Love Is A Verb

וַתִּשֶּׂנָה קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכֶּינָה עוֹד וַתִּשַּׁק עָרְפָּה
לַחֲמוֹתָהּ וְרוּת דָּבְקָה בָּהּ

During the festival of Shabu’ot, which we will soon celebrate, we will read Megilat Ruth. The book that tells the story of a Moabite woman who converted to Judaism and was King David’s great-grandmother. Briefly, Naomi, her husband Elimelekh, and their two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, left the land of Israel in a time of famine and settled in Moab (Jordan of today). There, the two sons of Naomi married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Tragically, Elimelekh and his two sons died. Orpah, returned to his people Moab. Ruth, however, decided to join the fate of Naomi, her mother-in-law and by extension (“Your people is my people, your God is my God”), to the fate of the Jewish people. Later on, Ruth converted to Judaism, she married Boaz and had a son: Obed. Obed was the father of Ishai, who was the father of David, the most important King of Israel, and from whose dynasty the Mashiah will proceed.

Returning to Ruth, there is a very interesting term with which the Megilla describes Ruth’s decision to join the fate of Naomi ורות דבקה בה VERUT DABQA BAH. “And Ruth clung to her” [to her mother-in-law Naomi]. This verb DABAQ (which in modern Hebrew is the origin of the noun “debeq”, glue) takes on a very specific meaning, which is learned from its context: by joining his mother-in-law, Naomi, Ruth left everything behind. She disengaged “definitively” from her family, from her house, from her village, and she became part of Naomi’s people without having anything to gain. In fact, her attachment to Naomi was totally unconditional, since in theory this new relationship would have left her in complete destitution. Ruth had no hope of getting married again, or to prosper economically. Even food or a roof was not guaranteed to her. It should not surprise us then that Ruth has become the role model of conversion to Judaism, where the proselyte

converts without ulterior motives, disengages from his or her past and identity, and out of *unconditionallove* for the Jewish people is willing to lose everything she is, owns or possesses.

Let’s take a closer look at this little but deep word: “DABAQ”. The Rabbis said: “The words of the Tora are poor in one place and rich in another place.” This means that sometimes a Biblical word is found in a “poor” context, which does not illuminate the whole sense of it. And at other times, that same word is found in a more “generous” context, which illuminates all the richness of a given word. Thus, the richer context helps us to understand the word that is in the poorer context.

Let’s see. The Tora tells us that we must “cling” to HaShem, using the same word DABAQ (לאהבה את ה ’ א’ ללכת בכל דרכיו ולדבקה בו). “To love HaShem, to walk in His paths and to cling to Him.” From Megilat Ruth we learn that “clinging” points to a much higher level of love: being willing to “renounce” and “sacrificing” material benefits. Clinging to HaShem means loving HaShem when things are going well for me and also when things are not going that well. When HaShem answers my prayers and when He does not. Being loyal and faithful to HaShem unconditionally, in good times and in challenging times.

It is interesting to note that the first time this word DABAQ is found in the Tora it defines the relationship between husband and wife (Gen. 2:24) ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד “And man shall cling to his wife and they shall become one Flesh. “ To the already many and beautiful interpretations on this verse we can now add one more interpretation, which we learned from Ruth. Love between husband and wife, beyond infatuation and romance, implies renunciation and sacrifice. It must be unconditional and unselfish. It must continue to grow in good times and in bad times. When I’m right and when she’s right. When we agree and when we do not agree.

In summary, thanks to the generous context of the word “dabaq” in Megilat Rut we can now understand that this deep verb

defines a level of love where one must be willing to give up and sacrifice; and to give oneself unconditionally to whom (or to Whom) one loves.