

Where Do We Go from Here?



Ah Gutten Erev Shavuos, Dear Friends,

“And they lived **happily ever after.**”

The magical ending at the end of each fairytale. The prince and princess have through the twists and turns of the story—proven their loyalty, commitment and sheer goodness. They deserve each other. The wedding bells are the rightful conclusion to all of this.

But what next? What happens when the prince and princess have an argument? What about the ups and downs of this fairytale marriage?



But no. We turn the page and the book has ended.

The story takes us no further.

In the cosmic story of the relationship between Hakadosh Baruch Hu and Klal Yisrael, **we are given a grand and sweeping narrative that leads up to the wedding.** The desperate condition of klal Yisrael enslaved in Egypt. The Ten Plagues, as we were freed. The gesture of commitment that klal Yisrael made when they brought the korban pesach. The intense preparation in the desert, as klal Yisrael washed away all trace of Egyptian contamination and readied themselves to stand under the chupa with our Creator. The thunder, lightning, and utter silence as we bound ourselves to Hakadosh Baruch Hu forever.

The idyllic wedding was short-lived. The wife

slid away from her obligations. The vision of marital bliss **evaporated, leaving sorrow and loneliness.**

What next? What kind of narrative follows? What is the shape of the story that will follow?

If Matan Torah was the dramatic Act 1, **what happens during Act 2?**

For this, we must turn to Megillas Rus.

The story of Rus is a story of idealism, kindness and loyalty and it's no wonder that it holds a special place in the collective heart of klal Yisrael. **And yet the story of Rus is something else as well.** The Bartenura, in his commentary on Rus, explains that Rus does nothing less than chart out the pathway we take through galus—and our way back home.

Estrangement

Famine. Dry fields, scarcity, the earth parched and bare. Megillas Rus begins with a famine in Eretz Yisrael. This famine was not simply the trigger that began the story of Elimelech and Naomi leaving Eretz Yisrael. **It was a deep symptom of a state of a relationship** that had fractured into disconnect.

Rain is not just umbrellas and sprouting fields. It's that which bridges the divide between heaven and earth. And it's not a one-way flow, though at first glance it might seem so. Rain brings life and vitality to earth, but it's precipitated from below: water vapor rises, causing clouds to form and rain to fall. **It's a beautiful cycle of connectivity and connection**, between nothing less than two opposite realms.

No wonder that Chazal teach that rain is the symbol of marriage: **that two-way dance of receiving and giving**, the sphere within which two opposites can nurture each other and in doing so, create a bond of love.

The famine that hit Eretz Yisroel then, was not just a freak of the weather. It was a symptom of the breakdown of **the marriage of Hakadosh Baruch Hu and klal Yisrael**. We lost the connection. Famine was the result.

What else happens when the bond between us and HKBH frays and snaps? Exile. We are dispersed, **scattered from the place of our spiritual roots and nourishment**. Wherever we may be located, symbolically, we enter Moav, a place of values that are antithetical to our own,

a place where we feel dislocated and strange and alone.

Act 2 has begun.

Jews know how to land on their feet. Not only was this personal exile not too trying, the upwardly mobile Machlon and Kilyon reached the highest strata of their new society. They married two Moabite princesses: Rus and Orpah. It is the classic galus pattern: **what looks like peak achievement is actually spiritual catastrophe**.

What became of the marriage between Hashem and Klal Yisrael? Was their bond irrevocably broken?

“And a man (*ish*) went from Beis Lechem, Yehuda, to settle in the fields of Moav. And his name was Elimelech....” (Rus 1:1-2).

These words hint at something astounding: The “Ish--Man” who exiled himself from Eretz Yisrael **is none less than Hashem Himself**: “Hashem Ish milchamah—G-d is a man of war” explains the Bartenura. In fact, the very name Elimelech is comprised of the two words Keli Melech. My G-d is King.

If the Ish here is Hakadosh Baruch Hu, then what of His wife?

Naomi, explains the Bartenura, corresponds to knesses Yisrael, whose deeds are “*naim*”, pleasant.

And so we can read the Megillah not only as a story of redemption and tznius and kindness. It's an allegory for what happens when a schism forms between Hashem and Klal Yisrael.

Megillas Rus provides **a map for what happens to us in Galus.**

A breakdown occurred. The relationship between klal Yisrael and Hashem became parched. Instead of fruitful bounty, there was want and need. Naomi—klal Yisrael—leaves Eretz Yisrael and seeks other places to find rest and plenty. She's packed her bags, set the lights on timer, turned off the gas, left a key with a neighbor. She's gone. But it's not over so fast. **Vayelech Ish. Hashem went along.**

Call Me Bitter

For ten years, **Hashem waited patiently** for Naomi, that representation of knesses Yisrael, to return to Him, and travel back to Eretz Yisrael. When that didn't happen, He shook them awake, first gently, through their possessions. Eventually, He dealt a bitter blow and Elimelech, Machlon and Kilyon died.

From the pinnacle of Moabite society, Naomi, Knesses Yisrael, was cast down to the depths. Naomi, the pleasant one, declared on her return to Eretz Yisrael: **"Call me bitter"** for this was the flavor of her life.

In our galus today, we know this bitterness firsthand. We may have forged full and successful lives far from the site of our newlywed home, but we haven't shaken off the anxieties of exile. So often, we feel lost, unsure of what to do, where to turn, and what the future will bring. We long for a meaningful relationship with our Creator, but that often feels out of reach. We search for an internal conviction that we are enough, that

our struggles don't come because we are bad or unworthy, **but are another act of love.** But it's not easy.

Exile is a trauma. Displacement causes us very real psychic pain. It's not meant to be this way. Our lives, our faith, our deeds, are all intended to reflect the sweetness of the Torah's ways—*deracheha darchei noam*. Our example brings to the world a taste of the justice and mercy of the Almighty. But when our lives do not reflect this sweetness, this order, when our lives are a chaotic and frenzied search for peace, then our lives do not reflect Hashem's majesty. Rather than knesses Yisrael as a glowing, resplendent bride, our clothes are stained **and we look forlornly for our Chasan.**

A Midnight Encounter

Through this, Naomi held on to the idea of return. She might be penniless and alone, her bare feet pierced by the stones along the path. **But she would return.**

Her determination—that feminine strength of hope—**was transmitted to Rus.** Against the odds, knowing that she was a convert from an enemy nation—she approached the gadol hador.

She did so under the **cover of darkness. Night:** the only light is the glow of the distant stars and the face of the moon. Night: a time of fear, a time when the way forward is shrouded in shadow. Time of exile, time of distance.

But it is also the moment that Rus followed

Naomi's instructions and lay down at Boaz's feet. When he awoke, confused and afraid, she asked for him to **"spread his wings over her"**. With these words she asked that he marry her and thus enable her to continue the bloodline that would eventually lead to Dovid Hamelech—and Mashiach.

He could have rejected her. He could have been repelled by the request of this strange woman—a woman of questionable origin, a woman who has known tragedy. But she found the courage. She was propelled by a vision of the chesed she could do to her deceased husband—and **the faint fragrance of redemption** that could be detected in this moment of utter hopelessness.

After all, who was she?

On an allegorical level, the man mentioned here, the Bartenura explains, is again a hint to HKBH. While at the beginning of the story, the Ish—Hakadosh Baruch—was revealed as Keli Melech, the G-d of kingship, in the darkness of exile, the Ish is now Boaz. *Bo oz*—in Him is strength. (Perhaps this is a hint to the fact of Hashem Oz L'amo yitein—Hashem gave might to Him people. i.e., the Torah.) In exile, we still hold fast to the mitzvos and absorb ourselves **in discovering the truth as we plumb the endless sea** of His word.

He is also referred to as the Goel, the Redeemer, for we ask and beg Him to take us back to Him.

Every night, throughout the darkness, Knesses Yisrael asks Hashem, longs for Him to spread out His wings of peace over Yisrael and redeem them. **We gather up our strength, our**

determination, our feminine ability to find hope in difficult times—and we timidly approach. Are we good enough? Are we worthy enough? Are we centered enough?

Do we want enough?

All of the questions fade in the raw plea of our request: *be our Go'el*. Redeem us. Bring us back to a bond of love and loyalty. We want it. The night is dark and the odds seem stacked against us, **but like Rus, we will not be deterred**.

From Bitter to Sweet

The return to Eretz Yisrael, to the home of her marriage, was with bitterness. But through her wanting, **her yearning, her hope, and her determination, the sweetness** was once again restored. Rus and Boaz had a son Oved, and through him, Dovid Hamelech was born.

And it was Dovid Hamelech who arose **at midnight—at that moment of both darkness and hope—to sing praises** to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Indeed, Dovid was called the “na'im zemiros Yisrael”: the sweet singer of Israel. Elimelech was no more, but Hashem's malchus was restored through the figure of Dovid, who, like the moon, was a faithful reflection of Hashem's glory in the world.

No wonder that Megillas Rus is read on Shavuos. Yes, it's the birthday and yahrtzeit of Dovid Hamelech. But more than that. At the very moment when we stood under the chuppah, at the revelation of Har Sinai, Hashem gives us a message. He says: **It's going to go wrong. It's not**

going to be smooth sailing. There will be an Act Two, when the love that was so strong seems to have faded. There's going to be displacement and exile and confusion. There will be feelings of estrangement and disappointment and bitterness.

But the sweetness will not be lost. And not only that—knesses Yisrael, My beautiful bride, it

is in your hands to tiptoe into My chamber in the darkness of light, **and ask that I spread My wings over you**, in love and in redemption.

May we all be zocheh to a Shavuot filled with both the fervent joy of the bond—and the deep faith, that **on both a personal level and as a klal, we hold the power to restore it.**

Sincerely,
Mrs. Faigie Zelcer

