

“AND SHE WENT TO THE THRESHING FLOOR, AND DID ALL THAT HER MOTHER-IN-LAW COMMANDED.” (RUS 3:6)

Rus heard Naomi's command and wisely understood that she should actually turn the sequence of events around

OUR SAGES EXTOL THE MODESTY of Rus and tell us that Boaz noticed the dignified and reserved way she conducted herself. Naomi had hoped that Boaz, who was a close relative of theirs, would take Rus as a wife and thereby continue the lineage of her late husband, Machlon. When the harvest season was drawing to a close, and Boaz had still not acted, Naomi felt that Rus had no other choice but to take the unconventional step of approaching Boaz privately at his field's threshing floor. Once there, Naomi hoped, Boaz would offer to marry Rus. In preparation for this encounter, Naomi instructed Rus to, “Wash ... wear nice clothes and go down to the threshing floor,” (Rus 3:3). The Gemara (Shabbos 113b, Rashi *ibid.*) tells us that Rus heard Naomi's command and wisely understood that she should actually turn the sequence of events around. She should first go to the threshing floor and, only there, change into her more elegant clothes and wait for Boaz to arrive. She correctly reasoned that going to the threshing floor already dressed-up would cause onlookers to wrongly assume that she was an immodest woman on her way to an illicit relationship.

Rus grew up in the palace of Moav, and yet she was a paragon of modesty. Waiting for Boaz to come to the threshing floor and meeting him there alone at night, went against every grain of her personality. Nevertheless, Rus overcame her naturally modest tendencies and followed Naomi's advice. This reversal of one of her most primary character traits must have demanded a complete nullification of the feelings she had toiled for so long to develop. How could Rus – at the very same time that she was correctly suppressing her native predisposition for modesty – be super-sensitive to her need to maintain a small detail of modesty? Only because of her heightened awareness of *tznius* and her great wisdom was she able to properly interpret Naomi's words. How could Rus suppress her modesty and concurrently detect this delicate nuance of *tznius*?

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Hashem created each human being with the unique ability to juggle many different – and even opposite – emotions at the very same time. There are times when we have to act with assertiveness, even “arrogance,” to take command of a situation when no one else is standing up for Hashem's honor or the honor of the Torah and its scholars. At the same time we have the capacity to remain humble and not violate the *midah* of *anavah* even one iota more than absolutely necessary. The Talmud teaches us that, “It is degrading for a woman to have a man stare at her.” The Gemara doesn't limit this statement to only very pious or modest women. Apparently, every woman, even an immodest woman who is deliberately presenting herself in a manner that attracts attention, is simultaneously degrading herself and internally feeling some degree of discomfort and even pain. Even this woman, who has repressed her natural feelings of *tzniyus*, still is sensitive on a subtle level to the shame she is wreaking on her *neshama*.

Let us be aware of the depth and breadth of the human being, and the breathtaking range of feelings than can coexist within us. No matter where our circumstances take us, we can still summon the most beautiful, delicate and exquisite sensitivities from within ourselves. This can connect us to the frequency of the radio signal of Sinai, which still calls to every Jew for over three thousand years, since the giving of the Torah on this very day of Shavuos.