

5 Sivan, 5776 – June 11, 2016

Shabbat Shalom and Mazal Tov to the *wonderful women* celebrating their Bat Mitzvah today!

Hila Ank

Louisa Caplan

Cathy Cohen

Martine Cohen

Jodie Covet

Batia Ora Deschamps

Andrea Elbaz

Sheila Esar

Rhonda Finegold

Doris Gandell

Sharon Gates

Susan Lefson

Andree Meltzer

Arnit Oshasha

Miriam Pearl

Cindy Pellatt

Abby Rosenblatt

Maxine Rosenblatt

Beverly Salomon

Marlene Salomon

Deborah Salpeter

Roslyn Schneidman

Bernice Shapiro–Luden

Lorna Smith

Sherry Stampler

Cheryl Szwimer

Elissa Topas

Libby Toulch

Naomi Tozman

Vanessa Wani

Cheryl Weiss

Marci Whitman

Sharon Zigman

Jean Zwirek

Michael Whitman, RABBI

Adath Israel Poale Zedek Anshei Ozeroff

rabbi@adath.ca www.adath.ca

t: 514.482.4252 f: 514.482.6216

223 Harrow Crescent, Hampstead

Quebec H3X 3X7 CANADA

ADATH

Judaism for the next generation

Starting in November, 2015, an amazing group of women, from all backgrounds and ages, began preparing for their Bat Mitzvah today at the ADATH. In preparation for this milestone, they have studied together the Book of Ruth, in depth, uncovering lessons for today about commitment to Torah and Israel, and celebrating women's leadership in our community. Many of the women are also presenting today a unique project that she has accomplished:

Louisa Caplan – Essay

Martine Cohen – Dvar Torah in the Sanctuary

Batia Ora Deschamps– Sefer Torah in the Sanctuary, Essay

Andrea Elbaz – Artwork at Kiddush

Sheila Esar – Dvar Torah in the Sanctuary

Susan Lefson – Essay

Miriam Pearl – Essay, Preparation at Kiddush

Maxine Rosenblatt – Dvar Torah in the Sanctuary

Marlene Salomon – Preparation at Kiddush

Deborah Salpeter – Essay

Roslyn Schneidman – Bat Mitzvah Brachah to all the women, in the Sanctuary

Bernice Shapiro–Luden – Dvar Torah in the Sanctuary, Artwork at Kiddush

Naomi Tozman – Dvar Torah in the Sanctuary

Marci Whitman – Preparation at Kiddush

Sharon Zigman – Essay

Anonymous – Essay

Michael Whitman, RABBI

Adath Israel Poale Zedek Anshei Ozeroff
rabbi@adath.ca www.adath.ca
t: 514.482.4252 f: 514.482.6216
223 Harrow Crescent, Hampstead
Quebec H3X 3X7 CANADA

ADATH אֲדַת

Judaism for the next generation

Thank you to the following women who are co-sponsors of today's beautiful and delicious Kiddush celebration:

Louisa Caplan
Martine Cohen
Andrea Elbaz
Sheila Esar
Miriam Pearl
Maxine Rosenblatt
Beverly Salomon
Marlene Salomon

Deborah Salpeter
Roslyn Schneidman
Bernice Shapiro–Luden
Lorna Smith
Naomi Tozman
Marci Whitman
Sharon Zigman



Andrea Dalys Elbaz

My Bat Mitzvah project is a piece of art that I created using a technique called Quilling or Paper Filigree. I found inspiration for my project in the Book of Ruth.

The composition includes three stalks of wheat, as it was in the wheat fields at the time of the harvest where Ruth meets Boaz the redeemer who returns land to Naomi and gives Ruth a son who will carry on the name of Elimelech, the Ephrathite from Bethlehem.

The work also includes an embellished Star of David, alluding to the direct family lineage between Ruth the Moabitess and King David. This lineage is significant because the Messiah was

prophesied to come from the House of David, making Ruth, a Moabite convert to Judaism, the predecessor of both King David and the Messiah.

Michael Whitman, RABBI

Adath Israel Poale Zedek Anshei Ozeroff
rabbi@adath.ca www.adath.ca
tel:514.482.4252 fax:514.482.6216
223 Harrow Crescent, Hampstead
Quebec H3X 3X7 Canada

By Louisa Caplan

Each year, on Shavuot, it is as if we receive the Torah again for the first time. We are reborn as a chosen nation. We renew our commitment to Hashem and to following His laws & customs set out in the Torah, as a guide book for Jewish life. But how do we prepare ourselves to do this?

In honour of Shavuot, and Rabbi Whitman's Bat mitzvah program in which we studied the Book of Ruth, also read on Shavuot, I would like to tell you all about another inspiring book by Rabbi Simon Jacobson, on how to refine your personal attributes over the 49 days of the Omer, in order to achieve inner renewal and prepare to receive the Torah all over again on Shavuot.

Many of us may be familiar with the custom to study Torah overnight on Erev Shavuot. I recently learned that this is a Tikun to correct the fact that the Israelites, after being told that they were to receive the greatest gift of Torah, actually fell asleep instead of preparing themselves spiritually in anticipation of this monumental, life-changing gift. We do it to show that we do indeed understand the importance of receiving the Torah, and to ready ourselves spiritually to be worthy recipients.

In addition, we count the Omer: 49 days from the second day of Pesach until Shavuot (day 50). In past, the explanation I got was that we count from the day on which the Omer, a sacrifice containing an omer-measure of barley, was offered in the Temple in Jerusalem, up until the day before an offering of wheat was brought to the Temple on Shavuot.

Surely, there must be more to counting the Omer.

Surely, we cannot become worthy recipients of the great Torah by studying for one night!

Surely, this period of the Omer presents an opportunity to work on ourselves, improve ourselves, to renew our spiritual commitment to Torah and Judaism, to strive to become more worthy to receive the gift of Torah on Shavuot.

But how do we do that? It is a difficult and complicated task. Where do we start? What do we strive to improve inside ourselves, and in how we live our lives every day? How do we renew ourselves spiritually? If only there was some type of guidance on this... Finally, I was given a more deep & meaningful explanation on how to prepare ourselves during the period of the Omer.

Rabbi Simon Jacobson's book, "The Counting of the Omer, Forty-Nine Steps to Personal Refinement According to the Jewish Tradition", is a wonderful guide to spiritual and character improvement over the 49 days of the Omer, in order to achieve inner renewal to receive the Torah (again), and indeed to live better, more spiritually fulfilling lives. In it, Rabbi Jacobson describes how to refine our personal character traits, by reflecting on the ways in which we interact with other people, how we see ourselves, and how we behave in the world. After we have accomplished all that we can through our own initiatives, we are then worthy to receive a gift (matan) from Hashem.

Although this sounds like a huge undertaking, Rabbi Jacobson breaks it down into 7 attributes, by which we strive to live in Judaism, and cross-references each one into 49 specific, manageable areas on which to self-reflect in our quest for personal growth and deep, meaningful self-improvement throughout the 49 days of counting the Omer. Each week is represented by one of the 7 attributes. Each day, as we count the Omer, we are asked to reflect on a specific aspect of each attribute, as it pertains to each of the 7. Questions are provided to guide one's self-reflection and objectively analyze our subjective

emotions, allowing us to see the strong and weak points of each attribute within ourselves. Subsequently, we better understand how to apply our efforts to develop towards emotional and spiritual growth.

The 7 Emotional Attributes are:

Chesed: Lovingkindness, Benevolence
Gevurah: Justice, Discipline, Restraint, Awe
Tiferet: Beauty & Harmony, Compassion
Netzach: Endurance, Fortitude, Ambition
Hod: Humility, Splendor
Yesod: Bonding, Foundation
Malchut: Nobility, Sovereignty, Leadership

Here are some examples of questions Rabbi Jacobson suggests one should ask oneself, as we analyze the cross-reference of different attributes:

e.g. Gevurah in Chesed (Discipline & Restraint in Lovingkindness): Is my love selfish? Do I see my loved ones as an extension of my own needs? Do others take advantage of my loving nature? Rabbi Jacobson writes about this aspect of discipline & restraint in lovingkindness: "Rain is a blessing only because it falls in drops that do not flood the field".

– Exercise for the day: Help others according to their needs, not your own.

e.g. Tiferet in Chesed (Compassion in Lovingkindness): Do I love without expecting anything in return? Do I only love people that are like me? Can I also love or help someone who has hurt me, with compassion and harmony? Can I love and empathize with strangers? – Exercise for the day: Offer to help a stranger.

...and so on.

I highly recommend this book, and intend to revisit it every year during the counting of the Omer. After all, self-improvement is an on-going process throughout our lives, and no matter where we are in the process, there is always a higher level towards which to strive.

A recent JWRP leader's blog suggested that Shavuot is a good time to renew our "New Year's resolutions" that we made at Rosh Hashana, especially if maybe some of those resolutions are flailing somewhat by what is now mid-year. Either way, this book is a great way to get a re-hit –whether mid-year or year after year -- to remind us of who we strive to be, and questions to ask ourselves to help us get there.

Since the Bat mitzvah was associated with Shavuot, and following this book was a meaningful way to reflect and strive to improve myself in a Jewish way, I thought I would count this as my Bat Mitzvah project. Although private & personal, the real project was deep & meaningful: self-reflection and self-improvement!

I would like to thank Rabbi Whitman for his wise and interesting tutelage. I would also like to thank Sigy Laredo, inspiring leader of the JEMS (Jewish Experience of Montreal Sisterhood), and JWRP trip leader extraordinaire, for recommending Rabbi Simon Jacobson's book. I now have a deeper understanding of both the Book of Ruth, and of the period of the counting of the Omer.

By Martine Cohen
BSD

First and foremost, I would like to thank Rabbi Whitman and his wife for undertaking this Bat Mitzvah initiative, from which many of us have benefitted. While I am not yet very familiar with the Adath community, this Bat mitzvah programme has allowed me to witness the level of commitment the Whitman family has, for the Jewish community in general, and for this community in particular, and I thank them for it.

The book of Ruth, which was the megillah we studied, in preparation for our women bat mitzvah, is quite a gem. It is the only book I find, which, through its story, exemplifies the importance of kindness, and in so many ways. The Tanach speaks of many things, from the creation of the world, to our time as slaves in Egypt, to the mitzvot we are to observe, the various victories of the Jews over their enemies, prophecies, and words of wisdom, just to name a few. To me though, the book of Ruth is quite unique, in that it embodies the various aspects of true kindness.

As I studied it, I came to realize that there are indeed different components required, for kindness to exist. I would suggest that there can be no true kindness without intent, without integrity, and without understanding the need of the other, to whom we are exhibiting the kindness. True kindness expects nothing in return. It comes not from a place of the ego, or a place of needing to be recognized or acknowledged, but rather from a place of love for Hashem and love for humankind. Were we to expand a little on this idea, we would realize that in reality, it comes from a place of sacred love for oneself as a being; a human being with a powerful touch of Godliness.

In the book of Vayikrah in Parshat Kedoshim, the Torah commands us to love our fellow man as ourselves. Rabbi Akivah teaches us, that this commandment is one of the fundamental principles of the Torah. And yet, as fundamental as it is, it is interesting to note, that the measure of love in this mitzvah that one is asked to exhibit towards another, is defined in the terms: "as one loves oneself". In a sense, the Torah sets no objective measurable for this mitzvah, no set standard, no comparison of one person's actions to the next, but a simple statement, though by no means superficial. It presupposes that one must first know how to love, and then love themselves, and only then, can they look to perform this mitzvah wholly. I believe the same can be said of kindness. When we exhibit kindness to others, in a sense we are also exhibiting a form of kindness to ourselves. The feeling of gratitude the person we have been kind to feels, gets reflected back to us. Our own act allows us to connect with something deeper within. The next time you are truly kind to someone else, give pause for a moment and sense how it feels to you. It is an elated feeling of connection that goes beyond basic human emotion. A type of spiritual elevation and nourishment that, through that act, we have brought to ourselves. It is in fact us, connecting to our own Godliness from within, us connecting to Hashem.

The book of Ruth recounts several instances of kindness. When Ruth chooses to go with Naomi back to her homeland. When Naomi tries to convince Ruth to remain with her own people, for Naomi can no longer offer her much, as she is now destitute. When Ruth still refuses and deliberately chooses to go with Naomi. When later in the book, Ruth goes outside her comfort zone and approaches Boaz. When Boaz accepts Ruth's proposition which, in itself, can be viewed as a two-fold kindness, one, a kindness to Naomi, in redeeming her family's land and returning it to her, and the second, in marrying Ruth. Both are mitzvot in the Torah. Interestingly though, Boaz himself, views Ruth's act of asking him, an older man, to marry her, as a kindness on her part. While Boaz is prepared to accept Ruth's proposition, he does so with integrity. He first seeks out a relative who is closer to Naomi, as that relative would have the right to perform this mitzvah first. It is only when that relative relinquishes his right, that Boaz agrees to move forward.

It is said in Pirkei Avot that Shimon Hatsadik, used to say: The world rests on three pillars: Torah, Avodah and Gemilut Hasadim. Torah, which is the ultimate manual for us to manoeuvre here on earth, and which I will expand upon, a bit later. Avodah, which is avodat Hashem, the worship of G-d, and the way in which we can grow and

evolve spiritually, and the third pillar, Gemilut Hasadim, literally translated as loving kindness, and the basis for all social dynamics and relationships. While loving kindness can sometimes be compared to tzedakah, it is much more all encompassing than that. Unlike tzedakah, performing acts of kindness is not limited to the poor; it need not be purely in the form of money or objects, so even the poor themselves can equally perform acts of kindness to others, and unlike tzedakah it can even be performed for someone who is no longer part of the living, such as attending a funeral, or in the times of the Torah performing the mitzvah of yeboom, that of a man marrying his brother's childless widow, so as to give the deceased brother's name continuity.

As part of this Bat Mitzvah undertaking, we were asked to each come up with a project. I could not find something more befitting than to undertake something related to the theme of the book of Ruth. While we do perform many acts of kindness in our lifetime, and benefit from many acts of kindness as well, unlike what we see in the book of Ruth, we do not always do so with full mindfulness and awareness. While we will most always certainly notice and react, to someone cutting us off the road for example, we do not always fully appreciate the stranger, who has stopped without even being asked to do so, just to allow us into the lane.

In the fast-paced world we live in today, we do not always operate from a place of recognition and awareness, of the good and ultimately, Godliness, that is around us, both in what we give and in what we receive. Kindness need not be a complicated undertaking. It can be a loving word, a kind action, something big or small. It has no measure, no minimum, or limit. As my ongoing project, I am making it a point, knowingly and with intent, to raise my awareness in both performing acts of kindness, and in acknowledging the kindness around me on a daily basis. Be it my kindness towards myself or others, the kindness of others towards me, or the never-ending kindness of Hashem towards all of us.

Tomorrow is Shavuot. On a personal note, Shavuot has added significance, as it is the day my daughter was born and made me a mother for the second time. To all of us, it is both the day Hashem gave us the Torah, and the day we received it. On Shavuot we read the book of Ruth. Out of all the things we could read on Shavuot, why this particular book? Perhaps it is because they take place at similar times, during the year. Perhaps because, just as Ruth accepted G-d and the mitzvot, we did as well on Shavuot. However what is the connection between receiving the Torah and a book that exemplifies kindness? I would suggest the following. While we may look at the Torah and the commandments as a series of limitations, or a list of do's and don't's, it is actually a manual, a set of instructions, on how to keep us safe, precisely what to do to maintain a balanced lifestyle, and how to build meaningful relationships with G-d, ourselves, and others. It is a guide, though one we did not have to break our heads to write. It is the ultimate guide, to growth and self-discovery which enables us, should we choose to follow it, to remain connected to G-d and keep our footing here on earth. I would say that, after the creation of the world itself, which admittedly Hashem gifted to us, the Torah is the second greatest kindness he bestowed upon us.

I believe life is much about perspective. The more kindness we see, the more kindness we create. The more we are connected to Hashem, the more we feel him present and with us. Understanding the great power of kindness, and how it connects us to G-d, it is no wonder that true kindness was the precise context required, from which King David, and one day Mashiach, could descend.

And on that note, I will end by wishing all of my fellow women bnot mitzvah a Yishar Koach and a Mazal Tov, and to all of you a meaningful and restful day. Shabbat Shalom.

Following in Ruth's footsteps

From: Batia Ora Deschamps to Rabbi Whitman

Date: Dec 8, 2015 10:15 AM

[...]

- I find it offensive that Ruth is presented as the model for convert. As far as we can tell from the book, she only converted for marriage, not out of love for Hashem, which is not something I approve of. While her attachment to Naomi seems a genuine love, I don't find her blind obedience to be a quality.

From: Batia Ora Deschamps to whoever is willing to read this

Date: sometime in June 2016

I think I owe Ruth an apology... a long overdue apology...

The conversion process is profoundly transformative. It took me five years to complete it, and while most of the time I felt like I was finally growing into who I really was, at other times it felt like I was completely losing my identity.

Aside from having to learn, start observing and embrace many (many, many, many...) laws and *mitzvot*, there came a point where I didn't really know who I belonged with anymore: the goyim, the Jewish people, both, none?!

On top of that, people usually react strongly to learning that someone is a convert and, whether positive or negative, that reaction made me very self-conscious about my "not-from-the-Tribe" status and created a sort of "second-hand citizen" feeling that was very difficult to handle. So there also came a point where, while certainly not ashamed of converting, I really wished the conversation would move on to any other subject.

That is probably why one of the most annoying things I heard throughout my conversion was "Oh! You should pick Ruth!" when talking about picking a Hebrew name. It felt like being branded, as if all I would ever be was a convert. Not even my own interpretation of what being a convert meant, mind you, but an emulation of THE quintessential convert, whose level I would never reach.

Indeed, when people talk about Ruth, most of the time it is not to praise the grand-mother of King David, or the first *Eishet Chayil* of our tradition. It usually is to say that she was a convert. Then the other qualities are mentioned but somehow it feels to me like they are added to compensate for her being a convert.

At least this is the mindset I had, and kept for a long time, when I first read the Book of Ruth. This is probably why I reacted so negatively to it, and why I feel completely different today.

I've always loved Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" and I think I wouldn't have been out of place in her novel. When I started reading the Book of Ruth, not only did my pride get in the way but I projected on to it all the prejudices I heard, both from Jews and non-Jews.

To prove that I wasn't "just a convert like Ruth", I searched for proofs that there was actually no connection whatsoever between her and me. I read the book looking for flaws, for weaknesses, for "bad" attitudes to condemn. It's almost frightening how incredibly easy it is to find faults when you look for them, even in the most righteous people, because your biased vision taints everything.

Ironically, I forgot to notice, or chose to ignore, how eerily similar our paths were, how each criticism I addressed to her was regularly addressed to me, probably more intended as comment though, but I took them to heart.

So I started thinking "*she only converted for marriage, not out of love for Hashem*", forgetting how much it would annoy me when people would ask me if I converted for my sister (my younger sister, and only sibling, who converted

years before me). I do not believe that anyone in their right mind would undergo such a life altering process as becoming an observant orthodox Jew for the sake of someone else. No matter how much you love them.

While I fell in love with the observant orthodox lifestyle of my sister, it is such a radical transformation of oneself that it takes a lot more than love to undertake and finish the conversion. Among other things, it takes complete *bitachon* that this is the right path to follow.

Then I criticized Ruth's "blind obedience" to Naomi's instructions, which in truth was obedience to halakha, while the highlight of my conversion day remains that moment when, asked if I would take upon myself to follow not only the *mitzvot* I knew of, but those I didn't know of yet, I surprised myself with a resounding "yes" burst out before I could formulate a single thought.

For most people this would seem the blindest form of religious observance there is. Yet for me, it was a moment of absolute clarity and perfect *emunah* that I cherish above all and try to emulate every day.

Finally, Ruth's most famous words, to Naomi, "Your people will be my people and your G-d my G-d", which I often judged as "being totally passive", are in fact the very essence of what becoming a Jew means: to embrace the Jewish people as your own and to walk in Hashem's ways. *Ahavat Yisrael ve'Hashem*. These turned out to be my greatest challenges. Indeed: unable to meet them, I left the conversion program twice.

The first time was after a particularly *machmir Pessach*. It seemed completely insane to me and totally out of my reach. So I left the program. A year later, I shared a very laid back, yet fully kosher *Pessach*. I don't know if it was really more relaxed, or if I was just ready, but in any case, I gave it another try and rejoined the program.

The second time I left was after attending a class in which our teacher talked about how Judaism is not practiced in a vacuum and being a Jew is not only about having a relationship with Hashem, but considering oneself a full member of *Am Yisrael*. At that moment in time I didn't, so I left, again, and took the time to cultivate my sense of belonging with the Jewish people, to see if I could make it grow and expand into really feeling it, and *Ahavat Yisrael*. I got there, slowly, and joined the program, again, until I finally became a Jew, on 9 *Shvat*, 5775.

Those words of Ruth, "Your people will be my people and your G-d my G-d", are now the words most dear to me. They sum up my journey better than any others and they remind me how far I've come. They are my very own *Haggadah*.

I've often prided myself on being strong, when in fact I was tough. I had good reasons to become thus but one doesn't need to become an executioner to avoid becoming a victim.

What Ruth taught me is that strength isn't toughness, it's actually quite its opposite; that what our society often views as weaknesses are the true foundations for strength. For not only is there strength in kindness, in humility, in obedience to G-d, these are the epitome of strength. And I have all of them in me, if I just let myself show them.

The Book of Ruth now tells me a completely different story than it used to months ago. It tells a tale of resilience, of not giving up in the face of hardship. A tale of courage and faith and love. Love of Hashem and love of the Jewish people.

But more than that, it revealed me to myself and allowed me to come full circle with my conversion. Yes I am a convert, but above all I am a Jew, one honored and very proud to be following in Ruth's footsteps.

My personal project for this bat mitzvah is to hold a Torah. Albeit not a project at all, it is the only thing I ever wanted to do on that celebration day. Throughout these past months, and while writing this text, one *pasuk* would come to mind, again and again, when trying to understand why I couldn't think of anything else: "G-d is my might and my praise and He was a salvation for me".

The Book of Ruth showed me what true strength is, and it's all coming from Torah. I guess my holding one is the best way I could think of to honor that immeasurable gift.

Oh and, Rabbi Whitman, you were right: I did change my view, and it was dramatic 😊

Presented by Sheila Katz Esar

Volunteerism

Why, you are asking yourselves, is she speaking about volunteerism when together with Rabbi Whitman we have studied "The Book of Ruth"? What is the correlation between the beautiful story of Naomi and her daughter in law Ruth and volunteerism.

First a definition of the word VOLUNTEERS.

"Volunteers are men and women who give of themselves, through time or talent, for charitable activities specifically within one's Community"

I am going to speak about what is familiar, of where we live, but I know the same situations are true everywhere today.

Government funding in our hospitals and CLSCs has been cut, eliminating many jobs which directly affects services to and for the sick, the elderly and others in need.

There is high unemployment and many people are living below the poverty line necessitating food banks and cafes to feed the hungry of all ages.

There are people who are unable to leave their homes and are dependent on others to not only provide their meals but also deliver them—sometimes the Good Samaritan - who knocks on their door, is the only person the recipient will speak to the entire day.

There are many people who require inexpensive or free transportation to medical appointments and also need company, someone just to sit and wait with them.

There are many sick and lonely people or people in crisis who need someone to speak to—a caring and kind person at the other end of the telephone line.

The only solution to all these critical scenarios I mentioned are caring and dedicated Volunteers!

My earliest recollection of Volunteering was with my late Mother who was a member of the Malbish Arumin at the Poale Zedek Synagogue on St Urbain St. -This dedicated group of men and women canvassed all the clothing manufacturers in the area and opened the doors of the Poale Zedek several times a year to provide clothing to immigrants who had recently arrived from Europe—our contribution as kids was to offer the children cookies and milk and perhaps some pencils.

I knew at an early age how fortunate I was and how important it was to help others who were less fortunate.

There are so many senior facilities, hospitals, kitchens, and other organizations which require volunteers - - the choices of where you prefer to volunteer are yours to make.

Our Adath has on many occasions volunteered at Mada and Cummings Le Café and continues to do so – and in September we will volunteer at Federation CJA's Clothing Give a Way.

I choose to volunteer in several areas of the Cummings Centre – a Volunteer based organization for the 50 plus Community. The Centre embraces our heritage and enthusiastically welcomes people of all faiths and backgrounds.

As my Bat Mitzvah project I have arranged and will continue to arrange for Adath Volunteers to serve meals at the Cummings Centre Le Café -The experience has been heartwarming –not only do the Adath volunteers serve the guests a tasty and wholesome meal, we are kind and friendly - we take the time to chat and the people we serve are so very grateful!

On May 17th, May 19th and this past week on June 9th the Adath Volunteers served a total of 961 Meals and approximately 2000 beverages - Kol Hakovod to everyone who participated -Our next opportunity at Le Café will be on August 4th and I know there will be no shortage of volunteers.

I quote from the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 143:7.

What constitutes “HONOUR?”

“One must provide them with food and drink and clothing. One should bring them home and take them out, and provide them with all their needs cheerfully.”

Volunteering is more than just the hours we give of ourselves; volunteering is based on the act performed by someone with the purpose of helping or bringing benefits to his or her Community.

Volunteers are not paid: not because they are worthless but because they are priceless!

As I studied the Book of Ruth, I realized that what was so obvious in the story was Ruth’s extraordinary kindness to her Mother in law –refusing to allow Naomi to return to her home alone -together they travelled back to an unknown future in Judah.

Another example of loving kindness occurred when Boaz instructed his servants to allow Ruth to glean from his fields and not to embarrass her.

In the Book of Ruth we are made aware of the Chesed which is in each of us, we are made aware of the positive effects our individual acts of kindness can have on others, and of the valuable effect these acts can have on ourselves.

The Book of Ruth is as applicable today as when it was written 3000 years ago.

In closing, I offer my Mazel Tov to all the other women who are celebrating their Bat Mitzvahs today.

To my family and dear friends, thank you for sharing this joyful occasion with me.

Rabbi Whitman, thank you for this wonderful opportunity and for the experience of learning with you – this has been an amazing journey!

Shabbat Shalom

Book of Ruth: Relationship between Daughter – In – Law and Mother – In – Law

By Susan Lefson

Up until November or December of this past year, I had never read the Book of Ruth. I have known of it for as long as I can remember and always knew it was associated with Shavuot; but I was never fully aware of the story.

As I did my initial reading of it, I was struck by the strong positive rapport between the mother-in-law, Naomi and daughter – in - law, Ruth. As I spent more time reading, I began to think more and more about their relationship. Ruth left her whole family and her home country to be with her mother in law in a new place. I was very impressed by that.

As I was growing up, I witnessed my mother with her mother - in – law (my father’s mother) and they always got along well. I always thought this was the norm until I began to hear stories as I got older. Most of the stories I heard were about bad relationships- and although at first I was surprised, I soon discovered just how common that was.

Eventually, I became engaged and I was getting ready to go look at wedding dresses. At the time, a colleague asked me who was coming with me to buy my wedding dress. My answer: “My mother and my future mother – in – law. My colleague looked at me shocked, “Are you sure you want to do that?” and not understanding her disbelief and shock I said, “Yes, of course! Why not?”

From then until today, I have a very good relationship with my mother – in – law, and I still often hear stories to the contrary.

I leave you with this question to think about: which is the norm?

I Found G-D and My Spiritual Path in a Baking Pan

By Miriam Pearl

I went to Hebrew day school. There I learned all about the history of the Jews, our traditions and the rules to follow as an observant Jew. I learned about our holidays, their meanings and what I must do to practice my religion. I was taught the language, the Bible and what it means to be Jewish. A rebel much of my life, following rules was not a great way to wheel me in.

When I got married I understood the responsibility of keeping a Jewish home and of passing my Jewish heritage on to my children. However, I was never taught how to spiritually connect to my religion or with G-d. Finding a spiritual pathway to G-d was something I had to figure out on my own.

As a young girl, I was determined, strong and fearless and I certainly knew what I liked. I routinely went after what I wanted with conviction and fierce determination and eventually I usually achieved what I worked so hard for. Somehow – somewhere along the way – I lost my direction. I was just going through the motions, a little less mindfully and a lot less purposefully. I needed to make sense of things and reconnect to myself. I wondered, what set me off my course and what was needed to propel me forward in my life and with my business plans in particular?

Fast forward to the life of newly divorced women with two young children and a hectic schedule. Apparently, the difficulties of my divorce revealed inherent blessings; the transitional process forced me to stop the busy, busy wheel I kept myself on. It was really hard to find answers because I first needed to learn how to sit still and listen. I needed to find that guiding powerful voice deep within. I thought perhaps I would find the answers in what I learned as a child but they were not there; the answers were not in my Jewish heritage or in synagogue or in the dogma of being a practicing Jew. Wow.

I began the journey to search for answers, but first I needed to articulate the questions. What is my soul purpose and how does that intersect with my religion? My teachers and my parents opened my mind to Religion but I did not have my own personal connection to the Universe. Now what?

With a full heart I believe that G-d exists and so I started praying to Him in my own words. That prayer was the start of my journey. I also believe that He blesses us each day with beauty and grace so I began to journal my gratitude daily for all my blessings. I was at peace in my personal life and yet I desperately sought guidance in my professional life and so I began to ask for clarity about my work.

For a month I repeated my request, several times a day. I practiced giving up all my preconceived ideas and expectations and tested my faith. I let go of what I thought I knew and sat still in prayer for answers and I believed if G-d was listening to me and I listened hard enough, the answers would somehow appear. But nothing happened. No answers came. Nothing appeared in an enlightening dream or in writing. And then one day, when I least expected it, I experienced a revelation.

I found my answer in 15 commercial baking pans and a series of “coincidences.”

A large part of my life revolved around caring for my celiac and allergic children and I was relatively certain that one day I would open a gluten-free pita factory. I knew I wanted to help families manage their gluten-free intolerances. While working on my connection with G-d and my spirituality I was also trying to develop a GF pita. It was such a struggle to get the pita to be flexible and pliable. For months I worked it and reworked it but without much success. I tried new flour but the results were poor. Instead of throwing out the remaining flour, I decided to use it in my regular bread recipe and it ended up being by far the best bread I had ever tasted. I drove myself crazy heel bent on getting this pita recipe right and BOOM! I end up with this most amazing bread instead.

The next day I was scheduled to coat my baking pans at a local shop. I called ahead to insure I had the right location. To my surprise when I arrived, the place was closing down and the office was being dismantled. Disappointed and confused, I asked what they were going to do with the pile of pans that looked like a junk pile. They gave me 15 commercial pans in forms of hamburger buns, baguettes and breads all for free (a value of over \$1000) and apologized for the inconvenience.

I set myself to baking samples of every shape of bread pan I received and indeed every one of them was amazing. For months, I had struggled, fixated on making the perfect GF pita and ended up with perfect bread in every form. Coincidence? I think not.

That next morning I awakened with some clarity. The more I pushed, the more I fought against a tide resulting in making things harder for myself and less likely to succeed. So I started to listen more. Really listen to the still and silent voice I began to connect to G-d in a spiritual way; G-d is there to lead the way and there is a bigger plan for me than even I could have dreamed for myself. When I let go of my expectations, I am allowing greater things to happen.

Eventually, I learned to take each step as it comes. I acknowledge the gifts I am sent each day and pay attention to the signals. I understand that there is a reason for why things happen and look for meaning in the events that happen during my day. I know that even if I make errors and face challenges that they are there to guide me in another direction. Life is a big learning ground and if we take the time to understand this, we can feel good about even the hard things in life. Time and again, I have learned that pain yields growth.

“G-d willing.” I never liked that expression. I thought “I” was in control of everything in my life and it was a cop-out to leave things in G-d’s hands, but now I understand the very meaning. G-d knows more than we do, and sometimes even if we don’t see the reason right away, things can be better than we expected in the long run. This change in perspective has enabled me to live my life open to possibilities, to live in the moment, be present and to keep things real.

Gaining this knowledge has been my greatest gift and greatest lesson in life thus far.

The Influence of my Mother-in-law on my life, by Maxine Rosenblatt

In the book of Ruth, the importance of the unique relationship between her and her mother-in-law Naomi is evident. While I myself was born Jewish, I never had any real education or upbringing that emphasized my heritage. When I got married my mother-in-law Mira Rosenblatt, helped to educate me on various things that she did in her own home. It is through this relationship with her, that I was taught about such things as maintaining a kosher home and preparing the various delicious dishes associated with the different holidays. My husband Marvin, was also a strong influence in helping our family maintain the Jewish traditional values, that he was brought up with in his mother's home. We decided to send our children to Hebrew perocial school. This made all the difference in my life. We were able to celebrate the holidays both in our home, and at synagogue. By sending our children to hebrew high school as well, this added to the importance of properly celebrating our holidays. This was made evident when enjoying such things as meals in the Sukkah, or enjoying going through the haggadah both the recounting and singing at Passover.

My mother-in-law, is a holocaust survivor. I can only imagine what she had to endure in her early life, losing so many loved ones. I have learned from her strength, the ability to endure much that life presents us with. To be able to survive the atrocities and seek to rebuild one's life. To thank Hashem, for everything and to confront whatever comes our way with optimism and never anger. Her life has not been an easy one. She has had to suffer from emotional and physical issues. With all that she has been through, she has never complained. Her strength has helped me when I was confronted by my own issues. I will always be very grateful for the important relationship I have developed over these many years.

By Roslyn Schneidman

The Book of Ruth has become an important part of our learning this year. Through lectures, discussions, and readings we have enriched ourselves. Today is a celebration.

As a role model Ruth is the embodiment of a great and inspiring ideal. We, as Jewish women should strive to achieve the devotion to our people as Ruth did. She is a role model. It is certainly my hope that all of us can apply some of what Ruth stood for in our daily lives to make us stronger and more balanced Jewish women.

I invite all Bat Mitzvah celebrants to rise as I say the Prayer for Bat Mitzvah.

Blessed are you, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has bestowed upon us all manner of good, and has given us life and kept us alive for this time, so as to be counted among adults and to accept the yoke of your Commandments. Lord, merciful and gracious G-d, slow to anger and abundant to kindness and truth, behold today we have begun to visit your holy sanctuary with awe of You, to become part of your inheritance.

Your praises with adoration, Lord G-d of the spirits of all flesh, who is like you instructing and teaching knowledge to Israel? From the heavens You have pronounced law. Moshe commanded us the Torah, an inheritance for the community of Yaakov, it is our life and the length of our days. Focus our heart to fear Your name and guide us in your truth, to rejoice in righteous statutes, Your holy words and the study of your wisdom.

May we uphold the Name of the God of our forefathers, and may Our hands not grow heavy. May our lips pronounce praise, to spread Torah and to bring it glory, and may we not grow silent. May we glory in the name Israel and not betray our faith. Our life is in Your hands. We entrust our spirit to You. Make us healthy and give us life to walk in Your ways wholeheartedly and willingly, to perform righteousness and kindness.

Strengthen us and give us courage to be among Your servants who cleave to You, to make known Your great and awesome Name among the many, that it may fill the earth, and that Your House may be called a House of Prayer for all the nations.

Blessed are You, our G-d who has brought us forth to this day.

Amen!

By Bernice Shapiro-Luden

Rabbi Whitman, members of the clergy, family and friends, my name is Bernice.

I am honored to have been a part of this Bat Mitzvah program. I would like to thank Rabbi Whitman for making this possible.

As part of my Bat Mitzvah program, I choose to do a mitzvah for the IDF soldiers in the tank division of which my daughter is presently serving in Israel.



I have learned that the power of mitzvot can multiply through chessed.

Let me explain:

Before I began on my Bat Mitzvah journey I was lucky enough to be chosen to participate in the Jewish Women's Renaissance Program or JWRP. I will be leaving for Israel July 11 th with 16 wonderful women. I was introduced to Sigy Laredo, the city leader for this trip, and that is how I found out about this wonderful Bat Mitzvah program.

With the help of Rabbi Whitman, I wanted to in turn do a mitzvah project for my Bat Mitzvah.

I decided to decorate wine glasses for Passover. I choose to make glitter wine glasses for Eliayhu, and use all the money raised to go to the IDF Soldiers in the Tank Division. I was hoping to raise \$180, but I have more than doubled that amount.

I would like to also thank my wonderful husband and two amazing sons for putting up with all the glitter and sparkles in the kitchen and all over the house as well as being in charge of marketing and logistics. Thank you!!

In July, after our Women's trip is over, I will be going to the army base where my daughter Gillian Luden is stationed.

She recently spoke to the Montreal contingent of the MOL students after Passover.

Her tank unit is so excited. With the money I raised, they are planning to purchase new hats for when they are working in the field

As we celebrate Shavout and read the book of Ruth, I am reminded about my daughter Gillian. Ruth felt the need to protect Naomi, and always be by her side. My daughter Gillian felt the need to go to Israel and protect the country of Israel, and our people.

When Naomi decides to leave Moav to go back to the land of Israel, Ruth stays by her side.

This is extremely courageous to go back to a country where she will have to face her family and friends she betrayed, to admit she was wrong, suffered the loss of her husband and sons, and now try to re-build her life in a society that feels only animosity toward her and her daughter-in-law Ruth.

Ruth leaves behind all her own physical wealth and comforts to care for her aging mother-in-law. My daughter Gillian leaves behind the comforts of her own room, family, friends, dog, and Montreal bagels.

Ruth goes into the fields at night to collect food for herself and Naomi.

At the end of the harvest, Ruth goes into the fields at night to sleep at the feet of Boaz in the hopes that he will marry her.

Ruth marries Boaz. The same night in which Ruth conceives, Boaz dies.

Ruth and Naomi are now full-fledged members of the community and share their new found happiness.

Ruth gives Naomi the best years of her life, to take care of her giving her a grandchild and seeing the family line continue. My daughter will give 2 years of her life to the IDF as a Lone Soldier in the Tank division.

So now, in conclusion, as I began my mitzvah project it can be tied to the book of Ruth.

Why do we read the book of Ruth on Shavuot?

This book is full of Chessed (loving kindness), as it says, "The Torah of Chessed is on her lips", and was given on Shavuot.

Thank you.

By Naomi Tozman

SCENE: ENTERING BET LECHEM

In case you don't recognize me, I am Naomi.

Older. Worn. Hopeful, now that I am back in my hometown Bet Lechem.

I left here many years ago with my husband Elimelech and our two sons, Mahlon and Chilion.

Why did we leave for Moab? We, the leading family of BetLechem, we, the elite of our tribe and most respected. But a wife must obey and follow her husband. Elimelech sold our land to seek prosperity in another country. Not just another country but our most despicable enemy, the land of Moab. Is personal prosperity more important than sharing the bad times amongst your people?

Why did we leave for Moab? Seeking greener pastures led to disaster in my family. Within the ten years we spent there, Elimelech died. But my sons did marry with lovely Moabite women. Orpah and Ruth. But soon more heartache arrived. My two sons died leaving me not only a widow but childless.

Oh why did we leave for Moab?

What did I do to deserve this ill fate? I was only being a dutiful wife. Maybe I did not argue hard enough to stay and share the hardships of our people. Maybe I as well subconsciously wanted not to suffer the famine and hunger that engulfed us all. The bitterness I feel is made worse by the guilt that I carry.

Perhaps the only gleam of light as I stand here amongst my people penniless and exhausted is that I have Ruth, my daughter-in-law, by my side. To you she is a Moabite, but to me she is my Jewish daughter. She shunned all my efforts to have her return to her family and previous way of life. She won't leave my side and cares for me as her own mother. She believes in my God and my traditions. She has vowed to be one of our Jewish community for the rest of her life. I don't understand why, much as I don't understand why we sold all our property and left for Moab? In fact, I could well understand Orpah finally deciding to return to her community. Perhaps that was very wise of her. Perhaps Ruth's loyalty to me will only lead her to unhappiness much as I have experienced by leaving my community so many years ago. I hope not! I will do everything in my power to make sure that won't happen.

SHORT TIME LATER:

Here we are in time for harvesting the crops that have finally appeared on our lands after such a long drought. I am hoping that our Jewish laws and traditions will allow Ruth and I to eke out an existence in this my country. I am too old to remarry or to work in the fields myself. But Ruth can and is willing to work hard to support us.

I have instructed her to go to the fields of a relative, Boaz, to glean in the corners of his property. He has noticed her and shown kindness and protectiveness towards her, she says. Indeed, she brings home extra sheaves of grain. Surely this must be a sign that he might be interested in taking her on as a wife. Tonight I will ask Ruth to lay down at Boaz's feet after all have ceased work and their meals are over. Should Boaz accept her gesture then he will offer to marry her.

But that did not happen, Ruth reported. Boaz told her that he had to ask a closer relative than himself first if he is willing to take Ruth on as his wife. She would have to wait no longer than the end of the day to receive an answer whether this anonymous relative will want her. If not, Boaz vowed to take responsibility for her. What a brave man Boaz is. Just as I thought he would be. He will buy back the land my husband sold and give it to me and my daughter in law. He will take on a Moabite despite the communal prohibition to marry a woman of that old Jewish enemy. I can only pray that Boaz prevails.

And he does. He follows all the communal laws pertaining to helping widows. He married Ruth and they have a family and home. They look after me and shower me with affection and respect.

Looking back on this segment of my life I wonder what if I had stayed in Moab? What if I had rejected Ruth and not thought of her as my family once my son had died. What if my suggestion to approach Boaz had not been successful? The end of my days would not have been so satisfying, so full of love and compassion. How fortunate I was that Ruth became my daughter and that her strength and wisdom prevailed. Greatness follows that woman, you will see!

SCENE: BAT MITZVAH DAY AT THE ADATH

Hi. My name is Naomi. I am a Jewish woman confirming my Jewish faith to my community.

As I mull over the story of biblical Naomi, I realize that we have more than our names in common. Almost. My birth name was Zisl, named after no one in my parents' family as is the custom. Not knowing who had survived or perished in November 1945, I was named "sweet baby" but on arrival to Israel in 1948 I was given the name Nomi, "pleasant", which became Naomi in Montreal 1951.

Perhaps the two Naomi's were sweet and pleasant at times. But there are insights into the character of Naomi that I hope carry over to me as well. Firstly, her ability to face adversity, tragedy and loneliness. No doubt Naomi's despair and anguish permeated her time in Moab but at times she undoubtedly felt joy and happiness as well. What strength and courage and perseverance she displayed as she went through her terrible life circumstances!! And yet she emerged with a positive plan of action in spite of the fear, guilt and regret she must have felt. And yet with great love and acceptance in her heart, she embraced her daughter in laws as her own, and was prepared to let them go so that they could find happiness amongst their people. The fact that Ruth chose to adopt Naomi's religion and community as her own was a great testament to Naomi's strong identity, values and personality. I could only wish for myself to have those traits in my life's journey.

What is interesting about the biblical narrative is that emotion and feelings are totally left out. Only events and actions are recounted. We must fill in the blanks based on our own circumstances and unique experience. But this is a hallmark of our religion as well, in that behaviors and actions are crucial not only to observance of Judaism but also to happiness and leading a good life. Words are important but only when accompanied by actions. I am very aware of this and try to live my life guided by this principle. And now that I've befriended my biblical namesake I have great respect for the woman who made Ruth possible.

Chag Sameach



*Hashem sent you as a gift to me
To deepen my love and spirituality.*

*So in honor of your wedding day,
I dedicate my D'var Torah to you today.*

*I began my journey on a spiritual path,
Led by Rabbi Whitman at the Adath.*

*The book of Ruth served as my guide
To bring loving kindness to you, our dear bride.*

*Naomi was a mother-in-law beyond compare;
Her devotion and caring were extremely rare.*

*After her husband and both her sons died,
She was left with two daughters-in-law by her side.*

*Yet she bid them to leave her and find a new life
In the hope they'd be spared both her tears and her strife.*

*She knew she'd be left empty and all alone,
A childless widow, without a home.*

*Orpah returned to the Moabite land
Where her forefathers had forsaken G-d's command.*

*But for Ruth, the choice not to go was clear
Since Naomi and Torah were both very dear.*

*Ruth told Naomi, "I'm staying with you.
To your G-d and your people, I vow to be true."*

*Since their faith in G-d was very strong,
With the help of the Lord, what could go wrong?*

*Through His infinite eyes, he saw their plight
And He led them towards eternal light.
So the two set out for Beit-Lechem
To dwell in the place that was blessed by Hashem.*

*At first, with barely a roof over their head,
Ruth gathered grain to trade for bread.*

*Then Naomi's kin, Boaz, entered the scene.
He owned the land Ruth had come to glean.*

*An honorable man, he did the right thing
And took lovely Ruth under his wing.*

*He had heard of her devotion to her mother-in-law,
And that she was an exceptional soul without a flaw.*

*Our sages would say it wasn't just fate
That he thought she would be the perfect mate.*

*A worthy husband, Naomi knew Boaz was it.
She thought he and Ruth would make an excellent fit.*

*But how could her daughter-in-law marry this man?
As a good Jewish mother, she had a plan.*

She sent Ruth to Boaz when he was asleep

To lie down before him and uncover his feet.

*He was surprised by this woman who appeared in the night,
With humility and kindness, a beacon of light.*

*Boaz saw her as a valorous Jew
And knew what G-d wanted him to do.*

*He redeemed Naomi's husband's land
And then asked nobly for Ruth's hand.*

*Hashem blessed Ruth with a baby boy,
Who soon filled all their lives with joy.*

*She called her son, Obed, which means "servant of G-d",
And Naomi became his nurse, which wasn't odd,*

*Because it wasn't just in a physical way.
She nourished him with kindness and Torah each day.*

*Women said that Hashem gave Naomi a son.
It was as if she and Ruth had merged as one.*

*Naomi's life was restored by Obed and his offspring:
His son, Jesse, and then David, our beloved king.*

*This story has lessons for you and me,
Now that you've joined our family.*

*We'll no longer be just friend to friend,
But like mother and daughter until the end.*

*Inspired by the Lord above,
We'll discover ways to deepen our love.*

*Material things can fade away,
But what's in our hearts will always stay.*

*Hashem leads us to refine our soul,
And it's up to us to fulfill this goal.*

*May He bless us and guide us in every endeavor
And strengthen the bond between us forever.*

*And may He help us to mentor the next generation
Through commitment to Torah and the Jewish nation.*

Love you always, Sharon

By Anonymous

You are welcome to share these few reflections, although I would ask if possible to share them anonymously (and with identifying details like locations and names redacted).

You see, I have myself converted. I don't let many people know this because unfortunately people view converts differently than they do baalei teshuva. In my mind I am a baalat teshuva, and I know others who know me will second that view. My story is that I was raised knowing that my mother was Jewish and her parents were Jewish, and so I understood that I was Jewish. I even went on Birthright! I became shomer shabbat, shomer kashrut, etc. I was fully involved with the orthodox Jewish communities, first in ??? and then in ???.

I had always known my mother was adopted but had largely ignored the issues this potentially posed. I did make a good faith effort to investigate, even grilling my grandmother on her deathbed about the adoption. She told me she adopted from a Jewish-only adoption agency and even told me the name of it. However, as I did not have access to the adoption paperwork, I could not prove my Jewishness and, reluctantly, agreed to go through with a giur l'chomra (conversion based on a doubt) to clear up any questions. As the date for this conversion approached, my mother asked what I was doing, and I was honest with her. I told her that without proper documentation to prove my Jewishness, I had to convert. She was upset by this and opened her adoption papers for the first time in her life, a very painful process for her. What they revealed was that her birth father was Jewish, but her birth mother was not! So the giur l'chomra was cancelled because I knew I had to do a full conversion.

So you can see why, having been raised celebrating Chanukah and Pesach, I still think of myself as baalat teshuva. However, in reality I am a convert. And that means I have an even stronger connection to Ruth. Converting means taking an active decision to become Jewish. When I discovered I was not actually Jewish, I thought immediately that I was released from all obligations. Suddenly there was no problem with me eating bacon cheeseburgers and shrimp cocktails! (And trust me, they taste really good!) But the truth is I wasn't even tempted. It made me realize how important my beliefs really were to me.

Most people who are Jewish never get to make that choice. Of course they can choose to be observant or not, but deep down I think most of them know that if they choose not to be observant they are doing something they shouldn't. That can feel oppressive in a way. For most people being Jewish isn't a choice, but for me it suddenly became a choice. I have asked my husband many times about this - what would he do if he was in my situation and found out suddenly that he wasn't Jewish after all? His response is that he would walk away and go do whatever he wanted! Of course, he admits he would probably come back to it later, but it does show that many Jews, no matter how observant, don't feel they're doing it out of choice, but rather out of obligation.

I sometimes wonder how different peoples' relationships with their Judaism would be if they viewed it as a choice they made rather than an obligation. We learn that when the Jews stood at Sinai and accepted the Torah, the mountain was held over their heads. I think so many people feel that intensely - as if they are being held to a standard they would not have chosen, but keep to only under some sort of spiritual duress. Personally, I didn't feel the weight of that mountain being held over my

head when I converted. I had the complete freedom to make the choice, or not to, and faced no pressure from any quarter. I didn't have any question because I believe so strongly in the truth of the Torah.

I think this is the point of reading the book of Ruth on Shavuot - to try to impress upon people that they too made this choice, albeit on a spiritual level. On a Yom Tov we disconnect from the mundane and focus on the spiritual and if we do this successfully, all Jews should be able to tap into their deep, G-dly soul - the soul that stood at Sinai and made that choice. And when they tap into that soul, they can reconnect to the giving of the Torah, as they have, spiritually speaking, every year since then. This is part of why, aside from loving dairy food, Shavuot is my favorite holiday!

Of course, I don't keep the Torah as perfectly as I wish I could. But when I am tempted to do something I know I shouldn't, I always think back to that decision. I remember that I made the choice to become Jewish, to take on these obligations, and that makes me responsible 100% for giving myself these mitzvot to keep, even if I don't always like them. In a way, it makes me feel more free because I know I had the choice to walk away. I think this is why Ruth merited to be the progenitor of the Kings of Israel. It is one thing to be born into a set of obligations and then keep them, but entirely another thing to take on 606 additional mitzvot you didn't have before. That takes a lot of guts and is a lifelong commitment. Once you make that choice, you can never use the excuse of, "Well, I don't want to do XYZ, and I shouldn't have to because I didn't choose to be Jewish!" (However theologically flawed that excuse is, you can't deny it is in frequent use...!)

In conclusion, I would like to answer your question about what I learned about conversion from Ruth. I am sure my answer is different from the answers of others. It is twofold: Firstly, that I am not alone. Neither with my decision, nor with the challenges that come with converting (as Ruth certainly faced many challenges as a result of her decision). And secondly, that as a convert I have tremendous value. Sadly, many communities and individuals today look down on converts and do not accept them, no matter how stringent their conversion was (as I have encountered firsthand in my personal experience!!). Of course this is why I do not want people to know I have converted - I know only too well that it can change the way others view you and treat you, and almost always lowers their respect for you, no matter how you conduct yourself. But the story of Ruth gives me a sense of self worth, in spite of that. I can content myself with knowing that G-d Himself regards converts as special and holy, even when people do not.

Thanks for reading and I hope you find these reflections valuable.

By Anonymous