

## FOREWORD

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It is a pleasure to provide a foreword to Reb Dovid Zucker's third volume of translations of the Dubner Maggid's commentaries. Once again, Reb Dovid has done the English-speaking public a great service by making the Maggid's ideas available in an English rendition.

Our Sages enumerated the means for acquisition of Torah. Most basic to this concept of acquisition (*kinyan*) is reverence for the Torah. Such reverence is reflected largely in our relationship with those who give over the Torah to the generations, i.e. our regard for the chain of tradition. In this respect we must appreciate the stature of this work's author—the Dubner Maggid, of sainted memory. He was a giant in a generation of giants. No less a personality than the Gaon of Vilna chose this author as his personal guide in service of Hashem, to be his conscience (*mochiach*). It is painful to contemplate how far we have come, that the name of the author has ceased to be familiar to us.

Having opened up for us a window into Eichah and Esther, Reb Dovid has now turned to the Book of Ruth. Whereas Eichah is the book of destruction and Esther the book of redemption, Ruth is the book of both—beginning with famine and dispersion, and ending with redemption and jubilation. Although seemingly the simplest of all the Biblical books, the Book of Ruth remains the most enigmatic. Written by the Prophet Shmuel as the definitive record of the beginnings of the Davidic dynasty, the tribulations that this book describes have been compared to the sufferings of Job (see *Yalkut Shimoni* II:594 and *Sefer Nachalas Yosef*). In spite of its enormous halachic content, the Sages maintained that Ruth was not written to teach, but rather to record the rewards of *chesed*, of kindness (*Ruth Rabbah* 2:14).

In a way this reflects the Torah as a whole. For the Sages made a point of saying that kindness is the essence of it all: the beginning, middle, and end of Torah is kindness.<sup>1</sup> It was kindness that brought the awareness of Hashem into the world, through the service of our forefather Avraham. And it is with kindness that the ultimate redemption will be realized (Isaiah 1:27). Kindness was shown to the Jewish People at Sinai,<sup>2</sup> and it represents one of the three primary principles of conduct to which man is expected to adhere (Micah 6:8). Insofar as kindness is one of the main pillars of Torah (cf. *Avos* 1:2), it is no accident that tradition has incorporated the reading of Ruth into the experience of Shavuot.

Even the name of this narrative is laden with meaning. The numerical value (*gematria*) of "Ruth" (רות) is 606, and we are told that this corresponds to the number of additional commandments a person accepts by converting to the Jewish faith, beyond the seven Noahide laws that apply to all of humanity. On the other hand, Ruth (רות) also denotes satiation (רויה), as in the expression "my cup runneth over" (כּוּסֵי רוּיָהּ, Psalms 23:5). Our Sages tell us that Ruth was given this name because she was destined to be the

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<sup>1</sup> *Yalkut Shimoni* II:702 on Psalms 25:10.

<sup>2</sup> As reflected in the concluding blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrei*—see *Sefer Ahavas Chesed*, Part II, Chapter 1.

grandmother of King David, the main author of the Book of Psalms, who would “sate” God with songs and praises (*Bava Basra* 14b).

Yet there is an even deeper level to this appellation. The Dubner Maggid's son, who brought the Maggid's commentaries on the Five Megillos to print, gave the commentary on Ruth the title קול התור – *Voice of the Dove*. The Maggid's son notes simply that תור (dove) in reverse spells רוּת (Ruth). But in fact there is another connection: King David referred to himself as תור האדם המעלה, “an exemplar of the supernal man.”<sup>3</sup> This unusual appellation is elucidated in a footnote to *Sefer Nefesh HaChaim* (Part I, Chapter 20). It expresses the profoundest role of King David in the pattern of history – up to the ultimate redemption. In this vein, King Solomon described the moment we were taken out of Egypt as the moment that the “voice of the dove is heard in our land” (Song of Songs 2:12).

In his efforts to make the Dubner Maggid's wisdom accessible to the English-speaking public, Reb Dovid has once again opened up a window to a book that for many has been a closed one – thereby, once again, making a place for himself in the chain of tradition. He is to be envied, even as we attempt to find the words to thank him. As with all the Maggid's works, the commentary on Ruth brings wondrous insights and clarity of perception, while reflecting a remarkable grasp of our historical experience. The English-speaking public has once again been done a great kindness.

In the merit of this translation of the Dubner Maggid's guide to the record of the rewards of kindness, may Reb Dovid and his entire family be granted all the blessings that this record encompasses. And may Reb Dovid bring to fruition his plans to make more of the Maggid's works accessible to the English-speaking public. It is certainly a merit for him, 200 years after the Maggid's passing, to bring the Maggid's Torah to light. May it serve as well as a merit for all of us, to bring us closer to the ultimate redemption. Amen.

*Isru Chag Shavuot, 5765*

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<sup>3</sup> I Chronicles 17:17; cf. II Samuel 7:19 (תורת האדם). *Rashi* on I Chronicles 17:17 interprets the Hebrew term תור as denoting rank, as in *Mishnah Kilayim* 3:3. Other commentators interpret the term as denoting form, related to the Hebrew word תואר.

## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

"The voice is the voice of Jacob ..." (Genesis 27:22).

"The blossoms have appeared in the land, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the dove is heard in our land" (Song of Songs 2:12).

With heartfelt praise and thanks to the One Who Gives Torah to the Jewish People, I present this English translation of the Dubner Maggid's *Kol HaTor—Voice of the Dove*—a commentary on the Book of Ruth. In view of the link between the Book of Ruth and the Giving of the Torah, I have also included a translation of the Maggid's commentaries on Exodus Ch. 19 (from *Sefer Ohel Yaacov*), which deals with this pivotal event. This is, *bli ayin hara*, my third volume of translations of the Maggid's commentaries, the first two covering the Book of Lamentations and the Book of Esther. The Maggid's commentaries on Lamentations, Esther, and Ruth are all part of the collection *Kol Yaacov—Voice of Jacob*—of Dubner Maggid commentaries on the Five Megillos. I am truly grateful to the Ribbono Shel Olam for granting me the opportunity and wherewithal to compose these works.

### *The Commentary*

I have noted in the prefaces to my previous translations that the Maggid's commentaries are deeper and broader than is generally recognized. The Maggid is popularly known as a master of the parable. Yet these parables, charming and incisive as they are, represent only part of the picture. The Maggid's original work, as redacted after his death by his son and other scholars, offers a rich treasure of profound wisdom. The original work, with its eclectic use of Biblical verses and Rabbinic sayings (particularly from the Midrash), penetrating analysis, sharp wit, and keen psychological insight, reflects enormous erudition and a powerful intellect. Moreover, the commentaries are remarkably wide-ranging. The Maggid's breadth is strikingly evident in the commentaries on Lamentations and Esther. Although the commentary on Ruth is shorter, it displays a similar breadth.

As with Lamentations and Esther, the commentary on Ruth centers largely on two dual themes: the first being the special relationship between God and the Jewish People, and the second being the need for the Jewish People to cast aside physical pleasures to pursue closeness to God and spiritual growth. The first theme is reflected in several places. In one of the pieces on Ruth 1:6, the Maggid discusses God's special love for the Jewish People. He tells us that, although God may temporarily hide His love from us, this love nonetheless abides eternally and will again burst forth into the open in full at the end of days. Another piece on the same verse discusses how God showers us with blessing when we merit it. The eventual re-emergence of God's full love for us underlies one of the pieces on Ruth 2:13, which discusses how God consoles us in times of tribulation.

Likewise, the second theme is reflected in several places. One of the pieces on Ruth 2:11-12, built on *Avos* 1:3, exhorts us to serve God out of love rather than for reward. The piece on Verses 1:8-9 discusses how we should channel our inborn tendencies toward

noble spiritual goals instead of letting them lead us to a life of indulgence and wantonness. This notion of self-mastery is also discussed in the piece on Ruth 3:13 and in the opening piece on Ruth 1:1. The opening piece, in particular, is a brilliant exposition of how the ideal Jewish ruler is a paragon of spiritual strength who leads the Jewish People close to God.

Both themes surface in other places in the work as well. They meld together in the two pieces in the Epilogue, which discuss the special role of the Jewish People as the Nation of Torah. Several other themes are also developed in the commentary. The piece on Ruth 2:3-5 (along with, implicitly, the piece on Ruth 2:10), discusses how God's guiding hand directs our lives, which is a recurring theme in the Maggid's commentaries on Lamentations and Esther. The pieces on Ruth 2:8, 2:9, and 2:19 take up the theme of kindness and charity. This theme, as Rav Belsky notes in his foreword, is regarded by the Sages as one of the central themes of the Book of Ruth. One of the pieces on Ruth 1:19-21 discusses how God's justice is rooted in kindness.

The foregoing summary, of course, is just an outline sketch of the commentary. To fully appreciate the depth and breadth of the essays in this work, one must read the essays themselves.

The Maggid's son, who directed the compilation of *Kol Yaacov*, gave the commentary on Ruth the title קול התור – *Voice of the Dove*, noting that תור in reverse spells רות (Ruth). The title fits well. Indeed, the *Zohar Chadash* draws a connection between רות and תור, saying that just as the dove is fit to be brought as an offering, so, too, Ruth was fit to join the Jewish People. In addition, the Gemara<sup>4</sup> likens Ruth to a dove, stating that the Jewish People were told to spare the nations of Moab and Ammon because God planned to bring forth from them two goodly doves (פרידות): Ruth the Moabitess and Naamah the Ammonitess. The Midrash<sup>5</sup> likens the Jewish People to a dove (יונה) in a number of respects; in particular it states that, just as the dove is faithful to its mate, so, too, the Jewish People is faithful to God. Ruth surely is a model of such faithfulness.

Rav Belsky's foreword notes further that Ruth's great-grandson David declared that God regarded him as תור האדם המעלה – "an exemplar of the supernal man" (I Chronicles 17:17, II Samuel 7:19).<sup>6</sup> According to one of the interpretations of II Samuel 7:19 in *Yalkut Shimoni* II:146, David was saying that God regarded him like Moses. For us, this parallel is a striking one, for one of the views in the Midrash on Song of Songs 2:12 – the verse from which the title קול התור derives – says that the תור referred to in this verse is Moses.<sup>7</sup> The *Radak* on II Samuel 7:19 elaborates on the parallel between David and Moses. He states that just as Moses was the greatest of prophets, so, too, David was the greatest of kings. Notably, the other view in the *Yalkut* on II Samuel 7:19 states that the phrase תור האדם המעלה represents a comparison between David and Joseph, another eminent Jewish ruler. The Maggid, in his commentary on Esther 3:2-4, expounds on the self-mastery displayed by Joseph, the son of Rachel, along with that displayed by Mordecai, another of Rachel's descendants who rose to rulership. All this links up with the

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<sup>4</sup> *Bava Kamma* 38b.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:63 on Song of Songs 1:15.

<sup>6</sup> In II Samuel 7:19 the reading is תורת האדם.

<sup>7</sup> *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 2:25 in the new Wagschal edition.

Maggid's opening piece in his commentary on Ruth, which portrays the ideal Jewish ruler as a man who is, first of all, ruler over his own self.

Because the Maggid's commentary on Ruth is relatively short, I decided to round out this volume with a translation of the Maggid's commentaries on Exodus Ch. 19, which deals with the Giving of the Torah. This proved to be a rewarding decision, for these pieces are especially engaging, and provide a fitting complement to the commentary on Ruth.

The Dubner Maggid commentaries presented in the two parts of this volume provide a masterful exposition of the special role of the Jewish People and the nobility of the Torah way of life. Obviously, this volume has a particular connection to the festival of Shavuot—the festival marking the anniversary of the Giving of the Torah—on which Exodus Chs. 19-20 and the Book of Ruth are read. At the same time, the commentaries in this volume can serve as a source of inspiration and spiritual fortification throughout the entire year.

### *The Translation*

In this translation, I followed the same general approach as in my previous translations of the Maggid's commentaries on Lamentations and Esther. My goal was to provide a full translation of the original Hebrew text into idiomatic English prose. Thus, this work is neither an abbreviated digest nor a strictly literal translation. A deliberate decision was made to leave intact the basic structure of the original Hebrew text, and to firmly avoid substantive deletions or additions. Headings and subheadings were added as an aid to the reader, along with citations to Biblical and Rabbinic sources. In addition, I have included explanatory notes, but, as before, I make no claim to comprehensive annotation. The work is divided into two parts, the first containing the Maggid's commentary on Ruth and the second containing his commentary on Exodus Ch. 19.

The text contains many references to Biblical verses and Rabbinic statements, particularly Midrashim. The translation of these passages is my own. I was guided here by the classical commentaries and by extant English translations, especially for Biblical verses. In many cases where the original Hebrew text quotes just a fragment of a Biblical or Rabbinic passage, the English version includes the full passage for the benefit of the reader. In several cases where such a passage is quoted more than once in the same section of the commentary, the repeated quotation is omitted or shortened in the English translation. In quotations from *Midrash Rabbah*, the new Wagschal edition of *Midrash Rabbah* generally is followed. Citations to the *Eitz Yosef* commentary on the Midrash are drawn from this edition. In citations to *Yalkut Shimoni*, the form of citation is either I:xxx or II:xxx, where I and II refer to Part A (Torah) and Part B (Prophets and Writings) respectively, and xxx is the paragraph number.

Citations to my translation of the Maggid's commentary on Lamentations and Esther refer to the works *Voice of Weepers: Commentary of the Dubner Maggid on the Book of Lamentations* (Feldheim Publishers, 2004) and *Voice of Rejoicing and Salvation: Commentary of the Dubner Maggid on the Book of Esther* (Feldheim Publishers, 2005). The second part of the volume contains several citations to *Yerios HaOhel* and *Sfas HaYeriah*, the glosses included by Rav Avraham Beirush Flamm in his compilation of *Sefer Ohel Yaacov*, the Maggid's commentaries on the Chumash.