

MACHAT SHEL YAD

ON MEGILLAS RUS - BY RAV YITZCHOK DOVID FRANKEL

The Written Word features reviews and synopses of newly-released English language seforim, books and biographies. Each week, Rabbi Binyomin Zev Karman selects and reviews a recently published volume, sharing with Yated readers information about its content and the background of its author. Suggestions may be submitted by authors, publishers and distributors to thewrittenword@yated.com.

The *Yalkut Shimoni* at the beginning of *Rus* (596) tells us that it is read on *Atzeres* (*Shavuos*), *Zeman Matan Torahseinu*, in order to teach us that the Torah is acquired only through poverty and torment. Although diminutive in size, this *sefer* of *Tanach*, written by Shmuel Hanovi, records the lineage of Dovid Hamelech for the ages. Indeed, there are several important *halachos* derived from *Megillas Rus*, including the manner in which we determine whether to accept *geirim*, the *kinyan* of *chalipin*, and the importance of *gemillus chasodim* and *tzedakah*.

Yet, despite the importance of this vital *sefer*, the events related therein remain somewhat of an enigma. The *Gemara* in *Bava Basra* (91a) tells us that Elimelech was a *gadol hador*; indeed, he was a son of Nachshon ben Aminadav. Yet, he fled the famine that gripped Eretz Yisroel to dwell in Moav until the hunger passed. If he was so great and was blessed with such wealth, why did he avoid his brethren by absconding to a foreign land? Why was he punished so severely? Furthermore, why did he allow his sons to marry Moavite wives? And perhaps one of the most significant mysteries is the manner in which Rus attaches herself to Naomi, her mother-in-law, and ends up negating herself completely to her. Yet another riddle is the way Tov, the brother of Elimelech and uncle of Boaz, declines to marry Rus under the pretense that he was unsure if it was permitted.

Rav Yitzchok Dovid Frankel, *rov* of Agudas Yisroel of the Five Towns for nearly two decades, published *Machat Shel Yad*, in which he offers his penetrating and inspirational expositions on *Sefer Rus* culled from *shiurim* he delivered over the years both in his *bais medrash* in Cedarhurst AND while lecturing AT T.A.G. (Torah Academy for Girls) in Far Rockaway.

As he begins to explain the *pesukim* that relate Elimelech's actions and the consequences he endured, the author notes that although Elimelech was a person of great stature, he erred in his decision to leave Eretz Yisroel. As a man of tremendous wealth, he had a massive number of poverty-stricken people asking him for support. He mistakenly believed that he was exempt from giving away more than a fifth of his possessions, since this would eventually render him poor as well. He could not be expected to empty his coffers to the poor, but at the same time he could not stay amongst them and see them suffer. For this reason, he felt justified moving to Moav.

Rav Frankel explains that although the normal punishment for such action is not immediate death, Elimelech was treated strictly precisely because of his greatness. He perished right away, not being forewarned through the confiscation of his property. Next, his sons lost everything they inherited from him. Elimelech

breached the trust that Hashem placed in him. He was granted his wealth as a means to help others, and when he failed to do so, he lost it all.

Continuing this thread, the author explains that in his greatness, Elimelech foresaw that the future kingdom that was destined to emerge from *shevet Yehudah* was meant to be his progeny. Thus, his name can be understood as a conjunction of *eilai melech*, meaning *the king is mine*. This was part of the reason he chose to go to Moav, since he knew that *Malchus Bais Dovid* was destined to emerge from there. And for this reason, too, his sons married Moavite wives.

Yet, the question remains how Machlon and Chilyon were permitted to marry non-Jewish wives. From the narrative, it seems that Rus only converted on her way back to Eretz Yisroel, as we see from the fact that we derive the manner of accepting *geirim* from the discussion between Naomi and Rus at that time. Yet, if this is true, they must have been gentiles at the time of their initial marriage, which seems uncharacteristic for people of their stature.

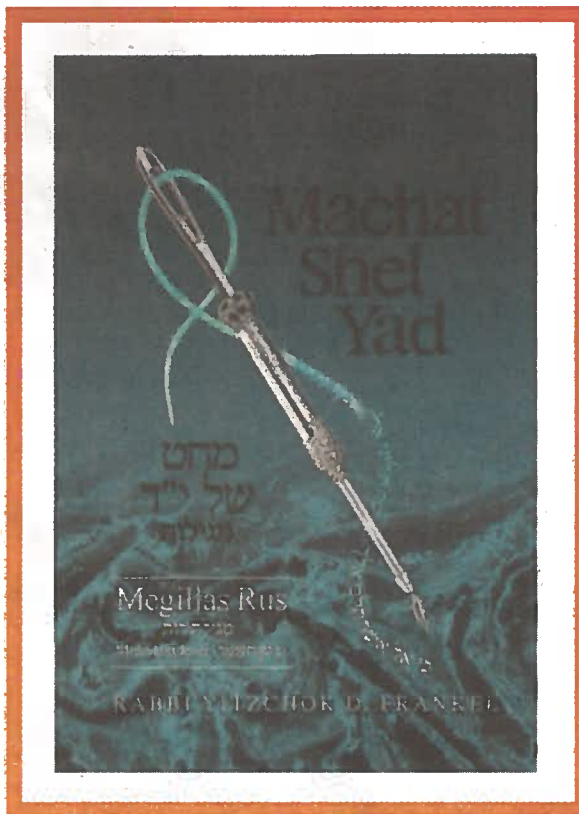
To resolve this issue, *Machat Shel Yad* presents a brilliant thesis. According to *Tosafos* in *Nazir* (23b), Rus and Orpah were minors when they married. The *halachah* is that if a minor converts, they have an opportunity to revoke their conversion upon reaching the age of *gadlus*. Thus, when Machlon and Chilyon married them, they were actually in a state of uncertainty. They could remain Jewish by accepting the yoke of *mitzvos* upon maturity or could revert to being gentiles by rejecting it.

With this in mind, the contradiction is resolved. Rus and Orpah certainly converted before they married Machlon and Chilyon, yet their conversion was incomplete inasmuch as they had the chance to undo it at a later stage. Thus, although at the time they were marrying Jewish wives, they took the risk that in the future their wives would be transformed into non-Jews retroactively. This is symbolized in Chiyon's name, which is associated with *chilayon* (obliteration). He was married to Orpah, who eventually turned her back (*oref*) on Judaism. Machlon, on the other hand, began his married life with the possibility of ending up with *mechiyah* (erasure), or *mechilah*, achieving forgiveness, which he received when Rus remained with Naomi.

This leads to a central theme, as we see Rus and Naomi essentially switching roles. In the beginning, Naomi seems to be the one who submits to the direction of others. She follows her husband, Elimelech, and accepts his decisions as those of a *gadol hador*. Yet, as time

goes on, Naomi takes on the leadership role, with Rus fading into the background, becoming a virtual non-entity as she accepts her mentoring and instructions.

Machat Shel Yad stitches together the threads of the *pesukim* and episodes to present one of his main ideas of the transformation of Rus. As a prerequisite to be the *ima shel malchus*, she had to negate her own self



and be deferential to Naomi, who was a great *tzadeikes*. Thus, as the story progresses, she accepts Naomi's suggestion that she marry Boaz, despite the fact that he was substantially older than her. The objective of this marriage was to establish a continuation of the souls of Elimelech and Machlon through a quasi form of *yibum*. By doing so, the spark of Elimelech and Machlon would continue and be associated with *Malchus Bais Dovid*.

For this reason, when the *pesukim* describe Naomi's instructions to Rus as she prepares to descend to his granary, although the *posuk* is read (the *kri*) as if Naomi is instructing Rus what to do, the written form of the word (the *ktiv*) is as if Naomi is describing what she herself was planning to do. In fact, the objective was to create continuity for Naomi's husband and son, and Rus was ready to sacrifice her entire future for the sake of obeying the wishes of this *tzadeikes*. Thus, when Oveid is born, the outcry of the people was that a child was born to Naomi.

Perhaps the most brilliant thesis presented by Rav Frankel involves his explanation as to why Tov, the brother of Elimelech and uncle

of Boaz, faltered when he was asked to marry Rus. His explanation, that he was afraid it would destroy his heritage, alludes to the fact that there was a debate as to the permissibility of marrying a converted Moavite female. The reason to permit this was because when the *posuk* prohibits marrying a Moavi, we define this as *Moavi velo Moavia*; it is limited to the male descendants exclusively. The females, who were not expected to greet the Jews due to concerns of *tznius*, would not be included in the prohibition. Those who were under the impression that the females were included in the prohibition felt that there was no clear proof to this definition.

Yet, the truth of the matter is that the proper way to understand the *pesukim* was given to Moshe at Sinai. Thus, the permissibility of a Moavite female is essentially a *halachah leMoshe miSinai*. Accordingly, why wouldn't Tov accept the testimony of Boaz that Rus was indeed permitted?

To explain this, *Machat Shel Yad* connects a patchwork of facts to wave the tapestry that ultimately solves this perplexity. The *Medrash* tells us that Nachshon ben Aminadav, the father of Elimelech, Salmon (the father of Boaz) and Tov died during the second year of the *Bnei Yisroel* were in the *midbar*. Thus, his sons were born before the second year, and were at least thirty-eight years old at the end of their sojourn in the wilderness. They were old enough to have heard and understood what Moshe meant when he declared that a Moavi could not

marry into the nation. Although Boaz declared with certainty that the proper understanding of the Moavite prohibition was limited to males, Tov, who was present in the *midbar* and heard Moshe teaching these laws, could not recall being taught that a female from Moav was permissible. For this reason, he refused to accept the leniency from Boaz despite the fact that Boaz was the *gadol hador*.

With this well-tailored explanation, we can now understand why Tov was called Ploni Almoni, which *Rashi* explains to mean that he was concealed and mute. He was muted from the Torah, since he should have been aware that the prohibition only applied to the males of Moav and not the females.

Rav Frankel previously published *Machat Shel Yad* on *Bereishis* through *Bamidbar*, as well as on *Haggadah Shel Pesach*, with *Devorim* being readied for release in the future. His themes and explanations on *Megillas Rus* scattered throughout this volume will help prepare those who are studying it in preparation for *Shavuos*, as well as anyone who wishes to gain greater comprehension of this *sefer* of *Tanach*.