

# CARRYING OUR BURDENS, TOGETHER

**Shavuot**, the festival of “weeks,” celebrates the summer harvest, when Jews of ancient times would make a pilgrimage to the temple to show gratitude for their crops. It also commemorates when the Israelites received the Torah on Mount Sinai seven weeks after the exodus from Egypt.

Shavuot brings us the story of Ruth and the middah (Jewish value) of **nosay b'ol im chavayro**, sharing the burden with one's friend.

In Jewish tradition, it's not just a mitzvah to help others; it's also a mitzvah to be helped by others. For many of us, receiving help with our mental health is hard. For starters, we put a cone of silence around mental health, and many of us feel ashamed to speak up. We may feel weak, like we don't deserve help, or like we're a burden for not being able to push through or shake off our struggles. We may think others won't believe us or take us seriously. We may fear judgment. Or we may feel alone.

**In 2020 we saw the number of Americans with mental health struggles jump up to 40 percent. Yes, nearly half of Americans.**

The book of Ruth highlights the special friendship between Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi. After Ruth's husband dies, Naomi decides to return to the land of Canaan. She encourages her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, to return to their own people, as they are not Jewish. Both insist on accompanying her. At the border, Orpah turns back to rejoin her people, but Ruth responds to Naomi's urges to leave by saying:

**"DO NOT URGE ME TO LEAVE YOU, TO TURN BACK AND NOT FOLLOW YOU. FOR WHEREVER YOU GO, I WILL GO; WHEREVER YOU LODGE, I WILL LODGE; YOUR PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE, AND YOUR GOD MY GOD." (RUTH 1:16)**



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Ruth and Naomi are both widows, traveling to a land impoverished, with no easy means to sustain themselves. And yet Ruth's willingness to support a loved one makes her a hero worthy of her own book and Jewish literature. Likewise, Naomi is remembered as someone who is kind, compassionate and supportive of Ruth.

As Ruth takes care of Naomi, the two form a stronger bond. They connect in a way that is meaningful, and the struggles Ruth helps Naomi bear make them feel closer and more fulfilled.

To be able to take on Ruth's role, to be someone who offers support, is both virtuous and noble. But Jewish tradition says it is just as important to be in Naomi's position, someone who is willing to accept help and to allow someone to help them carry their burden.

With this story, Judaism tells us nobody's burden is either too small or too important to receive help.

