

Intermarriage, Conversion and Identity
A Tikkun Leil Shavuoth Study Session
Tuesday May 14th 7:30

“Wherever you go I will go . . . Your people are my people; and your God is my God.”

These are the words of the biblical Ruth to her mother-in-law Naomi, which we chant on the holiday of Shavuoth, coming up on the evening of May 14th and into May 15th. Ruth becomes the model of a non-Jewish woman who marries a Jewish man and chooses (in this case after she is widowed) to become Jewish and adopt the rituals, traditions and beliefs of the Jewish people. For this reason, Shavuoth is often chosen as the holiday to complete and celebrate a conversion.

Shavuoth is also a time when the Reform Movement has customarily held its confirmation ceremony for High School teens completing their religious education program. Since Shavuoth celebrates the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people, it has become a time for people who are born and raised as Jews to affirm their heritage as well. There is a sense on Shavuoth that all of us who were at Mt. Sinai, so to speak, “chose” Judaism. So all of us reaffirm that choice every year, whether we were born Jewish or chose it later in life.

With those themes of Shavuoth in mind, we will focus on the study and discussion of intermarriage, conversion, and Jewish identity at our Tikkun study session for Shavuoth this year on Tuesday evening, May 14.

As the Biblical book of Ruth illustrates, it is not new that Jews have fallen in love with others from different religions, countries, and traditions. In America at this time, roughly half of Jews who marry, marry someone who is not Jewish, creating a set of choices for non-Jewish spouses similar to those facing Ruth—convert to Judaism; live beside my Jewish spouse as a supportive presence or an active partner without conversion; continue my own traditions as a parallel path? And what are the experiences of the Jewish partner and his or her identity or that of the family as a whole?

At the Tikkun, we will learn some historical and Jewish background about intermarriage and conversion and then hear from some of our own members who have faced the choices of Ruth and made different (evolving) decisions. We will discuss our experiences and have time for questions and discussion. (If you are interested in sharing your experiences please contact me.) And of course, we will enjoy traditional treats of Shavuoth, blintzes and cheesecake! Please join us!