

**The Whole Megillah:**  
**Wrapping Ourselves in the Biblical Scrolls**

*Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion  
New York School of Education  
Capstone Project*

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**Introduction:**

This curriculum will be a yearlong adult education course focusing on the five megillot: Ruth, Kohelet, Eicha, Esther, and Shir haShirim. I plan to teach this course next year at my biweekly pulpit in Marion, Ohio. Although I have not met the congregants yet, I know that the temple in Marion is a small community, in a remote setting, with a small (5-15 participants) group of adults who participate in regular Bible study. These participants will come from a variety of occupational/educational backgrounds and range from beginning to intermediate students of Bible. Each individual class session will be ninety minutes long, and we will devote three class sessions to each megillah, thus making this a 15-session course (which corresponds to the number of visits I will make to this pulpit). While we will not read any of these megillot in their entirety during class time, I will strongly encourage participants to do a cursory reading of the text on their own between the first and second lessons of each unit. I will approach each of the lessons in the three-class unit with a different teaching orientation.<sup>1</sup> The first lesson of each unit will have a “contextual” and “comprehension” orientation. I will introduce the text by situating it in its historical context (to the extent that we can determine what that context is) and by giving an overview of its storyline/themes. We will read a few key passages that exemplify said themes or represent key elements of the story line. The second lesson of each unit will have a “parshanut” orientation. We will study both traditional and modern commentaries about specific passages and about the text as a whole. Each time I introduce a new commentator, we will learn about his or her background as well. The third lesson of each unit will have an “ideational” and “personalization” orientation. We will review our learning from the previous two classes, identify big ideas found in the megillah in question, and discuss the relevance of these texts to our lives as modern Jews.

In order to teach this course, I will need to become an expert on the texts themselves (and their commentaries) and to continue to develop my adult education skills. The Teaching Bible course has helped me hone these skills, but I will practice some of these lessons on classmates and get feedback from experts in adult education prior to teaching the course. I will also need to compile resource sheets for each class with commentaries that we will consult, reflection

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Dr. Barry Holtz’s approach as detailed in *Teaching Bible: in Theory and in Practice*. 92-96.

prompts, and any artwork, photos, or other visual resources that we will incorporate into our study.

Each participant will need to purchase or print out a translation of the text for his or her own personal study and to use as a resource during class. I'm going to recommend that they purchase Herbert Bronstein and Albert H. Friedlander's edition of *The Five Scrolls* or Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler's *The Jewish Study Bible*. *The Five Scrolls* contains the Hebrew text, English translations, artistic depictions, and introductions to each of the megillot, as well as liturgy to accompany the public reading of each megillah. *The Jewish Study Bible* contains the English translation of the text, introductions to each book, and multi-faceted commentary on the entire Tanakh. I believe that our learning community will benefit from having multiple translations of the text and that these two editions represent excellent options that will facilitate our study. For those who are able to work in the Hebrew, I will recommend that they use *The Five Scrolls*, and I will call on them periodically to read certain sections of the text in Hebrew and to explain any verse whose translation is ambiguous. I will make sure that all texts are read aloud so that those with impaired vision or reading challenges are still able to participate in the discussion and learn with us. I hope to create an open and inclusive learning community as we embark on this yearlong journey to uncover the "whole megillah"—or in this case all five megillot.

**Content Rationale**

*Text:* These texts provide a wide range of timeless Jewish wisdom about topics that are directly relevant to Jews today such as belonging, coping with suffering, overcoming the odds, experiencing love, and striving to understand the chaos of the world in which we live. The fact that they are part of our liturgical cycle is a testament to their importance and their worthiness as the subject of this course. Although they are not as widely studied as our weekly parshiyot, the megillot can be an equally rich source of Jewish learning. Their content is both “adult” and complex, making them an especially compelling subject of study for mature Jewish learners.

*Teacher/Designer:* In the case of this particular curriculum, I am both the teacher and the designer. My continuing to build upon my own knowledge of the texts (and of curriculum design) will increase my authenticity as a teacher of this material and designer of this curriculum. In teaching this class, I hope to bring my passion and enthusiasm for text study as a key to understanding what it means to be a Jew. In crafting the teaching frames for each of the five, three-session units, I’ve drawn upon Barry Holtz’s orientations for teaching Bible to adult learners.<sup>2</sup> I find his “map of orientations” to be a useful way to focus one’s study on a particular understanding of the Biblical text. By concentrating on one or two interpretive strategies in a single class, the instructor can help students understand the text deeply from a certain perspective. By changing the interpretive strategy from one class to the next, the students will develop a repertoire of reading strategies that will guide them to a nuanced understanding of the material and will continue to serve them well in their Bible study beyond the scope of this course. Throughout the course, I will guide the students to engage with the text in a variety of ways including chevruta study, group discussion, dramatic reading, and constructing our own individual written and/or artistic interpretations of the text.

*Learner:* The students who will participate in this course are adults who participate in regular Bible Study. These participants come from a variety of occupational/educational backgrounds and range from beginning to intermediate students of Bible. Although I have not yet met my future students, I designed the course with the students’ experience in mind. In lesson one (of each three-session unit), the context and overview will give students a starting point from which they can then embark upon deeper exploration of the text. Building their personal knowledge base will also increase their confidence in their own ability to make meaning of

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<sup>2</sup> *Teaching Bible: in Theory and in Practice*. 92-96

relatively new material. In lesson two, exposing the students to contemporary and traditional commentaries gives them permission to read the text in different ways. Permitting diversity of interpretation segues into our third session in which we will address the personal meaning that a text can hold for the individual reader. At the beginning of classes two and three of each unit, I will guide the participants in a brief “review discussion” on what we have already learned about this particular megillah. I will make sure the content of this discussion answers the question “what does the text say?” and after lesson two, “what do its commentators say about it?” It is my hope that this discussion will help “catch up” the participants who have missed previous sessions. We will conclude each unit with a discussion of the big ideas of the text. It is my hope that discovering these big ideas will inform both the students’ personal Jewish identity as well as their understanding of the Tanakh.<sup>3</sup>

*Milieu:* This temple in Marion meets regularly for adult education on various topics of the student rabbi’s choosing. They have stated that they enjoy studying Tanakh so this curriculum should meet their needs. The class will take place on Shabbat at the synagogue, which is the center of religious life for this particular community. I also believe that studying in a place increases its holiness as well as its meaningfulness/significance for the students and teacher. It is my hope that this learning will bring wisdom, closeness among learners, and holiness to the congregation—possibly extending even to those who do not participate in the class.

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<sup>3</sup> Learner goals and progression of learning inspired by Lisa D. Grant and Diane Tickton Schuster, “Teaching Jewish Adults,” in *The Ultimate Jewish Teacher's Handbook*, ed. Nachama Skolnick Moskowitz (Denver: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 2003), pp15-17.

**Desired Results**

*Mission/Priority Goal:* I am teaching this class because Jewish text study is both a *midah* (Jewish value) and a *mitzvah* (commandment). Our Shacharit liturgy (and Peah 1:1) reminds us that the study of Torah, the breadth of Jewish teaching, is such an important mitzvah that it leads to or encompasses all others. Jewish learning can transform one's Jewish practice, shape one's Jewish identity, and make our lives more meaningful. My goal for this class is to guide the participants through an educational experience that leads to the aforementioned outcomes, reveals why our tradition privileges these texts, and demonstrates their relevance to a modern audience.

*EU:* Jewish tradition calls on us to return to certain texts (such as the megillot) year after year because engaging with them on a regular basis connects our Jewish present to our historical past, adds depth and meaning to our holiday celebrations, and enriches our lives with wisdom and holiness.

*EQs* (1 per megillah)

1. (Ruth) What role does choice play in creating families and communities?
2. (Kohelet) How can we find faith and purpose in a world that is chaotic and unpredictable?
3. (Eicha) How do we mourn?
4. (Esther) What place do absurdity and violence have in Judaism?
5. (Shir haShirim) How can sensual love be holy?

*Learner Outcomes:*

1. Learners will be able to describe the basic content of the five megillot
2. Learners will explore the five megillot during class, but continue their Jewish learning outside of class through text study, engaging in conversation about Judaism with one another, and personally reflecting on each megillah by writing in their binders/journals (described below).
3. Learners will appreciate text study as a Jewish value, reflect on the unique meaning that each of these texts holds for them, and incorporate this wisdom into their understanding of what it means to be a Jew.
4. Learners will form/belong to a community of learning that enriches the wider synagogue community

**Acceptable Evidence for Learning:**

Each student who participates in this class will receive a binder in which they can keep class handouts and write down notes from the class, questions the text raises for them, or random doodles. At the end of each individual class, I will pose an open-ended “essential” question based on our study that day such as those listed in the previous section. The students will have five minutes to write a reflection in their binder as an answer to my question. I will collect the binders and bring them to class each time we meet. At the end of each unit (which consists of three lessons about one megillah), I will give the students ten minutes to write a longer reflection about a topic of their choosing that pertains to the megillah we have studied. Students can even choose to reflect in the form of art, music, or poetry. I will provide guiding questions but the topic is open. They are also welcome to expand on an earlier reflection or (later in the year) to compare material from different units. In between each class, I will read through the participants’ reflections and highlight exceptional entries at the beginning of the following class. I will also use these reflections as a guide for what interests the learners most and do my best to bring in content that matches those interests for future sessions. At the end of the year, I will ask participants to choose a few of their reflections and to revise these into a form they are comfortable sharing with the community. I will type and format these reflections into a class “megillah” to be stored in the temple’s library and the American Jewish Archives. Our class study will conclude with a siyyum in which every person receives a copy of our class “megillah” to keep.



**Curriculum Overview (dates based on 2016-2017 calendar)**

*(Note: the first class of each unit focuses on context and comprehension, the second on modern and classical parshanut, and the third on ideation/personalization (Holtz). This structure is not totally rigid, but will help to create consistency in our coursework throughout the year.)*

<b>Class</b>	<b>Date of Class</b>	<b>Jewish Holiday that corresponds to megillah being studied (date)</b>	<b>Core concept</b>
Ruth 1	August 24	Shauvot (summer)	<i>Family is whom we choose to be near.</i>
Ruth 2	September 10	Shavuot (summer)	<i>Kindness builds close, healthy relationships.</i>
Ruth 3	September 24	Shavuot (summer)	<i>Close relationships can help us move from bitterness to joy.</i>
Kohelet 1	October 22	Chol haMoed Sukkot (October 22)	<i>Even in a chaotic world, faith is possible/God is present.</i>
Kohelet 2	November 5	Chol haMoed Sukkot (October 22)	<i>One person's search for meaning can be reinterpreted by another without diminishing the truth or validity of either interpretation.</i>
Kohelet 3	November 19	Chol haMoed Sukkot (October 22)	<i>Introspection can lead to truth.</i>
Eicha 1	December 11	Tisha B'av (summer)	<i>Grief is a painful but potentially holy experience.</i>
Eicha 2	January 14	Tisha B'av (summer)	<i>Destruction, loss, and other painful memories have an impact beyond the generation that experiences them.</i>
Eicha 3	January 28	Tisha B'av (summer)	<i>Sometimes we need to dwell in sadness.</i>
Esther 1	February 11	Purim (March 12)	<i>Levity and absurdity have their place.</i>
Esther 2	February 25	Purim (March 12)	<i>Levity and absurdity have their place.</i>
Esther 3	March 11	Purim (March 12)	<i>Levity and absurdity have their place.</i>
Shir Hashirim 1	March 25	Chol haMoed Pesach (April 15)	<i>Love is sacred.</i>
Shir Hashirim 2	April 8	Chol haMoed Pesach (April 15)	<i>Love is sacred.</i>
Shir Hashirim 3	April 22	Chol haMoed Pesach (April 15)	<i>Love is sacred.</i>
Siyyum	May 6		

## Content Description for Each Unit:

Text: Ruth

CC: *Family is whom we choose to be near.*

CC: *Hesed (kindness/loyalty) builds close, healthy relationships.*

CC: *Close relationships can help us move from bitterness to joy.*

The family relationships in the Book of Ruth are neither traditional nor simple, but loyalty, devotion, and closeness characterize the protagonists' relationships with each other. By studying the relationships between various characters (e.g. Orpah and Naomi, Ruth and Naomi, Ruth and Boaz, Boaz and the unnamed kinsman, etc.), the learners can gain a Biblical lens through which to observe their own family ties and to explore ways they can bring more hesed into their families and community. Beyond the frame of personalization, students will also study what this origin story says about the monarchy descended from Ruth and Boaz (e.g., assimilation of diverse peoples, loyalty to one's kin, agricultural background etc.) Additionally, Ruth's story creates a space to talk about conversion and the experience of being a newcomer.

Text: *Kohelet*

CC: *Even in a chaotic world, faith is possible/God is present.*

CC: *Introspection can lead to truth.*

CC: *One person's search for meaning can be reinterpreted by another without diminishing the truth or validity of either interpretation.*

The Book of Ecclesiastes gives voice to the human struggle to make sense of an incomprehensible world. Despite the author's pessimism, we can read hope between the lines of the text, as he finds joy and meaning in life, despite its challenges. The author's humility and awareness of his own process can validate the learners' struggle with issues of faith and theology. Kohelet is not able to assimilate all his thoughts and experiences into a neat theological package, but he does not give up his search for meaning, understanding, and a relationship with God. Even when God's omnipotence seems incomplete or arbitrary, Kohelet continues this search. His persistence and refusal to give up on life or on God despite it all being *hevel* can inspire similar resilience in readers of the text.

Text: *Eicha*

CC: *Sometimes we need to dwell in sadness.*

CC: *Destruction, loss, and other painful memories have an impact beyond the generation that experiences them.*

CC: *Grief is a painful but potentially holy experience.*

Rather than diminishing or sanitizing the pain of Jerusalem's destruction, the Book of Lamentations delves into the emotions of loneliness, grief, despair, and rejection—ones which we might normally repel or try to move through as quickly as possible. Eicha and the holiday of Tisha B'av on which we read it create a space for the reader to experience the profound loss and trauma of exile. In Eicha, we read about a loss that is painful for the entire community, in fact for the entire Jewish people. The community experiences and copes with that pain together, dwelling in sadness. Whether or not the student feels the pain of that exile, he or she has experienced sadness at some point. Personal loss and communal tragedy are universal experiences. Studying Eicha allows for a comparison between personal and communal suffering. Eicha can teach that allowing oneself to feel and to cope with pain—not masking it or brushing it under the rug—is essential for one's mental health. Eicha highlights the importance and the pain of the grieving process and yet, when we read it aloud, we end on a note of hope.

*Text: Esther*

*CC: Levity and absurdity have their place.*

The Book of Esther, much like the holiday on which we read it, is absurd, entertaining, and a little troubling. Depending on which sections of the text you read (and how we interpret them), Megillat Esther is either a great testament to the triumph of a persecuted people, a highly entertaining satire, or an abominable *shanda* to the Jewish people who sunk to the level of their enemies. In these three classes, we will explore each of these interpretations of the story and what they can teach us.

*Text: Shir haShirim*

*CC: Love is sacred*

*CC: Sensual love can be holy*

The Song of Songs demonstrates the breadth of the Biblical corpus. Far from etiological legend, priestly sacrifices, or “historical” narrative—subjects with which the traditional parashat hashavua group is more familiar—the Song of Songs is poetry that elevates human love to a sublime or divine place. Although this experience is not completely universal, love is something that most members of an adult audience have experienced at some point in their lives. Teaching that love (including sensual love) has a place in the Tanakh takes a seemingly “earthly” topic and makes it as sacred as our prayers and our holy texts themselves.

## Suggested Learning Experiences

### *Studying Ruth for Context and Comprehension: Lesson 1*

**EU:** Jewish tradition calls on us to return to certain texts (such as the megillot) year after year because engaging with them on a regular basis connects our Jewish present to our historical past, adds depth and meaning to our holiday celebrations, and enriches our lives with wisdom and holiness.

### **Learner outcomes (for the course):**

1. Learners will be able to describe the basic content of the five megillot.
2. Learners will explore the five megillot during class, but continue their Jewish learning outside of class through text study, engaging in conversation about Judaism with one another, and personally reflecting on each megillah by writing in their binders/journals (described below).
3. Learners will appreciate text study as a Jewish value, reflect on the unique meaning that each of these texts holds for them, and incorporate this wisdom into their understanding of what it means to be a Jew.
4. Learners will form/belong to a community of learning that enriches the wider synagogue community.

### **CC's:**

1. Family is whom we choose to be near
2. Hesed builds close, healthy relationships
3. Close relationships can help us move from bitterness to joy

### **Essential questions:**

- Why be kind?
- What role does choice play in creating families and communities?
- How do the stories we tell about our ancestors shape the behavior of individual Jews and character of the Jewish community?

### **Evidence of Understanding:**

Each student who participates in this class will receive a binder in which they can keep class handouts and write down notes from the class, questions the text raises for them, or random doodles. At the end of each individual class, I will pose an open-ended “essential” question based on our study that day. The students will have five minutes to write a reflection in their binder as an answer to my question. I will collect the binders and bring them to class each time we meet (unless a student really wants to keep his or hers). At the end of each unit (which consists of three lessons about one megillah), I will give the students ten minutes to write a longer reflection about a topic of their choosing that pertains to the megillah we have studied. Students can even choose to reflect in the form of art, music, or poetry. I will provide guiding questions but the topic is open. They are also welcome to expand on an earlier reflection or (later in the year) to compare material from different units. At the end of the year, I will ask participants to choose a few of their reflections and to revise these into a form they are

comfortable sharing with the community. I will type and format these reflections into a class “megillah” to be stored in the temple’s library and the American Jewish Archives. Our class study will conclude with a siyyum in which every person receives a copy of our class “megillah” to keep.

### Materials:

- Binders
- Blank sheets of paper
- Pens/pencils
- Handouts with pages 218-245 of *The Five Scrolls* and character descriptions (see capstone p. 16-17). Make sure these are hole-punched
- Index cards

### Outline:

1. Personal Introductions/Getting to know you game (00:00-00:20)
  - a. *This is the first time that we are meeting for the year, so I’m going to allow the introductions to be a little longer in the interest of building community. If participants are already close with one another, this game will move more quickly, but it will help me get to know my audience even if it doesn’t give them any new information.*
  - b. Briefly introduce myself (most of these participants will have met me at services/oneg the night before but many will not have).
  - c. “Before we dive in to the content of our learning this year, we are going to work a little on one of our yearlong goals: creating a community of learning. To start, we’re going to share a little bit about ourselves, and play a memory game along the way.”
  - d. Give participants an index card on which to write the following information on one side of an index card. Do not write your name. (3 minutes):
    - i. How long they’ve been members of the congregation
    - ii. A list of all the places they have lived throughout their life
    - iii. The name of a family member with whom you feel close
      1. *Note: The goal of this icebreaker question is to prime participants to think about close family relationships—a key theme we will explore in Megillat Ruth.*
    - iv. “Next, we are going to go around the table and share our names and what we wrote on our cards. After this, I will collect these cards (the text we’re studying has to do with ingathering anyway), and then redistribute them around the table. You will have to try to match the card with its rightful owner so make sure you’re paying close attention as people share.”
  - e. Participants share their names and the content of their cards
  - f. Collect the cards, shuffle them, and redistribute them.
  - g. Then ask each person to read a new card, and then guess to whom it originally belonged, and then return it to that person.
  - h. Now that we know a little bit more about each other, we are going to move into our topic for the year: the megillot or scrolls of the Tanakh (the Jewish Bible), the format of this class, and our topic for today: Megillat Rut or the Scroll of Ruth.

## 2. Introduction of Context (00:20-00:45)

### a. What is this class? (5 minutes)

- i. The tradition of studying the weekly Torah portion has been part of Jewish tradition for millennia (and perhaps part of this congregation's tradition for even longer...pause for laughter); however, from time to time, it can be good to take a break from text that we love and know well in order to study *other* important material from the corpus of Jewish text. This year, we will focus on the megillot which, like parashat hashavua, correspond to specific Jewish dates (certain Jewish holidays) and are filled with wisdom that we can uncover and learn from.
- ii. Over the course of the year, we will study all five of the megillot.
- iii. We will devote three, ninety-minute classes to each megillah
  1. The first class will focus on getting to understand the storyline or theme of the text as well as any background information we might need to understand it fully
  2. In the second class we will study different interpretations or commentaries on the text from classical and modern scholars who have tried to understand their meaning
  3. In the third class, we will discuss what meaning these texts hold for us as modern Jews and what big ideas the text can teach us about Judaism
- iv. We will not read the megillah from cover to cover during these classes (which I encourage you to do outside of class, just to get a sense of the text in its entirety, and since most of them are short), but instead we will focus on close readings of key passages, how the text has been interpreted throughout Jewish history, and how the text can have meaning for each of us and inform our personal Jewish identities
- v. For each class, please bring one of the following:
  1. *The Jewish Study Bible*
    - a. *The Jewish Study Bible* contains the English translation of the text, introductions to each book, and multi-faceted commentary on the entire Tanakh
  2. *The Five Scrolls*
    - a. *The Five Scrolls* contains the Hebrew text, English translations, artistic depictions, and introductions to each of the megillot, as well as liturgy to accompany the public reading of each megillah.
  3. If you aren't able to purchase one of these worthy books or find them at the library, please bring a Hebrew-English Tanakh from home or from the temple library.
- vi. I will bring a few extra copies of the text we'll be studying to each class, and today we'll be working with a handout.
- vii. I will also bring handouts each week with the specific text on which we will focus for you to keep, write on, and store in your binder.
- viii. Any questions about the class format?

- b. What are Megillot?<sup>4</sup> (5 minutes)
  - i. Five different books of the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible)
    - 1. Hodgepodge of Jewish holy texts ranging from narrative to poetry to wisdom literature
    - 2. All found in Ketuvim (Kh section of the Tanakh)
  - ii. Just as our yearly cycle of the parshiyot in the Torah grounds us and locates us within “Jewish time,” so too does the cycle of megillot give us a sense of our location in the Jewish calendar, specifically the holiday cycle
  - iii. Even though their content is not unified, these five texts do have one common feature: each one is assigned to a particular Jewish festival and traditionally, is chanted or read aloud by the community during said festival.
  - iv. In the Talmud (also known as the oral Torah, the compendium of Jewish law and literature which was compiled between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE) as well as other Jewish texts contemporary to it, the rabbis explain why each text is associated with each holiday. There is often more than one explanation or tradition, but we will be sure to study at least one of these reasons each time we begin a new megillah.
  - v. Unfortunately for us, two of the megillot are traditionally read during the summer when we do not meet. We will begin with one of the summer megillot which is read on Shavuot: the book of Ruth, because I think its theme lends itself nicely to new beginnings (like our class). The other summer megillah, Lamentations, traditionally read on the Ninth of Av (which I like to think of as the Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of the Jewish people), we will read partway through the year (so that we don’t end or begin on a note of lament). We will study the other three megillot in close proximity to the holidays with which they are associated.
- c. What is the Book of Ruth?<sup>5 6</sup> (15 minutes)
  - i. The Book of Ruth is set in the period of the Judges, in which Israel was ruled by prophet-judges rather than kings (c. 11<sup>th</sup> century BCE).
  - ii. Scholars believe that the text was actually composed much later, perhaps in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, around the time of the Babylonian Exile/Destruction of the First Temple and the return from said exile. One theory is that the authors were trying to demonstrate that just as the characters in the Book of Ruth leave Israel and return and are blessed, so too will those who were exiled from Israel be able to return and find blessing once again. Its tolerance for “intermarriage” also contrasts with other books of the Bible such as Ezra and Nehemiah which advocate for in-marriage. Of course, this debate is just as alive and well today as it is in our Biblical text.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Five Scrolls*. “Introduction,” vii-xi.

<sup>5</sup> Alter, Robert. *Strong as Death Is Love the Song of Songs, Ruth, Esther, Jonah, and Daniel; a Translation with Commentary*. New York: Norton, 2015, 57-60.

<sup>6</sup> Berlin, Adele, Marc Zvi. Brettler, and Michael A. Fishbane. *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004.,1578-9.

- iii. The setting is agricultural, and the main events of the story take place at the time of the barley harvest (aka early summer aka when Shavuot is) in Bethlehem
- iv. The Book of Ruth is one of the most optimistic books of the Tanakh.
- v. Its beginning is somewhat tragic, but the overall arc of the narrative is one of positivity and each of the protagonists' lives improve throughout story
- vi. Most of the action in the book focuses around three main characters: Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. Although we will meet these characters as we study the text, I thought a little background information would be helpful.
- vii. Divide participants into three groups. Each group will receive one "character" and be charged with developing a 30 second elevator speech for this character. No reading from the paper!
  - 1. Naomi is an Israelite woman who moves with her family from Bethlehem to Moab due to a famine in the land. When her husband and two sons die in Moab, she tries to return to Judah and her two daughters-in-law try to follow her. She tells them repeatedly to leave her alone perhaps out of stubbornness and selflessness or perhaps to avoid the burden of feeding extra mouths. When Ruth refuses to leave her, Naomi brings Ruth back to Judah, and helps her remarry (to her former cousin-in-law Boaz). At the conclusion of the book, Naomi becomes a grandmother, thus completing her transformation from a woman bereft of her entire family to a matriarch whose legacy will live on through Ruth, Boaz, and this grandson.
  - 2. Ruth comes from the land of Moab (which does not have a good name in the Tanakh—Moabites are descendants of Lot's incestuous relationship with his daughter; their evil king Balak tries to curse the Israelites; they tempt the Israelites to idolatry and infidelity with their beautiful women; they meet the Israelites in battle a number of times, etc.) Ruth is the widow of Naomi's son Mahlon. She is very loyal to Naomi, which she demonstrates by refusing to leave Naomi even after Mahlon dies—even going so far as to leave her native Moab to be with Naomi. Once the two arrive in Bethlehem, Ruth asks Naomi to let her go gather food for the two of them. When she goes to Boaz's field and meets him there, she greets him humbly and displays much gratitude in response to his generosity. When Naomi instructs her to "woo" Boaz by sneaking into his tent and lying at his feet, she readily obeys, and then boldly tells Boaz that he has an obligation to "redeem" her (due to a Jewish practice we will discuss in a moment). Once they marry, the crowd of assembled Israelites bless her, invoking the names of Rachel, Leah, and Tamar. When she gives birth to Oved, she blesses God and consecrates the child as the redeemer of her deceased husband and of Naomi.



3. Boaz is also an Israelite from Bethlehem. He is related to Naomi through her late husband Elimelech. He seems to be a pious person, greeting his workers “May God be with you” (*Adonai imachem*). When he first sees Ruth gleaning in his field, he asks his workers who she is and then instructs them to allow her to glean, to give her water, to allow her to eat with them, and to give her roasted grain to take with her. In addition to the kindness and generosity he displays to Ruth by giving her sustenance, he also shares another connection to her: he agrees to act as her redeemer—the male relative whose responsibility it is to ensure that a childless widow is provided for and has a son. Boaz marries Ruth, and they have a child together named Oved.
- viii. Participants present their elevator speeches and we move into text study
- d. Hesed
  - i. The midah or Jewish value which characterizes the relationships in the Book of Ruth is *hesed* which can be translated as kindness or loyalty.
  - ii. Throughout the book, the characters repeatedly display *hesed* to one another.
    1. What are a few examples of kindness that we have already learned about these characters?
3. Text Study/Introduction to Content of Megillat Rut (00:45-1:15)
  - a. Chapter 1
    - i. Summary:
      1. Naomi, Elimelech, and their sons (Mahlon and Hilion) leave their home due to a famine in Bethlehem (ironic since its name means house of food) and go to Moab
      2. Mahlon and Hilion marry Moabite women named Ruth and Orpah
      3. Mahlon, Hilion, and Elimelech die
      4. Naomi wants to return to Moab because she has heard that there is food there, and her daughters-in-law try to go with her
    - ii. Ask a volunteer to read verses 1:8-14 and then pose the following questions (*italics represent potential responses*)
      1. What is Naomi’s blessing to Ruth?
        - a. *Go home; you are kind, may God be kind to you; may you have a future*
      2. What are Naomi’s arguments as to why Ruth shouldn’t stay with her?:
        - a. *No more sons, no husband, too long for me to have sons, God is against me*
      3. How does Naomi view herself/her future?
        - a. *Bleak, hopeless*
      4. How does this contrast with the way she views her daughters-in-law/their future?
        - a. *Optimistic, they’re young*
    - iii. Read verses 15-18

1. Ruth's speech to Naomi here is perhaps the most famous in the entire book. It is part of many modern "conversion" ceremonies.
2. What makes Ruth's words so compelling?
  - a. *She is willing to give up everything she has known until this point (home, people, beliefs) for Naomi*
  - b. *Her loyalty to Naomi*
- iv. Summary:
  1. They return to Bethlehem together
  2. Overall in chapter 1 there is lots of name irony
    - a. Naomi states that she wants to be called "Mara"—bitter woman instead of Naomi which means pleasant
    - b. Beth Lechem means house of bread and is experiencing a famine
    - c. Machlon—means illness and Chilion—means end and they both die
  3. It is barley harvest time
- b. Chapter 2
  - i. Summary:
    1. Ruth asks to go glean some barley to feed them (a common practice in the Ancient Near East at this time)
    2. Ruth coincidentally chooses Boaz's field
    3. Boaz sees her and asks his workers about her
    4. Then he speaks to her and assures her that she will be safe and provided for on his property
  - ii. Read verses 2:10-14
    1. Based on this text and our study so far, how do you think Ruth would describe Boaz?
      - a. *Kind*
      - b. *Generous*
    2. How would Boaz describe Ruth?
      - a. *Humble*
      - b. *Attractive*
      - c. *Loyal*
    3. What traits do they have in common and what differentiates them?
      - a. *Shared: giving, kind, help others*
  - iii. Summary
    1. Ruth goes home and meets Naomi and tells her that she gleaned in Boaz's field
    2. What a coincidence! Naomi tells Ruth that they are related to Boaz
    3. The narrator tells us that Ruth continues to glean in Boaz's fields and that Ruth stayed with Naomi
- c. Chapter 3
  - i. Summary
    1. Naomi cooks up a convoluted plan for ensuring that Ruth is provided for in the future (and ensuring that Boaz will be said provider). These are her instructions to Ruth

- a. Clean yourself up
    - b. Go to the storehouse where he sleeps
    - c. Hide until he lies down
    - d. Uncover his feet (may be a euphemism, may indicate submissiveness)
    - e. Ask him what to do next
  2. Ruth says agrees, goes to Boaz, and then Boaz wakes up and this happens...
- ii. Read verses 3:8-13 (or -18)
  1. There are multiple examples of hesed (kindness or loyalty) going on in this passage. Look at the text and see if you can find some examples of hesed:
    - a. *Naomi is loyal to Ruth by ensuring that she has a future*
    - b. *Ruth is being loyal to Naomi by seeking out Boaz (as she instructed)*
    - c. *Ruth is being loyal to Mahlon by trying to find his redeemer*
    - d. *Boaz is being loyal to God by making sure that the laws of levirate marriage are followed dutifully*
    - e. *Boaz is being loyal to Ruth by making sure that she does not go out alone at night*
- iii. Summary
  1. Ruth sneaks out in the morning in disguise
  2. Naomi asks how it went
  3. Ruth tells her everything including that Boaz is checking on the other levir
  4. Naomi tells her to wait at home to see what happens
- d. Chapter 4
  - i. Levirate marriage
    1. According to Deuteronomy 25:5-10, when a married man dies without leaving a male heir, his brother is obligated to sire a child with his widow in order to carry on his deceased brother's name in the people of Israel. The Talmud elaborates on what to do if the deceased does not have a living brother, but essentially this duty (known as levirate marriage) is the duty of the closest adult male relative to the deceased. If he does not wish to perform this duty, he has to declare so publically and participate in a humiliating ritual in which he removes his shoe and someone spits in his face. In the case in the Book of Ruth, Mahlon (Ruth's late husband) dies without leaving a male heir. There is a relative who is closer to Mahlon than Boaz, but this relative chooses not to perform this duty, and thus, Boaz becomes Ruth's/Mahlon's redeemer.
  - ii. Summary
    1. Boaz finds the levir (the closest male relative) and the town elders and explains the situation to them

- a. Naomi has returned, she owns land that formerly belonged to Elimelech
- b. The levir agrees to “redeem her”
- c. Then Boaz tells the levir about Ruth and that he must sire a son with her in addition to acquiring Naomi’s estate
- d. Then he says no and takes off his shoe and tells Boaz to redeem her instead
- e. Boaz accepts

iii. Read 4:9-10-17

- 1. Why do women offer the blessings to the newly married Ruth and the newly grandmothers Naomi? What is the content of those blessings?
  - a. *Hesed*
  - b. *Bright future in the face of a dark past*
  - c. *Healing*
- 2. How has each character’s life improved as indicated in these verses
  - a. *Ruth now has a husband to provide for her (so does Naomi)*
  - b. *Ruth and Naomi have a child/grandchild to love*
  - c. *Mahlon has someone to carry on his name*
  - d. *Boaz gets Elimelech’s land and a wife*

4. Explanation of binders and first reflection “assignment” (1:15-1:30)

- a. As you’ve noticed, each of you has a binder, which you will use throughout our year of study together. We can keep them here at the temple so you don’t have to worry about remembering them each week. I’ll make sure all handouts are hole punched so that you can keep them in the binder and to bring paper if you want to take notes or write down questions you may want to revisit (or doodle...which helps me focus.) At the end of each class, I will pose a question based on our study that day. Then, you’ll have a few minutes to write a reflection based on that question (bullet points, a paragraph, art, poetry etc. are all acceptable answers.) At the end of each unit (which consists of three lessons about one megillah), you’ll have about 10-15 minutes to write a longer reflection about any topic that relates to the megillah we have just studied. I will provide guiding questions but the topic is open. You can even expand on an earlier reflection or (later in the year) compare material from different units. At the end of the year, each person will be asked to choose a few of their reflections to revise and share with the community. I will compile these reflections into a class “megillah” that we can store in the temple’s library and the American Jewish Archives (explain what the archives are). Our class study will conclude with a siyyum in which every person receives a copy of our class “megillah” to keep. Any questions before we move on to today’s reflection question?
- b. Why do the characters in the Book of Ruth display hesed to each other? How does treating someone with hesed impact your relationship with that person?

*Studying Ruth With Commentary: Lesson 2*

(See pages 12-13 for materials, EU's, CC's, EQ's, learner outcomes, assessment etc.)

Participants will also need copies of Appendix A for this lesson

**Outline:**

1. Review from last session 00:00-00:15:

- a. Brief round of names and “the first word that comes to mind when you hear the term ‘commentary’ ”
- b. Hesed: One major theme in the book of Ruth that we will return to in this class and the next one is the theme of hesed—which can mean kindness or loyalty. We closed our class last week by reflecting on how hesed impacts the relationships between characters in the book of Ruth as well as our own relationships with our loved ones. In a moment, I’d like to invite a few volunteers to share their reflections on hesed with us, but before we do that—can someone volunteer to give us a brief plot summary of the Book of Ruth to refresh our memories?
  - i. Important details:
    1. *A famine forces Naomi and her family (Elimelech, Mahlon, Chilion) to leave their home in Bethlehem to find food in Moab. Her sons marry Moabite women (Ruth and Orpah).*
    2. *Ruth is Naomi’s Moabite daughter-in-law who refuses to leave Naomi when Naomi’s sons and husband die*
    3. *Ruth returns to Bethlehem with Naomi and goes to glean in a “random” field which turns out to belong to Boaz, Naomi’s relative*
    4. *He treats her kindly, Ruth returns home, Naomi explains that Boaz is actually their relative and that Biblical law might lead to Boaz marrying Ruth so that they produce a son in Mahlon’s name*
    5. *Ruth tells this to Boaz, and after a brief period of uncertainty in which a different relative refuses to marry Ruth, Boaz and Ruth get married*
    6. *Boaz and Ruth have a son, Oved, who is the grandfather of King David*
    7. *Naomi is comforted*
- c. Now that we remember the story, who would like to share their hesed reflections from last week? (call on 2-4 volunteers)
- d. Remind participants that each week, at the end of class, we write reflections in our binders based on the day’s study and that these reflections will ultimately go into an anthology.

2. Introduction to Commentary and Theme (00:15-00:20)

- a. At the beginning of class, we generated a list of words that come to mind when we think of commentary: political, sports, literary, etc. some of which (may have) included examples of commentary in the Jewish tradition
- b. Throughout the ages, Jews have written libraries full of commentary on our sacred texts. These commentators all have different goals, but each tries to guide

the reader to a particular understanding of the text that cannot necessarily be gleaned from reading the text alone, without commentary. These commentaries, whether written by our contemporaries or separated from one another by centuries and continents, often contrast with and contradict one another. Their divergent opinions may appear to make it impossible to tell what is the “right way” to understand a particular text, but in fact they guide us to an understanding of the diversity of Jewish interpretive tradition and teach us what questions we should ask of the text.

- c. Some of these commentaries include
  - i. Midrash
    1. Exegesis on legal/narrative Biblical text
    2. Written/compiled c. 200-1000 CE
  - ii. Medieval *parshanut* (literally commentary)
    1. Commentary written by Jewish scholars such as Rashi/Rashbam/ibn Ezra
    2. c.11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries (and beyond, depending on which commentator)
    3. Focused on explaining difficulties in the understanding the Biblical text as a narrative
  - iii. Contemporary Jewish scholars and lay people
    1. Interpret the text from diverse perspectives, sometimes explicitly (e.g. feminist, queer, socialist, Zionist commentary/criticism) and others simply through their own lens of personal experience
- d. Today I’ve brought a selection of commentaries on the book of Ruth (one from each of these categories: midrash, medieval, and modern) all of which focus on the theme of family relationships in the book of Ruth.
- e. The midrash and medieval commentary we will study also share another concern: whether or not Ruth converts to Judaism. Because Ruth is from Moab (a land and people with a less than stellar reputation in the Bible) but also the great grandmother of King David, the authors of these two commentaries are faced with an issue that probably wouldn’t trouble us: How do we recognize the goodness and positive impact that a person who was not “born” Jewish (or isn’t Jewish at all) has had on the Jewish people? One solution (the approach these two commentators will take) is to assume that Ruth converts to Judaism. Although I see this as a perfectly valid reading of the text and of Ruth’s words to Naomi, I personally don’t think it is necessary for the story. Ruth’s character and personal reputation should *not* be defined by the actions of her people, but rather by her own traits and values. Furthermore, the Reform Movement welcomes interfaith families and recognizes the Judaism of individuals with at least one Jewish parent (mother or father). Ruth is part of the Jewish community regardless of whether she converts to Judaism, and by our definition, King David is fully Jewish.
- f. As we study commentaries whose authors’ do not necessarily share our values or modern outlook on the world, keep in mind that we can still appreciate their work and their ideas. Studying one particular understanding of the text can influence our own, even if we disagree.

- g. We will close with a discussion of what the book of Ruth teaches us about the complexity of relationships, as well as how each character's hesed is emphasized or minimized by each particular commentary.
- 3. Midrash 00:20-00:40
  - a. This midrash comes from Ruth Rabbah, a collection of exegetical midrashim which interpret the Book of Ruth verse by verse (or occasionally word by word). It was written/compiled by Palestinian Amoraic sages c. 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century CE.
  - b. The text comments on Ruth 1:15-17, so let's re-read that text to get a sense of what the midrash is commenting on.
  - c. Now let's read the midrash:
    - i. "And Ruth said, 'Do not urge me to leave you, to turn and not follow after you' (Ruth 1:16)." What does it mean, 'do not urge me'? [Ruth] said to [Naomi], "Do not sin against me, do not turn your misfortunes from me." "To turn and follow after you (ibid)." It has been my intention in every instance to convert, but it is better at your hands than at the hands of another. When Naomi heard this she began to expound to her the laws of converts. She said to her, "My daughter, it is not the custom of daughters of Israel to go to their theaters and their circuses." She replied to her, "Where you go, I will go (ibid)." She said to her, "My daughter, it is not the custom of Israel to dwell in a house that does not have a mezuzah." She replied to her, "Where you lodge I will lodge.(ibid)." "Your people will be my people (ibid)," these are the punishments and the warnings. "And Your God will be my God (ibid)," the other commandments."
  - d. The midrash breaks apart verse 1:16 into smaller sections and adds a comment after each one.
    - i. How does the midrash interpret "Do not urge/beg/entreat me?"
      - 1. *Naomi, don't sin against me by keeping your suffering from me*
    - ii. How does it interpret "to turn and follow you?"
      - 1. *I've always planned to convert, and I'd rather do so with your help*
    - iii. How does it interpret "where you go, I will go?"
      - 1. *As a reply to Naomi's instruction about where it is appropriate for Jews to go*
    - iv. How does it interpret "where you lodge I will lodge?"
      - 1. *As a reply to Naomi's instruction about Judean/Jewish dwellings*
    - v. How does it interpret "your people will be my people"?
      - 1. *As a prompt for Naomi's explanation of the curses that come upon one who does not follow mitzvot*
    - vi. How does it interpret "and Your God will be my God?"
      - 1. *As a prompt for Naomi's explanation of the rest of the mitzvot*
  - e. Having established all these things, which one seems to you to be the greatest interpretive leap? The one which takes the greatest liberty with the text?
  - f. Which element of this interpretation seems most faithful to the Biblical text?
  - g. Which of the following two readings implies a greater example of hesed:
    - i. Ruth converts to Judaism for Naomi
    - ii. Ruth affirms that she will always stay with Naomi and adopt her way of life, but does not formally convert

- h. These two categories of people also exist in our community (think about someone who converts to Judaism because he or she is in a relationship with someone Jewish or a non-Jewish spouse who chooses not to convert but is still active in the Jewish community). Regardless of which we think represents greater hesed, we must treat both with hesed, kindness, respect, welcoming.
  - i. Next we're going to read another commentary which also assumes that Ruth converts to Judaism, but focuses not only on the connection between Ruth and Naomi, but also sets the stage for Boaz's role in the story a few chapters later.
4. Medieval 00:40-1:00
- a. Intro to Rashi<sup>7</sup>
    - i. Rashi was an 11<sup>th</sup> century (c. 1040-1105) commentator who lived in Northern France.
    - ii. In many (Orthodox) circles, when it comes to studying the Tanakh or Talmud, Rashi is often cited as the authority on how the text ought to be read.
    - iii. He wrote extensive commentary on both of these massive texts, and drew heavily from the midrash as he did so.
    - iv. He often cites or includes selections of midrash in his commentary, usually choosing to include only the part of the midrash which best supports his argument concerning the meaning of the text
    - v. He claims that he primarily focuses on understanding the text in its own context (that is to say, its plain meaning or pshat...without superfluous interpretation or a desire to use the text to make a halachic point), but he often deviates from this strictly contextual interpretation of the text and includes comments that are more homiletical (d'rash)
    - vi. In his commentary, Rashi identifies various difficulties or questions the reader may find while studying text and then creatively resolves these difficulties using midrash or other interpretive techniques
  - b. Read Ruth 1:5-13 to get the context for Rashi's comments
    - i. Ask participants to summarize this text as a group
    - ii. Important points to note:
      1. *Naomi's sons (and husband) have died*
      2. *She is returning to her home because she hears there is food there again*
      3. *As they start to walk toward Judah, Naomi tries to send Ruth and Orpah (her former daughters-in-law) home to Moab*
      4. *They refuse and Naomi presents them with an argument about why they should listen to her and go back home*
      5. *Her point is that she won't ever be able to produce sons that they can marry and have children with*
  - c. One more piece of background before we get to Rashi's comments. Last class, we talked about a concept called Levirate marriage

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<sup>7</sup> Berlin, Adele, Marc Zvi. Brettler, and Michael A. Fishbane. *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation*. "Medieval Jewish Interpretation" by Barry D. Walfish. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. p. 1886-1888



- i. Levirate marriage
  - 1. According to Deuteronomy 25:5-10, when a married man dies without leaving a male heir, his brother is obligated to sire a child with his widow in order to carry on his deceased brother's name in the people of Israel. The Talmud elaborates on what to do if the deceased does not have a living brother, but essentially this duty (known as levirate marriage) is the duty of the closest adult male relative to the deceased. If he does not wish to perform this duty, he has to declare so publically and participate in a humiliating ritual in which he removes his shoe and someone spits in his face.
- ii. Rashi's commentary assumes that when Naomi tells Orpah and Ruth to leave, Naomi is thinking about levirate marriage and explaining that it would be impossible for Ruth and Orpah to enter into one, because Naomi has no more sons who could produce children with them.
- d. Read the text of Rashi's comment on 1:12 aloud once just to hear the way it sounds
  - i. Rashi Ruth 1:12 (translation based on the one found at chabad.org)
    - 1. "For I have become too old to marry: that I should marry someone and bear sons, that you should marry them, for they are not forbidden to you and you are not forbidden to them as far as the prohibition against marrying the wife of a brother who is deceased, for she does not require a levirate marriage because Mahlon and Chilion were not halachically married to them because they were gentiles, and had not converted, and now they were coming to convert, as it is stated (verse 10): "[No], but we will return with you to your people." From now on, we will become one people."
- e. Then read the text in small snippets, punctuated with comprehension-oriented questions
  - i. Who is too old to marry? *Naomi*
  - ii. What does it mean that she is too old to marry? *That she can have sons that Ruth (or Orpah) would be eligible to marry. It would take "too long" for them to grow up. By then, Ruth and Orpah would be too old to have children.*
  - iii. There is a Jewish law that forbids a woman from marrying her late husband's brother. Why could Naomi disregard this law if she were to hypothetically produce sons that Ruth and Orpah could marry? *(Ruth is a Moabite, therefore their marriage was not a legal Jewish marriage)*
  - iv. Why doesn't Mahlon require a redeemer/Ruth require levirate marriage? *Same reason as above: they weren't halachically married (i.e., Ruth doesn't need to marry one of Mahlon's nonexistent brothers)*
  - v. According to Rashi, once Ruth converts, how does this change the way Jewish law views Mahlon and Ruth's marriage? *It is halachic (in accordance with Jewish/Biblical law)*
  - vi. How does this change whether Mahlon needed a redeemer and whether Ruth has to enter into a levirate marriage? *Ruth now needs to marry one of his/Naomi's male relatives in order to have a son in Mahlon's name.*

- f. Rashi strives to fix problems in comprehending the text in a narrative fashion. His problem here is that there was actually no need for levirate marriage (a key narrative component in explaining how Boaz and Ruth get together) until it was established that the relationship between Ruth and Mahlon was a halachic one. By adding/emphasizing/clarifying that Ruth becomes a Jew, he resolves this narrative tension. It seems from this comment that Rashi is concerned with Ruth's Jewishness because of its potential impact on the narrative, not necessarily because of the implications for King David's lineage.
  - g. Even after Mahlon dies, Ruth's connection to his family (and to him) remains. Family relationships continue to impact us even when the family member in question has died. How do we know this to be true based on the text? (pause and answer this) Based on our own experiences? (if time, collect answers for this one. If not, pose the question now and allow participants to reflect on it in their journals later)
    - i. How we know this to be true based on the text
      - 1. *Her "conversion" is an expression of hesed (kindness/loyalty) to both Mahlon and Naomi*
      - 2. *Her moving to Bethlehem*
      - 3. *Her relationship with Naomi*
      - 4. *Her relationship with Boaz both benefits her and honors the memory of her late husband*
5. Modern 1:00-1:20
- a. Our "modern commentary" this morning comes from an anthology called *Healing and the Jewish Imagination: Spiritual and Practical Perspectives on Judaism and Health*. It was written by Dr. Tamara Ekanazi, a scholar of Bible and Women's Studies who also co-edited *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* and *The Jewish Publication Society Commentary: Ruth*.
  - b. Both the language in and the motivations behind this commentary differ significantly from Rashi's and the midrash's. As we read, keep in mind that the Dr. Ekanazi's goal is not to explain a narrative difficulty or elaborate upon a story; here, the goal is to highlight themes and messages of the book of Ruth that are both faithful to the story itself but also therapeutic to readers of the text who are seeking personal healing.
  - c. Read the text (see next page)

“The story of Ruth is a story about relationship. How do you put bread on the table when you are poor, when you are a stranger, when you are a widow, when you have no one? The book of Ruth suggests how, and it begins with one person igniting the awareness of life’s possibilities in the other. In chapter 3, Naomi begins to see a possible future. She tells Ruth she needs a man. For Naomi, the only way to make it in the world is to have a husband. Ruth has a different understanding of her situation, but this is not where I want to focus my argument. I would like to take a closer look at Boaz.

When Ruth and Boaz first meet, Ruth is essentially destitute, forced to gather the gleanings of Boaz’s fields. Boaz, however, senses something more in her and discovers her story. When Ruth asks Boaz why he is paying attention to her, Boaz replies:

I have been told of all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and you came to a people that you had not known before. May Adonai reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from Adonai, the God of Israel under whose wings you have sought refuge (Ruth 2:11-12).

This is a very nice sentiment, a very traditional understanding of the relationship between the individual and God. Boaz is offering charity, food, water, and a blessing. But once the harvest is over, the good deed is done, and there is no sign that Boaz intends to do anything more. He will return to his normal routine and the two destitute women will have to rely on what Ruth had gleaned beforehand.

It is Naomi who steps in and counsels Ruth to attach herself to Boaz. And it is on the threshing floor where Ruth and Boaz make their connection. Under the cloak of darkness, Ruth echoes Boaz’s earlier statements but with a difference. She says to him, “Spread your wings over me, for you are a redeemer” (3:9). In essence, she is saying: “Don’t wait for God to reward me and give me shelter [as you did in chapter 2]. You are my redeemer. Spread your wings over me.” Boaz rises to the occasion, and he doesn’t only redeem her by taking responsibility. He marries her. What begins as admiration from afar becomes a matrimonial bond that leads to the birth of Israel’s most famous king, King David.

Surprisingly, God does very little in this story. For the most part, God is little more than hearsay in the Book of Ruth. The people, Boaz, Naomi, and Ruth, bring God into the story through their blessings of each other in their work and actions. And God is, of course, at the very core of these actions. But God becomes a partner only after the human beings in the story have done their work. In the end, the Book of Ruth celebrates the extraordinary achievement of ordinary people who create and recreate relations and possibilities, building the world into one that is suitable for children.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Eskenazi, Tamara Cohn. "Reading the Bible as a Healing Text." *Healing and the Jewish Imagination: Spiritual and Practical Perspectives on Judaism and Health*. Ed. William Cutter. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2007. 90-91.

- d. Our previous two commentaries focused on Ruth's *hesed* towards Naomi (by Ruth's committing to attach herself to Naomi), while this one focuses on others' *hesed* towards Ruth. What examples does Dr. Eskinazi bring that show that Ruth received *hesed*?
    - i. *Naomi instructing Ruth to seek out Boaz*
    - ii. *Boaz offering Ruth grain*
    - iii. *Boaz marries Ruth*
  - e. Eskinazi downplays the role of God in this story. I agree with her interpretation that this story focuses more on human characters than the Divine one (think of how much more airtime God gets in the Exodus or Creation stories compared with this one), but she makes a choice to state this explicitly in her commentary. Knowing that her goal is to interpret Ruth as a healing text, why do you think she makes this choice to minimize God's role?
    - i. *(Possible answers listed below do not reflect the actual motivations of the author)*
      - 1. *Her theology doesn't include a God who fixes our problems for us*
      - 2. *To empower readers to seek healing and comfort from people in addition to or instead of from God*
      - 3. *To encourage readers to use kindness to support those who have suffered a loss like Ruth and Naomi or those who need any kind of healing*
      - 4. *To demonstrate that God's actions depend on those of human beings*
  - f. What can we learn from Eskinazi's commentary about the role humans play in helping others' heal and how does she connect this message to the book of Ruth?
    - i. *People can build and invest in relationships with people who are in need or who suffer in order to heal those individuals just as Naomi helped guide Ruth on a path that would ensure her a safe future, and Boaz helped complete that path. (In the process, Naomi even healed, too.)*
6. Reflection/Wrap up 1:20-1:30
- a. *Choose one commentary we studied this morning and write about how this commentary changed your own interpretation of the text OR choose a different section of the text that inspires you and write your own commentary about it.*

*Lesson 3: Ruth from an Ideational and Personalization Orientation*

(See pages 12-13 for materials, EU's, CC's, EQ's, learner outcomes, assessment etc.)

Participants will also need copies of Appendices B and C for this lesson

1. Introduction/Review (00:00-00:10)

a. Quickly review story line

- i. *A famine forces Naomi and her family (Elimelech, Mahlon, Hilion) to leave their home in Bethlehem to find food in Moab. Her sons marry Moabite women (Ruth and Orpah).*
- ii. *Ruth is Naomi's Moabite daughter-in-law who refuses to leave Naomi when Naomi's sons and husband die*
- iii. *Ruth returns to Bethlehem with Naomi and goes to glean in a "random" field which turns out to belong to Boaz, Naomi's relative*
- iv. *He treats her kindly, Ruth returns home, Naomi explains that Boaz is actually their relative and that Biblical law might lead to Boaz marrying Ruth so that they produce a son in Mahlon's name*
- v. *Ruth tells this to Boaz, and after a brief period of uncertainty in which a different relative refuses to marry Ruth, Boaz and Ruth get married*
- vi. *Boaz and Ruth have a son, Oved, who is the grandfather of King David*
- vii. *Naomi is comforted*

b. Last week, we also studied commentaries which focused on the various relationships depicted in the Book of Ruth

- i. We read a midrash that interpreted Ruth's refusal to leave Naomi and her declaration of loyalty to her as an act of conversion (which Naomi helped to facilitate)
- ii. We then read Rashi's commentary which added that Ruth's conversion must be interpreted as such in order to explain why Ruth and Boaz needed to be married (in a levirate marriage).
- iii. Then we read a contemporary commentary by Dr. Tamara Eskanazi that highlights the capacity of the human characters in the Book of Ruth to show *hesed* to one another and in the process, to heal/save each others' lives

2. Art activity c. (00:10-00:55)

a. Intro (5 minutes)

- i. We've spent most of our time so far in this class studying words and text. We're going to shift gears a little bit this morning to studying images.
- ii. My favorite thing to do when I go to art museums is to seek out the art depicting themes from the Tanakh and try to find as many Biblical references as I can. (There's probably a reason why I'm in rabbinical school)
- iii. There are thousands of artistic depictions of the Book of Ruth and today we're going to incorporate a few of them into our study.
- iv. Each of these paintings or drawings is itself an interpretation of the text, and I've tried to select works, which highlight episodes of *hesed* from the

story (who remembers what hesed is? *Kindness, loyalty, selfless acts done without expecting anything in return*)

- b. Activity (15 minutes)
  - i. We're going to divide into pairs, and each pair is going to get 1-2 images (depending on numbers)
    1. Images found in Appendix B
  - ii. Study your image(s) to determine why/how this image is a portrayal of hesed (you'll be describing this to the class)
  - iii. Then look up and re-read the verses of the Book of Ruth that correspond with that image.
  - iv. Some images may correspond with more than one set of verses
- c. Activity part 2 (5 minutes)
  - i. Once all groups are done, ask participants to walk around and stand in chronological order based on when their image fits in the narrative
    1. If anyone has mobility issues, they can appoint a proxy to stand in the appropriate place
    2. If their image could apply to more than one scene, ask them to choose one for the purposes of this activity
- d. Sharing (10 minutes)
  - i. Ask each group to share (in order) the verses that correspond to their image, how the image incorporates content from those verses, and how this image is a portrayal of hesed
- e. Wrap up (10 minutes)
  - i. Which image or episode of the story did you find particularly moving and why? Take 2 minutes to jot down the answer to this question in your binder.
  - ii. Invite willing volunteers to share the answers
3. Mussar (00:55-1:15)
  - a. As we bring our study of the book of Ruth to a close, I'd like us to focus our attention on its big idea, *hesed*, through the practice of mussar.
  - b. "Mussar is a Jewish spiritual tradition that offers insight and guidance for living by directing us to pay attention to the impact that our inner traits have on our lives"<sup>9</sup>
  - c. In Alan Morinis' *Every Day Holy Day*, he compiles a variety of Jewish texts, which focus on a particular trait/Jewish value. He brings short Jewish texts about *hesed* (which he translates as loving kindness), which you can find in your handout. Take a few minutes to read through the texts in the handout, then choose whichever text is most meaningful to you. Copy this text onto a blank page in your binder. We will then these texts aloud—even if a text gets read more than once. When you're done copying down your chosen text, put your pen down so I know you're done.
    - i. Texts found in Appendix C

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<sup>9</sup> Morinis, E. Alan., and Micha Berger. *Every Day, Holy Day: 365 Days of Teachings and Practices from the Jewish Tradition of Mussar*. Boston: Trumpeter, 2010.

- d. Before we each share our chosen texts, take a deep breath or two and try to empty your mind of all the external thoughts that constantly run through our heads. This will allow us to listen intently as our community shares what moves us about *hesed*. I encourage you to put the handouts down when you aren't reading and just listen.
  - e. Each person reads their chosen text aloud.
  - f. Return to this page of your binder and write a few sentences about why you chose this text and how you might use it as inspiration to bring more *hesed* to your everyday life.
4. Reflection (1:15-1:30)
- a. Take a moment to look back on your past three reflections. The ones you just wrote; your entry on the capacity of commentary to change our understanding or your own commentary on Ruth; and your first entry on why show *hesed* and how it changes relationships.
  - b. After reading your previous reflections, you can choose one to expand upon or answer one of the following three questions
    - i. One way studying the Book of Ruth has transformed me is...
    - ii. One new thing I learned about Judaism by studying the book of Ruth...
    - iii. One way I will commit to showing more *hesed* to others is....

## Annotated Bibliography

Alter, Robert. *Strong as Death Is Love the Song of Songs, Ruth, Esther, Jonah, and Daniel; a Translation with Commentary*. New York: Norton, 2015.

Although Dr. Robert Alter's translation and commentary does not include all five of the megillot, it has been a valuable resource for the three that he does include in this volume. His translation is poetic where appropriate but also faithful to the *pshat* understanding of the text. The commentary clarifies ambiguous moments in the narrative, provides necessary background information/context when needed, highlights overarching themes, and cross-references between different parts of the text. Prior to each text, he gives a thorough but concise overview of its historical context and subject matter. These overviews are very useful for context/comprehension, and I may incorporate some of his commentary into my parshanut lessons as well.

Bialik, Chaim Nachman, and Y.H Ravnitzky, eds. *Sefer Ha-Aggadah: Mivhar Ha-Aggadot She-ba-Talmud U-va-Midrashim: 6 Parts in 2 Vol*. Tel Aviv: Dēvir, 1973.

Bialik, Hayyim Nahman, and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, eds. *The Book of Legends = Sefer Ha-aggadah: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash*. Trans. William G. Braude. New York: Schocken, 1992.

Sefer ha-aggadah is Bialik and Ravnitzky's monumental compilation of midrashim which they have drawn from a diverse array of sources and organized by topic in order to make the midrashim accessible to those who are not scholars of Rabbinic Judaism. Their anthology includes sections devoted to Ruth and Esther, but their index of Biblical references also gives dozens citations of verses from all five megillot. When compiling each parshanut lesson, I will explore the midrashim that Bialik and Ravnitzky have compiled for each megillah and bring some of these texts to my lessons.

Grant, Lisa and Diane Tickton Schuster. "Teaching Jewish Adults." *The Ultimate Jewish Teacher's Handbook*, ed. Nachama Skolnick Moskowitz. Denver: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 2003.

In their article, Grant and Tickton-Schuster lay out twelve principles of effective adult Jewish learning based on the work of Jane Vella. The principles included in their article which have most strongly influenced my capstone are "sequence and reinforcement," "learning with ideas, feelings, and actions," "immediacy: teaching what is really useful," and "engagement: learning as an active process." I have structured each three-session unit in a way that builds on and reinforces the learning we have done in previous classes. The questions I incorporate encourage participants to engage with the text itself as well as how it makes them feel or inspires them to act. Many of the megillot will be taught in close proximity to the holidays on which we read them. The binders in which students will reflect on each class will ensure that students' learning is both active and reflective. It is also my goal that this course helps meet many of what Grant and Tickton-Schuster label "developmental tasks of Jewish adulthood" including becoming competent, finding peers, participating in community, and making meaning.



Holtz, Barry W. "Teaching the Bible: Building a Conceptual Map." *Textual Knowledge: Teaching the Bible in Theory and in Practice*. New York, NY: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2003. 61-96.

In his book, Dr. Barry Holtz explores various teaching orientations that educators can use when teaching Bible to adult learners. By naming and describing such orientations, Holtz creates a useful framework so that educators can be intentional about how and why they are teaching Tanakh. In structuring my curriculum, I have chosen to use certain "textual orientations" for each of the three lessons in my five units. Lesson One employs a *contextual orientation* (understanding the meaning of the Bible in the context in which it was written) and *comprehension orientation* (understanding the storyline, the characters, the laws, and the pshat meaning of the text). Lesson Two employs a *parshanut orientation* (studying the way that various classical commentators interpret the biblical text) with my own addendum of including modern commentary as well as classical. Lesson Three employs an *ideational orientation* (uncovering the big ideas of the Bible which transcend history and modernity) and *personalization orientation* (seeking to find or create relationship between text and our modern lives).

Meir, Tamar. "Ruth: Midrash and Aggadah." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. 20 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on January 27, 2016) <<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/ruth-midrash-and-aggadah>>

This article provides a wealth of midrashic and other interpretive sources—some of which I incorporate into my *parshanut* lesson. Tamar Meir draws primarily from Ruth Rabba and Ruth Zuta but also incorporates Talmudic sources and other collections of midrashim. Most sources strive to uphold Ruth as a pinnacle of modesty and kindness—in part to reflect positively upon King David's lineage, but also because her noble character and strong values make her a role model for any Jew. The article organizes these midrashim by topic including Ruth's biographical details, her personality and morality, her children, the validity of her conversion, and her name.

Pardes, Ilana. "The Book of Ruth: Idyllic Revisionism." *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992. 98-117.

In this chapter, Dr. Ilana Pardes argues that the book of Ruth is an idyllic revision of the story of Leah and Rachel. Unlike the two matriarchs, Ruth and Naomi do not experience conflict, nor does their narrative rely on their relationship to men. Their relationship is one of love not rivalry or competition. Furthermore, the relationship between Naomi and her son-in-law Boaz, although the two never speak directly to one another, is peaceful and supportive, unlike the relationship between Jacob and Laban. The relationship that Ruth has with Boaz does not harm her relationship with Naomi, and Ruth even allows Naomi to help nurse her child. Ruth's foreign-ness is part of the story until its last chapter, but so is her *hesed*. Pardes closes with a midrash which re-writes *hesed* into the story of Rachel and Leah, and writes that "the antithetical completion of female bonding and initiative turns out to be unexpectedly essential to the prosperity of the House of Israel." (cite page number). In teaching Ruth, I will use this article to highlight the unique relationship between Naomi and Ruth.

**Additional Resources:**

Adler, Rachel. Dr. Samuel Atlas Memorial Lecture, "For These I Weep: A Theology of Lament," in HUC-JIR Chronicle 2006, Issue 68, 16-21.

Berlin, Adele, Marc Zvi. Brettler, and Michael A. Fishbane. *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004.

Brettler, Marc Zvi. *How to Read the Bible*. Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2005.

Eskenazi, Tamara Cohn, and Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky. *Ruth = the Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*.

Eskenazi, Tamara Cohn. "Reading the Bible as a Healing Text." *Healing and the Jewish Imagination: Spiritual and Practical Perspectives on Judaism and Health*. Ed. William Cutter. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2007.

Exum, J. Cheryl. *Song of Songs: A Commentary*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005.

Fishbane, Michael A. *The JPS Bible Commentary: Song of Songs: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2015.

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Kates, Judith A., and Gail Twersky. Reimer. *Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story*. New York: Ballantine, 1994.

Meier, Levi. *Second Chances: Transforming Bitterness to Hope and the Story of Ruth*. Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2005.

Morinis, E. Alan., and Micha Berger. *Every Day, Holy Day: 365 Days of Teachings and Practices from the Jewish Tradition of Mussar*. Boston: Trumpeter, 2010.

Peerless, Shmuel. *To Study and to Teach: The Methodology of Nechama Leibowitz*. Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2004.

Sarna, Nahum M., Chaim Potok, Adele Berlin, Michael V. Fox, and Uriel Simon. *The JPS Bible Commentary: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation: The Five Megillot and Jonah*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999.

## **Appendix A**

### *Commentary on Ruth*

#### Midrash:

ותאמר רות אל תפגעי בי לעזובך לשוב מאחריך מהו אל תפגעי בי? אמרה לה: לא תחטא עלי, לא תסבין פגעיך מגי לעזובך לשוב מאחריך. מכל מקום דעתי להתגייר. אלא מוטב על ידך ולא על ידי אחרת. כיון ששמעה נעמי כך, התחילה סודרת לה הלכות גרים. אמרה לה: בתי אין דרכן של בנות ישראל לילך לבתי תיאטראות ולבתי קרקסאות שלהם. אמרה לה: אל אשר תלכי אלך. אמרה לה: בתי אין דרכן של ישראל לדור בבית שאין שם מזוזה. אמרה לה: באשר תליני אלין. עמך עמי אלו עונשין ואזהרות. ואלהיך אלהי שאר מצות

"And Ruth said, 'Do not urge me to leave you, to turn and not follow after you' (Ruth 1:16)." What does it mean, 'do not urge me'? [Ruth] said to [Naomi], "Do not sin against me, do not turn your misfortunes from me." "To turn and follow after you (ibid)." It has been my intention in every instance to convert, but it is better at your hands than at the hands of another. When Naomi heard this she began to expound to her the laws of converts. She said to her, "My daughter, it is not the custom of daughters of Israel to go to their theaters and their circuses." She replied to her, "Where you go, I will go (ibid)." She said to her, "My daughter, it is not the custom of Israel to dwell in a house that does not have a mezuzah." She replied to her, "Where you lodge I will lodge.(ibid)." "Your people will be my people (ibid)," these are the punishments and the warnings. "And Your God will be my God (ibid)," the other commandments." <sup>10</sup>

#### Medieval:

כי זקנתי מהיות לאיש . שאנשא לו ואוליד בנים ותנשא להם שאינם אסורים לכם ואינכם אסורים להם משום אשת אחיו שלא היה בעולמו שאינה זקוקה ליבם לפי שלא היו למחלון וכליון קדושין בהן שנכריות היו ולא נתגיירו ועכשיו הן באות להתגייר כמו שנאמר כי אתך נשוב לעמך מעתה נהיה לעם אחד

"For I have become too old to marry: that I should marry someone and bear sons, that you should marry them, for they are not forbidden to you and you are not forbidden to them as far as the prohibition against marrying the wife of a brother who is deceased, for she does not require a levirate marriage because Mahlon and Chilion were not halachically married to them because they were gentiles, and had not converted, and now they were coming to convert, as it is stated (verse 10): "[No], but we will return with you to your people." From now on, we will become one people."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ruth Rabah 2:22. Translation adapted from sefaria.org

<sup>11</sup> Rashi on Ruth 1:12. Translation adapted from chabad.org.

Modern:

“The story of Ruth is a story about relationship. How do you put bread on the table when you are poor, when you are a stranger, when you are a widow, when you have no one? The book of Ruth suggests how, and it begins with one person igniting the awareness of life’s possibilities in the other. In chapter 3, Naomi begins to see a possible future. She tells Ruth she needs a man. For Naomi, the only way to make it in the world is to have a husband. Ruth has a different understanding of her situation, but this is not where I want to focus my argument. I would like to take a closer look at Boaz.

When Ruth and Boaz first meet, Ruth is essentially destitute, forced to gather the gleanings of Boaz’s fields. Boaz, however, senses something more in her and discovers her story. When Ruth asks Boaz why he is paying attention to her, Boaz replies:

I have been told of all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and you came to a people that you had not known before. May Adonai reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from Adonai, the God of Israel under whose wings you have sought refuge (Ruth 2:11-12).

This is a very nice sentiment, a very traditional understanding of the relationship between the individual and God. Boaz is offering charity, food, water, and a blessing. But once the harvest is over, the good deed is done, and there is no sign that Boaz intends to do anything more. He will return to his normal routine and the two destitute women will have to rely on what Ruth had gleaned beforehand.

It is Naomi who steps in and counsels Ruth to attach herself to Boaz. And it is on the threshing floor where Ruth and Boaz make their connection. Under the cloak of darkness, Ruth echoes Boaz’s earlier statements but with a difference. She says to him, “Spread your wings over me, for you are a redeemer” (3:9). In essence, she is saying: “Don’t wait for God to reward me and give me shelter [as you did in chapter 2]. You are my redeemer. Spread your wings over me.” Boaz rises to the occasion, and he doesn’t only redeem her by taking responsibility. He marries her. What begins as admiration from afar becomes a matrimonial bond that leads to the birth of Israel’s most famous king, King David.

Surprisingly, God does very little in this story. For the most part, God is little more than hearsay in the Book of Ruth. The people, Boaz, Naomi, and Ruth, bring God into the story through their blessings of each other in their work and actions. And God is, of course, at the very core of these actions. But God becomes a partner only after the human beings in the story have done their work. In the end, the Book of Ruth celebrates the extraordinary achievement of ordinary people who create and recreate relations and possibilities, building the world into one that is suitable for children.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Eskenazi, Tamara Cohn. "Reading the Bible as a Healing Text." *Healing and the Jewish Imagination: Spiritual and Practical Perspectives on Judaism and Health*. Ed. William Cutter. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2007. 90-91.

## **Appendix B**

### *Images of Hesed in the Book of Ruth*



William Blake, 1795, *Naomi entreating Ruth and Orpah to return to the land of Moab* (Ruth 1:14)



Medieval miniature. Unknown artist. From Vatican's collection in Rome. (Ruth 2:8-9)





Jan Victors, 1653, *Boaz Regales Ruth* (Ruth 2:14)



Marc Chagall, 1960, *Ruth Gleaning* (Ruth 2:18-19)





Arsenal Bible (MS 5211, 364v) 13<sup>th</sup> century Acre, (Ruth 2:8-9, 2:14, 3:6-7, 4:9-10)



Louis Hersant, 1822, *Ruth and Boaz* (Ruth 3:9-13)



Simeon Solomon, 1860, *Ruth, Naomi, and Oved* (Ruth 4:16)



## **Appendix C**

### **Mussar texts from *Every Day Holy Day* by Alan Morinis (2010), p.29-35 and p.211-217**

“Eve ended up eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge because the snake fooled her, telling her that they would gain the power of Imagination and that it is the power of Imagination that gives one the God-like power of creating worlds. However this isn’t so. That ability comes from loving-kindness.”—Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe (1914-2005)

“Rabbi Simlai explained: The Torah begins with an act of loving-kindness and ends with an act of loving-kindness, as it says, “God made for Adam and his wife garments of leather and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). It ends with an act of loving-kindness, as it says, “God buried Moses in the valley...” (Deuteronomy 34:6).”—Talmud Sotah, 14a

“Many people do acts of loving-kindness, yet more profound is the personality of loving-kindness. Each of us is capable of acts of benevolence, but someone who is a personality of loving-kindness makes care for others the axis around which his or her life revolves. This person is not content to wait for opportunities to do kindness for others, but seeks out ways to give and care and support, as if his or her life depended on it. For the personality of loving-kindness, it does.

Phrase: My world on selfless caring stands.

Practice: Make a phone call, visit, or send a card every day this week, as an act of loving-kindness.”—Alan Morinis

“A day should not pass without acts of loving-kindness, either with one’s body, money, or soul.”—Rabbi Yeshaiiah Horowitz (1570-1626)

“The cornerstone service to God of Rabbi Nossan Tzvi Finkel [the Alter of Slabodka] was loving-kindness. To him, this meant being careful of another’s honor and dignity, helping others, having one’s heart overflow with kindness, and utilizing every opportunity to benefit others. It meant that older students should learn with younger ones. Above all, it meant that one should greet his fellow with a pleasant countenance, because it makes the other feel good and binds people together in friendship.”—Rabbi Chaim Zaitchik (1905-1989)

“If you make an effort to help everyone you meet, you will feel close to everyone. A stranger is someone you have not yet helped. Doing acts of kindness for everyone, you can fill your world with friends and loved ones.”—Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1892-1953)

“Acts of loving-kindness can be done through personal action as well as with money, they can be given to rich and poor alike, they can be performed for both the living and the dead.”—Talmud, Sukkah 49b

“A person who walks the path of kindness will constantly be striving to give to others and express love. Even if he has achieved much in other areas he still chooses to make his world one of love and generosity. He makes every effort to love every person; he strives to help his fellow in every possible manner—in thought, speech, and deed. He constantly arouses the love that is in his heart.”—Rabbi Shalom Noach Berezovsky (1911-2000)

“Most people are concerned about their own material needs and another person’s spirituality. It should be the other way around: a person is obligated to be concerned with his own spirituality and the material well-being of others. The material needs of my neighbor are my spiritual need.”—Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883)