

SHAVUOS

Payment in Full

She had once been a princess, privileged and pampered all her life, but now Ruth was reduced to scrounging in Boaz's fields for a few stray stalks of barley. When Boaz saw the destitution and poverty of this righteous convert, he told her, "You shall be rewarded in full from Hashem, under whose wings you have come."

What is the meaning of "rewarded in full"?

The commentators explain that the extent of the reward for any deed we do is always in direct proportion to the value we attach to it. If you do a *mitzvah* because they feel obligated to do so. Or if you feel it is worthwhile to take off a little time from your daily schedule and spend it on a visit to the synagogue or a religious ritual. Very little of the soul is invested in such observances. The reward is, therefore, essentially physical in nature, commensurate with the deed. But if your motivation emanates from the depths of your soul, if you are imbued with a burning desire to form an eternal bond with the Creator, then your reward is also eternal and limitless.

When Boaz saw that Ruth, the daughter of the King of Moab, was willing to turn her back on all the riches and glory of her exalted position and pick stray stalks in the field in order to connect with Hashem, he knew that her reward would be limitless and she would receive payment in full.

In this light, we can discern yet another dimension in the connection between Shavuot, the Festival of the Giving of the Torah, and the Book of Ruth, which is read on Shavuot. As we renew our bond with the Creator which was formed at the foot of Mount Sinai, the recollection of Ruth's incredible devotion serves to inspire us rise above the distractions of life and embrace Him with all our hearts and souls.

A pious man stopped for the night in a roadside inn. In the dining room, several rowdy merchants were smoking, playing cards and laughing uproariously at each other's witticisms.

One of the card players caught sight of the pious traveler. "Welcome," he said. "Would you like to join our game?"

"No, thank you," said the pious man. "I don't gamble."

"Then would you like to buy some of my beautiful merchandise?" asked the card player.

"I have no money."

“Well, what if I sell you my share in the world to come?” said the card player with a wink.

“I can only spare a few small coins,” the pious traveler replied.

“Fine, I accept,” said the card player. “It’s a deal.”

That night, the card player tossed and turned but could not fall asleep. What had he done? How could he have sold his share in the world to come for a pittance? Had he indeed fallen to such a low level? He resolved to abandon gambling and turn his life around. In the morning, he would buy back his share in the world to come.

“I’m very sorry,” said the pious traveler the next morning. “I will not sell it back to you for a few small coins. I want payment in full.”

“How much do you want?” asked the former card player.

The pious traveler named an exorbitant sum. The former card player was incensed. They argued back and forth and finally agreed to seek the guidance of a great sage who happened to be staying in the inn at the time.

“I have to agree with the other gentleman,” said the sage to the former card player. “He is not being unfair at all. When he bought your share in the world to come you were an irreverent, dissolute card player, and it really wasn’t worth more than the few small coins he paid for it. But now that you turned over a new leaf and care so much about your share in the world to come, it suddenly has immeasurable value. Why should he sell it to you for a few small coins?”

In our own lives, we all have numerous obligations, priorities and goals which call for our attention. But we must never let the business of everyday life distract us from the ultimate purpose of our existence. Everything we do only has lasting value if it facilitates and enhances our spiritual growth, if it reinforces our bond with the Creator. Only then will we be rewarded both in this world and the next. Only then will we receive payments in full.