



What's in a name?

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'Yibum' in the Book of Ruth?

A. Ruth 3:1-13

Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, "Daughter, I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy.

Now there is our kinsman Boaz, whose girls you were close to. He will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor tonight.

So bathe, anoint yourself, dress up, and go down to the threshing floor. But do not disclose yourself to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.

When he lies down, note the place where he lies down, and go over and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what you are to do."

She replied, "I will do everything you tell me."

She went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her.

Boaz ate and drank, and in a cheerful mood went to lie down beside the grain pile. Then she 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!

"Who are you?" he asked. And she replied, "I am your hand-maid Ruth. Spread your robe over your handmaid, for you are a redeeming kinsman."

He exclaimed, "Be blessed of the LORD, daughter! Your latest deed of loyalty is greater than the first, in that you have not turned to younger men, whether poor or rich.

And now, daughter, have no fear. I will do in your behalf whatever you ask, for all the elders of my town know what a fine woman you are.

But while it is true I am a redeeming kinsman, there is another redeemer closer than I.

Stay for the night. Then in the morning, if he will act as a redeemer, good! let him redeem. But if he does not want to act as redeemer for you, I will do so myself, as the LORD lives! Lie down until morning.

וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ נַעֲמִי חֲמוּתָהּ בְּתִי הֲלֵא אֲבַקֶּשְׁלֶךָ מִנוֹחַ אֲשֶׁר יִיטְבְּלֶךָ :

וְעַתָּה הֲלֵא בְּעוֹלָם מוֹדַעְתָּנִי אֲשֶׁר הָיִית אֶת־נַעֲרוֹתַי הַנְּהַחֵהוּא זָרָה אֶת־גֵּרוֹ הַשְּׂעָרִים הַלְּיָלָה :

וְרַחֲצִיתִי וְסָכַתְּ וְשָׁמַתְּ שִׁמְלַתִּי עָלַי (וַיִּרְדַּתִּי) וַיִּרְדַּת הַגֵּרוֹן אֶל־תַּוְדְעִי לְאִישׁ עַד כָּלְתּוֹ לֶאֱכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת :

וַיְהִי בַשָּׁכְבוֹ וַיִּדְעַת אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב־שָׁם וּבָאת וְגָלִית מֵרַגְלָיו (וַשְׁכַּבְתִּי) (וְהוּא נִגִּיד לָךְ אֶת־אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂין :

וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמְרֵי אֵלַי אֲעֲשֶׂה :

וַתֵּרֶד הַגֵּרוֹן וַתַּעַשׂ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוְתָהּ חֲמוּתָהּ :

וַיֹּאכַל בְּעוֹלָם וַיִּשָׁתּוּ וַיִּיטַב לְבֹו וַיָּבֵא לְשֹׁכֵב בִּקְצֵה הָעֵרְמָה וַתָּבֵא בִלְט וַתִּגַּל מֵרַגְלָיו וַתִּשְׁכַּב :

וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה וַיִּחַרַד הָאִישׁ וַיִּלָּפַת וַהֲנֵה אִשָּׁה שֹׁכֶבֶת מֵרַגְלָיו :

וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־אַתְּ וַתֹּאמֶר אֲנִכִּי רֵוֹת אֲמָתְךָ וּפְרִשְׁתָּ כְּנֶפֶךָ עַל־אֲמָתְךָ כִּי גֹאֵל אַתָּה : וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ לַיהוָה בְּתִי הִיטַבְתָּ חֲסִדְךָ הָאֲחֵרוֹן מִרַחֲמֶיךָ לְבַלְתִּי־לָכֶת אַחֲרַי הַבְּחוּרִים אֲסִדֵּל וְאֲסַעֲשִׂיר :

וְעַתָּה בְּתִל אֶל־תִּירָאִי כֹל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמְרֵי אֲעֲשֶׂה־לֶךָ כִּי יוֹדַע כָּל־שַׁעַר עַמִּי כִּי אֲשֶׁת חַיִּל אַתְּ : וְעַתָּה כִּי אֲמַנֶּם כִּי אִם גֹּאֵל אֲנִכִּי וְגַם יֵשׁ גֹּאֵל קְרוֹב מִמֶּנִּי :

לִינִי | הַלַּיְלָה וְהָיָה בִּבְקָר אֲסִיגְלֶךָ טוֹב גֹּאֵל וְאֲסִילָא יַחֲפֵץ לְגֹאֵלְךָ וְגֹאֲלֶיךָ אֲנִכִּי חִיִּיהָהּ שֹׁכְבִי עַד־הַבֹּקֶר :

Ruth 4:2-10

Then [Boaz] took ten elders of the town and said, "Be seated here"; and they sat down. He said to the redeemer, "Naomi, now returned from the country of Moab, must sell the piece of land which belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. I thought I should disclose the matter to you and say: Acquire it in the presence of those seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you are willing to redeem it, redeem! But if you will not redeem, tell me, that I may know. For there is no one to redeem but you, and I come after you." "I am willing to redeem it," he replied. Boaz continued, "When you acquire the property from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabite, you must also acquire the wife of the deceased, so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate." The redeemer replied, "Then I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own estate. You take over my right of redemption, for I am unable to exercise it." Now this was formerly done in Israel in cases of redemption or exchange: to validate any transaction, one man would take off his sandal and hand it to the other. Such was the practiced in Israel. So when the redeemer said to Boaz, "Acquire for yourself," he drew off his sandal. And Boaz said to the elders and to the rest of the people, "You are witnesses today that I am acquiring from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. I am also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, as my wife, so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate, that the name of the deceased may not disappear from among his kinsmen and from the gate of his home-town. You are witnesses today."

B. Origins

1. The Basic Law - Deuteronomy 25:5-7

(5) If brothers reside together, and one of them dies childless, the dead man's wife shall not marry an outsider; **her husband's brother** must come to her, taking her as his wife in a **levirate marriage**. (6) The firstborn son whom she bears will then perpetuate the name of the dead brother, so that his name will not be obliterated from Israel. (7) But if the man does not want to marry **his brother's widow**, then **his brother's widow** shall appear before the elders in the gate and declare, "My **husband's brother** refuses to establish a name in Israel for his brother; he will not perform the duty of a **levir**."

וַיִּקַּח עֶשְׂרֵה אַנְשִׁים מִזְקֵנֵי הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂבוּרָפָה וַיֵּשְׁבוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר לְגֹאֵל חֲלֻקְתְּ הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר לְאַחֵינוּ לְאַלְיִמְלֵךְ מִכְּרָה נַעֲמִי הַשְּׂבִיבָה מִשָּׂדֶה מוֹאָב: וְאֲנִי אֲמַרְתִּי אֶגְלָה אֲזַנֶּךָ לְאִמֹר קָנָה נֶגְדַּד הַיְשָׁבִים וְנֶגְדַּד זִקְנֵי עַמִּי אִם-תִּגְאָל גֹּאֵל וְאִם-לֹא יִגְאָל הַגִּידָה לִּי וְאָדַע וְאָדַעַה כִּי אֵין זֹלַתְךָ לְגֹאֵל וְאֲנֹכִי אַחֲרֶיךָ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי אִגְאָל: וַיֹּאמֶר בְּעֹז בְּיוֹם-קִנּוּתְךָ הַשָּׂדֶה מִיָּד נַעֲמִי וּמֵאֵת רֵוֹת הַמוֹאֲבִיָּה אֲשֶׁת-הַמֵּת קִנִּיתִי קָנִיתָ לְהַקִּים שֵׁם-הַמֵּת עַל-נַחֲלָתוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַגֹּאֵל לֹא אוֹכַל לְגֹאֵל [לְגֹאֵל לִי פְרָאֲשָׁחִית אֶת-נַחֲלָתִי גֹאֵל-לְךָ אֵתָה אֶת-גֹּאֲלֹתִי כִּי לֹא אוֹכַל לְגֹאֵל: וְזֹאת לְפָנַי בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל עַל-הַגֹּאֲלָה וְעַל-הַתְּמוּרָה לְקַיֵּם כְּלִדְבַר שְׁלֹף אִישׁ נַעֲלוֹ וְנָתַן לְרַעְהוּ וְזֹאת הַתְּעוּדָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: וַיֹּאמֶר הַגֹּאֵל לְבַעֲזוֹ קִנְהֶךָ וַיִּשְׁלַף נַעֲלוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר בְּעֹז לְזִקְנִים וְכָל-הָעַם עֵדִים אַתֶּם הַיּוֹם כִּי קִנִּיתִל אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר לְאַלְיִמְלֵךְ וְאֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר לְכִלְיוֹן וּמַחְלוֹן מִיָּד נַעֲמִי: וְגַם אֶת-רֵוֹת הַמֹּאֲבִיָּה אֲשֶׁת מַחְלוֹן קִנִּיתִי לִי לְאִשָּׁה לְהַקִּים שֵׁם-הַמֵּת עַל-נַחֲלָתוֹ וְלֹא-יִכָּרֵת שֵׁם-הַמֵּת מֵעַם אָחִיו וּמִשְׁעַר מְקוֹמוֹ עֵדִים אַתֶּם הַיּוֹם:

(ה) כִּי יֵשְׁבוּ אֲחִים יַחְדָּו וּמֵת אֶחָד מֵהֶם וּבֶן אֵין לוֹ לֹא תִהְיֶה אִשָּׁת הַמֵּת הַחוּצָה לְאִישׁ זָר יִבְמָה יָבֵא עָלֶיהָ וּלְקַחָהּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיִּבְמָה: (ו) וְהִזָּה הַבְּכוֹר אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵד יִקּוּם עַל שֵׁם אָחִיו הַמֵּת וְלֹא יִמָּחָה שְׁמוֹ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל: (ז) וְאִם לֹא יִחַפֵּץ הָאִישׁ לְקַחַת אֵת יְבִמְתּוֹ וְעָלָתָה יְבִמְתּוֹ הַשְּׂעִרָה אֶל הַזִּקְנִים וְאָמְרָה מֵאֵן יְבִמִי לְהַקִּים לְאָחִיו שֵׁם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא אָבָה יְבִמִי:

(9) Then his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, **and pull his sandal** off his foot, spit in his face, and make this declaration: Thus shall be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house. (10) And he shall go in Israel by the name of "the family of the **unsandalled one**."

(ט) וְנָגְשָׁה וּבְמִתּוֹ אֵלָיו לְעִינֵי הַזְּקֵנִים וְחָלְצָה נֶעְלָו מֵעַל רַגְלוֹ וְיָרְקָה בְּפָנָיו וְעָנְתָה וְאָמְרָה כָּכָה יַעֲשֶׂה לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִבְנֶה אֶת בֵּית אָחִיו: (י) וְנִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בֵּית חָלוּץ הַנֶּעְלָל:

2. Intimacy with brother's wife – Leviticus 18:16

Do not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is the nakedness of your brother.

עֲרוֹת אִשְׁתְּ אַחִידָה לֹא תִגְלֶה עֲרוֹת אַחִידָה הוּא:

3a. Yehuda's son – Genesis 38:8-9

(8) Then Judah said to Onan, "Join with your brother's wife and do your **duty by her as a brother-in-law**, and provide offspring for your brother." (9) But Onan, knowing that the seed would not count as his, let it go to waste whenever he joined with his brother's wife, so as not to provide offspring for his brother.

(ח) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה לְאוֹנָן בֶּן אֵל אִשְׁתְּ אַחִידָה וַיִּבֶם אֶתְּהָ וְהִקָּם זָרַע לְאַחִידָה: (ט) וַיִּדַע אוֹנָן כִּי לֹא לוֹ יִהְיֶה הַזָּרַע וְהָיָה אִם בָּא אֶל אִשְׁתְּ אָחִיו וְשָׁחַת אֶרְצָה לְבִלְתִּי נָתֹן זָרַע לְאַחִיו:

3b. Commentary of Ramban on Genesis 38:8

...The ancient wise men who were prior to the Torah knew of the great benefit in marrying a childless dead brother's wife, and that it was proper for the brother to take precedence in the matter, and upon his failure to do so, his next of kin would come after him... And it was customary for the dead man's wife to be wed by the brother or father or the next of kin in the family. We do not know whether this was an ancient custom preceding Judah's era...

4. Chalitzah Ceremony Nusach: All those present repeat her last words 3 times:

Chalutz hana'al, chalutz hana'al, chalutz hana'al
(‘The one whose shoe has been removed’ x 3)

At the end of the ceremony, the members of the Beth Din recite the blessing:

“May it be God's will that the daughters of Israel will never need to perform either Chalitzah or Yibbum. Blessed are You, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with the commandments and statutes of Abraham our father.”

5. Sephardi/Ashkenazi approach - Responsa Yabi'a Omer, VI, Even Ha-Ezer, no. 14

According to us, we instruct them to perform *yibum*, although we must explain to them the great value of the mitzva, that their intention should be for the sake of the mitzva of *yibum*, and this suffices. ... Therefore, in the case before us, the court should try to convince the widow to agree to the levir's request for *yibum* in order to raise the name of the deceased over his inheritance.

C. Meanings and Messages

8. Ruth 4:13-14, 17

(13) And Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. And he came to her and God gave her pregnancy and she gave birth to a son. (14) And the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be God, who has not withheld a redeemer from you today! **May his name be perpetuated in Israel.**' ... (17) And the women neighbours gave him a name, saying, 'A son is born to Naomi!' They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, **father of David.**

(יג) וַיִּקַּח בְּעֹז אֶת רוּת וַתְּהִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּבֵא אֵלָיָהּ וַיִּתֵּן ה' לָהּ הַרְיוֹן וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן: (יד) וַתֹּאמְרֶנָּה הַנְּשִׁים אֶל נַעֲמִי בְרוּךְ ה' אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִשְׁבִּית לָךְ גֹּאֵל הַיּוֹם וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: ... (יז) וַתִּקְרָאנָה לוֹ הַשְּׂכֵנֹת שֵׁם לְאִמֵּר יֵלֵד בֵּן לְנַעֲמִי וַתִּקְרָאנָה שְׁמוֹ עוֹבֵד הוּא אֲבִי דָוִד וְשִׁי אֲבִי דָוִד:

9. The Birth of Monarchy - Ruth 4:18-22

(18) This is the line of Perez: Perez begot Hezron;
(19) Hezron begot Ram, Ram begot Amminadab,
(20) Amminadab begot Nahshon, Nahshon begot
Salmon (21) Salmon begot Boaz, Boaz begot
Obed (22) Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot
David.

יח) וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת פְּרָחַ פְּרָחַ הוֹלִיד אֶת
חֲצֵרוֹן: (יט) וְחֲצֵרוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת רֵם וְרֵם
הוֹלִיד אֶת עֲמִינָדָב: (כ) וְעֲמִינָדָב הוֹלִיד אֶת
נַחֲשׁוֹן וְנַחֲשׁוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת שַׁלְמָה: (כא)
וְשַׁלְמוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת בְּעֹז וּבְעֹז הוֹלִיד אֶת
עֹבֵד: (כב) וְעֹבֵד הוֹלִיד אֶת יֵשׁוּ וְיֵשׁוּ הוֹלִיד
אֶת דָּוִד:

10. Midrash - Ruth Rabbah

"And, behold, Boaz came from Beth-lehem" (Ruth 2:4) – Rabbi Tanchuma in the name of the Rabbis said: Three things the lower Beit Din decreed and the upper Beit Din agreed with them; and these were: to greet someone with the name [of God], the megillah of Esther, and *ma'aserot*. ...And, behold, Boaz came from Beth-lehem, and said unto the reapers: '**Hashem be with you.**'"

וְהִנֵּה בָּעֹז בָּא מִבֵּית לָחֶם (רות ב, ד), רַבִּי
תַּנְחוּמָא בְּשֵׁם רַבָּנָן אָמַר, שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים
גְּזָרוּ בֵּית דִּין שָׁל מִטָּה וְהִסְפִּימוּ עִמָּהֶם
בֵּית דִּין שָׁל מַעְלָה, וְאֵלוֹ הֵן: לְשֵׁאל שְׁלוֹם
בְּשֵׁם, וּמְגִלַּת אֶסְתֵּר, וּמַעֲשָׂרוֹת... וְעַמֵּד
בְּעֹז וּבֵית דִּין דִּינוּ וְהִתְקִינוּ לְשֵׁאל שְׁלוֹם
בְּשֵׁם, שְׁנֵאָמַר: וְהִנֵּה בָּעֹז בָּא מִבֵּית לָחֶם
וַיֹּאמֶר לְקוֹצְרֵים ה' עִמָּכֶם.

11. Please, No More Need for Memorials, Rabbanit Sally Mayer