

20th of Sivan 5776 (June 23rd, 2016) – Netzach Yisrael Yeshivah, Yerushalayim

The Seven Stages of Family Development in Megilath Ruth and their Message for Us Today

Monthly English Broadcast

1. THE MEANING BEHIND RUTH'S NAME

Connecting Ruth with Shavu'ot

Welcome to everyone here and around the world. The month of Sivan is the month of the Giving of the Torah. A few weeks ago we celebrated Shavu'ot commemorating the Giving of the Torah. Together with reading the Ten Commandments and the story around it we read the Scroll of Ruth, one of the 24 books of the Bible.

The reason that we connect Ruth to the Giving of the Torah is because that on the same day, many years later, King David was born and he passed away on this day also. Ruth itself is a shortening of the word Torah (תורה), actually her name is made up of the first three letters of Torah, spelled backwards. Specifically, being that she is a woman, she alludes to the Oral Torah, which relative to the Written Torah is considered more feminine. In Hebrew, the Oral Torah is literally called, "the Torah of the mouth" (תורה פה שבעל פה), where the mouth in the introduction to the *Tikunnei Zohar* is a symbol for the *sefirah* of kingdom (*malchut*). Ruth herself was the subject of a new *halachah* (law) that was learnt in the Oral Torah. The Written Torah states, "Neither an Ammonite nor a Moabite shall join the community of God, even the tenth generation will not enter the community of God, forever."¹ Ruth was a Moabite convert and when she met Bo'az, on that very day, it had been ruled in his court that this verse is speaking specifically of male converts from Ammon and Moab and not of female converts. Were this not the ruling, then Ruth's great-grandson King David would not have been a kosher Jew.

Another beautiful connection between Ruth and the Oral Torah, the Torah of the mouth, is that the Scroll of Ruth contains exactly 85 verses, where 85 is the value of "mouth" (פה) in Hebrew.

The mother of converts and the mother of kingship

Ruth was the prime example of the righteous gentile who became a convert and she was King David's great grandmother. All the kings of Israel are present and included within her soul, for she is their all-inclusive soul, which is why the sages refer to her as "the mother of kingdom"² (אמה של מלכות).

The kingdom of David was established to fulfill the reason that the Torah was given to the Jewish people, to create on earth a realm of kindness. So we connect the Giving of the Torah with the lineage of the Kind David, who is alive eternally (דוד מלך ישראל חי וקים).

¹ Deut. 23:4.

² *Bava Batra* 91b.

For these reasons, we thought it would be appropriate to address and expound upon the message of the Scroll of Ruth. Once more, she is the archetypal soul of all righteous convert to the Jewish people, and she is the origin from whom kingdom emanates.

Meanings of the name Ruth: quenched, sight, and turtle-dove

There are several teachings regarding what her name means.

In the Talmud,³ the sages connect her name with the word meaning “to quench one’s thirst.” How so? Her great grandson, King David, was the one who quenched God’s thirst for song and praise. David is referred to as the pleasant singer of Israel. He composed Psalms, and around the world this is the book of the Bible illustrating man’s thirst for God. So King David, the pleasant singer of Israel (נעים ומירות ישראל), quenched God’s thirst for song.

A second explanation is that Ruth has to do with “sight” (ראות), which is the word you get when you add the letter *alef* in the middle of her name. This explanation appears in the Midrash.⁴ The midrash explains that Ruth saw, meaning she accepted the truth in the words of her mother in law, and followed in her footsteps. In fact, it was Naomi, her mother in law, that performed the conversion for Ruth, not a Rabbi. There is a special affinity between Ruth and Naomi that relates to this year in particular, 5776. When we write the year in Hebrew, it is customary to leave out the thousands, and so we usually say that we are in 776, or in Hebrew, תשעו. 776 is also the sum of “Naomi” (נעמי, 170) and “Ruth” (רות, 606). So, this is another good reason for us now to contemplate and emulate these two great personalities. Ruth clinged to her mother-in-law Naomi. The other daughter-in-law, Orpah, left. Naomi taught Ruth the way of Torah and she performed her conversion. So Ruth means to see the truth in Torah and to follow and devote oneself to these words. This type of sight, sight that sees and connects with the inner truth of Torah is described as the revelation of the inner eye in the heart. We all have this inner sight, and therefore we can all emulate Ruth in this respect. This is the second explanation for her name.

The third meaning given for her special name is stated in the Zohar,⁵ the most esoteric text in our tradition, written by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Ruth (רות) when written backwards spells תור (pronounced: Tor), which is short for Torah as we’ve already said, but it is also “a dove,” usually translated as a “turtle-dove.” There are a number of different species of dove mentioned in the Bible. Another is the palm-dove because it has an affinity to palm trees.⁶

The sound of the turtle-dove

The most famous verse about a dove in the Bible is in the Song of Songs, “And the voice of the turtle-dove has been heard in our land” (וקול התור נשמע בארצנו). This verse is about

³ *Berachot* 7b.

⁴ *Tanchuma Behar* 3. *Ruth Rabbah* 2:9.

⁵ *Zohar* I, 80b (see also *Zohar Chadash* [Margaliot ed.] 75a, 78a, and 85a).

⁶ The palm-dove raises another interesting association: the palm is called Tamar (תמר) in Hebrew, and in the Arizal’s writings we learn that Bo’az (Ruth’s eventual husband) is a reincarnation of Yehudah who married Tamar; Ruth is Tamar’s reincarnation.

the redemption and the whole Scroll of Ruth is also about redemption. In fact, the word "redemption" (גאולה) in its various forms, appears with greater concentration in the Book of Ruth than anywhere else in the Bible. The redemption in Ruth revolves around the marriage of Bo'az and Ruth.

The aforementioned verse from the Song of Songs is likening the voice of Mashiach heard in the land to the sound of the turtle-dove. So actually, the Zohar that relates Ruth's name with the turtle-dove is also placing Ruth in the role of the turtle-dove that heralds the redemption; Ruth herself is a herald of redemption.

There is another word in Hebrew for dove, "*yonah*." This is the more common word for dove. In fact, the value of the words "And the voice of the turtle-dove has been heard in our land" (וקול התור נשמע בארצנו) is 1562, which is the product of 22 and 71, where 71 is the value of *yonah* (יונה).

King David's humility and lowliness before God are exemplary. We find that he refers to himself as a "turtle-dove," beseeching God to save him, as one would save a dove in danger, "Give not to the animals the life of Your turtle-dove"⁷ (אל תתן לחית נפש תור), do not give to a wild beast the life of your turtle-dove. In this verse he refers to himself as a turtle-dove, obviously alluding to his great-grandmother, Ruth.

In English there are several words that are more or less synonymous, dove, pigeon, etc.

As we said before, the word "redemption" and "redeemer" appears the most times in this small text, the Scroll of Ruth, which has only 85 verses, quantitatively the smallest of the 24 books of the Bible.

2. MEDITATING UPON GOD'S ESSENTIAL NAME IN RUTH

Seeking God through His essential Name

When reflecting about and teaching the Scroll of Ruth, there are many motifs that we could focus on. Today we have chosen to see how God's essential Name, *Havayah*, known as the Tetragrammaton (because it possesses four letters) is reflected in this, the shortest book of the Bible. Specifically, as mentioned earlier, the four letters of God's Name appear in the makeup of the protagonists in the story.

Even though God is absolutely one and He cannot be known or grasped, still He has an essential Name with four letters representing first and foremost four levels of Divine revelation through the act of creation and in creation itself. Were we to simply accept that we can never know God and that the distance between us and Him can never be bridged, we would be left in a sense alone in the world and we would have no relationship with our Creator, certainly not through our intellect. But, the Torah teaches us that it is a mitzvah to seek God, in spite of the impossibility of ever reaching Him. As the Ba'al Shem Tov teaches, even though one cannot know God, one should not refrain from searching for Him, for the one who seeks is existentially different from the one who has given up on the search. The search for God is conducted, explains the Ba'al Shem Tov, through learning Torah and the first step in any such search, aimed at fulfilling our yearning to be close to God, begins with meditating upon His essential Name, *Havayah*. All Jewish

⁷ Psalms 74:19.

meditation is based on the structure and flow of the four letters of God's essential Name: *yud* (י), *hei* (ה), *vav* (ו), and *hei* (ה).

God's essential Name reflected in the Scroll of Ruth's protagonists

Now, in Ruth, we find that the protagonists, all member of the same family, constantly change, but at every stage, they correspond to the four letters of *Havayah*. These changing family members are always four, albeit using a special principle, as we will see shortly.

At the beginning of Ruth we read that a very important aristocratic family from Bethlehem in Judah, comprising of a father (Elimelech), mother (Naomi), and two sons (Machalon and Kilyon) has left the land of Israel to live in Moab. This cast of four original characters reflects the most basic understanding of *Havayah's* four letters. The four letters of *Havayah* represent, as stated earlier, the stages in which God reveals Himself and the stages in which He created (and continues to create at every moment) all of reality.

God's essential Name and the nuclear family

The easiest and clearest way to relate to creation is by looking at the nuclear family. Two people come together in order to fulfill God's first commandment to humanity: "Be fruitful and multiply." This commandment is so important and essential that it is described as "the power of the infinite" imbibed within man. To give birth to another human-being likens us to God's infinite power, allowing us to be one with Him at the highest possible level.

Of course, like every commandment, being fruitful, having offspring is governed by some stipulations. One of them has to do with how many children does one need to have to fulfill the commandment. Here we find that there are two different opinions among the sages of the Mishnah period: Beit Shamai (Shamai's Academy) states that the mother and father must have at least two sons. Beit Hillel (Hillel's Academy) on the other hand states that they need to have at least one son and one daughter.⁸ So according to Beit Hillel, if you have two sons you have not yet fulfilled the commandment, because you still need to give birth to a daughter.

In our present reality, we rule according to Beit Hillel, meaning that to fulfill the first commandment there have to be a father, mother, a son, and a daughter. Now this basic structure corresponds to the four letters of *Havayah*: the *yud* is the father, the *hei* is the mother, the *vav* takes the point of the *yud* and extends it downward, descending into reality so to speak, and this is the son. Then the final *hei*, is the daughter, as the verse says, "Like a mother, her daughter."⁹ According to this correspondence, the *yud-hei-vav-hei* reflects a male-female-male-female structure. The daughter who is the last corresponds to the *sefirah* of kingdom (*malchut*), which is actually rooted even higher than the father (in what is known as the tip of the *yud*, קוצו של יוד).

Stages of family evolution

But, actually, this is the final and most rectified structure that *Havayah* reflects. In practice, things can start differently as they do at the beginning of the Scroll of Ruth where we find

⁸ Mishnah *Yevamot* 6:6.

⁹ Ezekiel 16:44.

that the structure is Elimelech-Naomi-Machalon-Kilyon or a male-female-male-male structure for the four letters of *Havayah*,¹⁰ reflecting Beit Shamai's opinion regarding the commandment of being fruitful and multiplying.

This *yud-hei-vav-hei* is not yet stable, it's in a relative state of chaos, which actually shatters and then has to be rectified. The rectification as we will see occurs in a number of stages. But, to understand these stages, we have to introduce a concept from mathematics and physics called the pigeon-hole principle: it's probably one of the most intuitive and simple concepts ever, but how it has changed in the last century truly astonishes and proves to be essential for the rest of our discussion.

3. THE PIGEON-HOLE PRINCIPLE

The pigeon-hole principle is so simple that you wouldn't think anyone would be interested in it after kindergarten. But, actually, thanks to an innovative concept in non-local physics proposed by an important Israeli physicist, Yakir Aharonov, it has gained quite a bit of attention. Aharonov is best-known in the physics circles for the Aharonov-Bohm effect. In addition to his home in Tel Aviv, Aharonov now lives in Orange County, just south of LA, so maybe someone viewing the broadcast is from there and can send him this lecture). To put it shortly: Aharonov states that the seemingly trivial and obviously logical pigeon-hole principle is violated in quantum mechanics. Before we continue, you've probably already noticed the connection (at least in name) between the pigeon-hole principle and Ruth's name, according to the Zohar.

Musical chairs

So what is the pigeon-hole principle. The pigeon-hole principle is illustrated by Musical Chairs. Everyone knows what that is. You might have 5 players and only 4 chairs and the teacher sings or plays a song. The children walk around the chairs and at the moment that the music stops, everyone has to grab a chair and sit in it. Since there are more children than chairs, one will be left standing. You take away a chair and continue, until in the end only one child remains seated in the single chair, and he wins. So this principle brings together King David and his music with the pigeon hole.

The abstraction from musical chairs is that if we have n objects and m places for them to be placed, then if n is greater than m (meaning that there are more objects than slots to put them in, and the number of objects can be much greater than the number of locations to place them) then, if each slot can hold only one object some objects will not be able to find their way into any of the slots, they will be left out. Historically, at least in English, the objects have been referred to as pigeons and the places as pigeon-holes, which is why this is called the pigeon-hole principle. In fact, today we use the term "to pigeon-hole" to indicate that we are assigning people to some predetermined spot or slot.

¹⁰ This particular correspondence is noted explicitly in the beginning of *Tzaddik Yesod Olam*, an authoritative commentary on Ruth following the Arizal's writings (though it was apparently written based on the teachings of Rabbi Yisrael Srug, it is also accepted as authoritative by the Sephardic Kabbalists).

This is of course a very simple principle and seems so obvious that it is referred to as a truism—something that is simply true. It does have some advanced applications in infinite set theory and in other areas of mathematics. You can read the Wikipedia article to learn more about it.

Pigeon-hole principle and quantum objects

But, enter Yakir Aharonov who argued that this simple truism does not apply to quantum states. Meaning, that even you can find two quantum objects in the same place. Additionally, you could find a quantum object populating two spots at the same time. How is this possible? Because quantum objects do not behave like real objects. Real objects follow the pigeon-hole principle: they cannot be in more than one place at the same time, or variably, two objects cannot occupy the same place at the same time. But quantum objects, well, we might say that they just haven't heard about these limitations.

The Aharonov-Bohm effect

Aharonov's mentor was David Bohm, one of the greatest physicists of the 20th century, who together with Aharonov showed that electromagnetic fields affect particles non-locally (where the particle is too far away to be affected directly by the field). This is called the Aharonov-Bohm effect. Aharonov's present work in quantum physics is about how the future affects the present (dual-wave theory: every point in the present is a meeting ground for a wave from the past with a wave from the future. In Kabbalistic terminology: every point of reality is the union of *mah*, the wave from the future, and *ban*, the wave from the past). We will see that together with the inapplicability of the pigeon-hole principle in the quantum world, this principle too is illustrated in the Scroll of Ruth.

4. THE STAGES OF *HAVAYAH* IN RUTH

Now, let's return to the four letters of *Havayah*, God's essential Name and their correspondence with the protagonists of Ruth—the members of Elimelech and Naomi's family. To apply the pigeon-hole principle, we will treat the family members as the pigeons and the four letters of *Havayah* as the "pigeon-holes." Let's see how this works.

Stage one

We already saw the first stage. Elimelech, Naomi, Machalon and Kilyon occupy the four letters/holes. Because Elimelech was a leader of the generation and instead of staying with his people, he abandoned them and went to Moab, he was punished and he perished. So, the first hole was left empty; the pigeon flew the coop so to speak.

Stage two

Who then filled the first letter, the first pigeon-hole? We have only three players left (Naomi, Machalon, and Kilyon), and actually there are three possibilities:

The first is that Naomi comes to occupy two positions simultaneously. This is of course breaking the pigeon-hole principle. The simple rationale behind this possibility is that after Elimelech passed away, Naomi had no intention of marrying again, and therefore she now had to be both mother and father to her two sons.

The second possibility is that even though the first pigeon, Elimelech, flew away, he left an impression. This impression is known as the spirit that a husband leaves in his wife once they are married and procreate. This is certainly some kind of phantom reality and thus, Elimelech's phantom-like presence continued to fill the first letter, the first pigeon-hole.

The third possibility is that that position, the *yud*, now becomes filled by a future persona. This is the future affecting the present. Who this figure will be, we will see later.

These three possibilities are easily seen to correspond with past, present, and future. The past possibility is that Elimelech's past continues to fill the first letter, *yud*. The present possibility is that Naomi fills it (and the letter *hei* at the same time). The third possibility represents the future. This illustrates the important principle that the first letter of *Havayah*, the *yud*, corresponds to the *sefirah* of wisdom, considered super-temporal and able to include past, present, and future, as one.

Stage three

What happens next? The two sons marry two Moabite princesses. Their names are Orpah and Ruth. Ruth as we said went on to found the lineage of King David, her great-grandson. Orpah on the other hand, after forsaking Naomi, returned to Moab, remarried, and was the mother of Goliath, the giant who blasphemed God and fought the Jewish people, eventually killed in battle by the young David. The Scroll of Ruth mentions Orpah before Ruth, following the Rabbinic principle that darkness precedes light, and chaos precedes order.¹¹ How does this relate to our pigeon-hole principle?

Now we have two entities in each of the lower two positions. A union of man and woman in the lower two places: Machalon and Ruth together in the third position, corresponding to the *vav* of God's essential Name. And, Kilyon and Orpah together fill the fourth pigeon-hole, corresponding to the final *hei* of *Havayah*.

Stage four

We have arrived at the middle stage of the entire process (from which you can already guess that there are seven stages). In this stage, we find the Zohar's description of Elimelech's family. The Zohar¹² is quite consistent in this respect and repeats this make-up of the family a number of times. Here we have the four figures of Elimelech-Naomi-

¹¹ Orpah married Kilyon and Ruth married Machalon. The letters of *Havayah yud-hei-vav-hei* indicate as we said the order of creation. In Kabbalah there is an alternate order of creation, *yud-hei-hei-vav* that precedes the "straight" order alluded to by *yud-hei-vav-hei*. According to this alternate order, Kilyon (the second *hei*) would precede Machalon (the *vav*). This too is an example of chaos preceding order. Eventually, they both die, but nonetheless, between the two, Machalon is rectified eventually (by Ruth marrying Bo'az and reinstating his lineage), while Kilyon is not. Indeed, the name Machalon alludes to the word "first" (תחלה) and Kilyon to the word "last" (כלה). This is their true order when rectified.

¹² Zohar I, 80b; Zohar Chadash [Margaliot ed.] 83b; Ibid. Midrash Hane'elam 47a; Tikkunei Zohar 31 (75b).

Machalon-Ruth.¹³ Recall that by the time Machalon and Ruth had married, Elimelech had already passed on. Yet, the Zohar consistently places Elimelech in the first position, corresponding to the letter *yud*. We must therefore surmise that the Zohar means to say that his presence lived on, in the manners described earlier. Notice also that the Zohar ignores the fact that Kilyon and Orpah had also married. The explanation provided by the Zohar is that, relatively speaking as noted above, Machalon and Ruth's marriage was rectified (and Ruth eventually remarried to make her late husband a continuation in this world). As such, Machalon and Ruth pushed Kilyon and Orpah out of the side of holiness. Interestingly, the Zohar further elaborates about the meaning of this specific fourth structure: Elimelech-Naomi-Machalon-Ruth. These four figures are seen to correspond to the four parts of the Divine soul. Going from the bottom-up: Ruth is the psyche (*nefesh*), Machalon is the spirit (*ru'ach*), Naomi is the soul (*neshamah*), and Elimelech is the soul's inner soul (*nishmata lenishmata*). Since these four family members correspond to the parts of the Divine soul, it follows that Kilyon and Orpah that were demoted out of holiness correspond to the two lower parts of the animal soul (the mundane manifestation of the two lower parts of the Divine soul, corresponding to Machalon and Ruth): Orpah is the animal soul's psyche (*nefesh*) and Kilyon is its spirit (*ru'ach*). In practice, the animal soul's spirit is what we call the evil inclination, while its psyche is the physical consciousness of the body. Thus, we have that Machalon and Ruth occupying the *vav-hei* in the Zohar's structure push Kilyon and Orpah down from the world of Emanation (the Zohar by default describes the world of Emanation) to the three lower worlds.¹⁴

Still, as rectified as this stage was, it is not the fully rectified structure. It is but one of the stages in moving from chaos to rectification, one of the stages in building the fully rectified structure.

Stage five

Soon afterwards, Machalon and Kilyon both died, without having any children. They were either punished for the same reason as their father—for having left the land of Israel; it is explained that they could have influenced their father not to leave. Or, they were punished for having married Moabite women without converting them (according to the Midrash). But, according to the Zohar they did convert them before marrying them, which begs the question of why Ruth had to convert again.

In any event, in the first part of our fifth stage, the two husbands are gone and their wives alone remain. Thus, we have: Elimelech's spirit/Naomi/Future figure-Naomi-Ruth-Orpah

¹³ The Zohar's structure mirrors the stage that we will see later, where the structure is male-female-male-female, the most rectified and stable form. In that stage though, Machalon will be replaced by Bo'az who married Ruth in order to establish a new pedigree for Machalon.

¹⁴ For the more advanced reader: more specifically, we can say that since the four letters of *Havayah* also correspond to the four major fillings of God's essential Name: 72-63-45-52, or as they are better known, Ab-Sag-Mah-Ban, then Machalon and Ruth are the Mah and Ban of Mah and Kilyon and Orpah are the Mah and Ban of Ban. The ascent of Machalon and Ruth vs. the descent of Kilyon and Orpah are then alluded to in the verse, "Who knows whether the spirit of man ascends and whether the spirit of the beast descends" (Ecclesiastes 3:21), where "man" equals 45, the value of Mah and "beast" equals 52, the value of Ban.

(upon the deaths of their two husbands, Ruth rises to assume the place of her husband, Machalon, and Orpah rises, temporarily, from the lower worlds to assume the place occupied by Ruth while Machalon was alive that was previously occupied by Orpah's husband Kilyon and herself). But, this state reveals itself to be very unstable and very quickly Orpah leaves the structure. What is unique about this state is that both the *vav* and the *yud* are occupied by females. The entire *yud-hei-vav-hei* is entirely feminine (if the *yud* is taken to be the present manifestation of Naomi assuming the role of the father, as explained above). This is an amazing phenomenon. But, it can't remain this way.

The story continues that once her two sons perished, Naomi sets out to return to Bethlehem. On the way, she implores her two daughters-in-law to return to their families in Moab. Orpah does, she kisses Naomi and turns her back. But, Ruth will not move from her mother-in-law. Ruth tells Naomi that she will never leave her, wherever she goes, Ruth will go, and where Naomi dies, there she will die and be buried. When Naomi witnessed this absolute devotion, she stopped trying to convince her to leave. From this we learn how to treat a real convert, you test his or her sincerity, but the moment you see that they are indeed sincere you must embrace them fully. So Ruth clung to Naomi and would not leave her. She remained determined to rebuild her home and make a continuation for her husband Machalon.

So the second part of the fifth stage finds Ruth filling two positions: Elimelech's spirit/Naomi/Future figure-Naomi-Ruth-Ruth. She takes both her place and the place of Orpah, her former sister-in-law, remaining with Naomi and giving her hope for the family's continuation. At the revealed level, our *yud-hei-vav-hei* state now has only two positions filled: the *hei*, the second position, filled by Naomi and the *vav*, the third position, filled by Ruth. Like before, Naomi occupies two places simultaneously—she can be in position 1 and 2 at the same time. But, now Ruth assumes the same state, where she occupies positions 3 and 4 at the same time.

Stage six

Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem and Ruth goes out to gather grain from the fields like other poor people. By Providence she ends up in Bo'az's field. The topic of the entire second chapter of the Scroll of Ruth is this gathering of leftover grain from the fields. The fact that Ruth takes the initiative to go out to the fields by herself already shows that she is partially detaching from Naomi, that she is slowly descending back to her position in the fourth slot, in the final *hei* of *Havayah*.

The third chapter of the Book of Ruth describes the coming together of Ruth and Bo'az. When Naomi tells Ruth that she wants Ruth to become independent, to build a new home for herself, she gives Ruth very precise instructions about what to do in order to ensure that that home be built with Bo'az. Naomi instructs Ruth on how to come to Bo'az and lie at his feet, and when he wakes up in the middle of the night, to tell him that he is the potential redeemer of their family. Boaz praises Ruth for selecting him, he was a very old man at the time (there are different opinions regarding his age), and he makes an oath, by the life of God, that he will indeed redeem her.

But, then Bo'az drops a bomb so to speak. He tells Ruth, you should know that there is a closer relation than myself. I am only Elimelech's (your father in law's) nephew, but one

of his actual brother's is still alive. Therefore, this brother is the closer redeemer. The closer redeemer is never mentioned in name, he is called Ploni Almoni, which in Hebrew is like "John Doe" in English.¹⁵

Now we have two redeemers in our story. Two possible husbands for Ruth. The one, the closer relative, is called the "near redeemer" (גואל קרוב) and the other, Boaz, is called the "distant redeemer". The Zohar says something astounding about them. It says that even though Boaz is from the tribe of Judah, he plays the role of Mashiach ben Yosef in that generation. He is an archetypal soul of Joseph. The "close redeemer," on the other hand, the one who eventually did not redeem Ruth, he played the role of Mashiach ben David in that generation and even though David's lineage comes from Bo'az and Ruth, the eventual Messiah will come from this near redeemer, this Ploni Almoni.¹⁶

There is a great deal to discuss in this regard, but let us just say that Ploni Almoni, the unnamed person in this story, was the future soul who was all the time, from the Elimelech's death, affecting the present first position in the *yud-hei-vav-hei* model all from the future. Amazingly, the first half of his euphemism Ploni (פלני) equals Naomi (נעמי) and the second half Almoni (אלמני) equals Elimelech (אלימלך).

The Zohar, as we noted, says that he was the Mashiach ben David of his generation, but because the time for him to be revealed had not yet arrived, he refused to redeem Ruth, so he gave the task to Boaz, telling him, you should redeem now, as you are the Mashiach ben Yosef in this generation.

As soon as Ruth was redeemed, she moved back down to the fourth position, and Bo'az assumed the third position. Again, before marrying, Ruth and Naomi are clinging to one another at the second and third positions. But now, after remarrying, Ruth is pushed down to the fourth position, the level of kingdom. For Naomi to "push" Ruth down, to as it were separate the special bond that they had, Naomi herself has to rise up a little. At first Ruth was like a daughter who is a son (a little gender inversion), but then she has to become completely feminine by descending to kingdom. For this to happen Naomi has to ascend a little to the father position.¹⁷

So in our sixth state, we have Naomi second position, Boaz in the third position and Ruth in the fourth. But, now we find that the first position, for which we had a number of different options before, is now filled by the mysterious Ploni Almoni, the mystery soul affecting the present from the future.

Stage seven

¹⁵ The Targum translates this idiom as "concealed and unnamed" (כסי וטמיר).

¹⁶ In Kabbalistic terminology, Bo'az represents the *sefirah* of foundation (like Joseph) which is distant from *Ima* (the Mother principle, or understanding), which represents the redemption, while the "distant redeemer" represents "loving-kindness," which is much more close to *Ima*.

¹⁷ The Arizal explains this situation as follows: first Ruth was the kingdom of the *vav*, the *partzuf* of *Ze'er Anpin* and Naomi assumed her essential position of *Ima*. But now Naomi rises to her position in the *partzuf* of Abba (as explained above that following the death of her husband Elimelech she assumes two positions simultaneously) and following the principle that "Father has founded his daughter" (אבא יסד ברתא) Ruth now descends to the fourth position, the actual kingdom. She now becomes entirely feminine.

The sages add another amazing thing. They tell us that Boaz was a very old man when he met Ruth and married her. In fact, they say he passed away on the very day he married Ruth. So he was in the third position for only a single day.

When this happens then Bo'az and Ruth's son, Oved, takes Bo'az's place in the third position and from here we begin the lineage of David, as noted in the very last verses of the Book of Ruth.

Summary of all seven stages

Summarizing all seven stages that we've seen, we get the following chart:

stage/ position	<i>first-yud</i>	<i>second-hei</i>	<i>third-vav</i>	<i>fourth-hei</i>
one	Elimelech	Naomi	Machalon	Kilyon
two	Elimelech's spirit/Naomi/future soul	Naomi	Machalon	Kilyon
three	Elimelech's spirit/Naomi/future soul	Naomi	Machalon and Ruth	Kilyon and Orpah
four	Elimelech's spirit/Naomi/future soul	Naomi	Machalon	Ruth
five	Elimelech's spirit/Naomi/future soul	Naomi	Ruth	Orpah
	Elimelech's spirit/Naomi/future soul	Naomi	Ruth	Ruth
six	Ploni Almoni	Naomi	Boaz	Ruth
seven	Ploni Almoni	Naomi	Oved	Ruth

When we contemplate this chart, we can see that the seven stages correspond to the seven sefirot of the heart: from loving-kindness to kingdom.

The first stage corresponds to loving-kindness, whose inner experience love reflects the bond that keeps a family together. The Sefat Emet writes that the basis of every righteous family of leaders that come from the tribe of Judah is charity, and this was why Elimelech was punished for having left Bethlehem during a famine. If he would have remained there and given charity, acted with loving-kindness to the poor, he would not have perished with his two sons. Thus, leaving the land of Israel was for them a blemish of the *sefirah* of loving-kindness.

The second stage reflects the outcome of Elimelech's sin, and thus it reflects the judgment, the *din* with which God judged him. This is a reflection of might, the *sefirah* of judgment.

The third stage reflects what happened once Machalon and Kilyon married. Marriage is related to the *sefirah* of beauty (*tiferet*), as in the verse, “The beauty of a man is to dwell in his home.”¹⁸ Even though these were marriages that were not entirely rectified, still this stage reflects the outcome of their union.

The fourth stage, the structure repeated by the Zohar, reflects victory—the victory of holiness over its opposite, in this case the victory of the Divine soul over the animal soul, so it certainly reflects the *sefirah* of victory (*netzach*).

The fifth stage charts the movement of Orpah, first to take the place of her husband and then to be cast down when she rejects Naomi. The shattering and casting down motif is predominant in relation to the *sefirah* of *hod*, about which the Bible says that, “My *hod* [splendor] has turned against me.”¹⁹ This alludes to Orpah turning away from Naomi.

The sixth stage reflects the insertion of the *tzadik*, the righteous leader of the generation, Bo’az into his natural place in the *vav*, the third position. The *tzadik* is called the foundation of the world and thus this stage reflects the *sefirah* of foundation (*yesod*).

Finally, the seventh stage is the point behind this whole process: founding the regal line of King David—this is certainly the essence of the *sefirah* of kingdom (*malchut*).

5. ONE FAMILY UNITED IN LOVE (BY MOTHERHOOD)

There are many more topics to contemplate in this respect but we’ll leave these for another time. What this all teaches us is that our goal is to become a united family bound by love. By doing so, we reveal and embody God’s essential Name, *Havayah*, a necessary step in bringing about the complete and true redemption.

The many stages that we’ve seen in the development of the family until it reaches the final rectified state reminds us that for now, generations come and go, and the members of our families are continually leaving and being replaced. But, that no matter what the situation, because we are more than just pigeons that can be pigeon-holed, the full Name of God is always present in every remaining family structure. Sometimes, two family members have to make room for each other to occupy the same position, at others, one family member has to play two different roles. Certainly, there are times when a family member who was very important and central continues to be present even after having passed on. And, sometimes, as we saw, it is a future family member, one who has yet to be appear, who offers us the strength we need to continue on.

The most important message though is that Naomi never moves from her position. In all seven stages, she is constantly in the Mother position. We learn from this that it is thanks to her and her pleasantness (regardless of whether things are rough or easy) that keep the feeling of family together. This is of course true of every mother. It is motherhood that is constant and it is motherhood that keeps families together.

¹⁸ Isaiah 44:13.

¹⁹ Daniel 10:8.