

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH JEWISH LIFE

A JEWISH HEROINE — REBBETZIN MIRA WEIN

A Holocaust survivor's miraculous story of triumph over adversity...

BY SHIRA DRUION

REBBETZIN MIRA WEIN carries herself with a gentle grace and composure, the archetype of European elegance. She sits poised, radiating beauty from the inside out. She is perfectly groomed, and exudes a contagious joie de vivre. Romanian born, Wein captivates her audience with a multitude of miraculous stories from her tumultuous childhood, inspiring tears at every turn. But what is most astonishing about her is the courage she displays as she unabashedly tackles the many faith-based questions that are posed to her with an emunah so steadfast, that it draws the inner chambers of the Jewish soul only closer to Hashem.

She speaks with great intensity about the horrors experienced while under Nazi rule, enumerating the countless times she was able to see the hand of G-d in her life.

“One of the stories that stand out most poignantly for me is when my single aunt got word of a train that was leaving from the next village. The message was that if you managed to get your children onto the train, they would be transported to safety, away from the horrific tragedies of war-infested life. With great self-sacrifice and courage, my mother bundled up my brother and me, and in the dark of night, we painstakingly made the journey to the next village to board the train to a brighter tomorrow. I remember the image of my mother vividly, wracked with unimaginable pain, tormented at



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having to part with us, her beloved children. I was four years old at the time. That night, my mother's sister, who lived with us, woke up in a panic, screaming 'nisht emes, nisht emes (it's not true, it's not true)! They are lying; they are not going to save the children. She ran to the cupboard and grabbed the only remaining fur-lined men's coat, because it was a valuable commodity and bargaining tool. She then proceeded to

dodge the dangers that lurked in the shadows of the black night, all the way to the next village. When she got there, she ran to the train and approached the first gentile in sight, 'Here, this coat is yours, just please bring me my children.' She described what we looked like and begged him to bring us back to her. He took the coat, but didn't return. I am not sure to this day why he did, but he did take my brother and me off the train and

left us in a nearby barn. My aunt promised herself that she would not return to my mother without her precious children in tow, and so she proceeded to methodically make her way through the village, enquiring if anyone had seen her two children. Eventually somebody led her to where we had been hidden. I recall that moment with great emotion. We later got word that the whole train of children had been bombed, and I still shudder at the thought of what could've been, had it not been for the grace of G-d.

“My brother’s barmitzvah will always be etched in my memory. It was during the time that we were already in the camps, so my mother woke us up early in the

despite this, we never allowed ourselves to eat treif food. In fact, it wasn’t even a consideration. My parents both came from aristocratic Chassidic dynasties. My mother’s father was the Zalishker Rebbe, and my grandfather was the Antoniner Rebbe. My father was born into the Vizhnitz dynasty and his father was the Horedenker Rebbe. He, however, did not want to inherit the title through birth, so he ensured that he did a very good smicha (rabbinical ordination) and became a rov. Tragically, my father, grandfather and the rest of my family were all taken to a labour camp in the Ukraine. It was called Tranistra. I remember watching them being carried out and taken away.

that my father had made to Eretz Yisrael. My mother was still very sickly and had the wisdom to put my brother into the Ponivezh Yeshiva and me into a children’s home for young girls. She made this move to ensure that we would both be afforded the opportunity to have good schooling and our basic needs met. Eretz Yisrael was very dear to me, and when my mother met her second husband, Rabbi Twerski, after I graduated high school, they asked me to return to the United States with them. I was heartbroken to leave the Holy Land, but my mother was still very frail from the torture experienced during the Shoah, and I knew how pained she would be to leave me behind. So six months after she left, I decided to join them, and Baruch Hashem, because it was a move that was to bring me tremendous blessing and good mazel. After a lifetime spent teaching Torah and building a family in the United States, I was zoche (merited) to meet my second husband, Rabbi Berel Wein. We married, and he was living in Eretz Yisrael, so I returned with him to the land I love with every fibre of my being. Every morning, I wake up to the birds chirping, and I say ‘modeh ani’ to thank Hashem for blessing me with another day in Yerushalyaim Ir Hakoidesh (Jerusalem, the holy city).”

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morning, and we davened and then my brother proudly laid tefillin for the first time. After that, my mother called him aside and whispered, ‘Now Moishela, your present,’ and then she placed a half a loaf of bread in his cupped hands. I am sure I don’t have to explain, but it wasn’t a freshly baked piece of bread. It was hard, old, mildew covered bread. But his barmitzvah gift request had been for a ‘shtikkel broit’. My mother had made sure to save her daily portion all week, so that she could give him the present he so desired. Moishela just stood there and tears fell freely down his gaunt cheekbones. He was a haggard sight, but filled with a transparent elation. The most remarkable part of the story was how Moishela proceeded to then break his bread into little pieces, sharing it with those of us in his family who were there to partake in the joyous celebration of his recent manhood. Even in the direst of circumstances, a real Jew remains a mensch.

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“My first husband, Rabbi Shmuel Cohen, was a rabbi and head of *Keren Hakayemet Leyisrael*. As a result, we merited to visit Israel quite often. He was a scholar and a man whose life was devoted to ensuring the best for Eretz Yisrael. Many years after the Shoah (the Holocaust), Dr Yitzchak Refael from Mosad Harav Kook, heard who my father was, and made contact with my husband and I. When we arrived, he pulled out a large pile of papers from the archives, one of which was an official document – a proclamation used by father to collect donations in order to enable Jews to purchase land to in what was then called Palestine. The document was dated back to 1936, and he informed us that my father would travel from shul to shul to collect monies for this holy cause. I had never seen my father’s signature before, and the pride and honour that I felt at that moment is treasured deeply.

“After the war, my mother, brother and I were able to make our way to Eretz Yisrael as a result of the contribution

Rebbetzin Wein radiates a holiness that is so pure that it is almost tangible. “I am fully aware that if it were not for the generosity of G-d, I would’ve been very depressed by the things that I had witnessed in my lifetime. Today, I am privileged to say that I am the proud mother of three children, Baruch, Michael and Miriam, as well as thirteen wonderful grandchildren.”

In a generation that runs rife with trials and tribulations in all shapes and forms, the challenge of remaining faithful to G-d can be a tormenting journey for many. Rebbetzin Mira Wein is the greatest advocate for the latter option. Her extraordinary faith and simchat hachaim (love of life) is mesmerising, as she exemplifies the type of human being we can only dream of becoming. **IL**