

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

“And she picked herself up, with her daughters-in-law, and returned from the fields of Moav, for she heard in the fields of Moav that God remembered His nation and bestowed upon them bread. And she left the place where she lived, along with her two daughters-in-law. And they went on their journey to return to the Land of Yehuda. And Naomi said unto her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go back and return to your nation. May God grant you kindness as you have shown unto the deceased and myself. May God grant unto you that each of you find security in your husband’s homes.’ And she kissed them and they raised their voices and wept. And they told her, ‘We shall return with you to your nation.’ And Naomi replied, ‘Return, my daughters. Why shall you follow me? Have I sons in my womb to give you as husbands? Return, my daughters, to your place, for I am too old to remarry, for I have told myself, Even if I marry tonight and bear a son, you will no doubt not be able to wait until they grow up, you will no doubt be abandoned without a husband. No, my daughters, for it is bitter for me, your lot, for the hand of God is against me.’ And they raised their voices and wept more. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and Rus remained with her. And she told her, ‘Behold, your sister-in-law has

returned to her nation and to her gods; go after your sister-in-law.’ And Rus replied, ‘Do not persuade me to forsake you and to retrace my steps, for wherever you go I will go, and where you sleep I shall sleep. Your nation is mine and your God is my God. Where you die, I shall die and there I shall be buried. So and so shall God do unto me, for only death shall separate me from you.’ And she saw that she insisted on joining her, and she ceased to convince her.” (1: 6-18)

The previous chapter closes with Naomi widowed, alone, bereaved and bereft of family and possessions.¹

Naomi understood all too well the message Hashem had sent.² Her remorse was complete, as was her repentance.³ The time had come to undo the wrong, and so she set out to return to Eretz Yisrael.

Her transformation came just as Hashem once again showered His bountiful blessings on the inhabitants of Zion.⁴

¹ The Baalei Tosfos say that Naomi was still left with ownership of ten fields in Moav, but she left all her assets behind and set off for Eretz Yisrael.

² Commentaries

³ Rokeach

⁴ The commentaries stress that God remembered His nation on account of their merits (Meshiv Nefesh and others). The Malbim explains that if the people of that generation would not have repented, Naomi would not have returned to Eretz Yisrael. Once she heard that God remembered the people, meaning the nation repented, she returned. However, others view that the Jewish nation was not yet worthy of being remembered, but Hashem had mercy on them in the merit of Boaz *Hatzaddik* (Targum).

The famine was over.⁵ The news reached Naomi either⁶ via traveling peddlers,⁷ who were a source of communication in those days⁸, or, some say, through *ruach hakodesh*.⁹

Although Naomi and her family were faulted for their misdeeds, we can have an inkling as to their lofty spiritual level through the fact that she merited the divine spirit resting on her! Certainly her husband shared a similar spiritual level and also had *ruach hakodesh*. Though the *megillah* stresses his fault, we are still dealing with an incredibly great person.

Naomi Leaves Moav

Naomi received the heartening tidings from the Holy

⁵ Even according to those commentaries who view that Naomi decided to return to Eretz Yisrael because she understood that the passing of her husband and sons came as a result of abandoning Eretz Yisrael, there is no contradiction with the words of the *pasuk* which state that Naomi returned when she heard God once again remembered His nation. It can be assumed that while her unrepentant sons were still living, she did not take interest in news from Eretz Yisrael. Only now, when Naomi decided to return, did she take an interest in finding out what became of her brethren, and was pleased to hear the good tidings of God's merciful help. The Igeres Shmuel explains that before she heard that the famine passed, Naomi was unable to move back. She was worried her nation would turn their backs cruelly on her just as her husband had done to them and that she would be left to die of hunger. Only once the famine passed did she feel secure enough to return, and she did so without delay.

⁶ The Igeres Shmuel explains that according to those who say there was a famine in Moav too, when the famine passed in Moav and the fields started blossoming again, Naomi understood that the famine in Eretz Yisrael had passed also.

⁷ The Malbim explains that the peddlers did not say that God remembered His nation. They just brought foodstuffs from Eretz Yisrael to sell in Moav, and Naomi understood from this that the famine was over.

⁸ Rus Rabba 2:11

⁹ Midrash Lekach Tov, and from the Targum it is understood that an angel updated Naomi once the famine ended.

Land. She got up immediately after the seven days of mourning for her sons,¹⁰ ready to take action.¹¹ Left with only bitter memories, she had no nostalgic feelings for Moav. The time had come to return home.¹²

She left as soon as she heard the wheat had started growing,¹³ without even waiting to hear if it was a successful crop or not, and arrived in Eretz Yisrael at the harvesting of this first crop.

Naomi packed up her sparse belongings, preparing to leave secretly, before her neighbors might convince her otherwise.¹⁴ She did not even seek counsel with her daughters-in-law.¹⁵ She was worried they might try to dissuade her and she would not have the strength to resist them.

When Naomi left, her departure left its mark on Moav. Her righteous presence was felt by all, and her parting left a spiritual void.

Longing to again attain the lofty level of spirituality

¹⁰ Megillas Eliyahu

¹¹ The commentaries (Ibn Ezra, Malbim and others) explain that from the time Naomi decided to return to her land, Hashem considered her thoughts as actions, and Naomi was considered as having returned to Eretz Yisrael long before she even left Moav.

¹² Igeres Shmuel

¹³ Alshich

¹⁴ The Meshiv Nefesh explains that Naomi left predawn while everyone was still sleeping so as not to be seen. But the Yaavetz views that Naomi left as if going on a trip, not a long journey, to avoid her neighbors' persuasion.

¹⁵ Alshich

which she and her family had once known,¹⁶ she prepared to leave on her own. She was pleasantly surprised when her two daughters-in-law insisted on accompanying her.

And so they went, the three of them together, on their way to Eretz Yisrael. At this point¹⁷ all three had intentions to go to the Holy Land,¹⁸ to bond with *Am Yisrael*, and to keep the will of Hashem.¹⁹

In their great zeal to return, they did not pay heed to the journey's difficulties. Naomi left Moav on the first day of *Pesach*,²⁰ assuming that her staunch love and desire to return would even override any prohibitions of leaving the boundaries of Moav on a *Yom Tov*.²¹

It was also hazardous for them to leave without an escort,²² and the next caravan was not leaving for several days and Naomi felt she could not wait!

¹⁶ Midrash Lekach Tov

¹⁷ The Igeres Shmuel explains that as long as she had not actually left Moav, her daughters-in-law agreed to come along, but once the plans were put into action, they realized it would not be so simple to leave their homeland. Orpah then returned, but Rus did not.

¹⁸ The Shores Yishai explains that their intentions in moving to Eretz Yisrael were completely *l'sheim Shomayim*. They did not have any personal benefit from returning to Naomi's homeland.

¹⁹ Akeidas Yitzchak

²⁰ Rus Rabba 2:12

²¹ Obviously, according to the views that Rus and Orpah were before conversion, this *halachic* issue did not pose a problem for them, only for Naomi.

²² Rus Rabba as above

They walked barefoot,²³ not having the means²⁴ to buy walking shoes.²⁵ With each bruise they murmured again and again, “Oh, to go to Eretz Yisrael, to *Eretz Hakodesh*, to touch its very earth and draw near to the true God!” Thus they merited reward for each footstep, coupled by the difficulty involved.²⁶

Naomi, who had come to Moav in a luxurious carriage surrounded by family and wealth, was now returning destitute and widowed, with two non-Jewish daughters-in-law. But Naomi was not beaten down. As she walked, she introduced her daughters-in-law to the *halachos* of conversion. She made it clear that if they wished to live in Eretz Yisrael, they must convert.

Crossroads

After walking together forty steps,²⁷ they arrived at a crossroads.²⁸ Until that point, Naomi was unsure whether

²³ The Igeres Shmuel explains that they were not actually barefoot, for this would have been immodest. Rather, the soles of their shoes were torn, so that only the outer part of their foot was covered, but the bottom was exposed.

²⁴ The Igeres Shmuel adds that they walked barefoot intentionally, for they wanted to feel and touch Eretz Yisrael as soon as they arrived.

²⁵ Rus Rabba as above

²⁶ Shores Yishai

²⁷ Rus Rabba 2:2 and others view that Naomi turned to them only after four *mil* (approximately four kilometers). Otherwise, it is difficult to comprehend how Naomi could have discussed the laws of conversion with her daughters-in-law in just forty steps. Apparently, this Midrash follows in accordance with the view that the three of them walked together for four *mil*, which gave them ample time to discuss conversion.

²⁸ Peirush Hagra

her daughters-in-law truly intended to go with her or just to accompany her part of the way. She now understood they were serious when they turned with her onto the main road leading to Eretz Yisrael.²⁹

At this point, with tears in her eyes, she turned to them, pleading with them to return.³⁰ “My dear daughters-in-law, I beseech you, return to your nation!³¹ Return to your mother’s home,³² to your homeland. Do not come with me! Neither

²⁹ The Igeres Shmuel explains that Naomi understood they were serious about coming along when she saw them preparing themselves for a long journey.

³⁰ The Igeres Shmuel explains that until that point Naomi did not say anything to her daughters-in-law. She wanted them to get a taste of the hardships of traveling, after which they would understand it was best for them to return.

³¹ Rus Rabba as above

³² The Midrash (Rus Rabba 2:13) explains that Naomi specifically mentioned their mother’s home and not their father’s home, because generally amongst non-Jews the mother is more beloved than the father. The Midrash brings the story of Avnimus the weaver, one of the gentile wise men, whose mother passed away. R’ Meir, who was a good friend of Avnimus, paid him a condolence call and found him sitting with his brothers in deep mourning. After some time, Avnimus’s father passed away. Once again, R’ Meir paid him a condolence call and this time was surprised to find Avnimus and his brothers working. R’ Meir expressed his surprise, “Was your mother more beloved than your father?” Avnimus did not deny that it was so. Here, too, we find another indication that the non-Jews love their mothers more than their fathers. Naomi thereby hoped to convince them to return to their mother’s home, for they loved her more.

What is the reason for their loving the mother more? In the non-Jew’s life, education of morality is not extremely important. Therefore, a mother’s contribution to her children is much more significant than that of a father, who is constantly busy making a living. How very different is the Jewish outlook on life! The father’s role is vital. The burden of education is his; he teaches his sons Torah and guides his daughters in the Torah way of life. No wonder their love of their father does not in any way fall short than that of their mother.

The Igeres Shmuel explains another reason why Naomi mentioned their mother’s home. Rus and Orpah were daughters of Eglon who had several wives. There was no real “father’s house” to go back to. They could only return to that house which Eglon designated separately for each wife. He further explains that they were only

you nor I will benefit from you coming with me,”³³ Naomi pleaded.

“And if you feel uncomfortable leaving me on my own, rest assured that I have only the greatest of gratitude for all which you have done for me, though I am not in a position to adequately repay you. Return, my girls, and build new lives.”

Naomi concluded her plea with a blessing,³⁴ “May Hashem repay you³⁵ for the kindness you showed your

able to return to their mother simply because their father had already passed away.

³³ Malbim

³⁴ The Midrash (Rus Rabba 2:14) explains that Naomi related her blessing to both daughters-in-law, but it was only fulfilled for Rus who clung to her. Therefore the word *ya'as*, may God do, is written missing one letter (the letter *heb*; it is read *ya'ase*, as if written with the *heb*), because the *bracha* was only partially fulfilled, i.e., it too was “missing something,” and only came to be in one of them.

The Midrash Lekach Tov explains this in another way. Naomi’s *bracha* could not have been fulfilled entirely in this world, even for Rus, because, as *Chazal* say, “There is no happy convert in this world,” and “Suffering comes to converts.” This is true in order to cleanse them of their former sins. Therefore, this *bracha* was written missing a letter, because it will only be fulfilled completely in *Olam Haba*.

The Baalei Tosfos bring another hint from the missing letter *heb* (equivalent to the number five). Naomi hinted to her daughters-in-law that their reward would only be given to them after five generations: Boaz, Oved, Yishai, David and Shlomo. It was only during the times of Shlomo that Rus would receive her deserved reward, when Shlomo had a special chair designed for her next to his (Bava Basra 91b).

³⁵ The Gra explains that Naomi intentionally told her daughters-in-law that only God can repay them, for she wanted to stress there was no way she could repay them. Naomi was worried that her daughters-in-law wanted to join her because they thought she had assets in Eretz Yisrael from which they might benefit. Naomi made sure to inform them that it wasn’t so. “I am poor and alone, and I am unable to repay you. God is the One who I pray shall repay your good!” (Although, as previously mentioned, we do find that Naomi did have assets in Eretz Yisrael, it could be they were not sufficient to support anyone. Indeed, Rus did go out to look for abandoned wheat because their fields failed to provide them with enough.)

R’ Y. Yichye explains that this is why Naomi mentioned the good they did with their husbands after their passing together with the good they did for her, because

deceased husbands³⁶ and myself. I wish for you and bless you that you merit to rebuild your lives, and may you and your spouses live in peace and harmony.³⁷ May you easily³⁸ find a

she wanted to emphasize that just like they did kindness with the deceased and did not expect any remuneration, so too should they not expect anything back from her, even if it is rightfully coming to them.

³⁶ The Midrash (Rus Rabba 2:14) explains that the kindness which they showed their husbands was the *chesed shel emes* of paying for the burial shrouds, even though according to the Moavite laws they were permitted to pay for this from the inheritance (Malbim). The *chesed* which they showed Naomi was that they waived the amount of the *kesuba* which was coming to them from their husbands' assets. Apparently, this view does not follow the opinion that they walked barefoot, because if the sons left an inheritance, they definitely should have had money to buy shoes.

See the Igeres Shmuel that the inheritance lasted for some time, but was eventually exhausted. Again, this does not coincide with the view that Naomi left Moav right after the *shiva*.

The Malbim explains this according to the *psbat*. The kindness with the deceased was what they did for their husbands while their husbands were still living. They were referred to as dead, either because at this point they were no longer alive, or because they were wicked, who are referred to as dead even during their lifetimes. The kindness which they did for Naomi was that they accompanied her on her way out of Moav.

The Targum Yonasan explains that the kindness which the daughters-in-law did with the deceased was that they did not remarry after their passing. The kindness which they did with Naomi was that they supported her until she left Moav. It is clear that this explanation does not fit with the view that Naomi and her daughters-in-law left immediately after *shiva*.

In any event, this idea of Naomi's thanking them for not remarrying still requires clarification, because in her blessing she clearly states they should find peace and harmony with their future spouses.

³⁷ The Alshich explains that Naomi wished to impart a special blessing on her daughters-in-law. Although normally a woman only bonds with her first husband, Naomi blessed them that they find peace and bond closely with their second husbands as well. The Shoresh Yishai explains that the spirit of the first husband is attached to the wife and does not allow her to find tranquility in her second marriage. Therefore Naomi blessed them with a special blessing that there be no obstacle in their remarriages.

³⁸ This is the way the Shoresh Yishai explains the word "find."

wealthy husband who will support you comfortably.³⁹ May you bear sons and daughters in joy and happiness.”⁴⁰

Although she did not know it at that point, she was divinely inspired to conclude her blessing in the singular.⁴¹ This was a hint from above that only one of the daughters-in-laws would merit these blessings – Rus, who clung to her mother-in-law.⁴²

It wasn't only Naomi's concern for her daughters-in-law's welfare that made her encourage them to return to Moav.⁴³ She also had her own personal reasons for not wanting them to continue with her. At that time, it was accepted for every group of the Jewish people to live in its own place with its own status and lifestyle. There were separate streets and marketplaces solely for *kohanim*, for royalty, and for prophets, while the simple folk lived in their own area. Even the clothing for each of these groups was different.

Naomi was worried that if her non-Jewish daughters-in-law accompanied her, she would not be able to return to her old place with the respected class as the esteemed wife of Elimelech. Certainly she would be unable to include her

³⁹ Yaavetz

⁴⁰ The Igeres Shmuel explains that only then does a woman find tranquility in her husband's home, because if she does not bear children there can be tension and arguments. This *bracha* was appropriate because Rus and Orpah did not bear children during the entire ten years they were married to her sons and Naomi was concerned that they were barren.

⁴¹ The word is written as *umatzan*, and you shall find, in the singular, although it is read as *umatzena* in the plural.

⁴² Rus Rabba 2:15

⁴³ Yalkut Remez 601

daughters-in-law. On the other hand, if she wished to stay with them, she would have to live with people of lower status, which she certainly did not want to do.

Therefore, for her personal benefit, Naomi decided it was best to part. She let them know that they were not doing her a favor by joining her.

Only after Naomi was convinced beyond doubt of Rus's sincerity to convert did she acquiesce. She then understood that it was important for Rus's good that she come with her. For her sake, she was willing to give up her respectable status in Eretz Yisrael.

Naomi Dissuades

Let us now backtrack to Naomi's pleas to her daughters-in-law. She turned to both⁴⁴ simultaneously, explaining why they should not join her.

"On the one hand," Naomi explained to her daughters-in-law, "if you insist on coming along to convert, I will not hold you back from actualizing your good intentions."⁴⁵ But you

⁴⁴ The Shores Yishai explains that the *megillah* stresses that Naomi spoke to both Rus and Orpah equally, but because Rus was on a greater level, she was the only one who heeded her words.

⁴⁵ The Shores Yishai adds, based on the *Chazal* which tells us that Naomi studied the laws of conversion with her daughters-in-law, that Naomi did not oppose their coming along and converting. Rather, she acted as is generally accepted when accepting converts, "The left pushes away and the right brings closer." She even suggested that they accompany her to Eretz Yisrael to see the beauty of the Torah and the Jewish people, and, only afterwards, if they so desire should they return to their homeland.

have two choices.⁴⁶ Weigh your options carefully⁴⁷ and decide which is best for you.” She then kissed her two daughters-in-law farewell,⁴⁸ and they broke out sobbing bitterly.⁴⁹

“There is nothing to talk about!” they declared emphatically, tears streaming down their faces. “We are with you!⁵⁰ We shall not return to our nation, nor do we wish to remarry in our homeland! We wish to join together, united as part of one nation,⁵¹ come what may!⁵² All your wonderful blessings mean nothing to us if we must separate!”⁵³

But Naomi was adamant. “My dear daughters,⁵⁴ you don’t understand.⁵⁵ Your chances of remarriage in Eretz Yisrael are

⁴⁶ Alshich

⁴⁷ Shoresch Yishai

⁴⁸ Malbim

⁴⁹ The Megillas Eliyahu explains that their crying came as a result of Naomi’s mentioning their deceased husbands in her blessing.

⁵⁰ Rus and Orpah used the wording, “We shall return with you to your nation.” The Ralbag points out from their use of the word *sheiva*, return, as opposed to join, that they were already converts and were returning to their nation, not newly joining it.

⁵¹ Midrash Lekach Tov

⁵² The Meshiv Nefesh explains that Naomi blessed them on the condition that they return to their land and nation. They, therefore, stressed that they were not worried about losing her blessings and wished to remain with her at all costs.

⁵³ Shoresch Yishai

⁵⁴ The Shoresch Yishai explains that she used this wording once she realized their tremendous love for her, demonstrated when they expressed their desire to stay with her even if it meant sacrificing everything. The Igeres Shmuel says that she wanted to explain to them that she only wanted their good, and even if they were her daughters, she would give them the same advice.

⁵⁵ The Alshich says that Naomi explained to them that even if they wanted to convert, they could stay in their homeland and keep the Torah and *mitzvos* in Moav. In case they were concerned they might not find a suitable match in Moav, Naomi told them they would face the same problem in Eretz Yisrael.

very slight. Few are those who would agree to take a convert, let alone an Amonite or Moavite. Although *halacha* permits a woman convert to marry a Jew, most are unaware of this *halacha* and will not agree.

“Furthermore,” Naomi implored, “you can’t count on my bearing other sons who will marry you in order to perform the *mitzva* of *yibum*.⁵⁶ It’s not so simple.⁵⁷ I am no longer young,⁵⁸ and my chances of remarriage are few.⁵⁹ If I do

⁵⁶ Usually *yibum* only applies to a brother who was born before his brother passed away. However, a brother who was born after his childless brother died cannot do *yibum* with the deceased’s wife and she is prohibited to him, as any brother’s wife is prohibited for another brother. The Torah only permits marriage of one brother after another to the same woman in the case of *yibum*.

Regarding Rus and Orpah, Rashi tells us that if Naomi would have had more children they would have been permitted to marry the wives of their deceased brothers because the marriages of Machlon and Kilion were not valid since their wives did not convert before marriage. The Midrash (Rus Rabba 2:15), on the other hand, states that Naomi explained to her daughters-in-law that even if she will bear more children, they would not be permitted to do *yibum*, because they were not yet born before their brothers’ passing.

This *Chazal* follows in accordance with the view that Machlon and Kilion did convert Rus and Orpah before marriage, because, if not, there would be no reason to prohibit them for Naomi’s other sons, as explained by Rashi. But according to this view, we still need to explain why Naomi goes into detail regarding the slight chances of her bearing more children, when, even if she would, they would be prohibited from marrying Rus and Orpah.

⁵⁷ The Igeres Shmuel explains that although Naomi thought there might be a chance that her daughters-in-law would remarry in Eretz Yisrael, she still insisted it would not be fair for them to join her in Beis Lechem and cause her pain upon seeing their remarriage to other men. In case they would insist they would not marry strangers but only Naomi’s relatives, she then proves to them that their chances are very slight.

⁵⁸ The Malbim explains that Naomi was talking figuratively. Obviously, they knew she had no other sons, and she didn’t think they would wait around for more to come.

⁵⁹ The Beer Miriam brings that Naomi was no longer of childbearing age, and, therefore, her chances of remarriage were few.

remarry, will I become pregnant right away, if at all? And if I do bear a child, it might be a girl. And even if I would remarry now⁶⁰ and give birth to a son in nine months, you definitely don't want to remain *agunos*⁶¹ until he is eligible for *yibum*. And if you still insist on waiting,⁶² can I promise he will want you?⁶³ He might⁶⁴ refuse to marry you⁶⁵ too.

⁶⁰ The Malbim adds that *Chazal* teach us that a widow who remains alone for ten years without intentions of remarriage can no longer bear children. According to this, because Naomi remained in Moav exactly ten years after her husband's passing, she told her daughters-in-law that in order for her to still be able to have children she must either remarry that night, the last night before ten years is up, or have had intentions to remarry during the ten years. She then concluded that both these possibilities were not applicable.

⁶¹ The Midrash (Rus Rabba 2:17) explains the words *halaben ta'agena* as coming from the word *igun*, meaning, "will you remain *agunos*?" But Rashi explains this as *ag uga*, "will you draw a circle around yourselves and limit your possibilities of marriage until the children grow up?" See Rashi's query on the explanation of the Midrash.

⁶² The Yalkut (Remez 601) explains that Naomi declared that even if all the above happens and she remarries, has children who grow up and are willing to marry them, those sons would still be prohibited because they were not living during their deceased brothers' lifetime.

⁶³ It is very possible that these sons would not want them. Firstly, the women would be much older than them, as they had been married for ten years and widowed even before they were born. Secondly, the *halachic* precedent that it is permitted to marry a female Amonite and Moavite convert was not yet generally accepted. Thirdly, they might suspect that their sisters-in-law were barren, for they were married for ten years and did not bear children (Igeres Shmuel).

⁶⁴ The basic understanding of this is that if Naomi would have other children, she would permit them to marry Rus and Orpah. However, the Chida views that Naomi did not hide the fact that even if she would have more sons, she would not let them marry these women. Her older sons passed away on account of marrying them and she wouldn't endanger her younger sons as well.

⁶⁵ In addition to the fact that there is no *mitzvas yibum* for sons born after their brother already died, their marriages to Machlon and Kilion were also invalid from the start, so certainly the brothers would not be obligated in *yibum*.

“My dear girls, I fear⁶⁶ that by the time you realize I won’t have sons to do *yibum* with you, it will be too late for you to marry anyone else. It will only add to my pain to see you alone. I have suffered enough on your account;⁶⁷ my sons’ marriage to you caused their death.⁶⁸

“Do not compare your situation to mine, and do not follow my example of not remarrying.⁶⁹ I have lost my entire family,⁷⁰ and I have no strength to rebuild my life. But you are young! Don’t despair and give up your futures forever!”

And They Raised Their Voices and Wept

Naomi’s words made a deep impression on Rus and Orpah. They despaired of marrying another of Naomi’s sons⁷¹ and had to face the fact that their mother-in-law refused their company, blaming her tragic situation on their marriage to her sons.⁷²

⁶⁶ Igeres Shmuel

⁶⁷ The Igeres Shmuel and the Alshich explain that Naomi wanted to make it clear that she did not blame them for what happened. She knew she was punished for her sin of not reproving her husband for deciding to leave Eretz Yisrael during the famine.

⁶⁸ Midrash Lekach Tov

⁶⁹ Toras Chesed

⁷⁰ The Akeidas Yitzchak explains that Naomi’s status was worse than her daughters-in-law who only lost their husbands. The Chida further explains that Elimelech was punished immediately without prior warning, while Machlon and Kilion were warned by their cattle dying. The Chida, therefore, writes that Naomi’s situation was much worse, because she was not forewarned that her husband was to be taken, but her daughters-in-law were.

⁷¹ Alshich

⁷² Shoresch Yishai

They walked, sobbing, until they had no strength left.⁷³ But the tears of the younger women were different from each other.⁷⁴ Rus was crying from the depths of her heart, “Please, Naomi, grant me a share in your nation and your God,”⁷⁵ while Orpah was simply emotional at the parting.

Thereupon, Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye⁷⁶ and returned to her nation, her homeland and her idols. She cast away any holiness which she had absorbed from her mother-in-law and her late husband, who was also, as mentioned previously, a special person.

Rus, though, was stubborn. Nothing could make her forgo that exalted level of purity and the connection to eternity that she craved, even if it came at the expense of remaining widowed forever.

Although on that day Orpah fell to bitter depths spiritually,⁷⁷ she was nevertheless rewarded for her good intentions in accompanying her mother-in-law and for her sorrow at leaving. She shed four tears⁷⁸ when she left

⁷³ Rus Rabba 2:20

⁷⁴ Yaavetz, Megillas Eliyahu

⁷⁵ Yalkut 601, Igeres Shmuel

⁷⁶ Shoresh Yishai. Some commentaries explain that this kiss was intended to express her gratitude towards Naomi for telling her the stark truth that following her would result in her remaining widowed forever.

⁷⁷ Rus Rabba 2:20

⁷⁸ See Rus Rabba 2:20 which explains that the reward which Orpah received was for the four *mil* which she accompanied her mother-in-law. Others view that because she accompanied Naomi forty steps, Hashem waited while Golyas cursed Hashem for forty days, and only afterwards was he killed by Dovid *Hamelech*.

Naomi,⁷⁹ for which she merited⁸⁰ four stalwart descendants: Saf, Madon, Golyas and Yashvi.⁸¹

This certainly doesn't compare to Rus's reward... *malchus beis* Dovid, royalty, wealth, God-fearing children!⁸² Eventually, even Golyas, the giant descendant of Orpah, fell at the feet of young Dovid, descendant of Rus!

Return to Your Sister-in-law

When Naomi realized that she had succeeded in convincing Orpah to return to Moav, she tried to do the same with Rus. Naomi didn't want to send Rus if she was interested in sincerely converting, but she followed the procedure that is followed with any convert.⁸³ She tried to dissuade her three times from converting, waiting to accept her with open arms should her intentions prove completely earnest.

Naomi tried three times to dissuade her daughters-in-law: Once when they started out, again after they insisted on coming along (after which Orpah decided to return), and now again. Naomi knew that if Rus would still insist after

⁷⁹ See Rashi Sota 42b, who explains that this means one tear from each eye during both times that the *pasuk* mentions her crying. Though her crying couldn't have been coming from a place of deep emotion if she only cried one tear from each eye, Hashem still granted her a great reward, for God does not hold back reward from any of His creations!

⁸⁰ Sota 42b

⁸¹ Shmuel 2:21-22

⁸² Sota as above

⁸³ Rus Rabba 2:16

this third time that she wished to convert, she would have to accept her as a righteous convert.

This time Naomi used Orpah's departure to persuade Rus to leave as well. She was concerned that perhaps Rus really wanted to follow her sister-in-law, but was worried about leaving Naomi alone.⁸⁴

“Rus,” Naomi began, “you have just witnessed Orpah's decision. I know she said she wanted to join me and convert, but she made her final decision and returned home, to her nation and her gods.⁸⁵ It's now clear to me that Orpah was not motivated to convert for ideological reasons; she was just ashamed to leave me. I fear that perhaps you feel the same way. Bear in mind, if you return now, you will at least have your sister-in-law⁸⁶ as company on the way back. If you return later, you will do so alone. Please, it's best you return now with Orpah!”⁸⁷

“Oh no, Heaven forbid!” Rus declared. “My intentions are sincere! How my heart desires to join you! I have no regrets that I came with you. I don't desire all the blessings which you showered upon me if I return home; all I wish is to join

⁸⁴ Megillas Eliyahu

⁸⁵ The Midrash (Rus Rabba 2:21) explains Naomi assumed that when Orpah would return home she would be unable to withstand the temptations of her people and would return to her idols.

⁸⁶ The Igeres Shmuel adds that Naomi explained to Rus that if she returned now there would be nothing to be ashamed of, because she could say that it was just too hard to part from her sister-in-law.

⁸⁷ Alshich, Beur Hagra

you despite the difficulties.⁸⁸ I prefer exile with you to peace in my father's royal home.⁸⁹

“Please, trust me, I am determined to convert⁹⁰ no matter what!⁹¹ If you refuse me, I will find someone else to convert me. I will follow behind you⁹² all the way to Eretz Yehuda. There I will convert⁹³ and become close to Hashem and the Jewish nation. But you – you will bear the blame for refusing me!⁹⁴

“Therefore,” Rus begged, “do not push me to leave you.⁹⁵ You will not succeed! Do not insult me, implying that I am only concerned with marrying your future offspring.⁹⁶ I repeat, do not wait for me to leave.⁹⁷ If I leave you, I will be

⁸⁸ The Malbim explains that Rus tried to explain to Naomi that her intentions to come along were the same as Naomi's – to merit the Holy Land and not for any other reason.

⁸⁹ R' Y. Karo

⁹⁰ The Malbim explains that when she said *ameich ami*, your nation is mine, Rus was implying she already understood and accepted forever the Jewish customs she had learned from Naomi.

⁹¹ Rus Rabba 2:22

⁹² Beur Hagra

⁹³ The Yaavetz explains that Rus wanted to stress that she did not necessarily need to go with Naomi to Eretz Yehuda. Rus didn't want Naomi to suspect that she wanted Naomi's assets in Eretz Yisrael in lieu of her *kesuba*. “If you don't let me join you, I'll go alone. I will not give up the great merit of joining the Jewish nation in its homeland.”

⁹⁴ As above

⁹⁵ Rashi, Igeres Shmuel

⁹⁶ Igeres Shmuel

⁹⁷ The Igeres Shmuel explains that Rus was concerned that perhaps Naomi was trying to insult her so that she should not want her company. Therefore she explained, “If this is your intention, it is ineffective. I will not go back home for

cutting myself off from the true God,⁹⁸ and that is something I cannot bear.⁹⁹ Although I am a daughter of royalty, I prefer to be a maidservant, as long as I can remain with you!”¹⁰⁰

Naomi succumbed to her pleas, but still wanted to depict the difficulties and challenges which lay ahead,¹⁰¹ as the *halacha* obligates be done with every convert.

She turned to her daughter-in-law and said, “It is not so simple to be a Jew. The Torah not only obligates us to keep the *mitzvos*, it also restricts us in many, many ways. For example, are you aware that after you convert you will be prohibited to walk on *Shabbos*¹⁰² outside the *t’chum Shabbos* of 2000 *amah*?¹⁰³ That you will no longer be permitted to attend theater shows

anything!”

⁹⁸ Rokeach, Alshich

⁹⁹ The Alshich explains that Rus wanted to make it clear that she would not leave her mother-in-law under any circumstances, not by night or day, not even for a short time. She feared that if she would leave her mother-in-law, her mentor, even for just a moment, it might cause her to regress to her old ways.

¹⁰⁰ Midrash Rus Zuta

¹⁰¹ Rus Rabba 2:22

¹⁰² Why did Naomi choose the laws of *Shabbos*? The Igeres Shmuel explains that *Shabbos* is one of the main principles of faith in one God. Therefore, Naomi felt it befitting to focus on this area. He further explains that the laws of *Shabbos*, specifically the laws of not leaving *t’chum Shabbos*, would become relevant shortly during the journey. Naomi wanted to make it clear to Rus that their journey would take longer on account of *Shabbos*.

This view does not correspond to *Chazal’s* view that Naomi left Moav on the first day of *Pesach* and came to Eretz Yisrael the next day. If that were the case, there was no *Shabbos* during the journey. Regarding *Yom Tov*, although she was prohibited to leave the *t’chum*, she walked as usual, assuming that she was permitted to on account of the importance of returning to Eretz Yisrael.

¹⁰³ Yevomos 47b

and circus exhibits?¹⁰⁴ And that you will be obligated to bring offerings in the *Mishkan*, wherever it may be, and in the *Beis Hamikdash*?¹⁰⁵

Rus nodded emphatically. “Yes, I accept that upon myself. I will go only where you go.¹⁰⁶ If you won’t leave *t’chum Shabbos*, neither will I. Nor will I partake of frivolities; they hold no attraction for me anyway. And I promise to bring any offerings Hashem wants of me wherever He wants - the *Mishkan* in Gilgal, Shiloh, Givon, Nov or even the *Beis Hamikdash* in Yerushalayim.”

Naomi continued to caution her about the difficulties of living as a Jew. “Are you aware, my dear Rus, that you will be prohibited to be alone with any man other than your husband?¹⁰⁷ And that before you sleep anywhere you must check to make sure there is a *mezuzah* on the doorpost?¹⁰⁸ And that each time you bring an offering you will have to spend the following night in Yerushalayim?”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Rus Rabba 2:22

¹⁰⁵ Rus Rabba 2:23

¹⁰⁶ The basic understanding of this is that Rus accepted upon herself all the obligations of a Jewish woman. However, the Shevus Yaakov explains that Naomi was concerned that her own deeds would be deemed insufficient when compared to those of Rus, because converts are more precise in *mitzvos* than the average Jew. (See the Gemara and Tosfos on Kiddushin 70b, “Converts are difficult for Israel like the *sapachas* disease.”) Therefore, Rus answered that she will commit herself to do that which Naomi does, without subtracting and also without adding, so that there would be no accusation against her mother-in-law.

¹⁰⁷ Yevomos 47b

¹⁰⁸ Rus Rabba 2:22

¹⁰⁹ Rus Rabba 2:23

“Yes, my dear mother-in-law,” Rus complied, “I know all this and take upon myself to act according to the *mitzvos* of the Torah. I will do all the above!”

“Know, my Rus,” Naomi continued, “what I’ve told you is but a drop in the bucket! I cannot teach you the entire Torah all at once, but you must be aware that there are 613 *mitzvos*. Are you willing to take all this upon yourself?”¹¹⁰ Rus affirmed that she would.¹¹¹

Naomi persisted. “As a Jewess, serving idols will be completely prohibited.¹¹² You will also be prohibited to marry certain relatives which you may marry now.¹¹³ And if you do not stand up to your obligations, you will deserve the punishment of one who disobeys the Torah.”¹¹⁴

Rus was undeterred. “I agree to it all!” she declared.

“Look,” Naomi tried another tactic, this time trying to frighten her, “it could be you don’t quite understand what I mean. The punishments which I refer to are very severe! They are under the jurisdiction of the *beis din*, and include stoning, burning, death by sword and choking! If you transgress a prohibition which warrants the death penalty you will be

¹¹⁰ Yevomos 47b

¹¹¹ Rus replied by saying *ameich ami*, your nation is mine. The word *ameich* is equivalent to the number 610 (the Kaf Stuma is equal to 500), and the three letters of the word complete the count of 613 (Igeres Shmuel).

¹¹² Yevomos 47b, Rus Rabba 2:23

¹¹³ Midrash Zuta Rus 1

¹¹⁴ Rus Rabba 2:22

executed by the *beis din*, and you will not even merit a decent burial. You will be buried in the cemetery for the executed.”¹¹⁵

Rus didn’t even get nervous. “My dear mother-in-law, nothing will deter me! I am willing to be executed, to be buried anywhere, as long as I join your nation! God is my witness that my intentions are sincere.¹¹⁶ I will never turn back. Even after your passing,¹¹⁷ I will always remain a Jewess! I swear to you,¹¹⁸ I will not leave you; only death¹¹⁹ will separate us.¹²⁰ Then, too,¹²¹ I will be buried wherever you

¹¹⁵ Yevomos 47b

¹¹⁶ Megillas Eliyahu

¹¹⁷ Ralbag

¹¹⁸ The Malbim explains that Rus’s promise was to keep the Torah and its laws. But some commentaries explain that her promise was never to leave her mother-in-law.

¹¹⁹ Because Naomi told Rus that she might find her death by execution via *beis din*, Rus *davened* that only a natural death, the meaning of the death mentioned in the *pasuk*, should separate her and her mother-in-law (Igeres Shmuel).

¹²⁰ The Midrash Zuta explains that Rus wanted to calm Naomi and explain that she did not have intentions of looking for a *shidduch* from any other family in Eretz Yisrael; she will cling only to Naomi forever. The Alshich explains that Rus wanted to stress that only her own passing shall separate them. Naomi’s passing shall not, because once Naomi passes away, Rus wouldn’t be able to continue living without her and would probably pass on soon after, leaving them to meet again in *Olam Haba*.

¹²¹ The Igeres Shmuel explains that Rus told Naomi that when Naomi passes away she will continue to live where Naomi lived to ensure that she be buried next to Naomi. He further explains that Rus wanted to tell Naomi that after Naomi’s passing she will not be able to be together with her in *Olam Haba* due to her lowly level compared to Naomi, but she requests that she merit to live with Naomi in this world. The Megillas Eliyahu brings an opposing view that Rus explained to Naomi that after she converts, Naomi will be unable to be together with her in *Gan Eden*, because “where the repentant stands, even totally righteous *tzaddikim* are unable to stand.”

are buried.”¹²²

Rus then concluded with a solemn declaration, “My dear mother-in-law, my intentions of conversion are as pure as your intention to return to your homeland.¹²³ From this day on I have only one purpose in life – to gather as many *mitzvos* as I can for as long as I am alive!”¹²⁴

And She Sees That She Insists

Naomi was now convinced¹²⁵ of Rus’s sincerity. She understood that she should no longer reject Rus¹²⁶ and desisted¹²⁷ from trying further. Rus’s insistence that she was committed to living a life of Torah¹²⁸ made a great impression on Naomi.

Rus’s conversion was favorably accepted in heaven too. From that time onward, she was promised the greatest of

¹²² R’ Y. Karo. The Alshich explains that Rus wanted to express her desire to be buried specifically in *Eretz Hakodesh*. This was unrelated to her desire to convert, because she could have converted in *chutz la’aretz* too.

¹²³ Malbim

¹²⁴ Rus Rabba 2:24

¹²⁵ The Igeres Shmuel explains that Naomi saw that Rus’s determination was not wavering with her arguments, rather she was becoming more and more determined. She therefore stopped trying to convince her further.

¹²⁶ The Igeres Shmuel adds that usually a convert is dealt with as, “the left hand pushes away and the right hand brings close.” The potential convert is told both the negative and the positive aspects of Judaism. Here, Naomi did not even present the positive to Rus because she saw that Rus was determined to convert even without knowing all the good that awaited her.

¹²⁷ Yevomos 47a

¹²⁸ Midrash Zuta Rus 1

rewards. Her spiritual level was even compared to that of Naomi's.¹²⁹

And so they walked, side by side, enduring the hardships of the journey. But while Naomi's steps were light and joyful as she neared her beloved homeland, Rus's steps¹³⁰ required intense effort.¹³¹ With all her good intentions, she knew the road ahead was long and arduous.¹³² When Naomi saw how serious Rus was she understood, beyond any trace of doubt, that Rus was sincere.¹³³

Thus Rus embarked on a new life. In place of wealth and pampering, living in her father's palace, she walked side by side with her mother-in-law, who was returning humiliated. She continued on, en-route to a life of eternity.



¹²⁹ Yalkut Remez 601

¹³⁰ The Megillas Eliyahu explains that, on the contrary, when Naomi saw the journey was easy for Rus in her great desire to cling to the true God, she understood Rus's intentions were sincere and no longer tried to push her away.

¹³¹ Malei Haomer

¹³² Yaavetz

¹³³ The Chida states that when Naomi realized the journey was difficult for Rus, she understood that Rus sincerely took upon herself the yoke of Torah. He bases his premise on the famous story in the Gemara (Bava Metzia 84a) of Reish Lakish who accepted upon himself the yoke of Torah and immediately lost his physical strength. R' Yochanan explained that this loss of strength came because Reish Lakish accepted the Torah. The same now happened to Rus - when Naomi saw how hard it was for Rus even to walk she understood that her strength left her because she wholeheartedly accepted the Torah upon herself.

