THREE ELEMENTS OF JEWISH CONNECTION

Three major ways of connecting to Judaism are through personal attachment, a spiritual connection to Judaism as a way to seek/worship God and attachment to the Jewish people (community) as a whole. These connections may be made in each of the Faith Stages, to a greater or lesser extent.

RELATIONAL: Becoming attached to a Jewish partner, friend, family, role model. This person(s) becomes a means of increasing admiration for, and understanding of, Judaism. If the relationship fails or is seen as negative, the connection may end. If the relationship remains strong and supportive, the connection has the potential to draw the non Jew closer to Judaism.

Ruth to Naomi: “Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you.” Ruth 1:16

PEOPLEHOOD: Beginning to see Jews as a community--one whose boundaries extend over time and geography. The Jewish family illustrates, in microcosm, the wider relationship with all of Israel. The emotional, religious and social bond of the family extends to Jews everywhere. The individual has attachment and responsibility to the whole.

Ruth: “your people shall be my people....”

GOD/FAITH/ULTIMATE MEANING: There is a recognition and valuing of the unique covenant between God and Israel. The unique concept of mitzvot is appreciated as equally essential to faith and worship in a relationship with God. Realization that Judaism’s covenant with God is a unique, desirable and fulfilling spiritual connection.

Ruth: “your God, my God.”
God/Differentiation: This God of Naomi’s has not been kind to her—Why? 
Naomi says, when she and Ruth are greeted by the women of Bethlehem, “Call me Mara (bitterness) for Shaddai has made my lot very bitter. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. How can you call me Naomi when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, when Shaddai has brought misfortune on me?”
Ruth must labor long to provide food. She is painfully grateful for the kindness of Boaz. Is this a just God that has brought them to such poverty and despair?
In Moab, if one god didn’t help you, you could sacrifice to another.

Relational, Peoplehood, God/Practicing:
During her years in Moab, Ruth practices her Jewish identity by learning and living a Jewish way of life. Naomi’s instruction and guidance almost certainly continue on their journey from Moab to Bethlehem. In Bethlehem Ruth demonstrates the highest standards and practices of a devout Jewish female in all 3 elements of Jewish identity because of her immersion in Jewish religion, custom and culture.
Her attachment for and loyalty to Naomi survives all the hardships they endure.

Boaz: “I have been told of all that you did for your mother in law after the death of your husband. 
(Personal)

“How you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth and came to a people you had not known before” (Peoplehood)

“May the Lord reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge!” (God)

Relational/Mutuality:
Ruth binds herself permanently, and now with open eyes, to Judaism by again establishing a Jewish household with Boaz and blessing Naomi with a grandson to blunt the loss of her two sons and to whom she becomes a foster mother.

Peoplehood/Mutuality:
By her actions, she supports Judaism’s custom of levirate marriage. She will carry on the line of her first husband, “that the name of the deceased may not disappear from among his kinsman....” The elders and people of Bethlehem offer their acceptance and blessing to Ruth, “All the people at the gate and the elders answered, ‘May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel! Prosper in Ephrathah and perpetuate your name in Bethlehem!’”

God (Ultimate Meaning)/Mutuality:
Ruth and God are partners in the future of the Covenant. As Ruth is blessed by God with a son, she insures the line of the Messiah through her great grandson, David.
Ruth has achieved interdependence with Naomi and with Israel and found shelter with their God.