

The Weekly Message of Torah from Rabbi Rheins
Shabbat Shavuot 5780

Your People Will Be My People

*People,
People who need people,
Are the luckiest people in the world!*

Yes, we are a people who need people. It may have been a young Barbara Streisand singing, and it may have been music and lyrics respectively by Jule Styne and Bob Merrill, and it most certainly was the hit 1964 Broadway musical Funny Girl in which we first heard it, but the message belongs to all of us. We need each other. We need our family and friends and community.

Indeed, our beloved ancestor Ruth cried that very same sentiment, a desperate plea to belong, to be with loving family and friends. We will read her words both on Friday morning at our Shavuot Festival service and then again on Shabbat morning.

The story of Ruth is one of the most inspiring in the Hebrew Bible and her story's connection with the Festival of Shavuot adds a delightful and spiritual depth. By tradition, Shavuot is called *z'man matan Torateinu*, "the season of the gift of our Torah. It is the time when our ancestors received the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. It was there and at that time that

we were elevated from individuals and clans in to a people with Torah, values, meaning, purpose and a sacred sense of mission.

Ruth was born a Moabite. She was of a tribe that had some historic animosity with the Jewish people. Nevertheless, she married a Jewish man and grew to love the Jewish faith and the Jewish people. When Ruth's husband died and her mother-in-law (Naomi) was preparing to return to Israel, Ruth insisted that she, too, wanted to live in Israel. Naomi was mystified. "Return to your parents' house and may Adonai deal kindly with you." But Ruth would not leave Naomi. That is when Ruth uttered the famous words that pledged her love and commitment to Judaism:

*But Ruth replied, "Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; **your people shall be my people, and your God my God.**"*

(Ruth 1:16)

Ruth's conversion made a profound impact on the history of Judaism; she was the great-grandmother of King David. It was David who unified the tribes of Israel into a nation with Jerusalem as its eternal capital. The traditional date of David's *yahrzeit* is the 6th of Sivan, the day of Shavuot. From Sinai and Torah to Ruth and her longing to be a part of Israel, to King David who established Jerusalem and is said to have inspired the world's

future redemption, the Festival Shavuot links the past, present and future of our people.

During this time of COVID-19 separation and isolation, Ruth's words ring with even more significance: "Your people will be my people." Yes, we can see each other via Zoom for classes and programs. Yes, we are attracting several hundred viewers every Shabbat who virtually take part in the services. But, oh how we long to once again be with our friends and family. In the coming weeks, restrictions will be lessened and we'll be able to gather again at Temple Sinai, slowly but surely and most definitely safely.

In the meantime, please continue to join with us virtually. We may be keeping safe by keeping physical distancing...but we still are a people who need people!

Chag Shavuot Sameiach v'Shabbat Shalom,

Rick

Rabbi Rick Rheins

P.S. And if you or a loved one is interested in learning more about Judaism and/or is interested in conversion to Judaism, it will be my honor to meet with you or them.