

**Shavuot**  
**Choosing God Back**  
**Naima Hirsch Gelman - Class of 2024**

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When I would sleep over at a friend's house in high school, we would plan out a whole evening of movies and snacks and trade gossip anecdotes in hushed whispers long after parents and younger siblings went to sleep. We would complain about our teachers and concoct theories about the newest character in our favorite TV show, until we finally succumbed to sleep. Staying up all night for a *tikkun leil Shavuot* has a lot of the same features: eating lots of sugary snacks, consuming stories, but perhaps most importantly, a shared intimacy. Just like I used to stay up late with my dearest friends to try to make sense of the world, on Shavuot I stay up late with Torah to try to make sense of the gift God gave me.

Jewish text and traditions teach us that there are many ways to connect to God; my favorite model of studying Torah is but one of them. The opening of Megillat Rut, which we read on Shavuot because of its thematic connections to the holiday, teaches us about another one. After Naomi instructs her daughters-in-law, Rut and Orpah, not to follow her to Canaan, we read:

וַתִּשָּׂנֶה קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכְּינָה עוֹד וַתִּשַׁק עֹרְפָּהּ לְחֻמוֹתֶיהָ וְרוּת דָּבְקָה בָּהּ: (רות א:יד)  
They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung to her (Ruth 1:14).

The word דָּבְקָה, *clung*, may refer to a physical act of clinging to another person, but there's a deeper meaning at play here, based on the other times we see the word appear. In Bereishit, the word דָּבַק has a sexually intimate connotation when a man clings to his wife to become one flesh (Bereishit 2:24). This linguistic connection provides a textual proof for those who read Naomi and Rut's relationship as a queer one,<sup>1</sup> but even if we eschew that reading, the word דָּבַק indicates something new about Rut's choice to stay with her mother-in-law.

The word דָּבַק is also used in the book of Devarim to describe a Godly relationship – telling us that we should relate to God not just by offering sacrifices and prayers, or

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<sup>1</sup> See here: <https://jwa.org/blog/wherever-you-go-i-go-queerness-book-ruth>





Regardless of whether we are born Jewish or not, we must follow Rut's lead and choose God in return. While we may not all have turning points as dramatic as Rut's, we all have faced moments when we need to prove – to ourselves, to our communities, to God – our commitment. Rut's *devekut* to Naomi serves as a reminder that our relationships with other people cannot be separated from our relationships with God. We are connected not only by shared texts and traditions, but by love and care for one another.

So when we gather in our communities on *leil Shavuot* to study and learn and spend time with the Torah, let us remember that our relationships are Torah, too. And as we share food and conversation and board games on long Shabbat afternoons, let us remember that too, is Godly.



Naima Hirsch Gelman is a writer, educator, and life-long student. She is the Rabbinic Fellow at the National Council for Jewish Women, where she creates educational materials about Judaism and reproductive rights. Naima previously served as the Programming Director at the Beis Community in Washington Heights, where she created an inclusive and welcoming home for Jews of varying backgrounds through strategic programming and outreach. She completed an internship at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale and taught college students about Jewish approaches to sexuality at Hunter Hillel. Naima is an editor of *Monologues from the Makom*, a collection of women-written monologues, poems, and creative pieces related to sexuality, body image, gender, and Jewish identity. Her poetry and prose appear in print and online publications. Naima earned her BA from Hunter College in English (Creative Writing) with a minor in Women

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