

28/11/10

אני 1228/11/10

We celebrate this holiday with a feeling of heavy heart, thinking of the anguish in the hearts of mothers and fathers of children in Kiryat Shemona and Ma'alot, in the hearts of parents and wives and children and brothers and sisters of soldiers who, since last Shavuot, passed away in the Yom Kippur War.

It is a sadness that we share with them, and one augmented by the anxieties and suffering that each of us feels in his own heart, each contributing his own personal sadness, the sign deep within his own soul, to that of all the people, as we wonder how we shall feel happy -- *אני חושב שכל אחד מאתנו חש בלבבו את כבדו של האחר* on this holiday.

Yet, this is a Yom Tov, and a delightful one. We must not indulge our weariness, neither national nor personal.

How shall we achieve that? By reading well Megillat Ruth. Because above all it is a message of hope.

Avraham Kariv writes the following (*אברהם קריוו כתב את הדברים הבאים*): the Book is called Ruth, but in effect the real heroine is Naomi, she is a source of all inspiration in it. Even the great decisions of Ruth are really guided and stem from Naomi. So that is more than just an ancillary character. NL: interestingly, Ruth's conversion to Judaism is not presented as a result of a theological, spiritual, and metaphysical restlessness, but as the enchantment with a model of Jewish conduct: Naomi...)

Naomi begins as her name indicates -- as a sweet and pleasant person. But tragedy strikes at her again and again. Her husband dies, her sons intermarry, then her sons die and she is left penniless. She is certain that her life is finished forever. *אני חושב שכל אחד מאתנו חש בלבבו את כבדו של האחר*

She is a woman Job. Her bitterness wells up in her. Upon returning to Bethlehem, when everyone is shocked at the changes that had occurred, she says *אני חושב שכל אחד מאתנו חש בלבבו את כבדו של האחר*

However, surprisingly, after this Naomi never again speaks about herself. The end of the story of the Book of Ruth has really two different foci: Ruth and Naomi. The circle of Ruth is one which affects all of Jewish history -- the birth of King David. The circle of Naomi affects not Israel, but all Israelites. It is a story of personal victory and triumph. Naomi is "Naomi" once again.

How does this transformation occur? Simply, that Naomi has found a cause in which to throw herself into -- a worthy cause it is. She is now devoting her life to upbuilding the personality, the life, and the fortune of Ruth. How lucky Ruth is that she has Naomi -- and how lucky Naomi is that she has Ruth.

With the birth of a child to Ruth, Ben Boaz, the story of Ruth is finished insofar as Scripture is concerned. The Bible is not concerned with Ruth in her role as a mother. But the life of Naomi is now reconstituted.

Kariv points to the two words *אֵלֶּיךָ* and *אֵלֶּיךָ* as being significant: she who was certain that her life will come to an end, who bore a gaping emptiness within her bosom, now had it filled: all the women proclaimed knowingly and wisely *אֵלֶּיךָ*. This is a divine choir that speaks through the women, for they testified to the spiritual and emotional resurrection of Naomi. She began by telling her daughters-in-law *אֵלֶּיךָ*, and she ended with the call *אֵלֶּיךָ*. What biology could not supply for her, the powers of the soul and spirit did.

The story of Ruth teaches us about the mysterious ways of Providence. The story of Naomi teaches us about the luminous ways of the human soul.

Naomi teaches every person who has suffered, who has been bereaved, who has known grief and tragedy, who has tasted and drained the cup of bitterness of life. Not every woman can become a Ruth, but the most embittered of women and of men can become a Naomi -- if one she or he will learn how to care for another.

The whole book, comes to teach that the way you return from *אֵלֶּיךָ* to *אֵלֶּיךָ* is to find yourself by forgetting yourself. You escape from bitterness by escaping from your very self, and finding another worthy cause in which to invest all your life and your talents -- and then you discover your old self, that of pleasantness and sweetness and *אֵלֶּיךָ*.