

Jeremy Rosen | What Has Ruth Got to Do With Sinai | 05.12.21

- [Judi] Hi Wendy, we have gone live 'cause it's just gone-

- Oh, I'm sorry.

- [Judi] It's okay, but we actually have gone live.

- Okay, hi Jeremy, sorry I'm a little bit late.

- I'm sorry. Are you okay? I hear you've-

- No. I'm fine.

- You okay? Oh good. I'm pleased to hear that. How is-

- Too much, too much sun in South Africa, so I had to go, I had to go... That's a problem for all us South Africans, you know? We spend too much sun in South Africa, so then you have issues. So anyway, no, all fine. Procedure done, and I'm absolutely fine, thank you. And I'm back.

- Good. How long are you in town for?

- I'm here for a while.

- Oh, okay.

- I'm actually here until the middle of June and then I'll probably go back to L.A. for my daughter's birthday-

- Right.

- And my birthday. We share... She's the day before me, so.

- Oh nice.

- Yeah.

- June?

- She's the ninth, I'm the 10th.

- [Jeremy] Oh.

- And I can't believe that it's a year since we've last, you know, we were on lockdown in South Africa, when we last... It's incredible.

- Incredible.

- So, we had a fun evening, a fabulous evening actually, all on Zoom. So, so lovely to see you and welcome back everybody. And I'm sorry I'm late and I've kept you waiting. So now, I'm going to hand over to you. Looking forward to today's presentation. Thanks.

- So, hello everybody. Nice to be back again. I hope this is going to go better than my last snuffles when technology took control. And today, I'm going to focus on the Festival of Shavuot, Pentecost, which is due, not this Sunday, but next. And if any of you have access to the Book of Ruth in the Bible, it might help if you want to take it out. If not, and if you're interested in this, I suggest you log on to a website called Sefaria, S-E-F-A-R-I-A, www.sefaria.com. And it has all Hebrew documents in English and Hebrew. And if you log on to Bible, and you go down the list of Bible, you'll come to the Book of Ruth. And that way, you'll be able to follow the actual text that I want to start with.

But before I get there, in the Bible all Shavuot, this festival that comes 50 days after Passover, is a harvest festival. It's mentioned as the play time when we bring the first fruits. It is the wheat festival, the grain harvest, after the barley harvest, and there is nothing more said about it. Now, the genius of the rabbis, after the destruction of the temple, was not to reinvent, but to add an extra layer. Some people were still agricultural, but they added another layer, and gave this festival of Shavuot a different significance. The genius of the rabbis was to take what was a kind of a passive religion of performance in a temple and switch it into something based on study, and the importance of education, self-education.

Now, that meant they put the idea of the Torah at the very summit, but on a personal level, not just on a historical level. And so, Shavuot became the anniversary of giving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. And although the Torah doesn't actually say this, if you calculate according to the calculation, the number of days it took to get from out of Egypt into Sinai and up to the Mount Sinai and the Ten Commandments, it does fit. But then, this raises a whole lot of interesting questions that I'm going to come to in due course. One of the things the rabbis also introduced was that on Shavuot, we read the Book of Ruth. And there is no explanation as to why, of all the books in the Bible, we choose to read the Book of Ruth on this festival of Shavuot. And therefore, I want to start today by zipping through the Book of Ruth to see if we can uncover any clues as to why this should be.

The Book of Ruth starts off by saying, "This takes place during the period when the judges judged," except of course it could equally be in the Hebrew, "the time when the judges were judged." Why? Because after Moses died, Joshua took over. After Joshua died, the 12 tribes split into rival factions, arguing with each other, sometimes fighting with each other. Each tribe had its own judge. Judges were according to tribes, and they could rarely agree on anything.

Nothing's changed since then. Not only so, but the Bible actually says, "In those days," "each person did whatever he felt like doing." There was no authority throughout Israel.

And at this time of the judges being judged, there was a man called Elimelech, who lived in Bethlehem. Elimelech was married to a lovely lady by the name of Naomi, and they had two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. Interesting, the names of those two sons. Mahlon sounds like , sicko, and Chilion sounds about destructive, to destroy. Don't know if that's accidental, or not. But Elimelech is described as, "God's king on earth," so, he seems to be a leader. And there's a famine in the land, and instead of staying to look after his flock, and to try to feed them, look after them, he skips across the river into Transjordan. And in Transjordan, he and Naomi live, they settle down, and then he dies.

Naomi is left with these two sons. They marry two Moabite princesses, and then they die childless. Naomi has heard that there is food back home, and so, she decides to return. And she turns to her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, and she says, "Girls go back. You've got nothing more to expect from me. I'm not going to have any children anymore, so don't bother coming with me. I can't help you, whereas you come from rich Moabite families. Go back there."

A little bit of background, the Bible, and we don't know exactly what came first, but the Bible has a law, the law of Yibbum. And the law of Yibbum is an ancient Middle Eastern law that goes back a long, long way. And what it says essentially is, when a brother dies childless, the widow has to marry the next brother, and establish a new family bearing the name of that first-born child, the Yibbum.

And so, this idea is mentioned when Ruth says, "Look girls, you've got nothing more to expect from me. Even if I were to conceive tonight, are you going to wait until my child, or children are born so you can marry them?" You have this interesting reference to an important biblical law. Anyway, Orpah still says, "I'm going to come with you," but then she changes his mind and goes back home. And after that, Ruth turns around and says, "Naomi, I'm sticking with you. I'm not going anywhere. I'm coming home. Your people are my people. Your God is my God. Your land is my land. Where you die, I will die, and be buried there. I'm coming with you." And so, the two of them come back across the river to Bethlehem.

When they come to Bethlehem, everybody's buzzing around, "Wow, she was the top woman in town, and now look at her. She's a beggar. She's got nothing, living in a hovel." Another biblical law. There's a biblical law, it's mentioned in regard to the harvest, that whenever you have a harvest, the obligation on the landowner is to leave parts of his field, the corners, free for anybody to pick up. And the poor can come behind the reapers, and they can pick up whatever's been dropped, anything left, anything left in the field. And that was the important agricultural charity of those days. And anybody could come there. Remember, as far as they're concerned, Ruth is a Moabitess.

There's no evidence at this moment of any actual citizenship, but there's no problem, she

decides, "I've got to go out into the fields, and gather up grain 'cause we've got no other form of subsistence." She takes the initiative. She goes into the field, and she starts working. This field so happens to belong to a man called Boaz. Boaz comes into the field, he lives out of town, comes in to see how the work's going. Everybody says to him, "Hi Boaz, may God be with you," Boaz says, "God be with you." And he emphasises the idea that he has a good relationship with his workers, his workers respect him, there is, and he uses the word, peace everywhere.

If only that were the case in Israel nowadays. And he says, "Who is that woman?" pointing to Ruth. And the workers say, "Oh, she's only a Moabite woman. She's come here, she's gathering. She came in back with Naomi. She's not much significance." And Boaz goes up to her and he says, "I realise what a special person you are. You've come back with your mother-in-law with nothing, you don't belong in this country. You've come and you've belonging here, and you're working to pick things up for her. This is really special. So, I want you to stay near my men. I'll tell 'em not to molest you," 'cause in those days there was MeToo too. "They won't molest you. They'll leave you alone. And not only that, when they take a break for food and water, you can come and join them for food and water. And not only that, but when you go home at night, I'm going to give you an extra amount of grain to take back to your mother-in-law." What a lovely guy. The text of the Torah here, has already been emphasising this word, *chesed*, kindness. Naomi says to Ruth, "What a kind person you are." Boaz says to Ruth, "What a kind person you are," *chesed*, very important here.

Anyway, Ruth goes back home and says to her mother, when she comes in, her mother says, "My gosh, you've got so much food. Where did you go? What were you doing?" And she says, "Well, I just happened to be at this field of a guy called Boaz." "Oh," she says, "Boaz is a relative of ours. What fantastic news!" And here has another biblical law. Biblical law says that originally the land of Israel was divided up between the tribes, fairly, so that nobody would have a monopoly of territory. Each tribe had its own territory. You could sell within the territory, but if you sold land, territorial land, then the next of kin, or other members of the tribe, could buy it back. They had an obligation to buy it back to keep it in the tribe, and it seems that this is what Naomi had done. She had sold whatever was left from the inheritance of Elimelech, or maybe he sold it before he left, but it needed to be redeemed. And Naomi turns around to Ruth and she says, "Do you know, Boaz, he's our redeemer. He can buy back that land for us, and we'll have something to live off." So she says, "I've got some advice for you." And this advice is very, very strange. Very, very strange. She is implying that Boaz not only has to redeem the land, but he has to marry you to keep the name of the sons going, and the family going, which is strange 'cause the Torah only mentions brothers. Doesn't mention cousins, relatives, or anybody else.

So, this is either an interesting addition, or it's an other variation on the law from behind. But nevertheless, Naomi gives advice that no Jewish mother should give to her daughter. The advice is, put your good clothes on, get yourself all dolled up, put some perfume on, and some nice sweet smelling oil. Go and see where Boaz lies down at night on the threshing floor after a hard day's work, and crawl up to him and get into bed with him, lift the cover up and get into bed with him. So clearly, what she wants is some sort of sexual union, which will turn into a form of

redemption. And she does that. She sneaks in and gets under the blanket. In the middle of the night, Boaz wakes up and Boaz says, "My goodness, what's this? A woman in my bed?" Now, any younger person, I guess, would've jumped at the opportunity, but he was an older mature man. And he said, "Look, what you have done coming here tonight is an even greater act of chesed, of kindness, doing it for your mother 'cause you're coming to me. You could have gone to any young, good, body-building, man. You could have gone to any wealthy, wealthy man, but you came to me, and I accept that as being your loyalty to our traditions, but I can't deal with it this way at the moment because there's another redeemer who is closer than I am. So, wait here. Don't move. In the morning, very early, before anybody else gets up, you'll sneak out back home and go wait for me to sort this out."

And that's what she does. He gives her some more grain to take home to mommy. He goes, to mother-in-law, she comes back, mother-in-law says, "Well, what's your status? Who are you? And she said, "Look, it's all on hold at the moment. I don't have any definite information for you. We're going to have to wait." She says, "Okay, well Boaz is a good man. I can rely on him." The next day, Boaz goes to the city gates, or the town gates. And that's where the courts were, where everybody came in and out and had to be checked. And he gathers 10 men round and he sees this other redeemer, a guy who's anonymous, called peloni almoni, somebody without a name. And he says, "Hey, step in here, young man. You have an obligation as a redeemer to redeem the field of Elimelech. So, I would like you to come and pay for the land back." "Sure" he says, "happy to do that." He says, "But I want you to know if you do that, you've also got to marry Ruth." "Oh," he says, "I'm not so keen on that," as he says, "I don't want to screw up my inheritance."

And the Torah doesn't explain exactly what that means. Does it mean he's got children and he doesn't want to split his estate anymore? Or does it mean maybe that Ruth is a Moabite? And according to the Torah, a Moabite is not supposed to come into the community. The rabbis were very worried about that, incidentally, and they came round to getting a solution to the problem. The original problem was, I don't know if any of you know this from the Bible, but Lot, the guy of Sodom and Gomorrah, he actually survived, with his two daughters, up the hill, even though his wife was burnt to, or turned into a pillar of salt. And up there, he thought the world was all over, and his daughters were worried that nobody would be left.

And so, they got him drunk at night, one after the other, and they conceived from him. And the two children of this conception, this incest if you like, were Ammon and Moab. And so, Ammon and Moab became associated with licentiousness, with corruption, with decadence. And that's why the Torah said, we don't want these kind of people in undermining us. So, how come Ruth was allowed in? "Well," said the rabbis of the Talmud, "very simple. The Torah says, Moabi, a Moabite male, not Moabia, a Moabite female. So, Ruth could come in, it's all legit." "Too bad," said the guys, peloni almoni, "I don't want this." "Okay, said Boaz, "well if you don't want it, then I'm going to take it over, but before we take it over, we've got a strange transaction to undergo. And that transaction is, you've got to take your shoe off."

In those days, taking a shoe off was symbolically releasing myself from the obligation, releasing myself from the obligation to look after this woman appropriately and fairly. Interestingly enough, to this very day, in the ceremony of Yibbum, that is to say, when a man dies and he has to marry the, the next son has to marry his widow to keep the ceremony alive, that is called Yibbum. Yibbum still, theoretically, exists today. In the swath in the Oriental world, where you could have more than one wife, it continued right up until 1948, when coming to Israel they had to give up this oriental idea of having multiple wives. In the Ashkenazi world, 1,000 years ago, Jews were forbidden to have more than one wife. And so, you couldn't carry out this ceremony of Yibbum if you were married. And so, you had to go through a form of symbolic divorce, freeing this woman to marry anybody else. Freeing this woman to marry anybody else involved you giving up your responsibility.

So, the ceremony for giving up responsibility was called Halizah, literally taking off, taking off your shoe. And it involved that symbolism, not only taking off the shoe, but also expressing your disgust at the guy not being prepared to do what's right. And symbolically, that carries on to this very day to those who care about these things. So, this ceremony that the Book of Ruth records, involves him taking his shoe off, handing it over as a sign that the deal was done. This was a time before they had written contracts, or anything like that, but that's what he did. And so finally, Ruth and Boaz get married, and everybody is happy, and the whole town rejoices, and they're so pleased for Naomi. And she conceives, and she has a son. And this son has another son, has a son of his own. And the son of his own had a son of his own. That third son was called Jesse, and his son was David.

So, David is the great-grandson of Ruth, a non-Jewish woman, a Moabitess. And so, the story ends with everybody happy, living happily ever after, and the establishment of a line. It doesn't matter who the origin was, but it's where we've got to now, and where we are today. That essentially is the Book of Ruth. Very four short chapters you can read in about half an hour, or less. But the question then is, why indeed, was this book chosen for Shavuot? And in fact, there are three different explanations.

Explanation one, as I hinted before is, this all takes place during harvest time. Shavuot is the festival of the harvest. And every Jewish festival, Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, they're all associated with nature, with the natural world, the world that we're all a member of no matter what religion, or people we come from. In addition, there is always a national element, the national element, which in a sense is why we are who we are, what kind of rules do we abide by. And so, this records the laws of the Torah, the laws of Yibbum, the laws of charity, the laws of looking after people and taking care, and so, that identifies, if you like, the constitution.

But over and above the constitution, you have the idea of chesed, of kindness. And in the end, what the Torah is saying is, sure, all these things are important. Our background's important, our heritage is important, but most important of all, is being kind to other human beings 'cause if you're not kind to another human being, it doesn't matter what religion you're in, this is not going to help make the world a better place. The rabbis also added a very important idea, and that's

the second part of my lecture today. And that concerns the idea of the revelation on Mount Sinai, and the fact that unlike any other revelation that maybe others have, this, according to the Bible, was a revelation to the whole of the people. Not just to one person, not just to a small section, but before everybody, which is a lovely idea. This is the idea that the famous mediaeval, Spanish philosopher and poet, Yehuda Halevi, in his book, the "Kuzari" says this is what differentiates our religion. Everybody, in a sense, has this direct personal access to Sinai, to God. We don't need to go through intermediaries.

But the fact is that the Torah itself does not anywhere say you have to believe that every single word written in the Torah was given by God to Moses. And that's because although the Torah implies differently that that's what happened, that was the revelation, as with everything in this early biblical tradition, you don't have concepts of, you must believe. That's a very Greek idea which comes later, which I've referred to previously. Basically they're saying, "This is our reality. Our reality is our God, our tradition, our constitution, and this is what matters to us."

The Torah goes over what happened on Mount Sinai several times, with minor variations along the line. Sometimes it's God speaking to Moses directly. We don't know how he directly spoke to him. When it says mouth to mouth, does that mean God had a mouth? When it says speaking, how did God speak? What language did he use? How much did God convey to Moses on Mount Sinai? Mount Sinai, it seems, was only about Moses coming down the mountain with two tablets of stone, but on the other hand, the general opinion, since that time, has been that the whole of our constitution, the whole of our Torah started on Mount Sinai.

And Moses was privy to it all, but how he was privy, what the mechanism of this communication was, was it ESP, was it verbally, was it symbolically, was it intellectually, we're not told. All we're told is that Moses was 40 days and 40 nights up the mountain. Everybody was down the bottom watching it. There'd been pyrotechnics like a volcano. And in one version, the people turn around to Moses and say, "We're too frightened to hear from God directly. Rather, why don't we hear from you? You tell us what." And in others, it seems that the sound was just to Moses and in others it was to the people.

And to make things even more complicated, there are different versions as to what Moses wrote down, and what he didn't write down, and when he wrote down. So, here we are in a situation today where we take this as the anniversary of the Ten Commandments, but in fact we don't even know what the Ten Commandments were because the Hebrew is, the 10 statements, principles. If it would be the Ten Commandments, it would have to be, the Ten Commandments. So, this is not a question of 10 basic rules, it's a question of 10 very broad principles. But if you have a broad principle, you have to clarify what those principles mean. So for example, it's all very well to say, "Thou shalt not kill," but what do you mean by killing? Is it murder? Is it manslaughter? What about self-defense? What are the exceptions? What are the conditions?

So, none of these principles, in themselves, will have been the full detail. And therefore, the tradition developed that what came from Mount Sinai was not just the principles of these 10

carved in stone. And again, we don't know how they were carved in stone, carved by God, whether it was in whatever language it was, whether it was cuneiform, whether it was Sanskrit, which kind of biblical Hebrew script was it because there were earlier scripts before the one we have today, which came from Assyria.

And so, it must be assumed that there was some way of understanding this at the time. And it's understanding this at the time that we call the oral law as well as the written law. So for example, when in the oral law it says, "On the festival of Sukkot, take these four plants, and one of them is the willow, one of them is the date." Then there's a fruit of a thick tree, and we don't know what that is. And then there is a fruit of an ice plant, but what is the fruit? We don't know what it is. Could be a kumquat for all we know. But tradition says it was a citron, it was an etrog, something of that kind. But even then, what do we do with them? Do we make them? Do we put them into the sukkah? Do we wave them around? None of this was written. And therefore, not unlike the idea of, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," it doesn't make sense if you don't have it with some sort of commentary.

You know what happens if a man with no teeth puts out the tooth of somebody with a full mouth of teeth? How'd you get a tooth back? Does he go away scot free, or does he make some sort of fine? And therefore, Sinai's revelation can be understood in many ways. There are people who will turn around and say, look, it didn't happen at that time. It happened much later and it's a compilation of lots of different things that came at different times, from different people, different attitudes. And at some stage it was brought together, but there were different variations, different text. It wasn't all that clear.

And it wasn't until, really in fact, about 2000 years ago, maybe a little bit less than that, that the famous Masoretes, the Masoretic Texts, unified all these variations into one. But nevertheless, you can see that there were traditions going back, going back through to the period of the judges, going back to the time of Moses. How they were formulated, we don't know. And therefore because we can't turn the clock back, there are several ways of looking at what this revelation actually means. One way of looking at it is to say, look, this is an interesting document. It's not a scientific document the way we have nowadays, but it is a document, and we've had this document for thousands of years, in one form or another, and therefore, this is, shall we say, the most valuable text of our tradition.

The other point of view is to say, look, this tradition comes directly from God. After all, just think about it, nobody's produced a better version than the so-called Ten Commandments, than the Ten Commandments. It's survived remarkably well all these years. It's had to deal with all these different cultures, and all these different traditions, and yet it still managed to retain its integrity. And we've still managed to carry on with certain ways of understanding it that may vary from other people's ways, but it's our way, and our cultural heritage. So, another way of looking at it is to say, let's be mystical about it. Let's not be rational about it. Let's imagine that the Torah, in a way, symbolises God talking to us.

Now, whether we believe in God, or don't, that's a different matter. And that is again, an example of where it is left up to us to define what we mean 'cause as I've mentioned before, the first of the Ten Commandments doesn't say you must believe in God. It says, "There is a God." "You want to engage with me? That's up to you." So, you can look at this mystically and take it literally, "This is the word of God." You can take it symbolically. You can say, "This is as if God is speaking to me. I kind of feel the presence of God in this amazing text that has survived for so long, and has become so important to us, and that we value, and validate to this very day." And then of course, you can take a scholarly point of view.

You can analyse it the way you'd analyse Shakespeare. Did Shakespeare write Shakespeare, or did somebody else write Shakespeare? Or did they all contribute to it in different ways? And that is, if you like, the challenge that we all have in so many areas. Life is not black and white. And religion plays an important part in stimulating our imagination, and also stimulating our emotions. And this is why we come back to unite this whole idea of Ruth. Because law is important, but it's not enough. We have the idea, in the Torah, of justice. Justice, the constitution is vitally important, but at the same time we need something called tzedek, doing the right thing.

And we have something called chesed, being kind. And these all, if you like, the spirit of the law as well as the letter of the law, are just as important as each other. And we as individuals, therefore, in a sense, have to face the challenge. We're all different. We have different brains, different emotions, different feelings. We have to find the way that it works for us. I happen to believe that it's very important to have a structure. It's very important to have a constitution. We human beings need structures. But you also know, as I know, doesn't matter whether it's an American constitution, or an Israeli constitution, a British constitution, South African constitution, Australian, whatever it is, a lot of people don't always keep it the way they should. A lot of people, whether they're religious, or not religious, they're constantly making their own decisions about their lives.

So in the end, this is a celebration that is symbolised by one woman. This woman, Ruth, was able to overcome her environmental background, break away from the tradition that she was born into, come and join another one, take an independent view of life, and decide, "What I had there is not as good as what I might get here." She was able to intensify her spiritual life, make these decisions. She chose us rather than we chose them. And so in Judaism, you have this tension between did God choose us, the so-called chosen people idea, or did we choose God?

And I believe that the subtle message of Ruth and Shavuot is that together, we chose God. Now, Shavuot happens to be the least celebrated of our famous festivals. Whether religious or not, Shavuot doesn't mean as much as Pesach, not as much as Sukkot, the other harvest festivals. It's not as significant as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It's not as much fun as Hanukkah and Purim. But really, in a way, in Adir, I think it is so important both because of the idea of nature, the idea of, if you like, ecology, also the idea of the importance of rules and regulations, but above all, the importance of kindness, and human beings trying to be better.

And on that happy note, I will end, and we will turn to question time. So, if I come now to look at my questions, the first one I have...

Q&A and Comments

Ah, thank you, Bonnie Friedman, put up the sefaria. I hope you'll follow that.

Shoshana Shapiro's reminding me it's this coming Sunday night. That's true. I made a mistake in suggesting it was not this Sunday. I'm forgetting what day of the week I am. But yes, it's this coming Sunday night. So, thanks for putting me right.

Q: "Number 3 is in the Torah. Are 3, 3, 3, after Matan Torah?"

A: But as you know, I, you can play around with numbers all the time. And number 3s, and number 7s, and number 40s, many of these recur during the whole of the Torah. And they have mystical significance, and it's up to us as to whether we like the mystical, or numerical.

"There was a feminine disputation with leaders. Names given are just like Bar Kokhba, given name Bar Kokhba. The writer wants to denigrate as David and Abigail's husband." Thank you, I really don't know what you mean by that. My ignorance.

"Pity Ezra didn't follow her example and let non-Jews, but with belief, come to Jerusalem." Well, that's a different issue. Now, you are raising the whole question of conversion. And conversion is a subject that is so massive that I propose to deal with that in one of my upcoming speeches. So, if you don't mind, I'm going to wait until then to give a fuller answer to you.

"Surely mention of the harvest is limiting Shavuot in the Book of Ruth." Yes, I think I mentioned that it's a connection between Shavuot and the Book of Ruth.

"Surely Ruth was rewritten by King David." Who knows? We have no evidence one way, or another. "What a coincidence." Maybe, and you may be right, but there's no evidence that it was. Some people say it was written by Samuel.

Joseph Kahan, "A younger man would've welcomed a woman in his bed. What you thinking? Are you joking?" Yes, yes, I was joking.

Mike Dahan, "When drunk, very difficult to conceive." Still there, Mike. "Would you like to answer question number five?" Dunno what question number five is, Mike Dahan.

"Judah was same with his sons." Oh yes, and in fact, not only did this happen with Judah, you are quite right. I should have mentioned that. If you remember, Judah was the first case of this Yibbum. That is to say, Judah, if you remember, had two sons. He had Er and Onan. And to marry Er, he brought this Canaanite woman, Tamar, in to be his wife. Er died, and so she married Onan. Onan didn't want to have children in his brother's name, and so... This is all

before Sinai, before the Torah. And so, he died. At this moment, there was a third son, Shelah. And Judah said, listen, I don't really want Tamar to try with him. That's bad luck, two gone, three down, so he sent her home. She thought she had to still, according to the law, be married to this younger son. And when she saw she wasn't, she dressed as a prostitute. She waited on the crossroads for Judah to come by. She invited Judah to come in. He came in. And when it came to, after sex, paying her, he said, "I'm sorry, I've run out of cash." She said, "All right, so leave me your stick and your wallet as a kind of a pledge. And then tomorrow, you can bring me my money." So, he did that. He went home. The following day he sent his messenger with a sheep to pay her off, and she wasn't there. Couldn't find her anywhere. Well, few months later, word came back that Tamar was pregnant. He said, "Wow, she must have betrayed! She must have had sex with somebody. Bring her in, and we're going to put her to death." And as they brought her in, she said, "Listen, I am pregnant from whoever owns this wallet, and this stick, and this belt." "Wow!" said Judah, "that's me. My goodness, you are right. I did not do the right thing by you, and therefore I'll take care of you." He took care of her, and the son of those, of that union, was called Perez. There was another son, but one of them was Perez. And interestingly enough, it's Perez who was a great-grandfather of Boaz. So, there was a family link. So, this is the Bible's way of saying, this idea of marrying the brother goes back a long way. It is something that should be based on honesty. It should be based on lots of things, not just going through a legal process. And in fact, that's how the Book of Ruth ends. It ends with a genealogy, starting with Judah and his kids, leading all the way up to Boaz, and from Boaz along to David. So, I'm really glad that you reminded me of that. Thank you very much indeed.

So now, we go on to answer live to Aurelia, "In Haliza, one also spits," yes, I said, to show disgust. I didn't mention spitting, but yes, it's an act of showing that you disapprove of the person for not taking on his responsibility.

Judith, "One of my sons was on for a meeting. They needed a witness to the Haliza, and he acted as the witness. Quite an experience." Yes, it's a strange, weird experience. Thank God, I've never been through it, but nevertheless, it is part of tradition. And there are lots of parts of tradition that may not make sense, but of course, if you go back to, "Fiddler on the Roof," tradition, tradition, there's some value in keeping these traditions. Where it becomes a problem, and where it's difficult for somebody to cope with life, the Talmud found ways out. The trouble is that nowadays too many rabbis don't attempt to find ways out, but that's a different subject for a different time.

Romaine, "There seems to be a popular need for revelation to make religious thoughts stick." Look, what sticks and what doesn't stick is so subjective, but I do believe that revelation has two meanings. Revelation can mean I've revealed you something, and that's all there is. Revelation can also mean I want to start a process. Rather like starting off with the American Constitution and then, making sure that it develops to meet new conditions. And in a way, that was one of the geniuses of Judaism, that we did adapt. We adapted to losing our land, our temples, our structures, and we did reinvent. And we've continued to reinvent to the position of having a state of our own today.

Now, there are many people who say, "Yeah, but you didn't reinvent enough." Okay, well that's a matter of opinion, and we can argue about that.

McGill, says, Norm McGill says that, "Orpah was a loving daughter-in-law, and only when pressed by Naomi did she return to Moab. So, have the idea come that she is bad, ancestor of ancient Israel's future enemies? It seems slanderous to Orpah." Yes, I think this is one of the problems. One of the problems is that later on, rabbis, in the midrash, interpret the text in a way that suits them, in a way that conforms to the way they looked at the world at that particular moment in time. So, they were looking at the world when, by and large, the non-Jewish world was opposed. You might even say, that's not unlike our time where the non-Jewish world is not prepared to accept the idea that Israel may need to defend itself about people who bomb it. And therefore, they were eager to differentiate between those people who stood by the Jews, and those people who didn't stand by the Jews in the same way that they argued that Haman was descended from the tribe of Amalek. We've no evidence that was, but nevertheless it's a midrash. And that's what the rabbis keep on doing. The problem is when you take anything, either out of context, or you don't understand the motive behind it, and therefore it is a very important issue.

Now, Vivian asks,

Q: "Do you have Yizkor on Sahvuot?"

A: And the answer is, depends who you ask. Sadim, by and large, don't have Yizkor. Ashkenazim, by and large, do. And so, many of these things depend entirely on which community you're in. We do have varieties and I think it's a very healthy thing.

Q: "Would you say Boaz represented the concept of kindness, and justice, and other characteristics? You mentioned a parable."

A: Yes, I would. That's exactly what I think he stands for. Wonderful example.

Q: "Are there connections between Ruth and the Book of Job?"

A: Well, there are in some sources. People suggest they were written by the same source, but it's unlikely because the Hebrew of the Book of Job is far more complex, far more sophisticated than the Hebrew of the Book of Ruth. So, the only question you might have is that somebody up above is pulling the strings. I don't see it, but it's an interesting question altogether.

Hi Joe, dear Joe, good to hear from you.

Q: "Where's Mount Sinai?"

A: I haven't got the faintest idea. I haven't the faintest idea where it is. There are all kinds of traditions. There's a monastery on the place in, in Sinai that's called Mount Sinai. We're not certain of the actual roots that came out of Egypt. Which way did they go? How did they go, and where did they go? It seems marginally problematic if you take them crossing the Red Sea.

South route, more like the northern route. But the answer is, I don't know. And in the end, I don't think it matters because I'm not looking at this as a history book. I'm looking at this as the source of the tradition we have today, that I belong to, that I love, that I practise, that means a tremendous amount to me, and I want to pass on to the next generation.

Q: "Do we eat dairy food, do we eat dairy food on Shavuot?"

A: Yes, that's one of the customs that we have, that we do have, but again, this varies from community to community. Some people have dairy food on the first evening and not afterwards. Some on the, not on the first evening and afterwards, some before, some after. There are so many different customs and so many disagreements as to where the custom comes from. One point of view is to say, this is summer harvest food, to eat light food, not heavy food in the hot weather. Another point of view, which I find funny, but nevertheless, I'll tell you, on Mount Sinai, all of a sudden God gave them the Laws of Kashrut, the laws of what is kosher and what is not. And when they heard these laws, they suddenly realised, "Hey, back home, my dishwasher for meat's not going to work for my dishwasher for milk. We can't mix the two, and you don't have kosher plates. So, what can we do? We can only have cheese, or something like that." Well, I mean the funny part of that, of course, is that the laws about what to eat and what not to eat have developed at different times. I'm sure you know, there is this famous statement in the Torah that's associated with Shavuot, which says, "Don't cook a goat in its mother's milk." And this was interpreted to mean, "Don't eat meat and milk together." Now, I'm sure you've heard this joke, but I'll tell it again because I've got a little bit of time to tell a joke.

So, Moses is on Mount Sinai, and God dictates to him, and he says, "Moses, don't boil a kid in the mother's milk." "Ah," says Moses, "I see. So, what you mean is that we shouldn't have meat and milk together unless we wait six hours?" "No, Moses, I didn't say that. I just said, "Don't boil a kid in its mother's milk." "Oh," I said Moses, "I see what you mean. You mean we should have separate dishes for meat and milk?" "No, Moses, I just said. "Oh," says Moses, "Okay, so you mean we've got to have different fridges and dishwashers?" "Oh, all right, Moses," says God, "have it your way." So, you know, the origin of this is really clouded in mystery and each generation comes up with another one, and you choose the explanation that works for you. Some people like one, some people like the other.

Q: Marian Gill, "Is there any archaeological evidence that 3 million people were gathered at Mount Sinai?"

A: No, absolutely no. There's no archaeological evidence and you wouldn't expect to find archaeological evidence after this time. The only thing that might have remained would've been the two tablets, theoretically 'cause stone could have survived, but we haven't found them, and we haven't found any evidence. We haven't found any evidence about this massive migration, how it happened, where it went. We only know that somewhere, at a certain moment in time, there's a group of people that emerged, that have experienced migration, that have a tradition, and have built that tradition step by step into what we have today. How much was revealed to Moses, was it revealed to Moses, was Moses, according to Freud, killed afterwards 'cause he tried to get them to give up all their fun, we don't know. And that's why in a sense, in this sense,

it follows the literary theory that has been common in our day, we just have the text to look at. Do you treat this text as a science book? Do you treat it as a history book, or do you treat it as a documentary, a cultural spiritual document that has inspired us to this very day.

Q: "Do you recommend any authors who address the Book of Ruth?"

A: There are so many brilliant commentaries on the Book of Ruth, I dunno where to begin. The JPS, Jewish Publication Society has a good one. Even in some specs, the ArtScroll, which gives it from a more orthodox point of view. So, there are plenty of books. I don't know where you are, or how to recommend which store to go in and have a look.

Q: "How was Ruth converted? This is the question Ruth asked."

A: There's no record of how she was converted. Maybe in those days it was enough to say, "I accept being a member of the community." After all, the Bible itself, the Torah says, "If a ger, a stranger comes, make him welcome." How do they make him welcome? Only much later on do you have, after the Bible, the difference between a stranger who's coming as a temporary resident, and a stranger who's coming as a convert. The idea of conversion, in a practical way, seems to have come much later. After all, consider King Solomon, he had 700 wives and 300 concubines. There's no record that he converted them. Many of them still remained and worshipped other gods, and yet he was king, he could do it. So, the straight answer is, the ideas of conversion that we have today, essentially, might have started with Ezra, but they go back to Talmudic times.

Thank you, Adele Cohen, for your compliment. I really appreciate that.

Naomi Fromm, "Amazing women moving the time forward." Yeah, I think this is very important. I think there is a feminist element in this, but as my next lecture is going to be about powerful women, I'll deal with it at that time.

"My cousin, Yasmin, was a soldier and was unfortunately killed," oh dear. "And she had to marry his brother, but fortunately she was pregnant so she didn't have to." That, yeah, that was a good way out of it, but what a sad story. I'm so sorry to hear that. I hope she found happiness afterwards.

Q: "Which allowed man to have two wives and 294?"

A: Well, the Yemenites did. Yemenites did, some of the Indians did. I don't have a full list of them, but I know also some of the Persians did. So, it depended where you lived. So, that's, "In 1948?" Well, what I mean is that in 1948, everybody in the swarthy world agreed, "No more." But there were some people at that time who did have multiple wives. So, "Could women have had multiple husbands?" Unfortunately not. That was still a male chauvinist society. And again, this is something that I'm going to deal with in my lecture about powerful women, and women in Judaism, coming up. Don't miss it.

"Finding a way, finding a way is a traditional definition of tikkun olam." That's an excellent point,

yes. The original meaning of tikkun olam, in the Talmud, had nothing to do with making the world a better place. Its role simply was, if there's a problem, if for example, somebody is a half-servant and half-free, and wants to get married, how do we get them out of this, kind of impasse? We've got to make them either one, or the other. We've got to force somebody to release his servant, or to release him from his obligation. Or for example, what happens if a woman, for example, finds something? Is it hers, or is it the husband's? And because of tikkun olam, to encourage women to have some possessions, they changed the law in order to make it more livable, and similarly, being nice to non-Jews in order to have tikkun olam. If you're not nice to them, they won't be nice to you. It did not mean what we have come to mean. In mystical times, in the mystical era, in the 15, 1600s it came to mean something else. It meant to improve the world by being a more religious, spiritual person. And so, tikkun olam is mentioned in the Aleinu prayer, in the prayer that we say in most orthodox traditions, , which is, to put the world right by enthroning God as the ultimate power. It does not mean what we now use it to mean, as make the world a better place. The word for that is, chesed. Chesed is, be nice to people, whoever they are, wherever they come from. And therefore, that's again why the Book of Ruth keeps on emphasising chesed.

Thank you very much, Mida Sukin, for Rabat, for your compliment. I really appreciate it. Thank you, Bob, too.

Q: Jennifer Malvin, "Is there a way to be informed of any upcoming lectures you give?"

A: Ah, Judi's dealing with that. Thank you very much.

Esther Westelman, "You talked, and at this moment Israel for nearly every area in the country." Yes, this is a frightening moment, a frightening moment. I, by nature, I'm in favour of peace. I'm in favour of concessions to peace. I don't see anybody we could negotiate with. I think the world, by and large, is up against us simply because we are so small, simply because antisemitism has persisted. I don't have an answer. All I know is that when two people are fighting for the same house, even if they both have rights, either they come to a peaceful accommodation, or unfortunately, to use an expression from the Talmud, might in this situation only, is right. And I hope that Israel retaliates. I'm sorry to say this. It goes against my nature, but I hope, you can't go on living, my grandchildren can't go on living under the threat of rockets landing on Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Ashkelon, or anywhere else. And I don't care if the rest of the world thinks we're wrong. I think we've got to fight for our survival.

Q: "Is there evidence that Orpah was the mother of Goliath?"

A: There's no evidence, but you rightly point out that is a midrash That is a midrash, which says Orpah was the mother of Goliath. And again, these are fanciful ideas. I love them, they make interesting points, but they're not historical.

"Our prayers for Israel brothers and sisters." Most definitely, most definitely. Let's go on.

"I've done a study that comes from the word, har, and it's connected with Sinai. The conclusion

is that the word, Sinai, in a concept, refers not to a specific mountain, but an area in a region, and the Hebrew text refers to a non-specified mountain in the Sinai region." That's perfectly possible. In fact, there are several mountains that are called different things. Hor Hohar is the mountain, theoretically, where Aaron died, but there's another Hor Hahar in Northern Israel. So, lots of words, lots of towns have multiple names, and that's why it's difficult to know.

Q: "Do you know the Ruth-Orpah paintings? Rembrandt's Ruth and Boaz, quite elderly?"

A: Yes, yes, there's a lot of beautiful Renaissance and post-Renaissance art, which uses biblical themes.

"Abraham served three angels milk and meat on saliva. He served three angels milk and meat." Oh yes, but of course, he served, he waited six hours in between. Didn't say it was the same time. You can explain it any way you like, my dear, but you don't have to take it as history. And besides, you can also say this was before Mount Sinai, so they didn't have those rules. But it is true that within certain communities they claim that Abraham kept every single law that was given on Mount Sinai, probably including sacrificing in the temple, and probably including return stolen property. Don't take it too seriously.

"I was told that milk is important to the body as Torah is to the soul." Well, that's again, a lovely idea. Milk is nourishing. It's the first thing the baby takes, drinks, wisdom in, with its mother's milk. I think that's a lovely metaphor.

"Sorry to bring this news to group. Just heard of relative in Tel Aviv, bombs are falling, and Israelis are freeing safe. Yes, and sadly, this is really worrying, and I don't how it's going to end. I really don't know how to go to end.

"Mount Sinai traditionally. It's a 2,200 metre height. It is in Catherine." Thank you for that information. That's very valuable, and thank you.

Q: "Could the (indistinct) have accepted Ruth's conversion?"

A: Well, definitely not 'cause she wasn't wearing a sheitel, and she didn't have a Shabbas kettle. So, times have changed, thank goodness.

"Moses led strangers and Israelites out of Egypt, but Ezra didn't allow that." No, Ezra was very much interested in people joining, and people becoming, but he felt that if you are going to do that, you had to make sure that they would be supportive of the tradition and not undermine it. And his main direction was directed to the priesthood, not to the ordinary person.

Barbara Levin, "Thanks for the talk."

Jennifer Melvin, "It's not sister of Mary," sorry.

Yeah, thank you, Barry. Nice to hear from you from Glasgow. I miss Glasgow. I miss you.

Q: Aviva Altani, "How do we know that the commandments have been interpreted correctly? Maybe we don't need two sets of dishes and two dishwashers."

A: The straight answer is, we don't know whether it's correct or not. All we know is, this is our tradition. And it depends where you want to fit in. For example, I would not fit in to those Hasidic movements who expect me to wear long peyot, to wear black and white, to wear black suits all the time, white socks, and wear fur hats. I don't think Moses wore a fur hat. I don't think he dressed like a Polish peasant, or a Polish baron. So, it all depends on where you want to fit in. I don't want to fit in with that lot, so I don't have to adopt their customs, and neither do I want to fit in with those who don't keep any customs because I think they go too far in the assimilation way. So, we all choose where we believe. Some women don't cover their hair, religious women. Some religious women put a scarf on their hair. Some religious women put a sheitel on their hair. Some religious women put a sheitel and a hat on, and some people put a sheitel, and a hat, and a scarf on. And some religious just women dress up, like with a hijab, with a full, not with a hijab, with the whole works. Each community, Sephardi, Ashkenazi, Hasidic, non-Hasidic, has its own traditions. And in the end, it's where you want to fit in that counts. Thank you, Aurelia.

"I thank you for keeping Judaism, Jews in Judaism." Yeah, I want to keep Jews in Judaism very much. And it always upsets me when I hear about people, for example, who, if you like, convert and then abandon Judaism afterwards.

Sefaria, we've got that, Shavuot is Sunday night. Yes, that's right. We've gone there. I think, "Important number," I'm just going back down the list again now I think. Where are we? Here we are, getting back.

James, "Sephardic Jews could have multiple," yes, we dealt with that one.

"At this moment is there a bomb shelter?" Yes, sadly, we dealt with that one.

"Sorry to bring this news. Just heard," Yes, that's Michael Hahn.

"Shavuot Sunday night," yes, we've got that. We've got back. So, I think we've going around.

And that being the case, then, thank you very much everybody. I think I've dealt with all the questions, in which case we'll call it a-

- I think you have. Yes, I think, let's have a look. Yes, that looks like you've done all the questions.

- Okay Judi, so thank you very much. And thank you everybody. I'll see you a few weeks time.

- [Judi] Thank you everybody who joined us, and we will see you soon.

- Bye.

- [Judi] Thank you. Bye-bye.