

The Daily Portion - Sivan Rahav Meir

Righteous Women and Redemption: Then and Now

Translation by Yehoshua Siskin

Rachel Goldberg-Polin, the mother of Hersh who was taken hostage, was chosen this week by Time Magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world. I have personally felt this to be true for a long time. She influences me enormously and I quote her regularly in my lectures.

In Israel she is less well-known, but outside of Israel - wow. Rachel spoke at the United Nations and with Biden and at a rally in Washington DC, where 300,000 gathered in support of Israel. She is interviewed non-stop, appears on podcasts, and is invited to many different events abroad, for English speakers.

When we met, she showed me a video on her cell phone that she had received that morning. It showed girls in Chicago giving tzedaka for “Hersh ben Chana Pearl” (Rachel’s Hebrew name). “This gave me the strength to get out of bed this morning”, she said. Girls, coins for tzedaka, Chicago, Hersh. She got up and marked on her lapel the number of days of his captivity, as is

her custom each morning, and went out to meet another day.

Rachel relates how as a young woman she chose to return to her heritage, became religious and made Aliyah. She appeals to the world’s sense of justice and morality and to our own Jewish values, awakening hidden sparks of our identity. When she shouts “Bring them home now”, she is not only speaking of the hostages but of all the distant members of our nation in the Diaspora who hear her and are reminded of who they are and are thus inspired to return home.

On the eve of Pesach, the Festival of Freedom, we recall our sages’ dictum that “In the merit of righteous women we were redeemed from Egypt.” The women in that generation knew how to keep their faith in the midst of hardship and to demand a better life. In the merit of such righteous women, we too will be redeemed.

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