

The following is one of four poems that give voice to the thoughts of the three women in the Book of Ruth and are titled “Words Not Said: Four Poems after the Book of Ruth.” They were first published in *READING RUTH: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story* edited by Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (Ballantine Books, 1994). The poem is reprinted here with permission of Kathryn Hellerstein.

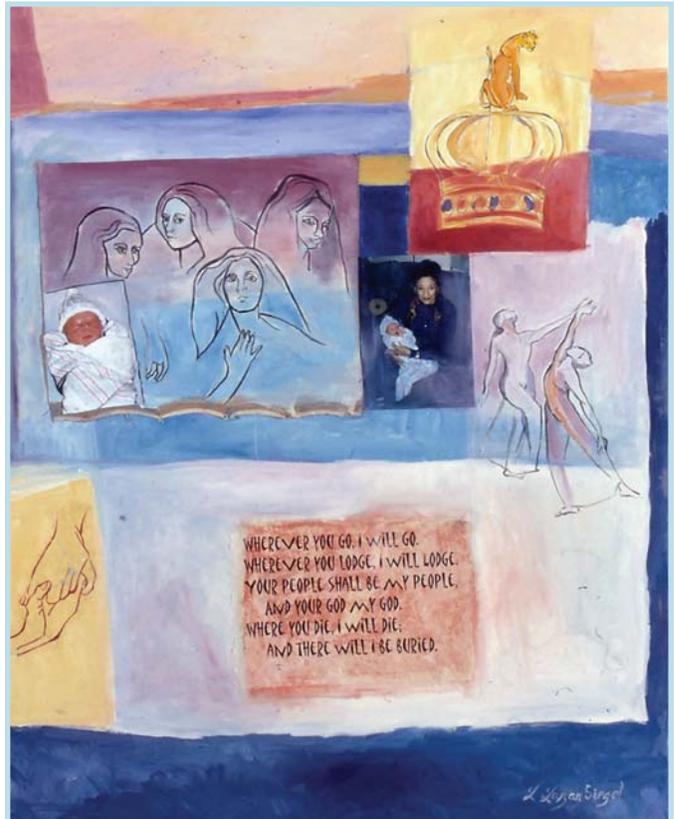
## Naomi: “Call me Bitter”

(Ruth 1:19 – 22)

By Kathryn Hellerstein

The path grows stonier, the hills are steep  
and the sheep and goats graze on the prickly brush.  
On terraced plots cling olive trees, their leaves  
sigh ashy melodies of my return.  
I walked this path ten years ago, going up,  
away from Bethlehem, whose walls now glisten  
where the road dips and branches out, a maze  
of what I’ve lost and what my God has gained.  
Ten years ago, I had to leave behind  
this starving puzzle of the ways of God.  
I was young then. My husband, hungry for  
a better life, trudged at my side, our sons  
walked, dreaming of their suppers in Moab.  
High noon. The sun is strong. It finds my face  
although I want to hide how old I am,  
how much I’ve lost. I’m not alone, there’s Ruth,  
but how can I without my husband, sons,  
be coming home? The women peer out from  
their market stalls, their courtyard gates, at Ruth  
concealed beside me in her foreign veil,  
and ask, “Naomi? Is that you?” I spit.  
“Do not call me Naomi, pleasant name.  
But call be bitter, Marah, for my God  
dealt bitterly with me. He emptied me  
of all my fullness. I have nothing now.”

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Laura Lazar Siegel, *Ruth: Choice*  
From

### THE BOOK OF RUTH: A CONTEMPORARY MIDRASH

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### HALITZA SHOES

Adler, Tikunei Shtarot, Hamburg, 1773

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