

Invitation to Judaism – Lesson Plan – Shavuot

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Reading: Telushkin pp. 651-662; Robinson pp. 126-137; Kushner 129-133; Handouts

Shavuot: Meaning of the Holiday

- a. **Feast of Weeks**, 6-7 Sivan exactly 50 days after 2nd day of Passover, omer (measure of barley) was brought each day during the counting to Temple. Also called *Atzeret* – Concluding Festival because ends the Spring holiday cycle.
- b. **Zman Matan Torateinu** – “Time of giving of our Torah” – i.e. – Revelation at Sinai
 - i. 10 Commandments (see **handouts below** of midrash on Sinai, Talmud on reduction of Commandments from 613 to 1, and 10 commandments – EJ)
 - ii. Based on Ex. 19:1 – 3rd month at Sinai – Talmud Shabbat 86b says refers to first of month and then counts days for different events to add up to 6, the day of giving the 10 Commandments.
 - iii. Torah service on Shabbat morning is recreation of Sinai
- c. Therefore, connecting Passover to Shavuot teaches us that freedom is not complete without obligation and responsibilities. Free from Pharaoh, but now servants of God – big difference between the two.
- d. **Hag Habikkurim** – Festival of First Fruits – 5 species of fruit found in Israel: grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates. Also, loaves of bread from the first wheat harvest. **Hag Hakatzir** – Harvest Festival – end of barley harvest and beginning of summer wheat harvest. (Total of [seven species](#) in Deut. 8:8 including wheat and barley.)

Rituals:

- a. Eat [dairy foods](#) in evening
 - b. [Tikkun Leyl Shavuot](#) – study session all night (big deal in Jerusalem)
 - c. Read [Book of Ruth](#) – the Biblical archetype for a Choosing Jew (gematria on Ruth’s name), story of *gemilut hassidim*
 - d. Festival – like the other two, Passover and Sukkot – semi-Shabbat
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God Appeared as a Statue with Many Faces at Sinai

Pesikta d’Rab Kahana 12:25 (Braude and Kapstein transl., JPS 1975, p. 249)

Rabbi Levi said: The Holy One appeared to [Israel at Sinai] as though He were a statue with faces on every side so that a thousand people might be looking at the statue, but they would be led to believe that it was looking directly at each one of them. So, too, when the Holy One spoke, each and every person in Israel could say, “The Divine Word is addressing me.” Note that the Scripture does not say, “I am the LORD *your* [plural] God,” but I am the LORD *thy* [singular] God. Moreover, said R. Jose bar R. Hanina, the The Divine Word spoke to each and every person according to his particular capacity.

The 613 Commandments and the Essence of Judaism

TALMUD Makkot 23b-24a (modified Soncino translation)

R. Simlai when preaching said: “**Six hundred and thirteen** *mitzvot* were communicated to Moses, three hundred and sixty-five prohibitions, corresponding to the number of solar days [in the year], and two hundred and forty-eight obligations, corresponding to the number of the limbs¹ of the human body.” Said R. Hamnuna: “What is the [support] text for this? It is, ‘Moses commanded us torah, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob,’² ‘torah’ being in letter-value, equal to [24a] six hundred and eleven,³ ‘I am’ and ‘Thou shalt have no [other Gods]’ [not being included, because] we heard from the mouth of the Almighty.”⁴

David came and reduced them to eleven [principles],⁵ as it is written, “A Psalm of David.⁶ Lord, who shall reside in Your tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Your holy mountain? — [i] He that walks uprightly, and [ii] works righteousness, and [iii] speaks truth in his heart; that [iv] has no slander upon his tongue, [v] nor does evil to his fellow, [vi] nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor, [vii] in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but [viii] he honors those who fear the Lord, [ix] He takes an oath to his own detriment and wavers not, [x] He does not lend his money on interest, [xi] nor takes a bribe against the innocent. He that does these things shall never be moved.”

Isaiah came and reduced them to six [principles],⁷ as it is written, [i] “One who walks righteously, and [ii] speaks uprightly, [iii] One that despises the gain of oppressions, [iv] that shakes his hand from holding bribes, [v] that closes his ear from hearing of blood, [vi] and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil; he shall dwell on high.”

Micah came and reduced them to three [principles], as it is written, “It has been told to you, O mortal, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: [i] only to do justly, and [ii] to love mercy and [iii] to walk humbly before your God.”⁸

Again came Isaiah and reduced them to two [principles], as it is said, “Thus says the Lord, [i] Keep ye justice and [ii] do righteousness”[etc.]⁹

Amos came and reduced them to one [principle], as it is said, “For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, ‘Seek ye Me and live.’”¹⁰

To this R. Nahman b. Isaac demurred, saying: [Might it not be taken as,] “Seek Me by observing the whole Torah and live?” — But it is **Habakuk who came and based them all on one** [principle], as it is said, “But the righteous shall live by his faith.”¹¹

(1) Joints, or bones, covered with flesh and sinews (excluding the teeth). See. Mishnah. Ohalot. 1:8; Talmud Bekhorot. 45a; Jewish Encyclopedia. I. Art. Anatomy, p. 565a, and J. Preuss, *Biblisches-Talmudischemedizin* (2nd ed.) Berlin, 1921. p. 66 ff.

(2) Deut. 33:4.

(3) ת= 400. *א* = 6; *ק* = 200; *ה* = 5, total = 611.

(4) See. Horayot. (Sonc. ed.) p.55, n. 14.

(5) i.e., reduced them to eleven leading virtues.

(6) Psalm 15

(7) Isaiah 33:15-16.

(8) Micah 6:8.

(9) Isaiah 56:1.

(10) Amos 5:4.

(11) Hab. 2:4.

DECALOGUE

EXODUS

DEUTERONOMY

YHWH am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt: You shall have no other gods beside Me. You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image or (> D¹) any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I YHWH your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children (and D²) upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love me and observe my commandments.

You shall not utter the name of YHWH your God for a vain thing; for YHWH will not clear one who utters his name for a vain thing.

Remember³ the sabbath day to hallow it. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but⁴ the seventh day is a sabbath of YHWH your God; you shall not do any work⁵ you and your son and your daughter, your male and your female slave⁶ and⁷ your⁶ cattle, and the stranger who is in your settlements. **For in six days YHWH made heaven and earth⁸ the sea and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore YHWH blessed the sabbath⁹ day and hallowed it.**

Observe the sabbath day to hallow it, as **YHWH your God commanded you**. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but⁴ the seventh day is a sabbath of YHWH your God; you shall not do any work⁵ you and¹⁰ your son and¹⁰ your daughter, **and**¹¹ your male and your female slave **and**¹¹ **your ox and your ass** and **all**¹⁰ your cattle, and the stranger who is in your settlements, **so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. You must remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and YHWH your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore YHWH your God has commanded you to make**¹² **the sabbath day.**¹³

Honor your father and your mother¹⁴ that you may long endure on the¹⁵ land that YHWH your God is giving you.

Honor your father and your mother **as YHWH your God commanded you**,¹⁶ that you may long endure **and that you may fare well**¹⁶ on the land that YHWH your God is giving you.

¹⁷You shall not murder.

(And D²) You shall not commit adultery.

(And D²) You shall not steal^{17d}

(And D²) You shall not bear false (שקר) E; (שווא) (D) witness against your fellow.

You shall not have designs on your fellow's **house (-hold)**.¹⁸

And² You shall not have designs on your fellow's **wife**.²³

You shall not have designs¹⁹ **on your fellow's wife**,²⁰ or²¹ his male or his female slave, or²¹ his ox, or his ass²² or all that is your fellow's.

And² **you shall not desire**²⁴ **your fellow's house**,²⁵ **his field** or²⁷ his male or²⁸ his female slave,²⁶ his ox, or²⁸ his ass,²⁹ or all that is your fellows.

Key to apparatus:

Dg = Greek Deut. (ed. Rahfs)
Ds = Samaritan Deut. (ed. von Gall)
Eg = Greek Exod.
Es = Samaritan Exod.
N = Nash Papyrus
Q = 4Q Deut.m (see Bibl.)
+ = added matter in source(s) indicated
> = "is missing in"

¹ + or Q, Ds, Dg
² > Q, Ds, Dg
³ Observe Es
⁴ + on N, Q
⁵ + on it (bh) N, (bvw) Q, Eg, Dg

⁶⁻⁶ your ox and your ass and all your N, Eg
⁷ > Es
⁸ + and Eg
⁹ seventh N, Eg
¹⁰ > Q
¹¹ > Q, Ds, Dg
¹² observe Q, Dg
¹³ + and to hallow it Dg; to hallow it, for in six days YHWH made heaven and earth, the sea all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore YHWH blessed the sabbath day to hallow it Q
¹⁴ + that you may fare well and N, Eg
¹⁵ + good Eg
¹⁶⁻¹⁶ that you may fare well and that you may long endure Dg

¹⁷⁻¹⁷ adultery, steal, murder Eg; adultery, murder, steal N, Dg (Philo)
¹⁸ wife [N], Eg
¹⁹ tm?wfi N
²⁰ house (or Eg) his field N, _Es, Eg
²¹ > Es
²² + or all his cattle Eg
²³ house(hold) Ds
²⁴ have designs on Q, Ds, Dg
²⁵ wife Ds
²⁶ + or Dg
²⁷ > Q, Ds
²⁸ > Q
²⁹ + or all his cattle Dg

"And the two went on": Ruth as Daughter, Wife and Friend Eliezer Diamond

This piece first appeared in the spring 1993 issue of *Masoret* (now *JTS Magazine*).

If ever I loved a woman I neither saw nor met, it is Ruth, the heroine of the biblical book that bears her name. My love affair with Ruth is a longstanding one and, as in many affairs of the heart, affection preceded comprehension. For the longest time, I could not understand what drew me to her.

The more I read the Book of Ruth, however, the more I realized I was not alone in failing to grasp, at least initially, the depth and richness of her personality. Her mother-in-law Naomi assumes at first that Ruth is an opportunist. She groups Ruth together with Ruth's sister-in-law, Orpah:

"Turn back, my daughters! Why should you go with me? Have I any more sons in my body who might be husbands for you ... ? Oh no, my daughters! My lot is more bitter than yours, for the hand of the Lord has struck out against me" (Ruth 1:11,13).

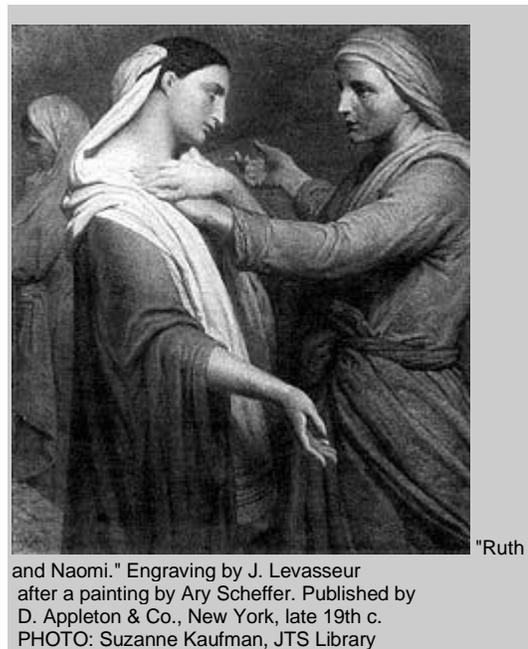
In Naomi's eyes, Orpah and Ruth have been bound to her only by the formal familial bonds, not by affection, admiration and compassion. Now that the familial bonds between Naomi and her daughters-in-law have been severed by the death of Naomi's husband and her two sons, she feels she has nothing left to give them; in fact, she sees herself as far more needy than they. Therefore, she cannot imagine that Orpah and Ruth might have any reason to remain with her.

Naomi is half-right; Orpah weeps, kisses her ex-mother-in-law and moves on. She is mistaken, however, about Ruth, for Ruth has come not only to feel a part of Naomi's immediate family but also to identify with the community that shapes Naomi's destiny and faith, the community of Israel. Despite all of Naomi's protests to the contrary, Ruth quietly but firmly remains at her side; "and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem" (Ruth 1:19).

Boaz appreciates Ruth's goodness, but he, too, understands her imperfectly. When Ruth asks Boaz why he treats her more kindly than all the others gleaning in his field, he replies:

"I have been told of all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and came to a people you had not known before. May the Lord reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge" (Ruth 2:11-12).

Boaz perceives correctly Ruth's strength and generosity (as opposed to Boaz's servant, who sees in Ruth only "a Moabite girl who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab" [2:6]). What he does not recognize is that he is destined to play an important role in the recompense which God has prepared for Ruth. This failure is in part because of his inability, like Naomi's, to appreciate fully the uniqueness of Ruth's spiritual gifts.



"Ruth and Naomi." Engraving by J. Levasseur after a painting by Ary Scheffer. Published by D. Appleton & Co., New York, late 19th c. PHOTO: Suzanne Kaufman, JTS Library

What is the gift of Ruth that they, and I, did not see? It is the blessing of companionship. Indeed, Ruth's very name is probably derived from *re'ut*, which means "companionship" or "female companion." Ruth, perhaps more than any other biblical character, understands the importance of friendship as well as its subtleties.

Ruth encounters two lonely beings in her life, one more obviously alone than the other. The first, of course, is Naomi. When she returns from Moab, Naomi protests to the people of Bethlehem that she is no longer Naomi, a woman of pleasantness, but rather Mara, one who is embittered (Ruth 1:20). "I went away full and the Lord brought me back empty" (Ruth 1:21), she declares. For Naomi, her life is over; she has neither husband nor child. In Naomi's eyes, Ruth is no longer part of her family; she is merely a hanger-on Naomi cannot shake.

But Ruth knows better. Naomi still has a family, if only she will open her eyes to see. She has a daughter -- Ruth. Shortly after they are re-situated in Bethlehem, Ruth says to Naomi, "I would like to go to the fields and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone who may show me kindness" (Ruth 2:2). This is exactly the way we might expect a daughter to address a mother, asking her permission to go on an errand. If Naomi will not initiate the mother-daughter relationship, Ruth will -- and does. And indeed, Naomi, rather than sitting in bitter silence, replies, "Yes, daughter, go" (Ruth 2:2).

When Ruth goes to Boaz's field and returns to tell Naomi where she has been, she reminds Naomi that she has other family, as well. As Naomi explains to Ruth, "The man [Boaz] is related to us; he is one of our redeeming kinsmen" (Ruth 2:20). Note that Naomi speaks of Boaz being related to "us," not merely to Naomi. She has come to understand that she and Ruth truly are part of the same family.

This realization leads Naomi to take an active role as Ruth's mother. "Daughter, I must seek a home for you where you may be happy" (Ruth 3:1).

What is Naomi's plan? Boaz and Ruth shall marry. When that takes place, the familial and emotional ties among Naomi, Boaz and Ruth are strengthened and formalized. Moreover, through this union, Naomi discovers that she has not only a daughter in Ruth, but also a son in Ruth's offspring. "Naomi took [Ruth's] child and held it to her bosom. She became its foster mother, and the women neighbors gave him a name, saying, 'A son is born to Naomi!'" (Ruth 4:16-17).

The second person whose lonely life Ruth touches is Boaz. Boaz's loneliness is less apparent, yet it is real. When we first meet him, he seems to be a hail-fellow-well-met, offering blessing to all his workers and receiving a benediction in response. We must take care, however, not to be misled by appearances -- as indeed Ruth is not. When he singles her out for special attention, she demands to know why. What Boaz tells her in his answer, almost certainly without realizing it, is that in Ruth he has discovered a kindred soul.

In the morally and spiritually shallow environs of Boaz's farm, where Boaz must instruct the men not to molest Ruth (Ruth 2:9) and where most of those around her care to know nothing more about her other than that she is a foreigner (Ruth 2:6-10), Boaz has discovered a woman of quiet moral strength and generosity of spirit. Boaz, and Boaz alone of all those present, has the sensitivity to recognize Ruth for what she is.

What he lacks is the courage to approach her, to share himself with her. It is left for Ruth, in that strange scene on the threshing floor that comes so close to seduction but is in reality a call to responsibility, to remind Boaz that he has the power to do that which will bring happiness both to him and to his family -- that is, to marry Ruth.

"Spread your robe over your handmaid," says Ruth of herself to Boaz, "for you are a redeeming kinsman" (Ruth 3:9).

Boaz's response is fascinating. "Be blessed of the Lord, daughter! Your latest deed of loyalty is greater than the first, in that you have not turned to younger men, whether rich or poor" (Ruth 3:10).

Although Boaz's ostensible goal is to praise Ruth, he also tells us something important about himself. In his own eyes, Boaz is an old man. He is past the age of passion, of sexual and emotional vitality. (A perceptive rabbinic midrash suggests that the day Ruth came to Boaz's field he had returned from burying his wife.) Ruth, however, thinks otherwise. She sees Boaz as a redeemer -- not simply in the economic sense, but in the familial one. Ruth wishes to start a family with Boaz. In this, she helps him discover the youth, strength and passion that is still within him.

Why, then, do I love Ruth? Ruth has taught me the true nature of love and friendship. It is not manipulation or martyrdom or all-consuming passion. It is realizing the fullness of self through what I give to others, and helping others become whole through the gifts they give me.

We read the Book of Ruth on Shavuot, the festival on which we celebrate God's giving us the Torah. I sometimes think that to understand the gift of Torah, I need to understand the gift that Ruth gave Naomi and Boaz.

That the Torah is a gift is not immediately obvious. It is a book of restrictions and dire warnings and great responsibilities. When I get stuck in this vision of the Torah, however, I think of the Torah as Ruth, as God's daughter whom he has betrothed to me. In God's unique way, through the gift of Torah, God calls me to intimacy through responsibility. As I toil in the study and fulfillment of Torah, I discover the fullness that is I, that is God, and that is the relationship between us.

May all who read the Book of Ruth experience the fullness of companionship with God and humankind.

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