

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Insights into the Bible
[13]

The "Other" in the Book of Ruth
The Book of Ruth



Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld: "Ruth in Boaz's Field", 1828

Chapter 1

1. Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land, and a man went from Bethlehem of Judah to sojourn in the fields of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

! There are no "others" - "he and his wife and his two sons."

2. And the man's name was Elimelech, and his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons' names were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites, from Bethlehem of Judah, and they came to the fields of Moab and remained there.

3. Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons.

4. And they married Moabite women, one named Orpah, and the other named Ruth, and they dwelt there for about ten years.

! The "others" appear on the scene - "And they married Moabite women."

5. And both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was left [bereft] of her two children and of her husband.

6. Now she arose with her daughters-in-law and returned from the fields of Moab, for she had heard in the field of Moab that the Lord had remembered His people to give them bread.

7. Then she went forth from the place where she had been, and her two daughters-in-law with her, and they went on the road to return to the land of Judah.

8. And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each woman to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the deceased and with me.

! The "others" have been kind but they belong in a different place.

9. May the Lord grant you that you find rest, each woman in her husband's house," and she kissed them, and they raised their voices and wept.

10. And they said to her, "[No,] but we will return with you to your people."

11. And Naomi said, "Return, my daughters; why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they should be your husbands?"

12. Return, my daughters, go, for I have become too old to marry, that I should say that I have hope. Even if I had a husband tonight, and even if I had borne sons,

13. Would you wait for them until they grow up? Would you shut yourselves off for them and not marry? No, my daughters, for it is much more bitter for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me."

14. And they raised their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth cleaved to her.

! The expected happened: "the other" turned her back.

15. And she said, "Lo, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and to her god; return after your sister- in-law."

16. And Ruth said, "Do not entreat me to leave you, to return from following you, for wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God.

17. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. So may the Lord do to me and so may He continue, if anything but death separate me and you."

! The unexpected happened: "the other" doesn't turn her back.

18. And she saw that she was determined to go with her; so she stopped speaking to her.

! The presence of "the other" is tolerated.

19. And they both went on until they arrived to Bethlehem. And it came to pass when they arrived to Bethlehem, that the entire city was astir on their account, and they said, "Is this Naomi?"

20. And she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Marah, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

21. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why [then] should you call me Naomi, seeing that the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has dealt harshly with me?"

! "...the Lord has brought me back empty" - The "other" was not yet fully acknowledged.

22. So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, who returned from the fields of Moab-and they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Chapter 2

1. Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a mighty man of valor, of the family of Elimelech, and his name was Boaz.

2. And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "I will go now to the field, and I will glean among the ears of grain, after someone whom I will please." And she said, "Go, my daughter."

! "Go, my daughter" in this context is an expression of deference, not yet of love and inclusiveness.

3. And she went, and she came, and she gleaned in the field after the reapers, and her chance was [to come to] the field that [belonged] to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

4. And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and he said to the reapers, "May the Lord be with you!" And they said to him, "The Lord bless you."

5. Then Boaz said to his servant, who stood over the reapers, "To whom does this maiden belong?"

6. And the servant in charge of the reapers answered and said, "She is a Moabite maiden who returned with Naomi from the fields of Moab."

! "She is a Moabite maiden" – She is "the other."

7. And she said, 'I will now glean and gather from among the sheaves after the reapers.' And she came and stood even from the morning until now, except when she sat a little in the house."

8. And Boaz said to Ruth, "Have you not heard, my daughter? Do not go to glean in another field, neither shall you go away from here, and here you shall stay with my maidens.

9. Your eyes shall be on the field that they reap, and you shall follow them; have I not ordered the youths not to touch you? And [if] you are thirsty, you may go to the vessels and drink from that which the youths draw."

! "...and here you shall stay with my maidens." - You are not "the other," you are one of us!"

10. And she fell on her face and prostrated herself to the ground, and she said to him, "Why have I pleased you that you should take cognizance of me, seeing that I am a foreigner?"

! "Why have I pleased you that you should take cognizance of me, seeing that I am a foreigner?" – I am the other, you are not supposed to care for me!

11. And Boaz replied and said to her, "It has been told to me all that you did for your mother-in-law after your husband's death, and you left your father and your mother and your native land, and you went to a people that you did not know before.

! "It has been told to me all that you did for your mother-in-law..." – You didn't see the "other" in Naomi. I don't see "the other" in you!

12. May the Lord reward your deeds, and may your reward be full from the Lord God of Israel, under Whose wings you have come to take shelter."

13. And she said, "Let me find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me, and you have spoken to the heart of your handmaid, but I am not [as worthy] as one of your handmaids."

! You didn't treat me as "the other" even though I am "the other".

14. And Boaz said to her at mealtime, "Come here and partake of the bread, and dip your morsel in the vinegar." So she sat down beside the reapers, and he handed her parched grain, and she ate and was sated and left over.

15. And she rose to glean, and Boaz ordered his servants, saying, "Let her glean also among the sheaves, and do not embarrass her.

16. And also, pretend to forget some of the bundles for her, and leave it that she may glean, and do not scold her."

17. And she gleaned in the field until evening, and she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.

18. And she carried [it] and came to the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. And she took [it] out and gave her what she had left over after being sated.

19. And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where have you gleaned today and where have you worked? May he who took heed of you be blessed." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and she said, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz."

20. And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he of the Lord, who did not leave off his kindness with the living or with the deceased." And Naomi said to her, "The man is our kinsman; he is one of our near kinsmen."

! "The man is our kinsman; he is one of our near kinsmen" – He is "one of us," he is not "the other;" but you, Ruth, are not "the other" either.

21. And Ruth the Moabitess said, "He also said to me; You shall stay with my youths until they finish my entire harvest."

22. And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maidens, so that they do not molest you in another field."

23. And she stayed with Boaz's maidens to glean until the completion of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest, and she dwelt with her mother-in-law.

Chapter 3

1. And Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, shall I not seek rest for you, that it be good for you?"

! Naomi is moving from her own misery to helping Ruth!

2. And now, is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maidens you were? Behold, he is winnowing the threshing-floor of the barley tonight.

3. And you shall bathe and anoint yourself and put on your clothes and go down to the threshing-floor; do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.

4. And it shall be when he lies down, that you shall know where he will lie, and you shall come and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what you shall do."

5. And she said to her, "All that you say to me I will do."

6. And she went down to the threshing-floor, and she did all that her mother-in-law had charged her.

7. And Boaz ate and drank, and his heart was merry, and he went to lie at the edge of the stack, and she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down.

8. And it came to pass at midnight, and the man quaked and was taken around, and behold a woman was lying at his feet.

9. And he said, "Who are you?" And she said, "I am Ruth, your handmaid, and you shall spread your skirt over your handmaid, for you are a near kinsman."

10. And he said, "May you be blessed of the Lord, my daughter; your latest act of kindness is greater than the first, not to follow the young men, whether poor or rich.

! True kindness is consistent!

11. And now, my daughter, do not fear, all that you say I will do for you, for the entire gate of my people know that you are a valiant woman.

12. And now, indeed, I am a near kinsman, but there is a kinsman closer than I.

! "...but there is a kinsman closer than I" – He is less "other" than I

13. Stay over tonight, and it will come to pass in the morning, that if he redeems you, well, let him redeem you, but if he does not wish to redeem you, I will redeem you, as the Lord lives; lie down until morning."

14. And she lay at his feet until morning, and she rose before one could recognize his fellow, for he said, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing-floor."

15. And he said, "Bring the shawl that *is* on you and hold it." And when she held it, he measured six *ephahs* of barley and laid *it* on her. Then she went into the city.

16 When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, "Is that you, my daughter?"

Then she told her all that the man had done for her.

17 And she said, "These six *ephahs* of barley he gave me; for he said to me, 'Do not go empty-handed to your mother-in-law.'"

18 Then she said, "Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out; for the man will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day."

Chapter 4

1. And Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz had spoken was passing, and he said, "Turn aside, sit down here, So-and-So," and he turned aside and sat down.

2. And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here," and they sat down.

3. And he said to the near kinsman, "Naomi, who has returned from the field of Moab, is selling the portion of the field that belonged to our brother, to Elimelech.

! The near kinsman understands "selling" and "portion" and "our brother"

4. And I said, 'I will let you know, saying: Buy [it] in the presence of those who sit here and before the elders of my people; if you will redeem, redeem; and if he will not redeem, tell me, and I will know, for there is no one besides you to redeem, and I am after you.'" And he said, "I will redeem."

5. And Boaz said, "On the day that you buy the field from the hand of Naomi and from Ruth the Moabite, the wife of the deceased, you have bought [it], to preserve the name of the deceased on his heritage."

6. And the near kinsman said, "I cannot redeem [it] for myself, lest I mar my heritage. You redeem my redemption for yourself for I cannot redeem [it]."

! The near kinsman is far from helping. For him "the other" is very far away.

7. Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redemption and exchange; to confirm anything, one would remove his shoe and give [it] to his fellow, and this was the attestation in Israel.

8. And the near kinsman said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself," and he removed his shoe.

9. And Boaz said to the elders and to the entire people, "You are witnesses today that I have bought all that was Elimelech's and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's from Naomi.

10. And also, Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's wife, have I acquired for myself for a wife, to preserve the name of the deceased on his heritage, so that the name of the deceased not be obliterated from his brethren and from the gate of his place, you are witnesses today."

! For Boaz (the "further away" kinsman) "the other" becomes part of his family.

11. And all the people who were in the gate and the elders replied, "[We are] witnesses! May the Lord make the woman who is entering your house like Rachel and like Leah, both of whom built up the house of Israel, and prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem.

! The people (following Boaz's lead) acknowledge and bless "the other" who now belong together with Rachel and Leah.

12. And may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, with the seed that the Lord will give you from this maiden."

13. And Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he was intimate with her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son.

14. And the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is the Lord, Who did not deprive you of a redeemer today, and may his name be famous in Israel.

15. And may he be to you a restorer of life and to sustain your old age, for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, bore him, and she is better to you than seven sons."

! **"The other" can genuinely love you and can be better than your own (certainly better than the near kinsman).**

16. And Naomi took the child and placed him in her bosom, and she became his nurse.

17. And the women neighbors gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi," and they called his name Obed-he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

18. And these are the generations of Perez: Perez begot Hezron.

19. And Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadab.

20. And Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmah.

21. And Salmon begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed.

22. And Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David.



! **When "the other" is being acknowledged the messiah is on his way!**

Appendix

Emmanuel Levinas and the Ethics of the Other

Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) was a Lithuanian-French philosopher who centered his work on ethics as "first philosophy," placing the encounter with the "Other" (l'Autre) at the heart of human existence. He argued that our responsibility toward the Other is infinite, asymmetrical, and inescapable, breaking through self-centered, everyday life.

Key Aspects of the Other in Levinas's Philosophy

- **Alterity (Otherness):** The Other is not a mirror of the self or "like us," but a unique, incomprehensible being whose radical difference (alterity) must be celebrated.
- **The Face-to-Face Encounter:** The "face" of the Other is not merely physical, but the expression of their vulnerability and inner world. It commands a response and forces a rethink of one's place in the world.
- **Infinite Responsibility:** The presence of the Other calls us to responsibility, which is not chosen but imposed. This obligation is infinite and cannot be fully fulfilled.
- **Refusal of Totalization:** The Other cannot be reduced to an object of knowledge or captured by the "I" (same). They resist being categorized or controlled.
- **Ethical Disturbance:** The Other disturbs our complacency, preventing us from remaining indifferent and making us question our own "being".
- For Levinas, ethical action is not about following universal rules, but about responding to the unique, personal claim of the other person in a face-to-face interaction.