



What is so Special about Boaz?

What really happened that night on the threshing floor, and why is Boaz one of the most impressive men in Tanach?

“Boaz ate and drank, and in a cheerful mood went to lie down beside the grain pile. Then she [Ruth] went over stealthily and uncovered his feet and lay down. In the middle of the night, the man gave a start and pulled back – there was a woman lying at his feet!” (Ruth 3:7-8)

Ruth comes at night to the threshing floor. This is her last chance – at least, thus believes Naomi, who cares so much for her. Ruth is willing to pay the price. She comes to the threshing floor and knows that anything can happen there. That no one promises her anything. With her status – foreign, poor, an outsider – she can quickly become easy prey.

What is Boaz bothered about? A woman came to him. At night. To the threshing floor. He hadn't asked for it, he hadn't ordered it. She had initiated it. What exactly did she think she was doing? Boaz could do whatever he wanted to her and give her nothing in return. And even if she would tell – who would believe her? He is an honorable, rich man, with status and power. And she? Both her class and her situation are so against her.

The truth is that he does not have to take advantage of her. He could just throw her out, scream at her, ask her what she thought she was doing exactly. He can embarrass her. Defame her. Or he can concede. Why wait for tomorrow? She's here.

The Midrash was well aware of these possibilities, and the test that Boaz faces:

“As the L-rd lives! Lie down until morning’ (Ruth 3: 3). The *yetzer hara* sat all night and told him, ‘You are available

and seeking a wife and she is available and seeking a husband; you know that a marriage can be consummated through relations. Get up and lay with her, and she will be your wife!’ So Boaz swore to his *yetzer hara* and told him, ‘As the L-rd lives, I will not touch this woman! And to her he said, ‘Lie down until morning.” (Sifre Bamidbar 88)

At this moment, when Boaz awakens after eating and drinking, ostensibly aware of himself and his body, the greatness of his spirit and soul are revealed.

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Boaz was horrified to find a woman lying at his feet, as the Sages rightfully state (Ruth Rabbah 6:3): “He would have been justified in cursing her, but... he gave her his heart and blessing, it says: ‘Blessed are you to the L-rd, my daughter.” (Ruth 3:10)

Boaz could have cursed Ruth. But he first asks: “Who are you?” She is not a generic woman, she is not a body. She is a woman with a personal belonging and identity. When the person across from me has a name and a personality, I see the person

within him, rather than an object or tool for personal use.

Ruth replies with words I think should be read in one breath, fast, frightened. She must say everything and ask quickly. Now. This is her chance. Now or never: “I am your maidservant, Ruth. Spread your robe over your maidservant, for you are a redeemer” (3: 9).

There is so much anxiety in this moment, so much fear and uncertainty. But Boaz is not just a great person; it turns out he has a deep understanding of the human psyche as well. He tells her exactly what she needs to hear in that moment: I do not think badly of you. You are wonderful. You are righteous. Good for you. I appreciate you: “Be blessed of the L-rd, daughter! Your latest deed of loyalty is greater than the first, in that you have not turned to younger men, whether poor or rich” (3:10).

He reassures her: Do not be afraid. It will be alright. I will help you: “And now, daughter, have no fear. I will do on your behalf whatever you ask.” And more: I will protect your good name. I know who you are. Everyone knows: “for all the elders of my town know what a fine woman you are” (3:11).

It is not for nothing that the Sages attributed the verse: גְּבוּרַתְּךָ בַעוֹז, “A wise man in strength (*be'oz*) and a man of understanding” (Mishlei 25:5) to Boaz.

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