

Ruth, Chesed, and The Woman of Valor

Source Sheet by Samara Schwartz

Ruth Rabbah 2:14

(14) ...Rabbi Ze'eira said: This scroll does not contain [the laws of] purity or impurity, and not prohibitions or allowances. Why was it written? It is to teach you the extent of the good reward for those who perform kindness.

Ruth 2:11-12

(11) 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. (12) 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!"

רות רבה ב':י"ד

(י"ד)...אָמַר רַבִּי זְעִירָא, מְגִלָּה זוֹ אֵין בָּהּ לֹא טְמֵאָה, וְלֹא טְהוּרָה, וְלֹא אֶסוּר, וְלֹא הֶתֵּר, וְלָמָּה נִכְתְּבָה לְלַמְּדֵךְ כִּמָּה שָׁכַר טוֹב לְגוֹמְלֵי חֲסָדִים.

רות ב':י"א-י"ב

(י"א) וַיַּעַן בַּעֲזוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ הֲגִד הֲגִד לִי כָּל אֲשֶׁר-עָשִׂיתְ אֶת-חַמּוֹתֶיךָ אַחֲרַי מִזֶּה אִישׁךָ וּתְעִזְבִי אֲבִיךָ וְאִמֶּךָ וְאֶרְצֶיךָ מִזֶּדְתְּךָ וּתְלַכִּי אֶל-עַם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַעְתָּ תְּמוּל שְׁלֹשׁוֹם: (י"ב) יְשַׁלֵּם יְהוָה פְּעֻלָּתְךָ וְתִהְיֶי מִשְׁכַּרְתְּךָ שְׁלֵמָה מֵעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר-בָּאת לְחַסוֹת תַּחַת-כְּנָפָיו:

Ruth Rabbah 5:4

(4) **“May the Lord recompense your work, and may your reward be complete from the Lord, God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge” (Ruth 2:12).**

“May the Lord recompense your work, and may your reward be complete [*shelema*] from the Lord.” Rabbi Ḥasa said. “Under whose wings [*kenafav*] you have come to take refuge.” Rabbi Avun said: We have heard that the land has wings, as it is stated: “From the end of [*mikkenaf*] the earth we have heard songs” (Isaiah 24:16). There are wings to the sun, as it is stated: “The sun of righteousness will shine for you who fear My name, with healing in its wings” (Malachi 3:20). There are wings for beasts, as it is stated: “The sound of the wings of the beasts” (Ezekiel 3:13). There are wings for cherubs, as it is stated: “For the cherubim spread their wings” (I Kings 8:7). There are wings for seraphs, as it is stated: “The seraphim stood above Him; each had six wings” (Isaiah 6:2). Come and see how great is the power of the righteous, and how great is the power of charity, and how great is the power of those who perform kindness, as they do not take shelter in the shadow of [the wings of] morning, not in the shadow of the wings of the land, not in the shadow of the wings of the sun, not in the shadow of the wings of beasts, not in the shadow of the wings of cherubs, and not in the shadow of the wings of seraphs, but rather in the shadow of He who spoke and the world came into being, as it is stated: “How precious is Your kindness, God, and men take shelter in the shadow of Your wings” (Psalms 36:8).

Ruth 2:13

(13) 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.”

רות ב':י"ג

(יג) וְהִיא אָמְרָה אֶמְצָא־חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲדֹנָי
כִּי נֶחֱמַתְנִי וְכִי דִבַּרְתָּ עִלַּי לֵב
שֶׁפָּחַתְךָ וְאַנְכִי לֹא אֶהְיֶה כְּאֶחָת
שֶׁפָּחַתְיךָ:

Ruth Rabbah 5:5

“She said: Let me find favor in your eyes, my master...though I will not be like one of your maidservants.”
He said to her: ‘God forbid, you are not like one of the maidservants, but rather one of the mothers.’

רות רבה ה:ה'

(ה) וַתֹּאמֶר אֶמְצָא חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲדֹנָי
וְגו' וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא אֶהְיֶה כְּאֶחַת שְׂפָחֹתֶיךָ
(רות ב, יג), אָמַר לָהּ חַס וְשְׁלוֹם אֵין
אֶת מִן הָאֲמָהוֹת, אֶלָּא מִן הָאֲמָהוֹת.

The rabbinic sources emphasize the superabundance of hesed, its "more-than-enoughness." As Maimonides puts it, the concept of hesed: *"Includes two notions, one of them consisting in the exercise of beneficence toward one who deserves it, but in a greater measure than he deserves it. In most cases, the prophetic books use the word hesed in the sense of practicing beneficence toward one who has no right at all to claim this from you"* [Guide for the Perplexed].

Berakhot 7b:9

Continuing on the topic of names, the Gemara asks: **What is the meaning of the name Ruth? Rabbi Yohanan said: That she had the privilege that David, who inundated the Holy One, Blessed be He, with songs and praises, would descend from her.** The name Ruth [*Rut*] is etymologically similar in Hebrew to the word inundate [*riva*].

ברכות ז' ב:ט'

רות, מאי "רות"? אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן:
שְׂזַכְתָּהּ וַיֵּצֵא מִמֶּנָּה דָּוִד שְׂרִירָהוּ
לְהַקְדִּישׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּשִׁירוֹת
וְתִשְׁבַּחֹת.

Proverbs 31:10-31

(10) What a rare find is a capable wife!
Her worth is far beyond that of rubies. (11) Her husband puts his confidence in her,
And lacks no good thing. (12) She is good to him, never bad,
All the days of her life. (13) She looks for wool and flax,
And sets her hand to them with a will. (14) She is like a merchant fleet,
Bringing her food from afar. (15) She rises while it is still night,
And supplies provisions for her household,
The daily fare of her maids. (16) She sets her mind on an estate and acquires it;
She plants a vineyard by her own labors. (17) She girds herself with strength,
And performs her tasks with vigor.^c
(18) She sees that her business thrives;
Her lamp never goes out at night. (19) She sets her hand to the distaff;
Her fingers work the spindle.
(20) She gives generously to the poor;
Her hands are stretched out to the needy. (21) She is not worried for her household because of snow,
For her whole household is dressed in crimson. (22) She makes covers

משלי ל"א:י-ל"א

(י) אִשְׁת־חַיִּיל מִי זְמַצָּא וְרַחֵק
מִפְּנִינִים מְכָרָה: (יא) בְּטַח בָּהּ לֵב
בַּעֲלָהּ וְשָׁלַל לֹא יַחְסֹר: (יב)
גְּמַלְתָּהּ טוֹב וְלֹא־רָע כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיהָ:
(יג) דָּרָשָׁה צְמֹר וּפְשָׁתִים וְתַעַשׂ
בְּחִפְזָה כַּפִּיהָ: (יד) הֵיטָה כְּאֲנִיּוֹת
סוֹחֵר מִמְּרַחֵק תָּבִיא לְחֻמָּה: (טו)
וְתַקֵּם | בְּעוֹד לִיָּלָה וְתַתֵּן טָרֶף
לְבֵיתָהּ וְזֶהק לְנַעֲרֹתֶיהָ: (טז) זְמַמָּה
שָׁדָה וְתַקְחָהּ מִפְּרֵי כִפְיָהּ (נטע)
[נְטָעָה] כָּרֶם: (יז) חָגְרָה בְּעוֹז
מִתְנִיָּה וְתֵאמֵץ זְרוּעֹתֶיהָ: (יח)
טַעֲמָה כִּי־טוֹב סָחָרָה לֹא־יִכְבֶּה
(בליל) [בְּלִילָה] גֵּרָה: (יט) יָדֶיהָ
שְׁלָחָה בְּכִישׁוֹר וְכַפִּיהָ תִמְכּוּ פְלָה:
(כ) כֶּפֶה פָּרָשָׁה לְעֹגִי וְיָדֶיהָ שְׁלָחָה
לְאֲבִיוֹן: (כא) לֹא־תִירָא לְבֵיתָהּ
מִשָּׁלֵג כִּי כָל־בֵּיתָהּ לָבֵשׁ שָׁנִים:
(כב) מִרְבָּדִים עָשְׂתָה־לָּהּ שֵׁשׁ
וְאֲרָגְמָן לְבוּשָׁה: (כג) נוֹדַע בְּשַׁעֲרֵים
בַּעֲלָהּ בְּשִׁבְתָּהּ עִם־זִקְנֵי־אֲרָץ: (כד)
סָדִין עָשְׂתָה וְתִמְכֹּר וְחִגּוֹר נָתַתָּה
לְכַנְעֲנִי: (כה) עֲזֹוְהָדָר לְבוּשָׁה
וְתִשְׁחַק לְיוֹם אַחֲרוֹן: (כו) פִּיהָ
פְּתַחָה בְּחֻכְמָה וְתוֹרַת חָסֵד
עַל־לְשׁוֹנָה: (כז) צוֹפְיָה (הילכת)
[הִלְכֹת] בֵּיתָהּ וְלָחֶם עֲצָלוֹת לֹא
תֵאכֹל: (כח) קָמוּ בְּנֵיהָ וַיֵּאֱשְׁרוּהָ

for herself;
 Her clothing is linen and purple.
 (23) Her husband is prominent in
 the gates,
 As he sits among the elders of the
 land. (24) She makes cloth and sells
 it,
 And offers a girdle to the merchant.
 (25) She is clothed with strength
 and splendor;
 She looks to the future cheerfully.
 (26) Her mouth is full of wisdom,
 Her tongue with kindly teaching.
 (27) She oversees the activities of
 her household
 And never eats the bread of idleness.
 (28) Her children declare her happy;
 Her husband praises her, (29)
 "Many women have done well,
 But you surpass them all." (30)
 Grace is deceptive,
 Beauty is illusory;
 It is for her fear of the LORD
 That a woman is to be praised. (31)
 Extol her for the fruit of her hand,
 And let her works praise her in the
 gates.

בַּעֲלָהּ וַיְהִלָּהּ: (כט) רַבּוֹת בָּנוֹת
 עָשׂוּ חָגִיל וְאֶת עֲלִית עַל-כְּלָנָה: (ל)
 שָׁקַר הַחֹן וְהַבֵּל הַיָּפִי אִשָּׁה
 יִרְאֵת-יְהוָה הִיא תִתְהַלָּל: (לא)
 תְּנוּלָהּ מִפְּרֵי יָדֶיהָ וַיְהִלָּהּ
 בְּשַׁעְרִים מְעֻשִׂיהָ:

Midrash Mishlei 31

Rabbi Yose bar Yirmiyah said, "Why did he compare the prophets to women?
 Rather, just like [a] woman is not embarrassed to claim the needs of the home
 from her husband, so [too] were the prophets not embarrassed to claim the
 needs of Israel from in front of the Holy One, blessed be He."...
 Another interpretation: "A woman of valor who can find?" - this is [the

meaning] of what the verse states (Psalms 92:15), "In old age they still produce fruit, etc." - corresponding to Avraham and Sarah who were of the same measure concerning charity and acts of kindness; they were a good sign for the world. In this way, He does not prevent proper women from the righteous ones, [but] matches them. As so [too] do we find with the wife of Noach that her actions and his actions were of the same measure - that is why she merited with him and was rescued from the waters of the flood.

"Her husband puts his confidence in her" - this is Sarah, our mother, as Avraham grew rich on her account, as it states (Genesis 12:16), "And he benefited Avraham for her sake."

"She bestows good to him, and not bad" - this is Rivkah, our mother, who bestowed [good] to Yitzchak at the time that Sarah, his mother died.

"She seeks wool and flax" - this is Leah, our mother, who received Yaakov with a pleasant countenance, as it is written (Genesis 30:16), "And Yaakov came from the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him and said, 'You are to sleep with me, for I have hired you, etc.'" Therefore she merited and kings and prophets came from her.

"She is like a merchant fleet" - this is Rachel, our mother, who was embarrassed about [her lack of] children every day. Therefore she merited and a son came from her who was similar to a ship that is filled with all the good [found] in the world - so [was it with] Yosef, that the whole world survived from his merit and he supported the world in the years of famine.

"She rises while it is still night" - this is Batya, the daughter of Pharaoh. She was a gentile and became a Jewess and they mentioned her name among the proper [women], since she took care of Moshe. Therefore she merited and entered the Garden of Eden in her lifetime.

"She sets her mind on a field and acquires it; [she plants a vineyard from the produce of her hand]" - this is Yocheved, that from her came Moshe who is equivalent to all of Israel, which is called a vineyard, as it states (Isaiah 5:7), "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the House of Israel."

"She girds her loins with strength" - this is Miriam, as before Moshe was born, she said, "In the future, my mother will give birth to the savior of Israel." Once he was born and the yoke upon them became heavier, her father got up and bopped her on the head. He said to her, "Where is your prophecy?" And he got up and spit in front of her face. And nonetheless, she exerted herself about her prophecy, as it is written (Exodus 2:4), "And his sister stood from a distance."

"She advises (*taamah*) that her merchandise is good; [her lamp never goes out at night]" - this is Channah who tasted (*taamah*) the taste of prayer, as it states (I Samuel 2:1), "And Hannah prayed, 'My heart exults in the Lord, etc.'" Therefore she merited and a son came from her that was the match of Moshe and Aharon, which would bring light to Israel like lamps, as it is written (Psalms 99:6), "Moshe and Aharon among his priests, and Shmuel among the ones that call His name." And it is written about Shmuel (I Samuel 3:3), "The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Shmuel was sleeping in the temple of the Lord."

"She sets her hand to the distaff" - this is Yael, who did not kill Sisera with a weapon, but rather with a peg through the force of her hands. And because of what did she not kill him with a weapon? In order to fulfill that which it states (Deuteronomy 22:5), "There shall not be the vessel of a man on a woman."

"Her palm she spreads out to the poor" - this is the widowed woman of Tzarfat, who supported Eliyahu with bread and water.

"She is not worried for her home because of snow, for her whole home is dressed in crimson" - this is Rachav the prostitute. When Israel came to destroy Yericho, she did not fear from them, because they give her a sign - (Joshua 2:18) "this line of scarlet string."

"She makes covers for herself; [her clothing is linen and purple]" - this is Batsheva, that from her came Shlomo, who was adorned with linen and purple and ruled from [one] end of the world to the [other] end.

"Her husband is known in the gates," - this is Michal, who saved David from death.

"She makes cloth and sells it" - this is the mother of Shimshon, that through him Israel was saved.

"Strength and splendor are her clothing; [and she laughs to the last day]" - this is Elisheva, the daughter of Aminadav, who saw four joyful events in one day: her brother [became] a prince; her husband, high priest; the brother of her husband, king; and her two children, young priests. "

She opens her mouth with wisdom" - this is the wise woman who said (II Samuel 20:16), "Listen, listen! Please tell Yoav, 'Come over here and I will speak to you,'" who saved the city with her wisdom; and this was Sarach the daughter of Asher.

"She oversees the activities of her household" - this is the wife of Ovadiah, who rescued her sons and they did not worship idolatry with Achav.

"Her children rise and declare her happy" - this is the Shunamite, who is called a great woman (II Kings 4:8). And because of what? Because she pressed upon Elisha to eat.

"Many women have done well, but you surpass them all" - this is Ruth the Moabitess, who came under the wings of the Divine presence. "Grace is false, beauty is illusory" - as she left her mother and her forefathers and her wealth, and came with her mother-in-law and accepted all of the commandments: the domain of Shabbat - "to where you will walk, I will walk" (Ruth 1:16); the prohibition of isolation with a man - "and in that which you will lay, I will lay"; the six hundred and thirteen commandments - "your people is my people"; idolatry - "your God is my God"; the four death penalties of the court - "and in that which you will die, I will die"; "and there will I be buried" - these are the two graveyards arranged for the court, one for the stoned and the burned, and one for the killed and the strangled. Therefore, she merited and David came from her, who gave pleasure with songs and praises to the Holy One, blessed be He. Therefore it is stated, "Give of the fruit of her hand and let her works praise her in the gates." Be strong in ethical behavior, keep the Torah, and be rescued from the evil inclination.

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