

Rebecca Hardin

Rifka bat Itzchak

Passed away May 29, 2001

Sivan 7 5761

Rebecca Hardin left us on the second day of Shavuot. One of the customs on this holiday, which tradition says is the anniversary of the day that the Torah was given on Mount Sinai, is to read the Book of Ruth. There are various reasons why the rabbis established this practice; the connection with the harvest, the acceptance of the covenant by Ruth, and the lineage of King David who according to tradition died on Shavuot.

One of the main themes of Megillat Ruth is *chesed* or loving-kindness. In Midrash Ruth Rabbah, Rabbi Zeira said “ The Scroll of Ruth teaches us nothing of the laws... of what is prohibited, or what is permitted. Why then was it written?

To teach you how great the reward of those who do deeds of loving-kindness.

In Megillat Ruth we read of the concern for the stranger and the widow, of strong family ties and feelings of obligation towards relatives. The word *chesed* appears three times in the megillah, and each time it is connected with a blessing from God.

Loving-kindness stands at the centre of the Book of Ruth.

Loving-kindness also stood in the centre of the life of Rebecca Hardin.

It is a trait she inherited from her parents and a trait she exhibited towards her husband and passed on to her children. She also mirrored the determination of Ruth who followed her mother-in-law Naomi in to a new land and helped create a dynasty. Rebecca Hardin was an independent woman who played a prominent role in her family's life and together with her husband also contributed to the welfare of the new state of Israel.

Rebecca Zaslow was born in Saskatchewan to parents who found freedom in Canada from the oppression against Jews in Russia. While she was still a child her parents moved to Edmonton where they operated a grocery store in the north end of the city. As part of the extended Hardin Rodnunsky Satanove families, the Zaslows immediately became active in the religious, social and educational life of the small but vibrant Edmonton Jewish community. Her parents instilled in her the importance of showing kindness and generosity to others. Only later in life did she discover one of the ways her parents practiced this mitzvah. She learned that many of the people who attended their funerals were from families who they had helped, by extending credit for food during hard times in the depression.

After attending both Jewish and public schools Rebecca attended business college where she studied and even won prizes as she learned the skills that would serve her so well in the life that awaited her. She is remembered as someone who was ambitious, excelling in everything she tried. To those who called her a close friend, she was a friend for life, through both good and bad times.

She knew Isidore Hardin, as a cousin and a fellow participant at HRS gatherings but their relationship grew closer, they fell in love, and were married in October 1943 following Issy's graduation from medical school. Their first months together were spent in Calgary where he was based out of the Colonel Belcher Hospital serving as an army doctor on troop trains. Following the war he set up his first practice in the small town of Oyen near the Alberta Saskatchewan border.

Their arrival in Oyen had a double impact on the community as Issy was not only the town doctor but Rebecca became the town piano teacher. She had won honors as a piano student and used her skills to instill the love of music in the children of area farmers and merchants. While they loved the community and the community loved them they wanted a Jewish life for their family that was starting to grow with the births of Marilyn and Sharon.

Issy had also discovered his interest in Dermatology, so the family moved first to Kansas City and then to Philadelphia where Dr. Hardin studied his specialty. The family lived in a small walk up apartment in a Jewish section of the city where once again they could take part in the religious and cultural traditions of our faith, but one thing Rebecca would not allow was having a child born in the United States. She had the foresight to recognize that a US born son could be subject to an American military draft and so less than two weeks before the scheduled arrival date of her third child, the family headed out on a cross continent car trip and within days after their arrival back in Edmonton, Barry was born. Then the car was loaded up with the extra addition and they returned to Philadelphia where Issy completed his residency.

It must have been a joyous time when the family returned to Edmonton permanently and Dr. Hardin opened up his practice. A family home was purchased close to the new Talmud Torah in Glenora and soon a fourth child, Philip, arrived.

The home was filled with music as Becky continued to play piano together with each of her children. It was a home open and welcome to not only her friends but to those of her children who shared in the warmth that she showed to everyone. Rebecca loved to nosh and there was always ice cream and bowls of candies in the house, not just for guests but for her too.

Rebecca was a consummate manager, not only handling a home and four children but literally running the office for her husband. They were a perfect team operating as a unit as together they looked after their patients. She operated the office with an efficiency admired by all.

Don't think for a minute however that her family suffered because of her involvement with her husband's practice. Education was of prime importance. When the new Hebrew School was being built in the 50's the Hardins were among the most generous supporters. Every one of the children attended Talmud Torah and then went on to complete high school and university. They grew up in a home where the laws of Judaism were respected and observed. They also learned the mitzvah of "*Kaved et avecha v'et ameecha*", honor your father and your mother, as they witnessed the devotion she had towards both her parents and her in-laws.

Rebecca will be forever remembered for her generosity. She was always ready to help anyone, family, friend or patient when they had a problem. She kept in close contact with family in Israel, giving assistance to the branch of her family who chose to be pioneers in the Jewish homeland.

Rebecca had a deep love and devotion for Israel. Her career prevented her from attending many of the meetings that Pioneer Women or ORT scheduled but this did not prevent her from being a generous supporter of the work these organizations do in Israel. Her devotion for Israel was intense. Rebecca and Issy visited Israel on several occasions. The only drawback for her was the distance, as Rebecca was never able to overcome her fear of flying.

On their first visit in 1957 they flew on separate airplanes as she feared a plane crash would mean that her children would grow up without parents. She was talked out of this fear at other times including the 1965 visit with Barry and Phillip but even in 1994 when the children gave their parents the fiftieth wedding anniversary gift of a trip to Israel, she preferred a long steamship voyage from New York to the shorter plane trip. Fortunately they were able to return home on the more comfortable QE II.

A love of Israel has been instilled on Marilyn, Sharon, Barry and Philip as each of them were given gifts of trips to Israel by their parents when they reached 16 years of age. The Jewish state has been enriched not only by the visits of the Hardin family but by their generosity through donations and projects benefitting youth and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In 1991 Rebecca and Isidore were honored by Pioneer Women, now called Naamat, for their support.

Rebecca was also a very astute financially. As well as ensuring that the business side of her husband's medical practice operated successfully she also did very well in her ventures into property and investments. She continued to live a simple life style however as her prime concern continued to be the welfare of others and Israel.

Rebecca did take time to enjoy the benefits of her hard work but always with others. She loved to swim and go for walks with friends. She enjoyed playing bridge with her cousin Lucy Satanove Estrin. She would often get up early to go for golf games with her cousin Martha Kushner before she went in to the office. She cherished family gatherings and looked forward to the holidays when the extended HRS clan would gather for festive meals.

When Issy retired from his practice in 1986 they were able to devote even more time to their family and their charitable interests. They were also now able to spend most of the winter instead of a month in their Florida condo. Upon their return each of their children could look forward to a special piece of Judaica purchased for them as a gift for an upcoming anniversary. Rebecca was a strong believer in equality so the first child to receive a present was able to inform the others what piece of art they would be receiving shortly from their mother. Rebecca liked to plan ahead and although this may be a surprise to some of her eleven grandchildren, she purchased complete sets of china and silverware for each of them in anticipation of the homes and families that they have or will one day establish.

In addition to more visits to Israel the entire family was able to celebrate Rebecca and Issy's golden anniversary together on an Alaskan cruise in August of 1993. This trip and the final one to Israel a few months later are now looked back on as even more significant as shortly thereafter Rebecca fell ill. Diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 1995 she and Issy moved to Calgary in 1996 where she could live in a residence where she would be most comfortable.

It was hard for the family to witness the last years of their wife, mother and grandmother who was so vital, independent and concerned for others. But they can be comforted with the knowledge that they who now showed concern and cared for her were her greatest joy. She had watched with pride as her children married Jewish partners and took on professional and communal responsibilities. She had glowed as each of them presented her with grandchildren to further extend her legacy.

All of us are grateful that Rebecca Hardin chose to devote so much of her time to others. We read on Shavuot of how Ruth could have taken the easier choice of returning to her own people rather than to accept the responsibilities that lay ahead for her in caring for her mother in law. Through this act of kindness the dynasty of King David was created and we benefit from this every day as we did by hearing his psalms which were recited earlier.

The results of acts of '*Chesed*' are lessons we can take not only from the life of Ruth but also from the lives of women of valour like Rebecca Hardin who have influenced not only people in this room but countless others who have benefitted from the gifts she bestowed.

May she be an inspiration to all of us to fill our lives with acts of loving kindness towards others so that we may all be closer to the day when peace and happiness will once again surround us.

*Tehi nishmata tzroorah tzroorah beetzor hachaim*

May her soul be bound up in the bond of life