

## Midrash Rabbah on Chapter 3 of the Book of Ruth

Tanach in bold, Midrash in non-bold, commentary in italics.

### Ruth 3:1-2

1. Then Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her: **My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?**
2. **Now is not Boaz, with whose maidens you have been, our relative? Behold, he winnows barley tonight in the threshing floor.**

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### Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 5:11)

*-Boaz missed chance to court Ruth during harvest. Naomi concluded that Boaz was not going to make the first move towards marrying Ruth, so she and Ruth had to take the initiative and be more aggressive.*

**Then Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her: My daughter, shall I not seek security for you... Now is not Boaz... our relative?**

*-"Now": The harvest period that just ended is 3 months, and so now is the time to act, because a female convert must wait 3 months before being allowed to marry, to be sure she is not pregnant. [Yevamot 41a]. Same for a widow or divorcee.*

*-By suggesting Boaz in the form of a question, Naomi is answering Ruth's objections: If you counter "Boaz is an old man [Midrash says he was 80] and how good can such a marriage be?", yes, earthly pleasures might not be plentiful, but the Heavenly reward for being married to such a righteous man as he, and his righteous descendants, is abundant! [Nachal Eshkol; Iggeret Shmuel].*

*-"With whose maidens you have been": You are personally familiar with his righteousness and kindness, having been with his maidens [Iggeret Shmuel].*

*-"That it may be well with you?" frequently means 'in the World to Come' in the Talmud [Kiddushin 39b]*

*-"Tonight": Naomi was certain Boaz would spend the night there to guard his grain from thieves, abundant in that period [Rashi]*

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### Ruth 3:3

3. **Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself, and put your garment on you, and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man, until he has finished eating and drinking.**

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### Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 5:12)

**Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself, and put your garment on you...**

**-Wash yourself** clean of your idolatry

*-Go to mikvah [Torah Temimma] – some still doubt her!*

**-and anoint yourself** -- refers to commandments and righteous conduct [mitzvot utz'dakot].

**-and put your garment on you.** Was she then naked? It must refer to Shabbat garments.

It was from this verse that R. Hanina said: A man should have two sets of garments, one for weekdays and one for Shabbat. [J Peah 8:6, Shabbat 113b]

And so did R. Simlai expound publicly. Whereupon the scholars wept and said: As is our garment on weekdays, so is our garment on Shabbat. He said to them: It is nevertheless necessary to change. [The same garment may be worn differently.]

**-and go down to the threshing floor.** She said to her, 'My merits will descend with you.'

*-Because the text actually says 'I will go down...'*

-Another interpretation of **and go down to the threshing floor**: from this we learn that one should make a threshing-floor in the lowest part of the city.

*-To reduce the chance of the wind scattering it*

-It was stated: R. Simeon b. Halafta purchased a field from R. Hiyya.

He said to him, 'How much does it produce?'

He answered: "One hundred kor."

He sowed it but it produced less than a hundred, and he complained to R. Hiyya saying, 'Did not the Master say that it would produce a hundred kor, [and it has produced less]?'"

He answered, 'It is so!'

He said to him, 'But it has produced less?'

He asked him, 'Where did you set up the threshing floor?'

He answered, "In the highest point of the city."

R. Hiyya retorted: Is it not written, **and go down to the threshing floor**? If you go sift the chaff, it will produce the remainder.

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## Ruth 3:4-6

**4. And it shall be, when he lies down, that you shall mark the place where he shall lie, and you shall go in, and uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what to 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 did according to all that her mother-in-law had told her.**

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## Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 5:13)

**And it shall be, when he lies down, that you shall mark the place... And she said to her, All that you say to me [elai] I will do.**

-The word elai (to me) is a k'ri [is read], but not a ketib [it is not written in the text].

*-It is a Masoretic addition. Nedarim 37b]*

*-Ruth decided to rely entirely on Naomi and remove herself [Iggeret Shmuel]*

Ruth said to her, "But perhaps one of those dogs [vile men] might molest me? Nevertheless it is up to me to find a way to fulfill your words."

*-Ruth is afraid someone will mistake her for a loose woman if she dresses as Naomi advises, at night [Tanch. Behar 3]. So she changed the order of things: First go down, then bathe, then dress well. That is why Ruth 3:6 says k'chal (AS all) rather than chal (all).*

*-“Mark the place where he shall lie” – so you can find it later in the dark [Targum; Iggeret Shmuel]*

*-“He will tell you what to do”: “He” refers to God. Naomi says: I can’t know how Boaz will respond, but God will inspire you. [Besurat Eliahu]*

## Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 5:14)

-“And [she] did according to all that her mother-in-law had told her”. Why not just say: she did so?

-It is written: “I know Moab's conception, says the Lord, but his descendants did not act thus.” (Jer. 48:30).

-R. Hanina b. Papa and R. Simone disagree.

-R. Hanina b. Papa said: The original conception of Moab was brought about not in a spirit of immorality but for the sake of Heaven. [*Lot's daughter cohabited with her father to produce offspring, i.e. Moab, thinking she was saving the human race.*] But his descendants [the Moabites] acted with immoral motives, as it says, “And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab” (Num. 25:1).

-R. Simone said: The first conception of Moab was not for the sake of Heaven, but in a spirit of immorality; “His descendants did not act thus,” means they acted for the sake of Heaven, as it says, “And she went down unto the threshing-floor, and did according to all that her mother-in-law told her” (Ruth 3:6).

-R. Levi said: If the first conception of Moab was in a spirit of immorality, then his subsequent actions too were in the same spirit, for 'Did not his descendants act thus?', as it says, 'And Israel abode in Shittim,' etc. While if his first conception was for the sake of Heaven, his subsequent acts too were thus: 'Did not his descendants act thus?' [Surely], 'And she went down unto the threshing-floor,' etc.

-*Ruth's decision to follow what Naomi said to the letter proves that everything concerning Moab was for the sake of Heaven.*

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## Ruth 3:7

**7. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid herself down.**

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## Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 5:15)

**And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry...**

-Why was his heart merry? Because he recited the Grace after Meals.

-*It also thanks God for the Land, and Boaz had reason to be grateful for that: a bountiful harvest*

-*This was the first harvest since before the famine mentioned at the beginning of the Book of Ruth. Boaz was grateful for all Israel. [Alshich]*

-Another interpretation of **and his heart was merry**: he ate different kinds of sweet things after his meal, as they accustom the tongue to the Torah.

-*It is better to study the Torah aloud to remember better [Eruvin 54a], so the sweet desserts prepare the voice for oral study.*

-Another interpretation of **and his heart was merry**: he occupied himself with the words of the Torah [during his meal], as it is said, “The Torah of your mouth is better for me [than thousands in gold and silver]” (Ps. 119:72).

-Another interpretation of **and his heart was merry**: he sought a wife, as it is said, “He who has found a wife has found goodness” (Prov. 18:22).

-*Because Boaz was righteous and recently widowed [Maharzu], God literally delivered a wife to his feet as he started thinking about marrying again [Yefeh Anaf]*

**-He went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain.** R. Yehudah Nesiah inquired of R. Pinchas b.Chama: Boaz was one of the notables of his generation, and yet it says that “**He went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain**”! He answered him: That generation was steeped in immorality, and they used to pay harlots with [grain they stole from] the threshing-floors, as it is said, “Do not rejoice, O Israel, like the exultation of the peoples... You have loved a harlot's hire upon every threshing-floor” (Hos. 9:1).

And the righteous do not act so. Moreover, because the righteous spurn ill-gotten gain, their possessions are precious to them. [Sotah 12a]

*-So it was not beneath Boaz's dignity to sleep on the floor. He was guarding his wealth and preventing the place from being used for immoral purposes.*

*-"And uncovered his feet": To remind him of levirate marriage*

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### Ruth 3:8-10

**8. And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was startled, and turned over; and, behold, a woman lay at his feet.**

**9. And he said, Who are you? And she answered, I am Ruth your maidservant; spread your skirt over your maidservant; for you are a redeemer.**

**10. And he said, Blessed be you to the Lord, my daughter; for your last loyal kindness is greater than the first one, because you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.**

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### Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 6:1)

*-"And it came to pass at midnight". The Midrash wonders: "Why midnight?"*

*-"At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You because of Your righteous judgments." (Ps. 119:62).*

R. Pinchas commented in the name of R. Eliezer b. Yaakov: A harp and lyre were suspended over David's head, and when of midnight came he used to rise and play on them.

*-Boaz woke up at midnight to study Torah [Iggeret Shmuel]*

*-"Play on them": So those inclined to study Torah would hear and do the same [J Ber 1:1]*

*-He inspired everyone to study at night [Pesikta Rabbati 7:3]*

*-"Because of Your righteous judgments" is interpreted to mean "because of Your judgments and righteous deeds", "judgments" referring to strict justice, and "righteous deeds" to charity and lovingkindness.*

-R. Levi said: "A harp was suspended," etc. [Lam. R. 2:22, Ber. 3b]. "Because of Your righteous judgments" [means] the judgments that You brought upon Pharaoh [when he took Sarah into his palace], as it is said, "And the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues" (Gen. 12:17), [Ex. R. 18:2] and the righteousness that You performed with Abraham and Sarah [by returning them together].

-Another interpretation: "Because of Your righteous judgments," [means] because of the judgments which You brought upon Egypt and the righteous actions You performed for our forefathers in Egypt, for they possessed no virtues or good deeds to justify their redemption, but You gave them two commandments with which they should occupy themselves and be redeemed, and these are the blood of the Passover sacrifice and the blood of circumcision.

-R. Levi said: On that night, the two bloods mingled, as it is said, "And when I passed by you, and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you: In your blood you will live; yea, I said to you: In your blood, you will live (Ezek. 16:6).

-Another interpretation: [King David said:] "Because of Your righteous judgments" [means] the judgments which You brought upon the Ammonites and Moabites [by allowing their women, but not their men, to become Jewish], and the righteous acts You performed for my [great-] grandfather and grandmother, [Boaz and Ruth], for had he hastily cursed her, but once, how would I have come into being?

*-Boaz might have cursed Ruth because she put him in an awkward position that might tarnish his reputation.*

-But You inspired him to bless her, as it is said, "**Blessed be you to the Lord, my daughter**".

"The fear of man brings a snare; but one who trusts in God will be set up on high." (Prov. 29:25).

-Once, when R. Akiba visited Rome [Ex. R. 30:9], he said to a member of his household, 'Go out and buy me something from the marketplace that is acceptable to all.' He went and brought back fowl.

He said to him, "What took you so long? Did you have to catch them?"

He answered, "Yes, because they frighten humans." [Pursuing them can lead to dangerous places.]

R. Akiba thereupon applied to him the verse, "The fear of man brings a snare."

*-Fear of failure is a snare, a self-fulfilling prophecy. By trusting in God and not being overly fearful, one can cope with unexpected obstacles [Metzudat David]*

-[The verse also refers to] the fear which Jacob caused Isaac to fear [when Esau confronts his father Isaac, after Isaac blessed Jacob instead of Esau], [Gen. R. 67:1] as it is written, "And Isaac trembled violently" (Gen. 27:33), and he might easily have cursed him, but "those who put their trust in the Lord He shall set up on high", and God put it in his heart to bless him, as it is said, "Yea, he shall be blessed" (Gen. 27:33).

-[The verse may also refer to] the fear which Ruth caused Boaz to fear, as it is written, **And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was startled**, and he might easily have cursed her, but "those who put their trust in the Lord He shall set up on high". But God put it in his heart to bless her, as it is said, **Blessed be you to the Lord, my daughter**.

-**"And turned over"**. She clung to him like ivy, and he began to finger her hair.

"Spirits have no hair," he thought, so he said, **"Who are you? -- a woman or a spirit?"**

She answered, "A woman."

'Unmarried or married?'

She answered, "Unmarried."

"Are you [ritually] clean or unclean?"

She answered, "Clean."

*-Only later, in King David's time, would the seclusion of a man with an unmarried woman be prohibited. So Ruth was not breaking any laws.*

**-And, behold, a woman, purest of women, lay at his feet, as it is said, And he said, Who are you? And she answered, I am Ruth your maidservant.**

R. Berekiah said: Cursed be the wicked! Elsewhere [in the case of Potiphar's wife] it is said, "She caught him by his garment, saying: Lie with me" (Gen. 39:12), speaking as one would regarding an animal, but here, she said, **spread your skirt over your maidservant**. [i.e., marry me]

## Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 6:2)

**- "...For your last loyal kindness is greater than the first one."**

-R. Johanan, Resh Lakish, and the Rabbis disagreed regarding this verse.

-R. Johanan said: One should never keep back from going to an elder to be blessed. Boaz was eighty years of age, and had not been vouchsafed children.

*-That is, children who lived. Boaz had 60 children and they all died. Ruth arrived in Bethlehem when Boaz's wife died:*

*Talmud: ...Boaz made for his sons 120 wedding feasts, for it is said, And he had 30 sons, and 30 daughters whom he sent abroad, and 30 daughters[-in-law] he brought in from abroad for his sons; and he judged Israel 7 years; and in the case of everyone [of these children] he made two wedding feasts, one in the house of the father and one in the house of the father-in-law... All these died in his lifetime. It is [in relation to such a case as] this that people say: Of what use to you are 60 [children]; the 60 that you beget for your lifetime [if they don't survive]? [Marry] again and beget [one] brighter than [these] 60 [i.e., King David, who will descend from Boaz. [Baba Bathra 91a]*

But when that righteous woman [Naomi] prayed for him, he was immediately vouchsafed [a child], as it is said, "And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law: Blessed be he of the Lord" (Ruth 2:20).

-Resh Lakish said: Ruth was forty years of age and had not yet been vouchsafed children as long as she was married to Mahlon. But as soon as that righteous man [Boaz] prayed for her, she was vouchsafed [a child], as it is said, **"Blessed be you to the Lord, my daughter"**

-The Rabbis, however, say: Both of them were vouchsafed children only as a result of the blessings of righteous people, as it is said, "And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said: We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman... like Rachel and like Leah" (Ruth 4:11).

**-“For your last loyal kindness is greater than the first one, because you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.”**

-R. Shmuel b. R. Yitzhaq said: A woman prefers a poor young man to a wealthy old man.

*-So Ruth's motive was kindness, not self-gratification*

*-“For you are a redeemer” [Ki goel atta] As such, you must redeem the estate of my late husband, which I was forced to sell . It is your obligation as redeemer to buy it back so it can remain in the family. Take possession of me, too. [Rashi]*

*-“For your last loyal kindness is greater than the first one”. For a woman in the prime of life to give up the opportunity to marry a young man just to perpetrate the memory of her late husband is a great sacrifice, greater than your earlier kindness to Naomi by staying with her. [Ralbag; Rav Arama; Iggeret Shmuel, Alshich]*

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### **Ruth 3:11-13**

**11. And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to you all that you ask, for the whole city of my people knows that you are a worthy woman.**

**12. Although it is true that I am indeed a redeemer, there is another redeemer closer than I am.**

**13. Stay this night. Then, in the morning, if he will redeem you, well! [tov]; let him redeem you; but if he will not redeem you, then I will redeem you. As the Lord lives!; lie down until the morning.**

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### **Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 6:3)**

**And now, my daughter, fear not... Although it is true that I am indeed a redeemer, there is another redeemer closer than I am.**

-The Rabbis and R. Yehoshua b. Levi commented on this. The Rabbis were of the opinion that Tov, Elimelech, and Boaz were brothers, while R. Yehoshua said that Salmon [Boaz's father], Elimelech, and Tov were brothers.

It was objected to him: But it is written, “[Then, [Boaz] said to the redeemer [Tov]: The parcel of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech...” (Ruth 4:3)?

He answered: A man does not refrain from calling his uncle brother.

*-They believed the word “Tov” did not mean “Well”, but was the name of the nearest redeemer.*

*Reason: Otherwise the word “Tov” is superfluous.*

*-Later that closer redeemer will be referred to as “Ploni Almoni”, a generic name for unidentified people. Tanach sometimes will not identify someone remembered in the negative (here, one who will not redeem a close relative). [Rashi]*

*-Abraham referred to his nephew Lot as “My brother” [Gen. 13:8, 14:4].*

*-“As the Lord lives” [Chai HaShem!]. Boaz added this to tell Ruth he was sincere and not just paying lip service to her request. [Rashi]*

### **Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 6:4)**

**Stay this night.** This night you will spend without a husband, but you will not be without a husband for another night. **Then, in the morning, if he will redeem you, well! [tov]; let him redeem you; but if he will not redeem you, then I will redeem you.**

*-The Midrash now goes on a tangent to discuss Rabbi Elisha ben Avuyah, the second-century apostate rabbi, known in the Talmud as ‘Acher’ – ‘the other one’. His student Rabbi Meir tried very hard to get him to repent.*

R. Meir was sitting and expounding the Law in a school in Tiberias.

His teacher Elisha passed by the street on horseback on Shabbat. *[Which is prohibited.]*

They said to R. Meir, "Look! Elisha, your teacher, is passing by in the street." He went out to greet him. Elisha asked him, "With what were you occupied?" He said to him, "With the verse, 'So the Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than its beginning'" (Job 42:12).

*"The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than its beginning. He had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 oxen and 1,000 donkeys. And he also had 7 sons and 3 daughters." [!!]*  
(Job 42:12-13)

He said to him, "And what did you say concerning it?"

He answered: "He blessed him" means that he doubled his wealth.

Elisha responded: "Your teacher, Akiva, did not explain thus. Rather, he said "And the Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than its beginning" means that he was blessed at the end \*because of\* the repentance and the good deeds which were to his credit at the beginning."

*-But did Job ever do anything wrong? Yes. The Talmud says he was an advisor to Pharaoh and did not intervene in favor of the Jewish slaves:*

*-R. Hiyya b. Abba said in the name of R. Simai: There were three in that plan [to destroy the Jews], namely, Bilaam, Job and Jethro. Bilaam, who devised it, was slain; Job, who silently acquiesced, was afflicted with sufferings; Jethro, who [opposed it and] fled, merited that his descendants should sit in the Chamber of Hewn Stone [where the Sanhedrin met]. [Sotah 11a]*

He said to him, "And what else did you expound?"

He answered, "The verse, "The end of a matter is better than its beginning" (Eccl. 7:8).

"And what did you say concerning it?"

-He answered, "I said, A man may purchase merchandise in his youth, and suffer a loss, and [again purchase merchandise] in his old age, and make a profit through it. *[One should never lose hope.]*

-Another interpretation of "The end of a matter is better than its beginning": A man may act wickedly in his youth, yet in his old age he may perform good deeds. *[It is never too late to do right.]*

-Another interpretation of "The end of a matter is better than its beginning": A man may learn Torah in his youth and forget it, but in his old age it returns to him.

These are my interpretations of: "The end of a matter is better than its beginning."

*-R. Meir wants to persuade Elisha that it is never too late to repent. Elisha counters that lapses cannot be forgiven.*

-He answered him: "Akiva, your master, did not expound so. Rather, he explained, the end of a matter is good only when it was good from its very beginning. I will give you an example from an incident concerning me personally. My father, Avuyah, was one of the notable men of his generation, and at my circumcision he invited all the notables of Jerusalem, including R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua. And when they had eaten and drunk, they sang. Some sang ordinary songs and others alphabetical acrostics. R. Eliezer said to R. Joshua, "They are occupied with their [frivolous] matters while we neglect ours [Torah study]." They began therefore with exposition of the Torah, and from the Torah they went on to the Prophets, and from the Prophets to the Writings. They rejoiced at these words of Torah as on the day these words were given on Sinai, and fire glowed around them. After all, were they not originally given on Sinai in fire, as it is said, "And the mountain burned with a fire reaching up to the heart of Heaven" (Deut. 4:11) ?

- [When my father saw this], he said, "Since the power of the Torah is so great, if my son survives for me, I will dedicate him to the Torah!" And because his intention was not for the sake of Heaven [but for a desire that I become like those rabbis], my Torah did not remain with me."

*-Yet Talmud says: "One should always be occupied with Torah and good deeds, even if not for their own sake, because out of [doing good] with an ulterior motive comes [doing good] for its own sake." [Pesachim 50b] Some say initial ulterior motives are OK only if not exclusive.*

[Elisha said:] "And what else did you expound?"

[He answered], "Gold and glass cannot equal it" (Job 28:17).

*-This is God's answer to Job asking: "But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?" [Job 28:12]*

He said, "And what did you say concerning it?"

He answered: "It refers to the words of the Torah which are as difficult to acquire as vessels of gold, and as easy to lose as vessels of glass."

He responded: "Your teacher, Akiva, did not expound thus. Rather, he expounded: Just as broken vessels of gold and glass may be repaired, so a scholar who loses his learning may recover it."

At this point, Elisha said to Meir, "Turn back."

He asked, "Why?"

He answered, "Up to this point is the Shabbat limit [*beyond which one may not walk – 2,000 cubits from home*]." [Eruv. 58b]

He asked, "How do you know that?"

He answered, "From the footsteps of my horse which has already crossed 2,000 cubits."

Said Meir to him, "You possess all this wisdom and you will not return?"

He responded, "It is not within my power."

He asked, "Why?"

He answered: 'I was riding on a horse, and was passing behind a synagogue on a Yom Kippur that fell on Shabbat, and I heard a heavenly voice bursting forth and saying,

"Return, O backsliding children" (Jer. 3:14).

"Return to Me, and I will return to you" [Shuvu elai, ve-ashuvah alechem -- Mal. 3:7]

*-People must take the first step*

– except Elisha b. Avuyah, who knew My power, yet rebelled against Me!"

*-The more one knows, the greater the sin of not applying the knowledge:*

*R. Shim'on b. Halafta said: If one learns the words of the Torah and does not fulfill them, his punishment is more severe than for one who has not learned at all. [Deuteronomy Rabbah 7:4]*

*-But Jewish teaching is that repentance is available to all. Commentators: The Voice did not mean to exclude Elisha, only to inform him that his repentance would have to be self-motivated, and not a result of the Voice's exhortation.*

-How was it that Elisha acted in this manner? They related that once he was sitting and studying in the Valley of Genossar and he saw a man who climbed to the top of a palm tree and took the mother-bird with her young,

*-Thereby transgressing the commandment: "If you come across a bird's nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young." [Deut. 22:6]*

*-This also happened on Shabbat [Yalk. Shim. 2:974] when it is forbidden to climb a tree [Bet. 36b]*

and came down safely. After Shabbat, he saw another man who climbed the tree and took the young, but let the mother-bird go, and when he came down a snake bit him and he died.

-Whereupon he said: It is written, "You shall let the mother go, but the young you may take for yourself, that it may go well with you, and that you may live long." (Deut. 22:7).

-Where is the goodness for this man, and where is the length of days for this man?

-But he was unaware that R. Akiba had publicly expounded: "That it may go well with you" means 'in the world that is entirely good', "and that you may live long" means 'in the world of eternity'.

*-The reward is therefore in the World to Come, not in this world. (Logical, from premise that Torah is good.)*

*-An extreme view: The reward for fulfilling a mitzvah is not given in this world [R. Yaakov, Kidd. 39b]. All rewards for the righteous are in the World to Come, where they are worth more. The wicked get rewarded in this world for whatever good they did, but are withheld the World to Come.*

*Maharsha: Rewards promised in this world by the Torah apply to the whole community, not to individuals.*

-Some say that it was when he saw the tongue of R. Yehudah the Baker [one of the ten rabbis martyred by the Romans] being fed to a dog. He thereupon said: If this is the reward of the tongue that toiled all its days in the Torah, then how much more so the tongue that does not know and has not toiled in Torah! And he said: Since that is so, there is no reward for the righteous and no resurrection of the dead.



-Others say that the reason was that when his mother was pregnant with him she passed by idolatrous temples, and she smelled the dish [idolatrous food offerings], and they gave her some of it to eat, and she ate it, and it spread through her belly like the venom of a serpent.

*-Our Rabbis taught: If a pregnant woman smells... pork [and wants to eat it], dip a reed into the juice and let her suck on it. If she is satisfied, well and good. If not, feed her the juice itself. If she is satisfied, well and good. If not, feed her the meat itself, for nothing comes before the saving of a life, except idolatry, sexual immorality and murder [which are prohibited in all situations]. [Yoma 82a]*

*-Jewish law says there is no penalty to the mother or the child for doing so. (That would defeat the purpose!) But the Midrash (Elisha?) implies there is a price.*

After some time, Elisha b. Avuyah was taken ill.

They came and told R. Meir, 'Elisha, your master, is sick.'

He went to him and appealed to him, 'Return in repentance.'

He said to him, 'Will they accept me after all this?'

He responded, 'Is it not written, "You turn man to contrition" (Ps. 90:3)? This applies even when one's life is crushed.' [*Repentance is possible even right before death.*]

At that, Elisha b. Avuyah burst into tears and died.

And R. Meir rejoiced and said, 'It appears that my master passed away in the midst of repentance.'

And when they buried him, fire came to consume his grave.

*-Meaning that he was judged in Heaven, found guilty and punished – he did not repent.*

They came and told R. Meir, 'The grave of your master is aflame.'

He went and spread his cloak over it [to extinguish the fire], and said to him,

**Stay this night. Then, in the morning, if he will redeem you, well! [tov]; let him redeem you; but if he will not redeem you, then I will redeem you. As the Lord lives; lie down until the morning.**

**Stay this night** in this world which is all night, **then, in the morning, if Tov (the Good One) will redeem you.** "Then, in the morning" refers to the world which is all good. **"If Tov (the Good One) will redeem you": The Good One** is the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is said, "The Lord is good to all – Tov HaShem lakol" (Ps. 145:9). **but if he will not redeem you, then I will redeem you. As the Lord lives; lie down until the morning,**

*-A bold intervention by R. Meir, which seems to defy God. He uses Ruth quote as proof-text that his intervention is justified. The cloak on the grave means Meir wanted his own merit to cover and atone for Elisha.*

and the fire subsided.

*-His plea was accepted.*

R. Meir's disciples said to him, [when they saw his touching devotion to his master]: "Master, in the World to Come, if they say to you, "Whom would you prefer to visit, your father or your master," what will you answer?"

He answered, "First my father and then my master."

They said to him, 'And will they heed your request [to give Elisha a place in Heaven]?'

He answered, 'Is there not a Mishnah to this effect? [Shab. 116b] The case of a scroll may be saved [from a fire on Shabbat] together with the scroll, and the case of a tefillin together with the tefillin. Elisha will be saved by the merits of his Torah.'

*-The case itself may have no religious value, but if its purpose is to enclose something of religious value, it is then permissible to save it. Elisha is "the case".*

After some time, the daughters of Elisha came to ask charity from Rabbenu [R. Yehudah ha-Nasi]. He quoted, "Let there be none to extend kindness to [a wicked man]; or to be gracious to his orphan children" (Ps. 109:12), whereupon they said to him, 'Master! Don't look at his actions, look at his Torah knowledge.' At this Rabbi wept, and ordered that they should be supported, and said, "If one whose Torah was not for the sake of Heaven produced such [daughters], how much more so [is the merit of] one whose Torah was indeed for the sake of Heaven."

*-Acher's grandson was Rabbi Ya'akov ben Korshai [Hullin 142a]. He said:*

*This world is like a lobby before the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the lobby so that you may enter the banquet hall... Better one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than all the life in the World to Come, and better one hour of spiritual bliss in the World to Come than all the life of this world. [Pirkei Avot 4:21-22]*

*-Rabbi Yosef: Had Acher interpreted the Torah's promises as did his daughter's son, he would not have sinned (Hullin 142a, Eccl. R. 7:8).*

R. Yose said: There are three people whose evil inclination came to attack them, and each and every one of them fortified himself against it by taking an oath. They are Joseph, David, and Boaz:

*-Chronologically, Boaz should come before David. Commentators:*

*-Follows order of Tanach (Torah, then Neviim, then Ketubim); or*

*-Follows practice of listing last the one related to the subject at hand.*

-Joseph, as it is written [of his encounter with Potiphar's wife], "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God!" (Gen. 39:9).

R. Chunia said in the name of R. Idei: Is Scripture ever defective? It does not say "and sin against the Lord" but "and sin against God"; he swore to his Evil Inclination and said, "By God, I will not sin nor do this evil!" [Lev. R. 23:11]

*-Issue: Did Joseph really take an oath, as the Midrash implies? He said: "V'chattati IElohim – and sin against Elohim". If that is all he meant, he would have said HaShem (the Lord), not Elohim, especially because he was talking to an idolatrous woman [Gen. R. 87:5]. So the final "IElohim" must be the beginning of a new sentence – the oath in question.*

-How do we know it of David? Because it is said, "And David said: As the Lord lives, the Lord will strike him with illness" (I Sam. 26:10).

To whom did he take this oath? R. Eleazar and R. Shmuel b. Nahman gave different answers.

R. Eleazar said: He took an oath to his Evil Inclination.

R. Shmuel b. Nahman said: He took an oath to Avishai the son of Tzeruah, saying to him, "As the Lord lives, if you touch him, I swear that I will mingle your blood with his."

*-Saul is pursuing David to kill him. David and Abishai (his nephew and ally) find him sleeping in his tent. Abishai wants to kill him. But David says: No, he is the Lord's anointed. Let God kill him.*

*-David's evil inclination was telling him: Saul is pursuing you to kill you, so if you kill him it will be justified self-defense [Num. R. 15:16]*

-How do we know it of Boaz? Because it is said, **As the Lord lives; lie down until the morning.**

R. Yehudah and R. Chunia commented on this.

-R. Yehudah said: All that night his Evil Inclination contended with him, saying, "You are unmarried and seek a wife, and she is unmarried and seeks a husband. Arise and have intercourse with her, and make her your wife." And he took an oath to his Evil Inclination, saying, "As the Lord lives, I will not touch her," and to the woman he said, **lie down until the morning... if he will redeem you, well! [tov]; let him redeem you.**

-R. Chunia said: It is written, "A wise man remains steadfast (be'oz) and a man of knowledge grows stronger" (Prov. 24:5). Do not read "be'oz" (steadfast), but Boaz; so it reads 'A wise man is Boaz, and a man of knowledge grows stronger', for he strengthened himself with an oath.

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## Ruth 3:14

**14. And she lay at his feet until the morning; and she rose up before one person could recognize another person. For he said, Let it not be known that the woman came into the threshing floor.**

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## Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 7:1)

**And she lay at his feet until the morning; and she rose up before one person could recognize another person.** R. Berekiah said: "Before" (B'terem) is written with an extra vav (B'tereVm). This teaches that she waited with him for six hours, the numerical equivalent of the letter vav.

-*Adding to Boaz's merit, because he was secluded with Ruth for six full hours.*

-*Others did not pass the 6-hour test:*

-*Adam was told to wait 6 hours before eating from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, until Shabbat, when the Messianic Era would have been ushered in, but he didn't.*

-*Israel was told to wait 6 hours until Moses descended with the tablets, and they didn't.*

[Gen. R. 18:6, Shabbat 89a]

**For he said, Let it not be known that the woman came into the threshing floor.**

To whom did he say this? R. Meir said: To a member of his household.

-*He was obviously not talking to Ruth since he said 'The woman'.*

-*A Torah scholar may not venture out alone at night [Berachot 43b], so it may be assumed Boaz had attendants nearby.*

R. Chunya and R. Yirmiyah in the name of R. Shmuel b. R. Yitzhak said: All that night Boaz lay stretched out on his face, and prayed, "Master of the Universe, it is revealed and known to You that I did not touch her. So may it be Your will that it be not known that the woman came to the threshing-floor, so that the name of Heaven be not desecrated through me."

-*Boaz was therefore talking to God. He was concerned about Ruth's reputation, not his own.*

[Alshich]

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## Ruth 3:15

**15. And he said, Hold out the shawl that is upon you, and grasp it. She held it, and he measured six measures of barley, and set it on her; then he went to the city.**

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## Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 7:2)

**-And he said, Hold out the shawl that is upon you. Hold out** (haviv) is written [in the masculine] havah, teaching that he addressed her in the masculine, so that no one should notice her presence.

-*But our text of Ruth does say 'haviv'. The Sages of the Midrash must have had a variant text.*

**-and grasp it.** This teaches that she girded her loins like a man.

**-and he measured six measures of barley, and set it on her.** R. Simone said: Bar Kappara expounded in Tzipori: Is it then the custom of a king to betroth a wife with six grains of barley? Or is it the custom of a woman to be betrothed with six se'ah of barley?

-*Six grains is too little, and six se'ahs is too much for a woman to carry. So what "measure" of barley was used? [1 se'ah is about 7.5 liters.]*

-*'Shesh' does not mean 'six' but one-sixth of a se'ah. [Malbim]*

-*He gave her six se'ahs and God gave her the strength to carry them home. [Onkelos]*

R. Yehuda bar R. Simone said: The meaning of **and he measured six measures of barley, and set it on her** is that she would be rewarded with six righteous people arising from her, each one possessing six outstanding qualities. They are David, Hezekiah, Josiah, Hananiah, Mishaël and Azariah, Daniel, and the King Messiah:

-David, as it is said, "Skilful in playing, and a mighty man of valor, and a warrior, and prudent in affairs, and a handsome man, and the Lord is with him" (1Sam. 16:18);

-Hezekiah, as it is said, "That dominion may be increased, and that peace be endless upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it, through justice and through righteousness" (Isa. 9:6).

*-Hezekiah (Chizkiah) was king of Judah for 29 years [2Kings 18:20], 715-686 BCE. A righteous man, he emphasized scholarship and study of Torah. In his reign, "They searched from Dan to Beersheva and could not find an ignorant man." [Sanhedrin 94b])*

And his name is called Wondrous, Adviser, Mighty, Lord, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. (Isa. 9:5).

*-These are the 6 qualities.*

Some observe that l'marbeh (be increased) is written with a closed mem.

*-The mem of l'marbeh is written as a final mem. God wanted to make Hezekiah the Messiah, but didn't because the divine attribute of justice complained to God, "If you did not make King David, who sang numerous songs of praise to You, the Messiah, how can you make Hezekiah the Messiah, when he never sang your praises despite the miracles You performed for him, [such as his miraculous victory over Sennacherib]?" The closed mem indicates that plan was 'closed'. [Sanh. 94a]*

-Josiah, as it is said, "For he will be as a tree planted near waters, which spreads out its roots along a brook, [and does not see when heat comes, whose foliage is ever fresh, who will not worry in a year of drought, and will not stop producing fruit]" (Jer. 17:8).

*-Josiah (Yoshiyahu) was king of Judah for 31 years (2Kings 23:25), 641-609 BCE. Spearheaded revival of faith in the Land.*

-Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, as it is said, "Youths in whom there was no blemish, who were good-looking, and skilful in all wisdom, and discerning in knowledge, and perceptive in learning, and who had the stamina to stand and serve in the king's palace." (Dan. 1:4).

*-These three were taken with Daniel to Babylon as children, made eunuchs, and rose in rank. They refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's idols, so he threw them in the fiery furnace, but they survived by miracle (as did Daniel in the lion's den), ~606 BCE.*

*-Counted as one because they acted in concert.*

-Daniel, as it is said, "Extraordinary spirit, intelligence, understanding, interpreting of dreams, solving riddles, and the resolving of difficulties have been found in Daniel" (Dan. 1:12).

-The King Messiah, as it is said, "And the spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and strength, a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord" (Isa. 11:2).

### Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 7:3)

**-Then he went to the city.** Surely it should have stated that SHE went to the city, yet it says **then HE went to the city.**

It teaches that he accompanied her to ensure that none of the young men would accost her.

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### Ruth 3:16

**16. She came to her mother-in-law, who said, Who are you, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done for her.**

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### Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 7:4)

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

Did she then not recognize her? Yes, but she meant, "Are you still a single or a married woman?"

She answered, "A single woman", **And she told her all that the man had done for her.**

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## Ruth 3:17

**17. And she said, He gave me these six measures of barley; for he said to me, Do not go empty-handed to your mother-in-law.**

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### Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 7:5)

*-Boaz did not say 'Do not go empty-handed to your mother-in-law'. Ruth said he did for shalom bayit, to flatter her lonely, widowed mother-in-law. [Iggeret Shmuel]*

**And she said, He gave me these six measures of barley.**

R. Alexander said: Wherever Israel went, they did not leave empty-handed:

-From the case of spoils of Egypt, they did not leave empty-handed [Ex. 12:35-36].

-In the case of the spoils of the battles with Sichon and Og, they did not leave empty-handed [Deut. 2:35, 3:7]  
*-Kingdoms conquered by the Israelites after they attacked her [Deut. R. 1:22]*

-In the case of the spoils of the battles with the 31 kings [defeated by Joshua], they did not leave empty-handed [Josh. 8:27, 11:14].

*-The point is that just as in every case the Israelites did not desire or need the spoils, but God gave them to them, so Ruth did not ask money from Boaz, but came to request that he marry her. He agreed, but gave her something tangible also, to emulate God.*

-The word rekam (empty-handed) occurs in connection with Egypt, as it is said, "And it shall come to pass, that, when you go, you will not go empty-handed (rekam)" (Ex. 3:21).

-And in connection with the Festival pilgrims, as it is said, "You shall not be seen before Me empty-handed (rekam)" (Ex. 23:15)

-And in connection with the righteous, as it is said, **for he said to me, Do not go empty-handed to your mother-in-law.** The word rekam, which occurs in connection with the righteous, is not to be compared to that of Egypt, but to that of the Festival Pilgrims, as we have learnt [Hag. 2a]: The re'iyah offering must be worth not less than two ma'ot of silver, and the peace offering of chagigah not less than one ma'ah of silver.

*-These are small amounts. The point is that God gives us lavish gifts, but asks only token offerings in return.*

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## Ruth 3:18

**18. Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out; for the man will not rest until he settles the matter today.**

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### Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 7:6)

**Then said she, Sit still, my daughter... for the man will not rest until he settles the matter today.**

R. Huna said in the name of R. Shmuel b. R. Isaac: The yes of the righteous is yes, and their no, no, as it is said, **for the man will not rest until he settles the matter today.**

*-Unknown to him, if he had delayed even one day he would not have married Ruth and started the chain that will lead to the Messiah, because he died on his wedding night after impregnating Ruth. [Yalkut Shimoni 608]. From this we learn that we must never delay performing mitzvot.*

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