

CHAPTER 1

1

Said R. Zeira:

This megillah contains nothing of ritual impurity or purity, nothing of prohibition or permission; It was written solely to teach you how great a reward is given to those who do acts of kindness.¹

2

In the days that the judges were judged

Analogize this to a province that owed a remainder of its tax-obligation to the king.

What did the king do?

He sent an official to collect it.

What did the people of the province do?

They took him and beat him and collected from him, saying: "What he sought to do to us, we did to him";

So too "**In the days that the judges were judged**"

a Jewish man would worship idols

and a justice would seek to impose justice on him

but he would come and beat the justice,

saying: "What he sought to do to me, I did to him".

Woe to a generation whose judges are judged!²

¹ R. Zeira's statement may presume that most of Tanakh serves to teach law, whereas Rut exceptionally seeks to inspire us to emulate those who act with kindness. A similar assumption seems to stand behind the opening question of Rashi's commentary to Chumash: Why does the Torah not begin with the first mitzvah, namely "This month shall be for you etc."?

However – even if one assumes that

- a) Rashi's question is intended seriously, and
- b) its premise is not utterly rejected by his answer

it would be astonishing to apply the same principle to all of Tanakh. What matters of law do Yeshayah, Yonah, Iyov, etc. come to teach?

Alternatively, R. Zeira's statement may be read as reacting against a specific narrow reading of Ruth which sees it as specifically intended to teach the law that Moabitesses may join "the community of Hashem", i.e. that male Jews may marry female Moabite converts, despite Devarim 23:4's ban against Moabites. This law is cited seven (7!) times in Rut Rabbah.

Of course, teaching the law also accomplished legitimating the Davidic monarchy, if one assumes that Biblical readers of the Megillah knew that King David had Moabite ancestors. For contemporary readers, it works the other way around – the story teaches us how tenuous the Davidic hold on aristocracy was.

My preference is to see the suggested purposes as conjoined. Megillat Ruth teaches that Hashema rewarded acts of kindness with monarchy, even when that reward required choosing a less-likely reading of His Torah. Rut Rabbah states several times that the ruling permitting the inclusion of Moabitesses originated *when Rut* appeared in Beit Lechem – had she not appeared, or had she not been as impressive, the law would have remained gender-neutral. Torah has many potential legitimate meanings – "These and those are the living words of G-d" – and which become Halakhah is affected by human choices, both directly through *psak* and indirectly by influencing the moral and spiritual environment in which Halakhah is decided.

² A weakness of both halves of the parable is that in each case, the defendant's objection is not to the character of the official seeking to impose the law, but rather to the law itself. In the next paragraph, by contrast, it is

3

Woe to a generation that judged its judges,

But also – woe to a generation whose judges deserve to be judged:

Shimshon followed after his eyes,

as Scripture writes “take her for me, for she is proper *in my eyes*”;

Gid'on worshipped *avodah zarah*,

as Scripture writes: “Gid'on made it into an apron . . .”³

4

In the days of the judging of the judges (plural)

Who were the judges (who served simultaneously)?

Rav said: Barak and Devorah.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Shamgar and Ehud.

Rav Huna said: Devorah and Barak and Yael.

“Judge” = 1; “Judges = 2; “the Judges= 3”⁴

acknowledged that at least some of the Judges committed the same sins as the people they were judging, and it is not made clear whether or why defendants must submit to hypocritical authorities.

Perhaps the intent here is to explain the refrain of the Book of Judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel; each man acted as seemed proper in his own eyes”. Hypocrisy is always with us, but there is a tipping point at which lack of respect for some of those who enforce the law generates a lack of respect for the entire notion of law.

The question that remains is: Given that this describes the environment of the period of the Judges, why is it *literarily* important to emphasize that the Book of Ruth took place in a time when judges were justifiably disrespected, and so respect for law broke down?

³ Note that Shimshon married a woman who “seemed proper in his own eyes”. His action was emblematic of the failure of the period. However, as Torah Temimah notes, many Judges were righteous, and we will learn in the next paragraph that the story of Ruth is not placed in the times of Gid'on or Shimshon. We must therefore say, as in the previous paragraph, that the obvious great failings of some Judges undermined the entire concept of law, so that even Judges of excellent character would be treated as brigands if they tried to enforce law.

⁴ Torah Temimah points out compellingly that Shamgar's accession is reported in Judges 3:31, and Ehud's death in 4:1, suggesting that Shamgar and Ehud overlapped. 4:1 also reports that “Benei Yisroel continued to do that which “seemed evil in G-d's eyes”. However, there is no similar report for the times of Barak, Devorah, and Yael, although 6:1 reports an immediate backsliding after their days.

The question for us is whether these options are simply attempts to satisfy the condition of simultaneous Judges, or rather arguments as to the best temporal context for Megilalt Rut. For example: Ehud fights against Moav, and Shamgar's period is described in Judges 5:6 as one in which travel was dangerous. Barak and Devorah, by contrast, fight against Canaan, and apparently secured the highways. Which of these circumstances seems a better fit for Elimelekh's upcoming removal to Moav, and Naomi and Rut's trek back?

Also: How might our perception of the story change if it occurs during the period that a woman serves as Judge? When two women serve as Judges?

Here we come to the border between one kind of “pshat”, which I will define here as what we can derive from the text, and one kind of “midrash”, which I will define here as how we can responsibly but speculatively fill gaps left in or opened up by the text. Would it matter if the leading Judges of Ruth's time – when the law allowing the acceptance of Moabitesses was established – were women?

5

Because they tricked The Holy Blessed One, some of them worshipping idols and some of them worshipping The Holy Blessed One. The Holy Blessed One imposed a famine on them in the days of their Judges.⁵

6

But did we not learn in a beraita: *"In times of plague, in times of war – bring all feet in; in times of famine – scatter all feet"* – why was Elimelekh punished (for leaving, when he was fulfilling *"in times of famine – scatter"*)?!

Because he collapsed the heart of Israel.

Analogize this to a senator who was situated in a province,

and people of the province thought and said that if there would come years of scarcity, he would be able to adequately supply the province with food for ten years.

When the years of scarcity came, his maidservant went out and stood in the market with her container in hand,

and the people said: "This is he whom we were confident that, if scarcity came, he would be able to support us for ten years?! His maidservant is standing in the market with her container in hand!"

So too Elimelekh was among the greats of the province and sustainers of the generation,

but when years of famine came, he said: "Now all Israel surround my doorways, each with his container!".

He arose and fled from before them –

This is the meaning of **"A man went from Breadhome in Gratitude to G-d;** when distress came, he went away and abandoned them.⁶

7

A man went

Like a stump (i.e., without describing his possessions (Jastrow))⁷

⁵ As Torah Temimah points out, the use of "tricked" here is confusing, and the connection to famine is unclear.

⁶ See Bava Kamma 60b and Sifrei Devarim 321 for discussion of and textual sources for the general advice to flee places of famine.

The analogy is not at all clear, as Elimelekh does not fake poverty – he runs away.

See subsequent paragraphs for an explanation of why, if Elimelekh was wealthy, his possessions are not mentioned in the description of his departure. See also Rut 4:3.

I wonder if this interpretation is not based on the translation of **בית לחם** as BreadHome, i.e. as indicating that Elimelekh did not leave because he personally feared starvation.

⁷ One explanation is that describing possessions is a mode of honoring, and Elimelekh's departure – whether because he was deserting, or simply because he was leaving the Land of Israel – did not deserve honor.

8

He and his wife and his two sons

He primary, his wife secondary to him, and his sons secondary to them⁸.

9

The name of the man – G-disKing

Rabbi Meir would interpret names;

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karcha would interpret names.

The name of the man – G-disKing

Because he would say: “Kingship will come to me”

and the name of his wife – Pleasance

because her deeds were pleasing and pleasant⁹

10

and the name of his two sons – Diseaseⁱ and Devastation

Translate Machlon as “erased”; translate “Kilyon” as “Ended from the World”¹⁰

11

R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: Palace-men.

R. Menachama said: Aristocrats.¹¹

⁸ Possibly this is intended to make Naomi blameless for leaving Israel. But in that case, why say that the sons were secondary to “them”, rather than to “her”, especially as they are “his sons”, not “their sons”?

⁹ Note that the decision to “interpret names” in Megillat Rut is well-grounded textually in Naomi’s pun on her name at the end of Chapter 1.

“Kingship will come to me” conveys almost the exact opposite sense of my translation, “G-disKing”. Rabbinic interpretations often work with a particular kind of irony in which true knowledge of the future misleads because someone mistakes a statement about their larger self – which includes their heirs – for a statement about their smaller, individual self. See for example Potiphar’s wife, who “knew” that she and Joseph would share descendants, but did not realize that he would marry her daughter.

The larger import of Rut Rabbah’s translation is that Elimelekh is seduced into arrogance by his royal self-awareness – he feels that he can leave his community without concern for his standing. In the end his descendants become king only through the peculiar mechanism of yibum – David is not his genetic descendant. My translation, by contrast, uses Elimelekh’s name as a marker of the period of Judges, and his death signals a transition to the human monarchy. In a thearchy, perhaps human beings feel less responsible for the fate of their fellows, and so Elimelekh left during the famine without consciousness of guilt.

¹⁰ I prefer connecting Machlon to מחלה

¹¹ This description of the ill-fated sons seems out of place.

12

Said Rabbi Pinchas: Bearing that same crown with which Efrayim was crowned by our forefather Yaakov at the time of his death.

Yaakov said to him: Efrayim my son – The head of the tribe, the head of the Yeshiva, the best and best-regarded of my sons will be called by your name: Elkanah, David, Yorav'am, Machlon and Kilyon.¹²

13

They came to the fields of Bornfromfather and they were there

Originally they came to the cities, but found them openly licentious, afterward they went to the villages but found them pressed for water, so they went back to the cities.¹³

14

GodisKing, husband of Pleasance, died

When a man dies, who feels the lack? His wife.¹⁴

15

so there remained she and her two sons

Said R. Chanina son of Rabbi Abahu: "She became leftovers of consolation (alt: flour-offerings)"¹⁵

¹² It is nothing short of astonishing to see Yorov'am on the list of "best and best-regarded" of Yaakov's descendants, and therefore very difficult to evaluate what this is intended to teach us about Machlon and Kilyon.

¹³ Note that "fields" = cities; this is argued midrashically in a section I have left out. The complicated narrative solves the oddity of "they were there" by inserting a period in which they were not, but clearly the explanations of why they originally left, and then returned, are imports from reality rather than emergent from the text. One might argue that this is not an attempt at interpretation, but rather a use of the text as an excuse to attack city morality; I prefer to see it as an attempt to use common knowledge to fill an apparent gap.

¹⁴ Therefore the text describes him as Naomi's husband, not as his sons' father.

¹⁵ שירי מנחות is a common rabbinic phrase, but I don't understand what the analogy adds.

16

They married Bornfromfather women

A beraita in the name of Rabbi Meir:

They did not convert them, nor did they immerse them, and they did not allow the law to originate [alt: there was no law to originate] and they were not punished for it [alt: for them]:

“Ammonite” – not Ammonitess;

“Moabite” – not Moabites.¹⁶

17

the name of the first was Backoftheneck

because she turned the back of her neck to her mother in law¹⁷

18

and the name of the second was Companionship Translate instead “Agreement”, because she “saw”, i.e. agreed with, the words of her mother in law.¹⁸

¹⁶ This is most mysterious; if the wives were not converted, why were they not punished? It seems unlikely that this is making the technical halakhic argument is that by not converting them, they avoided violating Devarim 23:4 and instead violated a lesser prohibition of promiscuous intercourse with Gentiles.

However – any interpretation will need to explain why Machlon and Kilyon died - I don't think deaths “just happen” in the context of Rut – and it would be troubling to attribute their deaths to the sin of marrying Rut and Orpah, when it is Rut's relationship to one of them which generates all the positive outcomes of the narrative.

¹⁷ Harsh but obvious

¹⁸ I prefer the derivation from רעות

19

R. Bibi in the name of R. Reuven:

Ruth and Orpah were daughters of Eglon (King of Moav, killed by Ehud).¹⁹

This is the significance of ". . . Ehud said: I have a word of G-d to you. He rose from the throne".

Said The Holy Blessed One: You rose from your seat and took three steps for the sake of My honor – By your life, I will raise up from you a son who will sit on My throne, namely Shlomoh, of whom Scripture writes: "Shlomoh sat on the throne of Hashem

20

Said R. Yudan:

This is an argument a fortiori:

Eglon was a descendant of Balak,

and because of the seven altars that he (Balak) built (to G-d) for evil purposes, he merited siring Ruth, so one who builds an altar for good purposes, how much more so!²⁰

21

R. Yudan bar Simon said: Whenever it says כעשר, or כעשרים, or כארבעים – it can mean more or less.²¹

¹⁹ The psychologically fascinating claim here is that Rut and Orpah married into the nation whose hero had killed their father.

²⁰ R. Yudan does not seek to justify the connection of Rut to Eglon – he assumes it. It therefore seems possible to me that the connection to Eglon was an oral tradition, which the previous paragraph added a textual connection for.

²¹ I translated "nearly", but on further reflection, "around" is probably more correct. There is a halakhic advantage in assuming that they were not actually married for 10 years, but I don't have any evidence for limiting the meaning to "nearly".

22

Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Yehoshua son of Rabbi Avin and Rabbi Zechariah son in law of Rabbi Levi in the name of Rabbi Levi: The Master of Mercy never initially takes repayment by taking life

...

This was true in the case of Machlon and Kilyon as well; initially their horses, donkeys, and camels died, and (only) afterward **The two of them also died, Disease and Devastation.**²²

23

so the woman remained from her two sons and from her husband

Said Rabbi Chanina in the name of Rabbi Abahu:

She became a remainder of a remainder.²³

24

She arose, she and her daughters-in-law - she returned from the fields of Bornfromfather, for she had heard in the field of Bornfromfather that G-d had recalled His nation to give them bread.

From whom did she hear?

From the peddlers circulating in the city.²⁴

25

She went out of the place where she had been there, and her two daughters-in-law with her

Was she the only one who left there? Did not some camels leave, and some donkeys leave, and yet you write "and *she* left"!?

R. Azaria in the name of R. Yuda son of Simon, R. Chanin in the name of R. Shmuel son of R. Yitzchak:

The greatest (person) of the city is its radiance, its glory, and its praise. If s/he turns elsewhere, its radiance, its glory, and its praise have turned elsewhere.²⁵

²² This is textually grounded in גַּם, also – one could take this to mean "in addition to Elimelekh", but as we already learned of Elimelekh's death, the word is unnecessary, and גַּם is often taken this way in מדרש הלכה (at least מדרש הלכה with an Akivan literary sensibility, which does not see idiom as an excuse for inefficiency).

²³ See note 15.

²⁴ Torah Temimah suggests that two questions are addressed here:

a) Where would she have heard, if not where she was, i.e. in שדה מואב?

b) Why specifically peddlers?

His ingenious answer is that on Bava Kamma 82a we learn that Ezra decreed that peddlers should circulate with cosmetics in the cities, but that the commentators note that this decree is suspended during famine, when it might seem frivolous. The return of peddlers therefore indicated the end of the famine. Perhaps the Jewish community fulfilled this decree even in Moav, or perhaps Ezra simply codified a widespread Near Eastern practice.

I wonder if another problem being addressed here isn't that Naomi, so far as we know, has no contact with any Jewish community in Moav, and indeed Elimelekh went to Moav to escape the Jewish poor – so she could have heard only from itinerants.

²⁵ I don't understand the argument. Why should we assume that the women had animals with them? Why is the singular problematic because of the missing animals, and not because of the present daughters-in-law?

26

and they went on the way to return to the land of Gratitude to G-d

Said Rabbi Yochanan: They transgressed the line of the Torah and travelled on Yom Tov.

Alternatively:

The roadway narrowed for them, so that they walked alone.

Alternatively:

They walked barefoot, and their bodies would crumble?

Alternatively:

They were engaged in the topic of the laws of conversion.²⁶

27

Pleasant said to her two daughters-in-law: "Go, return, each wife to her mother's house!"

Read instead of *imah*= mother, *ummah*=nation²⁷

28

May G-d do kindness with you

R. Chanina the son of R. Acha: The pronunciation is יעִט, but it is written יעִטָּה.²⁸

26

a. Torah Temimah suggests that as they seem to have arrived on the day of the Omer-harvesting, they likely travelled the day before, which is the Yom Tov of Pesach, and that furthermore that **"they went on the way"** suggests they did so without stopping. He further argues that they did so to correct for their husbands' sin in leaving Israel, and leaves open the possibility that they acted correctly, if perhaps illegally, in doing so. I do not find his textual argument compelling, nor do I see how returning to Israel following a famine could correct for the sin of leaving during a famine. I am more interested in why Rav Yochanan thinks this happened while Orpah was still with them.

b. The textual argument, that "they" means "only they" is weak. I think the underlying problem this interpretation tries to solve is how any number of unmarried women could have travelled on the roadway without being attacked.

c. The textual argument seems to be that **"they went (directly) on the way"**, but how often does Tanakh mention people putting on their shoes?!

d. I don't see the textual argument, but the claim that conversion was the topic of conversation all along sheds light on Orpah's departure.

²⁷ Perhaps the social convention was that widows returned to their fathers' houses, not their mothers'

²⁸ This might be simply a textual note, but as such qeri ukhetiv's are often interpreted elsewhere in Rut Rabbah, I wonder if something has been lost from the text here.

29

as you have done with the dead

by taking care of their burial shrouds

and with me!

by foregoing their ketubah-money for her sake²⁹

30

May G-d grant you that you find rest

Said R. Chanina said R. Acha: It is written ומצאון (but pronounced ומצאנה). This foreshadows that one would find rest, but one would not.³⁰

31

each wife in the home of her husband. She kissed them. They raised their voices and cried, saying to her: "But we will return with you to your people!"

Pleasance said: "Return, my daughters! Why would you go with me? Do I yet have sons in my entrails, who will become husbands to you?"

Does a man perform yibum with the wife of a brother who was dead before he was born?³¹

32

Return, my daughters! Go!

R. Shmuel bar Chiyya son of R. Yudan said in the name of R. Chanina:

It writes שבנה three times here, parallel to the three times one pushes off a (potential) convert, but if he persists beyond that, we accept him.

Said R. Yitzchak: "A convert must not lay down outside" – A person should always push (converts) away with the lefthand and draw (them) near with the right.³²

33

For I have aged past becoming wife to a man. If I were to say: 'I have something to look forward to!', even if I became wife to a man tonight, and even if I bore sons,

Is it the case that I became wife to a man tonight, and bore sons?³³

²⁹ The textual argument seems to be that "**with the dead**" implies after their deaths; I'm not compelled. However, it is true that we have seen no prior instances of chesed with Naomi, and so have to simply assume them.

³⁰ Note the apparent assumption that Orpah did not find rest in remarriage.

³¹ Naomi meant that even if she were pregnant, her new son would not be able to marry Rut and Orpah, as yibum is permitted only with the wife of a brother who was alive simultaneously with you. See Mishnah Yebamot 1:1. She did not mean to indicate that there were limits to Rut and Orpah's endurance.

³² I think Naomi's references to "her daughters" are the parallel to "drawing near with the right". Note that Orpah left anyway – is this regrettable?

³³ I think this comment is intended to prevent one from misreading Naomi as speaking in the past tense: "For I have said that I have hope etc."

34

would you wait expectantly for them, until they grew up?

Is it possible that you would sit fallow until they grew up?

Would you chain yourselves up for their sakes, not becoming wife to a man?

Is it possible that you would sit fallow and chained, not becoming wife to a man?

Don't, my daughters!

Translate instead "Alas, my daughters!"

For I have been very bitter for your sakes, since the hand of G-d went out against me."

for your sakes (rather than "bitter because of you" or "bitterer than you")

since the hand of G-d went out against me."

and against my husband and my sons.³⁴

35

Said R. Yehoshua"

Everywhere Scripture writes "the hand of Hashem" it refers to a plague³⁵

36

They raised their voices and cried more

It writes ותשאנה (although it is pronounced ותשאנ).

(This teaches that) they weakened, as they were going and crying.³⁶

34

a-b. I'm not sure whether this comment suggests that it would be psychologically untenable, or practically useless.

c. I think this is intended to improve the transition to the next phrase.

d. This comment I find simply incomprehensible as an interpretation of this verse.

³⁵ But here it cannot, as Naomi is still alive!? I don't understand this R. Yehoshua's comment.

³⁶ I don't understand why the orthography generates the conclusion that they weakened.

37

Rabbi Berakhyah said in the name of R. Yitzchak:

Orpah walked 40 paces after her mother in law, and so (the undoing of her children) was delayed for forty days, as Scripture writes: "The Philistine approached early and evening, and he stationed himself for forty days".

Rabbi Yudan in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak:

Orpah walked four *milin* behind her mother in law, and (as a result) four powerful men arose from her, as Scripture says: "Those four were were born to Horpah in Gath".³⁷

38

Said Rabbi Yitzchak:

All that night that Orpah separated from her mother in law she was abused by a posse of one hundred people – this is the meaning of "He was speaking with them when behold, the champion *mima'arakhot*" – it is written *mima'arot*, meaning from the one hundred foreskins that abused her (*nit'aru bah*) all that night.

Rabbi Tanchuma said:

She was also abused by a dog, as Scripture writes: "The Philistine said to David: Am I a dog?"³⁸

39

BackoftheNeck kissed her mother in law, but Companionship stuck to her. She said: "Here, your sister in-law has returned to her people and to her gods;

When she returned to her people, she returned to her gods.³⁹

³⁷ Torah Temimah cites a version in which Orpah sheds four tears, and suggests that "cried more" suggests at least twice, and each time with both eyes – thus four. His explanation cannot be correct, as it explains neither the four nor the forty in our text. But I do not have a compelling alternative.

³⁸ Note that both this and the preceding paragraph assume that Golyat descended from Orpah – I think this was considered established.

There is an element of the grotesque here, but I think the point that women in that society lived in constant danger is a derivation of the location in the time of Judges, which is epitomized by the story of the Concubine of Giv'ah, which in turn characterizes Israel as the recreation of Sodom. This will throw Ruth's safety in Boaz's field and silo into sharp relief.

³⁹ There is of course no explicit mention of religion here.

40

return, following your sister in-law!” Companionship said: “Don’t press me to abandon you, to return from following you.

Ruth said to Naomi: “Do not plead with me; do not continue your pressing⁴⁰ **to abandon you, to return from following you;** regardless, my intent is to convert, but better through you than through someone else.

⁴⁰ Torah Temimah translates: “Do not bear sin because of me (i.e., don’t drive me away from Judaism); Don’t receive punishment for my sake.”

41

Once Naomi heard this, she began arranging before her matters of the laws of conversion. She said to her: "My daughter, it is not the way of Israel to go either to theater –houses or to circus-houses, rather to synagogues and study halls. And it is not the way of Israel to travel more than two thousand cubits on Shabbat."

Ruth replied: "**For wheresoever you go, I will go.**"

(Naomi continued:) "And it is not the way of Israel to lie down except in a house that has a mezuzah."

Ruth said to her: "**And howsoever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people is my people**" - this referred to punishments and cautions – "**and your G-d is my G-d**" – so I nullify my idols.

42

. . . **Howsoever you die, I will die**

There are four types of capital punishment in Jewish law: 'Burning', 'stoning', 'decapitation', and 'strangulation'.

And there I will be buried

This refers to the two burial areas set aside for the courts, one for those stoned or burned, the other for those decapitated or strangled.

43

May G-d do thus to me, and yet more!

44

Naomi said to her: "My daughter, everything you can heap up in terms of mitzvot and good deeds in this world, but in the Coming World, **if death could separate between me and you.**

45

So she ceased to speak to her

Said Rabbi Abahu: Come see how precious converts are before The Holy Blessed One – once she made up her mind to convert, Scripture equated her with Naomi.

46

The two of them went until they came to BreadHome. It was when they came to BreadHome

Said R. Shmuel bar Nachman: Those days were the days of the Omer-harvest, as the Mishnah there teaches: "All the cities near there would congregate here, so that it would be harvested with great hubbub."

Some say: Itzan was marrying off his daughters, and everyone came to do *chesed*.

R. Tanchuma in the name of R. Azaria, and R. Menachama in the name of R. Yehoshua ben Avin: Scripture writes "Hashem G-d of Hosts – who is like you . . ." – who produces things in their proper time . . .

Some say: Boaz's wife died on that day, and all the cities congregated to do *chesed*, and while all her people were engaged with doing *chesed*, Ruth entered with Naomi, so that one was exiting and the other entering.

47

the whole city went into uproar around them, saying: "Is this Pleasance?"

They said: Is this she whose deeds were pleasing and pleasant?

In the past she would be covered with her colored and downy clothes, and now she is covered in rags!

In the past her face would be flushed with food and drink, and now her face is sallow with hunger!

In the past she would travel in her covered litter, and now she is travelling barefoot!

She said to them: "Don't call me Pleasance! Call me Bitterness

48

Bar Kappara said:

Analogize this to a yoke-broken cow that was standing in the market.

They said to the owner: What is the nature of that cow?

He said: It is yoke-broken, it makes even furrows.

They said: If it is yoke-broken, if it makes even furrows, what are these cudgel-marks on it?

So too – “If I am Pleasance, why has TheSufficient caused much bitterness for me?”

49

I went full

Full with children

Full with possessions

Alternatively:

I was pregnant.

50

but G-d has returned me empty; why would you call me Pleasance, when G-d has afflicted me, and TheSufficient has caused me evil?”

The Attribute of Justice afflicted me

Alternatively:

Testified against me

Alternatively:

He seems to have no concerns other than me.

51

So Pleasance returned, and Companionship the Bornfromfather woman her daughter in-law with her, who returned from the fields of Bornfromfather,

“That’s the one who returned from the fields of Bornfromfather”!

52

and they came to BreadHome at the beginning of the barley harvest.

CHAPTER 2

53

Now Pleasance had someone known to her husband

a relative

54

a man of mastery and valor

in 3:11 it says "that you are a woman of valor".

Said Rabbi Abahu: If a giant marries a giant, to what do they give birth? A master.

Boaz married Ruth, who do they raise up? "one knowing how to play music , of mastery and valor".

55

from the family of God is King

The wicked precede their names . . . but the righteous precede their names . . .

An attack question: "Rivkah had a bother, whose name was Laban!"?

56

Companionship the Born from Father woman said to Pleasance: "I will go, please, to the field, and I will glean among the stalks, following he {He} in whose eyes I will find favor. She said to her: "Go, my daughter".

R. Yanna said: She was forty years old, as one does not call someone a daughter unless she is forty years old

57

She went; she came; she gleaned in the field following the harvesters

She had just left, and you say she came?

R. Yudan son of R. Simon said: ? ... ?

58

And it just so happened to her

Said R. Yochanan: Whoever would see her would ejaculate

59

that the portion of the field belonged to ArrivingStrength who was from the family of GodisKing.

Here ArrivingStrength came from BreadHome -He said to the harvesters: "G-d be with you!"

They said to him: "May G-d bless you!"

R. Tanchuma in the name of R. Avin, R. Chuna in the name of R. Yehudah son of R. Simon, and R. Shmuel bar Nachman in the name of R. Yonatan, and Rabbis in the name of R. Yehoshua ben Levi say:

Three things were decreed by a human court and affirmed by the Heavenly Court. They are: Greeting using the Divine Name . . .

R. Azaria in the name of R. Yehudah son of R. Simon said: It was in the days when the judges judged when Boaz and his court agreed to greeting using the Divine Name . . .

60

ArrivingStrength said to his lad who was overseeing the harvesters:

Over how many was e appointed?

R. El'azar bar Meryon said: Over forty two.

That number is sustainable, as is less than that, but more than that can't be sustained and he wouldn't be aware of what was happening.

61

“To whom does this lass belong?”

He didn't know her, but when he saw her pleasing and pleasant, he began asking about her.

All the women bend when they collect, but she sits when she collects:

All the woman take off their clothes, but she ties them around her;

All the women play with the harvesters, but she conceals herself;

All the women collect among the sheaves, but she collects from the ownerless

62

The lad who was overseeing the harvesters replied, saying: “She is a Bornfromfather lass who returned with Pleasance from the field of Bornfromfather

She is a Moabite lass, and you say that her deeds are pleasant and pleasing!! Rather, her mistress tamed her.

63

She said: ‘I will glean, please, and collect among the sheaves following the harvesters.’ She came and
(I cannot translate either version)

64

ArrivingStrength said to Companionship: “Are you listening, my daughter? Don't go to glean in another field;

This is intended symbolically – do not go have other godsbefore Me.

65

don't even pass from this (place)

the word זה refers to the Biblical verse “זה קלי ואנוהו”, said by the Jews when they tangibly experienced G-d after the Reed Sea split. Ruth is told not to stray from that זה experience.

66

and stick so, with my lasses

These are the righteous, who are called "lasses" . . .

67

Your eyes should be on the field they are harvesting, and you should follow them

"Your eyes" – this refers to the Sanhedrin

68

Have I not commanded the lads so they won't touch you?

Not to push you away

69

When you become thirsty, go to the containers

These are the righteous, who are called *keilim*.

From where do we know that the righteous are called *keilim*?

R. Chaninah and R. Yonatan say: "How have the masterful fallen, and the *keilim* of war lost.

70

and drink from what the lads will draw.”

This refers to the wellhouse (in the Temple)

71

She fell on her face and bowed to the ground, saying to him: “Why have I found favor in your eyes that you give me this recognition when I am a foreigner?”

This teaches that she prophesied about herself that she would eventually recognize her ‘in the way of all the land’

72

Arriving Strength replied, saying to her: “I have certainly been told

Twice – once in the house, and once in the field

73

everything that you did for your mother in-law after the death of your husband;

not to mention while your husband was alive

74

that you left your father and your mother

your actual father and your actual mother

and your birthland;

this refers to your province

Alternatively:

that you left your father and your mother

this refers to your idols, as Scripture writes “who say to wood ‘you are my father’, and to rock “you birthed me””.

and your birthland;

this refers to your neighborhood.

75

that you went to a people which you had not known yesterday or the day before

for had you come the day before yesterday, we would not have accepted you, as the law had not yet been accepted that “Ammonite” – not Ammonitess; “Moabite” – not Moabites

76

May G-d repay you in full for all your works and may your reward be complete from G-d the God of Israel under Whose wings you have come to shelter."

She said: "May I find favor in your eyes, my lord {Lord}, because you have comforted me, and because you have spoken to your maidservant's heart when I could not be as one of your maidservants."

He said to her: Heaven forbid, you are not from among the handmaidens (*amahot*) but rather from among the foremothers (*imahot*)

ArrivingStrength said to her when it came time to eat: "Approach, come up here; you'll eat from the bread and dip your slice in the vinegar". She sat beside the harvesters; he held roast grains out to her; she ate and was sated and left over.

77

Approach, come up here

Draw near to here

78

you'll eat from the bread

the bread of the harvesters

79

and dip your slice in the vinegar."

80

She sat beside the harvesters

literally beside them

81

he held roast grains out to her;

in the small hollow (*kali*) between his two fingers

82

she ate and was sated and left over.

Said Rabbi Yitzchak: It seems that a blessing suffused the intestines of that righteous woman.

83

Said Rabbi Yitzchak bat Meryon:

Scripture came to teach you that if a person will do a mitzvah, he should do it wholeheartedly

...

as if Boaz had known that The Holy Blessed One would be writing "He held roast grains out to her", he would have fed her fatted calves.

She got up to glean. Arriving Strength ordered his lads, saying: "Even if she gleans among the sheaves you must not cause her shame, indeed, you must even spill for her out of the bundles; you must leave them, and she will glean, and you must not express anger at her."

84

She gleaned in the field until evening; she beat out the grain that she had gleaned and it was nearly an eiphah of barley.

How much is an Eiphah: Three sa'ah, as a Mishnah teaches: The eiphah = three sa'ah

85

She picked them up and came to the city. Her mother in-law saw what she had gleaned; She took out and gave to her what she had left over from her satiety.

She left over from the blessing a parallel to the good he had given her

86

"Where {eiphah} have you gleaned today, and where have you done this? May he (He) who recognized you be blessed!" She told her mother in-law what she had done with him,

A beraita in the name of R. Yehoshua:

More than what the householder does for the poor man, the poor man does for the householder, as when Ruth said to Naomi, **saying: "The name of the man whom I did (this) with today [is Arriving Strength.]"** - it does not say 'who did with me', but rather "whom I did this with today" – I did many deeds and favors for the sake of the portion he gave me.

87

Pleasant said to her daughter in-law: "Blessed is he to G-d who has not left off his kindness with the living

He feeds and sustains the living

and with the dead

that you took care of their shrouds

88

Pleasant said to her: "The man is a relative of ours; he is among our redeemers {from our Redeemer}."

Said R. Shmuel bar Nachman: Boaz was the greatest of his generation, and this woman makes of him her relative.

89

Companionship the Bornfromfather woman said: "He even said to me: 'You must stick with my lads

Said R. Chanan bar Levi: She was a genuine Moabite! Boaz said **and stick so with my lasses**, wherea she said **stick with my lads**.

Naomi as well spoke with Divine inspiration,

Pleasance said to her daughter in-law Companionship: "It is well, my daughter, if you go out with his lasses, so that they will not harass you in another field." She stuck to the lasses of ArrivingStrength, gleaning until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest, but she lived with her mother in-law.

90

Said R. Shmuel bar Nachman: From the beginning of the barely harvest untl the close of the wheat harvest are three months.

CHAPTER 3

91

Pleasant her mother-in-law said to her: “My daughter! Shall I not seek for you a resting place where it will go well with you? Now – is it not **ArrivingStrength** the one who knows us whose **lasses** you were with? Here – he is winnowing the barley silo tonight. You must wash from your idolatry

and anoint

with mitzvot and good deeds

92

and place your gown on you

Was she naked?! Rather, this refers to her Shabbat clothes

93

and go down to the silo.

It is written "eyoradti" (first person) even though it is read "veyoradt" (second person feminine singular).

She said to her: My merit will go down with you.

Don't make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking!

But when he lies down then you will know the place where he lies down and you will come and uncover his legs, and lie down, and he will tell you what you must do."

94

She said to her: "Everything which you will say to me I will do."

"to me" is read but not written.

Ruth said to Naomi: This generation is steeped in licentiousness; lest a dog will come and couple with me? But nonetheless **"Everything which you will say to me I will do"** – it is my responsibility to make it work out.

She went down to the silo and she did in accordance with everything that her mother in-law had commanded her.

95

Arriving Strength ate and drank, and his heart was cheered.

Why was his heart cheered (made *tov*)?

Because he made a blessing over his food, saying "Who is *tov* and causes *tov* to all".

Alternatively:

He ate a sweet after his meal, which accustoms the tongue to Torah.

Alternatively:

He was seeking a wife.

Alternatively:

He was engaged with Torah.

96

He came to sleep at the edge of the grainheap. She came stealthily, uncovered his legs and lay down.

Rabbi Yehudah the Nasi asked in the presence of R. Pinchas,, and R. Menachamyah in the name of R.

Yehudah son of R. Simon: Boaz was the greatest of his generation, and you say **He came to sleep at the edge of the grainheap?!**

He said to him: Because that generation was steeped in licentiousness, and they would pay prostitutes from the silos . . . but it is not the way of the righteous to do this. Furthermore, the righteous are distant from robbery, and therefore their money is dear to them.

97

It was in the middle of the night and the man became terrified and shocked –

She wrapped around him like lichen.

He said to her: Who are you, A succubus or a woman?

She said to him: A woman.

He began feeling her hair. He said: "Succubi have no hair".

He said to her: Available or married?

She said: Available.

He said to her:

Tehorah or *temeiah*?

She replied: *Tehorah*.

98

Here was a woman – the most *tahor* of women! - sleeping at his feet!

99

He said: "Who are you?"

She replied: "I am Companionship your handmaiden and you must spread your wing over your handmaiden

Said R. Berakhyah: Cursed are the wicked. There it writes "She grabbed him by his garment, saying 'Lie with me' – like a beast – but here "you must spread your wing over your handmaiden".

for you are a redeemer."

100

He said: "Blessed are you to G-d, my daughter!

It was more likely that he would curse her, but Hashem put in his heart to bless her

101

Your last kindness has exceeded your first, to not go follow the young men, whether rich or poor.

Said R. Shmuel son of R. Yitzchak: A woman prefers a poor lad to a rich old man.

102

Now my daughter, don't be afraid – Everything which you say, I will do for you

What you are asking, I will do

103

as all those at the gate of my people know that you are a woman of valor.

104

But know – while it is true, while I am yet (*im*) a redeemer, but there is also a redeemer more closely related than I.

“im” is written but not read.

He said to her: If I redeem you, there is a closer redeemer, and he will be angry because he is closer.

Rather, if he redeems you – he will redeem; and if not – **I am a redeemer** – I will redeem you myself.

105

Lodge for the night

Tonight you lodge without a husband, but there will be no other night that you lodge without a husband

106

and when it is morning if that good man will redeem you, well,

If he will redeem you – good

107

he will redeem you,

but if he does not desire to redeem you, then by the Living G-d I will redeem you!

Said R. Yose: Three had their evil inclination come to overpower them, but they were alerted to it and swore to it (not to give in). They are: Yosef, David, and Boaz.

Said R. Yudan: All that night his evil inclination challenge him, saying: You are available and seeking a wife, and she is available and seeking a husband – arise and mate with her, and she will be your wife!

He swore of his evil inclination, saying: “By the living G-d! if I touch her.

and to the woman he said:

Lie down until morning.”

108

She lay down at his feet until morning, when she arose before (*b’terem*) a man could recognize his companion.

It is written *b’terom*, with an extra *vav* – this teacher that she spent six hours sleeping at his feet, and yet he did not touch her.

109

He said: Let it not be known that the woman came to the silo.

To whom did he say this?

R. Meir said: To his servant.

Said Rav Huna and R. Yirmiyah in the name of R. Shmuel son of R. Yitzchak:

All that night Boaz was prostrated, saying: Master of the universe, it is revealed and known before You that I did not touch her. May it be Your will before You, Hashem my G-d and the G-d of my fathers, that **it not be known that the woman came to the silo**, so that the Name of Heaven not be desecrated through me.

110

He said: "Bring (*hav*) the shawl which is on you, and grasp it!"

It is written ?. This teaches that he spoke with her using the masculine, so that no one would perceive her.

She grasped it.

This teaches that she girded her loins like a male.

111

He measured out six of barley Said R. Simon: Bar Kappara taught publicly in Tzipori: Was it standard for her to marry with six sa'ah, or standard for a king to marry with six sa'ah?

Said R. Yudan son of R. Simon: In the merit of these six, six came forth: David, Chizkiyah, Yoshiyah, Daniel, Chananiah Mishael and Azariah, and the Messianic King.

112

and he came to the city.

Should it not have said "and she came to the city" – why "and he came"?

This teaches that he walked after her to prevent her from being harassed by one of the lads.

113

She came to her mother in-law, who said: "Who are you, my daughter?"

Did Naomi not recognize her?

Rather, she said to her: "Are you available or married?"

Ruth said to her: "Available".

114

She told her everything the man had done for her. She said; “These six of barley he gave to me, because he said to me: ‘You must not come emptyhanded to your mother in-law’”.

Said Rabbi Alexander: (The issue with “emptyhanded” wasn’t that she would leave Boaz without anything, but rather that she would come to Naomi without anything).

115

She said: “Sit, my daughter, until you know how the matter will fall out

R. Chuna and R. Yirmiyah in the name of R. Shmuel bar Yitzchak: The yes of the righteous means yes, and their no means no.

for the man will not quiet unless he finishes the matter today.

CHAPTER 4

116

ArrivingStrength went up to the gate and sat there. Here the redeemer is passing, of whom ArrivingStrength had spoken –

Had he been behind the gate this whole time?

Said R. Shmuel bar Nachman: Even if he had been at the end of the world, Scripture would have lifted him and brought him, so that that righteous one would not sit in suffering in his place.

Said R. Berakhyah: Thus two greats taught publicly, namely R. Elieze and R. Yehoshua:

R. Eliezer says: Boaz did his, and Ruth did hers, and Naomi did hers – Said The Holy Blessed One: It is on Me to do Mine.

117

He said: “Turn aside, sit here, Mr. Dumbstruck! (*ploni almoni*)”

R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: Ploni Almoni was his name:

R. Shmuel bar Nachman said: He was mute (*ilem*) in words of Torah.

He said: The earlier ones died only because they took her, and I will go take her? Certainly not! I will not mingle rejected/invalid ones with my children.

He did not know that the law had already been originated: “Ammonite” – not Ammonitess; “Moabite” – not Moabites.

He turned aside and sat.

118

He took ten men from among the elders of the city and said: "Sit here!" They sat.

He said to the redeemer: "The portion of field belonging to our brother, to GodisKing, was sold by Pleasance, who has returned from the field of BornfromFather. So I said: "I will uncover your ear, saying: 'Acquire', opposite those seated, and opposite the elders of my people. If you will redeem, then redeem!"

This he said to the redeemer.

But if he will not redeem, tell me,

This he said to the court

119

so that I will know this, as there is no one but you to redeem,

Let you say: I have a wife, I have children – I will bring her into my house with the intention of not coupling with her.

and I follow you."

He said: "I will redeem."

When the redeemer heard his, he said: "Certainly Ruth has gone from me".

120

ArrivingStrength said: "On the day that you acquire the field from the hand of Pleasance, from Companionship of BornfromFather wife of the dead, you have acquired (*kanita*) the obligation to reestablish the name of the deceased over his legacy."

It is written *kaniti*.

The redeemer said:

"I cannot redeem this for myself, lest I destroy my legacy. You, redeem for yourself my redemption, for I cannot redeem."

121

This was the previous custom in Israel in redemptions and exchanges to establish any matter: A man would remove his shoe and give it to his companion – This was the form of certification in Israel.

The redeemer said to ArrivingStrength: “Acquire it for yourself!”, and he removed his shoe.

Whose shoe?

Rav and Levi: One said: Boaz’s shoe; one said: The redeemer’s shoe.

Said R. Shmuel bar Nachman: It seems reasonable that it was Boaz’s shoe, as it is the way of the buyer to give a surety.

ArrivingStrength said to the elders and all the people: “You are witnesses today! That I have acquired all that belonged to GodisKing and all that belonged to Completion and Hope from the hand of Pleasance. Also – Companionship of BornfromFather Wife of Hope I have acquired for myself as wife to reestablish the name of the dead over his legacy, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his place. You are witnesses today!”

All the people at the gate, and the elders, said: “We are witnesses! May God grant that the woman who is coming to your house be like Rachel and Leah, the two of whom built the House of Israel! Do valor in Fruitful, and proclaim your name in BreadHome. May your house be like that of Peretz, whom Tamar bore for Gratitude to G-d, via the seed that G-d will grant you from this lass”.

122

ArrivingStrength took Companionship and she became his wife.

She had no womb, and The Holy Blessed One formed her a womb.

He came in to her and G-d granted her pregnancy and she bore a son.

The women said to Pleasance: “Blessed be G-d who today ensured your line of redeemers will not end. And may his name be proclaimed in Israel. May he be for you a restorer of spirit, and sustenance for your hoary old age, as your daughter in-law who has loved you bore him, and she is better for you than seven sons.”

Pleasance took the child and placed him in her lap and was a foster-parent for him.

The neighbors proclaimed his name, saying “A son has been born to Pleasance”, and they called his name “Service” – He was the father of Yishai, the father of David.

123

And these

Said R. Abba: Wherever it says “these”, it distinguishes them from those mentioned earlier; whenever it says “and these”, it adds them to those mentioned earlier.

So here: Just as the ones just mentioned were righteous, so too those to be listed now were righteous.

124

are the generations (*toldot*) of Peretz:

Said R. Shmuel bar Nachman: All *toldot* in Torah are written with only one *vav*, except for two: “These are the *toldot* of the heavens and earth”, and this one . . .

Peretz sired Chetzron

and Chetzron sired Rom

and Rom sired Aminadav

and Aminadav sired Nachshon

and Nachshon sired Salmah

and Salmon sired ArrivingStrength,

and ArrivingStrength sired Service

and Service sired Yishai

and Yishai sired David.

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