



Celebrating 10 Years of Ten Minutes of Torah

Shavuot Study Guide—*The Book of Ruth*

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This year marks the 10th anniversary of **Ten Minutes of Torah**. Each weekday, over 20,000 subscribers receive an e-mail that brings the Jewish world to them. From Torah commentaries written by scholars to recipes for baking challah, *Ten Minutes of Torah* explores the great variety of Jewish life. Join the many readers of **Ten Minutes of Torah** and subscribe now.

What better time is there to celebrate *Ten Minutes of Torah* than on Shavuot! Like many Jewish holidays, Shavuot has its origins as an agricultural festival. The word *shavuot* means “weeks,” and Shavuot refers to the period of seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot. The timing of the festival marked the end of the spring barley harvest and the beginning of the summer wheat harvest. Our ancestors would bring an offering from their harvest to the Temple in Jerusalem.

After the destruction of the Temple such offerings could no longer be made. Over time, this offering was replaced by reading the Ten Commandments and the Book of Ruth. By the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, Shavuot became associated with the Ten Commandments and the festival became known as *Z'man Matan Torateinu*, the “Time of the Giving of the Law.”

One of the most distinctive customs of Shavuot is *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, an evening-long study session held on the night of Shavuot. *Tikkun* means a “set order” of something and refers to the order in which the texts are read. The custom originated with the mystics of Safed in the 16th century, and today, many Jews stay up all night on Shavuot reading and studying a variety of sacred texts. Traditionally, readings from the Torah and Talmud are included.

Many synagogues hold a *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*. Some host programs that go on all night, culminating in morning services at sunrise. Other congregations gather for a few hours of study. Whether one is planning to attend an all-night session, study for a few hours, join with others, or study on one's own, Shavuot is a wonderful time to encounter sacred text.

We asked several rabbis on the staff of the Union for Reform Judaism to share their own encounters with our text. Each video explores a different text. Some focus on a commandment. Others challenge a difficult passage, while others grapple with age-old questions.

These videos provide interesting responses to our sacred writings whether you are studying with others or watching these videos on your own. This guide offers a couple of questions to accompany the video, spark conversation, and give the reader an opportunity for further reflection.

Rabbi Edythe Mencher, Faculty, Sacred Communities of Caring, Union for Reform Judaism
Text—The Book of Ruth

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Summary:

Traditionally, the Book of Ruth, part of the section of the Bible known as Writings, is read during services on Shavuot. Ruth is a young Moabite woman who married an Israelite man. When her husband died, she followed her mother-in-law, Naomi, back to Israel and adopted the Jewish faith and people as her own. To feed herself and Naomi, she gleaned in the field of Boaz, a rich man. Boaz is taken with her, and eventually they marry. Among their descendants is the famed King David who built the first Temple.

The theme of Ruth's conversion to Judaism is central to this story. In Ruth 1:16–17, she states: "Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following after 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. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. Thus and more may God do to me if anything but death parts me from you." Ruth is often considered to be the archetype of all who "choose" or convert to Judaism—accepting the Torah, just as Jews accepted the Torah at Mt. Sinai—and this passage traditionally has been understood as her conversion statement

Questions:

What gives you the strength to persevere in the face of adversity?

How has your community helped you through difficult times and celebrated success with you?