

Devar Torah

Book of Ruth: "Wherever You Go . . ."

By Gail Twersky Reimer

Shavuot, as celebrated in the Diaspora, is surprisingly devoid of ritual. One of the few rituals with which we do mark the occasion of the giving and receiving of Torah is the reading of the *Book of Ruth*.

A consideration of *Ruth* in conjunction with *Song of Songs*, the parallel reading for Passover, helps bring into focus the specific nature of Ruth's loyalty. Differences between the two books abound, not the least of which is the strikingly different cast of characters.

In *Ruth*, mother-in-law and daughter occupy the central space which in *Song of Songs* is taken up by the male and female lovers. The shift from the conventional paradigm of love drawn upon to celebrate our liberation from bondage to the new model of love with which we celebrate revelation is underscored by the way in which the language of the matrimonial bond (Genesis II:24) is used to describe Ruth's devotion to Naomi: "Ruth cleaved unto her" (*Ruth* I:14). Like the husband who leaves his parental home to cleave to his wife, Ruth leaves her parental home to cleave to her mother-in-law.

While it is easy to understand the actions of a man who leaves his parental home to begin a new home with his wife, Ruth's actions give us pause. The man, after all, is moving forward, leaving the past behind to build a future. But Ruth, as Naomi repeatedly reminds her as she urges Ruth to turn back, is seemingly forsaking a future in which she might remarry and bear children for the sake of the past. In Naomi's view, the death of her sons has effectively ended the relationship between her and her daughters-in-law.

Ruth's words and actions, however, suggest a different perspective. Shared loss and pain have strengthened the bond between her and Naomi, and opened the door to a more direct and profound relationship. It is not simply a past bond that she is honoring in clinging to Naomi, but a new bond with a future of its own and a new oath and pledge of its own: "Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God." (I:16).

Initially, Naomi finds Ruth's commitment as incomprehensible as we do. She ceases speaking to Ruth when Ruth refuses to leave her, and in greeting the women of Bethlehem, Naomi fails to acknowledge the bond to which Ruth has committed herself: "Do not call me Naomi, call me Marah, for Shaddai has made my lot very bitter. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty" (I:20-21).

Convinced that she has nothing to offer Ruth — "Have I any more sons in my body, who might be husbands for you?" (I:11) — Naomi fails to see that Ruth has something to offer her, and that Ruth's commitment to the relationship may be motivated by a desire to give rather than to get.

Eventually Naomi recognizes and accepts Ruth's gift — her companionship, the sustenance she provides, and, most importantly, Ruth's vision of *raut* (fellowship) which the name Ruth evokes through sound.

Having come to value Ruth as a daughter and to rely upon her, Naomi nevertheless risks losing Ruth's companionship in order to secure Ruth a husband and a future. Ruth, in turn, risks her reputation and her life to secure the husband Naomi has chosen for her.

Only in the final chapter of the book do we discover the magnitude of Ruth's loyalty, the remarkable ability of this woman to become a wife and mother without sacrificing the richness of her relationship to Naomi as daughter. When she marries Boaz and bears a child, she again reaffirms her commitment by giving Naomi her son to nurse. The meaning of her deed is not lost on the women of Bethlehem, who give the child a name, saying "A son is born to Naomi."

The relationship we witness in *Ruth* is strikingly different from the relationship posited in *Song of Songs*. In the latter, the lover is constantly concerned with the beloved's returning his love.

In *Ruth*, the daughter offers her love to her mother-in-law unconditionally. Ruth's initial pledge recalls the famous midrash of revelation which tells of how Israel, when offered the Torah, did not, like the other nations, quite reasonably ask what was in Torah, but unhesitatingly declared "Naaseh Venishma" (We shall do and we shall understand).

Ruth's radical decision to commit herself to Naomi is thus particularly appropriate reading for the festival on which we reimagine ourselves present at Sinai. But it is also appropriate that year after year, as we find ourselves involved in new relationships, participating in other communities, committed to more "isms" than Judaism, we read the story of a "woman of valor" who, in spite of changes in her circumstances, in spite of added commitments and new possibilities of fulfillment, remains loyal and devoted to a prior commitment.

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Torah Circles Enclose Mts. Sinai and Meron

By Nehemia Polen

Editor's note: Rabbi Dr. Nehemia Polen, Rabbi of Congregation Tifereth Israel of Everett, is currently on sabbatical in Jerusalem, where he is a Visiting Scholar at the Institute of Jewish Studies of the Hebrew University.

Someone said it was "like Woodstock." Over 150,000 people gathered recently from all parts of Israel at Meron, a hill near Safed in the Galilee, for the festival of Lag ba-Omer, traditionally celebrated as the Yahrzeit of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, a sage from the period of the Mishnah.

The Talmud describes Rabbi Shimon as an austere and ascetic teacher who spent thirteen years in a cave studying Torah, while hiding from Roman persecution. When he emerged from the cave, the Talmud related, his lengthy detachment from the world and its ways caused him to recoil in shock from those who spent their lives sowing and reaping their fields instead of contemplating the Divine wisdom of the Torah.

The highly charged spiritual energy which he had developed in the course of his years of solitude now emerged with laser-like intensity from his eyes, and wherever his gaze fell, the earth turned to fire. It is to this Rabbi Shimon that the authorship of the Zohar, the central work of Jewish mysticism, is ascribed.

With all this in mind, one might be a bit surprised at the tenor of the celebration held in his honor. Of course it is true that the Yahrzeit — the anniversary of the death of a saint or Zaddik — is a happy occasion, for on that day his soul ascends to a yet higher location in the heavenly Para-

dise, but this does not quite prepare one for the goings-on at Meron, where Rabbi Shimon's tomb is located.

After making the four hour trip from Jerusalem in a chartered bus which caters to a hasidic clientele (separate seating for men and women), we passed by a large army encampment, there to provide security for the gathering.

Alighting from the bus, one encountered the sights, sounds and smells of a carnival or state fair. Vendors hawked food, drink, phosphorescent rings and lottery tickets. Some of the items being sold, such as votive candles and pictures of saints, had a connection to the theme of the day, but others — stuffed pandas, toys, clothing — did not.

Couples strolled hand in hand; rock music blared from loudspeakers; pieces of meat were cut and roasted over charcoal. As one continued up the gentle incline which led to the saint's tomb, one encountered Rabbis dispensing blessings, complete with laying on of hands; vendors offering multi-volume sets of the Zohar and a Habad "Mitzvah Tank."

Outside the Mitzvah Tank we met a pleasant and earnest young man, whose parents had come to Israel from Iran, quoting — in Yiddish — the Lubavitcher Rebbe on the need to bring Torah values and sacred books into one's home. Another booth collected funds for a new yeshiva for "Ba'alei Teshuvah" — returnees to Jewish observance.

Finally, at the top of the hill, we reached the tomb itself. Waves of people streamed in and out of the large stone structure. The rush of bodies was so powerful that one could not direct

one's own movement; the safest thing to do was to passively submit to the direction of the human stream. On the roof of the tomb, huge torches shot red flames into the night sky, illuminating the celebrants against the backdrop of the rugged Galilee hills.

Many visitors were satisfied by simply being present at the tomb, luxuriating in the ambience of the saint's spirit. Some had come to give their three-year-old sons their first haircuts, a custom which parents fulfilled with glee, but which their young offspring viewed with considerable trepidation, as their long curls and cherished locks were attacked by the scissors.

Other visitors recited Psalms, danced in circles, and sang songs in honor of Rabbi Shimon ("Bar Yohai, praise to you, praise to those who study your holy Zohar, more praise still to those who comprehend its deep secrets . . ."). One group known as the "Reb Arele" Hasidim sang with particular fervor, dancing around their leader, who seemed to be transported to another world, his face beaming with flashes of heavenly joy.

The Hasidim did not seem to be bothered by the activity at the base of the hill evidently shutting it out of their consciousness, but this observer confesses to have been puzzled and a bit troubled by the stark contrast between the carnival atmosphere below, and the religious celebration on the hilltop.

Our friend T. Goshen-Gottstein offered a helpful perspective on the Lag ba-Omer celebration at Meron, viewing it as a Model or paradigm for the entire religious experience of the path of Judaism. One can imagine a sequence

of concentric circles which the religious aspirant encounters.

The outermost circle — corresponding to the base of the hill — is the army encampment providing essential security services.

One then meets those whose celebration consists largely in the consuming of food and drink.

As one continues on the path, one encounters various manifestations of folk-religion; people in this circle express their religious sentiments in a very direct and concrete manner, with a broad popular appeal.

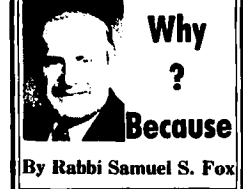
In the innermost circle — the hilltop tomb itself, one meets those who are uninterested in being entertained, but aspire to acts of selfless devotion and piety.

In this model, the different concentric circles, or different levels of the Meron hillside, are not in conflict; they complement and enrich one another. After all, even those who were awake all night reciting Psalms and prayers need to eat sometime; and even those who think they have come only for a good time are somehow infused with a taste of spiritual longing, with a vision of something higher.

And perhaps there were some few souls who went beyond the tomb itself, following a small path into the dark and clear air of the Galilee night; perhaps, together with the moon and trees, and in communion with the soul of an ancient Rabbi who spent thirteen years in a cave, they contemplated the mysteries of a world and its Creator, those mysteries written in books, and those mysteries written only in the hearts of those who yearn for Him.



HANDING OVER THE GAVEL AT OHABEI SHALOM — Outgoing president Sonia Ravech, whose three years of service as Temple President ended at the Congregation's 145th Annual Meeting recently, congratulated her successor, Leo Levi, and turned over to him the president's gavel. The Brookline-based Reform synagogue, the oldest in Massachusetts, presented Ravech with a personal gift in recognition of her years of service as Temple president and also has named its newly-purchased office computer "Sonia" in her honor. Ravech is a resident of Newton, while Levi is a resident of Newton Highlands and a member of TOS for more than 10 years.



By Rabbi Samuel S. Fox

QUESTION: Why is it required to recite prayers in memory of the deceased on the last day of each of the major holidays?

ANSWER: Some sources claim that this was done, especially on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), originally to memorialize the Jews who had been killed by the Crusaders in Europe at the end of the Eleventh Century. Others claim that it was instituted on the Day of Atonement because, even after a person has died, he is still in need of forgiveness (Sifri, Deuteronomy 21). A third opinion claims that, in the Seventeenth Century, when more Jewish martyrs were created in Poland, charitable contributions were made on

their behalf on Yom Kippur. Later it became customary to recite the memorial prayers on the last day of the three major holidays besides the Day of Atonement, because the Scripture reading on those days describes the obligation to offer charity. These charitable contributions are, therefore, also offered in memory of the deceased. Modern writers have added another theory. They claim that the memorial prayers on the holidays facilitate our remembrance of our deceased relatives who always participated with us in observing the holidays. The mystics go as far as saying that the souls of the Jewish patriarchs, as well as the souls of all the righteous people who have since passed away, come down from Heaven to join us in worshipping the Almighty on the holidays.

QUESTION: Why is it customary for those people whose parents are still alive to step out of the synagogue hall during this memorial service?

ANSWER: Some claim that their presence might create envy on the part of those worshippers whose parents are not alive. Others claim that there might be unintentional and accidental recitation of memorial prayers which might be misunderstood by living parents to think that those memorial prayers are being recited on their behalf.

Wayland Welcomes Rabbi

Rabbi Michael Mayersohn, of Temple Shir Tikva, Route 20 in Wayland, will be leaving his post on June 14, to move to California with his family and begin his appointment as rabbi of Temple Ner Tamid in Downey, CA. He has been at Temple Shir Tikva since 1979 and has seen the growth and development of the congregation from the original 75 families to the more than 200 families of today.

Rabbi Herman Blumberg will assume his post as the new rabbi on July 1. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1956 and the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1961. He and his wife live in Waban and have three children ages 21, 19 and 17.

Blumberg brings to Temple Shir Tikva a wealth of experience. Since his ordination, he has held several distinguished positions.

There will be an open house for prospective members to meet Rabbi Blumberg on June 10, at 8 p.m. at the Temple. For more information, call 358-5312.



BI VOLUNTEER BRUNCH — More than 250 volunteers and guests were recently honored at the annual Beth Israel Hospital volunteer brunch and recognition event. Pictured are volunteers celebrating five or more years of service. From left to right are (back) Josephine Sweeney, Betty Miller, Dot Finn, Deborah Henry (director, volunteer services), Aron Steinberg, Lou Shapiro. (Front) Rose Finkelstein, Anne Siegel, Sara Nelson, Anna Bornstein and Violet Kravetz.

Cuomo Lauds Agudath Israel

NEW YORK (JTA) — Gov. Mario Cuomo had lavish praise for the record and "philosophy of action" of the Agudath Israel of America at the Orthodox organization's annual dinner here at the New York Hilton Hotel on June 1.

He said its record since World War I, including rescue efforts during the Holocaust and its current work on behalf of oppressed Jews, made the Agudath Israel a model in the quest to build a just and equitable society.

Cuomo, who will seek reelection next November, addressed an audience of some

1,500 rabbinic leaders and lay activists representing all trends in Orthodox Jewish life. He was presented with the 1986 Humanitarian Award of the Agudath Israel of America by its president, Rabbi Moshe Sherer.

"While others equivocated, or, worse, looked away, you did all you could . . . Yours is an organization that knows when to speak out and when to work quietly to get done what must be done," the New York Governor said.

TEMPLE BETH ZION
1566 Beacon Street, Brookline

Rabbi Alvin Rosenberg
Cantor Harry Rosenbloom
President Gabriel Bell

SHAVUOT SERVICES
Thurs. Eve., June 12 at 7:00 P.M.
Fri. Morn., June 13 at 8:45 A.M.
Evening at 7:00 P.M.
Sat. Morn., June 14 at 8:45 A.M.
Yizkor at 10:00 A.M.
Evening at 8:00 P.M.
All Are Welcome

TEMPLE REYIM
1860 Washington St. Newton

Fri. Morn., June 13
Family Festival Service at 9:30 A.M.
Reading of "The Book of Ruth"
Presentation of Bat & Ben Torah Awards
Evening Service at 6:15 P.M.
Sat. Morn., June 14 at 9:30 A.M.
Family Festival Service
Dedication of Memorial Plaques
Yizkor

Daily Minyan at 7:00 A.M.
Sunday at 9:00 A.M.

Rabbi Philip Kieval
Cantor Martin Robbins
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A Conservative Congregation

Ephraim J. Greenberg, Rabbi
Theodore Schneider, Cantor
Beryl Chafetz, Sexton

Schedule For Shavuot
Evening Services
Fri., Sat. Eve., June 13 & 14 at 8:00 P.M.
Morning Services
Fri., June 13 at 8:45 A.M.
Sat., June 14 at 8:30 A.M.
Yizkor at 10:30 A.M.

DAILY SERVICES
Mornings at 8:45 a.m.
Sunday morning at 8:30 a.m.
Mincha at 8:00 p.m.

CONG. KEHILLATH ISRAEL
384 Harvard St., Brookline

RABBI MANUEL SALTZMAN
REV. FELIX KAHN, SEXTON

Fri., June 13
Shavuot Services
Chapel Service 6:30 A.M.
Main Synagogue Service 8:45 A.M.
Evening Service at 8:00 P.M.
Sat., June 14
6:30 & 8:45 A.M.
Visiting Cantor
Aurashim Albrecht

Sunday, June 15
8:00 A.M.

Daily Services 7:00 & 8:00 A.M.
Mincha 8:00 P.M.
Maariv 8:30 P.M.
ALL ARE WELCOME

TEMPLE OHABEI SHALOM
1187 Beacon Street, Brookline
(At Kent St. on the T) 277-6610

SHAVUOT
Friday, June 13, 10:15 AM
Yizkor

SHABBAT NASO I
Friday, 6:00 PM
Kabbalat Shabbat

Saturday, 10:15 AM
D'var Torah

DAILY MINYAN
8:00 A.M. and 6:00 P.M.
(9:00 A.M. Sunday)

Rabbi Eric B. Hoffman
Cantor Alex Zimmer
Rabbi Emeritus Albert S. Goldstein
A REFORM CONGREGATION
our synagogue family welcomes you

TEMPLE ISRAEL
Longwood Ave., and Riverway, Boston

Fri., June 13 at 10:00 A.M.
Shavuot Service
Confirmation at 5:45 P.M.
Qabbalat Shabbat
Sat., June 14 at 9:30 A.M.
Torah Study at 10:30 A.M.
Shabbat Service

Rabbi Bernard H. Mahlman
Rabbi William L. Berkowitz
Cantor Roy S. Etkin
Rabbi Roone Friedman
Temple Educator
Roland B. Gittelson, Rabbi Emeritus
All Are Welcome

MISHKAN TEFILA
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KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE
Shavuot
Fri., June 13 at 8:15 P.M.

2nd day Shavuot
Sat., June 14 at 9:30 A.M.

Yizkor
Mincha at 8:00 P.M.

DAILY SERVICES
Sunday & Holiday mornings at 8:00 A.M.
Mincha at 8:00 P.M.
Weekdays 7:00 A.M. — 8:00 P.M.

ALL ARE WELCOME

Rabbi Richard M. Yellin
Cantor Joseph J. Kozlowski
Dr. Israel J. Kozlowski
Rabbi Emeritus
Rev. Michael Domb, Sexton

Young Israel of Brookline
62 Green St. Brookline, MA 734-0276

Shavuot
Friday, June 13
Evening Services at 8:10 P.M.

Saturday, June 14
Morning Services at 7:00 & 8:30 A.M.
Evening at 6:00 & 8:00 P.M.

Weekday Mornings
Sunday at 7:15 & 8:00 A.M.
Monday, Thursday at 6:20 & 7:05 A.M.
Tues., Wed., & Fri. at 6:30 & 7:15 A.M.

Evenings at 8:15 P.M.

Rabbi Gershon C. Gewirtz
Rev. Myer L. Lokatch
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—Bruchim Habaim—

TEMPLE EMANUEL
385 Ward Street Newton Centre Tel. 332-5770

Fri., June 13
First Day of Shavuot at 6:45 A.M.
Hebrew School Graduation at 9:00 A.M.
Evening Service at 8:30 P.M.

Sat., June 14 at 6:30 & 9:30 A.M.
Yizkor at Both Services
Mincha at 8:15 P.M.

Daily Services
Mornings at 7:00 A.M.
Evenings at 7:30 P.M.
Sunday Morning at 8:00 A.M.

Rabbi Samuel Chiel
Rabbi Mark D. Friedman
Cantor Hochberg, Cantor Emeritus
Mervin Segal, Ritual Director
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TEMPLE SHALOM OF MILTON
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Rabbi Jerome Weistrop, D. Min.
Sylvia Pinot, Music Director
Cantorial Soloists
Deborah Lebowitz-Bassendort
Barbara Stiller

SERVICE SCHEDULE
Friday Evening at 8:00 P.M.
Saturday Morning at 9:30 A.M.
Saturday Mincha at 8:17 P.M.
Sunday Morning at 8:30 A.M.
Daily Services at 7:00 A.M. & 7:00 P.M.

Fri., June 13
Shavuot Services at 8:00 P.M.
Dedication of the Mortgage Redemption Plaque
Sat., June 14 at 9:30 A.M.
Yizkor Services

ALL ARE WELCOME

TEMPLE EMETH
194 Grove Street, Chestnut Hill

Rabbi Alan Turitz
Rabbi Emeritus, Rev. K. Nelson
Cantor Simon Kessler
Ritual Director Alan Alpert

Fri., June 13
Shavuot — 1st Day at 9:30 A.M.
Mincha at 6:00 P.M.

Sat., June 14
Shavuot — Second Day at 9:30 A.M.
Yizkor Services
Mincha at 8:15 P.M.

Sunday, June 15 at 8:30 A.M.

Daily Services at 7:00 A.M.
Mincha and Maariv at 8:15 A.M.

ALL ARE WELCOME

Sabbath Candle Lighting Time
June 13
8:02 P.M.

L'Chaim.

The entire Willow Manor family would like to extend our very best wishes for a happy and healthy Shavuot.

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Willow Manor

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