Lot’s daughter incarnate. An indication of this fact is, again, through numerical values. The lower numerical value of the words ctun ot yuk ,c(the daughter of Lot, mother of Moab) equals 42, which is precisely the value of vhctunv ,ur thv(she is Ruth the Moabitess), indicating that the mother of Moab and Ruth were one and the same person.

That vren*, event,* which took place when Lot unknowingly took part in a forbidden relationship with his daughter, caused Ruth to be found in the portion of the field that belonged to Boaz. Due to Divine guidance, the end result of that union was finally on the way to being realized. Hence, immediately following is the announcement: *Behold! Boaz come.* The words are not zguc tchuSo Boaz came, which would imply that he just happened to walk into his field.

**\* \* \***

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1. See *Vayikra* 19:9-10, "...and the gleanings of your harvest you shall not take. ...For the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them..." [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Vayikra 19:9-10, "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not complete your reaping to the comer of your field, ...for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them..." [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See *Devarim* 25:4-10, "When brothers dwell together and one of them dies, and he has no child, the wife of the deceased shall not marry outside to a strange man; her brother-in-law shall come to her, and take her to himself as a wife, and perform levirate marriage..." A "redeemer" was the close relative who actually performed the levirate marriage. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Leviticus Rabbah 16:4: Wherever the word אנשים is used it refers to righteous men, as it says, *And Moses said to Joshua, choose for us* אנשים, *men.* See also commentary on Ruth 1:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Exodus Rabbah 15:26: *This month shall be to you the beginning of months* (Exodus 12:2). “The month is thirty days long and the monarchy shall last for thirty generations. The moon begins *to* show its light on the first of Nissan and gets brighter as more of it becomes visible until the fifteenth day of the month. From the fifteenth until the thirtieth day its light diminishes as less of its face is visible. On the thirtieth day, it can no longer be seen. So, *too,* with Israel. There were fifteen generations from Abraham to Solomon. Abraham first generated light to the world, which grew brighter until the era of Solomon. when the moon was full, as it says, *And Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord* (I Chronicles 29:23). From that time, the greatness of the Kings oflsrael deteriorated...” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)