

Essential Essence: Book of Ruth

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller
Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

On Shavout we read the Book of Ruth. This book encapsulates the essence of Torah, the love of *chesed*. The Torah wants us to search for opportunities to do kind deeds. As the Siftei Chaim notes, *chesed* must involve a sense of caring for the other person and sensing his need, rather than gratifying one's ego or appeasing one's conscience. The Gemara tells us that a smile and a kind word are a greater *chesed* than giving someone money. *Chessed* means diminishing one's ego to enable us to see the need of the other. It means not interjecting my awful experience into my friend's lament when she needs reassurance. If I can downplay my own ego, continues the Siftei Chaim, I can uproot the source of all negative characteristics.

The Ohr Gedaliah notes that a person's name reflects his essence, his characteristics, and his potential to fulfill his mission while using the gifts Hashem gave him. But the word *shem*, name, is also the root of *shemamah*, desolation. If a person does not use his gifts appropriately, they will be the source of his destruction. The name Elimelech can mean, "to me will come kingship." Indeed, Elimelech was from the tribe of Judah, the kingly tribe, but his egotism destroyed his potential. As Rabbi Y. Bachrach explains based on the Midrash, Elimelech possessed great wealth, but he couldn't be bothered by needy people. He went to join Moav, a people who were the

antithesis of *chesed*.

In contrast, *Boaz* means, "strength is within him." The Shem Mishmuel explains that Boaz knew he had the potential within him to be the progenitor of the six great men of the Davidic dynasty, culminating in the Messiah. After seeing Ruth, Boaz realized that within her lay the trait of pride from Moab, but refined for Jewish use. A successful monarchy would require this refined character. Boaz was also aware that he himself was not the closest "redeemer" obligated to marry Ruth. Nonetheless, he altruistically ceded his potential for greatness to Ruth for the greater good of the Jewish people. When Boaz gave Ruth six grains of barley, he symbolically gave her his rights to these six descendants. At that moment, the Davidic dynasty and the Messiah were born. Through their altruism and *chesed*, both Boaz and Ruth demonstrated the character that Hashem was looking for in the ones who would be the eventual rulers of *Bnei Yisroel*.

When Naomi returned to Bethlehem, she told the people not to call her *Naomi*, pleasant, but *Mara*, bitter. The Nachalat Yosef explains that she was saying that before she was self-centered and now she could step out of herself and see the suffering in the lives of others. The Mishbetzot Zahav notes that *Mara* is written with an *aleph* at the end instead of the usual *heh*. Naomi indicated that she

changed because the Aleph, the One Master of the universe orchestrated events to improve her.

The name Ruth comes from *ro'atah*, she saw. Ruth saw and was sensitive to the pain of her mother-in-law. Orpah, however, turned her back, the nape of her neck, her *oreph* on Naomi. As the Siftei Chaim points out, she was so caught up in herself that she could not see the greatness of others.

Boaz and Ruth were married, and these two paradigms of *chesed* gave birth to a son named *Oved*. As Rabbi Bachrach points out, this name was the highest accolade anyone could be given, to be called a servant of Hashem as Moshe was, to do more than what is required or expected.

The foil for an *Oved* is a Ploni Almoni, a nameless one. This was Elimelech's brother, the close relative who refused to enter into the levirate marriage with Ruth. Rabbi Frand, based on the Nachalat Yosef, notes that the first redeemer's name was Tov. He declined the marriage for what appears to be appropriate *halachic* reasoning. Yet, because he could not reach beyond his comfort zone, his name fell into oblivion. In contrast, Boaz merited memorialization in the holy texts and became forever linked to the Davidic dynasty he originated.

Re-Experiencing Receiving of the Torah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

The Torah tells us, "*Rak hishomer lecha pen tishkach et hadevarim h'eleh*." Hashem adjures us not to forget what we experienced at Har Sinai. We must teach our children about the day we stood at the foot of the mountain and accepted the *Torah*. It's not just what we heard, but we must remember the day and what we saw. The experience is supposed to be alive for us on an ongoing basis and that is why it is among the six things we must remember daily. In the Rambam's letter to the Jews of Yemen he tells them to raise their children with this experience. It is supposed to be a part of our essence, something that we must remember

always.

The Torah discusses the experience of *Har Sinai* in Parshat Yitro and again in Devarim. The Torah says in Parshat Yitro that on the third month, the Jewish people left Egypt. On this day they came to the desert of Sinai. Why doesn't the Torah clearly state the day? The Ohr Hachaim explains that it teaches us the great love Hashem had for the Jewish people and the deep desire he had to give them their bride, the *Torah*. Why then did Hashem wait till the third month? The Ohr Hachaim explains that it was because *Klal Yisrael* were not ready when they just left Egypt. Hashem could have

brought them to *Har Sinai* in one day and they could have prepared there. Why did He make them go through a long journey? For the groom to already be at the wedding hall and be forced to wait is very difficult. That is why the *Torah* says, on the third month on this day. Hashem wanted to show His great desire to give the *Torah* to the Jewish people and that is the first thing we have to keep in mind if we want to re-experience the giving of the *Torah*.

What did *Klal Yisrael* experience on Shavuot? Hashem descended to the mountain in a fire. There was a cloud and smoke. It was heaven coming down to earth. There was an intense

Continued on page 2

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Continued from page 1

revelation that was so strong that we couldn't be exposed to it directly. It was hidden. That is hinted to with the smoke. Still it was a very intense level of revelation. The Torah describes it in Devarim as "*Panim el panim diber Hashem*," similar to the quality of the prophecy of Moshe. There was total clarity. The people saw and heard that Hashem gave them the Torah through Moshe.

At *Har Sinai*, sounds that are usually heard were seen, and sights that are normally seen were heard. Rav Chaim Volozhiner explains that when we look at a thing we normally see its physicality, which is not the full picture. For example, when we look at a person we see a human body. We do not see the person's essence, his thoughts, experiences and memories, and definitely not his soul. When

we experience the inner aspect of something, we momentarily stop focusing on the outer aspect.

When the Jewish people stood at Har Sinai and Hashem spoke to them, they saw the voices that He created. We cannot hold sounds. Sounds are less physical, and perhaps more spiritual. Hashem made the people shift their focal point and revealed to them the spiritual reality of this world. At that time, when they saw people, they saw souls. When they saw trees they saw the divinity within them. They saw what they heard, something intangible. Hashem opened up their eyes to see spirituality and they did not see physicality.

That's the meaning of what happened at *Har*

Sinai. It was an experience beyond this world. Suddenly they saw the world the way it really was.

On an ongoing basis we don't see it this way, because if we would we would not have free choice. But in order to make it totally clear to us that the *Torah* is from heaven, Hashem gave us this experience and brought all of our souls to experience it. We have an inner knowledge of it and we can reveal it. That is our mission and that is the meaning of remembering the day of the giving of the Torah. We must understand that when we look at things, the reality is not just what we see. We only see the external aspect of it. There's so much more to reveal and discover through the lens of Torah and that is the true reality.

Make It Count: 48

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshie Nissenbaum

The 48th day of the *Omer* corresponds to *Yesod Sheb'malchut*. *Yesod Sheb'malchut* is an expansive, powerful *middah*. It actualizes the potential of all the other *middot*. It helps to rectify difficult situations and gives man the power to fix what he needs to do. It stands up strong against sin and works to increase positive acts. It demands accounting for action and focuses on the mission.

Rava was a descendant of Eli Hakohen. Despite the curse on his family that they would not live long, he lived for 40 years because he made *Torah* his occupation. In *Masechet Bava Metziah* he tells us that a person who embarrasses his friend and causes him to turn white in public has no

portion in the World to Come. In *Masechet Shabbat* he teaches us that after 120 years when the soul ascends to the great heavenly court they will ask him, "*Nasata v'nasata b'emunah*?" Did you deal honestly in business?" Or as the *Netivot Shalom* explains, "Did you deal honestly with *emunah*? Did you work on it? Did you get the answers to your questions? Did you make sure to develop *emunah sheleima*?"

The second question will be, "*Kavata itim l'Torah*?" Did you establish fixed times to learn Torah?" Not just a bit of something here and there. Did you make it your daily priority? The third question will be, "*Tzipita l'yeshuah*?" Did you anticipate the redemption?" Rava, the king

of Torah, keeps us focused on where we're headed. He tells us what accounting we will need to do in the next world.

We're at the threshold of *Shavuot*. The Mishna in *Rosh Hashana* tells us that on this day we will be judged for the fruits of the trees. Man is compared to a tree. Did we bear fruit? What did we do with our potential? Did we use *Yesod Sheb'malchut* to actualize our potential? Are we ready to answer these questions in the heavenly court? As we get closer to *Shavuot*, let us daven to Hashem that He help us actualize all the things we have been studying and discussing and working on throughout the *sefirah* period.