

The scene described above is the “Dawn of Man” sequence from Stanley Kubrick’s iconic adaptation of Arthur C. Clarke’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*. This scene has always struck me as a Jungian meditation on the Sinai Revelation of Exodus 19–20—how the notion of a divine revelation of tablets on a mountain became part of the collective human unconscious. In my reading of the scene, the ancestors of human beings experienced the revelation of the monolith in our distant past, and that experience emerged as the Sinai revelation in the literature of Biblical Israel.

I see the “Dawn of Man” scene as a modern aggadah on the central narrative of Shavuot. It testifies to the Sinai Revelation’s continuing hold on our imagination. How we tell and retell this founding narrative also helps us understand how we interpret the human condition and the relationship between the terrestrial and celestial realms.

View the clip at:
www.jtsa.edu/the-revelation-in-sci-fi



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שבועות תש"ף



Ruth’s Torah Matters Now

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Like every Jewish holiday, Shavuot has seasonal and historical components. It celebrates the gifts of Torah and of the spring harvest. Both bounties manifest God’s glory, sustain Israel, and are captured masterfully by our liturgy.

On the first day of Shavuot, we read Exodus 19-20, which describes the revelation at Sinai and the giving of the ten commandments. On the second day, we have the tradition of reading the book of Ruth. Ruth captures both the Torah and harvest themes of the holiday. Set during the barley harvest, the book plays with the tropes of emptiness and fullness and tells a story that carries humans and the land from a state of infertility to fertility. Also, the Rabbis understood Ruth’s pledge to follow Naomi and accept her people and God to be a statement of faith and an act of religious conversion. By committing to Naomi, Ruth the Moabite accepts God’s Torah (Ruth Rabbah 2:22), as Israel did at Sinai.

I have always loved the book of Ruth. I love it for its literary craft and elegance. I also love it for its peculiarities—the fact that God is not an active character in the book and that humans—particularly *female* humans—take center stage. I love it for presenting a hero who, as a female Moabite, is as *Other* as anyone can be in the Torah’s universe.

I have always loved Ruth, but this year, I read Ruth in the context of Shavuot and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and I love it even more. In my reading, Ruth offers a profound Torah that speaks to us now. It is the Torah that comes from human relationships. It is the Torah of human connectedness.

Of all the books in the Bible, Ruth is the most human. God does not speak or act in the book and is mentioned only in passing. Human dialogue is central in Ruth more than in any other biblical book. At its heart, Ruth is a story about human relationships, and more importantly, about human relatedness. Its story shows how when human beings commit to and are kind to one another, bounty ensues.

The most famous moment of human connectedness is Ruth's declaration to Naomi that wherever Naomi goes, Ruth will follow, and that Naomi's people and God will both be Ruth's, too (Ruth 1:16-17).

This certainly is a powerful moment of human commitment and connection. But there are many more in this remarkable book that each provide unique inspiration.

There is the moment when Naomi first leaves Moab with her two widowed daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, and demands that they return to their mothers. Distraught, they both weep and refuse to leave Naomi's side (Ruth 1:8-10).

There is the moment when Naomi again begs Ruth and Orpah to return home to start over again with new husbands. This time, weeping and heartbroken, Orpah kisses her mother-in-law farewell and heads home while Ruth clings to Naomi (Ruth 1:14).

There is the moment when Boaz finds Ruth gleaning in his field and insists that she continue to do so, promising her protection (Ruth 2:8-9) and insisting that she eat and drink among his harvesters (Ruth 2:14).

There is the moment when Ruth returns to Naomi after gleaning in Boaz's field and offers her what she has gleaned as well as a portion of the food that was offered to her (Ruth 2:17-18).

There is the moment when Boaz withholds himself from Ruth in order to approach a more appropriate kinsman to marry her yet promises to marry her should the kinsman refuse (Ruth 3:11-13).

There is the moment that Boaz negotiates with the kinsman on Ruth's behalf (Ruth 4.3-6).

There is the moment when the townspeople witness Boaz's commitment to Ruth and welcome her into his house as if she were one of the biblical foremothers Rachel, Leah, or Tamar (Ruth 4:11-12).

There is the moment when the women of Bethlehem bless Naomi and declare Ruth to be better to her than seven sons (Ruth 4:15).

There is the moment when Naomi places Ruth's child to her breast and fully accepts the child and his mother into her family (Ruth 4:16-17).

There are many other moments of human connectedness that are the substance of Ruth's Torah. These moments reveal how human acts of kindness, loyalty, and love bring blessings. From these acts, great bounty is reaped.

This Torah, Ruth's Torah, is so evident and vital now during the pandemic. In this strange reality of "virtual" or "remote" connection (a reality that I'm currently living as I write), we value human connectedness even more and long for a world when we can be together and, most importantly, a world where we can cling like Ruth to those we love and do myriad acts of kindness.

When that moment comes and we can return to the world rich with human connection, we will live out Ruth's Torah fully and reap great bounty from it.

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דבר אחר | A Different Perspective



The Revelation in Sci-Fi

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As the sun rises over a craggy, barren landscape, the first rays of light penetrate the cavernous sleeping quarters of a family of primates. Off in the distance arise the sounds of an other worldly choir, an inchoate chorus. Agitated, the apes approach the entrance of their cave, situated on the side of a desert mountain, and find a mysterious object—a thin, pitch-black, rectangular monolith—standing erect, singing to them. At first one ape, then two, and then all of them approach the monolith, touch its smooth, black surface, and are in turn touched by it. These primates—our ancestors—receive the gift of cognition, enabling them to evolve into *Homo sapiens* who transcend their earthly confines and literally ascend into the heavens aboard human-engineered space vehicles.