

# *Women's League for Conservative Judaism*

## **Megillat Ruth: Coming Home**

This unit on house/home is taken from previous Women's League materials. It contains many exercises and activities that offer a variety of modules through which to experience and engage with the topic of home.

- Study: *Megillat Ruth*
- Ritual expression: *birkat habayit*
- Culture: music, film
- Social action: nursing home activity
- Personal/Jewish identity: Judaica in the home
- CJA (Creative Jewish Arts): Creating a *chamsa*

Modules provide resources, goals and recommended discussion questions or activities. Feel free to adapt and make the project/s your own.

### **BACKGROUND: What is a Birkat HaBayit/House Blessing?**

For background information on the idea of blessing a house in Judaism, this article is a great jumping off point: <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/southern-and-jewish/saying-goodbye-to-the-house-that-became-a-home/>

### **ACTIVITY 1 “Home” in Megillat Ruth**

**Goal:** Explore the concept of home in Megillat Ruth. Through the creation of a personal birkat habayit, each participant will consider what it means for her house to be blessed, and when a house can be considered a home. All of the sections and activities are optional; choose those that will be impactful for your community.

### **Resources: The Concept of Home in Megillat Ruth**

#### **Ruth 1:16-18**

**16** And Ruth said: 'Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God;

**17** Where you die, I will die, and there I will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts me from you.

**18** And when she saw that she was determined she was to go with her, she ceased arguing with her.

#### **Ruth 2: 8-14**

**8** Then Boaz said to Ruth: 'Listen to me, daughter. Do not glean in another field; don't go elsewhere, but stay here close to my girls. . . .

**10** Then she prostrated herself with her face to the ground, and said to him: 'Why are you so kind to single me out, when I am a foreigner?'

11 And Boaz said in reply: 'It have been told all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, and how you left your father and your mother, and the land of your birth and came to a people you had not known before.

12 May the LORD reward your deeds. May you have full recompense from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings thou have sought refuge.

14 And Boaz said to her at meal-time: 'Come here and partake of the meal, and dip your morsel in vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers; he handed her roasted grain and she eat and was satisfied, and had some left over.

### **Ruth 4:10-12**

10 I am also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate, that the name of the deceased may not disappear from among his kinsmen and from the gate of his home town. You are witnesses today.

11 And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said: 'We are. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel! Prosper in Ephrathah and perpetuate your name in Bethlehem.'

12 and let your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the LORD will give you by this young woman.

### **Questions:**

1. Ruth is an outsider who finds her place over the course of her story. Looking at the text, when is Ruth home?
2. Looking at Ruth's interactions with Boaz, in what ways does he make her feel at home?
3. Consider the blessing given to Boaz and Ruth by the elders: What are they hoping for? Are these blessings you would want for your own family, why or why not?

### **Activity 2 Arts in Action - Creating a chamsa**

#### *Materials*

Chamsaot can be made with wooden or glass templates and paint, or with card stock and tissue paper to create a stained glass effect.

Participants create their own chamsaot, using one of the two traditional texts below, and/or a passage of their choosing. While you work, consider the following questions as a group:

1. What would you consider a "Jewish" blessing for a house?
2. What would you consider a "secular" blessing for a house?
3. What are the blessings we hope to bring into our homes and families?

### **Activity 3 Creative Writing - Building our own house rituals**

While sometimes the traditional words of Jewish text are enough, often they may fail to capture our individual experiences in the ways we might have hoped. In these instances, Judaism offers us the space to create our own language, to be used alongside or in place of traditional texts. Ritualwell.org is a great resource for those looking beyond the siddur. Two examples of unique house blessings found on Ritualwell are <https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/blessings-new-home> and <https://ritualwell.org/ritual/chanukat-bayit-%E2%80%94-housewarming>. Additionally, Rabbi David Lerner of Temple Emunah, Lexington, MA has created a *Hanukat HaBayit* (home dedication) for interfaith couples, which can be found here: <https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/story/hanukkat-habayit-ceremony-interfaith-couple>

### Activity 3:1

Using these offerings and the guiding questions below, participants create their own home blessings or rituals, which may be used to decorate a chamsa, acknowledge a move, rededicate a family to shared experiences within their home, or recognize other moments of transition and renewal.

1. What do we need to feel blessed and secure in our home?
2. What do we need to feel blessed and secure in our family?
3. What are some rituals and traditions we hope to enact as residents of our shared space?
4. What are the blessings we hope to bring into our homes and/or families?

### Activity 3:2 Blessing a Home through Music

Renowned Jewish musician Basya Schechter has set the traditional Jewish house blessing to music:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmGxg7WS0\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmGxg7WS0_Q)

1. Does this composition resonate with the group?
2. What feelings does it bring up? How can we use music to bless our living spaces?
3. Which other songs (Jewish or secular) might we use to create a safe and sacred space within our homes?

\*You might want to create a playlist of songs of safety and security from this session to be shared with the group.

### Activity 4 Birkat HaBayit Ritual

Traditional Birkat HaBayit text:

Let no sadness come through this gate  
Let no trouble come to this dwelling  
Let no fear come through this door  
Let no conflict be in this place  
Let this home be filled with blessing and peace  
Through Hokhma (wisdom) is a house built; And  
with Binah (understanding) it is established  
And with Da'at (knowledge) are its chambers  
filled with all precious and pleasant riches  
*Proverbs 24:3-4*

בְּזֶה הַשַּׁעַר לֹא יָבֹא צָעַר  
בְּזֹאת הַדִּירָה לֹא תָבֹא צָרָה  
בְּזֹאת הַדְּלֵת לֹא תָבֹא בְּהִלָּה  
בְּזֹאת הַמַּחְלָקָה לֹא תָבֹא מַחְלֹקֶת  
בְּזֹאת הַמַּחְלָקָה לֹא תָבֹא מַחְלֹקֶת  
בְּחִכְמָה יִבְנֶה בַּיִת וּבִתְבוּנָה יִתְכַוֵּן  
וּבְדַעַת חֲדָרָיו יִמְלֵאוּ כָּל־הוֹן יִקָּר וְיִנְעִים

### Activity 5 From Wo-Flix Film Series, Mishpachah: The Modern Jewish Family from BookMarks <http://wlcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Wo-flix1.pdf>

**Goals:** This activity will explore how “home” and “family” are intertwined. Through this film series of diverse families – each addressing different issues – explore how relationships within the family affect the character of home.

1. How else might we think about the concept of home?
2. What factors influence whether or not a house (bayit) is blessed?

**Ordinary People:** The accidental death of a son reveals the tissue-thin façade of a seemingly perfect

family.

***The Wedding Banquet.*** To satisfy his nagging parents, a gay landlord and a female tenant agree to a marriage of convenience, but his parents arrive to visit and things get out of hand.

***Brighton Beach Memoirs:*** A young teenage Jewish boy goes through the hardships of puberty, sexual fantasy and living the life of a poor boy in a crowded house.

### **Activity 6 Social Action project from The Women's League Hiddur Mitzvah Project**

[http://www.wlcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/hiddur\\_mitzvah\\_rosh\\_hashana.pdf](http://www.wlcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/hiddur_mitzvah_rosh_hashana.pdf)

#### **Honey Cakes for Seniors**

**Goal:** Enhance the celebration of Rosh Hashanah in senior residences, home now for so many members' families.

### **Activity 7 Jewish identity: From Hiddur Mitzvah Project**

<http://www.wlcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/CHANUKKAH.pdf>

**Goal:** Examines the physical surroundings of a home, asking what makes a home "Jewish"?

**Words of Hiddur Mitzvah: Dr. Ron Wolfson** *"When I am invited to a synagogue as a scholar-in-residence, it is not unusual for me to spend time in someone's home – for Shabbat dinner or on Saturday night for Havdalah and a reception. The cultural anthropologist in me cannot resist the temptation of looking around for signs revealing the "Jewishness" of the house. I turn into a lookey-loo, making mental notes of what I see....(cont)"*

#### **Activity 7:1 My Mother's Candlesticks**

Members bring in Jewish artifacts, ritual objects and family memorabilia, and discuss how the object contributes to a home's Jewish character?

#### **Activity 7:2: What Makes This House Jewish? Personal Home Inventory**

Members first inventory anything Jewish in their homes: books, artwork, ritual objects; table and kitchen ware; knick knacks, etc. At the meeting people compare inventories.