

Boaz as a Model of Hope and Lovingkindness

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Midrash: Ruth Rabbah 2:14

אָמַר רַבִּי זְעִירָא, מִגְלָה זֶה אֵין בָּהּ לֹא טְמֵאָה, וְלֹא טְהוּרָה, וְלֹא אָסוּר, וְלֹא הֵתֵר, וְלִמָּה נִכְתְּבָה לְלַמְדֵּךְ כִּמָּה שָׂכָר טוֹב לְגוֹמְלֵי חֲסָדִים.

Rabbi Zeira says: "This book [of Ruth] does not have anything in it concerned with impurity or purity nor what is forbidden and what is permitted. So why is it written? To teach us the greatness of the reward for acts of lovingkindness."

Deuteronomy 23:3

לֹא יִבְּא עִמּוֹנִי וּמוֹאָבִי בְּקִהְלֵי יְהוָה גַּם דּוֹר עֲשִׂירִי לֹא יִבְּא לָהֶם בְּקִהְלֵי יְהוָה עַד-עוֹלָם:

No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the LORD; none of their descendants, even in the tenth generation, shall ever be admitted into the congregation of the LORD,

Ruth 2:3-16

She [Ruth] came and gleaned in a field, behind the reapers; and, as luck would have it, it was the piece of land belonging to Boaz, who was of Elimelech's family. Presently Boaz arrived from Bethlehem. He greeted the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they responded, "The LORD bless you!" Boaz said to the servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose girl is that?" The servant in charge of the reapers replied, "She is a Moabite girl who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.' She has been on her feet ever since she came this morning. She has rested but little in the hut." Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen to me, daughter. Don't go to glean in another field. Don't go elsewhere, but stay here close to my girls. Keep your eyes on the field they are reaping, and follow them. I have ordered the men not to molest you. And when you are thirsty, go to the jars and drink some of [the water] that the men have drawn." She prostrated herself with her face to the ground, and said to him, "Why are you so kind as to single me out, when I am a foreigner?" Boaz said in reply, "I have been told of all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and came to a people you had not known before. May the LORD reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge!" She answered, "You are most kind, my lord, to comfort me and to speak gently to your maidservant—though I am not so much as one of your maidservants." At mealtime, Boaz said to her, "Come over here and partake of the meal, and dip your morsel in the vinegar." So she sat down beside the reapers. He handed her roasted grain, and she ate her fill and had some left over. When she got up again to glean, Boaz gave orders to his workers, "You are not only to let her glean among the sheaves, without interference, but you must also pull some [stalks] out of the heaps and leave them for her to glean, and not embarrass her."

וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתְּבוֹא וַתִּלְקַט בְּשֵׂדֵה אַחֲרֵי הַקֹּצְרִים וַיִּקַּר מִקִּוְיָהּ חֲלֻקַת הַשֵּׂדֶה לְבַעַז אֲשֶׁר מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת אֶלְיָמֶלֶךְ: דוֹהֵנָה-בַּעַז מִבֵּית לָחֶם וַיֵּאמֶר לְקוֹצְרֵי יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם וַיֵּאמְרוּ לוֹ יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה: הוֹיָאמֶר בַּעַז לְנַעֲרֹה הַנֹּצֵב עַל-הַקֹּצְרִים לְמִי הַנֶּעְרָה הַזֹּאת: וַיִּלְעַן הַנֶּעַר הַנֹּצֵב עַל-הַקֹּצְרִים וַיֵּאמֶר נַעֲרָה מוֹאָבִיָּה הִיא הַשֹּׁבֶה עִם-נָעֲמִי מִשֵּׂדֶה מוֹאָב:

זֹאת־אָמַר אֶלְקָטָה נָא וְאִסְפְּתִי בְּעִמְרוֹת אַחֲרֵי הַקּוֹצְרִים וְתָבוֹא וְתַעֲמֹד מֵאַיִן הַבֶּקֶר וְעַד־עֵתָה זֶה שְׁבִתָּה הַבַּיִת מֵעַט:
 תּוֹיֵאמֶר בְּעֵז אֶל־רוֹת הָלֹא שְׁמַעַת בְּתִי אֶל־תִּלְכְּלִי לְלָקֵט בְּשָׂדֶה אַחֵר וְגַם לֹא תַעֲבוֹרִי מִזֶּה וְכִה תִדְבְּקִי עִם־נַעֲרֹתַי:
 טַעֲיִינָךְ בְּשָׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר־יִקְצְרוּן וְהִלַּכְתְּ אַחֲרֵיהֶן הָלֹא צְוִיתִי אֶת־הַנְּעָרִים לְבִלְתִּי נִגְעָךְ וְצִמְתְּ וְהִלַּכְתְּ אֶל־הַכְּלָיִם וְשִׁתִּית
 מֵאֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאַבוּן הַנְּעָרִים: יוֹתַפֵּל עַל־פְּנֵיהָ וְתִשְׁתַּחֲוּ אַרְצָה וְתֵאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי מַדּוּעַ מְצֵאתִי חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ לְהַכִּירַנִי וְאַנְכִי נִכְרִיָּה:
 יֹאמְרוּ בְּעֵז וְיֵאמֶר לָהּ הֲגֵד הֲגֵד לִי כָּל אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתְּ אֶת־חַמּוֹתֶיךָ אַחֲרַי מוֹת אִישׁךָ וְתַעֲזָבִי אֲבִיךָ וְאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתְּךָ:
 וְתִלְכִי אֶל־עַם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַעְתָּ תַּמּוּל שְׁלֹשׁוֹם: יְבִישְׁלֵם יְהוָה פְּעֻלָּךְ וְתִהְיֶי מִשְׁכַּרְתְּךָ שְׁלָמָה מֵעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 אֲשֶׁר־בָּאת לְחַסּוֹת תַּחַת־כְּנָפָיו: יִגְוֹתֵאמֶר אֲמַצְא־חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲדֹנָי כִּי נְחַמְתָּנִי וְכִי דִבַּרְתָּ עַל־לֵב שְׁפָחֶתְךָ וְאַנְכִי לֹא אֶהְיֶה
 כְּאִחַת שְׁפָחֶתְךָ: יִדּוּיֵאמֶר לָהּ בְּעֵז לָעֵת הָאֶכֶל גְּשֵׁי הַלֶּם וְאֶכְלֶת מִן־הַלֶּחֶם וְטַבְּלַת פֶּתֶךָ בְּחֶמֶץ וְתִשָּׁב מִצַּד הַקּוֹצְרִים
 וְיִצְבֹּט־לָהּ קָלִי וְתֹאכַל וְתִשָּׁבַע וְתִתֵּר: טוֹתִקֶם לְלָקֵט וְיִצּוּ בְּעֵז אֶת־נַעֲרָיו לֵאמֹר גַּם בֵּין הַעֲמָרִים תִּלְקֹט וְלֹא תִכְלִימֶיהָ:
 טוֹגֶם שֶׁל־תִּשְׁלַח לָהּ מִן־הַצְּבָתִּים וְעִזְבָּתָם וְלִקְטָהּ וְלֹא תִגְעֲרוּ־בָּהּ:

Talmud Bavli Shabbat 113b

ותלך ותבא ותלקט בשדה אמר רבי אלעזר שהלכה ובאת הלכה ובאת עד שמצאה בני
 אדם המהוגנין לילך עמהם ויאמר בועז לנערו הנצב על הקוצרים למי הנערה הזאת וכי
 דרכו של בועז לשאול בנערה אמר רבי אלעזר דבר חכמה ראה בה שני שבלין לקטה
 שלשה שבלין אינה לקטה

And the verse in Ruth states: “And she went, and she came, and she collected in the field after the harvesters” (Ruth 2:3). Rabbi Elazar said: This verse teaches that she went and came, went and came, until she found suitable people with whom to walk. It also says: “And Boaz said to his youth who was standing over the harvesters: To whom does this young woman belong?” (Ruth 2:5). This is surprising: And was it Boaz’s habit to inquire about a young woman? Rabbi Elazar said: He saw in her a matter of wisdom and Torah, and that is why he asked about her. What he saw was that she collected two stalks, but she did not collect three stalks. She thereby acted in accordance with the halakha that three stalks lying together are not considered to be gleanings left for the poor; rather, they remain in the possession of the owner of the field.