

## **RABBI'S MESSAGE**

### **Ruth: A Legacy of Kindness**

Perhaps my favorite book of the entire Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) is the Book of Ruth. For those less familiar with the story, it starts with a family that was rather well-off until tragedy struck. Three men die around the same time, leaving three widows: Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. While grieving for her husband and two sons, Naomi doesn't want to burden the young women. She implores them to return to their home tribe of Moab to find new husbands. Orpah graciously accepts Naomi's suggestion, but Ruth offers one of the kindest statements in all Biblical teachings: "Do not urge me to leave you. Wherever you go, I shall go; wherever you live, I shall live; your people shall be my people and your GD my GD." (Ruth 1:16-17).

The Book of Ruth is traditionally read on Shavuot, the same time that we commemorate the reading of the Ten Commandments. Both are stories of dedication and devotion. When the Israelites accepted the Ten Commandments in the desert, they did not know what the future would bring. They had faith that following GD's path would lead them in the right direction. Ruth and Naomi, two penniless widows, did not know what lay ahead for them. While Naomi was brave enough to continue alone, Ruth refused to abandon her, despite the uncertainty of the future. She had confidence that her choice was the right thing to do, and that it would turn out well.

When faced with difficult choices and an uncertain future, we must consider many factors. What is the easy choice, the safe choice, the logical choice or the most profitable choice? Which choice will be best for me, for my loved ones or for the world? Often, there is more than one possible answer, and very often, the multiple possible decisions could conflict with each other. We may not readily understand the impact of our choices, but sometimes, like with Ruth, the right thing seemed obvious. Of course, what is right for one person may not be right for the other.

Orpah is not considered "bad" for following her mother-in-law's suggestion. On the contrary, she did what Naomi insisted that she do. But it is not the Book of Orpah that we read on Shavuot. Ruth's determination stood out, and she became an example. While Orpah did what was expected, but Ruth took the next step, a more extraordinary measure. I find that when I err on the side of kindness, like Ruth, I might not always be 100% right, but I feel better about my choice.

Things did work out for Ruth. She was introduced to Boaz, a relative of her late father-in-law, who took an interest in her and they married...and developed a legacy. According to the Bible, Boaz was the great-grandson of Nachshon ben Amminadab, credited with being the risk-taker who was the very first person to set foot into the Red Sea when it began to part (according to Midrash). And the great-grandson of Ruth and Boaz becomes King David.

What did Nachshon and Ruth have in common? They made difficult choices, taking risks because something inside told them it was the "right" thing to do. It is not always easy to trust our instincts. Periodically, someone asks me the question, "What does GD want me to do?" The right thing to do may not be easy, but it's often obvious.

We pray for the courage to face the most difficult choices, and find that part of GD inside of us that guides us along the right path.

L'shalom,

***Rabbi Dan Gordon***

*NOTE: Shavuot is a two-day festival that begins 49 days (seven weeks) after Passover. This year, it begins Tuesday night, May 30, and is traditionally observed with all-night study. Temple Beth Torah will observe Shavuot at Shabbat evening services June 2, along with the bar mitzvah of Abraham Ramirez. An evening of dedication: as Abraham dedicates himself to a life of Judaism, the rest of the Jewish world is reminded of our commitment to the Ten Commandments.*