

WRJ CENTENNIAL



*Devar Torah*

Women's Voices Deepen Our Jewish Legacy

Naomi and Ruth: The Mitzvah of Membership and the Value of Diversity  
The Book of Ruth

During 2013, we celebrate not only the legacy of WRJ's first one hundred years, but also the way WRJ has evolved and remained relevant despite significant changes in demographics and culture. Having so many women who are new to Judaism in our congregations has led to the development of programming that serves not only those who were born Jewish, like Naomi, but also those who have embraced Judaism, like Ruth, and those who are still learning about Judaism. We especially honor those who have not chosen to convert but are nonetheless maintaining Jewish homes and rearing Jewish children. So many of these women are supportive of sisterhood, the temple, and the congregational family.

We have learned from one hundred years of experience that our programming must appeal to members of many ages from diverse backgrounds. WRJ endeavors to create a community of women bound by a sense of identity, friendship, and mutual respect, who work collectively to make a difference in our world, to strengthen and perpetuate Reform Judaism, to increase personal Jewish learning and literacy, to serve the synagogue, and to serve the broader community in which local sisterhoods are located. WRJ seeks to include all women in our congregations, following the model of welcome beautifully portrayed by Naomi.

In the Book of Ruth, we learn the positive effect of Naomi's welcoming Ruth into her family. Ruth embraces a Jewish life because of her nurturing mentor Naomi. Ruth accepts her destiny, becoming the great-grandmother of King David. *L'dor va'dor...* from generation to generation!

These two women, Naomi and Ruth, have different backgrounds yet they each impact the future of Judaism. Imagine how Naomi and Ruth might have founded the WRJ of their day to help them create a supportive Jewish community for their children, their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren.

In 1913, women actually did just that! They created a supportive Reform Jewish community for their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren through Women of Reform Judaism. *L'dor va'dor...* from generation to generation! Naomi and Ruth were the creators of the original sisterhood built on mutual love, respect, and working together. And they expanded their circle so others could experience what they created through their lives together.

WRJ President Lynn Magid Lazar (2009-2013) commented, “Ruth and Naomi shared a special bond that renewed a sense of the divine in both of them. What a gift they gave to one another! As sisterhood women, we understand the value of this kind of relationship as together we strengthen one another and strengthen the Reform Movement. Think about the many women for whom we act as Naomi. Recall the blessings and joys of interacting with these interesting and interested women who share our passion for Judaism. May we continue to welcome, energize, and connect every woman linked to our Reform congregations.”

Many years ago, Dru Greenwood, then URJ Director of Outreach, commented that WRJ women are ‘the Naomi’s of the Movement’. Creating a nurturing and safe environment for women is critical for the future growth of Reform Judaism. Women are natural nurturers, and that is a role sisterhoods can accept and enlarge with ease.

Consider the mission statement of Women of Reform Judaism: *Women of Reform Judaism, an affiliate of the Union for Reform Judaism, is the collective voice and presence of women in congregational life. Stronger together, we enhance the quality and ideas of contemporary Jewish living, to ensure the future of progressive Judaism in North America, Israel and around the world.*

Inspired by Naomi and Ruth, and their counterparts in every generation, we can ensure that all women in our congregations have opportunities to build relationships that nurture them and their families and nourish their Jewish souls.

Let us be deliberate today as guardians of both WRJ and of Reform Judaism and as today’s Naomis and Ruths... reaffirming the WRJ reality that we are always *Stronger Together*. Amen!

*This d'var Torah was written by WRJ executive committee member Cynthia Roosth Wolf for adaptation and use by sisterhoods/women's groups during the 2013 WRJ Centennial year. We are grateful to Cynthia and Michael Wolf and Family for generously sponsoring this Centennial project.*