

Rut Fixing Lot's Mistake

Nava Gelb

When Sodom was destroyed, Lot and his daughters thought they were the only people left on Earth and therefore thought it was their obligation to continue the line of people. One of the daughters gave birth to the leader of Moav. Rut therefore came from him and ended up descending from Lot.

Lot left Avraham because he thought that since he understands that Hashem is G-d, he doesn't need a connection; the knowledge is service enough. His mistake is that in order to serve Hashem, he can't just be aware of the truth, but he has to practice the truth and live the truth. He had to have a connection to G-d.

Rut felt the complete opposite way. She came from Moav, and after she learned about G-d from her new in-laws, she yearned for more. She followed Naomi and wanted to go to Israel with her. Naomi tried to dissuade her, but Rut ended up correcting her ancestor, Lot's, mistake by longing to be closer to Hashem.

Naomi tried to turn her away and told her to go back three times by saying "שבנה" meaning "return." This, perhaps, is Naomi's way of really converting Rut, as a convert is supposed to be turned away three times. We actually learn this halacha from Naomi. Naomi got Orpa to turn back, but not Rut. She just stopped trying to dissuade her at some point.

The Vilna Gaon says that Naomi stopped trying to convince her when she sees Rut struggling. Rut was younger than Naomi and Naomi's pace shouldn't be a problem: Rut should be able to keep up with her. However, Naomi realizes that she is having trouble walking by her side since she feels a bit conflicted. She was a Moavi princess, and is used to having the best of the best handed and served to her. There was a part of her that hesitated to convert. She is going from literally being a princess and having the princess high status to going into poverty.

Rut had the same thoughts as Lot by thinking, "Why do I need to go to Israel or stay with my mentor? I know everything I need to know to live a Jewish life by myself. I don't need to go with my 'spiritual coach.'"

Unlike Lot, however, Rut wanted that connection with G-d. If she remained in Moav, even if she kept the Mitzvot, she still wouldn't reach that closeness that her soul longs for -- only Naomi would be able to give that to her.

Naomi understood that the inner conflict halted Rut from running towards Israel. She realized that Rut wasn't just going to help her old, poor mother-in-law, but she was after what Judaism had to offer: an honest attachment with Hashem.