

This Shavuot, WE stand with Ruth



This Shavuot text study is intended to raise awareness about the issues of immigration reform in the United States. It has been created by Rabbis Organizing Rabbis (ROR), a project of the Reform Movement's social justice initiatives: the Justice and Peace Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Religious Action Center, and Just Congregations. Through the Rabbis Organizing Rabbis Campaign, we come together as a unified Reform Movement with justice at our core. We seek to build a powerful network of Reform Jews praying with our feet through effective grassroots and legislative action on vital justice issues of our time.

This study can take 30 minutes, one hour, or longer. No times are included in order to allow each rabbi to use what works best for your community. The answers given are just a jumping off point; we are sure that your community will offer many more insights. Please feel free to modify this study however you would like. We encourage you to use this as a Shavuot teaching session or in a Torah study leading up to Shavuot.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page 2: Introduction to session

Pages 3-4: Quiz (print double-sided so people cannot see the answers)

(Choose one of the two text studies provided, unless time allows for consideration of both)

Page 5-7: Text Study A: *HESED & NEDIVUT*

Page 8-10: Text Study B: *KAVOD, P'GIYUT & HAGANAH*

Page 11: Wrap-up & Call to Action

Page 12-13: Appendix A: Background Information on Immigration Reform

Page 14-15: Appendix B: Stories of Modern Day Immigrants

INTRODUCTION

It is customary to read and study the Book of Ruth on Shavuot. Ruth is tied to this holiday for several reasons. First, Ruth's acceptance of Judaism is tied to our symbolic receiving of the Torah on the day of Shavuot. Second, Ruth is the ancestor of King David and legend is that King David died on Shavuot. Finally, the book of Ruth takes place during the spring harvest, which is the time of the Shavuot holiday.

But, there is another theme within this book, one which relates to contemporary American life: The book of Ruth is concerned with how we treat those who are on the margins of society. Ruth journeys with her mother-in-law Naomi, to Bethlehem. Being a widow, and not only a stranger among Israelites, but a Moabite (from an enemy nation), Ruth is at a disadvantage from the start. She is an outsider who is unlikely to find acceptance in a foreign land. Yet remarkably, she finds kindness when she meets Boaz, a landowner whose fields she gleanes. Boaz is a relative of Naomi who treats Ruth well and eventually agrees to marry her.

The value of *hesed*, or loving kindness, runs through this story. During this study session, we will look more closely at texts about Boaz and Ruth, and we will not only learn more about our ancestors, but we will explore how their relationship provides insight into the current issue of immigration reform.

QUIZ

Which character in the Shavuot story are you most like?

Have participants take a brief Buzz-Feed Style quiz to pick which person in the Shavuot story (Boaz, Ruth, Naomi) each person resembles most. (See pages 3-4 for Quiz.)

- *Which character do you resemble most?*
- *Which character does your grandparent resemble most?*

(If you wish to include modern-day immigrant stories here, see Appendix B)

Quiz: Which Shavuot Character are you?

PICK ONE:

A) RESILIENT

B) PRINCIPLED

C) DETERMINED

GOING TO A NEW PLACE IS:

A) UNFAMILIAR
TERRITORY WHERE I
DON'T KNOW ANYONE

B) A CHANCE TO MEET
NEW PEOPLE... YOU
NEVER KNOW WHAT
YOU'LL LEARN

C) AS LONG AS I'M
WITH MY FAMILY I'LL
FEEL AT HOME

MY FAVORITE MOVIE IS:

A) "THE WIZARD OF
OZ" – THERE'S NO
PLACE LIKE HOME

B) "TO KILL A
MOCKINGBIRD" – IT'S
IMPORTANT TO STAND
UP FOR WHAT IS RIGHT

C) "E.T." –
OFTEN I FEEL LIKE I
JUST DON'T BELONG

MY FAVORITE JEWISH HOLIDAY

A) PASSOVER –
SOMETIMES YOU JUST
HAVE TO TAKE A LEAP
INTO THE UNKNOW

B) ROSH HASHANAH –
THERE ARE SO MANY
SWEET THINGS IN LIFE
TO CELEBRATE

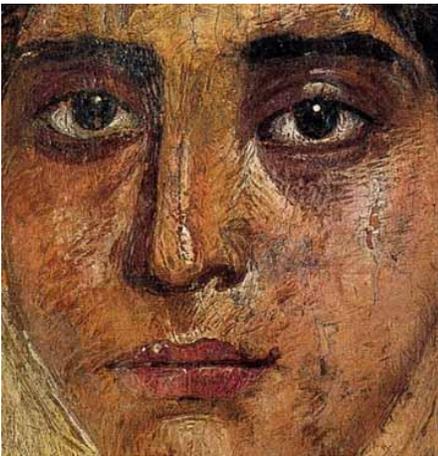
C) SUKKOT – IT FEELS
LIKE I AM NEVER
QUITE SETTLED

MY ANCESTORS:

A) LEFT THEIR HOMES
IN THIS COUNTRY BUT
THEN RETURNED

B) HAVE BEEN IN THIS
COUNTRY FOR
SEVERAL
GENERATIONS

C) AND I WERE BORN
IN ANOTHER
COUNTRY. I AM AN
IMMIGRANT



Mostly A: You are Naomi
When things didn't go well, you fled your home, doing what you had to do in order to survive. Now you have returned and your gutsy determination will help you to make a new life for yourself. You know what it is to be rejected and because of that, want to make sure others are not rejected.

Mostly B: You are Boaz
Your life is good and you are happy person. You also understand the importance of treating others well. You are kind to foreigners and immigrants in your midst, perhaps because you remembers an ancient history of wandering.

Mostly C: You are Ruth
You live in uncertainty. As a recent immigrant, you are not sure where you can go or who you can trust. But, you have determination and you never give up. You grasp every opportunity available to you and make the most of it. Despite the obstacles in front of you, you are able to succeed.

Text Study A:
HESED & NEDIVUT –
EXPLORING THEMES OF COMPASSION & GENEROSITY

Ruth 2:5-16

⁵ Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, “Who does that young woman belong to?” ⁶ The overseer replied, “She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. ⁷ She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.’ She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.”

⁸ So Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. ⁹ Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.”

¹⁰ At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?” ¹¹ Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. ¹² May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” ¹³ “May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants.”

¹⁴ At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.” When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. ¹⁵ As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, “Let her gather among the sheaves and don’t reprimand her. ¹⁶ Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke her.”

Questions:

What does Boaz do for Ruth through both positive and negative commands?

- *What are Boaz's positive commands (you shall)?*
 - Glean in his field
 - Help herself to water
 - Eat with him and the others

- *What are Boaz's negative commands (you shall not)?*
 - Don't leave for another field
 - Don't rebuke her/reprimand her

Maimonides: Laws of Gifts to the Poor 10:4

Whoever gives charity to the poor with bad grace and averted eyes has lost all the merit of his action even though he gives him a thousand gold pieces. He should give with good grace and with joy and should sympathize with them in his plight, as it is said, "Have I not wept for those in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor?" [Job 30:25]

Questions:

- *In what ways does Boaz exemplify Maimonides' adjuration to give with "good grace and joy?" How does Boaz go "above and beyond" the requirements for giving to others?*

- *Looking at all of these commands together, how can Boaz's behavior teach us how to relate to a nochriya/foreigner?*

Mishna Peah 1:1, 1:2

These are the things for which there is no measure: *Pe'ah* [the corner of the field that is left for the poor].... One should not make the amount of *Pe'ah* less than one-sixtieth [of the harvest]. And although no definite amount is given for *pe'ah*, it is all based upon the size of the field, the number of poor men, and the abundance of the crop.

Questions:

- Right after the Mishna tells us there is no measure for leaving the corners of the field, it suggests a "minimum amount" which must be contributed. *Why is this minimum amount suggested?*

- One reason is that people were not giving enough. We can imagine this was especially true when those gleaning were foreigners. Even today, people often worry that foreigners will take the bounty otherwise ascribed to native inhabitants, but Boaz takes a different approach; he

asks God to reward the foreigner in his midst.

- *Why was Boaz not fearful that the foreigner would affect his livelihood?*
- *How does Boaz represent the values of hesed and nedivut (compassion and generosity)?*
- *How can we extend this type of compassionate kindness to foreigners today?*

A Contemporary Perspective: Hesed and Immigration

Rachel Adler: Engendering Judaism: An inclusive Theology and Ethics (1998)

There are two gifts that even the destitute can bestow. The first of these is *hesed*... Various translations as goodness, lovingkindness, piety, fidelity, generosity, or righteousness, *hesed* is a feeling, a character trait and a mode of relations. Directed at the other, it is, nevertheless, independent of the other's response (p. 149).

As [Ilana] Pardes observes, Ruth puns two words from the same root when she asks challengingly, "Why have you been so kind as to recognize me (*lehakireini*), when I am a stranger (*nokhriaya*)?" Why, in other words, do you not go on ignoring the needy stranger? Is not estrangement the universal rule for maintaining the boundary between "us" and "them"? (p. 152)

Questions:

- *How can hesed help to break down the boundaries between "us" and "them," citizens and newcomers to this country?*

Text Study B:
KAVOD, P'GIYUT & HAGANAH –
EXPLORING THEMES OF DIGNITY, VULNERABILITY & PROTECTION

Ruth 3:3-15

³Wash yourself and anoint yourself, and put your garment upon you, and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man, until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴And when he lies down, you shall mark the place where he lies, and you shall go in, and uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what to do. ⁵And she said to her, "All that you say to me I will do." ⁶And she went down to the threshing floor, and did according to all that her mother-in-law had told her. ⁷And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid herself down.

⁸And it came to pass that in the middle of the night the man trembled and turned himself, and behold, a woman was lying down at his feet! ⁹He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your maidservant. **Spread your wings over your maidservant, for you are a redeemer.**" ¹⁰He said, "Blessed are you to YHWH, my daughter. This last act of goodness is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. ¹¹And now, my daughter, do not fear. All that you say I will do for you, for all the gate of my people know that you are a worthy/valorous woman. ¹²Now, though it is true that I am a redeemer, there is also a redeemer nearer than I. ¹³Lodge for the night, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good, let him redeem. If he does not desire to redeem you, I will redeem you, as YHWH lives. Lie down until the morning." ¹⁴And she lay at his feet until the morning, and rose before a man could recognize his fellow; for he said, "Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." ¹⁵Then he said, "Give the cloak that is on you and hold onto it." And she held onto it, and he measured six measures of barley, and set it on her. And he went into the city.

Questions:

DIGNITY

In verse 9, Boaz asks the woman beside him, “Who are you?” She answers, “I am Ruth, your maidservant.” This marks a crucial turning point for Ruth.

- *Why is it so important that Ruth is identified by her name rather than her place of origin?*
 - Before, Ruth was always identified as “the Moabite” who came back with Naomi. This question enables her to be viewed as an individual, rather than just a person who has come from somewhere else.
- *How does this passage relate to the contemporary issue of immigration reform?*
 - One critique of our current immigration policy in the U.S. is that immigrants are viewed as “foreigners” first, and human beings second.
- *Do we, like Boaz, provide opportunities for modern immigrants to define themselves, rather than being defined by the labels imposed by society?*

VULNERABILITY

- *What vulnerabilities are present in the opening of the scene?*
 - Ruth is not sure what will happen when Boaz realizes she is there. He could harm her, or her reputation. What happens in the situation is entirely up to him.
- *How is Ruth more secure by the conclusion of the scene?*
 - Boaz’s gift of grain is simply a ploy; another way of protecting Ruth from harmful accusations. If anyone should see her, they could suppose that she had simply come to the threshing floor to buy food. This conforms to the theme of security. He gives her a physical gift that will protect her, both in body and reputation.
- *How does Boaz allay Ruth’s fears of rejection?*
 - According to Boaz’s statement of commitment in verse 11, Boaz has assumed that Ruth feared rejection from him, and he therefore promises to respond favorably to her request, as he says, “all that you say I will do for you.” Boaz also demonstrates an assumption that Ruth feared rejection from the community of Bethlehem. Again, he reassures her, by affirming that “all the gate of my people know that you are a worthy/valorous woman.” Boaz makes it clear to Ruth that she will be accepted in the community, and will be judged not on the basis of her status as a widow or foreigner, but on the basis of her upright character.

A Contemporary Perspective: Julio Ponce

“My name is Julio Ponce, I am 25 years old and I have lived in Colorado for the past twelve years. My dream is to become a great chef and open my own business. Having come to this country undocumented has been one of my biggest challenges as this made it difficult for me to achieve my goals, being able to attend school, get a license to open my business, and even the ability to move from one place to another is always a challenge. I always live with the anguish of what will happen if a cop pulls me over. And it’s frustrating to live day-to-day thinking what will happen to me.”

- *Do you think our modern-day immigrants expect acceptance or rejection in the United States?*

PROTECTION

In verse 9, Ruth says, “Spread your wings over your maidservant, for you are a redeemer.” After she has “uncovered” Boaz, she asks him to cover her, playing on the dynamics of power and vulnerability between them.

- On the one hand, she demonstrates power over Boaz, as she has made him vulnerable in the night and has commanded him to act on her behalf. On the other hand, it is Boaz who has the power to “redeem” Ruth and spread his sheltering “wings” over her. Ruth has certainly taken the initiative in this matter, but ultimately, the choice belongs to Boaz.
- *What do you think it means for Boaz to “spread his wings” over Ruth?*
- *How could we “spread wings” over those who are looking for protection and compassion in the U.S. today? How can we act as modern-day “redeemers” for those in need?*

WRAP-UP AND CALL TO ACTION

This Shavuot, all over the country, Reform Jews are pledging to work on comprehensive immigration reform. Our refrain is “We Stand with Ruth.”

(If you wish to include additional modern-day immigrant stories here, see Appendix B)

This Shavuot, how can YOU stand with Ruth?

- 1) Comprehensive Immigration Reform policy has been stalled in Congress. Contact your representatives in Congress and urge them to move this issue forward in the legislature.

(For more information on Immigration Reform legislation, see Appendix A)

Urge your Representatives to support immigration reform that is truly comprehensive, and that reflects our values as Americans and as Reform Jews. The Capitol Switchboard can be reached at 202.224.3121, or you can send an email. For more information, please contact Eisendrath Legislative Assistant Charlie Arnowitz at 202.387.2800 or carnowitz@rac.org.

- 2) Reform rabbis are exploring an exciting new campaign to help prevent unjust deportations. The rate of deportation is at a record high, with an average of 1,100 people deported daily. Some of the undocumented immigrants being deported have committed crimes in addition to illegally entering and living in America. Many others, however, are law-abiding, productive community members, church-goers, and at the center of families who love and rely on them. While Congress remains mired in the politics of passing legislation, these individuals face constant fear of separation from their families and the lives they’ve built during decades of residence in the United States.

Immigrants who would have access to a path to citizenship if Senate bill S744 are asking Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials to dismiss their deportation case. We will send you more details as soon as they are available so you can share with your congregants how they can join in this Movement-wide campaign and continue to stand with Ruth!

APPENDIX A BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON IMMIGRATION REFORM

Today, we face the enormous challenges posed by our nation's broken immigration system. Over 11 million undocumented immigrants live in the shadows of our communities across the country. Families face up to decades long backlogs in acquiring visas, workers are left without protections, and children are left behind when their parents are deported.

Why Do Undocumented Immigrants Come to the United States?

Immigrants come to the United States for many reasons, some of them a “push” of a need to flee their homes, some of them a “pull” of a reason to come to the U.S.:

- To escape war and conflict.
- To escape famine or other natural disasters, which was the reason Naomi and her family left the land of Israel and travelled to Moab.
- To escape persecution, including threats based on faith, gender, or sexual orientation.
- To find greater freedom.
- To find work, often because U.S. employers hire them at wages substantially higher than they could earn in their native countries.
- To give their children a chance at a better life.

What Does It Mean To Be Undocumented?

- In the United States, two-thirds of new immigrants have legal status. Of the one-third who are undocumented, about half entered the country legally through on temporary visas, and the other half crossed the border secretly.
- Immigrants without documents live in a constant state of fear. They are always “looking over their shoulders,” worried that they or the people they love will be deported. They must keep their status secret, even from their friends and neighbors. This often means that they are vulnerable to being taken advantage of by criminals and even employers because they are reluctant to report abuse to the authorities. They know that if a loved one in their home country is sick or has died they will need to choose between being with their family in a time of need and staying in this country due to the risks of being arrested if they try to cross the border again.
- Why are people willing to live in this country as undocumented immigrants if it's so hard to do it? In most cases, it is a result of the power of both the “pushes” (like understanding that if they stay at home their families will be trapped by poverty) and the “pulls” (a dream of a chance for a better life for themselves and the people they love; the chance after many years spent apart for children to be with parents who are already in the U.S.; and more).

(For a more in-depth look at cause of and solutions to illegal immigration, please go to http://udallcenter.arizona.edu/immigration/publications/fact_sheet_no_3_illegal_immigration.pdf)

We can no longer delay comprehensive reform of our immigration system. The Reform Movement has been working for common-sense, compassionate immigration reform based on streamlined processing, a commitment to obey the rule of law, payment of taxes owed, family reunification, and a path to citizenship.

In June 2013, the Senate passed the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act (S. 744) with a vote of 68-32. This legislation was the result of long negotiations by a bipartisan “Gang of 8” Senators, and represents important progress toward achieving the comprehensive reform that is long overdue. We are encouraged by many of the key provisions in the Senate’s bill. A path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants here today, a renewed commitment to clearing systemic backlogs, a plan for processing future flow of immigrants, and a reasonable approach to enforcement are all cornerstones of the Reform Movement’s immigration priorities, and we are pleased to see such policies reflected in the Senate’s legislation. **It is essential that legislation that moves through the House of Representatives contains similar protections and provisions.**

For more, go to <http://rac.org/ROR>

APPENDIX B STORIES OF MODERN DAY IMMIGRANTS

If you or members of your congregation are seeking to connect to personal true stories of modern-day immigrants, please consider sharing one of the following stories (or visit www.notonemoredeportation.com). Two recommended places to include these stories are either: after the introductory quiz and/or at the beginning of the wrap-up and call to action.

Josue Sandoval Perez

For 15 years, Josue has labored, paid taxes, lived, and worshipped with the community at Saint Anthony's Church in Kansas City, MO. Josue was deported on Friday, January 31, 2013, after suffering inexcusable treatment in detention and a lack of due process.

Early that Friday morning, as his children slept, Josue Noe Sandoval was swiftly and quietly removed from detention in Kansas City, MO, transported through Texas, and escorted across the border to Mexico by two armed guards. While Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) told Josue's family and attorney that his case was still pending, they were actually deporting him with nothing but a few dollars in his pocket and the clothes he was wearing when detained

Nayelly's story about her dad:

Hi, I'm Nayelly. I want my dad to stay here with me and my family because he supports us. He goes to all my basketball games and practices. I want my dad to be here because I miss him and because I am daddy's little girl. Josue, my dad, has everything: a house, car, family, and a great life with me, my brother and family. Me and my brother and mom love him so much. I will always love my dad the way he is... I just want to say that my dad is the best dad that I could ever have. I am not going to stop thinking about my dad. God is going to help my dad get out of jail and get him with his family, so we can be a family again and things can go back to normal. I love you dad, and I am going to pray for you all night...

Erik's story about his dad:

I'm Erik and Josue is my dad. He has always been my role model. For example: my dad taught me that working hard can take you places. He has always been there for me and my family, good and bad. My dad always helps me out when I have trouble trying to fix something on my car, a 2005 Pontiac. He taught me how to change spark plugs, tires, oil, brakes, time belts – little things that will matter in life to me. I want my dad to stay here, so he can be here when I graduate from high school. I also want him here to help me achieve my dream of being a master tech car repairman... My dad has always been there, and since he was detained, it do not feel the same without him... He would always say goodnight to us. My dad is very hard-working. He came to this country to make a better life for me, my sister, and our family. All I want is everything to be normal again. All families need to be together, including mine. Please keep my family together and let my dad go. Thank you.

Bupendra Ram

Ethnically Indian, I was born in Fiji and I came to the United States when I was two-years-old [on a tourist visa]. Six months later, I became undocumented. At the age of 23, I became undocumented and unafraid [to tell my story].

Being raised in America, I caught the “American Dream” virus that was spread by teachers. In elementary school and middle school, I never knew what it meant to be undocumented; all I knew is that I had a passion to learn. I was exactly like the student sitting next to me learning about the values this country was founded on, believing that those who work hard can succeed in America...

My accomplishments read like a grocery list... For every year that I was at Hawthorne High School, I volunteered an average of 300 hours, raising funds for March of Dimes, breast cancer research, and UNICEF. I took on an average of five honors and advanced placement courses a year. I gained the respect of the student body, teachers, and administrators through my dedication and desire to be a hardworking student. I graduated in the top five percent of my high school graduating class...

At the conclusion of my senior year I accumulated more than \$10,000 in scholarships from private donors ranging from \$250 to \$1,500. I was unable to qualify for financial aid, so I chose to pursue my undergraduate Business Administration degree with a minor in Speech Communication at CSU, Fullerton. In May of 2010, I became the first person in my family to graduate with a bachelor’s degree. On October 1, 2011, I will submit my application for the masters in Speech Communication with emphases in Intercultural and Organization Communication to CSU, Fullerton...

I am not a criminal. I am a productive member of society. I am educated. I am hard working. Given chance or opportunity, I will make a difference... I want to give back to the community that nurtured my growth and development... want to serve as a mentor to the youth in disadvantaged communities and encourage them to pursue a college education...

There are thousands of undocumented college students who want to give back to the only country they know; their only home, the United States of America. People find it easy to say, “Deport them all!” To me that would mean leaving the only country that I know, leaving my mom and dad, leaving my four sisters, leaving my ten nieces and nephews, and leaving my friends, leaving behind an opportunity to make America a better place...