



CONGREGATION  
**KOL AMI**  
FOR ALL OUR PEOPLE

2425 East Heritage Way  
Salt Lake City, UT 84109

PHONE 801-484-1501

FAX 801-484-1162

info@conkolami.org

[www.conkolami.org](http://www.conkolami.org)

Dear Kol Ami Friends,

We're now in Sefira, that sad period between Passover and Shavuot. At this time, many of us are inadvertently refraining from haircuts, live concerts, and the like. Why? Not only because Dr. Fauci warns us, but because, in the time of our Roman conquest, the earliest of Rabbis were stricken with a deadly plague. That plague was lifted on Shavuot.

Tradition teaches us that if we study Torah late into Shavuot night, the heavens will open and we will see "marvelous things," for Shavuot is the anniversary of the giving of Torah. It falls on the 49th day after Pesach, the most popular of all Jewish holidays.

Why do we study Ruth on Shavuot? Because this is the time of the Barley harvest? Because Ruth was born on Shavuot? Because Ruth was a woman? Because she was a Jew by choice? These are weak reeds. Within Ruth lies a human response to the questions: *"Why was I created? What do I know about my purpose? How can I be redeemed from life's challenges?"*

Ruth is a book all about love and cooperation—everyone is nice. Just like Utah, Orpah, Ruth, Naomi, Boaz, and the townspeople are all gentle to each other. Yet, the background is famine, exile, death, poverty, violation of gleaners, and disgrace. But the chief characters are all honey and light. No, it's a novella, even a romance...

To understand its treatment of Redemption, we must remember several Mitzvot:

- Leviticus 19:9–10, (Gleaning) cares for the poor,
- Deuteronomy 25:5–6, Levirate marriage—keeps families together, preserves family property within the family,
- Deuteronomy 23:8–9, none of the descendants of Moab, even to the tenth generation, can be admitted into the Congregation of the Lord.

These Mitzvot informed the world of Ezra and Nehemiah. It was a Jewish world that was aware that the very word Mo-av: from the father, was a reminder that the Moabites were descended from Lot's daughters. Even late into the Biblical period, we didn't have a very high opinion of Moabites.

In that milieu comes the sweet, sweet story of Naomi, Elimelech, Machlon, Chilion, Ruth, Orpah, the redeeming kinsman (anon), and Boaz. Naomi's name means pleasantness. Elimelech: the kingship will come to me. Machlon: disease. Chilion, is consumption. Boaz, in him there is strength.

Within Ruth, I've found the following redemptions: Ruth redeems Naomi. Boaz redeems Ruth and Naomi. Ruth redeems Boaz from his old age and sterility. Naomi and Ruth redeem their land. Ruth's descendants redeem Israel through King David and the Messiah. God redeems Israel and Moab.

All comes through Ruth's receiving of Torah at the time of the barley harvest. The redemption of history at the time of the redemption of the land. A redemption done in a time of tragedy. How can we be redeemers ourselves? How can we be partners with God in the ultimate redemption? During this Sefira, Sundays at 4:30 pm, let us read Ruth together. If you need, [the text can be found here](#).

Shalom,  
Rabbi Fred Wenger