

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT BAMIDBAR

DVAR TORAH: GUARDING THE PALACE

The Book of Bamidbar, says the Ramban in his introduction, opens with the parallel between the revelation at Mount Sinai and the **משכן אוהל מועד**, the dwelling place of the Divine Presence in the Tent of Meeting. Entrance to the Mishkan was limited just as it was to Mount Sinai. There is a death penalty for illegal entrance as there was at the giving of the Torah. God's warning about the Leviim glancing at sacred items is reminiscent of His warning that the people do not look at what they are not supposed to on Mount Sinai. There are guards around the Mishkan just as the Kohanim were instructed to guard the mountain. Guards also stood watch in the **בית המקדש**, the Temple, as well, Leviim outside and Kohanim inside.

Guarding the Temple and the Mishkan had two distinct functions. Certainly the guards had to make sure that non-Kohanim or impure people did not enter prohibited areas. But, says the Midrash (Sifrei Zuta Bamidbar 18:4 quoted by the Ramban), the guards serve a second function as well: **לא דומה פלטריין שאין** – You cannot compare a palace without guards to a palace with guards. In the words of the Ramban: **והכל מעלה למקדש וכבוד לו** – All of this adds high status to the Sanctuary and gives honor to it. They were not only like border police who keep out unwanted people, but like palace guards who add dignity to the palace. The shomrim of the Mikdash are the ultimate palace guards.

Clothes serve the same two functions. Of course clothes are needed to protect man from the elements, from heat and cold and from rough objects. But clothes also express man's dignity. Rabbi Yochanan, says the Gemara (Shabbat 113a) used to call his clothes **מכבודתי**, my honor. We fulfill the mitzvah of honoring Shabbat, **כבוד שבת**, by wearing special clothing.

Rav Hutner, ztl (Pachad Yitzchak Pesach 83:4), applies the same concept to understanding the function of rabbinic laws. Not only do rabbinic laws protect against transgressing biblical laws, but they are also an expression of **כבוד התורה**, the honor of the Torah. Transgressing a rabbinic law, God forbid, not only opens one up to be 'bitten by the snake who sneaks through the breach in the wall,' it also violates the Torah's honor. And keeping a rabbinic law not only protects a person from the spiritual (and often physical) harm a biblical transgression brings; it elevates the Torah's honor.

Based on Rav Hutner's extrapolation – if we put two and two together – we can perhaps gain a better understanding of the special place of the rabbinic restrictions of Shabbat. Besides serving as 'guards of the biblical palace' like other rabbinic laws, not only protecting from biblical sins but also granting honor to the Torah, rabbinic Shabbat restrictions might also ascribe honor to Shabbat. The prophet teaches us that Shabbat should be honored: **וְקראתָ לְשַׁבַּת עֵנֶג לְקִדּוּשׁ ה' מְכַבֵּד** – You should call Shabbat a delight, and call God's holy day honored (Yishayahu 58:13). Honoring Shabbat might go beyond positive acts like wearing special clothing and preparing ourselves and our houses for Shabbat; we might be able to honor Shabbat through the rabbinic restrictions. Just as the guards of the Temple honor it, not only protect it; and rabbinic fences honor the Torah, not only protect us from biblical transgression; so Shabbat's rabbinic restrictions might have a special function of honoring Shabbat because of its special sanctity.

SOURCE GUIDE: RUTH AND ORPAH, DAVID AND GOLIATH

There is a puzzling one-line Midrash about Ruth, Orpah, and Naomi. After the death of Naomi's husband Elimelech, the death of her two sons Machlon and Kilyon, and a stay in Moav that lasts over ten years, Naomi hears that the famine in the land of Israel is over and decides to return to Beit Lechem. She tells her two widowed daughters-in-law to return to their mothers and to find new husbands – but they refuse to leave her. Naomi tries again to convince them, and Orpah kisses her mother-in-law and returns, whereas Ruth sticks with her. Orpah seems to be the one who listens to Naomi, and Ruth goes against her. Yet the Midrash says, “Orpah turned her back on Naomi and Ruth ‘saw her words.’”

Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah Leave Moav

Ruth and Orpah, in the beginning of the Megillah, are paired together and extremely similar: Both Moabite women marry the Jewish brothers Machlon and Kilyon, both of their husbands die, both accompany Naomi on her journey back to Beit Lechem, and both declare that they will not leave her.

<p>1. Ruth 1:6-10</p> <p>(6) She (Naomi) got up, with her daughters-in-law, and returned from the field of Moav, for God remembered His nation to give them food.</p> <p>(7) She left the place that she had been, and her two daughters-in-law were with her, and they went on the path to return to the land of Yehudah.</p> <p>(8) Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go and return each woman to her mother. God should do kindness with you like you did with those that died and with me.</p> <p>(9) God should grant that each of you find comfort in the house of her husband.” She kissed them and they lifted up their voices and cried.</p> <p>(10) They said to her, “We will return with you to your nation.”</p>	<p>רות א:ו-י</p> <p>(ו) וַתָּקָם הִיא וְכַלְחִיָּה וַתֵּשֶׁב מִשְׂדֵי מוֹאָב כִּי שָׁמְעָה בַשָּׂדֶה מוֹאָב כִּי פָקַד ה' אֶת עַמּוֹ לְהַחֲלִיֵּם לְחָם:</p> <p>(ז) וַתֵּצֵא מִן הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה שָׁמָּה וּשְׁתֵי כַלְחִיָּה עִמָּה וַתֵּלְכְנָה בְּדֶרֶךְ לָשׁוּב אֶל אֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה:</p> <p>(ח) וַתֹּאמֶר נְעָמִי לְשְׁתֵי כַלְחִיָּה לָכֵּן שָׁבְנָה אִשָּׁה לְבַיִת אִמָּה יַעֲשֶׂה ה' עִמָּכֶם חֶסֶד כְּאֲשֶׁר עֲשִׂיתֶם עִם הַמֵּתִים וְעַמְדִי:</p> <p>(ט) יִתֵּן ה' לָכֶם וּמִצְאֹן מְנוּחָה אִשָּׁה בַּיִת אִישָׁה וַתִּשְׁק קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכְּינָה: (י) וַתֹּאמְרֶנָּה לָּהּ כִּי אֵתְךָ נָשׁוּב לְעַמְּךָ:</p>
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Stage II: Ruth vs. Orpah

But in the next stage of the conversation Ruth and Orpah react differently.

<p>2. Ruth 1:11-14</p> <p>(11) Naomi said: Return my daughters. Why do you go with me? Do I have any sons inside of me that would be husbands for you?</p> <p>(12) Return my daughters. Go. For I am too old to be with a man. For even if I said there is hope, and even if tonight I was with a man and gave birth to sons,</p> <p>(13) Would you wait for them to grow up? Would you remain tied to them, unmarried? No, my daughters, for I am very bitter from you for the hand of God went out against me.</p> <p>(14) They lifted up their voices and cried again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law but Ruth clung to her.</p>	<p>רות א:יא-יד</p> <p>(יא) וַתֹּאמֶר נְעָמִי שָׁבְנָה בְנֹתַי לָמָּה תֵּלְכְנָה עִמִּי הַעוֹד לִי בָנִים בְּמִעֵי וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְאֲנָשִׁים:</p> <p>(יב) שָׁבְנָה בְנֹתַי לָכֵן כִּי זָקַנְתִּי מִהַיּוֹת לְאִישׁ כִּי אֲמַרְתִּי גֵשׁ לִי תִקְוָה גַם הָיִיתִי הַלַּיְלָה לְאִישׁ וְגַם לְדֹתַי בָּנִים:</p> <p>(יג) הֲלֹא הַיּוֹם תִּשְׁבְּרֶנָּה עַד אֲשֶׁר יִגְדְּלוּ הֲלֹא הַיּוֹם תַּעֲגֹנָה לְבִלְתִּי הָיִיתִי לְאִישׁ אֶל בְּנֹתַי כִּי מֵר לִי מֵאֹד מִכֶּם כִּי יֵצְאוּ בִי יָד דְּדוֹד:</p> <p>(יד) וַתִּשְׁנֶה קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכְּינָה עוֹד וַתִּשְׁק עֹרְפָּהּ לְחַמּוֹתֶיהָ וְרוּת דָּבְקָה בָּהּ:</p>
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The Midrash sharpens the contrast:

<p>3. Midrash Rabbah Ruth 2:9</p> <p>“One was named Orpah” that turned her back to her mother-in-law; “and the second was named Ruth” who saw the words of her mother-in-law.</p>	<p>מדרש רבה רות ב:ט</p> <p>“שם האחת ערפה” שהפכה עורף לחמותה “ושם השנית רות” שראתה בדברי חמותה.</p>
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The Midrash seems to look at this backwards: Wasn't Orpah the one who listened to Naomi and Ruth the one who went against her words? True, Ruth can be referred to as a pious convert and devoted, but why say that she "saw the words of her mother-in-law"?

Daughters or Daughters-in-law?

The Alshich Hakadosh (Rav Moshe Alshich, Adrianople, Turkey 1508 – 1593 Tzefat) makes a simple observation that explains the midrash. When Naomi hears of their intention to join the Jewish people – "We will return with you to your nation" – she now refers to them as "my **daughters.**" But Naomi is still cautious; maybe their intention is for her to somehow 'replace' their husbands. Here Orpah breaks and leaves, while Ruth reads between the lines, "sees the words" of Naomi. Ruth realizes that Naomi is writing between the lines and telling them, "You can be my daughters." But Naomi must probe further:

<p>4. Ruth 1:15 (15) She said, "Behold, your sister-in-law (she purposely uses the word יְבִמְתָּךְ, that refers to a childless widow) has returned to her nation and her gods; go along with your sister-in-law.</p>	<p>רות א: טו (טו) וַתֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה שָׁבָה יְבִמְתְּךָ אֶל עַמָּהּ וְאֶל אֱלֹהֶיהָ שׁוֹבֵי אַחֲרַי יְבִמְתְּךָ:</p>
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Is Ruth ready to return with Naomi to the land of Israel? That means more than being deeply connected to a beloved person; it means joining the Jewish people and connecting with their God through His mitzvot. Ruth makes this crystal clear:

<p>5. Ruth 1:16 (16) Ruth said, "Don't press me to leave you and to return from following you, for wherever you go I will go, wherever you stay I will stay, your nation is my nation, and your God is my God.</p>	<p>רות א: טז (טז) וַתֹּאמֶר רות אל תפגע בי לעזובך לשוב מאחריך כי אל אשר תלכי אלך ובאשר תליני אליו עמך עמי ואלקינו אלקי:</p>
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Ruth and Orpah, David and Goliath

The difference between Ruth and Orpah goes deeper. Ruth becomes the ancestor of King David (Ruth 4:13-22), while Orpah gives birth to Goliath (Sotah 42b, based on Shmuel II 21:16-22):

<p>5. Sotah 42b Rabbi Yitzchak said: Said the Holy One, blessed be He, "Let the sons of the kissed one (Orpah, who kissed Naomi goodbye and left her) come and fall into the hands of the sons of the one who clung (Ruth, who clung to the Divine Presence – Rashi).</p>	<p>סוטה מב: אמר רבי יצחק אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא יבואו בני הנשוקה ויפלו ביד בני הדבוקה:</p>
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The following two sources offer insights into the contrast between Orpah and Ruth:

A. **Rav Henoch Lebowitz, ztl** (1918-2008, Rosh Yeshivah of Chofetz Chaim) in Chidushei Halev (Ruth pp. 31-33) speaks of Orpah's contradictory feelings. On an external level she loves Naomi, her husband's mother, cried over their parting, and was even ready to join Naomi's nation (verse 10). But Chazal saw that Orpah had a sub-conscious desire to break away from Naomi, to turn her back on her and what she represented. That same Talmudic passage (Sotah 42b) tells of the decadence Orpah descended to immediately after she left. Orpah's connection to Naomi was a spiritual lifeline; she had a chance. But actualizing her dark inner feelings destroyed her.

B. **Rav Yosef Zev Lipowitz, ztl** (who was born in Poland 1889 to a Kotzker Chosid, became a close talmid of the Alter of Slabodka, made aliyah in 1924, devoted himself energetically to Torah education in Tel Aviv, and passed away in 1962), in Nachalat Yosef on Megillat Ruth (pp. 45-51), suggests that the difference between Ruth and Orpah that blossomed into the face-off between David and Goliath represents the struggle between two approaches to life: Which of the two takes precedence in our lives – ideals or self-interest? When it became clear that Orpah's personal future was brighter in Moav she returned; but Ruth was willing to make sacrifices for an ideal.

HOW TO MAKE CURSES VANISH BY RABBI MENDEL FARBER

The Gemara (Megilah 31b) tells us that Ezra instituted reading the קללות, the curses of Vayikra-Torat Kohanim in Parshat Bechukotai before Shavuot and those of Devarim-Mishneh Torah in Parshat Ki Tavo before Rosh Hashanah in order that “the year should end together with its curses.” Both Rosh Hashanah and Shavuot are each considered the beginning of a new year because Man was created on both of those days. Man was created once on Rosh Hashanah, and that ended in tragedy with the demise of the human form that resulted from the sin of the עץ הדעת, the Tree of Knowledge. But Man was also recreated on Shavuot and restored back to his original dignified stature.

We must prepare for both of those beginnings through reading the curses. On Rosh Hashanah we prepare ourselves to be recreated in our original regal nobility, and on Shavuot we prepare ourselves to once again receive the Torah that restored us to our distinguished origin. Both of these must be prefaced by reading the קללות so those curses will disappear with the termination of the old year. One could ask: If we want the year and its curses to end, and to commence a new year with blessings, why don't we just let the year end without bringing the curses to the surface by mentioning them? Why not let them simply fade away?

The answer is: The curses do not fade away by themselves; they disappear only because we mention them. How is that? It is because the קללות, both in Vayikra and in Devarim, are part of a ברית, a covenant that Hashem made with us. What does a covenant with curses attached to it mean? How does it differ from a covenant made without curses? A covenant with curses does not mean that Hashem curses us; nor does it mean that if we will violate the covenant He will curse us. Rather, it means that the covenant created a relationship between us and God that has no neutrality. The covenant does not merely mean that with the relationship things are good and without the relationship we do not have the good; it means much more than that. It means that with the covenant the very essence of our lives changed; we became different kinds of human beings. After the covenant: With Torah we live and without Torah we die. We accepted our Torah as life itself.

By prefacing our rebirth both on Rosh Hashanah and on Shavuot with the covenant that contains the curses – by re-identifying with those covenants with the full realization of our total identity with our Torah – the curses disappear. We and life become one. We and our Torah which is our life become one. The absence of life, the curses, completely vanish. May we all merit accepting the Torah as the essence of our lives which it truly is.

This issue is dedicated in memory of
Moshe ben Yitzchak haCohen (Mark Bader), ז"ל

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

To dedicate a Taste of Text, please email Rabbi Freedman at
rabbi.dr.moshefreedman@gmail.com

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