

MAMA ROCHEL

Posted by 7yipol - 29 Oct 2009 13:10

How could we not take this opportunity to talk to, and about Mama Rochel?

This piece was published in Hamodia newspaper years ago. Touched me deeply and is still able to bring me to tears:

A SILVER LINIING

The chains rattle dully, creating a macabre rhythm of their own as my feet plod, one after another in a state of zombie-like automation. How long have I been doing this? Hours and days have blended into a nightmarish, all encompassing state of forever; beginning-less and endless. An eternity of right foot forward, left foot follow - right, left, right, left, right, left. Only an occasional break in the slow, monotonous, never ending trek as another sister falls silently in a graceless heap, a miniscule smile of relief on the edge of her clenched mouth - almost hidden in the lines and creases etched into her worn and exhausted features.

Grace and beauty have no place here on the road to Gehennim. They belong locked away securely in treasure chests of forgotten memories. Back when young mothers and hopeful maidens could look at life and laugh with abandon at the golden daffodils nodding merrily in spring breezes and at plump, cherubic babies placidly gurgling along with the running streams.

But such lives are gone forever and to let such memories surface in a place like this, is like inviting a beautiful young girl into the home of an ugly, embittered old woman for the sole purpose of taunting and tormenting about a life never to be recaptured.

They've unlocked the manacles encircling my sister's ankles now and the march continues; right, left, right, left. Her emaciated form lies abandoned beside the road as we pass her in silence. Hers was not the first and many more will follow before we reach our new "homes".

What an irony in terms that word "home". For me, home will always be the two small rooms where my husband brought me as a young bride and where my three beloved babies were

born. A grapevine wove her arms around the walls in a comforting embrace and wine for Kiddush come from her bounty of luscious

clusters. A fig tree stood guard in the courtyard and when the summer sun shone

down in full glory, we would sit under her outstretched boughs, eating her fruit

and drinking pure, refreshing water from the brook which flowed by the village.

We were always filled with gratitude for the privilege of having a true Torah home here in Eretz Yisrael.

Three times a year we would lovingly close the door to our humble abode and joyfully parade - along with hundreds of our friends and neighbors - towards Yerushalayim. The fires from the karbanos were a beacon of light urging us on. What joy accompanied us on those marches! Men would play lively tunes on their lutes and horns, while others would dance and sing songs praising Hashem and all his creations. When we would finally reach Yerushalayim, a sense of suppressed excitement permeated the cobblestoned streets, as thousands converged on the city; bringing Karbanos, visiting the Sanhedrin and preparing for the holiday.

Yes; we were the honored guests invited into Hashems home for these holy days, and we conscientiously behaved as a privileged guest ought. When the holiday would too swiftly pass and the time would arrive for our return journey, we would beseech Hashem to return with us to our homes - to dwell with us as a most beloved and honored permanent guest.

But no more. They destroyed our home by fire. They set alight our grapevine and forced me to watch in a state of numb horror as the fire brought down our dreams with it's fiery embrace. My husband was a sofer, and I tugged at my chains and rushed towards the flames in a hopeless attempt to save the Sefer Torah which I knew to be open on the wooden table, awaiting completion. How fitting that the last he had written was the parshah of the tochacha.

Not only our home and those of my neighbors were razed. The rivers ran red with the blood of our husbands, children and mothers. Also Hashem's house - and dreams - was consumed by their greedy flames. The carnage was total, as they ravaged and murdered Yerushalayim's children; forever stripping the city of her maidenly innocence and beauty.

Now they promise us new homes when (if) we eventually stop walking. They speak of the beautiful Roman architecture, the bath-houses, fountains, Coliseums and statues. They tell of the “glory of the Roman Empire”, with its cultured people and philosophers, its poets and musicians.

They promised homes are to be in the bath houses, stoking the fires of the steaming baths, or flimsy shacks while building their mansions with backbreaking labor. They tell of living in the fields like animals while we'll harvest their wheat and plant their orchards - fed meager rations of stale bread and putrid water. And for those of us who won't “appreciate” their “generosity”, they speak of fighting lions in their arenas' and becoming playthings for their sadistic masters.

How am I to continue? For what should I push myself along this death march? The vision of my future does not spur me on; only makes my meager bundles feel lead-like and the chains on my ankles overwhelmingly heavy. I cannot continue. Without a dream for tomorrow I cannot muster the strength to keep moving. The merest glimpse of silver lining peeking out from behind the storm clouds would help me believe that the sun will yet shine - eventually - even if not tomorrow.

Finally; a rest stop! We try to huddle under the shade of a lone tree which stands as a sentry in a landscape devoid of water or flora, or rest our weary backs against the wall of a small stone structure nearby. Others simply collapse where they stand, resting their heads on the rocks and stones. No one has trouble falling instantly into deep, dreamless slumber, despite our bloated stomachs and empty water pouches.

I too am about to drift off into a blessed state of blissful unconscious when a low moaning breaks through the silence. A heart rending wail, emanating from the depth of the soul and piercing the heavens above is heard. I lie, paralyzed by the myriad levels of suffering and pain contained within that single cry.

Tears are something I have not seen for many a day. The wellsprings have long since dried up for my sisters and me; we have long passed our saturation point of suffering. Our personal purgatories are buried within our bottomless hearts, in an abyss too deep for mere tears to penetrate.

I close my eyes and let the cry wash over me in its totality. Emanating from the small, humble tomb beside me, it seems to span the universe; reaching beyond time, place and human existence. Slowly, some of my grief and despair begins to lift. The feeling of unbearable hopelessness and abandonment seems to dissipate a little. It's as if some of the burden has been gently lifted from my stooped shoulders and placed on those of one much stronger and better than I.

I have found my silver lining. However small it may seem, and however long the clouds will yet reign, I again believe that there will be a tomorrow. Mama Rochel has comforted me with Hashems promise for the future. In a distant time yet to come, the maidens will once again laugh as they watch the flowers growing in the cracks of an ancient roman road, and young mothers will bathe their babes in streams which once again flow with pure crystal water.

As we wearily rise and continue our march into exile, I can faintly hear the golden tinkle of Rochels laughter, as she softly plucks at the strings of her lyre; preparing a welcoming song for the eventual return of her children to their real homes - and Hashem to His.

© Michelle Borinstein

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Re: MAMA ROCHEL

Posted by the.guard - 29 Oct 2009 22:34

Who's this Michelle Borinstein? She writes good! (Gave me the chills)...

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Re: MAMA ROCHEL

Posted by 7yipol - 29 Oct 2009 22:39

[guardureyes wrote on 29 Oct 2009 22:34:](#)

Who's this Michelle Borinstein? She writes good! (Gave me the chills)...

Writes *well* Guard, writes *well*

We'd better ask Dov to call Ms. Mayefsky his Englissh teacher.

Yeh, I really like her stuff!

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Re: MAMA ROCHEL

Posted by yechidah - 02 Nov 2009 20:44

feels real.

like she was there.

makes you feel like you were there

both in the parade towards Yerusholayim

and in the death march

there were many of them before 1944

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